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SYRIAC INSCRIPTIONS NEAR URGUT, UZBEKISTAN ¹

SUMMARY

This article examines a collection of inscriptions in Syriac script left by Christians on the cliffs near a recently excavated church building located near Urgut, Uzbekistan. The text and translation of more than 160 inscriptions are given. The vast majority of these are onomastic in nature. The article concludes with a discussion of the names involved, which reflect the cultural melting pot that was medieval Central Asia.

Keywords: Syriac; Christian; Central Asia; Sogdiana; inscriptions.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine plus de 160 inscriptions en écriture syriacque laissées par des chrétiens sur des falaises à proximité d'une église récemment fouillée située près d'Urgut (Ouzbékistan). Il en donne le texte original et la traduction ; la grande majorité d'entre elles est de nature onomastique. L'article se termine par une analyse des noms en question, qui reflètent le creuset culturel que constituait l'Asie centrale médiévale.

Mots clés : syriac ; chrétien ; Asie centrale ; Sogdiana ; inscriptions.

Christianity had a presence in Central Asia for over a millennium, beginning with references in the Book of the Laws of the Countries by the Syriac writer Bardaisan (d. 222/23) to Christians in the realm of the

¹ In addition to my colleague Alexei Savchenko, without whom I would not have been able to produce this article, I also want to express my gratitude to Abduobir Ramkulov of the Archaelogical Institute of Uzbekistan (Samarkand), who first showed me the inscriptions in 2003, when I was living in Uzbekistan. I am particularly grateful to Nicholas Sims-Williams for his very helpful input in sorting out possible Sogdian and Persian material in the inscriptions. I would also like to thank Christoph Baumer, Thomas Carlson, Frantz Grenet, Erica C. D. Hunter, Yory Karev, Pavel Lutje, Salam Rasi, Mar Awa Royel and Peter Zieme for help in preparing this article for publication. Finally, my thanks to the many helpful suggestions from the anonymous reviewers of this article, suggestions which I have tried to incorporate wherever possible.
Kushans in Bactria and extending up to the time of the Timurids, when the Armenian historian T’ovma Metsobets’i describes events which likely led to the end of Christianity in Samarkand during the rule of Ulugh Beg (r. 1411-1449). The major challenge in reconstructing this history consists of synthesizing the various historical and archaeological sources available to us, many of them very fragmentary. In particular, it is difficult to gain insights into the day-to-day life of Central Asian Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, given the relative paucity of archaeological and textual evidence. Although we are fortunate to have significant numbers of Christian manuscripts from Turfan, along with smaller collections from Dunhuang and Qara-Khoto, in Eastern (Chinese) Turkestan, there are no Christian manuscripts extant in Western Turkestan, the current territory of the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In light of this, the following statement by the Muslim geographer Ibn Hawqal (fl. 988) – also mentioned by his earlier contemporary al-Istakhri (d. 957) – is of crucial importance:

On al-Sawadār [the Shāvādār mountain range south of Samarkand] there is a monastery of the Christians where they gather and have their cells. I found many Iraqi Christians there who migrated to the place because of its suitability, solitary location and healthiness. It has inalienable properties (muqaffa’), and many Christians retreat to it; this place towers over the major part of Sogd and is known as Wazkird.4

As a result of the definitive linking of the place name in the Arabic text with Urgut—located 30 km SE of Samarkand, Uzbekistan—excavations began in the area in 1995, eventually uncovering a Christian church (initially identified as such in 1999) located at the confluence of two streams, on Suleyman-tepa, a promontory just below the foothills of the Zarafshan Mountains, a location which matches Ibn Hawqal’s description. Alexei Savchenko, who conducted the archaeological excavation of the

5 For background information on Ibn Hawqal’s text and the excavation of the monastery mentioned here and elsewhere in this article, the reader is referred to the articles by Alexei Savchenko listed in the Bibliography below.

6 See the commentary on the archaeological site in Ashturov 2015, pp. 165-174.

7 Although they are referred to throughout this article as inscriptions, to call them graffiti would not be inaccurate.

8 On which, see Chwolson 1890 and Chwolson 1897. An overview of the gravestone corpus can be found in Dickens 2009.

9 See de La Vaisièrre 2005. The phrase “Silk Road” was coined, of course, in the nineteenth-century and refers not to a single road, but rather a vast network of trade routes connecting China with the Mediterranean via Central Asia, along which were traded not just silk, but many other commodities, as well as artistic, technological, philosophical and religious concepts.

10 See Foltz 2010.

11 Savchenko 2010, p. 75.
the steppe north of Sogdiana ca. 700. The Muslim conquest of the area began in the late 7th century, continued through the 8th century (when most of the major Sogdian urban centres, like Bukhara and Samarkand, were captured), and was completed by the 9th century, after which ما وراء البحيرة Mawārā' al-nahr, “that which is across the river”—as the Arabs called the territory beyond the Oxus, known in the West as Transoxiana—became an integral part of the Muslim world. Successful centuries saw the area ruled directly by the 'Abbasid Caliphate (8th-9th c.), the Iranian Samanids (10th c.), the Turkic Qaraqhansids (early 11th c.) and Seljuk (late 11th c.), the Buddhist Qara-Khitai (Western Liao) (early 12th-early 13th c.) and the Mongols, who controlled Mawārā' al-nahr from their conquest in 1220 until the disintegration of the Chaghatay Ulus (Khanate) in 1347, which facilitated the subsequent rise of Timur.

These diverse historical influences during the six or seven centuries that the Christian site was in use help to explain the variety of names found amongst the inscriptions, whether Syriac, Arabic, Middle and New Persian, Turkic or Sogdian. Of particular relevance is Ibn Ḥawqal’s reference to "many Iraqi Christians... who migrated to the place because of its suitability, solitary location and healthiness,"12 which highlights both the appropriateness of the location for establishing a monastic presence and the presence in that community of Christians who were bilingual in both Syriac and Arabic (typical of Christians from the Iraqi heartland of the 'Abbasid Caliphate when Ibn Ḥawqal was writing in the 10th century), as well as speakers of the local language (initially Sogdian, which was supplanted by New Persian in the wake of the Arab conquest of Central Asia and more particularly Samanid rule in Sogdiana).

Until the Mongol era, when the area opened up to other confessions (specifically Latin and Armenian Christians), the Christian presence in Central Asia was almost exclusively connected with the Church of the East, the branch of Syriac Christianity which has gone down in history under the misleading epithet "Nestorian."13 Although there were a few Christian communities in Central Asia from two other churches that originated in a Syriac milieu, namely the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Melkite Orthodox Church (who used Greek more than Syriac in their liturgies),14 it was the Church of the East that dominated the territory.15

There is abundant evidence for the presence of Christianity in Sogdiana. Samarkand received a metropolitan (archbishop) from the Church of the East sometime between the 6th and 8th centuries.16 Coins with crosses on them dating from the 6th-8th centuries found in Bukhara, Samarkand, Panjikent and Tashkent suggest that the rulers of some Sogdian city-states were Christians at this time, both before and during the Arab conquest of Central Asia.17 During the rule of the Muslim Samanid dynasty (819-999) based in Bukhara, when most of Sogdiana was converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam, Christianity flourished to the north amongst the Qarluq Turks.18 Despite this gradual conversion to Islam, when the Muslim bibliophile al-Nadīm describes "the land of al-Sughd" in his Fihrist (written in 990), he notes that "its people are dualists [Manichaean]s and Christians."19 Samarkand continued to play an important role in Central Asian Christianity up to Mongol and Timurid times.20

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF URGUT

The Russian scholar Vasily Bartol’d suggested in 1894 that the location of the monastery described by Ibn Ḥawqal might be near modern-day Urgut.21 The Syriac inscriptions and inscribed crosses on a nearby cliff called Qizil Qāya ("Red Rock") which are the subject of this article, discovered by university students from Tashkent studying the Tajik language and local lore in Urgut in 1920,22 supplied tangible evidence of a forgotten Christian past in the area. Further evidence of Urgut’s Christian heritage surfaced in 1955, when some local secondary school students exploring

12 See above fn. 4.
13 On which, see Brock 1996.
14 On the presence of these two Churches in Central Asia, see Daumel 1956; Daumel 1995; Klein 1999; Parry 2012.
15 For popular histories of the Church of the East, see Wilmshurst 2011 and Baumer 2016. On the former, see my review in Dickens 2013b.
16 Hoenerbach & Spies 1956, p. 123; Mai 1838, pp. 141-142, 146. See the discussion on the establishment date of the metropolitanate in Collin 1986.
17 Naymark 1996; Savchenko 1996, p. 338; Savchenko & Dickens 2009, p. 124. For images of such coins, see Savchenko & Dickens 2009, Pl. 2; Savchenko 2010, Abb. 3a, 3b. It has also been suggested that an ostracocon discovered in Panjikent with portions of Psalm 1-2 in Syriac (Paykova 1979) and two Christian gavestones with Syriac inscriptions in the Ashkhabad Museum (Mason 1978) may be from Urgut (Savchenko 1996, pp. 335, 339-340; Savchenko & Dickens 2009, p. 131), but these speculations have not been decisively verified yet. Both Savchenko 1996 and Savchenko & Dickens 2009 contain provisional summaries of the archaeological finds relating to the presence of Christianity in Sogdiana; see also the plate in the latter work.
18 See Dickens 2010.
20 Again, see Coles 1986 and Savchenko & Dickens 2009, p. 123.
21 Bartol’d 1894. On Urgut in general, see Savchenko 2008. On the history of attempts to identify the location of the monastery, see Savchenko 2006.
22 Bartol’d 1973, pp. 391f; Meshcherskaya & Paykova 1981. For images of Qizil Qāya, see Savchenko 1996, fig. 5-7; Savchenko 2010, Abb. 1b.
with their teachers in the area discovered a cave with intriguing contents, which they communicated to the Russian archaeologist G. Parfionov in a letter. Their explorations were in part a response to an earlier exhortation by Parfionov, published in a local newspaper, for schoolchildren from Urgut to look for archaeological artefacts in the area, an exhortation in which he specifically referred to the Syriac inscriptions from Urgut. Parfionov described several months later in the same newspaper what the students had written to him:

Having entered the cave, we saw some writing (inscriptions) on/in the entrance and wrote them down. Inside the cave we also found bones and all sorts of stones. There were also 17 books there written in the Arabic alphabet. We took all of them to the school and organized a museum (display). We will give all the artefacts that we found to our scholars.

