**The History of Christianity in Asia**

**I. Introduction**

“The church began in Asia. Its earliest history, its first centers were Asian. Asia produced the first known church building, the first New Testament translation, perhaps the first Christian king, the first Christian poets, and even arguably the first Christian state. Asian Christians endured the greatest persecutions. They mounted global ventures in missionary expansion the West could not match until after the thirteenth century[[1]](#footnote-1).” That’s missionary and historian Dr. Samuel Moffett, writing of Central Asian Christianity—something largely unknown to many modern Christians, and our topic for this morning.

***The Map***

For starters, where is Central Asia? There’s no standard answer to that question. For our purposes, it includes the countries or areas on the map on the back of your handout.

**Soviet Central Asia** includes all “the Stans” except for Afghanistan and Pakistan. On our map, in addition to Soviet Central Asia, we include Iran, Turkey, Northern Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Afghanistan and Pakistan. Roughly, the Turko-Persian world.

Let’s take a moment and identify a few **cities** on our map: Istanbul, Izmir (Biblical Smyrna), Edessa, Herat, Merv, Kashgar, Erbil.

Today, it’s a geographic area of some 300-350 million people, perhaps more. It remains one of the - if not the - least evangelized areas in our world. In the Central Asian region, 98.7% of its total population remain unreached by the gospel.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***Preview of Today’s Class***

* We’ll first look at how the **New Testament** provides some interesting glimpses of the church in Central Asia which morphed into the Eastern Church fairly rapidly.
* Then, there’s a long pre-Islamic history of what we’ll call the **Nestorian Church**.
* Next, we’ll consider the Islamic and Mongol rule over the church in Central Asia. Initially, as Islam was ascendant, it was a fairly tolerant Islam. Then came the Mongol rulers and Tamerlane and Central Asia after Tamerlane was much less tolerant.
* Then Soviet times and finally we’ll end up in present-day Central Asia and try to draw some conclusions from all this and some matters for prayer[[3]](#footnote-3).

**II. New Testament period (I Century A.D)**

The story of Christianity in Central Asia really starts with the Babylonian Captivity of Judah, which left enclaves of Jewish people in many areas of Central Asia—some of which remain to this day. Then we reach Pentecost in Acts 2.

**Central Asians repent and believe at Pentecost (Acts 2)**

**5**Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6**And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7**And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8**And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9**Parthians [like Iranians, Farsi-speaking people] and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia [that’s all part of Turkey and Central Asia], **10**Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11**both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

So how did the gospel get to Central Asia? Well, it’s likely because of Pentecost. They heard the good news and then some of them likely went home with much to tell about Jesus.

Then as you look through the New Testament, many of NT epistles were written to churches in Central Asia. Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. The churches of Revelation 2-3 (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, etc.) were all in Asia Minor.

**Paul and coworker’s difficulties in Ephesus (Eph 19 and 2 Cor 1:8)**

One of the key themes of the church in Central Asia is its nearly continuous minority status as a persecuted faith. Which, of course, was the experience of these Christians even in New Testament times. Paul seems to speak of his experience in modern-day Seljuk in Turkey in 2 Corinthians 1:8… when he writes**,** *For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+1%3A8&version=ESV#fen-ESV-28792a)*] of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself*.

This is one of our themes I’ll highlight at the end: **Christianity in Asia as a minority religion.** It’s always been difficult to be a Christian in Central Asia[[4]](#footnote-4).

**So how did things work out given that minority status? That brings us to our next point:**

**III. Pre-Islamic Period (100 A.D. to 800 A.D.)**

If we think about the pre-Islamic period from roughly 100 to 800 AD, there’s a few things I want to highlight. First is the amazing expansion of these churches.

***Missionary Expansion***

First, a note on terminology. The Eastern Church is often called the Nestorian church, named after Nestorius. He didn’t come along until well into this period, but people often read back into history and anachronistically call the Eastern church of this entire time period the “Nestorian” church. So we’ll go with that terminology today. The Nestorians (we’ll get to what exactly that means in a bit) had two primary schools where they provided biblical and theological training, one in **Edessa** and the other in **Arbela**. “Arbela” might not sound familiar but its modern name “Erbil” probably does. Edessa in particular is described as the headquarters of the Nestorian missionary expansion in the 3rd century. Nestorian missionaries were trained for 3 years in these schools and then sent out to share the gospel, start churches, and sometimes establish new monastery-like training and sending centers. Not unlike the Moravian sending model of many centuries later in history. By 220AD, we know from Tertullian that there was a strong Christian community in Persia. So things were expanding.

