



IN DU HUAN'S TRAVELOGUE "MEMORIES OF THE PLACES VISITED": CENTRAL ASIA AND CHINA

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Annotation. This article is about Du Huan and his travel stories. Du Huan's guidebook lists the places he visited roughly from east to west. The article shows the route of Du Huan, who traveled from the kingdom of Shosh through the Jenju (Norin) river to the state of Kang, then crossed the Amu Darya from Bukhara and reached Marw, also known as Mugo (穆国) on its southern bank (north of modern Mari in Turkmenistan) and gives information about the events he witnessed. This article also details Du Huan's impressions of the famous Battle of the Talas River between the Arabs and the Tang Dynasty. Du Huan also writes information about paper production in the city of Samarkand. Du Huan's travelogue contains valuable information about Central Asia and reflects the life of cities, the way of living of the population, political, social and economic situation. The article provides explanations of the names of the countries mentioned in Du Huan's travelogue. Du Huan was a great explorer who visited many places in the western region and traveled to Central Asia, West Asia, the Mediterranean coast and Africa. This is confirmed by his work "Travel".

Keywords. Central Asia, Battle of Talas, Turkic Khanate, Tang Dynasty, Abbasid Dynasty, State of Shosh, Suyob, State of Marv

Introduction. In the context of modern globalization, relations between Uzbekistan and China have elevated to a level of strategic partnership, marked by dynamic developments in political, economic, and cultural spheres. This growing cooperation has made it increasingly important to study and analyze historical Chinese sources, particularly in relation to Central Asia. Chinese historical documents and travel accounts provide valuable insights into the life, political dynamics, and economic conditions of ancient cities in the region, including those in present-day Uzbekistan. Among such sources, The Travel Account of Du Huan holds a special place, offering firsthand observations of significant historical events in Central Asia during the 8th century.

Written by Du Huan (杜环, Dù Huán) around 762–763 CE, this work reflects the author's experiences during his 12-year journey through various parts of Central Asia. His travel account offers critical historical information about the rivalry between the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the Turkic Khaganate over control of the Silk Road, as well as the famous Battle of Talas in 751 CE. As one of





the first Chinese travelers to be captured by Arab forces and directly observe their society, Du Huan provides detailed descriptions not only of political and social structures but also of cultural exchanges. Notably, he records the establishment of paper-making techniques in Samarkand by Chinese artisans taken prisoner after the battle—an event of great historical and technological significance.

Analysis and results. During the 730s and 740s, the Arab forces advanced rapidly westward, while the Tang dynasty sought to maintain its control over various territories in Central Asia through a network of Jimi prefectures (羁縻府州, Jīmí Fǔzhōu)—autonomous administrative and political units. In response to Arab incursions, these prefectures requested military assistance from the Tang central government. Simultaneously, the Tibetan Empire launched aggressive attacks on the Anxi Four Garrisons (Kucha, Hotan, Kashgar, and Karashar) and surrounding regions, posing a serious threat to Tang authority in the western frontier. In fact, the Tibetan expansion was considered a greater danger than the Arab invasion, prompting the Tang to concentrate its military efforts against Tibet.

Toward the end of Emperor Xuanzong's reign, the Tang dynasty had gained influence over the Patola Shahi Kingdom in Gilgit and ruled more than 20 surrounding regions. Despite multiple Tang military campaigns led by the commanders of the Anxi Protectorate against Tibet, success remained elusive until 747 CE, when Gao Xianzhi, deputy commander of Anxi and military head of the Four Garrisons, led a force of 10,000 troops through the Pamirs and Hindu Kush, striking a major blow to Tibetan forces. His campaign halted Tibet's western expansion and significantly weakened Arab advances in the east. For these achievements, Gao was promoted to chief commander of the Anxi Protectorate.

However, Gao later committed a critical misstep concerning the Shash Kingdom (modern-day Tashkent). Although the Shash ruler had remained loyal to the Tang and resisted Arab advances, Gao—acting on unverified intelligence suggesting ties between Shash and Tibet—launched a military campaign against the kingdom in 750 CE. Du Huan, the author of the travel account, participated in this campaign. After surrounding and capturing the Shash capital, Gao sent the king and his wife to Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) for execution, while seizing a large quantity of treasure. This act provoked outrage among Central Asian states and fostered sympathy for Shash, ultimately strengthening Arab influence in the region.



Shortly thereafter, Gao Xianzhi led a Tang army of 30,000 soldiers to confront the advancing Arab forces. The resulting clash—the Battle of Talas—lasted five days. During the battle, the Karluks betrayed the Tang by switching sides and attacking from the rear. The Tang army suffered a devastating defeat, with most of its soldiers either killed or captured. Du Huan was among those taken prisoner, marking the beginning of his years-long captivity and subsequent observations of the Islamic world.

After being taken captive, Du Huan spent twelve years wandering through various regions of Central and Western Asia as well as the Mediterranean basin. In the years 762–763 CE, he returned to China aboard a merchant ship that docked in Guangzhou. He compiled his experiences and observations in a work known as the Travel Account (Jīngxíngjì). Unfortunately, the original manuscript of the travelogue has not survived in its entirety; however, a portion of it has been preserved in the Tongdian (《通典》), an encyclopedic work compiled during the Tang dynasty.

