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# *The Origin of the Monophysite Church in Syria and Mesopotamia*

ARTHUR VÖÖBUS

The earliest extant sources of Syrian Christianity reveal a powerful spirit of self-consciousness for independence. This desire is imprinted on every page of the historical records. That which stands at the very forefront of Tatian's thought<sup>1</sup> is profoundly instructive for our purposes: it is his dislike, nay more his hatred, for everything bearing a Greek or Roman label. This spirit shows itself in whatever direction we look. Syrian gnosis is the least hellenized of all. The pattern of Christian life carries its own attributes of sovereignty in every respect. Autonomy is the hallmark of the early Syrian conception of the church. Theological thought travels along quite independent lines in accord with that genius—even in the works of Aphrahat<sup>2</sup> written decades after the Council of Nicea.

Later history of Christianity in Syria and Mesopotamia is comprehensible only if we take into account those factors which excited the stimuli for the development which ended with the nationalization of the church of the Syrians. The main elements concern the ethnic, cultural, religio-sociological and social areas—though this does not exhaust all the factors involved.

Ethnically we are confronted by a phenomenon stimulated by strong impulses to forge a route of its own. This passion is an essential ingredient in the Syrian psyche. It is an order of rapture which can be perceived in literary sources as well as in the frescoes of early Syrian provenance in which pictures of the screaming and over plus-dimensional figures of the Syrian deities are on view.<sup>3</sup> The flames of fury nearly scorch the parchment in the polemical writings of Ephrem, Ishaq, Rabbula and others. The fervor of fanaticism<sup>4</sup> leaps out of the hagiographical sources, and the searing lava of mortification of every conceivable kind virtually scalds the works in which such accounts are recorded.

In the cultural field we meet a constellation which can only evoke our admiration. The destiny of the idiom of Edessa, the metropolis of Mesopotamia, after it was adopted as the vehicle for the Christian community, is little short of amazing. Astounding is the élan of the Syriac language. As the idiom for the literary life, it had the power to absorb all other dialects; even a language like that of Palmyra—widely used in the third century—could not retain its identity in the face of this tongue. A steady and ambitious growth towards the stature of a literary language of the world marks this idiom.<sup>5</sup>

Allied with this was the surge of sources to enrich the literary life. Like

1. See A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, I (Louvain, 1958), CSCO Subsidia, 14, pp. 31ff.
2. See A. Vööbus, "Methodologisches zum Studium der Anweisungen Aphrahats," *Oriens Christianus*, 46 (1962), pp. 25ff.
3. See A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, II (Louvain, 1960), CSCO Subsidia, 17, pp. 314f.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 256ff, 292ff.
5. It is with awe and pride that the Syrians at the high-water mark of this advance became convinced that God himself spoke Syriac.

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an artesian well, they began to flow and that abundantly. It is astounding how eagerly the Syrians grasped hold of these works. They began to translate almost everything they could lay hold of with a zeal that is probably without parallel. Original creations were stimulated soon to join in the stream of works which fed and enriched the intellectual culture.<sup>6</sup> In turn, the national self-consciousness was excited by these new and positive stimuli.

The emergence of the loci of higher studies certainly gave added impetus to these endeavors. Once the torch of learning was ignited in Edessa, it impressed itself upon the intellectual and cultural climate throughout the Syrian Orient. A recent work on the School of Nisibis<sup>7</sup> describes the impact of this achievement in such areas as schooling, higher education, literary life, scholarly endeavors and mission work. Centers of higher education emerged in Edessa, Homs, Qenneshre, Tell Ade, Pesiltha, Mar Zakkai and elsewhere. This network delineates a most important milestone in the progressive advance in the intellectual arena. It is impossible to underestimate the impact of this development upon the Syrian self-consciousness.

We must also touch upon the religio-sociological area. This concerns the spectacular growth of monasticism in Syria and Mesopotamia during the fourth and fifth centuries. The rapidity of this advance spilling over from monasteries to caves and clefts in the mountains is truly surprising.<sup>8</sup> Special significance must accordingly be attached to this phenomenon in the history of Syrian spirituality.

