

Alexander Toepel

## Traces of Nestorianism in Manchuria and Korea<sup>1</sup>

The existence of cruciform objects from Korea and Manchuria has been noted by scholarship since more than fifty years but these remains have – probably due to their scarce nature – never received any thorough-going treatment<sup>2</sup>. The present paper's aim is to present some preliminary considerations in regard of the date and historical background of these findings. The relics from Manchuria include two clay crosses found in 1927 near An-shan in Southern Manchuria north of the Liao-dong peninsula, a bronze-cross discovered in Hai-lun in central Manchuria, approximately 150 km north of the present-day North-Korean border and a series of tombstones from Tian-shan (Ar Horqin Qi) in the border area between Manchuria and the present-day Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, circa 500 km northeast of Beijing<sup>3</sup>. The findings from Korea consist of two metal crosses, a large stone cross and a statuette believed to be a depiction of the Virgin Mary and child Jesus. All of them were found in the 1950s/1960s in the vicinity of Kyungju in the southeastern part of the Korean peninsula, but the exact circumstances of their discovery are not quite clear and at least the stone-cross must have been detected at an unknown earlier date since until its discovery by the Korean scholar Y.S. Kim it had been used for magical purposes<sup>4</sup>. The Chris-

1 The author is indebted to Prof. S. Gerö, Tübingen for reading a draft of this article and adding valuable complements. The drawings were made by Ms J. Chung, who also assisted in editing the Chinese characters. Responsibility for any shortcomings remains of course entirely with the author.

2 Cf. P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, Tokyo: Maruzen 1951, pp. 430–433 on the Manchurian finds and A. Toepel/J. Chung, “Was there a Nestorian Mission in Korea?”, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004), pp. 30 s. on the remains from Korea. Korean literature on this subject is given *ibid.*, p. 30 n. 6.

3 Cf. Saeki, *Documents*, pp. 440ss. and the map in H. Jedin/K. S. Latourette/J. Martin (eds), *Atlas zur Kirchengeschichte*, Freiburg: Herder 1987, S. 27. R. Torii claimed in the 1930s to have made additional findings in Tao-nan in Western Manchuria, around 450 km north of An-shan (cf. Saeki, *Documents*, p. 442; this place is likewise marked in Jedin/Latourette/Martin, *Atlas*, p. 27), but the information is, as K. A. Wittfogel/C. S. Feng, *History of Chinese Society: Liao* (= Transactions of the American Philosophical Society NS 36/1946), New York: MacMillan 1949, p. 308 point out, unconfirmed. The tombstones from Tian-shan show nativity-scenes but do not actually bear any cross-shaped marks. They are, however, included here due to their unmistakable Christian character. The clay crosses were found inside a larger tomb in which originally seven persons were buried, a cross having been set up for each of them. The five remaining crosses were obviously destroyed by accident during the excavation; cf. Saeki, *Documents*, pp. 440f.

4 Cf. Toepel/Chung, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004), p. 30 and the Korean literature given in *ibid.*, n. 5. The



tian character of these remains is in case of the stone and clay crosses (fig. 1, 2) shown by their similarity to cross-designs on Nestorian tombstones from Quan-zhou in Southern China (fig. 3, 4)<sup>5</sup>. The metal amulets (fig. 5, 6) are similar in shape to bronze crosses from the Ordos area south of the Huang-ho bend (fig. 7, 8), which are seen to be related to the Ongut, a Christian Turkish tribe which flourished in this area until the advent of Jinghis Khan and apparently even for some time after<sup>6</sup>. The cross-shaped engraving on a small metal plate (fig. 9), which was found in Kyungju alongside the iron amulet, shows a likeness to the well-known "Nestorian" cross-design, in so far as it has the typical pearl-like ornaments in the center and at the end of each bar<sup>7</sup>. While, therefore, a Christian origin of the Manchurian and Korean remains can be assumed, these artifacts stand apart from those found in the Ordos area and Southern China. Unlike the crosses found on tombstones in Quan-zhou, the clay and stone crosses from Kyungju and An-shan are not grafted upon larger blocks but individually sculpted. The metal crosses found in Manchuria and Korea are distinguished from those in the Ordos area by their clear outline and the absence of any syncretistic ornaments, which are found abundantly on the Ordos crosses. The cross-shaped engraving from Korea differs from other crosses with pearl-designs in so far as it has only one pearl at the end of each bar, not two or three,

