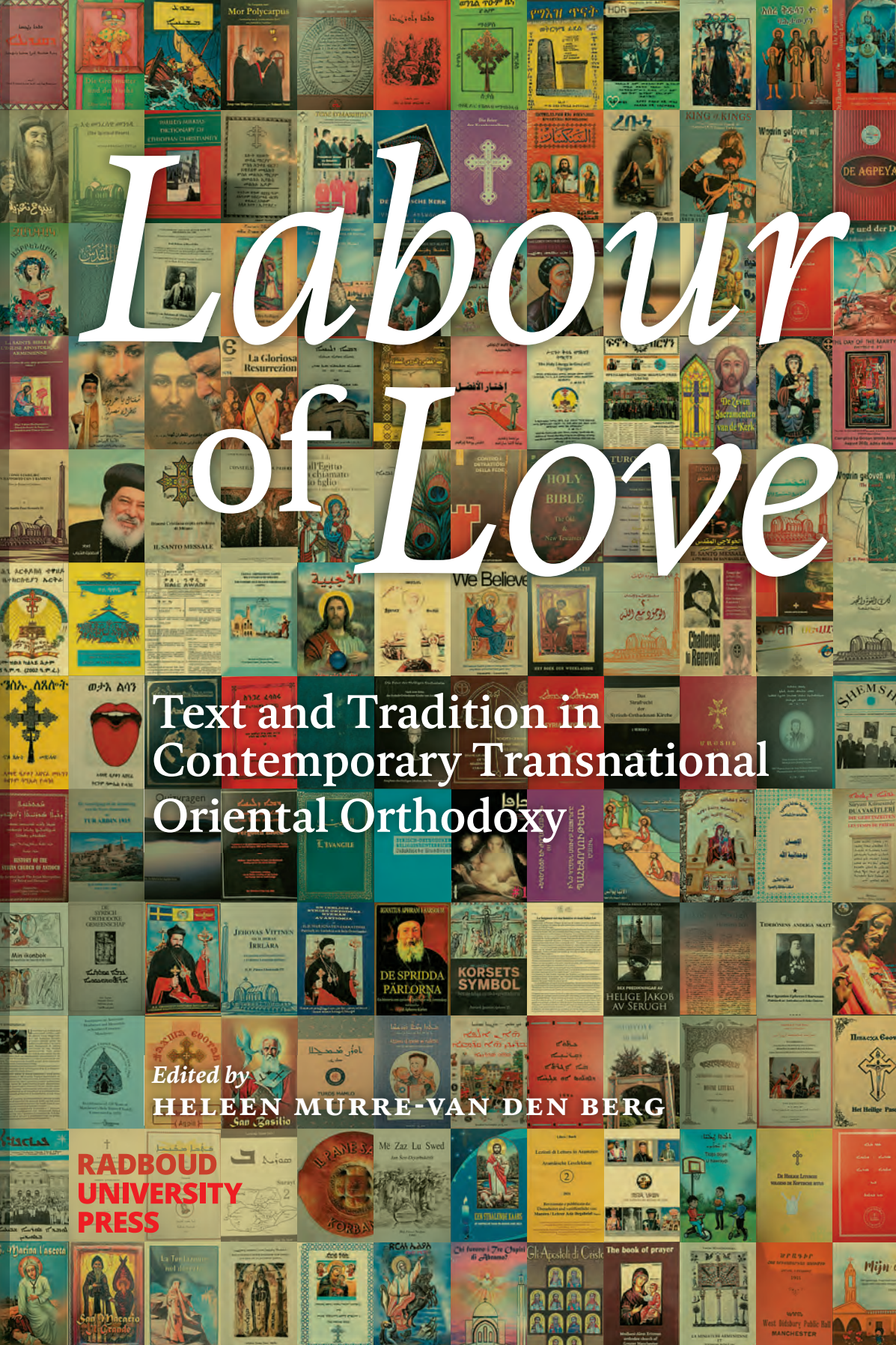
Labour of Love
Text and Tradition in Contemporary Transnational Oriental Orthodoxy
Edited by
HELEEN MURRE-VAN DEN BERG
RADBOUD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Acknowledgements

This edited volume arose from one of the conferences of the ERC project *Rewriting Global Orthodoxy: Oriental Christians in Europe, 1970-2020*. The project started at Radboud University in October 2019 [grant agreement No. 83444], only a couple of months before the COVID-19 pandemic completely overturned our plans. We had intended to visit Oriental churches in the Netherlands and other European countries in search of books and a better understanding of what these books meant to communal life in Europe. Little of that could be done in the first years of the pandemic. The first team members were hired in 2019 and early 2020 and had worked on-site in Nijmegen, varying from a few months to just one week, before the university closed its building and we were forced to move to our home offices. Two other members were hired via online meetings in the course of 2020. All of this was a considerable setback for how we envisaged the early stages of the project, by pushing our fieldwork to later stages, and making conference organizing more complicated and thus delaying publications. However, our regular online meetings allowed us to focus on reading and discussing together and to better integrate our multidisciplinary backgrounds into a shared vision of where the project was going. As importantly, our common struggle to deal with the challenges of the pandemic in our personal lives, our university, and our local contexts brought us closer together though we were stranded in different countries.

When things gradually improved, we started organizing conferences. The current volume reflects the second of the three workshops we organized as a team. The first of these, in October 2021, was on the layout and illustrations of the books we collected. The final conference in January 2024 brought our focus on the Oriental churches into conversation with a broader range of churches from the Middle East and Eastern Europe in various diasporic contexts. The second conference on texts and traditions was organized in October 2022 in the tranquil settings of the Soeterbeeck Conference Centre in Ravenstein near Nijmegen. Here, we discussed what had been published in the past fifty years in the Oriental churches in Europe, filling a gap in current scholarship that tends to ignore these recent materials. However, the group that came to Soeterbeeck was intent on taking this literature seriously. Its members came from various disciplinary backgrounds: theology, religious studies, Armenian history, Middle Eastern Studies, literature, history, and anthropology. Some hold positions in academia, others

work as professionals with and in the churches. This allowed us to integrate emic and etic perspectives, to hear and see how such literary production works in the communities, and to contextualize this production over a wide range of periods and locations – including the United States, which forms a critical comparative locus when studying European developments.

All of this allowed us to better understand how old texts are taken up in new contexts, how texts and books are intrinsically part of lived religion, and how the interaction between the content and the materiality of the books constitutes a crucial element of Oriental Orthodox religion. All of the essays in this volume, in one way or another, attempt to enlighten us on aspects of this dynamic. We focus here on the texts and the broader tradition in which these texts function, as well as how texts are being put to use, translated, transformed, and newly written. Together, these contributions complement and contextualize the work done on textual traditions in the ERC project. This, in turn, is part of the larger aims of the project that included attention to the design and illustrations of these publications and the larger socio-political and church-political context in which these literary developments took place. We thank the authors of this volume for their creative and constructive contributions to the conference and to this volume.

By now, the project not only has reached its formal end (in October 2024) but is also nearing completion as to the publications and other products that resulted from it. This, therefore, is the perfect time to thank the project members who played such crucial roles in making this happen. Two of them contributed to this volume with their essays, Gaétan du Roy and Christopher Sheklian. The others, especially PhD students Habtom Yohannes, Matija Miličić, and Jan Gehm, contributed in all kinds of other ways, in organizing the conference but also in being inquisitive and critical partners in all our discussions. Elise Aghazarian provided everything we needed (and much more) for fruitful conferences and many on- and offline team meetings. The database, the common core of our project, could not have materialized without the support and hard work of Emmanuel Chamilakis and Wessel Stoop. Over the years, our Advisory Board provided incisive and stimulating discussions over big and small questions arising in the project, in online meetings and during the conferences – I thank George Kiraz, Maria Hämmerli, Nelly van Doorn-Harder, Victoria Bernal, Jasmine Dum-Tragut, Andreas Schmoller, and Alessandro Mengozzi for their consistent and invaluable support. The project found a congenial home in the Department of Comparative Religion, led by Eric Venbrux, in the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies at Radboud University. In Eric I also thank the other staff members in and outside this department for practical help, in-depth discussions, and joyful outings.

With profound sadness, I honour our esteemed colleague Martin Tamcke, who supported the project from the very beginning, and who invited the team to a very stimulating conference in the Coptic monastery in Brenkhausen, which was organized in conjunction with his valedictory lecture at the Georg-August University Göttingen, in September 2021. Last year, Martin passed away much too early, on 2 November 2024. We remember him with immense gratitude, for his invaluable scholarly contribution to the field of Eastern Christian Studies, and for his deep humanity that brought together people in search of knowledge and understanding, from all walks of life.

One of the anonymous reviewers suggested I choose a more telling title than the rather bland "Introduction" that headed my first contribution in this volume. Starting from their suggestion I decided on a phrase I used in the first paragraph, where I characterise the work of Mor Julius Çiçek – one of the Syriac authors I discuss – as "labour of love." To me, this phrase captures the interconnection between the intensely personal commitment of individuals and the well-being and survival of the community as a whole. This is true not only for the deepest motivations of many of the authors we study in this volume, but it also reflects how we as group worked on this project over the past years, and how others – our colleagues, our spouses, friends, and family – supported us, in our shared love for research, for these churches, for the books, and for the people who wrote them. Indeed, labour it was, but a labour of love.

July 2025, Nijmegen/Leiden, Heleen Murre-van den Berg

Contributors

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Labour of Love: Introductory Notes on Religion, Books, and Learning

HELEEN MURRE-VAN DEN BERG

In the writing of books, I love you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, am born and baptized.
In the building of souls, I exalt you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, was taught and promoted.
In the embellishment of churches, I praise you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, am firm and steadfast.
In the spreading of books, I adorn you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, will die and be buried.
Refr: I delight in you, my Syriac church.[1]

These lines, taken from a long poem by Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek, state a straightforward truth that I overlooked even after I started the project on textual productions. This is, that the "writing"[2] and "spreading" of books for many in the Oriental churches is a primary expression of their commitment to the Christian community. In this poem, Mor Julius, the first bishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Europe (1979-2005), puts the writing and the spreading of books on a par with the "building of souls" and the "embellishment of churches." In his opinion, writing and distributing are crucial elements of building the church and, thus, a labour of love by those who belong to it.

In the current volume, we explore this commitment to the writing and distribution of books in the Oriental Churches from the 1950s onward. We trace how this process takes place in the various churches, who the actors are, what kind of books are being produced, and how this literary production relates to earlier types of literary output in the churches and to other kinds of religious cultural production in the past and present. These are the questions central to the group that worked at Radboud University on the ERC project 'Rewriting Global Orthodoxy: Oriental

1 Gabriel Rabo, "In Memoriam Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek†, Metropolit der syrisch-orthodoxen Diözese von Mitteleuropa und den Benelux-Ländern, 1942-2005," *Kolo Süryoyo* 147 (2005), 2–26, here p. 101 (reprint from *Kolo Suryoyo* 94 (1993), p. 433).

2 Literally: the "copying" (√*srṭ*), a term used for manuscript writing, an art that Mor Julius also practiced and used in the early phases of bookmaking with a mimeograph machine.

Churches in Europe, 1970-2020'.[3] After an earlier conference focused on the visual culture of these publications, the 2022 conference concentrated on the texts. What texts were transmitted, why, how, and by whom? We invited a variety of participants to broaden our perspective, regarding the region, with several papers discussing North America in comparison to European developments, and regarding the timeframe, with many papers including the earlier part of the twentieth century in their analysis – thus situating our focus on Europe between 1970 and 2020 in a broader context. Their contributions formed the basis of the papers of the present volume.

In this introductory essay, I will discuss three themes in more detail, explicating the keywords religion, books and learning from the title. The first is Oriental Orthodoxy as a specific group, the starting point of our project and this volume. Their groupness is not a given, not with the authors of this volume (most contributions focus on publications produced and distributed within one church) and not within the churches as communities vis-à-vis each other. However, there is reason to assume that Oriental Orthodoxy as such plays a role in how these churches are engaged in book production.

The second theme concerns the literary tradition we mostly took for granted during the conference. What are these traditions, and how do they play a role in assessing their various aspects? How do texts help create and sustain the social imaginaries that allow these communities to exist when their members are dispersed over more and more countries? How do texts contribute to maintaining the distinct Oriental Christian communities and the emerging creation of Oriental Orthodoxy? In this volume, most contributors focus on the contents of these texts rather than on their ongoing material presence in the form of printed books. However, the books' publishing processes and materiality are crucial in understanding what 'tradition' means in these churches. The research into these processes helps grasp how social imaginaries are sustained not only by the contents of the texts but also by the circulation of material objects – objects that embody the "aesthetic formations" of these churches, to use the term coined by Birgit Meyer.[4]

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3 The research group consisted, in addition to the author of this contribution, of Gaétan du Roy, Christopher Sheklian, Habtom Yohannes, Matija Miličić, Jan Gehm, Elise Aghazarian and Wessel Stoop. The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No. 834441 GlobalOrthodoxy). The corpus is made available via the database https://fourcornersoftheworld.ptrs.ru.nl/. See Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Rewriting Global Orthodoxy. Oriental Christians in Europe between 1970 and 2020," in *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities from the Middle East*, ed. by Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), 15–29.

4 Birgit Meyer, "From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms and Styles of Binding," in Birgit Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion and the Senses* (New York 2009), 1–30.

Thirdly, I will put the spotlight on the actors, those who are responsible for the physical objects and for their contents, many of whom, like bishop Julius Çiçek whom I quoted above, see the production and distribution of books as an integral part of their service to the church, regardless of their position in that church. The materials we have collected in the project database and the contributions to this volume allow us to sketch the lines of an extended transnational network that helps to understand better the contributions of individual authors, translators, and publishers as well as the broader network of supporters that labour together to safeguard and transmit their tradition to the next generation.

Oriental Orthodox Churches

In current ecumenical parlance, the term Oriental churches, despite the negative connotations of the term "oriental,"[5] became the shorthand for those churches that share a common history in their rejection of the Christology as formulated by the Council of Chalcedon (451).[6] With this term, they are distinguished from what in the same ecumenical vocabulary are called the Eastern Orthodox churches, which developed from the Eastern churches that accepted Chalcedon and developed out of the state church of the Byzantine Empire. According to the followers of the Alexandrian bishop Cyrill (d. 444), the divine and human natures were wholly united in Christ as "one nature." This earned this group the name *monophysites*, which today is usually replaced by *miaphysites*. These discussions over Christ's nature(s) led to the gradual separation of several distinct churches from the imperial Chalcedonian (later Byzantine) church in Egypt and parts of Syria and Mesopotamia. However, most of these communities, which we know today as the Coptic, Syriac-Orthodox, and Armenian Churches, and the Ethiopian and Eritrean Tewahdo Churches, differed from the churches in the centre of the East-Roman empire not only in terms of theological convictions. They represent distinct histories of Christianisation in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically different regions from the western Levant and Asia Minor, where the mostly Greek-speaking Chalcedonian church took priority.

5 As in the discussions over Europe's "Orientalist" bias in its dealings with the region, a discussion initiated by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Whereas this unpacking of the term Oriental led some to shun it in relation to this group of churches, most scholars and others involved – including those from the churches themselves – deem the term useful in distinguishing this group from the Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox Churches.

6 See, e.g., the website of the World Council of Churches (https://www.oikoumene.org/), under "member churches"> "church families" (last seen, d.d. 28/2/2024).

Over time, this conflation of dogmatic, ritual, regional, and linguistic differences resulted in a group of churches that cherished their independence from the Byzantine church and each other and which, precisely for that reason, were well equipped to survive the transition of the region to Islamic political dominance in the seventh century.[7] Whereas in the long haul, all churches gradually lost visibility and numbers vis-à-vis the population that converted to Islam, until the end of the nineteenth century, these churches retained substantial and flourishing communities in all parts of the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the independent realm of the Ethiopian kingdom. Ottoman administration brought these churches together administratively when they subdivided their non-Muslim subjects into three groups: Jews, Armenians, and Rum Orthodox. In this set-up, which in the nineteenth century matured in the so-called "millet system," the head of the Armenians was considered to represent not only the Armenian church but also the other miaphysite churches. Notably, the millet system was decidedly less rigid than it has often been portrayed in earlier scholarship, and the Syriac and Coptic churches especially had several ways to approach the Ottoman administration directly, locally and centrally, circumventing the Armenian patriarch.[8] Despite such intra-Oriental quarrels, this administrative grouping confirmed and enforced a shared history.

In the meantime, the increased Western influences in the Ottoman Empire and beyond changed the dynamics fundamentally, ultimately leading to the migration of many of these Oriental Christians to European countries. The arrival of Westerners, including many Catholic and Protestant missionaries, initially led to an active exchange of literary traditions and stimulated learning, translation, and book production.[9] It also encouraged conversion to Catholic and Protestant forms

7 See Ter Haar Romeny, Bas, Naures Atto, Jan J. van Ginkel, Mat Immerzeel, Bas Snelders, "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89,1–3 (2009): 1–52 and Volker Menze, *Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria: The Last Pharaoh and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2023).

8 For the Ottoman administration of religious minorities, see Heather Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), and Khalid S. Denno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the late Ottoman Period and Beyond* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017).

9 See the essays by Aurélien Girard ("Introduction. Livres et confession chrétiennes orientales (XVIe and XVIIIe siècles). Proposition pour une historie comparée et connectée," 9–84) and Bernard Heyberger (« Réseaux de collaboration et enjeux de pouvoir autour de la production de livres imprimés en arabe chez les chrétiens », 381–412), in *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Une histoire connectée entre l'Empire ottoman, le monde slave et l'Occident (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles),* ed. by Aurélien Girard and Bernard Heyberger, Vassa Kontouma (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023). See also Aurélien Girard, Cesare Santus, Vassa Kontouma, and Karène Sanchez Summerer (eds.), *Middle Eastern and*

of religion. Whereas actual converts comprised relatively small groups, these contacts began fundamental changes in the Christian communities. The division into denominational groups spurred discussions over communal identities, be they ethnic, linguistic, or religious, which questioned existing patterns of societal structure in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Western politicians and diplomats started to see the local Christians as potential allies, thereby undermining the stability of the Ottoman Empire. Over time, the relative strength that Christians found in this relationship turned against them when anti-Christian religious discourses fused with socio-economic concerns and resulted in local riots targeting Christians.[10] In the early twentieth century, similar lingering anti-Christian sentiments were joined with rival nationalisms and geopolitical concerns when the Young Turk rulers threw in their lot with the Central Powers (which included their long-term ally Germany) against the Allied Powers (which included Great Britain and Russia). This sealed the fate of Armenian and Syriac Christians in the Ottoman Empire when especially the Armenians were portrayed as a dangerous internal political enemy, betraying the Turks by fighting on Russia's side. The genocide of 1915 led to the first significant wave of Oriental Christian migration, with survivors being deported to Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Armenian survivors, however, also ended up further away from home, in Europe (mainly France) and the United States.[11]

The French Armenian communities thus make up the oldest Oriental Christian communities in Europe if we disregard the modest earlier Armenian presence in Rome, Venice and Amsterdam,[12] and the long-term Armenian presence in

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European Christianity, 16th-20th Century: Connected Histories. Essays by Bernard Heyberger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

10 See Heather J. Sharkey, "History Rhymes? Late Ottoman Millets and Post-Ottoman Minorities in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50,4 (2018): 760–64, Feras Krimsti, *Die Unruhen von 1850 in Aleppo: Gewalt im urbanen Raum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), and S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah, H.L. Murre-van den Berg (eds.), *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

11 The literature on the Armenian genocide is vast; see, e.g., the important work of Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2006) and the recent volume edited by Thomas Kühne, Mary Jane Rein, and Marc A. Mamigonian, *Documenting the Armenian Genocide: Essays in Honor of Taner Akçam* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). For the Syriac *saifo*, see David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006) and David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O. Barthoma (eds.), *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo – the Genocide against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn 2017).

12 René Bekius, Wout Ultee,"De Armeense kolonie in Amsterdam 1600-1800," *De Gids* 148 (1985), 216–224; Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011), Sebouh David Aslanian, *Early Modernity and Mobility: Port Cities and Printers across the Armenian*

parts of Eastern Europe. The majority of Oriental Christians, however, started to arrive in Europe from the late 1960s onwards. Initially, labour migration was the driving force, including highly educated Copts who went to the UK as medical doctors and engineers, as much as Armenian and Syriac workers from Turkey who came as part of labour agreements between Turkey and Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. These labour opportunities also allowed their families to leave the increasingly oppressive situation in South-Eastern Turkey, where economic and socio-political situations deteriorated quickly, especially after Turkish military operations against the PKK uprising became more numerous. Over the years, when labour opportunities decreased, more and more Syriac and Armenian Christians used asylum procedures to join the growing communities in Europe, further strengthening not only the Dutch, Swedish, and German communities but also those of the UK and France.[13] Additionally, Armenian communities grew as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union, whereas in 2015, Syriac and Armenian communities were augmented by those who fled Syria's civil war. Coptic Christians increasingly left Egypt, migrating to the US as well as to Europe, for a combination of economic and religious reasons.[14] From the 1990s onwards, Ethiopian and Eritrean Tewahdo Christians migrated to Europe and the US. The reasons were mainly political, with those opposing the new governments leaving the country. Over the years, new groups of Tewahdo Christians arrived, sometimes from opposing political parties, making it difficult for these communities to unite ecclesiastically in the diasporan context.[15]

Diaspora, 1512-1800 (Yale University Press, 2023), and Stephan Boghossian, *La communauté arménienne de Marseille: Quatre siècles de son histoire* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2009).

13 On European Armenian communities see Harutyun G. Harutyunyan (99–110), Christopher Sheklian (111–124) and Sevgi Çilingir (125–138) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*; and in the rich volume honoring pioneer diaspora scholar Khachig Tölölyan, edited by Talar Chahinian, Sossie Kasbarian, Tsolin Nalbantian: *The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power: Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024). On Syriac migration see Naures Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Diaspora" (Dissertation, Leiden University Press, 2011), the contributions of Kai Merten (59–66) and Jan Gehm (67–78) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*, and Sarah Bakker Kellogg, *Sonic Icons: Relation, Recognition, and Revival in a Syriac World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2025).

14 See Matija Miličić (79–90), Gaétan du Roy (91–98) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*; Angela Bernardo, *Ricostruire una comunità, la Chiesa copta ortodossa in Europa* (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020); Alistair Hunter, Fiona McCallum Guiney, *The Quest for Equal Citizenship. Middle Eastern Christian Narratives of Migration and Inclusion in the United Kingdom*, *Mashriq & Mahjar* 8 (2020), 1–39.

15 See Ancel Stéphan, Giulia Bonacci, Joachim G. Persoon, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church," in Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London/New York: Routledge 2014), 498-520, and Habtom Yohannes (145–160) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*;

With the Tewahdo Christians constituting an increasingly important group of Oriental Christians in Europe, this often neglected but vital part of Oriental Christian history begs for further research and inclusion in the scholarly narrative. The Orthodox Christianity of the modern states of Ethiopia and Eritrea has a long history that is distinct from but intimately connected with the Oriental churches further north, in Egypt, the Levant, and Armenia. Earlier, Tewahdo Christianity depended on Coptic patriarchs to appoint and consecrate their hierarch, the *Abuna*. This connection was severed gradually from 1948 onwards, with autocephaly granted in 1959. In 1991, Eritrea became an independent country, and in 1993, its church was granted autocephaly. Along the historical connection with Coptic Christianity, Tewahdo Christianity shared early roots with Syriac Christianity, whose influence reached Ethiopia via the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, the Tewahdo church has cherished its distinct character in language, rituals, iconography, and spirituality. It also became intricately connected to imperial rule in Ethiopia until the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. In the years following, the Tewahdo church gradually lost its privileged position in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Still, in both countries, it continues to enjoy the benefits of being the largest religious group in the country.[16]

Emperor Haile Selassie (r. 1930-1974) played a crucial role in further consolidating the Oriental Churches as a group when, in the aftermath of the post-World War II decolonisation, he sponsored the Adis Ababa conference of 1965. With the support of the World Council of Churches and the leadership of Paulus Mar Gregorius (born Paulus Varghese), a metropolitan of the Indian/Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church,[17] Haile Selassie brought the leaders of the Oriental Orthodox churches together. Whereas the Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian churches from the Middle East were present, the initiative came from the Oriental Orthodox outside the Middle East, emphasising their non-Western and post-colonial perspective

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Victoria Bernal, *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

16 On the Tewahdo churches, see John Binns, *The Orthodox Church of Ethiopia: A History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), Tom Boylston, *The Stranger at the Feast: Prohibition and Mediation in an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Community* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), and Stanislau Paulau and Martin Tamcke (eds.), *Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in a Global Context: Entanglements and Disconnections* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

17 On Paulus Varghese, see Vlad Naumescu, "'A World to Be Transfigured': Shaping a Cold War Vision of Orthodoxy from the South," in Todd H. Weir & Hugh McLeod (eds.), *Defending the Faith: Global Histories of Apologetics and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Proceedings of the British Academy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 231–248.

in the context of the Cold War.[18] A central topic of their meetings concerned the education of the youth, thus contributing to the renewal of the Sunday School movement, especially in Egypt and India, as well as in the other Oriental churches.[19] In 1973, perhaps inspired by these transnational gatherings, the bishops in the US established the "Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in America." The meetings were co-chaired by archbishop Torkom Manoogian, primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, and Mar Athanasius Yeshu Samuel, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of the United States and Canada. Until today, the Standing Conference has been an essential platform for the Oriental churches in North America. To date, there is no parallel organisation in Europe.[20]

Oriental Christians are a small part of many Christian groups that have migrated to Europe over the past half-century. Among these are Protestants and Catholics from all over the world, as well as a variety of Christians from the Middle East and North Africa. These include Maronites from Lebanon, Chaldean and Assyrian Christians from Iraq and Iran, Rum Orthodox Christians from Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, and small groups of Protestants and Pentecostals from all over the region. These communities – some now well established in Europe, some barely surviving as distinct groups – share essential characteristics with the churches included in the project. There were two reasons, however, not to include them in the basic comparative set-up. First, in taking the Oriental Christians as our starting point, we created a relatively homogenous group of churches with similar histories in the homelands and Europe. Because of these parallel histories, this group lends itself to comparative questions without overlooking their genuine differences. By including other Christians from the Middle East, the number of potential comparisons would have increased, making a comparative project challenging to manage. More fundamentally, there is a positive reason to delineate the group as we have done: whether and how these churches share a dogmatic starting point that affects how they act in the present, especially in the

18 See Naumescu, "'A World to Be Transfigured'," and the website of the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches: http://www.scooch.org/about/about-addis-ababa/ (last seen 11 April 2025).

19 See Fr. T. Paul Varghese (ed.), *Report of A Consultation of the Oriental Orthodox Churches on A Curriculum for Christian Nurture* (Kottayam, n.p., 1967). For the Sunday School movement in Egypt, see Wolfram Reiss, *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche: Die Geschichte der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Sonntagsschulbewegung und die Aufnahme Ihrer Reformansätze in den Erneuerungsbewegunen der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche der Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Lit, 1998), on clerical leadership see Magdi Guirguis and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2022).

20 See SCOOCH – Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (last seen 11 April 2025).

face of migration and transnationalism. Is this dogmatic affinity merely an element of the shared history I outlined above, or does it constitute an independent element that leads to similar or shared decisions about the present? As described above, there are clear signs of organisational communalities. Do these communalities affect how they position themselves in the Christian landscape of their homelands and of the countries in which they now find themselves? And is that reflected in the way they produce and use religious literature?

The most critical group towards which Oriental Christians in Western Europe position themselves is that of the Eastern Orthodox Christians.[21] Formal relations between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental churches have gradually improved since the fruitful process that started at a conference in Aarhus in 1864 was halted in the early 1990s.[22] However, despite considerable progress in mutual understanding, differences of interpretation barred the road to full intercommunion. These slow-moving theological dialogues, however, do not necessarily reflect what is happening on the ground, especially in Europe. The playing field – that globally tends to favour the more powerful Russian and Greek churches – has levelled up. Oriental and Eastern churches alike are newcomers dependent on the goodwill of other Christians and broader secular society. Even though Eastern Christians have larger and somewhat older communities overall, Oriental churches have succeeded in finding their place in the ecumenical context quite well, getting on a par with the Eastern Orthodox and engaging with them when needed vis-à-vis the government or other organisations.[23] This, then, puts the question of further cooperation on the table, mainly because believers tend to frequent other Orthodox churches, especially if and when their church parishes are too far away. To what extent are these practices endorsed rather than grudgingly accepted? To what extent do such interactions change how Oriental and Eastern Orthodox believers see themselves in the European context? And to what extent does the exchange of books and images – recognizable in our materials – reflect ecumenism on the ground that is little bothered by the official projects?

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21 On Eastern Orthodoxy in Western Europe, see Sebastian Rimestad, *Orthodox Christian Identity in Western Europe: Contesting Religious Authority* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021) and Maria Hämmerli, *Christian Orthodox Migrants in Western Europe: Secularization and Modernity through the Lens of the Gift Paradigm* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

22 See Christine Chaillot, *The Dialogue Between The Eastern Orthodox And Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Volos: Volos Academy Publications, 2016), which includes an overview of the history of the theological dialogues, actual cooperations in various countries, formal statements and agreements and perspectives from several key players in the formal and informal dialogues.

23 See, e.g., the cooperation related to theological education in Sweden (Sankt Ignatios; https://www.sanktignatios.org/college/) and the Netherlands (St. Irenaeus; https://irenaeus.nl/en/university/).

Alongside these developments within the Orthodox family, the Oriental Orthodox intensified their contacts with the Catholic and Protestant churches. Whereas in most Middle Eastern countries, Catholics and especially Protestants were small minorities alongside the more powerful Orthodox Churches, in the European context, they were the ones that could help the Oriental Churches find their way in a secular society, especially when developing ways to deal with the mostly secular governments. A varied array of informal cooperation was matched – at least on the Catholic side – with official dialogues, like the one set up in the US from 1976 onwards and those organized by Pro Oriente in Vienna from 1964 onwards.[24] These meetings resulted in formal "Christological agreements" between the Catholic Church and several Oriental Churches. Usually, the relationships with Protestant churches are cordial, and various informal and formal dialogues accompany practical cooperation.[25]

In one way or another, all contributions in this volume speak to the interactions with the religious and societal context in which these churches find themselves. They describe the intense cooperation of churches with the government in the German state Baden-Württemberg (Josef Önder), the importance of state-church relations in Ethiopia (Stanislau Paulau) and Armenia (Jesse Arlen), the tacit and sometimes explicit political support for minority religions in Sweden, Belgium, France and Egypt (Gabriel Bar-Sawme, Gaétan du Roy, Christopher Sheklian and Johannes Makar), and the self-conscious independence in the United States (George Kiraz). Though only Önder's article on Baden-Württemberg thematizes these relationships, the contributions suggest that despite similar starting points, especially when cast as diasporan minorities, the actual local political set-up – different within Europe as much as between Europe and other parts of the world – leads to marked differences in how Oriental communities are able to build their communities.

The question remains whether the actual miaphysite Christology, which emphasises the one-natured human-divine person of Christ, creates a distinct and recognizable Oriental way of being in the world. As argued by scholars such as Sarah Bakker-Kellogg, Rima Nasrallah and Ronella Sonnenberg, one could think along the lines of how Oriental theologies describe the world as similarly undivided as Christ is, with sacred and profane fused in ways that allow for little

24 For an overview, see https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/ecumenical-documents-and-news-releases#tab--oriental-orthodox;
Pro Oriente: https://www.pro-oriente.at/en

25 See the websites of the Anglicans (https://www.anglicancommunion.org/ecumenism/ecumenical-dialogues/oriental-orthodox.aspx; last seen 5/6/24) and that of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, see https://www.ecumenism.net/archive/docu/2001_oriental_warc_report.pdf (last seen, 5/6/24).

differentiation between them.[26] This type of theology might set these churches apart from Western Catholic and Protestant theologies, often seen as maintaining clear boundaries between secular and profane. At the same time, it seems to me that a more blurred line can also be perceived in Eastern Orthodox worlds that are equally Chalcedonian but not "Western" in this sense. Put differently, is this a distinction between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian theologies, or between late, post-Enlightenment, European theologies on the one hand and other (Eastern/Oriental) theologies on the other? Or even one between societies more strongly influenced by the analytic and discursive linearity of literacy and print and those that have retained essential characteristics of a more integrated and narrative oral universe?[27] For now, in line with McLuhan and Ong (more on them below), I tend to go with this broader cultural explanation because it seems to allow for a more fine-grained analysis of the different choices between the various Oriental churches, depending on the specific socio-political contexts – in home and host countries – in which they find themselves.

Textual traditions and books

The second cluster of concepts important in this project and this volume is that of textual traditions and books as physical objects constitutive of those traditions. We use "textual traditions" for the vast collection of texts circulating, read, and engaged with, in the Oriental churches. These texts range from texts being used during prayers, like biblical and liturgical books, books for teaching the faith to adults and especially youth, theological and historical books written both for experts and the broader public in and around these churches, and all kinds of occasional writings, such as commemorative booklets on the occasion of anniversaries of clergy and parishes. Finally, we include texts that comment on, develop, update, translate, or engage with these core texts. All this, taken together over the longue durée, constitutes the textual tradition. In line with Alisdair MacIntyre, this approach takes tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[28]

This leads us not only to emphasise the malleability of tradition, with texts being added, centred, or decentred, but also the importance of the human actors,

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26 Bakker Kellogg, *Sonic Icons*; Rima Nasrallah & Ronelle Sonnenberg, "Oriental Orthodox Young Adults and Liturgical Participation: A Matter of Identity," *Exchange* 49 (2020): 358–378.

27 See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962) and Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002/2012; orig. 1982).

28 Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press: 1981), 222; see also Sheklian in this volume.

the "social embodiment" that makes and remakes this tradition, in home- and host countries, in the past and the present. When acknowledging the social embodiment of these textual traditions, these traditions of the Oriental churches allow us to see something of the social imaginaries that bind these groups together. Thus, in the project and this volume, the textual traditions are studied not only for the sake of the texts themselves but also for how these texts function as crucial building blocks of the social imaginaries that allow Oriental Christians to fashion their lives in diasporan transnational contexts. Here, Appadurai's thinking about mediascapes and ideoscapes helps to see how media in general and texts in particular – physical and online – are particularly effective in creating transnational communities.[29] This is as true for religious communities as for ethnic or national communities. Scholars like Elizabeth McAlister have used "religioscape" to indicate the combination of textual, aural, and visual elements that create a world that allows for multidirectional interactions within a transnational religious community.[30] This cluster of terms builds upon the work of Benedict Anderson, whose "imagined communities" rely primarily on printed matter to create a sense of national belonging over and above local, physical kinship communities.[31] Birgit Meyer, writing about religious communities, proposes to see these imagined communities primarily as "aesthetic formations" in which the physical and visual form of what is being shared is as important as the actual contents of what is printed.[32] The current volume, therefore, studies texts and their physical forms to understand how these Oriental Christians situate themselves in a transnational world, between past and present, simultaneously here and there. As we have seen in the previous section, violence and migration have cut off these communities from other parts of their material heritage, especially from their churches and pilgrimage sites. Textual traditions, therefore – material and immaterial – became increasingly important as enduring and portable witnesses to the social imaginaries of these groups, allowing communities to continue their story when other parts of their heritage had to be left behind.

In most of the contributions in this volume, a subgroup of the textual tradition of a particular Oriental church is being discussed. The contribution of Jesse Arlen focuses on ascetic texts, Christopher Sheklian and Gabriel Bar-Sawme on

29 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

30 Elizabeth McAlister, "Globalization and the Religious Production of Space," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44,3 (2005): 249–55.

31 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006; orig. 1983).

32 Meyer, "From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations."

liturgical texts and their commentaries and context, and Johannes Makar, Gaétan du Roy, and Stanislau Paulau focus on magazines. In other contributions, a broad perspective on the textual tradition of one of the Oriental churches constitutes the starting point. George Kiraz focuses on the Syriac Orthodox Church in the United States, and Josef Önder describes the publication activities in the Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany. My concluding contribution tentatively maps the broader history of publication activities in the Oriental churches in Europe. In all these articles, core religious texts are situated within an ongoing and ever-expanding tradition of commentary and translation. Many of these texts have a distinct educational focus, geared towards children, lay believers, or non-Oriental Christians. All these elements can also be recognized in the magazines, which more explicitly address the changing social imaginaries of the time. This is particularly true for the long-running Coptic journal *al-Kiraza*, which Makar analyses in-depth. In Paulau's article, the writings of an Ethiopian Tewahdo author are taken as the lens to study the role of the Ethiopian Tewahdo Church in the early ecumenical movement, showing how his transnational imaginary addresses not only the members of the church but also those outside it. Du Roy, finally, adds an essential counterpoint by focusing on digital publications of the francophone Syriac and Coptic communities in Europe, thus situating material books in the broader context of a digital culture which in all these churches undergirds the production and distribution of books. This digital culture, notably, has a robust textual element but adds the visual and the aural to the transnational religioscape.

Du Roy's approach allows us to turn towards the printed books with a fresh eye. What do these books do – in transnational religioscapes and actual religious practice – that is not taken care of by the omnipresent and eagerly adopted digital culture? Why do believers continue putting time, effort, and money into producing physical books when digital publication is much easier and cheaper? However, the question of "why physical books" is concerned not only with the balance between printed and digital texts but also between textual and oral traditions. The production and transmission of knowledge is not restricted to using texts but employs all media, including the purely oral. This is true in various religious contexts but is undoubtedly true for Oriental churches, where printed books are relatively new. For most of their history, what we have styled as a "textual tradition" consisted of a smaller range of manuscripts than the current plethora of books. This core collection of bookish knowledge was grounded in an oral tradition whose contents and breadth are challenging to reconstruct. Therefore, when we probe into what books do in the contemporary period, we should not only compare the "age of print" with the present digital age but also with the much more

extended pre-print period. The work of Marshall McLuhan on the revolutionary effects of print in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and Walter Ong's work on orality and literacy (1982) remind us that printed books are a particular and contingent way of producing and transmitting knowledge, one that fosters a distinct way of organizing knowledge, with a focus on linearity, historicity, and visuality. This differs from manuscript culture, in which oral culture's repetitiveness, poetry, and flexible organisation have a substantial impact on how knowledge is organized and taught. However, as both McLuhan and Ong suggest, orality and literacy (like manuscript and print, and print and digital), though fostering and forcing distinct ways of organizing knowledge, should not be seen as closed systems that flourish independently in different periods. Orality remains an integral part of contemporary communication and influences how and what we write and what we do not write. Whereas in some domains, what is written constitutes the ultimate resource, in others, old and new types of oral transmissions (lyrics, poetry, movies, podcasts) indicate that orality is as strong as ever.[33]

This is certainly true regarding the making and remaking of religious tradition in the Oriental churches. First, the textual tradition is thoroughly enmeshed in an oral tradition of commentary, ad-hoc translations into vernacular languages, re-told bible stories, ever-changing varieties of saints' lives, and a vast collection of hymns.[34] Though not easy to prove, it is likely that the increasing literalisation of the religious tradition, starting in the sixteenth century, began to replace at least part of what previously was transmitted orally. This process was further stimulated by increasing literacy among all layers of the community, in combination with the availability of flexible and increasingly cheap ways of publishing. In the twentieth century, the loss of traditional communal forms of transmission in the homeland may have further stimulated the use of printed materials to safeguard and transmit the religious tradition.

Secondly, there is embodied knowledge without a counterpart in the textual tradition, that of the movements and comportments, the sounds, forms, colours, and smells of the practice of Oriental Christianity. Some find their way in pub-

33 Alessandro Mengozzi's work on the East Syriac literary traditions (Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Church) is particularly relevant, see, e.g., "Yazdandukht and Mar Qardagh: From the Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac to Sureth Poetry on YouTube, via a Historical Novel in Arabic," *Kervan. International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies* 24,2 (2020) and "'May I Treasure up the Words in My Heart!': Syriac Culture in Modern Aramaic Oral Tradition," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 11,1 (2011): 19–33.

34 Alessandro Mengozzi, *Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe : A Story in a Truthful Language : Religious Poems in Vernacular Syriac (North Iraq, 17th Century)* [Vol. 1, 11] (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), Heleen Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500-1850)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

lished materials, as pictures and symbols, as directions as to what to wear and how to move, and in newly devised ways to describe the correct tuning of the melodies.[35] Such directions or descriptions are a far cry from the actual practice itself and often only work when those using the directions are familiar with the embodied practice. Other parts of this embodied tradition continue to be transmitted without text in the daily life of Oriental families and the regular meetings of the community. However, like with the oral traditions of the first kind, there is a tendency to put to writing what in the past was transmitted without the interference of texts and books.

This brings us back to texts and books, especially to the question as to why books remain important in the digital age. I propose to see books as situated at the intersection of two strong concerns of the religious communities we speak of: the transmission of a distinct body of religious knowledge ("tradition") and religion's material and embodied practice.

As I argued above, the transmission of knowledge is not restricted to what is written and published. Both when manuscripts dominated the scene and when book publishing took over, traditional knowledge was transmitted in all kinds of oral and embodied ways. What manuscripts in the past and books in the present add to that is the fixation of the tradition. That is, they make sure that the knowledge of the church is systematically collected, organized, canonized, and controlled. As I will discuss below, most of those involved in the writing and publishing business are either in the ecclesial hierarchy or connected with it. Printed books, like manuscripts in the past, clarify *what* knowledge matters, what knowledge should be transmitted to the next generation, and who oversees this knowledge. This suggests that when we study what is being printed, in this volume and elsewhere, it is essential to see who writes and publishes, who is in charge, which books are widespread and well-executed, and which books are not. Even though printing has become much easier and cheaper over the past thirty years (thus blurring the lines between private initiatives and communally sanctioned projects),[36] publishing a printed book remains an act of defining and delimiting knowledge and, as such, is a public act of joining those who determine what tradition is.

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35 See, e.g. the introduction of western-style hymnals in the Syriac Orthodox Church: Gabriel Aydin, *Syriac Hymnal According to the Rite of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch* (N.p.: Syriac Music Institute 2018) and Tala Jarjour, *Sense and Sadness: Syriac Chant in Aleppo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

36 Alessandro Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (Eindhoven/Rotterdam: Onomatopee 77, 2012).

Material books, however, are more than a pragmatic choice for a reliable and durable medium. In all religious traditions, beliefs are expressed in practices that make up the daily lives of believers – ranging from the formal ritual behaviour in communal settings to the small practices that punctuate everyday life. From this perspective, books as objects are as much part of religious practice as their contents are used to undergird beliefs. This is particularly true in Christianity, where the codex became crucial to transmitting religious knowledge early on.[37] However, books also play a role in religious practices less closely tied to knowledge and knowledge transmission. Colleen McDannell, in her pioneer study into "material religion," shows how the bible as an object played a crucial role in the religious practice of nineteenth-century American Protestants.[38] Authors like Watts and Rakow recently explored the role of the Bible and other "holy books" in religion.[39] Watts, who uses the term "iconic" for the ritualized and sacralised role of the bible and other sacred scriptures of a particular tradition, emphasises how the materiality of such "iconic books" comes to stand for the holy, in a way that is related, but not confined, to its actual content. In Oriental Christian traditions, such specific and ritualized iconic usage can be recognized in the role of the Gospel Lectionary in the Holy Liturgy, where it is censed, carried around, lifted, bowed to, acclaimed with hymns, and kissed.

However, as Rakow argues, the role of the materiality of books is not limited to the specific iconicity of the Gospel Lectionary. In Oriental liturgical practice, not only Gospel Lectionaries but also liturgical prayer books, bibles, and hymnals are given extra attention in how they are executed, with expensive materials, well-printed images, and other extras. This suggests they share some of the iconicity attributed to sacred scriptures. Phrased differently, books used in devotional contexts tend to become part of the sacred vessels used to approach the divine and thus come to embody something of the sacred in their material form.[40]

However, they may also stand for other aspects of religious life, the two most important of which are *learning* and *community*. By producing, gifting, selling,

37 Mark Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

38 Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Yale University Press, 1995).

39 James W. Watts (ed.), *Iconic Books and Texts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013) and Katja Rakow, "Books in Religious Studies: From Relentless Textualism to Embodied Practices," in P. Tamimi Arab, J. Scheper Hughes, & S. B. Plate (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Material Religion* (London: Routledge, 2023), 113–127.

40 See my upcoming article "Situating the Sacred: Images and Style in Oriental Christian Publications in Europe." (*Oriental Orthodox Visual Cultures in Europe,* Christopher Sheklian and Gaétan du Roy (eds.) (in preparation; exp. 2025).

and collecting books, and thus, by being seen with books, community members explicitly connect themselves with the body of learning of the church. This practice references learning and belonging in general: shelves filled with books – be it in the church bookshop or a private home – suggest that the owner values learning, collects books from various sources, and is able and willing to consult these books when needed. Whether or not this is the case – if indeed and how often these books are consulted – is not the point: collecting, possessing, and sharing these books constitutes a particular form of participation in a world of knowledge and learning that is inherently part of Oriental Christian practice. It is not something everyone practices, but it is widespread and greatly valued, also by those who merely cherish the gifts of those who produce these books.[41] It is also a practice that might reference a particular type of learning and knowledge that is now *en vogue* in the European communities, addressing today's specific needs.

In this way, books visualize the community in which they are produced and circulated. At one level, this is the community of those involved in the regular practice of learning, distinct from the broader community of faith. At another level, the books, in their material presence, represent the church and its learned traditions to all, whether they are active readers or not. Thus, to possess books produced by the church, with characteristic lettering, images, and colours sitting on one's shelves or coffee tables, symbolizes belonging to the non-visible community of the church, locally and transnationally, by virtue of the varied origins of the books, their contents, their authors, and their publishers. Thus, these books are crucial building blocks in the transnational imaginary of the religioscape, built on the double pillars of a tradition of knowledge embedded in religious practice.

Actors and networks

This brings us back to bishop Mor Julius and all others who initiated, wrote, produced, published, and spread the publications, the actors creating these religioscapes through what Ludovico calls the "publishing gesture."[42] Who are those imagining the transnational community? What networks can we detect, and how do these networks relate to the churches we study? Based on the contributions to this volume and the broader work of the project, we can start sketching the network of producers that carry the publishing venture. In the analysis of these networks, we rely on a combination of participatory observation and the study of

41 This has not yet been systematically studied, but see Matija Miličić, "Rooting the Coptic Diaspora: Mediating Familiarity and Adapting Churches in the Netherlands," *Etnofoor* (2023) 35/2: 67–83.
42 Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print*, 67.

Genette's "paratext," i.e., all the text around the core text of the publication, the texts that situate the core text in a broader social context, deliberately guiding the readers in their interpretation.[43] Paratext includes straightforward elements such as titles, author names, publishers, and translators. It also contains prefaces and forewords, blurbs on the back cover, recommendations, and, in its broadest sense, other texts written about the text, before or afterward, in separate publications. The analysis of these materials suggests that four groups can be distinguished among those that produce and distribute these texts: clergy, educated lay, scholars in the field, and a large group of supporting lay members from the churches.[44]

Of these, the clergy undoubtedly are the most important: they dominate the list of authors, they write introductions, prefaces, and endorsements, and they are often involved in the creation and maintenance of printing presses. The majority of these are from the higher clergy, that is, bishops and patriarchs. The Syriac Orthodox Mor Julius, whom I introduced above, is exemplary rather than an outlier, even though few bishops have been as active in all domains of the book business as he has been. Heads of churches are particularly visible as authors. This is especially the case in the Syriac Orthodox Church, of which all patriarchs since 1933 are attested to in our corpus: Mor Aphrem I Barsaum (1933-1957), Mor Ignatius Yacoub III (1957-1980), Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (1980-2014), and the current patriarch, Mor Ignatius Aphrem II (2014-). For the Armenians, Catholicos Karekin I Sarkissian (1994-1999) is among the authors, accompanied by active priests such as Rev. Fr. Vatché Iknadiossian (Marseille; d. 2003). Among the Copts, a range of bishops and priests are active as authors, like Anba Kirolos (Milan, d. 2017), Anba Arseny (Amsterdam), and Rewis Anba Pola (Spain). However, all are dwarfed by the towering figure of the late Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971-2012). In our database, he is the author with the most publications to his name (27). Among these are texts in the original Arabic and in translation, in English, Dutch, French, Swedish, Italian, and Tigrinya – indicating that his texts are distributed far over the boundaries of the Coptic community.

Higher clergy also oversee publishing houses, like the current Dutch Syriac Orthodox bishop Mor Polycarpus, who took over from Mor Julius in 2007. They

43 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

44 Somewhat surprisingly, from the list of known authors in our corpus, only nine pre-date the twentieth century: Athanasius (4th c.), Jacob of Sarugh (5th-6th c.), Isaac of Nineveh (7th c.), Moses bar Kipho (9th c), Gregory of Narek (10th c.), Yaqub bar Shakko (13th c.), Bar ʿEbroyo (13th c.), Mor Basilius Shemʿon bar Malke (18th c.) and Sayat Nova (18th c.). These authors represent just a fraction of the wide range of known historical authors, most of whom apparently are not actively studied in the churches today.

often feature as supporters of texts written by others by supplying forewords, recommendations, and official permits and seals.[45] All of this suggests that the higher clergy see book production as part of their duties in leading the church and that book production in these churches is closely connected to establishing authoritative and canonized knowledge, as was suggested by Bernard Heyberger in connection to the early phases of book production in the Middle East.[46] Lower clergy, such as priests and monastics, also contribute to book production, though in lower numbers than the higher clergy. Those who do, tend to have some higher education, like most of the higher clergy who often have PhDs in theology from recognized institutions. This is true, e.g., for the Coptic priest Fr. Tadros Malaty, a prolific writer on theological subjects. Women clergies are absent among the authors, as in the churches unless one counts ad choir members and few female deacons. Female monastics are relatively common in the churches but – at least in the European context – have not been very active in the publishing business. Our database includes a translation of the *Paradise of Monks*, a classical text in Tigrinya by Welete-Meskel Hadgu and Tsebele-Mariam Gebremedhin, two Eritrean nuns who found refuge in a Coptic monastery in Egypt. In the acknowledgments, they note the encouragement and support of the late Pope Shenouda for their translation work. Though not included in our database yet, we might also mention the books of Hatune Dogan, a Syriac Orthodox nun who writes about her work for refugees.[47]

The second most important group comprises laypeople who produce books as initiators, publishers, authors, and translators. Here, too, learning in some form is essential. As among the clerical authors, most authors and translators have academic training, though not necessarily in theology. Women are better represented here since they, like men, have profited from broader educational possibilities in European countries. In line with the educational thrust of many of the publications, many authors in this category are directly involved with the educational programs of the churches. Some of these include textbooks for formalized education, like the works of Syriac Orthodox Augin Yalcin and Josef Önder for German schools. They also include children's books with an educational thrust or saints' lives in contemporary formats, such as those by Eliyo Aydin. Mikhael Maksi Eskander writes on Tewahdo saints. Elham Khalil's works on Coptic history are

45 See Murre-van den Berg, this volume.
46 Heyberger, « Réseaux de collaboration » 411.
47 Hatune Dogan, Cornelia Tomerius (eds.), *Es geht ums Überleben – Mein Einsatz für die Christen im Irak* (Verlag Herder: Freiburg 2010); with Tonia Riedl, *Ich glaube an die Tat. Im Einsatz für Flüchtlinge aus Syrien und dem Irak* (Brunnen Verlag: Gießen, 2015).

translated into Dutch for the Copts, Susan Paul Pattie wrote on Armenian topics, and Salam Somi on the Dutch bishop Polycarpus. The immediate paratexts suggest that, generally, these authors are in close contact with the clerical hierarchy and exert crucial roles in the church as deacons, choir members, and teachers, with most of their work being explicitly authorized by the higher clergy. In this volume, Paulau introduces Blatta ("scholar") Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos, another example of a scholar who through his writings was influential in the church.

This pattern of learning and commitment to the Oriental Orthodox communities can also be seen among those who are not – or not by birth – community members. Several scholars who study these churches' history, language and theology have been incorporated into the network of book producers. They contribute to communal and clerical publication ventures, and sometimes their scholarly work is appropriated by the community by selling and distributing their academic works or by including parts of their work in other publications. Our database contains some prominent examples, including the renowned Syriac scholars Sebastian Brock and Martin Tamcke, Armenian scholar Theo van Lint, the Dutch Coptologist Clara ten Hacken, and Syriacist Kees den Biesen, who have translated and introduced necessary liturgical materials. In Sweden, Tony Larsson plays a similar role. These examples underline the high regard for learning in Oriental Christian circles, with much appreciation for those outside the community who have immersed themselves in the sources of Oriental orthodoxy.

Around these three distinct groups that produce most of the texts – including translations, introductions, and commentaries – is a much broader group that commits to this venture with moral, practical, and financial support. Most of these church members remain anonymous, like those who sell, buy, and gift the materials. Some make large donations and are mentioned in the publication, thus continuing a long tradition of meritorious contributions to the work of the church. Others play active roles in youth groups or other church organisations and initiate specific publications, such as those from the *Syrisch Orthodox Jongerenplatform* (SOJP), the *Armeense Jongeren Organisatie Amsterdam*, the *Youth of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Milan,* and the *Syriac Orthodox Youth Association Germany* (SOKAD). Here, as with the groups of active producers, the networks transcend not only local communities but also those who are active members of the churches.

This quick survey of what we know so far about the producers of these texts acquaints us with a group of mostly learned authors and translators who, with different emphases and motivations, are committed to adding to and spreading knowledge about these churches – their histories, their theology, their liturgical life, to insiders and outsiders. What is not always immediately visible from the

paratextual materials is that many of those involved in this process know each other, influence each other, and cooperate on new projects. Books produced in the Middle East were brought to Europe in the early phases of migrations (see, e.g., the contributions by Gabriel Bar-Sawme and George Kiraz). Still, they continue to circulate – some return to the Middle East, or others are produced in the Middle East (Egypt and Israel) to be used in Europe. Yet others are co-productions, partly done in Europe, printed in Turkey (because of cost efficiency), and used both in Europe and Turkey. As described by du Roy, Coptic Sunday School materials, especially those in English, are shared among communities in the United States, the UK, and Australia, especially when published online. All of this suggests that there are extensive networks that allow various parts of the community to be in touch with each other, see each other's publications, and use these for their own contributions. Most of this remains within the boundaries of the individual Oriental churches. However, some publications transcend these boundaries because the author is valued in other circles (with Shenouda as the prime example) or because the book is a co-production.

In conclusion

This volume hopes to serve as the first mapping of Oriental Orthodox publishing in the contemporary period. I have argued that despite a surge of the digital, material book production remains an essential element of traditional learning and knowledge production in the Oriental churches. Books embody the traditional knowledge of the community in a material form that establishes and maintains its authority and canonicity. Because of this, physical books play a role in religious practices, also when they are not read or explicitly venerated. More generally, the presence of religious books in the churches' pews and on bookshelves in community halls and private homes signifies the importance of knowledge and learning within the community. The material presence of these books – born out of and re-inserted in transnational networks of the community of learners – connects those who own them with this transnational community. These types of connections are associated with, but not completely identical to, those established by other types of networks in the churches – be they clerical, regional, or familial networks, or the networks created by the online presence of the Oriental communities. Therefore, they provide essential insights not only in knowledge production and knowledge transmission but also in the fragile and fragmented lives of Christian migrants in Europe.

These books also allow us to trace the intensely personal commitment of those that maintain these networks. Over time books become actors in and of them-

selves, separated from their creators. However, the snapshot of this introduction and of the articles in this volume show how these books originate in the hard work of authors, publishers, donors, church leaders. These books exist through the labour of those that commit generous amounts of time and money to study, to collect, to write, to edit, to illustrate, and to distribute so that these books become part of the community, part of the intricate network that binds these churches together. And so their labour of love provides sustenance and comfort to fragile and fragmented lives.

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Addressing a Global Audience: The Ethiopian Orthodox Textual Tradition in the Context of the Early Ecumenical Movement

STANISLAU PAULAU

The modern ecumenical movement was born and found its first institutionalised forms in Europe. However, it was not exclusively a European project. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians were also part of the modern quest for Christian unity from the very beginning. Indeed, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewaḥədo Church was the first (and for a long time the only) sub-Saharan African actor in the international ecumenical movement, as well as being the largest Oriental Orthodox Church and a founding member of the World Council of Churches (WCC).[1]

Involvement in the ecumenical movement and the need to address a global audience largely unfamiliar with the Oriental Orthodox heritage inevitably influenced the textual practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The paper analyses these entangled processes. The first step reconstructs the history of the early engagement of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with the global ecumenical movement and contextualises these initiatives. In the second step, it examines the transformation of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition by using the

1 Of the WCC's 147 founding member churches, only two others were Oriental Orthodox: the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church (however, the delegation of the Coptic Orthodox Church was unable to join the Amsterdam Assembly in 1948 for technical reasons). In addition, two Eastern Orthodox Churches joined the World Council of Churches from the very beginning: the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Church of Greece. Several other Eastern Orthodox Churches as well as the Assyrian Church of the East had accepted the invitation but were not represented at the Amsterdam Assembly. Cf. Athanasios Basdekis, "Introduction to Major Ecumenical Organizations with Relevance for Orthodox Churches" in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, ed. Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald et al. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2014), 42. The reason for the relatively low level of Orthodox participation at the Amsterdam Assembly was that just one month before the Assembly, an international meeting of Orthodox leaders in Moscow adopted a resolution discouraging Orthodox participation in the WCC. Cf. Daniel Buda, "On the Critical Role of Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement," in *Orthodox Handbook on Ecumenism. Resources for Theological Education*, edited by Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Thomas FitzGerald et al. (Oxford, Regnum Books International, 2014), 123–124.

case study of the very first Ethiopian Orthodox work deliberately produced for the global ecumenical audience – the contribution of *Blatta* Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos [Märsəᶜe Ḫazän Wäldä Qirqos] published in the first volume of *The Ecumenical Review*, a quarterly of the World Council of Churches, in 1949. In doing so, the paper seeks to trace the transformations of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition and to uncover its entanglements with the emerging global ecumenical discourse.

Printing and translating the Word: *Ras* Tafari Makonnen's European journey and the project of Ethiopian modernity

"All the Christians in the world, although they may be divided in some minor matters … yet in essence there is no-one who does not know that there is one Christ only."[2] These simple words emphasised the fundamental nature of Christian unity during the festive Pentecost Vespers in Uppsala Cathedral on 8 June 1924. The fact that the congregation of the overcrowded church listened with undivided attention was not so much due to the novelty of the ecumenical vision expressed but rather to the exceptionality of the person who proclaimed it. The Crown Prince and Regent of Ethiopia, Ras Tafari Makonnen [*Ras* Täfäri Mäkʷännən], the future Emperor Haile Selassie I, addressed the Swedish Christians.[3]

The uniqueness of the situation described can hardly be exaggerated. Tafari Makonnen was not only the first Ethiopian ruler ever to visit Europe but also the first one to give a sermon in a Protestant church. At the Crown Prince's request, a visit to Uppsala was included in his five-month tour of Europa, which included Paris, Brussels, London, Geneva and Athens. There, he met Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, the head of the Church of Sweden. Söderblom's leadership in the Life and Work movement in the 1920s has led him to be recognized as one of the principal pioneers of the ecumenical movement.

It should be noted that Söderblom, who himself had a keen interest in the Orthodox churches,[4] took this high-profile visit to the realm of his church very seriously. At the invitation of the archbishop, the Ethiopian ruler celebrated Pen-

2 Ḫəruy Wäldä Śəllase, ደስታና፡ ክብር። የኢትዮጵያ፡ መንግሥት፡ አልጋ፡ ወራሽና፡ እንደራሴ፡ ልዑል፡ ተፈሪ፡ መኰንን፡ ወደ፡ አውሮፓ፡ ሲሔዱና፡ ሲመለሱ፡ የመንዳቸው፡ አኳኋን። [*Joy and Honour. On the Journey of His Highness the Crown Prince and Regent of Ethiopia Täfäri Mäkʷännən to Europe*] (Addis Ababa: Täfäri Mäkʷännən Press, 1917 Ethiopian calendar [= 1923/24 A.D.]), 61–62. Cf. Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937: The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Frontline Distribution International, 1997), 97.

3 In English transliteration usually: Haile Selassie.

4 Cf. Georges Tsetsis, "Nathan Söderblom and the Orthodox Church," *Tro och Tanke* 7 (1993): 89–102; Jörg Mathias, "Unity in Christ or Pan-Europeanism? Nathan Söderblom and the Ecumenical Peace Movement in the Interwar Period," *Religion, State and Society* 42, no. 1 (2014): 11.

tecost in the cathedral of Uppsala. During vespers, he even gave both the invocation and the benediction in Amharic.[5] During the sermon Söderblom read several verses referring to Ethiopia in the Bible, teaching the congregation that the Ethiopians, "the mighty Christian nation on the heights of Africa," embraced the faith and "became members of the household and fellowship of Christ" much earlier than the Swedes.[6] Ethiopia, this ancient Christian nation with biblical roots, evoked fascination among the gathered audience. As Mrs. Anna Söderblom, the archbishop's wife, mentioned that

> the church was more than filled by the congregation, which was so enthralled that it would be wrong to describe their mood as one of curiosity. Among the thousands who filled the church, most were readers of the Bible. And the Bible's wonderfully mighty poetry has bestowed a 'magic' glow upon Ethiopia's people and history.[7]

Tafari Makonnen's interest in the ecumenical movement and its attempt to overcome the divisions among Christians was expressed not only during the church service, but also in a private conversation with Nathan Söderblom. When Tafari Makonnen asked: "Why do Protestant Christians not unite?," the archbishop eagerly spoke of the forthcoming Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, to be held in Stockholm in August 1925.[8]

Söderblom invited the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to send ten delegates to this important ecumenical meeting, but the Ethiopian Church could not respond to this invitation at short notice.[9] The conference was indeed a success and is regarded as one of the most formative events in the modern ecumenical move-

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5 Cf. Jonas Jonson, *Nathan Söderblom: Called to Serve* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 334.

