

Syriac, Sogdian and Old Uyghur Manuscripts from Bulayïq*

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The German Turfan Expedition conducted 4 campaigns at the Turfan Oasis between 1902 and 1914 bringing 40,000 fragments in 20 scripts and 22 languages back to Berlin. During the 2nd and 3rd seasons (1904–1907), a library was unearthed at the monastery site of Shuipang near Bulayïq yielding ca.1100 fragments written in Syriac script and covering 3 major languages: Syriac, Sogdian and old Uyghur. Several fragments in New Persian and a Middle Persian (Pahlavi) Psalter were also found^[1]. Small quantities of Christian texts, in Syriac, Sogdian, Uyghur and Persian, were discovered at other sites in the Turfan oasis (Astana, Qocho, Qurutqa and Toyoq). Regrettably, there are scant remarks about the excavation of the archive by Theodor Bartus at Bulayïq, north of the city of Turfan, a site which von Le Coq had previously visited. Talking about his colleague's visit, von Le Coq stated in his book *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan*: “er hat ... in dem schauerlich zerstörten Gemäuer eine fabelhafte Ausbeute christlicher Handschriften ausbegraben” (he excavated ... in the extremely ruined walls an amazing Christian manuscript”)^[2].

The Syriac-script fragments from Turfan shed invaluable light onto the eastward missionary expansion of the Church of the East whose dioceses extended into Central Asia, China and Mongolia up till the 14th century, not only attesting the nature and expression of worship (liturgy etc) that was conducted, but also revealing how this branch of Eastern Christianity interacted with the local languages and cultures of its diverse congregations. As well as the Christian manuscripts in the Turfan collection, 97 Syriac fragments were brought back to St. Petersburg by N. N. Krotkov, the Russian consul at Urumqi^[3]. A few Christian manuscript fragments were also recovered from two other sites in western

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[1] Plate I: *The monastery site of Shuipang near Bulayïq*.

[2] Albert von Le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan* (Leipzig: 1926), p.88.

[3] E. N. Meshcherskaya, “The Syriac Fragments in the N. N. Krotkov Collection”, in Ronald E. Emmerick et al. ed., *Turfan, Khotan Und Dunhuang*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996, pp.221–227. These fragments currently remain uncatalogued and unpublished.

China, notably Dunhuang (Gansu Province) and Qara-khoto (Inner Mongolia), but they do not compare in quantity to the sheer volume of the Turfan material^[1].

Of the 1100+ fragments, approximately 450 are Syriac, about 550 are Sogdian but written in Syriac script, 50 are Sogdian, written in Sogdian script and 50 are Uyghur, being written in either Syriac or Uyghur script. In addition, there are 3 New Persian Christian fragments, written in Syriac script and a Psalter written in Middle Persian (Pahlavi). Syriac was the principal liturgical language of the Church of the East – and was used in this capacity at Turfan. Since Sogdian was widely spoken in the region, it was employed for Bible readings and was popularly used to write the ascetical texts and hagiographies that were read by the monks at the monastery. At some point, possibly around the 9th century, Uyghur seems to have eclipsed Sogdian as the primary spoken language^[2]. Texts began to be increasingly written in Uyghur, these cover various genres: prayer-books, a story about the Magi, an omen book, a hagiography of St George, a wedding blessing and economic documents.

The Christian library from Bulayiq in the Turfan oasis is exceptional, due to the quantity of fragments that were found; ranging in size from mere scraps, the size of postage stamps, to complete bifolia. Regrettably no complete Syriac manuscripts were found, hence there is an absence of colophon information which would have been very valuable for information regarding the dating and place of the manuscripts' writing. The fragments have dated between the 9th-13th centuries, corresponding to the period of the Uighur kingdom of Qocho^[3]. Whilst a handful of Sogdian fragments may have been Melkite in origin – a community had arrived in Transoxiana in 762 CE, establishing their base at Tashkent – the majority of fragments clearly pertain to the Church of the East, thus establishing the site as a monastery belonging to the East Syrian tradition^[4].

Much of the Syriac material can be classified as being either liturgical (approximately 75%–80%)

[1] On Christian materials from Dunhuang, see N. Sims-Williams and J. Hamilton, *Documents Turco-Sogdiens du IXe-Xe siècle de Touen-houang (Corpus Inscriptorum Iranicarum, Part II, Vol. III)*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990, pp.51–61, pp.63–76 and Wassilios Klein and Jürgen Tubach, “Ein Syrisch-Christliches Fragment aus Dunhuang/China,” *ZDMG* 144 (1994) pp.1–13, p.446. On the very few Christian finds from Qara-khoto, see N. Pigoulewsky, “Fragments Syriaques et Syro-turcs de Hara-Hoto et de Tourfan,” *ROC* 30 (1935–1936), pp.3–46 and Peter Zieme, “A Cup of Cold Water,” in *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia* (ed. Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter; Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006, pp.341–345).

[2] Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Sogdian and Turkish Christians in the Turfan and Tun-huang manuscripts”, In A. Cadonna ed., *Turfan and Tun-huang, the Texts. Encounter of Civilizations on the Silk Route*, Firenze, Leo S. Olschki, 1992, pp.49, 50–51, 54.

[3] Dating issues re the Turfan fragments are still being determined, however this period corresponds to the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho when it is thought that the majority were produced. Meshcherskaya, *op. cit.*, 226 considers that the Krotkov manuscripts date to the 13th and 14th centuries.

