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A Syrian Awakening Alqosh and Urmia as Centres of Neo-Syriac Writing

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the nineteenth century, European scholars gradually became aware of the fact that the Persian Church, the "Nestorian" Church of the East, was not dead, but still very much alive. And so was its literary tradition. Not only had Classical Syriac writing survived well into the nineteenth century, the activities of various missionary societies also brought to light the fact that a modern Aramaic, or "Neo-Syriac" language was in general use among the Christians of eastern Turkey and northwestern Iran. The activities of the missionaries among the Christians in Iran not only initiated a new interest in this ancient Christian people among westerners, but also played a significant role in the development of a new self-awareness among these Christians of Persia.

It is this Syrian "Awakening" which constitutes the starting point of the present article. However, a closer look at the history of these "East Syrian" or "Assyrian" Christians shows that the Awakening of the nineteenth century has an interesting precursor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Contrary to what most of the missionaries in the early nineteenth century thought, it was not in Urmia that the modern dialect was reduced to writing for the first time. This took place in Alqosh, in the late sixteenth century. There are several indications that the close connection between vernacular writing and general cultural awakening which I assume existed in the nineteenth century existed in the earlier period also.

In the following I will present the outlines of the developments in the two periods, starting from a description of what happened to vernacular writing and proceeding with the larger historical and cultural context.¹

¹ The first part of this article is based on as yet unpublished Ph.D. research; see Murre-van den Berg, *From a Spoken to a Written Language* (full references are given at the end of the article). The second part reflects the preliminaries to research into the Neo-Aramaic literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, now being executed in cooperation with A. Mengozzi, at Leiden University. Both research projects were made possible by subventions from the Foundation for Literary Studies, Musicology and Drama Research (LMT), part of the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

NINETEENTH-CENTURY URMIA

After 1836, when American Protestant missionaries, with the help of local Christians, had reduced the vernacular language to writing, it was the arrival of the printing press towards the end of the year 1840 which constituted the actual beginning of a new literary tradition. The first booklet in Neo-Syriac, which the missionaries worked on alongside an edition of the Psalms in Classical Syriac, was entitled *Lessons from the Words of God*.² Editions which were of greater importance for the development of the new literary language were the translation of the New Testament of 1846, that of the Old Testament of 1852, and the monthly magazine *Zahrir d-Bahra*, "Rays of Light", which first appeared in 1849 and was continued till the first year of the war, 1915. Most productions of this press reflect a form of Protestant piety dominant in America at that time. Characteristic themes like "saving faith", "repentance", "new birth", "keeping of the sabbath", and the evil of "drunkenness", were explored in tracts, pious biographies, and catechisms. In schoolbooks and in the magazine *Zahrir d-Bahra* the scientific and technical achievements of the "New World" were introduced to the Assyrian readers. In the first thirty years of the press, many books and tracts were translated from English, two of the most popular being translations of Leigh Richmond's *The Dairyman's Daughter* (1845) and of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1848). Many other books and tracts were composed by the missionaries themselves. They were assisted by some Assyrians who had mastered English, next to Classical Syriac, Hebrew and even Greek. In this early period, Assyrians did not submit any substantial works to the press themselves.³

It seems that from about 1870, Assyrians began to take part in the literary production.⁴ Most important were their contributions to *Zahrir d-Bahra*. Towards the end of the century the magazine usually had an

² See Coakley, "The First Modern Assyrian Printed Book". For a general overview of the various mission presses, see Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur*, 112-229 and Murre-van den Berg, *From a Spoken to a Written Language*, chapter 4. For the Anglican press, see Coakley, "The Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission Press".

³ See my "The Missionaries' Assistants".

⁴ The first booklet printed on the Urmia press of which we know with certainty that it was written by an Assyrian was an edition of the *Kārozutā 'al môtā d-Perkins šāhab*, "Sermon in Memory of Dr. Perkins", by Šamaša Yonan from 'Ada, probably printed sometime in 1870, after the news of Perkins' death in Dec. 1869 had reached Urmia.

