

dred years ago", that is at the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator,⁴⁷

But it is not altogether impossible that there were churches and oratories, although few in number, even before the time of the Illuminator, since it is a fact that there were Christians in Armenia before the Illuminator. Leaving aside the tradition of apostolic preaching in Armenia, there were at the end of the second century, in the time of Marcus Aurelius, Christians in Melitina in the Legio Fulminata, some of whom were natives. The martyrdom of the Forty Young Men at Sebastia, where Armenians had been established from early times, is proof of the existence of Christianity in that region. In the middle of the third century there already was an organized episcopacy among the Armenians; Dionysius of Alexandria corresponded with one of these Armenian bishops, namely Mithrozanus in the year 251.⁴⁸ In the year 311 Maximinus Daia waged war against the Armenians as a Christian people.⁴⁹ The existence of the episcopacy of Ardaz before the time of the Illuminator is not altogether without foundation and historical possibility.⁵⁰ The work of the Illuminator began in the year 287, and already at the beginning of the IVth century Christianity was promulgated as the state religion in Armenia by Tiridates the Great.

But even earlier than in Armenia, Christianity had become the state religion for a short while in the little neighboring Syrian kingdom of Osroene at the time of Abgar IX (179-216), whose capital was Edessa. The kingdom of Palmyra must also have been fertile soil for the spread of Christianity in the second half of the IIIrd century, at the time of Queen Zenobia. A third great center of Syrian Christianity was Nisibin before the year 325: it is sufficient to remember that Ephraim the

Syrian was born in that city of Christian parents in the beginning of the IVth century, which means that already in the IIIrd century there were Christians there. Also significant is the tradition of the kinship between our Illuminator and St. James, Patriarch of Nisibin, who was a noted writer and whose works, as well as those of Ephraim, have been translated into Armenian.

Christianity had spread also in Mesopotamia and Persia as far as the Parthian regions, where there were many Christian communities, fruits of Syrian missions. According to Nöldeke, in the middle of the IVth century Christianity was flourishing in the Tigris regions, with an organized episcopacy and clergy. In the year 310 the bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon was Simeon Bar Zabdan. His predecessor, Baba Aggai, had attempted to subject to his authority all the bishoprics of Persia, but without success.⁵¹ In Persia persecution against Christians began only in the reign of Sapor II; up to that time Christianity had progressed unhindered. In the Vth century the Syrian patriarchs of Ctesiphon were Yahbalaha (415-420) and Datisha (421-456).

From among the countries neighboring Armenia, mention should be made of Cappadocia with Caesarea as its capital, where Christianity entered as early as the first century. Tertullian, the famous presbyter of Carthage, knew of the persecutions going on there at the end of the IInd century. In the first half of the IIIrd century the bishops Alexander and Firmilian (bp. in 233) were active there. Alexander during his last days founded the Christian library of Jerusalem; Firmilian held correspondence with all the renowned bishops of his time, among them Cyprian of Carthage. It was at this time that the theological school of Caesarea came into being, the great exponents of which in the IVth century were Basil of Caesarea, Gregory the Theologian, and Gregory of Nyssa, whose works were translated into Armenian in

47. Lazar of Parb, p. 196, Etchmiadzin edition.

48. Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, pp. 8, 9.

49. Müller, Kirchengeschichte, 1892, p. 56. Har-nack, Die Mission, 1902, p. 441 seq., 471.

50. Ararat (periodical), ann. 1868, p. 102.

51. Nöldeke, Die Aufsätze, I. Labourt, Le Christianisme dans l'empire Perse, Paris, 1904.