

**NORTH MESOPOTAMIA  
IN THE LATE SEVENTH CENTURY**  
Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's *Riṣ Mellē*

S.P. Brock

*To M.J. Kister  
on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*

In 1908<sup>1</sup> Alphonse Mingana published the first (and only) volume of his *Sources syriaques*, printed by the Dominican Press at Mosul, and now a rare volume. The *pièce de résistance* in this intriguing collection of texts was the now notorious Chronicle of Arbela, which Mingana wilfully accredited to the sixth-century writer Mšihāzkā, but which some today would lay at Mingana's own door.<sup>2</sup> More respectable are the other two texts which Mingana included in the volume, a verse history of the monastery of Sabrisho<sup>c</sup> of Beth Qōqā (in Adiabene),<sup>3</sup> and Books X-XV of John bar Penkāyē's *Riṣ Mellē*, or summary of world history, addressed to a certain Sabrisho<sup>c</sup>.<sup>4</sup> Although John of Fenek's aim in this last work was, as Baumstark pointed out,<sup>5</sup> 'weit mehr religiöse als historische Belehrung', the final book nevertheless retains a certain interest for the student of seventh-century history in that it offers its own individual theological interpretation of the events of this momentous period, and provides evidence for the currency of apocalyptic expectations in the late 680s in North

<sup>1</sup> No date is in fact given; the preface to the Chronicle of Arbela, however, is dated June 1907, and that to John bar Penkāyē's *Riṣ Melle* January 1908.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. Fiey, "Auteur et date de la Chronique d'Arbèles," *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967), pp. 265-302. The case is not proven, and perhaps it is preferable to see it as a medieval compilation; see my comments in *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> On this see J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, Beirut 1965, I, pp. 130-57.

<sup>4</sup> Text on pp. 1\* - 171\*; French translation (of Book XV only) on pp. 172\*-197\*. Throughout I cite by the page number of the Syriac text. The Sabrisho<sup>c</sup> may well be Sabrisho<sup>c</sup>, abbot of the monastery of John of Kamul where, according to his *vita*, John bar Penkāyē was a monk; for this monastery see J.M. Fiey, *Nisibe: métropole syriaque orientale* (CSCO 388, Subs. 54), Louvain 1977, pp. 199-200.

<sup>5</sup> A. Baumstark, "Eine syrische Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrhunderts," *Römische Quartalschrift* 15 (1901), p. 275. Baumstark's summary of the work is still useful.

Mesopotamia; at the same time John's narrative sheds some valuable contemporary side light on al-Mukhtār's rebellion<sup>6</sup> – the only historical episode he treats in any detail.

The little that is known about John bar Penkāyē<sup>7</sup> (later tradition confused him with John of Dalyāthā or John the Elder) and about the manuscripts containing his *Rīs Mellē* was collected by T. Jansma<sup>8</sup> and so need not be repeated here. On internal grounds John was clearly an eyewitness of troubles in the Nisibis region during the last decades of the seventh century, and at one point he specifically mentions AH 67 (686 CE) as marking the inception of all the misfortunes from which North Mesopotamia was 'today' suffering. 'Today' was clearly only a few years after AH 67. Since John does not yet know of the replacement of the Catholicos Hnānīshō<sup>c</sup> by John of Dasen (AH 74/693 CE), but only of the latter's failure to oust Hnānīshō<sup>c</sup> in 686, it is likely that the book was completed before 693/4. If the reference to the death of 'Zubayr' refers to Ibn al-Zubayr, rather than to his father (see note to p. 155\*), then AH 73 will be the *terminus post quem*.<sup>9</sup>

John at one point<sup>10</sup> states his purpose in writing the work: it was 'not to get entangled in lengthy narratives, and so lose the thread and forget our purpose... but to demonstrate what God has done for us in His grace, and what we in our wickedness have presumed to do in opposition to Him.' Reading his final two books, it soon becomes apparent that John's interpretation of history was entirely shaped by ecclesiastical considerations. The Arab conquests form part of the divine plan: they both destroyed the pride of the Sasanians and punished the Byzantines for their religious policies, attempting to impose theopaschite doctrines on the entire Christian world.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Byzantine theological deviation was itself

<sup>6</sup> Cp P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses. The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge 1980, pp. 16, 264 (note 647).

<sup>7</sup> Fenek is on the Tigris, north of Gozarta (modern Cizre).

<sup>8</sup> T. Jansma, "Projet d'édition du ktābā d'c rēs mellē de Jean bar Penkaye," *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1962), pp. 87-106.

<sup>9</sup> The mention of Spain and Kush on p. 142\* probably signifies no more than the farthest west and south: it is most unlikely that John would have struck an apocalyptic note in connection with AH 67 if he had been writing after 711 CE.

<sup>10</sup> P. 30\*.

<sup>11</sup> On p. 147\* John specifies the addition of the words "who was crucified for us" to the Trisagion; for the use of this formula in Syria at about this time see my "A Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor," *Analecta Bollandiana* 91 (1973), p. 323.

the outcome of laxity in the Roman Empire, following on the cessation of the persecutions and the conversion of Constantine; for the Church in the Persian Empire, on the other hand, persecution had continued right up to the end of Sasanian rule, and so this church had been spared the consequences of religious peace – namely the lapse into theological bickering.

The Arab invasions, then, were the tool of divine wrath; but the children of Hagar, too, required punishing once they had accomplished their task. This punishment took the form of the division of their 'kingdom' into two parts, Eastern and Western. Once Mu'āwiya had gained control, however, conditions improved, and 'the peace throughout the world was such that we have never heard of or seen'. But peace inevitably brought with it laxity once again: the theopaschites took the opportunity to spread their doctrines, while in general moral corruption set in on an unparalleled scale.

With Yazid's death, however, and the anti-caliphate of Ibn Zubayr, Arab rule began to totter. The ensuing events, including al-Mukhtār's revolt, are given in a certain detail, with special attention paid to what was happening in Nisibis, where, subsequent to the Battle of the River Khāzir (AH 67), Ibn al-Ashtar's army of freed captives set up its own leader. These *šurte* (perhaps the *šurāt*)<sup>12</sup> John sees as about to be 'the cause of the destruction of the Ishmaelites' and in support of this he adduces a remarkable exegesis of Gen. 16:12. The concomitant plague, famine and earthquakes lead him (on the basis of Matt. 24:7) to interpret all these events as the birthpangs of the eschaton; the closing pages of his work accordingly take on apocalyptic dimensions.

John is not alone among Christian writers of the seventh century either in putting forward a sectarian theological explanation for the Arab invasions,<sup>13</sup> or for his readiness to adopt an apocalyptic note. John's view that the Arab successes represented a punishment for Byzantine theopaschite religious policy reappears a little over a century later in the Catholicos Timothy I's Apology for Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Nor were apocalyptic ideas exceptional,<sup>15</sup> and in East Syrian circles hints of such speculation already

<sup>12</sup> See note to p. 157\*.

