

617
17

ARTICLE X.

ON

THE GENUINENESS

OF THE

SO-CALLED NESTORIAN MONUMENT

OF SINGAN-FU.

BY

EDWARD E. SALISBURY.

(Read October 14, 1852.)

Chow. H. H.
8/23/13

Chas. W. W. W.
8/5/13

THE GENTLENESS

SO-CALLED NESTORIAN MONUMENT

OF SINGAN-FU

EDWARD L. SALISBURY

(First Edition, 1913)

OF THE
SO-CALLED NESTORIAN MONUMENT
OF
SINGAN-FU.

~~~~~

IN a recent conversation with the Rev. Dr. Bridgman, I expressed my belief that the so-called Nestorian monument of Singan-fu was now generally regarded, by the learned, as a forgery. Dr. Bridgman replied that he had no doubt of its genuineness, but would be glad to know on what grounds it could be questioned, and to investigate the subject, farther, on his return to China. I was thus led to read whatever I could lay my hands upon, relating to this inscription, with a view to ascertain, more exactly, the judgments of learned men as to its genuineness, and the true state of the evidence respecting it. Some of the results of my inquiries are here presented.

So early as when Kircher published his *Prodromus Copticus*,\* which first brought the inscription to the knowledge of the European world, there were those, as we learn from that reverend father's contemptuous treatment of their arguments, in his *China Illustrata*, who regarded the monument as only a fabrication of the Jesuits. What their arguments against it were, I have not ascertained; but Kircher, without citing them particularly, and notwithstanding his apparent contempt for them, was moved by them to prepare the work last named, in which he professes to give the inscription itself, more exactly, and a more reliable translation of it, than was possible for him in his *Prodromus*.†

---

\* Published at Rome in 1636.

† Kircher's *China Illustrata*, Amstelodami: 1667, pp. 1, 2, 6.



After this, there was still a division of opinion respecting the genuineness of the monument; nor were those who admitted it exclusively of the Jesuit party. Renaudot, in his *Anciennes Relations des Indes et de la Chine*, alludes to Horne and some other Protestants, who had treated it as a fabrication, as having been refuted by those of their own religion who were more moderate and learned. The same author, however, although he himself does not question the genuineness of the monument, remarks that there is no sense in many passages of Kircher's Latin translation, that Kircher evidently did not understand the Syriac part of the inscription, and that he was particularly at fault in respect to its historical and geographical references.\*

Assemanni, the distinguished author of the *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, assumes, in that work, the genuineness of the monument, while giving us, as the result of a collation of two manuscript copies of it, preserved at Rome, some very important emendations of the Syriac text published by Kircher.

Mosheim, in his *Historia Tartarorum Ecclesiastica*,† after stating that learned men had violently contended for and against the genuineness of the monument, and were still at variance on the subject, and while he waives a critical investigation of the disputed point, hesitates not to join himself to those who acquit the church of Rome and the Society of the Jesuits of all fraud, and hold this monument to be a remarkable and precious remnant of antiquity.

The writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, on the other side, whom I find particularly named, are, beside Bishop Horne, Spizelius and La Croze. What ground they took, I am unable to say, not having had access to the works in which they speak of this monument.

Coming down to the present century, we find the great champion of the monument in Abel-Rémusat, who says, in his *Mélanges Asiatiques*:‡ “As for the monument of Si'an-fou, it will not be useless, since an opportunity offers, to make some observations suited to dissipate doubts, which would not have been so accredited, if the replying to them had not been so long neglected. . . . I know that the authenticity of the inscription of Si'an-fou has been con-

---

\* Renaudot's *Anciennes Relations*, etc. Paris: 1718, pp. 234, 236.

† Mosheim's *Historia Tartarorum Ecclesiastica*, Helmstadi: 1741, pp. 9, 10.

‡ Tome ii. (Paris: 1826), pp. 35, ff.

tested by certain writers, who have gone so far as even to deny its existence, and to accuse the missionaries who have spoken of it, of having fabricated this monument by a pious fraud. Even if this fabrication had been practicable in the midst of a nation distrustful and suspicious, in a country where private individuals and magistrates are equally ill-disposed toward strangers, and especially toward missionaries, where every one has his eyes open to the smallest movements, where authority watches with extreme care over all that pertains to historical traditions, and monuments of antiquity,—it would still be difficult to explain how the missionaries could have been hardy enough to cause to be printed and published in China, and in Chinese, an inscription of eighteen hundred words, which never existed; how they could have imitated the Chinese style, counterfeited the manner of the writers of the Thang dynasty, cited usages but little known, local circumstances, dates expressed in the mysterious figures of Chinese astrology, and all without for a moment contradicting themselves, and in a manner to impose upon the most adroit men of letters, interested, by the very singularity of the discovery, in discussing its authenticity. One would have, therefore, to suppose that a Chinese man of letters united with the missionaries, to impose upon his countrymen. But this is not all. The borders of the inscription