



Original paper



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Dmitry E. Mishin Patriarch Papā Bār ʿĀggay and the Establishment of Seleucia-on-Tigris as the Centre of Christianity in the Sasanid Empire

(3rd century – early 4th century)

Abstract

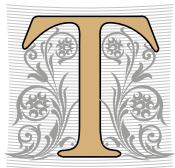
The rise of the initially peripheral chair of Seleucia-on-the Tigris is largely due to the activities of Papā Bār ʿĀggay ordained its bishop in 246/7. Being closer to the Sasanid king than any other bishop, Papā became a representative of the whole Christian community before the government. That gradually made Papā the manager of the affairs of the whole Church. Papā's rise met with the opposition of a number of bishops, of whom some disapproved of his acts as interference into their affairs and others considered the primacy of the Seleucian chair as unfounded. At some stage in 313 to 318, Papā's opponents, at a meeting with him, dismissed him and replaced him with his archdeacon, Simeon Bār šabbaʿē. Papā appealed to the Western church fathers. Those, in their answer, described any opposition to the church leader as unacceptable, but did not restore Papā in his position. Either party interpreted that answer as its victory and so long as Papā stayed alive (till about 325 to 330) the church had two leaders. But the head of the Seleucian church remained on the top of the church hierarchy because the necessity to deal with the government was always extant.

Keywords:

Sasanids, Ctesiphon, Papā Bar ʿĀggay, Simeon Bar šabbaʿē

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The mid-third century, the beginning of the period to be analyzed here, was a peculiar time for both the Sassanid Empire and the Christian communities dwelling there. The empire had come into being not long before, and some components of its structure were only in the process of taking shape. Ctesiphon, the Sassanids' capital, was not yet the magnificent agglomeration which it became later. West of the Tigris, the founder of the Sassanid state, Ardashīr I (225–240), founded a new city, Weh-Ardashīr, which was to become the capital of the state. The name of the city, to be translated as “Ardashīr has made better”, shows that it was intended to eclipse the earlier cities of the Ctesiphon agglomeration – the Greek Seleucia (Seleucia on the Tigris) and the Parthian Walakhshābād, but that position had not yet been fully achieved. At the same time, both Ardashīr and his successor Shāpūhr I (240–271) spent much of their time not in Ctesiphon, but in other cities or, during their numerous campaigns, in military camps; in addition, it is likely that they had already borrowed from the Arsacid Parthian kings the custom of going to the northern regions of the empire during the hot season.

Christianity had not yet spread across the territory of the Sassanid Empire as it did in the later centuries. Preachers of the Christian faith mainly arrived to the Sassanid lands through northern Iraq, going from northern Syria to the east, towards Nisibis (present-day Nusaybin in Turkey). By that route travelled Mar Mārī, a religious teacher and preacher, whose name is usually associated with the spread of Christian teaching in the Parthian Empire. According to the *Acts of Mar Mārī the Apostle*, he set out from Edessa, arrived in Nisibis, preached in the lands which today would be called “northern Iraq”, and from there went

to Ctesiphon¹. Many Christians who migrated to the East remained in northern Iraq, which later became an important centre of monastic life. The author of the *Chronicle of Arbela*² tells that at the time when the Sassanid Empire arose there were twenty bishops in the East, and lists seventeen dioceses many of which are located in the north of Iraq and Mesopotamia (Beth Zabdē, Kârḥā d-Bēth-Slōkh, Ḥârbât-Glal, Arzōn, Bēth Nīkaṭōr, Shahrkard, Ḥazza, Singara), although not all of those were under the Parthian, or Sassanid, power³. As for the Ctesiphon agglomeration, the spread of Christian doctrine there was complicated not only by its remoteness from northern Iraq, but also by the fact that the big communities which inhabited it stuck to their own religions, Hellenism and Zoroastrianism.

Under those conditions began the movement of the Seleucian see towards primacy. In the sources, it is associated with the activity of the bishop of Seleucia named Papā bâr Âggay. There are several stories about that in the sources, and the narrative focuses on the most striking episode, the dispute between Papā and the bishops who opposed him. The importance of those reports makes it necessary to provide their translation below.

¹ *The Acts of Mar Mārī the Apostle*. Ed. and tr. A. Harrak. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005. P. 12–43.

² Using the *Chronicle of Arbela* as a source for the purposes hereof, the present author is aware of the doubts as to its reliability, summarized, e.g., by S. Brock (see Brock S. Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources. In: *Journal of the Iraqi Academy, Syriac Corporation*. Vol. 5, 1979. P. 23–25 (302–304)). No doubt, the *Chronicle*, as well as the history of its writing, shall be put to a critical study. However, the volume of such a study would probably be much larger than the size of this article would allow. Therefore, it would seem possible not to go beyond the following observation. The data supplied by the *Chronicle of Arbela* are, so far as the subject matter hereof is concerned, generally consistent with evidence yielded by other sources. Some divergences may be observed, as this text will also show, but they are not bigger than those between other sources. To a certain extent, the occurrence of such divergences is natural because the *Chronicle* is a local, not a general, history, and, therefore, presents events in a particular way, i.e., from the local point of view. Therefore, for the time being, no compelling reason to reject the data of the *Chronicle of Arbela* can be seen.

³ *Sources syriaques*. Ed. A. Mingana. Vol. I. Mšīḥa-zkha (texte et traduction), Bar-Penkayé (texte). Mosul, 1907. P. 30. The score will be even more in favour of northern Iraq and Mesopotamia if it is taken into account that the list includes some cities whose development took place during the Sassanid period (Bēth-Lapaṭ (Gondēshāpūhr, now ruins near Islamabad approximately 10 km southeast of Dezful), Hormuzd-Ardashīr (present-day Ahvaz), Prat-Māyshān (near present-day Basra)).



Coin of Shapur I (240–271).
From open sources

Synodicon orientale (written between 775 and 790)⁴

Then Bishop Agapetus⁵ stood up and asked the chief and leader of the bishops and the governor of the entire East⁶ for permission to speak before him and to read the letters with the commandments, which had been sent at various times from the governors of the West to our ancient fathers, and later, in the days of the Catholicoi Mar Isaac⁷ and Mar Yhābalahā⁸. Catholicos Mar Dadīshō⁹ gave Bishop Agapetus the permission, and he read the letters, and then began to speak about the previous troubles from which the persecution of the Church arose, especially because of the rebellious and disobedient bishops, who, due to their shameful deeds, were severely rebuked by the holy, brilliant leader of the clergy, the orthodox Catholicos Mar Papā. Then they turned to

⁴ The fragment presented in the text is part of the account of the council which took place in 423/4, during the ministry of Catholicos Dadīshō⁹ (421–456). The dates of Dadīshō⁹'s ministry as Catholicos are as suggested by the present author in an earlier work (Mishin D.E. *Xosrov I Anushirvan (531–579), yego epoxa i yego zbizneopisanie i pouchenie v istorii Miskaveyxa* [Khusraw I Anushirwan (531–579), His Epoch, and His Biography and Admonition in Miskawayh's History]. Moscow: IV RAN, 2014. (in Russ.). P. 139–140.

⁵ Bishop of Gondēshāpūhr, which was at that time the second episcopal see after Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

⁶ The reference is made to Catholicos Dadīshō⁹.

⁷ Catholicos in 400–411 (Mishin, 2014. P. 134). The Syriac word *mar* literally meaning a “lord” is an epithet which can be placed before a person's name to express respect for him, but this is not obligatory. Therefore, in the cited texts, this word is present in some cases and absent in others.

⁸ Catholicos in 415–420 (Mishin, 2014. P. 136).

Mar Mīlēs⁹ and the virtuous bishops like him and led them astray, and they, in their simplicity and ignorance, were carried away by the vain zeal [of them] and [followed] them. Of those rebellious men some acted as accusers, others as witnesses. Mar Miles and the virtuous men like him accepted, as judges, the testimony of the rebellious. And, having no authority as judges, they deposed Mar Papā. And Mar Papā saw that justice had departed from the assembly, wickedness had prevailed both among the virtuous and the wicked, and truth had departed from both the rebellious and the best. He noticed that the Gospel was placed in the middle, and there was no fair trial between him and those assembled. Then he became inflamed with great anger and struck the Gospel and said, turning to it: “Speak, Gospel, speak a word! You have been placed this way, in the middle, as a judge, so that one may resort to you. I see that truth has abandoned both the honest bishops and those who lead astray from the right path, but you remain silent, not making a call to justice”. And since Mar Papā turned to the Gospel without fear and reverence and laid his hand on it not as a man [trying] to find refuge [from adversity], he was, for his evil deed, exposed to a blow which became for him a corporal punishment. Then the chapters and accusations of tyranny, oppression and suppression, written by the rebellious bishops against Mar Papā, became credible to [the other] bishops. They composed a story about him with many accounts of his deeds, depicting him as a man who committed evil acts, and sent [it] to many lands. When that was subsequently learned by the Western Fathers and they carefully investigated the matter, the injustice of the rebellious ones was discovered, their wickedness came to light, and all those rebellious bishops, of whom some were accusers and others witnesses, were condemned and deprived of their ranks. And of the virtuous bishops who were at that meeting held against Mar Papā, some left this world through a beautiful martyrdom, others departed this life with a good name, and those who lived on were forgiven, not for their deeds, but because it turned out that they were people of little knowledge and simple-mindedness, because of which those who lead astray from the right path were able to mislead them so that, [using] their good name, the rebellious would carry out their evil intentions regarding the Patriarch. But what

⁹ Mīlēs is mostly known as a bishop of Susa (present-day Shush in Iran). His name which is written as *Mīlēs* or *Mīles* in Syriac sources and as *Mīlās* in Arabic, will, for the sake of simplicity, hereinafter be written as Miles.

they feared, namely, that he (Papā. — D.M.) would deprive them of their titles, came to them from the Western Fathers. They were mercilessly condemned, deposed and expelled. The Fathers cancelled and abolished everything which had been done against Papā.

