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EAST SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY IN THE 'LAND OF SEVEN RIVERS': ASPECTS OF MATERIAL CULTURE AND ARTISTIC TRADITION

This article examines the history, material culture, and art of East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye (8th-14th centuries CE) from a Scottish private collection. Within the topic's framework, attention is focused on issues surrounding the current state of research on East Syriac Christianity in Central Asia and the primary paleographic and archaeological sources for studying its material culture and art. The essential issues of this study include the dating of the Christian cultural ecumene in Semirechye, the identification of the central location of the Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket, and the cultural and aesthetic influences of both Western and East Asia on the culture of Christians in medieval Semirechye are all considered. Based on the items of the East Syriac Christian circle from a Scottish private collection and other institutional and private collections, specific issues of East Syriac Christian culture in Semirechye have been analysed, including the local and extra-territorial artistic influences; stylistic and iconographic features; the development of East Syriac Christian figurative art in the context of the Islamic iconoclasm. This research article reviews selected objects of Christian material culture in medieval Semirechye, of various media and techniques, and pays particular attention to the compositional, stylistic, and iconographic aspects. The article includes a catalogue of artefacts from the Scottish private collection.

Key words: East Syriac Christianity, The Apostolic Church of the East, medieval Semirechye.

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THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH of the East¹ originated beyond the eastern borders of the Roman Empire. During the European Middle Ages, it surpassed any Western churches by its geographical coverage and had followers along the Silk Roads in Iran, Central Asia, China, and India. The Church operates to the present day, having existed under the rule of the Sassanid, Arab, Chinese, Turkic, Mongol, and Islamic dynasties. East Syriac Christianity significantly impacted the formation of the historical, spiritual, and cultural space throughout Central Asia, leaving behind interesting written sources, authen-

tic and original material culture, and the tradition of non-violent coexistence among nations and ethnic groups and their religions.

This article discusses a portion of a Scottish private collection² containing material cultural objects and East Syriac Christian art, mainly from Semirechye.³ The most famous Christian sites discovered in this territory include the medieval cities and set-

¹ This article moves away from the concept of 'Nestorianism' and uses modern and seemingly, more accurate concept of East Syriac Christianity (traditionally known as the Church of the East or the Nestorian Church). In this article, the terms 'Christianity' and 'Christians' in relation to Semirechye are used for convenience, but mean East Syriac Christianity and its followers.

² The formation of the collection dates back to the late 1950s. Its curation is still ongoing. The collection focuses on Central Asian art, which is represented by items from antiquity to the Timurid era, of various media and techniques. A significant part of the collection was catalogued, published and exhibited in Edinburgh, Scotland, in January 2013.

³ In this article, the term 'Semirechye' is applied to the historic and cultural region within the territories of modern-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in the Chuy and Ili rivers interfluvium. In Kazakh, the term is Jetisu, by which the region is referred to in its modern setting.

lements of Taraz, Aktobe, Stepninskoye, Talgar, and Ilibalyk (Kazakhstan), and the archaeological sites of Pokrovskoye, Kara-Jygach, Krasnaia Rechka, Burana, and Ak-Beshim (Kyrgyzstan). This article considers some of the problematic issues concerning the material culture and art of Christians of Semirechye, taking into account the topic's current level of development based on artefacts from institutional and private collections with which the author acquainted himself.

The major part of East Syriac Christian cultural material and art in the collection belongs to Semirechye and chronologically spans the 8th-14th centuries. The studies of East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye have a long-standing tradition, established in the late 19th century by Russian scholars and area studies experts. The modern development of this study, mainly archaeological aspects, is well-presented in recent literature (*Baypakov, Ternovaya* 2018; *Kolchenko* 2018).

East Syriac Christianity studies have been widely elaborated and referred to in various disciplines— theology, history, philology, archaeology, history of art, and others. (*Gillman, Klimkeit* 1999; *Baum, Winkler* 2000; *Malek, Hofrichter* 2006). These studies are based on a new approach, hinging upon the involvement of various textual sources. The history of East Syriac Christian culture and art in Semirechye is still an under-research segment of East Syriac Christianity studies. In this regard, the insufficient development of theoretical issues of Christian art of Central Asia, such as chronology, typology, genesis and evolution, regional differences, and extra-territorial influences, should be noted.

Another problem is the lack of East Syriac Christian textual sources of local origin, specifically within the Semirechye area,⁴ in contrast to East Turkistan, the neighbouring centre of Christianity in Central Asia.⁵ Epigraphic sources, such as epitaphs on

tombstones (or *kayraks*), are a massive and primary paleographic source in East Syriac Christianity studies, which are pretty well studied. The main problem of this relatively late (12th-14th century CE) group of sources is that the information contained in it is somewhat formalised, limited in depth and value of data, and often repetitive. A large number of known East Syriac Christian *kayraks* (over 700), unfortunately, did not lead to any significant breakthrough in the study of Christianity in Central Asia, in general, and in Semirechye, in particular. Meanwhile, the systematisation of information and creating a consolidated corpus of this group of epigraphic sources seems to be an essential task.⁶

The main iconographic material related to the East Syriac Christian visual arts theme has been obtained from paleographic and archaeological sources. The first group includes miniatures and decorative elements from illuminated East Syriac Christian manuscripts.⁷ The second group is represented by archaeological material from East Turkistan, adjacent to Semirechye, mainly fresco murals and silk paintings.⁸ Nevertheless, it should be noted that due to the large number of artefacts attributed to Manichaeans from East Turkistan and the significant study of that material, a kind of 'attributional revisionism' has occurred in recent works, in which artefacts previously connected to East Syriac Christian culture have received a new interpretation and are considered as Manichaean.⁹

Until recently, modern studies on East Syriac Christianity were focused mainly on Central Asia, a vague geographic term of debatable nature (*Parry* 1996). However, Central Asia is a vast geographical area stretching from the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea to the Altai Mountains. If the term Inner

⁴ The comprehensive analysis of fragments of the scanty Sogdian epigraphy from Semirechye (9th-11th centuries), undertaken by a Russian scholar Vladimir A. Livshits (1923-2017), does not indicate the spread of Christianity among Sogdians of Semirechye. At the same time, Livshits noted that abovesaid texts are related to a final period of the religious differentiation of the Sogdians and their transition from Zoroastrianism to Christianity, Manichaeism, Buddhism and possibly Islam (*Livshits* 2008: 351-88).

