THE MYSTICISM OF JOHN SABA
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II. JOHN SABA AND THE LEGACY OF SYRIAN CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

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## CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION AND RETROSPECT

1. Syrian Christian Asceticism 1
2. East Syrian Mysticism 4
3. West Syrian Mysticism 9

II. HISTORY OF JOHN SABA

1. The Identity of John Saba 12
2. The Biographies of John of Dalyatha
   (a) The Book of Chastity 15
   (b) Hymn on the Saints 16
   (c) Life of John of Dalyatha 16
   (d) Synodical Canons 19
3. The Biography of John bar Penkayé 26
4. The Account of David the Phoenician 28

III. JOHN SABA AND HIS PREDECESSORS

1. Quotations from Monastic Writers 35
2. Ephraim and Aphraates 37
3. Macarius and Messalianism 39
4. John the Solitary and Philoxenus 45
5. Origen and Evagrius 51
6. Dionysius and Hierotheos 53

IV. BAR HEBRAEUS AND JOHN SABA

1. The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus 56
2. Islamic Arabic Sources 57
3. Greek Christian Sources 58
4. Syrian Christian Sources 58
5. The Ethikon and the Dove 61
(6) Borrowings from Joseph Hazzaya 66
(7) Borrowings from John Saba 73

V. MUSLIM SUFISM AND SYRIAN MYSTICISM 79
(1) Mystics and Missionaries 79
(2) Muslim Mysticism and Eastern Christianity 81
(3) Al-Junayd and John Saba 87

VI. EUROPEAN SPIRITUALITY AND SYRIAN MYSTICISM 99
(1) Hagiographic Literature from the East 99
(2) Sacred Relics from the East 100
(3) Religious Literature from the East 104
(4) Ascetic Practices from the East 106
(5) Catholic Mysticism and the East 108
(6) Protestant Pietism and the East 117

VII. CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT 119

DISCOURSES ON MYSTICISM BY JOHN SABA OF DALYATHA 124
DISCOURSE 1: On the Training of Novices 127
DISCOURSE 2: Admonitions and Counsels on Holy Repentance 131
DISCOURSE 3: On self-custody 134
DISCOURSE 4: On flight from the world 143
DISCOURSE 5: On the visitations of the Spirit 146
DISCOURSE 6: On the visitations bestowed on solitaries 155

DISCOURSE 7: The Intermediate Stage: The Psychic State 158
DISCOURSE 8: On the demon of fornication 159
DISCOURSE 9: On the demon of blasphemy 166
DISCOURSE 10: On anger, distraction, distress, pride 170
DISCOURSE 11: On the love of the holy angels 172
DISCOURSE 12: On guarding the senses 174
DISCOURSE 13: On the Stage of Perfection 180
DISCOURSE 14: On the Charity and the Love of God 186
DISCOURSE 15: On the gifts of God 190
DISCOURSE 16: On contemplation of the Holy Trinity 192
DISCOURSE 17: On the self-revelation of Christ 195
DISCOURSE 18: On the self-revelation of God 199
DISCOURSE 19: On freedom of speech with God 201
DISCOURSE 20: On the mystery of the New World 203
DISCOURSE 21: On prayer 206
DISCOURSE 22: On absolute contemplation 215

Bibliography
I. INTRODUCTION AND RETROSPECT

(1) Syrian Christian Asceticism

In the eleventh century of our era a lengthy narrative poem circulated in France and elsewhere in Europe under the title "The Life of Saint Alexis". The hero of this prototype "chanson de geste" was a certain "man of God", who reputedly fled from the worldly life of Rome to become a beggar-saint in an Eastern land. As frequently happens in this type of legend the nuptial night was chosen as the opportune time for flight from the world, and in this case the saint made his resting place in front of the Cathedral of Edessa in the Syrian Orient. Actually the story stems from a Syriac original of the fifth century and has generally been deemed worthy of some credence.\(^1\) The important point is that here we have one of the many indications that the Medieval Western World knew of the existence of a centre of Christianity in the lands of the Tigris and the Euphrates, namely the Syriac-speaking Church, and, moreover, that they associated it with the idea of asceticism and world-flight.

The first Christian Father from Mesopotamia to find a firm place in Western Church History was the famous "Assyrian" Christian Tatian, reckoned among the early Christian Apologists of the second century. Tatian was a disciple of Justin Martyr and the founder of a Christian school in Rome. He is best known for his work in compiling the Diatessaron, a harmony of the Four Gospels, but he was also the founder of the sect of the Encomiastes, who practised extreme asceticism and placed a ban on marriage and wine-drinking.

\(^1\) I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 2nd Edn, 202f; cf. also Chapter Six below.
This attitude set the pattern for Syrian Christianity, it seems, for the apocryphal work known as The Acts of Judas Thomas, originally composed in Syriac, shows a similar concern for asceticism and celibacy and pictures the Apostle of the East going as far as Parthia and India in an effort to save men and women from the vile sin of matrimony and the curse of attachment to the things of this world. At the same time "Doubting Thomas" was well-known to the West, since according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle it happened that in 883, during the reign of Alfred the Great, two Englishmen named Aethelstan and Sighelm were sent to India to visit the tomb of St. Thomas. The modern Indian Christians of St. Thomas hold that the Saint's body still lies buried at Mylapore, but the European tradition states that his remains were removed to Edessa for a time but eventually laid in the cathedral of Ortona a Mare on the Adriatic coast of Italy.  

Two famous early Fathers of the Syrian Church, before it was divided into its Nestorian and Jacobite sections in the fifth century, were Afrem, proclaimed in 1920 a doctor of the Catholic Church under the name Ephraim Syrus, and Afrat, better known to us as Aphraates "The Persian Sage", both of whom advocated the ascetic and contemplative life of purity.

As regards the actual origins of monasticism in Mesopotamia and Persia, these are somewhat obscure, but in the Edessa area around the Northern Euphrates in the early fourth century we find the first Saba of Syrian Christian monasticism, namely Julian Saba, who lived in a cave and ate one meal a week, which was apparently enough to sustain him for his daily round of psalm-singing, meditation, and instruction.

of disciples. Our main concern here, of course, will be with that other Saba, namely John Saba of the eighth century, but it needs to be noted that these have sometimes been confused.\(^3\)

At the Northern end of the Tigris stood another great centre of Christianity, the city of Nisibis, associated in Persian Nestorian tradition with the name **Mar Awgin**, or Eugenius, reputedly a pearl fisher from the Suez region who became a monk under the Egyptian Desert Father Pachomius and then migrated to Mount Izla near Nisibis with 72 disciples, who spread out through the East founding monasteries. This tradition is probably correct in placing the origins of the monasticism of this area in the hills of Nisibis, but it may well be that the connection with the Egyptian Thebaid came later and that Syrian monasticism was of independent origin.\(^4\)

There is no doubt, however, about the fact that monasticism went on to flourish greatly in the Syrian Orient. J.M. Fiey has given reasons for believing that in the early sixth century, for example, there were some two million monastics in Mesopotamia.\(^5\) Certainly in the sixth to eighth centuries monasteries were strewn all over the hills and desert areas. Many of these were centres of education and the great Christian academies and schools in towns and villages, such as the Schools of Edessa and Nisibis, were likewise institutions where the monk or scholar could avail himself of instruction in Greek science, of training for missionary service, and of initiation into the path of asceticism and mysticism.\(^6\)

3. Thus, for **Ioanne Saba** read **Juliano Saba** in Urbina, 74.
5. Fiey, vol. 1, 14f.
6. See further my "Education in the Ancient Syrian Church".
(2) East Syrian Mysticism

Research on the subject of Syrian Christian mysticism has not been entirely neglected since the Syriac manuscripts began to flow into European libraries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One fact that has come to light is that it was the Nestorians who played the greatest role in the elaboration of the advanced form of mysticism that flourished in the seventh and eighth centuries; and yet it is ironical that it has largely been the Jacobite scribes who have preserved for us the mystical literature of those Nestorian solitaries. Indeed, if the Monophysites had not adopted John of Dalyatha posthumously into their own family it is very doubtful whether his writings would have survived to the present day. At the same time the fact that the West Syrian scribes censored the writings they copied constitutes the first difficulty of the modern research worker who enters the field of Syrian Christian mysticism, for he is confronted with the task of detecting the Jacobite alterations and interpolations. Ignorance of this fact led earlier scholars into error, as when J.S. Assemani, in his great Bibliotheca Orientalis, published quite uncritically the Syriac biography of the seventh-century Nestorian monk Isaac of Nineveh, unaware that some West Syrian copyist had removed Isaac from his proper East Syrian domain to the Desert of Scete, the home of the great Egyptian ascetics, and had also backdated him to the sixth century.  

As the modern scholar browses with deep admiration through the pages of Assemani's magnificent old tomes, he lights upon many an instance of this kind, where knowledge

7. This weary old war-horse with its Jacobite trappings was trotted out again as recently as 1954 in Early Fathers from the Philokalia (London 1954), 181f.
has increased through continued research. This is particularly true of many of the dates assigned in the past to various authors. Assemani relied to a large extent on the Catalogue of Abdisho of Nisibis (d. 1318); but the difficulty with this writer is that he neglected to give the dates of the authors whose works he was enumerating and, moreover, did not even arrange his notices in chronological order. As the pioneer in the modern study of Syriac literature, Assemani was thus faced with a formidable task and he can justifiably be pardoned for any lapse into error.

A case in point is that of Gregory the Monk, who was consigned by Assemani to the fourth century and considered to be orthodox in his position. Though born in Persia Gregory had spent some part of his life on the island of Cyprus, hence his alternative name Gregory of Cyprus. As a result of the scholarly labours of J. Hausherr, however, it is now known that Gregory actually lived in the seventh century, and he has therefore been restored to his rightful place in the great Nestorian school of mystics.

On the other hand cases can be adduced where Assemani's statements, though contradicted by subsequent Syriacists, have eventually been either wholly or partly verified. Thus it is a pleasure to note that Assemani has been vindicated in the case of John of Apamea. In the nineteenth century it became a common belief that certain works of the ascetic John of Lycopolis had been preserved in Syriac translation under the erroneous name of John of Apamea, and it is presumably for this reason that Wright made no mention of John of Apamea in his handbook on Syriac literature. For his part

9. For details see Urbina, 133f.
J.B. Chabot, in his manual on the same subject, attributed this confusion to Assemani. Once again it is Hausherr who has turned the tables on Assemani's detractors and reinstated another Syrian mystic to his proper place. John the Solitary of Apamea of the early sixth century emerges as the theologically orthodox author of a number of works usually attributed to John of Lycopolis!

This is just one of the knots in the tangle that enmeshes the Syrian mystics who bore the name John, of which the problem of the name John Saba will be investigated in the present work. The whole complex, however, will not be resolved until the relevant writings have been edited and made available for critical scrutiny.

The work of publication of the Nestorian mystical writings is proceeding steadily. A landmark along this road is the seventh volume of A. Mingana's Woodbrooke Studies, in which representative works of a number of Nestorian mystics have been made accessible, edited, it is important to note, from a codex of Nestorian provenance. Mingana was able to make significant comparisons between certain parts of these writings and a number of works that had been taken by Bedjan from Jacobite manuscripts and included in his edition of the mystical treatises of Isaac of Nineveh. Mingana thus brought to light many illustrations of the practices of Jacobite copyists in their editing of Nestorian books for West Syrian consumption. Unfortunately Mingana overlooked the fact that the writings he published from a single manuscript were also found in a codex of the thirteenth century (Alqosh 237, of which Vat. Syr. 509 is a copy), which had previously been

analysed by J.M. Vosté. Nevertheless in one sweep Mingana had gathered together works of Simon of Taibutheh, Dadisho Qatraya, Abraham bar Dashandad, Joseph Hazzaya, and Abdisho Hazzaya. As a by-product of this process Mingana was able to offer final proof that the last two writers on the list were actually the same person, for the reason that Joseph adopted the name of his brother Abdisho at one point in his career, apparently as a sort of pen-name. Admittedly Assemani had been a long way from recognising this fact and, as Wright was quick to point out, had erroneously identified Joseph Hazzaya with Joseph Huzaya, a sixth-century grammarian; but Wright himself did little better in suggesting that Assemani was at fault in translating Hazzaya by "Videns" instead of "Hazzaeus" (i.e. "from Hazz") whereas in fact the word does mean "Visionary" in this case and aptly describes the monk in question; moreover Wright missed the point in his idea that Joseph changed his name to Abdisho because he had been made a bishop.

The importance of Joseph Hazzaya for our present study lies in the fact that towards the end of the eighth century the Patriarch Timothy placed a ban on his writings, together with those of John of Dalyatha and also of John the Apamean. The reason for this ban was that the works of these writers were allegedly tinged or deeply dyed with such heresies as Messalianism and Origenism. The Messalian influence on Syrian Christian mystics was transmitted in the Spiritual Homilies of Pseudo-Macarius, while the Origenistic influence came by way of the esoteric writings of the fourth-century

14. Mingana, 145f.
ascetic Evagrius Ponticus. The culmination and combination of such movements as these produced the flourishing Syrian Christian mysticism of the seventh and eighth centuries, and brought its exponents into headlong collision with the ecclesiastical establishment.

Yet there was at least one Nestorian mystic who managed to steer away from the Evagrian mainstream, namely Sahdona, also known as Martyrius. What remains of his writings on monastic piety have now been published by A. de Halleux. These exhibit a spirituality that is more akin to that of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus than to the Alexandrian mysticism and esoteric intellectualism of Sahdona's contemporaries and visionary colleagues. De Halleux shows that there are in fact traces of this Alexandrian system in Martyrius, such as natural contemplation and contemplation of the Trinity, but these never achieve a coherent synthesis, and it is particularly significant that Martyrius never represents the soul as a mirror through which God reveals his essence to the mind. 16

Elsewhere the ideas of Evagrius made great headway and we are indebted to A. Guillaumont for publishing an edition with French translation and also a penetrating study of the influence of Evagrius' Kephalaia Gnostica ("Chapters of Knowledge"), a large collection of enigmatic maxims on esoteric theology and mystical contemplation. 17 The impact of this doctrine was felt not in the Greek-speaking churches alone but also in the monastic circles of both East and West

Syrian Christianity. A most important phenomenon in the transmission of this Evagrian corpus is that there were actually two Syriac recensions, both dating from the sixth century. One version follows the Greek original implicitly and is reckoned by Guillaumont to be the work of Sergius of Rashain, who was also the translator of Dionysius the Areopagite. The other version had a much wider circulation and was accepted as the true Evagrius, but in fact it had been very skilfully purged by some Syrian with a knowledge of Greek. Guillaumont suggests that this editor was the Jacobite scholar Philoxenus of Mabbug. The mention of the name of Philoxenus gives us our cue to turn now to a consideration of mystical movements in West Syrian circles.

(3) West Syrian Mysticism

Philoxenus of Mabbug, also known as Aksenaia, is held in great veneration in the Monophysite Church as one of their greatest theologians. In recent years it has also become apparent that he also held an important place in the realm of mystical theology. The most striking feature in his mystical writing is the tripartite division of the path of illumination and perfection, the three stages being designated as the somatic, the psychic, and the pneumatic. These terms are borrowed from St. Paul, of course, but the question needs to be asked whether Philoxenus was the first to use this terminology in a mystical context. P. Graffin has looked into this matter recently and has come up with a restatement of the earlier conclusion of Hausherr, namely that this idea is peculiar to Syrian Christianity and that it would seem to

have originated with John the Solitary of Apamea rather than with Philoxenus. 19 At the same time Philoxenus' writings show clear evidence of the influx of Evagrianism into Syrian monastic spirituality.

An earlier writer who had imbibed a heavy dose of Alexandrian doctrine was Stephen bar Sudaile (ca. 500), the presumed author of the so-called "Book of the Holy Hierotheos". This mystical work, which is an amalgam of Evagrianism and Dionysianism, has been described by its editor F. S. Marsh as "undeniably one of the most amazing mystical books ever written by a Christian and certainly the most interesting ever written in Syriac". 20 Amazing it is because of its unabashed pantheism: interesting it is through its lack of the minute details of mystical technique that fill the pages of the later Initiates such as Isaac of Nineveh and, we may add, Joseph Hazzaya and John of Dalyatha. Just how great and widespread was the influence of Hierotheos is not yet known, but it was eventually to leave its mark on one West Syrian scholar and mystic, namely the great Gregory Bar Hebraeus. Indeed, the only manuscript available to the editor of Hierotheos was the very one which Bar Hebraeus himself had succeeded in obtaining for his own use after a difficult search.

Gregory Abu-l-Faraj or Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) played an important part in the history of Syrian Christian mysticism, for, as in all other fields of science, philosophy, and theo-


logy, he brought the work of his predecessors to a head, thereby virtually making it unnecessary, if one is so unscientifically minded, to read their books. It is not surprising therefore to discover that Bar Hebraeus made extensive use of John of Dalyatha's mystical writings in his own Ethikon, as will be demonstrated later in this study.

Accordingly, in view of the importance of the writings of John of Dalyatha it is surprising that their publication has not been taken in hand long ago. Nevertheless the work is now in progress, and a modest attempt to fill part of this gap has now been made and is presented here.

II. HISTORY OF JOHN SABA

(1) The Identity of John Saba

The ascetical writings of the legendary "Spiritual Sheikh" or "Holy Saba" were known and admired throughout the Middle East, not only in Syriac but also in Arabic and Ethiopic, and even partly in Greek and Latin. The problem that has been set for modern scholars is the ascertaining of the exact identity of the Syrian monk who lies behind this legend and who produced this great bulk of writings.

J. B. Assemani catalogued Joannes Saba as a contemporary of Isaac of Nineveh and dated him in the middle of the sixth century. It has to be said that Assemani's dating was incorrect, for Isaac is now known to belong to the seventh century. Furthermore Assemani identified John Saba with Joannes a Dilaita and reckoned him as an orthodox writer, but it is now established that John of Dalyatha lived in the eighth century and was actually a Nestorian, though a somewhat heterodox Nestorian. Elsewhere Assemani edited a passage which gave details of the condemnation of Joannes Daliathensis.

Almost two centuries later W. Wright was unable to make any advance from Assemani's position. Following Assemani he gave John Saba's floruit as c. 550, but he did point out that Abdisho of Nisibis claimed John of Dalyatha as a Nestorian. For the rest Wright could only make an attempt to explain the discrepancy between the forms Dilaita and Dalyatha, suggesting that the name was not equivalent to Daliathensis, i.e. "from ad-Daliyeh", but rather meant "John

2. Ibid., III, 1, 100.
3. Wright, Syriac Literature (London 1894), 109f.
of the Vine-Branches"), or perhaps "John with the Varicose Veins", or even, as in Arabic, "John of the Buckets".

After the publication in 1899 of Sachau's catalogue of the Berlin Syriac manuscripts and also Chabot's edition of The Book of Chastity (1896), R. Duval had new data at his disposal for the third edition of his handbook on Syriac Literature. Duval pointed out that the Book of Chastity tells us that a certain disciple of Jacob Hazzaya settled as a solitary in the mountains of Beth Dalyatha and came to be known as John of Dalyatha. Jacob Hazzaya was, quite unjustifiably, taken by Duval to mean Joseph Hazzaya, who elsewhere in the same monastic history is dated to the time of the early Caliph Umar. It needs to be stated here and now, however, that this dating will not stand up to critical scrutiny, as will be shown below. In any case Duval goes on to state that John Saba lived in the ninth century and dwelt in the monastery of Dalyatha. Duval considered that this was the reason for the supposedly erroneous identification of John Saba with John of Dalyatha, and it only remains to add that the new manuscript evidence from Berlin showed that John Saba was to be identified with John bar Penkayé.

A. J. Wensinck, on the other hand, ventured to suggest in 1919 that this question was still lacking a definite answer, though a little later, in 1924, in a review of A. Baumstark's new manual on Syriac Literature, he admitted his inclination to agree with Baumstark's opinion that John Saba was actually John of Dalyatha, whose ascetical writings were sometimes erroneously attributed to John bar Penkayé.

4. R. Duval, La littérature syriaque (3rd Edn 1907), 228f.
5. Book of the Dove, XXI.
6. Wensinck, in Deutsche Literaturzeitung, 45 (1924), 120-123; A. Baumstark, Geschichte der syrischen Literatur (Bonn 1922), 211, 225f.
J.B. Chabot restated this opinion in 1935, declaring that the collection of 25 treatises and 51 epistles (and other miscellaneous writings) actually belonged to John of Dalyatha and not to John of Penek, i.e. John bar Penkayé. According to Chabot the explanation for the confusion was simply the common occurrence of the Christian name John and of the surname Saba ("venerable").

In describing the Arabic version of the writings of the "Spiritual Sheikh" G. Graf likewise accepted John of Dalyatha's authorship. This has now become the established belief, having been reaffirmed by I. Hausherr, P. Sherwood, and I. Ortiz de Urbina, for example.

Throughout the long investigation into this mystery no one seems to have taken up the ancient opinion reported by a certain David the Phoenician, whereby the Gordian knot was neatly cut with the assertion that John bar Penkayé and John of Dalyatha were one and the same person. Certainly it was not at all unusual for Syrian Fathers to be known by more than one name, as for example Gregory of Cyprus, who was also called Gregory the Monk, or Joseph Hazzaya who adopted the name Abdisho Hazzaya. Nevertheless there are serious difficulties in the way of this ready-made solution. It is therefore necessary to establish exactly what is known about these enigmatic authors.

