

AN INTRODUCTION TO SYRIAC STUDIES*

Sebastian Brock

- I. What Is Syriac?
 - II. Why Study It?
 - a. Biblical Studies
 - b. Patristic Studies
 - c. Liturgical Studies
 - d. Early Syriac Christianity
 - e. Syriac Poetry
 - f. Syriac as a Bridge Culture
 - III. The Scope of Syriac Literature
 - IV. The Place of Syriac among the Aramaic Dialects
 - V. Tools
 - a. Grammars
 - b. Anthologies of Texts (Chrestomathies)
 - c. Dictionaries
 - d. Main Editions of the Syriac Bible
 - e. Histories of Syriac Literature
 - f. The Historical Background
 - g. Bibliographical Aids
 - h. Series of Texts and Periodicals
 - VI. Epilogue: The Delights of Manuscripts
- Appendix: The Syriac Churches

* This article is reproduced, with the kind permission of the Department of Theology at the University of Birmingham, from J.H. Eaton, ed., *Horizons in Semitic Studies: Articles for the Student*, University Semitics Study Aids 8 (Birmingham: Dept. of Theology, University of Birmingham, 1980). Page numbers of the original volume are given in square brackets. A revised and updated version of the article is planned by the author. In the meantime, a more recent introductory bibliography may be found in: T. Muraoka, *Classical Syriac: A Basic Grammar with a Chrestomathy [With a select bibliography compiled by Sebastian Brock]*, *Porta linguarum orientalium*, Neue Serie 19 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997). Further bibliography may be found in: Sebastian P. Brock, *Syriac Studies: A Classified Bibliography (1960-1990)* (Kaslik: [Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik], 1996).

I. WHAT IS SYRIAC?

[1] A five-minute walk from South Ealing underground station in London will bring you to “Assyrian House,” where on a Sunday the Liturgy of the Church of the East is celebrated in Syriac. One of the first things that a visitor will be told is that Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic, the language of Jesus in first-century Palestine, a fact of which all members of this Church are extremely proud.

Syriac in fact continues today in use as the liturgical language of two Oriental Orthodox churches, the “Assyrian” Church of the East (better known to western Christians under the misleading title of the “Nestorian” Church) and the Syrian Orthodox Church (again more familiar under the nick-names of the “Jacobite” or “Monophysite” Church).¹ To a lesser extent Syriac is also used in the Liturgy of the Maronite Church, but in recent decades Arabic has been making rapid inroads there at the expense of Syriac.

But classical Syriac is by no means just a “dead” liturgical language: it is still employed as a literary language, especially among the Syrian Orthodox, and in some circles it is even spoken (it is the normal language of communication, for example, in the Syrian Orthodox monastic school of Mar Gabriel in Tur Abdin, in SE Turkey, where the children may come from Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish or Turoyo (modern Syriac) speaking backgrounds). Within the present century several European works of literature have been translated into Syriac—including Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and Dickens’ *Tale of Two Cities*.

II. WHY STUDY IT?

But just as people do not learn Hebrew in order to read the Hebrew translation of Goethe’s *Faust*, so no one is going to learn Syriac for the purpose of reading Dickens; nor is anyone today likely to find it useful (as St. Hilarion did, according to his biographer Jerome) for exorcizing possessed Bactrian camels. There are, however, other incentives, for there exists an extensive range of native Syriac literature, as well as of translations into Syriac from Greek and other languages, dating from the second century up to the present day. What is commonly regarded as the best of this literature, however, was written in the 300–400 years prior to the advent of Islam, and with one or two exceptions it is the literature of this “golden age” that has attracted the greatest attention among western scholars. It is worth looking at some of the areas which have claimed their particular interest.

A. BIBLICAL STUDIES

The study of Syriac has long been seen as an important adjunct to biblical studies. The first printed edition of the Syriac New Testament goes back to 1555 (the earliest European Syriac grammar dates from 1539), and the standard Syriac version of both Old and New Testaments, known as the Peshitta, features in the great Paris and London polyglot [2] Bibles of the seventeenth century alongside the other ancient versions.

The Old Testament books were translated into Syriac directly from Hebrew, no doubt at different times and perhaps in different places. It is striking that Syriac tradi-

tion has no account of the origins of its biblical versions such as we have for the Septuagint in the Letter of Aristeas. Certain books, in particular those of the Pentateuch, have close links with the extant Aramaic Targumim, and it is now generally agreed that in these books there must be some sort of direct literary relationship between the Peshitta and Targumim, even though the exact nature of this relationship still remains very obscure. In the case of one book, Proverbs, the relationship is, remarkably enough, reversed, for the extant Targum of this book is evidently derived from the Peshitta, rather than *vice versa*.

Since the oldest Syriac translations of Old Testament books probably only go back to the period of the stabilization of the Hebrew text in the first century A.D., the Peshitta Old Testament is of less interest than the Septuagint to textual critics of the Hebrew Bible, although it does nevertheless offer number of interesting readings which feature in the apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica* and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

Besides the standard version of the Old Testament, the Peshitta, there is a further translation, this time made from Greek in Alexandria around A.D. 615. Known as the Syrohexapla and made by Paul of Tella, this is a very literal translation of Origen's revised Septuagint text in the Hexapla, together with his critical signs (asterisks and obeli) and many marginal readings derived from Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus. Not quite the whole of the Syrohexapla survives, but since very little of Origen's Hexapla remains in Greek the Syrohexapla is of prime importance for Septuagint studies.

It is interesting to see that in the history of translation into Syriac (whether of biblical or of non-biblical texts) there is a continuous move away from the free to the very literal, a process which reaches its climax in the seventh century.

There are several versions of the Syriac New Testament of which the oldest, dating from the second half of the second century A.D., is probably Tatian's Diatessaron or harmony of the Four Gospels (he appears occasionally to have used some other sources as well). This work enjoyed wide popularity in the early Syriac church (it is not certain whether it was originally written in Greek or in Syriac), but was subsequently suppressed, with the result that no complete Syriac text of it survives: the nearest we have is Ephrem's Commentary on it. Although little is known of its original form, the influence of the Diatessaron was very widespread and we have medieval adaptations in Persian and Arabic, as well as in medieval German, Dutch, Italian and English.

[3] The earliest Syriac Gospel text that survives is known as the Old Syriac, and is preserved in two very old manuscripts, the Curetonian (in the British Library) and the Sinaiticus (at the monastery of St. Catharine on Mt. Sinai). Textually it is of very great interest, exhibiting a number of "Western" readings. Along with the Old Latin it is the oldest surviving translation of the Greek Gospels. It is likely that the Old Syriac once covered the whole Syriac New Testament Canon (which excludes Revelation, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Jude), but only quotations from books other than the Gospels survive.

The standard New Testament version, the Peshitta, is a revision of the Old Syriac, completed probably in the early fifth century. The work of revision has sometimes been associated with the name of Rabbula, bishop of Edessa, but this is far from certain. The distribution of the revised text was evidently very effective for Peshitta manuscripts (of

which several go back to the late fifth century) show remarkably little variation among themselves.

In the early sixth century the Peshitta was brought yet further into line with the Greek original under the auspices of the great Syrian Orthodox theologian Philoxenus bishop of Mabbug, who had found certain passages in the Peshitta (notably Matt. 1:1, 1:18; Heb. 5:7 and 10:5) too free and susceptible of a “Nestorian” interpretation. His version, known as the Philoxenian (although it was a certain chorepiscopus Polycarp who actually did the work) does not survive in its original form, but a century later it served as a basis for yet another revision, made by Thomas of Harkel in Alexandria, about 615. Thomas’s work, known as the Harklean, survives in a number of manuscripts (some of the seventh and eighth centuries) and, along with Paul of Tella’s contemporary Syrohexapla, represents the peak of sophistication in the technique of literal translation: every detail of the Greek original is reflected—which greatly eases the work of the modern textual critic who is interested in reconstructing the underlying Greek text!

An excellent survey of the Syriac New Testament versions is to be found in chapter 1 of B.M. Metzger’s *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1977), while for the Old Testament the best general discussion is that by C. van Puyvelde, the *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément VI* (1960), 834 f.

B. PATRISTIC STUDIES

A very large number of the works of the Church Fathers was translated into Syriac, sometimes more than once. The earliest to survive are some of Eusebius’ works, including the Theophania, lost in its Greek original; all these happen to be preserved in fifth century manuscripts. The process of translating Greek texts continued apace until the end of the seventh century, by which time the Arab invasions had effectively cut off the Syriac speaking churches from close contact with Greek culture.

Syriac translations of the Greek Church Fathers are of twofold interest. In the case of works where the Greek originals survive the Syriac translation not only usually antedates the earliest Greek manuscript by many centuries, but is itself preserved in manuscripts of great [4] antiquity (sixth century manuscripts are not uncommon). Even more important are the Syriac translations of works whose Greek originals are lost: besides Eusebius’ Theophania these include treatises attributed to Hippolytus and Gregory Thaumaturgus, Athanasius’ Festal Letters, Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Commentary on John, Cyril of Alexandria’s Commentary on Luke, and various works by Evagrius Ponticus. Syriac also preserves in translation the writings of several Greek anti-Chalcedonian theologians whose works, having been suppressed in their Greek form, would otherwise have been totally lost to us; most notable in this category are the voluminous works of Severus, patriarch of Antioch from 512 until 518.

C. LITURGICAL STUDIES

For someone interested in the history of liturgy Syriac has great riches to offer. It was the general area of Syria-Palestine that proved the most creative and fertile in this field for early Christianity, and it was from here that the rich Byzantine liturgies of St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil and St. James ultimately derived; here too, more than

anywhere else, did liturgical poetry, in both Greek and Syriac, flourish. The East Syrian Liturgy of St. Addai and St. Mari happens to be the oldest liturgy still in regular use, while West Syrian tradition has produced an astonishing abundance of anaphoras: over 70 come down to us, and of these a dozen or so are still commonly employed.

Of particular importance to the student of comparative liturgy is the early Syrian baptismal rite, consisting of an anointing followed by immersion in water, a sequence evidently modeled on the Jewish initiation rite of circumcision and proselyte baptism. Only around A.D. 400 was a post-baptismal anointing introduced, thus bringing Antiochene liturgical practice into line with that of other areas.