⁵ The study of the epigraphic heritage of East Turkistan (Chinese Turkistan or Kashgaria) concerning Christian culture in Central Asia has recently made significant progress, mainly owing to the study of the various texts from the European, Chinese, and Japanese collections. In this regard, the important work was undertaken by the University of Salzburg (Austria) by publishing the fundamental series *Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica*, including the works on East Syriac Christianity in Central Asia and China (*Tang, Winkler* 2009; *Tang, Winkler* 2013; *Tang, Winkler* 2016; *Tang, Winkler* 2020; *Dickens* 2020). A very important contribution to the study of written sources on the

history of Christians in Central Asia, mainly Christian Sogdian documents, was made by Nicholas Sim-Williams (Nicholas Sim-Williams) (*Sim-Williams* 2014; *Sim-Williams* 2016).

⁶ The study of the Christian gravestones (*kayraks*) of Central Asia has a long history, which is well known, and it will not be dwelt on in this article. Philological and historical aspects of Christian *kayraks* continue to be actively studied at present (*Klein* 1996, *Klein* 2000; *Dickens* 2009, *Dickens* 2016; *Zhumagulov* 2011; *Zheleznyakov* 2019a; *Tang* 2020; *Voyakin, Gilbert, Stewart* 2020; *Borbone* 2023).

⁷ It is noteworthy to mention the image of an East Syriac Christian from the 13th-century Gospel in the collection of the Berlin State Library (*Baumer* 2016: 75, 94) and the illustration from the East Syriac Gospel depicting Jesus Christ surrounded by four angels from the National Library of France (*Drege* 1992: 43, 187).

⁸ The fragments of fresco murals with a Palm Sunday scene and a girl in contemplation from a Christian temple in Kocho (Gaochang), dated to the 9th century, in the collection of the Berlin State Museums (*Le Coq* 1979: Tafel 7). Also, a portrait on silk (9th century) of a Christian abbot in the church in the Qianfodong cave complex in Dunhuang from the British Museum (*Whitfield* 1982: Pl. 25).

Asia is applied, the region in question practically doubles in size, reaching Mongolia in the east and Tibet in the south. Clearly, East Syriac Christianity could not be equally represented across such a vast territory and was limited only to certain areas (enclaves), mainly along the traditional caravan routes. In this regard, further discussion should be focused not on a single Christian ecumene of Central Asia but its separate enclaves, which, while maintaining the common Christian cultural tradition, possessed specific regional differences. The latter could be religious dogma, rites, rituals, and cultural and aesthetic elements. These differences depended on the degree of exposure to other neighbouring well-established and influenced cultures, religions, aesthetic and artistic traditions. In this sense, the Christian community of Khwarazm differed from the same community in Khorasan, just as together they differed from other Christian communities along the Silk Road, whether in Mawarannahr, Semirechye, East Turkestan, Mongolia, or inland China. The degree of aesthetic and artistic influence on these sub-regions from the main cultural sources – Western and East Asia – increased as they geographically approached them more closely and, accordingly, weakened as they distanced away.

Throughout the history of Christian cultural existence in Semirechye, it consistently, and sometimes simultaneously, experienced waves of influence from other cultures that existed on the ancient Silk Roads. The range of these cultures and influences is significant—Western Asian, Byzantine, Iranian, ancient Turkic, Islamic and Buddhist. These influences acted in various historical eras with varying degrees of strength and consequence. In this sense, East Syriac Christian art was, to some extent, Eastern art, whereas the images and symbols of the cultures and civilisations of the Asian continent intertwined most unexpectedly.

The Christian material culture and artistic tradition of Semirechye, while sharing much with East Turkestan, still had several unique features. Semirechye was influenced by East Asian and Buddhist art to a much lesser extent. In Semirechye, the wall painting and art of the book are less represented. In other segments of material culture and art, Christian art in Semirechye surpassed East Turkestan in terms of its development both quantitatively and qualitatively.

This is evidenced, for example, by a significantly lesser number of Christian items in the archaeological finds on the territory of the modern Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China, with which the Chinese researchers themselves agree (*Silu* 1998: 246), and what becomes apparent from an acquaintance with Chinese museum collections. This feature of East Turkestan was also pointed out by the well-known collector and connoisseur of Eastern antiquities, Nikolai F. Petrovsky (1837-1908), Imperial Russian Consul at Kashgar (*Petrovsky* 1895).

The absence of significant remains of Christian worship places and manuscripts found in Semirechye does not mean that they did not exist initially or were of poorer quality than in the neighbouring East Turkestan. Their absence can be explained by two fundamental factors: the specifics of the climate and a greater degree of anthropogenic impact. As for the former, the conditions of Semirechye, with its more humid and colder climate, are less favourable than the oases along the Tian Shan Mountains' southern slopes and along the Tarim Basin's northern fringe, the area which is known for its arid climate. As for the anthropogenic impact, this factor did not favour Semirechye, which, unlike East Turkestan, was located on the active trunks of the Silk Roads and witnessed devastated armed conflicts, often religiously motivated. These conflicts were most directly reflected in the spiritual and cultural landscape of Christian Central Asia.

The current knowledge and available sources do not fully solve the problem of varying denominations of East Christian churches in Semirechye. Recent attempts (*Goryacheva* 2010: 160) to solve this issue, mainly based on the application of pectoral cross-shape analysis, have not resulted in any significant progress. This is due not only to the relatively low quantity of objects or their poor archaeological documentation but also because pectoral crosses, despite some rare exceptions, do not bear any typological or iconographic differences associated with the East Christian churches and their denominations. Current approaches to this rather interesting question are still speculative and not based on a solid scientific basis.

