

Alexandria and Antioch in the First ‘Abbāsīd Century*

Phil Booth, St Peter’s College, Oxford, OX1 2DL

Abstract: By using several contemporaneous compilations now embedded in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, and by putting these in conversation with parallel texts produced in Syriac, this paper explores the revitalisation of the contacts between the Severan patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch in the context of the late Marwānīd and ‘Abbāsīd periods. It argues that while the commitment to communion was a shared inheritance of the late Roman period, the same commitment was renewed and refashioned in a quite different context, wherein the shifting distribution of power within the caliphate had placed the Alexandrian patriarchs in a position of distinct disadvantage and discomfort, far removed from the centres of patronage and of power.

Keywords: *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, Alexandria, Antioch, Michael the Syrian, Umayyads, ‘Abbāsīds

Introduction

* I would like to thank Philip Wood for his comments, and for sharing with me in advance of writing his forthcoming monograph, *The Imam of the Christians*, from which I have drawn much inspiration. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers, whose critical observations greatly improved the text.

“Now who will not marvel when he hears these wonders, namely that every patriarch who sits upon this holy throne directs his care towards three departments of business: the care for the synodical letter to the patriarch of Antioch; secondly our relations with the Abyssinians and the Nubians; and thirdly the carrying out of decrees issued by the governor of Egypt to the patriarch and bishops, that the affairs of the orthodox churches may be kept in good order?”¹

The reader of those sections of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* which describe the transition between the Christian and Islamic empires might note a curious phenomenon. For where, during the last decades of Roman rule, the text describes in some detail the interactions of the new Severan patriarchs in Alexandria and Antioch, for the first decades of Islamic rule a strange silence descends upon that same relationship. Then, from 715, the connection of the Alexandrian and Antiochene patriarchs starts to be recorded once again, to the extent that remembrance of that connection becomes an evident *sine qua non* of subsequent patriarchal *Lives* (as our opening quotation serves to demonstrate).² That the relationship should be reappear in this period, and not before, is not the product of mere coincidence or authorial preference, but rather of a real (re-)broadening of horizons. For it is one expression of a far wider transition realised within the

¹ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* ed. and trans. (to 849) B. Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, volumes I-III [*Patrologia Orientalis* 1, 5, 10] (Paris, 1904-1915), III: 507.

² I will not treat here the simultaneous interest in Nubian affairs, as also shown in the quotation; but see *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 24-25, 140-146; III: 503-508, 512, 528). For comment see M. Mikhail, *From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt: Religion, Identity and Politics after the Arab Conquest* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014) pp. 194-201. Note that *ibid.* pp. 191-194, also treats Alexandrian-Antiochene relations in the Islamic period, but emphasises the shared circumstances and accord of the two patriarchs, in contrast to the argument below.

caliphate in the eighth and ninth centuries, through which the tentacles of caliphal control were reaching ever further into the provinces, the relative independence of regional governors and local Arab elites was receding, and dormant connections between the disparate provinces of the caliphate were being reinvigorated.³

As the Severan episcopate had formed in Syro-Mesopotamia and in Egypt in the century before the Arab conquests – thus creating those hierarchies which would sometimes call themselves ‘Jacobite’ and ‘Theodosian’⁴ – it had replicated the traditional division of the Church into autonomous patriarchates, and with it a commitment to the maintenance of communion.⁵ The resurrection of that ideal amidst the shifting politics of the late Marwānid and early ‘Abbāsīd caliphates, however, should not be appreciated as the simple restoration of a late Roman *status quo*.⁶ For that commitment was re-enabled in a context quite distinct from that of its first realisation, in which the relative standing of the sees had been reconfigured through that same redistribution of power which had enabled their renewed contacts. In this new context, the Theodosian patriarchs found themselves both far removed

³ For elements of this process from the Egyptian perspective see e.g. Hugh Kennedy, “Central Government and Provincial Élites in the Early ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44 (1981): 26-38, esp. 31-38.

⁴ For this reason of self-identification, and for the precision which both offer (over broad terms such as ‘miaphysite’, or problematic ethnic ones such as ‘Coptic’ or ‘West Syrian’), I use these terms throughout this paper. Neither is intended as pejorative.

⁵ For these processes see Ernst Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d’Asie antérieure au VI^e siècle* (Louvain, L. Durbecq: 1951); Albert van Roey, “Les débuts de l’Église jacobite”, in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds Alois Grillmeier and Heinrich Bacht, volumes I-III (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1951) II: 339–360; Volke Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Phil Booth, “Towards the Coptic Church: The Making of the Severan Episcopate”, *Millennium* 14 (2017): 151-189; id., “A Circle of Egyptian Bishops at the End of Roman Rule (c.600): Texts and Contexts”, *Le Muséon* 131 (2018): 21-72. For the last interactions in the Roman period: see Philippe Blaudeau, “Le voyage de Damien d’Alexandrie vers Antioche puis Constantinople (579-580), motivations et objectifs”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 63 (1997): 333-361; *Peter of Callinicum: Anti-Tritheist Dossier*, eds Rifaat Y. Ebied, Albert van Roey, and Lionel R. Wickham et al. [Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta X] (Leuven: Department Oriëntalistik, 1981); Pauline Allen, “Religious Conflict between Antioch and Alexandria c. 565-630 CE”, *Religious Conflict from Early Christianity to the Rise of Islam*, eds Wendy Mayer and Bronwen Neil (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013) pp. 187-199.

⁶ For an overview of relations see Jean-Maurice Fiey, “Coptes et Syriques: Contacts et échanges”, *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 15 (1972–73) 295–365.

from a caliphal court which cast a lengthening shadow over Egyptian affairs, and in periodic tension with a Jacobite partner whose access to that court was far superior. In successive narratives which witness these expanding horizons within the *HP*, the dissonance between traditional ecclesiological understandings and the new realities of secular and ecclesiastical politics is palpable. Such narratives are, then, testament both to the renewal of the Severan communion following a hiatus; and to the refashioning of that communion in the context of a caliphate transforming.

The History of the Patriarchs

Crucial for our task is the so-called *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria (HP)*, a compilation of biographies of the patriarchs recognised within the Theodosian Church. Although most historians refer to the “*History of the Patriarchs*” as a discreet text, it is important to recognise its complexities. First, it exists in at least two recensions: the earlier ‘Primitive’, which is witnessed in a small number of manuscripts; and the later and more diffuse ‘Vulgate’, which is the more accessible and which will be our point of reference here.⁷ Second, both recensions are in fact a compilation of earlier, smaller collections of biographies which have no independent transmission either as discrete Lives or as collections. From the scattered editorial comments of different compilers we can deduce that the text was a living tradition which different compilers extended, at irregular intervals, with their own collections,

⁷ For the ‘Primitive’ see for now Christian F. Seybold, *Severus ibn al Muqaffa’, Alexandrinische Patriarchengeschichte von S. Marcus bis Michael I 61-767 nach der ältesten 1266 geschriebenen Hamburger Handschrift* (Hamburg: Lucas Gräfe, 1912). On the distinction of recensions and its limits see e.g. Perrine Pilette, “L’Histoire des Patriarches d’Alexandrie. Une nouvelle évaluation de la configuration du texte en recensions”, *Le Muséon* 126 (2013): 419-450.

