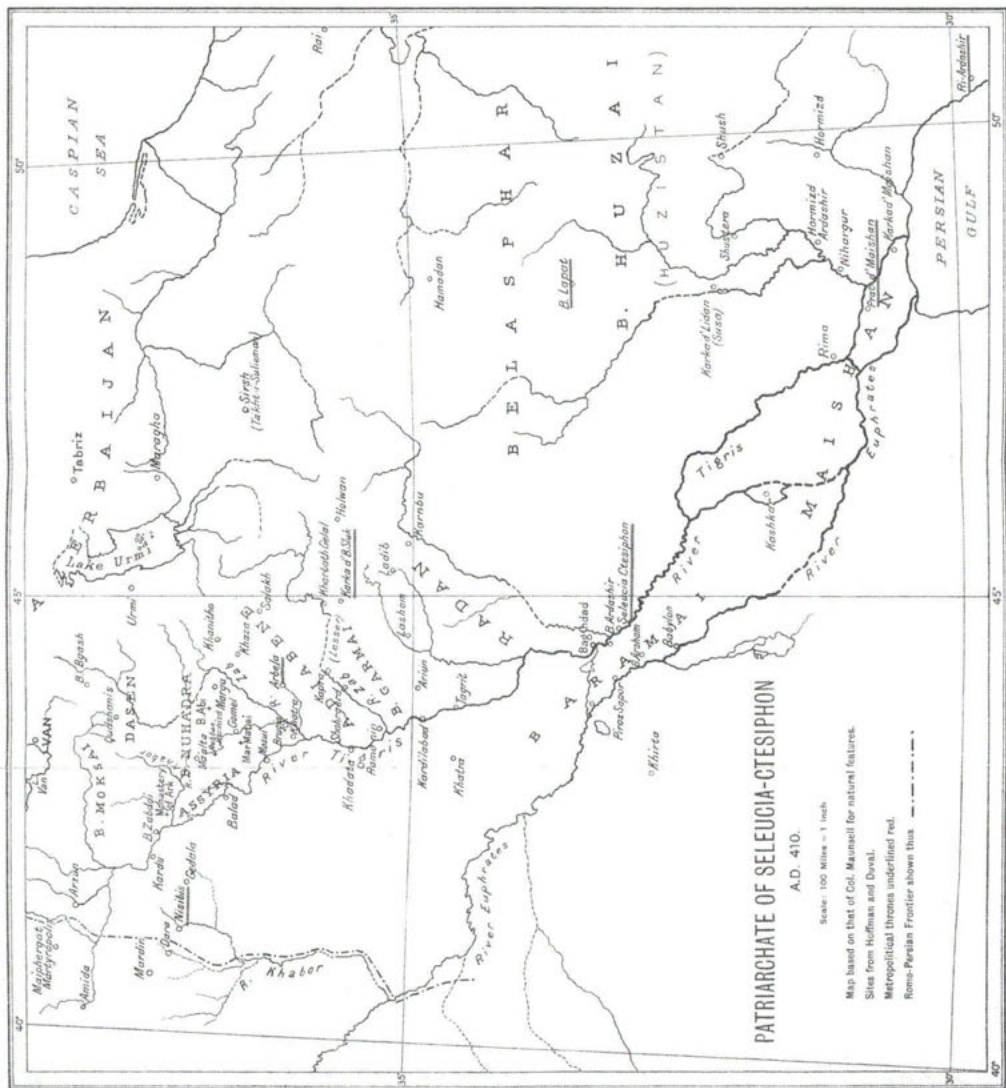


AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
HISTORY OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH

100-640 A.D.



AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
HISTORY OF THE
ASSYRIAN CHURCH
OR
THE CHURCH OF THE
SASSANID PERSIAN EMPIRE
100-640 A.D.