Another important topic in reconstructing the historical picture of East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye relates to general chronology and division into periods. The first attempt at dating was made by the famous Russian scholar Vasily V. Bartold (1869-1930) at the end of the 19th century, who somewhat vaguely determined the baseline date for the Christian community in Semirechye to the 8th century, linking it with the activity of East Syriac Patriarch Timothy I (780-819) (*Bartold* 1893: 8, 10). Subsequently, he considered the main stages of the development of the Christian community in Semirechye in direct

⁹ In particular, this refers to the abovementioned portrait of the 'Nestorian' abbot in the Aurel Stein collection in the British Museum, which has recently undergone an iconographic revision and attributed to Manichaean art (*Moriyasu* 2010: 357-60). Gulási referred to the Buddhist-style figure with a 'Nestorian' cross, depicted on a silk scroll (12th-14th century) from the collection of Seion-ji Temple near Kofu, Japan, to the group of Manichaean 'icons of Jesus' (*Gulási* 2015: 415-19).

connection with the dominance in the region of the pre-Islamic Turks, Karluks, Karakhanids, Kara-Kitai, and Mongols. Modern authors offer their versions of chronology, which remain quite controversial and are not entirely based on a systematic approach and integrated use of a variety of sources (Goryacheva, Peregudova 1995: 92; Kolchenko 2003; Goryacheva 2010: 157-161; Zheleznyakov 2019b: 231-247).

V. A. Kolchenko rightly states that a lack of well-documented archaeological material complicates the ability to fix the chronology and division into periods and that current dating is based on stratigraphic and typological dating techniques (Kolchenko 2018: 98). While this viewpoint is correct, modern archaeological dating methods are more diverse and technologically advanced. Additionally, specific dating methods exist in related disciplines, such as history of art and palaeography. One should not forget the significant number of institutional and private collections that form an extensive database. Returning to the Christian pectoral crosses from Semirechye, although relatively common material, they are very similar in type, limiting the possibilities for their use in dating. In other words, to solve the problem of chronology for East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye, a qualitatively more perfect material (objects of artistic metalwork, glass, and ceramics) is needed. The possibility of accurate dating increases progressively, moving a mere object into a contextualised work of art.

The current chronologies are primarily based on the continuity of the development of the Christian community and Christian cultural life in Semirechye. In other words, they use a linear approach to assess the dynamics of historical and cultural civilisational processes. Meanwhile, both textual and archaeological evidence suggest that the origin and development of East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye had a more complex picture and could be cyclical. The limitations of this article do not allow it to expand in more detail, though several assumptions could be made with further elaboration.

According to archaeological and paleographic sources, two historical development cycles conventionally can be distinguished in the chronology of medieval Christianity in Semirechye. The first cycle is the period from the emergence of Christianity (7th-8th century CE)¹⁰ until the establishment of Karakhanid dominance in Semirechye (late 10th century CE) (Davidovich 1998: 121-22). During this period, East Syriac Christianity's influence increased due to

the proselytism of the region's indigenous population and via the spread of East Syriac Christian dogma, ritual, culture, and aesthetics. The course and rate of this process remain unclear, just as does the relationship of East Syriac Christianity with other competing religions that spread in Semirechye at that time, specifically Manichaeism and Buddhism. Turkic Manichaean documents from East Turkestan of the 8th-9th centuries testify to the Manicheans' high level of missionary activity among the Karluk and Sogdian communities of Semirechye (Klimket 1993: 351-76). The rivalry of the three religions for influence led to the inter-confessional fragmentation of the Sogdians in Semirechye and the emergence of adherents of East Syriac Christianity, Manichaeism, and Buddhism, among them.

The establishment of Islam in Semirechye under the Karluks does not seem to have significantly impacted these missionary religions and their adherents, at least in the early periods. The situation changed significantly with the establishment of Karakhanids in Semirechye and the spread of their dominance across Mawarannahr.¹¹ It is known that the Karakhanid rulers, who converted to Islam in the mid-10th century, demonstrated a zealous attitude towards the new religion and positioned themselves as 'fighters for the faith' or 'champions of the faith' (*ghazi*). This ideology led to a tougher policy by the Karakhanids towards other religions in Semirechye within their control. The Islamic iconoclasm they practised was why the visual presentation of traditional images and symbols in the material culture and art among Christians of Semirechye waned significantly, as is clearly seen in several items from the collection.

The events in adjacent East Turkestan significantly aggravated the situation for Christians in Semirechye during the Karakhanid period. According to the hagiographic work *Tazkira-i Bugra Khan*, in 1096 CE (489h), during the war of Hassan Bugra Khan, the Karakhanid ruler of Kashgar, against nomadic tribes from China's western border (mainly Khitans), Christian clerics of East Turkestan participated in the conflict on the side of invaders. This coalition proved disastrous for Hassan Bughra Khan's army (Bellew 1875: 127-28). The treacherous betrayal would not go unavenged. The Karakhanids, who gained the upper hand in the fight against the Khitans, subjected the Christians to repressions and tried to nullify their political and economic influence in East Turkestan and neighbouring possessions, specifically, Semirechye.

¹⁰ This chronology is adopted for Semirechye on the basis of early Christian archaeological and textual evidence from neighbouring Xinjiang.

¹¹ Bartold assumed that 'Christians in the possessions of the Karakhanids were not subjected to oppression,' because there are no such references in the works of Christian authors (Bartold 1893: 23).

It is no coincidence that the decline of Suyab (Ak-Beshim), a sizeable Christian centre in Semirechye, falls precisely at this time.

The second cycle of Christian activity in Semirechye is observed during the political domination of the Kara-Khitai, who were distinguished by their sufficient religious tolerance. The influence of the Christian communities in Semirechye increased significantly after the Mongol conquest of Central Asia. Enough has already been said about this in the literature, and this will not be touched upon further. Lastly, this relatively short cycle led to significant changes in the life of Christian communities in Semirechye. This was reflected in the widespread distribution of Syriac writing in the Turkic-Syriac and (to a lesser extent) Sogdian-Syriac written synthesis. Some changes, primarily ritual and customary, occurred within the Christian community. This is especially true for the funerary rite with the appearance of Christian cemeteries and tombstones with epitaphs in Syriac writing with their indicative names and dates. Syriac epigraphy was widely and openly manifested during this period, used in everyday life and rituals and as a decorative element in clothing (belt sets). In jewellery, silver items became widespread. Christian symbols and images that were commonplace in Byzantium, among the Seljuks of Iran and Rum, and later in the Mongol Empire, such as a double-headed eagle, became popular in the decoration theme of Christians of Semirechye.