For the glorious deeds [of Papā], his ardent zeal and piety, and especially for the fact that he conducted affairs more skillfully than those who were before him, whereas his disciples, who held an assembly against him without having the right to do so, received their retribution for him, the fathers commanded thus: “Let Mar Papā be named in the Book of the Living at the head of all, and those who were before him, let them be named after him. And Mar Simon¹⁰, who was appointed in place of Mar Papā at the time when the leadership [over the Church] was destroyed, since we know that he is virtuous and pious, and the assembly forced him to that¹¹, let him be archdeacon with Mar Papā and serve him with love and piety. We command that when Mar Papā departs from this world to his Lord, Simon shall sit on his throne and assume the patriarchal government. For with us, disciples cannot rise above their head, nor be to him judges, for they have not been given the right by the Lord [Jesus] Christ; such are the just laws that God has laid down in human nature...”¹²

Chronicle of Arbela

“In the East, Papā, the Bishop of the Cities,¹³ whom we have mentioned, as he lived in the capital (*mḏīnāt māl̄kūthā*)¹⁴ and the other bishops needed him for “extraneous affairs” (*sbawathā nūkrayathā*), wanted to gain power over the other bishops, as if it were fitting that they should have one head. That was opposed by the priests of the Cities and all the people. For that they wanted to depose him. Even his archdeacon Simon was indignant at those innova-

¹⁰ The reference is made to Simon Bār Šabbaʿē (on him see below).

¹¹ I.e., to the acceptance of the leadership over the Church.

¹² *Synodicon orientale*. Paris, 1902. P. 46–47.

¹³ The word “Cities” (*mḏīnathā*) as used in the fragment in question clearly denotes the Ctesiphon agglomeration, which the Arabs similarly called *al-Madāʿin* (literally meaning “the cities”).

¹⁴ Seleucia on the Tigris.

tions and reported them to Miles of Susa, Âḳibalahā of Kârḥā-d-Bēth-Slōkh¹⁵, and many others. Mar¹⁶ Papā became very afraid of that, for Simon's parents were close to the king and were held in high esteem by all people. He wrote to the bishops of the West and especially to the Bishop of Edessa named Sâ'dā. All the bishops answered him, considering him a strong and valiant man, and promised to assist him before the king of kings, Constantine¹⁷. They thought it would be better if the bishop of the capital had primacy over all the bishops of the East. They wrote him a letter about that, in their own name and in the name of the rulers and nobles of the West. They wrote to him that just as in the West, which is under the rule of the Roman Empire, there are several patriarchs, those of Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople, so in the East, which is under the rule of the Persian Empire, there should be one patriarch.

God [...] arranged it so that Papā's plan was fulfilled. [Papā], without knowing it himself, was made the head of all the bishops and all the Christians of the East. So all the bishops [of the East] submitted to what was decided in the West, fearing those bishops [of the West], lest they should do so that they would find themselves between two powerful enemies, the rulers of the Christian Romans in the West, and the villainous kings of the Persians, in the East. But Simon, Papā's archdeacon, did not accept that arrangement in any way and wanted to achieve its cancellation through his parents. Papā, however, resorted to a trick and persuaded Simon's father, promising him that after his (Papā's. — *D.M.*) death his son (Simon. — *D.M.*) would be the next patriarch"¹⁸.

Martyrdom of Miles:

"Then a great schism occurred because of the bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, whose name was Papā, the son of Âḡgay. He (Miles. — *D.M.*) saw that he (Papā. — *D.M.*) [was attempting] to exalt himself above the bishops of the provinces who had gathered there to judge him. And he (Papā. — *D.M.*) was also trying to exalt himself above the priests and deacons of his cities. He (Miles. — *D.M.*) realized that he

¹⁵ Present-day Kirkuk in Iraq.

¹⁶ This word is only present in Kawerau's edition of 1985.

¹⁷ The reference is made to Emperor Constantine the Great (306–337).

¹⁸ *Sources...*, 1907. P. 44–45. Cf. *Die Chronik von Arbela*. Hrsg. P. Kawerau. Lovanii: In aedibus E. Peeters, 1985. S. 46–48.

(Papā. — *D.M.*) was arrogant toward them and had fallen away from God. Then he stood in the middle and said: ‘How dare you try to exalt yourself above your brothers and companions, having vain envy towards them, like the godless? Is it not written: ‘Whoever was a ruler among you, let him be your servant’¹⁹. Papā said to him: ‘Are you teaching me this, or are you just a fool? Do I not know this?’ Then he (*Miles. — D.M.*) came near and placed the Gospel, which was in his bag, on the pillow before Papā and said to him: ‘Since you do not want to accept a teaching from me, accept a judgment from the Gospel of our Lord, placed before your eyes, for you do not see its command with your eyes which have closed your thoughts!’ Then Papā, in a terrible anger, raised his hand, slapped it on the Gospel and said: ‘Speak, Gospel, speak the word!’ Saint Miles became afraid, took the Gospel, kissed it, placed it on his eyes and said loudly for all to hear: ‘Because you in your vanity have dared to raise your hand against the living words of our Lord, behold, an angel comes who will strike you in half your body and dry it up. Many will have fear and horror; but you will not die immediately and will remain alive, to the astonishment of others.’ And immediately, something like a lightning descended from heaven, struck Papā and dried up half his body. He fell on his side, suffering pain, and did not speak for twelve years. In such suffering he died. The assembled people were in fear and horror’²⁰.

Abridged History of the Church (Mukhtaṣar al-akhbār al-bīʿiyya, last quarter of the 10th or early 11th century)

“Then he (Papā. — *D.M.*) began to conduct affairs in a disorderly manner and somewhere appointed two bishops. Discord and schism increased in the Church. The fathers gathered to condemn him and persuade him to discontinue what they did not accept. Among them were Bishop Miles of Susa, Bishop Bōlīdāʿ of Dasht-Māyshān²¹, and a number of other fathers. They began to reproach him for what he had done, but he neither discontinued that, nor hear-

¹⁹ Cf. Luke 22, 26.

²⁰ *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*. Ed. P. Bédjan. T. II. Parisiis, Lipsiae, 1891. P. 266–268.

²¹ Dasht-Māyshān was a diocese with a capital at Prat-Māyshān. In the *Story of Simon Bār Šābbāʿē*, Bōlīdāʿ appears as the bishop of Prat (*Patrologia Syriaca*. Acc. R. Graffin. Pars prima. T. II. [Ed.] I(J). Parisot, F. Nau, M. Kmosko. Parisiis, 1907. Col. 831–832). Dasht-Māyshān is not identical with the diocese of Māyshān, the capital of which was Kārḥā d-Māyshān.

kened to them, and answered them in a rude manner; then they also began to speak rudely to him and accuse him of lying. Then he slapped his hand on the Gospel which was before him, not meekly, but arrogantly and haughtily, and said: ‘Speak a word for me.’ And then his right hand withered at the moment when he laid it on the Gospel; this became a common example. People, seeing that, heeded the warning and discontinued many of their practices; they also understood, from the punishment that had been inflicted on him, what power he had had under Christ. Papā discontinued his practices for which he had been blamed, and, in spite of his right hand having withered, remained for twelve more years.

