

A HISTORY OF THE JEWS  
IN BABYLONIA



A HISTORY OF THE JEWS  
IN BABYLONIA  
V. Later Sasanian Times

by

Jacob Neusner

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Later Sasanian Times  
By Neusner, Jacob  
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*In memory of*

Menahem M. Richter

Moshe Richter, his wife and three children

Frumme Karvat, her husband and two children

Inde Richter

Lazar Richter

Yehudit Richter

Haim Elkus and his wife

*who perished in the Holocaust*



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<sup>1</sup> J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse* (Paris, 1904), pp. 353-354.

## PREFACE

This book concludes the very imperfect execution of what I feel was a very good intention. It is no exhaustive history of Babylonian Jewry and Judaism, but at best an effort to promote the understanding of a few basic problems of Talmudic historiography and religion.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier accounts of "Talmudic history" normally concluded at 500 A.D., when, it is generally supposed, the Babylonian Talmud was completed. Since fifth century Talmudic data moreover are meagre, discussion of Iranian evidences generally has been confined to Yazdagird I, with some references to Peroz, Mazdak, and the allegedly difficult times at the end of the fifth century. Everything else is assigned to the "Saboraic age," about which we have in fact no firm historical evidence whatever. The conclusion is normally dolorous. The editing of the Babylonian Talmud, a process supposedly contrary to the character of an "oral revelation," naturally requires explanation, theological if necessary, historical if possible. What better explanation than the harsh circumstances of a persecution threatening the very existence of the holy traditions, unless they should be put into some more permanent and secure form than the memories of men whose lives were daily in danger?<sup>2</sup> The "Talmudic period" therefore conventionally closes with a fierce persecution, forcing the transcription of the formerly oral tradition, providing a satisfyingly pathetic and neat conclusion for otherwise disorderly facts, indeed hiding the paucity of facts to begin with. Since my effort has been to study the history of Babylonian Jewry and Judaism in the context of Iranian history, a more natural conclusion comes with the death of Yazdagird III in the middle of the seventh century A.D. The wisdom of earlier historians quickly becomes apparent, however, for our evidences for the sixth and seventh centuries indeed are sparse. Syriac sources provide some slight information on the state of Jewish-Christian relations. Iranian ones tell us very little more. Byzantine and Armenian historians have no reliable information on the condition of Babylonian

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952), preface.

<sup>2</sup> This is precisely the explanation given by Christian-Syriac writers for the editing of the Avesta. See F. Nau, "Étude historique sur la transmission de l'Avesta," *RHR* 95, 1927, pp. 149-199.

Jews and do not refer to them. And as I said, the Babylonian Talmud leaves off a century and a half before the last Sasanian emperor.

I have chosen to provide, in Chapters One, Two, Three, and Four, intentionally brief accounts of Iranian history from Shapur II to Yazdagird III, of Mazdean religious events, and of the affairs of Iranian Christianity. In this same context are summarized the relevant data on the political situation of Babylonian Jewry. These chapters correspond to Vol. I, Chapters One, Two, and Three, Vol. II, Chapters One and Two, Vol. III, Chapter One, and Vol. IV, Chapter One. Exilarchic history, so far as we know it, is given in Chapter Two, Section vii, Chapter Four, Section vi, and in relationship to the rabbinical courts, in Chapter Seven, Section ii, corresponding to Vol. I, Chapter Two, Section vii, Chapter Three, Sections viii and ix, Vol. II, Chapter Three, Vol. III, Chapter Two, and Vol. IV, Chapter Two.

My very skeletal summaries of Iranian political and religious history and of Christianity in later Sasanian times rely almost entirely on secondary scholarly literature. While I have consulted some of the relevant primary sources, I have made no effort to attempt my own reconstructions of events, but have simply consulted and reproduced the results of the best authorities known to me. I tried to select *only* those facts which seemed to me pertinent to Jewish political and religious history in Babylonia. To have done otherwise would have demanded mastery not only of Iranian and Byzantine sources, but still more important, of the substantial scholarly literature devoted to them over the past century and a half. Christian sources in both Greek and Syriac likewise have been the subject of much critical scholarship. It is both beyond my competence to pursue the requisite study and unnecessary for my current purpose, which is not to rewrite Iranian, let alone Byzantine history, but to begin to write that of Babylonian Jewry. I am especially fortunate, therefore, to enjoy the friendship of Professors Mary Boyce, University of London, and Jes P. Asmussen, University of Copenhagen; both provided guidance, and Professor Asmussen generously read and offered detailed criticism of the manuscript of Chapter One, Sections i-iv, Chapter Two, Sections i-vi, Chapter Three, Sections i-v, and Chapter Four, Sections i-iv. I asked them to make certain that I offered no *new* notions, which I cannot and ought not do, but only a reliable account of a few commonly accepted facts. My teacher, Professor Richard N. Frye, Harvard University, has continued to supply important insight and also read the designated

sections. I alone am responsible for any deficiencies of research, understanding, and presentation which may remain.

Chapter Five, "The Schools," continues the inquiry of Vol. I, Chapter Four, Vol. II, Chapters Four, Five, and Six, Vol. III, Chapter Three, and Vol. IV, Chapter Five. These chapters, read together, offer an account of the phenomenon of the Babylonian schools and of the rabbis as fundamentally religious institutions and holy men. I have tried to provide a balanced picture. The rabbis were not only holy men, and in the literature as we have it, not primarily so. Yet it seems to me an important part of the law pertains to the schools alone and functionally defines the *ritual* of "being a rabbi." In using the concept of ritual to interpret these data, I am guided by the excellent comments of Clifford Geertz:

It is in some sort of ceremonial form ... that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another. In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world... Whatever role divine intervention may or may not play in the creation of faith—and it is not the business of the scientist to pronounce upon such matters one way or the other—it is, primarily at least, out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance that religious conviction emerges on the human plane...<sup>1</sup>

I have tried to explain what rituals specifically pertain to the state of "being a rabbi" and to define those symbolic forms—gestures, words, modes of dress and eating, but most important, highly ritualized social relationships and intellectual activities—which constituted the core of "being a rabbi." For the history of Judaism it was this aspect of Babylonian Jewish life which proved of greatest consequence. The laws of the Babylonian Talmud divorced from the way of living of the rabbi are of interest chiefly to historians of law in late antiquity and of course to lawyers in the Jewish legal tradition. But the laws viewed as part of the lives of men who not only enforced them in court but embodied them in the streets and especially in the schools constitute the chief testimony to the character of rabbinical Judaism, not only in Babylonia in late antiquity but in other lands and later times as well. Even though working as an historian of religions, however, I still cannot ignore the specific, detailed historical questions raised by the

<sup>1</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. (London, 1966).

data. I have therefore concentrated as well on the questions of how we know what we do about the schools, trying to achieve greater self-consciousness, awareness of the structure of our knowledge. The rabbis' magical and theurgical powers, attributed to them not only by the fantasies of ordinary folk but by the sages themselves, are studied in this context, for I imagine magical powers in various forms—and the evidences for this period are rather thin<sup>1</sup>—to have been integrated into the world-view of the schools.

At the same time, in Chapter Six, "Other Jews, Other Magicians," I have presented and then examined evidences concerning masters of a form of magic not attested in the Babylonian Talmud and therefore probably not approved by the rabbinical academies. The appearance of R. Joshua b. Peraḥia provides a rare glimpse into the way in which non-rabbinical magicians and presumably their clients as well viewed a major rabbinical figure. It bears out my contention that for the ordinary folk outside of the schools the rabbi's magical skills as a holy man must have seemed more important than his legal knowledge and judicial power. Yet I see no considerable disjuncture between the rabbinical view of the rabbi, that he could give orders to demons, on the one hand, and the bowl-magicians' view of the rabbi, that a rabbi could give a writ of divorce to demons, on the other. What differed was merely the form of the magic, not its substance. Professor Cyrus Gordon graciously read and commented on this chapter. Professor Baruch A. Levine's appendix treats important philological aspects of the bowls and relates the bowls to the Palestinian Jewish magical text, *Sefer HaRazim*, recently discovered by the late Professor M. Margoliot. His contribution is greatly appreciated.

Chapter Seven, "The Courts," pursues the social issues raised in Vol. I, Chapter Four, Vol. II, Chapters Seven and Eight, Vol. III, Chapters Four and Five, and Vol. IV, Chapters Three and Four. The amount of evidence is limited, but much the same results as earlier were reached. The rabbinical court was fundamentally a Jewish small-claims court, able to make determinations of personal status, especially, though not only, when exchanges of property were involved, and in addition qualified to make decisions in transactions of real and movable property. The court operated by well-established formal rules of evidence and procedure, issued its official documents, and generally effected its decisions without much difficulty. Besides these two sorts of law, among the many in the Babylonian Talmud, the rabbi could

<sup>1</sup> Compare Vol. IV, pp. 391-403.

use his influence as a holy man to encourage people to keep aspects of ritual and moral law not within his power of enforcement as community administrator and judge.

I am still not entirely certain how the whole system of Jewish self-government actually worked within the framework of the Iranian administration. Where Jews formed the great majority of the local population, I can readily imagine that the Jewish courts operated in a normal manner as territorial or municipal courts. But when Jews were a minority, as in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Nisibis, and throughout Mesene, not to mention towns and villages of smaller size in Babylonia, did they go to Jewish courts alone or to state-courts some of the time? I think it is clear, even on the basis of limited evidence, that non-Jews were not regularly subjected to the decisions of the Jewish courts. But were Jews liable to those of non-Jewish courts—e.g. Iranian ones—under any circumstances? When Jews and non-Jews had litigation with one another, where did they go for trial? It is easy enough to envisage a kind of *millet*-system and to use that later development as an analogy for the earlier situation, and I have generally done so. Yet I am not entirely satisfied with the results to date, for the universal applicability of the *millet*-analogy is hardly to be taken for granted.