[4] Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Christianity iii. In Central Asia and Chinese Turkestan”, In Ehsan Yarshater ed., *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda, vol. V, p.531. Sims-Williams suggests that two fragments from a Sogdian Psalter with Greek headlines and the draft letter mentioning Byzantine dignitaries might have emanated from the Melkite communities or, at least contact with them. See also Werner Sundermann, “Byzanz und Bulayiq,” in Peter Yavroušek ed., *Iranian and Indo-European Studies: Memorial Volume of Otakar Klíma*, Praha: Enigma Corp., 1994, 255–264 for possible connections between Turfan and Byzantine Christianity.

and includes many texts from the Ḥudrā, the principal liturgical book of the Church of the East that contained “the variable chants of the choir for the divine office and the Mass for the entire cycle of the liturgical year”^[1]. At least 21 individual Ḥudras (more than 190 fragments) have been identified, on the basis of palaeographic and text-formatting criteria, but none is complete. Many of the exemplars consist of only one or two dislocated fragments, others are several bifolia. Eduard Sachau published single folios from three exemplars, using photographs that he had received on the 30th August, 1905 from von le Coq who sent them a couple of months earlier, on 24th June from Kara Khoja^[2]. These were designated: B-55, B-7, B-26; B indicating the provenance as Bulayiq^[3]. In each case, Sachau published a transcription of the Syriac text and a summation of contents; possibly due to time constraints he did not provide complete translations. In 1937 the Japanese scholar, Yutaka Saeki provided English translations^[4]. Sachau’s article made some very important observations about the manuscripts, dating them to between the 10th-12th centuries, but suggesting that they could be even older^[5].

The liturgical fragments clearly show that the monastery at Bulayiq belonged to the Church of the East and upheld its beliefs and tenets including the Nicene Creed (the Church of the East adopted the Niceno-Constantinopolitan version of 381 CE). A Sogdian version of the Nicene Creed has been found at Turfan^[6]. The debt of the great Antiochean theological tradition was upheld at Turfan, and is epitomized by the following passage:

“Upon the foundation of the truth of Simon Peter (Cephas) built the orthodox Diodore and Theodore with Nestorius, and the Great Ephrem with Mar Narsai and Mar Abraham with John, Job and Michael, the heirs of truth.”^[7]

Specific mention is made of Nestorius, the erstwhile patriarch of Constantinople and the “founder” of the Church of the East as well as its great theological exponents, Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, often termed in the East Syrian tradition “the Interpreter”. Both Mar Narsai and Mar Abraham (of Kashkar) were traditionally associated with the renowned School of Nisibis, the major theological centre of the

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- [1] W. Macomber, “A List of the Known Manuscripts of the Chaldean Ḥudra”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* XXXVI:1, 1970, p.120.
[2] E. Sachau, “Litteratur-Bruchstücke aus Chinesisch-Turkistan”, *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Sitzung der philosophisch-historischen Classe von 23. November) XLVII, 1905, p.964–973.
[3] Sachau, *op. cit.*, p.964.
[4] PY. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, Tokyo, The Toho Bunkwa Gakuin, 1937, ch. XVI, pp.337–347.
[5] Sachau, *loc. cit.*
[6] MIK III 59 (T II B 17 + T II B 28. For the Sogdian text and German translation: F. W. K. Müller, “Soghdische Texte I”, *APAW* 1912 (1913), pp.84–87. An English translation is supplied in I. Gillman and H-J. Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500*, London: Curzon, 1999, pp.252–253.
[7] SyrHT 80 (T II B 42 No. 1a).

Church of the East^[1]. Mar Narsai, in particular, had a reputation for learning, piety and asceticism, but above all for his poetry, that earned him the sobriquet, “Harp of the Holy Spirit”.

The liturgical texts were written in Syriac, a language which assumed a role in the Church of the East similar to Latin in the medieval Roman Catholic Church. The liturgy was recited in Syriac; the discoveries from Turfan include some very early fragments of an East Syriac baptismal rite which have been dated by Sebastian Brock and Nicholas Sims-Williams “to about the ninth or tenth centuries”^[2]. These fragments include instructions to the priest that are in Sogdian and are written in red ink, so that they could be easily picked out of the long liturgical text. Most of the instructions are very short: “the deacon says” and “the priest says”^[3], but some are longer, viz: “When they finish the priest shall go to the font with the censor and the fans and the [...] and the cross”. These fragments, and their instructions, shed significant light on the celebration of the rituals of the Church of the East at Turfan, but equally the Sogdian instructions show that many of the clergy must have been drawn from the local community and may well not have had a fluent understanding of Syriac.

Psalters and lectionaries make up the next largest group of Syriac material (approximately 10%–12%). More than 15 exemplars have been identified, but none are complete. The high number of Psalter fragments is not surprising; for as well as forming an integral part of the monastic life, the education of young men began with learning the Psalms by heart, along with mastering the rudiments of reading and writing. The 9th century work, *Historia Monastica* by Thomas, bishop of Thomas of Margâ reveals that the Psalms were amongst the first pieces of literature disseminated to new converts, presumably in their vernacular languages^[4]. In keeping with its role as one of the principal texts of the Church of the East, the Psalter was translated into other languages. These include:

- 5 Syriac -Sogdian lectionaries, where the texts written on alternating lines
- 1 Sogdian lectionary with Syriac rubrics
- 1 Middle Persian (Pahlavi) Psalter, consisting of 12 folios
- 1 New Persian Psalter, consisting of 2 folios

Conversely, the Syriac Psalter was occasionally transliterated into other scripts. 9 folios (Syr HT

[1] For translation of Syriac texts discussing the “School of Nisibis”, see Adam H. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* [Translated Texts for Historians vol. 50], Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008.

[2] Sebastian P. Brock and Nicholas Sims-Williams, “An Early Fragment from the East Syriac Baptismal Service from Turfan”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 2011, 77:1, 81.

[3] Plate 2: *SyrHT 88 side (b) with rubric Sogdian instructions*.

[4] Discussing conversion to Christianity, E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Governors: the Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Margâ*, 2 vols, London: Kegan Paul, 1983, I: 285 ܘܢܘܨܘܬܝܢ ܘܕܝܘܬܝܢ ܘܕܥܘܒܝܬܝܢ ܘܕܥܘܒܝܬܝܢ ܘܕܥܘܒܝܬܝܢ II: 513 “he ordained priests and deacons from them and wrote the Psalms for them”, I: 350 ܘܕܥܘܒܝܬܝܢ ܘܕܥܘܒܝܬܝܢ ܘܕܥܘܒܝܬܝܢ, II: 609 records that Magians who converted to Christianity were taught “the psalms and hymns”.

20–27, MIK III 58) of a liturgical text^[1] that includes Psalms and hymns by Syriac authors (including Ephrem) and was recited during worship was written in Uighur script^[2]. This unique example again demonstrates that the local communities did not speak, or possibly even understand, Syriac. However, they conducted their worship in Syriac which retained pride of place as the liturgical language of the Church of the East.