At that time, it was a norm (*rasm*) for the Christians of the East (*ahl al-Mashrik*) to write to the Christians of the West (*ahl al-Maghrib*) about discords between metropolitans and bishops, so that they (the Christians of the West. — *D.M.*) would judge between them and condemn what was worthy of condemnation. The Christians of the West did the same with regard to the Christians of the East. When the letters of the Christians of the East about the discords which had occurred between Papā and the others were delivered to the Christians of the West, the latter, being in the number of three hundred and eighteen fathers, all condemned them; that took place six years after Constantine became a Christian²². They gathered and wrote an epistle, mentioning in it that the Christians of the East (*mashrikiyyūn*) originally had the right to establish Patriarchs of the East. They set that no one was allowed to gather [others] and oppose their leader, to whom the title of leader had been conferred in the church of Ctesiphon (*bīrat al-Madāʿin*), to complain about him or to address the Christians of the West, either in writing or orally. [They said:] ‘Let your Patriarch judge you, and let the Savior judge the Patriarch!’ They

²² The reference is to Emperor Constantine the Great (306–337). In speaking of his becoming a Christian, the author of the text seems to be referring to Constantine’s visions and actions on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312). The circulation of such ideas in the East is attested by the report of Elijah (Elias) of Nisibis (wrote in 1019) that Constantine was baptized and became a Christian in the seventh year of his reign and that he defeated Maxentius in the same year (*Eliae Metropolitanæ Nisibeni Opus chronologicum*. Pars I. Parisiis, Lipsiae, 1910. P. 98). The question of Elijah’s chronology is considered below; here it can be said that this “time six years after Constantine became a Christian” may be identified with the end of 318 or perhaps with the immediate following months. This is entirely consistent with the chronology of the events under consideration, as suggested below.



Shapur I receiving the surrender of Emperor Valerian (253–260).
Relief at Naqsh-e Rostam.
From open sources

forbade by the word of God that any of them (Christians of the East. — D.M.) should oppose him, condemn any of his deeds or compete with him.

Others said that the believing Helen²³ sent him valuable gifts and asked him to build her a church in the lands which were under his administration (*fī ʿamali-hi*), and to divide the money sent by her among the needy and poor. She addressed him as *Catholicos*, *Patriarch* and *Father*. The *Patriarch of Rome* addressed him in the same way, calling him ‘*Catholicos of the East and West*’²⁴.

Chronicle of Seert (written after 1036)

“He (Simon Bâr Şâbbaʿ²⁵. — D.M.) was an archdeacon under *Catholicos Papā* and the manager of his affairs from the time his right hand withered. But according to some stories, there was a struggle between *Catholicos Papā* [on the one hand] and some bishops and part of the flock [on the other]. They (Papā’s

²³ Flavia Julia Helena (d. 330), the mother of Constantine the Great.

²⁴ *Mukhtaşar al-akbbār al-bīʿiyya*. Ed. B. Ḥaddād. Baghdad: Sharikat al-Dīwān li-l-ṭibāʿa, 2000. P. 158–159.

²⁵ Bâr Şâbbaʿē, although beginning with *bâr* (“son”), is not an indication of the name of Simon’s father, but rather a nickname for Simon, literally meaning “son of dyers”. It was given to Simon because his relatives were dyers of the clothes for the Sassanid king (see below).

opponents. — *D.M.*) seized Simon by force and made him Catholicos, whereas he was an archdeacon under Papā. When they did that, Papā said to Simon: ‘Christ will not forgive you for agreeing to this, unless your blood is shed and you steadfastly accept martyrdom.’ He (Simon. — *D.M.*) justified himself before him (Papā. — *D.M.*) by saying that he could neither choose nor influence [the matter]. Then Papā received letters from the Greeks, who asked him to forgive him (Simon. — *D.M.*), informed him (Papā. — *D.M.*) that he (Simon. — *D.M.*) was not guilty of what had happened, and [asked] that Simon be his servant and his deputy. And he (Papā. — *D.M.*) established that he (Simon. — *D.M.*) would be the Catholicos after him”²⁶.

Mārī Ibn Sulaymān (mid-12th century)

“Some say that he (Papā. — *D.M.*) conducted his affairs in a disorderly manner and placed two bishops on one see. Then the fathers among whom were Bishop Miles of Susa, and others gathered in an agreement [between them]. But he (Papā. — *D.M.*) did not discontinue [his practices], behaved in a rude manner, claimed that they were bringing senseless accusations against him, and boldly slapped his hand on the Gospel, calling on it to become a witness for him. And then his right hand withered, which became a common example. People became afraid, discontinued [what they did], and realized that that was because of the place he had with Christ, so that He soon punished him. The Western fathers were notified of what had happened, and they condemned it, recognized it as grave and confirmed what they had written: the companions of the Catholicos of the East are not allowed to speak out against him. And they made him (Papā. — *D.M.*) judge over them, whereas his own judge shall be Christ. The Western Fathers honoured him (Papā. — *D.M.*), and Helena sent him gifts and means for the building of the Church of the East and honoured his words. Jacob, the Metropolitan of Nisibis, famous for his miracles, honoured him, and in the letters of Mar Ephraim there are attacks on those who unjustly accused him”²⁷.

²⁶ Histoire nestorienne inédite (Chronique de Séert). Première partie (I). Pub. A. Scher. In: *Patrologia Orientalis*. T. IV. Ed. R. Graffin, F. Nau. Paris, 1908. P. 296.

²⁷ *Maris Amri et Slibae de patriarchis nestorianorum commentaria*. Ed. H. Gismondi. Pars I. *Maris textus arabicus*. Romae, 1899. P. 8–9.

Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286)

“Catholicos Papā was present at the Council of the Three Hundred and Eighteen, which met at Nicaea in the year 336 of the Greeks, fifty-nine years after his elevation to the rank. Some say that he was elevated to the rank at that Council, but this is not true. Others say that he did not go to the Council himself, but sent his disciple, Simon Bār Šābba‘ē. And nine years after the Council of Nicaea, the bishops of the East assembled and brought many charges against Papā, on account of the disorders which had befallen the affairs of the Church through his neglect. But he, being unable to defend himself against any of the charges against him, raised his hand, and struck it upon the venerable Gospel, which he had laid on the pulpit beside him, and said, ‘Speak thou, if thou hast anything to say, for I despair of speaking.’ And immediately his right hand withered. Some say that the bishops, seeing that, removed him, because the words of their accusations were found to be true. Others say that he was not removed, because the bishops said that God’s punishment was sufficient for him”²⁸.

The preceding events have less coverage in the sources, although the extant data are sufficient to make some observations. The first issue to be examined would naturally be when and how Papā received his rank. Here is what information we have about this. According to the *Chronicle of Arbela*, “...the inhabitants of Ctesiphon persistently asked him (the bishop of Arbela named Āḥḥādabūh. — D.M.) to ordain a bishop so that he would stay with them all the time. ‘There are many Christians now,’ they told him, ‘and the leaders, the lords bishops, are far from us and cannot come to us every time to satisfy our urgent needs and lead us along the path of righteousness, spiritually and physically.’ He heard their request and did what they asked for. He informed Bishop Ḥāyb‘il of Susa of that, and the two of them, with the consent of all the people, chose Papā, an Aramean and a man of knowledge and wisdom, and each of them returned to his place”²⁹.

The *Abridgement of the Church History* contains a paraphrase of a letter from Miles to the Metropolitan of Gondēshāpūhr, named Gāddayhāb. It shows that Papā was ordained in the year 557 of Alexander³⁰, without the consent of

²⁸ *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum*. Ed. J.B. Abbeloos, Th.J. Lamy. T. III. Parisiis, Lovanii, 1877. Col. 27–32.

²⁹ *Sources...*, 1907. P. 41. Cf. *Die Chronik...*, 1985. S. 43.

³⁰ The year of Alexander the Great, i.e. the year of the Seleucid era, covered the period from September of one year up to, and including, August of the

the community of the Fathers (*bi għayr riḏā djamāʿat al-abāʿ*). In the same book, but a line above and without reference to Miles, it is stated that Papā received the title of Patriarch from Dūday, Metropolitan of Basra³¹.

Bar Hebraeus states that Papā was ordained by David, Metropolitan of Mesene (Syr. Māyshān), in the year 577 of the Seleucid era³². This David is undoubtedly identical with Dūday of the *Abridgement of the Church History*. The mention of Basra, built much later, at the beginning of the Arab conquests, is an obvious anachronism and the reference is actually made to Prat-Māyshān, hence the reference to Mesene. A more complicated problem consists in the differences in the date, since Bar Hebraeus not only names 577 of the Seleucid era, but also states that the interval between the ordination of Papā and the Council of Nicaea is 59 years³³. So, the date of 577 belongs to Bar Hebraeus himself and cannot be attributed to some copyist's fault.

Bar Hebraeus also tells that “at the time of his (Papā's) election, a split occurred among the bishops, and the party of those who supported him prevailed”³⁴. This appears to be a reference to the lack of agreement among the fathers, mentioned by Miles. A later historian of the Church, ʿAmr Ibn Mattā (or Ibn Mattay, mid-14th century), states that Papā received the rank of Patriarch in Ctesiphon in 558 according to the Greek calendar³⁵.

next one (using the Greek calendar) or from April (sometimes from the end of March) of one year to the corresponding time of the next one (using the so-called Babylonian calendar). Accordingly, the 557th year of the Seleucid era corresponds to the period from September 245 through August 246 in the first of those cases, and to the period from the end of the first ten days of April 246 roughly to the same period of the following year in the second one. What calendar Miles used can only be said hypothetically (see below).

