

Linguistic maps of Central Asia (km)

Al-Kāshgharī was an eleventh century author who lived in Baghdad and wrote a book (in Arabic) about the Turkic languages called the *Dīwān lughat al-turk* (*The Compendium [or Account] of the Languages of the Turks*). It is the earliest book written on the topic. The sole surviving manuscript of the work (copied in 1266) includes a map. At the center of this map is a grid which lists the Turkic tribes. There is a legend at the four corners of the page, but it doesn't tell us what the yellow dots mean. In Islamic maps, yellow dots typically indicate cities. But in al-Kāshgharī's map, the yellow dots at the center signify tribes; along the margins, they signify countries. **Map 1** is the original. **Map 2** translates the Arabic captions into English.

The map is fascinating for two reasons in particular. First, as far as I am aware, it's the only pre-modern map that links language to territory. And secondly, it corroborates Marco Polo's testimony about outlier languages in Central Asia. In **map 3**, the central mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region are labeled on al-Kāshgharī's map. **Map 4** isolates a row of dots in particular. Marco Polo traveled through this same region (between roughly 1270-90). He describes the places named by these dots as regions that have "a language of their own" – i.e. not ones that Marco or his translators were proficient in. And al-Kāshgharī concurs: he is not interested in the Turkic dialects spoken here because they are non-standard.

The Fra Mauro map was made in about 1450 by a Camaldolite monk from San Michele di Murano (Venice), about whom little is known. The single extant copy is now owned by the Marciana library in Venice, and is usually on display at the Museo Correr. It's circular and about 195 cm (almost 6.5 ft) in diameter. Like most medieval Arab maps, it's oriented with south at the top. It's remarkably accurate, even with reference to parts of the world about which Europeans still knew very little. Here is what the map says about the Hindu Kush Himalayan region: "I am not convinced that one can find the real names [of places here]: it is not possible to establish agreement between such a variety of languages, which change and confuse names in accordance with their own idioms. These names are now necessarily changed and in corrupt form due to the variety of languages, the long time that has passed and the errors made by copyists." You can see a high-res reproduction of the map here:

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1b/FraMauroDetailedMap.jpg>

NASA loves the Fra Mauro map! Check out their discussion and image comparing the map to a photograph of the earth taken from space here:

<https://landsat.gsfc.nasa.gov/fra-mauros-mappamundi/>

For another, slightly more comical attempt to match language to territory, see **map 5**: a linguistic map of Central Asia from the *Synopsis universae philologiae* (1741) by German rector Gottfried Hensel (1687-1765). Hensel tries to match language to territory, and hilarity ensues. In Baghdad, for instance, they speak Armenian. Arabic, according to Hensel's map, is not a language of Iraq. Hensel suggests that Hindi is spoken in the Hindu Kush. The text translated into each of these languages is the beginning of the Lord's Prayer.

Map 1



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmud_al-Kashgari#/media/File:Kashgari_map.jpg

Map 2



