

P A T R I A R C H, S H A H A N D C A L I P H

A Study of the relationships of the Church of the East
with the Sassanid Empire and the early Caliphates

up to 820 A.D.

with special reference to available translated Syriac sources

which is submitted with

H A N D B O O K O F S O U R C E - M A T E R I A L S

for Students of Church History

up to 650 A.D.

by

WILLIAM G. YOUNG, M.A. (Hons.), B.D.

for the degree of Ph.D. of the University of Glasgow

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F O R E W O R D

The unusual course of presenting a thesis accompanied by a printed book calls for explanation. This is to be found in the history of my course of studies. It has to be borne in mind that I am a working missionary in Pakistan, and have done most of the study involved during furloughs.

1. I originally planned to do a year's study for M.Th., under the guidance of Dr John Foster. The work involved was to be the preparation of a handbook of source-materials for Asian students of Church History, the choice and arrangement of which was to illustrate the method of teaching Church History to be advocated for an Asian theological college. The handbook was to have been presented along with a short thesis on "The Teaching of Church History in Asia".

2. I started the research for this in the summer of 1965, but by January 1966 it was evident that there was so much Asian source-material accessible in Latin and French translations, and in out of print English books and articles, but not available in English in a collected form, that it was better to confine my researches to the period up to 650 A.D. Under Dr Foster's guidance, I then modified the plan. This was now to complete the volume up to 650, and present it with a brief apologia for the method used, and accompanied by some notes on interesting and significant source-material brought to light in the course of my researches.

3. Later in the spring of 1966 it became clear that, if the book

was to be adequately prepared during my furlough, I would not have time before my return to the field in Autumn 1966 to write the apologia as well. It was then that, on Dr Foster's advice, and with University permission, I changed over from studying for an M.Th. to studying for a Ph.D. I was permitted to pursue my second year of research further of Scotland.

4. During that "second year", which extended from autumn 1966 to summer 1971, I did the following:

a. Completed the Handbook of Source-Materials, and got it published. This involved, among other things, further research in the autumn of 1967 at the United Theological College, Bangalore, South India, where I revised the book, added more than twenty further extracts from source-material, and prepared it for the press. I was in particular guided by the experience and helped by the translations of Dr V.C. Samuel, of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India, who let me read his thesis on the non-Chalcedonian position, and other unpublished work, and use fourteen of his own translations from the Syriac.

b. Prepared an Urdu textbook on Church History, and got it published. This follows the arrangement of the source-material in the Handbook, and quotes much of it in Urdu translation, but also writes round it a good deal of historical explanation and background information. In particular, I took great care with the section on "Church and State in the Iranian Empires", using the material set out on pages 272-290 of the Handbook, but supplementing it with a fuller explanation of the Zoroastrian background in the Sassanid Empire, the reasons for opposition to Christianity, and the lessons to be drawn from it by a Church in a

minority situation in Pakistan today. I later translated this section of the Urdu textbook back into English, and sent it to Dr W.H.C. Frend, who had by then succeeded Dr Foster as Professor of Ecclesiastical History. This was in the summer of 1970.

c. Used the source-materials on pages 316-327 of the Handbook, along with material from Thomas of Marga and elsewhere, for an article on The Church of the East in 650, which was published in the Indian Church History Review of June, 1968 (pp. 55-71).

5. After seeing the English text of my section on "Church and State in the Iranian Empires", Dr Frend agreed provisionally in the autumn of 1970 that I should prepare a thesis on Church-State relationships in the East covering the years 410-820, i.e. the relationships between the Church of the East and the Sassanid Empire and Early Caliphates from the Council of Seleucia in 410 till the end of the patriarchate of Timothy I. Glasgow University agreed that if I were to pursue my research in the year ended September 1971, and Professor Frend be satisfied with my fulfilling the requirements, I should be permitted to complete the work in the autumn term of 1971-72.

6. I returned to Scotland in July 1971, and from the beginning of August 1971 I have continued my researches steadily, mainly on the period of the Early Caliphates. My most important field of research was in the letters of the Patriarch Timothy I. I translated many extracts from Latin into English, and classified the information they gave as to Church-State relationships.

7. The thesis now presented incorporates the greater part of the source-material which I had translated and made available in English for the first time in the Handbook. It is the logical outcome of much

of the research to which I was led in the preparation of the Handbook, though of course confined to one area of it - perhaps the area most relevant to the Church in Pakistan.

For these reasons of natural growth and close connection, it has seemed the logical thing to present the Handbook along with the thesis.

A Note on Original Work

In the Handbook of Source-Materials, there are over 60 translations; otherwise the original work is mainly in selection, arrangement and presentation of material from an Eastern point of view.

In the thesis originality is claimed for the following:

1. the theme. I believe that there has not before been a systematic approach to the subject of Church-State relations which links the Synod of 410 and the acceptance of the Christians as a subject community with both the Shahs and the Caliphs.

2. the statistical work of Chapter IV, and the maps, which represent, I believe, something not before attempted seriously.

3. the large extracts from original and as far as possible contemporary writers, and their selection and arrangement to illustrate Church-State relations. Most of them are not readily available in English, and much translation from French and Latin has been done. I believe that the presentation of extracts from Thomas of Marga in this way is something not before attempted, though they were available in English, and the account of the Synod of 410 with its Record, Mashihah-zakha's evidence, the Life of Mar Aba, and John of Penek's historical survey are the main records translated from the French, while the letters of Timothy I and Ishu'-Yab III are mostly taken from Latin translations.

4. The attempt to see the relevance of the experiences of a minority-Church in the East for present-day minority Churches in the East.

A Note on Words

Absolute consistency is not claimed in the transliteration of words. In general, Eastern names have been given in their Persian or Arabic, rather than Syriac forms, and as pronounced in Pakistan. Occasionally where the Persian form was not known, a Syriac name has been given in the Syriac form. Treatment of Greek and Western names has varied - for some English forms like Theodore, Cyriac, George, etc. have been used. Biblical names are usually, but not always, given in either an Arabic or an English form. Only a few names are likely to be unfamiliar - Hedayab for Adiabene, Nisibin for Nisibis, Jibrail for Gabriel, Khusrau for Chosroes, Shapur for Sapor, millat for melet, and perhaps a few others.

The use of "Rome" and "Roman" needs explanation. To the East, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Constantinople was Rome, or Rum. Eastern writers call the Byzantine Empire both "Roman" and "Greek"; only by the time of Timothy I do we get the term "Byzantine".

The term "Church of the East" means the Church in the Sassanid Empire and later the Nestorian Church in the Muslim Caliphates. From its point of view, which is taken throughout, both Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians were "the West" and "Westerns". When we use the term "Eastern", therefore, we never signify the Greek Orthodox Church in this study.

Key to Footnotes

A fully annotated bibliography is not given. Books marked * are in the Bibliography on pp. 328-341 of Handbook of Source-Materials for Students of Church History.

- Afrahāt Dem Afrahāt (Aphraates), Demonstrations*. See p. 38.
- AMS See Bedjan AMS.
- Analectia Bollandiana, vol. XLIII, pp. 261-304:
art. Le passionnaire d'Adiabene by P. Peeters, S.J.
- ANCL Ante-Nicene Christian Library*.
- Assemani BO G.S. Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis*.
- Atiya Aziz S. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity
(1968).
- M.B. Bad-akhshani, Tarikh-i-Iran (1969).
- Bardaisan DF Bardaisan, Dialogue on Fate*. See pp. 25-27.
- Bar-Hebraeus EC Bar-Hebraeus, Ecclesiastical Chronicle*.
- Bedjan AMS ed. P. Bedjan, Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*.
See p. 39.
- ed. P. Bedjan, Histoire de Jabalaha et de trois
autres patriarches pp. 206-274 (Life of Mar Aba)*.
- Bid R. Bidawid, Les lettres du patriarche Timothée 1^{er}.
- BJRL Bulletin of the John Rylands Library.
- Br Braun's translation of Timothy I's Letters.
See p. 202.
- Braun Braun, Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer aus dem
syrischen übersezt (Life of Mar Aba, German
translation). See p. 97.
- Brown WLA Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity.
- Browne E L.E. Browne, The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia.
Browne Eclipse See pp. 258-260.

- Budge RH E. Wallis Budge, The Histories of Rabban Hormisd the Persian and Rabban Bar 'Idta.
See p. 239.
- C-E C. Cary-Elwes, S.J., China under the Cross.
- Chabot SO J.B. Chabot, Synodicon Orientale*.
J.B. Chabot, Littérature syriaque.
Cosmas Indicopleustes, Christian Topography*
- CS Chronicle of Sa'ard*. See p. 98.
- CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.*
- DCC The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.
- DTC Dictionnaire de théologie catholique.
Arts on Nestorienne (L'église) and Timothée 1^{er}.
C. Dawson, The Mongol Mission.
Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1969.
Arts on Caliphate and Zoroaster.
- ERE Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
Eusebius, Life of Constantine*.
- Diehl Diehl and Marcais, Le monde oriental de 395 à 1081.
J. Foster, After the Apostles*.
- Foster CTD J. Foster, The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*.
- Fiey Jal J.M. Fiey, O.P., Jalons pour une histoire de l'église en Iraq, CSCO vol 310, 1970.
J.M. Fiey, O.P., Assyrie chrétienne, 3 vols, 1965-1969.
J.M. Fiey, O.P. Article in L'orient syrien xii (1967) pp. 265-302.
- Gelasius EH Gelasius of Cyzicus, Ecclesiastical History*.

- Gismondi MAS ed. H. Gismondi, Maris Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentarie*. See p. 243.
- Havret, Art. in Variétés Sinologiques.
- ICHR Indian Church History Review.
- I-Y ed. Rubens Duval, The Letters of Isho-Yabh III* in CSCO Second Series vol. 23.
D - Duval's Latin translation.
- John Joseph, The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours.
- Justinian, Novel*
- JP Jean bar Penkava, in Mingana SS 1 pp. *1-*197.
- Labourt CEP J. Labourt, Le christianisme dans l'empire perse*.
- Labourt T J. Labourt, De Timotheo I Patriarcha Nestorianorum.
- Lactantius, On the Anger of God*.
- Lang GS D.M. Lang, Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*
- Le Le Quien, Oriens Christianus* 1740
- Life Life of Mar Aba - see Bedjan. See p. 97.
- Min 9 A. Mingana, The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East*. Reprint from BJHL 9 (1925).
- Min 10 A. Mingana, The Early Spread of Christianity in India*. In BJHL 10 (1926).
- Moule A.C. Moule, Christians in China before the year 1550*.
- M-Z Mashiha-Zakha, Chronicle of Arbil* in SS 1 pp. 1-168. See pp. 14-19.
- Peeters RO II P. Peeters, art on Life of Mar Aba in Recherches orientales II, pp. 117-163.
- S-M Philip Scott-Moncricieff, The Book of Consolations. Syriac text and English summaries of first volume of Ishu'-Yab III's letters.
- SS A. Mingana, Sources syriaques, vol 1 *. Pp. 169-271 contain the History of the Monastery of Sabr-Ishu' at Bait Kokhe. See also JP and M-Z.

- Stevenson CCC ed. J. Stevenson, Creeds, Councils and Controversies, 1966.
- Sozomen EH Sozomen, Ecclesiastical History*, ed. J. Bidez/G.C. Hansen, Berlin (Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller), 1960.
- Tim Letters of the Patriarch Timothy I. See pp. 202-203. Translators' names are given:
 Bid - Bidawid Br - Braun
 Labourt T Chabot SO
 Min - Mingana.
- Tisserant Arts in DTC - see DTC.
- TM ed. E. Wallis Budge, The Book of Governors of Thomas of Marga*. See pp. 171-174.
- T Mar
- Tritton Tritton, The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects.
 E. Vartabed, History of Armenia.
- Wiltsch Wiltsch, Geography and Statistics of the Church, 1859.
- Wigram AC W.A. Wigram, An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church*.
 Yule, Cathay and the Way Thither*.
- Y W.G. Young, Handbook of Source-Materials for Students of Church History, 1969.
- Y Newly translated into English by W.G. Young.

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"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This was the classical answer given by Jews to those who asked whether Jews should pay tribute to the pagan Roman government. Christians have since tried to follow the same rule: the difficulty has been to draw the line rightly between what is due to Caesar and what is due to God.

Church historians have paid considerable attention to two familiar aspects of this problem: in the one, the State is opposed to Christianity, and persecutes the Church, and the call to the Christian's loyalty is an "either-or"; in the other, the State is itself nominally Christian, and the Church has to find

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

with it in which the rights of Caesar and the rights of God are both safeguarded. From the time of Constantine this second aspect of the problem has been familiar to us. From the time of Constantine this second aspect of the problem has been familiar to us. From the time of Constantine this second aspect of the problem has been familiar to us. From the time of Constantine this second aspect of the problem has been familiar to us. From the time of Constantine this second aspect of the problem has been familiar to us.

It is our belief, however, that not nearly enough attention has been paid by historians to a third possibility, that of the Church being legally recognised as a permitted religious community in a non-Christian State, with its own status and place in the nation. For many Churches today, especially in Islamic countries, this is the position. The State has an official religion, which is not Christianity; yet the State recognises the right of the Church to exist, and at least in theory to practice and propagate its

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faith.

The earliest significant experiment along these lines was made in 410 A.D., when the Sassanid Empire and the Church of the East came to an agreement by which the Church was recognised as a permitted religious community, or millat, in a State whose official religion was Zoroastrianism. This arrangement was to some extent at least taken over by the Muslim Arabs when they conquered the Sassanid Empire. It is therefore pertinent to ask how far this was a good arrangement, distinguishing properly the rights of God from the rights of Caesar. Was the Church free to practise and propagate its faith? Was it free to lead its own life, and carry out its own discipline without interference? Were flaws in this arrangement in any way responsible for the fact that the Church of the East disappeared from so much of Asia in the later Middle Ages? Questions like these are relevant and important to many Christians today.

Some writers, like Browne¹, would attribute the decline of the Church in Asia mainly to internal weakness, in belief, life, and missionary methods; others, like Atiya², would set much down to the hatred aroused by Western Christendom in the Crusades, and to the failure of these Crusades. Should we seek for the reason elsewhere, looking for fatal flaws in the agreement of 410, which the State was to exploit to the ruin of the Church? A modern writer³ has shown how unsuitable the conception of the Church of the East as a millat was to meet the dangers and challenges of 19th Century Turkey, and 20th Century Iraq and Iran. Was this weakness inherent from the start?

In this study we shall examine how the relationship worked, first under

¹ L.E. Browne, The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia, passim.

² Aziz S. Atiya, A History of Eastern Christianity, pp. 92-93, etc.

³ John Joseph, The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours, passim.

the later Sassanid Shahs, and next under the early Caliphs. As far as possible we shall let Christians of the East speak for themselves, using sources as nearly as possible contemporary with the events they describe. For the Sassanid period, we shall use the Chronicle of Arbil, Afrahat's Demonstrations, the Acts of the Nestorian Synods, with their records of attendance, the nearly-contemporary Life of Mar Aba, and other contributory sources. For the change-over to Arab rule we shall examine the contemporary witness of Ishu'-Yab III and John of Penek. For the state of the Church of the East under the early Caliphs our main authorities will be the letters of the Patriarch Timothy I and the monastic history of Thomas of Marga. Later Christian Arabic histories, like the Chronicle of Sa'ard, and the works of Mari and 'Amr-Saliba, will be used with a certain amount of caution.

A very few of the Syriac sources referred to are available in English translation; more are, however, available in Latin and French translations, as are the Arabic sources used. Some Syriac sources have so far not been translated, except for a few quotations in books. We have gathered together and made available in English what we felt to be important and relevant. Sometimes, especially in the Sassanid period, evidence is conflated, but important contemporary writings like the letters of Ishu'-Yab III and Timothy I are treated separately as units of information. Information about the sources used, with some assessment of their reliability, is given at appropriate points in the study.

The study ends with a statement of the main factual conclusions that arise from the evidence presented, and some suggestions as to the main lessons to be drawn from them for the guidance of Churches which are today minority communities in non-Christian States.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE 410 A. D.

days of the week after sun, moon, and five of the planets, believing that they were seven deities, who influenced the actions of men. By astrology, it was believed, the Magians could cause some dragons to

A. THE MAGIANS AND ZOROASTRIANISM

If Rome is accorded the first and highest rank because of the Apostle Peter, how much more should Seleucia and Ctesiphon on account of Peter's Lord. If the first rank and position is due to the people who confessed on Christ before all others, and believed in him, then we Easterns were the ones to do so. We showed our faith openly in the persons of our Twelve Envoys, who were guided by a star, and in the gifts which they offered to Christ - gold, as to the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords; frankincense, as to the One who is God over all; and myrrh, to signify the passion of his humanity for our sake... Thirty years before all others we Easterns confessed Christ's kingdom, and adored his divinity!

So wrote Timothy I, Patriarch of the East, in a letter sent to the Bishop of Nineveh about 785. He was, of course, referring to the "Magians" (Greek magoi) of Matthew 2. The Bible gives no number, and eastern church tradition varied between 12 and 13. Chrysostom, for instance, says they were 12.^{2a} Western church tradition, first found in the 5th century, puts their number down as 3, doubtless because they brought three kinds of gifts. Though Timothy, in arguing for the primacy of the Eastern Patriarch, stresses their faith, we find again and again that opposition to Christianity in the East finds its focal point in the Magians.

The origins of the Magians are obscure: one line of evidence points to a Babylonian origin, the other to a Median one. According to the Bible, Baalam the astrologer came from Mesopotamia³, and when the embassy of Balak King of Moab went to call him they brought the fees for divination with them.⁴ It was the Babylonians who named the

¹ The material for this section is mostly derived from articles on Magians from Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, and Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, and on Zoroastrianism in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics and the Schaff-Hertzog Encyclopaedia. Authorities for individual statements are not therefore cited.

² Tim 15 (XXVI), Br p. 101.y. ³ Deuteronomy 23: 4. ⁴ Numbers 22: 7.

^{2a} Op. Imp. in Mt. 2 ap. Chrysost. vi, 638.

days of the week after sun, moon, and five of the planets, believing that they were seven deities, who influenced the actions of men. By astrology, it was believed, the Magians could cause some dragon to swallow the sun, and so produce an eclipse¹. The "Rab-Mag" of Jeremiah 39: 3 may have been a "Chief Magian", used to guide the King's armies by the kind of divination described in Ezekiel 21: 21.² The writer of the book of Daniel speaks of "magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldeans"³ at the court of the King of Babylon, and the Septuagint uses magoi to translate "enchanters".

In contrast to this suggestion of Babylonian origin, the Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the 5th century B.C., says that at that time the Median people were divided into five tribes, of whom the Magians were one. They were like the Levites among the Jews, a religious tribe, and from among the Magians came the religious leaders or priests, known as Mobeds. The typical dress of the Magian was a long white robe, and a pointed white cap.

We may perhaps suggest that Babylonia, as the more civilised country, may have influenced the Medians to the north and east, and that when Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., the Magians of Mesopotamia continued with their astrology and divination, serving the new King and the new religion. If this was the case, it is probable that distinctions between Magians of Babylonian origin and those of Median origin became blurred as the years passed. This would account for the mixture of debased elements that we find in the Mesopotamian Magianism we find in the days of the early Church.

² N.E.B., however, translates it "the commander of the frontier troops".

¹ This may be the meaning of Job 3: 8. But see N.E.B. ³ Daniel 2: 2.

Zoroaster

In spite of the mass of tradition that gathered round his name, Zoroaster (Zartusht) was certainly a historical figure. He was a Median, born in Teheran, and a Magian by tribe. Estimates of his dates vary from 630-553 B.C. to 618-541 B.C.¹ From the Gathas (Songs), his extant prophetic writings, we gather that he was opposed to the magical and idolatrous practices of the Magians. His basic teaching was dualistic:

The two primal spirits who revealed themselves in vision as twins are the Better and the Bad in thought, word and action. And between these two the wise knew to choose aright, the foolish not so.

Zoroaster taught that there is one good God, Ahura-Mazda (Hurmiz), and that he is not to be likened to an idol, for he is spirit, and has six attendant spirits. There is also an evil God called Ahriman (Angra-Mainyu), who like Ahura-Mazda is eternal, and has six attendant spirits. In this present age Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman are about equal in strength to one another, but the wise man's duty is to follow Ahura-Mazda, because at the end of the age Ahriman will be utterly destroyed. To follow Ahura-Mazda, men must abandon nomadic life and settle down to agriculture, do their best to be merciful and righteous, and avoid all sacrifices of living animals, and all sorcery and magic. Those who do this will inherit the everlasting life of heaven.

According to tradition, Zoroaster went preaching among the Persians living to the south-east of Media, who were nomads and brigands. He was to some extent successful in his mission, but at the age of 77 died a martyr's death.

¹ Article, Zoroaster, in Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1969.

² Zoroaster, Yasna 30, quoted in ERE 12, p. 864.

Scholars are not agreed as to how far the Persian Empire (550-331 B.C.) accepted Zoroaster's teaching. Probably they accepted some elements of it, but the Magians were strong, and many of their customs and beliefs were incorporated into Zoroastrianism. The Magians remained the religious tribe, and the Mobeds became the Zoroastrian priests. For a short time under Alexander the Great and the Seleucids, idolatry was again established (331-256 B.C.); then the Parthian rule began (256 B.C. - 225 A.D.). The Parthians were followers of the Zoroastrian religion, but on the whole they were not religious enthusiasts. It is, however, possible that Wangsh I, who was contemporary with Nero, did something to collect the Zoroastrian writings. In the Sassanid Empire there was much more stress on religion: Shapur I (241-271), Bahram I (272-275) and Shapur II (310-379) all worked on the collection of Zoroastrian writings. These collected scriptures, which included not only the Gathas, but many other traditions, came to be known as the Avesta.

The first Sassanid ruler, Ardushir I (226-241) once more classified the Magians as equal to the nobles in rank, and Shapur II issued an edict that any Magian or Zoroastrian who abandoned his religion would be punishable by death.

Characteristics of Zoroastrianism in the Sassanid Period

We shall mention a few of the main characteristics, and especially those which were a cause of opposition to Christianity. It is clear that Zoroaster's teaching had become considerably adulterated with Magian ideas.

Beliefs. Ahura-Mazda is light, Creator of heaven and earth and all good things. He has six attendant spirits, three male and three female, named after various qualities, like Righteousness, Good Health, and so on. In addition, there are other good spirits. There is a kind of trinity, made up of Ahura-Mazda, Mitra (Mithras, the Sun), and Anahita (female, Water). There is also a powerful spirit called Atur (Fire), which is the necessary element of all life, for a living body is warm, and a dead corpse is cold.

Ahriman is darkness, and the Creator of serpents, insects, plague, war, death, and all evil things. He has many attendant evil spirits or devils, who try to tempt men to do evil.

Worship. Though Mitra and Atur were not called gods, they were worshipped as though they were gods, and it is therefore not altogether incorrect to call the Zoroastrians of those days Sun- and Fire-worshippers. There was a system of sacrifices to Mitra, especially of horses, oxen, sheep and camels. There were special temples where fire was kept burning perpetually. Five times a day the Mobeds would enter these temples, burn incense, repeat the incantation "right words, right thoughts, right deeds", and read passages from the Avesta. Fire was kept burning in every home. The Mobeds also drank a special kind of wine, which was believed to bring them into ecstatic communion with the spirits. In all religious customs the Mobeds and Magians were the cultic leaders, and they were therefore key-men in society.

Social Morality. "Right thoughts, right words, right deeds" were emphasised, and particularly that men should be reliable and honest. Agriculture, and the rearing of herds of animals, was

highly thought of. People were taught to be kind to animals, and even to dogs. Marriage was compulsory, and blessed were those who had many children. In order to multiply children, polygamy was permissible. Purity of caste was stressed, and in order to preserve this, it was permissible when necessary to marry a sister or daughter. Bardaisan, writing about 196, contrasted the morals of the Christians:

The brethren who are in Parthia do not take two wives... nor do those brethren who are in Persia marry their daughters.¹

and Mashihā-zakha thus explains the name of a Bishop of Arbil:

He was the son of a Mobed of the city of Arbil... Their mother was Magian by race, and had carnal intercourse with the one of her sons who preceded Ahadabuhi. He the last, born of this union, was because of this called Ahadabuhi, that is, the brother of his brother who had intercourse with his mother.²

It was a man's duty to keep as healthy as he could, and any kind of fasting or asceticism was forbidden. In order not to defile the spirits of Earth and Water, the corpses of the dead were exposed in open towers for the vultures to eat.

Politics. The Zoroastrian religion was the State Religion. For this reason, the Magians had a high position in the nation and at the Royal Court. The ruling Persians often took the attitude that if a man was not a Zoroastrian, he did not love his country, and that anyone who abandoned Zoroastrianism and accepted another religion was worthy of a traitor's death.

The Magians and the Christians

It is clear that in all four aspects - beliefs, worship, social morality and politics, there were bound to be clashes between

¹ Bardaisan, DF, Y p. 19.

² M-Z 35-36, tr. p. 113.Y.

Zoroastrianism and Christianity. This can be illustrated by three examples of Magian objections to the Christians, from the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries.

About 340 Shapur II, in a decree, made the following accusations against the Christians:

These Christians destroy our holy Teaching, and teach men to serve one God, and not to honour the Sun, or Fire. They ~~defile~~ ^{defile} Water by their ablutions, they refrain from marriage and the propagation of children, and refuse to go to war with the King of Kings. They ~~have no rules about the slaughter~~ and eating of animals; they bury the corpses of men in the earth. They attribute the origin of snakes and creeping things to a good God. They despise many servants of the King, and teach witchcraft.

In 449 a minister of Yazdgard II wrote in the following terms to the Christian leaders in Armenia:

Know ye that every man who dwells under heaven and does not follow the religion of Mazdaism is deaf, blind, and deceived by the devil of Ahriman. Ahura-Mazda created man; and Ahriman pain, sickness and death...Men who say that God is the author of death, and that good and evil come from him, are in error; in particular the Christians, who affirm that God is jealous, and that, just for a fig picked from a tree, he created death, and condemned men to undergo it...The Christians also profess another error. They say that God, who created heaven and earth, was born of a virgin named Mary, whose husband was called Joseph...Why do you share in the errors of the Roman Empire? What is more serious than anything else, they preach that God has been crucified by men; that he died and was buried; that he rose again and ascended into ~~the~~ ^{heaven}. The evil spirits are not imprisoned and tormented by men, much less God, the Creator of all things!²

About 544 the Magians presented before Khusrau I the following four accusations against the Patriarch of the East, Mar Aba I:

1. He had renounced the religion of the Magians, and become a Christian.
2. He had prevented the Christians from marrying more than one wife at a time.
3. He had annulled the decrees of their judges, and taken away cases from their jurisdiction.
4. He baptised Magians, and made them Christians.³

¹ Quoted in AMS 2: 351, Y p. 287.

² Cited from J. Stevenson, CCC, pp. 348-349.

³ CS 2: 27, Y pp. 287-288.

We are not, of course, bound to accept the truth of all the accusations made, but on the whole they give a correct picture, and show vividly why the Magians felt that Christian beliefs and worship and social morality were unbearable. We can also see political overtones: "They refuse to go to war with the King of Kings...They despise many servants of the King...Why do you share in the errors of the Roman Empire?" There is also resentment at the exercise of discipline by the Church, as though it was an imperium in imperio: "He had annulled the decrees of their judges, and taken away cases from their jurisdiction."

Such being the religious background, how in fact did Christianity fare, first under the Parthians, and then under Sassanid rule?

B. MASHIHA-ZAKHA. CHRISTIANITY IN THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE

Mashiha-zakha and the Chronicle of Arbil

For the spread of Christianity in the Parthian and early Sassanid period the most important, and almost the only, evidence we have is that found in the Chronicle of Arbil. This is a brief record of the lives of 20 Bishops and Metropolitans of Arbil, beginning in 99¹ with the conversion of Paqida, and ending with a reference to the return of Mar Aba I from Huzistan about 541². The Chronicle was written by Mashiha-zakha, himself a native of Hedayab (Adiabene), the province of which Arbil was the capital. He seems to have been a priest, and possibly also a monk, and probably a pupil of Abraham of Bait Rabban, who was in charge of the divinity school at Nisibin from 509 to 569. The Chronicle was written at some date between 541 and 569.³

Since its publication with a French translation by Mingana in 1907, the Chronicle of Arbil has been used by some historians⁴ as an authority for the spread of Christianity in the Parthian and early Sassanid period, while others have paid it scant attention. No systematic attempt has been made to evaluate its evidence. In 1925, however, Fr. Paulus Peeters, S.J., wrote an article which cast serious doubts on Mashiha-zakha's reliability. He compared the records of certain martyrs of Arbil set down in what he felt to be primitive sources of hagiography, with the accounts, or lack of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, we follow Mingana's dating. ² The earlier visit to Huzistan, to set things right and bring the "duality" to an end, fits the context better than Mingana's 550. ³ See M-Z, pp. VII-VIII. ⁴ e.g. Wigram in 1910.

accounts, in the Chronicle of Arbil. He came to the conclusion that Mashiha-zakha had either used inferior sources for the period of Shapur II's persecution, or deliberately suppressed material.

His words are scathing:

The fortunes of hagiographic texts have been very diverse, and unconnected with their real value. Only some, and not always the most reliable, were translated into Greek. Even in the Syriac language area, the Passions circulated at random, and owe their preservation to lying for a millenium in some forgotten corner. In the middle of the 6th century the author of the Chronicle of Arbil used only a few of them. Of those he did not borrow from, doubtless some...had not seen the light of day. But others, and especially the Passion of Aceptsimas, existed already at the beginning of the 5th century, seeing that Sozomen knew them. The self-styled historian of the church of Arbil is less well-informed than this stranger about the most celebrated martyrs of his city and province.

It is impossible to pretend that this does not reflect a very serious presumption against the value and authenticity of the sources which he must have drawn on. The Chronicle of Arbil must be re-examined in the light of the parallel documents...Every time it enters the domain of hagiography, or comes near it without entering, the compiler is caught out in some mistake. Whether he speaks or keeps silent, he arouses justifiable distrust. Even the most useful information he may have collected is of doubtful value when it comes from him. When we see how he massacres the documents that have survived, we wonder by what miracle of chance he could have preserved, with such an abundance of precise details, much more ancient records, records about which other witnesses and official documents, even though they do not contradict them, are totally ignorant!²

In view of this severe criticism, are we any longer free to use Mashiha-zakha with any measure of confidence as an authority for the Parthian and early Sassanid periods? It is our view that we can, though like Peeters we would welcome further critical comparison of his work with parallel records. We have this to say, briefly, about our own personal impressions:

¹ Fr. Paulus Peeters, S.J., Art. Le "Passionnaire d'Adiabene" in Analectia Bollandiana, tom. XLIII, pp. 261-304. ² ibid., pp. 302-303. v.

1. Mashiha-zakha's picture of the Parthian period has many signs of authenticity. The account rings true. The conditions described fit in with what we know of the loosely-knit Parthian Empire, the names of the Parthian Kings are historical, and such wars and civil wars as are described can be otherwise identified.
2. The frequent references to Jews in the earlier part of the work fits in with the well-known fact, mentioned by Josephus , that Hedayab had Jewish rulers during the 1st century A.D., and was indeed a centre of Mesopotamian Judaism long after.
3. Habil "the doctor" or "the writer", cited three times as an authority for accounts in the first pages of the book, ceases to be mentioned explicitly after 148 A.D. Unless only the earlier part of Habil's work was available to Mashiha-zakha, this suggests that Habil himself was a second-century writer whose accounts were written shortly after the events they describe, and are basically reliable.
4. Up to about 180 A.D. only two orders of ministers are mentioned - bishops and deacons. This accurate reflection of primitive Christianity would not have been invented in the 6th century, and gives us confidence that Mashiha-zakha is using early sources.
5. Taken as a whole, Mashiha-zakha's narrative of the way Christianity began in Arbil, and of the gradual development that led to the establishment of the primacy of the Cities under Papa, reads convincingly. The admission that there was no bishop in the Capital Cities in 225 is clearly no invention. Compared with the Chronicle of Sa'ard, and the histories of Mari and 'Amr-Saliba,

with their apostolic successions of apparently legendary Patriarchs of the Cities from Mari onwards, our writer is clearly more primitive and reliable. Though the use of the word "patriarch" for Papa is anachronistic, the narrative in general rings true.

6. Our personal impression of the Chronicle is that it is uneven in value, and we would attribute this to varying availability of source-material for different periods. Up till the outbreak of Shapur's persecution, the narrative is centred on Arbil, and is interesting, circumstantial, and varied. If we accept Peeters's strictures, the persecution of the next forty years is described sketchily and inaccurately. For the rest of the 4th and 5th centuries, the impression we get is that Mashih-zakha had very little interesting details to hand about the Bishops of Arbil, and that, in fact, he may well have had an incomplete list of their names. From 376 to 499 we are ~~told of only~~ 4 bishops, giving an average rule of 31 years. This is scarcely credible, when we compare it with the 7 bishops from 99 to 225, and the 7 from 225 to 376. It seems that to make up for his lack of information about the bishops themselves, the writer drew on his knowledge of contemporary historical events. He may have had access to the records of the Synods, and refers to five - in 410, 420, 424, 484 and 497. He speaks briefly of the Nestorian controversy, and with the benefit of a century's "hindsight", makes unconvincing efforts to measure its contemporary effects on the Church of the East:

The second Pharaoh, Cyril the Egyptian, with the help of the royal arm and worldly force, fought against the truth and persecuted the true martyr, Mar Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople. When Mar Daniel (of Arbil) heard of this division, he predicted, they say, that the time was come when the West would be dark and the light would be seen in the East. It was in the midst of these sorrows and thoughts that he died.¹

¹ M-Z 64, tr. pp. 143-144. Y.

Of his successor, Rahima, Mashiha-zakha writes:

It was then that discussions and controversies concerning the orthodox Faith began to bring the house of the Lord into travail, and mine its foundations: the Church was destroyed among the Romans, and built up in the Kingdom of the Persians; It was in this spiritual work that Mar Rahima ended his life.'

It is refreshing to come back into contact with convincing contemporaneity when we read the copy of Patriarch Shila's letter of about 510, and then read of the troubles of the "duality" following the Patriarch's death. It is a matter of deep regret that the last four pages of the MS are missing, and we are deprived of what a contemporary might have told us of the times of Mar Aba I.

7. A word about the marvellous. Here and there the writer mentions miracles of healing, raising the dead, and other wonders, though on the whole the narrative is refreshingly free from obsession with the unusual. While recognising that hagiographers were prone to list such marvels to do honour to their heroes, we do not altogether rule out the possibility that, as in the Roman Empire as described in the Acts of the Apostles, so also in the Parthian Empire there may have been some miracles attesting the truth of the Gospel message. While we shall not cite the miracles as evidence of what happened, their presence in the narrative does not shake our confidence in the veracity of the writer when he speaks of other events, or of the background of beliefs and customs.

It is, then, our considered opinion that we may safely treat Mashiha-zakha as a reliable authority for the Parthian period, and for the Sassanid period up to 339, as long as we make allowance for obvious anachronisms. From then on till the beginning of the 6th century, we shall find him of little help.

¹ M-Z 65, tr. p. 145. Y.

Before we leave this subject, some reference must be made to a series of attacks on Mingana's honesty, and suggestions that he was responsible for the forgery of certain Syriac documents. Two such accusations were made by Fr. Paulus Peeters, and are referred to in an article replying to one of them in 1967.¹ Fr J.M. Fiey, O.P. followed them up in 1967 with an article² accusing Mingana of similar forgery in the case of the Chronicle of Arbil. His theory is that all the contents of the Chronicle were derived from books in Mingana's library. In his most recent work, Jalons pour une histoire de l'eglise en Iraq³, published in 1970, Fiey studiously ignores Mashiha-zakha's evidence as spurious and valueless, and favours a return to a more traditional viewpoint.

We have given our personal impressions of the value of the Chronicle on pages 17-18 above. We do not find Fiey's hypothesis convincing. To take one point only, Mingana might conceivably been clever enough to connect the appointment of Paul as Bishop of Nisibin with Mar Aba's ending of the "duality",⁴ but surely not so devilishly clever as to make a deliberate mistake about which visit to Hm̄zistan! We have noticed one or two other points in which it seems to us that Mingana has misunderstood a reference, or failed to draw out an interesting point⁵; it seems incredible that this would happen in the case of a deliberate forgery!

It might not be wrong to hazard a guess that more respect might have been shown by Roman Catholic orientalists to Mingana's veracity had he remained in their communion. Fiey indeed shows a failure to appreciate the work of other Protestant orientalists, like Wigram and Wallis-Budge.

¹BJRL 50 (1967-1968) pp. 199-206, especially footnote p. 200.

²L'orient syrien xii (1967) pp. 265-302. ³CSCO Vol 310. ⁴See p.15 n.

⁵e.g. on Shah Rabb Garud and Moloch. See p.21 below.

Christianity in the Parthian Empire

The Arsacid (Arshaki) Parthian Empire, named after its first king, Arshak, was a loosely-knnt kingdom of warlike barons, each of whom had his personal army. The King was looked upon as a kind of leader-in-chief. About 140 we find King Walgash II sending a messenger to the ruler of Arbil

to command him, if he wished him well, to come to Ctesiphon without delay, so that the combined forces of the two men might check the impetuosity of the barbarian peoples, who had swooped on the mountain country of Qardu, and had plundered and destroyed many cities...He and the messenger set out without delay, accompanied only by a few men from his household. He left instructions to his brother to collect his forces, take command of them, and bring them to Ctesiphon.

Some 50 years later we find Narsai, the "king" of Hedayab, failing to help the Parthian King Walgash IV in a war with the Medes and Persians. After defeating his enemies, the King mounts a punitive expedition against Arbil, and drowns Narsai in the Greater Zab River.² In 216 we find Shahrat, "king" of Hedayab joining the Parthian King Artaban in a foray against the Romans³, but in 225 we find the Persians and Medes, allied with the "kings" of Hedayab and Karka of Bait Salok (Kirkuk), giving the final coup de grace to the Parthian regime.⁴

Again and again we hear of forays against the Romans, of civil war between the Parthian rulers and the Persians and Medes, and of attacks from barbarians from the north.

While the King was a Zoroastrian, and the Magians and Mobeds had considerable power in Hedayab, the religion of the common people

¹ M-Z 7, tr. p. 84. Y, p. 269. ² M-Z 25, tr. pp. 101-102.

¹ M-Z 28, tr. pp. 104-10

³ M-Z 28, tr. p. 104. ⁴ M-Z 29, tr. p. 105.

there was a mixture of animism and decadent idolatry, with a veneer of Zoroaster's teaching. The following description of the feast of "Shah Rabb Gamud" (King Lord Gamud) suggests that traces of Moloch (King) worship, with its child-sacrifices, had been left by Moabite exiles in Assyrian and Babylonian times.

Samsun began to preach in the surrounding villages. These worshipped fire, and were in the habit of throwing in little children at the time of their great Feast of Shah Rabb Gamud. The writer Habil describes this feast as follows:

"This feast comes in the month of May, and the people from all the country around collect near the great fountain. After bathing in it, they sit down, prepare food, and give all their slaves something to eat. The people themselves do not eat until they have thrown one of their little children into the fire. Then they take out his liver and kidneys, and hang them on the branches of the trees there, as a token that they have feasted. Finally they shoot several arrows into the air, as a sign of rejoicing, and return home."¹

Elsewhere we read of the inhabitants of a village near Niniveh who "worshipped a terebinth tree".²

According to Mashihā-zakha, the first Bishop of Arbīl was Paqida, whose father was the slave of a mobed. He was converted in 99 after seeing a miracle performed by "Addai the Apostle"; when his parents heard of it, they shut him up in a dark room, but he was helped, possibly by a sympathetic relative, and escaped to the hills, where Addai was preaching. Addai taught him for 5 years, and then sent him back to Arbīl as Bishop. He died in 114 after an episcopate of 10 years. In 120 Mirza, Bishop of Bait Zabdi, came to Arbīl with a trading caravan. Hearing there were Christians there, he went to them secretly, and having gained their confidence, he ordained Paqida's deacon, Samsun, to be the second Bishop of Arbīl.³

¹ M-Z 4-5, tr. pp 79-80. Y p. 267. ² M-Z 16, tr. p. 92.

³ M-Z 2-4, tr. pp. 77-79. Y pp. 13, 267.

Addai is traditionally associated with Edessa, and may have come from there to Arbil. In view of the mention of Bait Zabdi, however, and the fact that Christian churches grew up in many places north and east of the Tigris, it is tempting to see the old Persian Royal Road, built by Darius I from Sardis to Susa (Sus), and later re-routed to lead to the Parthian Capital Cities of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, as the main trade route used by the missionaries of the new Faith.¹ Of the bishops of Arbil during the Parthian period five - Samsun, Izhaq, Abraham, Nuh and Habil - have Jewish or Old Testament names; two - Paqida and Hiran - have pagan names; and one, 'Abd-Mashiha, "slave of Jesus", has a Christian name.² Abraham's father was Suleman, so he was almost certainly a Jew; Nuh was converted when he visited Jerusalem with his parents, so he was also a Jew. Mirza, Bishop of Bait-Zabdi, has a Persian name, and so have converts like Raq-bakht, Ra~~s~~-shah, and Raz-marduk,³ though the last name suggests a Mesopotamian origin. From the names given, and from the specific references to evangelisation, we may fairly conclude that the young Church of the East had, like the Pauline churches, a nucleus of converts from Judaism, but that it also included descendants of other captives of the Assyrians and Babylonians, descendants of these and other Mesopotamian peoples, and at least a good sprinkling of people of Persian origin.⁴ Besides Judaism and Zoroastrianism, the background of these converts included animistic tree-worship, and relics of idolatrous fire-worship. In this connection the moral consequences of conversion to Christianity, as stated by Afrahat

¹ See Map 1. ² See the list in M-Z, pp. 157-158

³ M-Z pp. 6, 14, 18, tr. pp. 82, 90, 94. ⁴ Mingana (Min 9, pp.5-6) goes too far when he states that the majority of the converts were of Persian origin.

in 337, are not without interest:

And that a man should separate himself from observing hours and sabbaths and months and seasons; and enchantments and divinations and astrology and magic; and from fornication and from revelling and from vain doctrines, the weapons of the Evil One; and from the blandishment of honeyed words; and from blasphemy and adultery; And that no man should bear false witness, and that none should speak with double tongues -

These are the works of the Faith that is laid on the true Rock, which is the Messiah, upon whom all the building rises.¹

"Hours and sabbaths and months and seasons" suggests Jewish practices, while "enchantments and divinations and astrology and magic" suggests the practices of the Babylonian Magians, carried over by them into their new religious allegiance. When Mashiha-zakha speaks of "Magians", we need not always conclude that they were Zoroastrians in the full sense of the term.

Persecution is frequently mentioned, but it is always local, and never a matter of Parthian Government policy. Paqida is shut up in a dark room by his parents,² Samsun has to suffer torture and decapitation from "nobles and Magians"³, Nuh is five times imprisoned and twelve times flogged, and has to spend most of his days in the country, coming to Arbil secretly to ordain clergy.⁴ Persecution of the common people is described vividly:

Because of the hatred of pagans and Magians our brothers suffered a lot in those days. Many who were young and weak in the Faith went back to the religion of the demons; for they saw their houses plundered, their sons and daughters either seized openly or kidnapped, and they themselves severely beaten.⁵

When Raq-bakht the Governor of Arbil became a Christian, Bishop Izhaq "baptised him secretly, because he was afraid of Walgash, King of the Parthians"⁶, but he readily helped the King in war and died in

¹Afrabat, Dem 1: 19, Y p. 62. ²M-Z 3, tr. p. 78. ³M-Z 5, tr. p. 80

⁴M-Z 14, 18, tr. pp. 90,95. ⁵M-Z 18-19, tr. p. 95, Y p. 13.

⁶M-Z 6, tr. p. 83.

battle against barbarian invaders, mourned by his country as a national hero. Some of the features of this story, which is given on the authority of Habil, may be overdrawn, but if there is a basis of truth in it it shows that in the Parthian period it was possible to be a good Christian and a good patriot.

Mashiha-zakha records one attempt to get state protection for the Christians against local persecution. Bishop Abraham (148-163) spent much time away from his see, doing evangelistic work in the mountain country.

While he was living among the high mountains, teaching the Christian Faith, the Magians rose against the Christians of our district, plundered their goods, and tortured them terribly. When news of this reached the Bishop Mar Abraham, he came down from the mountains. By the power of the miracles he performed and the authority of his wonderful wisdom, he prevented the savage wolves from completely devouring the servants of Christ. When he had calmed them down, he went off to Ctesiphon. King Walgash II was dead, and Walgash III had succeeded him. The servant of God had taken with him various presents for the nobles of the City, in the hope of obtaining through them a letter from the pagan King in favour of the Christians of his district, so that they would not be ill-treated, unreasonably and unjustly, by the Magians.

The unsettled state of the Kingdom, however, prevented him from attaining his end. Armies had gathered from all the countries, and were preparing to burst out upon the country of the Romans. He came back, therefore, without being able to obtain any letter.²

Apart from this, there is no mention in Mashiha-zakha of any relationship between the Church and the State in the Parthian period. He states specifically that there was no organised church with its bishop in the Cities in the Parthian period.³ We shall consider in a later chapter⁴ the evidence of Mashiha-zakha with regard to the geographical expansion of the Church of the East up to the end of the Parthian regime.

¹ For the full story, see Y pp. 268-270. ² M-Z 11-12, tr. pp. 87-89, Y p. 270. ³ M-Z 30, tr. p. 107. ⁴ See Chapter IV.

Although we accept Mashihā-zakha's statement that there was no bishop or organised church in the Capital Cities, it is certainly possible that there were Christians there. Fiey presents an attractive case for a visit by "the apostle Mari" to the Capital between 79 and 116. His authority is an older writer quoted by the historian Mari ibn Suleman, who says that the Apostle Mari came to Kokhe. Explaining the etymology of Kokhe, he connects it with the word kukhyata, "huts", and states that the workmen of the ruler of Ctesiphon lived there. Before 79 the Tigris flowed between Kokhe and Seleucia, so that Kokhe was on the same side of the river as Ctesiphon. After 116 the Tigris had changed its course, and flowed between Kokhe and Ctesiphon, so that Kokhe was on the same side of the river as Seleucia, and it would not be practical for workers at Ctesiphon to live there. Only a source of considerable antiquity, therefore, would have associated Kokhe in this way with Ctesiphon, and we may presume that the mention of Mari's visit is therefore based on historical fact¹. It is worth noting in passing that the Sassanids built their fortress of Bih-Ardushir on the site of Kokhe, and that what was to become the Patriarchal Church lay south-west of the fortress.

We shall consider in Chapter IV the information that Bardaisan, who flourished about 196 A.D., gives in his Dialogue on Fate about the geographical distribution of Christianity in the East at that

¹ Fiey, *Jal* pp. 40-43. Note the helpful maps on pp. 42-44.

period. The Dialogue, however, has an intrinsic interest, as the earliest Christian apology against Magianism known to history. The objector's opening question is the kind we would expect from a dualist:

The Objector - If God is One, as you say, and if he is the Creator of men, and if it is his will that you should do what you are commanded, why did he not create men that they should not be able to do wrong, but should constantly be doing what is right, for in this way his will would have been accomplished?

In face of a question like that, Bardaisan would surely be forced to admit that there is also an Evil God! But his answer is superb: man is a responsible person, not a mere puppet.

Bardaisan - If man had been made so, he would not have belonged to himself, but would simply have been the instrument of him that moved him...But God in his kindness chose to make man differently. By freedom he exalted him above many creatures.

Not all Bardaisan's answers are so convincing; we feel that he does not take the power of evil seriously enough. Then, as we might expect from a Magian, the objector asks whether men are not "governed by the decree of Fate", and subject to the same stars and planets everywhere, and when Bardaisan tells of the differing customs of the various countries he has to answer the objection that each country has its ruling celestial bodies. His answer is to point out that the Jews and Christians in these countries are ethically different from their fellow-countrymen.

Bardaisan - And what shall we say of the new race of us Christians, whom Christ at his coming planted in every country and in every region? For lo! wherever we are, we are all called after the one name of Christ - Christians. On one day, the first of the week, we assemble ourselves together, and on specified days we abstain from food.

Unlike their fellow-countrymen in various lands, the Christians are not homosexuals, bigamists, promiscuous, or practisers of incest.

Wherever they are, and in whatever place they are found, the laws of their several countries do not prevent the Christians from obeying the law of their Christ; nor does the Fate of the (Heavenly) Governors compel them to make use of the things which they regard as impure.

The Magian had his belief that in the end Good would win, and Bardaisan ends on the same eschatological note of hope:

All evil commotions shall cease, and all rebellions terminate, and the foolish shall be convinced, and there shall be quietness and peace, through the gift of the Lord of all existing beings.

In addition to this apology, it is possible that Bardaisan wrote the famous Hymn of the Soul. This beautiful allegorical poem was written before 230, when it was included in the Acts of Thomas. It should be read in Burkitt's rhythmic translation². It may well be called a Parthian "Pilgrim's Progress". The Soul travels from the mountains of Hyrcania (Gurgan, south of the Caspian), via Babylon and Maishan to Egypt, obtains there through conversion and baptism the Pearl of righteousness, and then, guided by the Word of God, returns to the East and is rewarded. The hymn takes pride in "the free-born race of the Easterns", and when the Soul is tempted, the Word reminds him: "Thou art the son of Kings; by whom art thou held in bondage?" and in his response he "remembered my Royal race and my free-born nature", and made his way back to the society of "Parthian Princes and Kings, and all the Eastern Chieftains", where he could live a life of freedom. There is something refreshing and moving in this expression of Parthian Christianity.

We conclude, then, that Christianity took real root in the

¹ Bardaisan, DF, Y, pp. 19, 97-98. ² Quoted in full in Y, pp. 14-18.

Parthian Empire, winning its converts from the Jews, the mixed races of Mesopotamia, the Parthians and the Persians. The Church was numerically small, and subject to local persecutions mainly from the Magians. At the level of the State, however, there was no relationship with the Church, or attempt to define its status.

C. THE EARLY DAYS OF THE SASSANID EMPIRE

The fall of the Parthians in 225 and the establishment of a Persian dynasty in the Cities was not merely a change of rulers, but introduced a new emphasis. Mashiha-zakha points out both the religious and the political significance of this:

When the Persians became masters of the East, the Christians feared persecution...Ardushir (226-241), the first King of the Persians,...made an edict that Fire-Temples should be set up in honour of his gods; and that the Sun, the great god of the whole universe, should be honoured with special worship. He was the first to take the title of King of Kings (Shahinshah), and god. Seeking to attach to himself the honour due to the gods, he added blasphemy to injustice. (He also compelled) several foreign cults to enter and merge themselves into the cult of the sun and fire.¹

That was the religious change. Politically, the Persians had vanquished all the Kings of the East, and had replaced them by governors and marzbans who were subject to them. Ardushir, the first King of the Persians, deputed a Governor named Adur-zad to rule our country.²

From now on, rule was to be much more centralised. The Sassanid Empire was to stress nationalism and patriotism in a way the Parthians had never done, and Zoroastrianism, as the State Religion, was the symbol of this. This made a clash with Christianity sooner or later inevitable. During 226-337, however, Church and State remained separate from one another. The State neither recognised the Church, nor did it try to exterminate it. During this period, however, the Church continued to grow, and developed a more centralised organisation, with its chief Bishop in the Capital Cities. This took place, not so much as a result of planned policy, as by a gradual and natural development.

¹M-Z 19, tr. p. 108, Y, pp. 380-381. ²M-Z 19, tr. p. 108. Y.

A Bishop in the Capital Cities, and his Primacy

According to Mashih-zakha, the steps of the development of a Bishop of the Cities, claiming primacy in the Church of the East, were as follows:

1. Appointment of a Priest. This was made by Shahlufa, Bishop of Arbil, during the reign of Shapur I (241-271).

In the army of Shapur there was a wealthy Christian, named Ganzqan. When he went to Hedayab, and saw that there were many Christians in the district and its villages, he begged Shahlufa to come to Ctesiphon and visit the little group of brethren who had begun to show themselves there. Shahlufa was afraid to go, but Ganzqan reassured him and calmed his fears, and he set off, strong in his God.

On the way he and his companions were kidnapped by Arab raiders, and it was four months before he was able to get away.

Then they entered into the rich City of Ctesiphon, gathered all the brethren who were there, and encouraged them. Shahlufa laid his hands on a man and ordained him priest. He stayed two years, from the time King Shapur left Ctesiphon till the time of his return.¹

Clearly the Bishop of Arbil hesitated^{at} the prospect of any direct confrontation with the Sassanid Emperor.

2. Appointment of Five Priests. Shortly before 291, Shahlufa's successor, Ahadabuhi, went again to the Capital:

One day messengers sent by the Christians of Ctesiphon came to seek Ahadabuhi, and begged him also to come to them, as Shahlufa who had preceded him had done, to teach and instruct them in the right way to live, and to some extent to encourage and console them. They had also elected five faithful, God-fearing men, that he might ordain them...He acquiesced in their request, and laid hands on the men. More than that, he went with the messengers to the Cities, accompanied by Zakha-ishu', Bishop of Harbat-Galal, and Shabta, Bishop of Bait Zabdi. They stayed there for a year.²

¹ M-Z 34, tr. p. 111, Y pp. 274-275. ² M-Z 38-39, tr. pp. 116-117. Y.

3. Appointment of Bishop. As we shall shortly see¹, Bishop Shabta preached a rash sermon, which nearly led to persecution. Shabta fled, but Ahadabuhi remained in the Capital with the Christians there till the danger was over.

The inhabitants of Ctesiphon asked him urgently to consecrate a bishop, who would remain always in their midst. "There is a good number of Christians here," they said. "The Lord Bishops are far from us, and cannot come every day to us, to meet our needs and guide us in the ways of justice, spiritually and materially." He agreed readily to do what they asked, and consulted Haibi'el, Bishop of Sus. The two agreed to elect Papa, a Syrian, a very learned and wise man. Then everyone went back to his own country.²

If we follow Mashiha-zakha's chronology, as Mingana does, this appointment took place in 291.

4. Establishment of Primacy. Some twenty or more years later, we find Papa claiming primacy over the other bishops.

In the East, since Papa, Bishop of the Cities, whom we have mentioned, lived in the Capital of the Kingdom, and the other bishops needed his help in outward affairs, he went on to claim supremacy over all the bishops, as though they needed only one Head. The priests of the Cities and all the people opposed him in this, and for this reason thought of deposing him; even Shim'un his archdeacon disapproved of all these novelties, and consulted with Miles of Sus, Kab-alaha of Bait Salok, and several others. Papa feared greatly, because Shimun's parents had access to the King and were greatly respected by all. He then wrote to the bishops of the West, and especially to the Bishop of Edessa, whose name was Sa'da. They all agreed with him, because they felt he was a powerful man, and to be feared.

They wrote a letter to him³ therefore on this subject in their name, and in the names of the kings and nobles³ of the West, saying that, as in the West - that is, the Roman Empire - there were several patriarchs - those of Antioch, Rome,

¹ On pp. 33-35.² M-Z p. 41, tr. p. 119, Y p. 275.

³ i.e. to Papa. Armed with this letter, Papa was in a stronger position. Mingana's suggestion that the letter was sent to Constantine seems unnecessary.

Alexandria and Constantinople¹ - so there should be in the East - that is, the Persian Empire - at least one patriarch.

God, ...in his Divine providence allowed Papa's idea to succeed...All the/agreed on what had been decided by the West, for fear that the Western bishops would bring them between two fires - in the West, of the Christian Kings of Rome, and in the East, of the perverse King of Persia. Shim'un, Papa's archdeacon, did not accept this innovation, but sought to make it null and void in the name of the King, by means of his parents. But Papa cleverly satisfied Shim'un's father, promising him that after his death, he would arrange for Shim'un to succeed him.² Eastern /bishops

It is possible that part of the agreement made was that Papa should be subordinate in some way to the Great Bishop of Antioch.

This would explain the complaint of the contemporary Afrahat:

Our brother, adorned with the tiara, was not well-liked by the people of his own country. He went to seek other distant kings, and asked for chains and fetters, which he distributed in his country and city.³

Interesting light is shed on the question also by the statement of Gelasius of Cyzicus, in the records of the Council of Nicaea which he published about 475, that "Eustatius, Bishop of Great Antioch" signed approval of the Nicene Creed "on behalf of the churches in Coele-Syria and the whole of Mesopotamia, and in Cilicia also." (It is worth noting, however, that it is "John the Persian" or "John, Bishop of Fars", who signs "on behalf of (the churches) in the whole of Fars, and in the great India").⁴ Antioch, however, does not seem to have exercised any effective hegemony; the outbreak of war between the two Empires in 337 prevented this. In 410 "~~Porphyry~~, Bishop, Catholicos of Antioch," joins with the bishops of Edessa, Tella and Amid in sending a

¹ The use of the word "patriarch" is an understandable anachronism. The inclusion of Constantinople, not built till 330, in Mashih-zakha's explanatory note, is worse! ² M-Z 44-45, tr. pp. 121-123. Y. (The translation of part in Y, p. 275 has some mistakes).

³ Afrahat, Dem 14, Y, p. 276. ⁴ Gelasius EH 2:17, Y pp. 27-28.

letter to the bishops of the East, asking them to observe certain rules and customs, and to accept the Creed and Canons of Nicaea¹; in 424, as we shall see², the Church of the East declared that its Head was not subject to anyone in the West.

There are anachronisms in Mashiha-zakha's account, and details which may be unhistorical, but in general we feel that it is convincing. Fiey, who rejects it altogether, believes that early in the 3rd century the Bishop of the Cities had a recognised primacy, though it is impossible to say when he was first called Catholicos, and he cannot have been called Patriarch before the middle of the 5th century³. Whatever view is taken, however, all are agreed that by the time of Shapur II the Bishop of the Cities was considered, in a way perhaps not very clearly defined, as the Head of the Christians in Mesopotamia. He was so considered not only by the other bishops of the Church, but by the Shahinshah, to whose court he had access. The stage was in fact set for a defined Church-State relationship, and this was to develop for a time into one of unrelenting opposition.

"The time for persecution had not yet come"

Before the days of Shapur II there is no record of any persecution of the Church by the State in the Sassanid Empire, but one amusing story shows that about 290 the Church had a narrow escape.

It would seem that Shabsa, Bishop of Bait Zabdi, was an eloquent preacher, a master of the art of rhetoric, but that he had two fatal weaknesses - complete lack of tact, and unreadiness to practise what he preached. At that time the Capital was buzzing

¹ See Appendix A. ² In Chapter V, A. ³ Fiey, Jal pp. 78-80.

with talk of the recent victory of Bahram I, who had defeated the rebellious governor of Arbil, and flayed him alive.

Shabsa "stood up in the middle of a crowd" and began to preach. Possibly he did so in the market-place, but it seems more likely that he was in some courtyard, where the Christians had gathered to worship, and the non-Christians were listening, perhaps sitting on the roofs, or standing behind. His text was Matthew 10: 28 - "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." He pointed out that God was to be feared, because His victory was real and lasting, while the victory of the kings of this world gives rise to nothing but pride, ills and death:

Pride - because, when kings triumph, they triumph only according to the flesh, and that is why they become unduly haughty and proud. They forget their mortal nature and think they are gods. This adds infinitely to their sins, and their reward will be the fire that will never go out.

Ills - because even at the time of their victory, who can tell what fatigues they put up with? Before the battle takes place, they worry ceaselessly about its outcome - will they win, or will they lose? They worry about this night and day- and how many sleepless nights they have!

Death - because without doubt there will be deaths on both sides, and this brings suffering to parents and relatives, and makes the tears of the mothers flow, because their children have been cut in pieces by the edge of the sword, and their dearly beloved sons have been transfixed by the steel of lances.¹

No such limitations marred Christ's victory - it was a means of rejoicing, and offered forgiveness even to His enemies, the Jews.

One of the listening pagans reported to a Minister of the Shah that the Christians were teaching that Bahram would be tortured by fire, and that his recent victory was little better than a fraud!

The Bishop's tactless rhetoric seemed to imply political disloyalty.

¹ M-Z 39-40, tr. p. 117; Y pp. 273-274 gives the full account.

When the Christians heard of this, they hid in their houses, and the eloquent Shabsa fled into the desert, and remained there for two years. "He was afraid to show his face, for fear he would be seized and beaten" (!) Bishop Ahadabuhi, however, remained in the Capital, and the Christians sent gifts to a Minister named Radgan, who saw to it that the wrath of Bahram was appeased. "The time for persecution," remarks Mashiha-zakha, "had not yet come."

To conclude: the first hundred years of Sassanid rule, on the side of the State, were years of increasing emphasis on Zoroastrianism as the State Religion. On the side of the Church, they saw the establishment of a Bishop in the Capital, and moves towards a centralised Christian hierarchy. There was as yet no clash between Church and State, but the stage was set for a possible confrontation.

D. PERSECUTION UNDER SHAPUR II

The reign of Shapur II (309-379), and especially its last 40 years, was a period of persecution, when the Sassanid State attempted to exterminate the Church within its borders. Chabot has conveniently summarised its main features:

The persecution which raged against the Christians of Persia in the reign of Shapur II was fomented by the Magians. To begin with there were local persecutions: in 318 in Bait Garma, in 327 in Arzanene, in 339 again in Bait Garma. It was above all from 340 on, when Shapur had promulgated an edict against the Christians, that the persecution became more general. It was particularly violent in Susiana and in Hedayab, where it raged almost uninterruptedly from 344 to 376. In 351 the punishment of the Gilanian soldiers took place, who had served as mercenaries in the Persian armies; their country, Gilan, a plain to the south west of the Caspian Sea, had been evangelised very early. About 360, Shapur captured several cities of Bait Zabdi, the frontier province of the Roman Empire; every city taken was delivered over to pillage, the inhabitants deported en masse, and the clergy decapitated.

Even after Shapur's death, persecution continued, and many clergy and monks were killed ~~and~~ imprisoned. The total scale of the persecution is thus estimated by the Greek historian, Sozomen, whose history was written about 440, and who had access to eastern documents.