The attendant consequences were far-reaching. In the light of the immense veneration of the ascetics and monks by the religious masses, it is not difficult to understand why the care of souls gradually fell into the hands of the monks. Indeed other sectors of the pastoral office also came under their control. The role which monasticism actually played in the religion of the Syrians is thus properly highlighted. It begins to dawn upon us that monasticism exercised extraordinary functions in that society.<sup>9</sup>

In view of such first-rate factors it suffices only to glance momentarily at the social conditions of the time as revealed by our sources. Abuse on the part of the administration was reckless. The peasantry particularly suffered very hard. Economic conditions, poor at best, were aggravated the more by additional hardships. The garrisons located in the communities and travelling functionaries caused endless bitterness with their exorbitant demands and chicanery in regard to food, lodging and so on. Abuse practiced freely by local administration caused deep resentment and affront not soon to be forgotten.

It is only when we take these factors into consideration that we begin to perceive the forces operative in the Syrian Orient embracing Monophysitism. These are the reasons why within a short time Monophysitism<sup>10</sup> was no longer merely a protest against the Chalcedonians but became a developed doctrine, a movement with its own content and a separate church which did not hope for anything from the Byzantine emperors nor from the Byzantine church.

If we are to understand the position of Christianity in Syria and Mesopotamia during the fateful period under the Emperor Justinian, we must take a look, however briefly, at the events leading up to and contemporaneous with

6. See A. Vööbus, *History of Syriac Literature*, I (in press).

7. A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (Louvain, 1965), CSCO Subsidia, 26.

8. See Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*. . . . ., I, pp. 209ff; II, pp. 70ff.

9. See A. Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen: Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde*. I: *West-syrische Originalurkunden*, 1A (Louvain, 1970), CSCO, 35, pp. 165ff.

10. See J. Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien* (Louvain, 1909).

that era. In other words, it is necessary to include a few words in the area of pre-history.

In the time of Emperor Justin (518-527), a synod was convened in July, 518 A.D., which rendered the fateful decision to condemn the Patriarch Severus.<sup>11</sup> Other synod meetings held in Jerusalem and Tyros quickly followed echoing the same decision.<sup>12</sup> The dark clouds on the horizon converged to rain destruction upon the Monophysites. Severus<sup>13</sup> was deposed and the patriarchal seat given to Paul. Save for hasty escape<sup>14</sup> to Egypt, Severus would have lost his life.

Heavier blows awaited. During the following year, a large wave of persecution swept through the patriarchate. Diocese after diocese was robbed of its bishop.<sup>15</sup> The bishops were deported or imprisoned. A few years later, either 521<sup>16</sup> or 525,<sup>17</sup> the tide of persecution welled up again to engulf the monks; they were driven from their monasteries. Many priests were so overwhelmed by the ferocity of these attacks that they lost their courage and switched to the Chalcedonian party.

The whole life of the communities was upset. The acute shortage of clergy became a life and death issue for virtually every Monophysite community.<sup>18</sup> Johannan of Ephesus paints a very sad picture of this tragic situation, basing his report on that of a man who himself had been ordained by the same Johannan. The terrified bishops hung on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, they were afraid to ordain;<sup>19</sup> on the other, the congregations bombarded them with requests and pleas for clergy. At conclaves of the bishops, one and all refused to ordain for fear of repercussion, if not also of reprisal. At this juncture, Johannan of Tella<sup>20</sup> volunteered to take the risk, provided his colleagues and the patriarch gave him the mandate to "ordain all expelled men".<sup>21</sup>

The superhuman efforts of this man who had been captivated by anchorite ideals and who now plunged into an ocean of limitless activity have been ex-