³¹ *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 157.

³² *Gregorii Barhebraei...*, 1877. Col. 27–28. Since Bar Hebraeus uses the calendar of the Seleucid era in its Greek version, the year 577 covers the period from September 265 to August 266. On the calendar used by Bar Hebraeus see Mishin D.E. Protivostoyaniye nestorian i monofizitov v pravleniye Xosrova Parviza (591–628) [Struggle between Nestorians and Monophysites under the Rule of Khusraw Parwēz (591–628)]. In: *Xristianskiy Vostok: Mnogoobraziye regionalnyx elit: Ot pozdney antichnosti do Novogo vremeni* [The Christian East: Variety of Regional Elites: From the Late Antiquity till the Early Modern Era]. Ed. K.A. Panchenko. Moscow: Izdatelstvo PSTGU, 2025. P. 69. Note 3. (in Russ.).

³³ *Gregorii Barhebraei...*, 1877. Col. 29–30.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Col. 27–28.

³⁵ *Maris Amri et Slibae de patriarchis nestorianorum commentaria*. Ed. H. Gismondi. Pars II. *Amri et Slibae textus*. Romae, 1896. P. 13. It is difficult to say



Coin of Bahram II (275–292).
From open sources

The chronological indications of Miles and ʿAmr Ibn Mattā are very close to each other. Perhaps, the difference of one year between the dates which they specify may be explained by supposing that Miles indicates the date according to the Babylonian calendar, and ʿAmr, according to the Greek one; then, the ordination of Papā is likely to be put in the period from the beginning of October 246 to the end of March 247. It is much more difficult to reconcile those indications with the chronology of Bar Hebraeus. Apparently, the information of Miles and ʿAmr Ibn Mattā is to be preferred. According to Bar Hebraeus, the meeting between Papā and his opponents takes place nine years after the Council of Nicaea, i.e., in 334. But in the *Chronicle of Arbela* it is stated that after the meeting Papā applied for help to the Western hierarchs, one of whom was Sâḏā, the Bishop of Edessa. The latter seems to be identical with Shâḏ, who was Bishop of Edessa some time between 312/3 and 323/4³⁶. So, Bar Hebraeus's chronology is shifted forward by at least ten years. The dating of the beginning of Papā's service as the Head of the Seleucian church to the period 246–247 corresponds to the indications of the *Abridgement of the Church History* and Mārī Ibn Sulaymān that during Papā's

which calendar (Greek or Babylonian) is used in this case. The last date which ʿAmr mentions in his book is the night of Sunday, 13 *Tishrīn II* (November) of the Greek year 1629, i.e. 7 *Ramaḏān* 717 AH (Ibid. P. 126). This date corresponds to 13 November 1317 and is determined according to the Greek calendar. If it is assumed that ʿAmr also used it in his narrative about the Sassanid times, the year 558 shall cover the time from 1 September 246 to the end of August 247.

³⁶ *Chronica minora*. Pars I. Parisiis, Lipsiae, 1903. P. 4.

ministry as *Catholicos*, *Dākiyūs malik al-rūm*, i.e. the Roman emperor Decius, died (July 251)³⁷.

The extant sources contain some other important information on the early stages of Papā's career. According to the *Abridgement of the Church History*, he was initially an artisan engaged in the manufacturing of luxurious brocade for kings³⁸. This means, in particular, that Papā came not from the ecclesiastical, but from the artisan milieu. Another important detail is that Papā became a church hierarch at a relatively young age³⁹; this may also be inferred from the reports of Papā's long period of service to be examined below.

It may seem surprising that such a person became the bishop, although there were probably other candidates who were not inferior to him in theological knowledge and piety. This is in addition to the above-cited statements that the elevation of Papā to the rank was not supported by all the hierarchs. To make the confusion worse, it is unclear how Papā's ordination took place: according to one version, it was performed by the bishops of Arbela and Susa, and according to another one, by the bishop of Prat-Māyshān.

In the early church history of Bārḥād̄bshābbā 'Arabayā (c. 600) it is stated, with reference to the time immediately preceding the Council of Nicaea, that the bishops of Persia received ordination from Antioch⁴⁰. There has been preserved a letter which, according to its text, was from the Western church hierarchs to

³⁷ *Maris...*, 1899. P. 8–9.

³⁸ *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 157.

³⁹ *Maris...* 1896. P. 13. It should be noted, however, that in the corpus of epistles usually termed as the "correspondence of Papā" there are indications that at the time of his address to the Western hierarchs (as will be shown below, that occurred in 313–318 or a little later) he was more than a hundred years old (*Braun O. Der Briefwechsel des Katholikos Papā von Seleucia. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der ostsyrischen Kirche im vierten Jahrhundert. In: Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie. 18-ter Jahrgang, 1894. S. 171, 180*). The epistles which the corpus consists of are, at least for the most part, forgeries, but they also contain references to events which actually took place. If, on the basis of that, the references to the age of Papā are to be accepted, the date of his birth should roughly be placed in the early 210-es. This would mean that Papā was elevated to his rank at the age of a little over thirty. Therefore, the words about the young age of Papā should most likely be interpreted as meaning that he had not yet reached forty years of age and in any case was not an old man.

⁴⁰ La première partie de l'histoire de Barḥadbešabba 'Arbaia. Ed. et tr. F. Nau. In: *Patrologia Orientalis*. Ed. R. Graffin, F. Nau. T. 23. Paris: Firmin-Didot et C^{ie}, 1932. P. 205.



Bahram II killing lions. Relief at Sar Mashhad.
From open sources

the Eastern ones and in particular to Bishop Agapetus of Gondēshāpūhr, i.e., obviously, to Agapetus, who, according to the above-cited fragment from the *Synodicon orientale*, delivered a speech at the council of 423/4⁴¹. According to that letter, following the death of a metropolitan of Seleucia and Ctesiphon his successor was to be confirmed in his rank by the Patriarch of Antioch, but it was no longer necessary to travel to him personally in conformity with an ancient custom, since due to the enmity between Rome and the Sassanid Empire, people making such journeys could be in danger⁴². If that evidence is correct, Papā was to receive ordination from the Patriarch of Antioch. But it is far from certain that the Patriarch would have agreed to the elevation of a craftsman, considered a young man, to the rank of primate of the Church. As shown in the Excursus, that gap was filled by a legend in which the Patriarch Demetrian of Antioch recognized Papā as the head of the Persian church.

Although the unknown author of the *Abridgement of the Church History* and ʿAmr Ibn Mattā claim that Papā was elevated to the rank of Patriarch, in 246–247 he probably became only a bishop. Until that time, Seleucia had

⁴¹ In the context of those times, Western hierarchs (or fathers) are understood to be church hierarchs from the Roman dominions, including those in Asia, while Eastern hierarchs are understood to be hierarchs from the Sassanid Empire.

⁴² *Assemanus (Assemani) J.S. Bibliotheca orientalis clementino-vaticana. T. III. Pars 1. Romae, 1725. P. 52–55.*

neither a Catholicos nor a Patriarch (as shown below, in church histories the bishops of Arbela are called the Heads of the church), nor, according to the above-cited passage from the *Chronicle of Arbela*, even a bishop. Whether Papā called himself a bishop or a Catholicos (and, if so, when exactly) is almost impossible to say due to the lack of documents from that time. Bishop Agapetus called Papā a Catholicos, but, as is evident from the history of the Council of 423/4, his main concern was to prove, with a convenient historical example, the illegitimacy of the opposition to Catholicos Dadīshō⁴³. Within that argument, Papā appeared as Dadīshō⁴³ of past years and, therefore, was to be described as a Catholicos. In the sources reflecting the position of Papā's opponents (the *Martyrdom of Miles*, the *Chronicle of Arbela*), he is called only a bishop. In the apocryphal letter of Papā to the inhabitants of Nisibis, which is part of his correspondence (see below), he calls himself the Head of the Church of the East⁴³. Apparently, the actual author of the letter believed that Papā would have called himself exactly that way. The titles of Catholicos and Patriarch are mentioned in sources in connection with the response of the Western Fathers to Papā's letters. If, given the lack of other evidence, the information set forth above is accepted as reliable, two interpretations may be advanced. According to one, Papā received ordination as a bishop from the bishops of Arbela and Susa in 246/7, and afterwards, possibly on the date indicated by Bar Hebraeus (265/6), the bishop of Prat-Māyshān ordained him Patriarch. The second one is that Papā was officially called neither Patriarch nor Catholicos, which titles (or one of them) came to be used in relation to him because they appeared in answers of the Western Fathers to Papā's letters (see below). Papā's supporters interpreted them to mean that Papā was the Head of the Church of the East and its Patriarch; that interpretation is reflected in the above-cited fragment from the *Chronicle of Arbela*. Of course, a combination of those versions is also possible. In any case, it seems likely that Papā called himself the Head of the Church of the East and that was visible evidence of his desire for primacy among the bishops, which is mentioned in the sources (see above).