There are surprisingly few hagiographies or “lives of the saints” amongst the Syriac material accounting for only 2%–3%. These include the popular story of Mar Barshabba, who was the legendary founder of Christianity at Marv. One of the Barshabba fragments includes the repudiation of Zoroastrianism by the Sassanid queen and three of her “ladies in waiting”, evidence of the tension that existed between the two faiths in the Sassanid dominions^[3]. Several fragments, narrating the legend St. George, have been dated to the 9th–10th centuries by Miklós Maróth^[4]. This legend appears to have been very popular for it is the only saint’s life to be found in all three major languages at Turfan: Syriac, Sogdian and Uyghur^[5]. However, the Syriac text differs from the Sogdian and Uyghur versions, and may not be a hagiography since the story revolves around his debate with the pagan magician Athanasius, demonstrating St. George’s powers and as such many have been a polemical text upholding the superiority of Christianity. Amongst the Ḥudrā material, in the Martyrs Anthems, are the martyrdoms of Mar Cyriacus and Julitta^[6]. Although they contain many common elements with stories about the saints, as such they are not strictly hagiographies.

The majority of the hagiographies that have been found at Turfan were written in Sogdian but were all translated from original Syriac texts. These include stories about St. George, the lives of John of Dailam and Serapion, and Mar Augen, who purportedly brought monastic ideas from Egypt to northern Mesopotamia as well as the aforementioned legend of Barshabba^[7]. Additionally, translations were made into Sogdian from the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and the *Apophthegmata Patrum* showing that the monks displayed an active interest in the ascetical life. Most valuably, various East Syrian spiritual

[1] For these 9 folios see Mark Dickens and Peter Zieme, “Syro-Uigurica I: A Syriac Psalter in Uyghur Script from Turfan”, in J. den Heijer, A. B. Schmidt and T. Pataridze ed., *Scripts Beyond Borders. A Survey of Allographic Traditions in the Euro-Mediterranean World*, ed., Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming.

[2] Plate 3: *Syr HT21 side (b) with Psalm 87:7–88:7, Syriac written in Uighur script.*

[3] *SyrHT* 45–46.

[4] M. Maróth, “Eine unbekannte Version der Georgios-Legende aus Turfan”, *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 1991, pp.18, 86–108.

[5] The Sogdian version was published by O. Hansen, “Berliner Soghdische Texte I: Bruchstücke einer Soghdischen Version der Georgspassion (C1)”, *APAW* 10, 1941, pp.1–38; I. Gershevitch, “On the Sogdian St. George Passion”, *JRAS*, 1946, pp.179–184; E. Benveniste, “Fragments des Actes de Saint Georges en version sogdienne”, *JA* 234, 1943–1945, pp.91–116. The Uyghur version was published by W. Bang, *Türkische Bruchstücke einer Nestorianischen Georgspassion*, Louvain, J-B Istas, 1926.

[6] *SyrHT* 140–1, 144.

[7] W. Sundermann, “Ein Soghdisches Fragment der Mar Eugen-Legende,” in Mehmet Ölmez and Simone-Christiane Raschmann ed., *Splitter aus der Gegend von Turfan: Festschrift für Peter Zieme anlässlich Seines 60. Geburtstags*, Istanbul-Berlin: Safak Matbaacılık, 2002, pp.309–331.

writings have been preserved in Sogdian, including several fragments of Dadisho Qatraya, a famous mystic who wrote his commentary on the *Paradise of the Fathers* at the monastery of Rabban Shabbour in Khuzistan during the 9th century^[1]. The range of hagiographical and ascetical material in Sogdian shows that the monks were keenly interested in the great monastic and ascetical heritage of the Church of the East. However, an enigma surrounds this material because, to date, no Syriac originals from which the Sogdian texts were translated have been found at Bulayiq.

Miscellaneous material constitutes a small category of the Syriac material, some 1% - 2%. A dozen fragments are calendrical tables that were used to determine dates in the liturgical calendar that depended upon the date of Easter^[2]. Their distinct form is in keeping with their purpose: the pages were often subdivided by rulings in which various information, usually the months of the year and numerical dates, were placed. SyrHt 291, a fragment measuring 8.9 x 5.8 cm, that consists of 8 rows subdivided into 3 columns: In the first column is the name of the month, the second column gives the date, the third column enters the Syriac term ܡܕܘܕܝܪܐ “its sign”^[3], although what is actually meant remains enigmatic^[4]. Calendrical tables are found amongst the Sogdian fragments, in some cases accompanied by texts that are concerned likewise to calculate certain dates in the liturgical year. On the *recto* of n 354, a table 9 rows by 8 columns has been drawn, on the *verso* is a text detailing when certain feasts should be celebrated:

“... both day [and] night alike, [from] the month ... until the nineteenth of the month Former Kanun one eats(?) at night. Again, finally(?), after the fast, after forty days from the Resurrection is the feast of the Ascension, and on the [ten]th day is the feast [of Pentecost].”

Whilst the function of the calendrical texts clearly pertained to the liturgical cycle and monastic life at Turfan, the application of other miscellaneous texts is not so clear-cut. 2 Syriac fragments are pharmaceutical recipes for various hair treatments: to stop hair dropping out and also to stop hair growing. The recipes name many different ingredients ranging from cedar oil, rose oil, ladanum, coriander, beetroot and even mouse droppings!^[5] These fragments may have come from a pharmacopaeic

[1] n 254, n 385, n208.

[2] For a comprehensive discussion of the Christian calendrical fragments in Syriac and Sogdian, see Mark Dickens and Nicholas Sims-Williams, with contributions by Thomas A. Carlson and Christiane Reck, “Christian Calendrical Fragments from Turfan”, in J. Ben-Dov, W. Horowitz, and J. Steele ed., *Living the Lunar Calendar. Proceedings of the Conference at the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem* (Calendars and Years 3), Oxford: Oxbow Books, forthcoming.

[3] htWta in its emphatic state, without the pronominal suffix, is a palindrome, although whether this had any bearing on its function remains unknown.

[4] Plate 4. *SyrHT 291 side (a)*.

