21. SYRIAC CHRONICLES AS SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE HISTORY OF ISLAMIC PEOPLES

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Sixty years ago William Wright wrote of Syriac literature in the following terms:

> 'We must own . . . that the literature of Syria is, on the whole, not an attractive one . . . The characteristic of the Syrians is a certain mediocrity. They shone neither in war, nor in the arts, nor in science. They altogether lacked the poetic fire of the older . . . Hebrews and of the Arabs. . . . Yet to the Syrians belongs the merit of having passed the lore of ancient Greece to the Arabs, and therefore, as a matter of history, their literature must always possess a certain amount of interest in the eyes of the modern student. . . . And even Syria's humble chroniclers . . . deserve their meed of praise, seeing that, without their guidance, we should have known far less than we now know about the history of two important branches of the Eastern Church, besides losing much interesting information as to the political events of the periods with which their annals are occupied.

So far William Wright. No one will deny the substance of his remarks. These Syriac writers were indeed lacking in imagination; and they were, for the most part, lacking in the humour that is a sensible by-product of imagination.

And yet Wright has done less than justice to the work of the Syriac chroniclers. To the student of history this very mediocrity of the Syrians and their homely respectability—for all the writers whom I shall mention are men who played a solid part in the affairs of their own times—is of advantage, rather than a defect. It is our best guarantee of the trustworthiness of their narrative. Our Syriac chroniclers were simple men, but they were men of good sense and integrity. They were all, it is true, devout, even doctrinaire, sons of the Church, and they make all the affairs of human kind conform to a certain larger pattern drawn by the guiding hand of Providence. But they tell their story without guile or affectation, without conceit and without cynicism. Carlyle wrote that 'the merit of originality is not novelty; it is sincerity'; these Syriac chroniclers were sincere men.

Let me define briefly the scope of the Syriac chronicles. By Syriac I mean

that branch of the Aramaic language that was written and spoken by the peoples of Syria, Mesopotamia, and the adjacent regions during the first thirteen centuries of the Christian era. Syriac, it should be noted, was not confined to Syria itself. On the contrary, at the time of its widest diffusion it was in common use from the Mediterranean seaboard in the west to the province of Adiabene in the east, from Lake Van and the Armenian highlands in the north to the borders of Galilee in the south. From the third century until the emergence of Islam, this area was predominantly Christian; and when, with the spread of Islam, the Christians became a minority, they remained nevertheless a close-knit and numerous community. The Syriac chronicles were (as I have already observed) Christian both in content and expression. They are profoundly coloured by the Bible and the Church Fathers. Most of them were composed in Mesopotamia, and several at or near Edessa, which had special sanctity as the first city of this region —indeed, the first kingdom in the world—to adopt Christianity as its official religion. At Edessa was spoken and written that form of the language which was a model throughout the Syriac world.

There is one striking feature common to the native Christians of Mesopotamia during the thousand years—from the third to the thirteenth centuries—over which these chronicles extend. They never took a direct part in governing their own affairs, nor did they ever seek to do so. Theirs was a helpless fatalism that was the product of their circumstances. During the first four centuries of this period they were divided between the great Aryan empires of Byzantium in the west and Persia in the east. The frontiers of the two powers marched between the Euphrates and the Tigris; and the countryside was ravaged by constant warfare in which the Christian peasantry had little interest. The political division of Mesopotamia induced also religious division, for a schism in the Syrian church in the fifth century gave the Persian Christians ecclesiastical independence of their brothers in the west. Only with the emergence of Islam was the barrier—this Iron Curtain of antiquity—removed, and Mesopotamia resumed its natural homogeneity of race and tradition. But the Christians had now become a dwindling minority, without effective power in the government of their country.

I make no apology for this brief digression. The value of these Syriac chronicles lies precisely in the picture that they present of the society in which they were composed, the background upon which were superimposed the lines of policies and action of the rulers of armies and of states.

II

The origins of Syriac historical writing may be sought in the numerous works of the early Church, narratives designed to arouse and intensify

Christian loyalties. Among them we have the legendary account of the arrival of the first Christian missions at Edessa and the exploits of the righteous Emperor Constantine and his successors. Others again are martyrologies, and their number is legion.[1] But of these the great majority may be dismissed as fanciful; the extraction of fact from their fiction is not a profitable task for the serious historian.

