

## Return to Kashgar – the Jarring Collection of Uyghur Manuscripts

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### Abstract:

#### *Return to Kashgar – the Jarring Collection of Uyghur Manuscripts*

*Kashgar was a major crossroads for trade and culture along the Eurasian Silk Route for thousands of years, a place where Turkic, Persian, Arab, Chinese and other groups interacted. The Lund University Library is privileged to hold some 600 handwritten books from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries from cities in this region like Kashgar, Urumchi and Yarkand. Containing about 1500 titles, presumably the largest collection in the world, this so-called Jarring Collection was mostly acquired in Kashgar in 1929-1930 by the Swedish philologist and career diplomat Gunnar Jarring (1907-2002), while doing research for his doctoral thesis on Turkic languages. (Ambassador Jarring served later as a UN peace negotiator in both the Palestine and the Kashmir conflict.)*

*In an attempt to return, as it were, these books, this cultural heritage, to Kashgar, the Lund University Library has undertaken an ambitious ongoing digitization and cataloguing program; the digitized books are free to access and download from the library portal. There are, however, other borders to cross and different problems to solve to meet the demands of global research and the free transmission of knowledge. The paper will deal with some of these problems.*

**Keywords:** Lund University Library, Gunnar Jarring, Kashgar, Uyghur manuscripts, Chaghatay

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### Kashgar

“Coming to Kashgar in 1929 was like coming from the present to the Middle Ages, like coming to a setting for *A Thousand and One Nights*. There were no cars, no motorcycles, not even a bicycle. No electric lights illuminated the dark, narrow passages in the bazaar districts. There were no newspapers, no printed books – scribes sat crosslegged and copied manuscripts in neat Arabic characters. The water carriers walked around with his heavy load of water contained in a sheep or goat skin. Dyers hung their skeins of yarn on rods on top of

the flat roofed mud houses. Their section of the bazaars was painted blue, yellow, red and mauve, and those cheerful colors were repeated in the clothes they wore. People of all nationalities teemed inside the narrow alleys. There were Turks, Tajiks, Tungans, Chinese. The rich and the aristocrats rode through the throng on stately horses with beautifully embroidered saddle blankets, Those who were less well off rode on mules, and the poor people, who were the majority, walked.”<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Gunnar Jarring, 21 years old, arriving in Kashgar on his quest for material to his doctoral thesis in Turkic philology. The place was well chosen. Kashgar was a major crossroads for trade and culture along the Eurasian Silk Route for thousands of years, a place where Turkic, Persian, Arab, Chinese and other groups interacted.



Fig. 1 Gunnar Jarring in Kashgar in 1929.

What is in a name?

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China is the largest administrative unit in the country, with a population of about 23 million inhabitants. It borders on Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The capital Ürümqi with some 4 million people is in the north, whereas Kashgar is an oasis city in the most western part, near the border with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup> Jarring, Gunnar, *Return to Kashgar: Central Asian memoirs in the present*, Duke, Durham, N.C., 1986, p. 78. In this talk I use the term « Eastern Turkestan » as Jarring does when speaking about the area in the period before the People's Republic of China, whereas for the period after 1949, I use the name « Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region » for the territory today in.

The region has a long and at times tumultuous history, and has seen many rulers come and go. It is also rich in ethnic groups, for example the Han, Kazakhs, Hui, Uyghur, Kyrgyz, Mongols and Russians, presumably a paradise for a philologist but also a region often times suffering from discord. Since 1949 it is part of the People's Republic. Other than Mandarin Chinese, the Turkic Uyghur language is one of the main languages of the region, and Uyghurs are one of China's 55 recognized minorities. It is a Turkic language, written in a modified Perso-Arabic script. In the twentieth century two different Latin scripts and one Cyrillic were also used but much less frequently, a true illustration of the shifting political and ethnic landscape of this region.

The name "East Turkestan", used by Jarring and his fellow philologists, was invented and used by Russian Turkologists in the nineteenth century to distinguish it from the Turkestan region west of the Pamir mountains. East Turkestan was also known as "Chinese Turkestan" and now by the Chinese term "Xinjiang" ('New Territories'), and referred to the Tarim Basin in the southwestern part of the province of the Manchu Qing Empire, the last imperial dynasty of China. Today the Xinjiang region includes both the Tarim Basin in the south and the Zhungarian Basin in the north.

Today the term "East Turkestan" is pregnant with politics and in China it is associated with European colonialism and has a strong negative ring. The Chinese government not only actively discourages its use but it is actually illegal for its Uyghur nationalist and separatist claims.

### The Clam

Gunnar Jarring, internationally nicknamed "The Clam" for his habit of never saying anything apart from "No comments" to the press, was born in 1907 and died in 2002, at 94 years old. He is the beginning of this story about books crossing borders. He was a highly respected scholar, a Turkic philologist who became a career diplomat, and he managed all through his long life to stay loyal to scholarship and combine his two worlds.

