

Archeological and linguistic evidence for the Tocharians in Eastern Central Asia

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There is no difficulty in documenting the existence of the Tocharians in Eastern Central Asia (ECA) during the medieval period, since we have prima facie evidence in the form of texts and wall paintings with captions identifying them as such. There also is historical evidence attesting to the presence of Tocharians in the Tarim Basin and surrounding areas during the medieval period.

However, when we go back in time before there are any Tocharian texts or wall paintings with captions, it becomes much more difficult to prove that Tocharians actually inhabited this area. For the period of antiquity and the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, we no longer have direct evidence for the presence of Tocharian speakers in the Tarim Basin, and yet we feel with a high degree of certainty that they must have been there before the medieval period.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the linguistic and archeological data that may be used to make a case for the presence of Tocharians in ECA before the medieval period.