

7th Salzburg International Conference

*Syriac Christianity
in China and Central Asia*

September 21-25, 2023, Samarkand

中國和中亞的景教

ܠܡܢܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

Xitoy va Markaziy Osiyoda suriya xristianligi
bo'yicha Zalsburg 7-xalqaro anjumani.

7-я Зальцбургская международная
конференция по сирийскому
христианству в Китае и Центральной Азии

Venue: Mövenpick Samarkand, 140100 Samarkand, Uzbekistan



PARIS
LODRON
UNIVERSITÄT
SALZBURG

Center for the Study
of the Christian East



International Institute
for Central Asian Studies

Cover page background photo:

The Xipang Christian Monastery in Turfan, China
Courtesy of Liu Wenshuo

Conference Organisers:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Dietmar W. Winkler & Dr. Li Tang
University of Salzburg, Austria

In Collaboration with:

Dr. Dmitriy Voyakin
International Institute for Central Asian Studies, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Programme

Wednesday, 20.09.2023

Arrival

Thursday, 21.09.2023

10:00–11:45 Registration – Lobby of the Mövenpick Hotel Samarkand

11:45–13:45 Lunch Break

Conference Section

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

13:45–13:55 Greetings
Welcome: Dmitriy Voyakin (IICAS)

13:55–14:15 Dietmar W. Winkler (University of Salzburg, Austria)
The Church of the East: Past & Present. On the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Salzburg International Conferences on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia

14:15–14:25 Li Tang (University of Salzburg, Austria)
From Central Asia to China: Introductory Comments

SESSION 1: CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

Chair: Nicholas Sims-Williams

14:25–15:00 Mark Dickens (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)
The Place of Samarkand in the Church of the East

15:00–15:35 Benjamin Sharkey (Magdalen College Oxford, UK)
The Metropolitans of Samarkand: An Institutional and Personal History

15:35–16:05 Coffee/Tea Break

Chair: Tjalling Halberstma

16:05–16:40 Manuel Kuhn (University of Salzburg, Austria)
The Catholicos-Patriarch and Central Asia: What did Timothy I know about the Geographical and Ecclesiological Structures of the Church of the East in Central Asia and China

16:40–17:15 Ali Balaeilangroudi (University of Göttingen)
Persian Muslim Poetry as a Source of Data on Christianity in Greater Khurasan

Friday, 22.09.2023

SESSION 2: ARCHAEOLOGY

Chair: Mark Dickens

08:50–09:25 Steven Gilbert (Kazakhstan/USA) & Dmitriy Voyakin (IICAS, Uzbekistan)

The Monks of Urgut: Discovery of a Monastic Cemetery in Uzbekistan

09:25–10:00 Valerii Kolchenko (National Academy of Sciences, Kyrgyzstan)
The Christian Church at the Settlement of Ak-Beshim (Object IV, 1954): Analysis and Interpretation of Field Documentation

10:00–10:35 Charles A. Stewart (Benedictine College, Kansas, USA)
From Ashes to Ashes: The Christian Funerary Chapel Recently Excavated at Usharal-Illibalyk

10:35–11:05 Coffee/Tea Break

Chair: Christoph Baumer

11:05–11:40 Liu Wensuo (Sun Yat-sen University, China) & Lin Lijuan (Peking University, China)

Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Excavations at the Jingjiao Monastery Site of Shuipang (Xipang) near Turfan

11:40–12:15 Wang Zexiang (Sun Yat-sen University, China)
The Chronology and Architectural Composition of the Jingjiao Monastery Site of Xipang (Shuipang) in Turfan, Xinjiang, China

12:15–14:15 Lunch Break

SESSION 3: HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE & INTERPRETATION

Chair: Peter Zieme

14:15–14:50 Sergei Kostomarov (Kazakhstan)
From Wroclaw to Karakorum: Journey of the Benedictine Brothers (1245-1247)

14:50–15:25 Nicholas Al-Jeloo (Iraq/Turkey)
Chinese Magi, a Chinese Christian Princess and a Turkic Catholicos-Patriarch: Urmia and its Links to the Far East (4th – 14th Centuries)

15:25–15:55 Coffee/Tea Break

Chair: Charles Stewart

15:55–16:30 Alexander Mikhailovich Kamyshev (Kyrgyzstan)
On the Dating and Functional Purpose of Tash-Rabat

16:30–17:05 Xing Yuge (Sun Yat-sen University, China)
A Glimpse of East Syriac Christianity: The Bema from the Church of Site in Tangchaodun, Changji, China

17:05–17:30 Peter Zieme (Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, Germany)
An Old Uighur Tombstone from Dali, China

Saturday, 23.09.2023

Chair: Li Tang

08:50–09:25 Erica C.D. Hunter (University of Cambridge, UK)
New Perspectives from Turfan: Paper and Production

09:25–10:00 Daniel Sheridan (Jesus College Cambridge, UK)
From Codex to Scroll: Syriac Christian Book Culture in a Chinese Context

10:00–10:35 Susan Balderstone (Australian Institute of Archaeology, Australia)
Traces of the Armenian Church East of Azerbaijan

10:35–11:05 Coffee/Tea Break

Chair: Peter Hofrichter

11:05–11:40 Tjalling Halbertsma (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)
Unpublished and Unsung: Essential Contributions of Local Guides and Interpreters towards Early Western Documentation of the Material Culture of the Church of the East in Inner Mongolia

11:40–12:15 Bolormaa Oyunchimeg (Mongolian University of Science and Technology, Mongolia)
Some Studies Related to the Funeral Rituals of the ‘Yelikewen’

12:15–14:15 Lunch Break

Chair: Pier Giorgio Borbone

14:15–14:50 Abdisabur Azzamovich Raimkulov (Samarkand Archaeological Institute, Uzbekistan)
The Architecture of the Koshtepa Christian Monastery in Nakhshab, Southern Sughd

14:50–15:25 Alexander Mikhailovich Kamyshev (Kyrgyzstan)
Christian Symbols in the Form of Fish from Kyrgyzstan

15:25–15:55 Coffee/Tea Break

Chair: Erica C.D. Hunter

15:55–16:30 Nicholas Sims-Williams (SOAS, London, UK)
Christian Sogdian and Christian Syriac: A Symbiotic Relationship

16:30–17:05 Kevin White (University of Salzburg, Austria)
Recent Discoveries of Syriac Christianity in Kazakhstan and the Potential Influence and Veneration of the 4th Century Bar Shabba, Bishop of Merv