The most important single event in Judaism in this period, the editing of the Babylonian Talmud, is not discussed here at all. The reason is that the kind of careful study required to do justice to that key problem seemed to me best pursued in its own terms and within its own discipline. I should need, first of all, to review the state of the question, as it has been variously formulated by both historians and literary critics. In general, historians tend to rely on a few pertinent sayings in the Babylonian Talmud and in the letter of R. Sherira Gaon, but to ignore the results of the study by literary scholars of the development of the *sugya* and related matters. The latter generally pay little attention to the historical setting of the schools or even to the history of the schools themselves. In any event they make slight effort, if any, to translate the results of their literary-historical studies into the language of historical inquiry. I am sure that careful attention to the work of Professors Abraham Weiss, Yeshiva University, and David Weiss, Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as of the late Professor Y. N. Epstein and Dr. Hyman Klein, will produce rich rewards. What is required is, second, detailed attention to the methodological requirements of the data and of the question requiring answer. I am not sure the problem has been properly formulated to date. Only then will the most fruitful

way forward become clear. I therefore have to turn to literary history in future studies. Afterward, as I have already explained, the time may indeed come for a truly critical history of Babylonian Jewry.

It was tempting to conclude with a final chapter, summarizing all five volumes and pointing to "major themes" or issues in the history of the Jews and Judaism in Iranian Babylonia. I found it easy to resist that temptation. I despise sentimentality and such abstractions as "spirit" and "essence," as well as their pretentious companions, "central tension," "crucial issue," and "continuing perplexity." These volumes are, as I said at the outset, studies of various kinds of sources from a single, limited, historical and history-of-religions' perspective. I believe I have omitted reference to no bodies of sources, although I do not claim to have exhausted everything to be learned from any one of them. The literary materials of Jewish, Iranian, and Christian origin have all been examined, and of course the Jewish ones have been considered in some detail. The two sources of archaeological information directly pertinent to the Jews, the Dura synagogue and the magical bowls, have been touched upon, perhaps in the case of Dura far too little.<sup>1</sup> For now I have said everything I have to say about the literary and archaeological data. When the sources conclude and my method of inquiry has been exhausted of usefulness, it is time for me to close.

Professors Gerald Blidstein, Temple University, and Baruch A. Levine, New York University, and Rabbi Joel Zaiman, Providence, Rhode Island, kindly read the entire manuscript and offered many helpful criticisms. During the period in which work on this volume was in progress, I was privileged to study Syriac with Professor Franz Rosenthal, and Rabbinic Exegesis with Professor Judah Goldin, at Yale University. Both teachers aroused in me a new interest in philological exegesis, and while the results are not immediately evident here, they are present and will be still more apparent in future work.

Since coming to Brown University I have been privileged to enjoy

<sup>1</sup> My difficulty in dealing with the Dura synagogue is two-fold. First, I am unable to determine the relationship between themes and ideas known to us from rabbinical literature and those supposedly present on the walls of the synagogue. Kraeling and Goodenough take extreme positions, the one using the *midrashic* sources as a kind of handbook, the other refusing to use them at all. Second, I am not satisfied that those who are qualified to comment upon questions of style, relationships of art forms to one another, the meaning of graphic symbols, and the like have completed their work. It is really too soon therefore for me to attempt to integrate the Dura materials into a unified picture of Babylonian and Mesopotamian Judaism.



the friendship of Professor Abraham Sachs, truly the master of all things Oriental. In frequent conversations he imparted to me a small measure of his learning and favored me with the opportunity to observe a most critical mind and an unsentimental, hard-headed, penetrating intellect at work. Even though only a few topics treated here directly came under discussion, no page fails to reflect his influence. Professor Ernest Frerichs likewise enriched my scholarly life, offering many criticisms of my work. Professor S. D. Goitein, University of Pennsylvania, provided helpful criticism of earlier volumes and valued suggestions for this one. My students in Brown University, both undergraduate and graduate, participated in and enhanced my education. Rabbi Robert Goldenberg and Rabbi David Goodblatt, busy though they were with their own graduate studies, generously criticized the manuscript and helped read the proofs. Their comments were always perceptive. It is a privilege to be their teacher. My former student, William Scott Green, likewise made helpful contributions. I thank them all.

Brown University generously paid for typing as well as other research expenses and the cost of preparing the indices.

Dr. Charles Berlin, Hebrew Curator of Harvard College Library, continued to assist me both by providing research materials and by calling to my attention important studies I might otherwise have missed.

I could not have undertaken this project or done it in exactly the way I thought best without E. J. Brill, my publisher, Dr. F. C. Wieder, Director, and Mr. J. D. Verschoor, Secretary to the firm. They undertook to publish my books, even though the potential interest in them is hardly considerable, and they have done so with painstaking care and genuine pride of craftsmanship, furthermore bearing the entire financial burden without complaint. Without Brill, many kinds of scholarship in both Europe and the United States of America simply would be impossible.

My beloved teacher, Professor Morton Smith, edited and commented upon the entire manuscript. No one can ever have enjoyed greater benefits of friendship and scholarly fellowship than have I on his account. If I am able to share only part of these with the reader, the reason is my incapacity, not his.

As in the past, I am unable to conclude without noting that my wife, Suzanne, and sons, Samuel Aaron and Eli Ephraim, create the happy world in which I work. The dedication, in memory of my wife's and children's family who perished in the Holocaust, is meant as a gesture

not of piety but of hope. Great-grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins of my sons, those who died live on, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, and also in memory. The legacy of Babylonian Jewry, the Babylonian Talmud, more nearly shaped the minds and lives of the Jews who perished than those of Jews in any other place or time. Both my late father, Samuel Neusner, and my father-in-law, Max Richter, happily yet with us, brought to this country a measure of that legacy. They are the link between the Babylonian Jews and particularly the Babylonian rabbis, who form the subject of this study, and my wife and sons, who provided the purpose for doing it.

At the end of ten years of work I am loathe to close. I enjoy only small satisfaction with some of my results, but have much regret for my failures. I have learned much I did not know and naturally hope the same is so for the reader. And yet, though we both have learned something, I remain only comparatively better informed, but absolutely—still a beginner, still a learner.

JACOB NEUSNER

Providence, Rhode Island  
5 Sivan 5729  
22 May 1969

## ABBREVIATIONS

### *I. Talmudic Tractates*

Arakh.	=	'Arakhin
A.Z.	=	'Avodah Zarah
B.B.	=	Bava' Batra'
Bekh.	=	Bekhorot
Bez.	=	Bezah
B.M.	=	Bava' Mezi'a'
B.Q.	=	Bava' Qama'
Eruv.	=	'Eruvin
Giṭ.	=	Giṭṭin
Hag	=	Ḥagigah
Ḥul	=	Ḥullin
Ker.	=	Keritot
Ket.	=	Ketuvot
Mak.	=	Makkot
Meg.	=	Megillah
Men.	=	Menaḥot
M.Q.	=	Mo'ed Qatan
Naz.	=	Nazir
Ned.	=	Nedarim
Nid.	=	Niddah
Pes.	=	Pesaḥim
Qid.	=	Qiddushin
R.H.	=	Rosh Hashanah
Sanh.	=	Sanhedrin
Shev.	=	Shevu'ot
Sheq.	=	Sheqalim
Soṭ.	=	Soṭah
Suk.	=	Sukkah
Tem.	=	Temurah
Yev.	=	Yevamot
Zev.	=	Zevaḥim

### *II. Other Abbreviations*

Vol. I	=	<i>A History of the Jews in Babylonia. I. The Parthian Period</i> (Leiden, 2nd printing revised, 1969).
Vol. II	=	<i>A History of the Jews in Babylonia. II. The Early Sasanian Period</i> (Leiden, 1966).
Vol. III	=	<i>A History of the Jews in Babylonia. III. From Shapur I to Shapur II</i> (Leiden, 1968).
Vol. IV	=	<i>A History of the Jews in Babylonia. IV. The Age of Shapur II</i> (Leiden, 1969).
AJSL	=	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
AO	=	Acta Orientalia
ArchOr	=	Archiv Orientalní