The critical study of the contents of the many liturgical books in use in the various Syrian Churches is very much in its infancy. Here mention might be made of the useful bibliographical guide provided by A. Baumstark (one of the pioneers in the study of Syriac liturgy) in the appendix to his fascinating book, *Comparative Liturgy* (English translation: London, 1958), and by J.M. Sauget in his *Bibliographie des liturgies orientales 1900–60* (Rome, 1962).

D. EARLY SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY

So far we have only considered the interest of Syriac as an appendage to larger fields of study, but Syriac literature is also of value in its own right, and here we may select two particular aspects, early Syriac literature as the sole surviving representative of a genuinely Semitic Christianity, and religious poetry, the genre in which Syriac writers best excelled.

The earliest major authors whose names we know, Aphrahat and Ephrem, both of the fourth century, are virtually untouched by Greek culture and they offer us an essentially Semitic form of Christianity, quite different in many respects from the Christianity of the Greek and Latin speaking world of the Mediterranean littoral. From the fifth century onwards the [5] Syriac speaking churches underwent a rapid process of hellenization with the result that no subsequent writers entirely escape from the influence of Greek culture in some form or other, and so it is primarily to these two early writers, Aphrahat and Ephrem, that we must turn in order to examine this phenomenon. This specifically Semitic aspect of the earliest Syriac literature has been curiously neglected, despite its potential interest for the study of primitive Christianity as a whole, for which its relevance could be said to be much the same as that of Rabbinic literature for New Testament studies.

The fact that the earliest Syriac writers are virtually “uncontaminated” by Greek—and hence European—culture also makes this literature of particular interest to modern Asian and African churches which, quite apart from an understandable desire to be rid of Christianity’s various European cultural trappings, find themselves more at home with Semitic than with Greek thought patterns.

An excellent and sympathetic introduction to this world of typology and symbolic theology will be found in R. Murray’s *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1975).

E. SYRIAC POETRY

Syriac literature has produced (and indeed still continues to produce) a very large number of poets, but one in particular among them towers in stature as a poet of real originality and spiritual insight, Ephrem of Nisibis, who died in 373 at Edessa; his *madrashē*, or hymns, can justly take a place among the great religious poetry of the world—despite the derogatory judgment of one or two eminent Syriac scholars, like F.C. Burkitt. Ephrem's is an allusive lyrical poetry filled with paradox and wonder, and making highly imaginative use of typological exegesis. His intricate theory of symbolism has been described as an anticipation of the basic philosophical position of Paul Ricoeur. It is unfortunate that so little of his work is available in English translation.²

Syriac poetic form falls into two main categories, stanzaic and non-stanzaic verse; the former is known under the general title of *madrasha*, the latter under that of *memra*. *Madrashē* were certainly sung, and the titles of the melodies are preserved, but not the music itself. Each stanza was picked up by a refrain, and Ephrem (whose genuine writings show a great tenderness and concern for women) was noted for having had his refrains sung by female choirs. Each *madrasha* will be based on a particular stanza pattern built up on isosyllabic principles, where the basic units are groups of 4, 5, 6 or 7 syllables. Ephrem employs some fifty different stanza patterns, and these can range from the very simple (e.g. four lines of four syllables each) to the extremely complex.

[6] The *memra*, or verse homily, was probably recited rather than sung, and consists of isosyllabic couplets. In a particular *memra* the couplets may consist of 5+5, 6+6, 7+7 or 12+12 syllables (in the 12+12 syllable pattern there is always a caesura, after the fourth and eighth syllable). The 5+5 syllable pattern is traditionally associated with the name of Balai (5th century), the 7+7 with that of Ephrem, and the 12+12 with that of Jacob of Serugh (died 521).

Undoubtedly the best practitioner of the *madrasha* form was Ephrem, but there are some fine pieces by other later writers too, among which a small group of short poems by Simeon the Potter (5th/6th century) deserves to be singled out. The *memra* form is already found in one of the earliest surviving examples of Syriac poetry, the gnosticizing "Hymn of the Soul," preserved in the Acts of Thomas (6+6 syllables). In the case of Ephrem the demarkation between genuine and non-genuine is particularly hard to make in the case of the *memre* (7+7 syllables) that come down under his name. Notable later poets who made extensive use of the *memra* are the East Syrian Narsai, head of the famous theological school at Nisibis (5th century), the West Syrian Jacob of Serugh, and the three Isaacs (all of the 5th/6th century).

According to the fifth century church historian Sozomen, it was Harmonius, son of Bardaisan "the philosopher of the Aramaeans," who being "deeply versed in Greek learning, was the first to subdue Syriac, his native tongue, to meters and laws." Since Bardaisan died in 222, his son Harmonius (if he is not entirely fictional) would have been active in the early third century. An examination of the actual evidence, however, indicates that the implication that Syriac verse form was based on Greek metre is totally incorrect, for whereas classical Greek poetry was quantitative, Syriac poetry has always been syllabic. Evidently we are dealing with an example of Greek chauvinism, which preferred to see anything good in barbarian Syriac culture—such as Ephrem's

poetry, some of it already translated into Greek by Sozomen's day—as ultimately derivative from Greek civilization. As a matter of fact it is more likely that there was influence the other way round, and that the Syriac *madrasha* provided the inspiration for the Byzantine isosyllabic hymn form known as the *kontakion*, developed in the fifth and sixth centuries; most of the best hymnographers happen to come from Syria or Palestine, and the greatest exponent of the *kontakion*, Romanos, originated in bilingual Homs in Syria, where he could well have heard Ephrem's *madrasha* regularly sung in church. In any case it is known from explicit statements by Theodore of Mopsuestia (died 428) and others that Syriac religious poetry was translated into Greek for use among Greek-speaking congregations.

F. SYRIAC AS A BRIDGE CULTURE

Many people will be aware that a knowledge of Greek philosophy reached the medieval west by way of Arabic, traveling through Muslim Spain. What is not so widely realized is that Greek philosophy, medicine and science did not reach the Arab world direct, but normally by way of Syriac. Syriac translations of the works of Aristotle and others go back to the fifth century, but it was chiefly through the work of Syriac Christians working at Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, in the ninth century that this process of transmission actually took place. Among the most [7] famous of these translators was Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq (died 873) who gave an interesting account of how he went about his work: having collected together the best and oldest Greek manuscripts he could find, he translated from Greek into Syriac and only then from Syriac into Arabic. The reason for this at first sight rather cumbersome procedure was that Ḥunain had behind him half a millennium's accumulated experience of translating complicated Greek texts into Syriac, whereas for Arabic there existed no such tradition and so this meant that translation from Indo-European Greek into Semitic Arabic was most easily achieved by way of another Semitic language, Syriac. Thus it comes about that a knowledge of Syriac is essential as a background to the study of Aristotelian philosophy among the Arabs.

Thanks to the work of these translators both Arabic and Syriac preserve a number of Greek philosophical and medical works which would otherwise have been entirely lost, seeing that no Greek manuscripts of them survive. Among such works, which come down to us only in Syriac, are Nicholas of Damascus' compendium of Aristotelian philosophy, a dialogue on the soul between Socrates and Erosthros, some sayings of a lady Pythagorean philosopher called Theano, and Galen's commentary on Hippocrates' *Epidemiai* (the last only partly known in Greek and Arabic)—to name but a selection.

It was, however, not only into Arabic that translations from Syriac were made: by the end of the first millennium A.D. both Greek writers in Syriac dress and native Syriac authors had found their way into languages as diverse as Armenian, Georgian, Sogdian, Middle Persian, Coptic, Ethiopic and Chinese. Nor was it unknown for Syriac texts to be translated into Greek: the influential *Apocalypse of Methodius* (late seventh century), for example, reached the medieval Latin West by way of a Greek translation from the Syriac original. Sometimes this traffic could even be two-way, as happened dramatically with some of the Aesop literature: the Greek life of Aesop, on the one

hand, contains a section taken from the Story of Aḥiqar, an old Aramaic tale going back to the sixth or even seventh century B.C.; a collection of Aesopic fables, on the other hand, was translated into Syriac (and attributed to Josephus), only to find its way back into Greek at the end of the eleventh century masquerading under the name of Syntipas!

Because Syriac culture lay geographically between the Byzantine and Islamic worlds this has meant that the extensive Syriac chronicle tradition contains much that is of direct relevance to Byzantine and Islamic history, and there is a great deal of valuable source material lying there which still waits to be properly tapped. [8]

III. THE SCOPE OF SYRIAC LITERATURE

Considered historically, Syriac literature can conveniently be divided up into three distinctive periods: (1) the golden age of Syriac literature, up to the seventh century; (2) the Arab period until about 1300; and (3) the period from about 1300 to the present day.

The first is the period which produced the most creative writers, and it is to this that we shall return shortly. The second period, which came to an end at about the time of the conversion of the Mongols to Islam, was essentially one of consolidation and compilation: as in the Byzantine world, this period saw the birth of an encyclopaedic type of literature, witnessing, right at its close, the appearance of the greatest of all Syriac polymaths, Gregory Abu'l Faraj, better known as Barhebraeus (died 1286). Gregory wrote on every aspect of human knowledge of his time, and it is not for nothing that he has been compared to his western contemporary Thomas Aquinas (died 1274).

The opening of the third period was a bleak one for all Christian communities in the Middle East, but the lamp of Syriac learning and literature never died out entirely, and there has been a continuous stream of writers, up to the present day, who have employed classical Syriac as their main literary language. In the seventeenth century we also find the earliest flowering of Modern Syriac literature, in the form of poetry from the Alqosh school (north Iraq); it was only in the nineteenth century, however, with the establishment of a Syriac printing press at Urmia, that a written literature in Modern Syriac really got going. (Among the English works, which the American mission at Urmia translated into Modern Syriac, was Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.) In the present century the last decade or two have witnessed a renewed interest in this vernacular literature in both Iraq and Iran.

Syriac literature of the golden age (third to seventh centuries) emerges from anonymity with the appearance of two great writers in the fourth century: Aphrahat, the author of twenty-three "Demonstrations" covering a variety of religious topics, and often touching on Jewish-Christian relations, and Ephrem, whom we have already met, undoubtedly the finest of all Syriac poets. But besides being an outstanding poet, Ephrem also wrote a number of prose commentaries on certain books of the Bible, among which his commentaries on Genesis and Exodus show intriguing familiarity with Jewish exegesis. His prose refutations of Marcion, Bardaisan and Mani constitute an important (if frustrating) source of information on the teaching of these three "heresiarchs."

