CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE SYRIAC-SPEAKING WORLD, 300–1000[1]

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The way in which histories were composed provide important indicators of how Syriac-speakers saw themselves and how they related to their neighbours and rulers. The selection of red-letter days in the past could be used to understand the present, whether the behaviour of men and states or the relationship between God and man.

I am reluctant to speak straightforwardly of Syriac historiography, because it seems to unduly privilege the language in which history was written. Certain historians, such as Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), did choose to emphasise the fact that they used Syriac and wrote histories that focused on miaphysite 'Suryayē'. But this use of history, and of the unity of language, ethnicity, and religion that it implies, were the perspectives of individuals. They were not shared by everyone and should not be considered 'natural', especially in the early parts of the period under discussion.

Instead, I have chosen to focus here on the ways in which the centres of Syriac scholarship such as Edessa were considered by historians. Therefore, I begin with the representation of Syriac culture in Greek and conclude with the reception of Syriac histories in Arabic. I argue that it is only in Arabic that we see the upgrading of the Syriac account of the formative past of Edessa to the rank of true history. Sources in Arabic also give us an insight into how much Syriac writing has been lost, especially from the Sasanian world.

SYRIAC CULTURE AND GREEK ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

The tradition of Greek ecclesiastical history is formed of a series of continuations of the work of Eusebius of Caesarea, who himself used and developed the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels. The works of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret in the fifth, and of Theodore Lector and Evagrius in the sixth, all fall into this tradition, which links the empire of Constantine and his successors to the deeds of the Gospel. From the final books of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, the genre came to focus on the deeds of emperors and bishops, and their efforts to preserve and extend orthodox religion and to maintain divine approval for the Roman Empire as a Christian state.

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Sebastian Brock has observed that the significance of Eusebius as a source for church history can often lead modern historians to ignore the importance of Christianity outside the Roman world and to underplay the role of Syriac as a third cultural tradition of Christianity, a 'third lung for the church' (Brock 2005, 1992). But we should also remember that the tradition of ecclesiastical history did play a role in championing the early 'achievements' of Syriac-speaking Christians within the Roman world. Chief among these was the so-called *Abgar Legend*, which is first extant in Eusebius (*Church History* I, 13) and which the historian claimed to find in the city's archives. Here Abgar, the king of Edessa, corresponds with Jesus in Jerusalem, shortly before his arrest. Abgar tells Jesus that he has recognised him as the son of God after hearing of his miracles, and invites him to live in Edessa. Jesus replies that he cannot go, but he sends his disciple Addai to instruct the king in Christianity and dispatches a letter that will guarantee Edessa's invulnerability.

It is striking that Eusebius would give such prominence to the figure of Abgar. The king may function here as a kind of precursor to Constantine: a secular ruler who recognises the coming of Christ (Mirkovic 2004). But inclusion of the story also gives Edessa a role in the history of Christianity in the era of the Gospels, and already by the fourth century Edessa was being included on tours of the Holy Land (*Itinerarium Egeriae* 47). In other words, by recognising the supposed claim of an Edessene document, Eusebius had extended the boundaries of the world of the Gospels.

Eusebius's successors also devoted notable scenes to the cultural and political achievements of the Syriac world:

- hymnography and the works of Ephrem

    (Sozomen 3.16; Socrates 6.34; Theodoret 4.26)

- the holy man Julian Saba

    (Soz 3.16; Soc 6.34; Thdt 4.24)

- Jacob of Nisibis and the defeat of the Persian invasion

    (Soz. 7.27; Thdt. 2.26)

- Edessa's defiance against the pagan emperor Julian

    (Soz. 6.1)

- The martyrdoms of Christians in the Persian world under Yazdegard I

    (Soz 2.9–15; Thdt 5.38)

Most of these examples are set in Edessa and Nisibis. These narratives owe much to the position of these cities on the Persian border and their consequent role as indicators of Christian Roman steadfastness in the face of Persia.

These references in the ecclesiastical historians both confirmed and reflected the importance of Edessa as a missionary centre and, consequently, of the Syriac language as a high dialect for speakers of other Aramaic dialects (Brock 1994; Taylor 2002). This led to a growing significance of Syriac in the epigraphy and manuscript

production of the lands west of the Euphrates, where Greek and Latin had long held a monopoly (Millar 2009: 49–54; Mango 1982). It is significant that when Theodoret of Cyrrhus, himself probably a Syriac-speaker, sought to praise the holy men of northern Syria in the fifth century, he traced their spiritual lineage back to two Mesopotamian ascetics of the fourth century, Jacob of Nisibis and Julian Saba (*Historia Religiosa* 1 and 2), who had both been praised by their near-contemporary Ephrem. The region around Edessa and Nisibis loomed large in the public imagination of ascetic piety: the cities provided an obvious starting point even for a hagiographic collection set in provinces further south (Wood 2010: 45–8).

