CHURCHES OF THE EAST

From *The Lost History Of Christianity* by Philip Jenkins

PHILOS PRIMER

FOREWORD

Philos Primers are brief studies on key topics that go to the heart of our mission to promote positive Christian engagement in the Near East. This installment traces the development of the Church of the East and its extraordinary contributions to historic and modern Christianity.

In an era marked by rising regional conflict, it is tempting to look at Near Eastern Christians solely through the lens of persecution. This primer tells another story, offering the depth and historical context needed to understand one of the richest and least understood branches of Christendom.

In this excerpt from *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age*, author Philip Jenkins chronicles Christian life beyond the borders of the Roman Empire: the scholarship, customs, and culture that shaped Africa and Asia and left an indelible mark on the Western churches of today. Uncovering a world that most of us have long forgotten, Jenkins shows what the Christian East can offer a Christian West that has been disconnected from its own origins.

CHURCHES OF THE EAST

No one has been sent to us Orientals by the Pope. The holy apostles aforesaid taught us and we still hold today what they handed down to us. —Rabban Bar Sauma, c. 1290

Merv (Merw) is the ancient name of one of the world's most evocative dead cities, located in the south of what is now Turkmenistan. In ancient times, it was Alexandria Margiana, one of the many cities named for the Macedonian conqueror, and through the Middle Ages this oasis community prospered on the strength of its location on the Silk Road. From the eighth century, it was a base for Muslim military expansion into central Asia. Its population swelled to two hundred thousand in the mid-twelfth century, making it (briefly) one of the largest cities on the planet.[1]

For several centuries, it was also one of the world's greatest Christian centers. Merv had a bishop by the 420s, and in 544 it became a metropolitan see of the Eastern (Nestorian) church. It was an ideal base for mission ventures to the east, among the Turkic tribes of central Asia, and beyond that, into China. Around 500, the school of Merv was translating essential works from Greek and Syriac into the languages of central and eastern Asia. The city had a rich history of Christian intellectual and spiritual life from the sixth century through the thirteenth, and Merv could compete in vigor with any European center, certainly before the universities emerged in western Europe during the twelfth century. Merv's scholars had access to Syriac versions of Aristotle at a time when

these texts were quite forgotten in western Europe. Several of the greatest Syriac scholars, including the brilliant Isho'dad, bear the title “of Merv.”

Christians needed to maintain the highest intellectual standards because of the constant competition they faced from other faiths. From the seventh century, Merv was under Muslim rule, but Christians coexisted with Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and Manichaeans. The city was notorious for producing idiosyncratic blends of different faiths, old and new. Eighth-century Merv was the home of *al-Muqanna*, the Veiled Prophet, who claimed to be God incarnate. [2]

Although well known to specialists, Merv’s story fits poorly with conventional assumptions about the development of Christianity. In a sense, the tale is both too ancient for our expectations, and too modern. It is too “ancient” in that it involves the survival of a Semitic Christianity into the second millennium. It is too “modern” in its portrayal of Christians living not as the intimate allies of a Christian king but as tolerated minorities; of a church in a multifaith society; and above all, of Asian Christians in a wholly non-European context.

For most nonexperts, Christian history after the earliest centuries usually conjures images of Europe. We think of the world of Charlemagne and the Venerable Bede, of Thomas Aquinas and Francis of Assisi, a landscape of Gothic cathedrals and romantic abbeys. We think of a church thoroughly complicit in state power—popes excommunicating emperors, and inspiring Crusades. Of course, such a picture neglects the ancient Christianity of the Eastern empire, based in Constantinople, but it

also ignores the critical story of the religion beyond the old Roman borders, in Africa and Asia. We suffer perhaps from using unfamiliar terms like *Nestorian*, so that the Eastern religious story seems to involve some obscure sect or alien religion rather than an extraordinarily vigorous branch of the Christian tradition. Only by stressing the fully Christian credentials of these Asian-based movements can we appreciate the abundant fullness and diversity of the global church during the millennium after the Council of Nicea—and the depth of the catastrophe when those movements fell into ruin. Anyone who knows the Christian story only as it developed in Europe has little inkling of the acute impoverishment the religion suffered when it lost these thriving, long-established communities.

CHRISTIANITY AND EMPIRE

The Roman Empire in which Christianity emerged extended far beyond the boundaries of Europe, and its richest provinces were in the Near East and North Africa. By the fifth century, Christianity had five great patriarchates, and only one, Rome, was to be found in Europe. Of the others, Alexandria stood on the African continent, and three (Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem) were in Asia. After the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, Christianity maintained its cultural and intellectual traditions in the Eastern empire, in Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. [3]

Western historians are most familiar with the churches of the Roman Empire, which ultimately split between the Catholic and Orthodox, but for centuries these chur-

ches were at their most dynamic in the Middle East. Eastern cities like Antioch, Edessa, and Nisibis were the glories of the Christian world. Still in the eighth century, Rome itself was a remote outpost of an empire based in Constantinople, and the popes operated within a Byzantine political framework. The papacy was as thoroughly Eastern in language and culture as anywhere in Asia Minor, with the dominance of Greek (which was by now known as the "Roman" language) and Syriac. Between 640 and 740, no fewer than six popes derived from Syria, in addition to several Greek natives. When the Roman church in the 660s decided to bolster the emerging church in England, it sent as the new archbishop of Canterbury Theodore of Tarsus, from Cilicia, supported by the African abbot Hadrian. The last of the "Greek" Fathers acknowledged by the church was the Syrian John of Damascus, who was Greek only in language. John (originally named Mansur) lived and worked in eighth-century Syria, and he held high office in the court of the Muslim caliph. Christianity in his age still looked like a Syrian spiritual empire.[4]

Repeatedly, we find that what we think of as the customs or practices of the Western churches were rooted in Syria or Mesopotamia. Eastern churches, for instance, had a special devotion to the Virgin Mary, derived partly from popular apocryphal Gospels. This enthusiasm gave rise to a number of new feasts such as the Purification and the Annunciation, as well as the commemorations of Mary's birth and passing, or Dormition. At the end of the seventh century, all these feasts were popularized in Rome by Pope Sergius, whose family was from Antioch. From there, the new Marian devotion spread across western Europe.[5]