17:30 Dinner Reception
Bus Departure from Hotel Mövenpick

Sunday, 24.09.2023

Samarkand & Urgut Excursion

Monday, 25.09.2023

Conference Section

Chair: Kevin White
08:50–09:25 Talant Aktanzhanov (Grace School of Theology, USA)
The Parallel Plot Patterns of the Conversion Histories of the Keraites and Bulus ibn Raja

09:25–10:00 Zhang Zhidong (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)
The 'Nestorian' Ma Family of the Önggüd: Their Possible Sogdian Origin and Migration

10:00–10:35 Helen Younansardaroud (Free University Berlin, Germany)
An Overview of the East Syriac Dioceses in Central Asia according to Syriac Sources

10:35–11:05 Coffee/Tea Break

SESSION 4: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chair: Glen Thompson
11:05–11:40 Baby Varghese (Orthodox Theological Seminary Kottayam, India)
History of Yabhallaha III and the East Syriac Understanding of Pilgrimage

11:40–12:15 Ziran Guo (National Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)
Survey on the Theological Background of the Chinese Texts of the Church of the East: A Comparison with the Theology of the School of Antioch

12:15–14:15 Lunch Break

Chair: Baby Varghese
14:15–14:50 Rong Huang (Harvard University, USA)
The Ascetic Path in the Jingjiao Dunhuang Manuscript 'Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy'

14:50–15:25	Shinichi Muto (Daito Bunka University, Japan) <i>Divine Accommodation in Jingjiao in Tang-China</i>
15:25–16:00	Coffee/Tea Break
16:00–16:35	Chair: Dietmar W. Winkler Glen Thompson & Agnus Cheng (Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong) <i>The 10 Vows in the Book of the Lord Messiah and Possible Local Adaptation</i>
16:35–17:10	Christine Chaillot (Switzerland) <i>Present and Future of the Church of the East</i>
17:10	Conclusion & Group Photo

Tuesday, 26.09.2023–Wednesday, 27.09.2023

Excursion to Bukhara

Participants without paper:

Balmont, Alexis (Italy)
 Baumer, Christoph & Theresa Weber (Switzerland)
 Borbone, Pier Giorgio (University of Pisa, Italy)
 Hofrichter, Peter & Hilde Hofrichter (Austria)
 Li, Gang (Academia Turfanica, China)
 Lindner, Ramsin (Germany)
 Tan, Yuh Ting (National Technological University of Singapore, Singapore)
 Thompson, Beth (USA)
 Wang, Long (Academia Turfanica, China)
 Zhang, Yong (Academia Turfanica, China)

Conference Stewards:

Tang, Steven Erkan
 Winkler, Gerolf
 Winkler, Gunther
 Zang, Yiyan

ABSTRACTS

Talant Aktanzhanov (Grace School of Theology, USA)

The Parallel Plot Patterns of the Conversion Histories of the Keraites and Bulus ibn Raja

The Keraites were a nomadic tribe who lived in Central Asia in the tenth and eleventh centuries. While medieval eyewitnesses confirmed the presence of Christianity among the Keraites, the story of their mass conversion is rather a legend than based on historical fact. The most widely known account of the Keraites' conversion recounts the story of a ruler who lost his way during a hunt and was miraculously led to safety by Mar Sergius. Eventually, upon the ruler's conversion, his tribesmen collectively accepted Christianity. However, this story bears a striking resemblance to the conversion story of Bulus ibn Raja (d. 1009), a scholar of Islam who became a Christian. Ibn Raja was also lost in the desert and was miraculously saved by a saint. He then converted to Christianity and was baptized. This paper will discuss the conversion narrative of the Keraites' and seek to identify its origin in light of Ibn Raja's conversion story. The similarities between the Keraites' and Ibn Raja's conversion stories suggest that they may have been based on a folktale circulated among Christians of the Eastern tradition.

Nicholas Al-Jeloo (Iraq/Turkey)

Chinese Magi, a Chinese Christian Princess and a Turkic Catholicos-Patriarch: Urmia and its Links to the Far East (4th – 14th Centuries)

The city of Urmia, in northwest Iran, has served for centuries as an important provincial capital and is still home to a native community of ethnic Assyrians, many of whom adhere to the Church of the East. This tiny remnant of a once mighty Church, which helped spread Christianity much further East along the Silk Road and Spice Routes, is centred upon the ancient church of the Virgin Mary, purported to have been built by the Magi returning from their visit to the Christ child in Bethlehem. According to a legend preserved in the fourth-century Syriac text *The Cave of Treasures*, these wise men came from China, adding another dimension to local oral tradition. Later on, another legend recounts a visit to Urmia by a Chinese princess named Bapri, sister of Tang Emperor Taizong, who had converted to the Church of the East and additionally funded the church's restoration. In 1284, the same church was visited by Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Yahb-Allaha III (1281-1317), an ethnic Ongut Turk from Inner Mongolia, who had received his religious training at a monastery near Beijing. In Urmia, he is believed to have had a premonition regarding the death of Il-Khanid ruler Ahmad Tekuder. This paper aims to present each of the above narratives with their context and sources, in order to reveal snapshots of Urmia's relationship with the Far East through the Virgin Mary church at various points in its history. It will thus include a synthesis of material found both in classical Syriac literary texts, as well as not-so accessible modern Assyrian oral and historical sources, to discuss perceptions by ethnic Assyrians throughout the ages of their links to China and, especially, to convey their growing understanding about their role on the Silk Road and in the Church of the East's missionary efforts.

Ali Balaeilangroudi (University of Göttingen, Germany)

Persian Muslim Poetry as a Source of Data on Christianity in Greater Khurasan

Persian literature emerged and developed in Greater Khurasan, including Central Asia, from the tenth to the thirteenth century onward. Today, extant early Persian poems are valuable sources of information for learning about the world in which the poets dwelt. Remarkably, although the poems were composed by Muslims, they have preserved a variety of references to Christianity and Christians at that specific time and place, i.e. the 10th-13th-century Greater Khurasan.

This paper demonstrates how a careful and critical study of Persian Muslim poetry can advance our knowledge about Christianity and Christian communities in that specific time and place. After discussing the theoretical framework of the investigation, the paper provides examples from a variety of topics related to Christian inhabitants of Greater Khurasan, e.g. monasticism, geographical spread, rituals, Syriac calendar, and Muslim-Christian encounters, which were addressed in Persian Muslim poetry.

