

Early drafts of a book became A History of Christianity in Asia Vol. I

The Church of The East

- Sam Moffett, Seoul, 1966/67

A writer in the Korea Herald recently praised Humanism as the only universal religion. "Christianity", he said, "is a Western faith, a white man's religion". (Herald, Feb. 1966) This is a common criticism. It is a regular part of Communist anti-Christian propaganda. But historically, of course, it is not true.

Christianity began in Asia. That is where Jesus was born - on the Western edge of Asia, it is true, but in Asia, not in Europe. Christianity was brought by missionaries from Asia to Europe. The first pioneer church in Europe was founded at Philippi by a missionary from Asia, named Paul.

The first countries to become Christian were in Asia. Western historians too often think of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine as the first official recognition of Christianity as a state religion, but 100 years before Constantine, an Oriental King named Abgar accepted the Christian faith and made his principality Christian.

The story of the Church of the East, and of the early spread of the Christian faith in Asia outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire, is one of the least known, most neglected, but most exciting pages in the 2,000 year record of the history of the Christian Church. The most severe Christian persecutions and the greatest martyrdoms were not in the West under the Roman Emperors, but in Asia under the Kings of Persia. And the greatest missionary church era of all time was not in the Roman Catholicism under Francis Xavier, nor even perhaps in

Protestantism after William Carey, but the period of the expansion of the Church of the East from the Red Sea to the Pacific across the heart of Asia. The Nestorians reached China with the gospel six centuries before the Western church; and at one time even had a Chinese Pope (Catholicos). Nestorian missionaries reached China as early as the seventh century, and again as late as the 14th century. We do not know if they ever reached Korea. Were the first Christians in Korea Roman Catholics in 1593? Or were they Nestorian Christians nine hundred years earlier? Our study this term of the Church of the East may not give us the answer to that question, but it will at least throw some light on a dramatically obscure chapter of the expansion of the Christian Faith.

This church is known by many names. It is sometimes called the Nestorian Church by Western Christians who confuse its doctrine with the so-called heresy of the 5th century bishop of Antioch, Nestorius. But it calls itself still, with great pride, The Church of the East. And though it survives today only with small handfuls of believers in pockets here and there in Asia, it is living proof that Christianity has never belonged to the West alone. The Church, the body of Christ, is still in truth a "Church of the East" as much as a Church of the West.

Do not confuse it with the Eastern Orthodox Church. They are not at all the same, though both are often called "Eastern". Historically, the difference between the two is that the Eastern Orthodox churches are those Eastern churches that grew up within the bounds of the old Roman Empire, while the Nestorian churches (the Church of the East) are

those eastern churches that developed and spread outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The Orthodox Churches were not distinct from Roman Catholicism, practically speaking, until about the 8th century, and the official separation came as late as 1054. But the Church of the East separated from the churches of the Roman Empire (which then included both Catholic and Orthodox churches) as early as the 5th century. The Eastern orthodox churches in general recognize the headship of the Patriarch of Constantinople and were therefore called "Greek Orthodox"; the Nestorian churches, however, trace their beginning and early allegiance to the Patriarch of Antioch in Syria, and were sometimes called the Syrian Church.

It must be added that the story of the Church of the East is also the story of a lost church. For a while, centuries ago, when the Nestorians were the greatest missionaries in the world, it seemed that Asia might well become the first Christian continent in the world. Today it is the least Christian continent in the world-- only 3% Christian. We do not really know what happened. We do not really know how a church with so much missionary zeal could die so quickly and completely and vanish almost without a trace. But perhaps our study will suggest some answers to the question, what makes a church die?

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I. The earliest Expansion of Christianity in Asia

Ignatius the second bishop of Antioch, (ad Ephes. iii) as early as about 100 A.D., speaks of Bishops as "settled in the outskirts of the earth", but what he means by the phrase is not clear. There is no direct evidence of Christian communities in Asia outside the Roman Empire before the end of the first century. By 180 A.D. however (the death of Marcus Aurelius) the list of Christian communities includes at least two regions on the border or beyond: (1)

- 1) Edessa
- 2) Mesopotamia, or the lower Tigris River

A. The Church in Edessa (now Urfa in Turkey, just across the Syrian border)

Edessa was the capital of the little Kingdom of Osroene, on the Syrian frontier between Rome and the Persian Empire. Up until 216 A.D. (when it was incorporated into the Roman Empire) it was governed by a line of native kings, friendly to Rome. The best source of information about the early history of the church in Edessa is the Chronica of Sextus Julius Africanus (ca. 160-240 A.D.) which survives only in fragments. (2) But it is Eusebius in the fourth century, who gives us the important legend (which he says he found in the archives of the city) of the conversion of Edessa to Christianity. (Hist. Eccl. i. 13). And further important information about the

1. See Harned's list, in The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries. (Theol. Tr. .., N.Y. 1905) Vol. II, p. 244 ff.