THE SYRIAC PSEUDO-HISTORIES

However, the public image of the heroes of Edessa or Nisibis was still very much conditioned by historians and hagiographers writing outside this geographical and cultural milieu. Even where Syriac saints' lives described the famous figures mentioned above, Greek texts, and Syriac translations of the Greek, often became more prominent than the original Syriac versions.[2]

The principal exceptions to this pattern are Pseudo-histories, composed as extensions of significant scenes in Christian history. A key example is the *Doctrina Addai*, a fifth-century Syriac embellishment of the *Abgar Legend* that describes the role of Addai in converting Abgar and his nobles and the account he gives of an idealised ascetic Christianity. This text is unusual in receiving imitations in Greek and Armenian, and provides an example of the success of one Edessene in magnifying the fame accorded to his city by Eusebius (Debié 2010; Wood 2010: ch. 4; Brock 2004; Illert 2008).

A second exception is the sixth-century *Julian Romance*, which, like the *Doctrina*, emphasised the invulnerability of the city of Edessa and its role as a stronghold of orthodox Christianity. The *Romance* represents a highly embellished account of Edessa's resistance to Julian (Wood 2010: ch. 5; Drijvers 1999). We can consider these two texts, the *Doctrina* and the *Romance*, as apocrypha to the main historical canon of Eusebius and his continuators. They are Pseudo-historical embellishments of minor scenes in the canon that aim to exaggerate Edessa's role in foundational moments of Christian history in the Gospels and in the fourth century.

Finally, a third example of Pseudo-history that deserves mention here is the *Cave of Treasures*. This remarkable text was probably composed in the early sixth century in Julianist (miaphysite)[3] circles in northern Iraq (Minov 2013: 84–6). It is a Christian, Syriac re-writing of the Old Testament, which emphasises the existence of an ascetic ur-Christianity in the time of Adam that was passed on to various patriarchs, who resisted the varied temptations of the children of Cain. Several references in the text imply that its author straddled the thought-worlds of the East and West Syrians. The geography of the text emphasises Iranian Azerbaijan, which the author identifies with the Biblical land of Nod (Wood 2010: 118), and refers positively to some customs of Iranian Zoroastrianism (Minov 2013: ch. 4). But it also circulated under the name of Ephrem and refers to Abgar of Edessa (Minov 2013: 315–21, 363–8). Furthermore, it emphasises the divine favour given to the Aramaic language, which it identifies with Syriac. Syriac was associated with Edessa and was spoken there, whereas elsewhere

it functioned as a high dialect for speakers of numerous different Aramaic dialects (Taylor 2002). This mixture of subjects suggests that the author is conscious of the need to emphasise the existence of a single language and ascetic religion that crossed political boundaries between Rome and Persia. The *Cave* circulated widely, in several different versions and languages (Minov 2013: 21–30).

WEST SYRIAN HISTORICAL WRITING IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

Two major extant works in Syriac continue the Eusebian tradition of ecclesiastical history, the works of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene (written in 569) and John of Ephesus (written ca. 585). Both authors were from Amida. These histories are often classified according to their authors' miaphysite confession or the Syriac language in which they wrote. But John's church history remained wedded to the idea of a Christian Roman empire, with the deeds of emperors at its centre. He certainly attacks individual emperors, such as Justin II, as irrational heretics, but so too did Socrates and Sozomen in their criticism of the 'Arian' Valens. Likewise, John's criticism of individual Chalcedonian bishops does not seem to extend to all Chalcedonians. At points he imagines Chalcedonians and miaphysites as a single church, and his criticism of Chalcedonian extremists rests on their refusal to recognise miaphysite sacraments, rather than on their Christological beliefs.

