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Epigraphica Nestoriana Serica¹

SAMUEL N. C. LIEU, Sydney

1. The Bilingual Xi'an Monument

The study of the epigraphy the Christian Church of the East (commonly referred to as Nestorianism) in China began as early as the Seventeenth Century when western scholars were able to study the large stele (ca. 270 cm high, 105 cm wide and 30 cm thick) found by workmen in 1623 CE² while digging a trench in the district of Zhouzhi 蓋屋 about 75 km west of the historic city of Xi'an 西安 (i.e. Chang'an 長安 the western capital of China during the Tang Dynasty). The stele bears a long inscription in Chinese but it also contains a number of lines in a script then unknown to scholars in China. However, Catholic missionaries were by then active on the South China coast, especially in the Portugese enclave of Macao, and the main text of the stele was soon recognized as pertaining to the establishment of the monasteries a monotheistic religion – ‘the Lumionous Teaching of Da Qin’ (*Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教) in the capital cities of Tang China, viz. the western capital of Chang'an and the eastern capital of Luoyang 洛陽.³

News of the discovery of an unusal ancient religious monument in China soon circulated among European missionaries in China and it was not long before the inscription was recognized both by Chinese and Western scholars as pertaining to the arrival of the ‘Nestorian’ form of Christianity in medieval China. Reports of this sensational discovery also circulated in Europe – mainly through work of the Jesuit scholar ÁLVARO DE SEMEDO who saw the stele in 1628 and later published a Spanish version (1642) and an Italian one (1643) of the Chinese portion of the text. An earlier translation had been made by NICOLAS TRIGAULT in Latin in 1625 but this was not published until almost three

1 The author is grateful to the Australian Research Council, the Chiang Ching Kuo Foundation and the Humboldt Stiftung for financial support for research in China, Berlin, London and Cambridge. He would also like to thank Dr GUNNER MIKKELSEN for much helpful advice and correction.

2 All dates are CE unless stated otherwise.

3 The existence of a Nestorian community in Luoyang has now been confirmed by the discovery in the eastern suburbs of the city in 2006 of a broken Nestorian ‘sutra-inscription’. Cf. ZHANG NAIZHU 張乃壽: “Ba Henan Luoyang xin chutu de yi jian Tangdai Jingjiao shike 跋河南洛陽新出土的一件唐代景教石刻”, in: *Xiyu yanjiu* 西域研究 2007.1, pp. 65–73.

centuries later by HENRI HAVRET in 1902.⁴ The language of the non-Chinese portion the inscription had also been recognized as Syriac – the *lingua franca* of the Church of the East commonly known by their perjorative name of Nestorians. These lines in Syriac which were written in the Estrangela (and not the Nestorian) script were first deciphered and translated by another European missionary P. TERCENIO (born PAUL JEAN SCHRECK) in 1629 who circulated his results privately.⁵ The presence of Syriac in this particular epigraphical text is not surprising as the main part of the text in Chinese (inscribed in AD 781) gives a laudatory account of the spread of a monotheistic ‘Luminous (or Radiant) Religion’ (*Jingjiao* 景教) from a country to the west of China called Da Qin 大秦 (which most scholars recognize as the archaic Chinese name for the Roman Empire) to the Middle Kingdom.⁶ Some lines of text in a foreign script would strengthen the credentials of *Jingjiao* as a privileged foreign religion. The discovery of a Christian (albeit Nestorian) inscribed monument discovery was at first disbelieved by many European scholars, including Voltaire, who commonly wrote it off as an ingenious ‘Jesuit forgery to deceive the Chinese and defraud them of their treasures’.⁷

The bilingual stele, now commonly known to scholars and the wider public as the Nestorian Monument (hereafter ‘Monument’), is the prime exhibit in the Xi’an Forest of Stelae Museum (*Xi’an beilin bowuguan* 西安碑林博物館, i.e. The Xi’an Epigraphical Museum) and is seen by hundreds of thousands of tourists each year.⁸ Earlier editions and translations of the text of the long inscription normally included both the Chinese and the Syriac texts.⁹ However, because the main body of the inscription on the Monument is in Chinese, the text has been studied mainly by Sinologists and not by Syriac scholars with the result that some recent translations of the inscription do not include the Syriac at all except for the first two lines – one at the beginning and the other at the end of the main Chinese text.¹⁰ This neglect of the Syriac is understandable in that the Monument is not strictly speaking a bilingual inscription as the Syriac and the Chinese versions bear little relation to each other. Moreover, while the Chinese text runs into 1,756 characters in 32 long lines – such length of text

4 See useful summaries of the discovery and publication history of this famous stele in PELLIOU 1996, pp. 5–146, and RIBOUD 2001, pp. 2–4 and 12–15.

5 Cf. PELLIOU 1996, pp. 102–103.

6 On the significance and geographical extent of Da Qin see LESLIE/GARDINER 1996, pp. 131–162.

7 The words of GEORGES HORN, cited in PELLIOU 1996, p. 151.

8 See *Xi’an beilin bowuguan* 西安碑林博物館 – *Xi’an Forest of Stone Tablets Museum (Exhibition Catalogue)*, Shaanxi 1993, p. 44. The monument was placed in the Museum in 1907.

9 See especially SAEKI 1937, pp. 320–333, and also MOULE 1930, pp. 35–52. SAEKI’s edition contains excellent reproduction of the Syriac parts of the text.

10 PELLIOU 1996, pp. 173–180 (translation of Chinese section only), and XU LONGFEI 2004, pp. 95–101 (translation of Chinese section only).

It is generally accepted that the Catholicos and Patriarch Hananishu died in 780 but news of death at Seleucia-Ctesiphon had obviously not yet been received in China in 781 when the stele was erected.¹⁶ It is not impossible that the otherwise unattested Syriac term in l. 1 of the Syriac text (viz. ܦܘܠܬܐ) might have been a transliteration for the term *fazhu* 法主 ‘King of Law’ which would certainly fit the seniority requirement and here given as translation for the Syro-Greek word ܦܘܠܬܐ ‘patriarch’.