2. See Charles Biggs, The Origins of Christianity, Oxford 1909, pp 443-447.

church in Edessa comes from the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, written about 200 A.D.

1. The Abgar Tradition. After the resurrection, Abgar the Black (the Mint) King of Edessa, was very sick, and wrote to Jesus, asking him to come and heal him, promising him that in Edessa he would be safe from all his persecutors. At that time Edessa was independent of Rome. In reply he received a letter from Jesus, saying that after his ascension he would send a disciple to cure the King and teach his people a better way of life. Very soon, as promised, the Apostle Thomas sent Thaddeus, one of the Seventy (Luke 10: 1-17), who cured the king and converted the people to Christianity. The story is certainly apocryphal, but the supposed letter of Christ to Abgar was kept for centuries in Edessa, and copies were used as late as the Middle Ages as charms to ward off evil.

This much at least should be said about the legend: it has the ring of authenticity in at least four important points:

- 1) A King Abgar of Edessa was in truth the first Christian King in history. He was probably not Abgar the Black however, but rather a descendant, Abgar the Ninth, who reigned a hundred years later, perhaps about 201 A.D. or earlier. This was still 100 years before

the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. And with the conversion of the king, for the first time anywhere in the world Christianity became the official religion of a region.⁽¹⁾

- 2) The promise of protection from persecution was undoubtedly an important factor in the rise of the Church of the East. The King's promise of protection to Jesus is only legend, but under the persecutions of the Roman Emperors, and later under persecutions for heresy by the Roman Church, Christians in truth found refuge in the East.
- 3) The mention of St. Thomas as the originator of the mission to Edessa is one of many references which lends credence to the very early and persistent tradition that Thomas is indeed in some way preeminently the Apostle to Asia, as Paul was the Apostle to Europe. Historically speaking, however, the first great leaders of Syrian Christianity were Tatian, famous as the author of the Pietessaron, and the mildly Gnostic but extremely active Bardesanes (or Bardaisan) who was born in Edessa about 155 A.D.
- 4) The tradition of the conversion of the entire Kingdom of Edessa may well be exaggerated but this much is

1. A. Harnack, Op.cit. p. 292 ff., Wright and Filson, Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible. Phila. 1956, p. 103.

true: Edessa did become the starting point and center for a missionary enterprise which was to reach as far as India and China, ~~an independent Christian church which used neither Latin like Rome, nor Greek like Antioch, but its own Syriac language.~~ It was the first home of the Church of the East. Edessa, says Harnack, "had a larger percentage of Christians among its population than any of the larger towns" before Constantine.⁽¹⁾ From Edessa as a starting point, the Christian church began to march across Asia. The chain of expansion is:

1) Antioch to Edessa, 2) Edessa to Arbela and Mesopotamia, and 3) Arbela to Central Asia.

1. Harnack, op. cit. p. 294.

2. The St. Thomas tradition

As St. Paul was the apostle of the Western Church, so St. Thomas was the apostle to the East. But whereas Paul's labors and accomplishments are carefully and clearly recorded by Luke in his Acts of the Apostles, and by Paul's ^{his} own letters to the churches, there is no similarly trustworthy record of the work of St. Thomas. As a result his connection with the Church of the East and the stories of his missionary labors must still be classified as tradition, but a tradition so strong and widespread that it must have some basis in historical fact.

The earliest record of St. Thomas's work is the apocryphal book, The Acts of St. Thomas. This is one of ^(a number of) ~~four~~ such works which appeared in the second half of the second century (c. 200 A.D.) to satisfy a popular craving on the part of devout Christians for more information about the apostles, who by then were almost superstitiously venerated as saints. Unfortunately, the writers of these later acts, unlike Luke who was a careful historian, wrote almost as novelists. Nevertheless, these "apostolic romances" undoubtedly contain many reliable traditions which must have still been preserved in the memories of early Christians.