BY
W. A. WIGRAM, M.A., D.D.
HEAD OF THE MISSION OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY
TO ASSYRIAN CHRISTIANS

WITH MAP



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TO
BENYAMIN MAR SHIMUN,
PRESENT "HOLDER OF THE THRONE OF MAR ADAI"
AND
PATRIARCH OF THE "ASSYRIAN" CHURCH
I DEDICATE THIS RECORD
OF THE WORK OF HIS SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

PREFACE

THIS essay is an attempt at the filling of what appeared to the writer to be a distinct void in English ecclesiastical histories; and to give some account of a branch of the Church unknown to all except a very few students, during the most critical and important period of its history.

No one can be more conscious than the writer how much his work has suffered and been handicapped from the circumstances of its composition. The book was necessarily written away from any libraries except what was contained in the author's study; at a place where the procuring of any pamphlet required might take any time from six to twelve weeks; and where on one occasion the consultation of an authority implied waiting till a chance offered of making a laborious and dangerous journey of fourteen days' duration.

If it gains anything in vividness, and in grasp of the difficulties of those of whom it treats, from the fact that it was written among their modern descendants, whose circumstances have changed but little during the course of ages—this may be one compensation among many disadvantages.

The writer has throughout used for the Church in question the name "Assyrian." There is no historical authority for this name; but the various appellations given to the body by various writers ("Easterns," Persians, Syrians, Chaldæans, Nestorians) are all, for various reasons, misleading to the English reader,

To the ordinary English Churchman of to-day "the Eastern Church" is the Church to the east of him—viz. the Greek Orthodox; the Church of the old "Eastern Roman Empire," of Constantinople, with her great daughter, the Russian Church. The name "Eastern," however, as applied by those Greeks, meant the Church to the east of them—beyond the oriental frontier of the Roman Empire.

To speak of "the Persian Church" is to do as much violence to ancient facts, as to speak to-day of "the Turkish Church" (meaning thereby some one Christian *melet* in the Ottoman Empire) is to disregard modern facts.

"Syrian," to an Englishman, does not mean "a Syriac-speaking man"; but a man of that district between Antioch and the Euphrates where Syriac was the vernacular once, but which is Arabic-speaking to-day, and which was never the country of the "Assyrian" Church. "Chaldaean" would suit admirably; but it is put out of court by the fact that in modern use it means only those members of the Church in question who have abandoned their old fold for the Roman obedience: and "Nestorian" has a theological significance which is not justified. Thus it seemed better to discard all these, and to adopt a name which has at least the merit of familiarity to most friends of the Church to-day.

The representation of the Syriac names of men and places in English, presents a problem almost as incapable of ideal solution as that of finding a name for the Church; and we make no claim to consistency in our practice. As a rule we have transliterated; marking compounds by a hyphen which has no existence in Syriac (*e. g.* Ishu-yahb). But where the name has a western version (Greek or biblical), which for any reason is familiar to

the western reader, we have employed it.¹ Few English readers would recognize in "Khizqi'il" the familiar "Ezekiel"; and though most students of Church history have a bowing acquaintance with Ibas of Edessa, how many would understand who was meant by "Yahba"? Greek versions are usually barbarous etymologically; and their historians are not even consistent—who without special study can recognize Cyrus and Chosroes as the same name? But at least they are familiar and are more euphonious than most Syriac names in English letters.

*Van,
Turkey in Asia,
1909.*

¹ With two exceptions, "Ishu" is the same name as "Jesus," but where it appears in compounds like "Sabr-Ishu" ("Hope-in-Jesus") I have kept the Syriac lettering. Also the name "Shimun" is, for reasons known to every friend of the Church, too familiar to be represented by "Simon."

