NEW SOURCES FOR THE SYMBOL IN EARLY SYRIAN CHRISTIANITY

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A new avenue was opened in the research on the origin and development of the ancient Christian symbols with the emergence of one such stemming from ancient Syrian Christianity, specifically, from East Syrian Christendom in Persia - it complements and enriches the material on the symbols of Western provenance.

Access to this precious item comes by way of a recension of the synodical acts of the convocation convened at Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the year 410.\(^1\) Embedded in that recension is the symbol in question.

This marks an important advance over the information previously available to us in the extant acts\(^2\) of this significant convocation. In these we see the resolutions put forward in the interest of reorganizing the East Syrian Church under Catholicos Ishaq. Among other innovations, there is included the promulgation of the Nicaean Creed. This is natural enough since the convocation was summoned precisely for this purpose, namely to bring the church affairs of Persian Christianity into line with the Western development and to make the Nicaean faith the creedal foundation of the reorganized church. To this end Marutā, bishop of Maipherqat, had labored and the results of these endeavors became manifest in the formulations adopted by the synod.

The same is the case with another document connected with the name Marutā, bishop of Maipherqat.\(^3\) Also this cannot offer this service.

The new avenue for research was occasioned by the emergence of another recension of the acts of the synod. It reaches us through another channel, namely through the collections of ecclesiastical legis-

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\(^1\) Ms. Par. syr. 62, fol. 237b–238a.
\(^2\) Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens, éd. par J.B. Chabot (Paris 1902).
\(^3\) Les canons de Pseudo-Nicée en syriaque, éd. par A.Vööbus (Stockholm 1972).
lative sources. These collections have incorporated also the acts of the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon but in a different recension.

The form of the text employed in this instance is often foreshortened and condensed, but in one respect this abridgement and redaction makes a move which is very surprising. The symbol embedded in this recension is not the symbol of the faith of Nicaea of the official acts of the synod previously at our disposal. It is different since it consists of archaic elements combined with those which appear in the Nicaean Creed.

It is understandable that a situation like this draws particular attention to itself for it provides access to an unknown and archaic source in the category of creedal formulations.

T. J. Lamy was the happy voyageur who came across the first and only document to that time in Ms. syr. 62 in Paris and he edited the text of this recension on the basis of this singular codex. He devoted a special study to the form of the symbol found – it was after all a discovery much too important to ignore. In discussing the background of this surprising phenomenon Lamy suggested that we have to do with an ancient symbol of Eastern Syrian Christianity – one that was part of the archaic heritage of that ecclesiastical community – which had to recede before the weight of the Nicene symbol in the wake of reform. This would explain the absence of the ancient creed from the official acts of the synod. However, Ms. Par. syr. 62 indicates that the new symbol must have been placed side by side with the ancient one, but the course of events initiated by this important synod were such that the archaic symbol was unable to retain its position in the official acts and was thus excluded. However, in the foreshortened recension of the acts, which could not be regarded as official, the ancient creed managed to survive. This is an attractive explanation of a curious situation and in itself is a plausible reconstruction of the circumstances. It would serve as an explanation of the literary phenomena presented by the two sets of texts.

Every ancient source, particularly a precious relic like this which

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