CHRISTIANS IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY IRAQ:
THE CHURCH OF THE EAST AS A
CONCEPTUAL COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Mainstream historical scholarship has largely neglected the social diversity of the medieval Middle East: the vast majority of studies focus on Muslim elites, whether political or religious. Non-Muslim populations have been studied almost exclusively by specialists in the fields of Judaic, Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic studies, often neglecting other populations in the historical context, or by specialists in Islamic studies as dhimmīs from the perspective of Muslim jurists, eliding the distinct experiences of non-Muslims. Yet as late as the sixteenth century Christians were more than a third of the population in northern Iraq. This dissertation examines how one branch of medieval Middle Eastern Christianity, the Church of the East (called “Nestorian” by outsiders), understood the nature of its own community in the fifteenth century. Chapter 1 generalizes Benedict Anderson’s work on nationalism to other associations and analyzes the potentials and pitfalls of the analytic use of “conceptual communities” which correspond to social groups. Two chapters put this community in context. Muslim rulers in Iraq and Diyār Bakr provided diminishing levels of patronage to Christians and increasingly enforced most discriminatory regulations on non-Muslims, but not the ban on church construction. Christian sources record only negative interactions across religious boundaries, but they also imply positive contacts, hinting that peaceful discussions and economic exchange occurred alongside nomadic armies’ pillaging and mob violence. The remaining chapters analyze the conceptual community of the fifteenth-century Church of the East in light of its theology, ritual, hierarchy, and history. The “Nestorian” label for East Syrian theology misrepresents this community’s self-concept, which emphasized worship of the Trinity and a collective relationship with Christ for salvation and present protection. An analysis of communal rituals reveals the textured quality of membership in this community, which was always qualified by an individual’s gender, rank, and
elective participation. Chapter 6 argues that a Mongol-era clericalist reform failed in the post-Mongol instability, forcing this church to adopt hereditary patriarchal succession as an alternate principle of legitimacy. Finally, Syriac sources emphasize the importance of the communal “deep past” rather than recent events for this minority’s self-concept, whether in theology, liturgy, hierarchy, or divine power.
What has been is far off and is very deep.
Who can find it?

-- Ecclesiastes 7:24
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The debts of all kinds which are incurred over the course of writing a dissertation are staggering. Though I could never hope to repay them, it is with pleasure that I recall them here to express my gratitude to the many scholars and many organizations who enabled me to pursue this project. Although there are small islands of order, there is no overarching structure to these remarks.

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The book grant I received from Gorgias Press in the initial stages of my graduate studies enabled me to acquire invaluable reprints of volumes which are now difficult to obtain. Who would have thought I would need all four volumes of a magisterial work of cutting-edge research from the 1720s?

The progression from newly admitted graduate student to post-doctoral researcher is a track, no matter how well trodden, still littered with pitfalls and often poorly marked branches, and I am grateful to Judy Hanson and the staff of the History Department for their navigational advice. In particular, I benefited from the time and advice of Audrey Mainzer and Amy Shortt, followed by that of Reagan Maraghy and Minerva Fanfair, and most recently that of Kristy Novak and Lauren Kane. Their generosity and patience have prospered my research and my career, and they are really the ones who keep the graduate program operational.

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The sources for the medieval Middle East survive in a multitude of languages which shames the most polyglot of modern scholars. In addition to being numerous, these languages are difficult. I am very grateful to Dennis Magary, David Taylor, and Alison Salvesen for instruction in Syriac, to Theo van Lint and Emmanuel Papoutsakis for instruction in Armenian, and to Michael Cook for enduring my self-taught Arabic in his Islamic Studies seminar. An informal Syriac reading group – especially Oded Zinger, Luke Yarbrough, Lev Weitz, Nick Marinides, Phil Forness, and Maria Conterno – looked over parts of my Syriac sources with me, and their suggestions improved my own comprehension. James Pickett and Luke Yarbrough also graciously allowed me to consult them on a few points of Persian.

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Abbreviations

Add. – Additional Manuscript
Ar. – Arabic
b. – bin (Arabic) or bar (Syriac)
Berlin – Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin
BL – British Library
BN – Bibliothèque nationale de France
Bodl. – Bodleian Library, Oxford University
Cambridge – Cambridge University Library
f./ff. – folio(s)
fol. – folio manuscript
ms. / mss. – manuscript(s)
orient. – oriental
p./pp. – page(s)
Pers. – Persian
Princeton – Princeton University Firestone Library
quart. – quarto manuscript
sir. – siriaco
Syr. – Syriac
Trichur – Church of the East Metropolitan’s Library, Trichur, Kerala, India
Vatican – Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
Transliteration Schemes

Arabic (modifying the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* transliteration system)

There are a few exceptions designed to facilitate recognition:

- ‘Abdīshō instead of ‘Abhdīshō
- Abrāhām instead of Abhrāhām
- Bey instead of Bīk, Bēk, Pēk, or Pak
- Sabrīshō instead of Sabhrīshō
- St. George instead of Mār Gīwrāḡīs
- Timothy instead of Ṭīmāthē’ōs
Introduction

When a Christian monk from China arrived in Rome after the death of Pope Honorius IV in 1287, the cardinals did not know what to make of him. Rabban Śāwmā was the ambassador of Arghun Ilkhan, the Mongol ruler of Persia, but until a new pope could be elected his official diplomatic functions would have to wait. In the meantime, they expressed surprise and ignorance that there were Christians in Persia and further east, and proceeded to question this unexpected messenger regarding his church and his theology. They seemed not to know anything about the Church of the East, its patriarchate in Baghdad, the apostolic origin which it claimed, or the theological differences which distinguished its doctrine from their own. Even when Rabban Śāwmā left the newly elected Pope Nicholas IV the following year to return to the Middle East, the letters he carried revealed that the pope was still confused regarding the ecclesiastical identity of his visitor. The surprise and confusion of the cardinals in hearing that there was a native Middle Eastern Christianity in medieval Iraq continues in the popular assumption that the “central Islamic lands” have been overwhelmingly if not exclusively Muslim since the early medieval period.

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3 Nicholas IV addressed a letter to “Yaulahae episcopo in partibus Orientis” and, the following year, to “patriarche Nestorianorum,” without apparently realizing that the addressees were identical. Chabot remarks concerning the substantial statement of faith which is identical in the two letters, “Elle vise surtout les erreurs des Grecs et n’insiste en aucune façon sur les dogmes rejetés par les Nestoriens. On voit par là que le pape n’était pas très exactement informé de l’état de la religion chrétienne chez les Mongols”: Jean Baptiste Chabot, “Notes sur les relations du roi Argoun avec l’Occident,” Revue de l’Orient Latin 2 (1894): 576–80, 599–600.
4 The confusion was also evident in the misconceptions of nineteenth-century American Protestant missionaries, who labeled the Church of the East “the Protestants of Asia” on account of their erroneous belief that the East Syrian Christians had never used icons: Asahel Grant, The Nestorians; or, The Lost Tribes: Containing Evidence of Their
By contrast, when another monk from the Church of the East stood before Pope Julius III almost three centuries later and requested consecration as patriarch of the Nestorians, he and the pope reached an understanding.\(^5\) Yōḥannān Sulāqā, a monk of the powerful monastery of Rabban Hōrmīzd north of Mosul, arrived in Rome in November, 1552 with a letter requesting his ordination as Catholicos of the East, claiming to be from “the great men, priests, monks, and the rest of the people believing in Christ” who had gathered in Mosul from “the rest of the Eastern locations.” After months of coaching the Easterner provided an acceptable statement on doctrine and the sacraments, and received patriarchal ordination on April 28 of the following year. When in November 1553 Sulāqā returned to Āmid, modern Diyarbakır in south-eastern Turkey, the papacy had gained an eastern ally and bolstered its claim to be the truly universal Church against the Protestant heretics, and the monk from Iraq had obtained his goal of patriarchal ordination. The subsequent history of East Syrian Christianity would be characterized by two (and sometimes three) rival patriarchates and their relations with Rome.\(^6\)

The interval between these two visits of Middle Eastern Christian leaders to Rome witnessed significant change for Rome and the world, stretching from the apogee of the Mongol Empire and the high Middle Ages to the new globalization of European exploration in the early modern period. It need hardly be remarked that Rome had changed in the interim; even the Basilica of St. Peter in which Yōḥannān Sulāqā received his patriarchal ordination was a different building than the Constantinian church of the same name visited by Rabban Śāwmā as

\(^{5}\) Sources describing Sulāqā’s visit to Rome, from both the Italian and Iraqi perspectives, are provided in Giuseppe Simone Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719), I:523–30.

\(^{6}\) For a clear summary, see David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 582; Subsidia 104 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000), 22–37.
the Mongol envoy. It is equally obvious that the Middle East from which these travelers sailed to Rome had been transformed in three centuries by the end of Mongol rule, the devastating conquests of Timūr Lang (known in the West as Tamerlane), and the Ottoman conquests of the vast sweep of territory from Baghdad and Cairo to Belgrade. What has not been remarked or studied, however, is the transformation undergone by the Church of the East and Middle Eastern Christianity in this same interval.

Although they often go unremarked, there were many Christians in the medieval Middle East. These were not only isolated merchants, diplomats, and missionaries representing European Christendom in the ports and courts of “the central Islamic lands,” but native communities and local populations. With history and tradition stretching back before the arrival of Islam in the seventh century, many of these Middle Eastern Christian communities did not look to contemporary Rome or Constantinople for legitimation or leadership, still less for the definition of what Christian orthodoxy should mean in Mosul or Tabriz. Their existence has often gone unnoticed or unmentioned in the scholarly presentation of medieval history as a set of tidy dichotomies between European Christianity and Middle Eastern Islam, between Western (Latin) and Eastern (Greek) Christianity, and between Sunni “orthodoxy” and Shiite

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The unexpected diversity of medieval Middle Eastern populations challenges the categories which have framed the history of the medieval world and the division of academic departments today. Although a full exploration of the numerous communities, large and small, which inhabited Iraq alone in the fifteenth century would likely exceed the ability of any single scholar, this dissertation considers one particular minority, the Church of the East (more often, although inaccurately, known in the West as the Nestorians), in order to examine the nature of a community which is Middle Eastern but not Muslim, Christian but not European, and medieval but a minority.

Before the rise of Islam, the Church of the East had been the most prominent branch of Christianity in the Persian Empire during late antiquity. It claimed a first-century foundation by Addai and Mari, disciples of the apostle Thomas, although evidence for its existence in the first three centuries is very sparse. In the Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Church of the East gained a reputation for “Nestorianism” by virtue of its refusal to condemn Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople as a heretic, although the ideas of Nestorius himself were never as influential as those of his teacher Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). Under

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the caliphate they moved their patriarchal residence from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital of the defunct Persian Empire, to Baghdad, and contributed to the intellectual culture of the Abbasid capital with important translations of Greek philosophical works into Arabic. From the seventh century they had sent missionaries to Central Asia and China, expanding so significantly among the steppe nomads that when Hülegü, the grandson of Genghis Khan, conquered Baghdad and destroyed the Abbasid caliphate in 1258, his chief queen Doquz Khatun was a member of the Church of the East and persuaded the Mongol commander to spare the Christians of the city. Under Mongol rule Middle Eastern Christians of all varieties enjoyed royal patronage again, and they were sometimes used as ambassadors from the Mongol rulers of Persia to the Latin states of Europe. It was on one such embassy that Rabban Šāwmā traveled to Rome. Scholarship on the medieval Church of the East ends with the Mongol Empire.  

The Christian minorities of medieval Iraq and eastern Anatolia were not negligible, though they have been neglected. John Woods cites European travelers’ accounts demonstrating “[t]he large number of Christians relative to Muslims in the urban centers of Arminiya and Diyar

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12 The only synthetic treatment of the Church of the East between the end of Mongol rule and the Ottoman conquest is a chapter in Wilmshurst, Martyred. Wilmshurst’s earlier book had acknowledged that “very little is known of [East Syrian] history in the following century and a half” after the Mongol period, and consequently his work has far more detail for the Ottoman period: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 1. An article by Heleen Murre-van den Berg discusses at some length a correspondence between members of the Church of the East in Iraq and India at the very end of Āqqūyunlū rule in the opening years of the sixteenth century, while another article discusses the patriarchal succession beginning in the fifteenth century: Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, “The Church of the East in the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century: World Church or Ethnic Community?,” in Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam, ed. Jan J. van Ginkel, Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, and Theo M. van Lint, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 134 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005), 310–13; Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, “The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries,” Hugoye 2, no. 2 (1999): 235–264. But most of Murre-van den Berg’s articles concern the Ottoman period or the twentieth century.

13 Tamer el-Leithy rightly points out that the relative demographic strength of Christians and Muslims was not recorded in medieval sources not due to an absence of available data (which may also have been true) but due to the lack of perceived relevance; the use of the term “minorities” in a demographic sense, as well as the political implications thought to attach to such a status, dates from modern liberal politics rather than medieval sources: el-Leithy, “Coptic Culture,” 27, especially fn. 71. Nevertheless, el-Leithy acknowledges a descriptive use of the term, and it is this descriptive sense that it is employed here. Indeed, although medieval chroniclers did not consider relative demographic strength a relevant feature, it certainly affected the perception of familiar society and, with it, “normal” social behavior, as well as the application of certain discriminatory laws.
Bakr” in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ In the following century, Ottoman records indicate that the rural population around Mosul was as much as 37% Christian in 1541, including Christians of various denominations.¹⁵ Although no systematic or comprehensive information about the proportion of the population that belonged to Christian or other minorities is available from the fifteenth century, these limited data indicate that in certain regions the Christian population was substantial, to say the least. Despite this fact, the literary histories produced for the Muslim rulers in Āmid, Tabriz, Cairo, or Herat very rarely mention these subject populations.¹⁶ The modern historical narrative of this period, basing itself on these literary histories, has told the story of two nomadic Türkmen confederations, the Qarāqūyunlū ruling Iraq from bases in Mosul, Tabriz, and Baghdad and the Āqqūyunlū ruling what is now eastern Turkey from the area around Āmid¹⁷ and later Tabriz, after the Āqqūyunlū defeated the Qarāqūyunlū.¹⁸ The lack of attention paid to the sedentary population, including Christians of all varieties, is a gaping hole in the scholarly account of nomadic Muslim rulers and political coups. It is clearly incumbent upon modern historians of this region to compensate for the shortcomings of these literary sources and to fill in the large portion of the population silently excluded from these histories.

¹⁴ Woods, Aqquyunlu, 246, n. 156.
¹⁷ I follow fifteenth-century usage by terming the city Āmid and the region Dīyar Bakr, although today both are named Diyarbakır.
The Possibilities and Pitfalls of Marginalia: Method and Sources

It is perhaps inevitable that most scholars will consider Middle Eastern Christians, if at all, as marginal adjuncts to the established fields of Islamic history and medieval European (including Byzantine) history. The experience of medieval Middle Eastern Christians can provide useful comparable data in order to separate the closely woven geographical and religious factors in medieval history.¹⁹ Scholars of medieval Europe attribute certain cultural features to the dominant religion, Christianity, while the comparison with Middle Eastern Christians may indicate that some of these traits are unique to European varieties of the religion. On the other hand, practices of Middle Eastern society which are often thought to be Islamic may be shown to have broader currency if they were also the custom of Middle Eastern Christians. Research may benefit in many ways from the consideration of the marginal figures at the intersection of Venn diagrams thought to be mutually exclusive.

Yet the consideration of Middle Eastern Christians as merely marginal figures, while understandable, is nevertheless dangerous as well. Not only does it differ from the way medieval Middle Easterners, whether Christian or Muslim, understood the world, but it also invites distortion of the Middle Eastern Christians’ history through the questions, preconceptions, and agendas of a foreign body of scholarship. As Paul Rowe wrote with regard to studies of the modern Middle East,

The greatest accomplishment of the past ten to twenty years of scholarship on Christian groups in Middle Eastern states is the way scholars have recognized the agency of a population long objectified in both academic and polemical circles. … Today, we begin to understand the way that Christians operate not solely as a minority or as an extension

¹⁹ The value of medieval minorities for comparative studies is not unique to Christians, of course; Jewish populations in both Europe and the Middle East also provide useful controls on the scholarly tendency to conflate the dominant religion with the scope of society.
of Western civilization but also as centuries-old groups rooted in the history and culture of the Middle East.²⁰

Although Rowe may overstate the case with implications of Christian cultural autonomy,²¹ nevertheless the older scholarship to which he objects portrayed Christians solely as victims of forces and circumstances outside their control. In order to take full advantage of the possibilities for comparison offered to modern scholars by the history of Middle Eastern Christians, we must understand their perspectives, values, ideas, and internal structures, not only the representations of them by outsiders.

This work begins to fill the gap by analyzing how the fifteenth-century Church of the East conceptualized its communal life. Benedict Anderson called attention to the imaginative dimension of social life, and his “imagined communities” have become a staple ingredient of scholarship on nationalism and political culture.²² My work generalizes Anderson’s insight and critiques certain assumptions implicit in his approach which limit its utility, in order to provide a broadly applicable method for examining the conceptual dimension of social life. In order to avoid the pungent connotations of labeling a phenomenon “imaginary,” I have adopted the more neutral term “conceptual communities.” The question of how historical groups understood their own collectivity is relevant not only to nationalism and political culture, but to all associations which the people of the past considered significant enough to name, whether those associations are political, ethnic, religious, occupational, geographic, or even recreational. I explore the theoretical outlines of this broad approach to studying historical societies in general, although my

²¹ In particular his statement that Christians “have become self-constituting agents with authentic and resonant experiences in the politics of the modern day”: ibid.
overarching project is to analyze the “conceptual community” of the fifteenth-century Church of the East.

“Conceptual communities” are not simple. The conceptual dimension of collective social life is always complex, and the fifteenth-century Church of the East is no exception. East Syrian Christians, like other medieval Middle Easterners, understood their community in relation to God and the world around them, so there is a theological dimension to their self-understanding. Contrary to scholarship in the history of theology which has sought to portray the East Syrian doctrine as determined by Nestorian heresy, internal sources emphasize the community’s relationship to the Trinitarian God rather than any fixed theological formula concerning the divine and human nature of Christ. Membership in the community was determined by the liturgies as communal rituals, which also clarified the content of that membership. The Church of the East had a particular ecclesiastical hierarchy, which changed in structure during the fifteenth century. Finally, East Syrian authors related a particular vision of their communal history, a vision which emphasized the deep past over more recent events, and which was concerned not only with demonstrating the unchanging essence of the Church, but also its continuous access to divine power.

Pursuing this project required coming to terms with the unusual source materials which enable the study of medieval Middle Eastern Christianity, which are not the kinds of sources customarily consulted by historians. In the case of the fifteenth-century Church of the East, probably the largest Christian population around Mosul and further east, they left no histories or chronicles of their own, and they are rarely mentioned in sources from other segments of the population. Surviving documentary sources from this community are limited to around three dozen colophons, long notes at the end of manuscripts which detail the circumstances of the
text’s copying, usually including the scribe’s name, place of copying, current patriarch or other ecclesiastical officials, and the patron who paid for the manuscript. These colophons are frequently a few pages long. The value of Armenian colophons, approximately two thousand of which have survived from the fifteenth century, was recognized by John Woods in his study of the Āqqūyunlū, but he used them only for their occasional references to political and social history. David Wilmshurst pioneered the use of Syriac colophons’ customary references to higher clergy in order to chart the development of ecclesiastical structure. But the colophons provide more than merely passing references to additional details of political and social history. The way in which different scribes reframe and fill in the conventional framework of the colophon genre provides evidence for their systems of values, beliefs, and concepts; colophons provide a diverse range of viewpoints on cultural and intellectual developments as well as social and political events. The way each scribe identifies himself, his community, and his place in that community reveals certain aspects of his own concept of that group, as does the colophon’s treatment of important features of the Church of the East, such as its ecclesiastical hierarchy. Thus the colophons provide a large number of viewpoints, if only briefly and very partially represented, to balance out the fuller pictures given by the few named literary authors of the fifteenth century.

23 Woods, Āqqūyunlu, 217–18. In this regard he follows Sanjian, who in the preface to his translation of selected Armenian colophons indicated the value of colophons only for the history of the Armenian language, for demography and topography, and for “the recounting of contemporary events and… descriptions of social and economic conditions”: Avedis K. Sanjian, tran., Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), xi–xii. Since Woods’ interest was in the Türkmen ruling elite, these uses were sufficient for his purpose.


25 All named fifteenth-century East Syrian scribes are male, although from 1767 we know of a woman named Teresa who copied an Arabic manuscript: Murre-van den Berg, “Generous Devotion,” 45–46.
All East Syrian literary sources of the fifteenth century are poetic. A priest from northern Iraq named Isḥaq Shbadnāyā (fl. 1751 A.G. / 1440) composed a long theological survey in verse entitled ‘Ūnithā d-ʾal mdabrānūthā d-allāhā men brāshīth wa-ʾdāmā l-ʾālam (“Poem on God’s economy from ‘In the Beginning’ until eternity”), to which he added a prose commentary citing a wide range of earlier authors. These shorter poems for liturgical occasions were composed by Shbadnāyā and his contemporary Ishō’ yahb b. Mqaddam, the metropolitan of Erbil in northern Iraq. These include poems for the Bāʿūthā d-Nīnwayē (“Prayer of the Ninevites”), a three-day collective fast observed only by the Church of the East, for the commemorations of St. George and of Rabban Hörmīzd, and for Shkhāhtā, the feast of the finding of the Cross by Constantine and Helena. Ishō’ yahb b. Mqaddam also composed a verse grammar of the Syriac language and four poems for funerals of different kinds. These sources reveal not only what these authors thought about their explicit subjects, but a range of other topics as well. The poetic compositions of the Church of the East reflect the conceptual community of their authors in many different ways.

An additional source for East Syrian thought in the fifteenth century is contained in the liturgy and communal rituals. Although the Church of the East used a large number of different compilations in its services, a nearly complete set of service books survives from the fifteenth century. This survival reduces the need for conjectural reconstruction and permits the use of ritual action as a historical source, although one with unique challenges. On the one hand, the liturgical prayers were texts which were familiar to all East Syrian authors and scribes, who in

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28 It will be seen in chapter 5 that the survival of service books does not fully remove the need for certain conjectures about the precise shape of the ritual at a specific place and time. But we may be far more certain about the shape of the rituals for which we have surviving service books than for rituals in the period before our earliest copies, which must be entirely reconstructed by conjecture.
the fifteenth century were all clergy, and therefore the liturgy must be read for its influence on
the other surviving sources. On the other hand, communal rituals were not merely spoken texts,
and by reconstructing the ritual actions in the context of attested interpretative frameworks for
those actions, it is possible to understand the church services themselves as communicating and
emphasizing certain concepts about the community. These repeated liturgies also provided
texture to the membership of this community, permitting individual East Syrian Christians,
whether literate or not, a certain range of possibilities for their involvement in the larger group.

With these sources, it is highly unlikely that one could write a detailed political or
institutional history of the Church of the East in the fifteenth century, of the kind that one could
expect from comparable late medieval Western European dynastic or monastic histories. The
sources which survive are predominantly literary or liturgical, whether composed in the fifteenth
century or preserved in fifteenth century manuscripts, and they fulfill a different set of functions
and answer a different set of questions than the documentary evidence customarily preferred by
historians. These sources will surely disappoint the historian attempting to extract social or
economic information, both for their difficulty of interpretation and their paucity of data. Yet for
the cultural historian these texts are a veritable gold mine of meanings, understandings,
frameworks, and concepts which were significant enough to this Christian minority in the
fifteenth century to find expression in substantive works. We may not be able to answer in detail
the question of what happened in or to the Church of the East in the period following Timur
Lang’s invasions, but we can abundantly sketch what their clerical leaders were thinking. Can
one write a history based on poetry? Is it possible to give an account of a population whose
existence is undoubted but whose histoire événementielle is almost entirely unrecoverable? It is
a central thesis of this dissertation that such a history is possible, and even necessary, but it is a very different sort of history. It is the history of a community’s self-conception.
Chapter 1: The Conceptual Dimension of Social Life

An Armenian scribe composed a long colophon in praise of Tēr Mkrtič’ Nałaš in 898 A.A. / 1449, extolling the many wonderful accomplishments of the bishop of Āmid. According to the scribe, the bishop was honored by “not only the Christian, but also the T’urk’ [Turk], the T’at’ [Tat], the T’at’ar [Tatar], the K’urt’ [Kurd], the Arap [Arab], the Jhut [Jew], and all other races.”

Evidently the author of the colophon divided the population of his region into different groups, among which the religious affiliation “Christian” contrasts with several ethnic identities; the final category, “Jews,” was both. The “Christian” group is broken into sub-groups later in the colophon, when the scribe reports that the bishop was able to convince the Türkmen ruler to overturn an onerous custom according to which “the Armenians, Asorik’ [Syrians], the Nestorakank’ [Nestorians], and Jhutk’ [Jews] were forced to drag off the bodies of the Christian dead” instead of carrying them high in honor.

This list includes a religious polemical label, Nestorians, alongside two ethnic labels used for Christians, Armenians and Syrians, and again the Jews at the intersection of religion and ethnicity. Modern scholars might be tempted to divide medieval society along either ethnic or religious lines, depending on the question under discussion, but such a division would be no more natural than the seemingly mixed categories of

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1 An early version of this chapter was presented as “Community Self-Concepts and Social Diversity From Trebizond to Tabriz” at the 6th Annual Pearl Kibre Medieval Study Graduate Student Conference, held at the City University of New York on March 4, 2011.


3 Այսիսպան, թատեր, թատար, կուրդ, արաբ, հույյութ, և այլ էթնիկ խմբեր. Avedis K. Sanjian, Colophons, 212; Xač’ikyan, Tasnhigerord, I:627. The statement is somewhat obscure. It seems to be a discriminatory custom related to dhimmī status, as indicated by the inclusion of Jews, but I have found no parallel among other lists of discriminatory regulations. It is not clear whether the requirement was that, when an Armenian died, the survivors had to hire corpse-draggers from among the non-Muslim sectors of the population, or that whenever any non-Muslim died, the corpse needed to be dragged to burial. If this latter interpretation is correct, the adjective “Christian” for the dead is overly specific, since the deceased could have been Jewish, but that is a plausible error given that the Christians were presumably the population which concerned the scribe.
this Armenian scribe. The division of a society into its constituent communities is not fixed by population statistics, but varies with the conceptual framework used.

The Armenian scribe who composed this colophon was not unique in how he conceptualized the different communities in his own society. This chapter presents a method for analyzing the conceptual dimension of social life. A community’s self-concept is not a static feature of the community, but develops over time in accordance with certain dynamics, including an internal logic which partly derives from and partly influences the social dimension of the group’s existence. “Conceptual communities” are historical forces in their own right, not merely curious epiphenomena of the driving forces of historical change, and therefore need to be taken seriously by historians of any period and region. In order to analyze the conceptual community of the fifteenth-century Church of the East, such a communal self-concept must first be shown to have existed in the period under discussion. That demonstration indicates not only the epistemic grounding of the analysis, but also the significance and rough characteristics of this conceptual community as opposed to others which might be considered for the same period.

The Conceptual Dimension of Society

Every community is as much conceptual as social. Benedict Anderson famously asserted that any community larger than a village exists in the imagination. In other words, for every social group there is a corresponding idea of what shared features define and shape the membership and their interactions. We can go further: the conceptual existence of a community is what distinguishes a socially significant identification from a common feature shared by many people but considered irrelevant for inter-personal or institutional relations. The defining

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features of the group are typically conceptualized as independent of the specific individuals who socially constitute the membership of the community at a given time. This is true even for local communities: every village has a concept of what type of village this is, what kind or kinds of people constitute the village or are excluded although present, how this village is different from the next village across the river or the ridge, how it relates to the city and the fields, etc. I prefer the term “conceptual community” over Anderson’s phrase “imagined community” for two reasons. First, it more accurately emphasizes the domain of inquiry: an inquiry into widely-held social concepts rather than into perhaps idiosyncratic imaginings. Second, it avoids the connotations of unreality and invention, which Anderson partly disclaims in his introduction but nevertheless employs elsewhere. The concepts of communities are a subject for historical inquiry which probes how the people of the past structured their societies and understood their relations.

Social groups of all kinds have their corresponding conceptual existence. Whether the community in question is national, such as the affiliations which Anderson investigates, or ethnic, political, religious, professional, linguistic, or recreational, each member has a concept of the purpose and collective actions of the community, the history and characteristic features of this society, the social constitution of the group, and how to recognize and relate to other members. The fact that all communities have self-concepts enables scholars to compare social groups across multiple typological categories. Many scholars emphasize the differences between classes of collective affiliations, often implying that they have fundamentally different natures.

6 It may be objected that “conceptual community” is pleonastic, since there is no community which is not also conceptual. I have nevertheless retained the term as a convenient shorthand for “the conceptual dimension corresponding to a particular community,” which would otherwise get unbearably cumbersome.
7 For example in his discussion of newspapers: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6, 33.
which defy common characterization. For example, in the introduction to their volume *Ethnicity*, John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith criticize Don Handelman’s typology of ethnicity because it “fails to capture the specifically ‘ethnic’ content of an ‘ethnic community.’” They rectify this lack by providing six characteristics which ethnic groups “habitually exhibit.” Thus they presume that ethnic identity is distinct in kind from other forms of social organization. Max Weber, on the other hand, had asserted that terms for ethnic groups usually implicitly refer to “either the existence of a contemporary political community, no matter how loosely organized, or memories of an extinct political community, such as they are preserved in epic tales and legends; or the existence of a linguistic or dialect group; or, finally, of a religious group.” In other words, group identities can cross conceptual typologies, but Weber’s point is merely to indicate that ideas of collective affiliation often reinforce each other in multiple social domains: “All history shows how easily political action can give rise to the belief in blood relationship,” which is apparently the kernel of Weber’s notion of ethnic identity. Weber therefore considers interactions between allegiances in different categories, which nuances the differences between typologies of social groups, but each category is still fundamentally distinct. Clifford Geertz likewise highlights the differences between types of communities, proposing that certain categories of social collectivities, those based on ties perceived as “primordial” such as kinship, language, region, and religion, command more loyalty than “class, party, business, union, profession” or other voluntary associations.

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10 Ibid.
There are undoubtedly different characteristics of distinct group affiliations, although it is open for debate which differences are essential to categories of social groups, and whether any categories of communities are themselves “natural.” For my purpose here, however, it is sufficient that every named community has a conceptual dimension, which implies that affiliations of different types can be compared in terms of their associated ideas. The ability to compare conceptual communities across typological boundaries is especially helpful when the primary sources list communities of different kinds side-by-side, even though scholars would classify the groups in different domains. The colophon from 1449 cited at the beginning of this chapter lists the populations affected by a decree of the Āqqūyunlū ruler as “Armenians, Syrians, Nestorians, and Jews,” even though the first two are “ethnic” designations, the third is religious, and the fourth is usually considered both. Social allegiances may be classified into categories, and more can be said about each category than about the nature of social grouping in the abstract, but the examination of conceptual communities provides the correct level of generalization for exploring how all varieties of collective affiliation compare and interact within a society. The notion of conceptual communities enables scholars to analyze a society’s understanding of its own diversity and integration.

It may appear, however, that conceptual communities suffer from certain limitations or pitfalls which hinder their analytical use. First, an association’s understanding of itself may be at variance with the reality of its social existence. For instance, the actual standing in society of a social club’s diverse members may not match what the club members imagine to be their collective social status. This may be termed the problem of inaccuracy. The plurality of members of any group also raises the question whether a conceptual community can be treated as a singular idea, or whether there are as many concepts of a community as there are participants in

12 Sanjian, Colophons, 212.
that association, or indeed even outsiders who interact with it. This is the problem of non-uniformity. Finally, there is the question of significance, namely whether conceptual communities are themselves causal forces or whether they are instead merely interesting epiphenomena of social developments. Addressing the issues of inaccuracy and non-uniformity will highlight the dynamics of conceptual communities and their use as analytical tools, and I will address the problem of significance in a separate section.

The concept of a community frequently exists in tension with social reality. For example, the court historian of the great Āqqūyunlū ruler Uzun Ḥasan carefully emphasizes his patron’s Islamic pedigree by reporting ancestors waging war on unbelievers (kuffār) since before the rise of Islam.\textsuperscript{13} In keeping with this, the historian depicts Despoina Khātūn as a daughter of the Greek king captured by Uzun Ḥasan’s great-grandfather Qutlū Bey in battle,\textsuperscript{14} when in fact the peaceful alliance between the Āqqūyunlū and the Greek rulers of Trebizond was sealed by Qutlū’s marriage to Maria Komnene, and renewed by Uzun Ḥasan’s own marriage to Theodora Komnene.\textsuperscript{15} Perpetual warfare with neighboring Christian kingdoms was not the \textit{modus operandi} of the early Āqqūyunlū beys, despite the historian’s assertions to the contrary. This example demonstrates a tension between a community’s conception of its past and its actual historical development. But it also shows that the understanding of the communal past is not independent of the author’s notion of his contemporary community, because he altered the history to conform more closely to his present self-concept of how an Islamic state should be ruled, a concept which was still at variance with the foreign policy of his sovereign.

\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Kitāb-i Diyārbakriyya} presents a legendary ancestor of the Āqqūyunlū emirs named Sanghar Bey as a contemporary of Muḥammad who was waging war with the kuffār of the plain of Qibchāq before hearing the call of Islam, while his father Bīrđī Bey had been waging \textit{jihād} upon the kuffār even earlier “in the time of Anushirvan”: Abū Bakr Ṭḥrānī, \textit{Kitāb-i Diyārbakriyya}, ed. N. Lugal and F. Sümer (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1962), 18–19.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{15} John E. Woods, \textit{The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire}, Rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1999), 34, 88.
Another tension between concept and reality exists in the self-consciousness of nomadic and sedentary lifestyles: in the early fifteenth century, the Āqqūyunlū ruler Qarā ʿUthmān personally practiced nomadic pastoralism.16 Qarā ʿUthmān asserted that sovereignty inherently belongs to nomads, while at the same time he strengthened the ruling clan’s ties with the urban elites, Muslim and Christian.17 Three generations later the tension between nomad ideology and ruling bases of power was more acute. Under Yaʿqūb b. Uzun Ḫasan in the 1480s, the court historian again praised the paramount Bayandur clan for maintaining a nomadic life, justifying this practice with reference to the Qurʾān.18 At the same time, however, Yaʿqūb himself was busy remaking his domain into a traditional Iranian sedentary empire. According to Woods, “the city of Tabriz—one of the great Islamic capitals of the age—remained the center around which revolved not only Yaʿqūb’s nomadic court, but also the entire political, economic, cultural, and religious life of the Āqqūyunlū Empire.”19 Although Yaʿqūb’s court maintained a form of local nomadism, Woods illustrates how Yaʿqūb’s diplomacy was in part determined by “the premodern economy of Iran” based on the silk trade rather than on his great-grandfather’s pastoralism, and Yaʿqūb himself built a permanent palace within the city of Tabriz.20 The question how nomadic the late Āqqūyunlū Empire really was illustrates the tensions between a concept of the nature of this society and the social reality.

Divergences such as these can be uncovered for almost all social groups, and they have sometimes caused historians to dismiss a community’s concept of itself as merely self-deluded fantasy. On the other hand, one should not necessarily expect greater accuracy – or less

17 Woods, Aqquyunlu, 17, 57.
18 Ibid., 17.
19 Ibid., 134.
20 Ibid., 137.
significance! – for a community’s self-concept than for their concepts of agriculture, politics, economics, and medicine. Simply put, they were sometimes wrong about themselves, but they acted individually and collectively on the basis of their self-understanding, and therefore to make sense of their actions scholars must understand the conceptual background to their decisions. A community’s self-concept is not less significant for being sometimes inaccurate.

The multiplicity of people who have ideas about any given social group immediately raises the issue that concepts of communities, of any size, are neither universal nor uniform. For any community, how it is understood by outsiders, for instance, is typically at variance (sometimes widely) with its own members’ concept of its nature. This is perhaps most apparent in rival religious communities, whose self-concepts both contain fidelity to God and whose concepts of each other contain faithlessness: Muslims are “infidels” according to Armenian Christians, who are themselves kuffār according to Āqqūyulī Muslim sources. But even members of the same social group often disagree over the nature and source of their community, how it is defined, who is or is not considered a member, and every other feature of the association. For example, both the Qarāqūyunlū emir Qarā Yūsuf and the Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Mu′ayyad Shaykh claimed to be faithful Muslims, and yet in 821 A.H. / 1418 the latter persuaded the qādīs of Cairo to declare Qarā Yūsuf to be outside the bounds of the Muslim

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21 Although contestations of community imagination are central to the development of nationalism, especially the transition from colonial control, Anderson focuses on nationalism as a system (or rather, a family of unique systems). One exception is the brief parenthetical remark citing “the struggles in late-twentieth-century Europe by certain ‘sub-’nationalities [sic] to change their subordinate status by breaking firmly into print – and radio”: Anderson, Imagined Communities, 45. On the other hand, by relegating these groups to the status of sub-nationalities, even with scare quotes, he implicitly takes the conceptual side of those who oppose such struggles.

22 Although the internal and external conceptions of a community are distinct, they are not independent, as is shown by the practice of groups adopting as self-designations terms that were originally applied to them derogatorily.

23 Sanjian, Colophons, 196.

24 Tīhrānī, Kitāb-i Diyarbakriyya, 12.
community. At a later period, the reform movement of Wahhabism challenged popular Islamic practices in the name of cleansing Islam from shirk, the practice of associating anything with God which Muslims considered tantamount to polytheism. The fact that Wahhābīs rejected widely-accepted devotional customs indicates a concept of the nature of Islam at variance with that of the Muslims who continued to regard such practices as integral parts of their religion. Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the founder of Wahhabism, acknowledged this difference in concept by contending that any contemporary from his home region who “claims that he knew the meaning of ‘there is no god but God’, or knew the meaning of Islam, … lies, fabricates, leads people astray, and falsely praises himself.” These examples show that two members of the same group may disagree upon the criteria for membership, or about the purpose or history of their group. Community self-understandings are not uniform.

This lack of conceptual uniformity does not mean that concepts of a community are fully individual or idiosyncratic, however. Many communal activities and institutions regulate the range of acceptable conceptualizations. On a subconscious level, the meaning of any term, including the names of communities, is socially regulated by linguistic exchange. Collective rituals, such as the weekly and annual liturgies of the church service or the Friday prayers in the mosque, call community members to enact or participate in certain concepts of their community. For example, the prayer for the well-being of the patriarch in every liturgy pressures the

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26 Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s “understanding of monotheism seems to have been such that he considered most of the professed Muslims of his day to be polytheists”: Michael Cook, “On the Origins of Wahhābism,” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 3rd series, 2 (1992): 191. Cook also points out that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s refusal to use Ḥanbalī scholars from before the seventh century A.H. / thirteenth century A.D. is probably due to their open acceptance of popular practices which the later reformer regarded as idolatrous: ibid., 198.
participants to a certain kind of loyalty to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Communities also privilege certain forms of authoritative discourse, such as the *khutba* or the sermon, which equally exert continual pressure for conceptual conformity. The fact that the typical Muslim vassal’s demonstration of loyalty was by striking coins and giving the Friday sermon in the name of the sovereign indicates an awareness of the power of authoritative discourses to influence conceptual communities. The pressure is not insuperable, and divergent or irreconcilable concepts of the community held by parties within its ranks may lead to controversies or simply to silent dissent. But neither is the pressure negligible, for the collective ritual life of a group communicates certain ideas about the nature of the community itself and attempts to enforce those concepts by strategies such as restricting access to sacraments, for a Christian example. Of course, the available sources will provide only a selection of the range of concepts used to understand a community at any given time. But in studying any group’s conceptual existence, the scholar must be alert to divergence and disagreement, to descriptive as well as prescriptive characterizations of the community, and to the mechanisms by which communities seek to regulate their self-conceptualization. The lack of uniformity, far from vitiating the utility of conceptual communities, merely challenges historians to a more nuanced understanding of the past.

If conceptual communities are useful analytical tools, they must be understood in light of their multiplicity and their historicity. It would be strangely simplistic to assume that for any group of people there is only a single community, and thus a single conceptual community, relevant to the whole range of their social interactions. A limitation of Anderson’s *Imagined* 

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Communities is that he is only interested in what might be termed “top-level” imagined communities, nations or larger “transcontinental sodalities” such as religious identifications or dynastic expansionist states. He explains the rise of the nation and nationalism as occasioned by the eclipse of the latter.\textsuperscript{30} While this may be sufficient for his purposes, religious communities such as Latin Christianity or Sunni Islam did not cease to exist with the advent of the nation-state; they merely ceased to be the most important social identification for a large portion of the population. This indicates the need to study not just “top-level” communities but also the competing allegiances which sometimes reinforce and at other times relativize the most important social identifications. By contrast, Edward Shils explicitly defines the object of sociology, “a society,” as the top-level identification, although he recognizes the parallel existence of “parochial loyalties.”\textsuperscript{31} Geertz similarly downplays the impact of voluntary associations compared to groups based on “primordial” ties, since communities in the former category “are virtually never considered as possible self-standing, maximal social units, as candidates for nationhood.”\textsuperscript{32} In other words, according to Geertz, only groups which could function as independent “ maximal social units” can be primary loci of loyalty.

However, it is not clear that an individual’s primary loyalty must rest in a self-sustaining social unit; the evidence of aristocratic elites, for example, may suggest that a dominating class or clan can be a powerful locus of social loyalty. Thus Maurice Keen indicated that the medieval laws of war, which closely regulated military and financial loyalties, pertained to people “of a particular social status and calling who kept on the right side of certain technical rules.”\textsuperscript{33} The Mongol prince Sartaq, whom contemporary Christian and Muslim sources both identified as a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 36.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Edward Shils, \textit{Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), vii, xiii.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Geertz, “Integrative Revolution.” 111.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Maurice H. Keen, \textit{The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 185.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Christian prince, had an East Syrian chancellor who instructed William of Rubruck, “Do not say that our master is a Christian, for he is not a Christian but a Mongol.”

This enigmatic assertion, misunderstood by the Flemish friar, reflects the Mongol prince’s primary identification with the conquering class, and shows how different segments within a single society can have different priorities for ranking their social allegiances. The modern scholarly preference for imagining unitary and uniform societies must be rejected in light of an awareness of the multiplicity of overlapping allegiances and the reconstruction, to the extent that the sources permit, of competing claims for adherence.

Every society is composed of multiple layers and overlapping circles of communities. Someone today might identify as a researcher in a particular educational institution, a member of an international but domain-specific scholarly community, a native of a particular region, a scion of a noble ethnic heritage, a leader of a neighborhood organization, and a participant in a religious institution, and all of these are conceptual communities. Fifteenth-century people likewise had their political, tribal, religious, geographical, and voluntary associations. Some communities include membership in a larger community as part of their self-definition. But societies almost always have overlapping groups, so that some but not all members of one conceptual community also belong to another named association and vice versa. Nor is it clear that just because one group is a sub-community of a larger association the more widely claimed label must be the more important identification. The residents of a particular village, all of whom are Christian, may consider their village identification more significant for who they are than their religious identification, or vice versa. The multitude of conceptual communities cannot be arranged in a strict hierarchy of larger and smaller memberships, and the relative

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importance of the different identified groups in which a person claims membership is not deducible from the relative size of those groups but must be read out of the historical sources.

Concepts of communities are also not ahistorical or superhistorical, but like all concepts, they change and develop over time. Historians rightly object to studies which treat Islam as a monolithic and immutable whole, as if sixteenth-century Turks understood Islam in the same way as did eighth-century Andalusians. To understand a community, therefore, it is not sufficient to apply the label by which the community designates itself, a label which might have been used with other concepts at other times and in other places, as is especially likely with large religious labels such as Islam or Christianity. One must supplement an identification of the “ingroup labels” with analysis of what features were considered essential to the community, and by whom. To identify how a group’s self-understanding changes over time, especially in communities which assert the timelessness of their identity, it is critical to be aware of the often subtle shifts in the meaning of continuously used collective names. Proper to the study of a community’s self-concept across time is also the analysis of what forces affect ideas of group identity. For instance, the unexpected forcible destruction of an institution previously considered essential to a community will force either a reappraisal of the group’s central structure or a desperate attempt to reconstitute it, both of which happened in the wake of the Mongol execution of Caliph al-Musta’šim after the capture of Baghdad in 1258. A more subtle influence on the development of notions of social collectivity is the idea that the nature of the community cannot change, which was common to many pre-modern ethnic and religious societies. Such a

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35 This point is well made by Devin A. DeWeese, Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tükles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 51, 66.

perceived immutability requires proposed modifications in the group’s self-concept to be justified by appealing to earlier precedent to show that the apparently novel development is not really new but rather fidelity to the unchanging collective identity. In this respect, concepts of a community compete and vary over time, but the internal logic required by a community’s self-understanding can partly slow and partly obscure historical developments. Clarifying the forces which shape and affect members’ concept of their group requires analyzing both their self-understanding’s internal logic and its relations to their understanding of the world in which they lived.

The Significance of Community Concepts

Conceptual communities not only change and develop over time, being acted upon by historical forces, but they are also significant for their influence upon other causal factors in history. Historians have rightly focused their efforts on identifying and analyzing forces which explain why certain trends and events developed as they did, rather than documenting all of the epiphenomena which could be identified as caused by various developments. For example, one could study all of the dogs owned by United States presidents,37 but one would not expect presidential taste in pooches to dictate developments of foreign or domestic policy. Similarly it must be asked whether the conceptual dimension of any community has causative force itself or merely reflects the results of the underlying forces. It is a central contention of my method that a community’s self-concept possesses a logic of its own, which partly derives from and partly influences the social dimension of the group’s existence. This can be argued both by a priori reasoning and by demonstrating examples.

37 Such a study has indeed been written, in a humorous vein: Roy Rowan, First Dogs: American Presidents & Their Best Friends, Updated ed. (Chapel Hill, N.C: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2009).
Much ink and many trees have been sacrificed to the professional debate as to whether the causal forces in history are personal or structural.\textsuperscript{38} I would suggest that historians need not choose between two mutually exclusive categories of causation. Instead, it appears that individuals and institutions both exert causative force, on themselves and each other, and that a full historical explanation needs to consider causes of both kinds. People create, maintain, modify, and abolish institutions, sometimes with dizzying speed, and exert limited amounts of control over non-social structures such as geography (through, for example, irrigation or terracing). People also influence other people towards or away from various actions, for example by amassing a large army for a long campaign which will have extensive social and demographic effects. But people also make their decisions on the basis of the structures in which they live and have lived, whether climatic and geographical or political and social, and under certain conditions large numbers of individual decisions can be statistically aggregated based on the prevailing structures of society.

In the agency debate, the concept of a community might be termed a “soft structure”: community concepts are not typically subject to the decisions of an isolated individual but instead are formed within a larger community, nor are they as independent of human control as seismic activity, yet they have elements which endure over generations or sometimes centuries. In this middle ground between “given” and “made,” conceptual communities are frequently the matrix of human understanding and decision-making. To take a single example, scholars acknowledge collective self-interest to be a potent historical force. But since the definition of

human flourishing is in part culturally dependent, allegiance to a community implies that collective self-interest must be mediated through that collectivity’s self-concept and values in order for group members to ascertain which goals are to be sought. In light of such conceptual dynamics, historians must take seriously communities’ self-understandings as the force-fields in which personal causes and institutional developments take shape.

In addition to such *a priori* reasoning, concrete examples demonstrate the causal significance of conceptual communities in fields traditionally recognized as historically determinative. Concerns over dynastic legitimacy indicate the power of conceptual communities in the field of political history. In the post-Mongol period, many legitimizing genealogies of ruling powers were of course forged and modified, but this fact itself reveals not the weakness of the prevailing community concept but rather its strength: legitimate genealogies are invented not to flatter a ruler’s vanity but to appease his anxieties and justify his rule to the governed, for the purpose of stabilizing a regime. Thus Tīmūr’s progression from claiming authority in the name of a Chinggisid puppet khan, to marrying a Chinggisid princess to become a “son-in-law,” to asserting direct descent from Genghis Khan for himself, reveals the need to acquire legitimacy in order to gain and maintain support from the nomadic military elite.39

Another concrete example of the impact of conceptual communities on political and administrative history is provided by the 1469 shift of the Āqqūyunlū capital from its hereditary location in Āmid in the region of Diyār Bakr to the recently conquered Qarāqūyunlū capital of Tabriz. At first sight, it is surprising that Uzun Ḥasan adopted the capital of a conquered rival

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39 The first two steps were taken in short succession following Tīmūr’s defeat of Amīr Ḥusayn in 1370: Beatrice Forbes Manz, “Temūr and the Early Timurids to C. 1450,” in The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank, and Peter B. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 184. The report that Tīmūr was directly descended from Genghis’ son Chaghatai is provided during the conqueror’s lifetime by the Castilian envoy Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, and such politically charged rumors could not have been circulating without Tīmūr’s knowledge and encouragement: Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane, 1403-1406*, trans. Guy Le Strange (London: G. Routledge, 1928), 214.
power, far removed from his consolidated bases of support, as his new capital. But the move is readily understood as a bid for legitimate sovereignty: an Armenian colophon noting the event connects it with the elevation of Tabriz as the capital of the Mongol Ilkhanate by Hülegü Ilkhan two centuries earlier.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, a chain of Armenian colophons had noted who held the “throne of Tabriz” as an indicator of Qarāqūyunlū legitimacy in the half-century leading up to their defeat by Uzun Hasan.\textsuperscript{41} The Ilkhanid legacy provided political legitimacy to the holders of the Mongol capital in Iran, and the Āqqūyunlū relocation implies a desire to lay hold of that mantle. In this regard, it is telling that the genealogy of the Āqqūyunlū emirs in the \textit{Kitāb-i Diyārbakiyya}, Uzun Hasan’s court-sponsored history, highlights the links of two of his forebears with Hülegü Ilkhan and Ghāzān Khān, the most memorable rulers of the Ilkhanate.\textsuperscript{42} The fact that Mongol rule was also conceived as universal rule identifies Uzun Hasan’s exchange of capitals as another strategy in his project to claim that his dominion was a world empire.\textsuperscript{43} The links between concepts of legitimate sovereignty, political strategies, and administrative reality are multiple and tightly woven, and for this reason historians cannot ignore the conceptual dimension which stabilized or de-stabilized society.

Economic history also demonstrates the importance of community concepts. Near the end of the reign of Sultan Ya’qūb b. Uzun Ḥasan, his tutor and chief financial officer Qādī Ṣafī al-Dīn ʻĪsā proposed remaking the Āqqūyunlū tax system by abolishing the \textit{tamghā} tax on crafts and commerce, which he considered to be inconsistent with Islamic \textit{sharī‘a}, and replacing it with taxes on land and people permitted by the religious law.\textsuperscript{44} As John Woods describes it, this plan

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Sanjian, \textit{Colophons}, 319.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 141, 156–57, 159, 174, 176, 189, 217, 272, and 285.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ṭahrānī, \textit{Kitāb-i Diyārbakiyya}, 14–15.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Woods, \textit{Aqquyunlu}, 104–108, 115.
\end{itemize}
“required shifting the entire state revenue system from the predatory exploitation of commerce by the nomadic military elite to the orderly taxation of a sedentary, agrarian ‘Oriental society.’”

The ‘ulamā’ debated the legality of the tamghāwāt, but they took for granted that the concept of their polity as an Islamic monarchy would have definite economic consequences. Ultimately the tax reform plan was defeated by the death of Sultan Ya’qūb and the opposition of the military leaders, but not before stirring up a great deal of economic turmoil in the province of Fārs. In this instance a concept of his community led a high-placed government official to undertake a complete overhaul of his government’s economic basis, and even in defeat the debate over this conceptual community had a wide-ranging social effect.

To sum up, instead of regarding the diverse social groups which comprise a population at any given time as stable trans-temporal entities, I have argued that the constitution of social groups forms a subject within cultural history. Cultural history is often regarded as a fluffier, less causal, branch of historical study. But in fact, this area of cultural history has a demonstrable impact on the political and social history of all periods. Rather than taking a position on the question whether social adhesion is “given” or “performed,” and instead of asserting the factuality or falsity of the identity claims of the various communities located in eastern Anatolia and northern Iraq in the fifteenth century, I emphasize the importance of the conceptual framework itself. This method of analysis allows the historian to consult the vast amounts of surviving literature and poetry from the fifteenth century to include the late medieval Church of the East in Middle Eastern history.

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45 Woods, Aqquyunlu, 144.
The Church of the East as a Conceptual Community

The application of this theory of conceptual communities to the specific case of the fifteenth-century Church of the East logically depends on the existence of such a group concept at that time, rather than being a later community’s historical concept imposed upon the earlier sources. Furthermore, the importance of this study will be directly related to the importance of this group identification relative to the other associations which included members of this community. If identification as a member of the Church of the East was an afterthought or “held lightly,” it presumably had fewer social ramifications and therefore will be less useful for our understanding of the period. If, on the other hand, it was considered a primary social identity in the way ethnic or class identity is considered by many people today, then it will be correspondingly more important for our understanding of the Christian minorities in fifteenth-century Iraq and Iran. Although the next two chapters will sketch the social context of the fifteenth century more fully, it is necessary here to demonstrate that the conceptual community of the Church of the East existed as such in the fifteenth century, and is therefore a well-defined topic of inquiry.

It is easy to demonstrate the existence of the conceptual community of the Church of the East in the fifteenth century, and although the relative importance of this group identification among other associations is more difficult to prove, the evidence that survives seems to indicate that it was moreover a primary communal allegiance. In terms of social structures, literary sources and colophons refer to the catholicos-patriarch of the East and a hierarchy of metropolitans, bishops, priests and deacons under him. Thus there is a hierarchically structured

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48 For examples from colophons, see Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a and Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b. Almost every colophon from the period includes the patriarchal title with the name of its current bearer. Ishāq Shbadnāyā’s “Poem on the Economy of God from ‘In the Beginning’ until Eternity” concludes with a prayer for the Church,
religious community underneath the leadership of a catholicos-patriarch. The existence of such a
hierarchy implies the existence of a corresponding conceptual community. A ritual for the
reception into the community of “Jacobites and Melkites who become Christians,” probably
dating from the beginning of the sixteenth century, indicates that at least according to the framers
and practitioners of this ritual the ecclesiastical hierarchy under the catholicos-patriarch of the
East is not considered merely a part of a larger Christian community, but rather excludes other
groups who identify themselves as Christian.49 This view is implicit also in those colophons
which identify the catholicos-patriarch of the East as having universal jurisdiction.50 Thus there
is an internal concept of a Christian community separate from other Christian denominations,
which gives its patriarch the title “catholicos-patriarch of the East.”

Armenian and West Syrian sources also indicate a contemporary conceptual community
corresponding to the Church of the East, called Nestorakank’ in Armenian and Nestûryone in
Syriac (“Nestorians”)51 in agreement with the dominant European practice. I have not yet found
a reference to this community by name from a fifteenth-century Persian text, but Arabic sources
from Mamluk Egypt present the Church of the East as a separate social group. The fourteenth-
century al-Qâmûs al-muḥīṭ refers to this community as al-Nustûriyya and asserts that they
oppose all other Christians,52 while the Šubḥ al-aʾšā of al-Qalqashandī, completed in 814 A.H. / 1412,
distinguishes al-Nustûriyya as a third division of Christianity after the Melkites and

49 Cambridge Add. 1988, f. 142a. The manuscript dates from the mid-sixteenth century, but the ascription of the
ritual to “Mār Ėlīyā, Catholicos-Patriarch of the East” probably dates its composition to the brief reign of Ėlīyā V
(1503-4), although the possibility that it was composed by an earlier Catholicos Ėlīyā cannot be ruled out.
50 For example, Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a gives the title as “Catholicos-Patriarch of the East and of all the universal
dominion.”
51 A colophon of 1449 lists this group alongside Armenians, Syrian (Christians), and Jews: Sanjian, Colophons, 212.
Tovma Mecope’i mentions Nestorakank’ twice in his history: T’ovma Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, ed. Levon
Xa’e’ikyan (Yerevan: Magałat, 1999), 35, 126. The anonymous continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ secular history
mentions Nestûryone monks: Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xlvi and 198a, col. 2.
Jacobites. Thus due to internal and external attestation, drawing on social, liturgical, and literary evidence, it is clear that there was a conceptual community in the fifteenth century which can be labeled “the Church of the East,” and therefore this is not an anachronistic imposition on the evidence.

The avoidance of anachronistic community identification explains why I have chosen an explicitly religious designation for this group rather than the now-preferred ethnic label “Assyrian.” Although the term surfaces sporadically in Syriac literature of various periods, no fifteenth-century text from this community adopts “Assyrian” as a term of contemporary collective identity. The Armenian sources apply the Armenian cognate Asorik’ not to the Church of the East but to the anti-Chalcedonian West Syrian Church (which designated itself Syrian Orthodox). Heleen Murre-van den Berg has likewise concluded that at the end of the fifteenth century the Church of the East did not consider itself an “ethnic” community, but a world church. The contemporary uses of the term “Nestorian” by outsiders to denote this community are useful to indicate an internally and externally recognized group boundary, but I have not found any indication that “Nestorianism” is an element of the collective conceptual

54 The only apparent exception to this is a quotation, in Shbadnaya’s “Poem on the Economy of God,” of a tenth-century author’s inclusion of “Assyrians” among “Persians,” “Medes, and the end of the East” as the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 201b. That this is not a contemporary use of “Assyrian” to mean “the Church of the East” (or its dominant ethnicity) is seen in the fact that this ethnonym is not privileged above the other two in the list, as well as the fact that Seleucia-Ctesiphon had not been the seat of the patriarchate since the eighth century, making the whole comment of historical rather than contemporary import. On the other hand, a different ethnic label was applied to the historical Church of the East in the introduction to Ishay’s poem for the commemoration of Rabban Hormizd, which described how from a particular monastery “all the Surayyeh breathed the odor of life” (مهمه... فيما تحمل، فنبات حلاقه، مهلة): Berlin orient. fol. 619, f. 101b.
55 The only exception of which I am aware is T’ovma Mecop’ec’i’s use of asori to refer to the Nestorian priest in Samarqand, where, however, he immediately qualifies the ethnic term by the exclusive adjective Nestorakan: Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, 35.
identity within the fifteenth-century Church of the East. Indeed, a century earlier the important East Syrian author ‘Abdīshō‘ of Nisibis, in his “Book of the Pearl,” had acknowledged the external label “Nestorian” as a term in doctrinal debate and rejected its accuracy and applicability. Therefore to designate this community “Assyrian” in the fifteenth century would be an anachronism, while to label it “Nestorian” is to skew its collective identity through an external polemical slur.

Establishing the importance of the “Church of the East” community concept relative to other social identifications is more indirect, but also implicit in the evidence. One would expect theological and liturgical poetry to emphasize religious affiliations over other social associations, but other sources also indicate the primacy of this social concept. A short poem probably by İshāq Shbadnāyā complains of mistreatment by outsiders, setting the author’s identification “Christian” against the exterior groups “the Muslims and the Turks” and “Kurds and Ishmaelites” (i.e. Arabs). From this author’s perspective, the Christian identification distinguishes his community from others and provides the occasion for harassment by outsiders. The same poem puts “our poor people” in a parallel position to “the chosen Church,” again suggesting the primacy of the religious concept. Of course, it could be objected that all texts

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57 At a later period the term would be used by certain members of the Church of the East. The ritual for the reception of “Jacobites and Melkites” into the Church of the East concludes with an instruction for the priest to admonish the convert “to be taking the [Eucharist] of us Nestorians” (ديری نستور) Cambridge Add. 1988, f. 143b. It is unclear whether that admonition was part of the original ritual, or whether it was added by the scribe in the middle of the sixteenth century. The oldest manuscript of the poem for Rabban Hormizd by Isho‘ yahb b. Mqaddam contains references to the Church of the East as Nəştəryānē, but a later contains Krestyānē instead, and in the absence of a critical edition it is not clear whether the use of the term was due to the fifteenth-century author or due to a later scribe: Berlin orient. fol. 619, f. 103b, 104b, 106b; Berlin Sachau 222, f. 322a-b, 324b.

58 ‘Abdīshō‘ bar Brīkhā, Kithābhā d-methgrē margānīthā d-’al shrārā d-khrestyānīthā, ed. Yosip d-Qelayta, 2nd ed. (Mosul: Mṭaab’ā tā Ṭhōrāyta d-’ēṭā tattītā d-madḥnhā, 1924), 27; George Percy Badger, The Nestorians and Their Rituals: With the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-1844, and of a Late Visit to Those Countries in 1850 (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), II:400. This work is extant in a fifteenth-century manuscript, Vatican sir. 176, indicating that it was being copied in this period.

59 Bodl. Syr. c. 9, f. 128a-b.

60 Bodl. Syr. c. 9, f. 129b.
composed by the fifteenth-century Church of the East, whether literary or liturgical, were written by priests, monks, or bishops, who by virtue of their office would be more likely to emphasize an ecclesiastical concept of community.

The dominance of ecclesiastical terms of identification in manuscript colophons, however, is not solely due to the fact that almost all scribes were priests or deacons. Most scribes are identified only by their ecclesiastical rank, their father’s name and rank (and perhaps grandfather’s as well), and their village of origin. When the colophons or contemporary inscriptions speak of laypeople, they identify them again by their occupation, their father’s name, and their village of origin, which suggests that only occupation or village loyalties were considered significant enough to mention in the case of laypeople as well. The nearly complete absence of an ethnic label contrasts markedly with the Armenian colophons and, to a lesser degree, with the West Syrian minority, both of which employ ethnic names for their communities.\(^\text{61}\)

Political loyalty is also notably absent from sources in the Church of the East. Fifteenth-century colophons are always dated according to the Seleucid era, as is typical for Syriac manuscripts of most centuries, rather than by the reign of the local ruler. Colophons almost always name the reigning patriarch, with only two manuscripts identifying the dominant Türkmen ruler,\(^\text{62}\) which implies that the patriarch was considered more relevant for structuring this community’s perception of time. Again, this contrasts markedly with Armenian colophons, which typically identify the period both by the ruler of one of the Türkmen confederations and

\(^{61}\) Armenian colophons often refer to the “Armenian race” (Հայեր) or “Armenian people” (Հայացք) respectively: for a few examples, see Sanjian. *Colophons*, 123, 142, 169, 204. Although the Syrian Orthodox usage is rarer than the Armenian, they occasionally employ the ethnic term Sūryoyē (سوری) as a self-designation: Gregory Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, ed. Jean Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (Lovani: Peeters, 1872), III:561–562.

\(^{62}\) Vatican sir. 186, f. 241b, is an additional note that indicates that Uzun Hasan just died, while BL Add. 7177, f. 321a, identifies the current ruler as Sultan Ya’qūb Āqqūyunlū.
the current Armenian patriarch. Although a few manuscript colophons mention village chiefs within this community, there does not seem to have been any political entity larger than a village in which members of the Church of the East actively participated.

The ways in which people were identified could indicate alternate community affiliations, but it is very unlikely that a community affiliation which was more important than the religious identification as the Church of the East would be omitted from the sources. On the basis of the fifteenth century evidence, it seems that the most likely associations which might have vied for the loyalty of East Syrian Christians to their religious community would have been their villages, their families, or their occupations. It is possible that no single loyalty was considered most important by all members of the Church of the East; the ranking of the multiple communities to which a person belongs according to relative importance usually varies from one individual to the next, or even in the same individual from one social context to the next.

Nevertheless, the evidence which survives hints that membership in the Church of the East was considered more important than membership in other groups. The fact that the village community was considered secondary to the religious identification may be demonstrated by the group of scribes who had left their villages prior to their scribal activity, and the cooperation between people of different villages to rebuild monasteries or fund scribal activity. Occupations, the only other identifying information regularly included in colophons and

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63 Sanjian, Colophons, 8.
64 Chief Ḥasan of Tal Zājīpā near Mosul and Chief Mattay of Talkēpē are each mentioned on account of a son who was a priest: BL Add. 7174, f. 206a; Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b; David Wilmshurst, The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 582; Subsidia 104 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000), 223, 234.
65 Wilmshurst lists scribes of manuscripts dated 1448, 1474, and 1477 who are identified as being from a village other than where they are copying the text, as well as a metropolitan of Nisibis who donated a manuscript to a church in Ḍim in 1458: ibid., 393–95. In addition, a monk from Salmās and a group of villagers from Hakkārī did construction work at the monastery of Rabban Hōrmizd, outside Alqūsh, in 1485: Jacques Vosté, “Les inscriptions de Rabban Hormizd et de N.-D. des Semences près d’Alqūš (Iraq),” Le Muséon 43 (1930): 274–75. BL Or. 4399 and BL Add. 7174 were copied in Mosul but commissioned by priests who were sons of village chiefs in the surrounding plain, from Talkēpē and Tal Zājīpā: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 396–97.
inscriptions, seem to have been less important as a basis for collective identification in this region in the fifteenth century than in Europe at the same time. Gabriel Baer indicates the complete absence of evidence for the existence of professional guilds in Egypt, Syria, and Turkey before 1450, and suggests that only the rise of the Ottoman power transformed earlier akhī and futuwwa groups, essentially Muslim young men’s associations, into organizations whose membership was based on a common profession. But Ottoman power did not come to the region of Diyār Bakr and Iraq until the early sixteenth century. Therefore it seems likely that the religious identification is the primary community concept for this particular minority, more important than the disparate village or occupational identifications, or of any other unnamed affiliations. This primacy is probably confirmed by the Armenian colophon which puts Nestorakank’ in the same list of names of peoples as Armenians, Syrian Christians, and Jews.

It is difficult to be more precise about the specificity of the religious allegiance of lay Christians in the Church of the East. Although the sources written by clerical authors distinguish the Church of the East from other Christian groups, it is less clear whether the majority of the laypeople in the Church of the East would have followed the example of the ritual for reception of heretics cited above and excluded other Christian groups from their concept of their community, or whether they would instead have regarded other Christian groups as part of the same larger community. Even accepting this ambiguity, however, it seems probable that members of the Church of the East would identify themselves primarily with their religious community before other forms of collective life. Given the probable demographic strength of the East Syrian Christian population in northern Iraq, this community’s idea of its own collective existence is an important concept to understand in the cultural history of this period.

67 Sanjian, Colophons, 212.
Chapter 2: Christians under Islamic Rule in Fifteenth-Century Jazīra and Iraq

In the spring of 1486, Sultan Yaʿqūb b. Uzun Ḥasan faced a difficult situation in Tabriz. A Persian soldier named Mahdī had confronted an Armenian merchant named Xoja Mirak’ and demanded that he convert to Islam, and when the Armenian refused, the soldier killed and beheaded him. Thereupon the murdered merchant’s relatives demanded justice in the form of the soldier’s head, prompting Sultan Yaʿqūb not only to execute the killer but also to hand over his severed head for them to kick around the streets of Tabriz, to the shock of the urban Muslim elites. The soldier’s funeral turned into a protest, and after the Āqqūyunlū ruler executed its spiritual leader that evening, the following day he faced a riot. He commanded his troops to plunder the city in retribution, but thereafter he left Tabriz and spent little time within the city. The Türkmen ruler and the Muslim citizens of Tabriz evidently had different views of the place of Armenian Christians in society, expressed here in the penalties expected to follow a fatal altercation between a Christian and a Muslim.

This surprising story of a Muslim ruler avenging a Christian subject against the wishes of the urban Muslim elites reveals the need for a nuanced analysis of the place of Christian populations in “Islamic society.” This analysis is complicated by the fact that the world inhabited by the Church of the East in the fifteenth century is not a familiar landscape to Western historians. The fifteenth-century inhabitants of Jazīra and Iraq, regardless of their social affiliations, have received scant attention from modern scholars. Historians have preferred to attend either to their more imperial contemporaries in Mamluk Egypt, Timurid Central Asia, or

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1 Portions of this chapter and the next were presented as a paper entitled “Syriac Patriarchs and Muslim Rulers in the Fifteenth Century” at the 6th North American Syriac Symposium, held at Duke University in June, 2011.
2 This narrative is given briefly in John E. Woods, The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire, Rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1999), 141. To the sources which he cites may be added a few Armenian colophons: L. S. Xač’ikyan, Tashhingerord dāri hayeren jerhageri hišatakaranner (Yerevan: Haykakan S. S. H. Gitut’yunneri Akademiayi Hratarakzut’yun, 1967), III:80–82, 109. The colophons make clear that Mahdī was not a Türkmen, as Woods reports, but a “Tajik” (i.e. Persian).
Ottoman western Anatolia, or on the other hand to their ancestors or descendants in these lands
themselves. In order to analyze the relations between Christian subjects and Muslim rulers, it is
necessary first to identify who the relevant rulers were. In the fifteenth-century Jazîra and Iraq,
the local and regional rulers were the effective brokers of social and political power, rather than
the imperial powers in distant capitals such as Cairo, Samarqand, and Constantinople, and it was
local rulers who determined the government’s treatment of Christians, whether in the form of
legal discrimination or as arbiters of disputes involving ecclesiastical hierarchies. On the other
hand, although individual rulers varied widely in their actions toward their Christian subjects, in
the regions of Jazîra and Iraq in the fifteenth century they do not seem to have distinguished
between different varieties of Christianity. This fact permits us to generalize the unevenly
distributed evidence to infer how the Church of the East specifically interacted with their Muslim
rulers.

Christians in fifteenth-century Jazîra and Iraq interacted with their Muslim rulers directly
as well as through the latter’s policies of taxation and discriminatory regulation. The local and
regional rulers took an active interest in the patriarchal successions and jurisdictional boundaries
of the different Christian populations under their authority, and provided a court of appeals for
Christian patriarchs against Muslim or Christian neighbors, as well as for bishops against their
own patriarchs. Some rulers, especially early in the fifteenth century, even extended their
patronage to include Christian officials, churches, or monasteries. The tax systems employed in
the fifteenth century were many and various: in addition to the jîzya tax on non-Muslims,
Christians were liable to additional taxes on priests, church buildings, commercial taxes,
agricultural taxes, and road tolls. The discriminatory regulations on non-Muslims were applied
only inconsistently in the first half of the fifteenth century, although they were to some degree
standardized by Uzun Ḥasan in the second half, at the same time as the cessation of wars allowed an increase of church construction as well.

**Imperial Politics and Local Power**

The majority of the Church of the East inhabited regions today located in eastern Turkey, eastern Syria, northern Iraq, and northwestern Iran. In the fifteenth century, these regions were the frontier zone between the Timurid Empire to the east and Mamluk Egypt to the south, with growing pressure over the course of the century from the Ottoman Empire to the west. The local dynasties which governed individual cities or regions often claimed to do so in the name of these super-powers, and diplomatic correspondence between regional rulers and Cairo, Herat, or Istanbul forms a major part of the source material for political developments in the region.³ Regional power was held by a succession of rival Türkmen confederations such as the Dhū al-Qadr west of the Euphrates, the Qarāqūyunlū ruling from Mosul and later Tabriz, and the Āqqūyunlū ruling first from Āmid and later Tabriz, as well as by urban dynasties such as the Artuqids in Mārdīn and the Ayyubids of Ḥiṣn-Kayf.⁴ The basic narrative of fifteenth-century political history in this region charts the rise of the Qarāqūyunlū in the east and the Āqqūyunlū in the west following Tīmūr’s devastation, with the Āqqūyunlū absorbing the smaller dynasties and defeating the Qarāqūyunlū and even the Timurids in 1467-69, only to be defeated first by the Ottoman Sultan Meḥmed II in the west in 1473 and later by the Safavid founder Shāh Ismāʿīl after 1501.

We would be mistaken, however, to see the local dynamics in eastern Anatolia and northern Iraq merely as local manifestations of the imperial political machinations between the

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⁴ Ibid., 31, 92.
major empires, as John Woods off-handedly remarks concerning Āqqūyunlū campaigns against the Dhū al-Qadr.⁵ There are several reasons to think that the decisive wielders of power in this region were the local rulers themselves rather than their imperial overlords. Although the sultans could and did arrive in the region at the head of large armies, for the most part the imperial sovereigns were distant and their power waned during their prolonged absences. Woods noted the ineffectual Mamluk campaigns against the Āqqūyunlū, which drove certain princes out of their cities and appointed others as governors only to have the former princes retake the cities they had temporarily lost.⁶ Even as powerful a ruler as Shāhrukh b. Tīmūr, whose three invasions shook the region in 1420-21, 1429-30 and 1434-36, was unable to impose the governor of his choice upon the regional capital of Tabriz. In 1421 he installed ‘Alī b. Qarā ‘Uthmān Āqqūyunlū as governor of Ādharbayjān in Tabriz, only for his governor to be evicted by the returning Qarāqūyunlū later in the year.⁷ After Shāhrukh’s second campaign he installed a rival Qarāqūyunlū prince in Tabriz, Abū Saʿīd b. Qarā Yūsuf, in place of the ousted ruler Iskandar b. Qarā Yūsuf, but the latter killed Abū Saʿīd upon his return two years later.⁸ The third campaign again drove Iskandar out of Tabriz to be replaced by his brother Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf as Shāhrukh’s governor of Ādharbayjān.⁹ Jahānshāh was driven out of Tabriz by his returning brother Iskandar in 1438, although in this instance he soon managed to defeat Iskandar and

⁵ “While resulting in three major Mamluk expeditions against the Āqqūyunlū in 1429/832, 1433/836, and 1438/841-42, these frontier skirmishes may be considered local manifestations of the larger conflict between [the Mamluk sultan] al-Ashraf Barsbay and [the Timurid] Shahrukh over Indian Ocean-Mediterranean trade”: ibid., 50.
⁶ Ibid., 68.
⁷ Ibid., 49.
⁸ Ibid., 52, 53.
retake the city in his own name. In these cases, imperial power only temporarily put off local power, which soon successfully reasserted itself.