Today it is difficult to speak with certainty about the reasons and driving forces that changed the rituals and artistic traditions among Christians of Semirechye during the Mongol rule. These innovations were possibly associated with the changed political and economic conditions in Semirechye under the Mongols, the stimulation of overland trade, and the intensified ideological and cultural exchange between Western and East Asia.

The modern sources relating to the history of East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye give the base for considering the interesting topic surrounding the location of the East Syriac Church metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket. This concept is based on the reservation that the existence of such a metropolitan is a fact, although it conflicts with alternative sources (*Le Quien* 1740; *Wiltsch* 1859). Bartold was one of the first to raise this topic, pointing out that the Church of the East's Patriarch, Ilya III (1176-90), 'established a Nestorian metropolitan in Kashgar' and that 'in *Tabula Amri*, the Kashgar metropolitan is called the metropolitan of "Kashgar and Navaket."' He also believed Semirechye was part of the Metropolitan of Kashgar (*Bartold* 1893: 26).

Bartold made his conclusions based on two rather late sources, the works of European Orientalists

Giuseppe S. Assemani (1687-1768) (*Assemani* 1728) and Gustav S. Oppert (1836-1908) (*Oppert* 1870). Upon careful examination of these works, it becomes clear that Bartold's information diverges somewhat from the data found in these sources, which resulted in a rather free interpretation. This vital point requires clarification.

Initially, it is important to note that both sources record the name of the metropolitan as 'Kashgar and Navaket' (*Caschgar & Noiakat*; *Chasemgaræ et Nuachetae*), but do not mention toponymy, the location of the metropolitan's residence in particular. Bartold fixes this location quite specifically in Kashgar, claiming that Patriarch Ilya III 'established a Nestorian metropolitan in Kashgar,' referring to Assemani's work. However, the latter only mentions the name of the metropolitan 'Kashgar and Navaket' and that John, Bishop of Chalat,¹² was appointed Metropolitan of Kashgar. In the text, 'Metropolitan of Kashgar' should be understood as an abbreviation of the full name Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket. This name is also mentioned by other sources (*Anciennes* 1718). Oppert named the Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket only in the list among other metropolitans of the Church of the East. Bartold, referring to Oppert, reports that 'the Metropolitan of Kashgar is named the Metropolitan of "Kashgar and Navaket."' Thus, the metropolitan centre was in Kashgar, and the metropolitan was called the Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket.

The result of such a peculiar use of sources was not only the conclusion that the centre of the metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket was located in Kashgar but also that Semirechye was 'part of the Kashgar metropolitan.' There is no mention of the exact location of the metropolitan centre in the sources Bartold referred to, and the idea of its location in Kashgar belongs entirely to Bartold himself.¹³ The groundlessness of such a conclusion suggests the need to return to the question of the metropolitan's whereabouts.

When comparing Kashgar and Navaket during the formation of a new metropolitan, it is easy to recognise the apparent advantages of the latter over the former. Geographically, Navaket was located on the most convenient caravan routes connecting China with Central Asia, Iran, and India, while Kashgar was isolated from the north, west, and south by the Tian

¹² Chalat is a city in the modern Khuzestan province, Iran.

¹³ The location of the metropolitan centre in Kashgar, established by Bartold, was not subjected to critical evaluation. Later sources have added to the old error. V. D. Goryacheva and S. Ya. Peregodova with reference to Bartold (!) pointed to Navaket as the centre of the metropolitan. The latter should be attributed to a misunderstanding since Bartold referred to Kashgar (*Goryacheva, Peregodova* 1995: 92).

Shan Mountains, Eastern Pamir, and Western Kunlun mountain ranges. The lands adjacent to Kashgar were not a continuous agricultural zone but developed in separate oases. Due to the lack of pastureland, cattle breeding was possible only within a narrow foothill strip. The best pastures were located outside Kashgaria, on the northern slopes of the central and eastern Tian Shan.

For this reason, the main caravan routes from inland China to Central Asia ran far to the east of Kashgar, between the ridges of the eastern Tian Shan and the Dzungarian Alatau. Thus, nature itself placed Kashgar on the geographical periphery of Central Asia. It is important to remember that for all missionary religions, including East Syriac Christianity, the availability of convenient communications and active caravan trade was a prerequisite to developing missionary activity.

By the time the Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket was established, Semirechye was under Kara-Khitai rule (1140-1212) and economically more prosperous than Kashgar, as evidenced by numismatic data (*Kochnev* 2006: 243). In addition, the Kara-Khitai, known for their patronage of Christians, placed their capital in Semirechye (Balasagun), making it highly doubtful that they would agree to open a metropolitan centre in Kashgar, outside the sphere of their political control. In Mongol Iran, the Patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Yahballaha III (ca. 1245-1317), resided in Maragha, the Ilkhanid capital, which indirectly indicates that the East Asian nomadic peoples controlled the confessional centres of their subject peoples. Finally, archaeological sources support Semirechye, a region more populated by Christians than Kashgaria.¹⁴

Based on these arguments, one can hypothesise that the Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket was ruled not from Kashgar but rather from Semirechye, and that Navaket (modern Krasnaia Rechka) was not necessarily the residence of the bishop. The name of the metropolitan should not be misleading. Examples of such discrepancies between the names of metropolitan sees and their actual centres in the Church of the East are well known. One example is the Metropolitan of Turkestan, with its centre in Merv. It is yet to be understood which cities in Semirechye could have served as the centre for the bishop's seat—Taraz,¹⁵ Balasagun (modern Burana), Suyab (modern

Ak-Beshim),¹⁶ Navaket,¹⁷ or some other, less prominent location. Since this significant and important topic is beyond the scope of this article, only a hypothetical assumption is that Suyab (Ak-Beshim) can be considered the most likely centre of the Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navaket. The remains of religious buildings and the number of finds of Christian origin at the Ak-Beshim site support this suggestion.¹⁸ Hope remains that the intensifying archaeological study of this interesting settlement, observed in recent years, will provide researchers with sufficient data to address this important question.¹⁹

The artefacts related to the material culture of East Syriac Christianity in Semirechye from known institutional and private collections include objects of various media—ceramics, metalwork, glass, and stone.