Assyrian editor. In the eighties a revision of the Bible translation was undertaken. The working committee consisted of six Assyrians and only one American missionary. Their work resulted in the edition of 1893, which was printed in New York and is in print up to the present day. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Lazarists, whose first production was a catechism printed in 1875, and the Anglicans, who started with a catechism in 1889, began contributing to book printing. These missions too employed educated Assyrians for their activities in the literary field. In 1906, a number of Assyrians started to publish a journal independently from the western missions, with the explicit object to unite Assyrians of all denominations. It was called *Kokba*, "The Star", a name which from that time onwards in numerous variations would be used for Assyrian magazines.

Growing literacy in Neo-Syriac was accompanied by growing literacy in Classical Syriac. Neither the missionaries nor the Assyrians wanted Neo-Syriac to replace Classical Syriac completely. Many mission schools, especially those which provided some kind of secondary education, paid extensive attention to Classical Syriac. Apart from a certain scientific interest in language history and in the heritage of the Syrian church, as well as in the practical use of the language in church, the Anglican and American missionaries envisaged another function for Classical Syriac.

Perkins, in November 1846, gives as one of the main reasons for adding the Peshitta to their edition of the New Testament in the vernacular that "the educated of the Nestorians should continue to study it as their classical language, to enrich and mature their imperfect vernacular tongue, and to harmonize their various dialects".⁵ Much later, the Anglican missionary Arthur Maclean expressed himself in a similar way, stressing even more strongly the potential interdialectal character of a language more influenced by Classical Syriac, both in orthography and in vocabulary.⁶ When Maclean was working in Urmia, in the eighties of the nineteenth century, the need for such an interdialectal language became more urgent than it had been when Perkins translated the New Testament in the forties. Considerable numbers of Assyrians from the mountain tribes, speaking dialects quite different from that of the Urmia plain,

⁵ ABC:16.8.1 v.3 nr. 249 of the ABCFM archives at Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge (Mass.). Permission to quote from this archival material was given to me by Dr David Y. Hirano of the United Church Board for World Ministries in Cleveland (Ohio).

⁶ Maclean, *Grammar of the Dialects of Vernacular Syriac*, xvi-xvii.

joined the group of readers and writers. The standardized language of the American press, based as it was on the Urmia dialect, proved unable to meet the needs of the expanding literate community. In this period a "syriacized" and interdialectal form of the language was developed by those connected to the Protestant and Anglican presses. Even if the grammar of the written language was still very much based on the dialect of Urmia, its vocabulary and orthography were reshaped on the Classical Syriac model. In this form, the language was better equipped to serve as the literary dialect of the whole East-Syrian community.

More things changed in the second half of the nineteenth century. Western influence in this part of the world continually increased. In Urmia this western influence consisted in a growing number of missionaries. The American-Protestant and Lazarist missions grew in numbers, whereas new missions were added, like the Lutheran mission in 1881, the Anglican mission in 1886, and the Russian-Orthodox mission towards the end of the century. Diplomatic and commercial presence in Iran also grew considerably, in a time when the Iranian government was weak. British and Russian diplomats strove for political influence at the Shah's court, and meanwhile the French and Americans were working to expand their commercial influence.

In the nineteenth century, the Assyrians themselves also began to travel. Even before the first missionaries arrived in the early thirties, Assyrians had been used to travelling to Armenia and Georgia in neighbouring Russia to earn some additional income during the cold winter months. After the missionaries had arrived, and especially in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Assyrians started to travel to Europe and America — to acquire a higher education, to find work, or to collect money from the Christians in these countries.