There is, however, another genre of literary composition—older than Christianity in Mesopotamia—which I prefer to regard as the lineal ancestor of the Syriac chronicles. I refer to the city archives; and the compilation of archives in some of the cities of Mesopotamia may well go back to at least the early Seleucid period. Only the records of Edessa have survived in Syriac, unhappily in a fragmentary condition.[2] The earliest entry belongs to the year A.D. 180. But the most extensive entry—and this we may term the earliest Syriac chronicle—is a description of the floods of Edessa in A.D. 201, whose vivid details clearly postulate its composition by an eyewitness. I cannot quote more than the opening lines:

> 'The springs of water that come forth from the great palace of king Abhgar became abundant and rose; and, as on a previous occasion, it grew full and overflowed on all sides . . .
> . . . And the courtyards and porticos and houses of the king began to be filled with water. And when our lord Abhgar the king saw this, he went up to a safe place on a hill overlooking this palace where the craftsmen of the royal works lived and dwelt.'

This is fine straightforward narrative, and it is the prototype of all that follows. Our next chronicle—the so-called Chronicle of 'Joshua the Stylite'—was composed after an interval of almost three centuries.[3] We know nothing of the writer. His chronicle opens in about A.D. 395–6 and ends in 506; and from its freshness and clarity we may assume that it was compiled at Edessa at that time. It is written with simplicity, honesty, and vitality, and the sequence of its dates is remarkably accurate.

We are given an account of the wars between the empires of Byzantium and Persia, and that slow attrition of their power that was to render them an easy prey to the Arabs a century and a half later. There are graphic descriptions of the methods of siege warfare, of ambushes and weapons. We hear the rumblings of the great hordes on the outskirts of western Asia. The Huns swept over Mesopotamia and even Syria, leaving behind a trail of devastation. Frequently foreign mercenaries took service in the armies of one or the other of the empires, attracted by the prospect of loot rather than by the meagre pay. So in 502, a force of Persians, Arabs, and Huns under al-Nu'mān ibn al-Aswad raided the fields of Harran and Edessa. Here is 'Joshua's' famous account of the Gothic detachments of the Byzantine army who were quartered on the citizens of Edessa:

> Those too who came to our aid under the name of deliverers, both when coming down and when going up, plundered us almost as much as enemies. Many poor people they turned out of their beds and slept in them, whilst their owners lay on the ground in cold weather. Others they drove out of their own houses and went in and dwelt in them. The cattle of some they carried off by force as if it were spoil of war; the clothes of others they stripped off their persons and took away. Some they beat violently for a mere trifle; with others they quarrelled in the streets and reviled for a small cause . . . Many they fell upon in the highways . . . From old women, widows and the poor, they took oil, wood, salt and other things for their own expenses; and they kept them from their own work to wait upon them. In short, they harassed everyone, both great and small, and there was not a person who did not suffer some harm from them.

But it was the nomads who were an ever-present terror to the inhabitants of the cities and villages of northern Mesopotamia. These are not, it should be observed, the people called *'Arab* or *'Arbaye* in the Syriac of that period. The latter dwelt in the steppe country—principally between Āmid and Thannurios—that lay beyond the villages. They were semi-sedentary, and the authorities sought to hasten the process of their evolution to settled farmers. It was the Scenite, or tent-dwelling, Arabs—the *Ṭayyaye*, as they were commonly called—who defied all the conventions of established society. The roads and peaceful villages were at their mercy. The story of the prince of al-Ḥīra who sacrificed four hundred captive virgins to the moon-goddess al-'Uzzā passed from mouth to mouth. True, Christianity had begun to temper the lawlessness of the Beduin, but usually their hands were against all men. 'Joshua' writes that they

> crossed the Tigris, and plundered and took captive and destroyed all that they found in Persian territory. Thy Holiness,

he continues, addressing his correspondent,

> must be well aware of this, that to the Ṭayyaye on both sides the war was a source of much profit, and they wrought their will upon both kingdoms.

We observe the homeliness and directness of style of the writer. Like all our Syriac chroniclers—even those who, by virtue of their office, were the greatest prelates of the Syrian church—'Joshua' shows sympathy and understanding of the common people, whose desire was to live in quiet and comfort. He tells us the prices of wheat and barley and vegetables and wine; he writes of good and bad harvests, of taxation and of popular rejoicings—even of the spring festival of Edessa which had obvious pagan significance and of which he himself heartily disapproved.

