

The Nestorians in Egypt

by

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When I visited the Coptic anchorites in the Inner Desert of the Wâdî al-Rayân, 45 km. south-west of the Oasis of Fayyûm, I was told by Abûnâ Mattâ al-Maskîn, the hegoumenos of this laura, which he and his followers had established there, that their principal authority for the spiritual life was neither St. Antony nor St. Macarius nor any of the other well-known Coptic Desert Fathers, but Isaac of Nineveh, the Nestorian bishop and ascete of the VIIth century¹. Apparently ignoring or indifferent to the anathemas pronounced against the Nestorians, the Coptic Desert Fathers of the Wâdî al-Rayân wholeheartedly follow the spiritual counsel of the Nestorian ascete².

The purpose of the following study is to throw some light upon the relationship of the Nestorians to the Copts in Egypt from the IVth to the XIIIth century. Following a brief note on « Nestorius in Egypt », we shall describe two distinct periods, which are clearly discernible. From the IVth century onwards, and especially during the VIth century, we discover a steady movement of Nestorian monks to the Egyptian Desert of Scetis. From the VIIIth to the XIIth century, Nestorians settled in Egypt, many of whom came to the Nile Valley during the 'Abbâsid Caliphate. Finally, we shall recall the several Coptic theologians of the XIIIth century employed for their treatises Nestorian source material.

A. Nestorius in Egypt

Any study of the Nestorians in Egypt cannot ignore the fact that Nestorius, after whom they are named³, spent the last years of his life in banishment in Egypt. At the same time it is quite evident from our sources that Nestorius' exile in Upper Egypt was of no importance whatsoever to the subsequent movements of his followers to the Land of the Nile.

¹ Meinardus, O., « The Hermits of the Wâdî al-Rayân », *Studia Orientalia Christiana : Collectanea*, XI, 1966.

² Isaac of Nineveh was consecrated bishop by the Catholicos George (660-680 A.D.). After five months he withdrew to a hermitage and later to the Monastery of Rabban Šabûr. For his literary contributions, cf. Graf, G., *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*. Città del Vaticano, 1944. Vol. I, pp. 436-442.

³ It is not within the scope of this study to discuss whether Nestorius was or was not a Nestorian.

Nestorius of Germanicia, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431 A.D., was condemned for heresy at the IIIrd Oecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. Immediately after his deposition, Nestorius withdrew into private life in his old Monastery of Euprepus near Antioch until 435 A.D., when the Emperor Theodosius II ordered his banishment to the Great Oasis of Hibis (al-Khargah) ⁴, where he was still living in 439 A.D. at the time when Socrates wrote his *Ecclesiastical History* ⁵. At al-Khargah he was taken prisoner by the Blemmyes, who deported him to Panopolis (Akhmîm), where they set him free (ca. 450 A.D.) and exposed him to further persecutions from Anbâ Shanûdah, the champion of Orthodoxy, who had also attended the Council of Ephesus. Nestorius was taken to Elephantine (Aswân), but returned again to Panopolis ⁶. In his *Bazaar of Heracleides* ⁷, Nestorius gives a full account of the Synod of Ephesus in 449 A.D., known as the Latrocinium, and seems to be aware of the proceedings at Chalcedon in 451 A.D. and the banishment of Dioscorus. According to Sa'id ibn Batrik, the Xth century Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, the banishment of Nestorius lasted for seven years, and Abû'l-Makarim informs us that Nestorius was buried in the city of Akhmîm, where it is said that when rain falls, it does not descend upon his tomb, because he was the cause of the Council of Chalcedon. ⁸

In Akhmîm, Nestorius is forgotten and no one knows the whereabouts of the tomb of the Vth century Patriarch of Constantinople.

B. The Nestorians in Egypt from the IVth to VIth Century

In spite of the condemnations of their theology, many of the great Nestorian Desert Fathers travelled to Egypt in an effort to learn from the « Old Men » of the Desert of Scetis (Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn) and of Sinai. It appears, therefore, that at least for the Nestorian monks the urge to emulate the Coptic Desert Fathers transcended the christological considerations, which led to the separation of the two churches.

According to Nestorian tradition, Mesopotamian monasticism had its origin in « the land of the Copts ». St. Eugenius, who had come from the island called Clysma (Qalûsmâ) ⁹, is believed to have gone with seventy

⁴ Fakhry, Ahmed, *The Necropolis of el-Bagawat in Kharga Oasis*. Cairo, 1955.

⁵ Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*. London, 1914, Bk. VII, Ch. 29-34, pp. 367-374.

⁶ Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History*. London, 1854, Bk. I, Ch. 7, pp. 263-267.

⁷ Bethune-Baker, J.F., *Nestorius and his Teaching*. Cambridge, 1908. For the full text of the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, which is the *Apologia* of Nestorius, cf. edition by P. Bedjan, Paris, 1910, or F. Nau, *Nestorius d'après des sources orientales*. 1911. Nestorius' fragments are collected in F. Loofs, *Nestoriana*. Halle, 1905.

⁸ Evetts, B.T.A., *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and neighbouring countries according to Abu Salih the Armenian*. Oxford, 1895, p. 239.

⁹ I.e. Suez.

followers to Nisibis, where he established a monastery (IVth century),¹⁰ and Milles, Bishop of Susa, is said to have proceeded to Egypt in order to learn from the monks there¹¹. In fact, it is interesting to note that for the later Nestorian historians, Egypt with its Desert of Scetis was the most important place where their Fathers could learn of the mysteries of the « angelic life », as the monks referred to the supreme state of ascetic discipline. Thus, for example, St. Eugenius is supposed to have returned to the Desert of Scetis, where he went to the Monastery of St. Pachomius¹². The legendary nature of this tradition is self-evident, since there was never a monastery dedicated to St. Pachomius in the Desert of Scetis. A similar tradition is associated with Rabban Sari, a disciple of St. Eugenius, who was among those who entered the Egyptian Desert with St. Eugenius¹³.