6 Ḫəruy Wäldä Śəllase, ደስታና፡ ክብር። የኢትዮጵያ፡ መንግሥት፡ አልጋ፡ ወራሽና፡ እንደራሴ፡ ልዑል፡ ተፈሪ፡ መኰንን፡ ወደ፡ አውሮፓ፡ ሲሔዱና፡ ሲመለሱ፡ የመንገዳቸው፡ አኳኋን። [*Joy and Honour. On the Journey of His Highness the Crown Prince and Regent of Ethiopia Täfäri Mäkʷännən to Europe*], (Addis Ababa: Täfäri Mäkʷännən Press, 1917 Ethiopian calendar [= 1923/24 A.D.]), 61–62.

7 Anna Söderblom, "Tre vise män från Österlanden," in *Minnen från Livskalle*, ed. Julius Wellhaugen (Uppsala: Lindblads, 1945), 245. Quoted in Ezra Gebremedhin, "'Let there be Light!' Aspects of the Swedish Missionary Venture in Eritrea and their Implications for Political Awareness (1866–1962)," in *African Identities and World Christianity in the Twentieth Century. Proceedings of the Third International Munich-Freising Conference on the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World (September 15–17, 2004)*, ed. Klaus Koschorke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 206–207.

8 Cf. George Kennedy Allen Bell (ed.), *The Stockholm Conference 1925: The Official Report of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work held in Stockholm, 19–30 August, 1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 235–375.

9 Cf. Viveca Halldin Norberg, *Swedes in Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, 1924–1952. A Study in Early Development Co-operation* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977), 122.

ment. Its paradigm of "practical Christianity" became a milestone in creating ecumenical and socio-political awareness among Christians. Although the Ethiopian church could not send a delegation to the Life and Work conference, its ecumenical paradigm resonated with Tafari Makonnen's personal views, which he tried to implement in the Ethiopian context. The encounter between the Ethiopian ruler and Nathan Söderblom led to their personal friendship, which lasted until the archbishop's death in 1931.[10]

Tafari Makonnen's stay in Uppsala was not just a courtesy visit. His aim was to integrate Ethiopia into the global processes taking place in the aftermath of World War I. The Ethiopian Crown Prince used his diplomatic contacts and skills to secure Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations in September 1923, which ensured the country's formal diplomatic equality with other states. His tour of Europe in 1924 brought him, his country, and his church (as well as other Africans and people of African descent) to the attention of the European press and public. At the same time, Ras Tafari Makonnen succeeded in bringing Ethiopian Christianity into the emerging ecumenical discourse and became its active upholder.

Furthermore, Tafari Makonnen's journey to Europe has to be seen in the context of the broad pattern of cultural and religious concerns which had increasingly crystallized as "Ethiopian modernity," or in Amharic *zämänawinnät*.[11] *Zämänawinnät* was used at the same time as the description of the changing reality in the Ethiopian Empire with its rapid modernization as well as an ideal, as a utopian image of an unprecedented cultural and economic advancement to be reached. Ethiopian modernity was in the making and its main symbol was a printed book, or to be even more precise: a printed book in Amharic language. I would suggest that the practices of translation and printing which made such a book possible embodied the main characteristics of the transformations of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition in the twentieth century. In 1921, just several years prior to his journey to Europe, Tafari Makonnen established the first Ethiopian governmental publishing house and the printing press with the aim of publishing Amharic-language books and tracts, which name was at first "The Printing Press of the Heir to the Throne of Ethiopia His Highness *Ras* Täfäri Mäkʷännən" (**የኢትዮጵያ፡ መንግሥት፡ አልጋ፡ ወራሽ፡ ራስ፡ ተፈሪ፡ መኰንን፡ ማተሚያ፡ ቤት**), but

10 A tangible symbol of these relationships were bee wax candles, specially blessed by Ethiopian Orthodox clergy, which had been sent to Uppsala every year as long as Ḫaylä Śəllase lived. Cf. Jonson, *Nathan Söderblom*, 334.

11 Cf. Stanislau Paulau, "Isaac of Nineveh, *Ras* Täfäri and the Making of Ethiopian Modernity," in *Symposium Syriacum XII* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 311), ed. Emidio Vergani and Sabino Chialà (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2022), 645–652.

later was changed into "Light and Peace" (**ብርሃንና፡ ሰላም**).[12] Ethiopian entanglements with Europe, and notably with Sweden, in this enterprise are evidenced by the fact that this first Ethiopian governmental printing press was managed by Gebre Kristos Tekle Haymanot, a scholar from Aksum who had been educated by the Swedish missionaries in Asmara.

Interestingly enough, the very first book being published by this newly established printing press was Amharic translation of the Ethiopian corpus of Isaac's writings, known as *Mäṣḥafä Mar Yəsḥaq* (**መጽሐፈ፡ ማር፡ ይስሐቅ**) together with its Gəʿəz text and the traditional commentary (**ትርጓሜ፡ ለማር፡ ይስሐቅ**, *Tərgʷame lämar Yəsḥaq*). Tafari Makonnen himself wrote an introduction to the book, stressing its spiritual importance. Apart from the book of Isaac of Nineveh, Tafari Makonnen ordered translation and publication of the sermons of John Chrysostom. The choice of these two non-Ethiopian authors, representing the Syriac and Greek traditions respectively, albeit widely recognised throughout the Christian world, may indicate Tafari Makonnen's desire to emphasise the interconnectedness of the Ethiopian textual tradition with the rest of Christianity. These publications were in fact not merely noticed but also highly appreciated within a wider ecumenical context extending beyond the borders of Ethiopia. This aspect was notably emphasised by Archbishop of Canterbury Randall Thomas Davidson in his address during Tafari Makonnen's visit to England in 1924:

> Your Highness! Your Church has an ancient history of about 1600 years. Its beginnings approach the even earlier period of the apostles of Our Lord. Your Church has a history which is related to the time of Athanasius and his companions. Your Highness is not only holding on to ancient traditions, but it is your glory to develop Christian civilization for the future and to spread the Christian scriptures among young people.
>
> For your printing press issues not only ancient and modern religious books. But you yourself are an active participant in the work. The Ethiopian books which Your Highness has caused to be printed have an introduction by you: everyone who studies the books of Chrysostom and of the monk Mar Yeshaq will derive much benefit.[13]

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12 H. Rubinowska, "Bərhanənna Sälam," in S. Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 1 A–C* (Wiesbaden 2003), 537.

13 Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892-1937: The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Selassie I*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Frontline Distribution International, 1997), 109.

At the same time, the publication of Amharic translations of the writings of Isaac of Nineveh and John Chrysostom was perceived by some Ethiopian Orthodox scholars as a scandal. The chronicles of *Abeto* Iyasu and Empress Zewditu, the last of the Ethiopian royal chronicles, make the following mention of the publication of these books and the subsequent reactions:

> ዛሬም፡ ግርማዊት፡ ንግሥተ፡ ነገሥታት፡ ዘውዲቱና፡ ልዑል፡ የኢትዮጵያ፡ መንግሥት፡ አልጋ፡ ወራሽ፡ ተፈሪ፡ መኰንን፡ ለአገር፡ ብርሃናት፡ ለሕዝብ፡ ዕውቀት፡ ለወንጌል፡ መንግሥት፡ ስፋት፡ እንዲሆን፡ ብለው፡ በግዕዝና፡ በአማርኛ፡ ቋንቋ፡ መጻሕፍት፡ ቅዱሳትን፡ በሊቃውንት፡ ጉባዔ፡ እያስተረጐሙ፡ አሳተሙልን። ሊቃውንቱ፡ ግን፡ እኛ፡ ብቻ፡ መጽሐፍ፡ ዐዋቂ፡ ተብአን፡ ስንሞገስበት፡ ስንሸለምበት፡ እንኖር፡ ነበር። ከእንግዲህ፡ ወዲህ፡ መጻሕፍት፡ ሁሉ፡ በአማርኛ፡ ከታተሙ፡ እኛን፡ ማን፡ ይጠይቀናል፡ የማለት፡ ሐሳብ፡ ገባቸው። አውነትም፡ ኢ.ቃውንቱ፡ እንዳሰቡት፡ መኳንንቱና፡ ውይዛዝሩ፡ ሁሉ፡ መጻሕፍትን፡ እየገዙ፡ ዘወትር፡ ከመመልከታቸው፡ የተነሣ፡ ቀሳው ስቱን፡ በጥያቄ፡ ያስቸግሩ፡ ነበር። [14]
>
> Recently Her Majesty Empress Zewditu and His Highness the Crown Prince and the Heir of the throne of Ethiopia, Tafari Makonnen, have had holy books printed in Gəʿəz and Amharic, translated by a group of scholars, so that they become light to the people and give knowledge for the expansion of the rule of the Gospel. But the church scholars became worried saying, "We alone used to be praised, being experts on books, and we used to be rewarded by this. But now, after all the books have been printed in Amharic, who will come to ask us?" And true enough, as the scholars feared, all the noblemen and noble ladies bought the Amharic books and were bothering now the priests [instead of the church scholars] with questions arising from their daily readings.

This account illustrates the contentious nature of the transformations of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition introduced by Tafari Makonnen among the ecclesiastical elites. Simultaneously, the favourable reception of the printed books by the noble laity (including noblewomen), who, in fact, constituted the vast majority of individuals who could read and write, besides the clergy, at that time, merits particular attention. However, it would be erroneous to presume that the primary division regarding book printing took place exclusively between the

14 R.K. Molvaer and Elyas Gebre-Igziabiher (eds.), *Prowess, Piety and Politics. The chronicle of Abeto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu of Ethiopia (1909–1930)* (Studien zur Kulturkunde 104; Köln 1994), 182.

ecclesiastical and secular elites. There are some accounts which indicate that, for example, the printed edition of Isaac of Nineveh was highly appreciated in monasteries, since it had a special advantage over manuscripts – the book provided a detailed table of content and a division of the text not only into chapters (አንቀጽ), but also into subchapters (ምዕራፍ), which proved itself to be highly practical.

Ultimately, the textual transformations initiated during Tafari Makonnen's era exemplify the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's ability to adapt to new historical contexts while maintaining its theological continuity. By embracing print culture and engaging with ecumenical conversations, Ras Tafari Makonnen laid the groundwork for the Church's continued involvement in the ecumenical movement, culminating in its role as a founding member of the World Council of Churches and a key voice in Oriental Orthodox Christianity on the global stage.

Engaging in a global network: the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the foundation of the World Council of Churches

One of the major milestones in the modern history of the ecumenical movement was the formation of the World Council of Churches. The decision to create the World Council of Churches was taken at a meeting in Utrecht in 1938 by a committee of fourteen people appointed by the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements. The basis of the organisation read simply: "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."[15] The young theologian Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft was appointed general secretary of the provisional committee. One of his main tasks was to organise the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches. Due to the outbreak of the Second World War, however, this assembly had to be postponed until a more favourable time and did not take place until 1948.

Although the Ethiopian Orthodox Church did not participate in the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements, it became a founding member of the World Council of Churches and has been actively involved in the work of this ecumenical organisation ever since. The first involvement of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the work of the World Council of Churches marked a new period in the ecumenical engagement of Ethiopian Christians at the global level and, therefore, deserves special attention.

15 Article 1 of the Constitution of the World Council of Churches. Cf. Hanfried Krüger, "The Life and Activities of the World Council of Churches," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Vol. 2, 1948–1968* ed. Harold C. Fey (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 33.

On 28 January 1947, Willem Adolph Visser 't Hooft addressed an official letter of invitation to the *echege* [*əčč̈äge*] of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Gebre Giyorgis. In the letter, Visser 't Hooft expressed "the earnest desire and hope of the committee that the Ethiopian Church may join the World Council of Churches and participate in the constituent assembly" in Amsterdam from 22 August to 4 September 1948.[16] Along with the invitation letter, he also sent some documents explaining the vision of the World Council of Churches. To underline the importance of the organisation, Visser 't Hooft emphasised that "130 churches, including churches of different confessions, many of them from the old historic Eastern traditions have already joined the Council. We hope that the Ethiopian Church may be led to take a similar decision."[17] However, no answer from the Ethiopian Church followed.

The dispute between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church over the latter's autonomy seemed to be the central obstacle to the participation of an Ethiopian delegation in the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches. The Coptic Orthodox Church regarded the Church of Ethiopia as part of its ecclesiastical structure and sought by all means to counter the growing aspirations for ecclesiastical independence in Ethiopia. Therefore, a direct invitation to the Ethiopian Church to join the WCC could have been seen by the Coptic Church as an unwelcome and, indeed, illegitimate interference in its internal affairs.

As the Assembly approached, the organisers decided to activate ecumenical contacts in Addis Ababa that could help to resolve local problems. In late April and early May 1948, just a few months before the Assembly, Visser 't Hooft wrote to the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aksum, Nicholas (1890–1967)[18] and to the Anglican Pastor A. F. Matthew,[19] asking for help:

> Since this is the constituent meeting of the World Council and since we attach particular significance to the presence at that first meeting of delegates of the oldest Churches we are very eager to have a favourable reply from the Abyssinian Church. But so far no answer has come. We should be

16 Letter of W. A. Visser 't Hooft to Ǝčč̈äge Gäbrä Giyorgis, 28 January 1947. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.
17 Ibid.
18 Letter of W. Visser 't Hooft to Metropolitan of Aksum Nicholas, 26 April 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4. The reason behind this letter was that Metropolitan Nicholas has previously mentioned in a conversation with Archbishop Germanos (1872–1951), Metropolitan of Thyateira who was also one of the Presidents of the WCC, that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church wishes to attend the assembly.
19 Letter of W. Visser 't Hooft to A. F. Matthew, 3 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

> most grateful, if you would kindly use your influence in this matter and we should be glad to hear whether we can do anything further.[20]

This step proved itself to be decisive. On 8 May 1948 A. F. Matthew met the two leading ecclesiastical figures of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Echege*[21] Gebre Giyorgis (1883–1970; later: Abuna Basilyos, the first Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church)[22] and *Liqa siltanat*[23] Melaktu, the Dean of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Addis Abeba (1910–1979; later: Abuna Tewoflos, the second Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church).[24] A.F. Matthew explained to them the vision of the proposed assembly, which they seemed to favour.[25] Apart from theological reasons, emancipation from the Coptic Orthodox Church was one of the aspects that played an essential role in the deliberations on possible participation in the Assembly. Official representation at an international ecumenical gathering was an excellent way to mark one's ecclesiastical autonomy. In response to this sensitivity, A.F. Matthew even urged Visser 't Hooft to use "Ethiopian Church" instead of "Coptic Church in Abyssinia" in correspondence sent on behalf of the World Council of Churches.[26]

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20 Ibid.

21 *Echege* [ኢጬጌ, ኣፈጌ] is the title traditionally given to the abbot of Debre Libanos monastery. It was used to designate the administrative head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In contrast to the metropolitan, the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, who until 1951 has been a Copt from Egypt, the *echege* has always been a native Ethiopian ecclesiastic appointed directly by the emperor. Cf. Getatchew Haile, "ኢጬጌ," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 2. D–Ha*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 212–213.

22 Gebre Giyorgis was made *echege* in 1934. During the Fascist occupation of Ethiopia, he lived in exile in Jerusalem. After liberation of the country and return to Addis Abeba in 1942, he was reinstalled in his former position and remained de-facto head of the Church and the Emperor's chief advisor on religious affairs. In July 1949 he was consecrated as bishop in Alexandria and became known as Abuna Basilyos. In January 1951, following the death of Qerəllos, the last Coptic metropolitan of Ethiopia, he was consecrated as the first ever Ethiopian metropolitan. In 1959, when the affiliation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the Coptic Church was finally terminated, Abuna Basilyos became the first Patriarch of the new autocephalous church. Cf. Bairu Tafla, "Basəlyos," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 1. A–C*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 495–496.

23 *Liqa siltanat* [*Liqä səḷtanat]* (lit. "Chief of the authorities") is the ecclesiastic title coined for the head of the Holy Trinity cathedral in Addis Abeba. He used to be a member of the imperial cabinet and assumed some of the power wielded by the *echege*. Cf. Evgenia Sokolinskaia, "Liq," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 3. He–N*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 576–578.

24 Cf. Mersha Alehegne, "Tewoflos," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 4. O–X*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 938–939.

25 Letter of A. F. Matthew to S. A. Morrison, 8 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4. Cf. also letter of A. F. Matthew to W. A. Visser 't Hooft, 15 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

26 Letter of A. F. Matthew to S. A. Morrison, 8 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4. At the same time, he was sceptical about the language skills of the possible Ethiopian delegates: "It had better be made plain, if not already understood, that there is no priest in Ethiopia with sufficient knowledge of English or any other foreign language really to follow the discussions which will take place

A few days later, on 12 May 1948, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aksum Nicholas managed to contact the private secretary of the emperor and to discuss with him the participation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the planned assembly.[27] It can be assumed that Haile Selassie personally decided that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church should be attending the Amsterdam Assembly. Since already two days later, on 14 May 1948, the *de facto* head of the Ethiopian Church, *Echege* Gebre Giyorgis, finally sent an answer to Visser 't Hooft:

> Your letter of 28th January is before me with its attached invitation to the Ethiopian Church to become a member of the World Council of Churches and to take part in the Constituent Assembly in Amsterdam from 2nd [*sic*! for 22nd] August to 4th September.
>
> The Ethiopian Church will follow with great interest and with every desire to encourage the work of the Provisional Committee. It has accordingly been decided that the Ethiopian Church will be represented at the Constituent Assembly in Amsterdam and that authority will be bestowed upon their representative to determine the participation in the World Council when it is formally constituted.
>
> Would you therefore continue to inform me of the progress of your work with its great promise of Christian cooperation and the growth of economical [*sic*!] consciousness among the members of all the Churches.[28]

In his answer, Visser 't Hooft stressed, in the name of the Provisional Committee of the World Council, the joy at this decision and highlighted the considerable value ascribed to the full participation of the ancient Ethiopian Church in the work of the World Council.[29]

It seems that the ecumenical movement, to some extent, facilitated the development of internal church affairs between the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox

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at Amsterdam. They will be unable to contribute anything that way. The priest who went to Birmingham last year can have got very little out of the specific matter for which he went, but I do not doubt that his ideas have been much enlarged. That may also be expected for the delegate to Amsterdam, if one be sent; and if he may give nothing to the Conference, he will probably gain something which will be of great benefit ultimately to the Church here." Cf. also letter of A. F. Matthew to W. A. Visser 't Hooft, 15 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

27 Letter of Metropolitan of Aksum Nicholas to W. Visser 't Hooft, 12 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

28 Letter of Ǝčč̣äge Gäbrä Giyorgis to W. A. Visser 't Hooft, 14 May 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

29 Letter of W. A. Visser 't Hooft to Ǝčč̣äge Gäbrä Giyorgis, 16 June 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

churches. In this context, the Coptic Orthodox and Ethiopian Churches finally reached an agreement on 13 July 1948 that led to the elevation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the status of an autonomous church. It also allowed the Archbishop of All Ethiopia to consecrate bishops and metropolitans for the Ethiopian Church and to form a local Holy Synod. As part of this agreement, the Coptic Patriarch in Cairo consecrated six Ethiopian clergy as bishops on 25 July. Among them were also the aforementioned Echege Gebre Giyorgis and Liqa siltanat Melaktu, who became Abuna Basilyos and Abuna Tewoflos respectively.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was represented at the Amsterdam Assembly by two official delegates: the newly consecrated Bishop Abuna Tewoflos and the scholar *Blatta*[30] Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos (1899–1978), the head of the Imperial Record and Archive Office, who was later to write the article for the *Ecumenical Review*.[31] However, since the names of the delegates were not given to the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches until 10 August 1948 (less than two weeks before the event),[32] they do not appear in some of the printed materials prepared for the Assembly.[33]

Abuna Tewoflos participated in the work of Section I, "The Universal Church in God's Design," and of Committee II on "Policy". The topic of ecclesiology in its relation to the challenging quest for the unity of the churches discussed in this section was also reflected in his speech addressed to the assembly. There, he summarised the ecumenical vision of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the following way:

> The representatives of the church of Ethiopia understand fully that the unity of churches is most needed for the benefits of Christians all over the world, but as there are some differences in doctrine and tradition, we find it necessary to have time to report to our church on the proposed work of the assembly to be studied there.

30 *Blatta* (ብላታ): honorific title granted to men of learning in the late imperial period. Cf. Sevir Chernetsov, "Blatten geta," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 1. A–C*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 595–596.

31 About him, see Asfaw Damte, "Märsəʿe Ḫazän Wäldä Qirqos," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Volume 3. He–N*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 798–799.

32 Telegram and letter of *Abunä* Basəlyos [formerly Əčč̣äge Gäbrä Giyorgis] to W. A. Visser 't Hooft, 10 August 1948. WCC Archives 42.4.022/4.

33 In the list of participants kept in the archive of the World Council of Churches they can be found under numbers 964 and 565. Cf. [*List of attendance of the*] *First Assembly World Council of Churches*. WCC Archives 31.019/13. It has to be noted that even though the Ethiopian Orthodox Church received credential for two delegates, in some documents of the WCC Blatta Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos is mentioned not as "participant," but rather as "visitor" or "observer". Cf. for instance: *Observers*. WCC Archives 31.019/13.

> As representatives from one of the most ancient cradles of the Christian faith we bring to this assembly our hopes and prayers for the meeting of Christians of the entire world to bring peace and the Kingdom of Christ on earth.[34]

Blatta Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos, on his part, participated in the work of the Section II: "The Church's Witness to God's Deign" and of the Committee I on "Constitution and Rules and Regulations". It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the participation of the Ethiopian delegation in the work of the Amsterdam Assembly. On the one hand, it marked the beginning of a new period of global ecumenical engagement by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On the other hand, it allowed Western Christians to become acquainted with this African Christian tradition. At the same time, the Ethiopian Orthodox engagement in the ecumenical movement opened a new chapter in the history of its literary production.

Addressing a global audience: the case study of Blatta Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos

Participation in the global ecumenical movement posed a particular challenge for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Its textual tradition had to be adapted to a new readership and incorporate new themes that had not played a significant role before. Whereas previously Ethiopian Orthodox religious texts were almost exclusively produced for Ethiopian Orthodox believers either in Gəʿəz or Amharic and even by the mid-twentieth century circulated predominantly in handwritten form, the intended public of texts created in the context of the ecumenical movement was global, predominantly non-Orthodox and at the same time mostly unfamiliar with the Ethiopian Christianity. Moreover, for the first time, Ethiopian Orthodox literary tradition had to find an expression in English. Similarly, the content of these texts was radically different from the works (re)produced for the Ethiopian Orthodox religious community back home. All this allows us to speak about the formation of a new literary genre within the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition – texts written for a global ecumenical audience.

This observation brings us to the question that will be explored in more detail. Namely, what elements of earlier Ethiopian Orthodox literary production were adopted in the context of the ecumenical movement, and in what ways were they transformed to serve the intended goal of reaching a global ecumenical audience,

34 *Abba* Theophilos, [*Word of greeting from*] *Ethiopia*. WCC Archives, 31.008/17.

and what new themes had to be incorporated into these new texts. In the following, I would like to discuss these questions based on the case study of the very first Ethiopian Orthodox text deliberately produced for the global ecumenical audience – the contribution of Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos under the title "The Ethiopian Church" published in the first volume of the *Ecumenical Review*, a newly established quarterly of the World Council of Churches.[35] The quarterly editors wanted it to become "an instrument to be used by the Churches to give substance and reality to the new relationships between them."[36] The issue focused on the Amsterdam Assembly and its reception in various churches. Articles in the issue include, for example, "Amsterdam in the Perspective of the Younger Churches"[37] and "The Moscow Patriarchate and the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches."[38]

Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos prepared his contribution "The Ethiopian Church" before the Assembly. The original text of the article that is now kept in the Archive of the World Council of Churches was written in French and was entitled " L'Église éthiopienne. Bref aperçu historique et descriptif."[39] The first folio of the document bears the following note: "Presented to Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft to be taken into consideration as a material for the *Ecumenical Review* by Blatta Marsie Hazen. 2nd September 1948, Amsterdam."[40] The folder contains two versions of the contribution. The longer version is typed on paper stamped "Legation Imperiale d'Ethiopie en Egypt" and has some handwritten additions and corrections; the shorter version of the text is typed on blank paper and has no additions or corrections. It could be assumed that the Ethiopian delegation spent some time in Cairo on their way to Amsterdam and that Mersea Hazen's originally handwritten contribution was typed there in the Ethiopian embassy. However, it is unclear how and when the abridged version of the contribution was produced. As the text was presented to Visser 't Hooft towards the end of the Assembly (which ran from 22 August to 4 September), it could theoretically have been created directly in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, the shorter version of the French text was translated into English and appeared in the *Ecumenical Review*.

35 Blatta Marsie-Hazen, "The Ethiopian Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 1, no. 2 (1949): 179–187.
36 "Editorial," in *The Ecumenical Review* 1, no. 1 (1948): 1.
37 T.C. Chao, "Amsterdam in the Perspective of the Younger Churches," *The Ecumenical Review* 1, 2 (1949): 131–136.
38 "The Moscow Patriarchate and the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches," *The Ecumenical Review* 1, 2 (1949): 188–197.
39 Märsəʿe Ḫazän Wäldä Qirqos, "The Church of Ethiopia," WCC Archives 42.8/110.
40 Ibid.

As there is no mention of the author of the English translation, the assumption is that the translation must have been the work of the *Ecumenical Review*'s staff.

Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos's adaptation of the Ethiopian Orthodox literary tradition to a new setting can be best understood within the context of his remarkable background. Born in 1899, he embarked on a path that would see him play a pivotal role in preserving and disseminating the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, both within and beyond the borders of Ethiopia. The son of *aleqa* Wolde Qirqos, a teacher of *Degwwa* at the esteemed monastery of Debre Libanos, Mersea Hazen was immersed in a rigorous traditional education from a young age. By the age of eleven, he had already completed his studies in *qəne*, a traditional genre of oral poetry in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. His scholarly journey continued with three years of New Testament exegesis (*andimta*) under the guidance of the renowned scholar *memhər* Welde Giyorgis, culminating in his studies of the patristic writings (*liqawint*) in Harar.

In 1920, his expertise and commitment to Ethiopian Orthodox scholarship led to his appointment as secretary of the newly established Commission for the Preparation and Publication of Biblical and Patristic Texts. This role, initiated and closely supervised by Tafari Makonnen, saw him translating and commenting on a significant corpus of biblical and patristic texts, making them accessible in Amharic. This initiative should be considered part of the broader programme of modernisation of Church and society initiated by the future emperor. The cornerstone of this programme was to increase literacy (also religious literacy) by introducing modern school education and disseminating key texts of the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition in Amharic translation. It was in the context of these educational reforms that Mersea Hazen became a teacher of Gəʿəz and Amharic at the newly founded Tafari Makonnen School in Addis Abeba in 1925. There, he authored the first systematic grammar of the Amharic language, which became a cornerstone in Ethiopian education until 1975. His literary endeavours also included the publication of *Təmhərtä ḥəṣanat*, a book of religious lessons for children, showcasing his dedication to education at all levels.

After the liberation of Ethiopia from Italian occupation, Mersea Hazen held several key positions. He was the head of the Imperial Records and Archives Office and the head of the Amharic Bible Revision Committee, whose work culminated in the publication in 1962 of the "Imperial Bible" (also known as the Haile Selassie I Revised Amharic Bible), the first Amharic translation of the Old and New Testaments produced and published for use in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Emperor Haile Selassie explained the need of the Amharic Bible translation in the following way:

> Ethiopia, an island of Christianity, is recorded in history as having received first the Old Testament, and then the New Testament earlier than most of the countries of the world. When, in Old Testament times, she received the Law, and when, in New Testament times, she received the Gospel, she ensured that the Scriptures were translated into the ancient language of Ge'ez. From those times to this, various books both of spiritual and material profit have periodically been compiled and written in Ge'ez. We remember with deep gratitude those fathers of old who, as time and opportunity allowed, worked with much care and labour and have left us books for the preservation of the Faith and for the increase of learning and knowledge.
>
> In former ages, Ge'ez was the language of the country and so, even without an interpreter, the people had no difficulty in examining and understanding the books; but just as one age succeeds another, so Amharic, which sprang from Ge'ez, gradually grew until it became the common speech of the people, taking the place of Ge'ez. At that time, Ge'ez was understood by the learned people of the Church, but was not readily understood by the ordinary people. Arising from this, the scholars in their preaching and work have for centuries been forced in their teaching to interpret from Ge'ez into Amharic. And these conditions prevailed until Our own times.
>
> Since the time when, by God's goodness, We were chosen to ascend the Throne of Ethiopia and while We have been leading Our people to progress in learning and knowledge, We have laboured in every way possible with an eye to their growth in spiritual and material learning and knowledge. In order to reach this goal, and realizing that the first necessity was to have the Scriptures translated into Amharic and printed in bulk, in 1918, when We were still Heir to the Throne and Regent, We chose from amongst the scholars some to translate the Scriptures and to produce the translation alongside the Ge'ez.[41]

In other words, Blatta Mersea Hazen was one of those scholars who had a lifelong dedication to the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition. At the same time, he belonged to the new generation of Ethiopian intellectuals interested in bringing

41 This English translation of Haile Selassie's foreword to the Amharic Bible is taken from here: Haile Selassie, Statement on the Revised Amharic Bible, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Statement_on_the_Revised_Amharic_Bible.

this tradition into dialogue with contemporary currents of thought and making it accessible to his compatriots through new translations and adaptations. These qualities played a crucial role in his involvement in the ecumenical movement. His efforts to present Ethiopian Orthodoxy to a global audience on the pages of the *Ecumenical Review* were not merely an act of cultural translation but a profound engagement with the ecumenical movement aimed at fostering understanding and unity among Christian traditions worldwide.

Mersea Hazen's portrayal of the Ethiopian Church is deeply rooted in its literary tradition. The text begins with the traditional story of the founding of the Ethiopian royal dynasty by the son of Queen Makeda (Queen of Sheba) and King Solomon. This historical narrative, presented as historical, but in fact midrashic in origin and legendary, is emblematic of Ethiopian Orthodox literature and underscores the nation's ancient Christian heritage. It also highlights the theological continuity between the traditions of the Bible and Ethiopian Christianity:

> Up to the time of the meeting between their Queen Makeda and King Solomon, about 1000 B.C., the Ethiopians, like all other ancient peoples, were pagans. They did not, however, worship idols, but regarded as their gods the light, the sun and the stars. The son born to Queen Makeda and Solomon, Ibn-el-Hakim (Menelik I), founded the dynasty still reigning there today. Makeda and her son introduced into their kingdom the faith of the God of Israel, which lasted until the adoption of Christianity. […] The religious observances and burnt-offerings were in accordance with the regulations laid down in the Old Testament, and from the time of Menelik I to the coming of St. Frumentius, who brought Christianity to Ethiopia, there was a sound Hebrew basis which was to act as a foundation for the building of Christianity.[42]

The mythical idea of the *translatio imperii* from ancient Israel to Ethiopia manifested here is the central theme of Ethiopian Orthodox theology. It can be found in a vast number of works of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition, but in the most profound way it was articulated in the highly influential medieval treaties *Kəbrä nägäśt* ('Glory [or Nobility] of the Kings').[43] The *Kəbrä nägäśt* substantiated

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42 Blatta Marsie-Hazen, "The Ethiopian Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 1, no. 2 (1949): 179.

43 The Gəʿəz text has been critically edited and translated into German by Carl Bezold: *Kebra Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige. Nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten Mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung versehen* (München: Verlag der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1905). The constantly reprinted English translation done by

this claim in a twofold way. Firstly, by creating a genealogical link of the Ethiopian monarchy with Solomon, King of Israel, and the Queen of Sheba, called in the text Makkeda and the "Queen of the South" (*Nəgəśtä Azeb*).[44] Secondly, by putting forward an elaborate narrative about the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Aksum, which in turn was interpreted as a visible sign of the divine election of Ethiopians as God's newly chosen people. Menelik I, the alleged son of King Solomon and the Queen of the South,[45] would have been the first in a line of Ethiopian rulers which stretched to the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie.

By recounting ecclesiastical history and hagiography, Mersea Hazen follows the traditional narrative, especially highlighting that "Ethiopia counts among the first Christian nations of the world, as it was in the year 330 A.D. that St. Frumentius came there bringing the Gospel."[46] However, to engage a global ecumenical audience, Mersea Hazen strategically transforms some traditional elements. The text is framed ecumenically, presenting Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as a national heritage and a vital part of the universal Christian experience. This is achieved through an emphasis on Ethiopia's early connections to the broader Christian world, notably through its historical ties with the Coptic Church of Alexandria. Mersea Hazen also emphasizes themes of Christian unity, appealing to ecumenical values by highlighting the Ethiopian Church's contributions to protecting Christians in the Middle East and its support during periods of persecution: "Three times during the Middle Ages the Church of Ethiopia rescued the Christian minority in Egypt from the persecution of the Sultans. In the twelfth century she worked for the ensuring of places of worship in the Holy Land."[47] Additionally, the narrative is crafted to be accessible to those unfamiliar with Ethiopian Orthodoxy, elucidating terms and practices in clear, understandable

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Ernest Budge is to be used with caution, since it has a number of notorious flaws: Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her only Son Menyelek, Being the History of the Departure of God & His Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, and the Establishment of the Religion of the Hebrews & the Solomonic Line of Kings in That Country: A Complete Translation of the Kebra Nagast with Introduction* (London: The Medici Society, 1922).

44 This narrative develops the biblical story depicted in 1 Kings 10: 1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9: 1–12. For a detailed discussion of the figures of the Queen of Saba and Solomon in Ethiopian tradition, see: Alessandro Bausi, "La leggenda della Regina di Saba nella tradizione etiopica," in *La Regina di Saba: Un Mito fra Oriente e Occidente*, ed. Fabio Battiato et al. (Napoli: UniorPress, 2016), 91–162; Witold Witakowski and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "Solomon in Ethiopian Tradition," in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition. King, Sage and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 219–240.

45 According to well-established later Ethiopian tradition the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba was called Mənilək (ምኒልክ). However, in the *Kəbrä nägäśt* itself he is called Bäynä Ləḥkəm (በይነ፡ ልሕከም; from Arabic *Ibn al-Ḥakīm*, "Son of the wise man").

46 Blatta Marsie-Hazen, "The Ethiopian Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 1, no. 2 (1949): 179.

47 Ibid., 180.

language. Thus, the tradition is made approachable and engaging for a global audience. Another innovative feature of the text is its comprehensive narrative of the modernization of the Ethiopian Church, which showcases its adaptive responses to contemporary challenges while maintaining its rich historical and theological traditions. Here the author especially highlights three fields: theological education, ecclesiastical reform and transformation of textual tradition.

A pivotal development Mersea Hazen mentions regarding the modernization of theological education is the founding of a theological seminary in December 1944, an Imperial foundation whose curriculum aligns with modern theological faculties. With an initial enrolment of 220 pupils from across Ethiopia, this seminary represents a landmark shift from traditional monastic education to a structured, formal theological education system. The syllabus includes Gəʿəz, Amharic, English, and Arabic and comprehensive studies in Old and New Testaments, church doctrine, ritual, and religious music, alongside secular subjects like hygiene, geography, history, and mathematics. Mersea Hazen underscores the seminary's role in preparing clergy for contemporary ministry, reflecting a significant modernisation effort within the Church's educational domain: "The education given there is to fill all the requirements of the ministry as practised in our day."[48]

Mersea Hazen's narrative also touches upon administrative reforms within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, particularly the move towards national and administrative independence. The consecration of Ethiopian bishops in July 1948, after two decades of negotiations with the Patriarchate of Alexandria, marked a historic moment of ecclesiastical autonomy:

> […] the consecration has just (July 1948) been carried out of six Ethiopian bishops, whose ministry marks the beginning of complete and definite national independence for the Church of Ethiopia, and of administrative independence from the Patriarchate, whose obedient daughter-church it still, however, remains in matters of dogma.[49]

This shift towards self-governance is portrayed as a response to the growing need for an indigenous leadership structure that resonates with the national consciousness and modern aspirations of the Ethiopian people.[50]

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48 Ibid., 184–185.
49 Ibid., 181.
50 Cf. ibid., 181, 186.

The transformation of the textual tradition under the auspices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is another theme Mersea Hazen explores. He highlights the translation of the Gospels and the liturgy into Amharic, spearheaded by the emperor.

> The present Emperor has, however, caused the Gospels and the liturgy to be translated into Amaric [*sic*!]. He imported a printing-press and had them printed with their commentaries. In 1922, at the Emperor's command, the translation of the Bible into Amaric [*sic*!] was begun.[51]

This initiative not only made religious texts more accessible to the Amharic-speaking populace but also represented a modern approach to engaging the faithful through their vernacular language. Furthermore, Mersea Hazen notes the significant project of translating the Bible into Amharic, completed in 1934 but published in England due to the outbreak of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in October 935.[52] Though hampered by the war, this endeavour symbolizes a monumental step in making the Scriptures available and understandable to a broader segment of the Ethiopian population, thus fostering a deeper, more personal engagement with the Christian faith.

Thus, Mersea Hazen's narrative encapsulates a Church in transition, actively engaging with modernity through educational reform, the revitalization of religious literature, and administrative restructuring. These endeavours reflect the commitment of the Church to preserving its ancient traditions while simultaneously embracing changes necessary to address the needs and challenges of contemporary society.

Another prominent theme, besides that of modernisation (he uses the adjective frequently when talking about reforming the educational system, e.g. "modern systems"[53]), which does not usually play a major role in Ethiopian Orthodox literature, but which is highlighted in the text of Mersea Hazen, is evangelisation. Mersea Hazen articulates a bold vision of evangelisation, emphasising its ongoing relevance amidst the shifting demographics and religious landscapes of contemporary Africa. According to Mersea Hazen, evangelisation "is the primary calling of the Ethiopian Church, its aim and its ideal."[54] His text reveals an understanding of evangelization as a dynamic and unfinished task started by St. Frumentius,

51 Ibid., 185.
52 Cf. ibid.
53 Ibid., 184.
54 Ibid., 186.

which requires the Ethiopian Church to adapt and respond to the complexities of modern African society.

Rather unexpectedly, Mersea Hazen showcased an ecumenically open stance towards assistance in evangelization from other Churches explicitly calling for the "support of ardent believers in the Word of God all over the world."[55] This appeal for global Christian solidarity not only acknowledges the immense scale of the missionary task at hand but also positions the Ethiopian Orthodox Church within the broader ecumenical movement, seeking collaboration and support beyond its traditional confines. Notably, the missionary responsibility of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is understood here not in the context of Ethiopia itself but in the context of the whole African continent: "The Church of Ethiopia believes that it has a mission in Africa. It wishes to brandish the torch of the Faith, sending the flame out from its mountain-tops far beyond its frontiers, to spread there the peace and the light of God."[56]

By adopting traditional elements of Ethiopian Orthodox literary production and transforming them to address a global audience while also incorporating new themes pertinent to ecumenical concerns, Mersea Hazen's work stands as a testament to the rich contribution of the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition to the tapestry of global Christianity. Ultimately, his contribution also innovated the discourses of modernisation and evangelisation within Ethiopian Orthodox literature by aligning the mission of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with the broader objectives of the global ecumenical movement.

Transforming of a textual tradition: conclusion

The transformation of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition in the first half of twentieth century was shaped by two interrelated forces: the internal drive for modernization and the Church's engagement with the global ecumenical movement. The visit of Ras Tafari Makonnen to Europe and his interactions with the emerging ecumenical movement marked a critical moment in this transformation. His efforts to modernize religious knowledge dissemination – most notably through the establishment of the first governmental printing press and the publication of Amharic translations of key patristic texts – initiated a shift from the traditional manuscript culture to a printed textual tradition that was both more accessible and aligned with the broader Christian heritage.

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 187.

This shift was deeply connected to the broader vision of Ethiopian modernity. First, the introduction of printed books in Amharic represented a technological and epistemological rupture, replacing the slow, labour-intensive manuscript tradition with a more efficient means of textual production. This "Gutenbergian" revolution in Ethiopia was a deliberate effort to standardize and disseminate religious knowledge on a scale previously unimaginable. Second, the adoption of Amharic as a primary medium of religious literature reflected the modernization of education, moving away from the exclusive reliance on Gəʿəz, which had traditionally restricted theological learning to the ecclesiastical elite. Printed books in Amharic not only made religious texts more widely available but also redefined the very notion of theological education. Third, the printed book became an instrument of nation-building. The translation and printing of key religious texts reinforced the role of Amharic as a unifying national language and emphasized the legitimacy of the "Solomonic" monarchy, which was often visually represented in the first pages of these publications.

However, these innovations also provoked resistance. The shift from Gəʿəz to Amharic and the move from manuscripts to printed books challenged the authority of the traditional custodians of theological knowledge – monastic scholars and church elites. The democratization of religious texts, which now became more accessible to noble laypeople and even monastic communities, sparked anxieties over the loss of clerical control. This tension illustrates that the transformation of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition was not a simple linear progression but rather a negotiated process between tradition and modernity, between local ecclesiastical authority and broader national and global influences.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's participation in the World Council of Churches (WCC) represented a further evolution of this transformation. More than a political or diplomatic milestone, this engagement required a fundamental reorientation of the Church's textual practices. The production of Ethiopian Orthodox texts, which had long been confined to Ethiopian monastic and ecclesiastical circles, now had to account for a non-Ethiopian, non-Orthodox audience. The Church had to articulate its theology in European languages and within new literary genres suited to ecumenical discourse. The contribution of Blatta Mersea Hazen to the *Ecumenical Review* in 1949 epitomized this shift, as it marked the first intentional effort to present Ethiopian Orthodox thought within a global Christian framework.

This expansion of the textual tradition to a global readership brought new challenges. The transition from handwritten manuscripts to printed books had already disrupted traditional modes of religious learning, and now, the shift

toward producing texts for an international audience further altered the function of Ethiopian Orthodox literature. No longer intended solely for internal theological transmission, Ethiopian Orthodox texts had to serve as bridges between Ethiopian Christianity and the wider Christian world. This required careful curation of Ethiopian Orthodox identity – emphasizing historical continuity with biblical traditions, theological connections with other Christian communities, and an openness to the global ecumenical conversation.

Ultimately, the evolution of the Ethiopian Orthodox textual tradition in the first half of twentieth century highlights the dynamic interplay between internal reform and external engagement. By embracing new forms of textual production and participating in global Christian discourse, the Church not only preserved its theological heritage but also redefined how it communicated that heritage both within Ethiopia and beyond. The shift from manuscript to print, from Gəʿəz to Amharic, and from local to global audiences illustrates how the Ethiopian Orthodox Church navigated the challenges of modernity while maintaining its historical and theological foundations.

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From *Intibah* to #baytokh_ʿīdto: Literary Production in the American Syriac Orthodox Diaspora

GEORGE A. KIRAZ

The Syriac Orthodox North American diaspora goes back to the late nineteenth century. The first to land on the Eastern shores of the United States was a skilled scribe, *Shammas* (deacon) Micha al-Naqqar. Micha was from Mosul and worked for American missionaries from the Boston area as well as for British missionaries. He learned English in Mosul and worked there as an interpreter for the missionaries. The missionary Dr. Grant called him an "intelligent and valuable assistant."[1] Micha immigrated to the United States, probably travelling with missionaries when they went back home. He arrived in the United States sometime in the 1840s. We do not know if Micha produced any manuscripts while living in the United States. We do not even know of Syriac Orthodox 'communities' back then.

By the 1880s, Syriac Orthodox from Kharput began to arrive in and around Worcester, MA. Immigrants from Diyarbakir settled in New Jersey and New York. Others from Tur Abdin resided in Rhode Island (not too far from Worcester). By the turn of the century, families began to coalesce into communities.

While most of the immigrants were labourers, we do encounter a few intellectuals and professionals early on. George Barsoom, born in Kharput in 1872, studied at Euphrates College before arriving in the US. He later attended a theological seminary in Chicago and subsequently followed a career in medicine. Abraham Yoosuf arrived in 1889 and attended Baltimore Medical School. He then opened a medical practice in Worcester in 1897 and became a prominent community member. Yoosuf later became a nationalist and produced many articles in English.[2] But we do not know of any literary production *during* the nineteenth century. Most of the other early immigrants must have produced letters that they sent to their families. These would have been written mainly in Ottoman Turkish. Nothing, as far as I know, survives from the 1890s.

1 Thomas Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1853), 214.
2 A collection of his writings was reproduced in Abraham K. Yoosuf, *Assyria and the Paris Peace Conference* edited by Tomas Beth-Avdalla (Nineveh Press, 2017).

After all the early silence, 1909 marks the beginning of journalism by Suryanis with the release of the first issue of the newspaper *Intibah*. Its editor was a newcomer to the eastern shores. Gabriel [Jabbūr] Boyajy of College Point, NY, was already in the United States in 1900. The first issue of his *Intibah* appeared in 1909. It was mostly in Ottoman Turkish, written in his hand and produced on a mimeograph machine. In the summer of 1911, Nasif Hanna Qirmizi of Mardin arrived in New York City. Gabriel showed him around. Qirmizi gives us a description of how Gabriel worked:

> He showed me how he edits and prepares the newspaper. In addition to his daily work, you find him spending all evening composing and editing the newspaper with no one to help him except a red electric lantern.[3]

Intibah would be followed by two periodicals, one beating the other in size and duration of publication. These periodicals were primarily in Ottoman Turkish but also in Arabic, Syriac, and Armenian (probably in this order), a representation of the linguistic ecosystem the immigrants left behind. Within a few decades, a new generation of English speakers would continue the tradition of their parents and grandparents and produce periodicals in English.

The 1948 war between Jews and Arabs in Palestine would indirectly change everything in America. The Archbishop of Jerusalem was dispatched to the US to gather aid for the 1948 refugees. Instead, he settled in the US permanently against the wishes of his patriarch, and began to form an Archdiocesan structure, forcing such a trans-local structure down the throats of the American parishes. And with that, first, we begin to lose the voice of the individual and instead mostly hear from a top-down organisational structure, albeit with only a few individuals running the show; and second, the no-longer-immigrant parishes – by now second and third-generation Americans – would soon be transformed again to an immigrant community with a new flux of immigrants following the various wars of the Middle East starting with 1948. It would take a few decades for the archdiocese to settle in, before it began to produce bilingual liturgical editions for its parishes. It would be the first archdiocese to produce its own liturgical texts.

In what follows, I will attempt to navigate through the literature that has been produced and seek to contrast top-down vs bottom-up production, the latter ultimately returning in the twenty-first century with a vengeance with the rise of the Read-Write-Publish era and its social media arm. The Germanist Sylvie Moli-

3 *Initbāh* (Sept 1911), 1–2.

tor-Lübbert presents top-down and bottom-up as directional models vis-à-vis the writing process itself.[4] I will apply these models to the agency of literary production to understand the relationships between creators and audiences or, in the case of social media, "users."

Historical background

The first signs of community formation in the US appeared in the late 1890s when associations and organisations were formed. The social aspect of these formations has already been addressed in my *The Syriac Orthodox in North America (1895–1995)*. Here, I will concentrate on how such organisations interacted with the agents of literary production.

The first organisation we know of was formed in 1897 in Worcester, MA. We do not know if it had a name then (compare with the naming history of New Jersey's *TMS* below). Later picture captions named it the Assyrian Benefit Association. The women established their own organisations. The earliest known women organisation is *The Assyrian Ladies' Church Loving Association*, established in 1908 in Worcester. Closer to our topic, a Syriac language organisation was formed in 1910 in Fitchburg, MA, with a membership of individuals from Mardin and Kharput. In fact, New England produced such a bewildering number of associations that umbrella organisations became necessary. It is from the minutes – rather newspaper reports – of such meetings that we know of intended literary productions. A 1916 meeting of The Harpoot Union of Worcester formed a committee to look into finding a print-type solution to publish the newspaper *Beth Nahrin* – which, like its immediate predecessor *Intibah*, has been produced with mimeograph technology – and "other books." It seems that the Union had already asked a number of "writers" in a previous meeting to put together a collection of articles on history and literature, but now that project was put on hold until a print-type solution was found. During a 1917 meeting, the Union collected $250 (about $5,785 in 2022) from each member organisation towards the print-type project.

The first non-periodical publication was a byproduct of establishing one such organisation. Immigrants from Diyarbakir met in 1899 in Sterling, NJ, and formed an organisation. But they did not know what to call it, and they did not know what sort of purpose it should have. They simply felt that they needed an organisation. A newcomer attended a meeting that was held on March 25, 1900. The newcomer

4 Sylvie Molitor-Lübbert, "Scientific text production under electronic conditions. A Heuristic Model of Cognitive Requirements" from 1997 [second hand reference from https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/do-you-write-top-down-or-bottom-up-286469e0ec5c].

was none other than Gabriel Boyajy who would publish the *Intibah* newspaper nine years later. Gabriel suggested a purpose and a name: *Terakkiyât-ı Mekteb-i Süryânî* "Progress of Syriac Schools" with the specific purpose of opening a school in Diyarbakir. Boyajy wrote a constitution in Turkish Garshuni in 1910. The first article gave the Turkish name as above and stated that the association should be known in English as … (with a blank line to be filled out later). Boyajy published the constitution in 1912 with the blank line intact. But the publication's title page read, "The Assyrian Orphanage and School Association of America, Inc." This is our oldest publication with an English title. The organisation would become known in the Syriac world as *Taw Mim Simkath*, the letters of the acronym that makes up its Turkish name written in Garshuni form. During the 1920s and 1930s, branches of the *Terakki* organisation would be established in many American towns on the East Coast. One such organisation, known as the Assyrian Progressive Association, was established in New England in 1924 and began to publish a periodical named *Nineveh* in 1927, mostly written in Armenian with a few articles in subsequent issues in English and Turkish Garshuni.

Before discussing such bottom-up publications of the pre-diocesan period, it is worth pausing briefly to investigate what sort of publications the community consumed other than its own productions.

Early literary consumption

We are fortunate to have a collection of a few hundred manuscripts and rare printed books at the Assyrian Orthodox Church of the Virgin Mary, Paramus, NJ. The collection is made up of the collections of immigrants from the early 1900s. Their families have deposited their books in the Parish's library. These manuscripts and books give us an insight into what the community intellectuals consumed.

The library must have already existed in 1927 when Afram Barsoum, by then an Archbishop, was sent as an Apostolic Delegate to visit the community. He took the opportunity to visit libraries, including the New York Public Library, Harvard, and the University of Chicago, where he stayed for almost a year at the Oriental Institute. Under the entry for Bar ʿEbroyo's grammatical work *Ṣemḥe*, Barsoum tells us that the oldest manuscripts of this work are found in Florence, Deir al-Zaʿfaran, London, New Jersey, Jerusalem, Oxford, Boston, and "our library in an elegant hand."[5] The only known Syriac collections in New Jersey are those of Princeton's Firestone Library and the library of Princeton Theological Seminary. But *Ṣemḥe* is in neither.

5 Afram Barsoum, *al-Luʾlʾal-Manthūr* (Aleppo, second edition, 1956), 528.

Barsoum was referring to the library of the Paramus parish, then in West New York, NJ. I came across this manuscript in 2005 when I attempted to organise the library.

The immigrants must have brought most of the manuscripts with them. One such manuscript (*Book of Qandilo*, a liturgical text of repentance and the anointing of the sick) once belonged to Naoum Elias Palak (1868–1930), aka Naum Faiq [Naʿʿūm Fāʾiq], whom we will meet shortly.[6] An Arabic Garshuni note in the front reads:

ܠܩܕ ܐܫܬܪܝܬ ܗܕܐ ܐܠܟܬܐܒ ܡܥ ܟܬܒ ܓ̈ܝܪܗ ܡܢ ܐܣܚܩ ܐܒ ܩܣ ܐܒܠܚܕ ܐܠܐܡܕܝ
ܦܝ سنة ٢٩ ܡ̄

ܫܡ̈ܫܐ ܢܥܘܡ
ܒ ܐܠܝܐܣ
ܒܐܠܐܟ

I have purchased this book with other books from Isaac son of Qas Ablaḥad
[ʿAbdulʾaḥad] of Amid in the year [18]92 AD.
Deacon Naʿʿum
son of Elias
Palak

Faiq clearly purchased "this book with other books" before leaving Diyarbakir. In addition to liturgical manuscripts, there are also commentaries, sermons, hymnals, and at least one manuscript on calendars. The manuscripts are mostly in Syriac, but there are a good number of Arabic Garshuni manuscripts, with a smaller number in Turkish Garshuni ones. The community also used and collected printed matter, books written in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic. Not all were religious in nature. There is a good number of books on general secular history.

Prior to the establishment of this West New York parish, a meeting was held in Paterson, NJ, in 1906. Those assembled determined that for the community to survive in the United States, they needed to have regular liturgies. They needed a priest. They chose one of their deacons, Hanna Koorie, whose father was already a priest in Diyarbakir. They raised funds to send him to be ordained and to "bring back liturgical books." Such books must have been manuscripts, as no printed liturgical books existed at the time. Indeed, many of Koorie's manuscripts are now part of the Paramus collection.

6 George A. Kiraz, "Fāʾiq, Naʿʿūm," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, edited by Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Faiq-Naum.

We also know that the community consumed non-community publications such as Turkish and Arabic newspapers produced both in the Middle East and America. We know this from various reports in the community's periodicals, sometimes editorials responding to an article in such non-community publications, or sometimes reproducing articles from newspapers that arrived from the Middle East to disseminate news.

We now turn to the periodicals that the community produced.

Bottom-up publications: "Awakening," "Progress" and "Union"

Intibah was only the beginning. The title means "awakening" and was borrowed from the name of an organisation that Naum Faiq created back in Diyarbakir. The organisation was Faiq's brainchild at a time when he was a mere teen,

> The history and desire for this Intibah and its necessity for our Aramaean nation [*qawminā al-'Arāmī*] was kept in my heart for more than thirty years, ever since I entered school and began learning our beloved Syriac language [*al-lugha al-Suryāniya*].

The organisation began to have branches in various Ottoman cities. Within two years, a branch was opened in Paterson, NJ in 1910. A year before the NJ branch was established, Gabriel Boyajy began to publish his *Intibah*. The Turkish subtitle reads "our pages are open writings for the benefit of the Süryânî millet." An English subtitle begins to appear in the second year, "Assyrian's Monthly Newspaper" (with the apostrophe before the *s*).

Intibah became a bridge between the diaspora and the homeland, frequently reprinting reports from Turkish newspapers. We also know that the newspaper was read by/reached readers in the Middle East who would write letters to the publisher that would appear in subsequent issues.

Gabriel's *Intibah* became an imprint. The TMS constitution mentioned earlier was published under the Intibah imprint. Gabriel also published an anthology of Turkish and Arabic poems in 1913. These were written mainly by Naum Faiq, Fr. Hanna Koorie, Nasif Hanna Qirmizi, the monk Afram Barsoum (later the Patriarch), and Ḥanna Sirri Çakı – the last two lived in the Middle East. Gabriel also published in 1914 the *Taqlab*, the calendar system that shows the dates of Easter for any year in a 532-year cycle (the number 532 is *tqlb* in Syriac letter, hence the name *Taqlab*). This publication came with an English title, *Taklab: Everlasting Calendar of the Orthodox Church*.

The lack of "Assyrian" and the presence of "Orthodox" in the title are interesting, considering a nomenclature war that would erupt in the 1950s. By the late 1920s, the Syriac Orthodox parishes on the East Coast would be called "Assyrian Apostolic" (probably borrowing "Apostolic" from their Armenian neighbours).[7] When a nomenclature dispute erupted in the 1950s, with the hierarchy favouring "Syrian" over "Assyrian", the diaspora parishes also complained about "Orthodox" that replaced "Apostolic."

Another publication of interest from this early period is a directory published in English in 1913 under the English title "A Directory of the Assyrian Population of the United States and Canada." The "Assyrian" population here is restricted to the Syriac Orthodox. It was published in Boston by the ܒܘܣܛܘܢܕܐܩܝ ܣܘܪܝܐܢܝ ܓܢܓܠܪ ܫܪܟܛܝ / *Boston'daki Süryani Gençler Şirketi*, known in English as The Assyrian Young Men's Association of Boston. The directory gives the names of males (1,126 of them), their marital status, profession, and how many male (total 224) and female (total 193) children they had. Around the same time, Naum Faiq published a Syriac language primer titled *Kthobo d-Qeryono d-Suryoutho* in Paterson, 1917.

While Boyajy was still publishing *Intibah*, Sanharib Baley, another immigrant from Diyarbakir, began to publish a competing newspaper in Paterson, NJ, and named it in Syriac *Sawto d-Oromoye* "Voice of the Arameans." No issues survive and it is therefore difficult to ascertain its motivation, circulation, or readership. Reports in other newspapers tell us that it was also published in Ottoman Turkish, but we do not know if in Garshuni form or not.

Faiq immigrated to the United States and settled in New Jersey in 1912. He became a regular contributor to Gabriel's *Intibah*. But for some reason, probably due to the lack of funding, *Intibah* closed in 1915. In fact, funding has always been a major problem. The 1911 editorial by Qirmizi asks the readers to support the newspaper as the subscriptions do not cover the expenses. Qirmizi tells that Boyajy himself pays for the rest. This will become a chronic problem in the community – and still remains, as I personally attest! *Intibah* was succeeded by *Beth Nahrin* in 1906; a 1927 editorial reads:

> We ask our readers to kindly send the subscription dues or inform us if they are not interested so that we do not print many copies and pay for the postage Our budget does not allow for this.

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7 The 1916 US census called them "Jacobite Church (Assyrian)" at a time when no formal parishes existed (Department of Commerce, *Religious Bodies: 1916*, Part II (1919)). The 1926 and 1936 census called them "Assyrian Jacobite Apostolic Church" (Department of Commerce, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, Part II (1929, 1941)).

Faiq published *Beth Nahrin* until the early 1920s, and at some point, he had two editions: Turkish and Arabic, both in Garshuni form. When *Beth Nahrin* ceased, Faiq started *Ḥuyodo* in 1921 until his death in 1930. In an English editorial, *Ḥuyodo* was introduced to the readers as the "legitimate offspring of *Beth Nahreen*, and the direct descendent of *The Aramean* [i.e. Sanharib Baly's *Sawto d-Oromoye*]." *Ḥuyodo* was the official publication of the Assyro-Chaldean National Unity of America, representing not only Syriac Orthodox, but also Church-of-the-East Assyrians and Chaldeans (some articles are in Sureth). It was also published with print type using the new Linotype technology.

If it was not for *Intibah*, *Beth Nahrin*, and *Ḥuyodo*, the history of the Syriac Orthodox prior to the establishment of the archdiocese in the 1950s would have been lost.

While by the 1920s, the community must have had second and some third-generation members who could only read English, neither *Intibah* nor *Beth Nahrin* published anything in English. Neither Boyajy nor Faiq were able to edit in English. The few English glosses that appear here and there are written phonetically, such as "unsinkuble" in an article reporting on Titanic and "cristmas" when reporting on a Christmas party in Worcester.

In 1916, *The New Assyria* was published in English by an Urmia editor Joel Warda. However, it was a pan-Assyrian periodical, with coverage of both communities who saw themselves as one nation. When a distinction was necessary, the Syriac Orthodox were called "Turkish Assyrians" while the Church of the East (and Protestant) community members were called "Persian Assyrians."

After the close of *Ḥuyodo*, the English-speaking next generation produced *The New Beth Nahreen* in English. Throughout, recurring themes of "nation" (the *millet* of the old), "unity" (the *Ḥuyodo* of earlier writers), and "progress" (the *tarakki* of earlier generations – itself borrowed from Ottoman modernity and the Taw of Taw Mim Simkath) are dominant. In addition to reporting on the community, the glories of the ancient Assyrians – and, to a lesser degree, of the ancient Arameans – became a recurring theme as the English speakers had access to English books published on the Ancient Near East. The sense of Assyrian identity grew stronger.

In California, Kharput immigrants who migrated from New England published in English the periodical *Assyrian Progress* – that *tarakki* again. Much of the interests and activities of community life during the 1930s and 1940s is preserved thanks to *The New Beth Nahreen* and *Assyrian Progress*, the latter our only source on the West coast region. It is from *The New Beth Nahreen* that we learn about the formation of modern women choirs, the earliest formed in 1934 at St. Mary's in West New York with fourteen young women and three young men. This becomes

the beginning of a 20th-century phenomenon in Syriac Orthodox parishes, where women's choirs complement the male-centric deacon's *gudo* (or traditional choir).

But soon, the voice of the community will be no more. Even the English-speaking periodicals would cease. One factor may have been the inevitable melting pot. Naum Faiq predicted this in the 1920s. We read in a letter that he wrote to Archbishop (later Patriarch) Afram Barsoum:[8]

> Not a long time will pass until all those Syriacs [*Suryoye*] in America will become Episcopalians [*meth'angolu*], Catholics, or secular, living without faith, without nationality, and without a name or appellation of a nation. They will become "modern," without "tradition." Woe to our time! Pooh to the age in which we live!

And indeed, many of the second and third generation *'eth'angal*, that is, became Episcopalians.

Within a few decades, those who resisted *'eth'angal*-ization were faced with a new flux of immigrants who would arrive as a result of wars in the Middle East and the "Americans" would be overrun by new immigrants. One elderly woman complained to me in the 1990s, "their kids would run around the church out of control and the women would cook the *kibbeh* and other dishes in a different way." Above all, none of the "Americans" with a strong sense of "Assyrian" (in its English usage) identity had anticipated that the new immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s would be calling themselves in English "Syrian Orthodox," not "Assyrian Apostolic."

A clash of sorts was in the awaiting.

Top-down publications: "The priest then places the crown upon the bride's head saying…"

The 1948 Arab-Israeli war was a disaster for the Syriac community in Palestine. Patriarch Afram Barsoum sent the Archbishop of Jerusalem as an Apostolic Delegate to the United States to raise funds to help the refugees. Barsoum himself was sent by his predecessor as an Apostolic Delegate to the United States in 1927. It was Barsoum who consecrated the first three parishes in the US.

