



MĀR MĀRI

MĀRMĀRI, the Christian apostle, considered as the first missionary in the Arsacid Empire.

The *Acts* of this saint were written (and are known only) in Syriac after the end of the Sasanian period (Abbeloos, 1885, 42-138; Bedjan, 1890, 45-94; Raabe, 1893), i.e., in about the 8th century in Babylonia. The oldest manuscript was found in a monastery in Alqosh, north of the Mosul plain (Abbeloos, 1883, 143-44). The author of the *Acts of Mār Māri* was probably a monk from the monastery of Dorqonie, near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, where the relics were kept (Jullien and Jullien, 2003b, 16-17). The text relates in 34 sequences the history of the Christianization of the Tigris valley and as far east as Fārs. Mār Māri, considered as one of the Seventy, the disciples of Christ referred to in the New Testament (Lk 10:1), is sent to the Babylonian lands by Addai, the apostle of Edessa – and the first five paragraphs are devoted to the *Doctrina Addai* (Jullien and Jullien, 2003a, 13-17; 2003b, 18-22; 2003c, 41-46; Desreumaux, 1997). The narrative presents precise and reliable information, e.g., Iranian background (Chaumont, 1988, 16-29; Jullien and Jullien, 2003c, 5-24), *gerousia* assembly in Hellenistic Seleucia (Cumont, 1893, 373-78). From Edessa and Nisibis, Māri travels through Arzanene, the region of the Zabs, Bēth-Garmay, and Bēth-Aramāyē, and preaches in the Royal Towns. His mission ends in Mesene, Bēth-Huzāyē, and Persia, at the boundaries of the missionary area of the apostle Thomas.

Through the *Acts*, we can infer a re-reading of the Christian origins of the Syro-oriental Church. At this time, Christians were confronted with



Manichaean and Marcionite proselytism (Jullien and Jullien, 2003c, 72-102; cf. Fiey, 1970, 183-88). Keys to interpretation enable us to discover the author's deep intentions; e.g., Māri appears as the antithesis of Māni. This account also gives new details about the Dosthean baptist movement, established near Kaškar, testified to essentially by Theodorus Bar Konaï (Hespel and Draguet, 1981, 345; Idem, 1982, 257; Jullien and Jullien, 2002, 51-54). On the other hand, this text justifies the claims of the Seleucia-Ctesiphon episcopal see to its sovereignty and independence.

The *Acts* were probably used for liturgical purposes as they end with a commemorative celebration at the apostle's shrine. The *Anaphora* of Addai and Māri (Botte, 1965, 89-106; Macomber, 1966, 335-71; Gelston, 1992, 29-41; Jammo, 1995, 106-107) is explicitly mentioned under this name in the 11th century by Ebn al-Ṭayyeb (Hoenerbach and Spies, 1957, 93). In the Syro-oriental tradition, the apostle is generally presented at the head of the patriarchal lists of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Nau, 1912, 232-33; Elisha of Damascus, see Assemani, 1728, XVII; Māri ebn Sulaymān, see Gismondi, 1899, 3; 'Awdišō', see Mai, 1838, 154; Budge, *The Book of the Bee*, 1886, 103; Bar Hebraeus, see Abbeloos and Lamy, 1872, 15-20; 'Amr, see Gismondi, 1897, 1). At present, Mār Māri is still the historical and liturgical reference for the Christian communities of Iraq, Iran, and their diaspora, the Assyro-Chaldaeans.

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