John certainly stretches the traditional borders of the genre: his willingness to give prominence to the Jafnid phylarch Mundhir in his attempts to reconcile different miaphysite factions in Book IV of his history is one striking example. But the Eusebian model of a universal church remained valid, and ecclesiastical history was not a genre that easily served communalist interests.[4] Later miaphysites did look back to John as the foundation of an independent 'communal' history, but their reading of him was selective and imposed the firm communal boundaries of their own days onto his text (van Ginkel 1998). John recorded the persecutions that gave miaphysites identity through shared suffering, but he did not consider the breach irrevocable (van Ginkel 1995: 182, 216; Menze 2008). John, ever hopeful for a reconciliation with the Chalcedonians, wrote on behalf of an 'orthodoxy in waiting' (Wood 2010: 175).

It is not necessary to place too much stress on John's history as part of a Syriac historiographical tradition. It might be more apt to see it as a work of ecclesiastical history in the Eusebian mould that was composed in Syriac. The same point could be made for Pseudo-Zachariah: he embeds a long miaphysite ecclesiastical history, originally composed in Greek, within his Syriac text, as Books III–VI, and follows Eusebius's precedent in including lengthy documentation (Greatrex et al. 2011: 19–28). John takes the whole of the eastern Mediterranean as his field, and his inclusion of the activities of missionaries beyond the frontier (in Nubia and in Arabia) has good precedents in Eusebius and the fifth-century historians. Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene does seek to 'improve' on Eusebius by referring to a hagiography of Pope Sylvester of Rome (Greatrex et al. 2011: 80), who allegedly baptised Constantine, but it is noteworthy that the Pseudo-histories of the *Doctrina* and the *Julian Romance* were omitted. Both the *Doctrina* and the *Romance* remained extraneous to the canon of sixth-century ecclesiastical history, even when composed in Syriac.

We can observe a very different pattern in the local histories of the same period, the *Chronicle of Edessa* (written ca. 550) and the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the stylite* (512). Both were composed in Edessa and drew on local archives. Neither have the miaphysite bias of the Syriac ecclesiastical histories of the same period, and the *Chronicle of Edessa* is noticeably pro-Chalcedonian and in favour of the emperor Justinian. The existence of both local chronicles is probably due to the high reputation of the archives held at Edessa. These were made famous by the reference in Eusebius to his use of the archives to discover the *Abgar Legend*. Whether or not Eusebius's claims were true, they were credible and stimulated the deposition of further documents, which would constitute raw material for the writing of local history (Segal 1970: 20–1).

The contents of the *Chronicle of Edessa* imply that the archival material included bishops' lists, records of local building and benefactions, and records of natural disasters. To this has been added references to church synods and a small number of significant events outside the city, such as the foundations of Tella and Amida by Constantius II (§19–20). Though the references in this short text are sparse, the lengthy account of the flood of the city in 202 draws on a detailed account that claims to have to have been composed under the Abgarid kings (§8). Witakowski has plausibly argued that the account of the flood derives from a more 'developed' text, an *Original Chronicle of Edessa*, which was drawn on by later chroniclers (Witakowski 1984/6).[5]

It is also important that the *Chronicle of Edessa* makes reference to several of the scenes of the history of the Syriac-speaking world made famous in the fifth century ecclesiastical historians. Julian Saba (§28), Jacob of Nisibis (§17), Ephrem (§30), Symeon the stylite (§69), the fifth-century persecutions in Persia (§54), Julian's Persian war (§26), and the 'heretic' Mani (§10) are all mentioned, even though the *Chronicle* does not regularly report heretics, holy men, martyrs, or warfare.

Pseudo-Joshua's *Chronicle* has a slightly different focus, and is more clearly presentist. It gives a vivid first-hand account of the Roman-Persian invasion of 502–6, including the fall of Amida and Edessa's resistance. But it too draws on archival material to give context to these events. They included recently published laws, the fluctuations of prices, death counts from famine, and the construction of public buildings (Trombley and Watt 2000: xxxii–xxxiv). Both Joshua and the Edessa *Chronicle* date their material according to the Seleucid era, and this may reflect the dating practices of local registers, which used this form alongside the imperial indiction (Trombley and Watt 2000: lii–liii). The Seleucid era would become a distinctive feature of West Syrian history writing and continued to be employed into the sixteenth century (Debié 2015: 267–70).

Thus, in the sixth century, we should be reluctant to think of a single Syriac historical tradition. Historical writing can be divided into Pseudo-histories like the *Doctrina Addai*; Syriac writing in the Eusebian tradition of ecclesiastical history; and local chronicles. They all have different forms and concerns. However, we should also observe that all three were stimulated, in different ways, by the production of Greek ecclesiastical history. This is obviously true for the continuators like John of Ephesus, but we should remember that the Pseudo-histories are embellishments of key scenes in the Greek ecclesiastical histories. The *Chronicle of Edessa*, too, owes its interest in events outside the city to the authoritative selection of events by the Greek ecclesiastical historians.