composed from a range of sources including pre-existing individual Lives and, closer to their own times, their own contributions. Between 1088-1094, however, the Alexandrian deacon Mawhūb b. Manṣūr b. Mufarrij translated the first five of such collections from Coptic into Arabic, adding two biographies of his own. It is this compilation which is transmitted in the two recensions.⁸

For the first Islamic centuries, Mawhūb had access to three pre-existing collections. The first was a long collection of biographies stretching from Cyril I (r. 412-444) to the mid-point (715)⁹ of the patriarchate of Alexander I (r. April 705-October 729), whose author, George the Archdeacon, was an associate of several patriarchs, and one of a number of Theodosian literati active in the Marwānid period.¹⁰ The second collection was shorter. It completed the Life of Alexander to 729, and then added biographies of Cosmas I (r. January 730-April 731), Theodore I (r. August 731-February 742), and Michael I (r. September 743-March 767) – the last of these is substantial, and is derived from an independent, but now lost, Life.¹¹ The author of that Life, and compiler of the larger collection, is one John (I), a monk and associate of Michael, and later bishop.¹² Another John (II) is the author of the third and final collection of relevance for us. It gathered nine biographies from Menas (r.

⁸ Fundamental is Johannes den Heijer, *Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrij et l'historiographie copto-arabe: étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Louvain: Peeters, 1989).

⁹ That George ended in 715 is confirmed by George's own statement at *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 57) concerning the incumbent emperor Anastasius II (713-15), and the comment of his successor John (I) at *ibid.* 91 that George wrote 'down to the time of Sulaymān, son of 'Abd al-Malik' (715-17).

¹⁰ On George's contribution see the editorial comment of John (I) at *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 90-91). Note that the dates of the patriarchs here and below are derived from internal dates and statements within the *HP*.

¹¹ See the comment at *ibid.* (Evetts II: 114).

¹² See the editorial comment at *ibid.* (Evetts III: 360). The compiler, John (II), here also refers to the work of two Macarii, who are perhaps the authors of the Lives of Cosmas and Theodore.

767-January 774) to 865/6, during the patriarchate of Shenoute I (r. January 859-April 880), in whose service he worked.¹³

These three compilations will form the basis of the investigation below, which stretches to the patriarchate of Joseph (r. November 830-October 849).

Nevertheless several methodological caveats must precede it. Although we will refer to individual Lives within each compilation, and speak of individual authors of those Lives, it is important to remember that the authors of several biographies are unknown. Thus, while autobiographical references indicate that each compiler has composed the most recent Life or Lives within his compilation, the materials from which more distant biographies are constructed is uncertain, and we should not assume a continuous tradition, updated at the death of each patriarch. At the same time, we must also bear in mind that Lives which are not from the pen of the compiler have gone through the process of compilation, and perhaps others (alteration, abridgement, interpolation, etc.); and that *all* the Lives considered here in turn been translated, from Coptic into Arabic, with similar potential for distortion. Although these problems are more or less unavoidable, our investigation proceeds with these caveats in mind.

The Theodosian Church under Arab Rule

Before turning to the presentation of the Antiochene-Alexandrian communion in the *HP*, it is expedient first to review the position of the Theodosian Church under Arab

¹³ See the comment at *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* eds Yassā 'Abd al-Masīh and Oswald H. E. Burmester (Cairo, 1943), p. 44 (with 48 for the name).

rule. Although the Alexandrian patriarchate has often passed between Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian incumbents in the period between the Council of Chalcedon and the reign of Justinian (r. 527-565), and although Theodosian commentators would later claim a continuous, orthodox succession stretching to the age of the apostles, the institution which we call the 'Theodosian Church' was first established in the reigns of Tiberius (r. 574-582) and Maurice (r. 582-602), when anti-Chalcedonian bishops founded a new, rival patriarchate in Alexandria, and when its first incumbents, Peter (r. 575-577) and Damian (r. 577-c.606), consecrated a raft of new bishops, several of whom are attested in a wide range of extant media.¹⁴ The frequent assumption of modern scholarship is that this new church was a populist one, and that Chalcedonism was present in Egypt but nevertheless alien. This is the perspective of the *HP* and other Theodosian sources, but we should nevertheless be cautious. Besides the difficulties in reconstructing, or even substantiating, the confessional opinions of normal people – and here our thousands of legal and fiscal documents are more or less silent –, Chalcedonian bishops had long controlled the cities, and were dispersed throughout the Egyptian provinces.¹⁵ On the eve of the Arab conquests, there is little reason to suppose that the Theodosian Church was either more powerful or more popular than its Chalcedonian rival.

Its immediate fate thereafter is difficult to discern. Our main source is the *HP*. Its narratives of the first decades of Arab domination – contained within the compilation of George the Archdeacon – are vague and impressionistic. But when

¹⁴ See Booth, "Making of the Severan Episcopate"; "Circle of Egyptian Bishops".

¹⁵ For documents and confessional politics: Bernhard Palme, "Political Identity versus Religious Distinction? The Case of Egypt in the Later Roman Empire", in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300-1000* ed. Walter Pohl, C. Ganter, and R. Payne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 81-100, at 88-89. For Chalcedonian bishops and the cities: Ewa Wipszycka, *The Alexandrian Church: People and Institutions* [Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement XXV] (Warsaw: Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 2015), pp. 141-142.

we enter the Marwānid period, and the governorship of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān (r. 685-705), the situation changes. Not only does the narrative of the *HP* become much richer, but we also have several other sources which describe, or which were composed in, that period. Two developments evident in those sources are worth emphasising here. First, the heartlands of the Theodosian Church seem to have shifted, for where in the period of Peter and Damian it is the rural Thebaid which appears as the stronghold of the new church, in this period it is the Delta, and the monasteries of the Wādī an-Naṭrūn, which are the focus, and which produce the new Theodosian literati. Second, the governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz is now celebrated for his patronage of the orthodox, and ecclesiastical politics revolves around his court at Fuṣṭāt, to the extent that the governor must confirm, and can overturn, the appointment of a patriarch. Both developments are related. As the focus of secular power shifted from Alexandria to the new capital at Fuṣṭāt, so did the Theodosian patriarchs look there for patronage, and so too did the bishoprics in its environs gain in prominence. In turn, as the governors began to promote the Theodosian Church – at the apparent expense of its rivals – so too did its members cede some independence through recognising the rights of the governor to intervene in their affairs, including in patriarchal elections.¹⁶

Although the reign of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz has no doubt been idealised in Theodosian sources, it seems to have represented a genuine apex for the fortunes of the Theodosian Church. Thereafter, our evidence base for ecclesiastical matters once again contracts, and although some Lives within the *HP* suggest a continued, wider production of now lost written texts, its narrative become again our dominant

¹⁶ For some of these changes see Phil Booth, “Images of Emperors and Emirs in Early Islamic Egypt”, (forthcoming); id. “Debating the Faith in Early Islamic Egypt”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 70 (2019): 691-707.

