

Mar Aba I

Historical Context and Biographical Reconstruction

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By

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## Acknowledgements

My motivation to write about the Church of the East, and especially about Mar Aba I, stems from my contacts with my friends<sup>1</sup> in the Church of the East and their kindnesses in the process of my studies about the history of Christianity. Without their help, I could not have continued my studies in this field.

Before my first contact with this church in Iran, my Christian friends advised me that this church will not be helpful. They were seen as a closed church which would not answer my questions. But from the very first day they answered my questions very kindly and encouraged me to pursue my studies. I would like to use the words of Isaac of Ninveh to express my own sense of this matter: “O man, what thou art reading, can these things be known from ink? Or can the taste of honey be spread over the palate of the reader, from written documents?”<sup>2</sup> And Narsai comes even closer, for he wrote that the mouth cannot express thanks to God,<sup>3</sup> and here I use Narsai’s expression to show my respect to my friends in the Church of the East.

Moreover, working on Paul the Persian as a member of the Church of the East and focusing on the sixth century encouraged me to read about Mar Aba I, who was a Catholicos and a teacher in the schools of Nisibis and Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the sixth century.

In addition personal reasons, based on my contacts with the Church of the East before studying Syriac Theology, I am grateful to my professors, Dr. Aho Shemunkasho and Dr. Dietmar Winkler and their colleagues, who established the program in Syriac Theology at the University of Salzburg with a selection of the best professors in the world. I would like to express my special thanks to all those who facilitated my studies in Salzburg.

I am also thankful to my dear Professor Dietmar W. Winkler for suggesting the subject of this research, which was a continuation of my former research on the sixth century and my previous

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<sup>1</sup> Including priests, secretaries and others with responsibilities in the Church of the East.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Arent Jan Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*. Translated from Bedjan’s Syriac Text, with an Introduction and Registers (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afdeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe Reeks, Deel XXIII, No. 1), Amsterdam, 1923; reprint Wiesbaden, 1969 [translation of The First Part, as published by Bedjan], 41.

<sup>3</sup> ܠܗ ܡܫܝܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢ

Lā mšē pumā kul da’ virā (h) ū l-memar šūvḥēh.

Cf. Narsai, Homily 29, line 3 in British Library Oriental Manuscript 9368, folios 160-165. I am thankful of my dear professor Robert Kitchen for giving the reference to this source.

studies in political science and the history of Persia. It is still amazing to me that he appreciated the content of my previous academic research, even though I did not share all of it in my C.V., and he then directed me to follow my own interests. There are no words to express my deep thanks to him.

I am very thankful to Mar Narsai, bishop of the Church of the East in Tehran, the Board of the Suryoye Theological Seminary Salzburg, and Initiative Christlicher Orient. Without their support my first year of study and my continued research in Syriac Christianity would have been impossible.

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## Introduction

Mar Aba I lived between 490 AD and 552. He was one of two Catholicoi of the Church of the East. He had a complex life but one that proved fruitful for both Zoroastrians and Christians, although he criticized the marriage canons of the Zoroastrians and decreed a prohibition on eating Murmurings.<sup>4</sup> He also encouraged many Zoroastrians to convert to Christianity, but he helped the king of Persia to control rebellions. He continued the reforms of Khusrau I in Christian communities and maintained the internal unity of Christians and Zoroastrians in general.

In this introduction, I will distinguish him from three other Mar Abas. I will then write about the significance of my study. Afterwards I will explain my methodology. Finally, I will delineate the structure of this thesis.

### A- Identification of Mar Aba I

There were three Mar Abas in Late Antiquity:<sup>5</sup> Mar Aba, Mar Aba I and Mar Aba II. Gerrit J. Reinink<sup>6</sup> and Oscar Braun<sup>7</sup> distinguished only two of them because they focused on the Catholicoi. They ignored Mar Aba, the disciple of St. Ephrem (ca. 400). Rubens Duval explicitly noticed that we should not confuse this disciple of St. Ephrem with the Nestorian patriarchs Mar Aba I and Mar Aba II.<sup>8</sup>

If we accept the sentence in the margin of manuscript number twenty as a reliable source, as Reinink<sup>9</sup> and Duval<sup>10</sup> confirmed, it reveals that there was a Mar Aba who was a disciple of

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<sup>4</sup> A kind of meat that Zoroastrians were using in Persian Empire.

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Braun distinguished only Mar Aba I and Mar Aba II. He also mentioned Mar Aba Išô'yahb von Gedâlâ (628-644). Cf. Oscar Braun, "Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der persischen Gotteslehre", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 57 (1903), 565. And many other martyr Abas. Read more in: Paulus Bedjan, (ed.), *Acta Martyrum ET Sanctorum*, VII, (Leipzig, Otto Harrassowitz, 1897), 225, 361, 359-363, 367, 393-395, 401-427.

<sup>6</sup> Gerrit J. Reinink, "Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangelienkommentars der Gannat Bussame", *CSCO* 414, Subs. 57. Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, (1979), 61.

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Braun, *ibid*, 565.

<sup>8</sup> Rubens Duval, *Le Littérature Syriacque*, (Paris, J. Gabalda, 1907), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Gerrit J. Reinink, "Neue Fragmente zum Diatessaronkommentar des Ephraemsschülers Aba", *OLP* 11(1980), 117, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Rubens Duval, *ibid*, 64.

Ephrem.<sup>11</sup> He was an interpreter of the New Testament,<sup>12</sup> the author of the ‘Book of Mind’,<sup>13</sup> a discourse about the Book of Job, and he wrote an explanation of verse 9 of Psalm XLII.<sup>14</sup>

Catholicos Mar Aba II<sup>15</sup> (reigned 741-751), son of Brik Şebyaneh,<sup>16</sup> was born in 641 near Kaşkar<sup>17</sup> and lived one hundred ten years.<sup>18</sup> He was a commentator on some parts of the New Testament<sup>19</sup> and appeared to have some fondness for Theodore of Mopsuestia<sup>20</sup> and Greek rhetoric.<sup>21</sup> Mar Aba II was known as a philosopher and a linguist. He introduced Aristotle’s Logic into Persia. Khusrau II also sent him to Byzantine Emperor Maurice as an envoy.

There was also Mar Aba of Katina or Maribas, who translated a Chaldean book into Greek by order of Alexander around BC 125<sup>22</sup> or BC 150.<sup>23</sup> It seems to me that we should not confuse Maribas with Mar Aba I, of whom we find a mention in Frédéric Macler’s article.<sup>24</sup> He has

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<sup>11</sup> Sebastian P. Brock and Lucas Van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir Al- Surian, Wadi Al-Natrun Egypt*, (Leuven, Peeters, 2014), 552.

<sup>12</sup> François Nau, “Fragments de Mar Aba, Disciple de Saint Ephrem”, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 7. 17 (1912), 69/70 & 72/73.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian P. Brock and Lucas Van Rompay, “The Syriac manuscripts of Deir al-Surian: some first impression”, *Newsletter of the Levantine Foundation* 1 (2006), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Rubens Duval, *ibid*, 64. And Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, (Bonn, A. Marcus und E. Webers, 1922), 66.

<sup>15</sup> Bar Hebraeus wrote his name “Aba bishop of Kashkar”. Cf. Gregorii Barhebraei, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum III*, (Parisiis, Maisoneuve, 1877), 153.

<sup>16</sup> The orthography of this name is from Reinink. Cf. Gerrit J. Reinink, “Aba II of Kashkar”, in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of Syriac Heritage*, (USA, Gorgias Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Gerrit J. Reinink, “Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangelienkommentars der Gannat Bussame”, *ibid*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Philip Penn, “When Christians First Met Muslims”, (California, Uni. of California Press, 2015), ProQuest Ebook Central. Web. 27 October 2016. Created from Unisalzburg- eBooks on 2016-10-27 00:48:55, 1. Michael Penn believes he wrote a large number of works, but most of them are not survived. *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Luke 1, 1/2 & 35. Cf. Gerrit J. Reinink, “Die Mar Aba-Quelle im Lukaskommentar der Gannat Bussame (Evangeliumlektionen der Adventszeit) und Ihre Beziehung zu den Turgāmê des Moses Bar Kepha”, in *XX. Deutscher Orientalistentag vom 3. bis 8. Oktober 1977 in Erlangen: Vorträge*. Edited by Voigt, Wolfgang. *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Supplement 4. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, (1980), 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 172.

<sup>21</sup> Gerrit J. Reinink, “Aba II of Kashkar”, *ibid*, 2. And in other article of Reinink: Gerrit J. Reinink, “Rhetorik in der Homilie zu Jes. 52, 13-53, 12 des Katholikos Mar Aba II. Von Kaşkar”, 307-316 in *IV Symposium Syriacum*, 1984: *Literary Genres in Syriac Literature* (Groningen – Oosterhesselen 10/12 September). Edited by Drijvers, Han J.W. and Lavenant, René and Molenberg, Corrie and Reinink, Gerrit J. *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 229. Roma: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, (1987), 308.

<sup>22</sup> Frédéric Macler, “Extraits de la Chronique de Maribas Kaldoyo (Mar Abas Katina [?])”. *Essai de critique historico-littéraire*, *Journal asiatique* X, 1 (1903), 493.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 491.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 496.



been introduced into the history of Armenians by Movses Khorenatsi.<sup>25</sup> He was in Nisibis and he went to Nineveh to research the history of Armenia.<sup>26</sup>

## B- Significance of the study

In the study of Christianity in the West,<sup>27</sup> the Church of the East which had various names during its history such as the “East Syrian Church, Babylonian Church, Seleucian Church, Edessan Church, Persian Church, Chaldean Syrian Church, Nestorian Church, and Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East”,<sup>28</sup> is usually a marginal or less important subject,<sup>29</sup> whereas it had a significant role in extending Christianity, at least in Asia.<sup>30</sup> This church, with its own rich literary and spiritual heritage, in the middle Ages was larger than any Western Church, with followers in Central and South Asia<sup>31</sup> as well as China. Until around the early fifteenth century, this church played a significant role in the Middle East and in global Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Now the history of this church is buried in the depths of ancient times.<sup>33</sup> Throughout its history this church suffered various schisms<sup>34</sup> and lost its manuscripts, churches, monasteries and cultural institutions.<sup>35</sup> In the last century, during the First World War, it lost one-third of its leaders and population.<sup>36</sup>

This research on Mar Aba I is an opportunity to think about one of its great Catholicoi. He had a significant role in controlling prolonged tensions in the leadership of this church and he strengthened its structure by his own management.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Paul Vetter, “Das Buch des Mar Abas von Nisibis”, in *Festgruss an Rudolf von Roth zum Doctor-Jubiläum 24. August 1893 von seinen Freunden und Schülern*. Edited by Kuhn, Ernst. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, (1893), 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Europe and America.

<sup>28</sup> Aprem Mooken, “The Assyrian Church of the East throughout History”, in *The Anaphoral Genesis of the Institution Narrative in Light of the Anaphora of Addai and Mari*, Cesare Girauda, (ed.), (Roma, Pontificio Istituto Orientale & Valore Italian<sup>TM</sup>, 2013), 82.

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm Baum & Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East*, (London, Routledge Curzon, 2003), XI.

<sup>30</sup> T. V. Philip, *East of the Euphrates*, (Delhi, CSS & ISPCCK, 1998), XIII.

<sup>31</sup> India.

<sup>32</sup> Heleen Murre-Van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500-1850)*, (Leuven, Peeters, 2015), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel D. Benjamin, *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, V.

<sup>36</sup> Dietmar Winkler, “Between Progress and Setback: The Ecumenical Dialogues of the Assyrian Church of the East”, in *Syriac Dialogue*, Johann Marte & Gerhard Wilflinger (eds.), (Austria, Ferdinand Berge & Söhne, 2001), 138.

Mar Aba I converted from Zoroastrianism to Christianity and became the Catholicos of Church of the East. He not only peacefully diminished the tensions between the defenders of Ališa‘ and Narsai, but also reinforced the structure of the Church of the East. In addition, he was helpful to the king of Persia in solving internal rebellions and increasing Christian-Zoroastrian integration. In spite of suffering many tortures, he never threatened the security of the Zoroastrians in the Sasanian Empire. He had many options to decrease his suffering, such as contacts with Justinian, Emperor of the West, or using the Christians’ capacity in the court of Khusrau.

## C- Methodology, goals and structure of work

### C-1 Methodology

In chapter one I pursue a historical study to give a general outline of Christianity in Persia up to the end of the Sasanians. The only viable approach to this is to use the descriptive-biographical method based on primary and secondary sources. I will employ an explanatory perspective to elucidate the importance of Mar Aba I during his administration as Catholicos and his actions to reunite this church. I will also follow him through the contacts he made when he was exiled and when he returned from exile. Other characteristics of his will emerge as I present this material.

### C-2 Goals and structure of work

In this master thesis I want to achieve the following goals:

- Distinguishing Mar Aba I from three others.
- Providing an overview of the history of the Church of the East and the Sasanian Empire up to the early seventh century and introducing the importance of Mar Aba I’s decisions.
- Giving a review of the biography of Mar Aba I
- Answering the question of why Mar Aba I was important in the Church of the East in his times

The aforementioned aims will be achieved by a review of the history of Christianity in the Sasanian Empire in three parts in chapter one: in the Parthian period, the Sasanian Empire until 540 AD, and from Catholicos Mar Aba I until the attacks of the Arabs.

In chapter two I will write about the life of Mar Aba I and his academic activities. Furthermore, I will discuss his importance for Zoroastrians, for academic centers and for the Church of the East up to the early seventh century. The conclusion and bibliography will round out this text.

# I: Christianity in the Sasanian Empire

## 1- Christianity in the Persian Empire before the Sasanians

The dynasty which was in power at the time of the appearance of Christianity and its initial growth in Persia was that of the Parthians. In spite of some historical debate about the date this dynasty was established, we know that the Seleucids handed over the government of Persia to the Parthians between BC 250-235.<sup>37</sup> The Parthians led the longest-lasting government in the history of Persia-Iran.<sup>38</sup> They continued their leadership for about 475 years.<sup>39</sup> About 224 years of this period falls within the Christian era.<sup>40</sup> During the first two centuries of Christianity, up until the fall of the Parthians, we find the name of some kings such as Vologeses I, II, III, IV, V, Osroes<sup>41</sup> and Vologeses VI.<sup>42</sup>

The Parthians were worthy of consideration because of more than just some of their artistic expressions and styles.<sup>43</sup> Because of their tradition of religious tolerance, scholars characterize their era as a period of peace, a time when all non-Zoroastrian minorities, including Christians, lived in peace and freedom.<sup>44</sup> In this dynasty, politics and cultural policies were at an intermediate point between the Achaemenid and Sasanian identities. The aspects of the Achaemenid Empire (BC 559-330) which we find in the Sasanian Empire were transmitted by the Parthians. They did more than inherit the title “king of kings” from the Achaemenids and transmit it to later dynasties<sup>45</sup> (a title which is still used directly and indirectly). They also inherited a system of fairness in administration which reached its peak in the reigns of Khusrau

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<sup>37</sup> Klaus Schippmann, “ARSACIDS ii. The Arsacid dynasty,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, II/5, 525-536, available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arsacids-ii>.

<sup>38</sup> “Iran” has been the formal name of the country since the Cabinet decree of Reza Shah on the January 1, 1927. I acquired this document and read it. Its complementary documents are kept in some institutes in Berlin, where I was able to obtain some of them.

<sup>39</sup> Klaus Schippmann, *ibid.* The writer of *Farsnama* estimated the length of this dynasty as 429 years. Cf. Ibnu’l-Balkhí, *The Fársnáma*, G. Le Strange and R. A. Nicholson, (eds.), reprint, (Belgium, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1921), 16. If we accept the validity of this figure, the Sasanian dynasty lasted five months and twenty days more than any other dynasty in Persian history. Cf. *ibid.*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Around the end of the reign of Šapūr ibn-I Aškān, Jesus Christ appeared in Palestine. Cf. *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/arsacids-ii>.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sasanian-dynasty>

<sup>43</sup> Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart, *The Age of the Parthians*, (New York, I. B. Tauris & Co, 2007), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Ehsan Yarshater, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, (Cambridge, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1983), 928.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, the first king of the Sasanians used this title in 226 AD. Cf. Klaus Schippmann, *ibid.*

I and Catholicos Mar Aba I. Both of them carried out fair reforms during their reigns, in a tradition that stemmed from the Parthians and Achaemenids.

Internal fighting with the remnants of the Seleucids<sup>46</sup> and external wars with the Romans<sup>47</sup> occupied the Parthians. Moreover, in the early centuries of Christianity, Christians were not powerful or influential during the Parthian period. Beyond all of these matters, the tolerance that the Parthian governors practiced appeared to create an appealing situation for all minorities,<sup>48</sup> especially for Christians.<sup>49</sup> They did not exercise a rigid, centralized control over their territory. Thus, for example, their dominions in Mesopotamia had some degree of autonomy.<sup>50</sup> Therefore we find Christians present from the middle of the second century<sup>51</sup> and some bishoprics established by Christians in the territories under the authority of the Parthian government.<sup>52</sup> The strength of Christians grew within the tolerant lands of the Arsacids (another name for the Parthians).<sup>53</sup> Because of the tolerance of Parthian kings,<sup>54</sup> and because of the violence of the Romans, Jews and Christians decided to take refuge in Persia.<sup>55</sup> In the aftermath of these events, the Abgar family in Edessa accepted the authority of the Parthians<sup>56</sup> and the Parthians recognized Abgar as “king of kings.”<sup>57</sup>

The three wise men known as magi who were looking for the Christ child in Jerusalem<sup>58</sup> as seen as the oldest indication of a Persian Christian tradition. There are some traces of this event in

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Bruns, “Bemerkungen zu den juristischen Grundlagen der Christenverfolgungen im Sasanidenreich”, in *Dona sunt pulcherrima: Festschrift für Rudolf Rieks, Katrin Herrmann and Klaus Geus*, (eds.), (Oberhaid, Utopica, 2008), 322.

