

CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: ADOPTION OF EAST SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY
IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

ХРИСТИАНСТВО В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ПРИНЯТИЕ ВОСТОЧНОЙ-
СИРИЙСКОГО ХРИСТИАНСТВА В СРЕДНИЕ ВЕКА

ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДАҒЫ ХРИСТИАН ДІНІ: ОРТА ҒАСЫРДАҒЫ ШЫҒЫС-СИРИЯ
ДІНІНІҢ ҚАБЫЛДАНУЫ

by

Zhuldyz Tashmanbetova

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Eurasian Studies

at

NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY -
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

NUR-SULTAN, KAZAKHSTAN

2019

THESIS APPROVAL FORM

NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: ADOPTION OF EAST SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY IN
THE MEDIEVAL PERIODХРИСТИАНСТВО ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ПРИНЯТИЕ ВОСТОЧНОЙ-СИРИЙСКОГО
ХРИСТИАНСТВА В СРЕДНИЕ ВЕКАОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДАҒЫ ХРИСТИАН ДІНІ: ОРТА ҒАСЫРДАҒЫ ШЫҒЫС-СИРИЯ
ДІНІНІҢ ҚАБЫЛДАНУЫ

BY

Zhuldyz Tashmanbetova

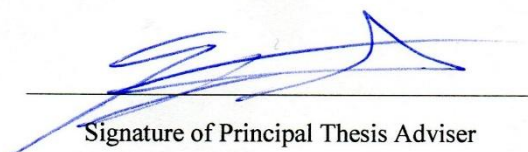
NU Student Number: 201799780

APPROVED

BY

Dr. Daniel Scarborough

ON

The 6th day of May 2019
Signature of Principal Thesis Adviser

In Agreement with Thesis Advisory Committee

Second Adviser: Dr. Paula Doumani Dupuy

External Reader: Dr. Mark Dickens

© 2019

ZHULDYZ TASHMANBETOVA

All Rights Reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1. Background information	14
1.1 Christianity in Mongol empire	20
Chapter 2. History of archaeological study and archeological evidence for Christianity in Central Asia	26
Chapter 3. Data set – the discovery of Ilibalyk	
3.1 Data description and record from Ilibalyk archeological site	36
3.2 Ilibalyk gravestones: the crosses	39
Table 1. The Central Asian East Syriac gravestones discovered in 2016 (Ilibalyk, Usharal)	
Table 2. The Central Asian East Syriac gravestones discovered in 2017 (Ilibalyk, Usharal)	
3.3 Ilibalyk gravestones: The inscriptions	46
Chapter 4. Discussion	
4.1 Local communities at Ilibalyk	48
4.1.1 Muslim influence on the East Syriac iconography of Ilibalyk community	52
4.2 Ilibalyk communities and the wider Christian presence in Central Asia	57
Conclusion	72
Bibliography	77
Appendix 1	
Table 3. The regional comparison of Central Asian East Syriac gravestones with Christian crosses and Syriac/Turkic inscriptions	86
Appendix 2	
Figures 1-4. Ossuaries with Christian symbols, Afrasiab settlement, Samarkand Museum, Uzbekistan	104
Appendix 3	
Map 1. Location of Ilibalyk	106
Map 2. Sites with East Syriac Presence in Eurasia	107
Map 3. Sites with East Syriac presence in Central Asia and China	108
Map 4. Borders of Chagatai Khanate in 13th-14th century CE	109

Abstract

In 2016 archeologists discovered the medieval city of Ilibalyk in modern day Kazakhstan. This new and exciting archeological excavation of the medieval archeological site Ilibalyk reveals the presence of the Church of the East or the East Syriac Church in the region for the first time. The excavations during 2016 and 2017 at Ilibalyk revealed East Syriac Christian gravestones and a graveyard of the late 13th - early 14th century CE, revealing the presence of a Christian population in the late medieval city and in Central Asia in general. Based on analysis of the range of gravestones recovered during excavations at Ilibalyk, this thesis questions the extent to which the Christian communities were integrated into the multireligious society of Central Asia. The thesis examines this question through stylistic analysis of the medieval Christian gravestones and of the crosses engraved on them. This analysis provides us with an insight into how East Syriac Christians were integrated in the multireligious society of Ilibalyk, which was located in the Chagatai *ulus*. From this research of the uncovered archeological data, we can say that the Ilibalyk Christians, who developed their religious identity in a non-Christian environment, may have been not only well integrated in the socioreligious life of the Ilibalyk community, but also occupied a place in a wider Christian network in this region. Moreover, the research poses further questions of how the East Syriac Christian community developed its identity in medieval Central Asia. This thesis provides some possible answers to those questions and stresses where further research could lead. It is one of the few studies that makes an attempt to understand the relation between the religious iconography developed by the East Syriac Christians in Central Asia and the religious identity that they expressed.

Acknowledgments

I would like first to thank my thesis advisors Drs. Daniel Scarborough and Paula Dupuy of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nazarbayev University. They consistently steered me in the right direction throughout two years of my master's studies while I was writing this interdisciplinary project. The doors to Prof. Scarborough's and Prof. Dupuy's offices were always open whenever I needed their advice and recommendations regarding my research, writing, and organizational issues. I am forever grateful for their support and their belief in my project and in myself as a future scholar.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Mark Dickens of St. Joseph's College at the University of Alberta as the external reader of this thesis. I am gratefully indebted to Dr. Dickens' academic passion and his input on the present project. Dr. Dickens' comments and expertise in Syriac Studies greatly advised me on how to develop my research ideas into a thesis paper.

I would also like to thank Dr. Dmitry Voyakin and Kevin White who invited me to participate in the archeological excavations of the medieval city of Ilibalyk. I am extremely grateful to Dr. Voyakin for providing me with the field reports of the excavations of the Ilibalyk site, thus allowing me to research the material evidence collected during the Ilibalyk expedition in more detail.

Finally, I would like to express my very profound gratitude to my family and friends for providing me with unfailing support and encouragement throughout the years of my studies and thesis writing at Nazarbayev University. This accomplishment would not be possible without them.

Introduction

In 2016 archeologists discovered the medieval city Ilibalyk in modern day Kazakhstan. This new and exciting archeological excavations of the medieval archeological site Ilibalyk reveal the presence of the Church of the East or of the East Syriac Christianity in the region for the first time. The archeological site of Ilibalyk is located beneath the modern-day village of Usharal, southeastern Kazakhstan, near the Kazakh-Chinese border (map 1). The on-going excavation of the site presents one of the few examples for Christian presence in the medieval period within the borders of Kazakhstan.

The excavations during 2016 and 2017 at Ilibalyk revealed East Syriac Christian gravestones and a graveyard, thereby suggesting the presence of a Christian population in the late medieval city and in Central Asia in general. Based on the numismatic analysis, the archeological evidence uncovered in Ilibalyk dates to late 13th - early 14th century CE.¹ The gravestones contain engravings of Christian crosses with some also containing Turkic inscriptions in Syriac script. Overall, the archeological research of 2016 revealed seven Christian gravestones, whereas the excavations of 2017 uncovered eleven stones containing Christian symbolism. All the gravestones differ in size, shape and in the style of the crosses engraved on the surface of the stones.

Based on analysis of the range of gravestones recovered during excavations at Ilibalyk, this thesis questions the extent to which the Christian communities were integrated into the multireligious society of Central Asia. It is crucial to our understanding of medieval Central Asia to consider the diffusion of what was once the biggest Christian church in Central Asia, the Church of the East, which was adopted by Turkic and Mongolian tribes in medieval Central Asia (in presumably the 7th-14th centuries CE).² Material studies offer one

¹ П. Н. Петров, К.М. Байпаков, Д. А. Воякин, Д. С. Ересенов, “Средневековый город, обнаруженный в долине реки Или (нумизматический аспект),” *Нумизматика Золотой Орды*, no. 4 (2014): 61-76.

² Mark Dickens, “Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 02 (2010): 117-139.

line of evidence in which to examine this problem, and to date they are superseded by textual analyses on documents of the period. Based on such studies, it has been established that during the late medieval period, the Ilibalyk city and its Christian community was a part of the Chagatai Khanate of the Mongol empire.³ Christians of Ilibalyk had to coexist with other religions as a minority community that expressed their religious identity through Christian iconography within the Chagatai Khanate. The religious affiliation of these tribes shaped both their local identities and their cultural ties with the broader world.

The present paper provides a brief overview of the religious environment in Chagatai Khanate, while also examining in more detail the position of this community within the Chagatai Khanate. The further research of this Christian archeological evidence can provide new insight into the cultural life of communities in the Mongol Empire. However, this study will question the extent to which the Ilibalyk Christian community was integrated into a religious life of the local population. In addition, it questions whether the Ilibalyk Christian community was or was not a part of a wider socioreligious Christian network of East Syriac Christianity developed in Central Asia and China during the medieval period.

The main dataset of this analysis is the recent archeological discovery of the Christian gravestones in Kazakhstan.⁴ This thesis aims to explore the communal affiliations of the medieval Christian communities through the stylistic analysis of the medieval Christian gravestones and iconographic analysis of the abstract image of crosses engraved on the gravestones discovered in a Christian graveyard of the medieval city, Ilibalyk. This study also consults with the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet scholarship in Russian, which brings various perspectives on the development of the Church of the East in Central Asia. In addition to the analysis of the motifs of various crosses on the corpus of the Ilibalyk gravestones, I am performing a regional comparison of crosses found throughout the

³ Refer to chapter 2 “*History of archaeological study and archeological evidence for Christianity in Central Asia*”.

⁴ Field Reports on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017.

Chagatai Khanate and in the surrounding areas in order to place Ilibalyk in its wider cultural network. The regional analysis and the systematization of the Christian archeological data from Central Asia expands those chronological borders to the period of the 7th to 14th century. Notably, the corpus of the gravestones is one of the main sources for reconstructing the Christian Central Asian and Chinese medieval history.⁵ Considering the geographical borders of the regional analysis, it is important to note that the analysis includes the areas that surrounded Ilibalyk in the medieval time. These are the regions with the Christian presence in the medieval time: Chu Valley, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolian part of modern-day China. Importantly, this thesis considers the Christian archeological sites with a significant Christian population acknowledging the fact that this Church was far more widespread than the territory of those sites presented in the analysis.

From the research of the uncovered archeological data, we can say that the Ilibalyk Christians that developed their Christian identity in a non-Christian environment may have been not only well-integrated in the socioreligious life of Ilibalyk community but also occupied a place in a wider Christian network in this region. The research revealed outstanding questions of how the East Syriac Christian community developed its identity in medieval Central Asia. This thesis provides some possible answers to those questions and stresses where this evidence could lead.

While discussing the possible interpretations of the research questions emerged from the analysis of Ilibalyk archeological evidence, the thesis covers an essential point of the ways in which the further research of this data may develop and the possible claims that can be made related to this data in the future analysis. These questions cover essential for the analysis of East Syrian Christian communities in medieval Central Asia. The analysis thus

⁵ Mark Dickens, “Syriac Gravestones in the Tashkent History Museum,” in *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, ed. Dietmar Winkler, Li Tang. *Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica* 1 (Berlin: LIT, 2009), p. 41.

revealed three main points of the analysis that could contribute to our understanding of how East Syriac communities developed their identity in a non-Christian culture of Central Asia.

Firstly, the present research revealed an intriguing variety of Christian crosses engraved on the Ilibalyk East Syriac gravestones. Further discoveries in this area may explain this seemingly eclectic style of embellishing crosses, while also possibly alluding to local autonomy in religious expression. While further research may reveal how unique the Ilibalyk iconography was, for now it is nevertheless remarkable that the gravestones present tremendous diversity in style and motifs chiseled into the gravestones. All the crosses from the site of Ilibalyk are known among East Syrian Christian communities documented elsewhere. However, it is remarkable that in a close examination of styles of the crosses used by East Syriac communities of Central Asia and China, there is no specific cross/singular cross used generally by this Church. The Central Asian and the Christians of northern China used various forms of a Christian cross that is also common for the Western church. Although the East Syriac Christians used Maltese type cross very often, there is no specific cross used by the Church of the East in Central Asia that may have possibly originated from the East Syrian funerary art tradition. While this thesis provides research of the images of Christian cross used by Central Asian Christians only, to draw upon the meaning of this diversity it is important to conduct further research on the crosses used by the Church of the East further to the west, in the homeland of the Church, Middle East, and styles of crosses used by Western Church.

Secondly, the abstract iconography on the gravestones may indicate the indigenization of Muslim religious art, for instance, of non-anthropomorphic imagery. Although Muslim influence was not found on any of gravestones, this transpired without the integration of religious traditions of Christianity with other religions but may have resulted in the emergence of an austere Christian iconography in the medieval city of Ilibalyk where Islam

had, moreover, support from the ruling authorities.⁶ While further archaeological study of domestic contexts will show if these groups were integrated, for now, we can surmise that the relationships were not antagonistic. It is evident that the funerary art tradition of the Christians of Ilibalyk included only abstract, non-anthropomorphic imagery. It may suggest that this kind of funerary art that excluded any anthropomorphic imagery is typical for Central Asian funerary traditions but unique in terms of a broader Christian funerary art. Hence, this thesis highlights an unresolved question of whether the Ilibalyk Christian community incorporated influence from Islamic ideology into the East Syriac funerary art.

Unlike the Christian communities that had a capacity to adopt Buddhist symbolism, Christians of Ilibalyk that incorporated only a plain cross and rarely short inscriptions, does not seem to demonstrate any Christian-Buddhist crossover. There are examples of the adoption and integration of East Syriac Christian funerary art with symbolism of other religious traditions, which possibly helped to develop their Christian identity in a non-Christian environment of a Mongol China.⁷ This kind of crossover is distinctive to the Christian funerary art of Asia and demonstrates the need in developing a Christian iconography in a non-Christian culture. It is evident that Christianity had a capacity to adopt symbols of other religions. If considering East Syrian Christianity that developed in Central Asia and China as an syncretistic religion, it is important to note that this feature does not tell us whether Christians adopted features of other religions with its theology or just adopted symbols without any attachment to the religious significance of the symbolism of other religions. Hence, the research of the Christian funerary art reveals the capacity of the Christian communities to integrate Christian iconography with Buddhist symbolism and may point to the Muslim influence of Christian iconographic tradition in the future research. Furthermore, the present paper demonstrates that Christian communities that located not

⁶ Refer to chapter 1 "Background information".

⁷ Ken Parry, "Images in the Church of the East: The Evidence from Central Asia and China," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 321.

necessarily close to each other, were able to commemorate their deceased in a way that suited their religious belief in an afterlife in a non-Christian environment (table 3). The level of sophistication of a Christian funerary art in non-Christian culture indicates the status of the deceased in a Chinese and Turkic society under Mongols, which in the case of Ilibalyk funerary iconography does not demonstrate a lack of a Christian theological knowledge of this community but rather highlights their devotion to the theological significance of the image of plain Christian cross.

Thirdly, the archeological data provides evidence for some level of Christian community integration into an Ilibalyk society, which was able to adopt Turkic language written in Syriac script for commemorating their deceased. Although we cannot identify yet the ethnic origins of the Ilibalyk Christians, the usage of the Turkic script may point out to the Ilibalyk Christian community being a part of a bigger Turkic society under Mongol ruling in 13th and 14th centuries. Thus, the implication of the Turkic script or rather the adoption of the local tradition of writing points out to the level of integration of Christian community of Ilibalyk into the local culture and Ilibalyk society.

Regarding the structure of this thesis paper, the essay is organized into three chapters that present various sides of the analysis of the Christian archeological evidence from Central Asia and the surrounding Christian settlements with a Christian population. In chapter 1, I refer to historical texts and archaeological evidence to discuss the period of Mongol ruling in Central Asia and China in the late medieval period. It covers the religious and political changes that took place in Mongol khanates, where the East Syriac Christian assimilated in the medieval age. Chapter 1 therefore provides historical context of how Christianity may have developed their identity under Mongol rule in Central Asia.

Chapter 2 “History of archaeological study and archeological evidence for Christianity in Central Asia” then systematizes the archeological evidence for the Christian

presence discovered in Central Asian order to place Ilibalyk in this wider socioreligious network. This chapter also provides coverage of a regional comparison of the evidence from various archeological sites (appendix 1, table 1) and draws upon perspectives presented in Russian colonial, Soviet and post-Soviet scholarships about the development of the Church of the East in this region, which contributed greatly to the process of systematization of this substantial evidence.

Chapter 3 outlines Ilibalyk discovery description, data description and record from Ilibalyk archeological site. This chapter discusses the inscriptions and crosses engraved on the Christian gravestones of Ilibalyk.

In chapter 4, I turn my focus explicitly to an interpretation of the Ilibalyk Christian archeological evidence, analyzing the results on a multi-scalar community level (local and regional). The analysis offers possible interpretations of Ilibalyk Christian evidence and in the later parts attempts to place Ilibalyk Christian community in a wider socioreligious Christian network. This chapter mainly aims to bring to the scholarly discussion the essential questions for the reconstruction of the Christian history in Central Asia and of the early modern history of present-day Kazakhstan, and to provide possible answers for these unresolved questions that require further research. Finally, the paper includes appendixes with a table of the regional comparison and the pictures of the Christian archeological evidence that I collected during my summer fieldwork in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Chapter 1. Background information

The Church of the East first appears in the historical accounts of ecclesiastical and dogmatic history in the fifth century council debates in the Roman empire. These debates were over the orthodoxy of Christology. The council was held in Ephesus in 431 CE. Due to the theological position expressed by Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople at the Council of Ephesus, the followers of the eastern Church who agreed with Nestorius's position were called heretics by the Orthodox Church. It marked the time when the Church of the East separated itself from the Orthodox Church of the Roman Empire.⁸

One mostly finds information about this denomination of Christianity under the heading "Nestorian Christianity". Nestorius was not their patriarch, however. Nestorius himself never organized a church and thus he was not a founder of the Church of the East himself. This title was applied for the Church of the East by those who opposed the theology of this church.⁹ The Church of the East, or so-called Nestorian church, venerated Nestorius as a saint, and thus the 'Nestorian church' title was used as a part of its communities' identity. However, it was other Christians who described them as Nestorians, not they themselves.¹⁰ In the present thesis paper I will refer to this Church as to the Church of the East and East Syriac Christians when describe people who were members of this church for brevity

The Church of the East was founded under the Persian Empire, which means that this Church was established outside the political sphere of the Roman Empire. The theological break from the Orthodox Church was politically helpful for the status of Christians living under the Roman Empire's enemy. Moreover, the rise of Islam in Persia was very good for the Church of the East, as it granted East Syriac Christians official toleration. However, due

⁸ Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 7.