are covered with Syriac names, in fair Estranghelo characters. The fabricator, then, was acquainted with the Syriac, and was able to have engraved, under his own eyes, with exactness, ninety lines of the Syriac writing which was formerly in use, and the knowledge of which is at the present day but little diffused. In the list of Syrian priests which is read on this monument, several bear names but little known at the period to which the discovery is referred, before the publication of the extracts of Assemani, such as Ahad-Gusnasph, Atdaspha, Yeschouadad, Izdbouزيد, etc. The fabricator, then, was a man who had made a profound study of the Syriac monuments, in the original. Besides, it would not suffice to account for the fabrication of the inscription in the Chinese edition, and in the copies brought by Fathers Semedo, Martini and Boym; the fabrication of the monument must also be explained; for the stone exists: it is ten feet high, by five wide; copies of it have been taken by laying transparent paper upon it after



inking it, and the engraving reduced from one of these copies is in the King's Library. Moreover, it is not the missionaries who found it in the ground, but some Chinese workmen, who were digging the foundations of a private house; it was the Chinese governor who caused it to be set up, and placed upon a pedestal, in one of the temples of the vicinity, and that without suspecting that he was the dupe of a pious fraud. Consequently, he had been obliged to have this inscription composed in Chinese by a man of letters gained over by bribery, to cause to be added to it some Syriac lines by a writer skilled in tracing the Estranghelo, to cause the whole to be engraved on the stone, this stone to be buried, without any one's perceiving it, and to direct the excavations of the masons of the city, so that they might recover it. What tricks, what cares, what difficulties, what risks, even, among a people like the Chinese! And for what object? To establish in a plausible manner what was otherwise known, that in the seventh and eighth centuries of our era, some Syrians had constructed churches at Si'-an-fou, and that a certain number of Chinese had embraced the Nestorian or Jacobite heresy. An object, doubtless, little worthy of the means which they were compelled to employ; one cannot imagine that Catholicism had any thing to gain by all that, nor how the Jesuits could find themselves recompensed for their pains, in seeing their inscription placed in a temple of idols, in the remote part of the province of Chen-si."

Klaproth takes the same view as Abel-Rémusat, and expresses himself in nearly the same words, in his *Tableaux Historiques de l'Asie*.\*

Schmidt, on the other hand, in the notes to his *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen*,† speaks of this monument as "assuredly nothing but a work of religious mystification and pious fraud, of which its contents afford the clearest indications;" without, however, giving any reasons for the opinion so confidently expressed.

The leader of the opposition, so to speak, to the genuineness of the monument, in modern times, is Neumann, who takes his ground in the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche*

---

\* Paris: 1826, pp. 209, 210.

† Schmidt's *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen*, St. Petersburg: 1829, s. 384.

*Kritik*,\* as follows: "The authors of the inscription were Syrians, or at least of Syrian origin, and were in constant communication with the West,—how then comes it, that they describe Tatschin (the West) precisely as Chinese geography under the Tang does? Have the Spaniards and Portuguese, the Dutch and English, in the monuments which they have left on foreign soil, described Europe and their father-land according to truth, or according to the fabulous views of foreign nations? Have the Chinese ever called India itself Tatschin, and was not the name given to the West, at the period of the inscription, Fulin? Upon the chronological error in respect to the Syrian patriarchs (of three years), we will lay no particular stress; Rénaudot's ground is indeed untenable, for there was, especially under the Tang, much communication between eastern and western Asia. But never, never, would a Chinese emperor, in a public decree, have dared to say of a foreign doctrine: 'it must be published throughout the land,' without stirring up a revolt in the body of the nation, the Schukiao; never has a Chinese emperor caused the sacred Scriptures to be translated, and made known through the whole empire ('he specially commanded to publish it,' etc.); never has an emperor caused a church to be built in his capital, and never were there churches standing in every city. We deny all this so decidedly, because in Chinese history, where even the slightest inclination of the emperors to the Taosse and Buddhists is noticed, and blamed, not the remotest trace of it all is to be found. 'But the Chinese held the followers of Buddha and of Christ to be the same.' How can it be that this should have happened to the Chinese, so exact in matters of fact? That they who distinguish even the several Buddhist sects, should have held the Christians and their enemies to be the same? Is there not, then, in the inscription itself, mention made of the hostilities and persecutions of the children of Sche (Sâkya)? And let it be now considered what an emperor it is who found the doctrine of Olopen so excellent,—it is the emperor who passes for a reinstator of the pure doctrine of Kong-tse, who declared: 'there is no salvation out of the doctrine of the perfect wise man.' And did not the Chinese Christians, and

---