The effective power of local rulers is also seen in their ability to determine their imperial loyalties to serve their own interests most effectively. The Āqqūyunlū emir Qarā ʿUthmān entered Timūr’s service in 1399 and thereby weathered the conqueror’s last invasion of Anatolia, but by 1409 he was rewarded by the Mamluk sultan with the city of Ruhā in return for sending the head of a rebel anti-sultan to Cairo. His son ʿAlī appealed to the Timurid general Muḥammad Jūkī b. Shāhrūkh to secure designation as governor of Diyār Bakr in 1436, but the following year he bargained with the sultan in Cairo for appointment as Mamluk governor of Āmid. ʿḤamza b. Qarā ʿUthmān was simultaneously recognized as the Mamluk, Ottoman, and perhaps Timurid governor of Diyār Bakr. Presumably each of these distant sultans regarded the territory as exclusively his own, but the example of ʿḤamza shows that appointments by multiple sovereigns were not mutually exclusive. Earlier, in 1420, Qarā ʿUthmān urged Shāhrūkh to invade Qarāqūyunlū-held Ādharbayjān with Āqqūyunlū support, while at the same time sending the head of the captured Qarāqūyunlū governor of Erzincan to Cairo. He was simultaneously serving two imperial masters, or rather serving his own interests with clever diplomacy.

The power of the regional ruler in this period is perhaps nowhere more clearly shown than when the imperial sovereigns were constrained to recognize as governors those who in fact already controlled the territory. Following the death of al-Ashraf Barsbāy, the Mamluk regency government recognized ʿḤamza b. Qarā ʿUthmān as governor of Āmid in 1438, acknowledging

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12 Ibid., 63–64, 66.
13 Ibid., 70.
the fait accompli that he controlled Diyār Bakr and the failure of Barsbāy’s campaign to support Jahāngīr b. ‘Alī as a rival contender for the rule of the Āqqūyunlū. Similarly, after Uzun Ḥasan secretly took ʿĀmid in 1452, he sought and obtained Mamluk recognition as governor of the region. The local and regional rulers often played the determinative role in which empire claimed which territory, rather than the imperial sovereigns determining who the local and regional rulers should be in this borderland.

The primacy of local power over distant imperial power is reflected in the primary sources. While Arabic historians in Mamluk Cairo of course ascribe primary agency to the Mamluk sultan and his designated generals, the Armenian colophons produced in this region tell a different story. Many Armenian colophons, in addition to providing the date of the manuscript in the Armenian era, also supply the name of the current political ruler in the formula, “in the year X, during the reign of ...” As Woods discovered, these colophons are very useful for establishing the geographical extent of rival rulers, but the absence of rulers from the dating formulae also indicates their irrelevance in the perspective of the colophons’ authors. Thus Tīmūr’s reign is acknowledged in several colophons after 1400 in Sanjian’s collection, twice in company with his son Mīrānshāh, but no subsequent Timurid is named as an acknowledged ruler within this collection. Shāhrūkh b. Tīmūr is presented as a foreign invader rather than an imperial ruler, and Abū Saʿīd is only named as a foreign king killed by Uzun Ḥasan Āqqūyunlū. Mamluk sultans are cited in the date formulae of only four colophons translated by Sanjian, but most of these manuscripts may come from Jerusalem within territory firmly held...

15 Ibid., 68–69.
16 Ibid., 80.
17 Sanjian, Colophons, 8.
18 Woods cites the Armenian colophons to indicate which Āqqūyunlū contenders were recognized where during the Great Civil War, for example: Woods, Āqqūyunlu, 61, 63–64, 70, 247n1–4, and 248n29.
20 Examples of Shāhrūkh’s portrayal as a foreign ruler or invader are given at Sanjian, Colophons, 147–48, 159, 174, 177–78. Abū Saʿīd is only mentioned in the period 1469-1472: ibid., 295, 298–99, 302, 304.
by the Mamluks, rather than from the contested border zone. The most explicit reference to Mamluk suzerainty occurs in an Armenian colophon from Xarberd completed in 1453, “during the rule of the Egyptians [Egiptac‘woc’] and the reign of Sulêyman Pak [Sulaymân Beg], who is a Dullatarc‘i [Dhu’l-Kadrid] by race. This is the third year that our citadel and city [Kharput] have been in the hands of the Dullarac‘i [Dhu’l-Çadrid], who is under the suzerainty of the sultans of Egiptos [Egypt].” Although the Egyptian hegemony is stated explicitly, the author provides the name of the local ruler but not of the Mamluk sultan. Ottoman sultans are named in only two date formulae from Sanjian’s collection, both from manuscripts written in Constantinople rather than further east.

By contrast to these few and isolated references to distant sultans in Armenian colophons, the Qarâqûyunlû and Äqqûyunlû rulers are named in dozens of date formulae, as are various emirs of smaller districts or individual cities. The most consistent references to “imperial” rule in the colophons harkened back to the Mongol Ilkhanate with a consistent concern for who controlled the “throne of Tabriz.” Citations of the rulers who occupied the imperial takht span the fifteenth century in numerous manuscripts. Jahânshâh b. Qârâ Yûsuf is even cited as holding the throne during his first appointment to Tabriz by Shâhrukh, before his brother

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21 Al-Malik al-Mu‘ayyad Shaykh is cited in 1419 in a manuscript from Jerusalem, while al-Malik al-Zâhir Jaqmaq is cited in two manuscripts from 1441, one of unknown provenance and one from Jerusalem, as well as one 1446 manuscript from ‘Arabkûr north of Malatya: Sanjian, Colophons, 144, 195–96, 208.
22 Ibid., 224.
23 Both manuscripts, one from 1459 and one from 1480, name Mehmed II: ibid., 263, 326.
24 As an example of these more local emirs, ‘Izz al-Dîn Shîr and his son Malik Muhammad, who ruled the city of Ostân south of Lake Van, are mentioned in the date formulae of ten manuscripts from the period 1405-1421. In half of these manuscripts they are mentioned with other rulers: ibid., 133, 137, 142, 144. But in the other five manuscripts the ruler of Ostân is the only secular ruler mentioned: ibid., 128, 137, 144, 145, 149.
25 Nine Armenian colophons refer explicitly to the takht at Tabriz: Sanjian, Colophons, 141, 156–57, 159, 174, 176, 189, 217, 272, 285, and 301. Although the word takht is not used, Tabriz is presented as the location of the sovereign in ten additional colophons: ibid., 166, 169, 193, 205, 217, 225, 259, 292, 294, and 312. T‘ovma Mecop‘ec‘i also presented the region around Tabriz as the shahastan, the region of the sovereign: T‘ovma Mecop‘ec‘i, Patmagrut’yun, ed. Levon Xač’ikyan (Yerevan: Magałat, 1999), 16. Concern with the “imperial” throne of Tabriz probably partly explains why Qarâqûyunlû rulers are cited more than Äqqûyunlû rulers in the period before 1467, although geographical distribution of their relative power also plays a role.
Iskandar drove him away and “occupied the t’axt” [i.e. takht]. The result is a persistent emphasis on local rulers as the point of reference, naming distant sultans as foreign invaders when they arrive at the head of armies.

The conflict between local and imperial perspectives on the political situation in this region explains the two divergent reasons given for the conflict between the Āqqūyunlū and the Qarāqūyunlū in 1450. According to a history produced for the later Āqqūyunlū ruler Uzun Hasan, the cause was his brother Jahāngīr’s refusal to extradite a rival Qarāqūyunlū pretender, in other words, a purely local affair. Jahānshāh Qarāqūyunlū, however, presented the issue in a letter to the Mamluk Sultan al-Ẓāhir Jaqmaq as Jahāngīr Āqqūyunlū’s “oppression” and “enmity to the Mamluk sultan,” who had appointed Jahāngīr as governor of Ruhā with the charge to capture Āmid. The explanation of this discrepancy is most likely that the local matters were the driving forces in the conflict, but Jahānshāh Qarāqūyunlū knew that he must appeal to Mamluk concepts of their government as sovereign and righteous in order to motivate military intervention from Cairo. This example demonstrates the ease with which local rulers ignored (in the case of the Āqqūyunlū) or manipulated (in Jahānshāh’s case) the sovereign claims of the distant sultans, in both cases demonstrating that the real decisions were taken by local rulers.

At times, indeed, power was divided even more locally than the level of the regional Türkmen confederations. Woods divides his history of the Āqqūyunlū into the reigns of individual rulers, and he writes as if there were only one legitimate Āqqūyunlū ruler at a time, the others being “pretenders.” Woods refers to the leader of the Mawsillu clan who had been

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26 Sanjjan, Colophons, 189.
28 Woods, Aqquyunlu, 250, n. 47.
29 Woods even uses the term “pretender” on two occasions: ibid., 75, 81.
captured by Uzun Ḥasan in the defeat of his uncle Shaykh Ḥasan as “traitorous.” Such a perspective accurately reflects the teleological Uzun-Ḥasanid bias of the Āqqūyunlû narrative histories, but not the situation at the time, when multiple princes simultaneously claimed Āqqūyunlû leadership and commanded the loyalty of different branches and member tribes of the confederation. The “traitorous” crime of the Mawsillu bey had simply been his loyal support for a defeated claimant to Āqqūyunlû rule. When multiple princes claimed Āqqūyunlû leadership, lower-level rulers gained the opportunity to exercise power by determining which of the rival claimants to support. On some occasions, the territory officially ruled by the Āqqūyunlû was geographically partitioned, with the effective rule being exercised at a more local level. Even when it was not, the power of local rulers and populations sometimes trumped the power of later Āqqūyunlû sultans. Walter Hinz notes that the tax system ascribed to Uzun Ḥasan actually reflected the varied local tax systems over which he ruled, and he did not succeed in making those local systems consistent. Vladimir Minorsky recounts how emirs under the Āqqūyunlû successfully thwarted attempts by Uzun Ḥasan and his son Ya’qûb to replace the type of taxes collected. It is clear that political power was not simply exercised from the top downward in these regions in the fifteenth century, but that different levels of local or regional power were frequently the most effective. For these reasons, this region is best

30 Ibid., 77.  
31 Woods is in general very aware of the bias of these sources: ibid., 38, 63.  
32 Ibid., 69, 75–77.  
33 Ibid., 75.  
34 Ibid., 69, 161.  
analyzed in light of local rulers, rather than under the rubrics of the nominal imperial overlords in distant capitals.

**Reading the Evidence: The Perspectives of Rulers and Subjects**

The local and regional scope for power and the frequency with which some of these cities changed hands warn us against assuming that the relations of political rulers with their Christian subjects were consistent or stable. Certain practices, such as differential taxation upon religious minorities, seem to have been relatively constant, while others, such as the wearing of distinctive clothing, varied in their application. Some studies of “Muslim-Christian relations” are flawed by assuming that all Muslims interact with all Christians in uniform ways,\(^{37}\) which is demonstrably false. Different rulers have treated their Christian subjects very differently, and Armenian colophons are full of descriptions of this sultan or that emir as “good to Christians” or “persecuting Christians.”\(^{38}\) Unfortunately the uneven distribution of evidence means that we know more about certain rulers than others, and more about their interactions with certain Christian minorities than others. For example, the Armenian colophons provide us with the richest evidence about how different governors (but most frequently the Qarāqūyunlū and Āqqūyunlū rulers of Tabriz) treated Armenians, a degree of detail not paralleled in other bodies of source material, while the most explicit accounts of how rulers interacted with Christian patriarchs are found in the anonymous continuation of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle, which pertains exclusively to Syrian Orthodox patriarchs and the rulers of Ḫiṣn-Kayf and Mārdīn. On the other hand, there is no reason to assume that the confessional divisions which

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\(^{38}\) The limitations of these evaluations are discussed below.
were very significant to ecclesiastical authors were inherently important to Muslim rulers.  

Here the notion of conceptual communities may aid our analysis: if we could demonstrate that most Muslim rulers in this region in the fifteenth century conceptualized Christians as a uniform subject population, we would have a good case for generalizing the rulers’ interactions with one Christian minority to their treatment of other Christian populations as well. One cannot assume without argument that rulers would consider all Christian churches to be equal, but one may be able to make a case for each period and region separately.

The most direct evidence we have for how Muslim rulers conceptualized Christian subjects is from official documents stemming from the rulers themselves. A body of official firmans from Qarâqûyunlû and Āqqûyunlû rulers has been edited by Ḫusayn Mudarrisî-Ṭabaṭabâ’î, four of which clearly name Christians as the subjects of the documents, three from the Qarâqûyunlû ruler Jahânshâh b. Qâr Yûsuf and one each from his son Ḥasan ‘Alî, the Āqqûyunlû ruler Uzûn Ḥasan b. ‘Alî, his son Ya’qûb, and his grandson Rustam b. Maqṣûd. The three edicts from the Qarâqûyunlû rulers refer to the Catholicos Ohanês of the Caucasian Albanians and an Armenian Vardapet Šêmawon as luminaries of “the people of the Messiah” (āl-i Masîh). The first document also mentions the Armenians of the monastery of Ganjasar, but puts them under the authority of the “the exalted one of the people of the Messiah, Ohanês Catholicos, from the region of Aghwân.” On the other hand, the same edict provides a

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39 Traditional Arabic Muslim tools existed to discuss the different Christian confessions, as shown by the presentation of Christian divisions in al-Qalqashandî: Ahmad al-Qalqashandî, Kitâb Šubh al-a’shâ (Cairo: Maṭba’a al-Amîriyya, 1918), 13:276–81. The existence of these tools does not necessarily imply their importance for rulers’ policy decisions, however.

40 Ḫusayn Mudarrisî-Ṭabaṭabâ’î, Farmânhâ-yi Turkumânân-i Qârâ Qûyûnlû va Āq Qûyûnlû (Qum: Châpkhânah-‘î Ḩikmat, 1973).

41 Ibid., 36, 53, 56. It is a revealing development of conceptual communities that in the editor’s prologue to each document he refers to them not as Christians but as Armenians, including the Catholicos of the Caucasian Albanians: ibid., 33, 52, 56.

42 مفرح آل مسيح ھانس کیتھکوس از ولائیت اغووان: Mudarrisî-Ṭabatubâ’î, Farmânû, 36. This Catholicos Ohanês is named in two Armenian colophons from 1464 and 1466: Sanjian, Colophons, 285, 289. The monastery at Ganjasar is the
terminology for discussing divisions between varieties of Christian: the monks of Ganjasar are required to obey Catholicos Ohanēs “in the matter of their sect.” The use of the Arabic term madhhab to refer to Christian divisions may downplay the importance of those distinctions relative to the identifier which is given prominence, “the people of the Messiah.”

Curiously, the three Āqqūyunlū firmans do not include any term describing Christians in general, but merely refer to the recipients as priests. In light of this lack, our evidence for how Āqqūyunlū rulers viewed their Christian subjects is more indirect than the firman evidence for their Qarāqūyunlū rivals. The clearest evidence is an Armenian colophon from 1449 recounting the wonderful accomplishments of the Armenian bishop of Āmid, Tēr Mkrtič’ Nalaš, who among other successes secured from either Qarāʿ Uthmān or his son Ḥamza the right for Christians and even Jews to lift their dead from the ground instead of dragging them to burial as they had previously been required to do. The colophon author makes the point that this privilege extended not just to the Armenian Christians, but also to the Syrian Orthodox, the “Nestorians,” and the Jews. We might infer that the Āqqūyunlū ruler in question made a consistent policy for all Christians and Jews regardless of confessional affiliation. Indeed, the inclusion of Jews suggests that the operative social category was “non-Muslim” rather than “Christian,” but in either case the divisions between Christian groups were not considered relevant for the framing of this decree. On the rare occasions that Āqqūyunlū historical writings refer to Christians, it refers to them as “Christians,” “unbelievers,” or similar terms which do not

source of an Armenian colophon of 1417, which mentions Ohanēs’ predecessor as Albanian Catholicos, Karapet: ibid., 138.

43 Mudarrisī-Ṭabaṭabā’ī, Farmānhā, 37.
44 Ibid., 78, 93, 107–8. The firman of Yaʿqūb b. Uzun Ḥasan uses the term “Armenians,” but only to refer to the inhabitants of the monastery of Ganjasar in Caucasian Albania.
45 The chronology of this change is uncertain, since both Qarāʿ Uthmān and Ḥamza are named earlier, but the emir who granted this permission is not named in the immediate context: Sanjian, Colophons, 212–13.
46 This might also be supported by the same colophon’s contention that Qarāʿ Uthmān gave Tēr Mkrtič’ Nalaš jurisdiction over “all his Christian subjects,” but it is not clear if in this context “Christians” is used in the narrower sense of “Armenians,” or whether it would include Syrian Orthodox or even the Church of the East: ibid., 210.
indicate which Christian minority is intended. Although a historian’s lack of specificity does not necessarily imply the monarch’s generalization, the concepts of the historian are tailored for the rulers as an audience, and this may be the closest we can get to the Āqqūyunlū sultans’ perspectives.

Our discussion so far has focused on the nomadic Türkmen confederations, the Qarāqūyunlū and the Āqqūyunlū, but can these arguments be generalized to other rulers? The Armenian historian T’ovma Mecop’ec’i reports a similar neglect of Christian differences on the part of the Timurid ruler Ulūgh Bey, decided to eliminate all the Christians of Samarqand as vengeance for the seduction of a Muslim woman by one “Nestorian.” Mecop’ec’i repeats this story on the authority of an Armenian bishop named Yovhannēs Č’anki, but it is not clear how knowledgeable this informant was of developments in far-off Samarqand. On the other hand, if this account is not the actual development of events, the narrative reflects the expectation that Muslim rulers would punish Christians of all ecclesiastical affiliations for the sins of one “heretic.” Therefore we can say that an Armenian bishop presumed that Muslim rulers would treat all Christian groups collectively. Both Armenian and East Syrian notes in manuscripts record the plunder of books by Muslim armies and their subsequent ransom, which would imply that the commanders of those armies regarded both populations as available for pillaging. Although this evidence is slight, the lack of evidence that any Muslim ruler favored one denomination or treated different Christian minorities differently would incline us to the view


48 Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, 34–36.

49 For Armenian notes regarding ransoming books, see for example Sanjian, Colophons, 120, 165, 167, 263. A comparable East Syrian ransom note is found in a New Testament now located in Cambridge which records the purchase of the book from “the Mongols” for five tangā in 1426: Cambridge BFBS 446, f. 255a.

50 As evidence of royal favoritism of one Christian population over another, one might allege an Armenian colophon’s boasts over Iskandar b. Qarā Yūsuf’s destruction of the Armenian Catholic fortress of Maku in 1426: Sanjian, Colophons, 171–72. However, it is doubtful that Iskandar’s motivation for taking the fortress was the
that most emirs in fifteenth-century Diyār Bakr, Jazīra, and Iraq considered Christians as members of one conceptual segment of the population, and dealt with them as “Christians” rather than as “Armenians,” “Syrian Orthodox,” and “Nestorians.” Therefore we can, cautiously, generalize the way that individual rulers treated one Christian minority to their presumed interactions with others as well.

If all varieties of Christians were the same from the perspective of their Muslim rulers, our sources make very clear that not all rulers were equal from the perspective of their Christian subjects. The Armenian sources are full of statements about how well or poorly the rulers treated the (Armenian) Christian population, but we need to be careful about these evaluations: each ruler is classified as kind or cruel to Christians, but many rulers get conflicting reports from different Armenian authors. Of the Qarāqūyunlū rulers of Tabriz, Qarā Yūsuf was praised in a colophon from 1407, the year in which he defeated the Timurid Abū Bakr b. Mīrānshāh, for freeing the Armenians “from the iniquitous [tax] collectors, who had subdued and enslaved many nations speaking various languages,” while another colophon from the same year calls him “the new Antichrist” who “went to the land of the Georgians” and “brought death to the Christians.”51

One colophon complains of Qarā Yūsuf’s son Iskandar as “the second Ašrap’ [Čūbānid Malik Ashraf] to us Armenians and the destroyer of the churches,” invoking the memory of a cruel ruler of the previous century, while another colophon praises Iskandar as “beneficent toward our

dyophysite theology of those who controlled it; more likely it was part of his general campaign to bring the mountain fortresses under his direct control, attacking Khatl’, Ostan, Van, Bīlīs, and Maku in the 1420s, with the result, according to a later Armenian colophon author, that “he made our country his mulk’”: ibid., 174–75.

51 The positive evaluation was written in the monastery of Ewstat’e (Tat’ew) in Siwnik’, while the latter came from the city of Hizan south of Lake Van: Sanjian, Colophons, 129, 130. At the end of his life, he still received mixed reviews from Armenian sources: a colophon from Caucasian Albania in 1420 asserts, “Although he is a Muslim [aylazgī], he is kind toward the Christians, the priests, and the churches,” while another author complains that “the levies imposed upon us by Łaray Usuf Xan [Kara Yūsuf Khān] were most exorbitant.” The praise comes from the region of Aghwān, while the complaint originates in a monastery in K’ajberunik’ northeast of Lake Van: ibid., 145, 148. The term ujjūqqū, translated “Muslim” by Sanjian, literally means “foreigner” with overtones of “pagan.” But in fifteenth-century colophons it was typically used of the Muslim population: ibid., 431.
Armenian nation.”

His brother Jahānshāh was praised as “beneficent to Christians” in 1468, the year of his death, while another colophon of the same year describes the panic which descended upon a village hearing of his approach, until “the merciful God made him go back, for He gave Hasan Bak [Uzun Hasan Beg] the power and strength to make him [Djihānshāh] and his sons and horsemen victims of the sword.”

The Āqqūyunlū ruler Qarā ʿUthmān was criticized for the fact that his troops “plundered, and they carried off into captivity as many as they could, and they spilled the blood of many in our country,” while a later colophon praised him for having “shown great love for the Christians and the ecclesiastics.”

Clearly these evaluations of how the Muslim rulers treated their Christian subjects do not reflect consistent region-wide policies of these rulers, but different local experiences differentiated by time and geography. Negative evaluations typically reflect the experience of being raided and plundered by an army commanded by the ruler in question, while positive evaluations are often derived from local peace or permission to build churches. In other words, these evaluations reflect very local conditions and cannot be generalized, and we need to be very cautious about how we use these reports.

Instead, to assess how the Christian minorities of this region generally interacted with their rulers we must examine the more explicit and detailed descriptions of their encounters.

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52 Both colophons are from 1425, the complaint from Jagavank’ in Ayrarat and the praise from the village of Agulis in Siwnik’: Sanjian, Colophons, 168–69.

53 This time the praise comes from Hizan, while the panic occurred in the region of Manzikert: ibid., 292, 294.

54 Both of these colophons come from monasteries in K’ajberunik’ northeast of Lake Van, the complaint from 1425 and the praise from 1435: ibid., 168, 182. Local rulers also received both praise and blame from different scribes. Two colophons praised the Kurdish ruler of the Hakkārī mountains, Malik Muḥammad b. ʿIzz al-Dīn Shīr, who “protects us well,” and he and his father “are most beneficent protectors of our Armenian nation”: ibid., 142. Each colophon’s author is named Astuacatur, but they were written in different monasteries, so it is not clear whether both were written by the same scribe, or whether they are two scribes with the same name. Nevertheless a slightly later scribe labels the same ruler as “notorious”: ibid., 145.

55 John Woods uses these evaluations in Armenian colophons to assert that Qarā ʿUthmān and his son Ḥamza treated Christians well, while Qarā ʿUthmān’s other son Shaykh-Ḥasan and his grandson Uzun Ḥasan treated Christians less well: Woods, Aqquyunlu, 57, 106, 249 n. 43. Woods notes the contradictory evaluations of both Qarā ʿUthmān and Uzun Ḥasan, but he argues that the preponderance of evidence argues for Qarā ʿUthmān’s favorable treatment of Christians and Uzun Ḥasan’s harsher policies: ibid., 247 n. 157, 260 n. 83. I do not think this evidence can be averaged in this manner.
Muslim Rulers and Christian Subjects: Personal Contacts

One thing the rulers of this region did not do was ignore the Christians, or the ecclesiastical hierarchies which governed them. Instead, they invested Christian patriarchs with authority over their respective churches. The firman of Jahānshâh b. Qarā Yūsuf on behalf of Catholicos Ohanēs of the Caucasian Albanians in 866 A.H. / 1462 confirms his authority over the Christians in the region of Aghwān, and shows that issues of ecclesiastical jurisdiction were matters of concern for the Qarāqūyunlū ruler of Tabriz.\(^56\) An Armenian colophon of the same year, 911 A.A. / 1462, reports that Jahānshâh gave Catholicos Zak’aria III of Alt’amar a khil’ā, a robe given as an honor, as did Jahānshâh’s foster-brother Maḥmūd Bey slightly later, and “they also granted him the [relic of the] right hand of Surb Grigor Lusaworič’ [St. Gregory the Illuminator], as well as the title of patriarch.”\(^57\) But the most extensive evidence for the relations between secular rulers and Christian patriarchs occurs in the anonymous continuation of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle. The chronicler refers on two occasions to Sultan al-Malik Khalaf of Ḥiṣn-Kayf giving “a garment of honor” to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, Ḫū‘ī ‘Īnwardoyo, in 1455.\(^58\) Muslim rulers invested Christian patriarchs as leaders of their communities.

Nor was this investiture merely *pro forma*: the same anonymous chronicler explicitly stated that the Christians offered a ruler of Mārdīn the choice between two possible successors to

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\(^{56}\) Mudarrisī-Ṭabaṭabā’ī, *Farmānḥā*, 36–37. Ohanēs was already mentioned in an Armenian colophon dated 905 A.A. / 1456, so this firman did not establish him in the office of Catholicos of the Albanians: Xač’ikyan, *Tashingerord*, II:66. But Catholicos of the Caucasian Albanians are mentioned so rarely in Armenian colophons that we cannot be sure when Ohanēs began his tenure.

\(^{57}\) Sanjian, *Colophons*, 272, 274–75.

Patriarch Ignatius Abrohom bar Garîbh after his death in 1412. Later Sultan Ibrâhîm Bey of Mârdîn played a similar role in selecting the successor of Patriarch Khalaf of Mârdîn after his death in 1484. Two parties formed around different candidates, but one party bribed Ibrâhîm Bey for their nominee to be made patriarch, brought the vestments and seal of the deceased patriarch, and the ruler commanded the ordination of their candidate, conferring upon him the patriarchal vestments and seal. Patriarch Nû/uni1E25 of Mârdîn was also invested with the vestments and seal as “Patriarch of all Sûryoyê” by both Qâsim b. Jahângîr Äqqûyunlû, the Sultan of Mârdîn, and by the emir of Hişn-Kayf. The Muslim rulers of the region influenced the succession of Christian leaders within the territory under their control.

In addition to choosing new patriarchs, the rulers sometimes removed problematic current ecclesiastical officials, or even attempted to suppress patriarchates or establish new ones. Patriarch Îshû’ bar Mûto of Tûr ‘Abdîn was deposed in the late 1410s by the vizier of Hişn-Kayf under Sulaymân al-Ayyûbî for failing to protect the vizier’s son who had been left in the patriarch’s custody while the vizier went on the Hajj to Mecca. His successor, Mas’ûd Şala hôyo, was abducted by Kurds in 1420, recovered by soldiers sent by Sulaymân al-Ayyûbî, and then poisoned by Sulaymân himself to respond to complaints that the sultan of Hişn-Kayf was favoring the Christians, according to the anonymous chronicler. Two Armenian patriarchs ruled simultaneously in the region governed by the Qarâqûyunlû, one based on the island of Alt’amar in Lake Van and the other at Éjmiac in near Vaḷarşapat further north, but in 1462

60 The identity of this ruler of Mârdîn is not fully clear. Two possibilities mentioned by John Woods are Ibrâhîm b. Jahângîr, the first cousin of Sultan Ya’qûb, or Ibrâhîm b. Dana Khalîl, known as Ayba Sulţân, who later put Rustam b. Maqšûd on the throne: Woods, Äqqûyunlu, 208, 210.
62 Ibid., III:559–62.
63 Ibid., 811–14.
64 Ibid., 813–14.
Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf, the Qarāqūyunlū ruler, deposed Catholicos Grigor X of Ėjmiacin and tried to join his patriarchal throne to that of Catholicos Zak’aria III of Alt’amar. After Zak’aria’s death two successors were chosen, Aristakēs for Ėjmiacin and Step’anos IV for Alt’amar, so the patriarchates did not remain united, and some scribes continued to name Grigor X as the Catholicos as late as 1468, probably regarding him as the legitimate patriarch even after he was deposed and Zak’aria III took over Ėjmiacin. In spite of the limited lasting effects of Jahānshāh’s policy, here we see a Qarāqūyunlū Türkmen ruler deposing one patriarch and re-writing ecclesiastical jurisdictions. As the dust was settling after the contested Syrian Orthodox patriarchal election of 1484, Sultan Ibrāhīm Bey of Mārdin offered to make the rejected candidate a patriarch rivaling the sultan’s earlier choice for the office of Patriarch of
Mārdīn, although the candidate refused the title. The rulers were therefore more frequently successful in removing a patriarch who had become offensive than at restructuring the patriarchates.

Local rulers and emirs also provided a court for complaints for or against the Christian patriarchs. When the Arabs living beside a Syrian Orthodox monastery made trouble for the monks, Patriarch Yūḥannān b. Shāyallāh appealed to the ruler of Mārdīn. Later the same patriarch traveled to Sultan Ya’qūb b. Uzūn šāh in Taβrīz for vindication against some Kurds who had destroyed a church in Ma’dān. This practice of patriarchs appealing to the rulers is probably implicit in the colophon dated 29 November 1789 A.G. / 1477 which credits Catholicos Shem’ōn with contending on behalf of his flock and emerging victorious, enabling him to re-open some churches which had been closed. Another colophon from seven years later, which mentions the rebuilding of churches at this time, is conspicuously the only fifteenth-century East Syrian colophon which names a non-Christian ruler. At the end of the century the Āqqūyunlū ruler Rustam issued a firman in favor of the Armenian catholicos at Ałt’amar against his rival at Ėjmīacin, and we may presume that the prelate had requested it. Evidently Christian patriarchs were able to obtain the sultan’s ear.

69 Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, II:839.
70 An Armenian colophon from 1449 asserts that Qarā ’Uthnān Āqqūyunlū put all Christians under the jurisdiction of the Armenian bishop of Šamīd, Tēr Mkrtič’ Nahāšt: Sanjian, Colophons, 210. But it is not clear whether the colophon’s use of “Christians” refers only to the Armenians or includes Christians of other churches, nor is it clear what sort of jurisdiction is referred to.
71 Cambridge Dd. 3.81, f. 86a. For a recent scholarly interpretation of this episode, see Andrew Palmer, “John Bar Šayallāh and the Syrian Orthodox Community Under Aqquyunlu Rule in the Late Fifteenth Century,” in Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages, ed. Martin Tamcke, Beiruter Texte Und Studien 117 (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2007), 202–3.
72 Cambr. Dd. 3.81, f. 87a.
73 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b. Identical text is found in a colophon dated 1800 A.G. / 1489, unfortunately damaged at its beginning: BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.
74 BL Add. 7174, f. 321a. An additional note added to Vatican sir. 186, f. 241b, after its colophon mentions Uzun Ḥasan, and these are the only two East Syrian manuscripts from the fifteenth century which name Muslim sovereigns.
Of course, the secular ruler also provided a court of appeals for other Christian bishops, sometimes against the patriarchs, for example when the bishops of Tür ’Abdîn complained to secular authorities of Ḥiṣn-Kayf about Patriarch Mas’ūd Zazoyo of Tür ’Abdîn in 1494, and the city leaders imprisoned Patriarch Mas’ūd demanding payment of five hundred gold dinars. Although Patriarch Mas’ūd eventually escaped, he finished his days hiding in obscure monasteries. In the same affair, the Āqqūyunlū sultan of Mârdîn, Qâsim, played an active role in brokering the ecclesiastical reconciliation between the Syrian Orthodox bishops of Tür ’Abdîn and Patriarch Nûh Pûnîqoyo of Mârdîn. Earlier in the century, a Syrian Orthodox bishop had apparently appealed directly to Mîrānshâh b. Tîmûr to spare his village of Arbû, and the request was granted. Two surviving Qarāqūyunlū firmans also confirm the authority of an Armenian vardapet over the monastery of Tat’ew and the duties of the territories under the monastery’s jurisdiction, which indicates that Christian leaders below the rank of patriarch sometimes came to the Muslim ruler’s attention. Sultan Ya’qûb’s execution of the Persian soldier who killed Xōja Mirak’, with which this chapter opened, likewise shows the Muslim ruler as the dispenser of justice for not only his Muslim but also his Christian subjects. These accounts make clear that Muslim rulers acted as a court of appeals for the Christian ecclesiastical hierarchies, whether against Muslims or against other Christians.

Christians even profited from the patronage of non-Christian rulers on occasion. Shâh Muḥammad b. Qarâ Yûsuf, the Qarâqūyunlû ruler of Baghdad in the 1410s, employed a

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76 Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, III:555–56. The text designates them “possessors” (امینی), which does not indicate what title they may have used for themselves.
77 Ibid., III:557–60.
78 Ibid., III:559–60.
79 Mîrānshâh is referred to only as “the son of Tîmûr Khan”: Gregory Abû’l Faraj Bar Hebraeus, The Chronography of Gregory Abû’l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Oxford Univ. Press, H. Milford, 1932), II:xxxvii, f. 194v.
80 The earlier firman is undated, but from Jahānshâh b. Qâra Yûsuf (r. 1438-1467), while the later one, dated 4 Ramaḍān 872/28 March 1468, is from his son Ḥasan ’Alî: Mudarris-Ṭabaṭâbâ’î, Farmânhâ, 53, 56–57.
81 Woods, Aqqûyunlu, 141.
Christian named ‘Abd al-Masih as his chief civilian governor,82 while in 1435 a deputy (nâ’ib) under Qarā ‘Uthmān had paid for the construction of a monastery and the copying of an Armenian book of saints’ lives.83 These examples seem to indicate that, at least early in the century, Christians could still attain prominent roles in the service of Muslim rulers in Iraq and eastern Anatolia. One scribe portrays Qarā ‘Uthmān and his son Sulṭān Ḥamza as lavishing gifts on the Armenian bishop of Āmid, Tēr Mκrtd Naša, and a colophon credits Qarā ‘Uthmān with building a church in the citadel of Arγhań.84 Another Armenian colophon, dated 911 A.A. / 1462, alleges that Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf’s foster-brother Maḥmūd Bey venerated the relic of St. Gregory the Illuminator kept by Catholicos Zak’aria III of Aḥ’tamar.85 Jahānshāh’s son Ḥasan ‘Alī is credited with building an Armenian church, and even Uzun Ḥasan is reported to have donated to an Armenian monastery.86 Indeed, a ruler’s patronage of Christians might lead to rumors circulating that the ruler had become Christian himself. Shāh Muḥammad b. Qarā Yūsuf is reported to have become a Christian by antagonistic Mamluk historians, and T’ovma Mecop’ec’i also mentions the rumor that the ruler of Baghdad was “a servant of Christ.”87

Sulṭān Ḥamza b. Qarā ‘Uthmān’s gifts to the Armenian bishop of Āmid also inspired speculation

83 Sanjian, Colophons, 182. The nā’ib in question probably governed Chamishgazak, and his request for an Armenian book probably indicates that he was an Armenian Christian.
84 Ibid., 205, 210.
85 Ibid., 274–75.
87 Al-Maqīrī, Kitāb al-Sulūk, IV:924; Abu al-Maḥāsin Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf Ibn Taghrībir dhī, History of Egypt, 1382-1469 A.D., trans. William Popper, University of California Publications in Semitic Philology 17-18 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957–1958), III:119, IV:116, 201; Ibn Taghrībir dhī, al-Manhal al-Sāfī, 11:183; Mecop’ec’i, Patmagraṭ’yan, 137. The Mamluk sources are from a hostile political and religious viewpoint, so it is unclear how far to trust them, but Mecop’ec’i’s report indicates that the charges were not fabricated in Egypt. On the other hand, if Shāh Muḥammad had been baptized into an Armenian church, it is unlikely that T’ovma Mecop’ec’i would have been content to report his Christianity as merely a rumor. It is therefore unclear whether Shāh Muḥammad was baptized into another church or was merely suspected of being Christian for his actions atypical of a Muslim, such as the crimes recounted by the Mamluk chroniclers.
that the Āqqūyunlū ruler might be a crypto-Christian. Although the gifts bestowed were far less than what they received from the Mongol Ilkhans two centuries before, fifteenth-century Christians in this region did look to their Muslim rulers as occasional sources of patronage, and they were sometimes rewarded.

Personal contacts between Christian leaders and Muslim rulers demonstrated the latter’s authority over the former, through the rulers’ influence on patriarchal elections or the distribution of patriarchates. A favorably disposed ruler could be beneficial for the patriarchs and bishops by providing a court of appeals against antagonists, whether Christian or Muslim, and sometimes Christians even benefited from the patronage of Muslim governors or rulers. After Uzun Ḥasan’s final defeat of the Qarāqūyunlū in 1469, rulers continued to invest patriarchs and to provide a final court of appeals, but actual patronage of Christian leaders or institutions by the Āqqūyunlū rulers seems to have ceased. Even though Uzun Ḥasan married a Christian princess to cement a peace treaty with Trebizond, and even though his son Yaʿqūb executed a Persian soldier who killed an Armenian merchant, there were no rumors that either of them had secretly converted to Christianity.

**Muslim Rulers and Christian Subjects: Policies**

The ruling powers in fifteenth-century Diyār Bakr and Iraq touched the lives of most Christians only indirectly, through taxation and discriminatory regulations rather than personal contacts. Taxation in this region was most recently studied by Walter Hinz, using early Ottoman

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89 The date of Uzun Ḥasan’s donation to the monastery of Glak is unclear. The gift is reported following the narration of other events of September 1472, but preceding a siege dated by the author to 912 A.A. / 1463 (Sanjian erroneously gives the latter date as 1473, unless there is an error in the Armenian text or translation): Sanjian, *Colophons*, 307. If the donation took place after September 1472, it is the last example of royal patronage for Christians in the fifteenth century.
documents which cite the tax law under Uzun Ḥasan Āqqūyunlū.\(^{90}\) We can supplement these later official sources, however, with the numerous Armenian colophons which complain about the levels of taxation. Many of these complaints are general, and do not give any detail, but some colophons enrich our understanding of how taxation worked at this time. Although probably all rulers taxed, not all taxed equally, and one scribe even thanked God for the Qarāqūyunlū ruler Qarā Yūsuf who freed the region of Siwnik’ from the Timurid tax-collectors by defeating Abū Bakr b. Mīrānshāh in 1407.\(^{91}\) Multiple tax schemes operated concurrently in the fifteenth century, and the scribe who complained, “They demand a price for our faith,” was probably referring to the jizya head tax on non-Muslims.\(^{92}\) Taxes fell especially heavily on the clergy, for in the 1440s Armenian scribes complained of greater taxes for priests than for laypeople under both Qarāqūyunlū and Āqqūyunlū taxation schemes.\(^{93}\) Apparently the Christians under Āqqūyunlū rule in Mesopotamia were also subject to a tax on church buildings in the early fifteenth century, although the colophon which reports the fact asserts that the Armenian bishop of Āmid was able to get this tax burden canceled.\(^{94}\) Christians were also affected by the transport tolls, even in the unexpected way that they raised the cost of pilgrimages.\(^{95}\) The continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ world chronicle notes that in 1491-2 a group of Syrian Orthodox priests went from Tūr ʿAbdīn to Jerusalem in the company of the ambassador from Bāysunghur b. Yaʿqūb and his protector Sulaymān Bey to the Mamluks, and the priests in

\(^{90}\) Hinz, “Steuerwesen.” The primary documents are compiled in Ömer Lütfi Barkan, XV ve XVI İnci Asrında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Ziraat Ekonomisinin Hukuk ve Mali Esasları (İstanbul: Bürhaneddin Matbaası, 1943).

\(^{91}\) Sanjian, Colophons, 130. Later scribes also complained of Qarā Yūsuf’s heavy taxes: ibid., 148.

\(^{92}\) Sanjian, Colophons, 124; Xač’ikyan, Tasnmingerord, 1:25. The word which Sanjian translated “price” (qḥū) can also mean “tax, tariff.”

\(^{93}\) Sanjian, Colophons, 201, 211. A later colophon, dated 1476, also complained that priests were liable for the land tax (kharāj): ibid., 316.

\(^{94}\) Sanjian, Colophons, 211.

\(^{95}\) Hinz devotes a whole section of his study of the tax system to tolls: Hinz, “Steuerwesen,” 196–99. The impact of road tolls on pilgrimage may be hinted at by a scribe who complained in 1421 that he was hindered from going to Jerusalem many times by Qarā Yūsuf’s taxes: Sanjian, Colophons, 148.
this retinue “gave nothing to any man on the road, not even one darîkûnâ.” Clearly the absence of paying the road tolls was noteworthy, while the paying of tolls may be presumed for other accounts of pilgrimages contained in this chronicle.

Türkmen rulers from both confederations employed the ecclesiastical hierarchies to gather taxes from the Christian populations. Bishops acted as tax-gatherers under Āqqūyunlû rule according to a colophon of 1449, and in 1462 Catholicos Zak’aria III collected the taxes of the city of Bidlîs for Jahânshâh b. Qarâ Yûsuf. It is unclear whether all taxes from the Christian populations were collected through the bishops, or whether other tax-collectors were employed by the rulers. An Armenian Christian named Lala Miranshês recorded in a colophon dated 1481 that he traveled to the imperial court at Tabriz to pay the kharâj (land tax) and the tamghâ (commercial tax) for Alt’amar and Ostan, which indicates that Christians outside the ecclesiastical hierarchy were involved in tax collection, but it remains unclear whether he was employed by the Āqqūyunlû rulers as a tax-collector, or whether he was merely sent as a courier by the bishops.

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96 Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, ii, f. 200r. A darîkûnâ would be a small coin.
97 Pilgrimages, often of high-ranking Syrian Orthodox clergy, are mentioned several times in the continuations of Bar Hebraeus’ chronicles: ibid., xxxv, I; Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, III:538, 544, and perhaps II:820.
98 Sanjian, Colophons, 211, 273. Actually, the role of bishops may be given more precisely as “customs chiefs” (Armenian եկեղեցու տարածքի քարտադոր, reflecting the role that the tamghâwât (taxes on commerce and transport of goods) played in the Āqqūyunlû tax system. It is unclear whether they collected only from the Christians, or from Muslims as well.
99 The frequent reference in the colophons to “wicked tax-collectors” would be surprising if directed at bishops, but the term can also be used of the rulers who demand the taxes. The term քարթադոր (tax-collector”) was used of the Qaraqûyunlû ruler Jahânshâh b. Qarâ Yûsuf and the regional governor Qilîch Aşlân of Van and Ostan in a colophon dated 1445: Xac’ikyan, Tasnhingerord, I:579. Thus it is not clear whether the “wicked tax-collectors” refer to non-bishops employed by the rulers to collect taxes, or to the rulers themselves.
100 Although the name is Persian, many Armenians had Persian names in this period, and the fact that he was Christian is deduced from the arrangements he made for the endowment of the Holy Cross Church at Alt’amar: ibid., III:11. The same colophon also refers to the “tamghâ officials of Ostan” (ئەقەبیەیەکانی ڕەنگێکەی, the second word representing the Turkish tamghâ-chî) in parallel to the “house-lords of Alt’amar” (ئەقەبیەکانی ڕەنگێکەی), probably indicating that these officials were not bishops.
101 One anecdote preserved in the continuation of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle may imply that the Qaraqûyunlû ruler of Baghdad, Aspahân b. Qarâ Yûsuf, employed Türkmen tax-collectors. The Syrian Orthodox Maphrian Barṣawmo Ma’dnoyo received a demand from Aspahân for a certain amount of wine conveyed by a
The rulers also provided tax exemptions to certain Christians who petitioned the court, and some records of these exemptions have survived. The 1449 colophon extolling the virtues of the Armenian bishop of Āmid includes among his good deeds his successful effort to obtain tax exemptions for priests and churches. Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf granted tax exemptions to Ohanēs, the Catholicos of the Caucasian Albanians, and Vardapet Šēmawon, the abbot of Tat’ew monastery in Siwnik’. Jahānshāh’s son Ḥasan ‘Alī renewed the tax exemption for the monastery of Tat’ew in 872 A.H. / 1468. Uzun Ḥasan granted tax immunity to the priests of Üch Kilīsyā (probably Éjmiacin) in 880 A.H. / 1475, and his son Ya’qūb confirmed Jahānshāh’s tax exemption to Catholicos Šēmawon of the Caucasian Albanians in 892 A.H. / 1487. All of these examples show Christian clergy petitioning the Türkmen ruler directly, but an Armenian colophon from 933 A.A. / 1484 indicates the role that minor lords could play in securing tax exemptions. The text praises the lords of Van because “they liberated the priests from the tax requirements of the wicked ones” [i.e. the Muslim rulers]. The priests in question are probably the patriarchate of Alt’amar, just offshore from Van. These grants of tax immunity show that the ruler’s taxation policy, while widely enforced, admitted exceptions.

The Armenian sources also present the Muslim rulers as enforcing or removing the discriminatory social rules affecting dhimmīs (non-Muslims), practices which ranged from distinctive clothing to prohibitions on building to requiring non-Muslims to drag their dead on the way to burial rather than lifting them up in honor. In the early fifteenth century these

“Mongol envoy”: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, II:826. “Mongol” presumably refers to nomadic Türkmen in this instance, and it is not clear whether the demand for wine was a form of tax or not.

102 The text does not specify which priests or churches were affected, but says the priests were freed from the “royal tax” (πουχανθηματικλη υπαρχει) and the churches from the *dimosakan* tax, which Sanjian defines in an appendix as “public, government, or municipal”: Sanjian, *Colophons*, 211, 447; Xač’ikyan, *Tasnigerord*, I:625–26. The nature of the exemption is thus very obscure, but the report serves a hagiographic rather than fiscal function.

103 Mudarrisi-Ṭabāṭābāī, *Farmānāhā*, 36, 53.

104 Ibid., 56–58.

105 Ibid., 79, 93.

practices varied in their implementation from one locality to the next. Distinctive clothing was a source of complaint in Armenian colophons early in the preceding century as the Mongol Ilkhanate converted to Islam.\textsuperscript{107} After 1336, it is not mentioned in any colophons translated by Sanjian until 1446, which may indicate that the practice had become the norm in certain regions and was not being extended to new regions, or that the custom had lapsed. A colophon from Erzincan indicates that when the Āqqūyunlū prince Maḥmūd b. Qarā ῶ Uthmān took the city in 1446 he ordered “that the Christians should remove the blue symbols from their heads and should freely practice their religion.”\textsuperscript{108} This indicates how the distinctive clothing was resented by the scribe, but also that it had been common practice in Erzincan in the period leading up to 1446. On the other hand, when Rustam Ibn Tarkhan captured Mārdīn in 1450 on behalf of the Qarāqūyunlū ruler Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf, a scribe indicates that he “put a blue symbol upon the Christians,” indicating that it had not been required under the Āqqūyunlū ruler Jahānḡīr b. ‘Alī.\textsuperscript{109} Both of these examples show that the discriminatory clothing regulations could change when a new ruler took over a city, and since Jahānḡīr was re-instated in Mārdīn sixteen months after Rustam’s conquest it is not clear whether Rustam’s rules for Christian dress remained in effect.\textsuperscript{110} The prohibition of non-Muslims raising their dead in honor on the way to burial was mentioned in the middle of the century: a colophon dated 1449, probably from Āmid, indicates that Christians and Jews were required to drag their dead and no bribe could relieve the requirement, until an Armenian bishop secured the removal of the practice from the Āqqūyunlū

\textsuperscript{107} Sanjian, \textit{Colophons}, 52–53, 60, 73, 76.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 207. Although Sanjian does not identify the princes involved, Woods narrates Maḥmūd’s capture of Erzincan following his brother Shaykh Ḥasan’s defeat and imprisonment outside Kemākh: Woods, \textit{Aqquyunlu}, 73. The distinctive clothing required for Christians in this region appears to have been a blue turban, given that some of the fifteenth century colophons describe it as “a blue symbol on the head.” The 1336 colophon from Tabriz makes this explicit: “they forced [the Christians] to wear a blue \textit{tawlpand},” i.e. turban: Sanjian, \textit{Colophons}, 76.
\textsuperscript{109} Sanjian, \textit{Colophons}, 221.
\textsuperscript{110} Woods, \textit{Aqquyunlu}, 78. The scribe of the colophon complaining about Rustam’s clothing requirements for Christians also reports Jahānḡīr’s reacquisition of Mārdīn, but he does not mention whether the reversion of power affected the discriminatory rules: Sanjian, \textit{Colophons}, 222.
ruler. The multitude of local rulers in the first half of the fifteenth century, each with a different perspective on the desired level of discrimination against Christians, along with the rapid changes of government as cities continually changed hands, prevented any region-wide policy on the dhimmī regulations.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, Uzun Ḥasan seems to have attempted to standardize the enforcement of discriminatory regulations across his domain even as he unified the region under a single ruler. He required the blue sign for Christians more extensively than previously: colophons complain of this from Kemākh in 1464, from a monastery in Siwnik’ in 1470, and from an unidentified location in 1476. The 1476 colophon ascribes the agency of the decision to Uzun Ḥasan himself, and the 1470 colophon identifies the distinctive dress for Christians as a recent imposition following Uzun Ḥasan’s defeat of Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf in 1467. The requirement that non-Muslims drag their dead to burial, revoked in Āmid in the middle of the century, appears to have been reinstated by Uzun Ḥasan, for in his reign two colophons mention the practice, in 1464 and 1476. The prohibition of church bells also appears as a late Āqqūyunlū development, mentioned in colophons in 1470, 1476, and 1485. The prohibition of ringing church bells is specifically associated with the Āqqūyunlū conquest of Tabriz in the colophons from 1470 and 1485, and the fact that all of these discriminatory regulations are best attested under Uzun Ḥasan indicates that he attempted to systematize their enforcement during his reign, perhaps as part of his “attempts to curry favor with the Islamic religious establishment,” as John Woods suggests.

111 Sanjian, Colophons, 212.
112 Ibid., 282, 299, 316.
113 Ibid., 282, 316.
114 Ibid., 299, 316; Xač’ikyan, Tasnhingerord, III:71.
115 Woods, Aqquyunlu, 106.
One aspect of the *dhimmī* regulations did not follow the trend of increasing standardization under Uzun Ḥasan, namely the prohibition on building churches. On the one hand, church buildings often became a bone of contention between the Christian population and their Muslim rulers in this period. Fourteenth-century colophons had complained of churches being demolished or closed by Muslim rulers, so the issue was not new in the fifteenth century.¹¹⁶ These complaints were echoed early in the fifteenth century by a colophon from Erzincan dated 1403 which does not specify who destroyed the local churches.¹¹⁷ A scribe labeled Iskandar b. Qarā Yūsuf “a destroyer of churches” in 1425, probably reflecting the Qarāqūyunlū ruler’s Hakkārī campaigns, while the Āqqūyunlū prince Shaykh Ḥasan b. Qarā ʿUthmān was reported to be scheming about the destruction of the churches in Erzincan and Kemākh in 1445.¹¹⁸ An Armenian colophon dated 1449, probably from Āmid, gives a specific statement of the restriction prohibiting restoration of ruined churches as well as the building of new churches: “no one could affix a stone onto the churches that were in ruins.”¹¹⁹ From the precision of the statement it seems that this prohibition had the force of law in Āmid in the middle of the fifteenth century.

On the other hand, many other sources record the building of churches in the fifteenth century. T’ovma Mecop’ec’i reports that a church was constructed by an Armenian monk in Arčeş north of Lake Van in the period 851-858 A.A. / 1402-1409.¹²⁰ Two colophons from Alt’amar report the construction of a church and the restoration of a monastery in the first decades of the fifteenth century, under the rule of ʿIzz al-Dīn Shīr and his son Malik

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¹¹⁶ Sanjian, *Colophons*, 58, 76, 86, 103. The last colophon complains specifically of the early Qarāqūyunlū emir Qarā Muhammad, the father of Qarā Yūsuf, as the instigator of persecution against Christians.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 126.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., 168, 206.
¹¹⁹ Ibid., 211.
¹²⁰ Mecop’ec’i, *Patmagraṭ’yun*, 91.
Another Armenian colophon from 1445, written in Arghanî, ascribes the erection of the church in Arghanî’s citadel to the deceased Āqqūyunlū ruler Qarā `Uthmān himself, although the colophon dated 1449, cited above, credits this church’s construction to the Armenian bishop of Āmid, Tēr Mkrtiĉ’ Nalaş, in the year 1433, near the end of Qarā `Uthmān’s reign. The earlier colophon ascribing the building to Qarā `Uthmān may indicate that he provided funds for the work. A colophon from Kemākh in 1439 explains how good Qarā `Uthmān’s son Ya`qūb was for the Christian population by asserting that he permitted the building of churches. A more contested example was the Armenian Cathedral of St. Theodore in Āmid, which Tēr Mkrtiĉ’ Nalaş began to construct in 1439, but which was partly demolished and the bishop himself sent into exile in 1443 due to Muslim opposition. After the death of Sultān Ḥamza b. Qarā `Uthmān, Jahāngīr b. ‘Alī took over Āmid and allowed the cathedral to be restored, and it was completed in 1447. A scribe in Ostan on the southern shore of Lake Van memorialized his own construction of a church in a colophon dated 1459, while a scribe on the island of Ktuc’ in Lake Van recorded in 1481 that his maternal uncle built a church. A later colophon from nearby Hizan praised Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf’s kindness to the Christians with the remark that “many churches were built and restored during his reign,” and Jahānshāh’s son Ḥasan ‘Alī was even reported to have built a church at Maku in Ādharbayjān.

Nor were Armenians the only ones building churches in this period, although they have the most plentiful evidence. When the Syrian Orthodox church in Bēth Sbhīrīno, a village in Ṭūr

121 Sanjian, Colophons, 201, 203. The fact that these colophons were written over twenty years after the end of Malik Muḥammad’s reign may indicate how noteworthy these construction projects seemed in the middle of the century, but it is not certain that church construction was disallowed in this region in the 1440s.
122 Ibid., 205, 211, 213. The year 1433 coincides with Qarā `Uthmān’s residing in Arghanī during the campaign of Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay: Woods, Āqqūyunlū, 52.
123 Sanjian, Colophons, 192.
124 Ibid., 213–14.
125 Ibid., 263: Xaĉ’ikyan, Tasnhingerord, III:12.
126 Sanjian, Colophons, 292–93, 304.
ʿAbdīn outside Mārdīn, collapsed in 1474, they were able to get builders from Mārdīn to repair it. An Syriac colophon from a village near Mosul dated 29 November 1789 A.G. / 1477 also speaks of the East Syrian Catholicos Shemʿōn rebuilding churches: “And when of all the churches in the whole eastern realm [politeia] some were closed and many were also ruined… [Catholicos Shemʿōn] opened the ones which were closed and (re-)built the ones which were ruined.”

An inscription records the repair of the church entrance of the East Syrian monastery of Rabban Hōrmīzd outside of Alqūsh, a village north of Mosul, in 1485, and an East Syrian colophon from Mosul dated 1484 indicates that reconstruction of ruined monasteries was taking place in the reign of Yaʿqūb b. Uzun Ḥasan. Both the Syrian Orthodox patriarchs, of Mārdīn and of Ẓūr ʿAbdīn, were involved in rebuilding a church for their denomination in Nisibis in 1489. The life of Yūḥannon b. Shayallāh, the patriarch of Mārdīn at the time, indicates that he secured permission from the local ruler and judges, and obtained a certification from the Islamic legal scholars that he was re-building a ruined church instead of building from the ground. The vita goes on to list five other churches and six monasteries which he repaired. Although church building and restoration was sometimes prohibited in this region, there were often means

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127 Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xliv–xlvi, f. 198r.
128 Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, II:839–42.
129 Cambr. Dd. 3.81, f. 85a; Palmer, “John Bar Šayallāh,” 200–1. Although all Islamic legal schools prohibited the construction of new churches, opinions were divided as to whether reconstruction of existing edifices was permitted, and the division did not always follow the lines of legal schools: Antoine Fattal, Le statut légal des non-musulmans en pays d’Islam, 2nd ed., Recherches. Série 3: Oriente chrétien t. 3 (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Sarl, 1995), 174–76. The version of the Pact of ʿUmar cited by Fattal prohibits re-building as well as new construction, but Fattal notes that enforcement in the late medieval period was variable: ibid., 61, 200–3.
of completing construction projects throughout the century, particularly accompanied by a substantial bribe. Unlike the regulations pertaining to distinctive dress for Christians, to dragging the dead, and to prohibiting church bells, the prohibition of church construction apparently was not enforced more systematically in the late fifteenth century under Uzun Hasan or his son Ya‘qūb than under the earlier Türkmen emirs. Indeed, the more peaceful conditions in Diyār Bakr and Iraq in the 1470s and 1480s, following the final defeat of the Qarāqūyunlū, may have enabled more construction to take place.

**Conclusion**

When two stars orbit each other, there is a place between them which orbits neither, where their gravitational fields cancel each other and where the dynamics tend to be unpredictable. As the empires of the Mamluks, Timurids, and Ottomans warily circled each other in the fifteenth century, their shared frontier zone in Jazīra and northern Iraq was such a place. Local and regional politics ruled the day, and Muslim rulers kept careful track of their Christian populations by confirming patriarchal successions, sometimes even choosing between multiple candidates or re-writing ecclesiastical jurisdictions, and adjudicating disputes between Christian leaders. They collected taxes, which were a perpetual source of complaint, and granted tax exemptions to certain patriarchs and monasteries. Discriminatory social regulations against non-Muslims were well-known, although applied inconsistently. But as the nearly incessant warfare of the first two thirds of the fifteenth century settled down into the long twilight of the Āqqūyunlū, the greater stability enabled Christians to rebuild after the earlier destruction even as it also enabled rulers to enforce stricter discriminatory regulations on the non-Muslim

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134 The story of the cathedral of Āmid twice indicates the strategy of bribing the political rulers, first in the failed attempt to save the cathedral in 1443, and second upon the bishop’s return from exile: Sanjian, *Colophons*, 213–14. We should probably assume that paying for a construction permit was a common element in church building plans.
populations. And when all is said and done, the only certainties for Christians in fifteenth-century Jazīra and Iraq were death and taxes.
Chapter 3: Christians in Middle Eastern Society

When a priest named `Īsā b. Fakhr al-Dīn b. `Īsā b. Mattā of Mosul finished copying the text of a liturgical book at the end of August in 1793 A.G. / 887 A.H. / 1482, one task remained to complete the volume: he must compose the colophon.¹ He wrote in two columns over three pages, giving the contents of the volume, expressing gratitude to God for enabling him to finish the task, providing the date of the copy’s completion in two calendars, praying for peace and good relations between the government and the religious hierarchy, praising the catholicos-patriarch and his designated successor, praying for long life for both of them, requesting prayers from the reader on account of his sins, identifying himself and his clan, praying for God’s blessings upon his city, begging to avoid the reader’s curse for any faults of the copy, praying to God for mercy for himself, his ancestors, and the Church, and cursing whoever does not love Christ. Other scribes included sections in praise of a donor or patron and soliciting prayers on the patron’s behalf, identifying the place of copying, or providing additional information about the author of the text.² Clearly a colophon should contain a large number of elements. Although a few of these elements (such as the final curse) were mostly fixed in form, and the new colophon could be modeled on the colophon of the manuscript out of which the text had been copied,³ nevertheless the majority of the new colophon’s text could be shaped and molded differently by each individual scribe.

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¹ This colophon is contained in Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, ff. 96b-97b. The scribe’s father’s name is given differently in the Arabic note at the end of the Syriac colophon, as Fakhr al-Dawla.
² An example of praising the patron, even in a brief colophon, is Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b. The place where Vatican sir. 186 was copied is identified as Griḥā, an otherwise unknown village outside Mosul, according to f. 241a. Metropolitan Sabrīshō of Ḥiṣn-Kayf provided not only the name of the text’s author, but also the date and reigning catholicos-patriarch when the author completed the text fifty years earlier: Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 106a.
³ Sanjian emphasizes the stereotyped nature of Armenian colophons, and indicates the frequent dependence of later scribes on the colophons of their exemplars: Avedis K. Sanjian, tran., Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 6–7. The Syriac colophons which I have examined possess many of the same characteristics as the Armenian colophons studied by
Most of the sources for social interactions between Christians and their neighbors, whether Muslims or other Christians, in the fifteenth century are colophons. These sources span the region now divided between eastern Turkey, Syria, northern Iraq, northeastern Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and into Georgia, and frequently describe historical events within a few years of their occurrence from a local perspective. Yet these sources were composed under particular circumstances and for particular purposes, and to use the colophons as historical sources requires an awareness of the world of the scribe. The geographical range of colophon composition may give the illusion of transcending the local perspective of a single chronicler, but in fact each colophon represents only the view from a single locality. Synthesizing these local viewpoints into a regional perspective is at best challenging, at worst impossible.

A systematic distortion of the corpus of colophon sources arises from the fact that, except when extolling the virtues of their patrons or recent holy men, the scribes were disposed to be negative about recent events. This is not to deny the fact that the life of a scribe was often painful, and the warfare of the fifteenth century frequently interrupted normal life, but it means that everyday rhythms and positive events are less likely to be recorded than disasters and

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Sanjian, but repetition seems less frequent among Syriac scribes than among Armenians. It is not clear whether that is due to a difference of scribal culture, or an artifact of the fact that far fewer Syriac manuscripts have survived. Sinclair made the point that the Armenian colophons showed the structures of fifteenth-century Middle Eastern politics and society "in motion": Thomas A. Sinclair, “The Use of the Colophons and Minor Chronicles in the Writing of Armenian and Turkish History,” Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies 10 (2000): 47.

The most detailed study of the circumstances of late medieval manuscript production and the components of Armenian colophons is given as the introduction to Sanjian, Colophons, 1–41. It is greatly to be regretted that Sanjian’s selection follows the principles of L. S. Xač’ikyan, whose edition of the colophons formed the basis for Sanjian’s translation, in that the earlier editor “has deleted certain passages from the texts, notably the introductory sections, as well as repetitive passages in the texts and stereotyped theological statements, on the grounds that they are devoid of historical value”: ibid., 6. Even fixed theological formulae are selected for certain purposes, and their inclusion is evidence, even if problematic evidence, of the worldview of the scribes.

The importance of this point was shown in the previous chapter’s discussion of the general evaluation of Muslim rulers as good or bad in multiple colophons.

Sinclair notes that the scribes’ “selection of events is somewhat biased in favor of disasters, and that the language, too, tends to systematically cast a formulaic gloom over the events described”: Sinclair, “Use of the Colophons,” 46.

Sanjian discusses these difficult circumstances in Sanjian, Colophons, 19–25.
afflictions. The result of this bias for our analysis of interactions between Christians and their Muslim neighbors, or even their Christian neighbors of different denominations, is that the sources almost universally emphasize conflict. We must review this evidence in detail, of course, but we must also be alert to implicit and probable social contacts which are not explicitly discussed in the sources in order to get a more balanced picture. The colophons of East Syrian manuscripts also provide the most important evidence for the internal social structure of that community in the fifteenth century.

**Christian and Muslim Neighbors**

If the Muslim histories of this period rarely refer to the Christian populations, with very few exceptions the Christian sources only mention non-ruling Muslims to complain about them. The most common picture of Muslim city dwellers in the sources is their opposition to anything that exalts the Christians. Legal experts reportedly objected to the rescue of the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Mardin by the Ayyubid Sultan of Hisn-Kayf at the beginning of the century, while the procession of Catholicos Zak’aria III back to Alt’amar in 1462 excited the envy of the non-Christians in Ostan. When Sultan Ya’qūb executed the killer of an Armenian merchant named Xoja Mirak’ in 935 A.A. / 1486 and gave his head to the Armenian community, the religious leaders in Tabriz complained. These examples portray Muslims as objecting to any favor shown to the Christians. The relative height of religious buildings was a sensitive issue, and

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10 Sinclair gives the example of a scribal notice that the price of bread rose after an invasion, but no colophon records any fall in the price of bread, or what the normal price is: Sinclair, “Use of the Colophons,” 46.
11 In the case of Armenian sources, inter-communal violence is highlighted by the application of the term “martyr” for any Armenian killed by a non-Armenian. For further examples of this usage, see below.
12 Gregory Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, ed. Jean Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (Lovanii: Peeters, 1872), II:813. The objectors are described as *faqîhê*, which is the Syriac plural of the Arabic title *faqîh*.
Muslims in Āmid in the middle of the century opposed the construction of an Armenian cathedral with a dome higher than the minarets, which was the boast of the scribe who recorded the conflict. Muslims apparently opposed the construction of a church in Arçēš in the first decade of the century. During a siege of the city of Kemākh in 1446, Shaykh Ḥasan b. Qarā ʻUthmān allegedly attempted to win the support of the city’s mullahs by promising to demolish the churches there, while the mullahs of Erzincan schemed with Shaykh Ḥasan to betray the city and destroy the churches. The antagonism between the urban populations provided an opportunity for besiegers: a Muslim historian reported that a Christian betrayed Āmid to Sultān Ḥamza b. Qarā ʻUthmān when he attacked the city in 1437. No doubt each population sought to secure the ruler it considered most favorable to its interests, and some antagonism between Christians and Muslims is to be expected as a result of competition for patronage and resources.

But not all reports of urban Muslims are negative, and they did not only oppose the Christian populations. According to the scribe who composed a colophon in his honor, the Armenian bishop of Āmid Tër Mkrtiç’ Nałaš was so amazing that even Turks, Persians, Kurds, Arabs, and Jews honored him. While this is certainly in part hyperbole, a firman of Ya’qūb b. Uzun Ḥasan dated 892 A.H. / 1487 indicates that the Āqqūyunlū ruler checked with the imams about the legality of a tax exemption for the Catholicos of the Caucasian Albanians. Since the edict was issued and the exemption granted, the imams in question must have ruled in favor of

15 Sanjian, Colophons, 213.
16 T’ovma Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrat’yun, ed. Levon Xač’ikyan (Yerevan: Magalat, 1999), 90–91.
17 Sanjian, Colophons, 206–7.
19 Sanjian, Colophons, 210. A similar sentiment is expressed by T’ovma Mecop’ec’i about an Armenian monk Yovhannës, whose appearance “terrified and put to shame all men, especially the Muslim peoples, so that the people of Čałatay [i.e. Timur] were coming to him for prostration” (վսահարջել են պատկերագրվել քանդվածությունը, վառման զարգացած ամենամեծությունը զավակի հռչակ): Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrat’yun, 50.
20 Հուսայն Մուդարրիս-Թաբատաբատ, Farmānhā-yi Turkumānan-i Qarā Qāyānlū va Āq Qāyānlū (Qum: Chāphānah-’i Ḥikmat, 1973), 93.
these Christian leaders. A band of Syrian Orthodox pilgrims returning from Jerusalem in the 1490s traveled part of the way in a company of Muslim merchants, presumably for mutual protection. There must have been more such contacts, but even these few examples demonstrate that not all interactions between Christians and Muslims were hostile.

Cities provided a certain social stability in this region, and the non-ruling Muslims outside the cities are typically presented as bandits and mercenaries. Kurds of various tribes are named in Christian sources, typically in order to complain of their harassment. Certain rulers are identified as Kurds in Armenian colophons, and Kurds are sometimes mentioned by Christian authors for their part in the political history of the region. Therefore one Armenian scribe lumps Kurds in with “Tatars” as “infidels” whose tyranny he bemoans. More commonly, the Kurdish tribes are mentioned by Christian authors for their violence to the Christian population. Christian leaders could be kidnapped or killed by Kurds, as happened to a Syrian Orthodox bishop named Bar Śawmo Shashū o Man’amoyo and an Armenian vardapet, Grigor Xlat’ec’i. Even patriarchs feared the Kurds: the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Tūr ‘Abdīn, Ignatius III Mas’ūd Ṣalaḥoyo, was kidnapped by Kurds, and an Armenian scribe accused the Kurdish ruler

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21 Gregory Abū’l Faraj Bar Hebraeus, *The Chronography of Gregory Abū’l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Oxford Univ. Press, H. Milford, 1932), II:lii, f. 200v. Although Budge’s translation gives “Arab merchants,” the Syriac term used is Ṭayayē, which is used specifically for Arab Muslims, as opposed to ‘Arbayē, which can refer to either Christian or Muslim Arabs.

22 Rulers identified as Kurds include ’Izz al-Dīn Shīr of Ostan (1405), Davut of Hizan (1427, 1442), Shams al-Dīn of Bidlīs (1455), and Amīr Malik of Hizan (1468): Sanjian, *Colophons*, 128, 173, 198, 253, 295. Interestingly, ’Izz al-Dīn’s son Malik Muḥammad is never identified as a Kurd in the colophons translated by Sanjian, although his father’s Kurdishness is also emphasized by T’ovma Mecop’ec’i: Mecop’ec’i, *Patmagrut’yun*, 8. A Kurdish ruler of Ostan is left unnamed in a colophon from 1462: Sanjian, *Colophons*, 275.

23 The anonymous continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ world chronicle presents various rulers employing Kurds, including the Artuqids of Mārdīn, the Ayyubids of Ḥiṣn-Kayf, and a later ruler of Hātam: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, II:xxxv, xlv. Kurdish rebels are identified in both the Syrian Orthodox chronicle and an Armenian colophon: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, II:xliv, xlix; Sanjian, *Colophons*, 305–7. Armenian colophons report that Kurdish armies were defeated by Qara Yūsuf in 1417, Iskandar b. Qara Yūsuf in 1425, Jahāṅgīr b. ‘Afi b. Qarā ’Uthmān in 1452, and Uzun Ḥasan in 1473: Sanjian, *Colophons*, 141, 167, 204, 222, 311.


of Ostan of plotting against Catholicos Zak’aria III of Alt’amar. Kurds are frequently presented as plundering the Christian populations for captives and loot. Sometimes the attacker is named, as when a colophon records that in 880 A. D. / 1431 the Kurdish emir Pîr Bey, the grandson of ‘Izz al-Dîn Shîr, had plundered the island of Alt’amar, the location of an Armenian patriarchate. Often, however, Kurds are presented as nameless, faceless, ravaging hordes which plunder the countryside, including its monasteries and Christian populations, like locusts. One chronicler even portrays a Kurdish tribe as being employed by an emir specifically as looters, evidently because they were so experienced at the task. Although individual Kurdish rulers might be remembered for their kindness to Christians, the Kurds in general were regarded by Christian authors as a source of tribulation.

Although the activities of Kurdish raiders caused frequent difficulties for the Christian population, the nomadic Türkmen and their almost incessant warfare commonly posed a greater threat. Fifteenth-century armies in this region typically supported themselves by plundering the sedentary population for what was necessary or valuable. A sixteenth-century colophon complained of a raid on the mountain districts of Bâz and Jîlû by Türkmen “bandits” employed by the Qarâqûyunlû ruler Jahânshâh in 1760 A.G. / 1449. This was such an established procedure that a Syriac chronicler assumed that an army which did not plunder the local farmers

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28 Ibid., 183, 263; Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, II:xxxviii, xliii; Mecop’ec’i, *Patmagrut’yun*, 33, 37.
29 Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, II:xliv.
30 An Armenian scribe praised the Kurdish rulers of Ostan, ‘Izz al-Dîn Shîr and his son Malik Muhammad, as “most beneficent protectors of our Armenian nation” in 1418: Sanjian, *Colophons*, 142. However, the Syriac chronicler complains that the Christians under Kurdish domination “were in great tribulation” in 1782 A.G. / 1471: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, II:xlv.
must have received strict orders from the commanding general not to harm the populace. The captives and stolen goods could be sold back to the Christian populations, thus converting them to money or consumable goods. Many manuscripts survive with notes indicating that they had been looted and were bought by a Christian from the Muslims, sometimes even listing the price. Church utensils and captured Christians were equally common objects of ransom. In one case even the patriarchal church on the island of Alt’amar in Lake Van may have been held for ransom. This recurrent practice of looting and ransom resulted in a progressive transfer of wealth from the sedentary populations into the coffers of the nomads, with almost the regularity of a non-governmental form of taxation. The continual ransoming of captives and possessions, however, also implies the existence of standardized social practices of exchange by which the people and property might be regained. Other forms of commercial exchange should be presumed, of course, so that the ransom payments are probably simply the best attested of the economic relations which linked the various population groups. The economic relations, although not necessarily amicable, were at least more stable and less violent than the better-attested looting.

The fact that the sources record ransoming captured people and goods is part of a larger bias within the Christian sources to highlight conflicts with their Muslim neighbors. In this regard, martyrdom also forms a prominent theme in the Armenian sources from the fifteenth century.

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32 The chronicler remarks twice on the fact that the vizier of Ya’qūb b. Uzun Hasan, Sulaymān bey, did not allow his army to destroy the agriculture in his campaign given under the years 1796-1798 A.G./1485-1487: Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xliv-l.


34 People are mentioned as being ransomed in Sanjian, Colophons, 258, 283; Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xl, xlv. The ransom of church furnishings is mentioned in Sanjian, Colophons, 86, 167, 171–72, 273, 283; Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, xxxi, xxxvii, xlvii, lii. Indeed, one scribe considered it remarkable that Uzun Hasan was not taking Christian captives in his siege of Bifiṣ: Sanjian, Colophons, 311.

