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CHRISTIANITY I. IN PRE-ISLAMIC PERSIA: LITERARY SOURCES
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CHRISTIANITY

i. In Pre-Islamic Persia: Literary Sources

In Middle Persian there are three terms used for Christians: KLSTYDʾN and NʾCLʾY in the inscription on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt of the 3rd-century Zoroastrian high priest Kartir; and *tarsāq*, Sogdian loan-word *trsʾq*, New Persian *tarsā*. The first term represents Syriac *kristyānē*; the second, Syr. *naṣrāya* "Nazarene" (cf. Heb. *nôtsrî* "Christian"). The third, "(God-)fearer," evidently is a translation of Syr. *daḥlā* (and cf. Psalm 135.20, Heb. *yîrei YHWH* "fearers of God"). J. de Menasce (see Bibliography) discusses the latter word in the context of a 9th-century Zoroastrian polemic against Christianity, and believes it was applied originally to monks, but S. Pines (see Bibliography) argues that the term was used independently of monasticism. It has been suggested that the two different terms for Christians reflect the division between the Greek-speaking Christian communities, many of whose members were presumably deportees from western regions conquered by the Sasanians, particularly Šāpūr I, and the Syriac- and Iranian-speaking, indigenous Church of Persia. In the Pahlavi translation of the Psalter, unbelievers are called *na-tarsāgān*, lit. "unfearing ones." The term

"Messianist" (cf. Ar. *masīḥī*), used commonly in the Middle East of Christians, seems not to have been employed in Persia: for Syr. *mešīhā*, "Messiah", the literal translation *ʾnwtky* (pronounced **annūdag*), "annointed," is employed.

History. J. Asmussen (*Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, p. 294) observes that the reference to travelers from Parthia, Media, and Elam (Ḵūzestān) in the description of Pentacost, Acts 2.9, suggests the presence in the Parthian period of Jews who were to become the nuclei of future Christian communities in Persia. But the main body of Eastern converts to the new faith must be assumed to have been in northern Mesopotamia: Syriac-speaking Adiabene and Osrhoene. Queen Helena of Adiabene and her son Izates (i.e., Mid. Ir. *yazad*) had converted to Judaism in the 1st century b.c.e., and she is supposed to have donated golden vessels to the Temple at Jerusalem. None of these survive; but the foot of the Menorah on the Arch of Titus at Rome, "with its pendant leaves, closely resembles the bases of Persian columns at Susa and Persepolis" (Yarden, p. 12, with figs. 5, 13, and 14). If the seven-branched candelabrum was not actually a gift of Helena, it reflects the strong Iranian influence on Jewish art of the period.

But the earliest Iranian contact with Christianity must be counted as the visit to the infant Jesus of the three Magi. Many aspects of this legend reflect Iranian religious belief: The Magi were themselves Parthian priests, and Herzfeld identified the "Mountain of Victory" from which they were supposed in Christian apocryphal writings to have come with Kūh-e Ḵᵛāja in Sīstān. The temple complex rises over Lake Hāmūn, where the Zoroastrian *Saošyant*, "Savior," is to be born. Christ is found in a rock-cave, like the infant Mithras, rather than a manger; and each Magus entering beholds the Lord at a different age, as though He were Zurvan. In early Christian art, the Magi are shown in Iranian priestly garb; and the soldiers of Ḵosrow II at Bethlehem are reported to have spared a church there when they recognized in a mosaic their own priests (Herzfeld, pp. 61ff; Messina; Mathews; Russell, 1987b). (For a comparison of the numerical symbolism of Iranian and Christian eschatology, see Russell, 1989).

Christian eschatological doctrines, beliefs concerning heaven and hell, and expressions of a moral and cosmic dualism of forces of good and evil, may have their origin in the *koine* of Greek and Iranian thought which colored intertestamental Judaism—in the Parthian period—but was in large part excluded from Orthodoxy by the Rabbis. (On possible Iranian influences, see Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* III, pp. 440-56; other scholars whose focus is the

Hellenistic world, such as Arthur Darby Nock, place greater emphasis on the heritage of Plato in the formulation of such Christian doctrines.) The legends of Apostolic missions to the East in the 1st century c.e. presuppose that the bearers of the Christian teaching passed through Parthian territory (see Russell, 1986). More materially, it is during the poorly documented Parthian period that the church at Dura Europos was built. Though the border town on the Euphrates was under Roman control, many Iranians passed through it, as the Parthian documents, and graffiti from the synagogue, attest; and it is likely that the Christian community of Iran acquired its first strength under the tolerant Arsacids.