He was of humble origin, the oldest of eight children in a farmer's family in a small village on the west coast of Southern Sweden. He studied languages at Lund University—Russian, Turkish, Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian among others—and earned a doctor's degree in 1933 with a dissertation on Eastern Turkic phonology *Studien zu einer osttürkischen Lautlehre*. In the rest of the 1930s, Jarring worked at the university library and taught Turkic languages at the university.

His extraordinary language skills were noted during the War, and in 1940 he entered the Swedish diplomatic service where he was to have a brilliant career. He started as an attaché to the embassy in Ankara. After positions in Teheran, Baghdad and Addis Ababa, he went to India in 1948 as Swedish minister and from there on to Pakistan.



Fig. 2 Gunnar Jarring in India, here with Indira Gandhi.

He became Sweden's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 1956 and sat in the Security Council 1957-58. During this time he also served as negotiator in the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. 1958-1964 he served as ambassador to the United States, and 1964-1973 as ambassador to the Soviet Union. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Jarring was appointed UN special representative for the Middle East peace process, the so-called Jarring Mission. He was unsuccessful, but some who take the long view in history argue that Jarring's diplomatic work was the first to plant the concept of peace in that conflict. Gunnar Jarring continued to publish studies on Southeastern Turkic languages throughout his diplomatic career and even more so after his retirement.

#### Work in the field

Xinjiang, and in fact all of the land along the Silk Road, had always been sought by explorers, traders, and conquerors, and was especially so in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. Sometimes the explorers had no scientific background at all, and the voyages were undertaken for other reasons: simple curiosity, power politics, strategic interests, and for collecting antiquities. European explorers—men like Aurel Stein, Albert von Le Coq, Albert Grünwedel, Paul Pelliot and Sven Hedin just to mention some of them—considered themselves rescuers, preserving valuable cultural heritage. Current debates about the ethical management of cultural patrimony were raised even then: Stein recalls becoming speechless when asked by a local official why he had to carry everything (45 camels heavily laden with archaeological findings) to a faraway country in the West.

#### Buying books in Kashgar - the beardless child gentleman

Jarring carried books he had bought in the bazaar to the West. Printed books were exceptional in Kashgar in 1929; these were mostly manuscripts and lithographed works imported from Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara. The handwritten books were less expensive. They were copied by hand in the bazaar, according to need and demand. The scribes were mullahs who knew the owners of rare works and who bargained for the right to copy them.

Buying books in the bazaar was not as easy as it might sound. First of all, the Muslim book sellers in the bazaar regarded the young foreigner, the beardless child gentleman, with distrust, and did not want to sell anything to him, let alone books and manuscripts. After some time he made the acquaintance of an itinerant book peddler, the somewhat less scrupulous mullah Roze akhon, with whom he managed to form a sort of business relationship.

Secondly, there were no fixed prices, and every acquisition thus meant lengthy bargaining, an art for both parties but one that Jarring had to learn. Haggling could take weeks sometimes a month: you had tea, ate melon and talked. It was very civilized but very time-consuming.

### The Jarring Collection

The Jarring Collection currently consists of 595 literary and documentary manuscripts. Many are miscellanies; there are some 1500 titles. All in all, it is presumably the largest collection in the world. It includes everything from single leafs and rolls to bound and unbound volumes. The manuscripts date from the sixteenth to the twentieth century and most of them are written on local paper from Khotan.

The works are primarily in late Chaghatay (Uyghur's antecedent language) and early modern Uyghur (Middle and Modern Turkic respectively), but also in Arabic, in Persian and in other languages like Mongolian, Tibetan, Urdu and Uzbek. Political unrest, wars, revolutions and modernizations have been hard on the written cultural heritage of this area and the premodern literary, linguistic and cultural heritage is not publicly available to the Uyghurs or to the world. The Jarring Collection is therefore one of the few places where the descendants of the Kasgharians and the general public can access this rich cultural heritage.

The collection contains a representative selection of many literary as well as documentary genres. The literary manuscripts are mostly Islamic religious and morality works but also of trade manuals, romantic tales about the sorrows of love, heroic novels, and so-called munazara poems, humorous competitions or mock quarrels between for example two dishes, two fruits, a horse and a camel, wine and opium, who try to outmatch each other. There is a rich folk literature with folk tales, songs, proverbs, riddles, and these are what interested Jarring the most. These works had until then attracted virtually no interest at all from scholars, partly because it was so hard to retrieve: it necessitated literary field work. The documentary manuscripts reflect the early modern Uyghur society and culture with judicial and historic documents. The collection also includes many books collected and/or printed by the Swedish missionaries.

Gunnar Jarring donated his manuscripts to Lund University Library in 1982, and the following years he worked on a summary catalogue of the manuscripts in English. It is handwritten and he considered it a temporary arrangement. The manuscripts were given provisional numbers (Prov. 1, Prov. 2 etc.) but the provisional call numbers have been quoted by other scholars and are now established.

Let me give you some examples, some outstanding, some representative, from the collection:

Gunnar Jarring and the missionaries did not collect manuscripts for aesthetic or bibliophile reasons, but from philological, cultural and historical.

