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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 syriaque 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 : syriaque ; chrétien ; Asie centrale ; Sogdiane ; inscriptions.

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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 Abdusobir Raimkulov of the Archaeological 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, Yury Karev, Pavel Lurje, Salam Rassi, 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).[2] 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,[3] 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 Ḥawqal (fl. 988) – also mentioned by his earlier contemporary al-Iṣṭakhrī (d. 957) – is of crucial importance:

> On al-Sāwadār [the Shāwdār 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 (*wuqūf*), 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 Ḥawqal's description. Alexei Savchenko, who conducted the archaeological excavation of the

2 Drijvers 1965, p. 61; Bedrosian 1987, §19. See also Savchenko & Dickens 2009, p. 123. For more on the history of Christianity in Central Asia, see Dickens 2015.

3 The Syriac and Christian Sogdian manuscript fragments from Turfan have recently been catalogued: Hunter & Dickens 2014; Sims-Williams 2012. For an overview of the Christian texts, see Dickens 2013a. On Christian Sogdian biblical and other texts, see Sims-Williams 2014 and Barbati 2016.

4 Savchenko 1996, p. 333, translating from de Goeje 1873, p. 373. Compare Savchenko & Dickens 2009, p. 126; Kramers & Wiet 1964, p. 478; Ouseley 1800, p. 257. For an argument regarding the probable form of the original toponym, see Savchenko 2006. For a possible connection of the location with the demise of Dēwāshtīch (the last Sogdian ruler of Panjikent) in the early 8th century, as a result of the Arab conquest of Central Asia, see Grenet & de La Vaissière 2002, pp. 162-163.

site, has identified the building as the monastery described by the Arab geographers,[5] although this identification has been questioned by others.[6] Equally significant are the Syriac inscriptions found nearby on cliffs and in caves,[7] the subject of the present article. As the only extensive collection of Christian inscriptions extant in Central Asia apart from the large corpus of Christian gravestones found in Semirechye (modern-day northern Kyrgyzstan and southern Kazakhstan) in the late 19th century,[8] the Urgut inscriptions are an invaluable source in our attempt to understand medieval Christianity in Central Asia.

The historical presence of a Christian community near Urgut, in the heart of the former territory of Sogdiana, should not be surprising. The area, known as *Suguda* in Old Persian, *Σογδιανή* in Greek and السغد (*al-Suġd*) in Arabic and New Persian, was located between the Oxus (Amu Darya) in the south and the Jaxartes (Syr Darya) in the north, centred on the Zarafshan and Qashqa Darya river valleys (in modern-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Traditional Sogdiana encompassed the settled areas of Paykent, Bukhara, Samarkand, Panjikent, Khojand, Kesh (Shahrisabz) and Nakhshab (Qarshi), but the Sogdian *diaspora* spread northward into the steppe region and eastward into China; as a result, Sogdian merchants controlled much of the trade on the middle section of the Silk Road.[9] In the process, they trafficked in not only commercial goods, but also religious ideas, whether those of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity or Islam.[10]

As documented elsewhere by Alexei Savchenko, the Christian building excavated near Urgut was likely inhabited on a continual basis from the late 7th to the 13th centuries.[11] This period was an extremely eventful one for Sogdiana, as the Sogdian city-states were subject before the Arab conquest to the influence of the Western Türk Qaghanate, the Chinese Tang Dynasty and the Türgesh, a Turkic group which inherited power on

5 For background information on Ibn Ḥawqal'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 Ashurov 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 Vaissière 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 النهر *Māwarā' 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. Successive centuries saw the area ruled directly by the 'Abbasid Caliphate (8th-9th c.), the Iranian Samanids (10th c.), the Turkic Qarakhanids (early 11th c.) and Seljüks (late 11th c.), the Buddhist Qara-Khitai (Western Liao) (early 12th-early 13th c.) and the Mongols, who controlled Māwarā' al-nahr from their conquest in 1220 until the disintegration of the Chaghatāy 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 community 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]

12 See above ftn. 4.
13 On which, see Brock 1996.
14 On the presence of these two Churches in Central Asia, see Dauvillier 1956; Dauvillier 1953; 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.

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-Ṣughd" in his *Fihrist* (written in 990), he notes that "its people are dualists [Manichaeans] 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 Vasiliy 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

16 Hoenerbach & Spies 1956, p. 123; Mai 1838, pp. 141-142, 146. See the discussion on the establishment date of the metropolitanate in Colless 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 ostracon discovered in Panjikent with portions of Psalm 1-2 in Syriac (Paykova 1979) and two Christian gravestones with Syriac inscriptions in the Ashkhabad Museum (Masson 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 plates in the latter work.
18 See Dickens 2010.
19 Dodge 1970, p. 33. On the identification of "dualists" with Manichaeans, see Tardieu 2012, pp. 491-494.
20 Again, see Colless 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.[23] 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.[24]

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 Kyrgyzstan 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.[25]

23 Parfionov 1955a.

24 My translation from the Uzbek text of Parfionov 1955b, kindly supplied to me by Alexei Savchenko: "Ғорга кириб борар эканмиз, кираверишдаги ёзувларни кўрдик ва ёзиб олдик. Ғорнинг ичидан суяклар ва ҳархил тошлар ҳам топдик. Шунингдек, бу ёрда араб алифбесида ёзилган 17га китоб бор экан. Биз буларнинг ҳаммасини мактабга олиб келдик ва музей ташкил қилдик. Барча топган ёдгорликларимизни олимларимизга совға қиламиз." See also Savchenko 1996, p. 335.

25 My translation from the Uzbek text of Parfionov 1955b: "Топганингиз ва нусҳасини кўчириб олганингиз бу сирия, христиан-несториан ёзувлари Ўзбекистонда ма'лум бўлган биринчи ёзувлардир. Бу ёзувлар Гулбоғ ғоридаги кояга таҳминан бундан 600-700 йил илгари ёзилган. Гулбоғ ёзувларининг нусҳасини академик В. В. Струвега ўрганиш, текшириб чиқиш ва таржима қилиш учун юбордим. Бундай сирия ёзувлари Ўрта Осиёда, Қирғизистон ССРда ҳам бор. Бу ёзув кўмилган мурданинг исми, фамилияси ва вафот этган вақтини кўрсатучи эпитафия-қабристон ёзувидир. Сиз, ёзувларни қоянинг устида эмас, балки ғорга кираверишда, шунингдек ғорнинг ичида ётган тошларда ҳам топганингизни ёзгансиз. Бундан ташқари ғорда кўпгина суякларга кўзингиз тушган. Сизнинг несториан ғор мозорида бўлганингизни ўзингиз ҳам билмагансиз, бошқалар ҳам тушунтирмаган. Сизнинг топганингиз катта илмий аҳамиятга эга. Чунки сиз Ўрта Осиёда биринчи бўлиб, несториан ғор мозорини аниқлангансиз." See also Savchenko 1996, pp. 341-342. Parfionov's comment that they had "verified the first Nestorian graveyard in Central Asia" is curious, since the gravestones found in Semirechye (now in Kyrgyzstan) in the late 19th century which he mentions were clearly from the first such graveyard discovered 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" allegedly 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.[26]

THE SYRIAC INSCRIPTIONS OF URGUT

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;[27] in some places it is covered with mould, lichen and/or 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.[28] Compounding these challenges is the fact that very few familiar

26 For images of the caves and a sample inscription, see Savchenko & Dickens 2009, Pl. 13-14; Savchenko 2010, Abb. 9a, 9b.

27 As Alexei Savchenko notes (personal correspondence, July 4, 2014), "the rock is limestone interspersed with shale."

28 Very helpful in deciphering the Urgut inscriptions is the extensive chart by Julius Euting at the end of Chwolson 1890, which provides numerous examples of how each letter in the Syriac alphabet is formed on the Semirechye gravestones.

with Syriac palaeography have visited the site, resulting in only two previous articles that do more than just mention the inscriptions.[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.[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.[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.[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 ﮎ, modified from either ﮐ or ﮏ to write the Sogdian or New Persian sound /x/ (as well as the Turkic

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.

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.

31 See Dickens 2013a, p. 11. On the evolution of Syriac writing, see also Briquel Chatonnet, forthcoming.

32 See Kiraz 2012, Part III on Garšūnography, particularly section 11.9 on Syro-Sogdian and Syro-Persian by Nicholas Sims-Williams.

sounds /k/, /q/ or /x/[33]) in Syriac script; it is found frequently in Christian texts from Turfan in these languages.[34] Another letter, ﮋ,[35] modified from ﭪ to render the sound /f/, may also be in evidence in the Urgut inscriptions (unless it is just a variant form of ﭪ 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/.[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 ﮒ for /γ/ and ﮊ for /č/. Words or names in the Urgut inscriptions containing these letters which are not demonstrably Syriac are glossed using Γ/γ and Č/č respectively. Finally, native Sogdian words tend to use ﮟ for /t/ and ﮎ for /k/ (following the system of representing Greek τ and κ in Syriac by ﮟ and ﮎ), 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;[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.[38]

CAVE 1 INSCRIPTIONS

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

33 There often seems to be phonological confusion in the use of this character on the Syro-Turkic texts in the Semirechye gravestone corpus.

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

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

36 For example, *MWŠTP*, *BWRPL*/*QWRPL*/*SWRPL* or *PŠYDN*/*PŠYRN*.

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

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 10×4 cm.[39]

[1][40] At the top is the name ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan* (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, ܥܝܕܐ, "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 ܗܘܫܥܢܐ, "Hosanna," which appears here as either an expression of praise or the Syriac name *Awša'nā*.[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) ܥܠܝܬܐ, "comfort, consolation"; 2) ܒܚܝܐ, "in/with life"[42]; 3) ܒܩܫܝܫܐ, "with the venerable/reverend"; 4) ܒܣܩܐ, "in/with sackcloth"; 5) ܒܥܝܢܐ, "with the eye" or even 6) the Turkic name ܒܘܩܐ, *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 ܩܫܝܫ, 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 ܟܘܪ ܩܫܝܫ is found on one of the Syro-Turkic gravestone inscriptions from Quanzhou, China.[44]

[5] Under this, two more words are visible— ܥܡܢ, "with us"—and another word beginning with ܕ 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

39 All dimensions are given in the order height × width.

40 Inscription numbers are given in square brackets. Where several lines can be confidently grouped together, they are considered one inscription.

41 The name ܗܘܫܥܢܐ occurs six times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 287).

42 The plural *seyāmē* marker is not visible.

43 See Clauson 1972, p. 312; for its use as a name, see Rásonyi & Baski 2007, pp. 171-172. This name occurs five times in the gravestone corpus, spelled both ܒܘܩܐ and ܒܘܩܗ (Chabot 1906, pp. 288, 292 – note that Chabot reproduces the names with the letter ܕ, not ܟ).

44 Lieu *et al.* 2012, pp. 189-190, on which see my commentary in Dickens 2014, p. 417.

45 Perhaps a name preceded by the preposition ܒ to signify "with (name)"?

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, ܢܨܝܪܝ, *Nāṣir*, either representing the Arabic name ناصر[46] or a badly spelled attempt at the Syriac word ܢܨܪܝܐ, "Nazarene, Christian." Alternatively, could it be an even more defective spelling of ܢܙܝܪ, "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 Ḥawqal's aforementioned reference to "Iraqi Christians" who migrated to the monastery. [7] Above, on the roof of the cave in an area roughly 4×6 cm., are two lines of faded writing in black ink; visible characters on the second line suggest they may have included the word ܥܝܕܐ, "our vigil" or ܥܝܕܟ, "your vigil" (if the first line contained a name or names, the remnants suggest it may have included ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*).