The four most important of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles are:

- 1) The Acts of Peter, which mainly describes Peter's conflict with Simon the Sorcerer in Rome (see Acts 8:9-24). From this comes the famous story of Peter's flight from Rome and return in the "Quo Vadis" incident.
- 2) The Acts of Paul, which ^{amplifies} the account in Acts, and provides the record, probably historical, that his life ended with martyrdom. It exists only in fragments.
- 3) The Acts of John, a series of miracles, including one in which

he orders all the bed-bugs out of an inn where he is staying and lets them back in again when he leaves the next morning. (H. Lietzmann, A History of the Early Church, Vol. II, p. 85)

These three Acts, though they contain many wild and incredible miracles, at least attempt to relate their contents to the earlier historical tradition of the church. (Lietzmann, II, p. 84)

4) The Acts of Thomas was written in the same period (about 200 A.D.) probably in Edessa, and was the most popular but least historical of the four Acts. It is the story of the apostle Thomas's missionary journey to India, full of strange miracles, like talking dogs and miracle-working donkeys, and even a dragon. (H. Lietzmann, II, p. 85) It was condemned by the Church as apocryphal as early as the fourth century, but not even that stopped its popularity. It is important not only as the literary basis of the St. Thomas legend, which may or may not contain at least a small kernel of historical fact, but also as a rather reliable indication of the general character of East Syrian (Edessene) Christianity at the beginning of the third century.

The Acts of Thomas opens with the apostles all assembled in Jerusalem to divide the world among themselves for the preaching of the Gospel. India was assigned to Thomas, who felt he could not undertake so difficult a task and refused. But by chance at that very time an Indian merchant, a representative of King Gundapher, came through Jerusalem with a commission to buy a carpenter, and Jesus sold Thomas to him as a slave. He went to India by sea, and was there given orders to build a royal palace. But instead of building the palace, he spent all the construction money to relieve the miseries of the poor. Hearing of this, the angry king asked to

see the palace. The apostle replied that he could see it only when he died. Angered, the king was about to put him to death, but his brother died just then, and his soul in heaven saw a great palace reserved for his brother the king, a palace, the angels said, which had been built by the Christian, Thomas. Hurrying back to earth he told his brother, and the apostle was spared and the King converted.

But, as we have said, more important than the fanciful details of this legendary mission to India, is the information the Acts of Thomas sheds on the character of the church in Edessa, where it was written. "We read in it," says Findlay (A.F. Findlay, Byways in Early Christian Literature, Edinburgh, 1923, p. 279 ff.) "how Christians in the East conceived the Christian faith and its ethical requirements." This leads to the following observation.

1. The Church in Edessa was orthodox in doctrine. Because of its connection with Bardesanes, who has been called "the last of the Gnostics", the whole Edessene church has been accused of heretical tendencies. But Bardaisan (Bardesanes) (b. 155 in Edessa, d. 222-3) was ~~just~~^{not} as Gnostic as his opponents made him out to be (see art. in Vece and Piercy, List of Christian Biography, Lond. 1911), and as for the Acts of Thomas, save for a very few docetic traces, a slight lack of clarity about the complete reality of Christ's human nature, it is markedly orthodox about the fact of the Incarnation, and unreservedly adores the living, risen Lord. Its baptismal formula is trinitarian. There is however, one curiously Eastern variation of the trinitarian formula in the Hymn of the Soul, one of the most beautiful sections of the Acts. Here the Deity is conceived of as Father, Mother and Son, a concept which was not uncommon in the early Syrian Church ^(perhaps due to the fact that the Greek word for spirit is *πνεύμα* in gender.) (Findlay, p. 298, Burkitt, Early Eastern Christianity, p. 88 ff.) But apart from this

variation, there was no marked doctrinal difference between the church of Edessa and the churches of the West.

(2) The Church of the East was extremely ascetic. The example of the Apostle Thomas in the Acts of Thomas set the tone for an ideal of rigorous self-denial which permeated the early Eastern church. This is how Thomas is described: "he continually fasts and prays and eats only bread and salt and drinks water; he wears one coat whether in warm weather or in cold, and he takes nothing from any one, but gives to others what he has." "chap. 20)

In the apostle's preaching most normal human activities are considered to be stained with worldliness. His position is asceticism carried to an extreme. Marriage is considered sinful. (Ch. 15) The wedding song which the Apostle sings at the marriage of the royal Indian princess leads the prince and princess to renounce the joys of married life, and consecrate themselves in perpetual virginity to Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom (Chs. 6, 7). "If you will present yourselves pure to God," says the apostle to them, "there will be born to you living children (that is, souls brought to Christ) and you will be free from care, and spend an untroubled life, looking forward to receive that incorruptible and true marriage, and you will enter as groomsmen into that bridal chamber which is full of immortality and light" (Ch. 12, quoted by A.F. Findlay, op. cit. p. 283).