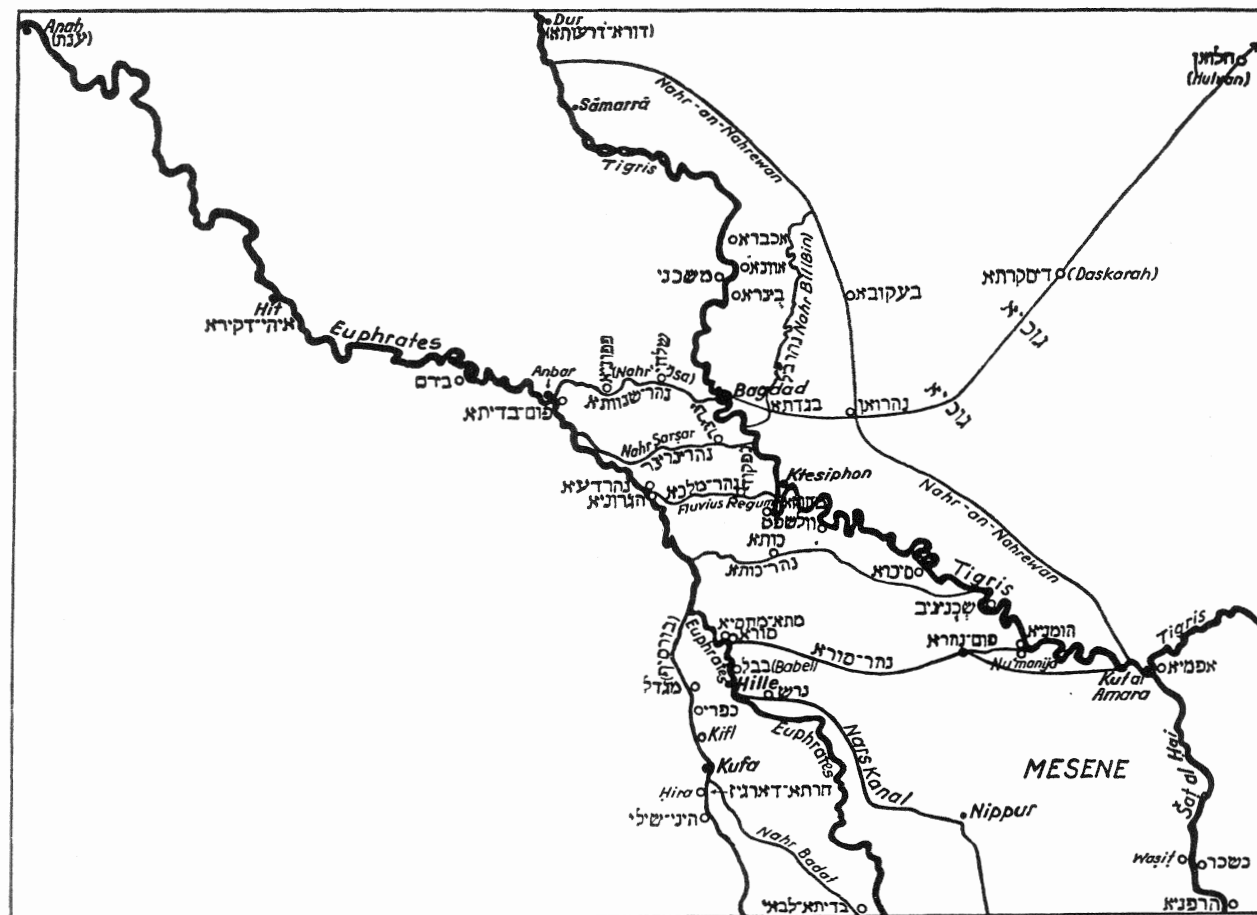
b.	=	Babylonian Talmud
BSOS	=	Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies
CMH	=	Cambridge Medieval History
DOP	=	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
EHR	=	English Historical Review
HR	=	History of Religions
HUCA	=	Hebrew Union College Annual
IA	=	Iranica Antiqua
JA	=	Journal Asiatique
JaJGL	=	Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur
JAJLG	=	Jahrbuch der jüdischen Literatur-Gesellschaft
JAOS	=	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	=	Journal of Biblical Literature
JE	=	Jewish Encyclopedia
JQR	=	Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	=	Journal of Religion
JRAS	=	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
MGWJ	=	Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums
PAAJR	=	Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
Pat. Or.	=	Patrologia Orientalis
REJ	=	Revue des Études Juives
RHR	=	Revue de l'Histoire des Religions
RSO	=	Revista degli Studi Orientali
ZDMG	=	Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft

### *III. Biblical Books*

Gen.	=	Genesis
Ex.	=	Exodus
Lev.	=	Leviticus
Num.	=	Numbers
Deut.	=	Deuteronomy
Jud.	=	Judges
Sam.	=	Samuel
Is.	=	Isaiah
Jer.	=	Jeremiah
Ezek.	=	Ezekiel
Ps.	=	Psalms
Prov.	=	Proverbs
Song	=	Song of Songs
Lam.	=	Lamentations
Qoh.	=	Qohelet
Dan.	=	Daniel
Chron.	=	Chronicles
Est.	=	Esther







III. Jacob Obermeyer's Map of Jewish Settlements in Babylonia.





## CHAPTER ONE

### TO THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

#### I. ARDASHIR II, SHAPUR III, AND BAHRAM IV

The death of Shapur II in 379/380 deprived Sasanian Iran of one of her three greatest emperors, Shapur I (242-272) and Khusro I "the Immortal" (531-579) being the others.<sup>1</sup> The empire now enjoyed predominance in Armenia, command of the Western marches, security under a strong, central government at home, and peace in the east. After three-quarters of a century under one king of kings, in the next twenty years Iran was ruled by three, none of them nearly so aggressive as the great Shapur.

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<sup>1</sup> I have followed the accounts of George Rawlinson, *The Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy* (London, 1876), pp. 254-268; Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les sassanides* (2nd edition, Copenhagen, 1944), pp. 253-257, 259-60; Roman Ghirshman, *Iran* (Baltimore, 1954), pp. 298-9; T. Nöldeke, *Aufsätze zur persischen Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1887), pp. 102-3; Alfred von Gutschmid, *Geschichte Irans und seiner Nachbarländer* (Tübingen, 1888), pp. 168f; Richard N. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia* (Cleveland and N.Y., 1963), p. 215; N. Pigulevskaja, *Les villes de l'état iranien aux époques parthe et sassanide* (Paris, 1963), pp. 44, 95-6, 113-4, 173-4; Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, *Ein asiatischer Staat. Feudalismus unter den Sasaniden und ihren Nachbarn* (Wiesbaden, 1965), pp. 111-112 (on the coins of the three emperors); T. Nöldeke, trans., *Tabari* (Leiden, 1879), on Ardashir II, pp. 69-70, 418, 450; Shapur III, pp. 70-71, 418; Bahram IV, pp. 71-2, 418-419; Addai Scher with J. Périer, P. Dib, and R. Griveau, "Histoire nestorienne inédite (*Chronique de Séert*)," *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris, 1908), Vol. 4, I, i; 5, 1910, I, ii; 7, 1913, II, i; 13, 1919, II, ii, vol. 5, pp. 260-1 (Chapter 43); 306-7 (Chapter 49); Percy Sykes, *History of Persia* (London, 1921), I, pp. 427-9; F. Justi, "Geschichte Irans von den ältesten Zeiten bis zum Ausgang der Sāsāniden," in W. Geiger and E. Kuhn, eds., *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie* (Strassburg 1896-1904), II, 525-6.

Rawlinson (p. 254 n. 2) notes that the Armenian and Roman historians do not seem to know about these three emperors, "even the name of the prince who sent the embassy of A.D. 384."

See also K. Patkanian, "Essai d'une histoire de la dynastie des sassanides d'après les renseignements fournis par les historiens arméniens," trans. by Evariste Prud'homme, *JA* 6th Series Vol. 7, 1866 (hereinafter = Patkanian), pp. 155-159. Note also Jules Mohl, "Extraits du Modjmel al-Tewarikh, relatifs à l'histoire de la perse, traduits du persan," *JA*, 3rd Series, Vol. 12, 1841 (hereinafter = Mohl), pp. 513-4. Note A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), I, p. 158, III, p. 158, n. 49, on the peace of 387.

Ardashir II, who succeeded in 379 and died in 383, supposedly collected no taxes during his reign, thus endearing himself to his subjects. Some Armenians, in the party of Manuel, revolting against the Roman-oriented Moushegh, acknowledged Ardashir II as sovereign and besought his protection. Ardashir's arrangement, exchanging Iranian protection for Armenian tribute, and, in the bargain, establishing effective joint suzerainty with Manuel over Armenia, did not last a long time. War followed, for, seeing the pendulum swing too close to the Iranian pole, the Armenians tried to correct matters. Several Persian invasions produced no good result. Neither Iran nor Byzantium, however, cared to renew the struggle for Armenia. In 384 Theodosius received ambassadors from Ctesiphon, and the partition of Armenia was agreed upon. The two empires so assured peace between themselves for a third of a century, as usual at the expense of the buffer-state.<sup>1</sup>

Shapur III took power when his father was deposed in 383 and concluded the Armenian settlement. He is recorded in Arab historiographic traditions as having attacked an Arab tribe, thus being called "the warlike." He died in 388. His brother or son, Bahram IV, had ruled Kerman before he came to the throne. He maintained control of Armenia. He died in 399, victim of a barracks-revolt.