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 ܝ; it is followed by a second illegible word beginning with ܕ, ܪ or ܨ (visible portions of these two words are roughly 4 cm. long). [9] The second possible occurrence, contained in a small area roughly 3×6 cm., appears to be ܠܝܘܚܢܢ, "to/by Yuḥannan," although it could also be ܠܝܘܢܝܐ, "of the Greeks" (with the plural *seyāmē* marker either missing or illegible), in which case the other remnants of characters 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.[47]

46 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 Ḥawqal 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 ܡܢܨܘܪ (منصور), *Manṣūr*, "victorious," ܡܣܥܘܕ (مسعود), *Mas'ūd*, "fortunate, happy, lucky" and the female names ܕܘܠܬ (دولت), *Dawlet*, "government, state, wealth" (Chabot 1906, pp. 288, 291), as well as ܡܠܝܟܐ (ملیکه), *Malīka*, "queen, princess" (Chwolson 1890, № 73) and ܣܡܝܪܐ (spelling error for ܣܡܝܪ i.e. سمیرة), *Samīra*, "entertaining companion" (Chwolson 1897, № 6).

47 The use of the Seleucid era dating system in the Syriac gravestones is discussed in both Dickens 2009 and Dickens 2016. ܠܡ, an abbreviated version of the phrase ܠܫܢܬ, is found in the dating formula on at least two gravestones from Almaliq, 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 3×3 cm., of ܫܩܕ, "he kept vigil/stayed the night" or ,ܫܩܕ, "my vigil," above which can be seen ܩܕ, 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 ܝܩܕ, which may represent the Sogdian name *Vōr*, meaning "brown"[48] (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 ܟܝܢܩܐ, "keeper of the bath," ܟܝܢܩ, "barren," ܟܝܢܩܐ, "in severe weather" or ܟܝܢܩܝ, "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," ܟܠܫܐ.[49]

Two additional inscriptions in Cave 1 were discovered in 2010 by Alexei Savchenko. [12] One clearly reads ܝܘܚܢܢ ܚܙ, "Yuḥannan has discerned," with a poorly-formed word preceding this which is possibly ܐܠܗܐ, "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 ܩܠܝ ܡܢ ܫܡܥ, "and hear/answer my voice," perhaps a partial (slightly garbled) quotation from Psa. 27:7 – ܩܠܝ ܡܢ ܫܡܥ ܒܩܠܝ ܩܪܐ ܠܟ ܘܥܢܢܝ. ܚܢܢ ܥܠܝ ܘܥܢܢܝ, "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 ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*, along with illegible attempts to scratch two words the same size (both of which seem to begin with the letter ܕ or ܡ) underneath and a smaller word above, all contained in a space roughly 3×3 cm. [15] Another phrase scratched into the rock here contains just two words. The second (which might be a name) begins with ܙ, but is so poorly

km. NE of Urgut. One has been published in Niu 2008, pp. 60-62: ܫܢܬ ܐܠܦ ܘܫܬܝܢ ܒ ܝܘܡ ܐܝܟܢ ܫܡ ܟܗܢܐ ܕܐܠܗ ܒܫܢܬ ܐܠܦ ܘܫܬ ܡܐܐ ܘܚܡܫܝܢ ܘܐܪܒܥ ܠܝܘܢܝܐ, "Yamghur the Priest departed and left this world in the year 1654 [1342/43 CE] of the Greeks." The other has been published in Dickens 2016, pp. 107-108. Similarly, a recently-deciphered Syriac inscription located in Mongolia contains a date (curiously, in Arabic numerals) followed by the word ܝܘܢܝ, "of the Greeks" (Osawa *et al*. 2015, pp. 193-194).

48 Lurje 2010, № 326.

49 Fig. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13, 17, 19, 21 by Alexei Savchenko, fig. 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 22 by Mark Dickens, fig. 20 by Yury Karev.

formed that it is unintelligible; the word above it appears to be ܬܗܡ, representing the Middle and New Persian name تهم, *Tahm,* "brave."[50]

[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 ܒܘܣ, BWS, but this has no meaning in Syriac, so it may be an ill-formed (or possibly phonetically spelled) instance of ܫܩܕ, "he kept vigil/stayed the night."[51] Alternatively, though not much more logically, could this be a transcription of Persian بوس, 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 8×4 cm.; discernible words include [17] ܚܛܝܐ, "the sinner" or ܚܛܝ, "sin" (the illegible line above this may be a name); [18] ܒ ܢ ܚܢ, "he tested us"; [19]ܫܢܥܢܕ, "*Ḥenanišo*"[52] (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 6×6 cm. scratched into bare spots on the rock. Unfortunately, mineral encrustations obscure most of the writing; [20] only the word ܒܪܟܬܐ, "blessing/benediction" is clearly visible, along with the ending ܟܬ of another word and the beginning ܐ or ܠ of a third. [21] A smaller area of rough rock, perhaps 1×1 cm., contains one complete word with the beginning of a second (the letter ܕ) 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 ܢܩܕ, perhaps a misspelling of Syriac ܢܩܕ "let him keep vigil/stay the night."[53] 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 3×3 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; Justi, 1895, pp. 318-319. The name *Tahm* does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

51 A native Persian speaker would almost certainly substitute /s/ for /θ/. Note the possibly related occurrence below of a word which appears to be ܣܒܘܣ, *BWSL*.

52 The name ܫܢܥܢܕ (meaning "mercy of Jesus") occurs once in the gravestone corpus (Chabot, 1906, p. 288) and is also mentioned on the Xi'an Stele, in a specific reference to Patriarch Ḥenanišo II (773-780) of the Church of the East (Hunter, 2010, p. 358).

53 Admittedly, this orthographic error would be odd, given the many correctly spelled occurrences of the verb ܫܩܕ 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 ـــ̈ܐ(•)ܡ and ̈ܐ(•)ܟ 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, ܫܡܥ, ܟܘܪܓܘܣ, ̈ܝܒܪܟ and ܬܡܝ), 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 11×8 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 square 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].[54] [25] The upper one (2×3.5 cm.) might be the name ܫܡܥ ܒܪ (ܝܘ)ܚܢܢ, *Ya'qob Bar Yuḥannan*, but several characters are missing, so this reading is very tentative.[55] [26] The lower one is written inside a box (3.5×2.5 cm.) and oriented vertically; it appears to read ܥܠ ܟܘܪܟ "on the wall, his

54 Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram representing the drawing on the wall of Cave 2 shown in fig. 3.

55 The name ܝܥܩܘܒ occurs three times on the Xi'an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and three times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 290). This name would be pronounced *Ya'qov* by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions. Here and elsewhere, I interpret ܒܪ, *bar*, "son" as part of the name, very common in Syriac, as can be seen in the names of famous scholars like Isho' Bar 'Ali, Ḥasan Bar Bahlul, 'Abdisho' Bar Brikha and Abū al-Faraj Grigorios Bar 'Ebroyo. In contrast, ܒܝܬ, *bareh*, "son of" is understood to indicate a filial relationship to the name that follows, as in ܫܡܥ ܒܝܬ ̈ܐܪܫܟ̈ܚ, "Baxtiyār, son of Yuḥannan," below. Several names in the gravestone corpus — ܒܪܫܒܐ, *Baršabba*; (ܐ)ܒܪܝܠܕ, *Bar Yaldā*; ̈ܒܪܟ̈ܠܦ, *BRXLF*; ̈ܒܪܒܠܢ, *Bar BLN*... — seem to contain ܒܪ, *bar* as an integral onomastic element.

name," perhaps a reference to the practice of writing one's name on the cliff and cave walls. Like many other examples in this corpus, the quality of the inscription leaves it open to other interpretations.

[27] A short inscription on the roof of the grotto, written in a box with triangular projections on the top and bottom, consists of just two words: ܟܫܝ (•)ܥܫܩ \ (•)ܥܫܩ "ASΓ_/ASK_ the sinner." The first word is presumably a name, but the final letter is unclear (ـ̈ܟ?ـ?). It might possibly be *Asïγ*, a Turkic name meaning "advantage, profit, gain" contained in a list of Christian monks from a Sogdian text in Syriac script found at Turfan.[56]

On the east wall are three short inscriptions, two of which (2×2 cm. and 2.5×2.5 cm.) are located close to each other, both consisting of a cross inscribed above a word. [28] The upper one seems to be ܟܫܝ, "the sinner," but not all the letters are well-formed; [29] the lower one is more clearly the Turkic name ̈ܡܢܓ, *Mangu*, "eternal."[57] [30] The third inscription is the name ܫܡܥ ܒܪ ̈ܡܪܩܘܣ, *Marqus Bar Yuḥannan*.[58]

[31] Undoubtedly the most significant inscription in Cave 2 is located on the east wall; roughly 3×5 cm., it is one of only two inscriptions from Urgut that seem to contain dates (the other is kept in the Samarkand Museum and is described below) and is written below a small cross [fig. 5]:

(1) ̈ܐܦܝ ܫܝܟ ܕ ܨܥܝܪ[59] (2) ܫܢ ̈ܐ ̈ܚܝܬ [sic] ̈ܫܢ
(3) ̈ܟܠܝ [sic] ̈ܟ(...)ܕ

(1) *Rafiq* the sinner, son of the priest.[60] (2) I recovered (revived, was saved) in the year 1064 [SE = 752/53 CE][61] (3) The *qaltā* (is) the crown of _____."

56 Lurje 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 Rásonyi & Baski 2007, p. 80.

57 Mangu, spelled ̈ܡܢܓ, ̈ܡܢܝ, ̈ܡܢܓ, ̈ܡܝ, ̈ܡܝ and ̈ܡܢܓ, 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 Rásonyi & Baski 2007, pp. 540-541.

58 The name ̈ܡܪܩܘܣ occurs four times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 291). Interestingly, it is also encountered in the name of Marghuz (Marqus) Sariq Khan (d. *ca.* 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 Marghuz, 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 Quriaqus.

59 Alternatively and less likely, ̈ܡܫܐ, *Moše*.

60 As in the Eastern Orthodox Church, priests in the Church of the East are permitted to marry and have children. As in the Semirechye gravestone corpus, the formula "X son of Y" in the Urgut inscriptions employs the word ܒܝܬ without the following particle ܕ, "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 ܪܦܝ (or possibly ܪܦܝܩ, which fits the suggested name better), representing the Arabic name رفيق, *Rafīq*, "friend, companion, kind."[62] The name of the father is similarly unclear; the most likely option is simply the title ܩܫܝܫܐ "priest"; less likely is the name ܡܘܫܐ, *Moše*.[63] 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 Gus, 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 ܫܝܒ, "I recovered," seems most logical.[64]

The next word is open to multiple interpretations, but given the final group of letters on line 2, ܫܢܬ̈, which seems to represent the date 1064, the second word must be ܒܫܢܬ̈, a misspelling of ܒܫܢܬ̈, "in the year." The first word on line 3 seems to be ܩܠܠ, perhaps an orthographic error for ܩܠܐ, "anthem sung at Nocturns." The words ܕ ܟܠܝܠ, "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 revival and then equated the *qaltā* 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 (Ḥudra) 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 – ܚܠ ܠܗ. ܟܡܪ ܫܡܗ and *ywxn x[ ]' sl'w 'ly* – the original sentence can be reconstructed: "Yuḥannan, the sinner; pray for me."[65] A second example can be found on U 5545, a small

61 SE = Seleucid Era, CE = Common Era.

62 Although we would expect Arabic ق to be transliterated by Syriac ܩ, it is commonly pronounced as /ɣ/ in Persian, a sound which is represented by ܓ when Persian is written in Syriac script (as noted above). The second letter appears to be the modified character ڤ used for representing /f/ in Persian words.

63 The name ܡܘܫܐ occurs twice on the Xi'an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and once in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 291).

