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CHRISTIANITY IV. CHRISTIAN LITERATURE IN MIDDLE IRANIAN LANGUAGES
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CHRISTIANITY

iv. Christian Literature in Middle Iranian Languages

Middle Persian. When the Christian church in Persia made itself formally independent of the patriarchate of Antioch early in the 5th century, the reasons for this step seem to have been not so much doctrinal as political or nationalistic. Thus it is not surprising that the 5th century also saw the beginnings of a Christian literature in Middle Persian. The earliest such works of which we possess apparently reliable information belong to the latter part of the century, when the catholicos Aqāq (d. 496) translated a summary of the Christian religion by Eliša‘ bar Quzbāye from Syriac into Persian, for presentation to Kavād I (Baumstark, pp. 114-15), and Ma‘nā of Shiraz, metropolitan of Rēw-Ardašīr, composed various works in Persian, including hymns (*madrāše*), “discourses” (*memre*), and responses (*‘onyātā*) for liturgical use (Baumstark, p. 105). The statement that the catholicos Ma‘nā, who lived in the first half of the 5th century, made translations from Syriac into Persian may rest on a confusion with the later Ma‘nā (see Gerö, p. 23 n. 50).

In Persia itself Syriac eventually regained its status as the sole literary and

liturgical language of the church, with the result that none of this Christian Persian literature survived, apart from a few texts preserved in Syriac translation, such as two legal works by the metropolitans Išoʿbōḵt and Simon (both published by Sachau, pp. 1-253). The only Christian work extant in Middle Persian is a fragmentary translation of the Psalms found at Bulayïq in Chinese Turkestan and published by F. C. Andreas and Kaj Barr (see bible iv. middle persian translations of the bible). A page found in the same area and containing paradigms of Middle Persian verbs (Barr) may also be of Christian origin. (For Christian seals with Middle Persian inscriptions, see Gignoux, Lerner; for the Christian Pahlavi inscriptions of India, see Henning, "Mitteliranisch," pp. 51-52, and references given there.)

Sogdian. The Pahlavi Psalter mentioned above forms part of a library of Christian manuscripts unearthed by the second and third German Turfan expeditions at the ruined Nestorian monastery of Bulayïq, the majority of which are in Syriac and Sogdian. A very few Christian texts in Sogdian, Syriac, Turkish, and New Persian were found at other sites nearby in the Turfan oasis, for example, Qurtuqa, Qočo, and Toyoq. Most of these fragments are now in the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin; smaller collections are also housed in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz and in the Museum für Indische Kunst in Berlin. Most of the Christian Sogdian manuscripts are written in a variety of Syriac script, with the addition to the alphabet of the new letters *f*, *x*, and ̀; a very few in cursive Sogdian script. Some Christian Sogdian texts may have originated in Sogdiana, where the Nestorian church was well established by the early 8th century at the latest, but no such text has been found there; the literature to be surveyed here is known only from manuscripts found in Chinese Turkestan.

Syriac was the principal language of the liturgy at Bulayïq, where several Syriac psalters, hymnbooks, and service books were found. Some of them contain rubrics in Sogdian, which show that they were copied and used by members of the local community. The Sogdian manuscripts, too, include a number of fragments of psalters and lectionaries containing portions of the Bible appointed to be read or sung in the services of the church (Müller; Sundermann, 1974; idem, 1975, idem; 1981; Schwartz, 1967, pp. 126-44; idem, 1974; see bible v. sogdian translations of the bible). Other Sogdian texts possibly intended for liturgical use are a copy of the Nicene Creed (Müller, pp. 84-88), a page from a "Book of Life," a text commemorating the names of the faithful departed (Schwartz, 1967, pp. 115-25), and a version of the hymn

Gloria in excelsis Deo (C19, unpublished).

As the site of Bulayïq is that of a monastery, it is natural that its library included many homilies and treatises concerning asceticism and the religious life. Such texts are difficult to identify precisely when, as is usual, no title or colophon is preserved. Some unidentified Sogdian texts of this kind have been published (e.g., Müller and Lentz, pp. 532-34, a fragment concerning Daniel probably belonging to a text on fasting; Schwartz, 1967, pp. 145-50, a "discourse against evil thoughts"; Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 69-77, on the three stages of the contemplative life). Works of known authorship or attribution include the *Antirrheticus* of Evagrius (Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 168-82) and fragments of the writings of Macarius the Egyptian and of Abbā Isaiah (Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 165-67). The high esteem in which Abbā Isaiah was held is even more clearly indicated by the survival in two Sogdian manuscripts (one published; Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 78-86) of excerpts from Dādišoʿ Qaṭrāyā's commentary on his works.