(2) The Biographies of John of Dalyatha

(a) The Book of Chastity

A good deal of information on the life of John of Dalyatha is found in the notice devoted to him in the Book of Chastity, which was composed by Ishodenah of Basra in the second half of the ninth century;\textsuperscript{12} the details supplied by this author are as follows:

(1) He came from the district of Beth Nuhadra.
(2) He was a studious child who read all the books in the school libraries accessible to him.
(3) He became a monk in the Monastery of Mar Yozadaq, attaching himself to the Blessed Stephen, who was a disciple of Mar Jacob Hazzaya and of Rabban Afnimaran.
(4) He had two brothers, named Sergius and Theodorus, who likewise became monks.
(5) He left the monastery and settled in the mountains of Beth Dalyatha,\textsuperscript{13} where he lived on "clusters of grapes" (?), (\textit{\textsuperscript{11}anbay d\textsuperscript{e}dalyatha}).
(6) He was the author of a number of books on asceticism.
(7) These writings met with the disapproval of the Catholicus Timothy, who anathematized him for having said that the humanity of our Lord sees\textsuperscript{14} His divinity.

12. J.B. Chabot, \textit{Le Livre de la chasteté}, Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire, 16 (1896), 225-291. Item No. 126 is concerned with John of Dalyatha, but it should be noted that P. Bedjan also edited the text of this work as a supplement to his edition of "The Book of Governors", \textit{Liber Superiourum} (Paris 1901) 437-517, and the number 127 is there allotted to John of Dalyatha. The full title of this work is actually "The Lives of the Founders of Monasteries in the Kingdoms of the Persians and the Arabs". Cf. also J. M. Piel, \textit{Assyrie Chr.}, I, 21-25, and "Icho\textsuperscript{e}dnah, métropolite de Basra, et son oeuvre", \textit{L'Orient syrien}, II (1966), 431-450.

13. Piel (II, 685) makes the following statement with refe-
(8) Eventually he went and settled in the hills of Qardu in the vicinity of the village of Argul, where some monks gathered round him and a monastery was set up.
(9) In extreme old age he gathered the believers and the monks around him and gave them instructions on monasticism.
(10) Thereupon he died and was buried in the monastery of Sahdona.

(b) Hymn on the Saints

This anonymous poem lists the Syrian saints and founders of monasteries, in the same order as the Book of Chastity, and appears to be based on that work.\textsuperscript{15} No.125 says:

John of Dalyatha established a splendid monastery in Qardu, and having attained to a goodly old age he was laid with honour in the church.

(c) Life of John of Dalyatha

This brief biography, edited and translated into Latin by I.E.Rahmani,\textsuperscript{16} has much in common with the account in the Book of Chastity. This translation is reproduced here for purposes of comparison with Ishodenah's account.

Vita Joannis Daliatharum, cujus coenobium in monte Cardu est.

Joannis Daliatharum parentes oriundi sunt a regione Beth Nuhadrae ex vico Ardamuth qui situs est ad certam distantiam a flumine Zab.

Cum autem adoleverit, operam legendis libris navavit in ecclesia sui vici. Duabus autem virtutibus praecipue excelluit, jejunio nempe perenni vigilantiaque nocturna.

dence to the village Deleb and to Bedjan's text, No.127: "C'est probablement ici aussi qu'il faut chercher la montagne de 'Dalpata' où l'auteur ascétique Jean de Daliata vécut pendant un certain temps, peut-être en souvenir de Narsai". (Narsai was born there in A.D.400).

14. The reading in Chabot's text is faulty(\textsuperscript{hdy\textsuperscript{2}}) and his attempt at translation("est unie à") is grammatically unsound. It is Bedjan's text that has the correct reading(\textsuperscript{hzy\textsuperscript{2}}).
Orandi causa quavis hebdomadu se ad Afni-Maran monasterium conferebat.


Duos habebat Joannes fratres, quorum unus Sergius, Theodorus alter; utrique monachi fuerunt. Quoties illi ei cibum oleumque volebant suppeditare minime ipse as-sentiebat.

Porro, coenobio derelicto, majoris solitudinis amore petii Daliatharum altos praerupte montes, qui impervii prorsus erant, ibique panis loco uva ramorum vitis vescebatur; atque idcirco ex vitibus (daliatha) quae constituebant ejus cibum Ioannes Daliathensis appellatus est.

Epistolas tractatusque, quos ad germanos mittebat, de vita ascetica elucubratus est.

Mar Salomon episcopus Hadethensis ita de eo testatur: montem quondam petii, ubi morabatur Mar Ioannes Daliathensis: sed duabus apud ipsum mensibus peractis, prae nivis frigorisque rigiditate nullatenus ulterius ibidem moram protrahere valui.

Exinde cum jam senuerit a monte Daliatharum in montes Carduenses se transtulit, ibique non procul ab oppidis Raghul et Nassur solitarius in eremo vitam duxit.

Cujus famam cum nonnulli anachoretae audierint, illuc se contulerunt commoratiique sunt in restaurato vetusto coenobio, quod olim Jacobus monachus et anachoreta in-colebat.

Ita coenobium evasit amplum celibreque, eidemque libros et superlectilem copiose illi providerunt.

Mar Ioannes statuta et leges elucubravit eidem coenobio more quidem populi nostri Syrorum, ibique congregati sunt quadraginta monachi.

Idem Ioannes volumen de ascetica vita conscrispsit quod ad germanos suos misit. Scripsit etiam de dogmate in adorandam Trinitatem ad mentem s. Synodi tercentorum et octodecim patrum.

15. Sachau, Catalogue, I, 234-239. Cf. Fiey, I, 22. The section of this hymn relevant to our purposes has notes on Isaac of Nineveh, Joseph Hazzaya, John of Dalyatha, and Martyrius (Sahdona), just as in the Book of Chastity.
Vita functus est in suo coenobio migrans ad Dominum. Preces ipsius sint nobiscum.

The significant details that supplement Ishodenah's version are as follows:

(1) His parents came from the region of Beth Nuhadra, but more particularly from the village of Ardamuth, "some distance from the river Zab". ¹⁷

(2) In his youth he visited the monastery of Aphnimaran every week.

(3) The monastery he founded (or rebuilt) was situated in the Qardu mountains near the villages of Raghul and Nassur. The monastery had originally belonged to a certain monk named Jacob.

(4) He wrote epistles and treatises on asceticism, apparently while he was living in Beth Dalyatha, and sent them to his brothers. Later, in the context of the narrative concerning the establishment of his own monastery, it is said that he produced a book on asceticism, which he sent to his brothers.

¹⁷ Rahmani suggests Adrama should be read and refers to Assemani, BiOr, III, 2, 711ff. Fiey (II, 694) says that Ardamusht (present-day Kawashi) is meant and comments: "Je ne sais qui a pu dire que leur village d'origine était "À quelque distance du Zab"? Comme on voit le jeune Jean, encore "pieux laïc" aller toutes les semaines au monastère d'Apnimāran, on peut penser que son lieu d'origine n'était pas tellement loin de ce couvent. En effet, 22 kilomètres seulement les séparent, car Ardamusht est à 16 kilomètres au sud-est de l'entrée de la gorge de Zāghū, alors que Za'farān est à 6 kilomètres à l'ouest. D'ailleurs, toute l'histoire de Jean de Daliātā est en relation avec le pays de Qardu, soit par le couvent de Mār Yūzādāq où il prit le scapulaire, soit par le monastère "des treilles" qu'il y fonda!"

For the identification of Ardamusht with Kawashi Fiey cites the authority of Yaqut and Yasin al 'Omari.
(5) It is added that he also wrote on the doctrine of the Trinity, and in this regard the Synod of 318 Fathers is mentioned.

(6) Solomon Bishop of Haditha (760-780) stayed with him for two months, apparently in the Beth Dalyatha mountains.

(d) Synodical Canons

Ishodenah tells us that the Patriarch Timothy I (780-823) anathematized John of Dalyatha at a special synod. He also informs us that Joseph Hazzaya was similarly condemned, along with John of Dalyatha and John of Apamea as we learn elsewhere, in the year 170 of the Arab calendar. Furthermore, he states with reference to Isaac of Nineveh's unpopularity with the ecclesiastical authorities: "I think that it was envy that was aroused against him as with Joseph Hazzaya, John of Apamea, and John of Dalyatha."19

Ishodenah's information concerning Joseph Hazzaya is surprisingly detailed; the reason is undoubtedly that he had employed the biography of this mystic composed by Nestorius Bishop of Beth Nuhadra. This document is lost to us, but we do have Nestorius' profession of faith to the synod of 174 (A.D. 790), in which he abjures certain Messalian and Origenistic doctrines, which Joseph and the other two had been accused of holding. This Nestorius was evidently suspected of being a theologically corrupted associate of Joseph. Incidentally, his association with Joseph is one of the facts showing that Joseph belonged to the eighth and not the seventh century, as has been recognised independently by A. Guillaumont and E. J. Sherry, both of whom calculate

19. Ibid, No. 124; this is his only mention of John of Apamea.
Joseph's date of birth to have been around 710. 20

There is also a letter of Timothy himself written to the synod of 174(790), preserved by Abdisho of Nisibis in his Nomocanon(lx,6). In this letter the Catholicus recalls the condemnation of Joseph and the two Johns. It should be noted that this is clear evidence for the correctness of Ishodenah's date for the synod of anathematization, 170/786. Some writers have stated that 174/790 is the correct year, but the Patriarch is plainly referring to an earlier synod in his letter of 790. 21

At an even later synod held in 804 the condemnation was reaffirmed thus:

"Just as the Catholicus Sabrisho(596-604)condemned the writing of Henana of Adiabene(a.610) and Ishoyahb III (647-658) the fictions of Sahdona(c.650) and the commentaries of Isaiah of Tahal(650?), so we proscribe the blasphemies of that Apamean and of Joseph and of John of Dalyatha". 22

One question that arises from this is whether these three were alive when the ban was placed on their writings. One might think that Timothy was implying that just as earlier Nestorian Patriarchs had banned the heretical books produced during their Catholicate, so he was carrying out the same policy in his own generation. Sherry uses this and other arguments for his theory that Joseph Hazzaya and probably also John of Apamea and John of Dalyatha were alive at the time of the synod of anathematization(786).

21. As pointed out by Guillaumont, 9; Sherry is in error on this point.
22. Sherry's translation, 82f.
The case of the Apamean is the most difficult. Hausherr has taught us to call the sixth-century mystic John the Solitary by the name John of Apamea. At the same time it would appear that there were two men from the sixth century who were known under that name, one of whom was extremely heretical, teaching a mixture of dualism, pantheism, and Platonism. Sherry is obliged, however, to posit a third personage of that name in the eighth century to maintain his theory that Timothy was excommunicating living contemporaries. Yet Sherry himself acknowledges that the Patriarchal decree was directed primarily against books rather than persons (although personal envy seems to have played a part in the controversy). In this regard it should be noted that Hausherr considers that the writings of John the Solitary are anti-Messalian; this would have pleased Timothy, but the fact is that they are also anti-Nestorian and Monophysite after the manner of Severus of Antioch. It is not yet certain which Apamean Timothy was condemning, but it can be said with certainty that the ideas of John the Solitary had a manifest influence on the Nestorian mystics, as will be shown in the case of John Saba in our next chapter, so it may well be that his writings were in some vogue during the eighth century and were therefore banned as the source of so much of the offending doctrine. Extant manuscripts of John of Apamea's books are quite old, dating from before the ninth century, and this may be an indication of the fact that they were proscribed. Similarly, no Nestorian manuscripts of John Saba's works are mentioned in modern catalogues as far as the present writer's

23. Hausherr, in the article mentioned above, 5f., n.11.
25. Hausherr, 40.
knowledge goes, while copies of Joseph Hazzaya's writings are very scarce.

As regards Joseph Hazzaya, Sherry has given a number of possible indications that this monk was alive at the time of the synod. As we have seen, Ishodenah suggested that Timothy's jealousy was one of the main motives in the affair; accordingly Sherry thinks it unlikely that the Patriarch would have been envious of a corpse. This argument is weakened, however, by Sherry's admission that Timothy's denunciation was primarily directed at writings not personalities and that he was concerned with the need to have books submitted to him for his imprimitur before they were published. Nevertheless Sherry may be right in postulating that Timothy's jealousy was particularly aroused by Joseph's title Hazzaya, "the Visionary", since Abdisho said many years later that "Timothy excelled in vision and in all virtue", and, moreover, Timothy would have been able to let the title bear its other sense of "Hazzean", that is to say "originating from HaZZ or Arbel, he being the most famous son of that city. 26 Another point against Sherry's view is Ishodenah's statement that Joseph lived to a ripe old age and was still the superior of his monastery, which is taken by Guillaumont as an indication that Joseph must have died before the synod of excommunication; but this argument is also inconclusive.

Another closely related problem has not been satisfactorily answered yet, namely Joseph's reason for issuing his later works under the name of his brother Abdisho: was it because Joseph had been excommunicated and wished to conceal his authorship, or was it simply because envy and suspicion were in the air? Sherry has brought to light some very

interesting passages from Joseph's *Discourse on Providence* which, he thinks, show that Joseph is writing after his condemnation, but, we should add, might simply show that he knew that he was under strong suspicion at the time of writing. The very title includes a significant exhortation: "Let discerning readers take heed; let them clear their mind of all envy; all that we say is true and we do not turn aside from the way of the Interpreter" (i.e. Theodore of Mopsuestia).

Another extract is very relevant: "God infused the Spirit into three men... If it were not for the jealousy that holds sway in our generation I would have mentioned the names of these men, but there is no need". It is quite possible that Joseph was referring to three of the four monks mentioned by Ishodenah as being victims of envy in high places, namely Isaac of Nineveh, the Apamean, John of Dalyatha, and Joseph himself.

A statement about the Incarnation is accompanied by a word of self-defense: God the Word, he says, "descended not in nature, but made a dwelling place for the descent of His love, I say, and not of His nature. Let no impious heretic think that I agree with his opinion". Sherry asks whether the "impious heretic" was John of Dalyatha, who said that the humanity of our Lord was united with His divinity. To this suggestion we must reply that, as stated above, the verb "is united", found in Chabot's faulty text of the Book of Chastity, needs to be corrected to "sees" as in Bedjan's text, and, moreover, Joseph may only be making a general statement, referring to no one in particular.

It would appear, then, that there is nothing in all this to compel us to conclude that Joseph was still alive at the time of the synod of 786, though it remains quite possible that he was. So what can we say in respect of John of
Dalyatha? Were his writings in circulation before his death? We know from the various prefaces, forewords, and appendices attached to the Book of John Saba that the writer's original wish was that his brother should show them to no one. Nevertheless, when these had eventually been collected in one volume he consented to its wider distribution, but only in the circles of the Initiated. Again, however, all we can say is that the writer's works were known before the synod of condemnation, a fact which naturally needs no demonstrating; but whether he was alive at that time does not clearly emerge from the various records of the councils.

At least we know that John of Dalyatha flourished in the eighth century, for Solomon of Haditha (760-780) paid him a visit. Moreover, Chabot has shown that an analysis of the chain of John's teachers as given in the Book of Chastity leads to the same conclusion. John is said to have begun his monastic life under the direction of Stephen, disciple of Jacob Hazzaya and Rabban Aphnimaran. In Paragraph 140 we learn that Jacob Hazzaya would not allow himself to be consecrated Metropolitan of Nisibis by the Catholicus Henanisho (686-701) and that he died at the age of 90 years when he was superior of the Monastery of Mar Ishoyahb. Item 117 states that one of his disciples named Aaron lived during the episcopacy of Cyriacus of Balad (c.760). At the same time we learn from Item 93 that Aphnimaran lived to be 100 years old and had started his monastic career under Qamisho, superior of the Monastery of Beth 'Abé (c.630). Thus, John of Dalyatha, younger by two generations, clearly belongs in the eighth century.

28. See Journal Asiatique, VIII (1906), 267f.
It should be emphasized here that Jacob Hazzaya must be carefully distinguished from Joseph Hazzaya. Too often we meet the false modern inference that John of Dalyatha was indirectly a disciple of Joseph Hazzaya. \(^{29}\) This opinion is based on the impossible assumption that in the monastic histories Jacob is an error for Joseph. Thus Labourt claimed that the writers John of Dalyatha and Joseph Hazzaya were accorded high veneration in Thomas of Marga's *Book of Governors*, but this is incorrect, for neither are in fact mentioned. \(^{30}\) Thomas writes of Jacob Hazzaya, \(^{31}\) and also tells of a certain John Saba, but this was not John of Dalyatha but another Saba, who was the sixth-century co-founder of the Monastery of Mar Eliya. \(^{32}\)

At the same time there seems to be a modern confusion between John of Dalyatha and John of Dailam, who, strangely enough, is associated with a vineyard in Thomas of Marga's monastic history, the *Book of Governors*. \(^{33}\)

We are left then with a small collection of biographical data connecting John of Dalyatha with a number of places in "Christian Assyria" and beyond, and also showing him as the contemporary of certain eighth-century personages. Whether he lived to experience his own condemnation by Timothy and the Doctors of the Church has not been definitely ascertained, but it remains a distinct possibility.

\(^{29}\) E.g., G. Widengren, "Researches in Syrian Mysticism", *Numen*, VIII (1961), (161-198), also issued as a separate monograph, 165f., following Duval, Labourt, and Baumstark.

\(^{30}\) H. Labourt, *De Timotheo I Nestorianorum patriarcha* (Paris 1904), 25.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., II, 50f.; cf. Piety, II, 645.

\(^{33}\) Widengren (165, n.17) is in error when he refers to *Historia monastica*, II, ch. XXIII-XXV, i.e. Thomas of Marga's
(3) The Biography of John bar Penkayé

The figure of John bar Penkayé is veiled in mystery. Bar Hebraeus has given us a fragment of one of his letters in the Ethikon (Part I, ch. 9) and Isaac Eshbadnaya gives a number of quotations of an exegetical kind in his poem "On the Divine Government of the World", while Abdisho mentions him in the Book of the Pearl (Part III, ch. 5) and lists his writings in the catalogue. We look in vain, however, for a reference to him in the Nestorian monastic histories. Nevertheless a number of writings have survived under his name, including a history of the world, and there is also a biography devoted entirely to this monk, which has come to us through the hands of Jacobite scribes and may therefore have undergone alteration in the process. The information that can be gleaned from this quarter is rather meagre:

(1) John bar Penkayé was also known as the "Spiritual Saba".

(2) He first became a monk in the monastery of Mar John of Kamul.

(3) Sabrisho was the head of the monastery at that time. (It should be noted that John's world-history is addressed to a certain Sabrisho.)

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34. Assemmani, BiOr, III, 1, 189f.
35. Further details in T. Jansma's article on the life and works of John bar Penkayé in L'Orient Syrien, 3(1963), 87-106. The Biography has been published in three different places: (1) E. Sachau, Catalogue, II, 554f. (2) A. Scher, "Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres de Yohannan bar Penkayé", Journal asiatique,
(4) He moved into a private cell and lived in solitude, though for instruction in combatting demons he used to go to the Monastery of Mar Bassima. (This convent was in the Qardu region and, according to Ishodenah, Joseph Hazzaya was its superior for a time.) He is said to have spent several nights in the snow to defeat the demon of blasphemy and to have lain on snow and ice in the course of a whole year in his war against fornication.

(5) Eventually he went to live in the Monastery of Argog, or Argul according to Rahmani’s manuscript. (Ishodenah states that the Monastery of John of Dalyatha was near Argul, it may be noticed.) This item of information occurs towards the end of the biography, after the detailed list of his writings.

(6) Here follows the puzzling statement that John bar Penkayé 'ethrabbì in the Monastery of John of Dalyatha. This verb is variously translated as "excelled in virtue" (Scher), "transferred to" (Rahmani), "did his noviciate" (Jansma), or may mean "grew up". At any rate Rahmani’s copy has this significant variant: "in the Monastery of Dalyatha, the one built (or rebuilt?) by that other John who records his victory elsewhere".

(7) He died at the age of 73 years and was buried in the Monastery of John of Kamul.

(8) John Bishop of Qardu relates that John Penkaya healed his hand.

(9) He put a tiger to flight who had been terrifying the brothers

[1(1907), 161-178(almost identical with Sachau’s text).

(3) I.E. Rahmani, Studia Syriaca, I (Sharfé 1904), 34-36, 64f. (appended to a manuscript of John of Dalyatha’s works).]
From the colophon of his world-history, the resh meli, we learn that he was called John Penkaya because he came from the village of Penek (in Beth Zabdag). The form bar Penkaye means "son of people from Penek", we may add. From the fact that the last event in this history occurs in the year 686, the date of this author is usually assumed to be the late seventh century. 37

The next step in our investigation is an examination of the hypothesis that John of Dalyatha and John bar Penkaye were one and the same personage.

(4) The Account of David the Phoenician

Attached to manuscripts of Recension M we find an interesting historical treatise on the subject of John of Dalyatha and John bar Penkaye. The author introduces himself as David the Phoenician. His date is uncertain but he must be later than Dionysius bar Salibi (d.1171), since he refers to that Jacobite theologian as "a great teacher" in one of his writings. 38

It may be assumed, therefore, that he was a West Syrian writer and that the Nestorian background of John Saba would be conveniently disregarded. In fact he calls the author of the book by his neutral designation of "the Spiritual Saba" and names only one place, Penek in Beth Zabdag, which was a region where both Jacobites and Nestorians could be found. He also mentions the Monastery of Dalyatha, without stating its geographical position; but he gives a very plausible explanation of the name Dalyatha as follows: 'an Arabic name meaning "Monastery of the Vines", since the Arabic for "vine" 36. The Monastery of John of Kamul was in the Qardu region; Joseph Hazzaya was baptized there. Ishodenah, items 7, 30, 125. 38. BiOr, III, 1, 189f. 37. Urbina, Patr. Syr., 151.
is dālyah, which becomes dālītha when taken over into Syriac, like ḫāzītha and shāqītha, and when one requires to say "vines" in the plural it becomes dālyātha, like ḫāzyātha and shāqyātha! The opinion is stated that John Saba received the name John of Dalyatha because he first assumed the monastic garb in this Monastery of Dalyatha.

