The Interconnected Histories of the Syriac Churches in the Sixteenth Century[1]

Abstract:

The various Syriac-using churches of the middle east have generally been understood as rivals to each other, due to their different doctrinal positions, with separate histories that can be studied in isolation. This article argues that doctrinal differences should not be given undue prominence, and that in the sixteenth century there was in reality considerable interaction between the different churches. Increased contacts with Catholicism in this period may have encouraged these interactions, particularly in Rome itself, but connections were already present within the Ottoman empire. These contacts had a significant effect on the churches' historical development.

An English missionary, George Percy Badger, included in his account of his mission to the various Christians of Mesopotamia a description of his own mother's funeral in Mosul in 1844.[2] He emphasised that her funeral saw the participation of members of various different local churches, including the 'Nestorians', 'the Chaldeans', the 'Jacobites', the 'Romanist Syrians' and the Armenians, as well as many prominent Muslims. On this theme, he notes,

> 'The united part which the Nestorian patriarch and Jacobite bishops took on this mournful occasion is perhaps unique in the history of these contending sects since the time of Gregory Bar Hebraeus [d.1286], of whom Gibbon...thus writes: "In his death his funeral was attended by his rival the Nestorian Patriarch, with a train of Greeks and Armenians, who forgot their disputes, and mingled their tears over the grave of an enemy".''[3]

His description conveys the diversity of the local Christian population of nineteenth-century Mosul. His words and his quotation from Gibbon, also, however, reflect a common tendency in scholarship: to treat the different Christian communities of the middle east as not only clearly distinct and bounded, but as separate from and hostile to each other. Co-operation between bishops of different sects is seen as exceptional. In part, this vision of starkly separated Christian communities arises from the nature of the surviving source material from the middle east, which tends to be literary, normative, and focused on the community of the author; more generally, however, it reflects a scholarly tendency to prioritise theology and doctrinal affiliations over the social realities of everyday life. This article, by drawing not only on middle eastern sources but on archival material from Italy, seeks to show instead that, at least in the sixteenth century, there was close communication and co-operation between the upper echelons of various eastern Christian confessions, and that this had a significant effect on their historical development. Sixteenth-century events in both east and west drew the Syriac churches more closely into an increasingly international world: in the east, the Ottoman consolidation of authority over Mesopotamia in the early sixteenth century brought most members of these churches into a large political entity stretching as far as eastern Europe; in the west, the turbulence of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation spurred renewed interest among Catholics in their Christian counterparts in the

middle east. In this context, the vision of the Syriac churches as isolated and separate units appears increasingly anachronistic.

The middle east had been home to a variety of different Christian sects for centuries. The so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East had always possessed a separate hierarchy from the other churches.[4] The origins of most of the other confessions lay in controversies over Christology in the fifth century, but they had crystallised into distinct churches with formally autonomous hierarchies only during the sixth and after the Arab conquests of the seventh century.[5] The situation became yet more complicated from the sixteenth century onwards, when renewed and intensified contacts with Catholicism led, falteringly but ultimately, from the eighteenth century, permanently, to the emergence of Catholic branches of all the major pre-existing eastern churches, as shown in Badger's list: the 'Chaldeans' are the Uniate (Eastern Catholic) counterparts of the 'Nestorian' Church of the East; the 'Romanist Syrians' the Uniate counterparts of the 'Jacobite' Syrian Orthodox.

Eastern Christianity in this later, Ottoman, period has received far less scholarly attention than its late antique predecessor. What scholarship does exist has been particularly bounded by confessional divides: studies usually take as their subject the history of one particular church. Bernard Heyberger's pioneering work on the Arabic-speaking Christians of the Near East has shown, however, the limitations of this approach: he analyses cross-confessional trends in the face of contact with Catholicism.[6] Because his work focuses on Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, however, he pays relatively little attention to the more easterly churches of the Ottoman empire, whose bases were in Mesopotamia: the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East, two churches in which Syriac as much as Arabic remained dominant liturgical and literary languages. Two recent ground-breaking monographs on the Church of the East in the Ottoman period, by David Wilmshurst and Heleen Murre-van den Berg, have given new impetus to the study of early modern Syriac Christianity.[7] Again, however, their focus is on one individual Syriac church and on its connections with Catholicism, thereby creating an image of Syriac Christianity in isolation from the other churches of the middle east.[8]

In part this is a reflection of the source material available from the Syriac-using communities of the middle east. Very little documentary and archival material has been accessible to historians from before

the nineteenth century; manuscript and literary evidence has instead predominated.[9] Most surviving Syriac manuscripts were copied in the Ottoman period, but the vast majority of these contain copies of older works; relatively little new Syriac literature was written in this period, apart from some important compositions in various hymnal genres.[10] These manuscripts do, however, often contain colophons, and it is these which have formed the kernel of Wilmshurst and Murre-van den Berg's books. Both literary sources, and manuscript colophons tend, as Murre-van den Berg has noted, to be inward-looking: they focus on their own particular churches, and intentionally or otherwise exclude the other communities among whom they lived from their narratives and from their images of themselves.[11] In the middle east and Mesopotamia, then, this image of separation and independence is an almost inevitable outcome of the inward-focused source material that survives.

There are, however, other opportunities for the historian. From the sixteenth century onwards, changing historical circumstances brought about a shift in the available source material. In particular, increased contact with Catholicism meant that, from the mid sixteenth century, Italian archives become relevant: they contain some exceptional letters and other documentary fragments relating to Syriac Christianity in this period, in both Syriac and western languages. These include records of communications between eastern Christians in Rome and those in their homeland, between eastern Christians and local Romans, and, sometimes and very excitingly, between members of different eastern Christian confessions. Even though this documentary record is not vast, what does survive is so different from the majority of the material extant in the middle east that it provides an opportunity to write a new history of the Syriac churches, a history not bounded by the limitations of the traditional sources. Instead of replicating the normative, theologically focused, inward-looking perspective of most manuscripts, these documents reveal how individuals and communities operated in complex and evolving historical circumstances, and how their religious commitments interacted with their social and political needs.

This article explores some of this documentary evidence preserved in Rome and in Florence, which suggests, *pace* Badger, that it was not exceptional to see co-operation between bishops of different sects, even those of very different Christological positions. It will consider, first, evidence of contacts between eastern Christians within Rome and from Rome to their homelands. This raises the important question

of whether Rome itself created special conditions which enabled new forms of communication: did these eastern Christians, who shared the same languages and somewhat similar cultural and liturgical traditions, forge new ties with each other in the context of a foreign city, unknown languages, and a relatively unfamiliar religious environment? Did contact with Counter-Reformation Catholicism prove transformative in terms of the relationships between eastern churches? Or, rather, do the exceptional sources from Rome reveal glimpses of much wider networks stretching across the Mediterranean and middle east?

The second part of the article will therefore consider interactions between Syriac Christians in the middle east, drawing in part on documentary sources preserved in Italy, and in part on a reappraisal of some manuscript sources from Mesopotamia. Even though Rome provided an exceptional ecumenical space for inter-communal relations, interactions of various forms were already taking place within the Ottoman empire. Some of these interactions were perhaps the product of extraordinary circumstances, such as appeals to bishops from different communities at times of crisis, but some were seemingly everyday, including shared participation in pilgrimages and in manuscript culture. This suggests, again, that doctrinal differences were not necessarily the dominant priority for these communities; in many areas, political and social concerns took precedence. Other aspects of the Christians' cultural and social situations could encourage contacts, including their shared use of Syriac and Arabic, and their similar political position of subjecthood within the Ottoman empire. Power dynamics prove crucial throughout: in Rome, members of different eastern Christian communities turned towards individuals from other confessions perceived to have close access to the papacy; in the east, members of more marginalised communities sought the assistance of members of other churches who were better connected to powerful Ottoman figures.