This unbiblical, over-ascetic emphasis of the Acts of Thomas represents a popular trend in the Eastern church older than that book itself. In fact, though the beginnings of ascetic monasticism are usually traced

to Egypt and St. Anthony, its original home may well have been in Syria among the Eastern Christians. St. Anthony, whom Athanasius (writing around 364 A.D.) called "the founder of asceticism", renounced the world when he was eighteen, which would have been about 270 A.D. The Syrian "enkratites", as the desert rigorists were called, considered Tatian who died about one hundred years earlier (c. 180 A.D.), to be their founder. This is true theologically, for his writings contain stern injunctions to self-denial, but the first real Syrian hermit of whom we have record was Atones, who lived like a wild beast in the caves of Edessa near Harran, by the well where Jacob met Rachel. His only food was uncooked herbs. (P. Carrington, The Early Christian Church, Cambridge. 1957. Vol. II, p. 212; H. Lietzmann, op. cit., Vol. IV, p.)

There is linguistic evidence also of the antiquity of Syrian monasticism. The name "Abbot" for the head of a monastery is the Syrian word "Abba", and not an Egyptian derivative. (Lietzmann, op. cit. Vol. IV, p. 163) Furthermore, it was a Syrian monk, Isaac, who built the first monastery in Constantinople in 381 A.D., overcoming Western reluctance to recognize the monastic movement. (Ibid, p. 174)

The lonely monks of the Syrian desert were even more fanatical and extreme than their Egyptian counterparts. They chained themselves to the rocks. They bent their bodies under huge iron weights. They walled themselves up in caves. They more nearly resembled today's Hindu "Fakirs" than Christian saints, but they were widely venerated by the common people of Syria both on the Roman and the Persian side of the border.

✓ By the year 370 A.D. the movement had grown so large that it was given a name, "Messalian", which in Syriac means Men of Prayer. It even attracted some of the great Western Fathers, like Jerome and Chrysostom. Jerome joined the Messalian ascetics in the Syrian desert about 373 A.D. for a period of withdrawal and contemplation (Duchesne, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 379)

Typical of the teaching of the ascetics are the Homilies of Aphraates (or Apheahat) who came to Edessa from Mesopotamia for a visit about 340 A.D. To him, the Christian life is a warfare between the believer and the devil. To conquer Satan, the Christian must overcome all his temptations. When Satan tempts with the enticements of this world's luxuries, the wise Christian will flee to the desert. And rather than succumb to the temptations of marriage (for woman has always been Satan's instrument), the true Christian will renounce the love of woman and live alone for Christ. This will not be possible for all, of course, but if a man must marry, he should do so before he is baptized, so that the waters of baptism can wash away the sin of marriage. (Lietzmann, op. cit., vol. II, p 166f.) Notice how this repeats the similar emphasis of the Acts of Thomas.

Syrian asceticism was so extreme, it produced a reaction. Its greatest saint was the half-mad St. Simeon Stylites, in Roman Syria. He came from a family of wealthy farmers, but before he was twenty he began to mortify his body by wearing a tight cord around his waist which chafed until the blood ran. He had himself "buried" for ten years. He tried to keep from relaxing in sleep by standing straight and refusing to lie down at all. Finally he took to a pillar, 70 feet high, with a

platform not more than 2 yards square, where he stood in continual prayer under the burning desert sun for 30 years, until he died in 459 A.D. By that time the Western Church, alarmed at the extremism of the "Messaliana" had begun to outlaw it as a heresy. The more radical sects were condemned by the end of the fourth century by the bishops (who tended to be more practical) and by emperors (who were more worldly). The West regulated monasticism finally. Its monks were scholars.

But in the Eastern church the ascetics were too numerous, too powerful, and too popular to be condemned, and the Church of the East capitulated and made its peace with them. (Leitzmann, p. 169) In Syrian Christian history, therefore, the saints of the church were the unwashed, celibate hermits and anchorites who lived in the caves of the deserts or like St. Simeon on high pillars baking in the sun. It was, unfortunately, a distortion of the Gospel.

(3) The Church of the East's only social concern was charity.