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Date.	Assyrian Patriarch.	Persian King.	Roman Emperor.
309	Papa	Sapor II	Constantine
328	Shimun bar Saba'i		Constantius
337			
340	Shah-dost		
346	Bar B'ashmin		
347	(vacancy)		
361			Julian
363			Jovian
364			Valens
379			Theodosius I
383	Tamuza	Ardashir II	
388		Sapor II	
395	Qaiuma	Bahram IV	
399	Isaac	Yezdegerd I	Arcadius
408			Theodosius II
411	Akha		
415	Yahb-Alaha I		
420	M'ana	Bahram V	
421	Dad-Ishu		
438		Yezdegerd II	
451			Marcian
457	Bahowai	Piroz	Leo
474			Zeno
485	Acacius	Balas	
488		Kobad (1st reign)	
491			Anastasius
496	Babai	Zamasp	
498		Kobad (2nd reign)	
505	Silas		
518			Justin I
523	("duality")		Justinian
527			
531		Chosroes I	
539	Paul		
540	Mar Aba		
552	Joseph		
565			Justin II
570	Ezekiel		
578		Hormizd IV	Tiberius
582	Ishu-yahb I		Maurice
590		Chosroes II	
596	Sabr-Ishu		
602			Phocas
604	Gregory		
608	(vacancy)		
610			Heraclius
628	Ishu-yahb II	(anarchy)	
632		Yezdegerd III	
640		Khalifate	Constantine III
644	Mar Imeh		

TITLE OF BOOK	REFERENCE IN FOOTNOTES
<i>History of Mshikha-Zca</i> (<i>Sources syriaques</i> , vol. i., ed. Mingana).	M.-Z.
<i>Acta Sanctorum</i> , 6 vols., ed. Bedjan.	Bedj.
<i>Histoire de Jabalaha et de trois autres patriarches</i> , etc., Bedjan.	IV Catholici.
<i>Synodicon Orientale</i> , ed. Chabot.	S. O.
Greg., <i>Bar-Hebraei Chronicon Eccles. III. Primates Orientis</i> , ed. Abbeloos and Lamy.	B.-H.
<i>John of Ephesus, Ecclesiastical Hist.</i> , ed. Cureton.	John of Ephesus.
<i>Anr et Sliba De Patriarchis Nestorianorum</i> .	Liber Turris.
<i>Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik</i> , ed. Noldeke.	Guidi.
<i>Chronicle of Zachariah of Mitylene</i> , ed. Hamilton and Brooks.	Zach., Mit.
<i>Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates.</i>	
" " <i>Sozomen.</i>	
" " <i>Theodoret.</i>	
" " <i>Evagrius.</i>	
<i>Book of Governors</i> (<i>Thomas of Marga</i>), ed. Budge.	T. of M.
Mar Babai, "De unione" (MS. consulted).	Babai.
Ishu-yahb, "Letters" (ed. Duval, <i>Corpus scriptorum syrorum</i>).	Ishu-yahb, Letters.
Tabari, <i>Gesch. der Sassaniden</i> (ed. Noldeke).	Tabari.
Assemani, <i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i> , 4 vols.	Ass., B. O.

Among other books consulted, the following are the most important :—

Labourt, *Christianisme dans l'empire perse*.
 Chabot, *École de Nisibe, son histoire et ses statuts*.
 Duval, *Histoire d'Edesse*.
 Coussen, *Martyrius-Sahdona: Leben und Werke*.
 Chabot, *De S. Isaaco Ninevita*.
 Hoffmann, *Syrische Märtyrer*.
 Hefele, *Councils*.
 Bethune-Baker, *Nestorius and his Teaching*.
 Rawlinson, *Seventh Oriental Monarchy*.
 Christiensen, *L'Empire des Sassanides*.
 Bury, *Later Roman Empire*.
 Gibbon.
 Ceiseler, *Ecclesiastical Hist.*

HISTORY OF THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH

CHAPTER I

§ 1. THE SASSANID EMPIRE

IN the year A.D. 225, when a revolution in Mesopotamia substituted the Sassanids of Persia for the Arsacids of Parthia as the rulers of what Roman writers called "the East" (meaning thereby all the countries of which they had practical knowledge to the east of their own border), dwellers in the country concerned regarded it as simply the rise of one more in the series of empires that rose and passed away in those lands. All the difference that it made to them, at the moment, was that the local governor was called "Marzban" or Marquis, instead of "King." From long usage, they were accustomed to be regarded by their rulers much in the same light as they themselves regarded their bees; and they took so little interest in the matter that the wise men of the countryside could see in the same event a warning of the downfall of a kingdom, and of the production of a good crop of honey.