This *Divan* by the Chaghatay fifteenth-century poet and mystic Ali Shir Nava'i (Prov 450) is therefore an exception (Fig. 3). Nava'i is considered to be the greatest representative of

Chaghatay literature, and his works have had great influence on all Turkic peoples and languages.



Fig. 3 *Divan*, Jarring Prov. 450, ff. 8b-9a, late eighteenth century copy.

The collection primarily mirrors Jarring's interest in the spoken early modern Uyghur language, and in genuine Uyghur folk literature, *munazara* poems as mentioned before, for example "The Contest of the Fruits" (Prov. 302:2, Fig. 4) and "The Conversation between the Horse and the Camel" (Prov. 207, 208:4).



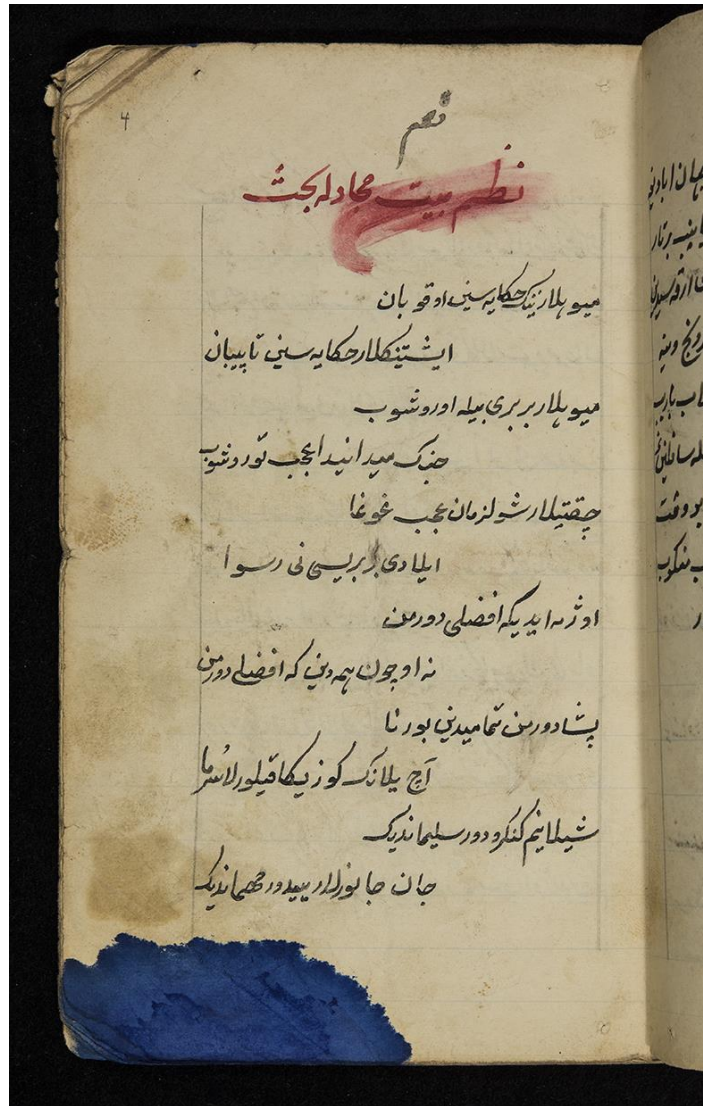


Fig. 4 The Contest of the Fruits, Jarring Prov. 302, f. 4r.

Yakub Beg, originally from western Turkestan, ruled Kashgar and the “Six Cities” of the Tarim Basin from 1866 to 1877 when he was murdered. His short rule was stormy but he is an important part of Central Asian history and the history of Yakub Beg is found in several manuscripts (Prov. 115 see Fig. 5, 116, 117, 163, 197, 478).