Ceramics include examples from cultic, decorative, and household utensils made on a potter's wheel, hand-moulded, or sometimes combined. Liturgical artefacts include double-necked jugs, incense burners (censers), and plaquettes with the image of a cross. Separately, it is necessary to focus on a group of ossuaries with Christian symbols, which, according to archaeological data, was common not only in Semirechye but also in the adjacent territories of Central Asia. The question of whether this type of pottery belongs to the Christian realm is still open.²⁰ L. R. Kyzlasov unambiguously refers such ossuaries to the burial inventory of the Manicheans of Central Asia (*Kyzlasov* 2006: 140, f.n. 9), which should be attributed more to an assumption than a substantiated conclusion.²¹

works and finds of artefacts of Christian origin (*Senigova* 1972; *Baypakov* 1986, *Baypakov* 2012).

¹⁶ See Suyab 2002; *Amanbayeva, Yamauchi* 2017.

¹⁷ See Krasnaia Rechka 1989; *Baypakov, Ternovaya, Goryacheva* 2007.

¹⁸ This hypothesis is supported by the composition of a hoard of East Syriac Christian objects from the settlement of Ak-Beshim from the Scottish private collection under consideration. The hoard contains highly decorative eucharistic bowls of enamelled glass, fragments of a Christian manuscript book in Arabic script, and a fragment of a priest's mitre. These unique pieces are currently under study and underway for publication.

¹⁹ Of note is the high-level scientific work of the Kyrgyz-Japanese archaeological expedition to Ak-Beshim (*Amanbaeva, Yamauchi* 2021).

²⁰ The presence of ossuaries with Christian symbols was established during the works of the Semirechye Archaeological Expedition (Sukuluk archaeological site). These objects were attributed by Russian scholar Alexander N. Bernshtam (1910-1956) as Sogdian (*Proceedings of SAU* 1950: Pl. LXII, 4, 5). The possibility of the existence of Christian ossuaries in Semirechye has also been raised in more recent research (*Mikheeva* 2021: 360).

²¹ The funerary rites of the Manicheans of Central Asia remain under studied. The original idea that it was based on the

¹⁴ Modern Chinese studies on the archaeology of Xinjiang do not mention significant finds of Christian artefacts. The exception is a limited number of East Syriac Christian kayraks, found mainly near the limits of the historical Semirechye (*Mu Shunying, Qi Xiaoshan* 1994; *Wan Binghua, Du Gencheng* 1997; *Silu* 1998; *Tianshan* 2002).

¹⁵ Taraz is often mentioned in connection with archaeological

Glazed dishes and jugs present decorative ceramics attributed to East Syriac Christians of Semirechye. The household utensils include vessels for storing foodstuffs (*khums*), oil lamps (*chirags*) and possibly, ceramic tables (*dastarkhans*).²²

Metal items are varied and were made mainly from bronze and copper. These include composite lamps, pectoral and ceremonial crosses,²³ pendants, and belt set elements. The so-called 'bronze cylinders' from Talgar, dating from the 12th to early 13th century, deserve special attention. In several studies, this group of bronze items is attributed as being bronze Christian candlesticks (*Baypakov, Ternovaya* 2018: 38-40, Fig. 39) based on the decorative elements used, such as combinations of crosses, designs, and Arabic inscriptions. A. A. Ivanov convincingly opposed this interpretation, attributing these objects to nomadic culture and explaining their use as connectors for wooden composite supports of yurts and tents (*Ivanov* 2008).

Stone items are represented by numerous *kayraks* and, less frequently, pendants in jade crosses.²⁴ The

practices of Iranian Manichaeism, close to Zoroastrianism, can be accepted as a preliminary but needs further elaboration. The identification of the ossuaries with crosses from Ak-Beshim as Manichaean made by Kyzlasov should be questioned since the image of a cross was not a part of traditional Manichaean iconographic program, although Jesus Christ himself was an integral part of Manichaean prophecy (*Gulácsi* 2003; *Gulácsi* 2015). The use of Christian symbols in the decoration of ossuaries— crosses, stylized palm branches, and others, may well indicate Sogdian Christians during the transition from the Zoroastrian to Christian funerary rite. The funerary rite of Sogdians upon their expansion from Semirechye further east underwent significant transformations under the influence of other cultures. It is clearly seen in the funerary rites of Sogdians in Tang China (*Lerner* 2005). In any case, this topic seems debatable and is in the initial stage of development, far from being completed.

²² The attribution of *dastarkhan* tables found in Semirechye to the material culture of East Syriac Christianity requires a separate study. Attribution of three *dastarkhan* fragments found during the excavations of the Lugovoye 'G' archaeological site (*Baypakov, Ternovaya* 2018: 17-20), to the East Syriac Christian origin is rather conditional; both due to the limited information about the existence of such ceramics among Christians of Semirechye and on adjacent territories, and the absence of archaeologically intact objects that allow to trace artistic features, patterns and symbols used. Traditionally, such compact tables are attributed to the nomadic culture. An early example of a wooden table originates from Kenkol burial ground (*Bernshtam* 1940: Pl. 10). *Bernshtam* attributed *dastarkhans* found during the works of the Semirechye Archaeological Expedition in 1941 to the Sogdian and Karluk period, without raising the question of their possible connection with Christians of Semirechye (*Proceedings of the SAE* 1950: 129-131, Pl. LXXI-LXXIV).

²³ The finds of Christian processional crosses in Semirechye are extremely rare. In this regard, a fragment of such a cross from Ak-Beshim settlement is of particular interest. (*Baypakov, Ternovaya* 2018: 130, Fig. 5 (5)).

²⁴ Jade pendant with the image of a cross from the settlement

literature also contains information about the existence of stone table-altars (shrines) in the Christian community of Semirechye and provides an iconographic analysis of their decor (*Baypakov, Ternovaya* 2018: 29-37). The attribution of these items to Christian origin remains debatable due to the lack of similar objects found in Semirechye and adjacent territories. The iconographic analysis given by the authors is neither fully substantiated nor connected with the local material.