Edessa is undoubtedly one of the oldest centers of the Christian faith in the world. Some people think it had the earliest known Christian church building. It produced the first New Testament translation (in Syriac), the first Christian king (in Armenia[[5]](#footnote-5)), the first Christian state, perhaps the first Christian poet, even the first Christian hermits. *(Moffatt Vol. 1 p. 418)*

Look at your map for a second. Maybe you can see Merv there in the middle, and Edessa over to your left. By 3rd century the gospel had apparently gone from Edessa as far as Merv (modern-day Turkmenistan, capital for the Parthians we read of in Acts 2)[[6]](#footnote-6). Much this expansion occurred along **established trade routes like the Silk Road.** The Silk Road was a large complex of highways throughout Central Asia that went as far as India and China. In spite great persecution, the Eastern church was sending out missionaries, training them to go along the silk trade routes as merchants to share the gospel, to take Bibles, and to set up training centers and even churches as they went. These Persian and Sogdian (that’s just another dialect of Persian) were educated laity traveling all along the silk road as far as modern-day Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and Kyrgystan. So Persians and Turkic peoples had some exposure to the gospel as early as the third and fourth centuries AD. Now, it’s an open question as to whether that gospel was the real gospel in every time and place. Or was it more of a Jehovah’s witness-type gospel since it was Nestorian. But there’s good reason to believe that if the true gospel was preached at Pentecost, some of these people—maybe many or most—were sharing the true gospel.

The Eastern church, it seems, trained merchants as well as monks and other full-time Christian workers to spread their faith—which is a key them in the history of Nestorian Christianity. As one scholar has written, “One of the reasons for the spread of Nestorianism to Central Asia was certainly the fact that Nestorians engaging in missionary activity could live by the work of their hands and were thus not dependent upon monastic settlements along the way.” These Christians were “a powerful army of devotees who strengthened the Church and fearlessly penetrated the vast Asiatic continent in an attempt at large-scale evangelization.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

So despite being a minority religion, these Christians were very evangelistic. It’s important to remember that one of the reasons the gospel spread was because the Bible was translated into a language that people could understand[[8]](#footnote-8). This seems to have been done sooner and more frequently than within the Western Church where Latin was the Christian language for a long time.

***What were these early Central Asian or Syriac Christians like?***

Here’s what a Syriac Christian writing around 196 A.D. stated:

*“We are Christians by the one name of the Messiah. As regards our customs our brethren abstain from everything that is contrary to their profession.... Parthian Christians do not take two wives.... Our Bactrian sisters do not practice promiscuity with strangers. Persians do not take their daughters to wife. Medes do not desert their dying relations or bury them alive [tells you what other people were doing back then]. Christians in Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who commit fornication but keep them apart and commit them to the judgement of God. Christians in Hatra do not stone thieves.*”[[9]](#footnote-9)

So whatever else we might know about these early Christians, their lives were distinct from those around them. From the very beginning, Nestorian Christianity was a spreading, evangelizing faith, growing so fast that within a century and half it had spread from Edessa to modern-day Iran, permeating the Persian Empire from 'the mountains of Kurdistan to the Persian Gulf'.[[10]](#footnote-10)

But, of course, being distinct from the world also made Central Asian believers a target. The persecution by Decius and Diocletian was even more brutal amongst the Persian Christians. In a 41 year period in the fourth century, it is estimated that over 15,000 Christians were put to death by the Persian Saasanid Emperor, Sapor II.[[11]](#footnote-11)

On this theme of being a minority, persecuted religion, let’s remember our brother Polycarp. Do you remember what he said when he was martyred? “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and he never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior.” There’s something of that Spirit in Central Asian believers, even today. In the midst of great persecution, they refuse to recant.