After recounting this report from the schoolchildren, Parfionov went on to explain the importance of their discovery:

These inscriptions that you found and copied are the first Syriac Christian-Nestorian inscriptions known in Uzbekistan. These inscriptions were written on the rock in the Gulbogh cave about 600-700 years ago. I sent copies of the Gulbogh inscriptions to Academician V. V. Struve to study, check and translate. There are Syriac inscriptions like this in Central Asia, in the Kyrgyz SSR. These inscriptions are gravestones that give the personal name, family name and date of death of the deceased who is buried. You wrote that you found the inscriptions not on the rock overhead, but on/in the entrance to the cave, as well as stones lying inside the cave. In addition, you saw quite a few bones in the cave. You did not know and others did not explain that you were at a Nestorian graveyard. What you discovered has great scientific importance, because you have verified the first Nestorian graveyard in Central Asia.

In the process of excavating the Christian site near Urgut, a search was conducted for the cave with inscriptions mentioned by the schoolchildren in 1955. Although the cave, which was identified by two of those involved in the original school expedition, now retired, was thoroughly searched, no trace of any inscriptions was found (and the current whereabouts of the “bones” and “books” alleged to be found in the cave is unknown). However, the ten-year search of approximately 100 caves in the area led to the discovery in 2006 of three other caves in the cliffs above the monastery site (across the valley from the inscriptions discovered in 1920), all of which contained Syriac inscriptions.

The Syriac inscriptions of Urgut have received relatively little scholarly attention since their discovery in the early 20th century, largely due to difficulties in accessing and deciphering them. The rock surface on which many of the inscriptions have been written is often rough and marred by flaking surface layers; in some places it is covered with mould, lichen and various mineral deposits. The writing is often layered, with some inscriptions scratched into the rock on top of others, frequently at right angles to each other so that horizontal and vertical inscriptions often coexist together. Furthermore, not many of those leaving inscriptions seem to have been trained scribes; thus, the writing is frequently haphazard and unclear. Compounding these challenges is the fact that very few familiar...
with Syriac palaeography have visited the site, resulting in only two previous articles that do more than just mention the inscriptions.\textsuperscript{29}

I initially viewed the cliff inscriptions in 2003 with Abdusobir Raimkulov of the Archaeological Institute of Uzbekistan, but I did not have the means to work on them until several years later, after having made the acquaintance of Alexei Savchenko, who kindly supplied me with digital images. After excavations at the monastery location were completed, I went back to the area with Savchenko in September 2009 to photograph and transcribe the cliff and cave inscriptions. In the process, new inscriptions were discovered and readings of some previously published inscriptions were revised.\textsuperscript{30}

Before describing the inscriptions, a few notes on the Syriac palaeography encountered at Urgut are in order. As will be seen, all the decipherable inscriptions (with one notable exception) are in the Syriac script. More specifically, they are in what we might call the East Syriac version of the Estrangela script (the latter originally shared by East and West Syriac Christians before theological and political factors from the fifth century on tended to differentiate the pronunciation and orthography of Syriac between the two communities). Eventually, the Estrangela script used by the Church of the East evolved into what is now called the Nestorian or East Syriac script, but this transition is not yet evident in either the Urgut inscriptions or the Christian texts from Turfan.\textsuperscript{31}

The Syriac script was also used to write other languages, usually with adapted characters for sounds in the source language not present in Syriac; from Central Asia, we have examples of this phenomenon in Sogdian, New Persian and Turkic.\textsuperscript{32} Although several extra letters were introduced to write these three languages, one letter shared by all three and evident in a number of the Urgut inscriptions (most notably Inv. № A-308-2 from the Samarkand Museum, discussed below) is \(\alpha\), modified from either \(\alpha\) or \(\alpha\) to write the Sogdian or New Persian sound /x/ (as well as the Turkic sounds /k/, /q/ or /x/\textsuperscript{33}) in Syriac script; it is found frequently in Christian texts from Turfan in these languages.\textsuperscript{34} Another letter, \(\varepsilon\),\textsuperscript{35} modified from \(\alpha\) to render the sound /f/, may also be in evidence in the Urgut inscriptions (unless it is just a variant form of \(\alpha\) itself, with the loop formed to the right of the upright, rather than the left). Thus, in names or other words which cannot be clearly identified (rendered in CAPITAL LETTERS), it is unclear whether this character represents /p/ or /f/.\textsuperscript{36}

Additionally, some Syriac letters normally used for sounds found in Syriac but not Sogdian, New Persian or Turkic, have been repurposed to represent sounds found in those languages but not Syriac, notably \(\gamma\) for /k/ and \(\varsigma\) for /g/. Words or names in the Urgut inscriptions containing these letters which are not demonstrably Syriac are glossed using \(\Gamma\gamma\) and \(\zeta\zeta\) respectively. Finally, native Sogdian words tend to use \(\Delta\Delta\) for /t/ and \(\varepsilon\varepsilon\) for /k/ (following the system of representing Greek \(\tau\) and \(\kappa\) in Syriac by \(\Delta\Delta\) and \(\varepsilon\varepsilon\)), as discussed below. This can sometimes lead to misspelling of Syriac words and names in the corpus.

The Urgut inscriptions can be divided into five locations: Cave 1, Cave 2, Cave 3, the upper cliff face and the lower cliff face. There are also two inscriptions that were sawed off the cliff by A. Y. Kaplunov of the Samarkand Museum of History, Culture and Art in 1936 and taken back to the Museum, where they reside to this day;\textsuperscript{37} both are addressed below. Sadly, there is evidence that other inscriptions may have been removed in more recent years; the careful manner in which this was done suggests not random vandalism, but intentional removal for sale on the antiquities black market.\textsuperscript{38}

**CAVE 1 INSRIPTIONS**

Cave 1 is accessed by a narrow opening in the rock face and provides just enough room to stand up in. It contains more than 20 inscriptions, most virtually illegible, so that some which appear to consist of several lines may actually be two or more inscriptions written on top of each other.

\textsuperscript{29} The only inscriptions published thus far are one in Tardieu, 1999 (discussed below) and several in Savchenko 1996 (fig. 2-3, 8-19); the latter article is based on black and white images taken in 1995.

\textsuperscript{30} Even the caves, comparatively easy to document given their limited area, yielded new inscriptions that had been missed when they were originally discovered and photographed in 2006. The process of documenting the cliff inscriptions was much more complicated, since they are scattered across a fairly large area at the bottom of the cliffs.

\textsuperscript{31} See Dickens 2013a, p. 11. On the evolution of Syriac writing, see also Briquel Chatonnets, forthcoming.

\textsuperscript{32} See Kiraz 2012, Part III on Gärünography, particularity sector 11.9 on Syro-Sogdian and Sỳro-Persian by Nicholas Sims-Williams.

\textsuperscript{33} There often seems to be phonological confusion in the use of this character on the Syro-Turkic texts in the Semireche valley.

\textsuperscript{34} See Hunter & Dickens 2014, entry 117 for SyrHT 122, entry 156 for SyrHT 161, entry 243 for SyrHT 249.

\textsuperscript{35} My thanks to George Kiraz for supplying me with this character from his modification of one of the Meltho fonts.

\textsuperscript{36} For example, MWnSIP, BWnRPL/QnWnRPLnSWnRPL or PnÝnDn/PnÝRn.

\textsuperscript{37} Savchenko 1996, p. 335, fig. 1. The museum is currently called the Samarkand Museum of History and Art of the Uzbek People.

\textsuperscript{38} This undoubtedly accounts for the fact that some inscriptions documented in 1995 by Savchenko were not located and photographed in 2009, when the majority of images accompanying this article were taken.
by more than one person, something which occurs frequently elsewhere in the corpus. There are several crosses in the cave, both inscribed and written in black ink.

On the south wall of the cave, opposite the entrance, are a set of inscriptions scratched into the cave wall in a space roughly 10x4 cm.39

[1] At the top is the name ܐܘܚܢܢ (the most common name in the corpus, discussed in the Conclusions below), under which is an indecipherable word. [2] Further down is another word found often (in various forms) in the corpus, ܕܝܐܢܢ, “vigil, place to stay the night,” below which is either an indecipherable word or a crude attempt at a cross. [3] Underneath is the word ܐܘܚܢܢܢ, “Hosanna,” which appears here as either an expression of praise or the Syriac name ܐܘܚܢܢܐ.41 Below yet another illegible word, a cross has been scratched into the cave wall. [4] Finally, at the bottom, is a poorly-written word which could be any of the following: 1) ܐܘܚܢܢܢ, “comfort, consolation”; 2) ܐܘܚܢܢܝܢ, “in/with life”42; 3) ܬܐܒܢܢ, “with the venerable/reverend”; 4) ܐܘܚܢܢܢܢ, “in/with sackcloth”; 5) ܘܓܐܒܢܢ, “with the eye” or even 6) the Turkic name ܓܒܢܢ, Buqa “bull”43; without more context, it is difficult to know which of these options is most likely. Of these inscriptions, perhaps the most significant is that containing the word ܐܘܚܢܢ, which may refer to an ecclesiastical dignitary (or perhaps their representative), either a bishop or (given the likely presence of a monastery below) a monastic superior. If that reading and interpretation are correct, this gives interesting insight into the presence of members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the area (or perhaps visiting from a larger centre, like Samarkand). Interestingly, the title ܬܐܒܢܢ is found on one of the Syro-Turkic gravestone inscriptions from Quanzhou, China.44

[5] Under this, two more words are visible— ܓܢܐܐ, “with is”—and another word beginning with ܐ but ultimately illegible.45 It is highly likely that mineral deposits to the left of these inscriptions have obscured what was once an intelligible phrase or sentence. Nonetheless, one can imagine a Christian monk or pilgrim writing what is visible after staying overnight in this cave as a means of penance or renunciation of some physical appetite.