By the VIth century, we hear of many Nestorian monks, who travelled to Egypt in order to enter the desert life there. Abraham the Great of Kaškar (492-586 A.D.), one of the early reformers of Nestorian monasticism, went to Egypt to visit the holy anchorites of the desert, and « to be blessed by the monks »¹⁴, and Rabban Bar 'Idtâ, a disciple of the former, « went down to the city of Egypt and dwelt in the Desert of Scetis »¹⁵, so did Rabban Ḥaia of Kaškar, another contemporary of Mâr Abraham¹⁶. There is no question that the most desirable spiritual achievement of the VIth century Nestorian monks was a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to Egypt. Rabban Ḥormizd endeavored to follow the examples of the great Nestorian ascetes, who began their career by making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the Jordan, Sinai and the Desert of Scetis. At the age of twenty, he set out on a journey to Egypt, where he wished to become a monk. On the road, however, he met three monks of the Monastery of Bar 'Idtâ, who urged him to become a monk in their monastery, and he did so.¹⁷ Mâr Âbâ I, the future Catholicos of the East (540-552 A.D.), was a teacher in the School of Nisibis. In this

¹⁰ Addai Scher, *Chronique de Séert, Histoire Nestorienne Inédite. Patr. Orient.* IV, p. 25. It is generally agreed that the IVth century relationship of Egyptian monasticism with Mesopotamia is highly mythological. Cf. A. Vööbus, *Les messaliens et les réformes de Barçaua de Nisibe dans l'église perse.* Pinneberg, 1947.

¹¹ Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History.* London, 1955, Bk. II, Ch. 13, p. 71.

¹² *Chronique de Séert, Patr. Orient.* IV, p. 25.

¹³ *Chronique de Séert, Patr. Orient.* V, p. 251.

¹⁴ *Chronique de Séert, Patr. Orient.* VII, p. 41. Budge, E.A.W., *Book of the Governors.* London, 1902, Vol. II, Part I, p. 180.

¹⁵ Budge, E.A.W., *The Histories of Rabban Ḥormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar 'Idtâ.* London, 1902. Vol. II, Part I, p. 180.

¹⁶ *Chronique de Séert, Patr. Orient.* XIII, p. 133. Chabot, J.B., *Le livre de la Chasteté.* Rome, 1896, No. 28.

¹⁷ Budge, E.A.W., *The Histories of Rabban Ḥormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar 'Idtâ,* p. 117.

capacity he visited the Holy Land and Egypt¹⁸. A contemporary of the latter was Mâr Abraham of Bêth Nathpera (or Nepthar) in Adiabene¹⁹. He too went to Jerusalem and to Egypt, « where he visited with the saints, who inhabited the deserts ».²⁰ Some of the Nestorian monks lived as long as forty years²¹ in the Desert of Scetis. True, the Nestorian monks in Scetis were few in comparison to the large number of Coptic Desert Fathers. At the same time, it appears strange that there is no direct evidence of the attitude of the Coptic monks towards Nestorianism in general and their Nestorian « brethren » in particular. Monasticism in the Desert of Scetis remained whole-heartedly on the side of Cyril, and there is no trace of division in the early history of the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn monasteries on the subject of monasticism²².

The idealization of the ascetic life in the Egyptian Deserts was furthered by the rapid spread of Palladius' *Lausiaca History*, versions of which existed in Syriac from the Vth century onwards. So great was the demand for this guide to the ascetic life, that in the VIIth century the monk Anan-Îšô compiled a new translation²³. We hear of Rabban Yunân of Anbar, Mar Yuhannân of Banqal (or Qanqal)²⁴ and Rabban Cyprian, who followed in the steps of their masters. About the latter it is reported that he « worshipped at the graves of the righteous and holy Antonius and Pachomius and Evagrius and Arsenius and Macarius and Serapion »²⁵. From the sight of these holy men, who were there and from their labours he gained a good type and example for himself²⁶.

In fact, there was nothing more desirable than to imitate or even surpass the Coptic Desert Fathers in their ascetic practices, and when Rabban Ḥudhwi founded the Monastery of Bêth Ḥalé in the Desert of Hira²⁷, it became known as a place « where large numbers of monks settled as in the Desert of Egypt »²⁸.

¹⁸ Peeters, P., *Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie Orientales*. Brussels, 1951, Vol. II, p. 126.

¹⁹ Cf. Fiey, J.M., *Assyrie Chrétienne*. Beyrouth, 1965. Vol. I, pp. 191-217. Graf, G., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 442.

²⁰ Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.* VII, p. 80.

²¹ The 'forty-years' stand for a long but a complete period.

²² Evelyn-White, H., *The Monasteries of the Wâdî 'n-Naṭrûn*. New York, 1932, Vol. II, p. 233.

²³ Graf, G., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 301, 383.

²⁴ Chabot, J.B., *op. cit.*, No. 4.

²⁵ The Desert of Scetis was generally identified with the site of the emergence of Coptic monasticism. Indeed, it is most unlikely, that the Nestorian Fathers ever went as far south as Tabennesi or the Wâdî al-'Arabah.

²⁶ Budge, E.A.W., *Book of Governors*. Vol. II, pp. 585-6, 615.

²⁷ Fiey, J.M., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 102.

²⁸ Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.* XIII, p. 272.

After the Arab Conquest in the VIIth century, the enthusiasm as well as the opportunities of the Nestorian monks to retain their spiritual contacts with the Coptic Desert Fathers decreased, and a new era of Coptic - Nestorian relations emerged with the concentration of Islamic power and prestige in Baghdâd.

C. The Nestorians in Egypt from the VIIIth to XIIth Century

With the establishment of the 'Abbâsid Caliphate in Baghdâd in 750 A.D., large numbers of Mesopotamians invaded and remained in Egypt. True, large portions of the 'Abbâsid army, which had pursued Marwân II into Upper Egypt, returned after their victory to the East; yet, between 750 and 812 A.D. the governors of Egypt came as a rule from the East, and a fair proportion of them were Persians (Baghdâd and Mesopotamia), like Abû 'Aûn and Harthamat ibn A'yan and others. According to al-Kindî, there were frequent arrivals of troops during the 'Abbâsid Caliphate, and these troops in Egypt would have formed colonies like the Khurâsânian colonies at Qairawân Baghâyah in North Africa²⁹.