64 Another less likely option is ܢܚ, *nḥet*, "I rested."

65 Hunter & Dickens 2014, entry 281 for SyrHT 287.

fragment containing a marginal note which proclaims ܟܡܪ ܫܡܗ ܚܛܝܐ ܟ(ܐ)ܚܠ, "Yuḥannan the sinner – I wrote the word."[66]

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 ܥܒܕ̈ܝܫܘܥ, *'Abdišo*[67] [fig. 6]. Elsewhere in the cave is evidence of someone having practiced scratching in the first two letters of that same name (ܥܒ). 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 20×14 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 (ܡ)ܪܘܟܒ (ܐ)ܒܥܝܪ ܒܫܡ, "In the name of Marqu[s] of the herd."[68] 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 (•)ܪܘܟܒ, possibly indicating where the writer was from (although one would usually expect the Syriac gentilic ending or the word ܡܢ, "from" to express this concept). If ܪܘܟܒ is the correct reading, it could represent the beginning of the following toponyms: Rāmand, a district near Bukhara, or Rāman, a village near Bukhara, which would give us "In the name of Marqu[s] of Rāman (Rāmand)."[69]

[34] One of the inscriptions in smaller hands in this set is written in Uyghur script in black ink, consisting of just one word: *Alp*, "hero, coura-

66 Hunter & Dickens 2014, Appendix XV, entry 31 for U 5545.

67 The name ܥܒܕ̈ܝܫܘܥ (meaning "servant of Jesus") occurs twice on the Xi'an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and three times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 292). This name would be pronounced *'Avdišo* / *'Awdišo* by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions.

68 This collective noun should be marked with the *seyāmē* 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.

69 On these place names, see Barthold 1968, pp. 117, 129.

geous warrior, champion,"[70] an element commonly found in Turkic names, such as the Uyghur ruler Alp Qutlugh Bilga Qaghan (779-789), Alp-Tegin, founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty (962-963), and Alp Arslan, the second Seljük Great Sultan (1063-1073).[71] We have at least one recorded instance of a Christian with this name, on a Sogdian inscription in Syriac script from Turfan, written in plaster and seemingly set up as a memorial to Alp, whose name is written in Sogdian script.[72] The presence of this inscription in Uyghur script at Urgut is curious; given its distance from traditional Uyghur territory—whether the Uyghur Empire on the Mongolian steppe or the Turfan oasis and other locations around the Tarim Basin, in Chinese Turkestan—the script was not commonly used in Sogdiana. Perhaps it results from a visit to the site of an Uyghur member of the Mongol occupying forces in the wake of the 1220 invasion (Uyghurs played a key role in the Mongol administration and military). [35] Adjacent to and below the name are remnants of more text in black ink, now illegible except for the Uyghur letter representing the vowel a/e.

Most lines in smaller hands in this first set of inscriptions are very difficult to read and open to multiple interpretations [fig. 7]. They include the following legible words or phrases written horizontally: [36] ܐܬܚ, "he visited" (followed by an illegible name); [37] ܠ̈ܫܢܥܕ ܚ ܝܗܢ, "to/by *Ḥenanišo Bar Yuḥannan*" (above and to the left of a cross); [38] ܒܘܣܠ, *BWSL*, possibly representing *Boz-ul*, a Turkic name formed from the elements *boz*, "grey" and *ul*, a variant form of *oyul*, "son"[73]; [39] ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*; and [40] (• ם ••) ܡܪܝ (ܪ)ܝܠܕܐ ܕܐ ܐܒ, "*Yob Bar Yaldā* and his son… cried out" – ܕܐ is perhaps a corruption of the name ܕܐܪ, *Iyob*.[74] The following words or phrases written vertically are

70 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/projekt_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 Rásonyi & Baski 2007, pp. 53-55.

71 Other Uyghur *qaghans* with the name include: AyTängridä Ülüg Bulmïsh Alp Qutlugh Ulugh Bilgä Qaghan (795-808), Kün Tängridä Ülüg Bulmïsh Alp Küchlüg Bilgä Qaghan (821-824), AyTängridä Qut Bulmïsh Alp Bilgä Qaghan (824-832) and AyTängridä Qut Bulmïsh Alp Külüg Bilgä Qaghan (832-839).

72 Sims-Williams, 1992, p. 58.

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

74 The name ܕܐܪ does not occur in the gravestone corpus, but it does occur once on the on the Xi'an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362). This name would be pronounced *Iyov* by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions. ܝܠܕ (or its orthographic variant ܝܠܕܐ), meaning "Nativity," occurs five times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 290).

also visible: [41] ܒܫܠܡ, "in peace" and [42] ܬܠܡܝܕ, "pastor, disciple." [43] A long vertical inscription on the right side of the other inscriptions in this set appears to be little more than random scratching, although a few Syriac characters are legible.

The second set of inscriptions on the upper cliff [fig. 8] consists of 15-20 short lines scratched in all directions into the roof of a small grotto (covering about 18×25 cm.) which may have functioned as a place of vigil, similar to the caves across the valley; the following are reasonably legible. Not surprisingly, there are several occurrences of the word ܚܛܝܐ:

[44] ܚܛܝܐ ܕ ܝܘܢܢ, "the sinner *Yawnan*"[75];

[45] ܚܛܝܐ ܕ ܢܐܨܝܪ, "the sinner *Nāṣir*"[76];

[46] ܚܛܝܐ ܕ ܡܢܨܘܪ, "the sinner *Manṣūr*" (Arabic منصور)[77] followed by a word which seems most likely to be ,ܒܘܟܪܝ, "Bukhārī," indicating that the writer originated from Bukhara, some 300 km to the west[78];

[47] ܚܛܝܐ ܕ ܣܓܘܢܛܠ \ ܣܢܘܢܛܠ \ ܣܢܘܢܛܠ, "the sinner *SGWNTL* (*SNWNTL*? *SƔWNTL*?)"; this name does not appear to be Syriac, so is likely of Iranian origin, hence the transliteration of ܛ and ܓ as /t/ and /γ/ respectively (however, if the reading of word-final L is correct, it cannot be Sogdian);

[48] ܚܛܝܐ ܕ ܝܗܢ ܒ ܝܘܚܢܢ ܒܥܐ ܪܚܡܐ, "may the sinner *Yuḥannan* obtain mercy through peace."

There are also several other occurrences of the name ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*, in this second set:

[49] one written vertically;

[50] another which seems to read ܝܘܚܢܢ ܠܢ ܪܚܡ ܥܠ ܥܝܕܬܢ, "*Yuḥannan*. Have pity on our vigil";

[51] one written upside-down: ܒܥܝܕܬܐ ܥܡ ܝܘܚܢܢ, "vigil with *Yuḥannan*."

Other discernible inscriptions include:

75 The name ܝܗܢ occurs once (or possibly twice, if ܝܢܗ is a misspelling or an erroneous reading) in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 290).

76 See discussion of this name in inscription [6] above.

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

78 However, we would normally expect the spelling ,ܒܘܟܪܐ. The word could possibly be read as ܒܘܟܪ, "the *baxšī*," referring to a long-standing profession in Central Asia with two distinct functions which were originally closely connected: musical recitation of oral epics and performance of healings and exorcisms; for more on the role of the *baxšī* in contemporary Central Asian culture, see Centlivres *et al.* 1971; Levin 1996, pp. 146-156, 173-180, 242-259. It would not be unusual for a Christian to be involved in either profession; for an example of a musician commemorated on one of the Semirechye gravestones, see Chwolson 1897, № 69; Dickens 2016, pp. 109-112. One of the Semirechye gravestones (Chwolson 1890, № XXI) seems to commemorate ܒܪܫܒܐ ܦܫܝܩܐ, "Baršabba the exorcist," unless the second word is an error for a word commonly found on these gravestones, ܡܗܝܡܢܐ, "believer"; see discussion in Klein 2000, pp. 248-249.

[52] (••)ܒܬܢ, BTN' (possibly a misspelling of ܒܬܠܐ, "conception"?),[79] followed by an illegible word and, on the next line, another illegible word which may be Syriac ܚܠܩ, "he/it divided" or ܚܠܟ, representing New Persian فلک, "sky, heaven" or Syriac ܚܠ, "so-and-so, a certain person"[80];

[53] ,ܐܒܘܢܝ, *Abū ZNRY*;

[54] a clearer instance of ܚܠ;

[55] ܐܠܝܐ, *Eliya*[81];

[56] ܒܪ ܫܒܐ ܩܥܝܕ, "*Baršabbā* kept vigil/stayed the night."[82]

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,[83] mentioned in several Syriac texts from Turfan; the presence of this name in the gravestone inscriptions and at Urgut is not surprising.[84] *Abū ZNRY* 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,[85] so it is difficult to verify whether the *kunya* is used in a literal or metaphoric 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[86] were known by various *kunyas*,

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

80 Alternatively, this may represent the cognate Arabic word فلان, *falān* (a loan-word into Persian).

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

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

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

84 Hunter & Dickens 2014, entry 45 for SyrHT 45 & 46; entry 389 on MIK III 45; Appendix XV, entry 9 for n164.

85 An alternate reading of ,ܐܒܘܢܝ, Abū ZKRY is unlikely; if the notion "father of Zachariah" were intended, it would be spelled ܐܒܘܢܝ ܕܟܪܝܐ.

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

including Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus,[87] Abū al-Faraj Grigorios Bar ʿEbroyo, [88] Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib,[89] Eliya III Abū Ḥalīm[90] and Theodoros Abū Qurra.[91]

In this case, could *ZNR* in ,ܐܒܘܢܝ, *Abū ZNRY* be a reference to the زنار (*zunnar*), the girdle worn by Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians at various times in Islamic polities to differentiate them from Muslims?[92] Indeed, the word has a monastic origin and undoubtedly reflects the pre-Muslim practice of monks, priests and other clerics wearing a girdle known as ܙܢܪܐ, *zunnārā* in Syriac (from Gr. ζωνάριον).[93] Moreover, the *zunnārā/zunnar* is referred to in Syriac and Christian Arabic literature as a symbol of the monk's commitment to celibacy, worship and ministry, to the separation of the base passions from the higher goal of serving God and to general spiritual preparation, perhaps reflecting the biblical injunction ܣܐܛܘ ܡܬܢܝ ܕܗܝܢ ܕܒܒܝܟܘܢ "gird up the loin(s) of your mind." (I Peter 1:13)[94] Thus, if the reading *Abū ZNRY* is correct, *ZNRY* may be a reference to the writer's piety as a monk or possibly ascetic.

[57] Sadly, the third set of inscriptions on the upper cliff, located under a very small overhang and comprising two lines written in black ink with a few words inscribed at right angles to this, may no longer be extant; although it was photographed in 1995, it was not located in 2009. Due to being written in ink which subsequently faded, it was largely illegible, except for some scattered letters and words:

87 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 *EI*^{2}.

88 A famous Syriac polymath and writer (d. 1286) who, as *maphrian* of the Syrian Orthodox Church, was second in rank to the patriarch of that Church; see "Ibn al-ʿIbrī" in *EI*^{2}.

89 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 *EI*^{2}.

90 Catholicos-patriarch of the Church of the East (1176-90).

91 Melkite Bishop of Ḥarrān (d. *ca.* 820) and a famous Christian apologist who wrote in Syriac, Greek and Arabic; see "Abū Ḳurra" in *EI*^{2}. 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).

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

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

94 Syriac text from http://dukhrana.com/peshitta/. References to both literal and symbolic uses of the *zunnārā/zunnar* by monastics and clerics can be found in the *Chronicle of Seert* (Scher 1919, p. 630), the *Book of the Fathers* (Parisot 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.

(1) (··), ܢ̈ܠ(·)ܐ[96] ܒ̈ܚ̈ܢ \ ܒ̈ܚ̈ܢ ܚ̈ܙ, ܠ(·) \ ܟ[95] (·)
(2) ܫ̈ܠ ܚ̈ܟ̈ܠ(·)ܬ (···) ܫ̈ܗ(···) ܣ̈ܗ (···)

"(1) … long/drawn, Lord… (2) it was sweet… united/joined"

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 ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ ܛ̈ ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܪ, *Abū Nazar Bar MWŠTP*.[97] In light of the discussion above regarding the metaphorical use of the Arabic *kunya* Abū to indicate the possession of a quality, *Nazar* in ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܪ may represent either the Syriac verb ܐ̈ܙ, "to abstain" or the Arabic noun نذر, *nadhr*, "vow," pronounced in New Persian as *nazr*,[98] 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 ܩ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܩ̈ܘ̈ܣ, *Quriaqus*[99] and then below it what seems to be the phrase ܟ̈ܩ̈ܕ ܒ̈ܝ̈, "*Bōč* has

95 The presence of this letter suggests that the original inscription contained a name or other word in Persian, Sogdian or Turkic.