11. *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz (Berolini et Lipsiae, 1914ff.), 3, pp. 76f.
12. *Ibid.*, 3, pp. 77ff.
13. About the discovery of a new source on Severus, see A. Vööbus, "Découverte d'un memra de Giwargi, évêque des arabes, sur Sévère d'Antioche," *Le Muséon*, 84 (1971), pp. 433ff. About the discovery of another new source on Severus, see A. Vööbus, "Ein Panegyrikus von Severus von Antiochein von Qyriaqos," *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 42 (in press).
14. About the discovery of a new important source, namely an unknown letter of Severus, see A. Vööbus, "Découverte d'une lettre de Sévère d'Antioche," *Revue des études byzantines*, 31 (in press). Among his letters this new document is of extraordinary character since it is autobiographical and gives a detailed account of his escape.
15. More than forty bishops were expelled from their sees (*Chronicon anonymum ad A.D. 846 pertinens*, ed. E. W. Brooks (Louvain, 1904), CSCO Syr. 5, pp. 225ff.
16. *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, ed. J. B. Chabot (Louvain, 1933), CSCO, Syr. 53, p. 27.
17. Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. W. Brooks (Parisii, 1924), CSCO, Syr. 39, p. 82.
18. Candidates from the Syrian Orient even went as far as Constantinople to obtain ordination; "and he would return perhaps after a year of days without gaining any satisfaction from his labor, as I saw happen to many" (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. E. W. Brooks, 2, *Patrologia Orientalis*, 18 (Paris, 1924), p. 522).
19. That they consecrated some of them secretly was of very little help in view of the situation (*ibid.*, pp. 515f.).
20. Regarding him see also the discovery of an unknown biography of Jaqob of Serug. A. Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Mēmrē-Dichtung des Jaqōb von Serūg: Sammlungen*, 1 (Louvain, 1972), CSCO Subsidia 39, pp.5ff. He was banned in 521 (Eliya, *Vita Johannis episcopi Tellae*, ed. E. W. Brooks (Parisii, 1907), CSCO, Syr. 7, pp. 80ff). After this he resided for some time in the Monastery of Mar Zakkai near Callinicus.
21. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, pp. 516ff.

toll'd in a monument by Johannan of Ephesus and also by his disciple, Eliya.<sup>22</sup> Johannan of Tella must have been a man of extraordinary stamina to brave the immense task before him. It took him on a marathon run from the Persian frontiers to Armenia, Cappadocia and Phoenicia,<sup>23</sup> encouraging, instructing, examining candidates and performing mass ordinations. Such heroic effort soon began to bear fruit. Depressed communities felt a quickening spirit; growing numbers of turncoats sought him out in order to be pardoned and received once more into the fold.<sup>24</sup> Candidates for ordination came to him "like a flood that is produced in a river by thick clouds"<sup>25</sup> wherever he appeared—in monasteries, on the road, even in the desert. His labors were risky but the communities and villages were provided with deacons and priests. The records he is reported to have kept are said to have contained thousands of names of ordained persons.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the epic efforts of this shepherd instilled courage, hardened determination and fanned the flames of the spirit of resistance. His example no doubt proved invaluable in establishing the essential premises for the upbuilding of life under the most severe of conditions.

The hurricane force of the persecutions sought to eradicate Monophysitism forever. But it failed to win the day; it brought opposite, latent powers to the fore. The Syrian Orient successfully withstood this first merciless test—an experience that gave it the muscle and iron to face the excruciating trials yet to come.

In 527 the imperial throne fell to Justinian (527-65) who thus came to the helm of the ship of state. This shift eased the furor, and monks quietly began to return to their monasteries.<sup>27</sup> The communities had been severely tried and tested and, though pressure was still applied, the enthronement of Justinian must have encompassed all these vexed ones with a surging emotion of relief. Johannan of Tella now prosecuted his work more openly and boldly, carrying out mass ordinations.<sup>28</sup> A graphic view of the situation in the year 529 is afforded us by one who himself experienced examination in a nightly gathering together with a contingent of monks at the hands of Johannan of Tella.<sup>29</sup> The vigor with which he fulfilled this program brought down upon him the wrath of the authorities and left him in a very precarious position.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, much more could be attempted during this period; increasing attention was given to the upbuilding of life. The breach between the church bodies widened to include areas beyond those of doctrine alone. The foundation was laid for an indigenous canon law which was designed to regulate ecclesiastical practice in piety, worship, liturgy and church order. The Monophysite tradition began to take on definite form. Most valuable glimpses are allowed us when we examine the canons issued by Johannan of Tella. Search for new manuscript sources in the churches and monasteries in the Orient has led to the oldest

22. *Vita Johannis episcopi Tellae*, pp. 1ff.

23. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, p. 519.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 519f.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 518.

26. The Oriental lightheartedness in dealing with numbers is shown by the figure given — 170,000! (*ibid.*, p. 522).

27. Mika'el, *Chronique*, ed. J. B. Chabot (Paris, 1910), 4, p. 270.

28. Eliya, *Vita Johannis episcopi Tellae*, pp. 23ff.

29. This company of about seventy monks came from the monasteries of Amid and its surroundings (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, p. 521).