The salient points in this biography are as follows:

(1) David recalls the occasion when he was sitting at the feet of his master Moses bar Mukaiṣif and a beautiful but somewhat damaged copy of the book of the Spiritual Saba was brought in, whereupon the teacher told the circumstances of its composition.

(2) A certain John, whose parents were citizens of Penek, entered the Monastery of Dalyatha against his parent’s wishes.

(3) Some time later another child was born to these people and this son was also given the name John. This looks like an attempt to explain the fact that in some copies of the "apologies" attached to the book of John Saba the brother who collected the writings is also called John. Ishodenah, however, says that John of Dalyatha had two brothers, whose names were Sergius and Theodore. In this regard there is a striking parallel with the legend of Hilaria. In the Syriac version Hilaria, daughter of Zeno, flees from the Imperial Court into the Desert of Skete, where she installs herself in a monastery as John the Eunuch; thereafter another daughter is born to her parents. In the Coptic and Arabic versions, as in the Egyptian tale of Bent-resh, King Zeno has two daughters from the start, as Wensinck has noted.

(4) This brother also entered the Monastery of Dalyatha.

39. Legends of Eastern Saints (Leiden 1913), VI and XXVI.
(5) The elder John eventually reached such a state of spirituality that he departed from the monastery to lead the life of the desert solitary.

(6) In the desert the wild beasts did him no harm because they sniffed the scent of their Creator on him, he being so perfectly united with God. David points out that in this respect John is like John the Evangelist speaking of himself as "the Beloved Disciple" or Paul the Apostle referring to himself as "a man in Christ" whom he knew, for"this saint has related that the man who was in union with God, as fire with iron, had the wild beasts at peace with him because they sniffed the scent of their creator on him, when it was he who experienced these things himself". David is here referring to a section of Sermo 26(Discourse 14, page 52f).

(7) The younger John left behind in the monastery contacted his elder brother and requested him to write to him letters of consolation on the subject of the spiritual life. These communications arrived "sometimes on pieces of stone, sometimes on pieces of wood, and sometimes on broken earthenware pots thrown out by their owners; sometimes spittle served for ink and scraps of wood and grass instead of a pen". David indicates that this information is found in one of the apologies written by the younger brother. We may add that we learn from the same source that the saint used to sign his letters with the name "Pig".40

(8) In spite of the saint's request that these writings should be shown to no one else, his brother wrote them out neatly on parchment and compiled a book from them.

40. W.Wright, who is generally unsympathetic towards Syrian mystics, calls this a curious example of affected humility. *Syriac Lit.*, 110.
(9) David now directs all his attention to this book. Eventually, he says, the superior of the monastery came to know of its existence and conferred with his monks as to what title it should be given, so that it might be deposited in the library. They were in a quandary over the fact that both the editor and the author were entitled to the names John of Penek and John of (the Monastery of) Dalyatha. The Holy Spirit came to their aid and the title "The Book of the Spiritual Saba" was given to it.

(10) David declares that this was the accepted version of the history of John Saba in his day, and he asks future scribes to include his account in their copies of the book.

It may well be that we have before us nothing but a midrashic kind of fabrication to explain the fact that two names were traditionally associated with the mysterious figure of the Spiritual Saba. At the same time David's case can be bolstered by the following additional facts and possibilities.

(1) We might suggest that the fact that there are very few references to John bar Penkayé in Syriac literature is due to a simple preference for the alternative name John of Dalyatha.

(2) It is not impossible for a person to write a history of the world that ends in his own day, about the year 686, and still be alive in about the year 760 to be visited by Solomon of Haditha. If Solomon paid this visit before he became bishop then we would have to think in terms of a date earlier than 760. This would fit in quite well with the life span of 73 years given to John bar Penkayé by his biographer, but it would definitely preclude the possibility that
he was alive at the time of the synod that dealt with John of Dalyatha in 786, exactly one hundred years later. It is likewise conceivable that this author's early writings, presumably produced in his monastery cell, were issued under the name of John bar Penkayé, while the mystical tracts, written in his desert cell, were known as the work of John of Dalyatha, his later name. An analogy can be found in the many works of Joseph Hazzaya that circulated under the name Abdisho Hazzaya, dating from the period after his brother's entry into the monastery.

(3) If we try to coalesce the respective biographies into a harmonious whole, however, we meet many difficulties. Nevertheless there are points of contact, such as John of Dalyatha's power over wild animals and John bar Penkayé's dismissal of the wild beast that was terrifying his brethren. At the same time it has to be noted that this was no unique experience since a perusal of such monastic histories as the Paradise of the Fathers shows that many other ascetics were credited with the same powers.

(4) Again, there is the long anecdote related by John Saba concerning a brother who defeated the demon of fornication by standing out in the night air in all weathers for four years (Discourse 5, page 16), which has a strong resemblance to John bar Penkayé's long icy battle with the same demon, lasting a whole year (Biography, item 4). John Saba insists that he is reporting another's experience, but we could perhaps apply David the Phoenician's principle (item 6) and say that he was actually speaking about himself in the third person. Once again, however, we need to point out that this is no isolated case, as witness the practice of
the more recent European mystic Sister Jeanne des Anges: "These impurities and the fire of concupiscence which the evil spirit caused me to feel, beyond all that I can say, forced me to throw myself on to braziers of hot coal.... At other times, in the depth of winter, I have sometimes passed part of the night entirely naked in the snow or in tubs of icy water". The monk of whom John Saba tells was similarly accustomed to standing out in the hot sun and also to immersing himself in snow or icy water. But one has to be careful about attributing all such stories to John of Dalyatha's own experience, since some of the anecdotes in Isaac of Nineveh's writings that were said by Wensinck to be veiled autobiography actually came from the Paradise of the Fathers, as Burkitt pointed out.

(5) The copyist of the text of the Penkaya Biography published by Rahmani was firmly convinced that John of Penek was the true Spiritual Saba and was the author of the Saba corpus of mystical writings, for he cites the first few lines of Sermo 1 as an indication of the book he means. Furthermore, he has two interesting variant readings. Thus, he states that John Penkaya finally settled in the Monastery of Argul and not Argog as in the other manuscripts, a detail reminiscent of John of Dalyatha's founding of his monastery near Argul. Again, instead of saying that John Penkaya was trained in the Monastery of John of Dalyatha, this scribe says that it was the "Monastery of Dalyatha", and adds that this convent was built by another John. There is, therefore, a faint possibility that this is the truth of the matter, that John Penkaya came to be called John of Dal-

42. F.C. Burkitt, "Isaac of Nineveh", Journal of Theological Studies, XXVI, 81-86.
yatha because he was associated with a certain Monastery of Dalyatha. This agrees with David the Phoenician's statement on the subject, but it has to be noted that the biographies of John of Dalyatha give a different reason for this monk's acquiring of his Dalyatha surname, namely that he dwelt for a time in the mountains of Beth Dalyatha and lived on grapes. Nor is it possible to harmonize satisfactorily all the other details in the biographical accounts that have come down to us; for example, the places of birth and burial are different for John of Penek and John of Dalyatha, but it would be a tedious process to recapitulate all the discrepancies here.

Accordingly our conclusion can only be that the case has to be left open. Either it is true that John bar Penkayé and John of Dalyatha are one and the same person, or else they are two Nestorian monks whose identities have been confused by later traditionists because they both bore the title "Spiritual Saba" and perhaps also because they were both connected with a monastery or place which bore the name Dalyatha.
III. JOHN SABA AND HIS PREDECESSORS

(1) Quotations from Monastic Writers

Until the complete works of John of Dalyatha have been edited and published it is unreasonable to expect that we can offer a thorough analysis of his theology and terminology. A glance through his bulky "chapters of knowledge" section, for instance, shows that he makes more use of Evagrian ideas and technical terms than is apparent in the discourses presented here. Accordingly, at this stage of the investigation into the sources of John Saba's doctrine, it is possible only to indicate certain points where he exhibits ideas derived from his predecessors.

As we have seen, John of Dalyatha's books were placed on the Nestorian index along with those of Joseph Hazzaya and John of Apamea, for the alleged reason that they were tinged, or shot through, with Messalian and Origenistic doctrines. John of Dalyatha in particular was accused of asserting that "the humanity of our Lord beholds his divinity." The reader will find that Discourse 16, "On the Contemplation of the Holy Trinity," contains a section on the contemplation of the Son (page 62). Whether this was precisely the passage to which objection was raised is not certain. This question will require more thorough investigation than can be attempted at this stage, but at least the difficulties confronting us in this matter need to be pointed out:

(a) The writings of John of Dalyatha may have undergone early Nestorian revision and purging.

(b) The writings, as we have them now, have certainly been worked over by Jacobites, but to what extent has not yet been determined; but we find, for instance, references to the Theotokos.

1. See 15 and 19-23 above.
(Yaldath Alaha) in the Discourses. It is unlikely that these were in the original text, but we can not be absolutely certain of this, having no other manuscripts except Jacobite copies to consult on this and other problematical points.

For the time being, then, besides the brief sketch presented here, we have Guillaume's excellent analysis of the documents relating to the Patriarch Timothy's ban on the three offending mystics, together with a demonstration of the Messalian and Origenistic influences manifested in the few works of Joseph Hazzaya available to us at present. ²

The biographies of John of Dalyatha present their protagonist as having been an avid reader in his youth, so we might expect to find traces of the ideas he imbibed from his reading of ascetic literature. He is not prone, however, to naming his authorities, in marked contrast to Dadisho Qatraya, for example. ³ In fact, the only quotation from the Fathers that has a name attached to it is one by St Anthony, found in Discourse 12 (page 34):

Many have toiled at great labours and because they did not toil with discrimination they did not find the path to God, nor did they reach the holy haven. ⁴

Elsewhere in his writings John Saba cites Macarius and Evagrius, but not in the Discourses. Here he does frequently quote the words of other brothers or fathers, but does not reveal their identity. A case in point is the not yet published Sermo 18,

3. Cf. the writings "On Solitude" in Mingana's Woodbrooke Studies, VII, 70-143, and notice how frequently Dadisho documents his citations with the author's name.
4. I. Hausherr, Penthos, 178, cites "Alph. Antoine, n. 8" (i.e. Alphabetic Series of Apopthegmata, Patrologia Graeca, 65, 71-440) as follows: "Il en est qui ont broyé leur corps par un ascèse (immoderée), et qui, pour n'avoir pas eu la discrétion, se sont éloignés de Dieu".
which commences with a vast array of sayings attributed to various unnamed monks, all awaiting identification by some future editor. At times, however, we cannot help wondering whether the many brothers quoted at great length are actually literary devices for the presentation of John Saba's own ideas and experiences. Be that as it may, we turn now to a brief outline of some of the obvious sources of this writer's teachings.

(2) Ephraim and Aphraates

In the works of the two great fourth-century Syrian teachers Ephraim (Afrem) and Aphraates (Afraat) we find a spirituality that borders on mysticism. Ephraim has been named by Margaret Smith as one of the earliest Christian mystics. Passages from his writings quoted by her teach the attainment of the Vision of the Divine Beauty through purification, love, and prayer. Ephraim uses the figure of the diver who plunges into the water of purification and brings up the pearl of great price. He also compares the soul to a mirror that needs to be burnished bright and shiny. Both of these symbols, together with the typical Syrian Christian figure of the merchant and the pearl, are found in Discourse 21 (pp. 77ff.).

5. It should be noted that in the Vatican Syriac Catalogue (p. 151) S.E. Assemani says that this treatise (S. 18) is found under the name of Isaac of Nineveh on p. 217 of Cod. Graec. Vat. 391. I have not been able to confirm this, but S. 18 is not one of the four discourses mentioned by Moss in his Catalogue (p. 498): "Four of the treatises (2, 7, 43, 80) in the 1770 Greek translation of Isaac of Nineveh (from the Arabic) by Patricius and Abramios... are actually by John Bar Dalyatha, called Sabha". Note, however, that this Greek version of Isaac's writings was made directly from Syriac, as pointed out by Graf, Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur, I, 438, n. 1.

6. For an outline of the theology and terminology of Syrian Christian mysticism, in comparison with other mystical systems, consult the Introduction to A.J. Wensinck's translation of Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove (Leiden 1919), XIII-OX, which has not yet been superseded. This should be compared with his intro-
In the writings of Aphraates we find the teaching that by a process of purification, involving strict asceticism, the monk may attain to the Vision of God and become a dwelling for the Holy Spirit. An examination of his Demonstratio VII ("De Monachis") brings to light a number of themes that reappear in the mystical discourses of John Saba. Thus the pearl motif occurs in an exhortation to monks to procure for themselves the Pearl. In the same context we find an admonition to become sharers in Christ's Passion, a theme developed fully in the latter part of Discourse 4 of John Saba, "On Flight from the World" (pp. 13f.). A little later mention is made of "entering into the treasury" and "seeing the King in his beauty." This latter phrase is ultimately derived from Isaiah 33:17, but it is interesting to find both ideas together again in Discourse 13, "On the Stage of Perfection" (p. 38): "Here begins the entering into the treasury, the place of glorious revelations, the place of joy and exultation, the place without a shadow, the place of light where no mention of darkness is made, the place of rest and delight, the place of peace: its inhabitants are illuminated by the sight of the beauty of the King." The mention of "light" and "illumination" in this extract points to another basic concept of mystical theology, and it is interesting to note that the Divine appellation "Light from light" is found in the works of Aphraates and also of John Saba.

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These, then, are a few of the motifs of primitive Syrian Christian spirituality that reappeared in the fully developed mysticism of John of Dalyatha. There is, however, yet another important primitive mystic who has recently been dubbed the first Syrian Christian mystic, namely Pseudo-Macarius.

(3) Macarius and Messalianism

In the very midst of the Syrian Churches the sect of the Messalians was operating and exerting powerful influences. Their name means "pray-ers", in Syriac Mesalleyane, and they are also known as Buchites, their Greek designation, for the simple reason that their cardinal characteristic was the belief in the absolute efficacy of prayer. Their system has been summarized by I. Hausherr in four main points:

(a) The indwelling of a demon in the soul;
(b) The powerlessness of baptism and other sacraments to purify the soul of this demonic influence and presence;
(c) The exclusive efficacy of prayer;
(d) The twofold result of (i) "apathy" or freedom from all passions, and (ii) the coming of the Holy Spirit.

A large collection of documents and information concerning the Messalian heresy is contained in the Introduction to N. Kosmo's edition of the anonymous Syriac Book of Degrees (Ketab demasqata). This is because the editor believed that

3. On the soul as a mirror see Wensinck, Dove, LXXIV-LXXVI.
10. Ibid., 245.
11. This passage was later used by Bar Hebraeus, as we shall see.
12. See Wensinck, Dove, LXXII-LXXXVIII.
13. This was noted by Wensinck (Dove, LXXXV), using Cambridge Add. 2012, f. 140a, which reproduces prayers of John Saba extracted from the discourses. See now Discourse 5, p. 14.
14. Note that Isaac of Nineveh stands as a possible intermediary carrier of many early influences. Cf. his use of the pearl motif: "Naked the swimmer dives into the sea to find a pearl and naked the solitary should live in this world in order to find the pearl of great price" (p. 326).
the book was of Messalian provenance, but Vööbus has rightly pointed out that none of these four distinguishing features of Messalianism are found there.\footnote{17} For instance, this Liber Graduum includes the affirmation that without the visible baptism by water the higher baptism by fire and spirit is unattainable.

There have been various attempts to identify one or another of the early ascetical writings still extant as the Asceticon of the Messalians, mentioned in the proceedings of the Synod of Ephesus. The Greek Spiritual Homilies of Pseudo-Macarius have been suggested as a likely possibility. On the other hand, because these offer, at least in their present form, very little obvious Messalian doctrine, there have been recent attempts to rehabilitate Pseudo-Macarius and to restore him to the position of widespread acceptance that he enjoyed in the past. Nevertheless Guillaumont reaffirms in the face of the defenders of Macarius that the Messalian aspects of the Homilies cannot be explained away.\footnote{18} The same writer states that the work was composed in Syria or Mesopotamia, since its Greek is marked by Aramaisms.\footnote{19} More recently G. Quispel has highlighted the typical Semitic Christian features of the Homilies and has consequently declared that Pseudo-Macarius was the first Syrian mystic known to us.\footnote{20}

17. See further Vööbus, Asceticism, I, 178-184; II, 127-139.
18. See further Guillaumont, 19-22, for details.
19. Guillaumont, 19, n. 44. The Greek text of 50 homilies is found in Patrologia Graeca, XXXIV, 449-322.
One likely Messalian concept that Guillaumont has detected in both Macarius and Joseph Hazzaya is the palpable character of the coming of the Spirit into the soul, so that definite signs can be described. This action of the Spirit is said to be like a burning fire in the soul. Macarius speaks of "the inflaming of the Spirit" (πυρόςις του Πνεύματος) and "the inflaming of the entrails" (πυρόςις τῶν σπλαγχνῶν) (coll. 672D and 673A). With Joseph Hazzaya it is "the fiery impulse" (ζαυ'α νυρανα), which expands in the soul with such intensity "that a man falls to the ground and eats the dust that is on it as if it were bread, from the ardour of divine love and the intensity and burning of its heat". 21 The same phenomenon is described by John Saba in Discourse 7 (p.23): "Sometimes it (namely the Spirit or "Grace") stirs up hot fiery impulses in his heart through the love of Christ and his soul is set on fire, his limbs are paralysed and he falls on his face. Sometimes it arouses a fervent heat in his heart and his body and soul are enkindled so that he supposes that every part of him is consumed by the conflagration, except what is in his heart".

To demonstrate Joseph Hazzaya's debt to Macarius and also to Evagrius, Guillaumont takes Joseph's discourse on the five signs "by which the Spirit makes manifest his working in us". 22 The first sign is the fiery impulse, "when the love of God burns in the heart of a man like fire. From this are born in his heart the hatred and complete renunciation of the world, and the love of solitude and asceticism, which is the mother and educator of all virtues". With this should be

21. A. Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies, VII, 149 (Syriac text 263).
22. Guillaumont, 17-21; Mingana, 165-167.
compared portion of Macarius' Homily IV,14(434A): "The soul that has renounced the world, that has desired the Lord with a great searching of soul, toil, and struggle, that is in constant expectation of him with hope and faith, and that has received the heavenly fire of Deity and of the love of the Spirit, is truly freed from all love for the world and delivered from all the evil of the passions...." The extract from John Saba cited earlier with reference to the fiery impulse and his various discourses on the subjects of fleeing from the world and experiencing Divine visitations all breathe the same spirit as is found here.

The second and third signs are different aspects of true humility manifested in outpourings of tears and in universal charity. In Macarius (Homily XVIII,8,64C8C) we find the desire to draw all men into one's entrails, so to speak, while Joseph talks of having all men dwelling in one's heart where one may embrace them all without exception, while considering oneself as "dust and ashes". In John Saba's discourse on the Spirit's workings in novices(p.21) we find, in similar vein, the following statements: "Grace sows humility in his heart and makes his own thoughts less than dust and ashes. Sometimes it causes him to shed tears through the remembrance of his sins... Sometimes it gives him love of actions giving
pleasure to his brethren... Sometimes it will arouse in his
heart pity for the oppressed and ministry to the sick".

The fourth and fifth signs, however, are not borrowed
from Macarius but from Evagrius as Guillaumont clearly shows.
This is a suitable point in our discussion to introduce the
opinion of Quispel, that there is no Neo-Platonism in the
Spiritual Homilies of Macarius. The Alexandrian influence
that Quispel allows would have come through Tatian and Enca-
tatism. Moreover, he declares, the best proof that Macarius is
of Syrian and Judaeo-Christian origin and cut off from the
mainstream of Hellenistic theology is the fact that he pre-
sents the Holy Spirit as Divine Mother: This sort of ima-
gery also appears in John Saba, as in Discourse 3(p.9), where
it is said with reference to "a man born of the Lord": "His
nurse is the Holy Spirit and from her bosom he sucks life
and inhales her fragrance for his delight".

That John of Dalyatha was acquainted with the writings of
Pseudo-Macarius (which circulated in Syriac and Arabic as well
as Greek) is shown by his reference to Father Macarius in
Sermo 28(= Eg. 51,M folio16a). John was not condemned by the
Nestorian councils for being influenced by Macarius so much
as for teaching Messalian doctrines. Guillaumont has studied
the relevant documents carefully and pointed out in the first
place that two traditional Messalian errors were highlighted:
(a) the belief that perfection is possible here below;
(b) contempt for the sacraments and the discipline of the
Church.

Guillaumont shows the tendentiousness of the way the
quotations from Joseph Hazzaya are used to support the con-

23. Quispel, 9f, where examples are given. Cf. my study of the
idea of the Motherhood of God in Biblical and early Christian
24. Guillaumont, 12-16, for discussion of the relevant texts.
demnination of Joseph: these have been violently wrenched out of their context. There is a third belief attributed to the Messalians, which John of Dalyatha in particular is accused of holding:

(c) The divinity of Christ is seen by his humanity.

Timothy hurled an anathema at any one who affirmed that "the divinity of the Lord can be seen by his humanity or by any other creature". Guillaumont connects this accusation with the known Messalian opinion that the Trinity may be seen by one who has attained perfection. He suggests that in the Nestorian theological climate, where emphasis was placed on the reality of the humanity of Christ, the Messalians sought to win support for their traditional thesis by arguing that if the humanity of Christ beholds his divinity any creature that has attained impassibility can also see God. Guillaumont then cites a passage from Joseph Hazzaya stating that there is no vision of God "neither for the angels nor for man, neither in this world nor in the world to come" except indirectly in the humanity of Christ as in a mirror.

Whether John Saba can be similarly freed from the same charge is a difficult question and one that will have to be left open for further investigation.25 A major difficulty that confronts us in the resolving of this question, one which does not arise in connection with Joseph Hazzaya, is that so far only Jacobite codices containing Saba writings have come to light, whereas the extant writings of Joseph are attested in Nestorian as well as Jacobite manuscripts.