Susan Balderstone (Australia)

Traces of the Armenian Church East of Azerbaijan

In the absence of anything much in the way of identified Armenian material remains so far uncovered in the regions north and east of Azerbaijan, it is difficult to trace the presence of the Armenian Church in Central Asia. However, historians have recorded that Armenian lords and their soldiers fought with the invading armies of Rome and Byzantium, often accompanied by their clerics (CHAUMONT 2011). Many were captured by Persian, Arab, and Mongol forces in turn, and subsequently distributed around the relevant regions controlled by their captors. Others who escaped capture in Greater Armenia, fled to northern regions, west into Cilicia or south into Egypt. How can the absence of Armenian gravestones be explained? Not all Armenian prisoners can have been ransomed as mentioned by Thomas of Metsop (BARTHOLD, 1968, 514 Note 198). And what of their churches? In Greater Armenia they left behind a country of architecturally distinctive churches and monasteries (ALPAGO-NOVELLO et al 1986, UTUDJIAN 1968). Did they carry the memory of these with them? Where did they worship? The thirteenth century traveller Friar William of Rubruck recorded that they were not allowed access to the churches of the 'Nestorians'. Perhaps they were allowed to use Syriac Orthodox churches if they could not build their own. If so, did they influence the form of those churches, or help to build them?

Oyunchimeg Bolormaa (Mongolia University of Science and Technology)

Some Studies Related to the Funeral Rituals of "Yelikewen"

A group of people left behind by the Church of the East of the nomads were called 'Yelikewen' and the information related to them was written in the records of travellers from the time of the Great Mongol Empire to the 20th century. The purpose of this paper is to deliver a comparative analysis of the Yelikewens and their burial rituals based on the written sources. In the reports of foreign envoys during the Mongol Empire, the rituals the Yelikewens followed were meticulously recorded. The report chronicled the rites of the Yelikewens and recorded in some sources of medieval Mongols will capture significance. Williams of Rubruck pointed out that they were different from the Franciscans when he mentioned the specific information related to their religious practices.

In the early 20th century, Mostaert reported that the religion of the Yelikewens who were in Ordos province in Inner Mongolia was different from that of other Mongol *ovogs* (clan). The Yelikewens undoubtedly included specific funeral rituals which they traditionally followed. Their funeral rites primarily consist of three active parts. First, the necessary actions to be done in advance, secondly, preparation for the funeral and thirdly, actual burial process. Some of the practices of Christians are interwoven with those of Buddhism, and new forms of religious practice emerged from them. The body was prepared by "six knots" which was used for funerals will be one of the topics to be studied further. *Bagsh* (teacher) in the Yelikewen clan played an important role in their burial rituals. It is worth noting that burials were carried out according to the instructions of the "teacher" and that there was a special ritual for burying the "teacher" too. It can be considered that the issue of burial rituals of *Erkhhuut* (Yelikewen) is another interesting form of Mongol funeral ritual as well as one of significant study related to the Church of East among the nomads.

Christine Chaillot (Switzerland)

Present and Future of the Church of the East

Because of the wars and troubles in the Middle East in the last decades, many faithful of the Church of the East had to live their homes and countries, forced to exile, and many became refugees. As for the future life of the Church, several questions may be raised. What will be the future of the communities remaining in the Middle East? Some estimate that today about 90% of the faithful left the countries of their ancestors. Then in the context of a diaspora now dispersed around the world, how to keep one's identity? How to keep the Syriac language (spoken and ancient) and culture alive? How to preserve the traditional liturgical life as well as other Church and daily life customs? In general, how to find a balance between tradition and modernity? How to keep the youth within the Church? There are also internal Church conflicts. What can be done to ensure that the Church of the East remains the guardian of the rich cultural, liturgical and spiritual heritage which belongs to it? At the cultural and artistic levels, how to keep a heritage and stop a patrimonial genocide?

Mark Dickens (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

The Place of Samarkand in the Church of the East

Samarkand is one of the most important cities in Central Asia. Its historical significance is arguably second to none in the region. It is therefore no surprise that it was chosen by the Church of the East as the location for one of its metropolitan bishops and that there are consistent references to it as a centre for Syriac Christianity in Central Asia over the many centuries that the Church of the East had a presence in the region.

This paper will give an overview of the history of Samarkand as a centre for Christianity, set in the context of its more general historical role in Central Asia and based on references in Christian and Muslim sources that cover nearly a millennium of history. A specific focus will be the attempt to unravel the complicated matter of when a metropolitan was initially appointed to Samarkand. Although the paper acknowledges previous scholarship on the issue, notably Brian Colless' 1986 article on "The Nestorian Province of Samarqand," it seeks to address the issue more comprehensively than before through delving deeply into the sources. It is hoped that the result will contribute to better understanding Samarkand's role as a leading metropolitanate in the ecclesiastical network established by the Church of the East along the Silk Road.

Steven Gilbert (Kazakhstan/USA) and Dmitriy Voyakin (IICAS, Uzbekistan)

The Monks of Urgut: Discovery of a Monastic Cemetery in Uzbekistan

Between 1996-2007, Alexey Savchenko led archaeological excavations near Urgut, Uzbekistan in the Zarafshan Valley between the Damgir and Qunlugh mountain streams, known as Suleman Tepa. He and his team revealed a Church of the East monastery dating between the 8th - 13th centuries. This discovery confirmed medieval textual sources and epigraphic evidence of monastic life in the region as found in nearby caves. In 2006 these inscriptions were thoroughly surveyed by Savchenko and Mark Dickens—a specialist in Syriac and Turkic linguistics and epigraphy. In April 2022, the current authors identified human remains 200-300 meters south of the monastery in the direction of the main cliff face of Mt. Allahyarhan; these were inadvertently revealed due to modern construction. Eventually our findings led to excavations a few months later, funded by the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (Bern, Switzerland). As a result, 17 graves were revealed, 13 with complete skeletal remains with a west-to-east orientation, indicating Christian burials. Forensic examinations confirmed that all the interred are male, with no accompanying grave goods. Further investigations of previously unexcavated sections south of the monumental building, uncovered more artefacts, including a ceramic bowl (*tagara*) with a painted cross design and a stone paved walkway. Initial radiocarbon dating of the skeletal remains ranges from the late 9th to early 10th centuries; this was corroborated by an excavated coin from the 11th century. This discovery marks one of the earliest datable Christian monastic cemeteries ever discovered in Central Asia.