There is another important event which has to be mentioned in connection with the "Syrian Awakening", this being the discovery of the remains of the ancient Assyrian civilization in the Mosul area. Dating to the earlier days of the excavations of Layard is the feeling among the *Surayē*, as they call themselves in Neo-Syriac, that there was some historical connection between them and this ancient people which lived in the area of ancient Nineveh, modern Mosul.⁷ Although it is unclear how exactly this identification came into existence, it certainly was stimulated

⁷ See Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains*, I, 258.

by ancient traditions in Syriac literature which linked the Syrians of present-day Iraq with the Chaldeans and Assyrians of biblical times.⁸

The influence of western Christianity, which started already with the attempts to uniatism in the sixteenth century, but reached its full force in the latter part of the nineteenth century, had transformed the until then relatively homogeneous Syrian tradition into a diversity of confessional strands. People belonged to the "Old Church", Protestant, Anglican, Lutheran, Russian Orthodox or Uniate (Roman Catholic) communion rather than to the Syrian tradition as such. At the same time, the literary language, also being introduced by the missionaries, made the East Syrians aware of the fact that they still had their language in common. However, apparently a common language was not sufficient as the basis of a communal identity. After the history of the Syrian Church had lost much of its cohesive force it was the theory of Assyrian lineage which was able to provide the common history the Christians of this area were looking for.

I suppose that the link with the ancient Assyrians accounts for yet another element of the "Assyrian" identity as it emerged in the early twentieth century: it enabled the transformation of group identity into a kind of "national" identity. In the history of the Syrian Church there never had been a close connection with a certain geographically confined territory or with some worldly power, as there was, e.g., in the history of the Armenian Church. In the case of the East Syrians, it was Ancient Assyrian history which was found suitable to provide such a political and "secular" history.

Summarizing, one can say that in the nineteenth century it was western presence which initiated the use of the modern language in writing. Whereas the activities of the western missions led to confessional diversity, the literary language as introduced by them at the same time became one of the vehicles of a development towards a new communal identity in a way the missionaries had never foreseen. This new self-awareness was transformed into a nationalistic identity through the identification with the ancient Assyrians, whose material remains had been unearthed in their homelands in the middle of that century. In this way, the literary language of Urmia did indeed play a considerable role in

⁸ See, among others, Heinrichs, "The Modern Assyrians" and Murre-van den Berg, *From a Spoken to a Written language*, 32-34.

the Awakening of the Syrian identity and in initiating its transformation into an Assyrian identity.⁹

ALQOSH AND TELKEPE

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, it was in the area north of Mosul that people started to write the modern Syriac vernacular more than two hundred years before the American missionaries. The earliest dated text is a poem written in 1591. This makes early Neo-Syriac literature a contemporary of Jewish Neo-Aramaic literature from roughly the same region, dating back to the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁰

The Neo-Syriac literature which existed before the arrival of the American missionaries consisted mainly of poetry. This poetry can be divided into three categories: stanzaic hymns, dispute poems, and drinking songs.

Of these three categories, only the hymns, which in Neo-Syriac are termed *durikyāṭā* (sg: *durak* or *durikta*) and which can be seen as the equivalent of the Classical Syriac *madrāšē*, can usually be traced back to individual authors. Most *durikyāṭā* are dated, ranging from the late sixteenth to the late nineteenth century. Most manuscripts come from the late nineteenth century, when Eduard Sachau had his copies made for the Berlin library.¹¹ In 1882 a first specimen of this poetry was published by Albert Socin, transcribed on the basis of oral recitation, whereas Sachau himself in 1895 published the same poem by T'oma Singari from manuscript.¹² This edition was soon followed by Lidzbarski's edition of a poem of Yosep Jemdani from Telkepe (Telkaif) and one of Ḥnanišo' from Rustaqa.¹³ Three other poems by Yosep from Telkepe were published by Bernard Vandenhoff.¹⁴ The most complete list of *durikyāṭā* is the one by Poizat, who published a critical edition of one of these poems, the

⁹ For a further discussion of such connections between western missionary activities and the emergence of new cultural and ethnic identities, see, among others, Sanneh, *Encountering the West*.

¹⁰ For an overview of this field and further literature, see Hopkins, *The Kurdistan Jews*.

¹¹ Cf. Sachau, "Skizze de Fellichi-Dialekts von Mosul", 77-8.

¹² Socin, *Die neu-aramäischen Dialekte*, 144-159, 214-219, and Sachau, "Skizze de Fellichi-Dialekts von Mosul", 79-91.

