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The Sogdian Versions of the Acts of the Persian Martyrs*

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The Christian community in the Turfan Oasis is represented by a significant number of texts found especially at the monastic site of Bulayīq, to the north of the modern town of Turfan. Though the site was an isolated one, exposed and probably far from a major settlement, it was in a strategic position beside a road. The texts found there are in Syriac, Sogdian and Old Turkish but also in Middle Persian and early Modern Persian. The Sogdian texts are in modified Syriac script but there is evidence for the use of Sogdian script for Christian texts too, and even for the transfer of at least one text (C2 [now E27], text 1 according to N. Sims-Williams' observations (1985, 67)) from Sogdian to Syriac script. The Old Turkish texts are in Syriac script. The Middle Persian Psalter fragment in Pahlavi script was found in the context of these Christian finds, as was apparently a fragment of a frahang-type systematised listing of Middle Persian Pahlavi spellings for seven verbs, i.e. a page from a book used to train or practise the use of Pahlavi script, which was in use in the Sasanian empire and, apart from these two examples, is not otherwise attested in the Turfan Oasis. The only more easterly evidence for this script is in an inscription in Xi'an, one of the capital cities of Tang China. This inscription belongs to the remnants of the

* A first version of this text was presented on the 5th of May 2012 in London at the meeting organized and chaired by Erica Hunter, Christianity in Iraq XI. Martyrdom in the Iraqi church: Historical and modern perspectives. I am grateful to Erica Hunter and the audience at that meeting and N. Sims-Williams in particular for comments that helped me to rethink some points. It is a great pleasure to dedicate this revised version to Yutaka Yoshida as a token offering for his excellent scholarship, collegiality, broad interests and, on a personal level, his friendliness and kindness.

Sasanian ruling dynasty that lost power in 651 and had sought refuge there. The location of Christian texts in the Turfan oasis and the occurrence of some Christian Turkish texts show that the community was in an Old Turkish-speaking area. This indicates a date not before the 8th century. The evidence of the early Modern Persian texts again points to connections with Iran after the 7th/8th centuries. The Middle Persian Pahlavi Psalter fragment might be expected to show the same connections for the earlier, Middle Persian period, before the demise of the Sasanians in 651, but its C¹⁴ date of ca. 840, its very likely connection with a Christian cross from Herat with a similar date confirms the connection with Iran in the Islamic period and seems to pin that down closer to Herat and possibly Marw as the route this community or its predecessors took to Central Asia. However, the surviving parts of the Pahlavi Psalter fragment have a considerably later date because they represent what was left of a well-used book that has fallen apart.

There is evidence that Marw, an important node on the Silk Road, was a centre of Christian missionary activity from at least the 6th c. But the precise role of the Sogdian texts is somewhat of a puzzle, particularly because the route through Marw would not necessarily take the Christian community through Sogdiana. Nevertheless the evidence of some late Sogdian features in a text such as C5 [now E5] with its spellings such as *rmyȳī* (with two vowel marks to indicate long vowels and therefore a younger ending) for earlier *rmy* (with a short vowel) suggests that there was ongoing translation work either in Turfan or in some intervening area between here and the Sogdian heartland much farther to the west. Where and when were the older Christian Sogdian texts translated? What was the interrelationship of Syriac, Middle Persian and Sogdian speaking Christians? Can the Sogdian versions of the Acts of the Persian Martyrs shed some light on this question?

In N. Sims-Williams' catalogue of the fragments in Syriac script in the Berlin Turfan Collection, 2012, the register on the contents of the fragments lists, on p. 228-9, under "Hagiography and legends" fourteen items, among them "Persian martyrs under Shapur II". This item is again divided into four entities "St. Shahdost,