\* For the year 1830, Bd. i. ss. 591-93.



the other Chinese, as soon as this fact was published, doubt it? This is told us by bishop Navarette in his famous *Tra-tados*: 'No solos los Gentiles, sino tambien los Christianos dudan, y no poco del caso;' the provincial authorities, therefore, as the same Navarette relates, caused the whole affair to be carefully investigated,—why have the Jesuits not made known the result of the investigation? But what object, it is asked, should the Jesuits have had in fabricating a Nestorian document? Are there, indeed, in this monument, important Nestorian heresies? The proof in respect to the passage where the trinity is spoken of, was annihilated already a hundred years ago by the great Sino-logue Prémare.

But that the Jesuits, in the first place, knew Syriac enough to make up the inscription, is known to every one who is only superficially acquainted with the history of the Indo-Syrian church; their famous seminary at Cranganor was especially designed for the conversion of Syrians, and flourished precisely at the time of the famous fact; in the second place, that the Jesuits have lied and deceived, and still lie and deceive, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, they allow, and this is also sufficiently known from history. What object, however, had the pious fathers in this? The Chinese should suppose that Christianity is by no means a new doctrine, but the faith of a large portion of their fathers; how can any one, afterwards, dare to speak against the doctrine of the Thiantschu, if he has read the decree of the all-honored Taythong of the Tang? Hence, in the extravagant and intentionally obscured fabrication, there is not a word about Christ's crucifixion, the foundation of redemption; this point was especially injurious to Christianity, in the opinion of the Chinese, and Ricci, so early as his time, sought to avoid it wherever he possibly could."

The same grounds for rejecting the monument as a forgery are presented by Neumann, in the *Zeitschrift d. Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*;\* and some objections not before stated are here brought forward, namely: that there never were, and never could be, cities in China named Chumdam and Saraga; that the mention of the four quarters of the earth betrays either a knowledge of the discovery of America, or that the ecclesiastics who composed the

---

\* Bd. iv. (Leipzig: 1850), ss. 33, ff.



inscription, accommodated their language to Chinese cosmogony; that the silence of the Syrian writers on the subject of the history of Christianity in China is irreconcilable with admitting the genuineness of the monument; that no traces of a Christian civilization have been discovered, in recent times, in that part of China where the Christian religion must have been established during a period of at least a century and a half; and that both the Chinese and the Syriac characters of the inscription are modern, not such as were in use in the eighth century.

In view of the reasonings of Abel-Rémusat, on the one side, and that of Neumann in the *Jahrbücher*, on the other, Ritter, in his *Erdkunde von Asien*,\* and Neander, in his *Allgemeine Geschichte d. Christlichen Religion und Kirche*,† have suspended their judgment respecting this famous monument. The former observes that the influence of a mission so early as that spoken of in this inscription, in the seventh century, may be said to show itself unmistakably in the traces of Nestorianism found in that part of China which it refers to, by missionary travellers and others, and noticed by annalists, who were ignorant of the disputed fact of its introduction at that time. Yet he thinks it not improbable that Neumann's theory of the origin of the inscription may prove to be correct.‡

Neander, inclining the same way as Ritter, on independent historical grounds, admits that the question respecting the genuineness of the monument is not yet decided, and that more light must be thrown upon it from the labors of modern Sinologists.

\* Th. ii. Buch 2, Bd. i. (Berlin: 1832), ss. 286, 287.

† Bd. iii. (Hamburg: 1834), ss. 178, 179.

‡ In connection with this opinion of Ritter, the following statement may not be without interest:

"A letter from Mr. Goddard of Ningpo, published in the *Missionary Magazine*, seems to indicate the existence of some remains of the early Nestorian missions in China:—A few days since, a respectable looking stranger came into our chapel, and listened with much apparent attention to the discussion. After service, he stopped to converse. He said that he and his ancestors had worshipped only one God, the Creator. He knew of Moses and Jesus and Mary, said he was not a Romanist nor Mohammedan, neither had he seen our books, but that the doctrine was handed down from his ancestors. He did not know where they obtained it, nor for how many generations they had followed it. He is from one of the western provinces of China, and said that in his native place there are some thirty families of the same religion. They have books, but do not propagate them."—*New-York Observer*, for September 2, 1852, p. 283.

Such have been the varying opinions entertained in respect to the genuineness of this monument, so far as I have been able to inform myself, from the age of its reported discovery down to the present time. I will now attempt to exhibit the true state of the evidence in respect to the point in dispute, referring back to the opinions which have been presented, as there may be occasion, in doing so. I shall first consider the story of the discovery of the monument; next, the inscription, with reference to the characters in which it was sculptured; and last, the contents of the inscription.