The most substantial portion of the Syriac text inscribed on the Monument is found below the main body of the Chinese and the text reads vertically and from left to right. The Chinese characters in l. 13 are therefore shown in their correct vertical position on the inscription and properly aligned with the Chinese main text above and next to the Syriac¹⁷:

ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܐܠ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(3)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(4)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(5)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(6)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(7)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(8)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(9)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(10)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(11)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(12)
僧靈寶 .. ܦܘܠܬܐ	(13)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(14)
ܦܘܠܬܐ ܦܘܠܬܐ ܕܘܫܘܐ	(15)

In the year One Thousand and Ninety and Two of the Greeks (1092 Sel. = 781 CE) My Lord Izd-buzid priest and Chorepiscopus of Khumdan the metropolis, son of the late Milis priest, from Balkh a city of Tauristan (i.e. Tocharistan), set up that tablet of stone. The things which are written on it [are] the law of him our Saviour and the preaching of them our fathers to the kings of Šinaye. *Monk Lingbao* Adam minister son of Izd-buzid Chorepiscopus.¹⁸

This section of the inscription was clearly intended for reading only by the Syriac-speaking monks who had come to the Middle Kingdom from Iran and Central Asia following the collapse of the Sassanian Dynasty to the Arabs. The dating formula used (‘In the year ... of the Greeks ...’) is that of the Seleucid

16 Cf. MOULE 1930, p. 47, n. 43.

17 While it is not impossible to use modern computer technology to print these lines vertically, i.e. exactly as they appear on the inscription, it would be highly inconvenient for the reader of Syriac. Replicas of the Monument are found in a number of European institutions thanks to the efforts of the Danish scholar FRITS HOLM and squeezes of the inscription are sold as souvenirs and frequently encountered outside China and one set of the squeezes is available for consultation at the Manichaean Documentation Centre at Macquarie University.

18 Trans. MOULE 1930, p. 48 (modified). WERNER SUNDERMANN thinks the word translated as ‘minister’ by MOULE should be rendered ‘deacon’ in this particular context and that Izd stands for ‘Yazad’.

calendar inaugurated on 1st October 311 BC and was used widely in the Near East and particularly by Christians living under the Sassanians. Its use is particularly well attested on pagan inscriptions in Palmyra.¹⁹ The lines are vertically inscribed from left to right in contradistinction to the Chinese which was inscribed throughout the monument vertically from right to left. The Chinese stone-cutter was probably given a hand-copied Syriac text of these lines which were written horizontally and he turned the text round 90 degrees to conform with the Chinese custom of writing vertically which is fortunate for the modern Syriac scholar because had these lines been inscribed from right to left as well as vertically, the modern scholar will not only have to turn the photograph or squeeze of the these lines through 90 degrees but will also have to read the text from the bottom line upwards. The use of the term *Ṣinya* ܣܝܢܝܐ for China is worth noting as the scribe had reverted to a form of the name more natural for Syrians instead of the Persian sounding *Ṣinistan* ܣܝܢܝܣܬܐ used in a more official context in l. 1 of the Syriac on the main part of the Monument. According to Thomas of Marga, a monk called David from the ‘king of monasteries’ of Bēt ‘Abhe (ܒܝܬ ܐܒܗܐ) near modern Mosul was elected to the metropolitan see of Bet Ṣinya (ܒܝܬ ܣܝܢܝܐ) at the end of the Eighth Century, probably in succession to Adam.²⁰ These thirteen lines of Syriac would be readily comprehensible to the Syriac-speaking monks at the monastery or their visitors from Central Asia. Even the names of the capital cities of Tang China: Khumdan for Xi’an (the western capital) and Sarag for Luoyang (the eastern capital) are well attested in sources in other Central Asian languages such as Sogdian and Turkish.²¹

The thirteen lines are followed by two further lines after a space on the stone of about 12 cm:

ܡܪ ܣܪܓܝܫ ܩܝܫܝܐ ܘܢܝܫܐ (16)
ܡܪ ܣܪܓܝܫ ܩܝܫܝܐ ܘܢܝܫܐ (17)

Mar Sargis priest and Chorepiscopus.

Chorepiscopus (< Gr. *χωρεπίσκοπος*) lit. ‘country-bishop’, or a suffragan bishop in modern parlance, is a very common rank among Nestorian clergy of Central Asia and is encountered in lines 5 and 15 above. How these two lines relate in sense and context to the previous lines is not clear.

The next few lines of the inscription are bilingual and give the names and ranks of the monk responsible for erecting the tablet and that of his assistant in both Syriac and Chinese – once more with differing information especially on

19 Cf. D. R. HILLERS/E. CUSSINI (eds.): *Palmyrene Aramaic Texts*. Baltimore 1996, pp. 57 (PAT 0259), 76 (PAT 0326), etc. and 443.

20 BUDGE 1893, I, p. 238.15 (text). This is an extremely important source as it is the most substantial source on the history of Nestorian Christianity in Iraq and Iran at the time of the erection of the Nestorian Monument in Xi’an.

21 Cf. W. B. HENNING 1948: “The date of the Sogdian Ancient Letters.” In: BSOAS 12 (1947–1948), pp. 603 (Sarag) and 606 (Khumdān).

the title and status of the monks concerned, except in the case of Gabriel his role as ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ ‘head of the monastery’ is faithfully rendered into Chinese as *sizhu* 寺主 lit. ‘monastery-chief’ or ‘abbot’. The task of reading these lines is complicated by the fact that although the Syriac reads vertically from left to right, the Chinese reads vertically from right to left. The hybrid text reproduced here has the Chinese rearranged to fit in with the line-order of the Syriac:

檢校建立碑
 ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ 僧行通 (18)

{Chin.} Supervisor of the erection (of the stele) the monk Xingtong
 {Syr.} Sabranisho (or Sabr'isho ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ) priest.

助檢校試太常卿紫裳寺主僧業利
 ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ (19)
 ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ (20)
 ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ (21)

{Chin.} The Assistant Supervisor of the erection (of the stele), the abbot and monk Yehli (i.e. Gabriel) who was awarded the purple *kaṣāya* (i.e. monastic robe) by the Taichang ching through (public) examination.

{Syr.} Gabriel, priest and archdeacon and abbot of (the monasteries) of Khumdan (i.e. Chang'an) and Sarag (i.e. Luoyang).

The special local honours acquired by Gabriel would have only impressed a Chinese reader of the inscription and no attempt therefore was made by the compiler to find equivalents for them in the Syriac version.