Christensen points out that in the times of the successors of Shapur II, the grandes of the empire easily retrieved the powerful position lost in the later days of Shapur II. Ardashir II, he notes, was dethroned, and his two successors died violently. Frye observes that as royal power declined, heroic stories about the emperors came to the fore. He comments, "One may suspect that titles and offices increased in number during the long period of weak monarchs. Concomitant with the new power of the nobility were struggles over the succession by opposing parties of the feudal lords."<sup>2</sup> The pretension of the successors to Shapur II is symbolized in the relief of Taq-i-Bustan, near Kermanshah. Ardashir II is shown standing between two gods, Ohrmazd and Mihr and beneath the feet of the king and one of the gods lies a slain enemy,

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<sup>1</sup> See the account of Moses Xorenazi in Victor Langlois, *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie* (Paris, 1869), I, pp. 155ff.; for Faustus of Byzantium, II, Book V, chap. 34ff., pp. 297ff. See also S. Funk, *Die Juden in Babylonien* (Berlin, 1908), pp. 78-93.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216.

who was, Ghirshman says, "apparently a Roman, though history records no such feat of arms by this obscure sovereign."<sup>1</sup>

## II. YAZDAGIRD I

Yazdagird I, 399-420, succeeded his murdered father Bahram IV. The Byzantine enemy now met one calamity on the heels of the last. Ostrogoths and Franks invaded in 386 and 388. Maximus revolted in 387. Antioch shortly afterward did likewise, and Africa was in revolt from 386 to 398. In 395 a Gothic revolt within the empire coincided with the invasion of Alaric, who ravaged Greece, taking Corinth, Argos, and Sparta. Yazdagird could easily have renewed the frontier warfare of Shapur II. He might indeed have seized the occasion to take Armenia, Syria, and even Palestine, as had the Parthians long before and Shapur I in the third century, and as Khusro II would do in the seventh. He did nothing of the sort. I suppose the reason was in part that he did not have to. The Iranian position remained dominant in Mesopotamia, which really mattered, and satisfactory in Armenia. Iranian rule of Syria and Palestine in Parthian and Sasanian times had always proved invariably brief and hardly worth the effort. While some traditions treat Yazdagird as "benign" and "quiet," (and indeed, he actually may have exhibited both qualities), it seems to me more important that he had inherited a secure international position, but a threatened throne. An heir of a murdered monarch may be wise quietly to stay close to home. Honoring his treaty obligations with Byzantium, he received a token of respect when in 408-9 the Roman emperor Arcadius designated Yazdagird as guardian of his son, according to later chroniclers. The story may not be true, but it is a fact that Yazdagird never threatened Roman territory even in times of great opportunity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roman Ghirshman, *Iran. Parthians and Sassanians*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons (London, 1962), pp. 190-191, and figures 233 and 234.

<sup>2</sup> I consulted Rawlinson, *Monarchy*, pp. 269-81. On Yazdagird and the will of Arcadius, see also E. A. W. Budge, trans., *Chronography of... Bar Hebraeus* (Oxford, 1932), p. 66. See also Sykes, *History*, pp. 429-431; Justi, *Geschichte*, pp. 526-7; J. B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene (395 A.D. to 800 A.D.)*, (Repr. Amsterdam, 1966), I, pp. 304-309; Christensen, *L'Iran*, pp. 269-273; Nöldeke, *Aufsätze*, pp. 103-4; Altheim and Stiehl, *Staat*, p. 113; Pigulevskaja, *Villes*, pp. 84, 98, 116; Langlois, *Collection*, Moses Xorenazi in II, pp. 162ff.; on the effort to install Shapur in Armenia, chap. 55, pp. 163-4. See also Patkanian, pp. 159-161; Mohl, p. 514; Funk, *Juden in Babylonian*, II, pp. 94-104.

Whether related to foreign policy or not, Yazdagird's religious policy proved highly favorable to both Christianity and Judaism. According to Greek Christian historians he actually persecuted Magi, which is most unlikely. In any event, he decisively ended the long and debilitating persecution of Christianity, which had begun *ca* 340 A.D. But the new Catholicos, or patriarch, of Ctesiphon, identified variously as Iahbalāhā or Abdas, supposedly made trouble for the Magi. Within a short time, Yazdagird put an end to the Christians' activities. A fire temple of Ctesiphon, razed by the Christians, had to be rebuilt. When Abdas refused to do so, Yazdagird authorized a general destruction of churches, accompanied by arrest of the believers. For five years, Christians were forced to deny their religion. Those who hid were hunted down "both in towns and in the country," and put to death.<sup>1</sup> (We shall return to this matter below, pp. 6-8.) In 413-4 Yazdagird likewise attempted to place on the Armenian throne not a Christian but his own son, Shapur. Shapur was supposed to convert the Armenian nobles to Zoroastrianism. The mission was a failure, and Shapur returned home in 418, to be assassinated in the intrigues following Yazdagird's death.

Western traditions celebrated Yazdagird's magnanimity, virtue, tranquillity, and piety. This is surprising in view of the stories of his persecuting Christians. It is possible that the persecution-stories are

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic traditions will be found in Hermann Zotenberg, *Chronique de... Tabari* (Paris, 1858), II, pp. 103-4, "When the crown came to him, he lost his good disposition and committed acts of violence..." See also C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, trans., *Maqoudi, Les Prairies d'Or* (Paris, 1914), II, 190 and Nöldeke, *Tabari*, pp. 72-85, 419-422. Nöldeke suggests that Yazdagird attempted to play off the Christians against the power of the Mazdean priesthood allied with the nobility. He concludes, "Alles in allem gerechnet, erscheint Jazdegerd als ein klüger, besonnener Fürst, wenn er auch freilich so wenig ohne Gewaltthätigkeit und Tyrannenlaune gewesen sein wird wie irgend ein anderer persischer König," pp. 74-6, no. 3. See also the *Chronique de Séert, Pat. Or.* V, p. 317, chapter 65, and especially, chapter 66, history of Mar Isaac, the fourth Catholicos of Seleucia. In reply to a letter from Mar Isaac, exhorting Yazdagird to be faithful to God, Yazdagird supposedly ended the great persecution. When Isaac died, Yazdagird consented to the appointment of Ahai, the fifth Catholicos (p. 324, chapter 69).

In the time of Iahbalaha I, the sixth Catholicos (pp. 326ff, chapter 71), Yazdagird abandoned his benevolent policy toward the Christians. His general Shapur persecuted them and destroyed their churches. Yazdagird fell ill of a headache; no medicine sufficed, but he was healed by the prayers of Iahbalaha. He thereupon ended the destruction of churches and exile of Christians. After the death of the Catholicos, Yazdagird resumed his earlier persecution. Consequently, he died. So the Nestorian Chronicle. But there is no evidence that Yazdagird actually favored Iahbalaha.

conventional, therefore false, for a report of the emperor's virtues is otherwise incomprehensible. Arabo-Persian traditions, based on Iranian sources, called him a sinner, violent, cruel, sybaritic, unreliable. He allegedly despised learning and suspected everyone, plundered the rich and misused the poor. His epithet in the chronicles is "the wicked." When he died, supposedly from a horse's kick, the horse was believed to be a divine messenger. Nöldeke thinks he was murdered.<sup>1</sup>

That the Christian historians should have favored Yazdagird is hardly surprising if he ended the three-quarters of a century of persecution. That the Oriental historians despised him is extraordinary if he also instituted new persecutions of the Christians. Tabari has Bahram V, the new emperor, tell the people that his father began his reign "in a spirit of just goodness, but when his subjects showed themselves ungrateful, he became harsh." It seems to me Yazdagird's primary concern was political. He needed to restore the stability of the throne. In returning to the tolerant policies of Shapur I, he sought to conciliate some of his subjects. His "friendship" with the Christians may well have been intended to counterbalance the power of the Mazdean priesthood allied with the nobility, as Nöldeke suggests. If so, the Christians proved a slender reed, for their lack of wisdom produced disaster. Christensen's view of the Christians is that "par leur insolence, ils défièrent tellement l'opinion publique que des représailles étaient inévitables."<sup>2</sup> He takes it as a fact that the Christians did destroy fire-temples, following Theodoret. Christians may have interpreted the end of a long persecution as repetition in Iran of the events of Constantine's reign, coming close on the heels of Diocletian's persecution. They may even have supposed that Yazdagird had been converted to Christianity. So they turned on the Mazdean cult and sought to extirpate it, beginning in Ctesiphon itself. But the emperor had not been converted. His gesture of reconciliation received a disastrously false interpretation in the church.

Ghirshman holds that in Yazdagird's time, the first clash between Iran and the rising power of the Hephthalite kingdom of the east took place. Shapur II had settled the Hephthalites on Kushan territory as confederates. By the beginning of the fifth century, they had expanded

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<sup>1</sup> *Aufsätze*, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 272.

on both sides of the Hindu Kush, threatening both India and Iran.<sup>1</sup> In the coming century they, and not Byzantium, would pose the severest threat to the Iranian Empire.

### III. MAZDAISM

Ardashir II certainly revered Ohrmazd and probably also Mihr.<sup>2</sup> If, as Widengren asserts, Shapur II had completed the "definitive elevation of Zoroastrianism to the rank of state-religion,"<sup>3</sup> it is difficult to see the effects of his action. We know little of religious developments between Shapur II and Yazdagird. As we have seen, the latter showed tolerance to various religions, for while the Iranian tradition called him "the sinner," Jews and Christians praised his magnanimity.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of his reign, Mihr-Narseh became Vazurgframādār, or prime minister.<sup>5</sup> He served Bahram V and Yazdagird II as well. Zaehner argues that Mihr-Narseh was a Zurvanite, for Mihr-Narseh had the clergy draw up an edict expounding the tenets of the faith, and this edict, preserved by Elišē Vardapet,<sup>6</sup> is frankly Zurvanite.<sup>7</sup> Yazdagird I at first rejected his advice to persecute Christians, being more tolerant than his minister. It was only later that Mihr-Narseh and Zurvanism acquired much influence.<sup>8</sup>

### IV. CHRISTIANITY

Christian communities were located in the western part of the Sasanian empire, mainly in the Tigris and Euphrates valley. The patriarchal see was at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Susiana was divided into four

<sup>1</sup> *Iran*, pp. 298-9. On Ardashir II, Shapur III, and Bahram IV, see also Zotenberg, trans., *Histoire des rois des perses par...al-Tha'alibi* [Hereinafter = *Tha'alibi*] (Paris, 1900), pp. 532-4, 534-5, and 535-6, respectively; on Yazdagird I, pp. 537-9, 547-9.