<sup>49</sup> Geographically, Christianity originated in Palestine. Cf. Heral Suermann, “Bedeutung und Selbstverständnis des Katholikos-Patriarchen in Seleukia-Ktesiphon”, Arafa Mustafa, Jürgen Tubach und G. Sophia Vashalomidze, *Inkulturations des Christentums im Sasanidenreich*, (Wiesbaden, Reichert Verlag, 2007), 227.

<sup>50</sup> Judah B. Segal, *Edessa ‘The Blessed City’*, (USA, Gorgias Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Philip Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert*, (Oxford, Oxford Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>52</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: The Thousand Years of Uncertainty (A.D. 500- A. D. 1500)*, (New York and London, Harper and Brothers publisher, 1938), 263. And Yahya Armajani, “CHRISTIANITY viii. Christian Missions in Persia,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, pp. 344-47; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-viii>.

<sup>53</sup> James R. Russell, “CHRISTIANITY i. In Pre-Islamic Persia: Literary Sources” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, pp. 327-28; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-i>.

<sup>54</sup> William A. Wigram, *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church of the Sassanian Persian Empire (100-640)*, (New York, E. S. Gorham, 1910), 31.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1: *Beginning to 1500*, (USA, HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Judah B. Segal, *ibid*, 11-14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. <http://www.bibleinfo.com/en/questions/what-were-names-three-wise-men>.

Matthew 2: 5<sup>59</sup> & 6<sup>60</sup>, Numbers 24: 17,<sup>61</sup> and Daniel 9: 25 & 26.<sup>62</sup> Eusebius mentioned “the magi” who came from the east<sup>63</sup> to find Jesus Christ. It is said that Addai, Aggai and Mari evangelized Persia during the period of Parthians.<sup>64</sup> Addai was one of the seventy-two<sup>65</sup> apostles who was sent to Edessa by Judas Thomas because of the request of Abgar.<sup>66</sup> Aggai expanded the missionaries of Addai to Mesopotamia.<sup>67</sup> Christianity in Asia was influenced by missionary activity.<sup>68</sup> According to tradition, the mission to the Parthian territories was begun by Thomas.<sup>69</sup>

We do not follow David Wilmshurst, who mentioned that the history of the Church of the East up to the fourth century is shrouded in mystery.<sup>70</sup> While we do not have access to primary sources, this does not mean that the fact is a mystery. In fact, there are some traces of Christianity from the earliest period in lyric, epic, didactic and mystical literature<sup>71</sup> as well as in legends.<sup>72</sup> For instance, in a Parthian hymn Jesus is called Yišō ‘ Zīwā.<sup>73</sup> We find the earliest documentation of the presence of Christians in Persia in Gilan<sup>74</sup> and among the Kushanians.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matthew%202.5-6>.

<sup>60</sup> <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/2-6.htm>.

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/search=Numbers24:17>.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/daniel/passage/?q=daniel+9:25-26>.

<sup>63</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, English translation by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991), 94.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. T.V. Philip, *ibid*, 37/38.

<sup>65</sup> George Phillips, (Eng. Trans.), *The Doctrine of Addai, The Apostle*, (London, Trübner & Co., 1876), III. This is the Armenian version. In Eusebius’ version Addai was one of the seventy apostles. *Ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Ehsan Yarshater, *ibid*, 926. With regard to Aggai joining Addai in his ministry of extending Christianity to Mesopotamia, cf. George Phillips, *ibid*, 33, 39, 45-47.

<sup>68</sup> T.V. Philip, *ibid*, X.

<sup>69</sup> Eusebius, *ibid*, 132. He described the expansion of Christianity as being aided by heavenly power with divine co-operation, the doctrine of the Savior, something like the rays of the sun which quickly illumined the whole world in accordance with the divine Scriptures. The voice of the inspired evangelists and apostles went forth through all the earth. Their words reached the ends of the earth. Churches quickly arose in every city and village. They were filled with multitudes of people. Cf. *ibid*, 107. It is noteworthy that this general description occurred in the context of the Parthian and Sasanian policy of religious tolerance, as well as the acceptance of the truth by the people, which is evident in the Magians’ search for the king of the Jews. Cf. *ibid*, 94.

<sup>70</sup> David Wilmshurst, *The Martyred Church*, (London, East & West publishing, 2011), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Qamar Āryān, “CHRISTIANITY vi. In Persian Literature,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, 339/42; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-vi>.

<sup>72</sup> Joel Walker, “From Nisibis to Xi’an: The Church of the East in the Late Antique”, in, *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Scott Fitzgerald, (ed.), (USA, Oxford Uni. Press, 2012), 997.

<sup>73</sup> Werner Sundermann, “CHRISTIANITY v. Christ in Manicheism,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, 335/39; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-v>.

<sup>74</sup> At present this is a province in northern Iran.

<sup>75</sup> They ruled a dynasty from the first through the third centuries AD in Central Asia and northern India. Cf. Adrian David Hugh Bivar “KUSHAN DYNASTY i. Dynastic History,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2014, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kushan-dynasty-i-history>.

76. ܠܗ ܠܘܣܬܪܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܒܝܬܝܢ ܕܕܓܠܝܝܢ ܘܕܟܘܫܢܝܢ ܠܐ ܘܢܩܘܠܘܬܝܢ ܥܘܠܘܬܝܢ ܥܘܠܘܬܝܢ.

“Our sisters among the Geli and the Kushanians do not have intercourse with foreigners.”<sup>77</sup>

It is a notable point that Christians in Edessa knew of the presence of Christians in Persia in the second century.<sup>78</sup> This presence of Christians is in post-apostolic times.<sup>79</sup> The expansion and growth of this church occurred by attracting Jewish and non-Jewish converts.<sup>80</sup> The earliest sign of this is found in Acts 2.9, which indicates that some Christians are from the Parthian sphere.<sup>81</sup> The tolerant policy in the Parthian Empire, which followed the Achaemenid tradition in their treatment of minorities; the latter is documented in some passages in the books of Isaiah,<sup>82</sup> Ezekiel and Haggai, and also in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, and Esther.<sup>83</sup>

Dynastic struggles weakened the Parthians<sup>84</sup> so much that they were unable to defeat Ardašīr on 28 April 224 in the region of what is now Golpāyegān, Between Isfahan and Nehāvand. Therefore Ardašīr established the Sasanian dynasty in 224 AD.<sup>85</sup>

## 2- Christianity in the Sasanian Empire till 540 AD

The tolerance of the Parthians continued at first in the Sasanian period as well.<sup>86</sup> The radical political developments in Persia,<sup>87</sup> the replacement of the Parthians by the Sasanians, increased the freedom of the minorities and helped Christians to develop an independent church from the fifth century onward. A notable point is that during the first century of the Sasanian Empire, the persecution of Christians increased in the Roman Empire, beginning around 249 AD in the reign

<sup>76</sup> W-la aḥwaten d-bayt Gelie w-bayt Qaišānāye qaštōtpan ‘am noḳraye. Cf. Han Jan. Willem Drijvers, *The Book of The Laws of Countries*, (The Netherlands, Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 1964), 60.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>78</sup> Alphonse Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: A new document*, (Manchester, Manchester Uni. Press, 1925), 301.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 298.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Joel Walker, *ibid*, 1000. And Philip Wood, *ibid*, 22.

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/read/eng/CEV/Acts/2/9/?redirect>.

<sup>82</sup> 40/55.

<sup>83</sup> Muchammad Abdulkadyrowitsch Dandamayev, “BIBLE i. As a Source for Median and Achaemenid History”, in <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bible-i>.

<sup>84</sup> Jacob Neusner, “The Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism”, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (March, 1964), 65.

<sup>85</sup> Klaus Schippmann, *ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> Ernst, E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran*, (London, Oxford Uni. Press, 1935), 103.

<sup>87</sup> This is the theme of another line of research that answers the question of how the policies of the Sasanians supported the establishment of the Church of the East, in spite of some persecution. For more about what I have mentioned, cf. Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 93.

of Decius and then again under Diocletian (303-304 AD).<sup>88</sup> Therefore, a stream of Christian refugees fled to the territories of the Sasanian Empire. These refugees strengthened the missionary activity of Christians<sup>89</sup> in the Persian Empire. Christianity, Eastern Judaism and Manichaeism all expanded during this dynasty.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the formation of the Church of the East started about the end of the second century and continued during the third century.

In the fourth century, we find an empire-wide community without a single head. However, its structure includes bishops, priests, and deacons.<sup>91</sup> The synod of Isaac (410) marked the beginning of the “antiochianisation” or “westernization” of the Church of the East;<sup>92</sup> this structuring of the church began in Seleucia-Ctesiphon.<sup>93</sup> Three elements combined to shape the Church of the East. These elements were the consensus of the bishops, the support of the Persian Emperor<sup>94</sup> and the relationship with the patriarchate of Antioch as the representative of the Western church.<sup>95</sup> This council adopted the Nicene Creed, decided to keep only one bishop in any diocese (who must be consecrated by three other bishops) and reached an agreement on the dates of the great feasts such as Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday and Easter.<sup>96</sup> In this synod, the bishops announced the six provinces of Persia.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, this synod provided much needed order and discipline for the ecclesiastical administration of the Church of the East.<sup>98</sup> Before the synod of Isaac, the synod of 315 played a crucial role on the self-definition of the Church of the East, where most Persian bishops consecrated the head of their church.<sup>99</sup> However, the council of 424 AD figured the autonomy of this church from the Western church.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, (Great Britain, T. & T. Clark, 1928), 7/8.

<sup>89</sup> Not the “Church of the East” that John Stewart mentioned. Cf. John Stewart, *ibid*, 7. In this period of time, the Church of the East was not yet extant.

<sup>90</sup> Shaul Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, (UK, Taylor & Francis, 2005), 1.

<sup>91</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 117.

<sup>92</sup> Baby Varghese, “East Syrian Liturgy during the Sasanid Period”, in Arafa Mustafa, Jürgen Tubach und G. Sophia Vashalomidze, *ibid*, 275.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 272.

<sup>94</sup> Yazdegerd I (399-420/421).

<sup>95</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 151/152.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>97</sup> Ehsan Yarshater, *ibid*, 932.

<sup>98</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid*, 18.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Aprem Mookken, *ibid*, 84.



The Church of the East did not appear because of theological controversies;<sup>101</sup> it was a result of diversity in unity.<sup>102</sup> The eminent position of Christianity in Persia stemmed from the role of the two swords of the law in moving this religion toward being a dominant religious option for Iranians.<sup>103</sup> The two swords are the faith of Christianity and its support for the Persian kings. I am adding to the statement of Sebastian Brock, who mentioned a close connection between Christians and Persian governors around the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth.<sup>104</sup> In the sixth century relations between the Church of the East and the government in Persia changed from something like resistance and animosity to cooperation.<sup>105</sup> Throughout the period of Catholicos Mar Aba I there was an affinity between the head of the Church of the East and the king of Persia.<sup>106</sup>

In the early Sasanian Empire, while Rome persecuted Christians, the tolerant policy of the Magians made it possible for Christianity to grow in Persia.<sup>107</sup> They allowed diversity within their borders.<sup>108</sup> Therefore a diocese under a bishop was established in the capital. The bishop of this diocese centralized the Christian hierarchy in the Empire.<sup>109</sup>

Over the course of twenty-five years of Sasanian rule, we can find sixty Christian tombs on Karg Island.<sup>110</sup> Not only on this island, but also in the regions around the Persian Gulf, there is evidence of some Christian communities.<sup>111</sup> Based on archeological excavations, the earliest traces of Christian communities in the Persian Empire have been found on the Euphrates River in 232 AD.<sup>112</sup> The first century of the Sasanians was a time of expansion without any obstacles

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<sup>101</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 169.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 199.

<sup>103</sup> Touraj Daryaei, "The Idea of Ērānšahr: Jewish, Christian and Manichaean views in Late Antiquity", in *Iranian Identity in the course of History*, Carlo G. Cereti, (ed.), (Roma, Instituto Italiano per L'Africa E L'Oriente, 2010), 92.

<sup>104</sup> There is an annotation on this matter by Sebastian Brock. Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, (London, Variorum Reprints, 1984), 3/4.

<sup>105</sup> Philip Wood, *ibid*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Philip Wood, *ibid*.

<sup>107</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 138.

<sup>108</sup> Michael G. Morony, "Should Sasanian Iran be included in Late Antiquity?", *E-Sasanika* 1 (2008), 2.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. William G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph*, (Pakistan, Christian Study Centre, 1974), 21.

<sup>110</sup> James R. Russell, "CHRISTIANITY i. In Pre-Islamic Persia: Literary Sources" in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, pp. 327-28; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-i>. About some of these Christian tombs, cf. E. Haerinck, "Quelques monuments funéraires de l'Île de Kharg," *Iranica Antiqua* 11, 1975, 137-43. Also cf. Ernst, E. Herzfeld, *ibid*.

<sup>111</sup> Ernst, E. Herzfeld, *ibid*.

<sup>112</sup> Carl. H. Kraeling, *The Christian Building, The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report 8/2*, (New Haven, Conn., 1967), 34-39.

put in place by the government.<sup>113</sup> A survey of the available research reveals that during the governments of the first eight Sasanian kings, with the exception of Varhram II (276-293), the Persian churches grew and multiplied in peace.<sup>114</sup> A large number of Christians can be documented in the first half of the fourth century.<sup>115</sup> The Sasanian rulers followed a policy that is called “creeping monotheism” and avoided being strictly orthodox.<sup>116</sup> This is why Christians, in their synodical documents, mentioned that Sasanian kings were not always hostile to the Christian church.<sup>117</sup>

It is of interest to see the labels given to Christians in the Sasanian Empire. In the third century, the Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, in the inscription on the Ka‘ba-ye Zardošt called Christians KLSTYD’N, N’CL’Y, and Tarsāq.<sup>118</sup>

Until the third and early fourth centuries, Edessa and Arbela were the most important Christian centers in the Persian Empire.<sup>119</sup> These two cities were the main route through which Christianity spread to Asia around the end of the second century as well.<sup>120</sup> Edessa had the buffer role between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire.<sup>121</sup> However, Christianity arrived in Persia, but it did not stagnate there. It was transmitted on to central Asia,<sup>122</sup> India, and China. From the fifth century onwards, Christian communities in Persia were stable. The government accepted Christians as a reliable community.<sup>123</sup> This is the reason why Khusrau I asked Catholicos Mar Aba I to solve the rebellions in Khuzistan as well as in Susiana<sup>124</sup> and Gundešābuhr.<sup>125</sup> The choice of Mar Aba I was a sign of the perspicacity of the king of Persia.

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<sup>113</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*, 109.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>115</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *ibid*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Samuel, H. Moffett, *ibid*.

<sup>117</sup> Alan Williams, “Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanian Iran”, *Bulletin of John Rylands, University Library of Manchester* 78: 3 (1996), 41.

<sup>118</sup> Its Sogdian version is “Trs’q” and in New Persian it is “Tarsā”. Cf. James R. Russell, *ibid*.

<sup>119</sup> Nicholas Sims-Williams, “CHRISTIANITY iii. In Central Asia And Chinese Turkestan,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, pp. 330-34; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-iii>.

<sup>120</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, XIV/XV.

<sup>121</sup> Aprem Mookan, *ibid*, 83.

<sup>122</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 100.

<sup>123</sup> Touraj Daryaee, *ibid*, 95.

<sup>124</sup> A city in Khuzistan. Cf. Eduard Sachau, *Die Chronik von Arbela*, (Berlin, Der König. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1915), 6.

<sup>125</sup> Manfred Hutter, “Mār Abā and the Impact of Zoroastrianism of Christianity in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century”, in *Religious Themes and Texts of Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, Carlo G. Cereti, Mauro Maggi and Elio Provasi (eds.), (Wisbaden, DR. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2003), 167. Ja(h)balaha wrote only ‘Beth Huzaye’. Cf. Paulus Bedjan,

He sent an envoy who was originally from Susiana and therefore had special influence on the Christians in that area. Khusrau I<sup>126</sup> did not send him only as the leader of the Church of the East. His talent for managing tensions was probably another reason why he was chosen as the king's commissioner. The ability of Mar Aba I was revealed in his contacts with "others." It was also apparent in his management of the followers of the Church of the East in the Persian Empire. Among them he played a significant role in resolving internal conflicts and extending Christianity in Asia. This helped to preserve it for its subsequent developments under the attacks of Arabs, Turks and Mongols.

In spite of occasional persecution especially und Šāpūr II, Sasanians in their period of rule in Persia helped Christians to form their own Church,<sup>127</sup> which is sometimes known as the Magian church<sup>128</sup> or the Persian (East Syrian) church.<sup>129</sup> They also helped to transmit Christianity to Central Asia.<sup>130</sup> A positive interaction between the Sasanian government and the hierarchy of Christians in Persia,<sup>131</sup> especially until the end of the patriarchate of Mar Aba I, had as a result that the Church of the East and all Christians in the Persian Empire had much more steady and striking growth during the Sasanian period than under the Muslims.<sup>132</sup>

I want to answer the question of why Christianity in Persia prospered, became centralized and grew, so much so that it even reached China and India. This success seems to have arisen from three levels of incidents: First, the legendary history of the three Magi and the natural desire of people in Persia to find and follow the truth. Second, the persecution and deportation of Christians from the eastern Roman Empire during the series of wars between Rome and

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(ed.), *Histoire de Mar-Ja(h)balaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques nestoriens*, (Paris: Otto Harrassowitz, 1893), 269. Manfred Hutter mentioned that this rebellion was led by Anōšazād, a son of Khusrau I, but Christians supported him. Consequently, the king of Persia asked Mar Aba to deal with it. Therefore, Mar Aba sent a letter to the Christians there. Cf. Manfred Hutter, *ibid*.

<sup>126</sup> He is known as the second Cyrus. Cf. Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), *ibid*, 946.

<sup>127</sup> Qamar Āryān, "CHRISTIANITY vi. In Persian Literature," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. V, fasc. 5, Costa Mesa, 1991, 339/42; available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/christianity-vi>.

<sup>128</sup> William A. Wigram, *ibid*, 22.

<sup>129</sup> T. V. Philip, *ibid*, X.

<sup>130</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *ibid*, 5.

<sup>131</sup> For more about the position of Christians in the Sasanian Empire, see Philip Wood, *ibid*, 13.