30. *Ibid.*, p. 520.

and most valuable evidence of these documents.<sup>31</sup> They aim at complete separation of the Monophysite believers and affirm the readiness to suffer unto death for the sake of their creed.<sup>32</sup> The position and lot of the clergy is also dealt with, especially in respect to its qualifications and further training—certainly a not unnatural consequence of the mass ordinations.<sup>33</sup> They cast a singular light upon another facet of his endeavors: the institution of the deaconesses and its role in the organism of church life. Newly discovered sources exhibit the attention given by him to the nurture and strengthening of organized monasticism.<sup>34</sup> These years saw not only the growth in the number of Monophysites but also consolidation in the life of the church, due in great part to this tireless man. An atmosphere was created in which, for the first time, not only two separate churches consisting of the clergy and the communities but also two traditions faced one another.

During the summer of 531 the Emperor Justinian issued an order permitting the exiled monks to return.<sup>35</sup> Near the end of the year, a half-dozen bishops, also in exile, were given a royal invitation to present themselves at Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> They were understandably enough nonplused at the turn of events.<sup>37</sup> What is more, in Constantinople these shepherds were allowed to submit a confession<sup>38</sup> to the emperor.<sup>39</sup>

The disposition of the Empress Theodora toward the Monophysites was as positive as it was gracious. She turned the Hormisda Palace over to oriental ascetics—to that company of men whose panoply of peculiar custom seemed so strange—to do with as they would.<sup>40</sup> The palace was converted into a huge monastic camp. A more conspicuous platform for the anti-Chalcedonian forces could hardly have been provided. It was this locus which provided the setting for a theological conference<sup>41</sup> with representatives of both parties in attendance.<sup>42</sup> The exact date is not known but it must have taken place either in 532<sup>43</sup> or 532/33.<sup>44</sup> The Monophysites were allowed to disseminate their propaganda<sup>45</sup> in complete freedom.<sup>46</sup> The appointment of the new patriarch Anthimus<sup>47</sup> was a

31. A. Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen: Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde*, I, 1,A, pp. 156ff; 1,B (Louvain, 1971), pp. 263ff.

32. Canon I, *op. cit.*, 1,A, p. 158.

33. It was necessary to curb the wild and the exotic in ecclesiastical practice and to specify the qualifications of monks to make them eligible for the priesthood (see Canon XI). See *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, ed. A. Vööbus (Stockholm, 1960), p. 58.

34. See Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen*, I, 1,A, pp. 156ff; 1,B, p. 267.

35. Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, II, 6,2, p. 82.

36. They were able to stay there for more than a year.

37. At first they did not go; they wrote to the emperor and received a new invitation.

38. This document is preserved in Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 9,15, pp. 115ff.

39. *Inter alia* it rejects Eutyches on the one hand and the council of Chalcedon on the other.

40. Even cells were created in this place to satisfy the needs of the reclusi (see John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, pp. 676ff).

41. Innocentius de Maronia, *Epistola de collatione cum Severianis habita, Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 4,2, pp. 169ff.

42. Both parties were represented by a six-man delegation. The Monophysites were represented by Sargis of Cyrrhos, Thomas of Germanicia, Philoxenos of Doliche, Peter of Theodosiopolis, Johannan of Tella and Nonnos of Circesion.

43. See E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* (Paris-Bruxelles-Amsterdam, 1949), 2, pp. 378 ff.

44. See Schwartz, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 4,2, p. xxvi.

45. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 17, pp. 18ff. See *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 3, pp. 139, 148, 181.

46. In 553 they utilized the panic caused by an earthquake in order to stage a mass demonstration against the Chalcedonians (see *Chronicon paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonnæ, 1832), p. 629).

47. Consecrated in June 535.

bold move, rather astonishing under the circumstances. On top of all this, the Patriarch Severus was invited to come to Constantinople. He was received and showered with great honor<sup>48</sup> and allowed to promote his cause.<sup>49</sup>

Did the Monophysites succumb to new hope in view of the emperor's new role—despite his known vacillation in ecclesiastical policy? Did they become so complacent about their activities that they dropped their guard?

