

- RGLT — A. du Ryer, *Rudimenta grammatices linguae Turcicae*, Parisiis MDCXXX.
- RO — „Rocznik Orientalistyczny“. Kraków.
- STT — A. Caferoğlu, *Sivas ve Tokat illeri ağızlarından toplamalar*, Istanbul 1944.
- TDB — Türk dili araştırmaları yıllıkı Belleten. Ankara.
- TDT — Türk dili ve edebiyatı tarihi hakkında araştırmalar, Ankara.
- Teza — Teza, *Un dialogo turco fatto in Italia nel cinquecento*, „Rendiconti della R. Accad. dei Lincei, Cl. di sc. morali“, ser. V, vol. I (1892), 391—403.
- Tietze — A. Tietze, *Griechische Lehnwörter im anatolischen Türkisch*, „Oriens“, Bd. 8 (1955), 204—257 (Nr. 1—303); — *Einige weitere griechische Lehnwörter im anatolischen Türkisch*, „Németh armaganı“, Ankara 1962, SS. 373—388 (Nr. 304—347).
- TSU — J. Németh, *Die türkische Sprache in Ungarn im siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, Budapest 1970. — S. III.
- TV — J. Németh, *Die Türken von Vidin. Sprache, Folklore, Religion*, Budapest 1965.
- Vig. — M. Viguier, *Éléments de la langue turque ou tables analytiques de la langue turque usuelle, avec leur développement*, Constantinople 1790 (SS. 351—456: *Essai de vocabulaire françois-turc*).
- WZKM — „Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes“. Wien.
- ZVO — „Zapiski Vostočnogo Otdelenija Imperatorskogo Russkago Archeologičeskago Obščestva“. S.-Peterburg.

JAN W. WERYHO

SYRIAC INFLUENCE ON ISLAMIC IRAN

(The evidence of loanwords)

فلك کرو تراست از خط ترسا مرا در بند دارد راهب آسا
.....
کنم تفسیر سریانی زانجیل بخوانم از خط عبری معما

Fate is more crooked than the Christian writing.
It holds me in bondage like a monk.

.....
Shall I prepare a Syriac commentary on the Gospel?
Shall I read the mystery of the Hebrew script?

Khāqānī.

The great Persian scholar Edward G. Browne had always insisted on the importance of Semitic as opposed to Aryan studies for the study of the Persian language and culture:

„It is a remarkable thing how great at all periods of history has been Semitic influence on Persia; Arabian in the late Sāsānian and Muhammadan time; Aramaic in earlier Sāsānian and later Parthian days; Assyrian at a yet more ancient epoch. And indeed this fact can scarcely be insisted upon too strongly. ... If, as an adjunct to my equipment for the study of Persian thought and literature, I were offered my choice between a thorough knowledge of the Semitic and the Aryan languages, I should, from this point of view alone, unhesitatingly choose the former. A good knowledge of the Aramaic languages is essential for the study of Pahlawi, and a fruitful investigation of the post-Muhammadan literature and thought of Persia is impossible without a wide acquaintance with Arabic books”¹.

¹ Edward G. Browne, *A literary history of Persia*. Cambridge, University Press, 1951, (First published 1902) Vol. 1: pp. 36—37.

The object of this study is to examine what Aramaic influence remained in or entered into the post-Muhammadan or classical Persian language written in the Arabic alphabet which remains, with very slight changes, the main written and spoken language of Iran today.

The 2nd century A. D. saw the emergence of a specifically Christian form of Aramaic known as Syriac. Originally the dialect of Ōrhay (Greek Edessa, Arabic Ruhā', Turkish Urfa) it gradually became, with the spread of Christianity, the chief language of Syria and 'Irāq, the latter a part of the Sāsānī empire. With the Arabic conquest it quickly declined, ceding place to the closely related Arabic, but small Syriac-speaking groups have maintained themselves in Syria, 'Irāq and Iran. In Iran the largest concentration of Syriac-speakers is to be found along the Western shore of Lake Ūrmiyā², but there are larger or smaller groups in Tehrān, Sanandaj, Kermānshāh and other towns of Iran. The correct Persian (and Arabic) term to describe the Syriac language is *Soryānī*. It is however seldom used outside scholarly literature. The commonly used Persian word to describe the language and the ethnic group which speaks it *Āsūrī* (Assyrian) in view of their claim to descend from the ancient Assyrians. (In their own language they call themselves *Ātūrāyē*)³. About half of the Assyrians in Iran belong to the Ancient Church of the East (the official

² The name Ūrmiyā, in Persian ارومیه Orūmīyeh, is of Semitic origin, consisting of Ūr, a common Semitic form in place-names (e.g. Ur of the Chaldees) and *miyā* „water“ in Syriac (Arab. ماء *mā*). In 1314 A. H. S. (1935 A. D.) Reżā Shāh who objected to foreign toponymy in Iran changed the name of the city from Orūmīyeh to Reżā'iyeh. This Arabic name, being derived from that of Iran's ruler, was not regarded as foreign.

³ For a support of the claim see Dr. W. A. Wigram, *The Assyrians and their neighbours*. London, Bell, 1929. Esp. p. 178 and ff. The great Semitic scholar William Wright says in his *Lectures on the comparative grammar of the Semitic languages* (Amsterdam, Philo Press, 1966 (first published Cambridge, 1890)) that the term „Syrian“ is merely an abbreviation of „Assyrian“ (p. 15). In this case the modern Persians are quite correct when they refer to the Syriac language as *Āsūrī*. The Soviet orientalists have accepted the term *assiriiskii* to describe modern Syriac, e.g. K. G. Tsereteli, *Sovremennyi assiriiskii iazyk*. Moskva, Nauka, 1964. (*Iazyki narodov Azii i Afriki*).

name of the Nestorian Church), the other half to the Chaldean Catholic Church, that branch of the Ancient Church of the East which in the 16th century had broken with Nestorianism and accepted the supremacy of the Pope. In 'Irāq the Catholics, who form the largest Christian denomination in that country, are known as Chaldeans and the Syriac language which they speak as Chaldean (*Kaldānī*). Some orientalists have used the term *Chaldean* (or *Chaldee* in old English) as a general term for all Aramaic dialects. In present-day Iran however the term *Āsūrī Kātōlik* is used in preference to *Kaldānī*. From the philologist's point of view this is very convenient since the Assyrians of Iran and 'Irāqī Kurdistan, whether Catholics or Nestorians, speak one dialect, while the Chaldeans of Mōsul and Baghdād another. I should therefore make it clear that when I use the terms *Assyrian* and *Chaldean* in this article I do not mean the ancient languages of Mesopotamia, but the Northern and Southern dialects of modern Eastern Syriac. The Chaldean dialect seems to be an intermediate one between the Eastern („Nestorian“) and Western („Jacobite“) form of Syriac, showing the characteristic West Syriac change of the final *-ā* into *-ō*⁴. The West Syriac dialect, formerly spoken in Syria and Western regions of 'Irāq and now almost extinct, geographically and culturally remote from Iran, does not need to be considered in relation to this study.