St. Tarbo, 120 martyrs and St. Barba'smin". All these texts are contained in E27, formerly C2, which Sims-Williams edited in 1985 after work by O. Hansen, E. Benveniste and M. Schwartz (s. Sims-Williams 2012, 99). One of the texts, on St. Tarbo, also occurs in E28/27. Three of the other items in the list "Hagiography and legends" are also contained in E27 and there only: Sleepers of Ephesos (E27/77), St. Eustathius (E27/83-91) and St. Pethion (in two versions, E27/1-27, E27/120-125). The others are attested in E23 (St. George, apparently the sole text in this short manuscript), E24 (Invention of the Cross E24/1-5; St. Barshabbā E24/7-11; St. Sergius and St. Bacchus E24/6), E25 (St. Serapion E25/1), E26 (St. John of Dailam E26/7-23; St. Serapion E26/23-32), E28 (Mār Awgen E28/9-10), E29 (Acts of Peter — Simon Peter and Simon Magus E29/6; St. Cyriacus and St. Jutta E29/8) and E30 (Dormition of Mary E30/1-2).

This list represents a large number of figures that play a central role in Syriac Christianity. The setting of these texts is in Palestine or neighbouring areas. Compared with the Syriac and later Greek texts about the Persian martyrs it is remarkable that the Persian martyrs under Shapur II represented by the Sogdian translations in the large book E27 are exclusively from Mesopotamia and not from the Iranian plateau and that the names of the martyrs are almost exclusively Semitic (though some figures are Iranians, e.g. Guḥištāzād and Pusai in the Syriac Simeon martyrology). The full range of Persian martyrs includes a number of interesting texts that have been also used to gain insights into Sasanian Zoroastrianism because many of the martyrs are converts from Zoroastrianism. Some of the details concern the way the Zoroastrian hierarchy and the Sasanian state, apparently working hand in hand, punish apostate Zoroastrians primarily for their apostasy rather than for the Christianity that they adopted, though, of course, it is their Christianity that ensured that the events were commemorated. This opens the possibility that Zoroastrian apostasy to other religions (Manichaeism, Judaism?) may have occurred without being recorded.

The martyrologies of Christians without a Zoroastrian background usually include two motifs. In the first place there is the traditional motive of testing the Christian by demanding that he or she submit to the publicly approved cult of whatever gods the state upholds – in the Roman empire this took the form of participation in public offerings, in the Sasanian state the sun, fire and water are the deities. In the second place the persecution takes on a political dimension by the association of Christianity with the Eastern Roman/Byzantine empire though there were in fact various attempts during the Sasanian period to establish a Sasanian Christianity, especially at the beginning of the 5th century.

The fall of the Sasanian empire and in particular the fundamental change brought about by the introduction of a new religious framework, Islam, meant that established identities and old rivalries had to adapt. Can we see anything of this in Turfan, in a Christian community that clearly uses Syriac as the language of its sacred texts but also has a clear need to produce translations into Sogdian and Old Turkish and also clearly has connections to Christians using both Middle Persian and Modern Persian? Apart from the process of translation — a statement in itself — do the texts reflect in any other way on their contemporary location or do they insist on maintaining a historical focus on past events essential for the origin of the religion and defining for the community?

To be sure, adherents of religions have no great problems with information about the local origin of their religion — the great numbers of pilgrims to the holiest sites of all the world's great religions testify adequately to that — what I am looking for here are indicators of local origin and local loyalty in at least some texts of the Christian community in Bulayīq that may point to stages in the movement of Christians to this place and anything that could show that the act of translating from Syriac to Middle Persian, from Syriac to Sogdian and from Syriac (or Sogdian?) to Old Turkish might have been accompanied by attempts to make the texts more accessible to the local community of believers or potential believers for whom the work of translation was undertaken.

It is not just a question of hagiography with reference to historical figures. The *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the “sayings of the fathers” are also represented in part in Sogdian translation and provide, when they do it at all, a setting in the early monastic environment of the Eastern Mediterranean and Egypt. Importantly, many of these texts are, apart from some personal names, quite vague about location — e.g. in one tale a monk is brought to “a city” without name. Therefore they can be assumed to have transported quite well to the Turfan area which provided quite a similar environment to that of the tales of monastic life in the desert and caves. Here it is quite likely that the translation into Sogdian already allowed monastic Christians in Sogdiana to imagine that the texts talked to them and even about them — though in fact the Christian site of Urgut (9th century?) in the Zerafschan valley is not in a desert area, quite unlike Bulayīq in the Turfan Oasis which is in an isolated and exposed place.