Eastern churches also produced the musical traditions that are such a glory of Catholic culture. Syria, after all, has a strong claim to be the source of Christian music. No later than the second century, Syria (Edessa?) produced the *Odes of Solomon* —what has been termed "the earliest Christian hymnbook." The earliest known pioneer of Christian music and chant was the Gnostic Bardaisan of Edessa, who around 200 composed hymns and songs that won a wide audience. Seeking to counter his heretical influence, Syrian church leaders like Ephrem of Edessa kept the older melodies and rhythms but added their own orthodox lyrics. Syrian music profoundly influenced later composers both East and West. It also shaped the various musical forms in the Western Latin world, and the Ambrosian chant of Milan was ordered "to be sung in the Syrian manner."[6]

The sequence of Eastern popes in Rome naturally imported customs and music familiar to them. When modern Catholics and Episcopalians sing the Agnus Dei in their liturgy, when they invoke the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world," they are following the Syrian custom imported to the Western church by Pope Sergius. Describing the arrival of Theodore and Hadrian from the Mediterranean, Bede records that "[f]rom that time also, they began in all the churches of the English to learn Church music." What we call Gregorian chant is a later synthesis of these local musical traditions, which ultimately stemmed from Syria.[7]

This Asian dominance continued for centuries. By the tenth century, the Byzantine Empire still had fifty-one metropolitans, supervising a hierarchy of 515 bishops, and of these, thirty-two metropolitans and 373 bishops

were still to be found in Asia Minor. Some of the metropolitan sees here, based in cities with associations dating back to the earliest Christian era, ruled over whole subordinate hierarchies as numerous as those of some Western nations. The metropolitan see of Ephesus had 34 subordinate bishops; Myra had 33; Laodicea and Seleucia, 22 each; Sardis and Antioch-in-Pisidia, 21 each.[8] Easterners could afford to scorn the pretensions of Rome and the upstart churches of the West. One Byzantine Emperor mocked Latin as "a barbarian and Scythian language," unworthy to be spoken in the civilized ambience of Greek and Syriac: it was scarcely fit for Christian use.

MOVING EAST

Let me present a story that is radically unfamiliar to most Western readers.

From its earliest days, Christianity spread throughout the empire, despite severe persecutions at the hands of imperial officials, who feared it as alien and subversive. Yet despite long sufferings and many martyrdoms, the new faith slowly won grudging toleration. Christians established influential churches and schools in the great cities and communication hubs. Benefiting from the empire's peace and stability, Christians spread along the protected trade routes, and used the familiar languages of the ruling elites. The ecclesiastical hierarchy closely mirrored the old imperial structure of cities and provinces, and when that empire faded away, the Christian church survived on its ruins.

Now, it may sound ludicrous to describe such a story as unfamiliar, as I am apparently describing the well-known course of Christian expansion into the Roman world. But in fact, this was also the story of the *Persian* Empire, where Christians won some of their most enduring successes. The Eastern expansion faithfully mirrors that in the West.

So central is the Roman world to the traditional story that for centuries, Christian historians have given a providential interpretation to the spread of Roman power. Rome built the roads and defended the sea routes along which traveled the missionaries, who spoke to their audiences in the widely familiar tongues of Greek and Latin. Obviously, it seems, Christianity's destiny lay to the west, in Europe. In fact, though, choosing a different map earliest Christians, and the opportunities available to them. The most important corrective for traditional visions of religious change involves the borders of the Roman Empire, which seem to demarcate the limits of Christian expansion. Yet these borders, which changed dramatically over time, placed few real limits on trade, whether in goods or ideas. [9]

Once we remove the symbolic constraint of the borders, we get a better sense of the opportunities available to early Christians. The Mediterranean world had its very familiar routes, but so did the lands east and northeast of Jerusalem, through Syria, Mesopotamia, and beyond. Still in early Christian times, travelers could follow sections of the ancient Persian Royal Road, which ran from southwestern Iran through Babylon and into northern Mesopotamia. These were the Asian worlds subjected by Alexander the Great, and they were littered

with place-names commemorating him and his generals—all the Alexandrias, Antiochs and Seleucias that stretch as far east as Afghanistan: Kandahar takes its name from Alexander. Through the late Middle Ages, Eastern Christians even continued to use a calendar based on the Seleucid Era. Instead of dating events from the birth of Christ, their point of reference was still the establishment of Seleucid rule in Syria/Palestine in 312/311 B.C.[10]

In the sixth century, the geographer Cosmas Indicopleustes described this Eastern world in terms that, although not always accurate, show how clearly contemporaries recognized the scale of an Asia that stretched as far as *Tzinitza*, China. Cosmas himself, who was probably a Nestorian, owed his name to having sailed to India. He calculated the breadth of Eurasia, from China to the Atlantic, to be roughly four hundred stages, or twelve thousand miles, using a crude average of thirty miles for each stage:

The measurement is to be made in this way: from Tzinitza to the borders of Persia, between which are included all Iouvia [the land of the Huns?], India, and the country of the Bactrians, there are about one hundred and fifty stages at least; the whole country of the Persians has eighty stations; and from Nisibis to Seleucia there are thirteen stages; and from Seleucia to Rome and the Gauls and Iberia, whose inhabitants are now called Spaniards, onward to Gadeira, which lies out towards the ocean, there are more than one hundred and fifty stages; thus making altogether the number of stages to be four hundred, more or less.[11]

That was the scale of the world in which Eastern Christians sought to proclaim their message.

The great Antioch on the Orontes, the city where the name "Christian" first arose, was a terminus for an ancient trade route connecting the Mediterranean world to Persia and central Asia. Throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the legendary Silk Road ran from Syria into northern Persia and into what are now the nations of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Beyond Merv, travelers crossed the Oxus River (the Amu Darya) to enter central Asia proper, and reached Bukhara and Samarkand. The route ultimately took them over forty-five hundred miles, into the heart of China. As Cosmas knew, "He then who comes by land from Tzinitza to Persia shortens very considerably the length of the journey." From Bukhara, one could follow the branching roads and tracks that linked central Asia to the Indian subcontinent.[12]

