



## Abstracts 7th North American Syriac Symposium

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Roby Alencherry, Good Shepherd Major Seminary Kunnoth, Kannur, Kerala

### **The Liturgy of Ramsa (Evening Service) according to the Commentary of Gabriel Qatraya (VII Century)**

The British Library's Syriac collection has among a unique thirteenth-century manuscript (Or3336) that preserves the earliest and most comprehensive liturgical commentary on the East Syriac daily liturgy, written by an early seventh-century author, Gabriel of Qatar. The liturgical commentary of Gabriel of Qatar (CGQ) is distributed in five treatises (*memre*) of uneven length, and each is divided up into chapters.

The content of them are respectively: (1) the weekday Evening Service (*Ramsa*), (2) the weekday Morning Service (*Sapra*), (3) the Evening and Vigil Service of Sunday eve, (4) the Sunday Morning Service, and (5) the Sunday Service of Mysteries. The whole mss contains 230 folios, and more than 200 folios still remain unexplored (studies has been done only on the chapters dealing with the Eucharistic liturgy and *Trisagion*) [S. Brock, "Gabriel of Qatar's Commentary on the Liturgy," *Hugoye: Online Journal of Syriac Studies* 6:2 (2003), pp. 1–13; S. Brock, "The Origins of the *Qanona* 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal' according to Gabriel of Qatar (Early 7<sup>th</sup> Century)," *Harp* 21 (2006), pp. 173–185].

Our paper is a study on the ferial and Sunday Evening Service (*Ramsa*), basing mainly on the first and third *memre* of the commentary. The paper has five sections. (1) At the outset we draw attention to the commentary itself, the author and his milieu. (2) Then, we propose the structure of *Ramsa*, and compare with the present rite. (3) In the third section, we describe the mystagogy attributed to each rite. (4) The celebration of the evening service, with the special rites of lucernarium and incense and are dealt with subsequently. (5) Finally, a theology of *Ramsa* is put forward.

This paper is significant because it is a manuscript study, on the earliest liturgical commentary on *Ramsa*, and the manuscript is the only one of this kind.

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Yury Arzhanov, Ruhr University, Bochum

### **Syriac Reception of Plato's *Republic***

No Syriac translation of any genuine Platonic work has become known thus far, though the name of the Greek philosopher, a number of ideas associated with it and texts that bear it in the

title became an integral part of Syriac literature. However, all three phenomena should be seen as a product of the specific period of time, Late Antiquity and the early Christian era. We are thus faced with an image of Plato based on the Hellenistic wisdom literature, with Platonism characteristic of the monastic ascetic tradition, and with the texts representing these influences. The paper presents some characteristic examples of this phenomenon preserved in the monastic anthology Sinai Syr. 14. These texts were labelled by their first publisher S. Brock as “pseudo-Platonic curiosities.” However, they give us important insights into the genesis and main features of the Syriac image of Plato and his philosophy.

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Abdo Badwi, Université Saint Esprit of Kaslik, Lebanon

### **The Iconographic Hagiography of the Syriac Maronite Church**

Iconography and Hagiography is a twin subject, description of the Saints by words and colours. Where is situated the Syro-Maronite church inside the Christian tradition and its Iconography. The Syro-Maronite Church is a part of the Syriac Churches but it has its own variety in this field.

We can divide this subject in four periods:

1. from the beginning till 10th century or the common heritage with the Eastern Churches especially the Syriac ones.
2. From the 10th century till the Crusaders
3. After 14th century till the Maronite College in Rome
4. 20th century and today

All these periods are treated and illustrated with bibliographic and iconographic document.

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Sharbel Iskandar Bcheiry, Lutheran School of Theology

### **The Unpublished Discourse on the Life of Severus of Antioch, Composed by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, Kyriakos of Takrit (793–817)**

Unpublished Biography of Severious of Antioch, by The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Kiryakos Severious, Patriarch of Antioch, was one of the most important theological figures of the 6th century. In my paper, I would like to present the unpublished biography written in Syriac by Kiryakos, the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, from (793–817), which was discovered in 1975 and remains unpublished. I would like to shed light on the historical importance of this Syriac text regarding not only the Syriac history, but also the Byzantinian Mediterranean history in general.

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Dina Boero, University of Southern California

### **Jacob of Serugh’s “Homily on Symeon’s Beauties”: Stylitism as Monastic Practice**

Both Theodoret of Cyrillus’ “History of the Monks in Syria” (440–444 CE) and the “Syriac Life of Symeon” (473 CE) agree that Symeon was an unruly and rebellious monk during his time

at the Tell ‘Ada monastery. His ascetic practice was disruptive to the communal life of the monastery and presented a danger to his fellow brothers should they wish to imitate him. After Symeon departed from the Tell ‘Ada monastery, his asceticism continued to be radical and individualistic. As Susan Ashbrook Harvey has pointed out, only after he benefited from the mentorship of the periodeutes Mar Bassus and entered into the care of the diocesan structure of the church did Symeon embark upon a productive ascetic career. In this way, both hagiographies are shaped by and promote ecclesiastical interests. Contrary to these earlier representations, Jacob of Serugh (d. 521 CE) portrays Symeon’s ascetic practice as complementary to monastic practice. In Jacob’s representation of stylitism, all ascetic practices are in harmony with one another, each leading to the single purpose and goal of seeking out one’s interiority and becoming closer to God. This representation was part of a wider trend in the late fifth and early sixth centuries to integrate the vocation of stylitism into coenobitic monasticism. It also demonstrates a substantial shift in institutional support for Symeon’s vocation. This presentation takes a close look at a previously unstudied homily by Jacob on Symeon, which I have preliminarily titled “Homily on Symeon’s Beauties,” to show how Jacob re-envisioned stylitism as a monastic practice. First, it briefly introduces the manuscript tradition and contents of this new homily. Second, it illuminates how Jacob presented Symeon’s ascetic achievements as ideal for monks to emulate.

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Thomas A. Carlson, Oklahoma State University

### **Syriac in the Polyglot Medieval Middle East: Digital Tools and the Dissemination of Scholarship across Linguistic Boundaries**

The Syriac language has consistently been written in polyglot environments, from competing with Greek and Persian before 600 BCE, to medieval Arabic and Armenian, to modern Swedish and Malayalam. While some work in Syriac Studies has taken a longitudinal approach to intra-Syriac questions, other scholars have brought a comparative perspective informed by multiple linguistic and religious traditions. Nevertheless, the study of Syriac sources often remains isolated from scholarship on Graeco-Persian antiquity, Islamic Studies, and the modern Middle East. The development of the digital humanities provides Syriacists an opportunity to situate our scholarship more broadly and make it more accessible to scholars in additional fields who ought to consider Syriac sources, but who have bypassed them due to linguistic limitations.

This paper has three goals. First, it explores how seeing Syriac in a polyglot context may broaden the range of questions asked of Syriac sources. While this is true of all periods, this paper focuses on the medieval Middle East, which is largely studied under the rubric of Islamic Studies by Arabists and Persianists with no knowledge of Syriac. Secondly, the paper suggests that this diversity, far from vitiating the importance of Syriac Studies, makes it integrally important to a wider range of fields of study than it has yet informed. Finally, this paper proposes that digital tools, such as [Syraca.org](http://Syraca.org) and the forthcoming Historical Index of the Medieval Middle East (HIMME), are useful sites for the dissemination of Syriac scholarship to a broader scholarly community and public, thus raising the profile of Syriac Studies.

Marika Chachibaia, Tbilisi State University

### **The Syriac Loans in the Oldest Georgian Editions of the Quadripartite**

The text of the oldest Georgian editions of the Quadripartite reveals the relationship and contact with absolutely different types of foreign sources. The Georgian text presents loans from Greek, Syriac and Armenian languages. Despite the quantitative difference of these various linguistic elements, it is hard to determine the final chronological reference. The political and cultural circumstances of Georgia (IV-V c.), the literary data (XI c.) and the data of the text comparison makes us suppose, that the source of the old Georgian edition must have been Greek. Yet how should be explained the existence of Syriac and Armenian elements in the Georgian translation? It is possible that the old Georgian translation, which was based on Greek was compared with the Armenian one, based on the Syriac translation. It is also possible, that the authors of the Georgian translation took into consideration sometimes either the first, or the second or the third source and therefore the oldest Georgian translation was of a comparative character from the very beginning, that is, the authors referred to the Greek, Syriac and Armenian sources to control it and they acquired the acceptable form of their viewpoint from these three sources. Sometimes they did not exactly follow any of these sources and they presented their own, peculiar interpretation of the original. Therefore probably the old Georgian translation might not be the direct taking of some foreign- language Biblical text, but a new edition of the Quadripartite, which is comprehended in its own way and which, on the whole, does not exactly follow either of the texts.

The existence of Syriac lexical units in the Georgian Quadripartite is well known in the scientific literature and it is considered to have entered via Armeniaca. In our report we shall consider the lexical units which either exclude the Armenian way of their entering, or their equivalent is not stated in Armenian yet and therefore they make us suppose they are Syriac loans, which points to the oldest contacts of these peoples.

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J. F. Coakley, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

### **An Early Ḥudra from Turfan**

This paper is an introduction to manuscript Berlin Museum für indische Kunst (MIK) III 45, a manuscript in Syriac recovered in 1905 from the ruins of a Christian monastery in the Turfan oasis in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Province, China. The manuscript has been noticed only briefly in publications since then, but it is now being fully edited and translated as part of the project “The transmission of Christian texts from Turfan” at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. The manuscript and its contents are likely to be of interest in various sub-fields of Syriac studies.

1. *Codicology and palaeography.* MIK III 45 consists of 61 paper folios, datable (as a result of a C<sup>14</sup> test) to 775–875 (at least fifty years before the earliest dated Syriac ms on paper). The script is an East Syriac medial or post-estrangela hand exhibiting some features, both in letter-forms and in the use of diacritical points, that place it on the trajectory of development of the East Syriac script, and at the same time point to a provincial scriptorium.

2. *The liturgy.* The contents of MIK III 45 we are cautiously calling a “liturgical miscellany”;

but it is only the surviving end-part of a much larger manuscript, and that was probably recognizable as a *Hudra*. The end of the annual cycle, the *hudra* proper, containing the variable material for the daily offices and eucharist, is preserved, along with the service for the consecration of a new church and the burial service. For both these texts, as well as for what it contains of the *Hudra*, MIK III 45 is the earliest known witness. It appears to pre-date the “Upper Monastery” recension that lies behind the *textus receptus* of most of the service-books of the Church of the East.

3. *Saints and provenance*. MIK III 45 contains a commemoration of Mart Shir, a Persian queen who became the evangelist of Merv. It is at least possible that this is a pointer to the provenance of the manuscript.

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Coleman Connelly, Harvard University

### **Translation as Tampering: Accusations of Taḥrīf Against Christian Graeco–Arabic Translators**

My paper examines a range of ninth- and tenth-century Arabic authors who allege that contemporary Christian translators of Greek scientific works tamper with these texts. It has long been observed, if little studied, that ‘Abbāsīd-era East Syrian Christian translators like Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq alter or omit elements of the Classical Greek past—such as references to the Greek gods—when translating works of Greek philosophy and science into Arabic via Syriac. In the field of Christian-Muslim relations, there has also been growing interest in the allegations of Christian taḥrīf or falsification of scripture, a notion with Qur’ānic roots according to which the People of the Book are anciently responsible for tampering with the text or interpretation of the Bible. My paper connects these two areas of research for the first time and uncovers accusations against Christian Graeco-Arabic translators like Ḥunayn which redeploy the Qur’ānic language of taḥrīf to suggest that these translators are transmitting a religiously biased or Christianized version of the Classical Greek past.