<sup>132</sup> William G. Young, *ibid*, 49.

Persia.<sup>133</sup> Third, a historical point of view regarding human rights. The main claim of the Sasanian rulers was that they called themselves followers of the Medes and the Achaemenids.<sup>134</sup>

It seems to me that the revival of Zoroastrianism and the reestablishment of the glory of ancient Persia resulted from the idea that everyone depends on his own capacity and ability. This showed the Sasanians' ideal of fairness without regard to sex, age or religion.<sup>135</sup> They demonstrated a kind of tolerance toward minorities and understanding of the true rights of all people. So when we find the tax reforms of Khusrau I and some other reforms of Mar Aba I carried out under the slogan of following the tradition of Achaemenids, it is not just a motto. It is a quality and a level of intent to act, accompanied by behavior that displays fairness. It is not a simple two-part project featuring the earthly protagonists of Zoroastrianism and the heirs of the Achaemenids dynasty.<sup>136</sup> It is a natural desire to follow the truth which appears in decisions. We find some traces of this natural desire in the hospitality shown to Christian missionaries in 19th century in Azerbaijan.

It is hard to grasp the opinion of Ehsan Yarshater, who claimed that the Sasanians established their own orthodoxy by choosing Zoroastrianism as the main religion in their Empire.<sup>137</sup> His statement confirms my idea when we compare it with his idea that Zoroastrianism was not just a further development of the religion of the Achaemenian Empire which respected the "others."<sup>138</sup> This is the point on which Mar Aba I based on his teaching in Nisibis,<sup>139</sup> Arzun and some other important centers in the Byzantine Empire where he learned how to deal with "others". This is how he was able to heal the fifteen previous years of tension and schisms while

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<sup>133</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid*, XIV.

<sup>134</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 106.

<sup>135</sup> I have written an article about the political economy of the Persepolis tablets. It is I have demonstrated their fairness not only to people but also to animals. They went so far as to provide wine for their donkeys during their travels.

<sup>136</sup> Averil Cameron, (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, (New Jersey, The Darwin Press, 1995), 160.

<sup>137</sup> Ehsan Yarshater, *ibid*, 820.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 863.

<sup>139</sup> For more about Nisibis, see Philip Wood, *ibid*, 27. Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*. CSCO 266, Subs. 26, (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1965). Adam Howard Becker, *Devotional Study: The School of Nisibis and the Development of "Scholastic" Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty Of Princeton University In Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, January 2004. Adam Howard Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, (Philadelphia, Uni. Of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

strengthening the foundations of this church.<sup>140</sup> He carried out the necessary reforms<sup>141</sup> that went along with the tax reforms of Khusrau I in Persian.

### 3- Khusrau I tax reform<sup>142</sup>

It seems that the relief of longstanding tensions in the leadership of the Church of the East, as well as other reforms in this church by Mar Aba I, arose in the context of the reforms that Khusrau I carried out during his reign in Persia.<sup>143</sup> This reform started during the reign of the father of Khusrau I,<sup>144</sup> when he decreased the tax rate from one-fourth and one-third to one-tenth.<sup>145</sup> It is worth noting that the reforms of Khusrau I were not limited to taxes. He also reorganized the army, the administrative system,<sup>146</sup> and religious and fiscal matters.<sup>147</sup> First, he restored the financial well-being of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>148</sup> We know that Mar Aba I was working in the court of Khusrau I or as the secretary of the Marzbān of Beth Arāmāyē,<sup>149</sup> and this means that he was knowledgeable of the reform policies of the father of Khusrau I and the series of attempts by rulers from the time of Kawād onward to bring about corrections in the lives of the population.<sup>150</sup> The sense of the need for these improvements came from a perception of increasingly oppressive taxation, which had become ever more onerous as the fifth century drew to a close.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> The Church of the East.

<sup>141</sup> Averil Cameron, *ibid*, 233.

<sup>142</sup> I mention in the text that the reform of Khusrau I include different areas. Why did I choose tax reform as the section title? Because the main problem of the Sasanian Empire at the end of the fifth century was oppressive taxation. Khusrau I based his reform on a fair system.

<sup>143</sup> It is conceivable that when Mar Aba I took his seat as Catholicos during the early years of the reign of Khusrau I, while the reform of the king of kings was starting Mar Aba I suffered because of the division in the leadership of the Church of the East. His priority was reform in the leadership of this church. On the other hand, we should briefly review the reform of Khusrau I.

<sup>144</sup> Kawād.

<sup>145</sup> Andrea Gariboldi, “The Great “Restoration” of Husrau I”, in *Husraw I<sup>ER</sup> Reconstructions D’un Règne: Sources ET Documents*, Christelle Jullien, *Studia Iranica. Cahier 53* (Paris, Association pour L’Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 2015), 55.

<sup>146</sup> Cristelle Jullien, *ibid*, 5.

<sup>147</sup> Andrea Gariboldi, *ibid*, 48.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>149</sup> Averil Cameron believes that Mar Aba I worked at the court of Khusrau I. Cf. Averil Cameron, *ibid*, 233. However, it seems that the correct statement is that he was the secretary of the marzbān of Beth Arāmāyē. Cf. Joel Walker, *ibid*, 1014.

<sup>150</sup> Averil Cameron, *ibid*. Zeev Rubin believes that reforms that were started in the reign of Kawād were completed during the rule of his son, Khusrau I. Cf. Zeev Rubin, “KOSROW I ii. REFORMS,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2016, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kosrow-i-ii-reforms>.

<sup>151</sup> Zeev Rubin, *ibid*.

Thus we cannot ignore the social circumstances that surrounded the reforms of Mar Aba I in his position as the head of the Church of the East. It is not credible that Mar Aba I could have been aware of four decades of division and decline in the Church of the East.<sup>152</sup> The social circumstances included developments in the leadership of the Church of the East and events in the history of the Sasanian Empire. Averil Cameron describes the tax reform of Khusrau I as a part of a number of far-reaching transformations in the Sasanian Empire.<sup>153</sup> Its aim was to raise fixed revenue for the government and, by not taxing land, to encourage landowners to practice crop rotation.<sup>154</sup>

In the tax reform of Khusrau I, anybody below the age of twenty or above the age of fifty was exempted from paying taxes. Anyone who was struck by disease or who had a chronic ailment was also freed from the obligation of paying taxes.<sup>155</sup> In the area of land taxation, the size of the plot and the kinds of crops were the main criteria for setting fixed tax rates.<sup>156</sup> This policy was based on levying fixed rates on area units according to the kind of their agricultural produce. A restoration was carried out on the lands of farmers to achieve this target.<sup>157</sup> It helped farmers to restart cultivation.<sup>158</sup> Khusrau I also reorganized the military forces. Professional horsemen under his direct command were established. They received their salary from the government during foreign campaigns. Khusrau I also recruited warriors from the landed gentry who wished to have a career in the military.<sup>159</sup> To achieve this goal, the government granted fiscal aid wherever necessary to help them renew their farms.<sup>160</sup> The program of Khusrau I for tax reform is known as an attempt to “modernize” the fiscal system of the Persian Empire and make it more efficient.<sup>161</sup> It was articulated during these reforms.<sup>162</sup>

Tax reform was a part of general projects of reorganization around the Empire carried out by Khusrau I, which increased the might of Persian armies, corrected the bureaucracy and

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<sup>152</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 204.

<sup>153</sup> Averil Cameron, *ibid*, 227.

<sup>154</sup> Philip Wood, *ibid*, 18.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 247. This kind of tax is called a “poll tax” or, in the Arabic sources, “jezya.” Cf. Zeev Rubin, *ibid*.

<sup>156</sup> See more in Zeev Rubin, *ibid*.

<sup>157</sup> Fiscal and tax reform.

<sup>158</sup> Zeev Rubin, *ibid*.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>160</sup> Averil Cameron, *ibid*, 291/292.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

<sup>162</sup> Philip Wood, *ibid*, 19.

championed the rights of the poor.<sup>163</sup> During his reforms and increasing great Zoroastrian families to his court, he accepted many Christians at court as well.<sup>164</sup>

By means of his reforms, Khusrau I inaugurated one of the most magnificent periods of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>165</sup> He restored the tradition of Ardašīr I, Šāpūr I and Šāpūr II.<sup>166</sup> Therefore Khusrau I became a brilliant king in the Sasanian Empire,<sup>167</sup> a proclaimer of Zoroastrianism, who became the head of the council of sages,<sup>168</sup> who restored the power of Persia, who was a friend of science and learning in the way of justice so much so that he earned the epithet “the Just.”<sup>169</sup> He uprooted some of the chief members of key dynastic families from their traditional territories and relocated them to other parts of empire. He put them in charge of the home territories of other families.<sup>170</sup> By this decision, he decreased their power. In this way he diminished their influence in his government. However, among Christians he was known as a generous and merciful benefactor.<sup>171</sup>

A view of the characteristics of Khusrau I found in early sources<sup>172</sup> reveals that his reforms were not just a part of his direction in the Persian Empire. They were rooted in his very personality, which compelled him to lead his empire with justice.

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<sup>163</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*, 221.

<sup>164</sup> Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1971), 166.

<sup>165</sup> Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of Sasanian Empire*, (New York, T.B. Tauris, 2008), 8/84.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

<sup>167</sup> Cristelle Jullien, *ibid*.

<sup>168</sup> Samra Azarnouche, “La Geste Zoroastrienne de Husraw IER Selon la Littérature Moyen-Perse”, in *Husraw IER Reconstructions D’un Règne: Sources et Documents*, *ibid*, 235.

<sup>169</sup> Michael Richard Jackson Bonner, “Sasanian Propaganda in the Reign of Husraw Ānūšīrvān”, in *ibid*, 258.

<sup>170</sup> Parvaneh Pourshariati, *ibid*, 97.

<sup>171</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 224.

مَرِيسَ كَرِهَ مَحَبَّةً وَسَعَةً وَأَمْرًا جَدِيدًا وَكَانَ كَلِمًا مَلِكًا.

Merciful and doer of good things, peaceful and kind, our victorious lord Khusrau, king of kings.

Jean B. Chabot, (ed), *Synodicon Orientale ou Recueil de Synodes Nestoriens*, (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 110.

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Abū Ḥanīfa Ahmed-bn Davood Al-Dīnwarī (815-896), *Al-Aḥbār Aṭīwāl*, Vladimir F. Girgas (1835-1887), (Leiden, Brill, 1888), 74.

أبي منصور الثعالبي، تاريخ غر السير : غر أخبار ملوك الفرس و سيرهم، (تهران، مكتبة الاسدي، 1963).

‘Abd-al-Malik Ibn-Muḥammad Al-Tha‘alibi (961-1038), *Gurar Aḥbār Mulūk al-Furs wa-Siyaruhum: Histoire des Rois des Perses*, Hermann Zotenberg (ed.), (Paris, Imp. Nat. 1900), 603.

أبي جعفر محمد بن جرير الطبري (310-229 هـ)، تاريخ الطبري: تاريخ الرسل والملوك، تحقيق: محمد ابولفضل ابراهيم، الجزء الثاني، الطبعة السادسة، (القاهرة، دار المعارف، 1967)، ص 101.

Al-Tabari, Abu JaLfar Muhammad Ibn Jarir: *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, (Cairo, Dar al-Ma‘arif, 1967), 101. And *Ibnu'l-Balkhī*, *ibid*, 88.

#### 4- Christianity in the Sasanian Empire until the attacks of the Arabs

In this period of time, by reducing the internal tensions of the Church of the East during the administration of Mar Aba I and the reforms of Khusrau I, this church consolidated its position in Persia and neighboring regions.<sup>173</sup> During the simultaneous reforms of Khusrau I in the society of the Sasanian Empire and the reforms of Mar Aba I in the Christians communities, some propitious circumstances arose on the Christian side. Thus, the number of converted Zoroastrians increased.<sup>174</sup>

Khusrau's successor Hormizd IV (579-590) fought off rebellions and attacks in spite of the attacks by Turks from the east, by Byzantines from the west, by Khazars from the northwestern Caspian region and the Arabs from the southwest.<sup>175</sup> He showed benevolence toward the weak and destitute. He also decreased the powers of the nobles.<sup>176</sup> These nobles played a crucial role in annoying Mar Aba I during the rule of Khusrau I, who referred to them during one of his contacts with Mar Aba I.<sup>177</sup> However, Hormozd IV strengthened his authority in Persia and established absolute power by overwhelming those who threatened his place on the throne. If they<sup>178</sup> had been successful, Christians would have faced another wave of martyrdoms.

Khusrau II (590-628) supported Christians in spite of the deception perpetrated by bishops<sup>179</sup> who introduced a fraudulent Gregory in place of the main Gregory as Catholicos, with the result that Khusrau II did not accept anyone else as the Catholicos until the end of his reign.<sup>180</sup> His desire to help Christians stemmed from his favorite Christian wife Širin.<sup>181</sup> And the crucial role of the Byzantines, who attempted to acquire the kingdom of Persia.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Aubrey R. Vine, *The Nestorian Churches*, (London, Independent Press, 2010), 64.

<sup>174</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*, 167.

<sup>175</sup> Parvaneh Pourshariati, *ibid*, 123.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, *ibid*, 118.

<sup>177</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 226 & 254.

<sup>178</sup> Powerful nobles.

<sup>179</sup> Sebastian Brock explained this event carefully. He wrote that synod passed over his idea about the Catholicos. Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, *ibid*, 5.

<sup>180</sup> Philip Wood, *ibid*, 22.

<sup>181</sup> About Širin cf. Wilhelm Baum, *Shirin: Christian- Queen- Myth of Love*, (USA, Gorgias Press, 2004), 25/26 and 30-32.

<sup>182</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *ibid*, 3. In addition to the Byzantines, his uncles helped him. Therefore, after taking power he rewarded them. He gave the position of his prime minister to one of them (Vindhūyih) and that of his Spāhbed to another (Vistāhm). Cf. Parvaneh Pourshariati, *ibid*, 132.



Between the time that Khusrau II lost his throne and Yazdgird III (632-651 AD) became the king of Persia, a dozen monarchs tried to establish themselves as the leader of Sasanian Empire.<sup>183</sup> Finally, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, Yazdgird III<sup>184</sup> rose to the position of the last king of the Sasanian dynasty.

From the time of Mar Aba I until 643, near the time that the attacks of the Arabs devastated the Sasanian Empire in 651, six Catholicos ruled: Joseph (552-567), Ezekiel (570-581), Yeshuyab I (582-595), Sabaryešu' I (596-604), Gregory I (605-608),<sup>185</sup> and after a twenty-year vacancy (608-628), Isho'yahb II (628-643).<sup>186</sup>

Joseph (552-567), with his medical experience in the Byzantine Empire,<sup>187</sup> was the first Catholicos after Mar Aba I. He tried to continue the reforms of Mar Aba I by formulating twenty-three canons<sup>188</sup> in the Synod of 554 to restore order and discipline within the church hierarchy<sup>189</sup> and to warn Catholicos, bishops, priests and lay people.<sup>190</sup> However, his arrogance was a great obstacle to his following in the footsteps of Mar Aba I, although like Mar Aba I he had been educated in the Byzantine Empire. He was therefore unable to bring about many reforms. He made reckless decisions against bishops.<sup>191</sup> He found himself faced with charges of simony, among other abuses.<sup>192</sup> He also was an opponent of the school of Nisibis, whose teachers tried to revolt against the king of Persia.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 161. And Ibnu'l-Balkhī, *ibid*, XXIV & 24-26.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>185</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 233.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>187</sup> ألبير أبونا، أدب اللغة الآرامية، بيروت، دارلمشرق، 1996، ص 156.

Albir Abuna, *Adab al-luġat al-Aramyya*, (Beirut, Dar al-Mashreq, 1996), 156.

<sup>188</sup> These canons were still regarded as valid and acceptable in the time of Timothy I (who became Catholicos in 780). He went so far as to ask Sargis to write Babowai to send him copies of the canons of the church, especially those of Nicea and Mar Aba. Cf. Jean M. Fiey, "Diocèses Syriens Orientaux du Golfe Persique", in Jean Maurice Fiey, *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552*, (London, Variorum reprints, 1979), 205. This was part of a project to compose extensive legal works after the overthrow of the Sasanian Empire by the Arabs. Cf. L. Weitz, "Shaping East Syrian Law in 'Abbāsīd Iraq: The Law Books of Patriarchs Timothy I and Išō' Bar Nū", *Le Muséon* 129-Fasc. 1-2, (Louvain-La-Neuve, Peeters, 2016), 75.

<sup>189</sup> Claudia Rammelt, "...damit so der Frieden der Kirche..", in Ciprian Burlacioiu und Adrain Herman, *Veränderte Landkarten*, (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2013), 44.

<sup>190</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, "Yawsep I of Seleucia-Ctesiphon", in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *ibid*, 435.

<sup>191</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 159.

<sup>192</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, "Yawsep I of Seleucia-Ctesiphon", *ibid*.

<sup>193</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 159/160. And Lucas Van Rompay, "Yawsep I of Seleucia-Ctesiphon", *ibid*.

Ezekiel<sup>194</sup> or Ḥazqiel<sup>195</sup> (570-581) was one of the disciples of Mar Aba I.<sup>196</sup> It seems that he pursued a path that Mar Aba I deliberately avoided.<sup>197</sup> In the synod of 576, he formulated thirty-nine canons. In his first canon he and the bishops they addressed the problem of the ‘Messalians’, whom they considered to be deceitful monks.<sup>198</sup> They also tried to end the activities of the Miaphysites. Other canons are related to church discipline.<sup>199</sup> Canon number thirty-seven forbade the study of secular music by girls.<sup>200</sup>

Isho'yahb I (582-595) was in the position of Catholicos for only two years.<sup>201</sup> He then left that position to become bishop of Arzun.<sup>202</sup> He is one of the very few Catholicoi who first formulated thirty-one canons. Later, as bishop, he arranged twenty canons in addition to his previous canons. He announced these twenty canons in his letter to Ya‘qub, bishop of Darai.<sup>203</sup> He continued the reform of Mar Aba I and based his practices on the doctrines laid out for us in his canons, his creed and his text on the Trisagion<sup>204</sup> during his administration as Catholicos and bishop of Arzun. These are some reasons why he is known as a man of deep learning, skill and experience.<sup>205</sup>

Sabaryešu‘ I (596-604) was born in Beth Garmai (ca. 525) and went to the school of Nisibis. After leaving Nisibis, he went on to live as an ascetic in different regions such as Qardu. He was subsequently consecrated as the bishop of Lashom<sup>206</sup> or Arzun.<sup>207</sup> Albir Abuna insists that he was the bishop of Arzun, for which reason he acquired the epithet ‘Arzunite’.<sup>208</sup> After ascending

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<sup>194</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, “Ḥazqiel”, in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *ibid.*, 193/194.