Certainly Justinian's move drew Johannan of Tella away from his activities; he too had been invited to Constantinople.<sup>50</sup> But it is highly improbable that the leaders, who had been tested and tried, cherished any illusions about the new imperial policy. The reasons are obvious. The clergy and monks in Constantinople remained adamantly opposed to the new trend in the emperor's policy. The formation of an assault detachment of monks, their agitation,<sup>51</sup> maneuvers and intrigues<sup>52</sup> were well-known facts. Further, the web of intrigue had drawn Syria<sup>53</sup> into the controversy as the documents themselves prove.<sup>54</sup> Let it not go unnoticed that the mastermind of the intrigue, namely the pope, was in contact with circles in Syria. The symptoms of a tour de force to come were perceptible. Severus, who in 534 went to Constantinople and remained there for a year, told his friends with resignation: "Do not err, under this emperor the peace of the church is impossible".<sup>55</sup> Predictions of Johannan of Tella may also be mentioned here. In 529 when Johannan of Ephesus along with a large contingent of monks received ordination from Johannan of Tella, the latter's admonition was indelibly pressed upon the memory of those participating in the act of consecration: "Pray and cease not, for a time is coming when men to give a hand of ordination to believers shall be wanting and shall not be found".<sup>56</sup> The outlook was bleak.

Indeed, that which men like Severus and Johannan of Tella anticipated probably came about more quickly than expected. The intrigues intensified to a feverish pitch when Pope Agapetus personally took matters into his expert hands. Arriving in Constantinople in 536, he assumed the role of prosecutor, intervening in ecclesiastical matters at will. Justinian complied with the wishes of Agapetus in every respect,<sup>57</sup> indeed to such a point that the throne itself suffered humiliation.<sup>58</sup> The pope's campaign was executed at lightning speed. Anthimus,

48. In the year 535.

49. He was able to promote the cause of Monophysitism for one year. He also influenced the newly appointed patriarch, Anthimus.

50. He was invited to Constantinople to participate in the conference.

51. The man who organized the band of monks and who directed the agitation on a large scale was perhaps Menas whose merits earned the patriarchal seat. This has been suggested by E. Schwartz.

52. Monks in Constantinople, used as an assault detachment, sent a delegation to Rome (*Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 3, p. 141).

53. Particularly Palestine and Syria II.

54. Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 9.19, pp. 135ff.

55. *Ibid.*, 9.19, pp. 136ff.

56. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, p. 521. See also a letter written about 530 in R. Draquet, "Une pastorale anti-julianiste des environs de l'année 530," *Le Muséon*, 40 (1927), pp. 83ff. This addition rests on Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14,663, which unfortunately has preserved only the first part of the document. A tireless search for new manuscript sources has revealed the only complete text preserved in Ms. Mardin Orth. 350. See A. Vööbus, *Syriac Manuscripts from the Treasury of the Monastery of Mār Hananyā, or Deir Za'f arān* (Stockholm) (in press).

57. Whether Justinian indeed did all this because he saw in the pope a help against Theodora (see E. Schwartz, *Zur Kirchenpolitik Justinians* (München, 1940), pp. 44f.) cannot be discussed here.

58. According to the official account of the Roman curia (*Gesta pontificorum Romanorum*, ed. T. Mommsen (Berolini, 1874), p. 142), the orthodox pope conquered the tyrannical heretic Justinian. This is a distortion; there was no resistance at all.

patriarch of Constantinople, was deposed. Menas was appointed his successor, consecrated by the pope.<sup>59</sup> The submission of a confession, Chalcedonian in theology, was required;<sup>60</sup> a synod was convened;<sup>61</sup> Monophysite leaders were anathematized;<sup>62</sup> and Severus thrown into prison.<sup>63</sup> The imperial decree followed;<sup>64</sup> the Monophysites were banished from the capital; the works of Severus were consigned to destruction;<sup>65</sup> and cruel punishment was established for everyone who copied Monophysite writings.<sup>66</sup>

A new vector in the zigzag course of Justinian's ecclesiastical policy had occurred. In consequence, the persecution which swept up the patriarchate of Antioch far exceeded the previous one in cruelty and severity. In the main, Patriarch Ephrem<sup>67</sup> himself carried it out, covering the territory<sup>68</sup> during the winter of 536/7.<sup>69</sup> He was accompanied by a detachment of soldiers<sup>70</sup> in order to ensure the submission of the Monophysites and to break their spirit.<sup>71</sup>

This persecution was carried out with savage fury which fed on inhuman cruelty and was coupled with the power of arrest, imprisonment and expulsion.<sup>72</sup> Many broke under the pressure.<sup>73</sup> Yet for all of that, the persecution failed to accomplish the objectives. The undaunted and the indomitable—particularly the monks—deprived of house and home, again became wanderers. Even nature itself, an extraordinarily cold winter, seemed to support the patriarch in his work of destruction.<sup>74</sup> Most of the shepherds, if not all, fell victim. Two years later, Johannan of Tella, having returned from Constantinople, was able to ordain only in Persia<sup>75</sup>—nowhere else! The hunt for him was on in the mountains of Shiggar.<sup>76</sup> This courageous figure was finally captured, imprisoned and killed.<sup>77</sup> Monophysitism had entered upon its most critical phase.