An important factor of Papā's rise was that he was a suitable person for solving certain problems. According to the sources, he had two important merits: in addition to Syriac, he also mastered Persian⁴⁴, and as a craftsman

⁴³ Braun, 1894. S. 174.

⁴⁴ *Maris...*, 1896. P. 13; *Maris...*, 1899. P. 8; *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 157.

serving the king (probably, rather, the foreman of such craftsmen), he could be received at the court. This means that Papā was well, and apparently better than other church hierarchs, prepared to solve the problem of establishing relations with the state. In the 240-es, that problem was very important, for the Sassanid state had been established a little earlier, the Sassanids came from Fars, where the Christian faith was not yet widespread, and therefore relations between the state and the church were at the initial stage of their establishment. Given that, the best candidate for the leadership over the church was the one who could have good relationship with the Sassanid authorities. That seems to be the “extraneous affairs” for which, according to the above excerpt from the *Chronicle of Arbela*, the bishops needed Papā.

Little is known of Papā’s activities during the first decades of his ministry. When, during the reign of Sassanid king Warahrān II (275–292), the persecutions originally directed against the Manichaeans also affected Christians, Papā, according to the *Chronicle of Seert*, was overtaken by great calamities and severe sufferings⁴⁵. Probably, for the authorities, Papā, as the head of the Christian community, was responsible for everything which happened in it; therefore, all accusations concerning its members fell primarily on him.

We are now coming to the conflict between Papā and the church hierarchs, which is mentioned in the passages cited above. It is possible to reconstruct the chronology of these events only approximately, allowing for the possibility of an error of several years. Some of the data with which this can be done are presented above, but they should be repeated here. The conflict occurred between 312/3 and 323/4, i.e., during the period when Papā appealed to the Bishop of Edessa for help. The remaining evidence comes from the extant data on Papā’s life. As shown above, he became a bishop around 246–247. The authors of the sources believe that his service lasted a very long time – 67⁴⁶, 68 years⁴⁷, about 68 years⁴⁸, 69⁴⁹, 70⁵⁰ or 79 years⁵¹. The date of Papā’s death

⁴⁵ Histoire..., 1908. P. 238.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Braun, 1894. S. 171, 179.

⁴⁸ *Assemanus (Assemani) J.S. Bibliotheca orientalis clementino-vaticana. T. III. Pars 1. Romae, 1725. P. 346.*

⁴⁹ *Gregorii...*, 1877. 31–32.

⁵⁰ *Maris...*, 1899. P. 9.

⁵¹ *Maris...* 1896. P. 15.

is specified by two authors; Elijah of Nisibis places it around 328/30⁵², while ‘Amr Ibn Mattā’s dating most likely corresponds to the period between October 325 and 5 September 326⁵³. It is sometimes claimed that after the scandalous meeting with the hierarchs, Papā lived for twelve more years⁵⁴. If so, the meeting took place around 313–318.

The *Chronicle of Seert* contains a list of bishops of Papā’s times, including, among others, Gāddayhāb of Gondēshāpūhr⁵⁵, Ābdīshōs of Kashkar⁵⁶, John of Mesene, Andrew of Dayr Mikhrāk⁵⁷, Abraham of Shushtar, and Miles of Susa; it

⁵² To closely follow the text, in the twentieth year of the reign of Shāpūhr II (*Eli-ae...*, 1910. P. 45). The question of what time the authors of the Christian East counted the reign of Shāpūhr II (307/8–379/80) from requires a separate study, which the present author intends to present later; at this stage, it may be proceeded from the fact that Elijah attributed the beginning of Shāpūhr’s reign to 621 of the Seleucid era (*Ibid.* P. 89). How Elijah dated the events, and from whom he took his chronological indications, is unknown. The victory of Constantine the Great over Maxentius (see note 22 above) is attributed by him to the year 623 of the Seleucid era, which is possible only if the Babylonian calendar is used. But the death of Constantius II (337–361), which took place on 3 November 361, is placed in 673 (*Ibid.* P. 103), and this is only possible if the year began in September 361, according to the rules of the Greek calendar. Therefore, if Elijah’s chronology is translated into ours, Shāpūhr II came to power in the year of the Seleucid era from September 309 to August 310, or from the 20-
es of April 310 to roughly the same time in 311. If this is applied to the calendar adopted at the Sassanid court, the first year of Shāpūhr’s reign will be the year from 10 September 309 to 9 September 9 310, or from 10 September 310 to 9 September 9, whereas the twentieth year will be the year from 5 September 328 to 4 September 329, or from 5 September 329 to 4 September 330.

⁵³ In the eighteenth year of the reign of Shāpūhr II and in 637 of the Seleucid era (*Maris...*, 1896. P. 15). As shown above, ‘Amr Ibn Mattā used the calendar of the Seleucid era in its Greek version; therefore, his 637 year of the Greeks covers the period from September 325 to the end of August 326. That year as per the Seleucid era almost exactly coincides with the year of the reign of Shāpūhr II (6 September 325 to 5 September 326).

⁵⁴ *Acta...*, 1891. P. 268; *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 159. Bar Hebraeus believes that the statement in question is a mistake, and that Papā died a year after his meeting with the bishops (*Gregorii...*, 1877. Col. 31–32). However, as shown above, Bar Hebraeus’ chronology of the events in question can hardly be trusted.

⁵⁵ The source text states *Djadhīmyahab*, but the reference is undoubtedly made to Gāddayhāb to whom, as shown above, Miles wrote.

⁵⁶ Kashkar (Ar. *Kaskar*) was located on the banks of the Tigris approximately 60 km southeast of present-day al-Kūt; in the Umayyad times, the city of al-Wāsiṭ was built opposite it.

⁵⁷ The text of the source has *Dayr F.ḥrāk*, which the editor corrects to be *Dayr M.ḥrāk* and reads *Deir Mahrâq*. This place is apparently identical with Dayr

then states: “these are those who gathered to reproach Papā”⁵⁸. It is noteworthy that the list only includes bishops from lands located relatively close to Seleucia; we do not see, e.g., anyone from northern Iraq. It may be conjectured that news of the actions of those bishops reached Papā more quickly and in greater volume, and, consequently, his reproaches which Bishop Agapetus spoke of, were directed primarily against them⁵⁹. Perhaps, those reproaches were at least partly based on real grounds. Several decades later, the “Persian sage” Aphrahat sharply criticized the state of affairs in the Church, and his critics were mainly directed against the hierarchs: “leaders arose among our people and abandoned the law and boasted, doing tyranny”⁶⁰.

It is worth noticing how the events in question are presented in the *Chronicle of Arbela*. In the account of Papā’s elevation to the rank he is presented as a famous and wise man, but his conflict with the bishops is explained by his

Makhrāk or Dayr Mikhrāk of the Muslim geographer Yāqūt (b. 1178–80, d. 1229), who, however, can only say about it that it is some locality Khuzestan (*Muʿdjam al-buldān li ... Yāqūt*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1977. Vol. 2. P. 533). It is noteworthy that the bishop of Dayr Mikhrāk is never mentioned among the participants in the local councils of the church of the Sasanid empire. It seems that the bishopric of Dayr Mikhrāk ceased to exist, perhaps because it failed to survive the persecution of the church under Shāpūhr II.

⁵⁸ *Histoire...*, 1908. P. 236.

⁵⁹ As shown above, Bishop Agapetus related that Papā had rebuked some bishops for their “shameful” acts. In a letter from Papā to the people of Nisibis, which is part of his apocryphal correspondence (see below), there is a fragment describing those acts. According to that fragment, some declared themselves bishops without having received ordination, others, when the bishop of a large city died, abandoned their sees and went there (apparently to seize the vacant place. — *D.M.*), others expelled bishops in order to take their sees, and even resorted to murder, others were accused of heresy, others fathered children and put them to death (to avoid publicity. — *D.M.*), others presented themselves as temptation-proof zealots of purity, but participated in feasts, even in places where that was not allowed (Braun, 1894. S. 175). As shown below, the author of the letter was seemingly aware of the state of affairs in the dioceses of the Sasanid possessions, and the texts of the correspondence reflect the information which he had at his disposal. It may, therefore, be assumed that Papā brought such or similar accusations against his opponents. But it must not be forgotten that the actual author of the letter, as well as Papā himself, was interested in presenting his opponents in the most unfavourable light; therefore, here, as in no other fragment of the correspondence, there is a high probability of exaggeration.