¹³ Lidzbarski, *Die neu-aramäischen Handschriften*, vol. 1, 346-392, vol. 2, 283-323.

¹⁴ Vandenhoff, "Vier geistliche Gedichte". An accompanying edition of texts apparently was prepared but never published. See also Pennacchiotti, "Due pagine".

"Plague of Pioz", a poem by priest Şaumō from Pioz, dated to shortly after 1738.¹⁵ Poizat points to the fact that the Dominican Fathers in Mosul already had published an edition of this poem, in a collection of otherwise nineteenth-century hymns.¹⁶

Pennacchiotti published two *durikyāṭā* to which parallels in Classical Syriac, Kurdish and Christian Arabic exist.¹⁷

Another group of poems can be grouped together as "dispute poems", in which two "persons" in turn are speaking.¹⁸ They often also carry the epitheth *durik*, probably due to the fact that they display the same poetical pattern of monorhyme strophes. Out of seven dispute poems, three are not explicitly religious,¹⁹ whereas the others are. The hymn on the "Robber and the Cherub", which was edited by Pennacchiotti, is based on a hymn by Narsai.²⁰ The sources of the other poems have not been established with certainty. None of these poems are dated, whereas the one on the Robber and the Cherub certainly belongs to the second half of the nineteenth century.²¹ It is not to be excluded, therefore, that all these dispute poems date from the nineteenth century, even if some may have had an oral tradition which goes further back.

These uncertainties with respect to time of origin also account for the third group of Neo-Syriac poems, the *zmiryāṭē d-rāwē*.²²

Here we are in the realm of popular songs, to be sung or recited at weddings and the like. These songs often have parallels in Arabic and Kurdish and probably were transmitted orally for a long period before they were put into writing at the request of visiting scholars.

Two manuscripts of a Neo-Syriac translation of a Gospel lectionary from the Alqosh area, which are ascribed to a certain deacon Israel

¹⁵ Poizat, "La complainte sur la peste de Pioz" and "La peste de Pioz".

¹⁶ *Recueil de Chants* 1896. A number of strophes, in a regularized spelling, occur in Rhétoré, *Grammaire*, 255-260. In 1860, Italian Dominicans established a mission press in Mosul, which carried on the literary tradition of the preceding centuries. On this press, see further Fiey, "L'Imprimerie des Dominicains".

¹⁷ Pennacchiotti, "La versione neoaramaica" and "La leggenda islamica del teschio".

¹⁸ Sachau, "Über die Poesie", 192-193 and Sachau 1899, 440-444.

¹⁹ For these, see Lidzbarski, *Die neu-aramäischen Handschriften*, I 442-458, II 344-356.

²⁰ Pennacchiotti, *Il ladrone e il cherubino*.

²¹ Pennacchiotti, *Il ladrone e il cherubino*, 13-16.

²² Pennacchiotti, "Zmiryata-d Rawe: 'Stornelli'" and "Zmiryata-d Rawe", Socin, *Die neu-aramäischen Dialekte*, 127-143, 207-213.

Alqoshaya, may perhaps represent a fourth category of Neo-Syriac texts originating in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. However, it is not certain when the translation was made and the work may as well belong to the nineteenth century.²³

The *durikyāṭā* which can be dated with certainty to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries constitute the starting point for our present research. The best overview of these texts, including most of their manuscript attestations, is the one by Poizat.²⁴ His list consists of sixteen items, from ten different authors. The oldest poem dates from 1591, by Mar Ḥnaniso' of Bet Rustaqa, the youngest from 1744, by deacon (šamaša) Toma, the son of Qasa 'Awdišo'. These are the poems which survived into nineteenth-century manuscripts and we may assume that, even if more poems existed, these probably were the most popular ones. Poizat's list, in all its brevity, provides us with important information on the Neo-Syriac literature of this period.