On the two side-panels of the Monument are inscribed in four rows the names of some seventy Syrian monks, some with titles and most with the Chinese equivalent of their names, making this section probably the most ‘bilingual’ part of the inscription. Of the 74 names in Syriac, 62 are accompanied by names in Chinese.²² For those monks whose names had no Chinese equivalents one can only surmise that they saw no need to ‘go native’ and were content to be known solely by their Syriac names. Only a small proportion of the names in Chinese are transliterations or translations of the Syriac. Thus, of the five monks with the same Syriac name of Sargis (Sergius), none have the same monk-name in Chinese which shows how their original name was pronounced in Syriac had little influence on their choice of Chinese equivalents. A good example, though, of a partially transliterated name is in l. 22 of the Syriac, viz. the first name on the list:

ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ ܪܫܐ ܘܝܥܘܒܐ

My lord Yoḥanan Bishop

22 TISSERANT (*apud* RIBOUD 2001, p. 23) believes 20 of the 70 names in Chinese have relatively similar pronunciation in Syriac but such a high figure is very hard to prove as we can not be absolutely certain of the Tang pronunciation of some of the characters in these Chinese names.

for which the Chinese equivalent is

Dade ('Great Virtue' = Bishop) Yaolun 大德曜輪

Yaolun is clearly a transliteration of Yoḥanan because the name in Chinese means a 'radiant wheel' which though Buddhist-sounding is an odd choice for a monk-name and the characters were most likely to have been chosen for their phonetic value. The use of the seemingly unrelated phrase *dade* (which is used in Buddhist texts to translate the Sanskrit term *bhadanta*) for the title of bishop is also attested on a Nestorian inscription in Chinese from a later period found in the port city of Quanzhou.²³ Another exception is the monk or priest Ephraim on l. 28:

ܐܦܪܝܡ ܦܘܠܝܢ 拂林

{Syr.} Afrem priest {Chin.} monk *Fulin*

where the Chinese characters used for transliterating the monk-name 'Fulin' are almost exactly the same as those used to designate the Eastern Roman Empire during the Tang Dynasty (*v. infra*) and have no religious significance. Another possible but less obvious phonetic transliteration might have been the Chinese equivalent on l. 45 for the Biblical name of Noah:

ܘܠܐܝܘܒ 僧來威

{Syr.} Noḥ (Noah) {Chin.} monk Laiwei

One pair of names though is of special interest. On l. 48 we read:

ܩܘܨܬܢܐܢܝܘܨ 僧居信

{Syr.} Qostantinos (i.e. Constantine) {Chin.} monk Juxin

To see the full Greek version of the name Constantine in Syriac instead of the more common abridged version of Qoshtanz ܩܘܨܬܢܐܢܝܘܨ used widely by Nestorians in Central Asia for both Constantinus (masc.) and the Constantia (fem.)²⁴ is of interest in itself but even more unusual is the fact the Chinese monk-name adopted by this Syriac (?) monk Juxin 居信 means 'constant in faith' which bears some relation to the meaning of the name not in Syriac, nor in the Greek from which the Syriac was derived, but in the original Latin from which the Greek was derived. The Latin meaning of the name (from which the English words 'constant' and 'constancy' are also derived) appears to have survived transmission across Central Asia probably through some type of lexical aid.

While most of the names of the Nestorian monks in Syriac on the Nestorian Monument are of Biblical or Semitic origin, a handful of names like Sargis (i.e.

23 Cf. WU WENLIANG 吳文良: *Quanzhou zongjiao shike* 泉州宗教石刻 [= *Religious Stone Inscriptions at Quanzhou*], revised and expanded by WU YOUXIONG 吳幼雄, Beijing 2005, pp. 404–405 (B39).

24 In Nestorian Syro-Turkic inscriptions the name Qoshtanz may, as SUNDERMANN (1995) has suggested, be a title for a '(female) teacher'.

Sergius (ܫܪܓܝܘܣ l. 20, 53, 56 etc.), Bacchus (ܒܥܚܘܫ l. 82),²⁵ Cyriacus (ܥܝܪܝܩܘܫ l. 81),²⁶ Posi (ܦܘܨܝܐ l. 57)²⁷ and Mahdad Gushnasp (ܡܗܕܕܘܩܘܫܢܐܣܦ l. 26)²⁸ is of pagan or Persian origin. However, most of these names are so firmly rooted in the martyrology of the Church of the East in Mesopotamia and Iran (both Nestorian and Monophysite) that they cannot be used to determine the racial origin of the monks of the community which set up the Monument.²⁹

The Syriac version also gives Izd-buzid, priest and Chorepiscopus of Khumdan the metropolis, as the son of the late Milis, a priest from Balkh in Tocharistan as the person who set up the stele in 781. The link with Balkh as a possible source or intermediary of Nestorian mission to the Middle Kingdom has drawn little attention from scholars. The ruins of Balkh now occupy the site of modern Bālā Ḥeṣār in Afghanistan. As Bactra in ancient times, Balkh was capital of the Indo-Greek kingdom of Bactria. It later became the capital of the Kushan Empire and from the late fifth century onwards it was occupied by the Hephthalites. The evangelization of the city also featured in the missionary work of the legendary Bar Shabba in the fourth century³⁰ and the city was also said to have been evangelized by Nestorians during the Shahanshah Kawad's exile among the 'White Huns' as he was said to have been accompanied by two Nestorian priests.³¹ The fact that it was linked to Tocharistan in the Syriac part of the inscription is worth noting as the city was captured by the Arabs in the Eighth Century and was made the capital of Khorāsan. The great centre of Nestorianism in Central Asia at the time of the Islamic conquest of Central Asia was Merv and in 651 it was the Nestorian Bishop of Merv who buried the corpse of the murdered Yazdgerd III after losing the decisive battle of Nihavand (642) to the armies of Islam. Nevertheless Balkh must have been a highly multicultural and multi-faith city in the decades before the Islamic conquest as it was Tēs, the King of Chaganian and Tocharistan, who sent a Mōzak (*muchē*), i.e. a Manichaean priest of the highest rank (= *magister* in Latin sources), who was well

25 On the acts of the famous SS. Sergius and Bacchus celebrated by both Monophysites and Nestorians see I. VAN DE GHEYN: "Passio antiquior SS. Sergii et Bacchi", in: *Analecta Bollandiana* 14 (1895), pp. 371–395. See also the important study of E. K. FOWDEN: *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Berkeley 1999, pp. 101–173.

26 On the legends of Cyriacus and Julitta in Central Asia see SIMS-WILLIAMS 1992, p. 52.

27 Pusai (Gr. Pusaëus, Pe. Pousik or Possi) was 'the chief craftsman' of the Shahanshah at Karka de Ledan and was engaged in the manufacturing of silk before he was martyred. See *Acta martyrum et sanctorum Syriace*, ed. by P. BEDJAN, Paris 1890–1897, vol. II, p. 208.

28 For the name Mahgušnasp in martyrdom acts see references given in F. JUSTI 1895: *Iranisches Namenbuch*, Marburg, p. 186.

