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A Review of Syriac, Oriental and Ecumenical Studies

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Martin Thomas Antony & Mathew Mailaparampil

The Pahlavi inscribed Processional Cross of Herat, Afghanistan and the Pahlavi Crosses of South India: A Comparative Study of Religio-Cultural traditions of the Churches of India and Parthia.



Introduction

A Pahlavi inscribed processional cross conceivably dated from the 8th century AD was found recently from Herat in Afghanistan. This cross has similarities with the Pahlavi inscribed



granite Crosses of South India and other crosses of Church of the East (East Syriac Church) in China. It bears Pahlavi inscriptions which proclaims a theological formula to defend the accusations made by the then growing new religion of Islam in the region. This processional cross witnesses the importance of liturgical processions prevalent in the East Syriac tradition.

Herat

Herat is the third largest city of Afghanistan and is the capital of the province of Herat. It is situated in the valley of river Hari. During the time of Achaemenid Empire 550-330 BC the area was called 'Haraiva' in Persian¹ It is situated in 'Khurasan', north west region of modern Afghanistan. 'Khurasan' or 'Khorasan' is a historical region comprising a vast area of north eastern Iran, Southern Turkmenistan and Northern Afghanistan.² Prior to the Sasanian rule, the region of 'Khorasan' was called 'Parthia'³ and was the homeland of the Parthian Emperors. 'Khorasan' comprises the cities of Balkh and Herat now in Afghanistan, Mashhad and Nisapur now in north eastern Iran, Merv and Nisa now in southern Turkmenistan, and Bukhara and Samarkand now in Uzbekistan.⁴

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- 1 Wikipedia article Herat, Afghanistan, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herat> accessed on 14 December 2014
 - 2 Encyclopedia Britanica article Khorasan, accessed on 25 April 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/316850/Khorasan>.
 - 3 Robert Guiseppi, Ed. A History of the Parthians, The International History Project. <http://history-world.org/parthians.htm>
 - 4 Wikipedia article Greater Khorasan accessed on 25 April 2015. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Khorasan.



Christianity in Herat and Central Asia

Christianity penetrated in to central Asia in the very early period itself. Bardaisan in AD 196 commented about Christians in Gilan, the southwest of Caspian and Bactria, the kingdom between Hindukush and Oxus (Amu Darya).⁵ In AD 549, the Hephthalites in the Bactria requested Patriarch Mar Aba I to consecrate a Bishop for them and an anonymous Syriac Chronicle describes Mar Elias, the Metropolitan of Merv converting an entire nomadic population to Christianity by a miracle in AD 644.⁶

Herat was a Metropolitan Province of the Church of the East. It was mentioned as a 'hyparchy' in the Synod of the Church of the East in AD 585. Herat had a Bishop since AD 424.⁷ Synodicum Orientale mentions that three of the four cities of Khurasan; Herat, Merv and Nisapur (Abrasaahr), were

5 Alphons Mingana, Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the far east, a new document, Bulletin of John Rylands Library, Manchester, Vol 9, July 1925, no 2, p 308.

6 Pier Giorgio Borbone, Some Aspects of Turco- Mongol Christianity in the light of Literacy and Epigraphic Syriac sources, Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies, Vol 19, No 2 2005 p 7 citing P Bedjan, Ed. Historie de mar Aba, in Historie de Mar Jaballaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prete et de deux laiques nestoriens, paris 1895, pp 266-269 A Christian Priest arrived at the court of the Persian sovereign, Khusraw I Anushirwan, as an envoy from the Hephthalites, with the request to Mar Aba to order him Bishop before his people.

7 Christopher Buck, The Universality of the Church of the East: How Persian was Persian Christianity, The Journal of Assyrian Academic Society, 10.1: 1996, p67.

Alphons Mingana, Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, , a new document, Bulletin of John Rylands Library, Manchester, Vol 9, July 1925, no 2. p 298.



represented by Bishops in AD 424.⁸ Herat was elevated as a Metropolitan province of the Church of the East in the Synod of Isho Yahb in AD 585.⁹ Synodicum Orientale mentions a Bishop Yasdoi in the synod of Dadisho in AD 424, Bishop Gabriel in Synod of Akak in AD 486, Bishop Yasdad attended the synod of Babai in AD 497, another Bishop Gabriel in the synod of Isho Yahb in AD 585. Besides, a Bishop John from Abiward or Baward in the north west of Khurasan attended the synod of Joseph in AD 554, Bishop David from Abrashahr, a district in Khurasan in the synod of Dadisho in AD 424, Bishop Yohannis also from Abrashahr in the synod of Babai in AD 497, Bishop Habib from Bushanj, a town west of Herat in the synod of Isho Yahb in AD 585, Bishop Gabriel from Kadistan near Herat and another Gabriel from Badishi or Badhgis, a district north of Herat in the synod of Isho Yahb in AD 585.¹⁰ Thus, Christianity was well established in the area with numerous Bishops attending various ecclesiastical synods showing vigorous activity of the East Syriac Church in the area.

There was presence of Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch since the first half of seventh century¹¹. There was also presence of Armenian Christian community in Herat during the fifth century.¹²

8 Erica Hunter, Church of the East in Central Asia, Bulletin of John Rylands Library, Manchester, vol 78.3:1996.p121

9 Erica Hunter, Opus cit p 134.

10 A Mingana, opus cit , p319

11 Erica Hunter, opus cit. p 142

12 Philippe Gignoux, Une Croix de procession de Herat inscrite en pehlevi, Le Museon, 07/2001; 114(3):pp291-304



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