One major difference between the Christianity in the Roman and Eastern Christianity in the Persian Empires was that the Persian form of Christianity was always **a minority status** and still is.

***Institutions***

Now, let’s turn to the kind of institutions that these Nestorians set up as Christianity spread Eastward.

As part of their missionary strategy, the Eastern church set up a number of schools in the Persian Empire where monks studied theology, medicine, music and other academic subjects before being sent out to evangelize.[[12]](#footnote-12) They also established “metropolitans” or bishoprics in major urban centers. So they didn’t just travel along and leave behind no institutions. These would be centers of Christian influence where bishoprics would be put in place. There was teaching and training, and missionaries were sent out.

According to the ninth-century Syriac document *Historia monastica*, the metropolitan was primarily appointed—and this is important because we might think of them as primarily administrative—as a “shepherd and teacher to the barbarian nations… to teach and show them the true knowledge of their doctrine… he baptized… he built churches, he established priests and deacons, and he set apart some of the brethren who were with him to teach them psalms and spiritual praises” *[quoted in Hunter (1996), 141][[13]](#footnote-13)*.

In addition to Herat and Merv, major Christian centres emerged in Bukhara and Samarkand[[14]](#footnote-14).

Bukhara probably had a Nestorian bishop before the Arab conquest and Samarkand definitely did[[15]](#footnote-15). There were Christians in Samarkand from at least the fifth century on, and prior to the Arab invasion, one writer said that “**Christianity had become, next to Zoroastrianism [or fire worship], the second most powerful religious force in the [Persian] empire.”** *(Gillman & Klimkeit)[[16]](#footnote-16).*

In its first thousand years, Asian Christianity spread much faster and farther than either of the Western sects—Roman or Greek Christianity. In spite of being a minority and often persecuted religion, it was notable for its intense missionary activity, excessive asceticism, theological orthodoxy (for the most part), and a quickness to indigenize, all of which help to explain its rapid cross-cultural expansion.

**Transition: So we’ve been talking about the “Nestorian Church.” What exactly is “Nestorian*ism*?”** The Eastern church is not well known in the West and perhaps misunderstood. There were political as well as theological divisions in the ecclesiastical councils, so it is not always easy to know what Nestorians believed.

**Eastern Church in Central Asia - Nestorian Church**

Nestorius (c. 381-451) was the patriarch of Constantinople who was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Nestorius preferred the term **Mother of Christ** (Kristotokos) for the Mother of Jesus rather than **Mother of God** (Theotokos). And that gives a sense for the nature of these controversies. There was another meeting on the nature of Christ at Chalcedon in 451, and at this point there was a breaking between East and West. Not the Roman church against the Greek church, which happened much later—but the Roman and Greeks in the West against the Central Asian church in the East.

Was Nestorius’ attempt to explain how Christ could be both God and Man a linguistic error, or was it heretical? The Council ruled it was heresy. Some scholars suggest this may have been more of a linguistic difference than a theological difference. That Eastern Christians may have struggled to articulate their faith in Latin Philosophical categories.

So, what’s the verdict on Nestorian Christianity? There were probably some, perhaps many, genuine followers of Christ among the Nestorians. It’s hard to know, especially about Syriac Christianity in Arbela and Edessa *before* Nestorius.

**Eastern Syriac Christianity**

I’d like to read from a Soghdian creed, just to give you a sense for what Eastern, or Nestorian Christians believed. This is from around 750AD.

*We believe in one God, the Father, who upholds everything, the Creator of all things that are seen and unseen. [We believe] in one Lord God, and in Jesus [Christ], the only son of God, [the firstborn] of all beings, who...in the beginning was not created but begotten by the Father; [true God] of true God...by whose hand the [aeons] were fashioned and everything was created, he who for the sake of men and for our salvation descended from the heavens and clothed himself in a body by the Holy Spirit, and became man and entered the womb; who was born of Mary, the virgin, and [who] suffered agony and [was] raised on the cross [in] the days of Pontius Pilate; and [was buried] and ascended and sits on the right hand of the Father and is ready to come (again) to judge the dead and the living. And [we believe] in the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, who went forth from the Father, the Holy Spirit who gives life.*

There’s certainly much in there we can affirm. A few interesting turns of phrase, which is what those Christological controversies were about.