[5] SyrHT 1 and SyrHT 388. Miklós Maróth, “Ein Fragment eines syrischen pharmazeutischen Rezeptbuches”, *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 1984, v. 11, pp.115–125, published SyrHT 1 where he points out the debt to Pliny.

text used at the monastery; there are also a couple of New Persian texts, written in Syriac, that also deal with herbal remedies and cures^[1]. However, another fragment which is a letter to a Byzantine official, seems out of place^[2]. The text exhorts, “Our Lord, may your radiant honour magnify increasingly before the Emperor and his nobles.”^[3] The emperor is not named but the *incipit*, “Peace to my lord so & so”, indicates that it was a draft. The contents of the *verso* consist of quotations from Proverbs 9:14 – 10:12 and Luke 1:26, written in two hands, which are different from that which wrote the letter. It is curious how this fragment ended up at Turfan, but the palaeography is typical of the Nestorian Estrangela script (the Pe may be possibly influenced by Sogdian). What the juxtaposition of two disparate genres does suggest is that the paper was recycled – as was often the case^[4].

Prayer-amulets form a small but important category of the Syriac material, approximately 5% of the collection. Some are prayers to the Virgin Mary. A small booklet, consisting of 6 folios – although regrettably the upper parts are missing– extols, “Blessed are you holy virgin, blessed are you, ܡܘܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡܐ mother of Christ”,^[5] where in keeping with the Church of the East Mary was considered to be the *Christotokos* “bearer of Christ”, not the *Theotokos*. Other prayers called on the assistance of saints – and were part of the liturgy. N. 394 (a) described as “Vespers and compline from an *Office for Martyrs*” is from a bilingual service book written in Syriac and Sogdian^[6]. It mentions the famous Roman martyr saints, Mar Sergius and Mar Bacchus (although the fragment is missing at this point) beseeching:

1. 5 to our people. Mar Sergius and Mar [Bacchus]
1. 6 the power prevails over all, which is released by the [bones]?
1. 7 Protects our souls by night and day.

Requests for protection and to stave off illness are often found in liturgical works, but some may also have been used as personal items. SyrHT 206 requests:^[7]

[1] See the contribution by Nicholas Sims-Williams in this volume.

[2] Plate 5. *Syr HT 2 side(a)*. Draft letter to a Byzantine official with excerpt of the *incipit*.

[3] Syr HT 2 has been published by Miklós Maróth, “Ein Brief aus Turfan”, *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 1985, 12, pp.283–287, which he dated to the 9th - 10th century.

[4] For an example from the Cairo Genizah, see Erica C. D. Hunter and F. Niessen, “Trousseau lists tells a story”, *Genizah Fragments* 41 (April 2001), where quotations from I Corinthians were written on one side of the fragment which was reused to write a *Ketubah* (marriage - contract).

[5] Plate 6. *Syr HT 280 side (a)*.

[6] Plate 7. n 394 side (a).

[7] Plate 8. *SyrHT 206*.

1. 1 qw[...] wq and may you remove
1. 2 from him illnesses and diseases
1. 3 and fevers and seizures/shivering fits
1. 4 and melancholy and evil eyes
1. 5 and all those sufferings

The term ܡܠܚܘܠܘܢ “melancholy” appears to be to be a corrupt spelling of the Greek loan-word, $\mu\epsilon\lambda\alpha\gamma\chi\omicron\lambda\iota\alpha$.

Other prayer-amulets were dedicated to specific saints. SyrHT 330, a fragment that begins quoting John 1:1–2 (“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...”) then continues “by the prayer of Mar Tamsis, [the martyr]”^[1]. Very few details are known about Mar Tamsis, whose name appears to be a corruption of Thaumasius and is connected with northern Mesopotamia. SyrHT 330 forms a dislocated join with SyrHT 99 and at one time, the two pieces originally belonged to a much larger folio^[2]. To date, however, the intermediate piece has not been found. The reconstructed contents of SyrHT 99 read:

1. 4 ... [Lord] God Almighty, grant me the request
1. 5 ... [diseases] or illnesses. And may it be commemorated
1. 6 ... of sorceries/magic this prayer
1. 7 ... that is recalled and by mercy/alms
1. 8 ... [crucifixion] suffering and holy. And bless
1. 9 ... to it² and your dominion. Your greatness shall be increased.
1. 10 ... and forever and ever. Amen.

The larger text of which SyrHT 99 + SyrHT 330 were part, was at some stage cut down and recycled. SyrHT 99 was folded into three with the cross drawn free-hand in the middle of the verso side of Syr HT 330. Arising out of a lotus flower, it is a crude representation of the fine specimen that was carved at the apex of the Xian Fu stele at Chang’an that was completed in 781 CE^[3]. Crease marks indicate that the fragment was previously folded and was probably kept in a pouch and hung as a

[1] See Erica C. D. Hunter, “Traversing Time and Location: A Prayer-Amulet to Mar Tamsis from Turfan” in *Proceedings, 3rd International Conference on “Research on the Church of the East in China and Central Asia”*, Salzburg, AUSTRIA, June 2009; forthcoming.

[2] Plate 9. *Reconstruction of SyrHT 99 + SyrHT 330*.

[3] Plate 10. *SyrHT 99 side (b) and cross on the Xian Fu Stele*.

personal amulet, possibly being the possession of a pilgrim or a monk at Bulayiq.

Two separate prayer-amulets were dedicated to Mar Quprina: SyrHT 102 and 2 fragments: n. 364–365. In a feature, unique amongst the Syriac fragments, each word of the text of n. 364–365 was separated by a red dot, possibly highlighting its function as an amulet^[1]. Commencing with the specific term, ܐܢܬܐ “the anathema” the text reads:

1. The anathema of the holy [Quprina]
2. In the name ... forever. Amen.
3. By the prayer of the saint ... who as he was celebrated
4. in this world ... he requested from our Lord Jesus Christ and he gave
5. him his request ... Praise to you God in heaven
6. and on [earth] ... that hangs on him, your servant
7. ... merciful God. Mar ...
8. directed his mind to God. Now
9. ... Yea, Lord

Thereafter follow 2 lines an unrelated text in Sogdian, followed by 7 lines of the Syriac liturgical text. A Sogdian text was written on the *verso* side is fragmentary and largely illegible but mentions “... the victorious cross ...” and “... accursed, obstructive Jews” amongst other terminology^[2]. How the Sogdian texts relate to each other and to the Syriac anathema of Mar Quprina is still unclear.

