

till the outbreak of Shapur's persecution, the narrative is centred on Arbil, and is interesting, circumstantial, and varied. If we accept Peeters's strictures, the persecution of the next forty years is described sketchily and inaccurately. For the rest of the 4th and 5th centuries, the impression we get is that Mashiha-zakha had very little interesting details to hand about the Bishops of Arbil, and that, in fact, he may well have had an incomplete list of their names. From 376 to 499 we are told of only 4 bishops, giving an average rule of 31 years. This is scarcely credible, when we compare it with the 7 bishops from 99 to 225, and the 7 from 225 to 376. It seems that to make up for his lack of information about the bishops themselves, the writer drew on his knowledge of contemporary historical events. He may have had access to the records of the Synods, and refers to five—in 410, 420, 424, 484 and 497. He speaks briefly of the Nestorian controversy, and with the benefit of a century's "hindsight", makes unconvincing efforts to measure its contemporary effects on the Church of the East:

The second Pharaoh, Cyril the Egyptian, with the help of the royal arm and worldly force, fought against the truth and persecuted the true martyr, Mar Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople. When Mar Daniel (of Arbil) heard of this division, he predicted, they say, that the time was come when the West would be dark and the light would be seen in the East. It was in the midst of these sorrows and thoughts that he died.¹

Of his successor, Rahima, Mashiha-zakha writes:

It was then that discussions and controversies concerning the orthodox Faith began to bring the house of the Lord into travail, and mine its foundations: the Church was destroyed among the Romans, and built up in the Kingdom of the Persians. It was in this spiritual work that Mar Rahima ended his life.²

It is refreshing to come back into contact with convincing contemporaneity when we read the copy of Patriarch Shila's letter of about 510, and then read of the troubles of the "duality" following the Patriarch's death. It is a matter of deep regret that the last four pages of the MS are missing, and we are deprived of what a contemporary might have told us of the times of Mar Aba I.

7. A word about the marvellous. Here and there the writer mentions miracles of healing, raising the dead, and other wonders, though on the whole the narrative is refreshingly free from obsession with the unusual. While recognising that hagiographers were prone to list such marvels to do honour to their heroes, we do not altogether rule out the possibility that, as in the Roman Empire as described in the *Acts of the Apostles*, so also in the Parthian Empire there may have been some miracles attesting the truth of the Gospel message. While we shall not cite the miracles as evidence of what happened, their presence in the narrative does not shake our confidence in the veracity of the writer when he speaks of other events, or of the background of beliefs and customs.

1. M-Z 64, tr. pp. 143-144.

2. M-Z 65, tr. p. 145.