But unknown to Barsoum, his Apostolic Delegate did not plan to go back. Mor Athanasius Yeshu Samuel brought with him a few hundred manuscripts from the St. Mark's collection as well as his personal papers – documents and letters he

8 Syriac Orthodox library, Maarat Saydnaya; no call number. A copy was transcribed by the author.

would not need had he intended to stay for some months. Samuel had another intention as well: to find a buyer for the Dead Sea Scrolls he brought with him.[9]

With Samuel's arrival and his manoeuvring around the Patriarch to establish an archdiocese, the US parishes had a new "leader" they did not plan for. Each parish was thus far free. The Americans had never had the experience of operating *under* an archbishop. But Samuel not only had a conflict with his Patriarch – due to his refusal to go back to his Archdiocese of Jerusalem – but he began to fight the locals over their "Assyrian" name. In fact, Barsoum tried to "correct" the name when he consecrated churches in 1927, but the locals fought him and he failed. Samuel, now in conflict with his Patriarch over his permanent stay in the US, may have wanted to at least appease Barsoum on the name issue. When Samuel established his Archdiocese, it was a "Syrian Orthodox" one. Soon, he would establish new "Syrian Orthodox" parishes: Hackensack, NJ 1958, Los Angeles 1963, Chicago 1966, and Detroit 1968. These now outnumbered the three existing "Assyrian Apostolic" parishes. The parish in Rhode Island soon changed its name to "Syrian Orthodox." But West New York and Worcester MA persisted on their "Assyrian Apostolic" title. The West New York parish would become "Assyrian Orthodox" when it moved to Paramus, NJ in 1968, maybe as a compromise. Samuel remained as the *de facto* Archbishop of North America, though Patriarch Barsoum never recognized him as such until the Patriarch's death in 1957.

The nomenclature struggle gave rise to a publication. Barsoum penned in Arabic a treatise on the Syriac name titled في اسم الأمة السريانية "On the name of the Suryani nation" in 1952. Samuel had it translated into English under the title *The Syrian Church of Antioch, Its Name and History*. This publication would become a go-to resource in Europe when the name became an issue there in the 1970s and 1980s.

Barsoum was succeeded by Jacob III. It took three rounds of voting to elect Jacob III. It is said that Samuel gave his vote on the condition of Jacob recognizing North America as an Archdiocese with Samuel on the helm. In 1960, Jacob III visited the United States and solidified Samuel's position.

A byproduct of the visit was the recording of the Beth Gazo melodies. Jacob III was a master of sacred music. Just before returning to the Middle East, Samuel asked him to record the melodies on reel tapes. While the recording was never published at the time, later reproductions ensured the preservation of the received liturgical heritage and paved the way for others to start recording other musical

9 Athanasius Yeshu Samuel, *Treasure of Qumran: My Story of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 169.

traditions. All of these have recently been incorporated into a mobile app called Beth Gazo Portal, available on the Android and iOS operating systems.

Only one religious book had appeared prior to Samuel's arrival. The West New York parish published a 1929-version of the *Catechism of Christian Doctrine*. It was translated from a Syriac text "prepared and approved by the Holy Synod Patriarchal [sic]" by Fr. "Kuruakos of India." It seems that the "Holy Synod" referred to is the one planned for in 1927, to be held at St. Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem. The Syriac text must have already been prepared by then. That synod did not take place until 1930 at Deir Mar Matta near Mosul. The portrait of Patriarch Elias III appears in the frontispiece as well as the portrait of Archbishop Barsoum, either because he consecrated the church in 1927 or because he played a role in composing the Arabic behind the catechism.

During Samuel's early years, two publications appeared with Samuel's consent. In 1951, the West New York church published an English translation of Barsoum's book on prayer titled *The Golden Key to Divine Worship with Commentary on the Ritual of the Syriac Church*; the translation was made by James A. Kinnear. The Eucharistic liturgy was published in English by Fr. A. Carim Karma of Sherbrooke in 1954, titled *The Order of the Holy Eucharist of the Syrian Church of Antioch (Syriac Rite)*. The Syriac word ܣܘܪܝܝܐ /*suryoyo*/ appeared twice in the title, "Syrian" to name the church and "Syriac" to name the language. This publication further solidified the new nomenclature realities. A prayer book containing the liturgy, hymns, and morning prayers was published by Fr. Peter Barsoum of Worcester under the title *Assyrian Apostolic Church Prayer, Hymn, and Liturgical Service Book* (1957). Here, too, we see the nomenclature wars play on book titles. When Fr. Peter Barsoum's book was reprinted later, the initial "AS" of "ASSYRIAN" (which was already in all caps on the title page) was removed; one can still see the title off-centred.

Samuel now turned his attention to preparing liturgical books for his increasing parishes, drawing on his previous experience as director of St. Mark's Press during the 1930s and 1940s. His first major publication was the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, or Anaphora of St. James, in English translation. Mor Athanasius recognised that the English translation needed to be checked by native speakers who were academic and familiar with liturgical literature. He first approached Cyril Richardson, Dean of Students at Union Theological Seminary. Richardson did not have time for the task and suggested the Professor of Liturgy Boon Poster, who accepted the task. The book was published in 1954 with the long title *Anaphora: The Divine Liturgy of Saint James the First Bishop of Jerusalem according to the rite*

of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch translated from the original Syriac. Notice "Syrian" and "Syriac"!

During the subsequent years, Mor Athanasius would recruit *Malphono* ("teacher") Murad Saliba Barsoum to translate many service books: baptisms, weddings, and funerals (all published in 1974). Now, for the very first time, the texts appear in a bilingual manner with Syriac on the right page and English on the left. The books were typeset and printed in Lebanon using Syriac type.

Other liturgical books edited by Samuel and translated by Murad Barsoum followed. The Major Feasts book known as *Mʿadʿdono* was published in 1984. But now, print type was hard to obtain and people began to publish books written by scribes and reproduced with offset printing. The Syriac text of the *Mʿadʿdono* was written by the hand of Mar Julius Yeshu Çiçek, Archbishop of Central Europe, a skilled scribe who published dozens of books this way in Europe.[10]

A larger bilingual *Anaphoras* containing thirteen liturgies was published in 1992. This time, the Syriac text was typeset in 1988 or 1989 by the author of the current contribution, who was then a young engineering student who had just devised Syriac fonts for the computer. Samuel had a good eye for typesetting from his St. Mark's press days. My early fonts had no kerning; the final-*nūn* letter was too far from the previous letter as in ܚܨ݂ܢ. Samuel insisted that the letter kerns (i.e. goes under the previous letter) as in ܚܨ݂ܢ. But the software had no way of kerning at the time. I implemented an additional final-*nūn* letter that operated like a diacritic and placed it on the left of the previous letter to achieve the desired visual result.

Samuel also produced a shorter daily prayer for the faithful (1993), and a book for the burial of clergy (published posthumously, 2003). Samuel's editions of liturgical books would become the foundation for future editions by the archbishops who succeeded him.

It is worth noting that none of Samuel's editions included Arabic, which, by the 1970s, was the primary language of most immigrants. After the passing away of Mor Athanasius, North America was divided into three archdioceses: Eastern US, Western US, and Canada. Each Archdiocese began to publish its own liturgical books. With the disappearance of the "old timers," the third and fourth-generation Americans, and their replacement with new immigrants, Arabic became an important language across all North American dioceses, and liturgical books became trilingual.

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10 On his contribution, see the contributions by Josef Önder and Heleen Murre-van den Berg in this volume.

The two US archdioceses – Eastern and Western United States – collaborated on putting together a series of Sunday school curriculum books, put together primarily by Sara Hadodo under a committee set up for this purpose. Hadodo was the daughter of a priest and an active Sunday school teacher. The archdiocese of the Eastern United States also established Beth Antioch Press under whose imprint a few translations of Arabic books by Matti Mousa appeared. Most of these were co-published with Gorgias Press, https://www.gorgiaspress.com/.
These publications include:

1 History of the Syriac Dioceses
2 The Collected Historical Essays of Aphram I Barsoum
3 History of the Za'faraan Monastery
4 Commentary on the Liturgy of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch
5 History of the Syrian Church Of India
6 Concise Teachings Of Christianity For Orthodox Families And Schools

In addition, an English translation of S. de Courtois' *The Forgotten Genocide: Eastern Christians, the Last Arameans* was commissioned by the Eastern Archdiocese and published by Gorgias Press in 2004.

Bottom-up again: #ܥܕܬܐ_ܣܘܪܝܝܬ and social media

The post-archdiocesan period saw no Gabriel Boyajy and no Naum Faiq. Sadly, the multitude of organisations that were active in the first half of the century all but disappeared, partly due to the American melting pot taking its course, and partly because there was now an ecclesiastical leadership in place that took the initiative to publishing. While I was able to write a micro-history of the diaspora for the first half of the century using their publications, my account of the second half is a macro-history. I no longer had the voice of the people.

Having said that, publications by church entities and at least one association are known. In 1961, the first archdiocese convention was held in West New York. Ever since, conventions have been held every year, each time at a different parish. At some point in the 1970s, conventions began to publish souvenir books. They usually included messages from the archbishop, the local priest, and representatives of local parish organizations. Sometimes there was a message from the President of the United States, or of a local Governor or Senator. A few had brief accounts of the history of the church in North America or of the local parish. Of note is J. Meno's "A Brief History of the Annual Archdiocesan Conventions" in the souvenir book of the 47th convention held in Teaneck, NJ, 2010. But the vast majority of the pages were messages and advertisements. These provide demo-

graphic data. Who lived where and when. And what sort of businesses people ran. My collection has several such souvenir books, listed in the Appendix. Similarly, an important non-convention souvenir book is the *55th Anniversary of the Ladies Aid Societies' Dinner* (1965). It outlines essential facts about the history of the West New York Parish (later moved to Paramus).

Two periodicals were published in the 1970s and 1980s, both short-lived. The Aramaic American Association, established in 1974, published *Aramaic Times* between 1975 and 1983. Fr. Abdulahad Shara of Detroit published *Voice of the Parish* between 1978 and 1988.[11] Some parishes published leaflets in the form of a periodical, but these were all short-lived as well. Leaflets that come to mind are *Shlomo* by the Worcester parish and *Meltho* by St. Mark, NJ. A list of issues found in my personal collection (deposited at the Beth Mardutho Research Library) can be found in the appendix, compiled by Jana Safely.

A few individuals produced books. J. Tarzi put together cooking recipes of the Edessa tradition in his *The Syrian Urhoyan Cuisine: The Art of Edessan Cookery* (1997). A few historical accounts were published: N. Donabed and S. Donabed wrote on early Kharput immigrants in their *The Assyrians of Eastern Massachusetts* (2006); S. Donabed wrote on the same subject in *Remnants of Heroes* (2003); and Edip Aydin (now Mor Polycarpus) wrote an M.A. thesis on the American experience at St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary.[12]

Eli Shabo, first as a deacon then as a priest, edited many liturgical booklets. He was an advocate for having the people recite the people's parts in the Eucharistic liturgy which in the past few hundred years – at least – had been taken over by the deacons. He instituted this in many of the parishes that he served. This was picked up at the archdiocesan level in some parishes and when the archbishop Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim became Patriarch as Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, he began to reinstitute this at the Patriarchal level. Eli Shabo also reworked Qarabashi's Syriac textbooks with English annotations during the 1990s and early 2000s.

No directory of Syriac Christians in the US has been published since the 1913 directory produced by the Boston Youngmen's Association. Mor Cyril's Eastern Archdiocese published a population directory in the late 1990s. The Western

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11 Shara, personal communication, 9/25/22:
اصدرت مجلة (صوت الرعية) لمدة تسع سنواتٍ متتالية وبلغاتٍ ثلاثة السريانية والعربية والانكليزية. وكانت سنتها عشرة اشهر.من ٨٧٩١ الى اواسط ٨٨٩١

12 Edip Aydin, *The History of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch in North America: Challenges and Opportunities* (MA Thesis, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 2000).

Archdiocese published another for the clergy of the Syriac church worldwide in 1999–2000.[13]

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With the rise of social media, information exchange moved from print culture to the digital world. Thomas Joseph of CA was the first to produce a Syriac Orthodox website in North America. It was dedicated to St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church (Malankara tradition). He later established Syrian Orthodox Resources [now syriacorthodoxresources.org] in collaboration with the present writer. The late Fr. Kamil Ishac of Canada published the web site syrianorthodoxchurch.com prior to 1996 and in 1997, Mor Cyril published syrianorthodoxchurch.org as a diocesan site with the help of John Samuel. These were the days of the read-only web.

The need for print production grew smaller and smaller with the rise of the read-write-publish era. The number of websites and portals increased. The Eastern Archdiocese even attempted a dating website for its youth.

At the Oregon convention in 1998 (or 1999), I spoke about the possibility of using computer technology in church services. One suggestion was the use of screen monitors to cater for the multilingual nature of Syriac parishes (speakers of Arabic, Turkish, and English) and those who can or cannot read Syriac. Within a few years, parishes began to use such screens showing the Syriac text with transliteration into the Latin or Arabic script – which was called Garshuni! Translations into Arabic and English were also provided.

And the move to the electronic format went beyond screens for the parishioners. In former times, many priests would produce their own Anaphora manuscripts and other liturgical texts. With the electronic availability of these texts, we now have PDF "editions" of such liturgical texts. Today, one hardly uses printed matter on the altar in a good number of US parishes. The Anaphora is on an iPad. So are many of the other texts.

With the Coronavirus in 2020 and the closure of churches, it was not that difficult to stream the texts online. They already existed in electronic form. Entire liturgies were streamed online, not only in the US but worldwide. In the US, liturgies began Saturday afternoon, streamed from Australia, and continued until Sunday afternoon when California parishes were done. When a man saw his mother

13 [Clemis Awgin Kaplan, ed.] ܫܡܗܐ ܕܩܫܝܫܐ ܕܡܪܥܝܬܐ ܕܐܬܪܘܬܐ ܡܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܐܡܪܝܟܐ / Directory of the Archdiocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch for the Eastern United States (1999–2000).

almost binge watching one Eucharistic service after the other, he told her that he would be coming for the *tapseh*[14] – the collection – every hour!

In addition, the Patriarchal youth department created the hash tag "Your home is a church", #ܒܝܬܟ_ܥܕܬܐ (#baytokh_ʿīdto), to encourage the faithful to pray at home.

In conclusion

The trajectory of North American publications went through three main periods, each characterized by its own genre and actors. The early publications were dominated by ideas of nationalism and modernity. There were a few actors, most prominently among them Naum Faiq. The publications were unidirectional, though when letters to the editor were published, one can argue that there was limited bidirectionality. It is difficult to estimate the size of the readership, and how many people actually knew the Syriac alphabet to read these garshuno-graphic writings.

The middle period was dominated by liturgical publications officially published by an archdiocese with an archbishop at its helm. These, too, were unidirectional publications, but their readerships are now limited to the clergy and to a lesser extent the faithful in the case of Sunday liturgy books. The dominant actors here were Mor Athanasius as main editor and Archdeacon Mourad Saliba Barsoum as translator.

The final phase was open to all, with social media dominating the scene. And "publications" became snippets, sometimes in text form, others in video form. These were peer-to-peer, not top-down or author-reader oriented. Each phase represented its world. Oceans separated the worlds of *Intibah* and *#baytokh_ʿīdto*.

14 Turkish for "plate," like a kitchen serving plate.

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Yoosuf, Abraham K. *Assyria and the Paris Peace Conference*. Edited by Tomas Beth-Avdalla. Nineveh Press, 2017.

Appendix

Convention Books

30th Annual Convention of the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese, St. Mark's Cathedral, Hackensack, 1991.

37th Annual Archdiocesan Convention, St. Peter's Syrian Orthodox Church, Long Island, NY, [2000]. [2 copies]

39th Annual Convention of the Syrian Orthodox Church of the United States and Canada, St. Matthew, Boston, MA, 2001.

47th Annual Archdiocesan Convention, St. Mark's Cathedral, Teaneck, NJ, 2010. [4 copies]

48th Annual Convention of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Archdiocese of the Eastern United States, [2011]. [3 copies]

49th Annual Convention of the Syriac Orthodox Church, St. Aphraim Syriac Orthodox Church, Washington, D.C., 2012.

51st Annual Syriac Orthodox Archdiocesan Convention, [St. Mary's Syriac Orthodox Church, Shrewsbury [formerly Worcester], MA], 2015.

55th Annual Archdiocesan Convention, Archdiocese of the Eastern United States, [2019].

Souvenir Books

The Assyrian National School Association of America, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Assyrian School and Orphanage at Beyrouth, Lebanon [T.M.S.], Union City, NJ, 1948.

Assyrian National School Association Golden Jubilee [T.M.S.], 1949. [2 copies]

Silver Anniversary of the St. Ephraim's Young Ladies Society Dinner Dance, [Central Falls, R.I.], 1958.

Dedication of Saint Ephraim's Rectory, [Central Falls, R.I.], 1966.

St. Ephraim's Church, "Burning of the Mortgage Celebration" [Central Falls, R.I.], 1967.

Assyrian Apostolic[15] Church of the Virgin Mary [on the occasion of moving from West New York to Paramus], Paramus, NJ, 1968. [2 copies]

Jubilee Banquet Celebrating the Twenty-Fifth Year of Episcopal Consecration of H.E. Archbishop Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel [1973].

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, St. Ephrem Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, Serbrooke, Canada, 1977.

His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka 1 … on the occasion of H.H.'s Visit to Los Angeles, 1981.

Golden Jubilee of Priestly Ordination of H.E. Archbishop Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, Hackensack, NJ, [1983]. [2 copies]

St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral 25th Anniversary ([1984]).

[Graduation of Students of Mor Aphraim School of the Aramaic American Association, 1991].

Mor Ephraim Syriac School, Aramaic American Association, Graduation Program, 1992.

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Banquet in Honor of Very Rev. John Koury, Paramus, 1992.

[25th Anniversary of the] Assyrian Orthodox Church of Virgin Mary, Paramus, 1993.

85th Anniversary of the Assyrian Ladies Aid Society, Paramus, 1994.

St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral Consecration Day, Teaneck, NJ (1996).

Silver Anniversary of Priestly Ordination [of] Very Rev. Chorepiscopus John Peter Meno, Teaneck, NJ, 1997.

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15 Note that the name has not changed from "Apostolic" to "Orthodox" yet.

The Assyrian Orphanage and School Association [T.M.S., formerly Assyrian National School Association] Diamond Jubilee, 1999.
Consecration Day [of] St. Aphraim Syriac Orthodox Church of Washington, D.C., 2007.
St. Mark's Cathedral 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee ([2008]). [4 copies]
Assyrian Orthodox Church of Virgin Mary Centennial Journal, 2009.
Grand Opening of the Mor Aphrem Center, Paramus, 2015.
St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral Consecration Day, Paramus, NJ (2019).

Short-Lived Periodicals

A list of issues of US Syriac Orthodox periodicals from the George A. Kiraz collection, preserved at the Beth Mardutho Research Library. The list was compiled by Jana Safley.

ID	Title	Place	Years	Avg. trim	Avg. pp.	No. of issues
18	Aramaic Times (Aramaic American Association)	New Jersey	1982-1983	21 x 27	30	5
21	Sabro Tobo	California	2005-2010	21½ x 28	75	7
32	Voice of the Parish (ed. Abdulahad Shara)	Michigan	?? (7th & 8th year)	21 x 28 & 19 x 25	40	9
33	Mhadyono (ed. J. Tarzi)	California	1992-1997	21 x 27½	35	12
43	The Western US Archdiocesan	California	1998-1999	21 x 27½	16	6
46	Meltho/The Word: St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Cathedral Parish News	New Jersey	1998-2007	14 x 22	30	30
48	Sabro	California	1999-2001	17½ x 24	90	19
49	Mnorto	California	1992-1993	21½ x 28	8	6
50	Youth News	New Jersey	1998-1999	21½ x 28	12	4
51	Soayo Speaks (Archdiocesan youth organization)	New Jersey	1997-1998	21½ x 28	12	3
53	Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese	New Jersey	2005	21½ x 27½	150	1
54	Hubo	Las Vegas	1996-1997	21½ x 28	35	2
55	Tebeh	New Jersey	2001-2002	21½ x 28	4	3
57	Mor Barsawmo Syrian Orthodox Church	New Jersey	?	21½ x 28	4	1
59	Voice of the Archdiocese	New Jersey	1997-2001	8½" x 11" & 17½ x 21½	15	20
61	Voice of Saint Gabriel	New Jersey	1996	21½ x 28	20	1
63	Mor Barsawmo Newsletter	New Jersey	2003	21½ x 28	4	1

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From Apostolic Mandate to Print Magazine: *Al-Kiraza* and the Networked History of the Coptic Church

JOHANNES A.P. MAKAR

In early February 2023, two Congolese military officers gathered before a wax figure of the late Coptic Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971–2012), their right hands raised in salute. Flanked by Bishop Ermia, they represented the Congolese Defense Ministry at the Coptic Cultural Center in Cairo. Their tribute symbolised Pope Shenouda's enduring influence in the Coptic Church and his role in expanding its presence globally.[1] By some counts, the Patriarch established 550 churches in 60 countries and undertook 102 pastoral visits to 38.[2] Once largely centred in Egypt, the Church is now represented in locales as diverse as Bogotá, Cleveland, Seoul, and St. Kitts.

This little-noted transnational picture contrasts with prevailing historiographies that frame the Coptic Church as a distinctly Egyptian institution. Western scholarship frequently portrays the Church as operating within a self-contained communal sphere, itself delimited by the political boundaries of the Egyptian

1 Acknowledgements: I thank the participants of the "Rewriting Global Orthodoxy" conference (Radboud University, September 2022) and its convenor Heleen Murre-van den Berg for their feedback on an early version of this paper. During this period, the Institute of Eastern Christian Studies (IvOC) at Radboud University hosted me as a Research Fellow. My research was also made possible through the online collections of coptic-treasures.com. Later, I benefited from the comprehensive collections at copticorthodox.church. All Arabic words and names are transliterated, except for well-known figures and organisations. To improve readability, full transliterations are provided in the footnotes only. Jirjis Māykal, "Wafd Wizārat al-Difāʿ al-Kūnghūlī yuʾaddī al-taḥīya al-ʿaskarīya li-mujassam Muthallat al-Raḥmāt al-Bābā Shanūda," *Wataninet.com*, February 8, 2023, https://www.wataninet.com/ 2023/02/وفد-وزارة-الدفاع-الكونغولي-يؤدي-التحي/. In this article, I use "Coptic Church" as a shorthand for the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is the primary focus of this study. Unless otherwise noted, the Coptic Catholic and Coptic Evangelical Churches are not considered.

2 This data is taken from an infographic that the St. Athanasius and St. Cyril's Theological School (ACTS) shared on its Facebook page in March 2023. See https://www.facebook.com/actslibrary. For other helpful data, see the articles "'ishrūn kanīsa fī Amrīka ta'assasat mundhu 1958" and "al-bilād allatī zārahā Qadāsat al-Bābā wa-murāfiqūhu" in *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 39–40 (24 November 1989): 4–5. For a modern representation of Pope Shenouda's legacy, along with a map of Coptic churches worldwide, see "Pope Shenouda III," St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Cleveland, *stmarkcoccleveland.org*. https://stmarkcoccleveland.org/pope-shenouda-iii/.

nation-state.[3] Meanwhile, Arabic-language historiography has tended to emphasise the Church's contributions to national life in ways that validate its patriotic commitments or affirm the harmony of Muslim-Christian relations.[4] Even in Late Antique and Medieval studies, terms like "the Egyptian Church" or "the Church *of* Egypt" – while capturing the Church's geographical and cultural ties to Egypt – risk casting it as a national church in ways that fail to account for its claims to catholicity and transregional authority.[5]

The dominant approach to the Coptic Church reflects a broader tendency to portray the Coptic community as insular and internally undifferentiated. In doing so, scholars often replicate a common shortcoming of state bureaucracies: the use of broad, static categories to describe what are, in reality, slippery social formations. Previously, scholars such as historian Paul Sedra and anthropologist Mina Ibrahim have critiqued this homogenizing impulse, yet much of the scholarship continues to constrain Coptic life within narrow analytical frameworks.[6] This is evident in the reliance on dyadic models, such as those of Coptic–Muslim, Church–state, and Church–missionary relations, that obscure the more contingent, multidirectional forms of exchange that have shaped Coptic life.[7] In some cases, these binary approaches have rendered Coptic history as the downstream effect of larger forces. Missionaries, for example, have been credited with "seed[ing]" a modern "Coptic cultural or ethnoreligious consciousness."[8] Similarly, Coptic interfaces with the Egyptian state are frequently framed in mono-

3 See e.g. S. S. Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Vivian Ibrahim, The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), as well as other works mentioned in this introduction.

4 See e.g. Ṭāriq al-Bishrī, *al-Muslimūn wa-l-Aqbāṭ fī iṭār al-jamāʿa al-waṭanīya* (Beirut: Dār al-Wiḥda, 1982) and Anṭūniyūs al-Anṭūnī, *Waṭanīyat al-Kanīsa al-Qibṭīya wa-tārīkhihā*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1995).

5 For a more extreme (if now unpopular) position, see W. H. C. Frend, "Nationalism as a Factor in Anti-Chalcedonian Feeling in Egypt," *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982): 21–38.

6 Paul Sedra "Class Cleavages and Ethnic Conflict: Coptic Christian Communities in Modern Egyptian Politics." *Islam & Christian Muslim Relations* 10, no. 2 (1999): 219–35; Mina Ibrahim, *Identity, Marginalisation, Activism, and Victimhood in Egypt: Misfits in the Coptic Christian Community* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

7 For Coptic–Muslim relations, see al-Bishrī, *al-Muslimūn wa-l-Aqbāṭ*; Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt*; Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*. For Church–missionary relations, see e.g. Heather J. Sharkey *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers and Education in Nineteenth Century Egypt* (London; New York, NY: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011); Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, *Voyage en Haute-Egypte. Prêtres, coptes et catholiques* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2019). For Church-state relations, see Sebastian Elsässer, *The Coptic Question in the Mubarak Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mariz Tadros, *Copts at the Crossroads: the Challenges of Building Inclusive Democracy in Contemporary Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2013).

8 Sharkey, *American Evangelicals*, 46, summarising Sedra's views in *Mission to Modernity.*

lithic terms as an "entente," a "partnership," or, conversely, as a "state within a state" in ways that flatten the varied configurations of political alignment and friction that take place on different levels across Church and state institutions.[9]

Today, the increasingly indisputable global character of the Coptic Church not only challenges assumptions about the Church's insular identity but also raises important methodological questions. What might a history of the Coptic Church look like if written with attention to its cross-border relations? And to what extent is the Church's reach beyond Egypt a distinctly modern phenomenon? This article draws on recent trends in global history to explore the diffuse and dialectical exchanges through which the Coptic Church has operated as a locally rooted institution with a universal Christian mission.[10] It argues that the Church has long been animated by a deeper mission captured by the concept of *al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya* (literally, "the Preaching of St. Mark"). Derived from the Greek *kerygma* (proclamation, preaching), the term conveys a historical vision rooted in the legacy of St. Mark the Evangelist, whom the Church remembers as its first founder and patriarch. More broadly, it evokes an ecclesial jurisdiction stretching from Alexandria into Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia. The canonical *History of the Patriarchs* – a medieval compilation of the biographies of the Coptic patriarchs, originally known as *Siyar al-Bi'a al-Muqaddasa* (Biographies of the Holy Church) – offers an important frame. Its introduction notes:

> These patriarchs were the successors (*khulafa'*) of the father and missionary, Saint Mark the Evangelist, who preached the holy gospels and the good news of the Lord Christ in the great city of Alexandria, and in the clime of Egypt (*iqlim Misr*), and in the regions of Abyssinia and Nubia, and in

9 See e.g. Mariz Tadros, "Vicissitudes in the Entente between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the State In Egypt (1952–2007)," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 2 (2009): 269–287; Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims;* Paul Sedra, *Copts and the Millet Partnership: The Intra-Communal Dynamics behind Egyptian Sectarianism*, T*he Journal of Law and Religion* 29, no. 3 (2014), 491–509.

10 Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016). See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). In the study of Eastern Christianity, see especially John-Paul A. Ghobrial, "Connected Histories and Eastern Christianities," *Pathways through Early Modern Christianities*, ed. Andrea Badea (Köln: Böhlau, 2023): 85–210; Bernard Heyberger, Middle Eastern and European Christianity, 16th–20th Century Connected History, Tr. M. Robitaille-Ibbett, Ed. Aurélien Girard, Cesare Santus, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023). In Coptic history, see especially Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439-1822: the European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

> Pentapolis in the West which is also called Ifriqiya ["Africa"], and in the neighboring territories.[11]

The concept of *al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya*, which Hans Wehr Dictionary elegantly translates as "the Missionary Province of St. Mark," has received little to no attention in scholarship, even as scholars have begun to reconsider the geography of the "Alexandrian Church."[12] The concept is not only essential for understanding how the Coptic Church has imagined its authority within a wider Christian ecumene, but, I argue, it also offers a productive lens through which to reconsider the spatial and political imaginaries of Coptic Christianity as shaped by long-standing entanglements along the Red Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan Africa.[13]

I focus on *al-Kiraza* ("The Preaching"), the official periodical of the Coptic Orthodox Church (1965–today), which in the twentieth century energised this ecclesiological idea. Founded in 1965 by Shenouda (then Education Bishop) as the flagship journal of the Coptic Clerical College, it became the Coptic Church's official mouthpiece in 1972 after Shenouda's election as patriarch. This study focuses on the period from 1965 to 1989, during which the magazine was suspended three times: first in 1967, after tensions with then-Patriarch Kirollos VI (r. 1959–1971), and again in 1972 and 1981 amidst a rift between Pope Shenouda and President Anwar al-Sadat (r. 1970–1981).[14] The magazine's turbulent publication history is but one indicator of its significance for modern Coptic history. In the 2000s, the historian S.S. Hasan observed that Pope Shenouda would spend hours reviewing issues line by line with his editorial staff.[15] Hasan, a rare commentator

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11 B.T.A. Evetts, ed., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria: I: Saint Mark to Theonas (300)*, Patrologia Orientalis, Tome I (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), 7. I have mildly amended Evetts' translation.

12 The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. JM Cowan, 4th ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994) 960. Joshua T. Georgy, "Fragmented Geographies: The See of Alexandria, Its Following, and the Estrangements of Modernity" (PhD. Diss, Columbia University, 2015).

13 For the nineteenth century context, see Johannes Makar, "That Knowledge May Flow: Coptic Intellectuals and the Making of Public Knowledge in Late Ottoman Egypt, ca. 1850–1900" (PhD Diss, Harvard University, 2025).

14 From the 1990s onward, its prominence gradually declined with the rise of the World Wide Web and satellite television, both of which significantly diversified Coptic media discourses. See in this regard the forthcoming work by Febe Armanios, *Satellite Ministries, The Rise of Christian Television in the Middle East* (Oxford/New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2025).

15 Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*,128. Hasan points in particular to two columns: *Afkār Ra'awiya* ("Pastoral Reflections") and *Ṣafḥāt al-Ābā' al-Kahna* ("The Fathers' Column), which, she argues, served as mechanisms of clerical discipline, describing the columns as a guide for future conduct and a warning to priests not to repeat the errors of their predecessors. However, *al-Kiraza* had been under Shenouda's supervision since its inception, and it would seem incomplete to characterise the magazine based on only two columns. Moreover, as far as I've been able to corroborate, both columns addressed a broader range of issues, framed more in the spirit of pastoral counsel

on *al-Kiraza*, links Shenouda's editorial investment to his desire for ecclesial control and centralization.[16] This was partly true. *Al-Kiraza* adopted a pastoral voice directed inwardly toward the faithful, often leaving little room for dissent. Yet this editorial stance did not preclude outward engagement; on the contrary, the magazine simultaneously functioned as a platform through which the Church forged national and transnational relations, whether through its commentary on state policy, its outreach to other Christian communities, or its positioning within ecumenical networks.[17]

Periodicals and the beginnings of *al-Kiraza*

In 1911, the Coptic historian Ramzi Tadrus likened periodicals to "a mirror of a nation's morals and customs."[18] Tadrus, witnessing the rapid spread of print media, noted how periodicals shape the moral state of nations and, by extension, their prospects for progress or decline. In recent decades, scholars have probed further into the intersection of print media and nationalism. Famously, Benedict Anderson noted that the shared consumption of newspapers enabled otherwise

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than institutional surveillance. Hasan quotes the 1989 issues of Apr. 21 (17, no. 16), June 16 (17, no. 24), and Nov. 25 (probably, Nov. 24, 17 no. 39–40) of 1989. The author of *Afkār Ra'awiya* in 17, no. 16, p. 16, calls on priests to be strictly neutral and impartial when mediating martial conflicts. Bishop Anbā Binyāmīn advocates in *Afkār Ra'awiya* 17, no. 39–40 (24 Nov. 1989): 18, for the use of computers in facilitating the pastoral tasks of the church. The author of *Ṣafḥāt al-Ābā' al-Kahna* in 17, no 24 (16 June 1989), 6–7, summarises Pope Shenouda's view on the election of new priests, stating that the process should involve the participation of the local parish devoid of pressure from either priests or lay individuals towards any candidate. However, it also emphasises the clergy's ultimate right to reject a candidate. None of the other articles I reviewed confirm the scandalising tone which Hasan underscores. *Al-Kirāza* 13, no. 7 (9 Aug. 1985) speaks of the importance of the church looking after those with disabilities; 13, no. 12 (13 September 1985) argues that a priest should care for his flock not superficially but with his heart. 13, no. 20 (8 Nov. 1985) reprimands parishioners who speak during church prayers. 13, no. 21 (15 Nov. 1985) speaks of how the priest (*al-rā'ī*) should exert efforts toward the people, not the other way around. In later years the column was published less frequently. By contrast, an earlier column, "Odd are They" called out undesirable spiritual practices. For example, *al-Kirāza* 12, no. 30 (24 July 1981) censured priests who curse others. *Al-Kirāza* 11, no. 13 (28 Mar. 1985) questioned those who follow a path even if it leads to an impasse. *Ṣafḥāt al-Ābā' al-Kahna* offered more extensive discussions. 12, no. 36 (4 Sep. 1981) stressed the spiritual nature of the liturgy, calling out priests who perform liturgical prayers routinely without care for its sacred (*rūḥanī*) character.

16 Ibid.

17 It is not clear when (and where exactly) *al-Kirāza* began to be distributed overseas. However, its earliest issues indicate an intention to reach readers abroad, listing two separate prices: one for readers in Egypt (40 milliemes, later raised to 50), and another for international readers (50, then 100 milliemes). Compare the price listings in *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 2 (February 1966) and 1, no. 3 (March 1966); the international prices were omitted in subsequent years. Beyond official distribution networks, the magazine also circulated informally by means of Coptic travellers and migrants.

18 Ramzī Tādrus, *al-Aqbāṭ fī-l-qarn al-'ishrīn,* vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ra'amsīs, 1911), 140.

anonymous readers to "imagine" themselves as members of a shared nation.[19] In Anderson's view, the modern nation displaced earlier forms of communal belonging rooted in the "divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm."[20] The case of *al-Kiraza* suggests that, in some contexts, older metaphysical and communal imaginaries persisted – and were even revitalised – through the very print technologies that he associates with the rise of nationalism.[21]

Unlike the nation-state, with its apparatuses of territorial display (ranging from maps to passports) the Coptic Church's kerygmatic imagination was rooted in the logic of apostolic succession and martyrology. Periodicals, and the press more broadly, would play a key role in connecting readers horizontally as a communitas of co-religionists whilst embedding them vertically in an ecclesiastical hierarchy that traced its lineage back to the apostles. Early efforts to establish a Coptic religious press included Yusuf Manqariyus's *al-Haqq* (est. 1894) and Habib Girgis's *al-Karma* (est. 1904). Manqariyus and Girgis, the first and second deans of the Coptic Clerical Seminary, respectively, found in the press a pedagogical instrument with which to cultivate a modern Orthodox readership. Thus, *al-Haqq* ("The Truth") declared, its goal was the promotion "the principles of faith" among the "Orthodox Copts in the Nile Valley."[22] In *al-Karma* ("The Vine"), Girgis expanded the institutional function of the press, making his journal the first official mouthpiece (*lisan hal al-Kanisa*) of the Coptic Church.[23]

This investment in the periodical press as a tool of religious instruction found renewed expression the mid-twentieth century through *al-Kiraza*. Building on the didactic foundations of earlier periodicals, it narrated Coptic ambitions for global belonging and evangelism. Its very title, *al-Kiraza*, invoked the Church's age-old apostolic mandate, amplified by the words from Mark 16:15 that featured on its cover page alongside global imagery, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach (*ikrizu*) the gospel to every creature" (KJV). *al-Kiraza* grounded this editorial vision through frequent reports on the Church's international dealings with refer-

19 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

20 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

21 See also the case of the Assyrian magazine *Light from the East* in Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Light from the East (1948–1954) and the De-territorialisation of the Assyrian Church in the East" *Religion Beyond Its Private Role in Modern Society*, ed. by Wim Hofstee and Arie Van der Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 115–134. The author argued that the journal allowed its Church leadership to redefine its ecclesiology by taking "[its new] transnational context into account [...] focusing on the malleable links between Christian history, church and language."

22 *al-Ḥaqq* 1, no. 1 (28 April 1894): 1.

23 For more about *al-Karma*, see Rāmī ʿAṭā Ṣiddīq, *Ṣafḥāt al-Aqbat wa-Qaḍāyā al-Mujtamaʿ al-Miṣrī* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2009), 302.

ences to patristic and hagiographic exemplars, like those of St. Athanasius, who, it reminded readers, helped disseminate Christian monasticism worldwide, or of saints like Verena, whose memory is tied to the Christianization of Europe.[24]

Habib Girgis' example proved especially enduring.[25] As the founder of the Coptic Sunday School Movement, he expanded religious education to broader segments of the laity. Among his students was Shenouda III (then Nazir Gayyid), who rose to prominence as a Sunday School teacher known for delivering rousing and accessible lessons to an increasingly urban audience.[26] The Sunday School also offered him formative editorial experience: in the 1950s, still as Nazir Gayyid, he served as Chief Editor of its flagship publication, *Majallat Madaris al-Ahad* (The Sunday School Magazine), which emphasised spiritual instruction and the preservation of Orthodox identity. In 1965, Shenouda carried forward this vision in *al-Kiraza*. Its inaugural issue noted:

> When we work, we do so for the sake of our Lord alone. We will place before us the lives of our Fathers the Saints, their sweet-scented biographies and sayings. We do not subscribe to innovative beliefs; [rather,] we shall proceed on the firm foundations which the Forefathers laid before us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We shall reject every person whose teachings contradict ours, and we will call on the people to reject them [too].[27]

More so than contemporary periodicals like *al-Haqq* or *al-Karma*, *al-Kiraza* exhibited a reformist bent. Its founding followed Shenouda's appointment three years earlier as the first Bishop of Christian Education and as Dean of the Coptic Clerical College. These positions afforded him new institutional authority, which he quickly mobilised toward political change. The magazine's first issue, for instance, featured an editorial calling for the reform of episcopal election laws, one of several interventions in ecclesiastical governance that would soon lead to open disagreement between Shenouda and the reigning patriarch, who ultimately suspended the magazine in 1967 (see Table 1).[28]

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24 This issue is dealt with eloquently in Ghada Botros, "Religious Identity as an Historical Narrative: Coptic Orthodox Immigrant Churches and the Representation of History," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19, no. 2 (2006): 174–201.

25 *al-Kirāza* celebrated his legacy in its first issue, featuring his profile on the back cover as the first instalment in a broader series on exemplary preachers (*kārizīn*). See *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 1 (January 1965): 54 (backcover).

26 Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 222.

27 *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 1 (January 1965): 2.

28 Ibid, 12–14. See *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 2 (Feb–Mar. 1965): 46–51. See also See also Rubīr al-Fāris, "Majallat al-Kirāza… Ṣawt al-Bābā wa-l-Kanīsa ṭiwāl 48 'āman," *al-Masry al-Youm,* Mar. 25, 2013,

During its early years (1965–1967), *al-Kiraza* retained many of the features of a traditional church review like *al-Karma*. Though it had begun to turn attention toward global ecumenical matters and evangelism, its primary function was scholarly, in alignment with its function at the Coptic Clerical College. Its early volumes appeared with plain layouts and little to no visual embellishment. Each monthly issue ran over 40 pages and featured religious essays and serialised commentary in accessible Arabic, primarily directed toward seminarians and fellow clergy.[29] Throughout this period, the magazine was printed at the press of Dar al-'Alam al-'Arabi, which also produced historical and religious works by Coptic and other Egyptian authors.[30]

In 1972, the magazine reemerged in a new form, transformed at the newly elected Pope Shenouda's direction into the official publication of the Coptic Church. Now printed on-site at the patriarchal headquarters in Cairo, the magazine adopted the style of a tabloid-style bulletin, filled with photographs and short, accessible entries designed to foster lay readership and participation.[31] In form and content, it stitched together the global and the local, the personal and the institutional. Two principal themes characterise this drive for cohesion and communal integration across scales. On the one hand, the magazine frequently reported on *ijtima'at* (gatherings), a term that described social events ranging from ecumenical meetings to local church get-togethers. While the latter positioned the church within the upper echelons of global Christianity, the latter, often written in an affective register, cultivated a sense of collective belonging within the community.[32] On the other hand, the church periodical channelled pastoral leadership by documenting clerical visits (*ziyara*, *iftiqad*), ranging from mission work and overseas patriarchal trip to Coptic priests' travels to remote Egyptian parishes.

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https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/298016 For more about the disagreements which involved the appoint of Anba Gregorius as Bishop of Higher Education, see Bītar Majdī, "Muwājihat al-Akādīmī wa-l-Bābā: Ḥalaqa jadīda min musalsal ṭāwīl," *al-Manassa*, Mar. 6, 2021, https://manassa.news/stories/4966. The tensions between Shenouda and other leading clergy are studied in detail by Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims.*

29 See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 2 (February 1966).

30 E.g., Sīdārūs 'Abd al-Masīḥ, *Maryam al-'Adhrā' fī-l-Tārīkh al-ṭuqūs wa-l-'aqīda* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-'Ālam al-'Arabī, 1974).

31 This was the Anba Ruways Press.

32 For instance, it spoke in the first-person plural, referring warmly to "our Church" (*kanīsatunā*) and "our Egypt" (*Miṣruna*). At times, it even addressed its readers personally. To cite one example, in May 1989, it publicly thanked (the Coptic scholar) Maged Ateya of Maryland, one of "our sons" (*ibnunā*), for sending a magazine covering the history of the church in Australia. See *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 21 (26 May 1989): 3. The magazine further fostered a sense of reciprocal communication through a reader letters column and a question-and-answer segment, as well content designed to include children such as riddles and school reports.

By translating clerical authority into an accessible, popular idiom, the magazine rendered itself legible, and at times, suspect. Typographically, it echoed conventions of *Nahda*-era Arabic print culture, with serialised essays, calligraphic headers, and multi-column layouts.[33] Its visual iconography drew inspiration from mid-century Protestant magazines, overlaid with Arabic calligraphy and Coptic-styled pictograms adapted to fit the aesthetics of Coptic life. Its content, in turn, adopted the journalistic conventions of Coptic newspapers like *Watani* ("My Homeland") and the national daily *al-Ahram* ("The Pyramids"). The very idea that the Church required an official mouthpiece – capable of reporting Holy Synod decisions and shaping its public profile – mirrored the logic of the Egyptian state gazettes.

Religious outreach in an anti-colonial age

Al-Kiraza emerged with the aim of serving as the Church's "voice to the world,"[34] and projected the Coptic Church's growing global presence and ambitions for international leadership. The timing of its establishment was auspicious. It was founded at the time of the 1965 Addis Ababa conference, which brought together the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Indian, and Syriac Orthodox Churches in a landmark show of pan-Oriental unity.[35] Other ecumenical initiatives were also underway, including the World Council of Churches (est. 1948) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (est. 1958). Meanwhile, Pope Shenouda periodically dialogued with Eastern Orthodox leaders and the Vatican.[36]

The push for Christian unity resonated with broader geopolitical currents. *Al-Kiraza* offered a Coptic vision of Third Worldism, framing the Church's international outreach as part of a broader struggle against colonialism and foreign domination. The magazine articulated biblical critiques of Israel and later con-

33 This illustrated format echoed earlier Coptic magazines like Mār Jirjis (est. 1949) but also resembled literary magazines as seemingly unrelated as the Lebanese cultural periodical *al-Barā'im* (based on its 1963 issues). For more about the mobility of visual culture in printing, see Hala Auji, *Printing Arab Modernity: Book Culture and the American Press in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

34 Sharīf al-Dawākhilī, *Majallat al-Kirāza: Ṣawt li-l-Kirāza*, *al-Masry al-Youm*. Apr. 16, 2018. https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1282064

35 See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 1, no. 2–3 (Jan.–Feb. 1965), 9–21. See also, Stanislau Paulau's contribution in this volume, titled, "Addressing a Global Audience: The Ethiopian Orthodox Textual Tradition in the Context of the Early Ecumenical Movement."

36 Despite these gestures of inter-Christian solidarity, however, *al-Kiraza* consistently affirmed the distinctiveness of the Coptic Church. For instance, when the question of standardizing major feast days arose in 1967, it insisted that ecclesial unity (*tawhid al-kana'is*) need not entail uniformity. See *al-Kirāza* 3, no. 1–2 (Jan.–Feb. 1967): 4.

tinued to uphold the Palestinian cause.[37] It also aligned itself with the independence movements sweeping the African continent, portraying the Coptic Church as a native institution poised to support Africa's decolonization. It emphasised the Church's African origins and called on Africans to reject the influence of the "white man" by embracing a Christian tradition indigenous to Africa.[38]

The Copts were not alone to seize on the anti-colonial moment. At the Addis Ababa conference, as *al-Kiraza* reported, Oriental Orthodox leaders affirmed a shared commitment to evangelism (*kiraza*).[39] Other Eastern Churches also expanded their reach in Africa. Notably, the Greek Orthodox Church, which, like the Copts, had long claimed jurisdiction over the See of Alexandria and its African domain, established an archbishopric in Tanzania in 1956.[40] During the same period, Cairo's al-Azhar University launched its own Mission City (*Madinat al-Bu'uth al-Islamiya*), aimed at spreading Islamic teachings across Sub-Saharan Africa, while 'Abd al-Nasser proclaimed to liberate "the dark continent."[41] These anti-colonial ambitions, though couched in the language of liberation and unity, were shadowed by deeper ambivalences. Institutions like the Egyptian government or the Coptic Church that had long been the objects of imperial and missionary overtures now recast themselves as caretakers of a continent-wide renewal, at times mirroring the civilisational logics they ostensibly opposed.[42]

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37 See e.g., *al-Kirāza* 3, no. 7 (Sep. 1967): 12. In the 1970s, the paper continued to stress that a Palestinian homeland would be a fundamental necessity, followed by a return to the boundaries of 1967. See *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 21 (27 May 1977): 3. The magazine also dedicated great attention to visits by Yasser Arafat to the Pope in 1985 and 1986. *al-Kirāza* 13, no. 21 (15 Nov. 1985) and 14, no. 4 (Apr. 1986). The use of Christian imagery in the struggle against Israel was echoed by Muslim figures. See e.g. 'Abd al-Ḥalim Ḥāfiẓ's Passion-inspired song *al-Masīḥ*(Christ), written by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Abnūdī and performed first in London in 1968. A later rendition is available on Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke-TOL-NefA

38 *al-Kirāza*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1965): 15–21. Later, *al-Kirāza* refered to Pope Shenouda as an "African Pope" (*al-Baba al-Ifriqi*). *al-Kirāza* 10, no. 43 (26 Oct. 1979): 1. The underlying theme of African originality is addressed in John W. de Gruchy, "From Cairo to the Cape: The Significance of Coptic Orthodoxy for African Christianity." *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa,* no. 99 (1997): 24–39.

39 *al-Kirāza* 3, no. 1 (January 1965): 19. It announced the founding of a missionary institute in Addis Ababa, jointly operated by the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

40 John N. Njoroge, "Missiological Context of the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa: Missiological Context." *International Review of Mission* 106 (2017): 356–368. For more about Coptic-Greek relations, see Makar, "That Knowledge May Flow."

41 Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, Book 1 (Cairo: Mondiale Press, 1955), 54. Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir, *Falsafat al-Thawra* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 2005), 59. President 'Abd al-Nasser's established a Committee of African Affairs (under the Ministry of Finance) and a Department of African Affairs (under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in 1956. Chanfi Ahmed, "Islamic Mission in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Perspectives of Some 'Ulamā' Associated with the Al-Azhar University (1960-1970)," *Welt Des Islams* 41, no. 3 (2001): 348–78.

42 Compare, for example, 'Abd al-Nasser's description of Egypt's responsibility in Africa and its Islamic civilization with *al-Kirāza*'s articulation of a Coptic duty toward the continent. 'Abd al-Nāsir, *Falsafat al-thawra,* 79; *al-Kirāza*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1965): 15–21.

The Coptic Church portrayed its outreach in Africa as the reaffirmation of its apostolic mandate. *Al-Kiraza* named St. Mark an African and spoke of the Church's historic responsibility toward the peoples of the continent,[43] a framing that had several precedents across the twentieth century. In 1908, at the request of Emperor Menelik II, the Copts established a school in Ethiopia that strengthened its institutional presence in the country. In 1912, Fr. Murqus Sarjiyus founded an Arabic-language periodical in Sudan titled *al-Manara al-Murqusiya* ("St. Mark's Beacon") with the aim of promoting Coptic teachings.[44] A more programmatic expression followed in 1944, when the earlier-mentioned Habib Girgis published his treatise *Practical Means for Coptic Reform*. There, he called for the restoration of the Church's traditional jurisdiction, offering an evocative image of his soul soaring across *al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya*, the Missionary Province of St. Mark:

> One summer night, just before the break of dawn, I [dreamt that] I became a soul freed from matter, able to wander at will [...]. In but a moment, I traversed all corners of Saint Mark's Missionary Province (al-Kiraza al-Murqusiya): from Alexandria in the north to Sudan in the south. From Sudan, I passed through Ethiopia, and from there continued to Eritrea [....] Everywhere I went, I encountered the concerns of my Coptic nation. Since I was already familiar with its condition, this vision did not weary me. The ailments afflicting the Church [...] became starkly clear to me, as did the obstacles that stood in the way of true reform.[45]

Girgis's dream vision sought to revitalise an ancient legacy, but the Church's twentieth-century activities would go well beyond this scope. Under Pope Kirollos VI (r. 1959–1971) and later Shenouda III (r. 1971–2012), the Church expanded its proselytising efforts across Africa and later into Asia, Latin America, and within diasporic contexts. To this end, the newly established Higher Institute of Coptic Studies began offering courses in African studies and evangelism.[46] In South

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43 *al-Kirāza*, 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1965): 15–21; 6, no. 1 (3 January 1975): 3.

44 The priest, Hegumen Murqus Sarjiyūs, also played a prominent role in the 1919 Revolution. An earlier magazine, *al-Sudān*, was published by As'ad Yassā al-Massāḥ, who was likely a Copt as well. These are among the earliest known Arabic journals to have been published in Sudan. See Fīlūthā'us Faraj, *Aqbāṭ al-Sūdān* (s.n., 2008).

45 Ḥabīb Jirjis, *al-Wasā'il al-'amalīya li-l-uṣlāḥāt al-Qibṭīya: āmāl wa-aḥlām yumkin taḥqīquhā fī 'ashara a'wām* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Tijārīya al-Ḥadītha, 1942), 1.

46 See Baṭriyarkīyat al-Aqbāṭ al-Urthūdhuks, *al-Ma'had al-'Ālī li-l-Dirāsat al-Qibṭīya* (Cairo: Dār al-Jīl li-l-Ṭibā'a, 1968), 31–2. Habib Girgis, too, had advocated the study of Ethiopic languages in Coptic theological education to reinforce the Church's bonds with Ethiopian Christians. Jirjis, *al-Wasā'il al-'amalīya*, 86. Also see Īrīs Ḥabīb al-Miṣrī, *Qiṣṣat al-Kanīsa al-Qibṭīya Tārīkh al-Kanīsa al-Urthūd-*

Africa, some 400 families joined the Church already during Kirollos's papacy. Writing in the 1960s, historian Edward Wakin observed: "Their services are in Coptic, their sermons in Bantu and Zulu, their chief priest a Coptic monk."[47] Soon thereafter, the Church attracted followers in Kenya and Uganda, and in the 1970s it established the Bishopric of African Affairs that institutionalised its presence.

Yet this outward expansion also coincided with a moment of internal reckoning. Even as *al-Kiraza* promoted an image of pan-African belonging, it also – more quietly – faced the uneasy legacy of the Coptic Church's centuries-long ecclesiastical dominance in Ethiopia. In 1959, the long-standing Ethiopian frustrations over Coptic oversight and restricted autonomy finally ushered in the formal granting of autocephaly to the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church. A decade later, *al-Kiraza* downplayed the rupture it had caused, framing Coptic-Ethiopian relations as an ongoing familial bond.[48]

National unity?

Al-Kiraza's reporting on inter-Christian affairs reflected a Coptic search for shared belonging that transcended their fragile existence in Egypt. This impetus became more pertinent following *al-Kiraza* re-instatement in the 1970s amidst a wave of sectarian violence. Following its hiatus from 1967–1972, the journal declared its commitment to continuing "to declare the will of God and defend the faith."[49] The message served as an omen of tension to come with Egypt's new president, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat (r. 1970–1981).

As Shenouda ascended to the papacy in 1971, Egypt was in the midst of broad changes. Sadat had initiated a "corrective revolution" aimed at reversing the pol-

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huksīya al-Miṣrīya alattī assasahā Mār Murqus al-Bashīr, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Maḥabba, 1988), 49. Central to this initiative was Makary El-Souryani, a monk who was consecrated in the early 1960s as Bishop Samuel, the first Coptic Bishop of Ecumenical Affairs. A close advisor to Kirollos VI, he earned a Master's in Christian Education from Princeton Theological Seminary, where he wrote a thesis that addressed Coptic evangelism in places as far and wide as Ireland and India. In the 1940s, he had worked as a teacher in Ethiopia. See Makary El-Souriany, "Ancient and Contemporary Christian Education in the Coptic Church of Egypt" (MRE Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1955), 34–39. A copy of the thesis can be accessed here, https://accot.stcyrils.edu.au/bsam-thesis/. See also a photo of El-Souryani pointing to a map of Africa in Wakin, *Lonely Minority*, plate 8 (inserted between pp. 102–3).

47 Wakin, 173–4. According to Īrīs Ḥabīb al-Miṣrī, the Coptic Patriarchate had already in 1949 received a request from South Africans during Apartheid rule to come under the Church's care. See Īrīs Ḥabīb al-Miṣrī, *Qiṣṣat al-Kanīsa al-Qibṭīya Tārīkh al-Kanīsa al-Urthūdhuksīya al-Miṣrīya alattī assasahā Mār Murqus al-Bashīr*, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Maḥabba, 1988), 49.

48 For example, it portrayed the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in affectionate terms as a faithful "son of the Coptic Orthodox Church." See *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 26 (27 June 1975): 1. See also, *al-Kirāza* 4, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar. 1972): 69.

49 *al-Kirāza* 4, nos. 4–6 (June–Aug. 1972): i (not numbered).

icies of his predecessor. He pursued economic liberalisation and, more importantly for Copts, promoted public religiosity in ways that privileged Islamic identity in national life. In public, Sadat's uncomfortable relationship with Egypt's largest religious minority was carefully managed under the banner of national unity (*wahda wataniya*).[50] On the ground, a different reality rang true. Just a year earlier, Sadat had amended the Egyptian Constitution to enshrine the principles of Islamic law (*al-Shari'a al-Islamiya*) as "a principal source of legislation."[51] The change in legislation precipitated rising sectarian tensions that ushered in a wave of anti-Coptic attacks. Only a few months later, in August 1972, *al-Kiraza* ceased publication for 26 months.[52]

The journal itself appears to offer no context to the suspension, but it is likely that *al-Kiraza* was halted because of political pressures, particularly given the growing friction between the Church and the state. The timing of the journal's return to publication in October 1974 is no less significant, as it resumed almost exactly one year after the outbreak of the October 1973 War with Israel, which provided a convenient pretext for the mending of relations between Shenouda and Sadat. *Al-Kiraza*'s inaugural issue that year (5 October 1974) took the opportunity to celebrate Sadat as a military "hero" (*batal*),[53] while *al-Ahram* anticipated the return of *al-Kiraza* with a note asking God to preserve the magazine for the benefit of the Church and the nation.[54] This triadic relationship between Church, state, and media became increasingly visible in the years that followed, particularly as Pope Shenouda III traveled to the United States, garnering international attention and meeting with President Jimmy Carter. During this time, Sadat appeared in *al-Kiraza* with expressions of goodwill toward the Copts.[55] In other issues,

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50 The cover page of *al-Kirāza*'s second (and final) issue of 1972 featured a photograph of Pope Shenouda standing alongside Sadat, Vice-President Husayn al-Shafi'i, and the Shaykh of al-Azhar Muhammad al-Fahham, with the caption proclaiming national unity. Ibid, i (not numbered).

51 Article 2 of the 1971 Constitution reads, "Islam is the state religion, the Arabic language is its official language, and the principles of Islamic law are a principal source of legislation. See "Dustūr Jumhūrīyat Miṣr al-'Arabīya," *al-Jarīda al-Rasmīya* 14 (12 December 1971): 2.

52 The surviving copies of *al-Kirāza* jump directly from 1972 (vol. 4) to 1974 (vol. 5), with no apparent issues for 1973. For 1972, I have identified only two combined issues: one for January–March (nos. 1–3) and another for June–August (nos. 4–6), with no for April and May 1974. Although the 1972-1973 hiatus is confirmed by the magazine's volume numbers, it not mentioned in *al-Kirāza*'s own historical genealogy, "Majallat al-Kirāzah khamsūn 'āman min al-mutābi'ah wa-l-'aṭā' wa-l-tanwīr (1965–2022)," *alkirazamagazine.com*, January 28, 2022, https://www.alkirazamagazine.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?ArtID=4098&IssueID=226&LanguageID=1.

53 *al-Kirāza* 5, no. 1 (5 October 1974): 1.

54 *al-Ahrām* (4 October 1974): 7.

55 See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 6 (11 Feb. 1977), 1; 8, no. 21 (21 Oct. 1977): 1; 10, no. 4 (26 Jan. 1979): 1; 10, no. 19; 10, no. 15 (13 April 1979): 1; 10, no. 20 (18 May 1979): 1. The latter dovetailed with growing attention to the Camp David Accords. See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 10, no. 11 (16 March 1979): 1.

al-Kiraza reported gratefully on the President's donation toward the construction of a churches, even as securing building permits for churches in Egypt remained fraught with difficulty. [56]

A deeper rift between Shenouda and Sadat became increasingly apparent by the late 1970s. Sadat's introduction of new constitutional amendments, this time elevating Islamic law to "the principal source of legislation," dealt a serious blow to Christian-Muslim relations. Shenouda denounced the changes as the ultimate sign of the Copts' second-class citizenship and began using *al-Kiraza* as a platform for dissent. In 1979–1980, the magazine published a series of political demands and announced the Holy Synod's decision to cancel the annual celebrations of the Feast of the Resurrection.[57] As tensions escalated, Sadat exiled Shenouda to the Monastery of St. Bishoy in 1981. *Al-Kiraza* was suspended for a third time and remained defunct until its reinstatement in 1985 under Sadat's successor President Hosni Mubarak (r. 1981–2012), four years after his assassination at the hands of Islamist militants.

The protracted ban on *al-Kiraza* under Mubarak provides an indication of the paper's efficacy. When the journal finally reappeared in June 1985, its relaunch signaled the restoration of Shenouda's public standing. However, Egypt had once again changed, and so had the Coptic community. Perhaps most significantly, activists in diasporic communities had begun to assert themselves as political force in their own right: the "Coptic of the diaspora," or *Aqbat al-Mahjar*, as the Egyptian national press often referred to this increasingly disruptive force. Many

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56 *al-Kirāza* 11, no. 15 (11 Apr. 1985): 5. For comparable events, see the founding of a church in Tanta, described as a "national gathering" (*ijtimā' waṭanī*) in *al-Kirāza* 5, no. 6 (6 Nov. 1974): 1-3. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 21 (21 Oct. 1977): 1 reports on the laying of a foundation stone for the St. Mark Hospital by President al-Sadat. The construction of churches has frequently served as a flashpoint in Coptic-Muslim relations, with Copts historically subject to severe restrictions. For an overview up to 2013, see Jason Brownlee, "Violence against Copts in Egypt," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Nov. 14, 2013, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2013/11/violence-against-copts-in-egypt?lang=en.

57 See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 10, no. 32 (1 Aug. 1979): 1 for a critique of the constitutional amendments expanding the role of Islam and Islamic law in Egyptian state affairs. Earlier, *al-Kirāza* had frequently spoken of "the Church's support (*ta'yīd*) for al-Sadat." See e.g. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 46 (14 Nov. 1975) and 8, no. 50 (16 Dec. 1977). For the announcement of the cancelation of the Resurrection service, see *al-Kirāza* 11, no. 15 (4 April 1980): 1. The same year, al-Sadat exiled Pope Shenouda, after which *al-Kirāza* came to be halted for a second time before reappearing in 1984. Later, the magazine also voiced critiques against the controversial Coptic theologian George Bebawy and the self-declared Patriarch Max Michel. See for instance *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 25 (23 Nov. 1989): 14. for a report on George Bebawy's admission to the Anglican Church. In *al-Kirāza* 13, no. 14 (27 Sep. 1985): 2, it warned against one Maksīmūs (i.e. Max Michel, known as Bishop Maksīmūs) who had adopted the title of bishop on false grounds (see "*inthiḥāl ṣiffat muṭrān*"). See also Rubīr al-Fāris, *Majallat al-Kirāza… Ṣawt al-Bābā wa-l-Kanīsa ṭiwāl 48 'āman, al-Masry al-Youm,* Mar. 25, 2013. https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/298016.

early emigrants, often well-to-do professionals, established active associations and a vibrant press that, grafted onto the associative life of earlier Christian Arab communities, drew international attention to religious discrimination in Egypt.[58]

The Coptic diasporic press built on the example of *al-Kiraza*, which it quoted on occasion; yet its editorial throughline conveyed a politically charged message that resonated less with the idiom of ancient martyrdom and more with the language of civil rights. In doing so, it rearticulated Coptic communal identity in ways that were often at odds with the domesticated posture of the Church under Mubarak. Unencumbered by Egyptian censorship, periodicals like *The Copts/al-Aqbāṭ* (New Jersey, est. 1974) and *Majallat al-Salam/Peace News* (Michigan, est. 1978) adopted a confrontational stance toward the Egyptian state. The-bilingual *The Copts* mobilised political imaginaries that needed to strike a chord with Congressional representatives and other policymakers.[59] For instance, Coptic activists in 1979 capitalised on the aftershocks of the Iranian Revolution to frame the plight of Egypt's Christians within broader Western anxieties about Islamic fundamentalism and regional instability. This strategy resembled the tactics used by Sadat, who referred to "Iranian spies" to explain away the local roots of anti-Coptic attacks in Egypt.[60] On other occasions, he evoked the Lebanese civil war to liken the Copts to a potential "fifth column" akin to the (Christian) Phalangist factions in Lebanon.[61]

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58 This can be gleaned from the commercials of Levantine and Chaldean-owned businesses and institutions that appeared in *Majallat al-Salam/Peace News,* alongside the contributions by Assyrian, Syriac, and Chaldean authors. See, for instance, an article on the "Assyrian National Question" in *Majallat al-Salām/Peace News* 7, [no. 5] (6 May, 1984): 3, and an interview with Patriarch Zakkā I of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Majallat al-Salam 8, [no. 1] (January 1985): 2. See also an article by the Chaldean Exarch Mar Ibrāhīm Ibrāhīm on the second-class citizenship of Middle Eastern Christians and a theological essay by the Chaldean priest, Fr. 'Imānū'īl of the Sacred Heart Church in Detroit. *Majallat al-Salām wa-l-Nūr/Peace News* 8 (December 1985): 16–17. For more about the relationship between Arab communities in the Americas, see Michael Akladios, "Critical Events and the Formation of a Coptic Diaspora in North America Between al-Khanka and al-Zāwiya al-Hamra," in *Routledge Handbook on Middle Eastern Diasporas* (Abingdon/New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 57–59.