25. These doctrinal questions will be taken up by Father K. Beulay in the introduction to his edition and French translation of the Epistles of John Saba. As a further point of interest, one burning question was whether the Blessed in Paradise will behold God: this was affirmed by the Messalians but denied by Evagrius, according to Wensinck, Dove, LVIII.
Thus we are faced with the possibility of Jacobite altera-
tions to the text on one side and on the other side Nestori-
ian distortion of John's teaching in the conciliar docu-
ments.

As a final word on the Messalian controversy we append a
note on demons. The Messalian belief was that the demons
inhabited persons. It is noticeable that John Saba gives us
a tremendous amount of discourse on the struggles with the
various demons, more than in any other Syrian mystical book
published to date, but he does not speak of the demon being
in the soul; rather the demon stands beside the solitary and
sometimes takes possession of him(labesh, lit."clothes").

(4) John the Solitary and Philozenus

We have already taken note of the characteristic Syrian
division of the mystical path into three stages, with the
terms somatical, psychical, and pneumatical borrowed from
St Paul to designate these three stations. The general op-
inion is that it was the early orthodox Syrian John the Soli-
tary of Apamea who formulated this scheme and that this was
taken up shortly afterwards by Philozenus of Mabbug. Event-
ually it passed into the mystical theologies of both East
and West Syrian Christianity. The name of John of Dalyatha
can now be added to the list of those who adopted this ter-
minology. Of course there are many other tripartite divi-
sions of the mystical path and many of the terms used in
these schemes are likewise found in John of Dalyatha's sys-
tem; thus the exponents are sometimes called (1)beginners,

26. This makes a point of coincidence with the John bar
Penkayé Biography:"He wrote on all the demons and the strug-
gles with them and he exposed them". It is interesting to
note that the solitary had two main obstacles to overcome,
namely demons and "varying states" or emotional fluctuations.
Wensinck(Dove,NCVF.) cites Isaac of Nineveh, who invokes
(2) intermediates, and (3) perfect; the Dionysian view sees the three states as (1) purification, (2) illumination, (3) union or perfection; the Alexandrian system of Origen and Evagrius includes (1) praxis, (2) natural contemplation, (3) divine vision; but the employment of the terms body (soma), psyche or naphsha ("soul"), and pneuma or ruha ("spirit") to designate the three stages of mysticism is specifically Syrian and not Greek.

While Simon of Taibutha appears to be the exception that proves the rule, in that he speaks of seven stages from the novitiate to the ineffable workings of grace and absorption in the love of God, the normal Syrian line has three divisions: (1)meshuhta dephagranutha, (2) m. denaphshanutha, (3)m. deruhanutha. In a brief discussion of these terms in the course of a study on the mystical ideas of Philoxenus, F. Graffin suggests that, because it is a matter of proceeding along a path, meshuhta (presumably corresponding to taxis, also found as a loan-word in Syriac, or metron) should be rendered as "étape" or "stage" rather than as "degré" or "degree, step". A passage from Joseph Hazzaya, however, will introduce a slight divergence from this pattern (probably because Joseph is combining this idea with that of the ascent of the mind), and at the same time it will introduce us to the characteristic states of the three stages:

Macarius against the Messalians, who say that the Perfect are exempt from "varying states". See further Dove, III, 9, to be discussed in the next chapter.

27. Whether this was the John of Apamea condemned by Timothy is uncertain. It will be assumed here that this John the Solitary is the same person as John the Seer, author of the treatise "On the Spiritual State of the Soul", edited by Wensinck in New Data concerning Syriac Mystic Literature (Amsterdam 1923).


anyone who contends against this is unknowingly inclining to error and has never read the books of the spiritual Fathers, nor has he experienced this state in himself, nor is he aware of the nature of serenity, nor of the state that is above it; nay, he is not even aware of the state of purity and that of impurity, but he is talking through his hat in ignorance of the nature of any of these stages. This so-called wise man does not know that it is in the form of the rungs of a ladder that are placed the stages to which the mind clings and gradually ascends in its course, until it reaches the top of the ladder on which the Lord is sitting. 30

An extract from John the Solitary will clarify the matter of stages and states, particularly the state of serenity (shaphyutha):

A traveller on his way towards a magnificent city passes through all sorts of uneven places, which require exertion and inspire fear. Then he arrives at a plain where he finds rest and assurance. Nevertheless he has not finished. The city is perfection; the plain is shaphyutha. 31

The translation "serenity" does not adequately show the basic root meaning "to plane, to level", but if used consistently it can be easily distinguished from "purity", the state associated with the preceding stage. Wensinck, who apparently did not realise the uniqueness of the Syriac terminology for the three stages, indiscriminately translated dakhyutha and shaphyutha as "purity". The technical distinction between these two terms is that purity belongs to the second stage of the path, being merely the preliminary purification from the passions, while serenity is the characteristic state of the third stage, which culminates in perfection.

Another passage from Abdisho (Joseph)Hazzaya gives an outline of the process:

The Fathers say that it is through the vision of this holy theory that a man is worthy to penetrate the spiritual sphere, as the visitation of this vision of theory becomes to the man the boundary line of his natural soul and the sphere of perfection. Below this visitation is, therefore, the sphere of the natural soul, in which sacrifices and prayers are offered, and above it is the sphere of perfection, in which neither sacrifices nor prayers are offered, but the mysteries and the revelations of the next world are made manifest to the spiritual mind. The following is a true sign and manifestation from which, on becoming conscious of it, a man will understand that he has for some time reached the sphere of the true natural soul: as long as your mind has not attained the vision of this theory, understand in your soul that you are below the sphere of serenity in your exercise, and strive with all your might against evil thoughts, and acquire vigil, fast, prayer, reading and meditation on divine books, from which you will be enabled to rise to the sphere of serenity. It is indeed from the order of his corporeal state that a man rises to purity, and from purity he elevates himself to the order of the natural soul; and from the natural soul to the consciousness and vision of this wonderful visitation; and from this vision to his entry into the sphere of perfection .... 32

This system, then, may be represented in a diagram, though it is not certain that the various writers had exactly this plan in mind.

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PERFECTION

(3) SERENITY
(2) PURITY
(1) IMPURITY
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SPIRITUAL STAGE

PSYCHICAL STAGE

CORPOREAL STAGE

32. Mingana, 150f.
Having said all this we must now state that in the Discourses of John of Dalyatha this system is not found in fully elaborated form. Nevertheless this terminology is freely used in the Chapters of Knowledge, and this serves to underline our point concerning the impossibility of giving a full picture of his theology before the other works have been published. In Sermo 2a, however, which we have divided into three discourses, we do encounter the features of the three stages described in outline, but the headings use an eclectic terminology: (1) "On the visitation of the first stage, that of novices; (2) On the intermediate stage, the psycheical; (3) On the stage of perfection".

Two images used to describe mystical phenomena are found in the writings of both the Johns under discussion, namely the embryo and the iron in the fire. John the Solitary, in his Dialogue on the Soul, twice uses the figure of the unborn child to explain different aspects of his mystical theory, while in the discourse "On the Spiritual State of the Soul" (attributed to John the Seer) he uses the figure to illustrate "birth" from the corporeal state into the spiritual state (p. 26). Similarly, towards the beginning of Sermo 23=Ec43, John Saba compares the babe that is born into the world of Adam with the sons born by Grace into the light of the New World. In similar vein Discourse 2, "On repentance", speaks of the holy womb of repentance from which Mercy gives new birth to sons to be nurtured to a state of purity and illumination.

Then again we find mystical union depicted in terms of the fire entering into hot iron. Here is John the Seer's analogy:
Just as iron, when it is introduced into fire so that this penetrates it and is embodied in it, is united to the fire and takes its likeness and colour and appears no longer in its former aspect but becomes like the fire, because the iron has been absorbed by the fire and the fire by the iron and they have become one; just so, when the love of Christ has entered the soul, a living fire that burns the weed of sin away from the soul, and they become embodied in each other, the soul that was old becomes new, it was dead and becomes alive; and the likeness of its nature is changed into the likeness of God (as it is given to created beings to behold the works of God spiritually), while it is absorbed into the love of all mankind, so that if it were possible it would prefer to perish itself if all mankind could thereby be saved, being like God whose life does not perish as that of mankind (p. 25)

There is a noticeable similarity here with the passage from Macarius cited above concerning the divine fire associated with humility leading to universal charity. In fact, the first part of Macarius’ statement concerning the soul (which was omitted by us earlier as also by Guillaumont) begins with the idea of metal being placed in fire, though in this case the iron melts:

As iron or lead or gold or silver, being cast into the fire, are melted from the hardness that belongs to them by nature, and are changed into softness, and so long as they are in the fire their natural hardiness continues to melt and be altered on account of the vigorous heat of the fire, in like manner also the soul that, having renounced the world, is possessed by the desire for God alone.... 33

This is how the same idea of iron and fire becoming united appears in John Saba (p. 53f.), as reproduced by Bar Hebræus in his Ethikon (p. 506):

Look at the fire that becomes one with the iron in the furnace. The iron alone is not to be recognized there, because it has assumed the likeness of the fire through their union. So you see not two images but one, no discrimination being possible, though the two substances remain separated. In the same way the children of God see themselves as the image of God; so they all become gods by the grace of their Creator.

(5) Origen and Evagrius

The most characteristic teaching of Origen is the pre-existence of the soul, which appeared as the first of the fifteen Origenistic doctrines condemned in 553 at the Fifth Ecumenical Council. Henana of Adiabene was the most notable or notorious Syrian exponent of this belief, and when he introduced it into the Nestorian realm he was condemned for his wilfulness in 596 by the Catholicus Sabrisho. Associated with this doctrine is the question of what happens to the soul after death. We know that Joseph Hazzaya was found wanting by Timothy on these matters, and Guillaumont has already given a thorough analysis of the question in which he shows that the Origenistic view of the soul is inimical to Semitic and Hebraic thought and that Timothy was only reaffirming the ancient view of Aphraates in declaring that the soul is created with the body and that at death it enters a state of sleep (hynopsychia), deprived of all sensibility until reunited with its body at the resurrection.\(^34\) There are, however, distinct discrepancies in the pronouncements of various Nestorian theologians, and this fact makes the question of "the sleep of the soul" a rather confused one.\(^35\)

It is interesting to find that John of Dalyatha has left

\(^34\) See Guillaumont, 10-12.
us a treatise on the question (not edited here), Sermo 12, which is a reply to questions of the brethren regarding what happens to the soul after it leaves the body since the opinions of the Fathers vary. It is surprising to find Assemani taking up a whole page to discuss the theological viewpoint of John Saba and coming up with the conclusion that John Saba is quite orthodox, from a Roman point of view: "nihil praeter Catholicam doctrinam affirmat". A new investigation of this problem will be made elsewhere.

The Origenistic style of mystical theology was further developed by Evagrius Ponticus. That John Saba was fully acquainted with the work of Evagrius is shown by the references he makes to him (M 139a, 150b, 153a). These are all found in the Chapters of Knowledge section, and again we must state that a fully coherent picture of these influences can only emerge when all the unedited sections are available in a critically acceptable form.

Meanwhile we may note a few Evagrian features found in the Discourses, such as the idea elaborated by Evagrius that the soul is a mirror through which God reveals his essence to the mind, and also the various "theories" or contemplations. Evagrius names five of these: "The first is, as the Fathers say, the contemplation of the adorable Trinity; the second and the third, the contemplation of those that are incorporeal and of the bodies; the fourth and fifth the contemplation of the judgement and of the providence of God" (Six Centuries of Kephalaia Gnostica, I, 27). Discourses 16 and 21, "On Contemplation of the Holy

36. Assemani, BiCr, I, 438f.
37. This task has been undertaken by Father R. Beulay.
38. Cf. above, Chapter I, 7-9.
Trinity" and "On Prayer and on the Power of the Spiritual Beings", may be cited as places where the influence is most manifest. A saying typical of the esoteric utterances of Evagrius, but not yet identified certainly as such, is found in Discourse 16 and introduced as a saying of "one of the seers in the Spirit": "Christ is the mind of the rational creatures and also that of the Father, as he is the knowledge of the Father, and from him all the rational creatures receive knowledge".

The clearest manifestation of the influence of Evagrius is in the very form or genre of Kephalaia Gnostica employed by John Saba. How closely Evagrius has been followed in the arranging of these collected sentences (for it is possible that there are six groups of these) is a matter for investigation.

Finally, for convenience we include here a note on the concept of "freedom of speech" or "outspokenness" with God. This idea is found at many points in the Discourses that deal with the third stage, and Discourses 18 and 19 are both concerned with this phenomenon. The Greek term parrésia, "boldness", was borrowed to express this idea, and as Wensinck pointed out it was used in the Syriac translation of Evagrius, who speaks of freedom of speech at the time of prayer. 39

(6) Dionysius and Hierotheos

There are a number of concepts found in John Saba's writings which may be labelled "Dionysian", since they are also present in the various Greek mystical books of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and the related Syriac Book of Holy Hierotheos. 40

For Dionysius the soul of man is potentially divine so that perfect union with God implies deification, as stated in this sentence from the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy:

"God deigned himself to come to us with outstretched arms... and by union with him to assimilate, like as by fire, things that have been made one, in proportion to their aptitude for deification". 41 With this should be compared the Saba passage concerning "iron in the fire" cited earlier(p.51), where it is added significantly that "they all become gods".

Also found in Dionysius and Hierotheos, as well as Evagrius, is the esoteric type of knowledge known as "unconsciousness","ignorance","non-knowledge", or "hyper-knowledge". This concept is associated with the idea of "pure prayer", which is described by Isaac of Nineveh thus:

The mind has ascended here above prayer. And further, there is no longer prayer, but the gaze in ecstasy at unattainable things, which do not belong to the world of mortals, and peace with no knowledge of any earthly thing. This is the well-known ignorance, concerning which Evagrius says: Blessed is he who has reached during prayer unconsciousness, which is not to be surpassed(pp.173-175). 42

It will be noticed that the Dionysian idea of the ascent of the mind is mentioned at the beginning of Isaac's statement. Other typically Dionysian concepts are "commingling" (Syriac bultana) and"the Cloud" (carpela) or "thick darkness". This latter idea has its ultimate roots in the Sinaitic cloud in which Moses spoke face to face with God, but more immediately in the gnophos of the Mystical Theology of Dio-

41. Cited by M. Smith in her section on Dionysius(79-83).
42. See Wensinck's introduction to his translation of Isaac, Lambda-XII, for a discussion of constant prayer, pure prayer, and spiritual prayer, known also to John of Dalyatha(e.g.D.21).
nysius: "The divine gloom is the inaccessible light in which God is said to dwell". 43 This phenomenon is mentioned by John Saba time and time again, and especially in Discourse 21. Finally, we may observe that all these Dionysian ideas are present in this extract from Discourse 6(p.21):

When Grace descends on the solitary at the start it works unknown sensations, feelings, pleasures, and gradually enriches his mind with pleasures, visitations, wondrous visions, and revelations, until he reclines in the cloud of essential light... Thereby it ascends and penetrates day by day, in proportion to its diligence and watchfulness from glory to glory through the Lord the Spirit, being changed into the likeness without likeness, in union and perfect commingling with God, and the sight and knowledge of his glory are more sublime than worlds, for they are seen and known by means of withdrawal of sight and knowledge.

There are distinct echoes of this passage in the mystical writings of Bar Hebraeus, and this leads us to a consideration of Bar Hebraeus' debt to John of Dalyatha.

43. See Wensinck, Dove, CIII-CV.
IV. BAR HEBRAEUS AND JOHN SABA

(1) The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus

Grigor Abu'l-Faraj, better known as Gregory Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), was the shining light of the Silver Age of Syriac literature. His vast scholarship, manifested in a prolific output of books in the fields of grammar, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, history, philosophy, and theology, marks him out as a remarkable polymath. And yet, in all this intense study Bar Hebraeus experienced a Faustian dryness of soul which nearly drove him to despair. We are fortunate in having from his own pen a description of his lifelong search for fulfilment:

From my early childhood burning with love for learning, I was taught the Holy Scriptures with the necessary explanation, and from an excellent teacher I heard the mysteries contained in the writings of the Holy Doctors. When I had reached the age of twenty, the then living Patriarch compelled me to receive the dignity of a bishop. Then it was inevitable for me to engage myself in disquisitions and disputations with the heads of other confessions...and I became convinced that these quarrels of Christians among themselves are not a matter of facts but of words and denominations...and I absolutely forsook disputation with anyone concerning confession. Then I zealously turned to attain the mastery of Greek wisdom, viz. logic, physics and metaphysics, algebra and geometry, and the science of the spheres and of the stars; and because life is short and learning is long and vast, I read concerning every branch of science what was the most necessary. During my study of these subjects I resembled a man who is immersed in the ocean and stretches forth his hands in all directions in order to be saved. And because in all teachings, internal and external, I found not what I sought, I almost fell into complete destruction... In short, if the Lord had not sustained my little faith in those dangerous times, and if he had not led me to look into the writings of the Initiated, such as Aba Evagrius and others, Western and Eastern, and if he had
not picked me up from the gulf of destruction and ruin
I would ere long have despaired of psychical, if not of
bodily life.

(2) Islamic Arabic Sources

The fact that emerges from this Augustinian type of con-
fession is that Bar Hebraeus was a man of great irenical
and ecumenical spirit. Thus his studies were not merely "in-
ternal", that is to say, presumably, confined to literature
of Monophysite persuasion and production, but also "exter-
nal", taking in literature from all Christian denominations
and not excluding pagan Greek and Muslim Arabic sources
either. Indeed, it has already been made clear by Wensinck's
research into the influences manifested in Bar Hebraeus'
mystical writings that not only did he reproduce in his own
experience the pattern of life of the great Muslim scholar
and mystic Al-Ghazali (d.1111), but also made extensive use
of this writer's Ihyā' in the compilation of his Ethikon
and Book of the Dove. The most obvious resemblance between
the Ethikon and the Ihyā' is their fourfold division, and, as
Wensinck has shown in great detail, not only are the subjects
treated in each of the four sections identical in both works,
but the parallelism extends to the very chapter headings. 2
Demonstration of Bar Hebraeus' debt to Ghazali is completed
by the clear evidence that he has borrowed details and illus-
trations from his Muslim predecessor in the field of mys-
tical ethics. 3 There are also a number of indications of
possible borrowings from other Arab writers too. 4

1. Taken with alterations from Wensinck, Dove, 60f.
2. Dove, XVI If, CXI-CXXXVI.
3. Dove, XLIIIf, CXX, CXXV, 103, etc.
4. E.g. Dove, 98, n.3.
(3) Greek Christian Sources

Wensinck has also given us an outline of the Christian authors quoted by name in the Ethikon. One of the most favoured by him was Evagrius Ponticus, as was to be expected in the light of his statement in the testimony cited above. Chapter IV of the Dove concludes with "some sentences communicated to him in revelations": the fact that these are 100 in number seems to indicate that Bar Hebraeus was following the model of Evagrius' Kephalaia Gnostica, which are arranged in "centuries".

Other representatives of Greek theology are the Great Cappadocians, namely "Gregorius Theologus", "the holy Basilius", and Gregorius of Nyssa. John Climacus, author of the Scala Paradisi, is referred to very frequently, as John the Prior, while the Fathers of Skete, with their apophthegmata and anecdotes, are said to be mentioned in every chapter of the Ethikon. Dionysius the Areopagite is mentioned once in the Ethikon and once in the Dove, but his influence extends much deeper than this fact would indicate.

(4) Syrian Christian Sources

Hierotheos is similarly represented by one reference in each book. In this regard we have already observed that Bar Hebraeus made a thorough search for the Book of the Holy Hierotheos and having obtained a copy of it, in 1268, he studied it and wrote a commentary on it.6

Two Nestorian writers are named: Mar Isaac (shown by Wensinck to be Isaac of Nineveh) and John of Dalyatha.7 This

5. Dove, XIX-XXI.
7. Wensinck lists the following pages in the Ethikon where John of Dalyatha is quoted: 272, 305, 312, 332, 441, 448, 475, 490. To this may be added 10f, 103f, and the many examples given below.
leads us to an interesting detail in the history of modern research into Syrian Christian mysticism. In 1923 Wensinck published a booklet, in which he outlined some new insights that had come to him as a result of his study of a Berlin codex (Sachau 203), which contained selections from mystical writings. He noticed that an anonymous collection of discourses (folios 130-182) contained many passages that he knew to be found also in the Ethikon of Bar Hebraeus, since he had worked on sections of the Ethikon in connection with his translation of the Dove. By a tour de force of reasoning Wensinck established a terminus ad quem for these tracts in the time of John of Dalyatha. The irony of the situation is that this was in actual fact a copy of the first fourteen treatises in the M-recension of the works of John of Dalyatha. Actually there was a serious flaw in Wensinck's argument, and this caused him to miss by a hair's breadth the truth of the matter. Wensinck states that he had located in one of the tracts an anecdote about a monk who stood in snow and rain without experiencing cold, which is also related by Bar Hebraeus in the Ethikon (p.490). He then says that Bar Hebraeus informs us that John of Dalyatha was this patient ascetic, but in fact this is not so, and it appears that Wensinck has misread a sentence on page 102 of his own translation. The full statement need not be quoted but in essence it runs: "as that brother, concerning whom the excellent Master John de Dalyata tells, that he, in the time of the first heat of love...was nightly standing naked, during four years, also in wintertime, in snow,

9. An excusable error in view of the bracket before "John" thus 3), and the complicated syntax.
rain, and ice". Wensinck must have come in at the word "John", but if he had read the sentence correctly he would have realized that it tells us that, according to Bar Hebraeus at least, John of Dalyatha was the author of the tracts Wensinck had before him.\(^{10}\)

This was an unfortunate mistake, but it did not prevent him setting a number of extracts from the Ethikon alongside their prototypes in the tracts and showing how Bar Hebraeus had modified and abridged them for his own purposes. To accuse Bar Hebraeus of plagiarism would be to apply modern conventions of literary and scholarly production to an age when these were irrelevant. However, it might be profitable to examine the cases where Bar Hebraeus has not explicitly referred to the sources he is quoting. With twenty-two of the Saba Discourses now before us we are in a better position than Wensinck was to make comparisons.