The use of imagery was never strong in the Church of the East, unlike the Byzantine Church, but figurative images were still present in East Syriac Christian iconography. East Syriac Christianity avoided the large-scale use of figurative images, preferring a more symbolic style, and this trend was observed even before Islamic iconoclasm. Over time, opposition to figurative images became the norm within the Church, the latter becoming even stronger during the period of Islamic domination and iconoclasm. The Church was forced to abandon icons, but in territories where Islam did not have a dominant influence, such as in East Turkestan, adjacent to Semirechye, or in the interior of China, pictorial subjects continued to be present. About 1330, John of Coria, a Latin bishop from Sultania (Persia), on a visit to the East Syriac Christians in Khanbalyk (the winter capital of the Yuan dynasty under the rule of the Mongol Empire), reported that the Christians had 'very beautiful and neat churches with crosses and images in honour of God and the saints' (*Parry* 1996: 148).

The little available evidence, nevertheless, allows for the conclusion that at least until the Karakhanids established complete control over Semirechye, East Syriac Christianity was not aniconic, and figurative images were part of the local Christian artistic tradition. The development of fine arts, primarily fresco painting, is evidenced by wall painting fragments from Church 'A' in the complex of Christian churches at the medieval site of Ak-Beshim (*Semenov* 2002). The murals used expensive materials – lapis lazuli and gold foil – which indicates the importance Christians of Semirechye gave to the decoration of churches and places of worship. Unfortunately, these fragments' small size and condition are insufficient for the analysis of the theme, composition, or stylistic features of this Christian wall painting, and hope that more extensive and significant material will be obtained in the near future. The very fact of such a painting's existence and the pictorial tradition among the East Syriac Christians of Semirechye is important, indicating a possible relationship with neighbouring

of Aktobe Stepninskoe (*Baypakov, Ternovaya* 2018: 25, Fig. 11). Jade cross from the Krasnaia Rechka archaeological site (*Pamiatniki* 1983: 67, Cat. no. 261a).

East Turkestan, where East Syriac Christian art provided excellent examples of wall paintings.

The East Syriac Christian art of the book in Central Asia remains very important. Almost nothing is known about the East Syriac Christian art book tradition within Central Asia, particularly Semirechye, due to the lack of surviving manuscripts. This situation contrasts sharply with Manichaean art of the book in Central Asia, which survived to the present day with beautiful and fairly numerous examples of handwritten books and manuscripts.²⁵ However, the art of the book and illuminating manuscripts certainly existed among Christians of Semirechye. This is evidenced by recent archaeological finds from the Ak-Beshim site, which included fragments of a manuscript leaf and leather bookbinding (Kolchenko 2018: 70, Fig. 19, 20). Fragments of a second manuscript from Ak-Beshim from the Scottish collection under consideration give grounds for a preliminary conclusion about the artistic features concerning the East Syriac Christian art of the book in Semirechye, which includes rich illumination, the use of polychrome paints (lapis lazuli, ochre-red, and black), gold foil, and East Asian influenced decorative elements. The binding fragments of this second Ak-Beshim manuscript also testify to the high artistic tradition of bookmaking. There is a certain similarity between East Syriac Christian art of the book in Semirechye and Manichaean in East Turkestan (Gulácsi 2001).

The iconographic model of Christian art in Semirechye is based on themes, images, and symbols traditional for all Christian art – themes such as communion, symbols of fish, bread, wine, and birds of prey. However, local differences exist with a somewhat subdued visual appearance of these classical Christian themes and symbols, including a rare use of images of Christ, the crucifix, and the cross. In this regard, Bartold's opinion concerning 'Nestorian asceticism' (Bartold 1893: 12) seems quite fair. In medieval Semirechye, the image of the cross as a universal symbol of Christianity on pectoral crosses and gravestones was quite common. This symbol remained far less presented on the other objects and applied for decoration more discreetly, being artistically less articulated and sometimes 'encrypted' graphically by being deliberately reduced in size and hidden in plain sight. This iconographic feature could result from necessity, especially during the spread of Islam-

ic iconoclasm in Central Asia and the persecution of local Christians.

Another artistic feature of the iconographic program of East Syriac Christian art in Semirechye was the use of a medieval bestiary. It is evident from the acquaintance with two highly decorative enamelled glass chalices from the Scottish collection. These images were presumably borrowed from the artistic culture of the Byzantine Empire or the Christian Middle East. Among them are various kinds of birds (pigeons, peacocks, ducks), lions, deer, and even an elephant. Paired compositions were also used, including confronted animals.

A distinctive feature of East Syriac Christian art in Semirechye was the manifestation of symbols and decorative elements borrowed from East Asian art, like the swastika, lotus, and cross resting on a lotus flower. The origin of this cultural synthesis most likely dates back to the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), when Semirechye was under the political and military control of the Tang Empire. The expansion of Buddhism and its cultural and artistic values in Semirechye further strengthened the fusion of Western and East Asia arts.

Unlike in Islamic art, the epigraphic decoration was used to a lesser extent within the iconographic repertoire of East Syriac Christian art in Semirechye. In the collection in question, there are only a few objects decorated with Syriac script, which can be attributed to the later period of the Christian community in Semirechye. There is an impression that inscriptions on the artefacts are meaningless and imitate the Syriac script for decorative purposes. In any case, there are no complete readings of such inscriptions to date.

A CATALOGUE OF SELECTED SYRIAC CHRISTIAN OBJECTS FROM THE SCOTTISH PRIVATE COLLECTION

1. Ceramic censer (?)

Semirechye, Talas Valley, archaeological site/settlement of Shelji. 8th-9th century. Height 9.2 cm. Hand-formed, light cream slip, two moulded loops (one lost) with eyelets for hanging. The upper part of the body is decorated with five mouldings (one is lost). Chips to the rim.

2. Ceramic incense burner

Ferghana Valley. 8th-9th century. Height 4.8 cm; width 15.2 cm. Wheel-thrown ware, partly hand-formed. The handle is missing.

²⁵ The finds of the German Turfan expeditions in East Turkestan contain about 100 pieces of Manichaean art, including 84 illuminated manuscripts, 15 painted and embroidered textiles, as well as descriptions of two buildings made of mud bricks, in which most Manichaean finds were made (Le Coq 1979: Tafel 1-6; Gulácsi 1997, Gulácsi 2001, Gulácsi 2005; Bhattacharya-Haesner 2003: 372, 377-79).