I shall briefly state that the number of men and women whose names have been ascertained, and who were martyred at this period, has been computed to be sixteen thousand; while the multitude outside of these is beyond enumeration, and for this reason to reckon off their names appeared difficult to the Persians and Syrians, and to the inhabitants of Edessa, who have devoted much care to the matter.²

We are not here concerned so much with the details of the persecution as with its causes, which can be stated briefly: Christianity was the religion of the enemy Romans, and the suspicion that ~~the~~ Christians were disloyal was fomented by the Jews and Magians; they themselves

¹ Littérature syriaque, p. 42. ² Sozomen EH 2: 14, Y. p. 280.

were in fact torn between loyalty to their country, and loyalty to the newly established Christendom in the West; and the Head of the Church of the East, Shim'un bar Saba'i, lacked the tact and flexibility needed in this difficult situation.

After one of his great victories, perhaps that of the Milvian Bridge, but more probably the final victory ^{over} of Licinius in 324, Constantine the Great received at court an embassy from Shapur II, seeking a treaty of peace with the victorious Roman. If it was 324, Constantine's reply belonged to the same year when he established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. He sent lavish gifts to the Shah, and a letter which included the following exhortation and confession:

I profess the Most Holy Religion (Christianity); and I declare that this worship teaches me deeper acquaintance with the Most Holy God...Imagine, then, with what joy I heard news so much in line with my desire, that the fairest provinces of Persia are to a great extent adorned by the presence of that class of men on whose behalf alone I am at present speaking - I mean the Christians. I pray, therefore, that both you and they may enjoy abundant prosperity, and that you and they may be equally blessed, for in this way you will experience the mercy and favour of that God who is the Lord and Father of all. And now, because your power is great, I commend these people to your protection; because your piety is outstanding, I commit them to your care. Care for them with your accustomed humanity and kindness. By this proof of faith you will obtain an immeasurable benefit both for yourself and us.¹

Here was a new situation for the Christians in the East - a Christian Empire bordering on the land where they lived, and a Christian Emperor claiming an interest in their welfare. Probably, as we have seen, their Head Bishop recognised in some way that he was subordinate to the Bishop of Antioch, who lived in that Christian Empire. As long as there was peace between the two Empires there was no problem, but in 337, the year of Constantine's

¹ Eusebius, Life of Constantine 4: 9 and 13. Y, pp. 276-277.

death, war broke out.

We know little about the life of the Persian monk Afrahat (Aphraates). He was probably a bishop, and head of a monastery near Mosul. He probably died a martyr some time in or after 345. His Demonstrations were written in 337, 344 and 345, and shed some light on the state of the Church and the thinking of a Persian Christian during Shapur II's reign. We have already¹ seen his views on Papa's claims and actions. In 337 he had no doubt as to which side was God's side in the war between Persia and Rome.

God's people (the Romans) have received prosperity, and success awaits the man who has been the instrument of that prosperity (Constantine). But disaster threatens the army which has been gathered together by the efforts of a wicked and proud man, puffed up with vanity (Shapur), and in the other world a curse awaits the man who is the cause of the disaster...

(The Roman) Empire shall not be conquered. Have no doubt of this, for the Hero whose name is Jesus is coming with His power, and His armour upholds the whole army of the Empire...His sign (the Cross) has been multiplied in their land. They have put on His armour, and are invincible.²

Afrahat also gives his views on the state of the Church.

Though published in 345, the following words were probably written before the outbreak of persecution, and describe the worldliness of the Church, and of its Head Bishop, Shim'un.

When men receive from us the laying-on of hands, they pay attention to nothing else. In our days, it is not easy to find someone who asks: "Who is the God-fearing man?" More often it is: "Who is the senior ordained man?" And whenever the reply comes "It is so-and-so", they say to him: "You must occupy the best seat."³

As for Shim'un

Shall we consider his lofty stature - like that of Saul? And his handsome looks - comparable to those of Eliab? Or his remarkable beauty - which reminds us of Absalom's? No, God is not satisfied with a pleasing outward appearance, and He does

² Afrahat, Dem 5, Y p. 277. ³ Afrahat, Dem 14, Y p. 302. ¹ on p. 32

not love the proud and those who seek glory.¹

According to Afrahat, Church discipline was governed by party politics within the Church:

If anyone does wrong, and has the luck to please the "Prison Authorities", they release him from his chains, and say: "God is merciful. He gives you remission of sins. Enter, take part in the Prayer." But if someone has displeased them, even just a little, they say to him: "You are bound and accursed by heaven and earth. Cursed also be anyone who speaks a word to you."²

A community that was unsure of its loyalty to the State, a Church in which power politics played too great a part, a Head Bishop who was proud, and sought glory - these, if we are to believe Afrahat, were the ingredients on the Christian side when war broke out.

The Acts of the Martyrs and Saints, collected and published early in the 5th century, describe thus the way in which persecution broke out in 339:

The King wrote a letter from Syria to the princes, in the following terms:

"When you have taken note of Our Divine Majesty's present instruction, which is enclosed in the cover we have sent, you shall at once arrest Shim'un, the Head of the Nazarenes. You shall not release him until he has signed this document, and promised to levy, and hand over to us, a double poll-tax and tribute from all the Nazarene people living in the territory of Our Divine Majesty, and inhabiting our territory. For Our Divine Majesty has nothing but the troubles of war, and they have nothing but rest and pleasure! They live in our territory, but their sympathies are with Caesar, our enemy."³

Shim'un refused to levy such a heavy tribute. It is difficult to be wise after the event, but it seems to us that he should have been more flexible, as Mar Aba was to be later in a similar situation⁴.

(Shapur) fell into a violent rage, gnashed his teeth and struck his hands together, saying:

¹ Afrahat, Dem 14, Y, p. 302. ² ibid. ³ Bedjan AMS 2:136, Y pp. 277-278.

⁴ See Chapter V, B p. 115 .

"Shim'un wants to arouse his disciples and his people to rebel against my Empire. He wants to make them slaves of Caesar: that is why he disobeys my orders!"

And the courtiers echoed the words of the King:

"If Your Majesty, who is the King of Kings, and Lord of all the earth, sends magnificent public letters, with precious gifts and superb presents, to Caesar - he thinks nothing of them. If, on the other hand, Shim'un addresses a mere scrap of a letter to him - Caesar will get up, fall on his knees, receive it in his very hands, and at once do what it asks! Besides this, it is no secret that Shim'un writes to Caesar to give him information." /

The Greek historian Sozomen tells the story of the outbreak of the persecution and Shim'un's martyrdom in a briefer form, but one which gives an accurate summary of the earlier Acts. He makes it plain that the Magians and Jews played a leading part in the attacks on the Christians.

When, in course of time, the Christians increased in number, assembled as churches, and appointed priests and deacons, the Magi...became deeply incensed against them. The Jews... were likewise offended. They therefore brought accusations before Shapur, the reigning King, against Shim'un, who was then Metropolitan of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, the Royal Cities of Persia, and charged him with being a friend of the Caesar of the Romans, and with communicating the affairs of the Persians to him. Shapur believed these accusations, and at first imposed intolerably oppressive taxes upon the Christians...He appointed cruel men to exact these taxes, hoping that, by being deprived of the necessities of life, and by the atrocity of the tax-gatherers, they might be compelled to abjure their religion - for this was his aim. Afterwards, however, he commanded that the priests and ministers of God should be slain with the sword. The churches were demolished, their vessels were deposited in the Treasury, and Shim'un was arrested as a traitor to the Kingdom and religion of the Persians. In this way the Magi, with the co-operation of the Jews, quickly destroyed the houses of prayer.

Shim'un was arrested, bound with chains, and brought before the King. There he showed clearly the excellence and firmness of his character; for when Shapur commanded that he should be led away to the torture, he did not fear, and refused to prostrate himself. The King, greatly exasperated, asked why he did not prostrate himself, as he had done formerly. Shim'un replied that he had not formerly been led away bound, in order that he might abjure the truth of God...When he had finished speaking,

the King commanded him to worship the sun. He promised, as an inducement, that he would bestow gifts upon him, and raise him to honour; but on the other hand he threatened that, if he did not comply, he would destroy him and the whole body of the Christians as a punishment. When the King found that promises and menaces were alike unavailing, ...he remanded him in prison...

The following day, which happened to be the sixth day of the week, and likewise the day on which, because it came immediately before the Festival of the Resurrection, the annual memorial of the Passion of the Saviour is celebrated, the King issued orders for the decapitation of Shim'un; for he had been again brought to the palace from the prison, and had reasoned most boldly with Shapur on points of doctrine, and had expressed a determination never to worship either the King or the sun. On the same day, a hundred other prisoners were ordered to be slain. Shim'un saw their execution, and last of all he was put to death. Among the victims were bishops, presbyters, and other clergy of different grades.¹

Here again, while we admire the "firmness and excellence" of Shim'un's endurance unto death, we cannot help wondering if it was necessary for him to refuse the King the ordinary courtesy of prostrating himself, which had previously been his practice.

To sum up: the reign of Shapur II saw a head-on clash between Church and State in the Sassanid Empire, in which the State tried to destroy the Church. The reasons for persecution were partly religious, and Magians and Jews joined in it; but they were partly political, due to a not entirely unfounded suspicion that the Christians sympathised more with ~~their~~ fellow-Christians in the Roman Empire than with their non-Christian fellow-countrymen. The State struck at the leaders of the Church, but the persecution was widespread, and involved ~~the~~ destruction of church buildings and the confiscation of property.

¹ Sozomen EH 2: 9 and 10. Y pp. 278-279.

CHAPTER III

THE SYNOD OF SELEUCIA

410 A. D.

In Western Europe 410 is a date known to all schoolboys: in that year Alaric and his Goths sacked the city of Rome, and from then onwards the Western Roman Empire remained only in name. The Eastern Roman Empire survived though for a time it was gravely threatened by the barbarian attacks, and already, at the beginning of the century, its Emperor Arcadius had been anxious for peace and friendship with Persia. The Sassanid Emperor Yazdgar I¹ (399-420) was also eager for peace, and the friendship of the two Emperors is said to have been such that at the request of Arcadius, Yazdgar sent a Persian scholar to act as tutor to his son Theodosius.² Arcadius died in 408, but his policy was continued by his son's regents, and in 410 the two Empires concluded a peace treaty. Yazdgar, who was called "the sinner" by the Persians, was more disposed to favour those of his subjects who lived in Mesopotamia than the Persians proper, and he aimed at curbing the nobles and the Magians.³ All this disposed him towards toleration of the Church in Mesopotamia.

The ambassador sent in 408 or 409 to treat for peace with Yazdgar was Maruta, Bishop of Maipherqat near Amid, not far from the border of the two Empires. He is said to have been a skilled physician, sent at Yazdgar's request, and to have cured the Shah of severe headaches.⁴ It was Maruta who, after consultations with Izhaq the Bishop of the Cities, prevailed on Yazdgar to summon the first Eastern Synod to meet in 410. The record of the Synod is preserved in the Synodicon Orientale.

¹ We have spelt Yazdgar as in Y p. 281. A Persian scholar tells us that it should be pronounced Yazdigard.

² For Persian history we have frequently used Bad-akhshani's Tarikh-i-Iran. Page-references for individual statements are not given.

³ Brown WLA p. 165, Wigram AC p. 86. ⁴ Labourt CEP p. 89, Wigram AC p. 88.

The "Synodicon Orientale"

"Synodicon Orientale" is the title given by Jean-Baptiste Chabot to the collection of records of Synods of the Church of the East which he edited and published with a French translation in 1902. It covers the period from the Synod of Seleucia in 410 to that of Hanan-ishu' II in 775. In 1934 Chabot wrote:

It was, we believe, due to the efforts of Timothy I, and at the beginning of his pontificate, that the collection of canons known as the Synodicon Orientale was made... The copyists who transcribed this first collection added later the Synod of Timothy held in 790, and numerous canonical decisions made by later writers.

We can safely date the collection between 775, the last Synod to be included, and 790, the Synod added by a later copyist.

In general, the records are first-hand and reliable. It is possible, as we shall find when we come to the Synod of Dad-ishu' in 424, that they were touched up here and there, especially in the anachronistic use of the word "Patriarch". There is no evidence, however, of any attempt to harmonise them to fit in with decisions of a later date: for instance, the arrangements for metropolitans in 410 are clearly contemporary, and not revised, as 'Abd-ishu' was later to do, to suit a later age; Mar Aba I's Practica has not been altered to suit the later requirements of Timothy I's Synod of 790, as laid down in his Letter 5 (L) of 781/2². As we shall see in the next chapter, the records of attendance at Synod meetings tell us a lot about the growth of the Church of the East during the period. Our concern here, however, is with what happened at the Synod of 410.

¹ Littérature syriaque, p. 109. ² Compare Chabot 80 pp. 272-273 with 618-620; and pp. 606-607 with 553-555.

The Sequence of Events

The text of the record of the Synod of Seleucia, a translation of which is given in Appendix A, divides naturally into 5 parts:

1. The Preamble, which tells that in 410 Yazdgard had already brought the persecution of the Church to an end, ordered churches to be rebuilt, and given clergy and monks liberty to go about openly. Three main participants in the arrangements that followed are then mentioned: "our Father Mar Izhaq, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, Catholicos and Archbishop of all the East"; the ambassador "Mar Maruta, Bishop, mediator of peace and concord between East and West"; and a group of Western bishops, including "Bishop Porphyry, Catholicos of Antioch", who had written a letter to Maruta for the ear of the Shah.

2. How the letter, translated into Persian, was read by Izhaq and Maruta before Yazdgard, who ordered that 40 bishops should be called together to a Synod, and sent instructions by river post to the local governors to see that they were sent.

3. How the bishops assembled on the Feast of Epiphany, 6th January, 410, in the Great Church of Kokhe, on the instructions of the Shah, and the letter sent by the bishops of the West was read before them.

4. What we might call the First Sitting of the Synod proper, held on 1st February, 410, doubtless after much preparatory work. It was opened with prayer for "the victorious and illustrious Shahinshah". then a letter sent by the bishops of the West was read before the Synod. in particular, three points in the letter were accepted: that there should be only one bishop in each diocese, regularly consecrated by 3 bishops and authorised by the "Metropolitan Archbishop" of the

Cities; that there was to be uniformity in the celebration of the Festivals of Epiphany and Easter, and in the Eucharist; and that the Synod should accept the Creed and Canons of the Council of Nicaea. Izhaq then asked for the Canons to be brought in and read. He pronounced anathema on all who would not adhere to them, and suggested that they should be recorded in writing, and signed by all. This was agreed to.

5. How, "some days afterwards", Izhaq and Maruta had an audience with the Shah, who then called the bishops into his presence and promulgated before them a decree of toleration, which recognised the Christians as a tolerated subject-community, or millat, within the country, and Izhaq as their royally-appointed Head, and threatened with punishment all who would oppose the arrangement. The bishops left the royal presence in a body, and seem to have met immediately afterwards for the final session of their Synod, where they signed their acceptance of the canons and rules of the Synod, and ended by instructing the notary to put down in writing instructions to all the churches to pray "for Kings and Potentates, that they may live in peace and tranquillity, and that they may not conceive any proud and violent design against the people of God and the Church of God".

The record of the Synod is followed by a transcript of the original Creed of Nicaea, 325, and by 21 canons (not those of Nicaea but canons clearly prepared by the Synod with their own pressing needs in mind), and ends with the list of 38 bishops who were signatories.

There are certain obscurities in this account, perhaps due to the fact that the Eastern mind is not as concerned as the Western with

¹ Chabot SO pp. 262-275 . Not included in Appendix A.

matters of exact chronology. Were there, in fact, as Labourt suggests, two letters from the Western bishops, one addressed to the Shah, asking him to confirm Izhaq as Head and call a Synod, and a second letter to Maruta, asking that if a Synod was held, it should accept the Nicene Creed and Canons? Did the bishops sign twice, the Nicene Creed and Canons on 1st February, and their own Canons and Rules later after the Shah had accepted them? Was the interval between 6th January and 1st February spent in committee work, and lobbying, and meetings with the Shah, with three objects: to end all schism in the Church by securing acceptance of Izhaq by all as Head; to prepare the Synod's Canons, with their careful rules for a hierarchy of Catholicos, metropolitans, bishops and priests; and to secure the Shah's full acceptance and backing of the arrangements? These questions are dealt with in some detail by Labourt ¹ and Wigram ². It is sufficient for our purpose to note that there had been opposition to Izhaq, particularly by the Metropolitan and bishops of Elam, and the Bishop of Mashmahig in the Persian Gulf, and that he had probably been imprisoned by the Persian authorities; and that some dioceses were represented by more than one bishop at the Synod, which indicated a certain amount of schism. ³ The organisational work of the Synod was therefore twofold: putting its own house in order, and setting the seal of its acceptance to a relationship with the State.

¹ Labourt CEP pp. 94-97 first quotes Braun's reconstruction, and then gives his own. ² Wigram AC pp. 94-95 in general follows Labourt, but with some differences.

³ See Labourt CEP pp. 91, 98-99, Chabot SO pp. 274-275.

Putting the Church's House in Order

The 21 canons of the Synod of Seleucia contain a variety of matters, but 12 of them directly concern Church order, and make arrangements for a hierarchy, with defined rights and duties for each stage.

1. At the head of the hierarchy is the Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, whose position is defined in Canons 12 and 21:

12. We accept of our own free-will, and we have been commanded by Yazdgard, King of Kings - we, all the Bishops of the East, and those who shall come after us - to obey, in all things right and prescribed, the Bishop, Catholicos, Archbishop, Metropolitan, of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, until Christ shall come - that is to say, every bishop who shall sit on the sublime throne of this Church of Kokhe.¹

21. The first and principal See is that of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The bishop who occupies it is the Great Metropolitan and Head of all the bishops. The Bishop of Kashkar is under the jurisdiction of this Metropolitan. He is his right hand, and his servant. He governs the diocese after his death. The Metropolitan of a single province is under the jurisdiction of this Great Metropolitan, who occupies the See of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.²

The names used are interesting. The word Patriarch does not occur in the canons, and its presence in the summary of the record is a late addition. The term Great Metropolitan, used also in Canon 20, was possibly the current one. The term Catholicos and Archbishop of the East occurs with variations several times in the Record of the Synod. Fiey is non-committal as to whether the use of the word Catholicos should be put down as a later interpolation.³ As the word is scarcely ever used alone, it may have been experimental, introduced by Maruta, who would be familiar with its usage for the principal bishop of the Armenian Church.⁴

¹ Chabot, SO p. 266, Y. p. 283. ² Chabot SO p. 272, Y. p. 283. ³ Fiey, Jal pp. 78, 83.

⁴ See Wigram AC p. 91.

We have one more name in Yazdgard's decree, as recorded in summary form - "Head of all the Christians of the East". This position of the Great Metropolitan of Seleucia was, therefore, not merely a matter of Church law, but of State decree.

2. Canon 21 goes on to name the 5 bishops who were recognised by the Synod as metropolitans, in their order of precedence - Bait Lapat, Nisibin, Parat Maishan, Arbil and Karka of Bait Salok. Names of sees subordinate to them are also mentioned, as well as a few isolated sees like Fars and Halwan, which were not brought into the hierarchical structure. Canon 10 lays down that each metropolitan is to possess a copy of the canons, and Canon 18 lays down the rights of metropolitans.

3. Canons 1, 11 and 20 deal with the election, consecration, and authorisation of bishops, and Canon 19 forbids bishops to tyrannise over one another. Canon 20 is the most important:

20. When the bishop of one of the dioceses under his jurisdiction dies, a metropolitan must assemble the bishops under him and establish as bishop the person chosen by that city, After ordaining him, he shall send him, with a letter, to the Great Metropolitan, so that he may be perfected by him. Apart from that, a bishop metropolitan has no power over the bishops placed under his jurisdiction; he cannot by avarice or gluttony force them to receive or give anything.¹

We can compare this with the rule for the consecration of bishops included in the Synod Record². Of the power of the Great Metropolitan, Wigram says:

The Council recognizes in, or confers on, the holder of the see of Seleucia a power over his suffragans that is singularly extensive and defined. He has a practical veto on their appointment; appeal from all their acts lies to him; and they are to report themselves to him personally twice a year.³

¹ Chabot SO p. 272, Y p. 283. ² See p. 45 above, foot, and Appendix A p. 282.
³ Wigram AC pp. 99-100.

Canon 6 lays down rules for the assemblies of bishops.

4. Canon 14 deals with "country-bishops", limiting their number to one in a diocese. Canon 15 lays down rules for the choice of an archdeacon. Canon 16 lays down rules for the selection and ordination of priests.

Other matters dealt with in the canons are regular Sunday services (9), Festivals and the Eucharist (13), clerical abuses like greed (4, 8) and concubinage (3), the duty of hospitality (7), self-made eunuchs (2), and the need to keep away from Magian practices of augury and divination (5). Canon 17 is the solemn anathema and pact referred to in the Record of the Synod.

The result of all this legislation was a carefully-defined hierarchy, with a designated Head. It meant that a relationship between the Head of the State and the Head of the Church was in effect a practical relationship between the State and the Church.

The Church as a legally recognised Subject-Community

The Persians were a people of precedent: the "laws of the Medes and Persians, which change not" are proverbial. Peter Brown notes that when Khusrau II conquered Egypt, the governors he appointed resumed a tradition of domination that had lapsed in Egypt for a mere 900 years, and show it in their tax-documents, which are extant in Pahlavi!¹ We are tempted to see the same kind of connection and precedent for the arrangement come to in 410, in the interesting examples of Persian State Decrees recorded in the Book of Ezra², and especially that connected with Ezra himself:

¹ Brown WLA p. 169. ² Ezra 4: 17-22; 6: 3-5, 6-12; 7: 12-26.

Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest and scribe learned in the law of the God of heaven:

This is my decision. I hereby issue a decree that any of the people of Israel or of its priests or Levites in my kingdom who volunteer to go to Jerusalem may go with you. You are sent by the king and his seven counsellors to find out how things stand in Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the law of your God with which you are entrusted...

And I, King Artaxerxes, issue an order to all treasurers in the province of Beyond-Euphrates that whatever is demanded of you by Ezra the priest, a scribe learned in the law of the God of heaven, is to be supplied exactly, up to a hundred talents of silver...We also make known to you that you have no authority to impose general levy, poll-tax, or land-tax on any of the priests, Levites, musicians, door-keepers, temple-servitors, or other servants of this house of God.

And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God with which you are entrusted, are to appoint arbitrators and judges to judge all your people in the province of Beyond-Euphrates, all who acknowledge the laws of your God; and you and they are to instruct those who do not acknowledge them. Whoever will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be rigorously executed upon him, be it death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

This decree has several interesting features. Ezra does not go to Jerusalem on his own authority; he is "sent by the king and his seven counsellors". He is to be given financial assistance, as a royal officer, by the local civil servants, and those like him involved in the temple worship are to be exempted from certain taxes. Ezra is given authority to appoint "arbitrators and judges to judge all your people in the province". Those who did not obey the laws he laid down - which were, in fact, the King's laws, were to be rigorously punished, presumably by the State, or at least with the full approval of the State.

We see something similar in the powers of the Ethnarch of the Jews in Origen's time (c. 240 A.D.):

Now, for instance, that the Romans rule, and the Jews pay the half-shekel to them, how great power by the concession of

¹ Ezra 7: 12-14, 21, 22a, 24-26, NEB.

Caesar the Ethnarch has; so that we, who have had experience of it, know that he differs in little from a true king! Private trials are held according to the law, and some are condemned to death. And though there is not full licence for this, still it is not done without the knowledge of the rulers, as we learned and were convinced of when we spent much time in the country of that people.¹

With precedents like these in mind, let us turn now to what is said of Yazdgard's edicts.

The first edict mentioned was one of toleration; in Labourt's words, like an Edict of Milan for the Persian Church².

He had, in fact, ordered that throughout his Empire the temples (churches) destroyed by his fathers should in his time be magnificently rebuilt; that the altars which had been demolished should be carefully restored; and that those who had been put to the test for God, who had endured prison and torture, should come out freely; that the priests, the rulers, and all the monks, should have liberty to go about without fear.³

The rebuilding of churches was presumably at State expense, though it may be reading too much into it to suggest that this was an acknowledgement that the Christians were a recognised section of the community. The second Edict is more explicit about this:

The victorious and illustrious King of Kings., with wisdom and liberality, issued an edict, and gave orders to Khusrau-Yazdgard, his Prime Minister, and to Mihr-Shapur, his Commander-in-Chief...In brief, what he said was this:

"Previously there was a great persecution against you, and you had to go about in secret; now, the King of Kings has brought you great peace and tranquillity. Thanks to the frequent meetings the King of Kings has had with the Catholicos Izhaq, whom he has been pleased to establish Head of all the Christians of the East, and especially since the day when Bishop Maruta came here, by the favour of the King of Kings peace and tranquillity have increased to you. With regard to the letter which has come from the land of the Romans, Yazdgard, King of Kings, now commands as follows:

¹ Origen, Letter to Africanus, in ANCL 10, p. 385. ² Labourt CEP p. 93.

³ See Appendix A, p.279 , Y p. 281

"Every man whom you shall choose, and know to be capable of governing and directing the people of God, who shall be appointed by the Bishops Izhaq and Maruta, shall hold valid office. No one must separate himself from them. If anyone opposes them and acts contrary to their will, let them tell us, and we shall inform the King of Kings, and no matter who he is, his malice shall be punished."¹

Along with this decree, we append the interpretation that the Synod made of the last sentence:

"Anyone who does not accept it, and behaves in a disorderly spirit after this definition has been laid down, shall be totally rejected, and rightly so, by the whole Church of Christ. There will be no remedy for him: he shall be condemned to a severe sentence by the King of Kings, and subjected to rigorous imprisonment, shame, and scorn."²

The main features of Artaxerxes' Decree recur here: Izhaq is not Head of the Church on his own authority; the Shahinshah "has been pleased to establish him Head of all the Christians of the East". Those whom he and Maruta appoint are to be recognised by the King as holding valid office. Those who did not recognise the authority of the Head of the Church were to be treated as enemies of the State, and punished by the State. There is, it is true, no explicit provision for financial assistance or exemption from tax, but we have already seen that Yazdgard had probably already made arrangements for the expenses involved in the rebuilding of churches to be met.

The Church on its side recognised its obligation to pray for the State, and issued instructions to congregations:

"First of all, in the churches, prayers, petitions, supplications and entreaties shall be made to God, to His Christ, and to His living and Holy Spirit, for Kings and Potentates, that they may live in peace and tranquillity, and that they may not conceive any proud and violent design against the people of God and the Church of God."³

¹ See Appendix A, p. 282, Y pp 281-282. ² *ibid.* pp. 282-3, Y p. 282
³ *ibid.* p. 283, Y p. 282.

This Edict, and the resulting Church-State relationship, was extremely important for the Church of the East, and is central to this study. By it the Church of the East became a millat, or legally recognised religious minority. The arrangement was to last with little significant change throughout the Sassanid period, and it was the arrangement that the Arabs found and took over when they conquered the Sassanid Empire. We may criticise it, and say that to some extent the Church had sold its freedom in exchange for State recognition, and State backing for its Head; yet perhaps in that period it would have been difficult to get a better arrangement. Eastern writers like John of Penek and Timothy I¹ were later to claim that their Church had more spiritual liberty than the Church of the West in the Byzantine Empire (what was later to be the Greek Orthodox or "Malkite" Church). At a cursory glance, we can see the following weaknesses in the arrangement, from the point of view of the Church:

1. The hand of the Shah, and after him the Caliph, was in the election and appointment of the Head of the Church. It would be easy for the State to appoint some flatterer or "yes-man" to the office, and even by refusing approval of a Church choice to leave a vacancy in the Church's leadership.

2. While the right of the Church to exist was recognised, there is no specific guarantee of its right to propagate its beliefs, or to make converts. In fact, the legal penalty remained death if a Magian or Zoroastrian became a Christian, and this was to be enforced again and again. When Islam became the State, the penalty for apostasy from Islam was again to be death, and it was even more strictly enforced.

¹ See Chapter VI B, p. 161 and Chapter VII B, pp.212-213 .

3. The recognition of the Church of the East as a millat had two other dangers: communalism and divisiveness. The Church might, on the one hand, be so concerned about its rights and privileges as a community, that it would forget its first duty was to evangelise, and settle down to becoming a permanent, if privileged minority. On the other hand, rival claimants to be Head of the millat might try to gain the backing of the State authorities; and should the Church become prey to more permanent division, the possibility lay open for the State to create additional Christian millats, and play them off one against the other.

4. The promising and invoking of State sanctions to support Church discipline and guard the Church against heresy and schism was wrong in principle. The Church should carry out its own polity and discipline; it should not use the State to force it on people. It has to be remembered, of course, that the Edict was passed in an intolerant age. Roman Emperors like Constantine the Great, Constantius and Theodosius I had laid down what the Church was to believe, and declared heretical or schismatic worship to be illegal. Later, the Roman Catholic Church was to try "heretics" and hand them over to the "secular arm" for punishment, while in the Byzantine Empire Justinian was to order the Governors of his Eparchies, under threat of the death penalty for disobedience, to see to it that metropolitans and bishops carried out their duties to the letter!

It will be our task in the following chapters to see how the system set up in 410 was to work in practice, both under the Sassanid Shahs, and under the early Caliphs, and to see whether it was or was not a workable system, allowing the Church to fulfil its spiritual

¹ Justinian, Novel 136: 8, Y p. 266.

duties towards its membership, and obey its call to evangelise those without. Were the weaknesses indicated above theoretical rather than practical, capable of being surmounted by a living Church? Or were they in the long run to be fatal to the Church's life and witness?

The Significance of the Synod of Seleucia

Before we leave the Synod, it seems worth while to quote the estimates of its significance made by the two historians who at the beginning of this century were the first to utilise the Record made available by Chabot in 1902 - Labourt (1904) and Wigram (1910). Labourt stresses most the ordering of the Church.

Maruta could be proud of the immense work accomplished in so little time. The Church, of yesterday scattered by persecution and undermined by schism, was now officially recognised and protected by the King of Kings. A methodically arranged hierarchy applied in all the Empire uniform rules which the almost secular experience of the Christendoms of the Roman world had made sacred, and, so to speak, canonised. The Faith of Nicaea became the unique symbol of all the Syrian Churches.

No more private liturgy in the houses of the faithful. One single church in the parish, one single bishop in the diocese, one single metropolitan in the province; and, at the head of all, the Bishop of the Royal Cities, Seleucia-Ctesiphon... Below the Great Metropolitan were five metropolitans in a rigorous hierarchy, established in cities which were "capitals of provinces"... About 30 bishops, whose jurisdiction was carefully defined, were brought under the authority of the metropolitans. Only a few sees, isolated or distant, in Media, in Rai, in Fars, and in the islands of the Persian Gulf, do not appear to have been from that moment grouped into a province.

Wigram, who was himself a missionary among the Nestorians from 1902 to 1912², was, as far as we are aware, the first to see the far-reaching significance for Eastern history of the Church-State relationship which was established:³

¹ Labourt, CEP, pp. 97-98. Y. ²Atiya p. 240. ³ In this connection we are amazed at Fiey's contemptuous remark (Jalons p. 6) that Wigram's work "n'ajoute rien à Labourt".

At this council the Church was put formally and finally into the position of a recognised millat in the Persian kingdom. It was subject to its own ruler (who was also its religious head), whose appointment must be at the least approved by the State. It could make its own laws in its own way, subject to State approval; and disobedience to them could be punished by State authority, if the moral and temporal power of the Catholicos failed. And it could own its own buildings, endowments and institutions. Any man could leave the millat by either abandoning his Christianity, or (in later times, when millats multiplied) by leaving his original Church for some other; but while he remained in it he must obey its rules.

This precedent set by Yazdgard has been followed so often, through so many centuries, by so many varying non-Christian rulers, and towards so many varieties of Christianity, that the first setting of it forms a really noteworthy point in oriental history. This system is essentially the one under which all Christians in "the Empire of the East" (whether the rulers of that Empire are Persian, Saracen, Mongol, Seljuk or Ottoman) have lived since, and still live today; and if survival can prove fitness, this fact would seem to show that it is, on the whole, well adapted for them.²

With the statement of these estimates of its importance, we shall for the present leave the Synod of Seleucia. After a study of how it worked in practice in Chapters IV-VII, we shall state our own conclusions on it in Chapter VIII.

¹ Wigram AC, pp. 95-96. (I have altered the spelling of "millat" and "Yazdgard" in the interests of uniformity).

² The validity of the final statement here is open to challenge today, in view of the history of the Nestorians in Iraq and Iran since Wigram's time. See Joseph, The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours, and Atiya, pp. 232-287.

CHAPTER IV

EXPANSION AND ORGANISATION

225 - 820

Christianity is a missionary religion, and one criterion by which we can judge whether Church-State relationships are sound is this: is the Church in fact able effectively to pursue its task of evangelism, so that there is a marked growth in its numbers, and spread in its geographical distribution? As far as we are aware, no serious attempt has been made to estimate the growth and spread of the Church of the East since the publication of Chabot's Synodicon Orientale¹ provided much new data. Mingana in his two well-known articles² did something to classify the details about sees to the east and south-east; and Fiey in his recent painstaking and invaluable volumes³ has brought the details about sees within present-day Iraq up to date. It is to be regretted that Professor Aziz S. Atiya, in his recent work⁴, seems to have ignored Chabot's material, and leant heavily on older writers like Assemani⁵ and Le Quien⁶: as a result, his lists⁷ tell us little more than Wiltsch's pioneering effort⁸. It seems therefore worth while to make a tentative effort to trace and estimate this growth, bearing in mind that the available information is very partial.

The main authorities we shall use are as follows:

For 225: the lists of bishops given by Mashih-zakha, with reference also to the place-names mentioned by Bardaisan.

¹ 1902. ² Min 9 (1925) and Min 10 (1926). ³ Assyrie chretienne, 3 vols (1965-1969). ⁴ A History of Eastern Christianity (1968).

⁵ Bibliotheca Orientalis (1719-1728) ⁶ Oriens Christianus (1740).

⁷ on pp. 255 and 265. ⁸ Geography and Statistics of the Church (1859), Vol I, pp. 226-238, 482-495.

For 410: the attendance at the Synod of Seleucia, and the list of metropolitans and bishops set out in its canons.

For 410-650: the lists of metropolitans and bishops attending the various synods of the Church of the East, and the letters of the Patriarch Ishu'-yab III.

For 650-820: the letters of Ishu'-Yab III, the records of Synod attendances in 676, 775 and 790, names mentioned in Thomas of Marga's Book of Governors, the letters of the Patriarch Timothy I, and (where useful) the list of Elijah of Damascus (893).

For the whole period: information about metropolitans given by the canonists Ibn-at-Tayyib (d. 1043) and 'Abd-ishu' (d. 1318); and the historians 'Amr ibn Matta and Saliba ibn Yuhanna (c. 1350).

The Main Evidence

1. Mashiha-zakha. After describing the fall of the Parthian Empire in 225, Mashiha-zakha continues:

The Church had more than twenty bishops: at Bait Zabdi, Karka of Bait Salok, Kashkar, Bait Lapat, Hurmizd-ardushir, Parat Maishan, Hanaita, Kharbat-Galal, Arzan, Bait Niqtor, Shahr-Qard, Bait Maskeni, Halwan, Bait Qatari, Bait Hezzi, Bait Dailami, Shigar, and in yet other cities¹. Nisibin and the Royal Cities did not yet have bishops, for fear of the pagans.²

Bardaisan, writing in 196, does not speak of bishops, but knows of Christians in Parthia, among the Gilanians and Kaishans (compare "Bait Dailami"), in Fars (Persia), Media (Halwan), and Hatra, south-east of Shigar³. To a limited extent this confirms Mashiha-zakha's names.

¹ M-Z 30, tr. pp. 106-107, Y pp. 19-20. Including of course Arbil.

³ See full quotation in Y p. 19.

2. Synod of Seleucia, 410. As Chabot points out,¹ the records of attendance at the Synod, and the lists of bishops and sees set out in its canons, do not entirely coincide; the following summary includes both.

The Cities:	Great Metropolitan, 4 bishops
Bait Lapat:	Metropolitan, 4 bishops
Nisibin:	Metropolitan, 6 bishops
Parat Maishan:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Arbil:	Metropolitan, 6 bishops
Karka of Bait Salok:	Metropolitan, 5 bishops
Without metropolitan:	Riv-ardushir, Qatar, Ardai, Toduru Masmahig, Islands, Abrashshr, Halwan, Rai, Garitin - 10 bishops
Total:	Great Metropolitan 1
	Metropolitans 5
	Bishops 38 ²

The total of bishops mentioned was, of course, greater, as some places had more than one bishop when the Synod began³.

3. Attendance at Synods, 410-605. The geographical index on pages 665-685 of the Synodicon Orientale, supplemented and corrected by Fley, is indispensable for checking on the attendance at the synods of the Church of the East. Doubtless some of the sees were only temporary, and shifted, but (with the exception of sees which were probably Monophysite before 650) we shall give the total number of places from which bishops attended. They are shown distributed among the provinces which had come into being before 650. The totals have been supplemented by a few sees mentioned in other sources: the evidence is given in detail in Appendix B. We again summarise:

The Cities:	Catholicos-Patriarch, 8 bishops
Bait Lapat:	Metropolitan, 7 bishops

¹ SO pp. 616-618. ² For details, see Appendix B. ³ See Chapter III, p.45

Nisibin:	Metropolitan, 8 bishops
Parat Maishan:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Arbil:	Metropolitan, 15 bishops
Karka of Bait Salbk:	Metropolitan, 10 bishops
Riv-ardushir:	Metropolitan, 18 bishops
Merv:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Harat:	Metropolitan, 8 bishops
Halwan:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Without metropolitan:	China, Samarqand, India (3?), Armenia, Damascus, Rai, Gurgan, Gilan and Amul, Garitin, Hamir, Karne - 13 bishops
Total:	Catholicos-Patriarch 1
	Metropolitans 9
	Bishops 96

The lists also give us an important check on the dates when some of the sees were given metropolitan status, as we can fix them between the last date when we have reference to a "bishop", and the first date when the name "metropolitan bishop" is used. They may also show us when the word "patriarch" was first used¹. We may also note that in 410 and 554 the metropolitan provinces are listed in the Synod minutes. The details are as follows:

The Cities:	Great Metropolitan, Catholicos and Archbishop, Head 410	
	Catholicos and Patriarch 424	
Bait Lapat:	Metropolitan 410	
Nisibin:	Metropolitan 410	
Parat Maishan:	Metropolitan 410	
Arbil:	Metropolitan 410	
Karka of Bait Salok:	Metropolitan 410	
Riv-ardushir:	Bishop 410.	Metropolitan 424
Merv:	Bishop 424-497	Metropolitan 554
Harat:	Bishop 424-554 ²	Metropolitan 585
Halwan:	Bishop 410-605	Metropolitan 780
Bait Qatari:	Bishop 410	Metropolitan 676

4. The Letters of Ishu'-yab III. The letters, which cover at least the period 627-652, mention the names of many sees, and

¹ But see Chapter V A, pp. 83-84. ² This corrects a mistake in Y, pp. 23 and 25. The minutes of 554 do not include Harat in the list of metropolitan sees; Shila could not therefore have appointed its first metropolitan.

his evidence supplements that of the Synod Records¹. In addition, the following statement is very important. It dates from 650-652:

There are more than 20 bishops and 2 metropolitans in the East, who have received in the past, and receive in the present, episcopal ordination from the Church of God (i.e. the Patriarch), and none of them have come to us for many years, nor did we ask them to come, but we know that in spite of the long distance that separates them from us, they fulfil the obligations of their episcopal office in strict conformity with the Church of God, while the rights of their episcopal jurisdiction are duly received from us. We write to them and they write to us.²

Who were the two metropolitans here referred to? We shall discuss this matter more fully later³, and content ourselves here with giving some names that have been suggested: Merv, Harat, Samarqand, Kashghar, China.

5. Evidence for the Period 650-820. The attendances at the Synods of 676, 775 and 790 were small, and tell us of only a few bishops. Many metropolitans and bishops, however, are mentioned in the letters of Timothy I, including specific reference to the Province reasons for his creating a new Metropolitan/of Rai. Many are also mentioned by Thomas of Marga. Places mentioned by Elijah of Damascus are only concluded in the following totals if known to have had a bishop before 820.

The Cities:	Catholicos-Patriarch, 9 bishops
Bait Lapat:	Metropolitan, 6 bishops
Nisibin:	Metropolitan, 7 bishops
Parat Maishan:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Arbil:	Metropolitan, 12 bishops
Karka of Bait Salok:	Metropolitan, 6 bishops
Riv-ardushir:	Metropolitan, 5 bishops
Merv:	Metropolitan
Harat:	Metropolitan, 1 bishop
Haiwan:	Metropolitan, 2 bishops
China:	Metropolitan

¹ For details see Appendix B. ² I-Y III, 21, Y pp. 23-24.

³ See Chapter VI B, pp. 145-147, and this chapter, p. 73.

Samarqand:	Metropolitan
Qatar:	Nil by 820.
India:	Metropolitan
Armenia:	Metropolitan
Damascus:	Metropolitan, 2 bishops
Rai:	Metropolitan, 1 bishop
Dailam:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Tibet:	Metropolitan
Turkestan:	Metropolitan), 7 bishops "beyond Dailam"
Sarbaz :	Metropolitan
Unidentified:	Bait Qale - 1 bishop
Total:	Catholicos-Patriarch 1
	Metropolitans 19,
	Bishops, at least 65'

6. Elijah of Damascus, 893. The list and order of metropolitans, and numbers of bishops in their provinces, given by Elijah of Damascus, is worth recording for comparison, though it is almost certainly incomplete.² There was a Metropolitan of India in his day. The omission of China may reflect the suppression of Christianity there in the latter part of the Ninth Century. The figures are as follows:

The Patriarchal Province:	Patriarch, 12 bishops
Gundeshapur:	Metropolitan, 4 bishops
Nisibin:	Metropolitan, 3 bishops
Basra:	Metropolitan, 2 bishops
Mosul:	Metropolitan, 6 bishops
Bait-Garma:	Metropolitan, 5 bishops
Damascus:	Metropolitan, 6 bishops
Rai:	Metropolitan, 1 bishop
Harat:	Metropolitan, 1 bishop
Merv:	Metropolitan, 2 bishops
Armenia:	Metropolitan
(Samar)qand:	Metropolitan
Fars:	Metropolitan, 8 bishops
Barda'a:	Metropolitan
Halwan:	Metropolitan, 4 bishops

If we add a Metropolitan of India, we get the following total:

Patriarch	1
Metropolitans	15
Bishops	54

¹ For details see Appendix B. ² Assemani BO II, 458-60 gives the full list in Arabic with Latin translation.

7. Ibn-at-Tayyib, d. 1043 . In quoting Ibn-at-Tayyib and his fellow-canonist 'Abd-ishu', we shall for convenience add the dates of the "patriarchs" referred to. Ibn-at-Tayyib describes thus the sequence of appointment of metropolitans:

When the diocese of a metropolitan is large and contains big towns, the Patriarch may divide it into many provinces in order to safeguard the purity of the Faith...Indeed, the Canon of the Fathers has empowered the Patriarch to create metropolitans whenever he wants... The rank of the metropolitans is regulated by the time of the creation of their respective sees.

Papa (fl. 325) created metropolitans first to Gundeshapur, then to Nisibin, then to Basra, then to Mosul. At the time of the (Council of Nicaea) the Garmaeans asked for a Metropolitan from Shim'un bar Saba'i (d. 341), and he nominated one for them. In the time of the Catholicos Izhaq (399-410) the Metropolitans of Fars and Merv were created; and in the time of Ishu'-yab the Metropolitans of Halwan, Harat, Samarqand, India and China were established. Timothy (780-823) created six metropolitan provinces, three of which remain at the present time and three have disappeared; among those that remain are Armenia and Rai.

The Patriarch may also, in case the see of a metropolitan is destroyed, transfer its titular to the see of one of his bishops. So when Bait Garma was destroyed, the Patriarch Sabr-ishu' (II, 831-835) established its Metropolitan in Shahr-zur.¹

It should be noted that "Mosul" is an anachronism; from about 825 to 1167 the metropolitan see of Hedayab was Mosul, but previously it had been Arbil. At some time there were metropolitans in both cities, but not in our period. The statement that Izhaq created Metropolitans of Fars and Merv is against the more reliable evidence of the Synod attendances. It is not clear which Ishu'-yab is referred to as creating metropolitans at Halwan, etc. Other available evidence would fit Ishu'-yab I (582-595) for Harat, Ishu'-yab II (628-643) for

¹ Canons of Ibn-at-Tayyib, f. 198b, tr. in Min 9 pp. 74-75.

Halwan, and Ishu'-yab III (650-657/8) for China, Samarqand and India.

8. 'Abd-ishu', d. 1318. The evidence from 'Abd-ishu' comes from two separate sources.

a. His canons give his account of the history of the creation of the metropolitan sees:

The precedence that the metropolitan sees take of one another is determined by the priority of the patriarchs who created them; and their rank is as follows:

The first patriarch who nominated metropolitans is Papa (fl. 325). He created first of all the Metropolitan See of Elam, and a short time after the Metropolitan See of Nisibin; then that of the South, which is Parat Maishan, and then that of Assyria...

At the time of (the Council of Nicaea) the Garmaeans asked for a metropolitan. (There were rival claimants). And Shim'un bar Saba'i (d. 341), in order to settle the claims of both parties, intimated that he would promote (the city whose bishop) was the more conspicuous in the work of evangelisation. The Bishop of Shahr-Qardawon, and Shim'un bar Saba'i created the See of the Metropolitan of Bait Garma...

The Acts of the Synod of Izhaq (410) also make mention of Fars and Merv, not exactly as metropolitans, but as high ecclesiastical sees, because the genuine Metropolitan of Fars, which is sixth in rank, was created and organised by Yab-alaha (I, 415-420), together with the seventh metropolitan see, which is that of Merv.

And Ishu'-Yab of Gadala (II, 628-643) created the eighth metropolitan see of Halwan; but Harat, Samarqand and China, it was the Catholicos Saliba-zakha (714-728) who created them into metropolitan sees, and some say that it was Ahai (411-414) or Shila (505-521/2). But in rank Harat and India take precedence of China, and China takes precedence of Samarqand.

After these Timothy (780-823) created six other metropolitan provinces, four of which have ceased to exist, and two remain: one is that of Armenia, which is the thirteenth, and the other that of Syria, which is the fourteenth.¹

It will be noted that 'Abd-ishu' agrees with Ibn-at-Tayyib about the first five provinces created, and that the order of the first

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Quoted in Min 9, p. 75.

seven provinces is the same as that of the Synod of 544¹. What he says of Fars and Halwan fits in with the evidence of the Synods, but he is clearly wrong about Merv.

b. 'Abd-ishu', as we have seen from the above quotation, was acquainted with the records of the Synod of 410. As a matter of fact, he revised the list of metropolitan sees, to bring it up to date. First come the six nearer sees - Elam, Nisibin, Basra, Arbil, Kirkuk and Halwan. Then follow another eight more distant ones - Fars and the Isles, Damascus, Merv, Turkestan, Rai, Harat, Arran, and "The Isles of the Sea, Dabbag (Java?), Sin and Macin"². This last reminds us of the wide "destination" of the Metropolitan and bishops who were appointed for India in 1503. The Patriarch "sent them to the country of India and the Islands of the Sea... inside Java (Dabbag), and China"³. There is, however, no evidence that the three so appointed went further than South India!

Even if the last see is mainly titular, this list of 'Abd-ishu' is quite a puzzle. Is it a real reflection of the actual provinces of his time? But if so, the inclusion of Rai, created by Timothy I, is in contradiction to his canons, which state that of Timothy's new provinces, only Armenia and Syria (Damascus) were still functioning.

9. Amr ibn Matta and Saliba ibn Yuhanna, c. 1350. Two recensions of the Book of the Tower, a history of the Nestorian Patriarchs by Mari ibn Suleman (fl. 1140) were made by 'Amr and Saliba. Probably 'Amr copied and amended Saliba's version. At

¹ See the comparison in Appendix C. ² Chabot SO pp. 618-620.

³ Min 10, p. 469.

the very end of the book is a list of metropolitan provinces. We give here 'Amr's list, with a footnote to show the slight variations in Saliba's list:

The metropolitans of the Patriarch of the East have the following sees, which are given in their order of precedence:

- | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Gundeshapur | 2. Nisibin | 3. Basra |
| 4. Mosul and Assyria | 5. Arbil and Hazza | 6. Bait Garma |
| 7. Halwan | 8. Fars | 9. Merv |
| 10. Harat | 11. Qatarba | 12. Sin |
| 13. Hind | 14. Barda'a | 15. Damascus |
| 16. Rai and Tabaristan | 17. Dailam | 18. Samarqand |
| 19. Turkestan | 20. Halah | 21. Segestan |
| (and, in the margin) | | |
| 22. Jerusalem | 23. Khanbaliq and Al Faliq | |
| 24. Tangut | 25. Kashghar and Nauakat | |

Each one of these metropolitans has bishops under him, some twelve, some six. (The first seven have the right to elect and consecrate the patriarch).¹

The separation of the provinces of Mosul and Arbil may reflect a real but temporary arrangement, due to the large number of bishops in the province. Halwan is probably "promoted" in order of precedence because its metropolitan shared in the election of a new patriarch. Qatarba (so Yule, rightly²; the Arabic "Fatarba" in the MS has one dot missing) is undoubtedly Qatar. The "some twelve, some six" may represent a standard not always attained.

Detailed consolidated tables, setting out the above evidence as to places where there were bishops, and as to the order and time of the creation of new metropolitans, are to be found in Appendices B and C. We are now in a position to seek for some tentative conclusions.

¹ Giesmondi MAS, Amr, pp. 72-3. Saliba has 8. Jerusalem, 9. Edessa, 8-15 as 10-17, 18. Rai, 19. Tabaristan, 17-21 as 20-24, 23-25 as 25-27. ² Cathay and the Way Thither, Vol I, p. cxlv (Kotrobah).

The Expansion and Organisation of the Church of the East

1. 225. Despite Cardinal Tisserant's reluctance to credit Mashiha-zakha's list of bishops without other supporting evidence¹, we feel that it deserves at least provisional acceptance. The specific omission of Nisibin and the Capital Cities is particularly convincing. Some of the bishops may have ministered to individual congregations rather than districts. The omission of Fars, which is mentioned by Bardaisan, suggests that it was then unconnected with the Mesopotamian Church. Of the 18 names given (if we include Arbil) only one, Bait Hezzi, has not been identified. Map 1 shows the location of the others.

The picture we have is of a numerically small church, whose organisation, as far as it had any, was at the local or diocesan level, with its main strength in the hill-country north of the Capital Cities and east of the Tigris, but with some following in southern Mesopotamia and Elam, and more distant evangelistic outreach towards the Caspian (Dailam), and down the south coast of the Persian Gulf (Qatar).

2. 410. The Minutes of the Synod of Seleucia give a remarkably clear and probably fairly complete picture of the state of the Church after 185 years of Sassanid rule, including more than forty years of severe persecution. The details of metropolitans are confirmed by canonists and historians alike.

The Church is now organised under a Head, the Great Metropolitan Bishop of the Capital Cities. Under him are 5 metropolitans, and 28 other places with bishops are organised in the hierarchy. In

¹ Article Nestorienne (L'église) in DTC vol. 11, col. 163.

addition, there are 10 places, including Riv-ardushir, which have bishops but are under no metropolitan. The church is still strongest in the north of Mesopotamia, but is spread well over the Euphrates-Tigris plain as well, is represented on both sides of the Persian Gulf and on several of its islands, and has reached north-eastwards to Rai and Abrashahr (Nishapur in Khorasan, famous today as the birthplace of the poet 'Umr Khayyam). For the full details, see Map 2.

3. 410-650. With the end of the State's attempt to exterminate the Church, and the establishment of the Christian millat in 410, there followed a brief period of quite remarkable expansion. The Synod of Yab-alaha I in 420 claims in its preamble that the Church under his authority extends to Armenia and "Ardushir Pharidh", which Chabot identifies with the Paridene of Ptolemy, or northern Baluchistan. By this time, according to 'Abd-ishu', a Metropolitan Province of Fars had been set up, and in 424 we find a Metropolitan and 7 bishops from Fars present at the Synod and accepting Dad-ishu' as Head. In all, we find present or represented at the Synod of 424 a total of 16 new bishops, including those of Oman (Mazon) to the south-east, Isfahan, Harat and Segestan to the east, and Merv to the north-east. From 5 metropolitans and 38 bishops, the Church has expanded to 6 metropolitans and 54 bishops in a mere 14 years!

Expansion during the rest of the Fifth Century seems to have been slower, and up to 497 we find only a further 8 place-names. As we shall see, there was serious persecution, as well as strife

within the Church, during that period. About 470 there seems to have been a strengthening of the links between Fars and the Persian Gulf islands and India¹.

There were further bursts of missionary expansion in the Sixth Century. It was possibly in the reign of Shila (505-521/2) that Merv was given metropolitan status. About 525 the Bishop of Arran in Armenia crossed the Caucasus on a remarkable mission to the Western Huns on the shores of the Black Sea.² About the same time Cosmas the Indicopleustes³ visited India, and he was later to write about the connection of Fars (or Persia) with churches in Kalyan, Malabar and "the rest of the Indians", as well as with Sokotra off east Africa³. In 544 we find no less than 5 new sees in what is now Afghanistan, no doubt the work of zealous evangelisation from Harat. In 551 the White Huns sent to Mar Aba I for a bishop⁴, and in 585 we find record of a bishop in their capital Badghis, near Harat. Perhaps the nomadic habits of the White Huns meant shifts in the places to which bishops were appointed: in 585 we find two new places, but none of those associated with Harat for the first time in 544 are mentioned again. Further north, round Merv, we find two new places with bishops in 554. In that year, too, we find a bishop in Gilan and Amul, to the south of the Caspian Sea. The Sixth Century sees new bishops also in various places in Mesopotamia, and at 4 fresh places on the Persian Gulf.

It has to be remembered that permanent evangelisation of places was not possible when tribes were on the move. In the Second Century there had been Christians among the Kaishans⁵, but they were replaced

¹ See Y pp. 26-29. ² See Y pp. 37-40. ³ See Y pp. 29-30.

⁴ See Y pp. 30-31. ⁵ See above, p. 60.

by the Huns, who were also to some extent evangelised, and then were replaced by Turks and Tatars. There was a constant pressure from the drying Mongolian steppes, driving tribes westwards. The fertile plains of Gurgan south of the Caspian, which contrast even today so vividly with the rest of Iran, were preyed upon successively by Kaishans, Goths, Huns, Turks, and Mongols. If there were Gilanian Christians in 196, and a Bishop of Bait Dailami in 225, it still meant a new evangelistic effort to have a Bishop of Gilan and Amul in 544, and two and a half centuries later, under Timothy I, the need of sending missionaries to Dailam and Gilan was again felt and met.

It was probably under Ishu-yab I (582-595) that the Bishop of Harat was given metropolitan status.

There was further notable missionary advance to the north-east in the Seventh Century. It was in 635, as the Arabs were attacking the Sassanid Empire, that Alo-pen reached Ch'ang-an, the capital of China, and three years later a monastery was built for him there on the Emperor's instructions¹; in 644, seven years before the murder of the last Sassanid Emperor, the Metropolitan of Merv carried out successful evangelistic work among the Turks beyond the Oxus². Nearer home, Ishu-yab III (628-643) had created the new metropolitan province of Halwan, or Media.

If we compare the figures for 410 and 650 we can see how far the Church had advanced in 240 years:

<u>410</u>		<u>650</u>	
Great Metropolitan	1	Catholicos-Patriarch	1
Metropolitans	5	Metropolitans	9
Bishops	38	Bishops	96
Total	44	Total	106

¹ See Y pp. 32, 294-295. ² See Y p. 31.

Even if the figure 96 is too high, because bishops did not always remain in the same centres, and we might be safer to settle for a figure of 75 or 80, this represents a remarkable achievement.

One thing should be added. Despite its wide geographical spread, the main centre of strength of the Church of the East remained Mesopotamia, with its 5 metropolitans and now 51 bishops. The Synod records mention no less than 15 sees in Hedayab, and 10 in neighbouring Bait Garma, and the Passion of Eustace the Cobbler (late Sixth Century) claims that Christians were in the majority in that part of the country.¹ The Fifth Century Byzantine historian Sozomen had earlier asserted that the majority of the inhabitants of Hedayab were Christians,² while about 650 Ishu'-yab III could claim, with doubtless some exaggeration, that there "the number of the saints of the Lord is in fact not much less than the number of those who submit to the yoke of matrimony",³ although in Radan, just north of the Cities, the pagans outnumbered the Christians.⁴ At the other extreme were the two metropolitans (probably of China and Samarqand) of whom Ishu'-yab was to write a year or so later, and the "more than twenty bishops" with whom he kept in touch by correspondence. In these distant places, Christianity was probably very thinly spread. See Map 3.

4. 650-820. Shortly after his accession in 650, Ishu'-yab III probably created new metropolitan provinces of China and Samarqand, and about 652 there is strong reason to believe that he added two more provinces.⁵ This represented, not an increase in the size of the Church of the East, but an administrative improvement. The Province of Fars had included the islands in

¹ Lang GS p. 97. ² E.H. ii.12.4 (Bidez/Hansen, p. 67). ³ Y p. 323.

⁴ Y p. 317. ⁵ See Chapter VI B, pp. 156-157

the Persian Gulf, Qatar and Oman, Sokotra, Kerman and India, as well as Fars proper, a total of at least 18 sees. Now two new provinces were created, Qatar and India¹. The first mention of a Metropolitan of Qatar is at the Synod of George I in 676, but it is also the last. The Christians in Mazon (Oman) had already apostasised, and the church on the south side of the Persian Gulf, and on its islands, was soon to disappear also.

Although the haughty and covetous Patriarch Saliba-zakha (714-728) does not show up well in Thomas of Marga's account of his visit to Bait 'Abe², his period of rule was certainly one of restoration after a long vacancy of 14 years, and he may well have restored metropolitans to Harat, China and Samarqand: this would account for 'Abd-ishu's reference to his creation of these into metropolitan provinces.

It may well be, as Tisserant suggests³, that during the first century or so of Muslim rule, the Church made quite a number of converts from a Zoroastrianism which had no longer the aura of being the national religion, and the sanction of threatened death for the apostate. At any rate, Islam had as yet made little impact on the mountainous regions of northern Mesopotamia, and Tisserant can speak of Timothy I's education (he was born in 728) as being given in an essentially Christian milieu⁴.

During the years 661-750 the Arab conquerors ('Umayyid Caliphs) ruled from Damascus, and the Church of the East was most pressingly related to the Governors of Mesopotamia. It had its bishop in Damascus, however, and a small following in Syria. From 750 onwards, however, the Abbasids shifted the centre of government

¹ See the full discussion in Chapter VI B, pp. 156-157. ² Y pp. 304-5

³ DTC vol. 11, col. 190. ⁴ In Bid p. v.

see p. 179 below.

to Mesopotamia, and the Patriarchs of the Church of the East came into close contact with the Caliphs. It was under five of these, including the famous Harun-al-Rashid, that Timothy I (780-823) had his long patriarchate. The evidence of his letters covers approximately the period 780-804, and is supplemented by that of Thomas of Marga, who wrote about 840, and relied on both eyewitnesses and written records for the events of Timothy's times.

It is clear both from their evidence, and that of the historians and canonists, that the patriarchate of Timothy was one of marked missionary outreach and achievement. The canonists each say that Timothy created six new metropolitans, and between them they mention three of their provinces - Armenia, Damascus and Rai. From Timothy and Thomas we can conclude that the other three were Dailam, Turkestan and Tibet (Bait Tuptai). All six metropolitans were appointed before 804¹. A letter of the period 795/798 mentions the appointment of a Metropolitan at Sarbaz². It is not clear whether he was a first appointment, and even whether he ultimately took up his post: possibly this penetration to the borders of Baluchistan was abortive.

How far did the appointment of these new metropolitans represent real missionary advance? In the west, the appointment at Damascus was administrative consolidation, and the same may be said for Armenia. According to Timothy's own account³, the erection of Rai into a province was connected with the fact that there was a provincial Governor there,

¹ See Chapter VII B, pp. 234-236 ² Tim 40 (XIII). See page 205 below.

³ Tim 55 (XXI). See page 234 below.

but it seems to have been a good strategic centre for missionary work to the north (Dailam) and north-east (Turkestan, Tibet, China)¹. In Moqan there was pioneer missionary work among animists and tree-worshippers, within the province of Dailam.² The Metropolitan of the Turks, sent at their request after their conversion, which must have been the work of missionaries, was probably located at Kashghar³; the Metropolitan of Tibet, if Mingana is right⁴, was in Tangut. Thus there was a line of strategically situated metropolitan sees along the silk route to China - at Rai, Merv, Samarqand, Kashghar, Tangut, and finally the Chinese Capital of Ch'ang-an. See Map 4.

We have little information about bishops in these provinces. Thomas of Marga speaks of seven monks from Bait 'Abe who became bishops "in the lands beyond Gilan and Dailam"⁵. Timothy sent monks by sea to both India and China, almost certainly to provide their churches with bishops.⁶ We are probably right in concluding a minimum of at least three bishops in each province. The distant metropolitans had a good deal of autonomy, and could appoint bishops. At the same time, Timothy at times seems to have made a missionary appointment of metropolitan, in the faith that a church would grow and appointment of bishops be made later.

In the light of these varied considerations, we can modify a little the information already given on pages 63-64 above, recognising that the figures are tentative, and the number of bishops may well have been greater. Tentative numbers of bishops

¹ TM V,7, p. 494. ² TM V,11, pp. 508-513. ³ Tisserant DTC vol 11 col 209.

⁴ Min 9 p. 30. ⁵ TM V,7 pp. 489-90. ⁶ Tim 40 (XIII). See p. 237 below. Possibly at

Tunhwang, the City of Sands, on the Silk Route, which was in Tibetan hands from 759 till mid 9th century. See M. Cable and F. French, Something Happened, pp. 225, 242.

are given after names of provinces.