At times, however, the boundaries are blurred and it is not always easy to discern how a text was used – whether as a prayer or an amulet or for another purpose. SyrHT 386 is written in a very rough hand and reproduces Ps. 148:1–3 in reverse sequence:^[3]

1. Praise...
2. Praise him, sun and moon
3. [ang]els. Praise him
4. Praise him, all his ang[els]
5. Praise him in the heights
6. Praise the Lord from the heavens

[1] Plate 11. n. 364–5. *Anathema of mar Quprina, the saint.*

[2] The author thanks Nicholas Sims-Williams for this translation.

[3] Plate 12. *SyrHT 386, Ps. 148:1–3.*

Why the verses were written in this order is not clear. If the fragment was a prayer or an amulet, the reverse order may have been significant. It is also possible that the fragment was just a scribal exercise with no particular meaning. Certainly the text was written on scrap paper for a face drawn on the *verso* around the hole makes it clear that the paper was already damaged before the text was written.

Concluding Comments:

The Syriac fragments provide a working insight into what must be considered to be “the easternmost library of the Church of the East”. Their range of genres shows what literature that was used at the monastery; providing considerable information about how it functioned and what roles it fulfilled. The large quantity of liturgical fragments which were written almost exclusively in Syriac uphold the primacy of the Syriac liturgy. Similarly, the prayer-amulets, written in Syriac, maintained in the citation of specific saints vital links with the “mother church” in Mesopotamia. They may also suggest that the monastery was a centre of healing, providing both spiritual as well as physical healing; the latter indicated by the pharmacopaeic fragments. In the monastic routine of following the liturgical cycle, the calendrical fragments supply clues into how the dates for Easter and other feasts were calculated. The abundance of Psalter fragments and their translation into a wide variety of languages shows that the monks were drawn from the surrounding communities. Yet the hagiographies that they read in their native languages, were all translations from Syriac upholding the distinguished ascetical heritage of the “mother church” in Mesopotamia.

The monastery at Bulayiq served the local Sogdian and Uyghur communities, but its ecclesiastical heritage looked westwards to the heartland of the Church of the East. Located on the northern edge of the Tarim basin, Turfan was on the middle branch of the Silk Route that lead to the Tang imperial capital where Alopen introduced Christianity in 635 CE, the monastery might have been just “one pearl in the chain” of institutions that spanned the vast distance from the Church of the East patriarchate in Baghdad to Chang’an (Xi’an), possibly offering facilities for rest and repose for ecclesiastical travellers. It may have supported large-scale proselytising programmes, as took place at the metropolitanate at Merv and at other important centres including Samarkand and Kashgar. The dates for the monastery’s foundation remain unknown. Nor are the reasons for its decline and eventual closure evident. However the monastery appears to have still been operating in the mid-13th century; the 14th century might be considered to be its *terminus ad quem*. Many questions still remain unanswered; but precious clues would be revealed by archaeological excavation of the site.