35 Sanjian, Colophons, 140–41. Unfortunately, the original is not explicit that it is a church rather than a cross which is being ransomed.
These sources apply the title “martyr” to any Christian killed by Muslims, apparently even to Christians killed in battle. Grigor Xlat’ec’i was evidently killed in a raiding expedition, while the troops of Jahānshāh b. Qarā Yūsuf “went into the monastery of Łazar, and roasted the sacristan in the fire and made him a martyr, and then they went away.” The soldiers were probably torturing the sacristan in order to find any hidden treasures, rather than executing him for his Christian faith. Indeed, martyrdom in the narrower sense of judicial execution for refusing to engage in practices considered (by the martyr or the martyr’s community) incompatible with Christianity is unattested in fifteenth-century sources from this region. When an Armenian noble named Musefir in Arčēš was killed, it was “by the slander and artifice of loveless Christians.” This may imply that he was judicially executed by Qarā Yūsuf rather than killed in battle or looting, but it would also imply that the charge was not his Christianity. In all of these examples the religion of the person killed seems not to have been an issue. Two examples closer to classical martyrdom are the murder of the Armenian merchant Xōja Mirak’ in 935 A.A. / 1486, although he was killed by a lone soldier instead of judicially executed, and the attempted stoning of a Persian convert to Christianity in Arčēš, although it did not result in the death of the individual. On the latter occasion, the attack broke his arm, but the Armenian historian records that it was the mullahs who rescued him from the anger of the mob, an instance where Muslim leaders helped the Christians, contrary to the religious zeal of the larger group. It is clear that most of the accounts of Christian “martyrs” in the period

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36 Syriac sources do not employ the term martyr to Christian victims of violence in the fifteenth century, for example Bishop Malkā in Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xxxiv.
37 T’ovma Mecop’ec’i and Dawit’ of Mārdīn both refer to large numbers of Christians being martyred at once, in the former case by Timūr as he ravaged the lands of Armenia, and in the latter instance by the Qaraqūyunlū general Rustam Ibn Tarkhan, who “tortured numerous Christians and made them martyrs” in the process of capturing and devastating a city: Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, 19; Sanjian, Colophons, 221.
38 Sanjian, Colophons, 168.
39 Ibid., 293.
40 Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, 71.
41 Ibid., 126–27.
involved real violence suffered by the Christian population, but for the purposes of plunder rather than persecution.

Conversions both into and out of the Christian populations indicate a permeability of boundaries and imply some positive social contacts in this period. Contemporary Christian sources bemoan the conversion of Christians to Islam. A poem preserved in a fifteenth-century East Syrian manuscript takes a deacon who became Muslim as its theme, depicting the mourning of the other Christians, the deprivation of the liturgical functions assigned to deacons, and even the grief of the sun, moon, and stars as a result of his desertion. Some Christians are said to have converted to Islam out of fear for their safety, or as a result of being taken captive. A Syrian orthodox chronicler complains of captured Christians converting to Islam. An Armenian poet includes apostasy among sins prompted by avarice. Of course, these sources were all written by clergy of the community which was abandoned, and a certain bias of reporting is to be expected; the converts to Islam would probably have taken a more positive view of their conversion. While in some cases concern for safety might have played a factor, in others we must presume that positive social contacts across religious divides, of the types celebrated by Christian authors when they led Muslims to convert to Christianity, would sometimes have operated in the opposite direction as well.

Some Muslims also became Christian in this region. We noted in chapter 2 that certain rulers who patronized Christians were rumored to have converted themselves, such as Shāh Muḥammad b. Qarā Yūsuf, the Qarāqūyunlū ruler of Baghdad in the 1410s, and the Āqqūyunlū

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42 Paris BN Syr 181, ff. 75a-78b.
43 Mecop‘ec‘i, Patmagr’yun, 36.
44 Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xlvii.
46 This fact may be implied by two texts which mention conversion to Islam as a result of being taken captive: Sanjian, Colophons, 160, 193.
ruler Sultan Ḥamza b. Qarā ʿUthmān. Non-rulers, however, are reported to have taken the step of baptism to be fully integrated into a Christian population. T’ovma Mecop’ec’i reports the conversion and baptism of a young Persian man from Tabriz named Yūsuf, who eventually fled to Georgia. An Armenian colophon from 1464 also reports that a bishop in Ankara attracted crowds of “Tačik notables” who “listened to the word of God and believed in Christ.”

Although Ankara is further west than Türkmen rule extended, there is no reason to expect prominent Muslims there to be more open to conversion to Christianity, although of course we cannot exclude the possibility that this report is more panegyric than fact. On the other hand, these conversions and rumors of conversion are more than just the sporadic actions of isolated individuals, for they imply an atmosphere where Muslims and Christians could at least occasionally discuss religious difference amicably.

The paucity of references to Christians in Muslim sources is keenly felt in any attempt to reconstruct the relationships of Christians with their non-ruling Muslim neighbors, for we are forced to rely almost exclusively on Christian sources. The various authors of these sources present their Muslim neighbors in an exclusively negative light, with the exception of when particular Christian preachers are praised by calling attention to the non-Christians in their audiences. Certainly there were many strained or even violent interactions between the Christian and Muslim populations, such as urban competition and rural looting with its attendant killing. But there was probably also a stable status quo which permitted economic exchange, and some more amicable relations crossed the religious divide, attested in a small number of anecdotes and implied in the individual conversions in both directions.

47 See chapter 2, fnn. 86-87.
48 Mecop’ec’i, Ptmagruti`yun, 120–27. Mecop’ec’i does not record the year.
49 Sanjian, Colophons, 284.
Relations between Christian Denominations

If the Christian sources portray the negative side of relations between Christians and their non-Christian neighbors, the sources also highlight conflicts between different Christian populations as well. Just as we can infer a broader range of interactions in the former case, so also Christians of different denominations did not always interact in hostile ways. Nevertheless, the negative interactions between Christian groups are more obvious in the sources. Although there is no record of physical violence between different Christian populations, the leaders of each denomination attempted to enforce separation from other groups. Divergences of doctrine remained a point of contention, as the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Nūḥ of Mārdīn at the end of the fifteenth century wrote a “Treatise on the faith of the Syrians” in which he condemned the dyophysite Christology of other Christian groups, especially the Maronites and Melkites but also the Church of the East.⁵⁰ While he was maphrian, he delivered a sermon in Mosul in 1803 A.G. / 1492 “on account of those who oppose Mary the God-bearer and do not celebrate the glorious festival of the Annunciation.”⁵¹ Only the Church of the East refused to call Mary “God-bearer” (yāldath ʿallāhā), preferring instead the term “Christ-bearer” (yāldath mšīhā), and only they celebrated the Annunciation not as a single feast in spring, but as a liturgical season leading up to Christmas. Thus it is clear that the Syrian Orthodox maphrian was targeting the “Nestorians” in this sermon, delivered in a city with a substantial East Syrian population.

Nor was the Church of the East the unique recipient of hostility from other Christian groups. The anonymous continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle reported that an earlier Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, Yūḥannun ʾĪshū’ bar Shūshan, had sent anathemas to the

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⁵⁰ Franz Cöln, “Die anonyme Schrift ‘Abhandlung über den Glauben der Syrer’,” Oriens Christianus 4 (1904): 82–85. The work is titled مسند على الأمامة السريانية, and although it is anonymous in the text, it is traditionally ascribed to Patriarch Nuḫ. For a discussion of the authorship of the text, see ibid., 33–39.

⁵¹ من أجل معاندين مريم والدة الله ولم يعملون عبد ال猁ارة المجيد: Vatican sir.97, f. 142a.
Armenians over the issue of their making the patriarchate hereditary.\textsuperscript{52} The different Armenian patriarchs had also issued excommunications against each other in the late fourteenth century, and how to deal with these mutual condemnations remained a point of interest for T’ovma Mecop’ec’i in the middle of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{53} After the death of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Shâm in 1732 A.G. / 1421, his successor Shem’ûn of Gargar went to the Coptic patriarch in Egypt for consecration rather than to another Syrian Orthodox bishop.\textsuperscript{54} Although Shem’ûn alleged as a reason the opposition of the “Arab” rulers, after his death in 1756 A.G. / 1445 the Patriarch Ignatius Basil Ḥedloyo of Mārdīn traveled to Jerusalem to prevent the election of a successor, “lest there should be a worse schism and commotion than before.”\textsuperscript{55} Clearly relations between Syrian Orthodox patriarchs were not all amicable, and one wonders if fear of the suppression of the patriarchate was part of the reason for Shem’ûn of Gargar turning to the Coptic patriarch. The rejection of other Christian groups was so emphatic that the Church of the East had a ritual, probably composed in the fifteenth century, for the reception of “Jacobites and Melkites who become Christians,” i.e. who wished to join their church.\textsuperscript{56} Each of these Christian minorities rejected the others with which it interacted.

Of course this mutual hostility between Christian groups expressed itself in other forms of opposition as well. T’ovma Mecop’ec’i hints at antagonism from the Church of the East when a Persian convert to Christianity traveled to Baghdad.\textsuperscript{57} Between 1482 and 1489, the Church of the East in Nisibis also opposed the attempts of the Syrian Orthodox patriarchs of Mārdīn and

\textsuperscript{52} Bar Hebraeus, \textit{Chronicon Ecclesiasticum}, II:795–96.
\textsuperscript{53} Mecop’ec’i, \textit{Patmagrut’yun}, 46–47, 81.
\textsuperscript{54} Bar Hebraeus, \textit{Chronicon Ecclesiasticum}, II:817–18.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., II:819–20.
\textsuperscript{56} Camb. Add. 1988, f. 142a.
\textsuperscript{57} Mecop’ec’i, \textit{Patmagrut’yun}, 126. He describes the convert as “tormented by the Nestorian people” (նեստորիացի դերասաներից), without specifying the nature of the harm.
It is possible that the “merciless clergymen” who delayed one Armenian scribe from redeeming a book which had been looted belonged to a rival denomination. Monks of different denominations also competed with each other. The poem for the commemoration of the seventh-century monk Rabban Hōrmīzd by Īshō’yahb b. Mqaddam presents intense rivalry between Rabban Hōrmīzd and a nearby Syrian Orthodox monastery, no doubt illustrating how inter-Christian relations were experienced at the time of the text’s composition. The continuation of Bar Hebraeus’ world chronicle also narrates in rich detail an episode of monastic competition. After part of a Syrian Orthodox church had collapsed in the village of Bēth Sbhīrīno in Ṭūr Ṭūn in 1474, the church discovered some relics of a saint previously unknown to them, one Mār Dādā. Some Nestorian monks boasted that Mār Dādā’s history was known in the Church of the East, specifically at an East Syrian monastery outside Tabriz, whereupon a Syrian Orthodox monk traveled to that monastery, posed as a “Nestorian” monk from Nisibis, and copied the saint’s history. The official anathemas and excommunications which divided different Christian minorities were also played out in mutual opposition and competition.

However, these negative interactions which are recorded in the sources are not the entire story. Although the sources do not make the point explicit, they imply a broader range of social contacts between Christians of different groups. After all, neither T’ovma Mecop’ec’i nor the continuator of Bar Hebraeus considered it necessary to explain why the Persian convert in

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59 Sanjian, *Colophons*, 133.
60 Berlin orient. fol. 103a, 104b-105b.
61 Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography*, xlv–xlvi, f. 198a–b. For a mix-sixteenth-century example of the reverse, East Syrian clergy consulting a Syrian Orthodox priest to find a history of their patron saint Mār ’Azīzā, see Fiey, “Saint ’Azzīza,” 432.
Baghdad and the Syrian Orthodox monks were discussing with “Nestorian heretics.” Such social interactions were taken for granted. Given the unsettled state of the region, Christian refugees of different denominations may well have taken shelter together.\footnote{Christian refugees were so common that they form the subject of two poems by the Armenian bishop of Āmid, Tēr Mkrṭič Nalāš, one of which has been translated into French: Xondkaryan, Mkrṭič Nalāš, 165–67, 168–176; Arshak Ķopanyan, tran., Les Trouvères Arméniens (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1906), 157–59. The precarious religious position of refugees is briefly indicated in Xondkaryan, Mkrṭič Nalāš, 174. Xondkaryan includes a third poem on refugees, but it bears the date 743 A.A. / 1294, so it cannot be by this Mkrṭič: ibid., 179. Later in the fifteenth century, a Syrian Orthodox priest named Dawid Pūŋqoyo penned a poem “On the Afflictions of Exile,” although the range of identified motives for exile include only “the love of the Lord” or “before anger from his own accord”: Aaron Butts, “The Afflictions of Exile: A Syriac Memrā by David Punquyo,” Museon 122 (2009): 61, 72–73.} No source reports this explicitly, but that would explain the appearance in the fifteenth century of Armenian scribes named “Šēmawon,” presumably representing the Syriac name Shem’ōn rather than the more traditional Armenian Simēon.\footnote{Xač’ikyan, Tasnhingerord, I:468; Sanjian, Colophons, 186.} These inter-Christian interactions remain elusive, but they were not wholly negative.

**Social structure of the Church of the East**

The Church of the East did not merely interact with outsiders in Middle Eastern society; it also maintained an internal social structure which is unfamiliar to most scholars. Several different varieties of sources allow us to reconstruct the structures of this society, of which the most reliable but least systematic variety is the genre of colophon which follows almost all dated East Syrian manuscripts of this period.\footnote{My dependence in this section upon the work of David Wilmshurst cannot be overstated: David Wilmshurst, The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 582; Subsidia 104 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000). As an appendix of his volume he compiled a list of all dated East Syrian manuscripts, to which I have been able to add seven from the fifteenth century. He gleaned from the manuscript catalogs the place and date of copying, the scribe’s name, as well as other information about the ecclesiastical hierarchy and patronage, which I have supplemented and corrected in a very few instances. Heleen Murre-Van den Berg demonstrated the utility of Wilmshurst’s database for social history in an article about the period 1550-1850: Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, “Generous Devotion: Women in the Church of the East Between 1550 and 1850,” Hugoye 7, no. 1 (2004): 11–54. I have similarly used Wilmshurst’s data, and although the analysis is my own, the work would have been incomparably more difficult without his painstaking precedent.} The scribes of such colophons are almost always...
priests or deacons,\textsuperscript{65} and they frequently mention the name of the current catholicos-patriarch of the East. Less frequently, fifteenth-century colophons also mention metropolitans,\textsuperscript{66} a bishop,\textsuperscript{67} monks,\textsuperscript{68} a “scholar,”\textsuperscript{69} an archdeacon,\textsuperscript{70} and “chiefs” of various villages.\textsuperscript{71} The burial practices of the Church of the East also indicate its social structure by providing different instructions for different people of different social status. A gospel lectionary from the fifteenth century specifies different readings for the funerals of different ranks: “Catholicoi, metropolitans, and bishops,” “teachers and interpreters,” priests, deacons, monks, nuns, and “everyone.”\textsuperscript{72} Given the nature of the available sources, only part of the social structure of the Church of the East may be reconstructed, with special emphasis on the clerical and monastic ranks.

But the disproportionate representation of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the sources is only partly due to slanted reporting from clerical sources. Given the predominance of the religious conceptual community, the clergy also played a leading role in the fifteenth-century society within the Church of the East. This is especially clear by contrast with the Armenians and the Georgians to the north. The Georgians had their own king throughout the fifteenth century, and members of the Orbelian family were mentioned as Armenian rulers with regional significance in Siwnik’ in eastern Armenia and in Georgia during the first half of the fifteenth

\textsuperscript{65} Of the thirty-eight dated manuscripts and notes of the fifteenth century of which I am aware, nine do not provide the scribe’s name. Of the remaining twenty-nine, seven name the scribe without indicating any ecclesiastical rank: Vatican sir. 176, Diyarbakır (Scher) 72, St. Petersburg Syr. 33, Cambridge Add. 1965, and Mosul (Scher) 15, and the two oldest manuscripts consulted by the editor of ‘Abdishō’ bar Brikhā, \textit{Pardaysā da-‘Eden}, ed. Yosep Qelayta, 3rd ed. (Chicago, 1988). One manuscript, Paris BN Syr. 369, was copied by a metropolitan, Sabrishō of Ḫiṣn-Kayf, as was the note in Jerusalem Greek Patriarchate Syr. 12, by ‘Abdishō’ of Nisibis. The remaining twenty manuscripts were copied by priests, deacons, or monks.

\textsuperscript{66} Paris BN Syr. 184, f.125b; Paris BN Syr 369, ff. 106b, 114b; Wilmshurst, \textit{Ecclesiastical Organisation}, 41, 50, 55, 72, 84–85, 87, 101, 193.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{68} Cambridge BFBS 446, f. 255a; Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 180a; Wilmshurst, \textit{Ecclesiastical Organisation}, 46.

\textsuperscript{69} Addai Scher uses the term “écolier” for the recipient of Diyarbakır (Scher) 73: Addai Scher, “Notice sur les manuscrits syriques et arabes conservés à l’archevêché chaldéen de Diarbékir,” \textit{Journal Asiatique} 10 (1907): 386.

\textsuperscript{70} BL Add 7177, f. 321a.

\textsuperscript{71} Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b; BL Or. 4399, f. 579b; Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b; and BL Add. 7174, f. 95a, 206a.

\textsuperscript{72} BL Add 7174, f. 212b-213a.
century. Both the Georgian king and the Armenian nobles are often mentioned in the dating formula of Armenian colophons, indicating their widespread importance. One Armenian noble prince is even mentioned in a Qarqūyunlu firman dated 4 Ramaḍān 872 / 28 March 1468, due to a property transaction between him and the monastery of Tat’ew. By contrast, the rēshānē ("nobles") of the Church of the East, like their Syrian Orthodox counterparts, seem to have possessed merely local significance. These secular East Syrian leaders are never cited in dating formula, but only in patronage formulas in manuscripts which their sons purchased for the church in the village in which they exercised some authority. In light of this contrast, the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of the East holds greater regional significance than secular nobles for our understanding of East Syrian society.

The head of the hierarchy of the Church of the East was the catholicos-patriarch of the East. The catholicos-patriarch consecrated the metropolitans and bishops for the respective districts. Despite the importance of the catholicos-patriarch in this community, the patriarchal succession of the Church of the East remains unclear in the fifteenth century. The last

73 Sanjian includes twenty-five manuscripts between 1399 and 1477 which include kings of Georgia in their dating formula: Sanjian, Colophons, 117, 135, 143, 145, 166, 184, 186, 188, 190–91, 197, 199–200, 209, 220, 265, 271, 280, 289, 301, 310–11, 320. Princes of the Orbeleian family are used in the dating formula in Armenian manuscripts from 1401, 1406, 1412, 1419, 1428, 1437, and 1438: ibid., 121, 128, 135, 143–44, 177, 186, 190.
74 Mudarrisī-Ṭabaṭabā’ī, Farmānhā, 57.
75 A liturgical book was copied for the monastery of Mār Qurŷqūs on behalf of the priest Hōrmīzd, the son of Chief Mattā of Talkēpē: BL Or. 4399, ff. 579a-b. A Gospel lectionary “was copied for two holy churches, the church of Mār Ya’qūb Mpassqā and of Mār Gīwārgīs the victorious martyr which are in the blessed village of Tal Zqāpā, by the diligence of the sacristan of the aforementioned churches… Priest ʻĪsā, the son of the deceased Chief Ḥasan” (BL Add. 7174, ff. 206a. The other three volumes which mention chiefs do not mention a specific church or monastery all state the patronage relation without naming a receiving church or monastery, although two of those volumes would have been used primarily in liturgical settings: a volume of liturgical hymns (Berlin orient. quart. 801) and a copy of the prophetic books of the Old Testament (Cambridge Add. 1665). The fifth volume consists of the commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles and the New Testament epistles by ʻĪshō’dad of Merv (St. Petersburg Syr. 33), which may have been intended for private use.
76 According to Wilmshurst, “The patriarchal succession between 1318 and 1552, in contrast to earlier centuries, cannot be satisfactorily determined”: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 347. J. F. Coakley has argued convincingly that the traditional uninterrupted list given in current scholarship is based on a compounded misreading
catholicos-patriarch of the Church of the East to be named in an external history written before 1500 is Catholicos Denḥā who resided in Karamlīsh east of Mosul, mentioned in the continuation of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle under the year 1676 A.G. / 1365. 77

According to a marginal note added to an East Syrian manuscript, Catholicos Denḥā died in 1693 A.G. / 1382. 78 Two lists of patriarchs extend beyond Denḥā II. An anonymous scribe updated Shlēmōn of Baṣra’s The Book of the Bee in the fifteenth century, extending the original list of catholicos-patriarchs included in that work to end with Mār Denḥā, Mār Shemʾōn, Mār Ėlīyā, and the scribe’s contemporary Mār Shemʾōn, 79 but the text does not indicate when these individuals were in office. All of the witnesses to the diptychs studied by J. M. Fiey extend the patriarchal list beyond Mār Denḥā to include the further patriarchs Ėlīyā and Shemʾōn. 80 Our only other evidence for catholicos-patriarchs of the Church of the East before 1497 consists of manuscript colophons. 81

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78 Mingana Syr. 561, f. 43a. Thanks are due to David Wilmshurst for directing my attention to this note.
79 Solomon of Akhlat, The Book of the Bee, ed. E. A. Wallis Budge, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Semitic Series v. 1, pt. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 119. Budge, in a footnote, follows Assemani’s identification of the last Shemʾōn with the catholicos who reigned 1504-1538, following the Shemʾōn who died in 1502 and the Ėlīyā who died in 1504. But this is most unlikely, as manuscript colophons have revealed an earlier Shemʾōn in the 1430s of which Assemani was unaware, as well as the death of another Shemʾōn in 1497.
81 A certain Mār Ėlīyā is named as the current Catholicos in an anonymous poem in Berlin Sachau 188, f. 218a, col. 1, but Sachau’s identification of that Mār Ėlīyā with a certain “Patriarch Elias (IV.)… der von 1435-1463 regierte” is contrary to the manuscript evidence for a catholicos-patriarch named Shemʾōn in the late 1430s and 1444: Eduard Sachau, Verzeichniss der syrischen Handschriften der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin (Berlin: A. Asher, 1899), 234. Sachau’s assertion of the existence of a Catholicos Mār Ėlīyā who reigned 1435-1463 is based on the falsified data which Coakley exposed. The Mār Ėlīyā in question may be that of the updated lists, implying this text was composed in either the late fourteenth or the fifteenth century. Or the name could belong to a later catholicos-
Fifteenth-century East Syrian manuscripts are particularly sparse before 1475, although one series of manuscripts names a Catholicos Mār Shemʿon in the 1430s, and another collection names a Catholicos Mār Shemʿon from 1477 to 1497. These two patriarchs are traditionally considered the same, albeit with a very long reign, but the state of the evidence does not permit us to conclude one way or another. Nor can we even exclude the possibility that another catholicos intervened between these two, or that multiple patriarchs named Mār Shemʿon are attested in the latter series. Although the exact succession may not be

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82 Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b (dated 27 March 1741 A.G. / 1430), the Vorlage (dated 1750 A.G. / 1439) of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a, and the probably lost Sīʿird (Scher) 119 (dated 6 June 1748 A.G. / 1437); Addai Scher, Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque épiscopale de Séert (Mosul: Imprimerie des pères dominicains, 1905), 86. According to Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 106a, a Catholicos Mār Shemʿon was in office on May 7, 1755 A.G. / 1444, when the text contained in the manuscript was composed.

83 Wilmshurst lists Kirkuk (Vosté) 39, Diyarbakır (Scher) 73, Diyarbakır (Scher) 72, Sīʿird (Scher) 3, Mārdīn (Scher) 43, BM Syr (Rosen-Forshall) 33 (= BL Add. 7177), Mārdīn (Scher) 1, Mārdīn (Scher) 13, BL Or. 4399, Leningrad Syr 33, Cambridge Add. (Wright) 1965, Dawra Syr 318, Berlin Syr 38 (= Sachau 167), and Mosul (Scher) 15: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 395–97. To this list must be added Vatican sir. 186 (dated 29 November 1789 A.G. / 1477), Berlin orient. oct. 1313 (dated 31 July 1792 A.G. / 1481), and Princeton Garrett Syr. 22 (dated end of August, 1793 A.G. / 1482).


85 A possible indication that the Mār Shemʿon of the 1430s was not the same as the Mār Shemʿon after 1477 is given in the colophon of Vat. sir. 186, which states, “Donning the mantle of the high-priesthood, this man whom his Lord had chosen and brought from the east to raise up the horn of his church…” (سُلَّمَيْنَاهُ مَلَکَةَ الجِمَاعَةِ وَفَرَّقَتْ لَهُ مَلِكَةَ الْحُضْرَةِ وَالْقُوَّةِ وَالْوَلِيدُ مَلِکَةَ الْعُرَفِ): Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b. It would be much more natural to refer to the consecration of a patriarch in the same year it occurred rather than almost fifty years earlier, although “donning the mantle of high-priesthood” could be metaphorical, or it may refer to taking up the mantle again for the specific purpose given, so this evidence does not fully preclude the long reign of the patriarch traditionally labeled Catholicos Mār Shemʿon IV.

86 I have only been able to consult four dated East Syrian manuscripts between 1440 and 1477, none of which name a catholicos-patriarch: Mingana Syr. 98 (dated Oct. 1454), Cambridge Add. 616 (dated 16 June 1461), Berlin orient. quart. 801 (Syr. 67; dated 1465), and Vat. sir. 176 (dated 14 February 1477 A.G. / 1476). However, the colophons in question are either shorter than normal or damaged, and the absence of a named catholicos-patriarch may not be significant.

87 Since the colophons only give the patriarch’s name as “Mār Shemʿon, Catholicos Patriarch of the East,” and do not indicate the beginning of his tenure or provide other distinguishing characteristics, one Shemʿon could succeed another without our being able to distinguish between them. A demonstrable example of this happened with respect to the Armenian Catholicos Stepʿannos of Altʿamar, who is considered to have reigned 1464-1489, but an overlooked colophon dated 1484 indicates that he died in that year: Sanjian, Colophons, 367; Xaʿikyan, Tasnhingerord, III:67. Therefore we can distinguish this Catholicos Stepʿannos, who reigned 1464-1484, from his successor, also named Stepʿannos, who reigned 1484-1489. The latter’s death is also recorded in a colophon, but we cannot always expect a colophon announcing the patriarch’s death to have survived: Xaʿikyan, Tasnhingerord, III:133.
reconstructed with certainty, it seems most likely that the list given in the diptychs omits the Shem’ōn which precedes the last Ţlîyā in the updated list of *The Book of the Bee*.\(^{88}\) This might suggest that the Shem’ōn who succeeded Catholicos Denḥā II had a brief reign or controversial legitimacy, which probably indicates that the final Shem’ōn in *The Book of the Bee* was the catholicos-patriarch of the 1430s.\(^{89}\) We are on firmer ground with a funeral inscription for a Catholicos Mār Shem’ōn dated February 20, 1808 A.G. / 1497, which allows us to separate the Catholicos Mār Shem’ōn named before 1497 from his successor, also named Shem’ōn, mentioned after 1497.\(^{90}\) According to a letter written by bishops in India, this last Mār Shem’ōn died in 1813 A.G. / 1502.\(^{91}\) This succession of catholicos-patriarchs is listed in Appendix B.

If the patriarchal succession is unclear, it is only at the end of the century that we have evidence about the location of the patriarch’s residence. A manuscript copied in the Mosul area in November 1789 A.G. / 1477 praises Catholicos Mār Shem’ōn and indicates that it was copied “under the shadow of his kindness in the flock blessed with the faith of Simon, Mosul,”\(^{92}\) while a manuscript copied in 1795 A.G. / 1484 by a “disciple of the patriarchal cell” in Mosul may likewise indicate that at this period the catholicos-patriarch was living in Mosul itself.\(^{93}\) His funerary inscription records that he was buried in the monastery of Rabban Hōrmīzd, outside the village of Alqōş thirty-five miles north of Mosul, in 1808 A.G. / 1497,\(^{94}\) which probably

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\(^{88}\) Alternate solutions are possible, such as that the updated list in *The Book of the Bee* omits the Ţlîyā mentioned in the diptychs, giving a succession Denḥā, Ţlîyā, Shem’ōn, Ţlîyā, Shem’ōn.

\(^{89}\) It is just possible that the catholicos-patriarch of the 1430s was the Shem’ōn who succeeded Denḥā II without intermediary (although presumably after a long gap), that Ţlîyā succeeded as catholicos-patriarch after 1444, and the final Shem’ōn was the catholicos-patriarch in office 1477-1497. This would suggest that the anonymous scribes who updated the lists in the diptychs and *The Book of the Bee* both lived in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, but it would be curious that the 1430s Shem’ōn should be omitted from the diptychs.


\(^{91}\) The text is edited in Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III, part 1:591.

\(^{92}\) BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.

\(^{93}\) Vosté, “Rabban Hōrmīzd,” 283–85.
implies that he was residing there when he died. His successor Mār Shemʿōn, conventionally numbered the fifth, was residing in the city of Jazīra in 1811 A.G. / 1500, and he was buried in the monastery of Mār Āwgēn outside Nisibis in 1813 A.G. / 1502.95 It seems that, at the end of the fifteenth century, the catholicos-patriarchs of the Church of the East did not have a fixed abode.

One of the few facts to enter general scholarship on the Church of the East in the fifteenth century is that during this period the patriarchate became hereditary.96 More precisely, Catholicos Shemʿōn IV began a practice of consecrating a nephew as a metropolitan bishop and designating him nāṭar kūrsyā (“the keeper of the throne”) to indicate that he was the chosen successor. The widespread scholarly cognizance of this practice is due to the fact that Yōḥannān Sūḷāqā, when he inaugurated a rival patriarchal line in the Church of the East by appealing to the pope for his consecration in 1553, indicated in his letter that this hereditary succession had been the custom for “a hundred years.”97 The earliest attestation of this practice previously known to scholars is from a colophon dated 1795 A.G./1484, in the time of Mār Shemʿōn and his nephew, “our upright and beloved and extolled father, the keeper of the apostolic throne, Mār Ėlyyā the metropolitan bishop.”98 The manuscript does not name Mār Ėlyyā’s diocese, so either he was a “metropolitan bishop at large” or his see was at Mosul, where the manuscript was copied. A slightly earlier colophon, dated 1793 A.G. / 1482, mentions names designated successor with an

97 Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis, I:526. The number caused some scholars to assume that Catholicos Shemʿōn IV had issued a formal decree making heredity necessary, but more recent scholars have concluded that the catholicos probably used informal means to establish the succession: Murre-van den Berg, “Patriarchs,” 240; Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 19.
alternate form of the title, suggesting that the protocol was not yet fixed, and implies that he was
the only metropolitan of the Church of the East at that time, although it does not mention his
relationship to the current catholicos-patriarch: “our blessed holy father, rich in spiritual things,
and high and exalted in heavenly things, lifted up among the fathers, unique among the pastors,
Mār Ėliyā, the metropolitan bishop of our lands, nātōr kūrsyā.”99 Subsequent patriarchs would
appoint their own nephews as nātar kūrsyā to succeed,100 although in some cases the designated
heir seems to have pre-deceased the patriarch.101

Although scholars have typically presented this as a curious feature of the Church of the
East, the Syrian Orthodox and the Armenians also experimented with patriarchal nepotism at this
period. The anonymous continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle explicitly
mentions that the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Ţūr ‘Abdīn in 1471, ‘Azīz bar Sabhto, tried to
designate his nephew heir to the patriarchal throne, which this author rejects as contrary to the
guidance of the Holy Spirit: “My brothers, it is not right or fitting or orderly to make family
members inherit the heavenly and divine throne, but the one who is called by the Holy Spirit
should sit on the apostolic throne.”102 Not everyone in the Syrian Orthodox Church agreed,
however: as early as 1333, Īwānnīs Ismā‘īl al-Majd, the nephew of Ignatius Bar Wahībh
Badarzakhē succeeded his uncle as Patriarch Ignatius II of Mārdīn, and subsequently designated
his own nephew Fakhr al-Dīn as his successor.103 On the death of Ignatius II in 1366, he was

99 bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, II:833.
100 Ibid., II:791, 795.
succeeded by another nephew as Ignatius III Shahāb, Fakhr al-Din having predeceased him.104

The next patriarch of Mārdīn, Ignatius Abrohom bar Garībh, is not known to be related, but the new patriarch promptly designated his brother as heir to the patriarchal throne, although in this case the anonymous chronicler exults that God foiled this plan by making the heir die before the patriarch.105 Some favored nepotism for the maphrian’s succession, as well: on the death of Maphrian Dioscorus Behnam Arboyo, “the easterners were ready to appoint [his nephew Barṣawmo] maphrian after his deceased uncle.”106 A less clear example of nepotism, in 1455 the nephew of Maphrian Basil Barṣawmo Ma’dnoyo was elected Patriarch Ignatius VI of Mārdīn, presumably since his uncle had just died and could not be elected.107 Patriarch Ignatius VI Khalaf of Mārdīn in turn consecrated his nephew ’Azīz as maphrian in 1471 to designate him his successor, although on the death of this patriarch in 1484 the election was disputed between partisans and opponents of Maphrian ’Azīz.108 Even if Maphrian ’Azīz did not become Patriarch of Mārdīn, his partisans alleged his relationship to his uncle Patriarch Khalaf as his qualification for the patriarchate.109

The other examples and the party in his favor amply demonstrate that some Syrian Orthodox Christians favored a hereditary patriarchate.

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105 Ibid., II:805.
106 ملایسی ۵۰۰ میرنشا وکه بمیشه میهنشا خدا ۴۰۰ میرش : ibid., III:542.
107 Ibid., II:821. The maphrian was the Syrian Orthodox hierarch responsible for the eastern branch of that denomination, namely the Syrian Orthodox churches in Iraq, and the office could be used to designate the presumptive next patriarch. Every other fifteenth-century maphrian who was alive at the death of a patriarch of Mārdīn either became the next patriarch or, in one case mentioned below, was appointed by the patriarch as his chosen successor but was opposed when the patriarch died. That Maphrian Barṣawmo Ma’dnoyo was the designated heir is further supported by a remark ascribed to Īshū’-Īnwardoyo: “I cannot be made patriarch without the agreement of the maphrian because he is my superior and the throne is reserved for him” (لا سرا آنا وحدک منه اخ: : ibid., II:823–24. A similar point is made more generally with respect to Maphrian Behnam Ḩedloyo in 1723 A.G./1412: “the throne of the patriarchate was reserved for our father the maphrian” (الخی میهنشی بهنمه میرنشی وکه میرنشا بهنمه اخ: : ibid., III:539–40.
109 Ibid., II:839–40. The partisans of ’Aziz are reported to have said, “Leadership is fitting for this one because he is the nephew of the one who passed away” (دارما بپا ۴۰۰ میرنشا میرا: وکه ساسه ۴۰۰ میرش ویپ چو).
Nor was patriarchal nepotism limited to Syriac-speaking churches. The anonymous chronicler, complaining of the succession, twice refers to it as the current practice of the Armenians and the “Hagarenes.”

Already at the end of the thirteenth century, Catholicos Zak’aria I of Alt’amar succeeded his older brother Step’annos II. Again at the end of the fourteenth century, Dawit’ III succeeded his brother Zak’aria II as Catholicos of Alt’amar, following the latter’s martyrdom. The successor of Catholicos Zak’aria III at Alt’amar was his nephew, Step’annos IV. According to Robert Hewsen, by the latter half of the fifteenth century, the office of the Catholicos of Caucasian Albania also became hereditary, passing from uncle to nephew within the local ruling house, the Ḥasan-Jalalids. This is evident in the firman of Ya’qūb b. Uzun Ḥasan from 892 A.H. / 1487, which names “the priest Shimʿōn Khalīfa and Mardīrōs the monk” as “the nephews of the priest Mātiyōs the Catholicos” who ruled in the time of Jahānshāh Qarāqūyunlū. In light of these earlier practices of other Christian minorities, it becomes clear that the hereditary office of catholicos-patriarch in the Church of the East, far from being a peculiar institution, was a regional understanding of religious authority which they adopted later than other Christian groups, and they are unique only in maintaining this practice (although not without opposition) into the twentieth century.

Below the catholicos-patriarch, metropolitan bishops and bishops were the higher clergy in the Church of the East. The geographical distribution of metropolitans and bishops which had

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110 Ibid., II:795, 833. The term “Hagarenes” most commonly refers to Muslim Arabs, and this may be a historical reference to the caliphate. However, no caliph was recognized in this region during the fifteenth century, and it is unclear that the chronicler would refer to the continuing Abbasid caliphate in Mamluk Egypt. On the other hand, the chronicler could refer to the common practice of a qāḍī being succeeded by his son, or to the hereditary succession of the leaders of Sufi orders such as the rising Safavids.
111 Sanjian, Colophons, 376.
112 Ibid., 119, 149.
113 Xač’ikyan, Tasnhaingerord, III:680.
115 كنیس شماعون خلیف و مردو محراسا برادر زاده ها [إ] كنیس ماتیوس کتیکوس Mudarris-Tabaštābāʾī, Farmānhā, 92. In this case the named nephews were not the immediate successors to their uncle the earlier catholicos, but it demonstrates a tendency to keep the succession within one family.

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developed in late antiquity had fallen apart in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as the centers of East Syrian population shifted. One result of this redistribution was a certain amount of flexibility in the location of bishops and the creation of new dioceses, indicating important geographical centers of the Church of the East. Metropolitans are attested during the fifteenth century in Erbil, Mosul, Nisibis, Ḫiṣn-Kayf, and Āthēl on the western side of the Hakkārī mountains. Of these the last two are identified as the sees of metropolitan archbishops for the first time in the fifteenth century, indicating a recognition that the East Syrian population was increasing on the upper Tigris. Wilmshurst guesses that Salmās in the Hakkārī mountains and Lake Úrmī may also have had continuous successions of bishops, although none is attested in the fifteenth century specifically. The dioceses of the metropolitans were flexible, and sometimes multiple metropolitan sees might belong to a single church leader. Thus a colophon dated March 26, 1741 A.G. / 1430 names Metropolitan Timothy “of Ḫiṣn-Kayf and Nisibis.” In the most extreme case Wilmshurst cites three colophons dated 1788-1794 A.G. / 1477-1483 which mention Mār Ėlīyā as metropolitan of Nisibis, Armenia, Mārdīn, Āmid, Siʿird, and Ḫiṣn-Kayf. On the other hand, Metropolitan ʿAbdīshōʾ of Nisibis added a note to a 119

116 David Wilmshurst makes this point in his detailed study of the larger period 1318-1913: Wilmshurst, 117 Ecclesiastical Organisation, 343–46. 118 Wilmshurst, 119 Ecclesiastical Organisation, 346. 120 Paris BN Syr 184, f.125b. 121 Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 41, 50, 84, 87, 395. The three manuscripts are Kirkuk (Vosté) 39, Diyarbakır (Scher) 73, and Mārdīn (Scher) 43.
manuscript in May 1769 A.G. / 1458 which does not mention Ḥiṣn-Kayf as part of his diocese, while at the end of the fifteenth century Metropolitan Sabrīshōʾ of Ḥiṣn-Kayf does not claim Nisibis as part of his diocese in the colophon which he authored. This indicates that Ḥiṣn-Kayf could be a separate diocese when useful and combined with other dioceses as necessary. It is not clear whether these metropolitans had suffragan bishops, as they had earlier in the history of the Church of the East, or whether the hierarchy had simplified to the point that all bishops were directly subject to the catholicos-patriarch. In any event, the presence of a bishop or metropolitan indicates an important center for the Church of the East.

Although the evidence is slight, it seems that bishops and metropolitans typically resided within the city, or one of the cities, over which they were appointed. In May 1769 A.G. / 1458, Metropolitan ‘Abdīshōʾ of Nisibis composed a manuscript note to indicate that he was donating this manuscript to the church of Mār Pethyōn in Āmid. Although the metropolitan does not specify where he wrote the note, and it is possible that this gift was in response to a written request, it may instead indicate the metropolitan’s presence in Uzun Ḥasan’s capital city shortly after the Āqqūyunlū ruler secured undisputed control of his confederation. The “disciple of the patriarchal cell” who copied a manuscript in Mosul in 1484 may indicate not only the catholicos-patriarch’s residence in that city, but also that of his nephew and designated successor Metropolitan Ēlīyā as part of the patriarchal household.

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124 The metropolitan and multiple bishops consecrated for India may indicate that the bishops would be dependent upon the metropolitan, or it may have been intended to increase the chances that one would arrive at the destination alive, since mortality in transport was not infrequent.
127 BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.
copied a manuscript, as he specifies, at the church dedicated to St. George in the city.\textsuperscript{128} Apart from these specific examples, a general practice seems to be indicated by a gospel lectionary dated 2 October 1810 A.G. / 1498, which includes among the various occasions which merit an altered gospel reading “when a bishop arrives in his city.”\textsuperscript{129} An urban episcopate of the Church of the East would contrast with the tendency of Syrian Orthodox bishops to dwell in monasteries outside the walls,\textsuperscript{130} but the practice of having a bishop resident within a city would be closer to the custom of some though not all Armenian bishops.\textsuperscript{131}

The geographical centers of the Church of the East are also indicated by the monasteries, all of which were outside of the major urban centers, near rural villages. Eight monasteries are attested within the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{132} Outside of Nisibis was the monastery of Mār Āwgēn, in which two manuscripts dated 1759 A.G. / 1448 and 1797 A.G. / 1486 were copied.\textsuperscript{133} The Mār Āwgēn monastery was also the source of the monks whom Mār Shemʿōn consecrated as bishops

\textsuperscript{128} BN Syr 369, f. 106a-b.

\textsuperscript{129} The verb "estaqbal" might, however, mean “to be present,” which would imply that it is a rare occurrence since all of the other circumstances for which special gospel readings are stipulated are occasional events.

\textsuperscript{130} The Syrian Orthodox patriarchs of Mārdīn lived in the monastery of Mor Ḥnanyo “beside Mārdīn,” while the patriarchs of Tūr Ḍabdīn typically inhabited the monastery of Mor Yaʿqūb Ḥbīshoyo beside Salāḥ: Bar Hebraeus, \textit{Chronicon Ecclesiasticum}, II:809–10, 815–18, 829–30, 843–46; III:541–42. Maphrian Barşawmo Maʿdnoyo appears to have resided in the monastery of Mor Behnam at Gūbhō (perhaps Jubbah on the Euphrates in Iraq): ibid., II:825–26 and III:543–44. The monastery of Mor Gabriel between Qartmīn and Bēth Sbīrīno in Tūr Ḍabdīn had a bishop in residence: ibid., II:827–30; III:553–54, 561–64.

\textsuperscript{131} Although the Armenian catholicoi of Altʿamar lived in a monastery on an island in Lake Van, the Armenian bishop Mkrtiʻ Nalash apparently resided within the city of Āmid: Sanjian, \textit{Colophons}, 211. Tʿovma Mecopʿecʿi mentions a bishop of Erzinjan named Mkrtiʻ and a bishop of Bidlis named Stepʿannos: Mecopʿecʿi, \textit{Patmgarutʿyun}, 68, 188. On the other hand, he also mentions a bishop of his own monastery of Mecopң, a bishop “of the holy congregation” named Abgar, a bishop of the monastery of Xarabast named Zak’eos, a bishop “of the blessed congregation” named Arak’el, and a bishop of the monastery of Tat’ew named Stepʿannos: ibid., 23, 39, 78, 82, 205.

\textsuperscript{132} Wilmshurst also reports, on Sachau’s authority, the restoration of the monastery of Mār Apnīmāran by Tal Zālpā outside Mosul in 1403: Wilmshurst, \textit{Ecclesiastical Organisation}, 223. Sachau, however, reports the date of the inscription he saw as “Jahr 1092 (A. D. 1403),” clearly a typographical error for “Jahr 1092 (A. G. 1403),” so this monastery should be dated to the eleventh century: Eduard Sachau, \textit{Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien} (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1883), 361. This monastery is not otherwise attested in the fifteenth century.

\textsuperscript{133} Wilmshurst, \textit{Ecclesiastical Organisation}, 46.
for India in 1811 A.G. / 1499-1500. A life of Mār ʿAzīzā seems to indicate a monastery dedicated to this saint in the village of Zārīnī in the Jīlū district of the Hakkārī Mountains in 1760 A.G. / 1449. Manuscript colophons mention the monasteries of Mār Sargīs and of Mār Gabriel outside Mosul, of Mār QūrıyāqĪs by the village of Bātnāyā north of Mosul, and of Mār Sabrīshō’ outside Erbil. The anonymous continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ world chronicle mentions an East Syrian monastery dedicated to Mār Dādā in the village of SīdĪs, near Tabriz. But the most important monastery north of Mosul was the one dedicated to Rabban HörmĪzd overlooking Alqōsh, where inscriptions record the building and restoration of the entrance in the fifteenth century, as well as the burial of Catholicos Mār Shenʿīn in 1497. The Rabban HörmĪzd monastery was a frequent patriarchal residence during the next three centuries. Four more monasteries are attested in the first decade of the sixteenth century, all in the western regions of the geographical distribution of the Church of the East: Mār Khūdhāhwī and Mār Yōḥannān outside Nisibis, Mār Yōḥannān the Egyptian outside Jazīra, and Mār Yaʿqōb the Recluse outside Siʿird. Some of these were undoubtedly inhabited in the later fifteenth century.

Monasteries also served as nodes to connect distant regions of the Church of the East, through the monks and scribes who passed through or came to reside in them. A priest named Nīsān of Erbil copied a manuscript in the monastery of Mār Āwghēn outside Nisibis in 1759 A.G.

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136 Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 170, 204, 232, 394; Scher, Catalogue de Séert, 61. It is unclear whether the monastery of Mār QūrıyāqĪs mentioned in BL Or. 4399, f. 579a, is the same Mār QūrıyāqĪs located in Bātnāyā or whether it is located in the nearby village of Talkēpē, where the patron’s father was chief. The name of the village was originally contained in BL Or. 4399, but is now lost.
137 Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, II:xlvi; Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 323.
139 Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 259.
140 Ibid., 43, 84; Addai Scher, “Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque de l’évêché chaldéen de Mardin,” Revue des Bibliothèques 18 (1908): 73; Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis, III/1:592. The monastery of Mār Āhā the Egyptian outside Jazīra is attested after 1528 in a number of manuscripts: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 102, 115–16.
while in 1785 A.G. / 1474 the priest Īshōʿ of Hakkārī had come down from the mountains to copy a manuscript in the “monastery” (really a village church) of Mār Qūryāqūs in Bāṭnāyā north of Mosul. The monastery of Rabban Hōrmīzd outside Alqōsh, thirty-five miles north of Mosul, attracted a monk named Rabban David from Salmās, northwest of Lake Ùrmi, as well as a group of builders from a village in the Hakkārī mountains for some construction work in 1796 A.G. / 1485. In fact, in 1785 A.G. / 1474 a Syrian Orthodox monk used this implicit monastic network to infiltrate the monastery of Mār Dādā in Sīdōs, a village near Tabriz, by posing as a monk from the city of Nisibis, which indicates that one could rely upon a certain amount of exchange between monasteries. Of course, not all manuscripts were copied in monasteries, and as indicated above Metropolitan ‘Abdīshōʿ of Nisibis may have been present in Ómid in 1458, while the deacon Ḥabīb of Ómid copied a manuscript in Siʿird in 1788 A.G. / 1477.

The leaders of East Syrian village society were the “chiefs” (rēshānē). In the fifteenth-century these nobles are only attested outside the region’s major urban centers, although the continuation of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle mentions a Syrian Orthodox “prince”

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142 Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 232.  
143 Vosté, “Rabban Hōrmīzd,” 274–75. Vosté interprets the inscription which mentions the builders as predating the inscription recording the reconstruction of the entrance by Rabban David of Salmās in 1485, but this is unnecessary since the verb used “to build” (bnā) can equally mean “to rebuild.” Instead, the two inscriptions flank the current entrance, one giving the date and the other naming the current catholicos-patriarch, and it seems they should be read as a coordinated pair. Wilmshurst implicitly interprets the inscriptions in this manner: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 259.  
144 Bar Hebraeus, Chronography, xlvi, f. 198b.  
145 Kirkuk (Vosté) 39: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 55, 93.  
146 In the fifteenth century itself, only three chiefs are named with villages: Chief Mattā of Talkēpē and Chief Hasan of Tal Zqūpā, both villages outside Mosul, and Chief Denḥā of Tālānī in the Hakkārī mountains: Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b; BL Or. 4399, f. 579b; BL Add. 7174, f. 95a, 206a; Ishoʿdad of Merv, Commentaries, V, pt. 1:180. Another chief, Shemʿōn, is named without his place of residence: Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b.
(rabbō) in Mārdīn in 1795 A.G. / 1484. There must have been more prominent and influential urban laypeople in the Church of the East at this period, of which perhaps Shāh Muḥammad’s physician ‘Abd al-Masīḥ was one, but the attested nobles of the fifteenth century seem to have dominated village life. It is likely that the status of “chief” was hereditary within certain families, although direct confirmation is lacking for East Syrian nobles of the fifteenth century. The anonymous scribe who continued Bar Hebraeus’ world chronicle mentions a Syrian Orthodox Chief Īsā, the son of Chief Malko of Bēth Sbhīrīno in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, in the early fifteenth century, which demonstrates a hereditary chieftainship in the neighboring Christian minority. Within the Church of the East itself, a sixteenth-century Chief Salmō, son of Chief Abrāhām, named in an East Syrian manuscript dated 1856 A.G. / 1545, also gives an indication that the status of chief was hereditary.

All five manuscripts from the fifteenth century whose colophons mention East Syrian chiefs were paid for by the chief in question or his son. By contrast, only one manuscript displays the marks of episcopal patronage in the fifteenth century, the one donated by Metropolitan ‘Abdishō of Nisibis to the church of Mār Pethyōn in Āmid in 1769 A.G. / 1458.

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151 BL Or. 4399 was copied “by the diligence and care” of the priest Hūrmīz, the son of Chief Mattā of Talkēpē, and BL Add. 7174 was copied “by the diligence” of the priest ‘Īsā, the son of Chief Ḥasan, apparently of Taḥ Zqūpā. Both manuscripts were copied for liturgical use in a monastery or church, and this is a standard way to indicate who paid for the copying. St. Petersburg Syr. 33 was copied “for the use of the chaste, God loving, the exalted Chief… Denḥa” who “took trouble and acquired this book by his work and his labour”: Isho’dad of Merv, *Commentaries*, V, pt. 1:180; V, pt. 2:121. Berlin orient. quart. 801 was also copied for the priest Hūrmīz, the son of Chief Mattā of Talkēpē, and Cambridge Add. 1965 was copied for the priest Yū ānīs, the son of Chief Shem’ūn. Both manuscripts were likely also paid for by their recipients, although the colophons are less explicit.
152 Jerusalem Greek Patriarchate Syr 12: Chabot, “Jérusalem,” 107. According to Wilmshurst’s list of dated East Syrian manuscripts, Mārdīn (Scher) 13 was commissioned by Catholicos Mār Shem’ūn in 1488, but I see no
and one other fifteenth-century manuscript was commissioned by a priest from a clerical family.\textsuperscript{153} Thus we see that the noble families were important sources of patronage at this period. Two of the manuscripts commissioned by the priestly sons of village chiefs were copied in the city of Mosul for use in village churches in the Mosul region.\textsuperscript{154} One of these manuscripts in particular is a magnificent gospel lectionary written “literis praegrandibus eleganter” according to the catalog and even a few illustrations,\textsuperscript{155} which are very rare in East Syrian manuscripts of this period; evidently such a luxury item could not be produced within the village of Tal Zqīpā, but required employing a scribe from Mosul.

The lower clergy consisted of the priests and deacons, and since they comprised the majority of the scribes, the greatest proportion of the names known from the Church of the East in the fifteenth century belongs to this class.\textsuperscript{156} Scribes often named their father and even grandfather, who were often also priests or deacons since the Church of the East, like all eastern Christians, did not require celibacy of the lower clergy. In a few cases the scribe named his great-grandfather, as did the priest ʻĪsā b. Fakhr al-Dīn b. ʻĪsā b. Mattā of Mosul in two manuscripts copied in 1793 A.G. / 1482 and in 1800 A.G. / 1489, and the priest ʻAmmānū ʻīl b.

\textsuperscript{153} Vatican sir. 176, dated 14 February 1787 A.G. / 1476, was commissioned by the priest Yōhannān the son of the priest Yōnān according to its colophon: Vatican sir. 176, f. 128b.

\textsuperscript{154} BL Or. 4399 and BL Add. 7174. The other two manuscripts which mention chiefs do not mention where they were copied.

\textsuperscript{155} Josiah Forshall, \textit{Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Orientalium qui in Museo Britannico Asservantur} (London: Impensis Curatorum Musei Britannici, 1838), 51, 53.

\textsuperscript{156} One “scholar” (probably Syriac ʻeskōlāyā, translated “l’écolier” by Scher) is mentioned in the fifteenth century, perhaps a priest in training: Scher, “Diarbekr,” 386. No schools for training clergy are attested in the fifteenth century, although a gospel reading is specified for the funerals of “teachers and interpreters” (malfānē wa-mfash[qānē]) is given in BL Add. 7174, f. 212b. The scribe of this volume also praised his patron for having “great diligence for the restoration of the churches and the copying of books and the teaching of schools” (لا ماهر و ماهر و هم ماهر و هم ماهر و ماهر و): BL Add. 7174, f. 206a. A sixteenth-century book of ordination rites dated October 7, 1870 A.G. / 1558 includes the ordination of readers and subdeacons, but no person with such a rank is attested in the fifteenth century: Cambridge Add 1988, f. 1b.
Dāwīd b. Ahrôn b. Barṣōmō in the village of Bōrb in the diocese of Āthēl in a colophon dated 1837 A.G. / 1526. All of the ancestors named by both priests, except Barṣōmō the great-grandfather of 'Ammānū ’īl, were also priests, establishing a clerical lineage for certain families. Although most of the clergy attested in the fifteenth century only name themselves as individual scribes, many clergy did not minister alone: a single church, whether in a city or a village, might have a number of priests and deacons serving it. This was the case in 1800 A.G. / 1489 at the village church of Mār Qūryąqūs (probably in Talkēpē), which had “a multitude of clerics, of priests and deacons and orthodox believers.” At a slightly later period, a group of eight priests and seven nobles jointly purchased a manuscript for the church of Mār Pethyōn in Āmid, probably indicating that Āmid had a large clerical staff in 1857 A.G. / 1546. In places with multiple priests, one of them seems to have been designated the qankāyā (“sacristan”) in charge of the church’s vestments, liturgical vessels, and similar property. Both of the sacristans attested in the fifteenth century were sons of chiefs who commissioned manuscripts. Perhaps sons of chiefs were preferred for the position of sacristan, although we do not have enough evidence to say. On the other hand, smaller villages probably often had only one priest and one deacon, although no source provides an explicitly stated example.

In the surviving records of the Church of the East from the fifteenth century, we see the fading traces of social interactions within their particular Christian minority. They were not the only minority in their region, and we have sketched how they probably interacted with other

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157 Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, ff. 97a-b; BL Or. 4399, ff. 376a, 579a; Paris BN Syr 345, f. 220b.
158 Note in Diyarbakır (Scher) 38: Scher, “Diarbekr,” 350.
159 Hōrmīz b. Chief Mattā of Talkēpē and ʿĪsā b. Chief Ḥasan of Tal Zqīpū: BL Or 4399, f. 579b, BL Add 7174, f. 206a. Curiously, the note in Diyarbakır (Scher) 38 seems to describe one of those designated “les notables” by Scher as “sacristain des sacristains et serviteur fidèle du roi”: Scher, “Diarbekr,” 350. It seems unusual for a non-priest to be sacristan, both at this period and later, although I have been unable to consult the manuscript.
groups they encountered, as well as how their internal social structure was similar to or different from that of the other Christian minorities in their region. The ecclesiastical hierarchy looms larger than any other social institution of the Church of the East in this period, partly due to the bias of the sources but probably also due to the lack of other ways by which this population identified itself. It is to this minority’s understandings of its collective nature that we now turn in delineating the conceptual community of the Church of the East.
Chapter 4: Between God and the World: Theological Dimensions of Communal Life

Theology has gotten a bad reputation in many modern intellectual circles, but among medieval Christians it held preeminent status among intellectual pursuits. Modern Westerners more frequently invest physics with the disciplinary status of *primus inter pares*, the right to explain reality at its most basic level and answer the deepest questions of the world. But for medieval Christians who wanted to explain the way the world really works, theology was the “queen of the sciences” and the most profound academic discipline. It is therefore natural to ask how the Church of the East understood itself in theological terms.

The Christians in Iraq and Diyār Bakr, however, did not participate in the development of the universities in medieval western Europe. A scholastic tradition of biblical interpretation and theology within the Church of the East stretched back to Nisibis and perhaps Edessa in the fifth century, but a millennium later no educational institutions as such are known to have existed. Nevertheless authors such as Īshāq Shbadnāyā cite their predecessors as authoritative sources for theology, and we would be foolish to forget how well-developed it had once been as an academic discipline. In the thirteenth century, a group of priests as far from the centers of East Syrian intellectual life as the Mongol capital of Qaraqorum were able to produce a “chronicle from the creation of the world as far as Christ’s Passion; and they went beyond… the Passion, to touch on the Ascension, the Resurrection of the Dead and the Coming in Judgment,” according

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1 Portions of this chapter were presented as a paper entitled, “Syriac Christology and Christian Community in the Fifteenth-Century Church of the East,” at the I. Uluslararası Şuryani Sempozyumu – Şuryaniler ve Diğer Kültürlere Etkileşimleri, held by Mardin Artuklu Üniversitesi, on April 21, 2012.
to the Franciscan missionary William of Rubruck.⁴ Theological literacy among clergy, even in remote Central Asia, was clearly higher than Rubruck’s condemnation of the ignorance of Nestorian priests would lead us to believe.⁵

Like the debates surrounding string theory, the most abstract levels of theological speculation remain the domain of the few. Yet all levels of the populace have access to more widespread theological concepts, for example as rehearsed in the weekly liturgies or transmitted orally as the reasons for certain practices.⁶ These popular understandings sometimes reflect and sometimes deflect the official doctrines of the church hierarchy, but they also indicate which ideas are considered by the larger population to be more vital. Rather than suggesting that theological understandings are unimportant, such diversity argues for the need for nuanced attention to a variety of sources, and suggests the possibility of distinguishing more central and fixed from more developing and unstable theological ideas. Historians of doctrine may get excited about doctrinal disputes and new developments, but for lay people these sides of theology may not be the most prominent in their conceptions of their own community. Just like the relative importance of overlapping or nested conceptual communities, explored in the first chapter, the centrality of theological concepts must be read out of the available sources.

The fact that theology is not the domain only of the educated few is implicit, for example, in the diversity of theological expressions employed by the vast majority of scribes. Almost all

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⁴ “Cronica a creatione muni disque ad passionem Christi; et pertranseuntes passionem tetigerunt de ascensione et resurrectione mortuorum et adventu ad iudicium”: Anastasius van den Wyngaert, *Sinica Franciscana* (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi-Firenze): apud Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929), 293; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson and David Morgan (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990), 230. Although the narrative uses the word *cronica*, the theological nature of the work is shown in the range of topics listed by friar, including future events, and the creation of the text in preparation for an inter-religious debate, indicating that this work cannot be a mere “chronicle.”


manuscript colophons begin and end with invocations of God or assertions about God, which often are also sprinkled throughout the text. In the space of ten short lines, the anonymous scribe who copied a liturgy book probably in 1465 began his note by ascribing the completion of the work to God’s help, “and to God be the glory, and on us his mercies and grace forever,” and ended the colophon by proclaiming, “Blessed be God forever and glorified be his name to generation after generation.”

This is entirely typical: more manuscript colophons contain such sentiments than not. One scribe expressed God’s eternality by referring to him as “the one who makes times and generations pass away, but he does not pass away.” Another scribe offered a brief statement of Trinitarian doctrine, while a third expanded the obligatory prayer for forgiveness of sins to describe the events of the Last Day. One copyist gave a flowery rubric introducing a text, which includes two technical names for God, while another concluded his volume with a colophon “in the name of the eternal Being.” A scribe expressed human dependence on Christ by quoting John 15:5, and described God’s mercy with the phrase, “Lord God, the Mighty one, the Good one who does not take pleasure in the death of the sinner,” a

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7 Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b.
8 For example, among fifteenth-century Syriac manuscripts indications that the manuscript was copied with God’s help are found in Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 124b; Paris BN Syr. 345, f. 210a and 220a; Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 105b and 114b; Cambridge Add. 616, f. 108b; Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b; BL Add 7174, f. 213b; BL Add. 7177, f. 320b; and St. Petersburg Nat. Lib. Syr. 33, f. 316a, published in Isho’dad of Merv, The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English, ed. Margaret Dunlop Smith Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), V, pt. 1:178. Such a sentiment is also found in the fifteenth-century Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a. In contrast, only two manuscripts which I have consulted omit such an indication: Berlin Sachau 167 and BL Or. 4399.
10 Paris BN Syr 184, f. 124b.
11 BL Or. 4399, f. 579b.
12 Paris BN Syr 181, ff. 97b-98a. For the use of the term ΠΙΠΙ, see below on the Trinity. The other term, ΠΠΠΠ, ultimately derives from attempts to graphically represent the Hebrew Tetragrammaton in Greek letters (ΠΠΠΠ): Bruce Manning Metzger, Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 35.
13 BL Add. 7174, f. 206a.
paraphrase of Ezekiel 18:23.\textsuperscript{14} One priest wove into his colophon a reference to “the eternal God, he who possesses eternality and immutable unity,”\textsuperscript{15} and later prayed to “God the Lord of all and the Creator of all.”\textsuperscript{16} Another scribe began his manuscript with nine lines of Trinitarian theology, incorporating all of the most important technical terms, and an assertion of God’s freedom from suffering, before finally telling the reader that he is copying a liturgy book known as the Gazzā.\textsuperscript{17} The copying of East Syrian manuscripts was carried out by a class of scribes who often invoked a range of theological concepts.

Of course the genre of manuscript colophon had developed in ways that encouraged the inclusion of theological expressions, but generic considerations are not sufficient to explain the diversity of such phrases and the ideas appealed to. Although some patterns of expression emerge, the phrases acknowledging God’s help and ascribing glory to him never reduce to repetition of fixed formulas, although the phrase “Blessed be God forever and glorified be his name to generation after generation” does become nearly fixed.\textsuperscript{18} Instead, the range of expressions shows that most scribes, even though not themselves authors of high doctrinal treatises, possessed an active facility with theological vocabulary, while the diversity of concepts invoked indicates that the scribal class engaged with these conceptual systems with sufficient familiarity to select ideas according to their individual interests. Although theology as a

\textsuperscript{14} BL Add. 7174, f. 213b.

\textsuperscript{15} BL Add. 7177, f. 320b.

\textsuperscript{16} BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.

\textsuperscript{17} In addition to naming the Trinity, the scribe includes the title Paraclete (_chunks) for the Holy Spirit, and expounds the divine unity as “one nature, three qnōmē, one being [\textipa{TH\textipa{U}TH\textipa{A}], equal in ousia and nature and unity, far from mortality and corruptibility” (_chunks): BL Or. 4399, f. 1b.

\textsuperscript{18} Apart from variation in the number of occurrences of the phrase “after generation,” the expression is found verbatim in Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a; Paris BN Syr 345, f. 210a and 221a; Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b; the Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 180a; and St. Petersburg Nat. Lib. Syr. 33, f. 316b in Ishā’īdād of Merv, Commentaries, V, pt. 1:180. Cambridge Add. 616, f. 109a, and BL Add. 7174, f. 215a, both make plural as the only variation. BL Add. 7177, f. 321a, replaces “glorified” with “established” (_chunks).
discipline was discussed in terminology developed by highly educated specialists, some of these theologically literate scribes probably received no training outside of their own villages, and they were most frequently lower clergy, drawn from the ranks of priests and deacons. Their interest in doctrinal matters indicates that access to theological systems of thought was not confined to the higher clerical elites.

It should come as no surprise that the theology of the Church of the East, especially when considered not from polemical treatises but from the ideas emphasized in the liturgy, contains broad continuities with the theology of other branches of Christianity. One might justifiably wonder, therefore, why anyone would consider dwelling at such length on what is basically “known,” and the answer is two-fold. In the first place, historians are no longer as familiar with theology as they may once have been, and often less familiar than they think they are. Scholarly training in theology has become rare for historians. As Laura Robson points out, explaining why Middle Eastern Christians have been little studied by secular historians, “For most historians of the modern Arab world, the functioning of the Orthodox and other eastern churches that dominate Arab Christianity remains an arcane mystery. Its theology, ecclesiastical structure, and institutional history are unfamiliar to many scholars trained in universities in Europe and the United States.”19 As a result of this lack of familiarity, scholars sometimes make suggestions which involve embarrassing theological gaffes. Furthermore, even among historians with theological training, the diversity of modern scholarly communities means there is no agreed upon standard in relation to which the unique features of any particular theological worldview of the past may be elucidated. Russian Orthodox, liberal Catholics, traditionalist Catholics, mainline Protestants, and American evangelicals all have competing understandings, not only of

their own theology, but of the history of theology as well, as do other scholars of the history of theology; so identifying which ideas from the fifteenth century will be surprising depends very much on the background of the observer. In order to communicate with the breadth of the scholarly community today, very little can be taken for granted, and therefore it is necessary to spell out the theological concepts of the Church of the East in the fifteenth century, as they relate to this minority’s conception of their own community.

To analyze the theological dimension of East Syrian community, it is important to remember that the development of theology is not the goal of the discussion. The historical exponents of particular theological systems have often emphasized the unchanging continuity of their doctrine, obscuring the actual developments. To counteract this trend, modern historians of theology have devoted their attention primarily to new developments and controversial formulations in any given period. My argument steps back from both of these programs, because my goal is not to narrate the history of doctrinal development, but to document the theological input to this minority’s self-understanding. To analyze only what is new, or only what is unchanging, would miss the totality of East Syrian theological thought, and would risk overlooking what is central to this social group’s concept of themselves at this time, since neither new developments nor older ideas are obviously more critical to self-understanding. The “payoff” of this discussion is not a story about theological change, but an account of how these people situated themselves in their world in theological terms.

This chapter delineates the major topics for theological reflection in the extant East Syrian sources. It would be foolish to assume, of course, that there was a single theological system embraced by all members of the Church of the East or even all clergy. For this reason I have paid attention to divergences of emphasis within the available sources. Just as in the case
of conceptual communities themselves, differences of understanding do not invalidate the endeavor but demand a nuanced approach, which I have attempted here. Divergences emerge not only in the content of the theological concepts, but also in their relative priority. Particularly significant is the relative importance assigned to distinctive theological concepts which separate this group from all others, as compared to theological ideas which East Syrian Christians shared with some or all of their neighbors. I will argue that theology is most relevant to the conceptual community of the Church of the East not in terms of sectarian adherence to a unique truth maintained against all other groups, but in terms of their understandings of the world, of its maker, and of their relationships to each.

Theology also provides in some sense a natural starting point for documenting the self-conception of the East Syrian Christians, for it functions as the glue which will hold together the topics in my subsequent chapters. Communal rituals, the topic of the following chapter, are interpreted and justified in light of their function according to the practitioner’s theological understandings, and these rituals necessitate the clerical hierarchy which again explains its existence in relation to God. Chapter 7 will address this community’s historical self-understanding, which in the fifteenth century emphasizes precisely the traditional authorities of doctrinal formulations and the Church’s connection to the historical Jesus Christ. In light of these conceptual connections between the different domains of social self-reflection, theology provides a natural starting place. This is especially the case given the lack of attested ethnic, political, or occupational loyalties, as demonstrated in the first chapter.
The Sources of East Syrian Theology

Although the Church of the East has not preserved any sources for a narrative history of events in the fifteenth century, it has done rather better at preserving theological sources. The most important theological treatise of the period immediately preceding the conquests of Timur was the Kthābhā d-margānīthā d-ʿal shrārā da-krestyānīthā (“The Book of the Pearl, on the Truth of Christianity”) by the early fourteenth-century author ʿAbdīshōʾ bar Brīkhā, the metropolitan bishop of Nisibis who died in 1318. This work is preserved in one of the few surviving fifteenth-century manuscripts from the Church of the East, which indicates that someone considered it significant enough to copy in this period. It is useful, therefore, in providing us with an example of systematic theological thought before our period.

The technical theology of the fifteenth century is represented by the work of an otherwise unknown priest, Īshāq Shbadnāyā. His masterpiece is a very long poem entitled ʿOnīthā d-ʿal mdabrānīthā d-allāhā d-men b-rāshīh wa-ʿdāmā l-ʿālam (“Poem on the Divine Economy from In the Beginning until Eternity”), divided into thirty sections devoted to different topics. To many of these sections, Shbadnāyā himself added a prose commentary clarifying or expanding the treatment of the subject, mostly with quotations drawn from the writings of early East Syriac authors but sometimes in his own words. This text provides an overview of the whole corpus of East Syrian theology, as selected by one particular author in our period.

21 Vat. sir. 176.
23 This work is unedited. I will cite the text from the earliest extant manuscript, Cambridge Add. 1998, except in the few places where that manuscript has lost a folio or is otherwise illegible, when I will cite the text on the basis of Berlin orient. fol. 1201.
24 There are also glosses, usually in Syriac but sometimes in Arabic, added to define the rare or foreign words used in the poetry. Although one cannot be certain, it appears that these glosses likewise originate with the author of the text as a whole. For more information about this work, see Carlson, “Shbadnaya’s Life and Works,” 201–5.
A range of smaller texts also contribute to our understanding of this group’s theological views at a number of levels. Shbadnāyā himself also composed three poems to be used in the liturgy on specified occasions: one for the Bā‘ūthā d-Nīnwāyē (“Prayer of the Ninevites”), one for the commemoration of St. George, and one for the feast of Shkhāḥtā (“The Finding of the Cross”). A smaller, previously unknown, poem ascribed to “the priest Īṣḥāq” is probably also by Shbadnāyā. His contemporary Īṣḥā‘yahb bar Mqaddam, the metropolitan of Erbil, likewise wrote liturgical poems (ʻonyāthā) for the commemorations of St. George and of Rabban Hormizd, a seventh-century East Syrian saint, as well as a previously unknown one for the Rogation of the Ninevites. He likewise composed four short poetic texts for the funeral liturgies. These texts composed for the liturgy were probably not yet incorporated into the service books of most East Syrian churches, but they represent the views of their authors as expressed in a language intended to be more accessible than the heights of technical jargon would permit. Finally, as shown above, the colophons of the few dated East Syrian manuscripts hint at the theological views of scribes beyond these two authors.

The liturgies of the Church of the East provide another important source for theological ideas which were circulating in the fifteenth century. Although the history of liturgy is a very technical subject, almost a complete set of East Syrian service books survives from the fifteenth century. Every service would culminate in the celebration of the Eucharist using one of three

25 All three are contained in BL Or. 4062, ff. 122b-143b, dated 1985 A.G. / 1674. The third of the three will be cited from this manuscript, but the first poem is also contained in Cambridge Add. 1983, ff. 71a-73a, from 1861 A.G. / 1550, and the second is also in Berlin orient. fol. 620, ff. 337b-343a, from the sixteenth century. They will be cited from these oldest manuscripts.
26 Bodl. Syr. c. 9, ff. 128a-129b.
27 Baumstark, Geschichte, 330, n. 2.
28 Paris BN Syr 345, ff. 186a-188a.
29 Baumstark, Geschichte, 330, n. 3.
anaphoras, ascribed respectively to “the apostles Addai and Mari,”30 to Theodore “the Interpreter,”31 and to Nestorius.32 The volume called the Ḣūdrā contains the distinctive texts which were appointed to be read at each service throughout the year,33 while the one named the Gazzā contains additional texts read for the night service (lēlyā).34 Mateos indicates that the contents of the Ḣūdrā are both older and more consistent than those of other liturgical books,35 so I have primarily used the Ḣūdrā in order to examine the theological texts most widely used in the fifteenth century. These texts would be chanted during the services by priests or deacons throughout the Church of the East, and thus would be the most widely available theological texts.

The role which the liturgy as action plays in the formation and regulation of the self-concept of the Church of the East will be considered in the following chapter, but as text the cycle of church services provides an important source for how the East Syrians understood and expressed their doctrines and their theological understanding of their own community. Taken together, these East Syrian texts constitute a rich corpus of source material from which to reconstruct their theological views.

33 A fifteenth-century Ḣūdrā survives as BL Add. 7177. The Ḣūdrā in use today has been published twice, once with modifications for Catholic use and once for the use of the Church of the East: Paul Bedjan, ed., Breviarium Chaldaicum (Paris: Via Dicta de Sèvres 95, 1886); Toma Darmo, ed., Ktaba da-qdam wa-d-bathar wa-d-hudra wa-d-kāškol wa-d-gaza w-qala d’udrane ’am ktaba d-mazmure (Trichur: Mar Narsai Press, 1960).
34 A fifteenth-century Gazzā survives as BL Or. 4399.
The Structure of East Syrian Theology

The topic of theology is most frequently expressed in Syriac as God’s mdabbrānūthā. This is the key word in the title of Shbadnāyā’s magnum opus, the “Poem on God’s mdabbrānūthā.” The same author entitled his poem composed for the feast of the Finding of the Cross, “On the mdabbrānūthā and on the revered Cross.” This term is an abstract noun derived from mdabbrānā, itself the noun of agent from the verb dabbar, which means “to lead, drive, steer, and guide,” and therefore “to govern.” The participial form is used of God in a beatitude in the service for Yaldā (Nativity): “Blessed is the Being governing [mdabbar] all, who sent his Son for the salvation of all.” The noun of agent therefore tends to mean “leader” or “governor,” and the abstract noun can mean “guidance” or “government.” In a theological context, it can also refer to how God guides the development of events, in English usually called “providence.” The term also corresponds to the many uses of the Greek term oikovomía, which is preserved in the use of the English term “economy” as theological jargon, a meaning older than the commercial usage which is more common today. To say, therefore, that East Syrian theology is concerned with God’s mdabbrānūthā is to indicate a complex topic comprising God’s reign, providence, and modes of interacting with the world and humans in it. This is a notion of theology distinctive to Syriac Christianity, and is both more concrete than Augustine’s broad definition “reasoning or speaking concerning the deity” and broader than

37 BL Or. 4062, f. 133a.
39 BL Add 7177, f. 20b, ll. 11-12.
Boethius’s definition as a branch of philosophy concerned with “the motionless, distinct and incorporeal divine substance.”

A more concrete sense of the content of *mdabbrānūthā* can be obtained from the table of contents of Īshāq Shβadnāyā’s largest work devoted to the subject. The poem is divided into thirty sections covering a wide range of topics, yet there is a clear progression. The first section is dedicated to the Trinity, that is, God alone before the creation of anything. The topic of the creation of everything then occupies the next five sections and part of a sixth, addressed in the order of the account in Genesis 1, with explicit reference to the numbered days of that narrative. A lengthy discussion of the fall of humanity is followed by a terse summary of the rest of the Old Testament. The central body of the text then addresses the incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in seventeen chapters. The long work ends with two sections addressing the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles at Pentecost, two sections delineating eschatological expectation (the coming of the Antichrist and the general resurrection), and a closing prayer for the Church. From this brief overview, it is clear that discussions of God’s *mdabbrānūthā* begin with God’s own nature, and then deal with creation, the person and work of Christ, and the interval between Christ’s ascension and the end of all things, although the topic of Jesus Christ is central and most detailed.

