

with a bold lapidary-looking writing. I recognized it at once as Runic Turki, the earliest Turkish script, first discovered some twenty years ago in certain bilingual inscriptions of the early eighth century A.D. on the Orkhon and Yenissei Rivers.

Professor V. Thomsen, the distinguished Danish savant, to whom belongs the merit of having first deciphered the script and language in those famous monuments of Mongolia, has been kind enough to undertake the publication of my Miran record. The provisional translation supplied by him shows that the document contains a long list of men, all bearing Turki names, to whom, either in person or through representatives, warrants, in all probability passports, were issued. A number of terms used in designating the recipients seems to prove that most if not all of them belonged to a Turkish military force, and thus the idea suggests itself that we have here a relic of the period preceding Tibetan occupation, when the Tarim Basin was being overrun by various Turkish tribes from the North over whom the Chinese endeavoured with varying success to assert some political control.

Neither in nor around the Miran fort could I trace any evidence of the site having been inhabited in any permanent fashion during the rule of the Uigurs, who drove out the Tibetans about 860 A.D., or during the succeeding Muhammadan period. Considering that even now a stream capable of being used for irrigation passes within a few miles of the site, progressive desiccation would scarcely suffice to explain this rapid abandonment soon after the period of Tibetan occupation, whatever the changes it has since worked on this ground. But it becomes easier to understand the abandonment when we remember the geographical facts which rendered the position of Miran so important for the Tibetans and for them only. At Miran they were guarding the key of the direct route from the southern oases of the Tarim Basin to Tun-huang. Like the branch previously mentioned as leading north of Lop-nor, this route must have been a main line of communication into China from the last centuries B.C. onwards, and must have grown in importance