In the year 1625, then, as is stated, some laborers, while digging the foundation for a house, in the province of Chen-si, the district of San-yuen, and the village of Cheu-che, near the city of Singan-fu, fell upon a stone tablet, buried in the earth, five palms broad, about one palm thick, and nine and a half or ten palms long, the upper end finished in a pyramidal shape, measuring two palms in length by one in breadth, within which appeared sculptured a cross, with arms terminating in lilies, and resting upon small clouds. The face of this tablet was found to be covered with an evidently ancient inscription in Chinese, together with marginal inscriptions in a character unknown to the Chinese, and which was not recognized by the first European who saw the monument. The person who first drew much attention to this remarkable discovery appears to have been a mandarin named Leo, a convert to Christianity, as his name implies, and who is said to have published an exact description of the monument, on account of the great advantage to the Christian faith which he hoped would thence accrue. Meanwhile, within a short time after the discovery, on the invitation of another Christian mandarin, named, by his name of baptism, Philip, the Portuguese Jesuit Semedo visited the district of San-yuen, baptized twenty persons, and with that mandarin went to see the monument. To use his own words, he "saw it, read it, and returned to read and to admire it at his leisure; and considering its antiquity, wondered how it could be so entire, and how the letters could be so clear and well defined." The governor of the locality, being informed of the discovery, struck with the strangeness of the circumstance, and partly moved by a superstitious feeling, caused to be written an elegant composition in praise



of the monument, caused a copy of it to be engraved on another similar tablet, of marble, and this, together with the original, to be deposited for safe keeping, under a covering, within the enclosure of a Taosse temple, one mile from the walls of the city of Singan-fu. Father Semedo, not having recognized the Syriac characters of the inscription, went to Cranganor, the residence of the archbishop of Cochin, in order to consult with father Antonio Fernandez, in regard to them, who informed him that they were Syriac, and such as had been in use. Subsequently, copies of the inscription, either in whole or in part, reached Rome, which have formed the basis of all criticisms upon it, and interpretations of it, from Kircher's day to this.

Reviewing, now, the account which has been given, with a careful attention to all the statements of fathers Semedo, Martini, Boym, and Kircher himself, of the discovery of the monument, it is to be observed:

1. That attention was first drawn to the discovery by a native convert of the Jesuits, not by disinterested Chinese, as would seem from Abel-Rémusat's remarks already quoted; and that it was this same Chinese convert of the Jesuits, and not the European missionaries, as the same writer supposes an objector to maintain, who caused the inscription to be printed and published in China. Of course, what Abel-Rémusat argues in favor of its genuineness on those grounds, is without foundation.

2. That the fact of the depositing of the stone, by the Chinese governor, within the enclosure of a Taosse temple, as stated, harmonizes with that identification of the Taosse and Christians, attributed to the Chinese, by which the defenders of the monument meet objection to it on the ground that the Chinese annalists make no mention of any one of their emperors having favored Christianity; and if the fact is admitted, Neumann's reasoning on that ground is unsatisfactory.

3. That the incidental mention of Semedo's obtaining at Cranganor an explanation of the unrecognized Syriac characters of the inscription, shows that the Jesuits of China could, probably, have had the Syriac part of it made up in India. Consequently, Abel-Rémusat's argument in its favor on the ground of the great improbability that any Chinese

fabricator of the inscription was acquainted with the Syriac, and was conversant with Syriac books, is not valid.

4. That there is no intrinsic improbability in the account of the discovery; but, inasmuch as it is not known that any one has pretended to have seen the original monument, during the last two centuries, and as the state of preservation of the inscription, and the condition of the tablet, might prove an important source of inference as to its being genuine, it is essential to a full belief in the story, that the monument be seen by some disinterested person, at the present day; and be found to be in such a condition as agrees with its claims to so great an antiquity, with the statement of Semedo already quoted, that, when he saw it, he was astonished at its being so entire, and that the letters could be so clear, and well defined, and with the probability of its having been preserved from any material injury, since that time.