Ziran Guo (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)

Survey on the Theological Background of the Chinese Texts of the Church of the East: A Comparison with the Theology of the School of Antioch

There exist many philological, historical and archeologic researches on the Church of the East in China, there are also observations about the relationship between the Chinese texts of this church and Chinese native religions, including Confucianism, Taoism and sinicized Buddhism, but very few scholars pay attention to the relationship between these texts and Christian theology which could be the source and the background of the theological thoughts of these texts. Even if the Xi'an stele and other discovered Chinese texts in Dunhuang are relatively short and full of terms borrowed from Chinese culture probably for missionary purpose or to be aimed at the sinicized Christian communities from Central Asia, it's legitimate to suppose that these texts have their theological foundations in the theology of the Church of the East. A survey on the comparisons of several theological points between Chinese texts and the theological School of Antioch which influenced deeply the theology of the Church of East can confirm the supposition, for example, the concentration on the human nature of Christ, the emphasis on the history of the salvation, the focus on ethics, etc. In this paper, I will make a survey on the theological background of the Chinese texts of the Church of the East and the theology of the theological School of

Antioch, especially that of Theodore of Mopsuestia to show the theological foundations of Chinese texts on the theological tradition of the Church of East despite the apparent inculturation of these texts.

Tjalling H.F. Halbertsma (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

Unpublished and Unsung: Essential Contributions of Local Guides and Interpreters towards Early Western Documentation of the Material Culture of the Church of the East in Inner Mongolia

Our understanding of the material culture of the Church of the East in Inner Mongolia is much shaped by the discoveries, documentations and subsequent publications of a small group of western scholars and explorers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Crucially, this early fieldwork in Inner Mongolia was enabled and facilitated by a small group of local guides and interpreters with an outstanding knowledge of the local languages, terrain and, in many cases, the exact whereabouts of the sites where remains of the Church of the East could be recorded and documented. In general, the contributions of these local guides and interpreters were essential to the field yet they remain under-acknowledged and under-researched. In the best case, we know of the presence of these local guides and interpreters, through the expedition records, travelogues or articles published by the western authors. In the worst case, their presence was not indicated in the publications on the fieldwork they were so instrumental to and we only learn of their presence and participation through other sources.

Focusing on the western Mongol herder simply known as *Arash*, this conference presentation identifies and assesses the contributions of local guides and interpreters to the early western documentation of the material culture of the Church of the East in Inner Mongolia. In addition, it examines the contributions of a number of “foreign guides” who had settled in the region for trade, missions or otherwise.

Rong Huang (Harvard University, USA)

The Ascetic Path in the Jingjiao Dunhuang Manuscript ‘Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy’

Dating back to the late Tang dynasty (late eighth to early ninth century) and written in Chinese, *Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy* is one among the manuscripts found in Dunhuang, China in the early twentieth century, recording the history and theology of the so-called Jingjiao tradition, i.e., the East Syriac Christianity in Tang China. This text is filled with Buddhist and Daoist terms to the extent that many scholars have concluded that it can no longer be seen as a Christian text. In my paper, I argue against this conclusion, proposing that *Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy* indeed preserves its Christian core if we take into consideration the rich background of Syriac Christian asceticism. I focus on two passages located in the beginning part of *Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy* and the concepts of non-desire, non-action, purity, and luminosity that are found within these two passages. In this paper, I first introduce the basic facts about the manuscript of *Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy*. Then I delve into the two passages, bringing up the Chinese religious context to analyze the general meaning these two passages might have conveyed to their Tang readers. Finally, I consider the East Syriac ascetic literature, arguing that the ideas expressed in the *Book on Mysterious Peace and Joy* by Buddhist and Daoist terms are quite pervasive in Jingjiao’s mother church, the East Syriac Christianity, during which process I also make use of the ascetic texts found in Turfan, China, by the German Turfan Expedition in the early twentieth century. Forming a comparative framework, my paper employs both the Tang Chinese and the East Syriac Christian contexts in order to understand the Jingjiao tradition properly.

Erica C.D. Hunter (University of Cambridge, UK)

New Perspectives at Turfan. Paper and Production

The discovery of paper-making by the Chinese revolutionised communication throughout its territories, across Central Asia and the Middle East. By the 9th century paper, as the medium of writing, largely supplanted vellum which was costly and laborious to prepare. A paper mill was already operating in 794-5 in Baghdad, shortly after the city’s foundation in 762. Analysis of MIK III 45, consisting of 61 folios and with a C14 dating (771-884), revealed that its paper was made from flora indigenous to Central Asia, indicating localised industries over and above Chinese imports. Whilst uncertainty surrounds the actual place of MIK III 45’s production (possibly Marv, Samarkand or Turfan), what is clear is that the Christian communities had embraced this new technology by the mid-eighth century. Using –as its primary focus– Syriac, Sogdian and Uighur fragments from the monastery site at Xipang, this paper will review what ‘paper and its production’ can tell us about the role of Christians in the

transmission of paper, their role in the economy of Turfan and Central Asia as well as their relations with Buddhist and Manichaean communities.

Alexander Mikhailovich Kamyshev (Kyrgyzstan)

Christian Symbols in the form of Fish from Kyrgyzstan

Numerous artifacts with Christian symbols collected from the settlements of the Chui Valley have already become the subject of research. The variety of forms of crosses is explained by the absence of established canons or the presence of all kinds of Christian currents [Rott, 2005. p. 49]. In a strange way, numerous pendants made of silver or bronze in the form of fish, collected at the settlements of the Chui valley, were not included in the list of Christian symbols. Their size varies from 10 to 38 millimeters. In the “drop-shaped” form of fish, the researchers saw an integral element of the ancient symbol of the peoples of Central Asia and the Far East “Yang-Yin” [Baypakov, 2007. p. 185. The pattern on the body of the fish is heterogeneous: on some it imitates scales, on others it has an intricate ornament, on others a cross with flourishing ends is clearly visible (Plate I, 1-12). In our opinion, the fish-shaped pendants depict the history of Christianity, which was banned in the Roman Empire until the beginning of the 4th century. Forced into hiding, the ancient Christians developed their own system of symbols to determine who is theirs and who is a stranger. One such symbol is the fish. Today, the exact dating of the “fish”, considering their random finds, is hardly possible, it remains only to assume that with the coming to power of the Karakhanid dynasty, which proclaimed Islam the state religion, the persecuted adherents of Christianity remembered the secret symbols.