By the beginning of the Sasanian period are recorded twenty Christian bishops, from Bēṯ Zabdē to the north through Karkā dᵉ Bēṯ Selôḵ, and south to Susiana and Mesene (Mešān; Asmussen, *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, p. 925); and Bardesanes (late 2nd-early 3rd century) refers to Christians in Parthia, Media, Kāšān, and Pārs. By 250, the religion claimed so many adherents in Iran that no less than sixty Christian tombs are found on Ḵarg island in the Persian Gulf. One John of Persis is recorded at the Council of Nicaea in 325. In 410, a Synod was convened at Ctesiphon: The royal capital had become also the acknowledged center of Christianity in the Empire. The proceedings began with a prayer for the king, Yazdegerd I; and the Synod adopted the creed of Nicaea (Asmussen, *Camb. Hist. Iran* III/2, pp. 941-42). Six provinces were then listed as Christian jurisdictions, including Ray and Abaršahr; in the late 6th century, Marv and Herat, whose Christian communities were already centuries old, are prominently mentioned. Ṯaʿālebī (*Ḡorar*, p. 748) reports that in 651, it was the Bishop of Marv who contributed a sepulcher for the murdered Sasanian fugitive Yazdegerd III.

In Iranian lands outside the Sasanian Empire, there were large and important Christian communities, notably that of Sogdia, which has left a relatively large body of translation literature from Syriac. Christian Sogdian is written in Syriac estrangela script with additional characters for certain Iranian sounds and a system of vocalic points, but without the archaisms of orthography or Aramaic ideograms which encumber the Sogdian texts of other denominations. One such manuscript contains homilies, the Apostolic Canons, a liturgical commentary, and lives of diverse saints and Persian martyrs (see Sims-Williams). From the early Muslim period there is mentioned a Nestorian metropolitan at Samarkand; and two ossuaries found at nearby Afrāsīāb have Maltese-type crosses. This indicates that some Sogdian Christians continued

the funerary practices of their Zoroastrian neighbors and forebears. There were other similarities: Sogdian Christians, like their countrymen of other faiths, were often travelling merchants: crosses with Sogdian inscriptions are found on a rock at Drangtse, in Ladakh. Christianity was eradicated at Samarkand only in the mid-15th century, with the massacre or forced conversion to Islam of the remnants of the faithful (see Grenet, p. 265 and pls. 13, 35; Colless). Farther to the east, in Xinjiang, was found a fragment of a translation into Pahlavi from Syriac of the Psalms, which Andreas dated on paleographical grounds to the mid-6th century (Andreas and Barr), indicating that a number of Christians were amongst the Persians who settled along the Silk Road.

The conversion of Constantine to Christianity, and the adoption of the faith as the state religion of the Roman Empire early in the fourth century, placed Christians in Iran under immediate suspicion as potential traitors: According to Eusebius, Constantine himself wrote to Šāpūr II, warning him that Šāpūr I in 260 had been allowed by God to defeat Valerian because the latter had persecuted the Christians. Ca. 337, Aphrahat wrote, “The People of God have received prosperity, and success awaits the man who has been the instrument of that prosperity [i.e., Constantine]; but disaster threatens the army gathered together by the efforts of a wicked and proud man puffed up by vanity [Šāpūr] . . . the [Roman] Empire will not be conquered, because the hero whose name is Jesus is coming with His power, and His armor will uphold the whole army of the Empire” (Demonstration 5.1.24, cit. by Brock; see also Wiessner). Christianity was practiced throughout the Empire; but the largest populations were in sensitive western border regions, and numerous Christians served in the armed forces. Although the Armenian Eznik Kolbatsʿi (*Refutation of Sects* 4.2) was in the 5th century to insist that one could be the servant of either the Persian king of kings (*arkʿayitsʿ arkʿay*) or Caesar, the Great Persecution, which began in 339 and lasted forty years—until the death of Šāpūr II—engulfed many subjects of the king of kings who were both Christian and loyal: Goštāzād pleaded that after his execution it be made known that he had died because of his religion, and not on account of disloyalty.