These interactions matter. Eastern Christianity, and Syriac Christianity in particular, has tended to be a marginal, isolated field in scholarship, while early modern eastern Christianity has received much less attention than its late antique and medieval predecessors. But the sixteenth-century Mesopotamian Christian communities, and their interactions with each other, have considerable significance to a variety of scholarly audiences. For eastern Christian specialists, the connections between members of

different churches show the need to look beyond the traditional paradigms of the discipline, which tend to focus on theology and on ecclesiastical units. They provide a reminder that eastern Christian identities were more variable, multiple and situational than has sometimes been recognised; and they encourage scholars to look to other fields, such as Ottoman studies, in order to understand the contexts in which eastern Christians were operating. Syriac Christianity has much to offer to scholarship on Ottoman religion, although thus far it has been almost entirely neglected by historians of the Ottoman empire. Research on Ottoman religious minorities is beginning to move beyond the traditional model of powerless 'dhimmis', but much work remains to be done in interpreting the lives of these communities.[12] Analysing cross-communal interactions provides one way of understanding how these 'minorities' operated in a sometimes difficult political environment: members of Christian communities appealed, in different contexts, to local Muslim authorities, to the papacy in Rome, and to members of other, more influential, Christian communities. Thirdly, the relations between Syriac churches are important for scholars of Counter-Reformation Catholicism. The case of middle eastern Christians provides a rare opportunity for scholars of Tridentine Catholicism to investigate local reactions to the spread of Catholicism globally, not filtered through the lenses of Catholic missionaries.[13] In particular, the interactions and connections between the Syriac churches reveal elements of fluidity in eastern Christian identities, and areas of ecumenism and openness which can help to explain how eastern Christians could in some contexts appear fully open to embracing Catholicism while simultaneously seeming to adhere faithfully to aspects of their old beliefs and practices. The fragmentary documentation from Rome thus offers the opportunity to look beyond doctrinal divisions to reimagine the relations of eastern Christians in the middle east and beyond.

Syriac Christians in Sixteenth-Century Rome

Interactions between the Christian churches of the Middle East and the Catholic church intensified across the sixteenth century, which led to small but significant numbers of eastern Christians travelling to, and sometimes settling in, Rome. These included members of the two Syriac-using churches on which this article will focus: the Syrian Orthodox (also known as 'West Syrian' or 'Jacobite') church and the Church of the East ('East Syrian', or, more polemically, 'Nestorian' church). These churches professed polarised Christological formulae, and have historically been viewed as rivals.[14] Contacts between both churches and the Catholic church began in the mid sixteenth century, although in rather different forms: the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Ignatius Abdallah (r.1521-1557) sent an emissary to Rome to seek the printing of Syriac books, while his successor Ignatius Niʿmatallah opened discussion about union between his church and the Catholic church;[15] the East Syrian church, in contrast, underwent a schism in 1552 and the breakaway 'Chaldean' part of the church successfully sent their newly elected patriarch, Yoḥannan Sulaqa, to Rome to seek ordination from Pope Julius III.[16] Sulaqa and his successors remained in union with Rome throughout most of the sixteenth century, while the other branch of the East Syrian church, the 'traditionalists' who remained loyal to the existing patriarch and his descendants, also attempted discussions with Rome in the later sixteenth century, less successfully: Eliya VI (1558-91) sent a profession of faith to Rome, but this was rejected by the Romans as heterodox.[17] All of these interactions deserve further study but this article will focus on those scraps of evidence which reveal interactions between the different eastern Christian groups. This material suggests that Rome created an exceptional space which encouraged new forms of communication between different churches. The relations between the eastern churches and the Catholic church were affected by information sharing across different communities, and by the actions of individual figures in positions of relative power who dominated contacts between East and West.

The documentary evidence from Rome comes in a variety of forms and fragments. On the Chaldean side, as I have discussed elsewhere, a letter written by the patriarch Yoḥannan Sulaqa after his return to Mesopotamia from Italy shows that while in Rome he had formed relationships with eastern Christians of different origins, including two Maronites as well as the well-known interpreter John the Baptist the

Ethiopian.[18] Certainly this letter suggests that eastern Christians of a variety of backgrounds interacted with each other in Rome, possibly in the context of their shared interest in Catholicism: the Maronites and John the Baptist the Ethiopian, like Sulaqa, were all in communion with the Catholic church. Unfortunately there is nothing in the letter that gives more information about the nature of their relationship, or that reveals whether he was in communication with these or other Maronites before he came to Rome. It does, however, imply, the existence in Rome of networks of eastern Christians from a variety of confessional backgrounds.

This is confirmed by the much better documentation surrounding a figure of exceptional historical interest, the West Syrian patriarch Ignatius Niʿmatallah.[19] Little is known about Niʿmatallah's early life, but he was from a family which became very prominent: his brother Dawudshah succeeded him as patriarch, while another brother, Toma, reportedly had great influence with Ottoman officials because he acted as their doctor.[20] Niʿmatallah became patriarch in 1557, and entered into discussions of union between his church and the Catholic church. His patriarchate ended ignominiously, however, when, it seems, he was forced to convert to Islam and to abdicate, whereupon he fled the Ottoman empire, returned to Christianity, and travelled to Italy. He spent over ten years, until his death in *c.*1587, in Rome, from where (among other activities including advising Gregory XIII on his calendar reform) he mediated discussions between the Catholic church and his successor as patriarch, Ignatius Dawudshah.[21] These negotiations, ultimately unsuccessful, prompted one of the first missions by Rome to the Syriac Christians, led by the newly appointed bishop of Sidon, Leonard Abel, in the 1580s.[22] Niʿmatallah left, in Rome and in Florence, a rich trove of both manuscript and documentary evidence.

In Rome, Niʿmatallah seems to have acted as a nodal point for contacts between the Catholic church and a variety of eastern Christian churches, including above all his own West Syrian church. This involved both correspondence with Christians in their distant homelands and meeting eastern Christian visitors in Rome. His role in these negotiations was semi-official: the Romans sometimes attempted to use him as their mediator, but he was never fully trusted to carry out their wishes or to pursue their interests. Many of his interactions were with two churches separate from but at least nominally in a form of communion with the West Syrian church, who also professed a Miaphysite ("one nature")

Christology: the Coptic and Ethiopian churches. These churches had a sufficiently close relationship that members of them could at least claim, albeit perhaps for strategic reasons when negotiating with Catholics, that they could not accept demands unless their sister churches also accepted them.[23] Niʿmatallah wrote several letters to various rulers of the (at that time warring) Ethiopians, including to the 'negus' Sarsa Dengel.[24] His contacts with the Copts included writing to the patriarch about the new Gregorian calendar,[25] as well as exchanging letters about the possibility of church union. This is attested in the notes made by Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro, the 'protector' of the eastern churches when Niʿmatallah arrived in Rome, of his audiences with the pope.[26] Niʿmatallah's relationship with Santoro progressively declined, and mistrust grew on both sides, at least in part due to Santoro's concerns about Niʿmatallah's reliability in his transactions with the Copts. Santoro's records reveal that letters addressed to Niʿmatallah were monitored, translated and read by the Catholic authorities before they were delivered to him: one record from 12 May 1583 notes that Santoro discussed with the pope a letter from the patriarch of the Copts to the patriarch of Antioch (Niʿmatallah), which had been given to the College of the Neophytes to translate before it was handed over to him.[27]