First, I draw on ninth- and tenth-century works of Christian-Muslim dialogue, particularly those of ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī to suggest that by the ‘Abbāsīd period traditional notions of taḥrīf had expanded to include corrupt scriptural translation on the part of Christians. Next, I show how ‘Abbāsīd authors express a general concern that Christians in general are bad custodians of Greek scientific texts and even tamper with them. Finally, I turn to four accusations of tampering leveled directly at Christian Graeco-Arabic translators, including one which mentions Ḥunayn and other East Syrian Christians by name. Two of these accusations are found in works by al-Jāḥiẓ, a ninth-century contemporary of Ḥunayn’s. A third is found in a tenth-century work by the theologian ‘Abd al-Jabbār. In the fourth testimony, the Christian mathematician and translator Yūḥannā al-Qaṣṣ accuses his fellow translators of Islamizing the Greek past and thus indicates that Christian authors too could level accusations of tampering against the translators. Taken together, these reports indicate that several ‘Abbāsīd intellectuals expressed anxiety about Christians’ privileged control not only over the prophetic past but over the Classical Greek past as well.

Rodrigue Constantin, The Catholic University of America

### **Isaac of Antioch on Fasting**

This paper proposes an English translation of, and a brief commentary on Isaac of Antioch's Mimro "On Fasting." Isaac views fasting chiefly as a source of blessing and a time of moral conversion. He zeroes in on the practice of usury, and urges the fasting Christian to mercifully remove this burden under which the poor are crushed. Isaac also believes fasting to protect his community from the ravages of an imminent, bloody war. Finally, he sternly rebukes the clergy for neglecting their pastoral ministry, and invites all Christians to imitate Christ's humility.

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Maria Conterno, Ghent University

### **Christian Arabic Historiography at the Crossroads between the Byzantine, the Syriac and the Islamic Traditions**

Early Christian Arabic historiographical works are often exploited as sources for factual information by historians of the Medieval Near East, but they are still poorly understood as regards their composition, their sources, and their context of production and fruition. A comprehensive, cross-denominational study of the beginnings of Christian historical writing in Arabic is still among the *desiderata*. The proposed paper will present a project aiming at filling this gap in scholarship. I will focus on one particular objective of the research, which is to define the place of early Christian-Arabic historiography in the history of Late Antique and early Medieval historical writing assessing the influence that other historiographical traditions had upon it.

Three investigation paths are envisaged: the connection between the Melkite universal chronicles (Eutychios' *Annals* and Agapius of Mabbug's *Kitāb al-'unwān*) and the "encyclopedic" trend characterizing both Byzantine and Islamic historiography in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries; the adoption by the East-Syrian Arabic ecclesiastical histories (the "Chronicle of Seert" and the "Mukhtaṣār al-akhbār al-bī'iyya") of the "biographical dimension" that is peculiar to the East-Syrian ecclesiastical histories in Syriac; the indebtedness of Elias of Nisibis' Syriac-Arabic work, with its rigorous annalistic structure, to the Syro-Orthodox chronicles, which perpetuated in the East the model of the Eusebian canons.

The divides between these main trends may prove to be only superficial in the case of Christian Arabic works, and features of them may coexist in the same text. I will support this working hypothesis with examples taken from the above mentioned works, arguing for the porosity of cultural, religious and linguistic barriers.

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Ryann Craig, The Catholic University of America

### **Jacob of Edessa's Response to Islam: The Eucharist and Confessional Identity**

Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), the polymath of the monastery at Qenneshrin, presents some of the

first responses to Islam, capturing daily interactions with the church's new Muslim neighbors. Prior to the church's fascination with positioning Islam in apocalyptic literature, Jacob's writings indicate recognition of something religiously distinct, without sensationalism, interwoven in communal life. Through the lens of the defining practice of the Eucharistic, this study examines what Jacob says with regards to Muslims in the vicinity of the holy elements, drawing on his concern for confessional purity against Chalcedonian adherents, presenting a comparative glimpse regarding Muslim practice and Christian interactions with Muslims.

Situating Jacob of Edessa's response to Islam and particularly assessing his comments with regard to Muslims and the Eucharist requires a methodological framework that is attuned to confessional concerns and the uses of terminology in Jacob's milieu. This paper first looks at confessional concerns among Jacob and his contemporaries, with attention paid to scholarship about defining distinct religious communities in late antiquity and the role of the Eucharist in framing debates. Next, an overview of the terminology available to Jacob is given (including *tayyāyê*, *mhaggrāyê*, *arabāyê*, *hanpê*, and *hereīqâ*), exploring labels used to describe the new Arab rulers and adherents of the faith they brought with them. Analysis of both the vocabulary and Jacob's usage of specific terms will then frame the discussion of Jacob's comments regarding his Muslim neighbors and the Eucharist. By understanding Jacob of Edessa's response to Islam through the evaluation of his comments with regard to Muslims in proximity to the Eucharist, one sees both his steady concern with church purity and his careful attention to the use of Syriac terms.

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Paul Davis, The Catholic University of America

### **The Script of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Its Relationship to Syriac Estrangelo**

It is widely recognized that Christian Palestinian Aramaic [CPA] uses a script that is closely related to Syriac Estrangelo, but a thorough typological explanation of this relationship remains a *desideratum*. Researchers writing on the Aramaic script rarely, if ever, discuss this relationship. Healey states briefly that the CPA script is “a crude version of [Estrangelo] and rather similar to cursive Palmyrene,” (Healey 1990, 49). In recognizing the script as specifically that of CPA (i.e. non-garshunographic), Kiraz slightly expands the connection saying that “[t]he CPA script differs from the Syriac script in a number of ways, but most importantly its unique joining properties: only <d/r> and <z> are right-joining. CPA has an additional grapheme, the inverted <p>,” (Kiraz 2012, 354). Elsewhere, Schulthess asserts that the CPA script remained relatively faithful to Estrangelo, with some awkward stylization. He does present a few typological suggestions concerning some letters of the script, but its relationship to the Syriac remains largely unexplored. Müller-Kessler likewise makes typological observations claiming that both the CPA and the Estrangelo scripts descend from a shared ancient proto-form.

This paper will contribute to this discussion in CPA research by providing an answer to the question: “What are the distinctive features of the CPA script as compared to those of Syriac Estrangelo?” I will examine the typological structures of the CPA script from texts of the early period (5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century), and compare this with the typology of Syriac Estrangelo from both inscriptional and manuscript evidence of a comparable time frame. Based upon this analysis, the way letters are ligatured and the structure of certain letters such as *taw*, *gamal*, and *šade* will

prove to be some of the most distinctive features. In addition, several observations will be made with an eye toward eventually pinpointing a chronology of when the two scripts diverged from their parent script.

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Maria Doerfler, Duke Divinity School

**Bishop and Martyr:  
The Curious Afterlife of Ambrose of Milan in Syriac Legal Literature**

Ambrose of Milan remains one of the most influential figures in Latin Patristic literature: his work as ecclesiastical politician, pro-Nicene polemicist, and champion of monasticism attracted attention in both late antiquity and contemporary scholarship. Indeed, unlike his more famous protégé, Augustine of Hippo, Ambrose's influence even extended beyond the West. A reader of Greek—a rarity among Latin theologians—and intellectual disciple of Origen's, Ambrose incorporated eastern influences into his work, and the Christian East in subsequent centuries amply repaid him the favor of his regard. Severus of Antioch, for example, quotes favorably Ambrose's *On the Holy Spirit*, part of the Milanese bishop's contributions to the Tome of Leo. Nor did Ambrose's afterlife in Syriac sources end there: 'Abdisho' bar Brikha, the 14th century metropolitan of Nisibis, invokes Ambrose prominently and repeatedly in his *Order of Ecclesiastical Decisions*, a canon law handbook for use in ecclesiastical courts. By the time his name appeared in the pages of the *Order*, however, Ambrose's legacy had undergone considerable mutation, expansion, and intertextual development. Bar Brikha hails him not only as bishop of Milan, but also as a Roman lawgiver, a close ally of "the Greek kings," and as a martyr, having died for his faith upon being persecuted by his senatorial contemporaries. The Ambrose presented here naturally bears little resemblance to the powerful and embattled bishop, whose life and work unfolded nearly a millennium before and at thousands' of miles' distance from bar Brikha's own. This paper traces the remarkable journey of a late ancient Latin writer into the ecclesiastical memory of the East Syrian legal tradition.

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Reyhan Durmaz, Brown University

**Saints, Stories and Sanctity between Christianity and Islam:  
Conversion of Najrān to Christianity in the Sīra of Muḥammad**

How does a saint's life cross inter-confessional boundaries? When Muslim historians use Christian sources how do they paraphrase the text and alter the story? This paper traces the transmission of a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Syriac hagiographical text to Islamic historiography by the 8<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. A section in *the History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qenṭos and Priest John of Edessa* was used by Muslim historians to narrate the conversion of Najrān (southwest Arabia) to Christianity, while Paul and John were renamed as Faymiyūn and Ṣāliḥ. The Islamic version of the story is found both in Ibn Ishāq's (d. 768) *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya* (the Biography of the Prophet) and in al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) *Tārīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk* (the History of the Prophets and Kings). With the above questions in mind, in this paper I will analyze the literary transmission of this story, and in the guidance of this analysis I will comment on the dialogue between Christian and Islamic hagiographical traditions during their early encounters,

and on the role of non-Biblical Christian holy men in the formation of the Islamic notion of sanctity.

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Rifaat Ebied, The University of Sydney

### **Quotations from the Works of St. Cyril of Alexandria in Peter of Callinicus's *Magnum Opus*, "Contra Damianum"**

Everybody, or at least everybody who is interested in reading about the controversy between Peter of Callinicus the "miaphysite" patriarch of Antioch (581–591) and Damian (578–605) his counterpart and spiritual superior of Alexandria, will know that they fell out and that the contestants, who were in dispute about the faith, fell out over the doctrine of the Trinity. Damian accused his critic (Peter) of Tritheist sympathies. Peter, in turn, put together his *magnum opus: Contra Damianum* in which he rebuts the thesis defended by Damian in his refutation of the Tritheists, that the characteristic properties of the divine persons, i.e. fatherhood, sonship and procession are the hypostases themselves. A critical edition of this important work was prepared by Ebied, Van Roey and Wickham and was published by Brepols in the "Corpus Christianorum: Series Graeca," vols. 29, 32, 35 and 54 (1994–2003).

In his *magnum opus*, Peter rebuts his opponent, Damian, by appealing to patristic proof-texts, patristic theology in order to advance his arguments and augment his thesis. To this end, he employs a large number of patristic quotations from the works of many Church Fathers, e.g. Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Cyril of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Severus of Antioch.

What this work reveals is that the patristic doctrine of the Trinity inherited by Peter and Damian alike was, if not actually inconsistent, at least expressed in various and genuinely puzzling ways.

The purpose of this paper is to identify, enlist and reproduce (together with an English translation and commentary) the numerous seminal quotations, in their Syriac dressing, from the various works of St. Cyril of Alexandria, which are contained in Peter of Callinicus's *magnum opus*, "Contra Damianum."