⁹ Parry, Ken, "Reflections on a Silk Fragment from Toyuq: Christian or Manichaean?" *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 7 (2016): 167-92.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar Winkler, *The Church of the East*, 2003, 12.

to the decline of the church of the East in Persia in the 6th century, it had to move to Central Asia.¹¹ The unique theology of the Church of the East developed after the 6th century under Arab rulers. The Abbasids were one of the long living dynasties of the Islam Caliphate. The third caliph Mahdi (775-785) tolerated Christianity, as is apparent from the outcome of his recorded dialogue with the Eastern Patriarch, Timothy. The new Abbasid dynasty moved the center of the caliphate out of Syria, to the East into Mesopotamia. In 762, the second caliph Masur (754-775) built a new capital at Baghdad. This site was chosen for the strategic aim of making contact with China. This was one of the first shifts in the orientation of the empire to the Asiatic part of the world.¹²

The emphasis on Islam as the true religion did not worsen the treatment of Christians as a minority religion in the Caliphate. Caliph Mahdi hosted the Christian bishop of the Church of the East, Timothy I (779-823), and engaged with him in a famous debate. Timothy I, who came from Adiabene, the ancient seat of the early Persian Christians, was the greatest spiritual leader of the Church of the East who served under the caliphate. Even under the generous Caliph Mahdi, the Abbasid dynasty destroyed churches and took Christian slaves from their borders with the Byzantine Empire.¹³ Timothy served as a patriarch under Mahdi's three successors for more than forty years. He not only led and maintained his Church under these conditions, but also worked to expand it through missionary activity.¹⁴ Considering the time and the political system of this dynasty, it was a remarkable gesture of tolerance by the Muslim Caliph towards Christians to host and debate the leader of the Church of the East. The caliph invited patriarch Timothy to debate by himself, which meant that Timothy had an outstanding opportunity to debate on equal terms. Patriarch Timothy

¹¹ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 217-242.

¹² Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*, 1998, 349.

¹³ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*, 1998, 354.

¹⁴ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*, 1998, 353.

recorded the proceedings after two days of fascinating debate that was circulated as *Apology of Patriarch Timothy of Baghdad before the Caliph Mahdi*.

This dialogue marks a high point in the intercommunication between Islam and Christianity. It also marks the apogee of the influence of the Church of the East in the early medieval era in the Abbasid Caliphate as well as in Tang China.¹⁵ The dialogue demonstrates Timothy's strategy for accommodating the religious priorities of Caliph Mahdi. Throughout these debates Timothy tried to explain the nature of the East Syriac Christianity, its beliefs and perception of God, while demonstrating his respect for the religious beliefs of the Caliph. Timothy explained the essence of East Syrian Christianity without denying the validity of the Muslim creed. He attempted to present Christian doctrine as satisfying the major tenets of both religions.

Timothy emphasized his Church's similarities and connections with Islam. For example, he presented the doctrine of the Trinity as compatible with Muslim monotheism:

If He is one God, He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and if He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, He is one God, because the eternal nature of God consists in Fatherhood, Filiation, and Procession, and in the three of them He is one God, and in being one God He is the three of them.¹⁶

In his defense of Christianity, and its compatibility with Islam, Timothy elucidated the unique "dyophysite" Christology of the Church of the East. According to this theological position, the human and divine natures of Christ, *Logos* and *Anthropos*, are separate. As Timothy explained, when Christ was crucified as *Anthropos*, Christ as *Logos* did not

¹⁵ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*, 1998, 352.

¹⁶ *Apology of Patriarch Timothy of Baghdad before the Caliph Mahdi*, *Early Medieval Christianity in Asia*, 236.

From A. Mingana, ed. and u. Woodbrooke Studies, vol. 2 Cambridge: Heffer, 1928, 60-73, 77-84, 87-90.

experience suffering and death.¹⁷ Hence, East Syriac Christians opposed to the basics of the Christian faith outlined in Bible and interpreted by Roman Church.¹⁸ Christians of the Church of the East accepted the belief in dual nature of Christ, divine and humane ones that united in one person. This doctrine was more acceptable to the Muslim Caliph than the Orthodox Christian doctrine that Christ experienced suffering and death as God.¹⁹

And our victorious King said: 'In this matter you believe more rightly than the others. Who dares to assert that God dies? I think that even demons do not say such a thing. In what, however, you say concerning one Word and Son of God, all of you are wrong.'²⁰

Summing up the outcome and significance of the dialogue between Caliph Mahdi and Christian patriarch for this history of the Church of the East, it is important to emphasize that Timothy's strategy of accommodation illustrates the Eastern Christian strategy of acculturation and accommodation of the majority religion since the Church of the East was minority religion under caliphs.

The missionaries of the Church of the East also settled in and established Christian communities in many medieval cities along the Silk Roads, covering the territory between Mesopotamia and Xi'an, China.²¹ Throughout the history of the Silk Roads, ideas and religions traveled along various trade routes.²² One of those religions was Christianity, and in particular, the Church of the East that spread to China from India. There is substantial

¹⁷ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*, 1998, 350.

¹⁸ Mark Dickens, *Nestorius did not intend to argue that Christ had a dual nature, but that view became labeled Nestorianism* (PRO), *Popular Controversies in World History: Investigating History's Intriguing Questions*, 2010.

¹⁹ Apology of Patriarch Timothy, 235.

²⁰ Apology of Patriarch Timothy, 241.

²¹ Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity*, 1998, 400-401.

²² Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 359.

material evidence of the Christian presence in China. For instance, the stele of 781 CE that was discovered in Xi'an mentions the arrival of the Church of the East in China.²³

Christian metropolitanates were organized in Central Asia and China in order to instruct Iranian, Mongol and Turkic Christians in the main cities along the Silk Road, such as Merv, Samarkand, Kashgar, Turkestan, Almalyk, Navekath, and others.²⁴ Missionaries of the Church of the East were not only monastic representatives but also merchants and traders that traveled overland in Central Asia and along the maritime routes via southern India.

In Central Asia and China, an East Syrian Christian church developed without any imperial power behind it, and among non-Christian populations. Hence, Christianity did not have support from the State as the Western Christians did, who maintained conversion campaigns or missionary activities with the support of the religious and governmental authorities. Thus, it is most likely that Christianity spread throughout Asia as a byproduct of trade networks.²⁵ The missionary activities that extended the networks of the urban societies in Central Asia and even more active participation of merchants and traders in the spreading of Christian ideology helped to establish Christianity around oases, particularly in the Turfan oasis of Xinjiang.

Ultimately, Muslim ideology politically dominated the Central Asian region, while Christians and Jews contributed greatly to the scientific achievements of Muslim civilization. Moreover, Eastern Christians became members of Muslim administration: "Their wide linguistic background made the Eastern churches valuable resources for rising empires in

²³ See Brock, S. P, "The Nestorian Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 23-35. Brock described how the church separated from the Western one and migrated toward the East. And why it is not right to call the Church of the East, Nestorian Church; also see Ken Parry, "Images in the Church of the East: The Evidence from Central Asia and China," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 321.

²⁴ Mark Dickens, "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 02 (2010) 117-139.

²⁵ Christian, David. "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History." *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1-26.

search of diplomats, advisers and scholars”.²⁶ Christianity as the minority religion in medieval Asia should not be considered a weak religious tradition or as the “victim of Islamic rule”. As Elverskog proposes, there is a substantial number of works that report the Muslim rulers’ tolerance towards diverse religious groups while Islam dominated the region²⁷.

There are different ways in which Christianity influenced Islamic ideology. For instance, there were influential Eastern Christians in the Muslim world who influenced the spread of East Syriac Christianity in Central Asian and in the Middle East, such as Mar Babai within the Sassanid Empire (7th century), Patriarch Timothy I within the Abbasid Empire (9th century), and Mar Yaballaha within the Mongol Empire in the end of the 13th century in the period of Muslim dominance in the Mongolian khanates. Their influence extended to further Christian generations across Asia and even affected the political attitudes of the shahs and caliphs under whose rule the Church of the East developed.²⁸

One of the primary factors that influenced the success of Christian missionary work in multi-religious Central Asia was the activity of the religious authorities, particularly of the Patriarch Timothy I, whose guidance of the Church of the East encouraged its diffusion. In studies on the activities of the most influential contributor to the mass conversion - Patriarch Timothy I: the date of the conversion of the Turks to East Syrian Christianity took place in the 8th century under the guidance of the “Nestorian” Patriarch Timothy I (792/3).²⁹

²⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The lost history of Christianity: the thousand-year golden age of the church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia- and how it died*. (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 32-37.

²⁷ See the brief reference to the development of Christianity in Johan Elverskog, *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*. (University of Pennsylvania Pr, 2013), 16.

²⁸ Andrew Platt, "The Church of the East at Three Critical Points in its History," (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2017).

²⁹ Hunter, Erica C.D. "The conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in A.D. 1007", *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 22 (1989-91), 160.

Eastern Syriac Christianity was adopted among various Turkic and some Mongolian tribes, such as the Keraites, Önggüds, Uighurs, Naimans, Merkites, Kangli, and others.³⁰ Chagatai, who was an expert in a Mongol law (*yasa*) and rituals, stayed to rule in Central Asia after his conquest of that territory. Some Turkic tribes converted to East Syriac Christianity in the 11th century. The Kerait converted to East Syrian Christianity in 1007 CE, which demonstrates the effectiveness of its missionary activities.

1.1 Christianity in Mongol empire

Since this study covers the period of Mongol rule, it is important to consider the religious and political changes that took place where the Church of the East resided, in the four khanates. The Mongol Empire was divided between the sons of the great Mongol ruler Chinggis Khan. Thus, the Mongol empire was divided between the empire of Chagatai in Central Asia, the empire of the Great Khan in present-day Mongolia, the Golden Horde located to the Northwest of the Chagatai Khanate and the Il-Khan empire in Persia.

The Mongol empire had a well-working mechanism of intercultural exchange. Most inhabitants of the Chagatai ulus were Muslims, although there were also considerable Buddhist and Christian communities.³¹ In 1209, the Uighurs submitted voluntarily to Mongol rule, and the Qarluks of Qayalyq and Almalyk, settlements with a Christian population, followed Mongols in 1211. Communities of the Church of the East were scattered throughout the Zhetysu region, Almalyk, and Samarkand. The East Syriac Christianity was present in Almalyk up until the 1360s.³² The various cultural and economic directions in which the Khanate of Chagatai was developing contributed to the collapse of Chagatai Khanate in 1347.

³⁰ Mark Dickens, "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 02 (2010).

³¹ Michal Biran, "The Mongols in Central Asia from Chinggis Khan's invasion to the rise of Timur: The Ogodeid and Chaghadaid realms," in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 64.

³² Michal Biran, *The Mongols in Central Asia*, 65.

However, due to the prestige of the name of Chagatai, the people continued to call this area the *Ulus* of Chagatai.³³

The Mongol era truly brought new political, social and religious circumstances to the Central Asian and Chinese regions. In fact, Mongols brought destruction to the Muslim world, but after their conversion to Islam in the latter periods they eventually brought a significant expansion of the influence of Islamic ideology.³⁴ The Islamization of the Chagatai Khanate was a gradual process. The Mongol State of the Chagatai Ulus was the most resistant to Islamization, and the last to adopt Islam. In certain periods the rulers ignored Islam, while in other made it was a core of their politics. Chagatai himself preferred to integrate Yasa into the communities of his Khanate.³⁵

In the Chagatai Khanate, different Khans had various ruling priorities, and religion played a great role in their domestic and foreign policies. Islam was adopted by the Mongolian Khan Tarmashirin who ruled the Chagatai Khanate from about 1325 and was the first ruler to adopt Islam in the Chagatai Khanate. Tarmashirin's Islam paved way for the consequent Islamization of the Chagatai Khanate. After his deposition, Buzan Khan who ruled after Tarmashirin was a non-Muslim, which changed the political directions in the ulus. Due to their political perspective on the various religious beliefs that co-existed in Mongol empire, Mongol rulers tolerated Christianity. Moreover, the fact that there was a tradition of marrying East Syriac Christian woman suggests that there was not any strong persecution of Christian communities in the reign of the Muslim authorities and the ruling of non-Muslims who trusted Yassa. Although, it is still unclear how the communities that did not have support from the state were able to sustain in the time of Tarmashirin ruling.³⁶

³³ Michal Biran, *The Mongols in Central Asia*, 66.

³⁴ Devin DeWeese, "Islamization in the Mongol Empire," in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 133.

³⁵ Michal Biran, *The Mongols in Central Asia*, 46- 62.

³⁶ Michal Biran, "The Chaghadaids and Islam: The Conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331-34)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (2002).

In the later periods of the Mongol empire's existence, it opened trade routes for Westerners and Western missions, and thus contributed to the establishment of networks between East and West in the late medieval age. In addition, after the division of the Mongol Empire, it was much cheaper and easier to trade and pay taxes within the four khanates.³⁷ Those networks covered a landmass from the South China Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean.³⁸ The Mongols remained nomads up until the late 14th century. Mongols provided traders with security along the Silk Routes, which lowered the costs of the traded goods and thus enhanced trade in the region. Although there is no direct correlation between the change of costs for trading goods and the spread of religion, this shift presumably increased the spread of the various religions, including Islam and the Church of the East, along the trading routes. Because of its central location, Chagatai Khanate had a major role in the development of commerce along the Silk Routes. Most of the merchant partners of Mongol rulers were either Central Asian Muslims or Uighurs. Hence, the *ulus* of Chagatai was responsible for the creation of commercial networks which spread throughout the empire.³⁹

The Ilibalyk city was a part of Mongol empire in the late medieval period. This medieval city developed under Chagatai Khanate and correspondingly the Ilibalyk Christian community did too. The gravestones of Ilibalyk were dated to the 13th and 14th centuries CE, later period of the Mongol dominance in the Central Asian region. None of the Ilibalyk stones include dates, which is why the stones were relatively dated with the help of materials that were discovered on the same archeological site. Ilibalyk stones specifically reflect the presence of East Syrian Christianity in the Chagatai *ulus* of the Mongol Empire. An indigenous Christian iconographic tradition related to Central Asian Christianity developed

³⁷ Timothy M. May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 129.

³⁸ Brock, S. P, "The Nestorian Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 32.

³⁹ Michal Biran, *The Mongols in Central Asia*, 62.

during the Tang period in China and the Mongol periods in China and Central Asia.⁴⁰ This was the period of Mongol religious tolerance. The Church of the East was able to develop during this period in Central Asia (particularly in Chagatai Khanate, the location of Ilibalyk settlement) and China (under Yuan dynasty) because it received support and patronage from the Mongol court.

The Church of the East had the status of a minority church. Parry notes that clergy of the Church of the East presented themselves as official representatives of the Christian religion in the time when the Franciscan Catholic mission was propagating their beliefs as well. The Mongol period provided opportunities for foreign religions to develop not only in China, but throughout the Mongol empire.

East Syriac Christians greatly influenced the upper circles of the Mongol empire. The Church of the East was one of the prominent churches in China and Central Asia under the Mongols. Some of the East Syriac Christians belonged to the elite that was a part of the Mongol court. There are many cases in the history of the Mongol period when the Mongols married East Syriac Christian women that had a certain authority in the court. These cases exemplify the variety of Christians' social status during the Mongol rule. In addition to the participation of Christians as missionaries in the Mongol empire, missionary activities of the Christians in Asia were performed not only by the merchants and traders but also by influential Christian women who actively participated in the conversion of their families. However, the role of women in the Mongol court as missionaries is questionable since there is no evidence that they were successful at converting the families that they married into. There are numerous scholars such as Tang Li⁴¹ and James Ryan⁴² suggest that women played

⁴⁰ Ken Parry, "The Art of the Church of the East in China." in Jingjiao, ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter (Sankt Augustin: Institute Monumenta Serica, 2006), 323.

⁴¹ Li Tang, *Turkic Christians in Central Asia and China (5th – 14th centuries)*, ed. Dingjing, Zh., Yakup A. (Beijing: Minzu University Press, 2009), 7-20.

⁴² James Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, 8, no. 3 (1998): 411-21.

an important role in the conversion of their families in Turkic and Mongol societies, which enhanced the status of women in the Muslim world, and in the pre-Islamic period. Particularly, influential Christian women in the Mongol court were Mongol khatuns, the wives of the influential people in the empires, which shows that the Christians were important members of the administration and elite in the Mongol empire. Thus, Christians played an important political role in the empire. Eastern Christians were invested in maintaining a positive relationship with the political authorities of the empires. The Christian members of the administration and the East Syriac Christian Mongol women such as Sorghaghtani Begi, who was the mother of three Khans Mongke, Khubilai, and Hulagu, may have played an important role in spreading Christianity.⁴³

The Church of the East influenced the upper levels of the Mongol empire during the later periods of the Mongol empire. It is important to note that even if one religion had particular influence in the elite circles of the Mongol empire, this did not change the tolerant view of the Mongols towards other religions that flourished in the region.⁴⁴ This tolerance towards various religions was a strategic policy intended to unite the empire..⁴⁵ Overall, Eastern Christians were widespread but not as dominant as Muslims in the latter period of the Mongol empire.⁴⁶ The East Syriac Christians were able to co-exist with other religions and thus preferred to live under stable rulers.⁴⁷ Well-educated East Syriac Christians already had stable relationships with the governing authorities, which was a great opportunity for the Muslims to expand their missionaries by the routes and relationship established by the Christians in a much earlier period.

⁴³ To read more about Nestorian women in Mongol society Li Tang, "A Prominent Nestorian woman at the Mongol court" In Jingjiao, ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter, (Sankt Augustin: Institute Monuments Serica, 2006), 359-401.

⁴⁴ Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 2012, 172.

⁴⁵ Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 2012, 173.

⁴⁶ Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 2012, 178.

⁴⁷ James Barrett, "Buddhism, Taoism and the Eighth-Century Chinese Term for Christianity: A Response to Recent Work by A. Forte and Others." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 65, no. 3 (2002): 555-60.