The fifth and sixth centuries witnessed a remarkable hellenization of much Syriac literature, both in style and in thought patterns, although poetry remained least touched by such influence. Among the several notable poets of this era (see II.e), both Jacob of Serugh (as a pupil) and Narsai (as a teacher) were associated with the famous “Persian School” at Edessa, which, after its closure by the emperor Zeno in 489, moved across the border to Nisibis, safe within the confines of the Persian Empire. The history of this important and influential school, which had Narsai as its director for the last decades of the fifth century, has now been well told in a monograph by Arthur Vööbus.

[9] Since Syriac literature has largely been handed down in monasteries it is not surprising that much of it is specifically Christian in character. From the strictly theological literature two authors stand out for their originality of thought (and, in the case of the first, his style): Philoxenus of Mabbug (died 523) in the Syrian Orthodox tradition, and Babai (died 628) in that of the Church of the East. Characteristically both men also wrote treatises on the spiritual life, a topic on which there exist many very fine works in Syriac. Best known, but only one among many Syrian mystics, is Isaac of Nineveh (seventh century), whose writings were translated into Greek at the monastery of St. Saba in Palestine in the ninth century: even today they are favorite reading among the monks of Mount Athos, while in Egypt their inspiration lies behind the contemporary monastic revival in the Coptic Church. What influence the Syrian mystics had on early Sufism is a question which still requires proper investigation.

Biblical exegesis is another prominent genre, with important representatives in both East and West Syrian tradition. Over the course of time commentaries on biblical books became more and more encyclopaedic and derivative in character, each writer drawing extensively from the work of his predecessors. Excellent representatives of the two theological traditions are the East Syrian Ishodad of Merv (ninth century) and the West Syrian Dionysius bar Salibi (died 1171), both of whom have left behind them commentaries on the entire Bible. Comparison of their two works and of their sources will show that, despite theological differences, there was a good deal of mutual interaction as far as the history of exegesis is concerned. A few biblical commentators show a remarkable critical insight, perhaps none more so than Jacob of Edessa; besides numerous penetrating “scholia” on difficult biblical passages, there survives his commentary on the six days of creation (the Hexaemeron) which takes on in places more the form of a scientific treatise.

An ever popular genre—and one of considerable interest from the point of view of social history—is hagiography.³ Some pieces of Syriac origin, such as the life of Alexis “the Man of God,” were soon translated into Greek and Latin, and so came to enjoy great vogue in the medieval West. A particularly fascinating collection of lives are those of the Persian martyrs, dating from the fourth to the seventh centuries, throughout which period the Church of the East suffered intermittent persecution from the Sasanid authorities, normally at the prompting of the Zoroastrian clergy.

Hagiography is often intimately connected with local monastic history. In the early Syriac life of Symeon the Stylite we can observe the tensions between this amazing athlete of the ascetic life and the monastic community to which he belonged. How such tensions came to be resolved in the course of time can be seen from the sixth century

Lives of the Oriental Saints, by the Syrian Orthodox Church historian John of Ephesus. Among East Syrian writers, Thomas of Marga's Book of Monastic Superiors shows how vigorous—and varied—monastic life continued to be under early Arab rule.

[10] Insights into the daily life and problems of ecclesiastics in positions both high and low are provided by the correspondence of various bishops, including two East Syrian patriarchs, Ishoyab III in the seventh, and Timothy I in the late eighth/early ninth, century. From the latter we learn, for example, that in his day the best Syriac manuscripts containing works by Greek writers were to be found in the library of the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Mattai (still functioning today in N. Iraq), and he describes how he has to resort to underhand tactics in order to have them copied.

But by no means all Syriac literature is religious in character. Of particular importance for the historian are the various chronicles, of which there is a long line culminating in those of Michael the Syrian and Barhebraeus, both valuable sources for the history of the Crusades. Among the earliest works of this sort is the delightfully naive "Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite," a source from which (to use Peter Brown's words) "we can learn more about what it was like to live (and to starve) on the streets of an ancient city, than we can ever know about the Rome of Cicero."

Mention has already been made (above, II.f) of Syriac philosophical and scientific literature. Although much of this was either translated from, or primarily based on, Greek works, this late Roman and early Arab period witnessed a number of scholars, such as Sergius of Reshaina (sixth century), Jacob of Edessa (seventh century), George bishop of the Arabs (eighth century) and Moshe bar Kepha (ninth century), who wrote with considerable learning and originality on secular as well as on religious topics. Commentaries on, and introductions to, Aristotle's logical works, constituting the Organon, take an important place among such writings. It is interesting to observe how little effect the Arab invasions had on Syriac culture of the seventh century; the many important scholars of this century also include among them a remarkable astronomer, Severus of Sebokht, only a few of whose writings have yet been published.

On a less exalted level there are works in Syriac on alchemy, the interpretation of dreams, astrology, and various forms of divination.

There also survives a certain amount of essentially popular literature in Syriac, such as the animal tales of Indian origin, Kalilah and Dimnah (better known under the name of Bidpai to seventeenth century European writers like La Fontaine); this work exists in Syriac in two separate translations, one made from Middle Persian in the sixth century, the other from Arabic in the ninth. Of native Syriac origin are the tensions, or contest poems, usually given a thin liturgical veneer (which has ensured their survival). This is actually a genre, which goes back to ancient Mesopotamia, from where we have examples in both Akkadian and Sumerian; subsequently it was to be taken up by the Arabs (known as the *munāzara*), and, perhaps by way of Spain, by medieval Spanish and Provençal jongleurs. In Syriac there are to be found precedence disputes between such figures as Death and Satan, Earth and Heaven, the Months of the Year, Wheat and Gold, the Vine and the Cedar, etc.

[11] Several important areas have been passed over in silence—the extensive apocryphal literature, and the canonical and legal texts, to name but a couple—but sufficient has by now been said to give some idea of the variety to be found within the

confines of Syriac literature, and it is time to turn to look at the place of Syriac among the various Aramaic dialects, and then to survey some of the more important “tools of the trade.”

IV. THE PLACE OF SYRIAC AMONG THE ARAMAIC DIALECTS

Within the Semitic languages Aramaic belongs to the group of North West Semitic languages which comprises Eblaitic, Amorite, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hebrew and Moabite, besides Aramaic. By the end of the second millennium B.C. two distinctive sub-groups among the North West Semitic languages had emerged, Aramaic and Canaanite, the later consisting of Phoenician, Hebrew and Moabite (some scholars would classify Ugaritic, too, as Canaanite).

The term “Aramaic” in fact covers a multitude of different dialects, ranging in time from the early first millennium B.C. (isolated inscriptions) to the present day when various modern Aramaic dialects are still spoken in certain areas of Syria, Eastern Turkey, Iraq, Iran and the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. Of the several written dialects of Aramaic we have extensive literatures produced, mainly in the course of the first millennium A.D., by three different religious groups in the Middle East, Jews, Christians and Mandaeans; of these three, the Christian and Mandaean dialects of Aramaic developed their own distinctive script, and it is largely for that reason that these two dialects have come to be called by the separate names of “Syriac” and “Mandaean” (or “Mandaic”). The various dialects of Jewish Aramaic, on the other hand, were written in that form of the old Aramaic script which was adopted by the Jews after the exile for writing Hebrew (and hence now known as “square Hebrew,” as opposed to the abandoned “palaeo-Hebrew” script). Today it is customary to use “square Hebrew” in printing all dialects of Aramaic other than Syriac and Mandaean (although texts from both these dialects have occasionally also been printed in Hebrew script).

The correct classification of the Aramaic dialects still remains a matter of dispute among scholars, and the following division of the dialects into four chronological groups follows the general schema put forward by J.A. Fitzmyer:

(1) *Old Aramaic*. This comprises the oldest surviving texts in Aramaic; all are inscriptions, and among them are the famous Sefire treaty texts. This period, when several different dialects are already discernible, is generally regarded as lasting from the tenth to the end of the eighth century B.C. (it should be remembered, of course, that the dividing lines between the different periods are inevitably somewhat arbitrary).

(2) *Official Aramaic* (sometimes also known as Imperial Aramaic, or Reichsaramäisch). Under the late Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires Aramaic came to be used more and more as a chancery language (see J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* [12] (Princeton, 1954), figure 235, where one scribe is writing cuneiform Akkadian with a stylus, and the other Aramaic, using a pen) and as such was inherited by the Achaemenid empire. From this period we have both inscriptions on stone and, from Egypt, documents and letters on papyrus and leather deriving from three different archives, the most famous, of which is the Jewish one from Elephantine. The Aramaic of the book of Ezra in its essentials belongs to this period.

(3) *Middle Aramaic*. The various texts that survive from the half millennium following Alexander's conquests in the Middle East (in other words, the Hellenistic and early Roman Empire, up to about A.D. 200) are today often lumped together as "Middle Aramaic"; in fact the dialects represented are very disparate, for, on the one hand there are archaizing literary texts like the Aramaic of Daniel and some of the fragmentary Qumran texts in Aramaic, while, on the other hand, there are the various local dialects, known mainly from inscriptions, which emerged around the turn of the Christian era at various points on the edge of the fertile crescent—Petra (Nabatean), Palmyra (Palmyrene), Hatra, and Edessa (the earliest pagan Syriac inscriptions belong to this period). From further afield, Armenia, Georgia and Afghanistan, come further inscriptions in what is often a very corrupt form of Aramaic.

(4) *Late Aramaic*. The period spanning the later Roman Empire and the beginnings of Arab rule (approximately A.D. 200–700) saw the emergence of a distinct division between Eastern and Western dialects of Aramaic. Western Aramaic includes Samaritan Aramaic, various Palestinian Jewish Aramaic dialects, and Christian Palestinian Aramaic (also known as Palestinian Syriac, since it employs the Syriac estrangelo script). Eastern Aramaic comprises Mandaean, Babylonian Jewish Aramaic dialects, and Syriac (what emerged as the classical literary dialect of Syriac differs in some small details from the Syriac of the earlier pagan inscriptions from the Edessa area).

