

## Dunhuang Manuscripts

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Paul Pelliot (1878 – 1945) was a French Sinologist who traveled to the Inner Asian side of China during the early years of 1900. His expedition started from Kucha where he found documents written in the Kushan language (see Chapter 28, **Kushan Empire**). After Kucha, Pelliot went to Urumqi (Urumchi), the present capital of the Uighur Autonomous region. He finally reached Dunhuang on the 12 of February 1908. The north-western part of China shown on the map below is the Uighur Autonomous Region, written as Xinjiang but pronounced as Sincan. The ancient city of Dunhuang, Dunghuang or Tung-Han shown below-right stands on the west of Kara-Khoto and is within Sincan.



Left : Xinjiang (Sincan) Uighur Province.  
Top : Location of Dunghuang city.

The name of Dunhuang is made out of Tung and Han, where Tung is, most probably, a twisted form of Tur-ung meaning “belonging to the Tur” and Han is found in Chinese as Huang (see Chapter 5, **Climatic Changes**). There is also an ethnic group in north-western Asia known as the Tunguz. The Chinese call these people the Dong Hu. The transformation from Tunguz to Dong Hu strengthens the regular relation between **Tung-Han** and Dunhuang.

In Dunhuang, Pelliot convinced the abbot Wang Yuanlu to let him examine a room full of ancient manuscripts. The room contained some 50,000 rolls written in a language which was unknown to the Chinese. The abbot, who wanted to renovate the monastery sold 6,000 of these rolls to Pelliot who carried them to France. Presently these manuscripts can be found in 29 different museums of the world. Below we see Paul Pelliot examining some manuscript in the room where the rolls were stored on the left and a portion of an original manuscript on the right.

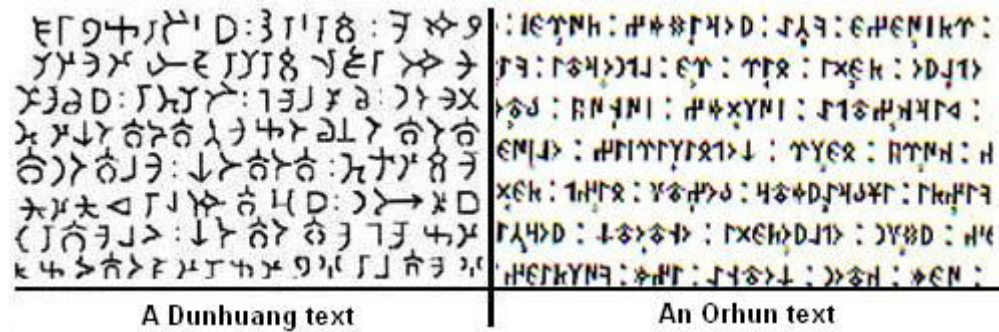


Paul Pelliot within the room of scriptures



An example page of scripture

The characters of these manuscripts are almost identical to the Orhun syllabary mentioned in Chapter 23, **The Orhun Script**. Below we see a short text transcribed from an original manuscript known as **Irk Bitig** on the left and a portion of the Bilge Kagan stele on the right. Not only do the letters match each other, but also the words are separated by two superimposed dots in both scripts, pointing to a common style of writing (1). We can therefore conclude that the manuscripts were written by a Turkic speaking culture.



Irk Bitig is a small book whose dimensions are 13X8 cm. It contains 104 pages and 65 paragraphs. The book is a narrative of the epics of Asiatic people and also contains portions of fables and soothsaying. It is presently exhibited in the British Museum.

The above portion of the book is telling about a gathering, celebrating the leadership of **Ata-Utuk**. Such celebrations were always followed by a round of mare drink known as “Kimiz”. Each person drank a sip from the same container specially designed for such occasions (see Chapter 15, **The Sacred horn**) and promised solidarity to their leader.

Drinking in ancient times, when written documents were not so widespread as today, was a way of sealing a promise. It meant: “I internalize and unite with these words agreeing to never break my promise”. We find many statues in Central Asia of a person holding a drinking vessel. Similar statues and relief have been found in remote places, wherever these people migrated. Several such examples will be discussed in the next chapter.

**References**

(1) On the left: **Eski Türk Yazıtları**, Hüseyin Namık Orkun, page 289, Türk tarih Kurumu, No: 529, 1986, Ankara, Turkey.  
 On the right: Ref. 2 of Chapter 23, **The Orhun script**.