Summing up, East Syrian Christianity spread along with commerce throughout Central Asia, and on to China. The Eastern Church developed in Central Asia as it was adopted by Turkic tribes before and during Mongol rule. During the later period of Mongol rule in Asia, Christianity gradually declined in Central Asia and China. The turning point was reached in 1294 when Kublai Khan passed away. The emperor Kublai was a protector of the Church of the East in Mongol China. His death preceded the dissolution of the great Mongol empire in the Far East. Around this date, in the Persian part of the Mongol empire the Il-Khan Ghazan converted to Islam and thus the Persian part of the empire became predominantly Muslim. After the collapse of the Mongol empire in China, in 1368, Christians of the Church of the East who once enjoyed the protection of the Mongols were compelled to leave the country.⁴⁸ Hence, Christians of the Church of the East who preferred a strategy of co-existence in the various multi-religious environments for many centuries were no longer protected. Finally, during the reign of the strongly anti-Christian ruler, Tamerlan, the East Syrian Christians were expelled from Central Asia or may have been converted to Islam. Timurids that were an inheritance of Turko-Mongolian traditions emerged out of the political environment of Chagatai Khanate. During the Timurid era, there was an ongoing process of Islamization. The adoption of Islam by Mongols and Timurids demonstrates us that Islamization in the medieval period was an escalating process whose characteristics constantly shifted, rather than being a step accomplished once and similarly for every political environment.⁴⁹ The Church of the East that began its rise from Edessa, later in Baghdad, and continued to develop in China and Central Asia was left without any place to live.

⁴⁸ Taylor, W. R., "Nestorian Crosses in China," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 55, no. 1 (1938): 56-60, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Devin DeWeese, *Islamization in the Mongol Empire*, 2015, 133.

Chapter 2. History of archaeological study and archeological evidence for Christianity in Central Asia

The data on the Church of the East includes archaeological material evidence, literary sources in Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Greek etc., travelers' reports, and various inscriptions left by Central Asian Christians.⁵⁰ The Christian archeological evidence discovered since the late 19th century demonstrates widespread diffusion of Christianity in Central Asian and China. The non-textual archaeological data consists of silver plates, coins, ceramics with Christian symbolism, fragments of mosaics, gravestones, silver and bronze pectoral crosses. Some of these objects are textual in nature such as Christian gravestones with Syriac and/or Turkic inscriptions.

The present chapter considers the general archeological evidence for the presence of Christian communities in the medieval Central Asia through the examination of the material objects. The social changes are generally reflected in the material objects. In the past and present, people had and continues to have strong attachment to material objects.⁵¹ In order to construct a deep insight into the remote societies, the scholars tend to dedicate their works to the examination of the afterlife. Thus, it is possible to study the burial rituals through the examination of material objects such as gravestones. The gravestones is one of the few material objects that can reveal the religious, national and even ideological identities of people even in their afterlife.⁵² What we generally know about the gravestones is that these material objects played and continues to play an important role in the burial rituals of people almost in every society of the world. Gravestones on the burial sites demonstrate people's appreciation and respect to the deceased, and this is one of the reasons why gravestones

⁵⁰ Mark Dickens, *Syriac Gravestones in the Tashkent History Museum*, 2009, 13-49.

⁵¹ Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and social structure in classical antiquity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13-18.

⁵² Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and social structure*, 1992, 18.

occupy such an important place in the life of society. Hence, the gravestones carry the historical and cultural memory.

The corpus of a larger Semirechie region, where Ilibalyk is located, of the gravestones is one of the main sources for reconstructing the Christian Central Asian and Chinese medieval history.⁵³ The most common archaeological material recovered in Central Asian Christian settlements is gravestones, referred to as *kayraks* in Russian scholarly literature. The predominant number of medieval gravestones of the Church of the East have been found in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Inner Mongolia (China). These are the territories of the Chu Valley and Eastern Turkestan. In the second half of the 20th century, many single examples of partial gravestones were also found in Semirechie along the Talas and Ili valleys, the places near Almalyk, Karakol, in Tokmak region (Kyrgyzstan).⁵⁴ Central Asian Kayraks or gravestones-pebbles were found in multiple Central Asian medieval settlements. Notably, the Central Asian *kayraks* demonstrate the latter periods of Christianity spreading in the region. The kayraks with the Syriac inscriptions and crosses from the discovered settlements in Uzbekistan, China and Kyrgyzstan are generally of 13th -14th century CE.

Some of the earliest scholarly accounts of the Central Asian Syriac Christianity in the sources, apart from the much earlier notes of the medieval travelers, were published by the pre-Soviet colonial authors in the annual Journal of the Imperial Archeological Society. In 1885, the orientalist Nikolay Pantusov published an article about the gravestones uncovered near Pishpek, on the territory of Kara-Kirgiz Alamedinskoy volosti in Tokmak uezd of Semirechie. The stones were scattered on the surface of the ground. Pantusov reported that this territory was once a Christian cemetery located near Pishpek. The locals reported to Pantusov that it was Kalmyks who constructed the cemetery. During the 19th century, the medieval cemetery was converted into agricultural fields by the local people. The area was

⁵³ Mark Dickens, 'Syriac Gravestones in the Tashkent History Museum, 2009, 41.

⁵⁴ Джумагулов Ч, *Язык сиро-тюркских (несторианских) памятников Киргизии* (Фрунзе:1971) 10-11.

convenient for obtaining water from the Dzhair irrigation ditch located nearby the cemetery. The scholar described the stones as the pebbles polished over time by water. Pantusov suggested that Christians selected the stones that were small enough to be transported easily. The stones were hand-polished to make the surface of the stone flat for inscribing the letters. The crosses defined the direction of the grave and correspondingly the head of the deceased was placed toward the west. Moreover, in the medieval time, the cemetery had the system of rows that Pantusov indicated with the help of the small kurgans on the top of the graves. Notably, there were not any building structures of Christians such as churches at the cemetery and the surrounding places.

Additionally, Pantusov noted that all crosses on the gravestones were of different shapes. Similar gravestones with crosses and inscriptions were discovered in Tokmak near the ancient Burana tower. Pantusov excavated couple of graves of Tokmak as well. The scholar concluded that some of them were family tombs with the directions of legs of the deceased pointed toward the east. The researcher made an important conclusion that the stones were relocated over time because of some local activities and thus were not located on the top of the graves. Pantusov noted that he was not able to decode the inscriptions, and no one else except old Kalmykian lama attempted to decrypt those letters.⁵⁵

In 19th century, the orientalist and linguist Daniel Chwolson researched the corpus of the gravestones from Pishpek and Tokmak more precisely.⁵⁶ The researcher outlined that the East Syriac Christians used various types of the Syriac language, which varied from the basic old Syriac writing Estrangelo, to the older forms of the Syriac letter of the Jacobite style. The translations included the title of the deceased such as: “In the year 1624 (1313); this is the

⁵⁵ Пантусов, Н., “Христианское кладбище близ города Пишпека (Семиреченской области) в Чуйской долине,” *Записки Восточного Отделения Императорского Русского Археологического общества под редакцией барона В.Р. Розена*, Санкт-Петербург, vol. I (1881), 74-84.

⁵⁶ Хвольсон Д., “Предварительныя замѣтки о найденныхъ въ Семирѣченской области сирійскихъ надгробныхъ надписяхъ,” in *ZVOIRAO*, Vol. I (1886), 84-109.

year of bull. This is the grave of Qutluq the priest”.⁵⁷ The names were of the various ethnic origins that included Turkic and the “European” names that are of biblical origin or of a Greek or Latin origins.⁵⁸ Chwolson noticed that many of stones were from the years 1338-1339, and included the words “died of the plague”.⁵⁹

Similarly, in their works of 1888-1891 and 1906-1909, Slutsky⁶⁰ and Kokovtsov⁶¹ correspondingly published research on the gravestones from Semirechie region. The authors considered the gravestones from the Pishpek and Tokmak East Syriac cemeteries of 13th and 14th centuries. Slutsky noted that the cemeteries consisted of no less than 600 graves out of which only 119 graves and the same number of gravestones correspondingly were researched by archeologists, where 85 graves of Pishpek and 34 of Tokmak. The burial types of the graves from both cemeteries were similar. Slutsky argued that the most important discovery was the Syriac inscriptions. Slutsky considered the direction of the inscriptions, the font and the location of the inscription on the corpus. Notably, Slutsky and Chwolson consider the typology of the crosses engraved along with the inscriptions only briefly.⁶² The translation of one of the inscribed texts is “ It is curious to consider crosses with asymmetrical (different) wings, that can be met around 1330 and about 1340: these are eight graves of women, two graves of young boys, and only one of an adult man”.⁶³

Considering later discoveries of the archeological evidence that belonged to the Church of the East – the Soviet period, the medieval settlement Ak-Beshim constitutes

⁵⁷ Daniel Chwolson, “Syrisch-Nestorianische Grabinschriften aus Semirjetschie,” in *M’emoires de l’Acad’emie imp’eriale des sciences de St.-P’etersbourg*, Vol. VII (Ser.), No. XXXVII (1890), 55.

⁵⁸ Хвольсон Д., “Сирийско-тюркские несторианские надгробные надписи XIII-XIV столетий, найденные в Семиречье,” *Восточные заметки: Сборник статей и исследований. Факультет восточных языков Имп. С.-Петербургского университета*. СПб Тип. Имп. А., (1895): 115-129.

⁵⁹ Daniel Chwolson, “Syrisch-Nestorianische Grabinschriften aus Semirjetschie,” in *M’emoires de l’Acad’emie imp’eriale des sciences de St.-P’etersbourg*, Vol. VII (Ser.), No. XXXVII (1890), 62.

⁶⁰ Слуцкий С.С. “Семирьченскія несторіанскія надписи,” in *DV*, Vol. I, No. I (1889), 1-66.

Слуцкий, С.С., “Къ Семирьченскимъ несторіанскимъ надписямъ,” in *DV*, Vol. I, No. II (1891), 176-94.

⁶¹ Коковцов, П.К. 1907. “Несколько новых надгробныхъ камней съ христіанско-сирійскими надписями изъ Средней Азіи,” in *ИАН (BAIS)*, VI Série, Vol. I, 427-58.

⁶² Слуцкий, 1889, 1-66.

⁶³ Слуцкий, 1889, 20.

evidence of the East Syriac Christians presence in Kyrgyzstan during the medieval period. Ak-Beshim or Suyab was established in the 5th century. The Soviet scholar Leonid Kyzlasov researched the site in 1959 and revealed the Christian church that was oriented from the west to the east. The building was 36 meters long.⁶⁴ Moreover, the archeological evidence in the form of coins, stamps, ceramics and the presence of a Buddhist monastery along with the Christian church demonstrate that the medieval city contained various types of communities who practiced Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Manicheism.⁶⁵ It is important to note that Kyzlasov generally ignores the topic of the Christian presence at Ak-Beshim settlement. Kyzlasov published his work that considers the Buddhist temple on Ak-Beshim. While the author considers other religion practiced by Ak-Beshim community, he ignores the presence of the Christian church on Ak-Beshim archeological site. The Buddhist symbolism can also be found on the crosses from the walls of Zaitun, modern day Quanzhou, China, it consists of the similar motifs of crosses rising from a lotus and other floral motifs.⁶⁶ Chinese heritage of the Church of the East is extremely rich, including the Xi'an stele, which bears symbolism of Buddhist ideology through the iconography of the cross. There exists East Syriac manuscripts from Turfan oasis⁶⁷ and multiple other examples of the East Syriac Christianity presence in China such as a church in Qocho near Turfan in Xinjiang, China.⁶⁸

Except the Buddhist-Christian monastery discovered in Ak-Beshim, there were few discoveries of the buildings that belonged to the Church of the East in Central Asia. In the

⁶⁴ Карл Байпаков, "Христианство в Казахстане в средние века" in *Из истории древних культов Средней Азии* (Ташкент, 1995), 96-100;

Горячева В.Д. and Перегудова С.Я., "Памятники христианства на территории Кыргызстана" in *Из истории древних культов Средней Азии* (Ташкент, 1995), 84-95.

⁶⁵ Кызласов Л.Р., "Археологические исследования на городище Ак-Бешим в (1953-1954 гг.)," in *ТКАЭЭ*, vol. 2. (Москва; 1959), 231-233, 241.

⁶⁶ John Foster. "Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 86, no. 1-2 (1954): 1-25.

⁶⁷ Mark Dickens, "Multilingual Christian Manuscripts from Turfan," In *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 9 (2009): 22-42.

⁶⁸ Mark Dickens and Alexei Savchenko, "Prester John's Realm: New Light on Christianity between Merv and Turfan," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days*, 2009.

1960s excavations of Afrasiab, archeologists discovered an underground room with terracotta artifacts. This collection of relics includes the stamped ornaments of the stylized cross of 9th - 10th CE.⁶⁹ In addition, in 1980s, archeologists from the Museum of Uzbekistan history conducted excavations of one of the hills at the settlement of Old Termez. Al'baum discovered fifteen rooms that constituted the complex of a Christian cathedral of the 10th-13th centuries. The central building of the complex was cross-shaped. The researcher proposed that the cathedral with designed walls were built for travelling pilgrims.⁷⁰

The settlement of Urgut, researched as well as the Ak-beshim in the Soviet period, also provides very rare archeological Christian evidence for Central Asian Christian artifacts in the form of a building, possibly a monastery of 8th -13th CE.⁷¹ Along with the monastery archeologists uncovered, as Mark Dickens and Savchenko point out, one of the most important pieces of evidence of the Christian presence in Uzbekistan is the censer or bowl of 8th – 9th CE from the Urgut settlement near Samarkand, Uzbekistan.⁷² Additionally, the Syriac inscriptions can be found on a rock cliff located near Urgut discovered in 1950s.⁷³ The rock includes two crosses on the top of it and engraved inscriptions of 9th -11th centuries. Moreover, Raimkulov reports on the types of the Christian buildings discovered in

⁶⁹ Гулямов Я.Г. and Буряков Ю. Ф., “Об археологических исследованиях на городище Афрасиаб в 1967-1968 гг.,” in *Афрасиаб*, вып. 1 (Ташкент: 1969), 277-78.

⁷⁰ Р.А. Дервиш, Л.Г. Левтеева and Мусакаева А., “Памятники истории, религии и культуры в Узбекистане. Распространение несторианства в Средней Азии и его памятники” in *УКИТОВЧИ* (Ташкент: 1994), 62-65;

Терновая Г., “Предметы Христианского культа из коллекции Средневекового города Навакет,” *Известия НАН РК*, №1 (2004), 176-179.

⁷¹ “Научный отчет об археологической разведке в кишлаке Суфиён, южная окраина г.Ургута Самаркандской области

(сентябрь-октябрь 1997 г.),” from *Научный архив ИА АН РУз*, Самарканд, 1988.

“Научный отчет Ургутского отряда Института археологии АН РУз (апрель-май 1999 г.),” Самарканд, 2000.

“Научный отчет узбекско-итальянской экспедиции за 2004 г.,” from *Архив Института археологии АН РУз.*, 2005, 138-162, 152-154.

⁷² Mark Dickens and Alexei Savchenko, *Prester John's Realm*, 2009, 126-127.

See also Залесская В.Н., “Сирийское бронзовое кадило из Ургута” in *Средняя Азия и Иран* (Ленинград: 1972).

⁷³ Мещерская, Е. and Пайкова А., “Сиро-тюркские наскальные надписи из Ургута,” in *Культурные взаимодействия народов Средней Азии и Кавказа с окружающим миром в древности и средневековье (тезисы докладов)* (Москва: 1981), 109-10.

Uzbekistan.⁷⁴ The Uzbekistani archeologists Raimkulov researched the medieval Christian monument of Talisor tepa. Considering the archeological evidence for Christianity in the form of mortars, the stone Christian mortar that was also discovered on the hillfort of Tortkol'tobe or the medieval Sharaba include the incised cross and dove.⁷⁵

In 1970-1990 the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences researched the medieval settlement of Krasnaya Rechka associated with the Sogdian city Navekath. Pectoral crosses from the settlement Krasnaya Rechka is another example of the presence of East Syriac Christianity in Kyrgyzstan.⁷⁶ The settlement revealed one of the first examples of the pectoral crosses of the Church of the East from Zhetysu.⁷⁷ The most valuable evidence is the Nephritic pectoral cross, ceramics and bricks with crosses of the East Syriac Christian origins revealed by Kyrgyz archeologists.⁷⁸ More pectoral crosses were discovered in Dzhamukat, settlement of Kostobe and the medieval city Navekath developed over 5th – 12th CE. The burials contained the silver and bronze pectoral crosses. The writings on the fragments of the ceramics and the Syriac burial incisions confirm the presence of the East Syriac Christianity in Navaketh. On one of the wine khums the inscription proposes: “This khum is for the teacher Yaruk-Tegin Master Pastun. Let it be filled. Amen, Amen”.⁷⁹

The archeological evidence of the Church of the East discovered and described during the Soviet period includes also the East Syriac silver jar of 8th-9th CE were discovered in 1923 with the Christian symbolic of equidistant cross on the bottom of the jar at the settlement

⁷⁴ Раимкулов А. А., “О Трех Неизвестных Типах Христианских Культовых Сооружений Средней Азии,” *ИМКУ* 34 (2004): 222- 231.

⁷⁵ Железняков Б.А., “Предметы с иконографическими изображениями из Семиречья (Несторианство, Манихейство),” *Известия МОН РК, НАН РК, Серия общественных наук*, по 1 (2003), 265.

⁷⁶ Горячева В. Д., “Наусы некрополя Краснореченского городища” *Красная речка и Бурана* (Фрунзе, 1980), 95.

⁷⁷ Zhetysu is a historical region in Central Asia, which translates as “seven waters”. It covers the territory of the Southeastern region of the modern Kazakhstan, northeast Kyrgyzstan, and northwest China. Zhetysu is also can be referred as to Semirechie or Semirechye, which means from Russian language “seven rivers”.

⁷⁸ Байпаков К. М., *Христианство в Казахстане в средние века*, 1995, 96-100; Горячева В. Д. and Перегудова С.Я., *Памятники христианства на территории Кыргызстана*, 1995, 84-95.