(5) *Modern Aramaic*. The Arab conquests effected the gradual elimination of Aramaic as a spoken language in most areas, and it is only in outlying mountainous regions that Aramaic has survived up to the present day, spoken by small groups of Christians, Jews and even a few Muslims. A Western Aramaic dialect survives only in three villages in the Anti-Lebanon (two Muslim, and one—Ma'lula—Christian), although the accounts of seventeenth and eighteenth century travelers indicate that it was much more widespread a few centuries ago. Eastern Aramaic dialects, however, enjoy a rather wider use: a Jewish dialect from North Iraq (Zakho) is still spoken by some immigrants to Israel from that area, while several somewhat differing Christian dialects are still in common use in the mountainous area formed today by East Turkey, North Iraq, North West Iran and Azerbaijan. In the area of South East Turkey known as Tur Abdin the local Syrian Orthodox Christians employ a dialect called Turoyo, the "mountain" language, which is hardly ever written. In Iraq, Iran and Azerbaijan the Chaldeans and East Syrians speak a rather different dialect (or rather, group of dialects); this is sometimes also written, and the [13] earliest texts in Modern Syriac, all poetic ones, belong to the seventeenth century and come from the Alqosh area, but it was only in the nineteenth century, with the establishment of a printing press at Urmia (modern Rezaiyeh) by the American Presbyterian mission, that a real impetus was given to the use of Modern Syriac for literary purposes. That the dialect spoken in Iraq (variously called Fellihi, Soureth, or Swadaya) is still a force for politicians to take note of was shown by the action of the Iraqi government in 1972 when, in a decree of the 22nd April, it granted "cultural rights to the Assyrian, Chaldean, and Syrian Orthodox citizens who speak Syriac." How extensive a literature there now is in

modern Syriac is indicated by R. Macuch's recent *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1976).

Syriac emerges as an independent Aramaic dialect in the early first century A.D., and is first attested in a pagan inscription dated A.D. 6, from Birecik on the river Euphrates, some 45 miles west of Edessa (whose modern name, Urfa, is derived from the Syriac *Urhay*), the cultural center of Syriac literature. To early writers Syriac is actually known as "Edessene," an indication that it started out simply as the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa. That it came to be adopted as the literary language of Aramaic speaking Christians all over Mesopotamia may in part be due to the prestige enjoyed by Edessa as a result of its claim to possess a letter written by Jesus to its king (of Arab stock) named Abgar the Black (this was translated into Greek by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, I.13).

It is a remarkable fact that written Syriac, in the form that had become fossilized by the fourth century, differs hardly at all in morphology from the written classical Syriac still employed today by Syrian Orthodox clergy and some others. Nevertheless, although the language remained the same, there emerged two different pronunciations of Syriac, usually known as the "Eastern" and the "Western." The Eastern, which is essentially the more archaic, came to be used by members of the Church of the East, living mainly in what is now Iraq and Iran, while the Western is employed in the Maronite and the Syrian Orthodox tradition whose homeland is further west (modern Syria and SE Turkey). The most obvious difference between the two consists in the pronunciation of original *ā*: the Eastern pronunciation preserves it (e.g. *malkā* "king"), while the Western alters it to *ō* (*malkō*).

Syriac Scripts

The earliest Syriac inscriptions of the first and second centuries A.D. (all pagan) employ a script with many similarities with Palmyrene cursive writing, but by the time of our earliest manuscripts (early fifth century A.D.) this script has taken on a more formalized character, known as "Estrangelo" (from Greek *strongulos*, "rounded"). The British Library preserves many superb pieces of calligraphy in this hand. Although the script continued to be used well into the Middle Ages (and indeed enjoyed a dramatic local revival in Tur Abdin in the twelfth century), during the course of the eighth century there emerged, side by side with it, a new and more compact script developed from estrangelo. The correct name for this [14] new script is *serto* (literally "a scratch, character"), but in European works it is often designated "Jacobite," since it became the normal script employed by the "Jacobites" (i.e. Syrian Orthodox); it is in fact also used by the Maronites as well. A few centuries later, among the East Syrians, we see the gradual emergence from estrangelo of the other distinctive Syriac script, today employed by Chaldeans and "Assyrians;" it is generally called the "Nestorian" or "Chaldean" script by European writers.

The study of Syriac palaeography is still in its infancy, and the dating of manuscripts on the basis of the hand alone can be a matter of great uncertainty. The only guidance available is the excellent photography in W.H.P. Hatch's *An Album of Dated Syriac Manuscripts* (Boston, 1946).

The early centuries of Arab rule witnessed the emergence of various vocalization systems to assist the reading and pronunciation of the unvowelled Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac scripts. For Syriac we know that one of the early experimenters in this field was the great Syrian Orthodox scholar Jacob of Edessa (died 708), fragments of whose grammar, setting out his suggestions, survive. What finally emerged were two different systems, one used by Syrian Orthodox and Maronites (the so-called Jacobite vowel signs), and the other employed by East Syrians (the so-called Nestorian vowel signs); the former consist of symbols derived from Greek letters, the latter of different combinations of dots. In practice today West Syrian scribes (using Serto) rarely bother to insert the vowel signs, while East Syrian ones quite frequently give them.

Many Syriac scribes, right up to the present day (as we shall see, manuscripts still continue to be copied), have been very fine calligraphers. A few have also been illuminators, and by far the most famous illustrated Syriac manuscript is the so-called “Rab-bula Gospels” in the Laurentian Library, Florence. According to the long colophon the scribe Rabbula completed this magnificent work on the sixth of February “in the year 897 of Alexander,” that is A.D. 586, at the Monastery of St. John of Beth Zagba, probably somewhere in North Syria. But this is by no means the only illuminated Syriac manuscript to survive, as can be readily seen by anyone who consults Jules Leroy’s *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures* (two volumes, one of text, one of plates; Paris, 1964).

V. TOOLS

A. GRAMMARS

These are best divided into two categories, elementary and reference grammars:

Elementary grammars

Until the appearance of John Healey’s *First Studies in Syriac* accompanying the present volume, the standard work in English for beginners was T.H. Robinson’s *Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar* [15] (Oxford, 4th ed. 1968), which is provided with exercises (Syriac-English, English-Syriac) and a two-way glossary. For a number of different reasons Robinson’s Grammar was not a very satisfactory work, even in the somewhat improved later editions. In Latin a much more useful introductory work is L. Palacios, *Grammatica Syriaca* (Rome, 1954), which also contains exercises, as well as a short selection of texts in serto script. For those who read German A. Ungnad’s *Syrische Grammatik* (Munich, 1913) is particularly well set out for beginners.

It is often helpful to start on reading simple vocalized texts at an early stage: for such purposes the grammatical analysis of the Peshitta Gospels in H.F. Whish’s *Clavis Syriaca* (London, 1883) will be especially helpful to those learning the language on their own. Much shorter, but similarly conceived, and with a brief introductory grammatical sketch, are the *Syriac Reading Lessons*, by “The Author of The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon etc. etc.,” in other words B. Davidson (London, 1851).

From the Middle East there come a number of elementary books designed for teaching Syriac to schoolchildren. One that makes use of English as well as Arabic explanations is Asmar El-Khoury’s *Companion* (Beirut, 1972).

Reference grammars

Of intermediary sized grammars there are German ones by E. Nestle (with an English translation, Berlin, 1889) and by C. Brockelmann (Leipzig, 1899 and many subsequent editions); the latter in particular is very handy. Both these works also contain a selection of texts and a glossary. Of comparable size and coverage in French (but without any texts) is L. Costaz' *Grammaire syriaque* (Beirut, 2nd ed. 1964), where there is a useful typographical distinction between material meant for the less advanced and that reserved for the more experienced student.

The standard reference grammars are those by R. Duval, *Grammaire syriaque* (Paris, 1881) and (above all) T. Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 2nd ed. 1898; English translation by J.A. Crichton (London, 1904)). The German reprint of 1966 contains some supplements and an index of passages quoted. Although both these works pay generous attention to syntax, there is actually a great need for a specifically diachronic study of Syriac syntax.

Of the older reference grammars, that by A. Merx, *Grammatica Syriaca* (Halle, 1867), in Latin, might be singled out. An intriguing glimpse into the earliest European grammars, produced during the Renaissance, is provided by the facsimiles in W. Strothmann's *Die Anfänge der syrischen Studien in Europa* (Göttingen, 1971).

[16] It should not be forgotten that there are numerous grammars by native Syriac scholars, going back to Jacob of Edessa in the seventh century. The thirteenth century polymath, Barhebraeus, even wrote a verse grammar, as well as one in prose. Of the more recent grammars published in the Middle East mention should be made of the Arabic one by C.J. David (Mosul, 1879; 2nd ed. 1896), the learned Syrian Catholic metropolitan of Damascus and editor of the Mosul edition of the Peshitta (1887–91), and of the French *Clef de la langue araméenne* (Mosul, 1905) by Alphonse Mingana, later of Birmingham fame.

B. ANTHOLOGIES OF TEXTS (CHRESTOMATHIES)

The chrestomathy at the end of Brockelmann's *Syrische Grammatik* offers a particularly good selection of texts (there is a slight difference in choice of texts between the earlier and later editions), with samples in all three scripts, both vocalized and unvocalized. One of the pieces included is part of the Teaching of Addai, the Syriac account of the legend concerning king Abgar's correspondence with Jesus. Brockelmann's work contains a useful glossary, of which an English edition, with added etymological notes, has been published separately by M. Goshen Gottstein under the title *A Syriac Glossary* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

R. Köbert's *Textus et Paradigmata Syriaca* (Rome, 1952) contains some twenty pages of paradigms followed by an interesting selection of texts, both biblical and non-biblical, in a handwritten serito. A glossary to this is provided in his *Vocabularium Syriacum* (Rome, 1956), to which there is a supplement in *Orientalia* 39 (1970), pp. 315-19.

A very good variety of texts, in vocalized serito script, is to be found in L. Costaz and P. Mousterdets *Anthologie syriaque* (Beirut, 1955). There are brief introductory notes on the authors represented.