29 See also the cautious approach to the question of ethnicity of the monks as suggested by their names by RIBOUD 2001, pp. 22–23. An onomastic study of the more unusual names in Syriac listed in the Monument is long overdue.

30 *Chronicon Seertensis* 40 in A. SCHER (ed.): *Histoire nestorienne inédite (Chronique de Séert)*, Paris 1910 (*Patrologia Orientalis* 5.2), pp. 253–256. On the legend of Bar Saba see N. SIMS-WILLIAMS: "Baršabbā", in: *EIr* III (1989), p. 823 (with full bibliography).

31 Cf. MOFFETT 1998, p. 208.

versed in astrology as envoy to the Tang court in 719.³² Balkh was decisively occupied by the Arabs and used as a military base for the conquest of Central Asia from 734 onwards.³³ The city stood astride a number of main routes and one of them which goes through the Qarā Kotal Pass to the plain of Bāmīān basin has the advantage of being the shortest for travellers from the west as well as the easiest.³⁴

2. Da Qin – Fulin – Rome

The Chinese title of the Monument, which is prominently displayed in large characters at the top of the stele, is *Da Qin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑 ‘Monument to the diffusion of the Da Qin (i.e. Roman) Luminous Religion (*Jingjiao*) in the Middle Kingdom’. The title raises two issues which have long attracted the attention of scholars interested in the diffusion of foreign religions in China in the Tang period. Firstly, the name Da Qin 大秦 which in Chinese means literally the Great or Greater Qin (Empire). The character use for Qin 秦 is exactly the same as that for the title of one of the most hated but fortunately short-lived dynasties of Ancient China (221–207 BC). It saw the unification of the China through military conquest by the Qin state and the birth of a superstate with a name by which foreign states would come to know the Middle Kingdom – Qin 秦 (Ch’in in Wade-Giles system of transliteration, hence China). The name of the dynasty also lives on forever in popular Chinese memory as a model tyrannical and legalist regime which completed the building of the Great Wall at great human cost and which was forever cursed by Confucian scholars for instigating the burning of the Confucian Classics and the burying alive of Confucian scholars who opposed the strict legalism of the regime. The term Da Qin 大秦 (lit. ‘the Greater Qin state’), however, was used from the Han Dynasty onwards as the designation of a mighty and utopian state to the north-west of Persia which could only have been the Roman Empire. The title of Qin was conferred on the Roman Empire out of respect for the territorial expansion of China achieved under Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝 (i.e. the Founding Qin Emperor, *r.* 221–210 BC) and its resultant rise in international status. As the compiler of the *Dynastic History of the Later Han* says:

They (the Romans) resemble the Chinese (lit. ‘people of the Middle Kingdom’), and that is why the country is called Da Qin (i.e. Great Qin or China).³⁵

32 *Cefu yuangui* 971.4b–5a. Cf. CHAVANNES/PÉLLIOT 1913, pp. 152–153, and W. B. HENNING: “Argi and the ‘Tocharians.’” In: BSOS 9 (1937–1939), p. 570.

33 Cf. C. E. BOSWORTH: “Balk. ii. History from the Arab Conquest to the Mongols.” In: EIr III (1989), p. 588.

34 Cf. X. DE PLANCHOL: “Balk. i. Geography.” In: EIr III (1989), p. 588.

35 *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 88.2919, trans. LESLIE/GARDINER 1996, p. 49.

The Nestorian monks and priests who had come to China because of the collapse of the Sassanian Empire and the subsequent Arab conquest of Iran and adjacent Central Asia, were anxious that their centers of worship should not be known as ‘Persian monasteries (*bo si si* 波斯寺)’ and petitioned to have the title of their monasteries changed to that of the ‘Da Qin (i.e. Roman) monasteries (*da qin si* 大秦寺).³⁶ This desire of these Persian Christians to return to their ‘Roman’ roots marked the sect’s decisive break with the now discredited Sassanian Dynasty. It also underscores the desire of the Nestorians to distance themselves from Zoroastrianism which was disliked in China for its approval of incestuous marriages and the exposure of the dead. However, as I have pointed out elsewhere,³⁷ the Nestorian Church, with its Catholicos normally resident in the Twin Cities of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (near modern Baghdad), had been an integral part of the Parthian and Sassanian Empires of Iran for nearly five centuries.

With the conquest of Byzantine Syria by the armies of Islam, the sect’s knowledge of the Roman Empire was largely based on events which took place in the New Testament. Prior to the Islamic conquest, Nestorian clergy in the Sassanian Empire were very aware of their need to remain an independent entity owing no political allegiance to the Romano-Byzantine Empire. Cross-frontier contacts were few and this is reflected in the lack of Byzantine sources on the history of the Nestorian Church from the end of the fifth century onwards. The adoption and dominance of Syriac as the official language of the Church of the East only served to reduce contact between the Nestorians in Iraq and Iran and their fellow Syriac- or Greek-speaking Christians on the other side of the Romano-Byzantine frontier.³⁸ We must also remember that the most commonly used name by Nestorians for the Roman Empire was not ܠܘܪܘܡܝ (i.e. Romania) nor ܠܘܪܘܡܝ ܕܐ (Land of the Romans) but ܠܘܪܘܡܝ ܕܗܘܪܝܢ (Land of the Greeks).³⁹ By this period ܠܘܪܘܡܝ ܕܐ (Land of the Romans) usually means not the Roman Empire but more specifically Rum, i.e. Asia Minor because Constantinople, its chief city, was the New Rome.⁴⁰ How the Nestorians in China could have equated ‘Land of the Greeks’ with the Da Qin of Chinese historical sources raises a number of intriguing questions. Chinese historical sources state that between Parthia and Da Qin was the city of An Ku which many scholars had regarded as Chinese for Antioch (on the Orontes) but it is also clear that An Ku was not seen as the capital of Da Qin – a name which must apply to the whole

36 *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 49.1012, cited in MOULE 1930, p. 65, and SAEKI 1937, p. 456 (Appendix II).

37 S. N. C. LIEU: “The Luminous Religion in China.” In: MUSTAFA/TUBACH 2007, pp. 315–316.

38 S. GERO: *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, Louvain 1981 (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 426; Subsidia 63), pp. 33–41, and GILLMAN/KLIMKEIT 1999, pp. 118–127.