96 Could this be the word ܢ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈ܘ̈ܦ̈ܪ, representing the Persian word نیلوفر, *nīlūfar*, "lily," a common female name in Central Asia?

97 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 8, read there as ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ ܛ̈ ١ ܒ̈ܝ̈ܚ̈ܢ. If the second part of the name were merely ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ ܛ̈, it might indicate a nickname connected with "stretching out" due to the use of the active participle of the Syriac verb ܐ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈. However, as it stands, this final element is currently indecipherable.

98 The following four Arabic letters are all pronounced /z/ in New Persian: ذ, ز, ض, ظ.

99 The name ܩ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܩ̈ܘ̈ܣ occurs once on the Xi'an Stele (Hunter 2010, p. 362) and eight times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 293). The Christian martyrs Cyriacus and his mother Julitta (d. 303) would have been well-known to Central Asian Christians, as is evident from fragments from Turfan in Syriac or Sogdian of their liturgical commemoration (Syr. ܩ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܩ̈ܘ̈ܣ), their hagiography and prayer amulets; see Hunter & Dickens 2014, entries 135-136 for SyrHT 140-141, entry 419 for n227; Sims-Williams 2012, entry E8 for n396 and entry E29/8 for n198. Again, this name is encountered amongst the aforementioned Keraits of Mongolia; the son of Marghuz (Marqus) Sariq Khan was called Quryaqus Buyruq Khan (fl. *ca.* 1140). His son in turn was Toghril Wang Khan (d. 1203) who was initially the mentor and then the enemy of Temüjin, later known as Chinggis Khan (Togan 1998, pp. 67-70).

discerned."[100] In the absence of an intelligible Syriac word or name, the second word seems best interpreted as the Sogdian name *Bōč*, from the root *βwc/bwxt* "to save"[101] (as noted above, the Syriac letter ܟ represents the sound /č/ in Iranian languages). It is unclear what connection there is between this individual and *Quriaqus*. [60] Another instance of the name ܝ̈ܘ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܢ, *Yuḥannan*, seemingly misspelled as ܝ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈,[102] is followed by a second illegible word.[103] [61] Written to the left of a cross is ܒ̈ܐ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈ܝ̈ܐ̈ܪ̈ ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܝ̈ܘ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈, "*Baxtiyār*, son of *Yuḥannan*,"[104] where ܒ̈ܐ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈ܝ̈ܐ̈ܪ̈ is an alternative spelling to ܒ̈ܐ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈ܐ̈ܪ̈, as it is rendered elsewhere in the corpus, and represents the Middle and New Persian name بختیار, *Baxtiyār*, "lucky, fortunate," a popular name in Central Asia to this day[105] [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]:

ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ (3) ܕ̈ܫ̈ܠ̈ܡ̈ ܡ̈ܬ̈ܕ̈ (2) ܝ̈ܘ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܪ̈ (ܡ)ܫ̈ܡ̈ (1)
[106]ܐ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ ⁘(7) [107]ܩ̈ܕ̈ܡ̈ ܡ̈ (6) ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܢ̈ܚ̈ܫ̈ (5) [108]ܕ̈ܫ̈ܠ̈ ⁘(4)
(8)ܓ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ܓ̈ܝ̈ܣ̈ (9) ܒ̈ ܝ̈ܘ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܢ̈

(1) May the sinner *Yuḥannan* be remembered. (2) In the name of Jesus, (3) the joy (4) of peace. (5) May the sinner (6) *Māh-dōk* be remembered. (7) *Abū Nazar* (8) *Giwargis* (9) *Bar Yuḥannan*.[109]

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

101 Lurje 2010, № 322.

102 Alternately, this could be ܝ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ܢ̈, a misspelling of the name ܝ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈, *Yawnan* (see Chabot 1906, p. 290).

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

104 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 11, read there as ...ܒ̈ܪ̈ܕ̈.

105 See Justi 1895, pp. 61-62. The name *Baxtiyār* does not occur in the gravestone corpus. Alternatively, could this represent an ethnonym, reflected in the modern-day Iranian province of Chahār-Mahāl-o Bakhtiyārī and the Bakhtiyārī dialect of Lurī spoken in southwestern Iran (see Digard 1988; Digard 2015)? However, two factors argue against this: 1) the absence of the Iranian gentilic ending *-i* in the occurrences of *Baxtiyār* in this corpus and 2) the great distance between Urgut and the Bakhtiyārī homeland in Iran. It seems more likely that this is a personal name or perhaps a nickname, not an ethnonym.

106 An alternate reading is ܐ̈ܢ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈, *Abū Nūr*, with the second word representing Arabic نور, "light."

107 Other than the initial ܩ̈, each of the letters in this word is open to multiple interpretations.

108 Reading of this word uncertain.

109 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 12, read there as ...ܓ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ܓ̈ܝ̈ܣ̈... ...ܒ̈ ...ܝ̈ܘ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܢ̈ ...ܩ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܩ̈ܘ̈ܣ.

Since the names ܡܗܝܕܘܟ, ܐܒܪܢܨܪ, ܓܝܪܓܝܣ and ܒܪ ܫܡܥ are each written on separate lines, it is unclear if they all belong to the same person or if this is a list of names (if *Abū Nazar Giwargis Bar Yuḥannan* is indeed one person, his name is an interesting mixture of Arabic and Syriac onomastic components); ܡܗܝܕܘܟ is a tentative reconstruction of the name of the second "sinner" mentioned and represents the Middle Persian name *Māh-dōk* (normally written ܡܗܝܪܘܟ). It is also the name of the father of one of the prominent Christians from Beth Lapaṭ (Gondeshapur) who signed the report of the Synod of the Church of the East held by the Catholicos Mar Aba I in 544.[110] This is the second occurrence of the name ܐܒܪܢܨܪ, *Abū Nazar*, discussed above. It is not surprising to find the name ܓܝܪܓܝܣ, *Giwargis*[111] in the corpus; the legend of St. George was popular throughout the Christian East and is extant in Syriac, Sogdian and Turkic versions from Turfan.[112] A comment on the phrase "May ____ be remembered" is also in order. This extremely important sentiment is often expressed on the Turkic language gravestones from Semirechye with the closing formula ܝܕ ܒܘܠܣܘܢ (ܐܪ) ܐܕ, *yād bolsun*, lit."may there be remembrance" (i.e. "may he/she be remembered").[113] Thus, there may be a funerary context to this Urgut inscription which contains this formula twice. Alternatively, the inscription may indicate the commemoration of ancestors.

[63] The following inscription from Savchenko's 1996 article was also published separately by Michel Tardieu, but my reading, based on in-depth examination *in situ* and multiple high-resolution images, differs significantly from his [fig. 13]:

ܚܛܝܐ ܡܗܝܕܘܟ ܕܝ ܢܘܪܙ ܫܒܩ[114] ܫܒܩ[115]
ܐܪ ܫ ܒܠܓܐ [sic] ܡܢܗܕ (••••)

The sinner, the sinner *Nawrūz* from the kindred of the interpreter... May he/it be enlarged. He made the sign of the living cross.[116]

110 Chabot 1902, p. 331 (see p. 79 of the Syriac text in the same volume); see also Gignoux *et al.* 2009, № 269. The name *Māh-dōk* does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

111 The name ܓܝܪܓܝܣ (or ܓܘܪܓܝܣ) occurs once on the Xi'an Stele (not included in Hunter, 2010) and 28 times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 288).

112 Syriac: Maróth 1991; Sogdian: Hansen 1941; Gershevitch 1946; Turkic: Bang 1926.

113 Several examples can be found in the Semirechye gravestone corpus (Chwolson 1890, pp. 139-140).

114 As noted elsewhere in this article, the possessive particle ܕ is omitted in this genitive construction.

115 This first instance of the word ܫܒܩ 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.

The name ܢܘܪܙ, *Nawrūz*[117] represents New Persian نوروز , "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 Nawrūz 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 kin. 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: ܢܨܪܐ ܫܘܥ ܡܪܢ ܚܝܐ, "The sign of life, Jesus our Saviour."[120] It may also be related to a verso mark, found on many Syriac and Sogdian manuscript fragments from Turfan, which seems to incorporate the word ܚܝ, "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: ܫܒܩ ܠܗ ܚܢܢ ܐܬ ܒܗ ܫܒܩ ܠܗ(ܝ)ܘ, "*Yuḥannan* 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 ܐܬܚܙܝ "I (or you?) have decided." [66] Written over top of the latter and below it, in one or more small hands, can be read ܠܗ, "to/by *Yuḥannan*"; [67] possibly remnants of the name ܩܘܪܝܩܘܣ, *Quriaqus*; and [68] another instance of the name ܒܪܫܒܐ, *Baršabbā*.[123]

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

116 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 13, read there as ܕܝ ...ܐ ...ܫܒܩ. Tardieu 1999 reads this inscription as ܐܪ ܒܫ ܒܟ ܚܛܝܐ ܡܗܝܕܘܟ ܕܝ ܢܘܪܙ ܫܒܩ "Itä Küröz, from Ušturqath, the exegete, in Ab of the year 1206," but this reading can no longer be upheld.

117 The name *Nawrūz* does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

118 See Justi 1895, p. 226.

119 Two interpreters in the East Syriac tradition that come to mind are Theodore of Mopsuestia (*c.* 350-428), the "*mphašqānā* (interpreter) *par excellence*" and "the Interpreter of the Turks" to whom 'Abdisho bar Berikha attributes the Syriac liturgical commentary *Gannat Bussāmē*, "Garden of Delights," written *ca.* 900 (Assemani 1725, p. 188; Badger 1852, p. 374). However, there is no indication in the inscription that Nawrūz was related to either.

120 Kokovtsov 1909, pp. 782-786; Džumagulov, 1968.

121 See Dickens 2013a, p. 14 and the discussion in Barbati 2016, pp. 33-39.

122 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 14, read there as ܫܒܩ ܠܗ ܒܗ ܫܒ[ܩ].

123 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 19, read there as ܒܪ ܚܒܐ ܩܘܪܝܩܘܣ.

off, including [69] ܟ ܫܠܝܐ, "the sinner X..."[124]; [70] ܒܪ ܐܠܝܐ, *Eliya Bar* (the rest of the name is illegible); [71] ܠܥܠ, "above" or the beginning of ܠܥܠܡ, "forever"; and [72] ܓܝ, likely the beginning of the name ܓܝܘܪܓܝܣ, *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 ܣܪܓܝܣ, *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 ܝ [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 ܒܟܬܝܪ, *Baxtiyār* and, [75] immediately to its left in a smaller hand, is the word ܒܢ, "he comforted" or ܒܢ, "he built" (perhaps originally part of a longer phrase). [76] Below this can be seen either ܒܘ (as noted above, this may represent the Sogdian name *Vōr*, meaning "brown") or ܒܘܕ, representing the Middle Persian name *Bōd*, probably meaning "perception, consciousness"; this was the name of the translator of the Old Syriac version of *Kalilah and Dimnah*, according to 'Abdisho bar Berikha's *Catalogue of Syriac Writers* (*ca.* 1318).[127] [77] Underneath is another occurrence of the word ܗܘܫܥܢܐ, "Hosanna" (or the name *Awša'nā*). [78] Below this, barely visible, are traces of characters in which one is tempted to see another instance of the name ܩܘܪܝܐܩܘܣ, *Quriaqus*.[128]

124 The letter ܟ 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 ܟܘܣܪܘ in Syriac), *Khorshid* (خورشید) or a compound name beginning with *Khodā* (خدا), "Lord," such as *Khodādād* (خداداد), "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 *Xvadāy*, "lord, ruler, master," spelled with an initial ܚ in the sources that have come down to us (Gignoux *et al.* 2009, № 434-437).