<sup>196</sup> ألبير أبونا، المرجع السابق، ص 158.

Albir Abuna, *ibid.*, 158.

<sup>197</sup> It seems to me that Mar Aba I did not want to become involved with the theological disputations in which Ḥazqiel used some of his canons in confrontations with the Miaphysites.

<sup>198</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, “Ḥazqiel”, 194. And Jean B. Chabot, (ed.), *ibid.*, 393/394.

<sup>199</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, “Ḥazqiel”, *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.* and Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*, 386.

<sup>201</sup> Arthur Vööbus, 223.

<sup>202</sup> Barḥadbešabba wrote that he became tired. Cf. *ibid.*, 224.

<sup>203</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Isho'yahb I”, in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *ibid.*, 218.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* and Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*, 390-455.

<sup>205</sup> Arthur Vööbus, 223.

<sup>206</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Sabrišo' I”, in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *ibid.*, 355.

<sup>207</sup> ألبير أبونا، المرجع السابق، ص 163.

Albir Abuna, *ibid.*, 163.

<sup>208</sup> ألبير أبونا، المرجع السابق، ص 162.

Albir Abuna, *ibid.*, 162.

to the position of Catholicos in 596, he convened a synod at the request of Khusrau II.<sup>209</sup> This synod approved thirty-one canons. We find some traces of a decrease in religious tensions, such as some decisions against the Messalians and political decisions about the internal policies of the Persian Empire.<sup>210</sup> His approach as Catholicos, especially through his canons, was far from the views of Mar Aba I.

Gregory I (605-608) was one of the teachers of the school of Seleucia before being elected Catholicos.<sup>211</sup> Queen Širin had a special role in his selection as Catholicos.<sup>212</sup> However, he too got involved in theological controversies. He and those he invited to the so-called synod of 605 followed the commentaries and writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia as the main text in the Church of the East.<sup>213</sup> In the synod, they also placed the management of monasteries in the hands of the bishops. They limited the independence of monks.<sup>214</sup>

After Catholicos Gregory I, from 608 until 628, Khusrau II did not accept anyone as Catholicos. This decision was made when the leaders of the Church of the East, during their own period of internal tensions, introduced a fraudulent Catholicos as the person who was accepted as Catholicos by Khusrau II.<sup>215</sup> During the twenty years of vacancy in the office of Catholicos, Babai the Great and an Archdeacon, rather than a Catholicos, directed and solved the problems of Christians.<sup>216</sup>

Isho'yahb II (628-643)<sup>217</sup> studied Antiochene exegesis, the philosophy of Aristotle, and the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia at the school of Nisibis.<sup>218</sup> He was one of those who left this school in opposition to the teachings of Ḥenana of Adiabene. He became bishop of Balad

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<sup>209</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Sabrišo' I”, *ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> ألبير أبونا، المرجع السابق، ص 163.  
Albir Abuna, *ibid.*, 163.

<sup>211</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, “Grigor I”, in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *ibid.*, 183.

<sup>212</sup> Jérôme Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224–632)*. Bibliothèque de l'enseignement de l'histoire ecclésiastique 11, (Paris, V. Lecoffre, 1904), 222.

<sup>213</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, “Grigor I”, *ibid.* And Jérôme Labourt, *ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*, 471-479.

<sup>215</sup> One account of this situation is found in the writings of Arthur Vööbus (*ibid.*, 315-317).

<sup>216</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Babai the Great”, in Sebastian P. Brock et al, *ibid.*, 49. And Arthur Vööbus, *ibid.*, 292.

<sup>217</sup> Sebastian Brock writes that the last year of his catholicate was 645. Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, “Isho'yahb II of Gdala”, in Sebastian Brock et al, *ibid.*, 218.

<sup>218</sup> Dietmar W. Winkler, “Zur christologischen Terminologie des Katholikos-Patriarchen Īšō'ya(h)b II. Von Gdālā (628-646)”, in Arafā Mustafa, Jürgen Tubach und G. Sophia Vashalomidze, *ibid.*, 215. On this page, we also read that the last year of Isho'yahb II was written 646 instead of 643.

even though he had married.<sup>219</sup> He met the Byzantine emperor when, as metropolitan,<sup>220</sup> he accompanied a group of Christian representatives such as Isho'yahb of Arzun (later Catholicos Isho'yahb III) and Sahdona in Aleppo.<sup>221</sup> It is clear that he chose a path far from that of Mar Aba I. He fell in Christological controversies. His few surviving writings attest to this.<sup>222</sup>

After Khusrau II a number of kings with weaker authority over the Sasanian Empire ruled an empire exhausted by long wars with the Byzantine Empire. Because of this weakened authority and the people's frustration with the Zoroastrian hierarchy, as well as a reform of the structure of the Church of the East by Mar Aba I, Babai the Great was able to increase the number of Christians and to formulate their liturgy and canons freely.

In a very concise comparison of the circumstance of Christians in the Sasanian Empire with those that later prevailed under the authority of Arabs, I should note that there were more opportunities for the expansion of Christianity in the Sasanian Empire than during early Muslim rule.<sup>223</sup> This means that the tolerance of the Sasanians had more practical effects than the slogans of the Muslims.

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<sup>219</sup> Ignatius Guidi, (ed.), *Chronica Minora, CSCO, Scriptores Syri, Series Tertia, Tomus IV*, (Parisii, E. Typographeo Reipublicae and Lipsiae, Otto Harrassowitz, 1803), 29.

<sup>220</sup> Dietmar W. Winkler, "Zur christologischen Terminologie des Katholikos-Patriarchen Īšō'ya(h)b II. Von Gdālā (628-646)", *ibid*, 217, as well as personal communication with Winkler in November 2017.

<sup>221</sup> Sebastian Brock, "Isho'yahb II of Gdala", in Sebastian Brock et al, *ibid*.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>223</sup> William G. Young, *ibid*, III.



Ḥūdanbūd<sup>235</sup> or Hamargerd, located in Raḏan in Beth Arāmāyē.<sup>236</sup> Later he traveled from Hamargerd to Ctesiphon.<sup>237</sup>

According to Syriac text Aba was overcome with a great desire to convert to Christianity during his short trip on the Tigris.<sup>238</sup> It is not known whether he felt the first spark of interest in Christianity when he was in Raḏan or when he was in Ctesiphon, but it was in Ctesiphon that he faced his first challenge from those opposed to his conversion to Christianity. He defended his Christian faith seriously. He was ready to be imprisoned rather than leave Christianity,<sup>239</sup> even though he had not yet received holy baptism.<sup>240</sup> After some time he returned to his hometown and after a period of fasting and prayer, he underwent holy baptism in the village of Aked.<sup>241</sup> His job as a secretary and his travels to Ctesiphon facilitated his later contacts with the court of Khusrau I.<sup>242</sup> It is clear that in his position as secretary he gained more familiarity with the socio-political developments of the Sasanian Empire. After leaving his position, he continued to do more fasting and prayer while living in the desert and the mountains.<sup>243</sup>

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(Wisbaden, DR. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2003), 167. This interpretation stems from the following line in Ja(h)balaha, who introduced him as being learned in Persian literature and well instructed in letters:

He was well versed in Persian literature, this one, from the time he had been deeply instructed in literature.	ܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ
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Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Or Ḥodanbod. *Ibid.*, 215. At this time, he was ‘arzbed’ or Bethter ‘argbed’. Cf. Philippe Gignoux, “Titres et Fonctions Religieuses Sasanides d’après les Sources Syriaques Hagiographiques”, in Philippe Gignoux, *Mazdéens et chrétiens en terre d’Iran à l’époque sassanide*, Serie Orientale Roma N.S. 3 (Roma, Scienze e Lettere, 2014), 523.

<sup>236</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*, 215. Walker wrote that he was a secretary of the marzbān of Beth Arāmāyē. Cf. Joel Walker, *ibid.*, 1014. This point is an accurate extrapolation from an annotation of John Stewart. John Stewart only mentioned that he was a secretary of the governor of the province. Cf. John Stewart, *ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*, *ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> The complete story is found in Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*, 210-215.

<sup>239</sup> Arthur Vööbus wrote something very interesting about him: “...an enemy of Christians and particularly of the benai qeīāmē became a devout adherent of the Christian religion.” Cf. Arthur Vööbus, *ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*, 216.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

He underwent holy baptism in the village of Aked.	ܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܩܘܠܘܢ
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<sup>242</sup> Joel Walker, *ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*, 216.

Aba then went to Nisibis and entered the school of Nisibis.<sup>244</sup> In this institution he was the student of Joseph<sup>245</sup> and the epithet of Joseph was Mosa.<sup>246</sup> He learned Psalms on some days.<sup>247</sup> He also meditated on Bible lessons.<sup>248</sup> His attempts to learn the Bible and his meditations on holy sources attracted Ma'na, bishop of Arzun (497- 579).<sup>249</sup> Consequently, Aba left Nisibis, followed Ma'na and got a teaching position in Arzun.<sup>250</sup> In Arzun the talent of Mar Aba in converting others was discovered as he converted many heretics.<sup>251</sup> This ability improved later. He returned to Nisibis from Arzun to improve his knowledge in exegesis and spiritual contemplation.<sup>252</sup> Before travelling to Edessa, he went to Beth-Rhomaye.<sup>253</sup> He also visited saints in various places and received their blessing through their prayers.<sup>254</sup> Then he met a man named Sargis,<sup>255</sup> who shared the views of Arius, which he<sup>256</sup> mingled with paganism. Mar Aba invited him to the truth.<sup>257</sup> Here he also exercised his talent, which improved with education in Nisibis and Arzun, in an integration between 'self'<sup>258</sup> and 'others'.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 216/217.

<sup>245</sup> Ja(h)balaha introduced him as a scholar, teacher, poor man and ascetic, a person who was gentle and humble, sent to Mar Aba I by Jesus:

<p>Jesus sent to him, the student, a teacher: a man poor, ascetic, gentle and humble, who in his attire was sober and modest; his name, indeed, was Joseph.</p>	<p>ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ  ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ</p>
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Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 211.

<sup>246</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 211. And Albir Abuna, *ibid*, 133.

<sup>247</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 217.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>249</sup> Florence Jullien, *Histoire De Mār Abba, Catholicos De L'Orient, Martyres De Mār Grigor, Général En Chef Du Roi Khusro Ier Et De Mār Yazd-Panāh, Juge Et Gouveneur, CSCO 658, Tomus 254, (Louvaini, Aedibus Peeters, 2015), XLVI.*

<sup>250</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*. And William A. Wigram, *ibid*, 185. David Wilmshurst does not mention that he left Nisibis for some time to learn from bishop Ma'na in Arzun.

<sup>251</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>253</sup> ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ.

*Ibid*.

<sup>254</sup> This is evidence that he was successful in making contact with the 'self'.

<sup>255</sup> ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ.

Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 218.

<sup>256</sup> Sargis.

<sup>257</sup> The source of returning from Arzun till here is in: Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 217/218.

<sup>258</sup> Who is the 'self' for Mar Aba I? This will become clear when I define who the 'others' are in his opinion. After that I will answer first question. Apparently, anyone who is not Christian is to be considered 'other' and anyone who is Christian is to be considered 'self'. All those who do not follow the apostolic canons are to be considered

Bar Hebraeus mentions that Aba studied Syriac in Nisibis. He goes on to discuss the uncertainty that exists about the correct name of Aba's Greek teacher, whether it was Thomas of Edessa, Thomas of Heracles or another Thomas.<sup>259</sup> Aba became an inseparable disciple of Thomas in Edessa.<sup>260</sup> Ya(h)balaha only mentions that when Mar Aba traveled to Edessa<sup>261</sup> a brother named Thomas<sup>262</sup> joined him. He<sup>263</sup> has been instructed in his faith. Thomas taught Aba Greek.<sup>264</sup>

After teaching for some time in Edessa, Aba went to the desert of Egypt. He enlightened many people there by his teaching and his practices. He taught the Scriptures in Alexandria and in Greece among those who had a profane mentality and he converted many there.<sup>265</sup> With his special method in teaching, he created some barriers to the spread of paganism there.<sup>266</sup> While he was in Alexandria, where pagans were teaching Christians as well, Mar Aba I was successful in attracting those he labeled 'others' and converting them to Christianity, and he placed some rational obstacles on the way of people who wanted to follow paganism. This was a pivotal point in his life. During his stay in Alexandria, Aba was able to attract some of the sophists,<sup>267</sup> when by his method of teaching he drew them away from their profane mentality and led them to the truth. They went so far as to confess and praise God. Aba was able skillfully to overcome their

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'others' and all those who try to follow the way of salvation based on the content of the canons is to be considered 'self'. However, more scrutiny of the primary sources revealed to me that 'others' for Aba are those who follow the commands of the ܠܘܘܐ. Who does not follow the truth. Whoever does not pursue justice. How we can prove these explanations? Khusrau I, the king of kings, was not Christian, but he was in contact with the truth. He did not want to send Mar Aba to jail. When Mar Aba escaped from exile, the king sent someone to meet him along the way. Khusrau did not want to punish Aba because of his statement when Mar Aba named Khusrau I as his friend. He did not want to punish him after he escaped from exile. He did so because of extreme pressure from the Zoroastrian elites. One of the goals of Khusrau I in his reforms was to decrease the influence of these elites in his court. Although he could have sent his army to confront the rebellions in Khuzistan, he asked Mar Aba to travel there and resolve the problems. Then, he used Aba's success in his mission as a major reason to release him from jail and chains. Now, with a short answer, I can clarify the concept of 'self' in the thought of Mar Aba I. 'Self' for him is not only a person faithful to Christianity or who fulfils apostolic canons. 'Self' is a person who follows the truth. This person pursues justice. Naturally, he or she will be a Christian as well.

<sup>259</sup> Gregorii Barhebraei, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum III, ibid, 89/90.

<sup>260</sup> Theresia Hainthaler, "Thomas of Edessa, Causa de Nativitate some considerations", Parole de L'Orient 31(2006), 66 & 68.

<sup>261</sup> ܘܢܝܘܢܐ

Paulus Bedjan, ibid, 218.

<sup>262</sup> ܘܢܝܘܢܐ

<sup>263</sup> Thomas.

<sup>264</sup> Paulus Bedjan, ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Oscar Braun, Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer, ibid, 192.

<sup>266</sup> Paulus Bedjan, ibid, 218/219.

<sup>267</sup> ܘܢܝܘܢܐ

Ibid, 221.



objections to embracing the Christian faith.<sup>268</sup> He was able to show his Excellency there, and again in Athens he confounded the Athenians who wanted to continue in their secular science.<sup>269</sup>

In spite of Aba's widespread acceptance in Alexandria, there was a serious threat against his life, so he escaped to Constantinople by ship.<sup>270</sup> There he continued to teach the truth. In his first year in that city, thousands of the truly faithful shared in his teachings. Soon he was offered a great quantity of gold and expensive cloths,<sup>271</sup> but he did not accept any of it. He earned his way by making baskets and selling them.<sup>272</sup>

It is noteworthy that Aba traveled to the Byzantine Empire early in the era that spanned 500–1500 AD, which is known as a period of vast movements of people.<sup>273</sup> He was one of earliest persons in this movement. In addition to traveling to Egypt, Greece<sup>274</sup> and Constantinople, as was mentioned above, Aba went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.<sup>275</sup> He must have been in Constantinople between 525 and 533.<sup>276</sup> Adam Izdebski has estimated that the time during which Mar Aba I traveled to the Byzantine intellectual centers was in the 520s.<sup>277</sup>

However, because of the growing fame of Aba's teaching, the king of the west<sup>278</sup> was eager to meet him. Aba, though, went east to Antioch and Nisibis.<sup>279</sup> Theresia Hainthaler writes that in Constantinople ecclesiastical authorities tried to force Aba to anathematize Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius, but he refused to do so and escaped to Nisibis with his companions.<sup>280</sup> Joel Walker mentions that Aba was trained in Christian monastic culture in Nisibis, Edessa and

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>271</sup> Oscar Braun, *ibid*, 219.

<sup>272</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 222. Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 194.

<sup>273</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *ibid*, 3.

<sup>274</sup> Theresia Hainthaler during a private discussions in Salzburg (May 2017) refused the idea of presence of Mar Aba I in Greece, while she wrote this point in her own article. Cf. Theresia Hainthaler, *ibid*.

<sup>275</sup> William A. Wigram, *ibid*.

<sup>276</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid*, 56.

<sup>277</sup> Adam Izdebski, "Cultural Contacts Between the Superpowers of Late Antiquity: The Syriac School of Nisibis and the Transmission of Greek Educational Experience to the Persian Empire" in *Cultures in Motion: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern periods*, Adam Izdebski and Damian Jasinski, (eds.), *Byzantine et Slavica Craeoviensia* 8., (Krakow, Jagiellonian Uni. Press, 2014), 203.

<sup>278</sup> Justinian (527-565). I wrote 'the king of west' because it is in the Syriac text. Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 223.

<sup>279</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 223. And Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 194.

<sup>280</sup> Theresia Hainthaler, *ibid*, 68.