The classical Syriac literature which flourished from the 2nd till the 14th century A. D. had exerted a profound influence on Arabic literature and thought, especially as a vehicle through which Greek philosophy was transmitted to the Arabs. A revival of Syriac literature, using the modern dialect of Ūrmiyā, took place in the 19th century. This modern Syriac literature is confined almost exclusively to the Assyrians, the Chaldeans being, except for the clergy, unacquainted with the Syriac alphabet, and using Arabic as their means of literary expression. Classical East Syriac continues of course to be the liturgical language of both the Assyrian (Nestorian) and the Chaldean (Catholic Uniate) Churches.

In studying the Syriac lexical influence on Persian we must

⁴ My chief informant reg. modern Chaldean pronunciation has been my wife, Margānithō (Margaret) née Tōmā of Baghdād, a native speaker of the Chaldean dialect of Syriac.

begin with the numerous Aramaic ideograms in Pahlavī. At first glance written Pahlavi gives the impression of being, like modern Persian, an Aryan language full of Semitic loanwords, Aramaic instead of Arabic. Those supposed loanwords however were not part of the language at all! Thus the word for „king“, written *malikā* was spoken *shāh*. A parallel phenomenon can be seen in the Chinese ideograms used in Japanese. These Pahlavī ideograms are outside the scope of this study except in the rare case of a genuine loanword which survived in Islāmic or classical Persian. After the Arab conquest of Iran many Syriac words found their way into Persian through (e.g. the names of the months of the Christian calendar: *Kānūn-e Sānī*, *Shobāt*, *Azār*, etc.). These have been purposely excluded from this study. The problem of Syriac loanwords in Arabic is a subject in itself, requiring a deep knowledge of Semitic philology, the student being faced with the difficult decision what is a loanword and what is a cognate word common to both Semitic languages. We are left therefore with those Syriac words which have entered Persian either directly or through Pahlavī. In my selection of words I have been guided by the following principle: Either the Syriac word has entered Persian and no similar form in Arabic can be traced (e.g. Pers. *saqī raghlā*, „polypody“, from Syr. *saqī reglā*); or the Persian word resembles the Syriac one closer than it does its Arabic cognate (e.g. Pers. *Yaldā*, „Christmas“ is obviously closer to Syr. *Yaldā* than to Arab. *Milād*); or again the history of the word could be traced to Syriac through Pahlavī (e.g. Pers. *gonbad*, „a dome“, from Pahl. *gumbat*, from Syr. *qūbbathā*). Since almost every Arabic word has the right of citizenship in literary Persian very often two forms of the same word exist side by side, e.g. *chalīpā* and *salīb* (cross), *gonbad* and *qobbeh* (dome), *gūr* and *qabr* (grave), etc. Popular etymology regards the Syriac form of these words as „pure Persian“, as opposed to Arabic, and, in a sense, it is correct since these Syriac words have entered Persian language earlier than their Arabic cognates and have become so assimilated that their foreign origin cannot be easily traced.

Persian scholars have shown little interest in the *Soryānī* or Syriac language. This is understandable. A Christian Arab will (unless his background is Byzantine or Coptic) regard Syriac

as the sacred language of his religious tradition. A Muslim Arab scholar may still be interested in Syriac from the point of view of comparative Semitic philology; or he may be interested in the part Syriac literature had played in the transmitting of Greek philosophy to the Arabs; or again he may be interested in the Syriac sources for the pre-Islāmic history of Syria and Irāq. A Persian however does not see much direct relevance of the Syriac language and literature to the study of his own culture. A certain interest in the Aramaic language has been shown by Iranian Pahlavī scholars who could not ignore the Aramaic ideograms in Pahlavī, but, following the majority of European Pahlavī scholars, they studied the pagan or Jewish forms of Aramaic rather than the Christian Syriac. Edward Browne however says:

When a Pahlavī text is read, a large proportion of the words composing it are found to be Semitic, not Irānian, and, to be more precise, to be drawn from an Aramaic dialect closely akin to *Syriac or Chaldean*⁵.

In discussing the attitude of some Iranian scholars towards the Syriac language it may be of interest to recall here a scene I had witnessed in Tehrān University where I was a student in 1955—57. I was attending a class in linguistics given by a professor who, although a distinguished scholar in Iranian philology, was a fanatical spokesman for the ultra-nationalistic or „Aryan“ school which refused to acknowledge any debt which Iranian languages may owe to the Semitic. „Only two Semitic languages are living languages“, he began, „Arabic and Abyssinian (*Habashī*)“. A student interjected: „Excuse me, Janāb Ostād, but there is also the Assyrian (*Āsūrī*) language“. The professor became visibly angry: „What are you talking about? It is not a proper language, it is just a dialect spoken by a few thousand vagabonds who are not even descended from the ancient Assyrians!“ The student bravely kept up his defense of the Assyrians and their language, pointing out that they even had their own alphabet. I was surprised. It is not customary in Iran (at least it was not customary at that time) for a student to argue with his professor. „Are you an Assyrian?“ I asked him after class. His answer surprised me even more: „No“, he replied. „I am a Kurd. But it angered me what

⁵ Browne, *op. cit.*, vol. 1: p. 73. Italics mine.

he said about the Assyrians. These Persians (*Fārs-hā*) look down on us Kurds too. They deny that we have a language of our own and claim that we speak various Fārsī dialects“.