The inscription is next to be considered with reference to the characters in which it was sculptured. But here it becomes important to recall the circumstances under which the only copy of it, pretending to be a fac-simile, which has been published, was produced. Kircher, in his *Prodromus Copticus*, gave some specimens of the Syriac part of the inscription which had been transmitted to him by father Semedo; but the first complete copy was received later. This copy, however, the same which was at length deposited in the Museum of the Collegio Romano, at Rome, and which Assemani, a century after Kircher, examined, a fac-simile, apparently, is not that which was followed in the engraving given in the *China Illustrata*, but another copy, also said to be a fac-simile, belonging to Kircher, which a native Chinese, named Matthew, of Singan-fu, in 1664, put into the form of the tablet which is engraved in that work. Now it cannot be said that this engraving, so far as the Syriac part is concerned, presents altogether faultless Estranghelo writing: there are some cases of letters badly made, and others where one has been, evidently, mistaken for another. Yet, upon the whole, the characters are unquestionably Estranghelo, Neumann's declaration to the contrary notwithstanding; and the exceptional cases referred to are sufficiently accounted for by the fact of a Chinese hand having prepared the sheet to be engraved from. Of the Chinese characters I am unable



to speak. I discover, therefore, here, no ground to doubt the genuineness of the monument, though the evidence in favor of it, from this source, might be greatly strengthened by a sight of the original, or even of the fac-simile preserved in the Collegio Romano. There has been presented to this Society by the Rev. William A. Macy, a copy of the Chinese part of the inscription, based upon unknown authority, which gives two small specimens of the Syriac part also; but whether these are to be regarded as copies from a fac-simile, or not, I am not informed.

It now only remains to consider the contents of the inscription. In order to do this intelligently, the state of the text, as we possess it, must first be inquired into. My remarks on this point must be confined to the Syriac part, for, not being at all acquainted with the Chinese, I am unable to judge of differences of reading in that language, and shall, therefore, rely, for the contents of that part of the inscription which is in Chinese, wholly upon a translation published in the *Chinese Repository*, which was written, as I suppose, by Dr. Bridgman.\* This translation is preferred, because it makes the most intelligible sense. As respects the Syriac part, it is evident that Kircher had before him a copy different from that of which he published an engraving in his *China Illustrata*, and one in some respects, in his view, to be preferred; for in his *Prodromus Copticus* he give names, as from the Syriac part of the inscription, which do not appear at all in that engraving, and are indeed silently left out in his complete translation accompanying it; and the order of the Syriac names, as presented in full in the *China Illustrata*, is not the same as in the engraving. Assemani does not hesitate to affirm that Kircher invented those names which appeared in his *Prodromus*, but were omitted in his *China*, and that for the particular purpose of making out that the heralds of Christianity in China were not all of the Syrian church, but in part of the Alexandrian.† However this may have been, such a diversity of text, having come down to us, deserved to be noticed. In Kircher's Syriac text of the inscription, it is farther to be observed, there are two important places where

---

\* *Chinese Repository*, Canton: 1845, vol. xiv. pp. 201, ff.

† See *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Tomi iii. Pars ii. (Romae: 1728), p. dxlvii.

no satisfactory sense can be made out. Assemani, however, has given a reading which removes all difficulty. If, then, we inquire into the origin of his text, it is found that he based it upon the fac-simile in the Collegio Romano, and another copy, whether a fac-simile or not is unknown, in the Vatican, which no writer but himself, so far as I know, has mentioned.\* There is, therefore, considerable uncertainty as to the text of the Syriac part of the inscription; yet, until either the original stone is consulted, or the fac-similes at Rome are examined, which is very desirable, I have no hesitation in saying that Assemani's commends itself the most. It may be added, that, in an important place, one of the specimens of the Syriac presented to this Society by Mr. Macy, agrees with the reading of Assemani, while it differs from that of Kircher.

The most important contents of the Syriac part of the inscription are the record of the name of the Patriarch in whose time the monument is said to have been erected, and the passage which gives the date, according to the era of the Greeks, and tells who set it up. The latter is thus rendered by Assemani: "In the year of the Greeks one thousand and ninety and two, Mar Jazedbuzid, presbyter and provincial bishop of the royal city of Kumdân, son of blessed memory of Milles, presbyter from Balkh, a city of Tokharistân, erected this tablet, in which are described the dispensation of our Saviour, and the preaching of our fathers to the king of the Chinese," followed by the names of certain ecclesiastics. The former is rendered by Assemani as follows: "In the days of the Father of fathers, Mar Ananjesus, Catholic Patriarch." Now the year of the Greeks mentioned corresponds to 781 of our era; but Nestorian history informs us that the Patriarch Mar Ananjesus, the second of that name, who alone can be thought of, died in 778. This discrepancy is explained by Renaudot, on the supposition that the tidings of the Patriarch's death may not yet have reached the Christians in China, when the monument was erected; and Assemani acquiesces in this, and refers to the similar case of a letter, extant in the Vatican, which was addressed by certain Nestorian bishops sent

---

\* Of the engraving said by Abel-Rémusat to be in the King's Library at Paris, reduced from a fac-simile, I know nothing farther.



