PART 1

Time and Place
The objective of Part 1 is to set the stage, so to speak, for the main discussion on the discovery, reconstruction and appropriation of the Nestorian heritage of Inner Mongolia. This stage is set, for the most part, by a number of the thirteenth century envoys, missionaries and travellers who connected medieval Europe and the Mongol realm. Contrary to common knowledge, these travellers included not only Europeans but also Asian discoverers. A great number of these voyagers returned to their homelands, some vanished en route while others simply stayed on after reaching their destination. The letters and reports they wrote now form the bases of our understanding of the Christian presence and heritage in Mongol China. Indeed, the influence of the early Western travellers to China is still very much felt. The appropriateness of the terminology they used when describing their meetings with the Church of the East is, for instance, still hotly debated.

Chapter 1 discusses the Chinese and Western terminology concerning the Church of the East. It concludes by selecting the terms and terminology used in this study.

Chapter 2 introduces a number of key sources who attest of a Christian presence in the Far East in the period of the Mongol rule. The aim of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with some early travellers and the sources they left that are frequently referred to in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 looks into the actual Christian presence in the Far East during the Mongol rule, the Mongols’ approach towards Christianity and the organization of the Church of the East.