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Joshua Falconer, The Catholic University of America

### **Poetics of Desire in Ephrem's *Madrāšê* on Fasting**

In his *madrāšê* cycle on the forty-day fast, Ephrem uses a number of poetic devices in order to reveal the hidden desirability of fasting, including parallelism, paradox, and paronomasia. The purpose of this paper is to point out how Ephrem's teaching on the nature of human desire in the context of fasting may be more fully appreciated by an encounter with these formal elements.

By all appearances, fasting renders one hungry, thirsty, tired, frail, dim, insipid, and infirm. Why should anyone find such a practice desirable? Without negating any of the goodness that life has to offer, Ephrem responds that habitual periods of fasting can help bring about all that is most desirable in the deepest parts of the human experience, including health, keen insight, beauty, satisfaction, refined taste, strength, a greater capacity of free will, and genuine happiness. The Church who overcomes in the fast not only finds her own desires fulfilled but also becomes

desirable to the Firstborn in the fast, who was first to overcome the Avaricious One.

To illustrate these points, Ephrem draws on many examples from scripture, woven together with a deft range of rhetorical devices in his poetry. Through syntactic parallelism, phrases are further developed, colored, or subverted by their relation to other phrases. One example of this is chiasmic parallelism, used to show how fasting can be a source of joy or bitterness depending on whether one recognizes it as a hidden gift and approaches it with joy in the heart (*Ieiun.* IX.2). To support his view that fasting is a source of healing, he uses phonetic paronomasia, or puns, to suggest hidden connections in one word to another, such as the similarity in the sound of *šawmê* = fasts, and *sammê* = medicines (*Ieiun.* X. stanzas 3 and 6). We will review a number of related formal aspects to see how Ephrem presents his vision of desire in the forty-day fast.

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Emanuel Fiano, Duke University

### **The Theological Legacy of Eustathius of Antioch: A Case Study in Late Ancient Syrian Christian Intellectual Traditions**

This paper focuses on the theological views of Eustathius of Antioch, one of the central figures of the so-called “anti-Arian” camp in the early phases of the fourth-century Trinitarian controversies. It examines their place in the history of Syrian Christianity through three subsequent movements. The paper first studies the theology of the nineteen Syriac fragments of Eustathius (ed. and transl. L. Van Rompay) treated as authentic by J.H. Declerck in his 2002 edition of Eustathius’ extant works. In doing so, it reassesses the question of their authenticity and points out their specific contributions to our understanding of Eustathius’ conception of Christ. Second, in line with the suggestions made by scholars such as R.V. Sellers, M. Simonetti, and P. de Navascués, the paper offers a comparative analysis of the theological views of Eustathius (as they emerge from the fragments and from his homily *De Engastrimytho contra Origenem*) and those of Paul of Samosata. While identifying and expounding elements of commonality, it submits to the scrutiny of current methodological reflection in the field of intellectual history the notion of an unbroken line of continuity supposedly sustaining an anti-Origenist Antiochene ecclesiastical party between the mid-III and the mid-IV century. In this connection, it clarifies some aspects of the relations between Syrian “monarchianism” and “pro-Niceneism,” keeping as a theoretical reference framework the work of L. Ayres on fourth-century Trinitarian taxonomies. Third, the paper proposes to utilize Eustathius as a case study for the investigation of the continuity of intellectual traditions in late ancient Syrian Christianity. It does so by prolonging the long-range study of the tradition of which he is considered to be an exponent, to include specific instances of post-Chalcedonian appropriation of his theological legacy by Syriac authors and florilegists on both sides of the Christological rift.

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Philip Michael Forness, Princeton Theological Seminary

### **Asceticism and Christology: Paired Themes in the Letters of Jacob of Serugh**

Asceticism and Christology assume equally prominent places in Jacob of Serugh’s corpus of letters. Previous scholarship has emphasized their Christological content; only recently have they

received any attention for their contribution to ascetic thought. But the content and transmission of these letters calls for an approach that balances Jacob's ascetic concerns with his expressions of Christology. This presentation offers two constructive approaches to this task.

First, individual letters exhibit connections between these two topics. Jacob's correspondence with the monastery of Mar Bassus, for example, evidences his direct engagement in Christological controversies. Yet within Jacob connects his exposition of Christology to ascetic practice. The recurrence of such connections suggests that a relationship between Christology and asceticism was assumed. Attention to these connections provides one means of analyzing the pairing of these topics in his epistolary corpus.

Second, the manuscript transmission of the letters suggests how medieval reading communities understood the relationship between asceticism and Christology. Two seventh-century collections (BL Add. 14587 and 17163) intersperse letters on ascetic concerns among letters related to Christology. Marginal notes offer glimpses into the way that scribes thought these texts might be read. Two fifteenth-century manuscripts (Harvard University, Houghton Library, Syr. 108, folder 18, and CFMM 420) contain a text called "The Creed of Mar Jacob." This Christologically focused text has recently been identified as an independently circulating excerpt from one of Jacob's letters. Both manuscripts consist of monastic anthologies; one includes Jacob's ascetically focused letters. Manuscript evidence offers glimpses at how other readers have navigated these dual emphases.

This presentation offers new horizons for research on Jacob of Serugh's ascetic thought and his Christology. It seeks both to increase our understanding of Jacob as a late antique thinker and to uncover the potential contributions of his letters.

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Jan van Ginkel, VU University Amsterdam

### **Copying the Alexander Romance. Formulaic and Non-Formulaic Elements in East Syrian Colophons of the 18th and 19th Century**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the text of the Syriac version of the so-called Alexander Romance was copied several times. At the moment the existence of 17 manuscripts can be established, 12 of which have been preserved to this day. All of these East Syrian manuscripts are closely linked and ultimately go back to an early 17<sup>th</sup> (?) century Vorlage. In my presentation I want to discuss the—at times elaborate—colophons of these manuscripts as a cluster. Even though they nearly all have different copyists, they are linked because of the (indirect) use of the same Vorlage. The closeness of the colophons in this cluster suggests that the selection of formulas is not just haphazardly, but influenced by the Vorlage as well. Could this also be linked to the contents or the setting of the manuscripts? How and why did the colophon structure within the cluster evolve? Most studies up until now are either discussing one colophon in detail or they mine large numbers of unrelated colophons for socio-historical elements. Hopefully this slightly different approach may give us some additional insights in the East Syrian copying activities of this time.

Todd Godwin, The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies

### **The Syriac and Arabic Translations of the Vita Mar Abae and the Conversion of the Hephthalite Huns to East Syrian Christianity in 549**

Specialist in Middle Iranian, Old Turkic and Middle Chinese studies continue to debate the ethnic identity of the White Huns. From Greek and Syriac Christian sources two things are clear about the crucial question of the White Huns' changing relationship to cultural and civilizational currents stemming from the West and how this impacted the Huns' relationship with the Sasanian Persian Empire (225–651). First, East Syrian Christians, and with leadership under Patriarch Mar Aba I (r. 540–552), were instrumental in the White Huns' conversion to Christianity in the mid sixth century. Second, expansions within the Sasanian, Roman and Turkic empires were aided and abetted simultaneously by the East Syrian church hierarchy's involvement in bringing the White Huns into the Christian fold at this time. This 20 minute conference paper, based on work in the presenter's doctoral dissertation, first presents a close reading of both the Syriac and Arabic versions of the Life of Mar Aba in order to tease out the contours of the four-way dynamic between the East Syrian church on the one hand, and Sasanian, late Roman and Turkic imperial hegemony on the other. The presentation then places this comparative Syriac and Arabic data next to the cutting edge of the scholarship on the White Huns by reading each through the lens of Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority and its use in contemporary Material Culture studies. In doing each of these things the presentation argues that the way in which the East Syrian church became an arm of the late Sasanian state and was preparing itself for autocephalous rule under the Umayyad Arab Empire (661–750) and the Tang Chinese Empire (618–907) simultaneously can be better understood; and as a result, connections between the Church of the East's cultural production in Syriac under the early Abbasids and Chinese materials from the late Tang Empire, and what the author calls the Church of the East's Sasanian Persian *Longue Durée*, become clearer.

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Simcha Gross, Yale University

### **The Sources of the History of 'Abdā damšihā, and the Creation of the Persian Martyr Acts**

In recent years there has been renewed and reinvigorated interest in the Persian Martyr Acts. This renewed interest was sparked, in part, by new methodological assumptions, including a certain amount of productive skepticism about the historicity of these texts, coupled with an interest in what these texts were meant to *do*. Scholars have begun focusing on the construction of these narratives, not only to question their historicity but in order to recognize the ideologies and identity claims that motivated their composition.

The *History of 'Abdā damšihā*, or *'Abd al-Masīh*, a rich but mostly neglected text, is a particularly striking example of a constructed narrative with, it seems, very little historical veracity. In my paper, I will show that 'Abd al-Masīh is in fact a later reworking of a number of earlier Greek sources from the west of Babylonia, which were creatively used by the author of the *History of 'Abdā damšihā* to construct his own narrative.

By identifying the sources used by the author of *History of 'Abdā damšihā*, we are better able

to recognize the way these sources were refashioned to create a new narrative. On a more basic level, these sources help explain some otherwise strange or inexplicable features in the text. But more importantly, I will argue that the author of the *History of 'Abdā damšihā* crafted his Western source(s) to conform to the genre of what we now call the Persian Martyr Acts. The *History of 'Abdā damšihā* is therefore one of, if not the, earliest recognitions of these texts as a distinct genre or as part of a larger corpus of related texts.

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Mary Hansbury, Philadelphia, PA

### **The Concept of Faith in Isaac the Syrian in the Context of Early Syriac Theology**

Faith is never far from Ephrem's mind. He warns against dispute (*heryanā*), and the investigation (*'uqābā*) and examination (*bṣatā*) of the Arians. But he does not neglect the higher dimensions of faith in an attitude of wonder before the mysteries (*razē*) of salvation history. In the Hymn on Faith 80, he speaks of the life of the soul as depending on faith, what G.Saber calls *âme de notre âme*, or faith as a second soul.

In Philoxenus the doctrine of faith stands at the heart of his theological system. In an article comparing Aphrahat and Philoxenus on faith, A. Lehto brings this out forcefully: "...that Philoxenus goes beyond merely saying that faith can perceive the spiritual world...but that he divinizes faith itself by describing it as a quality of God that God shares with his creatures." Using the trans. of the Discourses (R.Kitchen) and the recent publication of D. Michelson on Philoxenus's Christology, many patterns of faith are able to be individuated.

Then there is the Isaac corpus: Is.I and II, and now my recent trans. of Is.III and V (forthcoming Gorgias Press). One sees the ways he envisages the life of faith: in relation to knowledge (Is.I); the "eye of faith" (Is.II); and many aspects throughout Is.III dedicated to faith. Although Isaac never seems to reach the intensity of faith as "second soul" as in Philoxenus, I feel Isaac has been influenced by him.

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Blake Hartung, Saint Louis University

### **The Significance of Astronomical and Calendrical Theories for Ephrem's Interpretation of the Three Days of Jesus' Death**

Since the origins of the Christian tradition, Christian thinkers have attempted to give an answer to what I call the "three-day problem," an issue that stems from ambiguities in the Gospel accounts: if Jesus died on Friday afternoon and was raised on Sunday morning, how can one say that Jesus was raised after three days?