As a matter of fact, the revolution of 225 was not merely the exchange of one loose federation of kings, for another a little better organized; it was

the revival of a nation that had a great history behind it, and the aspiration to make that history live again. The Persian Empire had indeed fallen before Alexander in 300 B.C., and had remained in more or less uneasy subjection to his Seleucid successors, or to the semi-Hellenized Arsacids, who took their place. Still, the national life of Persia had not passed away; and after 500 years the opportunity came, and it rose again. Its ambition, however, was not to form a new empire, but to revive an old one; and it claimed to be the lawful heir, not of the Arsacid kingdom of modern Mesopotamia and Persia, but of the Achæmenid Empire of Xerxes and Darius, stretching from the Hindu-Kush to the Mediterranean. It was the dream of the Sassanids to revive this empire; and the dream was so far a national aspiration also, that a war-like king could always rouse the enthusiasm of the nation by a challenge to the Roman Emperor to "withdraw from the inheritance of the ancestors of the King of kings."

The greatest of the Sassanid house, Chosroes II, actually realized that dream for a moment, when in his great war against Phocas and Heraclius he pushed back the limits of the Roman Empire till it hardly extended beyond the walls of Constantinople; and the ruins of the palace at Mashita,¹ in the land of Moab, are a testimony that this king did not intend his occupation of Roman territory to be, as was the case on some other occasions, a mere raid. During the years that the watchers at Constantinople saw the lights of the Persian camp at Chalcedon, practically the whole of the elder Persian Empire was actually subject to the ruler of the newer one.

We are completely accustomed to look at this

¹ The sculptures from this palace are in the König Friedrich Museum, Berlin.

period from the Roman standpoint, and to think of these wars as unimportant episodes in a history of which the main interest lies elsewhere. But it may be useful to remember for a moment how they appeared to an empire which was by no means the barbarous power that we are accustomed to conceive.

It is obvious that, when such aspirations were entertained, the relations between the Empire of Rome and that of the East must have been normally hostile; and that only truces of more or less uncertainty could break a perennial state of war. Lest, however, the imperial aspirations of one of the two powers should be insufficient to provide a proper amount of fighting, fate had also seen to it that there should be two perpetually open questions, either of which could afford at any time a decent *casus belli*. These were, the control of Armenia, and the question of the frontier provinces. Armenia—that unhappy territory whose office in history it has been to be “a strife unto her neighbours” during such periods as she could claim some shadow of independence, and a problem to her rulers during the periods when she was avowedly subject to somebody—formed a “buffer state” between the Romans and Persians for most of their joint frontiers. The question, who was to control this kingdom, was one that constantly gave rise to friction; and the Armenians, as a general rule, seem to have employed themselves in intriguing against the suzerain of the moment with the emissaries of the rival power.

Where the two empires “marched,” which was the case only in the north-west of Mesopotamia, another question was open. Here, a comparatively narrow belt of fertile territory intervenes between the mountains of modern Kurdistan and the desert of Arabia. The power that held this district, and

with it the great fortress of Nisibis, was somewhat in the position of the holder of Alsace-Lorraine. It had control of a gate which might admit its armies into the territory of the enemy, or which might be effectively shut in the face of an invader. Hence both parties claimed the five small, and otherwise not very important, provinces into which this country was divided, and neither could be content to see them in the hands of the other.

With all these causes for war ready to hand, it is not surprising that only unusual combinations of circumstances, like the simultaneous accession of two peace-loving monarchs, or simultaneous invasion of both empires by the barbarians who threatened the northern frontiers of either, could keep their relations friendly.