Of more severe character is the history of John of Ephesus, who lived from 516 to about 587.[4] A native of Āmid, John resided most of his life at Constantinople and was intimately associated there with the Emperors and the leading personalities of the capital. He travelled widely, carried out a great proselytizing campaign in Asia Minor, and was one of the promoters of the Byzantine expedition to Nubia. He himself declares, somewhat ponderously, that he

> was no stranger to the conflict (of events) . . . but one of those marshalled in the battle who . . . endured those sufferings and patiently bore the pain of persecution and imprisonment . . .

For John was a leading member of the Monophysite church which was regarded by most Byzantines as dangerously schismatic. He was in an exceptional position to describe the 'narrowness and bigotry . . . the want of self-restraint, injustice and cruelty' which were a commonplace of that period.

The accident of John's Monophysitism brought him into close relation with Christian Arabs who were members of the same sect. We read, for example, that when a large body of Christians were imprisoned by the Persians at Antioch, two Christian Arabs succeeded in escaping from the city and made their way to Constantinople; there John brought them to the notice of the court. And when Tiberius, fearful of the religious schisms that tore his empire, invited al-Mundhir ibn al-Ḥārith to his capital and sought to effect a reconciliation with that Christian Arab king, John was himself a delegate at the conference. We find in the pages of John's chronicle a vivid picture of al-Mundhir and of his renown throughout the empire both as warrior and statesman.

Another acquaintance of John's shed a strange light on the Arab history of this time. One of the few representatives of the Monophysite church in Persian territory was Simeon of Beth Arsham, a rude and bitter disputant. He made frequent journeys to Persia, eluding his Nestorian enemies with the ingenuity of a Scarlet Pimpernel. It was while on a visit to al-Ḥīra in 524 that Simeon met the envoys of the Jewish king, Dhū Nuwās. He records in the pages of John's chronicle the despatch of Dhū Nuwās to the prince of al-Ḥīra, his account of the attack on Najrān and of the massacre of its Christians—an event which had far-reaching repercussions throughout the Arab world.

We should pay tribute to John's honesty as historian. To the king of Persia, the hated enemy of Christian Byzantium, he gives generous praise:

> As the facts themselves prove, he was a prudent and wise man, and all his lifetime he assiduously devoted himself to the perusal of philosophical works . . . It appears also that the war between Persia and the

(Byzantines) was a cause of great grief to him, and that he would readily have submitted to much for the purpose of re-establishing peace.

And how many chroniclers of this period would prefix their account of distant happenings with this warning—as did John in his outline of events Persia?

(These are) events which we neither saw nor learned of our own knowledge, nor can we testify to their truth ourselves, inasmuch as we were far away from the countries in which they occurred.

John wrote, in addition to his chronicle, the biographies of the Christian recluses and ascetics who were his contemporaries in the region of his early upbringing, Āmid.[5] Here is material for the student of pre-Islamic Mesopotamia. It is an account of pious, ignorant folk, glorying in their poverty and self-abnegation. To the cynic their torments may border on the masochistic, but it was these men and women who inspired the Beduins of their time to feats of devotion in prayer, fasting, and continence. The brutal directness of Monophysite doctrine appealed to the nomad Arab more than the compromise of the Nestorians; and this was the portent of a more passionate proselytizing movement that was to burst out from the desert scarcely two generations later.

The chronicles of which I have written are the work of Syrians of western, that is, Byzantine, Mesopotamia. The Syrians of Persian Mesopotamia produced, during this period, only biographies of saints and church leaders that are stilted and tendentious. But we may note three, composed in the sixth century, that are not without value—the Chronicle of Meshiḥazekha (with precious information on the rise of the Sasanid dynasty), the History of Karka de Bheth Slokh (with topographical data on pre-Islamic Persia), and the recently published History of Barḥadbeshabba.[6]

III

At the death of John of Ephesus, the prophet Muḥammad was probably seventeen or eighteen years old; and the world was soon to change more swiftly than any man could have foreseen at the time. We have, unfortunately, no detailed contemporary account of the Arab invasion in Syriac; indeed, one biography of this time passed over the campaigns of Heraclius and of the Arabs in no more than a few words.[7] When the curtain rises again, Moslem domination is securely established.