125 With reference to Savchenko 1996, Fig. 18.

126 Savchenko, 1996, Fig. 15, also read there as ܣܪܓܝܣ, 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 Öngüt 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).

127 Assemani 1725, p. 219; see also Gignoux *et al.* 2009, № 123; Justi 1895, p. 71. For a discussion of the name, see de Blois 1990, pp. 2-3. *Bōd* is given the ecclesiastical title "Periodeutes" (Syr. ܦܪܝܘܕܝܛܐ, from Gr. *περιοδευτής*), referring to "a visiting priest acting as the bishop's representative in visiting villages and monasteries" (Payne Smith 1903, p. 460).

128 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 16, read there as ܗܘܫܥܢܐ.

Yet another group of inscriptions (most of which are only partially legible), includes [79] the name ܒܪ ܫܒܥܕ ܒܥܕ, *Išo Bar Ḥenanišo*[129] (misspelled as ܫܒܥܕ), with crosses preceding and following ܒܥܕ on the first line and preceding ܒܪ ܫܒܥܕ on the second line; [80] below is what appears to be another cross incorporating the abbreviated word ܒܪܟ (ܟܝܬܒܪܟ), "grace" along the horizontal axis.[130]

Above the inscription mentioned earlier which begins "*Yuḥannan* 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] ܟܫܠܝܐ, "the sinner";

[82] ܟܐܒ, "he answered";

[83] ܠܥܐ, perhaps a misspelling of the name ܝܘܐܠ, *Yoel*[132];

[84] ܩ(ܘ)ܪ(ܝ)ܐ(ܩ) ܟܫܠܝܐ ܫܟܒ, "the sinner *Quriaqus* kept vigil/stayed the night" (underneath a cross);

[85] ܥܡ ܢ(ܚ), "*Yuḥannan* with us";

[86] ܓ(•)ܪ \ ܓ(•)ܪ, DW_G'R/RW_G'R, perhaps a Middle or New Persian word containing the agent noun suffix گر, *-gar*, in which case it may indicate the profession of *Yuḥannan* or one of the others listed above it – an obvious possibility is *durgar*, "carpenter"[133];

[87] ܟܫܠܝܐ ܒܪ ܢ, "the sinner *Yuḥannan*";

[88] ܒܪ ܟ ܠ ܚ, *BRXLF*, which seems to be a name of the type ܒܪ, *Bar*, "son of," with ܟ ܠ, *XLF* possibly representing the Arabic loan-word into Persian خلف, "successor," in which case it may be a Syriac calque of Persian فرزند خلف, "son worthy of his father, good son"[134];

[89] ܐܙܠ, "they departed" or ܬܩܦ, "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 ܒܥܕ occurs ten times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 290; Klein 2000, № 1).

130 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 17, read there as ܒܥܕ [...] ܒܪ ...ܒܥܕ. The form ܒܪܟ is likely an abbreviation for ܟܝܬܒܪܟ, the emphatic state of this word. Again, this inscription was not located and photographed in 2009.

131 Savchenko 1996, Fig. 18, read by Savchenko only as ܟܫܠܝܐ.

132 The name ܝܘܐܠ does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

133 This would be the Middle Persian word (MacKenzie 1971, p. 28); New Persian has درودگر, *durūdgar*.

134 The letter ܟ indicates that the language cannot be Syriac; since Sogdian does not have the sound /l/, it is most likely Persian. A less likely reading is ܒܪܟ ܚ, *BRX'F*.

[90] ܥܒܕ(ܠ ...) (ܪ)ܚܛ, "the sinner ...*išo*"[135], underneath which is an illegible word ܟܟ(...);

[91] (...)ܕ ܚ (...) ,ܙܟܪܒ, BWZKRY... *Bar N...*; no initial ܪ is visible, the first word is unlikely to be a name like ,ܙܟܪܝ, at the end of word, *Abū ZKRY*, but it may be a transliteration of Arabic بذكري , "in memory of," in which case there may be an illegible name between it and (...)ܕ ܚ, which is written on the line below (and this sentiment can be tentatively connected with the two requests in inscription [62] that individuals be remembered);[136]

[92] ܝܥܘܣ, *Yawseph*;[137]

[93] ܠܐܦܝ ܪܚܡ ܫܒ, "may the sinner *Raphael* be loved" (followed by an illegible word); note the contrast with the standard spelling of ܠܐܦܝ[138]; the letter ܕ is inserted in other names of Hebrew origin in the corpus also, namely ܝܘܐܠ, *Yoel* and ܡܝܟܐܝܠ, *Mikhael*;

[94] Below this is what appears to be (...)ܥ ܒܢܐ ܪܒ, "the builder/founder loves…";

Also somewhat visible in places under the patina on the rock are scattered words such as [95] ܚܛܐ, "the sinner" and [96] ܠܟ, "to you".

LOWER CLIFF INSCRIPTIONS (PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED)

There are numerous other inscriptions from the lower cliff that are not included in Savchenko's 1996 article; in the discussion below, those occurring in groups are treated before those that occur on their own.[139] Those that could be located in 2009 are addressed in this section; those which could not be located but were previously photographed in 1995 are addressed in the next section.

Part of the cliff where the rock has a pinkish hue contains a large number of inscriptions interspersed with several small crosses. Numerous individual letters are visible, but many inscriptions are indecipherable due to both fissures in the rock and the layering of inscriptions on top of each other. Moreover, it is very difficult to discern which visible words belong

135 This is likely a compound name ending in -išo, with the meaning "the ___ of Jesus." Possibilities include ܥܒܕܝܫܘ, *'Abdišo*, ܗܢܢܝܫܘ, *Ḥenanišo* and ܡܠܟܝܫܘ, *Malekišo*, all found elsewhere in the corpus.

136 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.

137 The name ܝܥܘܣ does not occur in the Semirechye gravestone corpus, but there is one occurrence of it on the Öngüt Turkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Halbertsma 2015, № 8).

138 The name ܠܐܦܝ does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

139 Otherwise, these previously unpublished lower cliff inscriptions are not presented in any particular order.

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] ܐܙܕܥ, "may he/it depart," immediately to the left of what looks like ܚܙ ܪܝ, "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 ܐܙܕܥ, "may he/it depart," (unless it should be read with several characters to the right as the name ܥܒܕ̈ܝܫܘ, *'Abdišo*), a little above and to the left of ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܥ ܚܙ(ܗ), "*Yuḥannan* the priest, vigil";

[100] To the right, ܚܙܗ ܪܚܡ, "the sinner *Yuḥannan*," underneath which can be seen ܒܢ̈ܝ and then ܒܢ̈ܝ, although the meaning of these two words is unclear[141];

[101] To the left of this, ܩܥܐ, "he cried out";

[102] Lower down, the words ܐܟܣ (...)ܕ ܩܡܥ, "may… *Hagar* grow cool" are visible, with ܐܟܣ (...)ܕ perhaps referring to ܐܟܣ ܒܝܬ, lit. "the house of *Hagar*," a reference to the Arabs.[142]

The occurrence twice of ܐܙܕܥ, "may he/it depart," 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 А. А. Ц.) contains the following names and words [fig. 15]:

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

140 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.

141 Both words call to mind Syr. ܓܢܣܐ, "family, race, nation, order, sort, kind, gender."

142 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 ܐܟܣܪ or ܐܟ ̣ܣܪ, perhaps representing a name?

[104] A word which can be read as ܐܘܪ (again, possibly representing the Sogdian name *Vōr*, meaning "brown") or ܪܘܪ, "waste" or ܐܘܪ (an abbreviation for ܟܪܝܐܠܝܣܘܢ ܟܝܪܐ, the Syriac transliteration of the liturgical phrase Κύριε ἐλέησον, *Kyrie eleison*) or ܟܝܪ, "cold, frost," below which is written ܒܪ ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Bar Yuḥannan*, seemingly in the same hand;

[105] A vertical word that bears more resemblance to the writing on the aforementioned ceramic pot from Gus than it does to genuine Syriac;

[106] Below all these, either ܚܨܝܨ, "beaten, cleaved, cracked" or ܚܬܝܡ, "solid, pressed together" (both verbs which could be associated with adverse weather conditions, if the word above is indeed "cold, frost")[143]; alternately, it may be another (incomplete) example of the name ܡܪܩܘܣ, *Marqus*.

A large and relatively flat rock face contains another set of multiple inscriptions layered on top of each other, once again making it difficult to distinguish individual words, other than the following:

[107] ܟܒܥܫܢܚ, *ČYŠBNH'*, perhaps a word or name of Iranian background[144];

[108] Immediately below this a word which may be the name ܗܢܥܢܝܫܘ, *Ḥenanišo*, is visible; [109] near the bottom of this rock, amidst a large number of scratches, at least one instance of ܟܫܝܥ, "the sinner" can be discerned;

[110] Nearby, on a patch of rock where much of the patina has eroded away, the remnants of two words are visible, one above the other; they seem to read ܐܫܚܘ ܫܦ, "he snored and he woke up" or (less likely) ܟܫܚܘ (ܟ)ܫܦ, "snoring and wailing"; fissures running criss-cross along the surface of this section of rock make deciphering difficult, but if the reading is correct, this inscription may provide some humorous insight into the experience of holding vigil with another who has fallen asleep.

[111] Another section of rock beneath a hole has up to ten lines of writing in what was probably a fairly legible script before it was unfortunately obscured by pitting and flaking of the stone, creating numerous lacunae. The following individual words can be made out, but the connections between them and therefore the overall sense is unclear:

(•••) ܟܫܝܥ \ ܟܫܝܥ (••)ܐܠܗܐ ܕ(ܫ)ܘ(ܒ) (••)ܐܠܗܐ ܕ[145]
ܟܪ ܟ(••••) ܕ(ܟܣ؟)ܐ ܟ(ܠ)ܐ ܟ \ ܟ(ܠ)ܐ ܟ

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

144 The initial combination of letters ܟܒ rules out the possibility that this is a Syriac word and hence the pronunciation of ܨ as /ṣ/. The initial syllable *ČYŠ-* may be compared with *ČAŠ-* in the name Čašmag (reconstructed from *cšmk*) recorded in Gignoux 1986, № 266.

145 Reading of this word very uncertain.

"The sinner *Yuḥannan* (or *Yuḥannan* sinned)… *Bar BLN.../BLT*... … with/by the cross/prayer of (victory?)... hour."

Perhaps *BLN* can be reconstructed as Syriac (ܟ)ܠܐܠܐ, "keeper of the bath" or alternatively, a Persian name involving the element *bāl*, "high"?[146] 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: ܐܢܬ ܗܟܐ ܠܐ ܟܐ ܡܢ ܒܥܝ ܠܡܐ ܚܕ ܫܥܬܐ, "Are you sleeping? Could you not keep awake even 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] ܫܪ ܗܘܐ, "*Sher* kept vigil/stayed the night"; if the reading is correct, the name *Sher* represents New Persian شیر, "lion," still a popular name in countries historically influenced by Persian culture and language, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan.[147] 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 ܒܫܒܚܐ ܕܝܩܪܐ, "in glory," followed by ܒܪ ܥܠܝܐ, "*Šliḥa*, son of".[148] 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] ܥܠܝ, "upon/about me"; [115] ܟܫܝܥ (•••) ܝܫܘ, "*Išo*… the sinner," below which an illegible word occurs, possibly another instance of ܟܫܝܥ.