Alexander Mikhailovich Kamyshev (Kyrgyzstan)

On the Dating and Functional Purpose of Tash-Rabat

In many scientific publications and tourist brochures, Tash-Rabat, an architectural monument in the Naryn region of Kyrgyzstan, is called a caravanserai built in the 15th century. Although it is remote from the caravan route and is hidden in a difficult gorge at an altitude of about 3500m above sea level. Complex historical-archaeological and architectural-art studies in 1978-81. made it possible to define it as a stationary dwelling of the monastic type, built at the turn of the 10th-11th centuries. However, despite the available archaeological data, the version was expressed by the outstanding Russian orientalist V.V. Bartold and A.N. Bernshtam. In 2011, an archaeological team led by the author of the report cleaned a well inside Tash-Rabat and, based on ceramics collected at a depth of up to 7 meters, the structure can be dated to be the 10th-11th centuries. In connection with the new data, an interpretation arose that Tash-Rabat is the monastery of the Armenian brothers, which is indicated on the Catalan atlas of the 14th century. Ancient structures requiring great labor and art for erection have always been considered something supernatural and are accompanied by many legends and tales. Information about the stone Christian monastery in the Tien Shan mountains also reached Christian Europe, and when compiling the Catalan atlas, it was put on the map along with another attraction of this region – Lake Issyk Kul. However, this version of interpretation requires confirmation by written sources or new archaeological research of the site.

Valerii Kolchenko (Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyzstan)

Christian Church at the Settlement of Ak-Beshim (Object Iv, 1954): Analysis and Interpretation of Field Documentation

In 1954, a Christian church was excavated at the site of Ak-Beshim in Kyrgyzstan. The information on the excavated object is extremely scarce in the publications - less than two pages of text, and a plan of the structure. In the 1970s-1980s, the remains of the church were dismantled, and the plot was leveled out and reclaimed for agricultural needs. In 2006, when preparing a new edition of the book on Ak-Beshim, some extra notes were added to the text with reference to the church. Apart from this, a plan without the burials, two architectural sections, and certain artifacts became part of the new publication. Upon analysis of what had been published in this regard by then, in 2018 we were in a position to assume a complex history of the building, with two or three periods of its construction. In 2019, we voiced our professional take on the architectural type of this building: a hall church with an altar part singled out as a separate adjacent indoor space. Simultaneously with this, field documentation of the 1954 excavations became available to us, which significantly complemented the data which we had before.

Working in parallel with A. Mikheeva, we elaborated her analysis in the Archives of the Institute of Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. A. Mikheeva published the findings of her research in 2019. We believe that the data presented by A. Mikheeva selected from the archive materials could, in effect, be supplemented by:

1. graphical information on the object prior to excavations;
2. an updated excavation layout on the basis of the textual and graphical data derived from the archive;
3. the exact moment on the excavation timeline, telling us when the graphical documentation was compiled; after the fixation, however, the work was actually resumed and carried on with;
4. analytical observations of the site stratigraphy;
5. some updates on the then current state of conservation of the walls and their foundations, collating these data with the excavated Christian burials.

Our analysis of archive materials enables us to conjecture that after the demolition of the church's remains, leveling out the plot, following the many years of plowing, the lower parts of the walls around its entire perimeter could have still been preserved. This means that resuming archaeological excavation is feasible, to be able to acquire more precise data on this structure and the time of its inception. The first step on this path forward should be a geophysical survey of the church area.

Sergei Kostomarov (Kazakhstan)

From Wrocław to Karakorum (1245-1247): Journey of the Franciscan Brothers

The paper will present an analysis of the works and articles written on the topic by the Franciscan brother Benedict the Pole. Benedict Polyak together with John Del Plano Carpini set off on a mission to Podolsk to the headquarters of the Great Khan to Karakorum at the request of Pope Innocent IV. During the journey the brothers met Nestorian Christians as well as Catholics from among European prisoners of war. Brother Benedict describes the reception at the Khan's headquarters, the rite to which they had to go through in order to get to the Khan. The brothers also wrote about what they met during the return, what failures and events they met on the way. Upon the return of the brothers, several cases were written that described what the journey looked like.

Manuel Kuhn (University of Salzburg, Austria)

The Catholicos-Patriarch and Central Asia – What did Timothy I. know about the geographical and ecclesiological structures of the Church of the East in Central Asia and China?

In many articles or lexica one can read, that Patriarch Timothy I. of Baghdad was one of the most influential promoter of missionary activities and a leading figure in the spread of the Church of the East and Syriac Christianity along the Silk Road, in Central Asia and China. There is rarely any paper talking about the missionary spreading of the Church of the East without mentioning Timothy I. as the main figure, if not even the founder of a structured and systematic mission strategy.

But a look at the sources, especially his letters, show supposedly little knowledge of the actual nature of the geography and ecclesiological network of the church. His mentions of *Beth Hinduwāyē* ܒܝܬ ܗܝܘܘܘܐܝܬܝܐ, *Beth Sināyē* ܒܝܬ ܫܝܢܝܐ, *Beth Tuptāyē* ܒܝܬ ܬܘܦܬܝܐ and *Beth Turkāyē* ܒܝܬ ܬܘܪܩܝܐ and metropolitanates to these regions are the only references given directly by Timothy. He mentioned these places and some new appointed bishops for these places, but that's what Timothy described about it. The question arises of what he really knew about the missionary activities, what he could have known about the area and what he was aware of what was going on there in his church. Was it really an increased effort in systematic missions or did he just continue what his predecessors did in the economic context (trade routes to the east)? Was he actually that promoter of mission, spreading Christianity abroad what scholars hold scholars today? This paper tries to discuss these questions on the basis of the theory of transnational exchange of ideas, cultures and philosophy (in this case mainly: theology and theological exchange) and other sources mentioning geographical locations.

Wensuo Liu (Sun Yat-sen University, China) & Lijuan Lin (Peking University, China)

Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Excavations at the Jingjiao Monastery Site of Shuipang near Turfan

In 2021, significant progress was made in the re-excavation of the Christian monastery site of Shuipang at Turfan, conducted in collaboration with the School of Sociology and Anthropology at Sun Yat-sen University, the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, and the Xinjiang Turfan Research Institute (Academia Turfanica). After a period of suspension due to the epidemic, archaeological excavations at the monastery site of Shuipang resumed in 2023 with a series of new discoveries. This report will present the core components of the archaeological work at Shuipang in 2021 and 2023, and will make preliminary remarks on representative Syriac fragments newly found.