39 BUDGE 1893, I, p. 335.1 (text), II, p. 587 (transl.).

40 *Ibid.* and *comm. ad loc.* See also G. LE STRANGE: *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge 1905, pp. 127–158, esp. 127–128.

of the Roman Empire and not just to the Roman East.⁴¹ One would expect a Syriac-speaker to have a reasonable knowledge of the Roman Empire through Syriac sources but the Nestorian monk or monks who composed the Chinese text of the Monument had to draw on Chinese (rather than Syriac) historical sources (esp. the Han and Wei Dynastic Histories) for a description of a mythical (and now Christianized!) Da Qin Empire:

According to *Xiyu tuji* 西域圖記 ('Illustrated records of western lands') and the histories of the Han and Wei (*Han Wei shice* 漢魏史策), the land of Da Qin is bounded on the south by the Shanhu (珊瑚 i.e. coral) Sea; on the north it stretches towards the Zhongbao 眾寶 Mountains; on the west it looks towards the Xianjing 仙境 (lit. 'Region of the Immortals') and Hualin 花林 (lit. 'Forest of Blossoms'); on the east it borders on the Changfeng 長風 (lit. 'Long Winds') and Ruoshui (弱水 lit. 'Feeble Water'). The country produces fire-washed cloth (asbestos), spices that restore the soul, bright moon pearls, and rings that shine in the night. The way of the people is to be happy and peaceful without theft and robbery. No religion but the 'brilliant' *jing* (景 i.e. Christianity) is practised, a ruler who is not virtuous is not established. The lands are extensive and broad, the civilization prosperous and enlightened.⁴²

This decidedly utopian picture of the Roman Empire is similar to descriptions of the Seres (the people of silk = Chinese) in Roman sources.⁴³ The use of the term Da Qin was decidedly archaic as another term Fulin which is much more accurate phonetically (< MPers. *brwm*, Pth. *frwm*, Sogd. βr'wm-, Bactr. φρομο etc.) had become current as the designation for the Eastern Roman Empire in the Tang period.⁴⁴ The Nestorians in China showed awareness of this, especially in their translation of texts from Syriac into Chinese. Though they situated Nazareth within Da Qin,⁴⁵ they placed most of the other Gospel place-names within

41 Cf. LESLIE/GARDINER 1996, pp. xxi–xxv and 67–72.

42 *Nestorian Monument* (Chin.), ll. 14–15 (line numbering following the system of PELLIOT 1996, pp. 169–180), ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), p. 4, transl. LESLIE/GARDINER 1996, p. 115.

43 See sources collected in G. COEDÈS (ed. and transl.): *Textes d'auteurs grecs et latins relatifs à l'Extrême Orient depuis le 4^{ème} siècle avant J.C. jusqu'au 14^{ème} siècle après J.C.*, Paris 1910, pp. 2–4, 10–19, 72–88. The first European writer and traveller to unambiguously identify the Seres with the 'Cataians' (i.e. men of Cathay = Chinese) was the Flemish Franciscan monk William of Rubruck (Willem van Rubroek) who travelled to the Mongol court at Qaraqorum in March 1254 AD, see P. JACKSON/D. MORGAN (ed. and trans.): *The mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, London 1990, p. 161.

44 See further other examples from Central Asian sources (many unpublished) given in W. SUNDERMANN: "Überreste manichäischer Yimki-Homilien in mittelpersischer Sprache?", in: *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg II*, Teheran/Liège 1975 (AcIr 5), p. 302, n. 49. See also summary of earlier debate on the location of Fulin in H. H. SCHAEFER 1934: *Iranica*, Berlin (Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, 3. F., Nr. 10), pp. 24–83 ('Fu-lin').

45 *Daqin jingjiao xuan yuanben jing* 大秦景教宣元本經, l. 1, ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), pp. 96, 312 (transl.). See also transl. LI TANG 2002, p. 199.

the boundaries of Fulin.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the author of the Monument was adamant that it was from Da Qin and not from Persia that the first major Christian envoy to reach China in 635, Alopen (i.e. Syr. *raban* ܪܒܢ ‘our master’),⁴⁷ was sent. Moreover, Persia (*bośi* 波斯) features in the Chinese text on the Monument only as the land (or people) of the gift-bearing (Magi) at the time of Christ’s birth.⁴⁸ This obsession with the Roman Empire as the native land of Christianity is more understandable if the Monument had been set up by Melkite or Jacobite (Monophysite) missionaries given their greater association with the Roman (and Byzantine) Empire and both these Christian sects were active in mission in Central Asia in the Eighth Century.⁴⁹ However, the Nestorian origin of the Monument could easily be proven as the patriarchate of a Nestorian Catholicos at Seleucia-Ctesiphon was acknowledged in l. 2 of the Syriac and many of the names of the monks listed on the side of the Monument are of Persian origin or are Syriac-Persian hybrids. The use of the term *Šinistan* for China instead of *Bet Šin* or *Bet Šinaye* also points to a strong link with Iran and Iraq rather than Byzantium as names of regions ending in -(i)stan are commonly encountered in the administrative geography of Sassanian Iran.⁵⁰ The modern tendency to translate Da Qin as ‘Syrian’ would not have pleased the Nestorians who knew their geography better. Adjacent to the west of the Sassanian Empire was not Syria but Mesopotamia (Assuristan) an area of dispute between Rome and Persia. Northern Mesopotamia, after the expulsion of the School of Edessa to Nisibis in 489, was strongly Monophysite and so was the Roman province of Syria south of Antioch. A Nestorian bishop of the marches like Barsauma (b. 415, consecrated 435) would guard the Persian allegiance of the Nestorian Church with great diligence as it was his accusation that the then Catholicos Babowi had made dangerous political overtures to Byzantium which brought the latter’s downfall and painful death. To designate Da Qin as ‘Syrian’⁵¹ would

46 Cf. *Xuting mishisuo(he) jing* 序聽迷詩所(詞)經, l. 163, ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), pp. 25, 141 (transl.). See also transl. LI TANG 2002, p. 154 (l. 127), and *Shizun bushi lun* 世尊布施論, l. 74, ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), pp. 56, 212 (transl.), and transl. LI TANG 2002, p. 173. The last reference is particularly interesting because Fulin was said to be ruled by a *jixi* 寄悉 i.e. Caesar (MPers. *kysr*).

47 *Nestorian Monument* (Chin.), l. 11, ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), pp. 4, 57 (transl.). It is quite common for Chinese translators in the Tang period to add the prefix a- or an- to foreign words beginning with r- to aid pronunciation. It is possible that the name of this cleric was Rabban NNN but the Chinese officials who preferred to have foreign names no longer than three or maximum four characters as in Chinese names, only transliterated his title and not his name.