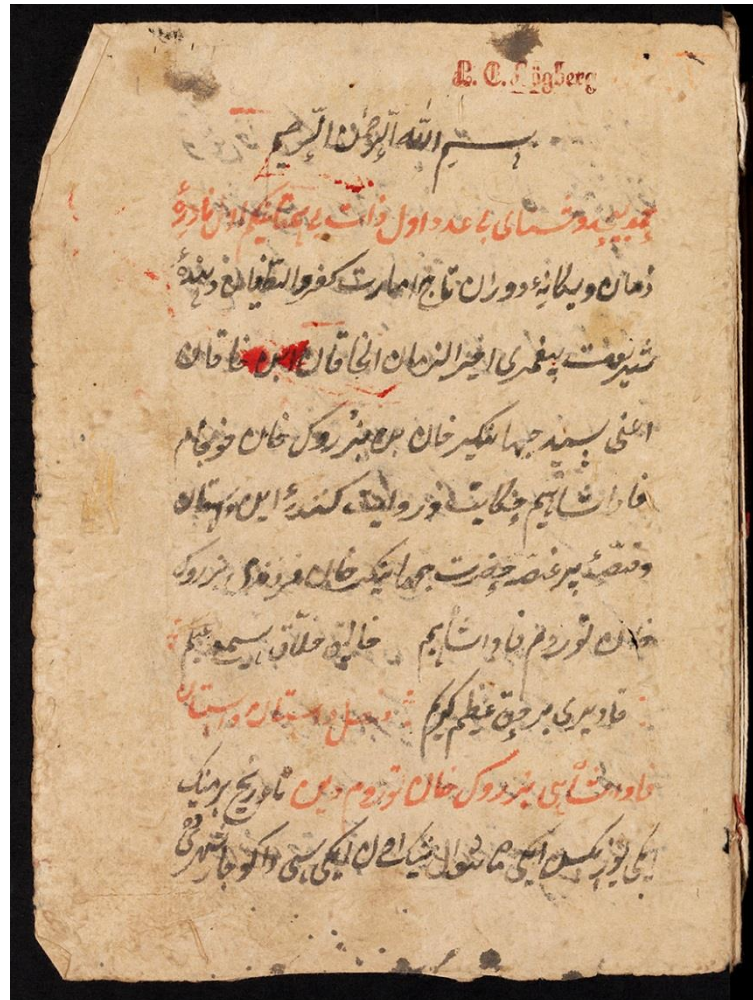


Fig. 5 The history of Yakub Beg, Jarring Prov. 115 p. 1.

A “risale” is a manual, a professional handbook. In Jarring’s collection there are several of these manuals: of the blacksmiths, the dyers, the farmers, the camel drivers, the artisans, the merchants, the butchers, the bakers, the shoemakers and last but not least the rainmakers (Prov. 53, Fig. 6). These manuals of course record everyday life in a culture now all but disappeared. When Jarring was there in 1929 there were still practicing rainmakers who knew how to evoke rain, but also how to stop it, if it came down too heavily. Rainmaking has a long history in Central Asia. All Mongol rulers, like Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, brought rainmakers on their campaigns who could evoke storm, snow and hail and force it on the enemies in order to create chaos and confusion.



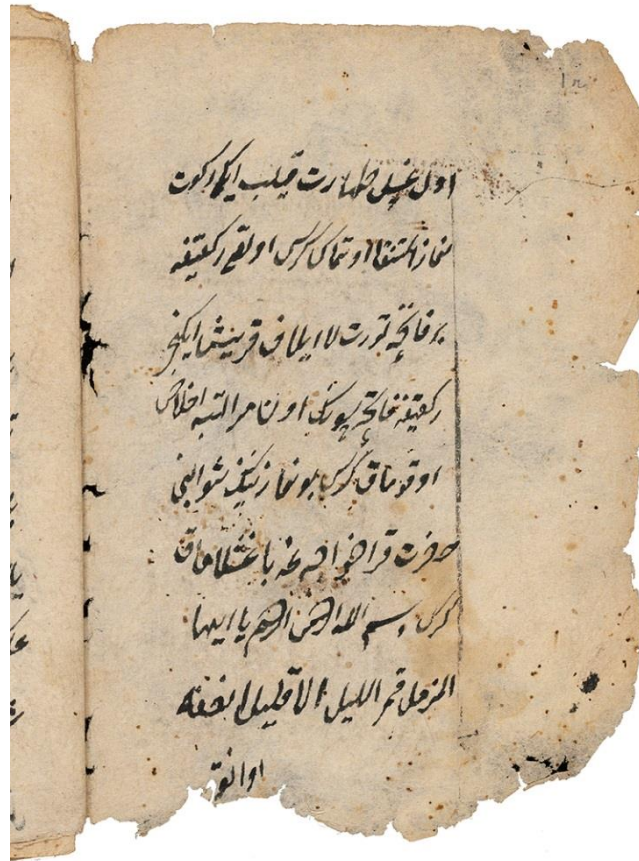


Fig. 6 The Risale of the Rainmakers, Jarring Prov. 53, f. 1v

A manuscript containing a translation into early modern Uyghur of Lewis Wallace's *Ben Hur* (Prov. 119, Fig. 7) may be taken as an example of the missionaries' activities. The first part was printed at the missionary printing office whereas the second part of the translation, never reached the printing press because of the troubles in Southern Xinjiang.