E27 (C2) contains on the surviving pages 64-69 texts on Persian martyrs under Šābuhr II. The texts are: St. Shahdost, St. Tarbo, 120 martyrs and St. Barba‘šmin. The end of the previous text in the manuscript on folio 64 is unidentified. Folios 63 and 62 are lost; the surviving lower part of folio 61 contains an identified, different text, the already-mentioned *Apophthegmata Patrum*. After folio 69 there is a gap; on the next attested folio, 77, there is again an identified, different text, the Legend of the Sleepers of Ephesus. Allowing for loss of the preceding and following texts⁽¹⁾, it is clear that the Persian martyrs can have occupied no more than 14 or 15 pages back and front. In fact it may have been even less, because folio 64R clearly contains, on the lower half of the page as preserved, the initial part of the text about St. Shahdost. This ended with a caption in the last lines on 65R. It is also clear that the text about St. Tarbo and the 120 martyrs began on the upper lost part of 65V and continued from there through the lost page 67 to end on 68V11 (final caption). The text on St. Barba‘šmin and 16 martyrs started on 68V13 with an initial caption and

⁽¹⁾ And the lack of certainty in the reconstruction of this part of the codex, as noted by Sims-Williams 1985, 19.

continued to where the text breaks off at the end of 69V. Judging from the Syriac version, not much more was lost. Since the martyrologies form a group, historically, linguistically and stylistically⁽²⁾, it is unlikely that another martyrology followed. The preceding text is from the sayings of the fathers; the following text is about the Sleepers of Ephesus — both are texts that have some relevance for the Turfan area and may indicate a local reference in the choice of texts for this large miscellany. As already mentioned, the sayings of the fathers, though located in Egypt and Syria, the homelands of Christian monasticism, fitted the very similar condition in Bulayīq. The sleepers of Ephesus, in turn, fit a prominent shrine in Toyuq, which, though it became a Muslim shrine, never entirely lost sight of its pre-Islamic Christian function and must therefore be regarded as a prominent piece of Christian topographical placement, a christianization of the local topography to yield a sacred landscape. This is demonstrated by the Chagatai text “the Companions of the cave”, Aṣḥābu ’l-kāhf⁽³⁾. The Muslim adaptation was facilitated by the occurrence of the seven sleepers in the Qur’ān.

As Sims-Williams (1985, 137) notes with reference to Wießner 1967, the texts on the Persian martyrs belong to the Simeon circle. The names of the main martyrs are, with one exception, Aramaic and therefore concentrate on Arameans/Syrians as opposed to Iranian Christians, who, however, also occur in the Syriac texts though not (perhaps just accidentally) in the surviving parts of the Sogdian versions. The localisation of the events is in Mesopotamia rather than on the Iranian plateau. The texts use Syriac placenames, e.g. Beth Lapat and not Gundeshapur⁽⁴⁾. An exception is the Middle Persian personal name Šāhdōst. In the Syriac version (and from there in the Sogdian version) this Middle Persian name Šāhdōst was translated “Friend of

(2) See Wießner 1967.

(3) See Gürsoy-Naskali 1985. Interesting common elements are the mention of Dakianus, the Roman empire, and Yamliha, cf. Yamlikā in the Sogdian text. Cf. also the use of the name Dakianus-šahr for Gaochang.

(4) Interestingly, this is just like what the Manichaean texts do when referring to the event of Mani’s death that occurred in the same area a century earlier.