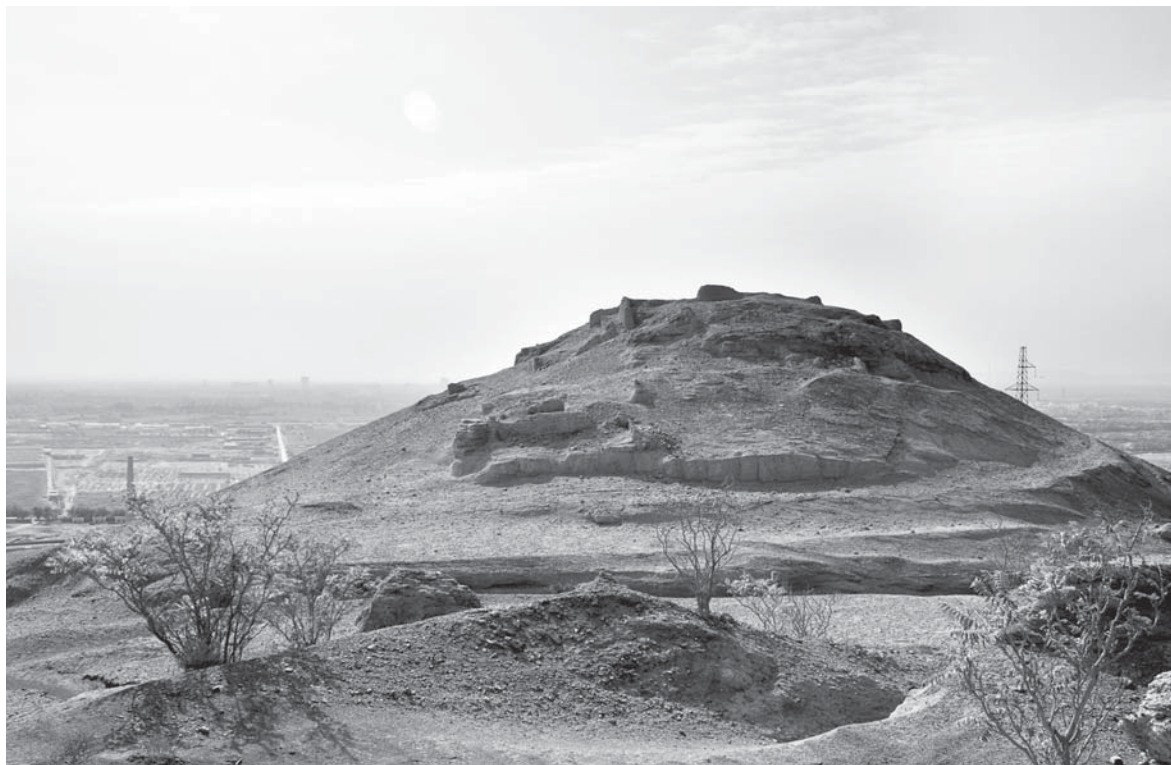


Plate 1 Monastery at Bulayiq

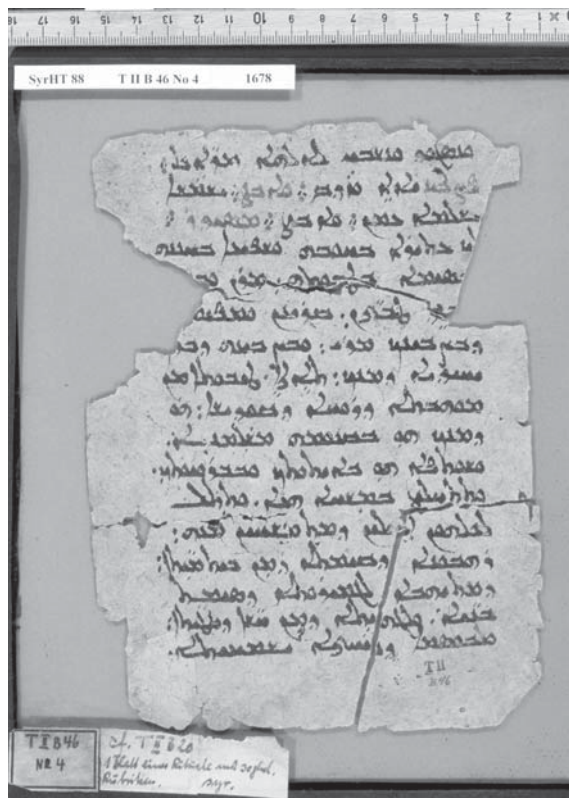


Plate 2 SyrHT 88

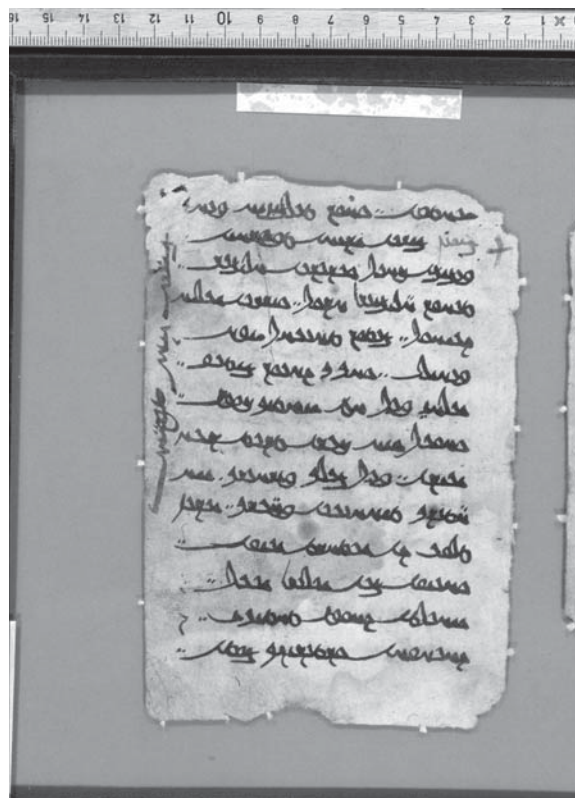


Plate 3 SyrHT 21 side (b)

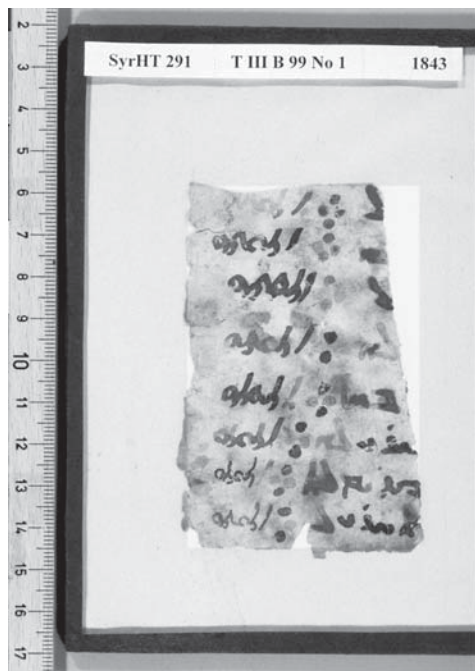


Plate 4 SyrHT 291 side (a)

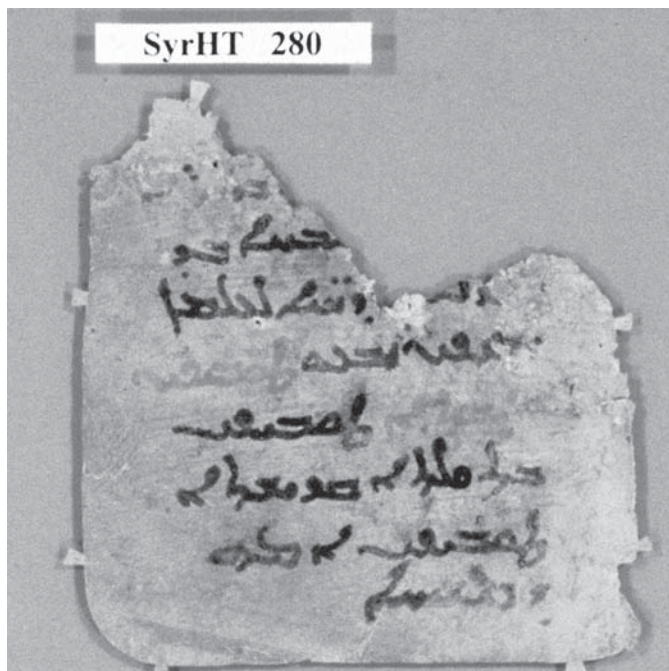


Plate 6 SyrHT 280 side (a)

