

The East-Syrian Patriarch: Constructing Identity through a Community Leader

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Summary – The emergence of strong identities within the different Christian currents in the Near and Middle East was a long process that stretched from the fifth century until the seventh or the eighth century, shaping specificities in the Syriac churches. As Michael G. Morony argues, memory was in this process a powerful factor of preservation. Christian religious minorities contributed to the blossoming of their christological position, and consequently forged their autonomy and its characteristics based on their own experience, perception of events and relationships with one another. Each of the competing Churches sought to construct an image of the primate, in a sort of “paternity proceedings”, and this process was one of the main elements which illustrates how these identity and memory have been preserved. The patriarch, in fact, alone represents his community of faith, whose cause and destiny he embodies in a way. Indeed, the great significance of his function, his crucial position within his Church, as well as his public role, explain that he has been at the core of a symbolic imagery, not only his person, but also his attributes and the places where he asserted his authority.

In a study looking at how the specificities of Syriac Churches were shaped, Michael G. Morony pointed out that marked identities within the various Christian movements in the Near and Middle East emerged during a long process stretching from the fifth century until the seventh or eighth century. Remembering and maintaining those identities constituted a powerful means of preservation.¹ Each religious group constructed an image of its independence and its characteristics based on its experience, its perception of events, and its relationship with others.² An essential aspect of this preservation of memory and identity was the construction of an image of the primate—in a “quest for

¹ Morony (2005: 1).

² In Sasanian context, see de Jong (2004).

paternity”—in each of the Churches competing with one another at the time.³ Indeed, in himself, the patriarch represented his Christological community, embodying, as it were, its cause and its future. The eminence of his position, his internal functions within his Church, and his public role explain why his person was the object of a symbolic rendering, not only in and of itself, but also as regards his attributes and the places where his authority was affirmed.

A NECESSARY POSITIONING WITH REGARD TO POLITICAL AUTHORITIES

One way for the Christian minority to express its identity in Sasanian territory, whether East-Syrian or West-Syrian, was to seek royal recognition and to position itself with respect to the empire’s official authorities, thus enhancing its visibility. While most patriarchs sought to integrate court society and gain influence, they were not an exception. Already in the Jewish community, the *reš galutha* had developed a support network within the circles of power; it was probably further consolidated at the time of Yazdgird I, one of whose spouses was, indeed, the exilarch’s daughter. For many years, research into the position of the exilarchate relied on rabbinical sources. A few studies, including Geoffrey Herman’s recent thesis, have helped to expand our knowledge of the subject, in particular by examining other corpuses of Jewish and Christian sources through comparative methodology.⁴ Marie-Joseph Pierre has also emphasised the extent to which both religious authorities shared similar traditions and claims: the importance of their Davidic lineage, a desire for autonomy as regards cross-border communities, and residence in the empire’s capital as imperial civil servants under the direct surveillance of the king of kings.⁵ Without speaking directly of officialisation, we can in fact suggest a similar status as regards the governmental administration and their respective clergies (priests and bishops on one side, rabbis and Talmudic academies on the other). If we follow G. Herman’s assertions, however, the structure of the exilarchate

³ On the patriarchal function and its historical evolution in the Church of the East, see De Vries (1964) and (1984); Fiey (1967). See also, Hage (2014, repr. 2016). See Detlef–Müller (1969); Macomber (1968); van Esbroeck (1991); Abramowski (2011). The term “Patriarch” is used here in a large way as a synonym for “Catholicos”; concerning the period before the fifth century, we prefer the word “Primate” for the sake of historical coherence.

⁴ Levine (1996); Herman (2012). See also Kalmin (2006); Widengren (1961).

⁵ Ed. and transl. Pierre (1988: 89).

also seems to have been an administrative body embedded in the Sasanian state apparatus, beyond the strict framework of an exclusively religious institution,⁶ unlike the catholicosate. This difference also explains a distinct approach in terms of social and political integration. On the Christian side, the need to be well established at court remained a means of affirming their existence, and the head of the hierarchic government had to impose himself as a special intermediary with the king, to whom he represented his community—just as he would with the caliph later. Ultimately, this situation added a political dimension to the position of the patriarch, who was no longer only, in the Mazdeans' eyes, the religious affairs administrator for a minority, but also an essential player in the social life of a segment of the empire's population.

In this vein, Louis Sako has highlighted the role of East-Syrian patriarchs in diplomatic missions and official delegations, especially between the fifth and seventh centuries: for example, Yahbalaha I, sent to Byzantium in 418; Acacius, sent in 486/487 under Balaš; and Īšō'yahb I, dispatched by Ohrmazd IV in 581 and 587 to the border area in Arzanene to work with the emperor Maurice towards peace negotiations. Īšō'yahb I had already taken part in a diplomatic mission in 546/547 when he was still a teacher at the School of Nisibis. In addition, Īšō'yahb II worked in 630 as an emissary for Queen Borān to update the Roman-Persian peace treaties concluded two years earlier. People close to the catholicos also actively participated in those legations.⁷ The choice of such high-ranking Christian figures can be explained by their command of different languages, and above all by the trust that the Byzantines had in them, a factor that the Sasanians sought to use for their diplomacy, often successfully. More rarely, some diplomatic missions could fail, resulting in political setbacks, which sparked reprisals directed at the primate himself. For example, Īšō'yahb was imprisoned with his whole escort and freed in exchange for a large sum of money.⁸ Other types of missions were also entrusted to them. According to what is written in *The Chronicle of Seert*, we know, for example, that under the reign of Yazdgird I (399–420), the catholicos Mār Aḥai (410–414) was sent by the king to the south-eastern part of the empire to conduct an investigation into the theft of merchandise by pirates operating on the seas between China and India (the second term here understood in the broad sense that it had in Late Antiquity, *i.e.*, the Erythraean Sea from the

⁶ Herman (2012: 11–16).

⁷ On this subject, see the exhaustive presentation in Sako (1985: 59–129). Garsoïan (1973–4). Historical context in Rubin (1986).

⁸ Sako (1985: 102); he mentions John of Ephesus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 38.