Shinichi Muto (Daito Bunka University, Japan)

Divine Accommodation in Jingjiao in Tang China

Better understanding of the Tang paradigms makes us understand Jingjiao Chinese documents more easily because Jingjiao writers who wrote in Chinese naturally attempted to follow the rules and norms of Chinese culture in that period. One of the significant paradigms was that of accommodation. To be sure, this concept was also important in Christian theology when it comes to divine matters since the early period of time. It was long the utilized distinction between God *per se* and perceived God, or between God as He is and God as related to the humans. This is especially the case in Syriac Christianity as well as Greek Antiochene since the 4th Century, both of which are the mothers of Jingjiao. The representatives were Ephrem the Syrian and John Chrysostom.

This kind of theory was not merely shared among Christians but also Buddhists and Taoists. In China, the accommodation theory was originated in the 3rd Century by Wang Bi (226-249) and Guo Xiang (252?-312), developed through the centuries, and continued to flourish among the contemporary Taoist writers in the Tang period. Among those were Cheng Xuanying (608-?), Li Rong (fl. 658-663), and Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712-756), who had commented on Laozi's *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* using this paradigm of divine accommodation. These Chinese Taoists in the 7-8th Centuries may have influenced Jingjiao writers. Therefore, if we make clear the background of Jingjiao expressions related with divine accommodation, it will be very helpful to understand them. Although Luoyang Inscription is also concerned, it is expected that they could shed light on one of the most important statements in the Xi'an Stele, which is situated near the very end of the main part of the Stele (l. 30) in order to declare the conclusion of the whole.

Nicholas Sims-Williams (SOAS, University of London, UK)

Christian Sogdian and Christian Syriac: A Symbiotic Relationship

In 1905, the discovery of manuscripts in Syriac script at the monastery site of Bulayik/Xipang near Turfan created a new field of study. In addition to many manuscripts in Syriac, mostly liturgical texts, and a small number in other languages such as Middle Persian, New Persian and Old Turkish, the find included manuscript fragments in Sogdian, at that time still an almost unknown language. Amongst the Sogdian fragments, a gospel lectionary translated from the Peshitta was quickly identified by F W K Müller on the basis of its rubrics in Syriac, and this text became one of the principal keys to the decipherment of Sogdian. Since that time, all the Christian Sogdian texts found in the early 1900s at Bulayik and other sites in the Turfan oasis have been published and the great majority have proved to be translations from Syriac. The work of identifying the sources of these translations has been carried out both by specialists in Sogdian and by specialists in Syriac, recently including Sebastian Brock, Grigory Kessel and Adrian Pirtea. Since the Sogdian texts are usually fragmentary, it is often only with the help of the underlying Syriac text that they can be understood. In this paper I will give some examples to demonstrate both the contribution of Syriac to Sogdian studies, which is already clear from the preceding paragraph, and the contribution of Sogdian to Syriac studies, not least through the survival in Sogdian translation of texts which are no longer known to be extant in their original language.

Abdisabur Azzamovich Raimkulov (Samarkand Archaeology Institute, Uzbekistan)

Architecture of the Koshtepa Christian Monastery in Nakhshab (Southern Sughd)

This archaeological site was accidentally discovered in the early 1990s during the expansion of the stadium in the village of Shaikhali near Karshi. The presence of a fire altar in two rooms of the structure indicated that it was the remains of a religious building. The complex consists of thirteen different rooms, the lower part of which is underground. According to the ceramics found in it, the structure dates back to the first half of the 7th century AD. After analysing the features of the building and the archaeological findings, we came to the conclusion that it is the remains of a Christian monastery, although no Christian cross was found.

We have published several articles on the results of the excavations, but the most important aspects – its architectural features—are still not well covered. This paper is about those architectural features. During the construction of a building, its plan and the direction of the walls were usually drawn on the surface of the ground; on the basis of this plan, the foundation and then the walls were built. During the construction of this building, trenches were dug along the foundation and walls. Depending on the functions of the future rooms, the trenches were dug to different depths (from 40 cm to 1.80 m) and filled with specially prepared clay. After the trenches were filled, the insides of the future rooms were excavated, and thus the clay walls were dried. This is how the lower half of the building was built. After this, the construction of the part of the building that was aboveground began, with walls at a height of 3-4 m. From the outside, therefore, the building looked like an ordinary house with a height of 3-4 m, but from the inside, the height was 5-6 m. This monastery is located in a village in the area adjacent to the large Koshtepa fortress, 1.5 km from Nasaf, the capital city of Southern Sughd. The architectural features of the temple/monastery, built in an unusual way for the early medieval period of Central Asia, are similar to the architecture of the Eurasian churches and temples of Syria and Byzantium. When the temple was completed, the underground part of all the religious rooms was completely buried with soft sandy soil. This may have happened on the eve of the Arab invasion.

Benjamin Sharkey (Magdalen College Oxford, UK)

The Metropolitans of Samarkand: An Institutional and Personal History

Within the historical records that come from the Church of the East's Mesopotamian heartlands, the many Christian communities that were active in Central Asia, as the archaeological record reveals, are rarely visible. When they do appear in these sources it is mostly in the form of references to the metropolitan bishops of Central Asian sees. Of those located beyond the Oxus river, the Metropolitan of Samarkand is the most frequently referenced. Active from at least the 8th to the 14th century, Samarkand's metropolitan surely reflects the presence of a very significant Christian community in this major urban centre. Yet, despite this, Samarkand's Christian community has received relatively little focused study compared to other Central Asian Christian communities.

In this paper I will look at the figure of the Metropolitan of Samarkand as a starting point from which to approach the history of Samarkand's Christian community. Using the church canons of Eliya ibn 'Ubayd, 'Abdisho' bar Brīkhā and Ibn al-Ṭayyib, the episcopal lists in the various recensions of the *Kitāb al-Majdal*, and paying special attention to a neglected letter from the Metropolitan of Samarkand to Patriarch Eliya I preserved in Bar 'Ebrāyā's Syriac Chronicle (referencing especially Bodleian MS Hunt 52), as well as narrative sources like the Syriac and Arabic lives of Patriarch Yahbāllahā III, I will begin reconstructing the history of the Samarkand Metropolitanate between the 9th and 14th centuries. I will discuss what we can learn through these sources about the nature of interactions between Christians in Samarkand and Mesopotamia, as well as the changing circumstances of Christians in Samarkand and their connections with the church centre in this period. I will also explore the individual experiences of these metropolitans: the process of their selection and training, their experiences of travelling between Baghdad and Samarkand, and the role of letters in staying connected, providing rare glimpses into the experiences of individual Christians in Central Asia. I will conclude by examining what these sources reveal about the motivations of these individuals in accepting an often dangerous, dislocating and unsought calling, exploring their doubts and protests as well as their hopes.