statue's significance is hard to determine but, since there is a similarity to the nativity scenes on the tombstones from Tian-shan in Western Manchuria, it will be surveyed in connection with the other, more clearly Christian, remains.

5 Cf. J. Foster, "Crosses from the walls of Zaitun", in: *JRAS NS* (1954), plates II, III, IV, V, XI, XII, XV with the illustrations given in Saeki, *Documents*, p. 440 and Toepel/Chung, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004). The stone cross found near Kyungju (fig. 2 in this paper) does *prima facie* not possess any characteristic details. A comparison with plate V (fig. 4 in this paper) in Foster's publication shows, however, that there were more simple designs beside those crosses whose bars have triangle-shaped endings, as is the case with the clay crosses from An-shan and those on Foster's plates II, III, IV, XI, XII and XV. All of the stones from Quan-zhou, Marco Polo's Zaitun, date from Mongolian times; cf. Foster, in: *JRAS NS* (1954), *passim*.

6 Cf. P. Pelliot, "Sceaux-amulettes de bronze avec croix et colombes provenant de la boucle du fleuve jaune" in: *Revue des arts asiatiques* 7 (1931/1932), pp. 1s.; I. Gillman/H.-J. Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1999, p. 230. According to Pelliot, in: *Revue des arts asiatiques* 7 (1931/1932), pp. 1s. these amulets date from the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> cent. The crosses from Manchuria and Korea exhibit a special affinity to those crosses classified by Hambis as types 3 to 17; cf. L. Hambis, "Notes sur quelques sceaux-amulettes Nestoriens en bronze", in: *Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient* 44 (1954), p. 486.

7 This design is found e.g. upon the Nestorian monument in Xian and some of the tombstones edited by Foster; cf. Gillman/Klimkeit, *Christians*, plate 34b and Foster, in: *JRAS NS* (1954), plates X, XIII, XIV, XVI. Since this type was also used among Manichaeans and is found mainly in the Near and Middle East it should not be regarded as typically Nestorian; cf. K. Parry, "Images in the Church of the East: The evidence from Central Asia and China", in: *BJRL* 78 (1996), pp. 146s. and W. Klein, "Ein Kreuz mit sogdischer Inschrift aus Ak-Bešim /Kyrgyzstan", in: *ZDMG* 154 (2004), pp. 153s. The same holds true for the so-called "leaved-cross", a type of cross with floral ornaments, which is found mainly in the Near East and Caucasus area, and even sporadically appears in Byzantine art; cf. Parry, in: *BJRL* 78 (1996), pp. 145s.



as is the case with most other crosses of this type<sup>8</sup>. Given these common characteristics of the Korean and Manchurian remains, which make them stand apart from other findings in neighbouring areas, it seems justified to assume that they are of common provenance and have to be assessed as a separate group.

A first clue to the date of these remains is provided by the fact that in the tomb from An-shan there were discovered coins of the Chinese Sung dynasty, which date from 998 and 1006 AD respectively<sup>9</sup>. By this time the area around An-shan, which previously had been ruled by the Korean kingdom of Parhae (698-926), with the rest of Manchuria formed part of the Khitan empire (907-1125), which covered northern China and Mongolia as far west as the eastern slopes of the Altai mountains and had adopted the Chinese dynastic name *Liao*<sup>10</sup>. The findings from An-shan thus indicate the presence of Christians within the Liao empire and it is indeed possible to adduce literary evidence in order to corroborate this assumption. An inscription from 987 found near present-day Beijing speaks of an abbot of the *Jing sect* 景派 [*jing pai*], which term obviously refers to 景教 [*jing jiao*], the Chinese name of Nestorian Christianity<sup>11</sup>. Chinese sources mention a Turkish Christian clan by the name of 馬 [*Ma*], which is attested in Northern China and Manchuria from the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century onward and whose founder is said to have been a Nestorian nobleman by the name of Hor-

8 A similar design with only one pearl in the center and at the end of each bar is apparently documented on the tombstone shown by Foster, in: *JRAS* NS (1954), plate X.