The Cities (9), Bait Lapat (6), Nisibin (7), Basra (3), Arbil (12), Karka of Bait Salok (6), Riv-ardushir (5), Merv (3), Harat (3), Halwan (3), China (3), Samarqand (3), India (3), Armenia (3), Damascus (2), Rai (3), Dailam (3), Tibet and Turkestan (7), with Sarbaz and Bait Qale.

Total:	Catholicos-Patriarch	1
	Metropolitans	19
	Bishops, say	85

It seems better to take this conservative figure than to accept uncritically 'Amr's statement that metropolitans had from six to twelve bishops under them. There is no clear evidence, for instance, that such an early province as Parat Maishan had ever as many as six bishops at one time.

Let us now compare the figures for 650 and 820, and see what has happened in 170 years of Muslim rule:

<u>650</u>		<u>820</u>	
Catholicos-Patriarch	1	Catholicos-Patriarch	1
Metropolitans	9	Metropolitans	19
Bishops	96	Bishops	85
Total	106	Total	105

After admitting that there is a great deal of uncertainty with regard to the figures of bishops (that of 650 may be too high, that of 820 too low), we are left with the impression that, in spite of losses in Arabia and the Persian Gulf, the Church did expand considerably its area of operation, and improve its organisation, and carried out much real missionary work. The expansion is less marked than in the Sassanid period, but geographically it is just as impressive.

We may come to a tentative conclusion, therefore, that

under both the Sassanid Shahs and the early Caliphs, the relations between Church and State did not altogether prevent the Church from exercising its missionary vocation, though at times they may well have hindered it. At the same time, we must record the impression that under the Sassanids the progress of the Church was a much more steady and striking growth than it was under the Muslims.

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE SASSANID SHAHS

410 - 630

The history of the Church of the East from 410 onwards has been given in detail by Wigram and Labourt,¹ and it is not our purpose to repeat their narrative here. Our concern is rather to highlight briefly some of the main aspects of Church-State relationships between 410 and 540; then to give a more detailed study of how these were seen under a strong and good Patriarch, Mar Aba I; and finally to deal again briefly with the period 552-630, and in particular the state of the Church under Khusrau II.

We have taken 630 as the year of the embassy to Constantinople, in which the Patriarch Ishu'-yab II took part, because it is the last important event in Church-State relationships under the Sassanids. The invasion of the Arabs came in 633, the Cities fell in 637, Yazdgard III the last Sassanid Emperor was murdered in 651. In our next chapter we shall consider the period of the change of rulers, beginning 630 or thereabouts. In the previous chapter we took the year 650 as an approximation for the end of Sassanid rule and the beginning of Arab rule: these dates are not to be pressed too literally.

¹ See Wigram AC, pp. 103-183, 210-312 and Labourt CEP, pp. 99-162, 192-246. In Sections A and C of this chapter no detailed references are given to material taken from Wigram and Labourt except where felt necessary for some particular reason.

A. CHURCH AND STATE, 410-540.

In this section we shall deal with three important aspects of Church-State relationships during our period: first of all, the significance of the Synod of 424, and its declaration of the autonomy of the Church of the East; then the relationship between the Shahs and the Heads of the Church of the East; and then the various outbursts of persecution. We shall end by noting briefly the strain which different doctrines of the Incarnation placed upon the Church's efforts to preserve its own unity, as one millat.

1. The Synod of 424. In 421 or 422 Dad-ishu' had been appointed Catholicos of the Church of the East. Some bishops, however, unready to accept his discipline, had incited the Sassanid rulers to arrest him. In 424, as the result of the efforts of an ambassador from Constantinople, Dad-ishu' was set free, but was so disheartened that he decided to resign his office and retire to a monastery.

At this the Metropolitan of Gundeshapur, Agapit, called a Synod. For fear of the Shah it was not called to the Royal Cities, but to a small town called "Markabta of the Arabs", which was so insignificant that scholars can no longer locate it. In all 36 bishops gathered, from near and far, including the Metropolitan of Fars and the Bishops of Merv and Harat. At the opening of the Synod Dad-ishu' presented his resignation. Then Agapit spoke:

"Whenever schism and discord have arisen among us, the Western Fathers have supported and helped this Paternity... They have also liberated and delivered us from the persecutions which the Magians have aroused against our fathers and us,

thanks to the ambassadors whom they have sent at different times. But now, when we are so weighed down with persecution and anguish, circumstances do not permit them to trouble themselves about us as formerly; but it is now for us, like beloved children and faithful heirs, to try to raise and help ourselves; for if - which God forbid! - we (lose our Head), we shall be completely lost. Come,... let us face every kind of death for our Father and Head, the Catholicos Dad-ishu'! He is our Peter, the Head of our Church Body."/

There is some special pleading here: Dad-ishu' had owed his own freedom to a Western ambassador. The meaning is however clear: it is time that the Church of the East learned to stand on its own feet, and to recognise its Catholicos as its "Peter", the rock on which a strong church could be built. If, as we suggested on page 32 above, the Catholicos was in any way subordinate to the Catholicos of Antioch, Agapit wished that this should be brought to an end.

The Synod went on to define the independence of their Head in the following terms, after which Dad-ishu' agreed to resume office:

"We have accepted and we accept the divine precepts and fatherly laws, which at various times have been transmitted to this Eastern land where we live, and lay down that the Father cannot be driven from his inheritance by his children, and the Head and Commander cannot be ordered about and dominated by those who are under him.

"WHEREAS it has been decreed by the Western Fathers that our bishops are not allowed to hold an assembly against the will of their Head, nor to prepare in writing heads of accusation and reproach; but if they have any complaint to make, and obtain no satisfaction at the Assembly in presence of the Patriarch, they may appeal to his colleagues (the Patriarchs of Antioch, etc.), who shall examine the matter and decide between him and them;

"And WHEREAS we have often experienced the fact that those who complain against the Catholicos have been condemned, punished for their folly by deprivation and deposition, and stripped of the title of their order and the vestment which they wore;

"NOW, by the Word of God, WE DECREE that the Easterns shall not be permitted to carry complaints against their Patriarch before the Western Patriarchs, and that every case which cannot be

¹ Chabot, SO, p. 293, Y p. 285.

determined in the presence of their Patriarch shall be left to the judgment of Christ...No one for any reason shall be allowed to think or say that the Catholicos of the East can be judged by those under him, or by a patriarch like him. His own judgment is reserved for the Christ who has chosen him, raised him up, and placed him at the head of His Church."¹

This decision of the Synod of 424 was an important and necessary step in the development of the Church of the East. It is superficial to blame the Easterns for a decision amounting to schism, and say that by this it separated itself from the Universal Church; in view of the demands of its time and situation, the decision was necessary. The Sassanid Empire was independent of the Roman Empire, and it was appropriate that the Church of the East, as far as its administration was concerned, should be independent of the Church in the Roman Empire, and so remove the doubt that Christians were not patriots but secret supporters of their country's enemies.

The use for the first time of the word "patriarch" in the Synod record will be noted. Fleury² is probably right in saying that this is a later "correction", and that the word was not used in the East before the Council of Chalcedon in 451 began its usage in the West, but came into general use only from the beginning of the Sixth Century. He notes that the word is not used in the records of the Synods of 484 and 486, and that it is from 544 that we find the title "Catholicos and Patriarch" regularly used. He notes also that Eastern writers always preferred the word Catholicos to the word Patriarch. Was there in fact a difference in the significance of the two words?

Fleury³ refers to the Synod of Yusuf of 554, and suggests that whenever elected as Head, the man concerned was entitled to be

¹ Chabot SO pp. 295-296, Y pp. 285-286. ² Jal pp. 78-80.

³ Jal p. 80.

called Catholicos, but he could only be called Patriarch after the imposition of hands by the metropolitans. In other words, the Catholicos was Patriarch-elect. But if this is all, why the constant use of "Catholicos and Patriarch" for the man after he had been ^{consecrated,} elected? We have to remember that the imposition of hands was possible only after the election had been approved by the State. Light is shed on the question by an interesting statement in The History of Rabban Hurmizd about a visit by the Catholicos Tumarsa:

Then did the minds of the believing men of the village of Bait Qopa fall between the mountains of doubt, for on the one hand, Mar Tumarsa was the Catholicos, and yet he had not revealed concerning himself that he was the Catholicos, and on the other he had proclaimed that he himself was the Patriarch; as the former he was a son of praise, and as the latter a son of the kingdom.'

Wallis Budge in his footnote, explains the last clause thus:

i.e. as Catholicos Tumarsa was a high ecclesiastical dignitary of whom they approved, both from a personal and a religious point of view; as Patriarch, however, it might be necessary to regard him as a mere high Government official.

This exaggerates the contrast between the terms too much, but points to what we believe came to be the distinction in usage: as Catholicos the Head of the Church of the East was the elected spiritual Leader of his people; as Patriarch he was the State-recognised administrative Ruler of the Christian millat.

At the same time the use of the term Patriarch for the Western pontiffs of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria may well have had its influence on the Church of the East in its choice of the word; this is brought out in the record of the Synod of 424 by the expression "by a patriarch like him".

¹ Budge RH, p. 127. ² Budge, RH, p. 127 footnote.

2. Patriarchs and Shahs. Whether or not named patriarchs, what then was the relationship of the Heads of the Christian millat with the Shahs during this period? Were they elected by the Church or nominated by the Shahs? How far did the State interfere in the administration or spiritual life of the Church? Some of the information we have is late, and even conflicting, but the following summary is probably fairly accurate.

Ahai (411-414) was favoured and appointed by Yazdgard I. No mention is made of his election, but he seems to have been a worthy man, who had distinguished himself by collecting the lives of the martyrs.

Yab-alaha (415-420) may have been Yazdgard's physician, but he seems also to have been a worthy man. Appointed by the King, he was sent on embassy to Constantinople in 415. During his period of rule the Church had some trouble with office-seekers who used the patronage of Zoroastrian nobles to get positions as bishops.

Ma'na (420) seems to have been elected Catholicos, but not confirmed by the Shah. He was Metropolitan of Fars. Shortly after his election, possibly on his failure to disapprove the destruction of a fire-temple¹, he was banished to Fars, and imprisoned. He was later released, and continued as Metropolitan of Fars. Because his election was not confirmed, he is not included in the official list of the Heads of the Church.

Fara-bakht (420) procured an unauthorised consecration by promising a Persian military leader that he would marry, but when

¹ Possibly that destroyed by Hassu with the approval of 'Abda. See below, p. 90 .

the bishops complained to Yazdgard, he was deposed by the Shah. He also is not recorded in the Lists.

Dad-ishu' (421/2-456) was elected, approved by the Shah, and consecrated. A late writer 'Amr says he was helped by the influence of a bishop who had saved the Shah from the Turks, but this is doubtful. When war broke out against the Romans, Fara-bakht accused Dad-ishu' of being a Roman sympathiser. He was arrested, beaten, and imprisoned till the end of the war with the Romans. After the Synod of 424 he seems to have held office undisturbed, even during the persecution of Yazdgard II of 448.

Babowai (457-484) was a convert from Zoroastrianism. He is said to have been imprisoned for 2 years during a war with the Romans, and released in 464. During his period of office there was dissension among the Christians in connection with the question of the Incarnation: Babowai seems to have inclined to the "orthodox" Chalcedonian view, while his opponent Bar-Sauma, Metropolitan of Nisibin, was pronouncedly "Nestorian". In 484 Babowai unwisely wrote to the Emperor Zeno, telling of his difficulties because "God has entrusted us into the hands of a Kingdom which is not Christian". The letter, it is said, fell into the hands of Bar-Sauma, who sent it to the Shahinshah Firoz. Babowai was put to death by being hung up by his ring-finger. In this case, clearly, the death of the Catholicos was for treasonable correspondence with an enemy ruler, and not for being an apostate Magian.

During the two years that followed Babowai's death, Bar-Sauma, with the approval of the Shah, was able to get "Nestorianism" accepted, possibly on the grounds that it was different from the Christianity

of the Roman Empire, and he may (although this is doubtful) have used Persian troops to enforce this. The death of Firoz in battle in 486 prevented his appointment as Catholicos.

Agag (485-495/6) was freely elected by the bishops, and King Walgash approved his appointment and ordered his consecration. He held moderate "Nestorian" views, and was able to hold a Synod in 486 where these were stated. He may have been sent by the Shah on an embassy to Constantinople.

Babai (497-502/3) was elected, but the fact that he was a married man may have ensured the Shah's favour. He obtained a royal farman, or order, to hold a Synod in 497, which hinted that he would do well to make marriage of all clergy a canon of the Church! This the Synod did - should we say that this is an example of Zoroastrian influence on clerical morals, or did the clergy want it anyway?

Shila (505-521/2) gets a bad name from all the chroniclers - Sa'ard, Mari, 'Amr-Saliba and Bar-Hebraeus. He was a married man, and said to have been influenced by his wife, covetous and worldly. He was elected, but some contested his election; Buzaq, the Metropolitan of Bait Lapat, an physician who had cured the King and his daughter, exercised his influence to ensure royal approval. But all chroniclers also state that "in his days the Christians enjoyed peace; churches were built", and the impression we get from his remarkable letter to Yusuf, Metropolitan of Hedayab, is that he was a wise and capable ruler, with remarkable breadth of sympathy and understanding, who also knew how to give an order that would be respected¹. As we have seen,² it was possibly Shila who created

¹ M-Z 70-72, tr. pp. 151-153, Y pp. 312-313. ² See p. 71 above.

the first Metropolitan of Merv.

The "duality". Shila tried to get his son-in-law Elisha appointed to succeed him (he had no son). He was irregularly consecrated, and after a fruitless appeal to King Qubad, the opponents of Elisha appointed and consecrated Narsai. The State does not seem to have interfered, and both so-called Patriarchs went about consecrating rival metropolitans and bishops to support their parties.

Paul (537 or more probably 539) had supplied water for Khusrau I's army when he was Crown Prince, and in 539, probably, when he was elected Patriarch, and Elisha and Narsai officially deposed or deleted from the official List of Heads, the Shahinshah approved of the appointment. He died, however, after only two months in office.

We can say, then, that about half the Heads of the Church between 410 and 540 are said to have been elected, and more may have been. In some cases those elected were in particular favour with the State, whether as physicians, or for other services rendered, and the clergy may well have chosen their man with this in mind. In one case only is the Shah recorded to have refused confirmation to a validly-elected Catholicos. In two cases there was imprisonment, and in a third imprisonment and later execution, but for political offences or on suspicion of sympathy with the Romans. The fact that a convert from Zoroastrianism could hold office for 27 years is worth noting. There is little evidence of significant interference by the Shahs in the internal life of the Church, except perhaps on the question of clerical marriage.

3. Persecution. The recognition of the Christians as a subject-community did not result in an entire absence of persecution, but it did mean that never again did the Sassanid State attempt to exterminate the Church. Persecution continued here and there at the local level, especially in the case of conversions of Magians; persecution by the State was sporadic, and though at times severe, it never lasted for more than a few years. The main persecutions in our period were those of Yazdgard I about 419-420, of Bahram V from 420 to 424, and of Yazdgard II, particularly in 445 and 448. The main reasons for persecution were:

a. The Law of Apostasy. For a Zoroastrian to become a Christian made him liable to the death-penalty. Even Qubad, the friend of the Catholicos Shila, executed three Magian converts within ten days of their baptism.¹ Under Bahram V a deacon named Benjamin was arrested, and then given conditional release provided he stopped preaching to Magians. When he continued his evangelism he was arrested and put to death with terrible tortures.²

b. Magian intolerance. No Shah could ignore entirely the influence of the Moëds, who were a powerful group in the community. They had their part in all three persecutions, and particularly in that of Bahram V, who had overcome his opponents with the support of the Mobeds at the time of his accession. The persecution under Yazdgard I was partly a reaction against the rapidly growing and spreading of the Church since 410.

c. Christian intolerance. So we might describe two incidents in the persecution of Yazdgard I. In the one, a convert built a church, but later reverted to Magianism, and lit the sacred

¹ Fiey Jal 95. ² See Y pp. 283-284.

Fire in the Church in the absence of the priest. On his return the priest, Narsai, put the fire out. He was arrested, and ultimately executed for refusing to relight the fire. It is not clear whether there was any connection (as Wigram suggests)¹ between this incident and another, when a priest Hashu, with or without the connivance of the Bishop of Hormizd-ardushir, 'Abda, destroyed a Fire-Temple. When arrested with several others, 'Abda refused to rebuild the Fire Temple, and this led to his death, the destruction of some Churches, and a general outbreak of persecution.

d. War with Constantinople. We have already seen in the cases of Dad-ishu' and Babowai how war could lead to suspicion being placed on the Christians, and resulting persecution. Usually when peace was made, it was on the basis of reciprocal tolerance for Christians in Iran and for Zoroastrians in the Roman Empire.

e. Royal bigotry. In the case of Yazdgard II, a good deal of royal bigotry seems to have mingled with matters of State policy, though he vacillated from one Faith to another. His main attempt to exterminate Christianity was in Armenia, where it was the national religion, but there were massacres of Christians in Mesopotamia also on quite a large scale.

f. Quarrels among the Christians. We have seen in the cases of Dad-ishu' and Babowai how Christians opposed to the Heads of their Church were prepared to gain their ends by denouncing them to the State.

We do well not to minimize the persecutions of those years, or the faith and witness of their martyrs; yet we are struck by the fact that, as we saw on pages 70-71 above, persecution could only slow down, it could not stop the growth of the Church, in these years.

¹AC p. 117

4. Christology and the "millat". At the risk of oversimplification, something must be said about Christology as it affected the Church of the East.¹ The question of the divinity and humanity of Christ, and how they came together in His incarnation, was a matter of fierce dispute in the Fifth Century in the Roman Empire. Nestorius taught that the divine and human natures were to be held separate, but the one Christ worshipped; he was condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431. Eutyches held that Christ's one incarnate nature was not of the same substance as His humanity; he was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. During the following centuries we can distinguish four main emphases:

(a) The Nestorians stressed the distinction between the divine Word and the human Jesus in the one Christ.

(b) The Chalcedonians ("Orthodox", Melkites) stated that Christ was "one Person in two natures".

(c) The non-Chalcedonians (Jacobites, Severians) emphasised the "one incarnate nature" of Christ - "one Person from two natures".

(d) The Monophysites (Eutychians, Julianists) taught that the humanity had been so swallowed up by the divinity that Christ was scarcely a real man.

In the East, the two main emphases were Nestorian and Jacobite. The Nestorians, though ultimately accepting Chalcedon as an

¹ For a detailed account of the Christological dispute, and its course in the East, see the source-material in Y pp. 201-223, and compare Labourt CEP, pp. 131-154, 217-301, Wigram AC, pp. 127-134, 142-171, 214-224, 246-289, 294-312, and Fiey Jal pp. 113-143.

orthodox definition of the Faith¹, tended to condemn (b),(c) and (d) indiscriminately as those who alleged that the Word of God had been subject to physical suffering and death. The Jacobites regarded (b) as well as (a) as teaching two natures in Christ, and therefore two Persons, two Christs, and a Trinity of Four!

No doubt the conflict was partly political, in the East as well as in the Roman Empire. The Shahs would be less suspicious of complicity with the Roman Enemy if Eastern Christianity was seen to be different from that of the Romans. During the late Fifth and early Sixth Centuries Constantinople tried to reconcile (b) and (c); the East tended to (a). By mid-Sixth Century Constantinople had opted for (b), and this enabled (c) also to press its claims on the East.

At the same time, the conviction that led the main body of the Church of the East to move gradually towards Nestorianism was basically religious, rather than political. The real thinker behind Nestorianism had been Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). This great Expositor, who stressed the historical as opposed to the allegorical interpretation of the Bible², had pressed the literal force of such verses Philippians 2: 7 and John 2: 21. Christ the Word dwelt in the temple of His human body; He clothed Himself with the form of man. During the second and third quarters of the Fifth Century Theodore's many commentaries and theological and catechetical works were translated into Syriac by scholars in Edessa, and widely used and disseminated in the Church of the East, as far as India³.

¹ See Chabot SO pp. 6, 545, 556 and Wigram pp. 294-298.

² See Y pp. 172-174. ³ See Y pp. 28-29.

When the Emperor Zeno closed the School at Edessa in 489, Bar-Sauma opened a new one at Nisibin, which was to become the training-ground for the clergy of the Church of the East. The tone was set by its first principal, Narsai, a convinced Nestorian, and the copying out of Theodore's commentaries was an important part of the course. Theodore was therefore a household word in the Church of the East: he was the Expositor. His condemnation, 125 years after his death, by Justinian's Edict of 553 provoked strong reaction in the East, and the following statement of the Council of Ishu'-yab I in 585 gives an indication of the honour in which he was held.

It concerns Saint Theodore the Interpreter, who was bishop of the city of Mopsuestia in the country of Cilicia. He lived a life chaste and laborious, and shone forth for 40 years in the dignity of the episcopate; with a wise spirit, saturated with the help of grace, he interpreted the Holy Books, he engaged in a struggle against strange doctrines and impious heresies, and he filled the church's libraries with a brilliant treasure of teachings and spiritual learning, for the use and edification of readers and listeners alike. With the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, he fought the seducers who, like masters of error, produced doctrines contrary to the truth. His teaching is confirmed by the fame of his virtue, and his virtue is sealed by his true wisdom...In life he was outstanding among the true doctors, and after his death his name became dear, and his memory illustrious, in all the churches of God. The books of this saint and his commentaries are sought out and honoured by all who confess the orthodox Faith...In his commentaries and teachings, in fact, the truth of the Apostolic Faith is preserved, as it was made known by the Prophets and preached by the Apostles.¹

For the purposes of this study, a few matters should be noted:

a. Up to 628 the attempts both of the Church of the East and its opponents in the East, whether "orthodox" or Jacobite,

¹ Chabot SO, pp. 398-399. Y.

was the doctrinal and administrative unity of the Christian millat. There was no thought of toleration, or of the possibility of two millats. The struggle therefore took place within the Church.

b. As we have seen (pp. 86-87 above) Bar-Sauma may have invoked and used the aid of the State under Firoz to back the Nestorian point of view in 484-486, but how far this led to bloodshed is difficult to determine.

c. At a Synod in 486 Aqaq produced a less belligerent Confession of Faith, sufficiently flexible to be acceptable to Nestorians, and at the same time to assure his acceptance as "orthodox" when he went on embassy to Constantinople.

d. This internal struggle, which was at its height in 460-490, accounts just as much for the slowing down of the expansion of the Church of the East as do the persecutions of Yazdgard II.

B. MAR ABA THE GREAT AND KHUSRAU I.

The Sassanid Empire had begun by the defeat of the Parthians and the conquest of Mesopotamia by Persian warriors from the Iranian plateau to the East. The tension between Pahlavi-speaking Iran, with its fervent Magian sentiments, and Syriac-speaking Mesopotamia, where Christianity gained such a hold, persisted until the reign of Khusrau I (531-579). As we have seen,¹ Yazdgerd I was called "the sinner" by the Persians, because he favoured Mesopotamia, and tried to curb the Persian nobles, while Bahram V, unpopular in Mesopotamia, was the opposite in Iran. According to Dr Peter Brown, Khusrau I changed this.

Khusrau protected the nobility, but on his own terms. He tied the Zoroastrian clergy and the great families to his court. A new class of professionals gradually took over the administration. Many were Christians: they came from Mesopotamia, not from Iran.²

Zoroastrianism became merely a conservative sentiment. The shahs are no longer shown receiving their powers face to face with their god, Ahura Mazda: Khusrau appears only with his courtiers.³

During his reign Mesopotamian Christians, who spoke the same Syriac language as did their neighbours across the frontier, transmitted Byzantine medicine, philosophy and court manners to the Sassanid capital.⁴

How was this change reflected in Church-State relationships? We have in fact a vivid picture of what these were, from contemporary or near-contemporary sources, in what actually took place during the Patriarchate of Mar Aba I (540-552). It was a relationship and confrontation between a great Shah and a great Patriarch.

¹ p. 43 above. ² Brown WLA p. 166. ³ Brown, WLA p. 167.

⁴ Brown, WLA p. 167.

Khusrau I (Naushirwan) has some claim to be regarded as the greatest of the Sassanid Shahs. He was a man of remarkable character. He was a great warrior, and the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527-565), who broke the power of the Goths in the West, was not so successful against Khusrau. When peace was made in 557 the Byzantines agreed to pay Khusrau a large sum to enable him to wage war on the White Huns in the east. Khusrau was later to defeat the White Huns (568) and issue a special set of coins inscribed "Iran delivered from fear"¹. He also drove the Ethiopians out of the Yemen, and for a time established Sassanid suzerainty over Arabia. He was also noted for his justice. He is recorded as having said:

"The monarchy depends on the army, the army on money; money comes from the land-tax; the land-tax comes from agriculture. Agriculture depends on justice, justice on the integrity of officials, and integrity and reliability on the ever-watchfulness of the King."²

He was not a religious bigot, but a broad-minded man, and in his relations with Aba we have the impression of a great man who recognises goodness and courage in another, and admires it.

Mar Aba was probably the most capable and prudent of the Patriarchs of the Church of the East, both in his exercise of church discipline, and in his relations with the State; he was certainly the most saintly of the great patriarchs. One of his diplomatic gifts seems to have been a good sense of humour, and in spite of his repeated sufferings there was a buoyancy in the man. He was ready to suffer all kinds of hardship rather than accept a position where the Church's right to evangelise was barred.

¹ Brown WLA p. 160. ² Quoted in Brown WLA p. 166.

The Main Sources

The main sources we shall use for Mar Aba's career are the records included in the Synodicon Orientale, covering the actions he took to restore the unity of the Church in 540 and the Synod of 544 and its various Acts and Canons; the Syriac Life of Mar Aba, and the Arabic Chronicle of Sa'ard. We have already (p. 44) estimated the generally reliable and contemporary character of the Synodicon Orientale.

The Life of Mar Aba was edited and published in Syriac by Bedjan in 1895¹. It was translated into German by Braun in 1915², but the translation was almost unnoticed till Peeters published his long and excellent critical study of the Life in 1946³. We have not seen Braun's translation. For extracts from the Life we are dependent on those translated in Labourt's book⁴, or by Mingana, or in the course of Peeters's study, which enables us to follow the sequence of the narrative step by step. Earlier, in 1934, Chabot had written:

The Life of Mar Aba which we possess, and which is lacking in chronological data, is not much later than the time of its hero; but it needs serious critical study.⁵

Peeters gave as his considered opinion, supported by internal evidence (e.g. the use of honorific titles for Khusrau I) that it was written before the Shah's death in 579. As Aba died in 552 it is almost contemporary, and much reads like eyewitness evidence. In general it rings true; here and there criticism is needed.

¹ Bedjan, Histoire de Jabalaha et de trois autres patriarches, pp. 206-274
² Braun, Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer aus dem syrischen
übersetzt, pp. 188-220. ³ Reprinted in Recherches Orientales, II,
pp. 117-163. ⁴ CEP pp. 163-192. ⁵ Litterature syriaque, p. 54.

The Chronicle of Sa'ard was completed not earlier than 828, and not later than 1020.¹ The MS is in three fragments, covering the periods 250-422 and 484-650 in all. From Shim'un bar Saba'i, onwards, whom it calls the 9th in the succession, it chronicles the doings of the "Patriarchs", but it has much to say besides of people and events, both in the East and in the Roman Empire. Much of its accounts are derived from earlier sources, and are basically reliable. In the case of Mar Aba, it summarises, sometimes at the cost of telescoping and obscuring the sequence, the main events of the Life, but it seems also in one or two places to have made use of additional authentic information; it also adds some clearly worthless stories of the Patriarch's astuteness, which are not in character.

The Chronicle was edited and published by Scher, with translations of the three fragments into French by various scholars.² Where its summaries are helpful, we shall quote them, remarking on when they vary from the Life.

There are further accounts of Mar Aba's life in the two later Arabic chronicles of Mari and 'Amr-Saliba, from the Nestorian point of view, as well as in the Syriac Ecclesiastical Chronicle of the Jacobite Bar-Hebraeus. From the historical point of view, they are of much less value, and even misleading.

¹ Fiey Jal p. 22 shows convincingly that it cannot be later than 1020, as Ishu'-yab IV became Patriarch that year, and the Chronicle refers to Ishu'-yab III as the last of that name. As Scher points out, it is later than the Patriarch Ishu'-bar-Nun (d. 828) whom it cites (PO 4, p. 216).

² Histoire nestorienne inédite (Chronique de Seert) in PO vols 4,5,7,13.

Conversion and Baptism

The Chronicle of Sa'ard gives a fairly full account of Aba's conversion and baptism, following the Life closely:

This holy and virtuous Father was originally from a village called Hali in the district of Radan; he was a Magian, and very attached to his beliefs; he was Secretary to the Marzban of the district of Nabt, who lived at Radan. God willed to choose him, and providentially arranged that one day, when he was preparing to cross the Tigris in a boat to go to Hali and visit his home, a scholar called Yusuf came forward to cross with him. Mar Aba turned him out, and made him leave the boat; but when the boat reached midstream, the wind rose violently and stirred up the waves, forcing Mar Aba to return to the bank, and wait for a calm. Once the storm had died down, Yusuf repeated his request, but Mar Aba again rejected his petition, reprimanded him, and refused to allow him to go across with him. Hardly had he reached the middle of the Tigris, when lo and behold, the wind rose again, and forced him a second time to return to the shore. This time, when the wind had died down, the modesty and calmness of Yusuf, who had already boarded the boat, led Mar Aba to respect him and allow him to sit down. When they began the crossing, the wind fell completely. Mar Aba was astonished. He asked him what his religion was, and the scholar told him. Mar Aba was impressed. He questioned him about what his Faith taught; Yusuf instructed him, and convinced him that the Christian religion was true. From that time onwards Mar Aba gave himself to fasting, prayers and enquiry. He even confessed the Christian Faith before his superior officer, who had seen him going to church, and asked why. He gave up everything, and received Holy Baptism in a village called Ahad, at the hands of an old priest, known by the name of Bar-shahda.¹

With regard to Aba's name, it is Syriac for "father", but the name Patrikios which Cosmas "the India-Sailor" gives him is² nearer in meaning to the Persian name Papakan. Peeters³ therefore conjectures that his original name was Papakan, and he adopted the name Aba to disguise the fact that he was a convert from Zoroastrianism. He was probably a Persian, not a native of Mesopotamia; the Life, however, makes it clear that, though he

¹ Chronicle of Sa'ard 2:27, PO 7:154-156, Y pp. 73-74.

² See below, p.102 . ³ Peeters RO II, pp. 119-120.

was a zealous and intolerant Zoroastrian, he was not Magian by caste. The Life is more specific about his employment, he was arzabād to the registrar of the hamārgard of Bait Arami. The meaning of these terms is not known, but Peeters makes the attractive conjecture that Aba was a junior member of a land valuation team.¹ This would explain Aba's interest in geography, as indicated by Cosmas, and we have already seen what importance Khusrau I attached to the just collection of the land-tax. Yusuf is called a scholar, but the word means more than a student; he would be a graduate of the School of Nisibin, a trained catechist. The Life says that he wore a distinctive dress, and that Aba thought him to be a Marcionite. We suspect that what is meant here is not a follower of Marcion of Pontus, but a Messalian, a member of a wandering mendicant fraternity who emphasised the importance of prayer, but often led immoral lives², and were recognised by the Church to be a particularly insidious heresy. It is interesting that the Life says that the boat was blown back 3 times, and Mari and 'Amr-Saliba repeat this; but the Chronicle of Sa'ard says only twice. One suspects that the Chronicle is here nearer the truth, and using another source: it was not customary for historians in these days to tone down the marvellous! The incident may have been between March and June, during the annual floods, but we can only guess the year - say between 520 and 525.

According to the Life, after the crossing of the river had been made successfully, Aba showed his real greatness by asking

¹ RO II, p. 121. ² They were often called Marcionites. Their view was that by prayer believers attained such communion with God that they conquered Satan, and their deeds became irrelevant!

Yusuf's forgiveness. Yusuf replied that a disciple of Jesus Christ was forbidden to harbour a grudge¹. The quiet witness of this answer impressed Aba, and led to further questions. Shortly afterwards the office of the hamārgard was transferred to the Capital Cities, and it was there he began to attend church. The registrar, his immediate superior, questioned him, and threatened to denounce him. Probably Aba gave an evasive answer; shortly afterwards he gave up his job, and returned to his home. The location of Ahad, where he was baptised, is unknown. The Life does not mention the name of the priest who baptised him, possibly because he was still alive, and publicity might have meant danger; but Peeters² considers that the Syriac name Bar-shahda, "Witness", given by the Chronicle is based on genuine tradition.

The Years of Preparation

After his baptism, Aba intended to enter a monastery, but he came on his way to the School at Nisibin, and remained there, the pupil of a teacher called Ma'na. Some time afterwards, Ma'na became Bishop of Arzan, and Aba followed him there, where he continued his studies and worked as a catechist. It was probably on the death of the Bishop, his teacher and protector, that he returned from Arzan to Nisibin, and shortly afterwards crossed the frontier into the Byzantine Empire.

The Life tells how in Edessa Aba met a "brother" called Thomas, who taught him Greek, and then the two set off to visit the Holy Places, and went on to Alexandria, Corinth, Athens, Constantinople, Cilicia and Antioch, expounding the Scriptures in accordance with the expositions of Theodore of Mopsuestia. They were opposed by

¹ Labourt CEP p. 164. ² RO II, pp. 123-124.

the Monophysites, who resented the popularity of their teaching, and their lives were in danger in Alexandria and Constantinople. Peeters considers this account very second-rate, conventional hagiography, and that in truth Aba had been denounced by his superior officer, the Registrar, had left the Sassanid territories because as an apostate Zoroastrian his life was in danger, and ultimately returned to Nisibin when enough time had elapsed for his origins to have been forgotten. His sojourn in the Byzantine Empire was probably a time of learning rather than teaching, and he returned to his own country a widely travelled scholar¹. What we can say with certainty is that during his travels Aba visited the Byzantine Capital, and that Thomas was with him. We have the contemporary statement of Cosmas for this:

(The geographical teachings in my book about the shape of the world, etc.) I have received from the most divine and great doctor, Patrikios. He, following the example of Abraham, had come from the land of the Chaldaeans with Thomas of Edessa, then a student of theology, who accompanied him everywhere, and who now, by the will of God, is dead at Byzantium. He shared with me his piety and most true science. It is he who now, by the grace of God, has been raised to the sublime and metropolitan throne of all Persia, having been installed there as Bishop Catholicos.²

Aba's return to Nisibin may well, as Peeters suggests³, have taken place in 533, when a peace-treaty between Khusrañ and Justinian doubtless included promises of toleration on both sides of the border. In Nisibin he was soon established as an Expositor and Teacher in the School, and may have continued this work, along with revision of the Syriac translation of the Scriptures, for about 7 years. It was the period of the "duality", and those of his students who became bishops (according to Mari there were many) must have felt

¹ Peeters, ^{RO}pp. 125-133. ² Cosmas, Christian Topography, quoted in Labourt CEP, p. 166.Y. Peeters ^{RO}p. 135.

sharply the contrast between the authority and ability of their teacher and the chaotic condition of the Church.

Appointment as Catholicos of the East

After the death of Paul, probably towards the end of 539, Aba's election as Catholicos and Patriarch took place. It is thus simply stated in the Life:

He was chosen for the great rule of the Catholicate by all the metropolitans and bishops, and by all the priests and believers who were present in the Cities, without his knowledge. They sent boats to fetch him in the name of the King of Kings.¹

Khusrau, who was himself a lover of learning, had doubtless heard of the great scholar-teacher of Nisibin, and would readily give his consent to the election, a consent which made it a royal command, which Aba had no choice but to obey. At this stage the Shahinshah was certainly not aware that Aba was a convert from Zoroastrianism. His election had been without any efforts on his part to secure office, but many of those who elected him were doubtless Aba's old students.

Restoration of Church Order and Unity.

Mar Aba became Patriarch in January or February 540. He had hardly been appointed when he left the Cities, and went on tour of the area where the "duality" was at its worst - to the south and east. He was accompanied by the Metropolitan of Bait Lapat and five bishops, and the main places visited were Anbar, Kashkar, Parat Maishan, Hormizd-ardushir, Riv-ardushir, Shuster and Bait Lapat. Every disciplinary decision was taken by Aba in association with his colleagues, and two examples show how wisely they acted.

¹ Quoted in Labourt CEP p. 170, Y p. 287.

At Riv-ardushir, there were rival bishops belonging to the two parties of Elisha and Narsai, one apparently calling himself Bishop, and the other Metropolitan. Aba deposed both, thus refusing to align himself with either party, and elected a worthy man as both Bishop and Metropolitan.

They remained there a long time. They confirmed the anathema, expulsion and deposition of Izhaq, who had been Bishop of this place, and had been justly deprived of the office and functions of the episcopate; of Ishu'-bakht who had followed him, and had proclaimed himself Bishop irregularly and in an unauthorised way; and of those who had been appointed, whether by Izhaq or by Ishu'-bakht, to the episcopal or some other ministerial office.

After Ishu'-bakht had shown signs of penitence for the above actions which had been done illegally,...and when he had given his written consent willingly to his deposition and deprivation of ministerial status, authority and episcopal office,...the Patriarch and the bishops received him charitably, gave him the peace, and allowed him to exercise the functions he had received canonically, and even to remain in the priestly order, if he was prepared to receive ordination as a presbyter in the same way as all those who had been appointed priests or deacons by him or his predecessor Izhaq had been reordained - for they were treated mercifully, after they had shown signs of repentance and received the canonical laying-on of hands...

He also deprived Mar Aqaq, Bishop and Metropolitan, of these functions, and chose in his place the virtuous friend of God, Mar Ma'na, who received the laying-on of hands from the Patriarch and the bishops...He was appointed Bishop of the City of Riv-ardushir and of its diocese, and Metropolitan of that city and of all the cities of the countries of these provinces.¹

At Gundeshapur Abraham, a dissolute and irregularly-appointed Metropolitan, had sold church plate and given the money to prostitutes. He had come to the Cities hoping to get the Patriarch on his side, but Mar Aba had only consented to meet him when he had come barefoot, as a penitent. He had been allowed to state his case before a group of clergy, proved to be a liar, and persuaded to sign acceptance of his own deposition. He then went

¹ Chabot SO pp. 322-323, Y pp. 145-146.

off, raised a party of supporters, and tried to get the Persian authorities on his side. Even they despised him. When Mar Aba and his judicial tribunal, now augmented by a further metropolitan and bishop, arrived at Bait Lapat, Abraham was excommunicated:

This present Act, in which is included this deposition and sentence, has been made by the Patriarch, the metropolitans and the bishops who were with him, assembled in the city of Bait Lapat, and has been signed and confirmed by their seals, unanimously, in accordance with the authority of Christ...

Therefore by this authority, I, Aba, Patriarch, (two) metropolitans, and (eight) bishops, have confirmed the censure and anathema made against Abraham...and his deprivation of episcopal order, of the title of metropolitan, of the functions of the presbyterate and diaconate, and also of all clerical order.

Let no one be permitted to give him the Sacraments, either of wine or bread, until he has shown repentance and obtained from us permission in this respect, by an act of clemency on his behalf written and promulgated by me, the Patriarch, in accordance with the penitence he may show.

No one shall address him, call him, or think of him - in secret or in public, in word or in thought, from near or far, or in any way forbidden by these writings - as possessing the name, functions, order, or authority of bishop, priest, or deacon, or as belonging to any order of clergy.

Should anyone transgress any of the above orders:-

if it be a man, may he never again see his wife, his children, or his home!

if it be a woman, boy, or girl, may this sentence overtake them - let the anger of God rest upon them with the consent of all Christendom!

As for him who hears these writings and obeys them, may the blessing of Christ rest on him for ever!

Clearly here was a Patriarch who knew how to rule firmly, with the consent and backing of his colleagues, and who expected to be obeyed. The tour occupied the months of February to October, 540, and those who have experienced the summer heat of Basra and Ahwaz will understand the remark in the Life that the Catholicos and his assessors had much to suffer from the tropical heat.²

¹ Chabot SO p. 330, Y pp. 146-147. ² Peeters RO II, p. 136.

Before returning from Bait Lapat, Mar Aba sent out an encyclical to metropolitans and bishops, instructing them to correct matrimonial abuses that had arisen in the Church through slackness of discipline and Zoroastrian influence. Marriages that were within the forbidden degrees, and even incestuous marriages like those described on p.11, had taken place among Christians. Disciplinary action was to be taken - deposition of clergy, excommunication of laity - of those who refused to give up their evil ways or contracted new marriages of this sort, though some concession was made in special cases.

Accusations and Trials, 541-543.

The Chronicle states briefly:

When King Naushirwan invaded the Greek Empire, Mar Aba, who did not want to see bloodshed, held back from going with him. The Magians, who hated him, accused him before the King of four things:

1. He had renounced the religion of the Magians, and become a Christian.
2. He had prevented Christians from marrying more than one wife at a time.
3. He had annulled the cases of their judges, and taken away cases from their jurisdiction.
4. He baptised Magians, and made them Christians.

Thus by these accusations they aroused the King to detest him; at his orders he was imprisoned for seven years in Azarbaijan.

This is in fact a very much telescoped summary of a sequence of events in which the Life makes it clear that the Magians did not at first know that Aba had renounced the State religion.

Khusrau had attacked the Byzantine Empire shortly after Mar Aba's accession, and it is probable that the Shah had already moved out of the Capital with his army before Aba arrived for his consecration in February 540. It was probably in November, when Naushirwan

returned from a victorious campaign in Syria, that Aba first paid his respects to him in the Capital. The Mobed of Mobeds, the Zoroastrian Chief Priest, annoyed at the restoration of order in the Church, the conversion of Magians, and the tightening up of discipline among the Christians about marriage laws, placed a formal accusation against Aba before the Shah. But "the peaceful and benevolent King of Kings" refused to receive it, in spite of the additional insinuation that the Patriarch was a friend of the Greek Emperor.

In the next two years or so, Mar Aba seems to have carried on his rule of the Church undisturbed. The evenings were given to correspondence, and from dawn till 10 a.m. he expounded the Scriptures in the School at Seleucia. From then till the evening he was busy settling disputes, whether between Christians and Christians, or between Christians and others. He was forbidden to itinerate, but Church discipline continued to be maintained.

In the spring of 543 Dad-hurmizd, the Chief Mobed, returned to the attack, and for about 70 days the trial of Mar Aba dragged on, while accusers and accused accompanied the royal armies into Azarbaijan, on their way north to attack Armenia.

1. Called before Dad-hurmizd, Aba was accused by the Rad of Fars, a high official, of having converted certain Magians there, and of having taken disciplinary measures which injured the State Religion. Mar Aba, after 4 days of violent attacks on his character, replied that he was prepared to stand trial for his faith, but before a royal tribunal.

2. Khusrau appointed an official to judge the case, but when he heard Aba's profession of faith, he agreed that he was worthy of death . death.

3. In the course of this trial Mar Aba, in answer to questions from the Chief Mobed, was describing how the penitent were restored. Avrodaq, a Christian courtier present, interrupted to say to the Chief Mobed that the Catholicos would gladly receive him if he was converted to the law of Christ. This was reported to Khusrau, who sent Avrodaq to Ctesiphon on an errand, out of danger's way.

4. The trial dragged on. Clearly it would not be easy to bring Khusrau to the point of condemning Aba to death. There were new complaints: Christians had submitted their cases to the Magians, and been acquitted, but Mar Aba had torn up the decisions, and excommunicated Christians whose marriage irregularities had been in accordance with the law of the State. They tried to make capital out of the Patriarch's clash of loyalties - would he put the Law of Christ before the orders of the King? Aba evaded the trap skilfully, doubtless with a smile.

Aba - The King asks me to do nothing against my conscience.

Mobed - But suppose the King were to ask you to do something which you consider to be forbidden by your religion, what would you do?

Aba - When the King forces me to disobey him, it will be time to see whose side I am to take!

A few days later the Shah, to whom the conversation had been reported, graciously returned Mar Aba's salutation on the road.

5. At this point, it seemed, the Mobed learned from an informer that Aba was in fact an apostate Zoroastrian, from a Zoroastrian family family. Aba was told that unless he renounced all proselytism of Zoroastrians, and took back his censures against the Christians who had contracted irregular marriages, they would proceed against him

Life, quoted by Peeters RO II, p. 142. Y.

under the Law of Apostasy. This was no idle threat. In 542 two noble Persian converts, Gregory (Piran-gushnasp, converted as far back as 518) and Yazd-panah of Karka of Laidan, had been put to death on this charge; in 544 the long arm of the law was to do the same in Tiflis with Eustace the Cobbler, originally from Ganzag (Tabriz); and in 545 Avida from a village near Seleucia was to be condemned to death, but instead have his ears and nose cut off. But Aba was unmoved by the threat. The matter was reported to Khusrau, who ordered Aba to be sent into exile. This was really an act of clemency, which stopped the legal process.

Peeters comments:

n The zeal of the Kings of Persia for official Zoroastrianism had greatly cooled since the time of Shapur II. In the measure that Christianity was gaining ground in the Iranian Empire, the ancient State Religion was losing its sovereign importance. Some years after Khusrau I, we shall see his grandson Khusrau Parvez building Christian Churches and monasteries in his capital...His grandfather Naushirwan, without prejudice to his flirtations with Greek philosophy, showed more than tolerance for Hindu thought. It is no matter of wonder that with such a bent towards religious indifference, he showed a deaf ear to the fanatics who tried to force him into an act of severity against Mar Aba.'

No doubt we should add to this that the Shah seems to have shown a positive appreciation of the Patriarch's character.

Exile in Azerbaijan - summer 543 - end of 549.

Aba was put in charge of the Rad of the Province of Azerbaijan, who, doubtless on the Shah's instructions, treated him well. He was under house arrest in a place probably called Farukh-Atur (Blessed Fire)², a Magian centre. He did not cross the door of his house for 7 years, and refused to flee when plague broke out in the summer of 543. But he was not isolated from the Church.

¹ Peeters RO II, p. 144. Y. ² See Peeters RO II, p. 146. Wigram (AC p. 203) suggests that the place was Takht-i-Suleman.

From Azarbaijan he did not cease to direct church affairs,...corresponding by letters with all the provinces on the subject of their concerns. The canons of the Psalter were composed in prison.¹

From the provinces assembled the metropolitans, bishops, priests and deacons, the Christian men and women, to pray there and receive his blessing. On account of their sins, many of them stood outside his door in sackcloth and ashes, and received his pardon. Others were consecrated bishops, others again ordained to the priesthood or the diaconate; similarly he conferred other ecclesiastical orders...Whole companies of bishops returned home to their colleagues, and sang to them hymns inspired by the Holy Spirit (which they had presumably learned from Mar Aba - the "canons"); legions of priests were welcomed back by their colleagues, and told of the great wonders they had seen and heard. The mountains and the heights of Azarbaijan seemed to be levelled under the feet of the saints.²

If we accept Chabot's deductions, which seem to us convincing, the Synod, or Assembly of Bishops, of Mar Aba was held in December 543 or January 544³. Its Acts are conveniently summarised by Labourt.⁴ Perhaps the most important was the Practiqqa, of which we possess only a fragment.⁵ It laid down rules for the election of a new Patriarch:

The method of the election of the Catholicos, it will be remembered, had been left open (in 410); and now Mar Aba made an effort to fill this gap by the formation of an electoral college, which should do something like justice to the three elements that had a right to a voice in the matter - viz. the clergy and laity of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, of whom the patriarch was diocesan; the bishops of B. Arami⁶, of which province he was metropolitan; and the other metropolitans and their suffragans. According to the scheme, the clergy and laity of the capital were to assemble, with the bishops of the province, and the metropolitans of Parat Maishan (Basra), Arbil and Karka of Bait Salok, each of whom was to bring three suffragans. This body elected the Patriarch.⁷

Wigram notes that no reference at all is made to the approval of the Shah; that was of course necessary, but clearly not considered

¹ CS 2: 27, P.O. 7: 159, Y p. 288. ² Life, quoted in Labourt CEP, p. 184, Y p. 288. ³ SO pp. 546, 566, pace Wigram AC p.191 footnote. ⁴ CEP pp. 185.

⁵ Chabot SO pp. 553-555. ⁷ Wigram AC pp. 197-198. ⁶ The patriarchal province.

part of the law of the Church. It is a witness by silence to Aba's high view of the spiritual and administrative authority of the Church of the East.

Escape from Azarbaijan, winter 549-550.

Though in exile, subject to the rigours of a cold climate, Mar Aba was still, obviously with the tacit approval of the Shah, acting as Head of the Church. A deposed pastor and renegade Christian, Peter Gurganara ("the Wolf"?) now put himself at the disposal of the mobeds, and brought to Farukh-Atur a letter from the Chief Mobed, in the name of the Shah, demanding the deposition of every bishop, priest and deacon consecrated or ordained by Mar Aba, who as an apostate Zoroastrian was to be refused recognition as Catholicos. The local authorities "smelt a rat", and refused to take action, doubting if the Shah had really given his consent. Peter then tried a night attack, but the assailants on the house where the Patriarch was being kept were heard coming, and repulsed.

It was clear, however, that sooner or later Mar Aba would be murdered, and then the story circulated that he had been killed while trying to escape. The Patriarch took a bold decision. At night, in midwinter, with one disciple and guided by the Bishop of Azarbaijan, he made his escape from Farukh-Atur, not to a place of safety outside the country, but to the Capital itself!

A prisoner in chains, 550-551

The Chronicle recounts thus the events of a full year very briefly:

Mar Aba presented himself at the King's court. The King, informed of his arrival, sent him a written message: "Were you not obliged to remain in the place to which I exiled you?" "If I have run away," replied the Father, "...it was to avoid a violent death. If I had been put to death in secret, against

¹Peeters RO II, p. 149. See p. 150 for the account of the escape.

whom could one have taken legal action?...If the King wishes, he can have me put to death..." "Get out!" said the King.¹

The account goes on to say that Mar Aba was imprisoned for a while, heavily chained, but later allowed to go free. This very much telescoped summary has been worth quoting because of the reply of the Patriarch, which with its sardonic humour seems to us to ring true. The course of events, according to the Life,² was as follows:

1. On arrival at Ctesiphon, Aba took sanctuary in what appears to have been a Zoroastrian temple. He was accused by the Chief Mobed's son, Farukh-dad, of grave disobedience, but the Shah sent a message assuring him that he would only have to stand trial for apostasy, and ending "Now, go to your house and rest". He left the refuge, but was prevented from leaving the city by a crowd of Magian supporters.

2. Next day, on his way to thank the Shah, he was captured by the Magians by ruse. The Shah, "like the benevolent man he was", sent a message forbidding his being put to death; but he was chained by the neck, arms and legs, and imprisoned in a palace dungeon.

3. In the spring of 550, when the Shah went with his armies to Azarbaijan, Mar Aba and his disciple were taken with the army, but his noble bearing gained the sympathies of many. He was offered his freedom, if he would give a verbal undertaking not to oppose the Magian religion, and to stop making converts from it. Once again he refused, and his chains were made heavier.

¹CS 2: 27, P.O. 7: 159-160, Y pp. 288-289. ²See Peeters RO II, pp. 151-157.

4. After travelling 1400 miles, the King returned to the Capital. Aba was imprisoned in a house, and the Shah ordered his chains to be taken off. His captors ignored the order.

5. In the spring of 551, Khusrau set out once more, this time for Fars. There he became aware that Mar Aba was still in fetters, and sent an officer with orders to remove the fetters instantly. This was done. His intention was that Mar Aba should have some days of rest, before returning to the Cities.

Naushad's rebellion and Aba's death, 551-552.

Naushad (Anaushang-zad) was the oldest son of the Shah, and his mother was a Christian. He himself professed Christianity, but for other reasons Khusrau considered him unsuitable as a successor, and sent him to Susiana. In 551 Khusrau was sick, and the rumour spread that he had died. On this, Naushad proclaimed himself Shahinshah, and with the support of many local Christians, seized Bait Lapat (Gundeshapur). As a result, Aba's freedom was short-lived:

The Magians raised a clamour before the King because of the Blessed One, and said: "If the Catholicos had wished it, the rebellion would not have taken place." They immediately had him heavily chained to the neck of a soldier, and led him to the court of the King of Kings. The King of Kings was annoyed by the accusation of the Magians, and sent a message to him through his Christian servant Zadagu:

"You are against Our Majesty, and because of you the Christians have rebelled. In many provinces and cities, the Christians have risen up against the Magians and the magistrates. They have beaten and plundered them, and now they are organising a rebellion. As for you, though you are under confinement, you consecrate bishops and priests, you send them to the provinces, and you show no kind of respect to us. For this reason, I am about to give immediate orders that your eyes should be put out, and that you should be thrown into a ditch and die there!"¹

The fact that Khusrau sent a Christian to announce the sentence suggests that he was looking for some way to avoid carrying it out.

¹ Life, quoted in Labourt CEP p. 189, Y p. 289.

Peeters is probably right in suggesting that there was a quiet conversation between Aba and the courtier, and that it suggested a way out of the difficulty. The Shah's wrath was appeased, and he sent the mobed Farukh-dad with a conciliatory message:

"It is my will," said the King, "that you write to the the inhabitants of Gundeshapur not to side with this young madman." The Catholicos wrote and excommunicated them. They separated themselves from the King's son, and opened the gates of Gundeshapur to the King's armies, which were then able to enter. The King and his men were amazed at this obedience, and this fear of excommunication.¹

Again the Chronicle gives the events in summary form. The Life gives the following sequence:

1. Aba wrote to the Christians in the province of Bait Lapat to return to their loyalty, warning them that impenitent rebels would all be put to death - Magians, Jews and Christians alike. (Another touch of Aba's humour?). He was immediately set at liberty, and followed the Shah back to the Capital.²

2. There the King was met by an embassy from the White Huns:

Khudai the White Hun sent a priest as a messenger to the King of Kings, and the White Huns, who were Christians, wrote a letter to the Holy Patriarch, requesting him to ordain as Bishop to all the Kingdom of the White Huns the priest who was sent from their country. When the priest saw the King of Kings, and the latter learned the nature of the mission on which he was sent, he was astonished to hear it, and amazed at the power of Jesus, and at the fact that even the White Hun Christians counted the Patriarch as their Head and Administrator. He therefore ordered him to go and decorate the church as was customary on such occasions, and to ordain bishop the man whom Khudai the White Hun had sent to him. On the following day, the Church was decorated, and the Hun priest was ordained Bishop for the White Huns, and joy increased with the people of the Lord.³

Khusrau was later to war against the Huns; at present, with a rebellion on his hands, it was politic to be conciliatory. Aba's return to the Cathedral at Seleucia after an absence of 8 years,

¹ CS 2:27, PO 7:163, Y pp. 289-290. ² Peeters RO II, pp. 158-159.

³ Life, quoted in Min 9 pp. 10-11, Y pp. 30-31.

in the midst of the gay decorations suitable for an important consecration, must have been a time of great joy for the Christians.

3. When Khusrau set out to deal with his rebellious son, however, Mar Aba had to accompany him, and help personally in the work of pacification. Naushad was captured, and mutilated to render him incapable of succeeding to the throne. The Life draws a veil over the painful business, but the Chronicle may be right in saying that Aba had to gather a large fine from the Christians.

4. On his return to the Capital, Aba received royal permission to take up residence near the citadel of Kokhe, beside Seleucia. There the Patriarch had many visitors, including Arabs from Hira, who had come with their Christian prince, al-Mundir, to do homage to the Shah. But Aba's long sufferings had taken their toll of his constitution: he was struck with paralysis. The Shah sent his own physicians, among whom may have been the future Catholicos Yusuf, but in vain. On 28th February, 552 Mar Aba died, and was buried at Seleucia¹.

The story of Mar Aba speaks for itself, and few additional comments are necessary. We are struck with the fact that, in spite of the tolerance of the Shah, the Patriarch was so often insecure, and almost, though not entirely, at the mercy of the Magians. This was chiefly due to the fact that he himself had been a convert; but it is also clear that Aba paid dearly for his insistence on the right of the Church to evangelise. At the

¹ And not at Hira. See Peeters RO II pp. 162-163. For the details of Mar Aba's final year see Peeters RO II, pp. 157-163.

same time we are struck by the fact that Aba was ready, in obedience to the Shah, to collect a fine from the Christians - behaviour which contrasts with that of Shim'un bar Saba'i and shows a readiness to be flexible in non-essentials. We are conscious too that Aba moved in a society where there were Christians at court, and where their numbers in the country were a challenge to a decadent Zoroastrianism. The concordat of 410 had not given freedom to proselytise followers of the State Religion, but if this could be won, Christianity might well become the dominant force in the country. Mar Aba did his best to ensure this, and his steadfastness of purpose compels our admiration.

C. CHURCH AND STATE, 552-630

1. The Shahs. Khusrau I ruled till 579, and was succeeded by Hurmizd IV, whose reign was occupied with continuous wars with Rome. One of his generals, Bahram, rebelled against Hurmizd; this was opposed by the followers of Hurmizd's son, Khusrau II, who murdered Hurmizd in 590. For a while Khusrau was an exile, but with the help of the Byzantine Emperor Maurice he regained his throne, and married Maurice's daughter Mary.

The reign of Khusrau II (590-628) was marked by amazing conquests, but ended in defeat and assassination. In 602 Phocas murdered Maurice, and this gave a good excuse for Khusrau to declare war on the Byzantine Empire. During the next 20 years Khusrau, who was nicknamed Parvaiz ("the Victorious") was remarkably successful. He seized the frontier fortress that had barred successive Persian armies 603-05. He invaded Syria in 609, captured Antioch in 611, Damascus in 613, and Jerusalem in 614. Phocas had fallen in 610 but his successor Heraclius failed to stem the tide. In 616 he was master of Alexandria, and of all Egypt by 619. By 617 he had made himself master of almost all Asia Minor, and his armies could see the Byzantine Capital from across the Bosphorus. He had restored the Persian Empire to its boundaries under Darius and Xerxes. In 622, however, the Emperor Heraclius defeated the Sassanid forces in Asia Minor, and steadily advanced until in 627 he invaded northern Mesopotamia, and in 628 reached the gates of the Royal Cities. At this point there was a revolution, in which Khusrau was murdered.

His successor Shiruya sent an embassy to make peace with Heraclius, and this was concluded in 630 during the short reign of Queen Buran.

2. Patriarchs and Shahs. In spite of the careful regulations laid down in Mar Aba's Practiga for the future election of patriarchs, his successor Yusuf (552-566/7) was nominated by Khusrau I himself to the Electoral College. He was the Shah's physician, and greatly favoured at court. According to a contemporary writer

Yusuf, the Patriarch of the Christians, has free access to the King, and is attached to him, because he is a physician. He sits in his presence in the first seat after the Chief of the Magians, and whatever he asks from him, he receives.

Yusuf, however, behaved more like a royal functionary than a Christian leader, and lorded it over the Church. He refused to call a Synod till 554, and there were complaints of his tyranny and acceptance of bribes. In 566/7 he was deposed, but it was only in 570 that Khusrau was persuaded by another Christian court physician to agree to the deposition.

Hizqiel, elected regularly in 566/7, was not consecrated as Patriarch till Khusrau gave permission in 570. He outlived the Shah, and died in 581.

The Electoral College then presented Hurmizd IV with two names. From them he chose Ishu'-Yab I, Bishop of Arzan, who is said, from his border see, to have given Hurmizd useful information about Roman troop movements. Hurmizd favoured the Christians, and is said to have told the Magians:

"My throne stands on four feet, not on two. On Jews and Christians as well as on Zoroastrians."

He used Ishu'-yab on an embassy to the Emperor Maurice. After Hurmizd's death, Ishu'-yab lost the favour of Khusrau II by cautiously avoiding going into exile with him, or greeting him

¹CSCO 3:6, p. 218, Y p. 286. ²Tabari p. 268 quoted in Wigram AC p. 214.

on his return. Ishu'-yab took refuge by visiting the court of the Arab vassal-king of Hira, who had become a Christian, and he died there in 595.

Khusrau II himself selected Ishu'-yab's successor, Sabr-ishu' I - his name was not one of the 5 submitted to the Shah by the Electoral College. He was, however, a man of sanctity of life, and a renowned ascetic, and greatly respected by Shirin, the Shah's mistress, whose position was practically that of Queen. When Maurice was murdered by Phocas in 602, Khusrau got Sabr-ishu' to crown the Emperor's refugee son. He accompanied the Shah on his campaign against the Byzantine Empire, and died in 604 at the siege of Dara.

The election of the next Patriarch, Gregory I (605-609) was a piece of trickery. The Electoral College was summoned by the Shah:

He in fact ordered that the Fathers, the directors of the Church, that is to say the bishops of each diocese, who were distant, should come on the royal beasts, with honour and at the expense of the kingdom, to the venerable court of the King of Kings, and he took care that those who were near at hand came promptly to the court to choose the Chief, and Governor of the Catholic Church...in the Persian Empire.

He also indicated the candidate he wanted them to choose, Gregory the Metropolitan of Nisibin:

Now when the valiant Khusrau had captured the city of Dara on the borders, in the fifteenth year of his reign, the Christians demanded of him a Catholicos; and the King commanded that the blessed Gregory, Metropolitan of the City of Nisibin, ...should be appointed Catholicos. But certain of the teachers and believing men by whom this matter was to have been carried out, acted with deceit against the blessed Gregory, because they were afraid of the immeasurable zeal which the blessed man possessed. Now there was in the Cities a certain expositor, and in respect of him they acted subtilly, and made him Catholicos without the will of the Holy Spirit.²

¹ Shabot SO p. 571. ² T Mar II, 25, p. 86.

In fact the man appointed was a second Gregory, and it was alleged that the Electoral College had misunderstood the Shah's instructions. It is not clear whether (as Wigram suggests)¹, the appointment represented the wish of the electors, or (as Labourt feels)², the second Gregory was imposed on them by the influence of Shirin. At all events, the Shah accepted the choice with a bad grace, and declared "As long as I live I will never have another patriarch in the country of the East."³ Later, when complaints of Gregory's avarice came to the ears of Khusrau, he refused to take any action.