The first thing to note is the fact that more than half of the poems come from two authors only: priest (*qaša*) Israel from Alqosh (Alqoshaya), the son of priest Hormiz, who himself is known as the author of one poem (1608), and priest Yosep bar Jamaleddin (Jemdani) from Telkepe (Telkepnaya). Priest Israel's four poems date from around 1611, whereas Yosep wrote his five poems between 1662 and 1668. Of the remaining eight poems, two were written before 1611 (1591 and 1608), one in 1662, and four others were written between 1722 and 1744. Although the small number of texts does not allow for any definite conclusions, this overview suggests that two of the three distinctive periods of Neo-Syriac literary activities were dominated by only one author, Israel Alqoshaya for the period up to 1612 and Yosep Telkepnaya for the period 1662-1668. As long as no other poems turn up, I prefer to think that this indicates that Neo-Syriac writing at that time was a matter of individuals rather than a large-scale movement. The fact that four different authors are known from the second quarter of the eighteenth century may indicate that in this later period Neo-Syriac writing had acquired a somewhat broader base.

²³ Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts*. Both copies are dated to 1889, but the time of translation is not mentioned. This translation might be identical to a gospel translation in the vernacular which Habbi (so Poizat, "La complainte sur la peste de Pioz", 164) dates to 1766.

²⁴ Poizat, "La complainte sur la peste de Pioz", 162-164.

The contents of these poems have not yet been the object of close study. At first glance, however, it is clear that all these poems are concerned with basic Christian themes. As their titles indicate, they deal with repentance, with the life and teachings of Christ and with Divine guidance. As to popular themes, it is remarkable that no less than three poems are concerned with an account of bubonic plagues²⁵ and that three others are dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In nearly all poems, whatever the overall subject may be, the theme of sin and repentance constitutes a recurring element. These poems give the impression of having been written to exhort the lay public to a more dedicated Christian life, a life characterized by confession of sins and repentance. This is further suggested by the fact that the authors do not go into theological detail, but rather seem to take their phraseology from popular religion. The very fact that these poems were written in the vernacular language is another indication of their lay rather than clerical public.

The language of these poems has not until now been the subject of a separate study, although both Pennacchietti and Poizat added some linguistic remarks to the poems they edited.²⁶ The grammars by Sachau and Rhétoré are concerned mainly with the language as spoken and written at end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁷ Sachau, in his article on the poetry of the "Nestorians", suggests that the language of these poems does not represent the particular dialect of its single authors, but rather a standardized form in use in northern Iraq.²⁸ Whether such forms of standardization should be attributed to some kind of common, formal education remains to be seen. If indeed some kind of vernacular writing was taught at schools in the early seventeenth century, one would expect more texts to have survived.²⁹

²⁵ These poems may in fact be seen as a different genre, of which also in the early nineteenth century some interesting examples are found, not only related to plagues, but also to pillage (Toma Singari and Damianos — cf. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne*, II, 392).

²⁶ Pennacchietti, "Due pagine", 697-702 and Poizat, "La complainte sur la peste de Pioz", 168-173.

²⁷ Sachau, "Skizze de Fellichi-Dialekts von Mosul" and Rhétoré, *Grammaire*.

²⁸ Sachau, "Über die Poesie", 180. In Sachau, "Skizze de Fellichi-Dialekts von Mosul", 5, the author suggests that in the late nineteenth century it was the town dialect of Mosul which functioned as a kind of *koine*.

²⁹ The only school we know of with certainty, is the one run by Kas Kheder Maqdassi in Mosul, in the early eighteenth century; see Vosté, "Kas Kheder". There are no indications that Neo-Aramaic was in use at this school.