9 Cf. Saeki, *Documents*, p. 440. The custom of putting coins inside a grave was still found in the 1930s with the Mongolian Erkut, among whom there are traces of an older Christian or Manichaean faith and who call this money "the grave's prize"; cf. G. J. Ramstedt, "Reste des Nestorianismus unter den Mongolen", in: *Journal de la Société Finno-ougrienne* 55 (1951), p. 45.

10 Cf. the map in D. Twitchett/K.-P. Tietze, "The Liao", in: H. Franke/D. Twitchett (eds), *The Cambridge History of China 6: Alien Regimes and Border States*, 907-1368, Cambridge: CUP 1994, pp. 118s. The exact ethnic identity of the Khitan remains still unknown. The approximately 200 words of the Khitan language, which are preserved in an appendix to the Liao's official history 遼史 [*Liao shih*], consist for the greater part of Turkish loanwords. The remaining material indicates a Mongolian or Tungusian origin; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 45s. The Parhae kingdom was founded 698 by Tae Cho-yeong, a Koguryeo general of Tungusian extraction, after the older Koguryeo state's absorption into unified Silla in 668. It consisted of remnants of the Koguryeo population and existed until 926, when it was annexed by the invading Khitan; cf. K. Pratt/R. Rutt, "Parhae", in: *id.*, *Korea: A Historical and Cultural Dictionary*, Richmond: Curzon Press 1999, pp. 340s.; cf. also W. E. Henthorn, *A History of Korea*, New York: The Free Press 1971, pp. 54s. and P. K. Sohn/C. C. Kim/Y. S. Hong, *The History of Korea*, Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO 1984, pp. 66ss. The dynastic name "Liao" apparently derives from the name of a river in Manchuria; cf. H. Franke/R. Trauzettel, *Das chinesische Kaiserreich*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 1968, S. 208.

11 Cf. Wittfogel/Feng, *Liao*, p. 308. The stones with carved crosses and a Syriac inscription on one of them, which were found in the same area, are most probably not an indication of the presence of Christians within the Liao empire, since a Chinese inscription from 960 states that the monastery in which the stones were found was ruined by 952; cf. A. C. Moule, *Christians in China Before the Year 1550*, London: SPCK 1930, p. 88s.



mizd, who settled within the Liao empire between 1065 and 1074<sup>12</sup>. Members of this family served as high-ranking officials in the Liao administration as well as under the Chin dynasty, which replaced the Liao in 1115<sup>13</sup>. Apart from that the Liao history 遼史 [*Liao shih*] under the years 1086 and 1089 mentions two chieftains of the Tatar by the name of 余古赧 [*Yu-gu-nan*] and 磨古斯 [*Mo-gu-si*] respectively, the latter of whom was publicly executed. Since these names are to be regarded as transliterations of the Syrian names *Yuhannān* and *Marqos*, the two men must have been Christians<sup>14</sup>.

12 Cf. Wittfogel/Feng, *Liao*, p. 308 and Y. Chen, *Western and Central Asians in China under the Mongols* (= Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 15), Nettetal: Steyler Verlag 1989 (repr. of the 1966 ed.), pp. 41–47. The notes in J. Dauvilliers, “Les provinces chaldéennes «de l’extérieur» au moyen âge”, in: *id.*, *Histoire et institutions des Eglises orientales au moyen âge*, London: Variorum Reprints 1983, p. 299 and Moule, *Christians*, p. 24, which refer to an *ineditum* of P. Pelliot, most probably aim at this family. The Ma clan were apparently Ongut according to the Yuan history 元史 [*Yuan shih*], but an inscription made by a family member in the early 13<sup>th</sup> cent. calls them Uighur; cf. Chen, *Western*, pp. 42–44. Both terms probably refer to a generally Turkish identity of this clan.

