But whether in its longer or its shorter form, the whole narrative must be pronounced unhistorical. In all probability the first king of Osrhoene to adopt Christianity was Λbgar IX., son of Ma’nü, who reigned from a.d. 179 to 214 or 216, and the legend has confounded him with an earlier Λbgar, also son of Ma’nü, who reigned first from b.C. 4 to a.d. 7 and again from a.d. 13 to 50.@@1 A contemporary of Abgar IX. at Edessa was the famous Bardai⅞an, himself a convert from heathenism, who was of noble birth and a *habitué* of the Edesseπe court. It was no doubt partly under his influence—also possibly in part through im­pressions received by Ahgar during his visit to Rome about A.D. 202—that the king’s conversion took place. But Christianity must have reached Edessa some thirty to fifty years earlier. Our oldest native historical document in Syriac —the account of a severe flood which visited Edessa in Nov. A.D. 201@@2—mentions “ the temple of the church of the Christians ” as overthrown by the flood. The form of this notice shows, as von Gutschmid and others have remarked, that Christianity was not yet the religion of the state; but it must for some time have had a home in Edessa. the same thing is seen from the fact that the heresy of the Marcionites was already showing itself in this district, for (in Tixeront’s words) “ heresies, in the first centuries at least, only spread in already constituted Christian communities.” And by a skilful piecing together of the date furnished by the oldest Syriac versions of the Bible— such as the derivation of the Old Testament version from the Jews, and the almost exclusive use of Tatian’s Diatessaron as the gospel of the Syriac Church down to the beginning of the 5th century—F. C. Burkitt has shown it to be probable that the preaching of Christianity at Edessa reaches back to the middle of the 2nd century or even to about the year 135.@@3

The Syriac versions of the Bible are treated elsewhere (see Bible) and may here be dismissed with a brief summary of facts and opinions. The received Syriac Bible or Vulgate (called the Peshitta or “ simple ” version from the 9th century onwards@@4) contains all the canonical books of the Old Testa­ment.@@8 In the New Testament, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and the Apocalypse were originally left out, but Syriac versions were made at a later time. The Peshitta version of the Old Testament must have been originally made mainly by Jews, of whom we know there were colonies in Mesopotamia in the 2nd century. The translation was executed entirely from the Hebrew, but underwent later revision which brought it more into conformity with the LXX—this to a greater degree in some books than in others. The Peshitta New Testament— according to the convincing theory which at present holds the field@@®—is not the oldest form of the Syriac version, at least as regards the Gospels. From the beginning of the 3rd to the beginning of the 5th century Tatian’s Harmony or Diatessaron —whether originally compiled in Syriac, or compiled in Greek and translated into Syriac—was the current form of gospel in the Syriac Church. The text of the Gospels underlying it “ represents the Greek text as read in Rome about a.d. 170.” Slightly later was made the Old Syriac version of the separate Gospels, which survives in two MSS.—the Curetonian and the Sinaitic—in two differing forms: but this never obtained much currency. Its text “ represents, where it differs from the Diatessaron, the Greek text as read in Antioch about a.d. 2∞.'' Then at the beginning of the 5th century, by the efforts of the

masterful Rabbülä, who was bishop of Edessa from 41x-412 to 435, a new version, or recension of the Gospels was made and incorporated in the Peshitta or Vulgate, the use of the Diates­saron being henceforth proscribed. Rabbülã’s text of the Gospels “ represents the Greek text as read in Antioch about A.D. 4∞.,' The history of the Peshitta rendering of the Acts and Epistles is less clear; apparently the earliest Syrian writers used a text somewhat different from that which afterwards became the standard.@@7