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

[116] ܒܢܝܣ, *BWNS*; the form of the final ܣ suggests a name of Greek or Latin origin, but this is not a known Syriac, Persian, Sogdian or Turkic name[149];

[117] An illegible word which seems to read ܐܠܗ(••)ܕ, below which are probably the remnants of the name ܝܫܘ, *Išo*;

146 MacKenzie 1971, p. 16; Gignoux *et al*. 2009, № 88a, № 91.

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 ܥܠܝܐ occurs ten times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 293; Kokovtsov 1907, № 5). As noted elsewhere, ܒܪ, lit. "his son," often represents "son of" in both the Semirechye gravestones and the Urgut inscriptions.

149 Compare ܐܒܢܝܐ ܟܗܢ ܒܢܝܣ, "Banus, the Uyghur priest"—likely a misreading of the name ܒܢܝܣ, "Bacchus"—found on one of the Semirechye gravestones (Chwolson 1897, № 97).

[118] ܚ ܟܪ̈ܗ(ܗ)ܝ, "the sinner *Bar Yuḥannan*," below which are traces of various Syriac characters.

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

[119] ܐܬ̈ܝ ܕ̈ܥ̈ܢ̈ܫ, "*Ḥenanišo*… calling, vocation," followed by a very poorly written word (؟ܡ̈ܠ̈ܝ ؟ܡ̈ܠ̈ܝ)[150];

[120] ܟܪ̈ܗ, "the sinner," followed by an illegible name that might be ܝ̈ܗ̈ܢ, *Yuḥannan*, and on the line below ܐ(•••) ܚ, *Bar ...iel*; typical Syriac names ending in ܐ which might fit in the lacuna caused by the surface layer of the rock flaking off include ܐܪ̈ܝ, *Daniel* or ܐܟ̈ܝ, *Mikhael*[151];

[121] ܟ̈ܗܪ, "he led into sin"; this makes little sense without more context, unless it refers to the devil[152] [fig. 17];

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

[123] ܪ̈ܚ̈ܡ, "have pity on us," followed by what appears to be another occurrence of ܟܪ̈ܗ, "the sinner";[153] [124] underneath is written ܩ̈ܘ̈ܛ, representing the Turkic name *Qut*, "soul, spirit, vitality, life, fortune, chance, luck, mercy, success"[154]; [125] to the lower right is another instance of ܝ̈ܗ̈ܢ, *Yuḥannan* [fig. 18];

[126] ܚ̈ܓ̈ܘ̈ܪ \ ܨ̈ܘ̈ܪ ܟܪ̈ܗ, "the sinner *'WQN/'WKYN*," adjacent to a Maltese-style cross; this might possibly be a variant spelling of the Syriac name ܚ̈ܓ̈ܘ̈ܪ, *Awgen*,[155] but it is not attested elsewhere (and indeed is not necessary in Syriac script)[156];

150 A line above the name ܕ̈ܥ̈ܢ̈ܫ is all but illegible.

151 Given other occurrences of names in the Urgut corpus ending in ܐ (e.g. ܐ̈ܝ̈ܦ̈ܐ, Raphael; ܐ̈ܥ̈ܝ̈ܫ, Mishael?), it is possible that these names were not spelled with the orthographically-correct ending that included an *aleph* (i.e. ܐܪ̈ܝ).

152 Alternately, it could be an incorrectly spelled attempt at ܐ̈ܗܪ, "I will boast" or the standard ܟܪ̈ܗ, "the sinner", with ܪ mysteriously moved to the beginning of the word.

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

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

155 On Mar Awgen, the traditional founder of monasticism in Mesopotamia, see Brock *et al*. 2011, p. 48. The name ܚ̈ܓ̈ܘ̈ܪ does not occur in the Semirechye gravestone corpus, but there is one occurrence of it on the Öngüt Turkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Halbertsma 2015, № 16).

156 The spelling of the names ܣ̈ܪ̈ܓ̈ܝ̈ܣ, *Sargis* and ܓ̈ܝ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܓ̈ܝ̈ܣ, *Giwargis* in Sogdian script as *srkys* and *yw'rks* respectively (Lurje 2010, № 1097 and № 1524) is irrelevant, since Sogdian script lacks a letter for the sound /g/, whereas Syriac script does not.

[127] ܚ̈ܪ̈ܨ, "he plundered me" (possibly a reference to an ascetic experience with the divine?), surrounded by illegible traces of numerous words, many of which are obscured by mineral encrustations;

[128] ܦ̈ܗ̈ܘ̈ܦ̈ܐ \ ܦ̈ܗ̈ܘ̈ܦ̈ܐ \ ܚ̈ܗ̈ܘ̈ܦ̈ܐ, *BWRPL/QWRPL/SWRPL*—the fourth letter looks similar to the Sogdian letter 𐼶, /f/ and the fifth letter may be followed by a faint ܪ—written to the left of a simple cross and probably a name, based on the next line ܐ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ܓ̈ܒ̈ܪ ܚ, *Bar Gabriel*[157] (ܒ in *Gabriel* is inscribed over top of ܪ, as if the letter was initially missed and had to be inserted after the name was written);

[129] slightly above and to the left, in a smaller hand, a name beginning with ܐ̈ܒ̈ܪ, *Abū*, is visible (the two or three subsequent letters are illegible) [fig. 19];

[130] ,(•)ܐ̈ܒ̈ܪ(•)ܕ̈, one or two very crudely written words inscribed next to a simple cross and above later graffiti (another occurrence of the Cyrillic initials А. А. Ц.);

[131] ܐ̈ܥ̈ܫ̈ܐ, possibly a mixture of the two Hebrew names ܡ̈ܫ̈ܐ, *Moše*, and ܡ̈ܝ̈ܫ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈, *Mišael*, or a misspelling of the latter, the original Hebrew name of the companion of Daniel renamed Meshach (Dan. 1:6-7)[158]; various individual or pairs of characters can be seen above (ܐ̈ܠ̈ܦ̈), to the right (ܪ) and below (ܒ);

[132] ܐ̈ܬ̈ܪ̈ܐ, "vigil, place to stay the night" (preceded and followed by unintelligible words);

[133] ܟܪ̈ܗ, "the sinner," followed by an illegible name ending in ܒ̈ܪ ... *'B* or ... *'V*, [134] below which is what appears to be another instance of the name ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܪ, *Eliya*;

[135] ܟܪ̈ܗ ܚ̈ܡ̈ܝ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈, "the sinner *Mikhael*"[159] written vertically, with what seems like an alternative spelling of the name ܐ̈ܝ̈ܟ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈; if so, then the substitution of ܡ for ܚ may indicate a native Sogdian speaker, since (as noted above) the sound /k/ is written with the former character when

157 The name ܐ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ܓ̈ܒ̈ܪ 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 *Gavriel/Gawriel* by native Syriac-speakers, but we do not know if this pronunciation was used by those who left the Urgut inscriptions.

158 The name ܐ̈ܝ̈ܫ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈ 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: ܚ̈ܢ̈ܢ̈ܝ̈ܐ̈ ܟ̈ܫ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈ "Ḥananiah, 'Azariah and Mišael" (Nau 1913, pp. 295 [Syriac], 305-306 [French]).

159 The name, spelled ܐ̈ܝ̈ܟ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܠ̈, 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] ʔ(ܕ)ܕ ܟܪܝ ܟܪܝ, "priest of..." below which ܟܪܝ ܟܪܝ is repeated, followed by an illegible word and underneath which are the remnants of yet another illegible word ending in ܟ; this inscription appears to involve confusion between the long and short forms for "priest" (*qašišā* and *qašā*), with ܕ possibly beginning an abbreviated form of ܕܒܥܕܬܐ, "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 ܟܪܝ, "the priest," below which is written ܟܪܝ (which can be variously translated as "suffering, sickness, sorrow, passion, desire") and what appears to be the remnants of ܚܛܝ, "the sinner," all written in the same hand;

[138] ܕܚܛܝ ܡܘܫܐ, "*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 ܫ into a diamond shape[160] [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 ܡܘܫܐ, *Moše*, although very poorly formed apart from the initial ܡ and final ܐ;

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

[141] ܚܛܝ ܒܗܡܪ, "*Bāmar* the sinner"[161]; 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[162];

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

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

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

160 As noted above, the form ܚܢܐ is likely an abbreviation for ܟܢܘܫܐ.

161 The name *Bāmar* does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

162 Budge 1889, pp. 73, 279 (see p. 130 of the Syriac text in the same volume); see also Gignoux *et al*. 2009, № 92.

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] ܟܫ, (the rest of this word is obscured), perhaps the beginning of the name ܟܫܝܪܬܝܪ (or ܟܫܝܪܗܝܪ), *Baxtiyār*, as noted above,[163] followed on the next line by another word beginning with ܒ, possibly ܒܗܒ, "he kept vigil/stayed the night"[164] and the traces of several other Syriac characters;

[147] ܡܠܟܝܫܘ, *Malekišo*, which is either a name[165] or the words "King Jesus," preceded by what looks like the word ܚܛܝ, "sin"; although the image is not clear, it seems that ܚܛܝ, "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 ܘܪ or possibly ܘܪܠ (the beginning of this word seems to be covered by mineral deposits) and what appears to be ܒܠܟ, XLF, calling to mind the name ܒܪܟܫܠܟ, *BRXLF*, encountered above and possibly representing the Arabic loan-word into Persian خلف , "successor," along with traces of other words in smaller hands below;

[149] [166] ܚܢܢܝܫܘ ܒܪ ܝܫܘ ܡܢܨܘܪ ܚܛܝ, "the sinner *Manṣūr Bar Išo*"; although the hand is different, one wonders if this is the same person as "the sinner *Manṣūr*" mentioned in the second set of inscriptions on the upper cliff;

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

[151] An illegible word (the image is blurry here) written above what appears to be ܥܒܕ, *PŠYDN* or ܥܒܙ, *PŠYRN*[167]; [152] below this are traces of another word or name, possibly ܐܘܓܢ, *Awgen*;

163 Due to the very clear second letter ܟ, it is unlikely to be ܒܚܣ, 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 Toleration in 311). The spelling ܒܟܫ, *BXWS*, 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.

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

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

166 Reading of this word uncertain.

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

[153] The letters ܒܐ appear to be the end of a Syriac word, perhaps the name, ܒܪܫܒܐ *Baršabbā* or ܨܠܝܒܐ, *Ṣlibā*,[168] underneath which appears ܢ, the end of another word (ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*?), followed by an illegible word beginning with ܠ;

[154] ܐܢܐ, "I" on top of a line (possibly remnants of a name), underneath which is scratched a cross and the words ܐܢܐ ܚܛܝܐ, "I, the sinner…" (if the illegible word following is a name); below this is ܒܘܟܬ, *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 this are indecipherable, except for [155] yet another instance of ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*;

[156] ܒܘܬܐ, "vigil" followed by an illegible word;

[157] ܢܘܪ, followed by some illegible characters, perhaps Syriac ܢܘܪܐ, "fire," or the Arabic name ܢܘܪ, *Nūr*, representing نور , "light,"[170] or the beginning of the New Persian name ܢܘܪܘܙ, *Nawrūz*;

[158] ܒܟܬܝܐܪ, *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] ܒܘܬܐ, "vigil" over traces of other words, [160] one of which may be ܛܒ "good" or ܛܚ, "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 ܝܘܚܢܢ, *Yuḥannan*;

[162] ܦܢܘܣ, probably the end of the name ܣܛܦܢܘܣ, *Stephanus*[171]; other traces of inscriptions nearby are obscured by pitting and flaking of the rock;

[163 and 164] Two instances of ܚܛܝܐ, "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 Turkic as *tamġa* and in New Persian as *nišān* (نشان); there are at least two other occurrences of these in Christian texts, namely in the colophon of a transliteration of the Syriac Psalter into Uyghur script from Turfan[172] and as part of some graffiti (Uyghur in Syriac script) left by a Christian priest in the White Pagoda near Hohhot, Inner Mongolia.[173]

Unfortunately, due to the tendency of those who left inscriptions at Urgut to write overtop previous inscriptions and the long-term effects of the environment on the surface of the rock (including the aforementioned flaking, pitting and development of a patina), there are many places on the lower cliff where vestiges of text in Syriac are visible, but it is impossible to discern anything beyond a few isolated characters. In other places, the rock surface does not obscure the inscriptions, but they are written so haphazardly that they appear to be little more than scribbling by those who knew the form of some Syriac letters, but were unable to write coherent words.