WEST SYRIAN HISTORICAL WRITING IN THE SEVENTH TO EIGHTH CENTURIES

In addition to his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius of Caesarea also composed the *Chronicon*. The second part of this work, the *Canons*, consisted of synchronic tables of regnal dates (the *fila regnorum*), annotated with notes on contemporary events (the *spatium historicum*) (Burgess 1999; Witakowski 2008; Debié 2015: 303–10). Though this form of historical writing fell out of use in Greek, it flourished in West Syrian writing in the seventh to ninth centuries. A number of 'minor chronicles' exist from this period, written in annalistic form and dated by the Seleucid era (Brock 1976; Palmer 2009). They were written by miaphysites, Maronites, and Melkites. They describe the controversies of the churches and local political history, and several give distinctive perspectives on the end of Roman rule in the Near East and the coming of the Arabs. The material is sparse, and its selection may have been intended to allow the reader to discern God's judgement on human behaviour (Palmer 1993: xxviii). I comment on these chronicles here with respect to their imagination of the Roman past and the rule of the Arabs in their own days.

The *Chronicle to 819* is especially interesting for its view of the past. This conceives of the third and fourth centuries almost exclusively through Edessene red-letter days: king Abgar; the founders of heresies that Ephrem opposed; the buildings of the Abgarids; Edessene bishops; Symeon the stylite. The chronicler has also added two further events of local significance: the miaphysite saint Barsauma of Samosata and the Persian invasion of Mesopotamia under Kavad I (which had been treated by Joshua the stylite). For this chronicler, writing in the miaphysite monastery of Qartmin, Edessene history has almost totally eclipsed knowledge of the wider church or of the Roman Empire. Though he is well informed about the regional politics of his day, the chronicler cannot see the past except through an Edessene lens. As we have seen, this lens was a construct of the identification of significant events made by the Greek ecclesiastical historians and the highlighting of the same events in local chronicles.

A second annalistic *Chronicle* that is worth discussing in detail is the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, composed in a monastery in northern Mesopotamia in ca.775. This text is striking for retaining the annalistic structure used by the 'minor chronicles' but pushing it to the breaking point by including large sections of Roman ecclesiastical history and contemporary reflections. Witakowski terms it a 'developed chronicle' (Witakowski 1987: 76–82). Parts I–III of the *Chronicle* are chiefly taken from Eusebius, Socrates, and John of Ephesus, while Part IV is made up of contemporary reflections on the rule of the Arabs and their wars (Witakowski 1987: 124–35; Brock 1980: 11–12). Interestingly, his coverage of the seventh century is very scanty, and he laments his lack of sources. Conrad (1991) and Wood (2011) have argued that the text was composed in several different layers, possibly involving a number of different authors, each with different criteria for inclusion that reflect changing political interests (also see Harrak 1998).

What is striking here is that universal Christian history in the Eusebian mode functions as the backdrop to very local events in the eighth century. On one hand, it illustrates the dramatic contraction of the worldview of one group of rural Christians. They no longer seem particularly connected to the rest of the Christian world, and they lose their residual loyalties to the Byzantine emperor after the wars of

Constantine V (Wood 2011). From the ʿAbbasid revolution onwards, the *Chronicle*'s chief concerns are the exactions of Mosuli tax collectors (Robinson forthcoming). Yet, at the same time, the fact that the *Chronicle* can appeal to this long set of predecessors may evoke a sense of past struggles and past glories helped by the persistence of a Christian solidarity under Arab rule.

The minor chronicles also provide an important insight into the early writing of history amongst the Arabs. Antoine Borrut has observed how the Arab king-lists preserved in these chronicles suppress the caliphates of ʿAli and Ibn al-Zubayr (Borrut 2014: 49–50). By a similar token, the *Zuqnin Chronicle* does not see the ʿAbbasid revolution of 750 in religious terms, but as an invasion of the Persians, which reflects how the event was seen locally by Muslims and Christians (Borrut 2014: 53; Borrut 2011: 151–2). Indeed, incidental references in the *Zuqnin Chronicle* give a good indication of the passage of the Arabisation of the countryside, in terms of intermarriage, linguistic change, religious conversion, or the creation of a cross-confessional regional identity (Wood 2011).