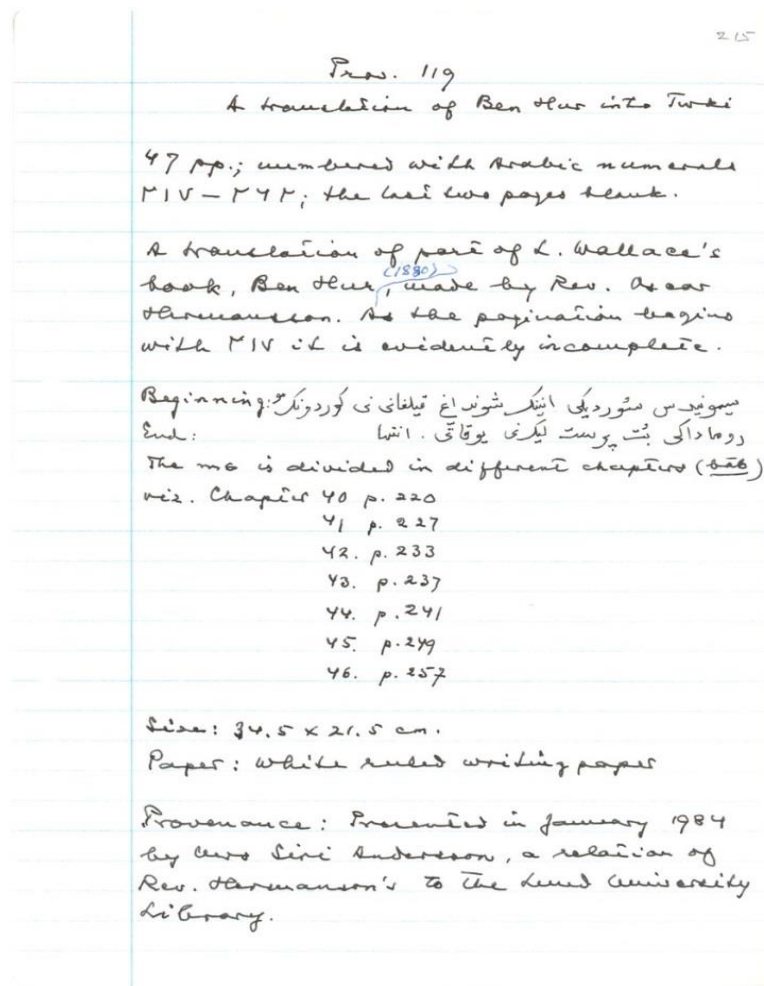


Fig. 7 Gunnar Jarring's handwritten catalogue, here the entry for Jarring Prov. 119, a translation into Uyghur of Lewis Wallace's *Ben Hur*.

The story of the demanding acquisition of what is today Prov. 370 is memorable and in itself almost like a munazara, a competition between in this case the digital and the analogue newspaper: Jarring's local book middleman Roze akhon appeared one day with an especially valuable volume, a shaman book containing prayers and incantations read by the soothsayer to cure toothaches or to protect travellers against the evil spirits of the desert. The bargaining went on for days and days and seemed to have come to a complete dead end, when Roze akhon caught sight of Jarring's collection of Swedish newspapers and the transaction was underway. Deal struck: Jarring was the owner of the desirable manuscript and Roza akhon was paid 2 *sär* plus two kilograms of the local Swedish newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*. Rose akhon had a good nose for business and he sold the newspapers on to the local tailors. The papers fitted perfectly as insulated lining, spread open in the back of the quilted ankle-long Uyghur coats, and protected against the coldest desert winds.

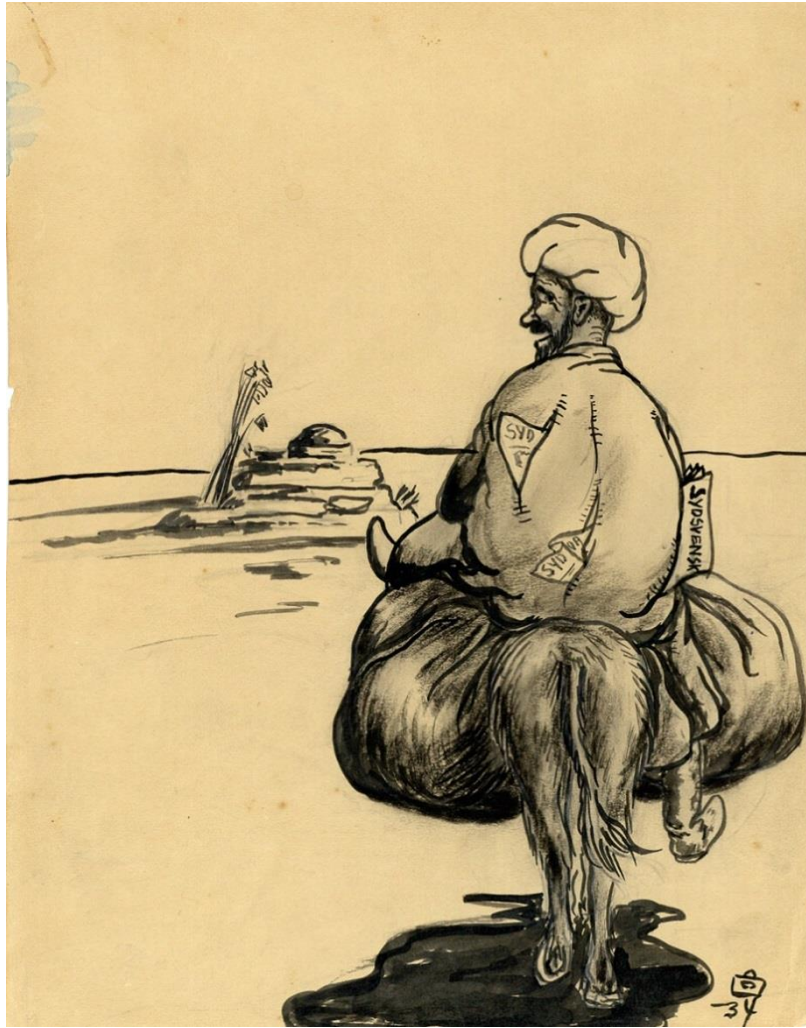


Fig. 8 Gunnar Jarring's book peddler Roze akhon, cartoon in the Swedish local newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*.