Something here falls to be said about Shirin, the Shah's mistress. She was from a Christian family, and celebrated for her beauty, her wit, and her gift of singing. She was at first loyal to the Church of the East, and to please her, Khusrau built three churches, and had Bibles and service-books brought for them from Edessa.⁴ After the death of the Shah's wife Mary - some said she was poisoned by Shirin - Shirin was given full charge of the palace harem, and became Queen in all but name. She was at first childless, but Jibraïl (Gabriel) of Shigar, a Jacobite Christian, gave her the treatment which resulted in the birth of her son Mardanshah.⁵ As a result, Shirin herself became a Jacobite, and Jibraïl rose high in the royal favour. It is possible that Shirin's choice of the second Gregory was due to fear that the first might take strong steps against the Jacobites.⁶

¹ AC pp. 246-247. ² CEP p. 222. ³ T Mar I, 25, p. 89.

⁴ T Mar I, 24, pp. 81-82. ⁵ Chabot SO p. 625. ⁶ Labourt CEP p. 222, and see for Shirin in general, M.J. Higgins, Chosroes II's votive offerings at Sergiopolis Byzantinische Zeitschrift, 48, 1955, pp. 89-102.

It is worth noting that, whatever might be the circumstances of their appointments, all these patriarchs - Yusuf (reluctantly), Hizqiel, Ishu'-yab I, Sabr-ishu' and Gregory - were able to hold synods and transact Church business in a perfectly regular way.

When Gregory I died in 609, Khusrau kept his word, and refused to appoint a new patriarch. In this decision he was backed by Jibrail and Shirin. When in 612 a petition was made that a patriarch should be appointed, Jibrail presented a counter-petition that the appointment be put into his hands. The Metropolitans of Hedayab and Bait Garma then came to the capital, accompanied by George, a monk from Mt Izala. This led to an inconclusive debate before the Shah as to which side professed the true Christian Faith. The representatives of the Church of the East presented an essentially Nestorian Confession of Faith, and stated:

This is the doctrine of the orthodox Faith confided to the Catholic Church by the Holy Apostles. In the land of the Persians, from the time of the Apostles to the present day, no heresy has appeared and aroused schisms or divisions. On the other hand, in the land of the Romans...there have been numerous and varied heresies; they contaminated many people; when they were chased out of there, and fled, their shadows reached to here. Such are the Manichaeans¹, the Marcionites,...the Severians...

Now it is our hope and belief that, since the land of the Romans has been submitted to your admirable authority, in an Empire new and astonishing in the number of its lands and cities, your Majesty will direct it, by the authority of useful laws, in such a way that they shall be established with us in that Apostolic Faith which we have received from the beginning.²

The petition was not granted. Jibrail and Shirin were strong enough to block the appointment of a Nestorian as Patriarch, while the Shah was not prepared to alienate the large majority of the influential Christian millat by appointing a Jacobite.

¹ Mani was, of course, from Mesopotamia! ² Chabot SO, pp. 584-585.Y.

Until Khusrau died by the sword of the Christian children of the Church, the Holy Church remained without a Patriarchate. And no bishops and no metropolitans were consecrated, and the Holy Church endured grief through the absence of the Head and Governor, and Father of Fathers, the Patriarch.¹

During the vacancy, which lasted 19 years, the Metropolitans of Nisibin, Arbil and Karka of Bait Salok arranged for Babai, of Mt Izla, an outstanding monk and scholar, to tour round the churches and act as a kind of unofficial Head.²

One of the first actions of Shiruya, after the murder of Khusrau I, was to command the Christians to appoint a Catholicos, and Ishu'-yab II (628-646) was duly elected.³

The story of the years 552-630 leaves us with two dominant impressions - of increasing royal interference in the elections of Patriarchs, ending with a long vacancy; and of increasing Christian influence at court. If there had been no Arab invasion, it is conceivable that the Persian Royal House might have become Christian, and exercised the kind of control over the Church of the East that Justinian had over the Greek Church of the Byzantine Empire.

3. One "millat" or two? During the Sixth Century the non-Chalcedonians were organised and strengthened largely as the result of two leaders, the theologian Severus of Antioch (c. 465-538) - hence the name "Severian" - and the travelling monk-bishop, Ya'qub Barad'i (Jacob Bardaeus, fl. 528-578, hence "Jacobite").⁴ Its main strength was in Syria and Egypt, but in the Persian Empire it gained strength from the large-scale deportations of Syrian Christians made in 540 and later by Khusrau I.⁵ During the first decade or so

¹ T Mar I, 26, pp. 89-90. ² ibid. pp. 91-92. ³ T Mar I, 35, p. 115. The new Patriarch headed Shiruya's peace embassy to Constantinople.

⁴ See Y pp. 214-217, 220-221. See Wigram AC p. 242.

of the Seventh Century, as we have seen, there was a struggle between Nestorian and Jacobite for control of the millat.

In 628, however, when a Nestorian was appointed Patriarch of the East, the Jacobites organised themselves as a separate millat. They were subject to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, had two metropolitans - at Mar Mattai and Taqrit in northern Mesopotamia - and were organised in twelve dioceses¹. They were to remain in the minority among the Christians of the East, but their proselytising zeal was to make them a thorn in the flesh of the Nestorian Church there.

4. Persecution. We have noted that during the reign of Khusrau I several converted Zoroastrians were martyred². In 575 also a Jacobite bishop called Ahad-amma was put to death because he had converted some Zoroastrians, including a son of the Shah. Under Hurmizd IV there was no persecution.

Khusrau II put several Zoroastrian converts to death. One of them, the George who was at the Cities in 612⁴, was arrested shortly afterwards on the accusation of the Jacobite courtier Jibrail, and put to death after an imprisonment of 15 months⁵. Another, Ishu'-sabran, was arrested in 605, and after a long imprisonment was crucified in 619 or 620 with 12 other converts⁶. Towards the end of his reign, when Heraclius invaded Mesopotamia, Khusrau let loose a more general persecution of Christians. He put to death his Nestorian Christian financier and tax-gatherer Yazdin, who was a very wealthy man, and confiscated his property⁷. It has to be remembered, however, that others besides Christians suffered

¹ See Wigram AC p. 264. ² See above p. 109. ³ Labourt CEP p. 199.
⁴ See above p. 121. ⁵ Chabot SO pp. 625-634. ⁶ Labourt CEP p. 234 n.1, and Chabot, Litterature syriaque, p. 99. ⁷ Labourt CEP p. 234.

from this outburst of tyranny. Christians were prominent in the conspiracy that led to Khusrau's deposition and death:

The blessed Mar Yazdin, the head of the believers, died... And Khusrau forgot all the good deeds of Mar Yazdin, and seized all his wealth and possessions, and he dismissed Shamta and Kurta, his sons.., and from being rich, they became poor, and from being men of rank, they became of no account. Now when the blessed Shamta saw that the wickedness of Khusrau the foolish King increased...he rose up secretly, and went down to the Royal Cities, and he slew with the sword the twenty-four sons of Khusrau who were being educated there. And he took Shiruya, that is Qubad, Khusrau's son from among them...and he made Shiruya King without the wish and command of his father. Now because of his avarice and greediness, Khusrau had disbanded his troops and sent them away, and the blessed Shamta went into the palace of Khusrau with his servants, and slew him with the sword; and there was rest for the churches in all quarters, and by the command of Shamta the troops of Shiruya proclaimed a good hope for men.¹

So wrote Thomas of Marga 200 years later. It is even possible that Shamta and his brother hoped to rule the country; one of those they killed was Shirin's son Mardanshah. Shortly afterwards Shiruya suspected the two brothers of treason, and they fled to Hira; there they were captured and put to death.²

The persecution of Christians came to an end; next year their Patriarch and several metropolitans and bishops were sent on embassy to Constantinople. Nevertheless, it is not altogether surprising that the Christians forgot many years of toleration and peaceful growth, and looked back on the Sassanid rulers as tyrants and persecutors of the Church.

¹ T Mar I, 35, pp. 112-115.

² Labourt CEP pp. 235-236.

CHAPTER VI

CHANGE-OVER TO ARAB RULE

A. THE ARABS AND ISLAM

The advent of Muhammad, who claimed to be the Prophet of God, brought a new and revolutionary element into the history, not only of the Arabs, but of the whole world. Born about 570, it was some 40 years later that he became conscious of a Divine call to prophesy to the Arabs against idolatry. At first his teaching met with fierce opposition, and in 622 he was forced to flee with some followers from his home in Mecca. He settled down in Madina, and there his adherents grew in numbers with the years. He organised them into a militant religious community so successfully that in 630 he was able to return in triumph to Mecca, and before his death in 632 had become the acknowledged ruler of Arabia. For the first time in their long history, the Arab tribes were united under one leader.

The Fall of the Sassanid Empire, 633-652¹

Under Muhammad's immediate successors Abu Bakr (632-634), 'Umr (634-644) and 'Uthman (644-656) the Arabs pursued an amazing war of conquest. In the West, the Byzantine Empire was attacked, Damascus captured in 636 and Jerusalem in 638, Egypt invaded in 639; and during the rest of the century conquests were pushed westwards to North Africa and Spain, and attacks made on Asia Minor and the Byzantine capital.

¹The history of the Arab conquests and the 'Umayyid and Abbasid Caliphates is taken mainly from the article Caliphate by H.A.R. Gibb in Encyclopaedia Britannica 1969, and Diehl and Marcals, Le Monde oriental de 395 a 1081, pp. 168-210 and 335-377. Detailed references are not given.

The assault on the Sassanid Empire took place simultaneously with the westward conquests. In 633 Abu Bakr's forces captured Hira, the capital of the tributary Arab Christian Kingdom, and all of the Empire south of the Euphrates, including Maishan, fell into Arab hands. During the next four years the Arabs crossed the Euphrates more than once, but it was only in June 637 that the decisive battle of Qadisiya was fought, and the might of the Sassanid armies broken. Next month the Arabs took Ctesiphon, and in December of the same year they opened the way up into the Median plateau by defeating the Persians near Halwan. The Arabs built fortresses at Kufa near Hira, and Basra. In 640 they pushed north, captured Mosul, and raided Azarbaijan and Armenia. The main struggle against the Sassanid Emperor Yazdgard III, however, was carried on in Elam (Khuzistan) from 638 to 644, and in Fars, Kerman and Khurasan from 644 to 650. In 651 Yazdgard was murdered in Khurasan, and in 652, with the capture and occupation of Merv, Balkh and Harat, the Arab conquest of the Empire was completed.

The 'Umayyid Caliphate, 660-750.

The murder of the third Caliph, 'Uthman, in 656 led to civil war between his father Mu'awiya, who had been Governor of Syria since 639, and ^{'Ali} the son-in-law of Muhammad, who had succeeded 'Uthman as Caliph in Mecca. 'Ali moved his capital to Kufa, but after some inconclusive fighting with the forces of Mu'awiya, who assumed the title of Caliph in 660, 'Ali was murdered by a fanatic in 661.

The dynasty founded by Mu'awiya, known as the 'Umayyids,

held power from 660 to 750. Their most powerful and successful rulers were Mu'awiya (660-680), 'Abd-al-Malik (685-705) and Walid I (705-715). Their capital was Damascus, and their support came mainly from the Syrian Arabs. Mesopotamia was ruled through governors, from fortresses like Kufa in the south and Jezira in the north. Among these were Ziyad (660-673), Obaidullah (673-686), al-Hajjaj (696-714), Khalid al Qasri (c. 725-738) and Yusuf bin 'Umr (738 onwards). Al-Hajjaj was a notable warrior, and a ruler with a reputation for extreme rigour and ruthlessness, and vigorous collection of taxes on land. He built a fortress at al-Wasit (Kashkar) in 702. He was responsible for digging new canals, and has been called "one of the greatest administrators in mediaeval history".

The period 680-692 was one of confused fighting in Mesopotamia and Arabia, a kind of three-cornered struggle, in which the protagonists were

(a) the 'Umayyid Caliphs Yazid I (680-683), Marwan I (684-685) and 'Abd-al-Malik, supported by governors or generals such as Obaidullah son of Ziyad and al-Hajjaj;

(b) the Shi'a leaders, sometimes supported and sometimes deserted by the Arabs of Kufa, especially Hussein son of 'Ali (d. 680) and Mukhtar (in power 686-687); and

(c) 'Abdullah son of Zubair, who ruled in Mecca from 680 to 692, and his brother Mus'ab.

The sequence of events was briefly as follows:

1. Hussein was defeated and killed at Kerbala in October 680 by Yazid's armies.

2. After Hussein's death Arabia, Egypt and parts of Mesopotamia acknowledged 'Abdullah as their ruler. Yazid I, however, reconquered Egypt, and captured Madina. While he was investing Mecca he died; his army returned to Syria, and 'Abdullah was able to hold Arabia.

3. In 686 the Shi'a Mukhtar, helped by the people of Kufa, killed the 'Umayyad Governor Obaidullah, and seized power in Mesopotamia. He captured Nisibin, and fought against both 'Abd-al-Malik and 'Abdullah.

4. In 687 'Abdullah's brother Mus'ab defeated Mukhtar, and reconquered Mesopotamia.

5. In 692 'Abd-al-Malik personally invaded Mesopotamia and crushed Mus'ab; he also sent al-Hajjaj to Arabia, and he captured Mecca and killed 'Abdullah.

The character of the 'Umayyad Caliphate has been thus described:

The 'Umayyad empire was an undisguised Arab supremacy, based on the partially Islamized warrior-aristocracy of the Arab tribes...It was the chieftains of the Bedouin tribes who created the Arab war-machine with their rude followers, and it was the style of life of this warrior-aristocracy - and not the sheltered piety of the core of devout Muslims - that held the empire together...

To the Arab supremacy, the populations that lay behind their advancing armies were not even conquered territories in the strict sense. For they were hardly occupied. They were treated as the rich neighbours of the Arabs who paid protection-money to the 'umma, to the Muslims, in return for military defence and as a sort of standing fine for not having embraced Islam. Hence the almost total laissez-faire of the seventh-century Arabs¹.

There were several reasons for the downfall of the 'Umayyads:

1. They leaned for support mainly on the Syrian Arabs, but they stretched their lines of communication too widely, and their

¹ Brown WLA pp. 194, 196.

defeat and heavy losses at the hands of the Byzantine Emperor Leo the Isaurian in 717 was a heavy blow to their prestige.

2. Two of the last 'Umayyads, Walid II (743-744) and Marwan II (744-750) alienated their Syrian followers, and Marwan went the length of dismantling the fortifications of Damascus, and shifting his capital to Harran in northern Mesopotamia.

3. The Shi'as, who looked back on 'Ali, Hussein, and his brother Hassan (poisoned in 669) as martyrs, resented the 'Umayyad rule as a usurpation; in Mesopotamia and Arabia there was resentment against the domination of the Syrian Arabs. In Persia there was opposition to Arab domination.

Opposition gradually gathered round the Abbasid family, descendants of an uncle of Muhammad, and by skilful propaganda, they succeeded in gaining the backing of both the Shi'as and the Iranians. Using troops mainly from Khurasan, Abu'l Abbas advanced on Mesopotamia, and in 750 Marwan II was defeated and killed.

The Early Abbasid Caliphs, 750-833

Although the Abbasid Caliphs had their internal rebellions to deal with, and their wars with the Byzantine Empire, the first hundred years of their rule was a period of much more settled government than Mesopotamia had known during the previous century. The outstanding Caliphs were Mansur (754-775), al-Mahdi (775-785), Harun-al-Rashid (786-809) and Ma'mun (813-833). Early Abbasid rule had three important characteristics:

1. It was Muslim, rather than Arab. Abu'l Abbas had come to the throne as a result of a partly religious war, flying the black Shi'a flag; and though the rulers soon found

it politic to claim to be Caliphs rather than Imams, and orthodox Sunni Muslims rather than Shi'as, they put a stress on their religious functions in a way that the more worldly and pragmatic 'Umayyids had not done. The Caliph took seriously his title of Amir-u'l Mominin, "Commander of the Faithful"; Islam was more and more stressed as the State Religion; and gradually Muslim lawyers began to work out how the Quran and the Muslim Traditions should be applied to the Muslims and the various religious minorities in an Islamic State.

2. It was centred on Mesopotamia, rather than on Syria. In 762 Mansur began work on a new Capital City, Baghdad. In origin it was a royal palace for the Caliph, surrounded by a circular wall of fortifications, using mostly material from the abandoned Sassanid Capital of Ctesiphon. Mansur completed his work of building in 766, but of course Baghdad continued to grow outside the walls of the fort, and became the splendid Capital City of the Abbasid Empire. For the first time since the fall of the Sassanid Empire, the centre of the Caliphate and the seat of the Patriarch of the Church of the East were side by side.

3. Its support was essentially Persian, and in many ways it was a revived Persian Empire. The Caliph was the "victorious King of Kings", in the imperial splendour of his palace, surrounded by Persian courtiers and imperial administrators (many at first, as under the later Sassanids, Christians) and

the slow-moving ideals of an organised and expensive imperial administration replaced the fearful mobility of the Bedouin armies¹.

¹ Brown, WLA p. 202.

Tritton has thus summed up the change:

As they had been raised to power by the Persians who were devoted to the family of the Prophet, the Abbasid caliphs were Muslims first and then monarchs in the style of the Great King. As Muslims they were exact in their performance of religious duties, and often genuinely interested in religion. As most of their supporters were Persians, the Arabs lost their pride of place, and any Muslim, whatever his race, might hope for success at court. As the antithesis between Arab and non-Arab disappeared, so that between Muslim and non-Muslim sharpened¹.

It is possible, however, to generalise too sweepingly. Persian influence did not have it all its own way. During the first 50 years of Abbasid rule the Persian family of the Barmakides enjoyed great power, and three members of the family, Khalid, Yahya, and Ja'far - father, son, and great-grandson - held successively the new post of Wazir (the "Grand Vizier" of the Arabian Nights):

With the Barmakides, the Wazir becomes in effect the lieutenant of the Sovereign, who delegates to him the most obvious side of his temporal authority. At will he can appoint and dismiss officials; he is entrusted with the distribution of pay, and thus holds in his hands the management of the imperial revenues, the control of the compatibility, recruitment, and direction of the army. Finally, he is in charge of the despatch service, of the correspondence with provincial governors. As the intimate counsellor of the Caliph, he inspires his decisions, and has the greatest initiative on all civil and military questions².

It was Khalid who intervened to assure al-Mahdi's succession in 775; it was Yahya who commanded the forces nominally under Harun which attacked the Byzantine Empire in 780 and 782, and whose influence saved him from death at the hands of his brother Musa al-Hadi in 786 and raised him to the Caliphate. Ja'far was for long Harun's favourite, and boon-companion. In 789, however,

¹ Tritton p. 3. ² Diehl and Marcais, *Monde Oriental* p. 349. Y.

after the death of the Caliph's mother, Harun appointed Fazil son of Rabi', a Syrian Arab, to the post of Wazir, and in 803 he got Ja'far assassinated, and Yahya and his other sons degraded, and their immense property confiscated. This led to rebellion in Khurasan, and Harun died at Tus trying to put it down. Today Harun's citadel at Tus lies a deserted and neglected ruin, less than a mile from the splendid tomb of the poet Firdausi, an indication of the attitude of present-day Iranians to one whom they look upon as an oppressor.

From 809 to 813 there was war between Harun's designated heir, the Arab al-Amin, and his eldest son by a Persian concubine, Ma'mun. Aided by the troops of Khurasan, Ma'mun finally won the day, but he felt it safer to rule from Merv until 819, when he entered Baghdad in triumph.

It was during the Abbasid period that Muslim canon law was codified. Of the four famous canonists, Abu Hanifa died about 767, Malik in 795, as-Shaf'i in 820 and Ibn Hanbal in 855. During the early Abbasid period Muslim tradition, or sunna, remained oral, but in the Ninth Century two great written collections were made by Bukhari (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875). The period was, then, one of consolidation of Islam, and of codification and collection of Islamic laws and traditions, including, as we shall see, laws applicable to the treatment of permitted religious minorities.

Under al-Mahdi and Harun especially, war was pursued vigorously against the Byzantine Empire, which was reduced to paying tribute as the price of peace. There were, however, no significant gains of territory.

The Muslims and the Christians

With the Arab conquest, the Church of the East found its position changed: instead of being a permitted minority in a Zoroastrian State, it became a permitted minority in an Arab, and ultimately in an Islamic State. It is possible that, given another century of Sassanid rule, amid a Zoroastrianism which had lost a great deal of its impetus, Christianity might have emerged as the State Religion. Now, ruled over by a new and much more vigorous Islam, that was not to be. In view of the later decline of Christianity in Asia, we are apt to use hindsight, and take for granted that the status of the Church at once became worse, or that the Christians were immediately conscious of a heavier tyranny. This, however, was emphatically not the case.

For all Zoroaster's high ideals, the State Religion of the Sassanid Empire had seemed to the Christians little better than idolatrous paganism, where the worship due to Ahura-Mazda was obscured by Fire-worship and Sun-worship, and a great place was given to Magian enchantment and astrology. On the other side, Christians by their beliefs and practices had been a source of constant irritation and antagonism to the adherents of the State Religion, and there had been much persecution. Islam, on the other hand, had obviously much more in common with Christianity, at least on the surface, and it is not surprising that the Christians felt their Arab conquerors to be much nearer them in faith than the Magians.

The Muslims believed in One transcendent God, who spoke to men through prophets (one of the greatest of whom was Jesus), acted in

history, called on men to respond to His revelation by personal decision, and would in the end judge the world. They recognised the inspiration of Sacred Books, including the Law, Prophets, Psalms and Gospel of the Christian Bible, and stressed the value of such approved Christian practices as prayer and fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage. They were taught by their Book, the Quran, to look on Christians and Jews, as "people of the Book", as nearer to Muslims than idolaters and pagans, and of the two, Christians nearer to them than Jews.

It must, however, be recognised that even in this early period there were matters which were bound to cause tension and strong difference of opinion between Muslims and Christians.

1. Beliefs. To the Muslim, the worst of all sins was shirk, "associating" someone or something with God, and making it or him a partner in His unique glory and transcendence. To call Christ God was to make Him a partner with God; to call Him Son of God was to attribute a marriage-partner with God; and to worship the Holy Spirit ("Spirit" is feminine in Syriac and Arabic) or to honour Mary the Mother of Christ, was to suggest that the unique God had an equally Divine Partner, as well as an equally Divine Son. The Trinity was misunderstood to mean God, Jesus and Mary. To say that Jesus was crucified and died meant either to suggest that the Almighty God would or could desert one of the greatest of His Prophets in his hour of need, which was unthinkable, or that God who was Jesus died, which was blasphemous and impossible.

Another very sensitive point was the refusal of the Christian to admit that Muhammad was a Prophet, whose coming had been

foretold in the Bible, and whose revealed Book, the Quran, was the final statement of God's will for all men, superseding the teaching of the Gospel.

2. Practices. Islam and Christianity were both religions which used public display, and there was always the danger of clashes when passions were aroused. Church buildings, with their visible crosses, declared publicly that their users were following a Faith other than Islam; festivals and processions stressed the points of Christian belief to which Muslims were most sensitive; even the beating of the wooden board for worship might compete in an unseemly way with the Muslim call to prayer.

To the Muslim it was strange that the Christians did not practise circumcision, that they turned to the east rather than to Mecca when they prayed, and that they practised monogamy and even celibacy. Eating of pork was offensive to all Muslims, and Eastern Christians soon gave it up; drinking of wine was offensive to the stricter Muslims. Christian veneration of saints and martyrs, and bowing to the Cross, seemed to the Muslims akin to idolatry, though the Church of the East, which made no use of crucifixes and images, was less offensive to the Muslims than Syrian and Byzantine Christianity.

3. The State. From the beginning of Arab rule, apostasy from Islam was punishable by death, first for Arab Muslims, and later for all Muslims, when many non-Arabs had embraced Islam. As the Caliphate under the Abbasids became more consciously Muslim and less consciously Arab, the idea was bound to become more and more prevalent

¹ For detailed Muslim objections to Christian faith and practice under the Abbasids, see Appendix D.

that only a Muslim could be a full, loyal patriot. The Christians in Mesopotamia, however, were no longer on the border of a Christian Empire, and identification with the Byzantine Enemy was much rarer than under the Sassanid Shahs, though one incident is recorded under al-Mahdi .

It must however be emphasised that the bitter opposition of Christian to Muslim, and Muslim to Christian, which has so often been characteristic of Mediaeval and Modern Times, was not a feature of this period. It came after the Crusades were to show Christian intolerance at its worst, and those who suffered most as a result were the Eastern Christians. We must not read back such hatred into our period.

B. TWO CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS, c. 625-690

After two or three hundred years of Muslim rule, a Christian historian could look back on the advent of the "Islamic law" as an event to be noted as important:

The Islamic law appeared in the time of Ishu'-yab of Gadala (II, 628-644/6). In the 985th year of Alexander (620-621)...Muhammad son of 'Abdullah...(peace be upon him!) appeared in the land of Tihana, and called the Arabs to the religion of the Most High God. The inhabitants of Yemen obeyed him; those of Mecca opposed him; he then took as his residence Yathrib, the city of Keturah handmaiden of Abraham, and called it the City (Madina). According to their accounts, the Arabs are the descendents of a son of Abraham, whom Hagar had after Ishmael, called Lazarus... In the 18th year of Heraclius (627-628) the Arabs began their conquests, and Islam became strong.¹

But what did it seem like to the Christians who lived through the period of the change-over? In this chapter we shall look at what happened through the eyes of two very different people - the Patriarch Ishu'-yab III and the monk John of Penek - and find out how they reacted to the change of rulers.

1. ISHU'-YAB III AND HIS LETTERS²

Ishu'-yab was the son of a Persian nobleman, a Christian called Bastomag, and was born probably a little before 600. Bastomag's lands were in the village of Kufalana, on the banks of the Greater Zab, on the opposite side from the monastery of Bait 'Abe.

Ishu'-yab entered the monastery as a novice, progressed quite rapidly, and was appointed Bishop of Mosul (that is, Nineveh) before 627. About 637 he was appointed Metropolitan of Arbil.

¹ CS 2;600-01,P.O. 13: 601.Y. ² See Y pp. 316-327, and W.G. Young, The Church of the East in 650 A.D. in Indian Church History Review, Vol 2 (1968) pp. 55-71; also Philip Scott-Moncrieff's Introduction to The Book of Consolations, and Budge T Mar Introduction, pp. lxxvii-xcvii.

both dates

In 647 or 650 (Tisserant considers^A possible; to avoid confusion, we shall accept 650 as the date, without attempting to decide the issue) he became Patriarch of the East, and he died in 657 or 658 (we shall accept 658). His patriarchate, therefore, was quite a short one, but it came at a crucial time, when the Arabs were consolidating their rule in the newly-won provinces of Mesopotamia and Persia, as well as in Syria and Egypt.

105 of Ishu'-yab's letters are extant, edited conveniently in three sections, 52 letters from the period when he was Bishop of Nineveh, 32 letters written as Metropolitan, and 21 written as Patriarch. Their order is more or less chronological, and they cover a period of more than a quarter of a century, from 627 or earlier to 652 or later. In addition, Ishu'-yab wrote the story of the martyrdom of the Metropolitan Ishu-sabran under Khusrau II, to which we have already referred,¹ and prepared a service-book for the monks of Bait-'Abe.

Ishu'-yab as Bishop of Nineveh, c.627-637.

The historical background of Ishu'-yab's letters as Bishop of Nineveh was that of the closing years and death of Khusrau II, during which there was the successful invasion of Mesopotamia by Heraclius, and some persecution of Christians by the Sassanid Emperor; and the opening years of the Arab invasion, possibly including the fall of the Capital in 637. There are echoes of these events in the letters. In Letter 4 he writes:

Add to this trouble also the departure of that leader, lover of the Faith, from this mortal life, when suddenly the arrival took place of that Magian, persecutor of religion, to the sorrow of many, whom he has cast down from their hope. They avoided the danger of suffering, and were a bad example to a great number of weaklings; add to this so much more, which increases the groanings of experienced men about the ruin of the people.²

¹. See p. 123. ². I-Y I, 4, D p. 10. Y.

In Letter 8 also he writes of "the calamities which befell after the death of Yazdin".¹ Ishu'-yab uses a highly ornate, rhetorical style, full of similes and metaphors, and it is difficult to disentangle any facts from the flow or language in this letter. In Letter 9 he writes in a similar vein to a friend about the Byzantine invasion of 627-28:

Seeing that the storm of war has stirred up by its turbulence the sea of the world, and the ships of mankind have been driven by the foam of the waves to the remotest corners of the earth, and those left behind are clinging to the rocks in terror, like the remnant in the days of Noah, it is no wonder that one's mind is involved in a shipwreck of doubt about the fate of the friends who gave one joy. The confusing accounts of messengers sometimes raise us to the crest of the waves, and sometimes dash us down to the depths, and this inconsistency gives us some hope that you are all right, but so far we have had nothing solid to back up what we want to believe. If, Your Chastity, you are like us alive, take the trouble either to write to us or come to see us, so that we can have cause for rejoicing. Perhaps when you hear what has happened to us, the sharing of the comfort we have received will lighten the burden. We have indeed escaped from the fire of the plunderers like a brand from the burning, and give thanks to God for His grace, for He has shown mercy to us in all things. At the same time, we pray that we may be able to welcome you soon with joy. Good keep you from all evil. Amen!²

Letter 15, which must have been written after the worst was over, Khusrau II was dead, and Ishu'-yab II had been appointed Patriarch, tells what actually happened to the Bishop of Nineveh during the Byzantine invasion. There is much empty verbiage in the letter:

This letter is intended by Ishu'-yab to form an apology to the Patriarch because of his flight from his diocese at the time when fierce war was raging between the Greeks and the Persians. The apology is verbose and full of vague explanations which, however, fail to convince the reader of anything except that the Bishop fled from his see just at the time when he was most needed.³

Here is the core of the letter:

Indeed, when many days had passed, and I had set an example by my

1. 1-Y I, 8, D p. 13. Y. 2. I-Y I, 9, D pp. 13-14. Y. We have paraphrased the rhetoric rather freely.
3. S-M p. xlix.

endurance right to the very extremity of necessity, I stayed on in hope. When I left it was because I was compelled to do so, and I left an explanation of what I had done in a letter which was to be presented to Your Paternity in person.¹

The facts were probably quite simple. Nineveh was on the direct line of Byzantine advance.² Ishu'-yab was a rich landowner. If he had been captured, his ransom would have cost him a fortune. He therefore fled to his estates in the hill-country, beyond the reach and interest of the invading forces, and waited there for the storm to blow over!

Thomas of Marga tells us that, while still Bishop of Nineveh, Ishu'-yab accompanied the Patriarch, three metropolitans, and some other bishops on the official peace embassy to Constantinople.³ On the way back, Ishu'-yab managed to steal a casket of relics from a church in Antioch. The account gives an amusing expose of the Bishop's conscience!

Not knowing what to do, he entrusted the matter to God, asking that while he used all human efforts, Christ would protect and defend him in a Divine manner. This actually happened, for he stole it and brought it with him here.⁴

Scott-Moncrief suggests that a bribe helped to ease the way.⁵

Letter 42 tells of a church built by the Jacobites in Mosul by bribing the rulers (possibly now Arabs) and getting help from the people of Tagrit.⁶ Bar-Hebraeus, however, says that Ishu'-yab by bribery prevented the erection of the church!⁷ The contemporary evidence is, of course, Ishu'-yab's.

The Arab invasion must have caused some confusion and disruption of Church life, for Letter 40 tells that two episcopi vagantes, Sham-ishu' and Narsai, themselves consecrated uncanonically, had appointed as bishop of

1. I-Y I, 15, D p. 20. Y.

2. The invaders came down the valley of the Greater Zab from Azarbaijan, and on 12th December 627 defeated Khusrau II close to Nineveh.

3. T Mar II, 4 pp. 123-127. See pp. 119, 124 above. 4. T Mar II, 5 pp. 127-128.

5. S-M p. xi. 6. S-M p. xlix. 7. Bar-Hebraeus EC 3, col. 127-128.

Azarbaijan,

a man whose country they did not know. They did not even know his name, or in what style and condition of life he had been reared, or whether he had a trade or profession in the world, or any position in the Church whatsoever . . . what was far worse, they did not even know if he belonged to the orthodox faith! ¹

Ishu'-yab wants the Patriarch to intervene.

Letter 47 tells of Ishu'yab's sending 1,000 measures of barley to Nisibin to relieve the people in a time of famine, which was perhaps a result of the war.² Letter 48, which presupposes Arab control in Mesopotamia, could not have been written before 637; it suggests that the different brands of Christianity were beginning to claim that the Arabs were on their side - the reference here is to the Jacobites.

If you were to say, inventing false reasons, or if the heretics were to deceive you and say that whatever has happened, has happened by the orders of the Arabs - it is certainly not true. For the Muhammadan Arabs do not help those who consider the omnipotent God to be passible and mortal . . . Let us act, my brothers, in all things with discretion. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."³

Finally, Letter 50 refers to a petition of the people of Arbil that Ishu'-yab should be appointed their Metropolitan, and this was no doubt carried out by the Patriarch without any Muslim interference.⁴

Ishu'yab as Metropolitan of Arbil, c. 637-650.

Ishu'-yab's rule as Metropolitan coincides with what one might call the "mopping-up operations" of the Muslim conquest of the Sassanid Empire, during which the Arabs moved into the hinterland of Persia, and drove Yazdgard further and further into the north-east, until his murder in 651 brought resistance to an end. The impression the letters give us is of a more settled time, and their chief preoccupation is with the defection of Sadhona,

¹ S-M pp. xlvi-xlvii. ² S-M p. li. ³ I-Y I, 48, D pp. 73-74. Y.

⁴ S-M p. liii.

Bishop of Ariwan in Bait-Garma, to the Jacobites. He had been one of the embassy to Constantinople in 630, and a dispute with a Jacobite teacher had persuaded him to embrace that doctrine. On his return he wrote a book to prove his new views correct. Ishu'-yab heard of it, and called him privately. He admitted he had written the book, but seemed convinced of its error, and said that he renounced his Jacobite views. Shortly afterwards it became clear that there was really no change, and Ishu'yab wrote a long letter, and sent men with it to reason with Sadhona. Sadhona publicly tore up sixteen chapters of his book and sent the men back with a letter of thanks to Ishu'-yab, but shortly afterwards he came out openly against the Patriarch, and tried to get the secular authorities to support his case.¹ Only then did Ishu'-yab expel him from the Church of the East. The letter which he wrote to the clergy at Ariwan² ordering them to expel their bishop is characteristic of Ishu'-yab.³ He begins by apologising for his own stupidity in not recognising sooner that Sadhona was incurable in his Jacobitism, and for trying to deal with him quietly and privately, when he should have warned others that he was a heretic. He makes a remark about the state of the world, which suggests that he was an old man looking back on better days:

I was thinking, O my beloved brothers, that now the world has become worn out and very aged, and has already declined, now that the human understanding has also perished, and can no longer discover what is evil.⁴

The attempt of Sadhona to get Muslim support for his opposition to Ishu'-yab did not succeed.

Ishu'-yab as Patriarch of the East, c. 650-658.

Basing his account on 'Amr, Scott-Moncrief thus describes Ishu'-yab's

¹ By this time they would be Arab, or Arab-appointed.

² Ariwan, usually in Bait Garma, may have been under Arbil at the time.

³ See Budge T Mar Introduction pp. lxxxvii-xcv.

⁴ Ibid pp. xc-xci. For further details of the controversy see I-Y II, 6, 7, 28-30.

election as Patriarch.

The Patriarch Mar-amma died, and the fathers met to consider who was to fill his place . . . They assembled in the chamber in which the patriarchs were elected, when it appeared that Ishu'-yab himself was the only candidate for the office whose claims were worthy of consideration, and being in difficulty about the matter they placed the authority for electing the new Patriarch in his hands, and, as we should expect, he elected himself, remarking as he did so: "I do not see among the present company any one who is more fitted for the dignity than myself, or who will administer it for you with greater honour than myself." This was, of course, a very natural result, for the Nestorian Church was greatly indebted to this wealthy man, and it is clear that there was no one present who could afford to maintain the Patriarchate with such splendour as he.¹

We can contrast with this the letter which Ishu'-yab himself wrote after his appointment to his friend Izhaq of Nisibin:

Even in what has happened, in the feeble hope which the people of the Lord have placed upon a weak man like me, my soul faints with sorrow because the hope is so small, and I am troubled with the thought that the Lord's holy people have fallen from such a height to such a depth; but when I think on the ways and vicissitudes of providence, then I acknowledge in memories of small things the grace of God overruling all this . . . Pray again for me that I may spend the rest of my days in a life that will please God.²

The Arab conquest was now virtually completed, and Ishu'-yab had no patience with a colleague who was sorry for what had happened. He writes thus to the Bishop of Shahr-zur:

Indeed, when I had read your letter, bewailing, forsooth, the lost bravery of a dead empire - the thing rushed into your head, if indeed the thing did rush into your head! - I was utterly astounded about two things: because the Magians, whose empire is now dead, stir themselves up against a religion that is always alive; and because you, a religious Head at such a time, did not show immediately and quickly that, now as always, Magianism is dead and powerless and lifeless as far as rising up against true religion is concerned.³

According to Mari, Ishu'-yab was on excellent terms with the Muslim authorities:

Ishu'-yab of Huzzah . . . was appointed Patriarch of the Royal

¹ S-M p. xxi. ² I-Y III, I, D pp. 159-160. Y. ³ I-Y III, 7, D pp. 171-172. Y.

Cities according to the rule. He was an exceedingly notable man, to whom the Rulers of the Districts greatly deferred, to such an extent that one of them gave him a Diploma, in which a warning was given that no one was to make trouble for him in respect of his own monasteries, or See, or revenue, or household immunities - with only a small charge exacted for these things. They asked him each week what he needed; or he asked for whatever could be useful for the affairs of the Christians.¹

How then did this "notable man" rule as Patriarch?

1. Strengthening the Church at the Centre. According to Thomas of Marga, who was in a position to know, Ishu'-yab did three things for the Church at its population centre, the hill-country of northern Mesopotamia: he built a new church at the Monastery of Bait-'Abe, and furnished it richly; he prepared a service-book for the monks and did all he could to improve the standards of worship and singing; and he set up a new monastic school. He wanted to set up the school at Bait-'Abe itself, but the opposition of the local abbot and monks was too strong. They were prepared to leave the monastery rather than "be disturbed by the sound of the chanting of the psalms and the singing of the humns and the services, and by the noise of the schoolboys and the watchmen"²! At first Ishu'-yab tried to reason with them, and use his authority too:

"You need not be angry over a matter that would bring you honour. (Study of the Scriptures and contemplation are both good, and both should have their place, and go together). And moreover, I have the power, . . . because, spiritually, I am Master of all monasteries and convents . . . Therefore, by the word of our Lord, cease from being obstacles to the work."³

But the Patriarch had a dream that convinced him he had been wrong, and he built the school instead across the river in his own native village of Kufalana.

2. Superintending the Eastward Expansion of the Church. In 635 the first

¹ Gismondi MAS, Mari f. 178a, tr. p. 55, Y p. 325. ² See Y p. 313.

³ T Mar 2: 8 pp. 149-150, Y p. 314.

Christian missionary to go to China, Alo-pen, had reached the capital, Ch'ang-an, and in 638 the Emperor T'ai Tsung had decreed Christianity to be a tolerated religion; in 644 the Metropolitan of Merv had evangelised a large number of Turks beyond the Oxus.¹ About 651 Ishu'-yab, writing to the Monks of Qatar, made this statement:

Lo, there are more than twenty bishops and two metropolitans in the East, who have received in the past, and receive in the present, episcopal ordination from the Church of God (i.e. the Patriarch), and none of them have come to us for many years, nor did we ask them to come, but we know that in spite of the long distance that separates them from us they fulfil the obligations of their episcopacy in strict conformity with the Church of God, while the rights of their episcopal jurisdiction are duly received from us. We write to them and they write to us.²

Allowing for the possibility that the rhetorical Patriarch is exaggerating the number of the bishops, the question still rises - what two metropolitans are referred to? Several answers are possible:

a. That of Mingana, that the Metropolitans of Samarqand and Kashghar are meant, both east of the Oxus, both working among the newly evangelised Turks.³ The bishops would be working under them, and also further east, Alo-pen in China would be included. It seems unlikely, however, that there was a Metropolitan in Kashghar before the time of Timothy I.

b. Our own suggestion in 1969 that the Metropolitans of Merv and Harat are meant.⁴ This would fit in with the statement of 'Abd-ishu' that it was Saliba-zakha who created China and Samarqand into metropolitan provinces. Synod attendances, however, tell us that the Bishop of Merv was present in person at synods in 424, 486 and 497, and in 554 two bishops from that province attended; the Bishop of Harat was present at Synods in 424 and 486, and bishops from that province attended in 576 and 585. It is therefore

¹ See above, p. 72. ² I-Y III, 21, D p. 202, Y pp. 23-24.

³ Min 9 p. 74. ⁴ Y p. 23 n. 1.

doubtful whether in 651 the distances to Merv and Harat were considered far enough to excuse personal visits.

c. That the two Metropolitans referred to are those of China and Samarqand. According to Ibn-at-Tayyib, "in the time of Ishu'-yab the Metropolitans of Halwan, Harat, Samarqand, India and China were established."¹ We have seen that Harat was probably established by Ishu'-yab I; and Halwan by Ishu'-yab II, as 'Abd-ishu' specifically states. Were the other three established by Ishu'-yab III? We shall later argue that he set up the first Indian Metropolitan. In 'Amr's list China is given priority of creation over India. If we accept Dr. Foster's translation of the Christian Monument, that the Emperor Kao Tsung (650-683) "raised Alo-pen to the dignity of Metropolitan",² this may well have happened about 650 as official Chinese approval of an appointment by Ishu'-yab III. Against this view is 'Abd-ishu's statement that it was Saliba-zakha who appointed the first Metropolitans for China and Samarqand more than sixty years later. We may perhaps reconcile the two statements by suggesting that Ishu'-yab made the first appointments, but that in the thirty years of weakness at the close of the 7th and opening of the 8th centuries, the offices went into abeyance, and Saliba-zakha restored them.

With some hesitation, then, we may accept the third of the above views as the one that best fits the evidence. If this is what in fact happened, then we see Ishu'-yab III setting up an organised hierarchy in the distant eastern provinces of the Church, and giving it at the same time a reasonable and practical measure of self-government.

¹ See above, p. 65.

² The phrase, translated literally, reads "honoured Alo-pen as Great Spiritual Lord Guardian of the Country". See Foster CTD p. 140 (line 137 and n. 1), and discussion on pp. 62-63.

3. Reorganisation of the Church to the South-East. As we have seen already, the Church of Fars seems to have had its origins independently of the Church in Mesopotamia,¹ and although a Bishop of Fars was included in the lists in 410, it was made a Metropolitan Province of the Church of the East less than a decade later, and recognised Dad-ishu as Head in 424.² Fars had tended to its own way a bit,³ and possibly the troubled times under Khusrau II had given it a chance to drift into semi-independence. At all events, when Ishu'yab became Patriarch, he found himself confronted by a huge sprawling Metropolitan province that was being run as a good money-making business by its Head, Shim'un of Riv-ardushir. As we have seen,⁴ in 650 the province had at least 18 bishops, of whom 9 were in the islands and south shores of the Persian Gulf, and others in Fars, Kerman, India and possibly Sokotra. We shall first summarise the stages in which Ishu'yab III dealt with the rebellion of this province, and then we shall consider particular points relevant to our subject that arise from the letters. Letters 14-21, the last in the third series, are the ones relevant to this problem. They are addressed as follows:

- 14. To Shim'un, Metropolitan of Riv-ardushir.
- 15. To a learned Doctor in Riv-ardushir.
- 16. To the Metropolitan, Bishops, Clergy and Christians of the Province of Fars.
- 17. To the Bishops of Qatar.
- 18 and 19. To the People of Qatar.
- 20 and 21. To the Monks of Qatar.

The order of the letters is more or less chronological, and they probably cover a period of about two years, 650-652.

Letter 14 is the most important, and the most impressive in its style and rhetoric. After conventional greetings, Ishu'yab speaks of a letter of

¹ See p. 32 above. ² See pp. 49 and 70 above.

³ The Synod of Ishu'yab I in 585 had to rebuke and suspend the Metropolitan of Fars and his bishops for deliberate non-attendance.

⁴ See above, p. 62.

good wishes which Shim'un had sent to him on his appointment as Patriarch. It was an attempt to get in the good books of the new Patriarch without giving up anything of his own position of autonomy: "You have sent a letter of greeting" is the gist of the first paragraph, "but you have said nothing about the bad news which I have heard from another source. You write to me as though I was a stupid old man, only (as you think) interested in having a good time." The letter then goes on to say that the Province of Fars was in a terrible state, with apostasy in Oman, schism in Kerman, and general apiritual deadness. The reason for this is clear: the link with the Patriarch, and therefore with the Apostolic succession and its spiritual power, has been broken, and all the Metropolitan is interested in is material wealth and rebellious autonomy. The letter ends with an invitation to the Metropolitan: "Come and see me this summer at Nineveh, or come in the winter to Seleucia."

Letter 15 is a courteous letter to a Doctor in Riv-ardushir, who had evidently been supporting the Metropolitan in some way, but had also written the Patriarch a friendly letter. Ishu'-yab's hope, clearly, was that this learned man would throw the weight of his authority in favour of submission.

The reaction of Shim'un and his bishops, however, was one of open defiance. Shim'un prepared his "declaration of independence", and got the signatures of his bishops to it. He and his followers attempted, apparently in vain, to get the support of the Arab authorities for their schism. Probably Ishu'-yab's own influence with the Muslim authorities was used to frustrate this attempt. The next steps he took can be described briefly:

1. He wrote a second letter to Shim'un, addressing it also to all his clergy and people, appealing to them to change their attitude, and

warning them that he would proceed against them if necessary (Letter 16). He sent the Bishops of Hurmizd-ardushir and Shuster to them with the letter, to try persuasion. They failed.

2. He summoned a Synod at the Royal Cities and deposed the Metropolitan and bishops,¹ but he asked for the sentence to be suspended and sent fresh delegations to Fars and Qatar. Letter 17 was sent to Qatar with the delegation, appealing to the bishops there to submit. Both delegations were treated badly, and returned empty-handed.

3. He wrote to the people of Qatar and the Islands of the Persian Gulf, appealing to them to elect new bishops, and send them to him for ordination (Letter 18).

4. In a second letter to the people of Qatar, he complains that the monks of Qatar, who were loyal to the Patriarch, were being oppressed and excommunicated by the local Christian authorities, and the people were doing nothing to stop them (Letter 19).

5. It is clear that Ishu'-yab looked on the monks of Qatar as his allies. They had come to him at the time of his accession, and recognised his authority. George, Metropolitan of Parat Maishan, who had been one of the delegation sent to Qatar, had brought back news of their steadfastness. Ishu'-yab now wrote a letter to them (20) in which he enclosed copies of Letters 14, 16, 17 and 18, obviously hoping that he would find the monks good propagandists, and that they would be able to present a true account of what he was trying to do.

6. The final letter (21) is again addressed to the monks of Qatar. Under the stress of persecution by their bishops, they had written to the

¹ The record of this Synod has not been preserved in the Synodicon Orientale.

Patriarch pleading for permission to compromise. The gist of his reply is that he would have had no objection if the clergy of Qatar had been validly ordained, but the monks are not to associate with schismatics to the peril of their own souls. If the people of Qatar were not even more stupid than the people of Fars, they would imitate them, and ordain their own bishops! But they say that getting the Metropolitan of Fars to ordain them is an old-established custom! Therefore the monks must separate themselves from their communion as they would from heretics and apostates.

7. The evidence of the letters breaks off at this point, but Mari continues the story:

Ishu'-yab was the first to take the initiative and go on a journey to put right the affairs of Shim'un, Metropolitan of Fars, and bring him under his authority; indeed the Metropolitans of Fars who had gone before had never subjected themselves to the authority of the Patriarch of the East.¹

Having failed by letter, Ishu'-yab went in person, and probably had the full support of the Arab authorities, as was his civil right under the Farman of Yazdgard I of 410. The settlement almost certainly included a splitting up of the Province of Fars into three, and the creation of two new Metropolitans, one for India, and one for Qatar.²

The following matters require further consideration: apostasy in Oman; schism in Kerman; appeal to Muslim authorities; Ishu'-yab's claim of Apostolic authority; the creation of two new Metropolitans.

a. The Apostasy in Oman. The opening of the argument in Letter 14 is worth quoting in full, as an example of Ishu'-yab's polished, balanced rhetorical style. It speaks of both Oman (Mazon) and Kerman, and follows a chiasmic pattern of ab a b a:

¹ Gismondi MAS, Mari f. 178a, tr. p. 55, Y p. 326. The final sentence is too sweeping.

² The above summary of steps has been taken almost verbatim from our article in ICHR 2, pp. 64, 69-71.

Where are your sons, O father forsaken? Where are your sanctuaries, O priest cast out? Where is the vast population of Mazon? They have not been compelled by sword, or fire, or torments, but merely seized with a desire for half of their possessions! Mad! - for apostasy has straightway swallowed them up, and they are destroyed for ever, while two "smouldering stumps of firebrands" only, so-called priests, have escaped from the flame of impiety and have been brought to naught. Alas! alas! From so many thousands of men called Christians, not one least offering is made to God as fitting sacrifice for our true Faith!

Where, too, are the sanctuaries of Kerman, and of all Fars? They did not wait to be attacked, or for State pressure to change their Faith, but were misled and overthrown by an upstart impostor.

This very man who led you astray, and turned your churches upside down, had appeared first among us in the region of Radan, where there are more pagans than Christians, but yet, because the life of the Christians shone so brightly, he has not even misled the very pagans, but he was driven away from here in disgrace. Not only did he fail to overthrow churches; he himself was overthrown instead! This less-than-a-nobody your Province of Fars has received, and he himself has rendered them as he would - the pagans in agreement, and the Christians silent and acquiescing.

Nevertheless these very Arabs, to whom God has granted the rule of the lands at this time, lo! they are in our part of the country, as you know; but they not only refrain from attacking our religion. They even commend our Faith, honour the priests and saints of our God, and confer benefits on churches and monasteries!

Why, then, have your people of Mazon given up their Faith because of them? And that when the Arabs, as the people of Mazon themselves admit, did not compel them to give up their religion, but ordered them to give up merely half of their possessions in order to keep their Faith! But they have forsaken the Faith that brings eternal benefit, to keep half the possessions of this transient age. A Faith, which all peoples have purchased and purchase still by shedding their life-blood, and by which they obtain the inheritance of eternal life, your people of Mazon would not purchase for half of their possessions!'

Ishu'-yab refers to the loss of Mazon again and again: he feels it deeply.

One other reference is worth noting:

Indeed the faith of the Christians there was not what it ought to

' I-Y III, 14, D pp. 179-182, Y pp. 317-318.

be. By a small puff of southern heat it has been sadly set on fire, and has been given over to everlasting perdition, while no Christian tribe there offers to Almighty God the customary sacrifices by testimony of blood; and out of the thousands and tens of thousands who belong to our God, two "smouldering stumps of firebrands", who keep the empty title of bishops, simply sit idly by - sad objects, memorials now to move the Church of God to tears.'

Even if we allow for some exaggeration - for Ishu'-yab is arguing the spiritual barrenness of the Province of Fars - there must have been hundreds of Christians in Oman who went over to Islam. Is it credible that the Arab conquerors in this case demanded half their goods? Yes, it is quite credible. Tritton quotes Baladhuri, a Muslim writer, as saying that some of the people of Bahrein made peace with the Arabs, promising to pay half their dates and corn, and in addition every adult male in Bahrein paid one dinar.² They accepted the terms; many in Oman preferred to become Muslims. Many such ad hoc agreements were made during the first years of the Arab invasions; they are not to be confused with the regular jizya later levied annually.³

Ishu'-yab is under no illusions about the seriousness of apostasy, even to Muslim monotheism - its result is "everlasting perdition". He attributes the apostasy to lack of connection with the Apostolic succession, as we shall see; the evidence of the letters, however, is one of neglect, due to the fact that ecclesiastical offices were bought and sold. The bishops of Oman saved their own skins, and gave no proper lead to their people. The apostasy was the beginning of the end of the Church south of the Persian Gulf. In addition to Qatar, 8 other sees in the Persian Gulf are mentioned in the Synod records; Ishu'-yab mentions 6 in his letters, including Oman; but in George I's Synod of 676, held at Diren, only 4 bishops attend, and by Timothy's time a century later there are none left. This was a serious loss.

¹ I-Y III, 18, D pp. 190-191, Y p. 318. ² Tritton p. 203.

³ Tritton, Ch. XIII, especially pp. 203-213.

Historians have tended to overlook this important evidence of loss, and concentrate their attention on the statement that the Arabs "not only refrain from attacking our religion. They even commend our Faith, honour the priests and saints of our God, and confer benefits on churches and monasteries!" Again allowing for the exaggeration of a man arguing a case, they give the impression that Ishu'-yab had weathered the storm of a changed government well, and established satisfactory relations for the Christian millat with the Arab state. They are important contemporary evidence, and bear out the essential trustworthiness of Mari's account of the Patriarch's position. The wealthy Ishu'-yab had done his best to establish good relations with the Muslims at the centre, but he was forced to cut his losses in northern Arabia.

b. The Schism in Kerman. The details of this are obscure, as Ishu'-yab only mentions it in Letter 14. It involved the loss of "sanctuaries", and was led by an upstart "less-than-a-nobody", who had previously failed to succeed in Radan. It is not clear whether he was a Jacobite, or a Manichaeian, or a Messalian, or just a schismatic. The result of his work was clearly to weaken the Church, always probably rather thin on the ground, in Kerman, which lies between Fars and Baluchistan.

c. Appeal to the Muslim Authorities. It is clear from two letters that when Shim'un and his bishops signed their "declaration of independence" of the Patriarch, they tried to get support from both local and central Arab rulers:

You took the statement of your rebellion to the tribunal of the secular Princes, and you did all this, in order to cut yourselves off completely from the hope of Church life.'

Your so-called bishops . . . have aimed to show off their

rebellion to the earthly rulers, and even to the Great Prince (the Caliph), the Chief of the Princes of this time. This is to behave contrary to the government of the Church of God, and they have in reality been despised by the Princes, just as their rebellion deserved to be.¹

There was, therefore, no question here of an Arab policy of "divide and rule".

As Head of the Christian millat, the Patriarch received the support of the Arab rulers.

d. Ishu'-yab's claim of Apostolic Authority. Ishu'-yab wrote as one who was conscious of holding supreme spiritual authority over the Church of the East, and expected it to be recognised. To be disobedient to the Patriarch was to abjure the Christian religion, to deny the Faith, to revolt against God. To take a quarrel to a secular tribunal was to cut yourself off completely from the hope of Church life. The Patriarch held a very mechanical view of Apostolic succession, and the passage of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands:

The perfect life of the Christians is proved by two indications: by a holy life, and by Divine miracles which they can perform; and above all by this, that they match a faithful life with a faithful death. They wondrously achieve these three things, because they first received the power of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism. But the Spirit Himself is rightly and justly conferred by the laying-on of hands and the Apostolic succession, which is imparted canonically in the Holy Church of Christ our Lord.²

Just as the Christians living among you cannot be Christians without priests, and your priests cannot be priests without bishops, so your bishops cannot be bishops without metropolitans, and so again metropolitans cannot be metropolitans without the Patriarch.³

The source of Christianity is the priestly power; but the priestly power is transmitted by the canonical laying-on of hands. But if the laying-on of hands is done illegally, the priestly power never flows with it by transmission from higher to lower, as (it has flowed) from Heaven upon the Apostles, and from the Apostles to their successors, until the end of the world.⁴

These are claims of absolute spiritual authority and complete spiritual

¹ I-Y III, 18, D p. 192, Y p. 321. ² I-Y III, 21, D p. 201, Y p. 322.

³ I-Y III, 21, D p. 203, Y p. 322. ⁴ I-Y III, 14, D pp. 180-181, Y p. 323.

autonomy.

e. The Creation of Two New Metropolitans. It seems clear that Ishu'-yab created two new metropolitans, one of India and one of Qatar, and left the Metropolitan of Fars with only the country north of the Persian Gulf. In his Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, published in 1925, Mingana put forward the suggestion that the first Metropolitan of India was appointed by Ishu'-yab II,¹ and in his Early Spread of Christianity in India, published the following year, he treated this suggestion as though it was a conclusion that could be taken for granted.² Historians since have frequently followed Mingana in this assumption. To us it seems clear that the references to India in Ishu'-yab's letters only make sense if it was part of the Province of Fars when they were written. He writes as follows:

Remember this also, holy Brother, that as you closed the door of episcopal ordination in the face of the many peoples of India, and impeded the gift of God for the sake of perishable gains which feed bodily desire, so also did our predecessors close in the face of your spiritual need the door of the gift of God³- and how hopeless the situation is among you, perhaps you might be able to know! . . . As far as your Province is concerned, since your revolt against ecclesiastical canons, the priestly succession has been broken for the people of India. In darkness, far from the light of the Gospel, which is through the true episcopate, dwells not only India, which extends from the borders of the Persian Empire to the place they call Qalah,⁴ which is a distance of 1200 parasangs (4,000 miles), but also even your own region of Fars.⁵

In a later letter there is a clear reference to Shim'un's moneymaking at the expense of India, which would be nonsense if India was outside his province:

From your accustomed wrong-headedness ingrained in you, you believe that whoever places himself under the Head of the Church

¹ Min 9, p. 74, n. 3. ² Min 10, p. 496.

³ Possibly Ishu'-yab II and Maran-amma had refused to "perfect" (see above p. 49) the simonaical Metropolitans of Fars, and they had carried on without this official blessing.

⁴ Possibly Galle in Ceylon, though some have suggested a place in Malaya. But "1200 parasangs" may be a rhetorical exaggeration.

⁵ I-Y III, 14, D pp. 181-182, Y p. 319.

does so, not to receive spiritual grace, but to pay material tribute! And this you yourselves have been accustomed impiously to exact from one another, and from the remotest peoples of India!¹

When then was the first Metropolitan of India appointed? We are told by Ibn-at-Tayyib that it was Ishu'-Yab who created the new Province - can he mean Ishu'-Yab III? In 'Amr's list, India follows China, and is followed by "Fatarba" which as we have seen² is a scribal error for Qatarba. About Qatar, it is both clear from Ishu'-Yab's letters that it was under Fars at that time, and from the records of the Synod of George at Diren³ that by 676 it had a separate Metropolitan. The evidence points clearly to the creation of both new Metropolitans by Ishu'-Yab III after he had brought Shim'un to submission. It did not mean an extension of the Church; it was intended to lead to its more effective government.

The letters of Ishu'-Yab III, then, give us a contemporary picture of what it was like to live through the eventful years that began with the Byzantine invasion and Khusrau's persecution of the Christians, went on to the Arab invasion and conquest of Mesopotamia and Persia, and ended with the Muslim rule firmly established. Though he was by no means a wholly admirable man, Ishu'-Yab managed to weather a troubled age, and proved a capable and masterful Patriarch. He did much to revive Church life in northern Mesopotamia, and was probably responsible for the reorganisation of the Church in the distant regions by the appointment of Metropolitans of China, Samarqand, India and Qatar. He seems to have been on good terms with the Arab rulers, and looked on their conquest as a judgment of God on the deadness

¹ I-Y III, 16, D p. 186, Y p. 320. ² See p. 68 above.

³ Chabot SO pp. 480-490.

of the Magian religion. In spite of the serious loss of Christians to Islam in Oman, which was to lead to the permanent loss of the Arabian coast south of the Persian Gulf, the Church under his leadership moved with confidence into a new era.

2. JOHN OF PENEK AND HIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

Almost contemporary with Ishu'-Yab III, but in very different circumstances, was John of Penek. He was a monk of Penek, a place on the banks of the Tigris near Jezira, not far from the borders of Mesopotamia and Syria. He seems to have lived in at least the latter years of Khusrau II, and the narrative of his historical survey brings us up to 687 or 688, so we may put his dates as about 610 to 690. Like Ishu'-Yab, he lived through the change-over to Arab rule, but more than that, the change-over to 'Umayyad rule, and its first three decades. It is of this last period that he speaks most vividly. His historical survey is in two parts, the first of which goes from the Creation to Christ, and the second from the life of Christ to the events of the seventh century. John sees himself as a second Jeremiah, a prophet of the last days, who has to justify God's ways of judgment to men, and call on them to repent while there is yet time. He clearly lived in troublous days, and it is his considered opinion that all the troubles - whether of bloodshed or famine or pestilence - point to the fact that God is judging His people for their sins, and the end of the world will not be long delayed.

²Mingana has provided a French translation of the last chapter of the second part of the survey, which deals with the period from 628 to 687/88, and it is this that concerns us here.

¹Syriac text of Part 2 in Mingana, *Sources Syriacques*, Vol. 1, pp. #1 - #71.

²Mingana SS 1, pp. #172-#197, hereafter referred to as JP.

We shall begin by summarising the argument of the chapter, and then give some quotations and comments.

In the Roman Empire, peace in the land led to vice in the Church, and to scandal, bribery, and struggles for power among its leaders. Under the Magians, the Church of the East was not so bad, but although there were eclipses to warn the faithful, monophysitism got some hold. The Arab invasion was God's punishment on the Eastern Christians, while the civil war between 'Ali's sons and Mu'awiya was God's punishment on the Arabs.

Mu'awiya established peace, and protected the Christians in return for tribute. The Monophysites benefited from his protection, and gained control of the Church in Syria. But the Church of the East, which kept the true faith, departed from the good works that should be the mark of Christians. The bishops ruled with force and severity, proud and ambitious; the priests and deacons filled their bellies and neglected their duties; the rulers¹ were gluttons, sucking the blood of the poor; the judges were corrupt, bad-tempered and evil; the common people were grasping and covetous, dabblers in sorcery and no better than pagans or Jews, "and I also was one of your number, and perhaps worse than you". Besides this, there was every kind of irreverence and impurity. God had given peace for his people's benefit, but they misused it. God sent various afflictions and signs, but they paid no attention.