<sup>13</sup> For a survey see my "Syriac views of emergent Islam," in G.H.A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, Carbondale and Edwardsville 1982, pp. 9-21, 199-203.

<sup>14</sup> Ed. A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies* 2, Cambridge 1928, pp. 59, 62.

<sup>15</sup> This applies to all religions. An earlier messianic movement among Jews is recorded in the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (ed. Guidi, CSCO *Scriptores Syri* 1, p. 33) during the catholicosate of

occur in one of Ishoʿyahb III's letters;<sup>16</sup> the most outspoken – and influential – text, however, was the apocalypse attributed to Methodius of Patara, dated by Alexander<sup>17</sup> to between 644 and 678, but which I have elsewhere suggested belongs to the early 690s, just prior to ʿAbd al-Malik's cadastral survey and tax reform.<sup>18</sup> If the slightly later date is correct, then Ps. Methodius will belong to very much the same time, as well as place (Sinjar), as does John of Fenek. The two works are, however, a long way apart in their outlook: John is content just to identify the birth pangs of the eschaton, and his key Biblical texts are Gen. 16:12 (interpreted as foretelling the end of the Ishmaelites),<sup>19</sup> Matt. 24:7-8 (the signs of the eschaton), 2 Thess. 2:6-8 (the removal of *to katechon*, interpreted as the removal of God's providential care), and 2 John 1:7 (the 'Deceiver', who has still to appear on the scene). Ps. Methodius, on the other hand, boldly foresees the Byzantine recapture of Jerusalem, and his work centres round quite a different selection of Biblical texts, notably the apocalyptic 'weeks' of Daniel, Matt. 16:18, 2 Thess. 2 (interpreted differently), 1 Cor. 15:24 and Ps. 68:31.<sup>20</sup> The radical differences between these two apocalyptic

Maremeh (c. 647-50): "At that time a certain Jew came forth from Beth Aramaye, from a village called Pallughta, where the Euphrates waters are divided up to irrigate the land, and he said that the Messiah had come. He collected together weavers, barbers and fullers, some 400 men in all, who set fire to three churches, and killed the local governor. Then an army from ʿAqula (i.e. Kufa) came against them and slew them and their wives and children. Their leader was crucified in his own village." Closer in time would be the case of Abū ʿĪsā of Isfahan, if Qirqisāni is correct in dating him to the time of ʿAbd al-Malik (Shahrastāni, the other main source, places him in the time of Marwan II); cp A.Z. Aeshcoly, *Ha-tenuʿot ha-meshihiyot be-Yisra'el*, Jerusalem 1956, I, pp. 100-2. In general, see A. Vasiliev, "Medieval ideas of the end of the world: East and West," *Byzantion* 16 (1942/3), esp. pp. 471-5.

<sup>16</sup> *Liber Epistularum*, ed. R. Duval (CSCO Scriptorum Syri 11), p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> P.J. Alexander, "Byzantium and the migration of literary works and motifs; the legend of the last emperor," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 2 (1971), p. 57 and note 29. It is hoped that Alexander's translation of the Syriac text of the Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius will appear shortly.

<sup>18</sup> "Syriac Views," pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> The use of Gen. 16:12 is not uncommon in seventh-century texts, e.g. Sebeos, *Histoire de Héraclius* (trad. Macler), Paris 1904, ch. 30 (in connection with the Prophet), the Apocalypse of John the Less (ed. J.R. Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, Cambridge 1900, p. 18\*), and Ps. Methodius (on which see G. Reinink, "Ismael, der Wildesel in der Wüste. Zur Typologie der Apokalypse der Ps. Methodios," in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 75 (1982) (I am most grateful to Dr. Reinink for letting me see the proofs of his article).

<sup>20</sup> For the use of Daniel, see G. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, München 1972, pp. 53-6; and for Ps. 68:31, see I. Shahid, in *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), pp. 174-6.

outlooks are readily to be explained by the fact that the two authors belonged to different ecclesiastical bodies.

Enough has been said by way of brief introduction in order to indicate something of John's main concerns in the final book of his *Riṣ Mellē*. Given the rarity of Mingana's edition of the text, it is hoped that the translation which follows will help rescue this intriguing document from undue neglect. It is a pleasure to offer it as a small tribute to Professor M.J. Kister on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.

The translation below covers the end of Book XIV, insofar as that book deals with the Arab invasions,<sup>21</sup> and most of Book XV: only two sections have been omitted for reasons of space, the first (pp. 148\* — 154\*) being a rather diffuse passage portraying the moral decadence that was consequent upon the peace brought about by Mu'awiya's reign, and the second (pp. 168\* — 171\*) being the concluding paragraphs of the work and containing little of real interest. Annotation has been kept to a minimum, and illustration has largely been confined to Syriac sources,<sup>22</sup> while on the Islamic side references have almost entirely been confined to entries in Caetani's *Chronographia Islamica*.<sup>23</sup> John's work is replete with Biblical quotations and allusions, and the absence of a concordance to the Syriac Bible makes it all the more likely that I have missed several of these. As one would expect, he quotes the Peshitta version (often rather different from the Hebrew and Greek).

In the translation below bracketed words have been supplied by myself for the sake of the sense. Names are given in their Syriac form in the translation, but (normally) in their Arabic form in the notes. In the annotation the following abbreviations are employed:

BH — Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Syriacum*, ed. P. Bedjan, Paris 1890; cited by page.

<sup>21</sup> A German translation of the end of Book XIV and the beginning of Book XV was given by R. Abramowski, *Dionysius von Tellmahre* (Abh. KM XXV, 2), Leipzig 1940, pp. 5-8.

<sup>22</sup> For a survey for this period, see my "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976), pp. 17-36.

<sup>23</sup> For detailed accounts of al-Mukhtār's rebellion based on the Arabic sources, see J. Wellhausen, *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam* (Abh. KGW Göttingen V, 5), 1901 (English translation: *The Religious Political Factions in Early Islam*, New York 1975), chapters 4-5 (based largely on Tabari), and 'A.A.'A. Dixon, *The Umayyad Caliphate 65-86/684-705*, London 1971, chapter 2 (based on Balādhuri); cp also W. Montgomery Watt, "Shi'ism under the Umayyads," *JRAS* 1960, pp. 158-72 (esp. 162-5).

Caetani — L. Caetani, *Chronographia Islamica*, Rome 1912; cited by entry number under the appropriate year.

Chron. 1234 — *Chronicon anonymum ad annum 1234*, ed. J.B. Chabot (CSCO Scr. Syri 36), vol. I; cited by page (of text volume). (Latin translation in Scr. Syri 56, with page numbers of text volume in the margin).

Elijah of Nisibis — *Opus chronologicum* (the relevant extracts are given in F. Baethgen, *Fragmente syrischer und arabischer Historiker* [Abh. KM VIII, 3], Leipzig 1884); cited by AH entry.

Khuzistan Chronicle — Anonymous Chronicle on the End of the Sasanids, ed. I. Guidi in *Chronica Minora I* (CSCO Scr. Syri 1); cited by page of text. (Latin translation in Scr. Syri 2).