#### Missionary contributions to the Collection

In 1929 there were not many Europeans in Kashgar. There were the Russians, the Englishmen and the Swedes.

The Swedish missionaries (The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden) dated back to 1892, when the first missionary arrived in Kashgar. It was a difficult region to work in, there were few converts and the missionaries concentrated on health care and secular education, and other humanitarian activities that could be called technical assistance. They started a printing house, in full operation from 1912, and printed books in Latin, Arabic, and Cyrillic script, school books, manuals, practical guidebooks (for example for the productions of silk and newspapers, calendars and almanacs). They tried to introduce a consistent spelling, a normalized orthography of Eastern Turki as spoken in southern Xinjiang, they had a bookbinder's shop of their own and they trained typographers, composers and printers for the future.



Fig. 9 The printing shop of the missionaries of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.

During the troubled years 1933-1937, they printed pamphlets, tracts, placards, visiting-cards, forms for passports, advertisements, receipts, telegrams, periodicals and short-lived reviews and weeklies, as well as bank notes (on paper, and in the end on cloth) for the rebels and ever-changing warlords and governments. Lund University Library has an almost complete set of the weeklies, also a donation from Dr. Jarring.

The Swedish missionaries also built houses. Jarring's teacher in Lund, the missionary medical doctor Gustaf Raquette had opened a hospital known far and wide, and they performed all sorts of surgeries, saving lives under very basic circumstances. In 1938 after a long and precarious period of political disorder, all the missionaries were compelled to leave and the printing office was destroyed.

A virtual repatriation?

Like Gunnar Jarring who in 1978, after half a century, returned to the Kashgar he loved, the library wished to “repatriate” these books —as it were—through a digitization scheme.

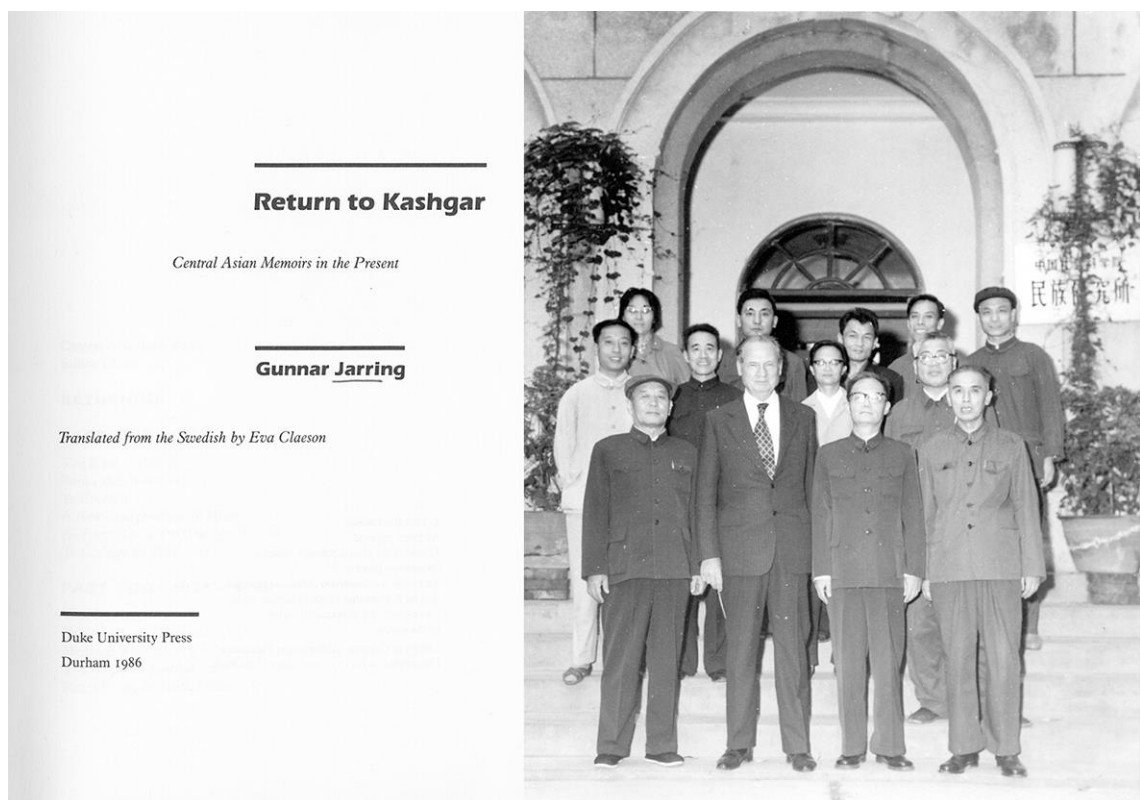


Fig. 10 Gunnar Jarring returned to Kashgar in 1978 and was enthusiastically received.



To improve preservation practice, the collection was assessed in 2005, all the books looked at by a paper conservator and labelled with the British Library terminology Good condition (20%), Fair condition (18%), Poor condition (34%) and Unusable (28%). Twenty eight percent of the collection is thus in such a bad shape that the books are in urgent need of conservation, before digitization to ensure long term usability.