An exceptional document in Syriac written by Niʿmatallah himself reveals how conflict over his communication with the Copts contributed to the breakdown in his relationship with Santoro. It is preserved in Florence, whose archives contain a significant collection of documents relating to Niʿmatallah because of his relationship with the Cardinal Ferdinando di Medici. Pier Giorgio Borbone and Margerita Farina, who discovered this collection, have begun publishing some of these very interesting (although often obscure and difficult to decipher) documents, but many remain unstudied and untranslated. In one of these unstudied documents I have found what appears to be a letter from Niʿmatallah, probably to his brother the patriarch Dawudshah, complaining that Cardinal Santoro had tried to suppress a letter from the Coptic patriarch to Rome because it contained praise for Niʿmatallah.[28] At the beginning of the document Niʿmatallah writes that there has been a transformation in his circumstances in Rome, because the man who had been the protector 'for us and our people',[29] as well as of the Egyptians, Armenians, Nestorians, and Melkites, namely the Cardinal of Santa Severina [Santoro], had been removed from the protectorate of the West Syrians and the Egyptians. The reason

for this, according to Niʿmatallah, related to an exchange of letters with the Coptic patriarch Iwannis. Niʿmatallah had sent from himself and from the pope two letters to 'our honoured brother',[30] Iwannis, who, as soon as he had received these letters, had formed a synod and written a long letter to Niʿmatallah in Rome, which came into the hands of the Cardinal of Santa Severina. This letter apparently praised Niʿmatallah and rebuked the Romans for not treating him with sufficient honour, which displeased Santoro, 'because he hated us and them because of the faith and never wanted good [things] for us'.[31] A friend of Santoro's read the letter to him, and 'when he learnt its advantage for us, towards everything, he hid it and determined that no-one would ever reveal its news in Rome'.[32] Eight months later, however, Santoro became drunk, and told someone about the letter; this man told Ni'matallah about it, whereupon Niʿmatallah waited to see if Santoro would reveal the information either to him or to the pope. When this did not happen, Niʿmatallah went to the pope and told him about Santoro's actions, which caused the pope to become very angry and remove the protectorate from Santoro and from Cardinal Carafa (presumably Antonio Carafa, sometime protector of the Maronite college). The pope then appointed 'for us and for the Abyssinians and for the Egyptians'[33] two new protectors, Cardinal Como (Tolomeo Gallio, cardinal of Como, secretary of Gregory XIII), and Cardinal Medici. The rest of the document continues to praise the two new protectors of the eastern Christians and reports that Niʿmatallah was now feeling much better disposed towards the Romans.

It is difficult to know how much faith to put in Niʿmatallah's claims in this document. It does seem to correspond to an episode described more vaguely in Santoro's autobiography: 'It also happened to me at that time, that having come to Rome, the patriarch of Antioch, received by me with all humanity and charity...suddenly turned against me, saying many lies to the lord cardinal of Medici, to whom he adhered; and having intercepted some of his letters, I showed them to the pope, recommending again and more warmly the said patriarch, so that it would not appear that I had retained anger against him and that I wanted to avenge myself.'[34] There is no evidence that Santoro fell out of favour dramatically with the pope, which may suggest that Niʿmatallah is exaggerating the scale of the change, but his words do seem to correspond to an increased influence in the protectorate of the eastern Christians for the Cardinals Medici and Como: the role of Medici is attested by his close relationship with Niʿmatallah,

and that of Como in a damaged entry in Santoro's notes of his audiences which reports: 'That not... [damage] but that I must make it understood; first it was replied that had been done by the Lord Cardinal of Como'.[35] Whatever the precise details of this conflict, the Syriac document attests to Niʿmatallah's engagement with the Coptic patriarch and to his uncertain position as a useful but mistrusted mediator between the Romans and other Christian groups. Niʿmatallah is revealed as a figure who, despite the suspicions which his behaviour provoked, managed to exploit his exceptional position to achieve continued importance: the Romans relied on him as someone with connections to various eastern Christian churches, while the distant members of these churches saw him as a well-informed contact who had influence with the papacy.

Niʿmatallah's contacts with other eastern Christians during his time in Rome were not confined to the West Syrian, Coptic or Ethiopian churches, nor to contacts conducted at a distance via letters. He also had contacts with members of the Armenian, Chaldean, and East Syrian churches. Niʿmatallah's interactions with an Armenian bishop are referred to in an admittedly hostile report by Cardinal Santoro, which speaks 'of the other Armenian bishop who came last summer to give obedience to His Holiness, and then, led astray by the Patriarch of Antioch who is in Rome, abandoned the expedition and left, as if the air did not agree with him'.[36] If Santoro's report is to be believed, it shows not only that Niʿmatallah interacted with an Armenian visitor to Rome, but that his own reservations about the Catholic church led him to discourage another potential uniate; thus the connections between different eastern Christians could prove decisive in determining the course of negotiations about union. It is not perhaps surprising that Niʿmatallah should have met with an Armenian bishop, since the Armenian church was also Miaphysite and therefore similar doctrinally to the West Syrian church.[37] In contrast, the Chaldeans and East Syrians historically professed very different beliefs and have been seen as rivals of the West Syrians. Yet Santoro also reports that Niʿmatallah received letters from traditionalist East Syrians—those who continued to adhere to 'Nestorianism'—: the record of one of his audiences notes 'of the letters written by certain Nestorians to the new patriarch of Antioch who is here....the schismatic Patriarch of the Nestorians that they want to come to negotiate against the obedient one [i.e. the Chaldean patriarch]'.[38] It is extremely striking that East Syrians were apparently writing to a West

Syrian bishop in Rome to explain that they wanted to contend against their Chaldean rivals. This suggests that, rather than avoiding the West Syrian church as a heretical opponent, they believed that Niʿmatallah could act as a valuable mediator on their behalf. Doctrinal differences, in this context at least, seem less important than shared linguistic and cultural background, and the desire to exploit Niʿmatallah's connections in achieving their political goals.

Niʿmatallah's efforts to influence Chaldean visitors to Rome are attested much more directly, in an important pair of fragmentary Syriac letters exchanged between Niʿmatallah and Eliya bar Asmar Habib, a Chaldean bishop and envoy of the Chaldean patriarch to Rome.[39] In his letter, Niʿmatallah urges Eliya not to trust anyone apart from him in Rome:

> 'On this account I ask you most earnestly and fervently to be discreet and careful not to disclose any of your secrets to anyone, and definitely not converse with anyone, nor give credence to anyone; you will [not] have a place to stay, or a residence, except in my house—it and its owner are indeed at your full disposal—even if someone invites you, besides us. I warn you all the more in this regard, because you are not familiar with the habits of the people here and their nature.'[40]

He continues to claim that the Pope had himself told Niʿmatallah to provide accommodation for Eliya in his own house—a seemingly false claim, as Santoro's audience notes record that he had successfully persuaded the pope that Eliya should stay with him, despite Eliya's expressed desire to stay with Niʿmatallah.[41] This vividly attests to Syriac Christian cross-confessional interactions in Italy, as well as to Niʿmatallah's intense interests in the affairs of other churches: he clearly hopes to control Eliya's stay in Rome as closely as possible.[42] He seems to play on his and Eliya's common background (presumably as Christians from the Ottoman east), contrasting their implicit closeness with the unfamiliar habits and behaviour of 'the people here'. Interactions thus seem to have been a two-way street: eastern Christians new to Rome or writing from Mesopotamia hoped to benefit from Niʿmatallah's relative closeness to the papal circle, but Niʿmatallah himself attempted to use this position of influence to exert control over the other eastern Christians, perhaps in part in an attempt to maintain his position as the dominant

contact between eastern Christians and the papacy, and thus to ensure ongoing prominence in Rome despite his personal tensions with figures like Santoro.