INSCRIPTIONS IN THE SAMARKAND MUSEUM

As noted above, two inscriptions sawed off the cliff in 1936 are currently kept in the Samarkand Museum of History and Art.

[166] The first, Inv. № A-308-1, is the other inscription from Urgut containing a date [fig. 21]:[174]

ܢܬܚܣ ܚܛܝܐ ܒܐܟ̰ܪܢܘܪܒܠܢܙ ܒܝܘܡܚܕܒܫܒܐ ܡܢ
(…) ܒܫܢܬ ܐܬܩܢܛ[175]

> "May the sinner *B'ČRNWRBLNZ* (?) obtain mercy on the day of Sunday from ___ in the year 1559 SE = 1247/48 CE."

The name as currently read cannot be Sogdian (due to the presence of the letter L, which only occurs in loan-words) and does not appear to be either Persian or Turkic.[176] However, could the first element be a misspelling of either Persian *bāzār*, "bazaar" or Sogdian *w'crn*, "road" (both of which could be onomastic elements)?[177] The letters ܢܘܪ may represent Arabic نور , *nūr*, "light"; alternatively, this element could be read as ܢܣܪ, rendering the whole name *B'ČRNSRBLNZ*. As noted in the footnote,

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[168] The name ܨܠܝܒܐ (or its orthographic variant ܨܠܝܘܐ) occurs eight times in the gravestone corpus (Chabot 1906, p. 293; Klein 2000, № 22). This name would be pronounced *Ṣlivā/Ṣliwā* by native Syriac-speakers; the variant spelling ܨܠܝܘܐ 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 *et al*. 2009, № 136-139. The name *Buxt* does not occur in the gravestone corpus.

[170] The name ܢܘܪ occurs once in the gravestone corpus, as part of the compound name ܢܘܪ ܒܝܓ ܝܘܚܢܢ Nūr Beg Yuḥannan (Klein 2000, № 28, where it is incorrectly read as ܢܘܪ · ܝܓ ܝܘܢܝܢܢ, NWR … YWNYNN).

[171] The name ܣܛܦܢܘܣ does not occur in the Semirechye gravestone corpus, but there is one occurrence of it (spelled ܐܣܛܦܢܘܣ) on the Öngüt Turkic gravestones from Inner Mongolia (Halbertsma 2015, № 22).

[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: ܐܬܩܢܓ = 1553 SE = 1241/42 ܐܬܩܥܓ = 1573 SE = 1261/62 CE; ܐܬܩܥܛ = 1579 SE = 1267/68 CE).

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

[177] 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 ܟ used for representing /x/ in Sogdian and New Persian texts: ܒܟܚ, *baxt* (بخت), Persian for "(good) luck, fortune"[178] [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.[179]

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.[180] However, the only definite ecclesiastical titles that we find in the corpus are four examples of ܩܫܝܫܐ or ܩܫܝ̈ܫ, "priest" (inscriptions [31], [99], [136] and [137], albeit with the possibility of alternate readings) and one of ܡܬܪܓܡܢܐ, "interpreter" (inscription [63]), although the latter seems to be the ancestor of the individual leaving the inscription. With the possible exceptions of a misspelling of ܢܝܫܢ, "Nazirite, ascetic" and a reference to ܩܕܫ "the venerable/reverend," there is a general absence of the titles that monks might use to identify themselves (e.g. ܐܚܐ, "brother," ܢܝܫܢ, "monk" or ܚܝܫܝܐ, "solitary") or titles of respect that would be expected in a monastic community (e.g. ܐܒܐ, "father" or ܡܪܝ, "master"). Rather, it seems that the primary and perhaps the only indication of monastic status left by those

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/inhalt_english/projekt_2.htm). Although it may occur as an element in a name, *baxt* 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-clvi and Jullien 2008.

who scratched their names on the rocks above Urgut was the self-abasing epithet ܚܛܝܐ, "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 *nisbah* "Bukhārī"). Ibn Ḥawqal'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 Ḥawqal 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 Ḥawqal 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.[181]

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.[182] Moreover, it is perfectly natural that the vast majority of names are Syriac. This reflects not only the Christians from Iraq mentioned by Ibn Ḥawqal, 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 Semirechye where one generation has a New Persian or Turkic name while another generation has a Syriac one;[183] indeed there are clear examples of this in the Urgut corpus, such as ܒܪ ܡܪ ܒܟܬܝܪ, "*Baxtiyār*, son of *Yuḥannan*." We must also take into account the common practice of inductees adopting Syriac names upon taking their monastic vows.[184]

181 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.

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

183 Examples include ܫܐܗ ܡܠܟ ܒܪ ܓܝܪܓܝܣ, "Shah-malik, son of Giwargis" (Chwolson 1890, № 78); ܣܪܓܝܣ ܒܪ ܫܐܗ, "Sargis, son of Ay Mangu" (Chwolson 1890, № 81); ܫܐܗ ܒܪ ܐܪܠܢ, "Arslan, son of Sargis" (Chwolson 1890, № 9); ܩܘܛܠܘ ܬܪܝܡ ܒܪܬ ܩܘܪܝܩܘܣ, "Qutluq Terim, daughter of Quriaqus" (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 Turkic for individuals with Syriac names, e.g. that of ܫܡܥܘܢ ܟܘܪ ܒܪ ܨܘܡܐ ܣܦܪܐ ܥܠܡܐ, "Šem'on the young boy, son of Ṣawma the scholar" (Chwolson 1890, № 11,[3]).

184 We have potential evidence of this practice in Central Asia in a fragmentary text from Turfan in Syriac script (SyrHT 161) which reads: *[Sa]brisho and Daniel and John… and 'Abdisho and George and Isaa[c]… Scholars. And instead of Bögä Totoq…* Although not conclusive, it appears to be a list of those taking on the role of "scholar" (ܣܦܪܐ), 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*, *Yuḥannan*, *Yawnan*, *Yawseph*, *Yoel*, *Ya'qob*, *Išo*, *Moše*, *Mikhael*, *Marqus*, *Stephanus*), saints and angels (*Awgen*, *Giwargis*, *Sargis*, *Quriaqus*, *Raphael* and the specifically Central Asian saint *Baršabbā*) or attributes (*Awša'nā*, *Ḥenanišo*, *Yaldā*, *Malekišo*, *'Abdišo*, *Šliḥa*). Readers will have noticed the seemingly ubiquitous presence of the Syriac name *Yuḥannan* in the Urgut corpus, occurring more than 25 times, including in patronymic forms. It is also the most common name on the Xi'an "Nestorian" Stele found in China and dating to 780/81 CE,[185] occurring 11 times (along with one occurrence of its Greek variant ܝܘܚܢܢܝܣ, *Yuḥannis*), and the Semirechye gravestone corpus, where it occurs 35 times.[186] 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 *Yuḥannan*" (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 Nazar*, *Manṣūr*, *Nāṣir*, *Nūr* and *Rafīq*—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 Samanid 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*, *Buxt*, *Baxtiyār*, *Māh-dōk*, *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—*Bōč* and *Vōr*—are both tentative readings. The relative scarcity of Turkic names—*Alp*, *Mangu*, *Qut* and possibly *Boz-ul*—is not surprising, in contrast to locations further north

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

185 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 ܝܘܚܢܢ occurs 11 times and ܝܘܚܢܢܝܣ once.

186 Chabot 1906, p. 290; Klein 2000, № 28, where it is incorrectly read as ܝܘܢܢ, YWNYNN. 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 in the rock just above the excavated church building were indeed majoritively members of a monastic community (if they were primarily pilgrims, one would expect at least some females to have recorded their visit).[187]

Discussion of the names in the Urgut corpus in turn raises the issue of the linguistic status of the community – what language did the Christians of Urgut use outside of the liturgy, which was invariably recited in Syriac? Although we cannot know for sure in the absence of solid evidence, it is possible that the presence of native speakers of Syriac from Iraq determined that the liturgical language was also the *lingua franca* of the community; this would have depended on the prestige of Syriac outside a liturgical context, which in turn may have affected attitudes of the Syriac-speakers and the native Persian-speakers towards learning each other's language.[188] However, the general poor quality of writing and apparently frequent orthographic and grammatical errors in the Syriac inscriptions suggest that there were few who were knowledgeable in the language amongst those who left their mark, whether they were monastics or otherwise. Finally, the remnants of words in Uyghur script, suggesting that a visitor from Chinese Turkestan was on the site at some time, perhaps during or after the Mongol invasion of 1220, remind us that visitors came to the area from both west and east.

As noted above, the range of non-onomastic words is typical for such a community. In addition to the frequent references to vigils, we also find definite or possible references to such notions as 1) seeking, discerning and perceiving (the calling, guidance or will of God?); 2) sin, sinfulness and sinners (in various different grammatical forms); 3) blessing, grace, peace and recovery (presumably in relation to both physical or spiritual ailments); 4) crying out, being heard and being answered (likely references to prayer); 5) asking for and obtaining pity or mercy; 6) asking to be remembered; 7) making the sign of the cross; 8) being tested; and 9) asking for something (perhaps a trial or temptation) to depart. There may even be references to severe weather, a reminder that spending the night in the mountains without appropriate shelter can be a daunting experience, especially in winter. Most of these references are fragmentary and difficult to

187 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.

188 On the historical relationship between Syriac and Persian in the Church of the East, see Wilmshurst 2011, pp. 44, 80 and, more generally, 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 Bulayïq 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, Seljük 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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TABLE OF PERSONAL NAMES FOUND IN URGUT INSCRIPTIONS[189]

Syriac script[190]	Transcription	Origin	No.
ܐܠܦ = ئالپ	*Alp*	Turkic	1
ܐܒܘ	*Abū...*	Arabic	2
ܐܒܘ ܙܢܪ	*Abū ZNRY*	Arabic	1
ܐܒܘ ܢܨܪ	*Abū Nazar*	Arabic (ابو نذر)	1-2?
ܐܒܘ ܢܘܪ؟	*Abū Nur?*	Arabic (ابو نور)	1?
ܐܘܓܢ \ ܐܘܓܝ	*Awgen (Eugene)*	Syriac	1-2?
ܐܘܫܥܢܐ	*Awša'nā (Hosanna)*	Syriac	2
ܐܠܝܐ	*Eliyā (Elijah)*	Syriac	3-5?
؟ܐܣܝ	*Asïy?*	Turkic	1?
ܒܐܡܪ	*Bāmar*	Middle Persian	1
ܒ'ܟܪܢܘܪܒܠܢܙ	*B'ČRNWRBLNZ*	unknown	1
؟ܒܘܕ	*Bōd?*	Middle Persian	1?
ܒܘܪܦܠ \ ܒܘܪܩܠ \ ܒܘܪܣܠ	*BWRPL/QWRPL/SWRPL*	unknown	1
ܒܘܢܣ	*BWNS*	unknown	1
؟ܒܘܙܠ	*BWSL = Boz-ul?*	Turkic?	1
؟ܒܘܟ	*Bōč?*	Sogdian	1?
؟ܒܘܩܐ	*Buqa?*	Turkic	1?
؟ܒܘܪ	*Vōr?*	Sogdian	3?
ܒܘܟܫܬ	*Buxt*	Middle Persian	1
ܒܟܬܝܪ & ܒܟܫܝܪ	*Baxtiyār*	Middle/New Persian (بختیار)	3-4?
؟ܒܪܟܠܦ	*BRXLF?*	Syr. ب + Ar. خلف?	1?
ܒܪܫܒܐ	*Baršabbā*	Syriac	2-3?
ܓܒܪܝܐܝܠ	*Gabriel*	Syriac	1
ܓܝܘܪܓܝܣ	*Giwargis (George)*	Syriac	1-2?
ܗܢܢܝܫܘ	*Ḥenanišo*	Syriac	4-6?
ܬܗܡ	*Tahm*	Middle/New Persian (تهم)	1
؟ܝܘܒ	*Iyob (Job)?*	Syriac	1?
ܝܘܚܢܢ	*Yuḥannan (John)*	Syriac	26-33?