The extensive hagiographical literature that was translated into Sogdian includes fragments of many widely diffused texts like the apocryphal Acts of Peter (Müller and Lentz, pp. 528-31); the legends of the invention of the cross (Müller and Lentz, , pp. 513-21) and of the Sleepers of Ephesus (Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 154-57); and the martyrdoms of Eustathius (ibid., pp. 158-64), Sergius and Bacchus (Müller and Lentz, pp. 520-22), Cyriacus and Julitta (C22, unpublished), and George (Hansen, 1941; for important corrections to this edition, see Gershevitch; Benveniste). The Sogdian manuscripts also include passages from the *Apophthegmata patrum*, the edifying sayings and anecdotes of the earliest monks and solitaries (Schwartz, 1967, pp. 42-52; Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 124-36), and several biographies of those who were regarded as playing an important part in the history of monasticism and its spread from the west to the east, for example, Serapion (C3 and C27, both unpublished), Eugenius (Sundermann, forthcoming), John of Deylam, founder of two monasteries in Fārs (Sundermann, 1976), and Baršabbā, to whom the Sogdian version of the legend (Müller and Lentz, pp. 523-28) attributes the foundation of Christian communities in an area extending eastward as far as Balḵ. Other hagiographical texts with an Iranian setting include the Acts of the Persian martyrs under Šāpūr II (Schwartz, 1970, pp. 391-94; Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 137-53) and the martyrdom of Pethion (Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 31-68, 185).

Other miscellaneous texts remain to be mentioned, for example, the Apostolic Canons (Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 101-09), a commentary on the symbolism of

the baptismal and eucharistic liturgies (Sims-Williams, 1985, 110-20), translations of Syriac metrical homilies (a *memrā* "On the final evil hour" by Bābay of Nisibis [Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 87-100], a poem (?) on the mercy of God [Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 121-23], a poem on patience [Müller and Lentz, pp. 535-38]), a collection of riddles on biblical themes (Sundermann, 1988), and a small fragment of an oracle book of the type known in the west as the *sortesa apostolorum* (Sims-Williams, 1976, pp. 63-65). This last manuscript was not found in the Turfan area but in the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas (q.v.) at Tun-huang, where Chinese and Sogdian documents attest the presence of a substantial number of Christians in the 9th and 10th centuries (see iii, above).

The Christian Sogdian literature consists almost entirely of translations from Syriac, in which Syriac words, especially technical terms, are freely used (see Sims-Williams, 1988) and Syriac syntax is sometimes followed slavishly; its literary value is therefore in general slight. Special significance attaches to those texts of which the Syriac originals appear to have been lost, like the legend of Baršabbā (of which only a fragment is extant in Syriac), the poem by Bābay, and the collection of riddles. In some cases the Sogdian version sheds light on the textual history of the underlying Syriac text, as in the account of the martyrdom of George (the Sogdian text of which shares with the Greek and other versions certain details absent from the Syriac, like a reference to George's belt; Gershevitch, p. 180) or the commentary on baptism and eucharist (Sims-Williams, 1985, pp. 110-12; Brock, 1980; idem, 1986). More generally, the Christian Sogdian texts are of great importance as evidence for the existence and nature of Christian communities that would otherwise be virtually unknown. Linguistically, too, they provide unique information, in particular through the use of the Syriac alphabet and the Nestorian system of diacritical points (: = *ā*, : = *ă*, *y:* = *ē/ĕ*, *y.* = *ī/ĭ*, *wÎ*^{w} = *ōÂ*¦, *wÂ¡* = *ūÂ*¦), which permits more precise indication of the vowels than is possible in Manichean or Sogdian script, where long vowels are represented only by consonants (*ʾ*, *y*, *w*) and short vowels are often not marked at all.

(For a more detailed account of the Christian Sogdian literature see Sims-Williams, forthcoming; earlier surveys by Hansen [1968] and Asmussen contain a number of inaccuracies, including incorrect identifications of texts.)

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