Focusing as we do on the Roman dimensions of early Christianity, we can forget just how accessible these Asian lands were for Middle Eastern believers, for Christians in Antioch or Edessa. We are scarcely surprised to learn that by 200 A.D. there were Christians in Gaul and Britain, in Carthage and Northwest Africa, but Christians had traveled far to reach these western lands. From Jerusalem to Athens is eight hundred miles as the crow flies: it is fourteen hundred miles to Rome, fifteen hundred to Carthage, and over two thousand to Paris or London. But just imagine traveling similar distances in the opposite direction, by land rather than sea. Going east from Jerusalem, the distance to Baghdad is just six hundred miles. From Jerusalem to Tehran is less than a thousand miles, while it is fourteen hundred to Merv and eighteen hund-

red fifty to Samarkand. Just in terms of mileage, Jerusalem is equidistant from Merv and Rome. Jerusalem is actually closer to the seemingly exotic territories of central Asia than it is to France. And if going west meant relying on Roman stability, eastward travelers depended on Persian power. As in Europe, early followers of Jesus spread into a world already extensively colonized by Jews, who had made Mesopotamia an intellectual center of their faith. Between the fourth and sixth centuries, thriving Jewish academies created the Babylonian Talmud.[13]

Alternatively, ancient sea routes connected the Mediterranean and Indian worlds, and abundant discoveries of Roman goods in southern India remind us of the sea traffic from Egypt. Between the fourth century and the ninth, Christian communities became widespread around the littoral of the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Major settlements and churches existed throughout Arabia and Yemen, Persia and southern India. If early Christians could reach Ireland, there was no logical reason why they should not find their way to Sri Lanka.[14]

LOST KINGDOMS

Not surprisingly, then, we must look beyond the borders of Rome to find the world's earliest Christian states. The world's first Christian kingdom was Osrhoene, beyond the eastern borders of the Roman Empire, with its capital at Edessa: its king accepted Christianity around 200.[15] That regime did not last long, but neighboring Armenia made this the official religion around the year 300 and

retains the faith until the present day. The Christian kingdom reached its height under the Bagratid rulers of the early Middle Ages, when the royal capital of Ani became one of the great cities of the Eastern Christian world. Although Ani has been a ghost town for centuries, enough ruins of cathedrals, churches, basilicas, and monasteries survive to give some impression of "the city of 1,001 churches." If the site stood in western Europe, it would be as cherished as Chartres or York Minster. The conversion of Armenia also led to the creation of an Armenian alphabet by the fifth century, and soon, a substantial written literature. Christianity became inextricably bound up with Armenian culture, identity, and nationhood.[16]

Georgia was converted shortly after Armenia, and both lands have left a splendid heritage in the form of ancient churches and monasteries, not to mention Christian manuscript art. Georgia, too, acquired its alphabet from Christian missionaries. To the east of Osrhoene was the small border kingdom of Adiabene, with its capital at Arbela. Whether or not the kingdom formally accepted Christianity, as legend claims, Arbela was undoubtedly an early Christian center. (It also had a strong Jewish presence.)[17]

The strength of Christianity in Egypt made it very likely that the faith would expand up the Nile, deep into Africa, and Syrian missionaries led the way. Nubia survived as a Christian kingdom from the sixth century through the fifteenth, dominating the Nile between Khartoum and Aswan, and straddling the modern-day border of Egypt and Sudan. Nubia's churches and cathedrals were decorated with rich murals in the best Byzantine style, show-

ing their dark-skinned kings in royal robes. Its main cathedral at Faras was adorned with hundreds of paintings of kings and bishops, saints and biblical figures- images that lay forgotten under the sands until rediscovered in the 1960s. This Christian state became a major player in African politics. In 745 its king invaded Egypt, with the goal of defending the patriarch of Alexandria:

And there were under the supremacy of Cyriacus, king of the Nubians, thirteen kings, ruling the kingdom and the country. He was the orthodox Ethiopian king of Al-Mukurrah; and he was entitled the Great King, upon whom the crown descended from Heaven; and he governed as far as the southern extremities of the earth.

By the 830s, the patriarch of Alexandria "appointed many bishops, and sent them to all places under the see of Saint Mark the evangelist, which include Africa and the Five Cities and Al-Kairuwân and Tripoli and the land of Egypt and Abyssinia and Nubia."[18]

Ethiopia, or Abyssinia, was still more powerful than Nubia, and its Christianity longer lasting. It was in fact converted even before Constantine accepted the faith. The kingdom's ancient center was Aksum, which had historically been a key point of contact with pharaonic Egypt, and by 340 this was the kingdom's main Christian see. Over the next three centuries, the Bible and liturgy were translated into the local language of Ge'ez. From the late fifth century, Syriac Christians were credited with introducing monasticism, which led to the foundation of many houses across northern Ethiopia.[19] When Europeans discovered the country in the seventeenth century, they were astounded by the degree of Christian devotion

tion. Even an author from Counter-Reformation Portugal, where religious houses were far from scarce, asserted that

[n]o country in the world is so full of churches, monasteries and ecclesiastics as Abyssinia; it is not possible to sing in one church without being heard by another, and perhaps by several.... this people has a natural disposition to goodness; they are very liberal of their alms, they much frequent their churches, and are very studious to adorn them; they practice fasting and other mortifications...[they] retain in a great measure the devout fervor of the primitive Christians.[20]

So rich is Ethiopia's Christian heritage, as it now enters its eighteenth century of existence, that it is impossible to describe it in any detail, but we should stress how absolutely Christian tradition has become established within the East African landscape. When Ethiopians read or hear the Bible, they do not need to imagine that the events are at all distant in time or space. Aksum is, after all, the reputed home of the Ark of the Covenant. The sacred landscape is no less apparent at Lalibela, New Jerusalem, the setting for the cluster of awe-inspiring rock-hewn churches built in the thirteenth century that are among the miracles of medieval architecture. The medieval ruling dynasty claimed descent from Solomon and the queen of Sheba, and this history was elaborated in the fourteenth-century chronicle the *Kebra Nagast*. With so much evidence to hand, who could doubt that Ethiopia was the true Israel?[21]

Ethiopian Christianity was also a thoroughly African affair, in which the church depended on the patriarchs or

popes of Alexandria, who ruled through their representatives, the abunas. Struggling for control with them were the local monastic leaderships: Africans argued with Africans. The nation was on occasion a potent ally for Egypt's Christians, when they fell under Muslim rule: as late as the fourteenth century, Ethiopia tried to prevent the ongoing persecution in Egypt by threatening to dam the Nile. [22]