His letters exchanged with Eliya confirm the impression given by Sulaqa's letter to the Maronite bishop that members of different eastern Christian confessions, with historically different beliefs, interacted closely in Rome. But were these interactions an exceptional product of the situation in Rome, as eastern Christians travelled far from their homelands into a city where they spoke little of the language and were often received with some suspicion, and therefore turned to each other for guidance and support? Or, rather, did they reflect the norm within the Ottoman empire, a norm of widespread interaction which is occluded by the nature of the sources surviving from the Middle East? It certainly seems possible that the situation in Rome intensified contacts. The prominence of a small number of eastern Christians who had access to the pope, most notably Niʿmatallah, must have encouraged members of other confessions to turn to them in the hope of exploiting their connections. A shortage of Arabic speakers must have stimulated new relationships, as did a lack of churches with eastern Christian liturgies. The Ethiopian monastery of Santo Stefano seems to have acted as a hub for Miaphysite visitors of not only African but also West Syrian and Armenian backgrounds to Rome; the West Syrian Moses of Mardin, for example, copied there a manuscript for an Ethiopian bishop; Niʿmatallah also wrote letters from there to the Ethiopian rulers.[43] The ways in which Catholics organised their relations with the eastern Christians—for instance, appointing the same 'protectors' for the different eastern Christian churches—is likely to have encouraged interactions. Even the problem of transport to Rome could bring different confessions together: the papal envoy Leonard Abel, who visited various communities during his trip to the Middle East in the 1580s, reported that he had recommended the same Venetian boat to the envoys of both the traditionalist East Syrians and of their Chaldean rivals.[44]

Contacts within the Ottoman Empire

None the less, enough material survives from the Roman archives to suggest that these interactions within Rome were in fact representative of broader patterns of communication within the Ottoman empire. This is indicated by the exchange of letters between Niʿmatallah and the Chaldean Eliya bar

Asmar Habib, which happened before Eliya had reached Rome. In Eliya's letter to Niʿmatallah, written from Venice, he brings news of Niʿmatallah's brother Dawudshah the patriarch: 'You must also know, father, if you were to ask about my brother, the patriarch Dawudshah and the others, they are in good cheer.'[45] He refers to Dawudshah as his own brother in a rhetorical expression of friendship, and claims to have knowledge of his well-being, which suggests that the Chaldeans and the West Syrians were in contact within their homelands.

This is confirmed by an exceptional document preserved in the Jesuit archives in Rome. The text is a report written in Italian by Niʿmatallah for the papacy about the East Syrian and Chaldean churches.[46] He begins by writing that it did not seem right for him to conceal his knowledge about the 'Nestorian' church, since this knowledge could help the papacy in their negotiations for union. He then gives some brief context on the origins of the East Syrian church before describing the schism of 1552 and the election of Yohannan Sulaqa. He recounts Sulaqa's journey to Rome, return to Mesopotamia, and death. Until this point, his narrative is all in the third person. But soon he himself becomes involved in the narration. He reports that after Sulaqa's death, his successor Abdisho of Gazarta, fearing

> lest the same should happen to him, came to me as a person much favoured by the Turk, and they did not dare to annoy those who had come under my protection, and he told me all the past business, praying to me that I should help him. So I recommended him to the Christians of my nation, which was in Aleppo, so that they would support him to the consul, so that he would be able to come in Christendom to your Holiness; they acted as I had ordered them. And thus he came to Rome in the time of good memory of Pius IV, and was received honourably; and was made Patriarch...in place of Sulaqa. With many honours and presents [Abdisho] went to Constantinople to obtain some safe conduct from the Great Turk by means of the ambassador of the Venetians, so that he could return safely to his country, and from there he came again to me in Amida [Diyarbakır]"

Niʿmatallah continues to state that in Amida the two factions of the East Syrian community (Abdisho's Chaldeans and the traditionalist supporters of the old patriarch Bar Mama) quarrelled about who was the legitimate patriarch,

> And while they persisted in these disagreements, they resolved to come to accept my sentence. I urged them they should accept Abdisho who had come to this dignity canonically and that they should not follow the other who had come through the *via hereditaria*, which is against the canons. But these [latter] did not want to accept my sentence, wherefore Abdisho was forced to retreat into a monastery of St. Jacob with much sadness and trouble, where, within a year, he died, as all those of that land testify.[47]

Niʿmatallah claims both that Abdisho turned to him for support against possible Ottoman oppression, and that both the Chaldeans and the traditionalists appealed to him for mediation in their rivalry, although the 'traditionalists' rejected his judgement. If true, this shows significant interaction and co-operation between the upper echelons of different Syriac churches, in the context of the destabilisation of hierarchies provoked by contacts with Catholicism. It is possible that Niʿmatallah exaggerated his involvement (and his support for patriarchal election by the papacy) in order to impress the Romans, to consolidate his position as their main negotiator with the other churches, and to further his main argument in the document, which relates to a dispute over the legitimacy of a Chaldean bishop in India. But several parts of the document ring true. Some West Syrian bishops did have close relationships with Ottoman officials: Leonard Abel, for example, rebuked the bishop and patriarchal vicar Toma (Niʿmatallah's brother) for claiming that his fear of the Ottomans made negotiating union difficult, pointing out 'he was not afraid of the officials of the Turk [Sultan], being their doctor, friend and favourite, and powerful to the point of saving him and us from all persecution'.[48] There were powerful and well-connected West Syrians in Aleppo, including the deacon Safar b. Manṣūr, whom Abel described as 'one of the first men of this Jacobite nation and also of the other Christian nations of Aleppo...he holds in contract the customs and mint of Aleppo; and is very esteemed of the officials of the Turk'.[49] There is little evidence of similarly well-connected East Syrians or Chaldeans, so obtaining West Syrian support might well have helped the position of Abdisho and his bishops. What is more, as

we have seen, both the Chaldeans and the traditionalist 'Nestorians' did write to Niʿmatallah when he was in Rome, and, in the latter case, did mention their dispute with the Chaldeans as if they trusted Niʿmatallah to raise this question with the papacy. It seems highly likely that his claims reflect a reality of intercommunications between these ecclesiastical elites, intercommunication encouraged by their shared position as Christians in a Muslim-dominated Ottoman society.

This may in fact be reflected in some of the literary material produced in the middle east itself. As noted above, there was relatively little Syriac literature produced in this period; most new compositions were in hymnographic genres which typically provide scant historical information. Nonetheless, a few exceptional texts may point to Chaldean-West Syrian interactions. The second Chaldean patriarch Abdisho of Gazarta, whom Niʿmatallah claimed had turned to him for help, was a prolific author and scribe. His compositions included three poems about the Chaldean schism of 1552 and Yohannan Sulaqa's journey to Rome.[50] In these, however, his focus is on his own community. Yet other, shorter and more obscure, poems survive attributed to him which attest to his positive relationship with some West Syrians. One poem attributed to Abdisho in a manuscript preserved in the Chaldean Cathedral in Mardin consists of praise for an unspecified cleric, seemingly upon the day of his appointment to high office.[51] It is a double acrostic poem and one side of the acrostic reads 'Our Father Lord Basileos'[52]; Basileos is the traditional name adopted by the 'maphrian', the second rank in the West Syrian ecclesiastical hierarchy. The next poem in the manuscript, also attributed to Abdisho, consists of a panegyric on the same maphrian being appointed patriarch.[53] The acrostic is again revealing: the initial letters on one side of the poem read 'Mar Ignatius the Great', and on the other side 'Patriarch of the West'.[54] All the West Syrian patriarchs from the fourteenth century onwards adopted Ignatius as their official patriarchal name. Unfortunately the highly laudatory poem is generic in contents with no specific references to tie it to a particular patriarch. It is quite possible, however, that it was written for Niʿmatallah's accession, as this happened in 1557, in the early years of Abdisho's patriarchate and shortly after he wrote his poems on Sulaqa. Viewed in the context of middle eastern literary production, this poem seemingly written about the patriarch from a rival line seems surprising, but it fits well into the context of inter-ecclesiastical contact and collaboration revealed by the Roman archival sources.

