with such Mesopotamian cities as Nisibis, Amid, Mardîn, Tagh- rïth and Seleucia-Ctcsiphon, as well as west of the Euphrates at such centres as Mabbogh (Hierapolis) and Aleppo, northwards at Malatiah and Maiperkat and in the districts of Lake Van and Lake Urmia, and ‘to the east and south-east of the Tigris in many places which from the 5th century onwards were centres of Nestorian Christianity within the Sasanian Empire. In Palestine and western Syria, the home of pre-Christian Aramaic dialects, the vernacular Semitic speech had under Roman dominion been replaced by Greek for official and literary pur­poses. Apparently this state of things lasted till after the Mahommedan conquest, for Barhebraeus@@1 tells us that it was the caliph Walid I. (λ.d. 705-715) who, out of hatred to Christianity, replaced Greek by Arabic as the language of official documents at Damascus. Probably (as Duval suggests) the use of Syriac in these regions went hand in hand with the spread of the monophysite doctrine, for the liturgies and formulas of the Jacobite Church were composed in Syriac. Similarly the spread of Nestorian doctrines throughout the western and south­western regions of the Persian Empire was accompanied by the ecclesiastical use of a form of Syriac which differed very slightly indeed from that employed farther west by the Jacobites.

So far we have spoken only of the *Christian* use of Syriac. Of *the pagan* Syriac literature which issued mainly from IJarrän, a city about one day’s journey south of Edessa, not a single example appears to have survived. From Christian writers we learn that Harran continued to be a seat of pagan worship and culture down to and even later than the Mahommedan era. A native of the city, Thãbit ibn Kuna, in a passage from a Syriac work of his (now lost) quoted by Barhebraeus,@@2 speaks of the paganism of Harrän as distinguished by its steadfast resist­ance to Christian propaganda. “ When many were subdued to error through persecution, *our* fathers through God were stead­fast and stood out manfully, and this blessed city has never been defiled by the error of Nazareth. ” He goes on to attribute the world’s science and civilization to pagan inventors; but it is not clear whether in this he is alluding specially to the culture of his own city. Anyhow, it is much to be regretted that no Syriac writing from líarrãn has survived.@@’

Syriac literature continued in life from the 3rd to the 14th century a.d., but after the Arab conquest it became an increas­ingly artificial product, for Arabic gradually killed the vernacular use of Syriac.

In the literature as it survives many different branches of writing are represented—homilies in prose and verse, hymns, exposition and commentary, liturgy, apocryphal legends, historical romance, hagiography and martyrology, monastic history and biography, general history, dogmatics, philosophy and science, ecclesiastical law, &c. But the whole is domi­nated by the theological and ecclesiastical interest. All chief writers were bishops, inferior clergy or monks, and their readers belonged to the same dasses. When wc put aside one or two exceptionally fine pieces, like the hymn of the soul in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, the highest degree of excellence in style is perhaps attained in staightfor- ward historical narrative—such as the account of the Perso- Roman War at the beginning of the 6th century by the author who passes under the name of Joshua the Stylite, or by romancers like him who wrote the romance of Julian; by biographers like some of those who have written lives of saints, martyrs and eminent divines; and by some early writers of homilies such as Philoxenus (in prose) and Isaac of Antioch (in verse). Nearly all the best writers are characterized by a certain naïve and earnest piety which is attractive, and not infrequently display a force of moral indignation which arrests attention. These

latter qualities are even more apparent in poetry than in prose. There are indeed but few specimens of Syriac verse which exhibit high poetic quality; except for a fairly copious and occasionally skilful use of simile and metaphor, there is little ol soaring imagination in Syriac poets. On the other hand there is much effective rhetoric, and much skilful play of language.@@4

As was to be expected, the better qualities of style were more often shown during the early centuries when the language was still a living speech. After it had been supplanted by Arabic in the ordinary intercourse of life its literary use was more and more affected by Arabic words and constructions, and its free­dom as a vehicle of thought was much impaired. Nevertheless, so late as the 13th century it was still an effective instrument in the hands of the most many-sided of Syriac authors, the eminent Barhebraeus.

For the general history of culture the work of Syriac writers as *translators* is, perhaps, as important as any of their original contributions to literature. Beginning with the earliest versions of the Bible, which seem to date from the 2nd century a.d., the series comprises a great mass of translations from Greek originals—theological, philosophical, legendary, historical and scientific. In a fair number of cases the Syriac version has preserved to us the substance of a lost original text. Often, moreover, the Syriac translation became in turn the parent of a later Arabic version. This was notably the case with some of the Aristotelian writings, so that in this field, as in some others, the Syriac writers handed on the torch of Greek thought to the Arabs, by whom it was in turn transmitted to medieval Europe. The early Syriac translations are in many cases so literal as to do violence to the idiom of their own language; but this makes them «all the more valuable when we have to depend on them for reconstructing the original texts. The later translators use greater freedom.@@6 It was not from Greek only that translations were made into Syriac. Of translations from Pahlavi we have such examples as the version of pscudo-Callisthenes’ *History oj Alexander*, made in the 7th century from a Pahlavi version of the Greek original—that of *Kalilah and Dimnah* executed in the 6th century by the periodeutës Bõdh—and that of *Sindbad,* which dates from the 8th century; and in the late period of Syriac literature, books were translated from Arabic into Syriac as well as vice versa.

All our historical sources support the view taken above that Edessa, the capital of the kingdom which the Greeks and Romans called Osrhoene, was the earliest seat of Christianity in Mesopotamia and the cradle of Syriac literature. But as to the date and circumstances of its evangelization we have little reliable information. The well-known legend of the correspondence of Abgar Ukkãmã, king of Edessa, with Christ and the mission of Addai to Edessa immediately after the Ascension was accepted as true by the historian Eusebius (t340) on the faith of a Syriac document pre­served in the official archives of the city. An amplified form of the same story is furnished by the *Doctrine of Addai,* an original Syriac work which survives complete in a St Petersburg MS. of the 6th century, and is also represented by fragments in other MSS. of the 5th and 6th centuries. This work was probably written at Edessa about the end of the 4th century. It adds many new features to the shorter form of the story as given by Eusebius, among which is the noteworthy promise of Christ about the impregnability of the city—“ Thy city shall be blessed and no enemy shall ever henceforth obtain dominion over it. ” This is probably a later addition made to the legend at a time when such facts as the capture of Edessa by Lusius Quietus in 116 and its second capture and the destruction of its kingdom by the Romans in 216 had faded from memory.@@6

*@@@, Chron, syr.,* cd. Bruns, p. 120, cd. Be<ljan, p. 115; cited by Duval, *Litt, syr.i,* p. 5.

*@@@, Chron, syr.,* ed. Bruns, p. 176, ed. Bedjan, p. 168. Thãbit was the author of about 16 Syriac works, of which the majority sur­vived in the 13th century, but all are now lost. Of his 150 Arabic treatises a few at least survive; see Brockeimann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur,* i. 217 seq.

@@@’ On this subject, see especially Chwolsen’s *Ssabier und Ssabismus.*

@@@, On the mechanism of Syriac verse, see Duval’s admirable section on *la poésie syriaque (Litt. syrA,* p. 10 sqq.).

@@@6 Cf. Duval, *op. cit.* p. 303 seq.

@@@6 Cf. Tixeront, *Origines de l'Église d’Édesse, p.* 93, and Duval, *op. cit.* p. 99. The above view is more probable than that taken by F. C. Burkitt *(Early Eastern Christianity,* p. 14), that Eusebius knew of Christ’s promise as part of the letter to Abgar, and pur­posely suppressed it as inconsistent with historical facts.