48 *Nestorian Monument* (Chin.), l. 6, ed. SAEKI 1937, pp. 2, 55 (transl.).

49 On the activities of Melkites and Monophysites in Iran and Central Asia at the end of the Sassanian period see SIMS-WILLIAMS 1992, pp. 51–52, and IDEM: “Christianity. iv. Christian Literature in Middle Iranian Languages”, in: EIr V, pp. 534–535; GILLMAN/KLIMKEIT 1999, pp. 220–221 and 241; MOFFETT 1998, pp. 246–247.

50 Cf. M. MORONY: *Iraq after the Islamic Conquest*. New Jersey 1984, pp. 125–164.

51 A suggestion put forward by WILMSHURST 1990 [1993], p. 51.

cause problems of historical theology as Christ was meant to have preached in a place in Da Qin called Nazaluo 那薩羅 (i.e. Nazareth) which of course is in Palestine.⁵² To say that by Da Qin the Nestorians in China implied Syria as WILMSHURST has done could lead to an entirely artificial link in the minds of scholars between the Syriac-speaking Nestorian monks who had come to China from Iran or Central Asia with a province of the Eastern Roman Empire now lost to the Arabs and thus fall prey to the very myth of a Roman origin of their mission which the Nestorians in China were trying to perpetrate.

In an important study on the name of the Christians in Tang China, TIMOTHY BARRETT has drawn attention to the fact that the name Da Qin was used of an utopian state by the Daoists before it was found used in the Dynastic Histories to designate the Roman Empire and even featured in a debate between Daoists and Buddhists.⁵³ This could explain how the Nestorians came to know of Da Qin as the monks at their monastery at Zhouzhi would very probably had active intellectual exchange with the Daoists in the famous temple at Louguan 樓觀 which was built on the site where Laozi 老子, the traditional founder of Daoism, was said to have transmitted his *Daode jing* 道德經 to one of his disciples.⁵⁴ It is still a major Daoist establishment (thanks to the generosity and devotion of a donor from Korea) and situated only on the other side of the same valley. The two religious communities were within easy walking distance from each other which would have encouraged regular mutual visits and discourse. The Daoists could have been a source of Da Qin as the term for the land of origin of Christianity for the Nestorians. The Manichaeans in China, followers of another religion from the West, had put forward the idea that Mani was none other than an *avatar* of Laozi, the founder of Daoism, who did not die but went west and converted the 'Barbarians' of the Western Regions to his teaching.⁵⁵ BARRETT goes on to suggest that the choice of Rome as the source of Christianity was not unmotivated by political reality. The inexorable rise of Islam had forced the states of Eurasia in its wake to establish diplomatic relations with each other and an embassy to the Tang court from Byzantium was recorded for 667 and the Byzantines might have been conducting a 'culturally sensitive policy' in Asia. The granting of permission for dissemination of Nestorianism by the Tang edict of 745 might have been preceded by the Byzantine mission of 742 and such missions were often accompanied by clerics.⁵⁶

52 *Daqin jingjiao xuan yuanben jing*, l. 2, ed. SAEKI 1937 (text section), pp. 96, 55 (transl.).

53 BARRETT 2002, pp. 558–559.

54 Cf. ST. ESKILDSEN: "Parallel themes in Chinese Nestorianism and medieval Daoist religion." In: MALEK/HOFRICHTER 2006, pp. 57–58.

55 For a summary of the so-called *fahu* (conversion of the barbarians) controversy S. N. C. LIEU 1992: *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 2nd ed., Tübingen, pp. 257–261.

56 BARRETT 2002, p. 560 [pp. 52–53]. See also related views expressed earlier by WILMSHURST 1990 [1993], pp. 56–59.

However, it is hard to believe that Byzantium which had just emerged from major doctrinal battles against Monophysitism and Monotheletism would feel in any ways inclined to further the fortunes of a few Diophysite Nestorians in distant Taugast (Gr. Ταυγάστ < Old Turk. tabyač *v. infra*)⁵⁷ – the name by which Northern China was known to the Byzantines – whom they were probably too ready to anathematize. If the Nestorians in any way wished to be associated with Byzantine missions then it would have been more logical to prefer Fulin to Da Qin for the ‘Roman’ part of the title of their religion as the Byzantines were bound to have presented themselves as Rhomaioi (Gr. Ῥωμαῖοι) – a designation by which the Byzantines were known until 1453. Perhaps Fulin would conjure up images of a persecuting heretical Chalcedonian state whereas Da Qin would for the Nestorians recall a period of Christian history before the bitter parting of the ways between them and the Melkites and Monophysites at the council of Chalcedon (451) and the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (498).

3. *Jingjiao* – a religion of luminosity or of fear and reverence?

The second issue concerns the choice of the character *jing* 景 for the name of the Christian religion or teaching in China. The word is normally translated ‘luminous’ or ‘radiance’ but this is not the most obvious meaning of the word which for most Chinese would call to mind ‘vista’ or ‘vision’ or ‘illustrious’ rather than ‘light’. Although Christ called Himself ‘the Light of the World’, throughout its history in Iran and Central Asia, the Church of the East was never known for a developed theology of light. For a religion which was centered on the figure of Christ a more logical name for the religion in Chinese would have been *mishihe jiao* 彌師訶教 (Messiah-religion), or *Yishu jiao* 移鼠教 (Jesus-religion – but not really recommendable to the Chinese as the transliteration means ‘Religion of a Migrant Rat’) or *shengzi jiao* 聖子教 (Holy Son-religion) or *tianzun jiao* 天尊教 (Lord of Heaven-religion) – the phonetically transliterated names Yishihe and Mishihe as well as the translated term Tianjun can all be found in the main Chinese part of the inscription on the Monument. To underscore the concept of light of radiance, the Nestorians could have simply called themselves *ming jiao* 明教 (Religion of Light) or *guangming jiao* 光明教 (‘radiant religion’) and there was no competition yet on this score from the Manichaeans. Despite their pronounced doctrine of the conflict of the Father of Greatness (𐫀𐫃𐫄𐫅 𐫆𐫇) dwelling in the region of light (𐫀𐫃𐫄𐫅 𐫆𐫇) and the Prince of Darkness

57 Theophylactus Simocattes, *Historiae*, VII,7,11, ed. C. DE BOOR, revised by P. WIRTH (Stuttgart 1977), 257.20. On the full extent and purpose of Byzantine diplomatic interest in China see K. HANNSTEDT: “Les relations de Byzance avec la Transcaucasie et l’Asie Centrale aux 5^e et 6^e siècles.” In: *Byzantion* 25–27 (1955–1957), pp. 421–456.