In comparison to the Jacobites and the other Christian communions, the Nestorians were highly respected by the 'Abbâsid caliphs. And although the Nestorian Catholicos no longer accompanied the Persian armies as in the days of Chosroes³⁰, the Nestorian Catholicos, who had the right of residence in Baghdâd, was the recognized official head of all Christians in the Empire³¹. During the middle of the VIIIth century, a great number of Nestorians migrated from Babylon and from Assur to Egypt, and it was at this time, that Mâr Âbâ II (741-752 A.D.) appointed a bishop to have charge of the Nestorian residents in Egypt³². The fact that the Nestorian community in Egypt was not only numerous but also vocal is reflected in a Synodical Letter, which Murqus II, the 49th Patriarch of Alexandria (799-819 A.D.), sent to Cyriacus, Patriarch of Antioch, reminding him of all the heretics ... and of the impure Council of Chalcedon, as being the cause of doubt throughout the world, and abjured the sect of Nestorius, composed of the new Jews³³.

²⁹ Guest, Arthur R., 'Relations between Persia and Egypt under Islam up to the Fatimid period' in T.W. Arnold and R.A. Nicholson (eds.) *A Volume of Oriental Studies presented to E.G. Browne*. Cambridge, 1922, p. 166.

³⁰ Catholicos Sabaryešû I (596-604 A.D.) accompanied the Persian Army to pray for its success. Vine, Aubrey R., *The Nestorian Churches*. London, 1937, pp. 67, 126.

³¹ Hitti, Philip K., *History of the Arabs*. London, 1963, p. 355.

³² Ishaq Armala, *As-Surjân fi l-quṭr al-misrî*, quoted by Strothmann, R., *Die Koptische Kirche in der Neuzeit*. Tübingen, 1932, pp. 64-65.

³³ Evetts, B.T.A., 'The History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church', *Patr. Orient.* X, p. 409.

A noteworthy story of the Nestorian community in Egypt in the early part of the IXth century is recorded by Bar Hebraeus : « A certain man of the Nestorians, who went to Egypt saith concerning this Gabriel, a physician :³⁴ 'The Jacobites make a mock of Nestorius in Egypt, and they heap stones on his grave, and they say that rain never falleth upon it, and that it is burnt up by wrath. 'And this Nestorian took a letter from the Caliph to the Governor of Egypt asking him to send to him the bones of Nestorius in a coffin to Baghḏād, as he wished to bury them in the church of Khôke. One of the Nestorian monks, wishing to remove disgrace from the people of his district and show that it was not the grave of Nestorius which was mocked and stoned by the Jacobites said : 'One of the holy Apostles said to me in a dream of the night ; This is a mistake. The bones of Nestorius are not there, and, moreover, no man knoweth his grave. And in this wise Gabriel the physician delayed in bringing the bones from Egypt³⁵.

Theological as well as non-theological factors led to increasing tensions between the two communities, so much so that the word « Nestorian » was considered a derogatory term, which the Copts even employed in their denunciations of the Chalcedonians³⁶. The Nestorians were condemned for splitting the Person of Christ, an accusation, which in the eyes of the Monophysitic Copts also applied to the Byzantines.

An additional reason for the ill-feeling of the Copts towards the Nestorians was due to the many Nestorians, who were engaged in the service of the oppressive government. Thus, for example, Lazarus, « a malignant heretic of the Nestorian sect », came to Egypt to demolish the Church of St. Menas at Mareotis (Maryût).³⁷ He robbed the church of its marbles and unequalled pavement, which were used for the construction of al-Mu'tasim's Gausaq al-Khâqanî in Samarra³⁸. It is impossible for us to estimate the influence of the Nestorians in the local 'Abbâsid government in Fustât. We know that in the days of al-'Azîz (975-996 A.D.), one of the wazîrs was Ya'qûb ibn Killis, a converted Baghḏād Jew, while another one was Ibn Nestorius, a Christian³⁹. At the same time, we hear that 'Isa, the son of Nestorius, was killed in Egypt, and that there was appointed in his place a Copt⁴⁰.

³⁴ Gabriel ibn Bakhtishû' (d. 830 A.D.) was the court physician of Harûn ar-Rashîd, al-Ma'mûn and the Barmakids.

³⁵ Budge, E. A. W., *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l-Faraj, commonly as Bar Hebraeus*. London, 1932, p. 124.

³⁶ Already in the Vth century, the Chalcedonians were called Nestorians by the Copts. Apophthegm. Patr. Phocas I, quoted by H. Evelyn White, *op. cit.*, II, p. 222.

³⁷ Evetts, B. T. A., *op. cit.*, *Patr. Orient.* X, pp. 512-514.

³⁸ Creswell, K. A. C., *Early Muslim Architecture*. London, 1940, Vol. II, p. 231.

³⁹ Lane-Poole, Stanley, *The Story of Cairo*. London, 1906, p. 122.

⁴⁰ Budge, E. A. W., *op. cit.*, p. 180.