To my knowledge the most complete list of Aramaic loanwords in modern Persian is given by Paul Horn in his *Neupersische Schriftsprache* in the *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie*⁶. The paragraph deserves to be reproduced in full in any work on the subject:

„Aus dem Aramäischen: *gazīt gazīd* (Qur'ān-Comm. S. 482 und VULLERS) „Kopfsteuer“, — *masihā* „Messias“, — *kašiš* „Priester“, — *čalibā* „Kreuz“, — *kuništ* „Synagoge“, — *mazgit* „Moschee“, — *tābūt* „Sarg“, — *juhūdih jahūdih* „Jude“, — *šanbadh šanba* „Sabbath; Woche“, — *kāsa* „Becher; Schüssel“, — *palita* „Docht“, — *dōl* „Eimer“, — *šipūr šaipūr* „Trompete“, — *dāhōl* „Vogelscheuche; Schreckmittel“, — *bōriyā* „Schilfmatten“, — *kamrā* „Gürtel“ (aramaisirtes, echt persisches *kamar*, wie *maghūšā* „Magier“ S 49, 1), — *mān māna* (unbelegt) „Ferāt“, — *āškōb* phlv. *āškōp* „Gebälk, Dachwerk“, — *gunbadh* phlv. *gmbat* (vd. 5, 134 Gl.) „Gewölbe“, — *gōr* „Grab“ (nicht sicher), — *gau gavadh* etc. „Grube“, — *tabāha tavāha* „eine Speise“, — *tafšila* „eine Art Ragout“, — *kāk* „eine Art Brot“ (der Ursprung ist nicht klar), — *dūšāb* „Sirup“, — *gāzur* „Walker“, — *hādūri* „Bettler“, — *šedhā* „wahnsinnig“ (phlv. *šedā* „Teufel, Dämon“), — *ler* „Schleim“, — *خابزدō* *خابزدōk* „Käfer“, — *tūdh* „Maulbeerbaum“, — *sattā* „Traube“, — *šafša šauša* „Besatz, Tressen“ (*šauš šafš* sind unbelegt), — *abār* „Blei“, — *šaxār ašxār* (unbelegt) *šaxīra* (*šaxera*) „schwarzer Vitriol“.

It is unfortunate that Horn does not give us the Aramaic sources for the above Persian words. Nor does he tell us which dialect of Aramaic, pagan, Jewish, Christian, Mandaean or other they come from. Since I have restricted my work to those Persian words for which I can trace a Syriac or Christian Aramaic origin I shall not try to study the etymology of all words on the above list. Some are included by mistake, e.g. reg. خبزدو *خابزدō* „beetle“. Dr. D. N. MacKenzie, reader in Iranian Languages in the London

⁶ Paul Horn, *Neupersische Schriftsprache* in *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie*; hrsg. von Wilh. Geiger und Ernst Kuhn. Strassburg, Trübner, 1898—1901. 1. Bd.: 2. Abt., p. 6.

School of Oriental and African Studies in a letter to me dated 8/9/70 points out the purely Iranian origin of this word: „*Xabazdū* puzzles me: what Syr. word do you take it from? ... It must surely contain Av. *pazdū-*, whence Pers *pazdak*, *payū*, and other dialect forms, even remote Yidgha *χowiza*!“ Syr. *kharpūstā* (Chald. pronunciation *kharpūshtō*) is probably derived from Pers. خرپشه *kharpasheh* „a gad-fly“. On the other hand Horn does not claim his list to be complete and I shall include in my study and try to trace the etymology of some words not listed by him. e.g. *Gabr*, *Yaldā*.

VOCABULARY

I Alef

آبار — „burnt lead, good for wounds and bruises“ (Steingass, F. *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary*)⁷; from Syr. *abārā*.

پ P

پیل — an elephant; from Pahl. *pīl*, from Syr. *pīlā*, from Akkad. *pīru*, *pīlu*⁸. A genuine loanword in Pahlavi, not just an ideogram. Arab. فيل is derived from Pers. *pīl*⁹ or possibly from Syr. *pīlā*.

ت T

تاهه — meat stewed with aubergines¹⁰; possibly from Syr. *tabābā*, a butcher, a cook; from the Semitic root T-B-H (Syr. „to

⁷ F. Steingass, *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary*. London, Kegan Paul 1947., (First ed., 1892).

⁸ C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*. Ed. 2., Halis Saxonum, Niemeyer, 1928.

⁹ Article *Fīl*, by J. Ruska — (Ch. Pellat) in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New ed., Vol. II. Leiden, Brill, 1965.

¹⁰ Borhān. *Borhān-e qāte'*; éd. par Moh. Mo'in. Teheran, Ebn-e-Sinā, 1963, 4 v. (2d ed.).

slaughter“, Arab. طبخ „to cook“). Since the Arabic loanwords in Persian almost always retain their original spelling this seems to be a very old, perhaps pre-Islāmic borrowing from Syriac.

ترسا — *Tarsā* — a Christian, literally „one who fears (God)“; from Pahl. *Tarsāk*. A loan translation of the Syriac term *dehelā* or *dehel Alāhā*.

„Tous les textes moyen-iraniens que nous connaissions jusqu'ici désignaient les chrétiens par le mot *tarsākān* „craignant (Dieu)“ qui correspond au syriaque *dehelā*, ou *dehel Alahā* (Act. Ap. 10, 2)...“¹¹.

In modern Persian the word *Tarsā* is no longer in use, the common term for a Christian being *Masīhī* or less frequently *Īsavī*.

تشله — „a dish of meat, eggs, carrots, and honey“ (Steingass); from the Syr. root B-Sh-L, „to cook“. The Persian word is obviously derived from the *tap'el* form of this verb, analogous to the word *talmīdhā*, „a disciple“. I have not been able to find a word *tabhshilā*, but it could have existed, not in literary Syriac, but in one of the colloquial Syriac dialects. Dr. D. N. MacKenzie whom I had asked to criticise parts of this work strongly doubts my hypothesis in view of the rarity of *tap'el* forms in Syriac. He points out however that Jewish Aramaic has *tabshilā* תבשילא.

ج CH

چلیا *chalipā* — a cross; from Syr. *šlībā* (modern Assy. pronunciation: *slīwā*, Chald. *slīwō*). Steingass¹² mistakenly derives this word from Arab. صليب *salīb*. 300 years earlier Borhān of Tabriz had made the opposite mistake by deriving the Arab. *salīb* from Pers. *chalipā*¹³. Arab. *salīb*, being a specifically Christian symbol, probably is derived from Syr. *šlībā*, although it could be a parallel formation from the common Semitic root Ṣ-L-B. The orthography of *chalipā* betrays its Syriac origin. The Arabic loanwords

¹¹ Pierre j. de Menasce, in his edition of Martān Farrūkh-i Ōhrmazdātān, *Škandgumānīk vičār*, Fribourg en Suisse, Librairie de l'Université, 1945, p. 209.