59 *Majallat al-Salam*/Peace News as largely cut-and-paste production, reproducing content from other Arabic newspapers. A third paper, al-*Risāla al-Qibṭīya*/The Coptic Church Review (published out of Lebanon, PA), is mentioned in *Majallat al-Salam* in its December 1985 issue. In Colorado, Evangelical Copts published a magazine title *Ṣawt al-Kirāza bi-l-Injīl* ("the Voice of Evangelism"). For more about periodicals in North America, see also Akladios, "Critical Events," 59–62.

60 Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 115–116.

61 Ibid.

Diasporic currents

The growing interest in missionary work preceded larger waves migration of Copts themselves out of Egypt.[62] When *al-Kiraza* first proclaimed its call "to go into the world," it likely did not foresee the extent to which the Coptic diaspora would define that objective. In 1961, the Church established a parish in Kuwait, making it one of the first diasporic churches.[63] Church Historian Iris al-Masry described the event as "extending" the reach of the Church's evangelical call (*imtidad al-Kiraza*).[64] Meanwhile, Coptic priests began preparing for service overseas. One priest, Fr. Morqos Morqos would be dispatched to Toronto in 1965, where he founded St. Mark's Church, as the first church in North America.[65] Later, he would become known as *Kariz al-Gharb* (The Evangelist of the West), modelled after St. Mark, *al-Karuz al-Maskuni* (the Universal Evangelist). Other priests served Coptic communities in Germany, the United States, and Australia. In many cases, they ministered to dispersed congregations, relying on makeshift spaces for liturgical services and requiring long travel between cities, emulating materially the peripatetic example of the Apostles.

Yet despite this early history of Coptic migration, it was only in the mid-1970s that *al-Kiraza* began to systematically cover events in overseas parishes. Initially sporadic, this coverage reflected a growing institutional awareness of the Church's expanding global footprint. The growing attention to diasporic affairs, while shaped by changing demographics, may also have been informed by Pope Shenouda's own 1977 visit to the United States. The magazine framed the papal visit in resonant terms as "breaking the walls of seclusion,"[66] with an opinion piece that likened St. Athanasius' participation in the ecumenical councils and the role of Egyptian monasteries in the global spread of monasticism.[67] The trip also affirmed the Coptic pontiff's rising stature abroad, with *al-Kiraza* eager to highlight American press coverage as well as acknowledgements from local church

62 In 1963, Edward Wakin still noted that "[u]nlike Armenians and Jews, the Copts have had little migration and no diaspora." Wakin, *Lonely Minority,* 5.

63 Benjamin Daniel Crace, Keeping the Faith in Exile: Kuwait-Coptic Orthodox Diasporic Spirituality (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

64 al-Miṣrī, Qiṣṣat al-Kanīsa al-Qibṭīya, vol. 7, 51.

65 Michael Akladios,"Competing Notions of Integration in Canada's First Coptic Orthodox Parishes, 1971–1985." *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 13 (Winter 2021): 79–91.

66 The piece was co-authored by Fr. Anṭūniyūs Rāghib and the Deacon Jūrj Ḥabīb. See *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 21 (27 May 1977): 3.

67 *al-Kirāza* 13, no. 21 (15 Nov. 1985). See also a comparable report on the opening of the first Church in the United Kingdom, during which visit Shenouda was reported to have met with local churches leader and Queen Elizabeth II. *al-Kirāza* 6, no. 10, 6 (9 February 1979): 1.

leaders and political leaders.[68] To this effect, it dedicated no fewer than six issues to his travels, some supplied with appendices replete with photographs.[69]

By the late 1980s, reporting from the *mahjar*, or "lands of migration," had become a prominent feature in the pages of *al-Kiraza*. The magazine now regularly included news from places as varied as Austria, Sudan, Cleveland, and Australia, alongside local reporting.[70] Columns like *Khawatir min al-Mahjar* ("Thoughts from the Diaspora") further amplified the visibility of these far-flung communities. Combined with its regular reporting on papal audiences, the magazine presented an image of a Church that was global, interconnected, and in motion. In the words of the Coptic historian Ramzi Tadrus, *al-Kiraza* offered a "mirror" of a globalising church which, though progressively scattered, was strung together in the columns of *al-Kiraza*.[71]

The growing diaspora was both an asset and a liability that Shenouda had to manage.[72] At times, tensions between lay activists and clerical authorities in the diaspora spilled into the public sphere. In 1981, amidst Sadat's visit to the United States, Coptic clergy and laymen sponsored competing full-page advertisements in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, reflecting divergent visions of who spoke for the Copts in the diaspora.[73] In later years, *al-Kiraza* articulated

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68 See *al-Kirāza* 8, no. 18 (6 May 1977): 2. This can be also gleaned from the newspaper clippings of American magazines that appeared in a book published on the occasion of Pope Shenouda visit. See al-Qummuṣ Ghabriyāl Amīn, *Ziyārat al-Bābā Shanūda al-Thālith li-iftiqād kanā'is Amrīkā* (s.n., 1985), 27–72. A development of comparable gravity took place in 1989 when Pope Shenouda embarked on a 16-week-long trip, during which he visited 70 churches on three continents. In *al-Kirāza,* Bishop Serapion described Shenouda's travels as marking a new era for the Coptic Church across "seven dimensions." Shenouda's travels, Serapion noted, signalled the ongoing renewal and growth of the church. Among other things, he complimented Shenouda's attention to the pastoral needs of Coptic communities abroad whilst investing in the training of Coptic clergymen through the establishment of new monasteries and clerical colleges. See *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 42 (22 Dec. 1989): 10–11.

69 *al-Kirāza* 8, nos. 16–21(22 April –27 May 1977).

70 *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 21 (26 May 1989): 1.

71 The importance of such representational tools is easy to overlook, yet it played a vital role in sustaining a sense of belonging across distances. In a recent address, Metropolitan Serapion reflected on the early challenges of establishing a Coptic presence in the United States. He recalled that when Fr. Bishoy Kamel traveled to the U.S. in 1969 (as one the first Coptic clergy to do so) he brought with him a photograph of Pope Kirollos VI, since many in the diaspora could not form an image of their patriarch. See Metropolitan Serapion's address "PATR 5035: History of The Coptic Patriarchs Part I with HE Metropolitan Serapion and Deacon Severus Mikhail," Apr. 30, 2023, at https://www.facebook.com/actslibrary.

72 See Rajab al-Bannā, *al-Aqbāṭ fī Miṣr wa-l-Mahjar: Hiwārāt ma' al-Bābā Shinūda* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1998).

73 Akladios, "Critical Events," 61. He notes, "In August 1981, priests across Canada and the United States bought a full-page advertisement in The New York Times, stating that the Coptic community was praying 'for the success of his [Sadat's] peace mission for the Middle East' (The New York Times, 1981a, p. B3). Diasporic organisations, for their part, purchased a full-page advertisement in

a vision of reciprocal responsibility between Copts in Egypt and those abroad. The magazine emphasised that diaspora communities continued to rely on the Church and faithful in Egypt for guidance and continuity. At the same time, it noted the vital role of churches in the *Mahjar* in preserving a distinctively Coptic environment, through the translation of religious texts, the establishment of clerical seminaries, and efforts to maintain strong ties with the Egyptian homeland, including through pilgrimage and educational travel.

In other issues, *al-Kiraza* leaned more heavily on the language of national unity, framing the Church as an extension of the Egyptian state. In 1989, the periodical described Pope Shenouda's visit to the United States, quoting Bishop Bula, as a "patriotic Egyptian mission" (*rihla Misriya wataniya*).[74] The issue emphasised the importance of Shenouda presenting Egypt to the world as "a nation of civilization and important history." He was said to have encouraged Egyptian-American children to take pride in their Egyptian heritage, even as they benefited from living in a "country of technology and science." He urged them to stay connected to Egypt by learning both Coptic and Arabic – "the language of Egypt" – and by visiting the country. The magazine described him as "a distinguished ambassador for Egypt" and stressed the importance of preserving Egyptian nationality alongside American citizenship.[75] *al-Kiraza* further claimed that the Pope never spoke of Egypt without invoking the broader Arab nation (*al-watan al-'Arabi*).[76] This multivocality was less a contradiction than a reflection of *al-Kiraza*'s role as both a pastoral organ of the Church and a platform through which the Church engaged non-Coptic publics while maintaining an appearance of cohesion.

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the Washington Post that accused the Egyptian President of lacking 'courage in handling the systematic assaults launched by Muslim fanatics against the Christians of Egypt', and called on him to put an end to 'state-sponsored fundamentalism' (The Washington Post, 1981, p. A20)…."

74 *al-Kirāza* 17, no. 39–40 (24 Nov. 1989): 9.

75 Ibid, 9–10.

76 Ibid, 10.

Conclusion

Migration throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has profoundly reshaped what scholars once described as a singular Coptic community. A myriad of transnational networks now links Coptic communities from Iraq to Canada to Barbados. Today, remittances from Australia, Europe, the Gulf, and North America account for a considerable portion of Egyptian Copts' financial support.[77] In the realm of education, theological institutes and youth conferences now connect Copts to their heritage and to each other.[78] New technologies, too, have quietly connected believers across continents, helping preserve unity in liturgical practice.[79]

Divergence, however, still looms as a major risk. In both the United States and France, the Church has started to bifurcate along ethnolinguistic lines, with newly emerging "American" and "French" Coptic Orthodox Churches catering to a growing number of non-Egyptian and non-Arabophone parishioners.[80] Meanwhile, the rise of mission churches has meant that a variety of new musical influences have begun to transform traditional hymnody, thereby reshaping a core feature of Coptic liturgical life.[81] The Church's global growth catechises the

77 Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff and Liesl Riddle, *General Findings: Coptic Diaspora Survey* (Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2012). Available here, https://copticorphans.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CopticSurveyWhitePaperReport2-2012.pdf.

78 Such conferences are held across continents. See e.g., the Logos Coptic Youth Forum and Mahragan al-Kiraza (The Kiraza Festival). Prominent Coptic colleges and theological institutes in the diaspora include the St. Athanasius and St. Cyril Theological School (ACTS) in Newport Beach, CA, as well as St. Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College in Carlton, Australia. Elsewhere, initiatives such as the St. Clement School of Theology in Indonesia and the European Academy for Coptic Heritage (TEACH) offer theological education.

79 See, for example, the Coptic Reader, an app launched over a decade ago in the Diocese of the Southern United States. See "Coptic Reader," https://suscopts.org/coptic-reader/.

80 Samuel Tadros suggests that the church in North America may seek autocephaly. See Samuel Tadros, "Fight over Christmas Hints of Looming Coptic Schism," *Providence Magazine*. February 5, 2020, https://providencemag.com/2020/02/fight-christmas-looming-coptic-church-schism-pope-tawadros/. According to testimony by Fr. Anthony Messeh of St. Timothy & St. Athanasius Church in Arlington, VA, the establishment of the American Coptic Churches received the approval of Pope Shenouda, who initially "didn't fully understand the concept of what we were trying to do." See "A Lesson from our Departed Pope," *franthony.com*, March 18, 2016. http://www.franthony.com/blog/a-lesson-from-our-departed-pope. For more about the Coptic Church in the US, see Telushkin, Shira. *The Americanization of an Ancient Faith*, *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/coptic-church/555515/. For more about the Coptic Church in France, see the article by Gaétan du Roy in this volume, "Online Coptic Theology: A Comparison between French and British Websites."

81 See e.g. Coptic mission in Congo, *Facebook.com*, https://www.facebook.com/Congo.coptic.mission/. In other contexts, scholars have noted the growing popularity of Protestant-inspired autotune music, see Carolyn Ramzy, "Autotuned Belonging: Coptic Popular Song and the Politics of Neo-Pentecostal Pedagogies." *Ethnomusicology* 60, no. 3 (2016): 434–58.

faithful to reflect on what it means to be Coptic in a transnational age.[82] At the same time, it poses an ecclesiological puzzle that raises questions about how the Church's ecclesial jurisdictions cohere in an organic conception of its community and church organisation. Indeed, as the Coptic Church becomes an increasingly "catholic" – that is, universal – institution, its global expressions will continue to change, most notably, perhaps, by the attendant challenge of maintaining unity in diversity.

Through a preliminary study of *al-Kiraza* in the period 1965-1989, I have argued that the magazine played a critical role in shaping the ecclesial identity of the Coptic Church in both local and transnational networks. While continuing the legacy of earlier Coptic periodicals, *al-Kiraza* distinguished itself by portraying the Church as an institution with a universal mission. To this end, it gave renewed force to the Coptic Church's "kerygmatic" ecclesiology. Though shaped by the context of post-1960s Egypt, the themes and strategies articulated in *al-Kiraza* echo longer trajectories in Coptic religious thought and political engagement. Taken together, these developments suggest that the history of the Coptic Church cannot be adequately understood within the confines of nation-state. Rather, it calls for a networked approach that attends to cross-border flows and the circulation of people, texts, and religious practices. Such an approach shifts the analytical focus away from conventional dyads – Coptic-Muslim, Coptic-state, Coptic-missionary, or more recently, Egypt-diaspora – and instead foregrounds the relational webs that have connected Coptic communities to one another and to wider Christian, Middle Eastern, and diasporic networks.

82 For a critique, see Maged Atiya. "King of the Copts," *salamamoussa.com,* August 21, 2018. https://salamamoussa.wordpress.com/2018/08/21/king-of-the-copts/

Tables

Period	Frequency	Coptic Patriarch	Egyptian President	Notes
Jan. 1965–July 1967	Monthly	Pope Kirillos VI (1959–1971)	Gamal ʻAbd al-Nasser	Occasionally two issues combined
July 1967–Jan. 1972	*Suspended*	Kirillos VI (until March 1971), then vacant	ʻAbd al-Nasser (until Sept. 1970), Anwar al-Sadat (from Oct. 1970)	Suspension due to disagreements between Bishop Shenouda and Kyrillos VI
Jan. 1972–Aug. 1972	Once per trimester	Pope Shenouda III (enthroned Nov. 1971)	al-Sadat	Only two issues released in 1972 (Jan.–Mar.; June-Aug.). No issues were published between April and May, or after August
Aug. 1972–Oct. 1974	*Suspended*	Shenouda III	al-Sadat	al-Sadat
Oct. 1974–Dec. 1974	Monthly	Shenouda III	al-Sadat	
Jan. 1975–Sept. 1981	Weekly	Shenouda III	al-Sadat	
Sept. 1982–June 1985	*Suspended*	Shenouda III (in exile 1981–85)	Hosni Mubarak (from Oct. 1981)	al-Sadat deposes Shenouda in 1981; in Jan. 1985, Mubarak lifts restrictions
June 1985–Jan.? 1986	Weekly	Shenouda III (restored)	Mubarak	
Jan. 1986–1988	Monthly	Shenouda III	Mubarak	
1988–1989	Weekly	Shenouda III	Mubarak	

Table 1: *Al-Kiraza*: Publication Frequency and Suspensions (1965-1989)

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Literary works within the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch in Germany with a focus on Baden-Württemberg

JOSEF ÖNDER

The following article offers a brief sketch of the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch as the starting point for an account of the emigration of Syriac Orthodox Christians from their home countries to Germany.[1] In a further step, the next section provides the background for the discussion of Syriac publishing in Germany and in the state of Baden-Württemberg in the later part of the twentieth and the early part of the twenty-first century. I will present some of the textbooks and learning materials written for Syriac Orthodox religious education in Baden-Württemberg and Germany.[2] Over nine hundred Syriac Orthodox pupils participate in such classes every week in Baden-Württemberg alone. The final part of this article will discuss its topics and the training of teachers at the University of Education in Schwäbisch Gmünd/southern Germany.

The Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany

Since the Syriac Orthodox Church has also been represented in the West for over a hundred years, it has also opened up regarding ecumenism/to the ecumenical movement. Intensive contacts between the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) have led to the sacramental communion of both churches. With that, the old separation following from the discussions during the Council of Chalcedon is abolished. The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch is represented in many ecu-

1 Cf. Claudia–Maria Corlazolli: "The Christian Syrians are ethnically Arameans of a Semitic tribe who have dwelled in the land of Aram of Damascus and Aram of Mesopotamia since the 15th century BC. The term Syrian used in connection with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch means Arameans and therefore has nothing to do with the current Arab state of Syria," in, *Religionsunterricht von kleineren Religionsgemeinschaften an öffentlichen Schulen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 255. Moreover, in current linguistic usage, "Arameans" and "Syrians" ("Oromoye" and "Suryoye") and "Aramaic" and "Syrian" ("Oromoyo" and "Suryoyo") are synonyms. In this article – unless quoted verbatim – the term *Syro-Arameans* denotes the ethnic group.

2 On Syriac Orthodox religious education in Germany, see Corlazolli, *Religionsunterricht*, 259–284. Cf. also https://www.sok-bw.de/religionsunterricht (accessed 17/7/2024).

menical bodies, for example, in the World Council of Churches (WCC) since 1960, in the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) since 1974 and others.[3]

Since the 1960s, Syriac Orthodox Christians, mainly from the Tur Abdin (Eng. "Mountain of the Servants") region in south-eastern Turkey, along with many from Syria and Iraq, have lived in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Tur Abdin region is a mountainous landscape in Anatolia, in the southeast of Turkey, which in the south borders directly on Syria, in the southeast on Iraq. Its borders are (in a clockwise direction): in the north, a bend running parallel to the Tigris and connecting the cities of Diyarbakir, Batman, Siirt, Şirnak, and Cizre. The southern border passes from Cizre past Nusaybin to the town and administrative unit of Kiziltepe, located south of Mardin. The western border line stretches from Syria across the city and the county of Derik up to Diyarbakir. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Syriac Christians became a minority and suffered oppression by ethnic groups striving for independence from the Ottoman Empire. The relationship between Christians and Muslims was and is ambivalent, depending on the region.[4]

The Syriac Orthodox Church traces its origins to the Christian community of Antioch, the second urban church in early Christianity (cf. Acts 11:19–26). The apostle Peter is considered the first bishop of Antioch, and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, who resides in Damascus, traces his lineage to him in uninterrupted apostolic succession.[5] From the late 19th century to the present day, Syriac Orthodox Christians have faced waves of persecution. Each of these persecutions has resulted in a wave of emigration from the ancestral homeland.[6] For this reason,

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3 Cf. Wolfgang Schwaigert, "Die Syrisch Orthodoxe Kirche," in: *G2W – Ökumenisches Forum für Glauben, Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, 1 (2011), 12–13; and Wolfgang Schwaigert, "Die Orientalischen Orthodoxen Kirchen III. Ereignisse in der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien in jüngster Zeit," *IKZ* (2004), Heft 1–2 (Januar–Juni), 1–65; Johannes Oeldemann (ed.), *Gemeinsamer Glaube und pastorale Zusammenarbeit. 25 Jahre Weggemeinschaft zwischen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche* (Epiphania Egregia 6), (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2011), 11–17.

4 Cf. Josef Önder, *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen. Zwischen Orient und Okzident*, 2nd ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar 'Ebroyo Press, 2015), 25–29; cf. also Helga Anschütz, *Die syrischen Christen vom Turabdin. Eine altchristliche Bevölkerungsgruppe zwischen Beharrung, Stagnation und Auflösung,* 2nd ed. (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1985), 11–14; Hanna Aydin, *Das Mönchtum im Tur-Abdin. Das Leben der Mönche im Tur-Abdin in der Gegenwart* (Glane-Losser: Bar 'Ebroyo Press, 1988), 12–33; Ignatius Afrem I. Barsaum, *Statistische Erhebungen zum Turabdin* (s.l., Lebanon: publisher unknown, 1964), 13–18.

5 Cf. Ignatiaus Afrem I. Barsaum, *The Syrian Church of Antioch. It's Name and History* (Glane-Losser: Bar 'Ebroyo Press, 1983), 25–27.

6 The emigration of Syriac Orthodox Christians from Turkey to Germany was examined in depth by Kai Merten, "*Die Syrisch-Orthodoxen Christen in der Türkei und in Deutschland. Untersuchung zu einer Wanderungsbewegung*" (Hamburg: LIT Verlag: 1997). Of fundamental importance in this context is also Naures Atto's study, "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora. Identity

of the five million Syriac Orthodox Christians worldwide, around 120.000 live in the Federal Republic of Germany (almost in all 16 federal states), 30.000 of them in Baden-Württemberg.[7]

Until 1997, there was only one diocese in Central Europe. Its Metropolitan was Julius Yeshu Çiçek (†2005). He was responsible for the Syriac communities in the following countries: The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Austria, France, Spain, Italy, and Germany.[8] In the summer of 1997, a separate patriarchal vicariate was created for Germany. Its first Metropolitan was Dionysius Isa Gürbüz. His official seat was the monastery of St. Jacob of Sarugh in Warburg, the spiritual centre of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch in Germany.[9] After the demise of Archbishop Julius Çiçek in 2005, the Diocese of Central Europe was restructured into the dioceses of Holland, Belgium, France and Luxembourg together, and Switzerland and Austria combined. The Patriarchal Vicar Dionysius Isa Gürbüz became Metropolitan of the Diocese of Switzerland and Austria. In 2006, the abbot of the Warburg Monastery of St. Jacob of Sarug, Dr. Hanna Aydin, was ordained bishop and Metropolitan of Germany in Damascus. In December 2012, he was succeeded as Metropolitan by Philoxenus Mattias Nayis, previously secretary to His Holiness Ignatius Zakka Iwas (†2014), Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East, based in Damascus.[10]

As already mentioned, around 120.000 Syriac Orthodox Christians live in Germany.[11] They are organized into sixty-three parishes and are led by over fifty-five priests.[12] The clergy are assisted in the organisation of the congregations by councils: parish council, women's council, and youth council.

Discourses Among the Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora" (Leiden: University Press, 2011).

7 Cf. the website of the Erzdiözese der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien in Baden-Württemberg: https://www.sok-bw.de/religionsunterricht (accessed 17/7/2024).

8 On the life and work of Metropolitan Julius Yeshu Çiçek, see Gabriel Rabo, *"Çiçek, Julius Yeshu,"* in Wilhelm Bautz, Traugott Bautz (ed.), (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2007), 308–322; cf. also the *Kolo Suryoyo* [Syriac Voice] Sonderausgabe [Tr. special edition], Gabriel Rabo, (ed.), *Sonderausgabe des Kolo Suryoyo, Zeitschrift der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Diözese von Mitteleuropa* 27 (2005; 147/3).

9 Cf. Sebastian Brock (ed.), *Die Verborgene Perle. Die Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kirche und ihr antikes aramäisches Erbe*, vol. III (Rome: Trans World Film, 2001), 72.

10 Cf. Claudia Rammelt, „Orientalisch-orthodoxe Gemeinschaften in Deutschland. Ein Überblick," in: *Migrationskirchen. Internationalisierung und Pluralisierung des Christentums vor Ort*, Georg Etzelmüller, Claudia Rammelt (eds.), (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2022), 245–246.

11 The number of members varies, since many Syriac Orthodox Christians have fled to Germany since the war in Syria and Iraq and the number of members has not yet been definitively recorded.

12 Cf. the website of the Syriac Orthodox archdiocese in Germany: https://syrisch-orthodox.org/die-erzdioezese-deutschland (accessed 17/7/2024).

> The work of the archdiocese is directed by the diocesan council, which is the highest decision-making and executive body of the archdiocese. The board of directors of the diocesan council – also known as the diocesan board or board of directors – consists of the archbishop, the chair, the vice-chair, the chief secretary, and the chief cashier. The diocesan council also includes the chief pastoral representative and his deputy, as well as six other representatives. These are elected as committee chairs – six of them – from among the members of the general assembly and two from among the members of the pastoral convention, so that the diocesan council, with the archbishop as head of the diocesan council, is made up of a total of 13 people.[13]

Furthermore, each congregation has a cultural centre or a cultural association. This is usually the sponsor of a soccer team. In addition, each community maintains a *Madrashto,* the Syriac term for a Sunday School, though lessons are regularly taught on Saturdays. Here, instruction in liturgy, catechism, and doctrine is given in classical Syriac-Aramaic (*Kthobonoyo*). According to the official website of SOKAD Youth, the official youth association of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch in Germany, the organisation was founded by Mor Philoxenus Mattias Nayis in March 2013. His motto was: "Youth is the future and the foundation of the Church!" The website's initial page stresses that the organisation is to be understood "as a member of the church and has the defined goal of continuing to support and reconcile the concerns of young people and young adults with institutional interests of the church in Jesus Christ." In order to achieve these goals, it organised meetings of various kinds, including local and nationwide conferences, lectures and seminars with Christian and church-related content. The organisation is under the regulations of the archbishop.[14]

In the past, two church-oriented magazines served to promote ethnic-religious cohesion: *Kolo Suryoyo* ("The Syriac Voice"), published by Metropolitan Julius Yeshu Çiçek from 1978 to 2005, and *Tebe d'Marhitho* ("News from the Diocese") which was published by Metropolitan Dionysius Gürbüz from 1998 to 2005. From 1989 to 2008, the Federation of Arameans (established in 1985) published the cultural magazine *Mardutho D-Suryoye* ("Culture of the Syrians"); this also served to promote ethnic and cultural cohesion.[15]

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13 https://syrisch-orthodox.org/die-erzdioezese-deutschland (accessed 17/7/2024).
14 Cf. https://syrisch-orthodox.org/sokad (accessed 17/7/2024).
15 Cf. Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle* III, 124; cf. also: https://www.mardutho.com/ (accessed 17/7/2024).

The Syriac Orthodox Christians have two television stations based in Sweden: Suroyo TV and Suryoyo Sat. The former has a branch in Syria and Suryoyo Sat has one in Germany. The two broadcasting networks have an important function for ethnic and religious cohesion and the cultivation of the language. According to several observers within the church, the programs of these two television stations have contributed to a more widespread familiarity with modern Syriac-Aramaic (Turoyo/Surayt), the mother tongue of a considerable part of the Syriac Orthodox Christians has improved significantly. On March 25, 2019, at the Feast of the Annunciation, a new TV channel was launched by His Holiness Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East. Suboro TV is supported by the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.[16] The Syriac Orthodox communities in the state of Baden-Württemberg are led by a chorbishop, or *Khuroyo*. The Khuroyo is assisted by eight pastoral priests. There are local congregations (parishes) in the following places in Baden-Württemberg: (1) Bietigheim-Bissingen: Saints Peter and Paul; (2) Göppingen: St. Ephrem, St. Jacob of Sarug (3); Heilbronn: St. Ephrem, St. John (4) Kirchardt: St. Gabriel, St. Stephan; (5) Kirchhausen: St. Jacob of Nisibis; (6) Leimen: Mother of God; (7) Pforzheim: Syriac Orthodox Church (no name yet); (8) Pfullendorf: Syriac Orthodox Church (no name yet) and (9) Tauberbischofsheim: Syriac Orthodox Church (no name yet).[17]

As already mentioned, catechetical and language classes are held on Saturdays in all of these parishes. As in their home countries, the Syro-Arameans cultivate their language and traditions also in Germany, Baden-Württemberg and other host countries. This occurs in cultural associations or in the parish halls of the churches. The lessons usually focus on learning the classical Syriac-Aramaic (*Kthobonoyo*), church music (*Beth Gazo*), Sunday prayers, and other religious practices such as daily prayers, fasting and traditions related to the ecclesial feast days.[18]

Contemporary Syriac-Aramaic literature

At the end of the 19th century, the burgeoning literary activity of the Syro-Arameans changed considerably with the beginnings of emigration from their traditional homeland in the Ottoman Empire, today's Turkey, Syria and Iraq. These

16 Cf. the website of agenzia fides: https://www.fides.org/de/news/62408-ASIEN_LIBANON_Syrisch_orthodoxes_Patriarchat _bringt_ fuer_2018_ den_Fernsehsender_ Suboro_TV_auf_den_Weg (accessed 17/7/2024). Cf. further Önder, *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen. Zwischen Orient und Okzident*, 57–58.

17 Cf. https://www.sok-bw.de/geschichte-und-gegenwart (accessed 17/7/2024).

18 Cf. Rammelt, "Orientalisch-orthodoxe Gemeinschaften in Deutschland," 250–251; Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle* III, 124.

migrations accelerated during and after the genocide in the years 1895/96 and 1914/15. Many Syriac Christians emigrated to America, Europe, and Australia, or within the region, to new locations in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. It was during this period that secular literature was created in addition to the ongoing production of religious publications. First and foremost among such authors was Deacon Naum Faiq (1868-1930).[19] Among other things, Faiq founded the magazine *Kawkab Madenḥo* ("Star of the East") in 1908. In the same period, secular novels started to be translated into Syriac-Aramaic.[20] In his overview of Syriac writing in the twentieth century, Sebastian Brock mentions the romantic novella of Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* translated by Paulos Gabriel (1912-1971), and Khattas Magdasi Elyas (*Myatrutho*, 1955), and *Athalie* by Racine, translated by Abrohom Isu (1978), Machiavelli's *The Prince*, translated by Gabriel Afram (1995), Hanna Salman (*Geneviève*), Boutros Saba (Fénelons *Télémaque*), Barsaum Ayyub who translated works by Khalil Gibran into Syriac. Patriarch Ignatius Zakka Iwas (†2014) translated the words of the civil rights movement song "I am black" into Syriac, perhaps inspired by his stay in the United States.[21]

Other important church leaders were active in the writing movement of the twentieth century. Among these are Patriarch Ignatius Afrem I. Barsaum (1887-1957) and Metropolitan Philoxenos Yuhanon Dolabani (1885-1969) from Mardin (southeastern Turkey). In 1943, Afrem Barsaum published *The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*. This masterpiece was first published in Arabic (in Damascus) and later translated into Syriac by Metropolitan Dolabani and, more recently, from Arabic into German by Amill Gorgis and Georg Toro.[22] Metropolitan Yuhanon Dolabani edited many works of the Syriac Church Fathers from ancient manuscripts during his time as a monk in Jerusalem and later in Mardin. He also kept a diary of his life in Syriac-Aramaic, which has already been published several times.[23] In total, he published 69 books, ten of which were translated from other languages. Shortly before his death, when asked if he was afraid

19 Cf. Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle II*, 101; Ignatius Afrem I. Barsaum, *Geschichte der syrischen Wissenschaften und Literatur. Aus dem Arabischen von Georg Toro und Amill Gorgis* (Eichstätter Beiträge zum Christlichen Orient 2), (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 422.

20 Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle* III, 130.

21 Ibid.

22 See for the German version Ignatius Afrem I. Barsaum, *Geschichte der syrischen Wissenschaften und Literatur. Aus dem Arabischen von Georg Toro und Amill Gorgis* (Eichstätter Beiträge zum Christlichen Orient 2), (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

23 The latest edition of the diary was published bilingually (Syriac-Aramaic and Turkish) in Istanbul by Zeki Demir, *Mardin Metropoliti Mor Filüksinos Hanna Dölebani'nin Yasam Öyküsü ve Günlügü*, (Istanbul: Anadolu Ofset, 2019).

of death, he answered his students with the following words: "I'm afraid that the pen will fall out of my hand and I won't be able to write anymore."[24]

Other personalities from the twentieth century who are still on the lips of Syriac-Aramaic clerics and literary figures are Abdelmesih Naʿman Qarabashi and Yuḥanon Qashisho. The latter wrote a short story called "Narmasin's Rocket".[25] Like no other, Qarabashi shaped the Syriac-Aramaic catechetical schools with his language books. Whether in the old homeland or in Europe, his books are still widely used in many catechetical and language schools. Although these were written over fifty years ago, their structure and methodology make them the most formative works for both students and teachers.[26] Qarabashi also wrote one of the earliest accounts of the genocide, which has been translated into several languages, *Dmo Zliho* ("Bloodshed").[27] Finally, he was very important for shaping the church liturgy: he wrote prayers and songs for the entire year which, after having been reviewed by the Liturgy Commission of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch, were approved by the Head of the Church Patriarch Ignatius Jacob III. (†1981) for usage in the transnational Syriac Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Julius Yeshu Çiçek later published these in the Netherlands in the book *Kinotho, Church Hymns of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch*.[28]

With the founding of the Diocese of Central Europe in the Netherlands in 1986, Metropolitan Julius created the Bar-Hebräus-Press publishing house (currently Bar ʿEbroyo Press) on the premises of the St. Afrem Monastery in Glane-Losser. His intention was to reproduce the liturgical books of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and, beyond that, the literature of the Church Fathers. By the time he died († 2005), he had published and copied 131 different works in his publishing house, a total of 395.000 printed copies. In the beginning, that is, before the Syriac-Aramaic language was encrypted into the computer, Metropolitan Julius copied the liturgical manuscripts and works of the Church Fathers by hand, in his beautiful handwriting. He was later able to benefit from the computer typeface designed by George Kiraz in 1988.[29]

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24 Josef Önder (ed.), *Syrisch-Orthodoxe Religionslehre 5/6* (Auf dem Weg zum Glauben 1), (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2019), 127.

25 Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle* III, 130.

26 For contemporary reprints of these books, cf. the webpages of the Mor Ephrem bookshop (https://morephrem.shop; accessed 20/7/2024).

27 The Syriac-Aramaic manuscript was translated into German by Amill Gorgis: Na'man Mschiho Abed Qarabasch, *Vergossenes Blut* (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2002).

28 Cf. Julius Yeshu Çiçek (ed.), *Kinotho, Kirchliche Hymnen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien*, 2nd ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 1993).

29 Cf. Rabo, *"Çiçek, Julius Yeshu,"* 308–322; Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle* III, 126–127.

With the emigration to the West, the Syro-Arameans also started to publish a variety of cultural magazines, following up on various journals that were published in the homelands. What was difficult in the homelands was now made easier in Europe and America because of greater political freedom and increased technical and financial possibilities. For the purpose of this contribution, especially the journals in the German-speaking realm are important to mention, such as *Mardutho d-Suryoye* (Gütersloh/Heilbronn, Federation of Arameans [Suryoye] in Germany; since 1989): Syriac-Aramaic (*Kthobonoyo*), German, Turkish, Modern Syriac-Aramaic (Turoyo) and *Nuhro* (Vienna; 1976-79): Syriac-Aramaic, German, Arabic, Turkish; and *Voice of Turabdin* (Linz; since 1995): Syriac-Aramaic, German, English, Turkish, and *Tebe d'Marhitho* (Kirchardt; since 2000): Syriac-Aramaic, German. Note, however, that some of the journals published in the Netherlands would also include German, in addition to Syriac, Turkish and Dutch sections. These include *Qolo Suryoyo* (St. Ephrem Monastery/Netherlands; since 1978): Syriac-Aramaic, German, Arabic, Turkish, *Shemsho* (Enschede, Federatie Turabdin; since 1985): Syriac-Aramaic, Dutch, German, Arabic, Turkish, and *Shoesheto Suryoyo* (Enschede, Suryoye Aramese Federatie; since 1981): Syriac-Aramaic, Dutch, German, Arabic, Turkish.[30]

Almost all of these magazines that were published in classical Syriac-Aramaic or in the modern Syriac-Aramaic dialect Turoyo/Surayt and in the respective national languages have ceased to be published today. The main reason for this is the fact that the digital media have gained the upper hand, while small print runs have made publications more difficult to finance. In addition, many of the older generation of Syro-Aramaeans were illiterate, making it more to find a sufficient readership, especially when publishing in the classical or vernacular Syriac languages.

The production of Syriac-Aramaic literature in Germany and Baden-Württemberg

Syriac-Aramaic literature in Germany and Baden-Württemberg is primarily associated with the Syriac Orthodox Diocese of Central Europe. Germany was part of this diocese, whose first bishop was Metropolitan Julius Yeshu Çiçek, whom we already mentioned above. Since he founded the Bar ʿEbroyo Press, a large number of books were published there.[31] In the years from 1980 to 2000, in addition to

30 For these journals, see Brock, *Die Verborgene Perle* III, 125; further: https://www.mardutho.com/ (accessed 20/8/2024).

31 After the demise of Metropolitan Julius, the publishing house continues its work of publishing books in different languages, see Mor Ephrem Bookshop (https://morephrem.shop, accessed

Metropolitan Julius Çiçek, more people copied liturgy books by hand and made them available to the congregations in Europe, such as Pastor Yusuf Demir (†2005) from Kirchardt, Pastor Petrus Ögunc (†2014) from Dasing, Subdeacon Ishok Esen from Gütersloh, and Subdeacon Sleman Hauschab from Bebra. Their copies were photographically reproduced and distributed.[32]

With the reorganization of the Diocese of Central Europe, Germany was organised into an independent patriarchal vicariate. Two strands in literary production can be observed in the last ten years: further copying of liturgical books and the publication of textbooks and teaching materials for Syriac Orthodox religious education. Pastor Abdulmesih Nergiz from Paderborn and Deacon Yuhanon Savci from Gießen copied the liturgy books of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch on the computer and translated individual volumes into Turoyo. These publications can be found all over Europe as well as in Turkey in the Syriac Orthodox Church. In addition to the works of these two copyists, a number of other liturgical books have also been published by deacon Yuhanun Savci Gießen, Germany.[33]

In the field of Syriac literature, the tireless commitment of Amill Gorgis from Berlin deserves special mention. In the early 1990s, he translated the sacraments of baptism, marriage and other fundamental works into German on behalf of Metropolitan Julius; they were published by Bar-Hebraeus-Press and are now used in all churches in German-speaking countries. At the same time, these translations functioned as a bridge between Syriac Orthodox, Protestant, and Roman Catholic pastors when administering the sacraments during ecumenical weddings or at ecumenical services. In addition to these liturgical publications, Gorgis also translated historical works into German, such as Aphrem Barsoum's *Scattered Pearls* (together with Georg Toro) as well as Isḥaq Armale's and Naʿman Mshiḥo's works on the genocide of 1915.[34]

After Metropolitan Philoxenus Mattias Nayis took office in 2012, the St. Jakob von Sarug publishing house was founded in the German monastery of the same

20/8/2024). See further Heleen Murre-van den Berg (this volume) and Murre-van den Berg, "Language and Religion in the (Re)Making of the Syriac Orthodox Communities in Europe," in: *Refugees and Religion: Ethnographic Studies of Global Trajectories,* 179–197, Birgit Meyer, Peter van der Veer (eds.), (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

32 Note that in the 1990s others started to produce academic work in the German-speaking countries, usually as part of their studies (Bachelor's, Master's, Diploma theses or Doctoral dissertations), including Hüsnü Acar, Gabriel Rabo, Sabo Hanna. The latter also published a very useful Syriac-German/German-Syriac dictionary.

33 Cf. his Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/groups/183852948341360/posts/httpkthobe-hitonoyede/1185123528214292/) for current and past publications (accessed 20/8/2024).

34 On the first, see note 22; Amill Gorgis and Dorothea Weltecke (ed.), *Isḥāq Armale: Die Schlimmsten aller Katastrophen für die Christen* (Schola Nisibina 3), (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

name. Various works have appeared since, such as the "Voice of the Shepherd" (*Die Stimme des Hirten*) in Syriac-Aramaic and German. Furthermore, important works by the Church Fathers have been (or are being) published in Syriac-Aramaic and German to this day.[35]

In the field of translations of world literature into modern Syriac-Aramaic (Turoyo/Surayt), the research centre for Aramaic Studies Nisibin [*Nisibin Aramäische Studien*] based at the University of Heidelberg has made a name for itself. In recent years, they have translated a number of important works of world literature into modern Syriac- Aramaic. Children and young people can read these publications in their mother tongue and practice this language. Among others, they published *Le Petit Prince* ("The little Prince") by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the *Schachnovelle* by Stefan Zweig, *The Prophet* by the Lebanese-American poet Khalil Gibran, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by the German-American children's book author Eric Carle and *Little Red Riding Hood* by the Brothers Grimm.[36]

In addition to the positive effects of emigration, the Syriac Orthodox Christians also feel the need to practice their modern Syriac-Aramaic mother tongue. To help in this process and to learn the language systematically, the "Shlomo Surayt" project, headed by Professor Dr. Shabo Talay of the Freie Universität Berlin, was launched. The textbooks and online courses are available in various European languages and deserve great praise and recognition.[37]

Syriac Orthodox religious instruction in schools in Baden-Württemberg

Works were also explicitly published for Syriac Orthodox religious education in Germany, in Syriac-Aramaic (*Kthobonoyo*) and German. In order to understand the concept of the teaching and learning materials that are used at the state schools in Baden-Württemberg, the subject of Syriac Orthodox religious education is presented first.

In a number of German states (*Bundesländer)*, the Syriac Orthodox Church, alongside the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, has been permitted to provide religious education within the school system. According to Article 7, paragraph 3 of the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany and Article 18 of

35 Books are available at the book shop in the monastery St. Jakob von Sarug in Warburg.

36 Cf. https://www.nisibin.de/publikationen (accessed 22/9/2024).

37 The Surayt-Aramaic Online Project (SAOP) was co-financed by the European Union's Erasmus+ program, among others. Nine institutions were involved; the text books have been published in six different languages: German, English, Dutch, Swedish, French, Arabic. For more on the project, cf. http://www. surayt.com/ (accessed 22/9/2024).

the constitution of the state of Baden-Württemberg, Syriac Orthodox religious education has become a regular subject for which the state and church bear joint responsibility. It is issued according to the School Law in accordance with the teachings and principles of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (Article 96, paragraph 2 SchG).[38]

In the 2024/2025 school year, eleven teachers taught over 900 students at seventy-three schools. Syriac Orthodox religious education takes place in Elementary schools, Lower secondary schools/junior high schools, and High Schools,[39] with the curriculum publicly available on the internet. Beginning with the 2022/2023 school year, Syriac Orthodox religious education is also being taught at vocational grammar schools.

The books and didactic materials required for school lessons are published by the school superintendent's office in Göppingen. At some schools, due to the smaller number of students, students in grades five and six, seven and eight, nine and ten, or five to ten are taught together.

The website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports ("Kultus, Jugend und Sport") of Baden-Württemberg – which presents the Educational curriculum of the schools, succinctly summarizes the aims of the Syriac school curriculum, focusing on the importance of the faith of individual pupils as well as on their contribution to a harmonious and tolerant society at large:

> The central task of Syriac Orthodox religious education is the introduction to life with God and the Church, the promotion of the development of the baptised into responsible Christians and the ability to properly understand the world and society. It is part of the school's mission to provide a globally aware education that respects human dignity and interreligious dialogue. In addition, it makes an important contribution to the integration of young Syriac Orthodox schoolchildren, regardless of whether they were born in Germany or arrived as refugees. Religious education teachers are particularly qualified to do this because they have mastered the languages of the Orient.

38 Cf. https://www.bildungsplaene-bw.de/,Lde/LS/BP2016BW/ALLG/SEK1/RSYR/LG (accessed 22/9/2024).

39 The syllabus can be found at the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in Baden-Württemberg: https://www.bildungsplaene-bw.de/,Lde/LS/BP2016BW/ALLG/GYM/RSYR (accessed 17/7/2024).

> The Syriac Orthodox religious education helps the students to find their personal, religious, and cultural identity and is a companion on the way to developing a personality with skills such as empathy, tolerance, and charity. Further tasks are the introduction to a conscious life with the church, to an understandable celebration of the holy liturgy, to the internalisation of a Christian ethic that respects human dignity with a view to one's own identity, knowledge of the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church, the teachings of the Church Fathers, and the history of the Syriac-Aramaic ethnic group with its highs and lows.
>
> Important positive influences upon the school culture come from the Syriac Orthodox religious education, for example, through the organization of church services, social projects, and the teaching of rules and rituals of living in peace and harmony with others from different backgrounds. Training in polite behavior, the handshake when greeting and constructive social behavior play a special role.
>
> At school and in society, the Syriac Orthodox religious education unfolds its positive effect by addressing respect for human dignity, the idea of tolerance and commitment to peace, justice, and the preservation of creation in such a way that it is emotionally accepted and thus controls the reflection upon one's own attitudes and behaviour.[40]

In the year 2000, the "Syriac Orthodox School Superintendent's Office of Baden-Württemberg" [*Syrisch-Orthodoxes Schuldekanat*] was established as the central office for teaching matters. This office was created when the responsibility for the subject "Syriac Orthodox religious instruction" was transferred from Kirchardt to the school superintendent and state coordinator of Baden-Württemberg in Göppingen. This was set in motion by the previous Syriac Orthodox Patriarch, Ignatius Zakka Iwas (†2014). The School Superintendent's Office is located in Göppingen in southern Germany.[41]

The school superintendent is supported by teachers who teach on a voluntary basis. State coordinator and school superintendent Dr. phil. Josef Önder (the author of this article) is responsible for the pedagogical aspects of the subject. In

40 https://www.bildungsplaene-bw.de/,Lde/LS/BP2016BW/ALLG/SEK1/RSYR/LG (accessed 26/9/2024).
41 Önder, *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen*, 58.

practical terms, this means to keep in touch with the Ministry of Education and regional councils in Baden-Württemberg as well as the exchange with the school authorities and principals of the various types of schools. In addition, the school superintendent's office maintains close contact with the local school superintendents, senior church councils, and ordinariate councils of the Protestant and Catholic sister churches. As a rule, the school superintendent sits in on the teaching colleagues in Baden-Württemberg once a year and carries out his responsibility to comply with his obligations to the state and the church. On the other hand, he has the obligation to the church to provide for new church members. The school superintendent's office trains the teachers at regular intervals through continuing education courses and is responsible for the publication of books for religious education. As is customary in the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches in Germany, there are also regular continuing education courses for the teachers in Syriac Orthodox religious instruction.[42]

The 2016-curriculum is divided into content-related and practice-related competencies. The practice-related competencies are divided into five competency areas: (1) perceiving and presenting; (2) interpreting/explaining; (3) evaluating; (4) communicating; and (5) designing. In addition, there are seven content-related competencies, following a uniform formal structure for all school types (with the exception of the upper level of the high school, Gymnasium): (1) human being, (2) world and responsibility; (3) Bible; (4) God; (5) Jesus Christ; (6) Church; (7) religions and belief systems.[43]

What is so special about the Syriac Orthodox curriculum of 2016 for the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch? There is no comparable plan anywhere in the Syriac educational world that addresses all aspects of being human. Pupils not only learn about God, Jesus Christ and the Bible. They also discuss topics such as nature and the environment, Buddhism, Hinduism, human dignity, ethics, understanding roles in life, conscience, basic questions of life, finding identity, and many other topics that they would not have been able to learn about in their old homelands of Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. In the homelands, church education was oriented towards catechism and their own church or religion, whereas in cosmopolitan Germany, the educational canon is broader. Here, the pupils, for example, in the sixth-grade programme, not only get to know their own denomination within what is understood as a "church" but also learn about the Protestant and Catholic churches and other local faith communities, becoming acquainted with ecumenism.

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42 See https://www.sok-bw.de/landeskoordination-und-schuldekanat (accessed 26/9/2024).
43 See https://www.bildungsplaene-bw.de/,Lde/LS/BP2016BW/ALLG/SEK1/RSYR (accessed 29/9/2024).

With the 2016 curriculum, a new way of thinking or approach to the various topics in Syriac Orthodox religious education emerged. While the texts of the liturgy in Classical Syriac-Aramaic were read with the children when religious instruction was established in the 1994/1995 school year, the content was, however, not discussed because there were no translations. Therefore, the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Education decreed in 2005 that this was no longer possible.[44] The texts also had to be available in German if they were to be taught in Syriac Orthodox religious instruction in German schools. The LITURGIA series[45] was therefore launched by the Syriac Orthodox school superintendent's office with the 2016 education plan. To date, "The Celebration of the Anointing of the Sick" and "The Funeral Liturgy" have already been published.[46] In the near future, all prayers and songs that are recited throughout the church year during the celebration of the Eucharist will be published, with parallel texts facing of Syriac-Aramaic and German. The students who will use these books in class thus will be able not only to read and sing the texts in Classical Syriac-Aramaic, but will also be able to discuss the content with the religion teacher in German. If all goes according to plan, by the year 2030, all liturgical texts of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch will be published in two languages.

A second series was launched with the 2016 education plan, which is named *On the Way to Faith: Syriac Orthodox Religious Education*. This was planned to become a six-volume series of which volume 1 (for grades 5/6) has been published. Volume 2 for grades 7/8 is currently in the design phase and will most likely be released this year. Volume 3 for grades 9/10 is being developed and will be published in 2026, and the two volumes for primary school (4/5) will be taken on in 2028.

What is so special about these books? These books follow a certain structure of thinking in eight dimensions or topics that are reflected in each of the books (and which are close to those that have been prescribed by the government as mentioned above): (1) prayer; (2) human beings; (3) world and responsibility; (4) God – our Father in heaven; (5) Jesus Christ loves us; (6) Bible and Tradition; (7) the Church – work of the Holy Spirit; (8) other religions and worldviews.[47]

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44 The curriculum for the years 1994 and 2005 can be viewed here: https://www.sok-bw.de/religionsunterricht (accessed 29/9/2024).

45 For more information cf. https://www.sok-bw.de/lehr-und-lernwerke (accessed 29/9/2024).

46 Cf. Josef Önder (ed.), *Beisetzungsliturgie für Frauen. Nach dem Ritus der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien (LITURGIA 2)*, 3rd ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2022); Josef Önder (ed.), Beis*etzungsliturgie für Männer. Nach dem Ritus der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien (LITURGIA 3),* 2nd ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2022); Josef Önder (ed.), *Die Feier der Krankensalbung. Nach dem Ritus der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien (LITURGIA 1),* 2nd ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2018).

47 For more information cf. https://www.sok-bw.de/lehr-und-lernwerke (accessed 01/10/2024).

All of these dimensions, which to some in the Syriac community might appear Western, are reflected in the religious education class in the public schools, anchored in the curriculum plan and filled with Syriac Orthodox content. For example, learning the basic prayers is very important in Syriac Orthodox religious education. For this reason, every religious lesson begins and ends with a prayer in Syriac-Aramaic.[48] Students learn the prayers that are appropriate for their age level. Starting from the topic of human beings, pupils deal with the topics of community, creation, strengths and weaknesses. Syriac-Aramaic Church Fathers who have commented on the above-mentioned content are used and discussed in the classroom, often in both Syriac and German. In this series of books, the authors, under the direction of Dr. Önder, have based themselves on similar education projects of the Protestant and Roman Catholic sister churches with respect to design, tasks, etc., while the content is purely Syriac Orthodox. The book for grades 5/6 is currently also being translated into classical Syriac-Aramaic and can then be used in the catechetical schools in Turabdin, Syria, or Iraq.

Another series of textbooks is called *On The Way To Prayer [Auf dem Weg zum Beten]*. To date, two volumes have been published: *Spirituality Of Children And Young People* and *Spiritual Orientation For Every Day*.[49] Volume I is a translation from the German book "Oh mein Gott! Jugendliche beten – fromm, frei und herzerfrischend"[50] into classical Syriac-Aramaic. It includes prayers written mainly by German and Syriac Orthodox students at the Dr.-Engel-Realschule, a secondary school in Eislingen/Fils under the guidance of Dr. Josef Önder and the Protestant religion teacher Dirk Schwarzenbolz.[51] Volume II is a translation of prayers from Syriac Church Fathers from Classical Syriac-Aramaic into German. These two volumes are used to start and end each religion lesson. The teacher greets the students at the beginning of the religion lesson. After the greeting, the student who has prepared a prayer from these books at home for class in either Syriac-Aramaic or German comes forward. The class stands, everyone crosses themselves,

48 On the practice of teaching cf. Linda Kaplan, „Syrisch-orthodox in der zweiten und dritten Generation. Beobachtungen einer syrisch-orthodoxen Religionslehrerin" in: *Migrationskirchen. Internationalisierung und Pluralisierung des Christentums vor Ort*, Georg Etzelmüller, Claudia Rammelt (eds.), (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2022), 283–286.

49 Cf. Josef Önder (ed.), *Spiritualität von Kindern und Jugendlichen (Auf dem Weg zum Beten 1)*, 2nd ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2020); Josef Önder (ed.), *Geistliche Orientierung für jeden Tag (Auf dem Weg zum Beten 2)*, 116th ed. (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2024).

50 Cf. Josef Önder and Dirk Schwarzenbolz (eds.), *Oh mein Gott! Jugendliche beten – fromm, frei und herzerfrischend: ein interkonfessionelles Projekt der Dr.-Engel-Realschule Eislingen* (Glane-Losser: Bar ʿEbroyo Press, 2019).

51 For more information cf. https://www.dr-engel-realschule.de/schreibende-schule (accessed 01/10/2024).

and the student recites the prayer. After the prayer, the teacher begins the lesson. The hour ends in the same way. All three series are provided with QR codes. The students can scan the QR codes with the iPads available at school and work on the content during the lesson. They can listen to the liturgy texts in Syriac-Aramaic and learn them in class or at home.

Two other books are worth mentioning here: The works *Aram and Aurora. An Aramaic-German friendship or Something More? (Vol. 1)* and *Aram and Aurora. The decision?! (Vol. 2)*. Both novels were written by students under the direction of Dr. Önder at the Dr.-Engel-Realschule (secondary school) in Eislingen/Fils.[52] They address the immigration of a Syro-Aramean to Germany and his integration into German society. The topics of friendship, culture, the Syriac Orthodox Church, manners and customs, dying, death and resurrection, homosexuality, and much more are the content of these volumes. Since these books were written by a multi-ethnic student body including those of German, Syro-Aramean, Turkish and Yazidi backgrounds, their content is also diverse. These books were translated into English and Classical Syriac-Aramaic and are also used as teaching aids for Syriac Orthodox religious education in grades 9/10, as well as in German lessons at German schools. These books are also used in Turkey, where the Classical Syriac-Aramaic version[53] is used in teaching in catechetical and language schools. At home, the children read contemporary literature in classical Syriac-Aramaic with secular vocabulary. They not only learn everyday words in the classical language, but also about how children in Germany think and live.

Teaching material (workbooks/teaching projects) similar to the projects in Baden-Württemberg are also published for Syriac Orthodox religious instruction in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). This project is led by state coordinator Augin Yalcin with the participation of Georg Bubolz.

Another important series is that of the *Lives of the Syriac-Orthodox Church Fathers* and books for children, which are published by religion teacher Eliyo Aydin. This is also used in Syriac Orthodox religious education both in North Rhine-Westphalia and in Baden-Württemberg.[54]

Thorough teacher training is fundamental to teaching. For this reason, an academic course in *Syriac Orthodox Theology and Religious Education* was established

52 For more information cf. https://www.dr-engel-realschule.de/schreibende-schule (accessed 03/10/2024).

53 Cf. Josef Önder (ed.), *Aram and Aurora. An Aramaic-German Friendship … or may it be more than that?, Vol. I & II (Yulfono Yayınları 1)*, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: Anadolu Ofset, 2024); cf. further Josef Önder (ed.), *Und plötzlich war es still … Der Exodus der Christen, Jesiden und Muslime aus Syrien und dem Irak*, 3rd ed. (Weikersheim: Margraf Publishers, 2023).

54 See https://morephrem.shop/index.php?route=product/category&path=45 (accessed 03/10/2024).

in the 2020/2021 winter semester at the ecumenical institute of the University of Education in Schwäbisch Gmünd (southern Germany) for future Syriac Orthodox religious teachers. This is the first institution worldwide to offer such a course and from which Syriac Orthodox religious educators graduate who are later employed in state schools. The course is open to all students enrolled at the University of Education. The course programme is made up of four modules which provide a basic introduction to Biblical theology and history, to patristic theology and world religions, Syriac Orthodox ritual and practice, and Syriac Orthodox religious teaching and didactics.[55]

Conclusion

Although emigration to the West was very painful for the first generation, there are many positive things to be said about Syriac-Aramaic literature in the diaspora as well as in the original homeland. In the last forty years, Syriac Orthodox authors have done a lot of work, published, and, above all, revived the works of the Syriac Orthodox Church Fathers.

If one looks at the Syriac Orthodox religious education in Germany and Baden-Württemberg, one may note how, in these lessons, Syriac Orthodox pupils get to know their faith and deepen it while they also engage with socio-political issues. The relevant literature – mostly in two languages – is available to both students and teachers. The teaching and learning materials that were published by Syriac Orthodox authors and are used in the classroom are on a par with the learning materials of the sister denominations. Remember that only recently, one could only write Syriac-Aramaic by hand, whereas today, more than fifteen fonts are included in modern word processing programs so that Syriac Orthodox writers, educators, and theologians can do the same as authors in almost any other language.

55 For more information cf. https://www.ph-gmuend.de/studium/studiengaenge/zertifikatsstudiengaenge/zertifikats-studium-syrisch-orthodoxe-theologie/religionspaedagogik (accessed 03/10/2024).

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The Migration of the Syriac Orthodox Community to Sweden: Towards a Description of Patterns of Change and Liturgical Adaptation

GABRIEL BAR-SAWME

In this paper, I will attempt to explore how migration to Europe has affected the Syriac Orthodox community with a specific focus on how the liturgy has been adapted in the migration process. A primary methodological question to ask when studying the liturgy is how one perceives the liturgy. Is liturgy simply in the text, or is liturgy an event that takes place whenever and wherever it takes place, regardless of the textual basis? My perspective is that liturgy is not in the text, rather it is alive; it is a ritual that takes place anew and requires what Catherine Bell has called ritual mastery from those that lead the liturgy, a kind of embodied competency interiorized of the liturgical practices. Anybody who is sufficiently familiar with the liturgical practice of the Syriac Orthodox Church will know that far from every act in the liturgy is codified. The practice is fluid and malleable. Its plasticity is not arbitrary; rather, it requires the leadership of ritual masters and the participation of the liturgy community. Consequently, negotiation in the act of performance is at the heart of the liturgical practice.

Where does this leave us with the literary tradition of the liturgical texts, in line with the focus of this volume? Liturgical texts are used in the liturgy and for the performance in the liturgy. Liturgical practices change and are fluid and change based on various variables, irrespective of the text. One such variable is the changing worldview of the community itself and movement into various contexts in the diaspora. The diasporic contexts have had an immense impact, and still do, on the liturgical tradition and the textual production of liturgical texts. One could describe this development in different stages. As we look at the different stages, it is useful to consider migration studies that describe the establishment of new groups in new contexts. The entire liturgical system of the Syriac Orthodox Church was developed in a rural context where the church had a central role in the lives

of the faithful.[1] It seems that it will not be so much longer, in the diaspora.[2] With this complexity in mind regarding the relationship between liturgical text, liturgical practice, and migration, I will explore patterns of change and adaptations. My data is limited and therefore my results will be limited and not generalizable. More comprehensive data-gathering is required for a fuller understanding of this complex relationship concerning the Syriac Orthodox communities.

Previous research on migration and liturgical adaptation

In this section, the literature regarding the experience of migration will be explored, followed by a review of the literature on the Syriac Orthodox experiences of migration. In an article concerning migration and culture, the anthropologist Pnina Werbner argues that many studies that deal with migration have an essentialist view of culture.[3] Instead, she explores other ways of approaching migration and culture that evade essentialism. By referring to a range of ethnographic cases, among which rituals are to be found, she suggests that cultural hybridity may be a better term to make visible the changes that take place as groups translocate and migrate to other places. She uses three terms to capture the process of change, namely, *dislocation*, second *transplantation*, and finally, *relocation*. The three terms are distinct yet not separate from one another. It would be erroneous to assume a linear development. Rather, the three terms can enmesh any given case simultaneously.

Her conclusions about cultural hybridity are close to those drawn in the recent doctoral dissertation of Victor Dudas, who conducted a study among Syriac Orthodox school children in Södertälje, a major southern suburb of Stockholm with a large population of Syriac Orthodox. He concluded that school children navigate several social identities connected to the family in which religion seems to play an important role, social identity in relation to peers, and Swedish society.[4]

In relation to the rituals of a community, Werbner argues that it is impossible for a migrant community to uphold old rituals. Rather, with different commitments, both to the new context they find themselves in and to their past and

1 Gabriel Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy*: *A Ritual and Theological Analysis* (Uppsala:, 2021).

2 Önver Cetrez, *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005).

3 Pnina Werbner, "Migration and Culture," in *Oxford Handbook of the Politics of International Migration*, eds. Marc R. Rosenblum and Daniel J. Tichenor, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2012).