Yazdegerd I accorded tolerance and even favor to Christians and other minorities: His queen, Šōšendoḵt, was the daughter of the Jewish *reš galūṯa* “head of the dispersion”; and his policy earned him the enduring sobriquet “the Sinner” (Pahl. *bazaggar* as in Markwart, *Provincial Capitals*, p. 67) or “the Harsh One” (*dabr*; cf. Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 67) amongst Zoroastrians, and in

later Muslim historiography. When the third Synod was convened at Ctesiphon in 424, and Dādīšōʿ was made Catholicus of the Orient, the Church of Persia had become largely independent of the old, Western jurisdictions; and, as if to underscore the separation, the Nestorian teaching became in the 5th century the established doctrine of the Church of Persia. In 428, Nestor became the Patriarch of Byzantium. He taught that Christ had two separate natures, divine and human. They remained separate; Mary was not the *theotókos*, "Mother of God." Cyril of Alexandria argued that the two natures of Christ became inextricably one with His birth. He opposed Nestor; and the latter was anathematized at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Many Nestorians were forced to flee Edessa, which was under Byzantine rule. They took refuge in Sasanian held Nisibis. Christians regarded as heretics by the western Church were obviously preferable from the Iranian point of view to those who maintained ties with it, and, thereby, with the Byzantine enemy. It has been suggested that Nestorian rejection of the divinity of the man Jesus, and certain anti-ascetic trends in Persian Christianity, reflect Zoroastrian influence (see Asmussen, 1962, p. 10; Geroe); but in general Iranian policy was guided, not by nuances of *akdēnīh* "evil religion," but by political expediency.

In the meantime, Eutyches, an archimandrite at Constantinople, opposed the idea of two natures of Christ, and held that there was but one, the divine: the very flesh of Jesus was not of human nature. This doctrine, the Monophysite ("one nature"), was refuted by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which held that Christ had one *hypostasis*, but two natures (Gk. *ousia*). In the sixth century, the Syrian Monophysites at Edessa, under the leadership of Jacob Bar-Addei, came to be styled as Jacobites; those who adhered to the Chalcedonian doctrine, which the Byzantine Empire upheld, were called Melkite, i.e., "royal" (see Young; Pigulevskaya).

At various times, Byzantium attempted to intervene to protect Christians in Iran. Treaties between the two Empires contained clauses providing for the reciprocal toleration of Iranian Christians and of Zoroastrians in Byzantine lands (presumably, Anatolia; see Gray). But in the *Acts of Šīrīn* (published by Devos), it is reported that the martyr was transported from one prison to another, so that a Byzantine embassy never succeeding in securing a meeting with her. Golendoḵt, a relative of Ḵosrow I, was converted to Christianity by prisoners of war. She refused to recant and was sent to the Fortress of Oblivion. There she was visited by a legate of Maurice on a peace mission: Though he would have been able to have her released, she settled on

martyrdom, and perished in 591. Very much less is known of the fate of the Zoroastrians who lived in Christendom: principally, Anatolia and Egypt. In 377 c.e., St. Basil of Caesarea, in Cappadocia, described in a letter to Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis, Cyprus, the *magousaion ethnos*, "nation of the Magians" (the Greek derives from Syr. *magusāyē*, which is also the source of the Koranic and later Muslim designation of Zoroastrians, Ar. *majūsī*). He says they have neither books nor teachers of doctrine, but pass down their traditions from father to son by word of mouth, calling fire God and tracing their descent to one Zarnouas; they shun the society of others, keeping to themselves (i.e., Zurvan; St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, IV, Loeb Classical Library, 1934, no. 258, p. 45). This writer has suggested that descendants of such communities in Armenia, together with the unconverted remnants of the indigenous Armenian Zoroastrians, were the people called *arewordikʿ* "Children of the Sun" by medieval writers (Russell, 1987c, Ch. 16). In the pre-Christian period, Iranians residing in Syrian and Anatolian Greek cities of the Roman Empire subsidized Olympic athletes and erected splendid public edifices; and 4th--century Iran boasted many priestly academies. So the impression given by St. Basil is of a community socially and culturally impoverished, by contrast equally with its Hellenistic predecessors and Sasanian contemporaries. The Jews were to be subject to increasingly onerous restrictions, culminating in the viciously anti-Semitic edicts of Justinian; the Zoroastrians of the Empire, fewer in number and less inured to the conditions of a diaspora, cannot have fared better.