The Travel Account has been studied extensively by numerous historians both in China and abroad. In China, scholar Ding Qian authored A Geographical Investigation of the Travel Account (《经行记地理考证》, Jīngxíngjì dìlǐ kǎozhèng), while renowned historian Wang Guowei included annotations and textual studies of the Travel Account in his work Collected Studies of Ancient Travelogues (《古行记校录》, Gǔxíngjì jiàolù). Before the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Zhang Yichun (张一纯) compiled and commented on the travelogue in his work Annotations to Du Huan’s Travel Account (《杜环经行记笺记》, Dù Huán Jīngxíngjì jiānjì), providing valuable clarifications and consolidating the findings of previous researchers. The present version of the travelogue is based on Zhang Yichun’s analysis and annotations.

Regions Described in the Travel Account. The Kingdom of Suyab. Located more than 500 kilometers northwest of Anxi, beyond the Bedel Pass. To the south of the pass was the northern frontier of the Tang dynasty; to the north lay the southern border of the Turkic Khaganate. Over 1,000 kilometers to the southwest, the Pamir Mountains stretch across the region. Rivers originating from the southern side of the pass flow toward the East China Sea, while rivers from the northern side flow into the Northern Sea through areas inhabited by small ethnic groups. A journey several days to the north reaches Bogda-Ula Peak, near which lies a mountain lake called the "Sea of Snow" (雪海, Xuě hǎi) in





Chinese, due to its frequent rain and snow during spring and summer. A narrow path runs through the lake, and beside it is a cave filled with water. Those who fall in become disoriented and lose their sense of direction.

Over 500 kilometers north of Bedel Pass lies the Chu River. At the river's eastern source is Lake Issyk-Kul, known in Chinese as the "Hot Sea" (热海, Rè hǎi) because it does not freeze despite the cold climate. Nearby was the city of Suyab. In 749 CE, Wang Zhengjian, the military commissioner of the Beiting Protectorate (北庭), led a campaign against Suyab, destroyed its city walls, and scattered its inhabitants. However, the Dayun Monastery, once home to Princess Jiaohe, remained standing.

To the west of the river lies the Kingdom of Shash, located more than 500 kilometers away. Various tribes and Turkic peoples of different surnames inhabited the central regions of the river, each maintaining armies of tens of thousands and engaging in frequent intertribal warfare. Farmers typically wore armor and engaged in raids, often enslaving one another. At the river's western source lies the city of Talas (or Taraz), a major city in the Kingdom of Shash and the site of Gao Xianzhi's defeat in 751 CE.

To the east of this region lies the Mediterranean Sea. From March to September, the skies are generally clear. Locals irrigate their fields with snowmelt and grow barley, wheat, rice, peas, and green legumes. Beverages such as grape wine, millet beer, and vinegar-mixed milk are common.

The Kingdom of Shash (Tashkent). Also known as 赭支 (Zhězhī) and 大宛 (Dàyuān). Between 742 and 756 CE, during Emperor Xuanzong's reign, the Tang general Gao Xianzhi captured the King of Shash and his queen and brought them to the Tang capital. The kingdom was crossed by two main rivers—the Zhenzhu River (真珠河, Zhēnzhū hé) and the Zhi River (质河, Zhì hé)—which likely correspond to the ancient names of the Naryn River. These rivers flowed north and west. Du Huan described the land as flat and fertile, abundant in fruits, with high-quality dogs and horses.

The Ferghana Valley (Sogdian Principality). Located approximately 500 kilometers south of Talas. To the east lie mountain ranges and, beyond them, the Kingdom of Shule, more than 1,000 kilometers away. To the west, over 500 kilometers away, is the Kingdom of Shash. The region consisted of many cities and boasted armies numbering in the tens of thousands. In 752 CE, during the reign of Xuanzong, Princess He I was sent to this kingdom as part of a political marriage alliance.



The valley was known for its large population of wild rodents. The area was ideal for cultivating grapes, Indian gooseberries (amalaka), dates, peaches, and pears. All the inhabitants lived in clay houses, wore garments made from sheepskin, and both men and women wore boots. Women did not wear white face powder but used dark-blue or black dye on their eyebrows.

The Kingdom of Kang (康国, Kāng Guó). Identified with the northern part of present-day Samarkand in Uzbekistan. It was located more than 150 kilometers southeast of the Kingdom of Mi (米国, Mǐguó), possibly modern Panjakent or Maymurg. It was also known by the name Samojian (萨末鞑, Sà mò jiān). This was a small but prosperous kingdom with fertile lands. Its people worshipped a deity referred to as "Xian" (祆), likely a reference to Zoroastrianism. Many state officials and administrators were reportedly from this region.

The sources of Chinese history are diverse and rich. Among them, travelogues related to ancient history hold a special place, and studying them is one of the important tasks. Du Huan's travelogue provides information about certain events and cities related to the history of Central Asia. The value of the travelogue lies in its precise narration of events and its clear reflection of the political, social, and cultural history of that era.

Conclusion. When studying the history of any nation, referring to its ancient history and sources helps to correctly understand the characteristics of its present development. This is especially important for an ancient and miraculous country like China. Moreover, many pieces of information about the history of Central Asia can be found in Chinese sources. Compared to sources in other languages, Chinese sources stand out by clearly indicating the exact years when events occurred.

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