THEOPHILUS OF EDESSA AND DIONYSIUS OF TEL-MAHRE

The ʿAbbasid period saw the development of two more elaborate histories, by the Maronite scholar and astrologer Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785) and the Jacobite patriarch Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d. 845). These were composed in a period when history writing in Greek had become rare (Whitby 2003: 492), and they serve as an illustration of the cultural significance of the Syriac-speaking world at this time. This salience of Syriac is related to the fact that Edessa and its environs survived the Arab Conquests relatively unscathed, and the role that Syriac-speakers acquired as translators of the products of Hellenic culture into Arabic (Conrad 1999; Tannous 2010).

However, neither of these major histories survives extant, and both must be reconstructed from later sources. Dionysius is attested through the *Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*; the *Chronicle of 1234*, and the *Ecclesiastical History* of Bar Hebraeus, while Theophilus is attested in the Arabic history of Agapius of Manbij, in the Greek *Chronicle* of Theophanes, and in Dionysius. It is best to underscore, therefore, the fact that comments on either historian depend on reconstructions, and there always remains the possibility that parallels between the texts that employ Theophilus or Dionysius are due, in fact, to other shared sources.[6]

Theophilus was a prodigious translator of Hellenic science at the court of al-Mahdi, and his chronicle may have provided a narrative that ran from the early seventh century to the consolidation of the rule of al-Mansur in 755 (Hoyland 2011: 20–1). As Robert Hoyland (2011: 34) observes, we should not simply think of him as a 'Christian under Muslim rule', but as an educated cosmopolitan. According to Dionysius, Theophilus composed a narrative without strict adherence to chronology, and it seems to have been densest towards the end of its range, during the end of the Umayyad period (Hoyland 2011: 23).

Much of the material that Hoyland attributes to Theophilus was 'secular', rather than ecclesiastical. It may be that, like his classical predecessors, he preferred not to continue his history into the reign of al-Mahdi because of the danger of commenting on the reign of his patron. The earlier part of the material that might be attributed to

Theophilus shows a markedly pro-Byzantine tone, unlike the material set in the 740s that has a sympathy for the Muslim government. This distinction may be explained by his use of Byzantine sources, which should be distinguished from Theophilus's own eyewitness account.

Dionysius's history was composed in sixteen books covering both secular and ecclesiastical material over the period 582–842 (Palmer 1993: 87–9). He made extensive use of Theophilus, but he also probably used minor Syriac chronicles, of the type surveyed above, and the histories of two magnate families from Edessa, the Rusafoye and the Gumoye (to which he was related) (Palmer 1993: 98–100). The overarching focus throughout his history are the deeds of the Jacobite patriarchs, their relations with the powers that be, and with prominent monasteries such as Qenneshre, Gubba Barraya, and Mar Mattai. This tendency becomes stronger as Dionysius becomes less dependent on the interests of his sources.

Though the chronicle must be constructed from later sources, we can still make some important observations about the differences between Dionysius's history and the minor chronicles of the previous centuries. Firstly, Dionysius conceives of himself as the heir to a chain of ecclesiastical historians: Eusebius, Socrates, John of Ephesus, and the obscure Cyrus of Batna, whose chronicle ended in 582 (Palmer 1993: 90–2). In this sense, we can draw a parallel to the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, where a prestigious historical tradition was continued in a remote corner of eighth-century Mesopotamia. But there is little sense from the final part of the *Zuqnin Chronicle* that the author(s) sought to emphasise their confessional difference from other Christians, and there is substantial sympathy with the military efforts of the Byzantines. The *Zuqnin Chronicle* received a miaphysite vision of the church history of the sixth century through John of Ephesus, but this is almost an incidental result of the fact that these texts were written in Syriac and that no alternative narratives were available to this isolated author. In Dionysius's case, by contrast, we know from his comments that he was able to use Theophilus, but also that he felt it necessary to edit out an alleged sectarian bias.