NESTORIANS AND JACOBITES

When Christians traveled beyond the Roman frontier, they had to leave the protection of the empire, but the very fact of imperial power could be a mixed blessing. Already by the third century, Persia had a substantial Christian presence, concentrated in the south of the country, along the Gulf. Once Rome became Christian, the link with that foreign government made life difficult for Christians living under the rule of the rival superpower of the time. (From the third century through the seventh, Persia was ruled by the powerful Sassanian dynasty.) The Persians responded by executing hundreds of bishops and clergy in a persecution at least as murderous as anything ever inflicted by pagan Rome: in the fourth century, the Persians killed sixteen thousand Christian believers in a forty-year period.[23]

Yet operating beyond the reach of Roman power had advantages for religious groups who now found themselves condemned or persecuted by imperial authorities—for Jews, and also for those Christian sects that the established Catholic/Orthodox deemed heretical. As the church-state alliance became ever more firm-

ly entrenched in Rome and Constantinople, so ever more Christian believers were forced to flee beyond the frontier, especially into those weakly controlled borderlands that became such fertile territory for religious innovation and interaction.[24] The number and importance of such religious dissidents grew steadily with the fifth-century splits over the relationship between Christ's human and divine natures. Monophysite teachings dominated in Syria and Egypt, and also prevailed in the Christian states of Armenia and Ethiopia. Orthodox supporters of the Council of Chalcedon were so massively outnumbered that they were dismissively known as Melkites—"the emperor's men"—suggesting that only their desire to please government could account for their wrong-headed opinions.[25]

Once free of Roman oversight, Christian leaders were free to establish their own churches, following the doctrines they believed to be correct. Within the Persian Empire, the main Christian church was based in the twin cities of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the imperial capital that was the successor to ancient Babylon, and the most populous city in the world at that time. This church followed the teachings of Nestorius after 431, detaching itself from the authority of Antioch: in 498 its head, the catholicos, took the title of patriarch of Babylon, the patriarch of the East. In the sixth century, Asian Monophysites also developed their own church apparatus, through the organizing ability of Jacobus Baradaeus. From his base in Edessa, Jacobus created a whole clandestine church, in which he ordained two patriarchs and eighty-nine bishops. These two alternative churches, the Nestorians and the Jacobites, represented powerful rivals for the Orthodoxy that held power in Constantinople.[26]

The Persians, meanwhile, were delighted to discover that so many Roman subjects were disaffected from Roman rule, and they protected these potential enemies of Roman power.[27] By 550, Cosmas the India-Sailor reported:

And so likewise among the Bactrians and Huns and Persians, and the rest of the Indians, Persarmenians, and Medes and Elamites, and throughout the whole land of Persia there is no limit to the number of churches with bishops and very large communities of Christian people, as well as many martyrs, and monks also living as hermits.[28]

The Nestorians and other non-Orthodox churches initially coped well with the Muslim regime that supplanted the Persians, and who accepted their Christian subjects as tributaries and taxpayers if not as full equals.

LANDSCAPES

Eastern Christianity had many spiritual and cultural centers, and the map of these religious powerhouses remained little changed between about 500 and 1200- that is, across the seemingly irrevocable change caused by the Arab conquests. Outside Constantinople, great monastic houses included Mar Saba in Palestine and Deir Mar Musa in Syria, each a fortified complex surrounded by the settlements of hundreds of hermits. (*Mor* or *Mar* is the Syriac word for "master" or "lord," and it serves the same function as *v* in the Western churches.[29]) Legendary Egyptian centers included Saint

Catherine's monastery in Sinai and Saint Antony's near the Red Sea, while "the holy desert" of Wadi el-Natrun was an extensive landscape of perhaps a hundred religious houses and hermitages, some very ancient. When the Armenian traveler Abû Sâlih offered a travel guide to Egypt's churches and monasteries around 1200, he was still describing a flourishing network of active monastic houses and pilgrimage shrines that was as extensive as anything in contemporary western Europe.[30]

The Christian continuity at such centers is astonishing. When the legendary icons of Saint Catherine's were displayed in the United States in 2006–7, the greatest treasure was a painting of Saint Peter that was apparently commissioned at or shortly after the opening of the house, in the sixth century. Over time, too, these houses acquired some of the greatest libraries that existed after the end of classical antiquity: Saint Catherine's has over three thousand manuscripts, in Greek, Arabic, Syriac, Georgian, and Slavonic. Another fine collection existed at Deir es-Souriani, the Monastery of the Syrians, in Egypt's Wadi el-Natrun. This library was the life's project of the tenth-century abbot Moses of Nisibis, who made it his business to gather all the works of Syriac learning he could find, some 250 manuscripts.[31]

BETWEEN THE RIVERS

Syriac-speaking Christianity found a stronghold in Mesopotamia, around the northern reaches of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. Northern Mesopotamia was an ancient land, one of the original hearths of civilization, and it was the core of ancient Assyria. Today, though,

these older names have vanished and bear no relationship to modern state divisions: in terms of modern nations, we are speaking of the area where Iraq, Turkey, and Syria come together, and where activists now struggle to create a new Kurdistan. The region includes many names that are much in the news as centers of political violence and instability. Southeastern Turkey, centered on Diyarbakir, is the heart of militant Kurdish resistance to the Turkish state. Yet for centuries, the major churches and religious houses here were as famous as any in Christian Europe.

To understand the region's importance for the history of Christianity, we have to imagine the completely different ethnic, political, and religious landscape between, say, the fourth century and the fourteenth. Northern Mesopotamia lay close to the most significant early powerhouses of Christian expansion, such as Edessa, and it is not surprising to find so many thriving Christian communities in the region. Diyarbakir was once Amida, a thriving monastic center and a patriarchal seat, while nearby Malatya was once the Christian metropolis of Melitene. Northwest of Mosul lies the Tur Abdin Plateau, the Mountain of the Servants of God. In this area we find the cities of Nisibis and Mardin, as well as a group of perhaps a hundred monasteries that have been described as the Mount Athos of the East.[32]

This region was critically important for both Nestorians and Jacobites. When the Romans closed the Nestorian university at Edessa, its leaders took up residence farther east at Nisibis, under Persian protection. As a chronicler boasted, "Edessa darkened and Nisibis brightened."[33] Even so, Edessa remained "the Blessed" for all denomin-

ations well into the Muslim period. By the seventh century, the Nestorian church alone had six provinces in Mesopotamia, ruling over a substantial hierarchy. Nisibis itself was a metropolitan see with six lesser bishoprics under its control.[34]