to Malabar, to their Patriarch in Assyria, in the year 1815 of the Greeks, when he had been dead already two years. At all events, the discrepancy seems to me to testify rather in favor of, than against, the genuineness of the monument; for would not a fabricator have avoided throwing such a stumbling-block in the way of the reception of his forgery?

But what is to be said of the name Kumdân? It will be remembered that Neumann rests one of his objections to the genuineness of the inscription on this name, which he mis-reads Chumdam, saying that there never could have been a city in China so called. Is it necessary, however, or even best, to suppose that the episcopate of the person who raised the monument should be designated, in this Syriac record, by its native Chinese name? If not, there is no difficulty here; for it is ascertained, as I learn from Reinaud,\* that the Arabs of the middle ages called the same place which now bears the name of Singan-fu, and which was formerly called Tchang-ngan, Kumdân; and it is natural to suppose that it was known to the Nestorians of China, through communication with their Patriarchate on the Euphrates, in the eighth century, by the same name.

In considering the contents of the Chinese part of the inscription, I shall first notice the doctrinal views and religious usages which it attributes to the Nestorians, and then its statements respecting the establishment and progress of Christianity in China.

As regards the doctrinal views and religious usages here attributed to the Nestorians, in general, it must be acknowledged, in accordance with the intimation of Neumann, in his remarks above quoted from the *Jahrbücher für w. Kritik*, that none are so characteristically Nestorian as to constitute an argument in favor of the genuineness of the monument, on the ground that no sufficient object can be assigned for the Jesuits having fabricated a record of doctrines and usages contrary to Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

The doctrine of the incarnation, in the expression of which one might look, if anywhere, for Nestorian peculiarity, is set forth in terms which, for aught I can see, might as well have proceeded from a partizan of the much dispu-

---

\* *Relation des Voyages faits par les Arabes et les Persans dans l'Inde et à la Chine dans le ix<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne. Publ. par M. Reinaud. Paris: 1845, Tome i. p. 65; Tome ii. note 133.*

ted appellation Θεοτόκος, applied to the Virgin Mary. The words are as follows: "Thereupon our Trinity set apart the illustrious and adorable Messiah; who, laying aside his true dignity, came into the world as man. Angels proclaimed the joyful tidings. A virgin gave birth to the holy child in Judea." Indeed, it may be questioned whether a Nestorian would have applied to the second person of the Trinity the name of Messiah or Christ, which Nestorians appropriated to the expression of the divine and human united in the person of Jesus.

Another particular point claiming notice, is the creation of the world in four parts, spoken of in the following passage: "He [Jehovah] determining, in the form of a cross, to establish the four quarters of the earth, moved the primeval Spirit, and produced all things visible and invisible." This is remarkable as coming from Nestorians of the eighth century, and may be capable of explanation only by a supposed accommodation to the popular cosmogony of the Chinese, as Neumann has suggested.\*

A division of the Canon of the Old and New Testament referred to, apparently, in the following passages, namely: "He [the Messiah] fulfilled the ancient laws, given by the twenty-four holy ones," and: "His [the Messiah's] mighty work thus finished, at mid-day he ascended to his true estate. Twenty-seven books remained," needs to be explained; for the Nestorian version of the Scriptures embraces all the books of the Old Testament in our Canon, and omits some books of our Canon of the New Testament, and there is no decisive authority for admitting a division of the two, respectively, into twenty-four and twenty-seven books among the Nestorians, except the assertion of Assemani, following Renaudot, that such a division was in accordance with the common sentiment of the Eastern Church.†

\* Rev. Dr. Murdock, however, proposes to understand the passage as referring, simply, to the four points of the compass, for the whole world, as in a passage in Ebed Jesu's Maḳāmāt, written about A. D. 1300, he says; "Worship all ye four (i. e. the whole world) the Supreme."

† But I am informed by Dr. Murdock, that the Nestorians of the present day receive the whole of our New Testament Canon, and that ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, divided into lessons for use in the Nestorian churches, embrace books which are excluded from the Peshito codices, in general, while these codices, themselves, scarcely ever represent fully the Nestorian Canon. It seems, therefore, quite likely that the Nestorians of the eighth century may have come to recognize as belonging to the New Testament all that is acknowledged among us as canonical.



The following passage: "They [the disciples of the Messiah] shave the crown of the head, to indicate the absence of passion," alluding to the tonsure, might be regarded as suspicious; for it would appear, from a quotation by Assemani, that the Nestorian priests of Malabar suffered the hair on the crown of their heads to grow, and Assemani, on the authority of Barhebraeus and others, ascribes to the Nestorians, generally, the error, as he calls it, of neglecting the tonsure. Yet he himself quotes from an original author who speaks of the tonsure as having been enjoined upon the Nestorians, by Abraham Cascarensis, a famous propagator of monastic discipline in the community, about the year 502.\* Consequently, it may have been in use among the Nestorians of China, in the eighth century.