the king” — Syriac *ṛḥm mlk’*, Sogd. *xwšywny fry*. This demonstrates not only a knowledge of Middle Persian and interest in that knowledge, i.e. that the text was entered into the Syriac tradition by someone with a knowledge of Middle Persian but also that, in the Syriac translation, the chosen Syriac frame is international and not restricted to an audience that could be expected to know Middle Persian. It is true, of course, that Greek versions of these texts were also made, each language referring to an international framework. Sims-Williams points out (1985, 147) that the Sogdian translation of Šāhdōst may have been influenced by the order of the parts of the Middle Persian name: *xwšywny fry*, though *fri-* is otherwise usually the first element in compounds. Similarly, on p. 149 he cites an observation by Gershevitch that while the name of the Sasanian capital city Tesifon is given in the Syriac version as *qṭyspwn*, a conventional historical form, the Sogdian version does not slavishly reproduce this, but rather replaces it by a form *ṭyspwn* that shows familiarity with the actual Middle Persian form of the place-name. The Sogdian translation, whether made in Sogdiana or in Turfan, shows knowledge of Sasanian geography, though again the Syriac name and not Weh-ardaxšīr is used⁽⁵⁾. This is a dating criterion because the demise of the Sasanians also meant the demise of their capital city, eclipsed by the founding of Bagdad in 762. Though it is possible that the name Tesifon may have retained its currency in some circles, it is safer to assume that the Sogdian version of this text was translated before the 8th century. This makes it more likely that the translation was made in Sogdiana rather than in Turfan, though the fact that Christians are recorded in China before the 8th century (635, according to the Xian stele made in 781) makes this tentative. Generally we simply have too little information on the spread of Christianity eastwards before the seventh century when the long demise of the Sasanian state in wars with Byzantium and with the Arabs and the ongoing unrest forced many people, including religious communities, to seek refuge from the conflicts. If Christians from the Sasanian state

⁽⁵⁾ However, this may be a question of the precise location in the conglomerate of cities sharing the site on both banks of the river channels.

sought refuge in Sogdiana north of the Oxus river they were quickly followed there by the Arab wars of conquest and will have been forced to move farther east. We can expect the situation to have been complex, new refugees coming into older already established communities in Sogdiana but then being forced to move eastwards. The literature they carry with them may not faithfully reflect any one community at a particular time and the textual material found at Bulayīq may not so much reflect the local community's view of itself as be an accretion of the various adaptations and developments of a succession of communities.

In this respect the Zoroastrian elements mentioned in the martyrologies are very interesting.

The quotations given here follow in the sequence of the pages in the codex. To simplify the transliteration, the vowel signs are given basic Latin values here and in the other quotations. The italics used in the translation are Sims-Williams' who uses them to indicate gaps in the Sogdian text translated on the basis of the Syriac original.

The first passage is from the text on the 120 martyrs.

68R 20 - 68V 4 [N. Sims-Williams 1985, 143-4/TITUS]

- 20 ' t fšmty b' pr wyšnt (mzy)x mwγ-
- 21 ptw cn xwšywn ' w' n qt [' w](štye ') [(p)[r wš]nt pdyb ' rcy ' ' t pr wyšnty
- 22 ptxwnq . ' t šn w' nw w' b p[r *xwšywny f]rm' [n q](t) n(m)[']c brt' qw xwr
- 23 s' ' t žwtaq' . p' cy(n)y w(ntnt)[=====] ' t w' nw w' bnt
- 24 cw ny weyntsq ' ye (p)[w-žy' wrt ===== *qw pt]x(wn)q s'
- 25 pryftyt bnt m' r' wt(ye ')[(n)(γwd)[n =====]
- 26 pcwqeyry prf' c bwt . ' t m' (x n) [y =====]
- 27 ' t m' x ryt ' āγ' rc sty w' nc' nw wr(d)[=====]
- 28 wntt' qw m' x s' . ' ye γnt' q-qre(y)tye=[=====]
- 29 b' t qt yxypθ bγw preycymq' . ' t qw [=====]
- 30 yw' r šm' x ' t šm' x xwšywnqy' ptyθy (d)[' rymsq =====]
- 31 s' ny nγwšymq' . w' n qt zpry' qeyn b' t[*pr *m' x *ywxnw *' t γwbty]

68V

- 1 b' t p(r) [*m' x p](t)(xwn)(q)[xy](d) [*xwšywnqy' =====]
 2 qy šm' x pr xypθ trxq(y)' q q' mt(s)[q ===== qy]
 3 m' x bwtq' wdey nwšc žw' n' t' yqw(n)c[y](q p)t[š'](d)t[y'](')t(šm')
 [x](bwt)[q](')
 4 z' ry' wey' t dntyē šq' f' yqwn pn {flower}