With that, let’s move on to Islamic Central Asia[[17]](#footnote-17).

**IV. Islamic Central Asia 800-1300 AD**

When Islam began to invade Central Asia, you had Christianity, you had Zoroastrianism, Shamanism, and Buddhism. But from about 800 to 1300, it was Islam that was ascendant. And as you’ve probably read, under Islam, Christians had a restricted minority status. They sometimes had to pay a special tax, or wear special clothing, or a particular ornamental sign that identified them as non-Muslims. They were often restricted from certain professions. But interestingly, the work of educators and physicians was often reserved for these Christians. It’s called “Dhimmitude.” Again, that theme of minority status.

But during this period, while Islam had taken over, it rarely destroyed churches and Christian communities. That would come later.

Though many Christians—or at least, nominal Christians—gave up and converted to Islam. Often, the apologetic was a kind of Central Asian prosperity theology that still compelling to many today in places like the Emirate or Iran or Saudi Arabia. “How can Islam be wrong if we’re doing so well, if we’ve conquered all your people?” Especially compelling when so many so-called Christians had lost jobs and privileges because of their beliefs. Yet God preserved some.

**Transition:** The Middle Ages in Asia brought lots of invasions, warfare, and destruction. Eventually, the church in Central Asia was nearly destroyed. So let’s look at that now.

**Mongol Rulers (Genghis Khan 1162-1227) and Tamerlane (1330-1405)**

The Mongol hordes swept through Central Asia taking control of the Islamic empire in Central Asia and cities like Bukhara and Samarkand around 1220 A.D. They set up their own religion and selectively persecuted religious minorities. Though note that word “selectively.” Some Mongols had been evangelized by Christian Nestorians since the 600s A.D. Some had Christian wives, some had been raised by Christian mothers, some had been trained by Christian teachers. Eventually, certain Mongol rulers granted some religious freedom in places, perhaps because Eastern Christians had been influential in Mongol circles and were typically good administrators, physicians, and civil officials.

In any case, somehow, manyNestorian Christians survived Mongol invasion and occupation.Samarqand might be an interesting example of a community that managed to retain its churches, schools, and monastic cells even through the Mongol invasion. By 1265, when Maro Polo visited Samarqand, he estimated 1 of 10 persons was a professing Christian[[18]](#footnote-18). He even describes the building of a great church dedicated to John the Baptist in Samarkand that was erected to celebrate the conversion of the Chaghatayid khan to Christianity. Polo also mentions Nestorian Christians in Kashgar, Yarkand, Kara Khoja (in “Uighuristan” this may be modern-day Urumchi) and Chingintalas (possibly modern-day Barkul).[[19]](#footnote-19) Ibn battuta, in 1332, reports a Mongol general who was Nestorian and whose family had Christian names and whose coins were inscribed as follows: “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God.” So even with Mongol invasion, Christianity was still holding on.

In fact, in 1300 the Nestorian Church still looked *strong*, with 25 metropolitans and between 200 and 250 bishops in far-flung locations around Asia, including India, Central Asia, and China.

**But then came Tamerlane.** He was ruthless—both his armies and his occupation policies. And when he came through Central Asia, he destroyed churches right and left. He burned holy books…it was the end of many Christian communities. Tamerlane dreamed of an empire that would surpass that of Chingiz Khan, ruled from his capital of Samarkand. In his campaigns of conquest, hundreds of thousands of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and pagans were indiscriminately slaughtered as his troops burned whole cities and left pyramids of skulls as a testimony to their military prowess. Tamerlane was a Muslim and his Islam tolerated no other religion. In fact, the devastation seems to have been so complete, it’s quite difficult to reconstruct the history of the church in Central Asia in the years after Tamerlane.

So to summarize, we see the Nestorian church’s restricted minority status under a more tolerant Islam and Mongol rule, and then its near (but not total) destruction under Tamerlane.