There is no doubt that many Mesopotamians settled in and around Cairo, which is illustrated by the story of a partisan of al-Munṭasir, who had fled to Egypt in disguise, but finding that there were so many people of Baghḏâd in Fustât, did not feel safe from being detected in the town⁴¹. Among the Persians, who visited or settled in Egypt, we shall note only a few. Abû Nuwâs, a poet at the court of Harûn ar-Rashîd, visited Egypt in 805 A.D. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Hishâm, a native of Basrah and the author of a well-known *v i t a* of the Prophet, died at Fustât in 833 A.D. Abû ‘l-Hasan Alî al-Mas‘ûdî, the Herodotus of the Arabs, and a native of Baghḏâd, died in Fustât in 956 A.D.⁴²

It is in this context that we should place the large Nestorian monastery south of Cairo and situated in the vicinity of al-Adawiyah or Munyat as-Sudân. The monastery contained a large church, of which the architectural features remained visible until the XIIIth century. The apse, however, was turned into a *Ḳiblah*, and above it there rose a lofty minaret, and around it, the chambers which belonged to the monks were inhabited by Muslims. According to Abû‘l-Makarim, this change took place during the caliphate of al-Hâkim (996-1021)⁴³. Numerous Nestorians, including monks, must have followed in the general migration of Mesopotamians from the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris to the banks of the Nile, and the Nestorian settlement in Cairo was unquestionably an important community, which, as we have pointed out, even had its own bishop. Amr ibn Mattâ ibn Behnam⁴⁴ writing in the XIVth century informs us that the Catholicos ‘Awdîšô‘ (963-968 A.D.) consecrated Solomon as bishop of Egypt. The Catholicos Yuhanna ibn Nâzûk (1012-1020) promoted the Bishop of Egypt to the archiepiscopacy of Persia, and the Catholicos Elias I (1028-1049) transferred the Metropolitan of Hulwân to the See of Egypt. Sawrîsô Zambûr III (1064-1072) consecrated John, Bishop of Hadîta, to the archiepiscopacy of Egypt, and the Catholicos ‘Awdîšô‘b. al-‘Arid (1075-1090) transferred Mark, the Archbishop of Egypt, to the See of Damascus.⁴⁵

During the IXth century, a Coptic Patriarch had publicly reaffirmed the condemnation of the heresy of the Nestorians⁴⁶. About two hundred years later, the Nestorian influence in Egypt was still strong enough to cause

⁴¹ *El-Mukafa‘ah*, quoted by A.R. Guest, *loc. cit.*

⁴² Guest, A. R., *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁴³ Evetts, B. T. A., *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt, etc.*, p. 139.

⁴⁴ Graf, G., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 216.

⁴⁵ Aziz, Pierre, *Statistique inédite de l’Ancienne Église Chaldéo-Nestorienne*. Beyrouth, 1909, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *Cf.* Note 33.

Anbâ Sâwirûs ibn al-Muḳaffa', Bishop of al-Ashmunain, to compose a refutation of the Nestorians⁴⁷.

For the size of the Nestorian community in Egypt during the XIth century, we have certain data provided by the *Statistique Inédite de l'Ancienne Église Chaldéo-Nestorienn*⁴⁸. It should be noted, however, that this text should not be considered as a reliable and accurate source of information, in so far as at least the data pertaining to the numbers of families in the respective localities appear to be exaggerated. According to the *Statistique Inédite*, there resided in 1015 in Cairo a metropolitan with three suffragan bishops, forty-seven priests, 306 clerks and 7,300 families⁴⁹. For Alexandria, the same source lists a Nestorian metropolitan, two suffragan bishops, twenty-three priests, eighty clerks and 4,025 families. One bishop, fifteen priests and forty-five clerks are also listed for the Fayyûm, though in this case the author confesses that the greatest number of Nestorians of this Province adhere to the Coptic rite after having surrendered their Nestorian tenets, while the remaining Nestorians had embraced al-Islâm⁵⁰. For the City of Rashîd, a bishop, twelve priests and thirty-six clerks are assigned. Moreover, the name of the Nestorian church is given as that of SS. Peter and Paul.

The XIIth century marks a definite turning point in Nestorian-Coptic relations in so far as the Nestorian communities in Egypt and especially in Cairo decrease in numbers and finally even disappear. This development is clearly reflected by the events which are recorded in connection with the Nestorian Monastery of St. George. During the XIIth century, the Nestorian Monastery of St. George in the district of al-Habash⁵¹ near the Well of the Steps was restored by Shaikh Abû'l-Faḍâ'il, the Nestorian, who was known as the physician of the tribe of al-'Azamîyah. It was renewed in an excellent style, « and there were here many Nestorian monks ». When al-Amir (1102-1130) was informed of this restoration, he issued a decree against Abû'l-Faḍâ'il and seized all his money; and the decree remained in force until the Caliph had built a mosque within the monastery⁵². With the seizure of the

⁴⁷ Aziz Suryal Atiya, *Yassâ 'Abd al-Masîh*, O.H.E., KHS., Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*. Cairo, 1948, Vol. II, ii, p. 164.

⁴⁸ Cf. note 45.

⁴⁹ For Cairo, four Nestorian churches are listed: The Church of St. Moses the Ethiopian, the Church of St. Elias, the Church of the Twelve Apostles and the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin.

⁵⁰ Aziz, P., *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵¹ Casanova, P., *Essai de reconstruction topographique de la ville d'Al-Foustât ou Misr* in: *Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire*, t. I, p. xxvi.

⁵² At the Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai, and at the Monastery of St. Menas in the Desert of Mareotis mosques were built within the monastery walls, and the monks remained in the respective monasteries.

monastery by the Muslims, however, the monks disappeared⁵³. The land, which was attached to the monastery was farmed by Abû'l-Barakât ibn Kitâmâh, the Jacobite scribe. The monastery was empty and deprived of liturgies and prayers. One of the stewards of Kitâmâh lived there in a garden, but the priest Yûsûf, the Nestorian, gained possession of it, and let the land to Muslims, and sold the upper story of the church at Misr, including the bake-house, and let most of the property with which the Nestorian churches⁵⁴ were endowed at low rents to the Muslims for long periods. There are no Nestorians with him, but they live in the East, and in Egypt there are few in number and of low class.

The Nestorian Monastery came into the possession of the Copts during the patriarchate of Anbâ Murqus ibn Zar'ah (1166-1189), who made it patriarchal and dedicated the church in it to St. Philotheus of Antioch. The church was solemnly opened and the liturgy was celebrated in it on the 16th of Amšîr 899 A.M. (1181). This change of ownership took place because no Nestorians were left in Misr, except one or two men⁵⁵. This information is of interest in so far that the monastery at Birket al-Habaš, immediately east of al-Fuṣṭât, must have survived the burning of al-Fuṣṭât in 1168⁵⁶.