Red Sea, including the coasts of Makran and the Persian Gulf, as far as peninsular India). That mission was in reality a very delicate undertaking because the king's own nephew, then governor of the region of Fārs, was implicated in the affair and suspected of theft. The involvement of a royal family member gave this action an eminently diplomatic aspect. Aḥai was therefore entrusted with the task of finding the missing items and the culprit(s), at the risk of pointing the finger at a governor and weakening his position. The Christian Arabic compilers of the *Book of the Tower* also relayed this story. A second account about Aḥai in *The Chronicle of Seert* describes the mediation by the catholicos, who was carrying a “missive from the kings” to the nephew-governor, whom Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā calls Behvār.⁹ The mission is described as being the catholicos's success on behalf of the whole Christian minority. Aḥai's report for Yazdgird increased his credibility with the king and secured him, the hagiographer says, “considerable authority in the empire”.¹⁰

THE OBLIGATIONS OF AN INSTRUMENTAL FIGURE

Such a position generated implicit duties that the catholicos was obliged to perform to preserve his Church's interests in the field. He therefore participated in the social life of the court and was part of the royal retinue. One such duty consisted of following the king in his seasonal travels, when he summered somewhere, and even during his military campaigns—a constraint that had to be maintained later under the Muslim government. In one of his *Letters*, the patriarch Timothy mentions the “king's” order, he says, to go and join him in northern Mesopotamian territory. Responding to the order, he left in a hurry and, he adds, used the public mounts to go more quickly.¹¹ In another missive, he says that the King had left for Baṣra and he intended to join him.¹² During the Sasanian period, this custom seems to have been an obligation under the reign of Khusrō I, who forced the catholicos Ezekiel, in 573, to accompany

⁹ A Middle Persian name that means “best fortress”, see Gignoux – Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2009, n° 106–109 and n° 425, n° 428). Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, *Books of the Mysteries*, Gismondi (ed.) (1897: 15). *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter XCIV, Scher (ed.) (1918: 573 [253]).

¹⁰ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXIX, Scher (ed.) (1918: 324 [212]–325 [213]).

¹¹ *Letter* 48; summary in Bidawid (1956: 37). See Heimgartner (2012).

¹² *Letter* 90; summary in Bidawid (1956: 58).

him to Nisibis and Dara, a theatre for Roman-Persian hostilities at that time.¹³ It can be noted that the aim of this tacit convention, based on mutual respect between the Christian elites and the Mazdean authorities, was to help to preserve a socio-political equilibrium and the stability of the State.¹⁴ A passage in the *Chronicle of Huzistān* (also known as the “Guidi Anonymous”) about a tragic political event during the reign of Khusrō II shows rather well these shared interests: when there was a revolt in the city of Nisibis, the king dispatched a local governor, the *naxwāragān*,¹⁵ to suppress the movement with an army and forced the catholicos Mār Sabrišōʿ to join his legate. The role given to Sabrišōʿ is not explained, but the context would suggest that he mediated on behalf of the royal authority. The chronicler explains that “through flattery,” and by relying on the *naxwāragān*’s promise not to punish the population, Sabrišōʿ succeeded in having the city gates opened to the soldiers.

But as soon as he entered, [the legate] went back on his promise and captured and tortured some of them; he looted their homes, destroyed everything that they possessed, and finally had them put to death through all sorts of methods.¹⁶

The army’s use of elephants heightened the disastrous effects. It is clear that the catholicos was—perhaps slightly despite himself—knowingly used as an instrument of royal propaganda to impose a contested power on the inhabitants of Nisibis again. In any case, this episode highlights the numerical importance of the Christian minority in the city, since Mār Sabrišōʿ was probably addressing Christian authorities of the city. It should also be recalled, however, that, despite the influence enjoyed by the catholicos, the patriarchate’s independence was limited as regards the supreme authority, and the catholicos had to be subordinate to the needs of imperial politics in order to preserve his credit for the benefit of his minority community, sometimes against his personal interests.

This aspect is clear in the affair of the double capitation that King Šābuhr II (309–379) demanded from the famous primate Simeon bar Šabbaʿē when a series of large-scale works was launched in a swampy area (probably to the

¹³ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter XXXVI, Scher (ed.) (1950: 193 [101]). ‘Amr ibn Mattai, *The Book of the Tower*, Gismondi (ed.) (1899: 48).

¹⁴ Payne (2015: 23–58). McDonough (2011: 303–305).

¹⁵ On this administrative title, see now Gyselen (2004) and (2019); Gignoux (2004: 41–43).

¹⁶ *The Chronicle of Huzistān*, Syriac text in Guidi (1903: 19); French translation in Jullien, F. (2009, especially p. 166).

South of Ctesiphon or in Mesene) in 339. The king decided to impose a tax on every monk living in a monastery and ordered tax to be doubled for the faithful. As citizens of the empire, the Christians had to show their solidarity by contributing to the sanitation efforts undertaken by the rulers of the country. The event is reported in the *Narratio*, written shortly after the execution of Simeon, in around 341 or 344.¹⁷ Simeon's refusal to comply with these payment demands reflects more a feeling of injustice regarding the discrimination that his community was facing than disloyalty to his king. During the Sasanian period, the religious minorities were sometimes subjected to differentiating measures. In the sixth century, the author of the Syriac *History of Mār Yazd-panāh* used very harsh language against the Mazdeans who were collecting "sin money" from recently converted faithful who had left Zoroastrianism for Christianity—an expression suggesting that the contributions were imposed and limited to a specific social group.¹⁸ The story of Simeon bar Šabba'ē, imprisoned and killed for having tried to shield his community from an excessive decree, became a prototypical role model who served as a literary canvas and source of inspiration for other descriptions, in particular of the catholicos Mār Abba under the reign of Khusrō I. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, Abba also had to face a levy of taxes earmarked for pacification efforts in the region of Bēth-Huzāyē which was agitated at that time because of a rebellion against the royal authority. The king demanded that he levy a tribute from the Christians in Susa, Gundēšābuhr, and the surrounding areas:

Fearing that, if he resisted, what Šābuhr [II] had done to Simeon bar Šabba'ē would happen to him and his people, the catholicos obeyed the king and collected large sums of money, which he presented to him.¹⁹

The author of the *History of Mār Abba*, a close contemporary of the catholicos, never mentions these facts, however. This silence suggests a literary construction of posterior accounts modelled on the situation experienced by Simeon, with a similar taxation context in the two narratives.²⁰ The figure of Mār Abba was thus associated with his illustrious predecessor, depicted in a

¹⁷ *The Life of Simeon Bar Šabba'ē*, Kmosko (ed.) (1907: 805–806). *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter XXVII, Scher (ed.) (1908:300 [90]–301 [91]). For the Syriac text see also Bedjan (1891: 136). See Smith (2014) and Wood (2013).