For this reason, God stirred up civil war after the death of Mu'awiya, in which the "Easterns" fought a ding-dong struggle with the "Westerns". The Church suffered, because of John (the Leper) whose support was bought by one of the contestants by the promise of the Patriarchate. All this civil war

¹ Possibly Heads of monasteries, but more probably Christians in positions of secular authority.

was God's punishment on men. It was followed by a terrible plague, in which Christians were so afraid of infection that they left their dead unburied, and this was followed by a terrible famine (described in words largely drawn from the Book of Lamentations). "Jeremiah wept for his people; we have to weep for the whole world." But there is still more judgment to come.

The end is surely near. All that remains is for Antichrist to come. John believes that the Arabs too will be destroyed. This will be followed by another ill, "hidden like poison in honey", and then the Kingdom of the Lord will come! He is the Ruler of all things. The world will be renewed, what is sown of good will come to fruition, and the Church of the East will recover the glory of its past. This is the beginning; perhaps the reader will live to see the end of all these things!

It is difficult to know how literally to take some of this account, because again and again the words used are those of the Bible, in which John is clearly steeped. The horrors of the famine, with women eating their children and so on, are so clearly borrowed from Lamentations that it is difficult to say whether they are meant to be pressed literally. We can, however, say that John lived in a time of turbulence, civil war, and distress, in which it was not easy for the ordinary Christian on these border-lands between Mesopotamia and Syria to settle down and have a quiet life.

It is also not certain how far we should accept literally John's strictures on the Christians of his day. Many of the sins of which they are accused are clearly quoted from the Old Testament prophetic books, and

it is possible that he was apt to look on the dark side of things too much. Like many older people, he looked back on the better days of the past, and condemned the present. He also had to justify to his readers the apparent severity of God in His treatment of His Church.

Bearing these things in mind, let us look at some of the details of what John has to tell us - both of his point of view, and of the historical events of his time. We shall take them in the order of the chapter, which is chronological.

1. Looking back on a rosy past.

(In the Roman Empire) as soon as peace was established and Christian Kings had taken up the reins of Roman government, vice and scandal entered the Church, and synods and sects multiplied, for every year someone invented a new creed. The security of peace led to many evils. Lovers of glory did not cease to stir up troubles, but by bribes they got the agreement of the Kings, with whom they played like little children. All that happened under the Romans.

As far as the Church of the Persians was concerned, since it was under the rule of the Magians, it was not carried away towards any other object. Although there might be some scandals, they were not allowed to develop, for from the very start the Lord checked them. This, then, was the state of affairs from the time of the Apostles up to the rein of this last Khusrau.¹

Two things are worth noting here: John, living in troublous times, looks back on the time of Persian rule as almost a golden age, and seems to have no memory of the persecution under Khusrau II - perhaps that persecution did not affect the common people much! Note also the contrast, later to be stated more pointedly by Timothy I,² between living in a non-Christian state which did not interfere with your creed, and living under a Christian Emperor who might define your creed for you - the fact that Khusrau

¹ JP pp. *173-*174.Y ² See Chapter VII, pp. 212-213 below.

favoured the Jacobites is conveniently forgotten!

2. The Arab invasion up to Mu'awiya.

Because God saw that there was no more amendment (in the spread of Monophysitism), he called against us a barbaric kingdom, a people who do not know how to listen to entreaties, who know no compromise, and **disdain** flatteries and underhand methods. They loved to shed blood without reason, and their pleasure was to pillage everything; their passion was raids and taking prisoners, and their food hatred and anger; they were never appeased by what was offered them. When they had prospered and done the will of Him who had sent them, when they had conquered all the kingdoms of the earth, rigorously subjected all the peoples and brought their sons and daughters into a bitter slavery, had taken vengeance in them on the disgrace to God the Word,¹ and the blood of the martyrs of Christ shed without their fault, then our Lord was satisfied, made His decision and agreed to be gracious to His people.

Then the Lord, to punish the sons of Hagar for the ravages which they had done, gave them two leaders from the beginning of their kingdom and divided them into two pieces, so that we might understand our Saviour's word. They were united until they had subjected all the world, but hardly had it been pacified and in peace from war, than they fought one another. Those of the East said: we are due the superiority, and the King must be chosen from among us; those of the West contradicted them and said they had this right. As a result of this quarrel, they went to arms. When they had cleared the matter up . . . the victory went to the Westerns, called 'Umayyads, and that after a big carnage between them.

One of them, named Mu'awiya, took the reins of government of both empires, Persian and Roman. Under his rule, justice flourished, and a great peace was established in the countries which came under his jurisdiction, and everyone could do as he liked. The Arabs had received, as I said earlier, an order from their Chief (Muhammad) in favour of the Christians and monks. Like us, they learned from him to worship one God, according to the customs of the ancient law. At first, they were so bound to the tradition of Muhammad who was their Chief, that they inflicted the death penalty on whoever seemed to be disobeying his commandments. Their armies went every year to far countries and islands, raiding and capturing all the peoples under the sun. From every man they asked only tribute, and left him at liberty to embrace whatever faith he liked; there were Christians also among them,² some of them heretics, and some belonging to us. As long as Mu'awiya reigned, there was such a great peace in the world that there was never anything like it.³

¹ i.e. of suggesting, as the Jacobites were alleged to do, that God the Word could suffer and die.

² i.e. there were Christian Arabs. ³ JP pp. *f74--*175 Y

This is a vivid contemporary picture of what the Arab conquerors looked like to the people they conquered. It confirms the view that in the first years of invasion there was barbarity and intolerance, but that when the dust had settled down, the Christians were accepted as a religion permitted by the rulers, on condition that they paid tribute. Probably the reign of Mu'awiya (660-680) was not such a golden age as John paints it, but in comparison with the troubles of the decade following, it seemed so.

3. The Church involved in troublous times.

On pp.*182*186 there is an account of the confused struggles of 680-687. As we have seen (above pages 128-129) there was in fact a three-cornered struggle between 'Abd-al Malik, 'Abdullah, and Mukhtar, but John speaks only of "Easterns" and Westerns", and as a result his account is rather confusing. The border-land between Mesopotamia and Syria, where John of Penek lived, was the scene of many battles. Nisibin, in particular, was a disputed town. In one battle on a tributary of the Zab, the Western general 'Abd-ul Rahman (son of Ziyad, brother of the murdered Obaid-ullah) was defeated by Mukhtar. Mukhtar's army was composed among others of the freed slaves of the men of Kufa, and these took control of Nisibin. Angered at this, the men of Kufa fought against Mukhtar, and finally succeeded in killing him.

What is relevant to us, apart from the general anarchy of the time, is that John "the Leper", claimant to the Patriarchate of the East, was involved. 'Abd-ul Rahman had promised him the office in return for his support (and doubtless that of his people) for the Westerns, and when they were defeated, he shared in the defeat.

(The son of Ziyad)¹ therefore armed very proudly and marched to

¹ The subject of the sentence is not clear, but the context demands that it should be 'Abd'ul Rahman son of Ziyad.

battle against¹ the men of Kufa. He took with him John, who was at that time Bishop of Nisibin. For long George, Patriarch of the Church of Christ, had passed into glory, and the Patriarchal See had been occupied by Mar Hanan-ishu' the Expositor. Therefore this son of Ziyad had promised John: "If you come with me, I shall depose Mar Hanan-ishu' and establish you in his place in the patriarchate." So John believed for long that the victory would be his.²

Instead, the Westerns were defeated.

He who had intrigued for the Patriarchate had difficulty in saving his own cloak!³

It seems clear, however, that Hanan-ishu', being resident in the Cities, was in a difficult position, and identified himself with the de facto rulers of Mesopotamia. Appointed in 685 or 686, possibly by Mukhtar, he was according to Mari accused in 691 before 'Abd-al Malik's son of having sided with Mukhtar and Mush'ad (Mus'ab, 'Abdullah's brother?). John "the Leper" his accuser this time succeeded in winning the patriarchal insignia, which he held till his death in 692/693. In such a ding-dong struggle for power, it was of course very difficult for a State Official like the Patriarch to remain neutral, as Ishu'yab I had found to his cost,⁴ and there was always the risk of being on the losing side.

4. The State of the common people.

After the war came plague and famine:

People did not even bury those whom the plague mowed down, but like pagans, abandoned them and fled . . . After escaping the plague, we were pursued by famine, and all we had left was plundered by looters . . .

The poor perish of hunger, the orphans and the widows die of thirst, the convents and monasteries have been destroyed, the monks wander in all directions, and the saints go away to other lands, . . . and the rich (think only of what they can make out of it). Therefore the prophet Jeremiah says: "You shall be punished even more than this."

¹ Mingana's emendation "in alliance with" is unnecessary. ² JP p.*184.Y

³ JP p.*185.Y ⁴ See pp. 118-119 above.

Look at those who are at the top, and come down to me, the least of all, begin with the priests and finish with the people, look at the monks and consider carefully the different members of society - can you see one man who keeps to his station? Can you see one man who follows his right way? Alas! we all walk in darkness.¹

5. A look at the future.

John's speculation is interesting:

The arrival of the freed slaves, of whom I have spoken, and their victory (at Nisibin) are the work of God, and I believe that they will be a cause of destruction of the Ishmaelites . . . After that, there will be another evil, hidden in the good, like a mortal poison in honey. Stop! For here begins the Kingdom of the Saviour. We began with Him, we shall end with Him . . . He will renew the earth a second time, not ex nihilo, as He did in creation, but to bring to fruition what had been sown in it.²

These are of course the words of an apocalypticist escaping from the grimness of the present. But are they more? The "freed slaves" were, in fact, one of the elements on which the Abbasids later leaned in their overthrow of the 'Umayyids. Either John had something of a gift of second sight, or the prophecy is a later insertion. We are inclined to the view that the words are John's.

The evidence of John of Penek supplements and corroborates that of Ishu'Yab III. It shows that the Arab rulers, in spite of initial excesses, soon settled down to acceptance of the Christians as a permitted minority religious group. Living on the border between two Muslim-held areas could be just as inconvenient for the Christians as living on the border between the Persian and Roman Empires, and they were subject to pressures and temptations, especially if they were ambitious. The period from 680 onwards is painted in colours of desolation and conflict, but this was shared with the non-

¹ JP pp.*187,*189,*191.Y ² JP pp.*194,*195.Y

Christians in the area; there was no question of religious persecution involved. Arabs might rule well or ill; for John it was a question of such changes of rulers as God might will, not of Christians being in a worse state because Arabs were Muslims, though like many old men he looked back nostalgically on the past, and hoped that a brighter future would make up for the bleakness of the present.

CHAPTER VII

UNDER THE EARLY CALIPHS

650 - 820

1195
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In this chapter we shall first consider in detail the evidence of Thomas of Marga's Book of Governors (c. 840), and the Patriarch Timothy I's Letters (c. 780-804), paying special attention to what they have to tell us about Church-State relations and the missionary outreach of the Church during the period 780-820. Finally we shall go on much more briefly to consider other miscellaneous evidence: evidence of conversions from Islam to Christianity; the rather bald accounts of the chroniclers Mari, and 'Amr-Saliba; facts relevant to our study gleaned from the modern works of Tritton and Browne; and finally the evidence from Chinese sources about Christianity in China up to 820, as far as it sheds light on the state of the Church of the East and its missionary vitality.

A. THOMAS BISHOP OF MARGA'S "BOOK OF GOVERNORS"

Some reference has already been made to Thomas of Marga, and the light he sheds on the reign of Khusrau II and the Patriarch Ishu'-yab III, but we must take a closer look now at him and his book, as they form one of the most important links in the chain of evidence for the state of the Church of the East under the early Caliphate.

Thomas and his Book

Thomas was born in Bait Sharonai (Shirwan) in the diocese of Salakh in Hedayab,¹ on the borders of Azarbaijan, round about 800. His father Yaqub was possibly a well-to-do Persian Christian. In 832 he entered the monastery of Bait 'Abe as a monk:

I came to this holy monastery when I was a young man, in the 217th year of the era of the dominion of the Arabs.²

I was a contemporary (of the Abbot Yusuf II). I have been blessed by that God-worthy old man, for he departed from affairs of this mortal life . . . in the first year of my coming to this holy monastery.³

As Yusuf II is the last abbot whose life he describes, it is not certain whether Thomas stayed at Bait 'Abe much longer, or whether, as Wallis Budge suggests, Joseph had no successor as abbot.⁴ Thomas gives us three contrasted pictures of his life there. One is of his work as a novice:

When I lived in the service of the monastery I used to pasture a few cattle which we had in the woods in the valley near the cemetery.⁵

Another is of his flight when Kurdish thieves attacked the monastery:

At that time when I was his contemporary the thievish Kartaw Kurds came against us in great numbers, and they spoiled and seized all the monastery, and they went into all the cells, and took everything which they found. . . We had all taken refuge in

¹ T Mar I, 32, p. 240. ² T. Mar I, 40, p. 266. ³ T Mar V, 17, p. 561.

⁴ Budge, T Mar Introduction p. cxvii. ⁵ T Mar V, 17, p. 566.

flight.¹

A third is of the eagerness with which he made enquiries about the glorious past of the monastery:

I used to listen to the histories of certain of the holy men, and by reason of the fervour which burned in me I used to make enquiries concerning them, and to learn about each one of them from the old men who were found here.²

It was perhaps when he was a monk there, but more probably later, that he visited the caves where various confessors had taken refuge during persecution.

Once, when the sense of what was right urged me to go round about and pray in the caves where they had lived, I went into them with great reverence, and I understood the affliction and tribulation of their lives, to which the very places where they lived testify.³

We next find him, in or after 837, at the court in Baghdad of the Patriarch Abraham, who had like him been a monk of Bait 'Abe, along with another monk called Eustathius:

He and I were deacons of the Catholicos in the Royal City.⁴

I was secretary to Mar Abraham.⁵

In the days of my youth I was copying letters before the Patriarchal throne of Mar Abraham.⁶

Shortly afterwards he was appointed Bishop of Marga, back in his native Hedayab, and it was probably in this capacity that he took an interest in the restoration of church music in his old monastery, which had fallen on evil days:

I was a spectator, and was in the midst of the whole matter, being a neighbour, and one who gave encouraging advice . . . At one time the monastery was obliged to hire . . . Solomon of Bait Garma . . . to teach all the brethren who needed it how to read the service-books, and how to sing the hymns and responses; . . . and also to bring . . . Ba'uth to our monastery for the same purpose.⁷

¹ T Mar V, 17 p. 563. ² T Mar I, 40, p. 266. ³ T Mar VI, 1 p. 560.

⁴ T Mar V, 12 p. 522. ⁵ T Mar IV, 20 p. 448 and IV, 25 p. 462.

⁶ T Mar I, 31 p. 103. ⁷ T Mar IV, 20 pp. 446-447.

It was as Bishop of Marga that he wrote his Book of Governors, probably about 840 or shortly after. Abraham promoted him, sometime before 850, to be Metropolitan of Bait Garma, and the last we hear of him is that he was present in 852 at his brother Theodosius's consecration.

The Book of Governors consists of a series of pious biographies of the "rulers" or Abbots of the Monastery of Bait 'Abe from about 595 to 832. In addition, there are accounts of other distinguished leaders connected with the monastery in some way. Books I to V are arranged in a kind of chronological order, but only three dates are given in the whole book, and it is not easy to be certain about the others, except within wide limits. Many of the "rulers" of the monastery went on to be bishops, metropolitans or even patriarchs, and the book follows the fortunes of one such "ruler" to his death, and then comes back to his successor, possibly a backward jump of as much as thirty or forty years. There are, however, many references to Patriarchs, and this again and again helps to give an approximate dating.

While there is much conventional hagiography in these chapters, and stories of incredible miracles of healing and effective cursing, not so incredible second sight, and so on, Thomas is not to be dismissed as a mere story-teller. If we had only Book VI of his work to go on, that might well be our verdict, for in it the marvellous is almost undiluted. In Books I to V, however, Thomas is only willing to record what he has heard or read, and he refuses to invent mighty works just because he is writing about some holy man,¹ and when he is told that one of his holy men, Elijah of Moqan, had called a pagan god a "son of a b----", he faithfully

¹ T Mar V, 7 p. 491.

sets it down, with some embarrassment, quoting his authority! Of his method of compilation he writes:

The things concerning holy men which my narrative recounts are not vain imaginations of my own, for I have collected the materials for them from the things which have been said concerning them in living speech, and from the written statements which I have found concerning them in the histories and traditions of others.²

Regarding the date, about 595, when the first Abbot, Yaquub, came to Bait 'Abe, he relies on two authorities and compares them:

In the fifth year, then, of Khusrau, according to what is written by the holy Rabban Ishu'-zakha, who lived in the days of the last Mar Ishu'-Yab (III, 650-658) . . . the coming of Rabban Jacob to this monastery took place. And having carefully investigated the matter of the date, I myself have found in the History of the Rabban Mar 'Idta (a contemporary of Jacob) that the time of his coming was exactly according to the word of the holy Rabban Ishu'-zakha.³

Again and again he names his authority, or authorities:

I affirm and bear witness, as before God, that I learned this from Narsai the Elder, who was surnamed Dad-ishu', from the village of 'Ain Barqi, and also from an Elder who belonged to the monastery of Bait Hizqiel.⁴

Wallis Budge notes also the faithfulness with which he records incidents that are discreditable and even disgraceful.⁵ It must also be remembered that as Secretary to the Patriarch, Thomas had access to important documents, including letters of Timothy I which are now lost.

Even, therefore, if we discount the tales of the marvellous, or the descriptions of extremes of asceticism, there remains a solid substratum of history in the book, history that rings true and presents us with a consistent and credible picture of an area of the Church of the East in the first century and a half of Muslim rule.

¹ T Mar V, 11 p. 511.

² T Mar I, 2 p. 23. ³ T Mar I, 23 pp. 79-80. ⁴ T Mar I, 31, p. 103.

⁵ Budge T Mar Introduction pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

At first sight it may seem that the Book of Governors is very parochial, dealing with one part only of the Church of the East, and therefore cannot make an important contribution to our understanding of Church-State relationships as a whole. There is truth in this. Thomas has little to tell us of events except in the three northern provinces of Hedayab, Nisibin and Bait-Garma. If he speaks of Baghdad, he is, as it were, looking at it from the northern hills. The missionary work he speaks of lies to the north and east - in Gilan, Dailam, and away towards China. It is clear that the provinces he speaks of were effectively occupied by the Muslims much later than the southern plains of Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, what he has to tell us is important, because it was in these three northern provinces that the main population and strength of the Church of the East lay.

It also has to be remembered that in the Church of the East, while a priest normally married, a bishop had to be celibate. Most bishops, therefore, started as monks, and when a Patriarch or Metropolitan wanted to appoint new bishops, he looked to the monasteries to supply them. Bait 'Abe, lying near the Upper Zab possibly some 25 miles due west of Arbil, was a particularly distinguished monastery from this point of view. As Wallis Budge points out, "four, if not five, of the Patriarchs of the Nestorian Church were educated at Bait 'Abe, and during the period of which we have any written record of its existence (595-850) at least 100 of its sons became bishops, metropolitans and governors of Nestorian dioceses in Mesopotamia, Arabia, Persia, Armenia, Kurdistan and China." For this reason, what happened in Bait 'Abe during these years was of vital

importance to the Church as a whole.

We shall, then, give serious attention to what Thomas has to tell us, recognising that though partial and to some extent one-sided, it is important; and prepared to supplement it later with the point of view of the man in Baghdad, as we shall find it in the letters of the Patriarch Timothy I.

The Arab Conquest

To us, living in the twentieth century, the Muslim conquest of the Sassanid Empire between 633 and 652 seems very important. Thomas does not mention it at all. Because his source mentions it, he records the name of one Caliph only, Hasan son of 'Ali, as being contemporary with the Patriarch George I.¹ He does not use the religious word "Muslim", but rather the racial word "Arab" or "Ishmaelite", and the impression we receive is that in northern Mesopotamia in Thomas's time there had been little or no conversion to Islam, and all the Muslims mentioned as being there were in fact Arabs. It is of a Christian Arab, however, that he gives a vivid picture of the national temperament which may reflect his own contact with earnest Muslims:

By nature heat of temper and excitable and fiery zeal cleave to the race of Ishmaelites.²

Only once does he date an event by the Muslim calendar, and then he calls it "the 217th year of the era of the dominion of the Arabs".³

There are tales of trouble from individual Arabs. The earliest, dated about 724, tells of an Arab employed as a storekeeper by the monastery, who asked for a place to build a house, and gradually took possession of the surrounding fields, and even slew the steward of the

¹ T Mar II, 16 pp. 207-208. ² T Mar I, 9 p. 54. ³ T Mar II, 40 p. 266.
The source was mistaken, see p. 245 below.

monastery.¹ Another, shortly after 754, tells of Arabs seizing a mill belonging to the Metropolitan of Hedayab.² A third, towards the end of the same century, tells of trouble from visiting Arabs whose dog died, and who attributed its death to the monks.³ In none of these cases is there any evidence that the Arabs were behaving as a ruling race, or getting help from the government authorities. They are rather, like the domineering "Shahrigan" big landowners, the thievish Kartaw Kurds, or the raiders from over the hills in Dailam, part of the unsettled lot of people living in troubled times in the hill-country. There were Arab merchants, also, with whom the monks might be on good terms, like the one from whom Cyriac borrowed 8,000 zuze after the locusts had destroyed all the seed crops of the monastery.⁴

More serious are the references, all from the period about 780 to 840, to Arab warriors and oppressors. In about 750 Maran-'amma had prophesied:

The time is at hand when all these villages and towns will be taken by the Arabs, and a man whose name is Hatin bar Salih shall persecute them and root them up.⁵

Thomas makes it clear that that prophecy had been literally fulfilled before the book was written. Towards the end of the 8th century another oppressor is mentioned:

There was a certain troublesome Ishmaelite whose name was 'Amran bar Muhammad, . . . a harsh, violent and pitiless man, and a murderer. Upon his coming into this country from Bait Bozai, he began to slay its inhabitants, and to take possession of the province of Birta, and of Helafta and Hatra, and Bashosh and Harpa, villages of Safsafa, and little by little many of the others . . . He would have compelled all the brethren to sign a deed selling the monastery and all its estates to him.⁶

According to Thomas, the resistance of Abbot Cyriac, and miraculous

¹ T Mar II, 19 pp. 231-233. ² T Mar III, 4 p. 313. ³ T Mar IV, 19 pp. 432-434.

⁴ T Mar IV, 17 p. 422. ⁵ T Mar III, 13 p. 312. ⁶ T Mar IV, 21 p. 450.

interventions, prevented this happening. A third oppressor went further:

There was an exceedingly wicked Arab, . . . Y'alai bar Hamran of Bani Taimullah, which is in this country of Hedayab . . . This man destroyed the monastery of the holy Rabban Mar Ayyub, and the monastery of Bait Nestorius, and the monastery of Margana, and he left many places without an inhabitant.¹

This was about 800, under the Patriarchate of Timothy I. Y'alai slew also Shubhal-maran, Abbot of the Monastery of Abba Shim'un, but was prevented from doing further damage by the (presumably Muslim) Governor of Hadita, who put him to death.

We do not hear of Muslim governors in the book before about 760, when a Governor of Mosul, hearing that the Church at Bait'Abe was being rebuilt, felt it was an opportunity to get some easy money seeing that the monks could afford building operations! He therefore "mulcted this congregation of 15,000 silver pieces".² Apart from an arbitrary exaction like this, there was regular taxation - "the imperial tax which was due from this monastery",³ but the first mention of this probably dates from the reign of Al-Mahdi (775-785), and ten or fifteen years later we hear of a village called Zarn, near Bait Baghash,

the inhabitants of which were warriors . . . Not only did they pursue thieves, and make raids, but they also showed themselves fierce and disobedient to the royal officers who came to them for the imperial taxes.⁴

We are left to read between the lines that these people were Christians!

It is significant that the Abbasid Caliphate, based on Mesopotamia, began in 750. The evidence of Thomas suggests that only after that did Muslim rule make serious inroads into the life of the north of the country.

¹ T Mar IV, 16 p. 555. ² T Mar IV, 10 pp. 401-402. ³ T Mar IV, 19 p. 441

⁴ T Mar V, 13, p. 524.

The Church's Spiritual Autonomy and Spiritual Life

It is not always safe to argue from silence, but it may well be significant that Thomas, who mentions with some bitterness Khusrau II's refusal to appoint a Patriarch, and obviously considers his murder a judgment of God,¹ says nothing whatever about interference by individual Muslims or Muslim authorities in Church life and discipline. Ishu'-yab III sends the Metropolitan of Nisibin to settle his troubles with the rebellious province of Fars;² George I makes his own peace with the Metropolitans who resented his elevation to the patriarchal throne;³ Mar Aha, the Metropolitan of Hedayab, goes down to the Cities with his bishops, and with much "tact and skill", arranges for the deposition of the unworthy Patriarch Surin (754);⁴ Maran-'amma of Hedayab improves the administration of his province by changing the boundaries of various dioceses;⁵ Ishu'-yab, another Metropolitan of Hedayab, overcomes local opposition to his appointment, and then waits for Timothy I to arrange for his installation;⁶ and many elections and appointments of other metropolitans and bishops are made - all without a single mention of outside meddling. There are several references to the building of churches, both at Bait'Abē and elsewhere,⁷ and the impression given is that there was no opposition to this, although, as we have seen, one Muslim Governor tried his chance to make some money, and an Arab oppressor is said to have destroyed some monasteries.

In spite of the uncertainty about much of the dating, and the

¹ T Mar I, 26 pp. 89-90, and I, 35 pp. 112-116. See above p. 124.

² T Mar II, 12 p. 182. ³ T Mar II, 13-14, pp. 183-188.

⁴ T Mar II, 44 pp. 283-284. ⁵ T Mar III, 7 pp. 316-317.

⁶ T Mar IV, 9 p. 393. ⁷ e.g. T Mar II, 7 p. 131.

⁸ e.g. II, 39 p. 264 and II, 30 p. 237.

similarity between the various characters, self-denials and marvels ascribed to the "holy men", a reading of the book leaves one with a distinct impression of advance and recession in the spiritual temperature of the Church. The times of spiritual upbuilding and revival are mainly associated with the periods of three patriarchs - Ishu'-yab III, Salibazakha, and Timothy I.

We have already said something about Ishu'-yab III (650-658), and it will be sufficient here to recall the trouble he took to rebuild and furnish the church at Bait'Abe, his arrangement of a service-book for the monks, and the school he established at Kuphlana, as well as the work for the wider church he did in the appointment of metropolitans for China and Samarqand, and in the bringing of Fars into line with the rest of the Church, and establishing new provinces of Qatar and Hind for its better administration. He was, as the historian Mari says, "an exceedingly notable man".¹

There was a decline round about the end of the seventh century, and the statement of Gabriel "the Dancer" about the fallen state of the monastery of Bait'Abe, although Thomas considers it to have been in bad taste at a memorial service for the founder, probably reflects its condition about 720.

They are entirely destitute of everything which they possessed, that is to say the estates which their fathers Mar Ishu'-yab the Catholicos and Mar George the Catholicos bequeathed to them . . . Although they labour . . . in seed-time and harvest, there is no profit.²

As far as their singing and services were concerned, the work of Ishu'-yab III seemed to have been forgotten or ignored:

¹ See above, p. 145. ² T Mar II, 33 pp. 247-248.

Each country, and town, and monastery, and school, had its own hymns and songs of praise and tunes, and sang them in its own way, and if a teacher or scholar happened to be away from his own school he was obliged to stand silent like an ignorant man.'

At first sight, it might not seem that Saliba-zakha (714-728) was particularly admirable character. We meet him in the Book of Governors in a situation where the worst in him comes out:

Saliba-zakha . . . was an avaricious and haughty man. And when he heard of the Golden Book of the Gospels, which our Mar Ishu'-yab (III) had bequeathed to this our monastery, he came with all his insolent pride to take it and carry it away with him to the Capital Cities. And when he had come into the monastery and this assembly had received him joyfully, even as they were wont to receive the other patriarchs who had come for the worship and honour of the place, he demanded of Rabban Yusuf, the Head of the Monastery, that he might bring to him that Book that he might rejoice in the sight of it . . . He brought the Book from the library and gave it into his hands.

When the Catholicos saw the splendour and beauty of the Book, which was ornamented with pure gold and precious stones, he was devoured by his desire for it, and he took it, and put it in his saddle-bag. Then the Head of the monastery answered and said to him, "You are not acting rightly in taking our Book in this iniquitous manner." And the Catholicos said: "You solitary monks have no need of this Book, therefore let the believers enjoy it!" - and straightway he commanded those that were with him to set out on their way quickly.

Now when this had taken place, the board for summoning the congregation was struck, and those among the ascetics who were young and strong ran after the Catholicos and stopped him, . . . and they prevailed against him with stones and sticks . . . They threw him off his mule, and they buffeted him with outspread hands and closed fists in an unseemly manner, although they had it in their power to take the Book without striking a blow . . . And when the aged Elders heard what had been done to him by the novices, they gathered themselves together and went forth to appease the Catholicos, and they began to apologise for what had taken place without their knowledge and consent; and in this manner they pacified Saliba-zakha, and he departed from them.²

¹ T Mar III, 1 p. 293. ² T Mar II, 27, pp. 228-230.

It is not a very edifying story. It is not surprising that Yusuf felt it best to resign his charge, and move to another monastery.

Not much more is said about Saliba-zakha in the book. Thomas mentions his consecration of Yusuf's successor John to be Metropolitan of Hedayab,¹ and of Gabriel "the Dancer" to be Metropolitan of Bait Garma.² In each case it was in response to the province's choice. But there are two very interesting sentences in Book III, chapter 1, which introduce Babai the musician:

It is found that the period in which he lived was in the days of Saliba-zakha, Catholicos and Patriarch, and the "Questions" of Rabban Babai testify that he made enquiries of Saliba-zakha concerning various matters.³

This shows us that Babai, who was to be a big force in reviving monastic standards, did so in close touch with the Patriarch, who must have encouraged, if not guided him. Babai did a great work:

The Holy Spirit made wise this blessed man, and taught him beautiful airs, and sweet blendings of melody . . . He became a father of teachers and a master of the wise.⁴

He began work at Gabilta, his native village, set up a choir-school and handed it over to disciples to run; went to Hedayab and set up a second school at Kafr 'Azzi; then went to Marga:

And he founded there 24 schools, some of them being founded for the first time, and others being decayed schools which he restored.⁵

To prove the truth of his words, Thomas gives the names of all 24 schools.

And he came back to Kafr 'Azzi, and twice a year he visited all the schools, in order that laxity of discipline might not enter, and that the musical training and canons and orders of services which he had made his disciples acquire might not be destroyed; and thus this manner of singing was called the "musical system of Rabban Babai".⁶

¹ T Mar II, 30 p. 237. ² T Mar II, 33 p. 245. ³ T Mar III, 1 p. 290.
⁴ T Mar III, 1 p. 293. ⁵ T Mar III, 1 p. 295. ⁶ T Mar III, 2 p. 297.

According to another account cited by Thomas, he had sixty disciples, and Thomas goes on to give an account of the life and work of one of them, Maran-'amma, later Bishop of Salakh and Metropolitan of Hedayab, who was clearly an ecclesiastical statesman of no mean order. We have already referred to his rearrangement of diocesan boundaries.

The impression we have is that the revival of life in the church persisted until well after the middle of the century, but that the coming of Timothy I to the Patriarchal throne gave a new missionary impetus to the Church at a time when things were beginning again to flag. The sordid story of the attempt by the monks of Bait'Abe to murder Shubhal-ishu' because of their jealousy of his successful farming suggests that there had been a slacking off, and that the ageing Abbot Cyriac was too remote from the monks to exercise effective control:

He established overseers to superintend non-spiritual matters, and he himself sat in the abbot's cell according to the custom of asceticism.¹

Timothy's practical response - sending Shubhal-ishu' away on a missionary journey, and rebuking the monks when they came to him for financial help² - points to Timothy's general policy, which was to save the church from too much inward-looking by sending men out to wider service. We shall look at some of this more closely.

Thomas does not say much, but we are left with the distinct impression that after Timothy's death there was a clear and perhaps rapid decline in church life, partly no doubt associated with the more effective occupation of Hedayab by the Muslim conquerors, and partly no doubt with the departure of the guidance and direction of an outstanding leader.

¹ T Mar IV, 17 p. 421. ² T Mar V, 2-4 pp. 469-482.

Thomas quotes, and notes the fulfilment of the mournful prediction of Cyriac:

From the glorious position in which this monastery now stands, flourishing with teachers, and expositors, and sages, and wise and understanding men, it shall be brought low . . . more particularly in respect of teachers, until the time comes when the monks shall be obliged to hire directors for the vigils, and men to carry out for them the musical parts of the service.¹

And there is something of the sadness of a man looking back at a glorious past with a nostalgia that cannot bring it back in the words:

Now this Awakh (in Marga, his own diocese!) was very famous for its fear of God, and concerning its church it is said that there were seventy priests in it at one time.²

At this point it is worth while making brief reference to the anonymous History of the Monastery of Sabr-ishu' at Bait Kokha,³ which according to Mingana was written in Syriac about 820.⁴ It is a brief account of the Heads of the monastery from c. 620 to c. 820, less attractive than Thomas of Marga's book, and much fuller of stories of marvels, healings and exorcisms, but it has some history in it. It refers to the martyrdom of Ishu'-saban in 620,⁵ and speaks briefly of the Arab conquest:

The empire of Kedar, son of Ishmael, began to see day, and the empire of the Persians, descendants of Nimrod, was extinguished.⁶

It has something to say about Arab attacks - of monks taking refuge in a fortress,⁷ of the death of a captured Persian Marzban,⁸ and of monks again taking refuge on an island in the River Zab.⁹ These incidents are all said to have taken place during the Arab invasion of the Sassanid Empire, and probably reflect authentic memories of a troubled time.

¹ T Mar IV, 20, pp. 445-446. ² T Mar II, 34 p. 251.

³ Mingana, Sources Syriaques I pp. 169-271 gives the Syriac text and a French translation.

⁴ SS I pp. 170 and 263 n. 4. ⁵ SS I, p. 225. ⁶ SS I p. 226 Y

⁷ SS I p. 229. ⁸ SS I p. 230. ⁹ SS I p. 233.

Later, between 675 and 692, we hear of Arabs pitching their tents near the monastery,¹ obviously still nomads rather than settlers, and between 693 and 729 we hear for the first time of an Arab governor "inflamed with anger and spite against the brothers", but calmed down by the saintly character of the Abbot, and of Arabs stealing the furniture of the convent.²

Some time before 820, we hear of the destruction and rebuilding of the monastery; we are left to surmise that the first was the work of Arabs:

After the death of Mar Sabr-ishu' bar Israil, the convent was destroyed, and the whole congregation was scattered abroad. But it was soon renewed by pious people, whom it would be very difficult to enumerate here. Jibrail, Bishop of Salakh, who had also been at our convent, repaired our breaches like Nehemiah, restored our ruins, put up our doors once more, strengthened our bolts, and built a magnificent temple for our Lord.³

It is, however, doubtful whether the life of the monastery was ever completely restored, and like Thomas, the author has nothing to say about a contemporary abbot, and leaves us to conclude that he too is looking back on a past glory from a rather bleak present. The History, then, tells us little new, but gives useful confirmation to the story of the ups and downs of the Church as we have seen it in Thomas of Marga.

What about conversions?

1. Magians and Zoroastrians. Thomas speaks of the inhabitants of his own village, Shirwan, as having been Magians of a debased kind:

That country abounded in Magianism, and not only in the worship of the sun, moon and stars, but . . . also of trees of beautiful foliage, and this worship of trees existed even in the days of the

¹ SS I p. 247. ² SS I pp. 250-251. ³ SS I p. 264. Y

old man from whom I learned this.¹

And Yaqub, my father . . . related to me . . . that there was a great old oak which was called the "king of the forest"; and in the villages round about it there were heathen who used to burn incense to it, and who worshipped before it, and we wished to cut it down, but we were afraid of the heathen who worshipped it, and of the devil which appeared in it.²

In both cases we are left to understand that the bishops of Salakh, Ishu'-zakha and Maran-'amma (the pupil of the singer Babai) laboured among them with some success, and in one place also we are told of a village called Golai "the inhabitants of which were formerly Magians, and having become disciples of the doctrine of Christ they built a church in their village".³ In Book VI there is the story of the conversion of some Magians of Sawra in Bait Garma by Rabban Cyprian, but the whole narrative has no date to indicate whether it took place before or after 650. We may say, however, that Thomas does give us indications that there was an evangelistic field among the Magians in Hedayab at least in his father's time, and that there were conversions and baptisms there.

2. Arabs and other Muslims. As we have already indicated, the book makes no reference to non-Arab Muslims. Some two dozen or more Arabs are, however, mentioned in the course of the narrative, and unless they are specifically stated to be Christians, they may be presumed to be Muslims. Neither of the Arab Christians mentioned is said to have been a convert, but both were connected with Hirta, which had Christians before 410.⁴

The Muslim Arabs mentioned were sometimes opposed to the monks for motives of personal gain, or oppressors, but often they were on friendly

¹ T Mar III, 3 p. 307. ² T Mar II, 34, p. 242. ³ T Mar II, 34 p. 243.

⁴ Elijah (c. 605) and Shubhal-ishu' (c. 780), T Mar I, 9 p. 54 and V, 2 p. 469.

terms. We hear of Arabs having been impressed by various signs and wonders performed by Christian holy men, like the fisherman who cast his net with the words "in the name of the living God, and by the prayer of the holy Mar Narsai"¹ because he had seen a marvel done by that bishop. There is the touching story of how the same bishop helped a good-hearted Arab who had stolen to satisfy his hunger, got him to return the stolen goods, and himself gave him money to make a fresh start in life.² The nearest we have to a conversion is in the story of a "poor Arab woman", out of whom Elijah of Moqan cast a devil:

She confessed the power of Christ, and lived freed from the attacks of the devil a life of gratitude to Christ our Lord, and she proclaimed, "There is no true belief except among the holy Christian people."³

There is no record, however, of her having been baptised. Finally, what are we to make of the statement about the Arab of Mosul "whose belief was akin to ours, and his offerings and gifts to the congregations of the monks were well known"⁴? Was he a secret believer, or is this a statement by Thomas himself that the beliefs of Islam are akin to those of Christianity? It is impossible to say, but the latter possibility cannot, we believe, be ruled out.

It is tempting to say that the Church of the East, faced with a resistant Islam, took the easy way out by shirking its duty to evangelise at home, and seeking an outlet outside the Muslim dominions. This may have a modicum of truth in it, especially in later centuries, but we doubt very much if Thomas of Marga and his contemporaries looked at things that way. To him, as he shows in the introductory chapter to Book

¹ T Mar V, 16 p. 557. ² T Mar V, 16 pp. 559-560. ⁴ T Mar IV, 18 p. 422.

³ T Mar V, 11 p. 517.

V, it was far more difficult and far more meritorious to go to the heathen:

(These men) were ordained by the pious Mar Timothy, the Catholicos and Patriarch, for the countries of the barbarians who were remote from all understanding and a decent manner of life, and to whose part of the world no preacher and planter of the truth had ever gone, and where the doctrine of the glad tidings of our Redeemer had never been proclaimed. But why should I speak of Christ our Lord? - for they had not even received the knowledge of God, the Creator of the worlds and their Governor, like the Jews and other nations, but they offered, and behold they still offer, worship to trees, graven images of wood, four-footed beasts, fishes, reptiles, birds of prey, and other birds, and such like things, and they bow down to worship fire and the stars and planets.¹

Surely these people needed the Gospel more than the Muslims, who already believed in the one God! Probably Thomas, faced with the debased Magianism of the hill-peoples, looked back on Sassanid rule as a time of abominable idolatry, while Muslim beliefs were much more akin to Christianity, and Muslim rule vastly preferable.

3. What about Christians turning Muslims? If there is no evidence that Muslims became Christians in the Book of Governors, there is also none that Christians became Muslims, or were under any pressure to do so. Whatever may have been the case in the plains or seaboard of southern Mesopotamia, the book affords no evidence of this in the north. There is, it is true, the case of the Shahrigan (Persian nobles of Hedayab) who "although they were nominally Christians, made confession that Christ was an ordinary man, and said that 'He was one of the Prophets'²". These were baptised and communicant Church members, and according to Thomas, came to be convinced that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and God by Babai's pupil Maran-'amma. While these big landowners had not left the

¹ T Mar V, 1 pp. 467-468.

² T Mar III, 3 p. 307. See p. 308 for the sequel.

Church, they may well have been influenced by Muslim teaching, or even used such expressions as "one of the Prophets" to curry favour with the Arabs. Most of the references to them in the book suggest that they were pretty worldly people. In the end, it is clear, they got no favour from the Muslims, and were dispossessed from their land.¹

Foreign Missionary Work

Thomas hints in two places at what might be called nowadays "church extension work". Twice he speaks of a "Bishop of the Scattered", once in Damascus about 630,² and once in Egypt a century later,³ though Wallis-Budge thinks this is a mistake. Certainly the Church of the East had its own Bishop of Damascus for its community there under the 'Umayyids, and he was to become a Metropolitan under Timothy I.

The only hint of foreign missionary work which Thomas gives us before the patriarchate of Timothy is in the incomplete story of Mar John, (Bishop) of Dailam. A son of old age, John had entered a monastery, and an old monk, Shim'un had prophesied that he would "teach the heathen barbarians".

The men of Dailam went forth to spoil and to make a raid upon the country where the blessed man was, and thus they also carried him off into captivity, and brought him to their country.⁴

We are left to assume, from his title, that he became a Bishop in Dailam, but we are told no more. He flourished about the time of the Patriarch Saliba-Zakha.

The climax, and the most interesting part, of the Book of Governors

¹ T Mar III, 3 p. 312. ² T Mar II, 6 p. 129. ³ T Mar II, 41 pp. 275-276.

⁴ T Mar II, 25 p. 227.

is undoubtedly its account of foreign missionary work during the time of Timothy I. After nearly two books concerned with events in the hill-country of northern Mesopotamia, our minds are suddenly enlarged and our view broadened by the missionary vision of Mar Cyriac, about 770. Then we are given fascinating details about the character and works of four foreign missionaries. We shall take these matters briefly in turn.

1. The Vision of Cyriac. Thomas gives the following account, based on the testimony of the Patriarch Abraham, who was present as a young monk:

On the day before the commemoration of the holy Mar Jacob (the founder of Bait 'Abe), in which all the brethren are accustomed to bake bread in the refectory, and to celebrate this night with psalms and spiritual praises; when they came to "I will sing of the goodness of the Lord for ever" (Ps. 89:1) the mind of the holy man was carried away as though by some spiritual vision. And it appeared to him . . . as though he were not in the refectory, but (in the chapel) and he saw that of the monks, old and young, . . . 42 persons were chosen, and in his hearing (the hymn for the consecration of bishops was sung) and there were given to them from the sanctuary turbans and staffs and the laying-on of hands.¹

Later he interpreted his vision:

"I saw that 42 men belonging to this congregation here present, old men, middle-aged, and young, were set apart to be Governors of the Holy Church; some of them Patriarchs, some of them Metropolitans, and some of them Bishops."²

Thomas is unable to get the names of more than 31 who actually went out, but even so, the list is impressive and wide-reaching:

Cyriac, Bishop of Balad.
 George, Bishop of Elam and Patriarch.
 Abraham, Bishop of Haditha and Patriarch.
 Qardagh, Shubhal-ishu' and Yab-alaha, Metropolitans of Gilan and Dailam.
 Thomas, Zakkai, Shem, Ephraim, Shim'un, Ananias and David, Bishops
 "in" or "beyond" Gilan and Dailam.

¹ T Mar IV, 20 pp. 443-444. ² T Mar IV, 20 p. 445.

Elijah, Bishop of Moqan.
 David, Metropolitan of China, mentioned in Timothy I's letters.
 Peter, Bishop of Yemen and San'a when I was Secretary.
 Ishu'-zakha, Metropolitan of Karka of Bait Salok.
 Burd-ishu', Cyriac, Babai, and Ishu' - Bishops in Bait Garma.
 Ishu', called Maran-zakha, Bishop of Sus.
 Diodore and 'Abd-ishu', successive Bishops of Bait Baghash.
 Lazarus, Gabriel and Jacob, Bishops of Marga.
 Cyriac of Awakh, Bishop of Nineveh.
 Narsai, Bishop of Senna.
 Elisha and George, Bishops of Bait Wazikh.¹

Apart from the two patriarchs, there are fourteen other names that take us out of the area of northern Mesopotamia, and of these 12 are definitely foreign missionaries. Tritton points out that the "Bishop of Yemen and San'a" was probably titular;² it seems in fact likely that he was the man appointed by Timothy to minister to the Christians of New Najran, or one of his successors.³

2. Shubhal-ishu', Metropolitan of Gilan and Dailam.

Shubhal-ishu' was an Arab Christian, whose family had come from Hira and settled in Mosul. He inherited "much riches" when his parents died, and brought it as a gift to the Monastery of Bait'Abu, where he became a novice. He then got land from the monastery, harvested good crops with the help of labourers, and provided food for the monks. Jealous of his success, the monks first tried to cheat him and then plotted to kill him. He was informed of the plot, and fled penniless to Baghdad to Timothy. Timothy knew a good potential missionary when he saw one.

Timothy, having learned about all his affairs, and seeing that he was instructed in the Syriac language and learning, and also in the Arabic and Persian tongues, determined (to consecrate him a missionary bishop) to the barbarian nations . . . And when he advised him to undertake this, relying upon the Lord . . . inasmuch as this work to which he was called was from the Lord, he undertook it with fear and joy.⁴

¹ See T Mar IV, 20 pp. 447-449.

² Tritton p. 91.

³ Tim 29 (XXVII) and 30 (XLI).

⁴ T Mar V, 4 pp. 479-480.

He was consecrated Metropolitan of Gilan and Dailam with great ceremony, the believers provided him with money and clothes for his mission, and he set out with some disciples. The Patriarch Abraham told Thomas:

"He made his entrance there with exceeding great splendour, for barbarian nations need to see a little worldly pomp and show to attract them and to make them draw nigh willingly to Christianity."¹

Browne criticises this as unworthy of a missionary,² but the bitter experience of William of Rubruck in his mission to the Mongols, and his complaint at the end of his account that only one with the status of royal ambassador would be able to win an effective hearing,³ confirms the soundness of Shubhal-ishu's missionary method.

"He taught many cities and thickly peopled districts . . . and baptised their inhabitants." He built churches, established priests and deacons and choir-masters among the people, while he himself travelled to "the ends of the East".⁴

What does Thomas of Marga mean by "Gilan and Dailam"? No doubt, primarily the country immediately south of the Caspian Sea, across the mountains from the north of Mesopotamia. It is clear, however, from the accounts of Shubhal-ishu's work and that of his successors, that the work spread much further east, and it may well be that the Turks and the Tibetans, of whom Timothy speaks in his letters,⁵ were included in their orbit. It is perhaps worthwhile at this point to quote from a description of the Christian Turks, which has been included in a so-called Letter of Philoxenus of Mabbog, but which Mingana is convinced is based on information

¹ T Mar V, 4 p. 480. ² Browne Eclipse p. 90.

³ See Dawson, The Mongol Mission, p. 220. ⁴ T Mar V, 4 pp. 480-481.

⁵ Tim 29 (XXVII) and 43 (XLVII). See below pp. 235-236.

supplied to Timothy I.¹

These Christian Turks eat meat and drink milk. They do not put any difference between lawful and unlawful food, but eat everything in good and pure conscience . . .

Their feasts they celebrate with great pomp, and they love more than any other people the commemorations of saints and martyrs. They do not learn nor do they accept any other script besides our own, and in the language of us Syrians they write and read the Books of the two Testaments. In their gatherings they translate the above books into the Turkish language . . . in order that all their congregation may understand what is read. (But they pronounce the names of God, Christ and Mary in Syriac).

In the days of the holy Lent they do not eat fresh and new meat, but meat that is dry like wood; and they fast from evening till evening, and they make wafers of the Holy and Divine Sacrament from bread of pure wheat. They bring from other countries, with great care and diligence, pure flour from pure wheat, and they store it up for the purpose; so also they fetch from remote regions the raisins from which they make the wine used for the Holy Communion.

In their dresses they do not differ from the Turks who are pagan . . . They dwell under tents, and have no towns, no villages, and no houses; but they are divided into powerful and great clans, and journey from place to place . . . They have many possessions; sheep, cattle, camels and horses . . . They have four great and powerful kings . . . They have a name common to all, Tatar, and the name of their country is Serikon . . . The Christian Turks of whom we have spoken receive ordination from the Bishop whose see is in that large town of the pagans which has five big churches . . .

No bread at all is found in their country, no cornfield, no vineyard, no wine and no raisins; and all their food consists of meat and milk of sheep.²

By the late eighth century these nomadic Turks would be as far west as the south of the Caspian, and as far east as Mongolia; contact with those in the west may well have led to contact further east.

After "many years", Shubhal-ishu' decided to return to Bait 'Abe, bringing gifts to his old monastery. On the way, he was ambushed by pagans, "and at a terrible spot on that road they surrounded him, and crowned him

¹ See the argument in Min 9 pp. 49-58. ² Min 9 pp. 68-72.

with swords."

And certain Christians who had become his disciples . . . went out to search for him and . . . buried him hastily in a church, and mourned for him greatly; and they gathered together from the men who had murdered him the things which had been made for him - veils, curtains, and stoles in which the priest administers the sacraments, . . . and sent them to Mar Timothy, and some of them were handed on to this monastery.¹

We are in a position to make a fair approximation of the dates of this missionary. His consecration could not have been before 782, when Timothy was firmly established on the patriarchal throne. His death is mentioned in a letter of Timothy's which Bidawid dates between 795 and 798.² An earlier letter, dated 792/793, had mentioned the request of the Turks for a metropolitan of their own,³ and this letter says that he has been appointed. We are probably not far wrong in estimating ten to a dozen years of missionary work to him before his martyrdom.

3. Yab-alaha and Qardagh, Metropolitans of Dailam and Gilan.

The death of Shubhal-ishu' left a blank that was not easily filled. The Patriarch tried his best, and in the end was obliged to send again to Bait 'Abe because "there was no one who would undertake the work for God's sake like unto that man".⁴ The men chosen were two brothers, Yab-alaha, who was a book-binder, and Qardagh, the younger, who was a writer.

And Mar Timothy wrote here that the blessed Yab-alaha and Qardagh should go down to him . . . and Mar Timothy appointed them both Metropolitans, Qardagh of Gilan and Yab-alaha of the people of Dailam. And when they came up to this monastery to put their affairs in order, there went with them according to what I have learned, 15 monks, holy and enlightened men, that they also might be companions with them in the spiritual labour of the Gospel of Christ. Among those men were those who were appointed to be bishops

¹ T Mar V, 5 pp. 484-485. ² Tim 43 (XLVII). ³ Tim 30 (XLI).

⁴ T Mar V, 7 pp. 489-490.

of the countries beyond Gilan and Dailam.¹

It seems clear that after seeing Timothy, these two men were fired by a realisation of the magnitude of the task before them, and made preparations for a big mission, which would specifically include the ordination and location of new bishops "beyond Gilan and Dailam". Timothy, indeed, with the flexibility of a real missionary statesman, was ready to let them break normal rules, and Thomas quotes from a letter which he later wrote to Yab-alaha. Yab-alaha had written:

"Through your prayers, O our Father, by the grace of Christ, many nations have been converted to the truth, and we want to appoint bishops over them from among the ascetics who have come with us."

Timothy's reply was:

"Inasmuch as the ordination of a bishop does not absolutely require three persons, and you in your country are free from this regulation, you have permission to do so Appoint as bishops whoever you and the pious Qardagh shall choose, and in the place of the third person, let the Book of the Gospels be laid on the episcopal throne on the right hand; thus by the hand of God perform the ordination of the first bishop, and let others be appointed by means of this third person. May the Divine Spirit direct and govern His consecrations by your means even as He did with the blessed Apostles."²

Seven bishops were consecrated, and Thomas gives their names, on the authority of a monk who had heard the names from Yab-alaha himself. We have already listed these names.³

It seems that the two Metropolitans worked together at first, but Qardagh "penetrated far into the countries beyond those where his brother was", possibly to Tibet, and never returned to Bait 'Abe. Thomas can give no authentic account of his work, but asks us to imagine his labours

¹ T Mar V, 7 pp. 489-490. ² T Mar V, 7 pp. 490-491. ³ See p.188 above.

among "those barbarian races of daring thieves, and plunderers, and worshippers of devils."

Yab-alaha, himself, however, was no stay-at-home, though he twice came back to visit Bait 'Abe. On one visit he told two of the monks, who were Thomas's informants, how he had journeyed back after a long sojourn in rice-eating countries:

"As I began my journey to come here I arrived at the dwelling of the pious Mar Habbiba, the Metropolitan of the city of Rai, and when I had partaken of food and bread made of wheat I became exceedingly sick, because I was accustomed in these countries to a diet of rice-bread."¹

This helps us to date Yab-alaha's visit, as the first Metropolitan of Rai. Habbiba, is mentioned by name in Timothy's letters, and the new province was set up between 799 and 804.

4. Elijah, Bishop of Moqan.

But Thomas gives in greatest detail the story of Elijah, the missionary bishop of Moqan, a city "in a country to the north-east, near to the border of the peoples of Dailam."² Elijah, who came from a village near Marga, was essentially a simple, humble man, with a deep, practical faith, little education, but a disciplined mystic sense. It is clear that he had made a tremendous impression on his fellow-monk, the Patriarch Abraham, who was Thomas's informant. As an ascetic he was strict, but not extreme, living in a hut of reeds surrounded by a simple hedge. His one possession was his Bible, which he took with him to the monastery chapel when he went there, but otherwise he had nothing worth stealing. He had worked out his own way of meditation:

¹ T Mar V, 7 p. 494.

² Labourt T locates Moqan on the plain of the lower Araxes, to the West of the Caspian.

Mar Abraham told me that he had made himself accustomed to live on a dark spot in his cell, where he used to perform all his seasons of prayer. Every time he repeated aloud the verse of a Psalm, he would say "Hallelujah! Glory be to Thee, O God" in such a way that his mind was compelled to think about the verse which was coming next . . . He cared less about the quantity of the Psalms which he sang than for the doubling of the riches and the concentration of the thoughts which were in his mind. It seemed a waste of time to him that others were saying the Psalter of David twice in a day and a night, while minds were building up, and hiding, and judging, and condemning, and buying, and selling.¹

Word of Elijah's practical piety came to the Patriarch Timothy, and "he wrote a letter to him with love and challenge, like a wise father to a son who can be easily persuaded, to come down to him and he would appoint him Bishop of Moqan".² But Elijah was a simple man. Consecration in the great City had no attraction for him, and he evidently felt that if he was to receive the Holy Spirit's power so necessary for his work, he would need to be consecrated on the Day of Pentecost in the familiar surroundings of his own monastery. Again we see Timothy's real greatness and flexibility. He agreed to postpone the consecration till Pentecost, and arranged for the Metropolitan of Hedayab to conduct it. Only after that did Elijah come to Baghdad, to receive the Patriarch's authorisation for his work.

Elijah travelled to Moqan in a company of merchants:

Instead of a cross on his neck, Elijah used to hang upon his breast a complete Book of the Gospels in a small size; and he took with him a cross of brass. When he required to sing the Psalms where he passed the night, he placed it on the top of the staff that was in his hand, and he used to drive the staff into the ground in front of him and pray.³

Elijah's missionary methods, and the stages of his work, are laid out with

¹ T Mar V, 9 pp. 502-503.

² T Mar V, 10 p. 505. See Budge's footnote for the variant reading which is followed here.

³ T Mar V. 10 p. 506.

great clearness by Thomas:

a. He began by surveying his field of work. He went into the city and looked round him and talked to people.

He saw that the name of God, the Lord of all, and confession of Him did not exist therein at all, but that all the people that were in it offered up worship to dumb trees and senseless stones, and that it was destitute even of the Arabs and Jews who confess One God, the Creator of heaven and earth.¹

b. He prayed that God might use him as a means to give the people "a new heart and a new spirit, that they might despise the images . . . and be converted".²

c. He preached daily in the streets of the city. Thomas gives the gist of his message:

"O men, who have erred from the true knowledge of God, God the Lord of all has sent me to turn you from the error in which you live. You have served enough those things which from their nature are not gods, for without knowledge and by the agency of devils you have offered the worship which was due to your God, to the trees which the earth makes to grow up for your honour."³

d. Each night he would go out of the city, fix his staff with its cross in the ground, and sing and pray till dawn. People were amazed that he was not afraid of the wolves, but he assured them that God would protect him.

e. At first his message was laughed at, but there was a plague, and he promised that he would heal the people if they were willing to give up their idolatry and turn to God. He healed them through the use of consecrated oil, cast out devils, and preached the Gospel about "the coming of our Lord Christ into the world."⁴ They were convinced and converted.

f. But there was still a barrier. They were tree-worshippers, and

¹ T Mar V, 11 p. 508. ² T Mar V, 11 p. 508. ³ T Mar V, 11 p. 509.

⁴ T Mar V, 11 p. 511.

they were afraid of Yazd:¹

"We have Yazd, whom our grandfathers, and ourselves, have worshipped, and we are afraid of the injuries he might do us. If, however, your God, in whom you made us place our trust . . . is able to slay and destroy Yazd, then . . . you can do what you like with us."²

"Where is Yazd, the son of a b---?" asked Elijah. They took him to a hilltop

and showed him a mighty oak tree, situated in a valley, which was called "the chief of the forest", and which owing to the length of time and the care with which they had treated it had grown to a great height, and had acquired great breadth, and great density of foliage.³

Elijah asked for no miracle this time. He called for an axe, rolled up his sleeves and girded up his loins, and went down alone to fell the tree. It is an incident remarkably parallel to what Boniface had done in Germany a hundred years earlier. When he had severed the main trunk, he called the watching people to come, and they made a bonfire of the tree and the smaller branches round about, which they had called "children of Yazd".

g. Now the people were ready for baptism. They built a church, and Elijah saw that it was properly furnished, baptised many, and ordained priests and deacons. He wrote out a copy of the Psalms for them, and taught them the responses.

h. Gradually the new life became evident in the people:

Little by little they became virtuous, and the grace of Christ grew and dwelt in them . . . They laid fast upon the ordinances of the seasons of prayer, and the receiving of Holy Communion, and they were sanctified in their manner of life, and God made them members of His household. And Elijah praised and glorified God.⁴

When we analyse it this way, it is clear that Elijah's missionary methods were essentially sound, and in accordance with the teachings of

¹ The word Yazd means "God", and is the name of the centre of Zoroastrian worship in Iran at the present day.

² T Mar V, 11 p. 511. ³ T Mar V, 11 p. 511. ⁴ T Mar V, 11 p. 513.

the early Christian Fathers as to the correct approach to polytheists.

. In the words of Lactantius

the first step is to understand religions which are false, and to cast aside the impious worship of gods made with hands. The second step is to perceive with the mind that God is one, most high, whose power and providence made the world from the beginning, and direct it towards a future. The third step is to know His Servant and Messenger, whom He sent on embassy to earth.¹

After many years Elijah returned to Bait 'Abe to report to his fellow-monks how God had blessed his work. He was ready to set out for Moqan once more, when a fellow bishop persuaded him to tour the surrounding villages first, to give his blessing to the people, settle disputes, and ordain priests. On his return to the monastery he fell sick and died. Mar Abraham's eyewitness account of his death gives us a measure of the faith of the man:

"While many of us were gathered together about him at the hour of his departure, he sat and spoke with us concerning his separation from us. And he commanded us to say the response of baptism, which runs: 'The doors of the spiritual marriage-chamber are opened for the absolution of men' while he sat with his hands laid upon his knees. And when we had come to the passage 'Enter in then, ye that are called, to the joy which has been prepared for you,' he opened his mouth three times joining in the singing, and his soul departed from his body with the joy which was prepared for him. And marvelling we understood that he actually saw and beheld with the hidden eye of his mind the happiness which had been prepared for him, and that it was because of this that he had asked us to sing the baptismal responses. Glory be to Christ our Lord who made him victorious!²

After considering these accounts of four missionaries, even if we discount such (in fact quite sparing) accounts of miracles they contain, we are left with the conviction that, whether on a wide scale like the

¹ Lactantius, On the Anger of God 2. See Y pp. 56-59, and especially Foster, After the Apostles, pp. 53-57.

² T Mar V, 11 pp. 518-520. Elijah was appointed later than Yab-alaha and Qardagh, and died before Thomas entered Bait 'Abe as a novice. His work was in the period c. 805-825.

work of Yab-alaha, or on a local scale like that of Elijah, this was real, effective missionary work, done not from a desire to escape confrontation with Islam, but because there was vitality in the Church and a desire to reach out to the heathen. And in none of the accounts do we hear of any interference by the Muslim rulers.

Thomas of Marga, then, is an important witness to the life of the Church of the East during the early Caliphates. His Book of Governors makes it clear that the serious occupation of northern Mesopotamia by the Arabs did not begin till the Abbassid period, after 750. The Church there had its ups and downs, but showed much resilience and vitality. There is no evidence of interference by Muslims in Church affairs, or of pressure on Christians to become Muslim. There is no record of effective evangelistic work among Muslims, but some reference to the conversion of local Magians, and valuable accounts of widespread and effective missionary endeavour to the north and the distant north-east.

B. THE LETTERS OF THE PATRIARCH TIMOTHY I

The contemporary account of the appointment of a Metropolitan of India in 1503 speaks of the Patriarch of that time as "the second Shim'un, the Papa of our days, the Timothy of our generation, . . . and the Ishu'-yab of our day".¹ These, clearly, were the patriarchs of the Church of the East who were looked back to as epoch-making - Papa the first Bishop of the Royal Cities, Shim'un bar Saba'i the martyr, Ishu'-yab III the one who established a separate Metropolitan of India, and Timothy. We miss the name of Mar Aba in this list. From all accounts he was a better and more saintly man than Timothy, and a more effective personal evangelist, but as ecclesiastical statesmen and leaders of a minority community in a non-Christian state, they share the claim to be the greatest of the Patriarchs of the Church of the East. It is to the letters of Timothy I that we now turn for a reliable contemporary picture of the Church of the East and its relationships to the Caliphate, as seen from the centre of operations, at Baghdad itself.