⁶⁰ *Patrologia Syriaca*. Acc. R. Graffin. Pars prima. T. I. [Ed.] I(J). Parisot. Parisiis, 1894. Col. 577–578.

desire to rise, which caused rejection even with his closest associate, Archdeacon Simon. If this reflects the position of the Adiabene clergy⁶¹, it may be conjectured that they were on the side of Papā's opponents.

There seemingly was another important circumstance which influenced the position of the Adiabene clergy. Initially, the Adiabene bishops were the spiritual shepherds of the Christians of Seleucia and Ctesiphon. In the *Chronicle of Arbela* it is stated that the Adiabene bishops Shāhlūfā and then Âḥḥādabūh preached in Seleucia, with the former ordaining one priest and the latter five⁶². As shown above, according to the same source Papā received his ordination from Âḥḥādabūh, which happened after the inhabitants of Ctesiphon, wanting to have their own bishop, turned specifically to Adiabene. The special role of the Adiabene bishops is recognized by the authors of all church histories, where Shāhlūfā and Âḥḥādabūh appear as the predecessors of Papā and the heads of the Seleucian church⁶³.

In connection with the above, it is worth effort to read again the *Acts of Mar Mārī the Apostle* mentioned at the beginning of this study. It is to be remembered that Mar Mārī is the man to whom the sources assign a crucial role in the spread of Christian doctrine in Mesopotamia. Now, according to the *Acts Mārī* personally elevated Papā to an ecclesiastical rank. Here is how this is presented in the source: "The Blessed One (Mārī. — D.M.) travelled for many years through the countries of the East, consecrated churches and united them in harmony. He appointed a man to govern the church of Seleucia (*'idā d-Kōkē*), so that he would be the head of the bishops of the East, for it is the most ancient one as to spiritual teaching. For many years he taught and did good works in piety, and then he left Seleucia and Ctesiphon, where he then lived, and came to the church of Dūrā d-Ḳūnī, which had been built for him. He called to himself his disciple Papā before the whole church and made him manager (*mdābranā*) after himself"⁶⁴.

A speech by Mārī and Papā's answer are then quoted, and thereafter it is stated that Mārī died and was buried in the same church. The text continues as follows: "His commemoration in it, by order of Papā, the successor to his

⁶¹ Adiabene was a region the capital of which was the city of Arbela (present-day Erbil).

⁶² *Sources...*, 1907. P. 34, 38–39.

⁶³ *Eliae...*, 1910. P. 45; *Gregorii...*, 1877. Col. 23–28; *Maris...*, 1896. P. 5–13; *Maris...*, 1899. P. 6–8; *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 151, 152.

⁶⁴ *The Acts...*, 2005. P. 76–77.



Coin of Shapur II (307/8–379/80).
From open sources

see (*yartā d-kūrseyēh*), continues constantly. And he (Papā. — *D.M.*) too, after the virtuous and most worthy Mar Mārī, appointed priests and administrators throughout the land of the East⁶⁵.

Those fragments cannot be accepted as reliable evidence because of their obvious inconsistency with the historical context. Mārī, whose activities fell, apparently, on the second half of the 1st or the beginning of the 2nd century, could not have met Papā, who was born later than his death. It is obvious that the author of the text seeks to justify the legitimacy of Papā's elevation among the church hierarchy. He does not claim that Mārī made Papā bishop of Seleucia (that was easy to refute), but at the same time presents Papā as the successor of Mārī, appointed by him. It is also noteworthy that, according to the *Acts*, Mārī baptized the king of Adiabene and all the local noblemen⁶⁶; this differs greatly from the narrative of the *Chronicle of Arbela*, where that episode is absent and the merits of spreading the Christian faith are attributed to the local bishops. Thus, in the *Acts*, the seniority of the church of Arbela is reduced to nothing, and the story is presented approximately as follows: the Christian faith was brought to both Arbela and Seleucia by Mārī, whose successor was not one of the Adiabene bishops, but Papā.

These observations, as well as the fact that the narrative in the *Acts* ends with the above-mentioned order of Papā, suggest that the text was originally composed during the time of the latter, apparently in connection with his confrontation with the opponent bishops.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 76–79.

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 20–21.

We can now attempt to make a rough picture of the conflict. It is hardly correct to believe that the conflict arose because of Papā's ambitions for power. At the time when the events in question took place, Papā was at least about ninety years old (according to some indications, he was over a hundred), and it is unlikely that at such an age he would have become involved in political intrigues. But, having become, at least for the Sassanid government, the head of the Christian community, he had to govern it in one way or another and supervise its affairs. At first, Papā, as it seems, interfered little in the affairs of communities outside the region of Seleucia-Ctesiphon; as shown in the Excursus, the Christian captives settled in Gondēshāpūhr organized their church life and elected a bishop for themselves without any visible participation of his. But everyday life went on and time after time brought Papā into conflict with other hierarchs. Sometimes Papā considered actions of the local hierarchs unacceptable and condemned them. Somewhere Papā and the local hierarchs disagreed about who should be the bishop of a particular see, each side supported its own man, and it turned out that there were two bishops on the same see. The hierarchs, especially from sees which had a long history and high prestige, were hostile to the attempts of a former craftsman, who became the head of the church thanks to his abilities of a courtier, to interfere in their affairs and make management decisions. In order to achieve the results he wanted, Papā had to rise above the other bishops, which he tried to achieve in one way or another. That was regarded by his opponents as a manifestation of his power ambitions, and the creeping confrontation resulted in an open clash, which we read about in the sources.

The descriptions of that clash, quoted above, do not give a clear idea on how it ended. From the text of Bar Hebraeus it is clear that the results of the meeting of Papā with the bishops were presented variously. However, the extant chronological data appear to provide the clue for re-constructing the course of events. As shown above, Papā was elevated to the rank of Bishop of Seleucia around 246–247, and the term of his ministry is given in almost all sources as 70 years or slightly less. Moving forward from 246–247 by 67–70 years, we arrive at 313–317, i.e., exactly the time slot when Papā's meeting with his opponents took place. There is no room left for the twelve years which Papā reportedly lived after the meeting. Thus, in church histories, Papā's ministry ends following his meeting with the bishops.

Another line of reasoning may be based on the fact that, according to the only extant dating of the beginning of Simon Bâr Şābba'ē's ministry (in the

history of ʿAmr Ibn Mattā), he was appointed Head of the Church in the sixth year of the reign of Shāpūhr II⁶⁷. Together with the above-mentioned statement by the same writer that Papā died in the eighteenth year of Shāpūhr’s reign, that indicates that during the last twelve years of Papā’s life, Simon was the Head of the Church. Since Papā lived twelve years after his meeting with the bishops, it is to be concluded that during that time he was not considered the Head of the Church.

In the church history of Bārḥād̄bshābbā mentioned above, it is stated that “since all the bishops, both those who were and those who were not subjects [of the Emperor Constantine the Great], were invited, Saint Simon Bār Ṣābbaʿē, who was Catholicos of the land of the Persians and resided in Seleucia-Ctesiphon⁶⁸, was also invited” to the Council of Nicaea. This shows that in the time immediately preceding the Council of Nicaea, Simon, and not Papā, was considered as the Head of the Church.

All that indicates that Papā’s meeting with the bishops ended with his deposition⁶⁹. In view of this, it appears that the “story” mentioned by Bishop Agapetus was, in the language of our time, a communiqué containing a declaration of the deposition and its causes⁷⁰; this is why Papā was depicted in it in the most negative tones.

It may be objected that since Papā was the representative of the Christian community before the Sassanid king, his removal was unreasonable at least because of an eventual negative response from the authorities. Under normal circumstances, this probably would have been so, but then the situation was peculiar. King Shāpūhr II was a minor and had little interest in church affairs, whereas the dignitaries were probably regarded by the church hierarchs as those with whom it would be possible to come to terms. The parents, or rela-

⁶⁷ *Maris...*, 1896. P. 15.

⁶⁸ *La première partie...*, 1932. P. 205.

⁶⁹ The author of the history of the Church of the Sassanid Empire, J. Labourt, also strongly asserts this, without, however, providing any justification for this opinion (*Labourt J. Le Christianisme dans l’Empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224–632)*. Paris, 1904. P. 23).

⁷⁰ In the apocryphal letter of Mar Ephraim to Papā, which is a part of the latter’s correspondence (see below), it is said that the writings composed by the rebellious, whose destiny is destruction, were unable to remove Papā from his primacy in the Church (*Braun*, 1894. S. 172). Apparently, the author of the letter has in mind the aforementioned “story” and considers it a document with the help of which Papā’s opponents tried to prove that he could no longer be the Head of the Church.

tives, of Simon Bâr Şabba⁶ē were dyers of the clothes for the Sassanid kings⁷¹. So, Simon came from the same milieu of palace artisans as Papā. That gave the hierarchs the possibility to claim that the removal of Papā did not change anything, and the position of the Head of the Church was still occupied by a true servant of the Sassanids.