¹² Steingass, *op. cit.*

¹³ Borhān, *op. cit.*

in Persian almost always conserve their original spelling, although the Semitic emphatics are not pronounced. (N. B. They are not pronounced in modern Assyrian either). Thus the emphatic Ṣ (Ṣād) is pronounced exactly like س *Sīn*. Before Islām and the influx of Arabic loanwords however the Semitic Ṣ used to become CH ج in Middle Iranian and vice-versa (c. f. the Arabic word for China صين *Sīn*, derived from Pers. چین *Chīn*). Another indication of the Syriac origin of *chalipā* is of course the final *Alef*, a characteristic feature of the noun in Syriac and other Aramaic dialects. On the other hand the material at my disposal is too small to allow me to establish whether the fricative *Bh* (*Beth rkīkhtā*), a sound intermediate between V and W, but closer to W, follows a regular phonetic pattern by changing into P in the case of this word. Of course the Persians, as Muslims, refuse to accept that Christ ever was crucified. Jalālo'd-Dīn Rūmī speaks of his search for God:

چلیا و نصرانیان سر بسر بیمودم اندر چلیا نبود

„Cross (*chalipā*) and Christians, from end to end,
I surveyed; He was not on the Cross“¹⁴.

د Dāl

داخول — *dākhūl* — a scare-crow; from Syr. *dabūlā*, „afraid“. دول — *dūl* — a bucket; from Pahl. *dōl*, from Syr. *dōlā*, cognate of Arab. دلو *dalw*. Both forms, *dūl* and *dalw* (from Arab. *dalw*) are used in modern Persian.

س Sīn

سته *sattēh* — grape, vine; from Syr. *šattā*.

سکی رغللا *saqī raghlā* (variant form ساکی رغللا *sakī raghlā*) — the herb polypody; from Syr. *sagī reglā*, literally „many feet“, *reglā* being of course a cognate of Arab. رجل *rijl*.

¹⁴ Jalālo'd-Dīn Rūmī, *Selected poems from the Divāni Shams Tabriz*; ed. by Reynold A. Nicholson. Cambridge, University Press, 1952. (First ed., 1898) p. 70.

سکوبا *sokūbā* — a Christian bishop; from Syr. *epīsqōpā*, from Greek ἐπίσκοπος *episkopos*. The final *Alef* proves that this word was borrowed into Persian through Syriac and not directly from the Greek.

نوشتند نامه به هر مهتری سکوبا و بطریق هر کشوری

„They wrote a letter to every prince,
Bishop (*sokūbā*) and patriarch of every land”.

Ferdawsī, *Shāhnāme* ¹⁵.

ش SHīn

شخار *shakhār* — black vitriol; from Syr. *shhārā*; variant form *shakhīreh* from Syr. *shhīrā*.

شنبلت *shanbalīt* — name of a plant: fenugreek (Steingass); *hermodactylus tuberosus*, *hermodactyle* (Mo'in, *M. Farhang-e Fārsī*) ¹⁶; perhaps from Syr. *shabbaltā*, ear of wheat or corn; a cognate of Arab. سنبلة *sunbulah* and سبلة *sabalah* (Brockelmann. *Lexicon Syriacum*).

شنبه *Shanbeh* — Saturday; preceded by a numeral this word is used to designate the other days of the week, e.g. *Yek Shanbeh* „Sunday“, *Dū Shanbeh* „Monday“, etc. (except *Jom'eh* „Friday“). The normal Syriac word for „Saturday“ is *Shabthā*, but the other days of the week take the form *Shabbā*, preceded, as in Persian, by a numeral, e.g. *Had Shabbā* „Sunday“, *Trē Shabbā* „Monday“, etc. (except *Erūbhthā* „Friday“). The Semitic -bb- regularly became -mb- in Middle Iranian. Of course both *Shabthā* and *Shabbā* are derived from the Hebrew שַׁבָּת *Shabbat*. The very rare Persian variant form *Shanbad* is probably derived directly from the Hebrew.

شوش *shawsh* — a branch cut from a vine; from Syr. *shabhshtā*.

شیپور *shaypūr* — a trumpet, a horn, a flute; from Pahl. *shīfōr*, from Manichean Parthian *šyfwr* (*shīfōr*), from Syr. *shīpōrā*,

¹⁵ Ferdawsī, *Shāhnāme* (ed. Barūkhīm) 6: 1469; quoted by Mo'hammad Mo'in, *Farhang-e Fārsī*. Tehran, Amīr-e Kabīr, 1963—68. 4 v. Vol. 2 under *Sokūba*.

¹⁶ Mo'in, *Farhang-e Fārsī*, vol. 3.

from Jewish Aramaic שִׁפּוֹרָא *shīpōrā* from Hebrew שִׁפּוֹר *shōfar*. (Brockelmann. *Lexicon Syriacum*).

شیدا *shaydā* — mad, insane, love-sick; from Syr. *shīdānā*, literally „possessed by a demon“, formed from the word *shīdā*, „demon“, „devil“ in the same way Pers. دیوانه *dīvāneh* is formed from دیو *dīv*. There is a Pahlavī ideogram *šyd* (*shaydā* or *shīdā*), derived from Aramaic *shīdā*, standing for the Pahlavī word for a demon, *dēv* (mod. Pers. *dīv*). Dr MacKenzie however most strongly doubts that this Pahlavī ideogram ever was a genuine loanword, to be read as written. It was merely an ideogram for *dēv*. In this case the mod. Pers. *shaydā* would be a direct borrowing from Syr. *shīdā*, not through Pahlavī.

ك Kāf

کاسه *kāseh* — a cup, goblet. Most Persian lexicographers derive this word from Arab. كأس *ka's* without explaining the final vowel -é represented by the letter ه -h. I would suggest that this word, pronounced *kāsa* in classical Persian (as it still is in Afghānistān and parts of Eastern Iran) is not derived from Arab. *ka's* but from its Syr. cognate *kāsā*.

کشیش *kashīsh* — a Christian priest, from Syr. *qashīshā*. The presence of the *SHīn* instead of a *Sīn* proves that this is a direct borrowing, not through the Arabic form قسيس *qasīs*.

کمر *kamrā* — the sacred string worn by Zoroastrians. This is the Persian word *kamar*, a belt, girdle (originally derived from Avestan *kamara*), borrowed by Syriac in the form *qamrā* and returned to Persian with the Syriac nominal final *Alef*. A rare case of a pure Persian word being modified in its form by Syriac. (c. f. مغوشا *Maghūshā* below).