It should first be noted that Wensinck had once pointed out a case where Bar Hebraeus had used Isaac of Nineveh in this unannounced way. Thus in an early section of the Ethikon, entitled "On the joy that comes to the Perfect during prayer", the opening paragraph includes a passage which is, as Wensinck says, "almost literally identical with a passage in Isaac of Ninive, though this author is not mentioned here by Bar Hebraeus".\(^{11}\)

It is remarkable that all the passages from John of Dalyatha that Wensinck discovered (without knowing their exact authorship) occur in Book IV of Chapter XV of the Ethikon, entitled "On the Love of God", and more specifically in has noticed

10. I do not know whether any one else has added significance of Wensinck's New Data, but this booklet is not included among the list of studies relating to John of Dalyatha in Ortiz de Urbina's Patrologia Syriaca.
11. Dove, LXXXVIII.
sections XI-XV (pages 491-506 of Bedjan's text). Although Bar Hebraeus has extracts from John Saba, named and unnamed, in other parts of the Ethikon it will be sufficient for our purposes if we confine ourselves to this same portion, for it will be found to provide an admirable indication of his compilatory methods. As a preliminary exercise for this task we should acquaint ourselves better with the respective nature and purpose of the Ethikon and the Dove.

(5) The Ethikon and the Dove

It is fair to say of both Ghazali and Bar Hebraeus that they were essentially systematizers of other men's ideas. Their work was encyclopedic and compilatory in character, and for this reason it is not surprising that we find contradictory materials sometimes placed side by side in their books. Yet the essential value of their work lies in the systematic way the thoughts of their predecessors have been presented, in logical sequence for the most part, with carefully constructed chapters and sections, and with meaningful titles and headings. Both of Bar Hebraeus' chief mystical books exhibit these admirable characteristics. Thus the Book of Ethics has four divisions: (i) dealing with the exercises of the body and of the mind, such as prayer, manual labour, study, vigils, fasting; (ii) concerning the regimen of the body; (iii) concerning the purifying of the soul from evil passions; (iv) concerning the adorning of the soul with virtues.

Wensinck has outlined the purpose of both the Ethikon of Bar Hebraeus and the Ihya of Ghazali by saying that they were written "in order to regulate the ethical and mystical life of every Muslim and every Christian, as they should be. They treat of the whole domain of human life; it is not only prayer and love which are described in their forms and religious
depth, but also commerce and marriage, the daily meals and the education of children. They are destined to be read by lay people and by monks".  

As regards the method and date of the composition of the Book of the Dove there is some doubt, but it appears to have been composed on the basis of the Ethikon and if this surmise is correct it would mean that it was written after the Ethikon, which is known to have been composed in 1297 at Maragheh (about 75 km. due south of Tabriz). It was at Maragheh also that Bar Hebraeus compiled his Histories Ecclesiastical and Dynastic, in preparation for which he had assembled Syriac, "Saracen", and Persian books at Maragheh. We may be sure that he also gathered books on mysticism, Christian and Islamic, Syriac and Arabic, for his Ethikon and Dove.

The aim of the Dove is different from that of the Ethikon in that it is a directorium spirituale expressly intended for the instruction of monks who have no spiritual guide to direct them in the mystic path. We have already seen in Bar Hebraeus' confession that he himself had gained his knowledge of mysticism through reading and experimenting. The universal exhortation of the mystics is "Obtain for thyself a spiritual leader", but in the Preface to the Dove Bar Hebraeus gives the following explanation:

Just as we find, my brother, in the field of physical medicine, books which describe the behaviour of patients not attended by a physician, it is fitting, in psychic medicine, to give instructions concerning the behaviour of those patients who are without or far from a leader; especially in this our age, in which the Syrian world is bereft of a Mystic who has personally experienced the straitness of the way leading to the Kingdom and the narrowness of the gate giving entrance to it. It is therefore our aim to give this sort of clear and simple inst-

12. Dove, XVIIIf.
duction.
Into four chapters this book is divided, small in extent but great in power.
(i) Firstly, instruction concerning the corporeal labour accomplished in the monastery.
(ii) Secondly, the quality of psychical labour performed in the cell.
(iii) The third explains the spiritual rest that the consoling Dove imparts to the Perfect, elevating them to royal rank and introducing them into the divine cloud where the Lord is said to abide.
(iv) The fourth is an account of the author's gradual progress in teachings and some sentences communicated to him in revelations.

Bar Hebraeus' aims are patent: he is writing for those who seek spiritual perfection but have no contact with the Initiated, who could assist them as spiritual leaders; he has set his instructions in a clear framework in which the three stages of the mystic path are clearly delineated, to which is added an appendix in which he recounts his own experiences and thoughts; he has taken the Dove or the Spirit, regarded as feminine in typical Syrian style, as his unifying symbol and theme. That Bar Hebraeus is following the uniquely Syrian characterization of the mystical stages as being concerned respectively with body, soul, and spirit is clear from the headings he gives to the three main sections:

(i) On the somatic service in the monastery.
(ii) On the psychic service accomplished in the cell.
(iii) On the pneumatic rest of the Perfect.

Here then is Bar Hebraeus' particular contribution to Syrian mysticism: he has set the experiences and utterances of his predecessors into a coherent framework. In the present edition of John Saba's Discourses the framework of Bar Hebraeus' Dove has been used, with prefatory materials followed by the three stages and finally biographical material.
An idea of how Bar Hebraeus carried out his avowed purpose of adapting the work of earlier writers for his own framework can be gained by comparing a passage from John Saba's treatise on the three stages, in this instance the intermediate or psychic stage (Discourse 7), with an extract from the Ethikon (Book IV, Chapter XV, Section XIII, page 497), "On the Stages of the Initiated with regard to their Love", and also with a chapter from the Dove (Chapter III, Section II, pages 565f.), "On the Progress of the Inclinations of Perfection".

Saba (22f.)
Henceforward the Spirit changes his workings in the soul notably, so that it is illuminated (var. purified) and sanctified for the reception of gifts, for the vision of revelations, and for the perception of hidden mysteries. Sometimes (Grace) comes to rest upon him during service and stills his mind from wandering thoughts and even cuts short the service and sends his mind into ecstasy in considering certain mysteries...
Sometimes it stirs up hot fiery impulses in his heart through the love of Christ, and his soul is inflamed and his limbs are paralysed and he falls on his face.

Ethikon (497)
After its workings of the former kind Grace changes its influences upon the soul, purifies and sanctifies it and makes it apt for spiritual vision and the receiving of revelations. In the first place it enlightens the intellect with distinction of the creatures. Then the mind will be brought to giving up the distraction of deliberations and be fascinated by the Creator only. And the intellect of the Initiated will meditate upon the highest one to such a degree that when awake he will seem to be asleep and when sleeping he will be thought to be awake. And when he has passed a space of time with such medita-

Dove (565f.)
After the inclinations of the initial workings of perfection the Dove changes her workings on the mind and makes it apt to behold what every contemplative soul beholds and to the receiving of revelations. So she begins by illuminating the intellect with distinction of the creatures, so that just as natural things are visible to the bodily eye through the medium of the visible sun, so intellectual things are discerned by the psychic eye through the medium of the spiritual Dove.
Sometimes it arouses a fervent heat in his heart and his body and soul are enkindled, so that he supposes that every part of him is consumed by the conflagration, except what is in his heart...

Sometimes an angel clothes him in love from head to foot and he burns with fervour and unspeakable gladness...

Sometimes it wakens in his mind thoughts of the creatures and sends him into ecstasy...

These things are bestowed at the time of service and prayer and meditations, rather than in reading. By them the soul is sanctified by the Spirit, and is enlightened to see hidden things. Henceforward the Grace of the Holy Spirit begins to show the mind wondrous mysteries and unspeakable visions, knowledge of hidden things and apperception of things to come; and the impulses of feverishness that have been in him till now are changed to calmness and wonderment, and universal love is accomplished.

Ethikon

tions, his Lord will show himself to him. But only in a flash of lightning which bursts forth and disappears; or as a star which is suddenly covered by a cloud. This happens especially during prayer; so that sight often breaks off his service and stupefies him. Then his spirit is tormented continually by hot inclinations and the love of his Lord burns in his heart like the fire in a furnace seven times hotter than usual, so that his soul is inflamed, his limbs are relaxed and he falls to the ground. Then he rises again and prepares himself for vision, and it is not withheld from him; but he begins to lengthen the duration from day to day, and his mind is enlightened so as to see hidden things; and gradually he becomes familiar with hidden mysteries and unspeakable visions; and the feverish inclination of the first state is changing into calmness and accomplished.

Dove

Then the mind abhors the surrounding things and turns its face away from all that is in heaven and on the earth. It burns with love of the Dove and desires to become familiar with her alone; and she, perceiving its burning love and its being tried like gold in the fire, will no longer appear unto it as lightning, vanishing quickly, but as a star, though hidden in a cloud, especially at the time of prayer, which the vision interrupts, inflaming the soul and stupefying the mind, so that the solitary falls to the ground as though dead. Then he will rise again and prepare himself for vision; and little by little the cloud will
be removed and the eye become enlightened. At this stage the Perfect, when awake, becomes as if he were sleeping; when sleeping he will be thought to be awake.

The picture that emerges is that Bar Hebraeus adapts and rearranges his material from John Saba, incorporates supplementary material from other sources, and places it all in a new setting in the Ethikon. In compiling his Book of the Dove he paraphrases and abridges his Ethikon material and alters the subject "Grace" to "Dove" in accordance with his unifying theme. This same process may be observed in action in his treatment of the first and third stages of mystical love.

Before we enumerate further details of Bar Hebraeus' debt to John Saba we should pause to consider a case where he has borrowed from Joseph Hazzaya.

(6) Borrowings from Joseph Hazzaya

As a further proof of Bar Hebraeus' debt to his predecessors and as a testimony to the fact that he was quite happy to borrow even from Nestorian mystics, we set down here for scrutiny a passage from the same section of the Ethikon (IV:XV:XIV,499-502), "On the Varying States that the Perfect have to go through", alongside the "Letter to a Friend on the Workings of Grace", of Abdisho Hazzaya alias Joseph Hazzaya, in the translation of Mingana(169-173). There is also a paraphrase and abridgement of the same material in the Dove (III:9,56-68 = Bedjan 573-575), it should be noted.

It will be seen that, in true Bar-Hebraic fashion, the material has been presented systematically with each point given a title and a number, from one to twelve, in contrast to the epistolary style of the prototype. Exactly what sources Joseph was employing in his turn is a question that must be left unanswered here, but it is noticeable that both writers punctuate their discourse with such phrases as "the Initiated say".
Concerning what you said: "I stand sometimes and examine my soul, and notice that no thought, either of righteousness or otherwise, is stirring in it: the mind is swallowed up in it, without any workings and without even venturing to stammer glorifications. Nothing but complete rest reigns over all the faculties of the body and of the soul, in such a way that the mind does not reap any satisfaction either from reading or from reciting the Psalms, but only receives an inward food on which the body also feeds"... The Illuminated say that in this condition food is given inwardly to the mind by the Spirit, on which the body also feeds without any need of its ordinary food.(1) Indeed, the baptism with which the mind is baptized in this condition is similar to that with which the blessed Moses was baptized in Mount Sinai. As long as you remain in this condition do not wish for reading or for the recitation of the Psalms, but only keep your mind in purity; that is to say, never leave your quietude; and if possible, as long as your mind remains in this condition, do not commune with any man; and if practicable do not hear even the voices of birds, but enter your innermost cell, close all doors and endeavour to respond to what is being done to you.

(2) When this condition has passed away from you it will be followed by the condition of the workings of understandings. Here beware of the demon of distraction. As long as understandings are stirred in the mind, keep the quietude.

Ethikon
These varying states are the following. The first is that of the baptism of the mind. For as soon as transition takes place the mind is baptized in the heart and deliberation stands motionless, even without stammering glorifications, but silence dominates the inclinations of the soul and the body; and by the food the mind receives from within, the body is sustained too. With this same baptism Moses was baptized on top of the mountain. Being in this state the perfect is not only unable to meet any creature but he can not even bear the sound of a bird.

The second is that of the influence of distinctions. When the mind has acquired purity of deliberations it recognises itself and it distinguishes the height of its rank and the loftiness of its race. And here too it maintains silence and it does not permit itself to divagate upon distinctions outside of it; and when it is overwhelmed by divagation it
and the regulations of the first condition; but if the mind begins to wander after understandings that are outside it and to represent images to itself and to form its own understandings, relinquish the regulations (of the first condition) and resort immediately to the recitation of Psalms, reading, and prostrations before the Crucifix; rise with strength and power, and do not allow the mind to go out of the inner door of the heart, so that it may not lose its life in the distraction of its thoughts.

(3) If the mind is kept away from the distraction of the thoughts this condition of "understandings" will be followed by another condition, that of the love of recitation of the Psalms and of reading. The furnace of the recitation of the Psalms and of reading will then be kindled in the heart to such an extent that if possible, even when a man is sitting at the table in order to partake of his food, the mind will be occupied inwardly with the recitation of the Psalms and with reading. The working of the demon of vainglory, however, accompanies this condition. Examine therefore and see, when you recite the Psalms and read, whether you are reciting them for the sake of the love of God, or whether in this recitation other images are formed, for the sake of which you perform your recitation and your reading.

(4) This condition of the recitation of the Psalms and of reading is followed, provided the mind is free from the thoughts of vainglory, by another condition, which consists in the flow of tears and in continual prostrations before the Crucifix. These tears are not forced, nor has will any

(Ethikon)

forces itself to the reciting of the Scriptures and the Psalms and obesiance before the cross; and when it has been strengthened thus it binds itself within the inner gate of the heart.

The third is that of the love of reciting Psalms. This love burns so strongly in the heart that even at the time of the meals the mind is occupied with the Psalms.

The fourth is that of outbursts of tears. These tears are not brought on by force and the will has no power over them; but when the fire of love burns the soul within, the body sheds tears without.

The fifth is that of the knowledge of judgement and of providence; and from this understanding is born in the soul
power over them, but the man sheds these tears only through the fire which kindles the soul within and the body without. This condition of these tears constitutes the boundary between purity and serenity: it stands above the sphere of purity and below the sphere of serenity but they (the tears) cause the mind to enter the sphere of serenity.

(5) After the working of these tears a second working affects the mind, that of theories, that is to say, of divine judgement and providence. From the sight of these the soul is imbued with the love of men and with a continual prayer for their conversion. When the mind looks within itself it sees all of them in the form of the image in which they were created and in this vision of this condition there is neither just nor unjust, neither bond nor free, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither male nor female, but Christ will be seen all and in all.

(6) This condition is followed by another condition, that of impulses stirring and rising in the heart. They are like light mixed with fire. In this condition there is great working (of the Spirit), which takes place in the third and fourth senses (smell and taste).

(7) This condition is followed by another and a higher condition, in which the working (of the Spirit) only affects the second sense (hearing). In it a man hears the voice of a fine sound of glorification, which the faculties of the body and of the soul are unable to bring to the utterance of the material tongue. This condition and this glorification are of the sphere of the next world, and the earnest of the future benefits, because this is the working of that Spirit about whom the blessed Apostle wrote: "He maketh intercession for the saints". In this condition you contemplate the cloud of the

(Ethikon)
the love of mankind and constant prayer for their conversion, because he sees them all as his equals and like himself. In this state there is no righteous and no sinner, no slave and no free man, no circumcision and no foreskin, no man and no woman, but Christ is seen to be all and in every man.

The sixth is that of the emotions of the heart, in which the mind is made radiant by the angelic rays, which are composed of light and fire. Then it burns with desire to be united with the spiritual hosts and it is ardent to be mingled with the orders of fiery beings.

The seventh is that of simple apperception. Here the mind
intelligible Cherubim, and you hear also their fine voices in which, when they expand, your mind becomes silent and is swallowed up in the light of the high and sublime Theory, like fish in the sea. In this condition the mind is mingled with the divine visitation that works in it, and both of them become one, because the light of the mind is not distinguished from the sea in which it swims. In this condition the working of the Spirit only affects the first sense (sight).

(9) This condition is followed by another one, in which a man is clad with fire from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head, and when he looks at himself he will not be able to see any material body, but only the fire with which he is clad. This is the condition spoken of by Saint Mar Evagrius, when he distinguishes those with knowledge ("the Initiated") from those who have no knowledge. He says as follows: "Those who possess now fine spiritual bodies reign in past worlds, and those who are subjected to the labouring body will reign in future worlds". He calls here "fine bodies" the bodies of the saints who have reached the condition that I have described. In order that no one may have any doubt about this, I will adduce another testimony to confirm him in this belief. The blessed Palladius writes about the Abbot Arsenius as follows: "When he stood in prayer (and the above condition came upon him, in which his whole being became like fire) an illuminated man among the brethren came and from an aperture saw the old man as wholly fire; and the writer testifies about that brother that he was worthy of this sight because, having seen the Abbot Arsenius in this condition, he was a seer".

(10) After this condition there is another condition, which cannot be expressed in a letter. Know only that it does take place, and that the following is its sign: in it there are

hears the voice of the spiritual beings who glorify with subtle sounds, sounds that cannot be embodied in composed spoken words and are only to be denoted in intellectual simple sounds. Of these sounds the new glorification in the new world is made up, and with this glorification the spirit prays, as Paul says, for the saints.

The eighth is that of likeness. In this state the mind is brought to silence, when it sees the True one eye to eye and is illuminated by his light and is changed into his likeness. And as the refined dense cloud, when it is near the sun, receives its light and its form and appears like it, so the pure mind, even though it is bound in the dense body, will become like essential light when it has become familiar with it.

The ninth is that of becoming like fire. In this state a
neither two nor three (senses), nor is the fourth (sense) distinguished from the fifth, but one expands and the other diminishes; and the food of both is identical in this condition.

(11) In the above two conditions that I have described the first and the fifth senses (sight, touch) are active, but in the condition that follows the above condition, and which is that of joy, there is also flow of tears. The man does not know what is the reason for this joy; he only sees it and is conscious of it, but why he sees it he does not know. In this condition the fourth and the third senses (taste, smell) are active, because the workings of these two senses go together.

(12) After this condition the condition of the flow of spiritual speech takes place. In it the second sense (hearing) is active.

Up to this point we have shown you, in the measure of our capacity, the workings of Grace. We shall speak now, o my beloved, of the false insinuations of the Rebels....

(ETHIKON) man is kindled by fire from the sole of his foot to his brain, and his body is made glowing like iron in fire. The blessed Palladius says concerning Aba Arsenius, that while he stood praying in his cell, a brother, looking through the window, saw him wholly like fire.

The tenth is that of unification. This state is called undescrivable by the Initiated. They say that the sign thereof is that there are no longer two or three, but one is solved and two is subtilized and the sustenance of the two becomes one.

The eleventh is that of joy, which also knows tears. Its cause is unknown to the Initiated; he knows only that he rejoices but not why.

The twelfth is that of outbursts of speech and prominence of the scrutinizing of things to come and explaining of things hidden, those that are written in the archbook, which is the book of the knowledge of God. And to the mind, when reading them they are here revealed.

A painstakingly thorough analysis would have to be done on the original Syriac texts in order to bring all the details to light, but the translations reproduced here are sufficient for our present purpose. Even a literal and collated rendering of both extracts would have made things clearer, but
the translations are given to show that Mingana and Wensinck also had difficulty in expressing the meaning of Syriac mystical texts. At any rate there are two main points that need to be taken up; the first will be treated here and the second in the following section.

In one instance we can say something about the origin of one of Joseph's ideas, one not found in the Saba Discourses. In the first state described by Joseph the mystic is warned about external disturbances: "if possible, as long as your mind remains in this condition, do not commune with any man; and if practicable do not hear even the voice of birds". It transpires that this statement was wrenched out of its context and used as evidence against Joseph to prove that he held Messalian beliefs. In the Nestorian Councils he was accused of having said: "If you wish to receive the Spirit do not turn to prayer and service, but flee and withdraw to dark places, where one can not even hear the voice of a bird". This is an unfounded accusation, since Joseph's statement (which, incidentally, also includes the advice to avoid reading and recitation of the Psalms) applies only to certain temporary states and does not constitute an absolute condemnation of religious exercises. 14 The idea of escaping from even the sound of birds is found also in Martyrius 15, but ultimately it seems to go back to the Paradise of the Fathers, where a saying of Aba Arsenius refers to the idea of silence and solitude (Greek ἡσυχία, Syriac shelya) in similar terms: "If a man who dwelleth in silence heareth but the twittering of a sparrow, he shall not be able to acquire that repose in his heart which he seeketh". 16

Perhaps there is a slightly different emphasis in Bar Hebraeus' expression of the thought: "Being in this state the Perfect one can neither meet any being nor even bear the sound of a bird". At any rate he has a similar statement in another context in the Ethikon (Section XI, 49lf.); there it is said of "the friend of God" that "he is only content with quiet solitude and cannot bear even the sound of a leaf".

Incidentally, it should be noted that John Saba has much to say on the concept of shelva, particularly in Sermo 25 ("On how profitable solitude is to the ascetic"), but the specific reference to the sound of birds is not found in the Discourses published here.