As can be seen from the above passages, the further development of events was such that Papā applied to the Western Fathers for help. A collection of letters from and to Papā is known (although in full so far only in the German translation by O. Braun), most of which concern the conflict in question. That the letters are apocrypha is evident from their first reading. In the so-called “Conciliar Epistle” (*Synodalschreiben*) of the Western Fathers to Papā, the first among its signatories is Patriarch Gāyūs of Rome, i.e. Pope Gaius (or Caius)⁷², but the latter died in 296, long before the events described. There appears, quite often, in the correspondence a man called Mar Ephraim, who, judging by some passages, should be identified with Ephraim the Syrian⁷³. But given the generally accepted dating of the latter’s birth in 306, in the period in question, i.e. in 313–318, and perhaps for several years after that, he was still too young for what is stated in the correspondence to apply to him. It should be borne in mind that the references to Mar Ephraim are not a few sporadic mentions here and there; on the contrary, one of the longest letters from the correspondence is the letter of Ephraim to Papā⁷⁴.

But the fact that the letters are forgeries does not mean that there were no letters from the Western Fathers at all. The appeal to the Western Fathers is mentioned by Bishop Agapetus and the author of the *Chronicle of Arbela*, who, as shown above, have different views on the events in question. Moreover, in the fragment cited above, the author of the *Chronicle of Arbela* reports that

⁷¹ *Histoire...*, 1908. P. 296; *Mukhtaşar...*, 2000. P. 186. This appears to be meant by the author of the *Chronicle of Seert* when he states that Simon’s parents were close to the king.

⁷² *Braun*, 1894. S. 178. Cf. Assemanus (Assemani), 1725. P. 56.

⁷³ This is indicated, on the one hand, by the respectful attitude towards Ephraim (in the letter of Bishop Jacob of Nisibis to Papā and the letter of Papā to the inhabitants of Nisibis, he is called a teacher, who is considered a prophet in the Church of God (*Braun*, 1894. S. 167, 176), and in the above-mentioned Conciliar Epistle, a saint, “who appeared in our race as a prophet” (Ibid. S. 178), and on the other hand, by the fact that Papā addresses him personally in his letter to the inhabitants of Nisibis (Ibid. S. 176). It is extremely difficult to find another person to whom such words could apply.

⁷⁴ Ibid. S. 169–174.



Coronation of the young Shapur II
(illustration to Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, 16th century).
From open sources

Papā wrote to the Western Fathers, in particular, to the Bishop of Edessa. The reliability of that evidence would hardly be put to doubt if we did not know from the texts of the letters that the correspondence is a collection of apocryphal writings. Moreover, the fact that the letters are apocryphal does not mean that the information contained in the extant texts is necessarily false. Their content appears to be a reflection of the information available to their author and his understanding of what the events in question were, or were to be presented as, rather than a mere fruit of his imagination. The letters, indeed, contain apparent errors regarding the Western Fathers, but their authors are much better informed about the Church of the Sasanid Empire. Some details in which the letters are in line with other sources are considered above (for instance, the estimate of the length of Papā's ministry as 68 years). Therefore, the information in the letters may be used, although with a constant understanding of the fact that their authors aimed at justifying the illegality of the actions of Church hierarchs against the Head of the Church with the help of an illustrative historical example. It is no coincidence that the accounts of Papā were most in demand in the cases when the Heads of the Church struggled against the hierarchs who opposed them. The "Conciliar Epistle", according to its manuscript, was copied by Bishop Agapetus⁷⁵, probably the one who

⁷⁵ Ibid. S. 163.

spoke at the Council of 423/4 which was devoted mainly to the struggle of Catholicos Dadīshō⁶ with the hierarchs who opposed him. According to Bar Hebraeus, some claimed that the author of the letters of Bishop Jacob of Nisibis and Mar Ephraim to Papā was in fact Catholicos Joseph, who fought against the hierarchs and was deposed by them in 569/70⁷⁶.

This leitmotiv of the letters is manifest in the “Conciliar Epistle”. Its authors faced a difficult task to show that the Western Fathers supported Papā even in spite of his chastisement which from the outside looked like God’s punishment, clear evidence of the Lord’s wrath against an unworthy clergyman. The authors solve this problem with the help of the following reasoning: undoubtedly, what Papā did with the Gospel is reprehensible, yet the Lord loves him and took into account his good deeds and worthy life, and therefore limited Himself to a mild punishment, whereas Papā’s opponents who spoke out against the highest Church authority, await a much more severe chastisement, and eternal torment is prepared for them⁷⁷.

Under this thick layer of forgeries and interpretations, the outlines of the events which actually took place are difficult to discern. However, the general course of events is suggestive and provides a good basis for their re-construction. It would be wrong to deny that Papā wrote to the Western Fathers. But it cannot be held that the response of the Western Fathers led to the restoration of Papā to the Seleucian See. As shown above, Papā’s ministry was considered to be over, and Simon Bār Šābba⁶ē was invited to the Council of Nicaea. This is a clear indication of the fact that for the organizers of the Council, Simon, and not Papā, was the Head of the Church of the Sassanid dominions. If all this is taken into account, the only possible explanation for the development of events will be the following. The response of the Western Fathers, set out in one or more letters, was generally that the Eastern Church was headed by its Primate, the hierarchs’ actions against him were unlawful, and the confrontation, including all accusations, the distribution of stories, etc., should be discontinued. This, apparently, was what contemporary and later supporters of Papā interpreted as the Western Fathers recognizing the accusations as unfounded and condemning those who made them. However, the Western Fathers did not make any decisions regarding Papā himself, which allowed

⁷⁶ *Gregorii...*, 1877. Col. 31–32.

⁷⁷ *Braun*, 1894. S. 179–180.

his opponents not to change anything and not to restore him to his rank. In that situation, both Papā and Simon could consider themselves heads of the Church. According to the *Chronicle of Arbela*, a new confrontation was beginning, and Simon was ready to use a weapon to which he had not resorted before, namely, his relatives' ties at the royal court. But there were also some circumstances which prevented the development of the conflict. On the one hand, Papā's old age and physical infirmity aggravated by the paralysis of a part of the body left little possibility for him to manage the Church's affairs, and there was no point in fighting to obtain it. On the other hand, the Western Fathers clearly spoke out against internecine strife within the Church, and renewing the struggle for the patriarchal throne amounted to going against their judgment. Therefore, the state of affairs quietly remained unchanged, and outside observers explained that by assuming that a compromise was reached, pursuant to which Papā appointed Simon as his successor.

The confrontation between Papā and his opponents is a colourful and fascinating, but still an episode in the history of the Church of the Sassanid Empire. As a matter of historical research, it cannot obscure a more important phenomenon, namely, the rise of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon over the rest of the Church hierarchy, due to the need to interact with the Sassanid authorities. It is worth noting that neither side in the confrontation, including the bishops of more ancient churches than Seleucia, advocated moving the residence of the Head of the Church from the capital of the empire. The idea that the Head of the Church should be the Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was preserved by the Church throughout the rest of the fourth century, when it was subjected to severe persecution under Shāpūhr II; it was adopted as a norm at the local council of 410.

Excursus. Papā and Demetrian

The relationship between Papā and Patriarch Demetrian of Antioch is, although connected to the subject matter hereof, a separate topic, which justifies its discussion in an excursus. Information on that mainly comes from Eastern church histories. According to them, the Sassanid king Shāpūhr, i.e. Shāpūhr I, campaigned in the west, went to Antioch and captured its inhabitants, including Patriarch Demetrian. The captives were driven into

the Sassanid lands and settled in Gondēshāpūhr. Then the following happened:

“When Patriarch Demetrian of Antioch and those whom Shāpūhr had taken captives were in the city of Gondēshāpūhr, Patriarch Demetrian was told: ‘Manage the captives who are with you.’ He replied: ‘God forbid that I should do that which the Holy Spirit has not given me, and for which He has not empowered me. For the office of the Head of the Church is not mine, but another man’s; he is Patriarch Papā.’ And when he thus refused, Papā asked him to be called Metropolitan, made him Metropolitan over Gondēshāpūhr and the first of the Metropolitans of the East, placed him at his right hand, and [established that] the Patriarch should be the one whom he would choose. This norm remains to this day. And the Zoroastrians treated Demetrian with respect and reverence for his dignity and nobility”⁷⁸.

This translation is given according to the earliest version of the original story, found in the *Abridgement of the Church History*. Mārī Ibn Sulaymān and ‘Amr Ibn Mattā narrate it in much the same way, whereby the most significant difference is that in their case Papā initially offers Demetrian to become patriarch (Mārī)⁷⁹ or to occupy the [patriarchal] throne (*kursī*) for the rest of his life (‘Amr)⁸⁰.

Shāpūhr I captured Antioch twice, in his campaigns of 251 or 252 and 260, and both times he took captives, whom he subsequently settled in his own domains⁸¹. It is difficult to choose between those dates solely on the basis of Ori-

⁷⁸ *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 158.