Monophysitism endured on the eastern fringes of the Byzantine Empire notably in Armenia. During the fourth century, the Armenian Arsacids, and then most of the population, gradually embraced Christianity—an act which had the political benefit of further separating the country from the Sasanians, who were detested as usurpers of the legitimate, Parthian crown. Some of the ancient dynastic families, the *nakharar*s, still held fast to Mazdaism: The Christian sources vilify them as traitors to the nation. In the 4th century, the Arian doctrine, which held Christ to be a kind of demigod, had gained adherents in eastern Anatolia and, as it seems, at the Arsacid court of Armenia. It was condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the Armenian Church waged a fierce battle against it (see Garsoian, 1985; idem, 1989). In the 5th century, there were new conflicts within Armenian Christianity, this time between Monophysites, Nestorians (who had Sasanian sanction), and (pro-Byzantine) Chalcedonians (see Sarkissian). Yazdegerd II attempted to force the Armenians to reconvert to Zoroastrianism, and defeated their commander,

Vardan Mamikonean at the Battle of Avarayr in 451. The campaign was led by the *wuzurg framadār* Mehr-Narseh, of the noble Arsacid Spandīād family. The Armenian historian Łazar Pʿarpetsʿi describes him preaching Zoroastrianism to the Armenian Varazvalan, and calls him *cḥʿarahnar ew dzhnamit*, "conceiver of evil and malign in thought." From the Sasanian sources, a rather different picture of this powerful Prime Minister emerges: He founded a village, Mehr-Narseyān, and endowed its fire temple; and at his own expense he built a bridge at Fīrūzābād and left a dedicatory inscription in Middle Persian which is still there. Although some *nakharar*s fought on the Sasanian side, the Armenian campaign was not successful: after a protracted guerrilla war, Iran conceded religious liberty to Armenia in the terms of the Treaty of Nuarsak, 484. New persecution, and renewed resistance under Vardan II, flared up in 570. But in the reign of Ḵosrow II, Armenia had come to be seen as a stable province of the Empire; so the Sasanians accorded some favor toward the Armenian Church, and accordingly, toward Monophysitism. The later Sasanian kings presided directly over the Synod of the Church of Persia at Ctesiphon: Ḵosrow I imposed his own nominee as Catholicus in 552; and in 609, Ḵosrow II expressed anger when his nominee was passed over, and forbade the election of any other.

Many Christians, wearied by the incessant wars of the 7th century and exhausted by punitive taxation, welcomed with palm fronds the Arab conquerors of Ctesiphon. Christianity, along with other minority faiths such as Manicheism, enjoyed a brief period of expansion in the early centuries of Islam, only to suffer diminution later on through conversion and attrition in times of strife, particularly in the 15th century, after which the faith survived only precariously in Iranian lands (see Morony, pp. 384-430).

Polemics. The Syriac martyrologies record abundant exchanges between captive Christians and their Mazdean persecutors. A pattern such as this is often encountered: A Christian, frequently a high-born Iranian proselyte, might approach a sacred fire, sweep it from its altar, and trample it underfoot; or break the *barsom* bundle; or, if a woman, deliberately defile the fire temple precincts by entering them in menses. The examining magistrate, usually a high-ranking Magus, then demanded monetary restitution, or return to the Good Religion, which the apostate eloquently rejected, desiring rather to receive the crown of martyrdom. During the Great Persecution in 339-79, when perhaps 35,000 died, many Christians certainly did not provoke the persecution that befell them, and for many martyrs the *imitatio Christi*, and

not abuse of an alien or ancestral religion, was their motive to the end; yet it is worthy of note that the practice of the Christian faith was never actually forbidden in the Empire. Details of grisly tortures are recorded (as of binding *sagdēs* "in the manner of a dog"—the Pahlavi names of these procedures are rendered in Syriac script); during these, the martyr refuted diverse Zoroastrian doctrines. In one debate at Ctesiphon in 612 c.e., George of Izla, a Persian whose former name was Mihramgošnasp, declared that the Zoroastrians were worshipers of fire, not of God. The Magus replied that one worshiped God through fire. George then produced an Avestan passage in which fire is called a god. The priest explained that this is because fire is of the same nature as Ohrmazd (Morony, p. 287, citing Hoffmann, pp. 109-10; the latter is the largest compilation of sources translated from Syriac on Christian martyrs in Iran; see also Zaehner, esp. pp. 419-46).