source.¹⁷ The late Umayyad governors continue to exert their influence over patriarchal appointments.¹⁸ But the governors and their officials are now presented in far more antagonistic terms. Complaints about the over-taxation of the faithful, the seizure of ecclesiastical properties, and capricious demands for monies from the patriarchs, sometimes resulting in imprisonment, are frequent.¹⁹ The ‘Abbāsid revolution – during which, according to the *HP*, the refugee caliph Marwān II made an example of the patriarch Michael, ripping out his beard while the rebels watched from across the river – seems first to have alleviated this situation.²⁰ Although the approval of the ‘Abbāsid governors seems to have remained prerequisite for the appointment of a patriarch, and was open to corruption,²¹ the *HP* often praises those governors as lovers of Christians,²² and even indicates renewed church building under the patriarchs John (r. January 775-January 799) and Mark (r. January 799-April 819).²³ But in the same period new challenges arose as governors began to receive bribes from candidates for episcopal office, and as the caliphs at Baghdad began to interfere in patriarchal affairs, as we shall see.²⁴

The situation deteriorated with the onset of the fourth fitna (811-819), when Egypt broke from Baghdad and was divided between local warring factions: al-Sarī in the Nile Valley; al-Jarawī in the eastern Delta; the tribes of Lakhm and Judhām in the

¹⁷ See esp. the conclusions to some Lives (at *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 79-83; 202-206; III: 531-532), in which the authors recount in brief the deeds of other contemporaries, perhaps based on lost hagiographies of those persons (as is certain with John of Scetis and Abraham and George, at II: 81-83).

¹⁸ See e.g. *ibid.* 104, 112.

¹⁹ See *ibid.* 54-55, 58-61, 64, 67-71, 72-73, 74-79, 86-87, 94-95, 119, 134-140, 148.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 173.

²¹ *Ibid.* III: 404, 481-2 (in the latter case suggesting that a candidate promised the governor 1000 dinars).

²² See the statements at *ibid.* II: 197 (Abū ‘Awn); III: 367, 375 (Ibn ‘Abd ar-Raḥman); 400-401 (al-Layth b. al-Faḍl), 407 (anonymous).

²³ See *ibid.* 383-5, 387-9, 407-8, 418-20.

²⁴ For governors pushing candidates for vacant bishoprics, first attested under James, see *ibid.* 457, 470-1, 519-21. Note that in all three instances the patriarch (with reported reluctance) acquiesces in the appointment.

western Delta; and certain Spanish Arabs in Alexandria.²⁵ The unrest forced the patriarch to re-establish his residence at Sammanūd, under the protection of al-Jarawī.²⁶ Under his rule onwards accusations of oppression (the capricious seizure of properties; profiteering through the hoarding of grain; threats against the patriarch) once again resurface;²⁷ and these accusations continue after the reestablishment of central 'Abbāsid control.²⁸ In particular, excessive taxation is blamed for the famous rebellion of the Christians of the Bāshmur, in the northern Delta, in 831-2 – the occasion for a remarkable episode in Alexandrian-Antiochene relations, and the first (and only) visit of an 'Abbāsid caliph.²⁹ Throughout that episode the patriarch Joseph (r. 830-849) is presented as a faithful servant of al-Ma'mūn, even against the interests of his own constituents. But later in the same Life, we read that Joseph bore a diploma of recognition (Ar. *sijill*, from the Gr. *sigillion*) which al-Ma'mūn had bestowed upon him, which his two successors renewed, and which protected the patriarch against local Muslims had agitated against him.³⁰ As the first 'Abbāsid century draws to a close, therefore, the progression of the *HP* suggests a remarkable reorientation of the Theodosian patriarchs, by which the importance of the gubernatorial court at Fusṭāṭ receded, and that of the caliph at Baghdad

²⁵ The unrest is described at length in *ibid.* 427-465; and also in al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wūlat* ed. Rhuvon Guest, *The Governors and Judges of Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1912), pp. 147-184. For discussion see Hugh Kennedy, "Egypt as a Province in the Islamic Caliphate, 641-868", in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, eds Carl F. Petry and M. W. Daly, volumes I-II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), I: 62-85, at 80-82.

²⁶ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 433-4).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 455-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 467-9.

²⁹ On this rebellion see *ibid.* 486-502; and al-Kindī, *Wūlat* (Guest 190-1), with esp. Ohta Kaeto, "The Coptic Church and Coptic Communities in the Reign of al-Ma'mūn: A Study of the Social Context of the Bashmūric Revolt", *Annals of Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 19:2 (2003): 87-116; Yaacov Lev, "Coptic Rebellions and the Islamization of Medieval Egypt (8th-10th century): Medieval and Modern Perceptions", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 303-344. Note also the restlessness of the Bāshmurites in 749/50 and 767/8, described at *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 156-188) and al-Kindī, *Wūlat* (Guest 119).

³⁰ *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 526-7).

advanced. With that reorientation also came increasing engagement with the patriarchs of Antioch.

Antioch, Damascus, and Baghdad

The Persian and then Arab conquests seem to have suspended contacts between the Severan patriarchates, and narratives produced within each are more or less silent on the other. Within the *HP*, the compilation of George the Archdeacon (composed in c.715) does not mention Antioch or Antiochenes for several decades after the union of 617, until it arrives at the Life of Simon (r. c.692-700) – of which George is author³¹ – who is said to have exchanged letters with his Jacobite counterpart Julian (r. 687-707/8), confirming the union of the sees.³² Nothing more is said, but then, in the final section of George's contribution to the Life of Alexander – between a report of the death of the famous governor Qurra b. Shārik (in 715)³³ and two events placed in Diocletian 431 (= 714/5) – we encounter a second report, recounting the election of Elias. This suggests that the caliph al-Wālid (r. 705-715) had prevented the appointment of a new patriarch but how his bishops then

³¹ George seems to have authored the Lives of John III, Isaac, Simon, and Alexander (to 715); see the statement at *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 20).

³² *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 30). Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.16 ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, volumes I-V (Paris, 1899-1910), IV: 447 places the accession is November AG 999 (687), complemented in *Chronicle to 819* ed. Aphram Barsaum in Jean-Baptiste Chabot (ed.), *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* [Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 81, Scriptores Syri 36] (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1920), pp. 3-22, at 13; *Chronicle to 846* ed. Ernest W. Brooks in *Chronica minora*, volumes I-III [Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 1, 3, 5; Scriptores Syri 1, 3, 5] (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1903-1905), II: 157-238, at 232, which give AG 999 (687/8). Note that the date given for Julian's succession in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Incerti auctoris chrnicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum*, volumes I-II (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1927), II: 155, AG 1015 (= 703/4), is incorrect.

³³ See al-Kindī, *Kitāb al-Wūlat* (Guest 95-96).

consecrated an Elias.³⁴ In the Jacobite tradition, however, there is no suggestion that the caliph prevented the succession of Elias – who succeeded in 708/9 – nor that relations were strained.³⁵ Indeed, the sequential placement of the episode within the *HP* suggests that Elias' letter was received in 715, and that this in fact marks not the succession but the moment at which contacts were renewed (and leading George, I would suggest, to interpolate the reference to Julian within his Life of Simon). At once, then, we sense in the chronological fudge an attempt within the *HP* to obfuscate and to excuse the lapsing of contacts – an attempt which, we shall see, reappears throughout the compilations of George's successors, John (I) and John (II), and which points to the ongoing importance of communion with Antioch within the upper echelons of the Theodosian elite.