In the Islamic period these Syriac chroniclers are no longer to be relied upon for a record of the major events of their times. They had, it is true, always been remote from the direction of affairs. But now, with the exception of a few individuals, they lived the separate life of a minority community, isolated from the courts of kings and princes by political

inferiority, passive and uninterested—even disillusioned—spectators of the passage of events. For a Christian it was safer to have little communication with the temporal power. In 765, for example, the Patriarch George, traduced by his enemies, was seized and whipped before the Caliph al-Manṣūr. When the Caliph harshly demanded why he had not applied for the royal diploma confirming his office in the Church, he replied mildly, 'I did not wish to disturb anyone.' Yet the Christians, however aloof they remained from the wars and intrigues of Moslem rulers, were nevertheless affected by those problems that affect the common folk in every land and in every age. From our Syriac chronicles we derive useful information on the social and economic condition of the ordinary people. And we obtain an illuminating picture of the problems that confronted a religious minority under Moslem rule. We must, of course, apply to these later chronicles a different slide-rule of historical reliability. In the pre-Islamic era the views of Syriac chroniclers are of interest even when they describe occurrences before their time, for they might well be repeating trustworthy traditions handed down by their predecessors. The later chroniclers can do no more than confirm facts established by Arab historians; where their views differ from those of Arab historians, they may be preferred only where they describe events which they themselves witnessed or which took place near to their own lifetime.

To one point I particularly draw attention. In these chronicles are passages that are critical—even severely critical—of the existing régime. Did the Moslem authorities give remarkable latitude to these non-Moslem writers; or did the latter feel free to write as they pleased in the strange tongue of Syriac? Whichever hypothesis we accept, the value of these records is considerably enhanced.

I have already shown that Syriac history—as we understand the term history—is a product of western, not of eastern, Mesopotamia. That this is the outcome of long tradition, and not an accident of literary survival, is demonstrated by the record of the Islamic era. Mesopotamia was no longer divided into two areas of different cultures, one under the aegis of Greek-speaking Byzantium, the other under that of Persia. Yet even when both regions were under the common rule of Islam, the writings of east Mesopotamian authors—Denḥa, Isho'denaḥ, Thomas of Marga, and the anonymous biographers of martyrs and saints—are no more than an uncritical medley of fact and pious fiction. Only two exceptions must be noted. The first is the anonymous chronicle which gives an account of events in Persia from the dethronement of Hormizd IV in 590 up to 670; its value is great because it must have been composed not much later than 680, probably by a Nestorian monk. The second is the Chronography of Elias, Metropolitan of Nisibis in the eleventh century; this, however, is little more than a bare list of events and dates.[8]

Those west Mesopotamian chronicles that are extant, on the other hand, although few in number, maintain the breadth and integrity of earlier Syriac histories. First in chronological order is the chronicle incorrectly ascribed to the Patriarch Dionysius of Tell Mahre.[9] It ends in the year 774. It is a somewhat tedious narrative, full of lengthy quotations from Scripture, of apostrophes to Heaven against the wrongdoing of man, and of vapid moralizing. Yet it gives us a picture of eighth-century Mesopotamia:

> All the land . . . was remarkable for its vines, its fields, its numerous cattle. There was not a single poor man in a village who did not have a field, donkeys and goats. There was no place more or less cultivable which was not sown or planted with vine-trees; even in the mountains wherever the plough could pass was planted with vines . . . The land was filled with shepherds out of the abundance of pasturage.

But, our author exclaims, the land is filled also with injustice. He writes bitterly of factious strife within the Church, of civil unrest, of revolt against authority and the carnage which followed. He inveighs against the exactions of governors and their minions, against expropriations, the branding of men's bodies to ensure full payment of the capitation tax, the constant interference with the liberty of the individual—even the fisherman, he declares, is not allowed to fish in the river without a licence. Tax officials overestimate the tithes:

> The fields had been inscribed as well filled, even though not more than five measures had been harvested. The Arabs endured more cruel trials than the Syrians.

Then the tax-collectors

> fall upon them with blows and torments of all kinds. In theory they had to take the tenth part; in fact, the Arabs could not collect what was demanded of them even when they had sold all that they possessed. They tried to persuade them to take according to the laws established by Muḥammad . . . and by the first kings, to take from each one according to what he had, grain from him who had grain, cattle from him who had cattle. But they did not agree and cried to them, 'Get away. Sell your goods and give us gold.'

Of great interest is the autobiography of this patriarch Dionysius (to whom the chronicle which we have just described is wrongly attributed).[10] Dionysius had quietly practised the study of history in a monastery before he was—against his will—consecrated as Monophysite patriarch in 816. Throughout his career he struggled tirelessly on behalf of his community, against schism from within and oppression from without. He travelled to

Mosul, to Baghdad, even to Egypt, to seek the intervention of the authorities. His autobiography—he was a shrewd observer of men—depicts the helplessness of minorities and their dependence upon the goodwill of individuals rather than upon the written articles of law. Here are the disdainful words to Dionysius of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn:

> You trouble and disturb us much, you Christians, and particularly you others, the Jacobites—even though we ignore the complaints you present before us, one against the other. Go away for now, and come back some other day.