4 Victor Dudas, *Exploring the Identity of a Group of Assyrian/Syriac Young Adolescents in Sweden : A Mixed-Methods Study within the Discipline of Psychology Religion and the Research Field of Identity Development* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2020).

homeland, rituals are renegotiated and hence changed. This was also suggested by a comparative study conducted by the anthropologists Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter.[5] They use language similar to Werbner's to describe the process migrant groups seem to go through, that is, *change and continuity, processes of placemaking*, and *lines of social differentiation*. According to them, it is beneficial to explore migration processes together with rituals. They see rituals of migrant communities as cultural prisms through which one could explore religious rituals and practices. This is often something overlooked in migration studies as well as in ritual studies. In comparing several cases, they argue that innovative dynamics of religious rituals offer experiences of connection and continuity, even when the rituals change and are adapted to the new context. Ritual practices offer a sense of grounding, so to speak, a connection to home and a making of a new home in the new context. At the same time, rituals seem to be part of a process of creating new identities and notions of belonging, making new physical buildings, and taking space that involves new relationships with the local environment. Finally, they suggest that rituals are important identity markers in creating boundaries. Informed by Catherine Bell's theory of ritual as a differentiation process,[6] they argue that rituals construct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

In line with the final point made by Pedersen and Rutter, one could argue that the adaptation and changes to ritual practices and texts depend on the physical space where the group chooses to settle. Studies concerning segregation in the Nordic countries in general and Sweden in particular show that people with a background in countries outside of Europe or North America have a higher unemployment rate and are concentrated in big cities and poorer areas. There is, therefore, a correlation between ethnic background and socioeconomic position in society and housing segregation.[7] A consequence of this variation is that groups close in and focus internally on the group's survival and continuation.[8]

While housing segregation and a high concentration of immigrants in certain areas and their lack of integration into the job market can be seen as something negative and its causes vary, it could also be seen as something positive for the survival of minority groups. The physical concentration of migration groups in certain areas leads to, among several things, a focus on the group itself. Most stud-

5 Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, "Rituals of Migration: An Introduction," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, 16 (2018): 2603–16.

6 Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

7 Moa Tunström and Shinan Wang, *Den Segregerade Staden [Elektronisk Resurs] En Nordisk Översikt* (Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd, 2019).

8 *Svensk Forskning Om Segregation* (Vetenskapsrådet, 2018).

ies deal with the negative effects of segregation, which is usually seen from the majority perspective in society, and immigrants are often seen as a problem.[9] The term segregation is mainly applied to immigrant groups and not rich, indigenous groups that move from areas with higher diversity. It seems then that the concentration of migrant groups in certain housing areas supports the survival of the group itself. The Syriac Orthodox communities in Sweden mostly live in segregated areas. A big part of the group settled in these areas, and as they integrated into the job market and received higher-paying jobs through education and entrepreneurship, they eventually moved out to other housing areas.[10] However, the churches that have been built have largely remained in the original areas of settlement in Swedish society,[11] potentially playing an important role that the church may have had in maintaining an important influence in the group.

Some studies have dealt specifically with the Syriac Orthodox communities and their integration into Swedish society, as well as their changing relation to church and ethnicity.[12] The studies show that the role of the church is diminished in the new Swedish context. Furthermore, ethnic identity movements among the Syriac Orthodox group have played a significant role in the new context. The internal struggle within the group has been coined as a struggle between a diverse minority group with ambitions to see itself as one group. The internal tension concerns the survival of the group and power struggles concerning group identity. More specifically, the name issue of *syrianska*/*assyriska* has remained an important question and was a divisive driving force in the 1980s and onwards. The internal tension in the church eventually led to the making of two dioceses in Sweden

9 *Svensk Forskning Om Segregation*.

10 Oscar Pripp, *Företagande i Minoritet : Om Etnicitet, Strategier Och Resurser Bland Assyrier Och Syrianer i Södertälje* (Tumba: Mångkulturellt centrum, 2001).

11 "Lokala församlingar – Syrisk ortodoxa kyrkan," 2023.

12 Naures Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora." (Dissertation Leiden University, Leiden University Press, 2011); Ulf Björklund, *North to Another Country: The Formation of a Suryoyo Community in Sweden* (Stockholm: Dep. of social anthropology, Univ. of Stockholm [Socialantropologiska inst., Stockholms univ.] 1981); Cetrez, *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization*; Fuat Deniz, *En Minoritets Odyssé*, vol. 21, Örebro Studies (Univ.-bibl, 2001); Fuat Deniz and Antonios Perdikaris, *Ett Liv Mellan Två Världar*, vol. 2, Forum För Migration Och Kultur (Institutionen för samhällsvetenskap, Örebro univ, 2000); Marianne Freyne-Lindhagen, *Identitet Och Kulturmöte : Syrianska Kvinnors Exempel : En Diskussion Om Grounded Theory* (Örebro: Högsk., 1997); David Gaunt, "Identity Conflicts among Oriental Christians in Sweden," *Sens Public: Revue Internationale*, 2010, http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-4814; Bengt Knutsson, *Assur Eller Aram-Spraklig, Religios Och Nationell Identifikation Hos Sveriges Assyrier Och Syrianer (SIV Rapport)* (Statens invandrarverk, 1982); Pripp, *Företagande i Minoritet*; Samuel Rubenson, "Kyrka Eller Folk – Den Syrisk-Ortodoxa Kyrkan Och Det Svenska Samhället," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 68 (1992): 71–79.

in the 1990s. While it seems to have been an issue of name and, hence, identity that was the driving force, there are indications that the divide was driven by clans and kinship that struggled to get a hold of the church through which an influence could be exercised in the group. Furthermore, some studies show that the church plays an increasingly less important role for the second and third generations of the group.[13] Kinship seems to be important, while the church is not. This suggests that the church's rituals play a less important role as a meaning-making system for the younger generations. The trend seems, therefore, to be that the role of the church diminishes over time.

This leads to another important field that needs to be touched on regarding the Syriac Orthodox community, namely the adaptation of the church in the face of new challenges and its diminished role. Almost no study has dealt with liturgical changes concerning the Syriac Orthodox group in the diaspora, with some exceptions.[14] This is an open field that needs data gathering. The lack of knowledge regarding the relationship between migration and rituals pertains not only to the Syriac Orthodox community but also to religious communities in general.[15] However, against the background of the field of migration studies, it is worthwhile considering the dynamic relationship between migration processes and ritual renegotiations.

The liminal experience of being on the go

Arnold van Gennep coined the rites of passage theory in the early twentieth century, after which it was made popular first by Victor Turner in the 1960s and later taken up by Ronald Grimes and other scholars.[16] There are three fundamental concepts connected to the rite of passage theory, which correspond fittingly with the migratory experience: *separation, transition,* and *reintegration.* These phases may have been fixed in the rites of passage that Van Gennep studied but have been

13 Cetrez, *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization*; Dudas, *Exploring the Identity of a Group of Assyrian/Syriac Young Adolescents in Sweden*.

14 Gabriel Bar-Sawme, "Den syrisk-ortodoxa liturgin i Sverige," in *Gudstjänstens mening*, ed. Stephan Borgehammar, Svenskt gudstjänstliv, årgång 94 (2019) (Skellefteå: Artos, 2019), 13–25.

15 Magdalena Nordin, "Vad vi vet och inte vet om kristna migranter i Sverige," in *Kristne migranter i Norden*, ed. Anders Aschim, Olav Hovdelien, and Helje Kringlebotn Sødal, vol. 28 (Portal forlag, 2016), 17, http://lup.lub.lu.se/record/dfa62e8c-3d56-4a73-bc84-ecoef315d413; Magdalena Nordin, *Migration, Religion Och Integration* (Stockholm: Delmi, 2023).

16 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 1960; Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo, Ontario: Ritual Studies International, 2013); Bjørn Thomassen, "The Uses and Meaning of Liminality," *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (March 3, 2009): 5–28; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures (Cornell University, 1977).

used successfully by scholars more recently to describe other types of experiences that are more fluid. Pnina Werbner's terms to describe patterns of migration correspond quite fittingly with these three terms of van Gennep, namely, *dislocation*, *translocation,* and *relocation.*[17] An immigrant to a new country who, according to any kind of measurement, has been integrated into the new society (e.g. has a job, knows the language, and contributes to society in different ways) may still have a sense of longing for the past and have a sense of not belonging. By this, I mean that Van Gennep's tripartite phases can coexist simultaneously.

Other theorists of migration studies have described the experience of migration as a liminal experience consisting of insecurity, uncertainty, and lack of belonging to any particular group other than its own.[18] The immigrant experience involves, perhaps more than anything, a lack of belonging to the new host country and a sense of belonging to the old country. According to the analysis of the ritual scholars Patrice Ladwig and Nicole Reichart, the successful creation of liminality of the heterogenous Lao migrant community in Berlin contributed to the renewal of identity and belonging within the diverse group who had a variety of backgrounds and experiences of migration.[19]

The benefit of using a theory that has been applied to other migratory experiences is that it can make visible the common experience that the Syriac Orthodox communities had in the process of moving from one place to another.

Dislocation: trajectories of migration and finding a new home

In light of previous studies concerning migration studies and the Syriac Orthodox group, I will, in this section, attempt to describe trends in the migration of the community to Europe in general but in particular to Sweden. One of the insights from migration studies regarding transnational movements is that it is a simplification to think about migration from one country to another as a way immigrants carry their culture, as if in a bag, from one place to another. Religious and secular rituals cannot simply be transferred from one place to another. They cannot simply be renewed; rather, they must be reconstructed. Reconstructed because rituals depend on the physical environment and space of the place from where

17 Werbner, "Migration and Culture."

18 Ville R. Hartonen et al., "A Stage of Limbo: A Meta-synthesis of Refugees' Liminality," *Applied Psychology* 71, no. 3 (2022): 1132–67, https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12349; Patrice Ladwig and Nicole Reichert, "Ritual Insecurity, Liminality and Identity. Differing Migration Trajectories and Their Impact on Buddhist Rituals in a Lao Migrant Community in Berlin," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 34, no. 1 (2020): 1–16.

19 Ladwig and Reichert, "Ritual Insecurity, Liminality and Identity. Differing Migration Trajectories and Their Impact on Buddhist Rituals in a Lao Migrant Community in Berlin."

the immigrants originate.[20] The Syriac Orthodox communities come from various contexts in the Middle East. Some come from big cities in the Middle East, such as Diyarbakir, Mardin, Beirut, and so on. However, the entire liturgical calendar and the liturgical celebration of the Syriac Orthodox Church are dependent on a rural context. It was developed to support the lives of farmers by asking for, for example, Marian blessings for the cycle of the year when it comes to farming, e.g., blessings for seeds, crops, harvests, grapes, and so on.

To illuminate how migration and liturgical reform influence one another, it becomes crucial to start with a description of the trajectory of migration that took place. Dislocation refers to the experience of moving from one's home to another place. It is the first step in the migration process. But to better understand the situation in Sweden, it is useful to paint an image of the migration process from the Middle East since it involves people moving from different countries and in different periods. Finally, in Sweden, in any given parish, the diversity is even greater than in the Middle East. From the homogeneity of the village or the city in the Middle East to a new country, a new meeting point.

Naures Atto distinguishes between three main migration periods in the second half of the twentieth and beginning of twenty-first centuries.[21] This is to illustrate the complexity of the migration process, leading to the fact that in any given parish in Sweden, the end destination for many, people from different countries and cities in the Middle East would have arrived. The tree periods are: 1965 to 1975, 1975 to 1984 and 1984 to 2009.

Migration falls into two different categories: asylum seekers and labour migrants who seek employment. The two groups coalesce in periods during the migration period. However, what is more interesting and important for our purposes is highlighting the trajectories of migrations. Atto describes an eightfold path in the trajectories of migration: From Tur Abdin to Syria and Lebanon; from Hakkari and Tur Abdin to Iraq; from Syria to Lebanon; from Tur Abdin to Istanbul; from Tur Abdin directly to Europe; from Tur Abdin to Istanbul and then to Europe; from Gozarto in Northern Syria to Europe; from Gozarto to Damascus, Aleppo or Beirut and then to Europe.[22]

This eightfold trajectory indicates the diversity of the Syriac Orthodox communities and that they have a variety of backgrounds and migration experiences. The different groups finally met in Europe. As indicated above, migration to

20 Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy*.
21 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland," 144.
22 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland," 145.

Europe happened in waves to different countries. The migration process was not collectively organised by any institution. However, family networks became very important in facilitating the trajectories. It is clear from the studies that families helped one another, villagers one another. The help consisted of assisting with the visa process, finding a job, and even offering housing during a transitory period.[23] People from the same villages or cities in the Middle East ended up at the same destination.

A primary concern for the community in the migration process seems to have been seizing the opportunity to find its way to Europe. In the disruptive process of migration, their natural pull towards other extended family members and villagers can be seen as a process of cultural reconstruction and revitalization. In other words, it means seeking security, what is known and safe in the face of the disruption of migration, and leaving one's home behind.[24] According to Atto, those who left the homeland rejected it and justified the migration process by saying that there is nothing to go back to. Consequently, she found a discourse of distance-making and of border-making. Some who left their homeland sold everything they owned as they came to Europe, for example, in the village Kerburan (Dargecit). Not because they had to, but to reject and move on.[25] On the other hand, many did not sell their properties. In Midyat in Tur Abdin, people invested their money in their houses and churches before they left to stay connected and not lose the transnational bond between the diaspora and the homeland.

Sweden was chosen as a country to migrate to due to the conditions regarding receiving permanent residence and citizenship. The Syriac Orthodox fled from fear and insecurity towards stability and a new home.[26] The pull to Sweden left the homeland abandoned, and a word often used by the group to describe this process is that Sweden *maḥraulah* (has destroyed) the homeland. The migration to Europe and Sweden did not leave the group without longing for the homeland. More specifically, it was a longing for those who had been left behind. In the correspondence that Atto has studied both in cassettes and in letters, the perception of Sweden was that it was like heaven.[27] The heaven-like description consisted of the freedom that the people enjoyed in wearing a cross openly, being treated well, nature being beautiful, and the riches of the country.

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23 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland;" Björklund, *North to Another Country*; Deniz, *En Minoritets Odyssé*.
24 Werbner, "Migration and Culture."
25 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland," 177.
26 Atto, 178.
27 Atto, 181.

Church leaders in the Middle East were worried about the migration to Europe. In relation to political leaders in the Middle East, the leadership of the church rejected the idea of migration and denied that their home countries were oppressive in any way. An example of this can be found in an interview with the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet on May 30 1982 with the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Zakka I Iwas who said: "Those who say 'we are persecuted in Turkey' use this just to get residence permission in European countries. They are not part of us."[28] Another example of this is a statement made by Chorepiscopos of Istanbul Aziz Günel during a visit with the Turkish ambassador in Berlin in 1982:[29]

> We are sad about the news about our people in the European newspapers. We, who live in Turkey as citizens of the Turkish Republic and as the Turkish *Süryani Kadim* community, have never been persecuted in Turkey. Some people use this argument when they apply for asylum. But, this is not true. We are Turks. Throughout history we have never been oppressed. We have always enjoyed the freedom to live our religious activities.

These statements must also be understood in the context of the political climate at the time, where church leaders in Turkey were likely unable to speak freely in the press. The point of these statements is to exemplify that at the time of the initial migration process, the disruption of the dislocating experience was multidimensional and painful. Those who migrated to the new context found ways to justify the move while apparently not having the support from those who were left behind. Especially the clergy of the church was negative to the migration, with the exception of some clergy, such as the late Archbishop Julius Çiçek of Central Europe – perhaps out of fear for authorities, perhaps out of fear for the potential assimilation process of the migration and consequently as the emptying of the land of the forefathers. Nevertheless, there was a clear discrepancy between what the asylum seekers said and the reports they received from the church leadership in the Middle East. This did not, however, stop the migration process. Rather, it furthered a rift between the church leadership and the eventual secular movements within the group in Europe.[30] The migration from Tur Abdin took place in waves, as indicated above, always driven by different social circumstances and with the support of those who had come before to Europe. The fall of Saddam

28 Quoted in Atto, 187.
29 Quoted in Atto, 188.
30 Deniz, *En Minoritets Odyssé*.

Hussein in 2003 led to a new migration wave from Iraq to Europe, and most specifically, to Sweden. The same can be said about the more recent war in Syria, which has led to significant new migration waves to Europe in general but to Sweden in particular.

The new migration situation in Sweden led to the formation of two independent ethnic federations, Syrianska Riksförbundet and Assyriska Riksförbundet, in 1977[31] and 1978.[32] This shows how, on a group level, the community organized early on separately from the church.[33]

The stories of the newly arrived immigrants to Sweden spurred responses from authorities. Some studies were conducted on the naming issue between *assyriska* and *syrianska*.[34] The stories of the Syriac Orthodox community were also told in the annotated picture book *Slutet på en resa, början på en resa.*[35] In the introduction to the book, the author Staffan Ekegren, writes[36]

> During a couple of years, we have followed some families from the syrianska group in Örebro. The reasons are many: first of all, we wanted to retell the story which we think ought to be a role model – for example the cohesion within the family in combination with their generosity towards outsiders. Second, we wanted to explain what seems to be odd or deviant to Swedes, that the Syriac Orthodox Church takes up so much space in the lives of the syrianer because the tradition is so important and a cause for the emigration itself.

This book is important since it depicts and documents, with images and texts, the experience of the Syriac Orthodox community in the 80s from the very beginning after their arrival to Sweden. Ekegren suggests that the community has two pillars: family and church. He attended a Sunday liturgy in the parish in Örebro and describes how the liturgy starts with only the priest and a deacon; with more deacons, the choir and other people fill the church accompanied by waves of incense. However, the liturgy in the new country is different from that in the homeland. In an interview with a member of the community, a member of the church says: "Before the kids were not inside the church as much as now. In Turkey they were

31 "Assyriska Riksförbundet – Historia," 2023, https://www.assyriskariksforbundet.se/om/historia.
32 "SRF's Historia – Syrianska Riksförbundet," 2023, http://syrianska.org/srf-s-historia.html.
33 This division took place within the Syriac Orthodox communities in Sweden.
34 Knutsson, *Assur Eller Aram-Spraklig, Religios Och Nationell Identifikation Hos Sveriges Assyrier Och Syrianer (SIV Rapport)*.
35 Staffan Ekegren, *Slutet På En Resa, Början På En Resa*, 1986.
36 Ekegren.

outside and played in the square – there were no cars. Older siblings took care of them. The youngest who were inside the church with their moms were more disciplined than here. Nowadays, they run in and out all the time."[37] In another interview with a Swedish priest, he predicts that the community will go through a similar process of a crisis of faith in the new context and that the church will have difficulties in meeting the curiosity and critical thinking of a new generation.[38]

The communities that are present in the same parish can at the same time be different, but through the same identity of being Syriac orthodox and attending the same liturgy develop a common identity and group belonging. The role of the church and the religious rites varied depending on where in the Middle East they were from. In an interview with a parish member from Örebro, it is said:[39]

> Our religious tradition differs from family to family. Those who cleave strongest to the church come from the mountain plains in the southeast of Turkey. They lived isolated and were exposed in the middle of Muslim settlements. In that situation, the priest and the church kept the syrianer together. Also, there was not much to do up in the mountains. In Beirut where we lived, there was so much else that dragged away our attention from religious life.

The quotation shows the image an immigrant from Beirut has concerning immigrants from Tur Abdin. This also shows how people from different parts of the Middle East met in Sweden, with their variety of traditions in Sweden, with challenges that required negotiations regarding the role of the church in the life of the community and how the church ought to be organized and the liturgy be celebrated.

The conflicts that arose after the migration to Sweden cannot be reduced to different traditions from different parts of the Middle East. In the new society, where women had greater action space, conflicts between church leadership and women's organisation were also part of the negotiation process. In an interview with Susan Dogan, who was the chairwoman of *Syrianska kvinnoföreningen* [Suryoyo women's association] she says:[40]

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37 Ekegren, 23.
38 Ekegren, 18.
39 Ekegren, 27.
40 Ekegren, 30.

> We have focused on relationship issues, children, and youth problems by working practically. We have opened a centre for leisure activities for youth, activated older people and helped the school children with their homework. We have even tailored the church gowns for the girl choir at church. Despite this, we have been continuously opposed by the church board, which only has men as members. Even outside the board, the men have opposed us. I think they are scared concerning what they've heard about, namely 'women's emancipation from men' and that we will organize against them.

The conflicts that are exemplified by what Susan says and what the person from Beirut says could be seen as a struggle for power and action space in the liminal phase of the migration process. This is not only known in the Syriac Orthodox community but this pattern of change in the dynamics of power has also been seen in other immigrant groups.[41] The Nordic countries are, according to the World Value Survey, associated with secular, liberal, and individualistic norms and values. In contrast to these values, immigrant groups from the Middle East are associated with values associated with religion, conservatism, and collectivism.[42] Especially among the younger generation, values in the host country are assumed, and conflicts between the different value systems occur in different ways. Here, it is clear that what Susan Dogan expresses is not something unique. Mehrdad Darvishpour, who studied the divorce rate and changing family relations among immigrant groups from the Middle East in Sweden, drew a similar conclusion. The divorce rate was higher among immigrant groups, and the explanation, it seems, is that women gain more action space and are thus filing for divorce. The changing power structure between men and women leads to higher degrees of conflict, which may lead to divorce.[43] A similar study among the Syriac Orthodox has yet to be conducted. Yet, it is to be expected that this would be rather similar, tying in with the fears expressed by Susan Dogan and others in the 1980s.[44]

The point that I want to underline in this part of the paper is that negotiations and changing power structures happen on different levels. We see in the story of

41 Mehrdad Darvishpour, "Immigrant Women Challenge the Role of Men: How the Changing Power Relationship within Iranian Families in Sweden Intensifies Family Conflicts after Immigration," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 33, 2 (2002): 271–96; Pernilla Ouis, "Hedersrelaterade familjekonflikter: Konsekvenser av förändrade normer i migrationsprocessen," *Fokus på familien* 49, no. 3 (2021): 213–36.

42 Ouis, "Hedersrelaterade familjekonflikter."

43 Darvishpour, "Immigrant Women Challenge the Role of Men."

44 Ekegren, *Slutet På En Resa, Början På En Resa*.

Susan Dogan that already in the early 1980s, negotiation from a gender perspective is taking place. The institution of the church is afraid of making changes to the gender roles and letting women into power positions. The complexity of the power struggle is amplified by the power structure of ethnicity. It has perhaps been assumed that the Syriac Orthodox community is a homogenous group. But this is not true. Not only is it diverse, but as I indicated above, the immigration to Sweden took place in different periods, which means that the group that meets at the liturgy, for whom the church is a fundamental pillar, have different histories and have not been in Sweden for the same amount of time. The patterns I have thus far highlighted are characteristics of the liminal stage in the life of groups on the go. As they arrive in Sweden, they create a safe space of shared identity and belonging. Naturally, this has led to severe conflicts within the family structure in relation to the institution of the church. To some extent, the liminal experience of being in a place outside of the home is what Victor Turner has called the experience of the neophytes as having a physical but no social reality. Neophytes in the groups that were studied by Turner were preparing to be given the status of fully incorporated members of the social group.[45] While the Syriac Orthodox group evidently had a community with one another, it is also clear from their experience that their longing for their relatives and not fully participating in society was a liminal experience.[46]

Furthermore, at its very core, the conflict of ethnicity-church should be seen as a power struggle between different groups within the diverse Syriac Orthodox community and its in/ability to handle the conflict, which eventually led to a split. Against the background painted above, with the power struggle taking place in the new context of one community with high diversity it is also worthwhile portraying the ecclesial conflict and split that took place in Sweden.

"Even the Swedish Archbishop has to obey the government. Therefore, our bishop has to obey us, the people."[47] This is a quote from a member of the central board in Sweden from the 1990s and reveals the complexity of the institutional conflict that took place, which eventually led to two jurisdictions in Sweden.[48] For the member of the board quoted above, the central board of the diocese is elected by the people and represents the people. The bishop is considered the

45 Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

46 See Thomassen, "The Uses and Meaning of Liminality"; Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern Living through the In-Between* (Farnham, Surrey ; Ashgate, 2014).

47 Rubenson, "Kyrka Eller Folk – Den Syrisk-Ortodoxa Kyrkan Och Det Svenska Samhället."

48 Thomas Arentzen, *Ortodoxa och österländska kyrkor i Sverige*, vol. 5,5 (Stockholm: Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, 2015).

leader who must listen to the elected board. According to the *millet* system, the bishop would have been the *millet bashi*, as we saw above, the representative of the people. In Turkey, there was no democratic vote for the bishop or for the members of any board. With the move to Sweden, elections of lay people to a diocesan board became a reality; therefore, a clash between the institutional church and the lay people was expected. The complexity of the issue is, therefore, a clash between the organizational structure from the Middle East and the organizational structure from Sweden.

In addition to the clash between the way the church was managed in Turkey and in Sweden, clan intrigues and conflicts had a big impact on the conflict. This led to an institutional division. At its heart, this institutional division is about different understandings of the relationship between church and society. The conflict was deepened under the guise of the ethnic division concerning the question of the identity markers of *syrianska* and *assyriska*. In a simplifying way, one could say that those in favor of the *assyriska* name held a position that there should be a separation between church and ethnicity. Those favoring the *syrianska* name as an identity marker put the church at the center. The church, from a synodal level, rejected any secular-ethnic movement that it understood as a factor that led to division of the people and tried to handle it by exhorting its members to reject any secular-ethnic discourse and movement. In the Encyclical issued by Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I on November 29, 1981, he took a stand against Aramaic and Assyrian movements as secular-ethnic movements that led to division. Local bishops were given the authority to use excommunication to stop the movements – which, in retrospect, were not successful. The variables of division should be understood from an intersectional perspective, where ethnicity, language, clan belonging, gender, and religion simultaneously intersect and amplify the conflict. These should be seen as power structures that play out in a game of gaining or maintaining action space and influence, all within the process of migration. For example, in the relationship described above between the bishop and the board, there is clearly a struggle for action space.

I hope to have shown so far that the experiences of migration differed in the Syriac Orthodox group. The experience was disruptive in many ways. First, the group that arrived in Europe and Sweden was heterogeneous. They arrived in different periods, and the group of people had different experiences from their home countries and spent varying periods in Europe and Sweden. The conflicts within the group were multifaceted and were mainly connected to clan and institution, family belonging, and church organization. The conflicts within the group also show the importance of the institution of the church. One could argue that

the rejection of the ethnic movements by Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas was an attempt to keep conflict and division out of the church and reflected a desire to keep the unity of the church. However, part of the issue was the conflation of church and people and an inability to handle the diversity among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Even so, even though I have so far emphasized the migratory experiences and the internal conflicts among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, I mean to argue that the liturgy was an important space where the diverse group met. It was also here that the conflicts were inflamed. The indication of the importance of the liturgy is seen in the attempt by the clergy to still conflicts by using excommunication.

Translocation: printing liturgical books, building churches, and changing ritual patterns

Part of the migration experience relating to liturgical practice and texts can be described as ritual insecurity in that there were no books, no priests, and no space to perform the liturgy initially. After the arrival of the community to Sweden, many attended the Church of Sweden and attended their Sunday school teaching and went to their Sunday mass. In the case where a priest was present, the role of the priest would have been to keep the commonality/oneness of the group despite its heterogeneity. The priest had to know several languages and function as somebody who was able to relate to different groups.

For the initial process of establishment in the countries in Europe, the work of bishop Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek was transformative. He published the anaphora in 1985, followed by books for the deacons to use in the Eucharistic rite.[49] Everything was written by hand until there was a way to use computing for writing liturgical books. The anaphora was, of course, not sufficient for the celebration of the entire liturgical year. For that, one needed the so-called *Mʿadʿdono*, the book for the feast days used in the Eucharistic liturgy. The *Shḥimo* for the daily prayers, which could be used for morning prayers prior to Sunday liturgies if need be, was published in 1981.[50] The most necessary liturgical books were published and distributed in Europe by the late bishop in the 1980s. There were still the other liturgical books that were needed for the full celebration of the liturgical year, the *Panqitho* and the *Ḥussoyo*, needed for morning prayers on Sundays, for *ramsho* on Saturday evenings, for Lent and other major feast days and saint days during the liturgical year.

49 Mar Yulius Yesu Çiçek, ed., ܐܢܐܦܘܪܐ ܐܝܟ ܛܟܣܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܣܘܪܝܝܬܐ ܬܪܝܨܬ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܐܢܛܝܘܟܝܐ *[Anaphora According to the Order of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch]* (Holland: St Ephrem der Syrer Kloster, 1985).

50 Ignatius Ephrem I Barsaum, ܫܚܝܡܐ, ed. Mar Yulius Yesu Çiçek, 4th ed. (Holland: Maouchy & Zakaria Printing Press, 1981).

These books are big, written to be used by the deacons and deaconesses on the *gudo*, in the nave of the church. The process of obtaining these looked different from parish to parish, a story that has not been told yet. There is, however, one case that I would like to point to.[51]

In 1981, Resit Özdemir accepted the calling to become a priest in a parish in Västerås in Sweden. The majority of the about 150 Syriac Orthodox families in Västerås were from the village of Kerburan in Tur Abdin. A graduate of the monastery Deir al-Zaʿfaran in Mardin, he decided to go back there to prepare for ordination, to learn what he needed to learn, and especially to master the liturgical year. During his stay in Deir al-Zaʿfaran, he went to the Mor Gabriel monastery as well. The village of Kerburan had been emptied of Christians, and the last one, Indrawus Demir, was killed in 1976.[52] All the remaining books in the church were brought to Mor Gabriel monastery, alongside the church bell, which is still used at the monastery today. Visiting the monastery, Özdemir investigated whether the books of this village could be brought to Sweden. Among the books which were at the monastery were *Panqyotho* for the entire liturgical year. These manuscripts had been copied by village priests. Most of the *Panqyotho* were written by chorbishop Fatrus Ay, the last priest of Kerburan before the migration to Europe. He also came to Sweden and, until his death, served as a priest in the parish of Mor Gabriel in Gothenburg. He is now buried in the monastery of Mor Ephrem in Holland. Some of the books had also been copied by Fr Iskander Sawma (Demir), who relocated to Sweden and served as a priest in Mor Efrem in Södertälje until his death. These were most notably the burial books for priests and laypeople. One of the most precious manuscripts of the village was a Gospel manuscript dated to the 1650s. Resit Özdemir searched Mardin for somebody who could bring the books to Sweden. Some freight companies imported goods from Lebanon and drove via Mardin, then, on to Sweden as the final destination. These were Swedish drivers with whom Resit made a deal. The books arrived in Sweden and were brought to the parish of St Koriakos (same name as the main church in Kerburan) in Västerås. They are all kept there. They were used for several years and were later copied as well for use in other parishes in Sweden. Hence, in 1981, St Koriakos parish in Västerås was one of the first parishes in Sweden to have been able to celebrate the full liturgical calendar in one year. This example shows how the manuscripts for the celebration of the full liturgical year could make their way to the diaspora after

51 The data presented is based on an interview with Resit Özdemir 2017-07-22, today chor-episcopos Simon Bar-Sawme and my own observation of the liturgy of the parish.

52 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland."

the initial establishment in Sweden. I am sure there are other similar stories to be traced, which combined would provide a fuller picture of how the process of being able to celebrate the full liturgical year could look like.

The initial process of the establishment of the Syriac Orthodox Church after the dislocation from the Middle East was to focus on the ability to celebrate the liturgical year, and having the right tools and location to do so. It meant publishing the necessary books for the celebration of the liturgical year, and finding locations where the liturgy could take place. This in and of itself meant reconstruction and an impossibility to simply perform the liturgy as it had been in the Middle East. Renegotiations must have taken place since the liturgical celebrations would have varied in the Middle East. In in the diaspora, where people from varied countries, cities, and villages would celebrate together, slightly different traditions met. Everything from how you perform the liturgy to melodies sung (*Beth Gazo* and tones of recitation) would have differed and indeed differ today. In the parish of St Koriakos in Västerås, most parishioners were from the village of Kerburan. But there were also members from other villages in the Tur Abdin. But those who would influence the rituals were mostly the deacons and the priest. The deacons were from Kerburan, Miden, Mar Bobo, and other villages. The deacons leading the liturgy had studied in Deir al-Zaʿfaran and Mor Gabriel. Mardin and Tur Abdin met and had to negotiate and adapt to one another. This meant primarily a negotiation on how to sing the melodies of the *Beth Gazo*. There was generally a great acceptance of the different musical traditions within the parish. A deacon trained at the Mor Gabriel monastery leading the *gudo* would sing according to his tradition, and everybody would attempt to adapt and line in with the tune, even though they would have had a different tradition. Most often, this worked fine since the differences in the tunes would not be so significant. The same kind of negotiation would take place if a deacon trained at Mardin led the *gudo*. However, as for the practices of the liturgical year, negotiations would most often take place prior to the actual practices taking place. Deacons, with the priest, had meetings most often before the big holidays to prepare for liturgical performances. Negotiations would take place between the different schools but also in relation to the rubrics of the given liturgical book. For example, the *Mʿadʿdono*, the book used for holidays in the Syriac Orthodox Church, contains rubrics and instructions on how to perform specific liturgical practices, from the feast of *Denḥo* (Epiphany) to all the big events happening during Great Lent. The negotiation would consist of what the right tradition is and whether the deacons and priest ought to slavishly follow the written instructions or whether the tradition they knew from their home village or the monastery is the correct one. Implicit in the negotiation

are negotiations between different ecclesiological views. Those wanting to follow the book slavishly referred most often to the authority of the book and the author of the book. Those who argued for an adapted practice based on the village's previous tradition argued for the diversity of practices. The negotiators, deacons, and priests referred to different sources of authority as the basis for practice.

The parish in Västerås did not have a church building of its own. Rather, they borrowed and rented parishes from the Church of Sweden. This was the situation for most parishes in Sweden. The deacons and the priests tried to uphold the tradition as they knew it. Since liturgy is more than simply reciting what is in the text, that is, it is about the performance of the text within a physical building to track all changes and adaptations, an in-depth comparison would need ethnographic material from Tur Abdin, from before the migration to Europe. Based on interviews with deacons from Miden, graduates of Mor Gabriel, at the parish of St Koriakos in Västerås, I contend that even in Tur Abdin the liturgical practices varied from village to village, and the structure of the church buildings varied as well.[53] Indeed, any ethnographic material from different parishes in Sweden today would show a big variation in the celebration of the liturgy, all depending on the tradition the priest and deacons belong to and whether they have their own church building or not.

The parish of Mor Koriakos in Västerås built its church and celebrated the first liturgy on Christmas day in the year 2000. Since the establishment of the church building, many different patterns of adaptations and change have taken place. One of the most significant adaptations was the introduction of Swedish in the liturgy. Most of the older generation in the parish in Västerås speak Kurdish (Kurmanci). Like in Kerburan, readings from Scriptures and liturgical texts were translated orally into Kurdish by deacons and the priest. In Sweden, many liturgical books were translated to Swedish via English. The late bishop Athanasius Yeshu Samuel of the USA had several liturgical books translated into English in the late 1990s, such as *The Order for Baptism and Marriage*.[54] The path to Swedish via English is an important pattern, not only because of the translation work per se, but because of the influence the liturgical developments in the USA would come to have on the rest of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the rest of the world, and not the least in Sweden. Once available, these Swedish translations replaced the Kurdish ones in the church in Västerås.

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53 Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy*.

54 Ignatius Ephrem Barsoum, *Vigselns Sakrament: Enligt Den Syrisk-Ortodoxa Kyrkans Urgamla Ritual [Elektronisk Resurs]*, trans. Tony Larsson (Gloria Förlag, 1998).

The next big adaptation of the liturgical practice in Sweden was the introduction of the projection of the liturgical text on a screen during the liturgy. The Syriac text of the liturgy, together with a Swedish translation, is projected, which means that the screen probably becomes the focal point for the participants in the liturgy. The Syriac text is not always transliterated, but the Swedish translation becomes the focus point. Only three anaphoras (out of more than twenty that are in regular usage) have been translated into Swedish, which means that the priest either must adapt and only use a selection of anaphoras and, therefore, not use the variety of texts that are extant or use the other dozen or so that are printed and in use today and pray something different than what is projected on the screen. This is what happens in the Mor Koriakos parish in Västerås today. The liturgical text is projected on the screen, but the priest chooses from various prayers and liturgical texts that are not translated. So, on any given Sunday, there is a mismatch between the screen and the actual liturgical text used.

Another pattern of change in the parish can be summarized under the term reduction. Liturgical texts published recently have been reworked and updated with full vocalization. In addition, the *Panqitho* used today in the parish has all the antiphons and instructions included in the book itself. These had to be added previously using other books. However, where the texts are more comprehensive, the practice has been reduced. One such reduction can be seen in the performance of the *Denḥo* (Epiphany) where according to the *Mʿadʿdono* a full blessing of the water according to the baptism rite should be performed.[55] The performance has been reduced significantly to the minimum blessing of the water. Rather than shortening rites, some of the rites are reduced completely. One example of this in Mor Koriakos parish in Västerås is the liturgical practice of the morning and evening prayers of the *Shḥimo*, which are no longer performed. Until the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019, the parish performed morning and evening prayers daily. Most attendees were retired people.

Similar reductive adaptations can be seen throughout the ritual system. While there is a tendency towards reduction, there is also a pattern of change originating from a liturgical movement in the USA, where the role of the laypeople is changing in relation to different liturgical practices. As a deacon, I was surprised when I moved to the USA in 2011 to study for my master's degree in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and attended the liturgy in various parishes in New Jersey. I was surprised by the fact that all responses in the liturgy were said by the lay people and not by the deacons. A comparison between the Anaphora published by

55 Denysenko, 2012.

Çiçek in 1985[56] and the order for the liturgy published for the deacons (*Qinotho*) by Çiçek in 1990[57] shows a discrepancy in the rubrics. In the anaphora, the book instructs the people to give the responses, whereas in the *Qinotho*, the deacons are instructed to give the responses. The latter reflected the actual practice at the time, whereas the Anaphora, which is based on a manuscript from the 15th century, reflects an older practice. The US practice reflects a general trend and movement within the church to go back to an older practice in which laypeople participate more in the liturgy. I was also surprised that women read the readings in the liturgy, that lay people prayed the litany in the liturgy, and that communion was received in the hand and not in the mouth during the liturgy and not after. The change in how communion was received occurred after the Sars Epidemic 2003 in the USA. The rest of the church followed along after the Corona pandemic in 2019. To this day, the readings are always done by deacons in the Mor Koriakos parish in Västerås and the litany is also prayed by the deacons. In some parishes in Sweden, communion is not given after the ending of the liturgy but in the proper place in the liturgical rite. The Syriac Orthodox community in the USA has a longer history than the community in Sweden[58] and with one of its previous hierarchs now being the patriarch of the entire church, there seems to be a general movement toward going back to older practices if they motivate higher lay participation.

Relocation?

The church has gone through several stages in its establishment in Sweden, which has been coupled with internal struggles and difficult negotiations. In Sweden, Syriac Orthodox meet from many countries in the Middle East with different commitments and loyalties. That also means different power structures and clans with different goals and intentions. This struggle has dominated the establishment of the community in Sweden. While the processes can be described as dislocation, transplantation, and relocation, they are far from linear. The process is messy with internal conflicts, power struggles, it being a search for identity and belonging, and new ways of being church in a completely new world. This search has been characterized by a reduction and shortening in liturgical practices. At the same time, there is a movement towards including lay people more and trans-

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56 Çiçek, ܐܢܐܦܘܪܐ ܐܝܟ ܛܟܣܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܣܘܪܝܝܬܐ ܐܪܬܕܘܟܣܝܬܐ ܕܐܢܛܝܘܟܝܐ *[Anaphora According to the Order of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch]*.

57 Mar Yulius Yesu Çiçek, ed., *Qinotho (Hymns of the Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch)* (Holland: St Ephrem's Monastery, 1990).

58 George Anton Kiraz, *The Syriac Orthodox in North America (1895-1995): A Short History* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019).

lating important liturgical texts into Swedish. This process is extremely complex to capture but is played in a field of tension between the younger generation, the older generation, clergy and laypeople, clan leaders of different clans, commitments to Swedish society, and commitments to an imagined past. The process is far from over, and probably will never be since such an assumption is based on an essentialist view of culture.[59]

One of the important aspects of ritual theory is the insight that ritual practices are spaces in which groups come together and form a community that may very well exist beyond the ritual itself. This is what I hope to have shown in this paper, namely, that even though the Syriac Orthodox community is heterogenous and has arrived in Sweden from different places in the Middle East in different periods, the liturgy seems to be the place where they all meet and have been forced to negotiate. One could argue that the role of a ritual is to have an effect on the audience, usually called ritual efficacy.[60] One such effect is the creation of a common identity and belonging. It seems that the liturgy both had successes and failures in this regard. The response of the hierarchy of the church to the Assyriska and Syrianska movements in the late 1970s and 1980s was a clear rejection, which eventually led to the split of the diocese in Sweden based on this issue. At the same time, liturgical adaptations to meet the new generation take place continuously. The adaptations seem to be driven by the migration process, meeting with new contexts, and changes in values within the community itself. It would have been unspeakable to allow a woman to read Scriptures at the liturgy, and it still is in many places in the Syriac Orthodox church. Yet, in parishes in the USA, this happens. Finally, the data is limited; therefore, the conclusions I draw regarding the patterns of change cannot be generalized. What is clear is that there are messy patterns, like life is messy. More ethnographic data is needed for a fuller understanding of what is happening with the community and the liturgical practices.

59 Werbner, "Migration and Culture."

60 Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, "Efficacy," in *Theorizing rituals : issues, topics, approaches, concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Joannes Augustinus Maria Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, Studies in the history of religions, 0169-8834 ; 114–1 (Leiden ; Brill, 2006), 523–31.

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Recovering the Monastic Tradition: Publishing Trends in the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia and America

JESSE SIRAGAN ARLEN

Introduction

Unlike the Catholic and most Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, the monastic tradition in the Armenian Church is all but non-existent today due to complex historical processes that were already underway in the fifteenth century. In recent decades, however, there has been an effort on the part of the Armenian Apostolic Church, both in the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia as well as the Diaspora, to seek ways to revitalise the monastic tradition and rediscover its vast literary heritage. This paper will proceed by first offering a brief discussion of the decline and disappearance of the Armenian monastic tradition from the late medieval to the modern period. I will then highlight one avenue by which the Church has sought to revitalize the monastic tradition in an attempt to bring its wisdom to the faithful of the Church today, namely through the publication of texts from the monastic tradition in modern vernacular languages. For the purposes of this paper, I will limit myself to those publications in modern Armenian issued from the headquarters of the Armenian Church – the Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin – and to publications in English issued from one of the largest and most important dioceses of the Diaspora, that of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) headquartered in New York City as well as St. Nersess Armenian Seminary – the only Armenian seminary in the Western Hemisphere – also located in New York and sharing a close relationship with the Eastern Diocese.

The decline of Armenian monasticism

Very little scholarly literature exists on Armenian monasticism from the fifteenth century to the present. For example, this period is entirely ignored in a recently published volume devoted to the Armenian monastic tradition.[1] It is, after all, easier for historians to document the appearance and activities of an institution than that same institution's decline and disappearance, which is what

1 Jasmine Dum-Tragut, Dietmar W. Winkler (eds.), *Monastic Life in the Armenian Church: Glorious Past – Ecumenical Reconsideration* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2018).

happened to Armenian monasticism from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. Given the minimal state of scholarly research into this question, it is thus difficult to account fully for the decline of Armenian monasticism across this time period. One crucial factor seems to relate to the gradual decline and disappearance of the *nakharar* (noble) class, who were the traditional landholders in Armenian society and the principal patrons and sponsors of monastic institutions throughout the medieval period.[2] It is thanks to the economic backing of various *nakharar* families, especially the Bagratid, Artsrunid, and Siwni, that permanently endowed, large-scale cenobitic monastic institutions came to be founded across the Armenian *oikoumené* beginning in the ninth century.[3] When the Byzantine state annexed the autonomous Armenian kingdoms in the eleventh century and resettled them westwards into the themes of Sebastia and Cappadocia, many of the monasteries in the dislocated Armenian realms also moved westwards with their patronizing lords and were refounded there.[4] Monasticism thrived in the area of Armenian Cilicia from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, thanks to the sponsorship of the Armenian noble families, such as the Rubenid and Hetumid, that controlled territory there during the period of the Crusades.[5] However, Armenian monastic life in the region declined drastically in the aftermath of the loss of sovereignty in the

2 On the decline of the *nakharar* class, which took place over the course of many centuries, see Nina Garsoïan, "Esquisse de l'évolution du *naxararutʿiwn* arménien durant l'interrègne (VIIe–IXe siècle)," *Revue des études arméniennes* 34 (2012): 41–71; Sergio La Porta, "'The Kingdom and the Sultanate were Conjoined': Legitimizing Land and Power in Armenia during the 12th and Early 13th Centuries," *Revue des études arméniennes* 34 (2012): 73–118.

3 On the role of noble and princely families in sponsoring monastic foundations in this period, see Krikor Maksoudian, "A Note on the Monasteries Founded During the Reign of King Abas I Bagratuni," *Revue des études arméniennes* 22 (1990–1991): 203–15," Zaroui Pogossian, "The Foundation of the Monastery of Sevan: A Case Study of Monasteries, Economy, and Political Power in IX-X Century Armenia," in *Le Valli dei Monaci, Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio, Roma – Subiaco, 17-19 maggio 2010*, edited by Letizia Ermini Pani, 181–215 (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2012), *eadem*, "Locating Religion, Controlling Territory: Conquest and Legitimation in Late Ninth Century Vaspurakan and its Interreligious Context," in *Locating Religions: Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, edited by Reinhold Glei and Nikolas Jaspert, 173–233. (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

4 One prominent example of this phenomenon is the case of the renowned Narek monastery (Narekavankʿ), which was refounded as Arek monastery (Arekavankʿ) in 1021 in Sebasteia, to where the Artsruni king Senekʿerim-Yovhannēs along with 14,000 retainers had relocated from Vaspurakan. See Jean-Michel Thierry, *Répertoire des monastères arméniens* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 76, note 410; Nina Garsoïan, "The Byzantine Annexation of the Armenian Kingdoms in the Eleventh Century." In *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian, 1:187–98 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 190.

5 Hamazasp Oskean, *Kilikiayi vankʿerě* [Կիլիկիայի վանքերը = Die Klöster Kilikiens] (Vienna: Mkhitʿarean Press, 1957).

late fourteenth century.[6] In the traditional Armenian homeland, monastic institutions did their best to survive under the shifting polities that ruled in the wake of the disappearance of *nakharar* rule over the bulk of the Armenian plateau. The migrations and subsequent conquests of various peoples from Central Asia – Turkic, Mongolian, Timurid – in the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries had a destabilizing and, in some cases, devastating impact on many of the monastic institutions in the Armenian *oikoumené*. Historians of the period recount monasteries being raided, monks being taken prisoner, and monastic teachers, such as Grigor of Tatev, being forced to relocate along with their students from monastery to monastery in an effort to carry on their spiritual and scholastic activity in a safe environment.[7] Despite this, many monastic institutions continued to flourish, especially in Eastern Armenian regions that were still in the orbit of autonomous Armenian lords. Likewise, thanks to the emergence and expansion of Georgian rule, some monastic institutions received economic assistance and sponsorship through new endowments.[8]

The sixteenth century was also a period of significant crises due to two major disruptive forces on the Armenian plateau. Firstly, many of the Ottoman-Safavid battles of the sixteenth century took place in Armenian-populated territory and wreaked havoc on the economic and cultural life of the inhabitants there.[9] Secondly, the Jelali rebellions of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries brought about the destruction of towns, brought terror among the local populace, and led to migrations out of the region into more stable western areas of the Ottoman Empire, such as Izmir, Rodosto, and Constantinople.[10] The local population was further depleted due to the forced relocation of Armenians from Julfa and its environs imposed by Shah Abbas in 1604/5 as he pursued a scorched earth policy and sought to create a no-man's land buffer zone between his own empire and the Ottoman.[11] The decline in monastic activity due to such disruptive forces is doc-

6 Jean Mécérian S.J., *Histoire et institutions de l'église arménienne: évolution nationale et doctrinale spiritualité – monachisme* (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1965), 302.

7 These are recurring themes in historians of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, such as Kirakos Ganjaketsʿi, Vardan Arewelтsʿi, and Tʿovma Metsopʿetsʿi.

8 See La Porta, "The Kingdom and the Sultanate."

9 Dickran Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom (1375) to the Forced Emigration under Shah Abbas (1604)," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian, 2:1–50. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 14–19.

10 Henry R. Shapiro, *The Rise of the Western Armenian Diaspora in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire: From Refugee Crisis to Renaissance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) 29–82; Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom," 19.

11 Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom," 19-21.

umented both by a chronicler of the time, Grigor Daranaghtsʿi, and also reflected in the notable decline in manuscript production in the scriptoria of this period.[12]

When the dust settled from these events, the monastic tradition never recovered. Armenians lacked autonomous rule in their homeland and were scattered across various diasporic communities divided by different empires under the jurisdiction of different catholicoi and patriarchs. Taking the place of the *nakharar* class as the new sponsors of Armenian culture was the new merchant elite (*khoja*, *chelebi*),[13] especially associated with the New Julfan merchant networks, as well as members of the new middle class, and later the financial and industrial magnates known as *amiras* in and around Constantinople.[14] These mobile *nouveau riche,* whose wealth was not as tied to the land as the *nakharars* of old, often had different priorities for their patronage and philanthropic activity than the old nobles who deposited much of their wealth and substance in stable, fixed monastic foundations.

The two final nails in the coffin of Armenian monasticism came in the twentieth century, with the brutal massacres, deportations, and genocide of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire and the enforced secularization and atheism in Soviet Armenia.[15] Thus, as we return to our present topic to examine recently published works pertaining to the Armenian monastic tradition both in the Diaspora and the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia, it is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with a Christian communion that has been ontologically severed from its own monastic tradition – which historically was the metaphorical mind, heart and soul of that same Church – and now is seeking ways both to revive and rediscover the monastic spirit and wisdom of the past.

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12 Shapiro, *Rise of the Western Armenian Diaspora*, 147–196. Dickran Kouymjian, "Dated Armenian Manuscripts as a Statistical Tool for Armenian History," in *Medieval Armenian Culture*, edited by T. J. Samuelian and M. E. Stone, 425–439 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984); idem, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom," 41–43; S. Peter Cowe, "Church and Diaspora: The Case of the Armenians," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Volume 5: Eastern Christianity*, edited by Michael Angold, 430–456 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 430.

13 Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom," 23–24; Dickran Kouymjian, "From Disintegration to Reintegration: Armenians at the Start of the Modern Era, XVIth-XVIIth Centuries," *Revue du Monde Arménien* 1 (1994): 9–18; Sebouh D. Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

14 Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*; Hagop L. Barsoumian, *The Armenian Amira Class of Istanbul* (Yerevan: American University of Armenia, 2007).

15 There is a vast bibliography on these topics. As a starting point, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else:" A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

In the appendix to this study one may find a brief bibliography of representative works related to the monastic or spiritual tradition, that have been issued by the Holy See of Ejmiatsin and the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) in recent years. The next section of the paper will provide a brief discussion of some of these publications.

The publication of monastic texts in the vernacular

Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin: Mayr Atʿor Surb Ejmiatsin Hratarakchʿutʿyun

The end of Sovietization ushered in a period of renewal and new possibilities for the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia. Naturally, the initial years were occupied by administrative and political expediencies. As the years have proceeded, increased emphasis has been turned toward recovering the literary and spiritual tradition of the Armenian Christian tradition, which was suppressed (if not extinguished) during the era of communist rule, with its official policy of atheism and suppression of religious activity, including all monastic life.[16]

In the middle of the first decade of the new millennium, several publication series were initiated at the official press of the Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin (the headquarters of the Armenian Apostolic Church), which brought spiritual and theological writings into modern Armenian. Here, it must be remembered that the official language of the Church is Old Armenian (*grabar*, գրաբար), with liturgical services still primarily conducted in the ancient idiom, which is not immediately intelligible to untrained speakers of the modern vernacular. With the modern forms of the language – Eastern and Western Armenian – only being standardized in the middle of the nineteenth century, there is not a long history of rendering spiritual or monastic texts in a form of the language that is readily understandable to the populace, particularly when one factor in the period of Sovietization, which all but eliminated the publication of such writings, at least as far as Soviet Armenia was concerned.[17]

The first of these series is called Հոգեւոր ընթերցումներ (*Hogewor ĕntʿertsʿumner*, "Spiritual Readings" or "Spiritual Texts"). 2007 saw the publication of four titles in

16 On the history of the Armenian Church since independence, see Hratch Tchilingirian, "The Armenian Apostolic Church," in *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Lucian N. Leustean, 471–497. (New York: Routledge, 2014), and "In Search of Relevance," in *Réligion et politique dans le Caucase post-Soviétique*, edited by Bayram Balci and Raoul Motika, 277–311 (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2007).

17 On the Armenian language in the modern period, see S. Peter Cowe, "Amēn teł hay kay: Armenian as a Pluricentric Language," in *Pluricentric Languages: Differing Norms in Differing*, edited by Nations M. Clyne, 325–345 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1992).

this series: the life of Saint Anthony the Great along with his ascetical instructions (Խրատներ, *khratner*), ascetical instructions by Macarius the Great, and ascetical instructions by Saint Ephrem the Syrian.[18] The fourth volume is a text known as *Հայելի վարուց* (*Hayeli varutsʿ*, *The Mirror of Life*), a late medieval ascetic miscellany compiled in 1480 and published in 1841 and translated from Polish to Old Armenian by Stepʿanos Lehatsʿi in 1651. The first three texts were not translated from the original languages or from Old Armenian but from Russian to modern Armenian, while the fourth was translated from Old Armenian. The introductions to the first three works contain historical, biographical, and theological information about the early church fathers as well as summaries of the texts being translated. The introductions seem to presume familiarity with the monastic or ascetic tradition and make no attempt to accommodate a modern audience unfamiliar with ascetic terminology or norms. Nor is there any discussion aimed at how the modern reader may practically use or apply the book in the contemporary world or setting.[19] The one-page introduction to the fourth book simply mentions the publication history of the volume and offers the (dubious) assertion that "the collection left its original mark on the prose of late medieval aesthetic literature (Ժողովածուն իր ուրոյն հետքն է թողել ուշ միջնադարի գեղարուեստական գրականութեան արձակում)." Such a statement reveals that the preoccupations of the editors and translators remained more on the literary plane than with spiritual or monastic issues, a holdover from the Soviet period when medieval texts were studied only for their literary merit with spiritual and theological elements largely ignored.[20]

Another series that held even more promise for enriching the spiritual lives of the contemporary faithful was called Աղօթագրքեր (*Aghōtʿagrkʿer*, "Prayer Books") and likewise started in 2007. Two prayer books in this series were published with the Old Armenian original and modern Armenian translation arranged in facing-page format. The first in the series was the prayer book of Yovhannēs Sarkawag (eleventh/twelfth c.), and the second was prayers by Yovhannēs Gaṛnetsʿi (twelfth/thirteenth c.). Here too, the texts of the prayers were presented

18 The works of Ephrem in this volume are not authentic works of the Syrian father, but rather issue from the vast corpus of Psuedo-Ephremica that circulated in Greek and Old Church Slavonic. On the Greek corpus attributed to Ephrem, see Trevor Fiske Crowell, "The Biblical Homilies of Ephraem Graecus" (Ph.D. Diss., Catholic University of America, 2016) 8–16.

19 On the general failure of the Church to address or speak to the spiritual needs of people in the post-Soviet sphere, see the Tchilingirian studies cited above in n. 16.

20 S. Peter Cowe, "Armenological Paradigms and Yovhannēs Sarkawag's 'Discourse on Wisdom' – Philosophical Underpinning of an Armenian Renaissance?" *Revue des études arméniennes* 25 (1994–1995): 125–156, here 130–134, Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, "Studies of Armenian Christian Tradition in the Twentieth Century," *Annual of Medieval Studies at Central European University* 18 (2012): 137–152.

solely with a brief scholarly introduction and without any instruction as to how they relate to the lives of contemporary readers.

Two other series, likewise begun in 2007, contained publications by church fathers. The first, Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր (*Ĕndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer*, "Universal Church Fathers") saw the publication of six texts between 2007–2009 from the following Greek patristic figures: St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, and Origen of Alexandria. One text was translated from ancient Greek (St. Cyril), three from French, one from Russian, and one from Old Armenian. Likewise, from 2007–2008, the series Հայ եկեղեցու հայրեր (*Hay ekeghetsʿu hayrer*, "Armenian Church Fathers") published writings translated from Old Armenian to modern Armenian from fathers of the Armenian church: The Teaching of St. Gregory, Movsēs of Khoren, Eghishē, Davitʿ the Invincible, Yovhan Mandakuni, and Vardan Aygektsʿi. Similar to the above series, the introductions contained biographical, historical, and some literary and theological commentary.

Finally, a publication series began that rendered patristic commentaries on the Bible in modern Armenian. Six books were issued between 2007 and 2010, with commentaries primarily on the wisdom literature and Gospels, the most prized portions of Scripture for medieval monks. Authors included St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory of Narek, St. Nersēs of Lambron, and St. Nersēs Shnorhali, among others, all of whom took a spiritualizing approach to the interpretation of Scripture. In this series, like the others, the introduction and notes focused on questions of historical and literary interest. They did little to elucidate the patristic approach to the Bible, which vastly differs from the approach of biblical or literary scholars to texts.

While the aforementioned series aims to bring the texts of the patristic and monastic tradition into modern Armenian so that they can be easily accessed by contemporary readers today, the editors and publishers of the text reflect more on the literary and historical value of the works than on their theological or spiritual value. Likewise, little discussion pertains to the monastic environment from which such texts were issued and in which they were intended to be read. Due to the rupture in the Armenian monastic tradition, especially during the period of Sovietization, such ascetic texts now circulate divorced from the environment to which they belong. In the pre-modern setting, ascetic texts, such as those issued in the above series, were produced and circulated in monastic settings, which were laboratories of ascetic practice. Such texts were not read for abstract or intellectual pursuits or for literary or aesthetic pleasure but rather were employed in conjunction with ascetic practices and for the purpose of acquiring virtue. Such texts formed an essential ingredient in the larger ascetic-mystical quest of monks

to transform the self and seek union with the divine.[21] By contrast, the texts issued in these series are divorced from the ascetic environment that gives them meaning and within which they were meant to be read and employed. Instead, the publication of such texts seems to have more to do with their cultural and literary value, which is perhaps not surprising given their emergence just fifteen years after the end of Soviet rule. While the content of the published texts contained much of practical use, one cannot help but feel that it was a lost opportunity to publish the texts without any accommodation to the contemporary reader in the twenty-first century or practical instruction as to how they might use or apply the text in their own spiritual life.

Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern): St. Vartan Press and St. Nersess Armenian Seminary

The Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) is one of the largest and most important dioceses of the Armenian Church in the diaspora. Founded in 1898, it was the first jurisdiction of the Armenian Church established in the New World.[22] In addition to its official press, St. Vartan Press, it is also home to two institutions that have also issued publications of a popular and scholarly nature: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, the only Armenian seminary in the Western Hemisphere, founded in 1962, and the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center, an endowed research library, a cultural and academic centre founded in 1987 thanks to the philanthropy of Dolores Zohrab Liebmann, daughter of the jurist, writer, and Ottoman parliamentarian, Krikor Zohrab.

Over the year since its founding, the Eastern Diocese has produced a small library of books and booklets. Many of these publications are liturgical and pertain to the practical functioning, operations, and services of the Church. There are also publications relating to Armenian history and culture of all time periods, literature, art, etc. Publications on such topics fall outside the scope of the present study. In the bibliography found in the appendix, I have attempted to compile the most relevant publications of the last fifty years, whose aim was to foster spirituality and present monastic wisdom and practice to the faithful. In the section that follows, I will highlight some of these publications.

An early such publication, which appeared in 1976, was called *Conversing with God* and included English-language Psalms and prayers for various occasions and

21 On this see Jesse Siragan Arlen, "Texts for Keeping Watch: The *Hymns of the Night* of Ephrem of Nisibis and the *Book of Lamentation* of Gregory of Narek." *Viator* 49 no. 2 (2018): 1–23.

22 Christopher Hagop Zakian (ed.), *The Torch was Passed: The Centennial History of the Armenian Church of America* (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1998), 3–12.

purposes, e.g., thanksgiving; for various times of the day; intercession; penitential; for receiving holy communion, etc. The introduction contains some instruction on prayer, including practical direction and instruction on how, what, and when to pray:

> First, we should pray regularly. To make a regular time and place for prayer is one way to open ourselves to God. Our place should be private, our time undisturbed. The Church has wisely told us to kneel in prayer, for this physical attitude helps us feel as creatures speaking to our Creator, and also to be grateful for His infinite gifts to us. Kneeling can help us get ready, psychologically, to pray. We can use the Bible, especially the Psalms, as prayers. There are also the prayers of the saints, such as Nersess and Gregory, which may be able to express for us all the things we need to say. Or they can be used to get us started, to help us form the words we will say. How do we say them? In our own most personal and natural way...[23]

This prayer book was intended not just to present prayers that one may pray but also to provide instruction on what prayer is, how, when, and in what posture to pray. It thus also serves as a practical guide for the individual who intends to use it in prayer with God. Such instruction on prayer ultimately derives in an adapted form from the Church's own monastic tradition, even when it is not explicitly mentioned or acknowledged.

Other booklets have focused on individual sacraments or practices that were central to monastic spirituality, intending to guide the reader toward making such a practice a regular part of their spiritual life. For example, a 40-page book entitled *Penance: The Sacrament of Saying I'm Sorry*, published in 1985, contained instructions on sin, forgiveness, confession, and the sacrament of penance. In the middle of the booklet are two detailed sections providing practical how-to guidance on how to prepare for confession and how to make a detailed examination of one's conscience through a series of reflective questions directed toward the self. This is followed by sections that feature relevant prayers as well as Scriptural passages like the apocryphal prayer of Manasseh. Following this is a section devoted to meditative and prayerful Scriptural reading (*lectio divina*) on key Scriptural passages for confession and repentance, such as Psalm 51, Psalm 32, or the parable of the Prodigal Son.[24]

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23 *Conversing with God,* By the order of Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, compiled by the Women's Advisory Council (New York, NY: Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, 1976), vii–viii.