[6] On the north wall of the cave, near the entrance, is what appears to be a single word crudely carved into the rock, ܐܘܓܢܢܐܕܝܢܢ, ܢܓܢܐ, either representing the Arabic name نازرين or a badly spelled attempt at the Syriac word ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, “Nazarene, Christian.” Alternatively, could it be an even more defective spelling of ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, “Nazirite,” used for one following a lifestyle of abstinence, celibacy and asceticism, thus a term often applied to monks? Either way, perhaps the spelling with aleph following nun indicates Arabic influence in pronunciation amongst those using the site, not surprising given Ibn Hawqal’s aforementioned reference to “Iraqi Christians” who migrated to the monastery. [7] Above, on the roof of the cave in an area roughly 4x6 cm., are two lines of faded writing in black ink; visible characters on the second line suggest they may have included the word ܐܘܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, “our vigil” or ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, “your vigil” (if the first line contained a name or names, the remnants suggest it may have included ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, Yuhannan).

There are possibly two other instances of the name ܝܘܚܢܢ in Cave 1, although both are obscured by mineral deposits (as well as lichen) that seem to have accumulated over the original inscriptions. [8] One of these could equally be another word ending in the letter ܢ; it is followed by a second illegible word beginning with ܢ, ܡܢ or ܢ (visible portions of these two words are roughly 4 cm. long). [9] The second possible occurrence, contained in a small area roughly 3x6 cm., appears to be ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, “to/by Yuhannan,” although it could also be ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, “of the Greeks” (with the plural ܘܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ marker either missing or illegible), in which case the other remnants visible to the right of this word could represent a date in the Seleucid era dating system used by Syriac speakers and found commonly in the Semirechye gravestone corpus mentioned above.46

44 The presence of Arabic names in the corpus (admittedly a minority relative to Syriac names) is not surprising, whether due to the “Christians of Iraq who had migrated to the area” mentioned by Ibn Hawqal or to the general influence of Arabic in the wake of the Islamization of Central Asia. The Semirechye gravestone corpus contains examples of the Arabic male names ܡܼܫܘܦܪ (Mansur, “victorious,” مسعود) and ܒܪܘܐ (Amir), ܕܘܦܢ (government, state, wealth) (Chabot 1906, pp. 288, 291), as well as ܓܼܫܒܼܬ (Ghobena, “queen, princess”) (Chawolson 1890, No 73) and ܓܼܫܘܗܪ (spelling error for ܓܼܫܘܗܪ i.e. سمانع) (Chawolson 1897, No 6).

47 The use of the Seleucid era dating system in the Syriac gravestones is discussed in both Dickens 2009 and Dickens 2016. ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ, an abbreviated version of the phrase ܢܓܢܐܕܝܢܢ (ܠܘܛܢܕܝܢܢ) (Arabic, “entertaining companion”), is found in the dating formula on at least two gravestones from Almahq, currently located just inside the Chinese side of the Sino-Kazakh border, about 1200
There are several other inscriptions inside Cave 1. [10] One is an instance, contained in an area roughly 3x3 cm., of הָלָה, “he kept vigil/stayed the night” or הָלָה, “my vigil,” above which can be seen הָלָה, probably an abortive attempt to write the same word before the writer realized there was inadequate room. [11] Another, about 3 cm. long, begins with the letters סחנ, which may represent the Sogdian name סחנ, meaning “brown” (this word/name is possibly encountered elsewhere in the corpus, as noted below); these three letters are followed by either two poorly-formed Syriac letters or a symbol which is not recognizably Syriac. Possible readings of this word include Syriac סחנ, “keeper of the bath,” סחנ, “barren,” סחנ, “in severe weather” or סחנ, “by/in necessity” [fig. 1]; if the first option is correct, this inscription could possibly be connected with inscription [111], which possibly mentions another word for “keeper of the bath,” סחנ.

Two additional inscriptions in Cave 1 were discovered in 2010 by Alexei Savchenko. [12] One clearly reads סחנ סחנ, “Yuhannan has discerned,” with a poorly-formed word preceding this which is possibly סחנ, “O God.” [13] The other consists of a line to the left of an inscribed cross and another below it; although the beginning of the upper line is unclear, the rest of the inscription appears to be כַּלָּה סחנ, “and hear/answer my voice,” perhaps a partial (slightly garbled) quotation from Psalms 27:7 – כַּלָּה סחנ יְהֹוָה, “Hear, O Lord, my voice when I call to you; have mercy on me and answer me.” Such a sentiment would not be unusual in the context of a prayer vigil.

There are several inscriptions outside and to the right of the cave entrance. [14] Perhaps the most obvious is another occurrence of the name סחנ, סחנ, along with illegible attempts to scratch two words the same size (both of which seem to begin with the letter ס or ס) underneath and a smaller word above, all contained in a space roughly 3x3 cm. [15] Another phrase scratched into the rock here contains just two words. The second (which might be a name) begins with ס, but is so poorly formed that it is unintelligible; the word above it appears to be סחנ, representing the Middle and New Persian name סחנ, Tähm, “brave.” [16]

[16] Written near the faded remnants of some writing in black ink outside the cave entrance is a very clear word that seems to read סחנ, BWSL, but this has no meaning in Syriac, so it may be an ill-formed (or possibly phonetically spelled) instance of סחנ, “he kept vigil/stayed the night.” Alternatively, though not much more logically, could this be a transcription of Persian מַעֲשִׂים, the imperative of “to kiss”? A larger collection of inscriptions contains seven lines of very poorly formed words, some of them scratched on top of others, in an area roughly 8x4 cm.; discernible words include סחנ, סחנ, “the sinner” or סחנ, “sinner” (the illegible line above this may be a name); סחנ, סחנ, “he tested us”; סחנ, סחנ, “Hemanait” (other lines are largely illegible due to the quality of handwriting and natural lines in the surface of the rock) [fig. 2].

Yet another set of inscriptions outside the cave entrance is written in an area roughly 6x6 cm. scratched into bare spots on the rock. Unfortunately, mineral encrustations obscure most of the writing; [20] only the word סחנ, “blessing/benediction” is clearly visible, along with the ending סחנ of another word and the beginning ס or ס of a third. [21] A smaller area of rough rock, perhaps 1x1 cm., contains one complete word with the beginning of a second (the letter ס) below it. The first and last letters of the complete word are clear, but the letters in between are open to multiple interpretations. The most logical (although still tentative) reading is סחנ, perhaps a misspelling of Syriac סחנ, “let him keep vigil/stay the night.” Unfortunately, in the absence of more text and therefore context, no more can be said about the intended meaning of this inscription.

[22] A final group of Syriac inscriptions outside the cave entrance, including a cross, are contained in another space roughly 3x3 cm. and are all in black ink, but unfortunately the combination of fading ink and mineral encrustations on the rock have rendered this group all but illegible.

50 I am indebted to Nicholas Sims-Williams for this suggestion (personal correspondence, Feb. 4, 2015) on this Persian name, see Gignoux et al, 2009, № 410-414; Jussi, 1895, pp. 318-319. The name Tähm does not occur in the gravestone corpus.
51 A native Persian speaker would almost certainly substitute ה/ for ول. Note the possibly related occurrence below of a word which appears to be סחנ, BWSL.
52 The name סחנ (meaning “mercy of Jesus”) occurs once in the gravestone corpus (Chatot, 1966, p. 288) and is also mentioned on the XI’im Stele, in s specific reference to Patriarch Ḥemanait II (773-780) of the Church of the East (Hunter, 2010, p. 358).
53 Admittedly, his orthographic error would be odd, given the many correctly spelled occurrences of the verb סחנ in the corpus. It could only be possible if someone with very little knowledge of Syriac had left this inscription.
apart from portions of two words underneath the cross containing the letters אָ(ר) and א(ש) respectively; some of the other “words” may in fact be merely zig-zags painted on the rock.

Other than the few names in Cave 1 (notably מָעַרְשָׁא, יְסֵפָר, מְעַפָּר, דָּבָר and מֶלֶך), most of the words left behind by those who spent time in these cramped quarters—whether they were members of the monastic community located below or possibly Christian pilgrims from elsewhere in Sogdiana or even further afield—are evidence that this cave was used as a place of vigil, whether for penance over sin, to ask for a blessing or to invoke the deity for an answer to prayer. Unfortunately, many of these readings (along with many of those below) must remain somewhat tentative.

CAVE 2 AND 3 INSCRIPTIONS

Cave 2 is actually a small grotto which, due to the overhang above, is capable of providing one person with a very cramped place to shelter from the elements. The inscriptions here are particularly interesting, for several reasons. On the west wall of the grotto is a group of drawings (most fitting in an area roughly 11x8 cm.), seemingly of the monastery complex which would have been visible below the caves. [23] One drawing appears to be a plan of the main church building with what look like several outbuildings, some of which consist of a wall with an X scratched inside (one of these is on the roof of the cave). [24] Another drawing, below the plan, appears to be a frontal view of the church, complete with a tower topped by a cross. Also on the west wall of the grotto, scratched rather crudely in the rock, are two inscriptions, one above the other [figs. 3 and 4] [25]. The upper one (2x3.5 cm.) might be the name יִרְבֶּק, יְרֶבֶק, יְרֶבֶק, יָרֹב (אָרֵב), יָרֹב, Bar Yuvannan, but several characters are missing, so this reading is very tentative. [26] The lower one is written inside a box (3.5x2.5 cm.) and oriented vertically; it appears to read מָרְגַּעס [sic] מַשְׁמָט מַשְׁמָט (2) מַשְׁמַט מַשְׁמַט (1) (…) מָרְגַּעס [sic] מַשְׁמַט (3) (1) Rafqy, the son of the priest. [27] I recovered (revived, was saved) in the year 1064 [SE = 752/53 CE] [28] (3) The qalītā (is) the crown of ______.

Laure 2010, № 153, with reference to Sims-Williams 1992, pp. 56-57. On the Turkic word, see Clauson 1972, pp. 244-245; for its use as a name, see Râsenyi & Baski 2007, p. 80.

Mangu, spelled by the speakers, is a very popular Turkic name in the gravestone corpus, occurring 18 times (Chabot 1906, p. 291; Klein 2000, № 17). On the Turkic word, see Clauson 1972, p. 350; for its use as a name, see Râseenyi & Baske 2007, pp. 540-541.