In Armenia, the principal refutations of Zoroastrianism belong to Eznik, 5th century, and to Ełiše, who probably lived about a century later and reproduces the former's arguments, in the dramatic setting of the war of Vardan against Yazdegerd II. On the plane of theory, Eznik focuses primarily on the logical inconsistencies of the Zurvanite cosmological myth, relying in large part upon Syriac sources—mainly, it is supposed, on a Syriac translation of the *Peri tēs en Persidi magikēs* of Theodore of Mopsuestia (see Zaehner, p. 420)—though he produces also a number of abstract arguments against dualism. The battle of the Armenian Christians against Sasanian proselytism and persecution is justified, as one might expect, in more emotional, biblical terms: Pʿawstos compares Šāpūr II to Nebuchadnezzar, invoking the paradigm of the Book of Daniel; and Ełiše compares the Armenian champions to the Maccabees. The Armenians were outraged by the Zoroastrian practice of consanguineous marriage (Av. *xvāetvadātha-*) and called the Persians *kinemol* "woman-crazy." In the text of Ełiše, the Iranians are made to retort that Christian monks by their celibate way of life depopulate the world and thereby further the destructive aims of Ahriman. The later arguments of the *Škand-gumānīg wizār* follow the same line: How, asks Mardānfarroḵ, could a good God have created the noxious serpent of Eden? And, paralleling talmudic critiques of Christianity, the same text ridicules the idea that God could have been born of an earthly woman. The Jews and Christians in the Sasanian Empire devoted more attention to refuting each other than to attacking Mazdaism. The theologian and Persian convert Aphrahat, writing in the mid-4th century, remarks in one polemic that God did not rest after Creation because He was weary. This cannot be a response to any Jewish doctrine, though; but is more

likely an implicit answer to a Zoroastrian charge, not cited by Aphrahat but independently attested later in *Škandgumānīg wizār*, that the God of the Bible was too weak and insufficient to create the world (see Neusner, p. 125).

Intercultural contacts. Mani, though a native speaker of Aramaic and not a Zoroastrian, grew and taught in a largely Iranian milieu, and his doctrines were very widely disseminated through Iranian lands. He describes himself as a physician, as Jesus did; and in his Persian-language *Šābuhragān*, Jesus is represented through citations from the New Testament. Manicheans, in the manner of Christians, organized monasteries, and encouraged asceticism and celibacy. Even though the Manicheans adhered to a Docetist viewpoint, disbelieving that the Lord Himself might have been susceptible to crucifixion, but only seemed to suffer and die, many Iranians must have learnt of some Christian beliefs through Manicheism (see Waldschmidt and Lentz). Manicheism imitated the legends of the Christian apostolic missions in the literature describing its own propagation: For example, the Sogdian text which describes the mission of Mar Gabryab to *ryβʾn* (probably Arbanos, mistaken for Revan, i.e., Erevan, whose Iranian form had more familiar, Zoroastrian associations) in Armenia and his conversion of the princess and royal court, with their subsequent backsliding from Manicheism to Christianity (!), is historically improbable. More likely it is a conflation of two legends of the missions of Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew (the Armenian sources present these together) with the names of the faiths involved suitably altered (for the text, see Sundermann, pp. 45-49).

Aspects of Christian iconography reflect interaction with Zoroastrian culture. The Persian word for the cross, *čalīpā*, Chr. Sogd. *clybʾ*; derives from Aramaic ultimately, but appears to have undergone internal development in Iranian. Nestorian crosses on monuments in China are often shown above an open lotus, taking the place, as it were, of the Buddha. In pre-Christian Armenia, sacred monuments (Arm. *arzdan*) were often made in the form of a stepped pyramid with an eagle or spear at the top. St. Gregory the Illuminator, a scion of the noble Parthian house of Suren, who established Christianity in Armenia, erected *arzdan*s surmounted by the cross. The Armenians carved vast numbers of *khacḥʿkʿar*s, “cross stones,” which became objects of cult. At Dvin, the capital of the Sasanian *marzbān*s of Armenia, the cross is framed by a pair of wings spreading upward from its base: This is, evidently, a Christian appropriation of a Sasanian iconographic convention. Another Sasanian convention to indicate divine glory and protection was to enclose a picture or

device in a ribbon, usually creased and with the ends fluttering up to either side. Such a ribbon encloses the cross in a 6th-century Georgian relief from Akvaneba—it is recalled that Georgia was a Sasanian province (see Rice; Foster, on the Chinese Nestorian examples; and Beridze, pl. 19). It is to be noted that Mithra at Ṭāq-e Bostān stands upon a lotus: This would indicate the influence of Buddhist iconography in Iran itself. If the image of Christ enclosed in a radiant mandorla, found early in Armenia and later on farther to the west, derives from similar Indian representations of the Buddha, then such an image came through Sasanian Iran. That there was an intriguing, if sparsely documented, Buddhist-Iranian syncretism, is borne out by Stavisky's discovery of a Buddha image in the *vihāra* at Qara Tepe (Old Termeḏ, in Bactria) with a Bactrian graffito "Buddha-Mazda" scratched above it.