This vessel consists of three equal-sized spherical vessels connected to each other. The vessels are interconnected via holes in the lower sections. The incense burner is made to form a cross, the lower beam of which serves as a handle. The connections between the vessels are decorated with incised patterns depicting palm leaves. The upper parts of the vessels are decorated with incised circles and lines. There are decorative friezes in the central part of the vessels covered with triangles and circles with dots and triangles. The decoration of the central vessel is inscribed with a tiny cross applied with a stamp. The incense burner is covered with grey slip; the lower part remains unpainted. A technique of interconnecting vessels was used for making the incense burner. This involves the use of a liquid substance, presumably fragrant oil. The triple vessels were quite widespread in Eurasia from the Neolithic to the late Middle Ages and were mainly used for religious purposes. This incense burner is an artistic adaptation of ceramic types commonly used in the region during the pre-Christian period.²⁶

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 95.

3. Elements of bronze lamps

Semirechye, Chuy Valley. 11th-12th century. Base: height 11.5 cm; diameter 21 cm. Shaft: height 74 cm; width 4.8 cm. Shaft (fragment): height 32 cm; width 9 cm. Cast, engraving.

These elements of bronze lamps were found in a small hoard. A fragment of the lamp shaft has traces of an old restoration (two drilled holes). Bronze lamps of this type were quite widespread in Semirechye. In their form, they are like Roman and Byzantine bronze lamps and differ from contemporary Islamic ones, which are characterised by massive stems of shorter lengths and a larger diameter. A distinctive feature of Islamic lamps is also their decoration with geometric, floral, and epigraphic decorations (*Baer* 1983: 10-13). The top of the stem fragment has a cruciform arrangement with stylised figurines of roosters and cut palm leaves which may indicate they came from Christian cultural material. In the Christian tradition, the rooster is a symbol of Christ, an association of light and resurrection. The palm leaf is a symbol of "divine blessing." A similar composition of the lamp's

top, depicting cross-shaped birds above a dome with inscribed crosses, is used on bronze lamps in the collections of the Aga Khan Museum (Cat. no AKM593) and the David Collection (*Folsach* 2001: Cat. no 455). A tetrahedral finial on a stem fragment on another bronze lamp from Semirechye also contains a diagonal cross in the shape of the Latin letter "X" in its decor. It is inscribed on the hollow space of all four faces and moulded simultaneously with the rest of the item (*Kamyshev* 2012: 119, Fig. XXXV).

4. Ceramic oil lamp (*chirag*)

Semirechye. 8th-9th century. Height 5 cm; width 9.5 cm; length 17 cm. Hand moulding, inscribed decoration.

This oil lamp's centre discus is decorated with the image of a cross, and the upper surface of the short handle is decorated with a stylised palm leaf. The base has a cross made by finger indentations into the fabric before firing.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 210.

5. Cross in the shape of a two-headed bird of prey

Semirechye, Chuy Valley. 13th century. Height 4.3 cm; width 2.5 cm. Silver, casting, engraving.

At the top of this cross is a bale in the centre which is framed with a pattern of dots. The bird's wings are decorated with a floral pattern.

This is a somewhat unusual object in Syriac Christian art iconographic repertoire and falls apart from the other known Christian crosses from Semirechye, which are of rather classical shapes. In Byzantine heraldry, the double-headed eagle was associated with the concept of empire, signifying the religious and secular power of the emperor and his dominant power in the East and West. This symbol arose long before Christianity and had its roots in ancient Greek and Hittite iconography. It revived in the Byzantine Empire and became popular among the Seljuks, Mamluks, and Mongols.²⁷ It is quite possible that this double-headed eagle cross is related to the Mongols' dominance in Semirechye.²⁸

²⁶ The Scottish collection includes a triple vessel (Cat. no 16) and double vessels (Cat. nos 11, 22) of the Wusun period. Items similar in type to the Christian incense burner include lamps of the 10th-11th centuries from the settlements of Krasnaia Rechka and Sady-Korgon (*Goryacheva* 2010: 70, Fig. 27).

²⁷ In this regard, of interest is a silk striped robe from the Museum of Islamic Art collection in Doha, Qatar, made in Iran or East Turkestan in the 13th century. One inconspicuous detail of this decorative composition is curious—the image of a cross between the bird's heads (*Thompson* 2004: 72-75).

²⁸ A collection of bronze objects from the Ordos, which look like seals but are considered crosses, belong to East Syriac Christians, is now in the University of Hong Kong's Museum and Art Gallery.

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6. Pendant in the shape of a priest with a cross

Semirechye. 8th-9th century. Height 5.5 cm; width 1.9 cm. Bronze, casting. The bail is missing.

This is a rare visual image of an Eastern Christian priest from Semirechye. In his right hand, the priest holds a cross aloft. Another cross is placed at the bottom of the figure. On the priest's head is a cone-shaped headdress with three elements.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8-18 January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 204.

7. Pendant in the shape of a priest with a cross

Semirechye. 8th-9th century. Height 5.8 cm; width 2.6 cm. Copper, forging, engraving, natural pearls.

This pendant is a cruder replica of a similar cast item in the collection (no. 8 above) but is embellished with an additional pendant of four pearls.

8. Jug

Semirechye. 11th-12th century. Height 20.7 cm; diameter 13.6 cm. Underglaze painting on top of a white

slip, transparent, colourless glaze. Wheel-thrown ware. Part of the neck and the handle is missing.

Among the pottery of Eastern Christians in Semirechye, unglazed ceramics predominate, and glazed products are quite rare.²⁹ This jug has several comparisons, also originating from Semirechye (Proceedings of the SAE 1950: Pl. LXXXVI, 2; (Monuments/Assets) (1983): Cat. No. 276). Their common features include cylindrical bodies, continuous decoration with complex compositions and polychrome painting with no traditional Islamic iconography, and the use of high-quality transparent colourless or light-yellow glaze.

The decorative composition of the jug consists of two friezes (on the neck and body), with goblet depictions, very likely chalices, between which are stylised fish figures. The vessel is decorated with chains of white dots, imitating pearls. The motif of the chalice and fish, classical symbols of Christianity, seems to have been traditional in the iconography of Eastern Christianity in Semirechye. The decoration of glass chalices from the Ak-Beshim site also testifies in favour of this idea.