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44 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 5a-19a.
Indeed, the term *mdabrānūṯā* often refers primarily if not exclusively to the incarnation of Christ and his ministry, death, and resurrection. Shbadnāyā quoted Patriarch Ḥnānīshā’, “The Savior’s dispensation [*mdabrānūṯā*] upon the earth begins from the birth in the flesh and goes to the resurrection and is completed with the ascension.” The structure of Shbadnāyā’s largest poem shows the same emphasis: of the seventeen sections in the clump of chapters dealing with Christ, the first and the next-to-last repeat the key term *mdabrānūṯā* in their titles: section 9 is the “Prologue to the *mdabrānūṯā* in Christ” and section 24 is “On the Messianic *mdabrānūṯā* in brief, rather, on the Resurrection and Ascension.” This *inclusio* indicates the centrality of the contained portion to the larger work’s treatment of this theme. Certain topics which may appear as digressions are inserted into this clump of sections, namely discussions of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, a terse catalogue of heretics, and a section in praise of “the revered Cross.” Yet even these “digressions” have logic: Christian baptism is linked to Christ’s baptism in the Jordan, while the Lord’s Supper is tied to the Last Supper, and both of these topics are addressed at the corresponding points in the narrative of Christ’s life. The heretics named are all presented as Christological heretics, those whose beliefs about Christ’s incarnation need to be rejected, and therefore are addressed in the context of teaching on that

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49 Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 252. This usage is also seen in the title of the theological treatise of the Syrian Orthodox author Mas‘ūd of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, “On the Trinity and on the division and the unity, and on the incarnation [*mdabrānūṯā*] of our Lord, and on the grants and gifts and divine miracles which were granted by it to all creatures of the angels and of humans” (حَلَّلَ اللهُ حَلْلَتَهُ تَحْلَّلَتْ وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ، وَحَلَّلَتْ). B. L. van Helmond, *Mas’oud du Tour ‘Abdin: un mystique syrien du XVe siècle, étude et texte*, Bibliothèque du Muséon 14 (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1942), 3°.


51 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 54a.

52 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 92a, 110b.
The Trinity is a necessary prologue, but the section on the incarnation structures a wider range of theological thought than merely historical interest in getting the correct details of Christ’s place in the past.

This essential structure is also reflected in the shorter poem which Shbadnāyā composed “on the mdabrānūthā” for the feast of the Finding of the Cross. Like his largest work, this poem is divided into sections, but no titles are given to the different sections which would indicate their contents. Nevertheless, the sections have individual themes, and the first half of the poem presents a theological context for the praises of the power of the Cross in the second half. The very first section is devoted to the Trinity, while the second deals with the creation of everything and the fall into sin, more briefly than in Shbadnāyā’s magnum opus. The third section begins, however, with the incarnation, and the rest of the first half recounts Jesus Christ’s life, ministry, death, and resurrection. The first section of the second half sketches the preaching of the apostles, with a summary statement of theological orthodoxy:

If in truth we are children of those who proclaim the truth,  
Let us confess and sing, “Three qnōmē, one ousia,”  
And let us preach Christ in unity, the Lord incarnate,  
Natures complete in the properties of the Word and flesh,  
Which were unified in will and person, and completed our salvation.  
And thus let us keep the deposit which we were commanded, that we may not fail.

We will examine the terms of this theological summary later, but here it is sufficient to note that the items considered most important in theology are the Trinity (expressed in one line) and the

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53 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 103a-104a. The Christological orientation of the heresiological section is indicated near the beginning with the lines “A trick (illusion and fantasy and as nothing) they considered the incarnation of the Lord Christ… They made a clamor at the economy [mdabrānūthā] of the Immortal” (BL Or. 4062, f. 138b).
54 BL Or. 4062, ff. 133a-134b.
55 BL Or. 4062, ff. 134b-138b.
56 BL Or. 4062, f. 138b.
Incarnation (expressed in three lines). Combined with the themes of the individual sections in the first half of poem, this liturgical poem supports the contention that the Trinity is the starting place for theology, but the Incarnation is the doctrine which draws the bulk of the attention.

This account of the central structure of East Syrian theology is also confirmed and renewed by the liturgical practice of the Church of the East. Although the East Syrian liturgical calendar contains no festival exclusively dedicated to the Trinity, as the Sunday following Pentecost came to be in the Latin West, Trinitarian doctrine figures prominently in the celebration of Christ’s baptism in the feast of Denḥā (Epiphany).\(^{57}\) The service for that feast chants, “A new creation sings glory to the Son, Christ, who… saved it from the error of idols and delivered to it the knowledge of the truth, the complete teaching of the glorified Trinity.”\(^{58}\) Moreover the Trinitarian doxology, “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,” occurs frequently enough in the liturgy on most days that the general verb shabbaḥ (“to glorify”) could be used in a technical sense to indicate the recitation of this specific formula.\(^{59}\) Following the command at Matthew 28:19, the Church of the East initiated all new members of the community with baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” which likewise indicates the importance of the Trinity as a theological starting point for the entire community.\(^{60}\) The most common East Syrian anaphora, that of Addai and Mari, likewise refers to “the worshipped and glorified name of the Father and Son and of the Holy Spirit.”\(^{61}\)

\(^{57}\) For example, on BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 9-10, ll.16-18; f. 29b, ll.8-10, ll. 24-25; f. 30a, ll. 13-14; f. 31a, ll. 11-12.

\(^{58}\) Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 555–56. An example of its use in the fifteenth century is found in the Ḥudrā at BL Add. 7177, f. 22b, l. 11.

\(^{59}\) Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 107b, 118b.

\(^{60}\) Macomber, “Anaphora of Addai and Mari,” 360, l. 23–24.
The narrower meaning of *mdabrānūthā* in reference to Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection is also seen in the progression of liturgical seasons for the first half of the year. The ritual year began with four weeks of Subbārā, which correspond in time to Advent in the Latin calendar but in theme to the Annunciation, followed by the feasts of Yaldā (Nativity) and Denḥā (Epiphany), the latter of which extended to form a new liturgical season. As in the West, the “Great Fast” (*šawmā rabbā*, Lent) culminated in the celebration of Jesus’ triumphal entry, last supper, crucifixion, and finally resurrection on Qyāmtā (Easter).^62^ The feast of Sūlāqā (Ascension) closed the cycle of dominical seasons, and then Pentecost began the season of the Apostles, so that the narrative of the liturgical year traced the *mdabrānūthā* through the descent of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church, as did Shbadnāyā in his “Poem on the *mdabrānūthā*.” The Anaphora of Addai and Mari includes the line, “Because of your whole marvelous *mdabrānūthā* toward us, we confess you and glorify you.”^63^ The liturgical cycles of the Church of the East emphasized the importance of the Trinity and the Incarnation as theological concepts.

**The Trinity**

Even before the world was, God was. Reflecting this, East Syrian sources from the fifteenth century emphasize the Trinitarian nature of God before all other elements of Christian theology.^64^ Ïšāq Shbadnāyā’s long “Poem on the Divine Economy” begins with a quatrain indicating his starting point in the nature of God:

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^64^ ʿAbdīshō of Nisibis similarly devoted the first *mēmrā* of his “Book of the Pearl” to the nature of God, although he dedicated chapters to God’s existence, uniqueness, eternity, and ineffability before ending the *mēmrā* with a
We will glorify Him who is forever in His existence,
Who by His essence made known to us His hiddenness
And whose role as creator by the arrangements of His providence
Indicated concerning His three-ness.\(^{65}\)

This quatrain is followed by the first of the long poem’s thirty sections, “On the holy Trinity,”
which immediately lists the three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.\(^{66}\) One of Shbadnāyā’s three liturgical poems also begins with a statement of Trinitarian theology as orthodox doctrine: “one nature / Which is confessed in three \(\text{qnomē} /\)
In the true and perfect teaching of orthodoxy.”\(^{67}\) To confirm the priority of the doctrine of the Trinity, Shbadnāyā follows the statement of the doctrine at the beginning of this poem with an assertion of its centrality:

This is the faith which has the rectitude of truth.
And that is the path of life to godly teaching.
The foundation which is built on the rock of Simon,
The chief of the good things of gospel teaching.\(^{68}\)

The Trinity is also invoked in certain manuscript colophons in a doxological context: “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.”\(^{69}\) One liturgical manuscript threatens anyone who might steal the volume with “the anathema of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”\(^{70}\)

Trinitarian doctrine occupies a prominent place in East Syrian theology.

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\(^{66}\) Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b. The last word is often translated “Trinity,” but in English we do not refer to “God’s Trinity.” In part this is due, no doubt, to forgetting that the Latin trinitas (like the Greek τριάς and the Syriac مسقخته) simply means “three-ness” and not “three-in-one-ness” as it is often misunderstood. This is not to suggest that Trinitarian theology denies monotheism, but that it communicates the unity of God in other ways.

\(^{67}\) BL Or. 4062, f. 133a.

\(^{68}\) BL Add. 7174, f. 206a

\(^{69}\) Paris BN Syr. 184, ff. 124b-125a; Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b.

\(^{70}\) Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b.
The importance of the doctrine of the Trinity to Middle Eastern Christians can perhaps partly be explained by the fact that it distinguishes them from their Jewish and Muslim neighbors. Muslim Arabic sources had recorded the doctrine of the Trinity for the purpose of disputing it since at least the time of Abū ʿĪs̱a Muḥammad b. Ḥarūn al-Warrāq in the ninth century. 71 A thirteenth-century Jewish author from Bagdad, Sa’d b. Mansūr Ibn Kammūnah, recorded the Christian belief in the Trinity as well as opponents’ objections to it. 72 But Trinitarian theology does not distinguish the Church of the East from the other Christian groups in the Middle East, which also emphasize the doctrine of the Trinity, so the importance of this belief cannot be entirely due to its power to delineate this community from its neighbors. 73 Indeed, an emphasis on Trinitarian doctrine may serve to rebut the accusations of heterodoxy which the other Christian groups had leveled against the Church of the East from late antiquity onwards. Polemical texts had accused “Nestorians” in Persia of introducing a fourth member into the Trinity since the sixth century, 74 which already caused an East Syrian patriarchal synod in the year 554 to anathematize any who spoke of a four-fold deity. 75 This accusation persisted at least into the fourteenth century, when ‘Abdīsh’ of Nisibis offered three counter-arguments to

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73 The theological treatise of a fifteenth-century Syrian Orthodox writer, Mas’ūd of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, also begins with an exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity: van Helmond, Mas’ūd du Ṭour ‘Abdin, 3*, 45*. An Armenian scribe who composed a long theological poem, at the end of a manuscript dated 932 A.A. / 1483, opened his text with a Trinitarian doxology: L. S. Xač’ikyan, Tashningerord dari hayeren jerhagleri hištakaranner (Yerevan: Haykakan S. H. Gitut’yunneri Akademiayi Hratarakzut’yun, 1967), III:42.
show that the Church of the East did not include four persons in the Trinity, and a late fifteenth-century liturgy book interrupts the ritual for consecrating the Eucharist with the observation: “It is worth knowing that these signs [in the name of the Trinity], according to the opinion of Mār Ėlīyā of Nisibis, rescue us from introducing a quaternity in our breaking [of bread].” The concern to rebut this accusation may be the meaning of the line with which Shbadnāyā introduces one summary of Trinitarian doctrine in the middle of his poem for the feast of the Finding of the Cross: “If in truth we are the children of those who proclaim the truth.” In this context, holding fast to Trinitarian doctrine refutes those who would contend that the Church of the East has erroneous theology.

So far we have considered the function of Trinitarian dogma in delimiting this group from certain neighbors, and responding to the hostile misrepresentations of others. Such an approach to the use of theology in charting the collective self-concept has only limited utility, however, for the function of a doctrine in this way is strictly extrinsic to the doctrine’s content. Any idea, regardless of what it says, may be used to define a social group by adherence, namely as the group whose membership is defined as “those who hold to this idea,” and many groups have been defined in this manner. But to stop here, to treat doctrines only as membership cards, 

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76 He even refers to the idea of a divine quaternity as “this accusation” (عَدُّلُهُ بَنَاتِيً) showing that its source is external to the Church of the East: ‘Abdīshī’ bar Brīkhā, Ktḥbhā d-methqrē margānīthā, 30–31.

77 He even refers to the idea of a divine quaternity as “this accusation” (عَدُّلُهُ بَنَاتِيً) showing that its source is external to the Church of the East: ‘Abdīshī’ bar Brīkhā, Ktḥbhā d-methqrē margānīthā, 30–31.

would be to presume that precisely what is believed is unimportant or irrelevant. It is further necessary to examine the intrinsic logic of a doctrine in order to understand how what is believed about God impacts the group’s understanding of itself.

At first sight, the doctrine of the Trinity seems to be a mere membership card, largely irrelevant for how the members of the Church of the East conceived of their collective existence. In part this is due to the very technical vocabulary which was developed to express the doctrine, vocabulary far removed from daily life. The unity of God is sometimes expressed by using the Greek word οὐσία written in Syriac letters, and sometimes by using Syriac translations of the term such as ʾithūthā or ʾithyā, both meaning “being.”

Sharing equally in this one being are three qnōmē, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, names “which rightly belong to the same substance in its equality,” in the words of Shbadnāyā. The word qnōmā (plural qnōmē) consistently translates the Greek theological term ὑπόστασις, although unlike the latter it should not be too quickly understood to mean “person.” The unity of the being with three qnōmē is underscored by appeal to a common “nature” (kyānā) and “essence” (yāth).

Shbadnāyā distinguishes the ousia from the qnōmē most explicitly among fifteenth-century

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80 For a few examples, نعئيم is used in BL Or. 4062, f. 138b, Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 2b, 3b, and BL Or. 4399, f. 1b; نعئيم at BL Or. 4062, f. 133a, Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b, and BL Or. 4399, f. 1b; and نعئيم at BL Add. 7174, f. 206a, Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 3a, and BL Or. 4062, f. 138a.

81 The development of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις as technical terms to express Trinitarian theology is typically attributed to the Cappadocians, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa, but for a more nuanced account see Joseph T. Lienhard, “Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of ‘One Hypostasis’,” in The Trinity, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 103–7.

82 The word qnōmā (plural qnōmē) is used by a priest from Mosul in BL Or. 4399, f. 1b, as well as by Isḥaq Shbadnāyā in Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b, 3b. The term نعئيم, related to نعئيم, is also used in Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 3b.
sources: “God, when his appellation is to his simplicity, his nature is called ousia. But when he
is designated by names, qnōmā is said. And when these qnōmē are described, they are called
‘persons’ (parṣōpē). For the nature common to the three qnōmē is the ousia, which when it is
named becomes a qnōmā, and when known by description they become persons.” These terms
are used with very specific technical meanings, when the doctrine of the Trinity is expressed
philosophically, although the concept is referenced in other ways as well.

The briefest statements of the doctrine simply assert that there is one being and three
qnōmē, but more complete descriptions address the various ways in which God is one and
three. The equality of the three qnōmē is expressed in all attributes which relate to deity. A
deacon from the village of Kpharbūrān near Ḥiṣn-Kayf emphasized the equality of honor and
power: they are “equal in name and equal in authority and lordship and might.” The priest ʿĪsā
from Mosul chose to add that the three qnōmē are “equal in ousia and nature and unity, far
removed from mortality and corruptibility.” Shbānāyā’s liturgical poem for the Finding of the
Cross almost presents the triple qnōmē as concessive: “And though there are three qnōmē they
possess an equal will / And power and operation and complete perfection.” Although it is not
clear that “nature” (kyānā) can be interpreted in a strictly nominalist fashion, at very least the
three qnōmē share or are equal in all attributes of divinity. According to this liturgical poem, the

85 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 3b. For a critique of the importation of modern notions of personhood
into analytic philosophical discussions of Trinitarian doctrine, with particular comparison to Gregory of Nyssa’s use
of the term ὑποστάσεις, see Sarah Coakley, “‘Persons’ in the ‘Social’ Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current
Analytic Discussion,” in The Trinity, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford
86 BL Or. 4062, f. 138b.
87 Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 124b. For the location of the village of
Kpharbūrān, see David Wilmshurst, The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913, Corpus
Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 582; Subsidia 104 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000), 44.
88 BL Or. 4399, f. 1b.
89 BL Or. 4062, f. 133b.
important attributes include lack of any limitation (lā mettahmā), simplicity (pshītā) as opposed to being composed of anything else, and life (ḥayā). The lack of limitation is emphasized by describing God as “The glorified King whose hidden nature has no end, / Exalted above every place and all times, perfect in ousia.” In light of these attributes, to say there is one God is to say that there is one being, who exists as three qnōmē which share the divine nature and existence.

The three-ness of God therefore needs to be explained in a way which preserves the notion of divine unity outlined above, since the same sources expound both sides of the description. The names “the Father,” “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit” (or, more often in Syriac, the “Spirit of Holiness”) indicate the three qnōmē, which are likewise correlated with other descriptors. But the three-ness of God is not merely a plurality of names. The three qnōmē are in some sense distinct, as Shbadnāyā indicates by adding “without commingling” to the assertion of three-ness. This distinctness is expressed in the dīlāywāthā, the properties particular to each of the three. The Father is identified as the “cause” (elthā) of the Son and the Spirit, and the processes of causation are labeled “begetting” (yālōdhūthā) and “procession” (nāpōqūthā). Yet our common notions of causation, begetting, and procession are explicitly restricted in their application, as Shbadnāyā asserts, “But it is not in our image that [the qnōmē] are named with

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90 BL Or. 4062, ff. 133a-b. Compare the description of “the simple unbounded nature of his deity, exalted above moments and times and intervals and durations” (جلبُ بُضُعُو مُؤَلُعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو مُقَوَّعُو Mīhāl Qīnī) in the service for Yaldā (Nativity): BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll. 24-25.

91 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b.


93 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b.

94 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 2a, 3a.
causation.” The reason for this distinction is that we are “under time and under motion and chance” whereas the divine qnōmē are not so limited. Therefore the procession of the Spirit is explicitly declared to be “without departure” in order to deny any spatial intuition regarding procession, while Shbdnāyā denies the temporal differentiation which is commonly assumed to result from causation in four lines which put the three qnōmē in parallel to each other and in contrast with beings within time:

Since the Father is always in being  
And since the Son is always in truth  
And this is also of the Spirit without delay.  
But temporal beings, when they were not, underwent becoming.

This quatrain emphasizes the equal eternity of the three qnōmē, with none of the three temporally preceding the others, in contrast to the “temporal beings,” for which there was a time when they were not. Shbdnāyā makes this shared eternity explicit on the basis of an interpretation of the opening verse of the Gospel of John, which indicates in his view “that the Being [īṯūṯāṯā] has eternally / Fatherhood and sonship, indeed, and procession / Which indicate by these things the persons [parsōpē] and the properties [dīlāywāṯā].” These relationships are the ground for other particular properties, such as the different roles each qnōmā has in the Incarnation.

96 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b.  
100 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 4a.  
101 For example, the service for the Friday following Yaldā (Nativity) praises “the Father who sent you, and the Spirit who anointed you, and the Son who dwelt in you and made you the Lord of all” (BL Add. 7177, f. 26b, ll. 5-6. The text of the same service ends in this manuscript with the exhortation, “Come, let us draw near to the living and rational sacrifice which was given for us as the fountain of helps, the image of the Father and the icon [yūqnā] of his only-begotten and the fitting sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, an incomprehensible nature” (
It is not obvious how this detailed development of Trinitarian doctrine relates to the conception of the community. Indeed, since the question first posed is what God is like apart from creation, not in relationship to anything created, one might be tempted to conclude that these details are necessarily divorced from any understanding of the social order of human groups, at a fundamental level of reality. Some texts that refer to Christians in relation to God’s three-ness simply use the label “Trinity” as a more specific replacement for the generic term “God.” Thus Shbadnāyā speaks of Christians as “members of the household of the Trinity,” when he could just as well have said “household of God.” Similarly Shbadnāyā refers to St. George as a “habitation of the Trinity.”

But the theology of God’s nature also shapes the conception of the community in functional ways. The same texts which provide the greatest doctrinal detail also present a response from the authorial “we,” presuming the participation of the author’s community. The community’s presumed response to the triune God is worship (ṣeghdthā). Worship bookends the statement of doctrinal orthodoxy which begins Īshāq Shbadnāyā’s liturgical poem for the Finding of the Cross:

We worship the one nature  
Which is confessed in three qnōmē  
In the true and perfect teaching of orthodoxy
Of the Church while praising and giving thanks.  

The first section of this poem, after enumerating the three persons of the Trinity, immediately characterizes God’s nature by received adoration: “The [divine] nature is worshipped, glorified, blessed, hidden, exalted.”

His larger poem begins with a synonymous declaration: “We glorify the one who is forever in His existence.”

The deacon of Kpharbūrān surrounds his brief declaration of Trinitarian doctrine with doxology, starting with “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,” and ending with “To [the Trinity] be glory and honor and confession and worship and exaltation and praise from the mouth of all made and created things.”

The opening doxology is taken from the liturgy, while the closing doxology indicates the many aspects of worship. Another scribe, Archdeacon Īshō’ of Mosul, also responds to God’s eternal nature with worship: “To the eternal God, him who possesses eternality and immutable unity, be glory and honor and confession and worship, now and at all times and forever and ever.”

Worship is taken to characterize this community so completely that in a poem addressed to Christ as a prayer the group can be denominated simply, “Your worshippers” (sāghōdhayk).

The liturgy for Denhā (Epiphany) highlights the universal obligation to respond to God’s Trinitarian nature with worship: “Let us be baptized with the confession of three qnōmē, of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, one nature (kyānā) and one power which is
not limited, the one who is from eternity and is worshipped by all creatures." This statement is so important that the celebrant is instructed to repeat it, punctuated with the formula “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.” The service for Yaldā (Nativity) likewise presents the universal response of worship to God: “all knowable and perceivable natures worship the nature of his being [īthūthā].” We will analyze the mechanics of worship, in the liturgies and ritual life of the community, in another chapter, but here it is important to note that the understanding of God’s Trinitarian nature apart from God’s relationship to anything other than himself correlates with a view of the community’s function in worship. The characteristic function of a community is an integral component of the concept of that community.

If worship emphasizes the ritual side of religious life, the other dominant theme in most discussions of God’s nature highlights and delimits the reflective aspect. God’s nature, independent of anything that is not God, is radically inaccessible to the human intellect. Shbadnāyā’s magnum opus defines the term “Spirit” as “an intelligent nature without limits, / Far beyond body and comprehensibility and quantity, / A subtle nature which is not at all subjected to sense perception.” A few lines later he again emphasizes that God cannot be known through the senses, being “exalted above all indications of perceivability.” After inserting the

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111 BL Add. 7177, f. 32b, ll. 5-8.
112 BL Add. 7177, f. 32b, l. 8.
113 BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll. 20-21.
114 Abdīshō’ of Nisibis devotes a chapter of the first memra of his “Book of the Pearl” to God’s incomprehensibility: ‘Abdīshō’ bar Brikhā, Ktḥābhā ḍ-methqr ∥ margānīthā, 7. Shbadnāyā also quoted the seventh-century author Yūḥannā b. Penkāyē: “Of all the true statements about God, this is the only true statement about him, i.e. that he is incomprehensible and ineffable and unlimited forever” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 208b).
115 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 2a-b.
prose comment where he distinguishes between ousia and qnomā as theological terms, Shbadnāyā inserts the caveat, “These things are said about God, not as one who is enclosed by a definition, for God is higher than the understandings of creatures.”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 3b.} Having explained his interpretation of the opening of John’s Gospel, Shbadnāyā warns his reader, “Do not investigate here, my people, into the manner.”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 4a. The inquiry prohibited is apparently how the Father begets the Son, since the author immediately draws an analogy with the soul and rationality to show seven lines later that the Father always has the Son.} The service for the Friday following Yaldā (Nativity) ascribes to the three qnomē “an incomprehensible nature,”\footnote{BL Add. 7177, f. 26b, l. 16.} and the begetting of the Son by the Father is “a hidden birth” which defies the notions of time and change.\footnote{“You have a hidden birth from eternity, for he was born from the Father without time, a living image and unchanging icon of his begetter” (BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll.10-11.).} The feast of Denḥā (Epiphany) also indicates that the eternal generation of the Son is beyond human comprehension: “Your birth is difficult to comprehend, O Word from the Father… Our Savior, the birth of your begetting is difficult for the comprehension of earthly beings.”\footnote{BL Add. 7177, f. 27b, ll. 2-5.} Humans cannot comprehend the divine nature.

If the divine nature is incomprehensible, the problem arises how it is possible to know anything about God. The answer is a doctrine of revelation: God chose to reveal certain aspects of his nature to humanity. The opening quatrain of Shbadnāyā’s longest poem presents worship as possible only because of God’s revelatory action: “He made known to us his hiddenness.”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b.} Shbadnāyā presents Christ as revealing “a perfect ousia and one which exceeded perfection” to
“his disciples the apostles, those who declare the mysteries of hiddenness.”

He quotes the opening lines of the Gospel of John with the preface that John “narrated about this incomprehensibility.”

A pair of obscure lines coordinate the incarnation of Christ with a prayer for direction in spiritual meditation: “in the body you revealed the establishment of the hiddenness of revealed things / … in soul, guide the meditation of spiritual things.”

The incomprehensible birth of Christ also becomes the subject of revelation in the service of Denhā (Epiphany): “The star’s course was above in the heights and it illuminated east and west and became for us a preacher of your incomprehensible birth... The marvel also informed us concerning the revelation of your begetting.”

Indeed, the incarnation of Christ is frequently labeled “his revelation” in a liturgical context.

This is the context for the statement, “He saved us by the revelation of his hiddenness,” namely by becoming incarnate.

The revelatory aspect of the incarnation was indicated by biblical passages such as John 1:18, with the logic perhaps being that becoming human made manifest the second qnōmā, the Son or Word, who was previously hidden in revelation about the unity of God, and the incarnation thereby made clear the plurality of qnōmē.

125 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 4b.
126 BL Add. 7177, f. 28a, ll. 14-18.
127 The service for Yaldā (Nativity) includes a beatitude which puts the concepts of revelation and incarnation in parallel statements: “Blessed is the one who made us glad by his birth and made us rejoice by his revelation” (BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, l. 22. Shortly before this the liturgy chants, “Blessed is the one who was revealed in our body and by his birth gladdened all” (BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, ll. 18-19). The service for Denhā (Epiphany) likewise refers to Christ saving his people “by his revelation”: BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, l. 22.
128 BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, l. 5.
Just as the three-fold nature of God corresponds to a functional concept of the community as a body of worshippers, so the doctrine of revelation correlates with an understanding of this group as those who respond to God’s revelation with acceptance and belief. The Christmas liturgy appeals to Christ to save “your believing people,” while a bit later it prays for God to “crown the heads of the believers.” Towards the end of the service Christ is praised for having “enlightened all of us with knowledge and made faith shine in us.” Īṣḥāq Shbadnāyā also frequently refers to Christians as “believers” (mhaimnē), sometimes referring to the Church as “those who believe” in God and as “the sons of my faith.” The term mhaimnā can also mean faithful, or even “official” in the sense of a person entrusted with a function, but the inaccessibility of the divine nature requires those who identify as God’s people to respond to God’s revelation with belief and trust. Of course, the Church of the East was not the only group in this region to identify itself as “believers”: so too did the Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Christians, and the Arabic cognate appeared in the traditional caliphal title “Commander of the Faithful” (amīr al-mu’minīn).

129 BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, l. 7-8.
130 BL Add. 7177, f. 24a, l. 25.
131 BL Add. 7177, f. 24b, ll. 13-14.
132 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 152b, 176a, 204b, 209b.
135 Timothy II had earlier implied a connection between the unknowable Trinitarian nature of God and the acceptance of that doctrine by “believers” in his interpretation of a portion the rite of baptism as indicating “the mystery of the Trinity which was given into the hearts of believers by Christ’s mediation” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 220b).
136 For an example of West Syrian use of mhaimnē to designate their group, see Gregory Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, ed. Jean Baptiste Abboelos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (Lovani: Peeters, 1872), III:539. Armenians also referred to their community as “the believers” (hūtûnuaghk̡açûphû), for example at T’ovma Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, ed. Levon Xač’ikyan (Yerevan: Magałat, 1999), 17–18, 28, 41.
Finally, the doctrine of the Trinity is relevant to the community’s self-understanding through its implications for the relationship of the Church of the East to each of the qnômê individually. In the fifteenth century it was not very controversial to say that God created the world and everything in it. But Trinitarian theology implies that when the Christian community references, prays to, or worships Jesus Christ, the recipient of this action is indeed God, and the work of Christ in redemption which marks this community is what God has accomplished. The same doctrine indicates that the role of the Holy Spirit in communal life is nothing other than the action of God. It is to these particular characterizations of the Son of God and the Spirit of God that we must turn to develop a more detailed picture of how East Syrian Christians conceived of their social group in theological terms. But first we must discuss the doctrine of creation.

God the Creator

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” and this was no surprise for most people in the fifteenth century. Although this idea is frequently invoked in East Syrian theological texts, from the elaborate doctrinal poetry of Īṣhāq Shbdnāyā to the common prayers of the liturgy, it is an idea which the Church of the East shared with almost all of its neighbors. All Christian groups attested in this period likewise held to the creation of the world by God, as did the Muslims, Jews, and even the Yezidis. To be sure, there are developments

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137 Five and a half sections of Īṣhāq Shbdnāyā’s “Poem on the Divine Economy” discuss the creation of the world in the framework of the six days of Genesis 1: Carlson, “Shbdnaya’s Life and Works,” 210.
138 For example, Christ is identified as the creator at the beginning of the liturgy for the festival of Nativity (سبوت): BL Add. 7177, f. 18a. The same sentence is used again in the service for the following Sunday: BL Add. 7177, f. 27a.
of the doctrine which are uniquely Christian, as a liturgical proclamation for Yaldā (Nativity) demonstrates: “In the completion of the last times he was revealed in flesh from our species and he taught us to recognize him alone as the creator of everything.”\(^{140}\) This assertion of the incarnation of the creator God would not be acceptable to Muslims or Jews, but the distinguishing element is not God’s role as creator, but rather the idea of divine incarnation. Therefore the doctrine of creation cannot function as a membership card in the way that Trinitarian theology can and did, because it was simply too widely held.

Nor does the intrinsic logic of the doctrine provide much scope for distinguishing one group of humans from another. God alone is the creator (bārōyā, ʾābhōdhā) who made everything else, so that everything which is not God is created. This created status applies as well to the Church of the East as to all of its neighbors, indeed also to everything else in the world, so that it does not say anything distinctive about one community as opposed to another. The doctrine of creation does imply that everything that is not God is therefore limited and derivative,\(^ {141}\) which therefore would be true of the nature of this or that particular community, but these ideas are more commonly invoked in reverse to ascribe an entire lack of limitation to the divine nature.\(^ {142}\)

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\(^{140}\) Shbānāyā calls the image of God in humanity “limited” (حَدَّسَةَ حَتَّىَ, حَيَّةً حَيَّةً), for example: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 17a.

\(^{141}\) The liturgy for Yaldā (Nativity) refers to all created things as “all knowable and perceivable natures” (حَلَّصَ وَحَلَّصَ وَحَلَّصَ), both of those adjectives being inapplicable to the divine nature: BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, l.20.

\(^{142}\) For example, Shbānāyā contrasts the authorial “we” with the unlimited divine intelligence: “Since we are under time and under motion and chance, / But there you will not accuse the intelligence of somata or of body” (مَحْرُومُ مَحْرُومُ مَحْرُومُ), Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 2a.
The connections drawn by East Syrian sources between creation and redemption could allow for the use of this doctrine to separate their group from others. The redemption accomplished by Christ’s incarnation is often depicted as a renewal or restoration of the created order which was disrupted by sin. The service for Yaldā (Nativity) includes a distilled form of this narrative: “That Creator in Paradise raised up his own image [i.e. humanity], and this the rebel [i.e. Satan] corrupted with envy and error, but that wise craftsman within the womb of the Virgin renewed it.”

Similarly, the same service later identifies the angels and shepherds of the nativity account in Luke 2 as “those who preached renewal, that the yoke of error and of death was removed from the inhabited world and the nature of humanity was freed from the slavery of sin.” This salvation extends beyond humanity to include all creation, as the Christmas service makes clear a bit earlier: “He mercifully saved material creation and the four elements from the slavery of sin.”

As the recipient of this renewal, the redeemed universe can be called “a new creation,” as in the service for Denḥā (Epiphany), which proclaims, “A new creation sings glory to the Son, Christ, who by his revelation renewed it.” Īṣḥāq Shbadnāyā also picks up this terminology to explain the darkness at the crucifixion as “the beginning of the new creation, so that just as that first (creation) began from darkness, this second (creation) too may begin with darkness.”

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143 BL Add. 7177, f. 22a, l.1-3.
144 BL Add. 7177, f. 24b, ll. 11-13.
145 BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll. 15-16.
146 BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 12-13.
darkness.”¹⁴⁷ Later he ties the resurrection of Christ to this concept: “For on Sunday our Lord arose for a type of the new creation.”¹⁴⁸

On the basis of Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Everyone who is in Christ, therefore, is a new creation,”¹⁴⁹ the Church of the East could have used the terminology of renewed creation in a personal way to designate the community of those individuals redeemed by Christ. And yet the new creation is not used as a term for a human community, despite the fact that the Denḥā service, immediately after the above mention of the “new creation,” echoes this quotation of the apostle Paul in an exhortation to the congregation: “Let everyone who is in Christ cry out with thanksgiving for the mdabbrānūthā which has been accomplished for us.”¹⁵⁰ Shbadnāyā explicitly quotes this statement of Paul with reference to “the renewal in Christ of the upper and lower beings,” not just humans, nor only of his own community.¹⁵¹ Although the conceptual tools were there, East Syrian authors of the fifteenth century do not seem to have used the restoration of creation as a way of distinguishing their community from their neighbors. The reason why this is so will be explored in the discussion of redemption below. But the theology of Creation, while an important doctrine which is constantly reaffirmed in the liturgy and literature, was simply not relevant for social distinction at this time.


¹⁴⁹ In the Peshitta Syriac version this phrase takes the form. 

¹⁵⁰ BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 17-18. Later in the same work Shbadnāyā does liken his group’s salvation to a renewed activity of creation: “As a new being he constructed us, that is, he created us through his cleansings” (ܫQRSTQضً ءﺎذً ٔىً ءذً يً ءذً ٔىً ءذً يً ءذً ٔىً ءذً يً ءذً ٔىً ءذً ٔىً ءذً يً ءذً ٔىً), Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 172a. But this line compares the results of salvation to new being, without “a new being” becoming a distinct appellation for the community. This line is the closest Shbadnāyā comes to deploying the doctrine of creation as a way to define his community, but the explicit use of creation in such a manner is otherwise unattested.
Christ, God and Man

It should come as no surprise that a group which labeled itself Christian conceived of its community in relationship to Christ, although here the languages used in the Middle East somewhat obscure the connection. The Syriac term *krestyānā*, adopted from the Greek term for “Christian,”152 does not have a corresponding title for Christ, since the preferred title in Syriac is the Semitic form *mshīḥā*. The noun of relation derived from this title, *mshīḥāyā*, is rarely used in fifteenth-century literature,153 although the adjectival form was used by one scribe from Mosul to qualify “the whole Christian flock.”154 The most common Arabic term for “Christian” (*naṣrānī*, “Nazarene”) also displays no obvious connection to the titles of Christ used in the fifteenth-century, although the Qarāqūyunlū firmans which refer to “the family of the Messiah” (āl-i *masīḥ*) make the connection more explicit.155 Nevertheless the liturgy draws the connection: the Qyāmtā (Easter) service addresses the congregation, “one Lord [i.e. Christ] you knew, for by his name you are called.”156 The structure of East Syrian theology, as discussed above, also highlights the importance of the incarnation of Christ for how the Church of the East viewed the world. In light of that centrality, we must examine how this group’s self-understanding relates to its doctrine of the incarnation.

In one sense, this has already been done: the Church of the East has been characterized in terms of Christological doctrine by Western European scholarship since the earliest extensive contacts occurred during the Mongol period. Known to Europeans as “Nestorians,” the East

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152 This term is used, for example, in BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.
153 The term occurs in the Easter service: BL Add. 7177, f. 194a, l. 9. It also occurs in an undated poem, probably by the fifteenth-century author Ishāq Shbadnāyā: Bodl. Syr. c.9, f. 128b.
154: BL Or. 4399, f. 579b. The plural substantive *mubṣīthā* does occur in a colophon from 18 October 1856 A.G. / 1544 from Cizre: BL Add. 7178, f. 465b.
Syrians were accused of holding unacceptable ideas about the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ which had been ascribed to Nestorius of Constantinople by the Council of Ephesus in 431 and thereafter by the Latin and Greek authors who comprised the canon of medieval theology. In particular, the accusation is that the Nestorians taught not only two natures in Christ, but two hypostases during the incarnation, resulting in two separate persons, one divine and one human, inhabiting the same body. This theological issue needs to be defined more carefully before we can formulate the question whether a distinctive Christological doctrine was understood by the Church of the East in the fifteenth century as a marker of their own community.

Among Christians of the fifteenth century, the Church of the East was not unusual either for asserting that Jesus Christ was both God and human, or for resorting to Aristotelian metaphysics to explain how that was possible. The statement that in Christ there are two “natures” (kyānē), one divine and the other human, distinguished this denomination’s application of metaphysical jargon to the Incarnation from that of their Syrian Orthodox neighbors. Yet the insistence that each of these natures has a corresponding qnōmā, resulting in two distinct qnōmē in Christ, separated the East Syrian use of philosophical vocabulary from

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159 Both of these developments continue to the present, although both remain controversial. For one contemporary review of recent theological and philosophical objections to Christ’s simultaneous humanity and divinity, along with the author’s deployment of the philosophical concept of natures (alternately labeled “essences” or “natural kinds”) to meet those objections, see Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 18–24, 33–40.
160 This view is expressed at the beginning of the Sunday after Yaldā (Nativity), “In two natures you are truly one Son without division” (حَقَّانِينِ، حَقَّانِينِ، حَقَّانِينِ، حَقَّانِينِ، حَقَّانِينِ، حَقَّانِينِ): BL Add. 7177, f. 26b, ll. 21-22.
Shbadnāyā equally refers to “two natures and a duality of qnōmē” (بَيْنَيِّهَا، بَيْنَيِّهَا، بَيْنَيِّهَا، بَيْنَيِّهَا): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 208b.
161 For a fifteenth-century Syrian Orthodox rejection of expressing Christology by reference to “two natures,” see van Helmond, *Mas'oud du Tour 'Abdin*, 38, 6*, 47*. 
that of the Greeks and Latins, who identified the personal unity of Christ with a single hypostasis, the Greek term usually represented by qnōmā in Syriac translations.\textsuperscript{162} This duality should not be understood as a rejection of personal unity, for the Church of the East also emphasized that the incarnate Christ was a single “person” (paršōpā),\textsuperscript{163} rejecting the polemical characterization of their theology as ascribing a dual personality to Christ.

The formula of two natures (kyānē), two qnōmē, and one person (paršōpā) in the incarnate Christ is first attested in the sixth century,\textsuperscript{164} but by the fifteenth century it had become the standard philosophical way of explaining how Jesus was both human and divine. Shbadnāyā quoted the seventh-century author Yōḥannān Penkāyā in one place to say that “it is fitting for us to confess [Christ] in two natures and qnōmē, one Son of God,”\textsuperscript{165} and in another place to express the view more completely, “Just as the two natures of Christ are said to be one Son, so also the two qnōmē which were unified in one two-fold person are glorified.”\textsuperscript{166} The precise formulation was included also on the tombstone of the Catholicos Shemʿōn who died in 1497: “his Son Jesus Christ, complete God and compete human, two natures and two qnōmē, one person.”\textsuperscript{167} By the fifteenth century the Church of the East had developed a distinctive and standard Christological formula in precise theological terms.

\textsuperscript{162} Brock, “Christology,” 130–31. I have left qnōmā untranslated in order to avoid the confusion generated by translating both it and paršōpā as “person,” as for example Badger did with the “Book of the Pearl” by Ḥabdīshō of Nisibis, making nonsense out of the passage quoted below: Badger, The Nestorians and Their Rituals, II:399.

\textsuperscript{163} For example, Shbadnāyā’s ʾōnithā for the Feast of the Cross exhorts the audience, “Let us preach Christ in unity, the Lord incarnate, / Natures complete in the properties of the Word and flesh / Which were unified in will and person, and completed our salvation” (\textit{ḇēṯuʾaṯ yāḏuḥa ṣaḥāmaṯ yāḏuḥaṯ ṣaḥāmaṯ yāḏuḥaṯ yāḏuḥaṯ}: BL Or. 4062, f. 183b.

\textsuperscript{164} Guillaumont, “Justinien,” f. 19r, ll. 14–15 and f. 20r, ll. 20–21.

\textsuperscript{165} Guillaumont, “Justinien,” f. 19r, ll. 14–15 and f. 20r, ll. 20–21.

\textsuperscript{166} For example, Shbadnāyā’s ʾōnithā for the Feast of the Cross exhorts the audience, “Let us preach Christ in unity, the Lord incarnate, / Natures complete in the properties of the Word and flesh / Which were unified in will and person, and completed our salvation” (\textit{ḇēṯuʾaṯ yāḏuḥa ṣaḥāmaṯ yāḏuḥaṯ ṣaḥāmaṯ yāḏuḥaṯ yāḏuḥaṯ}: BL Or. 4062, f. 183b. Unfortunately this folio is now missing from Cambridge Add. 1998, so I have used an eighteenth-century manuscript to supply it.

The divergent applications of the same philosophic al vocabulary to the incarnation by different Christian groups were very evident in the medieval period: the thirteenth-century Metropolitan ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis devoted the longest chapter of his Book of the Pearl to “the division of the confessions,” identifying precisely these differences between his own Church of the East and the various other Christian groups. ‘Abdīshō’ even ascribed the Chalcedonian confession of a single hypostasis to the fact that “there is no distinction between qnōmē and person (parsōpā) in the Greek language.” This explanation was also given by Īshāq Shbadnāyā in the fifteenth century, indicating a continued awareness of the difference and a continued interest in explaining it. But ‘Abdīshō’ denied that his own denomination’s “two-qnōmē” Christology was due to the teaching of Nestorius of Constantinople in the fifth century:

The third confession is that which confesses two natures and two qnōmē in Christ, one will, one Sonship, one authority, and it is called that of the “Nestorians.” For the Easterners, although they did not change their truth, but kept it without change just as they received it from the apostles, are named “Nestorians” by calumny, because Nestorius was not their patriarch, nor did they know his language. But when they heard that he was teaching two natures and two qnōmē, one will, one Son of God, one Christ, since he was confessing in an orthodox manner, they testified to him that they were holding this, and Nestorius agreed with them rather than they with him.

Nestorius barely figures in Shbadnāyā’s “Poem on the Divine Economy” and is never quoted by this text as an authority; it is no wonder that the Church of the East did not call itself

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171: Nestorius is named only twice in this work, once in a marginal note expressly excluding him from the category of heretics, and once to record his opposition to Cyril of Alexandria: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 103a"m" and 103b.
“Nestorian” in the fifteenth century. They included Nestorius in their Friday “Memorial of the Greek Fathers,” along with Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the quotation from 'Abdisho above makes clear that their Christology was considered to be of apostolic origin. The Church of the East did not view their Christological formula as Nestorian, nor value it for sectarian difference, but rather because of its alleged apostolic origin and truth.

The importance of the concept of doctrinal orthodoxy for the self-concept of the Church of the East varied widely in the fifteenth century. The 1497 tombstone of Catholicos Shem'on includes a Trinitarian confession, with a precise Christological formula, which would become the model for future patriarchal funereal inscriptions in 1538 and 1558. Doctrinal orthodoxy was evidently important to the patriarchal household at the end of the fifteenth century and through the early sixteenth century. By contrast, Shbadnaya’s theological magnum opus uses the Greek word ὄρθοδοξία (in Syriac script) precisely once, when assessing the results of the 451 Council of Chalcedon, a passage which notably gives the synod a generally positive assessment in spite of rejecting its Christological formula. The author’s ability to bracket off the formula itself demonstrates that terminological orthodoxy was not his most important consideration.

Individual members of the clergy evaluated the importance of orthodoxy differently.

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173 The only use of the term “Nestorian” as a self-designation near the fifteenth century which I have found is a ritual for the reception of “Jacobites and Melkites who become Christians” [sic], which ends with an admonition to the convert “that he should take the Eucharist of us Nestorians” (رسول نصارى للسقاطين): Cambridge Add. 1988, f. 143b. This text, contained in a manuscript dated 1558, may have been composed at the beginning of the sixteenth century, but shows a willingness by some shortly after our period to adopt the external label.


176 Shbadnaya rejects the confession of “one ḡnōmā in Christ,” but asserts that the Council “transmitted all the true things which we confess” (تَعَلِّمْهَا حَدِيثًا) and explains the difference as due to linguistic limitations: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 208b.

177 The same work uses the standard Syriac translation of “orthodox” (خليط) only once, in a non-dogmatic context to indicate an exegetical consensus on the question how the time between Jesus’ death and resurrection corresponded to the duration of Jonah’s stay in the belly of the fish: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 159a.
When the liturgy appeals to orthodoxy, the content is often left undefined or specified with reference to an idea other than dyophysite Christology. Just before breaking the Eucharistic bread, the consecrating priest was supposed to pray, “We draw near, my Lord, with true faith and we break [the bread] with orthodox confession,” but the content of that confession is unspecified.\textsuperscript{178} For most church services, that brief prayer was the only reference to orthodoxy. The festival whose prayers asserted the community’s orthodoxy with the greatest frequency was Pentecost, but the orthodoxy portrayed in that festival is Trinitarian, not Christological: “the true faith in the revered name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the incomprehensible nature.”\textsuperscript{179} Other East Syrian liturgies seem to invoke the notion of orthodoxy only very rarely.\textsuperscript{180} According to one poem for the Yaldā (Nativity) service, “orthodox teachers proclaimed you [Christ] divinely and humanly,”\textsuperscript{181} and the Virgin Mary is praised as “the decorated diadem of the holy catholic Church and the luminous crown of apostolic orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{182} The poem which Shbdnāyā composed for the Feast of the Cross opens with a brief reference to “the teaching of the perfect truth of orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{183} Certainly the Church of the East had a notion of correct doctrine as opposed to heresy, and Shbdnāyā included a catalogue

\textsuperscript{178} Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 92b-93a. The notion of orthodoxy is also invoked repeatedly in a $\textit{hūthāmā}$ (hymn closing the service), but this hymn was only one of several alternates that could be used: Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 99a-100a.

\textsuperscript{179} BL Add. 7177, f. 223b, ll. 21-22. Cf. f. 224b, ll. 3, 16-18; f. 225, ll. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{180} As might be expected, the ritual for receiving “Jacobites and Melkites” refers to Christ as “the Lord of Glory who is confessed by the true Orthodox as two natures and two $\textit{qunōmē}$ in one person of sonship, one Son, one Savior” (Cambridge Add. 1988, f. 142b. Cf. f. 143a, where orthodox faith is one of the qualifications for entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

\textsuperscript{181} BL Add. 7177, f. 24a, ll. 8-9. This poem is uniquely filled with recognizably Greek words, so the first word of this quotation is probably a corruption of the Greek $\textit{διδάσκαλοι}$, immediately glossed by the Syriac equivalent.

\textsuperscript{182} BL Add. 7177, f. 24a, ll. 17-19.

\textsuperscript{183} BL Or. 4062, f. 133a.
of heretics in his theological work, but the concept of orthodoxy played only a minor role in the assumed nature of this community.

Although appeals to orthodoxy were uncommon in its self-characterizations, the Church of the East did emphasize the role of belief about Christ as a defining characteristic of its community. This is typically expressed by forms of the verb “to confess” (audī), followed by the specific idea which is to be asserted publicly in this instance. Thus Shbadnāyā’s quotation of Yōḥannān Penkāyā, cited above, includes the duality of natures and qnōmē and the unity of the Son of God as a topic for confession. Christ himself is more commonly the object of confession, presumably with the implicit sense of recognizing him for who he is and acknowledging his central importance in God’s dealings with the world, as is seen in the structure of East Syrian theology outlined above. Confession of Christ is presented as a permanent characteristic function of the Church in the service for Holy Saturday: “Grant to your Church to confess you until your coming,” and a little later, “The Church has confessed with the mouth of her children the King, Christ.” But any aspect of the nature, incarnation, ministry, death, or resurrection of Christ can be confessed as well. The same liturgy earlier presents the Thief on the Cross as an exemplar for imitation, justifying his biblical request to Christ with the

184 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 103a-104a. This catalogue is curious for only naming people, whether heretics or the orthodox champions who are portrayed as vanquishing them, who died before 500, and the vast majority of the figures named are Greek.
185 The corresponding abstract noun “confession” (हमोइς) is not commonly used to characterize the community, perhaps because it can equally mean “thanksgiving”: Payne Smith, A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, 606.
186 Thus the liturgy for Denhā (Epiphany) exhorts the congregation, “Let us confess our king who descended to our race and put on our humanity, and by it he saved us from death and Satan, and with him in glory he has made us reign” (ματού ἐν δυνάμει χειρῶν, παρά τιμωθεὶς Χριστός: BL Add. 7177, f. 28b, ll. 1-3. A prayer shortly afterward begins, “Come, let us confess that very Christ” (πρὸς Χριστόν: BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, l. 19.
187 But any aspect of the nature, incarnation, ministry, death, or resurrection of Christ can be confessed as well. The same liturgy earlier presents the

188 Слова Лествицы в Синодике, гл. 23. Место: BL Add. 7177, f. 185a, ll. 24-26.
addition, “Because I, Lord, confess that you are God.”\textsuperscript{189} Confession of Christ’s whole redemptive action is urged upon all Christians: “Let everyone who is in Christ cry out confession of the \textit{mdabbrānūthā} which was completed for us.”\textsuperscript{190} Of course, doctrinal confession can also be invoked with reference to the Trinity,\textsuperscript{191} although it seems to occur most frequently in Christological contexts. Indeed, confession seems to be understood as a characteristic function of the community which unites the group’s worship of God and belief in his revelation into an inseparable whole. Confession presumes doctrinal content which is acknowledged, and it assumes that this content will be publicly declared in the context of worship.

The plurality of Christological topics for confession demonstrates that the sort of philosophical theology represented by the two-\textit{qnōmē} formula is only a portion of what the Church of the East understood to be its defining belief. The union of the Son of God, the second \textit{qnōmā} of the Trinity, with a “complete man” from conception onward in such a way that “his nature was not at all changed from its being,”\textsuperscript{192} as Shbadnāyā expresses it with doctrinal precision, was more often expressed in simpler metaphors in the liturgy. The East Syrians frequently used the metaphors of containment and clothing to express this union. For example, the Yaldā (Nativity) liturgy states, “The Word from the Father dwelt in our humanity,”\textsuperscript{193} and later refers to Christ as “the one who by his love humbled himself and put on our nature.”\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{189} BL Add. 7177, f. 184b, ll. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{190} BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 17-18.
\textsuperscript{191} For example, the Denḥā (Epiphany) liturgy refers to “the perfect confession of the glorious \textit{qnōmē} of your Trinity” (\textit{mūmānūn, mūmānūn, mūmānūn, mūmānūn, mūmānūn, mūmānūn})\textsuperscript{:} BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 9-10.
\textsuperscript{192} BL Or. 4062, ff. 134b-135a.
\textsuperscript{193} BL Add. 7177, f. 18b, ll. 10-11. Compare f. 18b, ll. 18-19, as well as f. 26b, l.6. Of course, such metaphors were not restricted to the liturgy. Shbadnāyā quotes Ishō’ dād of Merv’s description of Christ’s humanity as “the temple of God the Word” (\textit{xwēsēm bētēk tē kē xwēsēm bētēk tē kē xwēsēm bētēk tē kē xwēsēm bētēk tē kē xwēsēm bētēk tē kē}), Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 100a.
\textsuperscript{194} BL Add. 7177, f. 22b, l. 13. Compare f. 28b, l. 2 and f. 184a, l. 1, as well as Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 89b, 109b. Shbadnāyā also poetically described this in a line addressed to human nature,
This could even be phrased as tersely as “the newborn babe full of deity.” A common liturgical way of expressing the simultaneous unity and duality of God incarnate is by citing the double birth of Christ, one from the divine Father and one from the Virgin Mary: “Blessed is the one born twice, divinely [ʿīthā ʿīth] and humanly, both before the ages eternally and today temporally.” The liturgy also occasionally picks up the statement from John 1:14 that “the Word became flesh,” although at one point it cautions the congregation against applying this statement to the divine nature shared by the three qnōmē of the Trinity, because of its possible implications deleterious to the doctrines that God cannot change or suffer: “It is not the divine being [ʿīthā] which became flesh in the womb.” Similarly, the liturgy sometimes plays with the parallelism between the “form of God” and the “form of a servant” in Philippians 2:6-7, for example on the Sunday following Yaldā (Nativity): “Lord of all, although you are in the image of God, in your love you took the image of a servant, and you did not snatch your deity, nor did you falsify your humanity.” Finally, with no philosophical framework theological statements can simply refer to “deity” and “humanity” with respect to Christ: “Deity today has come to

“That the King, the director of all, put you on in the manner of a garment” (:

A more extensive treatment of the theme in the same service includes the divine attributes of timelessness and immutability: BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, ll. 3-4. For example, at Yaldā (Nativity) with the beatitude, “Blessed is the Word who was enfleshed” (:

BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, l. 27.

195 BL Add. 7177, f. 18b, ll. 17-18.

196 BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, ll. 3-4. Compare also BL Add. 7177, f. 23b, ll. 19-22 and f. 27a, ll. 3-4.

197 For example, at Yaldā (Nativity) with the beatitude, “Blessed is the Word who was enfleshed” (:

BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, l. 27.

198 BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, ll. 10-15. Compare also BL Add. 7177, f. 23b, ll. 19-22 and f. 27a, ll. 3-4.

199 Finally, with no philosophical framework theological statements can simply refer to “deity” and “humanity” with respect to Christ: “Deity today has come to
humanity to sanctify it.” Many of these statements could be used by Christians of other contemporary denominations without modification.

These manifold ways of expressing the core belief in Christ as both divine and human relativize the centrality and importance of any given formula, including the expression “two *qnōmē*” highlighted by traditional Western theological scholarship. Beliefs about Christ were important to the community, but the central truths of the Incarnation could be expressed variously. Therefore those scholars who have fixated on one particular formula which is identified as heretical have given only a distorted version of East Syrian Christology and the role played by that doctrine in the conceptual community of the Church of the East.

**Christ the Lord and King**

The Church of the East more frequently defined itself by its relationship to Christ directly, not by what it believed about Christ. This was expressed through a series of images which I will explore more fully below, such as the Church as the Bride of Christ, or as Christ’s flock. On the other hand, some common descriptions of Christ do not have corresponding images to describe the Christian group, and they are typically less significant for this group’s self-understanding. For example, Christ was frequently portrayed as the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies to the Jews. This is clearly important for establishing Jesus’ messianic

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200 The metaphor of the incarnation as clothing with a body was originally widespread in the Syriac milieu, but it was dropped by West Syrians over concerns that it expressed too great a divide between God the Word and the human Jesus: Brock, “Christology,” 132. The notion of God the Word dwelling in a human body is subject to the same concerns, and I am not aware of its use outside of the Church of the East. By themselves these metaphors need not imply a split personality in Christ, although saying, “The crowds of angels are crying without ceasing, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Father who sent you and the Spirit who anointed you and the Son who dwelt in you and made you the Lord of all that was created and put your enemies in subjection under your feet,’” as does the service for the Friday after Yaldā (Nativity), seems to push the issue: BL Add. 7177, f. 26b, ll. 4-6 with a marginal correction.

201 The service for Denḥā (Epiphany) narrates how Christ “completed and fulfilled all that was written in prophecy” (BL Add. 7177, f. 30a, ll. 3-4. The Good Friday service invokes a series of
credentials and God’s faithfulness to his revelation, but it does not seem to have been invoked in connection with the present Christian community. These facets of Christ’s ministry, while prominent in the source materials, apparently did not indicate correlated ideas of the nature of the community.

Other characterizations of Christ are relevant to the conceptual community of the Church of the East in the domains of history and hierarchy, rather than theology. The miraculous ministry of Christ as recorded in the gospels was significant enough to merit prominent mention in one of the sections of Ishq Shbadnaya’s theological masterpiece: the section entitled “On the choice of the disciples, and on the miracles and signs which our Lord did in the three years of his dispensation” opens with the lines “He performed signs and miracles, he purified lepers, / The signs and wonders which he did flew to all districts.” The divine power at work in these miracles was understood to continue into the author’s own day, and shows a concept of the diachronic community which will be analyzed in chapter 7. Similarly, Christ’s designation as the high priest (rab kūmrē) figures prominently in the liturgy for Sulqā (Ascension), and is sparsely incorporated into Shbadnaya’s magnum opus. This role does not seem to have

Old Testament figures (Abraham and Isaac, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Jonah) whose types or prophecies were fulfilled in Christ: BL Add. 7177, f. 179b, ll. 8-15.

The possibility that this theme presents a notion of historical continuity of the community from the Old Testament to the present will be examined in Chapter 7.

The liturgy for that feast includes two similar texts indicating Christ’s ministry in heaven: “He entered to minister as a priest in the most holy place for the life of humans” (BL Add. 7177, f. 215b, ll. 19-20) and “He entered to minister as a priest in the most holy place of God for our salvation” (BL Add. 7177, f. 218a, ll. 14-15). The service also pairs Christ’s high priestly title with a royal title and links both with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: “The King of kings and Chief of priests ascended to heaven and sent the Spirit upon his disciples” (BL Add. 7177, f. 215b, ll. 23-24).

Shbadnaya quotes a statement of Narsai which is similar to the liturgical statements quoted in the preceding footnote: “He entered to minister in the most holy place as the Chief of priests” (BL Add. 7177, f. 215b, ll. 23-24). He also quotes ‘Abdisho of Nisibis, who describes Christ as “him who
entailed any corresponding understanding of the entire community, but will be analyzed in chapter 6 with reference to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The titles most commonly applied to Jesus indicated his authority, and although his authority over all creation was frequently asserted, nevertheless the Church of the East claimed a special relationship with Christ as their authority. Thus the name Jesus (Īshōʿ in Syriac) is very frequently preceded by the title “our Lord” (māran), and the title alone can also be used for Christ without giving his name. Of course, a form of the title “Lord” (mār) was also used for bishops and saints, but the form māran was almost exclusively used of Christ, and the title “the Lord” (māryā) was exclusively used of God, including sometimes for Christ. The title “King” (malkā) was also traditionally used of Christ, even though the Arabic cognate mālik possessed the high priesthood.

A traditional metaphor, but rarely used in the fifteenth century, to describe Christ’s special authority over the Church of the East is the image of the community as the limbs of Christ’s body, of which he is the head. Shbadnāyā only uses it in a quotation of Theodore of Mopsuestia: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 192b. Nevertheless, it occurs in the baptismal liturgy repeatedly, and in a less explicit manner also in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari, which would ensure its ongoing familiarity for the clergy: Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 80b, 107a, 109a. It also occurs once in the liturgy for Sūlqā (Ascension): BL Add. 7177, f. 218a, ll. 17-18.

For example, in a verse by the scribe of Berlin Sachau 330, f. 84a, or the colophons of Paris BN Syr 345, f. 220b. The colophons of Cambridge Add. 616, f. 109a, and BL Add. 7177, f. 321a, include the common curse formula, “Whoever does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed” (مَالِكُ الْدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِيَة). The title was so frequently paired with the name that sometimes a scribe wrote them as one word (مَالِكُ الْدُّنْيَا), as at BL Add. 7177, f. 191b, l. 4; f. 215b, l. 25; f. 216a, l. 8; f. 223a, l. 11.

For example, BL Add. 7177 gives the title مَكَّل without the name in the rubric for the festival of Denhā (Epiphany), and again early in that service: BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, l. 4 and f. 29b, l. 23.

This title is used for Christ in BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, l. 19.

To give a few examples, Christ is titled “our King” on the first Sunday after Yaldā (BL Add. 7177, f. 28b, l.2), and is referred to as “the King” in the Holy Saturday service (BL Add. 7177, f. 185a, l. 26). Of course, prayers which address Christ and refer to “your kingdom” also imply his royal status, as for instance on Yaldā (Nativity), “You who by your kindness made us worthy of the help of your birth, receive us into your kingdom” (مَلِكُ الْدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِيَة). Compare BL Add. 7177, f. 180b, ll. 1-3 and f. 188a, l. 8. Shbadnāyā once refers to Christ as “King of kings” (مَلِكُ الْكَبَارِ) at Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 153b) and once quotes Rabban Emmanuel referring to God as “the King of kings” (مَلِكُ الْكَبَارِ at Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 187a).
was only one among a variety of sovereign political titles used in the region. Like some other Christological titles, “King” could also be used of God without specifying a reference to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, and sometimes Christ was invoked as “the King’s Son.” The commonality in titles between Christ and God, while sometimes ambiguous, was not accidental. For example, Shbadnāyā appealed to Christ’s divine royal status to justify worshipping him, a point of contention with his non-Christian neighbors: the crowds of Jerusalem “wove for him a crown of praise, for the King’s Son, the Chief of judges, / To whom worship and confession are fitting at all times.” The service for the Friday of the Passion also makes the precise recipient of worship explicit: “But we indeed worship Christ who suffered for our sake.” Christ’s royal role was understood to indicate his deity and therefore the acceptability of worshipping him, but it also evoked other aspects of his relationship to the Church of the East.

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213 A. Ayalon records the vicissitudes of the use of *malik* as an Islamic royal title, from its initial partial reservation to Allah through its revival and then late medieval devaluation: A. Ayalon, “Malik,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, ed. C. E. Bosworth et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1991), VI:261–262. To the examples he records, we may add that the Ayyubids of Hīṣn-Kayf continued to use the title in the fifteenth century: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, II:811, 823, 827–29. The Syriac *δαίμον* is unlikely to be an insertion of the anonymous chronicler, since in that case one would expect the definite case *δαίμον*.

214 Shbadnāyā writes of “the glorified King whose hidden nature has no end” (βασιλεύς αἰωνίων κρίνων) in his liturgical poem for the feast of the Cross: BL Or. 4062, f. 133b.

215 BL Or. 4062, f. 135b. The Good Friday liturgy refers to an angelic acclamation of Christ, “This is the King and the Son of the King” (δείκτης κυρίου καὶ του υἱου του κυριου): BL Add. 7177, f. 180a, ll. 10-11. Cf. BL Add. 7177, f. 192b, l. 2; f. 216a, l. 14; f. 220b, l. 24.

216 BL Add. 7177, f. 181b, l. 19. The designation of worship for Christ, of course, should not be taken to exclude the other divine *qūnāmā*, as the service for Pentecost makes clear in the prayer, “With the Father and with the Son, you, the Holy Spirit, we worship without division” (και την των πατρι του υιου του κυριου του ιουναμα, ημεις την επιθυμια αρμονιον τετελεσμενον των επιθυμιαν τους): BL Add. 7177, f. 221a, ll. 23-24.
The status of Christ as Lord means, in the first instance, that he is in charge. It is in this sense that East Syrian authors referred to themselves as Christ’s Church or people, that is, the Church under Christ’s authority. The Church was said to have been chosen by Christ, indicating that his relationship with the Church arises from his initiative. The language of “commanding” was infrequently used with respect to Christ’s authority, for example in the Pentecost liturgy, “By the prophets who announced you, you indicated and made known to us the way of your commands, Lord,” and the obedience of the gathered community is prayed for a little later, “Grant us by your grace that we may please your Lordship and may complete with diligence the will of your Lordship.” When Christ’s commands were invoked, the language more often referred to his specific instructions to the apostles as recorded in the gospels. But

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218 Shbadnāyā’s largest theological poem quotes references to “the Church of Christ” from an anonymous poem (Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 174b-175a) and from Yōḥānnān Penkāyā (f. 203b). He uses the phrase “his Church” at other locations: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 86a, 89a (quoting ʾĪshōʿ dād of Merv), 134b (quoting Ḥnāʾīshōʿ Mshāryā), 196a. The variation “his churches” also occurs once: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 176b (quoting an anonymous poem). Most fully, the title of his final section refers to “the holy Church of Christ” (/statsān ʿāmmakā). Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 220b.

219 Shbadnāyā referred to Christians as “your people” in his poems for the Rogation of the Ninevites and for the commemoration of St. George: BL Or. 4062, ff. 123b, 124b, 127a, 131a. The service for Yaldā (Nativity) refers to the Church, in a prayer to Christ, as “your faithful people” (statsān ʿāmmakā): BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll. 7-8. Cf. BL Add. 7177, f. 24a, l. 22. In general, the use of “people” (-statsān) to describe the Church of the East is rare in fifteenth-century sources, presumably because the Church is said to have been gathered from all peoples: BL Or. 4062, f. 131a. The two are not necessarily irreconcilable, however, as Robert Murray demonstrated with regards to the fourth-century authors Aphrahat and Ephrem, who spoke of the Church as “the people from the peoples”: Robert Murray, Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition, Rev. ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), 41.

220 This authority, of course, is delegated to the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Shbadnāyā’s line, “Υπαρξία [glossed as “Leadership”] of his Church he entrusted to those who were trustworthy,” (statsān ʿāmmakā) namely the apostles, who then appointed successors: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 196a.

221 In a prayer which Shbadnāyā puts into the mouth of St. George, the saint prays to Christ for “your Church which you have chosen from all peoples” (statsān ʿāmmakā): BL Or. 4062, f. 131a. The Yaldā (Nativity) service mentions “your Church, which you chose for yourself” (statsān ʿāmmakā): BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll. 8-9.

222 For example, Shbadnāyā reports that Christ commanded his disciples to remain in Jerusalem until Pentecost, as recorded in Luke 24:49: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 172b, 197a-b. One example not taken from the gospel accounts, but reflecting contemporary liturgical practice, is the account in an anonymous poem included by Shbadnāyā that Christ “commanded them at his ascension to put among his churches” / The leaven which they took from his body
commands received by the apostles were often considered binding on the subsequent community, for instance in Shbadnāyā’s treatment of the commission of the apostles as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Shbadnāyā recorded this as the ninth in his list of appearances of the risen Christ, “In Galilee, when he commanded them to make disciples of the peoples.” Later this is applied to the author’s present community with no apparent need to justify the transition: after listing the three parsōpē of the Trinity, he continues, “in whom we have been commanded to make disciples and to baptize.” Although it is not a major theme, the notion of Christ instituting a “spiritual law” is attested rarely, as is the presentation of Christ as guiding the community. The liturgies also refer to the congregation as “Christ’s servants,” the correlative term to “Lord.” The lordship of Jesus Christ is therefore understood, if infrequently, as his being the ruler of this community.

But the Lord Christ is not just in charge of his people; he also holds sway over all of creation, and he thus becomes a critical source of protection for the community. Near the beginning of the service for Good Friday, the prayer is said, “Your Church performs the memorial of your severe passion which was completed for our salvation, our Savior. Keep her children from harm.” The liturgy for Holy Saturday prays, “O Son of God who was sacrificed that it should be for the sacrament and for baptism” (อกипινέν Χριστόκης και σχηματίσας σύνεξα Χριστόν Κόσμησα και κτίσας Χριστόν Κόσμησα): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 176b.

230: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 81b. The apostles are also said to transmit “his law” (οξεθεσα): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 81b.

225 Macomber, “Anaphora of Addai and Mari,” 366, 368.
226 Shbadnāyā wrote the line, “Our Tutor guided, led, drew us by the lamp of his ways” (οξεθεσα): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 172a.
227 Shbadnāyā wrote the line, “Our Tutor guided, led, drew us by the lamp of his ways” (οξεθεσα): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 172a.
228 Macomber, “Anaphora of Addai and Mari,” 366, 368.
229 Macomber, “Anaphora of Addai and Mari,” 366, 368.
for our sake, guard your Church by your many mercies.”

Shbadnāyā invoked this protective role in general in most of his poems. In the penultimate section of his poem for Shkhāḥtā (the Finding of the Cross), he linked Christ’s kingship with the protection he can offer: “And with hymns and songs of glory we are exalting / The King who conquered by [the Cross], that under his wings he may hide us / From the injuries of our enemy, who spies on us.”

In his poem for the memorial of St. George he wrote, “Guard, our Lord, the sheepfold of your flock which you acquired, / Your Church which you chose from all peoples.” At the end of his longest poem, he prayed simply, “May he guard his Church from all evil.” This protective power is sometimes ascribed specifically to the Cross, unsurprisingly perhaps in the prayers for the Feast of the Cross itself: for that feast Shbadnāyā wrote, “May your Cross, our Lord, be guarding your Church.”

Although various kinds of protection might be envisioned, the one most commonly requested from Christ as king is peace for the various political authorities. Thus one of Shbadnāyā’s poems exhorts its hearers to pray “that [Christ] may bring peace to kings and sultans in tranquility.” The final section of his largest poem petitions Christ directly, “Unite kings and sow in their hearts the peace of your tranquility.” Given the incessant wars of the first two-thirds of the fifteenth century between the Qarāqūyunlū and the Āqqūyunlū, and the

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231 BL Add. 7177, f. 184a, ll. 10-11.
232 BL Or. 4062, f. 142b.
233 BL Or. 4062, f. 131a.
234 Berlin orient. fol. 1201, f. 107b. I have used an eighteenth-century manuscript because the last couple folios are missing from Cambridge Add. 1998.
235 BL Or. 4062, f. 139a. The second-to-last section of this poem also ends, “May your Cross, our Lord, be our guardian” (BL Or. 4062, f. 142b).
236 BL Or. 4062, f. 142b. Earlier in the poem as well, peace among “all kings” is requested: BL Or. 4062, f. 141b.
fact that the standard way to provision an army was by plundering the sedentary population, it is small wonder that the Christians might pray for peace among the military rulers, even if they otherwise felt no fondness for them. But peace was not only needed between the secular authorities; a small poem probably by Īšāq Shbadnāyā prays that Christ would “give to the priesthood peace with the royalty,” presumably referring to the regional or local Muslim rulers.\textsuperscript{238} This is probably what was intended by the prayer of Archdeacon Īšō’ of Mosul in a colophon dated 1795 A.G. / 1484, “We are asking God, the Lord of all and the Creator of all, that he would give peace to the priesthood and establish the kingship, and that he would give to each of them according to his will for good.”\textsuperscript{239} The ecclesiastical hierarchy sought divine protection and peace with the secular rulers.

Of course, other forms of protection were also seen to stem from the community’s relationship to Christ as Lord. Several fifteenth-century scribes presented Christ as the guarantor of continued occupation for their village or city of origin, by appending to the name of the settlement, “may our Lord make it inhabited.”\textsuperscript{240} Another scribe, Īšō’ of Mosul, prayed for his home city: “May the Lord keep its inhabitants from every evil.”\textsuperscript{241} A more elaborate form, which reveals a concern with protection from disease, was composed by the scribe Gabriel of the

\textsuperscript{238} Bodl. Syr. c. 9, f. 128a. The same prayer is found in a silent intercession of the priest in the order of consecrating the Eucharist, from which Shbadnāyā probably took this line: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 92a. The uncertainty of the direction of influence is due to the lack of manuscripts containing this prayer which can be reliably dated before Shbadnāyā’s lifetime.

\textsuperscript{239} BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.

\textsuperscript{240} This formula occurs exactly in colophons of 1430 (Paris BN 184, f. 125a), 1465 (Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b), and 1489 (BL Or 4399, f. 376a). In classical Syriac, would be a participle form, but the context requires a jussive sense. This usage probably shows influence of non-Syriac dialects being spoken in the fifteenth century, since Maclean’s grammar indicates that the participle “is used for an imperative of the first and third person”: Arthur John Maclean, Grammar of the Dialects of Vernacular Syriac, as Spoken by the Eastern Syrians of Kurdistan, North-West Persia and the Plain of Mosul, with Notices of the Vernacular of the Jews of Azerbaijan and of Zakhu Near Mosul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1895), 142.

\textsuperscript{241} BL Add. 7177, f. 320b.
mountain village Beth Sālim in 1801 A.G. / 1490: “may our Lord people [it], and preserve its inhabitants from all plagues hidden and revealed.”

A still more elaborate form is found in a colophon dated October 2, 1810 A.G. / 1498 by the priest Ţ莉yā ʻAlāʼ al-Dīn of Mosul: “may our Lord make it inhabited and may he guard its inhabitants from enemies and adversaries by the prayers of all the saints.”

The concept of Christ protecting the Church of the East was also expressed by Shbadnāyā in terms of the metaphor of Christ as the “good shepherd” and the community as his “sheep” (ʻānā) or “flock” (mar ʻithā).

In Shbadnāyā’s ʻōnīthā for the commemoration of St. George, he put into the saint’s mouth the prayer,

Guard, Lord, the pen of your flock which you acquired…
Restrain the storm of the persecution of unbelievers, who polluted our sanctuaries,
And mangled your people in every direction…
Strengthen and aid your people which is persecuted and thrust out…
Drive away the wolves of evening from your flock by your mercies
And hide them under your wings and fulfill your promises to them.

In the prayer which concludes his largest poem, Shbadnāyā also asked for good harvests to protect the people from famine: “Make the right hand of your mercies rest upon the sheep of your flock. / Enrich the crown of the year, my Lord, with fruits, and pour out your blessings. / Give grace to those who believe in you and enrich and abundantly supply them with your good
things.”

He also sought protection for his community from Christ’s death: “May your Cross be always guarding your sheep.” In a final image, the notion of Christ caring for the Church and providing for them was expressed in Shbadnāyā’s portrayal of Christ as a vineyard owner: “He planted us in his glorified vineyard.”