Timothy was born in 727 or 728 of a noble family in the province of Hedayab. His uncle George, the Bishop of Bait Baghash, sent him to a then-famous teacher, Mar Abraham bar Dashandad, and he studied sacred and secular subjects under him at Bashosh, Marga, and possibly Mosul.. Before 770 George resigned from his see in such a way that Timothy was appointed to succeed him. He was on friendly terms with Musa ibn Mus'ab, the Governor of Mosul, who exempted his diocese from taxes which were due about 770. In 779 the Patriarch Hanan-ishu' died of poisoning. Although Ishu'-

¹ Min 10 p. 470.

yab the old Bishop of Nineveh had the votes of the members of the Electoral Synod, Timothy persuaded him that the opposition of rivals would be too much for a man of his age, and he withdrew on the promise of appointment as Metropolitan of Hedayab. By this means, and by making monetary promises, Timothy succeeded in getting elected Patriarch about the end of 779, but he was not consecrated at Seleucia-Ctesiphon till 7th May 780. Timothy did not keep his promises of money payments, and he had powerful opponents in Ephraim Metropolitan of Elam, who had not attended his election, Yusuf Metropolitan of Merv, and others. For two years the patriarchate was contested, and there was an unedifying series of depositions, counter-depositions and anathemas. Yusuf even tried to get the Caliph al-Mahdi to depose Timothy, and when he was unsuccessful, he went over to Islam, and Timothy was blamed for it. Finally Abu Qaraish, the Caliph's Christian physician, acted as mediator, and Timothy was inducted a second time as Patriarch by Ephraim of Elam, at a service held in Baghdad, towards the end of 781. A rival Metropolitan of Hedayab had been appointed by Timothy's opponents, but he fell from his mule and was torn in pieces by dogs, and after that Ishu'-yab was accepted as Metropolitan.

In spite of this unpromising start, Timothy showed himself a most capable and effective Patriarch, and his reign continued till 9th January, 823, when he died at the advanced age of 95, and was buried in a convent in Baghdad.¹ He was a contemporary of the well-known Caliphs al-Mahdi (775-785), Harun al Rashid (786-809) and Mamun (813-833). We have already seen something of his leadership in connection with the widespread

¹ The above account summarises Bid pp. 1-5.

missionary work of his day in our study of Thomas of Marga's accounts.

Timothy's Letters

According to 'Abd-ishu' the canonist, Timothy wrote 200 letters in all, which were preserved in his day in two volumes.¹ Only 59 of these are now extant, and Bidawid has shown that these all come from the first volume, and can be dated between 780 and 804.² In addition, there are explicit references to another 48 letters (Timothy's letters mention 31 more; Thomas of Marga mentions 8, occasionally quoting, as we have seen; Ibn-at-Tayyib and Mari each mention 4 more; and 'Abd-ishu' one).³

Of the 59 complete letters which have come down to us, 39 have been edited and printed, with Latin translation, by O. Braun,⁴ 1 has been similarly edited and translated by R.J. Bidawid,⁵ 1 has been edited and translated into French by J.-B. Chabot,⁶ and 1 has been edited and translated into English by A. Mingana.⁷ This leaves 17 letters as yet unedited and untranslated. Bidawid has done a very useful piece of work in giving detailed summaries of these letters in French, and has translated a few sentences here and there.⁸ Where a translation is not available, we shall give Bidawid's summary. We know that the patriarchal office kept copies of letters sent, both from the internal evidence of Timothy's letters and from Thomas of Marga's statement that as Secretary he "copied letters"⁹

¹ Bid p. 11. ² Bid pp. 59-72. ³ Bid pp. 44-50.

⁴ CSCO Scriptores Syrii, vol. 67. ⁵ Bid pp. 91-125. ⁶ SO pp. 606-607.

⁷ Woodbrooke Studies No. 2. ⁸ Bid pp. 32-43. ⁹ e.g. Tim 30 (XLI), Bid p.124.

for the Patriarch Abraham¹, and Bidawid has shown convincingly, from external and internal evidence, that the letters are undoubtedly authentic.² Bidawid has also done a very useful and convincing work in arranging the letters in an approximately chronological order, with definite or tentative dates, and we shall accept this.³ In references to the letters we shall first give Bidawid's number, and then in brackets after it, the number in Braun's edition - or (for the unedited letters) in the MS order as given by Bidawid - and then the translator and page reference of the translation.

Before considering the evidence of the letters, it would be well to look at one complete letter, as a specimen of Timothy's style and lay-out. We shall take Letter 9, written in 783/5.

To Rabban Mar Sergius, priest and doctor, Timothy the pilgrim wishes peace in the Lord.

I have twice before written to Your Chastity, and now this is my third letter. Stand fast on the hope we all hold, as on the rock of truth; lift your meditation and thoughts to the Supreme High Priest, the great Jesus Christ; pray to Him without ceasing, that our sins and the sins of our community may be atoned for. Nothing is impossible for Him; without ceasing, therefore, please Him with the sweet sacrifices of chastity. Let all your actions and words be founded on Jesus Christ. "Whatsoever ye do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). "There is none other name among men, whereby we are bound to live" (cf. Acts 4:12). For God was made incarnate, and man was fixed and grounded in God, not like an accident in a substance, but like a subsistence in a subsistence.

In all things, be adorned with humility, for without that no one can come to God. It is the ladder that leads to heaven, the steps that lift us to God. Though lower than all, it alone is, and is deemed to be, higher than all. This and the like qualities are with you, and will continue with you, but pray God that they may be, and be deemed to be, more fully in you.

Take care of all that concerns the scholars, whether boarders or day-scholars. Take special care of the Monasteries of Saliba, and Bait'Abé, and the other convents. Take good care to copy out Dionysius as closely as possible to the version of Athanasius and

¹ T Mar IV, 20 p. 448. ² Bid pp. 51-58. ³ Bid pp. 59-75.

Phocas. Examine the letters I wrote to Mar Petion, of holy memory: borrow them from Elijah bar Farrukzad. Enquire what books of our Fathers there are in Bait Mar Mattai, and let me know about them. Enquire about rare books, as many as you can, and let me know about them.

Farewell. Pray for us!

This is a typical personal letter. It begins with general exhortations to live a life of prayer, contemplation, humility and consistent hope, as a good priest and monk should. There are scripture quotations to back it up, but when he comes to speak of the Incarnation, Timothy uses readily the currently popular terms of Greek philosophy. In the third paragraph, with simple brevity, we have practical exhortations about the care of the monasteries, and in particular of the schools where young men were trained for the Christian ministry. Then come enquiries and instructions about books, which were obviously of such absorbing interest to the Patriarch that hardly a letter of his concludes without some such reference. Then a brief farewell. The letter, in brief, shows us Timothy's pastoral concern, his educated philosophical outlook, and his interest in books.

When Timothy is writing a theological or philosophical dissertation, or defending some Christian doctrine against heresy, he can be long-winded and rhetorical, but when he is giving a piece of news, or sending instructions about something, or asking about books, he is refreshingly brief and to the point, and shows that he possessed a healthy sense of humour. The letter he wrote to his friend Sergius, Metropolitan of Elam, about the misbehaviour of the Metropolitan of Sarbaz, is worth quoting from, as an example of his racy narrative style:

¹ Tim 9 (XVI), Br pp. 79-80.Y.

We ordained Hanan-ishu', about whom I have written to Your Grace, as Metropolitan of Sarbaz, and we told him to keep the matter a secret between the two of us. "Don't let anyone realise who you are," I told him, "till you arrive at the See for which you have been appointed." This had to be done because the Persians were cruel and ferocious. Before the ordination had even been carried out, however, he let out the secret in our Royal City; and so I made up my mind that seeing he could not keep a secret, I would never lay hands on him to impart the Holy Spirit. Then he ran to some friends, and got their help; they pestered me with their entreaties: "Forget this stupidity of his," they said. "It was the result of impatience, not of malice." And when, after long efforts, they had persuaded me to go ahead with the ordination, I told him not to wait even for an hour in the Royal City, or in Basra or Huballat, but to set off at once to the place he was sent to. "I need expenses," he said. "Many monks," I told him, "cross the sea to India and China with nothing more than a staff and a begging-bag. Get it into your head that you are just as well-off as they are: you are setting out across the sea with ample resources!"

He disobeyed my instructions, and for about two months he went round the Royal City, from house to house. After that, he went down to Basra and Huballat, but it never occurred to him that his entrance into a see that was not his own ought to be unobtrusive: on the contrary, he made his entrance with staff and mitre as though he was going into Sarbaz itself! He began to abuse and threaten the Persians, and to read out to all and sundry the notice of ex-communication, which I had written against the accursed Babai, and which he had been instructed to read after his arrival at Sarbaz; and he began to collect zuze for his expenses. In fact, he didn't consider it worth his while to do even one of the things I had told him! As a result, the wretched man aroused against himself the wrath both of the Metropolitan of Basra and of the Persians, who were in Huballat. The former was angry, because Hanan-ishu' had intruded into his See in episcopal state; the latter, because he was frightening them and threatening them: "It won't be long now before I anathematise Babai, and all the Persians living in Huballat!"

He has, however, brought down on his own head a punishment fit for his stupidity. Things had started off like this, and all this had happened to him in Huballat, but he had not yet defrocked Babai, when at Sarbaz the wretched man roused a storm against himself from every side! Finally he wrote to me: "The episcopate is no good to me. I shall go back to my monastery."

Therefore, know and inform him that, by the Word of God, I

¹ Here possibly the Persians in the extreme east, round about Sarbaz, rather than the people of Fars proper, are probably meant. They would be in Huballat (Uballa), a port near Basra, as traders.

have defrocked him, and prohibited him from exercising any ecclesiastical order he may hold - outside Sarbaz. Send word by letters to all parts of Your Grace's province that I have prohibited him in this way. And if, deceived by Satan, he comes to the Royal City, I shall make him eat from a different kind of table than the one he had at Huballat! As far as that idiot is concerned, that is how things stand. By the word of God, no one - whether I am alive or dead - will get me to cancel this prohibition!'

A very different side to Timothy's character, that love of learning and interest in books to which we have already referred, comes out in a letter written a little later, possibly in the same year: here is Bidawid's summary of part of Letter 43:

In reply to a letter of Sergius asking about the Hexapla, Timothy reminds him, in accordance with his letter of the preceding year, that the Hexaplas had been transcribed, thanks to the diligence of Jibrail, the Caliph's counsellor. He had transcribed in three copies the whole of the Old Testament, including the books of Ezra, Susanna, Esther and Judith. One of the three copies was destined for Timothy, the second for Jibrail, the third for Bait Lapat. This work had taken him six months of hard effort, and had cost him a great deal of money, because of the many marginal notes of Aquila, Theodotion, Symmachus and others which had illustrated the text of the Septuagint. The variants are numerous, because all the copyists or those who dictated to them made many mistakes. Timothy has trouble with his eyes, his sight is a bit dim as a result of the considerable fatigue caused by the work of correction. At the end of the volume you read: "it was copied, finished and prepared, in accordance with the copies of Eusebius, Pamphylus and Origen". Timothy will try to get a copy of it made for Sergius.

He tells that he had learned from Jewish converts, ten years before, that people had discovered books near Jericho; among the books were the Old Testament in Hebrew and other texts not found in the Bible. He has written to Jibrail, and to Shubhal-maran, Bishop of Damascus, to enquire about it. Someone had also told him that there were more than two hundred Psalms of David. Timothy believes that the books had been composed by Jeremiah, Baruch, or some other of the prophets, and that they had hidden them in caves for fear of fire or theft. At the time of the exile,² about 70 years later, these writers were all dead, and Ezekiel³ was obliged to look for the books extant among the Jews. Timothy ardently desires to be informed about it . . .

¹Letter 40 (XIII), Br pp. 70-71.Y. ²(sic) - Return? ³(sic) - Ezra?

He asks Sergius to send him the book of Eusebius of Caesarea on Origen, to look for the book "On the Soul" by the Patriarch Mar Aba, and the treatise of Mar Marsai; Mar Ephraim (Sergius's predecessor) had written that he had plenty of other works there.¹

A letter like that, written when Timothy was close on 70 years of age, and when, as he says himself, his body was dried up, his hands stiff, his eyes dim, gives us an intimate glimpse of the calibre of the man, a true scholar, with an enquiring mind, open to new truth and anxious for new discoveries. We turn, then, with respect and with anticipation, to see what this great man has to tell us about the conditions of his time.

At the Royal City: Patriarch and Caliphs.

Timothy speaks of the centre of his Patriarchate as "Seleucia and Ctesiphon",² and it is clear that ecclesiastically the Sassanid Royal Cities were still the focal point. But with the establishment of the Abbassid Dynasty in 750, and the building of a new capital at Baghdad, 35 miles upstream in 762-766, it was obviously necessary for the Patriarch to reside there, and in the Dialogue with Al-Mahdi, one of the earliest of Timothy's letters, he speaks of having a "patriarchal residence" in Baghdad.³ This may well have been a rented house, for 9 years later, in 790, he speaks of having bought a piece of land for a patriarchal palace at the price of 10,000 zuze.⁴ It was clearly important to be in the Royal City. In a letter written about 800, Timothy speaks of a quarrel between two bishops which had been taken to the secular courts: it should, he says, have been brought to him,

for I am in the Royal City, and I can easily do anything I want against you.⁵

¹ Tim 43 (XLVII), Bid pp. 36-37.Y. ² Tim 15 (XXVI), Br p. 101.

³ Tim 4 (LXIX), Min p. 90. ⁴ Tim 28 (XLIV), Bid pp. 35-36.

⁵ Tim 52 (LVI), Bid p. 41, Labourt T p. 33.Y.

During the period of the letters Timothy was between 54 and 77. In his letters we have references to ill-health and feebleness, and even expectation of death,¹ but the general impression we get of him is of a busy and vigorous man, making the most of his position and opportunities:

As for me, I have hardly the time any longer to busy myself with questions of philosophy and theology. I am in the Capital City, exposed day and night to secular occupations. I haven't even an hour when I'm not in combat - wrestling, thinking things out, working, even writing books; pursued by strangers, by those within, yes, often even by the Christians themselves.²

What sort of relationship would a man of Timothy's age and status have with Caliphs who were on the whole younger men than himself? The impression we get from his letters is that it was both a formal one, and one which could also in a sense be a meeting between friends. In his letter to Sergius recounting the dialogue with al-Mahdi, Timothy describes his formal entry into the Caliph's presence:

I had an audience of our victorious King, and according to usage I praised God and His Majesty. In the words of my complimentary address I spoke of the nature of God and His eternity.³

We have two accounts of what he did when he was about to leave - they show that the Patriarch was prepared, and in fact felt it his duty, to pray publicly for his ruler and the royal family, and that the Caliph made no objection to it:

And I praised God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who grants to earthly kings such wisdom and understanding that through them they may administer their empire without hindrance. And I blessed also His Majesty, and prayed that God may preserve him to the world for many years, and establish his throne in piety and righteousness for ever and ever.⁴

We pray God, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, to preserve the crown of the kingdom and throne of the Commander of

¹ e.g. Tim 12 (XIX), 17 (XXIX), 43 (XLVII), and 55 (XXI).

² Tim 31 (XLIII), Bid p. 85.Y. ³ Tim 4 (LXIX), Min p. 17. ⁴ ibid. p. 59.

the Faithful for multitudinous days and numerous years! May he also raise after him Musa and Harun and 'Ali to the throne of his kingdom for ever and ever! May he subjugate before them, and before their descendents after them, all barbarous nations, and may all the kings and governors of the world serve our Sovereign and his sons after him, till the day in which the Kingdom of Heaven is revealed from heaven to earth!¹

In these summaries of prayers there is no mention of the name of Christ, and we can guess that Timothy was careful not to give offence by the way he prayed; nevertheless we are impressed by the fact that he did pray. We are also impressed by the courteous and tactful way in which the whole dialogue was conducted from both sides.

It was, however, more than a formal meeting. It seems clear that al-Mahdi enjoyed Timothy's company, and that there was real affection between two men who, though of differing faiths, had much in common.

Such audiences had constantly taken place previously, sometimes for affairs of state, and some other times because of the love of wisdom and learning which was burning in the soul of His Majesty. He is a loveable man, and loves also learning when he finds it in other people.²

We have already noted Timothy's interest in philosophy and learning. It comes out again and again in his letters, and it is clear that he used his learning to make Greek works available to those who spoke and wrote in Arabic. In Letter 6 for instance,

Timothy has translated with difficulty the Topics of Aristotle from Syriac into Arabic. He heard that someone has translated from Greek into Arabic, and asks if this is possible.³

That was in 782 or 783. But the scholar was not satisfied. He had collaborated in the translation with the Melkite Patriarch, and some other Greeks, and they had had difficulty in understanding a transliterated

¹ Tim 4 (LXIX), Min p. 90. ² *ibid* p. 60.

³ Tim 6 (XLIII), summary in Bid p. 35.Y.

"barbaric" word. In 799 we find Timothy writing to his friend Sergius to ask if he knows the meaning of the word!¹ The Caliphs were educated men, and enjoyed the company of other educated men, like Timothy. They enjoyed philosophical discussion, and (it rather seems) loved arguing for the sake of arguing. At the close of the first of his two discussions with al-Mahdi Timothy can speak of the Caliph's "jocular smile", as he called off the debate and promised another "intimate exchange of words" later.² For this reason the Caliph carried on the conversation "not in a harsh and haughty tone, but in a sweet and benevolent way." The Patriarch felt free to speak of the Caliph's children as illustrations in the discussion:

The splendour and glory of the kingdom shine in the same way in the Commander of the Faithful and in his sons Musa and Harun, and in spite of the fact that kingdom and lordship in them are one, their personalities are different.³

Harun, the blossom and flower of Your Majesty, . . . is now called by everybody 'Heir Presumptive', but after your long reign, he will be proclaimed King and Sovereign by all. He served his military service through the mission entrusted to him by Your Majesty to repair to Constantinople against the rebellious and tyrannical Byzantines. Through his service he will not lose his royal sonship and his freedom, nor his princely honour and glory . . . So also is the case with Christ.⁴

In spite of this familiarity, it was not always easy for Timothy. Shortly before Timothy's accession, al-Mahdi had been defeated by the Byzantine Emperor Leo in 777-778, and he had reacted by attacking the

¹ But possibly this was a new translation altogether. Tim 7 (XLVIII), summary in Bid pp. 37-38. Labourt T pp. 26-28 lists 8 secular Greek writers and 18 Christian writers, many represented by several works, who are quoted by Timothy, and notes that his letters in Syriac contain 58 transliterated Greek words!

² Tim 4 (LXIX), Min p. 59. ³ Tim 4 (LXIX), Min p. 81.

⁴ Tim 4 (LXIX), Min pp. 83-84.

Christians in his own dominions, destroying churches, pillaging districts, and forbidding Christians to keep slaves.¹ One of Timothy's early tasks was to get permission to reconstruct the churches. He writes to Ephraim of Elam:

It is not because of pride or negligence that we have not come to visit you. That is displeasing to God. But the reason is the reconstruction of churches, and other urgent matters. If, as a matter of fact, Almighty God has permitted, and the King - may God preserve his life! - has consented to the reconstruction of the churches, we have had, nevertheless, to go into the presence of the King six times to get this matter settled.²

References to the relationship between the Patriarch and Harun-al-Rashid give us very much the same impression.

At the end of October, I had audiences three days in succession with our victorious King. He received me with pleasure and good humour, and he granted me 84,000 zuze for the monastery of Mar Petion.

However, even a gift like that was not obtained without trouble. "Up till now," adds Timothy wryly, "we have not received it. Our King has gone to Basra, but I have a mind to follow him there."³

Unlike Shim'un bar Saba'i, Timothy was ready to follow the Caliph to war, and use public transport to do so, though his letter suggests that he was not absolutely sure that the outcome would be good.

We marched on 7th June of this year 183 (i.e. 799 A.D.); we used the public conveyances in order to get there more quickly, with the honours, gifts and expenses of the King. Pray, your Grace, that the Lord may accomplish His will in us, and that our journey produce, not damage, but great social benefit.⁴

Elsewhere in his letters, it appears that Timothy was ready to identify himself wholeheartedly with his country, looking upon the Muslims,

¹ For Mari's account, see below, p.251. ² Tim 5 (L), Ch p. 607.Y.

³ Tim 34 (VIII), Br p. 58.Y. ⁴ Tim 47 (XLVIII), Bid p. 77.Y.

not so much as non-Christians, but as those sent by God to punish not only the idolatrous sun-worshipping Persians, but also the "heretical" Byzantines. Here again, we feel that Timothy is genuinely conscious of common ground with the Muslim, although his condemnation of the Cyrillian doctrine held by the Byzantines seems to us to lack proportion:

The Jews are despised today, and rejected by all, but the contrary is the case with the Arabs, who are today held in great honour and esteem by God and men, because they forsook idolatry and polytheism, and worshipped and honoured one God.¹

God honoured (Muhammad) exceedingly, and brought low before his feet two powerful kingdoms, . . . the Kingdom of the Persians and that of the Romans. The former . . . worshipped the creatures instead of their Creator, and the latter . . . attributed suffering and death in the flesh to the one who cannot suffer and die in any way and through any process.²

At the same time, we must remember that when Timothy looked back to the period of Sassanid rule, the memory uppermost in his mind was that the Persians had persecuted the Church; and the Byzantine Empire had persecuted Nestorius and Nestorians, as well as the Jacobites, had condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia as heretical, and shut down the school at Edessa. In comparison, a sporadic outburst of Muslim fanaticism against some Church buildings may well have seemed trivial to Timothy. Writing to the monks of Mar Maron, he may well be doing some special pleading, but if we try to enter into his point of view, we need not accuse him of insincerity:

In our case at least, orthodox doctrine has been strictly adhered to without change. Our faith has never been opposed. We have neither added to, nor taken away from, that pearl of truth which the Holy Apostles have entrusted to this Eastern region. In your case, on the other hand, Christian kings have held absolute sway, and whenever they inclined towards heretics or orthodox, the priests and faithful followed their lead. The result in your case

¹ Tim 4 (LIX), Min p. 59. ² ibid p. 62.

was that things were added to your faith, and taken away from it. For example, what Constantine the Great had agreed to, Constantius destroyed and annulled; and what he agreed to, his successor did away with the rejected.

With us, however, there has never been a Christian King, but at first for something like 400 years the Magians ruled over us, and then the Muslims. Neither the one nor the other tried to get anything added to or taken away from the Christian faith, but they take care never to damage it - especially those blessed Muslim Kings, who have never used compulsion on us about anything in the religious sphere.¹

It is interesting that Timothy, living at the centre, uses the word Muslim, or rather its Persian equivalent Mussulman, and not Arab like Thomas of Marga. He does not use the word Caliph, though in the presence of al-Mahdi he may call him the Commander of the Faithful. But his usual title is King, or our victorious King, or King of Kings, titles which had been used of the Sassanid rulers. This usage suggests two things - on the one hand that the Abbasid insistence that they were Muslim, rather than Arab, was beginning to have its effect; and on the other hand, that the Abbasid ruler was looked upon as the successor to the Persian Kings. As an Arab writer put it: "The Umayyad dynasty was an Arab empire; the Abbasid dynasty, a Persian empire".²

Timothy did not, however, forget that the Persian Kings had persecuted the Church, and in such words as the following there is an implied contrast with Muslim tolerance:

We have been disturbed and oppressed in every age. Five or six of our patriarchs have won for themselves the crown of light and martyrdom. . . . God knows how many of our metropolitans and bishops, and how many of our faithful of both sexes, have gained the martyr's crown - some by crucifixion, others by sword or fire, others in torments and punishments, others in hunger and afflictions, and others through imprisonment. During something like 400 years of

¹ Tim 30 (XLI), Bid pp. 120-121.Y.

² Quoted in Brown WLA p. 200. On this subject see his pp. 200-203, and above pp. 131-133.

Persian rule the Church of the East was ceaselessly subjected to sword and massacre. Even during all this time of massacre and persecution, however, the Devil has been unable to plunder the treasury of this Faith, or add or take away anything.¹

To say "ceaselessly subjected to sword and massacre" is certainly an exaggeration and distortion, but Timothy was looking back on a history that began at least with the martyrdom of Shim'un bar Saba'i in 341, and ended nearly 300 years later with the deaths of George of Izala in 613, Ishu'-sabran and his twelve companions in 620, and Yazdin before 628.

Timothy's letters say nothing about the destruction of churches in Basra and Uballa by Harun-al-Rashid,² but he is clearly sensitive to the accusation that led to it, that the Christians worshipped the bones of the martyrs, and in a letter written early in that reign, he refutes this view:

We do not say that the bodies of the saints are to be worshipped along with God, and like God - for there is only One who is to be worshipped by all¹, like the type in the archetype, the body of the Word of God³ - but that we honour them as members of God's household, and friends of His. They ought to lie, not in churches and temples, but in martyr-shrines and places in the neighbourhood of temples, with the suggested implication that the temple of God ought to embrace and kiss them. If, indeed, we honour and love stone temples, things without life, because of the power of God living in them, how much more are the living temples and rational bodies of the saints to be honoured, because of the Holy Spirit and Christ living and dwelling in them!⁴

In the discussion with al-Mahdi there is very little reference to Muslim objections to Christian practices. There is a question as to why the Christians did not circumcise themselves. Again, the Church of the East did not venerate the images of Christ or the saints, but they showed respect to the Cross, and al-Mahdi asks why they worship the Cross.

¹ Tim 30 (XLI), Bid pp. 123-124.Y. ² For Mari's account, see below p. 251.

³ i.e. the humanity of Jesus. ⁴ Tim 20 (XXXVI), Br. p. 182.Y.

Timothy replies that the Cross had been the means of life, not death, "for it is the root for us of the tree of immortality". It was the supreme medium through which God showed his love to men.

It is only just . . . that the medium through which God showed His love to all, should also be the medium through which all should show their love to God.¹

We have already seen how in the matter of his enthronement as Patriarch, Timothy was assisted by a Christian court physician, Abu Quraish, who effected a reconciliation between Timothy and the Metropolitan of Elam. Bidawid mentions various other courtiers who helped in various ways - the physician Bakht-ishu', the scribe Abu Nuh al-Anbari, the treasurer 'Aun al-Gauhari, and above all the physician Jibrail (Gabriel), son of Bakht-ishu'.² Timothy mentions Jibrail frequently, and uses a transliterated Greek word to describe his position - synkellos. Braun suggests that it may be the equivalent of the Arabic "maula"; in that case we might translate "courtier".³ It may well be, however, that Timothy is thinking of a more intimate relationship, like "counsellor" or even "confidant". In ecclesiastical terminology a synkellos was the personal assistant of a bishop, who shared his cell so to speak, and was often his designated successor.⁴ The references to Jibrail come, as we might expect, from the later letters, and all date between 799 and 804. He was clearly one whose help Timothy could count on at the court in delicate matters, as in the frustration of an unworthy candidate's effort to get himself appointed Metropolitan of Nisibin:

Jibrail was for me, at the court of our victorious King, in this as in many other matters, a hand, lips, tongue; even better,

¹ Tim 4 (LIX), Min p. 40. ² Bid p. 77. ³ Tim 55 (XXI), Br p. 89.
⁴ See article Syncellus in DCC.

he was for me a soul, a conscience, and an intelligence. He was all that for me and for the whole Catholic Church. God keep his life for many years, and the life of our victorious King.¹

Shortly afterwards, Timothy succeeded in getting a contribution of 3,000 zuze from Jibrail towards the needs of a monastic school.² When attempts were made to interfere in ecclesiastical matters, Jibrail again helped:

May God have mercy on the soul of Rabban Jibrail, who is a shield both for the community, and for us. Indeed, he has obtained an edict from the King, according to which no prince may act against me in matters concerning the laws of the Church.^{3, 4}

Jibrail was not always discreet, and caused some embarrassment by letting out the secret of Timothy's intention to appoint Ishu'-bar Nun Metropolitan of Nisibin, but he clearly concurred in the Patriarch's ultimate appointment of John.⁵ When Timothy had trouble with the Bishop of Gai, he used Michael, Jibrail's son-in-law, as a trustworthy man by whom to deliver a letter. The impression we get is that Jibrail had the same position of influence at the court as Christian physicians had had under some of the Sassanids.

The Church's Spiritual Autonomy and Spiritual Life

How far do Timothy's letters give us the impression that the Church was master in its own house, and what kind of spiritual life within the Church is evident from them? We may perhaps begin with Timothy's own view of his office and position, which was at least as high as, if not higher than, that of Ishu'-Yab III:

Just as the fountain, which went forth from Eden to water the garden was afterwards divided into four heads (Gen. 2:10), . . . so, when the Fountain of life has appeared among us Easterns -

¹ Tim 53 (LVII), Bid pp. 77-78.Y. ² Tim 55 (XXI) and 56 (XXII), Br pp.89, 91.

³ Literally "the Christian laws". ⁴ Tim 55 (XXI), Br p. 89.Y.

⁵ Tim 56 (XXII), Br pp. 89-90.

for from us Christ appeared in the flesh, who is God over all (Rom. 9:5) - it has irrigated the whole garden of the world, when it irrigates the four thrones and seats of the patriarchs . . .

In the flesh, Christ came of David, but David was descended from Abraham, and Abraham was one of us Easterns, and belonged to the East . . . Therefore it was from the Easterns that the Fountain of Christian life arose and spread, and going from us, was divided into four heads, which irrigate the whole garden of the Catholic Church with divine drink and the spiritual Kingdom of Heaven.

And just as priority and logical claim are due to the original fountain, . . . so our Eastern throne . . . ought to be reserved the first and highest rank, but the four others . . . a secondary and derivative rank. If Rome is accorded the first and principal rank on account of Peter the Apostle, how much more should Seleucia and Ctesiphon on account of Peter's Lord!'

With this high view of his office, we should expect Timothy to be active in the rule of his church, and careful to preserve its independence of outside interference. The impression we get generally from his letters is that he was master in his own house, exercising effective discipline, and only occasionally having to invoke the power of his position in the state to bolster his authority.

This can be illustrated by the canons passed once he was firmly seated on the patriarchal throne, to prevent a repetition of what had happened when the Metropolitan of Elam had absented himself from the electoral body. They appear first in a firm but courteous letter written to Ephraim himself, but were later in 790 confirmed at a Synod. The Practica of Mar Aba the Great is re-enacted, and then follows the special provision:

It is not permitted to the Metropolitan of Elam, nor to the other designated metropolitans, nor to the bishops . . . to neglect to come in person, or to send their consent to their brothers without delay, as soon as they have received the letter. And if they do

'Tim 15 (XXVI), Br pp. 100-101.Y. See also p. 60 above.

not associate themselves with their brothers, either in person, or by adhesion, they shall be (deposed and excommunicated); and then those who are assembled according to the canons can do everything legitimately and regularly.¹

In view of the fact that Timothy is said to have offered inducements to get votes, there is a certain irony in another canon:

It is not permitted to the bishops or the metropolitans to ask, contrary to the canons, from him who shall be appointed to be placed at their head, either before or after his ordination, sees or monasteries in the patriarchate, or any other gift, large or small.²

Timothy's treatment of the Bishop of Karka of Maishan round about 800 gives us a vivid glimpse of the authority he possessed, and how he used it. In a letter to his friend, Ephraim the Metropolitan of Elam, Timothy first contradicts a false report that he had deposed Shim'un of Maishan. Such a deposition could only have been carried out after a properly-constituted trial before the ecclesiastical authorities, in which plaintiffs, defendant and witnesses had been heard. Then Timothy gives the facts. Accusations had been made against Shim'un by the people of his diocese, and Timothy had ordered him to come to the Capital to have the matter properly investigated.

We had again and again written to him about his foolishness and awkwardness, and when his opponents came to us, he himself, like a bold and contentious man, treated our letters as vain and empty. For this reason I suspended him, not for an indefinite period, but for a definite one, with a definite end - in other words, till he should come down to the Royal City to us with his opponents, and we should enquire, and examine, and test their allegations against him. He was suspended for disobedience to our letters, not for charges proved against him.³

Timothy then wrote to the Metropolitan-elect of Harat, and the Bishop of Kashkar, and asked them to investigate the matter. They went to Maishan,

¹ Tim 5 (L), Ch p. 606.Y. ² Tim 5 (L), Ch p. 606.Y. ³ Tim 59 (XXV), Br p.94.Y.

and after investigation wrote to Timothy that Shim'un should not be deposed, because no charge worthy of deposition could be proved against him. It is clear, however, that suspension had been enough to break Shim'un's spirit.

As a result of my necessary decree, the wretched man was hated on all sides, and in desperate straits, and he suddenly made the journey to us. After he had stood at our gate for forty days without being granted an audience - not because I was proud, but so that his conduct would not be used as an excuse by seditious and tumultuous men - and when none of his accusers had appeared before us, . . . I cancelled the suspension, and gave him and our nuncio letters to Zachariah, Bishop of Kashkar, and Shim'un, Bishop of Zabe, telling them to go to Maishan, and do all they could to make peace.¹

If peace were impossible, they were to find if the accusers were bona fide, and if so, bring the matter back to Timothy; otherwise they were to take drastic steps against the accusers.

The story reminds us of Canossa, or of Mar Aba's discipline of Abraham of Gundeshapur, and makes it clear that, when he wanted, Timothy could be a strict disciplinarian. In the letters we hear of other clergy being deposed and anathematised - Babai the Metropolitan of Sarbaz or a bishop in that province,² Adar-shapur. Bishop of Gai,³ and so on. In the case of Hanan-ishu' of Sarbaz, it is true, Timothy was ready to give the man a second chance, and as we have seen, lived to regret it.⁴ He was prepared to use his spiritual powers also to ensure that the province of Elam obeyed its new Metropolitan, Sergius:

We have heard that there are men among the clergy and among the scholastic order, who are rising shamelessly against the authority of the Holy Metropolitan, and seek to override his wishes in the church and in the school. Therefore our instruction and ruling is as follows:-

¹ Tim 59 (XXV), Br pp. 94-95.Y. ² Tim 40 (XIII), Br pp. 70-71.

³ Tim 56 (XXII), Br p. 91. ⁴ Tim 40 (XIII). See p.205-6above.

If any clergyman shamelessly rises up against the Metropolitan by the Word of the Lord, he is not permitted to minister in his order, nor to administer the life-giving sacraments, unless and until he has given satisfaction to the Metropolitan.

If, however, he is from the scholastics or the doctors, who are fighting against the Metropolitan, by the Word of the Lord, he is not permitted to minister in any of the ecclesiastical orders, to receive the life-giving sacraments, or to live within the bounds of the city of Bait Lapat, without the express order of the Metropolitan.

None of the faithful are permitted, by the Word of the Lord, to support rebels of this kind against the Metropolitan, whether secretly or openly.

Be strong in the Lord, and pray for us.¹

In only two cases do we find references to the secular authorities being involved in matters of church discipline, and in each case the initiative was taken, not by the Muslims, but by the Christians. In the first of these, the case of Bar-shahde, Bishop of Hormizd-ardushir (Ahwaz), it is probable that Timothy got his way. Bar-shahde was a quarrelsome man, and we find in Letter 49 (LIII) that there was a boundary dispute about the town of Duraq with a brother bishop. In Letter 51 (LV) we have Timothy's decision that the town was to go to the Diocese of Ram-Hormizd, and in Letter 52 (LVI) Timothy writes to Bar-shahde, forbidding him to go to Duraq.² This letter shows that Bar-shahde, had also been involved in a serious quarrel with Emmanuel, Bishop of Shuster, and that he had gone the wrong way about it. It is written to Bar-shahde himself, but a letter is also sent to the Metropolitan, to see that it is acted on.

The letters which Bar-Shahde has written to Emmanuel, Bishop of Shuster, have come to Timothy. They are very hard, inspired by the spirit of vengeance, against the spirit of the Gospel. These

¹ Tim 38 (X), Br p. 65. Y. Compare Mar Aba's anathema against Abraham, above p. 105.

² See summaries in Bid pp. 40-41.

letters have caused great pain to Timothy, who notifies him that, even if he has been badly treated, he ought to put up with it all for the love of Christ; and if that is impossible for him, he could write, or even ask for an interview. If in spite of all this, the bad goings-on do not stop, he ought to bring the matter to his Metropolitan, and if that failed, to the Patriarch. That was what he ought to have done, rather than hand over a bishop to the secular judges.¹

You treat him with abuse in the city of Hurmizd-ardushir. But I am in the Great City, and I can easily do anything I want against you. Put far from you the proud spirit and arrogant word, and humble yourself before all, and before your metropolitan. I forbid you to move a hand towards Duraq or enter into its borders, for we have learned from the elders that that village is not in the Diocese of Hurmizd-ardushir.²

It is clear from Timothy's reference to his own position, that he would have been ready, if necessity arose, to appeal to the Muslim authorities to back him up and restrain the judge in Hormizd-ardushir from interfering in a quarrel between bishops.

The other instance, however, was one in which Timothy had to some extent to bow to a court decision, though he saw to it that the resulting damage was not too great - the appointment of a new Metropolitan of Nisibin. We can reconstruct most of the story from Letters 50, 53, 55 and 56.

Bidawid thus summarises Letters 50 and 53:

He is thinking of Ishu'bar Nun for the See of Nisibin. Let Sergius pray about this; the people of Nisibin, influenced and bribed by the gold of Cyprian, were opposed to the candidate, and his supporters were few in number.³

After the death of John, Bishop of Nisibin, the partisans of Cyprian, Bishop of Arzan, got together and installed Cyprian in the See of Nisibin. Six men from Nisibin had come to the Patriarch with the suffrage, while Cyprian had approached the Royal Court asking for approval. But Mar Jibrail, the counsellor of the King, has thwarted all these attempts; he has convinced the King that Cyprian

¹ Tim 52 (LVI), summary in Bid p. 41.Y. ² Tim 52 (LVI), tr. in Labourt T.Y.

³ Tim 50 (LIV), summary in Bid p. 40.Y.

is unworthy of the See of Nisibin, and not even of that of Arzan. Thus the question is resolved. May God give long life to Mar Jibrail. Timothy wants to appoint Ishu'bar Nun to the See. Would Sergius pray that God's will may be done?'

Clearly Timothy had won the first round, with the help of Jibrail. It is doubtful, however, if Timothy was wise in pressing for the appointment of Ishu'bar Nun, possibly because he was an old fellow-student and he wanted to please him, possibly because he was an opponent, and he wanted to placate him. Ishu' bar Nun was not an easy man to get on with, and clearly the monks of Nisibin and Mt Izala feared his reputation for strictness.

Timothy speaks briefly of the result:

Let it be known to your God-loving Grace, that on the Sunday before Palm Sunday, the Spirit according to his good pleasure chose and consecrated our brother John, the Bishop of the city of Haditha, to be Metropolitan of Nisibin. We were unable to appoint Ishu' bar Nun ruler of this See, as we had written before, because the people of Nisibin hated him so much. Indeed, except for a very small minority, they hated him for no valid reason. The root cause of this is the immoderate zeal of the man, and the fact that the monks of the Great Convent were stirred up against him.²

This letter to Sergius, who was Ishu' bar Nun's Metropolitan, does not seem to have satisfied him. At any rate, shortly afterwards, Timothy wrote in more detail, showing that Jibrail had also been at fault in the matter.

As a matter of fact, I was disposed and ready, with full eagerness and intention, to make our brother Ishu' bar Nun ruler of the Metropolitan See of Nisibin, as indeed I had already written to you, my brother. But I have been hindered and prevented by the one who wears the royal crown. For just the other day, the villains got to know what I intended to do, mostly from what they heard at the King's Court, and from the great Jibrail's party. Jibrail had spoken, not secretly, but openly and authoritatively before them all, about matters which ought to have been introduced not openly, but secretly and enigmatically. Then these people went insidiously to our victorious King - not openly in person, but by means of the man who at that time³ was above all the nobles and household officials,

¹ Tim 53 (LVII), summary in Bid pp. 41-42.Y. ² Tim 55 (XXI), Br p. 88.Y.

³ If this is a reference to Ja'far son of Yahya, it dates the letter to 803 or 804. See above p. 133.

to whom the distribution of the largesse has been promised for twelve months.

I have been hindered by the hatred of the people of Nisibin for that person, for with very few exceptions, they had all turned their backs on him; for the white-hot and immoderate zeal of the man has roused against him first the monks of the Great Monastery, and then through them the whole city and province of Nisibin. A spirit of lying has spoken through the mouth of these monks; it has flattered, it has conquered. They have sharpened their tongue like a keen sword against the blameless, and made their word like an arrow, to smite the blameless in secret. Again and again they have written to me: "If you make Ishu'bar Nun Chief of the See of Nisibin, we shall be Severians rather than Christians."

When I saw the sedition or rebellion, . . . I called the saintly John, Bishop of Haditha. He has been anointed with the Spirit, has gone, has been welcomed, and is sitting on the throne of James,¹ with the consent and approval of all, as we have heard from many people, and in particular, from our great Mar Jibrail.²

Timothy, it must be remembered, is apologising for the turn of events to Ishu'bar Nun's Metropolitan. It may well be that the course to which he had been constrained by circumstances ultimately coincided with the Patriarch's own better judgment.

Otherwise we have many instances in the letters of appointments of metropolitans and bishops, and no suggestion of state interference, or even that the state needed to be consulted. The case of Timothy's friend Sergius is probably typical. Timothy let the Elamites know that he wanted to appoint Sergius to be their Metropolitan; on receiving a favourable reply from them, he asked Sergius to come to the Capital for official nomination and appointment.³

When we turn from the question of how Timothy ruled his house to that of what state his house was in, we have a mixed impression. Timothy saw clearly that the state of the monasteries and monastic schools was vitally

¹ i.e. James of Nisibin, famous 4th century bishop.

² Tim 56 (XXII), Br pp. 89-90. ³ Tim 32 (XLIX), summary in Bid p. 38.

important, because they provided the bishops for the Church of the East. In the letters Timothy again and again shows his concern that the teaching in the schools should be up to scratch, and their financial position satisfactory. Sergius, to whom most of his letters are written, was at first addressed as "doctor", and was Head of a monastic school. Later, when he was Metropolitan of Elam, Timothy is still insistent that he should keep a close watch on the progress of the schools. Again and again there are requests for suitable men to be sent from the schools for posts as metropolitans and bishops. Here are a few typical examples of Timothy's concern.

About 783-785 he writes to Sergius:

Take care of all that concerns the scholars, whether boarders or day-scholars. Take special care of the Monasteries of Saliba, and Bait'Abe, and the other convents.¹

The very next letter suggests that Sergius was not firm enough in his rule:

Order the affairs of the cells and the schools rightly, as a prudent master of a household should; for it is your duty to teach and guide your brothers, and not your brothers' duty to teach and guide you! The 500 zuze, which we assigned to you, because of the ruined cell about which you wrote us - it was to you that we assigned them. If, however, it seems more useful to you to spend the money on something else, it is for you to make the decision, not for others. Write at once to us all the reasons you have, or the scholastic brothers have, for we are their servants, not their lords. God has sent me here to support these, and others, not for my own honour. On no account are you to sell the field of Bait Bure, but let it out annually to farmers, in order to support yourself and the brothers.²

Later in the letter Timothy closes the matter of what to do with the money:

But take the 500 zuze, as I have written you, and make repairs to your cell. Send the rest of the zuze back here by a trustworthy man.³

More than ten years later, when Sergius is Metropolitan, Timothy

¹ Tim 9 (XVI), Br. p. 80.Y. ² Tim 10 (XVII), Br. p. 81.Y.

³ Tim 10 (XVII), Br. p. 82.Y.

entrusts a young man to his care for training:

Take care of our brother Humanshah, and shape and form in him an image of your virtue and knowledge. Be indeed a skilful sculptor.¹

Some four or five years later, we find an instruction being sent to Sergius to carry out an inspection of the monasteries in his province.²

Shortly afterwards we have interesting details of how Timothy provided for the needs of the Monastery of Rabban Abraham.

We have summoned our brother Ishu'-sabran, Doctor of the Monastery of Mar Abraham. We requested something from Rabban Jibrail, the King's counsellor, and he gave us 3,000; also from the faithful 'Aun (al-Gauhari), and he gave 3,000; and also from somebody else, and he gave 4,000. We want you to buy for the scholars the so-called Playground of Babai, which you know about, so that the school can have a place for recreation, and an auditorium. But I do not want anything bought there which will be liable to taxation.³

We shall call Doctor Ishu'-sabran, and give him 10,000 zuz . . . I commanded that with them they should buy the Playground of a certain Babai for the school of the monastery, and a third of it should be given to the teacher, and two thirds to the scholars.

Before Ishu'-sabran came we had set apart 1,200 zuz for the scholastic brothers. We have given one third to the teacher and two thirds to the brothers, but a hundred each to the two brothers who collect the money.⁴

We also have, about this time, an interesting reference to the testing out of a monk whom Timothy had in mind as a possible bishop:

This is the reason why we called Sabr-ishu' to come to us. I have instructed him to preach in front of the people, and he preached boldly and agreeably, with elevated, bold, and easily flowing speech, coloured with excellence of composition and quality, now with rhetorical argument, now with quotations from our father Gregory (of Nazianzus). If he does not dally and delay when he is called, he, and no other, will attain to the see of Nisibin.⁵

¹ Tim 9 (XVI), Br p. 80.Y. ² Tim 49 (LIII), summary in Bid p. 40.

³ Tim 55 (XXI), Br p. 89.Y. ⁴ Tim 56 (XXII), Br p. 91.Y.

⁵ Tim 55 (XXI), Br p. 89.Y. As Timothy has already in the letter spoken of the appointment of John to be the new Metropolitan of Nisibin, Sabr-ishu' must have been intended as a local bishop only.

In our study of Thomas of Marga we have seen something of the self-sacrifice of the missionaries sent out in Timothy's times, but there was another side also. It does seem that parts of the Church were poorer and less attractive than others, and that many monks were unwilling to make the sacrifices called for. The impression we get is that while in the northern provinces of Nisibin, Hedayab, Bait Garma, and The Cities, the state of the Church was little changed, in the south in Basra, and to the east in Elam, Fars, and beyond, it was a prey to poverty and indiscipline, and people felt that to be sent there was a kind of punishment. We have already seen how Hanan-ishu¹, when appointed Metropolitan of Sarbaz, went round the Cities and Basra and Huballat collecting "expenses", in anticipation of having a hard time making ends meet when he got there.¹ Some time after Sergius was appointed Metropolitan of Elam three of his workers - bishops or heads of monasteries - deserted his province. Timothy tried to persuade them to return, but had to report very partial success:

The brothers we wrote to - Hanan-ishu², Ishu'-rahmeh, and Ishu'-sabran have indeed come to see us at the Royal City, but they have shown very little submission on the question of returning to your province. They think that life depends more on the place you are in than on God, more on the kind of air you breathe than on the Creator and Mover of the air.

Sometimes they say they don't have the proper vestments, sometimes that they are unfit, sometimes they have other excuses. Ishu'-sabran indicated to me that he could not go back immediately, but he promised that he would return both to us and to you after a short time. Ishu'-rahmeh is giving

¹ Tim 40 (XIII). See above, pp. 205-206.

² Was this the man appointed to Sarbaz? But it was a common name.

up altogether the charge of the Monastery of Rabban Abraham. "I am weak, infirm, and sick," he says, "and I don't get enough to live on in that place." This is the present position.'

Shortly afterwards Timothy again wrote to Sergius about the difficulty of getting people to fill the vacancies in Elam because of a spirit of insubordination, the dangers of the journey, the bad climate, and the poverty of the province. Finally he had got hold of some monks and ordained them as bishops. He would send them to Sergius, and he would be free to use any he found suitable; this would save their making a second journey to the Capital to be "perfected" by the Patriarch.²

Thomas of Marga tells us that after Shubhal-ishu's death "there was no one who would undertake for God's sake" that difficult and dangerous work³, but that ultimately he had got plenty of new recruits from Bait 'Abe. We need not take too literally Timothy's statement to Hanan-ishu' of Sarbaz that "many monks cross the sea to India and China with nothing more than a staff and a begging-bag"⁴, which was doubtless an exaggeration meant to shame him. Shubhal-ishu', Thomas tells us, was provided by the believers with money and clothes.⁵ But sacrifice was called for, and not all were of the high calibre required.

Travel across Elam, and from Elam to Fars, seems to have been difficult, and in spite of Ishu'-yab III's work, Timothy had his

¹ Tim 45 (VI), Br p. 55. Y.

³ See above, p.192.

⁵ See above, p.190 .

² Tim 48 (LII), summary by Bid pp.49-50.

⁴ See above, p. 205 .

own troubles with the latter province. In a letter written between 795 and 798 Timothy asks Sergius to write to the Metropolitan of Fars, to remind him that he must submit to the canons of the Church, and those of the Council of Nicaea, and of Mar Aba.¹ Some years later, he writes again:

The people of Fars are like an incurable disease. Timothy has tried several times to cure them, but they always resist, preferring to die of hunger and thirst than to drink of the living water, and eat of the tree of life like the other churches. In order not to present himself before the tribunal of Christ as an unprofitable servant, Timothy has renewed his efforts and his subsidies² on their behalf. He asks Sergius to write to Babai, the Bishop³ of Fars, to bring home to him the horrors committed by the people of Fars in connection with the Sacred Mysteries (the sacraments). Perhaps they may wake from the sleep of death.⁴

Although the account of Bar-Hebraeus, writing nearly 500 years afterwards, may have got the name of the Metropolitan of Fars wrong, the following account may refer to the same trouble:

It is said that down to the time of this Timothy, the bishops of the province of Fars were wearing white garments like secular priests, eating meat, and marrying, and were not under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos of Seleucia. They used to say: "We have been evangelised by the Apostle Thomas, and we have no share with the See of Mari".⁵ Timothy, however, united them and joined them to him. He ordained for them as Metropolitan a man named Shim'un, and he ordered them not to eat meat, or marry, and to wear white garments made only of wool. He further permitted them to confirm the bishops whom he would ordain, without coming for such confirmation to the Catholicos.⁶

¹Tim 43 (XLVII), summarised by Bidawid, p. 37. ²Was this inter-church aid? ³Probably he was metropolitan, unless we are to understand Tim 40 (XIII) to mean that the Metropolitan of Fars resided at Sarbaz, and that the Babai against which he was to pronounce anathema was the Bishop of Fars! It seems unlikely; the evidence is too fragmentary for a conclusion, especially as many Christians had the same names.

⁴Tim 54 (LVIII), summary by Bidawid, p. 42. ⁵For Mari see p. 25 above.

⁶Bar-Hebraeus EC 3: Col. 169-171, Min 10 p. 467, Y pp. 326-327.

Perhaps it is enough, on this subject of unsatisfactory clergy, to refer to one earlier letter to Sergius:

As for the accursed Khusrau, send him away, for his end is going to be perdition. In his case, the sentence shall be carried out, and whoever hears of it, let his ears ring in that day, and it shall be like the consummation of the judgment on Eli's family. For that wretched man is desperately sick with avarice, and thinks God has set me apart to serve His servants for no other purpose than to fill his belly! Put him away from you like a dead dog...and let him have nothing to do with you for ever!¹

We shall not go into details about differences of belief among the Christians themselves. There is no doubt that the Christians were weakened by the disunity between Melkite, Severian (non-Chalcedonian), Julianist (Monophysite) and Nestorian, and the longest of Timothy's letters are expositions of what he calls the orthodox position.² It is clear that Severian influence went as far east as Harat, but there is no evidence in the letters of opponents of the Church of the East using the state against it, and we find Timothy ready to co-operate with the Melkite Patriarch in translation of Aristotle.

It is clear from both Timothy's letters and Thomas of Marga's book that the Messalians continued to be a threat to the Church, and one of the letters³ speaks of a Bishop of Bait Nuhadra accused of Messalianism.

¹ Tim 22 (XXXI), Br p. 105. Y.

² Tim 1 (I), 18-20 (XXXIV-XXXVI) and 30 (XLI). For these theological viewpoints see p. 91 above.

³ Tim 28 (XLIV), summary by Bid pp. 35-36. For the Messalians see p. 100 above.

What about conversions?

1. Accessions from other Christian Churches. There is no doubt that Timothy strove for, expected, and provided for accessions from other Christian churches to the Church of the East, and that he had some limited success. "Send me that intelligent young man," he writes to Sergius in his latest extant letter. "Perhaps we shall make him Metropolitan of Herat, for there are Severians there, and we need a good warrior!"¹ His long letter to the Monks of Mar Maron, with its high claims of the extent and orthodoxy of the Church of the East, and that "there is nothing that can stop the progress of the one Church that we build up"² is an attempt, which in the event proved unsuccessful, to woo them into the Church of the East. His letter to Maran-zakha, Bishop of Nineveh, with its high claims of priority for the Patriarchate of the East,³ is a comparative study of the doctrines of the Nestorians, Melkites and Severians. A letter to Solomon, Bishop of Haditha, the earliest of those extant, discusses the procedure to be followed in admitting "Cyrillians" who enter the fold of the Church of the East - they are not to be rebaptised - and the letter ends with an Order of Service for the Reconciliation of Heretics.⁴ Three other long letters, one to the priests and faithful of Basra and Huballat, and two to a believer called Nasr, set forth in detail the Nestorian doctrine of the humanity of Christ.⁵ Two letters give details of a mass accession of Julianists in New Najran:

Writing to Sergius, Timothy gives the first news.

We inform your Grace that Jesus, who has cast the net of the Kingdom of Heaven in the sea of the world, and from it has taken almost the whole world, has also in this day and age taken possession of the city of Najran, situated near Hira, which up till now had been in bondage to the heresy of Julian. 25 men have

¹ Tim 59 (XXV), Br p. 95. ² Tim 30 (XLI), Bid pp. 91-125.

³ Tim 15 (XXVI). ⁴ Tim 1 (I). ⁵ Tim 18-20 (XXXIV-XXXVI).

come over to us - clergy, presbyters and deacons - with a great host of people, and they have asked us to consecrate a bishop for them. With God's help we shall do this next Lord's Day. Give praise to God for His grace towards us. Pray that the work of the Lord may issue in a good result.¹

Shortly afterwards, we find him mentioning the matter in his letter to the Monks of Mar Maron, as a reason why they should join the Church of the East:

In Najran also, an important city, which had been dominated by the heresy of Julian, 13 churches came into union with us last year, a community of more than 2,000 people.²

These were Arab Christians from the Yemen, who had left south-west Arabia rather than become Muslims, and had settled near Hira, south of the Euphrates. As we have seen, the "Bishop of Yemen and San'a" mentioned by Thomas of Marga, may well have had his see at New Najran.³ The Book of the Himyarites makes it clear that these Arabs had been monophysites: the martyr Habsa says:

You must know that not only will I not say that Christ was a man, but I worship Him and praise Him because of all the benefits He has shown me. And I believe that He is Godm Maker of all creatures, and I take refuge in His Cross.⁴

The teaching of Julian of Halicarnassus was an extreme form of monophysitism.

2. Magians and Zoroastrians. There is no mention in Timothy's letters of conversions of Magians; the only references we have found to Magians have been in the claim that the Persians had been the first to worship Christ because the Magians had brought Him gifts,⁵ and in references to the practice of marrying the sister of a deceased wife as being the result of Magian influence.⁶

¹ Tim 29 (XXVII), Br p. 102.Y. ² Tim 30 (XLI), Bid p. 124.Y.

³ See above, p. 6. ⁴ The Book of the Himyarites pp. 33b-34a, Y p. 220.

⁵ In Tim 37 (IV). ⁶ Letters 3 (XL) and 4 (LIX).

3. Muslims. There is no mention in Timothy's letters of any conversions to Christianity from Islam, or of any evangelistic work among Muslims. There are, it is true, two records of discussions which Timothy had about Christianity, one with a Muslim Aristotelian philosopher, and the other with the Caliph al-Mahdi himself. There may possibly be the suggestion in the latter that Timothy at one time had had a faint hope that he might persuade al-Mahdi of the truth of Christianity, but the letters are records of philosophical and religious discussions. Timothy's words are:

I feel repugnance to write to your Grace, . . . on account of the futility of the outcome of the work. It is true that I could not have acquired a mature experience of such a futility from the single discussion mentioned here, but I may state that I have acquired such an experience from discussions that took place before the one involved in the present lucubration.¹

The discussions are full of interest, and some of the arguments remind us of Justin's Dialogue with Trypho and Origen's Contra Celsum, but the impression we get is that the Christian is much more on the defensive, and there is far less in the way of evangelistic zeal. The dialogue with al-Mahdi ends with a courteous agreement to differ, rather than the hope we find expressed by Justin that Trypho will find the Christ of God. It may be thus summarised:

- Timothy - In this dark world we believe that we have the pearl of truth, and so do you. When the Day comes, one of us will discover that we have only a worthless bit of glass.
- al-Mahdi - So in this world we do not know who has the pearl?
- Timothy - We partly do, by their good works, pious deeds, and the signs and wonders that God works among them. We see these signs first in Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah and Elisha, and then supremely in the miracles of Christ.
- al-Mahdi - We have hope in God that we are possessors of this pearl, and hold it in our hands.
- Timothy - Amen, O King. But may God grant us that we too may share it with you, and rejoice in the shining and beaming lustre
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¹ Tim 4 (LIX), Min pp. 15-16.

of the pearl. God has placed the pearl of His Faith before all of us like the shining rays of the sun, and everyone who wishes can enjoy its light.

al-Mahdi - Even unbelievers have performed miracles.

Timothy - These were the deceptions of demons. But Moses and Peter overcame demons in Simon Magus and Jannes and Jambres by the power of God.¹

The discussions are nevertheless important, in that they provide arguments many of which have been used by Christians to counter Muslim attacks on their Faith up to the present day. For this reason summaries of both discussions are given in Appendix D.

4. What about Christians turning Muslims? There is no evidence of this in the extant letters. We know from other sources that al-Mahdi persuaded Yusuf, Metropolitan of Merv, to become a Muslim, but if Bar-Habraeus is to be trusted, Yusuf had been guilty of sodomy,² and although his defection was a great blow to the Church psychologically, and Timothy was blamed for it, it is doubtful whether he was a genuine or permanent convert, or respected by the Muslims.³ Certainly his "conversion" did not lead al-Mahdi to depose Timothy.

The Extent of the Church, and Missionary Work to the East

In a well-known passage in the letter to the monks of Mar Maron, Timothy speaks of the rejection of a "monophysite" addition to the Trisagion:

For see, in all the area - in Babylon, Persia and Assyria, and in all the countries of the East, both among the Indians and the Chinese as well as the Tibetans and the Turks, and in all the territories under the jurisdiction of this Patriarchal Throne, whose servant and minister God has ordained us to be, this holy prayer has been from the very beginning recited without the addition "who wast crucified for us" - recited, I say, in regions and countries and

¹ Tim 4 (LIX), Min. summary of pp. 88-90.² Bar-Hebraeus EC 3, col. 171-172.

³ He later went to the Byzantine Empire. See below, p. 251.

languages widely separated and different from one another.¹

In his 31st canon, Timothy gives the following instruction to wives whose husbands are absent, feared dead, and who seek permission to remarry:

The wife is in no wise allowed to turn away to another marriage before it is known exactly if her husband is dead or not. This is not impossible, even if his dwelling is with the Indians or the Chinese. Let the matter be put therefore in writing, and tracked down by the bishops and metropolitans and the Patriarch, and wherever the man be, let him be constrained by the sanctions of the Word of God and the canons, until, as is right, he either return to his wife or send her alimony.²

These two passages give us a glimpse of the extent of the Church of the East, and of its unity in worship and in maintaining discipline. Again and again in the letters, too, we have lists of new appointments of Metropolitans and Bishops, giving the same impression. On the whole, the information given is neither so interesting nor so detailed as that in Thomas of Marga's book, but it has the advantage of being absolutely contemporary.

1. Establishment of a new Metropolitan Province at Rai. The old city of Rai lies a few miles to the south of modern Tehran, on the railway line from Tehran to Meshed. Round about 800 Timothy decided to make it the centre of a metropolitan province, and gave his reasons in a letter to Sergius:

On the same Lord's Day the Spirit consecrated our brother Habbiba, priest and doctor of the city of Haditha, to be the Metropolitan Bishop of the city of Rai. Rai is a metropolis, and ought to have a metropolitan bishop, and also in the Royal Province, which is attached to it, there are two satraps, one in Rai itself, and the other in Halwan. Indeed, there is a great harvest in both places, but the labourers are few. The metropolitan province extends about 200 parasangs (700 miles). Before the matter was settled I informed your Grace, so that the counsel and opinion of two people should settle the affairs of the Church. You answered me that when you held a Provincial Synod, you would write to all about this matter under your

¹ Tim 30 (XLI), Bid p. 117.Y. ² Tim Canon 31, Labourt T p. 64.Y.

seal, which I both expect and wait for. Pray that what has and will be decided may be satisfactory for the community.¹

We have already seen, in a previous chapter,² that the appointment at Rai may have also had strategic importance in connection with the missionary work further east.

2. Dailam. Between 795 and 798 Timothy writes:

Shubhal-ishu' of the Dailamites has put on the martyr's crown. We have sent another metropolitan to Gurgan . . . we have sent in his place ten monks from Bait 'Abe.³

This confirms Thomas of Marga's account, though the latter says 2 metropolitans and 15 monks, of whom 7 later became bishops. Timothy gives no further details.

3. The Turks. Writing to the Monks of Mar Maron in 792-793, Timothy gives news of the conversion of a Turkish Kingdom:

My dear friends, there is nothing that can stop the progress of the One Church of Christ that we build up. For see, even in our days, these ten years or so during which the ministry of the Church has been entrusted to me (as a matter of fact, I have been something like 13 years in this ministry) the King of the Turks, with nearly all his country, has rejected the ancient error of atheism, and been converted to Christianity, thanks to the working of the great power of Christ, through which they have all been subjected to this Faith. He has written asking us to appoint a metropolitan for his subjects, and with God's help, we have done this. God willing, we shall send you a copy of the letter we write to him.⁴

Between 795 and 798, writing to Sergius, he reports the death of Shubhal-ishu', and also mentions that "during these days the Spirit has consecrated a Metropolitan for the Turks".⁵ As we have seen in the previous chapter, the conversion of these Turks may well have been the work of Shubhal-ishu' himself, and the description of the Turks in the so-called Letter of

¹ Tim 55 (XXI), Br p. 88.Y. ² See above, pp. 75-76.