Most of the older grammars contain chrestomathies at the end, and sometimes these will include texts not published elsewhere (e.g. the Syriac version of the Lives of the Prophets will be found in Nestle's grammar). There are also several nineteenth century chrestomathies without grammars attached, and again many of these contain unpublished texts; of these the most important are by A. Rödiger (Halle/Leipzig, 3rd ed. 1892) and P. Zingerle (Rome, 1871–73).

From the Middle East there is a good graded series of reading books (*serto*) published in Qamishli (in eastern Syria; a modern town facing ancient Nisibis, now Nusaybin across the border in Turkey): A.N. Karabash, *Herje d-qeryana*, "Reading Exercises," in eight volumes (vol. 8, 1972). These contain several texts by contemporary Syriac authors.

Two older anthologies printed in the Middle East are of importance since they include some texts not yet printed elsewhere. [17] These are the *Kthabuna d-parthuthe*, or "Little book of scraps," published by the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission at Urmia in 1898, and J.E. Manna's *Morceaux choisis de littérature araméenne* (2 volumes; Mosul, 1901; reprinted Baghdad, 1977). Both these employ the East Syrian script.

C. DICTIONARIES

Besides the glossaries attached to the various grammars and chrestomathies already mentioned, the beginner will also find W. Jennings's *A Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament* (Oxford, 1926) particularly useful, seeing that one of the most readily available vocalized Syriac texts is the British and Foreign Bible Society's edition of the Peshitta New Testament.

Of the dictionaries proper the two most easy to handle are Jessie Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth), *Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, 1903 and many reprints), arranged alphabetically and very good for idioms, and L. Costaz, *Dictionnaire syriaque-français* (Beirut, 1963), arranged by root, and including English and Arabic equivalents as well as French. Both these will prove adequate for most practical purposes, but neither gives any references to sources; for these the two monuments of Syriac lexicography must be consulted, (Jessie's father) R. Payne Smith's *Thesaurus*, and C. Brockelmann's *Lexicon*.

Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum* (Berlin, 1895; much expanded second edition 1928) is the more convenient size to handle, and it is in a single volume. Arrangement is by root and the language employed is Latin (at the end there is a useful reverse Latin-Syriac index; the second edition simply gives the page reference for the Syriac equivalent, but the first edition more conveniently provides the Syriac word itself). Lists of references, especially for rarer words, are very helpful, but quotations are never given, for reasons of space.

Robert Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus* in two folio volumes (Oxford, 1879, 1901) must be one of the most splendid of the many dictionaries the Oxford University Press has put out: the beautiful headings and layout, with ample margins for annotation, are matched by the wealth of examples quoted. The work (which, like all dictionaries, draws on the fruits of many earlier dictionaries) employs Latin rather than English, and is arranged by root.

A *Supplement to the Thesaurus* of R. Payne Smith (Oxford, 1927) was compiled subsequently by his daughter Jessie, in order to include those texts which had been published for the first time only in the intervening years. Some further additions, mainly taken from medical texts, will be found in *Orientalia* 8 (1939), pp. 25–58.

[18] Both Brockelmann and Payne Smith make good use of the tenth century Syriac lexicographers, Bar Bahlul (edited by R. Duval, 1888–91) and Bar Ali (Part I edited by G. Hoffmann, 1874; part II by R.J.H. Gottheil, 1908). The more advanced student will find that these two works are sometimes worth consulting in their own right.

Of the older European dictionaries, E. Castell's *Lexicon Heptaglotton* (London, 1669 and reprints), based on Walton's Polyglot, and C. Schaaf, *Lexicon Syriacum Concordantiale* (Leiden, 2nd ed. 1717) still have their uses. Schaaf covers only the New Testament, but effectively acts as a concordance to this.

There are also some Syriac dictionaries published in the Middle East; of these the following deserve particular mention since they sometimes include words absent from the European dictionaries: G. Cardahi, *Al-Lobab, sive Dictionarium Syro-Arabicum* (2 volumes; Beirut, 1887–91); T. Audo, *Dictionnaire de la langue chaldéenne* (Syriac-Syriac, in 2 volumes; Mosul, 1897); and J.E. Manna, *Vocabulaire chaldéen-arabe* (Mosul, 1900). The Syriac Academy in Baghdad is making preliminary plans for compiling a new dictionary.

A large number of important Syriac texts have been published since all these dictionaries were compiled and, since these include quite a number of words not yet recorded in any of them, there is certainly room for at least another supplement to the *Thesaurus*!

D. MAIN EDITIONS OF THE SYRIAC BIBLE

The beginner will find the British and Foreign Bible Society's edition of the *Peshitta New Testament* very useful for reading practice: it is very clearly printed and is fully vocalized (serto with West Syrian vowel signs). At first the Gospels were also printed separately. This edition also has the advantage that it contains a reliable text, and for the Gospels it is based on the critical edition by Pusey and Gwynn (1901); the latter has a facing Latin translation and gives the variant readings (usually of a very minor character) from a number of early manuscripts. Since the original Syriac New Testament Canon did not contain 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude or Revelation, there is no Peshitta translation of these books available; as a result the Bible Society prints a later translation, probably belonging to the sixth century, for these particular books.

A good way to familiarize oneself with reading unvocalized texts is to read the *Old Syriac Gospels* alongside the Peshitta. The most convenient edition is that by F.C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* (Cambridge, 1904), based on the Curetonian manuscript (with variations of the Sinaiticus at the bottom of the page in the apparatus); this has a facing English translation and for the Syriac the estrangelo script is used (the smaller sized type in the notes is actually based on Burkitt's own beautiful Syriac handwriting). After reading only a [19] few verses it will be seen that this is a much freer translation of the Greek than is the Peshitta; the latter actually came into existence as a revision of the Old Syriac. For those interested in textual criticism of the New

Testament it is important to use A. Lewis' edition of the Sinaiticus in conjunction with Burkitt.

The surviving fragments of the *Diatessaron* in Syriac were collected by I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Vetus Evangelium Syrorum; Diatessaron Tatiani*, as volume VI of the Madrid Polyglot (1967).

The very literal seventh century translation known as the *Harklean* (in fact a revision of earlier revisions) was published in two volumes by J. White under the misleading title of *Versio Syriaca Philoxeniana* (1778–1803). A Latin translation is provided.

There are several English translations of the Peshitta New Testament, or parts of it: by J. Murdock (1851), W. Norton (1890), and G. M. Lamsa (1933).

In the absence of a printed concordance, Schaaf's New Testament lexicon (listed under V.c *Dictionaries*) is still useful. There exists a handwritten concordance, made by A. Bonus, which is now in the possession of the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, Melbourne.

For the *Peshitta Old Testament* there are convenient and good editions of the Pentateuch (estrangelo) and Psalms (serto) published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. At the present time there is a large-scale new edition of the Peshitta Old Testament in the course of publication, under the general editorship of Professor P.A.H. de Boer (Leiden). So far the following volumes have appeared:

Sample edition: Song of Songs, Tobit, IV Ezra (1966)

I.1: Genesis, Exodus (1977)

II.2: Judges, Samuel (1978)

II.4: Kings (1976)

IV.3: Apocalypse of Baruch, IV Ezra (1973)

IV.6: Odes, Psalms of Solomon, Apocryphal Psalms, Tobit, I(III) Ezra (1972).

These are beautifully printed in estrangelo script; the edition makes use of all known early manuscripts as well as of many later ones.

There are also reliable earlier editions of several individual books: Psalms (W. Barnes, 1904); Lamentations (B. Albrektson, 1963); Wisdom of Solomon (J.A. Emer-ton, 1959); and the Apocrypha (P. de Lagarde, 1861).

[20] There exist several old editions containing the entire Peshitta Old Testament, but none of these is based on the oldest or best manuscripts available. The edition of S. Lee (London, 1823), using sereto script, can sometimes be picked up second-hand; it is largely based on Brian Walton's London Polyglot Bible (1657), which in turn goes back to the Paris Polyglot of 1645. The manuscripts employed for these editions were mostly of very late West Syrian provenance, though Lee made some use of the twelfth century "Buchanan Bible," which had been brought back from India by the Reverend Claude Buchanan and presented to the University Library, Cambridge, around 1809.

The American Presbyterian Mission printed an edition at Urmia in 1852 containing the entire Peshitta Old Testament; for this, local East Syrian manuscripts were used as the basis, and the script employed is also East Syrian. A revision of this, made by Joseph de Kelayta, was published by the Trinitarian Bible Society in 1913 (printed in rather diminutive East Syrian characters).

A second Middle Eastern edition, prepared by the Syrian Catholic bishop C.J. David, was published by the Dominican press at Mosul, 1887–92; for this East Syrian script (vocalized) was employed. This edition was reprinted at Beirut in 1951 and is still available.

Mention should also be made of the magnificent photolithographic reproduction of the seventh century manuscript of the Peshitta in the possession of the Ambrosian Library in Milan; for this A.M. Ceriani was responsible (1876–79).

Since there is generally very little variation between Peshitta manuscripts (at least compared with Septuagint ones), for most purposes it will make little difference which edition of the Peshitta Old Testament is used. For serious work on the Hebrew text underlying the Peshitta, however, it is essential to use an edition (above all the Leiden one where ready) based on the earliest manuscripts, since the text of the Peshitta evidently underwent some small but important modifications during its early history.

For the *Syrohexapla* A.M. Ceriani produced a photolithographic edition (1874) of a ninth century manuscript in the Ambrosian Library, containing the second half of the Old Testament (Job–Malachi). The companion volume to this manuscript was still in existence in the sixteenth century and was used by various Renaissance scholars; subsequently, however, it disappeared in circumstances still unknown. Other scattered Syrohexapla texts containing books from the first half of the Old Testament were collected together and edited by P. de Lagarde (*Bibliothecae Syriacae*, (Göttingen, 1892); an earlier edition of this (1880) employed Hebrew type). Some subsequent finds were published by W. Baars in *New Syrohexaplaric Texts* (Leiden, 1968, with a valuable introduction), while a photographic edition of a Pentateuch manuscript from [21] SE Turkey has been edited by A. Vööbus (Louvain, 1975).

There are *concordances* to the following books of the Peshitta Old Testament: Psalms (N. Sprenger; Wiesbaden, 1976), Ecclesiastes (W. Strothmann; Göttingen, 1973), and Ecclesiasticus (M.M. Winter; Leiden, 1976). An invaluable *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts* was published by the Peshitta Institute (Leiden) in 1961.