Antioch.<sup>281</sup> During these travels, he not only continued his education, but also gained greater fame.<sup>282</sup>

On returning to Nisibis, Aba heard about the schism in the leadership of the Church of the East.<sup>283</sup> Instead of involving himself in the dispute and defending of Eliša ' or Narsai, he decided to leave Nisibis and live in desert.<sup>284</sup> He wanted to continue his teaching and spiritual study outside of Nisibis.<sup>285</sup> However, bishops<sup>286</sup> asked him to continue teaching in Nisibis.<sup>287</sup> The method that he chose was to be 'in' and 'out' of the significant tension in the leadership of the Church of the East; this method helped him later to manage such problems easily. If he had made any mistakes during this time, no one would have accepted his authority years later when he was in the position of Catholicos. Rather, his wise statements about this problem convinced others to support him so that he could rise to the position of Catholicos. These people were also willing to help him in his management on this church.

Aba was asked to teach in the school of Nisibis for several years.<sup>288</sup> He must have been in this position between 533 and 540 in Nisibis.<sup>289</sup> Based on the title 'Mepaşqānā,' which Thomas of Edessa applied to Mar Aba I in his work 'Cause de Nativitate' in 538,<sup>290</sup> it is certain that in this year he was not yet in the position of Catholicos.<sup>291</sup> Thomas of Edessa also acknowledged the piety and the very accurate knowledge of Mar Aba I,<sup>292</sup> these characteristics affected the life of Mar Aba himself and the lives of Christians in Byzantine and Persian Empires.

There was a consensus among metropolitans, bishops, clergies, and all the faithful in the cities, who agreed with the king of the Persian Empire that Aba should be chosen as a Catholicos,<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Cf. Joel Walker, *ibid*, 1008. Why Joel Walker ignores the position of Arzun on this education process?!

<sup>282</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*, 167/168.

<sup>283</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.

<sup>284</sup> Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 195.

<sup>285</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.

<sup>286</sup> Oscar Braun, *ibid*.

<sup>287</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 162.

<sup>288</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 223/224.

<sup>289</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*, 168.

<sup>290</sup> Read more about two causes were written by Thomas of Edessa and their relevance to Mar Aba I in: Theresia Hainthaler, *ibid*, 71/72 & 83.

<sup>291</sup> Theresia Hainthaler, *ibid*, 69.

<sup>292</sup> Florence Jullien, *ibid*, XXIX.

<sup>293</sup> There is some doubt about the exact year of his ascension to the position of Catholicos, whether it was 539, 540 or 536 (Cf. Daniel D. Benjamin, *The Patriarchs of the Church of the East*, English translation by Youel Baaba, (USA, Gorgias Press, 2008), 5. Juan Mateos has written the same start date for him. Cf. Juan Mateos S. I., Lelya-Şapra, (Roma, Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1959), 31. We find a date similar to the one that Jaun

even though he did not attempt to get this position.<sup>294</sup> They gave him the throne of the martyr Catholicos Mar Šem‘un and trusted him to deal with their struggles.<sup>295</sup>

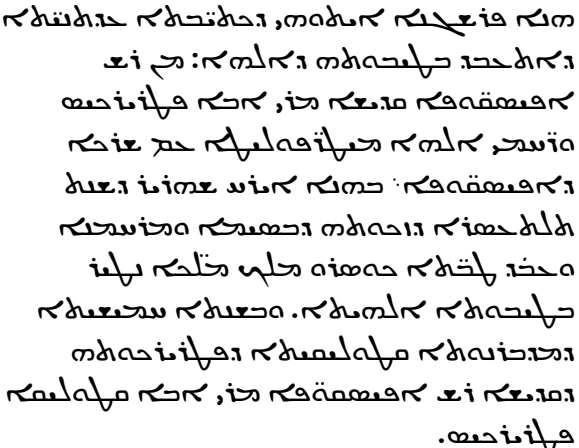
After rising to this position, Mar Aba I started to set some significant goals, such as removing the schism and all traces of it in the churches. He corrected an important part of the lives of his people:<sup>296</sup> the rules for marriage and the dietary practices of people which had been neglected during the fifteen years of schism. He also tried to bring disciples to this church by some reforms in the hierarchy of the church.<sup>297</sup> One of ways that Catholicoi customarily used to achieve their goals was the synod, and Mar Aba I also availed himself of this practice.

Mar Aba I decreed that a synod would be held in December 543 or January 544;<sup>298</sup> most scholars accept the date in 544 for this synod.<sup>299</sup> Among the matters decided by the synod of 544 were:

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Mateos mentioned in the “Le Littérature Syriacque” of Rubens Duval. Cf. Rubens Duval, *ibid*, 53.) . For instance, Lucas Van Rompay wrote 540. (Cf. Lucas Van Rompay, “Aba I”, in Sebastian Brock et al, *ibid*, 1. And Claudia Rammelt, *ibid*, 39 & 42/43). Baby Varghese also mentioned the date of Van Rompay (540). (Cf. Baby Varghese, “East Syrian Liturgy during the Sasanid Period”, *ibid*, 275).

If we accept that Khusrau I became the king of Persia in 531 and Mar Aba I held the synod in 544, considering that this synod was in the fifth year of his Catholicate and the thirteenth year of the reign of Khusrau I, this means he became Catholicos in 539. (Cf. Peter Bruns, *ibid*, 340).

<p>This is a copy of the ecclesiastical writings that was made by the grace of God by the holy archbishop Mar Aba, patriarch and the beloved of God, the metropolitans, along with the rest of the bishops, in this month of Shahrir of the thirteenth year of the rule of the kind and merciful and beneficent Khusrau, king of kings, kept by divine grace, and in the fifth year of the catholic leadership of his patriarchate, the holy archbishop Mar Aba, Catholicos and patriarch.</p>	
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Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 68.

<sup>294</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 224. And Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 195.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>296</sup> Marriage practices were affected by the customs of the Zoroastrians.

<sup>297</sup> I will discuss about all of these cases in the following paragraphs.

<sup>298</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*, 169. But most of sources accept 544 as the year of this synod. This opinion is correct based on the writing of Mar Aba I that I mentioned above. Cf. Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*.

<sup>299</sup> I think the date of this synod is a point of considerable importance, because Mar Aba set its date after starting his own corrections in the church. He called this synod after he had revealed his ability more clearly in his management of very hard problems. This synod was not an opportunity for him to gain legitimacy in order to start his reforms. It was, however, a great opportunity to implement the latest outcomes from his correction of the church. The praise he received during this synod because of his decisions over the previous five years of his reign increased

- 1- Great reforms.<sup>300</sup>
- 2- Correct faith.
- 3- Preferred behaviors.
- 4- Marriage rules.
- 5- Limitations and the age of church administrators.
- 6- Practical rules, include former rules and the process of achieving them.<sup>301</sup>

According to the decisions of this synod, no married priest could become a bishop or Catholicos.<sup>302</sup> Also in this synod, Mar Aba I ratified forty canons related, *inter alia*, to marriage and celibacy for priests.<sup>303</sup> He propagated an ideal monasticism.<sup>304</sup>

A general view on the results of this synod reveals a functional purpose behind the decisions which were made by Mar Aba I. He focused on facilitating the Christian faith by writing simple texts<sup>305</sup> for the faithful and correcting mistakes. He avoided falling into the traps of the various theological challenges<sup>306</sup> and the different perspectives on the identity of Jesus. It is interesting that Laurence Browne compares the results of the synod 544 with the council of Chalcedon.<sup>307</sup>

Mar Aba I's nights were devoted to his correspondence related to the ecclesiastical government. During the day, he would first devote four hours to the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. After that, in his position as judge he would answer complaints and resolve the disputes of Christians with each other and Christians and pagans. However, Christians of all regions and patriarchates were happy with his decisions.<sup>308</sup>

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jealousy and hatred among some factions of the elites in the Sasanian Empire. Therefore, after this synod he began to experience the trouble that would follow him until sometime before end of his life.

<sup>300</sup> This is an English translation of Albir Abuna's expression "أعمال الإصلاحات الرئيسية". Cf. Albir Abuna, *ibid*, 136.

<sup>301</sup> Albir Abuna, *ibid*.

<sup>302</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *ibid*, 268.

<sup>303</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*. For example canons third, fourth and fifth deal with priests, deacons and sub-deacons. Cf. Baby Varghese, "East Syrian Liturgy during the Sasanid Period", in Arafa Mustafa, Jürgen Tubach und G. Sophia Vashalomidze, *ibid*, 276.

<sup>304</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *ibid*, 270.

<sup>305</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 218.

<sup>306</sup> There is no Christological statement in the acts of this synod. Cf. Sebastian Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials", in: Ders. *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, Hampshire 1992 (CSStS CS357), ch. XII, 127. And Dietmar W. Winkler, *Ostsyrisches Christentum: Untersuchung zu Christologie, Ekklesiologie und zu den ökumenischen Beziehungen der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte, Band 26, (Münster, 2003), 70.

<sup>307</sup> Laurence E. Browne, *ibid*, 8.

<sup>308</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 226.

If we accept 544 as the date when he convened his synod, and also as the date when he was accused by some Zoroastrians elites, it seems that his criticism of some parts of the marriage canons of the Zoroastrians in this synod increased their enmity against. They accused Mar Aba I before Khusrau I for following reasons:

- 1- He had renounced the religion of the Magians and become a Christian.
- 2- He had prevented the Christians from marrying more than one wife at a time.
- 3- He had annulled the decrees of Zoroastrian judges and taken cases away from their jurisdiction.
- 4- He had baptized Magians and made them Christians.<sup>309</sup>

A reading of the text of Ja(h)balaha III leads us to another perspective on this challenge. The key word is ‘jealousy.’<sup>310</sup> Zoroastrians tried to persuade the king of kings, Khusrau I, and other influential people to arrest Mar Aba I when they saw and understood that in Fars people were receiving him with great honor.<sup>311</sup> Some Zoroastrians’ leaders used the toughest points, in addition to the four above-mentioned cases, to increase the motivation of Khusrau I to arrest him. They started with some statements about the disrespect of Mar Aba I toward his majesty and told the king of Persia that Aba had no esteem for him as king and lord. He did not respect the great and glorious kingdom.<sup>312</sup> They went on to recount his mistakes about Zoroastrianism and twice they repeated that his aim was to destroy Zoroastrianism. In their opinion, he wanted to destroy their religion in order to exalt Christianity. To their opinion Mar Aba I considered Zoroastrianism a thing of no importance.<sup>313</sup> These Zoroastrian leaders concluded their accusations by bringing the attention of Khusrau I to the danger to his throne caused by coalition of Mar Aba I and Caesar. They told him that Aba was a friend of Caesar<sup>314</sup> and an enemy of the majesty of the king of Persia.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> William G. Young, *ibid*, 7.

<sup>310</sup>  Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid*, 226/227.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

<sup>314</sup> Florence Jullien, *ibid*, 12. Ja(h)balaha used:

 Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*.

The king of Persia did not give credence to their slanders against Mar Aba. They repeated their slanders after the king of kings returned from battles in the north, but they were unsuccessful in bringing charges against him.<sup>316</sup> When they saw the depth of his faith in Christ they stopped persecuting Mar Aba for some time.<sup>317</sup> Again some Magians complained about him to the judge, saying that he had converted many Magians when he came back from Fars. They asked that he be sentenced to death.<sup>318</sup> The judge said he will have hundred heads (i.e. followers) they will be cut.<sup>319</sup> The head of Magians and his companions went to Khusrau I and told him again that Mar Aba I was destroying Zoroastrianism. The king of Persia asked Mar Aba I to answer them. He mentioned some important theological points of Christianity like God, Lord and the Trinity. He went on to express his faith in Christianity and the position of free will in this faith. He added that if anyone received the message of Jesus, Jesus would not reject him. Mar Aba I used this time to proclaim some biblical messages and he promoted Christianity in the court of Khusrau I very well.<sup>320</sup>

Mar Aba I was still an important subject of discussion in the meetings of Zoroastrians. One of them said that he<sup>321</sup> was a pagan<sup>322</sup> who had converted recently.<sup>323</sup> Then they talked with Mar Aba I and told him that if he would announce and write that he would not criticize the Zoroastrians' canons and that he would never convert Magians, he would be free. Aba would be free to go home and he could continue his mission. But Mar Aba I told them that he would not leave the true faith and that they could carry out their decision about him.<sup>324</sup> Khusrau I refused to send him to prison. He ordered that Aba should go into exile in the Zoroastrian village named Prahrawar<sup>325</sup> in Adin<sup>326</sup> in Azerbaijan Sirš near Takht-i-Sulieman, about sixty miles

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 228/229. And William A. Wigram, *ibid*, 201.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 230-232.

<sup>321</sup> Mar Aba I.

<sup>322</sup> **بنی پان** (Son of pagans).

Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 237.

<sup>323</sup> Some influential Zoroastrian leaders may not have known this before now, because after they were told they said he should be sentenced to death. *Ibid*, 238.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid*, 238/239. And Laurence E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, (Great Britain, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1933), 4.

<sup>325</sup> **پراہوار**.

Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 239.

<sup>326</sup> **آدین**.







*Mōbadān-Mōbadh*, the top Zoroastrian Mōbadh,<sup>350</sup> honored him for seven days in the cathedral by reading Scriptures and hymns.<sup>351</sup>

The key point in the life of Mar Aba I was salvation:

In our Lord our hope is complete.	352 ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ
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He considered his salvation to be based on the biblical statement “the fear of God, when we have it, if we are diligent about it and govern our lives by it with great care.”<sup>353</sup>

ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ [ܘܢܘܠܘܢ] ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ ܘܢܘܠܘܢ  
ܘܢܘܠܘܢ. 354

He enveloped himself in the salvation of the Lord, so the Lord preserved him in his very tough mission, though his sentence from the first moment was death. He died naturally, although no one can ignore the effects of what he suffered from radical Zoroastrians, especially in the last three years of his life, when he endured jail and chains on his neck, legs and hands.

I can rely on the statement of Maria Macuch, who mentioned that the life of Mar Aba I sheds some light on our understanding of the Christian religion as a part of Iranian identity.<sup>355</sup> A fair amount of pluralism is found throughout the history of Persia, with the result that the followers of all religions absorbed the Persian culture as part of their own culture and identity. Christians of Persia, as well as others, kept their religion in their lives. Of course, a kind of management from the center helped to create this situation.<sup>356</sup> If Mar Aba I criticized some aspects of the Magians’ religion and insisted on converting more Persians to Christianity, this is not a sign of his desire to follow Byzantine policies.<sup>357</sup> He was following the truth. At times there may have

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<sup>350</sup> Philippe Gignoux mentions that the meaning of this title employed by Mar Aba I is “chief of the Magi.” Cf. Philippe Gignoux, “Titres et Fonctions Religieuses Sasanides d’apres les Sources Syriaques Hagiographiques”, in Philippe Gignoux, *ibid*, 533. He referred to the primary source of Paulus Bedjan. Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 232.

<sup>351</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 271.

<sup>352</sup> Jean B. Chabot, 80 & 332.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>355</sup> Maria Macuch, *ibid*.

<sup>356</sup> Naturally, we can find some faults on this way.

<sup>357</sup> This point mentioned by Maria Macuch. Cf. Maria Macuch, *ibid*, 168.

been similarities between his ideals and the policies of the Byzantine emperor. This was not, however, because he had any intention of supporting the policies of the Byzantine Empire in the territory of the Persian Empire. He never wanted to destroy the government of Khusrau and bring the Sasanian Empire under that of the Byzantines. Anyone who lived in Persia and sensed its culture knew there was a desire among all its people of different religions to have unity in this domain. The full expression of this policy appeared later, but the basic concept was present long before it was made an explicit policy.

## His Writings

The writings of Mar Aba I focus on biblical translation and exegesis. His works on the Old Testament give attention to translating the text from Greek into Syriac.<sup>358</sup> He wrote commentaries, ecclesiastical canons<sup>359</sup> and synodic letters. He also authored a treatise on impediments to marriage, as well as hymns and homilies. In addition to these works, he translated the liturgy attributed to Nestorius into Syriac.<sup>360</sup> He wrote commentaries on Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, the Epistles of Paul,<sup>361</sup> the Pentateuch, and the Wisdom of Solomon.<sup>362</sup> His ideas to follow Thomas and Cyrus are reflected in the Topography of Cosmus Indicopleustes.<sup>363</sup> Therefore, he was one of scholars who figured a great period of exegetical activity in sixth century with Eliša' Bar Quzbaye, Abraham and John of Beth-Rabban, and Henana of Adiabene.<sup>364</sup>

Arthur Vööbus wrote about citations of the works of Mar Aba I by other authors. For instance, Abdīšō' cited his commentaries on Genesis, Psalms and Proverbs. But the Chronicle of Seert, which quotes Genesis and Psalms, also cites Proverbs, but incorrectly says that it is the commentary on the Wisdom of Solomon. Vööbus also mentions that Abdīšō' vaguely referred to his other writings, such as Romans, First and Second Corinthians, and Hebrews.<sup>365</sup> Vööbus

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<sup>358</sup> Florence Jullien, *Histoire De Mār Abba*, *ibid*, XXXI.

<sup>359</sup> For instance, he wrote an exegetical treatise on Leviticus 18. Cf. L. Weitz, *ibid*.

<sup>360</sup> Rubens Duval, *ibid*, 209.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>362</sup> Joel Walker, *ibid*, 1010.

<sup>363</sup> Lucas Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation", in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, Magne Sæbø, (ed.), Part I: Antiquity, (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 636.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>365</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 163.

clarifies some doubts about the references of Abdišōʿ to Mar Aba I and II.<sup>366</sup> Mar Aba I was accustomed to using Syriac, Middle Persian and Greek in his writings.<sup>367</sup>

## 2- Mar Aba I’s Reforms in the Church of the East

A general overview of the content of Mar Aba I’s reforms in the Church of the East shows that not only did he resolve some internal crises that had been plaguing the Church for years, but he also restored some neglected apostolic traditions. One of the clearest direct results of his management and reforms was an increase in the wealth and influence of Christians in the Sasanian Empire.<sup>368</sup>

### 2-a Reunifying the Church of the East

David Wilmshurst wrote that Mar Aba I’s first action was the founding of a theological school in Seleucia-Ctesiphon on the model of the school of Nisibis.<sup>369</sup> William A. Wigram, on the other hand, thinks that his first decision was repairing the division that pervaded the Church of the East.<sup>370</sup> In my view, the healing of the schism was the first accomplishment.<sup>371</sup> Aba reconciled churches, eradicated enmity and united believers.<sup>372</sup> He unified churches under the authority of the Catholicos in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, a location which had enough legitimacy for Christians and which was the one closest to the court of Khusrau I. Aba extended peace to the provinces

<sup>366</sup> Ibid, 165-167.