Daniel Sheridan (Jesus College Cambridge, UK)

From Codex to Scroll: Syriac Christian Book Culture in a Chinese Context

Syriac Christians journeying along the eastern Silk Roads brought with them a dynamic book culture. Indeed, from what survives of the monastic library at Bulayiq, it is clear these Christians devoted

considerable time and material resources in maintaining and transmitting not just their books but also a book culture. In short, this book culture was a distinct entity, entailing something beyond the books themselves, while still being intrinsically bound to them. Concurrently, they also adapted their book culture for their immediate locale. From Chinese sources, it appears that observers took particular notice of these Christian books from afar. While other religious traditions in China, at that time, also highly valued their sacred texts, the Christian regard for their sacred texts was uniquely reflected in the wording employed in Tang edicts. Moreover, the Christians living in China decided to translate not just their texts into Chinese, but they also opted to translate the book form itself from codex to scroll. Acquired by Pelliot from the Dunhuang library cave, the note in Pelliot chinois 3847 bears witness to an intentional strategy regarding materiality. The Pelliot scroll also provides precious insights into the production of a Chinese Christian scroll.

In this paper, I will explore some notable characteristics of Christian book culture's presence in the Sinographic world through evidence from the Tang dynasty and shortly thereafter. Particular attention will be made to the unique witness of P.3847 including its own materiality, which I have been able to examine in-person.

Charles Anthony Stewart (Benedictine College, Kansas, USA)

From Ashes to Ashes: The Christian Funerary Chapel Recently Excavated at Usharal-Ilibalyk (Kazakhstan)

During archaeological excavations in 2020 and 2022, a funerary chapel was excavated near the Chinese-Kazakhstan border at site called Usharal-Ilibalyk. The chapel has a “basilical” design and, at the eastern end, there is a square chamber with a table—thus, tentatively, identified as a bema with an altar. Because this chapel is oriented (to the east), and formed the southern boundary of a cemetery where Christian artifacts and five Syriac-inscribed tombstones were found, the building has been associated with Church of the East. The floor of the chapel was completely covered in ash and charcoal. One hypothesis is that the structure was roofed with a wood and reed roof; as such the building may have been abandoned after a cataclysmic fire. An alternative theory is that the chapel was vaulted, since the walls are 2.5 m thick, which is about 4 times larger than necessary for a wood roof; if so, then the ash on the floor cannot be explained by fire. If the later thesis is correct, then the ashes may have been used for ritual and symbolic reasons. In fact, ash was mixed to form the bricks used to construct the nearby tombs, and ash and charcoal was frequently found within the graves. This practice may be related to ancient rites of humility (describe in the Bible) as well as the specific Syriac practice of *hanānā* (ܚܢܢܐ, “compassion”). This presentation will provide our reconstructions of this chapel and discuss the use of ashes in Syriac literature, liturgy, and ritual practices.

Glen Thompson & Angus Kwok Fai Cheung (Asia Lutheran Seminary, Hong Kong, China)

The 10 Vows in the Book of the Lord Messiah and Possible Local Adaptation

The “Ten Vows” (十願) in the *Book of the Lord Messiah* (序聽迷詩所經) are normally thought to present the biblical Ten Commandments. This connection was already made by Haneda Toru in 1926. Saeki suggested that the “Ten Vows” might instead depend on sections of the *Didache*. Wang saw a dependence on both the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments, but also the Ten Precepts of Buddhism, and the Daoist teaching in the *Scripture of the Original Bound of the Perfect Unity of Great Mystery*. It is clear that, like the other surviving Jingjiao texts, the vows reflect the religious, social and cultural environments in Tang era China, including Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—all with longer local histories than the Jingjiao. However, the cultural and interpretive traditions of East Syriac Christianity have often not been given adequate and sophisticated consideration in discussions of this textual dialogue with Chinese culture and religious traditions. This paper will try to demonstrate the importance of doing so by analysing how the Ten Vows are in some ways similar to and in other ways different from the content of the Ten Commandments.

Baby Varghese (Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, India)

History of Mar Yahbh-allaha and the East Syriac Understanding of the Meaning of Pilgrimage

Several accounts of the pilgrimages of the East Syriac monks from fifth to fifteenth century have come down to us. However, the number of Syrian monks and ascetics who actually went to Jerusalem was not

very much. The Syrian monks were rather interested in their journey to the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’, than going to the early Jerusalem. The most famous East Syrian pilgrims were Mark the Ongut and Rabban Sauma the Uighur. Probably their travel had political goals, rather than spiritual edification. The account of their travel, composed in the early decades of the fourteenth century, describes the east Syriac understanding of the pilgrimage. The unknown author writes that the two monks wanted to visit important pilgrim centres of their mother Church in Persia as well as the holy land to be blessed by ‘the tombs of the holy martyrs and catholic fathers’ and to ‘receive complete pardon of offences and absolution for the sins’. In my paper, I shall discuss the importance of this document to understand the East Syriac theology of pilgrimage.

Zexiang Wang (Sun Yat-sen University, China)

The Chronology and Architectural Composition of the Jingjiao Monastery Site of Xipang (Shüipang) in Turfan, Xinjiang, China

The *Jingjiao* monastery site of Xipang is located on a hillock at the southern slope of the Flaming Mountains in the northern part of Turfan City, Xinjiang, China. Since 2021, archaeologists from Sun Yat-sen University have undertaken an archaeological excavation on the Xipang site in cooperation with the Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology of Xinjiang and Academia Turfanica. Up to 2023, we have uncovered the main buildings on top of the hillock and some buildings on the east, north, and west slopes, including more than 20 building remains and a large number of artefacts.

Based on the results of archaeological excavations and ¹⁴C dating, we think this church was used for a long time: at least three phases of structures were uncovered, and its main phase of occupation was Qocho Uyghur Kingdom period (ca. 9th–13th centuries), but some walls below room-remains of the main phase suggest there were some older structures. During the Qing dynasty (ca. 17th–20th centuries), the abandoned buildings were reutilized, and this practice and the subsequent illegal digging caused serious damage to the site. Due to these reasons, uncovered remains are quite complicated. Fortunately, a “triple-nave-church” building group has been well preserved, as well as some affiliated buildings around them, such as cellar, kitchen, bedroom, etc. Its architectural composition has many similarities as the churches or monasteries in Central Asia. Furthermore, some findings provide evidences for studying ancient construction techniques, including how to build walls and rooftops. This paper will discuss the chronology, architectural composition and the history of reconstruction and reutilization of the ruin basing on our archaeological excavations.

