



BĀBAY

BĀBAY, catholicos (d. 502) elected at the synod at Seleucia in 497. Bābay was of Seleucia and had served as a secretary of the *marzbān* of Bēt Arāmāyē. He was quite advanced in years when he was elected catholicos in 497. As far as the outer conditions were concerned, his time was advantageous. His rule fell in an epoch during which the church could enjoy peace, and the relations of the catholicos with the court were friendly. The presence of the patriarch was even welcome in the royal court, since King Zāmāsp (496-498), it seems, sought help from the Christians against Mazdak, whose revolutionary message upset the Persian communities.

Bābay was a patriarch without much instruction and education but with the ability to handle the affairs of the church with prudence, skill, and firmness. The interregnum had threatened to split the church, but Bābay succeeded in enforcing reconciliation among the forces inimical to the unity of the church. The acts of the synod gathered in November, 497, in Seleucia reflect the wisdom of the newly elected head of the church. The annulments of all the excommunications and suspensions which had taken place during the ecclesiastical turmoil of the preceding years, reveal his endeavors to mend entangled ties and to terminate mutual fighting through a formal act of reconciliation between the quarreling parties.

Practically, however, the decisions which were made at the synod of November, 497, moved in the direction of *Baršaumā*'s aspirations, being a renewal of the decisions adopted by the preceding synods. When the patriarchal see became vacant after the death of *Catholicos Bābōē*, the synod



elected Aqāq catholicos in 484. Āqāq had been a companion-in-arms of Bābōē in the battle against Barṣaumā and rejected for himself the term “Nestorian” applied to him by ’Aksenāyā of Mabbūg. However, he realized the inevitability of the process and so the synod held in February, 486, in Seleucia-Ctesiphon sanctioned previous decisions and solemnly adopted the Nestorian creed. The process of Nestorianization was brought to its conclusion through Barṣaumā’s friend Narsay (d. 507).

The adoption of previous decisions by the synod of 497 involved far-reaching decisions which reshaped the spiritual countenance and life of the church: The ancient ascetic ideals were to a great extent abandoned and the clergy, including the hierarchy, were obliged to marry. The canon adopted by the synod of 497 forbade monasteries in and near the towns. All this meant a transformation of the doctrine and the inner life of the Persian church and caused a complete isolation of the church in the East. Regarding the questions of faith and church life as well as ecclesiastical law, Bābay succeeded in establishing himself as the supreme head of the Persian church. He was able to put a restless and fermenting situation under control even after the Monophysites had resumed their activities in Iran, thanks to the propaganda activities of Šem’ōn of Bēt Aršām. This transformation, however, in which Barṣaumā of Nisibis stood at the forefront took place not without violence.

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