And there was sent against them from the king the great mōbed,
 so that *he might stand over their* trial and over their
 execution, and he said to them *at the king's* command: “Worship the sun
 and you shall live!” *These holy men* answered and said:
 “Do you not see, O *heartless blind ones*, that *they who* are taken to execution
wear garments of mourning, and *their face* is blanched *from their*
fear? And lo! We *are wearing garments of joy*
 and our face is bright as the rose *in the morning*! Do to us *all that you desire*,
 O wicked, *evil men*, because *far* be it *from us*
 that we should desert our God and *pay homage to His creatures*!
 But you and your kingdom we despise, *and to its commands*
 we shall pay no heed, so that *by our blood* may be honoured *and*
by our execution may be *glorified that kingdom which cannot be seen*,
 to which you in your bitterness desire *to send us*,
 in *which* there will be for us eternal life and everlasting *rest*, and for you *there*
will be torment and gnashing of teeth for ever.”

The next passage is from the text on Tarbo.

66V 1-4 [N. Sims-Williams 1985, 142/TITUS]

- 1 [ny](γ)rbntq {flower} ' t c['](nw p)t(yγw)[šnt](mwn)[w w]' (x)š z(pr)[tt
 *' dyt p' cny]
 2 wntnt ' t w' nw w' (bn)t (q)t (m' x) byw(pr wyn)y (s)[frywn =====]

- 3 ' t m ' x sfrey(n)ye nm ' c q(w xwr) s ' qy wy(ny bnt)[y === =====]
 4 ' t xwtw yšw(γ) m ' x wxšnw cn š[m ']x zwydm(') (p)[yd ' r =====]

The king sent answer and said: “If they will worship the sun they shall not die, because perhaps they do not know sorcery.” And when the holy ones heard this thing they answered and said: “We will not exchange our God for His creation, and we will not give our creator’s worship to the sun who is His servant, and we will not desert the Lord Jesus our saviour on account of your threat.”

The answer, re-establishing the correct Christian relationship between god and his servant the sun, amounts to a good strategy that any Christian could make use of in a religious discussion with a Zoroastrian, be he a Sasanian or a Sogdian. But the first passage goes much farther than that: “but you and your kingdom we despise”. Presumably, this was a sentence that Christians will have been careful not to repeat in public in Sogdiana or Turfan.

The martyrology of Tarbo, from which the second passage is taken, has a particular significance as a text showing how a beautiful and wise woman, surrounded by persecuting but lecherous Zoroastrians, defends her virginity, her modesty and her religious calling in no uncertain terms.

The third passage is from the text on Barba’smin.

68V 13ff [N. Sims-Williams 1985, 144/TITUS]

- 13 xwšmyqy srdy cn pšq'r . mȳr'mnt brbyšmyn nw qy psqpey
 14 m't qw slyeq 't tyspwn xwšywnye peynms' . 't w'nw w'bnt . qt (s)ty
 15 mdey yw žwȳy mrty qy 'wštety sty m'x ywqy ptryet . 't ȳrf mrtxmeyt
 16 zwyrtq cn m'x dyny , 't šn 'nc'ny wntysq <cn> xwšyw(nye 'r)qy . 't pr
 17 xwr byw xwy'ry' wntysq . 't 'āpey 't 'ātreȳ ptyθy' w(n)t(y)sq .

In the sixth year of the persecution they slandered Barba’smin — him that was bishop in Seleucia and Ctesiphon — in the king’s presence, and they said:

“There is here a certain difficult man who is standing (out) against our teaching, and he turns many men from our religion and makes them cease from the king’s work, and he belittles the sun god⁽⁶⁾ and abuses water and fire.”

The accusation (though not in fact slander) is that Barbašmin’s opposition is not only directed at religious teaching but also has an important disciplinary and even economic element. The disobedience towards the king is followed by and clearly connected with the lack of respect for the deities of the sun, of water and of fire.