<sup>367</sup> Florence Jullien, *ibid*, XXXI.

<sup>368</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 222.

<sup>369</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid*.

<sup>370</sup> William A. Wigram, *ibid*, 191.

<sup>371</sup> This point is proved by the text of Ja(h)balaha. Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 224/225. and also in the work of Jean B. Chabot, when we read the first statement related to this subject:

<p>After, by the grace of the Lord Christ and the love of God his Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the duality of the office of Catholicos, which Mar Elishaʿ and Mar Narsa of T... had introduced had completely come to an end, and the unity of the catholic leadership of the Patriarch in Seleucia and in Ctesiphon [in Tesiphon] and in all the ease and in the gulf that was near it had been firmly established. Jean B. Chabot, <i>ibid</i>, 68/69.</p>	<p>ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ  ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ</p>
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<sup>372</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.



and helped him to establish peace in some churches.<sup>381</sup> Aba continued to remove, prohibit and expel those who abused their titles, rank and episcopal authority from Mišan to Pherat.<sup>382</sup>

Mar Aba I was also able to establish the school of Seleucia-Ctesiphon very quickly because he was greater than his responsibility.<sup>383</sup> Therefore, he had to deal with the most important problem, the schism between the followers of Narsai and Eliša', which still existed in some dioceses;<sup>384</sup> thus he restored unity to this church according to the apostolic tradition.<sup>385</sup> The schism had occurred between Eliša', who was chosen by Catholicos Šila, and Narsai, who was elected by the majority of metropolitans and bishops and their representatives, especially in the southern provinces.<sup>386</sup>

Mar Aba I focused on unity and morality. He healed schisms and differences of opinion and practice. He achieved his goals by introducing reforms in the provinces. He encouraged those who were following the path of integrity. He directed Christians to adhere to morality. He forbade Christians to continue in their divisions and schisms. He composed canons to solve differences about ecclesiastical government.<sup>387</sup>

Because of the legitimacy and the unique personality of Mar Aba I, most of the bishops worked with him to achieve these aims, which had as their common goals the establishment of the Christian faith and the security of the Persian Empire. Aba replaced the refractory metropolitans

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid, 70 & 321.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

صع... لاف... .

Ibid, 70.

<sup>383</sup> This statement is based on one of the points in one of the texts of Bar-Hebraeus which states that “the bearer is stronger than the burden”. Cf. Gregory John Bar-Hebraeus, *The Laughable Stories*, English translation by E. W. Budge, (USA, Gorgias Press, 2004), 9. In my view, if Mar Aba I had not been not greater than his burden, he would not have been able to manage his responsibility very well. He would not have risen to the position of Catholicos. He would only have been one of the usual martyrs.

<sup>384</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid*.

<sup>385</sup> صفة... على... .

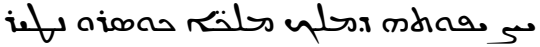
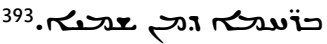
Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 70.

<sup>386</sup> Florence Jullien, *ibid*, XXXIII.

<sup>387</sup> Because of the importance of the Syriac version of these points, I have put the original of them in the main part of the text instead of in a footnote.

of Khuzistan, Maišan and Fars<sup>388</sup> with reliable men over the course of his first year.<sup>389</sup> It was a significant achievement for him to complete the pacification of this church.<sup>390</sup>

Mar Aba I announced that the source of his decisions to remove the worldly believers<sup>391</sup> and to end divisions was the spirit of the divine Scriptures.<sup>392</sup> He achieved these goals with the help of Khusrau I, which he acknowledged before his account of his successes.

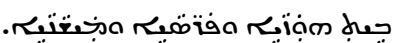
The care of the king of kings, Khusrau, preserved by the mercy which is from heaven.	<p style="text-align: center;">    </p>
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## 2-b Reintroducing Celibacy

Around 484 AD Baršaum of Nisibis asked that celibacy be required for the bishops and Catholicoi, but two years later Catholicos Mar Aqaq abolished this decree. Therefore, Mar Babowai married and had children before being consecrated as the Catholicos. Mar Aba I, though, reintroduced celibacy<sup>394</sup> in order to encourage the ascetic way of life.

## 2-c Reform on the Diets of Christians

Mar Aba I asked Christians not to eat the flesh of murmurings,<sup>395</sup> which they were eating as a part of the Zoroastrians’ traditions. Therefore, Christians were forbidden to eat Murmur.<sup>396</sup> He also imposed restrictions on the alimentary practices of Christians.<sup>397</sup> Richard Payne believes that these points of refusal to conform to Zoroastrian traditions were the reason why Mar Aba I

<sup>388</sup> 

Paulus Bedjan, *ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> Florence Jullien, *ibid.*

<sup>391</sup> 

Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*, 82 & 334.

<sup>392</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>395</sup> William A. Wigram, *ibid.*, 201.

<sup>396</sup> Florence Jullien, “Contacts et Échanges Mazdéo-Chrétiens sous Husraw I<sup>ER</sup>”, in *Husraw IER Reconstructions D’un Règne: Sources et Documents*, *ibid.*, 182.

<sup>397</sup> These two restrictions are mentioned in: Richard E. Payne, *A State of Mixture*, (USA, Uni. Of California Press, 2015), 93.

was exiled.<sup>398</sup> Elsewhere in this thesis I have mentioned that exile was not a punishment for Mar Aba I, but rather a way to make him available for another important problem that he was needed to resolve. He did this well when he traveled to Suziana to put an end to the rebellions.

Mar Aba I is a most notable person in the sixth century for a number of reasons:

First, he reorganized the Church of the East. He freed this church from the crisis of ‘duality,’<sup>399</sup> ‘a body with two heads’<sup>400</sup> or ‘a woman with two husbands.’<sup>401</sup> He carried out this very tough project easily because of his deep Christian faith.

Second, he facilitated the understanding of the Christian faith by writing a simple text and teaching the exegesis of the Scriptures. During his visits to Christian communities, he found that they did not have an adequate understanding of their faith.<sup>402</sup> So we find that the school he founded was a center for the theological guidance of the Church of the East. He had enough knowledge about the structure and functions of other academic institutions. He knew their advantages and disadvantages. He founded this school to overcome the disadvantages of the other schools. He expounded the Scriptures in his school.<sup>403</sup>

Third, he saw that Christians had grown arrogant, immoral and inordinately covetous of luxury.<sup>404</sup> His former experiences during his travels to Alexandria and Constantinople, where he refused many profitable offers,<sup>405</sup> helped him to develop a way to manage this problem. He led an ascetic life<sup>406</sup> and arranged the lives of his followers in this way. It seems this part of his life stemmed from his education in Christian monastic culture.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid. I, though, think these were among the reasons for him being exiled and sent him to prison later.

<sup>399</sup> Or the duality of leadership. Cf. Richard E. Payne, *ibid*, 97.

<sup>400</sup> ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܥܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܝܣܝܪܐ

<sup>401</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 218.

ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܥܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܝܣܝܪܐ

Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 70 & 86.

<sup>402</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*.

<sup>403</sup> William A. Wigram, *ibid*, 195.

<sup>404</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 219.

<sup>405</sup> Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 194.

<sup>406</sup> Richard, E. Payne, *ibid*, 96. He states on this page that he believes this ascetic way of life continued into the early Islamic period.

<sup>407</sup> Joel Walker, *ibid*, 1008.





contacts with Zoroastrians. In order to create a serious barrier against these sinners, he asked that those who were married in illegal marriages of the kinds mentioned should leave them and join Aba's faithful brothers. He asked them to meet with their priests and ask for forgiveness. They would have to promise the priests that they would not continue their sinful marriages. He strengthened his command with a serious threat. If a sinner did not do this, he will be forbidden to enter the church to receive the holy mysteries<sup>415</sup> and he would be allowed no communication with faithful people until he left his sin.<sup>416</sup>

Mar Aba I demonstrated the validity of his command by explaining that its source was the Scriptures.<sup>417</sup> To facilitate fulfilling a significant part of the canon for almost all people, he showed them his understanding of its difficulties. Concerning those who could not leave this sin because they had lived with their wives for a long time and had children, he asked them to give a part of their inheritance to the poor or the church.<sup>418</sup> He announced concerning those who could easily leave their sinful state but did not do so, that no one from the Church would assist them on the day of their death. No one would carry their coffin for their funeral or bury them.<sup>419</sup>

In brief, in order for Christians to follow orthodox doctrines and apostolic canons, and for them to remove the negative effects of Zoroastrian traditions in their lives,<sup>420</sup> Mar Aba I asked them to avoid marrying their mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, and the wives of their uncles. They should not marry concubines. He made this rule and decreed a punishment for those who transgressed it. The man who violated this rule would be sanctioned and anathematized. He would not be allowed to enter the church either.<sup>421</sup> After Mar Aba I issued his commands on this matter, the *Mōbadān-Mōbadh* told him that before he came and proclaimed these restrictions on marriage, some Christians had already entered marriages like those of Zoroastrians. The *Mōbadān-Mōbadh* said he thought that there should not be any obstacles to

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<sup>415</sup> .אָוֹרָה מִגִּזְרֵי

Ibid, 83.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, 83 & 326.

<sup>417</sup> .אָוֹרָה מִגִּזְרֵי

Ibid, 84.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, 84 & 327.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, 84/85 & 327. It is noteworthy that the threats issued by Mar Aba are signs of how serious he was about fulfilling the canons.

<sup>420</sup> Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 235.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

prevent such people from praying in the church. However, Mar Aba I answered, “I will not transgress Lord’s orders...”<sup>422</sup>

## 2-e His Canons

An important issue Mar Aba I confronted was forbidden forms of marriage. He was the first one to deal with this matter, which focused on the kinds of unions that are forbidden to Christians; he paid special attention to incestuous unions.<sup>423</sup> Richard Payne thinks that he developed his canons on marriage in order to remake Christian communities by giving their authorized ecclesiastical leaders new regulations on marriage to employ against the secular Christian elites. Aba wrote this part of his canons when he was in exile.<sup>424</sup> His opinions about marriage included related matters such as homosexuality and bestiality.<sup>425</sup> He was also the first one who decreed prohibitions against Christians eating Zoroastrians’ meals.<sup>426</sup> If we accept Payne’s view, he wrote his opinions about marriage during his exile, to which he was sent because of his opposition to Zoroastrian canons. This may be another sign of his deep faith. He had no fear about suffering more trouble in exile.

He not only corrected some theological mistakes of Christians in his school theoretically, but he also sent some metropolitans and bishops to instruct and correct matrimonial abuses in the Church of the East.<sup>427</sup>

## 3- Mar Aba I’s Method in Reform

Mar Aba I solved the problems<sup>428</sup> by his superior spiritual and moral qualities, not by autocracy.<sup>429</sup> His superiority stems from his faith in the Christians Fathers ܘܢܝܘܢܝܘܬܝܢ

<sup>422</sup> ...ܘܢܝܘܢܝܘܬܝܢ, ܘܢܝܘܢܝܘܬܝܢ, ܘܢܝܘܢܝܘܬܝܢ

Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Richard, E. Payne, *ibid*, 108.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>427</sup> William G. Young, *ibid*, 65.

<sup>428</sup> One of the problems was that of serious illness in some people. He was able to cure a woman who was sick, and who because of her sickness had uttered blasphemies against God. After Mar Aba cured her, she stopped cursing God and she became a follower of the correct faith of the head of the monastery. This is another example of the functional interaction of Mar Aba I with ‘others’. The complete story is found in Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 221. Another example is when brigands came to the true way of life after searching and finding only some teaching materials in his clothes. Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 222/223.

<sup>429</sup> William A. Wigram, *ibid*, 196.



Zoroastrians and criticized some points in the canon law of the Zoroastrians, such as marriage practices in the court of Khusrau I. The key point in all of this is that he kept Christianity in Persia within the Persian identity. He did not separate them from the community of the Persian Empire<sup>438</sup> and he did not attempt to persuade them to join the Byzantine Empire. This means that during his time in power, he attracted the trust of the hierarchy of authorities in the Persian Empire by his decisions in the management of Christians and their relations with other ethnic groups. Based on the method of Mar Aba I, the tenor of relations between Christians and the king of Persia changed from resistance and animosity to cooperation and amity.<sup>439</sup> Therefore Christians had the opportunity to extend their faith throughout Asia, thus becoming the world's greatest missionaries.<sup>440</sup>

Mar Aba I focused on functional methods in his administration. He directed his efforts to correcting factual errors and biased distortions.<sup>441</sup> For instance, when he realized that Christians do not have an adequate understanding of their faith, he established a school and wrote a simple text to achieve this goal. When he found that the lives of Christians were governed by love of luxury and arrogance, he tried to solve this problem. After he got released from exile, and in spite of suffering three years more of torments and tortures, he accepted the request of the king of Persia to travel to Susiana and solve the rebellions in Khuzistan. Aba was able to show understanding to the rebels because of his own sufferings. In doing so, he followed his initial resolution to keep peace between Christians and Zoroastrians.

Aba's successful method led him to promote Christianity in the court of Khusrau. One of the believers in Christ went so far as to try to convert the *Mōbadān-Mōbadh*,<sup>442</sup> the top Zoroastrian priest, in front of all the guests in the court of the king of Persia.<sup>443</sup> He not only passed the death sentence, but also tried to convert everyone who found some desires to Christianity, especially of Zoroastrians; in spite of all of its related dangers. Even those who held the highest positions in the Zoroastrian religion were targets for this mission. Because of Aba's continual success

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<sup>438</sup> Manfred Hutter, *ibid*, 167.

<sup>439</sup> Philip Wood, *ibid*, 30.

<sup>440</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, XIV.

<sup>441</sup> Philip Huyse, "Le Règne de Husraw I<sup>ER</sup> aux Yeux des Historographes Protobyzantins", in *in Husraw IER Reconstructions D'un Règne: Sources et Documents*, *ibid*, 210.

<sup>442</sup> Alan Williams, 50.

<sup>443</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 232.

during the period of his administration of the church, his time is called the ‘golden age’ of the Church of the East.<sup>444</sup>

Mar Aba I showed his intellectual prowess when he distributed his canons as the main source of authority.<sup>445</sup> These show his very detailed understanding of the circumstances in Persia. He knew that church leaders would not live eternally to manage their dioceses, but that the canon would be a functional guide for all Christians everywhere. He issued canons for the organization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the discipline of lay men and women.<sup>446</sup> Thus his method covered reforms at the highest and lowest levels of the Church of the East. He annexed his canons a series of punishments for those who transgressed his canons.<sup>447</sup> This represents to me a combination of his superior character, his legitimacy, and his standing before the king and the hierarchy of Persian elites. In addition, his program established a right way of doing things which he elaborated during his reform of the Church of the East.

Mar Aba I’s method helped him to gain the protection of Khusrau I, a phenomenon of which we find other examples in the Sasanian Empire.<sup>448</sup> This positive association with the king of Persia is reflected in the texts of the synods in which Khusrau I is described as being ‘preserved by divine grace.’<sup>449</sup> This was not the only method employed by Mar Aba I to keep the link between ‘self’ and ‘others.’ The authority of the Sasanians chose three Catholicoi<sup>450</sup> who studied in the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century.<sup>451</sup> Aba was one of them, and he was the one who most greatly improved his abilities while traveling and teaching in the Byzantine Empire.

In Mar Aba I’s training in the Roman Empire, education and excellence went together.<sup>452</sup> Aba visited some of the most important educational centers of that Empire; it is hard to imagine that he would not have been at all affected by this level of education. Moral and political virtue was also a part of Byzantine education in the fifth century.<sup>453</sup> It is virtually certain that Aba absorbed

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<sup>444</sup> Samuel H. Moffett, *ibid*, 217.

<sup>445</sup> Richard E. Payne, *ibid*, 100.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>448</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *ibid*, 5.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>450</sup> Two of them elected and confirmed by Khusrau I.

<sup>451</sup> Ninn Garsoian, “Byzantians and the Sasanians”, in *The Cambridge history of Iran*, Vol. 3 (1), 576.

<sup>452</sup> Edward J. Watts, *City and Schools in Late Antique: Athens and Alexandria*, (Los Angeles, Uni. Of California Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

something of the atmosphere of this way of education when he lived in these academic institutions of the Roman Empire in the early sixth century. At least one source emphasizes that he saw how in Alexandria, the Christian religious identity and pagan philosophy were reconciled to one another.<sup>454</sup>

However, it would be wrong to consider that the Byzantine educational centers to be the main source to help us to understand most of Mar Aba I's view on education. It is also necessary to pay special attention to his education in Hamargerd the court of Khusrau, Nisibis and Arzun. Mar Aba I, spent time in Alexandria, where pagans had been teaching Christians since the second century, and this process had continued during third and fourth centuries.<sup>455</sup> Although later the role of the church prevailed over that of the pagan teachers, pagan teaching was never eliminated.<sup>456</sup> This means that Mar Aba I built on his prior education refining his approach to dealing with 'self' and 'others' by his exposure to the milieu of Alexandria. His success in attracting and convincing pagans and sophists there increased his confidence that his way of teaching was the correct way. This aspect of his character was strengthened in Alexandria, where he gained a thousand faithful disciples in his first year. His great success cause his fame to spread to the Western Roman Empire, and the emperor of the west wanted to meet him. This point was proved when he returned to Nisibis, where because of leadership tensions he left this city and lived in the desert. Nevertheless, some church leaders asked him to teach in Nisibis. Later because of his characteristics, even though he did not want to lead the Church of the East, they chose him as the Catholicos of this church.

Mar Aba I did not suffer from 'cultural apathy.'<sup>457</sup> Nor did he fall into the usual trap that Christian leaders fall into as they struggle with their rule-making and ideology.<sup>458</sup> Aba focused on some practical and functional corrections which firmed up the foundations of the Church of the East and brought it out of its crisis. Based on the crucial position of reading, learning and

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<sup>454</sup> Adam Izdebski, *ibid.*

<sup>455</sup> Edward J. Watts, *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. Natural discussions between pagans and Christians were a characteristic of the culture in Alexandria. Cf. *ibid.*, 167.