13 Cf. Chen, *Western*, pp. 46s. The Chin dynasty was founded by the Jurchen, a Tungusian tribe from eastern Manchuria; cf. K. Pratt/R. Rutt, “Jurchen, The”, in: *id.*, *Dictionary* pp. 193s. In the early 12<sup>th</sup> century a branch of the Ma clan was deported by the Chin to the Liao-dong peninsula. In connection with this the inscription mentioned in the preceding note records the following incident: “Once, when T’ai-tung [the Chin emperor Wan-yen Sheng, who reigned from 1123–1135] went out on a hunting expedition, he thought he saw a golden man walking along clasped with the sun to his bosom. He was much excited and did not dare to gaze upwards. He gave up the hunt and returned, and commanded that a search be made of what he had just seen. It was thought by some that what the emperor had witnessed was the personification of Buddha... As there were no Buddhist temples or pagodas in Liaotung, a Buddhist likeness could not be obtained except in the building where the *fan-pai* [a type of psalmody]... [were chanted] by the Uighur. Hence, a painting was taken from them and presented to the emperor; this actually agreed with what he had seen. The emperor was delighted. He sighed with relief and ordered that an appropriate recompense be made. All tribesmen held as captives [i.e. the deported members of the Ma clan] were amnestied, and became common people. They were provided with funds and released” (Chen, *Western*, pp. 44s.; the episode is also briefly related in P. Pelliot, “Chrétiens d’Asie centrale et d’Extrême-Orient”, in: *TP* 15 [1914], p. 630 and Moule, *Christians*, p. 235). Since the temple in question belonged to the captured members of the Christian Ma clan, it must have been in fact a Christian church. A hint as to why an image from this church helped to explain the emperor’s vision is provided by a panel showing three seated figures, two of whom bear crosses in front of their chest; cf. H. D. Kim, 동방기독교와 동서문명 [Dongbang gidokgyowa dongseo munmyeong] (Eastern Christianity and east-western culture), Seoul: 까치글방 [Kkachi geulbang] 2002, p. 239 and fig. 10 in this paper. Given the fact that the cross is, like the Indian *svastika*, a sun-symbol (cf. L. Xu, *Die nestorianische Stele in Xi’an* [= Begegnung 12], Bonn: Borengässer 2004, p. 55), and that the said panel was found in the south-western region of the Sikhote-Alin mountains near present-day Vladivostok, which was part of the Chin, but not of the Liao empire (cf. Kim, *Eastern*, p. 239 and the map in H. Franke, “The Chin Dynasty”, in: Franke/Twitchett, *History*, pp. 236s.; the site is approximately 500 km east of the Liao-dong peninsula and forms part of the Jurchens’ native country), it seems likely that the Chin emperor saw in fact a depiction similar to or even identical with this panel.

14 Cf. L. Hambis, “Deux noms chrétiens chez les Tatars au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in: *JA* 241 (1953), pp. 473ss. The Tatar at that time inhabited the area around the lakes Buir Nur and Hulun Nur at the eastern end of the present-day Republic of Mongolia; cf. *ibid.*, p. 475. The crosses, which were dis-



The presence of Manichaeans within the Liao and Chin states is likewise attested. An Uighur source from Qocho, which is dated circa 1000, mentions an *auditor* returning from the Khitan empire with a Manichaean book<sup>15</sup>. In 1001 an Uighur embassy consisting of 梵僧 [*fan seng*] arrived at the Liao court; the term 梵僧 literally means “a monk from India” or “a monk who maintains his purity”, but taking into account the dominant role of Manichaeism among the Uighurs it is assumed that these monks were in fact Manichaean *electi*<sup>16</sup>. Finally there is an inscription of the Chin era (1115-1234), which denounces a heretic religion masking itself as a form of Buddhism. As a characteristic of this religion is given its emphasis on 無心 [*wu xin*] “non-desire”, 無言 [*wu yan*] “non-speech” and 無爲 [*wu wei*] “non-action”, which correspond to the three “seals” of the Manichaean *electi*<sup>17</sup>.