MS — *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. J.B. Chabot, Paris 1899–1924 (repr. 1963); cited by page of translation (vol. II) and of text (vol. IV).

In the notes dates are given in a simplified form, i.e. AH 64 — 683 CE (not 683/4); the following table gives the correspondences between the Hijra, Christian and Seleucid eras for the period:

AH 64 began	30 Aug. 683 CE — AG (Anno Graecorum) 994 <sup>24</sup>
AH 65 began	18 Aug. 684 CE — AG 995
AH 66 began	8 Aug. 685 CE — AG 996
AH 67 began	28 Jul. 686 CE — AG 997
AH 68 began	18 Jul. 687 CE — AG 998
AH 69 began	6 Jul. 688 CE — AG 999
AH 70 began	25 Jun. 689 CE — AG 1000
AH 71 began	15 Jun. 690 CE — AG 1001
AH 72 began	4 Jun. 691 CE — AG 1002
AH 73 began	23 May 692 CE — AG 1003
AH 74 began	13 May 693 CE — AG 1004
AH 75 began	2 May 694 CE — AG 1005

<sup>24</sup> The Seleucid year began on 1st October; thus AG 994 commenced 1st Oct. 682 = AH 63).

### Translation

#### Book XIV

[141\*] When the kingdom of the Persians came to an end, in the days of their king Khōsrō,<sup>a</sup> the kingdom of the children of Hagar at once gained control over more or less the whole world, for they took the whole kingdom of the Persians, overthrowing all their warriors who prided themselves in the arts of war.

We should not think of the advent (of the children of Hagar) as something ordinary, but as due to divine working. Before calling them, (God) had prepared them beforehand to hold Christians in honour; thus they also had a special commandment<sup>b</sup> from God concerning our monastic station, that they should hold it in honour. Now when these people came, at God's command, and took over as it were both kingdoms, not with any war or battle, but in a menial fashion, such as when a brand is rescued out of the fire;<sup>c</sup> not using weapons of war or human [142\*] means, God put victory into their hands in such a way that the words

[141\*] <sup>a</sup> Khusrau II had in fact died in 628, prior to the collapse of the Sasanian empire.

<sup>b</sup> Compare Chron. 1234, p. 240; Life of Gabriel of Qartmin (ed. P.Y. Dawlabani, *Maktabzabnê d-<sup>c</sup>umrâ qaddišâ d-Qartmin*, Mardin 1959, p. 97): 'Mar Gabriel preferred the advent of the Arabs to the oppression of the Byzantines, so he gave assistance and helped them. Subsequently he went to Gezira to their emir, who received him with great joy and honoured him greatly for his action on their behalf; he gave him a *prostagma* signed with his own hand with ordinances on all the points he had asked for: in it he granted all the *suryâyê* (i.e. Syrian Orthodox) freedom to use their church customs – the *semantra*, festival celebrations and funeral processions, and the building of churches and monasteries; he freed from tribute priests, deacons and monks, while he fixed the tribute for other people at four (currency unspecified). He also instructed the pagan Arabs to take great care to preserve the lives of the *suryâyê*.' (This passage is not included in F. Nau's selections from the Life of Gabriel in his "Notice historique sur le monastère de Qartamin." *Actes du XIVe Congrès international des orientalistes*, 1905, Paris 1907, II, pp. 19-31; a new edition of the Life of Gabriel, and of other abbots of Qartmin monastery, has been prepared by A.N. Palmer).

<sup>c</sup> Amos 4:11; Zech. 3:2 (cp p. 165\*).

written concerning them might be fulfilled, namely, 'One man chased a thousand and two men routed ten thousand'.<sup>a</sup> How, otherwise, could naked men,<sup>b</sup> riding without armour or shield, have been able to win, apart from divine aid, God having called them from the ends of the earth so as to destroy, by them, 'a sinful kingdom'<sup>c</sup> and to bring low, through them, the proud spirit of the Persians.

Only a short period passed before the entire world was handed over to the Arabs; they subdued all the fortified cities, taking control from sea to sea,<sup>d</sup> and from East to West – Aigyptos and the whole of Meşrin, and from Crete to Cappadocia, from Yâhêlmân<sup>e</sup> to the gates of Ālân, Armenians, Syrians, Persians, Byzantines, Egyptians and all the intermediary regions: 'their hand was upon everyone',<sup>f</sup> as the prophet says. Only half the Byzantine empire was left by them.

Who can relate the carnage they effected in Greek territory, in Kush, in Spain<sup>g</sup> and in other distant regions, taking captive their sons and daughters and reducing them to slavery and servitude. Against those who had not ceased in times of peace and prosperity from fighting against their Creator, there was sent a barbarian people who had no pity on them.

Having reached thus far, however, [143\*] in the narrative, let us end this book here, and give praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ever, amen.

## Book XV

While our affairs were thus prospering through divine care rather than from any human aid, we were seen to be resplendent, thanks to the power of our Victorious King,<sup>a</sup> in the face of all the wars stirred up against us by tyrannical kings. All our affairs were conducted in orderly fashion as long as pagan kings were in control, seeing that the lax and lazy were not al-

[142\*] <sup>a</sup> Deut. 32:30.

<sup>b</sup> Compare the story in MS II, p. 422 = IV, p. 417.

<sup>c</sup> Amos 9:8.

<sup>d</sup> i.e. Mediterranean to Persian Gulf.

<sup>e</sup> Identity uncertain, but it represents the furthest south, just as the 'Gates of Ālân' designate the furthest north.

<sup>f</sup> Based on Gen. 16:12 (on Ishmael); cp p. 167\*.

<sup>g</sup> The terms are evidently used loosely to designate raids in the extreme west and south.

[143\*] <sup>a</sup> A standard christological title in Syriac writers.

lowed to remain amongst us, owing to fear of (our) persecutors; for the moment someone dozed off, failing to keep vigilance for truth, the furnace of persecution would separate him (off from the church) without a synod having to go to the trouble. Sometimes, when the fierceness of persecution against us abated a little, then the (church) fathers would gather, according to custom, and would adjudicate on a few problems that had sprung up, and they would resolve any complications that had occurred, reaffirming the apostolic canons, as well as anything else appropriate that time and circumstances suggested to them that they should regulate and lay down.

[144\*] Thus, as I have said, our faith prospered and our way of life flourished. Now there had been many gatherings (of bishops) prior to that at Nicaea,<sup>a</sup> but they had not been ecumenical, and (their aim) was not to make a new creed, but their purpose was that which we have stated above. But once there was respite, and believing kings held sway over the Romans, it was then that corruption and intrigues entered the churches, and there were a great many creeds and assemblies (of bishops), seeing that each year they made a new creed. Peace and quiet thus brought considerable loss upon them, for lovers of fame did not fail to stir up trouble, furtively using gold to win the imperial ear, so that they could play about with the kings as if they were children.

Such, then, were the Romans.