Two other poems from the same manuscript suggest that Abdisho had contacts with West Syrians beyond the patriarchs and maphrians. One lacks a caption but the scribe of the manuscript implies that the author is Abdisho.[55] It again addresses a West Syrian maphrian, who is furnished with many laudatory epithets. The poet asks the maphrian to transmit his greetings to various figures and groups, including 'the great, God-bearing shepherd, marvellous and wonderful patriarch Ignatius'[56] and the monks of the monasteries of Mar Hananyo, Mar Yaqub, and Mar Azazel. All of these are identifiable with monasteries in the Tur ʿAbdin region near Mardin, the heartland of West Syrian monasticism.[57] The poet speaks of several of the monks as if they are close personal acquaintances; he refers to 'our friend, our companion, Rabban [master] Thomas'[58]; to 'our friend and beloved Rabban Hana'[59], and to 'the two brothers...Joshua and Daniel, young monks, that is novices, who served Our Weakness with fitting order'.[60] Most of these figures cannot be identified, but it seems very likely that they are all West Syrians; the poet, an outsider to their church, asks the maphrian to transmit his greetings to members of his religious community. Another poem from this manuscript, also seemingly attributed to Abdisho, is dedicated to the praise of the brethren of the Monastery of Mar Yaqub the Recluse—probably the same West Syrian monastery from the Tur Abdin mentioned in the previous poem.[61] This again suggests a personal relationship between the author and the brethren of the monastery of Mar Yaqub; the poet speaks of breathing in sorrow and sucking in wormwood when separated from them.

Abdisho's authorship of these poems cannot be proven with certainty. But his relationship with West Syrian monks is confirmed very strikingly in a manuscript colophon which has recently been discussed by Anton Pritula.[62] The manuscript consists in large part of a treatise on grammar by the medieval West Syrian patriarch Bar Hebraeus, whose works circulated widely in both West and East Syrian circles.[63] In the colophon, Abdisho identifies himself as the scribe of the manuscript. He records that he copied it in August 1552 in the monastery of Mary and of Mar Yaqub, in Mardin; he lists several neighbouring monasteries, including Deyrulzaferan. The manuscript was thus copied in the same West Syrian monastery of Mar Yaqub the Recluse referred to in the poems attributed to Abdisho. Abdisho writes that he copied the manuscript 'in the days of the righteous and excellent pastors...Mar Ignatius the Patriarch and Mar Basil, maphrian of the East'— that is, in the days of the West Syrian patriarch and

Maphrian.[64] It was very common for scribes writing in Syriac to give in the colophon the name of the reigning patriarch of the day from their own ecclesiastical hierarchy; but it is very unusual and striking that Abdisho here names not the East Syrian or Chaldean patriarch of the day, but the leaders of the 'rival' West Syrian church.[65] Abdisho also names several monks who helped him in copying the manuscript, who are likely to be West Syrian monks active in the monasteries mentioned; he gives particular thanks to one Niʿmah who drew the red lines on the manuscript pages outlining the text. Pritula has suggested that this could well be Ignatius Niʿmatallah himself, which seems plausible, if not certain. In any case, this colophon certainly attests to Abdisho's respect for the West Syrian hierarchy and to his presence in a West Syrian monastery. The evidence of collaboration on a manuscript seems to suggest that contacts stretched beyond high-level political interactions towards more everyday interaction and collaboration in the sphere of scholarship. A note of caution must be struck, however; Abdisho copied this manuscript in the year of the Chaldean schism, 1552, in August, after the break from Shemʿon Bar Mama but before Sulaqa had been confirmed in his position by the pope. It is not implausible that Abdisho could have sought support from the West Syrian monks at this period of instability for his own church; certainly it may foreshadow the later assistance which he apparently received from Niʿmatallah. None the less, the evidence of scholarly collaboration is indicative of the kinds of mutual interests and shared cultural ties which must have encouraged and enabled political interactions.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find much supplementary evidence from the middle east to round out this picture of interaction—and to establish what limitations it possessed. Most evidence relates to Ignatius Niʿmatallah and Abdisho; they may have had an exceptional relationship, but since they were the most prolific authors of the day from their respective church traditions it is equally possible that other comparable relationships existed but have been lost to posterity. A few fragments do survive to show other forms of contact. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem formed one arena for interaction.[66] A note in a manuscript in Mardin records that several East Syrian pilgrims visited Jerusalem in 1539. In Jerusalem, the note recounts, 'we easterners, [namely] the Nestorians [East Syrians] and Jacobites [West Syrians] and Armenians and Ethiopians and Maronites, celebrated with each other, and the westerners, [namely]

the Melkites and the Egyptians and the Franks and the Georgians celebrated with each other.'[67] The author distinguishes between two broader groups based on loose geographical ties, east and west, rather than on strictly doctrinal lines: the East Syrians could celebrate festivals with members of diametrically opposed Christological groups, such as the Miaphysite West Syrians, Armenians and Ethiopians. A note in a different manuscript by the most prolific sixteenth-century East Syrian scribe, Ataya son of Faraj, records the names of the members of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1572/1573. After listing the East Syrian participants, he notes that 'Isho, son of the priest Salman, a Jacobite from Gazarta, also came with us'.[68] These examples of pilgrimages to Jerusalem, with no direct link to Rome or Catholic involvement, show that contacts were not only the result of the turn to Catholicism and the recalibration of hierarchies which this entailed. The exceptional significance of Jerusalem to Christianity, as well as, perhaps, the difficulties of visiting it in an Ottoman context, encouraged interactions. None of this is to claim that there was no hostility between the Syriac churches, but it is to suggest that this was only part of the story. Different aspects of their identities and of their social-political situation, such as geographical ties, shared language use, and their position as Christians in a Muslim-ruled empire, took precedence over doctrinal differences in many contexts.[69] Certainly their histories cannot be studied with confidence in complete isolation from each other.

Conclusion

Although they are limited in number, Italian archival sources on the Syriac churches in the sixteenth century have the potential to alter radically scholarly understandings of these churches, their interactions, and their historical development. They show clear evidence of interaction and co-operation between members of the ecclesiastical hierarchies of eastern Christian churches of very different theological positions. Fragmentary evidence from the Middle East confirms these interactions also took place in Mesopotamia, in the eastern Christian churches' homeland; they were not entirely a result of the unique situation in Rome. Various forms of interaction have appeared in the sources. Some were the product of exceptional circumstances: thus the Chaldean patriarch appealed for help to the Syrian Orthodox patriarch in a time of great instability for his church, after the previous patriarch had been put to death by local officials. Renewed contacts with the Catholic church clearly encouraged and intensified interactions, not only because they created new fora for communication, but also because they destabilised the existing hierarchies in the region and created new rivalries and tensions, most significantly, in this period, between the new Chaldean hierarchy and its traditionalist opponents. None the less, there is no reason to think that Catholicism created these networks, and we find occasional glimpses of interactions which have no direct relation to Catholicism. East Syrian and West Syrian pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem together, suggesting that external danger, the difficulties of travelling from Mesopotamia to the Holy Land, as well as shared Christian interest in Jerusalem, could encourage cross-confessional collaboration. Collaborations also existed in manuscript culture: a Chaldean bishop and West Syrian monks worked together on a grammatical treatise. A Chaldean bishop also wrote highly stylised poems in Classical Syriac in honour of West Syrian acquaintances. These examples highlight the importance of language and shared cultural heritage as a crucial bond that provided the foundation for these collaborations.