According to the report of Niccolo of Poggibonsi (1346), the Nestorians still owned a church in the XIVth century in Damietta. Next to the Church of the Franks in Damietta, so we are told, there was the Church of St. Mary, which was held by the Nestorians⁵⁷. The Nestorian settlement in Damietta, however, consisted probably largely of merchants, and this community ought to be seen within the context of the Nestorian diasporae throughout the Middle East. For example, in Famagusta (Cyprus) Nestorians settled as refugees from the Holy Land during the Lusignan dynasty⁵⁸, and the Nestorians in Cyprus are mentioned in the correspondence of the XIIIth century Popes Honorius III and Gregory IX⁵⁹. During the XIIIth and XIVth century, there were so many Nestorians in Cyprus, that the island constituted a diocese of the Nestorian Church depending upon the Nestorian archbishop

⁵³ Evetts, B.T.A., *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt, etc.*, p. 134.

⁵⁴ These could have been the Nestorian churches mentioned in the *Statistique Inédite*, cf. note 49.

⁵⁵ Evetts, B.T.A., *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁵⁶ Lane-Poole, Stanley, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*. London, 1925, p. 184.

⁵⁷ Bellorini, T. and Hoade, E. (eds.), *Fra Niccolo of Poggibonsi: A Voyage Beyond the Seas*. Jerusalem, 1945, p. 122.

⁵⁸ Jeffery, George, *A Description of the Historic Monuments of Cyprus*. Cyprus, 1918, p. 103.

⁵⁹ Mas Latrie, *Histoire de l'île de Chypre sous le règne des princes de la maison de Lusignan*. Paris, 1855, Vol. III, pp. 655 f.

of Jerusalem⁶⁰, and travellers recorded the presence of the Nestorians in Cyprus still in the middle of the XVIth century⁶¹.

D. Nestorian Theologians in Coptic Theology

We may assume that by the end of the XIIth century the Nestorian community in Egypt had decreased to a small minority with no more than a few merchants in Alexandria, Damietta, Rašîd and Cairo. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the Nestorian theological literary influence upon the Coptic theologians of the XIIIth century was quite remarkable. Several of the mediaeval Coptic theologians were not only acquainted with but also relied upon and employed Nestorian sources in their treatises. As-Safî abû'l-Fadâ'il ibn al-'Assâl, the eldest of the three brothers (XIIIth century), compiled a collection of excerpts of patristic writings, in which he included the thirty-five chapters on monastic life by Isaac of Nineveh⁶². Al-Mu'taman abû Ishâq Ibrahîm ibn al-'Assâl, the younger step-brother of as-Safî and of Hibatallah, wrote a monumental *summa theologica* for the Coptic Church entitled *Mağmû' usûl ad-dîn wa masmû mahsûl al-yaqîn*⁶³, in which he appealed to many Nestorian theologians. Foremost among these theologians were the IXth century theologian Hunain ibn Ishâq⁶⁴, Israel, Bishop of Kaškar (IXth century),⁶⁵ Abû'l-Farağ 'Abdallah ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib al-'Iraqî, who served as patriarchal secretary under Yuhanna ibn Nazuk (XIth century)⁶⁶, his contemporary Elias of Nisibis, Metropolitan of Mosul⁶⁷, Yuḥannâ al-Anṭakî, a pupil of Yuwanis ibn Butlan (XIth century)⁶⁸, the XIIth century systematic theologian Mârî ibn Sulaimân⁶⁹, and the XIIIth century apologist Ammar al-Basrî⁷⁰. Ibn Kâtib Qaisar, one of the most important Coptic exegetical scholars used for his « Commentary of the Apocalypse » the « Paradise of Christianity » by the XIth century Nestorian philosopher Abû'l-Farağ 'Abdallah ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib al-'Iraqî⁷¹, who also provided source material for the compilation of Canon Law by the Coptic theologian *Farağallah al-Akhmîmî* (XIIIth - XIVth century)⁷².

⁶⁰ Jeffery, George, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁶¹ Cobham, C.D., *Excerpta Cypria*. Cambridge, 1908, pp. 143, 148, etc.

⁶² Graf, G., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 397.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 128.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-202.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 163, 381.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 427 ff.

With the decline of Nestorianism throughout the East, also the Nestorian presence and influence in Egypt decreased and finally disappeared. To-day, there are no Nestorians in Egypt, although a Chaldaean Catholic Patriarchate in Cairo was founded in 1891 by H.B. Elias Aboulyyounam thanks to the financial assistance of Mme. Helene al-Baghḍadiyah and Veuve Antoine Bey 'Abd al-Masīh of Baghḍād⁷³. The Chaldaean Catholic Patriarchate is situated at 43 Sharia Kamel Sidki Pasha at Faggalah, Cairo. One enters the Patriarchate through a court-yard in which is situated the Cathedral Church of St. Antony the Great. This church, which is artistically and architecturally uninteresting, was constructed in 1896. Since 1960, monks of the Order of the Preaching of St. Mark inhabit the Patriarchate. In addition to this church, there is the Chaldaean Church of Our Lady of Fatima at Sharia Nūzha in Heliopolis. Though the church is served by priests of the Chaldaean rite, Divine Liturgies are celebrated alternately according to the Latin, Chaldaean and Coptic rite⁷⁴.

⁷³ Meinardus, O., *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern*. Cairo, 1965, p. 409.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

A Note on the Nestorians in Jerusalem

We have mentioned that in the VIth century many Nestorian monks travelled across the Fertile Crescent in order to visit the Coptic monks of the Desert of Scetis. As important as this « monastic school » was for the Nestorian Fathers, yet, in many ways, Jerusalem with its Holy Places surpassed in spiritual significance the Egyptian Desert, and we may be justified in assuming that those monks, who entered the Desert of Scetis also visited the Holy Land in general, and Jerusalem in particular. About several of the Nestorian Fathers it is explicitly stated that they went to Jerusalem. At the same time, however, there must have been many anonymous monks, whose supreme hope and expectation was fulfilled, when, after long wanderings across the desert, they could behold the sacred sites of the Holy City.