Up to the time of the arrival of the children of Hagar the church in Persia had been under the rule of the Magians and so had nothing else to pit itself against. There were, however, some (internal) scandals which sprang up, but they were not allowed to come to anything, for our Lord held them back. This being the situation ever since the time of the Apostles up to the reign of this last Khōsrō, our Saviour – who foresees everything before it takes place – saw how much a state of ease proved detrimental to us, and (observed) the ills to which we had been exposed as a result of the interference of Christian kings who wanted us to ascribe suffering<sup>b</sup> to that Nature which is above suffering – something that perhaps not even demons had ever [145\*] dared to do.

[144\*] <sup>a</sup> In 325 CE.

<sup>b</sup> Ever since Justinian's proclamation of the so-called 'theopaschite formula' in 533, this issue had been the prize bone of contention between the Persian and Byzantine churches.

Even though God manifested many portents, we paid no attention at all; for ever since this iniquitous schism took place right up to this day, portents involving the sun – such as God manifested to the crucifiers at the time of the crucifixion – along with earthquakes, tremors and fearful signs in the sky, have appeared three times,<sup>a</sup> indicating nothing else but the wickedness of heretics and (hinting) at what was to come upon the earth. And so, when God saw that no amendment took place, He summoned against us the Barbarian kingdom – a people that is not open to persuasion,<sup>b</sup> which acknowledges no treaty or agreement, which accepts no flattery or blandishment, whose comfort lies in blood that is shed without reason, whose pleasure is to dominate everyone, whose wish it is to take captives and to deport. Hatred and wrath is their food; they take no comfort in what they are offered.

When they proved successful and had performed the will of Him who had summoned them, ruling and domineering over all the kingdoms of the earth, subjecting all peoples to harsh subjugation, taking their sons and daughters into slavery, taking vengeance on them for their abuse to God the Word,<sup>c</sup> and for the blood of Christ's martyrs<sup>d</sup> that had been shed in innocence, then was our Lord comforted and rested, and He was reconciled so as to act in mercy towards His people. And since it was right that the course of action taken by the children of Hagar should also be punished, it was for this reason that right at the beginning of their rule

[145\*] <sup>a</sup> Solar eclipses are recorded in Syriac chronicles for AG 976 (Chron. 1234, p. 282); AG 983, Sun. 1st December (MS II, p. 456 = IV, p. 436); AG 1005, Sun. 5th October (MS II, p. 474 = IV, p. 446-7; Elijah of Nisibis *sub* AH 74). (The first two references will be to the eclipses of 25th Aug. 667 [i.e. read AG 978] and 7th [not 1st] Dec. 671 CE). Several further eclipses took place in this period, some of which would have been observable in the Middle East: see T. von Oppolzer, *Canon of Eclipses* (tr. O. Gingerich), New York 1962, pp. 180-3 and charts 90-91; and (for total eclipses only), J.F. Schroeter, *Spezieller Kanon der zentralen Sonnen- und Mondfinsternisse welche innerhalb des Zeitraums von 600 bis 1800 n. Chr. in Europa sichtbar waren*, Kristiania 1923, p. 20.

<sup>b</sup> Cp. Is. 65:2.

<sup>c</sup> i.e. by imputing to him suffering.

<sup>d</sup> Perhaps John has in mind the martyrdoms of men such as George/Mihramgushnasp, a convert from Zoroastrianism denounced as such by Khusrau II's court doctor, the monophysite Gabriel of Sinjar (Khuzistan chronicle, p. 23).

(God) made [146\*] two heads, dividing the kingdom into two parts. This was in order that we might comprehend what had been said by our Saviour. For there had been concord until they had subdued the entire earth, but once they turned to themselves, and rested from war, then they quarrelled amongst themselves: those in the West were saying 'superiority is due to us, and the king should come from among us', whereas those in the East disputed this, (saying) that it was their due. As a result of this dispute they were provoked into war with one another.

Having let their dispute run its course, after much fighting had taken place between them, the Westerners, whom they call the sons of the 'Ammāyē, gained the victory,<sup>a</sup> and one of their number, a man called M<sup>c</sup>awya,<sup>b</sup> became king controlling the two kingdoms, of the Persians and of the Byzantines. Justice flourished in his time, and there was great peace in the regions under his control; he allowed everyone to live as they wanted. For they held, as I have said above, an ordinance, stemming from the man who was their guide (*mhaddyānā*),<sup>c</sup> concerning the people of the Christians and concerning the monastic station. Also as a result of this man's guidance (*mhaddyānūtā*) they held to the worship of the One God, in accordance with the customs of ancient law. At their beginnings they kept to the tradition (*mašlmānūtā*) of Muḥammad, who was their instructor (*tār'ā*), to such an extent that they inflicted the death penalty on anyone who was seen to act brazenly against [147\*] his laws.

Their robber bands went annually to distant parts and to the islands, bringing back captives from all the peoples under the heavens. Of each person they required only tribute (*madattā*), allowing him to remain in whatever faith he wished. Among them were also Christians in no small numbers: some belonged to the heretics, while others to us.<sup>a</sup>

Once M<sup>c</sup>awya had come to the throne, the peace throughout the world was such that we have never heard, either from our fathers or from our grandparents, or seen that there had ever been any like it.<sup>b</sup> It was as

[146\*] <sup>a</sup> The battle of Siffin. 657 CE.

<sup>b</sup> i.e. Mu<sup>c</sup>āwya, 661-680 CE.

<sup>c</sup> The term *mhaddyānā* is also used of the Prophet in Chron. 1234, pp. 227<sup>7</sup>, 238<sup>29</sup>.

[147\*] <sup>a</sup> i.e. notably the Ghassanids and Lakhmids respectively.

<sup>b</sup> Cp. Ps. Methodius, Vat. syr. 58, f.134a: 'Then there shall be peace on earth the like of which there has not been, for it is the final peace' (i.e. before the Gates of the North are opened).

though our Lord had written 'I will test by this means, as it is written,<sup>c</sup> "so that through grace and truth sin may be forgiven."' "

The accursed heretics, taking the situation then as beneficial to themselves, instead of converting and baptising the pagans, in accordance with ecclesiastical canons, started on a retrograde (kind of) conversion, turning almost all the churches of the Byzantines to their own wicked standpoint, reviving and re-establishing something that had been overthrown; (as a result) the majority of the Westerners were regularly using (the addition to the Trisagion of) the words "... immortal, who was crucified for us."<sup>d</sup> All the churches became like uncultivated land.

Just as we related above the praiseworthy actions of our valour at a time when we were worthy of this, so now we must disclose our laxity, without hiding anything, for "accursed is [148\*] he who shall call good bad, and bad good", as the Scripture says.<sup>a</sup> For to such a state of laxity did that time of respite which had overtaken us bring us, that the same happened to us as had happened to Israel: "Israel has grown fat and recalcitrant, he has grown fat and strong, he has acquired wealth and has forgotten God who made him, reviling the Strong One who had redeemed him."<sup>b</sup>

The Westerners adopted their wickedness without a flinch, while we, who imagined that we held on to the true faith, were so far removed from the actions appropriate to Christians that, if one of the men of old were to be resurrected and were to see us, he would be seized by pangs of death, and he would say: "This is not the Christianity which I left behind at my death." Accordingly I am obliged to disclose everything, in order that we may realize that everything that has befallen us has befallen us in (the course of) just judgment: we have been punished as we deserved, and in accordance with what we have done.