⁷⁹ Байпаков К.М., *Древняя и средневековая урбанизация Казахстана (по материалам исследований Южно-Казахстанской комплексной археологической экспедиции)*, *Урбанизация Казахстана в эпоху бронзы – раннем средневековье*, vol. 1 (Алматы: 2012), 301-304.

Novopokrovskoye, Chu Valley.⁸⁰ The jar originates from the period of the increasing level of the sedentary life in Semirechie. Boris Zheleznyakov suggests that this jar was for the baptism ritual.⁸¹ The motif of the cross corresponds to the various types of the crosses used East Syrian Christians discovered earlier on the territory of Kyrgyzstan.⁸² The same symbolism can be found on a ceramic cup from Kuyruktobe.⁸³ Furthermore, the preserved fragment of a jug vessel of 10th century from Kayalyk includes the equilibrium Christian crosses that was stamped on the unfired clay.⁸⁴ Finally, Sogdian coins with crosses were discovered in Penjikent and Afrasiab.⁸⁵

Considering contemporary scholarship that focuses on the history and archeology of the Church of the East, Pier Giorgio Borbone researched East Syriac gravestone from China stored in the Musée Guimet in Paris. The stone is with inscribed Turkic inscriptions in Syriac characters.⁸⁶ This tombstone originates from Inner Mongolia and represents the type of the burial stones of the Turkic tribe - *Önggüd*. Halbertsma researched the same type of tombstones from Inner Mongolia. Notably, the shape of these stones differs from Central Asian kayraks. The decorations consist of crosses, floral motifs, clouds and wave-patterns. Like the Central Asian kayraks, the Turkic inscriptions in Syriac script typically say a name of the deceased and the title. Moreover, Halbertsma reports on the tombstones with the crosses rising from a lotus, sometimes engraved in the circle. These stones represent the

⁸⁰ Городецкий В.М., “Серебряные сосуды из курганов села Покровское Пишпекского уезда,” *Известия Среднеазиатского комитета по делам музеев, охраны памятников старины, искусства и природы*, Ташкент, по 1 (1926.; Даркевич В.П. Художественный металл Востока VIII—XII вв. М., 1976. Табл. 20/3-4. Экспонируется в ЦГМ РК (КП 3984).

⁸¹ Железняков 2003, *Предметы с иконографическими изображениями из Семиречья*, 266.

⁸² Горячева В. Д. and Перегудова С.Я., *Наусы некрополя Краснореченского городища*, 91.

⁸³ К. М. Байпаков and Л. Б., Ерзакович, *Керамика Средневекового Отрара* (Алматы: Өнер, 1990), 94.

⁸⁴ Железняков 2003, *Предметы с иконографическими изображениями из Семиречья*, 264-268.

⁸⁵ Ртвеладзе Э.В., Ташходжаев Ш.С. and Федоров М.Н., “Нумизматические этюды,” *Афрасиаб* по 3 (1974), 110-115.

⁸⁶ Pier Giorgio Borbone, “An Önggüd Gravestone in the Musée Guimet, Paris, and its Inscription Palermo,” in *Officina di studi medievali* (Palermo: 2015), 221-231.

Önggüd funerary art, as well as the presumable syncretistic development⁸⁷ of East Syriac Christianity in the region.⁸⁸

Overall, the iconography and stylistic features of the crosses on the various types of the Christian artifacts (kayraks, fragments of ceramics, and pectoral crosses) from Central Asia is considered only briefly in the works of the pre-Soviet researchers. Nowadays, research of the inscriptions on the Central Asian Christian archeological evidence presented only in the limited amount of works because of the lack of specialists in Syriac language in Central Asia. There are few specialists in Syriac Studies who translate and analyze inscriptions in Syriac language that belong to the Church of the East, these are prominent researchers Mark Dickens, Pier Giorgio Borbone and Peter Zieme.

Research on the archeological evidence of East Syriac Christianity in Kazakhstan is only in its early stages. There are some examples of Christian artifacts uncovered in Kazakhstan. For instance, Patsevich who was excavating the Tekturmas archeological site of 6th – 12th CE suggested that the Ossuaries from this site are of Zoroastrian origins whereas the burials with graves at the same site are Christian and Buddhist. It is evident that Christianity was spreading throughout southern Kazakhstan in the early medieval time. Archeologists also discovered a bowl with the names of Gabriel and Petros in the cultural layer of 5th-7th centuries CE.

Moreover, although the presence of Christianity throughout the centuries in Central Asia and China is quite evident, public museums have neglected it. Christian artifacts are not necessarily indicated as such and do not include indication of the Christian denomination of the Church of the East in the museums of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. For instance, let us consider the ossuaries from the Afrasiab archeological site stored in the Museum of the

⁸⁷ "Syncretism is defined as the temporary co-existence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern." from Gort, Jerald D. *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 1-5.

⁸⁸ Halbertsma, Tjalling, Jian Wei, and 魏 坚, "Some Field Notes And Images Of Stone Material From Graves Of The Church Of The East In Inner Mongolia, China," *Monumenta Serica* 53, no. 1 (2005): 113-244.

history of Samarkand. Five ossuaries with presumably Christian symbolism of 6th -7th centuries are indicated as “Ornamented ossuaries” (figures 1-4). These coffin boxes represent the Zoroastrian burial ritual and the possible syncretic integration of the two religious traditions as the ossuaries include Christian symbolism as it is illustrated in figure 1-4.⁸⁹ The disregarding of the presence of the Christian symbolism demonstrates the poor level of the research of this topic in the region.

While the Church of the East has a great archeological history in the scope of Central Asia and China, many gaps remain in the history of the Church of the East that need further research. In order to understand the early history of modern-day Central Asian countries and to preserve the historical heritage of those countries, we should not underestimate the role of the East Syrian Church in the history of Asia. Hence, the present analysis provides us with the Christian archeological evidence from the newly discovered medieval city of Ilibalyk. It gives us an insight into the society of the city of Ilibalyk, newly uncovered city in southeastern Kazakhstan.

⁸⁹ See the Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4.

Chapter 3. Data set – the discovery of Ilibalyk

3.1 Data description and record from Ilibalyk archeological site

In his work of 1986, Karl Baipakov, Kazakhstani archeologist, researched the travelling notes of the traveler, missionary and explorer William of Rubruck.⁹⁰ While writing his notes Rubruk was travelling near present-day lake Alakol'. In his notes Rubruk mentions the medieval settlement Qayaliq (modern Koilyk) and the East Syriac Christian settlement that was located near this city. In addition, Baipakov mentioned that there is a mention about the East Syriac city from the route guide of the Armenian king Hetum I to Mongol Khans Batu (Chinggis Khan's son) and Mongke. Getum I made this trip during Mongol invasion of Armenia in 1253-1254 there was one more Christian city called IlanBalech (*Иланбалех*).⁹¹ The city was located to the west of Almalyk.⁹² Thus, Baipakov suggested that the medieval city with Christian communities was located between villages of Koktal and Panfilov. It was a place where the archeologists uncovered the remains of the medieval hillfort Usharal with the medieval wall stretching from Usharal to the present-day Kazakh-Chinese border.⁹³

In 2014 one of the villagers of the present-day Usharal village discovered the East Syriac Christian gravestone with the Syriac inscriptions, also known as a Usharal-Ilibalyk stele. This was evidence of the first medieval Christian cemetery uncovered on the borders of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which confirmed the theory of Karl Baipakov about the location of the medieval city Ilibalyk situated on the left bank of the river Ili. This gravestone is one of the largest Syriac gravestones discovered in Central Asia.

The location of the city suggests that Ilibalyk was a part of the trading routes connected to other medieval cities such as Suyab (Ak-Beshim), Navekath (Krasnaya rechka),

⁹⁰ Байпаков К. М. *Средневековая городская культура Южного Казахстана и Семиречья (VI-XIII)* (Издательство наука СССР: 1986), 37.

⁹¹ Байпаков К. М. *Средневековая городская культура*, 1986.

⁹² Байпаков К. М. *Средневековая городская культура*, 1986.

⁹³ Field Report on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017. The report was kindly provided by Dr. Voyakin, the director of the Ilibalyk expedition.

and Balasagun (Burana). Additionally, the mudbrick rampart that surrounds a *shahrstan*⁹⁴ of Usharal stretches to the medieval city Almalyk, the present-day north-western part of China. Thus, Ilibalyk was connected to the cities to the east, such as Almalyk. Moreover, the group of archeologists under supervision of Dr. Voyakin and Baipakov discovered a vast number of ceramic samples and random coin samplings around *shakhristan*. These fragments of ceramics demonstrate that the surrounding area was a place for residential housing and workplaces called *the rabat*. A collection of 175 coins, mainly Dirhams, was uncovered in the *rabats* and provided by local people of Usharal. The numismatic study of these coins and the typology of ceramics analyzed by the group of archeologists under supervision of Dr. Voyakin provided the dates of this settlement from the 13th-14th centuries.⁹⁵ The large number of coins that was provided by locals and uncovered during the archeological excavations demonstrate the presence of trade and urban life in the medieval city that was located on one of the Silk Road routes closer to the Tien-Shan mountains.

Dr. Dmitry Voyakin began his research of the area in 2015. A group of archeologists from the Archeological Expertise company based in Almaty worked on the identification of the borders of the medieval city and researching the layout of the ancient settlement. The preliminary research of the site included conducting of excavations on the territory of the site including making of delves and excavation that covered the area of 100 square meters.

The vast territory of Usharal settlement required more specialists for the consequent archeological excavations of the sites. In 2015, Dr. Voyakin and Dr. Baipakov invited the group of specialists from the Tandy Institute for Archeology in Texas. The Kazakh-American archaeological expedition was sponsored by the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia in Hergiswil, Switzerland. An international team from Archaeological Expertise LLC based in Almaty, and also from the Tandy Institute for Archaeology in Texas worked together on the

⁹⁴ Field Report on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017.

⁹⁵ Петров П.Н. et al., *Средневековый город, обнаруженный в долине реки Или*, 2014, 61-76.

excavation. The group of archeologists, including myself, discovered the ancient city of Ilibalyk, known from pilgrims' travels and historical texts, in Kazakhstan, as well as the city's cemetery. Moreover, the expedition gave a great opportunity for young researchers from Kazakhstan to gain valuable field experience in archaeological excavations. Consequently, the Ilibalyk excavations of 2016, 2017 and 2018 revealed a vast number of the Church of the East burial sites.

The Ilibalyk excavations of 2016 and 2017 uncovered a tremendous number of the ceramic fragments. Just considering briefly some part of the excavation's management, the group of archeologists collected and divided all pottery according to common patterns. The common sample ceramics were numbered and marked for further convenience for the reconstruction of pots, bowls, dishes, jars, etc. Overall, most of the ceramic patterns were not glazed. The fragments of pots and khums contain floral design, rounded ornaments, wavy lines and stamped crosses. It demonstrates the high level of the local pottery production and the developing commercial life in the medieval time. Thus, the 2016 and 2017 excavations provided the vast amount of ceramics with the various designs and decorations. The amount of ceramics uncovered on the site confirms the active urban life in the medieval time at Usharal settlement.

This on-going excavation is expanding and promises great results. The greater number of large and small gravestones were uncovered in 2018 excavations in addition to 2017 and 2016 evidence. Also, the archeologists expanded field 3 and were able to discover the graves with organic remains, human skeletons in the square where the Christian gravestones were found. Moreover, the burial sites contained some jewelry on the bodies such as rings and tiny pearls. The bodies were of infant babies, teens and adults. Any conclusions regarding the 2018 excavations are too preliminary as the data is not processed yet by the specialists in the area of DNA testing and Biological Anthropologists.

Summing up, I am concentrating on the new and exciting archaeological evidence, uncovered in 2016 and 2017 in the village Usharal, near Zharkent, the north bank of Ili river. This discovery provided valuable evidence of the presence of the Church of the East in medieval Central Asia. The two following subchapters will explicitly present the main dataset of this thesis project: the Ilibalyk gravestones and the styles of engraved Christian crosses and inscriptions on the presented gravestones.

3.2 Ilibalyk gravestones: the crosses

In 2016, archeologists discovered the medieval city Ilibalyk and the Christian burial site in Usharal village, Southeastern Kazakhstan, which constitute the latest Christian archaeological evidence (non-textual and textual) from the modern-day Kazakhstan, the territory that once was a part of a Chagatai Khanate. Over the previous two centuries, scholars have discovered a large number of Christian gravestones in Zhetysu region, which have been made even more exceptional due to the human burials in association. Likewise, the Ilibalyk excavations of 2016 and 2017, including the discovered Usharal stele of 2014, revealed eighteen gravestones with engraved crosses and with a limited Syriac/Turkic inscription. Notably not all the uncovered gravestones in Ilibalyk include inscriptions. Although the inscriptions did not reveal any dates, apart from the numismatic analysis, the excavations of 2016 revealed three construction layers of 13-14th and of 12-13th centuries CE. The stones are of the early 13th and the late 14th centuries, the last period of the existence of Christian communities in the region.⁹⁶

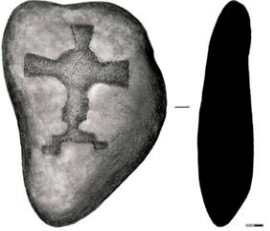

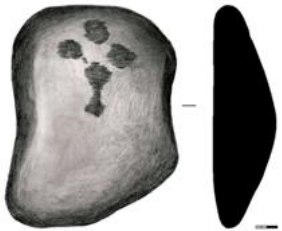
The gravestones include engraved crosses and inscriptions. These stones differ in form, in the type of crosses engraved on surface of the stones, and in the stones' texture. Importantly, three of the stones contain Syriac inscription on the stone whereas other stones

⁹⁶ Петров П.Н. et al., *Средневековый город, обнаруженный в долине реки Или*, 2014, 61-76.

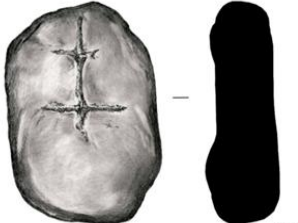
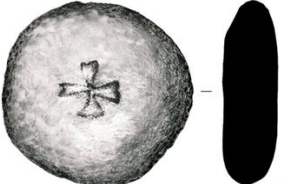
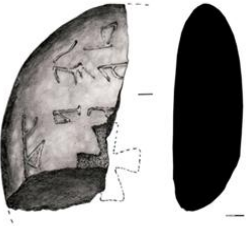
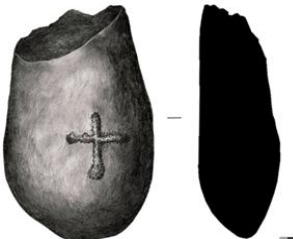
include engraved crosses of various types. Overall, the stones provide a sampling of different styles of Christian crosses.

As depicted in the table below, the excavations of 2016 of the medieval Christian graveyard revealed seven gravestones or Christian kayraks of the following characteristics.

Table 1. The Central Asian East Syriac gravestones discovered in 2016 (Ilibalyk, Usharal)⁹⁷



Line drawing of gravestones	Stone #	Stone color	Stone shape dimensions	Cross dimensions	Text	Additional imagery	Type of engraving
	1 IB-16-3-1	dark gray with a slight greenish tint	27x20x5.5 cm.	height is 13.5 cm, width - 12 cm, thickness at the ends - 3.5 cm, at the center - 2.5 cm.	—	—	Incised
	2 IB-16-3-2	dark gray; on the surface there are whitish stains from natural causes	24x17x4.5 cm.	12 cm, expanding at the edges 3 cm, circle in the center – 1.5 cm.	Size of the inscribed character height is 2-3 cm.	—	Chiseled
	3 IB-16-3-3	dark gray	22x15x5 cm.	7 x 6 cm, thickness is 3-2 cm.	—	—	Scratched

⁹⁷ Field Report on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017.




	4 IB-16-3-4	grayish-green	21x15x6.5 cm.	height - 12 cm, width - 7 cm, thickness and depth - 0.5 -0.7 cm.	—	—	Chiseled
	5 IB-16-3-5	coarsely-grained, dingy beige and gray	24x24.5x6 – 6.8 cm.	7 x 7 cm, width – 2 cm on the edges	—	—	Engraved
	6 IB-16-3-6	dark gray	21x11x9 cm.	—	partial inscription	—	chiseling technique
	7 IB-16-3-7	gray	33x20x8 cm.	height and width are 8 cm, thickness - 0.9 cm, the end of the bottom part of the cross is 1.7 cm.	—	—	chiseled




The excavations of 2017 at Usharal village revealed eleven stones with various cross types and stone dimensions, as shown in the table below.

*Table 2. The Central Asian East Syriac gravestones discovered in 2017 (Ilibalyk, Usharal)*⁹⁸

Pictures of gravestones	Stone #	Stone type/color	Stone shape dimensions	Cross dimensions	Text	Additional imagery	Type of engraving
	8 IB 17-IV-B-3-9	gray	40x31x9 cm.	—	—	—	Include carved area – preparation for incision
	9 IB 17-IV-C-7	greenish-gray in color	30x27x16 cm.	height and width are 12.5 cm, thinnest part of the arm - 2 cm, the flaring ends are about 4.25 cm.	Turkic language with Syriac script.	—	The cross and inscription was made with a chiseling technique.

⁹⁸ Field Report on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017.

	10 IB 17-IV-C-6	gray	25x16x9 cm.	height 9.75 cm, width 6.5 cm, thinnest part of the arm – 1.2 cm.	—	—	chiseling technique
	11 IB 17-IV-C-8	pinkish, multicolored	23x21.5x5.5 cm.	height 12cm and width 11 cm, thinnest part of the arm - 2 cm, the flaring ends are about 3 cm.	—	—	chiseling technique
	12 IB 17-IV-B- 3-10	pinkish gray in color	27.25x26.5x9.5 cm.	Height 17cm and width 11 cm, thinnest part of the arm – 1 cm, the flaring ends are about 3 cm.	—	—	chiseling technique

	13 IB 17-IV-B-3-12	brown-gray in color	29x17x5.5 cm.	height 17cm and width 11 cm, thinnest part of the arm - 1 cm, the flaring ends are about 3 cm.	—	—	chiseling technique
	14 IB 17-IV-C-1-11	pinkish-gray in color	16.5x13x5.5 cm.	Height 5cm and width 3 cm.	—	—	chiseling technique
	15 IB 17-IV-C-3-15	brownish- gray in color	8x7.5x4 cm.	height 4cm and width 5 cm.	—	—	chiseling technique

Stones 16, 17, 18 are only partially preserved, so they cannot be considered as the reliable source of material as an evidence for Christianity in Ili Balik settlement.