⁷⁹ *Maris...*, 1899. P. 8.

⁸⁰ *Maris...*, 1896. P. 14.

⁸¹ The Naḵsh-i-Rustam inscription of Shāpūhr I, the official Sassanid history of his wars against Rome, reports that during the campaign in which he defeated Emperor Valerian (253–260), the king’s troops captured prisoners in the lands of the Romans and non-Iranians; those prisoners were taken to the Sassanid dominions and settled in various regions, including Khuzestan (*Back M.* Die sassanidischen Staatsinschriften. Téhéran, Liège: Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1978. S. 314, 324–326; *Maricq A.* *Classica et Orientalia*. 5. *Res gestae Divi Saporis*. In: *Syria*. Année 1958. Vol. 35, No. 3. P. 314–315). The captives from Antioch are not mentioned here, but Antioch itself was mentioned earlier among the cities captured by the Sassanid troops (*Back*, 1978. S. 321; *Maricq*, 1958. P. 312–313). On the other hand, Zosimus (late 5th century), while narrating about the reign of Emperor Trebonianus Gallus (251–253), reports that at that time the Persians, having attacked the Roman possessions in Asia, captured Antioch; one part of its population was put to death, whereas the other was taken captive. (*Zos. I. XXVII. 2.* *Zosime. Histoire nou-*

ental sources. Mārī Ibn Sulaymān states that the campaign took place at the beginning of Papā’s service as the Head of the Church (*fi awwal ri’āsati-hi*); it was carried out by the son of Ardashīr I, named Hormuzd or Shāpūhr⁸². It would seem natural to assume that the reference to the “beginning of Papā’s service” is an argument in favour of assigning the campaign to 251/252. However, a similar fragment in the earlier *Abridgement of the Church History* does not state more than that the campaign took place ‘in his (Papā’s – D.M.) days’⁸³; it cannot, however, be ruled out that Mārī Ibn Sulaymān had at his disposal a better or, in any case, a more complete copy of the original text. In the *Chronicle of Seert*, Shāpūhr’s campaign is dated to the eleventh year of his reign (25 September 250 – 24 September 251), but immediately after that it is stated that the king defeated and captured Emperor Valerian (253–260), which happened in 260⁸⁴. It appears that in the historical memory of the East, Shāpūhr I’s wars against Rome merged into one, crowned by the king’s main achievement, the victory over Valerian and his capture; everything else is a supplement to that. For instance, in al-Ṭabarī (839–922/3)’s history, Shāpūhr defeats Valerian not at Edessa, where that actually happened, but at Antioch; after that begins the story of the Antiochian captives in which the emperor himself is included⁸⁵.

The available data on Demetrian can be used as a starting point for the study, but here we are faced with some problems as well. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (b. 260-es, d. 339), whose information is known from the transmission of St. Jerome (b. 340-es, d. 419 or 420), Demetrian was elevated to the rank of bishop of Antioch in the first year of the 258th Olympiad, i.e. in September 251 to August 252⁸⁶. In the list of bishops of Antioch by Patriarch

velle. T. I (Livres I et II). Ed. F. Paschoud. Paris: Société d’édition “Les Belles lettres”, 1971. P. 27). The mention of Trebonianus Gallus shows that the campaign of 251, or 252, is referred to.

⁸² *Maris...*, 1899. P. 8.

⁸³ *Mukhtaṣar...*, 2000. P. 157.

⁸⁴ *Histoire nestorienne inédite (Chronique de Séert)*. Première partie (I). Pub. A. Scher. In: *Patrologia Orientalis*. T. IV. Ed. R. Graffin, F. Nau. Paris, 1908. P. 220.

⁸⁵ *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Tabari*. Ed. M.J. De Goeje. Prima series. II. Rec. J. Barth, Th. Nöldeke. Lugduni Batavorum, 1881–1882. P. 826–827.

⁸⁶ *Evsepii Pamphili Chronici canones latine vertit, adavxit, ad sva tempora prodvxit S. Evsebius Hieronymus*. Ed. I(J).K. Fotherignham. London: H. Milford, 1923. P. 301.

Nicephorus (b. circa 758, d. 828), Demetrian is assigned 4 years of service⁸⁷. On the basis of that, it has been suggested that the date of Demetrian's capture be 256⁸⁸. Although the dating of the capture of Antioch by Shāpūhr I in 256 was popular in the literature for a while⁸⁹, it is at variance with some important data. For instance the sequence of the bishops suggested by Nicephorus is as follows: Babylas – Fabius – Demetrian; the first of them testified [to his religious beliefs], for which he was thrown into prison, under Emperor Decius (249–251), and the second was a bishop for 9 years⁹⁰. Even if Babylas' acts are put, in terms of chronology, into the very beginning of Decius's reign (September 249), Demetrian became the bishop in 258 at the earliest. Therefore, if a combination of the chronologies of Eusebius and Nicephorus is possible at all, it requires strong arguments in support.

In the church history of Eusebius, a letter from Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria to Pope Stephen (254–257) is cited; Demetrian is mentioned in it as the current Head of the Antiochene church⁹¹. It follows that the campaign during which Demetrian was captured could not have taken place before 254; therefore, its dating to 251/2 shall be ruled out. Euty chius of Alexandria (877–940) states that Demetrian became Patriarch of Antioch in the first year of the joint reign of Ghaliyūs and Yūliyānūs, i.e., apparently, Trebonianus Gallus and his son Volusianus, and served in that capacity for eight years⁹². If the time from about June 251 to June 252 is taken as the first year of their reign, it turns out that Demetrian's service as Patriarch came to an end in 260, i.e., when Antioch was taken by the troops of Shāpūhr I. Of course, Euty chius' chronology requires critical study, but this piece of evidence has the merit of eliminating the need

⁸⁷ *Nicephori archiepiscopi constantinopolitani Opuscula historica*. Ed. C. De Boor. Lipsiae, 1880. P. 130.

⁸⁸ Peeters P. S. Démétrianus évêque d'Antioche? In: *Analecta Bollandiana*. T. XLII, 1924. P. 310.

⁸⁹ See, e.g.: Downey G. *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961. P. 260, 594; Honigmann E., Maricq A. *Recherches sur les Res Gestae divi Saporis*. Bruxelles: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1953. P. 141–142.

⁹⁰ *Nicephori...*, 1880. P. 130.

⁹¹ *Eusebius. Hist. Eccl. VII. V. 1* (Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History*. With an English translation by J.E.L. Oulton. II. London: William Heinemann Ltd, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942. P. 138–139).

⁹² *Euty chii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*. Pars I. Ed. L. Cheikho. Beryti, Parisii, Lipsiae, 1906. P. 112–113.

to prove the fact of another campaign of Shāpūhr I against Antioch, not mentioned in the sources. Finally, to return to the reports of Eusebius and Nicephorus, it should be noted that the latter calls Paul of Samosata Demetrian’s successor⁹³. Eusebius indicates that Paul was appointed bishop of Antioch in the first year of the 260th Olympiad (September 259 – August 260) and in the seventh year of Valerian’s reign. Next preceding that is the statement that [captured] Valerian was taken to Persia⁹⁴. Of course, it can be assumed that Demetrian had lost the ability to perform the duties of a bishop earlier, but the further back in time the date of that is pushed, the more difficult it becomes to answer the question of why such an important see as Antioch remained unoccupied.

All that indicates that the Antioch was captured by the troops of Shāpūhr I, and Demetrian was taken prisoner, in 260.

The *Chronicle of Seert* contains no mention of negotiations between Demetrian and Papā. Instead, it reports that the captives brought by Shāpūhr “began to live in Gondēshāpūhr and chose Azdaḡ of Antioch, making him their bishop, for the Patriarch of Antioch, Demetrian, fell ill and died of grief”⁹⁵. Even more important is the statement of Eusebius that Demetrian died in Antioch, after which Paul of Samosata became bishop⁹⁶. This statement is extremely difficult to reconcile with the above-cited fragment from the *Abridgement of the Church History*, according to which Papā spoke to Demetrian after the latter arrived in Gondēshāpūhr with the captives. It appears that in the Eastern sources a legend has come down to us, composed primarily to give the primacy of Papā greater legitimacy. It is important to observe that in the fragment in question Demetrian recognizes the primacy of Papā over the Christians of the Sassanid Empire, that is, gives him the consent of the Patriarch of Antioch, which he lacked. At the same time, the legend also served the interests of the hierarchs of Gondēshāpūhr, allowing them to claim that their see was rightfully the second in the Sassanid Empire, immediately following that of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.

⁹³ *Nicephori...*, 1880. P. 130.

⁹⁴ *Evsebii...*, 1923. P. 302.

⁹⁵ *Histoire...*, 1908. P. 221.

⁹⁶ *Eusebius. Hist. Eccl. VII. XXVII. 1* (Eusebius, 1942. P. 208–209).



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