In his sixth *Hymn on the Crucifixion*, Ephrem offers a particularly creative answer to the three-day problem. Drawing upon his knowledge of astronomy and his convictions about the symbolic witness of the created world, Ephrem argues that the three hours of darkness at the time of Jesus' crucifixion constitute an additional "day." As a result, he is able to posit three days (Friday, added day, Saturday) before the resurrection. Furthermore, he claims that both the solar and the lunar calendars symbolically indicate the addition of this extra night and day into the calendar through their "extra hours" and need for regular intercalation.

In this paper I will first provide some background to the three-day problem itself, comparing Ephrem's answer with those of other early Christian writers. Next, I will interpret Ephrem's chronology of the three days by situating it within the context of late ancient calendars and astronomy. Finally, I will consider Ephrem's interest in this issue. What are the significant theological or symbolic issues that might have led him to devote an entire hymn to this subject?

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Susan Harvey, Brown University

### **“With a Loud Voice”: Women’s Piety and Women’s Places in Jacob of Sarug**

The homilies of Jacob of Sarug (d. 521) provide important evidence for women's liturgical roles in late antiquity, particularly with respect to the Syriac tradition of women's choirs. But they also provide models and paradigms for women's piety in more general terms, as these might have applied to the villages or towns where he preached. In his homilies on biblical stories, for example, Jacob often had occasion to lift biblical women as female role models into the spotlight. This he did not only to offer models for women, but as variations on patterns of virtue that could profitably fit any faithful Christian, male or female. At times Jacob also used such moments to reflect on familiar stations of women's lives: the widow, the mother, the wife. Consideration of such passages can contribute to our knowledge of Jacob's civic congregations, as opposed to his monastic flocks; and can further raise interesting ramifications for late antique social order.

As one would expect of Jacob, such reflection often revisited standard platitudes and stereotypes for the gendered social hierarchy of his times. Yet Jacob's biblical women do not easily fit the standard picture for women's lives that scholars have often presumed, nor that Jacob's homilies seem to presuppose, despite their stereotypical casting. This paper will consider Jacob's homiletic presentations of several of the “lesser” women characters of the Bible: the indebted widow and the Shilumite (=Shunammite) Woman, both from 2 Kings 4, treated in Jacob's Homilies on Elisha (Hom. 116 and Hom. 118); the Canaanite Woman of Matthew 15. 21–28 and Mark 7. 24–30 (Hom. 17); and the Samaritan Woman of John 4.4–42 (Hom. 46).

These presentations were colored by their ritual context, for Jacob's homilies were ritually embedded amongst singing female voices—whether women's choir or the responses of the congregation—providing added dimensions to gendered rhetoric as a tool of moral suasion within homiletic discourse. My paper will argue that these texts carry important suggestions for how we understand women's voices and places in late ancient Syriac society.

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Andrew Hayes, University of St. Thomas

### **Traces of the Qur'ān's Conversation with Philoxenian Christological Arguments**

One of the Qur'ān's most salient criticisms of its Christian opponents is the charge that they say God has adopted a son. This charge is puzzling since none of the Christian groups known to have existed in the Qur'ānic milieu actually makes this claim directly. Starting from existing research that the Christian groups known to the Qur'ān are in fact, the Chalcedonian and anti-

Chalcedonian parties to the sixth and seventh century christological controversies, this paper argues that here too the Qur'ān has their confessional formulae in its sights, albeit that it describes the results of these confessions in terms of the Qur'ān's own revisionist salvation history or "prophetology." The paper collects and explores in a preliminary way the nature and quality of the evidence for this assertion in the works of Philoxenus of Mabbugh. It argues that the Qur'ān's language is indeed adoptionist in the strict sense, and that its particular combination of the adoptionism critique with Christians' supposedly unwarranted claims made for Christ as well as their teachers suggests its familiarity with language characteristic of and uniquely prominent in the writings of Philoxenus of Mabbugh, particularly in his Letter to the Monks of Senoun, and in some of his fragmentary confessions that oppose the council of Chalcedon. The paper concludes with some reflection on the value of the light that Philoxenus' christology might shed on the Qur'ān's historical context, and on contemporary proposals for Christian-Muslim dialogue.

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Kristian Heal, Brigham Young University

### **Syriac Studies—A Lamentable Misnomer?**

The richness of the Syriac language, and Syriac literature, culture and history cannot be denied, and their apparent marginalization is often the subject of laments. "As long as I can remember," said Franz Rosenthal in 1978, "it has always been said that Syriac, the best-attested Aramaic dialect with its large literature and all the important topics it offers for study, is not being accorded the attention it deserves." This paper seeks to examine what this statement meant in 1978 and whether it could be made in 2015 with equal efficacy. In particular, the paper will address the following questions: What was the state of Syriac scholarship in 1978? Where, why and how has Syriac scholarship grown since? How does the new field of "Syriac studies" fit into the academy? Does the development of a field of "Syriac Studies" accidentally marginalize the work done in this field? In other words, is Syriac Studies a lamentable misnomer for scholarship that should be properly situated within other, well established academic disciplines? And finally, in terms of the contemporary academy, how can we describe the "attention [Syriac language, literature, culture and history] deserves"?

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Tala Jarjour, University of Notre Dame

### **The Musical Aesthetics of Religiosity: Barhebraeus's *Ethicon* and Timeless Spiritual Etiquette**

The sections on psalms and correct singing in Barhebraeus's *Ethicon* are not only the oldest record we have of written instruction on chant in the Syriac-speaking church. They are the only one that deals with Syriac musicality in its affective and spiritual dimension before Mor Ephrem I Barsoum's *Scattered Pearls* came about in the twentieth century. In this paper I take a close look at this medieval source and read it from a number of angles. I focus, on the one hand, on connections between aesthetics and spirituality in what many scholars consider among the distinctively mystical works of Barhebraeus's oeuvre, and on the other hand, on the *Ethicon*'s connections to contemporary forms of chant practice and dissemination. In combining a close

reading of the former with an ethnographic analysis of the latter, I trace a connection between aesthetics and spirituality in musical teaching and practice. I argue that the affective nature of the desired experience in musical forms of worship and devotion is not only an inductive component of the medieval teacher's philosophy, but also an essential constituent of today's Syriac Chant that can be traced in elements of urban and monastic musical practices alike.

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Scott Johnson, University of Oklahoma

### **Where Is Syriac Pilgrimage Literature in Late Antiquity? Explaining the Absence of a Genre**

Written from the fourth to ninth centuries, eight individual Holy Land pilgrimage narratives have survived in Latin, and two Greek accounts are extant from the same period. However, there is no evidence of Syriac pilgrimage literature in Late Antiquity. Why is this? Beginning with narratives embedded in saints' Lives (e.g. Peter the Iberian, Abraham of Kashkar, Theodotos of Amid), this paper briefly analyzes their formal characteristics and shows that an inconsistent pattern of narration suggests they were not drawn from a standard repertoire of pilgrimage accounts. The paper next considers material and other evidence of historical pilgrimage (e.g. inscriptions/graffiti, historiography, letters) and concludes that there are no external traces of a pilgrimage genre either, even though it is clear pilgrimage was practiced by literate Syriac Christians (Brock et al. 2006–2007; Palmer 1991; Bitton-Ashkelony 2004; 2010). The paper then discusses how this absence might be explained. First, cross-linguistic influence seems to have occurred less in this literary arena: is this because Syriac-speaking and Latin- or Greek-speaking pilgrims did not mix in the way that monks did? Second, East-Syrian monastic hagiographers from the 9th century (Thomas of Marga and Isho'dnah of Basra) use visits to the West as a common motif, especially for famous monks prior to their donning the habit (Fiey 1969; Teule 1994; Tamcke 2007): was there less impetus to write about pilgrimage among Christian groups originating closer to the Holy Land? Finally, later Syriac travel narratives (e.g. Rabban Sauma, c. 1275) seem to emerge from a developed tradition: if there is no late antique genre of pilgrimage in Syriac, where do such narratives come from? On one hand, the absence of surviving examples does not mean a genre never existed; yet, on the other hand, the meager examples surviving in Greek are possibly evidence of a weak eastern interest in the genre. The extensive Latin texts are indicative of a literary tradition characteristic of the West which perhaps found a limited audience in the late antique East.

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Joel Kalvesmaki, Dumbarton Oaks

### **The Syriac Versions of Evagrius's *Praktikos* and New Digital Approaches to Studying Translations**

The Syriac versions of the writings of Evagrius Ponticus are at the forefront of new avenues of research into the fourth-century monastic theologian. In this communication, I explore the Syriac versions of the highly influential *Praktikos*. Of the three known translations no version has yet been published. I focus especially on BL Add. 14,578, an important witness for other Evagriana syriaca. The manuscript is unusual in that the body of the *Praktikos* is fused with the

*Gnostikos* as a single treatise, and the prefatory letter of the *Praktikos* appears only much later in the manuscript, from a different translator.

I briefly note three particular areas where the translation of the prefatory letter differs in interesting ways from the Greek: geography (preface 1, where geographic locators are explicated in the Syriac), monasticism (throughout the preface monastic vocabulary is inserted in the Syriac), and in broad departures (preface 3, which replaces a quote from John 5:44 with other wording).

These peculiarities, always interesting, stand out against many other passages that are rather faithful to the original Greek. One is challenged to characterize the translation without some qualification, and without impressionistic wording. And one is tempted to look for linguistic patterns that might tell us more about the idiosyncrasies of a given translator.

To service such questions I have been developing a new XML format for text alignments. This format will facilitate alignment of texts in any language, but it is being tested specifically against Syriac translations of Greek texts. I show the alignment format very briefly, emphasizing the potential it has for anyone who studies Syriac translations of Greek to identify translation patterns and passages of interest, and to provide quantifiable nuance to a history of translation that, until now, has been described only in the broadest of subjective strokes.

I conclude with considerations on how the XML format will be used to publish the transcription of the Syriac *Praktikos* in the online reference work *Guide to Evagrius Ponticus*.

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Sandra Keating, Providence College

### **A Brief Examination of the Biblical Sources for the Apology of al-Kindī**

The exchange of letters between the Muslim □Abd Allāh ibn Ismā□īl al-Hāshimī and □Abd al-Masīh ibn Ishāq al-Kindī, the Christian, written at the beginning of the ninth century, is arguably one of the most influential yet under-studied sources for understanding the origins of Muslim-Christian apologetics. As the earliest Christian Arabic source to be translated into Latin in the mid-twelfth century and extensively studied by European scholars, the *Apology* became the foundation for much of what was known in the Western world about Islam until the seventeenth century.

Yet little is known about the origins of the *Apology* and its author(s). Recently, the text has attracted the attention of scholars of Latin and Arabic apologetical literature, and a critical edition is currently being prepared. Among the outstanding characteristics of the text are numerous quotes from the Qur'ān, as well as a host of biblical allusions and quotations. Further study of these quotes may give us some information of the origins of the text. In fact, the text may represent one of the very first attempts to translate Biblical texts useful for Muslim-Christian theological exchange from the Peshittā into Arabic.

This paper will give a brief overview of the limited scholarly work that has already been done, and then examine some key examples of the Peshittā and their Arabic equivalents in the *Apology*. It is hoped through this examination, specifically on variations in the translations, that some light may be shed on the date and origins of the text.