3.3 *Ilibalyk inscriptions*

The inscriptions on the Ilibalyk gravestones as well as engraved Christian crosses constitute an essential body of evidence for reconstruction of the history of the Church of the East in Central Asia and China. Generally, the Central Asian gravestones are of a very simple style, it includes a short inscription in Turkic in Syriac script and a cross on a stone. There are examples of stones with the quotation of Psalms of Syriac biblical text, particularly, Chifeng tile uncovered in China includes the quotation of Psalm 34:6, which shows that East Syriac Christians used a Syriac biblical text in a funerary context. Unlike this tile discovered in China, the East Syriac Christians of Ilibalyk did not refer to the biblical texts and incised only short inscriptions. Hence, the Syro-Turkic epigraphic evidence from the Ilibalyk settlement consists of very short texts. Nevertheless, the inscriptions provide an additional information about the deceased. The cross is depicted in the center of the stones and creates space for the inscriptions or just divides the stones into four quarters.⁹⁹ The Turkic texts are in Syriac script on the Ilibalyk stones defines the level of a limited knowledge of Syriac language.¹⁰⁰ Syriac was always maintained as the primary language of the Church of the East liturgy.¹⁰¹ However, it is still questionable whether all literate East Syriac Christians used Syriac language. The presence of Turkic inscriptions in Syriac script on the gravestones may point to the existence of some level of linguistical flexibility among the East Syriac Christians of Ilibalyk and other Central Asian and Chinese communities.

Notably, not all the gravestones include the engraved inscriptions. Regarding the translation of the inscriptions engraved along with the Christian crosses, Mark Dickens was able to translate the long stone discovered in 2014, and the stones of 2017 excavations. The

⁹⁹ Text, Translation and Tradition. Studies on the Peshitta and its Use in the Syriac Tradition. Presented to Konrad D. Jenner on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday. Edited by W.Th. Van Peursen – R.B. Ter Haar Romeny E.I. Brill, Leiden 2006, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ken Parry, "The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton." *Silk Road Studies From Palmyra to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography* (2005), 232.

¹⁰¹ Mark Dickens, *Syriac Gravestones in the Tashkent History Museum*, 2009, 13.

stones 2/IB-16-3-2, 6/IB-16-3-6, 2/ IB 17-IV-C-7 include the inscriptions. Two stones from 2016 excavations and one stone include inscriptions incised along with crosses. On the 2014 stone Dickens concludes that the language of the inscription is Old Turkic. He notes that usage of Turkic on the gravestones is typical for Almalyk style of corpus, the city located further south from Ilibalyk.¹⁰² The 2014 stone contains the names of two individuals, *Baršabbā* and *Petros*, who were the sons of *Qucha* and *Tegin*, respectively. Importantly, the names on the gravestones are of Syriac as well as Turkic origins.¹⁰³

Likewise, the inscriptions on two of the 2017 stones are in Turkic. The medieval Christians inscribed the title and the name of the deceased in the Syriac script of the Church on the gravestones to demonstrate the religious affiliations of the community in which the deceased lived. The inscriptions on the Ilibalyk stones indicate that some of the people buried beneath the stones were members of the clergy. Similar to the long stone of 2014, one of the 2017 stones were installed for two individuals: *Baršabbā Quč* and *Yošmid*.

One of the stones includes inscription in the Syriac language, which Dickens translates as “This is the grave (of?) Shirin the believer”. Moreover, it was engraved in the script of the liturgical language of the Church of the East along with the Christian cross on the corpus of the gravestone. Overall, Dickens concludes that the usage of the Turkic names demonstrates that the primary language of the Ilibalyk Christians was Old Turkic, the language of the local community; and the usage of the Syriac script shows that the locals retained their connection with the liturgical language of the Church of the East.

¹⁰² Field Report on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017.

¹⁰³ Field Report on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017. More information on the translation of the inscription are on the web-site of Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (one of the sponsors of the Ilibalyk project) http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/inhalt_english/frameset_projekt_aC.html

Chapter 4. Discussion

4.1 Local communities at Ilibalyk

Various cultures and religions have had different interpretations of the cross as a symbol. Like the Western Christian Church, Christians of the Church of the East adopted the cross as a central motif for their religious belief. At a closer examination the Ili Balik stones amaze by the diversity in the type of crosses incised on the various stones. The diversity of these forms of crosses deserves more attention as it tells us more information on how the Christian community developed in a non-Christian culture during the Mongol era.

The challenge of considering the Christian iconography of Central Asia is that, like the Chinese Christian iconographic tradition, we do not understand the full extent of those traditions and do not have a systematic history of all the Christian artifacts found in Central Asia and China. Hence, it is difficult to propose any firm conclusions until such a database is formed.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the present research attempts to provide a foundation for understanding the Central Asian Christian iconographic tradition through the research of the archeological evidence uncovered in Southeastern Kazakhstan in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The present analysis first provides a possible interpretation of Ilibalyk Christian evidence and in the later part considers Ilibalyk in a wider socioreligious Christian network. Hence, this chapter raises essential questions for the reconstruction of the Christian history in Central Asia in the medieval period. The particular aim of this chapter is to consider the funerary art, specifically as conveyed on gravestones, of the Church of the East in the Mongol period in the Chagatai Khanate and Mongol Yuan China. The historical accounts and archeological evidence related to the Chagatai Khanate allow us to consider the development of Christianity on a local scale whereas the discussion of archeological evidence of the

¹⁰⁴ Ken Parry, *The Art of the Church of the East in China*, 2006, 321.

Church of the East in Mongol China reveals the pattern of development of Christianity in surrounding regions.

This research offers possible interpretations of the funerary art objects of the Christians who lived in the medieval city of Ilibalyk, due to the availability of data provided by the on-going archeological excavations in the village of Usharal. It aims to determine whether the Ilibalyk iconographic evidence points to a unique East Syriac funerary art tradition of Central Asia. The present analysis also examines the communal affiliations of Ilibalyk Christians.

Notably, the size of the Christian community in Ilibalyk in the 13th – 14th centuries is quite unclear since the Ilibalyk excavations are an on-going project, and it is still impossible to predict future discoveries. However, the collection of the Ilibalyk gravestones that we have uncovered so far demonstrates a well-established and developing artistic tradition among the Christians of the Chagatai Khanate (Almalyk, Ilibalyk, Tokmak settlements) during the Mongol rule.

The purpose of erecting and engraving the gravestones is quite clear. In Ilibalyk, there is a clear connection of the tombstones to the graves. The excavations of 2018 revealed burials in the same area where the East Syriac gravestones were found in 2016 and 2017. However, one of the challenges of considering the history of Central Asian East Syrian Christianity is the lack of evidence of any church building at the Ilibalyk archeological site or at the most othersettlements with an obvious Christian presence. That is why it is difficult to draw any connections between tombstones and other art objects in Ilibalyk that the Christian community may have developed.

It is evident that Ilibalyk Christians developed their iconography based largely on the symbol of the cross. It shows the intentions of the East Syriac Christians to express their religious identity through art. The Christians of the Church of the East of Ilibalyk

demonstrated their confessional affiliations to the society of Ilibalyk by incising the Christian symbol of the cross on their burial objects. Hence, the incision of crosses that we can observe demonstrated their religious identity to the broader community.

We are looking at a community of converts, but the small dataset of the burial sites does not provide evidence to understand at what point the Christians of Ilibalyk converted to Christianity. Importantly, the Christians of Ilibalyk are not necessarily converts from Islam. It is more likely that the Ilibalyk Christians of the late medieval age were the descendants of the Christian Turks. It is also likely that the ancestors of Ilibalyk Christians converted much earlier than the late medieval age, the date of the erection of the Ilibalyk Christian gravestones.

Furthermore, Ilibalyk Christians had names of Turkic origins. It is evident from the names inscribed on the gravestones that members of the Ilibalyk Christian community were of Turkic origins. Turkic names of Christians were also found by Ken Parry on the Quanzhou tombstones, which display the iconographic Christian tradition developed by Mongol Yuan Christians. Parry suggests that this community was composed of Turkic Christians who resettled from Central Asia to China in the period of Mongol expansion.¹⁰⁵

The Church of the East was extremely diverse from a linguistic and ethnic point of view.¹⁰⁶ Notably, the stones discovered in Almalyk, region located in Chagatai Khanate in the medieval time, most commonly include the Turkic or Syriac inscriptions, whereas most of the gravestones from the Ilibalyk settlements lack such features. Proceeding to the Ilibalyk inscriptions, only three out of fourteen gravestones discovered in 2016 and 2017 in Ilibalyk have the Turkic inscriptions that surround the crosses. Indeed, the number of the Christian gravestones at Ilibalyk Christian cemetery is impossible to predict, as well as to know how many gravestones from Pishpek and Tokmak were without inscriptions. As it is an on-going

¹⁰⁵ Ken Parry, *The Art of the Church of the East in China*, 2006, 329.

¹⁰⁶ Ken Parry, "Byzantine-rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages." *Modern Greek studies (Australia and New Zealand)*, special edition (2012): 91-108.

excavation, we do not know yet how many more gravestones (with or without inscriptions) will be discovered in this area. Considering the evidence uncovered in Ilibalyk so far, the absence of the Syriac and/or Turkic inscriptions may indicate a small number of Christians in the community who had a good command of the liturgical language of the Church. Possibly it was only the members of the clergy who had knowledge of Syriac. Such abstract iconography of the Christian gravestones might have been the result of the poor economic circumstances in which the East Syriac Christians lived in the medieval time.

The medieval Christian gravestones with Syriac and Turkic inscriptions demonstrate that Turkic Christians formed the major part of the East Syriac Christian communities in China and Central Asia.¹⁰⁷ The inscriptions on the Ilibalyk gravestones demonstrate a certain level of integration with the local Turkic culture. Although the ethnic origins of those people are not clear, the usage of Turkic language in Syriac script may point out that there were Turks in the Ilibalyk Christian community that was part of the greater Ilibalyk Turkic society in 13th and 14th centuries CE.

The use of the Syriac script on Ilibalyk stones is very limited. As noted above, only three out of 18 stones uncovered in 2016 and 2017 include inscriptions in Syriac and Turkic language in Syriac script; the inscriptions surround the crosses on the stones, which demonstrates the presence of clergy in Ilibalyk Christian community who had the command of Syriac and for whom the stones were mostly erected. However, the limited inscriptions presented on the corpus of Ilibalyk stones narrows our knowledge about people who were not members of the clergy but rather represented the general Christian community of Ilibalyk, since the stones do not provide any other literal information about those people.

It is likely that not all the Ilibalyk Christians who lived in Turkic society had a command of Syriac language and most were not able to inscribe Syriac letters on their

¹⁰⁷ Mark Dickens, *Syriac Gravestones in the Tashkent History Museum*, 2009, 13-49.

gravestones. There was a limited use of Turkic letters, which suggests that in the Turkic speaking society of Chagatai Khanate East Syriac Christians of Ilibalyk used primarily the script of the community they lived in. However, it does not necessarily mean that Christians of Ilibalyk diminished the significance of Syriac language as the liturgical language of the East Syrian Church. They possibly had attachments to both their liturgical language and the language of the surrounding culture. In this Turkic community of Christian converts, Syriac was mixed with Turkic script. Thus, the implication of the Turkic script or rather the adoption of the local tradition of writing points to the level of integration of the Christian community of Ilibalyk into the local, Turkic-speaking culture of Ilibalyk society. Notably, this kind of Christian indigenization of a local community took place in medieval Quanzhou, China.

It is also notable that the Ilibalyk gravestones vary in size. Both excavations of 2016 and 2017 revealed stones of different sizes (see table 1, 2, column “stone shape dimensions”). We have big (stone discovered in 2014) and small stones (for instance, stone number 13/IB 17-IV-B-3-12). Similarly, the tombstones from the archeological site Zaitun, Quanzhou are of various sizes. As John Foster argues, the size and height were different according to the age of the deceased, for adults or for children.¹⁰⁸ It is possible that the Ilibalyk Christians erected gravestones of various sizes because size indicated the occupation, social status and age of the deceased.

4.1.1 Muslim influence on the East Syriac iconography of Ilibalyk community

Since Ilibalyk existed within the Chagatai Khanate in the late medieval period, it is interesting to question whether the Ilibalyk Christian community existed within the confines of a predominantly Muslim town. Islam in the late medieval period flourished in the Golden

¹⁰⁸ John Foster, *Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun*, 1954, 13.

Horde and in the Ulus of Chagatai.¹⁰⁹ The Mongol empire from the earliest days of its existence was familiar with the Islamic ideology because it had to deal with Muslim traders that travelled along the Silk Road routes.¹¹⁰ While further archaeological study of domestic contexts will show if these groups were integrated, for now we can surmise that the relationships were not antagonistic.

In his analysis of the East Syriac iconographic art, Ken Parry observes that in the 20th century there was a common opinion among scholars that East Syriac Christianity that developed under Islam, heavily hostile to religious images, denied any images in their iconographic tradition.¹¹¹ There is no solid evidence in the Ilibalyk archeological site to reject or to support this possibility. This community constituted a minority in the Mongol empire and was tolerated by Mongols in the Central Asian and Chinese regions of the empire. The abstract iconography on the gravestones may indicate the indigenization of the Muslim religious art practice, for instance, of creating non-anthropomorphic imagery. We should not ignore the possibility that this kind of abstract iconography, which is typical for Central Asian Christian funerary tradition, but unique in terms of broader Christian funerary art, was influenced by Islamic ideology. There is no direct evidence for the strong influence or even persecution of the minor religions in the Chagatai Khanate. Unlike the austere iconography of Ilibalyk gravestones, the burial attributes of the East Syriac Christians that lived in the surrounding area provides limited examples of the crossover of Christian, Buddhist and Taoist symbolism.¹¹² However, it is most likely that there were many other different reasons for having this kind of austere iconography for Ilibalyk Christians. Living within one multireligious Turkic community, Christians of the Church of the East had to interact with

¹⁰⁹ To read more see, Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1994).

¹¹⁰ Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests*, 2012, 182.

¹¹¹ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 232.

¹¹² Michal Biran, *The Chaghadaids and Islam*, 2002, 742.

the other religions in the city, while possibly living in the predominantly Muslim society. Although Muslim influence was not found on any of gravestones, this transpired without the integration of religious traditions of Christianity with other religions but may have resulted in the emergence of a non-anthropomorphic Christian iconography in the medieval city of Ilibalyk where Islam had, moreover, support from the ruling authorities.

Islam has usually defined itself in very sharp distinction from Christianity. Yet, it is likely that Christians and Muslims maintained amicable relations in the Chagatai Khanate. There are no gravestones with Islamic iconography depicted alongside Christian imagery. Muslims and Christians lived in strict differentiation from one another, and Islamic influence is not found on any of the gravestones. The only non-Christian iconography that was found on the Christian gravestones from Central Asia and China is of Buddhist origin. Christians used the image of the lotus without any association with Buddhist iconography. Even considering the possibility that Christians may have adopted symbols of other religions without its religious significance, it is evident that in the area with Islamic influence Christian funerary objects do not include any Muslim symbols.¹¹³ Importantly, we do not know yet whether there were any other religious groups that were buried in the same area as the Christians were. Thus, presumably, the uncovered Ilibalyk cemetery was a Christian graveyard.

Christian iconography at Ilibalyk lacked any anthropomorphic imagery. Ilibalyk plain crosses do not include image of a cross with crucified Christ. A cross without an image of Christ was “the symbol of Christ’s resurrection and victory over death”.¹¹⁴ Hence, it does not include any images that expressed the divinity of Christ for the East Syriac Christian community of this medieval city. However, there does not exist any specific anthropomorphic imagery that can be found in the non-Western Christian iconography. Quanzhou settlement

¹¹³ John Foster, *Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun*, 1954, 11.

¹¹⁴ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 235.

with its significant Christian population demonstrates that Christians of the Church of the East were able to adopt other religion's motifs or to imply Christian anthropomorphic motifs. There are examples of the funerary Christian art of the Church of the East that include the representations of flying figures. For instance, Quanzhou tombstones include not only mixed motifs of Buddhist and Christian symbols but also anthropomorphic imagery of so-called flying angels, which is known from early Christian art.¹¹⁵

The Ilbalyk crosses do not include the figure of the crucified Jesus. In general, there was no canonical prohibition against a cult with anthropomorphic images of Christ and the saints in the liturgical practice of East Syrian Christians.¹¹⁶ East Syrian Christians had "Syriac prayers for the consecration of icons", although from a later period. There was nothing that restricted the Church of the East in decoration with crosses and pictorial representations of their funerary or worship places. Additionally, archeological evidence from the much earlier time of the 6th century CE, Toyuq manuscript found in China, includes the scene of the "Women at the tomb", and more importantly it includes the depicted crucified Jesus on the cross with open eyes. Notably, the center of the fragment is a Maltese style cross, which very common for the East Syriac funerary art.¹¹⁷ The Toyuq settlement in Turfan oasis is famous for its Buddhist caves, and for a significant Muslim shrine¹¹⁸ that was important for Muslim pilgrims in Xinjiang in the medieval time (10th to 12th centuries CE). Parry questions whether the silk fragment from Toyuq of 6th century is Manichean or Christian. He also questions what Christian community it belonged to. Although the nature of the fragment is quite

¹¹⁵ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 240.

¹¹⁶ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 241.

¹¹⁷ Ken Parry, *Reflections on a Silk Fragment from Toyuq*, 2016, 167-92.

¹¹⁸ "Seven Sleepers. An exhibition of Central Asian Art held at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul in 2003 included a fragment of a silk painting (56.5cm × 24.5cm), described as Manichaeian (Fig. 1). This painting in question is listed in the catalogue as originating from Toyuq in the oasis of Turfan in Chinese Xinjiang and is dated between the tenth and twelfth centuries." From Ken Parry, *Reflections on a Silk Fragment from Toyuq*, 2016, 167-92.

unclear, the silk fragment includes features that are common to the Central Asian and Chinese Christian art.