That the consequences were of the utmost gravity to the sufferers is clear. A process of strangulation was in effect. Overnight the problem of the clergy became extremely important. The situation suddenly experienced an utterly critical tremor, presenting as it did the end of all that had been built up at such enormous cost and effort. The moment had arrived, the moment which had

59. The consecration by the pope on March 13, 536, was itself an unheard-of event.

60. *Epistolae imperatorum, pontificum, aliorum*, ed. O. Günther (Vindobonae, 1895-98), *CSEL*, 35, pp. 338ff.

61. May 2 to June 4, 536.

62. *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, 3, pp. 26ff.

63. This was regardless of the assurance of guarantee given to him. However, Theodora salvaged him from the worst and helped his escape.

64. August 6, 536, which sanctioned the decrees of the synod.

65. Novella XLII of August 6, 536.

66. For this crime his hand had to be chopped off.

67. Concerning this man, see J. Lebon, "Ephrem d'Amid, patriarche d'Antioche," *Mélanges Ch. Moeller* (Louvain, 1914), 1, pp. 197ff.; G. Downey, "Ephraemius, Patriarch of Antioch," *Church History*, 7 (1938), pp. 365ff.

68. Namely Aleppo, Qenneshrin, Mabbug, Serug, Edessa, Shura, Callinicus and the rest of the frontier area, Reshaina, Amid and Tella.

69. Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 10.1, p. 175.

70. *Ibid.*, 10.1, pp. 174ff.

71. See a moving account of the horrors and endless vexations of the monasteries of Amid in John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, pp. 607ff.

72. Some were burned alive (*ibid.*, p. 524). About Presbyter Qura of Amid, Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 10.3, p. 173.

73. *Ibid.*, 10.1, pp. 174f.

74. The extraordinarily cold winter multiplied the agony of the calamities, and many died (*ibid.*, 10.1, pp. 174f.).

75. Eliya, *Vita Johannis episcopi Tellae*, pp. 58ff.

76. He was detected by some functionaries with the aid of a "strangulator of the robbers" (Johannes Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonnae, 1831), p. 382).

77. He was dragged off to Antioch where he spent the remainder of his life in imprisonment and died on February 6, 538.



haunted the leaders—the flock in the Syrian Orient was without any shepherds. Philoxenos of Mabbug, Thomas of Marash, Thomas of Damascus, Thomas of Dara, Petros of Reshaina, Johannan of Tella and others were dead. Patriarch Anthimus, Patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria, Peter of Apamea and Johannan of Hephaistou were kept in confinement at a fortress. On top of all, the Patriarch Severus breathed his last in the year 538.

The situation was desperate beyond belief. Johannan of Hephaistou, a Syrian,<sup>78</sup> decided to do something about it. By a ruse,<sup>79</sup> he managed to slip out of interment at Constantinople. He made secret trips to accomplish his work, to confirm and strengthen the besieged communities and to provide the flock with shepherds. Various clandestine journeys took him to Asia Minor, as far as Tarsus, Cilicia, Cyprus and Rhodes. The third such journey probably took place in 541. He also used literary means to strengthen his mission.<sup>80</sup>

Naturally, assistance to the congregations in the oriental communities was very limited despite such extraordinary efforts. It is certain that some from these communities travelled great distances at enormous risk in order to receive ordination. For the oriental provinces, the only opportunity available was to be found in Persia. But in that territory, only one bishop, Qyros, was left.<sup>81</sup> He carried out ordinations during the period 537/8-544/5 at which time, regrettably, the frontier was closed because of the war.<sup>82</sup>