¹⁸ *The Martyrdom of Mār Yazd-panāh*, § 12, Jullien, F. (2015: 85–86). For the Syriac text, see also Bedjan (1895: 413).

¹⁹ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter XXVII, Scher (ed.) (1919: 163 [71]–164 [72]); see 'Amr ibn Mattai, *The Book of the Tower*, whose text comes from a common source, Gismondi (ed.) (1899: 44).

²⁰ On this subject, see Jullien, Ch. (2015: 114–115).

new paradigm for his community. He was also shown as a guarantor: by using him as a mediator for conciliation with the population, the king openly recognised the catholicos' influence on a considerable proportion of his subjects and sought to associate himself with the Christian elites for political ends.

CONTROL OF THE PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

As a trade-off for presenting the patriarchs at court and allowing their relative influence on the king, official authorities increased their control over the primatial authorities of religious minorities, in particular by means of an increasingly direct interference by the king of kings in ecclesial affairs. This interventionism occurred at the highest level of entities in the hierarchy of the Churches, especially when it was time to renew the patriarchate after the death of a catholicos. Despite a *modus vivendi* of recognition and cooperation between the Christian authorities and the royal power, the advantage always remained on the side of the king who, most of the time, oversaw the election of the new patriarch and validated the representative chosen by the episcopal college. This interference, on top of power-plays by various rival groups, pressure from Miaphysites who were hostile to continuity in the governance of the East-Syrian Church, and the choice of favourite candidates (successful practitioners, rhetoricians, or other prelates with good standing) who were not approved by the episcopal bodies, often resulted in a destabilisation of the Persian Church. The king presided over the validation of the newly elected patriarch and could even designate him, as occurred several times in the case of his Christian doctors whom he wanted to honour by bestowing on them that prestigious status: the catholicos Elišā', the personal doctor of Kawād I, who was invested concurrently with the Persian Church's candidate, causing a schism for 13 years in the first half of the sixth century (from 524 to 537); Joseph (primate from 552 to 566/567, † 570²¹); and Grigor of Kaškar (605–609), chosen by King Khusrō II despite the protestations and refusal of the East-Syrian bishops.²² Similarly, by sometimes refusing to grant the investiture of a catholicos who had just been elected, the sovereign acted as the master of his subjects and imposed his control over a weakened and dependent religious minority. Between 609 and 628, the Miaphysite Gabriel of Singar's influence on Khusrō II led to a vacancy in the catholicosate for nearly twenty years.

²¹ For the chronology and datation, see van Rompay (1999–2000: col. 174).

²² *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXXX, Scher (ed.) (1919: 521 [201]–523 [203]).

THE PATRIARCH, DEFENDER OF HIS COMMUNITY

Some Syriac historiographers built the image of the catholicos as a representative and defender of his community.

THE EXAMPLE OF SABRĪŠŌʿ OF LAŠŌM

In this connection, the author of the *Chronicle of Huzistān* offers a particularly significant illustration through the relationship between Mār Sabrīšōʿ and King Khusrō II. The portrait that emerges is one of a figure of authority. A demanding monk, a rigorous ascetic, and a man of moral rectitude devoid of personal ambition, Sabrīšōʿ was elected to the catholicosate in 596. His life story is known to us thanks to an account written by Petros, a monk from the famous monastery of Bēth-ʿAbē in Marga, and through the *Chronicle of Seert*.²³ Educated at the School of Nisibis, he chose monastic life in Bēth-Qardū, Cordouene, where he spent nearly ten years in a monastery before living as a hermit for a while. Noticed by the catholicos Mār Īšōʿyahb I, he was consecrated bishop of Lašōm in Bēth-Garmai. His election to the head of the East-Syrian Church owed much to the involvement of political authorities, for Khusrō II himself imposed him on the assembly of metropolitans and elector bishops after a first rejection of his candidature: “It is we [*i.e.*, the king] who shall choose the person that you [*i.e.*, the Christians] need, and we shall give him authority over you”.²⁴ The *Chronicle of Huzistān* explains this favour by the charismatic influence of Sabrīšōʿ over the king after his triumph over the usurper Wahrām Čobīn (Bistam in the *Chronicle of Seert*)²⁵:

It is said that the image of an old man appeared to Khusrō: he seized the bridle of his horse and marched off to war; and when, having returned from the war, he spoke about it to his wife Šīrīn, she told him: “That was Sabrīšōʿ, the bishop of Lašōm”; he kept that in his memory.²⁶

Sabrīšōʿ is presented as the protector and the *tychē* of the royal enterprise, a sort of guarantor of its *virtus* and of victory over the empire’s enemies. This

²³ *The History of Mār Sabrīšōʿ*, Syriac text Bedjan (1895²: 288–331). *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXV–LXXII, Scher (ed.) (1919: 474 [154]–506 [186]). See Tamcke (1988).

²⁴ The circumstances of this election are widely described by the anonymous author, *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXV, Scher (ed.) (1919: 485 [165]).

²⁵ Greatrey – Lieu (2002: 315 n. 10).

²⁶ *The Chronicle of Huzistān*, Syriac text in Guidi (1903: 16); French translation in Jullien, F. (2009: 163).

aspect is emphasised by two details: the old man who personifies wisdom, and the guide obliging the sovereign to “give free rein”. The king’s esteem for Sabrīšōʿ is reported several times. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, Khusrō may even have offered to transport him on his personal horse on the day of his consecration, and, upon his death, had him adorned with luxurious clothing and covered the embalming costs.²⁷ “He was greatly honoured every day by the king and by his two Christian wives, namely Šīrīn the Aramean and Mary the Roman”.²⁸

This situation also increased the visibility of the East-Syrian Christian community in Iranian territory during Sabrīšōʿ’ s governance of the Church of the East, and helped to position the community in court games of influence played by the various Christological groups. Such at-times ambiguous relationships of reciprocal authority and subordination led the author of the *Chronicle of Seert* to put these words in the mouth of Khusrō: “I am your child and this woman [*i.e.*, Šīrīn, the East-Syrian Christian queen] is your daughter”!²⁹ According to the writer, the emperor Maurice also had to demonstrate his deference to the prelate, perhaps with the goal of strengthening the alliance made with Persia. He sent an emissary to Sabrīšōʿ to sketch a portrait of him and to bring back a souvenir (his hat, “bearing the blessing of the saint’s head”), which were placed in the treasure with martyrs’ relics. The emperor, for his part, gave the primate a relic of the Cross.³⁰

DEFINING IDENTITY THROUGH CONFRONTATION

Through such political methods, the Christian minorities sought affirmation as distinct religious groups in an empire where Mazdeism was the official religion. The integration of East-Syrian Christians in the Sasanian Persian social fabric to a certain extent required confrontation with the other Christian groups in the areas of missionary efforts, courtly influence, and dogma. These dissensions were eminently expressed during Christological controversies held in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sasanian Empire, in the presence

²⁷ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXXI, Scher (ed.) (1919: 501 [181]–502 [182]). See Tamcke (1988: 24–25); Jullien, Ch. (2009: 188–190).