By way of appendix a word should be said of the *Christian Palestinian Aramaic* (or *Palestinian Syriac*) version of the Bible, made from Greek. As has already been seen, this is a Western Aramaic dialect quite separate from Syriac, even though it uses an estrangelo script. Only fragments of the version survive, often as the underwriting of palimpsest manuscripts. The Old Testament fragments are at present being re-edited by M. Goshen Gottstein and assistants, and one volume of *The Bible in the Palestinian Syriac Version* (Pentateuch and Prophets) has so far been published (Jerusalem, 1973). For the New Testament the most extensive texts are in A. Lewis and M. Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels* (London, 1899). A list, now incomplete, of other New Testament texts will be found in F. Schultess, *Lexicon Syro-palaestinum* (Berlin, 1903).

For guidance to the secondary literature on the Syriac biblical versions, see the works mentioned at the end of II.a.

E. HISTORIES OF SYRIAC LITERATURE

There is unfortunately no satisfactory up to date introduction to Syriac literature and the beginner has to make the most of what is available. Perhaps still the best, and certainly the most readable, is R. Duval's *La littérature syriaque* (Paris, 3rd ed. 1907), which treats the subject by genre. The standard English work, W. Wright's *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London, 1894) is useful, but outdated and very dry; de Lacy O'Leary's *The Syriac Fathers* (London, 1909) is not much better in this respect. A. Baumstark's section on Syriac literature in his *Die christliche Literaturen des Osten I* (Leipzig, 1911) is good for its date, and J.B. Chabot's *Littérature syriaque* (Paris, 1934) is also quite reasonable.

The only recent work is I. Ortiz de Urbina's *Patrologia Syriaca* (Rome, 2nd ed. 1965), in Latin. This is more a tool for reference, being a catalogue of the main writers and their works; its bibliographies, attached to each section, will be found very useful. A further edition is in preparation. There is also a brief German survey by A. Baumstark and A. Rucker in *Handbuch der Orientalistik III: Semitistik* (Leiden, 1954), pp. 169–204.

[22] The standard reference work, however, is A. Baumstark's great *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922; reprinted Berlin 1968), and this still remains indispensable for the serious student of Syriac literature. Unfortunately Baumstark's German style is notoriously difficult and this is hardly a work to be read from cover to cover. Besides editions, Baumstark notes all manuscripts of each individual work in so far as they were known to him (of the catalogues of major collections of Syriac manuscripts in European libraries only Mingana's *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts* (Birmingham) has appeared subsequently).

Another, much older, reference work which is still of great value to the specialist is J.S. Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, in three large volumes (Rome, 1719–28), where a volume each is devoted to "Orthodox," "Monophysite" and "Nestorian" writers. Generous excerpts from manuscripts in the Vatican library are given throughout. At the beginning of volume III is printed the important medieval catalogue of Syriac authors and their writings, compiled by Abdisho, the East Syrian metropolitan of Nisibis who died in 1318.

Thanks to recent manuscript finds (especially by Professor Arthur Vööbus in the Middle East) and the publication of important new texts there is now a great need for an updated large-scale history of Syriac literature. Such a volume has indeed been promised by Vööbus himself (announced at the first "Symposium Syriacum," held in Rome 1965).

Almost all the above histories of Syriac literature give the impression that Syriac literature died out after the Mongol invasions. Only Baumstark gives a few subsequent writers. This impression is actually a totally false one, for classical Syriac has continued to be an important literary language right up to the present day. The extent of this more recent literature was almost totally unknown to European scholars until the publication of R. Macuch's *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1976), which covers both literature in classical Syriac and that in Modern Syriac (first written down in the seventeenth century). (For some addenda and corrections see the review in the *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978), pp. 129–38).

Finally three important histories of Syriac literature published in the Middle East should be mentioned. The late Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ephrem Barsaum published a history of Syriac literature in Arabic in 1943 under the title *The Book of Unstrung Pearls in the History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*. An enlarged second edition appeared in 1956, and of this a Syriac translation was made by the late metropolitan of Mardin (SE Turkey), Mar Iuhannon Philoxenos Dolobani, himself a considerable Syriac scholar; this was published at Qamishli (Syria) in 1967. A partial English translation, by M.I. Moosa, was made for an American doctoral dissertation in 1965 (University Microfilms no 66-6949). Barsaum's work has information on several authors not included in Baumstark, but it excludes all writers belonging to the Church of the East.

[23] Albert Abuna's *Adab al-lugha al-aramiyya* ("Aramean literature;" Beirut, 1970), also in Arabic, is a good general history of Syriac literature. Until recently the author taught in the seminary at Mosul.

P. Sarmas's *Tash'ita d-siprayuta atoreta* (History of Assyrian, i.e. Syriac literature; Teheran, 1969-70) is in modern Syriac and covers East Syrian writers. Dr Sarmas, who died in 1972, was one of the foremost authorities on Syriac in Iran.

All these three works have been well exploited by Macuch in his book mentioned above.

For those interested in seeing what Syriac scholars, both western and Middle Eastern actually look like, the collection of photographs in Abrohom Nouro's *My Tour in the Parishes of the Syrian Church in Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut, 1967) is to be recommended. The author, whose family comes from Edessa, is a real enthusiast for the Syriac language and one whose energy and dynamism know no bounds; both he and his immediate relations speak Classical Syriac at home.⁴

F. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since Syriac literature spans a wide area both in time and in space there is no single work that covers the historical background. For the home of Syriac, Edessa, an eminently readable work is J.B. Segal's *Edessa, the Blessed City* (Oxford, 1971); the author is an authority on the early pagan inscriptions and mosaics from the area, and he has explored some fascinating byways of local literary history in the course of writing this book.

For the early history of the Church of the East as it existed under the Sasanid empire (roughly modern Iraq and Iran) there are two English works: W.A. Wigram, *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church, 100-640 A.D.* (London, 1910), and W.G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Prophet* (Rawalpindi, 1974). Wigram was a member of the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission to the Church of the East and he did a great deal to bring knowledge of that Church's plight to the English-reading public. For the period, of the origins of Christianity in Mesopotamia (where legends abound) neither of these two works is sufficiently critical, and a more reliable account will be found in J.M. Fiey's *Jalons pour une histoire de l'église en Iraq* (Louvain, 1970), which covers up to the seventh century. A more detailed history spanning the same period is J. Labourt's *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse* [24] (Paris, 1904), a solid work which still retains its value. For this Church's flourishing history under the early Abbasid caliphs, besides Young's book, there is a recent work by H. Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780-823)* (Beirut, 1975). The Mongol period (13th-14th cen-

ture) is well covered in the short book by J.M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols* (Louvain, 1975). The best overall survey of the history of the Church of the East is by the late Cardinal E. Tisserant, in the article “Nestorienne, église” in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*.

The period of the emergence of the Syrian Orthodox Church as a separate entity, in the 5th–6th century, is covered by W.H.C. Friend’s, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972) and W.A. Wigram’s *The Separation of the Monophysites* (London, 1923); the latter is especially valuable for the sixth century, being based on little-exploited Syriac sources. For the Arab period the only works available are in German: W. Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1966), and P. Kawerau, *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance* (Berlin, 2nd ed. 1960); the latter deals with the 12th–13th century.

Two authors in particular have made great contributions to the historical geography of the Syrian churches, E. Honigmann, covering the Mediterranean littoral in his *Évêques et Évêchés-monophysites d’Asie Antérieure au vi^e siècle* (Louvain, 1951) and his *Le Couvent de Barsauma et le Patriarcat jacobite d’Antioche et de Syrie* (Louvain, 1954); and J.M. Fiey, covering an area further east (roughly modern Iraq) in his *Assyrie chrétienne* (3 volumes, Beirut, 1965–68) and his *Nisibe* (Louvain, 1977).

Of interest too for Syriac Christianity is J. Spencer Trimingham’s *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979).

G. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AIDS

For individual authors the handiest source of information on secondary literature is Ortiz de Urbina’s *Patrologia Syriaca* (2nd ed. 1965). Apart from this, C. Moss’s *Catalogue of Syriac Printed Books and Related Literature in the British Museum* (London, 1962) provides the nearest thing available to a bibliography of Syriac topics; the work covers up to about 1959. A supplementary bibliography (but arranged differently), covering 1960–70, will be found in my “Syriac Studies 1960–70: a Classified Bibliography,” *Parole de l’Orient* 4 (1973), pp. 393–465; a second supplement to cover 1971–80, is in preparation.

The bibliography in Nestle’s *Syriac Grammar* is still useful for its listing of early printed editions of Syriac texts.

[25] A great deal of information, in succinct form, will be found in J. Assfalg and P. Krüger, *Kleines Wörterbuch des christlichen Orients* (Wiesbaden, 1975), where the entries are provided with bibliographies.

H. SERIES OF TEXTS AND PERIODICALS

Pride of place is taken here by the series *Scriptores Syri* in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Corpus of oriental Christian writers), published at Louvain since 1903; by the end of, 1978 a total of 174 volumes in the Syriac series had been published (nos. 173–74 were texts edited by the indefatigable general editor of the series, Professor R. Draguet, now in his 80s). The normal format is a separate volume each for text (estrangelo script) and translation (Latin, German, French or English).

A large number of Syriac texts have also been published in the *Patrologia Orientalis*, founded by R. Graffin and now edited by his nephew F. Graffin. By the end of 1978 a total of 39 volumes (each containing several fascicules) had appeared. In this series the translation (now normally French) either faces the text, or (in older volumes) is placed under it.

R. Graffin also started another series, *Patrologia Syriaca*, of which, however, only three volumes ever appeared (not to be confused with Ortiz de Urbina's history of Syriac literature under the same title).

Although not in a series, the large number of Syriac writers edited by Lazarist Father Paul Bedjan (1838–1920) should not be left without mention. Between 1888 and 1910 he published over fifteen volumes (often running to well over 500 pages each), of Syriac texts, which were printed (by W. Drugulin of Leipzig) in a beautiful East Syrian script. An appreciation of Bedjan's notable contribution to Syriac studies was given by J.M. Vosté in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* II (1945), pp. 45–102.