We are told about Rabban Simeon of Kaškar, that he visited the banks of the River Jordan¹. Rabban Ḥaia of Kaškar, a contemporary of Mâr Abraham, went to Jerusalem, and upon his return built a monastery in the vicinity of Kaškar². Rabban Bar 'Idtâ is said to have wandered about the Mount of Olives³, and concerning Rabban Cyprian it is recorded that he went to Jerusalem and worshipped in all the Holy Places, including the place where Christ was baptized in the River Jordan, the Temple, Golgotha, the Holy Sepulchre, the Upper Room and the Mount of Olives⁴. Rabban Abraham of Bêth Nathpera went to Jerusalem on his way to Egypt⁵, and Mâr Aba visited the Holy City in the course of his wanderings through the Middle East, Greece and Constantinople⁶. Rabban 'Ânân Îšo', the VIIth century translator and editor of Palladius' *Lausiac History*, went first to Jerusalem and from there to Egypt⁷, and Rabban Ukâma, one of the contemporaries of Îšô'yaw at the School of Nisibis, went with Mâr Baba'i from Nisibis to Jerusalem⁸.

From the correspondence of Îšô'yaw III of Adiabene with the Nestorian community in Jerusalem we may infer that in the middle of the VIIth

¹ Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.* XIII, p. 127.

² Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.* XIII, p. 133.

³ Budge, E. A. W., *The Histories of Rabban Hôrmîzd the Persian and Rabban Bar 'Idtâ'*. London, 1902, Vol. II, p. 180.

⁴ Budge, E. A. W., *Book of the Governors*. London, 1902. Vol. II, p. 584.

⁵ Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.*, VII, p. 80.

⁶ Kidd, B. J., *The Churches of Eastern Christendom*. London, 1927, p. 93.

⁷ Budge, E. A. W., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 174-175.

⁸ Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.*, XIII, p. 262.

century a distinct Nestorian community existed in the Holy City⁹. In fact, Gibbon speaking of the period from 638 A.D. to 1099 refers to the many pilgrims from the East and West, who continued to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and mentions that the Greeks, Latins, Nestorians, etc. maintained their chapels, their clergy and the poor of their respective communities¹⁰. Prior to 739 A.D., the Nestorians possessed a monastery on the Mount of Olives¹¹.

For that matter, as pointed out above, the Nestorians seem to have held a privileged position among the Christian 'nations' during the first few centuries after the Arab Conquest. Some fifteen years after the capture of Damascus, we find a Nestorian bishop writing: «These Arabs, to whom God has given in our time the dominion fight not against the Christian religion, nay, rather they defend our faith, they revere our priests and saints, and they make gifts to our churches and monasteries»¹².

In the beginning of the IXth century, the Catholicos Timothy I (778-819 A.D.) established in Jerusalem a Nestorian episcopal See, which was within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Metropolitan of Damascus¹³. It was during this time, that Nestorian monks lived in the Jordan Valley, as is evident from the discovery of the ruins of a Nestorian hermitage between Jericho and the River Jordan. This site must have been occupied by Nestorian monks about the IXth century, as can be tentatively deduced from the inscription of the mosaic. Owing to its size and secluded situation, it could not have been more than a hermitage¹⁴.

It was a most unfortunate coincidence that in the demolition of the famous Shrine of St. Menas in Mareotis in the IXth century as well as in the demolition of the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem (1009) during the reign of al-Hâkim, the Nestorians played decidedly unsavoury roles. In the case of the latter, a Nestorian Christian, known as Ibn Šîrîn, wrote the letter for the demolition of the Church to the wâlî. The chronicler informs us that Ibn Šîrîn died suffering from intense guilt on account of his deed¹⁵.

As H.C. Luke correctly pointed out, our knowledge of the Nestorians in Jerusalem is by far scantier than that of any of the other Christian com-

⁹ Chronique de Séert, *Patr. Orient.*, XIII, p. 335.

¹⁰ Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London, n.d., Vol. IV, p. 184.

¹¹ Baramki, D.C., and Stephan, St.N., 'A Nestorian Hermitage between Jericho and the Jordan', *QDAP*, IV, 1935, p. 84.

¹² De Goeje, M.J., *Mémoire sur la conquête de la Syrie*. Leyden, 1900, p. 84.

¹³ Chabot (ed.), *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*. Paris, 1905, p. 552.

¹⁴ Baramki and Stephan, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁵ Aziz Suryal Atiya, Yassa 'Abd al-Masih, O.H.E. KHS-Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*. Cairo, 1945, Vol. II, ii, p. 194.

munities in the Holy City¹⁶, and yet, many of the mediaeval pilgrims noticed their presence and listed them among the 'nations'. who were represented in Jerusalem and especially in the Church of the Resurrection. Johann von Würzburg (1165) merely listed the Nestorians as one of the many groups in Jerusalem¹⁷, while Jacques de Vitry (1180), who also noticed the Nestorians, discussed in detail their heretical tenets¹⁸. Burchard of Mount Sion (1285) mentions among the various communions in Jerusalem « the Nestorians and the Jacobites, and the like are so named after certain heretics, who were once their chiefs¹⁹».

The *Statistique Inédite de l'ancienne Église Chaldéo-Nestorienne* mentions²⁰, that in the latter part of the XIIIth century the Nestorians had a metropolitan in Jerusalem²¹ named Peter of Bêth Garmaï²² with four suffragan bishops : Mâr Gabriel of Aleppo, Mâr Michael of Persia, Mâr Yuhannân of Amed (Diyarbakir), and Mâr Ya'qûb of Nisibis. Four Nestorian churches are listed for Jerusalem : The Church of St. James the Apostle, which to-day belongs to the Armenians, the Church of St. John the Baptist, the Church of the Transfiguration and the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin²³. Amr ibn Mattâ ibn Behnam²⁴ relates that Abraham, Metropolitan of Jerusalem, assisted in the consecration of the Catholicos Yahwâlâha III in 1281²⁵.