<sup>457</sup> Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century", *Int. J. Middle East Stud.* 38 (2006), 275.

<sup>458</sup> Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, (UK, Cambridge Uni. Press, 2007), 19.

education of early Christians,<sup>459</sup> and the talent of Mar Aba I in learning and reading Psalms, his education affected his subsequent administration.

Mar Aba I was able to convince the *Mōbadān-Mōbadh* of the validity of his commandments about marriage. Aba provided him with rational and scriptural reasons to help him understand the canons of apostles. The *Mōbadān-Mōbadh* went so far as to tell Mar Aba I that if there is written in your books something like what you ordered you did and do well.<sup>460</sup> So he used a practical method to convince his opposites.

Mar Aba I’s method of argumentation to attract the opinion of ‘others’ worked when he escaped from exile. He apparently transgressed the command of the king of kings, so he had to endure even tougher punishment. However, the decision of Mar Aba I to choose the court of Khusrau I as his destination, and his answer to the representative of Khusrau I on the way helped him to avoid being killed by an apostate in exile and also to be free of subsequent punishment. He told Farrukh-dād Hormizd, the representative of the king of Persia, that he was keeping the command of the king, and that the king was his friend.<sup>461</sup> He showed his ability in his great reaction when he was rescued from being killed by someone after his exile. He told the king of kings that seeking revenge by killing that person would not be an appropriate reaction, and that it would do a great deal of harm to his government; Khusrau I found this to be a laudable decision.<sup>462</sup>

Mar Aba I used his capability in making contact with ‘others’ when he wanted to order Christians to spread the sphere of Christianity by spreading blessings. He achieved this target by praising Khusrau I effusively:

<p>Merciful and beneficent, [kept] by the power of his majesty in health of body and in gladness of soul, and by merciful will and good thoughts, long in years, Khusrau king of kings, protected by divine grace; after by the</p>	<p>ܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ</p>
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<sup>459</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>460</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 235/236.

<sup>461</sup> ܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܘܨܪܐ.

This expression is very interesting. He did not tell the representative of Khusrau I that he himself was a friend of the king, but he told him that the king of Persia was his friend. This is another sign of tolerance in the Persian Empire.

<sup>462</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 256/257.

<p>grace of God, the creator and lord and ruler of all.</p>	<p>ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ  ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ  ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ  ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ  ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ.<sup>463</sup></p>
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He described Khusrau I as the merciful, beneficent king of kings, who enjoyed health in his body and joy in his soul, who had a merciful will, who was protected by the grace of God, the creator, lord and ruler of all things.<sup>464</sup>

He named him as second only to Cyrus in excellence among all kings:<sup>465</sup>

<p>Then Mar Aba I used the name of Jesus Christ as his source for ordering the constant spread of blessings.<sup>466</sup></p>	<p>ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ  ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ  ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ.<sup>467</sup></p>
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To solve disputes about episcopacies, Mar Aba I would dismiss both contenders for the position. Then he would choose a third man who was acceptable to both of those who had been dismissed. For instance, when Mešaršiā and Šamu’il claimed the same position of bishop, he dismissed both of them and chose Mar Samuel as bishop, for he was accepted by both of them.<sup>468</sup> This is the way he used church canons.<sup>469</sup>

In the process of making decisions about the choice of bishops, he would seek the opinions of the inhabitants of the diocese. For instance, in the diocese of Hormizd-Ardašir in the province

<sup>463</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 69.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid*, 320.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid*, 69/70.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid*, 69/70.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid*, 70/71 & 321. Another example came about in Rew-Ardašir (544), where he deposed three bishops who were disputing the episcopate with each other. He chose a fourth one instead of any of them. Cf. Jean M. Fiey, “Diocèses Syriens Orientaux du Golfe Persique”, in Jean Maurice Fiey, *ibid*, 186.

<sup>469</sup> ܘܢܝܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܠܡܝܢ.

*Ibid*, 71.



of Huzaye, except when urgent corrections were needed, he asked for the thoughts of the natives of the area and their pastor<sup>470</sup> before he chose Mar Šila as bishop.<sup>471</sup>

Mar Aba I's method of achieving unity in the church was not merely to order peace. He and his companions would travel<sup>472</sup> to areas that were suffering a split in their leadership. They would reside there until they had established peace and then they would leave the place. For example, in Rew-Ardašir they stayed until they had completely deposed Isaac and Išoḃokt from episcopal authority. Aba did not accept the repentance of Išoḃokt.<sup>473</sup> He then consecrated Mar Ma' nā, a virtuous friend of God, as the bishop of Rew-Ardašir.<sup>474</sup>

Mar Aba I was very serious in the position of Catholicos. An example of the seriousness of his management was seen in what he did in Šouštre,<sup>475</sup> when he, along with metropolitans and bishops as his companions, deposed Sim'on Nisibiā<sup>476</sup> because of his mistakes. Not only that, but Aba confronted him before others, declaring that his decisions were contrary to the canons.<sup>477</sup> Because of Sim'on's major mistakes, Aba destroyed his reputation by enumerating his canonical errors to those present.

Mar Aba I's travels with metropolitans and bishops to some important cities, especially in the south of Persia, were not undertaken only for the purpose of reunifying churches. He also used these opportunities to announce some main points of the canons that some sinful bishops and

<sup>470</sup> Local priest.

<sup>471</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*, 322.

<p>And they established in it the peace and well-being of Christ with the agreement of all the inhabitants who, before their God-loving pastor Mar Šila, the bishop, made their journey to the region of the Persians.</p>	<p>ܐܘܫܩܠ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܘܕܥܝܟܘܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܕܡܫܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ      ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ      ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ      .ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ</p>
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*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>472</sup> He was not alone when he went on these kinds of travels. He was always accompanied by metropolitans. Cf. Claudia Rammelt, *ibid.*, 50.

<sup>473</sup> We read in another case that he accepted the real repentance of someone who was fasting and praying and was in deep sorrow. This makes it clear that Aba could distinguish between true and false repentance. Cf. *ibid.*, 88 & 343.

<sup>474</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid.*, 71/72 & 322/323.

<sup>475</sup> .ܕܫܘܫܩܪ

*Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>476</sup> .ܕܫܘܫܩܪ ܕܫܘܫܩܪ

*Ibid.*

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 72/73 & 322.

their companions had neglected. Aba also punished those who were involved with the transgression of canons.<sup>478</sup>

Mar Aba I was very patient and careful in solving crises. For instance, in one case, he heard of those who were involved in a certain matter. He proceeded to ask some questions. Then he allowed sufficient time for the people to speak about the subject. He compared their answers to one another. Finally, he made a decision.<sup>479</sup>

The system for finding out about the mistakes of bishops and punishing them which Mar Aba I organized worked without him as well. The agents responsible for doing this would make decisions based on the canons. They would turn to Zoroastrian authorities, as well as to other Christians who had a high level of legitimacy, to punish sinners. For example, Mar Paulus was involved in behavior contrary to the canons with a group of men and women, and he was very severely punished.<sup>480</sup>

Understanding the circumstances of the audience when fulfilling the canons was another of the characteristics of Mar Aba I. For instance, when he ordered who were involved in illegal marriages to leave this sin behind, he knew that some of them had lived with their wife or wives for a long time. In some cases they had children. He facilitated their compliance with the canons by asking them to give a part of their inheritance to the poor or to the church.<sup>481</sup>

Mar Aba I directed people to salvation in Jesus Christ. He exhorted them to take care and not to be negligent with the mercy and grace of the Lord who had honored his church with virtuous pastors.<sup>482</sup>

Be strong and take care to make these things known without negligence. Glory to Christ, who honors his Church with a diligent pastor, and mercy and grace be unto us forever and ever. Amen.	ܡܕܝܢܐ ܨܘܪܝܢ ܘܒܠܝܓܢ ܩܪܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܘܢܫܝܢ ܘܢܫܝܢ ܨܘܪܝܢ ܘܒܠܝܓܢ ܩܪܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܘܢܫܝܢ ܘܢܫܝܢ ܨܘܪܝܢ ܘܒܠܝܓܢ ܩܪܝܢ ܗܘܢ ܘܢܫܝܢ ܘܢܫܝܢ
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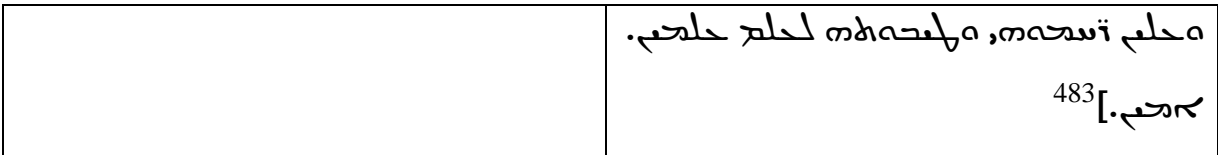
<sup>478</sup> Ibid, 73/74 & 324/326.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 75/76 & 327.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, 77 & 328.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid, 84 & 327.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid, 338.



This message enriched the hearts of the faithful and encouraged them to be firm in their faith in Jesus Christ. Even if we were to prove that Mar Aba I never uttered these sentences, we can be sure that this was the way he approached the matter. He could not have carried out his responsibility without a firm faith in this truth.

Mar Aba I did not use only his personal presence to bridge gaps in the Church of the East. He also used correspondence to resolve schisms in the church. For instance, he used this method to bring peace in Sagestan.<sup>484</sup> In this correspondence, Mar Aba I revealed his own ideas about Mar Eliša' and Mar Narsai. He wrote to them stating that neither of them had constitutionally, canonically, and legally received ordination into the patriarchal priesthood. Although Mar Narsai had been elected earlier than Mar Eliša', he seized power precipitately and irregularly. Aba explained that lust for power was the reason for this incident, which was odious and shameful for Christians and for the Church of Christ.<sup>485</sup> Both of these men fell into this temptation without sufficient fear or care about their own decisions.<sup>486</sup> These motives spread doubt and division about Christian leadership in this church with the result that the canons of the apostles were neglected for many years. Then Aba continued to work, by the grace of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all things, and with the help of the king of kings, Khusrau, who was gentle and philanthropic, until unity was restored and consolidated. Thus Aba fixed all the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy that were on the verge of disappearing. He also recorded in writing the two main mistakes of Mar Eliša' and Mar Narsai: they did not want to carry out ordinations according to the canons of Christianity and the will of the elites of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.<sup>487</sup> Aba explained the truth about the incidents in order to remove misinterpretations related to the schism.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid, 85.  
<sup>484</sup> Ibid, 85 & 338. For Sagestan see *ibid*, 85 (سجستان).  
<sup>485</sup> Ibid, 85 & 340.  
<sup>486</sup> Ibid, 86 & 340.  
<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

Mar Aba I introduced the requirement for ‘virtuous works’<sup>488</sup> and the fulfillment of ‘orthodox faith’<sup>489</sup> as two key criteria for the selection of one of the two bishops who were under consideration for the episcopal position. In this matter, Aba decreed that the one not chosen as bishop would serve as a priest.<sup>490</sup> When both of them proved to be equally virtuous and faithful, he confirmed the one who had first been ordained to the episcopacy.<sup>491</sup>

Mar Aba I did not trust only in his own judgement. Sometimes he would attribute his orders to the testimony of public opinion<sup>492</sup> which confirmed the worthiness of his decisions regarding the episcopate. Thus, he wrote the names of his witnesses and the public opinions conveyed by their letters, which confirmed the ‘stability and aptitude’<sup>493</sup> of ‘Yizidaphrid’ or ‘Yazdaphrid’<sup>494</sup> as the bishop of Sagestan<sup>495</sup> or Zarang.<sup>496</sup>

Not only did Mar Aba I try to choose a worthy bishop using the different methods I have mentioned, but he also followed up and asked for news of reactions after a bishop was consecrated. For instance, along with the aforementioned ‘Yizidaphrid’ or ‘Yazdaphrid,’ Aba sent a certain Sergius. Aba also wrote to ask about the reactions of the people to his decision. He mentioned that if Yizidaphrid passed away, it would not be lawful to ordain another bishop as long as Sergius lived. Rather, Sergius should ascend to the position, in accordance with the word of God.<sup>497</sup>

It is interesting that Mar Aba I emphasized that any contacts with the excommunicated bishop David was forbidden. This was another sign of his seriousness about enforcing the canons. Aba

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<sup>488</sup> The Syriac expression for this is the phrase ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ, which can be glossed ‘virtuous’. The location of the Syriac word is: *ibid*, 87.

<sup>489</sup> ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ

<sup>490</sup> This person did not have right to intervene in episcopal affairs. *Ibid*, 87 & 341.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>492</sup> He met people or read their letters.

<sup>493</sup> ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ

Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 87 & 342.

<sup>494</sup> «ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ» .or. «ܠܘܬܝܒܝܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ»

*Ibid*.

<sup>495</sup> Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>496</sup> Jean M. Fiey, “Chrétientés Syriaques du Ḥorāsān et du Ségestān”, in Jean Maurice Fiey, *ibid*, 99.

Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 88/89 & 343.

went on to say, though, that they had the right to communicate with Bishop David after they had received a letter from Mar Aba or one of his companions.<sup>498</sup>

Mar Aba I introduced two of his own characteristics in his direction of the Church of the East. One of these was carrying out the tasks of governance with regularity and moderation.<sup>499</sup> By means of this approach he reunited this church and freed it from schism. He also fulfilled forgotten apostolic canons during the time of schism. He was able to attract many Zoroastrians to Christianity by means of his administration. This second feature of his approach was what made it possible for him to achieve his goal. If he had attacked his counterparts among the Zoroastrian nobles, he himself would have failed dramatically and he would have thrown the Church of the East into a grave crisis even more serious than the schism. These two significant features of his administration had great advantages for Christians other than himself as well as for Zoroastrians. By his use of these two policies, he was able not only to ascend to the position of Catholicos, but also to carry out the responsibilities of his office without any concern about being sentenced to death because of his conversion from Zoroastrianism to Christianity. Another result of his method was his success in promulgating regulations accepted by all Christians. Consequently, there was no metropolitan or bishop who crossed the limits assigned by Mar Aba. Everyone accepted Aba's rule and no one allowed himself to rebel against his orders.<sup>500</sup> All the cooperation that he requested by his authority was provided. No one transgressed his edicts.<sup>501</sup>

#### 4- The importance of Mar Aba I

Mar Aba I's importance was not based only on his extensive writings or the extent of his knowledge. He also developed a remarkable personality because of his vast knowledge. He achieved the highest level of acceptance among Christians in Persia. He also had supporters in other geographical regions, such as Alexandria and Constantinople. His influence went far beyond his official position. Jullien Florence cites Héctor R. Francisco's emphasis on the Greco-

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<sup>498</sup> Jean B. Chabot, 89 & 344.

<sup>499</sup> ܩܘܠܘܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܒܐ ܐܝܘܒ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܪܐܢܐ.

Ibid, 90 & 346.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid, 91/92 & 347.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, 92 & 348.

Syriac education of Mar Aba I and its role in shaping his administration.<sup>502</sup> I think his presence in the orbit of Khusrau I' reforms helped him to use his education to achieve his aims.

## 5- The importance of Mar Aba I for Zoroastrians

There are many reasons why Aba could have been an enemy of the Zoroastrians. He was a serious opponent of their canons on marriage. He commanded Christians to follow their own canons on this matter.<sup>503</sup> He disciplined Christians if they accepted Zoroastrian canon laws.<sup>504</sup> He converted many Zoroastrians.<sup>505</sup> He resisted strong pressure from Zoroastrian elites to stop encouraging Zoroastrians to convert to Christianity.<sup>506</sup>

In spite of all of these reasons, he was a very important authority and an elite representative of Christians among Zoroastrians. He was a trustworthy teacher in the school of Nisibis for Christian leaders who became a reliable advisors to Khusrau I and his companions in their decision-making for the Persian Empire. He was a proponent of the national security of the Sasanian Empire, both externally and internally.

Mar Aba I suffered many pressures during his life in Persia.<sup>507</sup> He accepted exile and was sent to into exile in a Zoroastrian village.<sup>508</sup> He was a major target of terror plots.<sup>509</sup> He suffered many tortures and torments.<sup>510</sup> However, he did not use his power and position to plot revenge against the king of kings or against the *Mōbadān-Mōbadh* and his companions. He did not incite Christians to use force to decrease the pressure put on him by his opponents.

Mar Aba I continued the reforms of Khusrau I adopted by Christian tradition and based on apostolic tradition among Christians in different regions of this empire. By removing the remnants of the schism from the Christian communities and returning discipline to their societies, he provided security among Christians and in some parts of the regions where they

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<sup>502</sup> Florence Jullien, *Histoire De Mār Abba, Catholicos De L'Orient, Martyres De Mār Grigor, Général En Chef Du Roi Khusro Ier Et De Mār Yazd-Panāh, Juge Et Gouveneur*, ibid, XXXII.

<sup>503</sup> Manfred Hutter, ibid, 169. Jean B. Chabot, ibid, 82 & 335.

<sup>504</sup> Jean B. Chabot, ibid, 83.

<sup>505</sup> Paulus Bedjan, ibid, 228/229. And William A. Wigram, ibid, 201.

<sup>506</sup> Paulus Bedjan, ibid, 251/252.

<sup>507</sup> Some examples of these pressures are found in: William G. Young, ibid, 7. Paulus Bedjan, Ibid, 226/227. And Florence Jullien, ibid, 12.

<sup>508</sup> Paulus Bedjan, Ibid, 239/240.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, 251/252.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 272.

lived. In this way Aba aided the internal security of the Persian Empire by his reforms. When he created a hierarchy for decision-making in which those at lower levels had to accept the decisions of leaders at higher levels,<sup>511</sup> he created barriers against any individual reactions by Christians<sup>512</sup> to internal and external developments. This rule showed its positive results when he suffered the harshest torments in the last three years of his life in prison. There were no individual reactions to the sufferings of the Catholicos during this period of time. Thus he helped to establish the national security of the Sasanian Empire. His approach again proved its efficacy when he participated in calming rebellions in Khuzistan.<sup>513</sup> Although he suffered great pain, he helped the king of Persia to solve a serious internal problem.