[John now goes on to enumerate in general terms the moral degradation and malpractices of bishops, clergy, rulers, judges and ordinary people during this time of peace, at a time when crops were bountiful and trade 'doubled' (pp. 148\* - 54\*)].

<sup>c</sup> Prov. 16:6.

<sup>d</sup> See note 11 to introduction.

[148\*] <sup>a</sup> Is. 5:20.

<sup>b</sup> Deut. 32:15.

[154\*] While we were mixed up in all these evil and foul practices, which we have related above, God looked on in sorrow, and He began, in His accustomed compassion, to arouse our minds little by little to repentance: there were earthquakes in various cities,<sup>a</sup> but our stubbornness looked on in silence: He manifested portents in the skies,<sup>b</sup> but our wicked nature looked on and paid no attention; He brought on various kinds of locusts,<sup>c</sup> which stripped the fields and vineyards, but there was no one among us who asked the question 'why?'. The kingdom began to suffer disturbances, but our hearts were not in the slightest moved. He used up our strength (*or* wealth) in tribute, but we did not pay a thought; the kingdom over us was once again divided into two parts, each plundering the other, but this made no impression on our crassness of heart. (God) brought along raiders, He destroyed towns and laid waste the roads. During all this we (remained) in our wickedness, like a sheep in its flock; but then things began encroaching upon us little by little, with the intention that our hearts might possibly be aroused. (God) brought plague upon the oxen, so that we might come to our senses – but we imagined it might just be coincidence; reports reached us from all sides of captives being taken, and of plague – but we just said it was chance.

[155\*] Accordingly, I too shall say with the prophet Isaiah, taking the role of our Lord, 'Heaven and earth, rational beings and dumb animals, judge between Me and My people: what further is it appropriate to do to My people that I have not yet done? I waited for them to do good, but they did evil. Wait a little and see what I shall do to My people.'<sup>a</sup>

When M<sup>c</sup>awyā ended his days and departed from the world, Yazdīn<sup>b</sup> his son ruled after him. He did not walk in his father's ways,<sup>c</sup> but instead was fond of childish games and empty delights. Men's strength failed because of his empty-headed tyranny, and Satan wore down their progress by means of all sorts of tedious labours. God, however, speedily removed

[154\*] <sup>a</sup> The Edessa region had suffered a devastating earthquake at Easter in 679 CE (MS II, p. 457 = IV, p. 436); Chron. 1234, p. 288 (date corrupt).

<sup>b</sup> Cp. MS II, pp. 456, 470-1 = IV, pp. 436, 444-5; BH, p. 110, for such portents around this time.

<sup>c</sup> Cp. BH, p. 110 (AG 990).

[155\*] <sup>a</sup> Is. 5:3-4 (adapted).

<sup>b</sup> i.e. Yazid I, April 680 - Nov. 683 CE.

<sup>c</sup> Based on the phraseology of the Deuteronomist historian of Kings.

him and when he too departed from the world, one of the Arabs, by name Zubayr,<sup>d</sup> made his voice heard from a distance. He made it known about himself that he had come out of zeal for the house of God, and he was full of threats against the Westerners, claiming that they were transgressors of the law. He came to a certain locality in the South where their sanctuary was, and lived there. Preparations for war were made against him and he was overpowered; in this way they even burnt their own sanctuary,<sup>e</sup> as well as spilling much blood there. From that time on the kingdom of the Arabs was no longer firmly established. When Zubayr died<sup>f</sup> they set up his son in the emirate (*'amīrūtā*).

The Westerners had [156\*] a general called 'Abd al-Rahmān bar Zāyāt,<sup>a</sup> while the Easterners had one named Mukhtār.<sup>b</sup> Now at that time the Westerners controlled Nisibis, and an emir called bar 'Uthmān<sup>c</sup> was in control of it. Another emir from among the Easterners, whose name was bar Nīṭrōn,<sup>d</sup> advanced against him. The Westerners claimed that, because Nisibis had belonged to the Romans,<sup>e</sup> it was right that they should have it, while the Easterners claimed that it had belonged to the Persians, and so was theirs. This was the reason for the great unrest in Mesopotamia.

<sup>d</sup> i.e. 'Abdallāh ibn al-Zubayr, who proclaimed himself caliph in March 684: Caetani, AH 64, no. 27.

<sup>e</sup> Evidently the episode of October 683 (Caetani, AH 64, no. 27) is meant, rather than al-Hajjāj's siege of Mecca in 692 (Caetani, AH 73, no. 14).

<sup>f</sup> Ibn al-Zubayr was killed in 692; there is evidently some confusion over his son's succession (unless 'Zubayr' here [alone in this text] is al-Zubayr himself).

[156\*] <sup>a</sup> Clearly an error, for 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ziyād was governor of Khorasan: his brother 'Ubaydallāh is meant.

<sup>b</sup> The rebellion of al-Mukhtār features in MS II, p. 471 = IV, p. 444, and in almost identical wording in Chron. 1234, p. 290, as follows: '[In AG 995 Yazīd died] and Mukhtār rebelled in 'Aqūlā [or Babylon]; he was a false deceiver who hypocritically said of himself that he was a prophet [and that he had visions].' (Passages in square brackets are omitted in Chron. 1234; cp. also BH, p. 110).

<sup>c</sup> Not otherwise known; cp. M.G. Moroney, "Continuity and Change in the Administrative Geography of late Sasanian and early Islamic al-'Irāq," *Iran* 20 (1982), pp. 8-9.

<sup>d</sup> Not otherwise known.

<sup>e</sup> i.e. until 363 CE, and then again briefly during Heraclius' campaigns (627-8).

The Westerners won, and the Easterners were driven away. At the turn of the year bar Nītrōn got together a large army, and horsemen, like sand in number, made ready with him. Goaded on by enormous pride he set his face to go down to fight the ‘Aqūlāyē,<sup>f</sup> taking with him John, who was metropolitan of Nisibis at that time.<sup>g</sup>

Seeing that the Patriarch of the Church of Christ in the East, Mar Giwargīs,<sup>h</sup> had already departed this life for a more blessed one, and Mar Hnānīshō<sup>c</sup> <sup>i</sup> the exegete had been appointed in his place, bar Zāyāt promised John<sup>j</sup> ‘if you will accompany me, I will depose him and establish you in the patriarchate in his place.’ In this way he already [157\*] considered that victory was his, seeing that he had many army commanders with him. Now Mukhtār, angry with the ‘Aqūlāyē on the grounds that they were useless to him in war, had given orders that all their slaves should be liberated and go into battle in their masters’ stead. When this order had been issued, several thousand of them, slaves of captive origin, collected around him, and he appointed them a commander whose name was Abraham.<sup>a</sup> This man he sent against bar Zāyāt with 13,000 men, all footsoldiers, without arms or equipment, without horses or tents: all that they had in their hands was either a sword or a spear or a stick. They set off, and when the two armies met on the river named the Ḥāzar,<sup>b</sup> there

<sup>f</sup> ‘Aqūlā = Kufa (so expressly stated in the Khuzistan Chronicle, p. 36).