A series recently started is *Göttinger Orientforschungen, Reihe Syriaca* (some 16 volumes by 1978), reproduced from typescript: for the Syriac texts a typewriter with estrangelo script, developed in Holland, is employed. (This is one of the three Syriac typewriter faces that seem to be in existence; another, designed some time ago in Germany, is based on the modern East Syrian script, and was employed to type the Modern Syriac texts in a recent collection of these by R. Macuch and E. Panoussi).

Syriac studies have rarely had a periodical devoted solely to themselves, and the following are the chief periodicals where Syriac texts and articles of Syriac interest are frequently published (the list is alphabetical): [26]

- *Analecta Bollandiana*: this specializes in hagiographical texts (in any language) and it is published by the venerable and learned Society of Bollandists in Brussels.

- *Journal/Bulletin of the Syriac Academy Baghdad*: the Syriac Academy was established in Baghdad shortly after the Iraqi Government had proclaimed Syriac to be a recognized cultural language of the country (decree of 22 April, 1972). Although most articles are in Arabic (with English summaries), each number has a short English section with contributions by western scholars. Volumes 2 and 3 contain particularly important collections of Syriac inscriptions in Iraq (P. Haddad).

- *Le Muséon*: many numbers contain publications of shorter Syriac texts. There are now two indices covering all the numbers from its inception (1882) up to 1931, and thence to 1973

- *Oriens Christianus*: this august periodical has been published since 1901 and for a long time it was edited by A. Baumstark.

- *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*: published by the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome. There is a separate series of monographs under the title *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* (of which numbers 197 and 205 contain the papers given at the Symposia Syriaca of 1972 and 1976).

- *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*: published since 1970 by the Flemish speaking Department of Oriental Studies at Leuven (Louvain); articles are in English, French and German.

- *L'Orient Syrien*: this was edited from 1956 until 1967, shortly before his death, by Mgr Gabriel Khouri-Sarkis, Syrian Catholic Chorepiscopus living in Paris. The articles (all in French) are generally excellent examples of “haute vulgarisation,” and include many translations of Syriac texts. There is an index in the *Mémorial Mgr G. Khouri-Sarkis* (Louvain, 1969).

- *Parole de l'Orient*: published by the Maronite Université Saint Esprit at Kaslik in the Lebanon; articles are usually in French and the majority deal with Syriac topics. The first number of *Parole de l'Orient* (or, to use its Syriac title, *Melto d-Madnho*) appeared in 1970 as a successor to *Melto: Recherches orientales*, which ran between 1965 and 1969 (index in *Parole de l'Orient* 1).

- *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*: this valuable periodical, edited by R. Graffin, ran from 1896 to 1946; there are indices at the end of every ten volumes.

VI. EPILOGUE: THE DELIGHTS OF MANUSCRIPTS

To read, as one sits in the Oriental Studies Room of the British Library, the words “this volume was completed in the month Teshri II of the year 723 in Urhay, capital of Beth Nahrin” is a moving experience, for at the end of this, the earliest of all dated Syriac [27] manuscripts (411 of the Christian era), is also a list of names of Persian martyrs, almost certainly brought back from Seleucia-Ktesiphon only a few months previously by Marutha, bishop of Martyropolis, who had been serving as ambassador to the Sasanid court. It does not take much imagination to find oneself transported back across time and space to Edessa in November 411.

As a matter of fact the first Syriac manuscript I ever had the joy of handling was a rather scruffy and torn fragment on an undergraduate visit to Beirut; although it was no more than a couple of hundred years old at the most, my curiosity was aroused by the mention of the fifth century emperor Marcian. On return home I managed to identify the text as a fragment of the life of the fierce monk Barsoma who successfully scared off his theological opponents at the second council of Ephesus in 449. The excitement caused me by this very minor discovery proved addictive, but fortunately for one's pocket one does not necessarily have to go to the Middle East to browse among Syriac manuscripts; London and Birmingham happen to possess two of the largest collections of Syriac manuscripts in the world. The bulk of those in the British Library are exceptionally old, some belonging to the fifth and sixth centuries—thanks to their having been preserved until the mid-nineteenth century in a Syrian monastery in the Nitrian desert, between Alexandria and Cairo. The manuscripts in the Mingana Collection of the Selly Oak Colleges Library, Birmingham, on the other hand, are mostly very recent (one was copied as late as 1932), but nevertheless contain several works not otherwise represented in western libraries; they were collected by Alphonse

Mingana (whose grammar was mentioned above) during the course of two journeys to the Middle East financed by the generosity of Edward Cadbury.

Syriac scribes usually follow the old tradition, already found in ancient Mesopotamia, of adding at the end of the text they are copying a colophon, giving details of the date and place of writing, as well as their own name; and if there was empty space still available, their *horror vacui* might lead them to fill it with imprecations against anyone who borrowed the book and failed to return it. Jottings about some contemporary event might also find their way into empty end leaves, and one of the earliest, and probable contemporary, accounts of the Arab invasion of Palestine is to be found on the fly leaf of a sixth century Gospel manuscript in the British Library. The scribe of a much more recent (late nineteenth century) Mingana manuscript has left us with a moving narrative of several pages describing the massacre just suffered by the Syrian Orthodox communities of SE Turkey in 1895–96.

Habent sua fata libelli. Later owners, as well as the original scribes, were apt to add their names to manuscripts, sometimes even adding the price they paid for it. One such owner, to whom Syriac scholarship owes an inestimable debt, was Moses of Nisibis, abbot of the Syrian monastery in Egypt. Shortly after 926 he went to Baghdad to petition the Caliph on the matter of the tax problems faced by his own and other Egyptian monasteries. On his way there and back (932) [28] he visited various Mesopotamian monasteries, buying up old Syrian manuscripts wherever he could, thus accumulating a magnificent collection of texts—which today form the nucleus of both the Vatican and the British Library holdings of Syriac manuscripts (some of those in the Vatican, bought in the early eighteenth century, still bear the marks of a mishap on the journey to Rome, when a load of them fell into the Nile). The contents of Moses' superb library have now been reconstructed, on the basis of his various notes of ownership, by H. Evelyn White in his *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (New York, 1923).

Although the authorities of the British Museum were led to believe that they had bought up from the monastery all remaining Syriac manuscripts that had been left by Elias Assemani in 1707, it is now known that several dozen old Syriac manuscripts still remain in the monastery, locked away today in the safe keeping of the abbot's cell. During the two visits to the remote desert monastery that I made in the winter of 1978/79 (one ended in a sandstorm) the abbot, who alone has the key, successfully eluded me.

Modern owners, on the other hand, sometimes like to obliterate any too telling evidence of a manuscript's origin. In the Mingana collection there is a group of single leaves of early manuscripts cut out with scissors from their rightful home, and in several cases it is possible to mate them up—at least figuratively—with the original manuscripts from which they were taken—all at St. Catharine's monastery on Mount Sinai: one pair of leaves indeed proved to be part of a unique manuscript containing the works of the seventh century mystic Sahdona (or Martyrius), today divided up between Birmingham, Strassbourg, Leningrad and Milan! Happily it is certain that it was not Mingana who was the vandal: he bought all these fragments from a Paris dealer. A word of warning: such chance discoveries of "marriages" between loose leaves in different libraries can have unexpected, and time-consuming consequences: one

turned out to involve me in the writing of an entire book. But this is part of the fascination of the whole business.

European and American libraries are usually reasonably well catalogued, but catalogues do not always give away the true nature of a manuscript's actual contents. I would never have looked at "Initium martyrii Maximi Palaestinis" had I not been interested in another text in the same manuscript, yet this turned out to be an astonishing document—an early "anti-life" of Maximus the Confessor (died 662), written by a theological opponent, evidently within a few decades of his death. The manuscript proved to be a very rare example of an early Maronite text, and it incidentally threw some light on the exceedingly obscure origins of the Maronites themselves.

In the case of Middle Eastern libraries, for which catalogues are a rarity, the unexpected is always present (provided one can get access in the first place!). What treasures are still to be found there can be seen from the lengthy list of Professor Vööbus' discoveries as a result of his systematic examination of these collections (the [29] bibliography of his publications, given in the recent *Festschrift* in his honour, runs to over 50 monographs and 200 articles!).

One exciting moment in my own experience was when I came across a note by the great twelfth century Patriarch and chronicler, Michael the Syrian, to the effect that it was he who had copied the huge two volume collection of lives of the saints which I had perched precariously on a diminutive coffee table in the office of the secretary to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch in Damascus. (On a subsequent visit the Patriarch, His Holiness Mar Ignatius Yakub III, very kindly allowed me to work in the library itself—almost an *embarras de richesse!*).

It is usually only in the larger episcopal libraries that really old manuscripts are now to be found, but almost every village church will have a small collection of liturgical manuscripts (for the most part printed books are not used in church services). The colophons of these can often prove to be an unexpected source for local history. An unusually long colophon in a *Fenqitho* (the approximate equivalent of a western breviary) which I recently saw at the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Gabriel in Tur Abdin told how the manuscript had originally been written in 1838 by a novice called Zaytun at Mar Gabriel, then recently repopulated after it had lain desolate for 120 years as a result of various pillages. Probably in 1915, called "the year of the sword" in local tradition, it had been taken as plunder by Muslims from the monastery, eventually to be bought back in 1929 by a certain sub-deacon George, who then donated it to the village church of Keferze (also in Tur Abdin), where it had remained until very recently, when the present abbot of Mar Gabriel, Rabban Samuel Aktash, and the head of the monastic school there, Malfone Isa Gülcan, happened to visit the church and read the colophon; they arranged to have another *Fenqitho* copied for the church, and so the manuscript of 1838 (a fine piece of calligraphy) has now been returned to its original home where it is greatly cherished.