The catalogue entries so far available contain basic editorial titles and above all physical descriptions. Jarring's handwritten catalogue has been scanned and linked to each entry.

Up until now 132 manuscripts have been digitized. Out of these 63 manuscripts containing some 4800 pages have been digitized for the project "Annotated Turki Manuscripts from the Jarring Collection Online". In addition, that project has published digital facsimiles of 61 manuscripts, including to date transcriptions of 141 ff. (8 manuscripts). Translations and grammatical annotation are currently being prepared. See: <https://uyghur.ittc.ku.edu/manuscripts/index.xhtml>. Uyghur Light Verbs project (<https://uyghur.ittc.ku.edu/uylvs.html>) also did a linguistic analysis of Provs. 74 and 207.

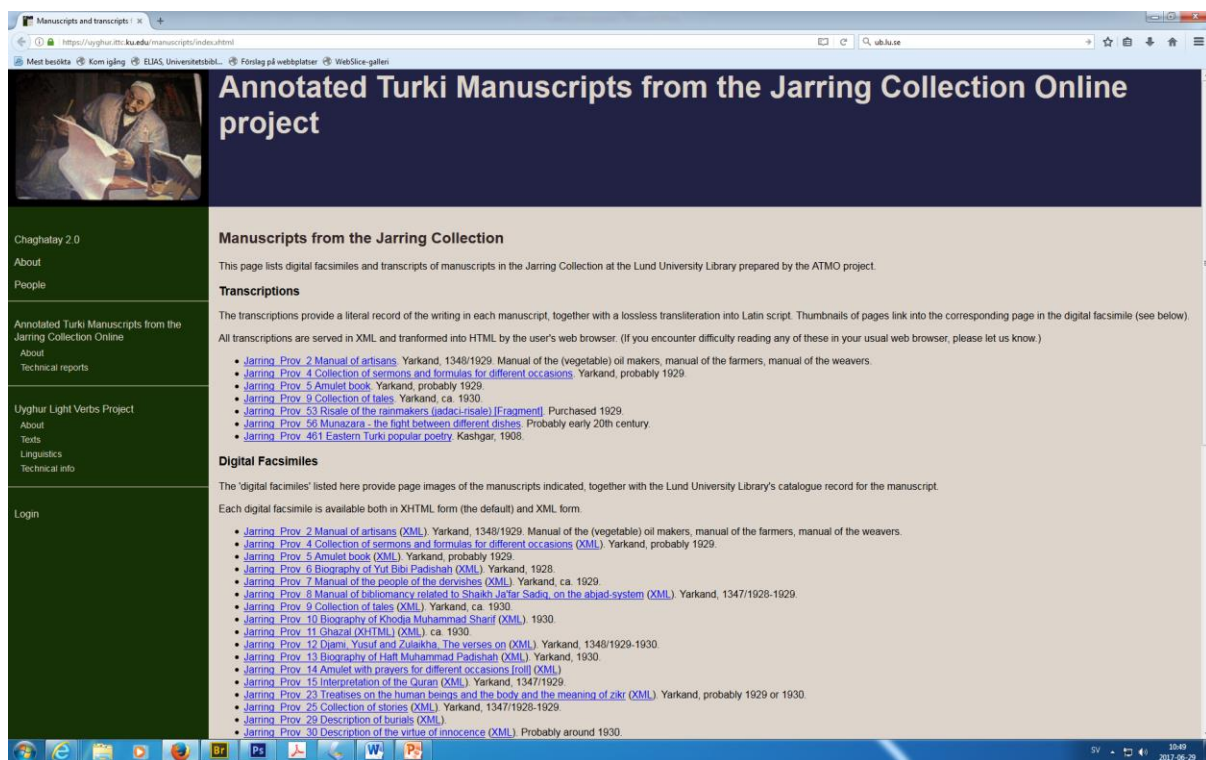


Fig. 11 Webpage of the current project Annotated Turki Manuscripts from the Jarring Collection Online [2017-06-29]

And yet scholars keep travelling to Lund from all over the world to access these manuscripts. Is it because, as in the case of Jarring's newspapers in Kashgar, the digital can never replace the analogue? Because when it comes to manuscript books and depending of course on your scholarly focus, materiality is paramount? Or —we have asked ourselves—could it be that the site is blocked in China because our catalogue, following the terminology of Dr. Jarring, uses the name "Eastern Turkestan"?

The Chinese government pays special attention to the cultural life and education of the minorities, but in the case of the term "Eastern Turkestan" it seems it has become an awkward predicament to distinguish peaceful expressions of cultural identity and scholarship from illegal separatist activities.



We understand that our site is in fact accessible in China and that for example a search engine like Baidu does find the Jarring manuscripts. Whether Baidu finds the new portal Alvin is not clear to me yet.