Dionysius wrote his history at the request of John, metropolitan of Dara, and he praises him for his training in the dogmas of orthodoxy 'from the softness of your fingernails until the silvering of your hair' (Palmer 1993: 90). The most distinctive feature of this focus on (miaphysite) orthodoxy is Dionysius's treatment of the Arab Conquests. Whereas the conquests themselves are barely treated in the *Zuqnin Chronicle*, Dionysius presents them as an act of liberation from Chalcedonian oppression: 'it was no light benefit for us to be freed from the tyranny of the Romans'. This should not be taken as a factual report of the feelings of seventh-century miaphysites, but a strategic re-imagination of the past by a patriarch embedded in struggles with contemporary Chalcedonians (Van Ginkel 2006). Dionysius also comments on his omission of any reference to the patriarchs of Rome or Constantinople (in a breach of tradition with predecessors like John of Ephesus) as a reflection both of political boundaries and of the deepening of Byzantine heresy after the acceptance of Monotheletism (Palmer 1993: 94). Dionysius's *Chronicle* can be read, therefore, as a symptom of the deepening confessional divide between Jacobites and Chalcedonians in the ʿAbbasid caliphate (cf. Morony 2005). Interestingly, he gives the separation a linguistic dimension that is not present in his predecessors: the Chalcedonians are said to have abandoned 'their language and literature' (Palmer 1993: 94). This likely

refers to the greater use of Arabic among the Chalcedonians, an area in which they anticipated trends seen in other Christian groups, in contrast to the Jacobites' longer preference for Syriac, which remained marked into the period of the Crusades (Vollandt 2015: 27–33; Van Ginkel 2008).

EAST SYRIAN HISTORICAL WRITING IN THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES

Historical writing in the Church of the East is even less unified than it was in the Roman world. In part, this was because the church was a much younger institution here: it was often subject to persecutions, of varying intensity, and catholicoi in Ctesiphon were only sporadically able to impose their authority. Furthermore, we should also remember that Syriac was not a native language in Sasanian Assyria or Babylonia, as it was in Edessa and Nisibis. For much of the east, we should imagine that speakers of numerous different Aramaic dialects were using Syriac as a Christian 'high language'.

In Late Antique Iraq, we are often the victims of fragmentary sources and must rely on reconstruction from later texts, often extant in Arabic, to trace the history writing of the pre-Islamic period. An important witness here is the tenth/eleventh century *Chronicle of Seert*, a Christian Arabic text that compiles substantial amounts of Syriac material and which covers the third to seventh centuries. In the fourth century, 'history' was primarily conceived through the hagiography of notable martyrs and holy men. This hagiographic tradition was adapted to produce a set of linked lives of the catholicoi of Ctesiphon in the second decade of the fifth century, in the aftermath of the sponsorship of the catholicos Ishaq by the shah Yazdegard I, which coincided with two embassies from the Romans. However, relations between the shah and the Christians of the empire broke down, and there was a corresponding lacuna in history writing until the end of the century (Wood 2013; Wood 2012: 116–9). Both the hagiographic and historical traditions of the fifth-century east may have been inspired by Eusebian models, in particular the hope for a Christian monarch in Yazdegard I, but this relationship is very hard to prove (Wiessner 1967: 35–6).

In addition to this patriarchal history, there was also a second stream of historical thought that had much more obvious links to the Roman world. The Persians had seized the city of Nisibis in 363, and this was a gate for Roman theological ideas until the seventh century. The influence of western ideas in the Persian world became especially strong after the expulsion of the Dyophysite school of Edessa to Nisibis in 484, and these scholars went on to play a major role in ensuring that the Church of the East as a whole leant towards that theological tradition (Gero 1981). One extant text produced in Nisibis was the *Cause of the Foundation of Schools*, which traces the transmission of divine *paideia* from the Creation to the author's own time. It is an intellectual history of the disciples of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the touchstone of orthodoxy for the Church of the East, but it also makes Ephrem an important link in the chain (Becker 2006; Wood 2012: 129–30).

However, there are only occasional reflections of this scholastic history in the histories composed around the court of the catholicos. It is only towards the end of the sixth century that we see an interest in western theology in the synods of the Church of the East, and that this corresponds with the transmission of Roman ecclesiastical

history to writers in Ctesiphon.[7] Such histories helped the Church of the East to demonstrate its orthodoxy in terms understood and respected in the Roman world.

One important feature of this new awareness of 'western' ecclesiastical history is the attempt to 'work up' or invent semi-mythical founder figures from the early history of the Church of the East and link them to well-known orthodox figures in the Roman world. The earliest example of this is the correspondence attributed to the fourth century catholicos Papas, likely invented in the sixth century, which links him to Jacob of Nisibis and to Ephrem (Braun 1894). Here it is worth stressing the significance of Edessa and Nisibis as a 'mesh' through which the history of Mediterranean Christianity was received in the Sasanian world.