And in his account of his visits to Egypt we have this graphic picture of a Christian community there.

> Our city is surrounded by water, and we have neither crops nor any other resources; we cannot keep flocks; the water that we drink comes from afar and we buy it at four *zuze* a pitcher; our work consists in the wool which our womenfolk spin and which we weave; the price which we receive from the cloth-merchants is one-half *zuz* a day. And since our work does not provide sufficient bread for our mouths—when we are taxed we are obliged to pay five dinars (that is, thirty *zuze*) each—we are beaten and thrown into prison; we are forced to give our sons and daughters as security, to work as slaves, two years for a single dinar . . .

Dionysius reported their plight to the ruler of Egypt, and he

> gave order that they should pay tribute according to the law of al-Jazīra—48 *zuze* from the wealthy, 24 from the middle class, and 12 from the poor—when the capitation tax was collected.

Another chronicle treats of the history of Edessa and its environs during the first half of the twelfth century.[11] It is a fine account, recalling in its virility of style the chronicle of 'Joshua the Stylite' some seven centuries earlier. The wealth of intimate detail and the familiarity of the author with the topography of Edessa show that he must have been contemporary to those events and probably an eyewitness of some; perhaps he was Basilius, the Syrian metropolitan of the city at the time. We read of the exchange of knightly courtesies between the Moslem governor of Mosul and his captive, the Crusader Joscelyn. But such generosity alternated with acts of shocking cruelty. There are vivid scenes of the terror and destruction at Edessa and nearby towns during their tenure by the Crusaders, of the capture of Edessa by Zengi in 1144—which aroused the zeal of Bernard of Clairvaux and a new host of Crusaders—and its recapture by Nūr al-Dīn two years later. A more pleasing incident was the visit of Zengi to the city in 1145:

> The metropolitans, priests, deacons, and all the Christians went out to meet him on one hand, and the Moslems who had gathered from all quarters on the other. He greeted the Christians with joy, kissed the Gospel, saluted the metropolitan, and asked after his health. He said that he had come for their sake to supply what they lacked . . . He visited our Syrian churches, examined their beauty, ordered two great bells to be given them and hung on them, as was the custom in the time of the Franks . . . He told the metropolitan to be zealous in guarding the town, and not to betray his government.

This account is incorporated in a chronicle whose author was present at the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187; his history was continued to the year 1234.[12] Better known, and of more importance, is the contemporary historical work of the Patriarch Michael, usually called Michael the Syrian.[13] He became head of the Monophysite church in 1166 and held that position for thirty years. He was a militant priest with a passion for polemics, and a disciplinarian who was unpopular even among his own adherents. His chronicle is frequently a platform for doctrinal argument—but, for all this, it is invaluable. It is set out in three columns; one deals with secular events, a second with religious affairs, while the third contains miscellaneous anecdotes and matters of local or personal interest. To us the third column, with its record of harvests and droughts, building and conflagrations, is often the most illuminating. The rulers and petty chieftains of Mesopotamia cared little for the welfare of the ordinary people, those simple townsfolk and peasants who formed the bulk of Michael's flock. And for those among them who were Christian the story was the same as in previous centuries, their fortunes precariously subject to the whims of foreign mercenaries and their Moslem overlords. In the fighting between Kurds and Turkomans each party vented its spite upon the local Christians. Nūr al-Dīn had a reputation for piety and charity among Muslims; the Christians saw him otherwise. When he came to Mosul, Michael tells us, he

> multiplied tribute from the Christians, increased the capitation tax, and established the law that they must be girded with a girdle, and must not permit the hair of their heads to grow—so that they might be recognized and derided by the Arabs. He also decreed that the Jews must carry a piece of red material on their shoulders that they might be recognized.

When a new Caliph ascended the throne in 1170, the vizier Ibn al-Baladī was put to death. Since, declares Michael,

> the vizier who had been slain was the enemy of Christians, the new Caliph took it upon himself to love the Christians from hatred of the vizier.

But Nūr al-Dīn remained the arch-enemy of the Christians. They placed great hope in Amalric I, and it was with dismay that they learned of his death in 1174. In such circumstances not even Michael could condemn as immoral the bribes offered to Muslim governors for the release of Christians who had fallen into their power.