(7) Borrowings from John Saba

In reworking the letter of Joseph Hazzaya, Bar Hebraeus has not only abridged it but also added a number of explanatory remarks. Thus, whereas Joseph simply states that at the final stage "the condition of the flow of speech takes place, and in it the second sense is active", Bar Hebraeus writes at length on this twelfth stage as involving "the scrutinizing of things to come and explaining of things hidden, those that are written in the archbook" and so on; the same appears in slightly abridged form in the Dove. One wonders in such cases whether he is introducing thoughts of his own or adding statements from other sources. Certainly, in one instance he has manifestly introduced a quotation from John of Dalyatha, in the relevant passage in the Dove, though not in the Ethikon. Thus he gives the title unification to the tenth state and says that "it is called undescrivable by the Initiated", but Joseph says simply that it "can not be described in a letter". In what follows it is possible that Wensinck did not understand the sense of the text before him, but then again it may
well be that Bar Hebraeus himself had misunderstood or not understood at all the sense of his source. At any rate the translation of Wensinck runs enigmatically thus: "there are no longer two or three, but one is solved and two is subtilised and the sustenance of the two becomes one". This is an esoteric utterance worthy of Evagrius! Actually the numbers refer to the five senses, mentioned often enough in mystical literature, and found in Discourse 12 of the present collection ("On guarding the senses..."). In their conventional order the senses are (1) sight, (2) hearing, (3) smell, (4) taste, (5) touch. Mingana's translation of Joseph's account brings out the meaning clearly: "In it there are neither two nor three (senses), nor is the fourth (sense) distinguished from the fifth; but one expands and the other diminishes; and the food of both is identical in this condition."

Whatever Bar Hebraeus' understanding of this statement was, in the parallel passage in the Dove (575) he simply says that "all numbers vanish in it"; but then he goes on with the statement: "Here no human weakness remains, nor prayer, nor beseeching; no remembrance of what is on the earth nor of future things, because the mind has become here as receiving all prayers, no longer praying itself; as granting requests, no longer asking itself". Actually he is here reproducing an extract from John Saba, a sentence he had already used in a different context in the Ethikon (492f., in the particular section on which we are concentrating in this study). The prototype of this statement is found in Discourse 19 ("On freedom of speech with God...").

As a matter of fact more than half of the material in sections XI-XV (491-506) has been lifted, either bodily or dismemberedly, from John of Dalyatha's discourses. This is not
to say that Bar Hebraeus merely sets bleeding gobbets before us; rather he transplants them onto a new body of more pleasing shape and more slender proportions. Nor does he seek to disguise the fact that he is remoulding his predecessors' work. Thus in Section XIII, "On the Stages of the Initiated with regard to their Love", the middle portion of which we have considered in detail above, he plainly states that he is quoting earlier writers' descriptions of mystical experiences, but in abridged form:

The holy solitaries teach that there are three stations or states of the Initiated... and as they have found that at any of the three there are particular experiences, they have instructed us concerning them. Therefore, borrowing their words, we give concerning each of them a passage as short as possible.

Almost all the material that he thereupon presents is taken from the treatise on the three stages by John Saba, a logical choice, for it is possibly the most compact statement on the subject in all Syriac literature. In the concluding part Bar Hebraeus mentions Hierotheos, but then goes on to quote at length, without giving notice of his intent, from Discourse 12 of John Saba(p.37), which is itself heavily influenced by Dionysian thought, it should be added:

And when the mind returns again (to the Lord) the body is almost borne along with it, and the soul can scarcely shake it off when it is elevated. And so it ascends from glory to glory through the Lord the spirit, and it forgets not only what is here but also itself. And because of the divine light with which it is clad it sees itself in the likeness of God. And it does not shun saying in freedom of speech:"I am in my Father and my Father is in me", and "I and the Father are one", together with other things which perhaps Master Hierotheos and the like venture to interpret. But concerning these things the Holy Ghost says: There is a mystery between me and my housemates; and it warns them to hide such things and not to
divulge them; and it does not permit them to scrutinize them except in personal intercourse with the housemates ...(499)

In the corresponding section of the Dove (III:IV, 567f., "On the Unification of the Mind") he actually cites an extract from Hierotheos on the mind's unification with God, which shows what he had in mind in the Ethikon passage, together with other ideas from "the same Initiated".

Finally, Section XV of Chapter XV ("On the Love of God") is entitled "A Collection of Scattered Sayings concerning Love". Here again Bar Hebraeus shows his imitation of Ghazali in the construction of the Ethikon, since the chapter in the corresponding position in the Ihya concludes with a collection of sayings on Love.

There are twelve passages, the first six of which (502f.) are quite brief and unidentified as to authorship. With the exception of the eighth extract the remaining passages are fairly lengthy, and all six of them are borrowed from John Saba. It would be tedious to set out all this material (503-6) in parallel columns, but suffice it to say that these are not quoted verbatim by Bar Hebraeus; rather he has abridged and paraphrased them to some extent. The sources of the various extracts identified as Saba material are as follows.

No. 7 (503f.). "A certain brother said: When paternal mercy dawned unto me and took my mind from me, it was, before being swallowed up in ecstasy and stupefaction, swimming in a sea of light ..." In his New Data Wensinck had already noted the source of this extract and observed that the anonymous author, whom we now know to have been John Saba, had in turn claimed to be quoting another monk's words, for he says "A certain brother told me". This passage, in which John Saba is possibly cloaking his own identity under another monk's garb, is found in Discourse 22 (p. 84).
No.8 (504). "Another has said: Morning dawns and gives joy, light radiates and gladdens, the Friend speaks and enflames, the Good One incites and exalts and shows himself and what is his, in joy". This short extract comes from Discourse 20 (p.73) but exhibits a number of variants.

No.9 (504f.). "Another has said: The fire of love does not permit him who burns with it to accomplish his service..." This extract (pp.48f.), like the following two, comes from the very long Discourse 13, which was not in Wensinck's Saba codex. On page 475 of the Ethikon there is an abridged quotation from this same treatise (pp.43f.) and its author is acknowledged as John of Dalyata.

No.10 (505f.) "Further it has been said: Love makes the body and the senses silent; it elevates the mind so as to gaze on the inaccessible light of the beauty of the Desired..." This is also taken from Discourse 13 (p.50), but there is a break in the middle, which the editor has stopped up with the filler "and when the solitary reaches the divine cloud". It includes an interesting reference to the subjection of animals to the mystic; because they sniff the scent of their Creator on him is the alleged reason for this.

No.11 (506). "It has further been said: Look at the fire which becomes one with the iron in the furnace..." Again we have an extract from Discourse 13 (pp.53f.), the one dealing with the analogy of iron in the fire, discussed earlier (49-51 above).

No.12 (506) "It has further been said: If any one writes the mysteries of the Spirit without the Spirit's dictating them to him, it will not mix its sweetness into his words..." This is taken from an unpublished treatise, Sermo 18 (V 336a, S 197d), where it is in turn stated to be a quotation from another brother.
This last item gives us an apt reminder that not only have we not yet completed the task of calculating Bar Hebraeus' debt to his predecessors, but also that there still remains the task of tracing the many unidentified quotations in the writings of John Saba himself, as in this Sermo 18, of which the opening pages are filled with sayings on the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We turn now, however, to a wider field of study, as we seek to establish some of the influences exerted on the Orient and the West by Syrian Christian mysticism in general and by John Saba and his Nestorian colleagues in particular.
V. MUSLIM SUFISM AND SYRIAN MYSTICISM

(1) Mystics and Missionaries
The term Sufism used in the title of this chapter denotes the main mystical movement of the Muslim faith: it is derived from the name Sufi, given to the devotee of this way of life. The would-be Sufi undertakes a spiritual pilgrimage on a path that has many "stations" and "states", in an endeavour to attain purity, illumination, and unification with God. The Sufis have also shown themselves to be effective missionaries for Islam and it has been argued by A.H. Johns that to them is due the rapid spread of Islam in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago. Johns sees the fact that Sufis came to assume the role of "chaplains" to craft guilds as the vital determining factor in the spread of Islam in Asia. The Sufis are thus seen as travelling around the Indian Ocean on trading ships and turning Rajahs into Sultans at the courts they visited. The comparatively late expansion of Islam in the East Indies is accounted for by the fact that the Sufis' influence did not become dominant till the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258 A.D.¹

The merchants and missionaries who carried Islam throughout Asia were to a large extent of Persian origin. Certainly we Westerners associate the term Sufism first and foremost with such names as Hafiz and Rumi, the Persian mystical poets, and al-Ghazali, the renowned Persian theologian. It is interesting to note that it was the Persian Nestorian Church which undertook the evangelization of the Far East. The missionary expansion of Nestorian Christianity into Central Asia, China, and India is well-known, but as the present writer has shown

¹. A.H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History", *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 2(1961), No. 2, 10-23; "Malay Sufism, as illustrated in an anonymous collec-
elsewhere Persian Christians preceded Muslim merchants and missionaries into South-East Asia, and this area was still included in the ecclesiastical dominions of the Nestorian Patriarch as late as the sixteenth century. Nestorian missionaries were specially trained for evangelization, in the many monastery schools and Christian academies of Mesopotamia, and then set out for the Far East, either overland through Central Asia or on trading vessels bound for the lands of gold, tin, and spices. The result was, in the words of the writer of the preface to the history of the Patriarch Yavalla ha III (d.1317):

"The Indians and the Chinese and other Oriental nations from various countries became restrained and submitted to the bridle of the fear of God, and their emotions were anointed by the Spirit."

Thus we find that these two movements of the spirit, namely Muslim Sufism and Syrian Christian monasticism have much in common. In both we find ascetics and mystics gathered together in schools and monastic communities, and both of them were to produce zealous propagators of their respective faiths. These and other similarities and the fact that Syrian Christian mysticism is prior to Sufism raises the question of the possibility that the Sufis may have borrowed ascetic and mystic ideas from their Christian counterparts. Accordingly it is our intention now to give an outline of some of the answers that have been given to this question and then to make a detailed comparison between two great exponents of the respective movements, namely the Persian Sufi Abu'l Qasim al-Junayd of Baghdad and the Persian Nestorian Christian John of Dalyatha.
(2) Muslim Mysticism and Eastern Christianity

As we have already observed in the preceding chapter, at the peak of the development of both Sufism and Syrian mysticism we encounter two great figures who brought the teachings of all who came before them to a head, namely al-Ghazali and Bar Hebraeus. A striking point of contact between these two scholars is that they, like Thomas Aquinas (who died in 1274, 163 years after Ghazali and 12 years before Bar Hebraeus), were stricken with a dryness of soul after many years of intense theological and philosophical study and were finally led to spiritual release in the Beatific Vision.

Even more significantly, A.J. Wensinck showed in 1919, again as noted in our previous chapter, that Bar Hebraeus had borrowed from Ghazali to the extent that his handbook for the spiritual guidance of Christians, the *Ethikon*, closely followed the outline and reproduced some of the material of his Muslim counterpart's *Ihya*, a sort of Islamic "Guide for the Perplexed". At the same time, however, Wensinck asserted that Ghazali himself had in turn received much from Christian monastics and he proceeded to give a long analysis of the material published to that time in an endeavour to prove that there was an intimate connection between Syrian Christian and Muslim mysticism. Wensinck also acknowledged that the last word on the subject could never be said and a history of mysticism in Western Asia would ever remain a desideratum, while ever the sources of Eastern Chris-

Asian Queen of Sheba", to appear in the *Journal of Southeast Asian History* (September, 1968). A detailed study on Nestorian and Armenian Christians in South-East Asia is in preparation.


tian mysticism remained inaccessible. In the Preface to his translation of Bar Hebraeus' *Book of the Dove* he gave notice of his intention to supply a part of this lack:

I hope that a future translation of Isaac of Ninive and an edition of the so-called John Saba may show to how large an extent Muslim mystics were indebted to the Syrians.

Isaac of Niniveh's mystical treatises are now available in Wensinck's English translation of 1923, with a brief discussion of Sufic dependence on Isaac (pp. LIV-LVI), but up till now no edition of John Saba has been forthcoming from any quarter.

A renewed impetus was given to the study of the problem when in 1931 Margaret Smith made an attempt to fill the need for a history of the mysticism of Western Asia on the basis of available published material, under the title *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East*. In this interesting survey further light was shed on the question of the part played by the mystical teachings of the Eastern Churches in the development of Sufism. In her Conclusion she sets out the following points: (1) the Muslims of the earliest period, in which Sufism made its appearance, were in the closest contact on the social and intellectual side with their Christian neighbours; (2) they were obliged to secure Christian teachers to educate their children; (3) these teachers are known in several instances to have been priests and monks; (4) discussions between Muslim and Christian scholars on theological questions were frequent and doubtless included mystical matters; (5) Muslims were well acquainted with the habits of life of the Christian solitaries and monastics and with their religious services and rituals; (6) in her opinion, the influence of Christian women married to Muslims should not be underestimated; (7) she mentions the possibility of direct influence
from Hellenistic sources but affirms that Christian mediation of the ideas is far more likely.

In the wake of these conclusions, in 1934, A. Mingana published as the seventh volume of his Woodbrooke Studies a considerable number of Syriac treatises on mysticism under the title Early Christian Mystics. While acknowledging the merit of the work of Wensinck and Margaret Smith and echoing the old cry that "a thorough comparative study of this subject is still a desideratum", he was nevertheless emboldened to declare that "there is hardly any point in Islamic mysticism which has not been borrowed from the main body of earlier Christian mystical thought".

Needless to say, scholars on the Arab side of the fence have not shared Mingana's exuberance in this matter. Rather we find S.H. Nasr declaring, with a trace of bitterness:

Among the few well-known Western scholars who have conceded the Quranic origin of Sufism one can name Margoliouth and especially Massignon and Corbin, whereas most of the other famous scholars, like Horten, Nicholson, Asin Palacios, and, more recently, Zaechner and Arberry, have posited a Hindu, Neoplatonic, Christian, or even Zoroastrian origin for Sufism. 5

In the light of this statement, the opinion of Louis Massignon may safely be taken as representative of the typical Islamic view. Massignon would say that down to the fourth century of Islamic history Sufism owed little to foreign influences, since it was the direct offshoot of primitive Muslim asceticism, which was in turn the product of intensive meditation on the Quran and studied imitation of the practice of Muhammad himself. This seems to be the view accepted by Nasr too, but it should be added that this Arab scholar is perhaps a trifle hard on R.A. Nicholson, for that great European Arabist tended to steer a middle course in this matter, taking account of the view that the essence of Sufism is an attempt to repro-
duce the mystical experience of the Prophet himself, but also giving due weight to a number of signs pointing towards influences from Christian asceticism and Hellenistic mysticism.6

At any rate, the chief grievance in Nasr's mind is that Western scholars have too often confused "the borrowed formulations of the Sufis with the inner experience and realization which is based absolutely on the grace, or barakah, issuing from the Prophet". In other words, he will allow that at a later period Sufism "drew some of its formulations from doctrines of Neoplatonic and Hermetic origin", but he nevertheless insists that Sufis did not practise anything that had not been done by the Prophet and his companions, who received his "esoteric instructions". Thus the interesting assertion is made by Nasr that Islam's exoteric component (shariah) and also its esoteric element (tariqah), both of which began to be codified in the third Islamic century, stem from Muhammad and the Quran.

Yet in the matter of asceticism and mysticism we might ask how Muhammad came by these ideas and practices. For Nasr the answer is simply "through Revelation"; but the fact remains that Muhammad had much contact with Christians, and in this regard Professor John Bowman has collected a large number of possible instances of Syrian Christian influence on early Islam.7 The Christian monk (rahib) would have been a familiar sight to Muhammad; indeed one piece of early Christian propaganda, namely the Bahira Legend, represents him as having

learnt all he knew from a certain Christian monastic. Of course it is often claimed that the Prophet condemned monasticism: "No monkery in Islam" is the saying put into his mouth in apparent agreement with Sura 57:27, which runs thus: "And they devised monasticism (We did not prescribe it for them), only seeking the good pleasure of God; but they did not practise it as it should be practised." Nevertheless Massingham has pointed out that this verse was taken to mean, by some early commentators and the Sufis of the 3rd century, that the monastic life was in fact a divinely ordained institution but it had been corrupted by lax monks, who were to be censured on that account.

The name Sufi, we are constantly being told by modern Western scholars, is derived from the word suf meaning "wool", and this is said to be a clear allusion to the coarse woollen garb or sheepskin worn by Christian solitaries and taken over by early Muslim ascetics. In this regard we should take note of a long letter of al-Hasan al-Basri (d.110 A.H.) written to the Caliph on the subject of world-flight, in which the austere practices of the Sufi ascetics (if we can use the term Sufi with reference to this stage of asceticism in Islamic history), including the wearing of wool, is attributed even to Jesus.  

However, such a connection between Sufism and wool is vigorously denied by many Muslim scholars, most recently and forcefully by Idries Shah. This Indian writer asserts, in avowed agreement with the early Persian Sufi Hujwiri, that the name Sufi has no etymology. Rather the Sufis are the people of the sounds ŠWP. Further, Idries Shah goes on to demonstrate how great has been the influence of Sufism in both Europe and Asia.

Such groups as the Fransiscans, the Masons, and the Zen Buddhists are declared to be deeply indebted to Sufism. In fact one gains the impression in reading his books that everybody owes everything to the Sufis and the Sufis owe nothing to anybody. Yet it is important to note the definition of Sufism given by Robert Graves in the Introduction to Idries Shah's large work on the subject: "The Sufis are an ancient spiritual freemasonry whose origins have never been traced or dated.... Though commonly mistaken for a Moslem sect, the Sufis are at home in all religions! 10

This seems to cut the ground from under our feet, but the reader is hereafter referred to the remainder of Shah's book, for he asserts that it must be read in its entirety. For our part, at the risk of being considered wilful and heedless, we will continue along the path that is marked out here for us. We need to take account of the personal testimonies of some of the early Sufis themselves regarding the sources of their ideas. Thus Arberry highlights the case of Ibrahim ibn Adham Prince of Balkh (d. 777 A.D.) from North-Eastern Persia (whose conversion is often likened to that of Gautama Buddha, but which actually differed sharply in the vital point that his renunciation of the world was in response to a call from God):

Like many other Early Sufis he is represented as having had contact with Christian anchorites in the desert; "I learned *gnosis*, he is reported to have told a disciple, "from a monk called Father Simeon". 11

In the light of such information let us move on to make a comparison of some typical representatives from both these streams of religion, in particular the Sufi al-Junayd and the Christian monk John Saba.

(3) Al-Junayd and John Saba

We shall now endeavour to bring to light in the life and teaching of these men a number of points of similarity, some of them being less significant than others but still making an interesting contribution to the overall picture.

1. As regards the life and times of al-Junayd, it is known that he was by trade a silk-merchant and that he spent almost all of his life in Baghdad, though he was born in Persia, in the town of Nihawand in the province of Jibal. His long life spanned the 3rd century of the Muslim era (9th century) and in the latter half of that century he became the foremost teacher of the famed Iraqi school of Sufi mysticism in Baghdad. He died in about 910 A.D. (298 A.H.).

The biographical details relating to John Saba of Dalyatha are not very precise, but the important fact is that he was a Nestorian monk who spent most of his life in Mesopotamia, in the regions of Beth Nuhadra and Qardu, either in monastic communities or in solitary seclusion in the hills, since the path of illumination and perfection lay in retreat from the world, in the view of the Syrian mystics.

2. Here we seem to find a glaring contrast between John Saba the desert ascetic and al-Junayd the city dweller. In this respect we may cite an observation of Nicholson:

Already in the third century it is increasingly evident that the typical Sufi adept of the future will no longer be a solitary ascetic, shunning the sight of men, but a great Shaykh and divinely inspired teacher, who appears on ceremonial occasions attended by a numerous train of admiring disciples. Actually we know that Junayd, when confronted by the dichotomy between the two streams, ascetic and aesthetic, of Sufism, had come to regard abnegation as secondary to spiritual

devotion. At the same time such exercises as fasts and vigils were not excluded from Junayd's life, which was characterized by withdrawal, for Junayd was definitely a man of retiring disposition (26-31). In fact another of Nicholson's remarks suggests that Junayd does not fit the picture delineated in the previous statement:

According to Jami (Nafahat, 36, 4) the theory of Sufism was formulated and explained in writing by Junayd (d. 297 A.H.) who taught it only in private houses and in subterranean chambers, whereas Shibli (d. 334 A.H.) made it the subject of public discourse. 14

3. In this regard, as writers and teachers, Junayd and Saba were alike in their setting forth of esoteric instruction. The writings of Junayd, represented only in the Kitab Risa'il, have survived in a single Istanbul manuscript, a fact which has led A.J. Arberry to surmise that the book was a guarded secret of the Sufis for private circulation but not for public divulgence (xvii). Certainly his thoughts are couched in an esoteric and enigmatic style, but nonetheless logically and systematically presented in the form of treatises addressed as letters to his friends (55-59).

The same is true of John Saba's writings, for even though in his case we have at our disposal a large number of Syriac and Arabic manuscripts containing his epistolary discourses, on every hand we encounter in them warnings that these things are only for the eyes and ears of the Initiated.

4. The special value of John Saba's mystical treatises is that he does not hold back from describing minutely, though in his own esoteric terms, the various aspects of the mystic's highest experiences. Al-Junayd was likewise a man who had

undergone all the stages of God's overwhelming and could take
an objective view of his experience to set before us a clear
theory of the states of obliteration (fa'ana) and unification
(tawhid)(94).

5. Syrian Christian mystics apparently considered them-
selves to be of the same order as the Prophets of the Old
Testament. They certainly claimed divine inspiration for
their utterances. A biographer of John Saba, namely David the
Phoenician, stated that some sections of the Discourses are
"more than Gospel". Similarly, we find that Sufis, whose avowed
aim is to reproduce the experience of the Prophet Muhammad,
might also claim that their teachings are equal to the Quran.
An extreme case is that of al-Hallaj, who, on hearing a certain
verse read from the Book, remarked,"I too can speak like that".
Al-Junayd rebuked al-Hallaj for his extremism in making such
utterances as "I am the Truth"; but Junayd himself is reported
to have said to an enquirer who had received from him excellent
answers to his questions:"God inspired me and put the words
into my mouth. They come neither from books nor from study; they
are grace from God(5).