In the compilation of John (I) – which embraces the patriarchates of Alexander, Cosmas, Theodore, and Michael (that is, the period 715-767) – Jacobite affairs are far more prominent, but now we encounter something new: consistent anxieties around the access of the Jacobite patriarchs to temporal power, and their subsequent elevation over their Theodosian equivalents. The tension is set up at once within the remaining Life of Alexander, which reports how its hero and the Jacobite patriarch Athanasius (r. 724-c.740)³⁶ dispatched a synodical to Alexander in which, in a striking variation on the *nolo episcopari*, he stated his reticence to serve, but for the will of the caliph Hishām (r. 724-743); how Alexander responded blessing the caliph and wishing him a long life and success against his enemies; and how

³⁴ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 65). Note that the status of Elias seems also to have confused John (I), who appears uncertain if he was patriarch proper (ibid. 73).

³⁵ See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.17 (Chabot IV: 450-1), on al-Wālid (cf. ibid. 11.19 [Chabot IV: 455-6], on Yazīd). Michel gives the date of consecration as AG 1020 (708/9), as do *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 14); *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 233). The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 155) gives AG 1019.

³⁶ Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.19 (Chabot IV: 456) gives April AG 1035 for Athanasius's succession. On his death see below n. 0000.

Hishām now had a prosperous reign, in which God thwarted his enemies, “through the prayers of the two glorious patriarchs, Alexander at Alexandria and Athanasius at Antioch.” But it continues to relate how Hishām then bade Athanasius to construct his patriarchal palace next to that of the caliph at Damascus.³⁷ The exchange with Alexander and the invitation of Hishām are unknown in Jacobite texts. But the whole episode seems to encapsulate an emergent tension within the *HP*. The patriarchs of both Antioch and Alexandria are now presented as dependants and defenders of the regime at Damascus. But the access of the Jacobite patriarch – not to a governor but to the caliph himself – is far more intimate, expressed here in the closeness of the patriarchal and caliphal palaces.³⁸

In the *Life of Michael* (r. 743-767), of which John (I) himself is the author, this tension comes to the fore. The text informs us, unconvincingly, that the new Jacobite patriarch John had composed a synodical but had found no time to send it, until he had occasion to appeal to Michael when his own bishops refused him the title of patriarch. The *HP* does not here describe the nature of the conflict, but the troubles of the patriarch John – former bishop of Ḥarrān, elected in c.740³⁹ – are recounted at some length in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Great. Here the patriarch John lavishes gifts upon the caliph Marwān (r. 744-750) at Ḥarrān, his new capital; in return he

³⁷ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 74-75).

³⁸ On the relationship of Jacobite patriarchs and caliphs see now the extensive treatment of Philip Wood, *The Imam of the Christians: The World of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, 750-850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming), prefigured in id., “Changing Geographies: West Syrian Ecclesiastical Historiography, AD 700-850”, in *Historiography and Space in Late Antiquity* ed. Peter van Nuffelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 136-163; and esp. id., “Christian Elite Networks in the Jazīra, c.730-850”, in *Transregional and Regional Elites: Connecting the Early Islamic Empire* ed. Hannah-Lena Hagemann and Stefan Heidemann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 359-384.

³⁹ On the date of John’s succession, the *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaum 18) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 235-236) suggest a date between AG 1047 (735/6) and 1054 (742/3). The *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 189) gives AG 1057 (745/6), although the narrative of Michael the Great (next note) suggests that John was patriarch upon the accession of Marwān II as caliph (in 744). Michael himself – at *Chronicle* 11.21 (Chabot IV: 462) – gives AG 1039 (727/8) which is impossible. On John’s death see below n.0000.

receives a diploma (Syr. *sigillion*) granting him power of all ecclesiastical affairs; and because of this his bishops turn against him.⁴⁰ The basis of the new conflict, then, was the granting of a caliphal diploma recognising patriarchal rights – the first time such a thing is mentioned in the text in this context. The *Chronicle* knows nothing of an appeal to Alexandria, but the *HP* claims that John and the bishops had dispatched separate letters to Michael, and that the patriarch's bishops advised him not to interfere, for fear of either angering the caliph or dividing the bishops. There the matter rests, but later in the Life of Michael the reader encounters a contradiction. During a subsequent appeal of John's successor, Isaac, around his own disputed succession, Michael is said once again to have gathered his bishops, who nevertheless refuse to be drawn into the issue, claiming it to be the patriarch's business. After a month of discussions with Isaac's emissaries, Michael then responds that he cannot support an uncanonical election, and states in the previous case of John he had signed his name to the declaration of the bishops, that those established on episcopal thrones through aid of the government should be excommunicated.⁴¹ Within that contradiction, we perceive an equivocation over the appropriate leveraging of temporal power in the matter of episcopal appointments; but also an evident discomfort – expressed in the pointed refusal of Michael's own bishops to be drawn into Jacobite affairs – around the interference of one patriarch in the conflicts of the other.

The occasion for Michael's later proclamation is the appointment of Isaac, also bishop of Ḥarrān, as John's successor upon the throne of Antioch. In the

⁴⁰ See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.22 (Chabot IV: 464-7). See also *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 190), referring in brief to John's troubles and the unwillingness of some to approve him.

⁴¹ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 211-212).

Jacobite tradition Isaac, appointed in 754/5, is a controversial figure.⁴² The *Chronicle* of Michael of Great alleges that Isaac, before his elevation to the throne of Ḥarrān, murdered a fellow monk who carried an elixir capable of turning lead into gold; and in both the *Chronicle* and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* he is said to have been an alchemist, and because of this to have come to the attention of the governor of the Jazīra, and thence of the caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 754-775), who elevated him to the patriarchate, but soon after dethroned and murdered him (in 755/6).⁴³ The *HP* contains a parallel but distinct account. Here Isaac, called bishop of Ḥarrān, is elected patriarch after impressing the caliph al-Manṣūr, but not for his alchemical knowledge, but rather for the performance of a miracle through which the caliph's wife fell pregnant. Although this points to the existence of far more positive traditions around Isaac's election, here too he is nevertheless then implicated in murder, not against a monk but rather against two 'great metropolitans' who complained about his uncanonical transfer from the see of Ḥarrān, and whom the caliph had killed upon Isaac's appeal.⁴⁴ At this point, the *HP* claims, Isaac sent the metropolitans of Damascus and Emesa with a letter asking Michael to recognise his claim, which, as we have seen above, he refuses to do. Isaac's metropolitans are said to bear two further documents from Isaac: a letter to the governor Abū 'Awn, asking him to send Michael to the caliph should he refuse him recognition; and a diploma (Ar. *sijill*) from the caliph, instructing Abū 'Awn to do all that Isaac desires.⁴⁵ Once again, therefore, the Life of Michael

⁴² For the date see Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.25 (Chabot IV: 473), the *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 210), the *Chronicle to 813* ed. Ernest W. Brooks, in *Chronica Minora*, volumes I-III [Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 1, 3, 5; Scriptores Syri 1, 3, 5] (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1903-1905) III: 243-260, at 243, *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 18) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 236), all of which give AG 1066 (= 754/5).