At different times, Jacobite leaders were based in Amida and in Tikrit, a city that in modern times gained notoriety as the home of Saddam Hussein and his Sunni Muslim al-Tikriti clan, which dominated Iraq under the Baathist regime. Once, though, Tikrit served as the seat of the Maphrianus (Mapheryan, or Consecrator), who headed the Jacobite church throughout Persia and the East. As late as the eleventh century, Melitene still counted fifty-six churches, and seven Jacobite dioceses looked to Melitene.[35]

Monasteries proliferated, and although most have left no physical trace, religious houses must once have been as thick on the ground as anywhere in the Christian world, including Ireland. Even today, a handful of ancient monasteries survive to suggest what they must have been like when they were the holiest shrines in an overwhelmingly Christian landscape. From the Jacobite tradition, we find the network of houses around Tur Abdin in what is now southeastern Turkey, each marked by the huge water cisterns needed for survival in this arid land. The house of Mor Gabriel, founded in the late fourth century, is today the oldest functioning monastery of the Jacobite Church (known in modern times as “Syrian Orthodox”). The building itself dates from around 510 but contains older fragments.[36] Nearby stands Mor Hananyo, Saint Ananias. Its yellow brick construction has also given this structure the name of Deir ez-Za‘feran, the Saffron Mon-

astery, and its history dates back to the 490s. From the eleventh century, these houses would also be the centers of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Jacobite patriarchs lived at Antioch until 1034, when they moved to Mar Barsauma, near Melitene, which was home to several hundred brothers. In 1293, the patriarchs took up residence at Deir ez-Za'feran, where their successors remained until 1924.[37]

Nestorians, too, had their venerated monasteries, especially the house of Beth 'Abhe, near Mosul, which had some three hundred brothers. Just how commonplace smaller monasteries and hermitages must have been across northern Mesopotamia is obvious from the ninth-century work the *Book of Governors*, by the bishop Thomas of Marga. Thomas's stories often involve abbots and churchmen visiting religious houses, many of which have dropped out of the historical record. Today, they survive only as fragmentary remains under Iraqi village mosques.[38]

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

By the seventh century, the Nestorians had an elaborate network of provinces and dioceses in Persia and neighboring lands, and they were naturally looking north and east. After all, the Persian Empire then stretched deep into central Asia, into the far western territories of what is now China. Already by the sixth century, Christian missionaries were reaching into the heart of Asia, and from the very beginning they recognized the need for vernacular scriptures, inventing alphabets where necessary. Some bold spirits even translated holy books into the language of the Huns. In 591, the Byzantines were

puzzled to find that Turkish envoys from Kyrgyzstan had crosses tattooed on their foreheads: "They had been assigned this by their mothers; for when a fierce plague was endemic among them, some Christians advised them that the foreheads of the young be tattooed with that sign."[39]

Christian missionaries spread among the peoples of central Asia – the Turks, Uygurs, and Soghdians, and later the Mongols and Tatars. In 644, a chronicle tells how "Elias Metropolitan of Merv, converted a large number of Turks." Traveling beyond the Oxus, the metropolitan met a king on his way to war, and the king promised he would be converted if Elias showed him a sign. The metropolitan

was then moved by divine power, and he made the sign of the heavenly cross, and rebuked the unreal thing that the rebellious demons had set up and it forthwith disappeared completely. When the king saw what Saint Elijah [Elias] did...he was converted with all his army. The saint took them to a stream, baptized all of them, ordained for them priests and deacons, and returned to his country.

By 650, the Church of the East had two metropolitans beyond the Oxus, probably based at Kashgar and Samarkand, besides twenty bishops. At the end of the eighth century, the patriarch Timothy renewed the church's eastward drive, to the lands of the Turks and Tibetans, in a golden age of missionary expansion.[40]

Apart from the efforts of monks and clergy, widely trav-

eled Soghdian merchants spread the faith across central Asia. Indeed, Syriac Christian writers used the word merchant as a metaphor for those who spread the gospel. One hymn urges:

Travel well girt like merchants,
That we may gain the world.
Convert men to me,
Fill creation with teaching.

Such merchants also brought the Syriac language. Even the Mongol word for "religious law" or "Buddhism"—*nom* —probably comes from the Greek *nomos*, via Syriac. We see the product of Soghdian labors at a site like Suyab in Kyrgyzstan, where the Nestorian church stands near a Buddhist monastery and a Zoroastrian fire temple. Spectacular religious diversity is also obvious in the scriptures from the Uygur center in the Turfan oasis, in what would later become Chinese Turkestan. Although Turfan is best known for its Manichaean texts, it also produced Christian documents, in Syriac, Soghdian, and Turkish, as well as Buddhist writings.[41] At a Christian cemetery in Kyrgyzstan, inscriptions in Syriac and Turkish commemorate Terim the Chinese, Sazik the Indian, Banus the Uygur, Kiamata of Kashgar, and Tatt the Mongol.[42]

CHINA AND INDIA

The Chinese missions naturally attracted special attention. China, after all, was already more populous than the whole of Europe. We are not sure when Nestorians reached China—just when did the first Christian see the

Pacific?—but already in 550, some monks smuggled silkworms from Serinda (China) to the Byzantine Empire. In creating the Western silk industry, this act was of revolutionary economic significance, but the religious implications are harder to assess. Already in 550, these monks had lived “a long time” in Serinda, and were used to traveling back and forth to Byzantine lands.[43]

The earliest formal mission can be dated to 635, when missionaries reached the Chinese imperial capital of Ch'ang-an, establishing a mission that endured for over two hundred years. Either fortunately or through acute judgment, they arrived in the early days of the new Tang dynasty, when entrenched interests were not as determined to exclude outside faiths as they might have been either before or afterward. In fact, the reigning emperor, Taizong, proved startlingly open to all kinds of foreign influences, including Buddhism. His regime granted toleration to a Christianity that was described as “mysterious, wonderful, spontaneous, producing perception, establishing essentials, for the salvation of creatures and the benefit of man.” This was Jingjiao, the “luminous teaching” from the distant land of Daqin (Tachin), or Syria. Monasteries spread across the country, using local building styles: the remains of one can still be seen in Shaanxi Province, in the seventh-century Daqin pagoda. By the end of the eighth century, the Chinese church was led by Bishop Adam, whom we have already met as an ally of Buddhism, but who also promoted his own cause. The appointment of a metropolitan in the early ninth century proves the existence of multiple bishoprics.[44]

In this case, the Nestorian mission proved to have shallow roots, and apparently failed to develop a mass local following: virtually all the names on the famous Nestorian monument of the late eighth century are Syriac. Indeed, this mission would be destroyed in the mid-ninth century when the Taoist emperor Wuzong condemned and expelled foreign religions and closed monasteries. As the imperial edict commanded,

As for the Tai-Ch'in (Syrian Christian) and Muh-hu (Zoroastrian) forms of worship, since Buddhism has already been cast out, these heresies alone must not be allowed to survive. People belonging to these also are to be compelled to return to the world, belong again to their own districts, and become taxpayers. As for foreigners, let them be returned to their own countries, there to suffer restraint.[45]

The ease with which Nestorians were expelled suggests the limitations of their mission, and particularly their failure to spread beyond a particular ethnic group.