<sup>g</sup> On John of Dasen, or ‘the Leper’, see Fiey, *Nisibe* [see note 4], pp. 69-70.

<sup>h</sup> 659-680/1 CE.

<sup>i</sup> 6856/6-692/3 CE; the intervening (and very aged) John I is ignored.

<sup>j</sup> Only later did John actually manage to occupy the patriarchal throne for 22 months (until his death in AH 76/695 CE). That John was in fact a rival candidate to Hnānīshō<sup>c</sup> from the first is stated by Mari, *Liber Turris* (ed. Gismondi), p. 63 (text) = p. 56 (tr.).

[157\*] <sup>a</sup> Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar.

<sup>b</sup> The defeat and death of ‘Ubaydallāh ibn Ziyād on the banks of the river Khāzir took place, according to Islamic tradition, on 6 Aug. 686 CE (Caetani, AH 67, no. 2). MS II, p. 471 = IV, p. 445 gives the following account, with a different date: ‘At the beginning of AG 996 (so editor, ms 995), on 22nd and 23rd Illul (September), the Arabs engaged in a fierce battle with each other, lasting several days. They mutually routed each other, and many tens of thousands of men fell on either side: it is said that the number of dead who were counted reached 400,000. This took place on the river Ḥāzir, in the region of Nineveh. They suffered huge

was a fierce battle in which all the warriors of the Westerners were slain. Thus was their pride turned to deep shame, seeing that they had been defeated, not by able-bodied men, but by weaklings. The man<sup>c</sup> who was all prepared for the patriarchal throne only barely escaped with his cloak. The Westerners were utterly broken and their general was slain as well. As for all the stores they had collected, and their riches, belongings, arms and silver, all this their enemies inherited, while they retreated until they had crossed the Euphrates.

Those captives, who were nicknamed *šurtē*,<sup>d</sup> [158\*] signifying their zeal for righteousness, entered Nisibis<sup>a</sup> and held it, thus gaining control over the whole of Mesopotamia. Wherever their enemies poked their noses out, the *šurtē* would win another victory.

When they had entered Nisibis, Abraham appointed his brother<sup>b</sup> as commander over them, and he himself went down to ʿAqūlā. Since, however, they preferred to have someone from their own ranks as commander – Abraham and his brother belonged to the ʿTayy – they rose up against him and slew him<sup>c</sup> and all his associates. They then set up an emir from among themselves, whose name was Abuqarab.<sup>d</sup>

The ʿAqūlāyē repented of what they had done when they saw that their slaves had rebelled against them, and so they rose up against Mukhtār and made war on him. After defeating them several times, he was himself finally defeated, and they killed both him<sup>c</sup> and a large army

losses; their might was brought low, and they were the cause of their own shame, for their pride and impiety had been very great.' (Compare BH, p. 110, where the date is given as 3rd Illul, AG 996).

<sup>c</sup> i.e. John, metropolitan of Nisibis.

<sup>d</sup> Probably the *šurāt*, who had 'sold' their life for the cause of God (Qur'an IV.76), rather than the *šurta* (bodyguard); for the emphatic *ṭ*, compare *zyṭ* for *Ziyād*.

[158\*] <sup>a</sup> Cp. Caetani AH 67, no. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Tabarī II, p. 716 names him as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.

<sup>c</sup> i.e. Ibrāhīm's brother.

<sup>d</sup> i.e. Abū Qārib, mentioned in Abū 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Bulāq edition), V, p. 155. MS II, p. 469 = IV, p. 445, Chron. 1234, p. 293 and BH, p. 111 all mention a certain Bwryd' (Bwryd, Chron. 1234) as holding Nisibis; according to Chron. 1234 he held it against ʿAbd al-Malik's brother Muḥammad, at a date subsequent to the battle on the Khāzir.

<sup>e</sup> Mukhtār was killed in battle on 3rd April 687 (Caetani, AH 67, no. 4).

of the ex-captives that he had with him. Others of captive origin collected together and joined those who were in the city of Nisibis. Every day more would turn up, from every quarter, and join them. They captured a number of fortresses, and the fear of them fell on all the Arabs (Ṭayy). Wherever they went they were successful.

From then onwards God began to afflict the land: He stirred and arose like a warrior, He caused His sword to flash out, terrifying the earth; [159\*] He revealed His arm, and the universe was terrified; He summoned destruction upon all His enemies, He began to take vengeance on those who hated Him,<sup>a</sup> and (acted) in accordance with the one who said<sup>b</sup> 'I have kept silence from eternity, shall I continue to be silent?', and again<sup>c</sup> 'From now on I shall be raised up, says the Lord, henceforth I shall be raised up, henceforth I shall be exalted. You shall conceive thorns, and give birth to the bow in your spirits', etc.

For, seeing that we had remained in our wicked ways and had not turned at all to repentance during all this time, and 'the priests had not said "Where is the Lord their God"', and the law-holders did not recognize Him and the shepherds had acted deceitfully with Him,<sup>d</sup> while each of us had turned aside and we had said to the Lord 'Depart from here',<sup>e</sup> then quite justly was (God) enraged against us: henceforth it was not through tyrannical kings who forced us to worship idols, or through Arians or even Eunomians (that He acted), but He began to wage war with us Himself, and as a result of His immense might 'peoples were stirred up and nations shook. He raised His voice and the earth shook';<sup>f</sup> for He set 'people against people, and kingdom against kingdom';<sup>g</sup> He brought on famines, earthquakes and plagues, as He had said.<sup>h</sup> He handed over a sinful generation to bitter afflictions, the like of which had not been experienced before. What they sowed, they also reaped. He puffed at this

[159\*] <sup>a</sup> John employs a *mélange* of Biblical phraseology here: cp. Ps. 78:65, 143:6; Ezek. 32:10; Is. 52:10; Deut. 32:41.

<sup>b</sup> Is. 42:14.

<sup>c</sup> Is. 33:10-11.

<sup>d</sup> Jer. 2:8.

<sup>e</sup> Cp. Is. 53:6, 65:5.

<sup>f</sup> Ps. 46:7.

<sup>g</sup> Matt. 24:7 (i.e. signs of the eschaton: cp. p. 165\* below).

<sup>h</sup> Matt. 24:7.

(generation) and it did not remain; He delivered us over into the hands of the raiders.

Who can henceforth enumerate the multiple woes that surround the world – in particular the unparalleled plague [160\*] and famine? People were imprisoned (indoors) for fear of raiders, for they could not even move away to safety elsewhere.

In the year 67 of the rule of the Arabs,<sup>a</sup> following on all these fearful signs which we have indicated above, and following those wars and battles by which (God) awoke us and summoned us to repentance – but we paid no attention; in this year 67 the accursed plague began:<sup>b</sup> there had been nothing like it, and I hope that there will be nothing like it again.