The name מָרְגַּעס occurs four times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 291). Interestingly, it is also encountered in the name of Marguz (Marquis) Sariq Khan (d. c. 1140), ruler of the Kerait, a Mongol-Turkic tribal confederation in Mongolia which, according to Eastern Christian accounts had adopted Christianity in the early 11th century. On Marguz, see Togan 1998, pp. 66-68; on the Kerait conversion to Christianity, see Hunter 1989/1991. See also the footnote below on his son, who bore the name Qarqyas.

Alternatively and less likely, מַשְׁמַט, Moše.

As in the Eastern Orthodox Church, priests in the Church of the East are permitted to marry and have children. As the Semirechev gravestones corpus, the formula “X son of Y” in the gravestone inscription usually refers to the word מֵת, without the following particle א, “of”. In both corpora, this seems to indicate an imperfect knowledge of Syriac grammar.
The first word on line 1 is unclear, but seems to be ٌماٌ (or possibly ماهماٌ), which fits the suggested name better, representing the Arabic name ملَك, Raif, “friend, companion, kind.” 61 The name of the father is similarly unclear; the most likely option is simply the title ملَك “priest”; less likely is the name ملَك, Malek. 62 The first word on line 2 is again very unclear, consisting of scribble-like writing, similar to that on a ceramic pot with a cross unearthed in Guss, near Urgut, in the mid-20th c. (Inv. № A 610–1 in the Samarkand Museum), which seems to be an attempt to imitate Syriac writing by someone who did not know the language or the script, resulting in palaeographic gibberish; the proposed مامام, “I recovered,” seems most logical. 63

The next word is open to multiple interpretations, but given the final group of letters on line 2, مامام, which seems to represent the date 1064, the second word must be مامام, a misspelling of مامام, “in the year.” The first word on line 3 seems to be مامام, perhaps an orthographic error for مامام, “anthem sung at Nocturns.” The words مامام, “the crown of” are followed by an illegible word or words. The crown is associated with various experiences and rituals in Syriac Christianity, including martyrdom, the wedding ceremony and the monastic practice of tonsuring. Thus the meaning is still somewhat unclear; was the writer giving the date when he experienced some sort of physical or spiritual renewal and then equated the مامام anthem with the crown that features so prominently in Syriac spirituality?

References to the self as a “sinner” (prominent not only in the caves, but throughout the whole Urgut corpus) are extremely common in the Syriac tradition, especially amongst monastics and scribes. Two more Central Asian examples of this can be found in the Christian texts from Turfan. On the blank side of SyrHT 287, a fragment from a liturgical (Hudra) manuscript found at Turfan, someone (presumably a monk from the monastery where these texts were found) has written the same sentence in both Syriac and Syriac transliterated into Uyghur script. By combining the legible portions of the two sentences – مامام and مامام – the original sentence can be reconstructed: “Mamam, the sinner; pray for me.” 64 A second example can be found on U 1545, a small

fragment containing a marginal note which proclaims مامام, “Mamam the sinner – I wrote the word.” 65

Cave 3, the highest, is inaccessible without climbing ropes for all but the most seasoned rock-climbers. Fortunately it contains only one complete inscription, one of the clearest in the whole corpus. [32] Written vertically, it consists of a cross and the name مامام, ‘Abdišo [fig. 6]. Elsewhere in the cave is evidence of someone having practiced scratching in the first two letters of that same name (مامام). Considering the difficulty in getting to this cave, the inscription is strong testimony to the dedication of the person who left it.

UPPER CLIFF INSCRIPTIONS

The upper cliff contains three sets of inscriptions. The first set is found on a section of red rock (similar to the rock making up most of the lower cliff), the second set in a small grotto where the rock is black and the third set written in black ink on red rock. The first set, covering an area of roughly 20 x 14 cm., includes writing in a relatively large hand that was perhaps inscribed initially, overlain with several lines in much smaller writing, roughly scratched into the rock, both horizontally and vertically. [33] The writing in the large hand (2-3 cm. high), relatively neat but incomplete, seems to be مامام, “The name of Marqu[s] of the herd.” 66 What is meant in this context by the last word is unclear, unless it is a nickname that the writer was well-known by. Alternately, and perhaps more logically, the final word could be read as مامام, possibly indicating where the writer was from (although one would usually expect the Syriac gentilic ending or the word مامام, “from” to express this concept). If مامام is the correct reading, it could represent the beginning of the following toponyms: Râman, a district near Bukhara, or Râman, a village near Bukhara, which would give us “In the name of Marqu[s] of Râman (Râmand).” 67

[34] One of the inscriptions in smaller hands in this set is written in Uyghur script in black ink, consisting of just one word: مامام, “hero, cora- 61 Hunter & Dickens 2014, Appendix XV, entry 31 for U 1545.
62 The name مامام occurs twice on the Xi’an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and three times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 291). This name would be pronounced ‘Abdiš / Abdišo by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions.
63 This collective noun should be marked with the seyâmê double dots, but such omissions are not uncommon in informal inscriptions such as these, especially if those who left them had minimal facility in writing Syriac.
64 Hunter & Dickens 2014, entry 281 for SyrHT 287.
This inscription was initially identified by Nicholas Sims-Williams, as noted on the website of the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/EurAsia/inhalt/English/prjekt_2.htm). The name Alp does not occur in the gravestone corpus. On the Turkic word, see Clauson 1972, p. 127; for its use as a name, see Rasonyi & Baski 2007, pp. 53-55.

Other Uyghur qahans with the name include: AyTəŋrədī Ulūq Bůilməsh Alp Qutlug Ulūq Bilgə Qahən (795-808), Kūn Təŋrədī Ulūq Bůilməsh Alp Kūlůq Bilgə Qahən (821-824), AyTəŋrədī Qut Bůilməsh Alp Bilgə Qahən (824-832) and AyTəŋrədī Qut Bůilməsh Alp Kūlůq Bilgə Qahən (832-839).

Sims-Williams, 1992, p. 38.

On the Turkic words, see Clauson 1972, pp. 388-389, 83-83; for their use in names, see Rasonyi & Baski 2007, pp. 164, 815. Note that there is sometimes confusion between /s/ and /z/ in writing some Turkic languages.

The name ʃaʃə does not occur in the gravestone corpus, but it does occur once on the on the Xi’an Stela (Hunter 2010, p. 362). This name would be pronounced ʃəo by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions. ʃaʃa (or its orthographic variant ʃaʃə), meaning “Nativity,” occurs five times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 290).
[52] 
[53] 
[54] 
[55] 
[56] 

Notes on two of the names found in the second set of inscriptions are in order. Baršabbā recalls the legendary founder of Christianity in Merv, mentioned in several Syriac texts from Turfan; the presence of this name in the gravestone inscriptions and at Urgut is not surprising. AbūZNRY is the first of several occurrences in the corpus of names with the Arabic kunya Abū (literally "father of"), which can be used to indicate either literal fatherhood or possession of a certain quality. In this instance, it is unclear exactly what name or word ZNRY represents, so it is difficult to verify whether the kunya is used in a literal or metaphorical sense. This is important in determining whether those who left inscriptions with a kunya were members of a monastic community or pilgrims from elsewhere. If the former, the literal sense is ruled out, but the metaphorical sense is entirely likely; if the latter, either sense is possible. Indeed, a number of important Syriac clerics who were celibate were known by various kunyas,

Since the sounds represented by the Syriac letters  and ＼ are not distinguished in Iranian languages, such an orthographic error would not be unusual for a Persian or even Sogdian speaker.

Alternatively, this may represent the cognate Arabic word  fašān (a loan-word into Persian).

The name  occurs twice on the Xi'an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and six times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 287).

Admittedly, the verb should precede the name here; since it is written below the name, it was perhaps an afterthought. The name  occurs four times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 288, where it is erroneously listed as  ; Klein 2000, No. 27).

On whom, see Simms-Williams 1988 [1989]; Brock 1995. The Syriac and Sogdian texts of his hagiography can be found in Müller & Lentz, 1934, pp. 559-564.

Hunter & Dickens 2014, entry 45 for SyrHT 45 & 46; entry 389 on MIK III 45; Appendix XV, entry 9 for n.64.

An alternate reading of  Abū ZKRY is unlikely, if the notion "father of Zachariah" was intended, it would be spelled  .

As noted above, not all clerics are required to be celibate in the Church of the East (or the Syriac Orthodox Church, for that matter); apart from monastics, celibacy is only required of bishops, metropolitans and patriarchs.

78 A member of the translation movement in Baghdad (d. 940) who initially studied and taught in the Monastery of Mar Mari (Church of the East); see "Mattā b. Yūnus" in EF.

79 A famous Syriac polymath and writer (d. 1286) who, as mapthrian of the Syriac Orthodox Church, was second in rank to the patriarch of that Church; see "Ibn al-'In" in EF.

80 A physician, philosopher, theologian and secretary to the Catholicos-patriarch of the Church of the East (d. 1043) who was also a life-long monk; see "Ibn al-Ṭayyib" in EF.

81 Catholicos-patriarch of the Church of the East (1175-90).

82 Melkite Bishop of Harrān (d. ca. 820) and a famous Christian apostate who wrote in Syriac, Greek and Arabic; see "Abū Kurra" in EF. My thanks to Thomas Carlson (personal correspondence, July 26, 2014) for this list, gleaned from the Syriaca.org list of Syriac authors (not publicly available at the time of writing).

83 The transliteration from Arabic is not strictly correct; one would expect  to represent Ar. زنار.

84 The inscription in question clearly does not include the Syriac word  .

85 Syriac text from http://dukhonara.com/peshita/. References to both literal and symbolic uses of the zimmār/znmar by monastics and clerics can be found in the Chronicle of Seert (Scher 1919, p. 630), the Book of the Fathers (Parsit 1890, p. 35) and 'Abdisho' Bar Brikha's Book of the Pearl (Badger 1852, p. 418). I am indebted to Salam Rassi (personal correspondence, July 29, 2014) for this information and these references.
LOWER CLIFF INScriptions (PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED)

There are dozens of inscriptions on the lower cliff face, along with several large crosses carved into the rock [fig. 9]. Like the cave inscriptions, most are very small, often no more than 4-5 cm. long. Many are so badly damaged by the elements that they are virtually illegible, but some can be made out. The following, most consisting of names, are presented in the order they appeared in a 1996 article on Urgut by Alexei Savchenko.