Prayers for the dead are referred to in the following passage: "Seven times a day they [the disciples of the Messiah] offer praises to the great advantage of both the living and the dead." But the Nestorian doctrine, as to departed souls, admits no state intermediate between that of the saints awaiting the blessedness which is to be theirs at the general resurrection, and that of the wicked awaiting the misery which is then to be their portion; and it affirms, moreover, that both the saints and the wicked, having departed this life, remain in a state of unconsciousness, until the general resurrection. What place is there, alongside of this doctrine, for prayers for the dead? The answer is that, notwithstanding the apparent inconsistency, Nestorian writers, and one so early as the middle of the tenth century, do advocate such prayers, and that the Nestorian liturgy recognizes them.†

I have thus noticed all the passages of the inscription, in which doctrines or religious usages are spoken of, which seem to me significant, either way, as respects its genuineness.

The evidence from the historical statements of the inscription I am not so well able to estimate, having but very limited means of ascertaining what is said in Chinese annals of the different emperors who are here represented as having been favorable to Christianity. Some things which have

---

\* See *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Tomi iii. Pars. i. (Romae: 1725), p. 155; and Id. T. iii. P. ii. p. cccclxxxix.

† Id. Tomi iii. Pars ii. p. cccxlii. ff.

occurred to me, however, in looking at this part of the subject, may be worthy of mention. In the first place, Neumann exaggerates the degree of favor which, according to the testimony of the inscription, the emperor Tàitsung showed to the newly introduced religion. It would, indeed, appear that he caused parts, at least, of the Scriptures to be translated, for it is said: "The Scriptures were translated in the library of the palace;" but it does not appear that they were circulated through the empire by his order, and one may as well suppose that the translation was simply for the emperor's satisfaction as to the real tenets of the new teachers; especially as, immediately after the clause just quoted from the inscription, it is added: "The emperor, in his private apartments, made inquiry regarding the religion; and fully satisfied that it was correct and true, he gave special commands for its promulgation." May not, then, the emperor Tàitsung have allowed, and even directed, the promulgation of Christianity in his empire, with the necessary accompaniment of the building of churches, viewing it as rich in valuable instruction and discipline, of universal application, in the spirit of an eclectic? Such, at all events, is the representation of the inscription, which makes the emperor's decree in favor of Christianity open as follows: "Religion is without an invariable name. Saints are without any permanent body. In whatever region they are, they give instruction, and privately succor the living multitudes." It seems to me quite possible to reconcile this even with the fact that the same emperor Tàitsung held Confucius in special veneration, and caused a new edition of the sacred classics to be prepared and published.

The same strain of remark is applicable to much of what is said in the inscription of the patronage bestowed upon Christianity by the succeeding emperors of the Táng dynasty. Indeed, it is remarkable that the language of the inscription in reference to these emperors is, for the most part, or, at least, appears, as translated, so general that one would not suspect them to have been favorers of Christianity at all. For an example, I quote the record respecting Kienchung, in whose reign the monument is said to have been erected: "Our emperor Kienchung, holy, divine, civil and martial, arranged his form of government so as to abase the wicked and exalt the good. He unfolded the dual system so as to



give great lustre to the imperial decrees. In the work of renovation he made known the mysteries of reason [tau?] In his adorations he felt no shame of heart. In all his duties he was great and good. He was pure, and unbiassed, and forgiving. He extended abroad his kindness, and rescued all from calamities. Living multitudes enjoyed his favors. 'We strive to cultivate the great virtues, and to advance step by step;' and again, in another connection: "Kienchung was eminent in all things, and cultivated bright virtues. His martial dignity spread over all seas, and his mild serenity over all lands. His light came to human darkness; and in his mirror the color of things was reflected. Throughout the universe, light of life was diffused. All nations took example (from the emperor)."