Just when darkness and despair were at their deepest, there occurred an event which was entirely unpredictable—the genesis of the Monophysite church is rich in such dramatic moments! Hārith bar Gabala, King of the Arabs, suddenly appeared in Constantinople in 542/3. He was determined to create a closely knit Monophysite realm in his kingdom and demanded two or three bishops for Syria from Theodora. She complied. This was salvation from the very brink of the chasm. It must rank as one of the most decisive events in the history of the period when Patriarch Theodosius intoned the ceremony of episcopal consecration of two monks who were in Constantinople at that time: Theodorus of Arabia and Jaqob Burdana.<sup>83</sup> The first became bishop of the Arabs whose settlements consisted of tents.<sup>84</sup> Immense territory came under his jurisdiction: the entire desert, Arabia and Palestine up to Jerusalem<sup>85</sup>—an area which had been a place of refuge to the hunted. The second bishop, Jaqob, became bishop of Edessa, but his territory included all areas beyond the diocese of Theodorus. The advent of these two bishops meant not reprieve but rescue. They were aware of the tremendous burden laid upon them and their mission. As it turned out, a new leaf in the book of Monophysite history had been turned.

Bishop Jaqob, a monk garbed in a patchwork garment, was a thoroughly

78. About him see Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen*, I, 1,A, p. 178ff.

79. Under the pretext of illness Johannan obtained permission from Theodora to live separately in a villa. From this base he slipped out on his secret mission tours (John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, pp. 530ff.).

80. From Cyprus he sent a letter with the canons to the Syrian abbots in the Orient (see Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen*, I, 1,A, pp. 175ff.).

81. Mika'el, *Chronique*, 4, p. 309.

82. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, p. 522.

83. *Op. cit.* 3, pp. 153f., p. 228. About the discovery of new manuscript sources on Jaqob Burdana, see A. Vööbus, "Neue handschriftliche Funde über die Biographie des Ja'qob Bürd'änä", *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 22 (1973).

84. Hirtha of the Arabs, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 693.

85. *Op. cit.*, 3, p. 154.

educated man,<sup>86</sup> having mastered Greek and Arabic in addition to Syriac. He undertook the enormous task of leadership within his immense<sup>87</sup> jurisdictional domain<sup>88</sup> and gave it all he had. A moving, vivid account of his heroic endeavors to encourage, comfort, strengthen and nurture the life of the communities under his care is given by Johannan of Ephesus.<sup>89</sup> Constantly harassed by pursuers, he moved from village to village; "he would complete all the work of his ministry in one night and perhaps one day, and would pass the next night 30 or 40 miles or more farther on."<sup>90</sup> The number of ordinations he performed in this necessarily clandestine fashion is reported in fantastic figures.<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, documentation for the study of this period is studded with lacunae. The picture Johannan gives us is not adequate; his colorful and moving panegyric does not include substantial data so essential for the historian. Some information can be culled from the tradition and habits which lived on in ecclesiastical practice, as seen in the canonical literature produced by Jaqob of Edessa in particular.

Newly discovered documents have unearthed unknown important material which increases our knowledge.<sup>92</sup> These documents show us how difficult it was even at a later time to wean the monks from the practice of blessing the myron and from exercising priestly functions. They reflect with all desirable clarity the role which the contingent of monks once had played, that is, during the most critical period under discussion. Among the resolutions, one tells us something of the travelling priest on the way to serve the scattered flock—a real *conversatio viatorum*; it describes in striking fashion how a deacon, while on the way, can serve as an altar for the celebration of the eucharist. What a portrait of ecclesiastical life under emergency conditions, of the cultic life geared to meet the demands of being on the move in secrecy and in haste!

Back to Jaqob—it is a miracle that this man who was pursued, who had a price on his head, was never caught by church agents working for the orthodox cause. Two phases can be distinguished in Jaqob's activities<sup>93</sup> in building up his church. The records we have can only be interpreted properly to mean that Jaqob initially wished to confine himself to the accomplishment of the most urgent and vital tasks. To create a Monophysite hierarchy at the very beginning was to attempt too much. But the time for this was to come. When it did, Jaqob took the initiative.<sup>94</sup> The first step was to select two monks for metropolitan duty in Asia Minor.<sup>95</sup>

As to the exact date of this event, the sources offer no record. It is very difficult to fix the time Jaqob forged ahead in this new direction. One source,

86. He was from Tella and was educated in the Monastery of Phesiltha (*op. cit.*, 2, p. 690).

87. His territory extended from the Persian border to Constantinople (*ibid.*, p. 693).

88. *Op. cit.*, 3, p. 154.