As to the influence of Classical Syriac writing on Neo-Syriac, the orthography of the early texts is less influenced by Classical Syriac than is Neo-Syriac from the late nineteenth century. However, as far as vocabulary is concerned, the language is perhaps closer to Classical Syriac than is the literary language of Urmia. One reason for this might be that the dialect of Alqosh had preserved more of its ancient Aramaic vocabulary, but another possibility is that, since Classical Syriac writing was considerably stronger in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than in the later period, Classical Syriac elements in vernacular writing should be attributed to influence from classical literature.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the so-called "School of Alqosh" became known for its Classical Syriac poetry, apparently in much the same style as the Neo-Syriac poems.³⁰ Israel Alqoshaya "the elder", the above-mentioned author of Neo-Syriac poetry, is considered to be the same person as the author of Classical Syriac poetry in this period. The term "School of Alqosh" can also be used in connection with the remarkable increase in manuscript production in this town, which started in the sixteenth century and went on well into the nineteenth century. Most of the copying took place in the village of Alqosh, near the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, the residence of the Patriarchs of the Elia-line, before in the nineteenth century the Chaldean monastery of Our Lady of the Seeds, close to Rabban Hormuzd, in Alqosh took over.³¹ In many other places, e.g., in Gazarta, Karka d-Bet Slok (Kirkuk), Diyarbakır (Amida), Telkepe, and Mosul, people were active in literary matters. They too concentrated on poetry in Classical Syriac, often for liturgical use. Further, some historical and theological prose was produced.³²

It may have become clear from this short survey that the period from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards should indeed be considered as a period of revival for literary activities in Syriac — especially so, when its literature is compared to the small amount of literature from

³⁰ The first to use this epithet probably was Baumstark; cf. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, 334-335, 359. See further Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne*, II, 393-95 and Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur*, 35-50. Note the difference between Baumstark, who limits the "School of Alqosh" to the poets actually from the village of Alqosh, and Macuch, who considers all writers of this period and this area as belonging to this "school". The results of further research should decide whether indeed all the literature of this period should be considered belonging to one "school" only, or whether more "schools" should be distinguished.

³¹ See Vosté, *Catalogue*.

³² See Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neusyrischen Literatur*, 31-50 and Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, 332-335.

the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The increasing production of poetry in Classical and Neo-Syriac was accompanied by a remarkable resurgence of copyist activities.

What factors can possibly have stimulated this revival of Syriac literature in this early period?

There are several indications that some of the authors of Neo-Syriac poetry in some way or another had Roman Catholic sympathies. Even if no definite proof of Israel Alqoshaya's Roman Catholic affiliation has been given so far,³³ it certainly is possible that Israel was sympathetic towards Roman Catholic piety. Yosep Telkepnaya, the author of five *durikyāā*, might well be the same person as "a priest named Joseph" who agreed to argue in favor of some Carmelite missionaries with the Patriarch in Telkepe in 1653-4,³⁴ If he is, this might be interpreted as an indication of his Roman Catholic sympathies, although he certainly was not considered to be actually a Roman Catholic. Most clearly committed to Roman Catholicism probably was Şaumo from Pioz, whom we know also as the translator into Classical Syriac of the Apocalypse as well as of the commentary of Jean Etienne Menochius S.J. on the Apocalypse, from an Arabic translation of the Latin.³⁵

It awaits further research to discover to what extent the poetry of these writers was explicitly aiming at propagating the union between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the East. In the poems studied thus far, "Nestorianism" is not explicitly condemned and sometimes even "Nestorian" phrases occur. It is a penitance attitude rather than being part of one church or another which seems to be the main interest of its

³³ Contra Fiey (*Assyrie Chrétienne*, II, 390, 394). The lines Fiey quotes to prove Israel's conversion to Roman Catholicism are transmitted differently in other mss., giving perhaps not the opposite, but certainly a rather different sense: "This is the profession of the faith of the *maddenhāyē* (Fiey: "Orientaux"). We have kept it truthfully from the time of the first apostles, and grace dwelled in it, and the *ya'qubāyē* (Fiey: "Nestoriens") changed it." (str. 51 in ms. Habbi 3, p. 9, ms. Hyvernat Syriac 15, fol. 23a (Library of the Institute of Christian Oriental Research, CUA Washington), and ms. Sachau 223.5). The profession of faith in an earlier strophe seems to reflect "Nestorian" Christology, in phrases like "The Son, the Word, who in his love took the man Jesus from his mother and he clothed [himself with it], and he adorned himself with our race" (str. 48). However, the fact that earlier Christ is said to have "one *paršopā* (person) and two *kyānē* (natures)", omitting the difficult "two *qnomē*" (str. 47), suggests that the author was aware of this critical issue between Roman Catholics and "Nestorians".