Grigory Kessel, Philipps Universität, Marburg

### **Cataloguing of Syriac Manuscripts in the United States: Status Quaestionis**

Despite an apparent growing interest to the various aspects of Syriac Christianity in the United States in few recent decades, the state of cataloguing of Syriac manuscripts in the American collections is unacceptably poor. For many of the collections the only description available is the brief “Checklist” of James T. Clemons (1966), whereas those collections that have their own catalogues (Harvard University, for example) quite often leave a lot to be desired from the point of view of both the current state of the Syriac studies and the advancement in palaeography and codicology. Needless to say that during the half-century that passed away from the publication of the “Checklist” many new manuscripts have arrived to the country that await for a proper description; on the other hand, some collections seem to disappear and are no longer available. By way of presenting some notable collections and manuscripts the paper will make a strong plea for a new comprehensive catalogue of the Syriac manuscripts in the United States.

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David Kiger, Marquette University

### **The Invisible Silence of God’s Wisdom: The Cosmological Foundations of John the Solitary**

John the Solitary (of Apamea) has a unique and compelling tripartite understanding of the human person. This tripartite division often takes preeminence in discussions about John because of his anthropological division into body, soul, and spirit. While there is certainly merit to approaching John from this perspective, I suggest that the governing principle of John’s anthropology, as evidenced in his theology of prayer, is his understanding of the division of the cosmos into two categories: the seen and the unseen (the visible and the invisible). While this cosmological division is certainly present throughout all of John’s thought, this paper centers on the notion of spirituality, specifically prayer and spiritual progression. The division of the cosmos is fundamental to John’s understanding of progression in the levels of body, soul, and spirit, and it is at the core of nearly all his theological understanding. The division between visible and invisible is central to John’s anthropology allowing the focus of spiritual progress to be an internal process grounded in the wisdom of God implanted in the person at creation. John’s notion of prayer is an example of this cosmological division and shows in a practical way how John envisaged spiritual growth and progress to be an internal matter. In the end, John’s understanding of the cosmos is such that the human person is a microcosm of the reality of being, and this reality is by its very nature spiritually driven.

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George Kiraz, Beth Mardutho: The Syriac Institute

### **The Antioch Bible Project: Status Report**

The Antioch Bible produces a text edition of the Syriac Bible (Peshitta whenever possible)

along with an English translation. The Syriac text is based mostly on the Mosul edition and 7a1 (when the text is absent in Mosul). The text is fully vocalized and dotted with RQ dots following the tradition of the BFBS edition. Proper names are vocalized based on Mashlmonutho ('masora') MSS. The English translation is being made by a team of inter-faith, international scholars. Since 2012, about 15 volumes appeared in print. This paper will give a fuller description of the project, will discuss some of the challenges and will provide a time-frame for the completion of the project.

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Robert Kitchen, Knox–Metropolitan United Church

**A Cloud of Witnesses and a Parrot:  
A New Entry into Isaac of Antioch's Mēmrā on the Parrot**

Despite its notoriety and distinctive icon, Isaac of Antioch's "*Mēmrā* on the Parrot who sang the Trisagion" has received little attention. Michael van Esbroeck's 1996 article is a thorough, yet brief, outline of the content and the significance of its historical resources, but while van Esbroeck presents a few selections in translation, there is no readily available English edition for the lengthy 1068 line poem in 7:7 syllable meter.

By far the longest section of the *mēmrā* is entitled by van Esbroeck, "The Faith of the Fathers as a model," a variation or midrash on the recital of the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11. In early Syriac literature this is not an uncommon exposition: the Ninth *Mēmrā* of the *Book of Steps* is a complex description of a number of Old Testament figures who by faith acted according to God's direction, particularly when their actions were violent and not reflecting a Perfect way of life. Jacob of Sarug plays upon the Hebrews 11 motif in at least four *mēmrē*, some closer to the Biblical model than others. Other early Christian literature, Greek and other, also adopt the motif.

Isaac's section may be read on its own, but it was obviously written in the context of his argument supporting Peter the Fuller's Addition to the Trisagion—"who was crucified for us"—a miaphysite interpolation bitterly accused of theopaschism. The intent here is to demonstrate how Isaac portrayed his selection of Biblical characters to exemplify his interpretation of living in Christian faith in the context of the Addition controversy. Other uses of the Hebrews 11 structure by Syriac authors will be examined to compare the strategic use of certain characters and how they support the author's perspective.

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Michael Lessman, The Catholic University of America

**The Treatise on Unity of Yahya ibn 'Adi:  
Syrian Christian influences on Arabic philosophy**

Hellenic philosophical thought was mediated to the Arab-speaking world by Syrian Christians; by the ninth century, not only had the Syrian Christians translated much of Aristotle into Arabic, but original, philosophical thinking flourished in 'Abbasid Baghdad, finding many avid followers, Arab, Syrian, and Persian, eager to attend the lessons of masters such as Matta Ibn Yunus and Alfarabi. However, far from being uniform, philosophy written in Arabic was also the stage for an interreligious debate centered on God's Unity and Multiplicity. This paper

will analyze the *maqala fii at-tawhid* of Yahya ibn ‘Adi, a Syrian Christian and a foundational thinker for the School of Baghdad, and the method he uses to demonstrate his understanding of the Divine and its attributes, particularly contra al-Kindi and earlier Arabic philosophers. To do so, I will explore the argument found in his *maqala fii at-tawhid* as edited by Samir Khalil and its relation to Ibn ‘Adi’s other shorter tracts edited by Augustin Perier in *Petits Traités Apologétiques de Yahya ben Adi*, which links Aristotelean concepts of the First Mover with the names of the Trinity. Finally, I will show how Ibn ‘Adi’s final position is made with the intent of refuting the ideas found in the first philosophy of al-Kindi’s, wherein is denied the existence of any kind of divine multiplicity. I will argue through this analysis that Syrian Christians not only played a pivotal role in transmitting Aristotle and Plato to the Arabs, but also were crucial in framing the debate, and therefore the dialectic, of future philosophy in the Near East. Yahya ibn ‘Adi, a philosopher and a Syrian Christian writing the first treatise on divine unity in the Muslim world, sets a precedent for the way in which future generations of monotheists in the Near East would use philosophy to deliberate on the nature of God.

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Andrew Litke, The Catholic University of America

### **The Violence of Fresh Blossoms: Breaking and Splitting in Ephrem’s Third Hymn on the Resurrection**

Throughout Ephrem’s paschal hymn cycles, the month of Nisan is a central component of Ephrem’s theology. He uses the meteorological events and botanical phenomena that occur during this season to discuss historical events and make theological assertions. Taking descriptions from only the third cycle of hymns, the *Hymns on the Resurrection*, Nisan is a month of rebirth (4:1) wherein all of creation is reconciled (5:4), rain showers (2:3) bring forth new blossoms (2:8), and commerce is able to commence following the hazardous winter months (2:9). It is clear that Nisan, the “victorious month” (3:1), is a joyous time of redemption. In that month the Israelites were delivered from Egypt (3:1), and received the Law at Sinai (3:2). The Passover was instituted and celebrated every year (2:3; 4:3) in Nisan, and according to Ephrem’s understanding, it is in Nisan that both the Annunciation and Jesus’ death and resurrection took place (4:13). Ephrem’s use of Nisan and the relationship between Easter and Passover have been previously examined in the studies of Rouwhorst and Gribomont. Additionally, this particular hymn has been analyzed with reference to specific themes, such as Ephrem and Judaism (e.g. Shepardson) and the betrothing of God to his people (Brock).

What has not been sufficiently described is the *destructive* side of the new creation that takes place in Nisan, most clearly seen in the third of the *Hymns on the Resurrection*, where we read in 3:8, “In Nisan the calyx split; the flowers and their roses came forth.” Simply put, a destructive split was necessary for the flowers to bloom. In this paper, I will discuss the creative ways that Ephrem uses the language of breaking, splitting, and stretching to describe several theological motifs: the divorce from God’s betrothed, the tearing of the temple veil and subsequent tearing away of the High Priesthood, the expansion of God’s people, and the breaking of Jesus’ body in the eucharist.

Kyle Longworth, The University of Chicago

### **The First Fitna in the Ninth-Century Syriac Chronicle of Dionysius of Telmahre**

Muslim historians recorded the First Islamic Civil War, the First *Fitna*, through strongly partisan lenses aimed at validating or undermining political authorities. Given the sectarian nature of the treatment of the First *Fitna* within Islamic historical writing, the question arises: did Christian chroniclers, specifically Dionysius of Telmahre (d. 845), participate in a similar type of sectarian writing of this event? Answering this question is impeded because Dionysius' chronicle only survives in two later Syriac Chronicles: the twelfth-century chronicle by Michael the Syrian and the anonymously composed *Chronicle 1234*. Narrative that is analogous between the two chronicles certainly represents a vestige of Dionysius. However, for the recording of the First *Fitna*, *Chronicle 1234* contains narrative absent from Michael. This presents a significant problem for deducing Dionysius' interpretation of the First *Fitna*. This paper's methodology is to compare the analogous material in Michael and *Chronicle 1234* in order to determine a coherent partisan perspective of the First *Fitna*, namely an anti-'Uthmānic interpretation. This perspective is then compared with the unique material of *Chronicle 1234* and Islamic historiographical trends. By doing so, it is conclusive that portions of the unique material in *Chronicle 1234* present a contradictory sectarian interpretation and therefore are not original to Dionysius. In conclusion, we are left with a single coherent narrative that reveals Dionysius' effort to introduce political opinions concerning Islamic history just as much as he is concerned with doing so with Christian history. This ultimately sheds light on how Dionysius interpreted Christian and Islamic history not as two distinct worlds, but a part of one grand narrative.

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Adam McCollum, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library

### **A Survey of Syriac–New Persian Textual Contacts**

Connections between Syriac and Persian are well known from the presence of Christians using Syriac in the Sassanian empire, to which the acts of the Persian martyrs, for example, bear witness. On a textual and linguistic level, there are many Iranian loanwords in Syriac, as in earlier Aramaic dialects, and on the Iranian side, there is the famous Middle Persian Psalter and a number of Christian Sogdian texts translated from Syriac. There are also texts in later Iranian, that is, in New Persian, that have some connection with Syriac, either through translation or through the script employed, most famously the so-called Persian Diatessaron. This talk will survey Syriac–New Persian texts, including the presentation of two (very short) hitherto unnoticed Persian texts from manuscripts in Mardin written in Syriac script to be added to those previously known (part of a Psalter, liturgical lines, etc.).

Kathleen McVey, Princeton Theological Seminary

### **Mara bar Serapion's Letter to his Son and Dio Chrysostom's Oration 13 "On Exile"**

Mara bar Serapion's *Letter* to his Son has received renewed attention in recent years. Still there does not seem to be consensus on its date and context. In a recent paper I argued that the famous passage about the "wise king" of the Jews is an interpolation by a later Christian hand and that the original subject of that section of the letter was Palamedes. In its original form the letter might come from a second or early third century rhetorician who was bi-lingual in Greek and Syriac and who was trying his hand at a Syriac version of the rhetoric of the Second Sophistic. As a further exploration of this hypothesis, I propose to examine thematic parallels between Mara's *Letter* and Dio Chrysostom's *Oration* 13 "On Exile"—a speech well-known in antiquity and also to modern students of the Second Sophistic. This literary analysis will be followed by a consideration of the possibility that Mara modeled his *Letter* on Dio's speech. After briefly situating the *Letter* within the earliest surviving evidence of Syriac culture (literary and material), we will be led to reflect, again, briefly, on the place of Syriac culture in the wider world of the Second Sophistic.