It was not only as an empire that Persia thus rose from the dead in the third century; it rose also as a religion, of a definite and militant type. The Persia of Achæmenid days had accepted Zoroaster's reforms of the ancient fire-worship as a national faith; and that religion had been preserved by the nation as its heritage, and treasured as only a subject nation can treasure its national faith (if, indeed, it had not been, as is possible, the force that had kept the nation alive) during the 500 years of dependence. Now, when Persia rose to power once more, their religion rose with them; and the Sassanian Empire had a definitely established Magian Church, loyal membership of which was the test and condition of loyalty to the empire.

This religion had its system of theology and its sacred books. It had its priestly caste, the Magians; who were at once one of the seven great clans of the nation, and an organized hierarchy under their "Mobeds" or prelates, with the "Mobed Mobedan" at the head of all. The fire-temple

stood in every village; the shrine in every orthodox house. Education was in the hands of the priests, and considerable temporal power and large endowments. The Shah-in-Shah himself dared not offend them, lest mischief should befall him.

The Sassanian kingdom, then, was no mushroom growth, with much magnificence but no strength. It was an empire, organized in an efficient way; whose provincial governors (though, when of royal blood, they might bear the honorary title of King) were kept well under the control of the Shah-in-Shah.

The empire was inhabited by a tolerably homogeneous nation, as far as its central provinces went; though a fringe of sub-kings (Armenian, Arab, Turk) ruled districts round its borders. It had a national religion, with an organized hierarchy, and it could fight at least on even terms with the whole power of Rome. One Roman Emperor, Valerian, died a captive at the Persian Court. Another, Julian, fell in battle against it; and his successor could only purchase his release by an ignominious peace. It endured for 400 years, and when it fell, its organization and machinery were simply taken over by its successor, the Khalifate of Baghdad.

In the following pages we propose to trace, not the history of the kingdom, but the story of the Church of Christ within its borders; the Church of Assyria, of the "Chaldæan Patriarchate," or, as it was usually called by Greek, or even by Syriac writers, "The Church of the East." Broadly speaking, the Christian Church, as it existed to the east of the Eastern border of the Roman Empire.

§ 2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

The Christian Church was a thing that the Sassanids found existing when they established themselves in the country, and one that was already widely spread, and organized on apostolic lines. This fact was of considerable importance for the future relations of the two, for the struggle would have been very hard before the Church could have established herself, *de novo*, in a Zoroastrian kingdom. The difficulty would have been comparable to that found in the spreading of Christianity in Fez or Morocco at the present time. As it existed, however, prior to the rise of the dynasty, it was, so to speak, taken over by it, as a part of the new empire; and when the relations between the two came to be formalized, it was on the assumption that Christianity had as much a legal right to exist in the Sassanid Empire, as it has in a Moslem kingdom like the Ottoman Empire of to-day. In each case, this qualified toleration was accorded to it on the same ground, viz. that the Christian religion was one that the dominant faith found existing at the time when it conquered the country.

The Church was widely spread; it extended from the Mountains of Kurdistan (for this last refuge of the descendants of these Christians was apparently not then evangelized) to the Persian Gulf, and was governed by "more than twenty bishops,"¹ whose sees were distributed over all the country named. It is to be noted, however, that though the bishoprics were thus widely scattered, there was as yet no bishop in the capital city, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, a fact that was to have some importance in the history of the body. Nisibis,

¹ Mshikha-Zca, *Life of Khiran*.

too (at this time a Roman city still), had no bishop, a fact due probably to the circumstance that it was a purely military station. It is, however, a curious coincidence that the two most important thrones in the later history of "the East" should both have been founded late in its development.

The question now arises, how and when did this Church come into being?