²⁸ *The Chronicle of Huzistān*, Syriac text in Guidi (ed.) (1903: 17); French translation in Jullien, F. (2009: 164).

²⁹ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXVII, Scher (ed.) (1919: p. 491 [171]).

³⁰ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXVII, Scher (ed.) (1919: 492 [172]–493 [173]).

of the observing king. In this setting, the sovereign played the role of both arbiter and organiser of the oratorical jousting. While the primary purpose of the debates was to provide distraction for the court, the considerable importance of these encounters should not be underestimated, for their outcome often determined the (temporary) fate of the contending parties. A controversy was a special tool for positioning and defending a religious identity.³¹ In this respect, the East-Syrian patriarch and the great East-Syrian metropolitan appeared as the *palladium*-s for their respective communities, while the Mazdean king consolidated his authority over the Christian minorities through these arranged events. One of the most famous debates took place under Khusrō I, opposing the catholicos Joseph and several renowned East-Syrian polemist, against the well-known missionary Aḥudemmeḥ at the head of the East-Syrian Christians. The debate proceedings were reported by John of Ephesus, taken up by Michael the Syrian and later re-established by Bar ‘Ebrōyō in the thirteenth century.³² The polemist were declared the losers, which likely explains why there is no account of the event in Eastern sources. The internal divisions within the Persian Church also largely contributed to this loss. Joseph, a valued favourite of Khusrō on account of his talent as a doctor, had been imposed by royal decision, and his participation in the debate was in principle a guarantee of protection for his community. However, his own clergy reproached him for his violent behaviour and abuses of authority, and the bishops managed, not without difficulty, to obtain, through the mediation of an influential Nisibean doctor, royal approval to depose him.³³ Following this *disputatio*, the Miaphysite community secured legal recognition enabling its hierarchal structuring. Indeed, Aḥudemmeḥ was later ordained metropolitan of the East by Ja‘qūb Burd‘ono around 559. The importance of politically anchoring these different Christian currents and of promoting authoritative figures to affirm their ecclesial power can clearly be observed. Another factor was the greater legitimisation that one Christological group would

³¹ See Reinink (2009); Jullien (2016).

³² John of Ephesus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, III, Livre VI, § 20, Cureton (ed.) (1853); partially translated by Nau (1909: 8–9). Bar ‘Ebrōyō, *The Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Abbeloos – Lamy (eds.) (1872: II, col. 99–101).

³³ See Fiey (1968: 233). About the story of patriarch Joseph, see *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter XXXII, Scher (ed.) (1911: 176 [84]). Bar ‘Ebrōyō, *The Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Abbeloos – Lamy (eds.) (1877: col. 95–96). ‘Amr ibn Mattai, *The Book of the Tower*, Gismondi (ed.) (1899: 46); Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, *Books of the Mysteries*, Gismondi (ed.) (1897: 24). Brooks (ed.) (1921: 217–218); Brooks (1924: 147).

receive from the royal power. The winning side in such debates could freely organise itself, gain ground from other Christian minorities, and extend its territorial influence by means of authorisations to build new churches and monasteries and to develop educational activities in order to spread its doctrine across the empire. Other court debates took place during the following reign, under the patriarchate of Mār Sabrīšōʿ. Later, during the crucial period when the catholicosial see was vacant, the controversy of 612 was recorded in the synodal acts of the East-Syrian Church.³⁴ There were serious consequences: no election for the primatial see was permitted, some prominent figures in the theological debate were persecuted (e.g., the martyrdom of Mār Giwargis in 615)³⁵; and the Miaphysite side's influence on the court was strengthened through Khusrō II's personal doctor, Gabriel of Singar. Resulting from intercommunity tensions, the controversies also served as a way for the groups who were present to increase their authority with regard to governmental entities. Naturally, decisions to favour one minority over another can also, of course, be explained by the international context of the Roman-Persian conflict. For example, Khusrō II had to support the Miaphysite populations of northern Mesopotamia to have backing for his expansionist policies against the Chalcedonian Byzantines.³⁶

AN ANCHORING FIGURE FOR COMMUNITY UNITY

The catholicos was a special figure that anchored community unity. Several episodes in ecclesial history during the Sasanian dynasty reveal, however, a somewhat porous level of demarcation, with members of the same confession sometimes going from being community members (“us”) to rivals (“them”). One famous such case is that of the influential Gabriel of Singar who, excommunicated by the catholicos Mār Sabrīšōʿ on the grounds of his polygamy,

³⁴ *The Acts of the Synods of the East-Syrian Church*, Chabot (ed.) (1902: 562–580; 580–598, Syriac text and French translation respectively); *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXXXIII, Scher (ed.) (1919: 528 [208]–529 [209]). *The Chronicle of Huzistān*, Syriac text in Guidi (ed.) (1903: 23); French translation Jullien, F. (2009: 170–171). *The History of Giwargis Mihr-Māh-Gušnasp*, Syriac text, Bedjan (ed.) (1895: 517).

³⁵ For the Church of Persia, there has been a causal link between the dispute with Miaphysites before the king Khusrō II in 612 and the martyrdom of Giwargis: see the East-Syrian *Compendium*, Abramowski – Goodman (eds.) (1972: I, p. 150; II, p. 88). For the context, see also Reinink (2009: 189–190).