Kevin White (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Recent Discoveries of Syriac Christianity in Kazakhstan and the Potential Influence and Veneration of the 4th Century Bar Shabba, Bishop of Merv

In 2014, a farmer in the village of Usharal in East Kazakhstan discovered a large stone which featured a cross with Syriac script surrounding the cross. Digital analysis and the translation of the Syriac script revealed the stone to be a gravestone of a Christian priest, bearing the ecclesiastical name Bar Shabba, possibly related to the 4th century Bishop of Merv. Subsequent excavations have uncovered over one hundred graves, including numerous gravestones with crosses. In addition to the Ilibalyk discovery, other archaeological excavations have uncovered a history of Christianity in multiple locations in Kazakhstan, dating as early as the 7th century. In addition, on the possible influence and veneration of the 4th century bishop Bar Shabba in the region, this presentation will provide a summary of recent archaeological discoveries in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, and seek to interpret them in the context of historical sources.

Yuge Xing (Sun Yat-sen University, China)

A Glimpse of Eastern Syriac Christianity: The Bema from the Church Site in Tangchaodun, Changji, China

The nave of the East Syriac Church in Tangchaodun唐朝墩 has a rectangular bema with an eastern-side staircase for accessing the top. This paper draws tentative conclusions on how the bema here reflects the liturgy of the East Syriac Church and how much cultural exchange occurred between different Christian traditions. Analysing the structure of the bema shows that the rectangular platform is a

localized characteristic in Xinjiang, while two pulpits dogmatically demonstrate that the bema served as the location of the Liturgy of the Word. It is also worth emphasizing that this bema which has an arched doorway from the north to south throughout was quite popular in Byzantine Ambo from the Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, which reflects the architectural evolution trend here: Originated in Antioch during the 4th century and spread West as the Greek Ambo, the Syriac-Byzantine featured bema echoes the Hellenization in East Syriac Christianity during the 5th and 6th centuries.

The unique approach is to observe liturgies through bema's iconographic program. Legend and *hūdrā* from Shūipang suggest that the south and north sides of the bema which have sets of arched frames with "title" may include icons of saints or martyrs such as Mar BarShabba, Mar Cyriacus & Julitta, St. Geroge, St. Sergius, and Bacchus. The week-long festive observance of the commemoration of the saints resembles the liturgy of the hours of the Lenten season. Liturgical structures such as vespers, cathedrals' vigil, and matins involve the bema and are associated with the "Cathedral-Centered Offices" related closely to Jerusalem. The "Jesus on a Donkey" mural on the eastern side of the bema alludes to Palm Sunday, the first day of the holy week during Lent. Combining the Cross on Golgotha and processions between the sanctuary and the bema demonstrates that the bema with icons is connected to Christ's earthly existence and serves as the church within the church. Additionally, referring to the Ambo in the Rotunda of the 6th century, Thessaloniki, the sculpture in the western niche of the bema may be Christ himself, flanked by wall-paintings depicting the Nativity or *Traditio Legis*. This confirms the symbolic significance of the iconolatry of East Syriac Christianity. Briefly, exploration of these fragments will allow for a fuller understanding of the bema in Gaochang Uighur Christianity.

Helen Younansardaroud (Free University Berlin, Germany)

On the Syriac and Arabic Sources of the East Syriac Dioceses

There are many important Syriac and Arabic sources on the East Syriac dioceses of Central Asia and China. In this paper some examples will be presented and commented.

Zhidong Zhang (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

The Nestorian Ma Family of the Önggüd: Their Sogdian Origin and Migration

Among the Önggüd (Öngüt) – a group of Turkic-speaking tribes that were active in the Yinshan Mountains and the surrounding areas during the twelfth and fourteenth centuries – the Ma family was very prominent. While scholars have studied the political activities and the Nestorian faith of the Ma family, much less attention has been given to their ethnic and geographical origins. In this study, I will analyse pertinent records from both traditional and unearthed Chinese historical sources to shed light on the family's origins. My analysis suggests that the Ma family was most probably of Sogdian origin. I draw this conclusion based on two main factors. First, like the Sogdians, the Ma family had a tradition of active engagement in trade and of training their young members as multilingual translators. Second, they maintained close relationships, including marital ties, with the Uyghurs of clear Sogdian origin. After departing from their Sogdian homeland during an era for which no sources provide information, the Ma family had resided for a prolonged period in the Uyghur kingdoms situated in the Tarim Basin and had adopted the Uyghur identity before migrating, alongside other Sogdian families, to Didao, a town close to the Song-Xi Xia border during the reign period of Xianyong (1065-1074 CE) of Emperor Daozong of Liao (r. 1055-1101 CE). After concluding their migration a few years after the collapse of the Liao Empire in 1125 CE in Tianshan, a town within the Jin Empire (1115-1234 CE) and in proximity to the Mongol frontier, the Ma family continued their established traditions in religion, education and career pursuits, and gradually adopted the new Önggüd identity in the second half of the thirteenth century. This study contributes to our understanding of the migration patterns of the Sogdian Nestorian families from Central Asia to China during the tenth and early thirteenth centuries, when the level of trading and migration along the Silk Road were relatively moderate, in contrast to the Tang and Mongol periods.

Peter Zieme (Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Science and Humanities, Germany)

An Old Uyghur Tombstone from Dali

In 2017, Zhang Tieshan edited an Old Uyghur tomb inscription which was found in Dali in Yunnan Province of China. Being of great importance for the history of Turkish/Uyghur speaking Christians

during the Mongol period I would like to revisit this inscription. The first editor of the concluded that the only date possible date was September 21, 1260. This date is ascertained by the Ape year which although reappearing every 12th year can be no other than that because of the historical circumstances mentioned in the inscription.

This conference is sponsored by:

- Center for the Study of the Christian East (ZECO), Universität Salzburg, Austria
- International Institute for Central Asian Studies (IICAS) by the UNESCO Silk Road Programme, Samarkand, Uzbekistan
- Stiftung Pro-Oriente Salzburg, Austria



Impressum

ZECO–Zentrum zur Erforschung des Christlichen Ostens, Universität Salzburg
Universitätsplatz 1, 5020 Salzburg, Austria
Tel. +43 662 8044 2690
Email: zeco@plus.ac.at