The texture of the later historical compilations made in Arabic suggest that these western histories were summarised or translated by many different authors, some of whom attempted to juxtapose this material with the 'indigenous' history of the patriarchate. The thirteenth-century bibliophile ʿAbdishoʿ of Nisibis wrote a substantial metrical poem listing, among other things, some fifteen historians. The earliest of these wrote in the late sixth century and may have been the men who summarised the western accounts (Wood 2013: ch. 5; Wood 2012: 123–9).[8]

EAST SYRIAN HISTORICAL WRITING IN THE SEVENTH TO NINTH CENTURIES

One East Syrian history from the mid-seventh century that has survived is the *Khuzistan Chronicle*. Though only thirty pages long in Guidi's edition, it gives a remarkable breadth of coverage of political and religious history during the wars of Hormizd IV, Khusrau II, and Heraclius and the Arab Conquest that followed. The author informs the reader that he will provide a mixture of *eqlesiasṭiqē and qosmoṭiqē*.[9] In context, this means both the history of churchmen and the deeds of the Sasanian shahs, and he appears to have understood his history as a continuation of two different historical traditions: the church histories that we have referred to above and the Sasanian royal histories. We should also note the presence of a number of extracts from the Sasanian histories in the *Chronicle of Seert*, which appear to have entered the Christian historical tradition before the reign of Hormizd IV (Wood 2013: 183–4, 187). The text is especially interesting for the prominence it gives to Yazdin bar Shamta, the Christian governor of much of northern Iraq under Khusrau II, whose son played a role in the shah's murder (§28).

The material in the *Chronicle of Seert* for the period 590–660 is especially dense. In part this is because of the tumultuous events of the period. But it is also a reflection of the presence of several different historical models. In this period, Christians showed increasing political prominence in Iraq, and this stimulated interest in secular models of history writing. To further complicate matters, the patriarchate, which had been the major patron of Christian historians in the east, was suppressed in 610, and this led Christian historians to hope for leadership from a number of different secular, ecclesiastical, and monastic sources and compose their histories accordingly. None of these histories is extant in Syriac, but the Arabic gives a good sense of the complexity of the way in which this period was handled (Wood 2013: ch. 7).

The *Chronicle of Seert* also incorporates a long series of monastic biographies that describe the foundations of monasteries. These are located across the former

Sasanian world, but are particularly clustered in northern Iraq. Similar biographies were collected in the ninth-century hagiographic collections of Thomas of Marga and Išoʿdenaḥ of Basra. Išoʿdenaḥ's hagiographies focus on monastic foundations, and the vast bulk of them are set in the late sixth to early eighth centuries, with a few later and earlier outliers, and this may well correspond to a genuine peak in monastic foundations in the late Sasanian and early Islamic period that was then systematically commemorated in the ninth century (Wood 2013: 150–3; Fiey 1972; Jullien 2008).[10]

THE ARABIC COMPILATIONS OF THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

Many of the groups that had once spoken Syriac increasingly employed Arabic under Muslim rule. This trend is seen first among the Melkites, followed by the Church of the East and finally by the Jacobites. It is likely associated with the proximity of different Christian confessions to caliphal centres of government in Damascus and then in Baghdad. The same period also witnessed considerable migration of Christians within the caliphate, which broke down the earlier cantonment of 'Nestorians' in the east and Melkites and Jacobites in the west.

A number of lengthy Arabic histories were composed in this period by 'Nestorians' and Melkites, and these make great use of materials that were originally composed in Greek and Syriac. Here I will discuss two Nestorian texts, the *Chronicle of Seert* and the *Haddad Chronicle*, and two Melkite texts, the histories of Eutychius of Alexandria and Agapius of Manbij.

One feature that all of these texts share is the 'upgrading' of the Pseudo-histories discussed above as part of history proper. The *Chronicle of Seert* (PO 5, XXXIII–XXXIV) gives much more space to material derived from the Syriac *Julian Romance* than to the account derived from Socrates, and the compiler seems unable or unwilling to discriminate between the two. Eutychius and Agapius both make full use of the *Cave of Treasures* to fill out their discussion of the pre-Christian Near East. And Agapius (PO 5: 474–5) and the *Haddad Chronicle* (LVIII–LIX) give accounts of Addai and Abgar, drawn from the *Doctrina Addai*.