It will come as a surprise to many to learn that Syriac manuscripts are still being copied in the Middle East. Facilities for printing are rare, and the printing press, donated by Queen Victoria, which the late Syrian Orthodox metropolitan of Mardin, Mar Yuhannon Dolobani, used for publishing Syriac texts, now has been taken over for the use of the local Turkish newspaper. The scribes are normally deacons, priests or

monks; Father Butrus Ögünç, now a priest to the émigré Syrian Orthodox Turks in Germany, whom I first met when he was schoolmaster in the small town of Midyat in Tur Abdin, had written some 100 manuscripts by the time he was thirty years old. If one has the privilege of meeting such people, one quickly becomes aware that to study Syriac is to study a tradition which is still very much alive. [30]

APPENDIX: THE SYRIAN CHURCHES

Syriac literature is closely tied to church history, and the variety of names in use for the various Syrian churches, coupled with the popular misconceptions which are current (even in otherwise reliable modern works) about their theological position, combine to increase the bewilderment of the outsider and the newcomer to the subject.

First of all it will be helpful to clarify the confusing terminology by means of a table:

<i>Official name</i>	<i>Also known as</i>	<i>Other (European) sobriquets</i>	<i>Uniate counterpart (in communion with Rome)</i>
Syrian Orthodox Church	West Syrians	Monophysite, Jacobites	Syrian Catholics
Church of the East (more recently "Assyrian Church of the East")	East Syrians	Nestorians, Assyrian	Chaldeans

Chaldeans

The terms "Nestorian" and "Monophysite" were originally devised as opprobrious epithets, and imply the holding of heretical opinions; as such they are misleading and should be avoided. "Jacobite" derives from Jacob Baradaeus who reorganized the Syrian Orthodox Church in the mid sixth century at a time when the emperor Justinian was trying to suppress its hierarchy. "Assyrian," very popular today in the Middle East and émigré communities (since it provides a much sought for "national" identity) seems to originate, as far as its present day connotations are concerned, with the conjecture of some nineteenth century archaeologists and missionaries that the modern Christian population of North Iraq (mostly East Syrians) are descendants of the ancient Assyrians. For nationalist reasons some Syrian Orthodox laity now also like to call themselves Assyrian, to add to the confusion (popular names to give children nowadays include Sargon, Hammurabi etc.).

In their essentials the divisions that exist today between the various eastern churches originate in the different stands taken over the christological controversies of the fifth century. Convenient touchstones are provided by the two main councils of that century: the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The mainstream of Christian tradition represented today by the Eastern Orthodox

Churches (Greek, Russian etc.), the Maronite and the Roman Catholic Church, and the various derived western Churches, accept both councils, whereas the Church of the East rejects Ephesus and accepts Chalcedon, and the Syrian Orthodox Church (along with the other “Oriental Orthodox” Churches, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic) accepts Ephesus but rejects Chalcedon.

[31] Looked at theologically, the Church of the East represents one end of the theological spectrum, making a sharp distinction between the divine and human natures in Christ (with the consequence that they do not allow Mary the title of Theotokos, “bearer of God,” but only Christotokos); the mainstream Christian tradition stands more in the middle, but still makes a real, albeit lesser, distinction between the two natures; while the Syrian Orthodox represent the other end of the spectrum (but by no means the extreme end), for they see only one nature in the incarnate Christ, “composed” out of two: to them, the presence of any duality in the incarnate Christ would vitiate the full reality of the incarnation. Ironically the Chalcedonian definition of faith, which ended up by declaring that the incarnate Christ existed “*in* two natures,” had in the text of its earlier draft “*out* of two natures”—a formula which is perfectly acceptable to the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Here it should be emphatically stressed that, contrary to widespread western opinion, the Syrian Orthodox do *not* hold that the one nature in Christ is *only* the divine, having “swallowed up” the human: this is the Eutychian position, which the Syrian Orthodox have always condemned as completely heretical. Thus the term “Henophysite,” rather than “Monophysite,” would be a much more appropriate one by which to describe the Oriental Orthodox Churches in contrast to the “Dyophysite” Churches which accept Chalcedon.

A few words should be said about each of the three Churches, which belong to the Syriac cultural world.

The Syrian Orthodox Church

The Syrian Orthodox Church only gradually became separated from the mainstream church in the course of the late fifth and the sixth century, and it was not until the first half of the sixth century that a separate hierarchy developed as a result of the deposition, by the emperor Justin, of the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch, Severus. Since then their patriarch (one of five patriarchs of Antioch today) has never resided at Antioch; the present patriarch, His Holiness Mar Ignatios Yakub III, lives in Damascus. Syrian Orthodox communities are now chiefly to be found in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey (Tur Abdin in the SE, and Istanbul), Iraq and India (Kerala); there is also a sizable diaspora in western Europe (Germany, Holland, Sweden) and the Americas (the present Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of America, Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, was one of the first owners of the famous Isaiah scroll from Qumran; he gives a fascinating account of this episode in his life in his *Treasure of Qumran: My Story of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London, 1968)).

The Uniate Syrian Catholic Church, with its own Patriarch (in Beirut), has its origins in the late 18th century.

The twentieth century has witnessed two great scholar patriarchs, the Syrian Catholic Ephrem Rahmani (died 1929), and the Syrian Orthodox Ephrem Barsom (died 1957).

The Church of the East

This Church was based in the Sasanid empire and so its history has always been distinct from that of the churches within the Roman Empire. It is indicative of the poor communication between Christians in the two empires that it was only in 410 that the Council of Nicaea (325) became known to and was officially accepted by the Church of the East. Whereas martyrdom was effectively brought to an end in the Roman Empire by the conversion of Constantine, it was only in the mid fourth century that Persian Christians experienced their first serious bout of persecution from the Zoroastrian authorities; persecution was to continue intermittently right up to the collapse of the Sasanid empire in the seventh century. A remarkable feature of the history of this Church is its missionary expansion across Asia, reaching China by 635—an event recorded on a bilingual Syriac-Chinese stele erected in 781, and discovered at Sian-fu in 1625; one unexpected by-product of this missionary enterprise has come down to us in the form of a diary of a thirteenth century East Syrian monk from Peking, Rabban Sawma, who traveled to Europe as an emissary of the Mongols (there is an English translation by E.A.W. Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan: The History and Travels of Rabban Sawma* (London, 1928)).

Although European writers have derogatively called this Church “Nestorian,” its connections with Nestorius are rather tenuous: only in the sixth century did any of Nestorius’ writings get translated into Syriac. As a matter of fact, beside their own great theologian, Babai (died 628), the East Syrian Church’s main source of theological inspiration was provided by the writings of the Greek Theodore of Mopsuestia (died 428).

The Patriarch (or Catholicos, as he is more frequently called) has always had as his titular see Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Sasanid winter capital, known to the Arabs as the “twin cities” (al-Mada’in), to the south of Baghdad. In the last hundred years or so their history has been a particularly tragic one; their previous Patriarch, Mar Shiman, was a refugee from Iraq, and lived in America (where there is a considerable émigré community). The present Patriarch, Mar Dinkha (who was consecrated in St. Barnabas’ Church, Ealing on October 17th, 1976) for the moment lives in Tehran, but hopes to be able, to move his permanent residence to Baghdad. His flock are chiefly to be found in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and south India (Kerala). As well as in the United States there is also a small émigré community in London.

The vigorous uniate Chaldean Church goes back to 1550; its Patriarch resides in Baghdad.

The Maronite Church

The origins of the Maronites as a separate church are obscure, although they are evidently tied up somehow with the monothelete/dyothelite controversy of the seventh and early eighth century. The [33] Maronite Church has accepted the authority of Rome since the time of the Crusades and their Patriarch Jeremiah II assisted at the

Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The Maronite Patriarch (one of the five Patriarchs of Antioch—the remaining two being the (Chalcedonian) orthodox and Uniate Melkite Patriarchs)—now resides outside Beirut; over the last century or so, in particular, the Maronite patriarchate has played an important role in Lebanese politics.

At Kaslik, just south of Jounieh in the Lebanon, there is a Maronite university, L'Université Saint Esprit, which produces a valuable periodical largely devoted to Syriac studies, *Parole de l'Orient*.

Maronites have played an important role in the history of Syriac scholarship in Europe ever since the establishment in Rome, in 1584, of a Maronite College. In the seventeenth century it was a Maronite, Gabriel Sionita, who was largely responsible for the Syriac text in the great Paris Polyglot Bible, while in the eighteenth century the Assemani family produced a notable succession of Syriac scholars, chief among whom was Joseph Simon Assemani (died 1768): his *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, a survey of Syriac literature based on the riches of the Vatican Library, in three fat volumes (Rome, 1719–28), is still an important work of reference for the Syriac scholar (a photographic reprint was published in 1975).

Some literature

A recent historical survey of the various oriental churches is given in A.S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London, 1968). For the modern situation D. Attwater's *The Christian Churches of the East* (2 volumes; London, 1968) gives information on ecclesiastical matters, while R.B. Betts' *Christians in the Arab East* (London, 1979) is concerned more with demography and politics.

A particularly fascinating account of the Syrian Orthodox Church at the end of the nineteenth century is given by O.H. Parry, *Six Months in a Syrian Monastery* (London, 1895)—the monastery was Deir ez Zafaran, on the edge of Tur Abdin in SE Turkey; at that time it was the seat of the patriarch.

Thanks to the Anglican educational missions to the Church of the East there are several readable accounts of this Church and its people, notably A.J. Maclean and W.H. Browne, *The Catholicos of the East and his People* (London, 1892), and W.A. Wigram, *The Assyrians and their Neighbors* (London, 1929). The older work by G.P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals* (two volumes; London, 1852) has become something of a classic. A scholarly account of the traumatic history of the Church of the East in the nineteenth and twentieth century is provided by J. Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours* (Princeton, 1961).

Notes

1. For an explanation of the confusing terminology, see the Appendix on the Syrian Churches.

2. Numerous extracts can be found in R. Murray's *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1975), and a selection of twelve poems, with a short introduction, is given in my *The Harp of the Spirit: Twelve poems of St. Ephrem* (Studies supplementary to Sobornost 4, London, 1975). There is an important introduction to Ephrem's theory of symbolism by R. Murray in *Parole de l'Orient* 6/7 (1975/76).

3. See the contribution by Susan Ashbrook in *Horizons in Semitic Studies*, ed. Eaton, 59-68.

4. I first had the pleasure of meeting Malfono (= Teacher) Abrohom Nouro early one morning at the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate in Charfet (Lebanon) where I was staying the night: having heard rumors that a European *mestaryono* ("syriacisant") was at large, he had taken a taxi out from Beirut at once and turned up only shortly after dawn.