6. Both these ancient worthies came to be held in high
esteem by posterity and their praises continually rehearsed in
the repetition of the titles of honour accorded to them. John
Saba's works were translated into Arabic and his fame spread
abroad as the legendary paragon of spirituality called "the
Spiritual Shaikh". Al-Junayd was variously known as "the
peacock of the divines" or"the crown of the mystics", and is
now acknowledged as the father of Sufism, in the sense that
he laid down its principles and his successors could only ela-
borate on these (xviii).

7. Yet in their own day both these men fell foul of the
watchdogs among their religious authorities. John of Dalyatha
along with others of his ilk was excommunicated late in the
eighth century, possibly posthumously, by the great Nestorian
Patriarch Timothy (d.323). In like manner, towards the end
of Junayd's life the Sufi school of Baghdad, not excluding
Junayd himself, was accused of heresy and many of the Sufis
were brought to trial. The case was eventually taken to the
Caliph Muwaffaq, who chose to acquit the Sufis. Thereupon
Junayd and his colleagues tended to withdraw from the gaze
and the hearing of the public, although Hallaj, who was to
some extent associated with the Baghdad school, was later con-
victed of heresy and "crucified" in 309 A.H. This was the cul-
mination of a striking series of parallels of life and thought
between himself and Jesus. Later Sufis declared that his crime
was that "he divulged the mystery of the Divine Lordship" (45-7).
However that may be, Abdel-Kader says that after the persecu-
tion and trial of the Baghdad school Junayd began to base his
teachings increasingly on the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sunna.
(40). Junayd's own declaration runs thus: "Whoever has not
learned the Quran by heart and has not formally studied Hadith,
and has not learned law before embarking on Sufism, is a man
who has no right to lead" (3).

The Syrian mystic Dadisho Qatraya gives a list of prescri-
bbed reading for the Christian monk, which includes not only
"the holy Books of the Old and New Testaments", "the Doctors of
the holy Church", and "the Fathers of the Desert", but also
"the Philosophers who lived before the coming of our Lord in
the flesh". 15

8. The mention of Greek philosophers brings us again to
the question of sources of ideas, for here we have a Syrian

Christian declaring that there is much profitable knowledge to be gained from the Philosophers. Now, it is generally acknowledged that Sufism at some time or other assimilated Hellenistic ideas into its system, and now that Junayd's writings have been published Abdel-Kader has located Neoplatonic influences there (14), notably the "theory of the pre-existence and post-existence of the soul before and after life in this earthly body as the reason for the longing of the soul in man to return to its origin".

It is known that the Neoplatonic treatise by Porphyry, the disciple of Plotinus, misleadingly titled Aristotalis Uthulujiya (Theologia Aristotelis), reached Baghdad in Arabic form about a generation before al-Junayd's time. Actually this work is only extant in its Arabic version, having been translated by a certain Syrian Christian and checked by the early Muslim philosopher al-Kindi for the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutasim (218-251 A.H.), as Abdel-Kader notes (14). So here we have indisputable evidence of at least one debt of Islam to Syrian Christianity, namely for the service the Christians rendered the Muslims in translating Greek scientific and philosophical literature into Arabic.

Yet it needs to be added that Arabic versions of Isaac of Nineveh's full-blown Syrian Christian mysticism of 7th-century vintage were circulating at least as early as the 9th century and could conceivably have come to the notice of Muslims. As regards the Arabic translation of John Saba, the extant manuscript evidence only goes back to the 13th century but it could well be much older than that. Presumably the fact that Syrian Christian mystical writings were known in an Arabic form at an early date would be irrelevant to Abdel-Kader, however, since he asserts that "these Neo-platonic elements in al-Junayd are
in no way tinted by the Christian mystical thought, itself largely of Neo-Platonic inspiration, which flourished before and at that time in the Near East" (104). Yet elsewhere we find the same writer saying that Arab Muslims might have adopted a few ideas from Syrian monks, and he cites the case of Junayd's teacher al-Muh Hasibi as one who is supposed to have been considerably influenced by his contacts with Christians (23). But al-Muh Hasibi was an Arab and Abdel-Kader seems reluctant to admit that Muslims of Persian descent were thus influenced; he insists that "there is no trace of any such influence in al-Junayd." In item 10 below we shall put this affirmation to the test, but here we should give an instance that is typical of the cordial relations between the Muslim scholars of early Baghdad and the Christians of the monastery schools of the same city. Take the case of Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus (d. 940): In his day Christians and Muslims followed the same courses on philosophy and science; his teachers included three Muslims and three Jacobite monks; in his turn he taught the great Muslim philosopher al-Farabi and the great Christian scholar Yahya ibn 'Adi (d. 974). 16

9. Further to the question of Syrian Christian mediation of ideas as against direct Neoplatonic influence, it is remarkable that the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul, cited in item 8, was one of the alleged tenets of John of Dalyatha and his colleagues that led to their condemnation. Junayd sought to prove this from the Quran by understanding Sura 7:166ff as depicting God speaking to the disembodied spirits (76). From a primitive Semitic point of view this acceptance of the belief in a pre-corporeal existence and post-corporeal survival for the

soul constitutes a surrender to Greek theories emanating from Alexandria. In the case of the Syrian mystics this doctrine was acquired from Origen, the Christian Platonist of Alexandria, through the intermediary Evagrius Ponticus. In Junayd's case, however, Plotinus would have been the direct source, without any Christian mediation, though Abdel-Kader in asserting this adds that Junayd did not necessarily read Plotinus himself but possibly received these ideas by oral tradition from his teachers and contemporaries (105).

10. In this respect it is surely significant, however, that the chains of teachers associated with Junayd, suspect though they may be, include men who had been Christians or else had come under Christian influence (12,17,23). In view of this it is not unreasonable, in spite of Abdel-Kader's categorical denial, to expect to find some trace of Christian influence in Junayd. In fact the passages from his writings that we shall now set alongside extracts from John Saba and John Hazzaya indicate that, if nothing else then at least the language and imagery of both schools is strikingly similar.
When God first becomes your intimate it is so overpowering that amazement and astonishment overwhelm you in your ineffable discovery. How can this be described or the intellect perceive it, unless God grants His control to the perception and His care to its secrets? Where are you when God has taken you entirely to Himself...when He has granted you the indulgence of His communion and favoured you with the ability to answer Him? In this state you are spoken to and you speak; you are asked about yourself and you ask questions. The words communicated are as unique pearls, testimony upon testimony, a cloud of witnesses multiplying continually, harbingers of divine grace. They are as heavy rain from every side, generous donors to you of glory from God the Glorious...Were it not for God's gift of grace and His vouchsafing His Holy Spirit then a man's mind would be completely stupefied before Him and his perception, in the presence of God, utterly shattered.

Happy are you when the sweetness of your God is mingled with your soul in intimate conversation with Him. Happy are you who toil in the labour of prayer when you have the repose that gives rest to the weary by the stirring of the Holy Spirit. Pen and ink are unable to set forth the wondrous beauties. He shines forth within them and makes the mirror of the soul bright with His rays and excites it with His glorious majesty. And one speaks freely with God. These precious pearls are gathered to be stored in the treasuries of his mind by the merchant who is intimate with prayer. For truly he is swimming in the sea of life. When paternal grace shines forth upon me and carries my mind off into this glorious sight, before it is swallowed up in amazement and nescience and is stupefied, I see my mind diverting itself in the sea of life..., revelling in the floods of His greatness and penetrating into His glory.

(Both these passages contain ideas found in both Christian and Muslim mysticism; but 1(a) is from Junayd (122) and 1(b) is a composite passage of excerpts from Saba.)
There are three stages in obliteration.
First: The obliteration of attributes, characteristics, and natural qualities in your motives when you carry out your religious duties, making great efforts and doing the opposite of what you may desire and compelling yourself to do the things that you do not wish to do.

Second: The obliteration of your following after the enjoyment of the sensation of pleasure in obedience to God's behests, so that you are exclusively His, without any intermediary means of contact.
(Then the lights of revelation shine upon them generously; God's companionship flows over them like the rising flood.)

Third: The obliteration of the consciousness of having achieved the vision of God at the final stage of ecstasy when God's victory over you is complete. At this stage you are obliterated and have eternal life with God and you exist only in the existence of God because you have been obliterated. Your physical being continues but your individuality has departed.

The first stage: Humility is sown in the novice's heart by grace. He is granted agility and delight during his long service, causing him to love frequent bending of the knees... and to remember the saints; and he is led to imitate their labours.

The second stage: The soul is purified and sanctified so as to receive spiritual things and the sight of revelations and hidden mysteries.

The third stage: The soul sees itself in the likeness of God because it is united to the light without likeness. When it has been trained and established in the sight of these things, then in a moment it passes through all these places till it reaches the glorious Cloud of Him who takes captive the power of the soul's desire and longing. And in that hour there is no human weakness...nor impulses, nor life stirring in a human way, nor recollection of things of this world or of things to be.

(With its constant use of the term "obliteration" (fana), often said to be connected with the Indian idea of Nirvana, passage 2(a) is obviously by Junayd (175f., 147); 2(b) is from Saba's trea-
tise on the three stages of the Spirit's workings. Though both mystics are speaking in different terms they seem to be describing the same experiences. Thus in the third stage the Cloud is the equivalent of fana'. With these two passages we should also compare a sentence of Abu Said ibn al-Arabi cited by Wensinck (Dove, CVIIf.): "Fana' is when (divine) greatness and majesty overcome the mystic and make him forget this world and the world to come and all states and ranks and stages."

3(a)

The second type of esoteric union consists in existence without individuality before God with no third person as intermediary between them, a figure over which His decrees pass according as He in His omnipotence determines, and that one should be sunk in the flooding seas of His unity, completely obliterated both from himself and from God's call to him and his answer to God. It is a stage where the devotee has achieved the true realisation of the Oneness of God in true proximity to Him. He is lost to sense and action because God fulfils in him what He has willed of him. This implies that in his final state the worshipper returns to his first state, that he is as he was before he existed.

3(b)

The second stage of the humility of the soul is this: when it is made pure and serene... and when the mind ascends and looks on God's greatness and beholds His incomprehensibility and His unlimitedness. When it looks on high it sees Him and when it looks into itself it sees Him in itself; and when the mind swims in the waves of God's greatness and incomprehensibility it is made ecstatic by the serenity of His greatness; and at once it becomes humble. Thus the soul, when it has become sound and pure and has acquired the pure sight that it possessed before it transgressed the commandment, really stands in the first and original unspeakable purity.

(Passage 3(b) is from Wensinck's translation of John the Seer's treatise on the soul and is included alongside 3(a) from Junayd (177f.) to introduce the concept of serenity or complete purity. It has been suggested by I. Hausherr (Cr. Chr. Analecta, 1920, 20) that the Muslim idea of purity (safa), not present in any of the Junayd extracts presented here (but well-known in Sufi texts and one etymology of the name Sufi connects it with this root), is derived from the Syrian Christian doctrine of shaphyutha first formulated by this same John the Solitary (or Seer).)
4(a)
In this state God wipes out all indications of their corporal existence in this world and removes the signs of their corporal existence and their human existence vanishes.... The bliss of this spiritual existence cannot be compared with human bliss.... Whereas the external signs are pleasurable the taste is, in fact, marred by bitterness. Their thoughts are constantly directed towards their Beloved and their inward thoughts never cease from praising the Lord.

4(b)
When a man is born from the corporal state into the spiritual state he begins to look spiritually, growing in spiritual knowledge according to the purity of his holiness. Pure prayer is this: when the soul stands in serenity with nothing from this world in it to move it. Pure service is this: when the soul serves the King of divine love, without being attracted by anything from this world. And when the soul stands in spiritual serenity and beholds God it rejoices...and weeps. And even itself it denies, lest it be bereft of the love of the heavenly Bridegroom.

Passage 4(b), again from John the Seer, is set alongside 4(a) from Junayd(162f.) to highlight the idea of love in mystical thought. One scholar who has made a close study of Junayd, namely R.C.Zaehner in his Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (London 1960), has made the following observation: "In her book, Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East, Dr Margaret Smith has shown how indebted early Muslim mysticism is, with its overwhelming emphasis on the love of God, to the thought of the great Christian mystics of a slightly earlier time, and, in view of the grave suspicion with which this doctrine of love was regarded by the orthodox theologians, her conclusions cannot be seriously disputed"(92).

Confronted with the similarities between Junayd and Saba Idries Shah would doubtless reply that John Saba was a Sufi! For the rest, these passages will have to be left to speak for themselves, though it needs to be added that, in spite of the close similarity manifested here and elsewhere in the writings of Sufis and monks, there are also striking dissimilarities.
After all, Christian mysticism is represented as being "the imitation of Christ" and also of St Paul, who urged his readers to imitate his example even as he imitated Christ. Sufism, on the other hand, is supposed to be an attempt to reproduce the spiritual exercises and experiences of the Prophet Muhammad. While some of the concepts and images that we have seen in Junayd's writings, such as pearls, the Holy Spirit, a cloud of witnesses, have their antecedents in the Bible and in Syriac mystical texts, we certainly do not find in Sufic literature such things as "the contemplation of the Holy Trinity" or the terms "somatic", "psychic", and "pneumatic" applied to the three divisions of the mystic path.

Finally, as matters now stand we can point to the following new knowledge and its significance: Abdel Kader has shown that there were Neoplatonic elements in Sufism as early as Junayd in the 3rd century of the Islamic era, and this enables us to affirm that this influence is due to Syrian Christianity, whichever way we look at it, if not through its own Syriac and Arabic literature on mysticism, then at least through its Arabic translations of Hellenistic writings, of which the Muslims so freely availed themselves.

As more and more Sufi and Syrian mystical writings are published we shall be able to see whether a prognostication made by A. J. Arberry in 1942 remains valid: "I do not think that future research will overthrow the theory that Sufism was influenced in its earliest period by Christian mysticism and that all other influences — Neoplatonist, Neopythagorean, Hermetic, and Gnostic — impinged on early Islam through this medium". 17

17. Arberry, An Introduction to the History of Sufism, 64. Abdel-Kader, who was a student of Arberry, expressed doubts on this exactly twenty years later in 1962, but we have already pointed out certain weaknesses in Abdel-Kader's position.
VI. EUROPEAN SPIRITUALITY AND SYRIAN MYSTICISM

(1) Hagiographic Literature from the East

Medieval Europe seems remote from the Syrian Orient, but in fact Western Christendom had many contacts with the Eastern Churches, particularly as a result of the Crusades. Moreover, the legend of Saint Alexius is a standing reminder that even before the Crusades Edessa was known to the West as a place for flight from the world, for Alexius, the man of God, was known to have fled from the worldliness of Rome to adopt a life of poverty and asceticism in the Syrian Orient:

\[\text{Damz Alexis en Aisís la citet}\]
\[\text{Sert son seignour par bone volentet...}\]
\[\text{Dis e set anz, n'en fut neient a dire,}\]
\[\text{Fenat son cors el Damnedeu servisie:}\]
\[\text{Por amistiet ne d'ami ne d'amie}\]
\[\text{Ne por onours qui lui fussent tramoses}\]
\[\text{N'en vuelt torner tant come il at a vivre.}\]

This tale is also known in a Syriac original written about 450-475, and in view of the fact that its chief protagonist, "the man of God", is said to have died during the episcopacy of Rabbula of Edessa (415-435), the proximity of its composition to the events it describes suggests that it is worthy of some credence. Bishop Rabbula was himself a typical representative of the ascetic mentality depicted in the tale, for he is alleged to have separated from his wife and children after his conversion.

The legend of Alexius passed by way of Greek and Latin versions into all the literatures of Christian Europe, namely French, Provençal, Italian, Spanish, German, English, Old Norse, and Russian. In the French version, for example, Alexius'
reason for choosing Edessa was the presence there of some kind of image of Christ:

Puis s'en alat en Alsis la citet
Por un imagene dont il odit parler,
Qued angele firent par comandement Deu
El nom la virgene qui portat salvetet,
Sainte Marie, qui portat Damnedeu. 4

Konrad von Würzburg's German rendering tells of the Edessene Cathedral that housed the famous image:

Ouch stuont ein münster wohl geslaht gezierete dâ vil sère.
In sant Marien êre
gewiht ez vil schöne was. 5

The place-name Alsis in the French version is puzzling, but apparently the author has confused Edessa in Mesopotamia with Sis in the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, in which case the prefix Al- would be the Arabic definite article. 6 At any rate the Latin prototype definitely speaks of Edessa:

Abiit Edessam Syriae civitatem, ubi sine humano opere imago Domini nostri Jesus Christi in sindone habebatur.
Quo perveniens...coepit sedere cum ceteris pauperibus ad atrium sanctae Dei genetricis Mariae. 7

It might not be unprofitable if we gave a moment's attention to the question of the nature of this intriguing "image of Jesus Christ"

(2) Sacred Relics from the East

As a pertinent prelude we might relate briefly the story of Rabban Sauma (d.1294), one of the monks sent to the West by Kublai Khan at a time when there was ecclesiastical dialogue

6. See the Nachtrag to G.Rohlfs’ recent edition, Sankt Alexius (Tübingen 1963),62.
7. The Latin text is given in the Introduction to Rohlfs’ edition. The Legenda Aurea of Jacques de Voragine (13th century)
between the Vatican and certain Eastern Patriarchates as well as political intrigue between the potentates of the Occident and the Orient.

A native of Peking and of Nestorian Christian parentage, Sauma caused his father and mother great grief by refusing, after the manner of Alexius, to consummate marriage with the girl to whom they had betrothed him. Again in typical Alexian fashion he distributed his possessions as alms to the poor and eventually found his way to the Syrian Orient. There he came to be appointed Visitor-General of the Nestorian Churches in the East, and in 1285 he was sent by the Mongol King Arghon on a diplomatic mission to the Pope and also to the kings of Byzantium, France, and England. The letters that he carried to those sovereigns sought the formation of an alliance to undertake the recapture of Jerusalem from the Muslims. This plan proved abortive, but Sauma had some interesting experiences in the course of his mission to Europe.8

On his arrival in Rome he found that the Pope, Honorius IV (1285-7), had just died and the cardinals were engaged in the prolonged business of electing the new Pope, who was to be Nicholas IV (1288-92); so Sauma and his companions went off to visit the kings to whom they were carrying despatches. In each city Sauma asked to see the holy places and their sacred relics. In Paris, for example, the Crown of Thorns was exhibited in its golden chamber in the Sainte Chapelle and Sauma was told by the king, Philippe IV le Bel, that the precious object had been brought by the French from Constantinople.9 This was one of the relics seen in Byzantium by the

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8. For the history of Sauma and his companion Markos, who came with him from the Far East and, under the throne-name Yavallaha, became the Nestorian Catholicus, see E.A.W. Budge,
French historian Robert de Clari during the Fourth Crusade (1201-4), as was also the Holy Shroud:

There was also another minster, which was called My Lady Saint Mary of Blachernae, where the shroud was in which Our Lord was wrapped. Every Friday this was raised upright (se drochoit tous drois), so that the form of Our Lord could be clearly seen, yet no one knows, neither Greek nor Frank, what became of that shroud (sydoines) when the city was taken. 10

Presumably this remarkable relic was in France at the time of Sauma's visit, but it was not brought out into the open until 1353 by the de Charny family. This is the famous Holy Shroud of Turin, which was found in recent times to bear the impress of a negative image of some kind, which, when photographed, offers a positive picture of a man who had undergone flogging and crucifixion.

A similar relic and one more significant for our present discussion was shown to Sauma in Rome, namely "the strip of fine linen on which Our Lord impressed his image and sent to King Abgar of Urhai (Edessa)". 11 In the various traditions concerning it the image is conceived as a painting or a cloth like "the towel of Veronica". Robert de Clari includes a cloth of this kind in his descriptive list of the relics he saw in Constantinople. This, then, was the "image" reputedly sent by Jesus to Edessa with the legendary apostle Addai, and which was said in the Alexius legend to have been housed in the Cathedral of Edessa.

As a further point of interest we may note that King Abgar was also supposed to have received a unique epistle from Jesus together with a blessing for his city Edessa, to the effect

The Monks of Kublai Khan (London 1928).
9. The Crown of Thorns was presented in 1239 to St Louis the King as a gift from Baldwin II, Latin Emperor of Constantinople; it is now preserved in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris.
11. Budge, 178. For the traditions and circumstances that accom-
that "the enemy shall nevermore prevail against it". This idea of the inviolability of Edessa was frequently mentioned by Syriac writers. Thus we have instances in the interesting chronicle of Joshua the Stylite, where the city is reported to have been miraculously preserved from destruction at the hands of invading armies.\textsuperscript{12} Actually in this matter of Divinely endowed immunity there were two parallel traditions, in which either the Image or the Epistle acted as the talisman.