Between the tenth century and the thirteenth, Christianity has no recorded history in China, which does not mean that it did not maintain a subterranean existence. But Nestorians returned in force when the Mongols conquered the nation and established the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Mongol rulers like Kublai Khan were happy to tolerate the Christian and Buddhist religions, and Marco Polo often reports finding Christian communities. Not surprisingly, Nestorians were firmly established in those areas that had the best trading contacts with the outside world, along the Silk Road, and on the southeastern

coast, in cities such as Zhenjiang (Chinkiang), with its seven monasteries, and Hangzhou. Building on Nestorian efforts, Roman Catholic missionaries arrived at the end of the thirteenth century, with the goal of establishing a whole Chinese hierarchy, with bishops at Beijing, Zaitun (Quanzhou), and elsewhere.[46]

Another scene of Nestorian successes was in India, where Christian communities claimed a succession dating back to Saint Thomas the apostle. Christianity appeared in southern India no later than the second century, and other missions and monasteries followed. Around 425, we hear of an Indian priest translating the Epistle to the Romans from Greek into Syriac. In 550, Cosmas reported, from firsthand observation, that

[e]ven in Taprobanê [Sri Lanka], an island in Further India, where the Indian Sea is, there is a church of Christians, with clergy and a body of believers, but I know not whether there be any Christians in the parts beyond it. In the country called Malê [Malabar], where the pepper grows, there is also a church, and at another place called Calliana there is moreover a bishop, who is appointed from Persia.[47]

India by this time had an indigenous church with its own hierarchy. Through the Middle Ages, churches operated on India's Malabar coast, in modern Kerala. As faithful members of the Church of the East, they used a Syriac liturgy and looked to the patriarch of Babylon as their spiritual head. Major churches existed at Mylapore (near Chennai), the alleged site of Thomas's martyrdom, and Nestorian crosses survive at Kottayam.[48]

Unlike other churches, which so often feature in the record of martyrdoms and persecutions, the Thomas Christians were blessed with having very little history to report. In 1500, a Nestorian reported that, in India, "there are here about thirty thousand families of Christians, our co-religionists.... They have begun to build new churches, are prosperous in every respect and living in peace and security." These churches also continued Christian expansion long after it had ceased elsewhere. In 1503, we hear of the ordination of "three pious monks" as bishops: the patriarch "sent them to the country of India, to the islands of the sea which are inside Java, and to China." Java was then closely tied to Indian trade routes. We have no idea how much earlier Christians had exploited those connections, or just how far they might have penetrated into Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Scholars have speculated on possible Nestorian ventures into Burma, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Korea.[49]

Although the Nestorian church was the most widespread, other Christian groups also had a broad Asian presence. In 1280, the Jacobite patriarch still "oversaw twenty metropolitans and about a hundred bishops from Anatolia and Syria to lower Mesopotamia and Persia."[50] By way of comparison, the English church at the same time had just twenty-five bishops.

No less impressive is the expansion of the Manichaean movement, which by this stage had evolved outside any recognizable form of Christianity, but which followed a geographical and political trajectory very much like those of the Syriac-speaking churches. Mani himself was a Mesopotamian, born in Babylon, and he spent his early

years among the Elchesaites, a Jewish-Christian Gnostic sect. Mani's own movement became a separate religion that taught an absolute struggle between the irreconcilable forces of light and darkness. However, Manichaeans still believed that Jesus, like Buddha, was one of the great prophets who came to enlighten believers. After the newly Christian Roman Empire brutally suppressed Manichaean monks and teachers, the faith survived beyond the borders, and it spread along the Silk Road. In 762 the Manichaeans acquired state backing when the leader of the Uygur nation accepted the faith. This was potentially epoch making, as the Uygur Empire at that time covered a vast territory north of China.[51]

CONVERTING ASIA

Calculating the numerical strength of these mission churches is all but impossible, not least because demographers differ so widely on the figures for organized and settled regions such as Egypt, and are even vaguer when dealing with remote nomadic communities. We can say confidently, though, that populations in the early Middle Ages were far smaller than might be expected in comparable regions today, so that the whole caliphate might have amounted to only 30 or 40 million people. That small scale of population was significant because establishing Christianity among a relatively small community might be a very valuable investment in the long term, if that group rose to political power. Conversely, a religion that existed among small compact populations was relatively easy to destroy by massacre or ethnic cleansing.

For all missionaries in that era, the ultimate dream was to convert a king or a ruling class, who would then bring the whole state into the church. This is what happened, briefly, when the Manichaeans won over the Uygurs. The Nestorians repeatedly came close to winning over whole peoples, most impressively the Mongol conquerors of the thirteenth century, but they rarely succeeded in creating a Christian state. The church did, however, achieve a real foothold among several important peoples, including the Uygurs and the Onggud Turks. Their greatest triumph came about 1000, when the king of the Kerait Turks (on the shores of Lake Baikal) accepted the faith that had originally been imported into his realm by Christian traders, probably from Merv. Reportedly, he brought over two hundred thousand of his subjects, and the Keraits retained a Christian presence for some four hundred years. The Keraits would not found a lasting state, but such a conversion might well have had great effects. Other, similar tribes would, after all, create great empires—the Seljuk Turks, who conquered much of the Byzantine Empire, and the Sons of Othman, who founded the vast Ottoman realm. Who was to say that the Keraits might not someday build their own Christian empire? In the event, Kerait women extended Christian influence through their marriages to influential pagan warlords.[52]