In the light of this evidence the Christian remains from Manchuria can be seen as a complement, which confirms the data yielded by various written sources documenting a continued presence of Christians in this region from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century until well into Mongolian times. The question remains, however, as to why similar artifacts made their way into the Korean peninsula. Since these objects do not seem to possess any specific material or artistic value, it is not probable that they came to Korea as commercial goods. There is a possibility, though, that they belonged to Nestorian Christians who visited Korea as envoys or traders from the Liao and Chin empires. Since both realms possessed a common border with the militarily not insignificant state of Koryo (918-1392), mutual relations were close, if not always peaceful<sup>18</sup>. There is ample evidence for the

covered in a graveyard in Inner Mongolia alongside Liao coins (cf. Wittfogel/Feng, *Liao*, p. 308), probably are to be connected with this information.

15 Cf. Wittfogel/Feng, *Liao*, p. 309

16 Cf. *ibid.* and K. H. Menges, “Manichaeismus, Christentum und Buddhismus in Zentralasien und ihr gegenseitiges Verhältnis”, in: *CAJ* 35 (1991), S. 92. Menges also emphasizes the Uighur component within the Liao dynasty, where the emperors’ wives were apparently as a rule of Uighur descent and the emperor’s maternal uncle played a significant role at the Liao court; cf. *ibid.*, p. 94. However, Tennant’s assertion that the Liao royal family actually favored Christianity (cf. Tennant, *History*, p. 85) seems to be unfounded. Tennant probably has in mind the fact that some rulers of the later Kara Khitai state, which had been founded by Liao loyalists after the Liao state’s breakdown and establishment of the Chin dynasty, were Christian; cf. Dauvillier, in: *id.*, *Histoire*, p. 291 and Gillman/Klimkeit, *Christians*, p. 229. It is, however, misleading to regard this state as succeeding that of the Liao, as is done *ibid.*, since the Kara Khitai (“black Khitan”) established themselves at the Western end of the Tarim Basin, approximately 1200 km west of the Liao empire’s Eastern border and 3000 km west of the Liao’s central capital near present-day Beijing. Apart from that the Liao rulers were predominantly Buddhist; cf. Menges, in: *CAJ* 35 (1991), p. 91.

17 Cf. Wittfogel/Feng, *Liao*, p. 309 and Menges, in: *CAJ* 35 (1991), pp. 92s. On the three seals cf. K. Rudolph, *Die Gnosis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1994, p. 377.

18 Cf. Tennant, *History*, pp. 82-87; Twitchett/Tietze, in: Franke/Twitchett, *History*, pp. 100-104. 137s.; Franke, in: *ibid.*, p. 239. 282s.; K. Pratt/R. Rutt, “Liao Dynasty”, in: *id.*, *Dictionary*, pp. 269s. The Jurchen, who were to become the founders of the Chin empire, had since the early



exchange of envoys and trade as well as Buddhist literature and learning between Korea and her Northern neighbours, which renders it *prima facie* quite likely that Christians, probably of the Ma clan, several of whose members are known to have held high-ranking offices within the Liao and Chin administrations, came to Korea during the time between the 10<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>19</sup>.

11<sup>th</sup> century contacts with Korea and were at first allies of the Koryo state; cf. Franke, in: Franke/Twitchett, *History*, p. 219 and Pratt/Rutt, in: *ibid.*, *Dictionary*, pp. 193s.