It has long been an admitted fact that the lands of Mesopotamia and Adiabene, and in fact the whole of what we may call by anticipation the Sassanid Persian Empire, received the gospel from teachers whose head-quarters were at Edessa. The little kingdom of Osrhöene had but a precarious independence during the brief period of its existence; still that independence was sufficient to give, for as long as it lasted, a distinctive character to the Christianity that existed in its capital, and made it an appropriate "nursing mother" to the two national Churches founded by teachers who came from thence, those, namely, of Armenia and Persia.¹ When the Edessene Church was merged in that ecclesiastical circle that developed into the Patriarchate of Antioch, one at least of these "daughters" was strong enough to stand alone; and the circumstances of its infancy probably contributed to give it that instinct of independence that was always so marked a feature of its life.

The "Church of the Easterns" was the daughter,

¹ Armenia, of course, owed much to Cappadocian help in later days, and became a sort of adopted daughter of Cæsarea. Christianity, however, existed in the land before the conversion of the King by Gregory the Illuminator, and Armenian writers declare that it owed its existence to Edessene teachers, and principally to Thaddeus the Apostle. They also declare that Osrhöene was a tributary state of the "Armenian Empire," but the ecclesiastical tradition may be better founded than the political.

not of Antioch, but of Edessa, and was never included in the Patriarchate of the former city.

While, however, the Edessene origin of the Church of the East is admitted (and indeed the laws of geography postulate it, for it is hard to get from Antioch to Mesopotamia without passing through Edessa), the date is a matter more open to dispute. Syriac tradition is clear enough on the point, of course. According to this, Mar Adai (who is variously described as either the Apostle Thaddeus, or as one of "the seventy") came during the first century to Edessa and planted Christianity there. His disciple, Mari, starting from thence, became the true evangelist of Persia; descending even into Fars, until he "smelt the smell of the Apostle Thomas,"¹ the traditional evangelist of India. Modern writers, and particularly Westphal and M. Labourt (to whom all students of Persian Church history owe much for his painstaking work), treat these traditions very cavalierly. While admitting the possibility of the real existence of Adai and Mari, as evangelists of wholly uncertain date, they refuse to admit the presence of any organized Christianity in Persia before Sassanid days. They sweep out of existence the older *Catholici* (whose names and biographies occur in the *Chronicles* of Bar-Hebræus and Mari Ibn Sulieman, of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries respectively), and date the origin of the Church in the latter half of the third century; making Papa, Bishop of Seleucia about the year 300, its first figure of any reality and weight.

With much of this criticism the writer fully agrees; the episcopate of Papa is a definite and important turning-point in the history of the Church, though not the starting-point which they incline to make it. The portentous length of

¹ *Acta S. Maris*, § 32. Ed. Abbeloos.

Episcopate assigned to him by both mediæval historians¹ is a sign of confusion only, and most of his predecessors are as apocryphal as the copes with which Mari Ibn Sulieman carefully endues each one. Moreover such of them as had some real existence were not, as we shall see, *Catholici* (*i.e.* archbishops) of Seleucia. Still, tradition in the East has a way of justifying itself, at least as regards the main facts which it asserts, as evidence accumulates; and a work has recently come to light that goes far to *comblér la lacune* between Mari and Papa, which M. Labourt laments. This is the *History of the Bishops of Adiabene* (Khaydab), a work composed in the sixth century by one Mshikha-Zca (Christ conquers), a scholar of the great college of Nisibis and a native of the province whose history he writes. The author frankly declares himself to be only a compiler, and refers to earlier and now lost authorities.²

Mshikha-Zca plainly acknowledges Adai as the apostle of Adiabene and Assyria, and states that he ordained his disciple, Pqida, as first bishop of that district, in the year A.D. 104.³ Pqida was by birth the slave of a Magian, and was of that faith. He had apparently gained his personal freedom; and he had been converted by the sight of a miracle wrought by Mar Adai, who was then travelling and teaching in the land. He had to undergo some persecution from the family (not from his

¹ B.-H., A.D. 266-330. Mari Ibn Sulieman (*Liber Turris*), A.D. 247-326 (!). Papa's latter-day successors are consecrated in their "teens," but even these do not attain to such magnificently lengthy tenures.