And later on, from the same text:

69R 11-16 [N. Sims-Williams 1985, 145/TITUS]

11 wyd'(γ)t(y) yp(')q ..[...][=====]
 12 't w(')nw w'b . (q)t (zw) w'[w](r)[y *wn'mq' =====]
 13 šm(')x (d)yn (p)r s't (s)fr[yw]n [=====]....t()[..](brbγšmy)n
 14 't šy w'(n)w w'b . (q)t (pr c)[w](tye ny) 'ā(nyd'ry tw' x(y)p)θ dw' (ny)t (by)yšt
 15 'ātr 't 'āp 't 'wpty'pt wn(w)t' pr s(wq)nt dn xwr()prwo (.) (q)t d(b)'t
 16 s't z'wr θ(b)rwtyent 't flyrt(') m'x cn zey w'(n)c'nw sw(qnt) xwrdr'y .

Then *the king became angry, and he swore by the sun his god*
 and said: “I will abolish your doctrine from the earth and I will make
 your religion *pass away* in the whole creation!” And at this Barbašmin *laughed*
 and said to him: “Why have you not brought your two other gods,
 fire and water, and made (them) co-partners in the oath with the sun, that perchance
 they may all give aid and you may make us pass away from the earth as you
 have sworn?”

Not only does the king indicate that there can be no tolerance — the victorious

(6) On the “sun god”, with the accompanying *βaγ-* and the plural *βaγīšt* used of water and fire, s Sims-Williams 1985, 149, note on 68V 17 *xwr byw*.

religion will destroy the conquered one — Barba'smin shows insolence by laughing and mocking the ineffectiveness of the king's oath, showing at the same time enough knowledge of Zoroastrian practise to make his mockery effective. Again it is hard to image that any religious community in Sogdiana or Turfan could have dared to express such insolence to a ruler.

Do these texts, with their polemical stance against Sasanian Zoroastrianism, relate in any way to Sogdian Zoroastrianism? Was possibly the continued struggle against Zoroastrianism in Sogdiana the reason for transmitting these texts? In Sogdiana there was undoubtedly a local, Sogdian form of Zoroastrianism. How much opposition to Christianity was there in the Turfan area from Zoroastrian Sogdians of the Sogdian diaspora or from Buddhists? It is likely that there was no state sanctioned opposition to Christianity in either region. This would have forced the religions to put up with each other and it would have made depictions of (apparently) state measures illusory. These derive, in the main, from martyrological texts referring to the Roman empire where the Roman state cult was prepared to avail of coercion. The reality behind similar depictions for the Sasanian empire is disputed and often regarded as a literary motive taken over from texts referring to the Roman situation. There seem to have been very few actual occurrences of state driven religious persecution in the Sasanian empire.

If we can make a distinction between the first group of Syriac martyrologies that concentrate on Syriac Christians in Mesopotamia in the 4th century and later martyrologies that at least partially refer to Christian converts from Zoroastrianism and are sometimes localised on the Iranian plateau, the question arises: Why do the Sogdian translators seem to ignore the second group? This is, of course, highly speculative due to the damaged and fragmentary nature of the Christian Sogdian texts but it does seem at least that enough is known about the contents of E27 and particularly of the part of the codex containing the sayings of the fathers, followed by martyrologies from the Simeon circle and followed in turn by the seven sleepers of Ephesus to suggest that there was not enough space for anything more than the

martyrologies from the Simeon circle. Since the texts framing the martyrologies seem to suit Toyuq it may be possible to find criteria that show that the martyrologies also fitted Toyuq in some way. Alternatively, only the sequence of the parts of the codex E27 is relevant to Toyuq and the individual texts were translated in Sogdiana with or without specific purpose.