Michael was an outspoken advocate of his flock and of his rights as its leader. To Sayf al-Dīn al-Ghāzī who proposed to nominate a rival priest as patriarch, he declared boldly:

> If you wish to change what has been done by the kings your predecessors, know that you are in opposition not only with me, but with the prophets Moses, Christ and Muḥammad; for you destroy . . . the will of God . . . But for me the loss of my head is a little thing . . . Here I freely give my head; bid them cut it, for I shall not transgress the precept of the law.

In 1181 Michael was summoned by Qilij Arslan to Melitene. He went in trepidation. But the sultan received him with honour and courtesy; the Patriarch conversed with him and was heard (he assures us)

> with pleasure . . . in such wise that tears flowed from (the sultan's) eyes.

Michael had occasion to visit his congregation throughout Mesopotamia and Syria, and he received representations also from Monophysites in Egypt. Three times he visited Jerusalem, then in the hands of the Franks, and he obtained diplomas from both Amalric I and Baldwin IV. His comments on the three principal power groups in western Asia at this period —the Turks, the Franks, and the Greeks (of Byzantium)—are concerned in the first place with religious freedom, but they are of wider interest.

> In the years of which we shall now write, calm and tranquillity reigned in our Orthodox Church for this reason . . . The cruel Greeks were confined beyond the seas . . . The Franks who at this time occupied the places of Palestine and also of Syria, and who had pontiffs in their churches, did not raise difficulties in the matter of faith . . . but considered as Christian anyone who adored the Cross without enquiry or examination. For their part, the Turks who occupied most of the country in which the Christians dwelt, who had no notion of the sacred mysteries and therefore considered Christianity an error, were not in the habit of informing themselves on professions of faith or of persecuting anyone for his profession of faith, as did the Greeks, a wicked and heretical people.

With Bar Hebraeus we come to the last of our Syriac chroniclers. He completed the history of the region from the death of Michael the Syrian down to the year of his own death in 1286. His Syriac chronicle—I do not discuss his Arabic chronicle here—is in two parts, one dealing with secular,

the other (in two sections) with ecclesiastical, events.[14] The arrival of the Mongols had changed the political scene. Bar Hebraeus reports the new conditions competently, and more particularly events at Melitene, his birthplace. He was himself present as metropolitan when Aleppo was captured by the Mongols in 1259–60. He was acquainted with princes and princesses of the Mongol court. The fortunes of the Christians followed an unpredictable course. On the one hand, Arabs combined with Christians to defend Melitene against Tatar attack in 1243 and again in 1256. So, too, in the Mongol assault on Baghdād in 1258, the wealthy Arabs of the city entrusted their property to the safe-keeping of the Catholicus. On the other hand, Christian monasteries were sacked by the soldiery and the Kurdish tribesmen, and Christian townspeople were attacked by Moslem mobs at Baghdād, Mosul, and Arbil.

The Christian community was certainly in a strange situation at this period. Mongol princes were not ill-disposed towards them; some even professed the Christian faith, and Christians held high rank at court. Bar Hebraeus declares that

> the Church acquired stability and protection in every place,

and he calls Kublai Khān

> the just and wise king, and friend of the Christians; he honoured the men of books, and the learned men, and the physicians of all nations.

Indeed, the commander of the Egyptian forces slaughtered all the Christians of a certain town

> because it had been said to him, The Tatars are made strong by these Christians whenever they pass over into Syria.

Yet this association gave no security to the Christians from the Tatars themselves. Bar Hebraeus writes of the Tatars in the same campaign that they

> in their greed also killed many of the Christians, and they made captives of them and looted, even though the king of kings had commanded that they were not to harm the Christians.

Bar Hebraeus's chronicle, for all its competence, is unsatisfying. He gives us none of the personal touches which his career and personal contacts lead us to expect. His loyalties are sectarian and narrow, and he seems lacking in the standards of honour and integrity by which earlier chroniclers were distinguished. For the cruelty and treachery of the Christian Mongol general Sandagha (that 'splendid young man') there is no reproach. Yet we should perhaps not judge Bar Hebraeus harshly. To him the writing of this chronicle was little more than an exercise in Syriac composition, part of his general endeavour to revive interest in the ancient language. The experiment was foredoomed to failure, for the renaissance

of Syriac was beyond the power even of Bar Hebraeus's erudition and industry. It is symbolic that the inscription over the grave of Bar Hebraeus is written in Karshuni—the script is Syriac but the language is Arabic.

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