Muslim influence may have caused the rejection of any pictorial iconography on the gravestones and any other Christian archeological evidence uncovered in the Chu and Ili valleys, the regions with an increasing influence of the Islamic ideology. However, further research is required since the Ilibalyk dataset provides only a limited sample of evidence for this question. Christoph Baumer argues that the rejection of anthropomorphic iconography by the late fourteenth century Christians was a “response to increased Muslim persecution”.¹¹⁹ However, the East Syriac Christian community that lived alongside the Muslim community and under Muslim political authority within Ilibalyk may have been influenced by Islam without being persecuted. There is even an example of the presence of the plain pectoral Christian crosses in the Muslim environment in Jabal Berri, which did not adopt any features of Muslim iconography even though it developed in a strictly Islamic environment. It was an East Syriac Christian community that depicted the Latin type cross with pearls or decorated with tear-drop serifs in a predominantly Muslim Sasanian Persian Arabian province.¹²⁰

From the archeological evidence of the funerary art of the Church of the East in Central Asia, East Syriac Christians venerated a plain cross without crucifix. Likewise, Ilibalyk gravestones include only austere iconography with plane crosses and no additional imagery. The absence of anthropomorphic imagery on the medieval gravestones may express the East Syriac Christians’ emphasis on Christ’s divinity. It may also suggest that this kind of funerary art that excluded any anthropomorphic imagery is typical for Central Asian funerary traditions but unique in terms of a broader Christian funerary art. Hence, this thesis highlights

¹¹⁹ Christoph Baumer, *The Church of the East. An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London: I.B. Tauris &, 2016), 382-452.

¹²⁰ Potts, D. T., "Nestorian Crosses from Jabal Berri," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 5, no. 1 (1994): 61-64.

an unresolved question of whether the Ilibalyk Christian community incorporated influence from Islamic doctrine into the East Syriac funerary art.

4.2 Ilibalyk communities and the wider Christian presence in Central Asia

The Ilibalyk Christian community developed within the confines of the Chagatai Ulus along with the Christian community of the medieval city of Almalyk. Similarly, there were other ethnically Turkic societies that adopted East Syriac Christianity. These communities formed a wider Christian socioreligious network in Central Asian and Chinese regions. With the help of archeological evidence of the Church of the East uncovered so far in those regions it is possible to track the connections and exchange of ideas between those Christian communities that existed under different or similar imperial powers and among diverse religious environment. Particularly, the East Syriac Christian gravestones serve as a valuable resource for the reconstruction of the history of the Church of the East in those regions. To understand how the religious affiliation of Christians of Ilibalyk shaped their networks within a broader world, it is crucial to consider the archeological evidence from Ilibalyk in a wider social context. It is particularly important to consider funerary objects in the form of gravestones of Christians from other regions that surrounded Ilibalyk city. Thus, I consider the Ilibalyk stones in a wider socioreligious context of Central Asian and Chinese Christian archeological sites. The regional comparison of the Christian funerary art of Turkic communities from Mongol Central Asia and Yuan Mongol China tells us more about the development of the Ilibalyk Christian community as well as about the broader Christian tradition that developed along the Silk Road in a whole region.

From the data presented in the table, it is evident that Christian crosses of various shapes were uncovered in multiple historically significant areas of Central Asia, including some cities located on the Silk Road routes (table 3). The regional comparison of the

gravestones uncovered in Central Asia and (Mongol) China have revealed sixteen groups of Christian crosses in the study region defined on the basis of the availability of material, and the available research of this study region. Geographically, it was territory in which the Church of the East expanded during the period of Mongol tolerance.

Ilibalyk Christian funerary objects amaze with their diversity in the patterns of crosses. However, it is questionable whether this kind of diversity in the styles of crosses that were chiseled by Christian artisans was unique to this particular Christian community or if it was typical for other Christian communities with a significant population. It is crucial to answer this question in order to understand how Christians of Ilibalyk related to the broader world, and how these societies communicated and exchanged ideas through a wider Christian network and along the Great Silk Road. This thesis considers the sites with Christian populations, acknowledging the fact that this Church was far more widespread than just the territory of those sites presented in the table. There is still more to be opened and recorded. The suggested typology of the Christian crosses presents malleability of Christian iconography in Central Asia.

This regional comparison focuses on one component of Christian archeological evidence – Christian gravestones, which formed a separate group of Christian art in medieval Central Asia and China. When considering Christian archeological evidence from the various regions, this thesis focuses on multiple characteristics. For instance, the analysis includes sites with a Christian population and substantial Christian archeological evidence. It is important to note that this table focuses only on the crosses on the Christian gravestones but does not explicitly cover any other types of Christian archeological evidence that include Christian symbolism such as pectoral crosses, ceramic fragments with Christian symbolism, plates or church buildings since these fall outside the scope of my thesis. Future research will focus on more assemblages of archeological Christian evidence from this study region. The

present discussion includes a brief comparison of the Christian crosses chiseled on the Central Asian gravestones with pectoral crosses uncovered in Central Asia and China.

The Christian artisans used a chiseling technique for inscribing the symbols. The East Syriac Christians of medieval Central Asia engraved the crosses on the stones along with the Syriac and Turkic inscriptions. These kinds of burial objects were uncovered in various places in Central Asia and China. In order to reveal the commonly used types of crosses by the medieval East Syriac Christians in Ilibalyk, I have compared the motifs of crosses of the Ilibalyk gravestones to the corpus of gravestones from the surrounding areas. In particular, the table includes the gravestones from the Ilibalyk settlements located in the Ili Valley and the gravestones from Chu Valley located in the Chagatai Khanate in the late medieval period. Additionally, in order to narrow down evidence from Chinese sites of the Church of the East, the table includes gravestones from medieval city of Almalyk, which was the capital of the Chagatai Khanate in present-day Xinjiang. To demonstrate the diversity of the Christian medieval gravestones from this region, the comparative analysis includes gravestones from Inner Mongolia researched by Halbertsma. It is also important to note that the table that presents the regional comparison of the motifs of crosses and the styles of the gravestones, but does not include all the Christian gravestones discovered in Central Asia. It rather demonstrates the most common cross patterns that the medieval Christian communities engraved on their burial objects.

The analysis reveals an extremely diverse typology of crosses chiseled by the medieval Christian artisans on the corpus of the tombstones. I was able to define some of the existing patterns of Christian crosses. It was not possible to identify some of the categories of crosses within the Christian iconographic framework. Thus, I included the description of these crosses as the names of the types of crosses.

These are the most common types of crosses that were incised on the kayraks found within the Central Asian region (see table 3).¹²¹

1. Calvary cross
2. “Pearl-tipped” crosses with/ and without one stair at the bottom
3. Checkered cross
4. Patriarchal cross six-pointed
5. Simple cross with flared arms
6. Latin cross
7. Simple/Greek cross
8. ‘Petal’ cross
9. Petal cross’ with an anthropomorphic image with an altar
10. “Pearl-tipped” cross with engraved cross at the end of vertical dash of the main cross
11. Maltese type cross Flared with a prong
12. Maltese type cross with an altar
13. Maltese type cross with the elongated bottom arm, and with one step or circle at the base
14. Maltese type cross 2 or cross pattée
15. Maltese cross with a ring in the center and a Greek cross inside the ring
16. Maltese cross with four and two pearls(?)
17. A mix of Maltese type cross and Petal cross with an altar¹²²

The gravestones from Ilibalyk contain seven of the listed types of crosses. Ilibalyk gravestones from 2016 and 2017 revealed seven types of crosses out of sixteen listed styles of crosses. The Ilibalyk Christian community used in their funerary art the following styles of

¹²¹ “14 types of ancient Christian crosses”, <http://pravoslavie.ru/97480.html>

¹²² “14 types of ancient Christian crosses”, <http://pravoslavie.ru/97480.html>

crosses: Calvary cross, Patriarchal cross, Knobbed cross, Maltese type cross (flared with a prong), Cross pattée (Maltese flared), Latin cross and Greek cross.

The gravestones from Ilibalyk, located in the Ili Valley, stones from the Chu valley (from Tokmak and Pishpek), and Almalyk stones (Xinjiang) can be considered as one group of stones that have similar style of crosses, shape, size of gravestones, and type of inscriptions (table 3). In the medieval time, all listed settlements were in the Chagatai Khanate in the Mongol empire. The stones from Ili and Chu Valleys constitute a group of gravestones with an abstract iconography, which means that the gravestones did not include any kind of crucifix, anthropomorphic imagery, and included predominantly a figure of a plane cross and sometimes of inscriptions in Syriac or Turkic. In other words, the funerary art tradition of the Christians from the Ili and Chu Valleys does not seem to have been transformed by the introduction of symbols from other religions to Christian art. One Almalyk gravestone includes anthropomorphic imagery (Almalyk gravestone, stone 57), although Almalyk located much closer to Ilibalyk than other sites considered in the regional comparison of Christian Central Asian and Chinese crosses. The various types of crosses of the Ilibalyk Christian community appear in other places, which tell us about the existence of some level of connectedness between those sites.

The most common of the crosses chiseled on the medieval gravestones was a Maltese type of figure (table 3). I was able to identify the following types of crosses that Christians used for expressing their religious identity on the gravestones: Maltese type cross Flared with a prong, Maltese type cross with altar, Maltese type cross with an elongated bottom arm, and with one step or circle at the base, Maltese type cross, Maltese cross with a ring in the center and a Greek cross inside the ring, Maltese cross with four and two pearls(?), a mix of a Maltese type cross and Petal cross with an altar. The Maltese type of cross is well documented in the East Syrian tradition that can be found in manuscripts and on Christian

seals.¹²³ One of the richest collections of Christians seals is the Ordos bronze cross collection. More than 300 pectoral crosses of different shapes are stored in this collection. The Ordos crosses were discovered in Northwestern China, and they include crosses of the Maltese type and bronze crosses in the shape of a bird or a dove. There is a theory that those crosses were used as seals by Christians in the 12th and 13th centuries CE.¹²⁴ Taylor suggests that these objects represent the great movement of the East Syriac Christians in the medieval time to propagate their belief in the Far East.¹²⁵ Interestingly, the type of cross that is referred as to as a Maltese type of cross appears in a diversity of styles. The diversity of Ilibalyk crosses that were chiseled on the gravestones and the crosses from Chu valley are quite various as well, although it constitutes a group of the presence of predominantly Maltese types of crosses with extending ends decorated with pearls. The variation of those crosses is defined by the number of pearls at the ends (table 3, corresponds with non-Maltese crosses on gravestones number 3 and 9).¹²⁶ Commonly, various stones included different elements that were incorporated by East Syrian Christian artisans into one or another Christian cross engraved on the medieval tombstones. An overall regional comparison that includes other regions reveals even more styles of crosses that can be qualified as Maltese type crosses (table 3). It is likely that the medieval East Syriac Christian communities that used various styles of Maltese type of crosses tried to supplement the meaning or message of the Maltese cross with additional motifs that lent new significance to the cross on the burial objects. The present research reveals that there is a need for conducting further research on the styles of

¹²³ "The Nestorian collection", the website of the University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong, https://www.umag.hku.hk/en/exhibition_detail.php?id=4838994

¹²⁴ Taylor, W. R., "Nestorian Crosses in China," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 55, no. 1 (1938): 58-59.

¹²⁵ Taylor, W. R., *Nestorian Crosses in China*, 1938, 60.

¹²⁶ Philipp Rott, "Christian Crosses from Central Asia," in *Jingjiao*, ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter (Sankt Augustin: Institute Monuments Serica, 2006), 395-401. See the last variation is most typical for images of crosses on Semirechye gravestones in Слущкий 1889, table III, I; IV, III.

crosses used by the Church of the East further to the west, in the Church's Middle Eastern homeland.

Although the East Syriac Christians used Maltese type crosses very often, there is no specific cross used by the Church of the East in Central Asia that may have possibly originated from the East Syrian funerary art tradition. In Russian Soviet and Post-Soviet academia, the Maltese type of cross is often qualified as a 'Nestorian cross'.¹²⁷ For instance, Boris Zheleznyakov suggests that the 'Nestorian cross' actually differs from the Maltese pattern by its number of small dashes at the ends of the cross bars.¹²⁸ However, it is incorrect to refer to the Maltese type cross as a 'Nestorian cross'. Importantly, this kind of cross was not only typical for East Syrian tradition but also was used in Western and Byzantine art.¹²⁹ The Christians of Central Asia and northern China used various patterns of a Christian cross. Although the Church of the East crosses exhibit a commonality with the Maltese cross, it seems that Christian artisans who chiseled these crosses on the corpus of the gravestones used different crucifix templates without any attachment to one common style. The Maltese type of cross is also common for Quanzhou tombstones, as well as to Inner Mongolian corpus. However, the funerary objects of the Quanzhou Christian community included various types of crosses including the Greek type of cross.

Further research of early Christian gravestones from Mesopotamia or Persia is required in order to understand what kind of motifs East Syrian Christians brought with their missionary migration from the Middle East to Central Asia and China, which makes it complicated to propose connections between the motifs used by East Syrian Christians and the Western Christian Church. However, it is important not to forget that at the same time when East Syriac missionaries prospered in China there was a Western mission of

¹²⁷ Галина Терновая, "Предметы Христианского Культа из Коллекции Средневекового города Навакет," *Известия. Серия общественных наук*, no.1 (2004):176-179.

¹²⁸ Железняков 2003, *Предметы с иконографическими изображениями из Семиречья*, 260-276.

¹²⁹ Ken Parry, *The Art of the Church of the East in China*, 2006, 331-332.

Franciscans in Mongol Yuan China as well, which may have influenced the iconography of Chinese Christian communities. This is not to suggest that there was a community of Franciscans in Ilibalyk. Hence, there is an iconographic crossover between the motifs of Eastern Christian funerary art and of Catholic tombstone motifs in Chinese funerary art of the Church of the East, which Ken Parry attributes to the same artisan who was responsible for carving tombstones from Quanzhou for both Churches in the Mongol period.¹³⁰

The diversity of the Quanzhou styles of Christian crosses on the tombstones demonstrates that an overall diversity of crosses from Ilibalyk is not unique to this community alone. Looking at the stones from Almalyk and Tokmak, one finds not only similarities in the motifs of crosses that artisans chiseled, but also the way in which they incised the inscriptions and crosses, such as their shapes and dimensions (table 3).

Certain pectoral crosses may have easily served as objects of trade and exchange, but it was not the same in the case of gravestones, which were of big and small sizes and were manufactured locally by Christian artisans in Chu and Ili Valleys and located nearby Almalyk, in Inner Mongolia and the East Syriac gravestones stored in Penjikent (table 3). Notably, the shape of gravestones and correspondingly the size of the crosses on the stones from Inner Mongolia differ from the stones from all other five regions that were located in the Chagatai Khanate and in Yuan Dynasty territory that developed under the Mongols. It is possible that pectoral crosses were locally produced in Semirechie as well as the production of Christian gravestones with crosses by medieval artisans, particularly in Chu Valley, archeological sites Krasnaya Rechka and Aq-Beshim.¹³¹ The pectoral crosses are mostly dated according to the dates of the objects that accompanied the crosses. Their chronological range covers presumably the period from the 7th to the 14th centuries, which approximately corresponds to the dates of the Christian gravestones that were uncovered in Central Asia. It

¹³⁰ Ken Parry, *The Art of the Church of the East in China*, 2006, 329.

¹³¹ Philipp Rott, "Christian Crosses from Central Asia, 395-401.

is not possible to say if the crosses were produced locally or imported to the place. This can be applied to almost all pectoral crosses except the pectoral crosses from the ancient archeological site Erk-Kala or city of Merv (Marv) that were locally manufactured. It is important to note that the pectoral crosses, which widens the diversity of Christian crosses from Central Asia, were found in only one out of 119 Christian burials that were excavated by Pantusov and Fetisov on the archeological sites of Burana and Kara-Djigach.¹³² Notably, regions like Fergana and Sogdiana present only fragmentary finds, whereas Semirechye region has many more finds that can be interpreted as Christian, or more precisely that belong to the Church of the East.¹³³

Considering the austerity of the Ilibalyk iconography, unlike the Christian communities that surrounded them (in the present-day territories of China), the East Syriac Christians of Ilibalyk did not include non-Christian symbols in their burial monuments. Unlike the Christian communities that had a capacity to adopt Buddhist symbolism, Christians of Ilibalyk that incorporated only a plain cross and rarely short inscriptions, does not seem to demonstrate any Christian-Buddhist crossover. Quanzhou gravestones present Christian-Buddhist crossover in its symbolism. Quanzhou tombstones provide a valuable example of the diverse ways in which Christian art developed within the confines of the Mongol empire in the late medieval age. It moreover suggests the presence of a Christian-Buddhist crossover in the medieval Christian funerary art. This kind of crossover is distinctive to the Christian funerary art in Central Asia and China, which demonstrates to us how medieval East Syrian Christian communities were developing a Christian iconography in a non-Christian cultural environment. Quanzhou Christians created a special mix of Christian and local religious art mixed with Mongol elements. The Ilibalyk gravestones may demonstrate a different example of the process of acculturation, presented by austere

¹³² Refer to chapter 2 “*History of archaeological study and archeological evidence for Christianity in Central Asia*”.

¹³³ Philipp Rott, “Christian Crosses from Central Asia, 395-401.

iconography and pure Christian symbolism, under the same Mongol rule but in the Chagatai Khanate, whereas the Quanzhou tombstones were created by Christian communities in Mongol Yuan China. Although it is outside of the scope of this thesis, in order to understand the nature of this austerity of the East Syriac iconographic tradition it is important to engage with the research of the gravestones from another confessional community with the Christians of Ilibalyk co-existed in the medieval period. It is important to make this comparison to understand whether Muslim gravestones from the Mongol era were similarly austere as the Christians gravestones from Chu and Ili Valleys.

Whereas Quanzhou East Syrian Christians adopted various elements in their funerary art, the Christian community of Ilibalyk lacks such features. For instance, Inner Mongolian East Syriac gravestones include floral motifs, which are absent on the Ilibalyk stones. Furthermore, unlike the Ilibalyk tradition, the artistic adaptation of the Quanzhou funerary art from the Mongol era is very rich in various motifs and includes anthropomorphic imagery and elements of Buddhist iconography. Christians of Quanzhou incorporated diverse motifs in their funerary art objects that demonstrated the cultural diversity that was apparent during the Mongol period.¹³⁴ The shape of Quanzhou crosses is diverse and mostly includes Greek type crosses with arms of equal length and Maltese-style crosses with flared arms ending in three pearls.