This evidence for cross-communal interaction has ramifications for our understanding of several key topics. First, scholarly approaches to the eastern Christian churches themselves needs rethinking. The churches cannot be studied in isolation, as if their different histories had no effects on each other. Even at the level of high political events, it seems that there was more cross-confessional interaction than has

sometimes been recognised. This interaction helps to embed the history of the Syriac churches within the broader regional and international histories of the Ottoman Empire and the Counter Reformation. The evidence for connections between the churches lends strength to the field of 'Syriac Christianity'; it shows that the languages shared by these churches did matter, and that their shared cultural heritage did have tangible results on their members' behaviour in the early modern period. More broadly, it encourages a rethinking of the nature of eastern Christian religious belonging and identities. Doctrines were not necessarily crucial to eastern Christian self-understanding; some eastern Christians had a relatively ecumenical attitude to other confessions, and some aspects of their church traditions — particularly belief in individual saints—may have been more fundamental to their identities, and less open to transformation, than others.[70] This undoubtedly affected their response to Catholicism as well as to the other Syriac churches. It is important to keep thinking about what mattered to eastern Christians in different contexts. How, for instance, is it possible to reconcile Abdisho of Gazarta owning several books 'against the Jacobites [West Syrians]', as his own list of his books reveals, with his also owning and copying treatises written by West Syrians, himself writing poems in honour of West Syrian monks and bishops, and apparently enjoying personal relationships with several West Syrian clerics?[71] While it may have been important for East Syrian theologians and clerics to distinguish themselves from other eastern confessions and to demonstrate their Christological superiority, this evidently did not entail straightforward rivalry between the groups, and did not preclude common interests in the fields of grammar, literature, and even ecclesiastical politics. Recognising interaction between confessions thus paves the way for scholars to refine understandings of eastern Christian religious identities. While article has focused on evidence for connections, it is of course also important to consider the contexts in which doctrinal differences did continue to matter, and to explain these rather than taking hostility for granted.

Secondly, from an Ottoman perspective, the Syriac Christian churches provide an opportunity to move beyond traditional models of powerless 'dhimmis' to investigate how members of non-Muslim communities operated in an Ottoman-ruled environment. Although Ottomanists have devoted considerable attention to some non-Muslim communities in the empire, Syriac Christians have been

largely neglected, even though they provide a good case study for examining communities in the diverse frontier provinces of eastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia.[72] Sulaqa relied on the Venetian consul in Aleppo for support in petitioning the sultan for a letter of protection;[73] Abdisho of Gazarta turned to the leader of another, better connected, Syriac Christian church for support from the Ottomans. Networks of support and patronage help to explain how these members of politically marginal communities living on the frontiers of empire could none the less attempt to achieve some degree of influence or at least protection. The fragility of these transactions is also apparent; the letter from the sultan did not prevent Sulaqa from being put to death by the local authorities a few years later. More broadly, it is possible that the Ottoman conquest of the Middle East affected relations between the West and East Syrian communities: did the balance of power among eastern confessions, for instance, shift towards the West Syrian church due to their greater prominence in more westerly cities and centres such as Aleppo and therefore their lay nobles' greater access to political power? This would help to explain Abdisho and the Chaldeans' turn towards the West Syrians for the support. In some ways, certainly, the Ottoman expansion helped to reintegrate the Mesopotamian Christians into transregional and global networks; travel to Jerusalem (and thence to Rome) was facilitated by their incorporation into the empire.[74]

Finally, these findings have implications for scholars of Counter-Reformation Catholicism. The Syriac Christians provide a useful case study for historians of the Catholic expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries since, unlike in many other examples, scholars do have some, albeit scarce, extent material written by the Syriac Christians themselves in 'indigenous' languages rather than being fully reliant on material produced by and for western Catholics.[75] The evidence for interactions between eastern Christian communities affects our understanding of both the processes and the effects of relationships with the western Church. At a broad level, we can trace the destabilising effects of contacts with Catholicism on local hierarchies. We also see that the Syriac Christians were used to interactions with churches of somewhat different doctrinal positions, and to finding common ground to achieve political goals without yielding their particular religious positions. More particularly, we can see how especially in the early stages of contacts with Catholicism, individuals such as Niʿmatallah became extremely influential mediators between eastern and western communities, taking advantage of the

needs of both sides for contact and communication. It may not be possible fully to explain the relationship of any one church with the Catholic Church without relating this to its negotiations, successful or otherwise, with other churches. No scholarly consensus has been reached, for example, on why the Chaldeans chose in 1552 to elect Sulaqa as a new patriarch and send him to Rome for confirmation.[76] It is important to remember, however, that this was only about three years after the first envoys had come from the West Syrian patriarch Ignatius Abdallah to Rome. 1552 was also the year that Sulaqa's supporter Abdisho of Gazarta copied a manuscript in a West Syrian monastery with the help of West Syrian monks. Were the Chaldeans in part inspired by the West Syrians, either in rivalry or from positive information received about Rome, to turn to the papacy for support? Only by considering relationships, networks and information-sharing between these eastern Christian groups can scholars hope fully to understand how the Catholic church expanded, falteringly but ultimately successfully, into the eastern Christian communities of Mesopotamia—or, from the other side, why these historically independent churches, which had survived centuries of adverse political circumstances, slowly began to fragment into independent and Catholic parties, a process which permanently changed the face of Christianity in the Middle East.

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[2] G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their rituals: with the narrative of a mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-44, and of a late visit to those countries in 1850*, London 1852, volume I, 296-8. On Badger's mission see J. F. Coakley, *The Church of the East and the Church of England: a history of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian mission,* Oxford 1992, 35-53.

[3] ibid. 298; the quotation is from E. Gibbon, *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 47.

[4] On the long-term history of the Church of the East, see W. Baum and D. W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: a concise history*, London 2003, and D. Wilmshurst, *The martyred church: a history of the Church of the East*, London 2011.

[5] Important recent studies on religious identity formation in the early medieval Middle East include P. Wood, *'We have no king but Christ': Christian political thought in greater Syria on the eve of the Arab conquest (c.400-585)*, Oxford 2010, and J. Tannous, *The making of the medieval Middle East: religion, society, and simple believers*, Princeton 2018.

[6] Heyberger explicitly challenges the 'confessional' approach to eastern Christian churches in 'Pour une "histoire croisée" de l'occidentalisation et de la confessionnalisation chez les chrétiens du Proche-Orient', *The MIT-Electronic Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* iii (2003), 36-49, at 37-8. His cross-confessional approach is demonstrated in his ground-breaking study, *Les chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles),* Rome 1994.

[7] D. Wilmshurst, *The ecclesiastical organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913,* Leuven 2000; H. Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and scriptures: the Church of the East in the eastern Ottoman provinces (1500-1850),* Leuven 2015.

[8] A recent, brief but important, exception to this tendency to discuss the churches in isolation is A. Pritula, 'Abdīšō' of Gāzartā, patriarch of the Chaldean Church as a scribe', *Scrinium,* 15 no.1 (2019): 297-320, at 305-10.

[9] A recent study of the West Syrian church based on late Ottoman archival documents is K. S. Dinno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the late Ottoman period and beyond: crisis then revival,* Piscataway, NJ 2017.

[10] There is no general study of late Syriac literary production, although there is a useful summary table of East Syrian and Chaldean writers active in this period in Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures,* Appendix C, 317-56. The dearth of new writing in this period has sometimes been exaggerated, as in Duval's study of Syriac literature, which contains the subheading 'The thirteenth century and the end of Syriac literature': R. Duval, *Syriac literature,* Piscataway, NJ 2013, translated by O. Holmey from the French third edition of 1907, *La Littérature syriaque.*

[11] Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures,* 39.

[12] As signalled by the papers at a workshop held in Oxford in July 2017 entitled 'Towards a New History of Christians and Jews in Ottoman Society'; a conference report by John-Paul Ghobrial appeared in the *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association,* 4.2 (November 2017), 419-23.