کنشت *konesht* — a synagogue; from Syr. *knūshā* or from Jewish Aramaic כְּנִישְׁתָּא *knīshā*, ultimately derived from Heb. כְּנֶסֶת *kneset* „assembly“. The Arabic word كنيسة *kanīseh* denoting a Christian church as well as a Jewish synagogue is of the same origin. C. van Arentzen writes in the article *Kanīsa* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islām*:

„KANĪSA (plural *kanā'is*), synagogue, church, the arabicised form of the Aramaic *kenishtā* „meeting (place), school, synagogue"... The Syriac form *kenūstā* in the Peshittā on the New Testament is a rendering of *synagoge* and sometimes also of *ekklēsia* ... whereas the form *kenishtā* in Christian Western Aramaic represents *synagōgē* as well as *ekklēsia* ... The *Lisān al- Arab*, viii. 83, 2 sq. is nearly right in so far as it derives *kanisah* from *kunisht*...".

Actually neither Arab. *kanisah* is derived from the Pers. *konesht* nor vice-versa, but both are derived from a common Aramaic source.

כַּיָּאנָא *kiyānā* — nature; from Syr. *kyānā*¹⁷. The final *Alef* shows us that this word is directly derived from Syr. *kyānā*. The final *Alef* shows us that this word is directly derived from Syr. *kyānā*, and not from its Arabic cognate كَيَّان *kiyān*.

ک Gāf

گَبر *Gabr* — a term of abuse applied to Zoroastrians and by extension to non-Muslims in general. Derivatives: old French and English *Guebre*; Turkish *Gâvur*, hence Byron's *Giaour*. Popular etymology derives this word from Arab. كَافِر *Kāfir*, „Unbeliever“, and this view is accepted by A. Bausani in his article on *Gabr* in the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islām*. The Arabic word *Kāfir* however is commonly used in Persian in the form *Kāfēr*, having submitted to the regular phonetic changes undergone by Arabic loanwords in Persian, the long -ā- adopting a sound intermediate between -ā- and -o-, the *kasrah* changing from -i- to -e-, and the stress falling on the last syllable. Could the Arab. *Kāfir* have given us two derivatives in Persian, *Kāfer* and the unsimilar-looking *Gabr*?

Another theory, now discarded by most scholars, had derived this word from the Pahlavī ideogram for a „man“ *gabrā*, itself derived from the Aramaic and Syriac word for „man“ *gabrā*. Unfortunately there are strong doubts as to whether the modern

Persian *Gabr* is derived from Pahl. *gabrā*. The Pahl. character *gabrā* was not meant to be read in its Semitic form but was merely an ideogram for the Iranian word *mart* (mod. Pers. *mard*).

As far as I am aware, no one has suggested that the Pers. *Gabr* may have been directly derived from the Syr. *gabrā*, not through the Pahlavī ideogram. The Syriac word *gabrā* meaning „man“ had at one time a secondary meaning of slave according to Toufic Fahd:

„L'acc. *gabru*, équivalent de l'héb. *gêbêr*, du syr. *gabrô* et de l'arabe *ğabr* (*ar-rağul*, *al-'abd*, etc. ...), a ici le même sens qu'*imru* et '*abd*.'"¹⁸.

So T. Fahd makes Syr. *gabro* synonymous with Arab. *'abd*, meaning a „slave“. If his statement is correct I would suggest that the Persian term of abuse, *Gabr* is derived from that secondary meaning of Syr. *gabrā* (or *gabrô*), namely „slave“.

گَزِیت *gazīt* or *gezīt* — a special tax collected by Muslim governments from their non-Muslim subjects; from Syr. *gezithā*, which is also the source of Arab. *jizyah*. Regarding the origin of this word Leone Caetani says:

„La parola *ğizyah* ... è di origine aramaica (*gezith(ā)*), ma fu adottata dai Persiani, i quali le diedero la forma iranica *gazīt*. Gli Arabi la presero dai Persiani e la tramutarono in *ğizyah*“¹⁹.

That the Persians should have borrowed the Syriac form of this word is understandable, since after the Arab conquest they found themselves (until their conversion from Zoroastrianism to Islām) in the same legal position as their Syriac-speaking Christian neighbours and had to pay the same tax.

گَرِیش نپذیرفت و نشنید پند

„He did not accept his *gazīt* and did not listen to advice“.

Daqīqī, *Shāhnāme*²⁰.

¹⁸ Toufic Fahd, *Le panthéon de l'Arabie centrale à la veille de l'hégire*. Paris, Geuthner, 1968, p. 137, n. 2.

¹⁹ Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām*. Vol. II: t. II. Milano, Hoepli, 1907, p. 930, n. 6.

²⁰ Daqīqī, *Shāhnāme*; ed. Barūkhīm, 6: 1497; quoted by Mo'in, *Farhang-e Fārsī*, vol. 3.

¹⁷ W. B. Henning, *Sogdian loan-words in New Persian* in „Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)“, vol. X, 1939—42, p. 93, n. 1.

It may be of interest to add here that the Syriac word *gzūthā* has entered almost all European languages. Engl. and Fr. *gazette*, „newspaper“ (c. f. Span. *gaceta*, Polish *gazeta*) are derived from Ital. *gazzetta*. The Italian word *gazzetta* (*gazeta* in the Venetian dialect) originally meant a small Venetian copper coin of the 16th and 17th century which one had to pay to purchase the paper. The popular etymology of *gazeta* as a diminutive of *gaza*, a „magpie“, does not sound very convincing. Venetian commercial activities in the Levant are well known and it is quite probable that they should have borrowed a word having to do with taxation to name one of their coins. The question remains from which language they would have borrowed this word: directly from Syriac, from Persian or from Ottoman Turkish? The latter would seem the most probable, but unfortunately the only Turkish dictionary in which I could find the word گزیت *gazit* or *gezit* was Redhouse's²¹. Thus the word, if it had existed in Turkish as a synonym of *cizye* must have been very rare.

گزر *gazīr* — „a *vazīr*; the superintendent or collector of the revenue; a hero, champion“ (Steingass). Dr. Mohammad Mo'in derives this word from Syr. *gzīrā* (*Farhang-e Fārsī*) which he translates into Persian by حارس جلد *hāres, jallād*. C. Brockelmann in his *Lexicon Syriacum* renders *gzīrā* into Latin by *lictor*. The *gzīrā* is derived from the Syr. root GZR (cognate of Arab. جزر JZR) meaning „to cut or hew stone; to tear; to probe a wound; to circumcise, be circumcised; to determine, decree“²².

The word *gazīr* bears a remarkable resemblance to Arab. وزير *wazīr* (Pers. *vazīr*), „minister“. Indeed Steingass gives us the word *vazīr* as a synonym for *gazīr*. Vullers in his *Lexicon Persico-Latinum* derives *vazīr* from *gazīr*. It is however generally accepted that *wazīr* (or *vazīr*) is in fact derived from Pahl. *vichīr* „decider, judge“, itself derived from Avestan *vichira*, having the same meaning²³.