Another area of interaction was in the official use of seals and titulature. The former have been studied by Judith Lerner: The cross is the predominant symbol, in some compositions evidently replacing the Zoroastrian fire (as on Georgian Christian coins modeled after Sasanian issues). As to titles, N. G. Garsoian has shown that the Zoroastrian ecclesiastical title, *driyōšān ǰādagōw*, "intercessor on behalf of the poor [i.e., the faithful]," was adopted by the Armenian Christian clergy (1989, p. 534 s.v. *jatagow*, citing Pʿawstos 4.3, with references).

In the Armenian and Iranian translations of Christian works, Zoroastrian terms are used, sometimes, it would seem, deliberately. In Armenian, for example, the word "righteous" is translated *ardar*, cognate with but not derived from Iranian; in Christian Sogdian the word is *ʾrtʾw*, from the Zoroastrian usage *ardāw*; and in the Pahlavi Psalter Syriac *zadîqâ*, "righteous," again is rendered as *ʾrtʾdy*/**ardāy*/ (see Russell, 1987a; idem, 1987c, Ch. 15). The Armenian translation of the Bible utilizes some Zoroastrian terms which would have been familiar to 5th-century hearers: e.g., "Dionysiac" is rendered *spandarametakan* in Maccabees. To Armenian *šnorh-kʿ* "grace," from Pahlavi *šnōhr*, Avestan *xšnaoθra-*, corresponds Pahlavi /*burd-šnōhr*/, "grateful," in the Psalter. Christian Pahlavi *pʾdlky*, corresponding to Syriac *qurbānā*, "offering, sacrifice," is paralleled by the Armenian loanword for the Divine Liturgy, *patarag*. Pahlavi *uzdēs*, the term used for the religious images of the *yazata*s which Sasanian iconoclasts destroyed, is found in the Psalter as the word for an idol (Ps. 134.15).

The Christian communities also served as a conduit for Greek science and literature (in Syriac translation) to enter Sasanian Iran, and, ultimately,

Islamic culture. The Christian Boḵtīšūʿ family, for example, provided prominent physicians to the royal court, and presided over the Nestorian medical academy at Gondešāpūr (see Rosenthal, pp. 6-7). The Pahlavi *Dēnkard* contains large philosophical sections derived from Aristotle; and Paul the Persian dedicated a Syriac book on Aristotelian logic to Ḵosrow I, who was responsible for the final redaction of the great Sasanian Avesta of twenty-one *nask*s that incorporated much knowledge which Zoroastrian apologists claimed had been "lost" to Greece and India and subsequently recovered (see Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems*, p. 80, citing Baumstark, 1922, passim).

Iranians confronted by the innovations of Christian culture changed their archaic ways of learning. There died in 620 a Persian convert to Christianity, ʿIšōsabrān. His Life was written by the Nestorian patriarch ʿIšōyahb: In his native village of Kur on Mt. Hedayab, ʿIšōsabrān had requested of the priest who converted him, ʿIšōrahmeh, that the latter's young son ʿIšōzekh teach him to read Scripture. The boy explained to the proselyte that one learnt first letters, then syllables, then the Psalms, then the rest of the Bible. "It is useless to teach me letters, teach me ten Psalms," said ʿIšōsabrān. The youth tried to explain that it was in vain to "mumble like the Magi"; but ʿIšōsabrān memorized whole words, pronouncing each forcefully and repeating it "nodding his neck, like the Magi." ʿIšōzekh taught him to read quietly, moving only his lips; and eventually ʿIšōsabrān learned to read whole books (see Chabot).

Although the *zamzama* ("muttering," a pejorative usage of the Muslim period, translating Pahl. *drānǰišn* "recitation") of the Avesta endured, the Zoroastrians were forced in various ways to counter the challenge Christian literacy posed to their traditions of oral learning. It was, possibly, in response to Christian credos and prayer books that the 4th-century high priest Ādūrbād ī Amahraspandān, patriarch of the subsequent generations of high priests, still revered by many Parsis as the *rāyēnīdār ī zamān* "regulator of the age," composed the Pahlavi credo *Nām stāyišn* "Praise is meet to the Name of Ohrmazd," and compiled the *Ḵorda Avesta* "Little Avesta"—the prayer book containing it, which is still used in daily devotions (see Russell, in press). The Manichean and Armenian scripts, especially the latter, the first true Oriental alphabet, may have stimulated the invention of the Avestan alphabet in the 5th century.

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