24 Rev. Vartan Kasparian, *Penance: The Sacrament of Saying I'm Sorry* (New York, NY: St. Vartan Press, 1985), 18–33.

Other publications of a hagiographical nature present the lives of the saints, many of whom were monastic figures or whose lives and memories were crystallized in a monastic setting. One such publication, entitled *The Light of the World: Lives of Armenian Saints*, speaks directly to this goal of adaptation in the introduction:

> It might have been advisable for us to wait for the publication of critical editions on which to base our English translations…Yet, waiting for the critical editions…would have required many years and would have deprived English language readers of spiritual nourishment. From our perspective, the utmost accuracy of a given text, required by serious scholarship, is not a matter of great concern, since our purpose is to reach not a scholarly public but the faithful of our Church, in order to present them with a readable work of spiritual benefit. To this end, the translated texts have been heavily edited so that the present-day reader may not struggle with difficult words, expressions, or grammatical forms.[25]

As the introduction to this volume makes explicit, the lives of the saints are published not for scholarly but for spiritual purposes and are meant to serve as exemplary models for the faithful to be inspired by and follow in their own lives in the contemporary world. The end of the introduction expands on this point:

> Saints' lives are meant to serve as examples for us who are still living. Their determination to bear witness to Christ, as conveyed through hagiographical literature, has inspired past generations and can also show us, on the threshold of both a new century and a new millennium, the way to eternal life through Christ our Lord.[26]

The introduction goes on to talk about how the example of the saints may be instructive for living in the contemporary world with all its unique challenges and difficulties.

A 130-page book published in 2004, entitled *Welcome to the Armenian Church*, aimed "to provide an informal narrative about the Armenian Church designed

25 Fr. Krikor Maksoudian, Fr. Arten Ashjian, and George Terian, *The Light of the World: Lives of Armenian Saints* (New York, NY: St. Vartan Press, 2000), xvii.
26 Maksoudian, Ashjian, Terian, *Light of the World*, xviii.

for those who want an introduction to its history and culture."[27] In the section of this book covering the history of Armenian Christianity, there was a discussion of the crucial role of monasteries and monastic life, especially as pertaining to the realms of spirituality, art, literature, and cultural production in different periods of history.[28] Tacit acknowledgement that monasticism in the Armenian Church no longer operates according to the traditional model comes in a discussion of the celibate clergy, who populate the hierarchical ranks. The book says:

> Celibate priests are, in our tradition, primarily monks who live in monasteries. They receive the same sacerdotal ordination as a married priest. Married and celibate candidates to the priesthood are frequently ordained together by the same bishop. In the present reality, the unmarried priests either work on administrative, liturgical and academic levels or serve as parish priests as a result of a shortage of married priests. The bishops, archbishops, patriarchs and the catholicoi ascend from their ranks.[29]

Likewise, celibate brotherhoods continue in the present day in the administrative centres of the Armenian Church (Ejmiatsin, Antelias, Jerusalem), yet such celibate clergy do not live a traditional monastic life according to a rule, nor do they necessarily occupy themselves with ascetic and spiritual practices, but rather manage administrative, liturgical, or educational activity in the Church (which one would not necessarily need to be celibate in order to perform).[30]

An interest in the Eastern Diocese to revive the monastic tradition of the Armenian Church is a development of recent years, which seems largely to be a result of influence from the faculty of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary. Earlier messages from the primate on the state of the Diocese plans for the future, and ways to nourish the Armenian faithful did not mention monasticism or the monastic tradition at all. For example, neither a forty-three-page booklet entitled *A Pastoral Letter to the Armenian Faithful,* published in 1995, nor a thirty-page one issued two years later, *The Primate's Plan: On the Road to a New Century*, which outlined a four-year plan and vision for the Armenian Church in America as it entered the new millennium (both from the pen of Archbishop Khajag Barsamian and published by St. Vartan Press) contained any

27 Michael Kermian and Arpi Nakashian McQueen, eds. *Welcome to the Armenian Church: Essentials about the Armenian Church Faith, Religious Culture and Traditions from Ancient Times to Present* (New York, NY: St. Vartan Press, 2004, 2007), 6.
28 Kermian, *Welcome to the Armenian Church*, 14–31 at 16, 19, 23, 26–27, 62.
29 Kermian, *Welcome to the Armenian Church*, 53.
30 Kermian, *Welcome to the Armenian Church*, 58, 61, 65.

mention of or reference to the words 'monastery' or 'monastic.' However, in 2022, a short volume entitled *Building Up the Body of Christ: The Treasure of the Armenian Church for Our People Today*, outlined the goals and vision for the Diocese by Bishop Daniel Findikyan – primate of the Eastern Diocese from 2018–2022, former Dean and Professor of Liturgical Studies at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary – and included the following goal related to the restoration of the monastic tradition:

> Bring the vocation of monastic life in the tradition of the Armenian Church to the greater awareness of our people with the objective of restoring within our diocese forms of monasticism appropriate for the conditions of our day in the United States.[31]

During Bishop Daniel Findikyan's years as dean of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary (2000–2012), a number of publications sought to bring the wisdom and spirituality of the Armenian monastic tradition to the contemporary faithful. Several short booklets were published containing the translations of texts and prayers from saints and monks, known as the St. Nersess Armenian Spirituality Series. One stands out as particularly exemplary for the way in which it contained instruction on how to use the prayers published in the booklet. The booklet is called *Daily Prayers for the Week by Hovhannes of Garni (ca. 1180–1245)*, and was edited and translated by the faculty of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and printed in 2001. Hovhannes of Garni was a monk of the twelfth/thirteenth century, who lived several years in solitude at the Monastery of Ayrivank' (Geghard) and later became known for the miracles he performed during pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Mount Sinai.[32] In the introduction, the editors provide the following instruction to readers:

> The key to using these prayers profitably is to take the time to read and contemplate each day's prayer in quiet solitude. Read the prayer slowly and patiently from beginning to end. Then start again from the beginning, pausing after each sentence. Turn the words and images around in your mind and imagination. Reflect on how each statement reflects your own life. When, for example, Hovhannes prays, "I yielded to the lures of the enemy of life and thwarted your commandments" [Fri], ask yourself: "What 'lures'

31 Bishop Daniel Findikyan, *Building Up the Body of Christ: The Treasure of the Armenian Church for Our People Today* (New York, NY: Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, 2022), 39.

32 *Daily Prayers for the Week by Hovhannes of Garni (ca. 1180-1245)* (New Rochelle, NY: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2001), v–vii.

> ensnare me? Who is the enemy of my life? How have I thwarted God's commandments?" When emphatic statements such as, "I have no rest from my excruciating pains" [Sat] seem excessive, mentally rephrase them to better reflect your situation. You will also certainly encounter images and phrases that seem to resonate with you in a special way, virtually pouring forth from your own soul. Stop and savor these words prayerfully. The piercing silence of the Lord's voice may be speaking to you.
>
> The faculty of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary offers you these prayers in English translation, with the hope that they will bring you physical and spiritual healing, and much more.

This is similar to the kind of instruction that a young monk might have received from his spiritual director in a medieval monastery and represents an approach aimed at popularizing monastic practices in the modern world, a phenomenon similar to the promotion and diffusion of Centering Prayer and lectio divina by Fr. Thomas Keating and Contemplative Outreach.[33] Other publications in the series also mentioned how the booklets were intended to be used in private contemplation and had the aim of leading readers into an awareness of God's presence. For example, the introduction to *Hymns and Odes in Honor of St. Gregory the Illuminator* has the following statement about the goal of the series as a whole: "Drawn from the deep roots of Armenian Christian tradition, these small volumes offer readers ancient doors to a modern awareness of God's presence."[34] The introduction thus reveals the explicit purpose of the series: to foster an 'ancient spirituality' by drawing texts from the monastic tradition and putting them into an approachable form and format for modern readers. Likewise, the foreword to the booklet *Twelve Saints: Twelve Prayers of the Armenian Apostolic Church* indicates that "The prayers are provided for private devotion, contemplation, and as a call to grow in the apostolic faith of our forebears. In some ways, these prayers are maps for our journey to God, uttered by saintly sojourners who knew the spiritual territory, and having arrived, now call us to join them."[35] Likewise, in the introduction to *Prayers of Catholicos Simeon Yerevants'i (c. 1710-1780)*, the faculty writes:

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33 https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/ (last seen, 6/4/25).

34 *Hymns and Odes in Honor of St. Gregory the Illuminator* (New Rochelle, NY: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2001), v.

35 *Twelve Saints: Twelve Prayers of the Armenian Apostolic Church* (New Rochelle, NY: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 1998, 2001), v.

> While the language of Simeon's prayers differs from our own in tone and vocabulary, the feelings he expresses are as applicable to the twenty-first century as they were to the eighteenth. The feeling that one should frame the day, start and finish, with prayer; the desire to rise above pettiness and pray even for our enemies; the sense of closeness with the departed, whether they be our own near and dear ones or the great saints; the assurance that Christ's mother is ours as well, and that the heavenly hosts are our colleagues in the praise of God and in His care for us – these are all integral parts of our own Christian prayer experience.[36]

Thus, the St. Nersess Armenian Spirituality Series represents an important development in the position of the contemporary church toward its defunct monastic tradition, representing one of the most tangible and specific ways that instruction in traditional monastic spirituality, prayer, and practice has been offered in a palatable form to a contemporary audience.

Concluding remarks

In this brief paper, I have attempted first to sketch the decline and disappearance of the monastic institution within the Armenian church. Against the background of the decline of monasteries and the attendant monastic life in the Armenian milieu, it is instructive to observe how ascetic materials are being published in the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia and the diasporic context of the United States. Both have published relevant materials that issue from the premodern monastic context, but the way these materials are framed differs significantly. While in the Republic of Armenia, the texts are presented more as items of cultural and historical value or for their literary interest, in the United States the texts are presented with an eye to their value for enriching the spiritual lives of the faithful. This difference can perhaps be explained by the general uneasiness or unfamiliarity with spirituality in the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia on the one hand, and on the other hand, with the educational impetus in the diasporic context that involves a growing sensitivity to the 'how' of spiritual practice and aims to bring ascetic and spiritual practices into the life of the ordinary believer.

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36 *Prayers of Catholicos Simeon Yerevants'i (c. 1710-1780)* (New Rochelle, NY: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 2005), x.

Appendix: Recent publications by the Armenian Apostolic Church in Armenia and America relating to the monastic tradition

Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin: Mayr Atʿoṛ Surb Ejmiatsin Hratarakchʿutʿyun Հոգեւոր ընթերցումներ (Hogewor ĕntʿertsʿumner, Spiritual Readings)

(2007)

Սուրբ Անտոն Մեծ: *Խրատներ*: Ռուսերէնից թարգ. Ա. Զօհրաբեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հոգեւոր ընթերցումներ Ա: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[Surb Anton Mets. *Khratner*. Ṛuserēnitsʿ tʿarg. A. Zōhrabean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hogewor ĕntʿertsʿumner A. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Սուրբ Մակար Մեծ: *Խրատներ*: Ռուսերէնից թարգ. Ա. Գ. Ալեքսանեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հոգեւոր ընթերցումներ Բ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[Surb Makar Mets. *Khratner*. Ṛuserēnitsʿ tʿarg. A. G. Alekʿsanean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hogewor ĕntʿertsʿumner B. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Ս. Եփրեմ Ասորի: *Խրատներ*: Ռուսերէնից թարգ. Վ. Ֆերեշեթեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հոգեւոր ընթերցումներ Գ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[S. Epʿrem Asori. *Khratner*. Ṛuserēnitsʿ tʿarg. V. Fereshetʿean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hogewor ĕntʿertsʿumner G. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Հայելի վարուց՝ բարոյախրատական պատումներ: Գրաբարից թարգ. Տ. Իսահակ աբեղայ Պօղոսեան եւ Տ. Ռուբէն աբեղայ Զարգարեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հոգեւոր ընթերցումներ Դ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[*Hayeli varutsʿ: Baroyakhratakan patumner*. Grabaritsʿ tʿarg. T. Isahak abeghay Pōghosean ew T. Ṛubēn abeghay Zargarean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hogewor ĕntʿertsʿumner D. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Աղօթագրքեր (Aghōtʿagrkʿer, Prayer Books)

(2007)

Յովհաննէս Սարկաւագ Վարդապետ: *Աղօթամատոյց*: Գրաբարից թարգ. Ա. Մադոյեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Աղօթագրքեր Ա: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[Yovhannēs Sarkawag Vardapet. *Aghōtʿamatoytsʿ*. Grabaritsʿ tʿarg. A. Madoyean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Aghōtʿagrkʿer A. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

(2008)

Մեր սուրբ հայր Յովհաննէս Գառնեցու Աղօթքները՝ իր անուան տառերով: Գրաբարից թարգ. Ա. Մադոյեան, խմբգ. Գէորգ Տէր-Վարդանեան: Աղօթագրքեր Բ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2008.

[*Mer surb hayr Yovhannēs Gaṛnetsʿu Aghōtʿkʿnerě ir anuan taṛerov*. Grabaritsʿ tʿarg. A. Madoyean, khmbg. Gēorg Tēr-Vardanean. Aghōtʿagrkʿer B. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atatʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2008.]

Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր (Ěndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer, Universal Church Fathers)

(2007)

Ս. Կիւրեղ Երուսաղէմացի: *Կոչումն ընծայութեան*: Հին յունարէնից թարգ. Ս. Կրկեաշարեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր Ա: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[S. Kiwregh Erusaghēmatsʿi. Kochʿumn ěntsayutʿean. Hin yunarēnitsʿ tʿarg. S. Krkeasharean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Ěndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer A. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Ս. Գրիգոր Նիւսացի: *Քրիստոնէական*: Ֆրանսերէնից թարգ. Պարգեւ Շահբազեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր Բ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[S. Grigor Niwsatsʿi. *Kʿristonēakan*. Franserēnitsʿ tʿarg. Pargew Shahbazean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Ěndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer B. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Ս. Յովհան Ոսկեբերան: *Ճառերի ընտրանի*: Ռուսերէնից թարգ. Թ. Խաչատրեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր Գ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[S. Yovhan Oskeberan. *Chaṛeri ĕntrani*. Ṛuserēnitsʿ tʿarg. Tʿ. Khachʿatrean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Ĕndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer G. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Որոգինէս: *Աղօթքի մասին*: Ֆրանսերէնից թարգ. Պարգեւ Շահբազեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր Դ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[Oroginēs. Aghōtʿkʿi masin. Franserēnitsʿ tʿarg. Pargew Shahbazean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Ĕndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer D. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

(2008)

Ս. Գրիգոր Նիւսացի: *Մովսէսի կեանքը*: Ֆրանսերէնից թարգ. Պարգեւ Շահբազեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր Ե: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2008.

[S. Grigor Niwsatsʿi. *Movsēsi keankĕ*. Franserēnitsʿ tʿarg. Pargew Shahbazean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Ĕndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer E. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2008.]

(2009)

Ս. Յովհան Ոսկեբերան: *Ճառեր*: Գրաբարից թարգ. Մարթա Արաբեան, խմբգ. Եզնիկ Արք. Պետրոսեան: Ընդհանրական եկեղեցու հայրեր Զ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2009.

[S. Yovhan Oskeberan. Chaṛer. Grabaritsʿ tʿarg. Martʿa Arabean, khmbg. Eznik Arkʿ. Petrosean. Ĕndhanrakan ekeghetsʿu hayrer Z. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2009.]

Հայ եկեղեցու հայրեր (Hay ekeghetsʿu hayrer, Armenian Church Fathers)

(2007)

Սուրբ Գրիգորի Վարդապետութիւնը: Գրաբարից թարգ. Սեն Արեւշատեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հայ եկեղեցու հայրեր Ա: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[*Surb Grigori Vardapetutʿiwnĕ*. Grabaritsʿ tʿarg. Sen Arewshatean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hay ekeghetsʿu hayrer A. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʿoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʿiwn, 2007.]

Սուրբ Մովսէս Խորենացի: *Աստուածաբանական երկեր*: Գրաբարից թարգ. Գ. Գասպարեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հայ եկեղեցու հայրեր Գ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[Surb Movsēs Khorenatsʻi. *Astuatsabanakan erker*. Grabaritsʻ tʻarg. G. Gasparean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hay ekeghetsʻu hayrer G. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʻoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʻiwn, 2007.]

Սուրբ Եղիշէ Վարդապետ: *Աստուածաբանական երկեր*: Գրաբարից թարգ. Մարթա Արաբեան, խմբգ. Ասողիկ եպիսկոպոս: Հայ եկեղեցու հայրեր Դ: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2007.

[Surb Eghishē Vardapet. *Astuatsabanakan erker*. Grabaritsʻ tʻarg. Martʻa Arabean, khmbg. Asoghik episkopos. Hay ekeghetsʻu hayrer D. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʻoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʻiwn, 2007.]

(2008)

Սուրբ Դաւիթ Անյաղթ: *Ներբողներ*: Մամբրէ Վերծանող: *Ճառեր*: Գրաբարից թարգ. Մարթա Արաբեան: Հայ եկեղեցու հայրեր Ե: Ս. Էջմիածին, Մայր աթոռ սուրբ Էջմիածին հրատարակչութիւն, 2008.

[Surb Dawitʻ Anyaghtʻ. *Nerboghner*. Mambrē Vertsanogh. *Chaṛer*. Grabaritsʻ tʻarg. Martʻa Arabean. Hay ekeghetsʻu hayrer E. S. Ējmiatsin: Mayr atʻoṛ surb Ējmiatsin hratarakchutʻiwn, 2008.]

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(2007)

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Armenian Liturgical Commentaries in the Twenty-First Century: What the Changes in an Ancient Christian Genre Tell us about the Oriental Orthodox Today[1]

CHRISTOPHER SHEKLIAN

> *Among the eastern churches, the Armenians possess perhaps the richest tradition of liturgical exegetical literature.*
> (Findikyan 517)

Many ancient Christian traditions utilize the genre of commentary on the liturgical practices of the Church. Germanus of Constantinople's *On the Divine Liturgy,* written in the eighth century, is perhaps the best-known and most cited of the commentaries on the Divine Liturgy, the celebration of the Eucharist.[2] This practice of reflecting on the central liturgical sacrament, the mystery of Christian salvation, and union with God through Jesus Christ already appears in the "mystagogical" sermons of fourth-century hierarchs and the influential discussion of the elements of the church and the liturgy in Pseudo-Dionysius's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy.*[3] Commentaries on the liturgy, especially on the Eucharist, reveal important assumptions about fundamental theological questions, including ecclesiology. Additionally, the genre of the commentary on the liturgy includes texts that use a variety of exegetical and hermeneutical principles, deploying the full range of devices available to the larger commentary genre.

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2 St. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1985). Already influential for later Orthodox commentaries, Germanus's text became the most accessible for modern scholarship on liturgical commentaries when it was included as part of the first printing of text of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy.

3 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments,* trans. F.L. Cross (Crestwood: NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1986). Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works,* trans. Colm Luibheid (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987).

If liturgical commentaries are part of a broader genre of commentary, there are also divisions within this genre of liturgical commentary, with texts that focus on services other than the eucharist: the liturgy of the hours, certain occasional services of blessing, and even in the case of the Armenian tradition, commentaries on liturgical books themselves, such as the Lectionary. In fact, as the epigraph from Bishop Michael Daniel Findikyan suggests, the Armenian Christian tradition is rich in commentaries, with "apparently unique" examples of exegetical genres, including "a genre of literature interpreting the colours and figures that decorate these ornate gospel canon tables."[4]

Armenian authors penned sophisticated exegetical discussions of different aspects of their liturgical experience through the centuries. In these commentaries, some described briefly below, clergy-scholars not only revealed their thoughts on the practice of the Divine Liturgy during their time, but they also revealed their anxieties about these practices and, therefore, the fundamental debates and concerns of their time. These authors, beginning in the eighth century with Step'anos Siwnets'i, had different pastoral and ecumenical concerns shaped by the realities of their time. The genre of the liturgical commentary, especially in its ability to comment on the eucharist, addresses practical ecclesiological concerns.

Contemporary hierarchs and theologians of the past century have also written liturgical commentaries. In these commentaries, like those of their predecessors, we see the concerns and anxieties over contemporary liturgical practice. These are likewise grounded in and refer to fundamental practical ecclesiological questions, though the ecclesiological situation is vastly different. For instance, Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan's short commentary, appended to his translation of the Divine Liturgy into English, works hard to establish an ecclesiology that can answer to modern concerns about history and language in a post-Genocide diasporic context. Thus, like the earlier Armenian commentaries, it can be read for insight into the anxieties and concerns over the contemporary *ecclesia* (in Armenian *ekeghets'i*) and the Church as the Body of Christ. Similarly, Bishop Vahan Hovhanessian's *In Remembrance of the Lord,* in its opening address to the reader and the historical and Biblical focus and structure, addresses common questions of parishioners of his time. Like the earlier Armenian commentaries on the liturgy, these recent and contemporary commentaries offer a lens into the concerns and cares of a Christian hierarch over the Eucharist, the fundamental ecclesial event.

4 Michael Daniel Findikyan, *The Commentary on the Armenian Daily Office by Bishop Step'anos Siwnec'i (d. 735): Critical Edition and Translation with Textual and Liturgical Analysis* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2004), 42; 53–4.

In this chapter, I suggest that the genre of the liturgical commentary reveals concerns and cares over the status of the Church. Practical ecclesiological concerns emerge in reflections on the sacrament of Holy Communion and on the Divine Liturgy. This genre opens space for contemplation of the contemporary liturgical situation and through this situation to the broader context of the liturgy. For Armenians, from Nersoyan's time until today, that broader context is shaped by the experience of living in a modern, pluralistic society in dispersion and Diaspora. This experience is shared with other Oriental Orthodox Churches, Christian churches in communion with the Armenian Church which have their own rich traditions of commentary. Thus, I argue that the contemporary deployment of the genre of the liturgical commentary, read through the long practice of commentary on the liturgy of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, reveals important practical ecclesiological concerns around the shared experience of living in Diaspora.

To make this argument, I trace the emergence of a genre of liturgical commentary in the Armenian Church. After presenting the rich tradition of liturgical exegetical literature of the Armenian Church, I briefly discuss my own exegetical and hermeneutical principles for considering the genre as a source of the practical ecclesiological concerns that play out in the terrain of liturgy, such as marriage and baptism. Establishing the connection between liturgical commentary and the broader context, the chapter turns to two relatively recent authors of the genre: Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan and Bishop Vahan Hovhanessian. Through a close reading of their commentaries, I describe the changes in the genre, especially regarding the need to establish a Biblical basis and a historicity to the liturgy. These changes, and the concerns addressed and expressed in these and other commentaries from the twentieth and twenty-first century, reflect a situation marked by the experience of living in diaspora and are important expressions of the dominant concerns about the Church Body of the time. In this, I suggest, these Armenian commentaries are similar to other Oriental Orthodox commentaries which reflect a similar circumstance. I conclude by reflecting on this shared situation and how the persistent deployment of the genre of liturgical commentary helps us to understand that situation.

The genre of liturgical commentary in the Armenian Christian tradition

Commentary, as a form of reflection and engagement, is a fundamentally hermeneutic or interpretative activity. While "there exist almost an infinite variety of commentaries – and they need not be just texts," in this paper, I leave broader debates about hermeneutics to the side to focus more specifically on textual exege-

sis.[5] If hermeneutics, in its broadest sense of interpretive activity, has become central to philosophical debates and social-scientific methods, I use exegesis to refer more narrowly to the hermeneutical explication of received texts. Historically, exegetical activity and the genre of the commentary are identified most closely with Biblical commentary, though commentaries on the corpus of Aristotle also shape the development of the genre.[6] In Greco-Roman antiquity, commentaries were "self-standing works containing exegetical remarks on another text."[7] Christian biblical commentary, as it develops in the first centuries of Christianity, is shaped by this Greco-Roman tradition, especially the commentaries on Aristotle, as well as earlier Jewish exegesis.[8] Through the centuries of the development of the Christian tradition broadly, biblical exegesis and the genre of the commentary emerged as one of the central textual genres and a key practice in Christian pedagogy and indeed theology.

Biblical commentary and exegesis form the largest and most influential subset of the broader commentary genre as it develops in the Christian tradition. Nearly all Christian denominations have developed practices of Biblical commentary, including written commentaries and oral exegesis through homilies, which were often also later written down. Early Christian commentators include Clement and Origen of Alexandria and Diodore of Tarsus. The commentaries of St. John Chrysostom, often delivered in homiletic form, exerted a profound influence on

5 Aaron Hughes, "Presenting the Past: The Genre of Commentary in Theoretical Perspective," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 2 (2003): 150.

6 There is an enormous literature on the practice of philosophical commentary on Aristotle, which also later influences grammatical education and commentary. For an introduction, see Lloyd A. Newton, ed., *Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Armenians, too, developed a practice of philosophical and grammatical commentary, partially dependent on Aristotelian and neo-Platonic works in Greek and in translation. See, for instance, Benedetta Contin, "Intertwining Aristotelian Ontology and Logic with Theology: The early Armenian Non-Chalcedonian Perspective: the Book of Beings and the Questions Addressed to the Heretical Diophysites," *Jahrbuch Der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 70 (2020): 429–463.

Of course, textual exegesis is not limited to "Western" knowledge, whether the Greek philosophical tradition or the Christian one. Not only does "Biblical" exegesis predate Christianity in Jewish exegesis of scripture, but the genre of commentary emerges in other traditions, notably Vedic commentary. However, given the overwhelming influence of Biblical (and to a lesser extent Aristotelean) commentary on the emergence of modern (Western) philosophical hermeneutics, Biblical exegesis and Christian hermeneutical practices often come to be seen as the paradigm of the genre of commentary.

7 Paul Griffiths, Jutta Jokiranta, Alan T. Levenson, David Thomas, Trevor W. Thompson, Barry Dov Walfish and Karin Hedner Zetterholm, "Commentaries (Genre)," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (Volume 5: Charisma – Czazkes) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012). Accessed online at: https://www.degruyter.com/database/EBR/entry/MainLemma_34537/html?lang=en.

8 Most importantly, Philo of Alexandria. Philo exerted a profound influence on the Armenian Christian tradition. On Philo in the Armenian tradition, see the work of Abraham Terian collected in Volume 13 of the *St. Nersess Theological Review.*

subsequent commentary. As Christian traditions diverged and ecclesial divisions took hold, each denomination continued the practice of Biblical commentary: John of Damascus in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Thomas Aquinas in the Catholic Scholastic one, and Jacob Bar-Salibi of the Syriac Orthodox Church are all noted exegetes. Among the Protestant reformers, Biblical commentary was a favourite genre, and both Luther and Calvin, among others, exerted an incredible influence on later Biblical exegesis. In the case of the Armenian Apostolic Church, "hardly any major scholar emerged from those [monastic] schools who did not establish his competence by producing a biblical commentary or translating one."[9]

While Biblical exegesis was the dominant form of the broader commentary genre, Christian scholars wrote hermeneutical texts interpreting other kinds of texts, as well as the church services and sacraments. Notably, a genre of liturgical commentary emerged, with "its origins in the fourth century, with the famous mystagogical catecheses of such leading figures as Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, and John Chrysostom."[10] Mystagogy, the explanation of the Christian and especially eucharistic "mystery," was part of the education of adult Christian catechumens during era of large-scale conversion to Christianity. Cyril of Jerusalem's famous "Catechetical Lectures," sermons given during the Lenten period in preparation for baptism during the Pascal celebrations, were followed by the "Mystagogical Lectures" that explicitly tackled the Christian sacraments and ecclesial mystery into which the newly baptized had entered. As we will see, the genre of commentary in general and the genre of liturgical commentary, in particular, is highly responsive to the historical and social context of its time: in this early case, that context was marked by the shift of Christianity from a persecuted "underground" sect to privileged and eventually official church of the Byzantine (Roman) Empire. The earliest liturgical commentaries, then, were focused on the preparation of an "initial, massive influx of converts" and their incorporation into the Church as the Body of Christ through the sacramental mysteries.[11]

Mystagogy and the developing genre of liturgical commentary "found a ready method for their commentaries in the long-standing tradition of biblical exegesis."[12] That is, liturgical commentary is explicitly part of a broader genre of com-

9 S. Peter Cowe, "Introduction," in Xosrov Anjewac'i, *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy,* trans. S. Peter Cowe (New York: St. Vartan Press, 1991), 52.

10 Paul Meyendorff, "Introduction," in St. Germanus of Constantinople*, On the Divine Liturgy,* trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 23.

11 Meyendorff, "Introduction," 23–4.

12 Meyendorff, "Introduction," 24.

mentary and takes many of its exegetical tools and hermeneutic principles from the broader genre, especially that of Biblical exegesis. Tracing the full history of Christian hermeneutics, such as the well-known but now more nuanced opposition between the "Alexandrian" and "Antiochian" schools, is well beyond the scope of this chapter. Here, it is most important to note that the principles of exegesis developed and debated for and within the broader genre of commentary can also be found in the specific genre of liturgical commentary. For later commentators across Christian traditions, in addition to the early mystagogical commentaries, the deeply eschatological and "anagogical" work of Pseudo-Dionysius, especially in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and the historical-tropological writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia were the most influential.[13]

In the Eastern Orthodox Byzantine Christian tradition, there are several important examples of the genre of liturgical commentary. The famous and influential Chalcedonian thinker Maximus the Confessor (580–662) penned a *Mystagogy* around 630 A.D., the "first properly Byzantine commentary."[14] Germanus's later commentary on the Divine Liturgy, part of his *Historia Ecclesastica* is perhaps the best-known example of the entire genre of liturgical commentary. According to its translator Paul Meyendorff, the commentary provides a "new synthesis" of the "Alexandrian" approach to the liturgy of Ps-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor where the "notion of the early liturgy as representing the heavenly liturgy predominated," adding a "more Antiochene perspective, far more historicizing and focusing on the human ministry of Christ."[15] Germanus's commentary "exercised tremendous influence in the Byzantine Christian world from the time of its composition at least to the time of Cabasilas' work in the fourteenth century" and was included in the first printed version of the Byzantine liturgy.[16]

While commentaries on the liturgy are found less often in the Latin Catholic tradition, in other Christian traditions of the Oriental Orthodox churches there is also a strong practice of liturgical commentary. In particular, the Syriac Orthodox Church, in the persons of Jacob of Edessa, Moses Bar Kepha, and John of Dara, among others, provides a rich body of liturgical commentaries.[17] It is among the Armenians, however, that a vast liturgical commentary tradition develops.

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13 This is true despite Theodore's later anathematization at the "Second Council of Constantinople," the "Fifth Ecumenical Council" (not recognized by the Assyrian Church of the East or the Oriental Orthodox Churches) and his association with Nestorius. See Frederick G. McLeod, S.J., "Theodore of Mopsuestia Revisited," *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 447–480.

14 Meyendorff, "Introduction," 36.

15 Meyendorff, "Introduction," 42.

16 Meyendorff, "Introduction," 9.

17 See Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology* (Farham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 16–34.

As Bishop Michael Daniel Findikyan puts it, the "relative wealth" of texts that fall within the genre of liturgy commentary should be considered a "truly distinctive feature" of the entire Armenian Rite. "Besides commentaries on the Divine Liturgy, a genre known to all ancient Christian cultures, the Armenians add more than a dozen commentaries on the daily Office, several on the Lectionary, and two early allegories on the ritual of dedicating a church, all of these unknown or practically unknown in other Eastern rites."[18] These commentaries, in Armenian մեկնութիւն (*meknut'iwn*), include both the style of text that focuses on explanation, what Findikyan terms an "exegetical commentary," in addition to the mystagogy (in Armenian խորհրդածութիւն, *khorhrdatsut'iwn* from խորհուրդ, *khorhurt,* mystery or sacrament). Findikyan suggests that the *meknut'iwn*s of the mystagogical type should be considered "original work[s] in [their] own right, shaped by the commentator's vision and concerns, whose roots nonetheless "lie in the base text." We will see, among the commentaries in the Armenian tradition below, both kinds of *meknut'iwn*s.[19] While some of the authors who wrote commentaries on the Divine Liturgy also wrote other commentaries, especially on the Liturgy of the Hours, we focus our overview here on the commentaries on the Divine Liturgy.

Contemporaneous with Patriarch Germanos, the earliest Armenian liturgical commentaries emerged: initially they were mostly commentaries on the Liturgy of the Hours. In fact, one of the most important representatives of the genre of liturgy commentary in the Armenian tradition, Step'anos of Siwnik' (Step'anos Siwnets'i), perhaps even met the Patriarch.[20] Whatever the historicity of this meeting, there was a general interest in liturgical commentary at the time of the seventh to eleventh centuries. Findikyan states that "for reasons that are not entirely clear, and perhaps by pure coincidence, the period of a century or so surrounding this date [729–735] gives rise to a surprising number of litur-

18 Findikyan, "Christology in Early Armenian Liturgical Commentaries," in *The Place of Christ in Liturgical Prayer: Trinity, Christology, and Liturgical Theology,* ed. Bryan D. Spinks (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Liturgical Press, 2008), 197.

19 I thank Bishop Daniel for his comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, as well as for this citation from his forthcoming textbook on the Armenian *Patarag,* the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church.

20 Step'anos's meeting with Germanus is described by medieval Armenian historians such as Step'anos Orbelian and is recounted in Patriarch Malakia Ormanian's magisterial *Azkapatum* (Istanbul 1913), 862–863. The collection of letters on doctrinal issues known as the *Girk' T'ght'ots'* [Book of Letters] includes correspondence involving Siwnets'i and Germanus, (Tiflis, 1901), 360–395. See also Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, "Travels and Studies of Stephen of Siwnik' (c. 685–735): Redefining Armenian Orthodoxy Under Islamic Rule," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 68 no. 3–4 (2016): 255–292.

gical commentaries practically throughout the Christian East."[21] Though it may be coincidence, there were also important historical, social, and theological contexts that made the liturgy itself, as the sacramental enactment of ecclesiology, an important object for debate, controversy, and reflection. Meyendorff, discussing Germanus's commentary, says that it "marks a clear shift in the Byzantine perception of the eucharist," the context for this shift being "the rise of iconoclasm."[22] While the iconoclastic controversy did not erupt with the same fervour or from the same theological grounding in Armenia as it did in the Byzantine Empire, the era was marked in Armenia as well by profound controversy: the continued development of a distinct Christology, including debates related to the work of Severus of Antioch;[23] relations with the Byzantine Empire and the imperial church; questions of Church hierarchy, especially vis-à-vis the sect known as the Paulicians.[24] The earliest Armenian liturgical commentaries emerge in this historical context.

Stepʿanos Siwnetsʿi (d. 735), Grigoris Arsharuni (d. 729), and Catholicos Yovhannēs Ōdznetsiʿ (d. 728), all contemporaries of Patriarch Germanus, author the first extant liturgical commentaries in the Armenian tradition. Siwnetsʿi's *Commentary on the Daily Office* is the "first complete liturgical commentary in Armenian" and "became the origin and model for a prolific lineage of commentaries on the daily Hours of Prayer."[25] Siwnetsʿi's work, with its "coherent and systematic" use of allegory influenced not only the subset of liturgical commentaries on the liturgy of the hours, but on all subsequent Armenian liturgical commentary.[26] Of these, the *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* by Khosrov Andzewatsʿi, also transliterated Xosrov Anjewacʿi, father of the famed mystical poet and now

21 Findikyan, "Christology," 198.

22 Meyendorff, "Introduction," 48.

23 See Nina Garsoïan, *L'Eglise armenienne et le grand schisme d'Orient* (CSCO vol. 574; Louvain: Peeters, 1999) and S. Peter Cowe, "Armenian Christology In the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with Particular Reference to the Contributions of Catholicos Yovhan Ōjencʿi and Xosrovik Tʿargmaničʿ," *The Journal of Theological Studies,* New Series 55, no. 1 (April 2004): 30–54. One the main debates revolved around the question of "incorruptibility" of Christ's body. Siwnetsʿi's important contribution to this debate was recently published. See Julia Hintlian and Roberta Ervine, "Bishop Stepʿanos of Siwnikʿ and his Florilegium *On the Incorruptibility of the Body* in Light of Sixth-Eighth Century Armenian Christological Debates," *St. Nersess Theological Review* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2023): 137–246.

24 See Nina Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* (The Hauge and Paris: Mouton & CO., 1967).

25 Findikyan, "Christology," 200. See his critical edition of the commentary, op cit.

26 Findikyan, "Christology," 201. Findikyan, in personal communication, suggests that this method aligns Siwnetsʿ*i's Commentary on the Hours* squarely within the mystagogical rather than the exegetical strand of the Armenian *meknutʿiwn* genre. Rather than an attempt to "explain" the liturgy of the hours, his "coherent and systematic" use of allegory serves a broader theological, specifically Christological theological point.

Catholic Doctor of the Church Gregory of Narek, is the best known, most studied, and most influential for later commentaries.

Khosrov "is our first detailed source for the contents and disposition of the Armenian anaphora," though heavily influenced by the commentaries on the liturgy of hours described above. He also penned a commentary on the liturgy of the hours, clearly conceived as "one undertaking" along with his commentary on the Divine Liturgy.[27] As with the earlier exegetes on the liturgy of the hours, Khosrov's life and times were shaped by "Byzantine expansion and reconquest" that led to a renewed Christological debate, such that there "was much pro-Byzantine and specifically pro-Chalcedonian sentiment at this period in certain circles of Vaspurakan."[28] Similarly, like the Paulicians before them, the contemporary Tondrakian sectarians required a response from the ecclesial hierarchy.[29] It is in this context that the most famous and influential of the Armenian liturgical commentaries on the Divine Liturgy is written.

After Xosrov's influential text, many subsequent Armenian commentaries followed his method closely, which Cowe describes as:

> Instead of emulating the Dionysiac formula of introducing the subject by a general definition of what constitutes a sacrament, outlining (rather succinctly) the peculiarities of the rite and then expatiating on its mystical dimensions, Xosrov opts for an unabashedly textual orientation, unhurriedly explicating the ramifications of each phrase in turn. This, then, was the Armenian classroom approach to biblical commentary and indeed the tone of the present work maintains an immediacy and liveliness indicating the writer's tangible awareness of his audience's presence and his task of engaging and sustaining their interest in a text inherently dense, whose communicability they were partly inured against by so frequent contact."[30]

Indeed, later commentators on the Divine Liturgy often betray "a familiar trend toward compilation, abbreviation and simplification which had already infiltrated the biblical sphere with Anania Sanahnecʿi's commentary on the Pauline Epistles of 1055."[31] These compilation/commentaries, heavily dependent on Andzewatsʿi,

27 Cowe, "Introduction," 25.
28 Cowe, "Introduction," 6.
29 Cowe, "Introduction," 7. On the Tondrakians, see Vrej Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement: Religious movements in the Armenian church from the fourth to the tenth centuries* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1987).
30 Cowe, "Introduction," 53.
31 Cowe, "Introduction," 88.

include Movsēs Erznkatsʿi (d. 1323), Yovhannēs Arjishetsʿi (d. 1330), anonymous commentaries of the era surviving in manuscript codices, and the summary theological efforts of Grigor Tatʿevatsiʿ.[32]

The *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* by Nersēs of Lambron, the erudite bishop of Tarsus and nephew of beloved Catholicos Nersēs Shnorhali, written in 1177, is "the main exception to the trend" of dependence on Andzewatsʿi, and marks an alternative approach to liturgical commentary within the Armenian tradition.[33] After these medieval examples of the genre, a few commentaries emerge in the early modern and modern periods, notably the work of Kapriel Ayvazean. Thus, the genre of liturgical commentary in the Armenian Apostolic church begins in the eighth century with Stepʿanos Siwnetsʿi, finds an exemplary and influential approach in the work of Khosrov Andzewatsʿi around the turn of the first millennium, and has another important – though less emulated – approach in the work on Nersēs of Lambron. As with much original theological writing, the genre sees a decline after Gregory of Tatʿev, though there are notable modern exceptions that carry the genre into the twentieth century.

Reading liturgical commentary as a historical document

Before turning to two examples of recent and contemporary commentaries on the Divine Liturgy, I want to pause briefly over the hermeneutic approach to these commentaries taken in the paper. Given that the object of analysis in the paper is a genre of text that is intimately concerned with the hermeneutical endeavour of interpretation, a short exposition of the approach taken here is appropriate. As should already be clear, the paper reads liturgical commentaries in their historical situation, already a hermeneutical principle far removed from many of the commentaries themselves.

However, it is not a general historicism that animates this interpretative strategy, but rather a methodological concern related to a larger question: how to make sense of the Armenian – and by extension Oriental Orthodox – experience through its textual production. Of course, for historical eras, this textual production is one of the only modes of access to past experiences. To consider the Christological controversies of the fifth century or the Byzantine-Armenian relations of the tenth and eleventh is largely to enter a world mediated by text. However, in the contemporary moment, other methods are possible. Yet, this paper suggests, the concerns, anxieties, and cares of liturgical commentary are a

32 Cowe, "Introduction," 88–9.
33 Cowe, "Introduction," 87.

privileged site to explore the lived Christian experience, even when other methods, like ethnographic fieldwork, are available. In other words, a contextual and historical approach to the texts themselves is grounded in the desire to access those contexts.

Without entering into a full debate on historical and social-scientific methodology, it is sufficient to note that many "theological" documents have recently been recognized for their historical value. If the hermeneutic approach to theology has long been one intended to help the reader *do* more theology, today, theology is increasingly recognised as a site from which to make other kinds of arguments and claims. That is, there is a tendency in the social sciences today to read and encounter theology – largely theological texts – in their relationship to what is various called "lived experience" or "everyday life." We can see this in the development of the anthropology of Christianity in the past two decades, marked, for instance, by the work of Joel Robbins.[34]

Given the relative paucity of engagement with the genre of liturgical commentary, I build this hermeneutical principle, that we can read liturgical commentaries for insights into the historical and social context and to discern the animating anxieties and concerns of the author regarding that context, through analogy with other (theological) genres. Much of this work has been oriented toward the writing of history itself, of discerning facts. For instance, in an essay on "The Homily as Historical Document," Wendy Mayer suggests that historians "are becoming increasingly aware that Christian homilies can prove a valuable source of certain types of information" since "reference can on occasion be found to significant events of the time, such as wars, political reversals, and natural phenomena and disasters. Since the preacher's comments are usually contemporary with the event, at times providing an eyewitness account, the transmitted homily can supply the historian with rare and significant detail."[35] In a similar move, laws and law codes have been read as sources for historical data, though this use has also been criticised.[36]

While there are certainly historical facts that can be gleaned from the liturgical commentaries, and indeed, one of the main hermeneutical uses of the commentaries has been for liturgical historians to reconstruct the shape of the liturgy at

34 See, most recently, *Theology and the Anthropology of Christian Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

35 Wendy Mayer, "The Homily as Historical Document: Some Problems in Relation to John Chrysostom, *Lutheran Theological Journal* 35, no. 1 (May 2001): 17.

36 See, for instance, Per Norseng, "Law Codes as a Source for Nordic History in the Early Middle Ages," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 16 (1991): 137–166.

the time of the writing of the commentary, the aim in this paper is slightly different.[37] Rather, as the forgoing discussion has shown, the author – usually himself a clergyman and hierarch writing from a position of authority – reveals anxieties over the Christian encounter with the liturgy vis-à-vis the context of the time. Findikyan suggests such a possibility with regard to Christology, after noting the "unabashedly christological focus" of many of the Armenian liturgical commentaries. He notes that "a more nuanced appreciation for the overtly Christological allegorical methods of Armenia's many medieval liturgical interpreters might well serve to sharpen our understanding of the Armenian Church's traditional view of Christ and of his redemptive work for mankind."[38] This paper pushes this insight from the theological to the sociological: the Christological emphasis ascertained by Findikyan is itself a partial response to the needs of the time. Christological controversy continued, and distinction from and relation to the Byzantine Empire and other Christian churches was a huge concern during the heyday of the classic Armenian liturgical commentary. Moreover, these relations played out in local social life in ways that required pastoral answers, many of which were related to sacramental life. Who could share from the Eucharistic cup? Who could be married? In other words, practical sacramental and liturgical concerns reflect the sociological situation, and these concerns animate the theological responses undergirding the liturgical commentaries, like the Christological emphasis Findikyan sees in the classic commentaries. Using the conventions of the genre, authors like Andzewatsʿi reveal their anxieties over ecclesial boundaries – especially those with the imperial Byzantine Chalcedonian Church – and the role of the hierarchy, the animating concerns of the era.

As the chapter turns to more contemporary commentaries, it does so with this methodological and hermeneutical principle in place. By looking at the specific topics addressed by contemporary liturgical commentaries, the paper reveals the concerns – surely different than Byzantine imperial encroachment – that animate them. As such, liturgical commentaries can be read for the practical pastoral – and hence, often ecclesiological and sociological – concerns of their day.

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37 Findikyan, for instance, commenting on Andzewatsʿi's commentary on the Daily Office, notes that "it is usually possible to reconstruct the principle liturgical texts of the offices as he knew them." Findikyan, *Commentary,* 35. See also the use of the liturgical commentaries in Robert F. Taft, S.J, "The Armenian Liturgy: Its Origins and Characteristics," in *Treasure in Heaven: Armenian Art, Religion and Society. Papers delivered at a symposium at the Pierpont Morgan Library 21-22 May 1994,* ed. Thomas F. Mathews and Robert S. Wieck (New York, 1998), 13–30, especially the discussion beginning on page 17.

38 Findikyan, "Christology," 198.

Contemporary commentaries

Though the contemporary genre of the liturgical commentary looks, in many ways, quite different from the anagogical comparisons that sometimes sweep to abstract theological heights, these more recent examples nonetheless equally reveal the anxieties, pastoral concerns, and sociological situations of their authors. To demonstrate this reading of liturgical commentaries, and to begin to read them for their insights into contemporary Armenian and Oriental Orthodox life, the chapter turns to two recent texts by influential clergymen of the Armenian Church.

First, we look at Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan's "Brief Commentary" appended to his *Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church with Variables, Complete Rubrics and Commentary.*[39] Archbishop Nersoyan was one of the most influential Armenian clergymen of the twentieth century. Born in Cilicia in 1904, he survived the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and came to Jerusalem with many other Armenian refugees. He entered the seminary at the Monastery of St. James, then one of the few remaining centres of Armenian Church education, and was ordained a priest in 1928. In 1933 he was assigned to the St. Sarkis Armenian Church in London, serving there for most of World War II.[40] Elected in 1943 as the primate of the Armenian Church of America, he was a dynamic leader of the Diocese in New York, leading the project to build a Cathedral and Diocesan Center in Manhattan. Though he was elected as the Patriarch of Jerusalem in 1957, he was not allowed to enter the country of Israel and never took up his post. Remaining in America, he founded the St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and continued his pastoral work in the United States until his death in 1989. An erudite scholar and dynamic clergyman, Archbishop Nersoyan is a revered figure of the recent past.

His *Պատարագամատոյց* (*Pataragamaduyts'*), the liturgy book under consideration in this chapter, itself was highly influential. Nersoyan's English translation of the Divine Liturgy continues to be the preferred English version for many Armenian Christians. First published in 1950, the 1984 "Revised Fifth Edition" was the ubiquitous pew book for many decades, especially throughout the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. It remains the book of choice for many deacons when they need to choose a variable to sing on a feast day.[41] His

39 First published in 1950. Citing from the widely available 5th edition: Tiran Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church with Variables, Complete Rubrics and Commentary* (London: St. Sarkis Church, 1984).

40 Marvine Howe, "Tiran Nersoyan, An Archbishop, Scholar and Author, Is Dead at 85, *New York Times,* September 3, 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/03/obituaries/tiran-nersoyan-an-archbishop-scholar-and-author-is-dead-at-85.html.

41 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 141–184.

description of the rubrics in the section on the "Ritual of the Divine Liturgy" is authoritative for some priests.[42] In addition to these practical liturgical elements of the book, the Archbishop included "A Brief Commentary on the Divine Liturgy."

The "Commentary" begins by providing a definition of liturgy as service in Greek, and stating that the Armenian name for the Divine Liturgy, *Surb Patarag,* means "Holy Sacrifice."[43] After the initial definition, he turns to "The Origin of the Divine Liturgy," relating the Christian Eucharist to "an old Jewish religious fraternal meal, called *Chabourah.*"[44] Liturgical historians debate the extent to which Christian liturgical practices derive from earlier Jewish worship, but crucially, Nersoyan begins by grounding the contemporary practice of the Armenian *Patarag* historically.[45] He approaches a philological justification in "The History of the Armenian Rite," tracing the contours of the five extant Armenian texts.[46] In this, his work is shaped by Dom Gregory Dix's seminal historical-critical study of liturgy, *The Shape of the Liturgy,* which at the time was the definitive research on the topic available in English.[47] This historical grounding is the first feature of Nersoyan's Commentary I note. At various points throughout the text, he offers a history of the development of the liturgy and also secures a foundation or justification for practices by showing their antiquity.[48]

From this historical and textual grounding, Nersoyan moves to the parts of the liturgy, "*The Preparation; The Synaxis* or *The Midday Office; The Eucharist; the Con-*

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42 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 195–236.

43 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 257.

44 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 257.

45 The relationship between "temple worship" and early Christian liturgy continues to be discussed and debated. Alexander Schmemann, an influential Eastern Orthodox theologian and liturgist writes that, "We know today that the cult of the early Church was essentially a Jewish cult, that practically all its forms can be traced back to Jewish antecedents." *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann,* ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 15. During the era when both Nersoyan and Schmemann wrote, this was the overwhelming consensus. More recent scholarship nuances the influence. See, for example, Marcel Metzger, *History of the Liturgy: The Major Stages,* trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997).

46 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 258–9. I say "approaches" because while it is animated by broadly philological concerns regarding textual transmission, including the historiographic justification for the philological endeavor, Nersoyan's commentary does not trace actual manuscript transmission. In other parts of the chapter, I use "philological" to refer to this historical-textual orientation.

47 Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945). Though, as with the specific question of the role of "Jewish antecedents" discussed above, much of this seminal work has been superseded. I thank Bishop Daniel Findikyan for pointing to this key piece of the intellectual background to Nersoyan's "Brief Commentary."

48 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 262.

clusion."[49] He identifies "the third part, the Holy Sacrifice proper, [as] the essential action of the Divine Liturgy or the Holy Eucharist and is sometimes called the *Anaphora*." In his discussion of this central third part, he describes how the "Eucharist proper" "affects the spiritual, or mystical *union* or *unification* of the Christian with his Lord and God, Jesus Christ." He continues, arguing that "this essential union of the Christian with the Lord constitutes the core of the Sacrament or Mystery of the Eucharist and is the ultimate purpose of Christian life as a whole."[50] Nersoyan describes the institution of the Sacrament of the Eucharist by "the Lord Christ himself at his last supper with the Apostles," suggesting that the "three acts, represented by the three parts of the Divine Liturgy, i.e., Purification, Illumination and Unification, are also the three stages of the process of perfection of the spiritual life of a Christian, as he travels on his way to God." This interpretation would not be out of place the Pseudo-Dionysius inspired work of Khosrov Andzewatsʿi. Indeed, Nersoyan cites both Andzewatsʿi and Nersēs of Lambron, demonstrating a clear connection to the long Armenian genre of liturgical commentary.

As Nersoyan unfolds a fine-grained walk through the sections of the Divine Liturgy, he circles around a perplexing and perennial problem in sacramental theology, namely the relationship between the liturgical instantiation of a sacrament and its transformative spiritual goal. Discussing the mystery – which is the same word used to denote a sacrament in Armenian – at the heart of the Divine Liturgy, he says that "the holiness of Christ in heaven, as manifested through the 'mystery' of His Body and Blood, makes the believers holy."[51] How exactly this happens is one of the central questions of sacramental theology. An influential strand of Catholic sacramental theology suggests that the relationship between the act of the sacrament and that of the spiritual goal is that "a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing."[52]

Nersoyan notes that Nersēs of Lambron asks "how can this (i.e., the Gifts) be changed by the Holy Spirit from being a symbol into being a reality?"[53] demonstrating that the discourse of symbol also has a long history in the Armenian reflection on the sacraments. However, Nersoyan's repeated digressions on elements of the liturgy, especially the eucharist, as a symbol, demonstrates that he is conscious of the long argument in Western theology over the "symbolic" nature of

49 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy*, 259.
50 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 260.
51 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 275.
52 See the discussion of sacrament in Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 154. Asad attributes this classic definition to Hugh of St. Victor. Nersoyan gives this common definition on page 273.
53 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 272.

the eucharist and also that there is a specifically modern sense of symbol, one that obscures the Armenian Christian understanding of the Divine Liturgy. While, for instance, the "ascending sweet-smelling smoke [of incense] *symbolizes* acceptable prayer,"[54] he argues that the Bread and Wine, the elements of communion, "are not merely symbols of the Body and Blood of Christ in the modern sense of the word 'symbol', which usually *is not* that which it signifies."

We note that Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan consciously and clearly writes within the basic parameters of the perduring genre of Armenian liturgical commentary. Not only does he cite his most illustrious predecessors, Khosrov Andzewatsʻi and Nersēs of Lambron, but at times he approaches the mystical or anagogical interpretation typical of many Armenian liturgical commentaries. At the same time, we note two key differences that mark the changes in the genre of liturgical commentary and demonstrate that Nersoyan was responding to new, distinctly and explicitly modern, challenges and demands. First, Nersoyan deploys an initial philological approach that justifies and grounds the present liturgy in its long historical development. While his explanation of Christian liturgy's emergence from Jewish worship remains debatable, the need to ground the liturgy historically is clear. Secondly, we note that while thinking about the sacrament as a "symbol" has its own long history in theological discourse, Nersoyan himself recognises that "modern" thinking about the symbol obscures what this earlier discourse on the symbol might have meant. In an attempt to recover a properly sacramental understanding of the symbol, he develops his own sacramental semiotics. This necessity of confronting the linguistic turn in theology is the second change in the commentary we note.[55]

In part, this confrontation is necessary in order for Nersoyan to develop his ecclesiology. The new elements in Nersoyan's commentary, those differences from his predecessors, mark a recognition that the broader context for the commentary has changed: he needs to ground the authority of liturgy historically, and he needs to explain the relationship of the liturgical act of the sacrament to its efficacy in a way that must confront the problem of the symbol. This way, he is able to

54 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 268.

55 The "linguistic turn" in philosophy often refers to the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein but is also used to refer to a whole series of philosophical moves, debates, and directions of the twentieth century that centered on language and semiotics. Heidegger's critique of "ontotheology" has especially pushed theologians to respond. See, for instance, Georges de Schrijver, "Postmodernity and the Withdrawal of the Divine: A Challenge for Theology" in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context,* eds. L. Boeve and L. Leijssen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 39–64. I am not suggesting that Nersoyan is responding directly to such philosophical arguments. Rather, this broad and influential philosophical development shaped ideas about interpretation, text, and Biblical criticism for much of the twentieth century. This influence would be felt, even without direct engagement with the foundational philosophical texts.

assert that "by partaking a communicant is actually incorporated and integrated in the Body of Christ,"[56] since the Body and Blood is a symbol only if we understand that "a symbol denotes a thing which in some kind of way *is* what it signifies."[57] If partaking of the Body and Blood is more than "merely" a symbolic act, then each parishioner is "actually incorporated and integrated into the Body of Christ," the Church. Nersoyan works through modern anxieties about language, reality, and history in order to secure a sacramental and liturgical foundation for the Armenian Apostolic Church, such that "when a local church, no matter how humble, shares in the Eucharist it experiences the wholeness of the Church and reveals it in its fulness."[58]

This full ecclesial instantiation of every local gathering, no matter where or "how humble" secures the spatial and temporal unity of the Armenian Church across diaspora. While Nersoyan does not tackle this condition head-on, in his commentary, he is clearly building a sacramental theology that secures a liturgical ecclesiology that can withstand the intellectual and practical demands of the modern church in diaspora. However, Nersoyan clearly considered the particularities of the situation of the modern church in diaspora in his other writings, as well as in his practical efforts such as setting up an Armenian Church Youth Organization in America. Here, rather than confronting these particularities head on, he uses the genre of the liturgical commentary to develop a sacramental and liturgical theology that could meet the demands of that overall situation.

Over fifty years after Nersoyan provided this grounding, Bishop Vahan Hovhanessian wrote an extended commentary on the Divine Liturgy, *In Remembrance of the Lord: A Biblical Introduction, Historical Review and Contemporary Commentary On the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church.* Hovhanessian, who was born in 1963 in Baghdad, is a graduate of St. Nersess Armenian Seminary and was briefly its dean (like Nersoyan). He wrote his commentary after he served as dean and had returned to pastoral work in the Eastern Diocese. The commentary, according to Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, primate of the Diocese at the time, was published by St. Vartan Press, the Diocesan Press, so that "individuals and communities will use this valuable publication to understand the meaning of the *Badarak,* and through this understanding, to participate fully and to become united with Christ and with each other."[59] Later, Hovhanessian was elected as the Primate of

56 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 276.
57 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 272.
58 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 267.
59 Khajag Barsamian, "Preface," in Fr. Vahan Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance of the Lord: A Biblical Introduction, Historical Review and Contemporary Commentary On the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian*

the Armenian Orthodox Church of the United Kingdom and Ireland and most recently served as the Primate of the Armenian Diocese of France until 2022. During that time, he had a French adaptation of his commentary published as *La Célébration de la Divine Liturgie, Badarak, dans l'Église Apostolique Arménienne* as part of the series *Explorons les racines de notre Église Apostolique Arménienne*, one of his initiatives as Primate.

Stylistically, Hovhanessian's 2008 commentary is much different from Nersoyan's shorter text. Conceived as a stand-alone text in the genre of liturgical commentary, it is also explicitly a "contemporary" commentary. Hovhanessian asks, for instance, at the outset of his commentary, a series of questions about "the origin of the *Badarak*", including, in a nod to one of the constant contemporary and diasporic criticisms, "Did it always last as long as it does now?"[60] While Nersoyan had alluded to the particular questions swirling around in the contemporary diasporic church about liturgical practice, even suggesting in a note that since "the Responsory of the Prologue" is of "recent origin and of dubious value" it could "therefore be conveniently omitted,"[61] Hovhanessian presents the specific practicality at the beginning. While Nersoyan offers brief interpretations of each part of the Liturgy, Hovhanessian lingers on what the parishioner is experiencing in each part. For example, in the "Prayers after the Lections," shortly after the recitation of the Armenian Nicene Creed, Nersoyan states that "the prayers after the Lections are the concluding prayers of the Synaxis," and then briefly describes the content of each prayer.[62] Hovhanessian, on the other hand, describes how "traditionally in the Armenian Church, long prayers are written in two parts with the blessing, *Khaghagootyoon amenetsoon*, in between the two parts," and asserts that after the deacons "Cry out the phrase *Asdoodzo yergurbakestoook,"* the "pious and proper tradition in the Armenian Church is to bow down," since "worship must include bodily gestures."[63] In other words, Hovhanessian is writing for an Armenian Christian audience that he feels needs to be instructed in the basics of liturgical elements and comportments.

Of course, this stylistic difference is due in part to the length and scope of the two commentaries. However, it also reflects Bishop Vahan's different concerns over the current status of the Armenian Church in diaspora. Rather than the ana-

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Church, St. Vartan Press, New York, 2008.

60 Fr. Vahan Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance of the Lord: A Biblical Introduction, Historical Review and Contemporary Commentary On the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church* (New York: St. Vartan Press, 2008), 4.

61 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 281, n. 28.

62 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 270.

63 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 93–4.

gogical explication of the classic commentaries or even Nersoyan's (non-modern) symbolic unfolding, Hovhanessian makes sure the reader – the parishioner – first knows what it is they are seeing and experiencing in the liturgy (something, which, at the most basic level it seems even Nersoyan felt he could assume) and then pushes them to understand it. Understanding, *Verstehen,* can refer to diverse hermeneutic bases, but for Hovhanessian it takes the form of making sure the reader knows the basic facts: what is the song, what do the words mean, what is the liturgical movement happening?

To help make sure the reader understands the liturgy they experience, Hovhanessian also refers to previous commentaries, including Nersoyan's.[64] While these references are sometimes laced within his own commentary, Hovhannessian also introduces the "Patristic Comments" on the Divine Liturgy as a separate part of his historical introduction to the Liturgy.[65] In other words, Hovhanessian, while still securely within the genre of the Armenian liturgical commentary, also refers to "the tradition" as its own historical element. While both Hovhanessian and Nersoyan ground the Liturgy historically, Hovhanessian's historical grounding pushes further than Nersoyan's.

Like Nersoyan, Hovhanessian secures the contemporary practice of the Divine Liturgy through the history of the liturgy. He emphasises that "our Lord's Last Supper" was "a ceremonial meal associated with the biblical feast of the Passover."[66] Thus, he similarly links the Armenian Christian Divine Liturgy to Jewish worship. However, Hovhanessian emphasises, in addition to Nersoyan's focus on Jewish antecedents, the Biblical basis of the Divine Liturgy. In fact, he states that "most of the prayers of our Church are either a compilation of direct quotations from the various books of the Bible or are commentaries on words or teachings in the Bible."[67] In a diasporic context where diversity of worship is accessible and parishioners encounter critiques of structured liturgical worship and a broadly Protestant wariness towards worship elements ungrounded in the Bible, Hovha-

64 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 82. Bishop Daniel Findikyan, another contemporary commentator on the Divine Liturgy who is preparing a line-by-line commentary on the text of the Armenian Anaphora, the main Eucharistic prayer, noted in personal communication that Nersoyan's commentary was the only contemporary thinking that both he and Hovhanessian had on the liturgical experience during their time together as students at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary. There is a clear and direct line of development, then, between these contemporary thinkers on the Armenian liturgical experience, and Nersoyan's first effort to comment on the Divine Liturgy in a "modern," diasporic setting.

65 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 37–43.

66 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 5.

67 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 71.

nessian focuses heavily not only on the historical but the biblical basis for the Armenian Divine Liturgy.

Of course, insistence on the biblical basis of liturgy is not a peculiarly contemporary concern. The critique of non-Biblical Christian practice and liturgical elements, like the hermeneutic principle of *Sola Scriptura,* was one of the hallmarks of many of the Protestant Reformers. However, Hovhanessian, placing the "Biblical Origins of the Badarak" as the first section after his Introduction, makes it clear that the context is one where, *for the parishioner* and not just for the theologian, the question of the biblical basis is important.[68] In other words, the context of living in a pluralistic society, especially the American "marketplace" of churches, requires an answer for the parishioner who encounters other Christian traditions and Christian neighbours in their daily life.[69] Hovhanessian sometimes refers directly to these other Christian traditions, noting for instance that one common name for the Armenian Divine Liturgy "which comes from, and is mainly used by, the Roman Catholic Church, is 'Holy Mass' (*Missa*)."[70] Thus, the pluralism of the diasporan (especially American) Christian landscape is a specter behind much of Hovhanessian's efforts to make sure the Armenian Christian understands – and hence could also potentially explain to a neighborly Christian of another tradition – their liturgical practice.