³ Tim 43 (XLVII), tr. in Labourt T.Y. ⁴ Tim 30 (XLI), Bid p. 124.Y.

⁵ Tim 43 (XLVII), Bid p. 85.Y.

Philoxenus of Mabbog may be contemporary. The seat of the Metropolitan may have been Kashghar.¹

4. The Tibetans. In the same letter to Sergius as that mentioned above, Timothy adds "we are preparing another (Metropolitan) for the Tibetans".² We have already mentioned Mingana's suggestion that his centre may have beenⁱⁿ Tangut.³

5. The Chinese. Apart from the reference to the Trisagion and Canon 31, we have two further references to China. Writing to Sergius between 795 and 798, in a letter whose final words are missing, Timothy says:

The Metropolitan of China has gone to be with the Lord. If you find a suitable person in the New Convent - for I have heard that there is a monk who is pure and . . .⁴

We can guess the rest; Sergius was to act as a recruiting agent. It is likely, however, that he was unsuccessful, and that the monk appointed was the David of Bait 'Abe mentioned by Thomas of Marga.⁵ The other reference to China is given below under "The Indians". The metropolitan seat was probably Ch'ang-an, the Chinese capital.

6. The Indians. Apart from the two references above, there is only one mention of India in the extant letters. It occurs in Timothy's remark to Hanan-ishu' of Sarbaz:

"Many monks," I told him, "cross the sea to India and China with nothing more than a staff and a begging-bag. Get it into your head that you are just as well-off as they are: you are setting out across the sea with ample resources!"⁶

¹ See Chapter IV, p. 76 above. ² Tim 43 (XLVII), Bid p. 85. Y.

³ See Chapter IV, p. 76 above. ⁴ Tim 40 (XIII), Br p. 72. Y.

⁵ See Chapter VII A, p. 189 above. Thomas had seen the name David in some letter of Timothy's now not extant.

⁶ Tim 40 (XIII), Br p. 70. Y.

There is more in this remark than meets the eye. As we have seen, Timothy's source of recruitment for new bishops and metropolitans was the monasteries. It is reasonable to suppose that some of the monks sent to India were sent with Timothy's authorisation to be bishops there, just as they were to China and elsewhere. The copper-plate charter which mentions Mar Sabr-ishu' and Mar Piroz coming to Cranganur in Malabar is further proof of this, for their titles show that they were both bishops, and it is interesting that South Indian tradition gives the date of their arrival as 823, the last year of Timothy's rule, when he reached the age of 95!¹

In addition to the extant letters, however, Ibn-at-Tayyib mentions three written "to the faithful of the Indies", and gives their gist:

1. For the election of a bishop, they should not apply to the Caliph, but to the Patriarch first, and then after him to the Caliph. The bishop should be intelligent, fear God, and know the Scriptures.
2. Rules about ordinations, and that the Cities have the primacy² among the patriarchal sees.
3. An apostate clergyman, who had spent 12 years in penitence, during which he had been forbidden to function, is to be received back not by laying-on of hands, or rebaptism, but by "ordination" of the bishop.³

Timothy evidently corresponded with the Church in India, and gave advice on its problems as they arose.

The letters of Timothy I, then, are important contemporary evidence of relations between the Church of the East and the Abbasid Caliphate at the close of the period of our study. They show us that the Patriarch was an important official at court, on terms of respectful friendship with the Caliphs, sharing in the patriotic feelings of his fellow-countrymen. He

¹ See Min 10, pp. 477, 507-508. ² Compare Tim 15 (XXVI), Br pp. 100-101.

³ Bid p. 49.Y. The subject of the third letter may be compared with that of Letter 1 (I).

valued the help of other Christian courtiers, especially court physicians. Though there were two sporadic outbreaks of anti-Christian feeling, there was no marked threat to the spiritual autonomy of the Church, and where interference is mentioned, it was at the initiative of discontented Christians. Timothy ruled ably, and exercised practical pastoral care, over a Church which had its good and bad elements, and which seems to have had to face poverty (perhaps due to economic depression or depletion of numbers) in the provinces to the north and east of the Persian Gulf. The Church gained numbers under his rule from "heretical" Christians, but there is no evidence in the letters of evangelism among the Muslims, or of any marked degree of apostasy to Islam. The letters give contemporary evidence of the conversion of a Turkish kingdom, and speak of an organised church stretching eastwards through Dailam, Rai, Merv, Harat, Turkestan and Tibet to China, through Fars to Sarbaz, and by sea to India.

C. OTHER MISCELLANEOUS EVIDENCEAccounts of Conversions of Muslims to Christianity

We have only come across two accounts of conversions of Muslims to Christianity during the rule of the early Caliphates in Mesopotamia. The first is the story of 'Aqba, the Governor of Mosul, and purports to have taken place between 650 and 700. It is in a hagiographic writing called The History of Rabban Hormizd the Persian. The story is that Sahibin the son of 'Aqba died, and was raised from the dead by the prayers of Rabban Hormizd, an ascetic monk from the Monastery of Bar 'Idta.

Then the governor answered and said unto Rabban, ". . . Let me be baptised in the Name of Him in whose Name my son was restored to life from the state of death; yet I am not worthy to make perfect the true faith in my soul, but only let His name be proclaimed over us, and we shall live thereby. Only, O my lord, give thou unto me the baptism of repentance and let us be pardoned thereby, even as John gave the baptism of repentance unto the people of the Jews." . .

Then first of all Shaibin (went down into a large brass vessel filled with water) and was baptised, and after him his father, 'Aqba the Amir, and then one by one the ten Arabs, the companions of the governor, who also had believed in Rabban . . . The Amir and the people of Al-Qosh (a village 30 miles north of Mosul) returned unto their village in unspeakable joy; and there were great gladness and triumph, which can never be taken away, unto all the countries round about in the hearing of the report of the triumphs of the blessed man!

"The description of the baptism of the son of the governor of Mosul . . . must be received with great caution" says Wallis Budge,² and in truth this piece of blatant wonder-working cannot be received as historical. Whether any Muslim governor was baptised, and this formed a historical basis for

¹ E. Wallis Budge, The Histories of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar 'Idta, Vol. 2, Part 1, pp. 102-103, and 105-106.

² *ibid.*, p. xxi.

the story, written centuries afterwards, is extremely doubtful, especially when the historical 'Aqba bin Muhammad was Governor of Mosul in 886, about 200 years later!¹

Of a very different nature is the story of the conversion and martyrdom of Abo, the "perfumer from Baghdad", in Tiflis in 786, during the short reign of Musa al-Hadi, which came between those of al-Mahdi and Harun-al-Rashid.

The passion of St Abo of Tiflis . . . is described by a Georgian observer, John son of Saban. His account has the merit of being written soon after Abo's death . . . partly to encourage his countrymen to stand firm.²

According to the account, Prince Narsai of Georgia was summoned to Baghdad by the Caliph Abdullah in 772,³ and kept there under house arrest; he was released by al-Mahdi in 775, and allowed to return to Georgia.

Abo . . . was of pure Arab stock on both his father's and his mother's side of the family. His father and mother and brothers and sisters resided there in Baghdad . . . He was a lad of about eighteen . . . Wishing to come here to Georgia with Prince Narsai, he entered into his service, because he was good at preparing fragrant scents and lotions, as well as being versed in the literature of the Saracens . . . When he arrived in Georgia he lived with Prince Narsai; his good qualities made him generally popular, and he learnt to read and write and converse freely in Georgian.

Then he started to acquire and read the holy books of the Old and the New Testaments, for the Lord guided his understanding. He used to go to church and listen regularly to the Holy Gospel and readings from the Prophets and Apostles, and ask questions and gain information from many expert theologians . . . In this way he became perfectly familiar with all the doctrine which has been given by Christ to the Holy Catholic Church. And so he became estranged from the faith of Muhammad and abandoned the rites and beliefs of his native land. He began to love Christ with all his heart . . . As he could not profess Christianity openly, he fasted and prayed to Christ in secret, and looked for a hidden place where he might receive the baptism of Christ, for he was afraid of the Saracens, who occupy and rule our land.⁴

¹ Budge: RH, p. 97, footnote 1. ² Lang GS p. 115.

³ The name is wrong. Mansur was then Caliph. ⁴ Lang GS pp. 117-118.

In 779 Prince Narsai was forced by the Muslims to flee from Georgia, and spent some time as a refugee with the Khaqan of the Khazar Turks, whose capital was on the banks of the Volga. Abo went with him, and was baptised there by Christian priests. Shortly afterwards the Prince moved to the Byzantine territory of Abkhazia, round about Trebizond, and there, in Christian surroundings, Abo's faith was nurtured and strengthened. In 782 al-Mahdi, who had appointed Narsai's nephew Prince of Georgia, granted the homesick Narsai a safe-conduct to return to Georgia. Abo was advised to remain in Abkhazia, where he would be safe, and under no pressure to deny his faith, but his reply was "Why should I hide this radiant truth with which Christ has illumined me?"¹

Then he went with Narsai to the land of Georgia and entered the city of Tiflis, where he walked about openly professing the Christian faith. Of the local Saracens who had known him before some swore at him, others tried to intimidate him, others pestered him, while some tried to win him over by soft words. But he remained firmly attached to Christ . . . For three years he went about openly in the city and the villages nearby as a professing Christian, and nobody molested him . . . But God-fearing people who knew of his piety provided him with food and clothes.²

In 785, however, Abo was arrested and brought before the Amir of Tiflis, and cast into prison. The intervention of Prince Stephen of Georgia led to his release. He was urged to leave the city, but refused to run away, and shortly afterwards was again arrested by a new Amir. The Amir asked:

"What is this I hear about you, that you are a Saracen by birth and descent, and have abandoned your native religion and fallen into error among the Christians? Now get ready to pray according to the faith in which your parents brought you up."³

On Abo's confession of belief in the Trinity the judge ordered him to be chained and imprisoned, and he remained in prison for nine days. He had a divine premonition that he was about to be martyred at the end of that

¹ Lang GS p. 122. ² Lang GS p. 122. ³ Lang GS pp. 123-124.

period. He anointed his head, and said:

"Once I myself was a skilled perfumer and mixer of fragrant oils. But today this is my anointing for the grave. From now on I shall no longer be anointed with this perishable oil, but . . . 'in the savour of Thy good ointments', O Christ, who filled me with the imperishable perfume of Thy faith and love. Thou knowest, O Lord, that I have loved Thee more than I have loved myself!"¹

The next day he again refused to recant, and the Amir ordered his execution.

Three times they struck him with the sword, for they thought that by fear of death, they might separate him from Christ; but the holy martyr looked on the sword in brave silence until he offered up his soul to the Lord.²

In order that the body of the martyr should not be used for a relic and means of healing, the Muslims had it burned, and other relics thrown into the river. But, says the writer in true hagiographic style, in spite of that there were portents, and the soil where the body had been burnt was used for miracles of healing.³

In spite of a certain amount of conventional tales of the marvellous, the story of Abo is basically an account of a conversion and martyrdom that really took place. In many ways it reminds us of the story of Eustace the Gobbler under Khusrau I (see p. 109). Basically the same principle was involved: it was no crime to be a Christian, but to be an apostate from the State Religion was punishable by death. It is, however significant that the only authentic account we have of a conversion to Christianity is the story of a martyrdom; many Magians similarly had become Christians, and died martyrs' deaths, but many more had survived, and been a source of strength and leadership to the Church. There is no evidence of this with Muslims under the early Caliphates.

¹ Lang GS p. 127. ² Lang GS p. 129. ³ Lang GS pp. 130-133.

The Arabic Histories of Mari and 'Amr-Saliba

We have already made some references to the chronicles of the Church of the East. There are three extant. The first in time is the Chronicle of Sa'ard¹, about which we have already written. It was written between 828 and 1020. Unfortunately it carries the history only up to about 640. The Book of the Tower², by Mari ibn Suleman, who flourished about 1140, is clearly dependent on the Chronicle of Sa'ard, and sometimes repeats it verbatim. In general it confines itself to the lives of the Patriarchs themselves, but notes the names of important contemporary Christians, and often gives some account of contemporary political events. Two recensions of the book were made by 'Amr ibn Matta and Saliba ibn Yuhanna, who flourished about 1350.³ Probably 'Amr copied and amended Saliba's version. 'Amr's Commentary concerning the Nestorian Patriarchs, as Gismondi has entitled it, is briefer than that of Mari, and follows a much more stereotyped pattern, describing a patriarch by a series of mostly conventional adjectives, giving his place of birth and method of election, and often ending with the date of his death and the length of his reign. Though clearly dependent on Mari, 'Amr seems to have had other sources to draw on, whether of written or oral tradition.

While we cannot rely on the veracity of all the details in these chronicles, the basic facts in them for the period of the early caliphates, including their dating and references to contemporary Muslim rulers, form an important chain of evidence concerning the history of the Church of the

¹ See above p. 98.

² Text and Latin translation by H. Gismondi, Maris Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria, 2 vols.

³ Also in Gismondi MAS.

East, in its relations to the state.

1. Under the early Caliphs. According to the Chronicle of Sa'ard and Mari, Ishu'-Yab II (628-644 or 646) wrote a letter to the prophet Muhammad, and Mari preserves copies of an agreement said to have been made between Muhammad and the inhabitants of Najran, and of the "Covenant of 'Umr", both of which are certainly later fabrications.¹ More credible are the statements of Mari that Mar-amma (647-650 or 644-647) and Ishu'-Yab III (647 or 650-657/8) made agreements and obtained "diplomas" of protection from the Arab rulers:

'Ali bin Abu-Talib² (peace be upon him!) wrote to Mar-amma in order to provide a diploma of immunity on his behalf, and on behalf of the Christians . . . to the governors. He was to show it to whoever should be given authority by the army-commanders and princes, and they were to obey the order.³

Ishu'-Yab III . . . was an exceedingly notable man, to whom the Rulers of the Districts greatly deferred, to such an extent that one of them gave him a diploma, in which a warning was given that no one was to trouble him in respect of his own monasteries, or See, or revenue, or household immunities - with only a small charge exacted for these things. They asked him each week for what he needed; or he asked for whatever could be useful for the affairs of the Christians.⁴

These pictures of the individual patriarchs, as Heads of the Christian millat, making ad hoc arrangements with different Arab rulers and governors, during an unsettled period of conquest, are probably authentic enough. There is no reference in the chronicles to any kind of persecution.

2. Under the Umayyad Caliphs, 661-750. The Umayyads ruled from

¹ PO 13 pp. 602-618. and 621-623. For a discussion of the "Covenant of 'Umr" see Tritton passim.

² The chronology is here at fault however, as 'Ali did not become Caliph till 656! Perhaps 'Umr is meant.

³ Gismondi MAS, Mari f. 177b-178a, tr p. 55.Y.

⁴ Gismondi MAS, Mari f. 178a, tr. p. 55.Y p. 325.

Damascus, and the immediate relations of the patriarchs were with the Governors of the Arab fortresses such as Kufa, Basra, al-Wasit and Jezira.

About the Patriarch George I (661-680/81) Mari has nothing special to say, except that his death was in the same year as that of the Caliph Mo'awiya.¹ Thomas of Marga tells the story of how he made peace with those who opposed his election,² and there is also the record of the Synod he held at Diren in 676 with the Metropolitan and bishops of Qatar,³ and in neither account is any mention made of the Muslim rulers. Nothing important emerges either about his successor John I, who died in 683. The next 31 years, however, were ones in which the Muslim rulers interfered considerably with the patriarchate, but this was largely due to the unsettled times.⁴

After the patriarchal office had been vacant for at least two years, Hanan-ishu' was appointed in 685 or 686, possibly by Mukhtar. In 691 his appointment was contested by John "the Leper". According to Mari, John gave Bishr, son of Abd-al-Malik money, saying that Hanan-ishu' had been the appointee of the ruler's opponents, al-Mukhtar and Mush'ad. (Mus'ab?). Bishr forcibly got possession of the patriarchal mitre, pallium and staff, drove Hanan-ishu' away from the Cities, and got John installed there. John died 22 months later, but Hanan-ishu' remained at the Monastery of Jonah at Mosul, with his authority recognised in Hedayab, Nisibin and Bait Garma. He died in 700, but al-Hajjaj the Governor refused to allow the appointment of a new patriarch, and the office of Head of the Church of the East remained vacant for a further 14 years.⁵ Against this background, we can

¹ And not Hasan as in T Mar II, 16, pp. 207-208.

² T Mar II, 12-13, pp. 182-189. ³ T Mar II, 13-14 and SO pp. 480-490.

⁴ See above, pp. 128-129 and 163-164.

⁵ Gismondi MAS, Mari f. 178b-180a tr. pp. 55-57 and 'Amr p. 56 tr. p. 32.Y.

understand why Thomas of Marga gives the impression that there was a marked decline in church and monastic standards about the end of the 7th century.¹

Mari and 'Amr both say that Saliba-zakha had been appointed Bishop of Anbar by Hanan-ishu', and deposed by John the Leper. They differ slightly in the account of his wanderings afterwards, but agree that he spent time at Nisibin, and that he was ultimately appointed Metropolitan of Arbil by Hanan-ishu'. When al-Hajjaj died, the fathers were allowed by his successor Yazid bin Aqil to choose a new patriarch, and Saliba-zakha was regularly elected and consecrated at the Cities. Both writers look on the patriarchate of Saliba-zakha as a time of restoration, although they are not very specific about it. "He restored the canonical rule, and founded a school," says Mari.² "He governed the church excellently," says 'Amr, "and he put right many things which had been done illegitimately."³ When we consider that Saliba-zakha probably restored the hierarchy in China and Samarqand, it is interesting that 'Amr speaks of two "holy men" who flourished during Saliba-zakha's patriarchate, one of whom founded a monastery in Merv, and the other a monastery in Segestan.⁴ After a period of weakness, the Church was again strengthening its eastward development. A new monastery was also founded at Haditha in Hedayab. Saliba-zakha ruled from 714 to 728.

After Saliba-zakha's death, the electors were not agreed as to his successor. The nomination was disputed:

When dissensions had arisen among the electors, the matter was put into the hands of the Sultan. The Christians were instant in prayer, and the next day the Prince of the Faithful ordered Phethion

¹ See above, pp. 178-179.² Gismondi MAS Mari f. 180a, tr p. 57.Y.

³ Gismondi MAS 'Amr p. 60, tr. p. 35.Y.

⁴ Gismondi MAS 'Amr p. 61, tr. p. 35.

to be made Patriarch. At his command, all made ready, and Phethion was made Patriarch without delay.¹

Although Mari says that the decision was made "the next day", the dispute had in fact meant a vacancy of three years in the patriarchate. Phethion was on good terms with the Governor of Kufa:

Khalid bin Abdullah al-Qasri held the governorship of Iraq. His mother was Roman by race: he often visited the Patriarch, and held him in honour: when the Patriarch visited him in Kufa, he would give him a seat and fine clothing, seek his blessing and ask him to pray for him. He required him to send only the bare minimum of tribute to the Cities, and wrote a letter asking Tariq his subordinate to protect him.²

Phethion was patriarch from 731 to 740, and he was succeeded by Aba II, 741-751. Aba seems to have shown tact in dealing with a difficult governor.³

When Yusuf bin 'Umr, who hated the Christians, was ruler of the country of Iraq, Mar Aba did not want to settle at the Cities until he had gone in person to greet the man. So he went to Kufa, and as soon as he saw him, Yusuf liked him, and was satisfied with the answers he gave to questions about himself and other matters.⁴

'Amr notes that it was during Aba's patriarchate (actually it was in 750) that the Umayyid Caliphate fell, and was replaced by the Abbasids.⁵

Under the Umayyids, then, we see the Caliph, or his governor, taking at times an active part in the appointment of a new patriarch, and in one case keeping the office vacant for 14 years. We have to remember, of course, that as Head of the Christian millat, "the patriarch was a government servant, and his appointment needed to be ratified by the Caliph,"⁶ and it was sometimes difficult to know who was the real ruler.

¹ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 180b-181a, tr. p. 58.Y.

² Gismondi MAS Mari f. 181a, tr. p. 58.Y. ³ ibid.

⁴ Yusuf was a personal enemy of Khalid, whom he succeeded as governor in 738; in 743 Walid II sold Khalid to Yusuf, who put him to death.

⁵ Gismondi MAS 'Amr p. 62, tr. p. 36.Y. ⁶ Tritton p. 80.

3. Under the early Abbasids, 750-823. The Church of the East did not get off to a good start under the Abbasids. Aba II died in 751, and after a vacancy of three years, an unworthy candidate, Surin, got himself elected, and got the Caliph Mansur to imprison his competitor Yaqub. According to Mari, once Mansur was informed of the real facts of the case by the Church leaders, he released Yaqub, who was consecrated as Yaqub II, and imprisoned Surin.¹ According to 'Amr, Surin was later released, and made Metropolitan of Basra.² Perhaps the "tact and skill" of Aha, Bishop of Hedayab, played their part in this settlement.³

Yaqub II (754-773) had difficulties to face. Mari makes it clear that during his patriarchate the Christians had to face heavy burdens of taxation. He was, however, helped by a Christian physician, 'Isa, who had cured the Caliph of a serious illness, and had much influence at court. The building of Baghdad took place during Jacob's reign.⁴

The accounts of the election of Hanan-ishu' II, Jacob's successor, are of great interest. Here we must give priority to the official, contemporary account, incorporated in the minutes of the Synod of Hanan-ishu', held in 775:

In the year 1087 of the Greeks, which is the year 159 A.H. . . . the Catholic Church of the East, after the death of Yaqub, its patriarch, remained widowed and bereft, without Head or director, for the space of 9 years.

God stirred up the heart of a certain monk, George the solitary, from the country of Kashkar . . . Aided by the grace of the Spirit, he sought out the victorious King and lover of Godm Muhammad (al-Mahdi), Commander of the Faithful, and asked and begged him to use his authority to gather all the Fathers to elect a patriarch, according to the perpetual rule and custom. The King said to him: "Because

¹ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 181b-182a, tr. p. 59.

² Gismondi MAS 'Amr p. 63, tr. p. 36. ³ T Mar II, 44, pp. 283-284.

⁴ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 182a-184a, tr. pp. 59-62.

you have been zealous for your people, I appoint you yourself to be their Head and Director."¹

But the monk refused such an appointment. He sent for the Bishop of Kashkar, who collected metropolitans and bishops together at the Royal City of Baghdad. The Caliph sent his general into the assembly with a message for the Bishop of Kashkar: "The King, Lover of God, wants the man who has shown zeal for his people to be the Catholicos!"² The account goes on:

According to the precept of Scripture, that "every soul should be subject to the power of the Authority" (Romans 13:1), the Bishop, finding nothing in the way of blame or crime in him that would make the man worthy of rejection, and seeing that it was the wish of the people of the Cities, of Kashkar, and elsewhere, and that the Prince was not trying to introduce heresy or schism into the Church, replied to the general: "I accept the King's choice, as is right for subjects towards their ruler."

But I, Hanan-ishu', and all the Fathers, Metropolitans and Bishops who were with me - we were totally opposed to such a decision, because we considered it an innovation. Wanting to establish our just rights by roundabout ways, and by ruse, we arranged the whole business without the knowledge or consent of Isaac, Bishop of Kashkar; and I, Hanan-ishu', Bishop of Lashom, was elected Patriarch.³

The Bishop of Kashkar then sent a letter making the complaint that no patriarch could be elected without his consent, or consecrated without the imposition of his hands. This was accepted by Hanan-ishu' as right, and he apologised about it to the people of Kashkar, whose Bishop had meanwhile died. He then held a Synod, and passed a canon safeguarding the right of future Bishops of Kashkar in elections (for was not Kashkar entitled to seniority, as Ur of the Chaldees?). After that the people of Kashkar accepted the authority of Hanan-ishu'.⁴

As we might expect, the account says nothing of the Caliph accepting the change, and we might conjecture that some means were used to "save his

¹ SO pp. 515, 516.Y. ² SO p. 516.Y. ³ Chabot SO pp. 516-517.Y.

⁴ Chabot SO pp. 517-523.

face", but if it is a true account of what happened, it is a remarkable instance of a Caliph bowing to the expressed wishes of the leaders of the Church of the East, and withdrawing his own nominee, and shows an essentially healthy respect for the rights of the Church by the State. Mari's account, however, is quite different:

When 'Isa the physician entreated al-Mahdi to do the right thing and appoint a patriarch, the Bishop of Kashkar wrote on a certain day to the Fathers that they should assemble. When therefore they had assembled, the archdeacon Marwa and the people of Hira and Bait-Garma elected Hanan-ishu'. Jacob of Kashkar opposed them, electing George son of Yazdin, a monk of the Monastery of Bahal, a man learned in Syriac, Arabic and Persian literature. The contestants assembled in the Monastery of Mar Phethion at Baghdad, and the matter was referred to al-Mahdi, who summoned both of them, George and Hanan-ishu', and suggested that they should accept Islam. George kept quiet; Hanan-ishu' pretended that he did not understand Arabic. Presently, when al-Mahdi was uncertain whether George, with his elegant speech, was not the more able of the two, he asked them both: "Of what kind of wood was Moses' rod made, by which so many miracles were to be accomplished?"¹

George replied that it was nowhere mentioned in the Pentateuch. Hanan-ishu' replied "It was of almond", and proved it from Numbers 17:8, where Aaron's rod produced ripe almonds. Then Mahdi decided to appoint Hanan-ishu' Patriarch.²

'Amr says nothing about the disputed election. Neither Mari nor 'Amr speak of a 9-year vacancy before Hanan-ishu's appointment, and Tisserant puts the death of Yaqub II and the appointment of his successor both in 773.³

What are we to make of this discrepancy? Perhaps the Synod's reference to "9 years" is a copyist's slip for "9 months". If we otherwise follow the Synod's account of events as being more contemporary, we may still be tempted to accept the story of al-Mahdi's question about the rod, and this

¹ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 184ab, tr. p. 62.Y

² Gismondi MAS Mari f. 184b, tr. p. 62. ³ DTC vol 11, col. 262.

may give us the clue to how the Caliph "saved face". It is, in fact, just the kind of catch-question that we would expect al-Mahdi to ask!

Finally, we come to Timothy I. Most of the details about the struggles at the time of Timothy's accession given in the preceding chapter are from Mari. From his account of Yusuf's apostasy it would seem that it may not have been permanent:

By the efforts of al-Mahdi Joseph embraced the Muslim faith. He was splendidly rewarded by the Caliph, and appointed in charge of certain lands in Basra, where he remained for some time. Finally he emigrated to the Roman realm.¹

Mari also gives the accounts of temporary destruction of churches by al-Mahdi and Harun-al-Rashid to which reference has already been made:

Mahdi sent his armies against the Romans, and Leo sent two of his nobles against him, who waged war with his soldiers and took them into captivity. Mahdi took it very ill, . . . and demolished churches, and forbade Christians to keep slaves, . . . but in the sixth year of his caliphate the order was revoked, and the condition of the Christians remained unchanged.²

Now Hamdun, who used to visit Rashid, nursed hatred against the Christians, and therefore denounced them before the Caliph, saying that they worshipped and adored the bones of the dead, and taught that they should be kept in their temples; therefore Rashid ordered the destruction of churches, and this was done both in Basra and Uballa and in other places. (But when the true facts had been explained to him) he ordered the churches to be rebuilt.³

Mari also tells of an attempt to get Christians to wear a distinctive dress, which according to him was foiled by the physician Jibrail:

Harun-al-Rashid succeeded Musa as Prince. He admitted the local inhabitants into dependency on the Muslims, and compelled them to wear distinctive clothing. One day Jibrail son of Bakhtishu' the physician went into his presence wearing a robe dyed with Persian dye, and when Rashid reproached him about this, he replied: "But I myself am one of the dependent people. I don't consider it right to wear a splendid robe, as though I was shrinking

¹ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 186a, tr. p. 64.Y. ² Gismondi MAS Mari f. 187a, tr. p.66.Y.

³ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 188a, tr. p. 66.Y.

back from this kind of clothing!" The answer pleased Rashid, and he exempted the Christians from this burden.¹

Mari also speaks of Harun's wife Zubaida, and why she favoured Timothy and helped him:

Rashid had taken an oath to repudiate Zubaida. When he regretted it, the unanimous sentence of the Muslim doctors was that he should marry someone else, whoever he liked. Timothy, however, finding that Rashid was extremely averse to doing this, suggested that Zubaida should become a nominal Christian, on account of which Rashid should condemn her to death, and then she should quickly seek to become a Muslim once more - and in this way it would be lawful for Rashid to take her again! This shrewd suggestion of Timothy's was considered valid by the doctors. Because of this Zubaida showered her thanks on Timothy, and gave him all the help he needed in his business, as well as gold and silver furnishings, damask robes, and other bounty.²

Mari is aware of the wide missionary work done during Timothy's patriarchate, even if his account is a bit exaggerated:

Timothy brought to the faith the Khaqan of the Kingdom of the Turks and other kings, from whom letters came to him, and besides that he implanted innumerable men with the Christian teaching.³

He lived under the rule of Mahdi, Hadi, Rashid, Amin and Ma'mun, nor was there king to whom he did not write, or lead to the faith, or teach the elements of Christianity.⁴

He also tells us a little about Ishu' bar Nun, whom Timothy had tried in vain to appoint Metropolitan of Nisibin.

He was prone to anger, and of an inconstant spirit. He opposed Timothy and showered him with hatred . . . He wrote books to denigrate Timothy, and disseminated them throughout the provinces.⁵

After Timothy had died, and Ishu' bar Nun had been appointed Patriarch, he tried to get Timothy's name struck off the patriarchal roll, but Jibrail and Michael the physicians, and Yozadaq the doctor prevented this, and got

¹ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 186b, tr. pp. 64-65.Y.

² Gismondi MAS Mari f. 188ab, tr. p. 66.Y.

³ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 186b, tr. p. 64.Y.

⁴ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 187a, tr. p. 65.Y.

⁵ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 188b, tr. pp. 66-67.Y.

Ishu' bar Nun's letters burned.¹

'Amr's account is much briefer, but part of it is worth quoting:

He was honoured by the caliphs and kings on account of his excellent teaching and virtues, and the appropriateness of the answers he gave to questions they put to him about matters of the faith . . . Quite often Caliph Hadi² summoned him, to discuss religion, and he asked him about many other things, and posed him many difficult problems and involved questions . . . He never refrained from protecting the Christian religion, and governed the Church excellently, and made . . . 98 canons³ about the offices of worship and the discipline of Church courts.⁴

Under the Abbasids, then, up to 823 A.D., we have the impression that we might expect with the caliphate now back in Mesopotamia, of a much closer and more intimate court link between the Caliphs and the Patriarchs. Although church quarrels about Patriarchs are brought to the Caliph as arbiter, one has the impression that the caliphs took their responsibility to choose a capable man seriously, and were prepared to bow to the Church's right of election. The Patriarchs were respected figures at court, and were of course state officials in their capacity as Heads of the Christian millat. The Caliphs were ready to discuss questions of religion with them, as well as other subjects.

Of the two instances of persecution of the Christians and destruction of churches, one under al-Mahdi was really political in origin, the other the kind of outbursts that were periodical under the Sassanids, and though unpleasant, must not be looked upon as forming calculated anti-Christian policy.

What is more serious is the reference to discrimination against the Christians in the matter of dress. We know from other sources that 'Umr II

² (sic). Probably Mahdi is meant, as al-Hadi's reign was short.

³ 99 canons of Timothy have been translated into Latin by Labourt T pp. 50-86.

⁴ Gismondi MAS 'Amr p. 65, tr. pp. 37-38.Y.

¹ Gismondi MAS Mari f. 188b tr. p. 67.

(717-720) had issued laws about dress for Christians and Jews:

'Umr II forbade them to wear the kuba (the short Persian jacket), silk garments, and a special kind of cloak, 'isb; he complained that they omitted to wear the girdle, did wear turbans, and let their hair grow long.¹

The girdle was to be the distinctive mark of the non-Muslim minorities.

Though put into operation in Egypt, these laws do not seem to have been enforced in Mesopotamia in 'Umayyad days. Tritton refers to the regulations of Harun al Rashid:

By the time of the Caliph Harun it was expected that they would wear a thick cord as a girdle, a quilted tall cap, twisted thongs on the sandals, and shoes different from those of the Muslims. Their saddles had to have two wooden balls as big as pomegranates on the back, and the women had to use pack saddles when riding on camels . . . In 191 (A.D. 808) Harun forbade the Christians to be like the Muslims in dress and manner of riding.²

This looks like a deliberate attempt to give the Christians a status of social inferiority, which was something new. Note also the attempts of al-Mahdi to win over prominent Christians to Islam, and the fact that death remained the penalty for apostasy from Islam, once accepted. There are ominous changes here.

Tritton on the Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects

Tritton's valuable survey covers a wide ground: it refers to Jews, Sabeans and Zoroastrians as well as to Christians; it deals with the whole period of the caliphates up to the Mongol invasions; it covers the whole extent of the caliphates, giving special attention to Egypt. It uses Muslim sources mainly.

The writer's thorough examination of his evidence explodes the tradition found in both Muslim and Christian writers, that the Caliph 'Umr (634-644)

¹ Tritton p. 116, quoting Abu Yusaf.

² Tritton pp. 117-118, quoting Abu Yusaf and Tabari.

made a Covenant with the Christians and other minorities, setting down a list of various conditions and disabilities under which they would be entitled to state protection. He shows that the status of non-Christian subjects was a gradual development, partly through the actions of caliphs, partly through the writings of Muslim lawyers:

The lawyers' laws seem to have been complete by A.D. 815, while the laws of Mutawakkil (847-861) sufficed for later monarchs, who only put them in force again. It depended on the temper of the monarch or the political exigencies of the time whether they were enforced or not.¹

Tritton makes it clear that under the early caliphs it was a question of conquest by Arabs and ad hoc arrangements with the conquered, which varied with the circumstances. Under the early Abassids, however, the status of the Christians was beginning to change, though serious legislation lowering the status of the Christians was only to be laid down after the end of our period, under Mutawakkil.

It is worth while looking briefly at some of the examples given by Tritton, and some of his conclusions.

1. Government Service. During our period, there were many Christians in government service. In about 646 a Christian was head of a prison near Kufa. To begin with, Arabs were in subordinate posts. In the time of al-Hajjaj a Christian headman of Edessa was put to death. Mutawakkil re-enacted a law of 'Umr I that Christians should not hold such posts.²

2. Churches and monasteries. Treaties with towns in Persia made by the Arab conquerors usually guarantee the exercise of religious rites, including possession of places of worship.³ The Patriarch got a church built in Halwan under 'Abd ul 'Aziz "because he had to pay his respects to

¹ Tritton p. 4. See above p. 133.

² Tritton Ch. II.

³ Tritton p. 38.

the governor there".¹ After 730 a church was built at Kufa,² and about 770 the apse of the church at Nisibin was completed.³ Muslim sources confirm that Christians were allowed to rebuild destroyed churches in the reign of Harun.⁴ During Harun's reign, a lawyer held that Christian churches should not be destroyed, but that they should not build new ones.⁵ A year or two before Timothy's death a new church at Harran was destroyed, and in 853 Mutawwakil ordered all new churches to be destroyed.⁶ Tritton summarises the evidence:

At first churches were built freely, sometimes with the approval or even the help of authority. 'Umr II is said to have forbidden the building of churches. As only one historian records this, and the Christian records are silent, it may not be true. Apart from this solitary notice, it is not till (760) or (780) that there is the least suggestion of a ban on new churches . . . Mutawakkil was the first to make this ban law.⁷

3. Religious practices. It is clear that when a church was near a mosque competing noises could cause annoyance, especially the beating of the wooden board for worship, and the chanting of hymns, as happened at Kufa.⁸ Tritton's general conclusion is:

At quite an early date the Muslims disliked the public display of other forms of worship. 'Umr II and Mutawwakil tried to suppress the commonest manifestations of Christianity but did not succeed. In the time of Harun it was felt that the right of the Christians to take out some religious processions was too ancient to be assailed, however great the annoyance of the Muslims. Normally, festivals were occasions of rejoicing in which all joined eagerly. However, the dhimmis were never safe from arbitrary acts of the ill-disposed, whether they were their rulers or fellow-subjects.⁹

4. Dress. We have already quoted Tritton's conclusions.¹⁰

5. Persecutions. In the time of al-Hajjaj "several important Christians were put to death, . . . and their houses plundered" in Nisibin

¹ Tritton p. 42. ² Tritton p. 45. ³ Tritton p. 47. ⁴ Tritton p. 47.

⁵ Tritton p. 37. ⁶ Tritton p. 50. ⁷ Tritton p. 50. ⁸ Tritton p. 104.

⁹ Tritton pp. 113-114. ¹⁰ See above p.254.

and Edessa.¹

6. Physicians at Court. Tritton mentions several, including Jibrail, and states that his monthly salary was 12,000 zuze.² It is clear that Christian physicians had an important place for long at court.

7. Music and Literature. A Christian flute-player, Bar-sauma often played at Harun's court.³

Muslim philosophy and science began in translations. Many, if not most, of those who turned books from Greek and Syriac into Arabic were Christians . . . The caliphs Mansur and Ma'mun especially employed men on this work. It is said that the three sons of Musa, famous patrons of learning, paid five hundred dinars monthly for translation work.

8. Apostasy from Islam. All the instances Tritton gives are of people who turned Muslim first and then apostasised. No example is given of a born Muslim becoming a Christian.⁴

9. War. There are various instances given of Christians fighting in Muslim armies, certainly in the first two centuries of Islam.⁵

10. Taxation. The Arabs imposed varying terms on the places they conquered, and the figures for different places quoted by Tritton show great variety and no fixed system. Tritton concludes:

The original terms with the conquered places were almost forgotten. When remembered, the historians interpreted them in the light of later conditions, and so misunderstood them . . . The original tribute was that paid to the preceding government . . . The graded poll-tax was first levied in Mesopotamia. At first monks did not pay poll tax. The subject peoples at first bore the whole weight of the taxation; though it is not possible to decide how heavy that was. It certainly grew heavier, but then the dhimmis did not bear the whole weight, for the Muslims paid land tax, the religious taxes were paid into the treasury, and Muslims and dhimmis alike were liable to the other burdens.⁶

¹ Tritton p. 157. ² Tritton p. 165. ³ Tritton p. 170. ⁴ Tritton pp. 181-185.

⁵ Tritton pp. 185-186. ⁶ Tritton pp. 222-223.

11. General Conclusion.

A few dates are fixed and some periods can be marked off roughly, though the boundaries are vague. Under the first 'Umayyads, the conquerors were on fairly good terms with the vanquished. Most of the minor officials were not Muslims, and many of the victors were better Arabs than Muslims . . . There can be no doubt that . . . the reign of 'Umr II saw the beginning of definite disabilities for the dhimmis. Restrictions were placed on their dress, and the attempt to oust them from official posts began . . . Not all of his laws were enforced.

During the second century (A.H.), the Muslim spirit hardened . . . The laws about dress were made more stringent, and the idea took shape that churches might not be built.

The next fixed point is the reign of Mutawwakil. His laws deserve the name of persecution. Yet his zeal was strangely impersonal, for he was on the best of terms with his Christian doctors. His were the most severe laws that were issued against the dhimmis; in later times it was enough to put them in force . . . In later times the position of the dhimmis did change for the worse . . . The world was divided into two classes, Muslims and others, and only Islam counted.¹

Browne's "Eclipse of Christianity in Asia"

L.E. Browne, writing in 1933, three years after Tritton, gives what he concludes to be the reasons for the eclipse of Christianity in Asia from the time of Muhammad till the Fourteenth Century. A great deal of his book is taken up with an analysis of the weaknesses of the Church of the East - in teaching, and life, and missionary methods, and polemic, and although, as we have seen, some of his conclusions may seem to be one-sided, like his criticism of Shubhal-ishu's missionary methods,² and his condemnation of the Church for a complete misunderstanding of the Incarnation,³ they make a valuable contribution to our understanding of what happened. The book contains also some important facts or quotations relevant to our study.

1. Christian Population of Mesopotamia. Giving Mez as his authority, Browne states that 'Umr I, when the Sassanid Empire had fallen, found that

¹ Tritton pp. 229-232. ² Browne E p. 90. See above Chapter VII A p. 190.

³ Browne E ch. VI.

500,000 non-Muslims were liable to tax. With their families, Browne reckons that this means a total of 1,500,000 Christians and Jews, of whom the majority would be Christian.¹ I think that this is probably an over-estimate, as surely Zoroastrians would also have been included.

2. Arabs in New Najran. Browne quotes Muslim accounts of taxation to show that the number of Arab Christians who settled in New Najran were reduced between 637 and 717 from 40,000 to 4,000; presumably the rest either had become Muslims or migrated to Byzantine territories.² As we have seen, by the time of Timothy I, they were reduced to "a community of more than 2,000 people."³

3. Respect for Christian Churches and Festivals. Browne quotes Abu Jusaf's statement to Harun-al-Rashid on the subject, made between 786 and 798:

As to thy question, O Commander of the Faithful, concerning the dhimmis, how it is that their synagogues and churches in the important towns or other places of the Muslim conquest have been left to them without being destroyed, and how it is that they have been allowed to continue to display their crosses at the time of their festivals, the reason thereof is that the arrangement made between the Muslims and the dhimmis took place (on such conditions) . . . It is thus that the whole of Syria and the great part of Hira was conquered, which explains why the churches and the synagogues have been respected.⁴

4. Appointment of Catholicos. Browne says that from A.D. 987 onwards the Catholicos of the East was appointed by the Caliph "even against the wish of the bishops."⁵

5. Apostate Christians. Browne quotes a statement of the Caliph

¹ Browne E p. 9. ² Browne E pp. 35-36. ³ Tim 30 (XLI) Bid p. 124.

⁴ Browne E pp. 38-39.

⁵ Browne E p. 51. The point for us to note is that in the period with which we are dealing this was not the rule.

Ma'mun, the last of the caliphs under which Timothy ruled, as saying that among his courtiers were some insincere apostate Christians:

I know that (certain of them) were Christians and became Muslims although they were averse to it, so they are neither Muslims nor Christians.¹

Of course, as Browne remarks, their children would be lost to the Church, and brought up as Muslims.

6. Assemani's Summary of the Situation. Browne quotes Assemani's summary of the treatment of the Church of the East under the Caliphs:

Although the Nestorians were furnished with royal diplomas, and although they held positions as scribes and doctors at the court, and very often became famous rulers of places, nevertheless they suffered vexations from the Muslims no less than other Christians. The cause of the evils may be gathered from those things which I shall shortly relate, the most important being the inconstancy of the Caliphs, the greed of the rulers, and the innate hatred of the Muhammadan doctors and people towards the Christians. But not rarely the tempest of persecution was aroused by the mutual jealousy of the Christians themselves, the licence of the priests, the arrogance of the leaders, the tyrannical power of the magnates, and especially the altercations of the physicians and scribes about the highest authority over their people (i.e. the appointment of the Catholicos).²

It has to be remembered, of course, that Assemani was a Maronite, with no love for the Nestorians, and he wrote after the Crusades, and therefore his judgment of the feelings of the Muslims is exaggerated. We need Browne's own corrective that "Christians and Muslims probably lived on fairly friendly terms up to the time of the Turkish invasion of the eleventh century, and even on into the thirteenth century."³

Christianity in China

Translations of the documentary evidence for the early history of the Church of the East in China are given by Moule (1930)⁴; detailed reconstruction

¹ Browne E pp. 52-53. ² Browne E p. 53. ³ Browne E p. 136.

⁴ A.C. Moule, Christians in China before the year 1550, pp. 27-77.

of the history they tell is given by Foster (1939)¹ and less detailed surveys by Browne (1933)² and Cary-Elwes (1957).³ It is not our purpose to give another account, but simply to draw attention to points and problems which shed light on our subject.

1. Where did Alo-pen come from? The first missionary, Alo-pen, who arrived in the Chinese capital in 635, is called "Persian monk" in an imperial rescript of 638;⁴ but in the Christian Monument he is said to have come from Syria.⁵ Pace Cary-Elwes, we accept the older evidence that he came from the Persian Empire, whose capital did not fall to the Arabs till 637. His arrival had probably nothing to do with Sassanid or Arab politics, though when the broad-minded Emperor T'ai Tsung established a Christian monastery in his capital in 638 he may have been partly moved by Chinese political considerations.

2. Appointment of the first Metropolitan. As we have seen,⁶ it is possible to follow Ibn-at-Tayyib and conclude that Ishu'-Yab III appointed the first metropolitan for China, and that he was Alo-pen. By 650 there were probably at least six Christian monasteries in various parts of China.⁷

3. The Ups and Downs of Christian Fortunes. These may be thus summarised: the Church was established in 638, and grew and spread till near the end of that century. A period of persecution lasted from 698 till 712, in which several of the monasteries, and finally that of the capital, were attacked. After 712 there was a period of reconstruction and restoration, and the Church was at its most flourishing at the beginning

¹ Foster CTD, passim. ² Browne E, pp. 93-101.

³ C. Cary-Elwes, S.J., China under the Cross, pp. 19-35.

⁴ Moule p. 65. ⁵ Moule p. 38 ("Ta-chin" - Syria).

⁶ See above pp. 146-147. ⁷ Foster CTD p. 61.

of Timothy's patriarchate, when (in 779 or 781)¹ the Christian Monument was set up at Ch'ang-an. It was probably during Timothy's reign that the Chinese version of the Gloria in Excelsis was written. Opposition was again evident in 820, and all Christian as well as Buddhist monasteries were suppressed in 845, and probably about 2,000 Christian monks forced to return to the world. It is not possible to say how long an organised church survived in China after that, but by about 987 it was extinct.

These ups and downs are mainly connected with Chinese political history. It is, however, not perhaps without significance that the periods of progress correspond in some measure with the patriarchates of Ishu'-yab III, Saliba-zakha, and Timothy I, and that at the close of the 7th century, when there was schism and vacancy in the patriarchate, there was bad persecution in China.

4. Christian ambassador. Mention is made of a monk who came as member of an embassy from the "Persian King" (doubtless the Caliph) in 732.²

5. Change in the Name of the Church. In 745 an official decree was made changing the name of the Church from "the Persian religion of the Scriptures" to "the Syrian religion of the Scriptures". Had this any political significance? There are four possible reasons for the change:

- a. It was to avoid confusion with Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism, which had entered China in 677 and 631 respectively.
- b. Syria includes Palestine, where Christianity began, and so the name gets away from the idea of a foreign religion.
- c. The Church of the East used Syriac as its ecclesiastical language, and today claims that it was nearest to the language that Christ spoke.

¹ see Mingana's discussion of the date in *Min* 9 pp. 37-39. ² Moule p. 66.

d. Under the 'Umayyads the Caliphate had its capital in Damascus in Syria. If this was the reason for the change, we must note that the name "Syrian" was retained even after the Abbasid period had begun.¹

6. Indigenisation and Missionary Vitality. According to Browne "the seventy-five names on the Nestorian monument (of 779/81) are almost without exception Syrian".² Of these, one is a Bishop, over 30 are priests, including two country-bishops and an archdeacon, there is a deacon, and about 40 simple monks. Many of the names are given in both Syriac and Chinese, but 3 only in Chinese and about 10 only in Syriac. If we omit Biblical names, or names with a Christian meaning, like Mashiha-dad, there are few western names left. Two monks have the pagan Greek name Bacchos, and there are two Persian names, Mahdad Gushnasp and Izadsafas.³ The majority were certainly foreign missionaries, and we note that the decree of 845 classed the Christian monasteries as "foreign".⁴

On the other hand, Foster and Cary-Elwes are agreed that in the expression of the Faith the Church had gone a long way in indigenisation. 635-638 had been lame translationese. In contrast, a monk called Adam, whose Chinese name was Ching-ching, in his translation and inscription on the Christian Monument, was able to go far not only in the Chinese language, but in getting inside the Chinese mind. Speaking of the Nestorians, Cary-Elwes writes:

Their manner of presentation of the Christian truths is still topical for us. These they transposed into a Chinese idiom. There is no doubt that, of all the attempts by foreign Christians to get inside the Chinese mind, the Nestorian was by far the most thorough. True, the Jesuits adopted Chinese customs and manners, and even made use of Confucian ideas. But here, if we are to go by the technique

¹ See Moule p. 67 and Foster CTD pp. 87-90. ² Browne E p. 90.

³ List in Foster CTD pp. 149-151. ⁴ C-E p. 32.

of the Nestorian inscription, is a thoroughgoing transposition of idiom, not only into Confucian idiom, but into Buddhist and Taoist as well, to an extent that has never been attempted since. The only comparable example was that made by the early Christians in the Greco-Roman world.¹

Coming from a Jesuit of today, this is a remarkable tribute. He goes on to quote Havret's analysis of the list of literary echoes:

This list contains three or four hundred expressions: that is to say, that four hundred times a skilled litteratus would, on reading the inscription, experience the satisfaction of the humanist, which every Chinese experiences when someone conjures up before him a recollection of past ages. More than thirty of these expressions are borrowed from the Book of Changes alone; almost as many come from the Book of Odes; twenty or so from the Annals. The Canonical Books alone furnish a total of about 150 allusions. The Historians provide more than one hundred others; the Philosophers about thirty; the remainder come from different collections.²

Writing of Adam, Foster says:

Everything that we hear of him is connected with literature. It was he who brought the Church of the T'ang Dynasty to its classical period of literary production in the second half of the eighth century. He is far removed from Bishop Alo-pen and those with him, who stumbled, with execrable style and disastrous mistranslations, over the first Chinese Christian books in the years 635-638. Now, nearly a century and a half later, the Church can boast a scholar who, though a foreigner from the West, knows the Chinese classics, and is able to fill his works with classical allusions, as a good Chinese writer should. He has studied the writings of the Taoist mystics, and is skilful in choosing illustrations from them. Above all, he is able to walk with Buddhists in the heights of their philosophy, and is accustomed to borrow from them both background and terms to expound his Christian theme.³

Was this an unwise compromise? "He was a pioneer, and deserves full praise for breaking new ground," says Cary-Elwes, "but there are dangers, and more especially in the East where religions tend to amalgamate."⁴

Foster, however, denies that it was any kind of syncretism:

 Rather it is a borrowing of terminology, and a relation of

¹ C-E p. 33.

² C-E p. 34 quoting Havret in Variétés sinologiques No 12 p. 216 n. 2.

³ Foster CTD pp. 107-108. ⁴ C-E p. 35.

doctrine to a familiar background of thought, as the only way of expressing Christian truth in its far-eastern environment. Not only was this missionary labouring to make the Chinese people Christian, he laboured also to make Christianity, in a worthy sense, Chinese. Underneath the strange terminology - strange to us of the West - are quotations from the Bible and ideas which come from the great Fathers of the Church. Borrowing from non-Christian sources is but the eastern counterpart of the debt owed by the Church in the West to Greek philosophy.¹

¹ Foster CTD pp. 112-113.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

9/1/51
560
760

A. FACTUAL CONCLUSIONS

We are now in a position to state some conclusions on the Edict of 410, and to see how far the estimate on pages 54-57 above of its significance stood the test of 400 years of usage.

Two basic conclusions emerge unmistakably from the evidence: that Yazdgard's Edict was definitive for Church-State relations in the East throughout the years 410-820; and that there was continuity, and yet a certain discontinuity also, between the way this worked out in practice under the Sassanid Shahs and under the early Caliphs.

1. A Definitive Edict. The main features of the Edict were three:
 - a. The recognition of the Christians as a legally permitted religious minority, or millat, entitled to State protection of their rights and privileges.
 - b. The recognition that the State had a legitimate part to play in the appointment of the Head of the millat.
 - c. The recognition that the State had a duty to uphold the discipline of the millat, and give physical backing to its Head.

During the period of our study, the Edict was never questioned, nor were any legal steps taken by the State to modify its features. It is worth reminding ourselves of the negative limiting feature of the Edict: the State religion was the religion of the majority-community, and this state of affairs was intended to remain, and therefore nothing in the Edict was said about the right to evangelise members of the majority-community,

which in fact remained illegal.

2. Continuity, and yet Discontinuity. All these features continued to be characteristic of Church-State relations under the Caliphs, but it is an over-simplification to say that they took over the arrangement unchanged. Such a statement must be modified in two ways:

a. We must recognise that there was an interim period of more than a century, in which the centre of government was not Mesopotamia - in other words, it did not coincide with the centre of the Church of the East - and comparison of conditions can only be profitably made after the Abbasid Caliphs had settled down to rule from Baghdad as successors of the Sassanid Shahinshahs.

b. We are conscious of a subtle change of climate in the application of the Edict after 750, of which the two main features were:

i. an almost complete absence of physical persecution and martyrdom of Christians; but rather the beginning of moves towards legally defining, and so lowering and limiting and ultimately segregating Christians as second-class citizens; subject to prescribed legal disabilities.

ii. a complete absence of marked or successful evangelisation of the majority-community by the Christians.

In a way, it was natural for the Church to feel that the change was for the better. The sharp pain of martyrdom was gone, and Islam seemed to have much more in common with Christianity than Zoroastrianism. The Church was still, under good leadership, able to expand and develop, and do much effective missionary work. Looked at from a long-term point of view, however,

the absence of an effective impact on Islam was ominous for the future. If this was mainly due, as seems clear from the evidence, not so much to lack of vitality in the Church as to the great vitality of Islam, what would happen if the Church was to lose its own missionary vitality? Would the future see the gradual erosion of the Church as a result of legal disabilities, or a segregation turning the Church into a closed ghetto-community?

Let us look a little more closely at the working-out of the main features of the Edict of 410.

a. On the whole, with the exception of a few periods of severe persecution under the Sassanids in the Fifth Century, the right of the Church to exist and be protected was upheld, and there was no serious attempt to exterminate it by force.

The Church, however, soon recognised that in spite of its status as part of an international community, it must have absolute autonomy within the Sassanid Empire, and be independent of interference, especially from the "enemy" Byzantine Empire. This separation became more marked when the Church became officially Nestorian in doctrine.

b. The State at times played too prominent a part in the appointment of the Head of the Church, and there were two long vacancies, one under Khusrau II, and the other under the 'Umayyads. Some unworthy time-servers, like Yusuf and John "the Leper" were appointed, but on the whole the State did its best to appoint men who were both capable and acceptable to the Church.

Once the Head of the Church had been appointed, the State on the whole left the Church to carry out its own internal discipline without interference. There was some clash on the question of clerical marriage in the Fifth Century, and part of the attack on Mar Aba in the Sixth was an attempt to interfere with his enforcements of Church discipline and Christian moral standards, but Mar Aba seems to have won his battle for spiritual autonomy, and afterwards there was little questioning by the State of the Church's right to discipline its members. Resistance came from offenders, but on the whole their attempts to invoke the aid of the State authorities, whether local or central, were not successful.

While the divisions in the Church, and heresies like that of the Messalians, led to dissipation of its strength, there is no evidence that they resulted in serious State interference, or a policy of "divide and rule", except for about 20 years during the reign of Khusrau II. In-fighting among the members of the Church of the East itself led at times to appeals to the State or local authorities. In the case of John "the Leper" this meant a serious vacancy in the Patriarchate, but other factors - especially uncertainty as to who in effect constituted the State when it was a bone of contention - played their part.

During the period of the study, the Church of the East did not display any marked communalism. It had its periods of barrenness and recession, but it was kept from the ghetto mentality by three factors - the educational and cultural calibre of its leaders, the consciousness of belonging to the one "Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church", and a striking missionary outreach beyond its own homeland.

c. Eastern Christian writers reiterate frequently the statement that the fact that they had non-Christian rulers meant an absence of the kind of caesaropapism prominent in the neighbouring Byzantine Empire, when the State tried to define the faith of the Church. We have seen, however, that the Church occasionally called on the power of the State to help with the enforcement of its discipline, especially in the case of Bar-Sauma in the Fifth Century. Appeal to the secular authorities by the Patriarch, whether at the Centre or in the Provinces, was however the exception rather than the rule. On the whole the Church carried out its discipline without it. This discipline was recognised outside the bounds of the State, witness such instances as the embassy of the White Huns to ask for a bishop, the statement of Ishu'-yab III about his authority over distant metropolitans and bishops, and Timothy I's 31st canon. References like those of Mar Aba, Ishu'-yab III and Timothy to "the Word of God" and their apostolic office, make it clear that they considered their authority to be basically spiritual - the authority of "Catholicos" rather than "Patriarch".

Turning now to the negative limiting feature, we see a marked contrast between the Sassanid and the Muslim periods.

Under the Sassanids the State Religion remained to the end the official religion of the rulers and the majority-community, but during the last Sassanid century it was becoming more political and less religious. There is much evidence that, in spite of fierce resistance by the Mobeds and Magians, and many martyrdoms, Christianity was making a serious impact on Zoroastrianism, and steadily winning and holding converts. We have clear evidence, too, that the social status of the Christians was steadily

rising, especially due to the Christian physicians at court, and that even Khusrau II was not prepared to alienate such an influential community by appointing a Jacobite Patriarch.

Under the 'Umayyads it was not so much a matter of majority and minority as of Arabs and subject-peoples, the rulers being in the minority to begin with. Apart from Arabia proper, including Oman, there was no sizeable loss to Islam by the Church of the East during this interim period. When the Abbasids had been fully established, however, it became clearer and clearer that Islam was a missionary faith, determined to spread; and this determination was clearly too strong for the evangelism of Muslims to be permitted, or to be carried out effectively on any scale, by the Church. Towards the end of the Eighth Century Muslim lawyers began to do what Zoroastrians had never done, to define legally and systematically the status of Christians and other religious minorities as second-class citizens, or dhimmis. The Christians were able to maintain their social status and influence at court during the early Abbasid period, and we find educated Christians like Timothy I and physicians like Jibrail mixing on equal terms with the élite of the Court. Financial and social pressures, however, were there in embryo, which were to lead to the gradual reduction of the status of the Christian community, and its ultimate turning in on itself.

B. SOME LESSONS FOR MINORITY-CHURCHES TODAY

1. "Persecution will come to all who want to live a godly life as Christians" (2 Tim. 3: 12, N.E.B.). True Christian life and witness will always arouse opposition, especially when Christians carry out their primary duty of spreading the Gospel, and bringing others to Christ, because on a personal and social level Christianity is a revolutionary element. No concordat between Church and State will prevent local and individual persecution while Christians continue to evangelise. In a State whose official religion is other than Christianity this will certainly be the case.

It is, however, important that, wherever possible, Christians should by law be given the freedom not only to practise but to propagate their faith. This is a basic human right, and should be guaranteed, though the majority religion, or any other religion, has the right to be protected against unworthy methods of proselytisation. This right, however, will only be of use to the Church as it continues of itself to be outgoing, sharing its faith with others and seeking to win them.

The following Principle of Law-Making in the Pakistan Constitution of 1962 is relevant here:

Freedom of religion.

No law should

(a) prevent the members of a religious community or denomination from professing, practising or propagating, or from providing instruction in their religion, or from conducting institutions for the purpose of or in connection with their religion.

2. Christians, however, have a duty to love those of the majority religion, and treat them with courtesy. When 'Abda destroyed a fire-temple, or the Christians of Kufa beat the board for worship at the time of the Muslim call to prayer, they were not only foolish, but lacking in Christian spirit. Minorities, especially religious ones, are apt to react to their position by rudeness and aggressiveness, finding victimisation where there is none, and showing a lack of courtesy to those of the majority community which sours relationships. This is just one step short of the ghetto mentality, which leads to barren communalism. Where Christians are in a position to make a positive and imaginative contribution to the life of a whole nation, they should seek to do so, and where they can give unselfish and meaningful service to the majority community - be it in the medical or educational or any other sphere - this will not only be in accordance with the spirit of Christianity, but an antidote to communalism, and a method of keeping bridges open with the rest of the nation.

3. There is always bound to be some kind of clash between Christianity and patriotism, because the Christian Church is an international fellowship, and nations sometimes fight cruel and unjust wars against which Christians may have a duty to protest, although a church which is a very small minority in a non-Christian State may in practice be unable to do so effectively. Even Christian States have to make provision for conscientious objectors to war. It is also inevitable, especially in the modern world with its mass communication media, that the actions or policies of nominally Christian States should lead to reactions unfavourable to Christians who are minority communities in non-Christian States. It is

always necessary for Christians to remember that a so-called Christian State is not necessarily right in its actions, nor deserving of their sympathy or support, and that if it is a matter of war, normally their duty is to be good patriots and support their country in every way possible. It is a matter of common sense, and also right, that the administration of a Church should not be carried on from a centre outside the State in which it is situated, and certainly not from a place in an enemy country. The Churches in Pakistan did well in 1957 to insist that the Plan of Church Union for North India and Pakistan should envisage two autonomous churches, a Church of North India, and a Church of Pakistan.

4. In a State whose official religion is not Christianity, it is right that as far as possible the Church should preserve its spiritual freedom, especially the full authority to appoint its own leaders and office-bearers, and look after its own administration. The provisions of the Constitution of the Church of Pakistan are worth quoting:

1. In common with the whole Christian Church, the Church of Pakistan declares its belief in the Holy Catholic Church, of which it is a part, according to the Scriptures and as witnessed to by the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. The Church is a body created by the Lord of the Church and by Him alone, and members are incorporated into it 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' by His sole authority. Therefore the Church of Pakistan affirms that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Lord and Head of the Church.

2. In keeping with this fundamental truth the Church of Pakistan claims that it shall of right be free in all spiritual matters from the direction or interposition of any civil government.

3. While it is not possible to give an exhaustive and rigidly exact definition of the content of such a phrase as matters of religion or 'spiritual matters', the Church of Pakistan understands it to imply the autonomy of the Church in such spheres as the

following:-

- (a) Worship, which being directed to God alone is not subject by way of command, prohibition or prescribed form to any save a Church authority.
- (b) Membership, which being membership in the body of Christ is beyond the jurisdiction of any save a spiritual authority.
- (c) Spiritual office, appointment to which, whether it be that of a bishop, presbyter, deacon, lay elder or other spiritual responsibility, is a spiritual act carried through in an act of worship before God, from whom comes the gift of the ministry. Removal from spiritual office partakes of the same character.
- (d) Confession of Faith, the soundness of which, as agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, only a spiritual authority is competent to determine.
- (e) Proclamation of the Gospel, which the Church carries on in obedience to its Lord.
- (f) Instruction of its people in the Faith, by which the Church in every generation is built up.
- (g) Church Polity, including wider Union: The Church alone, being satisfied that the basis of a proposed union is such as to ensure the continuity of the Church which enters it, can in the exercise of its spiritual autonomy resolve to enter upon a union.