Let me add a few words on a related collection of Gunnar Jarring's printed books. These he originally donated to the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. They were catalogued and kept as a separate collection for about ten years at Stockholm University, before being donated and transported to the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul in 2012. There, the books are also being digitized, in an effort to increase the accessibility of the material. The collection is categorized into Kashgar Prints, Travel Literature and Maps.

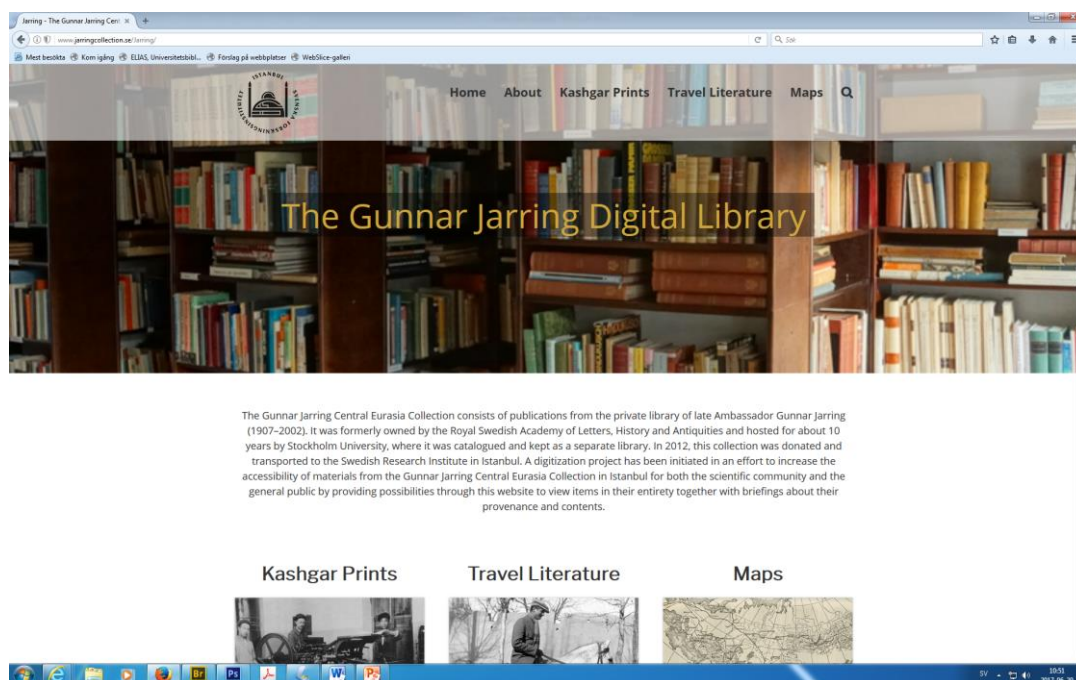


Fig. 12 Webpage of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul [2017-06-29]

The Jarring Collection has stimulated a flurry of recent research projects as an act of giving back: The previously mentioned "Annotated Turki Manuscripts from the Jarring Collection Online" is a collaborative project funded in part by the Henry Luce Foundation and directed by Arienne Dwyer, Professor of Linguistic Anthropology and Co-Director of the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Kansas. It involves the digital scanning of selected manuscripts from the Jarring Collection, transcriptions and transliterations into Perso-Arabic and an extended Latin script. Many transcripts are translated, and some will be annotated linguistically (segmented into morphemes and tagged with part of speech). The project is also creating a digital edition of a medical handbook. <https://uyghur.ittc.ku.edu/about-atmo.html>

Other scholars have made use of the Jarring Collection as a primary source in a number of fields, including manuscript technology, history, social anthropology, Sufi studies, linguistics and ethnomusicology. And even medical anthropology, as the digital edition of the healing manuscript above shows. The wealth of unused primary sources and the sheer number of genre exemplars of the Jarring Collection allow scholars to make new discoveries and connections across Eurasia. Our Library is unusually accommodating to scholarly research, I am told, which also contributes to its relatively heavy use.

An assistant librarian who perhaps would never return

I give the final words to Gunnar Jarring himself:

“A dream, an assignment, a promise I made in Lund, was that I would return with a representative collection of Eastern Turkic manuscripts. Now so much later [half a century], it occurs to me that the university library, which had shown so much interest in my assignment, never gave me any funds to carry it through. I had to manage without, in some way. Perhaps the reason for not providing me with an adequate advance was exaggerated caution: they doubted the trustworthiness of a young assistant librarian who perhaps would use the funds otherwise and never return.”<sup>2</sup>

No one could have doubted the trustworthiness of this young man who would make such profound contributions to scholarship and diplomacy, but it is true that he was lost to the library world and never really returned. He continued though, all his life, to think of Lund and wherever he went he acquired books that would enrich the university collections in the areas of his expertise.



Fig. 13 Gunnar Jarring at the information desk in Lund University Library.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Dr. Gunilla Törnvall for her dedicated work on the Uighur manuscript collection and on Gunnar Jarring's personal papers, as well as Professor Arienne Dwyer for invaluable help and good advice.

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<sup>2</sup> Jarring, Gunnar, *Return to Kashgar: Central Asian memoirs in the present*, Duke, Durham, N.C., 1986, p. 105

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