The Church of the East therefore understood itself as a community with a special relationship to Jesus Christ, a relationship which included his all-encompassing divine protection for this community.

As Lord and King, Christ was also understood eschatologically as the heavenly bridegroom and as the final judge of all things, but neither of these is commonly understood with special reference to this community. In fifteenth-century sources, only once is the Church described as “like a bride” (kalthā), at the end of the Easter service, and once the Church is described as “Christ’s betrothed,” in the Pentecost liturgy. A quotation of the fifth-century poet Narsai included by Īṣḥāq Shbadnāyā refers to Christ explicitly as the Church’s “suitor” (mākhorrā), and a small verse by Shbadnāyā himself refers to the “heavenly bridegroom,” most likely implying the Church as the bride, but the comparison is very rare. Far more frequent,
however, is the notion of the promised future life for the Church in “the bridal chamber of his kingdom,” perhaps ultimately derived from the image used by Jesus in Matthew 9:15. The surprising paucity of references to the Church as Christ’s bride is probably due to the fact that the book of Revelation, the only biblical book to use the term “bride” explicitly of the Church, remains non-canonical in the Church of the East. Although the image is implicit in Ephesians 5:22-32, the term itself is not used, and therefore the divine royal wedding was typically understood as referring to the final state of believers, and not to their present society.

On the other hand, the universal judgment of Christ as King, while again important and reiterated, had many of the same features as the doctrine of creation which limited its applicability to the community’s self-understanding. The notion of God judging the world at the end of time was well developed in Jewish and Muslim thought as well, with the only distinctly Christian element being that Jesus would be doing the judging. The teaching of the Church of the East on the subject of judgment seems to agree in every particular with that of other Christian groups as well. Christ was presented as the final Judge who will judge all people, whether

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254 BL Add. 7177, f. 20b, l. 23. Cf. BL Add. 7177, f. 180a, l. 20. Shbadnāyā also uses the image, for example at Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 111b and BL Or. 4062, f. 132a.


256 The thirteenth-century New Testament manuscript Cambridge BFBS 446 does not contain Revelation, but only the smaller Syriac New Testament canon: the four gospels, fourteen Pauline epistles (including Hebrews), Acts, James, 1 Peter, and 1 John. Indeed, Brock indicates that Revelation was unknown among the Church of the East until the nineteenth century: ibid., 181.


258 One way to express this in Syriac is “Chief of judges” (نَظَيرُ الْقَسّامين), for example at Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 106a.
members of this group\textsuperscript{259} or outsiders.\textsuperscript{260} Since this idea was not uniquely held by this group, nor did this group uniquely escape judgment, it is not clear that the doctrine of judgment implied anything about this community’s self-conception. It is true that, drawing from the description of the Last Judgment given by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46, those who would be vindicated in the judgment were sometimes referred to as “the people of [Christ’s] right hand” (myannānē) and those who would be condemned as “the people of [Christ’s] left hand” (semālāyē).\textsuperscript{261} This could have been used to generate a notion of the group in light of Christ’s judgment, namely as those who will not be condemned, but the Church of the East never asserted that their association in this world was identical in membership with the collection of those who would be spared at the end. Instead, the members of the Church of the East prayed that they would individually be admitted to that latter group, as Shbadnāyā did in invoking his predecessor Rabban Emmanuel with a prayer, “by his advocacy may my supplication be received on the day of Judgment, yes and amen!”\textsuperscript{262} Therefore the doctrine of final judgment is not useful for understanding how this community conceptualized themselves, although it is necessary to understand the doctrine of salvation, which is the next most common feature of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

\textsuperscript{259} This is presumed in a liturgical prayer to Christ, “Do not drive us away from the gates of the bridal chamber with the fools, darkened lamps” (kā ǧam muḥālū ǧabāḥā mā ṣāḥibū ǧabāḥā mā ṣāḥibū ǧabāḥā); BL Add. 7177, f. 188a, ll. 5-6. It is also implicit in the use of Matthew 25:31-46 described below.

\textsuperscript{260} Pontius Pilate is addressed, “This Man whom you are judging will come again and judge you” (kā ǧam muḥālū ǧabāḥā mā ṣāḥibū ǧabāḥā mā ṣāḥibū ǧabāḥā); in the service for Easter: BL Add. 7177, f. 189b, l. 13. Shbadnāyā applies this same reversal to the Jewish Sanhedrin in his large poem, “From him you will receive the repayment of your evil rewards, / Before that King whom you judged and condemned, unruly ones” (mīyā ǧam muḥālū ǧabāḥā, ǧam muḥālū ǧabāḥā); Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 159b.

\textsuperscript{261} Both terms occur on BL Add. 7177, f. 188a, ll. 4, 7. These terms do not refer to the handedness of the person judged, but to the division of people between the right and left sides of Christ as judge in Matthew 25:33-34, 41.

\textsuperscript{262} Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 211a.
Christ Our Savior

Christ’s work of salvation was central to the East Syrian understanding of Christology, as well as of themselves. Jesus was frequently referred to simply as “the Savior” (pārōqā) or “our Savior,” and salvation (pūrqānā) is presented as the purpose of Christ’s work in the incarnation (mdabbrānūthā). The action of Christ saving people from Satan, from death, from idolatry, from sin, and from hell (shyōl) was celebrated in various liturgies. Of

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263 I have listed only a few examples. “The Savior”: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 116b (quoting Patriarch Hnānīsh’), 127b, 147a, 163a. “Our Savior” (قائمة): BL Add. 7177, f. 178b, l. 27; f. 182a, l. 16; f. 191b, l. 26; BL Or. 4062, f. 136a; Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 192a. The liturgy for the feast of Sūlāqā (Ascension) also refers to Christ as “the Savior of all” (قائمة وقائمة) and “the origin of our salvation” (قائمة وقائمة): BL Add. 7177, f. 215a, ll. 19, 21.

264 Shḥdānāyā’s ūnīthā for the Finding of the Cross asserts, “So he became human and also incarnate to save his image,” i.e. humanity (قائمة وقائمة قائمة فائدة): BL Or. 4062, f. 135a. His longest poem refers to “the mdabbrānūthā of the salvation of all” (قائمة وقائمة فائدة جد): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 149a. The liturgy for Yaldā (Nativity) indicates that Jesus “came for the salvation of the world” (قائمة وقائمة وقائمة)، while the service for Good Friday addresses Christ regarding the Church’s celebration of “your severe passion which was completed for our salvation” (قائمة وقائمة): BL Add. 7177, ff. 22a, 178b.

265 For example, the service for Holy Saturday includes Satan with “error and death” in a list in BL Add. 7177, f. 185a, l. 19, whereas the Easter liturgy singles out Satan in a beatitude, “Blessed is the one who rose from among the dead through authority and gave victory to our nature over Satan” (قائمة وقائمة قائمة قائمة: جد قائمة), while the service for the Finding of the Cross asserts, “So he became human and also incarnate to save his image,” i.e. humanity (قائمة وقائمة قائمة فائدة): BL Add. 7177, f. 189a, ll. 24-25. But most surprisingly, the Easter liturgy earlier presents a short lamentation put in the mouth of Satan, who complains that Jesus is making him “a joke to Adam and his children” (قائمة وقائمة فائدة: جد) by plundering his property, namely those who had died: BL Add. 7177, f. 186b, ll. 11-14.

266 Death is most frequently what Christ saves people from in the liturgical services. In addition to the reference in the Holy Saturday service mentioned in the previous footnote, salvation from death is mentioned four times in the Easter liturgy: BL Add. 7177, f. 189a, l. 8; f. 192a, l. 11; f. 193b, l. 14; and f. 194b, l. 16. The notion, of course, is not that Christians will not physically die, but that the expectation of final resurrection guarantees that death is temporary. This is expressed in the Easter liturgy in the form, “The authority of death is broken! Christ by his suffering conquered death and promised life by his resurrection” (قائمة وقائمة قائمة قائمة: جد قائمة), while the liturgy for Denhā (Epiphany): BL Add. 7177, f. 194b, ll. 15-17.

267 The liturgy for Holy Saturday includes “error” (قائمة) in the list of what the people are saved from: BL Add. 7177, f. 185a, l. 19; also f. 29a, l. 23. The error in question is identified as “the error of idols” (قائمة وقائمة) in the liturgy for Denhā (Epiphany): BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, l. 15.

268 The services for both Yaldā (Nativity) and Sūlāqā (Ascension) both mention “the slavery of sin” (قائمة وقائمة) as what Christ frees people from: BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, l. 16; f. 215b, l. 4. Although the language of “saving from sins” is not used, the concept of forgiveness of sins is linked with Christ’s role as Savior in the liturgies for Holy Saturday and Easter: BL Add. 7177, f. 184b, l. 7; f. 189a, ll. 6-7.

269 Salvation from hell is mentioned less frequently than the other topics of salvation, but the Easter service mentions both that “hell was closed” (قائمة وقائمة مقدسة) and “by the rays of the lamp of his [sic] suffering you brought us out of the hellish darkness” (قائمة وقائمة مقدسة: جد)
course, to save people from these things presumes that they were in danger from them, and this is where the doctrine of the judgment is incorporated as a preliminary to the understanding of salvation. Shbadnāyā relates the fall of Satan and the transgression of the first humans, Adam and Eve, against God’s command not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil on the devil’s instigation. Their disobedience resulted in the expulsion of humanity from paradise and their condemnation to death by God’s just judgment. Condemnation to death is equivalent to being destined for Shyōl, the place of the dead. The liturgy for Qyāmtā (Easter) portrays Satan claiming that the dead are his property: “Jesus has deposed me from my authority and plundered my property from my hands and by his resurrection he has distributed life to the sons of his race.” Satan is also presented as the instigator of idolatry, the error of failing to recognize the true God, in a long quotation which Shbadnāyā takes from John Penkāyā. The phrase “slavery of sin,” used in the liturgy, implies that sin is not just a single action, but a state

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270 Shbadnāyā was typically more circumspect than the liturgies about what Christ saves from, but part of this reticence is simply his use of a more varied terminology in a poetic work. He often preferred to use verbs other than “saved,” although the concept is present. It is to salvation from Satan that the poet refers with the line, “And he made our adversary kneel, he grieved him, and he made us victorious in his contests” (Sayyid al-adwār bi-kādir Moḥiyya), as is revealed by a marginal gloss: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 172a. A line soon after refers to the Cross “which saved us from a hand leading astray and destroyed his snares” (Bilākhtu yuḥdūdū Maḥdūdū Muḥdūdū Mubātdīn), again terminology suggestive of Satan: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 172a. Christ’s salvation from death is depicted in the line, “The shadows of death, the tyrant, he drove out from our family by his words” (Sūdūr al-ṣawād, al-markhūza, hūmu kaṣāali wa-lāmuna bi-‘ayyatuğna), according to a poem of Rabban Emmanuel quoted by Shbadnāyā: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 145a. Salvation from sin is presented tersely as “He took our sins” (Bīghu). Salvation from Sheol is presented dramatically in the line, “The bars of Sheol he destroyed before us” (Sunu ṣāmūʿ Malūm Tuṣūr Muṣūrā), while in the same context salvation from Sheol is presented dramatically in the line, “The bars of Sheol he destroyed before us” (Sunu ṣāmūʿ Malūm Tuṣūr Muṣūrā), according to a poem of Rabban Emmanuel quoted by Shbadnāyā: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 149a. Salvation from Sheol is presented dramatically in the line, “The bars of Sheol he destroyed before us” (Sunu ṣāmūʿ Malūm Tuṣūr Muṣūrā), according to a poem of Rabban Emmanuel quoted by Shbadnāyā: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 153a.


272 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 27a-28b.


of enslavement and lack of freedom.\footnote{See citations in fnn. 143-144 and 267.} Thus the salvation accomplished by Christ is also termed “liberation” (ḥūrārā)\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 109b. Shbadnāyā uses a form “to free” repeatedly in his third liturgical poem: BL Or. 4062, ff. 135a, 135b, 136b, 137a. The Qyāmtā (Easter) liturgy extols Christ “who freed us from death” (َّلِحَصِّبُ قَدِيِّبٍ). BL Add. 7177, f. 194a, l. 8. Cf. BL Add. 7177, f. 216b, l. 14; f. 219b, l. 24.} and “life” (ḥayyē),\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 111a, 116b (quoting John Penkāyā), 139b, 150a; BL Add. 7177, f. 193b, l. 14; f. 194b, l. 17; f. 215b, l. 20. Salvation from death is not understood to preclude the possibility of physical death, but rather refers to spiritual life and unending physical life after the general resurrection. “Eternal life” (َّلِحَصِّبُ قَدِيِّبٍ) is said to be given in the Yaldā (Nativity) liturgy: BL Add. 7177, f. 19a, l. 1. The feast of Sūlāqā (Ascension) prays for the gift of “immortal life” (َّلِحَصِّبُ قَدِيِّبٍ): BL Add. 7177, f. 217a, l. 19. “Spiritual life” (َّلِحَصِّبُ قَدِيِّبٍ) is mentioned in the service of Denā (Epiphany): BL Add. 7177, f. 29b, l. 24.} and Christ is given the title “Life-giver” (mahyānā).\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 86a, 93a, 126a (quoting Rabban Emmanuel), 203b (quoting John Penkāyā); BL Or. 4062, f. 137a. The term is also used in the service of Yaldā (Nativity) and Sūlāqā (Ascension): BL Add. 7177, f. 18b, l. 7; f. 20b, l. 20; f. 216b, ll. 4, 9; f. 217b, l. 5.} The multi-faceted doctrine of salvation leavens most of the theological discussions within the Church of the East, in one form or another.

There is an important ambiguity, however, concerning the beneficiaries of Christ’s saving work. Both the liturgical services and Shbadnāyā occasionally characterized the Church of the East explicitly in terms of this salvation. Shbadnāyā, for example, addressed his group as “beloved flock saved by the Cross”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 111a, 116b (quoting John Penkāyā), 139b, 150a; BL Add. 7177, f. 193b, l. 14; f. 194b, l. 17; f. 215b, l. 20.} and “crowds saved by the crucifixion.”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 86a, 93a, 126a (quoting Rabban Emmanuel), 203b (quoting John Penkāyā); BL Or. 4062, f. 137a.} In his poem for the Rogation of the Ninevites, he prays to Christ asking for salvation for “your people who have been forgiven.”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 111a, 116b (quoting John Penkāyā), 139b, 150a; BL Add. 7177, f. 193b, l. 14; f. 194b, l. 17; f. 215b, l. 20.} At Yaldā (Nativity), the liturgy prays, “Save, my Lord, your faithful people who have celebrated your birth,”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 86a, 93a, 126a (quoting Rabban Emmanuel), 203b (quoting John Penkāyā); BL Or. 4062, f. 137a.} namely those present. The services for Good Friday and Holy Saturday repeatedly identify the people who are saved as “his sheep,”\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 86a, 93a, 126a (quoting Rabban Emmanuel), 203b (quoting John Penkāyā); BL Or. 4062, f. 137a.} which as we saw above was a common self-designation for the Church of the East. The Easter liturgy exhorts the
congregation, “Confess, oh Church, the death of the Son who saved your children by the sacrament of his death.”

Even more explicitly, the service for Good Friday prays, “Christ, who saved us by his own blood, give peace to your Church saved by your Cross.”

Even the Anaphora of Addai and Mari asserts that the worshippers present will glorify God “in your Church saved by the precious blood of your Christ.” The festivals of Yaldā (Nativity), Denhā (Epiphany), Easter, and Sūlāqā (Ascension) all refer to “our salvation” or Jesus saving “us,” and Christ is most commonly not called “the Savior,” but “our Savior.”

The first-person possessive suffix is significant; the salvation accomplished by Christ was considered a defining characteristic of this community’s nature.

Yet Christ was not only called “our Savior,” but also “the Savior of all,” and there is a theme in the discussion of the beneficiaries of salvation which resists the tidy imposition of communal boundaries. The liturgical references to Christ saving “all the peoples” could be understood with reference to a universal Church incorporating all ethnic groups, but other descriptions of who is saved are less easily containable. Shbadnāyā refers to “general salvation” and “the salvation of all those who were and would be.”

The reference to salvation demonstrates that the word “church” in this context does not refer to the building, although in other contexts it may.

Shbadnāyā concurs, for example in his poem for the Finding of the Cross: BL Or. 4062, f. 135a.

See above, fn. 262.

For three examples from Easter, see BL Add. 7177, f. 189a, l. 2; f. 191a, l. 23; and f. 192b, l. 7. This interpretation might be supported by the parallel in the last prayer with “all the churches” in l. 5.


nature in general is extolled especially in the feast of Yaldā (Nativity), so all humanity may be said to benefit at least theoretically from Christ’s salvation. Later in the same service the angels, inspired by Christ’s birth, are said to “have proclaimed hope for humanity and salvation for all flesh.” Nor is salvation restricted to embodied organisms, as the liturgy of Yaldā (Nativity) also declares, “By his birth he saved the creatures.” The world as a whole is depicted as the beneficiary of salvation, and indeed in a couple services Christ is called “the Savior of all worlds.” As discussed above, the liturgy at Denhā (Epiphany) speaks of “the new creation” which Christ saved. That service also refers to Christ’s baptism being for the salvation of angels. All of these notions, included in the materials chanted when the congregation is gathered, imply a conceptual tension between the notion that salvation is a characteristic of one particular group of humans and the idea that it is applicable more broadly. This tension is not intractable, since the fall of humanity into sin has often been understood to have had repercussions beyond those on individual humans, and therefore Christ’s saving work may be

295 From the feast of Yaldā (Nativity), BL Add. 7177, f. 18b, ll. 11 and 27; f. 19a, l. 7; f. 22b, l. 20; and f. 23a, l. 23. The Easter liturgy made explicit that the salvation of human nature is a consequence of Christ “putting on our nature” (BL Add. 7177, f. 192a, l. 10-11). Shbadnāyā likewise designated the salvation of “his image”, i.e. humanity, as the purpose of the incarnation: BL Or. 4062, f. 135a.

296 BL Add. 7177, f. 21a, ll. 3-4.

297 BL Add. 7177, f. 22b, ll. 16-17. A little later the liturgy continues, “He saved material creation and the four elements from the slavery of sin” (BL Add. 7177, f. 23a, ll. 15-16. The salvation of “all creatures” is also mentioned in a quotation of Theodore of Mopsuestia in Shbadnāyā’s commentary: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 140a.

298 BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 12, 15.

299 BL Add. 7177, f. 27a, l. 16 and f. 215a, ll. 24-25.

300 BL Add. 7177, f. 29a, ll. 12, 15.

301 “He came for the salvation of the world” (BL Add. 7177, f. 22a, ll. 21-22.

302 Thus Shbadnāyā, for example, quotes Theodore of Mopsuestia’s assertion, “For the transgression of the head of our race [i.e. Adam] was the cause of the confusion of the creatures” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 140a).
seen as restoring not only those people whose sins are forgiven but also all of creation to its
rightful order. But even if there is not a logical contradiction, it remains the case that the
doctrine of salvation at the same time partly characterized the self-understanding of the Church
of the East and also made it conceptually more difficult to delimit their group precisely. In other
words, even as the concept of the group’s nature becomes clearer, the identification of its
membership grows more problematic.

The Presence of the Holy Spirit

Compared to the centrality of Christ in the liturgy and theological poetry of the fifteenth
century, the Holy Spirit plays a more limited role. Neither ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis nor Īshāq
Shbadnāyā devoted a section of their respective theological works to the third qnōmā of the
divine Trinity in particular. Nevertheless we would be mistaken to presume that the Holy Spirit
was unimportant to the self-understanding of the Church of the East. The liturgy for Yaldā
(Nativity) refers to the congregation as the “sons of the Holy Spirit,”303 which indicates the
prominent role which the Spirit can play in the characterization of this community. Of course, a
certain amount of the self-understanding of the Church of the East in relation to the Spirit is
shared with other persons of the Trinity. The identification of the Holy Spirit as a divine qnōmā
implies the worship and confession of the Spirit with the Father and the Son, and this implication
was drawn in fifteenth-century sources.304 The Pentecost liturgy addresses the Holy Spirit with

303  The service for Pentecost refers to the Holy Spirit as “the hidden qnōmā of the Being [tīḥāhā]” (سرفنا جسمان): BL Add. 7177, f. 228a, ll. 16-17.
304  The service for Pentecost refers to the Holy Spirit as “the hidden qnōmā of the Being [tīḥāhā]” (سرفنا جسمان): BL Add. 7177, f. 228a, ll. 16-17.
worship: “With the Father and with the Son we worship you, Holy Spirit, without division.”

The Trinitarian faith of the apostles is presented later in the same service: “they believed in and confessed the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Shbadnāyā’s longest poem also specifically includes the Holy Spirit in the list of recipients of worship: “Come, let us render to him thanksgiving, to him who made us worthy for the worship [of the three qnômē], / Thanking to the Father and to [Christ] and to the Spirit with them.” Furthermore, the role ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the accomplishment of Christ’s incarnation and saving work extends some of the concepts involved with Christ to include this additional divine agent. Thus the Pentecost liturgy refers to the Holy Spirit as “the Paraclete … who gives life to all,” and prays to the Holy Spirit “that you will save the souls of all of us.” Both of these quotations extend Christ’s saving work to include the work of the Holy Spirit, with the same ambiguity as to the beneficiaries of that salvation as we discussed above.

305: BL Add. 7177, f. 221a, ll. 23-24. The Qyāmtā (Easter) liturgy also explicitly includes the Spirit in a complex description of worship: “In your resurrection, Lord, we rejoice, and your living name we confess, and to your Father we offer worship, and the Holy Spirit we glorify” (BL Add. 7177, f. 189a, ll. 10-12). Cf. the service for Ḥašā (Good Friday) at BL Add. 7177, f. 181a, l. 12.

306: BL Add. 7177, f. 223b, l. 4.

307: Cf. the canon in the baptismal liturgy which addresses God the Father, “To you and to [Christ] and to the Holy Spirit let us raise up glory and honor and thanksgiving and worship” (BL Add. 7177, f. 221a, l. 25).

308: “This point is made with regard to Christ’s birth, following Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:20, by both Shbadnāyā’s poetry and the service for Yaldā (Nativity): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 56b; BL Add. 7177, f. 19b, ll. 4-5. The descent of the Holy Spirit at Christ’s baptism, as reported in Matthew 3:16 and parallel passages, was also picked up by the liturgy of Denā (Epiphany): BL Add. 7177, f. 29b, ll. 8-10 and 24-25. Jesus’ own appropriation of Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” as reported in Luke 4:17-21, was quoted by Shbadnāyā from a work by Ḥnānšāh Msharyā: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 132b-133a. This indicates a role for the Holy Spirit in Christ’s miraculous ministry. Shbadnāyā also attributes Christ’s work of salvation to “the power of the Spirit which clothed him” (BL Add. 7177, f. 223b, ll. 1-2.

309: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 181a-b. Cf. the service for Ḥašā (Good Friday) at BL Add. 7177, f. 181a, l. 12.

310: Both of these quotations extend Christ’s saving work to include the work of the Holy Spirit, with the same ambiguity as to the beneficiaries of that salvation as we discussed above.
Both Shbadnāyā and the liturgical sources present the Holy Spirit’s relationship to the Church in terms of individual Christians, as opposed to the almost exclusively collective nature of the Church’s relationship to Christ. Shbadnāyā saw evidence of the Spirit’s intellectual guidance of Christians in the development of doctrine: “That by the grace of the Holy Spirit all believers were led is known from the fact that all those things that were previously difficult to understand are now very easy.”

When Shbadnāyā describes baptism as “the noble birth in the Spirit who dwells in us,” the individual experience of baptism implies a similarly individual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This relationship of the Holy Spirit to individual members of the group is clarified by Shbadnāyā’s long quotation of the seventh-century author Yōḥannān Penkāyā, which presents the Spirit as the agent of the spiritual birth which Christians experience in baptism and the provider of the nourishment for believers in the Eucharist. He likewise quotes Theodore bar Kūnāy, who presents Christ’s experience of baptism as a model for all Christians, “that we may obtain the confidence of faith, that also in our case when we are baptized the Father is pleased with us, and the Spirit of holiness rests upon us.”

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311 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 204b. It is not clear from the punctuation whether these words are Shbadnāyā’s own, or a quotation of Yōḥannān bar Penkāyā. Although “all believers” could be collective, the ease of understanding implies that the Spirit’s guidance is available to all individuals alike.

312 BL Or. 4062, f. 135b. “The Spirit who dwelt in us” (Josh. 2:23-3:8) is referenced just a few lines later, with the perfect verb likely being intended in an inceptive sense: BL Or. 4062, f. 135b. The Holy Spirit is closely tied to the East Syrian understanding of the sacrament of baptism, for example in the services of Qyāmtā (Easter) and Pentecost: BL Add. 7177, f. 186a, ll. 11, 13 and f. 221a, ll. 19-21. The association is so strong that Shbadnāyā refers to baptism as “the waters of the Spirit”: BL Or. 4062, f. 135b. For a further discussion of the relationship between baptism and the conceptual community of the Church of the East, see Chapter 5.

313 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 89b-89a. During the baptismal liturgy the deacon addresses the recipients of baptism regarding “the pledge of the Holy Spirit which you have received” (Josh. 2:23-3:8): Berlin Sachau 167, f. 119b. Although the verb is plural, each recipient is individually marked with the sign of the cross and baptized, implying an individual reception. The same ritual also requires the recitation of John 2:23-3:8, which describes baptism as a new and spiritual birth, ending with the individualizing reference to “Thus is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:4): Berlin Sachau 167, f. 113b.

for Denhā (Epiphany) expresses this same relationship between Christ’s experience of the Holy Spirit in his baptism by John and every Christian’s experience of baptism: the Spirit “dwelt upon one, but now she has come down and dwelt upon all who were born of the water.”

Liturgical texts make more explicit than Shbadnāyā what is implicit in the Spirit’s association with baptism, that the Holy Spirit communicates to individual Christians the benefits of the salvation which Christ accomplished in general. The Pentecost service begins by explaining the availability of forgiveness for sins, one of the effects of the crucifixion, to the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit, Paraclete, shone in Creation and for this reason all the world was filled with grace, and the sins of humanity were forgiven through the atonement comes from baptism.”

The future hope of believers with Christ could also be obtained from the Spirit through baptism, according to a long text near the beginning of the Easter liturgy:

All of you who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ from the water and the Spirit, so with him you will reign in the dwelling of heaven. Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In one Spirit you were baptized and one Spirit you put on, one Lord you knew, for by his name you are called and with him you will be refreshed in the dwelling of heaven.

These sources declare that all Christians have experienced direct, personal, individual contact with the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit is more often presented as involved with certain classes of Christians than with all and sundry. Although Shbadnāyā does not make the point, a scribe in Mosul emphasizes in a colophon dated October 2, 1810 A.G. / 1498 that the Catholicos-Patriarch “was

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315 Liturgical: BL Add. 7177, f. 30b, ll. 7-8. The use of the feminine gender for the Spirit is typical in Syriac, due to the grammatical gender of the noun “spirit”.

316 BL Add. 7177, f. 221a, ll. 18-21.

317 BL Add. 7177, f. 186a, ll. 11-15. I have expanded the text’s abbreviation of the Gloria to better communicate how it would be recited, and because of the thematic congruity between the Trinitarian invocation and its context.
chosen by the Lord through the Spirit,” while an earlier scribe in the same city made the point that the patriarch’s designated successor was selected “by the choice which belongs to the Holy Spirit.” The conceptual relationship between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Holy Spirit will be examined more in chapter 6. Rather than linking the Holy Spirit with the hierarchy, Shbadnāyā invoked the Holy Spirit specifically in relation to traditional East Syrian authorities. Shbadnāyā’s long theological poem frequently refers to earlier authors with titles such as “clothed with the Spirit,” “inspired by the Spirit,” or “filled with the Spirit,” which is no doubt partly honorific and partly conventional, but the language presupposes a belief in the Holy Spirit’s engagement with the framers of Christian tradition particularly. Saints loom even larger than authors in relation to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The liturgical memorial of John the Baptist celebrates him as “in his radiant and holy soul a dwelling of the Holy Spirit.” Shbadnāyā’s poem for the memorial of St. George describes how the Spirit armed the saint for spiritual combat, and alleges a unique relationship between the Holy Spirit’s power and the saint’s intercession. The poet pled inability to praise St. George due to the Holy Spirit having glorified the saint: “My tongue is insufficient to praise you, for the Spirit of Holiness adorned your glory.” The notion of the Holy Spirit as saints’ armor is also picked up in the liturgy for

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318 BL Add. 7174, f. 214a.  
319 BL Add. 7177, f. 321a, ll. 5-6.  
321 BL Add. 7177, f. 38a, ll. 11-12.  
322 BL Or. 4062, f. 129b.  
323 BL Or. 4062, f. 130a.  
324 BL Or. 4062, f. 130b.
Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit “who is the invincible armor clothed the workers which he chose that they may conquer the error of paganism.” Clearly saints enjoyed a special relationship with the Holy Spirit. Among saints, the apostles were particularly singled out for the action of the Holy Spirit in their work. Shbadnāyā depicted Christ “establish[ing] them as temples for his Spirit,” but it is preeminently the festival of Pentecost which repeatedly extols the apostolic connection to the Holy Spirit. In that service, they are presented as empowered by the Spirit to bring Christianity to the world. To this end the Holy Spirit entrusted them with the priesthood and delivered to them “the keys of the heavenly treasury,” probably a reference to the sacraments. The place of apostles, saints, and past authorities in constituting the self-concept of the Church of the East will be examined more fully in chapter 7, but it is clear that the Holy Spirit was understood by both Shbadnāyā and the liturgy to bring God’s presence and grace to individual Christians, especially so in certain categories.

“One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church”

The foregoing discussion shows how the Church of the East conceptualized itself in relation to its central theological commitments, namely Trinitarian doctrine and Christ’s mdabbrānūthā. In many instances the concept has been expressed explicitly, though sometimes we have had to infer what is implicit, but in each case the thinking on the nature of the Church has been something of a digression, not the main topic of discussion. A specific pronouncement

326 “The strength of the Spirit filled them that they may convert the erring peoples” (خَلْقَةُ الْرَّحْمَةِ صلى الله عليه وسلم) BL Add. 7177, f. 225a, l. 16. The Holy Spirit’s role in sending the apostles is described at greater length earlier in the service, at BL Add. 7177, f. 221b, ll. 6-11.
327 The Spirit’s role in establishing the priesthood is asserted at BL Add. 7177, f. 226a, ll. 19-21, although the service later presents Christ as making the apostles into priests: BL Add. 7177, f. 229a, ll. 22-24. “The keys of the heavenly treasury” (كَلِمَةُ الْكِرْسَمِ الْمَكْرُومِ): BL Add. 7177, f. 224b, ll. 13-14.
about the nature of the Church is, however, found in no less a document than the Syriac version of the Nicene Creed, arguably the most central dogmatic text in the Church of the East. The Creed employs four adjectives to confess “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” and each of these attributes of the religious community needs to be understood in the way interpreted by East Syrian interpreters.

The East Syrian liturgy presents the unity of the Church primarily in terms of the relationship between God’s earthly and heavenly worshippers. This is expressed most explicitly in a non-liturgical source, however, namely in Shbadnāyā’s quotation of Mār Ābhā’s explanation of the angelic acclamation found in Luke 2:14: “‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,’ the angels were singing while clapping their hands and stamping their feet, ‘and good hope for humanity.’ For this festival of joys is the appointed festival of angels and of humans, for the Church is one in Christ.” The liturgy for the feast of Yaldā (Nativity) interprets the same text similarly: “In the highest heights the ranks of angels sang ‘Glory!’ and with them also the earthlings sounded one hymn to the one who by his love humbled himself and put on our nature.”

The Easter service likewise identifies the unity of the Church vertically: “Through your holy Cross, our Savior, there came to be one flock, angels and humans, and one holy Church, heavenly beings and earthly.” Indeed, almost all festivals include texts to be recited

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329 The text of the creed is usually not given in full in liturgical manuscripts, but its recitation is marked by its opening words, “We believe in one God, the Father”: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 82b. For various forms of the Nicene Creed used in the Church of the East, see Peter Bruns, “Das sogenannte ‘Nestorianum’ und verwandte Symbole,” Oriens Christianus 89 (2005): 43–62.


331: BL Add. 7177, f. 22b, ll. 11-13.

332: BL Add. 7177, f. 191b, l. 26 – f. 192a, l.1.
exhorting the congregation to worship with the angels, who are a model of devotion to God even when the unity of the Church is not explicitly invoked.\textsuperscript{333} The anaphora of Addai and Mari, used for the consecration of the Eucharist at almost half of the services throughout the year, also couples the worship of the congregation with that of the angels: “With these heavenly forces we confess you, Lord.”\textsuperscript{334} Although a unity of faith is briefly presented in the text for Pentecost,\textsuperscript{335} liturgical sources understood the ecclesiastical attribute of unity primarily as linking the human congregation with the angelic world in worship.

This unity of worship is ultimately derived from the unity of God, and is effected in a human context by the unity of baptism. The liturgy for Easter rephrases Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:13 to express the unity of all Christians in the unity of Christ and the unity of the Spirit which is given at baptism: “In one Spirit you were baptized and one Spirit you put on, one Lord you knew, for you will be called by his name.”\textsuperscript{336} Later in the same service, Ephesians 4:5 is expanded: “The Lord is one, one the faith, one the baptism for the forgiveness of sins.”\textsuperscript{337} The sacramental unity expressed in both of these scriptural paraphrases in the liturgy is also asserted by Shbadnāyā in his long poem, where he describes baptism as “the new birth, the renewer, and the unifier.”\textsuperscript{338} The efficacy of the sacrament may also be what Shbadnāyā meant when he prayed, in the context of his short poem for the Ba‘ūthā d-Nīnāwē (the Rogation of the

\textsuperscript{333} Yaldā (Nativity): BL Add. 7177, f. 21a, ll. 25-26; f. 23b, l. 7; f. 25b, l. 3; f. 27a, l. 6. Denḥā (Epiphany): BL Add. 7177, f. 31b, ll. 12-13. Qyamtā (Easter): BL Add. 7177, f. 187a, ll. 21-26. Sūllāqā (Ascension): BL Add. 7177, f. 216b, ll. 6-9; f. 219b, ll. 18-20. Pentecost: BL Add. 7177, f. 224a, ll. 5-7.

\textsuperscript{334} “May your kindness, Lord, keep the Church and her children in one accord of faith” (يَا ئِسَاهِيُّ مَعَ هَمْهُ مَحْمُودٍ): BL Add. 7177, f. 227b, ll. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{335} Macomber, “Anaphora of Addai and Mari,” 362.

\textsuperscript{336} “May your kindness, Lord, keep the Church and her children in one accord of faith” (بِلَطُمير يَا سيِء هيِ مُحْمُود): BL Add. 7177, f. 186a, ll. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{337} “May your kindness, Lord, keep the Church and her children in one accord of faith” (بِلَطُمير يَا سيِاء هيِ مُحْمُود): BL Add. 7177, f. 190b, ll. 4-5.

\textsuperscript{338} “May your kindness, Lord, keep the Church and her children in one accord of faith” (بِلَطُمير يَا سيِاء هيِ مُحْمُود): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 92b.
Ninevites), “Make us worthy of your inheritance in unity.” Shbadnāyā also quotes an exegetical tradition of Ishō’dād of Merv that the Jordan River, in which Jesus was baptized, is derived from two sources in order to demonstrate “the communion of the [Jewish] people with the gentiles in the unity of sonship and worship.”

Again, unity in worship and sacrament are the most important features. On the other hand, apart from the quotation of Mār Aba cited above, the theme of the Church united between the angels and the humans which dominates the liturgical sources is otherwise absent from Shbadnāyā’s works, which place greater emphasis on baptism as the marker for unity in the human Church.

Of the four attributes attributed to the Church by the creed, the community’s holiness is the one most frequently indicated in the sources. On the other hand, it is difficult to be very concrete about the way in which holiness was understood, since “the holy Church” seems to have been used almost interchangeably with “the Church.” Some sense of the meaning of holiness can be gleaned from other adjectives with which it is paired, and the Pentecost liturgy refers to the “glorified and holy Church,” while the memorial of John the Baptist describes him as “a true virgin in his body and in his radiant and holy soul a dwelling of the Holy Spirit.” The set of nouns which are modified by the adjective also gives hints as to its meaning: “holy” modifies the distinctive items and actions of the Church, such as the ritual objects and liturgical

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339 BL Or. 4062, f. 124b. In this phrase, “your inheritance” (_camūna_ lahwī_ dīn_) likely refers to the glorified saints, by way of allusion to Ephesians 1:18.


341 The phrase “holy Church” (camūna_ dīn_) occurs, for a few examples, in the liturgy at BL Add. 7177, f. 38a, f. 224b, l. 1; f. 185a, l. 17; f. 191b, l. 24; f. 218a, l. 18; and f. 226b, ll. 4-5. Shbadnāyā used the phrase at BL Or. 4062, f. 126a; Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 82a (quoting Shem ʾon Shaqlawāyā), 208a (quoting John of Zō’bī), and 220b, as well as in a little poem probably by him: Bodl. Syr. e.9, f. 128a. A scribe also used the phrase in the colophon of BL Add. 7174, f. 206a. For uses of the adjective in the larger phrase “holy catholic Church,” see below. With a different metaphor, the community is referred to as Christ’s “holy flock” (camūna_ muṣūma_): BL Or. 4062, f. 132a.

342 BL Add. 7177, f. 224b, l. 1.

343 BL Add. 7177, f. 38a, ll. 11-12.
celebrations, as well as the deceased members of the community. The attributes of God, however, are most insistently categorized as holy. Not only is the third divine  named the Holy Spirit, but the Trinity itself is often qualified by the adjective “holy,” and Shbadnāyā once refers to God by a shortened form of the Hebrew tetragrammaton, “Yah, the Holy one.” References to God’s holiness are multiplied in the descriptions of divine presence as “the holy of holies,” drawing from Old Testament temple language, and in the allusions to the seraphim singing “Holy, holy, holy” in Isaiah 6. Christ is also referred to specifically as “holy,” drawing on Luke 1:35, as is the divine nature and name. Thus we may provisionally understand the holiness of the Church to be a participation in God’s character and radiance.

That ecclesiastical holiness is derived from divine sanctity is shown in a number of ways. The Holy Spirit plays a prominent role in representations of the community as holy, as in the description of John the Baptist in the phrase quoted above, “in his radiant and holy soul a

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344 The liturgies refer to the “holy altar” (BL Add. 7177, f. 20a, l. 16; f. 179a, l. 13) and “holy vestments” (BL Add. 7177, f. 188a, l. 7), although the “holy Cross” (BL Add. 7177, f. 191b, l. 26) is so labeled by association with Christ. Shbadnāyā also applies the adjective “holy” to festivals (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 82a quoting Shemʿōn Shaqlawāyā; also in the Easter liturgy at BL Add. 7177, f. 188a, l. 14), Denḥā (Epiphany; Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 82a), baptism (Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 82a, 90b, 92a), and the sacraments in general (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 110b). Shbadnāyā also refers to a “sanctuary” as (literally “house of holiness”): BL Or. 4062, ff. 123a, 130a. 346 Shbadnāyā speaks of the “holy Trinity” at Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 1b, 82a, 85a, and 90a. Also in the Pentecost liturgy: BL Add. 7177, f. 224b, l. 18. 347 Among these are the “holy apostles” (BL Add. 7177, f. 221b, l. 2 and several other places), “holy disciples” (BL Add. 7177, f. 223a, ll. 12-13 and f. 226a, l. 7), “holy fathers” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 139b), the “holy women” who came to the empty tomb (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 162b), Basil of Caesarea (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 206b), and the Virgin Mary (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 207a). We often forget that “saint” in English is nothing other than a substantial use of an adjective meaning “holy,” and in Syriac likewise “the saints” are referred to as “the holy ones” ( ).

348 The service for Sulāqā (Ascension) has more references to the “holy of holies” ( ) than any other service: BL Add. 7177, f. 215b, l. 19; f. 218a, l. 14; and f. 220a, l. 27). Shbadnāyā also uses the phrase repeatedly: BL Or. 4062, ff. 135a, 136b, 138b; Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 89b, 193b. 349 Shbadnāyā alludes to this episode on three occasions: BL Or. 4062, f. 141b; Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 187a; and Berlin orient. fol. 1201, f. 6b. The folio of Cambridge Add. 1998 corresponding to this last text is no longer extant. An abbreviated liturgical reference is given for Sulāqā (Ascension): BL Add. 7177, f. 216a, l. 24. 350 The biblical text is quoted by Shbadnāyā at Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 200a. Christ is referred to as the “holy first-born Son” in the service for Yaldā (Nativity): BL Add. 7177, f. 22a, l. 20. 351 For example, the divine nature is labeled “holy” by Shbadnāyā at the end of his largest work: Berlin orient. fol. 1201, f. 107b. The “holy name” is mentioned in the Pentecost service: BL Add. 7177, f. 224a, l. 7.
dwelling of the Holy Spirit.” The service of Yaldā (Nativity) also refers to the congregation as “children of the Holy Spirit,” while Shbadnāyā speaks of previous authors in his tradition as writing “by the holy inspiration of the Paraclete.” Christ’s agency in Christian holiness is presented poetically by Shbadnāyā: “he committed the sacrament of his body to those whom he purified.” Shbadnāyā’s references to “deification” or “theosis” can therefore also be interpreted as the transformation of Christians to more completely partake of divine holiness, in both the moral and the glorious aspects. The liturgy for Denḥā (Epiphany) concurs with ascribing human holiness to God, very generally: “Deity today has come to humanity to sanctify it.” Soon afterward the service blesses Christ “who sanctified us by his baptism and washed us with his cleansing and exalted us by his humiliation and qualified us for his glory,” which seems to present a complex understanding of the nature of holiness, of which Christ is the source. Indeed, as the sun is the source of light, so Christ is portrayed as the “Sun full of righteousness which makes sinners righteous” in the same liturgy. Unlike the perfect divine holiness from which it is derived, however, the sanctity of the Church is presented as a work in progress, as is shown by the participles and imperfect verbs used to describe sanctification and deification. The imperfect holiness of the Church explains why the title “Saint” (qaddīshā, “holy one”) is reserved for Christians who have died, but moral lapses within

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352 BL Add. 7177, f. 25a, ll. 3-4.
355 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 93a, 112a, 196b. Although Shbadnāyā does not identify the agent, he ascribes baptism with instrumentality in theosis, which suggests a divine origin. The complex agency of baptism will be analyzed in chapter 5.
356 BL Add. 7177, f. 30a, ll. 21-22.
357 BL Add. 7177, f. 31b, ll. 3-5.
358 BL Add. 7177, f. 30b, ll. 20-21. Christ is also termed the “Sun of righteousness” (ḥūdūd waṣṣaḥ) in the service for Hashā (Good Friday): BL Add. 7177, f. 181b, ll. 22-23.
the present community need not be taken as evidence against the understanding that God’s sanctity is being communicated to the faithful.

In contrast to unity and holiness, the Church’s attributes of catholicity and apostolicity are rarely invoked as such in fifteenth-century sources. For the former, the services for Yaldā (Nativity) and Qyamtā (Easter) each mention once “the holy catholic Church,” but they provide no explanation for what the phrase means or why it is used in this context. The Anaphora of Addai and Mari includes the same reference to the Church. Shbadnāyā uses the adjective “catholic” only once, in his prose commentary coupled with the Greek word έκκλησία ("Church"), in contrast to contemporary Jews. But even here no definition is given, and no Syriac calque was devised for the Greek adjective, as happened in the case of the more important word “orthodoxy.” Indeed, by far the most common use of the word “catholic” in the fifteenth century is as the title of the catholicos-patriarch who headed the hierarchy, so that it would not be surprising if the term were understood in a Syriac context in relationship to the patriarchal title, rather than the other way around.

The apostolic nature of the Church was understood in both historical and doctrinal terms, although typically without employing the adjective found in the creed. The Church of the East continually taught that it was founded by the apostles, as will be explored more fully in the

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359 A ritual for the reception of heretics into the Church of the East, probably dating from the early sixteenth century, refers to “the apostolic catholic Church” (الجية عیشه المعلپیم): Cambridge Add. 1988, f. 143a. The context identifies the “Greek fathers” Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius as pillars of the Church. Perhaps then “apostolic” and “catholic” in this context are opposed to the heretical denominations which anathematized these saints.

360: BL Add. 7177, f. 24a, ll. 17-18, and f. 194a, l. 23.
363 Shbadnāyā used the word in this sense at the end of his long poem: Mingana Syr. 57, f. 111a. The relevant folio of Cambridge Add. 1998 is no longer extant. He also used the title in his shorter poem for the Bāūthā: BL Or. 4062, f. 124b. The word likewise occurs in prayers for the hierarchy, for example at BL Add. 7177, f. 194a, l. 24. Almost all fifteenth-century colophons name the catholicos-patriarch, employing this adjective in the process.
chapter on the East Syrian historical self-conception.\textsuperscript{364} Even more important than this understanding of their past, however, was the assertion of the community’s continuing adherence to the doctrine taught by the apostles. Thus the liturgy for Yaldā (Nativity) speaks of “apostolic orthodoxy,”\textsuperscript{365} while the Pentecost service asserts that “the holy apostles in the Holy Spirit taught one perfect confession.”\textsuperscript{366} Shbadnāyā likewise mentions the theological teaching of the apostles in his longest poem: “The confession of the truth they taught and wrote, they also made known.”\textsuperscript{367} In his poem for Shkhāhtā (Finding of the Cross), Shbadnāyā exhorts his congregation to hold fast to this truth which they have received: “And let us keep the teaching of truth which we learned from the preachers… / If in truth we are children of those who proclaim the truth, / Let us confess and sing… / And thus let us keep the deposit which we were commanded.”\textsuperscript{368} Thus we see that the apostolic nature of the Church plays a role, even if the adjective is not used to modify the noun “Church” directly, in understanding the history and doctrinal stability of the community.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The Church of the East understood itself in relation to God and the state of the world, most importantly in light of the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ’s \textit{mdabbrānūthā}. The importance of these doctrines for the East Syrian conceptual community was partly, but not primarily, as “membership cards” which defined the group as consisting of those who agreed

\textsuperscript{364} Shbadnāyā, for example, narrates the foundation of the Church by the apostles in Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 196a-b.  
\textsuperscript{365} BL Add. 7177, f. 24a, ll. 18-19.  
\textsuperscript{366} BL Add. 7177, f. 223b, ll. 16-17.  
\textsuperscript{367} Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 196b.  
\textsuperscript{368} BL Or. 4062, f. 138b.
with these ideas; they were more important for their content, what they said about God, the framework governing the world, and the community’s place in it. God’s ineffable Trinitarian existence was supposed to elicit worship from all creation and faith in his revelation, and these ideas provided a function for the Church of the East. Although the creation of the world by God evidently did not indicate anything distinctive about this community, Christ predictably played a more central role. Nevertheless the focus of East Syrian Christology was not terminological precision or a fixed formula, deemed heretical by outsiders. Although a standard formula for the application of philosophical jargon to the incarnation was available, the emphasis instead lay on the communal recognition of Christ as both God and human, and in the direct relationships between Christ and the Christians. In the first place, Christ’s titles of authority justified calling him divine and worshipping him, while the place of the Church under his authority implied obedience, but even more it implied protection for this community from enemies, rulers, starvation, and plague. Equally central to the East Syrian understanding of themselves in relationship to Christ was the belief that Christ saves people from Satan, death, idolatry, sin, and hell (shyōl). This salvation was understood to be particularly applicable to the Church of the East and yet not restricted to its membership, resulting in a conceptual tension. The relationship of Christ to the Church of the East was presented in almost exclusively collective terms, however, while it is the Holy Spirit who was thought to bring God’s presence and gifts to individual Christians. These relationships give greater context to the description of the Church in the creed as “one holy, catholic, and apostolic,” although even these adjectives need to be understood in a specifically East Syrian context. The unity of the community was described as unity of sacrament and unity of worship, the latter especially with the angels, according to the liturgy. Holiness was even more important to the self-characterization of the Church of the East,
which understood the attribute in terms of God’s glorious purity, communicable to his worshippers. By contrast, catholicity and apostolicity were rarely invoked as such, although the latter was understood in historical and doctrinal ways.

The relationship of East Syrian doctrine to the concept of Christian community may help explain the pattern of relationships between Christians and Muslims, although of course it cannot provide the full explanation. In the previous chapter we saw how the contemporary sources emphasize negative interactions across religious divides, such as opposition or competition, but theological discussions and conversions between different groups are implicit in the record. The doctrinal structure which emphasized the Trinity before all other doctrines may partially explain this group’s rejection and condemnation of conversion to Islam, an important factor in the continued existence of this minority despite social and economic pressure to assimilate. The emphasis placed by East Syrian sources on Jesus Christ’s divinity and sacrificial death on the cross would likewise be obstacles to conversion in either direction. Yet Jesus the Messiah was also honored as a prophet in Islam, and both Muslims and Christians claimed to practice strict monotheism, which provided points of contact that might ease the transition from one religion to the other. As long as a Christian accepted the perspective offered in the East Syrian sources analyzed here, that the most important elements of theology are precisely those rejected by Muslims, conversion to Islam would hardly be a possibility, but if Christians began to regard the commonalities as more important, or to suspect that the other side might have better arguments for their distinctive views, then their theology might in fact enable other factors to render becoming Muslim the most attractive option. Thus theological views could variously restrain or facilitate conversion, depending on individual factors.
There are certain things that the doctrines discussed here do not tell us, however. Although the Holy Spirit was seen as communicating Christ’s salvation to individual Christians, theology alone does not tell us whether this work of the Spirit was automatic or whether it needed to be acquired, and if the latter, how an individual would obtain these benefits. The theological concepts explored here have provided a rich notion of the place of the Church of the East in relation to God, but it is striking that none of these concepts delineate the membership of the group itself. Indeed, some theological ideas, such as the extension of salvation to all creation or all humanity, resist the imposition of a group boundary limiting their applicability to only a subset of the population. None of these doctrines provide observable criteria by which to distinguish those inside the group from those outside, but the self-understanding of a particular social group includes more than just how to demarcate itself from outsiders. Nevertheless, the ability to recognize other members is a critical portion of any group’s self-concept, and in order to explore this aspect of the Church of the East, we must turn to their communal rituals.
Chapter 5: The Rituals of Life Together

At least once every week, and more frequently in certain seasons, members of the Church of the East in the fifteenth century would gather and engage in regular communal rituals. Of course not everyone was present, some people came rarely for a variety of reasons, and in times of natural or military disaster the rituals might be temporarily suspended. But the regularity of this liturgical cycle of meetings at least every week for year after year is a social force often unfamiliar to modern scholars, many of whom see only immediate family and institutional coworkers with such frequency. The importance of liturgy and ritual to the late medieval Church of the East is indicated in the statistics of extant manuscripts: of thirty-five manuscripts which I have been able to identify as from the fifteenth-century Church of the East, fourteen (two fifths) are liturgical in nature. The next most numerous category of texts are those which are explicitly theological, which are only found in seven and a half manuscripts, just over one fifth of the total. Although the haphazard survival of manuscripts prevents us from drawing any firm conclusions from these numbers, they are still suggestive of the prominence of liturgy in literate culture and the lopsidedness of any study which ignores these sources.

It would be surprising if such a prominent feature of communal life did not leave its mark on the way in which the Church of the East conceptualized its own collective existence. That mark is seen most clearly in its characterization of membership in this social group. In the

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1 BN Syr 184, Diarbakır (Scher) 54, Seert (Scher) 50, Berlin orient. quart. 801, Vatican sir 186, Mardin (Scher) 43, BL Add. 7177, Mardin (Scher) 13, BL Or. 4399, Baghdad Dawra (Haddad) 318, Berlin Sachau 167, Mosul (Scher) 15, Urmi 23, BL Add. 7174. My list is slightly expanded from that collected by David Wilmshurst, The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 582; Subsidia 104 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000), 393–97.

2 Of these, seven are of the Paradise of Eden of ‘Abdīshō bar Brīkhā: Cambridge Add. 616, Jerusalem Greek Patriarchate Syr 11, Kirkük (Vosté) 39, Diarbakır (Scher) 73, Diarbakır (Scher) 72, one mentioned by Yosep Qelayta as in his personal possession, and one which Yosep borrowed from the American Missionary James W. Willoughby: ‘Abdīshō bar Brīkhā, Pardaysā da-‘Eden, ed. Yosep Qelayta, 3rd ed. (Chicago, 1988), 8, 10. The half codex is a text of ‘Abdīshō bar Brīkhā’s “Book of the Pearl,” in the same manuscript as Shlēmōn of Baṣra’s less theological and more exegetical miscellany, “The Book of the Bee”: Vatican sir 176.
previous chapter we delineated how theologians and the liturgy conceptualized their community in relationship to the triune God and to each divine Person, especially Jesus, with multiple benefits accruing to the group through the divine patronage. But for all of the concrete ways in which the Church of the East conceived of its divine connection, the theology simply did not answer the question which people belonged to this group and which people did not. This is a question which could be answered by the rituals.

Communal membership as defined by the collective ritual life of the Church of the East was not clearly bounded and flat, however. Rather, it was highly textured, permitting different gradations and modes of belonging as well as providing overlapping accounts of what membership meant. In order to elucidate fifteenth-century East Syrian ritual life and its conceptual content, however, it is necessary to consider the sources of our knowledge and the specific challenges they present to the interpreter. Reconstruction of the sacramental rituals of baptism and the Eucharist reveals multiple ways of tying individuals to the community and through the community to God, and the spiritual benefits to be gained from such a connection. The liturgical seasons and occasional rituals gave additional bounded definitions of membership, but also enabled certain possibilities of slippage and differences of observance. We will finally turn our gaze from the rituals to the varieties of membership constituted by these actions.

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3 Nor should we expect theology to do so: the nature of God might determine the sort of relationship, but a religion such as Christianity, which proclaims that all people (or at least all sorts of people) can participate, requires that the membership necessarily remain theologically underdetermined.
Sources for Ritual Life in the Fifteenth Century

The Church of the East used a bewildering variety of service books in the context of its liturgies. Lectionaries provided the scriptural texts for the main services, with readings drawn from the gospels, the Apostle (the letters of Paul), and the Old Testament. The variable prayers for services throughout the year were contained in the Ḥūdrā (literally “cycle”), of which a selection entitled Kashkūl was often bound separately for use on weekdays. The Gazzā (literally “treasury”) supplemented the Ḥūdrā by providing the variable prayers for the night services throughout the year, while the invariable rites such as baptism and Eucharistic anaphoras were collected in the Taksā d-Kāhnhō (“the priests’ order”). Additional liturgical poetry was collected in volumes which circulated under the names of prominent medieval poets such as Abū Ḥalīm, Wardā, and Khāmīs, although the first contained works attributed to earlier

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5 Such lectionaries do not tell us much about ritual actions per se, although they can be used to map the liturgical calendar in different locations at different times, as well as indicating which scripture passages would be associated by clerical authors with which liturgical events. A fifteenth-century gospel lectionary survives as BL Add. 7174, while the apostle lectionary which is closest in date is Mardin (Scher) 17.

6 A fifteenth-century Ḥūdrā survives as BL Add. 7177. The Ḥūdrā in use today has been published twice, once with modifications for use by the uniate Chaldean Catholic Church and once for the use of the Church of the East: Paul Bedjan, ed., *Breviarium Chaldaicum* (Paris: Via Dicta de Sèvres 95, 1886); Toma Darmo, ed., *Kthābā ḍ-aqām wa-d-bāṭhar wa-d-ḥūdrā wa-d-kashkūl wa-d-gazzā w-qālā d-`ūdrānē `am kthābā d-mazmūrē* (Trichur: Mar Narsai Press, 1960).

7 Unlike the other names of liturgical texts, kashkūl is not a Syriac word. It is used in Arabic and Persian for a beggar’s pouch or bowl, or for a book of varied contents. Paris BN Syr 183 is a Kashkūl dated to the fifteenth century on paleographical grounds, although its colophon has not survived.

8 A fifteenth-century Gazzā survives as BL Or. 4399. Badger did not notice the restriction of the Gazzā to the night service, which was observed by Mateos, *Lelya-Ṣapra*, 11.

9 A fifteenth-century Taksā partially survives in Berlin Sachau 167, although the title has not survived. For comparable manuscripts with that title, see Séert (Scher) 37 and Séert (Scher) 50: Addai Scher, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque épiscopale de Séert* (Mosul: Imprimerie des pères dominicains, 1905), 25–26, 34.

10 The first was Catholicos Ḫīlyā III Abū Ḥalīm (d. 1190), the second Gīwarīs Wardā (early 13th C.), and the third Khāmīs bar Qardāhē (late 13th C.).
poets, and the last continued to incorporate works penned by later authors. Occasional rites such as funerals and ordinations were gathered into separate volumes, while prayers for the three-day fast known as the Bāʿūthā d-Nīnwāyē (“Prayer of the Ninevites”), which preceded Lent in the East Syrian liturgical calendar, were gathered into a book titled after the observance.

It should be stressed, however, that these liturgy books are not in the first place records of liturgical actions as performed, for two reasons. First, they were written not to describe every aspect of each ritual and prayer, but rather to remind the celebrant what is to be done. Priests and deacons presumably learned many rituals by observation and oral instruction, rather than by reading books, which contained primarily the words of prayers and only some of the accompanying actions. Abbreviations abound in these texts, and certain elements of the ritual might not be included because they “go without saying.” For example, no liturgical source which I have inspected identifies whether the priest consecrating the Eucharist stood on the side of the altar near the congregation or the far side, although presumably whether he was facing toward the congregation or away would be regarded as an important part of practice to keep consistent. Secondly, the liturgical volumes prescribe rituals rather than describing them, indicating how a liturgy ought to be performed, rather than how it was in fact performed. Local variations and priestly sloppiness could be obscured by the liturgical norms of the standardized

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11 A fifteenth-century Abū Ḥalīm survives as Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 1a-76b, a fifteenth-century Wardā as Mardin (Scher) 43, and a fifteenth-century Khāmīs as Vatican sir. 186. The first collection contains a poem attributed to Shallīṭā of Rēsh ’Āynā (f. 39a), whom Baumstark ascribed to the eighth century, and one ascribed to Gīwargīs of Erbil (f. 46b; d. 960): Anton Baumstark, Geschichte der syrischen Literature, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber, 1922), 230, 256. On the other hand, the later collection grew to incorporate later authors such as Īsḥaq Shḥadnāyā (fl. 1440), for example in Jerusalem Greek Patriarchate (Chabot) 31, which was copied before August 1823 A.G. / 1512: Jean Baptiste Chabot, “Notice sur les manuscrits syriques conservés dans la bibliothèque du patriarchat grec orthodoxe de Jérusalem,” Journal Asiatique 9 (1894): 121–22.

12 A funerary codex which is dated to the fifteenth century on paleographical grounds is BL Or. 4067, although its colophon is lost. A book of ordinations (ṣyūm ʿdlḥā) from the early sixteenth century survives as Vat. sir. 66.

13 A fifteenth-century Bāʿūthā d-Nīnwāyē is preserved as Paris BN Syr 184.
texts, and the conservative nature of these volumes would delay both the incorporation of new practices and the exclusion of disused customs. In certain cases the normative nature of liturgical books aids the reconstruction of ritual meanings, since the interpretive schemes for understanding ritualized action were themselves normative, and might be obscured by actual transcriptions of occasional clerical confusion or mistakes. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the liturgical books record only what ought to have been rather than what was.

Theological sources also provide evidence for the rituals of the community. The most detailed and consistent of these, from the century before Timūr Lang’s invasion, is the commentary on the sacraments by Catholicos Timothy II (r. 1318), entitled “The Causes of the Ecclesiastical Mysteries.” In this commentary Timothy II provides reasons and meanings for various liturgical actions and associated prayers, sometimes in great detail, although not necessarily in ritual order. Timothy’s commentary also sometimes presumes a certain form of a ritual which might not be the form most commonly practiced, so variations of practice need to be considered. Other references to rituals and their meanings in fifteenth-century theological works occur only in passing and do not provide systematic detail. Nevertheless, these occasional

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14 The Syriac term ʳᵃᶻᵃᵐ meant both “mystery” and “mystical signifier,” and was used in Syriac to refer to what Latin Christianity came to call “sacraments.” A partial edition of Timothy II’s text with English translation was published by Paul Kadicheeni, who gave the title as “The Causes of the Seven Mysteries of the Church,” but no witness which he cites provides that title. Vatican Sir. 151, which provides his base text, and Jerusalem St. Mark’s 142 give the title as یَکَلَبَا یَبَّنَا یَخُبَّهِمْ (“The Seven Causes of the Ecclesiastical Mysteries”), while Mingana Syr. 13 and BL Or. 9378 give the title without “seven”: Timothy II, The Mystery of Baptism: The Text and Translation of the Chapter “On Holy Baptism” from The Causes of the Seven Mysteries of the Church of Timothy II, Nestorian Patriarch (1318-1332), trans. Paul Blaize Kadicheeni (Bangalore, India: Dharmaram Publications, 1980), iv–vi, 2. Kadicheeni’s edition only gives the prologue and the section on baptism. For other sections, I have consulted Mingana Syr. 13.

15 Thus Timothy II discussed the consecration of the oil and water of baptism and the triple repetition of the sign of the cross, before discussing the arrival of the recipient of baptism which preceded them: ibid., 15–57, 57–79, and 80–81, respectively.

16 For example, Timothy II described the form of baptism for adults, or at least recipients who could speak for themselves, as is shown by the presumption that the baptizand would verbally renounce Satan and verbally confess the Trinity. But the vast majority of recipients of baptism would likely have been infants, as will be shown below. Timothy himself defended infant baptism near the end of his treatment of the subject, but he did not give any precise indication how the rite would be altered in the case of infants: ibid., 80–81, 94–97.
references can sometimes be used to confirm the practice of certain actions as well as certain interpretations of the ritual in question.

**Actions Spoke Louder than Words**

A language barrier probably separated all East Syrian laypeople from the texts of their liturgy. All surviving liturgical volumes of the Church of the East from the fifteenth century are in classical Syriac,\(^{17}\) which was probably not a living language by that period. Other dialects of Aramaic were spoken by certain members of the Church of the East,\(^{18}\) as was Arabic\(^{19}\) and Persian.\(^{20}\) This disjuncture would limit the understanding of the liturgical texts by the laypeople.


\(^{19}\) Arabic notes in a fifteenth-century gospel lectionary probably indicate that Arabic was spoken by portions of the Church of the East, as do the Arabic glosses in *Īṣāq Shḥbdnāyā*’s masterpiece: BL Add. 7174, ff. 10a, 215a; Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 116a, 181a, 196a.

\(^{20}\) The Persian gospel manuscript Leiden 675 Warner was copied in 1465 by a Christian from Tabriz in Constantinople: Anton D. Pritula, *Христианство и Персидская Национальность XIII-XVII вв.*, Православный Палестинский Сборник 101 (Sankt Peterburg: Rossiyskaya Akademiya Nauk, 2004), 109. It is not clear, however, whether the scribe was from the Church of the East, since no ecclesiastical affiliation is given. On the other hand, the 1375 gospel lectionary Paris BN Persan 3 follows the East Syrian liturgical calendar, revealing that it is a product of the Church of the East, although it was copied in the Crimea. Thus it seems likely that some portion of
who were not trained in Syriac, although to some degree it would be mitigated by the tendency for Syriac religious terminology and saints’ names to be loaned to vernacular languages. Of course all people present would develop some understanding of the meaning of the liturgy, but the linguistic disjuncture surrounding Syriac as a liturgical language suggests that we focus on the meanings of the ritual actions rather than on the words of the recited prayers.

Actions express meanings. This is to some degree true of all actions, as the doing of a certain act reveals certain facts about the agent, but it is especially true of rituals and communal actions. This fact was grasped by medieval commentators on the liturgy, who identified the precise significations of various ritual actions, explaining not only “why we do it” but “what it means.”
means.”\(^{25}\) It is in principle possible, therefore, to examine the communal rituals of the fifteenth century for clues regarding communal self-understanding. Such an investigation faces difficulties due to the fact that the meanings of ritual actions are not determined solely by the physical movement involved. What is done can mean a number of different things,\(^ {26}\) because there is no trans-cultural code which reveals universally recognized meanings of conscious physical movements.\(^ {27}\) The lack of such a code does not invalidate the meanings of ritual actions any more than the lack of a universal language invalidates the meanings of linguistic utterances. But just as an interpreter must learn the language in order to understand an utterance in that language, so interpreters of ritual actions must learn the historical interpretive schemes by which ritual actions were understood. Richard McCall expressed the need to consider the past hermeneutical frameworks, “The metalanguage of gesture depends for its context upon the gestural universe of discourse of a particular epoch.”\(^ {28}\) It is plausible that in all contexts there have been disagreements and divergences, sometimes large and sometimes small, among the ways in which individual actions ought to be interpreted, so in addressing the question of liturgical meaning, scholars should not attempt to create a single coherent system out of disparate sources.\(^ {29}\)

\(^{25}\) Timothy II, for example, ascribed meanings to the nakedness of baptism candidates, to the recording of candidates’ names, to the number of immersions, and to the garments worn by the candidate after baptism, among other aspects of the rite: Timothy II, *Mystery of Baptism*, 82–85.

\(^{26}\) Different understandings of the meaning of ritual elements, for example, provoked a controversy between Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Christians in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *The Work of Dionysius Barṣalībī Against the Armenians*, ed. Alphonse Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies IV (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1931), 6–7, 23–24.

\(^{27}\) Unconscious physical movements, such as flinching, may be more broadly understood across cultural lines.

\(^{28}\) McCall, *Do This*, 130.

\(^{29}\) Both Eamon Duffy and Richard McCall warn of the danger of harmonization of liturgical sources. Duffy’s preface to the second edition of *Stripping of the Altars* addresses a criticism of the first edition “that in seeking to demonstrate the internal coherence of late medieval religion, I was in danger of imposing an idealized harmony on the period, smoothing out dissent, conflict, and, in general, difference” which he did not wish to do: Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, xviii. McCall, in discussing his reconstruction of an eight-century Roman liturgy, ascribes its lack of social tension to the liturgical sources: “What we do not see in either the text of the sacramentary or the ordo are the fault lines in such a seemingly benign construction of the world”: McCall, *Do This*, 135. Of course
On the other hand, the sources will not permit a full reconstruction of all meanings ascribed to various actions. It seems likely that many ways of interpreting liturgical and ritual acts were never written down, but were instead shared verbally. Those that survive in the extant written sources were intended for a literate and predominantly clerical audience. But the meanings ascribed to liturgical action in these clerical sources would not necessarily remain inaccessible to illiterate laypeople, for the clergy who performed these rituals could share such meanings orally with their non-clerical neighbors. Eamon Duffy summarizes a Latin manual for priests in late medieval England instructing them how to communicate the essentials of doctrine to their English-speaking parishioners during confession. Of course the Middle Eastern context did not have the requirement of annual confession adopted at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, but such instruction could take place informally. The movement of ascribed meanings from clerical texts to clerical readers and from clergy to laity appears as a one-way traffic, but in reality, of course, laypeople were quite capable of generating their own ideas about the significance of specific rituals, and may have influenced local clergy’s understanding of the liturgy in certain cases. Some of these local clergy might have written down such interpretations, although I am not aware of any suggested interpretations being credited to lay interlocutors, but these possibilities suggest that the apparent one-way conceptual traffic would have been more complicated in practice. They also suggest a plausible continuity with difference between clerical and lay understandings of the rituals.

there were social tensions, but they were not written into the liturgical celebrations which sought to present and construct an ordered and peaceful social universe.


31 This continuity with difference was documented for late medieval England by Richard McCall, who summed up, “The popular and the official, at least until the end of the fifteenth century, are poles dynamically united in a semiotic dialectic”: McCall, *Do This*, 21–40, quote from 39. McCall is able to demonstrate, in the case of England, what I can only hypothesize, in the case of Iraq, because of the existence of lay-authored vernacular sources in the former setting which have no parallel in the latter.
The ritual meanings diffused in these ways were not just intellectual curiosities, however; the rituals and their contexts exerted normative pressure on how various participants interpreted them. Attendance at a liturgy implies a certain degree of personal investment in what is transpiring; joining in the ritual responses prescribed for the congregation implies a still greater involvement. But the terms of these rituals were not dictated by autonomous participants independently. Instead, the ritual actions were set by tradition and community structures, so that an average lay Christian would have no more influence over the shape of the liturgy than modern computer users have over the terms of the end-user license agreements which regulate their use of computer software. The ecclesiastical legal system explicitly gave priests the right to exclude individuals from participation in the sacraments if they failed to conform to certain standards of behavior and belief. Although priests might not practice excommunication in every case, social pressures could also encourage a certain kind of conformity to the dominant group practice within the congregation as well. If everyone around is participating in a ritual in a given way, it can be very difficult to abstain from that collective action and the meaning it is widely held to express. Indeed, the fourteenth-century Catholicos Timothy II described how, during the congregational recitation of the Creed, the priest was to be inspecting the congregation to see if any were silent or doubtful: “The priest stands with his face toward the congregation who observes secretly both who is repeating the faith while certain and who also doubtfully, whether with a loud voice or with silence.”

Even for parts of the liturgy performed by the priests, such as the ubiquitous theological prayers in classical Syriac, the congregational response of “Amen”

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implied an affirmation of what was said, and failure to give an “Amen” could be noticed by one’s neighbors. Communal rituals are not merely expressive, but also coercive, which continuously works to reduce the variety and idiosyncrasy of ritual practice and its interpretation.

Given the ubiquity and meaning of ritual action, the liturgies and communal rituals of the Church of the East in the fifteenth century are important sources for the collective self-understanding of this group, even if the interpretation of these sources is challenging. As with the use of theological sources for this purpose, however, it is worth remembering that the goal of this study is not a history of liturgical development, nor even an account of changing ideas regarding the interpretation of the liturgy as a whole. The goal, instead, is to discover what the rituals and their contemporary interpretations, to the degree that they are recoverable, say about ways in which members of the Church of the East understood their community in the fifteenth century. Our evidence for the clergy is most direct, found in the numerous liturgical texts written for and recited by priests, as well as the literary compositions whose audience would have been primarily clerical. Therefore after the reconstructions of the ritual actions, we can most precisely delineate the attested meanings ascribed to the rituals in clerical sources. Lay interpretations prove more elusive, but since lay and clerical interpretations would have been most likely continuous, the clerical interpretations provide some indirect evidence for how laypeople could have understood the rituals. When the concepts presented in clerical sources correlate very clearly with the actions performed or witnessed by the laity, we may suggest probable ways in which the laity too understood the liturgies.

34 Timothy II distinguished between “Amen” and a simple “yes,” glossing the former as “you speak the truth”: Mingana Syr 13, ff. 125a-b. Even if most laypeople would not provide such a formal translation, the affirmative aspect of “Amen” would be more familiar for Middle Eastern Christians, in a linguistic environment where their own Semitic mother tongues (whether Arabic or Neo-Aramaic) possessed cognates, than for Anglophone laypeople.
Participation in the Mysteries

The theological self-reflection of the Church of the East, as discussed in chapter 4, identified many benefits which the community derived from their divine connection. But these theological concepts did not delineate the membership of this community. Many of the benefits discussed were not visible (such as forgiveness of sins or the presence of the Holy Spirit) or not absolute (such as protection in this life), so what guarantee was there that God provided these benefits to real people here and now? The answer given in fifteenth-century Iraq was through the sacraments.

The standard Syriac term for the sacraments was the “mysteries” (_GRAY). Although the mechanics of sacramental theology do not seem to have been spelled out as they were in Latin theology during the medieval period, the concept of a “mystery” was frequently used to refer to something which pointed to a spiritual reality without fully depicting or revealing it. The ecclesiastical sacraments themselves were ordained “with bodily materials since we are bodily,” as Shbadnāyā explained. Systematic thought of the late Mongol period had inclined to enumerate seven sacraments. ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis had listed priesthood, baptism, holy oil, the Eucharist, absolution, holy leaven, and the sign of the cross in his Kthābāh d-Margānīthā.

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35 Shbadnāyā, for example, repeatedly refers to the Sabbath ordinance of the Mosaic law as a “mystery” which signifies “the renewal of the worlds” and “that there is a beginning to creation and an end”: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 141a. This is not to be interpreted as arguing that the sacraments were in any sense merely symbolic. Timothy II argued that the placement of the Eucharistic cup on the right of the consecrating priest “indicates the liver which is placed on the right in the body, and it transforms all foods into blood for the sustenance of the whole body… and concerning the fact that the body and blood receive transformation through the overshadowing of the Spirit, just as food and drink are transformed to blood in the liver” (SHN 1998 Syriac 13, f. 121b).

although in another place the same work identifies marriage as a “mystery” as well.37 Timothy II also enumerated seven “ecclesiastical mysteries,” but his list contained priesthood, the consecration of the altar, baptism, the Eucharist, monastic vows, funerals, and marriage.38 The only items common to these lists are priesthood, baptism, the Eucharist, and marriage, which indicates that the number seven was important, but the other rituals and consecrated items which might make up that number were of secondary importance. The prime importance of baptism and the Eucharist is also shown by the fact that Īshāq Shbadnāyā dedicates sections of his theological magnum opus to those sacraments, but not to any others.39 Although priesthood was necessary for the performance of the sacraments, as will be discussed in chapter 6, yet baptism and the Eucharist were identified as the means by which Christians obtained the theological benefits of their communal relationship with God and Christ.

Baptism: The Mystery of Divine Adoption

Baptism was the sacrament which, at least from a clerical perspective, constituted people as members of the community. Metropolitan Sabrīshōʿ of Hisn-Keyf, in a colophon to a Syriac grammar book copied in 1808 A.G. / 1497, repeatedly referred to “all the sons of the Holy Church.”40 This phrase is significant especially for its occurrence in one of the priest’s prayers for consecrating the Eucharist, which specifies it further: “all the sons of the holy catholic Church, those who have been signed with the living sign of holy baptism.”41 A person must

37 ‘Abdīshōʿ bar Brīkhā, Kithābhā d-methqrē margānithā d-ʿal šhrārā da-khrestyānāthā, ed. Yosip d-Qelayta, 2nd ed. (Mosul: Mṭṭāb’āṯā Āthorāyta d-ʿēdtā ṣattīṯā d-madḥnā, 1924), 32, 44. The holy leaven was a culture kept in the churches and used to make the leavened bread for the Eucharist.
38 Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 5a-b.
40: Paris BN Syr 369, ff. 105b-106b, contains the phrase three times, once without “all.”
41: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 91a.
have been baptized to participate in the Eucharist, which itself was necessary for a person to be commemorated in the church after their death.\textsuperscript{42} If baptism was a boundary marker for communal membership, however, we must ask what is the meaning of the membership which it constituted.