³⁴ *A Chronicle* I, 391.

³⁵ Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne*, II, 473-4, Vosté, *Catalogue*, 11, 20.

writers. However, it is possible that this renewed focus on "sin and repentance" is a result of western theological influence.

Among those who wrote Classical Syriac, some of the most prolific writers were officially connected to the Roman Catholic Church, like 'Abdišo' from Gazarta, the second Chaldean patriarch (1555-1570),³⁶ Adam 'Aqraya, who negotiated with Rome on behalf of Elia VIII (1591-1617),³⁷ the Chaldean patriarch Yosep II (1667-1731), and priest Kidr from Mosul (1679-1751), who spent much of his life in Rome.³⁸

These Roman Catholic sympathies among the writers of Modern and Classical Syriac are not as obvious as one might think. Whereas in the nineteenth century most of the villages of northern Iraq, including Alqosh and Telkepe, professed obedience to the uniate, Chaldean patriarchate, this certainly was not the case in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The first to go to Rome was Yoḥannan Sulaqa, the superior of Rabban Hormuzd who had been elected patriarch by a number of bishops in opposition to Shimun VII Bar-Mama. After Sulaqa received his episcopal ordination, he returned to Diyarbakır (Amida) in 1553, only to die in a Turkish prison within less than two years, probably at the instigation of the Old Church patriarch.³⁹ In this period, Roman Catholicism affected a minority of the East Syrian population only, many of whom lived in the citadel of Diyarbakır.⁴⁰ After Yoḥannan Sulaqa's first two successors had been in full communion with Rome,⁴¹ his successors in the seventeenth century no longer succeeded in meeting with Rome's demands.⁴² At the beginning of the eighteenth century, formal ties with Rome were severed

³⁶ See Vosté, "Mar Ioḥannan Soulaqa".

³⁷ Tisserant, "Nestorienne", 233-236.

³⁸ On "Kas Kheder Maqdassi", see Vosté, "Kas Kheder".

³⁹ On Sulaqa, see Vosté, "Les inscriptions", "Mar Ioḥannan Soulaqa", Habbi, "Signification de l'union chaldéenne", and Lampart, "Ein Martyrer", 50-55. Habbi and Lampart provide convincing arguments for the assumption that Sulaqa's opponent still was Shimun Bar-Mama, who died in 1558 rather than in 1552.

⁴⁰ See Tisserant, "Nestorienne", 232, and Habbi, "Signification de l'union chaldéenne", 128-130.

⁴¹ On the doubtful "orthodoxy" of 'Abdišo' of Gazarta, the successor of Sulaqa, see Vosté, "Catholiques ou Nestoriens?".

⁴² See Lampart, "Ein Martyrer", 57-63. Tfinkdji 1914, 456-8 is considerably more positive about the "catholic" content of this patriarchal line, and so also Tisserant, "Nestorienne", 228-232. See also *A Chronicle* I, 382-390, for an interesting account of contacts between Carmelite missionaries with Mar Shimun in 1652-57, who was then residing in Khosrawa.

and from then on the late successors of Sulaqa, now carrying the name Shimun, considered themselves to be "Nestorian" again.

It took till 1681 before a stable uniate patriarchate was established, with its see again in Diyarbakır. However, as was the case with the earlier attempts, the authority of the Chaldean patriarch was acknowledged only within a rather limited geographical area. Neither Mosul, nor Alqosh or Telkepe belonged to his jurisdiction.⁴³

In the same period, also the patriarchs of the Elia-line residing in Rabban Hormizd near Alqosh, the successors of Shimun Bar-Mama, tried to establish closer ties with Rome. None of them, however, succeeded in acquiring full recognition. They, as much as Sulaqa's successors, were unable to satisfy Rome's conditions.⁴⁴