This notion and the text of the Epistle were even known in Europe at an early date, in Pope Hadrian's first letter to Charlemagne (A.D. 787), for example, and also in various redactions of the legend in the Germanic languages.\textsuperscript{13} In England the story of Abgar was told in an Anglo-Saxon poem of 204 lines based on Chapter 13 of Book I of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, in an ancient service book from Saxon times preserved in the British Museum, the Abgar Letter follows the Pater Noster and the Apostles' Creed, with an appended description of its virtue as a charm ensuring the safety of any one who carries it with him in his daily walk:"Si quis hanc epistolam secum habuerit, securus ambulet (ambulabit ?) in pace". Again, writing of the devotion to the Epistle in eighteenth-century England Jeremiah Jones stated: "The common people in England have had it in their houses in many places in a frame with a picture before it; and they generally, with much honesty and devotion, regard it as the word of God and the genuine epistle of Christ."\textsuperscript{15}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item panied it from Edessa to Byzantium and ultimately to Italy see L.J.Tixeront, Les origines de l'église d'Edesse et la légende d'Abgar (Paris 1888), 52-62.
\item W.Wright, Ed., The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite (Cambridge 1882), V, IX, LXI; cf. further Tixeront, 20-29.
\item Tixeront, 27-29.
\item G.Stephens, Abgarus Legenden paa Old-Engelsk (Copenhagen 1853), with English translation.
\end{itemize}
In France we find related in the *Legenda Aurea* (Ch. LVI) the story of Judas Thaddaeus, reputedly sent by Thomas to Abgar king of Edessa, and it says of the Image and the Epistle:

"Et Jean de Damas, qui nous raconte tout cela d'après une vieille chronique, nous décrit aussi ce portrait du Seigneur. Il nous affirme qu'on y voit l'image d'un homme avec de grandes yeux, d'épais sourcils, un visage allongé, et des épaules un peu voûtées, ce qui est signe de maturité. Quant à la lettre du Christ, tel était son pouvoir que, dans la ville d'Edesse, aucun hérétique ni païen ne pouvait vivre, et qu'aucun tyran ne pouvait opprimer les habitants. Mais lorsque Edesse, plus tard, fut prise et profanée par les Sarrasins, elle perdit le privilège de cette sainte lettre."  

All these details, though somewhat accidental to our main theme of the influence of Syrian Christian asceticism and mysticism on European spirituality, serve to demonstrate that the West was not unmindful of the existence of Syrian Christianity.

(3) Religious Literature from the East

Three books, none of them specifically mystical in character, may also be mentioned as evidence of this contact between East and West. The first is a work of Biblical exegesis: it is the isagogic manual of a certain Paulos, who was a teacher at the East Syrian School of Nisibis in the sixth century. The influence of this book and of the great academy in which it was produced may be traced to Constantinople in Junilius, to North Africa in Primasius bishop of Hadrumentum, to Rome in Cassiodorus, to England in Aldhelm, to Germany in Wibod, and

also to France. Thus not only was the West Syrian centre Edessa known in Europe but the Persian school of Edessa's East Syrian rival Nisibis had a widespread influence there during the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{17}

Another important book is the *Diatessaron* or harmony of the Four Gospels prepared by the early Christian apologist Tatian. The work was in great vogue among the Eastern Churches, and there are also many versions of it in European languages, which circulated during the Middle Ages. Tatian was also the founder of an ascetic movement known as Encratism, and because Tatian was an "Assyrian" Christian G. Quispel has argued that Encratism was one of the basic impulses behind Syrian mysticism and the vehicle for the transmission of Alexandrian ideas into Syrian Christianity. Quispel sees an apt symbolism in the fact that St Boniface (d. 754) carried with him in his travels a Latin version of the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, namely *Codex Fuldensis*.\textsuperscript{18} The name of this codex serves to remind us that one of Boniface's most notable achievements was the assistance he gave in the founding of the great Benedictine monastery of Fulda, which became a great centre of learning in Germany.

The third book singled out for mention here is the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, which is definitely ascetic in tone, being a Christian adaptation of the life of the Buddha. Some scholars have assumed, by analogy with other cases to be mentioned below, that this tale goes back to a Syriac version, but Jean Sonet's detailed research has brought to light no evidence to support this assumption.\textsuperscript{19} One surprising feature

\textsuperscript{17} For further details of this remarkable exegetical work see A Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (Louvain 1965), 192-196.


of this work is the inclusion of the early *Apology of Aristides*. Barlaam and Josaphat reappear as Christian saints in *The Golden Legend* (Ch. LXIX): "Barlaam, dont l'histoire nous est racontée par Jean de Damas, converti à la foi chrétienne le roi Josaphat" (=Bodhisattva). This traditional attribution of the book to John of Damascus has apparently been proved correct in recent research; if so, then at least we have a Greek-Syrian mediation of an Eastern ascetic work to add to our list of influences.

(4) Ascetic Practices from the East

Influences from the Syrian Orient can in fact be traced in Western monasticism. Jerome, as is well known, lived in Palestine and for a time among the Syrian monks of the Syrian desert, and eventually introduced this way of life to Westerners. In one of his letters Jerome has given an idea of the extent of the monastic movement at the end of the fourth century: "From India, from Persia, and from Egypt there comes to us in Bethlehem each day a horde of monks."

One peculiarly Syrian ascetic practice was not unknown in Europe, namely pillar asceticism, which was instituted by Simeon Stylites (c.389-c.459). The practice was generally depreciated as being unsuitable to European conditions and St Walfroy (Vulfolaic), a would-be stylite in the Ardennes during the sixth century, was ordered down by his bishops after suffering such physical torments as the loss of his toenails and icicles in his beard, according to the account of Gregory of Tours.

In the matter of monasticism there is a great gulf between the dominant Syrian and European ideals. The contrasting emphases may be seen in the life of St Benedict of Nursia (c. 475 - c. 547). As a young man Benedict abandoned Rome in the Alexian manner and went to live as a solitary in the tradition of the ascetics of the East. Yet we can see from the way he formulated his Rule for healthy coenobitism that he came to appreciate the defects of hermitism. A statement of G.H. Russell on this subject prepares the way for the continuance of our discussion of this point:

We may say that at the heart of the life of the Benedictine ideal there lie the three great and characteristic occupations of the monk — labor manuum, the opus Dei of the celebration of the Liturgy and the lectio divina.... The first of the trio is that occupation to which Benedict attributed such importance that he tells us that a man is most characteristically a monk when he lives by the work of his hands.\(^{24}\)

In stark contrast the monastic life of the Eastern Churches is almost entirely contemplative, as V. Lossky has pointed out.\(^{25}\) In the Syrian Orient the coenobitic life was usually regarded as a preliminary to hermitism, while in the mystical solitaries' view manual labour was something for weaker brethren. Throughout his book Lossky uses Isaac of Nineveh as his Syriac-speaking example, since Isaac's works are known in Greek and Russian translation among the Orthodox Churches, and it is Isaac of Nineveh who is taken to task by F.C. Burkitt for encouraging this state of affairs:\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) F.C. Burkitt, "Isaac of Nineveh", Journal of Theological Studies, 26 (1924-5), 81-86.
He represents the complete abandonment of the world.... And when we examine the reason for this renunciation it appears to be very little but selfishness based on superstition. There is very little in Isaac of the practical wisdom of St Benedict, or of the ardour of St Bernard, to say nothing of St Francis... The whole aim of the solitary's life seems to be a perpetual crescendo of self-induced emotion; there is none of the Western advice to attend to work during work-time, that the mind may come back refreshed afterwards to contemplation... 'Do not think that there is any work more profitable than vigils'.

(5) Catholic Mysticism and the East

With regard to mysticism in particular (though it has become apparent that asceticism and mysticism go hand in hand in Syrian Christianity), Dom (now Bishop) C. Butler has given us an analysis of the teachings of Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard, in which he characterizes Western mysticism as pre-scholastic, or pre-Dionysian, because it is without visions and psychophysical concomitants. 27

Eventually the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite became a vital force in the further development of the mystical theology of Western Christendom, and Hugues de Saint-Victor and Thomas Aquinas wrote commentaries on them. 28 Moreover, while Dionysius found his own way to Europe in his proper Greek garb, without the Syriac and Arabic guise that so many Greek authors adopted on their long roundabout way to Western Europe, and moved about freely in the ninth-century Latin dress tailored for him by John Scotus Erigena, the

27. C. Butler, Western Mysticism, revised edition, 123ff.
suggestion is often made that he originally hailed from a Syrian milieu in the sixth century.  

In saying this we have touched on the manner in which Greek scientific literature reached Europe to spark off the burning quest for knowledge that characterized the Renaissance. This subject is worthy of mention here, since it seems that mystical ideas were transmitted along the same line. The general principle in this process was that the Syrian Christian literati translated books from foreign languages into Syriac and Arabic to the benefit of the nascent Islamic civilization. An instructive example of how books (in this case a literary work) travelled from East to West is the collection of animal fables of Sanskrit origin known as Kalila and Dimna, which came by way of Old Persian into Syriac and then into Arabic. From thence it found its way on the one hand into the Malay region in South-East Asia, and on the other hand into Europe in Spanish and Latin dress, ultimately becoming one of the sources of La Fontaine.  

As an additional point of interest and significance we may note that the Monophysite Syrian scholar named Būd who translated Kalila and Dimna into Syriac was also the reputed translator of Book I of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

Actually the Syrian schoolmen were more interested in this latter type of literature than in belles lettres, for although

29. For a detailed bibliography and study of the questions associated with Dionysius see the Introduction of René Roques to *Sources Chrétiennes*, No.58: Denys l'aréopagite, *La Hiérarchie céleste* (Paris 1958), V-XCV. The opinion has also been expressed that the Dionysian literature is of Alexandrian origin.

30. Further details in H.A.R. Gibb, "Literature", *The Legacy of Islam* (180-209), 196; G. Hooykaas, *Over Maleise Literatur* (Leiden 1947), Ch.15 (136-144), entitled "Pantja-Tantra, de overal verspreide Fabelverzameling"; it was also known in Europe as The Fables of Pilpay.

Homer's epics were known in Syriac translation, the poets and playwrights were neglected in favour of the philosophers and scientists. Moreover it was the research and translation activity of the Syrian schools of Edessa, Nisibis, Qennesrin, and Jundaysabur that laid the foundations for the development of Islamic philosophy and science at the school of Baghdad. When the Caliph al-Ma'mun founded this school in 832, naming it the Bayt al-Hikma or House of Wisdom, Christian scholars were given royal patronage in the task of rendering from Greek into Arabic, generally by way of intermediate Syriac versions, works of a medical, astronomical, physical, mathematical, and philosophical nature.

When this learning had been assimilated into Islamic culture it spread as far as Muslim Spain. The Arabic books were taken up and pressed into a Hebrew mould by the Jewish scholars of Spain, France, and Italy. Scholars of Medieval Europe came to sit at the feet of these Rabbis and rendered their books into Latin, in which form they were then disseminated among the scholastics of Europe. Thus the monks and teachers of the Syrian Churches had fixed the first spoke into the wheel that was to transport the science of the Greeks from Athens and Alexandria to Baghdad and eventually to Cordova, Salerno, and Montpellier.

Mystical teachings must have followed the same road, for it can be demonstrated, as in our preceding chapter, that Muslim Sufism was influenced by Syrian Christian ideas, themselves largely of Hellenistic origin, and it is remarkable that we find great Catholic missionaries like St John of the Cross in Spain, which was the home of the illuminist Sufis.

32. A Syriac rendering was made by Theophilos of Edessa, who also translated Greek philosophical works in the 8th century. See Georr, 30f.
33. Max Meyerhof, "Science and Medicine", The Legacy of Islam,
At the same time G. Widengren seems to have detected points of contact between Syrian mysticism and the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola. Accordingly it is difficult to ignore the evidence pointing to a mutual influence between Syrian mysticism, Muslim Sufism, and Catholic mysticism. The experience of the beatific vision, after a lifetime of scholasticism, shared by al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), and Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) is symbolic of the identical currents that flow through these three movements of the Spirit. Similarly, because there are apparently Arabic philosophical ideas and Sufic erotic imagery in the work of Dante Alighieri, H. A. R. Gibb feels justified in saying of Dante that "he fused into one magnificent synthesis not only the great heritage of Christian and classical mysticism, but also the richest and most spiritual features of the religious experience of Islam."

In this respect Idries Shah has hunted high and low for traces of Sufic influences and he now claims to have identified "materials bodily taken from Sufism, ideas which are characteristic of it, methods, tales, legends and even poetry of the Sufis" in the work of the Troubadors, Roger Bacon, Chaucer, Dante, and St John of the Cross, to name only a few who are deemed to have undergone such influence. As an example of his approach we may take the case of St Francis of Assisi. Evidence is presented for Francis Bernardone's strong links with France and the Troubadors and therefore with Sufic ideas:

311-355, esp. 315-322.
34. See A. Guillaume, "Philosophy and Theology", in The Legacy of Islam, 239-283; De Lacy O'Leary, How Greek Science passed to the Arabs (1949).
38. Idries Shah, Special Problems in the Study of Sufi Ideas (London 1966), 10f; cf. The Sufis, passim, for more details.
his father had originally called him Giovanni but renamed him Francesco because of his love of France; Francesco is said to have spoken Provençal, the language used by troubadors; one anecdote concerning spinning oneself around at the intersection of three roads is seen as a point of connection with the whirling dervishes, while his Cantico del Sole is reminiscent of the sun poems of Rumi, the chief of the dervishes and the greatest poet of Persia; Francis travelled in Spain and the East and had significant contacts with Muslims; the Franciscan Order is more like a dervish organisation than anything else; all sorts of tales about him find parallels in stories concerning Sufi teachers.39

Idries Shah has omitted one vital characteristic, presumably because it is unique to St Francis and Western Christianity: we refer to the phenomenon of the stigmata. John Saba's thirty-fifth epistle begins with a reference to those who bear the marks of Jesus in their members, but this is probably only a reference to scars of sufferings borne for Christ's sake after the manner of St Paul. These stigmata of St Francis were emblematic of his intense devotion to the Passion of Jesus. This was, moreover, just one instance of the upsurge of European Christian spirituality in the late Middle Ages, which found its deepest expression in devotion to the Passion, as pursued by Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventura, and the Franciscan poets,40 a movement that took hold of the art of the Medieval World,41 and came to a climax in the enormous popularity of the "Mystères de la Passion" on the late Medieval stage.42

39. The Sufis, 228-234.
40. P. Pourrat, La spiritualité chrétienne,II, Le Moyen Âge (Paris 1951); the following sections are particularly relevant: Anselm (24-27), Bernard de Clairvaux (71-74), Brigitte (138f.), François d'Assise (253-256), Bonaventure (275-277), Les écrivains franciscains (279-282), Les mystiques allemands (351), La dévotion à la Passion du Christ et aux douleurs de sa mère (502f.).
A partial explanation for this spiritual upsurge may be found in a dissemination of religious ideas from the Orient, for which we might invoke a Southern Mediterranean theory of transmission from the Middle East by way of Egypt, Morocco, Spain, and France. Certainly there are striking parallels to be found in the Syrian devotion to the Cross and the Passion, and in such Muslim practices as the Sufic devotion to the crucified martyr Hallaj (executed in 922 by the religious legalists of Islam), and the Shi'ah Passion Play for Husayn. There seems to be in all this a chain of sentiments and ideas linking East and West. As a concrete example of the European counterpart we may cite an extract from the Regula Novitiorum of Bonaventura (1221-74):

Have always the eyes of the mind towards Jesus crucified, crowned with thorns, having drunk the vinegar and gall, spit upon and abused, blasphemed of sinners, wearied with the multitude of scourgings, consumed with death most bitter, pierced by the spear, buried of mortal men. And think on this, whether thou eatest or drinkest, or doest any other thing, that thinking on the Creator crucified, thou mayest have sorrow in thy heart all the day long, and in thy body show sadness of countenance, saying with the Apostle: "Far be it from me to glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ".

41. E. Mâle, L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Age (Paris 1931), Ch. I-III.
43. E.g. J. van der Ploeg, "Un traité nestorien du culte de la Croix", Le Musée. Revue d'études orientales, 56 (Louvain 1943), 115-127, concerning the Homily on the Cross edited by P. Bedjan in the appendix to his edition of the works of Isaac of Nineveh; G. Widengren (see n. 36), passim; cf. n. 47 below.
44. L. Massignon, La Passion d'al-Hallaj (Paris 1922); Annemarie
But what is John Saba's specific place in this area of religious history? To answer this question we need to set forth a Northern Mediterranean theory, whereby an additional line of communication passes from Persia and Mesopotamia through Byzantium to France. We have already seen how the exegetical manual of Paulos of Nisibis passed from Persia through Junilius in Constantinople to Cassiodorus in Rome and likewise to scholars in England, Germany, and France. In the field of liturgy and religious music there are additional connections: for instance the musical style known as Gregorian Chant has its roots in the Syrian Orient. In this regard Augustine gives us an illuminating aside in his Confessions (IX, 7, 15) to the effect that in Milan shortly before his baptism in 387 "the singing of hymns and psalms after the manner of the Eastern Churches was introduced...and imitated by many, yea by almost all Thy congregations throughout the rest of the world".

Furthermore, in the matter of mystical and liturgical devotion centred on the Passion of Christ, we almost seem to have an integral chain stretching from John of Dalyatha and the Solitaries of the Syrian Orient through Byzantium to France and the rest of Europe.

In the first place we have the treatise "On Flight from the World" by John Saba (Discourse 4), which includes a meditation on the Passion beginning in this vein: "O Thou who wept and shed tears of sorrow over Lazarus, receive my bitter tears; may my passions be allayed by Thy Passion; may my wounds be healed by Thy wounds; my blood be mingled with Thy blood; and

46. Cited by F.J.E. Raby, Christian Latin Poetry (1927), 420, in the course of a discussion on "Franciscan Christianity".
the lifegiving fragrance of Thy body be mingled with my body...". It is significant that not only was the whole tract translated into Greek and Latin as a result of its inclusion among the works of Isaac of Nineveh, but also the prayer found a place in the Byzantine Liturgy according to the testimony of MS Paris Gr. 1076. 47

The next link in this chain is forged by E.O. James through his research in the comparative history of religions. James has taken great pains to establish a connection between the ancient Near Eastern ritual patterns on the one hand, such as the Mesopotamian New Year Festival with its atonement rites and the Egyptian Coronation Drama, and on the other hand the Medieval Christian Liturgy and the Miracle and Mystery Plays. At one stage in his argument he causes us to prick up our ears with the statement: "In the more complicated Gallican liturgy, which displays many Eastern characteristics, the later developments of the ceremonial became more apparent, until by the Middle Ages the Holy Week symbolism was complete. On Maundy Thursday the drama of the Passion began with a solemn commemoration of the institution of the Eucharist in a festal High Mass...". 48

Regarding the Gallican liturgy, that is to say the liturgy of Gaul in the kingdom of the Franks (as distinct from the Gaul liturgies, i.e. of the lands stretching from the Iberian Peninsula up to the Danube countries, including also the British Isles and Upper Italy or Cisalpine Gaul), J.A. Jungmann makes a significant comment, which sets another link in our chain: "Under the influence of traditions from the Gallican liturgy was likewise developed that popular devotion which was standard...

48. E.O. James, Seasonal Feasts and Festivals (London 1961), 212 (emphasis mine). See 239ff. on "The Drama of the Medieval Church".
during the whole of the Middle Ages and beyond, with a predilection for the mysteries of Christ's childhood and Passion and an inclination to address prayers indifferently to Christ and to God. This last feature is also represented in the prayers attached to the various Discourses of John Saba, while an interest in Christ's childhood and in Mary and Joseph is found in the unpublished Sermo 19, the main theme of which is the mystical contemplation of the Glory of Christ.

The mystical writings of Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) seem to stand at the end of this same chain. At any rate there is a striking point of similarity to be found in descriptions of mystical union on the one hand in Bernard's De Diligendo Deo (X) and on the other hand in John Saba's tract on the same subject, De Amore et Dilectione Dei (Discourse 14, page 54). We have already had cause to discuss the idea of iron in the fire presented in this extract (49-51 above):

Consider the fire that becomes one with the iron in a furnace. The iron cannot be recognised there, because it has assumed the likeness of the fire by their union. Hence you see not two images but one....In the same way the children of God see themselves as the image of God, so they all become gods by the Grace of their Creator.

As was pointed out earlier (54 above) this passage itself seems to be a combination of ideas taken from Dionysius, Macarius, and John the Solitary, but in any case it is surprising to find that Bernard brings together in one place the same ideas of mystical "deification" and the image of iron and fire:

Certainement c'est être tout divinisé (deificari) que de se trouver en cet état: car...de même qu'un morceau de fer tout embrasé et tout pénétré du feu, étant dépouillé de sa

propre et première forme, ressemble parfaitement au même feu...". 50

On the basis of the evidence presented here, at the very least we may assert that the mystic ways followed by the Syrian Christian Solitaries and the Muslim Sufis ran parallel to the path of mystical devotion pursued by such Western Saints as Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, John of the Cross, and Thomas Aquinas; but the ideas and characteristics of Syrian, Muslim, and Catholic mysticism touch one another so closely that it seems impossible to deny that mutual influences have occurred.

(6) Protestant Pietism and the East

The Reformers, of course, would have nothing to do with such things: they emphatically rejected all Dionysian ideas and eschewed morbid concentration on the sufferings of Christ. Nevertheless it is a fact that Protestantism has its own mystical Thebaid, in that it has willingly opened its heart to the influence of the "Spiritual Homilies" of Macarius. The Blessed Macarius made deep inroads into the Pietistic movement and thereby touched the hearts of such redoubtable personages as Gottfried Arnold and John Wesley. No one ever knew that in reality he belonged to the camp of "the enemy", for just as Dionysius was welcomed by Catholicism in the erroneous belief that he was the Areopagite convert of St Paul, just so was Macarius welcomed by Protestantism as the presumed orthodox Saint of the Egyptian Desert. Yet modern research indicates that the author of the Homilies was a Pseudo-Macarius, who was associated with the heretical Syrian sect of the Messalians or "Tray-ers" (39-45 above).

After a detailed comparison of the Spiritual Homilies with the Gospel of Thomas and the Syriac Song of the Pearl, G. Quispel went on to characterize Pseudo-Macarius as "the first Syrian mystic". At the same time Quispel has provided us with our trump, for just as Idries Shah has sought to demonstrate that Sufic literature contains material that is far ahead of its time (such as theories of psychology, evolution, the atom, "the fourth dimension", relativity, space travel, and much else besides), so Quispel asserts that the modern concept of personality, with its idea of individuality and subjectivity, goes back to Pietism and ultimately to Macarius and Syrian Christian mysticism.

52. Idries Shah, Sufi Ideas, 13ff., 30f.