³⁶ Flusin (1972: 112–114). Reinink (2009: 180 n. 54).

according to the *Chronicle of Huzistān* and *The Chronicle of Seert*, opted for Miaphysite obedience and became a fervent supporter of that doctrinal branch. He appears to have gained the support and protection of Queen Šīrīn, who was grateful to him for the birth of her son and heir to the throne.³⁷ In the province of Fārs, frequent dissidence with regard to the central power offers another example of this porosity, which can be explained in that case by a tradition of opposing the see of Mār Māri. In the seventh century, a new contestation of the patriarch's authority over all ecclesial jurisdictions led, as in Fārs previously, to dissidence in the province of Bēth-Qatrāyē, which was administratively linked with it.³⁸ Such resistance to primatial centralisation was age-old in Iran, dating back to the catholicosate of Pāpā bar 'Aggai during the Nicene period. Although the natural pre-eminence of the see of Kokhē / Seleucia-Ctesiphon had already been recognised in that period, the centrifugal tendencies imposed by the primatial see sparked much contestation from communities concerned about their prerogatives.³⁹ Philip Wood has shown that the history of the bishops of Seleucia, as leaders of the Church of the East, was not linear. Indeed, the emphasis placed on their position seems to be a construction *a posteriori*, reflecting a situation that emerged in the fifth century when the primates forged closer relations with the governing bodies, the king of kings, and the Roman authorities.⁴⁰ Internally, a case of dual governance claimed by two rival catholicos resulted in a long schism between 524 and 537 in the Church of the East. Each catholicos had appointed partisan bishops in the large cities and attracted a network of active independent supporters. The arrival of Mār Abba in 540 put an end to this situation because his personal engagement on the ground, his conciliation, and his open-mindedness helped to soothe tensions and restore the referential nature of the patriarchal

³⁷ *The Chronicle of Huzistān*, Syriac text in Guidi (ed.) (1903: 19); French translation in Jullien, F. (2009: 166–167). *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXIX, Scher (ed.) (1950: 498 [178]; p. 525 [205]). Labourt (1904: 219–221). Nevertheless, it seems that Gabriel of Singar was a Miaphysite before adopting Dyophysite Christology—the most prominent Christian movement for the Sasanian authorities — and then returned to his first religious obedience. The East-Syrian authors are rather partial on Gabriel; J. Labourt is certainly right when he analyses his polygamous practices as an attempt of acculturation to the Persian customs in the environment of the Persian court.

³⁸ Fiey (1969b) and (1970). Ioan (2005); Jullien, F. (2011).

³⁹ See Fiey (1967); Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003a).

⁴⁰ Wood (2012); new edition in Wood (2013).

position.⁴¹ Strongly expressed recognition of this unifying influence can still be found in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the *Book of the Fathers*, which contains a colourful comparison between the different levels of the celestial hierarchy and those of the priesthood (including the minor orders): cherubim, seraphim, and thrones represent patriarchs, metropolitans, and bishops, respectively; then dominions, virtues, and powers are paired with chorepiscopi, periodeutes, and priests; lastly, deacons, subdeacons, and lectors are designated as principalities, archangels, and angels. For each position mentioned, the anonymous author provides a description of its distinctive liturgical garments, and its specific functions and duties within the East-Syrian Church.⁴² It is significant that this text was attributed to the catholicos-martyr Simeon bar Šabba'ē, a paragon of federative authority in his community in many respects.⁴³

CONSTRUCTING AN ARCHETYPICAL IMAGE

The construction of the catholicos figure and the resulting establishment of a pluralistic tradition were the fruit of a long writing process.

DEVELOPING A HAGIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION AS AN EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY

Jack Tannous has recently shown that the Christological identity of various Christian Syriac movements depended on what was read and taught by the authorities of each group within the intellectual centres of knowledge production and the schools of higher learning.⁴⁴ The image of the primate as an expression of the community was first developed through literary output centred on patriarchal successions, which is characteristic of historiographical focalisation on the person of the catholicos. This process probably took place jointly and concurrently with the administrative and legal centralisation of episcopal authority around the primatial see of Kokhē. These collective biographies,

⁴¹ *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter XXV, Scher (ed.) (1950: 147 [55]–152 [60]). 'Amr ibn Mattai, *The Book of the Tower*, Gismondi (ed.) (1899: 42–43); Šalībā ibn Yūḥannā, *Books of the mysteries*, Gimsondi (ed.) (1897: 22–23).

⁴² *The Book of the Fathers*, Vosté: (1940b: 1–38).

⁴³ See Smith (2016); Wiessner (1967).

⁴⁴ Tannous (2010).

arranged in a diachronic order, represent a specific literary genre among the histories of the Church, as attested by, for example, *The Chronicle of Seert* and the *Book of the Tower*, the content of which was partially re-established by the late Christian Arabic authors ‘Amr puis Ṣliba and Māri, and which Philip Wood describes as “patriarchal chronicles”.⁴⁵ As in the *Lives* of Late Antiquity pagan philosophers which inspired them, these biographies, written in circles close to the catholicos government, were organised chronologically to underscore the continuity of transmission, apostolic and episcopal succession, and ultimately the history of a community. Defining an identity thus entailed a new appreciation for the history of the religious minority in question and hence the view of their history that Christians wanted to convey. In this sense, the narration (in its silences, choices, subjective descriptions, and scriptural aspirations) played a significant role in constructing this identity. It should be remembered, however, that the intent of writing these “patriarchal annals” was above all to produce a collective hagiography, which explains the repetitions and similarities, the tendency to abbreviate, and the recurring introductory elements in each biographical account.⁴⁶ These techniques underline the strong symbolism of the catholicos figure, erected as an allegorical representation or even a lasting archetype for his community through the ages.

In this connection, East-Syrian Christians, in order to establish themselves as a distinct group, developed an apostolic tradition around the person of the patriarch, who had become a shared reference and a federative figure for the community. The aim was to strengthen the central authority at a time of slackening discipline under the influence of anti-hierarchical Messalianism and social pressure from Persian customs; uncertainty and the questioning of dyophysite faith, arising from successful preaching by Christianising religious groups such as the Manicheans, Marcionists, and Bardesanists, and from the active proselytism of Miaphysite missionaries in the Sasanian Empire after the edicts expelling them from Byzantine territory under the emperor Justin I.

The East-Syrian Church thus claimed two illustrious legacies, one apostolic, and the other—which can also be found in the West-Syrian tradition—martyrological. The apostolic legacy is pluralistic. The Christian communities

⁴⁵ *The Chronicle of Seert*, Scher (ed.) (1908–1919); ‘Amr ibn Mattai, *The Book of the Tower*, Gismondi (ed.) (1899) and Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, *Books of the Mysteries*, Gismondi (ed.) (1897). On this topic and collective biographies, see Cox Miller (2000); Becker (2006: 110–112). See Delehaye (1921); Wood (2013: 66–68).