After the short-lived activities of two Maltese Dominicans who had accompanied Sulaqa to Diyarbakır,⁴⁵ it was only after 1622, when the *Sacra Institutio de Propaganda Fide* was established in Rome, that a more active policy towards the oriental churches was pursued. With respect to the Church of the East, one of the first activities of the Propaganda was to send two Franciscans to Diyarbakır in 1629. After the Franciscans, it was the Conventuals who tried to establish a union, but it was only after the establishment of a Capucin mission in Diyarbakır in 1667, following an earlier mission in Mosul around 1663, that the Chaldean patriarchate was renewed.⁴⁶ In the same period, Carmelite missionaries working in Persia had contacts with the Syrian Christians in that country.⁴⁷ In 1750, the Dominican order established itself in Mosul.⁴⁸ Although these Latin missionaries reached only a minority of the population, they played an important role in introducing Roman Catholicism among the East Syrians.

⁴³ See Lampart, "Ein Martyrer" on the first patriarch of this line, Joseph I (1681-1696).

⁴⁴ On several attempts to a union with Rome, see Lampart, "Ein Martyrer", 64-68, on "Eli VII" (1591-1617), and Babakhan, "Deux lettres" and Vosté, "Kas Kheder" on "Eli XI" (1722-1778). See further Vosté, "Les inscriptions", and Fiey, "Résidences et sépultures", 164.

⁴⁵ Goormachtigh, "Histoire de la mission", 276, Vosté, "Mar Ioħannan Soulaqa", 193, and Habbi, "Signification de l'union chaldéenne", 110.

⁴⁶ Lampart, "Ein Martyrer", 69-103, Da Seggiano 1962.

⁴⁷ *A Chronicle* I, 382-393.

⁴⁸ Goormachtigh, "Histoire de la mission", 279-283. See also Vosté, "Kas Kheder" on Kas Kheder, who was perhaps involved in Rome's decision to send the Dominicans.

In addition to the increasing Roman Catholic presence in this part of the world, the West was present in other ways too. In the sixteenth century, the area around Mosul had been incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, after a period of uncertain alliances. This provided not only for a more stable social and political situation, but also for increasing contacts with representatives of western powers who extended their influence into the Ottoman Empire and often were very much interested in the situation of the oriental Christians. Travel in both directions became easier and it was not only westerners who made it to the east, but also easterners who were able to travel to Europe.

CONCLUSIONS

We now can point to some important similarities between the two periods under discussion. Although there is no evidence that it was Roman Catholic missionaries who initiated writing in Neo-Syriac, it is remarkable that, as much as in the nineteenth century, popular religious literature in the vernacular emerged in a period when western missionaries extended their activities into the region of the East Syrian Christians. Whether the poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was indeed meant to propagate a western type of piety remains to be seen, but I do believe that it represents an answer to the Roman Catholic challenge at the very least.

Another parallel between the two periods is the fact that through, as well as apart from, missionary presence, western culture in general became more accessible to the Christians of this region. This certainly can be seen as another factor which may have stimulated cultural development and the acceptance of vernacular writing.

A factor that needs closer consideration is the political and social environment of the Christians in both periods. In the nineteenth century, the presence of the missionaries gave greater stability for the Christian minority. It is unlikely that the presence of Latin missionaries had the same effect in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If there was any influence, it varied greatly during the period under discussion. The incorporation into the Ottoman Empire and the greater stability which resulted from this may have provided better living circumstances for the Christians and in this way have stimulated cultural awakening.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Cf. Pennacchiotti, "La versione neoaramaica", 170.

The outcome of the cultural developments in the two periods at first sight seems different too. In the late nineteenth century, vernacular writing, in its interdialectal form, became an important element of the new nationalistic identity of the "Assyrians". Such a nationalistic tendency is totally absent in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. However, it is very well possible that the literary awakening of this early period played a significant role in the development of a communal identity of the "Chaldean" party. Further research certainly is needed, but for now the parallelism between the two developments is striking: at the end of the eighteenth century, the Chaldean community had emerged in northern Iraq and at the end of the nineteenth century, the Assyrian community had taken shape. In both cases a literary Awakening came first.

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