4. The Church of Pakistan shall be an autonomous Church and free from any control, legal or otherwise, of any Church or Society external to itself. At the same time the Church of Pakistan, on account of its origin and history, must have special relations with the Churches through which it came into existence, and it will endeavour so to regulate its acts as to maintain fellowship both with those Churches and with other branches of the Catholic Church with which the several uniting Churches were at the time of union in communion.

The Church of Pakistan, as a part of the Church Universal, will give full weight to the pronouncements of bodies representative of the whole Church, and in particular desires to take part in the deliberations and decisions of an Ecumenical Council, if such should in the mercy of God be some day called together.

¹ Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan, 4th edn. 1965, pp. 38-40.

It has to be recognised, however, that nowadays, except in the case of totalitarian or Communist States, the State is normally not interested in trying to administer the Church or interfere with its discipline. The danger arises more often from quarrels among the Christians themselves, or rebellion by those disciplined by the Church against its authority, and wrongful resort to litigation, and this usually at the local rather than the central level.

5. This brings us to our final point. For the spiritual health of the Church, and to ensure its security and respect in a non-Christian State, it is absolutely essential that Christians lay to heart the importance of avoiding in-fighting or inter-denominational conflicts. Where visible union is possible, it is not only desirable but right; where it is not possible, at least the various churches should co-operate with one another and aim at unity of spirit.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ARECORD OF THE SYNOD OF SELEUCIA, 410¹

Helped by the living God, we are transcribing the Synodical decisions which were laid down at various times by our holy Fathers in the country of the East, and the canons which were established by Mar Maruta, Bishop of Maipherqat, when he came down as ambassador to the Persians, in the time of King Yazdgard, and of Mar Izhaq the Catholicos installed at Seleucia and Ctesiphon.²

RECITAL OF THE THINGS WHICH WERE DECIDED IN THE ASSEMBLY OF BISHOPS, HELD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE COUNTRY OF THE PERSIANS; OF THOSE CANONS AND RULES, ESTABLISHED IN THE WEST, THE LAND OF THE ROMANS, BY THE BISHOPS OF THAT COUNTRY, TO WHICH THE BISHOPS OF THE COUNTRY OF THE PERSIANS ALSO ADHERED; OF THE THINGS WHICH THEY THEMSELVES ESTABLISHED AND DEFINED CONCERNING THE RANK OF THE BISHOPS AND METROPOLITANS, THE PATRIARCH AND EVERY ORDER OF CLERGY; OF THE ADVICE WHICH THEY LAID DOWN FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH; OF THE PROFESSION OF FAITH OF THE 318 FATHERS BISHOPS; TO WHICH THE PERSIAN BISHOPS, WHO WERE FORTY IN NUMBER, ADDED SEVERAL MATTERS WHICH ARE ACCEPTED, ADMITTED AND CONFIRMED, RELATING TO OTHER CANONS ESTABLISHED BY THEIR WORD AND SIGNATURE.³

First Synod; of. Mar Izhaq, Catholicos

In the eleventh year of Yazdgard, King of Kings, victorious; after peace and tranquillity had been re-established to the Churches of the Lord, he gave liberty and rest to the congregations of Christ, and allowed the servants of God to exalt Christ publicly in their body, whether in death or life. He scattered the tempest of the persecution of all the Churches of God; he dissipated the darkness of the oppression of all the flocks of Christ. He had, in fact, ordered that throughout his Empire the temples (churches) destroyed by his fathers should in his time be magnificently rebuilt; that the altars which had been demolished should be carefully restored; and that those who had been put to the test for God, who had endured prison and torture, should come out freely; that the priests, the rulers, and all the monks⁴, should have liberty to go about without fear.

These things took place

1. during the tenure of office of him who had been elected to the primacy, the excellent and great man of God, our Father Mar Izhaq

¹ Translated from the French in Chabot SO pp. 254-262, with slight changes in the paragraphing for greater clarity. ² This introduction is later than 775. ³ This excellent summary is a late addition. The name "Patriarch" is anachronistic. ⁴ literally, "the holy alliance".

Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, Catholicos and Archbishop of all the East, adjudged by God worthy to be put at the Head of all the East; who by his administration and good government opened the door of mercies for peace and concord to the people and Church of God; whose Chastity shone with more radiance than that of all the Bishops of the East that had preceded him;

2. by the diligence and care of that Apostle, Messenger of peace, whom God in His mercies had sent to the East, the wise Father, the honourable Ruler, Mar Maruta, Bishop; who was the mediator of peace and concord between East and West; who applied himself to strengthen the Churches of the Lord Christ; who exerted himself so that the laws and Divine regulations, the orthodox canons and verities, established in the West by the honourable Fathers, Bishops, should also be established in the East, for the building up of justice and truth among all the people of God;

3. and also by the care of the rulers and fathers bishops of the country of the Romans: Bishop Porphyry, Catholicos of Antioch; Aqaq, Bishop of Aleppo; Paqida, Bishop of Edessa; Eusebius, Bishop of Tella; Aqaq, Bishop of Amid; and all those who are worthy of good remembrance before the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in all our churches and congregations of the East - for, separated in body from us, they have openly shown the excellence of their love towards us, as well as their prudent sollicitude, in writing a letter to their honoured brother, the glory of our Churches, Mar Maruta, and in asking with solemn adjurations that it be read without delay before the King of Kings, illustrious and victorious.

The honourable Bishop Mar Maruta showed the letter secretly to his brother and colleague, who shares in his love and participates in his affection, our Father, the Elect of God, Mar Izhaq, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, Catholicos and Archbishop of the East. Of one accord and one mind, they translated the letter from Greek into Persian, and it was read before the victorious and illustrious King of Kings. God disposed the heart of Yazdgard, King of Kings, to do all kinds of good and excellent things, as it is written: "The heart of the king is like waves in the hand of the Lord; he inclines to the side God wills." By God's will, at the very moment that Yazdgard heard the letter read, he said, in the joy of his heart:

"East and West form one power only, under the Empire of our Royalty."

In the haste of his heart he instructed that His Majesty's orders should be carried to the marzbans of the different places by swift river posts, that they should send the bishops (to the Capital Cities) - him of Nisibin and the bishops of his Province; him of Bait Urqa (Amlil)

Proverbs, 21: 1.

him of Bait Garma and the bishops of his Province; him of Bait Huzza (Arbil) and the bishops of his Province; him of Maishan and the bishops of his Province; and him of Kashkar. Forty bishops were called by name, in order that, by their coming together in a meeting, disputes should cease, and schisms and divisions be brought to an end; that they should establish and enact things right and fitting for the rule of the Catholic Church; that their brothers the bishops of Fars and faroff places might accept what was decided by these bishops, as far as it related to them.

In the month of Canun, on the Holy Festival of Epiphany¹, they came to the Great City, Capital of all the cities of the East. The King of Kings, victorious and illustrious, heard of their arrival; he instructed our honourable Father, Mar Izhaq, Bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, Catholicos and Archbishop of all the East, and his brother, the Bishop Mar Maruta, to gather them all together in the Great Church², and that the letter sent by the bishops of the West should be read before them, and that they should hear and observe all that was written in it.

The first Tuesday of the month of Sebat³ was for us a resurrection, when we saw the restoration of the dead to life; we were brought to safety and peace, and "things new were done in our generation." This was during the tenure of office and under the primacy of our Father Mar Izhaq, Catholicos and Archbishop, through the efforts of the worker for peace and sower of concord, the Bishop Mar Maruta. On that day the Synod of Bishops was held in the Land of the East. Our mouth is opened to glorify God, our hearts have thrilled with joy, our tongues have chanted praise, in faithful adoration of spirit we have magnified the living God, His Christ the Saviour, and His Holy Spirit, for he has multiplied and done these great things among us, and we are not sufficient to render Him thanks. We asked with one accord from our merciful God that he would add days upon days to the victorious and illustrious King of Kings, Yazdgard, that his years might be prolonged for many generations and many centuries. At this glorious sight of the Synod of Bishops our soul is lifted up, as though we were in the very presence of the throne and majesty of Christ.

The elect Fathers and Rulers of the Synod commanded that the letter from the West be read before the whole of this first⁴ Synod assembled in the East; and we all, bishops assembled from various places, to the number of forty, heard the letter joyfully and attentively. We have accepted all that is written in it:

¹ 6th January, 410. ³ 1st February, 410. ⁴ literally "new"

² at Kokhe, beside Seleucia.

1. On the subject of bishops. In future there shall no longer be 2 or 3 in a single town, but only one for each town and its jurisdiction. A bishop when he dies shall have no right to appoint his successor, any more than he has a right to do so during his life. A bishop consecrated by one or two other bishops shall not be considered validly appointed, but only one consecrated by three others, and that only on the authorisation of the Metropolitan Archbishop, even when the bishops are far distant.

2. Together, in one way, we shall all celebrate the Holy Festival, the first among the blessed Festivals, the glorious day of the Nativity and Epiphany of our Saviour the Christ; moreover, we shall observe together and simultaneously the complete Fast of 40 Days, in 7 weeks; and we shall celebrate the Festival of Holy Easter, the Great Day of the Crucifixion and Passion and Resurrection of our Saviour. In all the churches we shall offer to God a Holy Sacrifice - that of the body and blood of Christ - for the sanctification of the living and the resurrection of the dead.

3. We heartily approve of the following words written to the honourable Bishop Mar Maruta: "Should it please our Lord, and should the King of Kings, victorious, accede to our request, and permit the bishops to assemble and hold a Synod, we shall send you the regulative canons, set forth in the Great Synod held in the city of Nicaea, in the time of the just and God-loving Emperor Constantine, victorious, when the bishops assembled, 318 in number, and according to the fear of the Lord which they possessed, laid down and established true precepts, holy laws, right works, glorious canons, clear rules."

When we had heard the above extract from the letter of our honoured colleagues, then our Father, holy and worthy of good remembrance, Head over us at the time when our bowed heads had been straightened, and we had peace and concord, Mar Izhaq, Catholicos, Archbishop, was the first to open his mouth, as being the Chief of his colleagues. He said to his brother the Bishop Mar Maruta, who partakes in the affection and peace of Christ:

"Let the volume in which the canons are written be brought in, and let it be read before all the bishops."

They brought it in, and read it. We heard all those precepts required for the regular order of the ministry of the Church of Christ; we learned all the canons promulgated in the wisdom of God by the Fathers Bishops in the Great and Holy Synod of the West; and our soul was restored to life in perfect joy. And the First, Mar Izhaq, like the Chief that he was, elected by his colleagues, said:

"Anyone whatever, who does not adhere to all these glorious laws and all these orthodox canons, and receives them not, let him be anathema in the eyes of all the people of God, and let him have no office in the Church of Christ!" And all we bishops followed him unanimously, defining our position in the words he had used.

According to Eastern tradition, there were 318 bishops at the Council of Nicaea, which is often called the Council of the 318 Fathers.

After this, Mar Maruta said to us all:

"All these precepts, these laws, these canons, ought to be set down in writing, and we ought to sign at the end of the regulations, and confirm our signature by an irrevocable pact."

And Mar Izhaq, Catholicos, said first:

"At the head of all, I will sign with my own hand."

And we all, bishops of various places, declared after him:

"We shall accept them with joy, and we shall confirm all that shall be written above it by our signature at the end."

Some days afterwards, our holy Fathers, Mar Izhaq, Catholicos of the East, and Mar Maruta, Bishop, spoke to the victorious and illustrious King of Kings. He, with wisdom and liberality, issued an Edict, and gave orders to Khusrau-Yazdgard, his Prime Minister¹, and to Mihr-Shapur, his Commander-in-Chief.² All the bishops entered the royal presence, and heard all. In brief, what he said was this:

"Previously there was a great persecution against you, and you had to go about in secret; now, the King of Kings has brought you great peace and tranquillity. Thanks to the frequent meetings the King of Kings has had with the Catholicos Izhaq, whom he has been pleased to establish Head of all the Christians of the East, and especially since the day when Bishop Maruta came here, by the favour of the King of Kings peace and tranquillity have increased to you. With regard to the letter which has come from the land of the Romans, Yazdgard, King of Kings, now commands as follows:

"Every man whom you shall choose, and know to be capable of governing and directing the people of God, who shall be appointed by the Bishops Izhaq and Maruta, shall hold valid office³. No one must separate himself from them. If anyone opposes them and acts contrary to their will, let them tell us, and we shall inform the King of Kings, and no matter who he is, his malice shall be punished."

We went out from his presence in a body. Once more Mar Izhaq, Catholicos of the East, and his brother, the honourable Bishop Mar Maruta, said to us:

"This Synod which has taken place today, these canons and rules which have been before you, establishing for every one of the bishops in every city what their conduct ought to be, and what the bounds of their authority⁴, you have all heard and accepted them. Now let a resolution be written down embodying all that is required for the work and ministry of the Catholic Church. Sign it with your hands, and confirm it as an inviolable and indissoluble pact."

And we replied in a loud voice:

"Certainly we shall do it, and sign with joy. Anyone who does not accept it, and behaves in a disorderly spirit after this definition

¹ literally buzurg-farmadar, Grand Wazir. ² literally argbed, which Chabot translates as "of the house of the Generalissimo". ³ literally "shall be head". ⁴ literally "and what their limits and their authority".

has been laid down, shall be totally rejected, and rightly so, by the whole Church of Christ. There will be no remedy for him: he shall be condemned to a severe sentence by the King of Kings, and subjected to rigorous imprisonment, shame, and scorn."

We accepted it all openly, by an unchangeable alliance, by an inviolable oath, by an indissoluble pact, by an immovable decision; and we instructed the Notary to write:

"First of all, in the churches, prayers, petitions, supplications and entreaties shall be made to God, to His Christ, and to His living and Holy Spirit, for Kings and Potentates, that they may live in peace and tranquillity, and that they may not conceive any proud and violent design against the people of God and the Church of God."

(Thereafter follow the Creed of the Council of Nicaea, and 21 canons suited to the needs of the Church of the East).

(The documents ends with the following signatures:

Bishops Izhaq and Maruta.

The Metropolitans of Nisibin, Parat Maishan, Arbil and Karka.
32 other bishops).

APPENDIX BDETAILS ABOUT METROPOLITANS AND BISHOPS' SEES

225 - according to Mashih-zakha.

Dates in records of Synods (attendance or mention) given where available first and last 410-605, and later dates separately.

T - Letters of Timothy I. IY - Letters of Ishu'-yab III.

M - Mention by Thomas of Marga after 650.

E - Elijah of Damascus, 893.

F - on the authority of J.M. Fiey.

Briefer details are given about metropolitans.

THE CITIES. Not 225. Great Metropolitan, Catholicos and Archbishop, etc. 410. First called Patriarch 424.

Kashkar, Ur	225	410-605	775,790	TME	
Hira, Hirta		410-585		TE	605,700 etc. - F
Bait Darai, Ardai		410-605	790	TE	
Zabe, Deir Harqal		410-585	790	TE	
Qunni		424			
Anbar, Firoz-Shapur,					
Bait Maskeni	225	486-605	790	TME	
Tirhan		544-605	676,790	TME	
Senna, al-Sin		576-605	790	TM	
(New) Najran				T	Yemen and San'a - M
Nafar				ME	
Qasr				E	Unknown before 893 - F
'Uqbara				E	After 833 - F
'Abdasi				E	Unknown before 893 - F

BAIT LAPAT, GUNDESHAPUR. Bishop 225. Metropolitan 410.

Hurmizd-Ardushir,					
Ahwaz	225	410-585	IY	TE	
Sus, Susa		410-605		ME	
Shuster		410-605	IY	TE	
Karka of Laidan		410-605		E	
Isfahan		424-576			
Bait Mihrqai,					
Mihran-qadaq		497-595			With Isfahan 497
Ram-Hurmizd		544-585		T	
Gai				T	

NISIBIN. Not 225. Metropolitan 410.

Arzan	225	410-585		E	
Bait Zabdi	225	410-497		M	
Shigar	225			M	At least from 533 - F
Qarda, Bait Qerdi,					
Baqarda		410-605		E	Possibly M
Bait Rahimai		410			Mentioned by 'Abd-ishu'
Bait Moksai		410-424			
Baita of Oustan		410-554			
Balad		497-554	IY	ME	Bishop c.484/5 - F
Qubbe of Arzan				790 T	

PARAT MAISHAN, later BASRA. Bishop 225. Metropolitan 410.

Nahrgur	410-605		Bishop up to 649 - F
Karka of Maishan	410-605	T	
Rima, Nahr-ul-Marra	410-605	E	
Uballa, Huballat		T	
Dastahsan		E	

ARBIL, later (after c. 825) MOSUL. Bishop 225. Metropolitan 410.

Hanaita (& Hefton)	225	790 TM	Bishop 576; with Ma'alta on the Zab, 714 - F
Bait Bagash	410-605	TME	
Bait Dasan, Dasen	410-605	TME	
Bait Mahqart, Marga	410	790 TM	F identifies with Marga
Ramonin	410		Location uncertain - F
Bait Nuhadra	410-605 IY	T E	
Dabarinos, Rabarinhesn	410		Location uncertain - F
Azarbaijan, Ganzak (Tabriz), Urmia	486-605 IY	M	Place mentioned 420
Ma'alta on the Zab	497-605	TM	
Ma'alta near Dahok	544-554		
Nineveh, Mosul	554-585 IY	T E	
Paidangaran, N. Azarbaijan	540-554		
'Ain Sifne	576		
Bait Tabyati and Kartawai	585		
Taimana		790 T	
Kafr Zamri		790	Location uncertain - F
Haditha, Hedata		TME	Bishop c. 595 - F
Salakh		M	
Badiya		E	Unknown before 893 - F

KARKA OF BAIT SALOK, KIRKUK. Bishop 225. Metropolitan 410.

Kharbat-Galal	225 410-605		Later Monophysite (?) - F
Shahr-Qard, Seharqart	225 410-605	E	
Lashom, Daquqa	410-598	775 E	
Ariwan, later Bait Wazikh	410-605 IY	ME	
Radani	410-424		
Ariwan of Ebra	424		
Dasqarta of Malka	424		
Tahal	424-605 IY		
Barhis	544-605		Later Monophysite (?) - F
Shahr-zur	554-605	T	
Bourzen	576		
Gaukai		790 T	
Khanijar		E	From c. 800 - F
Darabad		E	

RIV-ARDUSHIR. Not 225. Bishop 410. Metropolitan 424.

Qatar, Bait Qatari	225 410	IY 676	M	Metropolitan 676
Diren, Darai, Ardai	410-585	IY 676		(to Qatar)
Toduru	410			(to Qatar?)
Masmahig	410	IY		
Sokotra, Islands	410		E	Mentioned by Cosmas 525
Ardushir-Khurra,				(to Qatar?)
Firozabad	424			
Darabgard	424-554		E	
Maskena of Kurdo	424			
Talwan	424	IY		(to Qatar)
Ruha	424			(to Qatar?)
Mazon	424-576	IY 676		(to Qatar)
Ishtar, Persepolis	424		E	
Bi-Shapur	544			
Hagar	576	IY 676		(to Qatar)
Qish	552			(to Qatar?)
Hatta	576	IY 676		(to Qatar)
Kerman		IY	E	
Shiraz			E	Mentioned c. 470
Marmadit			E	
Siran			E	
Hurmizd, Ormuz				Mentioned c. 540 (Wiltzsch)

MERV. Not 225. Bishop 424-497. Metropolitan 554.

Abrashahr (Nishapur)				
and Tus	410-497			
Abiwerd	554			
Merv-ar-Rud	554			
Deir-Hans			E	
Damadut			E	

HARAT, HAREW. Not 225. Bishop 424-554. Metropolitan 585.

Segestan	424-576		E	Metropolitan ('Amr-Saliba)
Bist, Bust	544			
Farah, Phra	544			
Qash	544			
Zarang	544			
Rukwad, Kandahar	544			
Badisis, Badghis				
and Qadistan	585			Bishop appointed 551
Pushang	585			

HALWAN. Bishop 225 and 410-605. Metropolitan 780.

Bait Lashpar, Belash-				
par, Bait Madai	424-576		T	Bishop mentioned 610
Hamadan	486-576		E	
Masabadan	554-576			
Dinur			E	
Nihawand			E	
Karj			E	

SIN, CHINA. Bishop 638 (Alo-pen). Metropolitan possibly 650 (Alo-pen) or after 712; certainly before 780.

SAMARQAND. Bishop for Turks c. 644. Metropolitan possibly about 650 or after 712.

QATAR, QATARBA, BAIT QATARI. Bishop 225, 410. Under Fars till 650. Metropolitan 676.

See under Fars for Diren, Toduru, Masmahig, Talwan, Ruha, Mazon, Hagar, Qish and Hatta.

HIND, INDIA. Bishop at Kalyan and probably in Malabar before 525. Under Fars till after 650. Cosmas also mentions "the rest of the Indians". Timothy mentions monks crossing the sea, probably to become bishops.

ARMENIA, ARRAN, later (after 705) BARDA. Bishop 420-486, after which Armenia proper separated from the Church of the East. A Bishop of Arran is mentioned about 525. Metropolitan probably appointed by Timothy I.

DAMASCUS. "Bishop of the Scattered" 630. Metropolitan before 790, probably appointed by Timothy I.

Aleppo	E)	Labourt T says they had
Jerusalem	E)	bishops long before 780.
Manbag	E)	According to Wiltsch
Mopsuestia	E)	these four bishops
Tarsus	E)	were only titular
Maltiyya	E)	

RAI, TABARISTAN. Bishops 410-544. Metropolitan appointed by Timothy I between 799 and 804.

Isfahan	424-576	
Gurgan	424-576	E

Isfahan
Gurgan AM, BAIT DELAMI. Bishop 225. Metropolitan appointed by Timothy I not earlier than 782. Two metropolitans of "Gilan and Dailam" appointed by Timothy in 795/798.

Gilan and Amul	554	TM	Bardaisan 196, martyrs 351.
Moqan		M	
Nihawand	790	T	
Khamlikh			Mentioned by 'Amr

BAIT TUPTAI, TIBET (TANGUT?). Metropolitan appointed by Timothy I, 795/798.

7 bishops appointed "for the country beyond Gilan and Dailam" - M

APPENDIX CORDER OF METROPOLITAN SEES

Name of See	Synods		Elijah	Ibn-at	'Abd-ishu'		'Amr(Saliba)
	410	554	893	Tayyib	d.1318		c. 1350
				<u>d.1043</u>	<u>Can.</u>	<u>410 rev.</u>	
Bait Lapat, Gundeshapur, Elam	1	1	1	1	1	1	1 (1)
Nisibin, Bait 'Arabi	2	2	2	2	2	2	2 (2)
Parat Maishan, the South, Basra	3	3	3	3	3	3	3 (3)
Arbil, Huzza, Hedayab, Assyria, Mosul	4	4	4	4	4	4	4 (4) 5 (5)
Karka of Bait Salok, Kirkuk, Bait Garma	5	5	5	5	5	5	6 (6)
Riv-ardushir, Fars		6	12	6	6	7	8 (10)
Merv		7	9	7	7	9	9 (11)
Harat, Harew			8	9	9	12	10 (12)
Halwan			14	8	8	6	7 (7)
Sin, China				12	11	14 (?)	12 (14)
Samarqand			11	10	12	10 (?)	18 (21)
Qatar, Qatarba, Bait Qatari							11 (13)
Hind, India				11	10	14 (?)	13 (15)
Armenia, Arran, Barda'a			10,13	Tim.	13 T.	13	14 (16)
Damascus, Syria			6		14 T.	8	15 (17)
Rai, Tabaristan			7	Tim.		11	16 (18,19)
Dailam, Bait Delami							17 (20)
Bait Tuptai, Tibet, Tangut							24 (26)
Turk, Turkestan, Kashghar						10 (?)	19,25 (22, 27)
Sarbaz (Segestan?)							21 (24)

Notes: (1) Both Ibn-at-Tayyib and 'Abd-ishu' say that Timothy created six metropolitan sees. It is suggested that these were Armenia, Damascus, Rai, Dailam, Tibet and Turkestan. Sarbaz was possibly too ephemeral to be remembered.

(2) Note how near the above tentative order is to that of 'Amr.

(3) We suggest the following Heads of the Church of the East as creators of metropolitan provinces:

Pepa, fl. 325	Bait Lapat
	Nisibin
	Parat Maishan
	Arbil
Shim'un bar Saba'i, d. 341	Karka of Bait Salok
Yab-alaha I, 415-420	Riv-ardushir
Shila, 505-521/522	Merv
Ishu'-yab I, 582-595	Harat
Ishu'-yab II, 628-643	Halwan
Ishu'-yab III, 650-657/658	China
	Samarqand
	Qatar
	India
Timothy I, 780-823	Armenia
	Damascus
	Rai
	Dailam
	Tibet
	Kashghar
	Sarbaz

Of the above provinces, Qatar was short-lived, and so was Sarbaz. 'Abd-ishu's mention of Saliba-zakha as the creator of the provinces of Harat, Samarqand and China may reflect interruptions in the line of these distant metropolitans due to the vacancy of 14 years in the Patriarchate from 700 to 714.

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APPENDIX DTIMOTHY I'S APOLOGETIC1. Discussion with a Muslim Aristotelian¹

This letter is the summary of a discussion in which Timothy faced an Aristotelian philosopher at the royal court.

In Part 1, the discussion deals with God. We arrive at our knowledge of God through the senses, drawing our knowledge from existing things. Or rather, we decide what God is not, by excluding from His nature, which is simple and eternal, all imperfection. From His eternity issue His intelligence and His will ab aeterno, etc., but not inevitably the necessity that He should create, because this last attribute is an act of His free will, while the others are inherent in His Divine nature itself. We cannot admit any imperfection in God.

In Part 2, he discusses the operations of God ad intra, that is, generation and spiration². These do not imply any multiplicity in God, for God remains One in nature, but Three in properties. Timothy tries in every way to illustrate the dogma of the Most Holy Trinity so as to make it accessible to Muslim understanding, making use of examples borrowed from nature. For example, just as heat and light subsist in one sun, so three Divine Persons subsist in God, and so on. This Unity of God must be understood in a way that is transcendental and cannot be categorised. The same dogma is proved by Scripture, the Quran, and the arguments of reason.

Part 3 studies the Incarnation. The Word has incarnated Himself without His nature undergoing any change, and without His being limited in the flesh. God has been really and truly revealed in the flesh. We worship the Most Holy Trinity, and we worship the humanity of our Lord, not in itself, but because of God who dwells within it. If the Muslims, says Timothy, adore God in the Qa'ba, how much more should we worship Him in His Temple, the humanity of our Lord! As far as the flesh is concerned, the Word has been subject to suffering and death, but not as far as God is concerned; we attribute suffering and death to the Word on account of His union with the body.

Timothy must have interrupted the discussion and brought it to an end, assuring his interlocutor that he would meet him elsewhere. He promises Sergius that he will write him another letter, and give him the substance of his controversy with al-Mahdi.

¹Tim 3 (XL), Bid pp. 32-33. This letter is unedited and untranslated as yet; we here translate Bidawid's summary.

²We understand this to mean the operations by which God generates His Son and breathes His Spirit, corresponding with the fact that the Son is "begotten" and the Spirit "proceeds".

2. Dialogue with the Caliph al-Mahdi¹

In introducing his Apology, Timothy expresses to Sergius his reluctance to do so, because he is convinced that such discussions are really futile. But he cannot rid himself of his affection for Sergius, and therefore must write!

When he came into the Caliph's presence, Timothy praised God and His Majesty. The Caliph introduced the dialogue with a question.

Mahdi - You have no right to say that God married a woman and had a Son.

Timothy - What a blasphemy! We say that Christ is the Son of God, the Light, the Word, born of God high above time and before all worlds. He is Word-God - "born of the Father before the times, as light from the sun and word from the soul" - but also man - "born of the Virgin Mary, in time".

A rather trivial discussion follows about whether Mary's seals of virginity remained intact.

Mahdi - How was the Eternal One born in time?

Timothy - Only in His humanity.

Mahdi - Then there are two Christs, one Divine and one human!

Timothy - No. "Christ is one in His Son-ship, and two in the attributes of His natures." It is like the Caliph and his clothes, or his insignia of office.

Mahdi - (re John 20: 17 - "I ascend unto my Father...and to my God") "How can this be? If He says that He is His Father, He is not His God, and if He is His God, He is not His Father."

Timothy - As the Word, God was His Father; but as man, God was His God. To illustrate, body and soul make one man; the Caliph is both owner and "father" of the letters he writes on papyrus. Christ "was not born of Mary in the same way as He was born of God".

Mahdi - You believe in Three Gods, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Timothy - The King is one King, though he has a word and spirit; the sun is one sun, though it has light and heat.

Mahdi - But my word vanishes and disappears.

Timothy - Because God is God, His Word and Spirit are eternal. Nor can the Word and Spirit be separable from God, or exist without Him, or He without them.

¹ Tim 4 (LIX), Min pp. 15-90. We summarise the argument of the dialogue, quoting here and there from Mingana's English translation.

Mahdi - How is it that you accept Christ from the testimony of Law and Prophets, and not Muhammad?

Timothy - Because there are clear and detailed testimonies to Christ (examples given). "So far as Muhammad is concerned, I have not received a single testimony either from Jesus Christ or from the Gospel which would refer to His name or to His works."

Mahdi - Who then is the "Paraclete"?

Timothy - The Spirit, who was not man, but God, and therefore cannot have been Muhammad. (6 scriptural proofs that Muhammad is not the Paraclete). "If he were mentioned in the Gospel, this mention would have been marked by a distinct portraiture concerning his coming, his name, his mother, and his people...Nothing resembling this is found in the Gospel concerning Muhammad."

Mahdi - "There were many testimonies, but the Books have been corrupted, and you have removed them."¹

Timothy - Produce a copy of the uncorrupted Gospel, and I'll believe you! Even the Jews have not dared to corrupt the Law. "If I had found in the Gospel a prophecy concerning the coming of Muhammad, I would have left the Gospel for the Quran, as I have left the Torah and the Prophets for the Gospel."

Mahdi - Do you not believe that our Book was given by God?

Timothy - It is not for me to say. But it was not confirmed by any miracle, as the Gospel was, and therefore does not abrogate the Gospel, as the Gospel abrogated the Law.

Mahdi - In Isaiah 21:7 the rider on the ass is Jesus, and the rider on a camel is Muhammad.

Timothy - No, they refer respectively to the Medes and Elamites (Persians). Various proof-texts prove that after Jesus there were to be no more prophets.

Mahdi - Why do you worship the Cross?²

Timothy - It is the supreme medium through which God showed His love to man. "It is only just that the medium through which God showed His love to all, should also be the medium through which all should show their love to God."

Mahdi - "Can God Himself then die?"

Timothy - The Son of God died in our nature, not in His Divinity.

Mahdi - But the Quran says that God made a similitude for Him.

Timothy - Other verses of the Quran prove that He died. This was frequently prophesied in the Law also. If there was a similitude, and God made it, God deceived men, which is unworthy of God. Nor would He have allowed Satan to do such a thing. After all, even the Apostles cast out demons.

¹This is the first historical reference to this accusation.

²The Nestorians used the Cross, not the Crucifix.

Mahdi - What books prove this point?

Timothy - The Prophets and the Gospel. David speaks of Word and Spirit being eternal; so does John in his Gospel. John 17:5 proves that Christ was not created. Matthew 28:19 shows equality. "It is not the servants who participate in royal honour but the children."

Mahdi - How then do you distinguish the Son from the Spirit?

Timothy - As you would distinguish the reason of man from his mind, the light of the sun from its heat, the scent of an apple from its taste. One is begotten, the other proceeds.

Mahdi - How did the Father and Spirit not put on human body with the Son, though so near to Him?

Timothy - Just as the King's word clothes itself with the papyrus on which it is written, while his soul and mind do not. Other similes prove the same.

Mahdi - Jesus was circumcised. Why do you not circumcise yourselves?

Timothy - I leave the image and cleave to the reality. The Law was the image of the Gospel. The Gospel is not the enemy of the Law, any more than the sun is the enemy of the stars, but it supersedes it.

Mahdi - Jesus worshipped in the Temple: why do you face east?

Timothy - (1) Because Eden is in the East. (2) Because He taught us to do so. (3) Because the East is the place of light. "Because Adam transgressed the commandment of God, he was driven out of Paradise, and when he went out of Paradise he was thrown on this accursed earth...He turned his face away from God, and his children worshipped demons, stars, sun, moon, and molten and graven images. The Word of God came then to the children of men in a human body, and in His person paid to God the debt that they were owing Him.¹ To remind them, however, of the place from which their father was driven...He made them turn towards Paradise in their worship and prayer, because it is in it that God was first worshipped."

Mahdi - If Christ worshipped and prayed, He was not God.

Timothy - He did this as a man, and for our sakes, and not because He needed to.²

Mahdi - But every man needs worship and prayer!

Timothy - You admit that Christ was sinless. "If He who is Lord of everything and a Creator is not in need, and He who is not a sinner is pure, it follows that Jesus Christ worshipped and prayed to God neither as one in need nor as a sinner, but...to teach worship and prayer to His disciples, and through them to every human being."

¹This in a nutshell is Timothy's doctrine of the Atonement.

²This is sheer docetism!

Mahdi - It was not honourable to Jesus Christ that God should have allowed the Jews to kill Him.

Timothy - Only His Humanity died. He suffered willingly.

Mahdi - Then the Jews were not to blame!

Timothy - No, they are to be blamed, because their intention was bad. Similarly, Satan is to be blamed for falling, though God made him, and let him fall; Adam is to be blamed; though Muslims are ready to die for God, those who kill them in battle are to be blamed. If you wanted to pull down a house, and an enemy came first and pulled it down and burned it, you would punish that enemy.

"He who rescued from the mouth of Sheol in such a wonderful way the temple of His humanity after it had lain therein for three days and three nights, was surely able to save and rescue the very same temple from the unjust Jews!"¹

"In order that this expectation of the immortal life and of the world to come might be indelibly impressed upon mankind, it was right that Jesus Christ should rise from the dead; but in order that He might rise from the dead, it was right that He should first die, and in order that He might truly die it was imperative that His death should have been first witnessed by all...That is why He died by crucifixion."²

Mahdi - Who gave you the Gospel, and when?

Timothy - Christ, before His ascension.

Mahdi - Then what about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?

Timothy - They wrote what they had heard and learned from Jesus, and what the Spirit-Paraclete reminded them of.

Mahdi - Why do they differ, and contradict one another?

Timothy - Different writers write differently, but there are no essential contradictions. Try getting several men to write about Your Majesty, and see.

Mahdi - Just as God gave the Law through Moses and the Gospel through Christ, He gave the Quran through Muhammad.

Timothy - (after quoting O.T. passages). "God, therefore, pointed out clearly to the transition from the Law to the Gospel, when He showed us a new covenant, and signs, and ...gifts of the Holy Spirit...God nowhere showed such irrefragible signs for the transition from the Gospel to something else...The Gospel is the symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven, and there is nothing higher than the Kingdom of Heaven."

Mahdi - What about Moses' saying, that God would raise up a prophet "from among your brethren"?³ "Who are the brethren of the children of Israel besides the Arabs, and who is the prophet like unto Moses besides Muhammad?"

¹This is Theodore of Mopsuestia's way of presenting the death of Christ.

²Origen also stressed the public nature of the Crucifixion, in Contra Celsum, 2:54-68, ³Deut. 18: 15, 18.

Timothy - The nearest brethren to the Israelites were the Edomites, and the Ammonites and Moabites were also brethren. but Moses is here speaking of fellow-Israelites - Joshua, David, Samuel and others - who like Moses taught the Law. For "brethren" see other O.T. references.

Mahdi - Jesus allowed His mother to die. In other words, He killed her. He therefore deserves strokes, fetters and death!

Timothy - When she died He transferred her to the next world, and so honoured her, and is worthy of all blessings. "If Mary had not died, she would not have risen."

Mahdi - Was Jesus good? He said that none were good but God!¹

Timothy - David said that there was none just,² but he excluded himself. So Jesus said there was none good, but excluded Himself. He called Himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus was in fact showing up the hypocrisy of the rich man, who called Jesus "good", but in his heart thought only God to be good.

Mahdi - "If you accepted Muhammad as a prophet, your words would be beautiful, and their meanings fine!"

Timothy - After Jesus, there is to be only one prophet - Elijah - who shall precede His Second Coming as John the Baptist (in Elijah's spirit) preceded His First Coming.

Mahdi - If you had not corrupted the Scriptures, you would have found Muhammad.

Timothy - "Neither we nor the Jews have ever tampered with the Books. Our mutual hostility is the best guarantee of our statement." If we had changed anything, we would have cut out things that seemed undignified for Christ, like His food and drink, His fatigue, anger, lack of omniscience, prayer, passion, crucifixion and burial, and we would have eliminated apparent contradictions in the text.

Mahdi - We must leave off now. We shall have another opportunity later to continue this intimate discussion.

The first interview ends with praise and blessing from Timothy.

Some time later, Timothy has another audience, which began by his paying his respects in the usual way. After Mahdi had again objected to there being four Gospels, and Timothy had answered him, Mahdi went on:

Mahdi - "What do you say about Muhammad?"

Timothy - Muhammad is "worthy of all praise"³, and "walked in the paths of the prophets", because (1) he taught the Unity of God; (2) he taught the way of Good Works; (3) he opposed idolatry and polytheism; (4) he taught about God, His Word and Spirit; (5) he showed his zeal by fighting against idolatry with the sword; (6) like Abraham, he left his kindred rather than worship idols.

¹ Mark 10:18. ² Psalm 14:3. ³ A play on the meaning of the name.

Mahdi - Why do you not accept his teaching that God is One?

Timothy - We do.

Mahdi - Then how can God be Three?

Timothy - (after a barren philosophical argument about one being the cause of two and three). Various passages in the Law and Prophets imply plurality in the Godhead, like Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 9:7, Isaiah 6:3, etc. Even the Quran uses "We fashioned, said, did."

Mahdi - But this is the plural of majesty.

Timothy - I agree. Majesty contains people; the King is the mouthpiece of his people, his will is their will, etc., and he has his word and spirit. "The greatest honour that can be offered to God is that He should be believed in by all as He is. In His essence He is One, but He is Three because of His Word and Spirit. This Word and Spirit are living beings and are of His nature." The Quran often has three letters at the beginning of a Sura. Perhaps these are ciphers for God, His Word and Spirit!

Mahdi - Why, then, did Muhammad not say so?

Timothy - Possibly he could not say so openly, because he might have been misunderstood by polytheists as referring to three gods.

Mahdi - Either God is One or Three. He can't be both.

Timothy repeats simillitudes about sun and light, etc.

Mahdi - We cannot use bodily similes to explain the One without body.

Timothy - I agree that God is far above our thoughts or description.

Mahdi - The mind of rational beings cannot speak of God as a Trinity.

Timothy - "The mind...of the rational beings can only extend to the acts of God, and even then in an imperfect and partial manner; as to the nature of God, we learn...not so much from our rational minds as from...what God has revealed and taught about Himself through His Word and Spirit." Only the Son knows the Father.¹ The Spirit searches out the deep things of God.²

Mahdi - "How does the nature of the subject compel us to believe it?"

Timothy - If God is a perceiver, "does not a perceiver perceive a perceived object?"

Mahdi - Yes, but God perceives Himself.

Timothy - We cannot see ourselves with our own eyes! But God perceives Himself through His Word and Spirit. The Word and Spirit are a clear mirror of the Father.

¹Matt 11: 27. ²I Cor 2: 10.

Mahdi - Are they parts of one another, and placed at a distance from one another, so that one can perceive and one can be perceived?

Timothy - No, all are infinite.

Mahdi - If God perceived His creation before it was created, as you are ready to admit, it is also possible that He perceived His Word and Spirit before they were created!

Timothy - God perceived His creatures only through prescience in a finite way; but if His perception is infinite, His Word and Spirit, perceived in an infinite way, must also be infinite.

Mahdi - I say that the Word and Spirit are creatures also.

Timothy - But the Holy Books say that by His Word and Spirit God created the worlds.¹

Mahdi - You believe, then, that we have Three Heads!

Timothy - No, One Head, God the Father, with His Word and Spirit. It is only the idolaters who believe in false gods, or idols who have neither reason nor life.

Mahdi - You must believe in a vacuous God, since a child goes out of Him!

Timothy - No, God is a Spirit, without body of any kind. (After the repetition of some old arguments and similes, Mahdi raises another objection).

Mahdi - Christ is called a Servant, so how is He worthy of honour?

Timothy - Your sons Musa and Harun are also your servants, but they reflect your one Kingdom and Lordship, and no one looks on them as being in servitude.

Mahdi - You can argue out things cleverly, but I believe in reason and the Revealed Books.

Timothy - I too am arguing on this basis. Moses and David call Christ Lord, and say that His Kingdom is for ever. Even the Quran, I have heard, calls Christ the Word and Spirit of God - not a servant. It is true that the Prophets have called Christ a servant, but only on account of His mission, not on account of His nature. Your Majesty sent Harun to serve you on a mission against the Byzantine Empire. "So also is the case of Christ, the Heavenly King's Son. He fulfilled the will of His Father in His coming on His military mission to mankind, and in His victory over sin, death and Satan. He did not by this act lose His royal Sonship."

Christ is called not only Servant, but Door, Rock and Lamb. (More proof-texts given about the eternity of Christ's Kingdom) "The expression that God suffered and died in the flesh is not right."

¹ Gen 1:3, II Peter 3: 7.

Mahdi - Who speak like that?

Timothy - The Jacobites and the Melkites. But we say that God renders the passible and mortal human nature of Christ impassible and immortal like Himself, not the other way round.¹

Mahdi - You are more in the right than they are, when you deny that God dies. But you are all wrong about the Word and Son of God!

Timothy - In this dark world we believe we have the pearl of truth, and so do you. When the Day comes, one of us will be found to have only a worthless bit of glass.

Mahdi - So in this world we do not know who have the pearl?

Timothy - We partly do: by their good works, pious deeds, and the signs and wonders that God works among them. We see these signs first in Moses, Joshua, David and Elijah and Elisha, and then supremely in the miracles of Christ.

Mahdi - "We have hope in God that we are the possessors of this pearl, and hold it in our hands."

Timothy - "Amen, O King. But may God grant us that wettoo may share it with you, and rejoice in the shining and beaming lustre of the pearl. God has placed the pearl of His Faith before all of us like the shining rays of the sun, and everyone who wishes can enjoy the light of the sun."

(The discussion being clearly at an end, Timothy prayed for the Caliph and his family, and then Mahdi made his parting shot).

Mahdi - Even unbelievers have performed miracles.

Timothy - These were the deceptions of demons, as in the case of Jannes and Jambres, and Simon Magus. But Moses and Peter overcame them by the power of God.

At this point Al Mahdi rose, and discussion ended.

¹This is sheer monophysitism, though Timothy would not have admitted it!

APPENDIX ECHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Head, Catholicos, Patriarch</u>	<u>Shah</u>
399	Izhaq I, 399-end 410	Yazdgard I, 399-420
411	Ahai, 411-end 414	
415	Yab-alaha I, 415-beginning 420	
420	(Ma'na, 420) (Fara-bakht, 420)	Bahram V, 420-438
421	Dad-ishu' I, 421/2-456	
438		Yazdgard II, 438-457
457	Babowai, May 457-June 484	
459		Firoz, 459-486
485	Aqaq, 485-495/6	
486		Walgash, 486-488
488		Qubad, 488-531
497	Babai, 497-502/3	
505	Shila, 505-521/2	
524	"The Duality", 524-538/9	
531		Khusrau I, 531-579
539	Paul I d. Palm Sunday 539	
540	Aba I the Great, Jan 540- 29 Feb. 552	
552	Yusuf, May 552-566/7 (d. 576)	
567	Hizqiel elected.	
570	Hizqiel consecrated, d. 581	
579		Hurmizd IV, 579-590
582	Ishu'-yab I, 582-595	
590		Khusrau II, 590-628
595	Sabr-ishu' I, 595-604	
605	Gregory I, April 605-609	
609	Vacancy, 609-628	
628	Ishu'-yab II, Between 11 May and 30 Aug 628 - 646	Shiruya, 628-629
630		Queen Buran, 630-631
632		Yazdgard III, 632-651

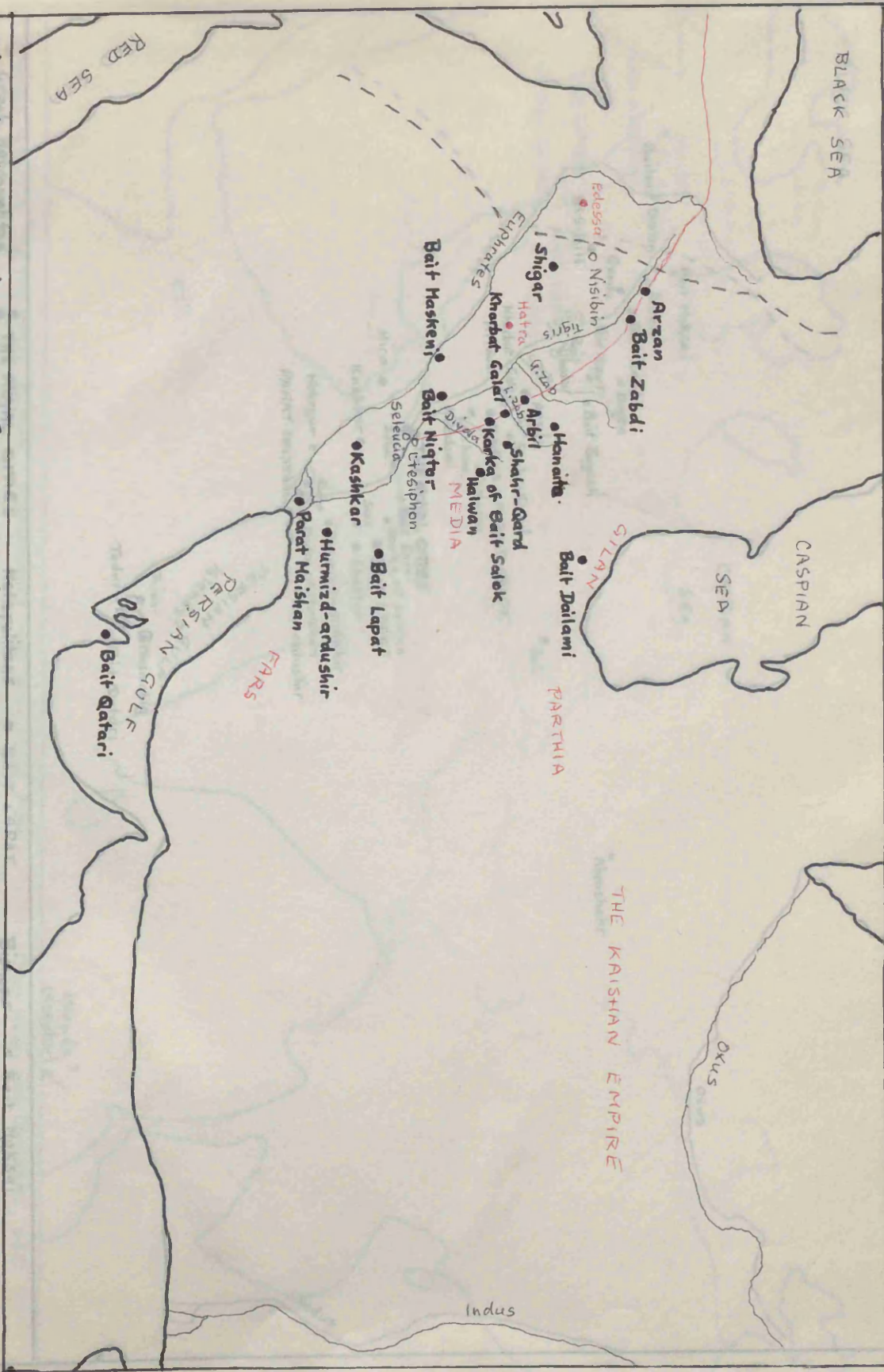
Note. The names of a few Shahs of the period 629-632 have been omitted as unimportant.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Patriarch</u>	<u>Caliph</u>
628	Ishu'-yab II, between 11 May and 30 Aug 628-646	
632		Abu Bakr, 632-634
634		'Umr, 634-644
644		'Uthman, 644-656
647	Mar-amma, or Maran-amma, 647-650	
650	Ishu'-yab III, 650-658	
656		'Ali, 656-661
660		Mu'awīya, 660-680 †
661	George I, 661-680/1	
680	John I, 680/1-683	Yazid I, 680-683
684		Marwan I, 684-685
685	Hanan-ishu' I, 685/6-699/700	'Abd-al Malik, 685-705
691	(John "the Leper", 691-692/3	
700	Vacancy, 700-714	
705		Walid I, 705-715
714	Saliba-zakha, 714-728	
715		Suleman, 715-717
717		'Umr II, 717-720
720		Yazid II, 720-724
724		Hisham, 724-743
728	Vacancy, 728-731	
731	Phethion, 731-740	
740	Aba II, 740-751	
743		Walid II, 743-744
744		Marwan II, 744-750
750		Abu'l Abbas, 750-754 †
751	(Surin, 12 Apr - 26 May 751)	al-Mansur, 754-775
	Yaqub II, 754-773	
775	Hanan-ishu' II, 775-780	al-Mahdi, 775-785
780	Timothy I, 780 1 May 780- Jan. 823	
785		al-Hadi, 785-786
786		Harun-al-Rashid, 786-809
809		al Amin, 809-813
813		al Ma'mun, 813-833

† Here begin the 'Umayyads. A few less important 'Umayyad Caliphs are omitted.

‡ Here begin the Abbasids.

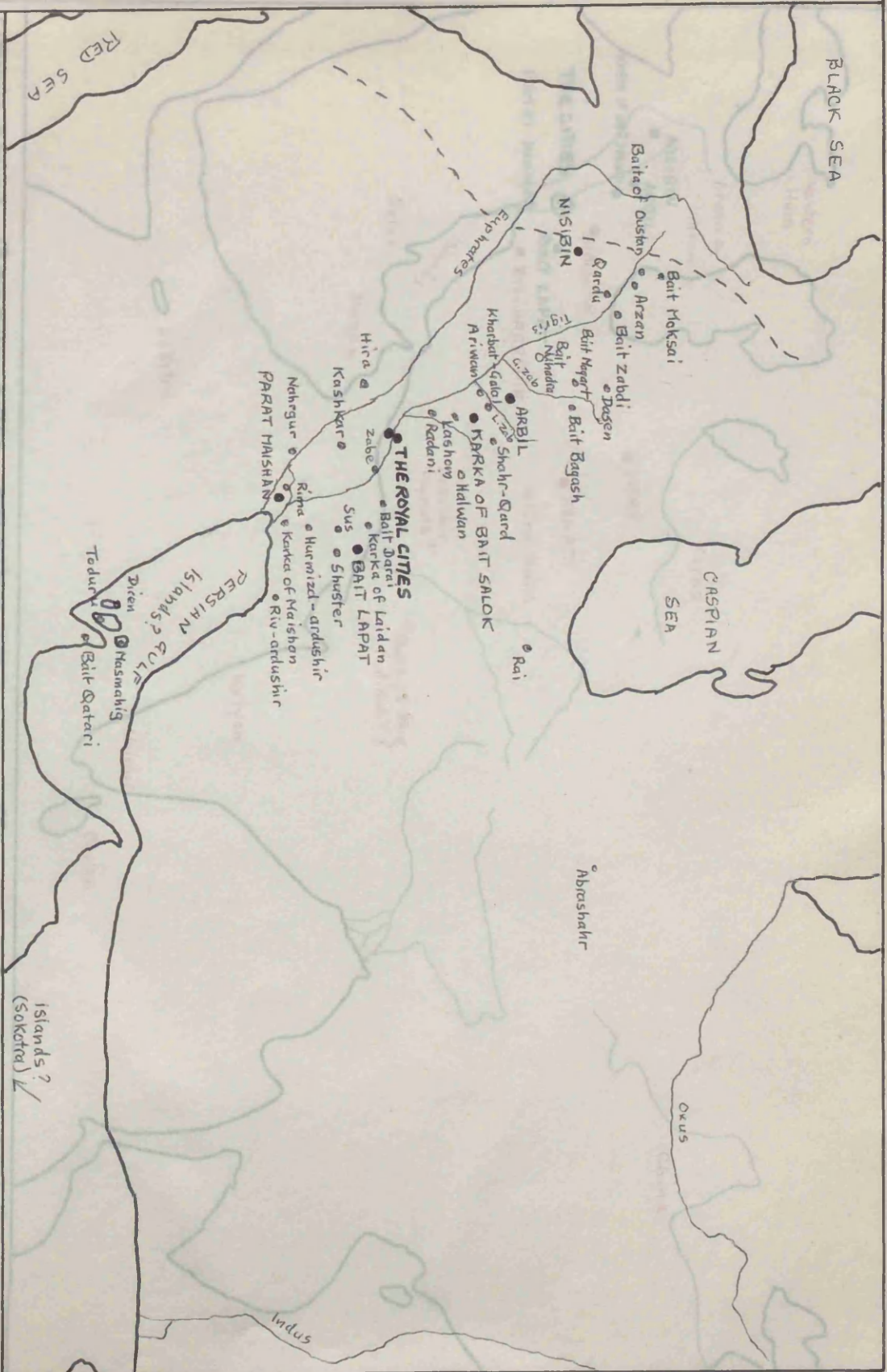
THE CHURCH IN 225 A.D.



Gishops (Mashina - zakha) • Arzan. Places (Bardaisan) • Edessa, FARs. Other cities • Nisibin. Persian Royal Road

Approximate Eastern Boundary of Roman Empire - - - - -

THE CHURCH IN 410 A. D.



Great Metropolis

THE ROYAL CITIES

Metropolitans

Bait Lapat

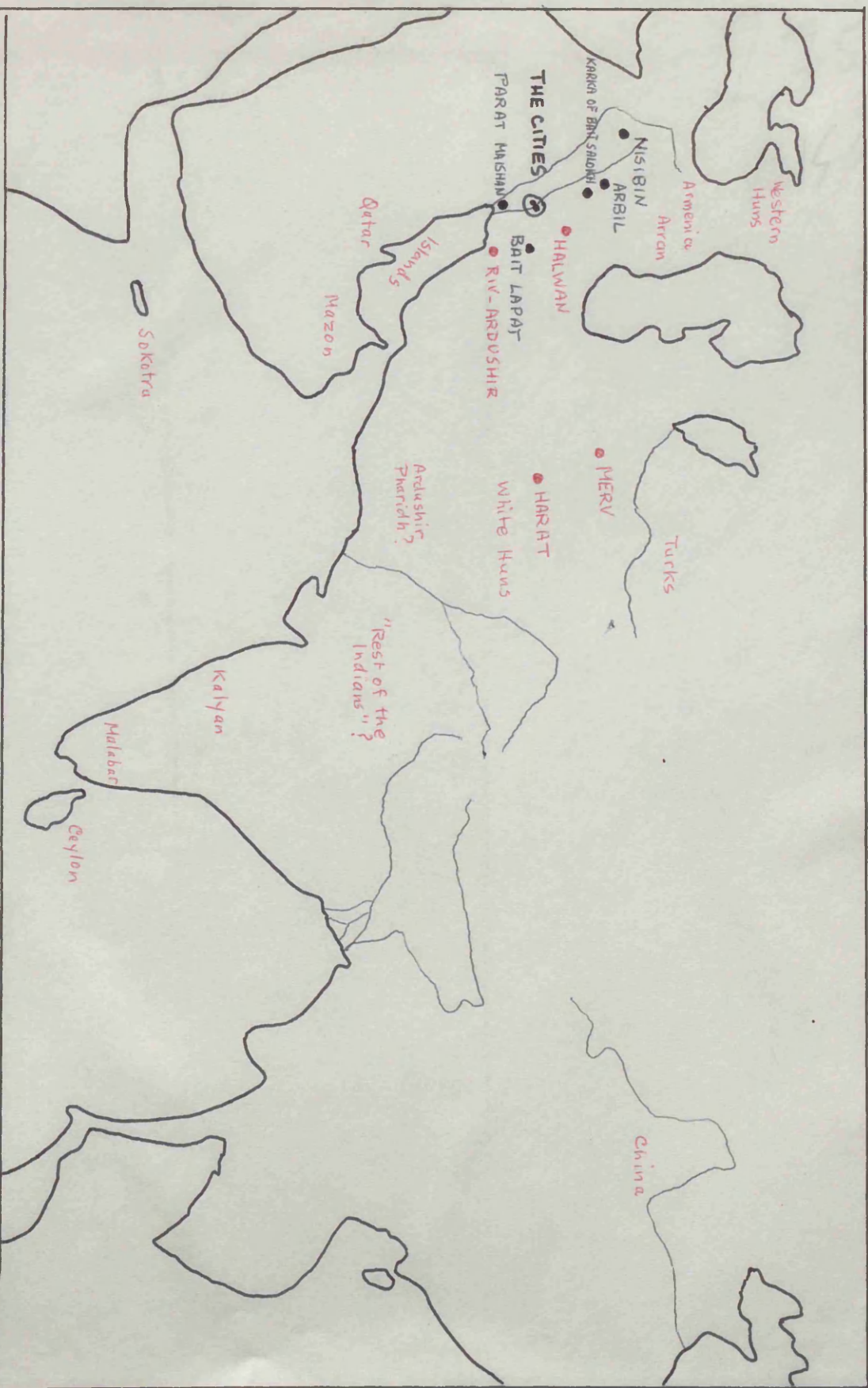
Bishops


Bait Hoksai

Unlocated: Bait Rahimai, Ramonin, Dabarinos, Garitin.
Approximate Eastern Boundary of Roman Empire - - - - -

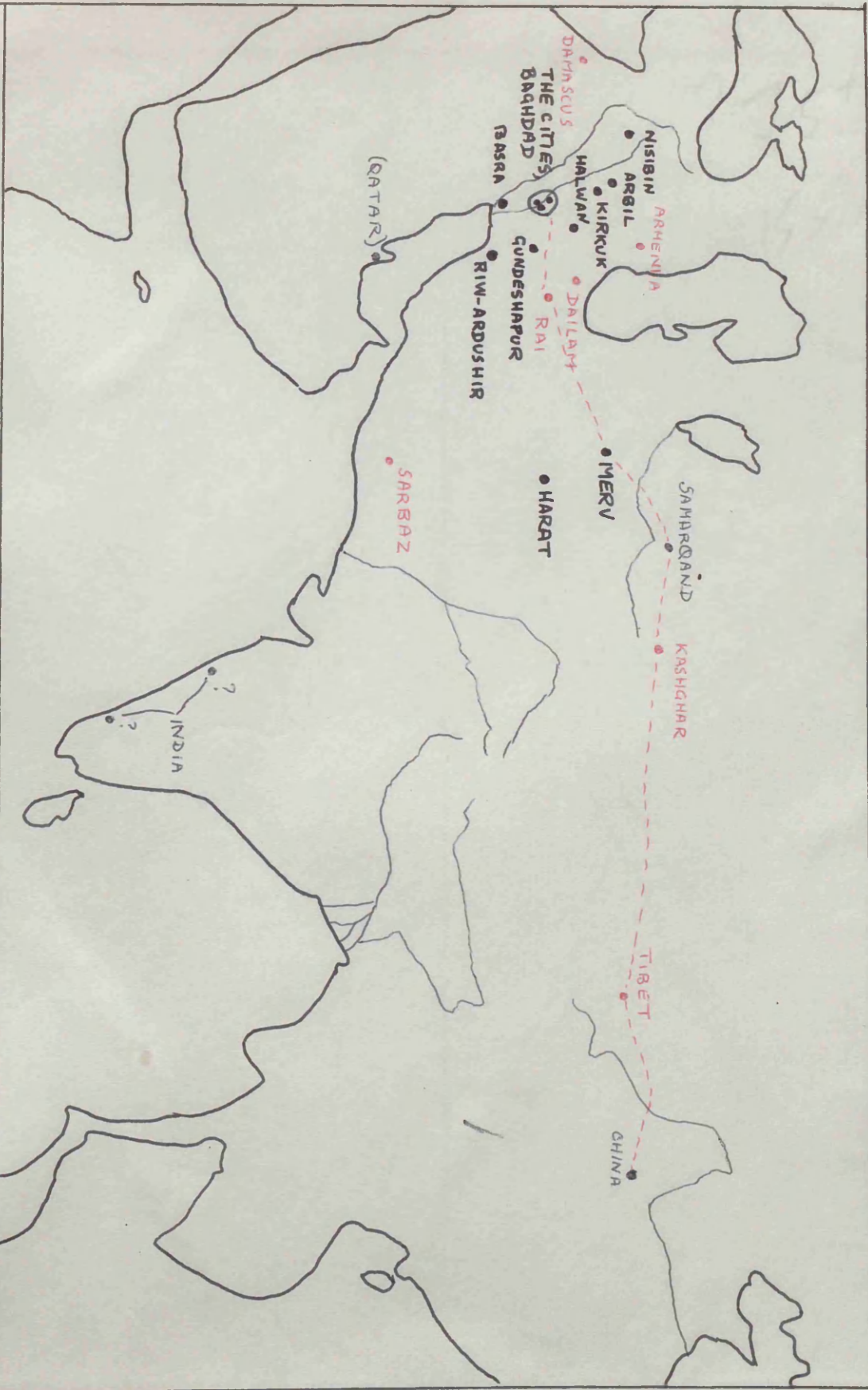
Islands?
(Sakata) ↙

THE CHURCH, 410 - 650 A.D.



Catholics - Patriarch  THE ROYAL CITIES. Metropolitans - 410 • NISIBIN, 650 • MERV. Other places with Christians, 650 Malabar.

THE CHURCH, 650 - 820 A.D.



Catholics - Patriarch



THE CITIES, BAGHDAD. Metropolitanans 650 • NISIBIN, before 660 • CHINA; before 820 • KASHGHAR

The Silk Route from Mesopotamia to China

