

RUHR-UNIVERSITÄT BOCHUM

Guest Lecture at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg

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Nestorian Christianity and Japan

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About 600 years before the Roman Catholic Church began missionary work in China, Nestorian missionaries had already arrived at Chang'an, the Chinese capital at that time. Nestorians left behind cultural goods like books, especially translations of the Bible, and institutions such as hospitals along their way from Mesopotamia, the birthplace of Nestorian Christianity, to China. Even today one can find traces of a Nestorian heritage in the culture, religions, ethics, and science of the countries along the Silk Road.

The lecture will address the question if the Nestorian Christianity reached Japan. This question has been asked by many historians since the beginning of the 20th century, and yet even today there is no clear answer. It is generally accepted that Nestorian Christianity did not come to Japan, because no records or archeological traces of any Nestorian missions to Japan exist.

To delve further into this question the following three points are of interest: 1. Christian immigrants could have possibly come to Japan in its ancient time. 2. The Mahayana-Buddhism, which was spread from China to Japan, incorporated the Christian teachings as it developed in Central Asia. 3. Christian knowledge was imported to Japan by Kentoshi (Japanese embassies to China). By inquiring into these three points, the relationship between Nestorian Christianity and Japan more precisely defined. Thus the probability that the Nestorian Christianity came to Japan becomes clear, in other words, it is historically improbable that Nestorian Christianity did not come to Japan.



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