[13] The literature on early modern Catholic missions is considerable; see for an important recent collection of essays, R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed), *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions,* Leiden, 2018. On the potential of eastern Christian sources for this discussion, see also L. Parker, 'The ambiguities of belief and belonging: Catholicism and the Church of the East in the sixteenth century', *The English Historical Review,* 133, 1420-45, esp. 1423-4.

[14] On the origins of West Syrian theology, see for example. A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian tradition,* vol.2 part. 2, London 1995, 19-178. Fundamental on East Syrian theology are the first three articles in S. Brock, *Fire from heaven: studies in Syriac theology and liturgy,* Aldershot 2006, and idem, 'The Christology of the Church of the East in the synods of the sifth to early seventh centuries: preliminary considerations and materials', in G. Dragas (ed.), *Aksum-Thyateira: a festschrift for Archbishop Methodios,* London 1985, 125-42.

[15] On West Syrians in sixteenth-century Rome, see P. G. Borbone, 'From Tur 'Abdin to Rome: the Syro-Orthodox presence in sixteenth-century Rome', in H. Teule and others (eds.), *Syriac in its multi-cultural context,* Leuven 2017, 277-87. On the negotiations over union between the Catholics and the Syrian Orthodox, see G. Levi Della Vida, *Documenti intorno alle relazioni delle chiese orientali con la S.Sede durante il pontificato di Gregorio XIII,* Vatican City 1948, esp. 1-41.

[16] On these events, see J. Habbi, 'Signification de l'union chaldéene de Mar Sulaqa avec Rome en 1553', *L'Orient Syrien* xi (1966), 99-132, 199-230, at 104-15; Murre van-den Berg, *Scribes and scriptures,* 44-54. Many Roman sources relating to these events have been published by S. Giamil, *Genuinae relationes inter sedem apostolicam et Assyriorum orientalium seu Chaldaeorum ecclesiam,* Rome 1902, and G. Beltrami, *La chiesa caldea nel secolo dell'unione,* Rome, 1933.

[17] Eliya VI's letter and profession are edited in Giamil, *Genuine relationes,* 492-510.

[18] The letter is edited in Beltrami, *Chiesa caldea,* 148; see also Parker, 'Ambiguities of belief and belonging', 32.

[19] On Ni'matallah the foundational work remains Levi Della Vida, *Documenti.* More recently Pier Giorgio Borbone and Margerita Farina have done crucial work on manuscripts and documents relating to Ni'matallah from Florence. See especially P. G. Borbone, 'Syriac and *Garšūnī* manuscripts produced in Rome in the collection of the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 13 (2013), 29-44.

[20] See the report of Leonard Abel: Vatican Secret Archives, ASV, AA.Arm.I-XVIII, 3095, fos 3r, 6r; and below note 48.

[21] Levi Della Vida, *Documenti,* esp.1-41.

[22] His report on his mission survives in the Vatican Secret Archives, ASV, AA.Arm.I-XVIII, 3095.

[23] See for example the letter from patriarch Dawudshah to Gregory XIII published in Levi Della Vida, *Documenti,* 103-111; on p.109 he states that nothing can be done without the agreement of 'our brothers', the Copts and Abyssinians.

[24] See the documents edited in C. Beccari, *Rerum Aethopicarum Scriptores Occidentales* 10, Rome, 1910, pp.300, 302, and especially document 103, pp.309-20, and 104, pp.320-2; On Roman relations with the

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Ethiopians, see also R. Lefevre, ‘Riflessi etiopici nella cultura europea,’ Part 3, in *Annali Lataranensi* 11 (1947), 255-342, including, on Niʿmatallah, 317-20; Levi Della Vida, *Documenti*, 26.

[25] Levi Della Vida, *Documenti,* 22.

[26] His records relating to eastern Christians have been edited by J. Krajcar, *Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro and the Christian East. Santoro's audiences and consistorial acts,* Rome 1966.

[27] ibid. 64.

[28] The document is contained in the manuscript Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Or.458. The manuscript does not have visible folio numbers in its online version; the document analysed here is available at http://teca.bmlonline.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=TECA0001474577&keyworks=or.458#page/884/mode/1up (accessed 17 Feb. 2019). All subsequent references to the text come from this page.

[29] ܒ ܘܠܐܘܡܢ

[30] ܠܐܚܐ ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܕܝܠܟ

[31] ܘܗ ܗܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܒ ܘܡܕܘܢ ܡܠܟܐ ܠܐܘܪܚܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܗܘ ܪܒܐ ܗܘܐ ܒ ܠܡܠܬܐ

[32] ܡܢ ܚܕ ܡܬܪܘܢ ܕܒܬܠ ܠܟܠ ܕܒܬܠ ܡܬܩܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܟܣܝܘ ܕܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܢܟܠܐ ܠܬܪܘܢ ܒܢܘܗܝ ܗܘ

[33] ܒ ܘܡܫܝܚܝܐ ܘܠܐܬܘܦܩܝܐ

[34] M'occorse anco in questo tempo, ch'essendo venuto in Roma il patriarcha d'Antiochia, ricevuto da me con ogni humanità e carità... in un tratto mi si voltò contra, con dire molte buggie al signor cardinale de'Medici, a cui s'era adherito, et essendo state intercette alcune sue lettere, le mostrai al papa, raccomandandoli di nuovo e più caldamente detto patriarcha, acciò non paresse ch'io ritenessi sdegno contra di lui et che mi volessi vendicare: edited by G. Cugnoni, ‘Autobiographia di Monsignor G. Antonio Santori, Cardinale di S. Severina', *Archivio della Reale Società di Storia Patria,* 12 (1889), 153-4.

[35] ‘Che non lo....<..> ma ch'io dovevo farlo intendere; prima fu risposto che si era fatto per il Signore Cardinale di Como', ed. Krajcar, *Cardinal Santoro,* 67.

[36] Dell'altro Vescovo armeno che venne l'estate passata per dare obedientia a Sua Santita, et poi disviato dal Patriarcha d'Antiochia ch'è in Roma, lasciata la speditione si parti, come che l'aria non li faceva: 20 March 1586, ed. Krajcar, *Cardinal Santoro,* 91.

[37] Leonard Abel reports that the West Syrians considered only themselves, the Copts, Ethiopians and Armenians to be orthodox: ASV, AA.Arm.I-XVIII, 3095, f.10r. On the early modern Armenian church and its contacts with Catholicism, see S. Cowe, ‘Church and diaspora: the case of the Armenians', in M. Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Christianity volume 5: Eastern Christianity,* Cambridge 2006, 430-45, at 430-43.

[38] Delle lettere scritte da certi Nestoriani al nuovo Patriarcha d'Antiochia ch'è qui...il Patriarcha scismatico di Nestoriani che vorrebbono venire a trattare contro l'obediente: ed. Krajcar, *Cardinal Santoro,* 49-50.

[39] They are published and translated in P. G. Borbone and M. Farina, ‘New documents concerning Patriarch Ignatius Naʿmatallah (Mardin, c.1515-Bracciano, near Rome, 1587)', *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* xxxvii (2014), 179-89.

[40] ܘܡܛܠ ܗܕܐ ܟܠ ܐܢܐ ܠܟ ، ܦܛܪܝܪܟܐ ܘܡܝܛܪܦܘܠܝܛܐ ܘܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܐ ܘܠܐ ܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܡܢ ܐܪܬܕܘܟܣܐ ܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܠܐܢܫ ܟܕ ܐܢܐ ܐܘ ܠܡܪܗ ܠܐܢܫ ܐܘ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܟܘ ܕܩܢܐ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܘ ܟܠܗ ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܐܠܐ ܟܕ ܟܢܫܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܘܐܬܟܢܫܘ ܗܘ ܡܫܝܚ ܕܫܪܝܪ ܘܐܦܢ ܢܥܒܕ ܐܢܫ ܗܟܢ ܡܢ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܡܬܟܢܫ ܡܕܡ ܐܢܐ ܟܕ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܩܒܠ ܐܢܐ ܚܬܡܢ: ܚܬܡ ܗܘ ܐܠܐ ܠܡܨܡܘܗܝ. ibid. 182. I have made minor alterations to Borbone and Farina's translation.