²¹ Sir James W. Redhouse, *Türkceden İngilizceye lügat kitabı. A Turkish and English lexicon*. Constantinople, Printed for the American Board Mission (by) H. Matteosian, 1921.

²² R. Payne Smith, *A compendious Syriac dictionary*; ed. by J. Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth). Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1903, (Reprinted 1967).

²³ See article *Wazīr* by F. Babinger in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. IV, Leiden 1934.

Therefore, if we accept Dr. Mo'in's derivation of *gazīr* from Syr. *gzīrā* and of the latter from the Semitic root GZR then the resemblance between *gazīr* and *wazīr* can only be coincidental, the former having a Semitic, the latter an Iranian origin.

گنبد *gonbad* — a dome, a cupola; from Pahl. *gumbat*, from Syr. *qūbbāthā*, a cognate of Arab. قبة *qubbah*. The Semitic -bb- became -mb- in Middle Iranian. Subsequently Pahl. final -t became -d in classical and modern Persian. This word is one of the few Aramaic/Syriac words in Pahlavī which became assimilated as loanwords and were not used merely as ideograms for pure Persian words. Thus it survived the disappearance of the Pahlavī script and passed into classical and modern Persian. An interesting question arises as to why should the Persians have borrowed a Semitic word for the dome instead of using a pure Iranian one. Did they borrow the very concept of the dome from their Aramaic-speaking neighbours? This takes us to the question of the origin of the dome in Iranian architecture. André Godard has some relevant remarks on the subject in his *L'Art de l'Iran*:

„La plus ancienne coupole iranienne connue est celle du palais d'Ar-dashīr à Firūzābād. (3-e siècle chr.)... Certes longtemps auparavant l'Assyrie avait construit des coupoles, si nous en croyons les bas-reliefs de Kuyundjik...“²⁴.

Although Professor Godard is sceptical about any possible direct influence („ce qui prouve seulement qu'en de nombreuses régions du monde on entreprit de couvrir des salles carrées ou circulaires au moyen de coupoles“) ²⁵ perhaps he would have been less sceptical had he taken into account the linguistic evidence presented by the borrowed word. I would suggest that the Persians had borrowed the idea of the dome (if not the actual methods of its construction) from 'Irāq towards the end of the Parthian era when Aramaic had long replaced Akkadian as the language of that country.

گور *gūr* — a grave, a tomb; from Syr. *qabhrā*, pronounced *qōrā* in modern Assyrian, *qōrō* in Chaldean. Its graphic form *qbr* clearly shows its relation with Arab. قبر *qabr*. The Persians use

²⁴ André Godard, *L'art de l'Iran*, Paris Arthaud 1962, p. 217.

²⁵ Ibid., loc. cit.

both *gūr* and *qabr* without being aware of their common Semitic origin. In the case of *gūr* the change of ق *Qāf* into گ *Gāf* shows that this is a much older borrowing, dating from the time before the impact of Arabic had familiarised the Persians with *Qāf* and other Semitic gutturals. (Actually *Qāf* is pronounced like غ *Ghayn* in Persian, except in Shīrāz and Khūzestān where it retains its Arabic pronunciation). Why should the Persians have borrowed a foreign, Semitic word for a grave instead of using an Iranian one? The answer will be obvious if we bear in mind that Zoroastrianism forbids burial and commands that dead bodies be exposed in „towers of silence“ (*ḍakhmeh*). Consequently in pre-Islāmic Iran burial was an institution belonging to non-Zoroastrians of whom the Syriac-speaking Christians formed the largest group. Hence the Persian word for a grave was a Syriac loanword.

گونيا *gūnyā* — „a perpendicular, a mason's or carpenter's rule; an architect's line“ (Steingass); from Syr. *gōnyā*, „angle“; from Greek γωνία *gōnia*.

کو نوح که سازهاش بخشم تا مسطرو گونیاش بخشم

„Where is Noah, so that I might give him his instruments (for navigating), So that I might give him his ruler and *gūnyā*?“.

Khāqānī, *Tohfato'l-'Erāqayn* ²⁶.

ل Lām

لیر *lār* — saliva; from Syr. *rārā*.

م Mīm

مار *Mār* — Lord, master: a title born by princes in the medieval kingdom of Gharjestān (in Afghānistān) whose ruler bore the title *Shār* (variant form of *Shāh*). *Borhān-e qāte'* says under the word *Mār* (besides its other meanings):

²⁶ Khāqānī, *Masnavi-e Tohfato'l-'Erāqayn*; ed. Dr. Yahyā Qarīb. Tehrān, Chāpkhāne-ye Sepehr, 1333/(1955), p. 207.

مار... وحکام وامرای غرجستانرا نیز گویند همچنانکه پادشاه آنجارا شار خوانند

„Mār... and (by this name) they call also governors (*hokkām*) and princes (*omarā*) of Gharjestān, just as they call the King (*Pādeshāh*) of that country *Shār*“.

And Farrokhī Sīstānī has sung:

در این دیار بهنگام شار و چندین مار پلنگ وار نمودند غر چگان عصیان

„In this land in the time of the *Shār* and so many *Mārs*,²⁷

Like leopards rose the Gharchahs in rebellion“.

Derivation: from Pahl. *mar*, from Syr. *mārā*, which is a cognate of Arab. امرو *imru*, „a man“. In Syriac it is used in the form *Mārī* „my Lord“, preceeding the names of Christian Saints and Bishops. The personal pronominal suffix -ī, „my“, shown by the letter *Yūd* is never pronounced and the word is read simply as *Mār*, e.g. *Mār(ī) Shim'un*, title of the Nestorian Patriarch.

I was told by Mār Zay'ā Dashtū, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Urmīyā that the name of مرغه *Marāgheh*, a town in Iranian Azarbāyjān was derived from Mār Abhā I, Nestorian Patriarch from 536 to 552 A. D. who was imprisoned there by the Shāh of Iran, Khosraw Anūshīrvān „the Just“ ²⁸. The Syriac letter *Beth rkikhtā*, usually shown in Roman transliteration with the letters BH, represents a sound intermediate between V and W, although closer to W. Now Middle Pers. V often changes into غ *GHayn* in modern Persian, e.g. Pers. مرغ *morgh* „a bird“ form Pahl. *murv*.

مزکت *mazket* or مزگت *mazget*, variant forms of مسجد *masjed* — a mosque. While *masjed* is the Arab. *masjid*, the forms *mazket* and *mazget* are derived from Syr. *masgedā* or from its feminine form *masgedtā*.