From what we know of Sogdiana through personal names and the iconography of funerary caskets (*astodans*) in Sogdiana and even the funerary couches of high-ranking Sogdians in the Chinese hierarchy (or affiliated to the Chinese hierarchy) in the east, we could expect the conversion of Zoroastrians, now of the Sogdian variety, to Christianity to be a stated aim of Christian missionaries to Sogdiana and possibly even to Sogdian communities farther east. The martyrologies of the Simeon circle simply present the rejection of Zoroastrianism by, in the main, Christians who did not have such a background themselves. The tenor of the texts is very much like that of the first Christian martyrs in the Roman empire, the “new” element is the localisation of the events on the territory of the Sasanian empire and in particular in Mesopotamia rather than the Iranian plateau closer to Sogdiana. The later Syriac martyrologies describe the fate of Zoroastrian converts to Christianity who suffer the full force of the Zoroastrian reaction to their apostasy. Could it be that the main reason for not including translations of these later texts was not the absence of a Zoroastrian and Christian conflict but rather the lack of martyrdom in Sogdiana on this basis, possibly because the Zoroastrian communities, losing some though perhaps not many members to Christianity, did not have the coercive power and possibilities of enforcement that Sasanian Zoroastrians in the Sasanian state had?

There is also a possibility that the kind of martyrology translated in E27 could be a dating criterion, meaning that the Sogdian translators had access to the earlier type of martyrology and not to the later. This would yield a date of after the beginning of the 5th century and before the 6th and 7th centuries for the Sogdian community. But in fact it seems quite impossible that the Christian communities in Sogdiana, whether they were there as early as the fifth century or moved there only in or after the seventh century, would not have known the later martyrologies because they clearly had access to a wide range of Syriac literature. In any case, there were ongoing links between various eastern stations of the Silk Road and Persian Christian communities in the 8th, 9th and later centuries who will have known these texts. Sogdian translations of such texts might have risked stirring up a similar conflict in Sogdiana or farther east in environments where neither group had the power to enforce actions against apostasy or conversion. Is this primarily a reflection of exiled Sogdians moving into a new area rather than of a community being successful in converting locals?

What do Old Turkish martyrologies signify for the development of the community?

Besides fragments of the Syriac text on St. George published by Maróth 1991 and the quite extensive Sogdian version there is an Old Turkish version of the text⁽⁷⁾, pointing, as Sims-Williams 2012, 68 observed, to the “popularity of the legend of St. George at Bulayīq”. The translation includes proper and place names that give Eastern Mediterranean places continued significance, and the evidence of the above-mentioned Chagatai text about the cave dwellers at Toyuq also points to extensive continuity partly using the same names, as well as other Roman names. On the one hand, like other religions, Christianity retains a strong focus on its place of origin, on the other hand it also needs local holy spaces, graveyards, churches etc. Was there a cult of relics etc. in Bulayīq? Presumably yes. The concentration on St. George and the continuation of this through the translation into the local language,

⁽⁷⁾ See Le Coq 1922, 48-9 and Bang 1926, 64-75.

Old Turkish, provides an old model for the Christian community. This model can be transferred but it remains essentially foreign and remote in time, even if various things, such as church dedications, murals, reading of the text, were undertaken to bridge the gap. The discrepancy between the world depicted in the hagiographical text and the contemporary world of the believer means that the believer does not transfer the conflict to his own world. The hagiographical text loses its potentially dangerous aspect in favour of its central function to uphold the religion.

In any case, Sogdiana and later Turfan were areas where apparently no religious group suffered active persecution and where, before the 11th c. and the dominance of Buddhism in the Uigur Empire, no religious group could claim such secular support as to be able to enforce their beliefs. It seems very unlikely that Manichaeism in the Uigur Empire was able to use the undoubted support it had to coerce others. If the Christians were essentially an exile community then it is likely that they relied heavily on being tolerated. All in all, this reduced the religious communities to private institutions which may, of course, at the most have found various ways of enforcing conformity within the group if necessary. They may occasionally even have dared to act in some coordinated way against a rival group, but that meant risking a breach of public order which was likely to be noticed by the secular power. The Syrian texts were therefore not adequate to describe the situation in Sogdiana and Turfan and a presentation of the more vicious elements of some of the Syriac martyrologies might have risked being inflammatory. On the other hand, the various religious communities use and define themselves by using texts that do not adequately describe their contemporary situation but refer to historical time and in particular to the time and place of origin of the religion, however foreign this might be for a particular community. There would be no reason not to use martyrologies, and E27 shows that some were used in a context with texts that seem to allow local ties. The fairly straightforward narrative and the lack of depictions of sadistic violence may have played a role in the choice of specific texts.

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