The majority of recipients of baptism were the children of Christians, brought as infants. This is seen even in the baptismal rite itself, where the minister’s prayer presumes that the recipients are “in the age of infancy” and receiving baptism “although they did not ask.”\textsuperscript{43} The minister prays, “In them may bodily stature and spiritual growth spring up together,” which would make no sense for adult recipients.\textsuperscript{44} The presumption that infants receive baptism is strengthened by the fact that the ritual of baptism gives variants for this opening prayer in the case that only one child is being baptized, but gives no variants for the case in which the recipient(s) of baptism are fully grown.\textsuperscript{45} The rubrics for the ritual of baptism later presume that the recipient is carried by the deacon to the priest and back, although variant instructions are given for the case of “a child who walks” and “a man.”\textsuperscript{46} Since there are few records of adult conversions to Christianity in the fifteenth century, and the reception into the community of

\textsuperscript{42} For Timothy II’s assertion that baptism must precede the Eucharist, see Mingana Syr 13, ff. 107a-108b. Shbadnäyā ascribed to earlier authorities the rule according to which “the memorial should be performed for the deceased who had received the medicine of life,” i.e. the Eucharist: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 112b. The necessity of baptism for participation in the Eucharist was enshrined in the command for the unbaptized to depart before the communion in the Eucharistic liturgy (Berlin Sachau 167, f. 81a), and is the reason why Shbadnäyā called the Eucharist “the second grace which is bestowed on the one who trusts” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 111a).

\textsuperscript{43} Berlin Sachau 167, f. 107a, ll. 7-8. \textsuperscript{44} Berlin Sachau 167, f. 107b, l. 3.

\textsuperscript{45} Berlin Sachau 167, f. 107a, ll. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{46} Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 118b-119a.
Christians from other groups did not require baptism, we may presume that the vast majority of baptisms were performed on young children.

The service for baptism, as contained in a fifteenth-century Taksā d-Kāhnē, was rich in symbolic actions. The priest initiated the service outside the baptistery proper by reciting the Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 84, interspersed with prayers, and then laying his hands on the heads of the recipients in turn. After praying for the recipients, he dipped his forefinger in oil and marked a sign of the cross on each recipient’s forehead, the direction being specified from bottom upward and from left to right. Then the priest entered the baptistery (bēth mayā) with a prayer and recited Psalm 85, followed by a presentation of the nature and history of baptism in classical Syriac, which might well have been lost on most of those present. After the priest recited Psalm 110, the deacon would then admonish those gathered to repentance and lead them in prayer, especially for the reigning Catholicos Patriarch and the metropolitan. A few more prayers and hymns preceded the putting of water in the font, although it was not consecrated at this stage. More set prayers intervened, followed by the reading of 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 and John 2:23-3:8. The order of baptism specifies more prayers, while the priest poured some unconsecrated oil into a bowl and placed it on the altar, covered with a cloth.

47 The ritual for the reception of “Jacobites and Melkites who become Christian,” contained in a manuscript dated October 7, 1870 A.G. / 1558, mentions that the individual was marked with the sign of the cross “with the oil which is in the horn of baptism” and afterward is said to be “signed and sanctified with the holy oil of baptism for the true faith in Christ” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 80b). No mention is made of water, however, so it appears that the anointing with oil took the place of a full baptism.

48 The following summary is extracted from Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 106b-121a.

49 The text of Berlin Sachau 167 here presumes multiple recipients, although it gives variant instructions to cover the case of a single baptizand. It is unclear whether the presumption of multiple recipients implies that baptisms in most communities happened once a year, presumably on the evening before Easter, rather than a fixed number of days after birth. This also seems to be the implication of Shbadnāyā citing Ishō’yahb III “that they should baptize at the end of the Fast,” i.e. Lent: Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 80b. In the fifteenth century, Ishō’yahb III was believed to be the author of the baptismal liturgy: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 106b. On the other hand, practice might well have varied on the question whether baptisms were done at a fixed time annually or individually.

50 Timothy II presumed in his commentary that every time the sign of the Cross was made, it should be right to left, in the order opposite to that presented here: Timothy II, Mystery of Baptism, 76–79.
With the elements now in place, the consecration of the oil and the water began with the Creed, apparently but not certainly recited by the congregation. The priest then consecrated the oil by reciting a prayer inaudibly, followed by making the sign of the cross upon himself, removing the cloth covering the oil, and making the sign of the cross over the oil, while having a brief call and response exchange with the congregation, who affirmed (in classical Syriac) their mental orientation toward God and that performing the ritual is right. After that affirmation the priest again recited an inaudible prayer, followed by audible prayers and two more signs of the cross over the oil, the second time using previously consecrated holy oil. The Lord’s Prayer was then recited, evidently by the congregation, and then the priest consecrated the water in the baptismal font with another inaudible prayer and two signs of the Cross, once without and once with the old holy oil, announcing afterwards the completion of the water’s consecration.

The recipients of baptism were then presented naked to the priest by the deacon, and he marked them with the newly consecrated oil in the sign of the cross using three fingers, making the cross from the top downward and from right to left, and then anointed each recipient’s whole body with oil. Then he immersed the recipient in water three times, after which he laid his hand upon the recipient’s head and announced that the recipient “is baptized in the name of the Father, Amen, and the Son, Amen, and the Holy Spirit forever, Amen.” While the priest was actively baptizing, the congregation was supposed to be reciting certain hymns “so that they will not be

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51 The order simply says “they add: ‘We believe…’” (قَبِلَتُمْ بِمَأْمُولٍ مُّصَدِّمٍ) without specifying the subject: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 114b. With reference to the Eucharistic service, Timothy II specified that the congregation recited the Creed together as a prerequisite for partaking in communion: Mingana Syr. 13, f. 123a. Timothy’s evidence, of course, is for a period before the fifteenth century, and it is impossible to know what proportion of each congregation in different regions participated in reciting the Creed, or how they interpreted its classical Syriac phrases.

52 The order simply says “they answer: ‘Our Father who is in heaven…’” (خَلَّصْ نَفْسِي، وَجَعَلْنِي صِرَّةً) without specifying the subject: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 117a.

53: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 118b.
Each recipient was then handed to the deacon and carried (or, in the case of older children and adults, led by the deacon) to the edge of the chancel, where the recipient was entrusted to a sponsor, an adult other than the child’s parents who assumed responsibility for the child. When all were baptized they put on new garments. More prayers and hymns followed, and the priest again marked all of the recipients of baptism with the sign of the cross, this time using his thumb, in the direction specified as from above downwards and from right to left, and again announced the baptism of each by name. The recipients of baptism then received their first Eucharist, while a long list of hymns kept the congregation occupied. The ceremony ended with the priest adding the newly consecrated oil to the old holy oil (with excess that would not fit in the oil container being scrubbed into the consecrated water), putting his hand into the consecrated water, and “seizing it violently like one who wrests something from it,” after which the water may be poured out.

Clerical discussions of baptism presented it as the means by which God granted to individual Christians the theological benefits derived from the community’s divine connection. Although a priest performed the necessary ritual actions and prayers, the actor in baptism was supposed to be understood to be Christ himself. The baptismal service used passive constructions identifying the recipient of each stage of baptism: “(Name) is signed,” “(Name) is anointed,” and “(Name) is baptized.” Timothy II made explicit that the reason for the passive voice was to emphasize that “the sign is not of the priest but of his Lord and that he is a mediator

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54 Berlin Sachau 167, f. 118a.
55 Patriarch Timothy II recorded that this third sign of the cross should be bottom upwards: Timothy II, Mystery of Baptism, 72–73. The patriarch explicitly indicated a diversity of practice by mentioning that some people performed this third signing of the recipient of baptism with the forefinger rather than the thumb in the case of children, and in the case of women some used the forefinger (as for children) and others the thumb (as for men): ibid., 74–75.
56 Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 120b-121a.
57 Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 107b, 118b.
who is elected by (His) mercy to serve." The orientation of the infant being presented for baptism was also glossed in the baptismal service itself to indicate that the priest was not the source of the sacrament: “the face of the one being baptized is to the east and to the Cross and to the Gospel, because from there he receives the grace of adoption, and not toward the priest.”

All of the benefits obtained by Christians from God could be ascribed to baptism. Shbadnāyā began his poetic section on Christian baptism, “Baptism is the spring of all good things for the steadfast one.” He went on to enumerate many benefits derived from baptism. The forgiveness of sins for which Christ died is granted to Christians first in baptism: “It’s the help of our weakness which it pledges through forgiveness.” Later Shbadnāyā revisited the theme: “It’s the wiping away of that primeval sin and the purifier.” Just as Christ’s death accomplished not only forgiveness of sins but also liberation from the “slavery of sin,” the inescapability of sinning, so baptism grants freedom from sin: “It’s the key of the kingdom on high and the abolisher of slavery.” In Shbadnāyā’s understanding, the fall of humanity from perfection was reversed by baptism: “It’s the raising upright again of the fallen.”

58. Shbadnāyā, Mystery of Baptism, 82–83.
60. Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 92a. Cf. Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 79b. This interpretation of baptism existed in tension, however, with the standard age of baptism being infancy, because infants were widely considered to be free from sin. Shbadnāyā quoted Ābhā Marqūs to raise this issue. The earlier author’s answer is not fully clear in this quotation, but seems to emphasize the grace of God, while Shbadnāyā adds the caveat of universal condemnation to death for Adam’s transgression: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 94a-b. Timothy II defended both the theory of baptism as granting forgiveness and the practice of baptizing infants by appealing to the concept of baptism as liberation, since the children of slaves were also enslaved, and by appealing to the impropriety, in light of baptism’s adoptive function, of calling slaves of sin “sons of God”: Timothy II, Mystery of Baptism, 94–97.
delights… The composition of new transformation it effects and is the justifier." The Holy Spirit’s residence in individual Christians was likewise initiated at their baptism, which could therefore be called “the bestower of the Spirit.” Shbadnāyā even ascribed to baptism the power to make humans like God: “It’s the immersion and anointing and thus the deifier.”

Other aspects of baptism were understood based on the biblical accounts of the baptism of Christ, which was taken as the clearest model of Christian baptism in the New Testament. Thus Shbadnāyā explained that the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in baptism (as recorded in Matthew 3:16 and parallel texts) was for the purpose of demonstrating the giving of the Spirit to Christians in baptism: “It was not that the fountain of holinesses [i.e. Christ] needed the Spirit’s consecration, / He whom the lauded Spirit filled at the beginning of his formation [i.e. conception], / But that the granting of the bestower is for the one who puts on the garment of baptism.” The biblical account mentions that at Christ’s baptism “the heavens were opened,” which according to Shbadnāyā was in order “to show you that the epiphanal sacrament is heavenly / And that also to heaven the Spirit is raising you.” Shbadnāyā also quoted the interpretation of the eighth-century author Theodore bar Kūnāy, who interpreted the declaration of the heavenly voice at Christ’s baptism, “This is my Son, in whom I am pleased,” as indicating not that God became pleased with Jesus at that time, “but that we may obtain the persuasion of faith, that in us also when we are baptized the Father is pleased with us, and the Holy Spirit rests

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66 For more quotations on the relationship between baptism and the Holy Spirit, see the section on the Holy Spirit in Chapter 4.
67 Shbadnāyā also used it with reference to the Eucharist (see below, fn. 127).
68 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 80a. “Deification” seems to have been a less common concept in East Syrian reflection on salvation than the corresponding Greek notion of θεώσις in Greek Orthodox soteriology, but Shbadnāyā also used it with reference to the Eucharist (see below, fn. 127).
The biblical account of Christ’s baptism provided grist for the conceptual mill of Christian baptism.

The dominant understandings of baptism in clerical sources, however, were the images of new birth (maulādhā 'd-men d-rēsh) and of adoption (sīmath bnayā). The former image was explicitly used by Shbadnāyā in his poem: baptism “is the new birth, the renewer and unifier.” Shbadnāyā also quoted John Penkāyā’s assertion, “Those who in the sacrament of the holy Trinity are baptized in the knowledge of the truth, the womb of grace receives them like new infants and in the image of Christ they are born with the birth of the new world.” Shbadnāyā also expressed baptism as a womb: “It’s the spiritual womb for the one being born again.” These images recur in the priest’s prayers for the baptismal service itself, where the recipients “will be born with a new and spiritual birth.” Timothy II had even given “birth” as one of the names of the sacrament. The New Testament foundation for the concept of spiritual rebirth was John 3:1-8, cited by Penkāyā in the portion quoted by Shbadnāyā, and read during the baptismal service itself.

The less organic and more familiar metaphor of adoption also loomed large in clerical discussions of baptism. During the baptismal service, the priest would pray regarding the sacrament “which is given for the completion of adoption.” Ishāq Shbadnāyā identified the adoptive function of baptism as the purpose for which Christ underwent baptism: Jesus “first

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75. Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 91a; Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 113a-b.
received baptism as the beginning of the granting of adoption.”

In a list of different varieties of baptism throughout history, Shbadnāyā summarized Christian baptism as “this which we baptize, this which our Life-giver [i.e. Christ] entrusted to his Church, by which we gain entrance into the household of the Trinity.”

Timothy II had earlier, in a similar but different list, included Christian baptism under the heading “that of our Lord, which is (a baptism) of adoption of sons through water and the Spirit.” By means of baptism, humans would become members of God’s family, therefore finding themselves under divine protection and patronage.

The metaphors of re-birth and adoption are both metaphors of inception, and it is in light of this initiatory character of baptism that the sacrament was also presented as a doorway granting entrance into the Church, with the building standing for the community. Shbadnāyā ascribed to Christ’s baptism the purpose to “prepare for us an open door,” and later quoted Ishō’dād of Merv saying, “this [baptism] of his, [Christ] opened as a door to his Church.” This entrance into the Church community conferred not only social membership, but also access to

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78 This statement could be understood to suggest that Jesus himself was adopted by God, but such a view would be at odds with Shbadnāyā’s Christology as expressed elsewhere, for example immediately above this quotation where he says that Jesus “did not need to be baptized” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 79b). Instead, the notion seems to be that, just as Jesus was the Son of God, so in baptism we become identified with him and therefore become children of God. Shbadnāyā ascribes an explanation along these lines to the authoritative interpreter Theodore of Mopsuestia: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 83b-84a.

79 Timothy II had also identified “a household relationship with God” (Mystery of Baptism, vii, 4–5). Kadicheeni gave an intellectual genealogy for the concept, but taking the meaning of the ambiguous term bayā‘ūyāhā as “household-relationship” fits better with the pervasive emphasis on adoption.

80 Adoption of believers by God is a Pauline theme in the New Testament (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5), but curiously none of these passages are typically cited in late medieval East Syrian discussions of baptism as adoption. Perhaps the reason for the omission is the lack of other baptismal elements in these passages, perhaps indeed hindered by the future tense of the adoption in Romans 8:23.


82 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 89a.
the recurring sacrament of the Eucharist, and both senses might be implicit in Shbadnāyā’s designation of baptism as “the granter of communion.”

It is unclear how much of this clerical understanding of baptism would have been communicated to the laity. For most laypeople, no doubt, the precise shifts in direction and finger used to mark the different signs of the cross would have passed unnoticed, and it is unlikely that the divergences in practice on these points would have had a significant impact in how the ritual was understood. The inaudible prayers of the celebrating priests would likewise not affect the lay understanding directly, although the performance of chanting inaudible to the laity might communicate that there is something mysterious about the sacrament. The purifying function of baptism could easily be understood from the washing in water and the new garments put on after baptism, while its role in granting spiritual life might be communicated by its proximity and assimilation to birth and by the recipients’ immediate participation in the Eucharist. The understanding of baptism as adoption into the family of God might be symbolized by the sponsor’s role in place of the parents in receiving the child after baptism.

Nevertheless, baptism’s role as the gate into the church community would be the most readily understood, given the presumably universal practice of baptism among Christians and its necessity in order to participate in the Eucharist and other communal rituals.

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84. Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 92b. This rare noun means something that grants ( communion, in both senses of human sharing and the Eucharist.

85. Perhaps the most significant divergence in practice is the difference, noted by Timothy II, between those priests who administer the final sign of the Cross to women as to children and those who administer it to women as to men: Timothy II, Mystery of Baptism, 74–75. This could indicate and encourage conceptual assimilation of women to juveniles or to men, an important distinction. But the effect of this divergence of practice would be mitigated by the rarity of administering baptism to adults, whether women or men, since most recipients of baptism were infants.

86. Timothy II mentioned that “the sponsors make themselves responsible to the priest for those who are receiving baptism that (the candidates) will be without blemish in their services and in all their conduct” ( ibid., 80–81. It is unclear whether verbal pledges were required during the baptismal service itself, but if so, these pledges are not mentioned in the order of baptism contained in Berlin Sachau 167.)
Eucharist: The Body and Blood of Christ

Baptism was to be received only once, and was enacted only as often as the community welcomed new members into its ranks. The Eucharist, however, was consecrated every Sunday at least, and the order of the ritual presumes that all present will partake of the communion on every occasion.\(^{87}\) There were three different anaphoras for consecrating the Eucharist, ascribed respectively to “the apostles Addai and Mari,” to Theodore “the Interpreter,” and to Nestorius, although the ritual actions involved seem to have been shared between them.\(^{88}\) But the Eucharist functioned differently than baptism in constituting the membership of the Church of the East.

While baptism was an all-or-nothing step, the frequency and the complexity of the Eucharistic liturgies might permit different degrees and overlapping definitions of membership.

According to Timothy II, the Sunday service was typically to be observed at the third hour of the day, 9 A.M.\(^{89}\) The clergy put on decorated vestments\(^{90}\) while the curtain which veiled the chancel from the sight of the laity was closed.\(^{91}\) After drawing aside the curtain, the clergy proceeded from the chancel at the front of the church to the bema in the middle carrying

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\(^{87}\) Indeed, a deacon would announce that those who would not receive communion should depart before the consecration: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 81a. Christians in Iraq did not experience the restriction of almost all lay communion to Easter, as occurred in Western Europe after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215: McCall, Do This, 29.

\(^{88}\) An edition of the oldest extant text of this anaphora, along with a discussion of the later sources and some later developments, is given in William F. Macomber, “The Oldest Known Text of the Anaphora of the Apostles Addai and Mari,” Orientalia Christiana Periodica 32 (1966): 335–71. A critical edition based on more manuscripts is given by A. Gelston, The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). It is to be regretted that both editions give solely the spoken texts and include none of the accompanying actions, and they begin partway into the sacramental liturgy in order to only give prayers which are specific to this anaphora as opposed to the others. Both editions also exclude the additional prayers which had been inserted into the anaphora by the fifteenth century, which are found in Berlin Sachau 167. By contrast, there is no critical edition of the anaphoras of Theodore of Mopsuestia or of Nestorius, although an edition for use was printed by the Anglican Mission in Urmiia, from which an English translation was printed in London: Liturgia sanctorum apostolorum Adaei et Marii: cui accedunt duae aliae in quibusdam festis et feris dicendae: necnon ordo baptismi (Urmiia: Archbishop of Canterbury’s Mission, 1890); The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles Adai and Mari (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1893).

\(^{89}\) Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 114b-115a.

\(^{90}\) The most detailed descriptions of the late medieval vestments can be found in Timothy II’s commentary: Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 115b-117a, 119b.

\(^{91}\) This narration is derived from Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 77a-97a, with clarifications derived from Timothy II’s commentary as found in Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 114a-136a.
the Cross. After a prayer, the priest would put incense on the censers of the deacons, who would presumably use the censers to fill the air with incense, and then a few more prayers by the priests and deacons would precede the readings. A designated reader would read from the Old Testament from the *bema* while the clergy sat, followed by a deacon reading from the Apostle lectionary. After the reading from the Apostle, the clergy stood while psalms were being chanted and proceeded to the gate of the chancel, where a priest would put on a humeral veil and pick up the Gospel lectionary to read. The deacons would add incense, and then the priest would read the Gospel passage for that week, followed by a deacon’s admonition to the congregation to bow their heads and by additional prayers.\(^{92}\) This concluded what liturgists label the “Liturgy of the Word,” focused on reading scripture passages.\(^{93}\)

The “Liturgy of the Sacrament” began with the deacons entering the altar area while proclaiming that everyone should depart “who has not taken baptism,” “who has not received the sign of life,” or “who is not partaking.”\(^{94}\) It is most likely at this point the chancel curtain was closed, concealing the clergy within, although their prayers would still have been audible.\(^{95}\) While the priest recited a hymn, the sacristan and the deacon would place a plate of bread and a cup of wine on the altar. The priest crossed his arms to take hold of the cup with his right hand and the plate with his left while praying, and when he finished he covered the Eucharistic

\(^{92}\) Timothy II inserted between the Gospel reading and the deacon’s admonition, “Bow your heads,” a reference to a *tūrgāmā* and two *kārōzwāṭā* (sing. *kārōzwāţā*) which are not mentioned by Berlin Sachau 167: Mingana Syr. 13, f. 120a. It could be that they were not practiced in the fifteenth century, or that they were practiced but not mentioned. Timothy II also indicates that the Cross and the Gospel were carried by deacons from the *bema* to the chancel gate, which implies that the Gospel was read by the priest on the *bema*: Mingana Syr. 13, f. 120b. Berlin Sachau 167, however, leaves ambiguous where the Gospel was read, only indicating in passing that the priest gave the Cross and the Gospel to the deacons on f. 80a.

\(^{93}\) Medieval East Syrian sources do not indicate a break between the “Liturgy of the Word” and the “Liturgy of the Sacrament.”

\(^{94}\) It is unclear that anyone actually departed at this time, although various sources repeatedly make clear that only baptized Christians were to receive the Eucharist.

\(^{95}\) The point at which the chancel curtain was drawn closed is not specified in any fifteenth-century source I have found, but Timothy II mentions the unrolling of the veil to conceal the altar after explaining the deacon’s admonition for the unbaptized to depart: Mingana Syr. 13, f. 121a.
elements with a towel. Then the chancel curtain was withdrawn and the priest moved to the
bema in the center of the church, bowing down on each of its four sides and then being greeted
by the whole congregation and by the deacons in turn. The Creed was recited next, probably
by the whole congregation, after which the priest hurriedly entered the chancel. Then the
deacon would lead the congregation in a litany of prayers, with a set congregational response
after each item.

While the litany was going on, the priest would solicit prayers from the other clergy who
had joined him around the altar, and would then bow repeatedly before the altar while repeating
multiple prayers and kissing the middle and corners of the altar itself. The priest would
evidently perform a series of genuflections and would kiss the altar in the middle and on both
near corners, exchange prayers with the other clergy, and then repeat the genuflections and kisses
of the altar while the deacon led the congregation in another litany. The priest was instructed
to leave the chancel and interrupt the litany at a certain point, adding his prayers to those of the
deacon for the acceptability of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and then the priest would return to the
chancel, genuflect again, and pray inaudibly until the litany was completed. Upon its

96 Timothy II mentioned the priest washing his hands before leaving the chancel, although Berlin Sachau 167 does
not mention it. The nature of the greeting was also recorded by Timothy II as kissing the priest’s hand: Mingana Syr.
13, ff. 122a-b.
97 Timothy II made very explicit that the whole congregation recited the Creed with the priest watching: Mingana Syr.
13, ff. 123a-b. Berlin Sachau 167, f. 82b, indicates that the priest “raises his hands upward and cries out with
his whole voice and says” the Creed (βασιλιας θεος θανατον, ἔρημος ἀγίου, ἐνλύομαι ἱδρύομαι), but does not indicate whether
the congregation joined in the recitation or not.
98 Timothy II recorded that two deacons should here read the diptychs, namely a series of prayers for the living and
the dead, and for the hierarchy: Mingana Syr. 13, f. 124a-b. Berlin Sachau 167 makes no mention of them, which
may be due either to the lapse of the practice, or to the fact that it is a ritual book for the priest rather than for the
deacons. The former possibility may be indicated by the fossilization of the diptychs as used in the patriarchal
residence at the village of Karamfish east of Mosul in the late fourteenth century: Jean M. Fiey, “Diptyques
99 After the completion of the litanies, according to Timothy II, the priest was to distribute to the deacons the
makhshānyāthā (sing. makhshānīthā), a sort of pole with a silver fan on top, to which were attached little bells to
make tinkling noises to indicate “the flapping of angels with their wings” (στήχος ΜΑΧΘΑΝΘΑ): Mingana Syr.
13, f. 124b.
clergy, and then praying softly so as to be heard by the clergy but not the congregation.\textsuperscript{100} After this he would cross himself with his hand spread open toward the congregation,\textsuperscript{101} raising his hand above his forehead until the fingers are visible above his head, and moving his hand from beyond one shoulder to beyond the other; the scribe of the Taksā d-Kānhē indicates that this exaggerated sign of the cross was meant to include the congregation, who then responded to his prayer with “Amen.”\textsuperscript{102} A set dialogue between the priest and the congregation, each wishing peace to the other, then followed, and then another litany of prayers led by the deacon during which the priest approached the altar and prayed silently.

After the priest removed the towel covering the Eucharistic elements, another dialogue between priest and congregation repeated the set phrases indicating a mental focus on God as the recipient of the offering, but again in classical Syriac, followed by the priest saying a prayer while adding incense to a deacon’s censer. Then he stretched out his hands and prayed inaudibly for a time, but finishing loudly so that the congregation could respond in Syriac, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord almighty, heaven and earth are filled with his praises.” The priest continued with alternately audible and inaudible prayers, making the sign of the Cross over the Eucharistic elements at intervals. Finally he would spread out his hands\textsuperscript{103} and repeat a prayer three times, and then lift up a loaf of consecrated bread called būkrā (“first-born”). The priest prayed for

\textsuperscript{100} Berlin Sachau 167 records that some priests say this prayer silently, while others pray it loudly so as to be heard by the congregation, but the scribe rejects both: Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 86a-b.

\textsuperscript{101} Berlin Sachau 167, f. 87a, specifies the hand’s direction as “with the face of his hand being to the west” (مَيْتَنُ، مَيْتَنُ، مَيْتَنُ، مَيْتَنُ). but since medieval East Syrian churches were oriented with the chancel at the east end of the building, this implies that the hand is open toward the congregation. Fiey gave a “typical” plan of an East Syrian church oriented toward the East, but then did not mark the directions on the plans of actual East Syrian churches in Mosul: J. M Fiey, Mossoul chrétienne; essai sur l’histoire, l’archéologie et l’état actuel des monuments chrétiens de la ville de Mossoul, Recherches publiées sous la direction de l’Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth t. 12 (Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique, 1959), Pl. II, IV–VI. Nevertheless, the churches of Mār ʿĪshaʾ yā, Mār Shemʾōn al-Ṣafā, and Mārt Meskintā are all oriented toward the East.

\textsuperscript{102} The specification that the fingers be visible above his head probably indicates that his back is toward the congregation, although the point is not specified. Timothy II says that the priest is “not looking toward the people” (لا َلَى َتَبَحْرُ َرَفْقَ َلَّهُ): Mingana Syr 13, f. 126a-b.

\textsuperscript{103} Berlin Sachau 167, f. 92a, records that some say the priest should fold his hands at this point.
the loaf, kissed it on four sides,\textsuperscript{104} lifted it above his eyes, and broke it into two parts. Setting down the part in his left hand, he made the sign of the Cross horizontally over the Eucharistic cup with the part in his right hand, moving from east to west and then north to south, and finally he dipped a third of the loaf into the wine in the cup. He then used the same piece of bread to make the sign of the cross horizontally over the rest of the bread, and then picking up both broken pieces of bread he fit them back together and prayed. He then arranged the bread on the plate again in a shape approximating a cross, after which he made the sign of the Cross over the deacons, folded his hands, and prayed, before bowing down to the altar and then kissing it. He made the sign of the Cross over himself and then prayed inaudibly while breaking up the consecrated loaf, while the deacon addressed the congregation in classical Syriac regarding the proper attitude with which to receive communion.

The Eucharistic elements having now been fully prepared, a loud prayer from the priest preceded the repetition of the Lord’s Prayer by the congregation, after which the priest again prayed inaudibly, raising his voice for the final “and forever and ever,” during which he made the sign of the Cross over himself and the deacons in the chancel responded with “Amen.” A set dialogue between the priest and the congregation included wishing each other peace and a statement by the congregation that each of the Trinitarian persons is holy. While the congregation sang a hymn, the priest gave the bread to one deacon and the cup to another, whereupon the clergy exited the chancel and the priest blessed the congregation, who responded, “Forever and ever, Amen.” The clergy partook of communion, followed by the congregation,\textsuperscript{105} with the priest serving the bread and the deacon the wine, with set phrases to say to each recipient in turn according to the recipient’s ecclesiastical rank. After everyone had partaken, the

\textsuperscript{104} Timothy II specified that the priest kissed the loaf three times: Mingana Syr 13, f. 129b.
\textsuperscript{105} Timothy II made explicit that the consecrating priest received the Eucharist first: Mingana Syr 13, f. 132a-b.
priest closed with a long prayer invoking God’s blessings on the various groups of people represented in the congregation, from clergy and rulers to parents, the elderly, children, and teenagers.  

This was clearly a long and complex ritual, although enacted very frequently, and yet the liturgical prayers recited by the priest performing this ritual consistently portrayed the Eucharist as a sacrifice of atonement for the recipients’ sins, if celebrated rightly. The atoning aspect of the Eucharistic offering is mentioned on no fewer than seventeen occasions during each liturgy according to the order given in Berlin Sachau 167.  

The sacrament was related to the saving death of Christ both as a commemoration and as an offering of Christ’s same body and blood which were sacrificed previously for salvation: “May Christ, who was sacrificed for our salvation and commanded us to make the memorial of his death and of his burial and of his resurrection, receive this sacrifice from our hands in his kindness and his mercies forever, Amen,” and the Eucharist is “the commemoration of the body and the blood of your Christ which we offer to you on your pure and holy altar.”  

For a composite text which developed over several centuries, the Eucharistic liturgy expressed a surprisingly univocal concern for the forgiveness of sins.

The emphasis on atonement in the liturgical prayers is probably partly due to the fear that the offering, if conducted unworthily, would instead provoke condemnation, and therefore the

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106 Timothy II included additional hymns, prayers, and congregational responses between the distribution of the Eucharistic elements and the closing prayer: Mingana Syr 13, ff. 134a-135a.
107 Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 77a, 81a, 81b, 82a, 85a, 88a, 88b, 91a-b, 92a, 92b, 93b, 94a, 95a (twice), 96a (twice), 97b.
109: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 89b. Christ’s incarnation already “forgave our debts and made righteous our sinfulness” according to an inaudible prayer: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 89b. Cf. the prayer over the incense at Berlin Sachau 167, f. 88a. Although early modern European debates would divide those who held that the Eucharist was (merely) commemorative from those who believed that it was an offering of Christ’s body and blood, these debates should not be imposed upon late medieval Iraqi Christians to imply tensions which need not have been felt at that time.
priest prayed, “May it not be to us for judgment or for vengeance.” But the difference between atonement and judgment was not determined by the technically correct performance of the ritual, but rather by God’s grace. This divine mercy not only forgives sins but also chose Christians to be members of the community: “May your mercies and your grace be for the forgiveness of the debts of all the sheep of your flock which you chose for yourself by your kindness and your mercies, Lord of all.” God’s compassion might even be personified as making Jesus incarnate in a priest’s prayer: “Glory to the eternal mercies which sent you to us, Christ.” Most importantly, however, it is God’s grace which made the clergy worthy to offer an efficacious sacrifice on behalf of whole church. The other clergy pray for the priest consecrating the Eucharist, “May Christ… receive your offering by the kindness of his grace.” Indeed, the notion of “worthiness” was invoked over a dozen times in each Sunday service, and in almost every case as a verb where the agent is God making the priest worthy to perform the sacrament or the congregation worthy to receive it. Thus the liturgical setting of the Eucharist wove a tightly knit web of references to Christ’s kindness enabling unworthy priests to perform the sacrament in order to effect atonement, which was accomplished by Christ’s death on the Cross, on behalf of the particular people who received the sacrament.

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110 Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 94b-95a. The concern regarding the adverse affects of unworthy communion is ultimately derived from 1 Corinthians 11:27 and 29: “Therefore whoever eats of the bread of the Lord and drinks from his cup, and is not worthy of it, is guilty of the blood of the Lord and of his body… For whoever eats and drinks while not worthy, it is judgment for himself that he eats and drinks, since he did not discern the body of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

111 Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 80a, 80b, 83b, 90a, 90b-91a.

112 Berlin Sachau 167, f. 79b.

113 Berlin Sachau 167, f. 82b.

114 Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 79b, 80a, 80b, 82a, 84a, 84b, 85a, 86b, 87b, 90b, 91b, 94a, 94b, 95a, 97b.
By contrast to this relatively tight liturgical focus on atonement, Īṣḥāq Shbdnāyā deployed a wider range of metaphors for the Eucharist. He of course also presented the Eucharist as granting forgiveness of sins, even “the destruction of sin and the renewal of perfection.” But he more frequently uses the image of scouring away the stains from a dish to characterize the removal of sins by sacrament: “It’s the wiping away of sins and blemishes and debts and lightens the load,” and “The filth of stains it scourgs, cleanses, enlightens, purifies. / It’s the astringency of the rust of sins and the furnace melting, renewing, forging.” Purification imagery for the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood is also described as “sprinkling,” presumably by analogy with animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. In Shbdnāyā’s poetry, the sacrament is the “sprinkling of living blood” and “the sprinkling which purifies and purges.” The Eucharist is about forgiveness in Shbdnāyā’s understanding as well.

But Shbdnāyā’s Eucharist also gives spiritual life. It is the “bread of life that crowns” given by Christ: “Life to the eternal ones was conferred by the one ascending on high.” The image of the Eucharist as the “bread of life” was derived from John 6:35 and 48, where Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.” This New Testament background is confirmed by Shbdnāyā’s description of the result of communion as “the giving of life in oneself,” echoing John 6:53: “Unless you eat the body of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in

119 Compare, for instance, Lev. 4:17; 14:7; and Num. 19:12-13, 18. For a New Testament appropriation of the image as narrated in Exod. 24:8, which may have mediated the use of the sacrificial parallel in this case, see Hebr. 9:19-22; 10:22.
yourselves.” Shbadnāyā unites this life-giving function with the sprinkling of sacrificial blood as well: “The sprinkling of living blood and drinking it causes one to drink life.” This life-giving function of the sacrament is described in nutritive terms in a quotation of Yōḥannān bar Penkāyā included in Shbadnāyā’s prose commentary: “This is the nourishment which the grace of the Spirit feeds you when it gives birth to you, the living body of Christ. And this is the sweet drink which it gives you to drink, the precious blood of our Lord Jesus.” More than simply the removal of a barrier to spiritual life, the Eucharist is seen to be the source of spiritual life.

Since the life given in the Eucharist was understood as eternal life, Shbadnāyā painted a picture of the eternal life in the world to come as bestowed by participation in the sacrament. He picked up the notion of the Eucharist as true food and drink bringing its partakers into eternity: “Spiritual eating and drinking which carries into the Kingdom.” The eternal endurance of spiritual life is represented in the Eucharist: “The continuance of life it displays to those who are pure and being deified.” In light of the adoption given in baptism, the Eucharist “accomplishes the inheritance of adoption for the one who has refined the heart… / While giving

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124 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 90b. One intercession in the Eucharistic consecration referred to the sacrament as “nourishment of the whole world” (كسرتْ أَنْذَهُمْ وَفَكَرَتْ عَلَى ُذَهَبُهُمْ) in addition to the more typical atonement: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 92a.
125 The epiclesis included a prayer that the Eucharist might be “for a great hope of the resurrection from the place of the dead, and for new life in the kingdom of heaven” (كسرتْ أَنْذَهُمْ وَفَكَرَتْ عَلَى ُذَهَبُهُمْ) in addition to the more typical reference to atonement: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 91b, repeated on p.93b. This recurs in a slightly modified form on f. 95a, but in all three places the reference to resurrection and eternal life is immediately preceded by the typical reference to atonement and forgiveness.
even blessedness and causing one to ascend above the heavens.”

As baptism was presented as the door to the Church, so the Eucharist could be portrayed as making heaven accessible: “It opens the door of the bridal chamber of the kingdom before those who receive it, and it gathers.”

The heavenly bridal chamber was also a wedding banquet, and the Eucharist furnished the Christian with appropriately festive attire: “Clothing of (decoration/festal garments) which raises to the (mountain/upper city) it provides.”

The inheritance and clothing metaphors could be combined in a single line as well: “Immortality it makes the mortals inherit and enrobes them.” It provides for all the requirements of the future age: “Lacklessness in the world of light it accomplishes and assures.”

The Eucharist provides an eschatological guarantee in the here and now.

In addition to being a source of life, the Eucharist is attributed various other benefits by Shbadnāyā. The benefits could be described in vague terms, perhaps to encourage readers to fill in many possibilities: It is “the cup of comforts, removing grievous things” and “Partaking of it...”
enriches and makes triumphant the one who trusts in it.”

Christ “depicted his death sacramentally and uses similes as a type. / The (band/crowd) of the disciples he (met/gathered), and entrusted with the deposit of his love.”

Subsequent lines clarify that the “deposit of his love” is nothing other than the “sacrament of his body,” communion, which thus becomes a vehicle for the expression of God’s kindness toward the community. Shbadnāyā also gave the sacrament a psychological function of assuring the believer of the truth of the theological promises. Officially, he took a hard line on doubt: “Those doubting of heart, it blackens their faces in judgment and reproaches” while “It’s the second grace which is bestowed on the one who trusts.” On the other hand, the poem exhorted its readers, “Take a confirmed hope,” and the sacrament “grants uncovered faces in the confidence of Jesus toward God.” Thus it could be an aid to faith among those who already partly trusted. Finally, Shbadnāyā quoted Yōḥannān bar Penkāyā’s description of the physical as well as spiritual curative properties of the sacrament: “The body of Christ is spiritual medicine... by which the sufferings and pains of the body and the soul are healed.”

Unlike the liturgy, Shbadnāyā presented manifold meanings and benefits of the sacramental body and blood of Christ.

Our sketch of lay concepts of the Eucharist, as with baptism, must again be somewhat tentative. For those who partook of the body and blood of Christ, the emphasis on the forgiveness of sins could be tied to the article of the Creed where Christ “was crucified for us,”

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and the petition for forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer. It is less clear how much the liturgy’s insistence on the necessity of God’s grace to cover the unworthiness of the priest and the congregation would have communicated. It seems likely that lay understandings of the Eucharist would have enumerated additional benefits of communion, as did Shbadnāyā, and the association of food with sustaining life could easily lead laypeople to share some of the theologian’s ideas regarding the nourishing properties of the mystical meal, even if some of his specific eschatological conceptions would have remained inaccessible. The additional benefits which Shbadnāyā identified, such as strengthening faith and granting healing, might well attach to the Eucharist as the central ritual of Christian communal life.

But the ritual surrounding the Eucharist also opened doors for various definitions of lay membership. As the central communal ritual of the Church of the East, membership could be defined by participation, but participation could come in various ways. Individuals might choose whether to receive the Eucharist or not. Individuals might also choose independently how much to participate in the congregational responses prescribed by the liturgy, or even at what point before or during the liturgy to arrive. The result could be that some members of the community received baptism, and occasionally show up for the Eucharist, but otherwise do not engage in religious rituals, while others do not partake of the sacraments directly but by their continuous presence and congregational participation indicate a non-sacramental membership in the community. In other words, the sacraments provide a certain definition of full membership, but the complexity of the rituals and congregational participation provide for wide margins of membership and involvement. The many different modes of affiliation in this gray zone were not necessarily hierarchically ordered, for people might disagree on whether someone who

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141 Although most East Syrian laypeople had undergone baptism involuntarily as infants, someone who grew up outside of the community would have the choice whether to associate with the community through baptism or only through attendance.
consistently appears just in time to receive the Eucharist was more or less a member of the community than someone who is unable to receive the Eucharist, but who is always present reciting the congregational responses. The liturgical celebration of the Eucharist provided for multiple bounded definitions of membership which did not necessarily line up, or which could be made to disagree if desired, thus softening the hard edges of sacramental participation into a broader penumbra of communal boundaries.

For Everything There is a Season

There were communal rituals in addition to the sacraments. The importance of the sacraments lies in the fact that they linked individual believers to the theological understanding of the community, but they were not necessarily the rituals which most deeply affected everyday life, especially for the laity. Additional rituals were prescribed to mark the stages of life, in the form of weddings and funerals, while other rites were tied to the annual liturgical calendar which structured the ecclesiastical year. On the one hand, these additional rituals broadened the penumbra brought about by the Eucharistic liturgy, enabling additional possibilities for partial involvement in the community. On the other hand, these rituals may have concretely defined for laypeople what membership in the Church of the East meant in practical terms.

Similar to the sacraments in their occasional character were the rituals which marked stages of life. Birth was sacramentally marked by baptism, but marriages and deaths also required the gathering of the Christian community and specific ritual actions. Of course the Church of the East was not the only community in this region marrying and dying, so what marked certain marriages and deaths as specifically involving Christians of this community was
the presence of the East Syrian priest and the performance of the necessary Syriac rites. East Syrian canon law had specified the necessity of having a priest perform the betrothal ceremony, although exceptions could be made for marriages in distant lands with no priests available. Funerals equally required prayers from the priests. Yet other members of the community were also present, and played necessary functions, such as the best man and the bridesmaid, or those washing the body of the deceased. The fact that the community would gather for these events would have emphasized the importance of these milestones and their accompanying rituals, perhaps conveying by association the meaning that membership in the Church of the East was a matter of life and death. But when some of those present or participating were not themselves Christians, or at least not of the same denomination, that would complicate the lines of membership drawn around such communal rituals.

Other rituals were tied to the calendrical rhythms. The entire year was divided into liturgical seasons (shābhōʾē, sing. shābhōʾā), mostly of seven weeks duration. As mentioned in chapter 4, the seasons of the winter months were tied to the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, while later seasons referred to particular apostles or prophets. These seasons shaped
the way clergy viewed time, as is demonstrated by the dates given in manuscript colophons. The
unnamed scribe of a theological work by ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis dated the completion of his labor
on “the fourth Tuesday of the fast of the chosen apostles, on June 16 in the year 1772 A.G.
[1461],”147 while the Gabriel who copied some commentaries by Īshō’dād of Merv gave the date
as “in the year 1801 A.G. [1490]… on April 3, on the sixth Saturday of the Savior’s great
fast.”148 The archdeacon Īshō’ who copied a Ḥūdrā in Mosul even omitted any reference to a
month or the day of the month, saying only that he finished the book “on the Sunday of Nūsardīl,
the feast of the blessed apostles, in the year 1795 A.G. [1484], which is 889 A.H.”149 These
liturgical seasons determined which of the variable prayers were to be used during the various
services.

For the laypeople, the liturgical seasons might be most influential through their
differentiation from the communal rituals of other groups. Celebrating the weekly qurbānā on
Sunday would distinguish those who congregated for the occasion from Jewish observation of
the Sabbath on Saturday and Muslim participation in the Friday gathering at the mosque.150
Although other Christians celebrated their communal liturgies on Sunday as well, the liturgical
seasons distinguished the Church of the East from other Christian groups in the region.151 This
difference prompted the Syrian Orthodox Maphrian (later Patriarch) Nūḥ Pūnīqoyo to preach a

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147: Cambridge Add. 616, f. 109a.
148: Isho’dad of Merv, The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and
149: BL Add. 7177, f. 320b.
150: The fact that these communal gatherings occurred on different weekdays, however, opened the possibility for
interested parties to attend multiple gatherings if desired.
151: The fact that the Christian liturgical year is tied to the solar calendar, unlike the lunar Islamic (hijrī) calendar,
further distinguishes the ritual observance of Christians from that of their Muslim neighbors. It also ensured an
approximate seasonal fixedness of the various feasts and fasts, which for laypeople could link to agricultural
rhythms and permit the ritual calendar to structure lay as well as clerical perceptions of time.
sermon in Mosul in 1492 against “people who oppose Mary the God-bearer and do not perform the great feast of the Annunciation.” Unlike the Syrian Orthodox, Armenian, and European Christians, who celebrated the Annunciation on March 25, nine months before Christmas, the Church of the East dedicated the four weeks leading up to Christmas to the theme of the Annunciation, which thus corresponded in time to European Christian observances of Advent. The result for the Church of the East was that March 25 was not a date on their liturgical calendar, and a high-ranking bishop from a rival Christian hierarchy used this discrepancy to warn his own flock against mixing with the Church of the East. Membership in a particular community could be defined by which festivals one attended.

In addition to the community differentiation accomplished by different cycles of communal celebration, the lay experience of annual rituals might structure their relationship to others inside and outside of the community. The fasting regulations during Lent and other periods, for example, could hinder commensality with outsiders for portions of each year, and would in any event differentiate those who observe East Syrian fasting obligations from other communities who fasted differently. In areas with large Muslim populations, the most marked difference of this kind, of course, would be the Christian non-observance of the fast during the month of Ramaḍān, but other fasting practices also varied between Christian denominations. The Church of the East was the only Christian group who observed the Bāʿūthā d-Nīnwa(yē) (“the prayer of the Ninevites”), a three day fast with intensive communal prayer services designed to stimulate repentance, scheduled twenty days before Lent. That laypeople were supposed to observe the fasts is evident from a prayer, included in a mid-sixteenth-century manuscript, to be

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152 Vatican sir. 97, f. 142a. The text is in Garshuni, but I have transcribed it here in Arabic script to make it more widely accessible.
153 On the other hand, laypeople might also be less scrupulous than clergy about attending the major festivals of other groups.
used “for someone who departs from the faith and turns back again, and also for someone who
eats meat during the Fast, or takes communion after eating, or commits any transgression.” It
is entirely possible that this prayer’s equation of breaking the fast with apostasy was a clerical
view not shared by many laypeople, but those lay Christians who desired to continue receiving
the sacraments might find it expedient to observe the fast to the satisfaction of their clergy.

These additional rituals distinguished their practitioners from other surrounding
populations who did not practice them in the same way or at the same time. For laypeople, the
rituals fostered relationships with other group members through the gathering of the community,
and in heightened form through marriages and the need for wedding attendants. The rituals
might also hinder relationships with outsiders who did not participate in the same communal
actions. These boundaries might supply a very concrete notion of who is or is not a member of
the community, and what that membership meant. But the permission for a man to marry a
woman from a different religious group suggests other possibilities as well. Laypeople might
observe some of the rituals, but not others, keep some of the fasts, but not others, or even
participate in the rituals of this group and of other groups simultaneously. The greater number of
communal rituals increased the range of possibilities for different varieties of participation at the
margins of the group.

Textured Membership

The collective ritual life of the Church of the East delineated the membership, but
membership in the medieval world could be very different than membership today. The

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155 Cambridge Add. 1888, f. 139b (dated 1588), according to William Wright and
Stanley Arthur Cook, A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts Preserved in the Library of the University of
egalitarian impulses of modernity have often led scholars to consider membership typically as a binary option: one either is or is not a member. Overlapping memberships between groups are often pictured as bounded Venn diagrams on flat paper. But for the late medieval Church of the East, membership was a much more complex and textured reality. The members of the Church of the East were never simply members, but always certain kinds of members as well. These kinds were determined by age, gender, varieties of participation, social hierarchy, and even physicality.

Members’ first qualification was baptism, which constituted a membership which was largely involuntary, at least initially. Most Christians were baptized as infants, and that baptism was the “gateway of the Church.” As children grew up in this community, they were already a certain kind of member. This is not to say that no aspect of membership was voluntarily. Of course conversion to a different religious group, whether Islam or another Christian group, would be perceived as repudiation of one’s membership in this group. In the other direction, attendance at Church services and rituals implied a tighter degree of membership than simply having been baptized, as did participation in the ritual through the communal responses or partaking of the Eucharist. Thus it was possible to modify the quality of one’s membership consciously and to adopt differing contours of membership as desired.

156 Richard McCall made a similar point regarding the social hierarchy enacted in early medieval papal Easter masses at Rome: “What we cannot find in this enactment is anything that would salve our post-Enlightenment consciences looking for a democratic ordering of society. This church reflects an order that hierarchizes according to class and gender.” He did not take this to vitiate the unity of the congregation in the offering of the Eucharist, however: “The church is differentiated according to class and gender; but it is one in its enactment of the sacrament”: McCall, Do This, 133.

157 A poem contained in a fifteenth-century manuscript takes as its theme “the deacon from the town of Mashkelg near Erbil who turned aside from the straight path” by converting to some other (unspecified) religious group (٤)[٩]٢٣: Paris BN Syr. 181, f. 75a. The poem portrays the universal sadness caused by this desertion, which turned the deacon into the enemy of his father and grieved his four brothers, and indicates that he will no longer receive a Christian burial.
Options regarding varieties of participation in the congregational aspects of communal rituals were open to the laity, but it might also be possible to change category of membership. Laymen could seek ordination as clergy to obtain a greater level of participation and degree of communal membership. As in other eastern Christian denominations, ordination as a deacon or priest was compatible with marriage and raising a family, and in many ways the lower clergy would resemble their lay neighbors, yet they would play more central roles in the religious life of the village or city. An alternate gradation of membership, parallel to ordination as clergy and independent of it, was offered by the monastic life. Monks would be expected to leave their families to reside in monasteries, and like clergy would be marked by distinctive clothing even if they were not ordained to participate in the liturgies. Unlike ordination to the clergy, this option was in theory available to women as well as men, but it is not clear whether there were in fact communities of nuns in the fifteenth century.

Nevertheless certain differences of membership remained involuntary, as long as the believer had not chosen to convert to another group. In certain cases, such as age, this involuntary difference was temporary, whereas with regard to gender it was permanent. The difference in membership between children and adults was illustrated in the baptismal ritual, where in the rare case of an adult convert a verbal renunciation of Satan and profession of faith would be necessary. This differentiation went beyond the options available for greater

158 An ordinal dated October 7, 1870 A.G. / 1558 does contain a service for the ordination of “deaconesses” (ἡ διακονία): Wright and Cook, Cambridge, 321. I have not seen any references to deaconesses in fifteenth-century sources, however, either to women with that rank or to places for them to serve in the liturgy.
159 See chapter 3 for a list of attested monasteries in the fifteenth century, but the evidence seems to indicate that these were all male monasteries. Nevertheless, a burial lection for “virgin daughters of the covenant” (τένας τὸν δικαιούς, i.e. nuns) was still listed in a gospel lectionary dated October 2, 1810 A.G. / 1498: BL Add. 7174, f. 213a.
160 Timothy II, Mystery of Baptism, 80–81. I mentioned above that Timothy II discusses a divergence of baptismal practice according to which some priests assimilated women to children with regard to the finger used in the final sign of the Cross, while others assimilated women to men. This could have an impact on notions of gendered
involvement, with the clergy being a male-only institution, so that pious women might become nuns but not priests. Architecture also separated men and women when they came to church services. The typical medieval East Syrian church structure had two separate doors, one for men and one for women. These led to separate portions of the nave in which men and women were to stand: men closer to the front, women towards the back of the building. On the dividing line stood the *bema*, a raised platform to which priests, deacons, and readers would come to read the scriptural texts for the service, before processing back to the chancel and consecrating the sacrament there. The gender line was not set in stone, however, as women most likely went forward to the chancel gate to receive the Eucharist from the priest and deacon, and in most churches the separation of gendered space was probably structured socially rather than

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162 Women were also located at the back of medieval mosques. A *ḥadīth* in Muslim’s collection states a principle that women should gravitate to the back of the mosque when the congregation lines up in rows for prayer: “The best row for men is the first, and the worst is the last, but the best row for women is the last and the worst is the first” (يَخْرُرُ صَفْوَةَ الزَّنَادِقِ أَوْلِيَةً وَيُخْرُرُ صَفْوَةَ أَخْرَى أَوْلِيَةً وَيُخْرُرُ صَفْوَةَ أَخْرَى أَوْلِيَةً) juxtaposed with: “Hishām ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, ʻṢāḥīḥ Muslim (Bayrūt: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1995), al-Ṣalāt 28, #132, 1:273. Regardless of the ḥanāfī, its occurrence in this collection reveals that the principle was considered normative by some. An anecdote recounted by a seventh/thirteenth-century biographical dictionary mentions the second/eighth century Ibn Ishāq “sitting near the women at the back of the mosque” (يَخْرُرُ صَفْوَةَ النِّسَاءِ فِي مَسْجِدِهِ)، and that Hishām “forbade him from sitting there” (نَهَاهُ عَنَّالَجُوْسِهِ ِهِنَّهِ). Yaqūt ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Muṣammat al-ʻudābā* (Beirut: Dār al-Mustashriq, 1970), 18:7. Behnam Sadeghi’s dissertation examines different ḥanāfī formulations of what he terms the “adjacency law,” the law that a certain relationship of proximity or orientation to women renders male Muslim prayers invalid, most notably when a man prays behind a woman: Behnam Sadeghi, “The Structure of Reasoning in Post-formative Islamic Jurisprudence: Case Studies in Ḥanāfī Laws on Women and Prayer” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2006), 104–22. As he discusses earlier in the dissertation, late medieval ḥanāfī law progressively discouraged and eventually prohibited women from attending all communal prayers, but this was not the position of all legal schools, nor necessarily standard practice in Iraq and Diyār Bakr: ibid., 75, 88–95.

163 The procession to and from the *bema* is indicated, for example, by Berlin Sachau 167, ff. 77b, 79a. The texts read in between would include the Old Testament reading (*qeruwdā*) and the selection from the Apostle (*shlēḥā*), the lectionary drawn from Paul’s epistles. The Gospel reading follows the return to the chancel, but involves “going” (*ne ʿzdāl*), “carrying the Gospel from the altar,” and giving it to the deacon, so it is not clear whether it took place from the *bema* again or from the front of the Church: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 79b.
architecturally. The division between male and female members was not simply a question of greater or lesser access to religious rituals, because both groups would have roughly equal access to the scripture readings, and in principle access to partaking of the sacraments. But laywomen were put in a back-seat position for the majority of liturgical actions, which took place at the front of the nave. Even laymen, however, were not primary members, a class which was limited to those ordained men who participated behind the altar veil and enacted the rituals.

Membership in the Church of the East also extended beyond those physically present to include past members of the group. Most importantly, this included the great saints, whose intercession with God was sought on behalf of the community. Churches and monasteries were dedicated to particular saints, and the most important saints had annual commemorations to remind the community of their availability as intercessors. Although in theory any Christian could become a great saint, those saints invoked in the fifteenth-century Church of the East were invariably ancient saints from before the rise of Islam. Their antiquity was no bar to their active involvement in the community, however, through their intercession. But even recently

164 Indeed, the liturgical prayers allege also the presence of angels at the worship service participating with the congregation, e.g. Berlin Sachau 167, f. 77a. It is unclear to what degree the laity might equally have considered angels to be present, or to what degree they would have inclined to limit participation to the visible congregants, but the use of incense and the tinkling silver makhshānyāthā mentioned above in fn. 99 might suggest to laypeople as well that there was more involved than met the eye.

165 For example, the colophon of a theological manuscript copied in the monastery of Mār Sabrīshō outside Erbil invoked his prayers on behalf of the inhabited world: Cambridge Add. 616, f. 108b-109a. The incipit of a liturgical manuscript of “the order of the upper monastery of Mār Gabriel and Mār Abraham” invokes their prayers: BL Or. 4399, f. 1b. How an ancient saint might pray for the contemporary community is revealed in a poem which Shbadnāyā composed for the commemoration of St. George: BL Or. 4062, ff. 130b-131b.

166 In the fifteenth century, the most important saints with commemorations were the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, Peter & Paul, the Evangelists, St. Stephen the Martyr (all first century), the Greek teachers (Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius, all before 451), the Syrian teachers (Ephrem [d. 373], Narsai [fl. 5th C.], and Abraham [fl. 6th C]), Mār Aba the Catholicos (d. 552), St. George (presented as a martyr in the fourth-century persecution of Diocletian), Rabban Hormizd (fl. late 6th C), Jacob of Nisibis (fl. early 4th C.): BL Add. 7177, ff. 36b, 42a, 45b, 49b, 83b, 87a, 202a, 204b, 261b; Paris BN Pers. 3, ff. 16a, 24b, 31b, 34b, 38b, 43a, 46a, 122b, 124a, 152b.

167 The prayers of Mār Ishūḥ yahb bar Mqaddam (fl. 1444) were invoked in the colophon of his grammar copied in 1808 A.G. / 1497: Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 106a. But this apparent exception may be due to his rank as metropolitan archbishop of Erbil, for the prayers of bishops and patriarchs were often invoked in this way. For examples, see the invocation of the prayers of the current Catholicos Mār Shemʿon in BL Add. 7174, f. 214a, and the prayers of the current Catholicos and his nātar kūrsyā in BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.
deceased Christians were considered part of the community, and were thought to benefit from the atonement available through the Eucharist. The priest consecrating the body and blood prayed, “Christ our God, for all those who are alive and those who are dead this sacrifice is offered.” Shbadnāyā specified that having received the Eucharist, “the medicine of life,” during their lifetimes was what qualified Christians to be commemorated in the churches after their death. The membership of the Church of the East was understood to include past members as well as present.

Conclusion

The collective rituals of the Church of the East defined the meaning of membership in this community, linking the theological ideas concerning what Christianity meant in the abstract to particular individuals in specific places at precise times. The central ritual link between theology and the lay Christian was through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, and the liturgies surrounding their celebration communicated the necessity of participating in these rituals for purity, for forgiveness, and for spiritual life. But these liturgies could also qualify the use of these sacraments to delimit an all-or-nothing membership, enabling laypeople to adopt different varieties of participation in a wide penumbra of communal belonging. The liturgical seasons and communal fasts served to draw communal boundaries, but could also complicate the range of possibilities available to laypeople. The result was that membership in the Church of the East, while thematically about spiritual health and life, was not an all-or-nothing affair. The

168 Berlin Sachau 167, f. 84a. Compare f. 91a, where the priest prays for prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, teachers, bishops, priests, deacons, and laity, silently transitioning from ancient saints to contemporary believers. Timothy II interpreted this prayer as asking for “heavenly refreshment in eternal life for those who have passed away and for those who remain and who live in the true faith” (Mingana Syr. 13, f. 129a).

egalitarian bounded model of membership is simply inapplicable to the complicated world of pre-modern society. Even a hierarchical model, where members are arranged in a finite number of ranks with a definite precedence, breaks down before the reality of independent orders of membership as ordained clergy or monks. Varieties of membership might fall into partial hierarchies for particular purposes, such as the order of reception of the Eucharist. But membership in the Church of the East was always textured by the age, gender, rank, presence, and level of elective participation of the individual.
Chapter 6: Between the People and God: the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

When Metropolitan Joseph of Erbil was consecrated Catholicos Timothy II in February 1629 A.G. / 1318, in the first year of the reign of the young Mongol Ilkhan Abū Saʿīd, he knew what he needed to do: “before everything else he had concern for the renewal of the canons and ordinances which are useful for the building and establishing of the apostolic Church and for the foundation of the fear of God, those by which Christianity is increased.” With the support of Metropolitan ‘Abdishō’ of Nisibis and the other metropolitans and bishops who elected him, he convened a council and issued canons to centralize the clergy of the Church of the East and thus to address some of difficulties which had plagued his predecessor, Catholicos Yahballāhā III. The first canon declared the collection of canon law recently compiled by ‘Abdishō’ of Nisibis legally binding. Timothy II also wrote a commentary on the sacraments, starting with ordination to the priesthood, and this commentary together with the canons promoted a view of the Church with the clergy at its center and strict punishments for deviation from the canonical norms. The clerical structure erected by the new catholicos-patriarch proved too rigid, however, to survive the upheavals of the post-Mongol period, and that failure required the Church of the East to experiment with different models of ecclesiastical hierarchy, ultimately assimilating the clergy to secular nobles, at least in part, and adopting the hereditary patriarchate for which this denomination would be known into the modern period.

2 Ibid., III, part 1:570.
East Syrian Clericalism in the Late Mongol Period

When Metropolitan ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis wrote his basic summary of Christian doctrine in 1603 A.G. / 1292, he ensured that the clergy figured prominently in his presentation of the church. About two thirds of his section devoted to the Church likens the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the angelic hierarchy:

The noun “church” therefore signifies the gathering with the festival, and it depicts the type of the things that are above, for just as those who serve the [divine] Majesty are nine ranks divided into three orders, so also [the Church]. Patriarchs and metropolitans and bishops fill the order of cherubim and seraphim and thrones. Archdeacons and periodeutai and priests stand in the order of powers and authorities and dominions. And deacons and sub-deacons and readers serve in the order of rulers and archangels and angels.

The ecclesiastical hierarchy is thus patterned on the orders of angelic creation and is a necessary feature of the Church. The priesthood was also listed by ‘Abdīshō’ as the first of the sacraments, and necessary for the consecration of all the sacraments. The administration of these sacraments is the purpose of the priesthood: “Priesthood is the service of mediation between God and humans in those things which atone for sinners and procure good things and avert wrath.”

The ecclesiastical priesthood contrasted with the old Levitical priesthood specified by the Mosaic Law in that “the new priesthood is passed down by apostolic succession of ecclesiastical

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3 ‘Abdīshō’ bar Brīkhā, Kithābhā d-methqē margānīthā d-al shrārā da-khrestyānūthā, ed. Yosip d-Qelayta, 2nd ed. (Mosul: Mṭabba’t Āthūrāyta d-ʿēdītā ʿatīqātā d-madhnīthā, 1924), 31. Of course the nine ranks of angels are derived ultimately from Ps.-Dionysius’ Celestial Hierarchy, which was also cited by Shhadnāyā, although without drawing a parallel to the ecclesiastical hierarchy: Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 182a-b.
4 Ibid., 33–34.
5 Ibid., 34.
ordination to those who are worthy.”

The metropolitan of Nisibis presented the clergy as a structure essential to the Church and necessary for the sacramental means of atonement.

Timothy II likewise regarded the priesthood as essential to the Church. Ordination is the first sacrament he discusses in his treatise on the sacraments, and the first section of that portion is tellingly titled “On the glory of the priesthood.” Timothy’s discussion of the subject opens by interpreting Matthew 16:18-19 as the institution of the ecclesiastical priesthood: “Our Lord Jesus Christ preached the glory and made known the power of the priesthood in his statement to Peter, ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church,’ and also ‘To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and what you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’”

The catholicos asserted that the earthly priesthood imitated Christ’s heavenly ministry and exercised Christ’s authority: “From the Father, [Christ] received all this great and unspeakable authority and he entrusted this power to the priesthood. And he desired it to do that which he was doing in heaven.” This power was exercised most notably in the sacraments: Timothy II asserted that the priesthood transforms the water into the spiritual “womb” of baptism, and in celebrating the Eucharist, “the priests fill the place of Christ for the sons of the Church, so that while Christ is in heaven the priests make known his distant

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6 ibid., 35.
7 Mingana Syr. 13, f. 5b.
8 Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 5b-6a. The second verse was also cited by ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis as the “foundation” (ʻAbdīshō bar Brīkhā, Kḥābhāḏ d-methqrē margānūthā, 34.
9 Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 8a-b.
appearance through the fruits of bread and wine.”¹⁰ The ecclesiastical hierarchy, for Timothy, was passed down in a succession of ordinations beginning with that of the apostles by Christ: In answer to the question “whether the apostles received from our Lord the gift of these three [episcopacy, priesthood, diaconate] and transmitted them to us, or from themselves,” Timothy answered, “We say that from the Savior himself the apostles received and transmitted [the hierarchy] to us.”¹¹ Thus Timothy II tied the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the foundation of the Church by Christ and his ongoing priestly ministry in heaven, with particular attention to the power to consecrate the sacraments.

These two theologians of the Mongol period synthesized a multi-faceted image of the clergy at the center of the Church. The clergy mediated the sacraments, and with them atonement, to the laity, and continued the apostolic ministry. The hierarchy itself was patterned on the angelic created order (according to ‘Abdīsho’ of Nisibis) and Christ’s ministry (according to Timothy II), and in either case was essential to the definition of the Church. This complex clerical image would not survive into the fifteenth century in this form, but would undergo diverging modifications by Ishāq Shbdnāyā and fifteenth-century scribes seeking to understand their hierarchy in a time of upheaval.

**The Center Did Not Hold: Clergy Disconnected From Christ**

The aspect of notions of the clergy in the late Mongol period which most completely disappeared was its patterning on a heavenly prototype. No fifteenth-century East Syrian source follows ‘Abdīsho’ of Nisibis in likening the clergy to the angelic hierarchy, and with two

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¹⁰ The reference to Abdisho of Nisibis and Christ’s ministry is cited from Mingana Syr. 13, ff. 7a, 9b.

¹¹ The reference to Timothy II and the apostolic ministry is cited from Mingana Syr. 13, f. 29b.
exceptions the clergy was considered without reference to Christ. Fifteenth-century East Syrian concepts of the clergy were surprisingly divorced from the notion of Christ’s own priesthood. The latter notion was mentioned sparsely, but only briefly linked to contemporary clergy in the funeral madrāshā for priests composed by Metropolitan Īshō’ yahb bar Mqaddam of Erbil, the response for which chants “Christ, the true priest and the head of goodness, whose priesthood never passes away and gives life.” Yet Īshō’ yahb bar Mqaddam did not draw any connection between Christ’s priesthood and how contemporary priests ought to behave, nor did he indicate that the clergy represented Christ to the congregation. The other exception is a colophon which asserts that the Catholicos “holds the place of Christ,” which as we shall see is one among a series of strategies to legitimate the authority of a patriarch who was probably newly elected in a non-canonical fashion. The fact that Christ’s priesthood is nowhere else in the fifteenth century linked to the contemporary hierarchy is all the more remarkable for its prominence in the discussion of the clergy by Timothy II.

This absence in fifteenth-century consideration of the hierarchy cannot be entirely due to the different Syriac words that were used for priesthood in each case, although the lexical discontinuity would not have aided attempts to preserve such a connection. Christ’s priesthood was typically presented using the noun kūmrā, which was almost never used of the ecclesiastical clergy. The typical title for a Christian priest was qashīshā (“elder”), which in turn was never

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12 Mingana Syr. 570, f. 77a. The reference to Christ’s unending priesthood echoes Hebrews 7:24.
13 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b. The colophon was copied by the scribe of BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.
14 For sample fifteenth-century uses of kūmrā with reference to Christ, see the liturgy of Pentecost at BL Add. 7177, f. 215b, ll. 23-24 and Shbadnāyā’s theological magnum opus at Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 54b, 171a, 193b. The only exceptions I have found where kūmrā seems to be used of contemporary clergy is in three colophons dated between November 1789 A.G. / 1477 and 1795 A. G. / 1484, where among the patriarchal titles is “anointer of priests and pastors” (kūmrūthā): Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b; Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, f. 96b; BL Add. 7177, f. 321a. The abstract form “priesthood” (kūmrūthā) is ascribed to the apostles in a prayer for Pentecost: BL
used of Christ. The more general term apparently used to designate all clergy was kāhnā, and while certain words derived from this noun were used of Christ, the main form itself never was. Thus there was linguistically little connection between Christ’s priesthood and the ministry of the contemporary Church of the East. The funeral madrāshā composed by Īshō’yahb bar Mqaddam indicates that the two could be brought together, but in the fifteenth century they do not seem to have been linked in ways that would indicate how the ecclesiastical hierarchy was understood.

The closest parallel between the clergy and Christ was drawn through the metaphor of the shepherd. As discussed in chapter 4, the Church was the flock of Christ the Good Shepherd, an image used for different purposes in the liturgy and in Shbadnāyā’s poetry. But Shbadnāyā also prayed to Christ to “glorify and support [the Church’s] chief shepherd” and to “guard her pastors and her shepherds,” applying the same metaphor to the clergy. The colophons also repeatedly apply the title “shepherd” to the catholicos-patriarch or bishops, often with adjectives emphasizing his diligence and vigilance. But all that is really expressed about those hierarchs

Add. 7177, f. 226a, l. 21. This abstract form is also used to refer to the patriarch’s “high priesthood” (πρεσβύτερος) in a colophon dated 1800 A.G. / 1489: BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.

15 This translates the Greek priestly title πρεσβύτερος.

16 The feast of Sūlāqā used the derivative verb kahen (“to minister as a priest”) with Christ as the subject at two places: BL Add. 7177, f. 215b, ll. 19-20 and f. 218a, ll. 14-15. Shbadnāyā quoted ‘Abdīshō of Nisibis, who described Christ as “him who possessed the high priesthood” (คมฟัยอิห์ ฟัง กิจกรรม มหาบุญ): Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 192b.

17 “Watchful and diligent shepherd” (คมฟัยอิห์ ฟัง กิจกรรม มหาบุญ) is found exactly in Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125a; Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a [quoting the Vorlage]; St. Petersburg Syr. 33, f. 316a; and BL Add. 7174, f. 214a. This phrase was applied to Bishop Yōḥannān of Āthēl in 1837 A.G. / 1526: Paris BN Syr 345, f. 220b. The variant “watchful and earnest shepherd” (คมฟัยอิห์ ฟัง กิจกรรม) was applied to Metropolitan Timothy of Nisibis in 1741 A.G. / 1430: Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b. Another scribe included the patriarch among “our reverend and holy fathers, the diligent shepherds” (คมฟัยอิห์ ฟัง กิจกรรม): Berlin orient. oct. 1313, f. 176b. Unfortunately the colophon is badly damaged, so it is unclear which other ecclesiastical leaders were named. On the other hand, “head of the shepherds” (คมฟัยอิห์) is used of the catholicos-patriarch in BL Add. 7177, f. 321a, while “chief of the shepherds” (คมฟัยอิห์) was used in Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a; BL Add. 7174, f. 214a; and Paris BN Syr. 345, f. 220b.
is that they did their job, without specifying what job that was. This is seen in the general metaphor used by Deacon Mas'ūd of Kpharbūrān for Metropolitan Timothy of Nisibis in 1741 A.G. / 1430: “The watchful and earnest shepherd who is eager to give to his lambs and his sheep and his ewes the spiritual pasture of the divine teachings leading to natural and scriptural theorias.”19 To the degree that any particular episcopal duty is indicated here, it seems to include theological instruction, but the entire passage is extremely vague. Indeed, instead of Christ, the model for the patriarchs (at least according to the accepted rhetoric of the colophons) was the apostles and other non-divine biblical heroes.20 Thus the deacon of Kpharbūrān praised the patriarch as “the second Moses, and the likeness of Melchizedek, the Simon of our days, and the Peter of our time, and the Timothy in our generation,”21 although these praises are equally vague with regard to patriarchal duties.

Uniquely among fifteenth-century sources, the liturgical prayers for Pentecost repeatedly emphasized the unbroken succession of the priesthood from the time of the apostles to the present. According to one prayer, “The holy apostles… finished and completed the charge which they had received and they transmitted it to the teachers and the priests, illustrious athletes, true pillars.”22 Later the priesthood is said to have been given to the apostles by the Holy Spirit: “The Paraclete, when he found the group of apostles, filled them with priesthood, the glorified Holy Spirit, heavenly kindness and the spiritual gift and priesthood and heavenly

19 Deacon Mas'ūd, Kpharbūrān. BL Add. 7177, f. 223b, ll. 11, 13-15.
20 The only exception is BL Or. 4399, f. 579a, where the patriarch is described as “like a good shepherd and imitating his Lord” (Deacon Mas'ūd, Kpharbūrān. Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b), evidently because he risked his life to stop the persecution of Christians.
21 Deacon Mas'ūd, Kpharbūrān. Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b. This is the longest such string from a fifteenth-century colophon, but similar praises were used in the Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a and BL Add. 7174, f. 214a.
might.” The priesthood of the apostles was then linked to the current priests’ abilities to administer the sacraments: “Great and glorified and excellent is the rank of priesthood which the apostles received in the upper room from the hands of the Lord, and through them he performed miracles and signs and healed the sick and opened the eyes of the blind. May that same right hand come and rest upon your servants that they may be administering your holy mysteries.”

The apostolic succession preserved into the fifteenth century by this single liturgical celebration indicates the conservative nature of liturgy, which also appears in the liturgy’s preservation of the sacramental understanding of the clergy.

Mediating Atonement in the Sacraments: A Liturgical View of the Clergy

The liturgical prayers for the various services in the Church of the East preserved the greatest range of concepts of the priesthood from among those advanced by the theologians of the late Mongol period. In addition to the apostolic succession of the clergy, which was restricted to the liturgy for Pentecost, the sacramental dimension of the clergy was expressed in many ways. Most fully, this concept portrayed the ecclesiastical hierarchy from the catholicos-patriarch down to the parish priest as chosen and ordained by God for the administration of the sacraments, out of divine grace rather than inherent worthiness on the priests’ part, in order to communicate forgiveness of sins to the members of the Church.

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23. BL Add. 7177, f. 226a, ll. 19-22. By contrast, the liturgy for Sūlaqā (Ascension) prayed to “Christ, who by his ascension to heaven exalted our dust from the earth to heaven and gave us the high rank of priesthood”: BL Add. 7177, f. 217a, ll. 26-27.

24. BL Add. 7177, f. 229a, ll. 22-27.
The clerical sources presented the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of the East as chosen by God. This is most clearly true with respect to the Catholicos Patriarch, the pinnacle of the human hierarchy. A liturgical poem found in a fifteenth century manuscript rehearses the succession of East Syrian catholicoi into the fourteenth century, in order to invoke their prayers for their successor, the current patriarch. The patriarchs are listed very briefly in this poem, but repeatedly the notion of their divine election is invoked. “The upper [divine] Will seated [Mār Ėliyā I] upon the apostolic throne” while Sabrīshō` “was chosen for the Church from on high.”