89. *Op. cit.*, 2, p. 623.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 623.

91. John of Ephesus believes that 100,000 is not too high a figure for the number of his ordinations (*ibid.*, pp. 696f).

92. *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, ed. A. Vööbus, CSCO (in press).

93. The time granted for his work was quite lengthy. He died on July 30, 578. About the bishops he consecrated, see E. Honigmann, *Evêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure en VI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Louvain, 1951), CSCO Subsidia, 2, pp. 178ff.

94. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 2, p. 697.

95. Eugenios of Isauria and Conon of Cilicia. The first became the metropolitan of Tarsus (*ibid.*, p. 697; see *op. cit.*, 2, pp. 155f.).

namely the chronicle of Ps. Dionysios with its obviously erroneous chronology,<sup>96</sup> has for some time been a source of confusion to scholars.<sup>97</sup> Assumptions about an early date for the consecration of the patriarch by Jaqob<sup>98</sup> have simply muddled matters so much the more. The ground is more secure when we take a different fact into consideration. Constantinus, the metropolitan of Laodicea, upon the death of the Patriarch Severus, was invested with the dignity of deputy.<sup>99</sup> It is known that he died in 553.<sup>100</sup> This fact becomes important as soon as we realize that his death left Jaqob free to act.<sup>101</sup> Confirmation seems likely from another angle—from the list of the bishops and archbishops consecrated by Jaqob. This list begins with Dimat, the successor of Constantinus in Laodicea.<sup>102</sup> His consecration must have taken place soon after 553. The impression given is that this prelate was the first to be consecrated by Jaqob.

If so, then more than a decade passed before Jaqob began to expand the hierarchy. The list just mentioned then provides us with further information on the framework of the first organization. In respect to the Syrian territories of the patriarchate of Antioch,<sup>103</sup> two metropolitans were appointed for Syria (Laodicea and Seleucia) and one for Mesopotamia (Amid). Of the three bishops consecrated for this area, one was assigned to Syria (Qenneshre), one to Osrhoene (Harran) and one for Euphratesia (Shura). In consecrating the Patriarch Sargis, Jaqob completed the highest degree in the Monophysite hierarchical ladder.<sup>104</sup> He had to repeat this act very soon.<sup>105</sup>

This list takes us to 566. At that time, the hierarchical network was well provided in respect to Syria I, with the patriarchal seat, two metropolitans and one bishop for Qenneshre. The further development and completion of the structure of the Monophysite hierarchy belong to a later epoch, even to the epoch following upon the Islamic conquest.

96. A large number of consecrated bishops appears in connection with the time of the great pest, Pseudo-Dionysios (*Historia ecclesiastica*, p. 110). It has been wrongly assumed that this section is simply a copy of the work of John of Ephesus.

97. About this question, see A. van Roey, "Les débuts de l'église jacobite," in A. Grillmeier-H Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, 2 (Würzburg, 1953).

98. The consecration of Sargis as patriarch of Antioch has been placed in 538 (A. Šanda in Johannes Philoponos, *Opuscula monophysitica* (Beryti Phoenicum, 1930), p. 6); about 547-50 according to A. Jülicher, "Zur Geschichte der Monophysitenkirche," *ZntW*, 19 (1925), p. 37. But this event actually took place later, about 557 (see E. W. Brooks, "The Patriarch Paul of Antioch and the Alexandrian Schism of 575," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 30 (1930), p. 469).

99. About this document and the newly unearthed manuscript sources, see Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen*, I, I, A, pp. 167ff.

100. Mika'el, *Chronique*, 4, p. 312.

101. See also Honigmann, *Evêques et évêchés monophysites*, pp. 171f.

102. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 3, pp. 156ff.

103. Jaqob consecrated bishops and archbishops also in Egypt, Asia Minor and the island of Chios.

104. When he consecrated his former fellow brother of the Monastery of Phesiltha is not clear. In any case this must have taken place about 558; shortly before that time Johannes Philoponos dedicated his work to him (Johannes Philoponos, *Opuscula monophysitica*, pp. 81ff.).

105. Sargis died about three years later. It was Theodosios, the former patriarch of Alexandria, who after a sedisvacance of three years wrote to Jaqob and asked to consecrate Paul to the vacant seat of Antioch (*Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas*, ed. J.B. Chabot (Paris, 1908), CSCO Syr. 18, pp. 89f.).