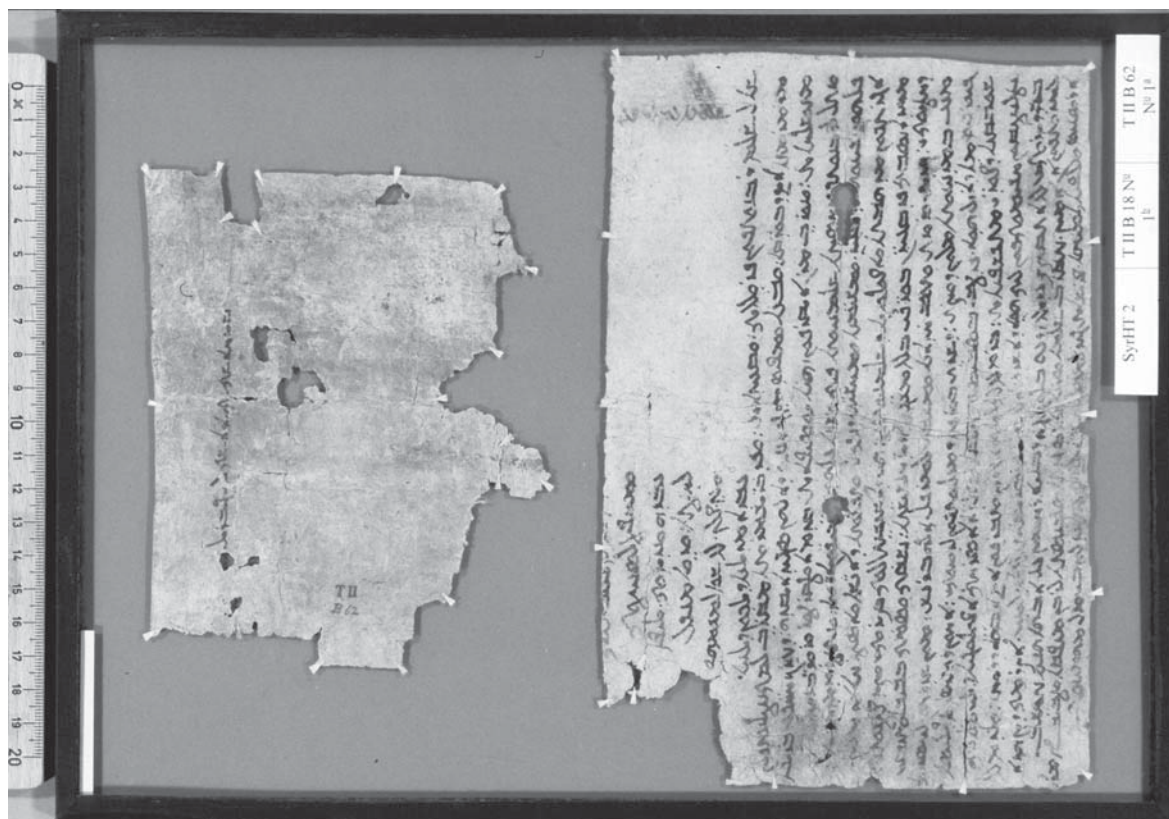


Plate 5 SyrHT 2 side (a)

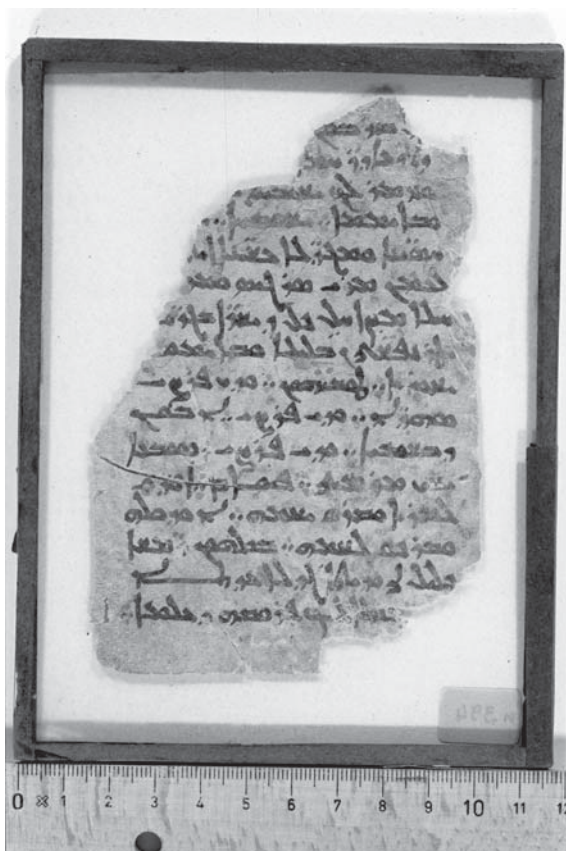


Plate 7 n394 side (a)

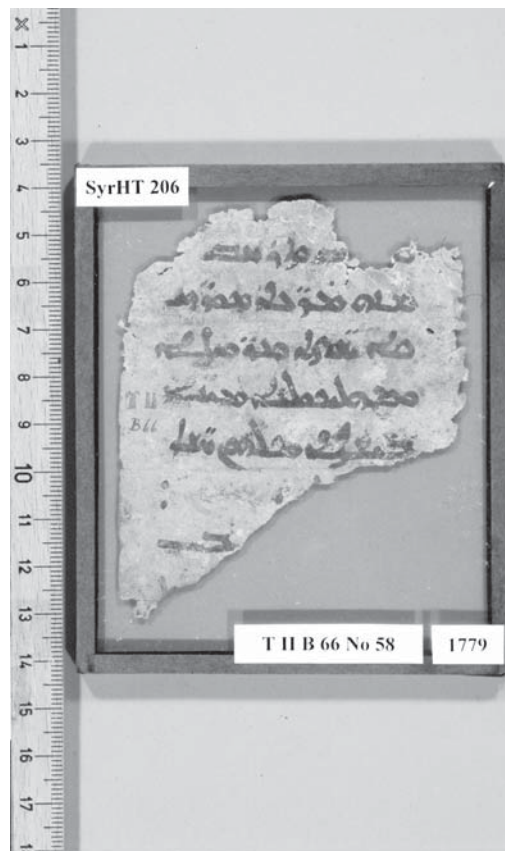


Plate 8 SyrHT 206 side (a)

