



YARKAND

YARKAND (Yarkend; Modern Uighur *Yärkänd*; Chinese *Shache*, the same characters can also be read as *Suoche*), a town in [Chinese Turkestan](#), at the southwestern end of the Tarim Basin (38°27' N, 77°16' E; alt. 1,190 m). Yärkand is located in a fertile oasis on the banks of the river of the same name; it is accessible from Khotan via Karghalik by the road going along the southern edge of the Taklamakan Desert and from Kāšġar situated to the northwest. Through the mountains to the west of Yärkand, one can proceed to Sarykol and then to the Pamirs and the Oxus Basin, or towards the upper course of the Indus (the route of the modern Karakorum Highway). This location gave Yärkand high importance for the Silk Road trade route.

The territory of Yärkand is for the first time mentioned in the *Hanshu* (1st century BCE), under the name *Shache* (Old Chinese, approximately, *s³a(j)-ka), which is probably related to the name of the Iranian Saka tribes. At the time of the Han expansion into the “Western Regions,” Yärkand was larger than the neighboring kingdoms, being reported to have 3,049 soldiers. Later it began to expand still more, and between 29 and 61 CE, under the ruler Xian, it controlled the Tarim Basin. Afterwards, Buddhism became dominant in Yärkand, and several monasteries were observed by Xuanzang, although some of them were already in ruins at the time of his visit to the area (around 630 CE). Unlike the neighboring oases, however, no remains of Buddhist monuments have been found in Yärkand as yet (for Chinese records about pre-Islamic Yärkand see Rhie, pp. 255-57; Litvinskiġ, p. 241; Hulsewé and Loewe, pp. 139-41).



Yārkaṅd was conquered by the Qarā-khanids (see [ILAK-KHANIDS](#)) in the 10th century, and its population converted to Islam. From the 11th century onwards, we encounter its present name, which can probably be derived from Turkic *yar* ‘cliff, gorge’ and *kāṅd* ‘town’ (ultimately an Iranian lexeme). This name is mentioned by Mah³mud Kāšġari (1005-1102), and it is found on coins and in a number of land-ownership documents written in Arabic and Turkic (the latter in both Uighur and Arabic script), which date back to the 11th-12th centuries. The legal style of these documents is already purely Islamic, although many names are Turkic; a Jewish population seems to be mentioned as well. Subsequently, Yārkaṅd (like the neighboring settlements) passed to Kūčlüġ (the usurper of the Qarā-khitay throne), then to the Mongols Qaydu and Čaġatāy. In 1274, Marco Polo visited Yārkaṅd and noted some Christians living there. Later, the [Chaghatayid dynasty](#) ruled over Yārkaṅd (as well as over all the Tarim Basin), and in 1514 Yārkaṅd became its capital. New city walls were subsequently erected, canals dug, and gardens laid out. In this period, the Naqshbandi K^vājas of Yārkaṅd began to amass power into their hands, and in 1678 they replaced the old dynasty. Yārkaṅd became one of their capitals along with Kāšġar. In 1758, the Tarim Basin was captured by the Chinese Qing Empire, and initially Yārkaṅd was regarded as the capital city of the new province. However, after the revolt of Ya‘qub-beg, who also considered Yārkaṅd his capital, Kāšġar replaced it in this function. In mid-2000s, Yārkaṅd/Shache had a population of about 373,000 inhabitants, most of whom were Uighurs.

See: [CHINESE TURKESTAN](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

O. F. Akimushkin, ed., *Tarikh-i Kāšġar. Anonimnaya tyurkskaya khronika vladetelei Vostochnogo Turkestana po konets XVII veka* (Tāriḳ-e Kāšġar. An anonymous Turkic chronicle of the owners of the Eastern Turkestan up until the end of the 17th century), St. Petersburg, 2001.

C. E. Bosworth, “Yārkaṅd,” *EI²* XI, 2002, pp. 286-88, with bibliography.

Šāh-Maḥmud Čurās, *Khronika (Tāriḳ)*, ed. and tr. O. F. Akimushkin, Moscow, 1976. A. F. P. Hulsewé and M. A. N. Loewe, *China in Central Asia, the Early Stage, 125 B.C.–A.D. 23*, Leiden, 1979.

B. A. Litvinskiĭ, ed., *Vostochnyi Turkestan v drevnosti i rannem srednevekov'e: ocherki istorii* (Eastern Turkestan in antiquity and early Middle Ages: essays in history), Moscow, 1988. Ma Dazheng, "The Tarim Basin," in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia*, vol. V, ed. Ch. Adle, I. Habib, and K. M. Baypakov, Paris, 2003, pp. 181-208.

M. M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, vol. I, Leiden, Boston, and Köln, 1999, p. 255-57.

(Pavel Lurje)

February 20, 2009