The story of St. Thomas giving to the poor the money he was given to build a palace is characteristic of the nature of the Eastern Church's concept of Christian Social responsibility, which was a mixture of irritating irresponsibility and genuine compassion. In this it was not too different from the Western Church in the second and third centuries. But unlike the Church in the Roman Empire, the church in the Persian Empire remained a minority movement. When the Western Church became the church of the Empire its social concerns broadened, but in the East the Church's social gospel remained narrow, a pattern of over-emphasized alms-giving, which too often stressed the heavenly rewards which the giver would receive, rather than genuine Christian love and concern for the needs of the poor. (Findlay, p. 287)

(4) The Eastern Church was Sacramental. In general, emphasis on the sacraments obscured the importance of faith as the pre-requisite of salvation. Ascetic self-denial and compassionate charity were requirements for life as a Christian in this world, but the way to eternal life was through the sacraments. Baptism, in the Acts of Thomas, actually brings forgiveness of all sins committed to the past. This view was also common in parts of the Western Church. The Emperor Constantine, for example, postponed baptism until he was on his death-bed so that in one final act he could get rid of a whole life-time of guilt and go clean and sinless to heaven.

The Sacramental ritual of the Eastern Church, as shown in The Acts of Thomas, began with a double ceremony, the Anointing and the Baptism of the convert. The Anointing was with oil, on various parts of the body, and probably had for the more ignorant people a touch of superstition that it drove out evil spirits from the body. Baptism was by immersion, and was preceded by a sermon.

The Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) immediately followed baptism. The emphasis was on the bread. No wine was used, only water (ch. 121) and sometimes the use of the cup is not mentioned at all. The giving of the bread was accompanied by the words, "May this Eucharist be for your salvation and joy and the healing of your souls". (Ch. 158, quoted by Findlay, p. 291)

5. The Schools of The East.

The real glory of Edessa was neither King Abgar nor the Apostle Thomas. Abgar is partly legend, and Thomas's connection with Edessa is apocryphal. The ground of the continuing historical importance of Edessa

in the life of the Eastern Church was its great theological school, the School of Edessa. This was the greatest, but not the first of the Theological centers of the Eastern Church.

(1) Tatian's "School". The earliest of the Syrian theologians was Tatian, born in Mesopotamia about 110 A.D. (?) who was converted by reading the Scriptures and who journeyed to Rome where he became a pupil of Justin Martyr. He greatly admired the Old Testament for its antiquity, and his lost work on the solution of some difficulties in Old Testament interpretation ("Biblical Problems") marks him perhaps the first Christian Biblical Commentator. He also produced the famous Diatessaron, the first harmony of the four gospels. But after the death of Justin he left Rome, where he had been accused by Irenaeus of some heretical tendencies-- , such as his "encretitic" denunciation of marriage, and his Gnostic allusions to aeons above the heavens and the influence of the stars in the lives of men. (Nace and Piercy, op. cit. "Tatianus"). About 173 A.D. he returned to his native Mesopotamia and established his school in the 'Midst of the Rivers', which would be east of the Tigris.

Whether it was a real school or a semi-heretical schismatic church, his influence continued to be great in the East. The ascetic strain in his thought colored the theology of the East with an excitable, unstable longing for super-spirituality, and led to the Messalian movement. Even more important, it marked a conscious break with the Hellenizing of Christianity that produced Western Christendom. Tatian denounced Greek philosophy. He is an "Oriental Tertullian" says Carrington. Away with Rome and Athens, is his motto, and Back to the Bible, which is older and truer than anything the West has to offer. "Tatian reminds us of one point that Justin has forgotten," says Carrington. "Christianity was an

oriental religion, not a European one. He was destined to become the theologian of a Christian Syrianism, not of a Christian Hellenism. He reminds us that Syrian Christianity existed, and that it comprised a large proportion of all living Christians, who may not all have been loyal and devoted subjects of the Roman King." (Carrington, op. cit. vol.II, p. 164. See also pp. 161 ff., 207 ff.)

(2) The School of Edessa.

