

SILK ROAD STUDIES: SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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"Church of the East" was called in antiquity that church that spread outside, to the east, of the Roman Empire. Already in the 5th century, this East Syriac (so-called "Nestorian") Christianity found its way to Central Asia and had long since reached the south Indian Malarbar coast, where the followers of this church called themselves Thomas Christians. Eastern Syriac Christianity gained a foothold in the Arabian peninsula and reached the Chinese imperial court of the Tang dynasty in the 7th century via the Silk Roads. In the Middle Ages, at the time of the Mongols, the Church of the East was the geographically largest church of Christianity.

Since 2003, the University of Salzburg has established an internationally recognized research focus on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia. Triennial, the Center for the Study of the Christian East (ZECO) of the University of Salzburg, founded by the project leader, is organizing the "Salzburg International Conference on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia", which brings together the world's leading scientists on the topic in an interdisciplinary manner. Approximately Fifty scientists from China, Japan, India, Turkey, USA, Australia, Germany, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Canada, Austria, etc. present the latest research results in the fields of history, archeology, theology, philology, epigraphy, manuscript science (Syriac, Sogdian, Uighur, Chinese, Arabic, etc.) to the East Syriac Christianity.

The relevant excavation sites for this research are located in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China (notably Inner Mongolia, Turfan). With the new partnership with the Al Farabi Kazakh National University and the Kazakh Academy of Sciences in Almaty open up access to the (new) discoveries of archaeological sites. At the request of the Kazakh partners the next "Salzburg International Conference" will be held in June 2019 in Almaty. Planning is in progress, the call for papers has already been sent out.

The goal is twofold: First of all, the International Scientific Community has to be brought to the field in order to further develop the research. Secondly, the project application to the EPU serves for scientific exchange and the development of a future research project (FWF and / or EU) to be submitted. The archaeological expertise of Kazakh colleagues provides access to the archaeological sites and artifacts, while the historical-philological expertise in Salzburg translates, evaluates and interprets them. For this purpose, the "Salzburg" mentioned in the application to Kazakhstan have to establish the partnership and to explore the archaeological sites or artifacts, while the Kazakh colleagues come to Salzburg for specialized training (Syrian language, history and culture). In this way, the EPU would enable the necessary initiation, development and exploration for a larger-scale research project and serve reciprocal education.