The identity of the divine elector was made more explicit for other patriarchs: Mār Ėliyā III “was made catholicos by the Lord’s command,” and Īsh̀’yahb of Bēth Zabday “his Lord chose like Matthew.” The divine person who made the choice could be identified either as Jesus or as the Holy Spirit: a later Mār Sabrīshō` “was chosen by the Lord, Jesus, to lead the sheep of Jesus” while earlier ‘Abdīshō` of Mosul “was chosen by the Spirit, the Lord, for the high and exalted throne.” Although this poem pertains specifically to the catholicoi-patriarchs, lower ranks of clergy were also seen as chosen by God’s grace. Indeed, the rite of the consecration of the Eucharist instructed priests to pray, “by the kindness of the Holy Spirit… the ranks of the ordination of true priesthood are given, and by your compassion, my Lord, you have made our

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25 The poem is found in Berlin Sachau 330, ff. 93b-95b, which is dated on paleographical grounds to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The colophon is missing, but the scribe is identified as Bishop Sabrīshō` of Hisn-Keyf on f. 231a. A Metropolitan Sabrīshō` of Hisn-Keyf was the scribe of Paris BN Syr. 369, copied in 1497, while another Metropolitan Sabrīshō` of Hisn-Keyf was active in the 1570s: David Wilmshurst, The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 582; Subsidia 104 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2000), 84. If we presume that the diocese was a bishopric later elevated to a metropolitan see, that implies the former Sabrīshō` (or a predecessor) was the scribe, so the manuscript is probably from the fifteenth century. The poem’s termination with the death of Timothy II implies that it was probably composed in the fourteenth century. Although the poem could not have been composed by ‘Abdīshō` of Nisibis, an edition of the poem was included in ‘Abdīshō` bar Brikhā, Khābhā d-methqē margānīthā, 93–97.

26 “Poem on the Catholicoi of the East” in ibid., 97.

27 “Poem on the Catholicoi of the East” in ibid., 96.

28 “Poem on the Catholicoi of the East” in ibid., 97, 96.
lowliness worthy that we may be the known limbs in the great body of the holy Church, and that
we may administer the spiritual helps to the souls of believers.” This prayer linked the divine
election of the clergy to their function as dispencers of the sacraments despite the intervening
unworthiness of individual priests.

The purpose and function of the clergy was typically presented as mediating God’s grace
through the sacraments to the larger Christian people. In addition to the quotation above, the
sacramental prayers emphasized this clerical function. Indeed, before consecrating the Eucharist
the priest was instructed to ask the other clergy present to pray that God would “receive this
offering from my hands for me and for you and for all the Holy Catholic Church by his kindness
and his mercies.” This emphasis was understood by clergy in the fifteenth century:

Metropolitan Īshō’ yahb bar Mqaddam of Erbil, in his new funeral madrāshā for the death of
priests, spoke only of the deceased’s sacramental and liturgical roles. “Just as he sang hymns
here at all moments, may he praise and glorify there with the angels. And as upon this altar of
yours he put in motion the glorified atonements, also above within your altar may he receive
perfect gifts.” Later the same text is more specific about the priest’s sacramental function: “he
completed the service of your holy mysteries and sanctified the atoning womb of baptism for
your children.” Fifteenth century liturgical sources emphasized that the primary function of the

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29 Sachau 167, f. 80b.
30 Sachau 167, f. 83b.
31 Mingana Syr. 570, f. 77a.
32 Mingana Syr. 570, f. 77b.
priesthood was to provide atoning grace to the Church through the mysteries which they alone could celebrate.\(^{33}\)

This atonement did not arise with the priests themselves, however, but was in turn mediated to them from the patriarchs. In a colophon dated 1741 A.G. / 1430, Deacon Mas’ūd of the village of Kpharbūrān near Nisibis traced the atoning power of the sacraments back to the patriarchal office itself, naming the current patriarch “by whose hand atonement continuously flows to the people of the Lord and to the sheep of his flock.”\(^{34}\) The mediation of the catholicos-patriarch and the regional metropolitan were also invoked in a prayer for them during the baptismal liturgy: “We pray also for our holy fathers Mār (name) the catholicos-patriarch and Mār (name) the metropolitan bishop, who were made mediators of this great and amazing gift which creatures cannot attain. He who delights in them [i.e. the catholicos and metropolitan] and gave them this fountain which was given with mercies for the atonement of humanity, that by their hands it may be opened…”\(^{35}\) On this view, the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy functioned as a conduit for God’s atoning mercies to the people. Although the connection was rarely drawn for the entire hierarchy, the main function of the clergy was often presented as mediating sacramental atonement.

The role of the clergy in mediating the sacraments was understood to be accomplished by God’s grace rather than by any inherent virtue of their own. The priest consecrating the water and the oil for baptism was instructed to pray, “As for me, my Lord, whom you have appointed as a mediator that I should administer your gift, it was not because my way was blameless, nor

\(^{33}\) Indeed, the only other function ascribed to clergy in fifteenth-century liturgical texts was a brief reference to the Pentecost liturgy to teachers teaching true doctrine: BL Add. 7177, f. 224b, ll. 2-4.

\(^{34}\) Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b.

\(^{35}\) Berlin Sachau 167, f. 110b.
because my lifestyle was worthy of your embassy that you set me apart.”

For the consecration of the Eucharist the priest was to pray, “We confess, our Lord and our God, the poured out riches of your kindness toward us, that while we are sinners and defective, because of the abundance of your compassion you made us worthy to serve the holy sacraments of the body and blood of your Christ.”

Unlike Christians in the Latin West, who forged a notion of sacramental efficacy by the correct performance of the ritual (ex opere operato) out of the fires of the Donatist controversy, the Church of the East insisted upon the grace of God being the factor which determined the power of the mysteries in spite of the clergy’s unworthiness.

This liturgical emphasis on clerical unworthiness contrasts sharply with the assertion of ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis that the priesthood was a continuous succession of ordinations of worthy candidates. Nevertheless the liturgy preserved an important component of the theological synthesis of the late Mongol period in the emphasis on the priestly celebration of the sacraments and to a lesser extent the apostolic succession of the clergy. The liturgical notion of the priesthood was a narrower concept of the clergy than the broad and powerful notion advanced by Timothy II and ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis, because it excluded the Christological and angelic models of the priests and restricted the domain in which priestly power was understood to be exercised to the sacraments alone. Despite these shifts, the liturgy functioned as a fundamentally conservative genre to preserve a significant portion of the theology of an earlier period.

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36: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 114b.
37: Berlin Sachau 167, f. 86b.
Fact Without Concept: Clergy in Shbadnāyā’s Poetry

The existence of East Syrian clergy was a fact of life in the fifteenth century. So when Īshāq Shbadnāyā concluded his theological masterpiece with a prayer on behalf of the Church, he prayed for its component structural parts:

Glorify and support her chief shepherd [i.e. the Catholicos] by the strength of your care. Her pastors and her shepherds [i.e. bishops], keep in your strength. Equip her priests and her Levites [i.e. deacons] with the victory of your weaponry. Make them wise with your wisdom, that they may proclaim your truth. Protect also her sons from all harm by your care.  

This prayer presents the entire community as supported by Christ’s providential care and protection, with particular emphasis on the various levels of clergy. What is striking, however, is the rarity with which Shbadnāyā referred to the clergy, and the lack of any developed concept of the role of the clergy in the Church. Compared to the very developed clerical notions of Timothy II and ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis, it seems that Shbadnāyā downplayed the role of the priesthood in his theological vision of salvation.

Shbadnāyā consistently mentioned clergy only in the various prayers for the Church found in his poetic corpus. In addition to the passage cited above from his magnum opus, each of his three shorter poems for liturgical occasions includes prayers for the clergy. In his prayer for the Baʿūthā d-Nīnwyē (“Prayer of the Ninevites”), he prayed, “Incite the priests in uprightness and stir up the kings with victory,” and later, “Glorify [the Church’s] ranks of Catholicoi in all her orders, / her leaders and her sons.” For the memorial of St. George, he put into the saint’s mouth the prayer, “Guard, our Lord, the priests and kings in concord, that they

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38 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 220b. The structured view of the Church was indicated more briefly a few lines earlier by the plea, “Cast out turmoil from her ranks” (‘اوذأ پقأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ('<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميآ(<خذأ ناطقأ‘ل،<خذأ ينذأ ميأ(...39 Cambridge Add. 1983, f. 72b.

40 Cambridge Add. 1983, f. 72b.
Finally, in his poem for Shkhāḥtā ("The Finding of the Cross"), Shbadnāyā prayed for Christ to “protect the priests that are blameless and in righteousness. / Let them pasture his sheep perfectly with uprightness and holiness.” These prayers indicate the presence of clergy, but they say very little about the clergy. They indicate perhaps that the catholicos-patriarchs should be glorious, and the clergy should be morally upstanding and teaching the truth about God, and that the clergy may require strength, wisdom, and peace. But these are minor points in Shbadnāyā’s grand sweep of theology from the Trinity and the creation through redemption and the final renewal of all things.

What is most striking, however, is that these prayers are almost Shbadnāyā’s only references to Christian clergy in all his writings. Given the focus of his magnum opus on the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, it is perhaps not surprising that that text more frequently uses “priest” to refer to the Jewish religious leaders of the first century. But even in his discussion of sacraments and Pentecost, where the liturgical texts are at such pains to connect these topics with the priestly ministry, Shbadnāyā only briefly makes the connection in passing, if at all. His discussion of baptism makes no mention of clergy, although in his commentary on the Eucharist he remarked in passing that it “is completed by the mediation of the apostolic priesthood.” In his discussion of the apostles, he defines “pastors” (‘allānē) as “High priests,

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41 Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 342b. A shorter poem probably by Shbadnāyā echoes the prayers of Eucharistic consecration to pray, “Give peace to the priesthood with the royalty” (قيد خشن بل علل خويه): Bodl. Syr. c. 9, f. 128a. The prayer is found almost verbatim in the order of the Eucharist at Berlin Sachau 167, f. 92a.

42 Krakow Biblioteka Jagiellońska Sachau 178, f. 132b.

apostles, pillars of the Church,” and asserts that the apostles “appointed clerics in every clime.”

Although Shbadnāyā does not mention the clergy explicitly, he probably regarded the ecclesiastical power of his contemporary priesthood as derived from the authority given by Christ to the apostles: “Υπατεία [Leadership] of his Church he entrusted to those who were trustworthy.” These brief remarks are easily lost in the sea of poetry penned by this Iraqi priest.

The only extended discussion of the clergy in Shbadnāyā’s entire corpus was not even his own composition. He quoted at length a poem attributed to the tenth-century author Rabban Emmanuel, which lists five patriarchal thrones established by the apostles in Rome, Byzantium, Seleucia-Ctesiphon (the twin capital of the Sasanian Persian Empire), Antioch, and Alexandria. In four of the five cases the verse states that the priesthood “flows from” (rādhē men or variants) the patriarchal office. In order to drive home the point, the poem concludes the list by adding

| And from there and forever in them and from them all priestly offices |
| In other cities, servants of the metropolis, |
| From the ends to the ends of the world, all peoples and nations, |
| To these thrones, then, are bound and also ordained as priests. |

This quotation communicates the hierarchical nature of the clergy and its apostolic origin, but it is odd for listing the patriarchate of the Church of the East as Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which had not

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44 “Clerics” transliterates the Greek word κλήρικοι, which is glossed “Heads of the service, chiefs and overseers” (Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 180b and 196b).

45 The exception is the patriarchate of the East at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, although the reason for the difference may simply be the poet’s inclusion of multiple ethnic names for those served by this patriarchate: “the Persians and Assyrians and Medes and the end of the East” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 196a). Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 200b-202a.

46 The exception is the patriarchate of the East at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, although the reason for the difference may simply be the poet’s inclusion of multiple ethnic names for those served by this patriarchate: “the Persians and Assyrians and Medes and the end of the East” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 196a). Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 200b-202a.

47 This quotation communicates the hierarchical nature of the clergy and its apostolic origin, but it is odd for listing the patriarchate of the Church of the East as Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which had not
been the location of the East Syrian patriarchate since shortly after the founding of Baghdad in the eighth century. Shbadnāyā quoted this passage as a commentary on his poetic presentation of the apostles’ actions on Pentecost and afterward, and it may be that the quote appealed to him less for its discussion of the clergy and more for its narrative of apostolic preaching throughout the inhabited world, as signified by the five patriarchal thrones which supplied clergy to all peoples.

This completes the survey of references to Christian clergy in Shbadnāyā’s largest work, and there are no other references to priests in his shorter poems. Compared to the frequent references to the clergy in the liturgical prayers, these are slim pickings. But does this paucity of clerical references imply a deliberate downplaying of priestly importance? Of course Shbadnāyā left no explicit statement of an intention to minimize the role of the priests, but circumstantial evidence suggests that this paucity was no accident. In the first place, Shbadnāyā was himself a priest, and therefore recited the liturgical prayers for the appropriate services whenever they came up. He would have known those prayers and the concepts which they communicated, and his poetry must be read in comparison to the liturgical texts. Therefore it is no surprise that he mentions clergy with regard to the Eucharist and the apostolic origins of the priesthood; what is surprising is how tersely he mentions them compared to the prayers for the rite of Eucharistic consecration and the feast of Pentecost, and that he does not mention them at all with regard to baptism. It is surprising that he nowhere presented the clergy as chosen by God, nor mediating the forgiveness of sins which he discusses at such great length in several passages of his poetic compositions. Secondly, since Shbadnāyā’s “Poem on God’s Economy” presented a relatively systematic discussion of the divine mdabrānūthā, including details on the ranks of angels and the individual days of creation, this text might be viewed as a compendium of basic Christian
teaching, and as such might be compared to the far shorter “Book of the Pearl” by Abdīshō of Nisibis. But the earlier work devoted two thirds of its section on the Church to the heavenly pattern of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as well as an additional section on the priesthood, sections which have no parallel in Shbadnāyā’s theological poetry. The near absence of references to the priesthood, even in contexts where the hierarchy would be expected to figure prominently, is so striking as to hint that it was not by accident.

The reasons for Shbadnāyā’s minimization of the clergy must remain speculative, but should be put in the context of fifteenth-century disruptions of the clerical structure of the Church of the East. The only date known for Shbadnāyā’s life is 1751 A.G. / 1440, when he composed his three shorter liturgical poems. A catholicos-patriarch is known to have been in office between 1430 and 1444, but for the half-century preceding this range only two patriarchs are attested, and none at all for the thirty years following it. While the lack of attestations might simply be due to lack of evidence, it seems likely that there were gaps in the succession when there was no patriarch. The prayer for the “chief shepherd” at the end of Shbadnāyā’s longest poem may imply that the office had a current incumbent, but he would have been aware that this could not be guaranteed. Even when there was an ecclesiastical hierarchy, lay Christians could find themselves taken captive without a priest to minister to their spiritual needs. For example, T’ovma Mecop’ec’i reports the steadfast faith of a group of Armenians in Samarqand despite the failure of a bishop to reach them: “The captured Christians remained firm in the faith in the city of Samarqand. Subsequently there was a bishop [dispatched], but he did

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49 The fact that the text is titled ʿeskūlyōn, “school text”) in Bodl. Syr. c. 9 might suggest that it was used for this purpose in the eighteenth century.
50 The date is already found in the oldest extant text of the collection, Krakow Biblioteka Jagiellońska Sachau 178, f. 113a.
51 See chapter 3, fnn. 82-83.
not reach that land; instead, he died in Sultaniyeh." In a context with such evident lack of order among the clergy, the parallel drawn by ‘Abdīshō‘ of Nisibis between the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies may have seemed far-fetched. It is likely that Shbadnāyā considered it important to specify the doctrinal content of Christianity and emphasize the importance of the sacraments without requiring too much precision from the disordered state of the clergy.

New Meanings for Priesthood: The Colophon Evidence

While the liturgical prayers were a genre which encouraged conservatism, only gradually incorporating new texts and neglecting old ideas, the colophons at the end of manuscripts enabled experimentation. Certain aspects of the colophon genre were traditional, such as the inclusion of the date and place of copying, the current patriarch and perhaps the local bishop or metropolitan, and protestations of the scribe’s unworthiness. But even when the genre specified what was to be said, it allowed wide leeway as to how to say it, and the many different scribes from diverse localities brought local and personal interests to bear on the traditional texts. What these different scribes reveal about conceptions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy is that, although certain components of the older theological and liturgical conceptions continued, the idea of the priesthood was also assimilated to notions of non-ecclesiastical authority, especially toward the end of the fifteenth century.

The bulk of the discussion of priesthood in the colophons is found in self-deprecations and praises of other clergy. While it might be objected that such notions are conventional and cannot be taken as neutral description of the clergy indicated, the conventionality does not hinder

53 Տերերում քրիստոնեանությունը հանդիսանումը ենին համաձայն Հայերեների պատմություն: Տ'ումա Մեկոպ'եցի, Պատմագրություն (Երևան: Մագալություն, 1999), 34; Տ'ումա Մեկոպ’եցի, Տ'ումա Մետսոբեցի իս Հիստորի Օֆ Թամերլանդ Անդ Հիս Սուֆերսորս, trans. Robert Bedrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1987), 19. 34, 19
their value for instructing us regarding what the scribes viewed as normative or ideal for the priesthood. Where the praises or self-deprecatons acquired a fixed form, they might have been preserved as a fossil from a previous period disconnected from current conceptions of ideal clergy. But since the colophon genre encouraged saying something negative about oneself and something positive about others, without specifying precisely what, then what was said still indicated what was considered positive or negative for the clergy.

The self-deprecatons of the scribes indicate the existence of a conceptual distinction between the clerical office and the qualities of the individual cleric. Thus several scribes, in addition to the conventional insistence upon their own sinfulness, also asserted that they did not deserve their ecclesiastical rank. Deacon Mas`ūd of Kpharbūrān, according to his colophon, “is not worthy of the name of deacons.” The priest George of Shanqlābād indicated his vocation as a monastic priest with the words, “By name he is a priest and by appellation a monk clothed in the exalted and angelic habit.” A priest named ʾĪsā in Mosul in 1489 insulted himself as “fruitless and evil in actions and as far as the east from the west from the rank which was entrusted to him and from the lot which came to his ignorance,” while another priest ʾĪsā in 1496 described himself as “one who, by the grace of our Lord, is a priest even though

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54 Almost all scribes called themselves “sinful” (مَكَّنَ), in addition to other optional deprecatons. The sinfulness of the scribes was often alleged as the reason for their unworthiness to have their names recorded, a stricture which in most cases was circumvented by the scribe providing his name in case the reader might want to pray for his forgiveness: Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a, 180a. Some scribes reconciled this tension by encoding their names in a cipher, giving the numeric values of each of the letters of their name in order: for example, Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125a. The scribes of Cambridge Add. 616 and Berlin orient. quart. 801, on the other hand, after stating that they were not worthy of their name or appellation, did not provide any name.


56 Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 180a.

57: BL Or. 4399, f. 376a.
unworthy." In 1499 a priest Ėlīyā identified himself as someone who “in name is a priest and not by deeds of righteousness.” Taken together, these self-deprecations reveal what might be termed a “conceptual detachability” between the priesthood, which ought to be characterized by “deeds of righteousness” and avoidance of sin, and the sinfulness or unworthiness of individual clerics. This distinction could enable the liturgical emphasis on the celebrant’s unworthiness to be held in tension with the clericalism asserted by the ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis and Timothy II in the late Mongol period.

The glue between the individual priest and the holy priesthood was thought to be the grace of God who chose the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Like the priest ‘Īsā in 1496, Metropolitan Sabrīshō’ of Ḥiṣn-Kayf described himself in a colophon as “the wretch Sabrīshō who by the grace of the Lord serves the metropolitan’s throne.” For the highest ecclesiastical ranks, however, this was more commonly expressed as divine election than divine grace. The catholicos-patriarch of the Church of the East was thought to be chosen by God, as is made explicit by colophons from 1477, 1489, and 1498. The former two refer to the current incumbent as “this man whom his Lord chose and brought from the East to raise up the horn of his Church,” and the last not only adds the adjective “chosen” (gabhyā) to the list of praises of the

58 Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a.  
59 BL Add. 7174, f. 214a. Similar sentiments were expressed by Armenian scribes, who might insert “falsely named” (անկանխաբեր) before their title among other protestations of their unworthiness: for examples, see L. S. Xač’ikyan, Tashingerord dari hayeren jeřhagreri hišatakaranner (Yerevan: Haykakan S. S. H. Gitut’yunneri Hratarakzu’yun, 1967), III:38, 81, 88. An Armenian scribe named Melk’iset’ even described himself as “the falsely named presbyter, which I am called in name and not by deeds” (անկանխաբեր հայերեն ղեկավար, որոնցում ես կոչում կոչ, ոչ իրախոր իրախորուծ): ibid., III:37.  
60 Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 106b. The name and the last three words are partly covered in the manuscript, but he wrote a similar note on f. 114b: “the wretch Sabrīshō who by grace is metropolitan of Ḥiṣn-Keyf” (անկանխաբեր հայերեն ղեկավար): Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b; BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.
catholicos-patriarch, but then additionally describes him as “chosen by the Lord in the Spirit.”

The tenure of Metropolitan Ėlīyā, the designated patriarchal heir (nātaš kārṣyā), was “by the choice which belongs to the Holy Spirit” according to Archdeacon Ėshō of Mosul in 1795 A.G./1484. Thus God was portrayed as in control of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The notions of priestly unworthiness and divine election were traditional before the fifteenth century, but the colophons written under Türkmen rule introduced new aspects of the ecclesiastical hierarchy which conformed it to secular rule. The most notable of these is the attribution of “victory” (zkhāthā) to the patriarchs. Victorious rule was commonly portrayed as an element of good secular rule. Thus Archdeacon Ėshō of Mosul asserted that in the 1480s “believers were blessed by the mediation of the one prosperous in kingship and clothed with victory, Sultan Ya’qūb” b. Uzun Ḥasan, the Āqqūyunlū ruler. The liturgy for Qyāmtā (Easter) included a prayer that God would “bless our exalted, victorious, and guarded-in-life king So-and-so and enrich the kingdom and subdue before him all his enemies.” The ancient Emperor Constantine, often presented as the model of Christian rulership, was also traditionally given the epithet “the Victorious” (zakhāyā), and when Shbadnāyā recounted Constantine’s vision of the Cross, he described how “the believing king made [a cross] in the image of [the one in the

63: BL Add. 7177, f. 321a. We will consider the possibility that this reference had a particular apologetic purpose below.
64: BL Add. 7177, f. 194b, ll. 1-2.
and by it he conquered enemies.” Shbadnāyā maintained a conceptual distinction between ideal priests and successful kings, however, in his prayer that Christ would “incite the priests in uprightness and stir up the kings in victory.” It is this conceptual distinction which fifteenth-century colophons started to blur.

Colophons from the Mongol period often prayed for long life or salvation for the patriarch, and these requests continued through the fifteenth century, but it is only in the fifteenth century that the victories of East Syrian catholicoi become the object of prayer. In 1741 A.G. / 1430, Deacon Masʿūd of Kpharbūrān described Catholicos Shemʿōn as “established and strengthened in all victories.” At greater length, in 1795 A. G. / 1484, Archdeacon Īshōʾ of Mosul prayed, “We ask from God, the Lord of all and the Creator of all, to grant peace to the priesthood and to establish the royalty, and to give to each of them according to his will for good, and may they be worthy of victory in this world and in the one to come refreshment.” Although the prayer includes secular power in its scope, the referent of “they” which is to be worthy of victory is the same as those worthy of salvation, and thus includes the priesthood. A scribe in 1807 A.G. / 1496 linked the patriarch’s victories to the pride of the Christian people: the catholicos was “established and exalted and made illustrious by all victories for the boasting of the holy Church and for the renewal and the exaltation of his sons to the end of days.” The priest Īsā b. Fakhr al-Dīn b. Īsā of Mosul prayed in 1793 A.G. / 1482, “May [the Catholicos-

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69 Cambridge Add. 1983, f. 72a.
70 For an example dated 1750 A.G. / 1439, see Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a.
71 Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b.
72 BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.
73 Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a. The masculine pronoun “his sons” is probably an error for the feminine “her [i.e. the Church’s] sons,” which is more common in coordinating phrases “for the boasting of the Church and the exaltation of her sons.”
Patriarch] live with all victories and act mightily with all powerful exploits.” As an extension of prayers for patriarchal victories, the same scribe Ыsă prayed in a colophon dated 1800 A.G. / 1489 for the designated patriarchal heir, Metropolitan Ėlīyă of Mosul, that “his arm may be strong with strength and victories.” In the fifteenth century, the ideal patriarch must also be victorious.

On a conceptual level, this shift was enabled by the shifting meanings of the term rēshānā (“first, noble, chief”). In the Mongol period, the term could include both ecclesiastical and secular leaders. On the religious side, a colophon dated 1612 A.G. / 1301 termed Catholicos Yahbhallāhā “the head of the rēshānē, the high priests,” namely the bishops. The law-book of ‘Abdishō’ of Nisibis also cited an earlier synod which referred to the patriarchal office as “the patriarchal primacy [rēshānūthā]” and “the primacy of the patriarchal thrones.” On the secular side, in 1643 A.G. / 1332 a manuscript was copied for “the glorious chief” Ḥakim Hormīzd. In fifteenth-century colophons, however, the noun rēshānā was used exclusively for non-ecclesiastical leaders, apparently a class of village chiefs or nobles. In light of this shift, the

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74 Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, f. 97a.
75 BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.
78 Addai Scher, “Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques du Musée Borgia aujourd’hui à la Bibliothèque vaticane,” Journal Asiatique 10, 13 (1909): 263. Unfortunately Scher did not give the Syriac text and I have been unable to consult it directly, but I presume the word which he translated “chef” was rēshānā.
79 See citations in Chapter 3, fn. 146. An ambiguous and complex possible exception, from a colophon dated October 1850 A.G. / 1538, describes the designated patriarchal heir, after the death of the catholicos but before his own election as the replacement, as “the head of the chiefs of the faithful Church” (فرحان وهم مفاده تعالما) that secular rulers within the Church of the East could be described in this manner: Vatican sir. 83, f. 574b. The same colophon immediately before this phrase referred to the patriarch-to-be as “chief of pastors” (رث راحلا) and “chief of priests” (حعلس).
use of the derived noun \(rēshānuθā\) ("primacy" or "chieftainship") to describe the patriarchy could acquire a more political dimension.\(^{80}\) At a lower level of the hierarchy, the conceptual association between ecclesiastical and secular leadership could be strengthened in those villages where the leading priest was also a member of the chief’s family. Indeed, all known fifteenth-century East Syrian \(rēshānuθā\) are mentioned in colophons due to the patronage of a son who served as the priest, with the exception of Chief Denḥā of Ṭālnā who was himself a priest.\(^{81}\) The priest Hormizd, son of Chief Mattai of Telkepe, was explicitly designated the primary priest of his village: “this aforementioned priest was sacristan of [the church of Mār Qūryaqūs], and there were in this village people of his craft and his entourage, a multitude of clerics.”\(^{82}\) Shifting vocabulary and shared social connections could provide conduits for conceptual slippage.

The adoption of secular notions of leadership, and “victory” in particular, by the patriarchal office was also necessitated by the political reality of instability. Without powerful patrons capable of leveraging military power to protect the community, the Church of the East looked to political means to obtain security, and the patriarch was the prime representative. A colophon of 1795 A.G. / 1484 celebrated the current stability in terms which hint at but do not spell out the political means which brought it about:

And in the days [of the catholicos and \(nātar kūrsyā\) just mentioned] the Church was at peace and monasteries and fathers were freed, and the ruined monasteries were rebuilt and the rank of priests and Levites abounded and the believers were blessed by the mediation of the one prosperous in kingship and clothed with victory, Sultan Ya’qūb, the king of Media and Persia and Armenia and Babylon and the Euphrates and the Tigris, while we ask from God, the Lord of all and the Creator of all, to grant peace to the priesthood and establish the royalty and give to each of them according to his will for

\(^{80}\) For example, in Vatican sir. 186, f. 240a. The term \(rēshānuθā\) was also applied to Metropolitan Timothy of Hīṣn-Kayf and Nisibis in 1741 A.G. / 1430: Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125b.

\(^{81}\) See chapter 3, fn. 151. The exception is mentioned in the colophon at the end of Isho’dad of Merv, The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.) in Syriac and English, ed. Margaret Dunlop Smith Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), V, pt. 1:180.

\(^{82}\) BL Or. 4399, f. 579b.
good, and may they be worthy of victory in this world and in the one to come
refreshment, Amen.  

This colophon has been interpreted to indicate a period of resurgent monasticism in the Church of the East during a period of peace. But a portion of the unstable back story to this celebration of tranquility is provided by a colophon from seven years earlier, previously unstudied, which mentions the same patriarch

putting on the mantle of high-priesthood, this man whom his Lord chose and brought him from the East to raise up the horn of his Church. And when all the churches in every eastern district – some of them were closed, the majority of them were destroyed, and there was a great persecution upon all Christians. Then he, like a good shepherd and imitating his Lord entrusted himself to his Lord and placed himself intentionally on behalf of his flock. And like a strong wrestler and a wise contestant he made a great contest on behalf of these. And he went out from it with victory and a marvelous triumph. And he opened the ones which were closed and rebuilt the ones which were ruined, and the Lord had mercy upon his people by him, our holy father and blessed in every way, our lord and the lord of our life, Mār Shemʿon the Catholicos-Patriarch of the East.

Evidently a period of danger for the Church of the East had prompted the catholicos-patriarch to intervene, and the reference to the Āqqūyunlū ruler Sultan Yaʿqūb in the later colophon suggests that the ecclesiastical leader had appealed (successfully) to the Türkmen military ruler.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the role of the patriarch was enlarged to include protecting his people, the Church of the East, from physical as well as spiritual harm. A

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83 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b. This section was copied in a colophon dated 1800 A.G. / 1489: BL Or. 4399, f. 579a.

colophon dated 1810 A.G. / 1499 prays for the effectiveness of the protection achieved by the successor of the catholicos-patriarch of the 1480s: “May his prayer guard the believers and make pass from them the harms of evil disturbing enemies and troublesome grievous sufferings, and those who stand against him and those who hate and also envy him, let them be in this world accursed and in the one to come, yes and amen.” In times as violent as the fifteenth century, it would make sense for some sectors of the Church of the East to view their most effective protector, in this case the patriarch, as earlier generations viewed their military protectors, and to pray for his victory. As a corpus of disparate texts from diverse locations and authors, not all fifteenth-century colophons assimilate the catholicos-patriarch to images of victorious rulers, but this image would become increasingly standard in the following centuries.

The Crisis of Legitimacy

The most fundamental shift in how the ecclesiastical hierarchy was understood in the fifteenth century was the adoption of a hereditary patriarchate, and this shift was likely driven by a crisis of legitimacy unintentionally brought on by the reformist program of Timothy II and ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis. The first canon of Timothy II’s 1318 council authorized the use of the collection of canon law recently compiled by the metropolitan of Nisibis. But that law-book contained strict requirements for patriarchal legitimacy. Apparently in an effort to prevent patriarchal schisms and the ordination of rival catholicoi, ‘Abdīshō’ quoted an anathema on any would-be catholicos consecrated anywhere other than the traditional patriarchal seat of Kōkhē near Baghdad: “And if it is not in the church of Kōkhē that he is ordained patriarch but outside of

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86 BL Add. 7174, ff. 214a-b.
87 More traditional colophons which do not pray for victory include the Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a; St. Petersburg Nat. Lib. Syr. 33; Cambridge Add. 1965; and probably Berlin orient. oct. 1313, although the colophon is only partially preserved.
the great church … let him be deposed and nullified from this great service, and from all the ranks of the priesthood, and let him, the one who was ordained, and those who ordained him be anathema forever by the command of the glorified Trinity.”

‘Abdīshō’ did consider how to elect a catholicos “if it is a time of disorder in the world and persecution in the Church,” but while these harsh conditions reduced the number of metropolitans necessary for the consecration, it was still necessary for the bishops and clergy of “the great hyparchy” (i.e. the suffragans of the patriarchal see in Baghdad) to ratify the choice. The patriarchal church at Königē was the non-negotiable location for a consecration, despite the relocations of the catholicos under Mongol rule. Patriarchal legitimacy required sitting upon the “apostolic throne” which had been used for consecrating each new catholicos, it was thought, since the first century.

The difficulty is that in the upheavals of the post-Mongol period, access to the patriarchal church at Königē could not be assured. Timothy II is the last catholicos-patriarch certainly known to have been enthroned at Königē. After the death of Timothy II, his successor Denḥā II was elected in 1648 A.G. / 1337, apparently after an interval of some years. A near contemporary note in an East Syrian manuscript records an intense persecution of Christians by a Muslim Mongol emir named ‘Alī Pāšā, and his subsequent defeat by a Christian Mongol emir named Haqqī Togāy; it was only with the support of the latter that the catholicos could be elected, presumably consecrated in the traditional manner. After this patriarch’s death in 1693 A.G. / 1382, the next patriarch for whom we have any dates is the Catholicos Shem’ōn listed in a

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88 ‘Abdīshō’ bar Brīkhā, Nomocanon, 389.
89 Ibid., 394–95.
90 The year in which Timothy II died is unknown, but he was named for the last time in a colophon dated 1639 A.G. / 1328, and apparently no patriarch was named in a few colophons from the early 1330s: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 391–92.
91 Mingana Syr. 561, ff. 44a-43b (written upside down in the margin).
series of colophons from the 1430s.\textsuperscript{92} It is perhaps no accident that an East Syrian patriarch is known in the period following the rule of Shāh Muḥammad, the Qarāqūyunlū governor of Baghdad in the 1420s who was rumored to be Christian or pro-Christian himself.\textsuperscript{93} Under the favorable Qarāqūyunlū governor, the Church of the East may have regained access to the patriarchal church in Kōkhē, which may have been inaccessible under other rulers of Baghdad. It is unknown at what point the traditional patriarchal throne was permanently lost to the Church of the East, but it was probably at some point in the fifteenth century.

With the loss of the patriarchal church at Kōkhē, the question of patriarchal legitimacy must have presented itself in a sharp form. A colophon composed on 29 November 1789 A.G. / 1477 provides evidence of anxiety over patriarchal legitimacy. There is no evidence of a catholicos-patriarch of the Church of the East between 1444 and 1477,\textsuperscript{94} and the description in this colophon of Mār Shemʿōn “putting on the mantle of high-priesthood” likely indicates that his appointment was recent.\textsuperscript{95} The praise accorded to the catholicos in this colophon far exceeds that in all other colophons within a century.\textsuperscript{96} He is “the most holy sanctuary which the Trinity fixed as its voluntary dwelling upon the earth, and the illuminating resting-place which the eternal Being made a temple for the overshadowing of the power of its might, the spiritual pillar

\textsuperscript{92} See chapter 3, fn. 82. Only one East Syrian colophon is dated between 1382 and 1430, and it is presently inaccessible: Diyarbakr (Scher) 91.

\textsuperscript{93} See chapter 2, fn. 86. This Catholicos Shemʿōn was either preceded or followed by a Catholicos Ėliyā, according a later scribe’s updating of Solomon of Baṣra’s \textit{Book of the Bee}, but without any dates attached to this patriarch it is difficult to infer the circumstances of his ordination: Solomon of Akhat, \textit{Book of the Bee}, 119.

\textsuperscript{94} No patriarch is named in Mingana Syr. 98 (dated October 1766 / 1454), Cambridge Add. 616 (dated 16 June 1772 A.G. / 1461), Berlin orient. quart. 801 (dated 1776 A.G. / 1465), or Vatican sir. 176 (dated 14 February 1787 A.G. / 1476). Of manuscripts from this period, I have been unable to consult Diyarbakr (Scher) 54 (dated 1759 A.G. / 1448), Diyarbakr (Scher) 106 (dated 1770 A.G. / 1459), Siirt (Scher) 50 (dated 17 July 1772 A.G. / 1461), Siirt (Scher) 81 (dated 1784 A.G. / 1473), and Mosul (Maqdisi) 3 (dated 1785 A.G. / 1474). According to Scher’s catalogue, Vatican Borgia sir. 52 is dated 24 April 1779 A.G. / 1468, but correspondence with the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana indicated that the manuscript bearing that code does not match the description given by Scher: Scher, “Manuscrits syriaques du Musée Borgia,” 262.

\textsuperscript{95} See chapter 3, fn. 82. Only one East Syrian colophon is dated between 1382 and 1430, and it is presently inaccessible: Diyarbakr (Scher) 91.

\textsuperscript{96} The only exception is that part of this colophon was copied in the colophon of BL Or. 4399, ff. 579a, dated 1800 A.G. / 1489. Unfortunately the latter colophon is damaged, so it is unclear precisely how much of the Vatican manuscript’s note was included at the end of the British Library manuscript.
which lights and guides before Israel his separated one.”97 The scribe goes on to praise the catholicos-patriarch’s authority over the ecclesiastical hierarchy and his care for monasteries, orphans, widows, the poor, the grieved and afflicted, the hungry, the blind, the erring, before narrating how he contended for the re-opening of closed and ruined churches.98 It is in this context that the scribe introduces the older theme, which all but disappeared from fifteenth-century sources, of the patriarch “keeping the place of Christ.”99 Such unparalleled praise could be read as a list of reasons why this particular priest was rightly “our holy father and blessed in every way, our lord and the lord of our life, Mār Shem’ōn the Catholicos-Patriarch of the East.”100 The very exorbitance of such an encomium may be intended to assuage the anxieties about legitimacy raised by the fact that the law-book of ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis left no ambiguity regarding the necessity of patriarchal ordination at Kōkhē.

Hereditary succession likely presented itself as a solution to the problem of determining patriarchal legitimacy. By the late fifteenth century, the patriarchate and bishoprics of the Church of the East were among the few non-hereditary Christian offices in Iraq. But colophons were assimilating the patriarchs to non-ecclesiastical leaders such as village chiefs, who seem to have been predominantly hereditary.101 The lower clergy were also largely hereditary, with most scribes being clergy, the sons of clergy, and often also thegrandsons or even great-grandsons of clergy.102 For other Middle Eastern Christian groups, hereditary succession to the patriarchate had already come to be used as a legitimizing principle. A Syrian Orthodox scribe in a small

97 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240a.
98 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b.
99 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b.
100 Vatican sir. 186, f. 240b.
101 See chapter 3, fnn. 149-150.
102 See chapter 3, fn. 157.
village in Ṭūr Ḍābīn was aware of the practice not only among his own community, but also among Armenians and Muslims.\textsuperscript{103} It is unclear precisely which hereditary Muslim successions he has in mind,\textsuperscript{104} but his reference shows that even obscure priests from small villages were aware of the practices of hereditary succession in various communities across the region.

The crisis of legitimation brought on by the uncompromising anathemas of the law-book and the irreversible loss of the patriarchal church in Kōkhē likely prompted members of the Church of the East to consider nearby models of legitimate patriarchal rule. The adoption of the term \textit{nāṭar kūrsyā} (“keeper of the throne”)\textsuperscript{105} to identify the designated patriarchal heir may suggest that the model was taken from the Armenians, in that it would be a reasonable calque on the Armenian term \textit{at’ořakal} (“throne-possessor”).\textsuperscript{106} On the other hand, it is not known how those Syrian Orthodox Christians who favored hereditary patriarchal succession termed the practice, since the only sources are written from a hostile perspective, so the possibility of influence from the Syrian Orthodox to the Church of the East cannot be ruled out. The regional perspective on legitimate patriarchal authority being transmitted to relatives of the current


\textsuperscript{104} This may be a historical reference to the caliphate, but no caliph was recognized in this region during the fifteenth century, and it is unclear that the chronicler would refer to the continuing ‘Abbasid caliphate in Mamluk Egypt. On the other hand, the chronicler could refer to the common practice of a qādī being succeeded by his son, or to the hereditary succession of the leaders of Sufi orders such as the rising Safavids: John E. Woods, \textit{The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire}, Rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1999), 142–43, 156–57.

\textsuperscript{105} The earliest attestation of the practice in an East Syrian manuscript employs a slightly different form of the title, with the same meaning: \textit{nāṭar kūrsyā} in Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, f. 97a. The use of a variant title probably implies that the practice is newly developed and has not yet been fully institutionalized.

\textsuperscript{106} The only scholarly discussion of the office of \textit{uprṇnulṣṣṛ} of which I am aware is Avedis K. Sanjian, “Catholicos Aristakēs II’s Encyclical of A.D. 1475,” \textit{Revue des Études Arméniennes} N.S. 18 (1984): 161. Sanjian interprets the \textit{uprṇnulṣṣṛ} as a “coadjutor catholicos” with the same canonical abilities as the catholicos who appointed him, but it is not clear what the relationship between the catholicos and the \textit{uprṇnulṣṣṛ} was in precise terms. The notion of a “fellow catholicos” may be suggested by Sanjian’s translation of the title as “occupant of the throne,” but the Armenian could mean someone who “holds the throne” in the event of it becoming vacant (\textit{uprṇṇ} “throne” + \textit{lṣṣṛ}, from the irregular aorist of \textit{nuhul} “to possess”). Sanjian emphasizes the newness of appointing an \textit{uprṇnulṣṣṛ} during the lifetime of the current catholicos, but nephews or brothers inheriting the patriarchal throne from their relations had a long history before the fifteenth century.
patriarch, coupled with the breakdown of legitimate patriarchal consecration according to the requirements of put forward by the 1318 council of Catholicos Timothy II in the law-book of ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis, provides a probable context for the Church of the East adopting a hereditary patriarchate in the latter half of the fifteenth century.

The practice of hereditary patriarchal successions was not without its critics, however. These criticisms would come to a head within the Church of the East in 1553, when a monk of the powerful monastery of Rabban Hōrmīzd traveled to Rome and solicited the pope’s consecration as a rival patriarch. Earlier criticism of hereditary patriarchal succession within the Church of the East has not survived, though we should presume that such a bold change of practice could not have been universally popular. ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis had earlier contrasted the ancient Jewish priesthood with the Christian clergy in that the former was hereditary while the latter was by ordination based on merit, “and it testifies concerning the perfection of this priesthood and the incompleteness of that one,” since good parents often had bad children and vice versa. From the perspective of priests trained on the writings of ‘Abdīshō’, the adoption of a hereditary patriarchate would sink the Christian clergy to the level of the Jewish priesthood and would imply a rejection of merit-based consecration.

East Syrian criticism of the hereditary patriarchal succession may also be drawn by analogy from arguments proposed by the Syrian Orthodox critics of the practice within their own church. The Syrian Orthodox patriarchate of Mārdīn became hereditary in the middle of the fourteenth century, and the anonymous continuator of Bar Hebraeus’ ecclesiastical chronicle records the event with explicit opprobrium: the patriarch Ignatius II Īwānnīs Ismāʿīl al-Majd of Mārdīn

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107 For a brief summary of this episode, see Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 22.
108 ‘Abdīshō’ bar Brīkhā, Kīthābhā d-methqē margānīthā, 35.
was seeking to make his nephew Fakhr al-Dīn inherit the [patriarchal] throne, just as the Muslims do, as also his own uncle Badarzakhē, who is Bar Wahibbī, had made him inherit the throne, an unlawful deed, and as the Armenians do. For because of this practice Patriarch Mār Yūhannon, who is Ḫūṣ bar Shūshān, wrote to the Armenians, saying, “Everyone who sells the priesthood and makes members of his family inherit the throne of episcopacy or the maphrianate or the patriarchate is anathema.” This is what the apostolic canons command.\(^\text{109}\)

This author later again criticized the practice of hereditary patriarchal succession at length, this time when a later patriarch of Mārdīn, Ignatius VI Khalaf, consecrated his nephew ʿAzīz as maphrian and designated successor in 1782 A.G. / 1471:

The patriarch was seeking to make the maphrian his nephew inherit the [patriarchal] throne just as did Bar Wahibb Badarzakhē, who made his nephew Majd Ismāʿīl inherit the throne, just as the Muslims and Armenians do today. My brothers, it is not right or fitting or orderly to make family members inherit the heavenly and divine throne, but the one who is called by the Holy Spirit should sit on the apostolic throne.\(^\text{110}\)

For this Syrian Orthodox author, the notion that the patriarch should be selected by God (a notion shared by the Church of the East, as we have seen) implied that the office could not be hereditary.

East Syrian proponents of patriarchal nepotism may have heard similar complaints within the Church of the East, or from similarly-minded West Syrian neighbors. Such a background would explain the emphasis in the earliest known reference to a designated patriarchal successor within the Church of the East: the colophon of BL Add. 7177 was dated 1795 A.G. / 889 A.H. / 1484

in the days … of Mār Shemʿōn the Catholicos Patriarch… and in the holiness and reverence of his sister’s son, and in the choice which belongs to the Holy Spirit, our

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\(^{110}\) Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, II:833.
righteous and loving and courageous father, the keeper of the apostolic throne, Mār Ėliyā the Metropolitan bishop.\(^{111}\)

In this colophon, the scribe carefully emphasized the qualifications which justified Mār Ėliyā’s claim to succeed his uncle as patriarch. Surrounded by conventional character references is the more contentious statement of the bishop’s qualification by virtue of his relationship to the present incumbent. But as if anticipating the sort of argument advanced by the contemporary Syrian Orthodox chronicler, the scribe immediately followed the acknowledgement of the relationship with the assertion that Mār Ėliyā is in fact the choice of the Holy Spirit, as demanded by the critic. The scribe is asserting that in fact that Holy Spirit condones this practice of hereditary patriarchal succession, at least in the present case. Since the scribe of this colophon is none other than Archdeacon Īshō’ of Mosul, “the disciple of the patriarchal cell and adhering to the illustrious fathers whom we mentioned,” this defense of the practice comes from the patriarchal circle itself.\(^{112}\) Ultimately the linking of hereditary succession and divine election would reach its clearest statement in the middle of the sixteenth century, shortly after the schism over the issue of hereditary succession, when a metropolitan loyal to the hereditary line speaks of the new patriarch as “one chosen from the womb.”\(^{113}\)

Although we do not have any surviving criticism of the institution from within the Church of the East per se, it is noteworthy how rarely the title designating the patriarchal heir was used before the sixteenth century. Apart from its appearance in the 1484 colophon by Archdeacon Īshō’ of Mosul, it was used by the priest ‘Īsā b. Fakhr al-Dīn b. ‘Īsā of Mosul in the colophon of a liturgical work dated 1793 A.G. / 1482, by the monk Shem’ōn of Mār Ėwgēn

\(^{111}\) BL Add. 7177, f. 321a.

\(^{112}\) BL Add. 7177, f. 321a. The “illustrious fathers,” of course, are the catholicos-patriarch and his successor.

\(^{113}\) Cambridge Add. 1988, f. 168a.
monastery near Nisibis in the colophon of a copy of the Pentateuch dated 16 June 1797 A.G. / 1486, and again by the same ‘Īsā in Mosul in 1804 A.G. / 1493, but these are the only other extant uses of the title from the fifteenth century.\(^{114}\) The title nāṭar kārsyā appears in manuscripts dated 1504, 1530, 1538, and then commonly in the 1540s.\(^ {115}\) But other scribes chose instead to name the designated heir under his other, and more traditional, ecclesiastical title. Between 1477 and 1483, and in the contested election of 1795 A.G. / 1484 one of the rivals was Maphrian Ā, the metropolitan of Nisibis, Mardin, Amid, Hisn-Keif, and Si’ird.\(^{116}\) Three colophons written between 1489 and 1493 instead refer to Mār Ėliyā as the Metropolitan of the Mosul region, with one manuscript adding “and of all the orthodox believers.”\(^ {117}\) Scribes could find other ways of referring to the designated patriarchal heir without emphasizing his anticipated hereditary succession.

\(^{114}\) Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, f. 97a; Addai Scher, “Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conserves dans la bibliothèque de l’évêché chaldéen de Mardin,” Revue des Bibliothèques 18 (1908): 65; Buṭrus Ḥaddād, Al-Makḥūṭāt al-Suryānīyah wa-al-Arabiyyah fī Khizānat al-Rahbānīyah al-Kalādānīyah fī Baghdād (Baghdād: al-Majma’ al-’Ināl al-’Irāqī, 1988), I:138. Addai Scher summarized the colophon of the middle manuscript, “Écrit dans le couvent de Mar Awgen le 16 Ḫızrān 1797 des Grecs (juin 1486), du temps du patriarche Mar Siméon et de son neveu Mar Ėli, héritier du siège,” the last phrase of which presumably represents نَياَةٌ حَماَمْيَة. These are the only fifteenth-century manuscripts in Wilmshurst’s list which includes this title, although some authors of manuscript catalogues might not have included the detail even if it was present in a colophon which they inspected: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 396.

\(^{115}\) Séert (Scher) 46, Vat syr. 91, Vat syr. 83, a manuscript in Beirut dated 1852 A.G. / 1541, Mardin (Scher) 14, BL Add. 7178, Vat syr. 66, Bātnāyā (Ḥaddād) 35, and Mosul (Scher) 80: Wilmshurst, Ecclesiastical Organisation, 398–404.

\(^{116}\) Kirkuk (Vosté) 39 (= Ḫaddād 90), Diyarbakr (Scher) 73, and Mardin (Scher) 43: ibid., 395. Diyarbakr (Scher) 73 apparently omits Mardin, while it and Mardin (Scher) 43 add “Armenia” to the list. Unfortunately only one of these manuscripts indicates where it was written and by whom: Kirkuk (Vosté) 39 was written in Si’ird by Hābīb of Ṣi’īr. The fact that these are all western dioceses of the Church of the East raises the possibility that the position was conceived as the ecclesiastical leader for the western half of the Church, a mirror of the Syrian Orthodox maphrians. It is worth noting that Syrian Orthodox maphrians succeeded to the patriarchate of Mardin in 1412 and 1493, and in the contested election of 1795 A.G. / 1484 one of the rivals was Maphrian ‘Azīz, the nephew of the deceased Patriarch Ignatius VI Kaleph of Mardin, whom the patriarch of Mardin had consecrated as maphrian in 1782 A.G. / 1471: Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, II:809, 833–39; III:551.

\(^{117}\) The first was written by the same priest ‘Īsā of Mosul who in 1493 used the title nāṭar kārsyā for the designated heir, but here referred to him instead as “Metropolitan bishop of Nineveh” (مَيَادِنَةُ أَمْامَ مَارَ كَلَّابَحَ: BL Or. 4399, f. 579a. The second was copied in 1490 in a Hakkar mountain village and gave the title as “Metropolitan of Assyria and all the orthodox believers” (مَيَادِنَةُ مَارَ كَلَّابَحَ: Išo’dad of Merv, Commentaries, V, pt. 1:179. The third, written at an unknown location in 1493, labeled the patriarchal successor “Metropolitan Mār Ėliyā of the region of Nineveh” (مَيَادِنَةُ مَارَ كَلَّابَحَ: Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b.}
Although concrete evidence is lacking, scribes might also silently protest the hereditary patriarchate by refusing to mention the heir. It is not clear whether Metropolitan Ėlīyā in fact survived to inherit from Catholicos Shemʿōn after the latter’s death in 1497: the patriarch’s epitaph was put up instead by an otherwise unknown Mār Ḥnānīshōʿ “the youth”, and a colophon composed in 1807 A.G. / 1496 mentions the catholicos but no metropolitan. If Metropolitan Ėlīyā was still alive in 1496, the scribe’s omission of his name may indicate a rejection of his authority. The adoption of an objectionable hereditary patriarchate to resolve an otherwise insoluble crisis of legitimacy may also explain the failure to update patriarchal lists into and through the fifteenth century. A scribe copying Shlēmōn of Baṣra’s Book of the Bee extended the patriarchal succession contained in the thirteenth-century text down to his own patriarch: Timothy II, Denḥā II, Shemʿōn, Ėlīyā, and “Mār Shemʿōn of our days.” Although the regnal dates of these patriarchs are not given, the last Shemʿōn might at the latest be the catholicos who designated his own nephew as heir in the 1480s and died in 1497. Later scribes do not seem to have added to the list. The liturgical diptychs in commemoration of the patriarchs became fossilized in the form under Catholicos Denḥā II in the middle of the fourteenth century, and their continued copying in manuscripts long after the fourteenth century may suggest a refusal to recognize later patriarchs as legitimate. The liturgical poem listing the successive catholicos-

118 The inscription was edited by Jacques Vosté, “Les inscriptions de Rabban Hormizd et de N.-D. des Semences près d’Alqoš (Iraq),” Le Muséon 43 (1930): 283–84. The honorific “Mār” implies that this Ḥnānīshoʿ was a bishop or metropolitan, while “the youth” (خليمه) suggests that he was younger than was typical for a man of his office, which may have resulted, for example, if he were the newly designated successor to the patriarch. The colophon is Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a.

119 Solomon of Akhlat, Book of the Bee, 119.

120 Budge follows Assemani in identifying the last Shemʿōn as the one ordained in 1504, who followed a catholicos named Ėlīyā, but the Catholicos Shemʿōn who died in 1497 was succeeded by another Catholicos Shemʿōn, and not immediately succeeded by the intervening Catholicos Ėlīyā. Thus this scribe could have updated the list in this way only if he had mentally merged the two successive patriarchs named Shemʿōn into one, which is unlikely within a generation of the succession.

patriarchs, present in a fifteenth-century manuscript, ended with Timothy II and then a prayer for the current, but unnamed, incumbent. While this may indicate the period of composition, the fact that the poem was not expanded may also indicate doubts as to the legitimacy of the later patriarchs.

**Conclusion**

When Metropolitan Joseph of Erbil was consecrated Catholicos Timothy II in 1318, he and the other metropolitans of the Church of the East evidently felt that what was needed in the unstable period under the rule of Mongol khans newly converted to Islam was a more centralized clergy. The synod affirmed the validity of the law-book compiled by Metropolitan ’Abdīshō’ of Nisibis, which imposed strict requirements for the legitimate consecration of a catholicos-patriarch and the ordination by him of the other ranks of clergy. Moreover, both Timothy II and ’Abdīshō’ of Nisibis wrote theological treatises emphasizing the centrality of the clergy to the Church. But this clericalist structure of the Church proved untenable in the even greater upheavals following the breakdown of Mongol rule. The liturgy partially preserved and yet narrowed this synthesis in the prayers for the sacramental system. The poetry of Īshāq Shbadnāyā, on the other hand, referred to the clergy only in passing, almost exclusively in prayers, and refrained from suggesting any notion of their necessity for the Church. The several colophons from the fifteenth century, however, show the piecemeal assimilation of the clergy to the non-ecclesiastical chiefs, particularly in prayers for victory for the catholicos-patriarchs. Finally, the adoption of a hereditary patriarchal succession within the Church of the East was most likely motivated by the need to resolve the crisis of legitimacy brought on by the inability

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to satisfy the requirements of patriarchal succession in the terms required by the law-book of
‘Abdishō of Nisibis.
Chapter 7: The Presence of the Past

When Šalība b. Yūḥannā of Mosul completed his Astār al-asrār in the middle of the fourteenth century, no subsequent East Syrian authors would continue the historical portion of his work. Isolated episodes would occasionally be reported in brief historical notices, usually of not more than a few pages, and long-dead saints continued to attract the attention of hagiographical poets, but for centuries no author from the Church of the East undertook to write the history of that community. The historiographical tradition that included such important

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1 A portion of this chapter was presented as “Christian history and Christian identity in Ishāq Shbadnaya and Ishoyab bar Mqaddam,” at Symposium Syriacum XI, held at the University of Malta, on July 17, 2012.

2 On the Kitāb al-majdal, its revision and authorship, see Bo Holmberg, “A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al-Magdāl,” Parole de l’Orient 18 (1993): 255–273. For discussions of much of the rest of Syriac historiography, with comparison to Armenian historiography, see the articles collected in Muriel Debié, ed., L’historiographie syriaque, Études syriaques 6 (Paris: Geuthner, 2009). Anton Baumstark and Rudolf Macuch described a pair of poems listing the Catholicos-Patriarchs of the East into the fourteenth or perhaps fifteenth century as pertaining to “die nestorianische Patriarchengeschichte,” but each patriarch receives no more than two lines of verse, sometimes less, so this cannot be termed a historical work of substance: Anton Baumstark, Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber, 1922), 331; Rudolf Macuch, Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 36. An edition of the earlier of the pair, dating from the fourteenth century, is found in ‘Abdīshīr b. Bīkhār, Kithāb h-methqār mūriqīn b-‘al sh̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲̲...
works as Yōḥannān Penkāyā’s *Rēsh Mellē*\(^6\) and Ėliyā bar Shēnāyā’s chronography\(^7\) came to an end in the fourteenth century.

Yet the Church of the East thought of itself as a community with a past. The theology, liturgy, and hierarchy of the Church of the East structured a certain range of communal self-understandings for the East Syrian population. These concepts were neither uniform nor static, but they were all contemporary, in the sense that they spoke primarily about the community in the present. But East Syrian Christianity had a past and a future as well as a present, and the Church of the East understood itself in light of a particular set of narratives about history.

The absence of chronicles or other genres of historical writing valued by modern historians for reconstructing past events presents a problem, but not an insuperable one, for the study of how the fifteenth-century Church of the East understood its own history. Theological and liturgical texts frequently referred to the past and community’s place in it. The requirements placed by modern Western historians on historical accounts were not those of fifteenth-century Middle Eastern Christians, yet to understand the conceptual community of the latter requires seeing how they appealed to the past. East Syrian authors of the fifteenth century typically discussed the past in three ways: through a tightly sequenced and dated discussion of the foundation of the Church by Jesus and the apostles, an unordered appeal to previous authors (late antique and medieval) as authorities in exegetical and doctrinal discussions, and the undated veneration of particular saints (mostly late antique) for their benefits to the congregation in the present. In contrast to modern Western views of history, the fifteenth-century Church of the East


seems to have regarded its recent past as less important than its ancient past for the purposes of the present.

**After the End of History**

No East Syrian chronicle survives from the fifteenth century or for several centuries thereafter. This was not due to a lack of interest in the past, or to the loss of the tools which enabled earlier authors to compose their histories. Instead, as we shall see, it is more likely due to the violent and continually disturbed nature of much of the period, in which the composition and preservation of texts proved difficult. Nevertheless, even in their paucity, the references to the communal history of the Church of the East reveal certain priorities with which East Syrians thought about the past.

In the fifteenth century, as in earlier periods, the Church of the East had the tools to write historical narratives and it knew how to use them. Although it is a brief text, the account of the consecration of East Syrian metropolitans for India and the arrival of the Portuguese there, which includes dates and explanations of the order of events, shows that at the beginning of the sixteenth century monks from the Church of the East were able to compose historical narrative. The concepts which supported the composition of history were maintained by certain ideas about time held by the Church of the East among others. East Syrian theology presented time as a linear progression from the creation of the world by God “in the beginning” to the return of Christ and the restoration of all things. The title of Īshāq Shbadnāyā’s longest poem indicates its concern with the theme of God’s governance “from ‘In the Beginning’ until eternity.”

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9 188. Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 1b.
signals the beginning of time. Shbadnāyā’s discussion of creation in the second section of his long poem asserts, “Motion begins, or rather is, from a time, / And every motion is in time.”

This ability to move is a property of created things, but not of God, “Since we are under time and under motion and chance, / But there [i.e. of God] you will not accuse the [divine] intelligence of somata or of body.”

Shbadnāyā invites his audience, “Come, see therefore the fitting order which belongs to creation,” and begins his narrative with “On the first day he created the four natures.” Creation therefore began with the “first day,” the beginning of time.

If the world had a beginning, Shbadnāyā also expected the world to have an end. He quoted Āḥōbh Qatḥāyā, “There is a tradition that the world will be thirteen indictions [periods of 532 years each] from its beginning until its end, ten former ones before the coming of Christ, and three from his coming until the end.” According to this calculation, the world was created 5,320 years before Christ, and would come to an end 1,596 years afterward, this latter number confirmed by Shbadnāyā’s immediately preceding quotation of Āḥōbh Qatḥāyā: “Some pass down that the offerings and thanksgiving which our Lord delivered will endure 1,596 years, the...
quantity that the offerings of Jerusalem and the Law continued.” In other words, the Christian sacramental system will last for the same duration as the Old Testament sacrificial system, from its institution in the time of Moses until its abrogation by Christ. Shbdnāyā was early enough that this date, almost two centuries in the future for him, seemed plausible, and even though the end did not come at that time, it reveals this author’s understanding of the world as having bounded linear time in which historical development could make sense.

This linear view of time was shared by the East Syrian scribes most broadly. It might be implicit in the scribal doxologies praising God “who makes times and generations pass away and he does not pass away,” and “blessed be his name to generations of generations,” although this latter is essentially formulaic. But the use of the Seleucid calendar (“the year of the Greeks”) certainly implies a linear view of time, in which one can count the number of years since a past event. Although manuscript colophons might be damaged and have their dates effaced, it seems that the inclusion of the year was one of the most important characteristics of the colophon. No colophon survives which is dated to the fifteenth century on other grounds and yet clearly omitted the date. Even the brief note by the monk Rabban Mūshē of the monastery of Mār Sargīs, recording the fact that he redeemed this volume from “the Mongols” for the price of

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15 Shbdnāyā, see note 12.


5 tanga, included the date of the transaction.  Scribes sometimes also recorded the date of the text which they were copying, as for example one copyist gave the date 1627 A.G. / 1316 for the composition of the *Pardaysā da-‘den* of ʿAbdīshō of Nisibis, and another indicated that Metropolitan ʿĪshō yahb bar Mqaddam of Erbil composed his grammar in 1755 A.G. / 1444. The fact that the East Syrian scribes erroneously believed their calendar counted years from the reign of Alexander the Great did not vitiate the utility of such a long-range calendar for the relative dating of more recent events, as is shown by Shbadnāyā’s reference to the translation of the Greek Septuagint from the Hebrew “three hundred years before the coming of our Lord Christ, more or less, in the reign of Ptolemy the Egyptian.”

Despite the availability of the conceptual tools for writing histories, however, no such texts are known to have been composed, which must be due in large part to the frequent disturbances caused by raiding armies. The frequent wars between the Qarāqūyunlū and the Āqqūyunlū, as well as the occasional invasions by Timurid, Mamluk, or Ottoman sultans and the

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18 Cambridge BFBS 446, f. 255a. Unfortunately the date is damaged, but it probably read 1737 A.G. / 1426.
19 Cambridge Add. 616, f. 108b.
20 Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 106a.
21 The calendar was often identified simply as the year “of the Greeks” (كمس) or “of the blessed Greeks” (كمس بنliche: Cambridge BFBS 446, f. 255a; Mingana Syr. 98, f. 100b; Cambridge Add. 616, f. 109a; Berlin orient. quart. 801, f. 48b; BL Add. 7177, f. 320b; BL Or. 4399, f. 377a; Cambridge Add. 1965, f. 257b; Berlin Sachau 167, f. 139a; Paris BN Syr. 369, f. 106a; BL Add. 7174, f. 213b. But it was also identified as the year “of Alexander the son of Philip the king of the Macedonians” (كمس بنيليه: Paris BN Syr. 184, f. 125a), “of Alexander the son of Philip the Greek” (كمس بنيليه: Berlin orient. oct. 1313, f. 176b); “of Alexander the Macedonian” (كمس بنيليه: Cambridge Add. 616, f. 108b); “of the king of Greece” (كمس: Vorlage of Berlin orient. quart. 845, f. 179a); or “of the kingdom of the sons of Greece” (كمس: St. Petersburg Nat. Lib. Syr. 33, f. 316a, published in Isho’dad of Merv, *Commentaries*, V, pt. 1: 179.). In reality the Seleucid era numbered years since the return of Seleukos I Nikator to Babylon in 311 BC.
22 We cannot rule out the possibility that a history was composed and is merely no longer extant. But the same forces that make the composition of histories difficult also make their transmission and preservation challenging. If a history was composed, it must have circulated sufficiently little so that Catholic and (by the nineteenth century) Protestant missionaries did not obtain a copy to bring to Europe with them. Indeed, the fact that the brief historical account of the bishops consecrated for India in 1811 A.D. / 1500 survives in multiple early copies suggests that it is more likely that no fifteenth-century history was composed within the Church of the East: Mingana Syr. 11, ff. 105a-108a; Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III, part 1: 589–99.
more local conflicts of Kurdish tribes or Türkmen dynastic warfare, were also the occasion of armies plundering the sedentary population and selling back to them anything that might be valuable. Books were prominent among the items plundered and resold, as a note already cited in a thirteenth-century Gospel manuscript records the price which a monk paid to redeem it from the “Mongol” (probably Timurid) army.  

In these disturbed times the writing of history was more difficult not only for the Church of the East, but also for other groups. Only one Armenian history survives from the end of the Mongol Ilkhanate until the seventeenth century, compared to four histories from the briefer period of Mongol rule. This single historical text was written in the early to mid-fifteenth century by the vardapet T’ovma Mecop’ec’i, who recorded also his frequent relocations to avoid capture by passing armies, sometimes without success.  

After a spate of three major chronicles between the late twelfth and late thirteenth century, the only lengthy Syrian Orthodox historical writing of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was an anonymous continuation of the chronicles, both ecclesiastical and secular, of Bar Hebraeus.

24 Cambridge BFBS 446, f. 255a. For more citations concerning redeeming plundered books, see chapter 3.  


26 T’ovma Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, ed. Levon Xa’č’ikyan (Yerevan: Magałat, 1999), 25, 70, 73, 132, 148, 155, 187. Indeed, T’ovma Mecop’ec’i recognized that his historical narrative was out of order and asked the reader’s indulgence: “You must forgive me, for I was old and commenced (writing) at fifty years of age. Therefore I wrote going backward and forward” (γῇ  ὕπερ θ’ῃ ἐγὼ ἐπὶ πολλάς Ἔτες ἐγὼ ἐξῆκεν ἄγενθ’); translation modified from T’ovma Mecop’ec’i, T’ovma Metsohets’i’s History of Tamerlane and His Successors, trans. Robert Bedrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1987), 33; Mecop’ec’i, Patmagrut’yun, 65.  

Even the ruling Qarāqūyunlū dynasty failed to produce or transmit a court history in this period, while the earliest surviving Āqqūyunlū court history dates from after Uzun Hasan finally defeated the Qarāqūyunlū in 1469 and established a period of relative peace in the region.

In these more difficult times, what East Syrian authors chose to write reveals the priorities they had. As discussed in chapter 5, the preponderance of liturgical and (to a lesser degree) theological manuscripts among those which survive from the fifteenth century shows the greater importance of religious matters. New compositions such as Īṣāq Shbadnāyā’s “Poem on God’s Economy” and the smaller poems for liturgical occasions by him and Īṣhō’ yahb bar Mqaddam again emphasize this liturgical and theological dimension. But the past is not ignored in these texts. The core of Shbadnāyā’s magnum opus recounts the story of Jesus’ life, work, death, and resurrection, and he provided dates to anchor various parts of this narrative in historical time. This narrative extends through the founding of the Church and the ministry of the apostles, understood to be in direct connection with the author’s own community. The same work appeals to numerous earlier Christian theologians as doctrinal authorities. One of Shbadnāyā’s shorter poems recounts the life and martyrdom of St. George for that saint’s annual commemoration, as does a poem by Bar Mqaddam, while another poem of the latter author gives the narrative of the monastic founder Rabban Hōrmīzd. These texts may not be what modern Western historians would consider as histories, yet they testify to the engagement of the Church of the East with its own past. In order to analyze how this community conceptualized its

Patriarch Yūḥannon bar Shayallah (Cambridge Dd. 3.81, ff. 82a-87b and Vatican sir. 166, ff. 351b-353b) and a very brief chronicle by Patriarch Nūḥ Pūnūqoyo (Vatican sir. 97, ff. 138a-140a). This last text was edited and translated into Latin by Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis, II:469–72.

Some of their perspective on their own history may survive in the court chronicle of a cadet branch which fled to India and established a kingdom there: Vladimir Minorsky, “The Qara-qoyunlu and the Qub-shāhs,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 17, no. 1 (1955): 50–73.

diachronic dimension, we must overcome our own provincial perspective of what “counts” as history and consider their exposition of their own past.

**The Church’s One Foundation**

In fifteenth century East Syrian sources, the bulk of the historical attention, like the bulk of the theological consideration, was directed to Jesus. In his prose commentary to his longest poem, Shbadnāyā discussed four proposed dates for the birth of Christ, in the first case providing also the year of the Annunciation, and supplying for the first two cases the year of Christ’s baptism (at age thirty) and death (at age thirty-three). He cited Eusebius and “the synod of the apostles” in favor of the first proposal, in which Christ was announced in 305 A.G., born in 306 A.G., baptized in 336 A.G., and died in 339 A.G., which he concluded “is more true” than the other dates supplied. He then considered the question on which weekday, in which month and day Christ’s conception was announced, in both the solar and lunar calendars. This was a particularly important question, since Armenians celebrated the Annunciation on April 6, while Syrian Orthodox celebrated the festival on March 25. But the Church of the East uniquely celebrated the Annunciation as a liturgical season of four weeks leading up to Christmas, which freed Shbadnāyā from needing to toe a party line on the date of this event; instead he opted for a date almost midway between these two, April 1.

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30 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 57b. The other dates considered for Christ’s birth were 309 A.G., 316 A.G. (after an Annunciation in 315 A.G.), and 308 A.G. The difference in years between Christ’s Annunciation and birth are due to the fact that the years in the Seleucid era begin on October 1.

31 The difference in dates for the Annunciation are related to the difference in dates for Nativity nine months later, which Armenians celebrated with Epiphany on January 6 but Syrian Orthodox celebrated on December 25: Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, *The Work of Dionysius Barsalibī Against the Armenians*, ed. Alphonse Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies IV (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1931), 45–46.

32 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 58a. Shbadnāyā’s calendrical arithmetic was somewhat weak. He asserted that the Annunciation took place on Wednesday, April 1, that Christ spent 270 days in the womb, and then was born on Friday, December 25. But the period between April 1 and December 25, counting inclusively, is only 269 days. No doubt the roundness of the number 270 is important, exactly 9 months of 30 days each. Curiously, Shbadnāyā cited
This historical discussion was not merely antiquarian, of course, but had implications for the author’s present day. Of course the assertion that the Annunciation took place on a day other than the date on which it was celebrated by rival Christian groups had polemical value, arguing that those other groups were fundamentally mistaken. The dates given for Jesus’ birth and death may emphasize the reality of the incarnation and salvation accomplished by these events. On the other hand, since the historical existence of Jesus was not denied by Jews, Muslims, or other Christian groups, it may be that Shbadnāyā gave these dates more specifically to confirm the truthfulness of the accounts found in the gospels, against Muslim assertions that Jesus did not in fact die on a cross and that the gospel texts were corrupted. This could partly explain why Shbadnāyā also supplied time markers for events concerning John the Baptist. He indicated that John the Baptist first came to the Jordan at the beginning of September and stayed there five months, rephrasing also the regnal date given in Luke 3:1: “In the fifteenth year inscribed for the king of a disturbed place (Tiberius Caesar).”

He cited the same author regarding the chronology of John the Baptist’s imprisonment and death: “John was locked in prison one year, and he was killed one year before the suffering of our Lord.” Having dates to back up the assertions in the gospels could add weight to the assertion of their trustworthiness.

The relative timing of events in Jesus’ life was also significant for justifying the liturgical cycle of the Church of the East, as with other Christian denominations. Thus the feast of the

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33 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 78a-b.
34 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 83b.
35 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 91b.
Nativity (Yaldā) on December 25 was believed to be the actual anniversary of Christ’s birth, and Epiphany (Denhā) on January 6 the anniversary of Christ’s baptism. The links between liturgical celebration and historical reenactment were especially powerful in Shbadnāyā’s extended discussion of the twelve-day interval between Christmas and Epiphany and whether Jesus fasted before or after his baptism. The synoptic gospels all record a forty-day fast of Jesus in the wilderness after they record his baptism by John in the Jordan River, yet this order is the reverse of the typical liturgical practice by which adults fasted before receiving baptism.

Shbadnāyā cites the opinion of “many of the teachers… that during the thirty years before his baptism our Lord Christ fasted, and this they suppose while saying that the time of our Life-giver’s fast is unknown, and they confirm their opinion by the many proofs which they adduce.”

It is no accident that the only teacher whom Shbadnāyā explicitly names as holding this opinion is Īshō’yahb, presumably the third catholicos of that name, who was regarded as the author of the baptismal ritual. Shbadnāyā himself, however, favored the view that Christ fasted after he was baptized, in the order narrated by the gospels rather than by analogy with contemporary liturgical practice.

Shbadnāyā immediately followed that discussion with a presentation of the reasons for the twelve-day interval between Nativity (Yaldā) and Epiphany (Denhā). Interestingly he did not present the view that they are both anniversaries of independent events. Instead, he cited Ėlīyā d-Badmeh’s statement that the twelve days signify the historical fact that it was twelve days after

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38 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 80a-b.
39 A fifteenth-century testimony of this traditional ascription of authorship is found in Berlin Sachau 167, f. 106b.
40 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 80b.
Christ’s baptism that he departed to the wilderness to fast.\(^{41}\) Although this is the view which the author himself finally advocated after presenting all alternatives,\(^{42}\) he also presented the views of unnamed “others” that either the twelve-day period is merely an ancient custom (‘yādhā ’atīqā) or that “twelve days had gone from the thirtieth year in which our Lord was baptized, and in June our Lord fasted.”\(^{43}\) With the exception of ascribing the Lord’s fast to the month of June, this latter opinion would seem to agree with Shbadnāyā’s assertions that Christ was born on December 25 and baptized on January 6 thirty years later, but evidently he did not regard that explanation as sufficient. Shbadnāyā also quoted an extensive passage of Shemʿōn Shanqlāway indicating that the baptism of Christ is celebrated twelve days after his birth because the Church could not wait thirty years between celebrating the one and celebrating the other.\(^{44}\) Although this opinion appears as a variant of the assertion that the twelve days are merely customary, it shows also the impulse to imitate historical periods in liturgical observance to the degree possible. Shbadnāyā’s solution, that the twelve days been the holidays imitates the fact that Jesus left for the wilderness twelve days after his baptism, likewise reveals the liturgically normative role played by statements about past chronology.