Following the custom of the wickedness which is implanted in mankind, people did not even deem those who were harvested by death to be worthy of burial; instead, like the pagans,<sup>c</sup> they left them and fled. From then on brothers and members of the family proved to be (like) dogs and wild animals to anyone who died: crows and vultures were their buriers. Human corpses were strewn in the roads and streets like ‘manure on the earth’<sup>d</sup> with the result that springs and rivers became contaminated. The dogs began on many people while they were still alive: each saw his destruction with his own eyes. No brother had any pity on his brother, or father on his son; a mother’s compassion for her children was cut off: she would gaze on them as they were convulsed with the pangs of death, but she was not willing to approach and close [161\*] their eyes.

Such was the fearful sight, such was the horrifying iniquity. Those who were still alive were scattered, like sheep without a shepherd, over the mountains: their aim was to escape the plague, but it, like a harvester, followed on their footsteps: dogs and wild animals would heap them up in sheaves. What was worst of all were the looters, from whom they could not escape, for they wandered about everywhere following them like

[160\*] <sup>a</sup> AH 67 = 686/7 CE.

<sup>b</sup> Cp. Caetani AG 67, no. 7 (and AH 69, no. 1); also already AH 65, no. 8.

<sup>c</sup> The comparison will be with Zoroastrians; cp. M.G. Moroney, “The Effects of the Muslim Conquest on the Persian Population of Iraq,” *Iran* 14 (1976), p. 53.

<sup>d</sup> So the variant reading in Mingana’s edition, = Jer. 16:4 (Mingana’s text has *tar‘a* ‘door’ for *ar‘ā* ‘ground’).

gleaners: they would haul them out of hidden places and strip them of their belongings, leaving them naked. They failed to consider or to think or say (to themselves) 'no one can escape from God, except by means of repentance and conversion to Him.' As for anyone who reminded them about this, they would angrily rebuke him, saying 'Get out; we know very well that escape is much more profitable to us than supplication;' and 'We did repent, but it did not do us any good; we have not got the strength for this any longer.' To such a state of despair have people come as a result of the multitude of their sins.

Afflictions such as these pressed upon them, but still they did not repent. 'The bellows for their fire have failed, and so has the lead,' as the prophet's word says; 'and the refiner refines in vain. Call them reject silver, for the Lord has rejected them.'<sup>a</sup> Truly has He rejected [162\*] them and His soul has abhorred them. He smote us, without any effect, as we did not accept the chastisement. He brought upon us locusts of various sorts, but we were not converted; He brought upon us raiders, but we did not repent; He held back the rain from us for three months prior to the harvest,<sup>a</sup> but we were unmoved; plague herded us like sheep, but we only increased our wickedness; priests and upholders of the law expired, churches became ruined, and the holy vessels<sup>b</sup> were profaned; villages were burned, towns laid waste, fear ruled over all the roadways.

This was just 'the first generation', that is to say, it was just the beginning of the pangs. God continued to chasten us seven times over<sup>c</sup> for our sins. All the words of the prophets and all the curses of the law<sup>d</sup> and the Apostles came to fulfilment concerning us. We were plundered and scattered over the whole earth; we were in anguish, resembling 'a reed

[161\*] <sup>a</sup> Jer. 6:29-30.

[162\*] <sup>a</sup> For famine in Syria this year see Caetani AH 67, no. 15; see also MS II, p. 474 = IV, p. 447: 'In that year (AG 1005 = 993/4 CE) there was a lack of rain everywhere, and grain became expensive, so that 3 modii of wheat were sold for a dinar, while seven years previously, when that great and dire famine occurred, a modius of grain had been sold in all the villages for 3 dinars, and people had eaten bread made out of lentils, varieties of chick-peas, and other kinds of pulse.'

<sup>b</sup> Or 'vestments', for which one might compare Ps. Methodius. Vat. Syr. 58, f. 131a: '... they sleep in the sanctuary, and the holy vestments (*mānay qudšā*) serve as their clothing.'

<sup>c</sup> Gen. 4:15.

<sup>d</sup> Cp. Dan. 9:11.

quivering before the winds,<sup>e</sup> like Cain shaking and quivering on the earth.<sup>f</sup> What further? Yet another blow, impossible to escape or run away from: famine and plague. When we escaped from plague, famine chased after us, and anything that we had left over was taken away from us by raiders.<sup>g</sup> We are forced to use the words of Jeremiah: he lamented for a single people, that is, Jerusalem alone, but we (lament) for the entire world. Let us accordingly adduce from his lamentations, so that our suffering may be contained – but it will not be contained, for we are unworthy. (See) the notables of Sion ‘lying asleep at the head of every street, resembling flabby beetroot, having had their fill of the wrath [163\*] of the anger of the Lord’.<sup>a</sup>

Again, ‘the (very) hands of compassionate mothers have boiled up their children to serve as food – at the destruction of the daughter of my people.’<sup>b</sup> Again, if I went out into the wilderness, there are those slain by the sword; or if I went into the inner rooms, there are those racked by hunger:<sup>c</sup> ‘those killed by the sword were better off than those wracked by hunger, for these latter wasted away like people wounded’<sup>d</sup> in war.

Our lax generation was imprisoned with all this chastisement. Owing to the strength of the famine, people’s faces turned (blue) like sapphire,<sup>e</sup> or they turned black,<sup>f</sup> like brands rescued from the fire.<sup>g</sup> Many women rejected their children, and many of those who gave birth would convey them alive from their womb to the grave. There were no people left to bury, for everyone was exhausted and worn out from hunger. The storage pits which famine had emptied, were again filled by the famine with the corpses of human beings. Fortunate was the person who was overtaken by death swiftly, for suffering worthy of lamentation attached itself to him who daily underwent many deaths from hunger: how often, as he opened

<sup>e</sup> 1 Kings 14:15.

<sup>f</sup> Gen. 4:12.

<sup>g</sup> Cp. Ezek. 6:12.

[163\*] <sup>a</sup> Is. 51:20.

<sup>b</sup> Lam. 4:10.

<sup>c</sup> Cp. Jer. 14:18.

<sup>d</sup> Lam. 4:9.

<sup>e</sup> Cp. Lam. 4:7.

<sup>f</sup> Cp. Lam. 4:8.

<sup>g</sup> Amos 4:11, Zech. 3:2 (cp. p. 141\*).

his mouth to ask for bread, did he faint with the very words. Many lay sprawled out in the streets, becoming silent the moment they fell. It was a sight truly worthy of grief. Young children in particular were a terrible spectacle: a father did not even recognize his children, so altered was the colour of their complexion: [164\*] they fed off grass like young sheep, they hugged stones as they slept; in the morning they had become like dry sticks of wood.<sup>a</sup> Many a mother made her children into food: sometimes in the evening she might be sleeping with her children, but in the morning their lives had been put to a silent end.