Two points need to be stressed here. The first is that, despite the origin of the *Julian Romance* and the *Cave of Treasures* in miaphysite circles, this was no impediment to their wide circulation. And the second is that texts that had once been 'apocryphal' were now treated as part of the canon. This may be in part because the Greek ecclesiastical histories were now harder to access and did not exist as single texts in Arabic translation that could be appealed to as a canonical vision of the past. Furthermore, the history of the period before Chalcedon did not bear the weight of justifying confessional divisions, which meant that it could be adapted more easily.

Another feature of these histories that should be stressed is their testimony to intercultural/interconfessional transmission. We have already seen important instances of this in Theophilus of Edessa, but our examples become more marked in texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The history of Elias of Nisibis (121–2/59 [AG 868–881]), for example, openly cites the Jacobite historian John of Ephesus, and the *Chronicle of Seert* incorporates a number of narratives of Melkite and Jacobite origin (Wood 2012: 139, 142).

We also find substantial use of Muslim historians in texts of this vintage. Agapius deploys a detailed Muslim text in his narrative on the ʿAbbasid revolution, and Elias of Nisibis's text is dominated by material of Muslim origin after the eighth century. The *Chronicle of Seert* (PO 13, CII–CIII) displays a slightly different phenomenon, which is the re-telling of the life of Muhammad to suit Christian political goals, in this case the presentation of the Christians of Najran as early allies of the Muslims against the Jews and pagans. Finally, we should note that this kind of exchange was not only one-way. Material of Syriac origin, such as the *Julian Romance* and the martyrdoms at Najran, is much more significant in al-Tabari's history (I. 840–43) than Greek material, which he seems not to have had access to.

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that the Eusebian tradition of ecclesiastical history was a major stimulus to the recording of the past in Syriac. But this did not produce a single 'Syriac historical tradition' in the sixth century. After the Muslim conquests, historical writing in Syriac became increasingly dependent on sources available in Syriac, but even annalistic histories like the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* are still heirs to a Eusebian universal tradition, even if their contemporary information is highly parochial. In the ninth century we do see a marked confessionalisation of West Syrian history writing, which is partly a consequence of the ʿAbbasid sponsorship of the clergy as the leaders of distinct confessional groups.

East Syrian writing was also much inspired by the models and information provided by Eusebius and his successors. But East Syrian awareness of these 'Roman' models was limited to certain moments of cross-border contact.

Historical writing by Christians in Arabic in the ninth and tenth centuries also shows the hallmarks of earlier historical writing in Syriac: what was known of historical writing in Greek was often accessed through Syriac intermediaries, and Syriac Pseudo-historical material was increasingly incorporated into history proper.

NOTES

1 My thanks to Dan King, Scott Johnson, and Hartmut Leppin for their comments.

2 This included Ephrem (Amar 2011), Jacob of Nisibis (Peeters 1920), and Symeon the stylite (Harvey 1993).

3 The term 'Julianist' refers to the followers of Julian of Halicarnassus, who led a Miaphysite splinter group in the early sixth century. See Moss (2016).

4 Here I part company with Debié (2009: 113). In particular, I do not follow her in dating the dissolution of the genre of ecclesiastical history to the sixth-century persecution of Miaphysites (which was, in any case, intermittent). Muslim patronage of different Christian groups had a much stronger effect in the crystallisation of inter-communal boundaries.

5 But note Debié (2015: 77), who observes that it is unlikely that the chronicles of Edessa were ever 'closed texts'.

6 Different reconstructions of Dionysius are suggested in Abramowski (1940) (esp. the schema at 126–9) and Palmer (1993) (up to the 730s). Hoyland (2011) assembles the materials that might have been found in Theophilus. Note, however, that Papaconstantinou (2013), Conterno (2014), and Debié (2015: 27–31, 139–42) suggest that much of what has

been ascribed to Theophilus actually derives from a number of shared histories that were transmitted 'interculturally', possibly including material composed by Muslim Arabs.

7 Goeller (1901) provides an example of the raw material that might have been extracted from the Western texts. Eusebius's *Chronicon* seems to have provided a skeleton for several of the ecclesiastical histories preserved in the *Chronicle of Seert*. This was probably received through a sixth-century (?) translation (Wood 2012: 131–3; Witakowski 1987: 78; Keseling 1927–8). Debié (2015: 223) challenges the attribution to Sergius of Beth Garmai.

8 The best attested of these lost historians is Daniel bar Maryam: Degen (1968).

9 On authorship, Nautin (1982).

10 Nautin (1974) argues that the *Chronicle* is written by Išoʿdenaḥ, which I do not find convincing.

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