Of the large number of Apocryphal books existing in Syriac@@\* the majority have been translated from Greek, one or two (such as *Bar Sirã* or *Ecclesiasticus)* from Hebrew, while some (like the *Doctrine of Addai* above referred to) are original Syriac documents. Special mention may be made here of the tale of Abîkãr—the wise and virtuous secretary of Sennacherib, king of Assyria—and of his wicked nephew Nãdhãn. This is the Syriac version of a narrative which has had an extraordinary vogue in the world’s literature. It is now known to have existed in Aramaic as far back as the 5th century b.c., appearing on Jewish papyri which were lately discovered by the German mission to Elephantine.@@9 It appears to be traceable in its Greek dress in writings of the philosopher Democritus and the dramatist Menander; it was certainly known to the author of Tobit and perhaps to the author of Daniel; some would trace its influence in the New Testament, in the parable of the wicked servant and elsewhere; it was known to Mahomet and is referred to in the Koran; it has been included among the tales in the *Arabian Nights',* and it survives in a good many versions ancient and modem. The old Syriac version, which is to be found in a number of MSS., was probably made from an early Aramaic version, if not from the original itself (which must surely have been Semitic). The Syriac has in turn become the parent of the Arabic, Armenian and Ethiopic— possibly also of the Greek and Slavonic versions.@@10

Another deeply interesting Syriac Apocryphon is the *Acts of Judas Thomas (i.e.* Judas the Twin), which is included in the collection of *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.* The *Acts of Thomas* is now generally recognized to be an original Syriac work (or “novel,” as Burkitt calls it), although a Greek version also exists. It seems to have arisen in Gnostic circles, and its ten­dency is wholly in favour of asceticism and celibacy. Among its peculiarities is the fact that Judas Thomas is regarded as the twin brother of Christ. The author has incorporated in it the finest poem to be found in all Syriac literature, the famous Hymn of the Soul. This depicts the journey of the soul from heaven to earth, its life in the body, and its final return to the heavenly home, under the figure of a Parthian prince who is sent from the court of his parents to the land of Egypt to fetch the serpent-guarded pearl; after a time of sloth and forgetfulness he fulfils his quest, and returns triumphant and again puts on the heavenly robe. According to Burkitt, the hymn must have been composed before the fall of the Arsacids and the commencement of the Sasanian Empire in 224. It is plainly Gnostic and may perhaps have been composed by Bardaisãn or his son Harmonius.@@n

Among recent editions of Apocrypha in Syriac may be men­tioned those of the *Apocalypse of Baruch,* the *Epistle of Baruch,*

@@@1 See especially Lipsius, *Die edessenische Abgar-Sage* (1880), and the brilliant analysis of the legend by A. von Gutschmid in *Mém. de Γacad. impér. des sciences de St Pétersbourg,* tome xxxv. No. I. The above dates for the kings’ reigns are taken from von Gutschmid.

@@@s Incorporated in the *Chronicle of Edessa* (Hallier’s edition, p. 145 sqq.).

*@@@, Early Eastern Christianity,* Lecture II.

@@@\* See the explanation in Burkitt, *op. cit.* p. 41 seq.

@@@5 The MSS. which contain the Syriac *Massoraħ* or tradition of the reading of the text pass over Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, and in the case of the Nestorians also Esther. But all these books are quoted by Aphraates.

@@@β That of F. C. Burkitt. See especially his 5. *Ephraim’s Quotations front the Gospel* (Cambridge, 1901); *Evangelion da-mepharreshe* (Cambridge, 1904), and the above cited Lecture.

@@@7 For the later Monophysite versions, none of which attained much popularity, see Wright’s *Syr. Lit.* pp. 13-17, and for the single Nestorian attempt at revision, ibid. p. 19.

@@@8 See the lists in Wright, *op. cit.* pp. 5 seq. 25-27, and Duval, *Litt. Syr.s* ch. viii.

@@@9 See F. Nau, *Histoire et sagesse d’Ahikar l'Assyrien* (Parie, 1909), P∙ 288 sqq.

@@@10 See especially *The Story of Ahikar from the Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Greek and Slavonic Versions,* by F. C. Cony- beare, J. R. Harris and A. S. Lewis (Cambridge, 1898); and Nau, *op. cit.* The latter has a very full bibliography.

@@@J1 Of the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* there is the well-known edition and translation by Wnght (London, 1871) ; the *Acts of Judas* were re-edited *by* Bedian in the 3rd volume of *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* (Paris, 1892); of the *Hymn of the Soul* there is a fresh edition and translation by A. A. Bevan (Cambridge, 1897). See also Lecture VI. in Burldtt,s *Early Eastern Christianity.*