<sup>2</sup> J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien* (Paris, 1962), p. 284. See Mary Boyce, "On Mithra's part in Zoroastrianism," *BSOAS* 32, 1969, pp. 10-34, esp. pp. 21-5.

<sup>3</sup> Geo Widengren, "Stand und Aufgaben der iranischen Religionsgeschichte, II: Geschichte der iranischen Religionen und ihre Nachwirkung," *Numen* 2, 1955, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 5 and note also R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford, 1955), p. 39; also Geo Widengren, *Religionen*, p. 281.

<sup>5</sup> Christensen, *L'Iran*, pp. 272, 277 ff.; Zaehner, *Zurvan*, pp. 39ff.

<sup>6</sup> Zaehner, *Zurvan*, pp. 419-427.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Boyce regards Zaehner's arguments as convincing; see "Some Reflections on Zurvanism," *BSOAS* 19, 1957, p. 305.

<sup>8</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin, *Religion*, p. 285.

bishoprics, all under the Seleucian Patriarch. Other sees were found at Kashkar and Hira, Nisibis, Adiabene, Khorasan (with the metropolitan at Merv), Atropatene, Rev-Ardashir, and elsewhere.

For more than forty years after 340, the Christians had refrained from naming a new Catholicos in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, for under Shapur II and Ardashir II, consecration as bishop was the prelude to a martyr's death.<sup>1</sup> Shapur III and Bahram IV apparently began to relax the restrictions on Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Tomarsa now was elected Catholicos, followed by Qayoma. The work of rebuilding the church was begun.<sup>3</sup> The improvement of relations with Rome doubtless encouraged the Sasanian court to free Christians from former restrictions.

When Yazdagird came to power, the Byzantine ambassador, Maruta, bishop of Maipherqat (Martyropolis), and Isaac, Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, together with the new emperor, produced a concordat.<sup>4</sup> Their agreement was supposedly facilitated by various miracles of healing wrought by the Christian authorities. By 410 the Christians

<sup>1</sup> See vol. IV, pp. 20-27, for a brief summary of fourth-century Christian history. The best account is Martin J. Higgins, "Chronology of the Fourth-Century Metropolitans of Seleucia-Ctesiphon," *Traditio* 9, 1953, pp. 45-100. Higgins states (p. 84), "A bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon survived so brief a time in office that the Christians felt it useless any longer to elect one."

For this survey of Christianity in later Sasanian times, I consulted J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224-632)* (Paris, 1904); Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East. I. The Origin of Asceticism. Early Monasticism in Persia* (Louvain, 1958); G. Bardy, "Les églises de Perse et d'Arménie au V<sup>e</sup> siècle," and "Les églises de Perse et d'Arménie au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Augustin Fliche and Victor Martin, eds., *Histoire de l'église, IV. De la mort de Théodose à l'élection de Grégoire le Grand* (Paris, 1937), pp. 321-336 and 597-612 respectively; for the martyrs, Georg Hoffman, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Martyrer* VII, 3, reprinted in Liechtenstein, 1966), and Oskar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Martyrer* (Munich, 1915); as well as the *Chronique de Séert*, cited above.

Of interest are Aziz S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London, 1968), on the Jacobite and Nestorian churches, pp. 167-326, 237-303, on the Armenian church, pp. 303-356; E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India* (Westminster, Maryland, 1957), pp. 1-11, and particularly the excellent bibliography, pp. 205-250; E. Hammerschmidt, P. Hauptmann, P. Kruger, L. Ouspensky, and H.-J. Schulz, *Symbolik des orthodoxen und orientalischen Christentums* (Stuttgart, 1962), with E. Hammerschmidt, *Symbolik des orientalischen Christentums, Tafelband* (Stuttgart, 1966); and C. Lagier, *L'Orient chrétien des apôtres jusqu'à Photius (De l'an 33 à l'an 850)* (4th edition, Paris, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> Bardy, pp. 321-2; Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I, p. 258; and Labourt, *Christianisme*, pp. 84-5. But both Nöldeke, *Tabari*, pp. 71-2, and *Chronique de Séert*, *Pat. Or.*, IV, p. 307, had Bahram detesting the Christians.

<sup>3</sup> *Chronique de Séert*, *Pat. Or.*, V, pp. 305-6.

<sup>4</sup> Labourt, *Christianisme*, pp. 87-92.

hoped that Yazdagird might follow the example of Constantine. In that year, it was ordered, as in the edict of Milan, that churches earlier destroyed be rebuilt, demolished altars be restored, those imprisoned be released. The Christians behaved as had their counterparts a century earlier.

The monastic movement made considerable progress.<sup>1</sup> Its success produced an "aggressive spirit," and in its missionary zeal, it went so far as to convert nobles and to attack fire temples.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, on February 1, a synod at Seleucia-Ctesiphon undertook the reorganization and reform of the church.<sup>3</sup> The persecution beginning in the last days of Yazdagird coincided with deterioration in Iranian-Byzantine affairs.<sup>4</sup> But the conversion of high nobles aggravated matters, as did the destruction of fire-temples, for the emperor would surely force nobles to apostatize from their new faith and would avenge the destruction of fire-temples. In 420 several priests, scribes, deacons, and lay-people were brought to court and, after the usual disputation, martyred.<sup>5</sup>

Theodoret, in his *History of the Church*, records that the Bishop Abdas destroyed a fire-temple. When Abdas declined to rebuild it, Yazdagird ordered all the churches of the empire to be destroyed. What is interesting is Theodoret's comment. While deploring Abdas's lack of wisdom, he says, "I ... greatly admire the firmness of Abdas, in consenting to die rather than to rebuild the temple which he had destroyed, and I judge that he thereby merited a crown."<sup>6</sup> But the consequence of Abdas's martyrdom was a thirty-year-long persecution during which many others merited crowns. The thirst for martyrdom characterized Iranian Christianity throughout Sasanian times.

## V. YAZDAGIRD I AND THE JEWS

Just as Christian traditions persistently regarded Yazdagird I as a

<sup>1</sup> Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I, pp. 260-266.

<sup>2</sup> Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I, pp. 272-282; Bardy, p. 323; Labourt, pp. 92-9. On Mar Isaac and his successors, see *Chronique de Séert, Pat. Or.*, V, pp. 317-319; 321ff.; Labourt, *Christianisme*, pp. 99-103.

<sup>4</sup> Above, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann, *Auszüge*, pp. 34-38; Braun, *Akten*, pp. 139-150; Vööbus, *Asceticism*, I, pp. 282-284; E. Sachau, *Die Chronik von Arbela* (Munich, 1915), on the persecution of Adiabenean Christianity by Yazdagird I and Bahram, pp. 83-4.

<sup>6</sup> Theodoret, *History of the Church* (London, 1854), Book V, Chapter 39, pp. 245-248. No translator is specified.



friend of Christians,<sup>1</sup> so both later Iranian and Talmudic traditions held that he showed favor to Jews. Item 47 in Markwart's edition of *The Provincial Capitals of Iran*, reads as follows:

The capitals of Shōs (Susa) and Shōstar have been built by Shōshāndukht (Shūshan), the wife of Yazdkert, the son of Shāhpuhr, since she was the daughter of the Rēsh-Galūtak, the king of the Jews, and the mother of Vahrām i Gōr.<sup>2</sup>

Markwart comments, "It is very probable that there were many Jews in the great cities Shōsh (cf. the Book of Esther) and Shōshtar, and that these had golden times during the reign of king Yazdkert I, who had married Shōshandukht, but the attribution of its foundation to her influence is obviously a popular etymology."<sup>3</sup> Widengren shares his view.<sup>4</sup> Item 53, further, reads:

The capital of Gay (Ispahān) was built by the accursed Alexander the son of Philip; there was a settlement of Jews there whom Yazdkert the son of Shāhpuhr carried there in his reign at the request of Shōshāndukht who was his wife.<sup>5</sup>

Of importance also is item 10:

The capital of Khwarizm, was built by Narsēh the son of the Jewess.<sup>6</sup>

On this passage, Markwart states (p. 43), "Narsēh the brother of Bahram Gor (420-438)," who was appointed by the king as governor of Khorasan, with residence at Balkh, and given the title of *Marzēban-i Kushan*. We already have noted the Armenian tradition that Shapur II resettled large numbers of Armenian Jews in Isfahan, as part of his general deportation of Armenian populations to Fārs.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, these are several traditions giving somewhat similar facts. That someone,

<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 5. See also Nöldeke, *Tabari*, pp. 74ff., n. 3.

<sup>2</sup> J. Markwart, *The Provincial Capitals of Erānshahr* (Rome, 1931), pp. 19, 96-98. See also his *Erānshahr, nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorena'zī* (Berlin, 1901), p. 20, # 54 on the city-lists: "The Jews were settled there [in Isfahan] by Yazdgird I at the desire of his Jewish wife." See also p. 52, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Capitals*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>4</sup> Geo Widengren, "The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire," *IA* 1, 1961, pp. 119-120, 139-142.

<sup>5</sup> *Capitals*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> See Widengren, *Status*, p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. III, pp. 339-343. See especially Widengren, *Status*, pp. 134-5 for text and translation of the traditions of Moses Xorena'zī and Faustus of Byzantium. Widengren gives the key sentence as follows: "At this same time there arrived a command from King Šāhpuhr to destroy and pull down the fortifications of all the towns, and to carry away the Jews in captivity, and the Jews who were living according to the law of Judaism, in Van in Tosp... these Šāhpuhr caused to live in Ispāhān."