⁴³ Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.24 (Chabot IV: 473-5); the same account in *Chronicle to 813* (Brooks 243-244); *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 210-211). For Isaac's death in AG 1067 see *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 18) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 236).

⁴⁴ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 206-208).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (Evetts II: 208-209).

explores an instance of one patriarch's interference in the affairs of another. But where Michael can issue a disapproving letter, Isaac can leverage his access to the caliph to threaten deposition. For the first time within the narrative, then, the threat of subordination to the twin pillars of Antioch and Baghdad begins to loom.

The Affair of Peter and the Advent of Dionysius

We will return below to some of the Jacobite patriarchs recorded in the subsequent text, but for now let us retain our focus on the problem of political access, and the imbalance this created within the Severan communion. The compilation of John (II) begins with the Life of Menas (r. 767-774), and almost all of this concerns a significant episode which again rehearses the tensions seen in the affair of Isaac of Ḥarrān. In this a failed candidate for the Theodosian patriarchate, the disgruntled deacon Peter, travels to Syria pretending to be Menas' representative, and bearing forged letters to the Jacobite patriarch George which accuse the governor in Fuṣṭāṭ of oppression. Peter then goes to Baghdad, where he aspires to bring further forged letters before the caliph al-Manṣūr, accusing Menas of being a secret alchemist. After Satan contrives to transform Peter into the likeness of the caliph's dead son, he moves into the palace, and soon receives a caliphal diploma (*sijill*, the first time such a thing is mentioned in this context within the *HP*)⁴⁶ appointing him patriarch of Alexandria, and instructing the governor, Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, to aid him in all things. (Peter also commissioned a lavish cap, the text reports, emblazoned in Arabic with

⁴⁶ Cf. however the *sijill* through which the governor 'Abd al-'Azīz appointed a *locum tenens* (Evetts II: 49); or that given to the Jacobite patriarch Isaac to present to the Egyptian governor Abū 'Awn (ibid. 208-210).

the words, “Peter, patriarch of Alexandria, and servant of the prince”.) Peter then returns to Alexandria, where the reluctant governor enforces the caliph’s decree, and condemns Menas and his episcopal allies to hard labour in the shipyards of Fuṣṭāṭ. After a year, however, when the governor still hesitates to recognise Peter as patriarch proper, the latter threatens to report him to the caliph, and the governor imprisons him for three years, restoring Menas in the process. Ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān is then recalled, however, and his replacement releases Peter and dispatches him to Baghdad, where he converts to Islam and receives lavish gifts from the caliph. Before he can return and punish the patriarch, however, al-Manṣūr dies, and with his death Peter’s cause was thwarted.⁴⁷ The internal chronology of the text suggests that Peter’s patriarchate lasted for over one year in c.771/2 (i.e. around four years before the death of al-Manṣūr). Nevertheless, it is not recognised as legitimate in the annals of the Theodosian Church, no doubt because Peter usurped a sitting patriarch. Indeed, if the Life of Michael’s recounting of the affair of Isaac of Ḥarrān – another favourite of al-Manṣūr, as the Life of Menas reminds us at length when introducing the case of Peter⁴⁸ – had raised the spectre of caliphal (and Antiochene) interference in the patriarchate of Alexandria, so too does the Life of Menas meditate on the problem of political access, in a world in which central power was looming larger over provincial affairs, and in which greater distance from the capital spelt greater disadvantage in the secure administration of one’s church.

Perhaps the most striking expression of this same tension are the subsequent reports around the two personal visits of the Jacobite patriarch Dionysius of Tel Maḥre (r. 818-845).⁴⁹ Although the Life of Mark (r. 799-819) introduces Dionysius

⁴⁷ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 362-380).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (364-5).

⁴⁹ For Dionysius’s election (in August AG 1129 = 818) see Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 12.10.

(called ‘an excellent person’) upon his succession, it is the Life of James (r. June 819-February 820) which records his first visit.⁵⁰ This reports that the new patriarch longed to confirm his bond with Dionysius, either through a letter or personal encounter, but was prevented by the disruptions of the fourth *fitna*.⁵¹ Then, however, the caliph dispatched the general ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir to reintegrate the separatists, at which, according to the *HP*, the patriarch seized upon the chance to salute his counterpart in person. An exuberant meeting – for which the venue is not stated – ensues, but then something quite remarkable occurs. The ‘bishops of Egypt’ approach Dionysius with complaints about an Alexandrian archdeacon, and the Jacobite reproves his counterpart, warning him not to be a cause of offence to his bishops. When James despairs at the bishops’ action, Dionysius recognises his holiness, the two are reconciled, and the Jacobite departs in peace to his see. Although the author makes a manifest attempt to assert the accord of the two sees, the reader again senses a distinct disquiet around the actual positions of the patriarchs. Despite the praise for Dionysius, the latter arrives in the entourage of a conquering general and confidant of the caliph, and his superior position is expressed both in the appeal of James’ bishops to him, and in his subsequent rebuke. The *HP*, of course, pretends to offer resolution. But the Realpolitik of the scenario, and the attendant anxieties around subordination, seem quite clear.

Remarkably, we can compare the *HP*’s account with Dionysius’s own, now embedded in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Great.⁵² First let us note that the patriarch’s account of his first visit to Egypt is prefaced with a long narrative around

⁵⁰ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 434-437). Note that the *Chronicle* of Michael does not acknowledge the exchange of synodicals between Dionysius and Mark.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 455. Cf. n. 0000 below.

⁵² For Michael’s use of Dionysius’s own *Chronicle*, which stretched from 582-842, see now Wood, *Imam of the Christians*.

the ongoing conflicts within his patriarchate, which places a notable emphasis on his secular patrons (the generals Ṭāhir and his son ‘Abd Allāh), the diplomas granted through them, and their interventions in his favour.⁵³ In parallel columns of Michael’s *Chronicle*, the text then describes the same political situation in Egypt, and how ‘Abd Allāh b. Ṭāhir was sent to reintegrate the province under caliphal rule (in a campaign lasting 825/6-827/8). Dionysius then describes how the Muslim authorities were ruining churches at Edessa and at Ḥarrān, and how he travelled to Egypt to appeal to ‘Abd Allāh. It is difficult to believe, however, that ‘Abd Allāh had not consented to the visit in advance.⁵⁴ The patriarch describes how he boarded a ship at Joppa – his precise destination is not stated – but how a storm then forced him to put in at the island port of Tinnīs, where the local people flock to him. There the patriarch James and some bishops also come to him, and when the Theodosian remarks that no Jacobite patriarch has visited since Severus, Dionysius corrects him, reminding him of Athanasius the Camel-driver – and noting to his readers how the Egyptian patriarch was rich in books, but lacking in learning and in administration. The condescending aside is much more than a statement of the author’s own superior learning. As a student of the annals of the church, Dionysius cannot have been unaware of the implications of representing an Theodosian patriarch attending upon him, in particular within Egypt, and the whole scene seems designed to emphasise his superior position – political, ecclesiological, and intellectual. As if to labour the point, Dionysius reports that he went to the “camp of the Persians”, where ‘Abd Allāh upbraided him for taking the sea route “at such age and when so dignified, for I was greatly honoured by him”. Dionysius then presents the case of the Edessans, but

⁵³ Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 12.9-12.12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 12.13 (Chabot IV: 513-515).