In the twelfth century, tales of Christian tribes in central Asia – and of Christian kings in Ethiopia – inspired the enduring European legend of Prester John. Johh, the immensely powerful Christian priest-king who lived far beyond the boundaries of the known world, was reputedly descended from one of the three Magi. According to

a bogus letter that surfaced in Europe in the 1140s, Prester John declared that he was "a zealous Christian and universally protected the Christians of our empire, supporting them by our alms.... Seventy-two provinces, of which only a few are Christian, serve us. Each has its own king, but all are tributary to us." It was a dream, but the notion of a Christian kingdom beyond the caliphate was not wholly fanciful.[53]

A European comparison suggests the relative speed, as well as the scale, of Christian growth in the East. In fact, Eastern achievements in such vast areas look all the more impressive when set beside the relatively slow pace of European conversion. Although Christianity reached the European continent in Saint Paul's time, the religion took a long while to move beyond the Mediterranean world. The Franks who conquered Roman Gaul accepted the faith in the early sixth century, the Anglo-Saxons during the seventh, but that still left a great deal of Europe unevangelized. (In each case, of course, the dates for conversion refer to the formal acceptance of Christianity by the political elites, and paganism maintained an underground life for decades afterward.) At the end of the eighth century, Charlemagne was fighting a long war to conquer the pagan Saxons who dominated central Germany, and the conversion of the Slavs and Scandinavians took at least two hundred years more. Only in 987 did the Russian kingdom based in Kiev accept the Orthodox Church, after considering the rival attractions of Islam and Judaism. Poland accepted Christianity in 966, while Norway and Sweden were in the process of conversion only around 1000. The continent's conversion from paganism was only completed when

the powerful state of Lithuania accepted the new religion, as late as the 1380s.

The continuing strength of Christianity in Asia is obvious if we look at the distribution of the world's believers around the year 1000, roughly at the halfway point in the story of the faith. Still, at that point, Asia had 17 to 20 million Christians, with a further 5 million in Africa. The European continent as a whole had some 40 million people, including Russia. Of those Europeans, at least a quarter either were still pagan or else lived in countries that had only very recently undergone formal conversion. That overall total would also include the Muslim inhabitants of Spain and Sicily, perhaps 4 or 5 million, in addition to European Jews. By this point, a reasonable estimate would suggest that Europe had some 25 to 30 million Christians, many whose faith was very notional indeed compared with the ancient churches of Asia and Africa. 54 Many Europeans were still in the first or second generation of the faith, a situation comparable to that of modern-day Africa. Most Asian Christians, in contrast, stemmed from Christian traditions dating back twenty-five or thirty generations. If raw numbers favored Europe, Asia could still properly claim the leadership of the Christian world.

FOOTNOTES

1. Georgina Herrmann and Hugh N. Kennedy, Monuments of Merv (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1999); Edmund O'Donovan, The Merv Oasis (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883).

2. For scholarship at Merv, see Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 275. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, ed., The Commentaries on the New Testament of Isho'dad of Merv, 6 vols. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005; first published 1903); Clemens Leonhard, Ishodad of Merw's Exegesis of the Psalms 119 and 139–147 (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2001).

3. W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

4. Peter Llewellyn, Rome in the Dark Ages (New York: Praeger, 1970); Chris Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005); Julia M. H. Smith, Europe After Rome (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005).

5. R. N. Swanson, ed., The Church and Mary (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2004).

6. "The earliest Christian hymnbook" is quoted from Moffett, History of Christianity in Asia, 1:52. For the history of music, see William Dalrymple, From the Holy

Mountain (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 175–78. John Meyendorff, ed., Ephrem the Syrian (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Javier Teixidor, Bardesane d'Édesse (Paris: Le Cerf, 1992); R. J. Schork, Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1995).

7. Bede, Ecclesiastical History, book 4, chap. 2, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/be de/history.v.iv.ii.html; Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen Westerfield Tucker, eds., The Oxford History of Christian Worship (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

8. Vryonis, Decline of Medieval Hellenism, 304.

9. Richard C. Foltz, Religions of the Silk Road (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

10. Peter Green, Alexander to Actium (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002); Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams, eds., The Silk Road (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2004).

11. McCrindle, Christian Topography, 149–52.

12. Frances Wood, The Silk Road (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002); Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams, eds., The Silk Road (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2004).

13. Richard L. Kalmin, Jewish Babylonia Between Persia and Roman Palestine (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

14. For Egypt's role as a hub of trade and communication, see Roger S. Bagnall, Egypt in Late Antiquity (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993); Christopher Haas, Alexandria in Late Antiquity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997).

15. Judah B. Segal, Edessa "The Blessed City" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Steven K. Ross, Roman Edessa (London: Routledge, 2001); Robert Doran, Stewards of the Poor (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006).

16. Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 277. Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson, eds., East of Byzantium (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Center for Byzantine Studies, 1982); Thomas J. Samuelian and Michael E. Stone, eds., Medieval Armenian Culture (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984); Nina G. Garsoïan, Church and Culture in Early Medieval Armenia (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999); Vrej Nersessian, Treasures from the Ark (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001).

17. Adriano Alpago-Novello, Vahtang Beridze, and Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, Art and Architecture in Medieval Georgia (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Institut Supérieur d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'Art, Collège Érasme, 1980); Antony Eastmond, Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1998). For Adiabene, see Joel Thomas Walker, The Legend of Mar Qardagh (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2006).

18. The quote about Cyriacus is from B. T. A. Evetts, ed., History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexan-

dria (first published 1907–15), http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/severus_hermopolis_hist_alex_patr_03_ part3.htm. For the power of the see of Alexandria, see http://www .tertullian.org/fathers/severus_hermopolis_hist_alex_patr_04_part4.htm. Laurence Kirwin, Studies on the History of Late Antique and Christian Nubia (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Variorum, 2002); Derek A. Welsby, The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia (London: British Museum, 2002). For the influence of Alexandria, see Stephen J. Davis, The Early Coptic Papacy (Cairo and New York: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2005).

19. Donald Crummey, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church," in Cambridge History of Christianity: Eastern Christianity, ed. Michael Angold (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), 457–62. Isichei, History of Christianity in Africa; Sundkler and Steed, History of the Church in Africa.

20. "No country in the world" is from Father Jeronimo Lobo, "Voyage to Abyssinia," http://lobo.thefreelibrary.com/Voyage-to-Abyssinia/3–4. See also Isichei, History of Christianity in Africa, 52.

21. Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932); Taddesse Tamrat,Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270 – 1527 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

22. Koschorke, Ludwig, and Delgado, History of Christianity, 141. For the threat to the Nile, see Browne, Eclipse of Christianity in Asia.