Shapur II or Yazdagird I, moved Jews to Isfahan is a view held unanimously by Armenian and Iranian traditions, but Talmudic ones on these monarchs know absolutely nothing of that deportation. On the other hand, rabbinical traditions are certain that the mother of Shapur II was friendly to the rabbis.<sup>1</sup> 'Ifra Hormizd would have been Yazdagird's great-great-great grandmother. Rabbinical traditions preserve no record of any exilarch's daughter's marriage to an emperor.<sup>2</sup> This practically proves there never was one, since the rabbis would certainly have bragged of the connection. (On the other hand, the charge that a pro-Jewish emperor was married to, or born of, a Jewess appears also in the Alexandrian Martyr Acts, Professor Morton Smith notes.)

We may take it as fact that Shapur II did move Jews to Isfahan. I think it is equally plausible that Yazdagird I was not hostile to the Jews. To both emperors were attributed women-folk who favored Jews, in the former case, his mother, in the latter a Jewish wife. Precisely how these traditions became garbled into the report that Yazdagird I built cities at the request of a Jewish wife or moved Jews to Isfahan for the same reason I cannot say. But I see no grounds to suppose they have the slightest basis in fact. What was fact was that strong Jewish com-

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. IV, pp. 35-39. I must stress, friendly to the *rabbis*, for the point of the 'Ifra-Hormizd-stories is that she was impressed by rabbinical wisdom and by the effectiveness of Jewish prayers. See also Widengren, *Status*, p. 131.

Note also that Christian martyrological traditions report that the wife of Shapur II fell ill (about 341, at the time of the martyrdom of St. Simeon). Darmesteter (*REJ* 19, p. 48) quotes the story as follows: "Dans ce même temps... comme si c'eût été fait par le diable, la reine tomba malade; et comme l'esprit de celle-ci était vers les Juifs, les ennemis de la croix, ceux-ci lui dirent par une vilaine calomnie, selon leur habitude: les sœurs de Simeon t'ont jeté un sort, parce que leur frère a été tué." As a result, St. Tharba was killed, and the queen recovered her health. On this basis, Darmesteter refers to Shapur II's wife as "la reine judaisante." He therefore attributes Yazdagird's Jewish policy to the "strong Jewish influence" in the harem of Shapur II.

On the attribution to Jews of a role in the martyrdoms under Shapur II, see especially Gernot Wiessner, *Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte I. Zur Martyrüberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Schapurs II* (Göttingen, 1967), pp. 180ff. The fact that the patriarchate was located in Koké and the exilarchate in nearby Maḥoza seems to him important: "Vor diesem Hintergrund eines engen Zusammenlebens des christlichen und des jüdischen Hauptzentrums im Stadtkomplex von Seleucia-Ctesiphon und einer damit verbundenen jüdisch-christlichen Polemik versteht sich die Entstehung der in ABx verwandten Tradition, die den Juden die Schuld am Tode Simons (und Tarbos) zuschreibt."

<sup>2</sup> Note the comment of Funk, *Juden in Babylonien* II, p. 96, and Widengren, *Status*, p. 130, n. 3.

munities were found in Isfahan in Islamic times.<sup>1</sup> For the rest, fanciful, probably garbled stories provided the necessary explanation.

The above passage in *Provincial Capitals of Iran* was most extensively studied by James Darmesteter.<sup>2</sup> He points out that Bahram Gor was born in the eighth year of Yazdagird, that is, in 407-8, and so could not have been the son of Huna b. Nathan, exilarch who was (once) at Yazdagird's court, for by that date (following Lazarus's chronology), Huna b. Nathan was no longer exilarch. Darmesteter therefore supposes that the Jewish queen was the daughter of Kahana, exilarch from 390 to 410.<sup>3</sup> But if Bahram's mother was Jewish, Darmesteter notes, one can find no trace of that fact in the stories about Bahram Gor. No Moslem source knows anything of his alleged Jewish origin.<sup>4</sup> As to the supposed construction of Shus and Shustar and the founding at Gay of a Jewish colony by Yazdagird's Jewish wife, Darmesteter says, "La nouvelle Astourieh devait avoir une prédilection particulière pour Suse, la capitale de la reine d'Assuérus."<sup>5</sup> He notes that "construction" of a city may merely indicate that large investment was made in a particular city by a particular emperor. As to Gay (= Isfahan), later traditions held that after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C., numbers of Jews were settled there, which according to Moslem historians accounts for the origin of the Jewish quarter mentioned above. Darmesteter says that the Jewish settlement was a half-century old by the time of Yazdagird I. But it is probable, he concludes, that his Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> Widengren, *Status*, p. 142, "From other sources we actually know that Ispāhān was an old Jewish site." At the time of the Arab conquest, one of the town's two quarters was called al-Yahudiyyah. See also Funk, *Juden*, II, p. 146, who thinks "Djai" (or "Jeï") = "Jehudia." It is a groundless supposition.

<sup>2</sup> "Texts pehlvis relatifs au judaïsme," Part ii, *REJ* 19, 1889, pp. 41-83, in particular pp. 41-52.

<sup>3</sup> P. 47. See also Widengren, *Status*, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> But Darmesteter makes much of the quotation attributed by Firdausi to Bahram, "I am descended from the queen Schémiran," which, Darmesteter said, is the name of Sémiramis, legendary grandmother of the last Darius. He quoted several traditions on Sémiramis, who was of Jewish origin, according to Masoudi, and came in the exile of Bokhtnashr (Nebuchadnezzar). Darmesteter concluded, "Bahram-Gôr, en se rattachant à Shémiran, c'est-à-dire à Hûmai Cihrazâd, proclame ainsi indirectement son origine juive et se trouve confirmer le témoignage direct du texte pehlvi, qui lui donne pour mère l'héritière du sang royal de Juda." So Darmesteter! In my view, one can come to no such conclusion on the basis of late Persian poetry, read in the light of very early Iranian legends.

<sup>5</sup> On the importance of the Book of Esther to Babylonian Jews, see Vol. II, pp. 57-64.

wife made a great contribution to the building of the settlement.<sup>1</sup>

The following Talmudic stories mention Yazdagird I:

Amemar, Mar Zuṭra, and R. Ashi were sitting at the gate of the palace of 'Izgūr the King. The butler of the king passed by them. R. Ashi saw that Mar Zuṭra turned pale. He [R. Ashi] took his finger and put it in his [own] mouth. He [the steward] said to him [R. Ashi], "You have spoiled the king's meal." They said to him [R. Ashi], "Why did you do so?" He replied to them, "Whoever made this has spoiled the king's food." They said to him, "Why?" He replied to them, "I saw 'something else' [= leprous pork] in it." They examined it but did not find anything. He took his finger and placed it on it [the meat]. He said, "Have you examined [the meat] here?" They examined [it] and found [the spoiled meat]. The rabbis said to him, "Why did you depend upon a miracle?" He replied to them, "I saw the spirit [*ruah*] of leprosy hovering above it."<sup>2</sup>

(b. Ket. 61a-b)

R. Ashi said, "Huna bar Nathan told me, 'One time I was standing before 'Izdegar the king, and my belt slipped upward, but he [himself] pulled it down, saying to me, '*Kingdom of priests and holy people* (Ex. 19.6) has been written concerning you.' When I came to Amemar, he said to me, '*And kings shall be your nurses*'<sup>3</sup> (Is. 49.23) has been fulfilled in you."

(b. Zev. 19a)

The first story is one of the tales about rabbinical wisdom which attributes to the rabbis supernatural insight. The rabbi saw what others did not see, in this case the spirit [= demon] of leprosy, and therefore was able to warn the steward that the food was spoiled. The other rabbis thought some sort of miracle to save R. Ashi had been necessary, for the spoilage was not immediately apparent, but they were told no miracle had taken place (except a private vision of a demon!). What is important is that no opinion of Yazdagird is reflected in this account. The rabbis' question suggests that it was dangerous to make accusations against the royal cooks, but R. Ashi's reward, whether commensurate or not, is not specified. We therefore can derive from this conventional story no special information whatever about Yazdagird's relations to rabbis or other Jews.

The second account is unequivocal. The exilarch had an audience with the king of kings. When his garment became disarrayed, Yazdagird straightened it out, quoting an appropriate scripture. The

<sup>1</sup> *REJ* 19, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Or, following Rashi, "above him," meaning Mar Zuṭra.

<sup>3</sup> *'ūman* = foster-father.

kindness of the king provoked an even more striking quotation of a verse of a scripture which the rabbis believed was said by Isaiah concerning the time of Cyrus:

Thus says the Lord God  
 Behold I will lift up my hand to the nations....  
 And they shall bring your sons in their bosom,  
 And your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.  
 Kings shall be your foster-fathers,  
 And their queens your nursing-mothers.  
 With their faces to the ground  
 they shall bow down to you  
 and lick the dust of your feet.  
 Then you will know that I am the Lord....

(Is. 49:22-23)

That Yazdagird knew Scripture, including the requirements about priests' underclothing, seems unlikely. That Amemar believed Yazdagird's behavior actually rendered him a new Cyrus is, at best, a remote possibility. Stories about his subservience to rabbis or other Jews were not preserved, and I doubt that they were told, or, if told, would have been either believed or true. So we can only be certain that the rabbis thought the exilarch once was well-treated at court. We need not doubt the accuracy of their conviction.<sup>1</sup> But the stories themselves do little to attest to it. They merely indicate, quite plausibly, that rabbis frequented the gate of the palace, where much government business was carried on, and that the exilarch came to court, as his duties required. The fanciful details about the emperor's quoting Scripture are clearly incredible and may be ignored.