goes much further in interceding also for the inhabitants of Tinnīs, whose sufferings under excessive taxation is set out in some detail. ‘Abd Allāh, in a dramatic concession to the patriarch, then orders the Egyptian capitation to be fixed at certain levels.⁵⁵

Both the Alexandrian and Antiochene accounts of the visit therefore expose a certain consciousness of Antiochene pre-eminence, and that consciousness is exposed again in mutual accounts of Dionysius’s second visit. In a potential sign of dislike for Dionysius – although consistent with similar apologies earlier in the text – the Life of James’ successor Joseph (r. 830-849) informs its reader that the new patriarch found no time at all to dispatch a synodical letter, but that God ordained once again that Dionysius should visit. The context for that visit is the famous revolt of the Bāshmurites – that is, the inhabitants of the litoral marshes in the northern Delta – against the predations of two Muslim tax officials. The Life of Joseph reports that the caliph al-Ma’mūn had dispatched the general Afshīn to suppress the revolt, but that the Bāshmurites proved obstinate, despite dire warnings in a stream of letters from the patriarch. Then, in an unprecedented move, the caliph came in person. In his entourage came Dionysius.⁵⁶ The Life recounts how Joseph learnt of the arrival of caliph and patriarch, and travelled to Fuṣṭāṭ to attend upon the pair. There Dionysius, acting in the role of Joseph’s patron, informed the caliph of Joseph’s previous attempts to propitiate the rebels and, gratified, al-Ma’mūn then instructed the two patriarchs to travel to the Bāshmur and to persuade the rebels to desist, or else to accept the consequences. Although the patriarchs’ mission fell upon deaf ears – so that al-Afshīn devastated the Bāshmur after certain neighbouring persons

⁵⁵ Ibid. 514-515.

⁵⁶ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 489-492).

revealed the paths through the marshes – the shared venture is remarkable, and without precedent in the late Roman period.⁵⁷ Two Christian patriarchs acted as the emissaries of a non-Christian ruler to fellow Christians, and the Jacobite patriarch interfered in a region subordinate to his Theodosian counterpart, attempting to succeed where the latter had failed. Although the author of the *Life* once again maintains a dispassionate position in recounting the episode, and presents the patriarchs as acting in concert, the informed reader cannot help but sense a now familiar disquiet. For the intervention of the Jacobite patriarch in Egyptian affairs, if not a humiliation for Joseph, was, again, at least a conspicuous reaffirmation of his lesser status within the new ‘Abbāsīd order.

Dionysius, nevertheless, now over-reached. According to the *HP*’s subsequent account, the Jacobite patriarch – in a further expression of his superior access, and in notable distinction to Joseph’s own actions – took the Bāshmurites’ grievances against the local tax officials to the caliph, who warned him to flee, for the same officials were amongst the followers of his brother Ibrāhīm (i.e. the future caliph al-Mu‘taṣim), who would kill him if he learnt of the complaint, he would kill him. The scene is instructive, for it suggests that the Jacobite patriarch, in attempting once again to assert himself over local affairs, had gone too far in extending his interventions from Christian to Muslim matters, misunderstanding both patronage networks amongst local Muslims and the extent of his own *parrhesia* before al-Ma’mūn.⁵⁸

Dionysius’s own account of the visit – which follows an extensive report of an audience with al-Ma’mūn, and which culminates in the caliph’s recognition of the

⁵⁷ Ibid. 492-493.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 495-6.

patriarch's rights – follows the contours of the *HP*, including his arrival in the entourage of al-Ma'mūn, his shared and failed mission to the Bāshmur, and his flight following his (rash, according to his own account) complaints against the official Abū l-Wazīr, a dependant of the governor Abū Ishāq (i.e. al-Mu'taṣim).⁵⁹ But he also closes his account with some reflections on what he observed. These reflections include long and fascinating reports of the ancient buildings at Heliopolis, of the Pyramids, and of the Nilometer (at Rawḍa).⁶⁰ But for our purposes, we note again some condescending comments about the Egyptian patriarch and his bishops who, Dionysius claims, have fallen some distance from the example of their late Roman predecessors. Thus he notes that training in the Scriptures has disappeared, so that episcopal office is not obtained through learning, but rather through wealth; and that the patriarch accepts such a practice because of the debts of the Alexandrian Church.⁶¹ Whatever the truth of such statements, their inclusion is consonant with the wider tone of the text, and with his reported activities. For in the world of the 'Abbāsid caliphate, the Antiochene patriarch, dependant of the great and good, could indeed count himself superior to his Alexandrian counterpart.

The Anxieties of Communion

So far we have seen that the authors of the *HP*, from c.715 onwards, place a consistent emphasis on the maintenance of communion with Antioch, insisting that synodicals were exchanged, excusing periods when contacts had lapsed, and

⁵⁹ Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 12.16-12.17 (Chabot IV: 522-525).

⁶⁰ Ibid. 12.17 (Chabot IV: 526-527).

⁶¹ Ibid. 12.17 (Chabot IV: 525-6).

obfuscating moments of evident conflict.⁶² We have also seen several instances in which those authors seem quite well-informed on relations with, and matters within, the Antiochene patriarchate. What were their sources? It is possible that some authors had access to a patriarchal archive of letters, in particular where their *incipit* and *explicit* of letters are quoted. Although no such letters are extant in the original, we can presume them to have contained at least some reportage of events within Antiochene patriarchate. At the same time, we should also bear in mind the less formal oral reports which emissaries from patriarchs and other travellers (merchants, itinerant monks, pilgrims, etc.) also brought with them, and which contemporaries noted in one form or another. Thus the tale of Isaac of Harran's accession to the Antiochene patriarchate, for example, is reported on the basis of 'two sons' (sc. spiritual disciples) of his predecessor John, who had visited,⁶³ while the synodical letter of Cyriacus (appointed in 792/3)⁶⁴ is brought by one Anastasius, metropolitan of Damascus, who seems to be a genuine person.⁶⁵

Indeed, for the reader familiar with Jacobite texts, the *HP* contains some quite striking emphases. As Michael prepares to travel to the caliph over his refusal to recognise Isaac, for example, news arrives that the patriarch has died, as too has his immediate successor, Athanasius, three days later. The author now offers more information on Athanasius on the basis of unnamed informants, in a manner unparalleled elsewhere in the text. Athanasius is called 'one of the chief bishops and

⁶² For further instances of the exchange of synodicals see *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 394 [John and Cyriacus], 437 [Mark and Dionysius]).

⁶³ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts II: 207).

⁶⁴ The date (AG 1104) is given in *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaum 21) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 238); and Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 12.3 (Chabot IV: 484).