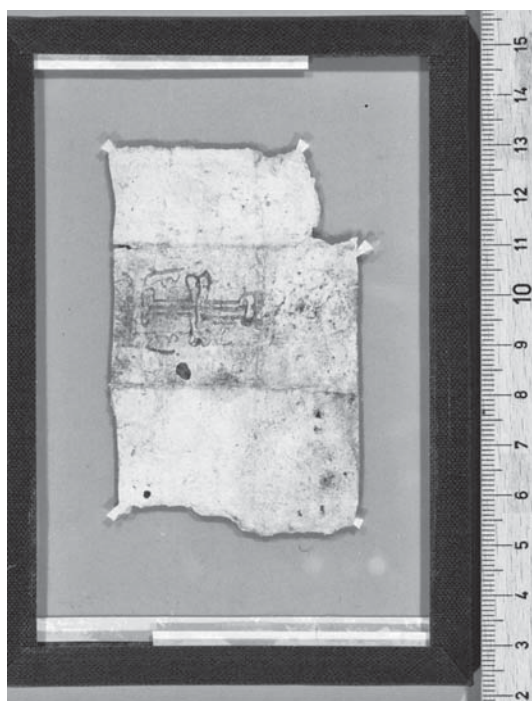


Plate 10 SyrHT 99 side (b)

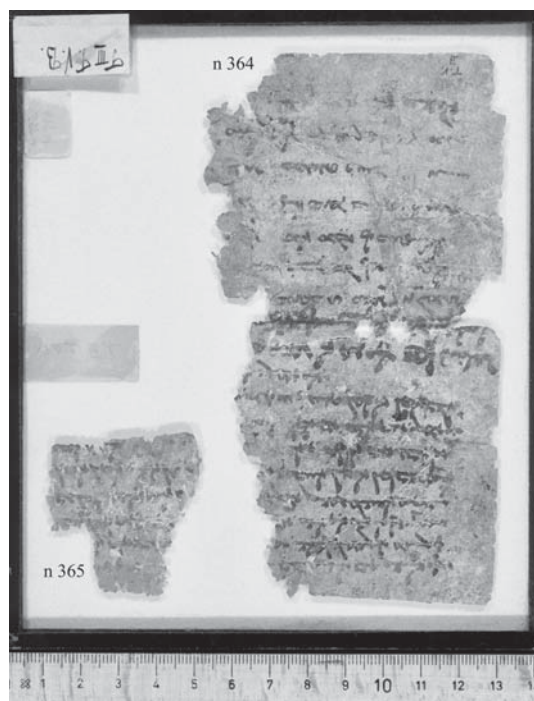


Plate 11 n364-365 side (b)



Plate 9 SyrHT 330 side (a)

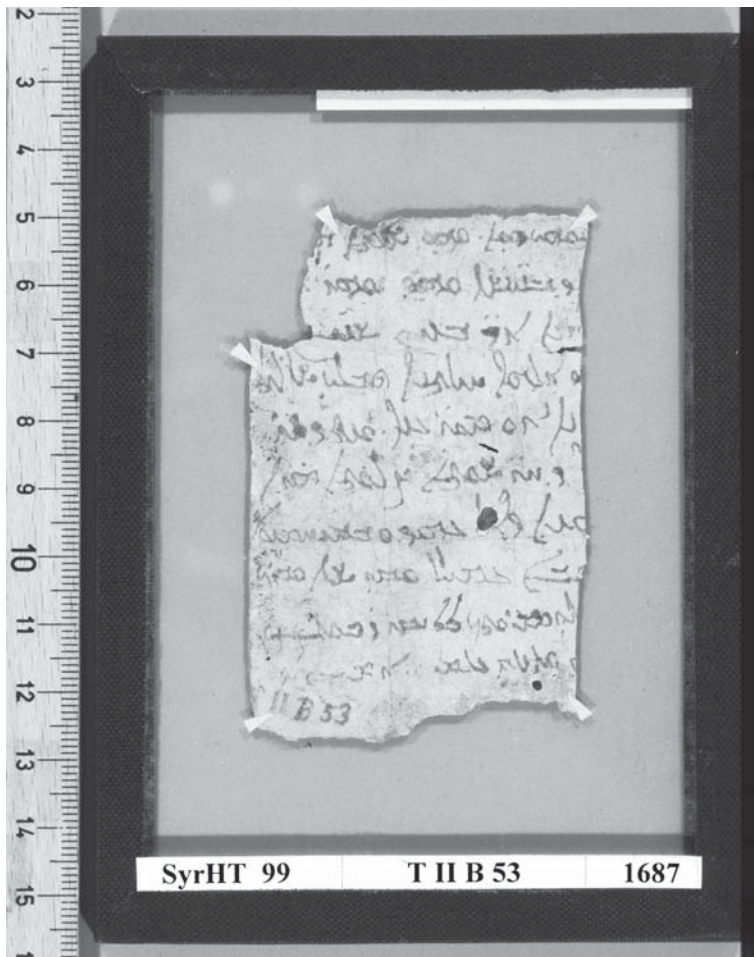


Plate 9 SyrHT 99 side (a)

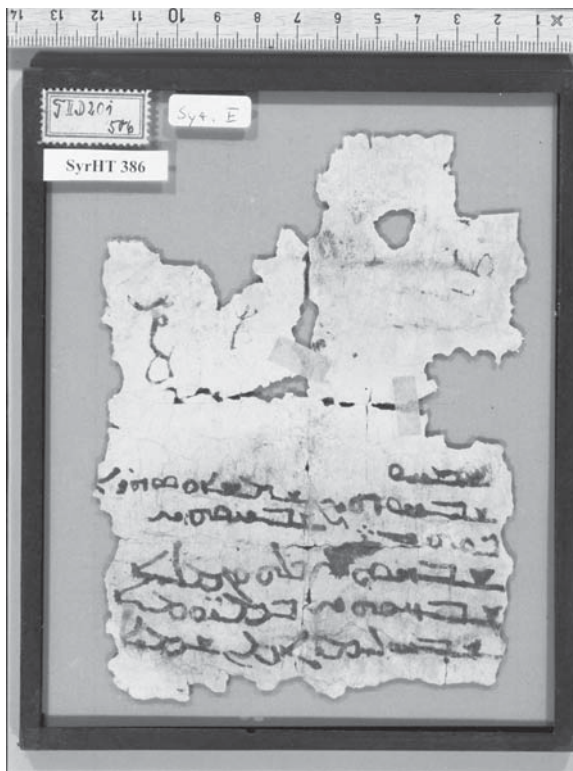


Plate 12 SyrHT 386 side (a)



Plate 12 SyrHT 386 side (b)