⁴⁶ Debić (2010: 46–50).

of the Persian Empire first of all claimed the evangelist Mār Māri, regarded as one of Christ's seventy disciples.⁴⁷ His *Acts*, probably written at the end of the Sasanian period in the first half of the seventh century, tend to legitimise the ancientness of the patriarchal church in Kokhē, a southern district of Ctesiphon. Traces of pagan cults, as well as a description of Hellenistic civic institutions in Seleucia, the Seleucid city, reveal the use and incorporation of narrative elements that predate the time of writing.⁴⁸ This story, featuring an apostolic itinerary, effectively helped to construct the identity of the East-Syrian Christian minority. Textual analysis has shown the importance of rewritings and the intentions of the scribe, keen to record the ecclesial concerns of his Church at the time of writing, in particular the missionary successes of the Manicheans, and Marcionists, and the anti-trinity affirmations of Christianising groups.⁴⁹ In their reconstruction of the past, the acts thus reflect the special interests of the community at that time, and Mār Māri emerges as an emblematic figure for a community that promoted a cult of him. The use of a sacred history explaining the foundations of the patriarchal see and the monastery of Dorqonie, which housed Māri's relics, facilitated the development of an apostolic heritage that was distinct from that of the large missionary centres in the East. The East-Syrian Church was indebted to those centres, in particular Edessa in Osroene, the cradle of Mesopotamian evangelisation.⁵⁰

An effort to reclaim the Edessan tradition is even more obvious in the case of the missionary 'Aggai. This process is nonetheless late among Syriac authors, dating from after the tenth century. Elijah of Damascus, Solomon of Baṣra, as well as Bar 'Ebrōyō and 'Abdīšō' of Nisibis, often mention him together with Māri among the seventy disciples, the first evangelists from the Mesopotamian East. A reading of their accounts suggests that 'Aggai may have received an immense territory with poorly defined boundaries, corresponding to the outer edges of the Iranian Empire (the northern reaches of Media and Gilān, the frontiers of India, among other areas).⁵¹ Consistently

⁴⁷ Lc 10, 1. See Metzger (1968). *The Actes of Mār Māri*, § 29, Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c: 40–41; 45–46, Syriac text and French translation respectively). Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c: 24–26).

⁴⁸ Cumont (1893); Briquel Chatonnet – Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2001).

⁴⁹ Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c). For the construction of identity defining community in the East-Syrian milieu, see especially van Ginkel (2005).

⁵⁰ See Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003b).

⁵¹ Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2002: 73–75).

presented as a disciple of Addai of Edessa, ‘Aggai appears as an intermediary between his mentor and Māri.

The other apostolic figure claimed by the Persian Church in its quest for primatial origins is the apostle Thomas. The *Acts of Mār Māri* mention him as a missionary from the province of Fārs (§ 32).⁵² In-depth analysis of the itineraries and journeys that diverse literary traditions associated with him reveal that this saint remained the core figure for Christians in northern Mesopotamia.⁵³ Indeed, Thomas-related traditions were used as foundational material for the first communities in those regions. Beginning with Eusebius and Rufinus of Aquilea, authors have presented Thomas as being first the evangelist of the Parthians, and then, after the apocryphal acts of the apostle, of India. Mediaeval traditions, in particular Greek and Latin, were instrumental in extending his missionary zone to the whole East. An apostle from the eastern regions of the Euphrates where Christianity was starting to take root, he was hence from the Iranian Empire, including the dioceses of north-western India under the administration of the mother-Church of Persia. The role of the city of Edessa was, there too, essential in propagating the cult of Thomas. It is known that his relics were claimed to be there from the beginning of the third century, and that his acts were written there during the same period. The *Doctrine of Addai*, a foundational text for the Christian community in Edessa, is linked to Thomas, thought to be the one who sent the missionary Addai.⁵⁴ The spread of the cult of Saint Thomas, especially into areas where the Persians had developed their political and economic clout, constituted an extension of the city’s influence. Furthermore, between the fifth and eighth centuries,⁵⁵ the jurisdictional and institutional dependence of communities in India on the metropolitan of Persia (who appointed the bishops), together with the primate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, also explains why the apostle was considered to be a referential figure for the communities of the Sasanian empire. This asserted protection should be understood in the framework of the succession process for the patriarchal see. In this way, by building apostolic fame for itself, Seleucia-

⁵² In his missionary travel, Mār Māri cannot go beyond the Bēth-Huzāyē—there, “the good smell of the apostle Mār Thomas was exhaled,” § 32, Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c: 44, 49, Syriac text and French translation respectively).

⁵³ Poirier (1997); Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2002: 79–110).

⁵⁴ *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*, § 7, Desreumaux (1993: 59). Drijvers (1991).

⁵⁵ Hambye (1977). ‘Abdīšō’ of Nisibis, *Epitome des canons apostoliques*, VIII, 15, translated in Mai (1848: 141). *The Acts of the Synods of the East-Syrian Church*, Chabot (ed.) (1902: 273, 285). See Fiey (1969a: 178–179) and (1970: 33–34).

Ctesiphon assumed a central role in the history of the Christian origins in Babylonia.

Running parallel to these apostolic traditions, and closely linked to the hierarchic and dogmatic independence acquired after the great Christological debates,⁵⁶ the authorities of the East-Syrian Church began to put into writing their perception of the primatial status and to reflect on the origins of the first bishops of the see of Kokhē. Beginning in the sixth century, and with similarities to hagiographical output seeking to justify the position of the primatial see in its sovereignty, so-called “patriarchal” lists were drafted. Their aim was to present the catholicos of a newly independent and autocephalous Church as the uncontested leader by demonstrating a chain of transmitted authority dating back to the time of Christ. Previous holders of the position and first primates were directly linked to people close to Jesus, and were related to his earthly father, Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth. Three predecessors of Pāpā bar ‘Aggai are presented: Abrīs, Ja‘qūb, and Abraham are linked to “the Lord’s brothers” from the gospels, Simon and James of Jerusalem.⁵⁷ Furthermore, they appeared to be mirror reflections of Christ. Indeed, physical resemblance constituted a visible sign among elected bishops in the East. The apostle Thomas, whose name means “twin,” was considered to be the first bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in later lists and especially in Bar ‘Ebrōyō.⁵⁸ In the apocryphal traditions, writers and compilers customarily associated such a reference to twins with a resemblance to Christ.⁵⁹ Such onomastic elements are certainly not unusual in scriptural elaborations about the kinship of the primates of Seleucia with Christ. Aḥadābūhī was considered to be the son of Ja‘qūb, himself presented in the lists as a relative by marriage of James of Jerusalem, whom the anonymous author of the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* says was patterned after Jesus “in life and manner of speaking, as though he were his twin brother, from the same womb; it was as if he saw Jesus in the respect of the lines of his body”.⁶⁰ The Arabic Christians ‘Amr and his successors, and Bar ‘Ebrōyō (who described the last phase in the evolution of the

⁵⁶ Fiey (1967); Brock (1994); Jullien, Ch. (2015: col. 223–225).