⁶⁵ *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 392-394). On Anastasius see Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 12.10 (Chabot IV: 502), where an Anastasius of Damascus is amongst the signatories of a later council of AG 1129 (817/8). Note that earlier, in an unusual detail, *History of the Patriarchs (Vulgate Recension)* (Evetts III: 409) reports that Mark's synodical to Cyriacus went via two bishops, Mark of Tinnīs and Mark of al-Faramā, who are otherwise unknown.

a metropolitan', and placed in Ḥarrān. The *HP* describes how his province was extensive, and how he used to travel across its mountains wearing iron sandals (Ar. *madās*, but an implicit explanation, unknown in Jacobite accounts, of Athanasius's soubriquet, Sandalāya); how he was tall, strong, and stout; and how, because of the distance of his see from Antioch, he had the privilege of ordaining bishops.⁶⁶ This account seems both to complement and to contradict elements within the Jacobite tradition. On the one hand, like the *Chronicle* of Michael and the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*,⁶⁷ it places a severe curtailment on Athanasius's patriarchate, which other sources suggest stretched from 755/6-757/8.⁶⁸ But on the other – in more effusive tone than other Syriac texts, and in startling contrast to the *Chronicle* of Michael – it describes Athanasius in quasi-hagiographic terms, recognising both his metropolitan title and his independent ordinations.⁶⁹ In contrast, the *Chronicle* presents Athanasius Sandalāya, bishop of Maypherqaṭ and 'Metropolitan of Mesopotamia', as an unambiguous villain, who embodies both the subversion of patriarchal prerogative and the improper leveraging of secular power.⁷⁰ The *HP*, then, has access to a quite different, even antithetical, perspective.

Straight after the praise of Athanasius, we find further information unique to the *HP*. A further notice records how one George – who is presented, in contrast to

⁶⁶ Ibid. (II: 212-213).

⁶⁷ See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.24 (473-5), with the same account in *Chronicle to 813* (Brooks 244-245), suggesting a brief reign; *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 211), with Isaac's death and Athanasius's patriarchate all placed under AG 1065 (754/5).

⁶⁸ For these dates (AG 1067-69) see *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 18) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 236).

⁶⁹ Cf. *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 210-211), which calls Athanasius 'venerable' while also referencing rumours around his death, and noting the scandals around his appointment. *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 18) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 236) do not refer to such scandals. Both chronicles are associated with Abraham's alma mater at Qartmin.

⁷⁰ See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.22-24, with A. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Ṭur 'Abdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 169-174.

Jacobite texts, as a former Chalcedonian⁷¹ – succeeded to the throne (in 758/9)⁷², and how soon a bishop David, whose mother had nursed the caliph al-Manṣūr, accused him of unmentionable crimes, and that the caliph arrested and imprisoned him ‘in the eighth year of his reign’ (761/2, which is correct).⁷³ The author, John (I), now states that no letters have come from Antioch since then, but it is difficult to suppose that he, writing up to 767, does not know that the bishop David was in fact George’s controversial successor.⁷⁴ Jacobite texts preserve divergent perspectives on David, who was appointed after George was maligned at court and incarcerated.⁷⁵ The *HP* aligns with the *Chronicle* of Michael in making David the agent of George’s deposition, but of further interest here is the unique claim that David’s mother was the nurse of al-Manṣūr. The origins of the claim are uncertain, but it is consistent with other unique claims, all with the same emphasis. Thus where earlier the appointment of Isaac occurs when the caliph’s wife perceives him in a dream and falls pregnant, and where later that of Peter is attributed to his semblance to the dead caliph’s son, so here that of David is also associated with an intimate connection to the court. In such instances, therefore, traditions from Antioch seem interwoven with particular Alexandrian anxieties constructed around the perceived political advantages of access to the caliph’s court.

⁷¹ Cf. Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.25 (Chabot IV: 475); *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 212).

⁷² See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.25 (Chabot IV: 475), *Chronicle to 813* (Brooks 245), *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 19) and *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 237), giving AG 1070 (758/9).

⁷³ The same date in *Chronicle to 819* (Barsaüm 19), calling David ‘impious’, as does *Chronicle to 846* (Brooks 237).

⁷⁴ That the bishop who accused George also replaced him is however known to the author of the *Life of John* (Evetts III: 382-383), also noting the new patriarch’s failure to send a synodical. The same author also notes George’s failure to send a synodical to Menas when recording that of his successor John (ibid. 392-393).

⁷⁵ See the competing accounts in Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.25-26 (Chabot IV: 475-6, with the same in *Chronicle to 813* [Brooks 245-246]); and *Chronicle of Zuqnin* (Chabot II: 247-249). The *Chronicle*’s dissonance with Michael’s account of David is consistent with its presentation of George’s election (Chabot vol. 2 211-213), of the council which restored George after John of Callinicum’s death (ibid. 226; 243-244), and of David’s patriarchate (ibid. 249-252, 289).

If we accept that the *HP* is rather well-informed on the affairs of the Jacobite patriarchs, and on some of their conflicts, we must also acknowledge that it omits several substantial episodes recounted within the extant narratives of the Jacobite Church. It knows nothing, for example, of the remarkable union of the Antiochene and Armenian churches under Athanasius in 724;⁷⁶ likewise it does not speak of Cyriacus's attempted union with the Julianists in 797/8;⁷⁷ and it ignores continuous conflicts of successive patriarchs around the status and prerogatives of the metropolitans of Tikrit.⁷⁸ Of course we might presume disinterest or a lack of information. But it is perhaps not coincidental that all of these episodes concern the expansion of the Antiochene communion. Their omission in the *HP*, therefore, seems consistent with the wider anxieties which we have detected around the ecclesiological ambitions of the Jacobite patriarchs, even as successive authors and compilers revalidated traditional claims to the equal status of the two patriarchs.

If we now switch our perspective, and approach the Theodosian Church through the lens of Jacobite texts, we again uncover a telling situation. The *Chronicle* of Michael – chiefly depending, we will remember, on the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tel Maḥre – also ignores Alexandrian interactions with Nubia and with Ethiopia, mirroring the *HP*'s omission of Antiochene interactions with the Armenians, Julianists, and Tikritians. But its silences are greater still. The *Chronicle* is indifferent to the institution of the synodical – although there is on occasion reason to suppose that these were received⁷⁹ – and ignores the reported appeals to Alexandria around

⁷⁶ For the Jacobite perspective, see Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.20 (Chabot IV: 457-61).

⁷⁷ Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 12.4 (Chabot IV: 485-6), with the same account in *Chronicle to 813* (Brooks 251-253).

⁷⁸ See Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.23 (Chabot IV: 470); 12.1 (Chabot IV: 479-80); cf. *Chronicle to 819* [Barsaüm 20] *Chronicle to 846* [Brooks 237]; 12.7-9 (Chabot IV: 492-497, 499).