- 19 The trade and diplomatic relations are documented in Wittfogel/Feng, *Liao*, p. 179 n. 50, p. 232 n. 35, pp. 334. 346s. with n. 9, p. 349 n. 19, pp. 354. 361s. 585. 588. 594. Cf. also Franke, in: Twitchett/Franke, *History*, pp. 298s and Menges, in: *CAJ* 35 (1991), p. 92. It is of course possible that the remains found in Korea stem from a single person, who was buried with them or lost them in some other way. While the cross-shaped amulet can best be explained as a pendant like its Manchurian counterpart, the metal plate with a cross-shaped engraving could have been part of a head-dress, such as is shown in paintings from Dun-huang and Qocho in Northwestern China (9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century; cf. Gillman/Klimkeit, *Christians*, plates 24s. and 28). Since the person shown *ibid.*, plate 25, actually wears a head-dress with cross and a cross-shaped pendant, and a Chinese inscription from 1281 describes Christians as wearing the cross on their head and chest (cf. A. C. Moule, "The use of the Cross among the Nestorians in China", in: *TP* 28 (1931), pp. 80s.), the two items probably belonged to one and the same person. The alleged statue of the Virgin Mary, which was found alongside the cross-shaped remains, can probably best be explained by a comparison with the depictions on the tombstones from Western Manchuria. While the Nestorian tombstones found in Southern China and Semirīče in present-day Kyrgyzstan do not show any pictorial displays except occasionally angels flanking a cross, the Manchurian relics exhibit scenes of Christ's birth including a depiction of the Virgin Mary holding the new-born child Jesus; cf. the illustrations in Saeki, *Nestorian*, between pp. 442 and 443. In view of the fact that this motif is apparently unknown to Buddhist iconography, the most ready explanation would be to regard the said statue from Korea as indeed being an image of the Virgin Mary, probably in a nativity context. The stone-cross could be seen as being a tombstone due to its similarity to the clay crosses found inside the Christian tomb near An-shan in Manchuria. From here one could proceed to the hypothesis that the Korean findings in fact come from a single tomb, but all this necessarily remains highly speculative. In regard of the question, however, whether there was any prolonged presence of Nestorian Christians in Korea, such a possibility has to be taken into account for the time between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century and the allegations made in Toepel/Chung, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004), p. 33, where such a possibility was assumed only for the time of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty, have to be modified accordingly. It remains a task for future research to evaluate whether it is possible to identify members of Christian families, such as the Ma clan, in Korean historical sources.

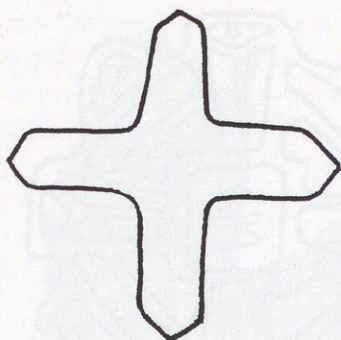


fig. 1: Clay Cross, Manchuria  
cf. Saeki, *Documents*, p. 440

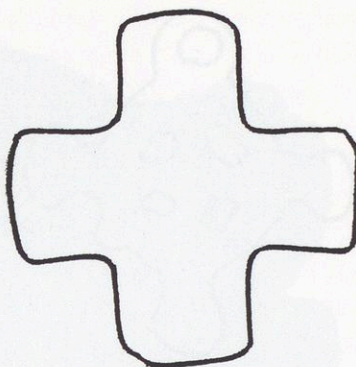


fig. 2: Stone Cross, Korea  
cf. Toepel/Chung, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004)