Niccolo of Poggibonsi (1345-1347) is the first European traveller to provide us with the exact data as to the sites of the Nestorians in the Church of the Resurrection. Speaking of the northern part of the Church, he says : « At the altar, where Christ appeared to St. Mary Magdalene the Georgians celebrate, at the Prison of Christ celebrate the Christians of the Girdle, at the altar, which is behind the apse²⁶ celebrate the Nestorians. On Olive Saturday, one hour after Vespers, all the congregations of Christians collect

¹⁶ Luke, H.C., 'The Christian Communities in the Holy Sepulchre' in C.R. Ashbee (ed.), *Jerusalem 1920-1922*. London, 1924, p. 50.

¹⁷ Tobler, T., *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII, IX, XII et XV*. Leipzig, 1874, p. 189.

¹⁸ Jacques de Vitry, 'The History of Jerusalem', *PPTS*, XI, pp. 77-79.

¹⁹ Burchard of Mount Sion, 'A Description of the Holy Land', *PPTS*, XII, p. 104.

²⁰ Aziz, Pierre, *Statistique inédite de l'ancienne Église Chaldéo-Nestorienne*. Beyrouth, 1909, p. 11. The author of this document is unknown. The document was acquired by P. Aziz from a Jacobite, who found it in a Maronite church in Damascus and copied it there.

²¹ Cf. Chabot, *op. cit.*, p. 552.

²² Bêth Garmaï, a province south of Adiabene.

²³ Aziz, P., *loc. cit.*

²⁴ Cf. 'Nestorians in Egypt', Note 44.

²⁵ Aziz, P., *loc. cit.* Yahwâlâha III was catholicos from 1283-1317.

²⁶ This would appear to be the present Chapel of the Division of the Raiment, which is the property of the Armenians.

in the piazza afront of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on one side the Greeks, the Christians of the Girdle and the Nestorians, and on the other side the Nubians, the Jacobites, the Georgians and the Latins»²⁷. Whereas during the XIVth century only few of the pilgrims referred to the Nestorians in their lists of communions represented in Jerusalem in general, or in the Holy Sepulchre in particular, *e.g.* Guilielm de Boldensele (1336), Ludolph von Suchem (1348), Philippe de Mézières (1384)²⁸, during the XVth and XVIth century they were almost always included in the reports of the Western pilgrims²⁹. The majority of the pilgrims do not elaborate upon the Nestorians, except for their heretical beliefs³⁰. The Nestorians are mentioned as the seventh group in the so-called Letter of Guarantee³¹, which is attributed to 'Umar, the second caliph, but which actually ought to be assigned to the Mameluk period³².

By the beginning of the XVIth century, the Nestorians were still in Jerusalem, although it is questionable whether there was a permanent community³³. With respect to the Church of the Resurrection, certain property alterations must have taken place during the XIVth and XVth century. The altar behind the apse was acquired by the Armenians, while the Nestorians possessed an altar to the left of the Holy Sepulchre behind the columns³⁴, or as a Latin pilgrim says: « They officiate near the door of our (Latin) chapel to the right as you enter »³⁵. Moreover, Francesco Suriano (1516) explicitly states, that these Nestorians « who live on the borders of the territory of the Sultan Asambeck ... have no monastery or any habitation in Jerusalem »³⁶. Throughout the XVIth century and probably until the middle of the XVIIth century, the Nestorians maintained this site in the Church of the Resurrection. In 1582, 'Enanišô, the Metropolitan of Mardin, joined with those who accompanied him in the Easter celebrations in Jerusalem³⁷. Bernardino Amico's plan of the church (1593) indicates that the « Nestorian Chapel was called of the Magdalene, but that they have no

²⁷ Bellorini, T. and Hoade, E., *Fra Niccolo of Poggibonsi. A Voyage Beyond the Seas.* Jerusalem, 1945, p. 22.

²⁸ Meinardus, O., *The Copts in Jerusalem.* Cairo, 1960, pp. 19-20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24, 26-28.

³⁰ *E.g.* Felix Fabri, 'The Book of Wanderings', Vol. II, *PPTS* X, p. 388.

³¹ Themelis, T., *Les Grecs aux Lieux Saints.* Jerusalem, 1921, p. 7.

³² Scholz, A., *Reise in die Gegend zwischen Alexandrien und Parätonium, etc.* Leipzig, 1922, p. 293. Scholz writing in 1820 already questioned the authenticity of the Omarite Covenant.

³³ Suriano, Francesco, *Treatise on the Holy Land.* Jerusalem, 1949, p. 77.

³⁴ De Khitrovo, B., *Itinéraires russes en Orient.* Geneva, 1889. Vol. I, pp. 172-173.

³⁵ This site corresponds to the Latin Sacristy, *cf.* Luke, H.C., *op. cit.*, p. 50.

³⁶ Suriano, F., *op. cit.*, p. 91.

³⁷ Rücker, A., 'Ein alter Handschriftenkatalog des ehemaligen nestorianischen Klosters in Jerusalem', *Oriens Christianus*, XXVIII, 1931, p. 96.

services in it»³⁸. It was situated between the Column of the Flagellation and the quarters of the Nestorians³⁹.

At Easter 1697, the Reverend Henry Maundrell, Chaplain to the Factory of the English Levant Co. in Aleppo, visited Jerusalem and mentions that the Nestorians were among those who had forsaken their quarters⁴⁰.

The history of the Nestorian community in Jerusalem during the XVIIth and XVIIIth century is rather nebulous, although the Nestorian manuscripts belonging to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Sepulchre⁴¹ and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem⁴², which were studied by J.B. Chabot and A. Rucker, provide us with some information. According to Rucker, the Syriac manuscripts of the Library of the Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Sepulchre belonged to the Nestorian Monastery of St. Mary, which was situated in the vicinity of the Monastery of St. Demetrius⁴³. Most of these manuscripts are to be assigned from the end of the XVIth to the beginning of the XVIIIth century, and were written upon the order of the Catholicos either in Alqôš⁴⁴ or in the Monastery of Rabban Hôrmîzd for the Monastery in Jerusalem.