[58] Written to the left of a cross is the name Abū Nazar Bar Mîwîkî. In light of the discussion above regarding the metaphorical use of the Arabic kunya Abū to indicate the possession of a quality, Nazar in this instance may represent either the Syriac noun ܕܵܪܨܬ, “to abstain” or the Arabic noun نذر, “vow,” pronounced in New Persian as nazîr, either of which would be appropriate kunyas for a monk to use. Alternatively, it may represent the Persian name Nazar (from the aforementioned Arabic نذر), in which case it may be an indication of literal fatherhood (implying someone who has not taken monastic vows) [fig. 10].

[59] Two lines that appear to be in the same hand and to belong together contain the well-known Syriac name Quriaqos, Quriaqos and then below it what seems to be the phrase “Bēc has discerned.” In the absence of an intelligible Syriac word or name, the second word seems best interpreted as the Sogdian name Bēc, from the root בַּכֶּ ל (BAK) “to save,” as noted above, the Syriac letter .Skin represents the sound /s/ in Iranian languages. It is unclear what connection there is between this individual and Quriaqos. [60] Another instance of the name Yuhannan, seemingly misspelled as يُحَنّان, is followed by a second illegible word. [61] Written to the left of a cross is بَسَتِيَعَر, “Bāstīyār, son of Yuhannan,” where يُحَنّان is an alternative spelling to يُحَنّان, as it is rendered elsewhere in the corpus, and represents the Middle and New Persian name بژطوری, Bāstīyār, “lucky, fortunate,” a popular name in Central Asia to this day [fig. 11].

Amongst the inscriptions published by Savchenko in 1996, there are several longer ones, [62] the first of which contains at least nine lines (remnants of other inscriptions, some written vertically, can also be observed nearby) [fig. 12]:

(1) يُحَنّان (2) يُحَنّان (3) يُحَنّان (4) يُحَنّان (5) يُحَنّان (6) يُحَنّان (7) يُحَنّان (8) يُحَنّان

(1) May the sinner Yuhannan be remembered. (2) In the name of Jesus, (3) the joy (4) of peace. (May the sinner (6) Mîh-dîk be remembered. (7) Abū Nazar (8) Giwargis (9) Bar Yuhannan.

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 9, read by Savchenko only as يُحَنّان. This was not located and photographed in 2009, so is possibly amongst the inscriptions which have been removed, as noted above.

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 10, read there as يُحَنّان. Like the previous inscription, this too was not located and photographed in 2009.

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 11, read there as يُحَنّان. See Justi 1895, pp. 61-62. The name Bāstīyār does not occur in the gravestone corpus. Alternatively, this could represent an ethnonym, reflecte in the modern-day Iranian province of Chahār-Mahč-i Bakhšiyārī and the Bakhšiyārī dialect of Lūr spoken in southwestern Iran (see Digard 1988; Digard 2015) However, two factors argue against this: 1) the absence of the Iranian gentilic ending - in the occurrences of Bāstīyār in this corpus and 2) the great distance between Urgut and the Bakhšiyārī homeland in Iran. It seems more likely that this is a personal name or perhaps a nickname, not an ethnonym.

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 12, read there as يُحَنّان. An alternate reading is يُحَنّان, Abū Nūr, with the second word representing Arabic نور, “light.”

Other than the initial يُحَنّان, each of the letters in this word is open to multiple interpretations.
The name Nauruz\(^{117}\) represents New Persian, “New Day,” referring to the Persian New Year celebrated on the spring equinox; it is still used as a male name in Iran and Central Asia.\(^{118}\) The word written after the title “interpreter” is unclear, but is presumably the name of the individual with this ecclesiastical position to whom Nauruz was related.\(^{119}\) The subject of the verb “be enlarged” is not clear, but it seems to be connected with the descendants of this unknown biblical interpreter whom the writer claims as his. Finally, the reference to making the sign of the “living cross” calls to mind not only the many crosses inscribed on the red rock cliffs of Urgut, but also the words inscribed in the four arms of the cross on two gravestones from Semirechye:  "The sign of life, Jesus our Saviour."\(^{120}\) It may also be related to a verso mark, found on many Syriac and Sogdian manuscripts fragments from Turfan, which seems to incorporate the word  "living, alive, life-giving" into a stylized cross, a mark which seemingly has only been observed in a Central Asian context.\(^{121}\)

A collection of inscriptions written where the surface layer of the rock has flaked off in several places includes the following [64] in a larger hand, written underneath a cross:  "Yuhanna the sinner obtained mercy. He discerned, he sought, he sang, he kept vigil/Stayed the night.”\(^{122}\) [65] Below this (seemingly in the same hand) is written  "I (or you?) have decided.” [66] Written over top of the latter and below it, in one or more small hands, can be read  "Yuhanna,” to/by Yuhanna; [67] possibly remnants of the name  Quriaqus; and [68] another instance of the name  Barsabba.\(^{123}\)

To the far right, also in smaller hands, are portions of several names and other words which are obscure by parts of the rock which have flaked

\(^{117}\) Savchenko 1996, Fig. 13, read there as  AllowAnonymous. Tardieu 1999 reads this inscription as  whereas Robertson Smith has  “Il Šuruq, from Urtuq, the exegite, in Ab of year 1206,” but this reading can no longer be upheld.

\(^{118}\) Savchenko 1996, p. 331 (see p. 79 of the Syriac text in the same volume); see also Gignoux et al. 2009, 66. 269. The name Māḥ-dāḵ does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

\(^{119}\) The name Nauruz (or Nauruz) occurs once on the Xi’an Stele (not included in Hunter, 2010) and 28 times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 288).

\(^{120}\) Syriac: Marōth 1919; Sogdian: Hansen 1941; Gershevitch 1946; Turkish: Bang 1926.

\(^{121}\) Several examples can be found in the Semirechye gravestone corpus (Chwolson 1890, pp. 139-140).

\(^{122}\) As noted elsewhere in this article, the possessive particle is omitted in this genitive construction.

\(^{123}\) This first instance of the word  is written above the rest of the inscription and seems to be in a separate, although similar, hand. Perhaps it was scratched initially as practice before commencing the rest of the text.
off, including [69] سَمِيلَاتٍ, “the sinner X...”\(^{124}\); [70] كَلِمَةٌ, Eliya Bar (the rest of the name is illegible); [71] لَدَأٍ, “above” or the beginning of لَدَآلٍ, “forever”; and [72] سَمِيلَاتٍ \(\mu\) سُمِيلَاتٍ, the likely beginning of the name سُمِيلَاتٍ Giwargis. Other inscriptions located just above and below these, one of which was published in Savchenko’s 1996 article, are addressed below.\(^{125}\) [73] Another inscription published in the same article contains the name سَمِيلَاتٍ, Sargis\(^{126}\) written twice, one above the other and each preceded by what appears to be a crude triangle; above this are the remnants of an otherwise illegible inscription ending in \(\mu\) [fig. 14].

Elsewhere, amidst a number of vertically-written inscriptions in various states of legibility and to the left of a cross, we find [74] another instance of the Middle and New Persian name سُمِيلَاتٍ, سُمِيلَاتٍ, Baktiyar and, [75] immediately to its left, in a smaller hand, is the word سُمٌ, “he comforted” or سُمٌ, “he built” (perhaps originally part of a longer phrase). [76] Below this can be seen either سُمٌ (as noted above, this may represent the Sogdian name وَر, meaning “brown”) or سُمٌ, representing the Middle Persian name بُدَ, probably meaning “perception, consciousness”; this was the name of the translator of the Old Syriac version of Kahlil and Dimnah, according to ‘Abdisho bar Berikhah’s Catalogue of Syriac Writers (ca. 1318).\(^{177}\) [77] Underneath is another occurrence of the word سُمٌ, سُمٌ, “Hosanna!” (or the name وَسَاتُاِن). [78] Below this, barely visible, are traces of characters in which one is tempted to see another instance of the name سُمِيلَاتٍ, Quiriuicus.\(^{128}\)

The letter \(\mu\) indicates that the following illegible name must be of Iranian origin (Persian or possibly Sogdian). Possible Persian names include Khosrau خسرو (although this is usually rendered as خسرو سُمِيلَاتٍ in Syriac), Khorshid خورشید or a compound name beginning with خُدَو (خُدَو), “Lord,” such as خُدَو‌سادات خُدَو‌سادات, “given by the Lord”; cf. those monks and bishops in the Church of the East during the 5th-7th centuries whose names contained the Middle Persian onomastic element خَوُدَبَ، “lord, ruler, master,” spelled with an initial ح in the sources that have come down to us (Gignoux et al. 2009, № 434-437).

With reference to Savchenko 1996, Fig. 18.

Savchenko, 1996, Fig. 15, also read there as خَوُدَبَ, the name occurs five times on the Xi’an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and 15 times in the Semirechye gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 292; Kokovtsov 1904-1905 [1906], № 6) and is also found on one of the Ongut Turkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Halbertsma 2015, № 29). Sergius was a popular saint in Central Asia, as discussed in Hunter, 1989; 1991, pp. 154-155; one of his namesakes rose to prominence under Kublai Khan according to Marco Polo (Latham 1958, pp. 210-211; see also Pelliot 1959, pp. 774-776; Ligeti 1972).

Assemani 1725, p. 219; see also Gignoux et al. 2009, № 123; Justi 1895, p. 71. For a discussion of the name, see de Blos 1990, pp. 2-3. بُدَ is given the ecclesiastical title “Patriarch” (Syr. بَلاذَرٍ, from Gr. Πατριάρχης), referring to “a visiting priest acting as the bishop’s representative in visiting villages and monasteries” (Payne Smith 1903, p. 460).