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Alessandro Mengozzi, Università degli Studi di Torino

### **Turgame from the Book of Khamis bar Qardahe (Late 13th Century)**

The Book of Khamis is a label term that covers a variety of manuscript collections of poems the majority of which are attributed to Khamis bar Qardahe, active in the last decades of the 13th century, probably a representative member of the East-Syrian community at the court camp of the Il-Khans, and somehow connected with the town of Arbela. Together with his contemporary Gewargis Warda and 'Abdisho' bar Brikha (d. 1318), Khamis is one of the leading East-Syrian figures of the so-called "Syriac Renaissance," as far as poetry and hymnography are concerned.

The present paper will focus on the third section of the Book of Khamis, which contains up to 22 turgāmē, i.e. hymns to be sung before the reading of the Gospel. They exhort the faithful to listen to the reading, often referring explicitly to the name of the evangelist chosen for a given feast. Sometimes, they allude to the content of the Gospel. Thus they constitute a poetic amplification of the rites that prepare the reading of the Gospel. The elaborate metrical forms and rhyme schemes of these hymns are connected with the introduction of Arabic and Persian models into late Syriac poetry, hence in East-Syriac hymnography.

In the manuscripts, the transmission of the third section of the Book of Khamis is rather stable, especially as regards the texts and the order in which they are copied. The degree of internal textual variation is low. Text transmission, formal structures and rhyme patterns of the 22 turgāmē will be described and a number of representative hymns will be presented. Wherever possible, a comparison will be proposed with turgāmē by 'Abdisho' bar Brikha.

David A. Michelson, Vanderbilt University

**“To All Scribes Who May in the Future Encounter this Book...”  
Digital Strategies for a Distant Reading of Syriac Literature**

Jacob of Edessa’s late seventh-century letter to George of Serugh about the craft of writing offers a first-hand account of the transmission history of Syriac texts. Complaints about the lack of standards notwithstanding, the letter reveals that by Jacob’s day the copying of Syriac texts was a well established process with conventions formed over centuries. Indeed, Jacob’s rhetoric shows an awareness of this *long durée*. Not only does Jacob look backward to dismiss neologisms less than a century old, but he also looks forward addressing his letter “to all scribes who may in the future encounter this book.” Taking its cue from Jacob, this paper proposes a new scholarly approach to the long history of Syriac literature.

The diachronic study of large corpora of literature has recently benefited from a variety of new interpretive methods arising from the tools of the digital humanities. This paper investigates the extent (and limits) to which two such digital practices may aid the analysis of Syriac literature. First, the paper weighs the applicability to Syriac manuscripts of Franco Moretti’s hermeneutic of “distant reading.” Second, the paper draws from the work of Charlotte Roueché and the *SAWS Dynamic Library of Wisdom Literatures* to apply semantic web technology to medieval literary citations. Both methods can be applied to the digital corpora of Syriaca.org to reveal new aspects of textual transmission and manuscript production in the Syriac tradition. While Moretti’s “distant reading” was conceived as an alternative to traditional “close reading,” this paper argues that it may be modified to serve as an auxiliary as well. For example, statistical analysis of the survival of certain texts in Syriac, e.g. the *Sentences of Sextus*, can aid us to broaden our understanding of representative reading patterns. Similarly, the digital linking and modeling techniques of the SAWS Library bring into focus the role of excerpts and fragments in the production of Syriac texts. In sum, the paper models one way in which the tools of Syriaca.org can be combined with new strategies for textual and codicological investigation into the *long durée* of Syriac literature.

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Yuliya Minets, The Catholic University of America

**The Interactions in Foreign Languages  
in the Syriac Literature of the 4th–7th Centuries**

The proposed research belongs to the Syriac studies and touches upon the interdisciplinary area at the intersection of socio-linguistics, patristic exegesis, and rhetorical studies. It focuses on one of the less known aspects of the transformation that Christianity underwent in the 4th–7th centuries in the multilingual milieu of the late Ancient Near East. The works of Roger Bagnall, Hannah Cotton, and Fergus Millar provide the important background for this study.

My primary research goals are to examine how the real and imagined situations within which people communicated in different languages were described in the Syriac texts and then to inquire how the chosen strategies depended on the literary, ideological, and historical contexts and agendas of authors. My sources include the major authors of the period (Aphrahat, Ephrem, Jacob of Serug, Narsai, Philoxanus of Mabbug, John of Ephesus, Babai the Great, Isaac of

Nineveh) and anonymous texts representing different genres (hagiography, poetry, theological, historical, and missionary narratives).

I trace the development of the *topos* of *xenolalia*, i.e. the miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages, in the Syriac literature. I am also interested in the situations when one's unexpected command of foreign languages was reported as a sign of demonic powers; when an author emphasized the difference between the language of the characters in the text and the language of the text, and thus created an alienation effect that helped to construct a mental distance between the narrated events, the text as a medium, and the audience; and when the obvious linguistic barriers were ignored in the text, and thus the presence of the "other" was underplayed and the integrity of the Christian universe was highlighted.

Taking into account the growing influence of Christianity as a point of reference for the explanation of the historical reality in Late Antiquity, this study will contribute to a better understanding of the symbolic meaning of languages at that time in the Near East and their contextual use.

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Robert Morehouse, Saint Leo University

### **A Devil in Snake's Clothing: Satan Hidden in Plain Sight in Ephraem of Nisibis**

This paper explores Ephraem of Nisibis' references to the evil one as an active agent in the world from his role within the serpent tempting Eve in the garden down through his effecting the heretical traditions of Ephraem's own time. Ephraem's interpretation of the role of Satan in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 will be compared to his description of the agency of Satan in the world more generally. Particular attention will be given to how Ephraem suggests that Satan is actively involved in trying to weaken the church by raising up heretics.

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Craig Morrison, Pontifical Biblical Institute

### **Did the Dying Jacob in Gen 49:33 Gather His Feet into His Bed (MT) or Stretch Them Out (Peshitta)? An Insight into the Peshitta as a Translation**

The Peshitta translator of Genesis made numerous decisions about how to translate particular Hebrew idioms. Many of these unique Peshitta readings are often classified as "clarifications," though they interpret the Hebrew text more than they clarify it, revealing how the translator understood the Hebrew exemplar behind the Peshitta. In Gen 49:33 the Hebrew text describes the death of Jacob, noting Jacob's final gesture: "he gathered his feet to the bed." Though the phrase is unique in the Hebrew Bible, an accurate Aramaic translation was possible as demonstrated by the translations in the pentateuchal Targums. The Peshitta reads, "he stretched out his feet in the bed," the opposite gesture from what we read in the Hebrew. This paper will explore the meaning of the Syriac expression "to stretch out the feet" in order to uncover a possible reason for the Peshitta translation. What does this translation and others like it reveal about the nature of the Peshitta version of Genesis as a translation of the Hebrew?

Mark Mourachian, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary

**Human Freedom in Ephrem's Outsider Polemics: The Self-Evidential Character of Freewill and an Ontology of Evil in the Broader Context of Ephrem's Theology**

Any general categorization of Ephrem's various polemical writings must hinge, at least in part, on the distinction between those of his adversaries who operate within the limits of the church and those whom he relegates to "outsider" status. In his polemics against the outsiders, questions regarding the reality and efficacy of human freedom loom large. In *Hymns against Heresies* and the *First Discourse to Hypatius* there emerge three principal themes bearing on such questions: the self-evidential character of human freedom, the ontologization of evil, and astral determinism. This paper examines Ephrem's treatment of the first two of those themes, and aims to interpret that treatment in the context of Ephrem's broader theological and anthropological vision. In the texts noted above Ephrem makes various appeals, whether implicitly or explicitly, to natural philosophical and metaphysical concepts (depending on how one defines "metaphysics"): for example, he employs a Stoic conception of names, examines the distinction between bound and unbound natures, and rejects any conception of evil as a substance or subsistent principle. Due partly to the nature of the debates that gave rise to those texts, Ephrem's arguments in them are more a demonstration of the sheer reality of human freedom than a robust account of its essence. As a consequence, the reader might come away with an impoverished view of what Ephrem understood human freedom to be. And so, whatever the merits of the specifically philosophical dimensions of Ephrem's arguments, they show themselves to rely, for their full force, on his protological and eschatological interpretation of human existence and the teleology it entails.

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Yakir Paz, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Re-Dividing the World: Deut. 32:8 and the Apostolic Lottery in the Apocryphal Acts**

The Acts of Thomas and several other of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles open with a description of the division of the world among the twelve Apostles by casting of lots. In this paper I wish to argue that this description is modeled after Deut. 32:8 (in both its masoretic and other versions) which describes the division of the nations by the Most High. There is a long tradition, found also in the works of several Syriac authors, according to which this division was a result of divine lottery. Thus the Apostolic re-division of the world is consciously shaped as a correction to the primordial division. Rather than separate, this division is intended to unite all nations under the true message of Jesus.

Ute Possek, Harvard Divinity School

**“The Mother of Sciences”: Some Reflections on the School of Nisibis**

The School of Nisibis was a preeminent center of learning in the East Syriac church, and it is well known that several leading ecclesiastical figures were associated with it. The School’s *Statutes* and other late antique sources inform us about its organizational features and its history in the late fifth and sixth centuries.

Whereas scholarship on the School has generally emphasized its monastic character, this paper will argue that the “monastic” aspects of the school’s life do not constitute an integral aspect of its institutional self-understanding. Noting parallels between the School of Nisibis and medieval western universities, this paper will posit that the School of Nisibis was not, in fact, a “semi-monastic” foundation, but rather a type of university.

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James Prather, Abilene Christian University

**The Emergence of the Eastern Christian Apocalyptic Genre:  
Theologies of Resistance in the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius**

The decades leading up to the Arab invasions and conquests of the seventh century were full of social, religious, and political turmoil. The conditions for Syriac-speaking Christians under the Arab caliphate were anything but ideal from the very beginning and what little status or privilege they retained was slowly wiped away. In its place came hardship, oppression, and scattered persecution. The Arab caliphate sought to challenge the identity of Christians within their empire and imposed a harsh narrative of Islamic transcendence and victory. Syriac apocalyptic literature of the late seventh and early eighth centuries records some of the earliest Christian responses to Arab conquest and domination. Like their religious forebears, Syriac Christians turned to the genre of apocalypse to understand the present state of the world by examining the past and predicting the future. Through claimed authority from divine revelation and an imaginative retelling of scripture, these authors wrote new texts to reassert identity and status in the face of religious persecution and secular domination. In this paper I will examine the socio-political milieu that produced the Eastern Christian apocalyptic genre, survey a few extant examples, and finally look closely at the earliest and most important exemplar of that genre, *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. The writer of that apocalypse saw a very different vision of reality and in his work proposed a counter-narrative to that of the caliphate. Using a socio-political framework for resistance, I will show that *The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* advocates a response to Arab domination through active resistance.