How many more woes do I have to relate – woes which came upon us as a result of our sins? Many fell down and died on the roadways, such was the grip of the famine. Corpses lay in the streets, with people treading on them as they passed along.

These, then, (are the circumstances) of the second trial, more specifically, the consequences of the mode of living we mentioned above. Is that enough so far? No, 'you will be further smitten and chastised once again'.<sup>b</sup> Because the poor have perished from hunger, and orphans and widows have faded away from lack of anyone to support them; monasteries and convents have become ruined as the monks and holy men were scattered, having left them to wander about all over the place; while wicked men have stopped up their feelings of compassion, and the rich have looked only for destruction – as the prophet said, 'When will the month come to an end and the Sabbath pass, so that we can open up the store-chambers and give short measure' etc.<sup>c</sup> While expecting all these evils 'you will be further smitten, and chastised once again'.<sup>d</sup> The plague returned again to glean, following on them; it herded people, head by head. What the famine had left, the plague devoured, what [165\*] the plague left over, the sword finished off.<sup>a</sup> These torments were the retribution for our wickedness: because we had paid no attention to the fear of God in times when we were in straits; He neither had pity nor compassion – just as we had not had pity on the afflictions and tribulations of

[164\*] <sup>a</sup> Cp. Lam. 4:8.

<sup>b</sup> Is. 1:5.

<sup>c</sup> Amos 8:5.

<sup>d</sup> Is. 1:5.

[165\*] <sup>a</sup> Cp. Joel 1:4.

our brothers. On the day of His wrath He did not keep in mind His holy name, but He delivered us over to our sins, averting His face from us; further, He became our adversary and fought against us, slaughtering without sparing, in the wrath of His anger.

These, then, are the causes of this chastisement that has come upon us, my beloved brother Sabrishō<sup>c</sup>. This 'is our evil that has turned bitter and reached right into our heart'.<sup>b</sup> Truly, I am aware that the end of the ages has arrived for us; I know this from the holy Scriptures, and in particular from our Lord's last words; for everything written has been fulfilled. Men have become deceitful and 'self-loving, traitors, brutish, haters of all that is good, enslaved to lusts, rather than to the love of God; they have the outward appearance of piety, but they are far removed from its true meaning'.<sup>c</sup> The blessed Paul spoke these things with reference to our time, and here they are. Likewise, as our Lord said:<sup>d</sup> 'One people is against another, one kingdom against another.' Here are famines, earthquakes and plagues; only one thing is missing for us – the advent of the Deceiver.<sup>e</sup> I imagine that these are his birthpangs, as our Lord said: [166\*] 'These are the beginnings of the birthpangs',<sup>a</sup> and likewise the blessed Paul, 'If he who now holds (power) is removed from the midst, then the wicked one shall be revealed, whom our Lord will finish off with the breath of His mouth, bringing him to nought by means of the revelation of His advent'.<sup>b</sup> What is 'he who holds (power)' if not the care of our Lord? See, He has removed it from mankind today, and there is no restoration at all; rather, the proper ordering of kings, priests and ordinary people has been brought into confusion; and the same applies to the seasons. Because wickedness has so much increased, love has also grown cold, as it was said:<sup>c</sup> for whom can you see today who loves his brother

<sup>b</sup> Jer. 4:18.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Tim. 3:2-5 (abbreviated).

<sup>d</sup> Matt. 24:7.

<sup>e</sup> 2 John 1:7.

[166\*] <sup>a</sup> Matt. 24:8.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Thess. 2:7-8. The passage is also used by Ps. Methodius, but with a very different interpretation, where 'the restrainer' is the Byzantine empire, and 'until he is out of the way' is referred to the mystery of lawlessness: see P.J. Alexander in *Medievalia et Humanistica* 2 (1971), p. 54.

<sup>c</sup> Matt. 24:12.

with a love appropriate to our Lord? Instead, all ranks of society are filled with envy, hate, accusations and complaint: people calumniate one another, and there is no one who offers support<sup>d</sup> or comfort – or if you do find someone, he is only doing it in semblance, and not in truth.

Our Lord foresaw all this and said, ‘The Son of Man shall come, and shall He find faith on earth?’<sup>e</sup> For in whom can you see today (even) the semblance of the faithful? Look carefully, starting with those who are numbered among the first rank of the faithful, and continue until you reach me, who am at the last; begin with the priests, and finish with the ordinary people; look at the monks and consider those mingled (in society): can you find anyone who keeps to his (due) position? Can you see anyone who walks in his (proper) path? For we all walk completely in darkness. What other demonstration stronger than this do we need to indicate [167\*] that the outcome of our Lord’s words is at hand?

The arrival of these *šurtē*, and their victory, is from God; and I imagine that they will be the cause of the destruction of the Ishmaelites. And the prophecy of Moses is fulfilled, when he said ‘His hand is upon all, and the hand of all is upon Him’;<sup>a</sup> for upon all peoples has the hand of the Arabs gained control, while these *šurtē* include among themselves all the peoples under heaven. Therefore, as it seems to me, their kingdom is going to receive its end in these people. That these people, too, will not last is clear: they will be mingled in with the other kingdoms from which they were taken captive; they will become their awakers, and it seems that those who survive the sword, famine and plague of today are being kept back for even more bitter afflictions than these. For a people from afar<sup>b</sup> has been summoned against them, the one whose activities the prophets also indicated: for ‘these will undo others’;<sup>c</sup> for they are striving to undo the Byzantine kingdom, and they are most eager to dominate everyone. It is a greedy people which is summoned to perform that which is not fitting and that which it does not realise.

<sup>d</sup> Cp. Is. 63:5.

<sup>e</sup> Luke 18:8.

[167\*] <sup>a</sup> Gen. 16:12 (cp. above, p. 142\*).

<sup>b</sup> Cp. Deut. 28:49.

<sup>c</sup> This looks like a quotation, but I have failed to locate it.

When he is released from his tether, then do you arm yourself against the things within: the senses will be a manifest sign. When people have seen, they will understand. The land shall then be like wheat in a sieve; the earth will quake and the sky grow dark; the whole earth will be filled with the blood of mankind.<sup>d</sup> For they are not striving against a kingdom, [168\*] nor are they desirous of gold: they think nothing of possessions. For they are setting at rest the will of God. And after them is another calamity, an evil hidden in good, like poison in honey.<sup>a</sup> Thus far is enough: here is the kingdom of the Lord. We began with Him, and we have committed (everything) into His hand; for everything (stems) from Him, everything is in Him, and everything (takes place) through Him – to whom be praise and blessing for eternal ages, amen.

[The final exordium (pp. 168\* - 171\*), addressed to Sabrishō<sup>c</sup>, adds nothing of substance].

<sup>d</sup> Cp. Ezek. 9:9.

[168\*] <sup>a</sup> No doubt a traditional image; it occurs in the letter of Babai (the Catholicos?) to Cyriacus, on the solitary life (§26 of my forthcoming edition): 'It is as if someone was given a honeycomb mixed with poison, and all unawares he ate it and ended up dead.'

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