189 Not including names not used as personal names, e.g. ܗܓܪ, *Hagar*.
190 With the exception of the first entry, which is in Uyghur script.

ܝܘܢܢ	*Yawnan (Jonah)*	Syriac	1-2?
ܝܘܣܦ	*Yawseph (Joseph)*	Syriac	1
ܝܘܐܠ	*Yoel (Joel)?*	Syriac	1
ܝܠܕܐ	*Yaldā*	Syriac	1
?ܝܥܩܘܒ	*Ya'qob (Jacob)?*	Syriac	1?
ܝܫܘ	*Išo (Jesus)*[191]	Syriac	2-4?
?ماه‌دوخ	*Māh-dōk?*	Middle Persian	1?
ܡܘܫܐ	*Moše (Moses)*	Syriac	1-3?
ܡܘܫܬܦ	*MWŠTP*	unknown	1
ܡܝܟܐܝܠ	*Mikhael (Michael)*	Syriac	1
?ܡܝܫܐܝܠ	*Mišael?*	Syriac	1?
ܡܠܟܝܫܘ	*Malekišo*	Syriac	1
ماڭۇ	*Mangu*	Turkic	1
منصور	*Manṣur*	Arabic (منصور)	2
ܡܪܩܘܣ	*Marqus (Mark)*	Syriac	2-3?
ناصر	*Nāṣir*	Arabic (ناصر)	2
?نور	*Nur?*	Arabic (نور)	1?
نوروز	*Nawruz*	New Persian (نوروز)	1-2?
ܣܓܘܢܛܠ \ ܣܢܘܢܛܠ \ ܣܓܘܢܛܠ	*SGWNTL/SNWNTL/ SΓWNTL*	unknown	1?
ܣܪܓܝܣ	*Sargis (Sergius)*	Syriac	2
?ܣܛܦܢܘܣ	*Stephanus (Stephen)?*	Syriac	1?
ܥܒܕܝܫܘ	*'Abdišo*	Syriac	1-2?
?ڤشين or ڤشن	*PŠYDN or PŠYRN?*	unknown	1?
?ڜيشبنه	*ČYŠBNH'?*	unknown	1?
?ܨܠܒܐ	*Ṣlibā?*	Syriac	1?
ܩܘܪܝܐܩܘܣ	*Quriaqus*	Syriac	2-4?
قوت	*Qut*	Turkic	1
?رفيق or رفيم	*Rafiq?*	Arabic (رفيق)	1?
ܪܦܐܝܠ	*Raphael*	Syriac	1
شير	*Sher*	New Persian (شير)	1
ܫܠܝܚܐ	*Šliḥa*	Syriac	1

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

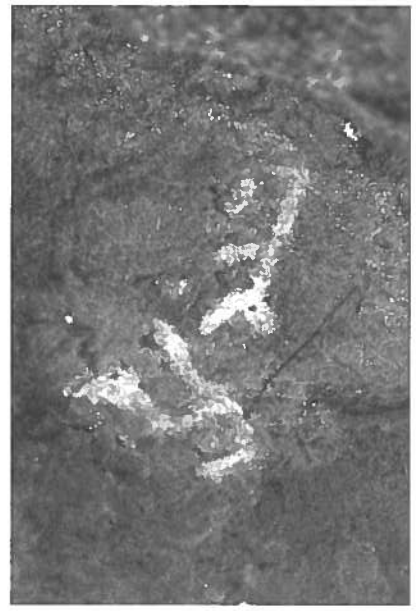

Fig. 1. Urgut Syriac inscription 011.
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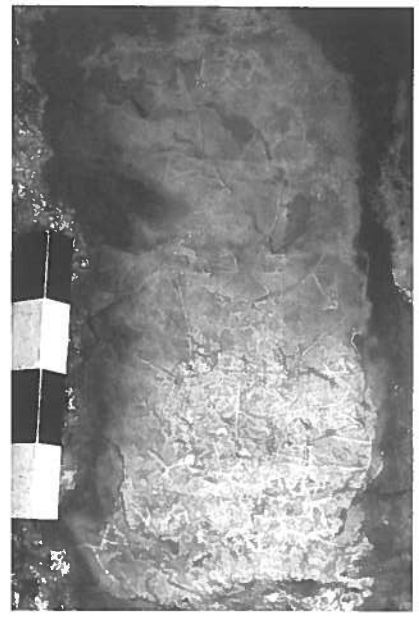

Fig. 2. Urgut Syriac inscription 017-019.
© A. Savchenko, 2009.

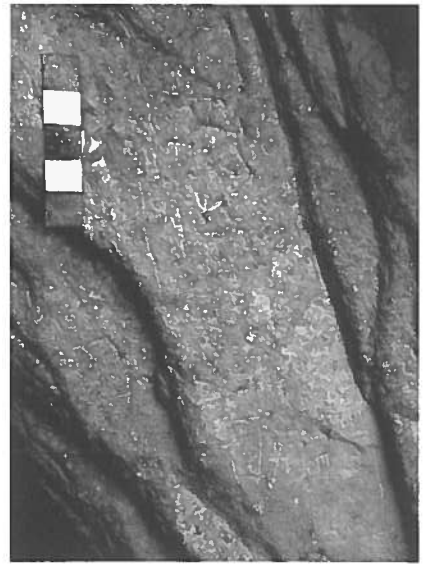

Fig. 3. Urgut Syriac inscription 023-024.
© M. Dickens, 2009.

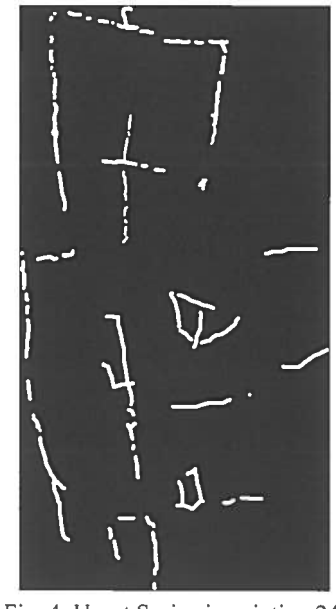

Fig. 4. Urgut Syriac inscription 24.
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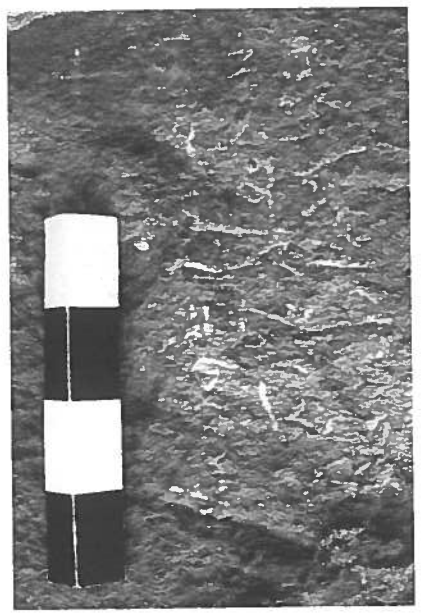

Fig. 5. Urgut Syriac inscription 031.
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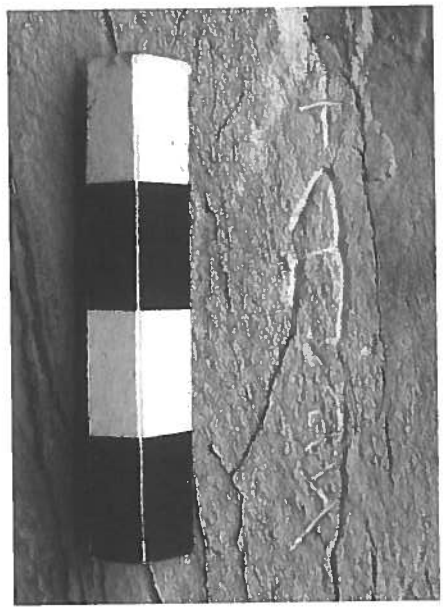

Fig. 6. Urgut Syriac inscription 032.
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Fig. 7. Urgut Syriac inscription 036-043.
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Fig. 8. Urgut Syriac inscription 044-056.
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Fig. 9. Urgut Syriac cross.
© M. Dickens, 2009.

Fig. 10. Urgut Syriac inscription 058.
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Fig. 11. Urgut Syriac inscription 061.
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Fig. 12. Urgut Syriac inscription 062.
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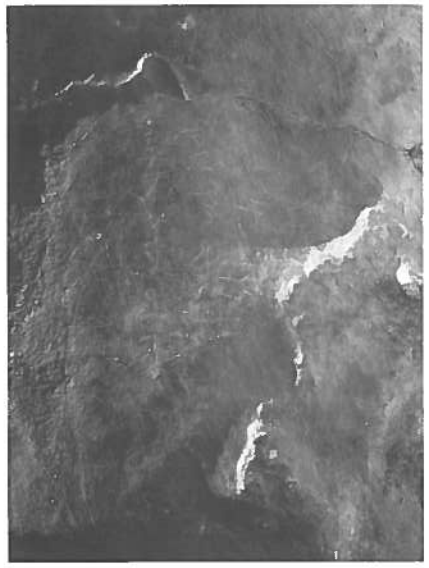

Fig. 13. Urgut Syriac inscription 063.
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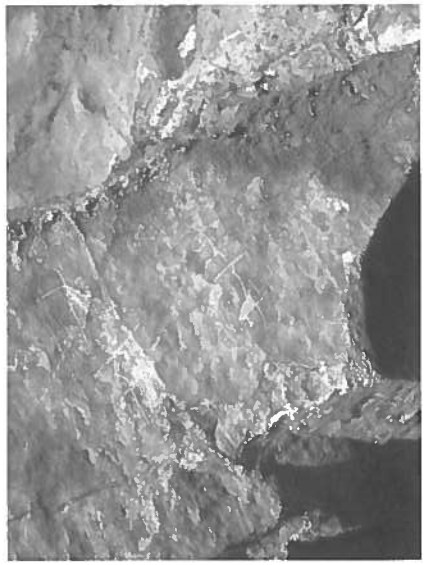

Fig. 14. Urgut Syriac inscription 073.
© M. Dickens, 2009.

Fig. 15. Urgut Syriac inscription 097-102.
© M. Dickens, 2009.

Fig. 16. Urgut Syriac inscription 116-118.
© M. Dickens, 2009.

Fig. 17. Urgut Syriac inscription 121.
© A. Savchenko, 2009.

Fig. 18. Urgut Syriac inscription 123-125.
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Fig. 19. Urgut Syriac inscription 128-129.
© A. Savchenko, 2009.

Fig. 20. Urgut Syriac inscription 138.
© Y. Karev, 1996.

Fig. 21. Urgut Syriac inscription 166.
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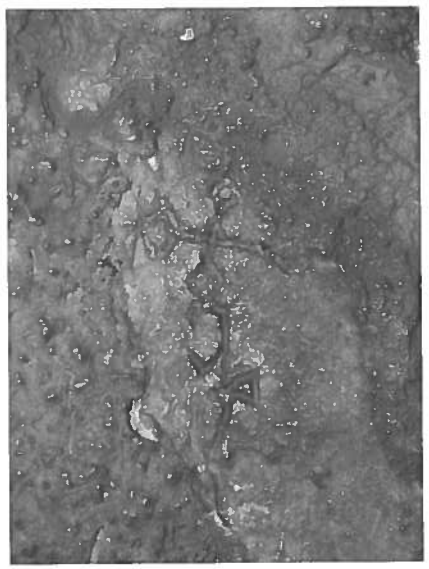

Fig. 22. Urgut Syriac inscription 167.
© M. Dickens, 2009.

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