Drawings:

8A. The decoration of the upper frieze.

8B. The decoration of the lower frieze.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8-18 January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 387.

9. Double-necked jug with a crucifix

Semirechye, Talas Valley, archaeological site/settlement of Shelji. 7th-9th century. Height 12.5 cm; diameter 9 cm. Wheel-thrown ware, partly hand-formed.

The vessel consists of two necks with a handle attached on the reverse side. The upper part of the handle splits into two segments, which are individually attached to the necks. A crucifix is placed between the necks. The face of Christ is modelled in a stylised manner. The eyes and mouth are marked with holes; the nose is embossed on the face. This object is unique in that it is perhaps the only example of the crucifixion on a ceramic vessel from medieval Semirechye. The vessel's two necks may symbolise a visual association concerning the dual nature of Christ. The traditional Christological formula for East Syriac Christianity declared Jesus Christ perfect God and perfect Man in unity, with two natures, two hypostases in one person, one dominion and one will. At the same time, attributing this object to the East Syrian circle seems rather problematic. The tradition of East Syriac Christianity did not identify the cross with the sufferings of Christ but presented it as a tri-

umph and victory of faith, and accordingly, in the liturgy and church iconography, the church preferred to use the cross without a crucifix (portraying the body of Christ on the cross). The existence of such vessels raises the question about the activities in the region of other churches or denominations of Eastern Christianity apart of East Syriac Church. However, it cannot be ruled out that the crucifixion was not completely taboo among the followers of the East Syriac Church.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 208.

10. Double-necked jug

Semirechye, Talas Valley, 7th-9th century. Height 23.4 cm; diameter 16.5 cm. Wheel-thrown ware, partly hand-formed.

This jug is typologically close to the two-necked vessel with a crucifix. It may also be decorated with a crucifix, which is visible from the moulding in the upper part of the jug's body at the junction of the necks. The vessel is decorated with a frieze of wavy lines and a palmette in the centre (partially preserved). The patterns are typical for decorative compositions in Sogdian ceramics from Semirechye. Yet, the frieze of wavy lines may well refer to Christian iconography, implying water is a symbol of the divine spirit, renewal, and communion (Cooper 2009: 189).

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 126.

11. Ceramic jug

Semirechye. 8th-9th century. Height 12.5 cm; diameter 7.8 cm. Wheel-thrown ware. The handle and part of the neck are missing.

This jug is decorated in the body's upper part with a frieze of diagonally crossed lines; a stylised cross is placed in the body's centre.

12. Jug with cruciform decoration

Ferghana Valley, reportedly from Uzgend. 8th-10th century. Height 32.5 cm; diameter 24 cm. Moulded on a potter's wheel, painted with pinkish-brown paint on a cream slip.

This vessel is decorated along the neck with three large crosses and four smaller crosses inscribed between them. The large crosses have almost triangular rays, and the small crosses have spherical thickenings at the ends of the rays. The vessel's shoulders are decorated with a wide frieze with an abstract pattern of

intertwining geometric figures.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 211.

13. Christian pectoral crosses

Semirechye. 8th-12th century. Height 5 cm (max) - 3 cm (min). Bronze, casting.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 202.

14. Belt fittings in the shape of a cross and a pectoral cross

Semirechye. 8th-10th century. Height 3.8 cm (max) - 2.6 cm (min). Bronze, casting.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 203.

15. Belt fitting with a cross image

Semirechye. 8th-9th century. Height 3.5 cm; width 2.2 cm. Bronze, engraving.

There are three mounting pins on the reverse side of the item.

16. Belt fitting with a cross

Semirechye. 12th-14th century. Height 2.1 cm; width 1.1 cm. Bronze, engraving.

There are two mounting pins on the reverse side of the item.

17. Belt fitting with inscription in Syriac script

Semirechye. 12th-14th century. Height 3 cm; width 1.8 cm. Bronze, casting. There are two mounting pins on the reverse.

This epigraphic decoration on this plaquette consists of a Syriac inscription in which only two graphemes are clearly visible (from right to left) - '... ܒ, ܫ (šade) ... ' (ālah). According to Professor Pier Borbone, who studied the inscription, the "letters" are very close to the Syriac alphabet, but their shape does not quite correspond to the "classical" graphics, including a similar one found in samples of the Semirechye Syrian epigraphy collection.²⁹

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 205.

18. Belt fitting in the shape of a cross

Semirechye. 8th-10th century. Diameter 2.7 cm, on the reverse side are two mounting pins.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 206.

19. Decorative element with a cross

Semirechye. 8th-12th century. Diameter 3.2 cm. Bronze, casting.

On the outside are three loops for a patch.

20. Pendant with a cross

Semirechye. 8th-10th century. Diameter 3 cm. Bronze, casting.

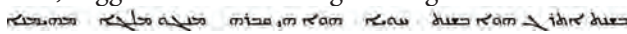
Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 207.

21. Gravestone (Kayrak)

Semirechye, archaeological site/settlement of Kara-Jygach (?). 1292. Stone, engraving.

Professor Pier Borbone, who studied this inscription, suggested the following reading:

 bsnt 'trg hw' bsnt hwy' hd' hy qbrh mngw pylg' mhymnt'

Ba-šnat 1603 hwā, ba-šnat Hewyā. Hādē-hāy qabrāh Mengü Bilgä mhaymntā.

'It was in the year 1603, in the year of the Snake. This is the grave of the believer [lady] Mengü Bilgä.'

The Seleucid Year 1603, Year of the Snake, corresponds to 1292 CE.

Exhibitions: Arts from the Land of Timur. Edinburgh, 8th-18th January 2013.

Published: Klein 2000:166; Zhumagulov 2011:143-144; *Arts from the Land of Timur* (2012): Cat. no. 209; Borbone 2023 upcoming.

with underglaze painting was found at the settlement of Karatobe in southern Kazakhstan. The central field of the dish has a cross composition with a circle at the intersection of the rays. In the centre there is another cross in the form of the swastika, tilted to the right (Smagulov 2011: 173, Fig. 16).

²⁹ An excellent specimen (thou fragmented) of a Christian dish

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