تومشرف تری زهر مردم همچو بیت الحرم ز هر مزکت

„Thou art more honoured than any man

Just as the Sacred House (the mosque of the Ka'bah) is more honoured than any *mazket*“.

Sūzanī ²⁹.

²⁷ Farrokhī Sīstānī; quoted by Dr. M. Mo'in in his edition of *Borhān-e qāte'*, vol. 4, p. 1935, n. 2.

²⁸ See William Wright, *A short history of Syriac literature*. Amsterdam, Philo Press, 1966, (First published 1894), pp. 116—117.

²⁹ Sūzanī; quoted by Mo'in, *Farhang-e Fārsī*, vol. 3, p. 4063.

مسیحا *Masīhā* — Christ, the Messiah (a variant form for the more common مسیح *Masīh*). This word shows in its orthography and pronunciation a mixed derivation from Arab. *Masīh* and Syr. *Mshīhā*. On the one hand the Arabic *Sin* takes the place of the Syriac *SHin*, on the other hand the final *Alef* of the Syriac is retained. E.g. The well-known line by Hāfez:

در آسمان نه عجب گر بگفته حافظ سرود زهره برقص آورد مسیحارا

„In Heaven no wonder if upon the utterances of Hāfez
The song of Zohreh should bring Masīhā to dance”.

مغوشا *Maghūshā* — a Zoroastrian (esp. a Zoroastrian priest), a Magian; from Pahl. *Magūshā*, from Syr. *Magūshā*, from Old Pers. *Magush* through an older Aramaic form. It is strange that such a purely Iranian term should have been influenced by a Semitic language (c. f. کامرا *kamrā* above). The word *Maghūshā* however is very rare in Persian which prefers the form مغ *Mogh*, from Pahl. *mag(u)*, from Old Pers. *Magush*. Arab. مجوس *Majūs* is derived from Syr. *Magūshā*, while Greek *Máγος* *Mágos* was borrowed directly from Old Persian. Latin *Magus*, French *Magie*, English *Magian* are all derived from Old Persian through Greek *Mágos*.

ملکا *Malkā* — a mythical character, supposed founder of the Melkite sect of Christianity. Even Steingass in his *Comprehensive Persian-English dictionary* has fallen into the trap and explains this word as „The leader of a Christian sect”. Actually no personage bearing this name had ever existed! The confusion is best illustrated by a line from Khāqānī’s pseudo-Christian poem:³⁰

مرا اسقف محقق تر شناسد ز یعقوب وز نسطور و زمکا

„The Bishop will consider me a more trustworthy theologian
Than Ya’qūb, Nestorius or Malkā”.

³⁰ Khāqānī, *Dar shekāyat az zendān ō band va madh-e ‘Azīmo’r-Rūm ... Qaysar* in his *Divān*; ed. by M. ‘Abbāsī and H. Nakha’i. (Tehrān, Amīr-e Kabīr, 1336/1957), pp. 17—22, line 49. In this poem Khāqānī, imprisoned by the Muslim ruler of Shervān ironically proposes to renounce Islām, go to Constantinople and become a Christian monk. He displays his rather superficial knowledge of Christianity and uses without fully understanding their meaning as many as possible Christian religious terms. This includes many Syriac (or Syriac-sound-

Ya’qūb al-Baradā’i or Ya’qobh Burdē’ānā (died in 578 A. D.) was the founder of the Syrian Monophysite Church, named after him the Jacobite. Nestorius was Patriarch of Constantinople (428—431 A. D.) whose teaching regarding the two personalities in Christ, human and divine, condemned by his own Church were accepted by the Assyrian Church, henceforth known as the Nestorian. But who was Malkā? *Malkā* is simply the Syriac word for „King”, cognate of Arab. ملك *malik*. The term „Melkite” *Malkāyā* in Syriac, ملكائي *Makā’i* in Arabic, meaning „royalist” was applied to those Christians of the Middle East who were faithful to the Orthodox form of Christianity, upheld by the Byzantine Emperor (*Malkā*), as opposed to the „heresies” of the Monophysites and Nestorians. Until the schism of 1054 A. D. the Melkites, like other Orthodox, were united with the Catholic Church. Nowadays the term „Melkite” means an Arab Christian of the Byzantine tradition, Orthodox or Uniate Catholic. As Iran had never been part of the Byzantine Empire there has never been any Melkites in that country. Hence the ignorance regarding the meaning of the term is quite understandable.

. H

هادوری *hādūrī* — an importunate beggar; from Syr. *hadōrā*.

معیشتی نه که با عزت وقناعت آن بهردری نروم چون گدای هادوری

„Give me a means of livelihood so that with the self-respect and contentment (derived from it)³¹

I would not go to every door like a *hādūrī* beggar”.

Asīr Akhsikati³¹.

ing) words. The poem has been translated into English and analysed in detail by Prof. V. Minorsky in his article *Khāqānī and Andronicus Comnenus* in the „Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies”, vol. XI, 1943—46, pp. 550—578; published again, with a few additional notes in Minorsky’s *Iranica*. Tehran, University, 1964, (Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Tehrān, 775), pp. 120—150.

³¹ Asīr Akhsikati; quoted by Mo’in, *Farhang-e Fārsī*, vol. 4, p. 5080...

يلدا *Yaldā* — the longest night of winter; from Syr. *Yaldā*, „Christmas“. This word corresponds to Arab. ميلاد *Milād* and is derived from the same Semitic root YLD (or WLD) — to give birth or to be born.

وفي الليلة التي يتقدمها الخامس والعشرون من هذا الشهر [كانون الأول] وهو ليلته على مذهب الروم عيد يلبدا وهو ميلاد المسيح

„And in the night which falls on the 25th of this month (December) is the night of the festival of *Yaldā* in the sect of Rūm, and it is the birth (*Milād*) of Christ“.

al-Birūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiyah* ³².

The „sect of Rūm“ is the Arabic term for the Orthodox and Catholic Christians (united until 1054 A. D.). Birūnī does not mean that Christmas was not celebrated by other Christian denominations, like Nestorians or Jacobites, but in this particular chapter of his work he was specifically discussing the calendar of the Greek Church (*Rūm* or *Malkā'iyah*). Birūnī who had studied Syriac and Greek, as well many other languages, had had a knowledge of Christianity perhaps unparalleled by any Muslim writer. Unfortunately later Iranian scholars, lacking Birūnī's erudition could not explain the origin of this word. A vague remembrance persisted that the word had something to do with Christ and some Persian lexicographers, including *Borhān*, thought that *Yaldā* was the name of one of the disciples of Christ! Of course the Persians, as Muslims, do not commemorate Christmas in any way. Since however they recognise Christ as a true Prophet of God they very well understand its significance for Assyrian, Armenian and other Christians. The modern Persian word for „Christmas“ is the Arab. *Milād* which seems to have replaced *Yaldā* very early. For a longer discussion of the term *Yaldā* in the Persian language I would refer the reader to Dr. M. Mo'in's footnote on *Yaldā* in his edition of *Borhān-e qāte'*.