² *Sources Syriques*, vol. i., Msiha-Zkha, texte de traduction. A. Mingana, Mosul, Life of Pqida.

³ Samson, successor of Pqida, died "seven years after the victory of Trajan," *i.e.* A.D. 123. This was nine years after the death of Pqida, whose episcopate lasted ten years. Pqida was therefore consecrated A.D. 104.

owner), for his "apostasy"; but escaping from them, remained the personal disciple of his master for five years; at the end of which time he was consecrated as stated, apparently just before the death of Mar Adai.

In the face of this record, there seems no reasonable ground for refusing to admit the absolutely historical character of Adai; or the rank which ancient tradition accords to him of founder of the Church "of the East," and possibly of that of Edessa and Armenia also. If, however, our author establishes the existence of Mar Adai as a real fact and not as a figment only, he at the same time makes it almost impossible to identify him with Thaddeus, the Apostle of Christ. Traditionally, we regard the Twelve as all adult men, with one possible exception, during the period of their association with the Redeemer. A man full grown in the year 30 could hardly have travelled about, as Adai is represented as doing, in the years 100-104. That he should have been one of the "seventy" is less impossible; and a tradition that has justified itself in much has a right to a respectful hearing in its other statements. If we may regard Mar Adai as a youth of sixteen or seventeen when "sent out" as one of the seventy disciples, he would have been hard on ninety (no impossible age) when called to his rest in 104.

In the case of Mari the supposed disciple of Adai, and the evangelist, not so much of Adiabene as of Khuzistan, and in a less degree of Seleucia and the "Aramæan province," we are at present on less certain ground. The *Acta S. Maris* which we have to-day is certainly not the contemporary document it professes to be; it is not earlier than the sixth century, and possibly later still. Even if contemporary with the *History of the Bishops of Adiabenê*, it is far inferior to it as an authority,

the one being a history, and the other a piece of hagiography.

Mshikha-Zca makes no reference whatever to Mari in his work, and his editor is inclined, on that ground, to regard the saint as purely legendary. This we consider too stern a judgment. Even if the Acta be ruled out of court altogether as an authority, we have to account for the fact that from the fifth century and before it (*i.e.* from before the time of the composition of the Acta) this Church has looked back to Adai and Mari as its founders.¹

How came they, on the legendary hypothesis, to select an absolutely unknown name as that of their founder, when such an one as St. Thomas, who traditionally passed through the country on his way to India, was ready to their hands?² That the life contains much legend (even apart from some of the miraculous episodes) need not be doubted. But it also contains matter that a mere hagiographer would scarcely ascribe to his hero, unless he were following some older tradition or authority. The saint's discouragement, and request to his Edessene senders for his recall; his finding Christian traders in Khuzistan; his comparative failure in Seleucia itself, where, as we now know, Christianity gained no strength till late in the third century; and his peaceful death at the obscure shrine of Dor Koni;—all these have the ring of truth rather than of invention; and the most conspicuous "blunder" in the book, namely, the fact that Papa, the fourth-century bishop, is declared to have been the immediate successor of Mari as Bishop of Seleucia and Catholicos of the

¹ See *History of Karka d'B. Slok, Bedj.*, ii. 512.

² St. Thomas is called the "Founder" by Bar-Hebræus, but is represented as a bird of passage only. The work is done by Adai, and his disciples Agai and Mari. B.-H., § 1.

Church of the Persian Empire,¹ admits, as we shall see, of a natural explanation.

We incline then to admit, not only the traditional founding of this Church by Mar Adai at the close of the first century, but also its extension from Adiabene southwards by the teaching of Mari and his companions, as well founded in fact, though embroidered by later traditions.

It remains to sketch the history of this Church as far as our authorities admit, for the first 200 years of its existence, until it emerges into clearer light at the beginning of the fourth century.

¹ *Acta S. Maris*, § 19, ch. viii; § 32, ch. xi; § 33, ch. xii.