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Mark Roosien, University of Notre Dame

**Mystagogical Synthesis and Pastoral Concerns  
in the Liturgical Commentary of George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes**

The liturgical commentary of George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes, has often been appraised as

the first synthesis of “Antiochene” and “Alexandrian” mystagogical interpretation in Syriac. In this paper I argue that the commentary is not only a synthesis of those two intellectual trends, but also addresses the pastoral concerns of its time, place and author. The commentary combines two sources: an anonymous Syriac liturgical commentary from the early fifth (revised in the sixth or seventh) century and the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. George’s pastoral concerns can be discovered through a rudimentary source-critical analysis. Whereas George borrows sections from the anonymous Syriac commentary nearly word for word, his modifications of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* as well as his original comments reveal a set of concerns directed toward his provincial context. His non-specialist audience, noted explicitly in his introduction to the work, is also evidenced by George’s reticence to use the highly abstract language of Pseudo-Dionysius, as he chooses often to paraphrase the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* using simpler terms or justify a Dionysian interpretation with added quotations from scripture. George also modifies sections from the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in order to depict a rite presided over by a priest alone rather than a bishop—a likely situation in George’s diocese. Other issues unique to the commentary concern lay liturgical piety, including the question of sin and purity when receiving the eucharist, whether one can be held responsible for experiencing temptation or demon-possession and thus still receive the eucharist, rules concerning genuflection, and trinitarian orthodoxy in liturgical hymnography. Framing these pastoral concerns within the context of George’s life and letters, I offer a new, contextualized reading of the commentary.

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Abdul Massih Saadi, Baylor University

### **A 9th-century Syriac Exegete and Apologist: Moshe Bar Kepha’s Commentary on Luke**

Moshe Bar Kepha, as a churchman, exegete and apologist, lived in the time and place of the most troubled center of the Abbasid Empire, witnessing the consequences of its policies upon the Christian communities. The most daring policy was the Islamization policy of Caliph al-Mutawakkel (d. 861), under which Christianity was not merely assailed as a false faith, but also as a social evil. In addition to paying *Jizyah*, this caliph further humiliated the Christians by imposing on them harsher rules which came to be known as “Omar Conditions” against Christians.

It was in the context of enduring the Islamification policy and in the context of open/receptive relationships among Christians of different traditions that Moshe Bar Kepha ministered, taught, and wrote his Commentary on the Gospel of Luke. In fact, he produced a masterpiece of inclusive (ecumenical) theological approach, and with apologetic tendency responding to Muslims.

Through examples from his *Commentary*, I will expose Bar Kepha’s position on various Christian theological topics, which he presented in a harmonious way, stressing the essential unity among all Christians. At the same time, by means of instructing his Christian community, he responded to Muslims’ challenge to the Christian faith.

Jeanne–Nicole Saint–Laurent, Marquette University

### **In Search of the Children of Awgin: Using Syriaca.org to Map the Relationships of Saints and Their Cults in Syriac Christianity**

Syriaca.org has created two databases pertinent to the study of Syriac saints, one on persons, and the other on lives. This two-volume project is entitled *Gateway to the Syriac Saints*. The first database, *Qadishe*, is organized around Syriac saints as individual entries and is composed of biographical and historical information about them. Entries are tagged according to hagiographic topoi and motifs. The second database, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Syriaca Electronica*, is organized around literary works, specifically Syriac saints lives or *vitae*. This database is a legacy project that we inherited from Fr. Ugo Zanetti and his student Dr. Claude Detienne. Their data contains over 1000 saints' lives from the Syriac tradition along with the *incipit, desinit*, and other parts of these lives. It also contains information on the MSS that contain these lives as well as secondary literature.

In my paper, I will demonstrate the utility of these databases for further research on Syriac hagiography through a case study using the traditions of Mar Awgin. Syriac hagiographic traditions attribute the founding of many monasteries in Northern Mesopotamia and Iraq to disciples of the legendary ascetic, Mar Awgin. Awgin was purported to have lived in the fourth century. His (possibly ninth-century) *Vita* explains that Awgin was a pearl diver from Clysma (in Egypt) who trained at the monastery of Pachomius to learn ascetic practices. He then left Egypt with a group of disciples in order to found monasteries in Mesopotamia. This imaginary link or lineage between the monks of Egypt and the monks of Mesopotamia was set into narrative form through a series of hagiographies of monastic founders who trace their roots to Awgin. Some of these include: Aaron of Serug, Abraham of Beth Sayyare the Penitent, Benjamin, Disciple of Awgin, Dodo, Daniel the Doctor, Mar Eulogius, Mar Ezekiel, Isaiah of Aleppo, and John the Arab. Each of these has an entry in one or both of our databases. I will show how links among these hagiographic traditions (cultic, literary, material, topographic) can be mapped in our database through the use of linked data and the material that we have collected on these holy persons and their lives.

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Tom Schmidt, Yale University

### **Shapur II and the Persecution of Christians: Evidence from Non-Christian Sources**

This paper examines new lines of evidence from non-Christian sources concerning the persecutions of Christians under Shapur II (309–379 CE). The paper first briefly sketches out the most serious objections lodged against the historicity of large-scale Christian persecutions in fourth century Persia, in particular the late date and hagiographical character of the Acts of the Persian Martyrs, the unreliability of historians such as Sozomen, and the relative silence of Aphrahat and Ephrem. Though these substantive points leave large holes in the historical framework undergirding our knowledge of Christian persecution in Persia—even calling into question whether any persecution actually occurred—such gaps may be at least partially filled by utilizing various non-Christian sources such as Ammianus Marcellinus, Al Tabari, Manichaean

sources, the Babylonian Talmud, and the Zoroastrian *Denkard*. These help to build a portrait of how Shapur, his predecessors and his associates dealt with enemies, minorities and religious groups. This image reveals religiously zealous and cruel rulers who were quite willing to slaughter or deport entire peoples to secure their power. Furthermore, such sources specifically mention empire wide persecutions of religious minorities carried out under the Sassanian dynasty, one of which, according to the *Denkard*, was undertaken by Shapur II himself. This narrative not only supports the general theme of widespread persecution presented by the Acts of the Persian Martyrs and ancient Christian historians, but further illuminates the geopolitical and religious landscape which motivated such persecutions.

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Colby A. Scott, The Catholic University of America

### **Mar Jacob of Serugh on the Evil One in the Life of the Monks: The Ephremic Influence on the Second Metrical Homily “On the Singles”**

Sidney Griffith, in his “Mar Jacob of Serug on Monks and Monasticism,” has shown that Jacob of Serugh’s two homilies “On the Singles” draw heavily upon Evagarian themes. The second of these homilies (*Memra* 138) discusses the tempting thoughts of sadness (*karyut lebbā/lupe*) and listlessness (*ma`inutā/akedia*) in distinctly Evagarian language. Moreover, Griffith briefly alluded to “echoes” of Ephrem in Jacob’s discussion of the role of free will in spiritual exercise. However, Ephrem’s influence upon this sermon is far more direct than mere echoes, for Jacob explicitly quotes and thoroughly engages with key passages from Ephrem’s “Second Homily on Reproof” (CSCO 305, Sermo 2). In particular, Jacob’s discussion of the Evil One and his role in the life of the monk is dependent upon Ephrem. The purpose of this paper is to investigate Jacob’s understanding of the interaction between the work of the Evil One and the monk’s free will and how this interaction shapes Jacob’s spiritual guidance. The paper summarizes the imagery employed and the types of action taken by both the Evil One and the Monk. Then, it examines how Ephrem develops these same themes in his spiritual guidance addressed to the entire Church. Both authors employ agonistic *topoi* to describe this interaction. However, these authors use this agonistic imagery to demonstrate that the Evil One is ultimately powerless before humanity’s free will. Thus, the Evil One uses cunning and patient variation of temptation to lay enough traps that a person can choose one that pleases his inclination. For Ephrem, as well as Jacob and Evagrius, the locus of these temptations was thoughts (*ḥušobē/logismoi*). However, unlike Jacob and Evagrius for whom *ḥušobē* are necessarily negative, Ephrem employs *ḥušobē* in strictly neutral contexts.

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Jason Scully, Seton Hall University

### **The Itinerant Mind in Dadisho of Qatar’s Commentary on Abba Isaiah**

This paper is an examination of the little-known and understudied *Commentary on Abba Isaiah*, by Dadisho of Qatar (late seventh-century). In this work, Dadisho develops a notion of the “itinerant mind” which is a creative fusion of two earlier ascetical trajectories. In the first trajectory, as described early on by the *Acts of Thomas*, Pseudo-Clementine *Letters to Virgins*, and, most importantly, the anonymous *Book of Steps*, perfection is tied to physical itinerancy.

For a monk to be perfect, he needs to be free to be itinerant: in practical terms, he needs to be celibate. In the second trajectory, expressed by John the Solitary, perfection is associated with the inward reception of knowledge.

Throughout his commentary, Dadisho manifests a number of signs that he is trying to combine the sometimes incongruous insights of these two earlier ascetical trajectories. For instance, at some points he divides the Christian life into two groups in a manner similar to the division found in the *Book of Steps* (i.e. “perfect” and “upright”), but at other points, he posits a threefold division modeled after John the Solitary’s three degrees.

Dadisho’s most thorough and obvious attempt to combine these two trajectories, however, occurs in his discussion of the concept of itinerancy. Dadisho defines itinerancy as something more than physically wandering on this earth; rather, the real meaning of itinerancy is the ability of the mind to wander into heaven and receive spiritual insights. Dadisho ironically declares that internal itinerancy of mind and spirit depends on “rest” (ܠܥܠܡܐ). However, he teaches that the rest necessary for internal itinerancy is best found, not in external rest, but in external itinerancy. In other words, physical itinerancy enables the mind to find the necessary rest to pursue mental itinerancy. When a monk is not attached to a specific location, he remains free to meditate on heavenly objects.

With this definition of itinerancy, Dadisho preserves the emphasis on itinerancy, so important to the first ascetical trajectory, but he redefines itinerancy as a means by which a person receives knowledge, which is the hallmark of the ascetical trajectory associated with John the Solitary.

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Vince Skemp, St. Catherine University

### **Jerome’s Dependence on Specific Aramaic and Syriac Dialects**

There is some evidence, however meager, that allows one to determine when Jerome is probably dependent on Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, or Syriac respectively. This paper (a) outlines the evidence; (b) explains the problem that arises when Jerome comments on lexemes that he refers to as *syrus*; and (c) provides the methodology for attempting to determine which dialect Jerome is dependent upon in a given instance.

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Kyle Smith, University of Toronto

### **Was There “Religion” in Sasanian Persia?**

For some time, religious studies scholars have argued that “religion,” as the term is commonly used and understood in the twenty-first century, did not exist in antiquity. If religion is to be understood as a genus with many species, then it is, they argue, necessarily a modern and Western concept that developed during the Enlightenment. No one disputes whether ancient peoples worshipped gods, or even understood their own cult practices and holy books to be sacred while characterizing those of others as deviant. Rather, at issue is the question of whether religion, as a category of thought, could have existed without its twin, “secularism.” If secularism was not intelligible as a concept prior to the Enlightenment, then, so the argument goes, neither was religion. But is it the case that there was no broad concept of the secular (and, hence, religion) until modernity?

Focusing on the underutilized sources known as the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs*, this paper will consider several Syriac terms that are often translated into English as “religion” in order to reassess whether “religion” is a term that might appropriately be used in a late antique context. Going beyond a word-level study, this paper will also consider whether it is possible to posit a “religion”/“secularism” divide in pre-modern, Syriac Christianity. For this latter question, the *History of the Blessed Simeon bar Šabba‘e* is instructive. Simeon’s *History* discusses two realms of authority: that of bishops, which is confined to the spiritual realm, and that of the ruling elite, which is restricted to the worldly realm.