³² al-Birūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiyah*. (*Chronologie orientalischer Völker*); hrsg. Dr. C. E. Sachau. Leipzig, Brockhaus, 1878, p. 292, lines 6—7.

شليخا *Shalikhā* — Apostle (of Christ); from Syr. *Shlīhā*, in Arab. سليح *Sillīh*.

بيت المقدس واقصى وصخره بتقدسات انصار وشليخا

„By Jerusalem and al-Aqsá (Mosque) and the Rock, By the Consacractions of the Disciples and Apostles!“

Khāqānī ³³.

Linguistic conclusions

All the words in our list are nouns, with the possible exception of *Tarsā*, *shaydā*, *Gabr* and *hādūrī* which can be used as adjectives. Regarding phonetic changes it is difficult to establish any rules basing our evidence on not more than some thirty five words. We can however make the following observations:

1. A striking characteristic of the Syriac and Aramaic noun, differentiating it from other Semitic languages (e.g. Arabic or Hebrew) is the addition of a final *Alif*, -ā (pronounced -ō in the Chaldean and Jacobite dialects). This final *Alif* is lost by the majority of our words, but it is retained by some, e.g. *chalīpā*, *Masīhā*, *Yaldā*.

2. A double consonant (*tashdīd*), very common in Semitic languages, is rare in purely Iranian words. Before the influx of Arabic words it was very unfamiliar to the Persians. The Semitic -bb- usually became -mb-. Examples: *qūbbāthā* into Pahl. *gumbat* (mod. Pers. *gonbad*); *Shabbā* into *Shanbeh*.

3. The Semitic emphatic *Ṣ* س (*Sād*) which cannot be pronounced by the Persians became *Ḥ* ح in Middle Iranian. Example: *chalīpā* from *slībhā*.

4. The Semitic guttural *Q* ق (*Qōp*, *Qāf*) becomes either *K* (example: *kashīsh* from *qashīshā*) or *G* (examples: *gonbad* from *qūbbāthā*, *gūr* from *qabhrā*). In modern Persian words borrowed from Arabic on the other hand the *Qāf* becomes confused with *GHayn* (except in Fārs and Khūzestān where it retains its Arabic pronunciation).

³³ Khāqānī, *op. cit.*, line 80.

5. Insertion of a short vowel -a- (*fatheh*) between two initial consonants. In modern Persian a word cannot begin with a consonant cluster and a vowel has to be inserted. Examples: *Masīhā* from *Mshīhā*, *chalīpā* from *šlibhā*. This of course applies to Persian words borrowed not only from Syriac, but also from Sanskrit, Greek, French or any language which allows initial consonant clusters.

A Cultural Conclusion

Syriac loanwords in Persian are not numerous. This may seem strange in view of the fact that the two peoples had been neighbours since time immemorial and in the pre-Islāmic period Aramaic had a profound influence on Pahlavī-Persian, providing ideograms if not true loanwords. Why had this influence suddenly stopped with the Arab conquest of Iran and the acceptance of Islām by the majority of the Persians? I would suggest that the reason for it was the close similarity between Syriac and Arabic. In borrowing a Semitic word the Persians have naturally preferred an Arabic to a Syriac form, Arabic being the sacred language of their new religion. The Syriac language itself had begun to die out in the Middle East giving place to Arabic. Thus only those Syriac loanwords which, in their Persian form, looked very different from their Arabic cognates could hold their own and resist the rivalry of Arabic. Many more Syriac words entered Persian through Arabic, but this was not a direct influence and lies outside the scope of this study.

One feature in our list which may strike our attention is the proportion of Christian religious terms: *Tarsā* (a Christian, loan translation of a Syriac term), *Chalīpā* (Cross), *sokūbā* (bishop), *kashīsh* (Christian priest), *gazīt* (tax collected from Christians and other non-Muslims), *gūr* (a grave, in pre-Islāmic Iran a Christian feature), *Masīhā* (Christ), *Malkā* (supposed founder of Orthodox Christianity), *Yaldā* (Christmas), *Shalīkhā* (Apostle of Christ). Unlike Arabic the Persian language is very poor in Christian religious terminology because it never had a need for it. There are no Christian Persians as there are Christian Arabs. The two Christian minorities of Iran are either Armenian- or Syriac-

speaking. What was the situation in pre-Islāmic, Zoroastrian Iran? Arthur Christensen in his monumental *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* in surveying the different languages spoken in Sāsānī Iran says:

„Pendant l'époque des Sassanides, la langue littéraire des chrétiens de race sémitique de l'empire iranien était le syrien, dont l'origine est la ville d'Edesse”³⁴.

The famous „Church of Persia“, as the Nestorian Church was known to most ecclesiastical historians was in fact more Syriac than Persian as far as her language was concerned. Syriac was not only the language of her liturgy but was also the language of the majority of her faithful. The zeal of the Nestorian missionaries and their successes in Central Asia, China and India are well known. In Iran however the intolerance of the Zoroastrian Iranian state was particularly ruthless towards any apostates from the official religion. Hence the Assyrian Christians of Iran had enough difficulty to keep their own faith without trying to convert the Persians. This will explain why we have not been able to find any Christian literature in Pahlavī with the exception of a translation of the Book of Psalms. Nevertheless, of all the Christian peoples with whom the early Persians had come into contact (Armenians, Georgians, Greeks, Ethiopians, Christian Arabs of Hīrah) the Syriac-speaking Assyrians or Chaldeans were the ones with whom they were the most familiar. Nowadays the Armenians form by far the larger Christian group in Iran (when travelling in more remote parts of Iran the present writer when asked about his religion had to say *Armenī* to be understood) their mass settlement in that country dates only from the time of Shāh ‘Abbās the Great. Thus for a long time Christianity was associated in the Persian mind with the Syriac language. Thus Khāqānī says in his ironical proposal to become a Christian:

کنم تفسیر سریانی ز انجیل

„Shall I prepare a Syriac (*Soryānī*) commentary on the Gospel?”³⁵

³⁴ Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*. 2. éd. Copenhague, Munksgaard, 1944, p. 49.

³⁵ Khāqānī, *op. cit.*, line 39.