If considering the Christian art objects that included elements of other religions, the most common Buddhist symbol used with the Christian crosses was the Lotus flower, often depicted at the bottom of the Christian cross. Quanzhou artistic remains demonstrate an existed capacity of medieval East Syrian Christians to adapt to diverse and challenging multireligious surroundings.¹³⁵ The majority of Quanzhou gravestones of the 13th century have a cross on a lotus flower or include images of clouds, which are similar to the Xi'an

¹³⁴ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 233.

¹³⁵ Ken Parry, *The Art of the Church of the East in China*, 2006, 331.

stele motifs erected five centuries earlier than the Quanzhou tombstones. The Xi'an stele of 781, with bilingual inscriptions in Syriac and Chinese, demonstrates a style of iconography that adopted features of Buddhist symbols. This stele is an example of a Christian composition from the Tang dynasty, with carvings similar in style to the Christian tombstones of 13th – 14th centuries CE.¹³⁶ The introduction of iconographic symbols of Buddhism in East Christian art is obvious if considering Quanzhou art objects, which demonstrates the influence of Buddhist tradition on the culture and society in China. Hence, the Quanzhou funerary objects constitute unique Christian art, offering rare insight into a Christian community that tried to promote its identity in a non-Christian environment. John Foster suggests that the Quanzhou tombstones also include motifs of Chinese culture; in particular, the angels carved on the tombstones are Sinicized.¹³⁷

Christianity in Mongol China was absorbed into the Chinese religious systems.¹³⁸ The epitaphs of Xi'an stele propose that there were Central Asian Christians who settled in China. It demonstrates that the East Syriac Christians were able to transfer iconographic traditions of Central Asia to China and vice versa. There was a common motif in a Christian iconography of the Church of the East of those two regions. There is epigraphical evidence that those people in China were of Turkic origin.¹³⁹ However, there is also a strong difference between those styles, especially in terms of Ili Balik archeological site that presents various styles of Christian cross applied not only by East Syriac Christians but also by the Western church.

As was mentioned before, the Ordos Christian bronze crosses were manufactured in the Chinese region of Ordos, and included similar syncretistic motifs, particularly the

¹³⁶ Matteo Nicolini-Zani, "The Tang Christian Pillar from Luoyang And Its Jingjiao Inscription," *Monumenta Serica* 57, no. 1 (2009): 99-140.

¹³⁷ John Foster, *Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun*, 1954, 13.

¹³⁸ Matteo Nicolini-Zani, *The Tang Christian Pillar from Luoyang*, 99-140.

¹³⁹ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005.; see also T. Ailsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural history of Islamic textiles* (Cambridge: 1997), ch.3.

depiction of the mixed Christian and Buddhist motifs in the same material object.¹⁴⁰ Hence, Christianity had the capacity to adopt symbols of other religions. While considering East Syrian Christianity that developed in Central Asia and China as a syncretistic religion, it is important to note that this feature does not tell us whether Christians adopted features of other religions with its theology or just adopted symbols without any attachment to the religious significance of the symbolism of other religions.

It is important to note that the presence of Buddhism in Zhetysu was limited. The majority of inhabitants of this region were Muslims. There was some limited influence of Buddhism in the areas that surrounded Ilibalyk. For instance, in the medieval city Almalyk, which is located in the present-day Xinjiang region, was a part of the Chagatai Ulus and located very close to Ilibalyk. The archeologists uncovered in Almalyk a medieval gravestone with limited but apparent influence of Buddhist iconography (table 3, stone 57). However, Quanzhou corpus demonstrates that different Christian communities in the Mongol empire adopted some features of Buddhist iconography since there were a majority of Buddhist followers in the Yuan Chinese communities. Hence, East Syriac Christians of Ilibalyk lived in a religious environment with a limited Buddhist influence, which may have been the reason why East Syriac Christians of Ilibalyk did not adopt any features of other religions even though the city was located along the Silk Road.

The East Syriac gravestones with Buddhist motifs were also found at the archaeological site of Krasnaya Rechka and Ak Beshim (medieval city Suyab), in present-day Kyrgyzstan. The stylistic features of the gravestones found at these sites differ dramatically from those of Ilibalyk (table 3, column “Chu valley stones”). The Christian gravestones discovered in Almalyk and Quanzhou, developed under Chagatai Khanate and Yuan Mongol China respectively, also display the syncretic symbolism of the Christian cross and Lotus

¹⁴⁰ “The Nestorian collection”, The University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong, https://www.umag.hku.hk/en/exhibition_detail.php?id=4838994

engraved on the surface of the stones by the medieval artisans.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the Christian gravestones of the Church of the East discovered in a medieval site in Inner Mongolia also include the combined cross and flower motif.¹⁴² We do not know how exactly the motif of cross with lotus flower appeared in Christian iconography and who started this tradition but there was a continuity in Christian art from the Tang period to the Mongolian period. It was an interesting integration of Eastern and Western religious traditions.¹⁴³

The carved angels reflect the ability of the Quanzhou Christian community to imply a cross-cultural approach to religious iconography and demonstrate their flexibility to adapt to the Yuan Chinese cultural environment. The willingness to use such iconography of the local religious tradition and culture demonstrates Christians' confidence in their social status in Chinese society, which led to the development of a unique Chinese Christian iconographic tradition that displays the crossover of Christian and Buddhist symbolism. This flexibility of incorporation of Buddhist iconography in their art, moreover, outlines their desire to be accepted by the Chinese society. Hence, the Quanzhou Christians developed their identity in the non-Christian culture as a minority. During the same period, Christian communities of Central Asia were developing their identity under Islamic ideology in Chagatai Khanate, which constitutes completely differently iconographic tradition. The East Syrian Christians of Almalyk incorporated anthropomorphic imagery similar to the Quanzhou angels on the corpus of its gravestones with angles and fire altar, which indicates Zoroastrian influence. This kind of style of funerary objects was not adopted by Ilibalyk Christians who developed abstract Christian iconography. The Quanzhou corpus provides five stones with images of angels. It is important to mention that Islam, under which Christianity was developing in Central Asia, avoided anthropomorphic imagery.

¹⁴¹ Григорий Семёнов, "Ак-Бешим и города Семиречья," in *Проблемы Политогенеза Кыргызской Государственности* (Бишкек: ARHI, 2003), 218-222.

¹⁴² Halbertsma, Tjalling, and Jian Wei, *Some Field Notes and Images of Stone Material from Graves Of The Church Of The East*, 113-244.

¹⁴³ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 237.

Overall, it is evident that the Christians of the considered sites, which were located not necessarily close to each other, were able to commemorate their deceased in a way that suited their religious belief in an afterlife. The level of sophistication of Christian funerary art in non-Christian culture indicates the status of the deceased in Chinese society under Mongols. Due to their connection with Mongol ruling families (for instance, Christian wives of Mongols), Christians were privileged in Mongol Yuan society.¹⁴⁴

To sum up, the Ili Balik gravestones differ from one another by the motif of crosses. It is clear that the integration of Christian-Buddhist symbolisms existed in the medieval Christian art and iconography, while there are not any anthropomorphic figures on Ili Balik stones. For instance, one of the stones from Almalyk includes Petal cross' with an anthropomorphic image and an altar (six steps), whereas the Ilibalyk stones provide only abstract images of cross. The Ilibalyk gravestones do not include the symbols of the other religions that developed at this time in the multireligious community of Ilibalyk, even though the city located on the trading route, which means that it was a part of an active ideological exchange on one of the trading routes. Furthermore, the East Syrian Christians used a commonly different variation of the Maltese style cross. However, the East Syrian gravestones present valuable evidence of the implication of Western-styled crosses in their Church tradition. Whether it was adopted from Franciscan missionaries in China, or brought by East Syriac Christians to Central Asia and China is a question that must be considered to widen our understanding of Central Asian and Chinese East Syriac communities. The level of interaction between Christians of Ilibalyk and other religions that co-existed in the multireligious environment of the medieval city is unclear; however, the commonality in the funerary art and in the malleability of crosses of Ilibalyk and of Christians from the surrounding areas suggest that the Ilibalyk community of the Church of the East was a part of

¹⁴⁴ Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005, 245-246.

a bigger socioreligious network of East Syrian Christians.¹⁴⁵ Assumedly, there was an exchange of the idea of the funerary Christian tradition that took place in the Mongol empire. Furthermore, the regional analysis demonstrates that archeological Christian evidence from other regions and not Ilibalyk had a capacity to integrate Christian symbolism with this of other religions. Developed as a minority, the Christian community of the Church of the East in Ili Valley, Chu valley, and Inner Mongolia was able to express its identity through funerary objects and symbols in a non-Christian religious and geopolitical environment. Finally, an abstract iconographic tradition of Ilibalyk East Syriac Christians and the diversity in styles of crosses was typical not only for the Ilibalyk community, but rather was a way in which East Syriac Christians demonstrated their religious affiliations in the Central Asian and Chinese regions that shaped their relationship with a broader world.

¹⁴⁵ Ken Parry, *Reflections on a Silk Fragment from Toyuq*, 2016, 167-92.

Conclusion

The thesis draws upon the Ilibalyk excavations of 2016 and 2017 that revealed East Syriac Christian gravestones of the late 13th - early 14th century CE and a Christina graveyard, which suggests the presence of a Christian community in the Central Asian region. All the gravestones differ in size, shape and in the style of the crosses engraved on the surface of the stones. My aim in this thesis was to explore the communal affiliations of the medieval Christian communities through iconographic and stylistic analysis of the crosses engraved on the gravestone-pebbles with Syriac inscriptions discovered in a Christian graveyard of the medieval city Ilibalyk. In addition to the stylistic analysis of the motif of crosses on the corpus of the Ilibalyk gravestones, the research provided the regional analysis of the abstract images of Christian crosses, which helped us to place Ilibalyk in the wider cultural network of Asian medieval history. On the basis of the archeological evidence presented here, the following possible interpretations and research questions seem to emerge from the analysis of archeological data and historical accounts of the Church of the East that developed in the late medieval age in Central Asia and China.

The present study provides a brief overview of the religious environment in the Chagatai Khanate, while also examining in more detail the position of this particular religious community. This study questions the extent to which the Ilibalyk Christian community was integrated into the religious life of the local population. In addition, it questions whether the Ilibalyk Christian community was or was not a part of a wider socioreligious Christian network of East Syriac Christianity developed in Central Asia and China during the medieval period.

The dataset of the Ilibalyk site constitutes a small sample, which is why it is impossible to propose any firm conclusion yet. Hence, more research is required to understand to what extent Ilibalyk Christian community was integrated into the socioreligious

life of Ilibalyk and what place they occupied in a wider Christian network in the region while promoting their Christian identity in a non-Christian culture. However, this thesis discussed the possible reasons for the purely abstract religious symbolism of Ilibalyk gravestones, despite the presence of Buddhism in that area. It proposes the possible influence from the radical monotheism of the Muslims with whom Christians interacted under the Mongols, and the possible connections of East Syrian Christians in Central Asia to the Western iconographic tradition. Ilibalyk Christian iconography is not unique within the East Syrian tradition of funerary art. However, it provides us with an interesting example of how Christians expressed their religious identity through the commemoration of the deceased with a help of gravestones with decorative features. Those features are purely of Christians origins. Their iconography reflected the way they expressed their belief in resurrection and the afterlife.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the research revealed outstanding questions of how the East Syriac Christian community developed its identity in medieval Central Asia. This thesis' discussion provided some possible answers to those questions and stressed where this evidence could lead. The analysis of the Ilibalyk crosses and the regional analysis of the motifs of Christian crosses thus revealed three main points that could contribute to our understanding of how East Syriac communities developed their identity in a non-Christian culture of Central Asia. Let us consider these possible interpretations and the general observations from the analysis of the dataset.

Firstly, the research revealed an intriguing variety of crosses chiseled on the Ilibalyk Christian gravestones, which presents the malleability of Christian iconography of Central Asian East Syriac Christian communities. Further discoveries of Christian archeological area may reveal the presence of local autonomy for this kind of religious expression through the funerary art. Nevertheless, even with this small dataset from the on-going excavations of

Ilibalyk, it is remarkable the diversity and variety of styles of crosses applied by the medieval Christians of the Church of the East in this medieval city. Furthermore, this diversity is not only typical for the Ilibalyk corpus, the regional comparison of the considered Christian evidence from the various archeological sites of the medieval period demonstrates that all these (table 3) styles of crosses appear in other sites. Hence, it tells us about the possible connection between all the considered medieval Central Asian Christian sites, which may have exchanged with and connected their Christian iconographic art tradition. At a close examination of styles of the Christian crosses there is no specific Christian type of cross applied by the East Syriac Christians in Ilibalyk and other considered communities of Central Asia and China that had similar funerary traditions. Although the crosses of the Church of the East exhibit a commonality with the Maltese cross, the Christian artisans who chiseled these crosses on the corpus of the gravestones used various styles of crosses without any attachment to one common style. The styles of crosses used by Ilibalyk Christians is also common for the Western Church. While this thesis provides research of the images of Christian cross used by Central Asian Christians only, to draw upon the meaning of this diversity it is important to conduct further research on the crosses used by the Church of the East further to the west, in the homeland of the Church, Middle East, and styles of crosses used by Western Church.

Secondly, the iconography of Ilibalyk gravestones is abstract, which means that it does not include any anthropomorphic imagery. The thesis considered whether this abstract iconography on the gravestones may or may not indicate the indigenization of Muslim religious art. The question is debatable since Muslim influence cannot be found on any of the Ilibalyk gravestones. However, as Christianity and Islam always identified themselves in sharp distinction from one another, this influence could have taken place without any overt integration of religious traditions of Christianity with other religions, and may have resulted

in the emergence of abstract iconography. The dialogue between patriarch Timothy and Abbasid caliph Mahdi demonstrates the way in which it could be possible. The dialogue clearly shows Timothy's strategy for accommodating the religious priorities of Caliph Mahdi or of the major religion in the caliphate. Hence, the Christian bishop attempted to present Christian doctrine as satisfying the major tenets of both religions. Further study of the domestic context may reveal if these groups were integrated. It is possible to speculate that the Christian-Muslim relationship was not antagonistic. Moreover, the regional comparison revealed that this kind of abstract iconography is typical for the Central Asian East Syriac art tradition, but it may be unique in terms of a broader Christian funerary art. Hence, this thesis discussed the very debatable question of whether the Ilibalyk community developed under the influence of Muslim funerary tradition.

Furthermore, the thesis discussed explicitly the Christian communities that had a capacity to adopt Buddhist symbolism,¹⁴⁶ whereas Ilibalyk Christian iconography does not display any Christian-Buddhist crossover. This kind of crossover is distinctive to the Christian funerary art of Asia and demonstrates the need for developing a Christian iconography in a non-Christian culture. It is evident that the Church of the East that developed in Central Asian and Chinese regions was able to adopt and integrate with other religious traditions, which helped to develop their Christian identity in the East. Christians of Ilibalyk had to coexist with other religions as a minority religious community, but formed a unique iconographic tradition. Hence, the research of the Christian funerary art reveals the capacity of the Christian communities to integrate Christian iconography with Buddhist symbolism and may point to the Muslim influence of Christian iconographic tradition in the future research.

¹⁴⁶ John Foster, *Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun*, 1954.; see also Ken Parry, *The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton*, 2005.

Finally, the Christian archeological evidence revealed some level of Christian community integration into an Ilibalyk city's society. Ilibalyk Christian community was able to adopt Turkic language in Syriac script for commemorating of their deceased. It may point to the Ilibalyk East Syriac Christian community being a part of a wider Turkic society in the late medieval period, although the ethnic origins of Ilibalyk Christian is still not identified.

Overall, there is still much to understand about the acculturation undertaken by the East Syrian Christians in medieval Central Asia. Hence, the possible interpretations presented above of the Christian archeological evidence from Ilibalyk medieval site provide us with an insight into how well East Syriac Christians were integrated in the multireligious society of the Ilibalyk city located in Chagatai *ulus*. Besides, it is one of the few studies that makes an attempt to understand the relation between the religious iconography developed by the East Syriac Christians in Central Asia and the religious identity that they expressed.

The excavation of 2018 revealed even more Christian gravestones of various shapes and sizes, with various motifs of crosses. Moreover, the archeologists uncovered burials with skeletons of adults, subadults and infant babies. Future analysis will reveal the ethnic origins of the bodies or of the genetically related or unrelated individuals, their ethnicity and possible kinship ties, which could present us an overall view on the ethnic diversity of the East Syriac Christian community of Ilibalyk city.

Bibliography

- Abu-Lughod, Janet L. *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Allsen, Thomas T. *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- “Apology of Patriarch Timothy of Baghdad before the Caliph Mahdi. Early Medieval Christianity in Asia.” In A. Mingana, ed. and u. Woodbrooke Studies, Vol. 2, 231-242. Cambridge: Heffer, 1928.
- Barrett, T. H. "Buddhism, Taoism and the Eighth-century Chinese Term for Christianity: A Response to Recent Work by A. Forte and Others." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 03 (2002).
- Baum, Wilhelm, and Dietmar W. Winkler. *The Church of the East: A Concise History*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Baumer, Christoph. *Church of the East - an Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity*. I.b.tauris & Co, 2016.
- Biran, Michal. "The Chaghadaids and Islam: The Conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331-34)." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (2002): 742.
- Biran, Michal. “The Mongols in Central Asia from Chinggis Khan’s invasion to the rise of Temur: The Ogodeid and Chaghadaid realms.” In *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, 46-66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Borbone, Pier Giorgio, “An Önggüd Gravestone in the Musée Guimet, Paris, and its Inscription Palermo,” in *Officina di studi medievali* Palermo (2015), 221-231.

Brock, S. P. "The Nestorian Church: A Lamentable Misnomer." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 23-35.

Christian, David. "Silk Roads or Steppe Roads? The Silk Roads in World History." *Journal of World History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1-26.

DeWeese, Devin A. *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde : Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007.

DeWeese, Devin. "Islamization in the Mongol Empire." in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, 120-134. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Dickens, Mark. "Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 02 (2010): 117.

Dickens, Mark. "Nestorius did not intend to argue that Christ had a dual nature, but that view became labeled Nestorianism," *Popular Controversies in World History: Investigating History's Intriguing Questions*, 2010.