From the Middle Ages until the 20th century, the church in Central Asia seems mostly to have been in survival mode with the Nestorians or Syriac Christians managing to survive and live an isolated existence outside the city centers. The Armenian church seems to have persevered in Iran and in Armenia, though with less evangelistic zeal. Let’s jump ahead to:

**V. Soviet Central Asia - (20th Century until 1990)**

During the years of Soviet domination of Central Asia, Central Asians themselves were largely unreached by the gospel. Christian witness during these years was mainly with German and Russian Baptist Churches—German and Russian speakers who preserved the Scriptures and continued gathering, discreetly sharing their faith with family members and others. Under the Soviets, Soviet Central Asians were required to learn Russian. For 70 years or so, Soviet Central Asians were bilingual, retaining their heart languages like Uzbek, Kazak, Azeri, Tajik, or Turkmen. So with the fall of the Soviet Union, evangelizing Central Asians would require Scriptures and outreach in these Central Asian languages. For the most part, though, there was no Christianity in Central Asia in these years, as had been the case really since Tamerlane. Which brings us to today.

**VI. Central Asia in the 21st century (1990 - present)**

As you know, the Soviet Union fell in 1990, opening a doorway for the gospel back into Central Asia. And a lot has happened in the last 35 years or so. We can’t know for sure about the genuineness of Nestorian, Syriac Christianity in the past, or whether the Christianity in those surviving communities is real today. But we *can* be cautiously optimistic about what God is doing more broadly in Central Asia today.

Just like in times past, Christianity is still a minority religion, there’s still a great deal of persecution. But just like in the past, some of the best inroads for the gospel are for merchants, or teachers, or doctors, who take the gospel along with their jobs. Let me highlight some points of light for the gospel today in Central Asia:

* We can rejoice that Christian workers from Singapore, Korea, South Africa, Latin American, North America, and a few from China have refreshed the effort to evangelize, disciple, and start churches in Central Asia. We can give thanks that today some older persecuted churches (Armenian, German and Russian Baptists) are renewing their engagement of Central Asian peoples.
* The Bible began to be translated into major Central Asian languages and a Central Asian Russian Scripture was published. Since Russian was the imposed language, after the Soviet Union dissolved, almost all adults could read and write Russian. **The CARS Bible,** as it is called, was an attempt at an updated and more understandable Russian translation of the Bible with some Central Asian names or terms replacing the Russian names of Bible characters. It seems that the Lord has really blessed the distribution of that Bible.
* Today in Northern Iraq, there are churches in several cities that did not exist a decade ago.
* In Kazakstan, in the early 2000s or so, there were 15,000 Kazak believers all newly won to Christ since 1990 and gathered into churches. A few Kazak churches have even trained and sent short-term workers to share the gospel in other Central Asian countries—just like the ancient Nestorian Christians.
* In Tajikistan, Christian workers from a variety of Central Asian nations have established training for pastors and church planters. Clean water wells are dug by a team of traveling local believers who move into a mountain village and live for a month or so among the people working alongside them by day and then sharing the good news in the evenings.
* Central Asians are also scattered around the world, with many in Queens and Brooklyn, Istanbul, Moscow, Dubai, Amsterdam, and Kuala Lampur, DC. We celebrate persecuted pastors who end up in Moscow driving taxis and sharing the good news among Central Asians as bivocational church planters or pastors.
* Whereas 25 years or so ago, we knew of-at most-a handful of believers in some places, there are now whole churches in those cities and villages in Tajikstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, and in all of the Stans. Fragile churches, minority religion, little or no religious freedom - but they are sending out trained missionaries to other Central Asian villages.
* Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978-79), many Iranians have become Christ followers. The reports are unbelievable how many Iranians are turning to follow Jesus. In Iran, it certainly seems that Christianity has reached a tipping point. For years, many missionaries gave their lives to plant gospel seeds in Iran with very, very little visible fruit. But now, a hundred years later, we see an incredible response to the gospel in Iran. That sowing of gospel seeds that seems to be coming to fruition in Iran is just beginning to happen in so many other Central Asian places.

There are opportunities in almost every Central Asian country for marketplace Christians to come alongside a fragile but true church and help establish solid, healthy churches that send laborers into the harvest.