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 16, read there as خَوُدَبَ.\(^{129}\)

Yet another group of inscriptions (most of which are only partially legible), includes [79] the name سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی، سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی، Iso Bar Hananišo\(^{129}\) (misspelled as سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی)، with crosses preceding and following سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی on the first line and preceding on the second line; [80] below is what appears to be another cross incorporating the abbreviated word سُمِيلَاتٍ سُمِيلَاتٍ (سُمِيلَاتٍ سُمِيلَاتٍ), “grace” along the horizontal axis.\(^{130}\)

Above the inscription mentioned earlier which begins “Yuhannan the sinner obtained mercy,” several lines are scratched—as noted above, the surface layer has flaked off in numerous places, making it difficult to interpret many of the inscriptions—including the following, reading from top to bottom, which seem to be written in the same hand and may be intended to be read together:\(^{131}\)

[81] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی, “the sinner”;
[82] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی, “he answered”;
[83] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی, perhaps a misspelling of the name سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی, Yeho;
[84] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی سُمِيلَاتٍ, “the sinner Quiriuicus kept vigil/stayed the night” (underneath a cross);
[85] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی سُمِيلَاتٍ, “Yuhannan with us”;
[86] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی سُمِيلَاتٍ سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی سُمِيلَاتٍ سُمِيلَاتٍ, DW_G'RW_G'S, perhaps a Middle or New Persian word containing the agent noun suffix غَر, in which case it may indicate the profession of Yuhannan or one of the others listed above it—an obvious possibility is durgur, “carpenter”;
[87] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی، “the sinner Yuhannan”;
[88] تُبَغَلَ, BRULF, which seems to be a name of the type بَلَ, Bar, “son of,” with BRUL possibly representing the Arabic loan-word into Persian بلَ, “successor,” in which case it may be a Syriac calque of Persian خلف, “son worthy of his father, good son”;
[89] سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی, “they departed” or سُمَيْه‌یه‌ی, “they gained strength, prevailed.”

Although not published in Savchenko’s 1996 article, it is appropriate here to mention another group of inscriptions located below those just described, which include the following: \(^{129}\)

The name سُمِيلَاتٍ occurs ten times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 290; Klein 2000, № 1).

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 17, read there as سُمِيلَاتٍ بُدَ. The form بُدَ is likely an abbreviation for بُدَ, the emphatic state of this word. Again, this inscription was not located and photographed in 2009.

Savchenko 1996, Fig. 18, read by Savchenko only as سُمِيلَاتٍ بُدَ. The name سُمِيلَاتٍ does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

This would be the Middle Persian word (MacKenzie 1971, p. 28); New Persian has بُدَ, durtidgar.

The letter \(\mu\) indicates that the language cannot be Syriac; since Sogdian does not have the sound ب, it is most likely Persian. A less likely reading is سُمِيلَاتٍ بُدَ, 3RVF.
with each other, if any. However, the following can be made out (from top to bottom):

[97] A simple cross to the right of two figures, each resembling the Chinese character 山, “mountain,” one of which is over a third such figure;[140]

[98] may he/stay,” immediately to the left of what looks like 我们, “we see/perceive” (due to the layered nature of inscriptions in this section, it is unclear if these are all part of one inscription or not);

[99] Another instance of 我们, “may he/stay,” (unless it should be read with several characters to the right as the name ‘Abdīs, a little above and to the left of ‘Abdīs, “Yuhannan the priest, vigl”;

[100] To the right, گرب، “the sinner Yuhannan,” beneath which can be seen میکه and then میکه، although the meaning of these two words is unclear;

[101] To the left of this, هر, “he cried out”;

[102] Lower down, the words گرب ( ... هر, “may... Hagar grow cool!”) are visible, with گرب ( ... هر perhaps referring to the house of Hagar, a reference to the Arabs.

The occurrence twice of ‘Abdīs, “may he/stay,” evokes images of a pilgrim, penitent or celibate monastic praying for deliverance from some form of temptation or demonic presence, a common theme in writings concerned with Christian asceticism. A smaller and more distinct group of inscriptions (along with a simple cross and modern graffiti in the form of the Cyrillic initials A. A. LL) contains the following names and words [fig. 15]:

[103] هر، “my prayer,” below which appears to be another attempt at writing the same word, with the first letter obscured by encrustations on the rock: هر;

This is not to suggest that these are in fact Chinese characters. Although there were strong historical ties between the Sogdians and the Chinese, there was rarely more than a nominal allegiance in Sogdiana to the Chinese emperor. Once it became obvious that he was unable or unwilling to intervene in the Arab conquest of Sogdiana, Chinese influence to the west of the Tien Shan diminished even more, vanishing altogether in the wake of the Arab victory at the Battle of Talas (751). However, since this is one of the easier Chinese characters to write, it is possible that someone who had travelled to Chinese Turkestan (or even a member of the Mongol invasion force in 1220) could have left these marks. Alternatively, the resemblance to the Chinese character may be purely coincidental.

Both words call to mind Syr. گرب, “family, race, nation, order, sort, kind, gender.”

If this reading and interpretation are correct, the inscription seems to be an expression of dissatisfaction with Arab (or more generally Muslim) rule. Alternately, the second word could be read as گرب or گرب، perhaps representing a name?

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This is likely a compound name ending in -ISO, with the meaning “the _______ of Jesus.” Possibilities include گرب, ‘Abdīs, گرب, ‘Abdīs, گرب, Hanīs, and گرب, Maleksīs, all found elsewhere in the corpus.

This would be odd to have an Arabic non-onomastic element in these inscriptions, where such words are by and large Syriac, with the exception of a few Persian examples.

The name ‘Abdīs does not occur in the Semirechye gravestone corpus, but there is one occurrence of it on the Žögöt Türkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Hallbertsma 2015, № 8).

The name گرب does not occur in the grave.stone corpus.

Otherwise, these previously unpublished lower cliff inscriptions are not presented in any particular order.
The sinner Yuhannan (or Yuhannan sinned) . . . Bar BLN...BLT... . . . with/ by the cross/prayer of (victory?) . . . hour."

Perhaps BLN can be reconstructed as Syriac (κίρος ἡμέρας), “keeper of the bath” or alternatively, a Persian name involving the element bāl, “high”.

The last word in this inscription calls to mind the words of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, certainly a relevant verse for those who would keep vigil overnight: "οὐχὶ λέγεται ἡμέρα καὶ νύχτα, κακοὶ λατρεύουσιν." "Are you sleeping? Could you not keep awake for one hour?" (Mark 14:37).

Two words written to the left of the preceding inscription which do not align with that text seem to comprise a separate statement: [112] "Δῆμος ἤματος," "Sher kept vigil/stayed the night"; if the reading is correct, the name Sher represents New Persian 𐭤𐭗𐭩, "lion," still a popular name in countries historically influenced by Persian culture and language, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. Alternatively, this could be another occurrence of "he sang, he kept vigil/stayed the night," as in inscription [64].

[113] Underneath inscription [111] are a further two lines in a smaller hand which appear to read 𐭢𐭪𐭩 𐭫𐭩𐭦, "in glory," followed by Sibha, son of. Underneath these are several unintelligible words composed of angular characters scratched into the rock which bear a certain resemblance to the aforementioned ceramic pot with a cross unearthed near Urgut. Then, at the bottom of the rock, amidst portions of the outer layer which have flaked off, one can make out the following words: [114] 𐭫𐭩𐭪, "upon/about me"; [115] 𐭪𐭥𐭩, "Bo... the sinner," below which an illegible word occurs, possibly another instance of Sibha.

Another group of inscriptions includes the following names and phrases (from top to bottom) [Fig. 16]:

[116] BWN; the form of the final ω suggests a name of Greek or Latin origin, but this is not a known Syriac, Persian, Sogdian or Turkic name;[147]

[117] An illegible word which seems to read 𐭩𐭬, below which are probably the remnants of the name 𐭠𐭪𐭩, Bo;

These participial forms are identical for past and present participles. The initial combination of letters 𐭠𐭩rules out the possibility that this is a Syriac word and hence the pronunciation of 师事务 as /t/. The initial syllable CYS- may be compared with CYS- in the name Cašmag (reconstructed from cimk) recorded in Gignoux 1986, № 266.

Reading of this word very uncertain.

143 These participial forms are identical for past and present participles.

144 The initial combination of letters 嚢rules out the possibility that this is a Syriac word and hence the pronunciation of 师事务 as /t/. The initial syllable CYS- may be compared with CYS- in the name Cašmag (reconstructed from cimk) recorded in Gignoux 1986, № 266.

145 Reading of this word very uncertain.


147 See Gignoux et al. 2009, № 403-406; Justi, 1895, pp. 294-298. The name Sher does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

148 The name 𐭠𐭩 occurs ten times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 293; Kokovtsov 1907, № 5). As noted elsewhere, ša, ša, “his son,” often represents “son of” in both the Semirechye gravestones and the Urgut inscriptions.

149 Compare 𐭦𐭢𐭩 𐭪𐭩, “Banus, the Uygur priest”—likely a misreading of the name 𐭦𐭪𐭩, “Bacchus”—found on one of the Semirechye gravestones (Chwolson 1897, № 97).
the sinner Bar Yuhannan," below which are traces of various Syriac characters.

The following are individual inscriptions which are not part of larger groupings:

[119] "Henanišo... calling, vocation," followed by a very poorly written word (κολήμον, κολήμον, κολήμον)\(^{150}\);

[120] "the sinner," followed by an illegible name that might be Yuhannan, and on the line below μάκατος

Bar...iel; typical Syriac names ending in μάκατος include Barakhan, Daniel or Michael.\(^{151}\)

[121] "he led into sin;" this makes little sense without more context, unless it refers to the devil\(^{152}\) [fig. 17];

[122] "to/by Yuhannan;" with one or two traces of what may be σαλία, "the sinner" above this name and others written on the same piece of rock are written on low baselines;

[123] "have pity on us," followed by what appears to be another occurrence of σαλία, "the sinner;"\(^{153}\) [124] underneath is written ἄναμνήστημεν, representing the Turkic name Qui, "soul, spirit, vitality, life, fortune, chance, luck, mercy, success;"\(^{154}\) [125] to the right is another instance of σαλία, Yuhannan [fig. 18];

[126] "the sinner WQNY/WKNY, adjacent to a Malatse-style cross; this might possibly be a variant spelling of the Syriac name Awgen,\(^{155}\) but it is not attested elsewhere (and indeed is not necessary in Syriac script)\(^{156}\);

\(^{150}\) A line above the name is all but illegible.