Dickens, Mark. "Syriac Gravestones in the Tashkent History Museum," In *Hidden Treasures and Intercultural Encounters: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, edited by Dietmar Winkler and Li Tang, 13-49. *Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica* 1, Berlin: LIT, 2009.

Dickens, Mark. "Multilingual Christian Manuscripts from Turfan." *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 9 (2009): 22-42.

Elverskog, Johan. *Buddhism & Islam on the Silk Road*. Singapore: ISEAS Pub., 2013.

Field Reports on Complex Archeological Investigations of the Usharal (Ilibalyk) Site. Almaty, 2016-2017.

- Foster, John. "Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 86, no. 1-2 (1954): 1-25.
- Gort, Jerald D. *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989.
- Halbertsma, Tjalling, Jian Wei, and 魏 堅. "Some Field Notes and Images Of Stone Material From Graves Of The Church Of The East In Inner Mongolia, China." *Monumenta Serica* 53, no. 1 (2005): 113-244.
- Hunter, Erica C.D. "The Conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in A.D. 1007." *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 22 (1989-91): 142-163.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia- and How It Died*. New York: HarperCollins E-books, 2009.
- Jenner, Konrad Dirk., Willem Theodor Van Peursen, and Haar Romeny Robert Barend Ter. *Text, Translation, and Tradition: Studies on the Peshitta and Its Use in the Syriac Tradition Presented to Konrad D. Jenner on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- May, Timothy. *The Mongol Conquests in World History*. London: Reaktion Books, 2012.
- Moffett, Samuel H. *A History of Christianity in Asia*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.
- Morris, Ian. *Death-ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univer. P., 2001.
- Nicolini-Zani, Matteo. "The Tang Christian Pillar from Luoyang And Its Jingjiao Inscription." *Monumenta Serica* 57, no. 1 (2009): 99-140.

- Parry, Ken. "The Iconography of the Christian Tombstones from Zayton." *Silk Road Studies from Palmyra to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography*, 2005, 229-46.
- Parry, Ken. "Images in the Church of the East: The Evidence from Central Asia and China." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (1996): 143-62.
- Parry, Ken. "Reflections on a Silk Fragment from Toyuq: Christian or Manichaean?" *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 7 (2016): 167-92.
- Parry, Ken. "Byzantine-rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages." *Modern Greek studies (Australia and New Zealand)*, special edition (2012): 91-108.
- Parry, Ken. "The Art of the Church of the East in China." in *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter. Sankt Augustin: Institute Monuments Serica, 2006.
- Platt, Andrew. "*The Church of the East at Three Critical Points in its History*," (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2017).
- Potts, D. T. "Nestorian Crosses from Jabal Berri." *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 5, no. 1 (1994): 61-65.
- Rott, Philipp, "Christian Crosses from Central Asia," in *Jingjiao*, ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter, 395-401. Sankt Augustin: Institute Monuments Serica, 2006.
- Ryan, James D. "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8, no. 03 (1998): 411-21.
- Savchenko, Alexei and Dickens, Mark, "Prester John's Realm: New Light on Christianity between Merv and Turfan", Pages 121-135 in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected*

- Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days*. Edited by Hunter, Erica C.D.. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 13. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.
- Tang, Li, "Turkic Christians in Central Asia and China (5th – 14th centuries)." In *Studies in Turkic philology Festschrift in honour of the 80th birthday of Professor Geng Shim*, edited by Dingjing, Zh., Yakup A., 7-20. Beijing: Minzu University Press, 2009.
- Tang, Li. "A Prominent Nestorian woman at the Mongol court." In *Jingjiao*, ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter, 359-401. Sankt Augustin: Institute Monuments Serica, 2006.
- Taylor, W. R. "Nestorian Crosses in China." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 55, no. 1 (1938): 56-60.
- Байпаков К. М. *Средневековая Городская Культура Южного Казахстана и Семиречья (VI-XIII)*. Издательство Наука СССР, 1986.
- Байпаков К. М., and Ерзакович Л. Б. *Керамика Средневекового Отрара*. Алматы: Өнер, 1990.
- Байпаков К.М. *Древняя и Средневековая Урбанизация Казахстана (по Материалам Исследований Южно-Казахстанской Комплексной Археологической Экспедиции)*, Vol. 1. Алматы: Институт Археологии им. А. Х. Маргулана, Казахстанское Археологическое Общество, 2012.
- Байпаков К.М. "Христианство в Казахстане в Средние Века." In *Из истории древних культов Средней Азии*, 96-100. Ташкент: Главная Редакция Энциклопедий Малое Предприятие "Комрон", 1995.
- Воякин Д. А. *Религии Центральной Азии и Азербайджана. Иудаизм и христианство*, Vol. IV. Самарканд: МИЦАИ, 2018.

- Городецкий В.М. “Серебряные Сосуды из Курганов Села Покровское Пишпекского уезда.” *Известия Среднеазиатского Комитета по Делах Музеев, Охраны Памятников Старины, Искусства и Природы*, no. 1 (1926) 165-76.
- Горячева В. Д. “Наусы Некрополя Краснореченского Городища.” In *Красная речка и Бурана*, 85-95. Фрунзе: Илим, 1989.
- Горячева В.Д., and Перегудова С.Я. “Памятники Христианства на Территории Кыргызстана (XIX-XX вв.).” In *Из Истории Древних Культур Средней Азии*, 84-95. Ташкент 1995.
- Гулямов Я.Г., and Буряков Ю. Ф. “Об Археологических Исследованиях на Городище Афрасиаб в 1967-1968 гг.” *Афрасиаб*, no. 1 (1969): 268-293.
- Дервиш Р.А., Левтеева Л.Г., and Мусакаева А. “Распространение Несторианства в Средней Азии и его Памятники.” In *Памятники Истории, Религии и Культуры в Узбекистане*, 62-65. Ташкент: УКИТОВЧИ, 1994.
- Джумагулов Ч. *Язык Сиро-тюркских (Несторианских) Памятников Киргизии*. Фрунзе: Илим, 1971.
- Железняков Б.А. “Предметы с Иконографическими Изображениями из Семиречья (Несторианство, Манихейство).” *Известия. Серия Общественных Наук*, no 1 (2003), 260-276.
- Залесская В.Н. “Сирийское Бронзовое Кадило из Ургута.” In *Средняя Азия и Иран*, 57-60. Ленинград: Аврора, 1972.
- Коковцов П. К. “Несколько Новых Надгробных Камней с Христианско-сирийскими Надписями из Средней Азии.” *Известия Императорской Академии Наук*, сер. VI, Vol. 1, no. 12 (1907): 427– 458.

Кызласов Л.Р. “Археологические Исследования на Городище Ак-Бешим в 1953-1954 гг.”

In *Труды Киргизской Археолого-этнографической Экспедиции*, Vol. 2, 155-241.

Москва: Издательство АН СССР, 1959.

Мещерская, Е., and Пайкова А. “Сиро-тюркские Наскальные Надписи из Ургута.” In

Культурные Взаимодействия Народов Средней Азии и Кавказа с Окружающим Миром в Древности и Средневековье (Тезисы Докладов), 109-110. Москва, 1981.

Пантусов. Н. “Христианское Кладбище близ Города Пишпека (Семиреченской Области)

в Чуйской Долине.” *Записки Восточного Отделения Императорского Русского Археологического Общества под Реакцией Барона В.Р. Розена*, Санкт-Петербург, Vol.1 (1881), 74-84.

Петров П. Н., Байпаков К.М., Воякин Д. А., and Ересенов Д. С. “Средневековый город,

Обнаруженный в Долине Реки Или (Нумизматический Аспект).” *Нумизматика Золотой Орды*, no. 4 (2014): 61-76.

Раимкулов А. А. “О Трех Неизвестных Типах Христианских Культовых Сооружений

Средней Азии.” *ИМКУ* 34 (2004): 222- 231.

Ртвеладзе Э.В. Ташходжаев Ш.С. and Федоров М.Н. “Нумизматические этюды.”

Афрасиаб, no. 3 (1974), 110-115.

Семенов Григорий. “Ак-Бешим и Города Семиречья.” In *Проблемы Политогенеза*

Кыргызской Государственности. Бишкек: АРНИ, 2003.

Слущкий С.С. “Семиреченскія Несторіанскія Надписи.” *Древности Восточные. Труды*

Восточной Комиссии Императорского Московского Археологического общества, Vol. I, no. I (1889), 1-66.

Слущкий, С.С. “Къ Семиреченскимъ Несторіанскимъ Надписямъ.” *Древности*

Восточные. Труды Восточной Комиссии Императорского Московского Археологического общества, Vol. I, no. 2 (1891), 176-94.

Терновая Г. “Предметы Христианского Культа из Коллекции Средневекового Города Навакет.” *Известия*, по.1 (2004): 176-189.

Хвольсон Д. “Сирийско-тюркские Несторианские Надгробные Надписи XIII-XIV Столетий, Найденные в Семиречье.” *Восточные Заметки: Сборник Статей и Исследований. Факультет Восточных Языков Имп. С.-Петербургского Университета*, (1895): 115-129.

Хвольсон Д. “Предварительныя Замѣтки о Найденныхъ въ Семирѣченской Области Сирійскихъ Надгробныхъ Надписяхъ.” *Записки Восточного отделения Императорского Русского Археологического общества*, Vol. I (1886): 84-109.

“Научный Отчет об Археологической Разведке в Кишлаке Суфиён, Южная Окраина г. Ургута Самаркандской области (сентябрь-октябрь 1997 г.).” *Научный архив ИА АН РУз*. Самарканд, 1988.

“Научный Отчет Узбекско–Итальянской Экспедиции за 2004 г.” *Архив Института Археологии АН РУз*. Самарканд, 2005.

“Научный Отчет Ургутского Отряда Института Археологии АН РУз (апрель-май 1999 г.)”, *Архив Института Археологии АН РУз*. Самарканд, 2000.

“14 Types of Ancient Christian Crosses,” St. Elisabeth Convent, last modified September 29, 2016, <http://pravoslavie.ru/97480.html> (The article is based on the work by Kuznetsov V.P. “The History of development of the shape of the cross. A brief course of Orthodox stavrography.” Moscow: Almanac «Жизнь вечная», 1997.)

“Archaeological Excavation of a Medieval City and Presumed Nestorian Christian graveyard,” Society for the Exploration of Eurasia, last modified August, 2018, http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/inhalt_english/frameset_projekt_aC.html


“The Nestorian Collection”, The University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of

Hong Kong, last modified August 27, 2018,

https://www.umag.hku.hk/en/exhibition_detail.php?id=4838994

Appendix 1

Table 3. The Central Asian East Syriac Christian gravestones with Christian crosses and Syriac/Turkic inscriptions.

Samples of crosses	Find sites	Ilibalyk, Ili Valley, Kazakhstan	Chu Valley, Kyrgyzstan ¹⁴⁷	Almalyq, Xinjiang, China ¹⁴⁸	Inner Mongolia ¹⁴⁹ , China	Quanzhou (Zaitun), Fujian, China
Calvary cross						

¹⁴⁷ From the Kyrgyzstan AOS Archeology Museum storage; Kyrgyzstan History Museum storage; Фонды археолого-архитектурного музея «Башня Бурана»; Tashkent History Museum Saint-Petersburg museum.

Chwolson 1897, Slutsky 1889, 1891, Pantusov 1873, 1887, 1907.

¹⁴⁸ Воякин Д. А. Религии Центральной Азии и Азербайджана. Том IV. Иудаизм и христианство. Самарканд: МИЦАИ, 2018.






¹⁴⁹ Halbertsma, Tjalling, Jian Wei, and 魏 坚. "Some Field Notes And Images Of Stone Material From Graves Of The Church Of The East In Inner Mongolia, China." *Monumenta Serica* 53, no. 1 (2005): 113-244.

13



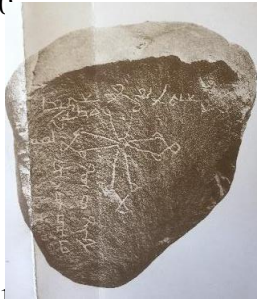
0



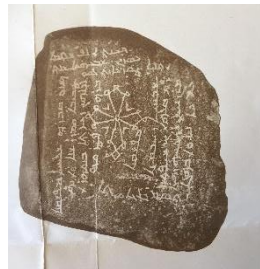
<p>“Pearl-tipped” crosses with/ and without a base</p>		<p>16</p>  <p>17</p>  <p>18</p>  <p>19</p>	<p>49</p>  <p>2</p> <p>69</p>  <p>(The stone stored in Penjikent, Tajikistan, presumably from Chu Valley)</p>		
--	--	--	---	--	--



20













21



		 22			
		 23			
Maltese type cross on an altar			 3		
			50		

<p>“Pearl-tipped” cross with engraved cross at the end of vertical dash of the main cross</p>		<p>24</p> 			
<p>Checkered cross</p>	 <p>3</p>				
<p>Patriarchal cross</p>	 <p>4</p>				

<p>Maltese type cross</p> <p>Description: Flared with a prong on the bottom</p>	 <p>11</p>  <p>5</p>  <p>9</p>  <p>12</p>	 <p>25</p>  <p>26</p>  <p>27</p>	<p>51 (with altar)</p>  <p>7</p>  <p>11</p>	<p>58</p>  <p>59</p> 	
---	--	--	---	--	--

		<div data-bbox="719 193 969 555" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="680 528 725 563" data-label="Text">28</div>		<div data-bbox="1402 193 1704 462" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1361 435 1406 470" data-label="Text">60</div>	
<p>Maltese type cross with the expanded bottom arm, and with one step or circle at the base</p>		<div data-bbox="759 568 936 847" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="680 563 725 598" data-label="Text">29</div> <div data-bbox="719 847 943 1185" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="680 1158 725 1193" data-label="Text">30</div>			

31




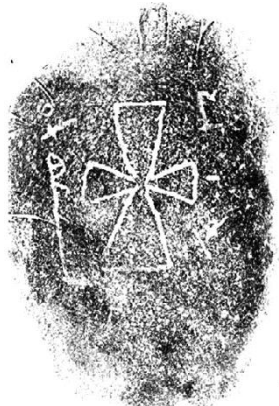



32



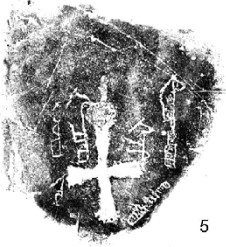




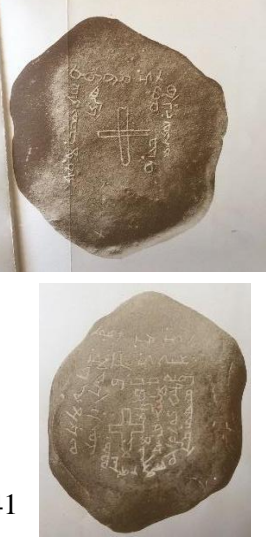
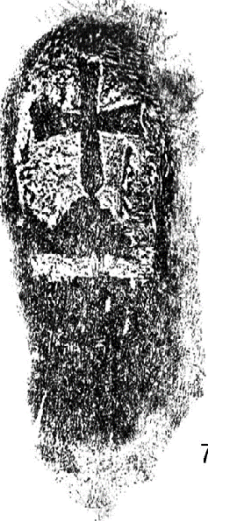
33



		<div>34</div> 				
		<div>35</div> 				
Maltese type cross 2 Or cross Patee	6	<div>36</div> 	52	<div>4</div> 	61	


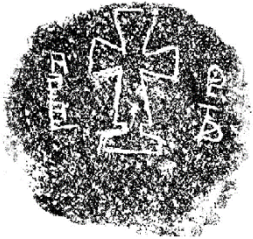

		<div data-bbox="689 467 719 496" data-label="Text">37</div> <div data-bbox="719 193 976 493" data-label="Image"> </div>		<div data-bbox="1375 379 1404 408" data-label="Text">62</div> <div data-bbox="1404 193 1709 400" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1375 416 1404 445" data-label="Text">63</div> <div data-bbox="1375 453 1740 700" data-label="Image"> </div>	
Simple cross with flared arms		<div data-bbox="689 1106 719 1134" data-label="Text">38</div> <div data-bbox="719 743 976 1131" data-label="Image"> </div>			
Latin cross Description: cross with unequal arms					




	 <p>7</p>	 <p>39</p>	 <p>53</p> <p>5</p>		
Simple/Greek cross	 <p>10</p>	15	40		
Description: cross with equal arms					


	 <p>14</p>	 <p>41</p>	 <p>54</p>		
--	---	---	---	--	--

		<div data-bbox="719 193 949 635" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="680 604 725 639" data-label="Text"> <p>42</p> </div>			
'Petal' cross		<div data-bbox="719 676 960 922" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="680 892 725 927" data-label="Text"> <p>43</p> </div> <div data-bbox="719 927 920 1299" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="680 1268 725 1303" data-label="Text"> <p>44</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="1039 676 1323 1002" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="999 971 1048 1008" data-label="Text"> <p>55</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1274 956 1301 975" data-label="Text"> <p>6</p> </div>		

					
<p>'Petal cross' with anthropomorphic images (could be interpreted as angels(citation) and six steps at the bottom (altar is very similar to zaraostrian fire altar))</p>					
<p>Maltese cross with the ring in the center and the Greek cross inside the ring</p>					

		<div>47</div> <div></div>			
Mix of Maltese type cross and Petal cross with one dash at the bottom		<div>48</div> <div></div>	<div>57</div> <div></div> <div>8</div>		
Maltese cross with four dots				<div>64</div> <div></div>	

				65		
Cross with two dots and Lotus				66		
						67

					68	
--	--	--	--	--	----	---

Appendix 2



Figure 1 Ossuary with Christian symbols, Afrasiab settlement, Samarkand Museum, Uzbekistan



Figure 2 Ossuary with Christian symbols, Afrasiab settlement, Samarkand Museum, Uzbekistan



Figure 3 Ossuary with skulls and Christian symbols, Afrasiab settlement, Samarkand Museum, Uzbekistan



Figure 4 Ossuary with Christian symbols, Afrasiab settlement, Samarkand Museum, Uzbekistan

Appendix 3.



1 Location of Ilibalyk



2 Sites with East Syriac presence in Eurasia



3 Sites with East Syriac presence in Central Asia and China



4 Borders of Chagatai Khanate in 13th-14th century CE.