To compare these sparse materials with the themes of the Book of Esther, as Darmesteter suggests, we note that the king of kings was married to a Jewess; rabbis, like Mordecai of old, saved the king's life;

<sup>1</sup> But I cannot follow the reasoning behind Widengren's judgment (*Status*, p. 140). "In these circumstances [married to a Jewish woman] it is not astonishing that Yazdakirt entertained friendly relations with many Jews, receiving some prominent men among them in audience [here Widengren refers to the two passages cited above]. That Yazdakirt during his reign was in intimate association with the exilarchs goes without saying and it is related that Yazdakirt readjusted the girdle worn by Huna bar Nathan during an audience, at the same time quoting a saying from the Old Testament." On the basis of these two stories, we can hardly conclude with any certainty that Yazdagird knew "many Jews," received "some prominent men... in audience," or was "in intimate association with the exilarchs."

I moreover see no point in attempting to connect the citation of the Isaiah passage with the groundless conjectures of Darmesteter on Bahram's supposed "indirect reference" to his Jewish ancestry.

a high Jewish official was welcomed into the intimacy of the royal circle; so "then you will know that I am the Lord." But it is far-fetched to suppose on this basis that the Esther story played any role at all in the formation of these traditions. In their present form, they are subordinated to the rabbis' purposes in telling them. In the first instance the context is how rabbinical authorities behaved toward royal butlers.<sup>1</sup> In the second, the discussion concerns priestly garments. Yet if Yazdagird was married to a Jewess, then it would have been natural to fabricate fables about the new Esther (just as Darmesteter does) and to look for a new Mordecai as well. The exilarch, engaged in constant dealings with the government, would have been a natural candidate for the role, and indeed, the rabbis closest to him<sup>2</sup> alluded to a very friendly relationship. Talmudic literature, however, is not in so primitive a state that we can fruitfully speculate about the earlier form of later tales such as these.

Our most reliable conclusion is that Yazdagird's times were not marked by persecution of the Jews. It also is probable that, as in the reign of Shapur II, women in Yazdagird's royal harem were sympathetic to the Jewish community, and that the exilarch enjoyed good personal relations with the court.<sup>3</sup>

## VI. BABYLONIAN JEWRY AT THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY

In addition to specific references pertaining to Yazdagird I, we have a number of rabbinical sayings possibly reflecting the general condition of Babylonian Jewry in the half-century after the death of Shapur II. These sayings presuppose the ancient view that the Jews were in exile and would some day be brought back by the Messiah to their own land. Whatever happened to Babylonian Jewry would therefore be interpreted within the messianic framework. This meant, for one thing, that the Jews—for I think this viewpoint was widely held within the Jewish community—would regard themselves as outsiders, seeking no significant place in Iranian political life, looking upon the state as alien, if mostly benevolent, and supposing that, as foreigners exiled from their own land by an angry God, they should encounter occasional misfortunes to remind them to repent. In reality the Jews were not the only minority in Babylonia, which seems to me to have been a land of

<sup>1</sup> The following story concerns the effects of swallowing too much saliva.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 45-60

<sup>3</sup> See also Funk, *Juden*, II, pp. 95-103; L. H. Gray, in *JE* 9, p. 465.

“minorities”—groups distinguished by cultural or religious traits from the Aramaic-speaking majority to which they otherwise actually belonged. (In a linguistic sense, the Iranians and surviving Greek-speaking population probably were the only real minorities in Babylonia.)

The contrast between the Jewish and Christian viewpoint on historical events in the Iranian empire is striking. Both exhibited the same vivid sense of the transience of this world and of the working of providence through history. But if the form was similar, the content was not. In place of the “exile,” “redemption,” and “return to the homeland” of Judaism were the Christians’ equally vivid expectations that the pagan state would be converted to Christianity and that a Christian ruler would come to power either by natural conversion or by the return of Jesus. The “exile” would end for Christianity not when Christians would depart from their present abode but when the world would accept or be conquered by Christianity. That attitude accounts, as I said, for the foolishness of Christian behavior both in the time of Shapur II and at the cessation of the great persecutions by Yazdagird I. The Babylonian Jews’ attitude toward persecution was profoundly dissimilar. They took a less apocalyptic view of matters, being more experienced in suffering and less optimistic in its interpretation. If things were difficult here, they might be easier elsewhere. But apart from the coming of the Messiah, not much of real consequence could happen. So we find rabbinical reflection on the curse of Leviticus 26:38, “And you shall perish [W’BDTM] among the nations ... and the land of your enemies consume you”:

R. Papa objected, “Perhaps like a lost object [’BYDH] which is searched for in the sense of Psalm 119:176, *I strayed like a lost [’BD] sheep, seek thy servant.*” [That is to say, the sense of the curse of Leviticus was not that they should *perish*, but that they should be *astray*] ... Mar Zuṯra objected [to the distressing sense of the latter part of the Scripture], “Perhaps as cucumbers and pumpkins are consumed. [That is, not all at once, as they come to fruition at different times in different places].”  
(b. Mak. 24a)

The meaning of R. Papa was that the curse did not threaten the actual annihilation of the Jews. He stressed another sense of the root ’BD, namely, to go astray or be lost. Similarly, Mar Zuṯra proposed to interpret the “consumption” in a somewhat less disastrous sense. If Jews suffered in one place, that did not mean they would utterly perish everywhere. The purpose of the two exegetes was to mitigate the harsh

threat of Scripture. "No one could be delighted at the present situation of the world, but here it is bearable"—this, I think, is their theological assessment of contemporary events. In fact, the rabbis held, it was God's as much as Israel's situation; as R. Aḥa said to R. Naḥman b. Isaac, (of the preceding generation), God had not laughed since the destruction of the Temple.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, all religiously virtuous actions could contribute toward its reconstruction and Israel's redemption. R. Naḥman b. Isaac said, for instance, that felicitating the bride and groom was like rebuilding Jerusalem's ruins.<sup>2</sup> And this saying introduces the second part of the rabbinical theory of history. Though history proved unfulfilled and unhappy, Jews could change it through pious action. They were by no means helpless to improve both their own condition and that of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The rabbis' theology was entirely congruent to the political and social realities of Babylonia. The Jews were not a dominant group and could do little to change the conditions in which they lived. Their support might prove helpful to a contestant for the throne, though when they actually committed themselves to Bahram VI against Khusro II, it proved catastrophic. When, similarly, rabbis and exilarch joined to oppose the bitterly hostile policies of Yazdagird II and Peroz, they were put to death, and many others suffered as well. Since there was little the Jews could do to change their situation, it was just as well to interpret it in a theologically quietistic sense. They depended entirely upon God, who would send the Messiah to save them when they had shown themselves fully worthy of being saved. This they would do through study of Torah, practice of the commandments, and doing acts of compassion, but *not* through taking up arms against a hostile and more powerful state.

When we come to specific sayings on everyday life, we find considerable theologizing of ordinary and routine events, as in the following:

R. Papa said, "If the arrogant cease [in Israel], the Magi will cease. If [Israelite] judges will cease, *gezirpats* [= GZYRPTY, Magian gendarmes] will cease." [Proof] text [of the former is], *And I shall purge your proud ones* (Is. 1:25), and [of the latter], *The Lord hath taken away thy judgments. He hath cast out thine enemy* (Zeph. 3:15).

(b. Shab. 139a = b. Sanh. 98a)

<sup>1</sup> b. A.Z. 3b.

<sup>2</sup> b. Ber. 6b.

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. II, pp. 52-7, 180-187, 236-240, 282-287. This matter is summarized in my "Religious Uses of History," *History and Theory*, V, 2, 1966, pp. 153-171, and "The Phenomenon of the Rabbi in Late Antiquity," *Numen* 16, 1, 1969, pp. 1-2.0



The prophecy of Zephaniah was unconditional, but concerned "those who are left in Israel," a remnant of poor and faithful who would "do no wrong and utter no lies." R. Papa interpreted the prophecy as *conditioned* upon doing no wrong and uttering no lies. That is to say, if the one will happen, then the other surely will follow. What the prophet had expected was bound to happen, the rabbis taught could be brought about by right action but not otherwise. This is paradigmatic of the rabbinic treatment of apocalyptic vision. On the one hand the rabbi reaffirmed the promise of the vision, but on the other he taught that it was dependent upon ethical behavior. R. Papa thus played upon the popular resentment against the Iranian gendarmes. He diverted attention from the supposed iniquities of the Iranian religious and political officials to the alleged pride of the Jewish bureaucrats. Since the Jewish officials to whom he objected did not conform to the rabbinical way, his further implication was that those who oppose rabbinical instruction ("the arrogant," "the judges") are standing in the way of redemption. Whatever took place in the streets of Babylonia could easily provide the occasion for such a sermon. If the state and its officialdom mistreated the Jews or otherwise aroused their resentment, the rabbi readily turned the Jews' hostility away from the "evils" of the Iranians and toward their "own guilt," and especially toward the vices of Jewish local officials.

We find, however, only a few specific contemporary references to Iranian mistreatment of the Jews. Among them is R. Papa's reference to certain fast-days which are described as days of joy and gladness (Zech. 8:19). He said when there is peace, the days shall be for joy, but when there are government decrees (against the Jews), they shall be fast days. When there is neither persecution nor peace, those who want to may fast.<sup>1</sup> R. Ashi referred to the possibility of the Iranians' forcing a man to eat unleavened bread.<sup>2</sup> This is a most interesting saying, since it supposes there were some Jews who would not eat it unless forced, and that on these the Persian government enforced the *Jewish* law. Such a policy would go back to the time of Ezra.<sup>3</sup> R. Ashi further held that one must not let a corpse remain unburied on the second day of a festival. Rabina commented, "But nowadays when there are Magi, we

<sup>1</sup> b. R.H. 18b.