These statements about the dating of certain aspects of the incarnation of Christ are less closely tied to specific concepts about the historical nature of the community, however, than the accounts of apostles. Shbadnāyā devoted a section of his \textit{magnum opus} to describing the apostolic preaching from Pentecost onward. Using the classic architectural metaphor, he described the building up of converts from all peoples into a structure representing the Church upon an apostolic foundation: “For [the apostles] became a rock, for upon their foundation were

\(^{41}\) Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 80b-81a.
\(^{42}\) Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 82a.
\(^{43}\) Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 81a.
\(^{44}\) Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 82a.
According to Shbadnāyah, Christ appointed the apostles leaders of his Church, which they promptly founded in all regions: “Hupatia (leadership) of his Church he entrusted to those who were trustworthy… Everywhere and place they made disciples and brought back people, also brought them into the household… From one end to the other the preachers circled and made disciples.” He noted that “They made a beginning from Jerusalem just as they were commanded,” but this locale did not limit their ministry, as “Clerics (Leaders of the service, chiefs and overseers) in every clime (region) they appointed. They gathered all.” Later Shbadnāyah provided a prose summary of the apostolic ministry, with a citation of his most important sources:

[The apostles] were proclaiming among the nations openly, and they were making disciples and baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are the things which the blessed Luke the evangelist recounts in Acts in an ordered arrangement one after another, concerning the things which were done by their hands, and in the volume of the Ecclesiastical History of Mār Eusebius of Caesarea, the head of the council of 318.

In these quotations, Shbadnāyah emphasized the foundational role played by the apostles in the Christian community along with their universal ministry.

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49 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 207b. Eusebius of Caesarea was erroneously presented in Syriac sources as the presiding bishop at the Council of Nicea.
Earlier in his work Shbadnāyā had included a substantial historical excursus on the upper room mentioned in the gospels which also emphasized the very local beginnings and ultimately global scope of the apostolic ministry:

So our Lord made the owner of the upper room prepare it for him according to what was usual, for the passing on of the sacraments and for the hearing of the teaching and for receiving the gift of the Spirit, and it was like a church and meeting place for the disciples until the uprooting of Jerusalem. And Caiaphas the chief priest, the one who prophesied about the suffering of our Savior, when he saw the signs and wonders through the hands of the apostles, he was baptized 49 days after the descent of the Paraclete upon them, and it was the first church, and in it the resurrection was announced, and in it our Lord appeared to his apostles, and in it they chose Matthias, and from it they went out to proclaim in the inhabited world etc. However, what is trustworthy and more conformable to the truth is that it belonged to Simon the Cyrenian, and this is exact and very believable.50

Although the putative purpose of this quotation is to resolve a disagreement over the minor historical detail who owned the room in question, in fact this quotation also brings together in kernel the three domains in which the Church’s apostolic past was considered definitive for Shbadnāyā’s contemporary community concept. The theological component of the self-concept is indicated by the preparation of the upper room, the “first church,” for “the hearing of the...
teaching” and the announcement of the resurrection. The liturgical dimension appears in the identification of this place as “the owner of the sacraments” (mārt ʿrāzē). The designation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy is shown in the reference to choosing Matthias as the replacement of Judas among the apostles. These three dimensions, examined individually in more detail in the preceding three chapters, were all understood to be grounded in the Church’s apostolic foundation.

The Church of the East understood itself to preserve apostolic doctrine. Shbadnāyā included doctrinal exposition among the actions of the apostles:

- The marvel of the beginning of the union of our body they signified.
- The hymn of the greatness of the garment of the Son, the Word, they established.
- A theater (wonders of the world, a house of spectacles) they were for the angels and humanity as they testified.
- The confession of the truth they taught and wrote, they also made known.\(^{51}\)

This truth was revealed by Christ “to his disciples the apostles, those who declare the mysteries of hiddenness.”\(^{52}\) The identification of East Syrian theology as apostolic was not only a declaration of continuity with the past, but also an assertion that the apostles taught what was not known previously, especially the doctrine of the Trinity: “Therefore the Old Testament taught people only about God, that he is eternal, and he is the cause of all. But the New Testament revealed to us three Persons, i.e. the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in whom we are commanded to make disciples and to baptize. But this was from the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles.”\(^{53}\) In his poem for the Finding of the Cross (Shkhāḥtā), Shbadnāyā also

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characterized the apostolic teaching as consisting of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The feast of Pentecost especially emphasized the Trinitarian aspect of apostolic doctrine: “The Holy Spirit who was sent from God the Father of truth to the crowd of apostles… enlightened their simplicity by his teaching… that they should be henceforth ambassadors and preachers to all peoples of the kingdom of heaven and evangelists also teachers of the Trinity.” But the apostolic doctrine could also be left less specific by the same service: “The holy apostles in the Holy Spirit taught one complete confession.” The Church of the East believed its doctrine to come directly from the apostles.

The Church of the East also considered its liturgical practices to have been instituted by the apostles. This was easiest to maintain in the case of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, when specific scriptural passages could be cited to demonstrate the fact that they were practiced by the apostles. The injunction to baptize in the Trinitarian invocation at the end of the Gospel of Matthew was fulfilled by the apostles, as indicated in the Pentecost liturgy’s rephrasing of Matthew 28:19 into the past tense: “they made disciples and baptized Creation in the revered and honored name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one glorious incomprehensible nature.” Shbadnāyā also quoted a line from Rabban ‘Ammānū’ēl: “In the Son and the Spirit were unknown before the apostles was also expressed in the Pentecost liturgy: BL Add. 7177, f. 222a.

54 BL Or. 4062, f. 138b.

55 Cf. later in the service BL Add. 7177, f. 221b.

56 BL Add. 7177, f. 223b.

57 Indeed, although Timothy II and ‘Abdishō both enumerated seven sacraments, Shbadnāyā quoted a poem which begins, “I confess two sacraments which are instituted in the Church of Christ” (Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 174b-175a. Although the author is not identified by name in the main text, in the margin of f. 174b the name “Yōḥannān of Zō’bī” is given.

58 BL Add. 7177, f. 225a. Cf. BL Add. 7177, ff. 229a, 229b. This same idea is expressed more tersely by Shbadnāyā’s poetry: “The
name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, they made disciples and baptized all peoples."  

For the Eucharist, the gospel narratives of the Last Supper provided the natural scriptural anchor, as Shbadnāyā narrated the gathering of Jesus with his disciples and wrote "On that [night] also he committed the sacrament of his body to those whom he purified."  

Shbadnāyā ascribed the regulation concerning the use of olive oil in the Eucharist to the apostles as well:

The greatly exalted mystery indicates incorruptibility and indelibility, which was passed down from the blessed apostles, the preachers of the world, for the perfection of all good things. … It is completed with anointing of olive oil and by the mediation of the apostolic priesthood it is completed. The apostles, evangelists, and reverend, blessed fathers defined much and warned that it should not be completed with anything else.

The timing of the feast of Epiphany was also ascribed by Shbadnāyā to the apostles: “The holy blessed apostles ordained twelve days that the feast of Epiphany should be after the feast of Nativity because after twelve days after his baptism it is said that he departed for the wilderness to fast.”  

Shbadnāyā likewise ascribed a liturgical rule about not celebrating funerals on dominical feasts to the Holy Spirit through the apostles: “For it pleased the Spirit of holiness and she commanded through the blessed apostles that it was not allowed to perform the memorial of the deceased on the day of Passover, nor on any dominical feast, nor on Pentecost, nor on the finding of the venerated Cross.”  

The anachronism implicit in the apostles proscribing funerals on the day celebrating the discovery of the Cross by Constantine’s mother Helena three centuries

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63 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 82a.
later did not seem to bother Shbadnāyā, who insisted that his community’s liturgical practice was determined by the apostles at the time of the Church’s foundation.  

The apostolic foundation was also invoked as the explanation of the hierarchical nature of the Church. In the discussion of the sacraments quoted above, Shbadnāyā asserted the necessity of the “apostolic priesthood.” Later, he mentioned the ordination of clergy by the apostles during their universal ministry: “Clerics in every clime they appointed.” The Greek term κληρικοί is glossed as “Leaders of the service, chiefs and overseers,” which probably implies the bishops and higher ranks. Shbadnāyā likewise specified that Christ appointed the apostles over the Church: “Hupatia of his Church he entrusted to those who were trustworthy.” Here Shbadnāyā glossed the Greek word ὑπατεία as mdabbrānūthā, which in addition to its reference to divine providence and governance is the abstract noun for the rank of directors (mdabbrānē). The concrete noun was used for bishops in a poem by Rabban ‘Ammānūʾēl quoted by Shbadnāyā: the apostles “passed on the deposit of grace to the directors and priests.” The quotation from Rabban ‘Ammānūʾēl continued by narrating the apostolic institution of a pentarchy of patriarchal thrones in Rome, Byzantium, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Antioch, and Alexandria for the ordination of priests. This quotation closes the description of the patriarchates with a restatement of their apostolic origin: “These things the disciples arranged

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64 The anachronism might be less apparent among Syriac Christians who regarded the true Cross as having been discovered already before Helena, in the first century by the legendary wife of the Emperor Claudius named “Protonike”: George Phillips, ed., The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle (London: Trübner, 1876), 10–15. Nevertheless Shbadnāyā did not mention Protonike in his poem for Shkhāštā, and it is unclear how widely this story was known in the fifteenth century.


67 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 196b. The final term, sā’ōrā, could refer to a chorepiscopus or ecclesiastical “visitor,” an assistant to the bishop.


70 Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 201a-b.
and fixed in the four corners.”⁷¹ The Pentecost liturgy likewise presented the ecclesiastical hierarchy as the heirs of the apostles, who “finished and completed the deposit which they received, and they passed it on to the teachers and the priests.”⁷² Indeed, according to the liturgy the apostles were the first priests: “Great and glorious and excellent is the rank of priesthood which the apostles received in the upper room from the hands of the Lord.”⁷³ Thus the ecclesiastical hierarchy, along with the theology and liturgy, was understood by the Church of the East to belong to the apostolic foundation of the Church.

The apostolic history of the community was significant for defusing the polemics of rival Christian denominations. Shbadnāyā was aware that Armenians and Syrian Orthodox authors accused the Church of the East of being Nestorian heretics, and therefore he added a gloss even to the title of the section “Against heretics” in his largest poem. The gloss defines the term “heretics” as “Contentious people and people who strive against the truth,” but then it immediately anticipates the hostile assertion that Nestorius was one of these: “It is not Nestorius who wrote these things, that you should contend against him with envy. Paul, the tongue of the Spirit, spoke just as it was granted to him.”⁷⁴ Thus Shbadnāyā, in response to the allegation that his community believed heresy invented by Nestorius, retorted that their doctrine came from the apostles. As discussed in chapter 4, the Church of the East had been accused of introducing a fourth qnōmā into the Trinity, to which Shbadnāyā responds that the apostles (and thus his community) did no such thing:

The confession of the truth they taught and wrote, they also made known.

⁷¹/\textit{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 201b.}
⁷²/\textit{BL Add. 7177, f. 223b.}
⁷³/\textit{BL Add. 7177, f. 229a. Earlier in the service priesthood was said to be granted to the apostles on Pentecost by the Holy Spirit: BL Add. 7177, f. 226a.}
⁷⁴/\textit{Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 103a.}
The gnome which were conjoined were not accepting an addition.
Also without confusion and without mixture of composition they distinguished.
They repeated without confusion their union, they also separated.\footnote{Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 196b-197a.}

Thus, East Syrians had a response to other Christians’ polemical assertions that the Church of the East was wrong to believe a certain way, to celebrate the liturgy a certain way, or to adhere to a certain ecclesiastical hierarchy. On the basis of their self-understanding as a community which was founded by the apostles, all of whose central features were instituted by those authorities or by Christ himself at that time, this denomination could respond that they were not at liberty to alter what the apostles had fixed. Of course, the concept of an apostolic foundation was also claimed by their neighboring Christian rivals, so subsequent history was appealed to in order to demonstrate that the apostolic foundation of Christianity belonged properly to the Church of the East.

Mind the Gap

The fifteenth-century Church of the East had very little interest in the prior fourteen centuries of their history, the period since the apostolic age. Prominent Christian authors, saints, and ecclesiastical figures from this interval were named in certain contexts, but almost never with any dates or other information given to indicate the period in which they lived. With one important exception, even the order of these historical members of the community was neglected by fifteenth-century authors. Yet these intervening figures are precisely the ones who were considered responsible for passing down the character of the community, as established by the apostles, to the Christians of the fifteenth century. Indeed, since the other Christian groups in the same region likewise claimed apostolic foundation, and yet they differed in doctrine, liturgy, and
hierarchy, the post-apostolic Christians were essential to the task of proving that the apostolic foundation of Christianity actually belonged to the Church of the East.

_Doctrine Since the Apostles_

The fifteenth-century Church of the East believed that their doctrine was unchanging since the apostles, and therefore did not have a historical development. This was made explicit at the end of the thirteenth century by Metropolitan 'Abdīshō' of Nisibis: “The Easterners… did not change their truth, but just as they received it from the apostles they kept it without change.” The reason for this lack of change was simply that the apostles knew all that there was to know on the subject, according to Shbadnāyā: “Excellence of knowledge on high and in depth they were taught” by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This poetic expression is clarified by Shbadnāyā’s quotation of a verse by the earlier author Yōhannān of Zō’bī: “Every mystery and all knowledge which has been revealed to the holy Church / Was known on Pentecost by the apostles in the Spirit of Holiness.” The same quotation then focuses primarily on the deity of Christ and the Trinity as key doctrines: “If they saw the deity which is hidden in the temple of our humanity, / What is higher than this which was hidden from their minds? / If the distinction of the qnome of the divine nature / The Spirit of Holiness made known to them, what remains...

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which he did not make known to them?" Christian doctrine would have no history, because the truth of the subject was already fully known from the beginning.

Nevertheless, the writings of the apostles were not as explicit on certain topics as later authors who re-affirmed apostolic teaching in new words. These later authors were mentioned especially in two liturgical commemorations, one of “the Greek doctors” and one of the Syriac, and by the citations of earlier authors incorporated by Ishq Shbadnāyā into his largest work. Both annual memorial services reveal that these post-apostolic teachers were celebrated for their doctrine. The service for the Greek authors refers to “the memorial of the teachers who proclaimed the truth by their words and enlightened creation,” and that truth is later specified with reference to Christology: “The Word from the Father and a complete human from us the faithful ones proclaimed, Mār Diodore and Mār Theodore and Nestorius.” The Syriac teachers were likewise celebrated as “holy priests and scribes and teachers who were farmers of truth in the inhabited world and sowed in the churches the upright teaching and rooted out from the

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80 “The Greek doctors” are Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius, while the precise identification of “the Syriac doctors” varies. BL Add. 7177, a fifteenth-century Hūdā, names Ephrem, Narsai, Job, Lūlyānē, Babai, Aba, and Qīyyūrē (f. 84a), while a sixteenth-century Hūdā names Ephrem, Narsai, Abraham, Lūlyānē, and John: Trichur 27, p. 312. For the identity of these figures and for alternate lists from the diptychs, see Jean M. Fiey, “Diptyques nestoriens du XIVe siècle,” Analecta Bollandiana 81 (1963): 390–92; Sebastian P. Brock, “The Nestorian Diptychs: A Further Manuscript,” Analecta Bollandiana 89 (1971): 182–83. The service for the commemoration of the Greek doctors is no longer contained in BL Add. 7177; apparently the more recent scribe who supplemented portions of the text did not feel the need to provide that service. It clearly is contained in a Hūdā dated October 19, 1850 A.G. / 1538, although it has been badly damaged to the point that very little of it is legible and some folios missing, evidently due to its celebration of figures condemned as heretics by the Catholic Church: Vatican sir. 83, ff. 98a-98bis b. I have supplemented the text of this memorial where it is badly damaged with the undamaged (but evidently expanded) text found in a later sixteenth-century copy, Trichur 27.
81 Vatican sir. 83, f. 98bis b; Trichur 27, p. 204. The Trichur manuscript substitutes “Son” for “human,” but the Vatican manuscript’s text is clear at that point, and I preferred it for its earlier date. The service elsewhere suggests that the purpose of these authors’ teaching is a rejection of theopaschite theology: “Blessed is the one who by his love made his faithful ones victorious in the holy Church and they confessed and said that God does not die” (مَحْبَوبٌ بِحُبِّهِ فِي مَحْبُوبٍ عَلَى الْكَبِيرِينَ وَفِي الْكَبِيرِينَ كَثِيرًا، كَثِيرًا: مَحْبَوبُ بِحُبِّهِ، مَحْبَوبُ بِحُبِّهِ) Vatican sir. 83, f. 98bis a; Trichur 27, p.203.
Church the weeds of the evil one.”

The annual commemorations of the Greek and Syriac teachers were primarily about doctrine.

Yet almost no historical information is provided about any of these prominent teachers. The service for the Greek doctors recalls only that Diodore “nullified the idols,” that Theodore “interpreted the Scriptures,” that Nestorius “completed his course with the sufferings of Christ,” and that their opponents were “kings and Egyptians who were not persuaded by the proclamation of the faithful ones.”

Even less detail is provided for the Syriac authors, most of whom are only named once in the service, when they are all listed together. Only Ephrem and Narsai were mentioned separately to indicate their opposition to heresy: “The harp of David was chasing away the demon of Saul, and the harp of Ephrem and Narsai was driving away the heretics.”

Yet both groups of teachers were assimilated to the apostles who preceded them. The Greek teachers were given by Christ for the benefit of his Church as successors to the apostles: “The heavenly Shepherd established shepherds for the crowd of his sheep and confirmed three approved ones after the first ones,” i.e. the apostles, and “in the footsteps of the Twelve of the Renower of all ran our spiritual fathers.”

The commemoration of the Syriac teachers begins by applying to them the language of the apostolic commission recorded in Matthew 28:19-20, asserting that “they made disciples and baptized and taught just as they were
commanded.”

What mattered about these ecclesiastical teachers was their imitation of the apostles who preceded them.

In contrast to the very restricted list of post-apostolic doctrinal authorities celebrated in the liturgy, Shbadnāyā cited dozens of earlier authors in his prose commentary and in marginal notes around his poetry, primarily Syriac but sometimes also Greek authors in translation. These authors range from Josephus to Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Greek side and from Ephrem to Patriarch Timothy II on the Syriac side. Shbadnāyā did not specify the rationale for citing these earlier authorities, beyond a remark which prefaces a citation of “Our blessed father, the Interpreter Mār Theodore,” namely Theodore of Mopsuestia: “It appeared to [me] that he could decorate with his word the undertaking of my weakness.” But with none of these citations does Shbadnāyā give any historical information about the author in question. Since Christian doctrine was understood to be unchanging since the apostles, it simply did not matter when individual authors lived, as long as they expressed the same doctrine from Shbadnāyā’s perspective. Although outsiders and modern scholars might see the quotations of East Syrian authors as providing a particular theological development over time from early Christianity to the late medieval period, Shbadnāyā simply saw his quoted authorities as so many witnesses to the same unchanging doctrine.

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87 BL Add. 7177, f. 83b.


89 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 22b.

90 One possible exception was a citation, among a number of Greek witnesses to the two natures of the incarnate Christ, of Cyril of Alexandria “from before he went into schism” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 206b). The citation of the arch-enemy of Nestorius might raise some eyebrows among East Syrians, but the implicit argument is that even their enemies agreed that the theology of the Church of the East was correct, until said opponents falsified their doctrine.
If all true doctrine was already taught by the apostles, doctrinal innovation was by
definition heretical, and Shbadnāyā’s lengthiest treatment of the post-apostolic history of his
community is contained in his catalogue of heretics and the orthodox champions who refuted
them. He rejected by name Arius, Eunomius, Bar Dayṣān, Macedonius, Marcion, Mani,
Valentinus, Tatian, Eutyches, Apollinaris, Cyril, and Photinus. His champions of the Church
include the standard “Greek Doctors” celebrated in the East Syrian liturgy, Diodore of Tarsus,
Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius, as well as other Greek authors such as Polycarp,
Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Gregory Nazianzen. Surprisingly, he
named very few Syriac refuters of heresies, only naming Ephrem, Narsai, and possibly Aqaq, if
that name refers to the fifth century Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Equally surprisingly,
Shbadnāyā also cited the Latin author Ambrose.\[91\] The fact that most of these names are Greek,
and all from the fifth century or earlier, probably indicates that this presentation is derived
primarily from late antique Greek ecclesiastical histories. But Shbadnāyā’s concern was not the
pedigree of his catalogue, but how it established the truthfulness of his own community. In
addition to complaining of the heretics’ opposition to the true doctrine of Christ’s incarnation, he
indicates their rebellion against the apostles. Just before launching into the various names, he
characterized the heretics as “Theopaschites (those who make God suffer) who sprouted in the
field which Petros weeded.”\[92\] Shbadnāyā charged that Cyril of Alexandria, the only heretic in
this list condemned uniquely by the Church of the East, “entirely blotted out the humanity which
Paul preached.”\[93\] On the other hand, in his gloss on the Greek word αἱρέσιώτης he deflected

\[91\] Cambridge Add. 1998, ff. 103a-104a.
\[92\] Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 103a. I assume \(θηοπαστίμο\) is a transposition error for \(θηοπαστίο\). The marginal gloss quoted here seems, on the manuscript page, to belong to
an earlier word and a later gloss seems to pertain to this word, but by sense it is clear that these glosses have been
erroneously switched. The rare use of the Greek form of the name Peter is due to the rhyme scheme.
\[93\] Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 103b.
external complaints against Nestorius to the apostolic authority of Paul: “It is not Nestorius who wrote these things, that you should contend against him with envy: Paul, the tongue of the Spirit, spoke just as it was granted to him.”

Since all of the neighboring Christian groups championed Cyril of Alexandria and condemned Nestorius, Shbadnāyā’s assertion that Nestorius agreed with Paul and Cyril rejected Paul likewise claimed that the Church of the East uniquely preserved apostolic doctrine.

Liturgy After the Apostles

Fifteenth-century East Syrian texts say very little about liturgy since the apostolic era, although they hint at continual liturgical development. Shbadnāyā only explicitly mentioned one post-apostolic Christian with respect to the liturgy, ascribing the practice of baptism at the end of Lent to Mār Ḫaṣṣā b. Mqaddam also composed poems for the Bāʾūthā d-Nīnwāyē and the commemorations of St. George and of Rabban Ḫormīzd. Indeed, some medieval East Syrian poets composed so much additional liturgical poetry that new collections were made in

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95 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 80b. The attribution of the baptismal rite to Mār Ḫaṣṣā b. Mqaddam is also found in Berlin Sachau 167, f. 106b.  
96 The earliest manuscript to contain all three is Biblioteka Jagiellońska Sachau 178, ff. 113a-133a from the sixteenth century.  
97 Manuscripts of the latter two poems are listed in Baumstark, Geschichte, 330. The first poem, unknown to Baumstark, is contained in Paris BN Syr. 345, ff. 186a-188a.
order to contain the texts.  The liturgical manuscripts preserved the ascriptions of these texts to particular authors.  The liturgy was clearly not static since the apostolic age.

Perhaps the most fundamental development in the liturgy acknowledged by fifteenth century sources was the institution of the Rogation of the Ninevites (Bāʿūthā d-Nīnwayne), a three-day fast preceding Lent.  The communal prayers associated with this liturgical event were gathered in a separate volume, and a fifteenth-century copy of such a volume is preceded by a short explanation entitled “The Cause of the Bāʿūthā.” The text ascribes the first cause of the fast, or perhaps the reason for its name, to the preaching of Jonah to the Ninevites in the Old Testament.  But the reason why “in this time the Bāʿūthā is performed in these regions” is explained with reference to a plague which was checked in response to a time of communal fasting and intercession inaugurated by Metropolitan Sabhrīshū of Karkā d-Bēth Slōkh (modern Kirkuk) based on angelic inspiration.  “When the Church, the shepherds and their flocks, saw the mercies which came upon them because of the Bāʿūthā which they performed, they appointed and ordered that it should be done in this week every year by year, and it continued and was handed down from then until now in these regions of ours diligently.”  Here we have an account of the post-apostolic institution of a new liturgical fast, peculiar to the Church of the East, copied in a fifteenth-century manuscript, and thus a recognition that the liturgy had changed since the apostles.

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98 See the discussion of Abū Ḥalīm, Wardā, and Khāmīs in chapter 5, fnn. 10-11.
99 Indeed, in the case of Shbadnīyā’s three poems, later manuscripts also preserve the year in which he composed them, 1751 A.G. / 1440: Krakow Biblioteka Jagiełłońska Sachau 178, f. 113a.
100 Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, ff. 2b-3a.
101 Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, f. 2b.
102 Princeton Garrett Syr. 22, f. 3a.
On the other hand, in order to claim the apostolic foundation for their own community, East Syrian authors did not need to assert the utter immutability of the liturgy in every aspect. The references to post-apostolic liturgical development, although rare, clarify the nature of fifteenth-century claims: when Shbadnāyā cited the apostles with respect to the liturgy, the issue was not liturgical texts but liturgical practices and proscriptions. Adherence to those practices and proscriptions was all that was necessary to preserve liturgical continuity since the apostles, and thus to demonstrate that the apostolic foundation belonged to the Church of the East.

_Hierarchical Continuity from the Apostles_

The claim that the Church of the East was the same community as that founded by Christ and the apostles depended on the maintenance of hierarchical continuity as well as doctrinal conformity and liturgical observance. But whereas the dates and order of past authors were irrelevant to the unchanging doctrine and obedience to ritual regulations, in order to demonstrate hierarchical continuity, order is everything. In particular, an unbroken chain of patriarchs extending from the apostles to the community’s own patriarchs is critical to claim that these patriarchs are the heirs of the apostles. Not all fifteenth-century authors considered this claim necessary, however: consistent with Shbadnāyā’s minimization of the role of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in his conception of his community, he does not name any previous catholicoi except when he cites particular individuals as authorities for doctrine or (in the case of Īshō’yahb III) liturgy. A few anonymous scribes, probably from the fifteenth century, evidently disagreed, and updated earlier patriarchal lists to bring them to the present.

Two patriarchal lists, one from the thirteenth century and one from the fourteenth, seem to have been updated in the early fifteenth century. The early thirteenth-century bishop Shlēmōn
of Baṣra included a list of “The names of the eastern Catholicoi, the successors of the Apostles Addai and Mārī.” Although the author’s original list must have ended earlier, a scribe has updated it to include Timothy II, Denḥā II (1336-1381), Shemʿon, Ēliyā, and Shemʿon “of our days.” The dates for these latter patriarchs are unclear, but likely end in the first half of the fifteenth century. A fourteenth-century patriarchal list was also included in the diptychs studied by J. M. Fiey. Although Fiey’s concern is to identify the origin of the text, and he convincingly demonstrates that it was promulgated by Catholicos Denḥā II in Karamlīsh, all of the witnesses to the text include the further patriarchs Ēliyā and Shemʿon. After the early fifteenth century, the patriarchal lists were no longer updated, although the apostolic origins of the present hierarchy were not abandoned, as is seen by the fact that these texts were copied by later scribes. Indeed, in order to maintain the claim that the current patriarchs are the successors to the apostles, the line of succession need only continue late enough to reach earlier patriarchs who were the undisputed predecessors of the community’s current catholicoi.

Although in the sixteenth century, two rival patriarchates would lay claim to the succession from Addai and Mārī through Denḥā II, in the fifteenth century none of the neighboring Christian groups would dispute the claim that the latter patriarch was the predecessor to the current

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103 I have modified Budge’s translation slightly.
104 Ibid., 119. Not all branches of the textual tradition were updated in this way: a fifteenth-century copy of the text ends with a thirteenth-century patriarch: Vatican sir. 176, f. 112b.
105 The latest possible date for the updating is 1497, if the Shemʿon “of our days” refers to the catholicos of the 1470s and not, as is more likely, of the 1430s.
106 Fiey, “Diptyques.”
107 In Fiey’s witnesses K and Q, these two names precede that of Denḥā, but I agree with his assessment that the precedence represents “une « mise à jour » postérieure et malhabile”: ibid., 376. The correct order is given by Fiey’s witnesses “B (et N?)” and the additional manuscript M discussed by Sebastian Brock: Brock, “Diptychs,” 179.
108 E. A. Wallis Budge cites two eighteenth-century copies of the Book of the Bee: Solomon of Akhlat, Book of the Bee, v–viii. Some of Fiey’s witnesses are not dated, although one is dated 1670 and another is ascribed to the eighteenth century, while Brock’s additional manuscript is dated 1931: Fiey, “Diptyques,” 374; Brock, “Diptychs,” 178.
Catholicos of the East.\textsuperscript{109} If, therefore, a chain could be constructed from the apostles to Denḥā II, it would suffice to show that the hierarchy, and therefore the Church, established by the apostles was identical with the Church of the East in the fifteenth century.

**Past Saints and Present Power**

When East Syrians thought about their community’s past, they thought not only of their apostolic foundation, but also of the saints of a past age. The major liturgical feasts told the story of Christ and the apostles, but annual commemorations also celebrated individual Christians who were renowned for their sanctity and power.\textsuperscript{110} Two of these saints were the subject of new compositions for their memorials in the fifteenth century: St. George was the topic of a poem each by Īşāq Shbadnāyā and Īşō’yahb bar Mqaddam, while the latter author also wrote a text for the commemoration of the late sixth-century saint Rabban Hörmīzd.\textsuperscript{111} Each local church and monastery was dedicated to a particular saint, in the case of monasteries often the founder of the institution. Past Christians of extraordinary sanctity loomed large in the historical

\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, Mār Denḥā was named as “Nestorian” in the continuation of the ecclesiastical chronicle of Bar Hebraeus: Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, III:507–508.

\textsuperscript{110} Much work remains to be done on the commemorations of the saints, including documenting which saints were commemorated when and where, but the standard work remains Jean M. Fiey, “Le Sanctoral syrien oriental d’après les Évangéliaires et Bréviaires du Xe au XVIIIe s.” *L’Orient Syrien* 8 (1963): 21–54.

\textsuperscript{111} Unfortunately, I have been unable to use Īşō’yahb bar Mqaddam’s poem for the commemoration of Rabban Hörmīzd for this section due to unresolved issues of attribution and the composition history of the text. I am only aware of the text in two manuscripts, Berlin orient. fol. 619, ff. 101a-107b (dated 1715) and Berlin Sachau 222, ff. 318b-325b (dated 1881). The former manuscript ascribes the text to Īşō’yahb bar Mqaddam, but the following text is ascribed to “the same author, Mār Ābdīshō”\textsuperscript{111} (f. 107b), which questions the attribution. The attribution to Bar Mqaddam seems to be supported, although complicated, by the latter manuscript’s preface to the text indicating that it “is selected and composed from the longer history of the same Rabban Hörmīzd by Mār Īşō’yahb bar Mqaddam, Metropolitan of Erbil” \textsuperscript{111} (f. 318b). The latter manuscript’s text is not significantly shorter than that of the former manuscript, and both texts have significant issues with the narrative flow. Until such issues can be satisfactorily resolved, it will be difficult to be confident that the text as it stands represents the thought of the fifteenth-century author Īşō’yahb bar Mqaddam, although the text seems only to confirm the thesis that the primary role of the saints was as mediators of miraculous power.
consciousness of the Church of the East. What these saints reveal about the East Syrian conception of their community through history is the importance of supernatural power.  

Miracles are described in Syriac with terms falling in three semantic domains. Like the Latin miraculum, from which the English word “miracle” is derived, the Syriac word tedhmūrtā denotes something amazing, at which to marvel. A second domain includes āthā which, like the Greek σηµειον, is often translated “sign,” denoting an act which is indicative or even revelatory. But the most common semantic domain for Syriac words which refer to miraculous actions is words about power. The plural term haylē is the word most frequently used for miracles, although in the singular it typically means “might” or “power.” Similarly, gabhrwāthā is glossed by Payne Smith as “exploits, deeds of renown, mighty acts, miracles.”

This power was seen active in the ministry of Jesus himself. Shbadnāyā dedicated a section of his magnum opus to “the choice of the disciples and the miracles [haylē] and signs which our Lord did in the three years of his dispensation.” The section begins, “He performed signs and miracles [gabhrwāthā], he purified lepers, / The simane (portents and signs) and wonders which he did flew to all ends [of the earth].”

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112 Certain saints, such as Rabban Hōrmīzd, could delimit the community by virtue of only being venerated by the Church of the East, and not by any other Christian group. But as important to the fifteenth-century Church of the East were saints venerated in common with other Christians (and sometimes Muslims) such as St. George.


114 A quotation of Ishō dād of Merv included by Shbadnāyā makes this explicit: “All the actions of the messianic dispensation were performed beyond nature, and they are entirely incomprehensible” (Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 102b).

115 Cambridge Add. 1998, f. 101b

the woman who touched his garment, that of the woman with the crooked back, and others.\textsuperscript{117}

Shbadnāyā also referred to Christ’s sending out of his apostles to heal the sick before his death: “Fishers (apostles, fishermen) also accompanied his command and healed the sick. / They were repeating the sound of his name and all the infirm (the sick of every variety) were being healed.”\textsuperscript{118}

This quotation indicates that Christ’s supernatural power also operated in the apostolic ministry, and indeed miraculous power was given by Christ to the apostles according to the liturgy for Pentecost: “he filled them with the wisdom of the power [haylā] which he sent from on high, and he taught them to do amazing and wondrous miracles [haylē].”\textsuperscript{119} Later the same service attributes these miracles to Christ working through the apostles: “he performed through them miracles [haylē] and signs, and they healed the sick and opened the eyes of the blind.”\textsuperscript{120}

Shbadnāyā also mentioned the apostles’ miraculous deeds. He attributed the Christian conversion of Caiaphas to “the signs and mighty deeds [gabhrwāthā] which happened through the hands of the apostles.”\textsuperscript{121} A poem by Rabban ‘Ammānū’ēl regarding the apostolic ministry, quoted at length by Shbadnāyā, referred to the apostles’ miraculous power: “In the name of Jesus they were speaking in every tongue which they required / And in his name they were performing miracles [haylē].”\textsuperscript{122} Later in the quotation, the miracles of the apostles are ascribed to Christ and linked to the conversion of the gentiles:

He put in their hand signs and miracles, marvelous and amazing
And they drew the peoples and nations to the knowledge of the confession of their Lord. Because of the might of the signs, the sick who were healed in the name of Jesus and the paralyzed who were healed, the world ran to the faith. They gave sight to the blind by the power of their Lord, the deaf listened to their prayers in their shadow the dead came to life and their garments healed the diseased. While we gaze in all quarters at the greatness of their making disciples we recognize the signs and the miracles which happened by their hand.  

Rabban Šm‘ūnū‘ ēl, and Shbadnāyā through him, makes the several related points that the apostles’ evangelism was characterized by the Lord working miracles through them, continuing the acts of power which Jesus performed before his crucifixion.

This miraculous power which characterized the foundation of the Church continued in the saints. Shbadnāyā’s poem for the commemoration of St. George records several miracles on his behalf, including his foreknowledge of his martyrdom; 124 not being harmed by fire, poison, and a heated gridiron; 125 receiving healing from one set of tortures; 126 and two visions of Christ. 127 St. George is also recorded as miraculously causing the idols to fall down, 128 a tree to sprout and bear fruit instantly, 129 and the deaf, blind, and paralyzed son of a widow to hear, see, and walk. 130 In one of his confrontations with the pagan king, St. George

Performed before them mighty acts, amazing and glorified. The chosen one prayed and he raised two hundred dead who in the dust were consumed and rotted, that the magi who erred might believe. His prayer was the key of the Spirit of holiness for all signs. 131

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125 Berlin orient. fol. 620, ff. 339a, 340b, 341a.
131 Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 341a.
Īshō`yahb bar Mqaddam’s poem for the commemoration of St. George also records that the saint miraculously raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, healed a widow’s sick son, made a dry tree sprout, and “healed every leper and deaf person.” The saint’s fame was due to these miracles, “ten signs which were made evident by you and their report flew in the world.” Bar Mqaddam praised St. George by comparing him to Moses before Pharaoh: “You became for him like the son of ‘Amram in the miracles which you performed.” In the context of the saint raising the dead, the author praised him with the words, “You were strengthened with power.” St. George healed the widow’s son “by the might of your Lord,” and was the “farmer who by his power caused to bud the tree which was too dry for budding.” For both of these fifteenth-century authors, St. George performed miracles with divine power.

The continuation of divine power in the lives (and deaths) of the saints did not fully bridge the gap from Jesus and the apostles to the present community, however, because the Church of the East in the fifteenth century does not seem to have venerated any saint who lived since the rise of Islam eight centuries earlier. The most detailed study of the range of saints venerated by the Church of the East remains that of J. M. Fiey, who divided the many manuscripts which he consulted into two groups, those dating from before the fourteenth

132 Berlin orient. fol. 619, f. 156a; BL Or. 4399, f. 432a.
133 BL Or. 4399, ff. 431b, 432a.
134 BL Or. 4399, f. 432b.
135 BL Or. 4399, ff. 432a-b.
136 BL Or. 4399, f. 433a.
137 BL Or. 4399, f. 431b.
138 BL Or. 4399, f. 432a.
139 BL Or. 4399, f. 432b.
140 This distinguishes them from Armenians, who venerated new martyrs killed in the fifteenth century itself, as is seen in a collection of hagiography for more recent saints: Y. Manandean and H. Achaean, Hayoc’ Nor Vkanerê (1155-1843) (Vagharshapat: Ejmiadzin, 1903); Knarik Ter-Davtyan, Новые Армянские Мученики (1155-1843) (Yerevan: Izdatel’stvo “Nairi,” 1998).
century, and those dating from the sixteenth century and later.\footnote{Fiey, “Sanctoral,” 26–29.} He provided three lists of saints: those mentioned in manuscripts of both periods, those only occurring in the former period, and those which appear for the first time in the second period.\footnote{Ibid., 35–40, 42–45, and 48–52, respectively. On the basis of this comparison, he concluded that a revision of the liturgy had taken place at the beginning of the sixteenth century: ibid., 32–33. But his study is limited not only by not having consulted any fifteenth-century sources, but also by omitting to note that not all saints from a given period occur in all of the manuscripts which he consulted from that period. For example, none of the first four saints which he lists as pertaining to the second period are commemorated in the first manuscript which he consulted for that period (and the only manuscript he consulted from the sixteenth century), Vatican sir. 83: ibid., 29, 48. It seems that new saints’ cults may have been introduced more gradually than a patriarchal reform would suggest, but a more nuanced study of the range of saints attested in various manuscripts, considering both the progress of dates and the geographical differences involved, is necessary to evaluate Fiey’s proposal.} If one excludes commemorations of particular offices, such as catholicoi-patriarchs or bishops of particular sees, Fiey only lists six saints born after the rise of Islam in any of his three lists,\footnote{John al-Azraq (bishop of al-Ḥira into the eighth century), John of Daylam (late seventh century), John the Camel-Driver (eighth century), John of Dulyāthā (eighth century), Catholicos Pethyōn (eighth century), and Shlēmūn the Crier (bishop of Hadīthā in the eighth century). Fiey also mentions a commemoration of three tenth-century abbots of Bēth Ṣayyārē, who are the latest saints listed.} and none of them is attested in a fifteenth-century liturgical manuscript. The Church of the East does not seem to have had any formal canonization process to recognize more recent saints. Without living miracle-workers, fifteenth-century East Syrian authors looked for the miraculous power of God in the saints to continue for the present community through two means, the saint’s ongoing intercession with God and the saint’s relics.

The prayers of St. George were especially emphasized by Shbadnāyā’s poem for the saint. A bit under two thirds of Shbadnāyā’s poem on St. George is a record of the saint’s arguments against idolatry and tortures; the rest consists of the author’s praise of St. George, St. George’s long prayer to Christ for the Church, a brief exhortation by the author to the congregation, a lengthy prayer by the author to St. George on behalf of the Church, and finally the author’s prayer to St. George on his own behalf. In this final third, Shbadnāyā referred to George’s ongoing prayers for his community almost a dozen and a half times, including a sample
of such prayer in forty lines. \(^{145}\) Shbadnāyā addressed St. George as the one “whom your Lord made ruler over his treasures,” \(^{146}\) and St. George prayed to Christ, “You, my Lord, love to pour out your helps to humanity.” \(^{147}\) St. George prays to Christ, “receive the request of all who call to you / In my name, George – I am your servant – and rescue them by your help,” \(^{148}\) and “Do not let the evil one, the hater of humanity, reign / Over all who call on me, the weak one, and let them be rescued from every calamity.” \(^{149}\) So Christians were instructed to pray to St. George, and to pray in the saint’s name to Christ. The community expected to receive assistance from the saint’s intercession with Christ: “every help by the power of your prayer let us receive with the persuasion of your intercession.” \(^{150}\) This intercession granted St. George the power to perform miracles in the author’s own day, such as healings: “Grant healings to the sick with the power [haylā] by which you performed all signs.” \(^{151}\) According to Īshāq Shbadnāyā, the miraculous power of the saint continued in his own day through the mediation of prayer.

Compared to Shbadnāyā’s lengthy prayers on behalf of the Church, Īshō’ yahb bar Mqaddam’s poem only briefly intercedes with St. George for the community in twelve lines. Nevertheless, the saint’s intercession is credited with having converted sinners, guarded the lost, “helped the weak with power,” and kept vigil for healing for the sick. \(^{152}\) Bar Mqaddam links St. George’s prayer with the congregation’s observance of his festival: “The Church which honored your festivals, / And extolled, decorated your memorial, and completed the commandment of

\(^{145}\) The saint’s prayer for the Church is recorded on Berlin orient. fol. 620, ff. 341b-342a.

\(^{146}\) Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 341a.

\(^{147}\) Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 341b.

\(^{148}\) Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 341b.

\(^{149}\) Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 342a.

\(^{150}\) Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 342b.

\(^{151}\) Berlin orient. fol. 620, f. 342b.

\(^{152}\) BL Or. 4399, f. 433a.
your Lord. Pray that it may be established forever and may remain free." The connection between observing the memorial and the saint’s intercession figures only briefly in Shbadnāyā’s prayer for St. George, where the saint prays once for “everyone who remembers the day of your servant’s crowning.” For the majority of the saint’s prayer to God and the author’s prayer to the saint, no mention is made of the annual liturgical celebration, although that would have been the social context in which this poem was recited. Instead, Shbadnāyā exhorted the congregation, “Come, my beloved, let us remember his name every day and every hour / That he may pour out blessings upon our congregation and his prayer may meet us.” Both authors ascribed power to the saint’s prayer on behalf of the Church, but Bar Mqaddam emphasized the prayer itself less than Shbadnāyā, and he linked it more closely to the annual commemoration of the saint’s martyrdom.

Both authors also indicated, if only briefly, that supernatural assistance could be obtained from the saint through the saints’ relics. Īshō’ yahb bar Mqaddam prayed to St. George on behalf of “the band which has lodged within [the church], has also dwelt on this night / Under the reliquary of your bones, the cave of miracles [haylē] and wonders which it performed.” Shbadnāyā exhorted the congregation, “Come, let us take refuge in his reliquary that he may help us,” and later prayed to St. George for “those who take refuge in the faith of your grave full of all

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153 This command may be itself the observation of the saint’s day, as earlier in the poem he wrote, “Your memorial is set apart by Yah” (BL Or. 4399, f. 433a.
154 The liturgy of Pentecost draws a similar link, asking Christ to “keep our crowd by [the apostles’] prayer, who celebrate the day of their memorial” (BL Add. 7177, f. 225a.
155 BL orient. fol. 620, f. 341b.
156 BL orient. fol. 620, f. 342a.
157 BL Or. 4399, f. 433a.
A practice of using relics must also lie behind the curious statement in the Pentecost liturgy, addressed to the apostles, “Your bodies are with us, and everywhere they persuade your assistances on our behalf.” Later the same service is more explicit regarding the miraculous power of relics: “Thanksgiving to the Lord who chose you and made his power dwell in your bones, that they should be for the race of mortals harbors of peace in the midst of the world.” Like the liturgical commemorations which bound the celebrating church to the celebrated saint, the relics provided a direct connection between the mediator of divine power and those who needed it.

The saints were therefore presented as liaisons between the power exercised by Jesus and the apostles and the very present needs of the fifteenth century. On the one hand, they were past members of the community which required divine assistance for survival and protection. On the other hand, they were agents of the Lord’s supernatural power, mediating the miraculous to fulfill those needs. Thus Shbadnāyā could write of the present as well as past miracles of Jesus: “The wonders and mighty deeds which he did and is doing have honored my contemptible state.” In this economy of supernatural power, communal continuity mattered, as did honoring the memorials and relics of the community’s saintly ambassadors to God, but the precise dates or
periods in which particular saints lived and died were immaterial.¹⁶³ The fifteenth-century East Syrian veneration of the saints reveals a notion of their community as characterized throughout history by divine power.

**Conclusion: Deep Past**

The fifteenth-century Church of the East had more of a sense of its communal past than its complete lack of recent chronicles might lead us to suspect. Each of the dimensions of its conceptual community examined in the previous three chapters – theology, liturgy, and hierarchy – it regarded as rooted in the apostolic foundation of the Church, which Shbadnāyā especially discussed in great detail. Fifteenth-century East Syrian sources mention more recent Christians primarily to demonstrate that the apostolic foundation belongs to the Church of the East. In an environment where every other Christian group also claimed an apostolic origin, and denied that claim by the Church of the East, these intermediate Christians served to make good on the East Syrian claim to be the community founded by the apostles. But these three dimensions need to be supplemented by a fourth aspect of the conceptual community of the Church of the East, which becomes manifest in the saints: the aspect of divine power. Just as Christ and the apostles performed miraculous acts of supernatural power, so also the saints mediated the power capable of working miracles in their own day.

But in all of these dimensions, there is a historical gap between the figures discussed and the present day. One might naively suppose that a linear view of history would imply that the

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¹⁶³ Indeed, no fifteenth-century source assigns a date to any of the saints. A nineteenth-century copy of Ḫishō’ yahb bar Mqaddam’s poem about Rabban Hörmızd erroneously specifies, “He was martyred in the year 464” (هُرْمِذ ُمُلُوك). No calendar is specified, but the manuscript’s preface to the text refers to “the fourth century of Christ,” indicating the Christian era. But no fifteenth-century East Syrian manuscript or other source uses years counted from Christ, so this date must be a later accretion to Bar Mqaddam’s text. In the first half of the sixteenth century, an exceptional date is given for the death of Catholicos Shem’on bar Šabbā’ē in 655 A.G. / 344: Vatican sir. 83, f. 437a.
more recent past would be more important to the present than the distant past. Such was not the case for the Church of the East in the fifteenth century. Although they possessed a linear view of time, it was their communal deep past, preeminently the foundation of the Church by Christ and the apostles, which drew the greater part of their historical attention. Comparably few Christians of more recent centuries were cited, and most of these were cited by Shbadnāyā in the field of doctrine, where they were considered merely to have rephrased the truth which was already fully known and unchanging since the apostles. The domain of liturgy provoked almost no discussion of post-apostolic developments, and even the necessary chain of catholicoi from the apostolic age came to an end in the early fifteenth century, not to be updated later in the period. The saints who were venerated were without exception ancient saints of the pre-Islamic period, and the miraculous power which they continued from the apostolic age was, in the fifteenth century, presently available only through their exalted intercessions with God in heaven and through their relics on earth. In all of these areas, there was a chronological gap, but it was the events of fourteen centuries earlier which the Church of the East considered determinative for the nature of its community in its own day. In the difficult circumstances of the fifteenth century, they did not have the luxury of writing the entirety of their history, ancient and recent. Forced to choose, they chose the deep past as more relevant to the present.
Conclusion

In Samarqand in the 1440s, the Timurid ruler Ulūgh Bey b. Shāhrūkh b. Tīmūr compiled a zij, a manual of astronomical tables. Such manuals often included information on the different calendars in use and how to translate between them, and the second calendar discussed in this particular zij was the “Rūmī” calendar dating from shortly after the death of Alexander the Great.¹ The “notable days” (‘ayyām mashhūra) in this calendar include “Nativity, which is the birth of Jesus (peace be upon him)” on 25 December and Epiphany on 6 January, namely Christian holidays.² For scholars familiar with European liturgical calendars, two dates will stand out as surprising: the “feast of the Cross” (‘īd-i ʿalīb) on 13 September rather than 14 September and Annunciation (bashāra) on 1 December rather than 25 March.³ The Church of the East uniquely commemorates the finding of the True Cross by Constantine’s mother Helena on 13 September, and uniquely celebrates Annunciation on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas on 25 December. Although this work specifies Annunciation as a day, 1 December is a possible date for the start of the East Syrian liturgical season. This zij does not explicitly mention Christians, much less the Church of the East specifically, but parts of the information contained here clearly derive from East Syrian Christians.

Who were the East Syrian Christians of the late medieval Middle East? Their absence from modern scholarship reflects their invisibility in the zij of Ulūgh Bey as well as the varieties of historical sources conventionally preferred by Western historians. To write the history of the post-Mongol Church of the East requires finding a way to use unconventional sources in new

³ Ibid., 99, 101.
ways, but the wealth of fifteenth-century poetry and colophons from this community gives us an abundance of evidence for what was considered and valued by this particular Christian minority. This dissertation writes the history of a group with no histories, by generalizing Benedict Anderson’s work on nationalism to include social groups of all kinds, which allows us to analyze the “conceptual community” of the Church of the East in the domains of theology, ritual, hierarchy, and history.

Much scholarship has debated the precise nature of the “Nestorian” Christology of the Church of the East, but for the fifteenth century it seems that sectarian theology was not as important for communal definition as doctrines largely shared with other Christian groups, especially the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ. Nor were these doctrines primarily important as membership cards, defining the membership as consisting of those who held particular beliefs. Instead, East Syrian theology shaped the collective self-concept of the Church of the East in functional and relational terms: the Church of the East defined itself by its belief in God’s revelation of the ineffable divine nature and worship of the triune God, as well as by being the recipients of the salvation accomplished by Christ and benefiting from his protection. The theology of the Church of the East clarified the self-concept of the community, but it did not delineate the communal membership, and indeed the variety of ways of describing the beneficiaries of Christ’s salvation could raise obstacles to specifying who’s in and who’s out too precisely.

Membership in the Church of the East seemed to be determined primarily by the communal rituals. Analyzing liturgy’s implications for the conceptual community of the Church of the East is complicated by the fact that the liturgical prayers were in classical Syriac, a language not spoken by the laypeople. For this reason, ritual actions presumably spoke louder
than ritual words, and the interpretation of the liturgy must proceed by reconstructing the physical actions involved. The sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist were understood to communicate to individual Christians all of the benefits obtained for them by Christ, and thus provided one definition of membership. But the Church of the East was not merely a bounded flat collection of individuals; instead, East Syrian Christians were always members of certain varieties. Membership in the Church of the East was always textured by voluntary features such as differing degrees and varieties of participation, including which liturgical responses one recited and how frequently one received communion, as well as involuntary characteristics such as age and gender. What mattered in any given setting may not be whether one was a member, but what sort of member one was.

It is in the domain of the ecclesiastical hierarchy that the most rapid developments in the conceptual community of the Church of the East are visible. At the end of the Mongol period, Metropolitan ‘Abdīshō of Nisibis and Catholicos Timothy II attempted to reform the clerical system aimed at centralizing the Church and preventing schisms. But the reformed structure proved to be too rigid and too fragile during the upheavals which followed the break-up of Mongol rule, so that different genres of fifteenth-century sources preserved different elements of the earlier synthesis. The liturgy emphasized the sacramental role of the clergy, but also emphasized its unworthiness. The poetry of Īšāq Shbadnāyā mentions the clergy primarily in prayers for the Church, but does not provide any substantial concept of the nature of the clergy, perhaps due to the inability to guarantee access to properly qualified East Syrian clergy by the laity during the wars of the early fifteenth century. The colophons experimented with different views of the clergy, and began to assimilate the higher clergy to the image of ideal secular rulers. This assimilation may partly explain the adoption of the hereditary patriarchate for which the
post-medieval Church of the East came to be known among European and American scholars until the present: the exacting requirements for patriarchal legitimacy in the book of canon law by ‘Abdīshō’ of Nisibis simply could no longer be met from some point during the fifteenth century, and the adoption of hereditary patriarchal succession in imitation of neighboring Christian groups may have been adopted as a solution, however contentious.

As important as the hierarchy for the communal self-concept of the fifteenth-century Church of the East was its account of the history of Christianity. Although they maintained notions of linear time and historical continuity, fifteenth-century East Syrian authors regarded the community’s deep past as more relevant to its present than the events of recent decades. In particular, the foundation of the Church by Christ and the apostles was understood to be determinative for the community’s doctrine, liturgy, and structure. The events of the succeeding fourteen centuries seem to have held less interest for the fifteenth-century Church of the East, except insofar as was necessary to establish a claim on that apostolic foundation. The most significant awareness of post-apostolic Christians in the Church of the East came in the veneration of the saints, which reveals a concern for the continuity of miraculous divine power within the community. This power was exercised by Christ during his earthly ministry, and afterwards through the apostles and the later saints. But even the saints did not fully bridge the chronological gap between the apostles and the fifteenth-century, since the Church of the East in that period did not venerate any saint who lived since the rise of Islam. Instead, it was the prayers to the saint by the community, and to Christ by the saint, combined with the saints’ relics, which made the past power present in the contemporary community. In each of these four areas – theology, liturgy, hierarchy, and miraculous power – the deep past was more relevant than the recent past to the fifteenth-century present.
This rich conceptual community of the Church of the East helps to fill in a chronological and causal gap in the study of Middle Eastern Christianity. Scholarship on the Church of the East almost entirely ends with the Mongol domination of Persia in the 1330s, and the few studies which examine the later period usually begin with the increasing European contacts in the middle of the sixteenth century or later. In the Mongol period, the Church of the East extended from Jerusalem to China, and catholicos-patriarchs lived in the Ilkhans’ imperial camp. By the Ottoman period, the Church of the East had mostly retreated to Jazīra and northern Iraq, and rival patriarchates competed for the loyalty of the East Syrian laypeople and the resources of a Roman alliance. In order to explain this shift, scholars have tended to appeal to the conversion of the Mongol ruler Ghāzān Khān to Islam in 1295 and the devastations wrought by Tīmūr in the closing years of the fourteenth century. Yet Ghāzān continued to show favor to the East Syrian Catholicos Mār Yahballāhā III until the former’s death in 1303, and it is unclear that the conquests by Tīmūr were more devastating to the sedentary population than the continuing warfare between the Āqqūyunlū and the Qarāqūyunlū over the first two thirds of the fifteenth century. The scholarly tendency to assign the blame to 1295 and 1403 must be seen as partly due to the absence of studies of the fifteenth century.

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4 In addition to the works cited in fn. 12 of the introduction, see Heleen L. Murre-van den Berg, “Generous Devotion: Women in the Church of the East Between 1550 and 1850,” Hugoye 7, no. 1 (2004): 11–54.
The destruction caused by the anti-Christian massacres of late Mongol rule and the devastation caused by Tīmūr’s campaigns were very real, but they were not the whole story. The continual plundering of the sedentary population, including the Christians, by the nomadic rulers’ armies resulted in an irreversible flow of wealth and resources away from all Christian groups in the region. The fifteenth century also witnessed a shift in the attitudes of Muslim rulers toward their Christian subjects. Early in the century, Christians in Iraq and Diyār Bakr still occasionally profited from the patronage of Muslim rulers. Later, and especially after the Āqqūyunlū ruler Uzun Ḥasan finally defeated the Qarāqūyunlū, there was an increased application of the discriminatory regulations which separated non-Muslims (dhimmī) from Muslims, with the notable exception of the building restrictions. The decreased warfare of the last third of the fifteenth century resulted in something of a building boom among all branches of Christianity, despite the prohibition on constructing churches in Islamic law. These data nuance our understanding of the decline of Middle Eastern Christianity from its medieval extent under the ‘Abbasid caliphate and then the Mongols to its marginalization in the Ottoman Empire, and extend the process later than previous scholarship has considered.

This narrative clearly has implications for Middle East history more broadly. Just as the zīj of Ulugh Bey derived information from Christian sources without mentioning them, Muslim society in the medieval Middle East typically regarded the Christian populations as unremarkable. This was not due to the rarity or exotic quality of the Middle Eastern Christianity, but because they were so commonplace as to be a familiar feature of normal daily life in much of the Middle East. The Timurid ruler of Samarqand did not need to point out to his audience that the “Greek” calendar was primarily used by Syriac Christians; that would be common enough knowledge in the fifteenth-century Persian-speaking lands. The identification of Middle Eastern
history with Islamic history implicitly excludes this multi-cultural awareness, and despite recent challenges this categorization remains prevalent in history departments, for example in the titles of academic positions. Insofar as the narrative of Middle Eastern history remains merely Islamic history, historical scholarship misrepresents the society of the region between the Nile and the Caspian Sea.7

Medieval Middle Eastern society was very diverse. Even the Christian populations of the region differed markedly from one another, permitting the positive identification of an East Syrian source for some of the calendrical information contained in Ulugh Bey’s zij. These different Christian groups are not interchangeable, still less so with the Jewish or other non-Muslim populations, indicating that the category dhimmī is of limited utility outside of discussions of those sections of Islamic law which treated all non-Muslims equivalently, since it represents only an external and negative characterization of diverse religious communities. If scholars are to abandon the notions of convivencia favored by some Muslim apologists and of constant persecution favored by some Christian apologists, it is necessary to replace these models with a nuanced account of past inter-communal interactions. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the diverse groups inhabiting fifteenth-century Jazīra and Iraq were not balkanized or strictly segregated. Even though relations between Muslims and Christians, as well as between different Christian groups, were passed over in silence by Muslim sources and only recorded if negative by Christian sources, nevertheless the records imply positive as well as negative contacts. The

7 Marshall Hodgson’s ground-breaking distinction between Islamic and “Islamicate,” which refers “to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims,” while a step in the right direction, still presumes that the Muslim element holds the determinative position in Middle Eastern society, “a society in which, of course, non-Muslims have always formed an integral, if subordinate, element”: Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, vol. 1: The Classical Age of Islam (University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57–59. Muslims certainly ruled the medieval Middle East, with certain notable exceptions, and were socially and culturally dominant in much of the region. But Muslim dominance in all aspects of social and cultural life cannot be taken for granted in Jazīra and northern Iraq, parts of which remained predominantly Christian into the fifteenth century.
evidence hints at standard systems of encounter and economic exchange between groups, systems which were typically peaceful, although the depredations of the nomadic armies and the ever-present threat if not actuality of mob violence broke down normal social relations. Over the course of the fifteenth-century, the regions under Türkmen rule saw an increasing enforcement of dhimmī discriminatory regulations, shifting the systems of exchange steadily in favor of the Muslim population.

The study of the Christian population in the medieval Middle East not only challenges the identification of Middle Eastern with Islamic history, it also forces a reappraisal of the view of medieval Europe as coterminous with Christian society. Most studies of Middle Eastern Christianity have presented it as the exotic “other” to European Christianity’s “mainstream.” It is unquestionably true that medieval European Christianity is more familiar to modern Western scholars trained in a scholarly tradition which was birthed in medieval France and England. But it is equally true that the Christians of fifteenth-century Mosul and Cairo did not regard themselves as sectarian divergences from a normative Christianity found elsewhere. As we have seen with regard to the role of theology in the conceptual community of the Church of the East, to highlight the difference can misrepresent what is important. Conversely, differences between European and Middle Eastern Christian thought and culture can reveal what is distinctively European about medieval Latin Christianity. The methods developed here for the interpretation of theology, ritual, and hierarchy can be applied mutatis mutandis to Latin Christians as well, as this study benefited from the work of Eamon Duffy and Richard McCall on medieval England.
and Rome. Most importantly, the model of conceptual communities developed here is applicable to medieval Europe as well.

Conceptual communities permeate all societies. The central insight of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* was that there is a conceptual dimension of any social group larger than a village. His work was exclusively interested in top-level political associations, but this is as true for religious, ethnic, geographical, and professional associations. The first chapter of this dissertation sketches some of the potentials and pitfalls of conceptual communities as analytic tools in the study of the past. The subsequent chapters have demonstrated that conceptual communities are far from simple. There is no simple answer to the question, “What did it mean to be the Church of the East in the fifteenth century?” Fifteenth-century East Syrian Christians would have regarded the question as equivalent to asking, “What did it mean to be Christian in Mosul under the rule of the Türkmen dynasties?” But the answers were complex, including components of particular beliefs, participation in communal rituals, adherence to certain social hierarchies, and a particular place in a certain narrative of Christian history. Some of these components, such as the nature of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were changing much faster than other elements, although none were immutable. The particular example of a neglected Christian population in fifteenth-century Iraq and eastern Anatolia has served as a case study in clarifying the dynamics of conceptual communities, which are found throughout the full breadth of human societies.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Anaphora: A fixed series of prayers and dialogues which consecrate the Eucharist.

Anathema: An ecclesiastical condemnation of a person, expelling him or her from the Church.

Archdeacon: The chief ecclesiastical assistant to a patriarch.

Baptistery: A building or room within a church for the performance of baptisms.

Bema: A raised platform in the middle of a church, from which the scripture passages were read.

Bey: A Turkish term of respect or authority.

Catholicos: A title for the patriarch of certain Middle Eastern Christian denominations, such as the Armenian Orthodox Church or the Church of the East.

Chancel: The area around the altar in a church.

Christology: The collection of theological ideas pertaining to Christ.

Colophon: A note, typically at the end of a manuscript, identifying the circumstances in which the manuscript was copied.

Deacon: An ecclesiastical rank below priest, responsible for assisting in the liturgies but not consecrating the sacraments.

Dhimmi: An Arabic term for a non-Muslim.

Diptychs: A list of saints and ecclesiastical leaders who are invoked in prayer during a church service.

Dyophysite: The notion that Christ possesses two distinct natures, one divine and the other human.

Ecclesiology: The collection of theological ideas pertaining to the nature of the Church.

Economy: In a theological sense, the system by which God rules creation. See chapter 4 under the section entitled “The Structure of East Syrian Theology” for more information.

Emir: An Arabic title for a military ruler.

Epiclesis: The prayer invoking the Holy Spirit to consecrate the Eucharist.

Eschatological: Pertaining to the events expected at the end of time.

Excommunicate: To exclude someone from participation in the Eucharist, and by extension from social participation in a community.
**Firman**: A Persian term for a ruler’s edict.

**Garshuni**: Arabic written in Syriac script.

**Hagiography**: Texts about saints, typically describing their lives, deaths, or miracles.

**Ḥaḍj**: The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

**Ḥūdā**: A liturgical manuscript used in the Church of the East, containing the distinctive prayers for each service throughout the year.

**Humeral veil**: A liturgical vestment draped over the shoulders which can be used to cover the hands to prevent direct contact with sacred objects.

**Ilkhanate**: The Mongol dynasty which ruled Persia from 1258 to 1335.

**Imam**: The leader of a communal Muslim prayer.

**Jizya**: A head tax assessed upon non-Muslim subjects.

**Lectionary**: A manuscript containing Scripture passages arranged according to the liturgical calendar.

**Litany**: A series of short prayers, each punctuated by a congregational response of affirmation.

**Liturgy**: A church service, or particularly the text established to be recited during a church service.

**Lord’s Prayer**: The prayer taught by Jesus to the apostles in Matthew 6:9-13.

**Maphrian**: The highest ranking Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical official in Iraq.

**Mdabrānūthā**: See Economy.

**Metropolitan**: An archbishop.

**Mullah**: A colloquial Arabic term for Muslim clergy.

**Nave**: The portion of the interior of a church where the laity stand.

‘Ōnūthā (pl. ‘onyāthā): A genre of Syriac liturgical poetry consisting of verses with lines of a fixed number of syllables.

**Patriarch**: The highest-ranking ecclesiastical official in a Christian denomination.

**Pneumatology**: The collection of theological ideas pertaining to the Holy Spirit.

**Qāḍī**: A Muslim judge.
Qūrbānā: A Syriac term for the Eucharist or the liturgical service which consecrates it.

Sacristan: A priest in charge of the items used in church services.

See: The official residence of a bishop.

Stylite: A Christian monk who lives on top of a pillar or column.

Suffragan: A subordinate bishop who is under a metropolitan.

Takht: A Persian term for a throne.

Tamghā (pl. tamghāwāt): A tax on commercial transactions.

Theopaschite: A theological view which ascribes suffering to God.

Vardapet: An Armenian title for a teacher of theology.

Vestments: Special clothes worn by Christian clergy while celebrating a liturgy.

Vita: An account of the life of a saint.
Appendix B: Lists of Rulers and Patriarchs

Timurids

Timur (d. 1405)

Shahrukh (1377-1447)

Ulugh Bey (1394-1449)
Muhammad Jukhi

Miranshah (d. 1408)

Abu Bakr
Muhammad

Abu Sa'id (1424-1469)

Mamluk Sultans of Egypt

al-Zahir Barquq (1382-1399)
al-Nasir Faraj (1399-1405, 1405-1412)
al-Manṣūr `Abd al-`Azīz (1405)
al-Musta'īn (1412)
al-Mu`ayyad Shaykh (1412-1421)
al-Muzaffar Aḥmad (1421)
al-Zahir Taṭār (1421)
al-Sāliḥ Muhammad (1421-1422)
al-Ashraf Barsbāy (1422-1438)
al-`Azīz Yūsuf (1438)
al-Zahir Jaqmaq (1438-1453)
al-Manṣūr ʿUthmān (1453)
al-Ashraf Īnāl (1453-1460)
al-Mu`ayyad Ahmad (1460-1461)
al-Zahir Khushqadam (1461-1467)
al-Zahir Yalbāy (1467-1468)
al-Zahir Timurbughā (1468)
al-Ashraf Qāʿit Bāy (1468-1495)
al-Nasir Muḥammad (1495-1498)
al-Zahir Qānṣawh (1498-1499)
al-Ashraf Jānbalāt (1499-1501)
Ottoman Sultans

Bāyazīd I Yıldırım (1389-1403)
Meḥmed I Čelebi (1413-1421)
Murād II (1421-1444, 1446-1451)
Meḥmed II Fātiḥ (1444-1446, 1451-1481)
Bāyazīd II (1481-1512)

Āqqūyunlū Rulers

\[ \text{\textbullet } Qutlū Bey (d. 1389) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Qarā ʿUthmān (d. 1435) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Aḥmad \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Hamza (d. 1444) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Maḥmūd (d. 1443) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } ʿAlī (d. 1451) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Shaykh Ḥasan (d. 1451) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Qilīch Aṣlān \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Jāhāngīr (d. c. 1469) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Uzun Ḥasan (d. 1478) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Qāsim (d. 1502) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Yaʿqūb (d. 1490) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Maqṣūd (d. 1478) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Bāysunghur (d. 1493) \]
\[ \text{\textbullet } Rustam (d. 1497) \]

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\[ ^1\text{Simplified from the charts at the back of John E. Woods, } \text{The Aqqūyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire, Rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1999). Death dates not contained on those charts were supplied from indications throughout the same text.} \]
**Qarāqūyunlū Rulers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Dynasty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qarā Muḥammad</td>
<td>(d. 1389)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qarā Yūsuf</td>
<td>(d. 1420)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abū Saʿīd</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shāh Muḥammad</td>
<td>(d. 1434)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ašpahān</td>
<td>(d. 1445)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Iskandar</td>
<td>(d. 1438)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jahānshāh</td>
<td>(d. 1467)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥasan ʿAlī</td>
<td>(d. 1469)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Catholicos-Patriarchs of the East²**

Yahballāhā III (1281-1317)
Timothy II (1318-?)
Denhā II (1336-1381)
(Shemʿōn?)³
Ēliyā
Shemʿōn (attested 1430-1444)
Shemʿōn IV (1477-1497)
Shemʿōn V (1497-1502)
Ēliyā V (1503-1504)
Shemʿōn VI (1504-1538)
Shemʿōn VII Īshōʿyahb b. Māmā (1538/9-1558)

**Armenian Catholicoi at Sis⁴**

Karapet I (attested 1395-1404)
Yakob II (attested 1411-1414)
Grigor VIII (attested 1417, deposed 1419)
Pawłos II (attested 1418-1428)
Kostandin VI (attested 1431-1438)

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² For the evidence supporting this list, see Chapter 3.
³ This catholicos is listed in The Book of the Bee but not in the diptychs.
⁴ The dates given in these lists of Armenian catholicoi differ significantly from the dates given by Sanjian in his index, which are based on the work of Malakʿia Ormanean: Avedis K. Sanjian, tran., Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969). I do not think Ormanean’s dates deserve much credence, as they are everywhere contradicted by the colophon evidence in Xačikyan’s volumes, on which these lists are based: L. S. Xačʿikyan, Tasnherentord dari hayeren jerhageri hiṣatalkaranner, 3 vols. (Yerevan: Haykakan S. S. H. Gitutʿyunneri Akademiayi Hratarakzutʿyun, 1955-1967).
Grigor IX (attested 1441-1444)
Karapet (attested 1446-1467?)
Step’annos (attested 1476)
Yovhannēs (attested 1488-1497)

Armenian Catholicoi at Alt’amar

Zak’aria II (d. 1393)
Dawit’ III (attested 1395-1431)
Zak’aria III (attested 1419, died 1464)
Step’annos IV (1464-1484)
Step’annos “the younger” (1484-1489)
Zak’aria IV (attested 1490, died 1495)
Atom (attested 1496-1499)

Armenian Catholicoi at Ėjniacin

Kirakos (attested 1442-1444)
Grigor X (attested 1441, deposed 1462, attested 1468)
Zak’aria III of Alt’amar
Aristakēs II (19 February 1465, attested 1473)
Sargis II (attested 1473-1478)
Yovhannēs VII (attested 1475-1481)
Sargis III (attested 1480-1500)

Catholicoi of Aghwân at Ganjasar

Karapet (attested 1402-1423)
Mat’ēos (attested 1423)
Yohanēs (attested 1428)
Mat’ēos (attested 1432-1436)
Ōhanēs (attested 1456-1468)
T’umay (attested 1466-1471)
Nersēs (attested 1476)
Arakeal (attested 1497-1499)

Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs of Shām

Ignatius Miḵhā’īl Barṣawmo (November 1292-December 1312)
Miḵhā’īl II Ḳīshō’ b. Shūshan (1313-1349)
Basil Gabriel (1349-1387)
Philoxenus the Scribe (1387-1421)
Basil Shem’ūn Man’amoyo (1421-1445)

5 The successions of Syrian Orthodox patriarchs and maphrians are taken from Gregory Bar Hebraeus, Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, ed. Jean Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (Lovanii: Peeters, 1872).
Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs of Mardin

Ignatius I Bar Wahībh Badarzakhē (1293-1333)
Ignatius II Īwānnīs Ismā‘īl al-Majd (1333-1366)
Ignatius III Shahāb (1366-1381)
Ignatius IV Abrohom bar Garībh (1381-1412)
Ignatius V Basil Behnam Ḥedloyo (1412-1455)
Ignatius VI Khalaf Ma’dnoyo (1455-1483)
Ignatius Yūḥannon bar Shayallāh (1483-1493)
Nūḥ Pūnīqoyo (1494-1509)

Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs of Ṭūr Ḥabdīn

Ignatius I Sobho Šalaḥoyo (1364-1389)
Ignatius II Īshū’ bar Mūţo (1390-1417, d. 1421)
Ignatius III Mas‘ūd Šalaḥoyo (1417-1420)
Ignatius IV Ḥenūkh Ḥīwardoyo (1421-1445)
Ignatius V Qaumē Sbhrīnoyo (1446-1455)
Ignatius VI Ishū’ Ḥīwardoyo (1455-1466)
Ignatius VII ‘Azīz bar Sabhto (1467-1489)
Yūḥannon Ḥīwardoyo (d. 1493)
Mas‘ūd Zazoyo (1493-?, d. 1509)

Syrian Orthodox Maphrians

Barṣawmo al-Ṣafī bar Ḥbroyo (1286-1308)
Mattay b. Ḥannō (1317-1345)
Ya’qūb b. Qaynoyo (1360-1361)
Athansius Abrohom (1364-1379)
Basil Behnam Ḥedloyo (1404-1412)
Dioscorus Behnam Arboyo (1415-1417)
Basil Barṣawmo Ma’dnoyo (1422-1455)
Cyril Yūsuf b. Nīsān
Basil ‘Azīz (1471-1487)
Nūḥ Pūnīqoyo (1490-1494)
Basil Abrohom (1496-1507)
Map 3. Diyār Bakr and Eastern Anatolia
Map 5. Lake Van and Armenian Highlands
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Ḥūdrā. Trichur 27.

Ḥūdrā. Vatican sir. 83.


ʿĪsā b. Fakhr al-Dīn b. ʿĪsā b. Mattā Bēth Sukbāj. Colophon. BL Or. 4399, ff. 376a, 377a, 579a-b.


İşāq Shbadnaya. ‘‘Onīthā d-‘al mdabbrānūthā d-‘allāhā d-men brāshīth wa-‘dāmā l-‘ālam.

İşāq Shbadnaya. ‘‘Onīthā d-‘al mdabbrānūthā d-‘allāhā d-men brāshīth wa-‘dāmā l-‘ālam.
Mingana Syr. 57.


İşāq Shbadnaya. ‘Onyāthā. BL Or. 4062, ff. 122b-143b.


İşāq [Shbadnaya]. Unyāyā ‘al mashlmānē w-thūrkāyē da-khmā nesyōnē w-shūnāqē mshahlpay znayā masblnīn la-khrestyānē meskēnē wa-msaybrīn lhōn wa-m’azēn b-āgōnhōn. Bodl. Sir. c.9, ff. 128a-129b.


Marginal note. Mingana Syr. 561, ff. 44a-43b.


Nūḥ Pūnīqoy. Tawārīkh al-‘anbiyā’ w-al-mursalin w-al-salāṭīn... Vatican sir. 97, ff. 138a-140a.


Tash ithā da-thlīthay ūthē lbbīsh l-’allāhā abhūn Mār Īgnāṭīus Paṭrīārkīs mshabhā d-Anjiṭūkhēyīa d-Sūrēyā, d-hū mnāhā Yuḥannōn bar maqqdsho yo Shayallāh. Cambridge Dd. 3.8¹, ff. 82a-87b.


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