(𐭄𐭆𐭇𐭉) in his infernal kingdom, Manichaeans in China throughout the Tang period were known as *moni jiao* 摩尼教 (the religion of Mani). The fact that the characters for *moni* are nearly the same as those used for transliterating the *muni* part of Sakyamuni (the name of the Buddha) gave the Manichaeans instant Buddhist camouflage. There was no open mention of their connection with light in any official documents and the term *ming jiao* only appears in a Manichaean context in the fragmentary trilingual (Chinese, Sogdian and Turkish) inscription at Karabalghasun in Inner Mongolia at the end of the Eighth Century where the word *ming* could mean ‘to understand’ or ‘realize’ rather than ‘light’ or ‘enlighten’.⁵⁸ It was only after the religion had moved into South China, especially in the Five Dynasties and Song periods that Manichaeans came to designate their religion as Mingjiao. This has now been confirmed by bowls inscribed with the phrase *mingjiao hui* 明教會 (‘Society of the Religion of Light’) found near the site of the extant Manichaean shrine on Huabiao Hill in Jinjiang near Quanzhou in Fujian.⁵⁹

The Nestorians in China were only a small community and when they first arrived they saw themselves as religious colonists with strong cultural ties with their co-religionists in Iran and Central Asia. How their religion was called in Central Asia, to my mind, must have a strong influence on their choice of a Chinese term for the name of their religion. In the Sassanian Empire, Christians were called by a variety of names. In Syriac martyrdom literature they called themselves *kristyānē* (ܕܚܝܫܬܝܢܝܐ), especially when faced with Zoroastrian persecutors who derided them as *nāšrāyē* (ܢܫܪܝܐ) – a derogatory term derived from Nazareth (ܢܫܝܪܝܐ) which stresses the humble Galilean origins of the sect. However, for much of their history in Iran, they were referred to by the Middle Persian name of *tarsāg* ‘(God) fearer’ (hence Sogd. *tr̥s’q*).⁶⁰ This term was not confined to Iran but was widespread in Central Asia. It is found in a Sogdian Manichaean historical text where a Christian lady (fem. *tr̥s’k’nch*) was converted by the preaching of Mani.⁶¹ Even in the Mongol period we find the area around Karadžigač in Kyrgyzstan nicknamed Tarsakent because it was home to a large Nestorian community.⁶² The term

58 Chinese text in CHAVANNES/PELLIOT 1913, p. 194.

59 P. BRYDER: “... Where the faint traces of Manichaeism disappear”, in: *AoF* 15/1 (1988), pp. 201–208; P. BRYDER: “Cao’an Revisited”, in: A. VAN TONGERLOO/S. GIVERSEN (eds.): *Manichaica Selecta; Studies Presented to Professor Julien Ries on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, Louvain 1991 (Manichaean Studies I), pp. 35–42.

60 On this see the very important study of F. DE BLOIS: “Našranī (Ναζωρηῖαος) and hanīf (ἕθνηικός): studies on the religious vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam.” In: *BSOAS* 6/1 (2002), pp. 1–20, esp. 8–12.

61 So 14196 R 26 (= l. 17 of the whole text) ed. and transl. CHR. RECK: “Die Bekehrung einer Christin zum manichäischen Glauben.” In: MUSTAFA/TUBACH 2007, p. 58, see also p. 62.

62 See the important explanation of the name by W. KLEIN: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14. Jh.*, Turnhout 2000 (Silk Road Studies III), pp. 132–136.

tarsāg even appears in Chinese transliteration as *tasuo* 達娑 in the main Chinese text on the Monument.⁶³

The word *jing* in Chinese has several meanings other than ‘luminous’ and one of them is ‘reverence’. Moreover, there are a number of Chinese words with virtually the same sound as *jing* like 敬 (reverence) or 驚 (fear) or 兢 (fright) the meanings of which could be transferred homophonally to the character *jing* 景. This is a very common phenomenon in Chinese. A very good daily example of what is known to linguistic scholars as the ‘Rebus Principle’ is the word *mien* 面 (face) which is often depicted outside noodle(麵 *mien*)-bars with little fear of it being misunderstood by the restaurant-goer who knows Chinese well. The choice of the character *jing* under the influence of the word *tarsāg* would fit very well if the Nestorian monks at Zouzhi still thought of themselves being called ‘God fearers’ and this would explain why they decided to go for a term in Chinese which had no connection with sacred or theophoric names like Jesus or Messiah or Lord of Heaven unlike the modern Catholics who chose a term for their religion (*tianzhu* 天主) which is remarkably similar to the *tianzun* (Lord of Heaven) in the Nestorian texts. The word *jing* is used very many times in the inscription and terms like *jing zun* 景尊, *jing fa* 景法, *jing jing* 景淨, *jing li* 景力, *jing ming* 景命 can be better explained by the ‘reverential awe’ aspect of the meaning of *jing*.⁶⁴

The word *jing* is also written calligraphically on the inscription in a manner which is completely unorthodox in that the ‘sun’ (*ri* 日) radical at the top portion of the character has been replaced with the ‘mouth’ radical *kou* 口 and then vice versa for the mouth part of the lower and phonetic part of the character *jing* 京 (which literally means ‘capital’). This could be the personal preference of the calligrapher as he uses the sun radical instead of the mouth for the stand alone character *jing* 京 in l. 12. It has been suggested by WILMSHURST that the calligraphic change was deliberate so as to suggest that the “‘brilliant teaching’ is a doctrine to be spread to others, to be communicated by word of mouth”.⁶⁵ For such a subtle trick to work with an average Chinese reader, I believe the mouth radical has to be moved to the left side of the character instead of leaving it on top as the majority of Chinese would regard it as a calligraphic variant. A variant it certainly is and the present author who cannot fail to note while on a recent visit to the Daoist Louguan Temple on the other side of the valley from the probable site of the Nestorian monastery at Zouzhi, that the character *jing*, which features on an unpublished Daoist temple-inscription dated to 751, is written also with minor variation to the orthodox. In this case, the sun radical at the top of the character is written without the bottom stroke and thereby

63 *Nestorian Monument* (Chin.), l. 26, ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), pp. 8, 64 (transl.). See also extensive discussion and other possible interpretation in PELLIOT 1996, pp. 290–292.

64 See the useful list of terms with the character *jing* listed in XU LONGFEI 2004, pp. 114–115. Dr MIKKELSEN has drawn my attention to the fact that the term *jing* can also mean ‘grand’ or ‘imposing’ in addition to ‘luminous’ or ‘radiant’.