If Hovhanessian's commentary pushes the historical grounding and the biblical basis of the Armenian Divine Liturgy even further than Nersoyan's, he is less anxious about the "symbolic" status of aspects of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist itself. The commentary still addresses the question of the "real presence" of the Eucharist, a long debate about the relationship between the bread and wine of the Eucharist and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ that has its roots in Scholastic Catholic thought and emerges as a major point of contention during the course of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation.[71] Yet if Nersoyan unfolds the symbolic meaning of nearly every moment of the Divine Liturgy using an anagogical method familiar to the Armenian patristic

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68 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 5.

69 On the idea of "church-shopping" in a "marketplace" of churches that might meet the individual needs of a particular Christian, see Amy Sullivan, "Church-shopping: Why Americans Change Faiths," *TIME Magazine,* April 28, 2009, http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/ 0,8599,1894361,00.html. See also Shay R. Hafner and Audre P. Audette, "The politics of church shopping," *Politics and Religion* 16, no. 1 (March 2023): 73–89, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048322000384.

70 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 4.

71 See Graham Ward's discussion of "The Birth of Presence" in "The Church as Erotic Community" in *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context,* eds. L. Boeve and L. Leussen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 172-190. Hovhanessian uses of the language of "real presence" in his discussion of the bread and wine of the Eucharist on page 23: "The identification of the bread and wine as Christ's body and blood point to the *real presence* of the Lord among his followers" (emphasis mine).

commentaries, Hovhanessian limits his discussion of the symbolism of aspects to the liturgy to highly "ritualised" moments often unfamiliar to his audience.[72] Similarly, while Nersoyan develops a rather sophisticated sacramental semiotics, Hovhanessian limits his comments to the "symbolism" of various ritual elements. For instance, he notes that "the symbolism of the curtain conveys a powerful theological message: Christ's sacrifice atoned us with God."[73] Likewise, discussing the continued use of incense in the practice of the liturgy, he says that "certain items are incensed emphasizing their role in the liturgy as images and symbols of God's presence. This includes the Gospel book, the main and two side altars, the chalice, crosses, icons (sacred paintings) and reserved communion."[74] This list of items that serve as "images and symbols of God's presence" suggests that Hovhanessian is more concerned with helping his readers understand how to approach certain aspects of the liturgy that might be relatively unfamiliar to them, rather than to develop fully the relationship between symbol and reality.[75] As he notes with respect to the priest's prayers, "it is very important for the participants in the *Badarak* to *know and understand* what the celebrant's prayers mean, because they are being offered on their behalf."[76]

This understanding is constitutive of Hovhanessian's main concern in his commentary, namely that the reader is able to be what he calls an "active participant" in the Divine Liturgy. In fact, after the main body of his commentary, he provides an Appendix, "Active Participation in the Badarak."[77] Of course, "receiving the Holy Communion is the culmination of our participation in the *Badarak.* It does not make sense to 'participate' in the *Badarak* without receiving communion."[78] The "participation" in the theological sense (the ability to "become participants of His external sacrifice of the remission of sins"[79], the *theosis* of the patristic commentators, and the "mystery" of all Christian sacramental life) is connected to the "active participation" through knowledgeable understanding, singing, praying,

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72 See Catherine Bell's discussion of "ritualization" in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

73 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 16.

74 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 58.

75 Another example of his explanations of symbolism regards the movement of the priest during the liturgy: "one can easily see the symbolism in the descent of the celebrant from the altar (a symbol of the biblical "holy hill") to walk among the congregation, as a reminder of the historical event of the incarnation (the descent of our Lord to the world and his birth in flesh) in order to preach the 'good news' of our salvation." Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 83.

76 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 75 (emphasis mine).

77 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 131.

78 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 122.

79 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 127.

and receiving communion during the liturgy. Hovhanessian thus develops his central ecclesiological insight in relation to his concern that parishioners know and understand the liturgical experience in front of them. Hovhanessian develops an ecclesiology steeped in the patristic insight that "the great mystery of our salvation through Christ" is that we "become one with Christ our Lord" "through our participation in the Holy Communion."[80] This ecclesiology is attentive to the needs of a diasporic situation. In such a situation, parishioners might not necessarily understand the dynamics of the liturgy they are experiencing. Thus, Hovhanessian maintains that "the main objective of the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is our inspiring union with Christ," focusing all of his explanation, his efforts to help people understand, to the central soteriological and ecclesiological focus on the Divine Liturgy.[81]

In this, Hovhanessian's text shares much with the classic, patristic genre of liturgical commentary. Through the Divine Liturgy, the Church understood as the Body of Christ (ecclesiology) is constituted through the participation in the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, for the salvation of sins (soteriology). The great mystery of salvation is simultaneously the foundation for the Church. As a genre, the liturgical commentary is uniquely situated to meditate on this simultaneous encounter with the Body of Christ. Hence, a practical ecclesiology, as we have seen in the earlier commentaries, Nersoyan's commentary, and now in Hovhanessian's text, is always one of the major themes of the genre.

If both Nersoyan's and Hovhanessian's commentaries share this and other aspects with the earlier Armenian liturgical commentaries described above, they also exhibit new and different concerns and anxieties. As we have seen, both newer commentaries are steeped in historicism and a need to ground the Divine Liturgy in its historical development. Similarly, while the relationship of the bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ has long been a concern in theological discussions of the liturgy, for these two authors that concern is filtered through several centuries of Catholic theological development as well as the "linguistic turn" and the "critique of onto-theology" of recent philosophy.

Finally, while these two recent commentaries share much, exposing a general modern and diasporic context that leads to shifts in the genre, there are also important differences between the two of them. In particular, Nersoyan's symbolic or anagogical explanations seem to assume a parishioner who is broadly aware of the shape and language of the liturgy. Hovhanessian, on the other hand,

80 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 73.
81 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 26.

writes for an audience that needs to understand what it is they are seeing and experiencing. In the final sections, I turn to the question of how the concerns of these recent commentaries are also shaped by a diasporic condition.

Commenting on diaspora

Neither of the two recent and contemporary commentaries explored above tackles the question of "diaspora" directly. Even the regular litany of contemporary diasporic concerns about the liturgy – the Classical Armenian, the length, the unfamiliarity with liturgical rubrics – described by Findikyan in "Eastern Liturgy in the West" barely make a clear appearance.[82] Hovhanessian mentions the perennial concern over the length of the liturgy at the beginning of his text, and Nersoyan, in a footnote, suggests that one portion of the service, notably one without a biblical basis, might be cut. Similarly, Hovhanessian notes in passing that "Classical Armenian is the language of the *Badarak* in the Armenian Church throughout the world."[83] However, as Findikyan's article makes clear, there are a plethora of liturgical concerns the "average parishioner" in diaspora has that are not taken up explicitly in either of these commentaries.[84]

Nonetheless, I want to suggest that through the concerns that are directly addressed in the text, the broader diasporic context is an omnipresent "spectre" behind these works, especially Hovhanessian's. Through the anxieties that *are* directly addressed, such as the biblical basis, the historicity of the liturgy, and the symbolic status of certain aspects of the liturgy, we can discern what the animating concerns of the hierarchs are regarding the diasporic situation. Several of these have been addressed throughout the close reading of the two commentaries. Some are more broadly "modern" concerns, while others relate more specifically to the diasporic situation.

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82 Michael Daniel Findikyan, "Eastern Liturgy in the West," in *Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Colloquium: Music, Workshop, Arts* 8 (Autumn 2006), 55–65.

83 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 62.

84 Findikyan's own efforts during his tenure as the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America were directed towards a liturgical renewal that recognised these concerns. In his programmatic text *Building up the Body of Christ,* he devotes one of his five "guidelines or pillars" (20) to "'Knitting the Body Together in Love' – the Holy Badarak" (25). There, he suggests that "the challenge of drawing our people into a meaningful engagement with the *Badarak* is a complex and emotional problem that involves issues of faith, language, culture, and a general lack of biblical and liturgical knowledge among our people, societal and economic pressures, and other factors, many of which are out of our diocese's control and jurisdiction. Nevertheless, they must be addressed as issues of primary importance" (25). Michael Daniel Findikyan, *Building Up the Body of Christ: The Treasure of the Armenian Church for Our People Today* (New York: Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, 2022).

Of those modern concerns, the most prominent in the two commentaries is the need to ground the liturgy historically.[85] Both Hovhanessian and Nersoyan point to Jewish worship as the historical context out of which Christian liturgy emerges. Likewise, they treat the emergence of the Armenian Divine Liturgy as a historical-philological question, with Hovhanessian explicitly discussing the "Evolution" of the Armenian Divine Liturgy.[86] In this, Hovhanessian's position towards the entire Armenian Christian tradition is perhaps more "historical" than Nersoyan's: both authors discuss their medieval predecessors in the genre of liturgical commentary, but Hovhanessian also deploys them as witnesses to the historicity of the Armenian Divine Liturgy.

Another modern – and indeed, "postmodern" – concern is that of the "real" or "symbolic" nature of aspects of the Divine Liturgy.[87] After the "linguistic turn" of the early twentieth century and the "critique of ontotheology" and metaphysics initiated by Heidegger, the older debate about the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, took on a different form. If already during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation the debate about the "real presence" of the Eucharist was raging, this debate shifts under the weight of the linguistic turn. We see this in Nersoyan's admission that there is a "modern" understanding of symbol which does not do justice to the "symbolic" explanation of the patristic commentaries nor to his own. Hovhanessian, on the other hand, avoids the anagogical explanations of both Nersoyan and the earlier exegetes, except for instances where understanding what the parishioner is seeing or experiencing would require a kind of symbolic explanation, such as "the descent of the celebrant from the altar" as "a symbol of the biblical 'holy hill.'"[88] Otherwise, he prefers to unfold the basics of what the congregation is seeing or experiencing, translating prayers they do not hear or describing the raising of the chalice as a "dramatic moment."[89] In its own way, this sidesteps the debate over the symbol that Nersoyan takes head-on.

While these aspects of the two recent commentaries demonstrate the broader context of "modernity," the hierarchs' concerns also reflect the specific situation in the diaspora. This is true in three ways. First, the eucharistic ecclesiology, while

85 I do not intend here to give a full treatment of the debate over the "modern." Briefly, I follow Talal Asad in seeing modernity as a project, whereby that project includes the inculcation of certain sensibilities and arrangements that are deemed modern – for instance, an attitude toward history. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 14–16.

86 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 28.

87 See L. Boeve and L. Leijssen, eds., *Sacramental Presence in a Postmodern Context* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001).

88 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 83.

89 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 116.

completely in line with age-old concerns and reflective of the genre of liturgical commentary, also arises from the need to secure a basis for a transnational church of which each diasporan diocese is just one instantiation. Second, the condition of a plurality of Christian (not to mention religious) experience available as a "religious marketplace" undergirds the two commentaries. Finally, there are specific anxieties around language, length, and a general "understanding" of the ancient liturgical practice of the Armenian Church that emerge from a diasporic condition.

Of these three, Hovhanessian's texts is more directly concerned with the last, the question of understanding. As the paper has demonstrated, even though he only notes the language question explicitly in passing, his overall project of making sure that parishioners understand the liturgy so that they can actively participate in it assumes, in fact, that they do not understand what they are experiencing. This basic presupposition reveals something crucial about the diasporic context, at least as viewed from the ecclesial hierarchy. For the church leadership, Armenian Christians today do not engage with the liturgy enough and do not know how to do it. Findikyan's discussion throughout "Eastern Liturgy in the West" makes this concern explicit. Similarly, Hovhanessian's focus on "understanding" throughout his commentary belies not only a modern hermeneutic mode of engagement with liturgy that makes understanding the most important way of encountering liturgy but a more specific diasporic context where newer generations and those born in diaspora are assumed not to understand or have a solid grounding in the ancient liturgy of the churches.[90]

Second, we can discern in both commentaries an underlying anxiety about religious plurality in diaspora. Again, religious pluralism by itself is unique neither to diaspora nor to the modern condition. However, what is new is the ease through which conversion or the crossing of denominational and religious lines occurs. Merely through an individual choice, one can leave the Armenian Church. With the even more recent phenomenon of "church shopping," especially in America, this anxiety over religious pluralism and the possibility of leaving the

90 This emphasis on understanding is tied to the primacy of "belief" in Protestant forms of Christianity and is similarly tied to the Protestant hermeneutics of Scripture. See, for instance, Asad's reading of the work of the prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz, suggesting that Geertz's treatment of belief "is a modern, privatized Christian one because and to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than as constituting activity in the world." Asad, *Genealogies,* 47. Note that Asad's rejection is not to the importance of belief to Christianity at all, but rather to a particular kind of belief as a "state of mind." When belief is first and foremost a "state of mind," then a specific form of understanding follows suit. There are unresolved questions for future research regarding the changes for (Oriental) Orthodox Christians that come when a hermeneutics of understanding tied to the primacy of belief as a "state of mind" are adopted wholesale into a tradition that has long operated with other forms of exegetical principles.

Armenian Church is heightened. Neither author discusses this diasporic situation directly, but the need both authors feel to justify the Armenian liturgical rite and its unique and ancient practices points to the underlying anxiety. Nersoyan gives the historical "origin of different rites,"[91] while Hovhanessian emphasises the fact that "Armenians developed their own unique celebration of the *Badarak*."[92] Both exegetes offer the unique aspects of the Armenian Rite over and against other forms of worship Armenian Christians might encounter in diaspora. Hovhanessian makes this explicit when he says that "unlike the theological lectures or expositions in some Protestant churches – where the focus of the liturgy is the preacher's sermon and where there is no *Badarak* celebrated – in the Armenian Church the sermon is limited to a brief reflection on the assigned daily readings from the Scriptures."[93] That is, the focus on the particularity of the Armenian liturgy, whether in practice or through its historical grounding, emerges in part from the need to justify participation in the Armenian liturgical experience. Such a need arises because of the contemporary conditions of a diasporic church.

Finally, the ecclesiology the paper has traced in both commentaries can be read as in part a response to the need to secure the unity of a transnational church in diaspora. As we have seen, the genre of liturgical commentary is particularly attuned to the longstanding theological insistence that the liturgy is the moment that connects salvation through the Eucharist, the Body of Christ, to the constitution of the Church, the Body of Christ. Securing the unity of a large Church through the eucharistic has its own long history. For instance, in early Christian Rome, since the Bishop was understood to oversee a singular church in the city, all of the *tituli* churches were sent the *fermentum,* portions of the Eucharist, instantiating the unity of the Church as Body of Christ through the sharing of a single eucharistic sacrifice of the Body of Christ.[94] Yet, in transnational and diasporic conditions, the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ comes up against the dispersion of the members of that body across continents. Thus, as we have seen, Nersoyan beautifully insists that the "local church" always "experiences the wholeness of the Church" every time the Eucharist is offered.[95] Similarly, Hovhanessian insists that his readers understand that "in the fellowship of the *Badarak,* we become one with each other and with the Lord. This unity is experienced in

91 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy*, 258.
92 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 127.
93 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance*, 91.
94 See the discussion in John F. Baldovin, S.J., *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy* (Roma: Pontifical Institutum Studiorun Orientalium, 1987), 145–146.
95 Nersoyan, *Divine Liturgy,* 267.

its fullness through the receiving of His body and blood."[96] Thus, the ecclesiology of the two commentaries emerges in part as an answer to the diasporic condition of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Oriental Orthodox in diaspora through the lens of the liturgical commentary

Such a diasporic condition is shared by all the Oriental Orthodox Churches as well. Though not all the Oriental Orthodox self-consciously consider themselves as "in diaspora," a transnational and global experience of dispersion characterises the contemporary situation of all these churches. By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that the genre of the liturgical commentary, found among all the Oriental Orthodox churches, can reveal common and contrasting responses to the diasporic condition. While the ERC Rewriting Global Orthodoxy database has very few entries specifically of "commentaries," many sermons and teaching texts in the "Religious Teaching" or "Religious Practice" genres approach the same concerns as the two texts under consideration in this paper.[97]

In this chapter, I have shown the connections between the genre of liturgical commentary and the central contemporary issues of the Church as expressed by clergy. Such a connection was true for Armenian patristic commentators a thousand years ago, and it remains true for current exegetes. Through the genre of liturgical commentary, the authors express practical ecclesiological concerns of the time. For the two recent commentaries under consideration, the modern and diasporic conditions of the Armenian Church crucially shaped their commentaries. Since the other Oriental Orthodox churches shared both the long practice of commentary on the liturgy and the current diasporic condition, a closer consideration of the genre across the churches should yield important details regarding the shared anxieties and the common experiences facing all of these ancient churches.

96 Hovhanessian, *In Remembrance,* 128.

97 When searching "commentary" in the Global Orthodoxy database, in addition to Armenian texts, the Dutch language text, *Aan de tafel van het leven,* a translation and commentary of the Syriac Orthodox liturgy is found. Matija Miličić recently brought an English-language "reference book" to the Liturgy of St. Basil, used by the Coptic Church and printed in New Jersey, to my attention.

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Online Coptic Theology: A Comparison between French and British Websites

GAÉTAN DU ROY

This study addresses the question of the role the Internet plays in the religious life of Coptic Christians living in Europe. It does so by analysing websites created and administered by communities located in Great Britain and France and by adopting a particular angle: the transmission of textual traditions. My research is part of a collective project dealing with textual practices of Oriental Orthodox Christians in Europe since the 1970s.[1] I am interested in understanding which role the internet plays in the transmission of religious texts besides the usual printed material that is still circulating abundantly. Another question touches on the impact digitization has on the production and reception of those texts. I am also looking at content produced especially to be displayed online, what could be called screen texts.[2] We can indeed divide the texts we find online into different categories which partially overlap: we encounter translations and original productions, and we can also distinguish between screen-texts and book PDF's or eBooks, which can be original content or translations. I will argue that the translation process generates tensions in Coptic communities, anxious about the potential alteration of the "chain of transmission"[3] linking them to their past. One of the greatest challenges of religious diasporas is to rebuild a robust chain linking them to their roots, but that would fit at the same time their new environment of living. The internet completely changes the situation regarding text transmission and production. There are two important constraints linked to this new situation: first, websites ask for new kinds of texts to be written and displayed to fill in the rubrics typical of the architecture of this digital media. Second, the potential audience totally changes: those textual productions can potentially be read by anyone interested. Many of those screen-texts are also directed at a virtual audience of outsiders and are thus also a kind of justification of the Coptic faith and tradition.

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1 ERC, R*ewriting Global Orthodoxy. Oriental Christianity in Europe between 1970 and 2020*. The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 834441 GlobalOrthodoxy).

2 A term coined in French by Souchier who speaks about « écrit d'écran », see Emmanuël Souchier, "L'écrit d'écran. Pratiques d'écriture et informatique," *Communication et langages* 107 (1996): 105–119.

3 See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion pour mémoire* (Paris: Cerf, 1993).

Copts and new media

Many studies have addressed what has been called "digital religion," which is now fully part of the experience of most believers worldwide.[4] As scholars in this field have shown, the internet has an impact on the way people appropriate religious knowledge, on the concept of authorship but also, and probably more crucially, on relations of authority within religious groups. If the internet allows for a quick and massive diffusion of authoritative versions of orthodoxy, whatever is considered as such, the same is true for the many counter-discourses easily accessible to anyone interested in them. The internet has been described by Olivier Roy and other authors as an instrument of deterritorialisation and deculturation of religion – even one of de-ethnicisation. Religious messages tend to lose their distinct cultural features as they adapt to global trends such as individualism, and they are increasingly separated from their cultural matrix, often rejected as superstitions.[5] Those messages also tend to circulate without considering physical or political boundaries. Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity are now globalised. Copts are no exception to this, with faithful living all around the globe, mainly in North America and Australia, as well as in the Persian Gulf and Europe.[6]

Coptic diasporas communicate in Arabic with their historical centre in Egypt, but Arabic is also used between the diaspora communities, though increasingly English is being used. Coptic webpages do refer to other Coptic sites, and more broadly to other Christian websites, created in other countries, even on other continents. Coptic diasporas around the world are thus in contact with each other. Digital practices of Copts have been the object of a certain number of studies, mostly focusing on Coptic activism, that is, the activity of lobbying the American Congress to influence its stance towards Egypt and the way the country treats its minorities.[7] Other studies have addressed the role of satellite channels

4 See among others, Wendi Bellar, Heidi Campbell (eds.), *Digital Religion: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2022); Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Religion and the Internet. Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* (London: Routledge, 2018).

5 Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

6 Among other research, see Michael Akladios, "Heteroglossia: Interpretation and the Experiences of Coptic Immigrants from Egypt in North America, 1955–1975," *Social History* 106 (2020): 627–650; Benjamin Daniel Crace, *Pneumatic piety: a sociotheological study of the Coptic orthodox diaspora in Kuwait* (PhD, diss., University of Birmingham, 2018); Matija Milicic, "The Coptic Orthodox Church in the Netherlands," *Egypt Migrations* (July 30, 2021), online: https://egyptmigrations.com/tag/copts-in-the-netherlands/, and Matija Milicic, "Preserving, Adapting and Self-inscribing: The Case of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Italy (2 parts)," *Egypt Migrations* (March 11 & 18, 2022); Nora Stene, "The Challenge of the Diaspora as Reflected in a Coptic Sunday School," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 1 (2002): 77–89.

7 Elizabeth Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt Coptic Media, Identity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2011); Donald Westbrook, Michael Saad, "Religious Identity and Borderless Territorial-

and, more broadly, new media, which have developed primarily in Australia and North America, where communities have founded TV channels, printing houses and even seminaries to train their clergy.[8] Other investigations have shown the importance of the Internet in connecting sometimes very small groups scattered all around the globe.[9] However, no studies have really attempted to address the religious content of those websites and the effects of the translation and circulation process of religious texts and ideas.

Online content circulates, is borrowed, copied, and reinterpreted by believers, who will probably never meet in person. This is, of course, not totally new, as people, books, and ideas have been circulating for a long time, at least since the 1960s.[10] For example, one famous " traveller" was Bishop Samuel (1920-1980), who used to visit diasporas worldwide during the 1960s and 1970s. He was, for instance, used to celebrate a religious service two or three times a year during the 1970s in Switzerland, a country he had to visit regularly due to his participation in the World Council of Churches in Geneva.[11] Many monks and priests were sent to serve Coptic communities around the world, and Copts living in the diaspora increasingly felt confident enough to express their opinions publicly and even to try to intervene in their country of origin's affairs.[12] This trend of internationalization has now reached new dimensions. From approximately 2004, since the access to the internet generalized in Egypt, Copts outside Egypt have been able to comment on the country's situation. They did so in 2009, when during the infamous episode of the "swine-flu" all pigs were killed. While the Church and most Coptic elite members were publicly supporting the decision, Copts in the diaspora were criticizing it as persecution against Christians.[13] Social media and YouTube increased those distant interactions. YouTube allowed certain Coptic preachers to gain inter-

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ity in the Coptic e-Diaspora," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18, no. 1 (2017): 341–351), Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, "Digital diasporas and governance in semi-authoritarian states: the case of the Egyptian Copts," *Public Administration and Development* 25 (2005): 193–204.

8 See Febe Armanios, *Satellite Ministries: The Rise of Christian Television in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

9 See for example Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Voice of the East: The Transnational Messenger of the Assyrian Church of the East," in Mirella Cassarino et al, *Diaspore nel vicino oriente. Melodie Ebraiche in Benedetto Marcello* (Milan: Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2022), 59–89.

10 Earlier, the circulation was more unilateral, with textual productions entering the Middle East through Christian missions.

11 https://eglisecopte.ch/leglise-copte-orthodoxe-en-suisse-romande/, accessed September 2022.

12 Here I refer above all to the activity of Coptic lobbying. See Nadia Marzouki, "The U.S. Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 14, no. 3 (2016): 261–276; Grégoire Delhaye, "La réponse des états à la dissidence diasporique. Le cas de l'Egypte face au militantisme copte aux États-Unis," in *Loin des yeux, près du cœur, les Etats et leurs expatriés*, eds. Stéphane Dufois, Carine Guerassimoff, Anne de Tinguy (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 323–342.

13 See Iskander, *Sectarian*, 150.

national fame, which led some of them to undertake speaking tours around the world. Daoud Lamei is one interesting example of those itinerant preachers, and it is probably no coincidence that he is also an ardent promoter and organiser of Coptic missions abroad. Lamei has, for example, 304k (on 12-09-2022) followers on his YouTube page. He preaches in Arabic and English, and he is present on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Soundcloud. Lamei also published numerous books, the PDFs of which can be found on Coptic websites. To give a striking example of his fame, one London church that offers access to videotaped sermons presents material from only three preachers: the current pope, the late one, and Daoud Lamei.[14] Another example of the role of the Internet as an amplifier of fame and outreach is the members of the "charismatic trend," with priests like Abuna Samaan (1941–2023) and Abuna Makari (1934–2022), both linked to Egyptian and foreign Charismatic Evangelical movements. Their discourses and exorcisms were broadcast through satellite channels like SAT7 and others, and they themselves circulated outside their country to participate in religious meetings.[15]

Coptic diasporas between Egypt and World Christianity

This internationalisation of the Coptic Church generates tensions between its Egyptian ethnical dimension and the will to reach out to other Christians, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Still, this tension can also be seen in diasporic groups caught between their socialisation as church members and in their host societies. A typical case of this tension is the integration of Copts' spouses who are most of the time Catholic or Protestants and sometimes feel excluded from the community for not being Egyptian.[16] Religious communities in the diaspora greatly value their particularism, and this is certainly true for Orthodox Christians for whom preserving the ties to their historical roots is so important. These traditions have lot in common with other Christian denominations; however, their differences are real and have effects on the way Copts articulate the idiosyncratic and universalist aspects of their religious practices. Nonetheless, in the diasporic context, Copts need to build ties to other Christian churches. In the first moments

14 Saint Mary & Saint John, East London, https://www.smasg.org.uk/videos, accessed 15 September 2022.

15 Those priests were influenced by foreign and local Evangelical missionaries and are often criticized by high clergy members for being too Protestant. On this trend, see Gaétan du Roy, "Father Samaan and the Charismatic trend within the Coptic church," in *Copts in Context. Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity*, ed. Nelly van-Doorn-Harder (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 66–79.

16 As shown by Rachel Loewen, "Strategies of Adaptation and Survival: The Introduction of Converts to the Coptic Orthodox Community in the Greater Toronto Area," in *Copts in Context*, 124–133.

of their implantation in a new country, they generally needed to be supported by a 'broker church', that is a local church well established in the host society and able to provide or rent buildings for worship and gatherings, and to play the intermediary with state authorities. Copts are also willing to build alliances with other Orthodox (Oriental or Eastern) for the sake of ecumenism because they feel they belong to the same branch of Christianity, or sometimes more prosaically to obtain the organisation of religious courses in schools (when the state offers this possibility). These websites provide an excellent starting point to further explore the tensions between ethnicity and religion, between local and global dimensions of the life of Coptic diasporas.

The study of these websites allows us to follow the multiple connections linking local parishes to distant parishes, institutions, and individuals around the globe. It is also a way to show the limits of Roy's deculturation theory. Any diasporic group needs some sort of emplacement in their places of living. As David Garbin has shown in his ethnography of African Pentecostal churches in the UK, those groups make conscious efforts to anchor themselves in their local contexts of living, even when their discourse is clearly geared toward internationalisation and mission.[17] Copts, too, try to carve a place for themselves in diasporic lands, articulating the various scales of their belongings in different ways. I will show in this paper how the Internet plays a role in that process.

The two cases considered involve three languages, French, English and Arabic, with very different influences and outreach capacities. One could assume that the English diaspora is more internationalised than the latter, as it can rely on the experience of the two largest diasporas, the North American and the Australian, which virtually provide them with all kinds of texts already translated and ready for use. Secondly, the choice of national websites allows for a combination of online and offline observations. This paper will mainly propose an exploration of online content, but it will be complemented with the results of fieldwork among Coptic communities in France.

In this contribution, I will propose reading these internet websites through the prism of tradition, its preservation and reinvention. Indeed, as could be expected, Coptic communities need, at the same time, to preserve what they perceive as their heritage and to adapt it to the contexts in which they live. I will thus propose to review some themes that will organise the comparison. The first one

17 David Garbin, "The Visibility and Invisibility of Migrant Faith in the City: Diaspora Religion and the Politics of Emplacement of Afro-Christian Churches," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39,5 (2013): 677–696.

will address the general organisation of those websites: which categories are proposed? Which are those common to different web pages, and which are those differing? I will also suggest some explanations about the organization of the French and UK/Irish diasporas to contextualise my findings. The second part will propose a reading of the classical "who are we?" or "what is the Coptic church?" rubric to investigate if there is any recurring self-definition of the Coptic Church displayed online to the larger public. The third will offer a closer look at the texts downloadable on these websites. Along the way, I will pay close attention to the links to other websites and the connections to other contexts.

General presentation of the British and French churches and their websites

The websites I investigate in this paper can be described as institutional. Most of them are direct emanations of parishes or dioceses. It is, however, impossible to study them without considering the rich ecosystem of media that is fully part of Copts' lives: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and smartphones are intrinsic to today's religious life and have a real impact on it. For example, many parishioners are now used to following the liturgy on the small screens of their phones or on the larger ones displayed in most churches, which helps them to keep up with the complex liturgy in different languages. Some faithful also participate with "likes" and other emoticons in a celebration broadcast live on Facebook. This chapter will nonetheless focus on websites, even if some other media will be mentioned.

General description

Almost all websites offer a basic presentation of the Coptic church and often one of their local community. When it comes to churches or dioceses' websites, most of them address practical matters like the localization of the parish, the schedule of services and a presentation of the church's priests. In brief, they are at the heart of everyday religious practices and give access to indispensable information to organize a communal life. Many parishes' websites propose tools to find one's way in the liturgical calendar (an online version of the *Synaxar* is often accessible online, as well as a daily biblical reading) and in the complex Coptic liturgy, by giving access to liturgical books in pdf, calendars of feasts and fasts, or by proposing links to internet apps, which have the advantage of giving access to corpora that would have otherwise necessitated carrying several heavy books. These tools help the believers to find their way in the religious space-time. When and how to pray? With which texts and hymns? When and how to fast?, are some of the questions to which those sites try to provide an answer.

Websites also display discourses on more specific topics, addressing questions related to personal behaviours and morality, usually sermons or piety-oriented discourses. Those are presented in a written form, or as audio recordings and videos. Most churches also have a YouTube channel to present their own video production or to share content of interest to their parishioners. Some sites have a page giving the latest news, and including spiritual thoughts, and reactions to important events. Many churches in the UK, for instance, reacted to the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The diocese of the Midlands, like other Coptic sites, conveyed its condolences to the royal family and to the country on its homepage in the days following the announcement.[18]

All those internet pages propose a way to get in touch with them, but none give access to direct possibilities of reacting to the online content, like an open forum. This possibility is, of course, offered by FB pages and other social media, even if they can be restricted on certain occasions, notably when there is an ongoing internal conflict in one community.

French and British churches and their websites

Many websites, particularly those belonging to dioceses, deliver information and give access to links to the diverse "satellite" associations, dedicated to religious outreach, youth activities – like scouting groups or sports competitions – and to diverse charities related to the parish. In this regard, examining these parallel associations provides some insight into the level of activity of Coptic communities in various locations. If we have a look at the Bishopric of Paris and the North of France, we can see a link to a project targeting poor Copts in Egypt and to another called "Coptic Maraude"[19] (in English in the text), dedicated to helping homeless people in France. These social services clearly raise the question of the Copts' relationship with their country of origin and their host country.

Compared to Paris, the internet page of the London diocese displays much more information on its activities: youth activities – religious and sportive – charities (another "maraude" called "Coptic City Mission"[20]). There is also an "Art and Film Award," football tournaments and a "Joint Youth Committee" meant to "provide joint spiritual and social service for Coptic youth at a general level through the coordination of the efforts of youth servants nationally, and along-

18 https://ukmidcopts.org/, on their first page, accessed 9 September 2022.

19 In French, Maraude refers to wandering through the streets to find homeless persons and help them; see https://www.instagram.com/coptic_maraude/ (accessed 10 June 2025).

20 https://copticcitymission.com/, accessed 5 May 2023.

side each church's localised service."[21] Thus, the London diocese seems far more active than the Paris one. Parish activities are generally local and may not be listed on websites that are not intended to provide a comprehensive account of what parishioners do daily. The coordination level and initiatives depend largely on the bishops' actions and personalities.[22] Indeed, Angaelos, London's Archbishop, is a prominent and hyperactive member of the Coptic church. Born in Egypt, he spent his childhood in Australia. Angaelos has been serving the UK for a long time. He became a monk in 1990 in Anba Bishoy's Monastery (Wadi Natrun, Egypt) and a parish priest in London in 1995. In 1999, he was consecrated general bishop for the UK, by Pope Shenouda and ordained Archbishop of London in 2017 by the latter's successor.[23] Bishop Marc, born in 1970, has served in Vienna, where he taught at the Coptic seminary, before being appointed first as a general bishop in 2015 (still based in Vienna) and later as a bishop of Paris and the North of France in 2017.[24] The anchorage of Bishop Marc in France is thus recent compared to the long experience of Angaelos in the UK, and the former did not know French when he was nominated to his new position, which was certainly a disadvantage and led him to deploy more efforts to establish his legitimacy.

The legacy of Pope Shenouda's governance

We see how the situation of different Coptic diasporas can greatly vary in relation to the personality of the bishop in charge and the local history of each community. To get a clearer view of the origin of these differences, we need to take into account the governance of the late Pope Shenouda. During his 40 years of reign between 1971 and 2012, Shenouda had the occasion to consecrate many prelates, which helped him to reinforce his power and his centrality in the church's governance.[25] He could impose his vision over the years, and though he reinforced the institution, he did so essentially based on personal relations rather than by applying standardized procedures and collegial decisions. Shenouda consecrated many general bishops during his long patriarchate, a clerical position directly

21 http://www.copticorthodox.london/youth-mission/joint-youth-committee/, accessed 13 September 2022.

22 A fact that is also true for Egypt. See for some examples, Sana Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt. The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

23 London is a patriarchal diocese depending directly from the pope while the two other dioceses are "regular" ones depending on the Bishop. Information taken from Bishop Angaelos' personal website: http://www.bishopangaelos.org/about-Bishop-Angaelos, accessed 2 January 2023.

24 https://copte.fr/notre-%C3%A9v%C3%AAque/, accessed 13 September 2022.

25 About this see Dina El Khawaga, "The political dynamics of the Copts: Giving the community an active role," in *Christian communities in the Arab Middle East: The challenge of the future*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 172–190.

depending on the patriarch. This "role" of bishop without territory had been created by Pope Kirillus IV in the 1960s to integrate reformist monks among whom Shenouda himself. The future pope, who acted as general bishop for religious education under Kirillus, would later nominate many general bishops. Some oversaw sub-parts of Cairo, normally a papal district; others were "secretaries of the pope" or in charge of a domain like Bishop Mussa, responsible for the bishopric of youth. In the diasporic context, consecrating general bishops who could be easily removed offered more flexibility in a complex situation where parishes were recent and sometimes very isolated. Tawadros II seems to be adopting the opposite strategy as he is currently stabilizing diasporic bishops by giving them a full ordination, which is then normally irrevocable.[26] This trend will probably lead to greater autonomy in the future for the diasporic communities. In the meantime, it sometimes creates conflicts with parishes which had benefited from great autonomy and which can rebel against the authority of the new bishops. In this case, the pope would sometimes stay personally in charge of parishes, refusing to submit to the new prelate's jurisdiction.

France is a very particular case which shows the kind of freedom Shenouda took with the procedures when dealing with bishops' nominations. The first stable bishops to be nominated were a Dutch and a French convert who became the head of the French exarchate in 1974 – Bishop Marcos (d. 2008) was made bishop of Toulon-Marseille and Bishop Athanasios (d. 2023) became chorbishop. In 1994, an "L'Eglise copte *de* France" was distinguished from l'"Eglise copte *en* France."[27] The priests of the second one were first kept under the authority of Pope Shenouda, whereas in 2017 the diocese was into two, with bishop Marc as the head of Paris and the North of France and bishop Luka, bishop of Francophone Switzerland and South of France, since 2017. The first was led by Anba Marcos, who was then made metropolitan of the eparchy of "Toulon et toute la France", and Anba Athanasios then became bishop and was meant to be a French church, targeting converts, while the other was meant to represent the "classical Egyptian" Coptic church.[28] Nevertheless, if we take the case of the Villejuif (north of Paris) parish, the only one depending on the Eglise copte de France in the Paris region, most faithful are of Egyptian origin even if most of them are probably French citi-

26 There is a recent counterexample with Bishop Suriel, who left his Australian diocese to become responsible for the Los Angeles diocese.

27 Alessandra Fani, "Les coptes orthodoxes," in *Les minorité religieuses en France. Panorama de la diversité contemporaine*, ed. Anne-Laure Zwilling (Paris: Bayard, 2019): 346–347.

28 A similar attempt to create a Parish targeting non-Egyptians has been made in Toronto, see Loewen, "Stategies".

zens. This kind of tension can be found in other diasporic contexts. For example, a church for Coptic converts was founded in Toronto, and a recent debate arose in the United States about the language that should be used in liturgy.[29] In the second case, the generations born in the USA and their relationship with tradition are at the heart of these controversies.

Both cases, France and the UK, show that the church's territorial organisation in diasporic lands is a complex story full of tensions between the different layers of migrants and between the different clerical actors involved in the church's life outside Egypt: monks, bishops (general or regular ones, papal legates), priests, deacons and laypeople. Regarding the transmission of the religious heritage, choices also have to be made: in which language to pray and sing? How and what to translate? What parts of the rite cannot be changed, and what needs to be adapted?

Visual aspects

Visually, French and British websites adopt different strategies to illustrate their religious belonging, on a scale ranging from the local parish, the Coptic Church and Orthodoxy, to Christianity as a whole. Many pictures of church buildings are displayed. For instance, the websites of the dioceses of Paris and London show a picture of their cathedral as a synecdoche of Coptic communities. The French site presents a photograph of the church interior, focusing on a Coptic icon painted in the neo-Coptic style,[30] counterbalancing the very Catholic aspect of the church (which it was initially). The British internet page of the London diocese offers a more complex narrative through a succession of pictures automatically scrolling in a determined order. It starts with a view of the cathedral building, and then it moves to a picture of the church's interior. Thereafter, we see a picture of bishop Angaelos sitting with various interlocutors, including (the then) Prince Charles and some Muslim and Christian clerics. After showing the Cathedral and the bishop, we move to a bird's-eye view of the (young) faithful gathered outside the church. To highlight the links between the bishop and the faithful, we have a group picture presenting a smiling Bishop Angaelos surrounded by many young people standing on the steps of the church. The last two photos are two group pictures, one of Angaelos among Christian clerics from various denominations and another showing Pope Tawadros surrounded by his bishops in Cairo. This

29 Loewen, "Stategies"; Shira Telushkin, "The Americanization of an Ancient Faith," *The Atlantic*, March 31 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/coptic-church/555515/, accessed 4 May 2023.

30 A style launched by Isaac Fanous from the 1960s, and which he wanted to revive the authentic Coptic and even pharaonic iconic tradition.

small narrative underlines many important themes: the Coptic Church – both the local diocese and the mother-church-, social involvement, ecumenicism, the faithful and particularly the youth among them. The whole narrative puts on the forefront the person of Bishop Angaelos who is really portrayed as the pillar of his diocese. He is indeed very active and visible not only in his church but in British society. He has, for instance, created an advocacy group for minority/ies, and he travels a lot around the world to give conferences. He was recently nominated as a Special Legate to Australia by the pope, in addition to his role as archbishop of London (he is the only bishop in charge of this large diocese). Angaelos has his own website distinct from the one of the diocese, which shows the special place he occupies in the Coptic diaspora and the Church as a whole. The archbishop's webpage, www.bishopangaelos.org, includes the schedules of his conferences, his talks and press releases.

On other pages, we can see diverse ways to refer visually to the Coptic Church: Coptic crosses, details of churches' interiors, Coptic scripts, neo-Coptic style icons, and photographs of clerics. We see in the choice of religious images a real eclecticism. The Coptic church has indeed a versatile visual tradition with many layers appropriating Catholic and Protestant iconography, which have been part of Copts' religious practices since the end of the nineteenth century and are considered by many as fully part of their daily religious life even if these "foreign" images are rejected by others who would like to purify Coptic art from Western influences.[31]

"What is our faith?" – presenting the church to a general audience

The self-presentation texts found on those websites are very similar in terms of content, even if they differ in the number of details displayed due to their length and particular layout. Some pages use the visual possibilities of the internet to present their history, like in St-Mark (London), proposing a chronological timeline presenting the important historical landmarks.[32] Those texts often start with an explanation of the etymology of the word "Copt", referring to its original meaning "Egyptian." They also describe the origin of the Church dating back to Saint Mark's mission to Egypt, and by doing so, they insist on the apostolic character of the Coptic Church. The link with ancient Egypt is systematically mentioned but it can be articulated differently. The theological importance of Egypt is underlined

31 Even though the presence of these "foreign" images is criticized by some.

32 St Mark Church, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London: https://stmark.org.uk/history-of-the-church/, accessed 10 June 2025.

both in terms of the sacredness of Egyptian lands – through biblical quotations mentioning Egypt in the Bible and the journey of the Holy Family – and in terms of theological debates. This latter aspect is underlined through the evocation of Egypt's major contribution to the ecumenical councils and the "miscomprehensions" or the "injustice" of Chalcedon. The martyr era is often but not always explained, as well as the invention of monasticism by Antony and Pachomius. When put forward, the invention of monasticism is described as a great contribution to Christianity as a whole and to Western Christianity in particular.

In those texts, we can see the will to present and valorise the role of Egypt in global Christianity, sometimes very clearly, on other occasions in more subtle ways. Besides the themes already mentioned, such as Egypt as a blessed land and the theological role of Egyptian church fathers, we also find some mentions of Coptic missions. Regarding this last aspect, the role of Egypt as a precursor is underlined and even the role of the Coptic Church in evangelizing Europe, through the story of the Theban Legion in Switzerland and a few others, like the alleged role of Egyptian monks in founding the church of Ireland. In the case of Switzerland, this aspect is emphasised, and the members of the Legion are presented as the ancestors of the contemporary Copts living in the country on Swiss Coptic websites. It is even presented as the source of all Christian presence in Switzerland, as the members of the Legion are described as the evangelists of Switzerland.[33] In the same vein, a French priest interviewed in a radio program started his history of Copts in France with a Coptic priest, Yuhanna al-Shiftishi,[34] who moved to France in the nineteenth century and helped Champollion to decipher the Egyptian language.[35] This shows how those communities use all possibilities offered by history and hagiography to affirm their place in the countries in which they settled during the last 50 years.[36]

On other occasions, some apologetical elements seem more directly targeting the local audience, British or French, not only outsiders to the community but Coptic youth, socialised in those societies as well, who could potentially be in tension with some conservative positions defended by the older generations of Copts. For

33 https://eglisecopte.ch/les-premiers-coptes-en-suisse/, accessed 19 September 2022.

34 https://ccdl.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce/id/454/

35 https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/chretiens-d-orient/presence-copte-en-france-avec-le-pere-joseph-stefanos-5998640, accessed 16 September 2022, about Yuhanna Chiftichi see Anouar Louca, "Chiftichi, Yuhanna," in *Coptic Encyclopedia,* online version: https://ccdl.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce/id/454/, accessed 16 September 2022.

36 A good example of this is given by Christopher Sheklian about Armenians in the Netherlands, "'Their Compatriot St. Servatius'. Armenian Emplacement in Maastricht," in *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities from the Middle East*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verla, 2022), 111–124.

instance, in the following text, from the St Mary and St George Coptic Orthodox Church in East London, the separation between church and state is considered intrinsic to the Coptic historical experience. This can be read as a commitment to secular European societies and as a way to distance oneself from Islam, often described in mainstream media discourses as ignoring this separation:

> Despite persecution, the Coptic Church as a religious institution has never been controlled or allowed itself to control the governments in Egypt. This long-held position of the Church concerning the separation between State and Religion stems from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when he asked his followers to submit to their rulers: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." [Mathew 22:21]. The Coptic Church has never forcefully resisted authorities or invaders and was never allied with any powers, for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are clear: "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Mathew 26:52). The miraculous survival of the Coptic Church till this day and age is a living proof of the validity and wisdom of these teachings.[37]

This kind of statement could also be seen as a form of allegiance to the Egyptian state, known for having an eye on Egyptian communities abroad.

Theological texts online

Performative texts

Besides the *ad hoc* texts, mostly anonymously explaining aspects of the liturgy, or dealing with moral issues, the websites also function as an online library, giving access to texts that we can divide into two broad categories. The first is the texts that can be considered manuals,[38] that is, performative texts. Those texts mean to generate concrete action and accompany practices, they mainly concern the liturgy and appear under the format of book-length PDF's, PowerPoints and audio recordings. They are conceived to serve as guides to perform a ceremony, to recite or sing the liturgy. They are in Coptic, Arabic or the local vernacular and often a mix of those different languages. We can also include the curricula of the Sunday

37 St Mary and St George Coptic Orthodox Church in East London, https://www.smasg.org.uk/about-coptic-church, accessed 14 September 2022.

38 On this idea of religious texts as manuals, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

schools in this category. Sunday schools are at the heart of religious transmission. They are meant to inculcate children with the basics of the Coptic faith and to lead them to embody this rich tradition by adopting gestures, attitudes and feelings as part and parcel of their religious communal life. Sunday schools are equally a space of socialisation, perpetuating a sense of community, mixing different sorts of solidarities related to family, Egyptian origin, and religious ties.

What belongs to this category is largely uncontested. At least, it is presented as such – there are adaptations and translations, but the traditional corpus is said to be unique and stable. However, there are some exceptions and possible exemptions to the canon of the liturgy, as it is the case with the "Eglise Copte de France." On a website called *Coptica,* emanating from one of its priests, we find the following explanation:

> Excepté le texte de la liturgie complète de saint Basile, les autres textes des Offices liturgiques présentés ici ne correspondent pas toujours à l'ordo égyptien actuel.
>
> Les textes variables n'ont pas reçus l'approbation formelle, pour chacun d'eux, de l'autorité hiérarchique. Toutefois, ils sont en conformité avec la bénédiction d'Abba Shénouda qui a «*accordé comme privilège à l'Eglise copte orthodoxe française, la célébration de la liturgie avec des chants liturgiques [parties variables] adaptés à l'Occident, ainsi que le synaxaire de l'Eglise indivise ajouté aux saints d'Egypte*» . – courrier d'abba Marcos, métropolite de Toulon et de toute la France du 16 mai 2005 – .[39]

We must keep in mind that the liturgical material available online coexists today with smartphone apps, like *The Coptic Reader* created and administrated by North American Copts, *Eklisia* recently created by the Paris bishopric, and *Calendrier Copte* emanating from the Eglise copte de France.[40] These are powerful tools of homogenisation, as their usage is now widespread. This explains why church authorities are very careful about their content, as can be seen in this quotation from Bishop Youssef (Southern USA), in charge of the Mobile App *Coptic Reader*:

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39 http://coptica.free.fr/liturgie_et_rites_025.htm, accessed 14 September 2022.

40 It is linked to Eglise Saint-Athnase et Saint Cyrille VI in Sarcelle. The same church website also gives access to the Hours' prayer in French.

> As the Coptic Orthodox Church continues to grow in the diaspora, updates to inaccurate translations can be inconvenient. It is not easy to re-learn common hymns when the translations change, and the Coptic Reader team fully sympathizes with this dilemma. However, the very real translation errors need to be corrected to ensure that future generations are keeping the Coptic faith, prayers, and rites unchanged.[41]

We see here the potential conflicts that can arise from the tension between different "orders of worth."[42] One would correspond to the "scientific" exactitude of translations and transmission, while the other would refer to the bodily knowledge of the trained practitioners of liturgy, who are allergic to any changes in the content of religious texts.

The influence of North American diasporas

British and Irish Copts seem to strongly rely on the material translated and published in America. For example, the bishopric of the "Diocese of Ireland, Scotland, North East England and its Affiliated Regions" (DISNA) provides online access to four prayer books, all originating in North America: St Basil and St Cyril Liturgy, published by St Mark Church in Jersey City, and two deacons' books with no mention of the publisher or translator but written in American English. The same can be said for the syllabuses for Sunday school classes. The DISNA gives access to thirteen e-books produced by the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Southern USA, while St Mary & Archangel Michael in London showcases a mix between the latter and its own production. For nursery and primary levels, this church gives access to schoolbooks prepared by the London Diocese, while for secondary school, the diocese is currently working on an adaptation of the Sunday school material published by the Diocese of Southern USA. We can read in the introduction of one of those books borrowed from the Southern USA Diocese:

> The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London has opted to use the new Children of Light curriculum of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, with amendment to suit our children & society. A committee commissioned by His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos and the Clergy Council have worked for several months to prepare this curriculum.[43]

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41 https://www.suscopts.org/pdf/CopticReader.pdf, accessed 24 September 2024.

42 Expression borrowed to Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). The book and the expression insist on the irrevocable plurality of social life that we can see in religious life as in other sectors of activity.

43 http://smaam.church/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Year8-Grade-7.pdf, accessed 15 September 2022.

We see here a good example of the borrowing and adaption processes between Coptic diasporas sharing a common language. Various websites of the Coptic Church have created pages where books and other materials can be downloaded, though not all links are active.[44] A church servant has told me that the curricula were sent by email to the teachers as PDF documents by one of the Paris region's priests. A lot is also happening through Whatsapp groups, allowing teams of teachers to keep in touch and exchange practical information as well as teaching material. Liturgical and prayer books were progressively translated into French, mainly through the efforts of some priests and servants from one of the oldest and most active parishes, the church of the Archangel Michel and Saint George in Villejuif (Paris region). Many of those manuals were translated and made accessible to the faithful. Some of those texts are available on the Paris diocese website and were also downloadable on the church website. The latter is, unfortunately, inaccessible due to a conflict between the bishop of Paris and a part of the parishioners.[45] French websites distinguish themselves by the number of PowerPoint documents present online, which are now used in almost all diasporic churches. Those became important tools to help the faithful follow the liturgy easily by presenting the text in columns in different languages. This example shows the importance these electronic texts – necessary to find one's way into the complex multilingual liturgy – have taken in Coptic religious practices.

After the category of manuals, the second one is made of texts which can be attributed to a particular author, that is, spiritual or theological books. Several internet sites already provide worldwide access to Coptic texts in different languages.[46] We cannot thus consider parish websites independently from these other sources of religious literature. One phenomenon needs to be underlined first: the textual production of Pope Shenouda dominates the theological landscape of these online

44 https://www.eglisecopte.fr/catechisme_enfants/college/ancien_testament, and https://biblio.copte.fr/document.php?category=LS, accessed 15 September 2022.

45 The conflict started in 2017 around the alleged use of Villejuif church funds by the new bishop to buy the land of the new cathedral, and later in 2020 around the exclusion of a monk/priest who was sent back to his Egyptian monastery. See the articles published online in *Yuwm al Sa'ba* (https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/8/15/%D8%A3%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%A9/3367900, 15/08/2017) and in the Coptic newspaper al Watan (https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5011157?t=-push, 26/10/2020).

46 St-Takla.org, https://coptic-treasures.com/ (mainly in Arabic), and https://e.copticbook.net/, to take only a few examples.

libraries.[47] Many websites give access to the books written by the late Patriarch. The Diocese of Ireland, Scotland & North East England, for example, proposes 51 books of Shenouda, while St Mary and St George Coptic Orthodox Church in East London has a book section which consists only of the written production of the late pope. Other sites offer a more diverse selection of titles. The site of the Midlands diocese offers books written by Tadros Malaty (born in 1937), another ubiquitous author whose books are also available in French.[48] Many of his books were translated into English in the United States, such as those available on the Midlands' site, which originate from a New Jersey Church.[49]

For some books, it is difficult to know who published and wrote them, as there is little or no paratextual information. The preoccupation with copyright questions and authorship (or translators) is not very present. Some of those books have probably been translated in Egypt at the time of their first publication.[50] Many translations were made by volunteers who are not professional translators: the typical profile would be a devoted servant[51] (often a woman) who attended a Francophone or Anglophone school. There is thus an attempt to retranslate some books, particularly Shenouda's ones, which have mainly been translated in Egypt and then circulated in the different diasporas. Some of them need to be retranslated because of the dubious quality of the first translations. For example, the son of a Villejuif priest I met while doing fieldwork remade several translations of the Patriarch's publications in French. Yet, he prefers to sell them on Amazon for a moderate price rather than to offer them for free on the church website. The omnipresence of Shenouda's books raises many questions which cannot be addressed in this paper. Still, a brief overview of some central themes helps reassess the evolution of Coptic religious thinking in the last fifty years. In terms of content, we could think of the strong biblical literalism, supported by many Bible quotations, which denotes deep Evangelical influences despite the strong anti-Protestant

47 This presence is also true in parishes' bookshops.

48 The website also features Shenouda's books but fewer than those of Malaty. They also included texts by Daoud Lamei: https://ukmidcopts.org/resources/bookstore/, accessed 15 September 2022. On Malaty see https://accot.stcyrils.edu.au/authors/hegumen-tadros-yacoub-malaty/.

49 Queen Saint Mary and Prince Tadros church in East Brunswick. https://www.qsmpt.org/, accessed 15 September 2022.

50 Some of them need to be retranslated because of the dubious quality of the first translations. Comment made by bishop Suriel (Los Angeles) at the International conference for Coptic studies in Brussels.

51 The term servant here translates *khādim* (plur. *khuddām*). Those *khuddām* designate all faithful involved in the church at any level. They were at the heart of Pope Shenouda's reform promoting a kind of clericalization of the Copts, increasingly involved in parishes' activities, see El Khawaga, "The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform," *Between Desert and City. The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, ed. Nelly van-Doorn (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 1997), 143–167.

tone of many of his writings. However, this literature should certainly not be analysed only in terms of its content. During his forty years on Saint-Mark's chair Shenouda imposed his authority in different ways. When he took control of the Coptic Institute, he expelled many Coptic intellectuals, such as Aziz Atiya, who found refuge in a US University and would later edit the *Coptic Encyclopedia*.[52] He also entered into a rivalry with his former spiritual, Father Matta al-Maskin, and ended up putting his books in the index. The omnipresence of Shenouda's booklets, but also of his poetry adapted into Coptic songs (*taranim*), was also a way to reinforce his hegemony on the church apparatus and strengthen his monopoly on the theological and spiritual production of the Church.

However, we also see a timid return in grace of Matta al Maskin, whose books had been banned for decades by the former Pope.[53] For example, the page of the Paris diocese gives access to some of his texts translated into French. It is particularly noteworthy that the French versions of Matta El-Maskin's books were translated by the printing press of a Catholic monastery and not by Copts.[54] We find very eclectic material on the same site. Besides the liturgical books and PowerPoints, there are books translated into French originating from various places. Among them are two books on Pope Kyrilus and his miracles,[55] but also Pope Shenouda's books, and even some short texts by the late Patriarch with no mention of the translator. A young servant has told me that his bishop sometimes asked him to translate texts from Pope Shenouda or Tadros Malaty. The young translator admitted that he often used English translations instead of the original Arabic version, as he felt more comfortable in English than Arabic. This shows how central English is becoming for Coptic diasporas worldwide.

The themes covered in the various online bookshops include the systematic interpretation (verse by verse) of the Bible (Tadros Malaty) in the style of Matthew Henry, which was an important influence on Coptic theologians during the twentieth century.[56] In addition, spiritual, moral or societal themes, accompanied

52 This happened when Shenouda became General Bishop for Higher Clerical education in 1962, see Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 88.

53 For the conflicts between Shenouda and Matta al-Maskine, see Jacques Masson, "La divinisation de l'homme : les raisons de l'opposition de Chenouda III," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 57, no. 34 (2007): 279–290.

54 Though the monks of Saint-Makarius are active in translating and spreading his work in different languages. But it seems that they've found an audience among a non-Coptic audience. Several books of Father Matta were translated by the Abbaye de Bellfontaine.

55 Both are without dates but probably from the 1980s. One of them was published by a church in Quebec while the place of publication remains unknown for the other.

56 Matthew Henry, a Presbyterian English theologian who published in 1706, a book called *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments,* a commentary of the Bible verse by verse. It was translated

by many biblical citations, are well represented. Other texts discuss the several feasts and rituals of the church. The hagiographic domain is also widely covered. This last genre has known a remarkable revival since the 1950s which continues to this day.[57] Compared to the other oriental churches, the Coptic church has created a considerable number of contemporary saints and martyrs (the last ones being the fifteen Copts killed by Daesh in Libya).[58] Those saints represent real models to the faithful, and sanctify many aspects of the religious life of Coptic Christians through their life stories.[59] Their *vitae,* which often find their sources in old collections of texts like the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* or the *Synaxar*, are often extended and peppered with edifying stories.[60] Some saints also help emplace the communities in their new countries, like in the case of the already mentioned saints of the Theban Legion who are said to have evangelised Switzerland, thus offering a symbolic anchorage to the Coptic communities who settled in this country since the 1960s.[61] We can also see some attempts to extend the themes addressed and to explore new spiritual ways, probably under the influence of other Christian denominations. For example, the website *Keep it Coptic* was created and is administered by young Copts for the UK as a whole. It offers categories that do not exist on parish websites (at least in Europe), like "practical spirituality," "healthy relationship," "contemporary issues," "poem corner," and "story corner". Interestingly, *Keep it Coptic* does not hesitate to suggest links to Christian non-Coptic internet pages.[62] Copts are not immune to the influence of globalised religious discourses in line with American Charismatic Evangelical and Pentecostal religiosity, praising self-development and social success.[63] Those discourses generally have a conservative tone but are fully compatible with a neo-liberal ethos centred on the individual and her achievements.

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into Arabic in the 1900s. See https://st-takla.org/bible/commentary/en/mh-index.html, accessed 8 May 2023.

57 See Brigitte Voile, *Les Coptes d'Egypte sous Nasser. Sainteté, miracles, apparitions* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004).

58 The Armenian church has however recently canonized collectively the victims of the genocide.

59 Some of them perpetuating gender inequalities, see Febe Armanios, "The 'Virtuous Woman': Images of Gender in Modern Coptic Society," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38,1 (2002): 110–130; Febe Armanios, Andrew Amstutz, "Emerging Christian media in Egypt: clerical authority and the visualization of women in Coptic video films," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 513–533.

60 See the example of Saint Sam'an, in Gaétan du Roy, *Les Zabbalin du Muqattam. Ethnohistoire d'une hétérotopie au Caire (979-2021)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

61 I have also been told by Coptic parishioners that Copts like to participate in Catholic Pilgrimages, particularly those dedicated to Mary, like Lourdes in France or Banneux in Belgium.

62 This website is not accessible anymore. Some snapshots are available on the website Wayback machine https://web.archive.org/web/20220208231531/https://keepitcoptic.co.uk/.

63 Patrick Haenni, *L'islam de marché. L'autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

Conclusion

This comparison gives a series of hints showing that the UK/Irish diaspora is more structured and more diversified regarding the range of activities in which its members get involved than the French one. Its online communication is also more systematic and "professional." During his long presence in the UK, Archbishop Angaelos developed activities targeting Coptic parishioners but also those geared towards the general public. As already mentioned, the bishopric of London has recently created an advocacy agency called Refcemi (the Coptic word for advocacy), or the "Coptic Orthodox Office for Advocacy and Public Policy," which addresses "a broad range of advocacy issues, especially that of Freedom of Religion or Belief, around the world."[64] Rather differently, the French diaspora is still divided into the Eglise *de* and *en* France. This situation leads to the autonomous development of many local churches, mostly left to their own devices for decades. The conflict between Villejuif and the new bishop is illustrative of these dynamics, as Villejuif developed as an important centre for translation, social services, and plenty of other activities. However, their independence was contested by the new leader of the Paris region, who needed to establish his authority. The Coptic churches in France now rely on a considerable body of translations. Still, some members of the clergy think that it should be revised to rectify the mistakes and be more faithful to the Coptic original versions.[65] Interestingly, French Copts sometimes use texts produced by other Francophone diasporas like the Québequoise community. Perhaps more surprisingly, the French app *Eklisia* gives access to a book summarising the history of the Coptic church, written by a Congolese member of the Lubumbashi parish in the Democratic Republic of Congo.[66] Above all, those examples show that texts in French are still scarce (even if books in French were already produced in Egypt, such as the translations of Shenouda's book). Quite differently, UK Copts can use the vast production emanating from North America and Australia, which includes Sunday school books, liturgy texts and apps, TV channels, and printed books for teens.[67]

Regarding the content of the books and the theology which can be accessed through websites, it still bears the mark of Pope Shenouda and his social conservatism and Biblical literalism. To be sure, many Copts are happy with this type

64 https://refcemi.org/about-us, accessed 19 September 2022.

65 Discussion with a Coptic priest in France.

66 About the development of Coptic missions in Africa, see Jacques Masson "La mission copte en Afrique noire," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 55, no. 3–4 (2005): 294–308 and Hiroko Myokawa, "The Coptic Orthodox Mission in Kenya: An African Search for Identity and the Coptic Encounter with Africa," *Sophia Journal of Asian, African and Middle Eastern Studies* (2021): 69–86.

67 See, among others, the catalogue of Saint Shenouda Press in Australia.

of theology, which suits their vision of the world. However, things change, and not everyone agrees, and thus his hegemony on theological production is now contested. We can see it in the (still rare) public mentions of the rich body of work of Matta al-Maskin, probably with the approval of the new Pope Tawadros. We can also see it through the development of Coptic counter-narratives criticizing, often online, the conservatism of their Church: groups presenting narratives of Coptic LGBT, Coptic liberation theology's FB page, Coptic liberals, groups of Coptic women fighting to be allowed to sing in the church choirs or denouncing the sexual abuses committed by some priest. All this shows that the English-speaking Coptic diaspora has reached a "critical mass," allowing it to internally diversify and produce counternarratives, able to contest the hegemony of the higher clergy on theological discourses. France, on the contrary, is still a small diaspora in terms of the number of faithful and in terms of international connections. However, it has reached a certain size and is constantly developing. Regarding the production of new texts, those are mainly produced in Arabic and increasingly in English, while new productions in French are still very limited.