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Rami Tanous, University of Toronto

### **The Recasting of Mary’s Encounter with Gabriel: Parallels between Ephrem’s Hymns on the Nativity and Sūrat Maryam**

Numerous Sources recast the encounter between the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel, presented originally in the Gospel of Luke, with the aim of reconceptualizing and reinterpreting it. Among these sources, the Qur’ān represents a unique treatment of this theme. Thus, *Sūrat Maryam* introduces a surprising sexual tone in this encounter: It displays Mary’s fear from the angel’s appearance as she seeks refuge in God asking him if he is God-fearing (Q 19.18), and it also expresses Mary’s defensiveness as she states that she has not been touched by a man, nor was she a “harlot” (Q 19.19). These hints at sexual tension are further explicated in the works of prominent Muslim *mufassirūn* who discuss these verses.

This depiction is very perplexing, particularly in light of the fact that the Qur’ān emphasizes the virginal conception of Jesus in various statements (Q 21.91; 3.47). Therefore, in an endeavor to explain this sexual tone, this paper will examine *Sūrat Maryam*’s portrayal of this encounter in light of certain references in the *Protoevangelium of James*, Ephrem the Syrian’s reinterpretation of this scene in his second *Hymn on the Nativity*, and the general depiction of Mary in other late antique sources. The analysis of these sources will help demonstrating that *Sūrat Maryam* draws upon earlier Christian traditions as it recasts this encounter.

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Jacob Thekeparambil, SEERI, Kottayam, Kerala

### **The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Syriac Liturgical Traditions**

Both the “*Shimo*”—the Book of Common Prayer containing the hymns and prayers for week days, and the “*Penqito*”—the Volumes containing hymns and prayers for Sundays and Feast days, have an imposing number of hymns on parables. These hymns help the faithful to comprehend the teachings of the concerned parables. They are “rhythmic in style and prayerful in subject matter.” Several of them are mere paraphrases of scriptural passages, in rhyme and metre and with easily understandable wordings. Their interpretations, formulated according to the meters and rhythms of the various melodies of Syriac “*octo-echos*” are from the common teachings of the Fathers and are made quite fitting for the liturgical occasions. Such a hymnody constitutes a literary genre by itself, having its own features. Through the example of the hymns on the parable of the “Traveler” from Jerusalem to Jericho and the “Good Samaritan” (Luke 10 33–37), treated mainly on the Fifth Sunday of the “*Sawmo rabo*” (Great Lent of fifty days), I

will be highlighting the main features of such hymnal treatment of the parables and other scriptural passages.

Attention will be given to the hymns on the parable of the Good Samaritan also in the East Syriac Liturgical Tradition. As for the exegesis of the Parable in the hymns, the patristic inspirations, for example, that of Mar Aprem, Jacob of Sarug etc. will be illustrated in this paper.

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Zack Ugolnik, Columbia University

### **Seeing to be Seen: Mirrors and Angels in John of Dalyatha**

“I am practically plural,” the many-eyed Cherubim, Proginoskes, exclaims in L’Engle’s *The Wind in the Door*. Though the Cherubim in John of Dalyatha’s *Letters* and *Homilies* do not appear with many eyes, angels or “Watchers” play an equally important role in John’s inward metaphysical journey. As so does the mirror (*mahzîâtâ*) in the soul, through which such angels are often seen.

Elaborating upon the scholarship of Beulay, Colless, Hansbury and Treiger, I will briefly trace the possible influences upon the eighth-century John of Dalyatha in his use of mirror and angelic imagery. John seems to combine the mirror imagery of Gregory of Nyssa with the tradition of angelic companions in Evagrius, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Pseudo-Macarius with possible traces from Merkavah literature. The illuminated mirror in the heart or soul in the Syriac tradition, according to Beulay and Brock, demonstrates humanity’s creation in the image of God and intimacy with divine light. Yet it also maintains the transcendence of the essence reflected. Or, in John words, unity with divine glory (*šûbhâ*) not divine nature (*kyânâ*). Additionally, Hansbury has pointed to John’s non-systematic treatment of angelic companions. Drawing from these conclusions, I will argue that for John of Dalyatha both the mirror in the soul and the angels met there allow for an interiorized encounter or a “mingling” (*hlt*) between unity and multiplicity. The final vision of the Holy Trinity in John of Dalyatha is not an event of complete union, even at its farthest stages, but an encounter amidst unity. Both a mirror and a choir of angels within the heart express this paradox and the continual shift between seeing and being seen leading to a final stage of “wonder” (*témhâ*). Golitzin’s work on the “Interiorized *Apocalyptic*” and the Syriac *Apocalypse of Daniel* provide a useful model when examining this role of the ascetic body as a microcosm of the cosmos or a temple of internal liturgy. For John, a polished mirror in the heart acts as a threshold through which one can swim in the “spiritual sea” and amidst a choir of celestial beings in the interior heavens praise the divine.

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Lucas Van Rompay, Duke University

### **Lazarus of Beth Qandasa’s Commentary on the Gospel of John (9th cent.) and the Reception of Early Syriac Tradition**

Lazarus’ Commentary is preserved in only one manuscript (ms. BL 14,682). It has not received much scholarly attention and has remained unedited. There are reasons, however, to assume, that the author was a highly educated Syriac Christian intellectual from the region of Edessa in the ninth century. Within the Commentary the author uses and quotes several earlier sources, including John Chrysostom, Ephrem, Jacob of Serug, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and

Pagan prophecies on Christ. The presentation of these sources and a brief analysis of the ways in which they are used will lead to some more general reflections on the reception and rewriting of early Syriac literary tradition in Lazarus' day.

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Erin Walsh, Duke University

### **Comparing Narsai and Jacob of Serug on the Canaanite Woman: Ephrem's Influence between East and West**

Historians of biblical interpretation have paid little attention to the exegetical history of the Canaanite Woman from the Gospel of Matthew (15:21–28) in patristic sources. Jesus' enigmatic exchange with this non-Israelite woman provided preachers and exegetes ample opportunity to explore the motivations and posture proper to the repentant religious subject. The text also raises questions concerning the boundaries between Israelite and non-Israelite that were often explored by exegetes in light of their own concerns about the relationship of Christians and Jews. Within the corpus of Syriac literature, both Narsai and his younger contemporary, Jacob of Serug composed verse homilies on this particular biblical pericope. Narsai and Jacob present the Canaanite Woman as a model for Christian emulation, showing a particular concern for her bold speech. While Jacob's homily exists in an edited form, Narsai's homily on the Canaanite woman (Homily XXXII) has heretofore been unedited and unpublished. I have prepared a critical edition and translation based on two of the four manuscripts containing: the oldest extant manuscript, ms. Diyarbakir 70 and ms. Vat. Syr. 594. The two other manuscripts (ms. M3 and M5) are currently at the Chaldean Patriarchate and inaccessible. The focus of this paper will be a comparison of how Narsai and Jacob follow Ephrem's exegesis of this Gospel passage. While Ephrem has frequently been noted as an inspiration for Jacob's biblical exegesis, less attention has been paid to how Narsai's poetry also reflects Ephrem's pervasive influence on Syriac literature. This project serves to further elucidate Narsai's exegetical practices and sources beyond the common view of his indebtedness to Theodore of Mopsuestia. Attending to this shared exegetical tradition elucidates the places of continuity between the Schools of Edessa and Nisibis while clarifying the distinct contribution of Narsai to the East Syriac tradition.

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James Walters, Princeton Theological Seminary

### **Re-Considering the Compositional Unity of Aphrahat's Demonstrations**

Ever since the discovery and publication of the Syriac text of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, it has been assumed that the twenty-three individual Demonstrations represent the work of a single author and that the dates provided within the text represent the date when these texts were written. Some scholars have raised doubts about the authenticity of individual Demonstrations (most notably Fiey's treatment of Dem. 14), but otherwise the text of the *Demonstrations* is treated as a unified work. Despite this scholarly consensus, however, there are some issues in the reception history of the *Demonstrations* that might suggest a more complex history of composition, collection, and publication. This paper will argue that the *Demonstrations* as they are known in the Syriac tradition were not written as a single, unified work, but rather represent the work of an editor who arranged them as an acrostic and "published" them as a three-volume

work. In order to make this argument, this paper will consider both external evidence, such as Gennadius' list of titles attributed to Jacob of Nisibis and the broader reception history of the *Demonstrations*, as well as internal evidence, including proposed literary seams within the text that may be the result of second hand editorial activity. Finally, in light of this argument, this paper will offer some suggestions for re-considering the task of editing texts and the concept of "authorship" in the early Syriac tradition.

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Lev Weitz, The Catholic University of America

### **Shaping Christian Law in Abbasid Iraq**

Among all the intellectual disciplines that make up the traditions of the Syriac churches, law remains one of the most understudied by scholars. This is so despite the fact that it became a vitally important field in the early Islamic Near East, cultivated with particular vigor by bishops of the Church of the East beginning in the seventh and eighth centuries. The most notable aspect of these jurist-bishops' traditions of Christian communal law was the degree to which they ranged beyond ecclesiastical matters to cover areas of civil law, especially marriage, divorce, and inheritance. As such, the law books and treatises they produced remain important but relatively unknown sources for the social and intellectual history of the medieval Syriac churches. This paper takes up two exemplars of the East Syrian legal tradition, the law books composed by patriarchs Timothy I (r. 780–823) and Išō' bar Nūn (r. 823–828), in order to examine their place in the broader legal culture of the medieval Near East. These texts represent some of the earliest attempts by bishops to comprehensively cover civil in addition to ecclesiastical law. But what were the sources of that civil law? If law was a largely new venture on the part of East Syrian ecclesiastics, from where did they draw its substance? The paper argues that in issuing the rulings on ecclesiastical law, the patriarchs drew from a range of earlier Syriac legal texts. But to create a confessional civil law they adopted and adapted a variety of legal instruments and practices common to other Mesopotamian legal cultures, especially those of the Sasanian state and rabbinic Judaism.

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Ashoor Yousif, University of Toronto

### **The History of Early Abbasid Caliphs (786–842 CE) in Syriac Sources**

In recent decades, more critical readings of Islamic historiography have cautioned against accepting the canonical narratives about the origins of early Islam. Such critiques appreciate the impact of personal, ideological and political factors on Islamic historiographical narratives. As a result, scholars have widened their literary corpora to include the literature of non-Muslim "others" in their study of early Islam. A similar approach, one that relies upon non-Islamic (Syriac) sources on the early Abbasid caliphate (750–950 CE) is still needed. This period was a crucial moment for defining and shaping Islam as a religion, writing the historical narrative of its nascent period, and transforming the Middle East culturally and religiously. In this paper, I discuss the potential benefits of using Syriac sources in studying the early Abbasid caliphate. In so doing, I offer some preliminary conclusions about the role of Syriac historiography in shaping the historical images of that era, and evaluating the historicity of Islamic historiography. I further

underscore the role of Syriac historiography in shedding light on the history of the Christian “others” within the Islamic milieu, whom Muslim historiographers often either neglected or addressed in superficial or/and uninformed ways. To achieve these objectives, I mainly examine how the Syriac Anonymous Chronicle of 1234 narrates the Abbasid caliphate in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.

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### **Workshop on Syriac Pedagogy**

During the first part of this workshop, panelists will present short papers on historical and contemporary aspects of Syriac language instruction. These presentations will be followed by an open discussion. We invite our colleagues to join us and share their insights on methods for teaching Syriac. Topics for conversation may include: experience with available teaching grammars, classroom strategies, an inductive versus a systematic approach, and spiraling the curriculum.