[41] Audience notes from 12 January 1581 and 26 January 1581, ed. Krajcar, 37-8; Borbone and Farina, ‘New documents', 183. Borbone notes that Krajcar has mistranscribed the date of this record.

[42] As noted by Borbone and Farina, ‘New documents', 183.

[43] Moses' manuscript is now in the British Library: W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac manuscripts of the British Museum acquired since the year 1838, Part 1,* London 1870, MS 283 (Harley 5512), pp.214-6. For Niʿmatallah's letter, see Lefevre, *Reflessi Etiopici,* 320. Sam Kennerley's recent work on Ethiopians in early modern Rome has revealed the presence of other Miaphysites, including Armenians, at the monastery: his paper delivered on this topic at St Andrews in June 2017 will be published in a volume with Brill edited by Emily Michelson.

[44] ASV AA.Arm.I-XVIII, 3095, fos 13v, 14v.

[45] ܘܟܠܗ: ܕܝܢ ܐܚܘܗܝ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ، ܘܡܛܠ ܗܕܐ ܐܢܬ ܡܢ ܐܚܝ ܦܛܪܝܪܟܐ ܕܡܨܪܝܢ ܘܐܬܝܘܦܝܐ ܒܥܕܬܐ ܐܪܬܘܕܘܟܣܝܬܐ: ed. and trans. Borbone and Farina, ‘New documents', 185-6.

[46] The document is printed in J. Wicki, *Documenta Indica,* XI: *1577-1580,* Rome 1970, Appendix 4, 864-8.

[47] My translation from the Italian text published in ibid. 866-7.

[48] No[n] haveva paura delli officiali del Turcho, essendo egli loro medico amico, e favorito, e potente à liberare se stesso, e noi da ogni persecutione: ASV, A.A.Arm.I-XVIII, 3095, fo.6r.

[49] delli primi di questa natione Giacobita, et anco delle altre nationi christiane di Aleppo...tiene in appalto la dogana, e la zeccha di Aleppo, et è molto stimato appresso li officiali del Turco': ibid. fo.8v.

[50] These poems are translated into French in J-M. Vosté, ‘Mar Ioḥannan Soulaqa: premier patriarche des Chaldéens, martyr de l'union avec Rome (†1555)', *Angelicum* viii (1931), 187-234.

[51] The manuscript is available online through the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, with the project number CCM 00398. This poem is on fos 248r-v. On these poems see also Pritula, ‘ʿAbdīšōʿ of Gāzartā', 310.

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[52] ܢܒܘܝ ܡܪܝ ܒܫܠܝܘܗ ibid.

[53] ibid. fo.248v.

[54] ܡܪܝ. ܥܒܕܝܫܘܥ ܪܒܐ ܡܝܛܪܦܘܠܝܛܐ ܕܡܥܪܒܐ. ibid. fos 248v-249r.

[55] The next poem is captioned ‘another by the same Mar Abdisho’; suggesting that the anonymous text was also written by Abdisho. The poem is in a similar style to Abdisho’s other works.

[56] ܢܟܝܢܐ ܪܒܐ ܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܘܗ. ܡܝܛܪܦܘܠܝܛܐ ܐܡܝܕܐ ܕܡܥܪܐ ܥܒܕܝܫܘܥܘܗ CCM 00398, fo.247r.

[57] The monastery of Mar Hananyo is the official name of the monastery better known as Deyrulzaferan (monastery of Saffron), seat of the West Syrian patriarchate throughout much of its history; the monastery of Mar Azazel is in the village of Kafarze; and while there are many monasteries ‘of Mar Yaqub’ from context this probably refers to the monastery of Mar Yaqub the Recluse in Salah. On the Tur ʿAbdin, see for example A. Palmer, *Monk and mason on the Tigris frontier: the early history of Tur ʿAbdin*, Cambridge, 1990.

[58] ܒܪ ܚܘܒܝ ܘܒܪ ܚܣܝܢ ܪܒܝ ܐܘܓܢܐ. CCM 00398, fo.247r.

[59] ܪܚܘܡܝ ܕܦ ܡܫܝܚܝ ܪܒܝ ܚܢܐ ibid. fo.247v.

[60] ܗܪܟ ܢܫܝ...ܢܫܘܥ ܘܕܝܢܝܐܠ ܕܩܘܡܢܐ ܚܘܐ ܥܕܘܢܐ. ܕܠܡܫܝܚܘܗܝ ܥܡܥܘ ܕܒܚ̈ܫܐ ܠܡ ܘܠܝܬ̈ܐ܀ CCM 00398, fo. 248r.

[61] ibid. fos 249v-250r.

[62] Pritula, ‘ʿAbdīšōʿ of Gāzartā’, 305-10.

[63] The manuscript is available online via the Hill Museum Manuscript Library, number DCA 00065.

[64] ܫܠܡ ܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܦܘܩܠܛܐ. .... ܡܪܝ ܥܒܕܝܫܘܥ ܡܝܛܪܦܘܠܝܛܐ ܘܡܪܝ ܒܫܠܝܘܗ ܡܟܪܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ. ܢܐܡܝ ܘܐܡܝܢ ܚܘܪܫܘܗܝ ܠܟܘܟ ܢܘܩܕܐ. DCA 00065 Fo. 113v.

[65] On conventions for East Syrian colophons, see Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and scriptures,* 113-42.

[66] On East Syrian pilgrimage to Jerusalem in this period see S. Brock, ‘East Syriac pilgrims to Jerusalem in the early Ottoman period’, *ARAM* xviii (2006), 189-201; J. M. Fiey, ‘Le pélerinage des Nestoriens et Jacobites à Jerusalem’, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* xlvi (1969), 113-26.

[67] ܫܢܝ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܢܨܝܒܘܬܐ ܘܐܡܡܪܬܐ ܘܕܘܟܝܬܐ ܘܫܬܥܝܬܐ ܘܡܕܘܢܬܐ ܠܕܝܪܐ ܠܡ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܘܡܫܝܚܝܐ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܐܒܐܗ̈ܝܬܐ ܘܩܕ̈ܝܫܬܐ ܘܟܠܗܘܢ ܠܕܝܪܗ ܠܡ ܫܝܕܐ. Hill Museum Manuscript Library, project number CCM 00103. The note is on fo.1v.

[68] ܘܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܚܛܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܢܫܘܥ ܒܪ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܠܝܐ ܢܫܘܥܝܐ ܕܡܢ ܓܙܪܬܐ. A photograph of this note is provided in S. Fogg, *Manuscripts of the Christian East,* London 1996, 36. See Brock, ‘East Syrian pilgrims’, 194.

[69] On the interplay of different aspects of eastern Christian identities in an earlier period, see esp. Tannous, *Making of the Medieval Middle East,* 209-10 and passim.

[70] Parker, ‘Ambiguities of Belief and Belonging’.

[71] ܠܘܚܡܕ ܢܡܩ̈ܒܢ Abdisho wrote a list of the books he owned in a manuscript now preserved at St Mark’s Monastery Jerusalem, MS 116, fo. 139v.

[72] They barely feature, for instance, in the seminal collection edited by B. Braude and B. Lewis, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the Functioning of a Plural Society* (New York, 1982).

[73] Beltrami, *Chiesa caldea,* 148.

[74] Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures,* 30.

[75] Parker, ‘Ambiguities of Belief and Belonging’, 1423-4.

[76] A useful recent discussion of some possible causes is found in Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and scriptures,* 44-50.