To summarise the empirical observations made in this paper, we can distinguish two aspects of the digital religion of Coptic diasporas, which correspond to the two principal ways in which the Internet and religion have been addressed so far by social scientists.[68] One of these research paths studies the uses of the Internet by religious communities, while the other focuses on "online communities," i.e., communities that formed and exist mainly online and in which religion sometimes emerged in the digital realm. This contribution mainly belongs to the first category as it investigates institutional websites, but the second approach would account better for the important Coptic groups that formed online, mainly in North America and Australia. However, those are not two separate worlds, as most members of those Facebook pages and blog writers also participate in parish life. Nonetheless, by using social media, they develop other approaches to the new challenges faced by Copts in the lands of immigration and formulate other theological visions that would be difficult to circulate in the more "traditional" forms we discussed in this chapter. To take but one example, many blogs and Facebook pages discuss food and fasting, a practice so crucial for the Coptic faithful. They propose recipes and exchange advice on how to stick to the very demanding fasting rules of their Church. This is also a way to propose practical advice away from the sometimes austere theology that can be found in books and which insists, above all, on normative behaviours and the repression of deviations from religious rules.

68 Olivier Servais, David Douyere, Andrea Castellani, "Religious and the digital: New conceptualizations in the French-speaking world," in *Social Compass* 67,4 (2020): 505–518.

Then, what is the impact of the digital era on the evolution of books and printed material? Books will certainly continue to be written and printed, as their symbolic value is still important for believers. Those books, read or not, do not only matter for their content but also for their iconic importance, representing a source of blessing – like those Bibles left beside newborn babies to protect them. People are also attached to some of their books because they remind them of good memories, be they linked to religion or not. I happened to open a liturgical book forgotten by parishioners on a church bench in Sarcelles in which a sticker commemorating a deceased relative had been pasted, which shows how it had been personalised with intimate memories.

What is at stake, particularly for the liturgy, is a new articulation between printed books and electronic devices. Electronic texts and PowerPoints are now broadly used in religious ceremonies, in diasporic lands, and in Egypt, and they are fully part of the religious experience. It is, however, more crucial in diaspora as an easy way to deal with the liturgical multilingualism of Coptic communities, even when they seem to slowly move to a form of monolingualism when it comes, for instance, to Sunday school classes. Indeed, the trend seems to be the adoption of the host countries' vernaculars, with a new role given to English as the diasporic lingua franca, besides Arabic, but gaining ground in transnational connections. That is even the case in non-English speaking communities, as shown by the example of the French servant using English versions instead of Arabic ones to translate Shenouda's books.

Finally, it is worth noting the possible disappearance, or at least the decline, of a genre that was incarnated by Pope Shenouda, that is of books originating in oral speeches and conferences. Those can still be found in the form of printed books and screen texts, but YouTube and podcasts have dethroned the old theological pamphlet popularised by the late Patriarch. That is not totally new, as the success of Shenouda already was multimedial. People used to come to his Wednesday meetings at the Cathedral and then listen to the recorded version on cassettes and, from the 2000s, on the Internet and satellite TV channels. Copts, like other religious groups, tend to reinvent their difference[69] by using modes of preaching and perpetuating their traditions, typical of the ongoing "formatting" of religion at stake in the globalisation process.[70] It is particularly obvious in the growing body of theological texts – exegesis, spirituality, social and moral questions – that develops beside the pragmatic texts centred on liturgical life and largely based on Western Christian models.

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69 This expression was borrowed to Jean-François Bayard. See "L'Afrique dans le monde : une histoire d'extraversion," *Critique Internationale* 5 (1999): 108.

70 Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 241–243.

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Rewriting Global Orthodoxy: Contemporary Oriental Orthodox Textual Traditions in Europe

HELEEN MURRE-VAN DEN BERG

In the summer of 2022, Mor Polycarpus, bishop of the Dutch Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Churches, gifted me a nicely bounded and abundantly illustrated book with the title *Orientalische Kirchen, Glaube und Leben* ("Oriental Churches: Faith and Life") that was published in Vienna in 2012. The book introduces the Coptic, Armenian, Syriac, Malabar, and Tewahdo churches in two to three pages, with half a page devoted to the Assyrian Church of the East. It further includes thematic chapters on various aspects of the faith of the Oriental churches, the liturgy, the sacraments, and the feasts, with brief excerpts and images from all the different churches. The text is straightforward and geared towards readers who know little to nothing about these churches. The principal authors are a Syriac Orthodox priest of Vienna, Emanuel Aydin, and a German professor, Daniel Lanzinger. The book is commissioned by the Orientalisch-orthodoxen Kirchenkommission and published by the Austrian Bible Society. According to the colophon, the book is intended for "Oriental Orthodox religion teaching" in Austrian schools.[1]

This book (of a mere hundred pages) tables all the themes that are important in the current volume and this final contribution: the 'Oriental churches' as one group,[2] a focus on teaching faith and tradition in the local language and the national school system, the cooperation between a variety of actors within and outside these churches, and the transnational production and distribution process. The book was printed in Italy to be used in Austria, ending with a Dutch bishop who brought it to our project via a scholarly meeting in Paris. Our project, under the title *Rewriting Global Orthodoxy: Oriental Christians in Europe, 1970-2020,*[3] aims to understand the profound changes that Oriental Orthodox churches

1 Emanuel Aydin and Daniel Lanzinger, *Orientalische Kirchen: Glaube und Leben* (Vienna: Osterreichische Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

2 See my introductory essay for a conceptual and historical discussion of the 'Oriental Churches'.

3 The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 834441 GlobalOrthodoxy). For more information on the project, see https://www.ru.nl/ptrs/researchinstitute/research-centres/crcs/ongoing-projects/@1335159/rewriting-global-orthodoxy/ I thank the

underwent in the past fifty years, starting from the perspective of European Oriental communities and their publications. In the coming pages, I will situate this rather exceptional Austrian publication in the larger context of what these churches have produced over time, based on my initial analysis of the collection of publications that we have at our disposal at the moment and which is available via the database FourCornersoftheWorld.[4] Over and above this descriptive aim, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of how the Oriental churches position themselves in this European world, what those involved in writing and publishing intend to convey to co-religionists and outsiders, and how these materials contribute to constituting a new Oriental Orthodox world.

Methodological considerations

Our focus on a combination of corpus analysis and close reading of religious publications situates itself at the intersection of sociological and anthropological studies of specific contemporary communities and the mostly philological study of religious literature. These fields are often practiced in distinct scholarly communities, whereas we hold that bringing these two approaches together yields valuable insights that provide deeper layers to our understanding. This is especially the case because texts in these churches play fundamental roles in practicing religion. In this way, we intend to bridge the divide between those who study 'lived religion' ethnographically and those who focus on 'belief' as expressed in texts. Our starting point is that 'belief' is never just a matter of texts and the mind, while at the same time, religion is lived in and with texts as much as outside written materials.[5]

Starting from the texts, the *FourCornersoftheWorld* database forms the backbone of our study. As a team, we began to collect materials from the beginning of the project in 2019. Though the restrictions posed by the emerging COVID-19 pandemic hampered the collection process, the number of items has steadily increased, especially since the summer of 2021. In addition, we included relevant materials that were acquired, as gifts or purchases, in earlier years. The way items

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team members, Elise Aghazarian, Habtom Yohannes, Matija Miličić, Jan Gehm, Gaétan du Roy, Christopher Sheklian, Emmanuel Chamilakis and Wessel Stoop for their invaluable help in setting up the database and working with me on this project.

4 https://fourcornersoftheworld.ptrs.ru.nl/. The analysis of this chapter is largely based on the database collection as it stood in the summer of 2023.

5 For more on the theoretical considerations that have informed this project, see my overview article "Rewriting Global Orthodoxy: Oriental Christians in Europe between 1970 and 2020," in *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities from the Middle East*; ed. by Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2022), 15–29.

in the database are described is based on a combination of straightforward bibliographical data, with additional data that register characteristics important to our specific research questions: photographs of the publication to document layout and aesthetics, comments on the content and collection context, and a variety of tags labelling language(s) of publication, the church community to which it is connected, whether the publication is registered in national collections via ISBN or not, and our initial classification as to the genre. Note that this partly overlaps to what one would find if and when these publications were included in a university library catalogue; however, the vast majority of these publications are not included in national or university library collections.

For this sub-study, 'genre' has been the most critical heuristic tool, at least as far as our initial analysis is concerned. In the database, we employ genre at the level of subcategories of the broader genre of religious texts, which is difficult to define and demarcate. Rather than starting from an external definition of religion, we take books produced by and circulating in the churches as 'religious,' also when the topics are not necessarily religious in and of themselves. For example, language teaching is a significant concern to some churches. It thus should be studied as part of the religious genre as defined for this project, although we do not assume that all language teaching should be seen as religious. The same is true for publications on nationalism and (national) culture, which function in the context of debates over what it means to be an Orthodox Christian in Europe. Again, not all nationalism is, by definition, religious, but the presence of nationalist themes in church-related publications indicates that these are part of a broader conversation about religious identity.

Thus, though we start from a theoretical approach to *genre,* based on given formal and content characteristics of a text, our interpretation of these a priori genres relies strongly on how these formal and content-related characteristics relate to the historical and contemporary social contexts in which they function – the context of the author as much as that of the recipients. In this, we follow Carolyn Miller in seeing genre as a flexible concept that helps to understand the social dynamics in which texts function.[6] Such an approach to genre bridges the divide between the study of religious practice and religious belief by interpreting texts, in their material form but also regarding their immaterial content, as intrinsically part of religious practice.[7] This led us to start from an initial list of genres

6 C.R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984), 151–67 and C.R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action (1984), Revisited 30 Years Later (2014)," *Letras & Letras* 31 (2015), 56–72.

7 See Theo Pleizier, Arnold Huijgen, Dolf te Velde, "On the Construction of Religious Texts: The Case of Writing a Catechism," *NTT* 74 (4), 355–373.

based on traditional Orthodox genres such as liturgy, Bible, theology, grammar, and canon law,[8] complemented with contemporary genres such as news and biography. With additional tags for formal characteristics ('poetry') or particular audiences ('youth'), this allows for fine-grained comparison and analysis within and between the churches, over time, on language and between genres.[9]

Before I move into a discussion of our findings, a few notes are in place as to how the collection so far, as it stands in the summer of 2024, is representative of the whole of publishing activities of the Oriental Orthodox over the past fifty years. We believe this is the case, but only when considering some clearly defined problems of our current collection. This concerns especially numbers and historical distribution. Undoubtedly, the more than 450 items constitute only a small part of what was published in the past fifty years. We know this because we could not collect and include everything we came across in our church visits and internet searches. We often come across references to earlier publications that today are out of print and most likely are lost to scholarship. Moreover, when considering the years of publication, almost 75% of our collection is post-2000, reflecting that these are the publications now in circulation. Whereas production likely increased over the years, the publications of the earlier decades are surely underrepresented. This is particularly true for magazines, which were prominent in the early years but not collected systematically in libraries or (church) archives. Many of these magazines have been discontinued; their backlists have disappeared, and only incidental copies surface. Similar fates have befallen leaflets published for a particular occasion, such as a special liturgical celebration or parish anniversary. A few of these are in the collection, but this is a small sample of what was produced. This means that we have to argue carefully as to what the relative numbers of the various types of publications mean for our general analysis: in some instances, absence might indicate non-existence, in others, loss and fragility; in some cases, low numbers suggest changing tastes and habits, in others care and longevity.

8 On such genres in earlier Syriac literature, see Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500-1850)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), Ch. 4–6.

9 These are: Scripture, Liturgy/Prayer books, Hagiography, Auto(Biography), Canon Law, Sermon/Homily, Theology, Religious Teaching, Religious Practice, Spirituality, Language & Grammar, History, News/Contemporary Issues, Nationalism & Politics, Arts & Culture, Youth/Children, Fiction & Folk stories, Poetry. See the database for a concise description of each of these categories: https://fourcornersoftheworld.ptrs.ru.nl/genres/.

Publishing and distribution

Printing by Oriental Christians in Europe began in the early modern period.[10] Many of these publications resulted from the cooperation of Oriental authors with European editors and publishers, often in connection to Catholic missionary activities.[11] As one of the first, *Armenians* operated printing presses in Amsterdam, Venice, and Vienna, reflecting the transnational networks of the time.[12] After the genocide and displacement from the Ottoman Empire, many Armenians settled in France, housing the first substantial modern Oriental Christian community. Marseille, where many of the early Armenian materials in the database come from, is one of the oldest Oriental communities in Europe, dating back to 1922. The oldest attested publication dates back to 1957, followed by a liturgical publication in 1963, which, though without a place name, may also have originated in Marseille, whereas output continues to the present.[13] An early publication in our database testifies to the connections between pre- and post-war UK and French Armenian communities: it was printed in Paris in 1922 and included the bylaws of the Manchester community.[14] Until today, France has remained vital

10 Note that I mention individual publications only when the contents are foregrounded; those indicated by place and date of publication can easily be found in the database. In general, I keep references to primary sources that are also in the database as brief as possible, no translations of the titles are given except when the publication uses non-Western scripts.

11 For an excellent overview of earlier printing activities in relation to Eastern and Oriental Christians, see Aurélien Girard, « Introduction. Livres et confession chrétiennes orientales (XVIe and XVIIIe siècles). Proposition pour une historie comparée et connectée », in Aurélien Girard, Bernard Heyberger, Vassa Kontouma (eds.), *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Une histoire connectée entre l'Empire ottoman, le monde slave et l'Occident (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023), 9–84, as well as earlier chapters by J.F. Coakley, Jeffrey Roper & John Tatt, and Meliné Pehlivanian in Eva Hanebutt-Benz et al, *Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution: A Cross-cultural Encounter*. (Westhoven: WVAVerlag Skulima, 2002). For further context, see Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du proche-orient au temp de la réforme catholique* (École Française de Rome: Palais Farnèse, 1994).

12 Meliné Pehlivanian. "Mesrop's Heirs: The Early Armenian Book Printers," in Eva Hanebutt-Benz et al, *Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution*, 54–92. See also Theo Maarten van Lint & Robin Meyer, *Armenia: Masterpieces from an Enduring Culture* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2015).

13 The database includes publications from 1980, 1990, 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2006, as well as ten undated but probably post-2000 four-page leaflets on the feast days by local priest Fr. Aram Ghazaryan; cf., e.g., Սուրբ Զատիկ | *La Fête de Pâques*.

14 (Anon.) Կանոնագիրք Մանչեսթրի Հայոց Երեսփոխանական Ժողովոյ [Bylaws of the Representative Assembly of the Manchester Armenians] (Paris: Dbaran Nerses / Nerses Publishers, 1922). See also the early Manchester publication (Anon.) Ծրագիր Հայ Երիտասարդաց Ակումբի / Հիմնեալ ի Մանչեսթրր, Programme of the Armenian Youths' Club / Founded in Manchester (Manchester: Armenian Youths' Club of Manchester, 1911), and a recent one detailing its history: (Anon.) *Holy Trinity Armenian Church. Inscriptions on Armenian Headstones and Memorials in Southern Cemetery Manchester: In celebration of 150 Years of Manchester's Holy Trinity Church Consecrated in 1870* (Manchester: Heritage Fund, 2022).

for Armenian publishing in Europe, with, from the 1990s onwards, a considerable number of publications from various publishers in Paris between 1992 and 2020.[15] The earliest publication on this list is a scholarly history of Armenians in France. In contrast, in 1995, a diocesan magazine of Catholic Armenians in France was restarted, and it picked up on a publication in 1958.[16] However, Armenian publishing was not restricted to Marseille and Paris but took place in various local parishes, such as Montélimar (2007, 2012), Décine (1997-), Chaville (1995-), Romans Bourse-de-Péage (n.d.) and Lyon (1980-, 1994). Though France remains the uncontested centre of Armenian life in Europe, Armenian publishing activities occurred all over Europe. Another early Armenian publication comes from Venice (1977), and further publications come from Switzerland (Geneva: 1986-), Italy (Lucca: 2018), the UK, Belgium (n.p.: 2019), Sweden (Stockholm: 2023), and the Netherlands.[17] Finally, the database testifies to the interaction with communities outside Europe, with publications from Etchmiadzin (2018, 2020, n.d.), Yerevan (2004, 2014, 2018), Beirut (1959), Antelias (1988, 2013, 2016), Istanbul (2009), New York (1969, 1987, 1994, 1996, 2000) and Glendale (1997).

The oldest *Syriac Orthodox* publication in our database dates to 1981. It is a collection of poems related to the genocide (*Sayfo*) edited, translated, and partly authored by Mor Julius Çiçek (1942-2005), the first metropolitan of northwestern Europe.[18] This publication predates the official beginnings of what today is called the Bar ʿEbroyo Press, located in the Mor Efrem monastery in Glane (Netherlands). This successful publishing house originates in the activities of Mor Julius Çiçek, who, right from the moment Patriarch Mor Ignatius Jakob III tasked him with the pastoral care of diasporic communities in Europe and the United States, started to think about publications. These publications were aimed at the communities in Turkey, where the government did not allow the Syriacs to publish such materials, and the new communities in the US and Europe. The first two publications were published in the US in 1977.[19] Mor Julius was an accomplished

15 1992, 1995-, 1997-, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

16 Martine Hovanessian, *Le Lien Communautaire: Trois générations d'Arméniens* (Paris: Armand Colin Editeur, 1992); Եկեղեցին Հայկական | *L'Église Arménienne: Bulletin de l'Éparchie de Sainte-Croix-de-Paris des Arméniens Catholiques de France* (The Armenian Church Paris, 1995-).

17 Amsterdam: 2001, 2008, 2017-, 2019, 2021; Den Haag: 2008; Almelo: 2023.

18 Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek, 1714-1914 ܡܐܡܪ̈ܐ ܕܥܠ ܩܛܠܐ ܕܣܒܠܘ ܡܫܝܚܝ̈ܐ ܒܛܘܪܩܝܐ ܡܢ ܫܢܬ [Poems about the massacres that were suffered by the Christians in Turkey between 1714 and 1914] (n.p.: 1981).

19 Gabriel Rabo, „In Memoriam Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek†, Metropolit der syrisch-orthodoxen Diözese von Mitteleuropa und den Benelux-Ländern, 1942-2005," *Kolo Süryoyo* 147 (2005), 2–26 and Sebastian Brock, "H.E. Mor Julius Yeshu` Çiçek; An Appreciation," *Kolo Süryoyo* 147 (2005), 41–45.

scribe who handwrote these early Syriac publications in the absence of affordable Syriac typesetting. That same year, he was appointed as patriarchal vicar for Central Europe and moved to Hengelo (Netherlands), where he continued his publishing activities. After he established the Mor Ephrem monastery in Glane in 1981, printing and publishing activities were moved there. These included the church magazine *Kolo Süryoyo* ("The Syriac Voice") from 1978 onwards.[20] From 1985 onwards, under the name Barhebräus Verlag, professional printing equipment was used.[21] No complete list of their publications is available, though Rabo's overview of the publications overseen by Mor Julius lists everything until 2005.[22] Since then, printing has long been outsourced to other places, but the Bar ʿEbroyo Press continues to be a hub of Syriac publishing in Europe, led by Rabban Said Çakıcı under the supervision of bishop Mor Polycarpus. This publisher's books are sold mainly via the web shop of the monastery, which also sells similar publications produced by other publishers.[23] Alongside the Bar ʿEbroyo Press (BEP) in Glane, a few other Dutch towns, such as Hengelo and Enschede, have hosted Syriac publishing.[24]

Some early Syriac Orthodox publications come from Vienna[25]; the oldest item celebrates the tenth anniversary of its parish.[26] Notably, this booklet was published by a Protestant publishing house and written by an Austrian scholar. However, Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas's explicit support situates it firmly within

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20 Fikri Sümer, *De Syrisch Orthodoxe Gemeenschap* (Hengelo: 1982), 130–3.

21 Mor Ignatius Yacoub III. ܥܕܬܐ ܣܘܪܝܝܬܐ ܬܪܝܨܬ ܫܘܒܚܐ [The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch] *The history of the Syriac Church* (Glane: Bar-Hebraeus Verlag, 1985).

22 Rabo, „In Memoriam Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek†". Our database lists items under this imprint for 1985, 1987, 2x 1988, 1989, 2x 1990, 1992, 2x 1995, 1997, 1999, 2x 2002, 2x 2005, 2008, 4x 2009, 2x 2010, 3x 2012, 4x 2014, 2015, 2016, 3x 2017, 3x 2018, 2x 2019, 3x 2020, 2x 2021.

23 Mor Ephrem bookshop (https://morephrem.shop/) (last seen, d.d. 18/7/23). Note that the "about us" section does not explicitly mention the Syriac-Orthodox connection and in fact presents itself as a publisher as much as a bookseller: "Mor Ephrem Books is a publisher of new titles and reprints of rare books in the areas of Arabic, the Near East, classics, religion, languages and linguistics, Syriac studies, the Middle East and more." For more on the press and its publications see Rabo, "In memoriam Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek" and Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Texts, Language, and Religion in the Making of Syriac Orthodox Communities in Europe," in Birgit Meyer, Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Refugees and Religion: Ethnographic Studies of Global Trajectories* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 179–197.

24 Hengelo: n.d., 1982, 2001, 2020 (in cooperation with BEP), Enschede: 1993, 2007, n.d.; from 1986 onwards, the cultural magazine *Shemsho*, which included many church- and religion-related topics, was published in Enschede.

25 n.d., 1984, 1993, 2012, 2015.

26 Peter Mallat, *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen in Österreich. Zum 10jährigen Bestehen der Gemeinde von St. Efrem in Wien-Lainz* (Vienna: Nuhro Yayinlari, 1984). Similarly: Reinhard Kuster, Hans-Urs Köppel, *Die syrisch-orthodoxe Kirche: ihre Geschichte und Herkunft, ihre Situation in der Schweiz* (Bern: Texte der Evangelischen Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, 1989).

the context of Syriac Orthodox publishing. A similar publication was produced in Switzerland (Bern: 1989), to which only one publication from Arth-Goldau (2014) can be added.

From its early days, Bar ʿEbroyo Press also published for the German Syriac communities, sometimes in co-publication, like in Berlin (1995) and, more recently, in Tübingen (2015) and Delbrück (2017). Over the past decades, a flourishing publishing scene has supplanted BEP by private initiatives or new Syriac publishers. St. Jakob von Sarug Verlag (JSV) is the most important. This publisher mainly publishes from Warburg and Giessen.[27] Warburg also houses the private publishing house ESC-Eigenverlag (2009). In contrast, other publications seem to come from either church dioceses or private owners, such as in Berlin (2000, 2007-2011), Paderborn (2013), Delbrück (2007), Göppingen (2016), Giessen (2008), Herne (1991), Gütersloh (2x 2017), and Rheda-Wiedenbrück (2005, 2x 2009). Some books were published further afield, most notably by the Syriac Orthodox community in Turkey and India.[28] Though it is not always certain whether these books were published with the European communities in mind, most were acquired in European contexts. One of the most vibrant European communities is that of Sweden, which was formed from 1976 onwards.[29] The oldest samples in our database date to the late 1980s and early 1990s, starting with primarily secular publications in the modern language, followed by Classical Syriac publications, both earlier reprints and contemporary writings.[30] Earlier, journals had been initiated, *Hujådå* in 1978 and *Bahro Süryoyo* in 1979. The database also includes more recent Swedish publications from Stockholm (2001, 2003, 2003), Göteborg (2009), and Alberga (2020, 2x 2021). So far, the UK and France have not yielded much in the line of Syriac publications, with only two attestations for London (2016, 2019). Though the French and British communities are smaller than those in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany, this low number of publications in our database might well underreport the production in these countries, especially because no sustained fieldwork could be done there.

The oldest (dated) *Coptic publication* of Europe in our database is somewhat of an outlier, being a booklet published by an established Dutch publisher (Kok, Kampen) with a Dutch translation of spiritual lessons by the Coptic Pope Shenouda III. The

27 2014, 2019, 2020, 2021; Giessen: 2021.

28 Istanbul: 2002, 2014, 2015, 3x 2019; Adiyaman: 2012, 2015, 2016; Puthencruz (India): 2009.

29 See Sümer, *De Syrisch Orthodoxe Gemeenschap*, 126–8, Naures Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Diaspora" (Dissertation, Leiden University Press, 2011), and Jennifer Mack, *The Construction of Equality: Syriac Immigration and the Swedish City* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2017).

30 Modern Syriac: 2x Örebro: 1989, and 2x Jönköping: 1990; Classical Syriac in Jönköping: 1993, 1994, 1995.

introduction has a foreword by archpriest Arseny of Amsterdam (the future bishop) and thus situates the book published in 1988 at the interface of early Dutch-Coptic cooperation.[31] The second oldest publication, a brief tract on Pope Shenouda III, dates to 1992 and was probably produced on the occasion of the consecration of the Virgin Mary Church in Amsterdam on 21 February of that year.[32] Another early publication consists of a translation of a small pamphlet by Pope Shenouda on the intercession of the saints.[33] The diocesan magazine *al-Ṭarīq* ("The Way") was published from 1985 onwards. From the mid-1990s onwards, more publications have been preserved, many of which were produced under the auspices of the diocesan office in Amsterdam,[34] but also by the Coptic Orthodox parishes in Eindhoven (magazine *Het Licht*, 2018-), Utrecht (n.d.) and Bussum (n.d.).

Coptic publications also originate in other European countries, including the UK, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain.[35] Like in the case of the Armenians and the Syriac Orthodox, the wide range of small publications originating in parishes or dioceses all over Europe suggests that the collected materials cover only a small part of what was published over the past decades.

Remarkably, our collection shows that the textual corpus of the Oriental Christians in Europe includes many materials published elsewhere. Some of these may have been brought along upon migration. Still, because many of these publications are being sold in bookshops and church locations, we may assume that these books are imported directly from their source. This is most clearly the case for the Tewahdo communities, our shorthand for the various churches of the *Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo tradition*. Most of the materials collected in Europe so far find their origin elsewhere. Until today, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Asmara (Eritrea) remain essential sources of Tewahdo publishing in various languages. A few of these materials predate the independence of Eritrea and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church in 1991; others date to the 1990s, such as [*The] Book*

31 Pope Shenouda III, *Brood uit de Woestijn* (Kampen: Kok Kampen, 1988).

32 Pope Shenouda III, *Paus van Alexandrië en 117e Opvolger van de Heilige Marcus de Evangelist* (Amsterdam 1992).

33 Pope Shenouda III. *De Voorspraak der Heiligen* (Amsterdam: Stichting Koptisch Orthodoxe Kerk in Nederland 1993).

34 2x 1994, 2x 1995, 2x 1996, 2x 1999, 2x 2000, 2x 2008, 2011, 2020, 2021.

35 Stevenage, 2x 2012; Paris: 2x 2005 (including a publication by a non-Coptic author & publisher, but available in the Coptic church in Amsterdam: Christine Chaillot, *The Coptic Orthodox Church: A Brief Introduction to its Life and Spirituality* (Paris: Inter-Orthodox Dialogue, 2005), Fontanieu: 1975-, Villejuif: n.d. (2x), 2009; Bégrolles-en-Mauges: 1998; Kröffelbach: 2005, Höxter-Brenkhausen: n.d., 2013, Dillenburg: 2017, Göttingen 2016; Lausanne: 2002; Rome: n.d., 2008, 2x 2009, Milan: various n.d.; 2x 2001, 2013, 2018, 2018-, 2x 2019, 2021, Reggio-Emilia: 2007; Cervera: 2013, 3x 2014, 2015, 2x 2016.

of Light published in Asmara in 1994.[36] Most publications date to the last two decades, testifying to the ongoing contacts between home and host countries.[37] Other countries that produce books for the various Tewahdo communities in and outside Ethiopia and Eritrea include Egypt, Sudan, Israel, Australia, and the United States.[38] In addition to materials from outside Europe, a few were produced in Europe: the UK, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands.[39]

Whereas the Coptic community publishes extensively in Europe, the oldest Coptic materials in the collection come from Egypt, among others from the well-established Mahabba Bookshop in Cairo.[40] There are also active printing establishments outside Cairo, such as Alexandria (n.d., 1979, 1986), Wadi El-Natroun (1993, 2003, 2015), Qena (2007), Mallawi (1995), Samalout (2015), Ismailia (2017), Fayoum (2010), Beni Suef (n.d.). Most of these publications are in Arabic, though English and occasionally French are used. One church shop (in Eindhoven, The Netherlands) sold an Arabic Gospel edition that was published in Lebanon (Beirut, 1996),[41] and the community in The Hague had a publication from Sydney (Australia, 1996).[42] Rather remarkable is an electronic publication offered via an app from the Diocese of Paris and North of France (*Eklisia*), a text produced in Lumumbashi (DRC, n.d.) by Fidèle Mutonkonle. One is tempted to interpret this transmission as testifying to the increasing importance of Coptic Orthodoxy in other African countries. However, as Gaétan du Roy suggests, its usage is probably also connected to the shortage of Coptic materials in French.[43]

So far, the Armenian European communities produce and use mainly their own materials. However, a few exceptions exist, such as materials for teaching Armenian. In the Netherlands, two language textbooks used at Sunday school in Amsterdam come from Armenia (Yerevan 2004, 2014) and another from Leba-

36 Ghebre-Egziabher, Welde Abrham Zebizen, *The Book of Light* (Asmara: Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church (EROTC), 1994). Further publications of the 1990s: Asmara: 1995; Addis Ababa: 2x 1993.

37 Asmara: 3x 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2x 2013, 2017, 2x 2018; Addis Ababa: 2000, 2001, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016, 3x 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021.

38 Cairo: 2003, 2018, 2019; Khartoum: 2000; Tel Aviv: 2009, 2017, 2018, 2019; Sydney: 1997; California: 2017, 2018, New Jersey: 2018, Maryland: 2010, Atlanta, Georgia: 2019; n.p.: 2004.

39 London: n.d.; 2015; Frankfurt, 2018, 2018; Turin, 1997; Umea, 2021; Rotterdam: 2020.

40 As of 18/7/23, the website include 37 publications from various publishers in Cairo, of which 16 from Mahabba Bookshop (several n.d., 1979, 1980, 1983, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1997, 1998, 1999, 3x 2000, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2009, 2x 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018); see, e.g., Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty, *Tradition & Orthodoxy* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George Coptic Church: 1979), collected in The Hague in 2020.

41 *The Gospel* (Beirut: La Société Biblique au Liban, 1996).

42 Deacon Ehab R. Wahib. سفر يهوديت, *The Book of Judith* (Sydney: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1996).

43 See Gaétan du Roy, this volume ; Fidèle Mutonkonle, *L'histoire de l'Eglise orthodoxe copte* (Lubumbashi: Paroisse Saint Philo pater (Mercure- Abu sefein), n.d.).

non (Antelias 2013). A fourth one, however, is produced in Amsterdam (2019).[44] As noted by Christopher Sheklian, another production of Antelias (2016) was encountered in the Armenian Church in Athens (Greece), which perhaps is less surprising because this diocese falls directly under the Cilician Catholicosate in Antelias.[45] English-language materials perhaps were more readily shared: Christopher Sheklian notes the usage of US-origin materials in the Armenian community in Manchester.[46] The other way around, one recent Dutch publication published by the (Dutch-Armenian) Narekatsi Foundation in 2018 was printed in Yerevan.[47] So far, publications produced in Istanbul have not been used in Europe.[48]

This brief overview of fifty years of publishing by and publications used among the Oriental Christians in Europe suggests a sustained commitment to printing and distributing written materials among the new European communities. As argued above, what we found is likely only a small part of what has been published and what continues to be published. What is more, our collection largely ignores online publications. Websites with PDFs, postings on social media, and a variety of liturgical apps increasingly take over functions earlier covered by printed materials. Most of these postings are brief and ephemeral, related to contemporary matters. However, longer texts are posted regularly, adding to the texts circulating in the communities. One genre in which online possibilities have had a significant impact is church magazines. Many of the 1980s and 1990s printed magazines are no longer around.[49] Constraints of costs and effort related to printing vis-à-vis the short-term use of such magazines make it likely that online platforms (includ-

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44 S. Abrahamyan, A. Movsesyan. Արագիլ Այբբենարան Աշխատանքային Տետր [Quick Armenian Alphabet Work Notebook] (Amsterdam, 2019).

45 Vaghinag Ts. Vrt. Meloyian. Ի՞նչ կ՝ըսեն Սուրբ Հայրերը Պահեցողութեան մասին [What do the Holy Fathers Say About Fasting?] (Antelias: Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, 2016).

46 See, e.g. Şahan Arzruni. A *Treasury Ոսկեփորիկ of Armenian Chants* (New York: St. Vartan Armenian Press, 1994), and Սրբազան Երգեցողութիւնք եւ Անմահ Ս. Պատարագ Հայաստանեայց Առաքելական Սուրբ Եկեղեցոյ – *The Sacred Music and The Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church* (Glendale, 1997).

47 Gregory of Narek. *Het Boek der Weeklaging*. Vert. Theo Maarten van Lint. (Yerevan: Stichting St. Grigor Narekatsi Amsterdam, 2018).

48 Religious Council of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. Խաչվերացի Թափօր Անդաստան եւ Երեկոյեան Ժամերգութիւն, Հանդերձ աշխարհաբարով [The Antasdan Procession and Evening Service of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Accompanied by Modern Armenian.] (Istanbul: Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, 2009). And Religious Council of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. Կարգ Օրհնութեան Խաղողոյ, Հանդերձ աշխարաբարով, Service of the Blessing of the Grapes, Accompanied by Modern Armenian. Istanbul: Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, 2009. However, note the connection between these publications and those produced in the US (Glendale), using similar cover illustrations.

49 This is especially true for the Syriac magazines, where all of the early publications, like *Kolo Süryoyo, Bahro Suryoyo* and *Mardutho*, were discontinued.

ing websites, YouTube channels, FB pages, WhatsApp groups, and customised apps) have taken over the role of such magazines – especially regarding ongoing community news such as times and dates of the liturgy, pictures, reports of community events, and daily spiritual guidance.[50] Nevertheless, despite the increasing number of online postings and publications – exacerbated further under pandemic pressures – there is little doubt that for the time being, the production and distribution of printed publications do not seem to diminish significantly. To understand why this is the case, we will need a better look into what is published and how these materials are used.

Tradition, teaching, and transnationalism

Now that we have set the stage for the production and distribution of materials in Europe, we can have a closer look at what was published. I will discuss these texts along the lines of the three themes I highlighted above in the vignette on the book *Orientalische Kirchen: Glaube und Leben* (Vienna 2012): transnationalism, tradition, and teaching. These constitute three critical characteristics of the materials that we have collected so far and speak via a genre-based analysis to the broader context in which these materials are produced (the transnational communities), the main thrust of their contents (the 'tradition' of the churches), and their primary function, as to how these texts are used (educationally).

Transnationalism

As I have argued earlier, the study of Oriental Christian migrant communities in Europe is best approached from the perspective of transnational communities characterised by complex, multilayered, and multi-directional interactions between communities in home- and host lands.[51] Written materials, whether printed matter or online publications, play crucial roles in these networks – both

50 For a first appraisal of online publications in relation to printed matters in Oriental Orthodox circles, see du Roy, this volume and Habtom Yohannes, "Some Reflections on the "aba-nefs" WhatsApp of an Eritrean Priest Queshi-Afwerki," Martin Tamcke (ed.), *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities from the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2022), 145–160.

51 See also earlier work on Syriac and Assyrian transnationalism, "A Center of Transnational Syriac Orthodoxy: St. Mark's Convent in Jerusalem," *Journal of Levantine Studies* (2013) 3(1), 61–83; "Voice of the East: The Transnational Messenger of the Assyrian Church of the East," in Mirella Cassarino [..] Marco Moriggi et al. *Diaspore nel vicino oriente. Melodie Ebraiche in Benedetto Marcello* (Milan: Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2022), 59–89; and dissertation work by Jan Gehm on the Syriac Orthodox communities in Germany.

as constitutive elements of these networks and as witnesses to the social, political, and economic dynamics that characterise these networks.[52]

The ecclesiastical organizations of each Oriental church constitute the primary transnational network reflected in the publications. This is most explicitly the case when the publications include formal blessings of the patriarch. Some books include a letter. and sometimes a photograph, from the highest dignitary on one of the early pages, often with a seal, signature, and official permission to print added to it.[53] Less formally, prefaces and introductions usually supply information about the production process, providing ecclesial connections and thus authority to the publication.[54] These pages confirm that for many types of publication, the hierarchy's permission is needed or at least preferred, thus honouring and maintaining the ties between the communities in Europe and the centre in the Middle East where the church's highest leadership usually is located. Such official permissions are found regularly in liturgical publications (whose efficacy relies on correct transmission) but also in history books, religious teaching, theology, or books on healing.[55]

Often, however, transnational ties transpire in different ways. As described above, Coptic books in Arabic, in most cases, come from Egypt, where a vibrant, well-educated, and relatively wealthy Coptic community produces many materials that continue to be relevant for those in the lands of migration. These cover various genres, including liturgy, religious teaching, history, arts and culture. Some of these printing houses are close to the cultural and clerical centre in Cairo, with an extensive range of publishers publishing for the church centre.[56] Others, at least geographically, are further away from the centre, like the printing houses in Egyptian cities such as Alexandria, Wadi El Natrun, and Asyut. Notably, some of these

52 In this section too, I mention one or two examples in the notes; for more examples, please consult the database FourCornersoftheWorld, either via search terms, or via one of the tabs in the side bar, which among others include 'church', 'genre', 'city of publication', 'authors' 'translators', and 'file categories'.

53 See, e.g., *Shḥimo – Veckobönebok enligt den Syrisk-ortodoxa kyrkan av Antiokia* (SOKU, 2016). For more examples, search via File Categories › Frontispiece, Dedication and Imprimatur.

54 See, e.g., Pope Shenouda III, *Brood uit de Woestijn* (Kampen: Kok Kampen, 1988).

55 *La prière des heures (Agpia)* (Villejuif: Eglise Archange Michel et Saint Georges, 2009); Holy Gospel of our Lord of the dominical feastdays. (Glane Bar ʿEbroyo Verlag, 2010); Georg Bubolz, *Syrisch-Orthodoxer Religionsunterricht: Didaktische Grundlinien* (Glane: Bar ʿEbroyo Verlag, 2015); شفاءً للمرضى (مع باقة عطرية من سير قديسين أطباء), Healing the Sick (with a Special Collection of Biographies of Healing Saints) (Wadi El Natrun: Monastery of St. Pishoy in Wadi El Natrun, 2015).

56 Publishing ventures such as Mahabba Bookshop, Anba Ruwis Printing Press, Clerical College (لكلية الإكليريكية بالقاهرة), and the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate – the Bishopric of Youth and Trikromy printing house (شركة تريكرومى للطباعة).

publish in English, suggesting that these publishing houses are well aware of the increasing importance of English in the transnational Coptic community. The importance of homeland publishing is also obvious in the case of the Tewahdo churches. Here, the balance is even stronger in favour of homeland publishers because many Tewahdo European communities have been reluctant to start publishing themselves. As was mentioned earlier, most publications from outside Ethiopia and Eritrea come from the US. Others are produced in Israel, where a vibrant Tewahdo community developed over the past decades. However, such transnational publishing links also point to different allegiances, corresponding with the presence of the publications of one or another hierarchical line. In the case of the Tewahdo churches, such rivalries characterise many of the publications, but one can trace this also among the Armenians, where productions linked to the different Catholicosates in the homelands (Echmiadzin and Cilicia represented by Antelias and Beirut) cater to different parts of the Armenian diaspora.

The history of the Bar ʿEbroyo Printing House, mentioned above, demonstrates yet another way in which book production reflects and creates transnational connections. In its earliest phase, archbishop Julius Çiçek published primarily for the international Syriac community, especially for those in Turkey, where publishing due to political restrictions was nearly impossible.[57] Gradually, the focus shifted, and the publications were more and more geared towards the larger diocese of which Germany formed an important part. In both phases, printing was mostly in Classical Syriac, though gradually German and Dutch publications were added to the collection. Magazines such as *Kolo Süryoyo* were consistently multilingual (Classical Syriac, Dutch, German, English, Turkish, Arabic), and thus allowed for a wide distribution among European Syriacs.[58] After 2005, separate German dioceses were created, and BEP started to cooperate with other publishing houses, thus expanding its transnational network. At the same time, it started to publish more materials specifically for what now was the Dutch (rather than Northwest European) diocese.

Though the transnational market was intrinsically part of early European publishing activities, local publication for local markets remained a crucial aspect of textual practices, at the level of the parish as much as the level of a diocese.

57 Rabo, "In Memoriam Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek†."

58 *Kolo Süryoyo: Zeitschrift der syrisch-orthodoxen Diözese von Mitteleuropa*, 1978–2005 (Ed.: Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek). Similar multilingual magazines were published by cultural and political Assyrian and Aramaic organizations in Sweden (*Hujådå: Assyrisk Manatlig & kulturell-, nyhets- och informationstidning*), the Netherlands (*Shemsho*) and Germany (*Mardutho d-Suryoyo)*; Gabriele Yonan, *Journalismus bei den Assyrern. Ein Überblick von seinen Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Beth-Nahrin, 1985).

Enabled by the increasing possibilities of cheap production without complicated and expensive printing equipment, many parishes started to publish their own materials (professionalizing earlier publications that used mimeographs and photocopies). These include occasional publications on parish or clerical anniversaries, liturgical texts for special occasions, publications on local histories, and officially sanctioned translations of the liturgy in local languages. So far, such publications seem to remain mostly local in distribution, although incidentally, we see examples of translations done in one language being used as the basis for another translation elsewhere.

Tradition

It is not surprising, both in the context of Orthodox theology and regarding the needs of a migrant community, that the textual traditions (see the Introduction) of the respective churches are particularly attuned to the theme of 'Tradition,' capitalised as it often is in Orthodox literature.[59] 'Tradition', that is, as the whole of religious knowledge, written and unwritten, that characterises Orthodox Christianity over and above other Christian traditions and that is explicitly valued in contradistinction to the 'Sola Scriptura' of most Protestant churches. Texts play an important role in safeguarding this Orthodox Tradition. Tradition in this sense, however, is never static and comes in formative and transformative ways in today's collections as much as in the past. This is true for the make-up of the collection as a whole, the contents of the actual publications, the way in which 'tradition' is thematised, and the way in which the books are designed. This last aspect is discussed in more detail in a separate publication on visual culture,[60] so here I focus on the contents, starting from the major genres of Oriental literature.

The most traditional genre is *liturgy*. Liturgical books comprise a good deal of the collection (about twenty percent), though less prominently so than in the past.[61] Most of the publications include either the traditional liturgical texts or translations or excerpts from those texts. However, even in the most traditional part of the collection, embodying the heart of traditional knowledge, no text comes out quite the same as in the past – all are transformed in myriad ways. One reason for this is the demands of current liturgical practice. In the past, for example, marriage and baptismal liturgies would have been included in larger priestly

59 Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Penguin Books, 1963), chapter 10.

60 Murre-van den Berg, "Situating the Sacred: Images and Style in Oriental Christian Publications in Europe," in *Visual Culture of Oriental Christians*; Sheklian & du Roy (eds.) (in preparation).

61 In Syriac manuscript collections, liturgical items would make up about fifty percent of the collections, see Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures*, 181, 274–5.

ritual books. Today, we find copies of the complete text in small booklets – more manageable for the priest to use and accessible to the families when they want to follow what is happening.[62] As importantly, lay members of the community are increasingly expected to participate actively in liturgical rituals, and therefore, liturgical books are produced especially for this group. In the Coptic and Syriac churches today, certain parts of the eucharistic service, including the Bible lections,[63] are read or sung in translation, in Arabic, vernacular Syriac, or European languages.[64] In the Armenian churches, the liturgical languages are less likely to be replaced by translations, though they are sometimes added alongside the Classical Armenian in Latin transcription.[65] This production for the laity also includes volumes with prayers for use at home, in the original texts and in translations, of which the Coptic *Agpeya*, the Book of Hours, is the most prominent example, with the somewhat similar Syriac *Shḥimo* as yet less well represented.[66] Finally, the database includes several introductions to and commentaries of the liturgy. Some of these are newly composed, others build upon and explain earlier commentaries, some are geared towards the wider public of the educated lay or even to children, and some are geared to fellow clerics and academics.[67]

This interplay of traditional texts, translations, and commentary also characterises the genre of *hagiography*. Here the transformation of tradition is mostly in translating the traditional texts into various modern languages. Often, these translations are accompanied by introductions and modern illustrations – photographs of the shrines and monasteries of the saints in the homelands combined

62 See, e.g., *Orde van de Doop* (Glane: Bar ʿEbroyo Verlag, 2020), Կանոն Կենդանարար Սուրբ Մկրտութեան Ըստ Հայաստանեայց Առաքելական Եկեղեցւոյ / *Le Sacrement Du Baptême Du Rite Église Apostolique Arménien* (Marseille, 2002).

63 Usually, standard Bible translations in English, Dutch, Swedish etc. are used, but compare Amill Gorgis. *Biblische Lesungen für den Gottesdienst: Eingerichtet für das Kirchenjahr nach der Ordnung der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochien* (Glane: Bar ʿEbroyo Verlag, 1995).

64 See, e.g., *Santo Misal y las fracciones santas Liturgia de San Basilio* (Cervera: Patriarcado de los coptos ortodoxos, 2013); *Hemels Brood & Geestelijke Drank. Syrisch-Orthodoxe Eucharistieviering* (Glane: Bar ʿEbroyo Verlag, 2017) and *Kerkgebeden* (Moeder Gods Mariakerk Hengelo, n.d.). Increasingly, translations are projected on screens during the liturgical celebration.

65 Սուրբ Պատարագ Հայաստանեայց Առաքելական Եկեղեցւոյ |*Heilige Liturgie in de Armeense Apostolische Kerk* (ed. by Armen Melkonian) (n.p., 2019).

66 *Agpeya* (*Agbeya, Agpia, Agbia*), with at least twelve copies in the database, in Arabic, Dutch, Spanish, Italian); see, e.g., *De Agpeya* (Amsterdam: Stichting Koptisch Orthodoxe Kerk in Nederland, 2008); *Shimo – Veckobönebok enligt den Syrisk-ortodoxa kyrkan av Antiokia* (SOKU, 2016).

67 See, e.g., Mgr. Vahan Hovhanessian, *La Célébration de la Divine Liturgie, Badarak, dans l'Église Apostolique Arménienne: Explorons les racines de notre Église Apostolique Arménienne*, vol. 2 (Paris: Diocèse de France de l'église apotolique arménienne, 2019) and Rewis Anba Pola, *Mi Iglesia: la misa* (Cervera: Patriarcado de los coptos ortodoxos, 2014). On this topic, see further Sheklian in this volume.

with traditional and modern icons.[68] Sometimes, the texts are retold for a younger audience, combining different sources and historicizing the story.[69] The Coptic materials also include the stories of recent saints, along the lines of earlier hagiography, like those of Pape Cyril IV, the apparitions of Mary in Zeitoun, and the Libyan martyrs.[70] Some of these overlap with the historical genre, which often displays hagiographic tendencies when concerned with important church leaders.

In other genres, too, we find traditional texts that, through re-editions and republications, are brought back into circulation. In the *Scriptures* category, only a few of the publications more or less keep to the traditional forms, most clearly so a Gospel lectionary in Classical Syriac and a (Coptic) Book of Psalms in Arabic.[71] Perhaps also a Syriac Peshitta or Arabic version of the whole Bible counts as such, even though this form – the whole Bible in one concise volume – is new to the Syriac and the Coptic traditions.[72] Other publications in this category include translations for children, a two-column translation of the Gospels (Arabic and French), a vernacular Syriac Epistle lectionary, a translation of all the lections of the Syriac liturgy in German, and a few publications including biblical commentary – all of these new inflections of the genre of biblical literature.[73] The genres of 'Theology' and 'Spirituality' both consist of a mix of traditional texts (straightforward or adapted to modern readers in language and set-up) and new texts that build upon traditional texts. Here, the differences between the churches are significant, with the Copts having produced a range of new texts in both genres, whereas the Syriacs and Tewahdos appear to be more conservative in keeping to traditional texts.

The category of *History* so far contains only one traditional historical work. This is Barhebraeus' *World History* or *Chronicon*, published by the Syriac press, which was named after this famous thirteenth-century author (Glane, 1987). All the other texts under History are new works, narrating the history of the churches in light of the contemporary period, explicating what of the past is deemed essential for today's Oriental Christian identity. Three main themes characterise the works in this category. The first is the foregrounding of a concise version of the earliest history of the churches. All churches cherish their origin stories, and most

68 See, e.g., Eliyo Aydin (ed.), *Das Leben des Heiligen Jakob von Nisibis* (Glane: Bar 'Ebroyo Verlag, 2008).
69 See *Die Heilige Hilaria Die Tochter des Königs Zinon* (St. Antonius Kloster: Kröffelbach, 2005).
70 See Fr. Rafael Ava Mina, Hanna Youssef Ata, *La Vie de Sa Sainteté le Pape Cyril VI* (Lausanne: Les fils de Pape Cyril VI 2002).
71 *Gospel Lectionary* (Glane: Bar 'Ebroyo Verlag, 2010) and *The Book of Psalms* (Cairo: Mahabba Bookshop, 2003).
72 Cairo: The Bible Society of Egypt, 2015; see also Murre-van den Berg, "The Long-Term Influence of American Bible Translations in the Middle East," *Cairo Journal of Theology* 3 (2016): 19–29 (http://journal.etsc.org).
73 For examples, see the database, under 'Genre' > 'Scripture'.

churches have published works in European languages that capture this for contemporary audiences, young and old. The Austrian publication nicely summarises these, referring to the Coptic stories about the Holy Family's flight to Egypt and St. Mark's apostolate for the Copts, the Tewahdo identification with the stories about Menelik, the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and the first convert of the apostle Philip, the Armenian references to the apostolate of Bartholomew and Judas Thaddaeus (Jude) and the early state church of Armenia, and the Syriac pride in the Aramaic language of Jesus, the first Christians in Antioch and bishop St Ignatius.[74] These historical snippets – all related to biblical and early Christian periods – have come to stand for these churches' unquestionable early Christian credentials. Today, they form the backbone of a variety of historical works that, in various levels of detail, tell the history of the churches. Each of these churches, in different ways, emphasises their apostolic connection, early reception, and pure transmission of the Gospel and thus their legitimacy vis-à-vis each other as much as vis-à-vis the churches of Europe and the rest of the world. The second theme concerns recent pre-migration history. The same works that recount the earlier history often include chapters on the recent history in the homelands, with stories of discrimination, persecution, and genocide – thus explaining why these communities, or at least part of them, decided to leave their home countries. Sometimes distinct volumes are produced, especially with the Armenian and Syriac presses. The writing of the history of the 1915 genocide, spurred by the need to preserve this for the next generation, is also stimulated by the fact that in Turkey, writing about the genocide is restricted if not outright forbidden. Finally, we see a considerable amount of texts that relate to the history of migration and the establishment of communities in Europe. Often, these focus on establishing parishes and dioceses, documenting the building of a European church.[75]

'Tradition', therefore, captures the fundamentally conservative nature of the textual practices of the Oriental churches, in the literal sense: in attempting to preserve for future generations what is the essence of being an Oriental Christian, of explaining what is needed (to 'do' and to 'know') to be a true Oriental Christian. At the same time, however, when focusing on *how* tradition is being transmitted, it becomes clear that renewal is omnipresent because, apart from a few rare exceptions, the traditional texts rarely are transmitted 'as is' – the textual corpus we are studying is both formative and transformative in relation to tradition. What this

74 Aydin & Lanzinger, *Orientalische Kirchen,* 8–17.

75 For examples, see under 'History', '(Auto)Biography' 'Mixed Genre' and 'News & Contemporary issues'; for a discussion of Syriac materials on the genocide, see also Murre-van den Berg, "Texts, Language, and Religion".

re-constitution and renewal of the tradition entails differs from subject to subject and from church to church. In liturgical texts, the continuity between past and present remains relatively strong, with change mostly restricted to translations, new and additional explanations, and the addition of new hymns. The breach with the past is much bigger in the writing of history, with new traditions being built up almost from scratch and whole new histories being written to include recent developments. Yet, the texts here reflect only part of the picture: some of the new stories may have been around orally for much longer than they have been written and printed, whereas liturgical practice regularly deviates from the texts in ways not being recorded in the texts.[76]

Teaching

The most striking element of the textual production of the Oriental churches is the pervasive educational aspect in the materials that we have collected. Put differently: whereas parts of the collection are explicitly geared towards ritual use in the church and others are aimed at personal spiritual reflection, most publications are envisaged as teaching material. Explicitly, this is the case in many German-language publications, where state funding is often used for religious primary and secondary education. Many such materials are included in the database, among which is the example with which I started this contribution.[77] Other books in layout and text are clearly aimed at children or youth and are used in Sunday schools or other educational activities organised by the churches. However, the educational aspect is not restricted to explicitly educational textbooks. The overall educational intent shows how traditional contents are reframed and reformulated by adding introductory and explanatory materials (including illustrations) to the traditional texts and by re-telling traditional stories, beliefs, and practices to make them accessible to contemporary believers of all ages. Again, this might seem obvious for religious publications (of all religious groups), as to some extent inherent to the broader genre of 'religious texts.'[78] However, when comparing this to the traditional literatures of the Oriental churches, the educational thrust entails a fundamental change that has shifted the focus of religious literature from that of religious specialists who write for each other, to texts that are primarily produced with the wider, non-specialist, public in mind. This wider

76 See Bar-Sawme, this volume.

77 Aydin & Lanzinger, *Orientalische Kirchen*, 2: „als Schulbuch für den orientalisch-orthodoxen Religionsunterricht herausgegeben im Auftrag der orientalisch-orthodoxen Kirchenkommission and approbiert am 26.03.2012."

78 See Pleizier, Huijgen en te Velde: "On the Construction of Religious Texts".

public includes not only youth and adult laypersons who are interested but are not learned in the traditions of the church but also outsiders to the tradition, such as potential converts or those encountered in ecumenical contexts. Early traces of this move to the broader public of lay members of the church can be noticed in the materials from the sixteenth century onwards, especially in those of the Church of the East.[79] However, what was then an emerging and relatively small genre relative to the materials produced by learned clerics for other clerics now constitutes the majority of what is produced.

This move to the educational is best visible in the works we have subsumed under 'Religious teaching,' which at the moment constitutes the largest single group within the various genres. In comparison to some of the other genres, one is struck by the preponderance of European languages (English, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, German) among these publications. When homeland languages are used, these are all contemporary languages, such as Modern Standard Arabic, Eastern or Western Armenian, Amharic, Tigre, or Tigrinya, rather than the classical liturgical languages of these churches. This suggests that these educational publications aim not only at younger generations or those from outside who do not read the classical languages but also at the older generations who are literate in the languages of the homelands and perhaps not yet as much in the languages of the home countries.

When we look at the type of educational materials that are subsumed here, there is a wide variety of subgenres, from books that retell the stories of the biblical and post-biblical saints (overlapping with Scripture and Hagiography), books that educate people about fasting or the sacraments, and books geared towards 'theology' proper, sometimes in the form of catechisms. Some of these catechisms are reprints or translations of catechisms of the first half of the twentieth century; others date to a later period.[80] The works of the Coptic Pope Shenouda III constitute a considerable subcategory among the educational materials. These have been translated into various European languages, with English, Dutch, French, Italian, Tigrinya, and Swedish represented in our collection. Most have been produced in Cairo and are easily recognizable by the same stylised drawing of St. Mark's Cathedral in Abbassiya, Cairo. Interestingly, some of these are not published by

79 Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures*.

80 See, e.g., the Syriac Orthodox catechism of Mor Ignatios Aphrem I Barsaum in Dutch translation: *Catechismus van de Syrisch-orthodoxe Kerk van Antiochië* (Glane: Bar 'Ebroyo Verlag, 2002) and Mgr. Vahan Hovhanessian, *Catéchisme Abrégé De L'Église Apostolique Arménienne Pour Les Adolescents: Explorons les racines de notre Église Apostolique Arménienne*, vol. 4 (Paris: Diocèse de France de l'église apostolique arménienne, 2019).

Copts but by Tewahdo Christians (those in Tigrinya) or by Syriac Orthodox Christians, like the one in which Shenouda argues against the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses.[81] Despite occasional polemic works or paragraphs (such as in the last example), these publications are mostly set in a positive tone that would not endanger relations with the major churches of the countries of migration.

However, it is especially in the genres that I discussed in more detail under 'Tradition' that the educational thrust becomes particularly visible. Here, the publications are not necessarily produced for an educational setting, but yet display clear didactic aims. This is true for liturgical publications, where paratexts such as introductions, translations, and commentaries help modern readers, most of which are not clerically trained, to understand what is going on. Additionally, these paratexts suggest how these readers can participate in ways that in the past were restricted to clergy but now are expected of all committed believers. As indicated above, hagiography fits into this educational trend and is published in ways that make the stories accessible to all believers. And finally, this is particularly true for the historical genre, which has greatly expanded over the past fifty years. It is here where this educational drive comes across as the most urgent, where authors feel committed to sharing their knowledge of the history of the larger community and their particular local or regional part of that history. If anything, migration has brought home the need to write history, to deal with the past – a story of pride as much as of suffering and expulsion – to be able to inscribe oneself as part of Europe's past, present, and future.

Conclusion

The preliminary analysis of the materials that have been collected so far indicates that though there are obvious differences between the churches of the Oriental tradition, there is much that they share. These similarities may be summarised under the shorthand "teaching tradition transnationally." How this maxim takes form, however, differs from church to church and from country to country: the actual types of publication, the role of European versus homeland publishers, the role of clergy versus laity and lay experts, and the role of liturgical languages vis-à-vis homeland and European languages. In further publications, project members will show how, among other things, the political contexts of home- and host countries have played a considerable role in determining the outcome of similar

81 Pope Shenouda, *Jehovas vittnen och deras irrlära* (Sweden, 1996); note that also the original Arabic, French and English publications are distributed among non-Copts, see, e.g., the Tewahdo website tewahedo.dk › Litteratur (which hosts pdfs of the English series).

initiatives. Other differences are rooted in distinct migration histories and the impact of transnational communal dynamics, including the power (or the absence of it) of homeland politicians and clergy over the diaspora.

The main aim of this paper, however, was to show that it is indeed possible to write a common history of Oriental communities in Europe through their publication practices. Indeed, similar Christian theologies, largely parallel migration histories, and comparable publication strategies allow for various avenues of comparison. At first sight, much of what is common seems to be a matter of similar responses to similar challenges born from similar starting points. What is dear to Oriental Christians is shared and published, taught and transmitted, without concerted efforts to calibrate amongst the various Oriental churches. However, similarities also arise from commonalities. There are signs that common ground between those churches is gradually emerging in Europe and elsewhere. This is often stimulated by local or national politics of recognition: in many countries, it is easier to gain governmental support when forces are joined into an 'Orthodox' or 'Oriental Orthodox' group that advocates on behalf of all the churches. The publication which was described in the initial paragraph originates in such a context, in which internal and external forces stimulated a concerted effort to portray the 'Oriental Christians' as one group vis-à-vis other (Eastern) Orthodox churches on the one hand and other Christians (esp. Catholics and Protestants) on the other. Our corpus shows, however, that such pragmatic ecumenism is only one part of the story. It is likely, for example, that the success of Pope Shenouda's publications – among Copts and non-Copts alike – stimulated other clergy to try their pen at similar texts. The attempts to make the Syriac Orthodox *Shḥimo* available to the larger Syriac Orthodox public seem to be patterned on the success of the *Agpeija* among the Copts, whereas, vice versa, the active European publishing policy of the Syriac Orthodox might have spurred clerics of other churches to do likewise. As a final example, we note websites such as that of a Tewahdo church and a Syriac Orthodox Church in Sweden, which advertise not only publications of their own church but also those of others – suggesting that as to 'what one should read' other (mainly Eastern) Orthodox materials are just as legitimate as those from one's own church.[82]

Above all, I hope we have showed – in this final contribution, and in the volume as a whole – how books remain important in the Oriental churches. Books are produced and cherished for their ability to solidify and transmit faith and knowledge,

82 See Syrisk-Orthodoxa Ungdomsförbundet: //souf.nu/shop › shop (last seen dd 25/7/23). For the Tewahdo, see previous note.

religious practice, and religious belonging, while remaining versatile and portable – as much and as easily as a community on the move needs. Whereas new media have been widely accepted and integrated in the flexible toolbox available for religious mediation, books have retained their centrality in religious thought and religious practice, deserving our full attention. And in this, perhaps, the Oriental Churches are not so different from many other religious communities, Christian and otherwise, and not so different from all communities that put high stakes on transmitting a living and ever-expanding textual tradition to a new generation. Among which, of course, is the learned community of scholars.

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In this edited volume, publications from Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, and Tewahdo publishers are taken as crucial witnesses of how these communities rewrite themselves in the lands of migration, taking into account not only the texts as such, but also how physical books accompanied by social media and digital publications are central in a transnational religious practice geared towards transmitting tradition to the next generation. In this, the volume bridges the gap between two burgeoning fields, the anthropology of Orthodox Christianity and the historical study of the major texts that form the backbone of the Oriental religious traditions.

Scholars from a variety of disciplines (including history, anthropology, theology and religious studies), as well as practitioners in the field of education and publishing, have contributed to this volume by bringing in a variety of case studies. Thus they helped to situate the concerns of the ERC project Rewriting Global Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodox Churches in Europe, 1970-2020, in a broader context of the study of the role of texts and traditions in the Oriental Churches, with examples from the North America, Armenia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Sweden, France, Belgium and Germany. The volume is opened by an introductory article discussing a few of the underlying themes of the project and the volume (religion, books, learning) and closed by an overview of the communal work of the project in mapping publications and publishing by Oriental Orthodox Churches in Europe, based on the project's website, **https://fourcornersoftheworld.ptrs.ru.nl/**.

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