Given other occurrences of names in the Urgut corpus ending in μακατος (e.g. ἄραθος, ἄραθος, Raphael; ἄραθος, Michael?), it is possible that these names were not spelled with the orthographically-correct ending that included an aleph (i.e. ἄραθος).

Alternatively, it could be an incorrectly spelled attempt at ἄραθος, "I will boast" or the standard ἄραθος, "the sinner," with ττ never moving to the beginning of the word.

If this word indeed follows on from "have mercy on us," one would expect the plural form ἄραθος, "the sinners," but (as indicated elsewhere) the plural seyane marker is rarely found in the Urgut inscriptions, another indication that those leaving the inscriptions were not well versed in Syriac grammar.

On the Turkic word, see Clauson 1972, p. 594; for its use as a name, see Råsomy & Baski 2007, pp. 505-506.

On Mar Awgen, the traditional founder of monasticism in Mesopotamia, see Brock et al. 2011, p. 48. The name ἄραθος does not occur in the Semirecords or Semirecord Corpus, but there is one occurrence of it on the Urgut Turkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Halbertsma 2015, N° 16).

The spelling of the names ἄραθος, ἄραθος, Sargis and ἄραθος, Giwargis in Syriac script are ἀραθος and ἀραθος respectively (Lurje 2010, N° 1097 and N° 1524) is irrelephant, since Syriac script lacks a letter for the sound /g/, whereas Syriac script does not.

The name ἄραθος occurs twice on the Xi'an Stele (not included in Hunter 2010), but does not occur in the gravestone corpus. This name would be pronounced Gabriel/Gabriel by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions.

The name ἄραθος does not occur in the gravestone corpus, but it occurs in the Syriac History of John the Short, which mentions a church built in the name of the three Hebrew youths cast into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar: ἄραθος ἀραθος ἀραθος "Hanani, Azariah and Misael" (Nau 1913, pp. 295 [Syriac], 305-336 [French]).

The name, spelled ἄραθος, occurs once on the Xi'an Stele (not included in Hunter 2010) and once in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 291).
Sogdian is written in Syriac script (although this is not expected with Syriac proper names);

[136] Y(s) ... "priest of..." below which  is repeated, followed by an illegible word and underneath which are the remnants of yet another illegible word ending in  , this inscription appears to involve confusion between the long and short forms for "priest" (qalīṣ and qalī); with  possibly beginning an abbreviated form of  "of the church" (there is only room for one character in the lacuna caused by the surface layer of the rock flaking off);

[137] What appears to be  "the priest," below which is written  (which can be variously translated as "suffering, sickness, sorrow, passion, desire") and what appears to be the remnants of  "the sinner," all written in the same hand;

[138]  "Moše who is in grace," written in a large script that is up to 8 cm tall in places; this is one of the more carefully written inscriptions in the corpus, complete with an artistic flourish which has transformed the letter into a diamond shape[10] [fig. 20] (could this elegant inscription possibly refer to the prophet Moses, rather than the person who inscribed it?);

[139] Another instance of what seems to be the name  , Moše, although very poorly formed apart from the initial  and final  ;

[140]  "blessing," possibly preceded by  "in/with you," and followed by an illegible word;

[141]  "Bāmar the sinner"[16]; this Middle Persian name is also encountered in the Syriac History of Alexander the Great, where it refers to a noble present at the meal where Darius hosted Alexander[20];

[142] Above (and distinctly separate from) the group of inscriptions described above that begins "May the sinner Yuhannan be remembered..." is yet another clear instance of the name  , Yuhannan, above which may be the faint traces of the word  "the sinner" and [143] below which is one or possibly two occurrences of the name  , Elyia;

[144]  "in/with Jesus," below which are several words (or the beginning of words) starting with either  or  , one of which appears to be a form of the verb  "to seek" (possibly  , "I sought" or  "we sought");

[145]  ... Abū..., presumably the beginning of another name with an Arabic kunya, as discussed above;

LOWER CLIFF INSCRIPTIONS NOT LOCATED IN 2009

The following inscriptions were photographed in 1995, but were not located and photographed in 2009. Although it is possible that they were just missed, it is equally likely that they were previously located on parts of the cliff which have since been removed, as noted above.

[146]  (the rest of this word is obscured), perhaps the beginning of the name  or  , Baxiyār; as noted above,[16] followed on the next line by another word beginning with  , possibly  , "he kept vigil/stayed the night"[16] and the traces of several other Syriac characters;

[147] Malekišo, which is either a name[16] or the words "King Jesus," preceded by what looks like the word  , "sin"; although the image is not clear, it seems that  , "the sinner" is written below;

[148] Under a square with an X in it (as seen already in Cave 2), are traces of several words, including the ending  or possibly  (the beginning of this word seems to be covered by mineral deposits) and what appears to be  , XLF, calling to mind the name  , BRXLF, encountered above and possibly representing the Arabic loan-into Persian  . "successor," along with traces of other words in smaller hands below;

[149]  , "the sinner Mansūr Bar Išo"; although the hand is different, one wonders if this is the same person as "the sinner Mansūr" mentioned in the second set of inscriptions on the upper cliff;

[150] Possibly the remnants of the name  , Henanišo (with only the initial and final letters clearly visible);

[151] An illegible word (the image is blurry here) written above what appears to be  ,  or  ,  ;[152] below this are traces of another word or name, possibly  , Awgen;

Due to the very clear second letter  , it is unlikely to be  , the Syriac rendering of Bacchus (the Christian saint supposedly martyred with Sergius in the early 4th century during the final wave of persecution before Galerius’ Edict of Tolerations in 311). The spelling  , RXWS, is a theoretical possibility if a Sogdian speaker were writing this name, but there are no extant examples of this orthography in Sogdian Christian texts; see Lurje 2010, № 293 & 885.

Again, one would expect the verb to precede the name, unless the former was added as an afterthought.

The name occurs once, spelled  , in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 291).

Reading of this word uncertain.

The only Syriac letter which the first character could possibly be is  ; no dot is visible on the fourth character, hence the two possible readings of  or  .

100 As noted above, the form  is likely an abbreviation for  .
101 The name Bāmar does not occur in the gravestone corpus.
102 Budge 1889, pp. 73, 279 (see p. 130 of the Syriac text in the same volume); see also Gignoux et al. 2009, № 92.
[153] The letters ـ ﷺـ appear to be the end of a Syriac word, perhaps the name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ Baršabbā or ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ Slībā,\(^{168}\) under which which appears ـ ﷺـ, the end of another word (ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Yuhannan?), followed by an illegible word beginning with ـ ﷺـ.

[154] ـ ﷺـ, “I” on top of a line (possibly remnants of a name), under which which appears a scratched cross and the words ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ “I, the sinner…” (if the illegible word following is a name); below this is ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Buxt, a Middle Persian name meaning “saved.”\(^{169}\) Due to being written on top of each other, various words written to the left of or below these are indecipherable, except for [155] yet another instance of ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Yuhannan;

[156] ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, “vigil” followed by an illegible word;

[157] ـ ﷺـ, followed by some illegible characters, perhaps Syriac ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, “fire,” or the Arabic name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Nur, representing نور, “light,”\(^{170}\) or the beginning of the New Persian name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Nawrāz;

[158] ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Baxtiyār; if this reading is correct, it is another instance of this Middle and New Persian name already noted above; two words written below this are basically illegible;

[159] ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, “vigil” over traces of other words, [160] one of which may be ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, “good” or ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, “troubled, disturbed” (either of which would be appropriate adjectives to use in describing an overnight vigil), [161] another of which may be yet another occurrence of the name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Yuhannan;

[162] ـ ﷺـ, probably the end of the name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, Stephamus;\(^{171}\) other traces of inscriptions nearby are obscured by pitting and flaking of the rock;

[163 and 164] Two instances of ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, “the sinner” without an accompanying name;

[165] Finally, what appear to be two examples of distinctive marks or symbols (functioning as seals or brands in different situations) used during the Mongol era, known in Turki as ـ ﷺـ and in New Persian as ـ ﷺـ.

\(^{168}\) The name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ (or its orthographic variant ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ) occurs eight times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 293; Klein 2000, № 22). This name would be pronounced Slībī/Slībā by native Syriac-speakers; the variant spelling ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ found on two of the Semirechye gravestones (Chwolson 1890, № 38 (223); Chwolson 1897, № 90) suggests that this pronunciation was also used by at least some Central Asian Christians.

\(^{169}\) See Justi 1895, p. 72; Gignoux 1986, № 253-264; Gignoux 2003, № 80-81; Gignoux \textit{et al.} 2009, № 136-139. The name Buxt does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

\(^{170}\) The name ـ ﷺـ occurs once in the gravestone corpus, as part of the compound name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ Nūr Beg Yuhannān (Klein 2000, № 28, where it is incorrectly read as ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ. NWR... YWNYNN).

\(^{171}\) The name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ does not occur in the Semirechye gravestone corpus, but there is one occurrence of it (spelled ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ) on the Öngüt Türkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Halbertsma 2015, № 22).

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\(^{172}\) Dickens & Zieme 2014.

\(^{173}\) Borbone 2008.

\(^{174}\) Savchenko 1996, Fig. 3 (no interpretation provided).

\(^{175}\) The last two letters in the date could be read differently, resulting in the following less likely dates: ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺ~ (1247/8 CE).

The name as currently read cannot be Sogdian (due to the presence of the letter ـ ﷺ, which only occurs in loan-words) and does not appear to be either Persian or Turki.\(^{176}\) However, could the first element be a misspelling of either Persian bādār, “bazaar,” or Sogdian w’crn, “road” (both of which could be onomastic elements)?\(^{177}\) The letters ـ ﷺـ may represent Arabic نور, nūr, “light”; alternatively, this element could be read as ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ, rendering the whole name ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺـ ـ ﷺ~ (1247/8 CE).

My thanks to Pavel Lurje for his feedback on the possible linguistic origins (or lack thereof) for this name (personal correspondence, Aug. 7, 2014).