(2) The School of Edessa. The great school of the Eastern Church, its major theological center, was the School of Edessa. It is linked to the names of the first great teachers in Edessa, one a suspected heretic, Bardaisan; and the other the only "doctor" of the Catholic Church produced by the Church of the East, St. Ephrem (I. Aitwater, The Christian Churches of the East, Lond. 1961. Vol. 2, p. 170)

a) Bardarsan (155 - 222 A.D.) Bardesanes, as he was called in Latin, was born in Edessa. When he was twenty-five he passed by the church which Addai (of the 72) had built and hearing the bishop of Edesse explaining the Scriptures, he believed and asked to be baptized. It was around this church - the first church building mentioned in church history (P. Carrington, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 151) - that the School of Edessa probably formed, and its first scholar and Christian philosopher was Bardesanes. Nothing of his writings survives, unless he is the author of the beautiful Hymn of the Soul in the Acts of Thomas, which has been called "the most beautiful piece of literature produced by the early church". (Findlay, op. cit., p. 294) We do know he taught by composing hymns, and his "150 Psalms" were immensely popular in Edessa. One work by a disciple of his, Philip, still survives, Dialogue on Fate. It's strange ideas on heavenly powers and the creation of the world and the power of the stars seemed like Gnosticism to the next bishop of Edessa, who condemned him, but he is actually, like Tatian, whom he may have known, closer to orthodox Christianity than to the Gnostic heretics. His Christianity is simply Syrian, not Greek or Roman. (See Carrington, op. cit. p. 401 f., and Wace and Pierce, op. cit., "Bardaisan".)

b) Ephrem the Syrian (308-375). The real founder of the School Of Edessa was St. Ephrem, and to him at least, Bardesanes was a heretic. When he came to Edessa (c. 340 AD.) about three generations after Bardesanes had died he found the people still singing the "150 Psalms" of Bardesanes whose son had put them to the music of guitars. Alarmed at the heresy Ephrem thought he found in these Psalms, he composed a series of orthodox hymns to displace the heretical hymns, and trained young women in choruses to sing them. This must have been his "School of Christian Education"! On the great festivals Ephrem brought his choirs together for great concerts, and the whole city came to hear them and soon forgot Bardesanes. (Wace and Piercy, op. cit. "Ephrem the Syrian".)

His theological writings were extensive. He is said to have written more than three million lines. Six volumes of his works still survive, mostly sermons, Bible commentary and hymns. Some have been translated into English: H. Burgess, Select Metrical Hymns and Homilies of Ephraem Syrus (Lond. 1853, 2 vols.); J.B.Morris, Select Works of Ephraem Syrus (Oxford, 1847); and J. R. Harris, ed., Fragments of S. Ephraim (Cambr. U.) His method of Bible interpretation is midway between the extravagant allegorizing of Origen and the literal method of Theodore of Mopsuestia (which is similar to our modern method of Bible teaching). To Origen every Bible verse has three meanings; to Theodore only one (the literal). But to Ephrem and the Eastern Church, Bible passages have two meanings: "first, the literal interpretation, and secondly a spiritual one, which generally refers to the church." (ibid.)

The School of Edessa remained the great center of learning in the Church of the East almost up to the beginning of the 6th century. But in

the great Nestorian controversies of the 5th century the school sided with Nestorius and came under the condemnation of the Roman Church and the Roman Empire. Its last Rector, Barsumas (or Barsauma, 420-492) defended Nestorianism against the Roman Bishop of Edessa, and when he was expelled about 450 A.D., he took its professors and students with him across the border to Mesibis, 150 miles east of Edessa, in the Persian Empire. In 489 the Roman Emperor Zeno officially closed the School of Edessa and for all practical purposes the Church of the East ceased to exist in the Roman Empire. (See B.J.Kidd, A History of the Church to A.D. 461, Oxford 1922, Vol. III, p. 271) It had begun as a Syrian Church, but now it was the Persian Church.

An historical footnote should be added to this account of the Church in Edessa. Though its Nestorians had been driven into Persia, the city did not long remain loyal to Rome and the West. Fifty years later, (A.D. 541) Jacobus (or James) Baradaeus was ordained by the anti-Roman Monophysite party as Bishop of Edessa. Orthodox Roman Catholicism taught in the Creed of Chalcedon that Christ had two natures (divine and human) in one person. The Monophysites objected that one person could have only one nature, and that Christ's real nature was divine, and his humanity only an outer form. Under Jacobus Baradaeus another Eastern Church began to grow from Edessa as a base; not Nestorian, but Monophysite. It spread down into Africa, where it is today called the Coptic Church, and through Syria, where it was called Jacobite, after the name of its greatest missionary and leader, Jacobus Baradaeus, Bishop of Edessa. (See Wace and Piercy, *op. cit.*, "Jacobus Baradaeus")

But across the border, in Persia, it was the Nestorian Church of the East, the bearer of the original Edessene Christianity, that now began to spread across Asia.