⁵⁷ Concerning the “sons of Joseph”: *The Protoevangelium of James* 9, 2; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 2, 1, 2; 3, 11; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7, 93–94; Origen, *Hypotyposes*, fragment 13; *History of Joseph*, 2. See Corluy (1878); Pourkier (1992).

⁵⁸ Bar ‘Ebrōyō, *The Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Abbeloos – Lamy (eds.) (1877: col. 12).

⁵⁹ The theme is well-known and studied; see Kuntzmann (1983); Poirier (1981–1982) and Drijvers (1990a).

⁶⁰ Rendell-Harris (1927: 57–58). I allow myself to refer to Jullien, F. (2003).

patriarchal hagiographical tradition within the East-Syrian Church⁶¹), certainly knew about this tradition. They incorporated it into their scriptural elaborations by making Aḥadābūhī (whose name means “other of his father,” i.e., his father again) into the spitting image of his father Ja‘qūb (himself already presented as a double of James of Jerusalem), and hence of Jesus too. Being “nearest” to Christ, looking like him, and belonging to the close circle of his loved ones (the authorities of the primitive Jerusalemite Church) were all powerful legitimising arguments invoked against detractors professing another Christology.⁶² These apocryphal traditions, used thus to support hegemonic religious politics, were meant to strengthen the new patriarchal role of Kokhē and to affirm the pre-eminence of the Christology professed by the Persian Church over all other Christian theological movements.

THE PROMINENCE OF THE MARTYR CATHOLICOS

Constructing the figure of the primate as a community archetype was also spiritually legitimate because it drew on the celebration of catholicos who died as martyrs in periods of persecution during the Sasanian dynasty and who were held up as exemplary shepherds for the “flock”. This martyrological legacy was seen as all the more glorious because it concerned the first historic primates after Pāpā bar ‘Aggai: Simeon bar Šabba‘ē (329–341/4) and his successors Šāh-dōst (341–343) and Barbašmīn (343–346), executed under Šābuhr II. Like the sages and philosophers whose talents as mediators are lauded in the *Lives*, like biblical role models, the representations of each martyr also highlight another aspect: *theios aner*,⁶³ an embodiment of divine presence in the world and an intermediary for the local community. Most of these shepherds thus died in imitation of Christ’s life, such as Simeon—whose *Martyr*, written in Syriac and known very early to Greek authors such as Sozomen, and then to Armenian authors—states that he was executed on Good Friday on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan.⁶⁴ The repeated re-use of predefined literary

⁶¹ ‘Amr ibn Mattai, *The Book of the Tower*, Gismondi (ed.) (1897: 3–7); Šalībā ibn Yūḥannā, *Books of the Mysteries*, Gismondi (ed.) (1899: 5–6). Bar ‘Ebrōyō, *The Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Abbeloos – Lamy (eds.) (1877: col. 23–26).

⁶² On the patriarchal succession, Coakley (1999); Jullien, F. (2003).

⁶³ Brown (1971); Bieler (1976²). Deléani (1995: 202–203); Smith (2012).

⁶⁴ For a discussion on the date of Simeon’s death, see M. J. Higgins; he suggested the liturgical context of the Feast of the Glorious Cross, September 14th, for the martyrdom, but considered that the date of Good Friday would probably be an extrapolation from the original text,

structures to describe these martyr catholicoi's life events and deeds helps to position them as role models offered to all, examples that mirror the example of Jesus. There is also the case of Confessors of the Faith, sometimes considered martyrs by hagiographical and liturgical posterity in their respective communities. For instance, the *History* of the catholicos Mār Abba (540–552), who, under Khusrō I, died of exhaustion after long periods of imprisonment and exile, concludes with this commemoration: “End of the story of the divine conduct of the martyr saint, our father, Mār Abba, patriarch catholicos”.⁶⁵ Without mentioning his martyrdom, the acts of the synod of his successor, Joseph, held in 554, recall, in laudatory terms, the memory of Mār Abba, “an admirable example for all those who, anywhere, fear the name of the Lord”.⁶⁶ Likewise, on the Syro-orthodox side, the fate of the great metropolitan of the East, Aḥudemmeḥ (559–575), condemned to die of starvation, is sometimes equated to that of a martyr. Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite bestows on him this prestigious status, as does Gregory Bar ʿEbrōyō later, even though Aḥudemmeḥ died in prison as a result of poor incarceration conditions and was decapitated post mortem.⁶⁷ These representations of “martyr” catholicoi, venerated and integrated as such into liturgical expression, contributed to popular memory—a dimension underpinning the criteria for defining an identity beyond the *topoi* inherent in the construction of the ecclesial primate's image.⁶⁸

A SIGNIFICANT SITE OF MEMORY: DŪRA D-QONIE

This process also included choosing a place of historical significance, a site of memory: the monastery-school of Dūra d-Qonie in Bēth-Kusāyē became a centre of catholicosal power alongside Kokhē, the see of the primate in the East. The monastery claimed a tradition going back to Mār Māri. The anonymous author of the *Acts*, probably a monk at that institution, recounts that,

Higgins (1955: 31–35); see also Burgess – Mercier (1999); Peeters (1938) and Drijvers (1990b).

⁶⁵ *The History of Mār Abba*, § 41, Jullien, F. (ed.) (2015: 43, 41, Syriac text and translation respectively).

⁶⁶ *The Acts of the Synods of the East-Syrian Church: Acts of the synod of Mār Joseph*, CHABOT, J.-B., *Synodcion orientale*, Paris, Chabot (ed.) (1902: 96, 353, Syriac text and translation respectively).

⁶⁷ See Assemani (1725: 192–193 n. 3). Bar ʿEbrōyō, *The Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Abbeloos – Lamy (eds.) (1877: col. 99–103).