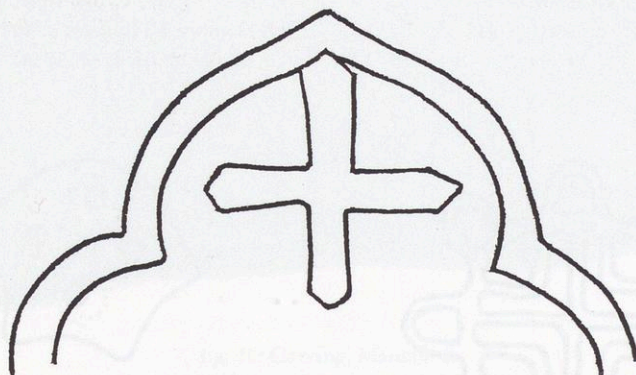


fig. 3: Tombstone, Southern China  
cf. Foster, in: *JRAS* NS (1954), pl. II

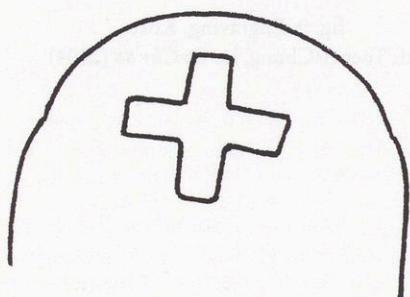


fig. 4: Tombstone, Southern China  
cf. Foster, in: *JRAS* NS (1954), pl. V

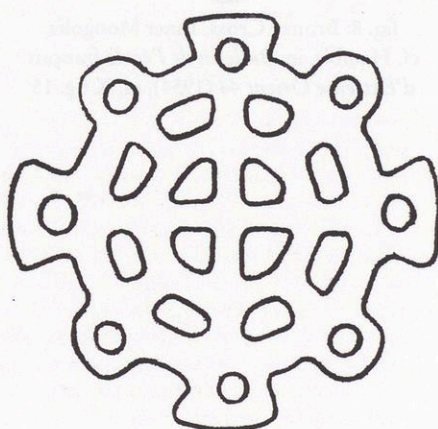


fig. 5: Metal Cross, Korea  
cf. Toepel/Chung, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004)



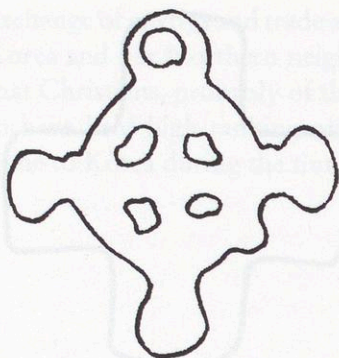


fig. 6: Bronze Cross, Manchuria  
cf. Saeki, *Documents*, p. 442

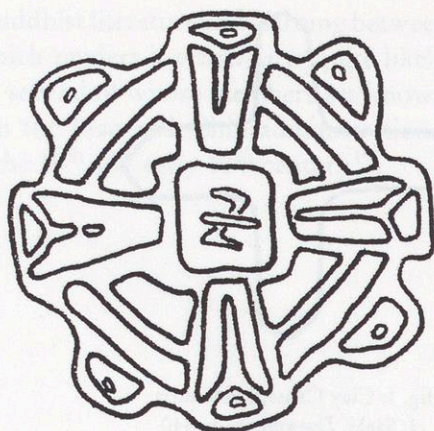


fig. 7: Bronze Cross, Inner Mongolia  
cf. Hambis, in: *Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient* 44 (1954), pl. V fig. 8

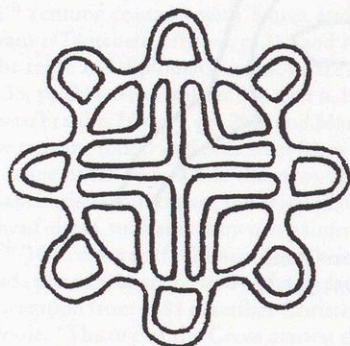


fig. 8: Bronze Cross, Inner Mongolia  
cf. Hambis, in: *Bulletin de l'école française d'Extrême Orient* 44 (1954), pl. X fig. 15

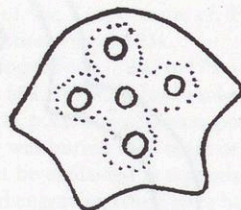


fig. 9: Engraving, Korea  
cf. Toepel/Chung, in: *OrChr* 88 (2004)





fig. 10: Carving, Manchuria  
cf. Kim, *Eastern*, p. 239