<sup>2</sup> b. R.H. 28a.

<sup>3</sup> On state enforcement of Passover laws at Elephantine, see Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine. The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley-L.A., 1968), pp. 129-130.

take care [lest, if we allow the Jews to bury on the second day of a festival, the Magi may regard that day as an ordinary work-day and compel them to do other work]." The assumption is that the Magi will force Jews to violate their festivals only if they are not persuaded that the Jewish claim is valid.<sup>1</sup> But in general they were supposed to allow the Jews to keep their religion as they liked. These sayings reflect the government's actual policy toward the Jews. They show what the rabbis expected, and that expectation was presumably shaped by what the Iranians actually did. R. Ashi did not say that the Persians actually did such a thing as force a man to eat *mazgah*, but he assumed they might. R. Papa did not say the government was then issuing hostile decrees against the Jews or Judaism, but he assumed it could. Both masters took for granted the possibility of government persecution. They made no more of it than necessary. It was one of the facts of Jewish life, to be coped with, but to be changed only by religious-theurgical measures.

On the one hand, R. Ashi clearly showed awareness of the temporal usefulness of the Iranian government and was willing to collaborate with it.

R. Adda b. Ahavah said, "One may not sell them [pagans] bars of iron." What is the reason? Because they hammer weapons of war from them. If so, even spades and pickaxes [should be forbidden]? R. Zevid said, "[We prohibit] Indian iron." And nowadays that we do sell [iron to pagans] ... how [is this to be justified]? R. Ashi said, "[We sell to] the Persians who protect us [and that is justifiable]."

(b. A.Z. 16a)

R. Ashi's dictum does not prove he was a "Persian patriot." It only indicates he knew full well the importance of the common defense. Since the Iranian government secured the prosperity of all its subjects through holding the northwestern frontier against the Roman Christian enemy, the desert frontier against the Arabs, and the Armenian and Caucasian passes against the barbarians, the Jews among others had better cooperate in the defense for their own good. The benefits of the government were not exaggerated, just as its potential threat was taken for granted.

On the other hand, I do not think R. Ashi brought to the Jewish schools a prejudice in favor of the Persians. When Amemar expressed a measure of admiration for their sending gifts to one another and never retracting them afterward, R. Ashi said that the reason they do not retract is merely pride, but not an innate sense of rectitude.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> b. Bez. 6a, and see *Ozar HaGeonim* II b, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> b. A.Z. 71a.

*Summary:* I find in rabbinical sayings no evidence whatever of local or imperial persecution of the Jews. But I am unimpressed by the evidence cited to prove Jewry enjoyed special favor. The rabbis expressed no particular affection for Yazdagird I. Huna b. Nathan, the exilarch, reported that he once had been well-treated. Apart from that, rabbinical sources provide no support whatever for the assertion that Yazdagird I had singled out Jewry for especially favorable treatment. Having examined all relevant Iranian traditions, we find that Yazdagird supposedly had a Jewish wife, and that at her request he settled Jews in Susa, Isfahan, and Khwarism.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish sources record a miracle of R. Ashi, who saw the spirit (demon) of leprosy hovering over food that was to be served to the king, and as I said, he mentioned the emperor's adjustment of Huna b. Nathan's undergarment. The generalized comments on "Persians who protect us," on the one hand, the possibility of persecution, on the other, as well as the traditions in which Yazdagird I is named, together do not add up to much. They permit us to conclude only that the turn of the fifth century found Jewry in an acceptable situation. This supposition furthermore conforms to what we know about Yazdagird's policy toward non-Iranian minorities in general.<sup>2</sup>

## VII. JUDAISM AND OTHER RELIGIONS

The primary concern of the rabbis was to win the loyalty of Jewry for Judaism as they understood it. Standing by themselves, legal discussions presupposing the existence of Israelite apostates do not prove apostasy was a serious problem. R. Aḥa b. Rava asked R. Ashi,<sup>3</sup> for example, about the law if one Jew was about to slaughter another's animal as a sacrifice to idols, was warned against it, and accepted the warning—a highly unlikely situation. Similarly:

R. Aḥa and Rabina—One says that [one who eats prohibited food] to satisfy his appetite is an apostate, but one who does so for spite is a *min*. The other said that one who does it for spite is merely an apostate. A *min* is one who actually worships idols.

(b. A.Z. 26b)

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<sup>1</sup> But, as I said above, this is probably an explanation, long after the fact, of the actual settlement of Jews in Fārs by Shapur II. He did so not because he "favored" them, but because he sought to build up the demographic and economic resources of territories well outside Roman reach.

<sup>2</sup> Above, pp. 3-6.

<sup>3</sup> b. Hul. 41a.

These theoretical discussions were intended to define the limits of apostasy. The rabbis thought one who became a *min* to be the worst sort of sinner. Most of the Babylonian references to the *minim* probably denote Jewish-Christians,<sup>1</sup> though it is entirely likely that the term comprehended more varieties of Christianity than we can now identify. References to *minut* at this time include the following:

Amemar hoped to establish [the reading of the Ten Commandments in the synagogue service] at Nehardea. R. Ashi said to him, "They have already abolished [reading] them because of the claim of the *minim*."  
(b. Ber. 12a)

*Minim* claimed that Moses had revealed at God's behest only the ten commandments and that the rest of Mosaic revelation was not of divine origin. R. Ashi's comment makes it evident that the practice had long ago been prohibited but also could not now be safely revived. Further polemical sayings are as follows:

It was stated, Mar Zuṭra said, "He [Balaam] practiced sorcery with his penis." Mar b. Rabina said, "He had intercourse with his ass."  
(b. Sanh. 105b)

R. Papa commented [in a discussion on Balaam], "This is what men say, 'She who was from chiefs and rulers played whore to carpenters' ..."  
(b. Sanh. 106a)

Mar b. Rabina said to his sons, "...with reference to the evil Balaam, whatever you find concerning him, expound about him..."  
(b. Sanh. 106b)

A further saying by R. Papa about *Kutim* in Babylonia<sup>2</sup> is interpreted by Jacob Obermeyer<sup>3</sup> to refer to Christian migrants to Babylonia in the third and fourth centuries. R. Papa said that since *Kutim* had become mixed up with the residents of certain areas, one may no longer freely marry with people from those towns, which suggests the Jews there had already intermarried with them. Herford has shown that references to Balaam frequently intend Jesus.<sup>4</sup> The saying of R. Papa about a carpenter's harlot comes in the context of Balaam sayings. Hence Herford supposes that R. Papa referred to Mary. The above sayings are similarly interpreted by Herford. Balaam was a magician who led Israel astray, and the same accusations were leveled by the rabbis against Jesus, often called a sorcerer and magician. These discussions

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 12-16.

<sup>2</sup> b. Qid. 72a.

<sup>3</sup> *Landschaft Babylonien*, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (repr. Clifton, N.J., 1966), pp. 47-8, 64-67.

do not prove that the rabbis now had to contend with widespread apostasy to Christianity. Still, we have some Christian references to baptism of Jewish populations, as in the following, in *Chronique de Séert* (*Pat. Or.* VII, p. 473):

Il [Titus, bishop of Ḥdatta] baptisa beaucoup de ses habitants [that is in Ḥdatta] et des Juifs qui s'y étaient installés.

This reference to a seventh century bishop suggests that in outlying regions conversions took place in some numbers. The situation in Babylonian Jewish settlements may have been dissimilar, for rabbinical influence was far more pervasive there. The ferocious quality of the rabbis' remarks furthermore leads to the inference that Christianity now may have posed considerable problems to the local Jewish communities. We may speculate that the easing of the persecutions in the time of Yazdagird I led some Jews to suppose the Christians' high expectations were really right. In general, however, the competition between the rabbis and the Christian leadership, and not some specific turn of events, probably underlay the polemical exegeses about Balaam. Relations between Jews and Christians had long ago been embittered, on the one side because Jews thought the Christians had known God but denied him, on the other because the Christians similarly thought the Jews had known the Christ but had crucified him.

An example of the Christian viewpoint on the Jews at the end of Sasanian times is the following:

One tells the following story: Between Maḥoza and Hira there lies a village named Mātā Mehāsiā which is inhabited entirely by Jews. Now when one day a student passed through, one of the Sons of the Crucifiers seized him, took him into his house, and for a considerable time kept him a prisoner by making him turn the mill. At about that time a Christian, by order of the king, was sent into the village on some business, and through God's will he stayed at just that house. When the student saw him, he complained [and told him of the affair]. Then the Christian seized the owner of the house, and he confessed the whole truth with the following words: "If you forgive me this transgression, I shall show you a wonderful treasure." And he showed him the place in the house where the corpses of Ḥananiah and his youthful companions were lying. God had arranged the incident with the student so that the treasure of the corpses of the blessed might be found. As the story goes, Mār Emmēh, when he was on his way from Maḥoza to Hira, had to spend the night in exactly this village. Out of fear of him they entertained him with great honor.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. Nöldeke, *Die von Guidi herausgegebene syrische Chronik* (Vienna, 1893), p. 35. My colleague Professor Horst Moehring kindly translated the passage from Nöldeke.