⁶⁸ See van Ginkel – Murre-van den Berg (2005).

descending the valley of the Tigris, the missionary came to an area of water-courses and canals where he decided to build an oratory on a former site of “idol worship”. Traditionally, the toppling of ancient divinities and the destruction of temples were signs of the conversion of the inhabitants and the imposition of Christianity. In the late Sasanian period (when the *Acts of Mār Māri* were written), while the Christians of Persia periodically suffered persecution by civil and religious Mazdean authorities, this message could help to reassure a weakened minority community. The site of Dūra d-Qonie is described as being “on the edge of the sea,” which withdrew at the command of Māri, modelled like a new Moses or a new Joshua. This richly symbolic description likely implicitly evokes missionary activities in the Baptist community of meridional Babylonia. It is known that there were many Baptists there at the end of the Parthian period and the beginning of the Sasanian period.⁶⁹ The little chapel was, in the end, erected on an inhospitable and swampy site, a choice that ultimately fulfilled a strategy seeking the assimilation of another religious minority regarded as a special foundation of evangelisation.

The legend of Mār Māri, which has a connection to the development of the identity of the Church of the East, began in Dūra d-Qonie. In fact, Dūra was a centre of pilgrimage associated with the saint’s relics.⁷⁰ In the *Acts*, it is where the founding apostle chose his successor; where he established the hierarchic foundations of the Persian Church, built a sanctuary, and delivered his spiritual testament to his disciples. It was also where he died and was buried.⁷¹ His tomb is traditionally located “to the right of the altar” in the large church.⁷² Following J. M. Fiey’s work, there is general agreement that the expression “to the right of the altar” refers to the lateral chapel located to the right of the choir, the usual place of Bēth-sahdē (*martyrium*).⁷³ The concluding account in the *Acts of Māri* provides a certain number of indications showing that the text was read at a ceremony at the saint’s tomb: reference is made to clergy from the monastery, to a spiritual celebration in the presence of the relics, and to a crowd of pilgrims gathered for the occasion, in a prose reminiscent of the solemn benedictions of annual commemorative liturgies. Gradually, however, in

⁶⁹ Cirillo (1984); Thomas (1935); Henrichs – Koenen (1988); Henrichs (1973); Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2002).

⁷⁰ See *The Chronicle of Seert*, chapter LXVIII, Scher (ed.) (1919: 494 [174]).

⁷¹ Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c: 44–45, 50–51, Syriac text and translation respectively).

⁷² See Fiey (1968: 189).

⁷³ Fiey (1986: 187); and Fiey (1963: 100).

the process of centralising authority, initiated under Pāpā, the prerogatives and the aura of Dūra d-Qonie were recovered by the see of Kokhē. The *Acts* reflect as much: the author explains that “the Church of Dūra d-Qonie is mentioned with that of Kokhē because the saint is the one who built it”.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, in the hagiographic design advancing the evangelist, Seleucia-Ctesiphon was still considered to have been Christianised first, before the region of Qonie⁷⁵—a point intended to emphasise a chronological and therefore hierarchic gradation in the foundations. The monastery of Dūra d-Qonie was, moreover, included in the itinerary of the patriarchal investiture ceremony precisely because it had been shaped into a place of acquired significance, and so became an apostolic site of memory. After being anointed in Kokhē, the new elected patriarch would travel in pilgrimage to the tomb of Māri, as the East-Syrian pontifical attested.⁷⁶ The Church of the East emphasised special links of many catholicoi with the scholastic and monastic institution of Dūra. According to the Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, several may have received instruction at the monastery-school, including Aḥai (410–414) and Yahballaha I (415–420), successive primates of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Babai (457–484) may have been baptised there after his conversion from Mazdeism;⁷⁷ Isaac (399–410) may have been buried there. The author of the *Acts of Māri* locates in Dūra the investiture of Pāpā, who was appointed the direct and legitimate successor of Mār Māri, and presented under the title of “leader” (*mdbrn*) of the Church of Kokhē, “who stands at the head of the bishops of the East”.⁷⁸ Thus, despite a policy of re-centring around the see of Kokhē, the sanctuary in Dūra became

⁷⁴ *The Acts of Mār Māri*, § 29. Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c: 41, 46, Syriac text and translation respectively).

⁷⁵ See the indication in the *Acts of Mār Māri*, § 30; cf. §§ 19–26 (Seleucia-Ctesiphon) and §§ 28–30 (Dūra d-Qonie). Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003c: 42; 29–37; 39–43, Syriac text; 46; 34–42; 44–48, translation).

⁷⁶ Cyprian, metropolitan of Nisibis between 740/1 and 766/7, wrote a document for the laying on (or imposition) of hands which would be a revision of the *Pontifical*. About Cyprian, see the *Chronography* of Elias of Nisibis, Delaporte (ed.) (1910: 104, 108, 110), in the years 123, 141 and 150 of the Hegira. Fiey (1977: 73, 75–78, 130, 175). In his *Catalogue of Books*, ‘Abdīšō’ bar Brikha mentions his writings concerning preparation and reception of the sacraments, Assemani (1725: 111); see pp. 111–113. See the 5th chapter of ‘Abdīšō’'s *Ordo iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum* where are presented laws and ordinances concerning the authorities of the East-Syrian Church. Ed. and translation by Vosté (1940a).

⁷⁷ Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā, *Books of the Mysteries*, Gismondi (ed.) (1897: 19). See Wood (2013).

⁷⁸ *The Acts of Mār Māri*, § 33. Jullien, Ch. – Jullien, F. (2003: 44, 50, Syriac text and translation respectively).

associated with the prestigious site of ecclesial governance through the presence of Māri's bones and the establishment of a tradition.

In the Persian society, the positioning of the hierarchic representatives of religious minorities as regards official Mazdean authorities added a political dimension to their functions. For the patriarch of the East-Syrian Church, this absolutely essential aspect entailed his presence at court, participation in diplomatic services and missions, and advice to and mediation with the king in exchange for the preservation of his Church's interests in the field. This role also subjected him to growing interventionism by the Sasanian sovereigns in ecclesial affairs. Between influence and power-plays on the one hand, and persecutions and humiliations on the other hand, the equilibrium of the status quo largely depended on the interpersonal relationships between the Christian elites, in particular their patriarch, and the civil authorities. One result of this situation was the gradual development of an image of the catholicos as the representative and defender of his community. The centralisation and universalising affirmation of his authority resulted from a dual context: socio-political factors leading to a renewal of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction after persecutions in the fourth century, and dogmatic aspects including the empowerment of the institution following the conciliar definitions in the fifth century. From these two contingencies, the role of the catholicos emerged consolidated and strengthened through the development and promotion of a new image of his position and prestigious legacy. The creation of a simultaneously apostolic, hagiographical, and martyrological multiform tradition, rooted in a federative geographical hub, helped to structure the East-Syrian community around the patriarchal figure, who had become the very expression of its identity.

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