⁷⁹ See the knowledge, consistent with dates within the *HP* (Evetts III: 440; 473-474, 476), of the months in which the patriarchs Mark, James, and Simon died, in Michael the Great, *Chronicle* (Chabot IV: 505, 522). As the information no doubt derives from Dionysius, it is possible that he

the successions of John and of Isaac. There is little reason to doubt these appeals, after which the patriarch Michael seems to have sided with the schismatic bishops. Indeed, where the *Chronicle* does corroborate an appeal recorded in the *HP*, it does so in perhaps revealing circumstances. Thus the *HP*'s Life of Mark (r. 799-819) records how Satan had stirred up against the patriarch Cyriacus a metropolitan, Abraham, who "spoke perverse words of the mysteries of Christ", how Mark then wrote a letter to the patriarch encouraging him (which is quoted at some length), and how Abraham and a number of other bishops nevertheless broke communion.⁸⁰ Once again, the *HP* proves itself well-informed, for the conflict of Cyriacus with the monks of Gūbbā Barrāyā and, later, with the anti-patriarch Abraham – which indeed revolved around conflicting understanding of a eucharistic formula – is described in detail across several chapters of Michael's *Chronicle*.⁸¹ But here we find explicit acknowledgement that certain Abrahamite monks went to Alexandria, and tried to create a schism between Mark and Cyriacus; that Cyriacus wrote to Mark; and that Mark and his bishops then anathematised Abraham and the Gubbites.⁸² The difference with the earlier appeals to Alexandria, of course, is that here such appeals result in the reaffirmation of patriarchal prerogatives. One senses, then, that in a context in which the Jacobite patriarchs were beset with dissident and schismatic metropolitans and bishops, the suggestion that a legitimate patriarch depended on recognition from his Alexandrian counterpart, or that that Alexandria might function as some sort of court of appeal for disgruntled Jacobites, had proven inapposite to

acquired it during his visits. For epigraphic evidence for the sending of Antiochene synodicals to Egypt, see Johannes den Heijer, "Relations between Copts and Syrians in the Light of Recent Discoveries at Dayr as-Suryān", in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium* eds M. Immerzeel, J. van der Vliet, M. Kersten, and C. van Zoest (Leuven, 2004), pp. 923-938.

⁸⁰ Ibid. (Chabot IV: 416-418). On the Abrahamites cf. also ibid. 436-6, on Dionysius's efforts to reintegrate them.

⁸¹ Ibid. 12.3-12.8.

⁸² Ibid. 12.6 (Chabot IV: 492). These Egyptian anathemas against the Abrahamites are also referred to in ibid. 12.9 (Chabot IV:98).

the patriarchal perspective of the narrators.⁸³ Where the *HP* celebrates such contacts while obfuscating friction, the *Chronicle* can ignore them altogether.

Conclusion

The narrative of Christian communities in the caliphate has sometimes been told as one of progressive regionalisation, as religious impresarios within the different confessional hierarchies brought into being a series of localised ‘ethno-churches’, distinguished through their distinctive senses of past, of homeland, and of culture.⁸⁴ Indeed, in several perspectives the sections of the *History of the Patriarchs* examined here – with their resolute focus on the succession of Theodosian patriarchs, their indifference to Roman affairs, and their flirtations with an emergent ‘Coptic’ identity, defined in opposition both to Chalcedonism and to Romanitas⁸⁵ – can seem to complement such narratives. But the reader of the late Marwānid and ‘Abbāsid sections of the text will soon encounter a parallel emphasis, which constructs its audience not simply as Theodosians or Egyptians, but also as Severans, that is, as members of an orthodox group which transcended the boundaries of their province, and which embraced, in particular, the Christians of the Antiochene patriarchate.

⁸³ It is interesting to note in this context a metropolitan of Tikrit appealing to the Alexandrian-Antiochene model as a basis for his see’s own independence; see *ibid.* 12.11 (Chabot IV: 506).

⁸⁴ The classic account is Michael Morony, “Religious Communities in Late Sasanian and Early Muslim Iraq”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17 (1974): 113-135.

⁸⁵ For elements of this construction (which should not be confused with realities on the ground) see e.g. Arietta Papaconstantinou, “Historiography, Hagiography, and the Making of the Coptic “Church of the Martyrs” in Early Islamic Egypt”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 60 (2006): 65-86; Booth, “Images of Emperors and Emirs”.

The mutual commitment of Theodosian and Jacobite patriarchs to the maintenance of the Severan communion was in part the shared inheritance of the late Roman period, and of the foundation of the patriarchates in the confessional maelstrom of the age of Justinian. But in the post-Roman period, the same commitment had been re-enabled and revitalised through shifting patterns of political organisation and patronage within the caliphate which, in the late Marwānid and ‘Abbāsid periods, was becoming more centralised and more connected. We have seen that the first proper evidence of renewed contact between the Theodosian and Jacobite patriarchates comes in 715, and this is not insignificant. For it is in this same period that the historian of Egypt senses a wider transition, in which the region begins to transform from a more or less autonomous zone into a province of the caliphate.⁸⁶ This transformation can be measured through various means: it is seen, for example, in the gradual replacement of the name of the governor on official protocols with that of the caliph (first attested during the governorship of ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Malik [r. 705-709]);⁸⁷ in the appointment of (often short-tenure) non-Egyptian bureaucrats as governors at Fustāt (evident from Qurra b. Sharīk [r. 709-715] onward);⁸⁸ and in the first attested dispatch of Egyptians both as craftsmen and labourers for projects in Jerusalem and Damascus (attested in documents from 706)⁸⁹ and as sailors on the *kourson Anatolēs* (also seen from 706).⁹⁰ The reported

⁸⁶ On Egypt under ‘Abd al-‘Azīz see now Joshua Mabra, *Princely Authority in the Early Marwānid State: The Life of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017).

⁸⁷ For the name of the caliph al-Wālid alongside that of the governor, see e.g. CPR III 32-33 (705-709), 34 (705-708), 35 (706/7), 36-37 (707/8), 38 (708/9), 39 (707); for the name of the caliph alone in the same period, *ibid.* 32-33 (705-709), 34 (705-708), 35 (706/7), 36-37 (707/8), 38 (708/9), 39 (707).

⁸⁸ See the comment of. Nadia Abbot, *The Kurrah Papyri from Aphrodito in the Oriental Institute* [The Orient. Inst. of the Univ. of Chicago Studies, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization XV] (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1938), pp. 57-61.

⁸⁹ See Federico Morelli, “Legname, palazzo e moschee: P.Vindob. G 31 e il contributo dell’Egitto alla prima architettura islamica”, *Tyche* 13 (1998): 165–90.

⁹⁰ See e.g. *P.Lond.* IV 1433 (707), 1434 (716), 1441 (706).

renewal of the Severan communion seems, then, of a piece with this reconnecting world.

For successive authors within the *HP*, it was of evident importance to emphasise the standing of their patriarchs within these wider horizons – to memorialise the sending and receipt of synodicals, and to reaffirm the right of the Theodosian patriarchs to hear the grievances of disgruntled Jacobites. But it is also evident that the Severan communion was reconstituted in a quite different context to that of its first realisation, a context in which the Jacobite patriarchs were now far closer to the centres of temporal power. Successive anecdotes within the *HP* manifest the discomfort which this new situation created, as Christian clients of the caliph – whether Antiochene patriarchs or claimants to the Alexandrian throne – began to insert themselves into Theodosian affairs. No doubt the relationship could sometimes bring discomfort to the Jacobite patriarch too, as the occurrence and subsequent suppression of appeals to the patriarch Michael suggests. But where, in Theodosian narratives, the association with Antioch offers an alluring link both to the wider Christian experience and to the distant caliph's court – with all of its aura as the perceived fount of patronage –, in their Jacobite equivalents the reverse association is a far more minor concern, to be cited at moments of convenience or condescension. If the eighth- and ninth-century Islamic caliphate, then, had resuscitated the notion of a Severan Church which bound together distant regional hierarchies, it had nevertheless done so with a sense of distinct imbalance, and with the Alexandrian patriarch cast in an unfamiliar role as *secundus inter pares*.