But there are some passages which seem to imply distinguished favor shown to Christianity by Chinese emperors. For example, of Hiuentung it is said: "Tienpáu, in the commencement of his reign, commanded his general Káu-lihsz' to take the portraits of the five sacred ones [his predecessors on the throne], and place them in the church, and also to present one hundred pieces of silk, to give éclat to the same;" and again: "In the third year of Tienpáu's reign, there was a priest, Kihloh from Judea [more properly the West], who observing the star sought renovation; and, seeking the sun, came to the honored one. His majesty commanded the priests Lohán, Púlun, and others, seven in all, with the eminently virtuous Kihloh, to perform divine service in the church of Rising Felicity. Then the celestial writing appeared on the walls of the church, and the imperial inscriptions upon the tablets. The precious ornaments shone brightly. The refulgent clouds were dazzling. The intelligent edicts filled the wide expanse, and their glory rose above the light of the sun. The bounteous gifts are comparable to the lofty mountains of the South; the rich benevolences, deeper than the eastern seas. The righteous [or those who possess tau], do only what is right, and that which is fit to be named. The holy ones can do all things, and that which they do is fit to be commemorated." Such representations I must leave it to others to explain.\* Per-

---

\* Dr. Murdock refers me to the *Lettres Édifiantes* for parallels to these representations, in the accounts which the Jesuits give of the favor shown to

haps some of these favorers of Christianity, among the emperors of the Táng dynasty, confounded it with the doctrine of the Taosse. It must be observed, that the persecution of the Christians in the reign of Káutsung proceeded from the Buddhists, and not from the followers of Lao. Neumann himself finds evidence in the inscription of an attempt to confound Christianity with the doctrine of Lao.

In conclusion, I must notice what Neumann speaks of as a geographical absurdity in the inscription, namely, that the author of it describes the region from which he came in the language of the native Chinese geographers of ancient times: "according to the maps and records of the western nations, and the histories of the Hán and Wei dynasties." My very little acquaintance with Chinese literature renders me unable to meet this objection satisfactorily; but I would suggest that the author might have chosen to describe his home in the received language of Chinese geography, in order to be more readily understood, and credited; and that perhaps the knowledge which the Chinese had more recently acquired of the Byzantine empire, had not yet modified the expression of their conception of the West, handed down to them in their ancient annals. That the name given by the Chinese to the West, at the period of the inscription, was not that which the inscription would seem to imply, Tatsin, but another, Fulin, which Neumann suggests in the *Jahrbücher für w. Kritik*, he seems to have given up in his later article in the *Zeitschrift für d. Kunde d. Morgenlandes*.

---

them and their religion by the Chinese emperors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See, for example, *Lettres Édif. et Cur.*, published by Aimé-Martin, Tome iii. (Paris: 1843), p. 71: "Our Portuguese fathers, who first founded this mission, had here a great number of beautiful churches, already nearly twenty years since, when our French fathers arrived. There were reckoned . . . in the single province of Nankin more than a hundred churches, and more than a hundred thousand Christians. But the good fortune which the Jesuits of France had in making themselves agreeable to the emperor, and rendering him favorable to religion, placed both in a condition to make many new establishments." . . . "Although we have already three churches at Pekin, they are not enough, and we have resolved to build a fourth in the eastern part of this great city." Ibid. p. 167, we read that, in the year 1705, the emperor gave ten thousand ounces of silver to aid in building a church at Pekin, and that he wrote with his own hand three Chinese inscriptions for the church. One of these inscriptions, placed in the façade, was: *To the True Principle of all things*.



I have thus endeavored to set forth, as well as I could, the true state of the evidence, from all sources, in respect to the genuineness of this celebrated monument. The story of its discovery may be allowed to pass without suspicion, and yet the monument should be seen and examined, at the present day, to give it a claim to full belief. The Syriac characters of the inscription are truly Estranghelo, but of the antiquity of the Chinese I am unable to speak. The text, at least of the Syriac part, is not sufficiently established. The contents of the inscription, although some things have been made too much of, in the way of argument, either for or against its genuineness, do not bear a uniform testimony, either way, on the subject.

On a review of the whole ground, I cannot but express the hope that the several unsettled points may, by farther investigation, be cleared up, so that the highly interesting historical facts stated in the inscription may be established, or else that this forgery which has so long maintained itself, may be thoroughly exposed.\*

---

\* At a meeting of the American Oriental Society, held in October last, on motion of the Corr. Secretary, seconded by the Rev. Dr. Anderson, it was resolved: "In view of the interesting historical facts stated in the so-called Nestorian monument of Singan-fu, and the uncertainty, at the same time, which there seems to be, as to its genuineness, and in view of its not having been seen by any European, so far as appears, since the middle of the seventeenth century,—that the American missionaries in China be requested to take some measures, as they may have opportunity, in order that the monument be re-visited, its present condition described, and a new fac-simile of the whole inscription taken, by some competent person, and made accessible to the learned." A copy of the foregoing resolution was subsequently addressed to each of the American mission-stations in China, with a special letter on the subject to Dr. Bridgman. It is hoped that this effort will not be fruitless.