65 WILMSHURST 1990 [1993], p. 52.

depriving the *jing* part of the character of its normal dot at the top. However, the Nestorian version of the character is certainly unique and almost unattested as it is not given in any of the standard dictionaries of the Chinese language. More importantly, it became virtually a logo for the religion in the Tang period and features in at least two Nestorian texts in Chinese found among the manuscripts brought back by Sir AUREL STEIN from the Cave of a Thousand Buddhas in Dunhuang and one if not both of them could have been the work of Adam-Jingjing – the Nestorian cleric who was also the author or recorder of the Chinese and Syriac texts on the Monument.⁶⁶

Once the term *jing* had been adopted as the title of the religion, Adam became aware of the potential of developing it in Chinese by adding the ‘luminous’ and ‘radiance’ dimension to the meaning to the title of the sect. This was expounded by him in the Chinese part of the inscription on the Monument:

A true and eternal way (or religion) is often too wonderful to name, but as (our religion’s) merits and achievements are so conspicuous that we have strong reasons to call it *Jingjiao*.⁶⁷

However, this light-radiant-illustrious theology is found no where else among Nestorian texts in Chinese from the Tang period found in Dunhuang and was clearly not developed beyond the text on the Monument. As a self-promotional exercise it was clearly not a success as the term *Jingjiao* – the term by which the Nestorian religion in China is known to modern scholarship – is virtually unattested outside the Monument and a few Nestorian texts from Dunhuang already mentioned.

Both the *Old* and the *New Dynastic Histories* of the Tang period (compiled in 941–945 and 1044–1060 respectively) do not mention the Nestorian monasteries in Chang’an and Luoyang as symbols of ‘Roman’ presence in China even though both works state that the country now called Fulin was once called Da Qin.⁶⁸ The sect’s effort to re-badge itself as a ‘Roman’ religion, however, was not altogether without success as the name Da Qin was used in conjunction with the sect in Tang administrative records. According to an edict of 638, the sect of the ‘Persian Scriptures’ (*boji jingjiao* 波斯經教) was originally from Da Qin and permission was thereby granted for their monasteries to be known as Da Qin (i.e. ‘Roman’) and not as Persian monasteries.⁶⁹ In the local history of Chang’an mentions a Nestorian monastery ‘north-east of the cross roads’ in the Yining quarter of the capital which was of ‘foreign Persian’ origin which was

66 See e.g. the title of the Nestorian ‘Gloria in excelsis Deo’ in Chinese: *Daqin Jingjiao sanwei mengdu zan* 大秦景教三威蒙度讚, photograph of manuscript facing SAEKI 1937, p. 266, and in names and titles in the *Zun jing* 尊經, l. 18 etc., photograph of ms. facing *ibid.*, p. 272.

67 *Nestorian Monument* (Chin.), l. 10, ed. SAEKI 1937, (text section), p. 3, author’s own translation. Here the term would certainly express the meaning of ‘brilliance’.

68 *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 198.5313 and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 221B.6260.

69 *Tang huiyao* 49.864, Chinese text given in SAEKI 1935, (text section), pp. 26–27.

established in 638 by a monk called Aloben 阿羅本 (Chin. Alosi 阿羅斯 [sic]) from Da Qin.⁷⁰ This renaming had the desired effect. So much so in fact that the name Qin 秦 rather than Jing 景 came to designate the sect while the Nestorian Monument laid buried c. 783–c. 1625. During the Mongol period, Nestorian monks and missionaries and their followers re-entered China as members of a privileged foreign religion. They were collectively known by the title of Yelikewen 也利可溫⁷¹ but in one of the bilingual Syro-Turkic and Chinese inscriptions from Quanzhou (Zayton) in Fujian dated to 1313, we find (Da) Qin Jiao as a sect of the Yelikewen along with the Manichaeans (*v. infra*). The final triumph was the mention of Christianity in the section on Da Qin/Fulin in the chapter on the Western Regions in an official dynastic history of China. Sadly it was not the Nestorians who achieved this but the Catholics whose priests aided the Manchus in the overthrow of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) – the last dynasty to have an officially compiled Dynastic History (completed in 1739). In the chapter on Fulin (which precedes that of Yidaliya 意大利亞, i.e. Italy) in the *Ming shi* 明史 (*Dynastic History of the Ming Dynasty*) we learn that the nation of Fulin formerly called Da Qin had not sent embassies to China for a number of years. During the Mongol period it received as envoy a man by the name of Nigulun (捏古倫 i.e. Nicholas, Gr. Νικόλαος, acc. Νικόλαον).⁷² The section concludes with the arrival of ‘men from the Great West Ocean (*Da Xiyang* 大西洋, i.e. Atlantic = Europe)’ to China in the Wanli 萬曆 period (1573–1620) who claimed that it was in Rudeya (or *Yudeya* 如德亞 i.e. Judaea) in ancient Da Qin that Yesu 耶穌 the Lord of Heaven (*tianzhu* 天主 as used in the Chinese title of the modern Roman Catholic Church) was born, but this, remarks the Confucianist (?) compiler, is ‘an unbelievable hearsay’.⁷³ It is extraordinary that while scholars in Europe, Japan and China debated vehemently on whether Da Qin or Fulin in Chinese sources was indeed the Romano-Byzantine Empire in the early Twentieth Century,⁷⁴ the methodically trained Chinese bureaucratic historian had known all the time that Da Qin was the old name of Fulin and he had three centuries earlier correctly placed the information (though ridiculed) on the birth of Jesus geographically within Da Qin. The Nestorians of Tang China would have been delighted to see the link belatedly but officially (and correctly) made between the origins of Christianity and their utopian Roman Empire.

70 *Chang'an zhi* 長安志 10.10, Chinese text in SAEKI 1935, (text section), pp. 51–52; transl. in SAEKI 1937, p. 458.

71 On the probable derivation of the term see below.

72 Sadly he could not have been the Venetian Niccolò Polo, the father of Marco, as this Nicholas came to China at the end of the Yuan Dynasty and was stranded in China when Mongol rule collapsed. Given the dominance of Venice over Byzantium after the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, it is not impossible that Nicholas was a Venetian. Cf. MOULE 1930, p. 261.

73 Cf. *Mingshi* 326.8458 (Beijing, 1974). Chinese text also in SAEKI 1935, (text section), pp. 18–19.

74 See summary in LESLIE/GARDINER 1996, pp. xxii–xxvi.

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