23. Walls, “Eusebius Tries Again.” W. A. Wigram, An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004; first published 1909).

24. W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of the Monophysite Movement (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972); Cornelia B. Horn, Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

25. Patrick T. R. Gray, The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979); E. W. Brooks, ed., A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch, 2 vols. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1985–2003); Jan-Eric Steppa, John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002); Ramsay MacMullen, Voting About God in Early Church Councils (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2006).

26. Mark Dickens, “The Church of the East” (1999), W. Winkler, The Church of the East (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Christoph Baumer, The Church of the East (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

27. Stephen Gero, Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1981).

28. McCrindle, Christian Topography.

29. For the Christian landscape of Palestine in the Byzantine and early Muslim period, see Yoram Tsafrir,

ed., Ancient Churches Revealed (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993). Compare Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, The Monastic School of Gaza (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2006).

30. For Egypt's Christian landscape around 1200, see B. T. A. Evetts, ed., The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895). Gawdat Gabra, Coptic Monasteries (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2002). Massimo Capuani, with Otto F. A. Meinardus and Marie-Helene Rutschowscaya, Christian Egypt (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2002). For Saint Antony, see Elizabeth S. Bolman, ed., Monastic Visions (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2002). Otto F. A. Meinardus, Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

31. For Saint Catherine's, see Thomas F. Mathews, David Jacoby, Justin Sinaites, Robert S. Nelson, and Kristen M. Collins, Holy Image, Hallowed Ground (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006). Françoise Micheau, "Copts, Melkites, Nestorians and Jacobites," in Angold, Cambridge History of Christianity, 399.

32. Andrew Palmer, Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990).

33. Quoted from "The School of Nisibis," http://www.nestorian.org/the_ school_of_nisibis.html. 34 . Other metropolitan sees included Arbela, Kirkuk, Basra, and Jundaisapur (Gundeshapur). The catholicos had his main residence in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Browne, Eclipse

of Christianity in Asia.

35. Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. “Melitene,” http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10166a.htm. For Amida, see Susan Record of the Visit to the Head Quarters of the Syrian Church in Mesopotamia, with Some Account of the Yazidis or Devil Worshippers of Mosul and el Jilwah, Their Sacred Book (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002; first published 1895). For the monasteries as they exist today, see, for instance, http://www.morgabriel.org; https://www.deirmarmusa.org/; and Stephen Griffith, “The Situation in Tur Abdin” (2001), http://sor.cua.edu/Pub/StephenGriffith/VisitSETurkeyNov2001.html.

36. Dalrymple, From the Holy Mountain , 100.

37. Oswald H. Parry, Six Months in a Syrian Monastery, Being a Record of the Visit to the Head Quarters of the Syrian Church in Mesopotamia, with Some Account of the Yazidis or Devil Worshippers of Mosul and el Jilwah, Their Sacred Book (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002; first published 1895). For the monasteries as they exist today, see, for instance, http://www.morgabriel.org; https://www.deirmarmusa.org/; and Stephen Griffith, “The Situation in Tur Abdin” (2001), http://sor.cua.edu/Pub/StephenGriffith/VisitSETurkeyNov2001.html.

38. E. A. Wallis Budge, ed., The Book of Governors (London: Kegan Paul, 2003; first published 1893).

39. For the Hunnish translation, see Zachariah of Mitylene, “Syriac Chronicle,” http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/zachariah12.htm. The story of the tattoos is from Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 267.

40. Mingana, Christianity in Central Asia, 11–12; and 73–74 for the church in 650.

41. For “merchants,” see Foltz, Silk Road, 62. For nom , see Brown, Rise of Western Christendom, 284. Christopher Dawson, The Mongol Mission (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955); Wassilios Klein, Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14 Jahrhunderts (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000); Mark Dickens, “Nestorian Christianity in Central Asia” (2001), www.oxuscom.com/Nestorian_Christianity_in_CA.pdf. Zsuzsanna Gulácsi, Mediaeval Manichaean Book Art (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005); Roman Malek and Peter Hofrichter, eds., Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006). “The Work of the Academy Project: Turfan Studies,” http://www.bbaw.de/bbaw/Forschung/Forschungsprojekte/turfan forschung/en/blanko.2005–03–02.3373813525.

42. Mingana, Christianity in Central Asia, 13; Wallis Budge, Book of Nestorian Adventure in China (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001).

43. Procopius History of the Wars 8. 17.1–7.

44. Mingana, Christianity in Central Asia; Frits Holm, My

Nestorian Adventure in China (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2001).

45. Quoted by T. V. Philip, “East of the Euphrates,” http://www.religiononline.org/show chapter.asp?title=1553&C=1363.

46. Moffett, History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1. Stephen G. Haw, Marco Polo’s China (London: Routledge, 2006). James D. Ryan, “Conversion vs. Baptism?” in Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1997), 146–70. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds., The Cambridge History of China , vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994). For the Franciscan missions, see Lauren Arnold, Princely Gifts and Papal Treasures (San Francisco: Desiderata Press, 1999).

47. Mingana, Christianity in India, 6, and 27 for the Indian priest. McCrindle, Christian Topography.

48. Leslie Brown, The Indian Christians of St. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982); Stephen Neill, A History of Christianity in India (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984); Leonard Fernando and George Gispert-Sauch, Christianity in India (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2004).

49. The “thirty thousand families” quotation is from Koschorke, Ludwig, and Delgado, History of Christianity, 4. Moffett, History of Christianity in Asia, 1:302 (“the islands…inside Java”), 1:459–62. Susan Visvanathan, The Christians of Kerala (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993);

Antony Kariyil, Church and Society in Kerala (New Delhi, India: Intercultural Press, 1995).

50. For the Jacobites, see Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Christians in Asia Before 1500 (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1999), 71.

51. Samuel N. C. Lieu, Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1994); Yuri Stoyanov, The Other God (New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2000); Lilla Russell-Smith, Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005).

52. Mingana, Christianity in Central Asia, 15–16; Moffett, History of Christianity in Asia, vol. 1.

53. Elaine Sanceau, The Land of Prester John (New York: Knopf, 1944). ed., The Cross Goes North (York, England: York Medieval Press, 2004).

54. David B. Barrett, World Christian Encyclopedia, 796. Muldoon, Varieties of Religious Conversion; Richard Fletcher, The Barbarian Conversion (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1999); Martin Carver, ed., The Cross Goes North (York, England: York Medieval Press, 2004).