These points which I have mentioned about the significant role of Mar Aba became apparent in the respect shown to him when he was not killed, nor was another persecution against Christians initiated. The authorities showed him their high respect after his special help in resolving the problems in Khuzistan. They sent the royal physician to treat him. When he passed away, not only there was no barrier to performing the proper ceremonies for him, but also the hierarchy of decision-making in the Sasanian Empire facilitated those ceremonies. Khusrau I, the king of Persian Empire, and the *Mōbadān-Mōbadh* sent their representatives to his funeral ceremony.<sup>514</sup>

Thus we see that Mar Aba I was a very important leader of Christians in the eyes of the Zoroastrians, including the king of kings, Khusrau I, and the Zoroastrian elites. Because of the many problems he suffered, he could have asked for the help of the king of the West, who was eager to meet him<sup>515</sup> when he was in Alexandria. However, he relied on the support of Jesus Christ. He did not ask for help from anyone other than the Lord. He always was faithful to him:

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He received his most special support from the Bible and the tradition of the apostles.

## 6- The importance of Mar Aba I for Academic Institutions

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<sup>511</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 83 & 91/92.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>513</sup> Eduard Sachau, *ibid*, 6.

<sup>514</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 232 & 271.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid*, 223. And Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 194.

<sup>516</sup> Jean B. Chabot, *ibid*, 80.

## 6-a Nisibis

Mar Aba I studied in Nisibis. His talent was discovered in Nisibis by bishop Ma‘na.<sup>517</sup> After traveling to some academic centers such as Alexandria,<sup>518</sup> Constantinople,<sup>519</sup> Antioch,<sup>520</sup> Athens<sup>521</sup> and Corinth,<sup>522</sup> Aba returned to Nisibis<sup>523</sup> and taught there.<sup>524</sup> While he was teaching there, he was introduced to the king of kings, Khusrau I, who accepted him as Catholicos. Aba was proud of this school and increased its fame during his excellent administration of the Church of the East. On the other hand, he introduced this center indirectly because of the role of bishop Ma‘na in discovering him and training him by giving him a teaching position in which he improved his method of handling contacts between ‘self’ and ‘others.’. Aba’s teaching in Nisibis during a schism reveals the quality of education in this school, where the administrators tried to limit the negative effects of the schism on the education of students and scholars.<sup>525</sup> Thus Aba acquired fame from Nisibis and he increased its fame as well.

## 6-b Alexandria

By using his own method, Mar Aba I was able to attract large audiences in Alexandria.<sup>526</sup> According to the Syriac source he not only converted many pagans, but also raised some rational barriers to those who wanted to follow pagan beliefs when he was teaching in Alexandria. He also convinced sophists, which was not easy work at all.<sup>527</sup> That was how he expanded his service to the Lord there and extended the acceptance of this school. He was also offered a great many gifts by those who were interested to his teaching,<sup>528</sup> but he did not accept them. That was

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<sup>517</sup> Florence Jullien, *Histoire De Mār Abba, Catholicos De L’Orient, Martyres De Mār Grigor, Général En Chef Du Roi Khusro Ier Et De Mār Yazd-Panāh, Juge Et Gouverneur*, *ibid*, XLVI.

<sup>518</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 218/219.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid*, 223. And Claudia Rammelt, *ibid*, 42.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid*, 219. And Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 192/193.

<sup>522</sup> Wanda Wolska, “La Topographie chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustès: Théologie et Science au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Bibliothèque Byzantine, Études 3*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 66. This city located on the isthmus which connects mainland Greece with the Peloponnese. Read more: <http://www.ancient.eu/corinth/>

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

<sup>524</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 162.

<sup>525</sup> During end of management of Ḥenana in this school, when his attention to manage threats decreased tensions increase. So some teachers and students left this school. Cf. Jeff. W. Childers, “Ḥenana”, in Sebastian Brock et al, *ibid*, 194. And Arthur Vööbus, *ibid*, 247/248.

<sup>526</sup> Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>528</sup> Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 194.



another reason why the status of this center was increased in the hearts of students and of people in general.

### 6-c Constantinople

Mar Aba taught many audiences in Constantinople.<sup>529</sup> He earned his living there by making baskets and selling them.<sup>530</sup> The fame of this significant Christian center expanded during his presence there because of his decisions about his teaching and his way of life.<sup>531</sup>

Therefore, we find a mutual relation between Mar Aba's presence in these centers and his role in increasing the fame of these centers among lay people, students and scholars. On the one hand, he improved the methods of education he had used during his earlier travels. On the other hand, his success in teaching there attracted the attention of the emperor of the West, who wanted to meet him<sup>532</sup> and who invited him to teach in the school of Nisibis. These reasons caused Christian leaders to elect him Catholicos.

### 7- The importance of Mar Aba I for the Church of the East according to the History of Ja(h)balaha III

Since Mar Aba I was accepted by the king of the Persians as the Catholicos of Church of the East, he was able to have contact with Christians during his time in exile and he participated in the resolution of rebellions in the Sasanian Empire. These facts confirm that he was an important Catholicos in the eyes of the Zoroastrians. An overview of his situation in prison indicates to me that by exiling him, Khusrau was trying to decrease the pressure from Zoroastrians opponent who were questioning the Sassanid government about how a convert to Christianity could be accepted as a reliable person and why he had not been punished.

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<sup>529</sup> Syriac source mentioned "audiences in the number of thousand". Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 222.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>531</sup> There is not enough information about his presence in Athens to devote a separate paragraph to it. We are sure, though, that he had success in his teaching there. Cf. *ibid*, 219. See also Oscar Braun, *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, *ibid*, 192/193.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

It is known that Mar Aba I had a strategic role for the policy of Khusrau I as he directed Christians in Persia,<sup>533</sup> in spite of his insistence on converting Zoroastrians and the obstacles he faced in some canonical disputes with Zoroastrians.

A reading of the list of the names of Catholicoi reveals that among those that are repeated are biblical names such as Shim'un, Yohannan, Oraham and Elia, as well as names related to the name of Jesus, like Khnanishu, Sorishu and Odishu. When we find the name of Mar Aba II repeated around a hundred years after his death,<sup>534</sup> it seems to me that they wanted to commemorate Mar Aba I.

The same name is found for Mar Aba II of Kashkar (641-751). This means that the name of Mar Aba I still was acceptable and memorable after less than a hundred years, so much so that another Catholicos chose Mar Aba as his regnal name.

The History of Mar Ja(h)balaha III does not begin with any direct information about Mar Aba I, but with some explanations near the beginning which provide some characteristics of saints in general and of Mar Aba I in particular. For instance, in the following sentences some adjectives describing saints appear, such as brave, fearless and heroic:

<p>It is a custom between these people who shined out in ages in grasping their authority and mighty, strength, brave of strive with orders. Who are pure and destroys hedges and camps of enemies and remembered them their offerings.</p>	<p>                 حقه كابه صله جنتك: دى لي                  دى ابني به حقه اجني كه ستك                  دى لاهم: دل جنتك دى لاهم                  اتيك دى ابني خمر يوتيك: داه                  دم خجه لجه دى دى جنتك                  دى لاهم: دى ابني                  خمر جنتك دى لاهم.<sup>535</sup> </p>
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<sup>533</sup> Florence Jullien, Histoire De Mār Abba, Catholicos De L’Orient, Martyres De Mār Grigor, Général En Chef Du Roi Khusro Ier Et De Mār Yazd-Panāh, Juge Et Gouverneur, ibid, XLVI.

<sup>534</sup> Daniel D. Benjamin, ibid, 47/52.

<sup>535</sup> Paulus Bedjan, ibid, 206.

There is a custom that men that those who are victorious as long as they are in the territory of their ruler, and the warriors and the valiant mighty men against whose ranks they have fought, and have been victorious and have destroyed the companies and armies of their enemies, and it has become known among their warriors...

They are people who are learned and skillful, with the ability to heal their parents, children, servants, friends and disciples:

<p>or the wise and the sophists of this world, who were learned and brilliant in their knowledge in the time of their generations; or the skilled and learned physicians who subdued and were victorious over diseases, and gave lasting health to all those who were possessed by them: those who were subject to them and were theirs by right and their children and their heirs, and their friends and their students.</p>	<p>                 536                  537                  538             </p>
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They should be grateful and humble:

537. *Arabic text*

They should have the ability to appreciate aesthetic value:

538. *Arabic text*

Ja(h)balaha III continually warned them to keeping and to display paintings and sculptures in the villages, towns and regions:

536 Ibid.  
 537 Ibid, 206/207.  
 538 Ibid, 207.



<p>may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God his Father.</p>	<p>542 ܘܥܠ ܐܝܢܝܢ ܐܘܪܝܢ ܕܐܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ 543 ܘܥܠܝܢ: ܐܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ ܕܘܪܝܢ.</p>
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After that, by emphasizing the importance of the spiritual Fathers, Ja(h)balaha III answers our question: “Why Mar Aba I and people at this level are important?”

<p>We should especially not be found to be ungrateful for the spiritual benefits of our holy fathers.</p>	<p>ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ 544 ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ</p>
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The answer is that he was filled with the spiritual merits of his predecessors. He did not neglect the spiritual values of the holy Fathers. He had regard for the spiritual traditions of Christianity.

What we should do? We should train spiritual pastors who fortify and strengthen Christian spirituality by their labors, their difficult struggles and the blood of their veins.

<p>The beautiful and resplendent image of ... the heroic deeds and the way of life and the teaching of the chief spiritual pastors, who by great works and mighty battles and with the blood of their necks confirmed and strengthened their spiritual way of life.</p>	<p>... ܘܘܗܘ 545 ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ</p>
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The expression “preaching against falsehood”<sup>546</sup> can be a normal expression in this kind of text, but when we find this point as a special aspect of Mar Aba I’s life in his confrontations with

542 Here was a mistake orthographically, where “ܘ” and “ܘܘ” were together. Cf. ibid, 208.  
543 Paulus Bedjan, ibid.  
544 Ibid.  
545 Ibid.  
546 ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ ܘܘܗܘ





## Conclusion

The erudite and eloquent Mar Aba I,<sup>554</sup> a man of great ability and energy,<sup>555</sup> the pastor par excellence who was depicted as a shepherd<sup>556</sup> love, like Jesus gave his life for his sheep.<sup>557</sup> When he first converted to Christianity, he could have ended up like many other converts, becoming only a martyr or a faithful member at a low level of the Christian community, associating only with the lowest levels of Zoroastrian society in the Sasanian Empire. However, Aba's special attention to education and the increase in his knowledge of Christianity in some very significant educational centers of the world in order to have contact with 'others' enriched his ability to teach and train students. He went so far that he was able to reach the highest position in the Church of the East. In that position, he not only delivered this church from the very serious schism that was threatening it, but he also overcame the problems that the Zoroastrians plan for him. He was released from the sentence of death and managed to be granted nice circumstances in prison. He even had the opportunity to direct the Church of the East from his prison. He was also helpful to the king of Persia in resolving some internal rebellions.

Mar Aba I was at the apex of the pyramid of the political culture of the Sasanian Empire, which was based on the Achaemenid policy of using the best of 'self' and 'others.' Aba employed his education and learning in the school of Nisibis as well as what he learned from Bishop Ma'na, and his experiences in Arzun, Alexandria, Athens, Constantinople, Antioch, and Palestine to make a correlation between 'self' and 'others.' Thanks to these experiences, he was able to shore up the foundations of the Church of the East. His effect on this church was so great that by the time of Timothy I (780-823) its influence had spread over Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, across Central Asia, India, Arabia, Soqotra, TiBeth and China.<sup>558</sup> During the tenth century this church reached its greatest extent by including all these areas and having authority in them.<sup>559</sup> We cannot ignore the role and position in this expansion of Mar Aba I,

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<sup>554</sup> Florence Jullien, *Histoire De Mār Abba, Catholicos De L'Orient, Martyres De Mār Grigor, Général En Chef Du Roi Khusro Ier Et De Mār Yazd-Panāh, Juge Et Gouverneur*, *ibid*, XXXII.

<sup>555</sup> David Wilmshurst, *ibid*, 56.

<sup>556</sup> Ja(h)balaha used this title ten times to refer to Mar Aba I and thus identify him with Jesus. Cf. Florence Jullien, *Histoire De Mār Abba, Catholicos De L'Orient, Martyres De Mār Grigor, Général En Chef Du Roi Khusro Ier Et De Mār Yazd-Panāh, Juge Et Gouverneur*, *ibid*, 3.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid*, LVII.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid*, XIV.

<sup>559</sup> Aubrey R. Vine, *ibid*, 135.



whose approach was based on a high level of education and on decisions that proved fruitful to relations between ‘self’<sup>560</sup> and ‘other.’<sup>561</sup> These decisions mixed Christians communities with other people in Persian Empire, especially where they were most heavily concentrated, such as in the Western part of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>562</sup>

Positive interactions between Mar Aba I and Khusrau I helped the king of Persia to establish his authority in Central Asia after a long period of cultural influence.<sup>563</sup> In general, it is a notable point that Christian missionaries in the Sasanian Empire were extraordinary active,<sup>564</sup> to my opinion most likely because of the poor and inconvenient management of Zoroastrians. This great event took place because of the policy of tolerance followed by the kings and elites of Persia. These important events stemmed from the reciprocal understanding and the fair system that Mar Aba I and Khusrau I tried to set up in their communities.<sup>565</sup> Both were aware of the freedom of Christians in the time of Kawād, when the problem of Christians was their own controversy, namely, the tension between the defenders of the Church of the East and the Miaphysites.<sup>566</sup> We do not find any signs of this challenge continuing in the period of Mar Aba I’s administration.

In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, educational texts were needed. They appeared in the writings of Mar Aba I and in those of some other monastic father. The ascetic texts of Mar Isaiah and Mar Sergius were some of the main sources, in addition to the Psalms and the New Testament,<sup>567</sup> which had a crucial role in the education of Christians in the Persian Empire.

It should be mentioned that Mar Aba I’s presence in the Church of the East and his practical reforms in this church led it to continue its golden age of missionary outreach in Central Asia, which started toward the end of the fourth century and lasted until around the end of the ninth

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<sup>560</sup> Christians.

<sup>561</sup> Zoroastrians.

<sup>562</sup> Touraj Daryaee, *ibid*, 96, wrote from Michael Morony’s article “Population Transfers Between Sasanian Iran and the Byzantine Empire”, in *La Persia e Bisanzio: Atti del Convegno Internazionale* (Roma, 14-18 ottobre 2002), Roma, 2004, 95.

<sup>563</sup> Michael Alram, “The Cultural Impact of Sasanian Persia along the Silk Road: Aspects of continuity”, *E-Sasanika* 14 (2015), 16.

<sup>564</sup> Kenneth S. Latourette, *ibid*, 271.

<sup>565</sup> The foundation of the reforms of Khusrau I was developing a fair system (cf. Zeev Rubin, *ibid.*), which was also the main aim of Mar Aba I in his reforms.

<sup>566</sup> Peter Bruns, “Bemerkungen zu den juristischen Grundlagen der Christenverfolgungen im Sasanidenreich”, *ibid*, 339.

<sup>567</sup> John Stewart, *ibid*, 39.

century.<sup>568</sup> We should pay special attention to the fact that the extension of the sphere of the Church of the East in Central Asia was of more importance than its expansion in Arabian territories.<sup>569</sup> From another point of view, we can say that soon after this church arrived in Central Asia and occupied it,<sup>570</sup> it extended itself to China and then east of the Asian continent. The result was that the biggest continent on earth received the message of Jesus through the missionaries of the Church of the East in the course of administrative developments in which Mar Aba I played a special part. All of these thoughts occurred because of the powerful belief of Mar Aba I in integration between ‘self’ and ‘others’.

It is noteworthy that if Mar Aba I had chosen a destination other than that of the court of Khusrau I after leaving exile, he would have destroyed what he had planned for the Church of the East. His return to the court increased the integration of Christians with Sasanian leadership. The climax of this process was Aba’s role in settling rebellions in Khuzistan, an accomplishment which increased trust in him and in Christians in general. This created a great buffer against another massacre of Christians.<sup>571</sup> In addition, this decision helped Christians to expand their presence to the east of the Sasanian Empire in the 6th and 7th centuries.<sup>572</sup>

Khusrau I was famous for being ‘rational’, ‘sufficient’<sup>573</sup>, ‘fully just,’<sup>574</sup> helpful to people,<sup>575</sup> and endowed with worthy knowledge and decisions.<sup>576</sup> If, however, there had been another king with harsh decisions against Christians, like Šapūr II, could Mar Aba I have been a successful Catholicos? Based on what I have mentioned about his methods and characteristics, his deep faith in ‘self’, and his sources within Christianity, in addition to an understanding and perception

<sup>568</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> This significant movement took place through the agency of Christian artisans and Christians who were trading in this geographical sphere. Cf. *ibid*.

<sup>571</sup> Khusrau I threatened Mar Aba I by saying that if he would not help him to calm the Christians, he would send his forces there. Cf. Paulus Bedjan, *ibid*, 266.

<sup>572</sup> Philippe Gignoux, “Titres et Fonctions Religieuses Sasanides d’après les Sources Syriaques Hagiographiques”, in Philippe Gignoux, *ibid*, 535.

<sup>573</sup> «معروفًا بالعقل و الكفايه». ابى حنيفه احمد بن داود الدينورى، المرجع السابق.

Abū Ḥanīfa Ahmed-bn Davood Al-Dīnwarī, *ibid*.

<sup>574</sup> Ibnu’l-Balkhī, *ibid*, 23 & 88.

<sup>575</sup> Al-Tha‘alibi described him:

«كان خير الملوك نفسا واكلهم عقلا واتمهم عدلا»

Cf. ‘Abd-al-Malik Ibn-Muḥammad Al-Tha‘alibi, *ibid*.

<sup>576</sup> أبى جعفر محمد بن .. «كان كسرى انوشروان قد عرف الناس منه فضلا فى رأيه و علمه و عقل، و بأسه و حزمه، مع رأفته و رحمته بهم.» جزيير الطبرى، المرجع السابق.



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