**VII. Takeaways:**

**Indigenous Church Life and Missions Activity** - theology, church growth, influence in the world, etc.

* + **Minority Status** and Persecution persists alongside evangelistic zeal.
  + Established **outposts, training centers, and institutions** existed in major centers.
  + **Marketplace Christians and the Silk Road Network** crossed cultural barriers and seem to have reproduced themselves. Seem to have used networks well to spread the gospel and start churches.
  + **Pray** for the Central Asian church: 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 and 1 Timothy 2:1-7
  + **Bible translations** still needed! The first translation was in Central Asia, but we still need Central Asian translations today. The gospel can spread where the Word is available.

1. A History of Christianity in Asia Vol. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Retrieved from <https://www.imb.org/2016/09/04/fast-facts-central-asia/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Removed: There’s sadly a real lack of historical sources for much of this region—both because of what Tamerlane did in destroying so much, and also because what we do have is generally written in Syriac, which isn’t a common language among scholars. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. When we think of Central Asia it’s good to remember also that the Apostle John wrote the Letter of Revelation from an island in Central Asian Turkey….Patmos. Why was he on the island? He was in prison for his faith. There are pastors in prison today in Central Asia because of their faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gregory the Illuminator led King Tiridates of Armenia to Christ about 301 A.D. So some say Armenia was the first Christian nation…before Constantine’s baptism and apparent conversion. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Arbela (Erbil, Northern Iraq) was the center for missionary advance into Central Asia. Early Christianity outside the Roman Empire spread down the Euphrates valley until the majority of the population of Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq, had embraced the Christian faith - at least in principle. It then moved into Iran and northward to the Caspian Sea. The first nation to adopt Christianity as its state religion was not the Roman Empire, but the Kingdom of Armenia. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Dickens, Mark. (2001). Nestorian Christianity in Central Asia. Retrieved from <http://www.oxuscom.com/Nestorian_Christianity_in_CA.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The first translation of the NT from Greek was into Syriac (Peshitta) was completed in Arbela or Edessa in Eastern Turkey/Northern Iraq/Syria. It was a gospel harmony called Diatesseron done by Tatian in 160-175 A.D. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Moffett, Samuel Hugh. A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Moffett, Samuel H. (1998). The Great Persecution. Retrieved from <http://www.syriacstudies.com/AFSS/Syriac_Articles_in_English/Entries/2007/10/12_THE_GREAT_PERSECUTION-_SAMUEH_HUGH_MOFFETT.html>

    Jenkins, Philip. (2015, February 6). The Reality of Persecution. Retrieved from <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2015/02/the-reality-of-persecution/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Removed: The same document also refers to the role that the miraculous played in the work of these bishops and archbishops: “They evangelized them and they baptized them, worked miracles and showed prodigies, and the news of their exploits reached the farthest points of the East” [quoted in Gillman & Klimkeit, 219]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Removed: Among other artifacts that have been discovered in Central Asia, many coins with crosses on them have been recovered from around Bukhara, mostly dating from the late seventh or early eighth centuries. In fact, more coins with Christian symbols have been found near Bukhara than anywhere else in Central Asia, prompting one scholar to suggest “Christianity was the religion of the ruling dynasty or even state religion in the principality where this coinage was issued.” (Gillman & Klimkeit). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Several dates for the appointment of the first bishop in Samarkand are given, including the patriarchates of Ahai (410-415), Shila (505-523), Yeshuyab II (628-643) and Saliba-Zakha (712- 728). (Gillman & Klimkeit). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Even the favourite wife of the great Shah Khosrau I (531-579) was a devout Christian, as was the favourite wife of his grandson, Khosrau II (590-628). In addition, the personal physician to the Shah during this time was usually a Nestorian Christian. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Mohammed’s successors invaded and subdued Central Asia by the end of the 700s A.D. Some regions were easily conquered and others put up much resistance. It wasn’t until the Abbasid dynasty that the Islamicization of Central Asia really gained traction. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Meaning there were likely 11,000 believers in the area. [P. 45-6 The Hidden history of Christianity in Asia, the churches of the East before 1500 John C England. ] [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. England, John C. The Hidden History of Christianity in Asia: The Churches of the East Before 1500. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)