The general penury of the Nestorians in the XVIIth century reflected also upon their holdings in the Holy City. Thus, for example, in 1614 the Nestorian Monastery of St. Mary was without resident monks and priests. The Syriac Codex No. 3 had to be pawned for five gold darics to the Armenian Metropolitan. The Nestorian Metropolitan David bought back the Codex for the Monastery, but in 1614, the Codex as well as several other manuscripts were turned over to the Franks, since the Nestorians had neither priests nor deacons in their monastery in Jerusalem⁴⁵. In fact, Rabban Joseph, the priest and pure monk, who gave the History of the Patriarchs of the Orient to the Church of the Chaldaeans in Jerusalem, and who died in Jerusalem and was buried in the year 1925 of the Greeks (1614 A.D.)⁴⁶ may well have been the last resident monk of the monastery.

³⁸ Amico, Bernardino, *Plans of the Sacred Edifices of the Holy Land*, Jerusalem, 1953, p. 88.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Maundrell, M.H., *Reisebeschreibung nach dem Gelobten Lande, etc.* Hamburg, 1737 p. 95.

⁴¹ Rucker, A., *op. cit.*, pp. 90 ff.

⁴² Chabot, J.B., 'Notices sur les manuscrits syriaques conservés dans la Bibliothèque du Patriarcat grec orthodoxe de Jerusalem', *Journal Asiatique*, IX, ser. t. 3, 1894, pp. 92-132.

⁴³ Rucker, A., *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴⁴ From 1551-1804, Alqôš was the seat of the Nestorian Catholicos. Fiey, J.M., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 390.

⁴⁵ Rucker, A., *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁴⁶ Vosté, I., «Notes sur les manuscrits syriaques de Diarbekir et autres localités d'Orient», *Le Muséon*, L, 1937, p. 350.

At this time, reference is made to a letter (1616) by the Nestorian Catholicos Elias VIII (1591-1617) to Pope Paul V (1605-1621), in which he mentions Timothy, who served as archbishop of Jerusalem and Amed (Diyarbakir), moreover, we are informed that the Chaldaean clergy resided in the Monastery of St. James⁴⁷, which, of course, belonged even then to the Armenians⁴⁸. In 1669, we hear of a hegoumenos Bacchus, who came to Jerusalem and wrote two hymns, which are included in Codex No. 2. Apparently he is the same person, who in 1683 also entered his name in Codex No. 36⁴⁹. In 1717, a certain Kanûn, a priest of the village of Tell kaif near Mosul, came to Jerusalem upon the order of the Catholicos Elias XI Marawgin (1700-1722) to arrange the affairs of the Nestorian community. He remained for four years in the Holy City and served at the Holy Sepulchre and in the Monastery of St. Mary, which is the Church of the Nestorians. Every day, so he tells us, he celebrated the Divine Liturgy and said the Offices. In addition he established a catalogue of the manuscripts of the Nestorian Monastery in Jerusalem⁵⁰. In 1724 and again in 1724 several Syriac codices were newly bound by the Priest George, the spiritual son of the Priest Daniel of Alqôš, who was the sacristan of the church in Jerusalem⁵¹. According to Chabot, these manuscripts belonged to the Syrian Nestorian Monastery of St. Mary Magdalene in Jerusalem, which was situated in the north-eastern part of the city, not far from the gate, now known as Herod's Gate⁵². So far as I know, the Monastery of St. Mary Magdalene situated south of Bab as-Sahira (Herod's Gate), and which is now the Qadassiyah School for Girls, was from the IXth to the XVIth century in the hands of the Jacobites⁵³. It is questionable that the Nestorians would have acquired the site in the XVIIth century, at a time, when their power and influence was on the decline.

With regard to the Nestorian Monastery of St. Mary, which was situated north of the Church of St. Demetrius, we are informed that its services came to an end in the middle of the XVIIIth century⁵⁴. It is impossible for

⁴⁷ Aziz, P., *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Cf. the reports of the XVIIth century pilgrims, e.g. Sandys, George, *Relation of a Journey*. London, 1632.

⁴⁹ Rücker, A., *op. cit.*, p. 96. Chabot, J.B., *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90. *Revue Biblique*, XLI, 1932, p. 318. Fiey, J.M., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 361.

⁵¹ Chabot, J.B., *op. cit.*, pp. 102, 119.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵³ Moore, Elinor A., *The Ancient Churches of Old Jerusalem*. Beirut, 1961, p. 113. Meinardus, O., *The Copts in Jerusalem*, Cairo, 1960, pp. 13-15. Meinardus, O., 'The Syrian Jacobites in the Holy City', *Orientalia Suecana*, XII, 1963, pp. 66-67.

⁵⁴ Rücker, A., *op. cit.*, p. 90. Vincent, H. and Abel, F.M., *Jérusalem Nouvelle*. Paris, 1926, Vol. II, p. 1000. T. Tobler calls the Nestorian Church immediately north of the Monastery of St. Demetrius 'the Church of the Theotokos' (!). Tobler, T., *Topographie von Jerusalem*. Berlin, 1853, Vol. I, p. 453.

us to identify with accuracy the site of the former Nestorian Church of St. Mary. True, north of the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Demetrius there is situated the Dair al-Banat, *i.e.* the Church of St. Mary Megale Panagia, which, however, was always in the hands of the Greeks, on the other hand, it is quite possible that the dedication of the Nestorian church was altered, when the property changed hands.

Since 1959, the Chaldaean Catholic Patriarchate of Jerusalem has its offices in a two-storied building on the left side of the small lane opposite the entrance to the Latin Pro-cathedral of St. Stephen and the École Biblique on the Nablus Road. The patriarchate is administered by a Chaldaean priest.