Note.—Labourt (p. 14) and Duval (*Littérature syraque*, p. 118) both criticize the *Acta S. Maris*, on the ground that they represent the hero as contending with the worship of sacred trees and springs; not with Magianism or star-worship, as ought to have been the case had they given a reliable picture of Mesopotamian life at their supposed date. This is true; but it should be noted that the author represents the nature-worship as existing in provinces like Adiabene and Garmistan, where, according to Mshikha-Zca, it was very strong at the time, and where fire-worship was never a national cult. There are no references to it in the chapters that deal with Seleucia and Khuzistan. As in the district named the worship of trees and springs is not extinct to this day, centuries of Christian and Mussulman teaching notwithstanding (the writer knows two sacred springs, and sacred trees by the dozen, in the country in question), it is reasonable to conclude that it was more conspicuous in early centuries.

The almost total absence of any mention of fire-worship is a difficulty that cuts both ways. That a sixth-century writer in Persia should not have known of the cult is inconceivable—as well could a Hindu Christian be ignorant of the existence of Brahmanism—so the omission must be designed. Possibly, the writer did not care to speak of a campaign against the State faith, for fear of consequences. A Syriac biographer of to-day, for instance, would hardly venture to boast of his hero as making converts from Islam.

CHAPTER II

THE CHURCH UNDER ARSACID KINGS

THE history of the Church from the time of Adai to that of Papa, or, roughly, from the year 100 to 300, is, on the whole, one of quiet progress, unmarked either by the quarrels or organized persecutions that were to chequer its later history; and unmarked, too, by the rise of any such striking personalities as we find, for instance, in the story of the African Church, or, in a less degree, in our own. Adai is too shadowy a person to have, for us at any rate, the charm of an Aidan; and not even the inventiveness of his chronicler can give to Mari's life the romance that encircles Columba's. The conditions of the life of a subject *melet*¹ in an oriental empire do not tend to produce very striking characters in normal times.

At first, at any rate, the body was not formidable enough to excite the State to persecute; and the rule of the Parthian kings was always tolerant. They appear to have favoured a sort of religious eclecticism themselves, and to have recognized all creeds among their subjects; though there is some evidence that the political power of the Magian clan

¹ *Melet* ("Millet") is the technical word in Turkey for a Christian subject nation, organized, as they always are, in a Church, and dealing with the Government through its religious head. It suits the condition of the Church in Zoroastrian Persia so perfectly that we must use the word, particularly as no Western nation possesses the name or the thing. A *rayat*, or subject, is a member of such a *melet*.

won for their religion a favoured position. Still, the Government was so far indifferent that about the year 160 Abraham, then Bishop of Adiabene, had good hopes of procuring a formal edict of toleration from the then King, Valges III; and apparently only failed in his object because the outbreak of war with the Romans put such a trifling circumstance out of the King's mind. As things turned out, the Church had much to suffer before obtaining her "Edict of Milan" from the Shah-in-Shah 250 years later.

The faith of the people which the Christian teaching had to combat (as far as it is shown by the chronicles of Syriac writers, and by the collections of magical formulæ and invocations which still survive) seems to have been the old idolatry of Assyria and Babylon, "run to seed" in a strange fashion, and sunk into the worship of sacred trees, and a star worship which was no higher than a very debased astrology.¹

Both in Mesopotamia and in Asia Minor, as probably in Egypt (though not in Persia), the old faiths were outworn. Hence it was that nations who, whatever their faults, do not lack the religious instinct, turned so readily to the new light that came to them from Judæa; and embraced it with a readiness that makes the progress of Christianity in these lands at once so startlingly rapid, and so undeniably sound.

Among the Zoroastrian fire-worshippers the advance of the Faith was far less rapid than among the pagans, and it was here that the Church found its most formidable opponents. Still, it could win

¹ Many of these magical formulæ are current among Assyrians of to-day, and these are often essentially the same as those on the most ancient Babylonian tablets. A substratum of the oldest faith of the country has survived the changes of 7000 years.