

# **Archaeological Investigations of the Medieval Ilibalyk: Achievements and Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

The present paper includes topographical and archaeological studies of the large medieval settlement on the territory of the Ili River Valley – today's Usharal, Kazakhstan, which is also known in Armenian, Persian and Chinese sources of 12th - 14th centuries as Ilibalyk, Ilibalyk, or Ilibaly. The ancient settlement was situated on the left river bank of the Ili River, a two-day march from the city of Almalyk, the capital of Chagatai Khanate and Mogulistan, now located in northwest China. A large number of the coins, which were collected on the surface, demonstrate the significant urban and commercial life of the city from the 11th to the 14th centuries situated in the mountains of the Tien Shan corridor of the Great Silk Road.

In addition, the discovery of gravestones, or "kayraks" with Nestorian crosses and Syriac or Old Turkic inscriptions demonstrates the presence of Christian communities, most likely Church of the East (commonly known as Nestorian) in the city.

Archaeological investigations provide new data for understanding the nature of the medieval site of Usharal-Ilibalyk and give important information regarding the spread of Christianity along the Great Silk Roads together with its role in the cultural life of the Karakhanid Empire through the Chagatai Khanate of the Mongolian Empire as well as its relationship with other religions.