I am indebted to Franz Grenet for this suggestion.
although the first three letters in the date are clear, the last two open up several interpretations, all falling in the mid-13th century.

[167] The second inscription in the museum, Inv. № A-308-2, is perhaps the best example of inscriptions in languages other than Syriac found at Urgut; it contains a single word, written in Syriac script to the left of a cross, with a fine example of the aforementioned letter š used for representing /x/ in Sogdian and New Persian texts: šąk, baxt (baxš), Persian for “(good) luck, fortune” [Fig. 22]. This inscription, along with the Middle and New Persian names noted above, clearly indicates that Persian (probably New Persian) was spoken by at least some living in or visiting the local Christian community, not surprising given its geographic location.

CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions can we draw from this seemingly random assortment of crosses, names and other words scratched on the cliff and cave walls above Urgut over the course of several centuries? Perhaps the most basic observation is that they are by and large the type of inscriptions we would expect those seeking spiritual retreat to leave behind, but were they primarily clerics, monastics or laity? Certainly, the frequent references to keeping vigil are consistent with monastic practices. However, the only definite ecclesiastical titles that we find in the corpus are four examples of ṣąk, razor; or ṣąk, “priest” (inscriptions [3], [9], [136] and [137], albeit with the possibility of alternate readings) and one of ʿantar, “interpreter” (inscription [63]), although the latter seems to be the ancestor of the individual leaving the inscription. With the possible exceptions of ʿantar, “Nazirite, ascetic” and a reference to ṣąk, “the venerable reverend,” there is a general absence of the titles that monks might use to identify themselves (e.g. ṣąk, “brother”; ṣąk, “monk”) or ṣąk, “solitary”) or titles of respect that would be expected in a monastic community (e.g. ṣąk, “father” or ṣąk, “master”). Rather, it seems that the primary and perhaps the only indication of monastic status left by those who scratched their names on the rocks above Urgut was the self-abasing epithet “ṣąk,” “the sinner,” so prevalent in the Urgut corpus.

At the same time, we should not rule out the possibility that some who left their mark in the corpus were pilgrims from elsewhere in Sogdiana (notably the possible nisbā “Bukhārī”). Ibn Hawqal’s reference to “many Iraqi Christians... who migrated to the place because of its suitability, solitary location and healthiness” has been noted above; the implication is that these Christians from the Mesopotamian heartland of the Church of the East had moved to Urgut expressly to join the monastic community. However, Ibn Hawqal also mentions that “many Christians retreat to it [the monastery],” suggesting that others who were not part of the coenobitic community also availed themselves of this “solitary and healthy” location for religious purposes. Ibn Hawqal does not tell us where these people came from, but it seems most likely that they were “locals” from Sogdiana, perhaps from some of the hotter desert or semi-desert parts of the region.

It is not at all surprising that the most common feature of the inscriptions is the presence of a name; this is certainly understandable if the visitor were a pilgrim. Moreover, it is perfectly natural that the vast majority of names are Syriac. This reflects not only the Christians from Iraq mentioned by Ibn Hawqal, all of whom would presumably have been native Syriac-speakers, but also the practice of Central Asian Christians giving their children Syriac names, as is evident on many gravestones from Semi-rechye where one generation has a New Persian or Turkish name while another generation has a Syriac one; indeed there are clear examples of this in the Urgut corpus, such as āyān, “Bāxyār, son of Yūḥanān.” We must also take into account the common practice of inductees adopting Syriac names upon taking their monastic vows.

178 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 2 (no interpretation provided). This inscription was initially identified by Nicholas Sims-Williams, as noted on the website of The Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/EurAsia/ Inholt_English/Projet_2.htm). Although it may occur as an element in a name, baxš is normally not used as a name in itself; see Justi 1895, pp. 61, 72.

179 The importance of New Persian (in contrast to Middle Persian, which it replaced) in the Central Asian Christian community is highlighted by several Persian fragments written in Syriac script from Turfan, including a bilingual Psalter, pharmaceutical recipes, and a marriage contract (Sims-Williams 2011; Muraviev 2012).

180 On monasticism and asceticism in the Church of the East more generally, see Budge 1893, pp. cxvii-cxviii and Julienne 2008.

To this day, those who dwell on the plains of Central Asia will escape to the mountains for rest and relaxation when they are able to.

181 On multilingual graffiti in Christian pilgrimage sites in Palestine, see Strange 1983.

182 Examples include hālāṭ šābāt, “Shah-malik, son of Giwargis” (Chwolson 1890, № 78); ʿantīr, “Sargis, son of Ay Mang” (Chwolson 1890, № 81); āyān, “Arslan, son of Sargis” (Chwolson 1890, № 9); ʿantīr ʿayn, “Outluq Terim, daughter of Qurqiuas” (Chwolson 1890, № 21). Many more examples of this phenomenon can be found in the gravestone corpus. Another indication that names are not markers of ethnicity in that corpus is the presence of gravestone inscriptions partially or wholly in Turkish for individuals with Syriac names, e.g. that of ʿayn ʿayn, “Sen’on the young boy, son of ʿawma the scholar” (Chwolson 1850, № 11).

183 We have potential evidence of this practice in Central Asia in a fragmentary text from Turfan in Syriac script (SyRHT 161) which reads: ṣàbūšiš and Daniel and John... and ṣàbūšiš and George and Isa[o]... Scholars. And instead of Būga Tōtq... Although not conclusive, it appears to be a list of those taking on the role of “scholar” (šàbūšiš), in the context of which possibly the person formerly known
As we find elsewhere in Central Asian Christian texts, particularly on the gravestones, the names above reflect a mixture of ethnic influences. However, the majority are typical Syriac names, whether commemorating biblical characters (Eliyā, Gabriel, Iyob, Yuhannan, Yawman, Yassēph, Yoel, Yaʿqūb, Išo, Mose, Mikhail, Marqūs, Stephanus), saints and angels (Avegen, Giwargis, Sargis, Qoriaqaus, Raphael and the specifically Central Asian saint Baršabbâ) or attributes (Awašānā, Henanīsā, Yaldā, Melēkīsā, Abdisē, Sīhā). Readers will have noticed the seemingly ubiquitous presence of the Syriac name Yuhannan in the Urgut corpus, occurring more than 25 times, including in patronymic forms. It is also the most common name on the Xī an “Nestorian” Stele found in China and dating to 780/81 CE, occurring 11 times (along with one occurrence of its Greek variant Yohannēs), and the Semirechye gravestone corpus, where it occurs 35 times. Thus, it seems to have been very popular amongst Christians in Central Asia and China (most of whom were speakers of Iranian or Turkic languages). One does wonder, however, if there really were that many members of the community named “John” and whether so many of them struggled with a sense of their own sinfulness, as suggested by the high occurrence of the phrase “the sinner Yuhannan” (at least five times in the corpus)

Although Syriac names are clearly in the majority, the presence of Arabic, Iranian and Turkic names is also significant. As noted above, Arabic names—such as Abū Nazaar, Mānṣūr, Nāṣir, Nīr and Rafaq—can be seen as an indication of the spread of Arab and Muslim influence after the Arab conquest of Central Asia, particularly during the period of Sasanian power, as well as possibly the influence of Christians from Iraq, many of whom came to use Arabic names as well as or instead of Syriac ones. At the same time, names of Middle and New Persian origin—like Bāmar, Burt, Baxtīyār, Māh-dūk, Tahm, Nawrūz and Sher—are to be expected more than Arabic names, given the location of Sogdiana in the Iranian-speaking world. However, there is a marked lack of demonstrably Sogdian names; the only two mentioned above—Bēr and Vēr—are both tentative readings. The relative scarcity of Turkic names—Alp, Mungī, Quh and possibly Bōz-ul—is not surprising, in contrast to locations further north

by the Turkic name Bögī Totog would be given a new name (sadly, the text breaks off precisely at this point); see Hunter & Dickens 2014, entry 156 for SyHT 161. On the practice of replacing Middle Persian names with Syriac ones in Sassanian Iran, see Gignoux & Jullien 2006.

See Hunter 2010, p. 362, where it is said to be “cited no less than 11 eleven [sic] times” (referring to both spellings); images of the stele show that occurs 11 times and once.

Chabot 1906, p. 290; Klein 2000, № 28, where it is incorrectly read as , YWNYYNN. On its use in Sogdian texts, see Lurje 2010, № 1534.

(Semirechye) or east (Turfan and the Tarim Basin in general) where Turkic speakers were predominant at the time. Finally, it is striking that none of the names found in the inscriptions are female; perhaps lending weight to the notion that those who left their imprint on the rock just above the excavated church building were indeed major tively members of a monastic community (if they were primarily pilgrims, one would expect at least some females to have recorded their visit). This in stark contrast to the aforementioned Christian gravestones from Semirechye, as well as those from Inner Mongolia mentioned elsewhere in the notes to this article, where females make up a significant percentage of the corpus.

On the historical relationship between Syriac and Persian in the Church of the East, see Wilmshurst 2011, pp. 44, 80 and, more generically, Payne 2015.
decipher without a larger context, although we are fortunate to have a small number of inscriptions that run longer than just a few words. Finally, the proposed dates found on two inscriptions, 752/53 CE and 1247/48 CE (or the three other possible readings of this latter date), fit roughly within the chronological spectrum dictated by the archaeological finds associated with the monastery, although the 13th century date, coming as it does after the Mongol invasion of 1220, is slightly later than the latest dateable artefact.

Sadly, unlike the analogous situation with the Christian documents found at the monastic site of Bulayq near Turfan, Chinese Turkestan, we have no texts at Urgut (apart from the inscriptions) to give us further insights into the specific nature of the Christian community there. But the inscriptions nonetheless bear witness to a group of Christians who, during a time which saw the rise and fall of numerous dynasties, including the Samanids, Qarakhanids, Seljuk Turks, Qarakhitai, Khwarezmshahs and Mongols, maintained their faith in the middle of the many upheavals that occurred during the 600 or more years that they inhabited the site.

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191 Only instances when ܐܠwidgets is likely a personal name (as opposed to a reference to Jesus Christ) are included here.
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