

The figure of Melchizedek, who is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible only briefly (Gen 14:18-20, Ps 110:4), captured imagination of many generations of Jewish as well as Christian readers and interpreters of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> One of the most imaginative outcomes of this fascination that came to us from the period of Late Antiquity is the Greek composition known as the *Story of Melchizedek*, a work that presents an extended account of the life of the priestly king.<sup>2</sup>

The content of the *Story* could be summarized briefly as follows:<sup>3</sup> Melchizedek is introduced as one of the two sons of Melchi, the pagan king of the city of Salem. One day the father orders Melchizedek to bring some cattle for offering to the idols. While on his way, Melchizedek contemplates the sun, moon and stars in heaven and comes to the conclusion that there is only one true God, who created them and to whom sacrifices should be offered. When he returns home without the cattle and tries to persuade his father to become monotheist, the king gets enraged and decides to sacrifice one of his sons. As the king and the queen cast lots to choose who of the two sons should be sacrificed, the lot falls to the latter and she saves Melchizedek. While preparations for the sacrifice of his brother are being made, Melchizedek flees to Mount Tabor and prays there to God for the evildoers to be punished. His prayer is answered and the whole city and its population, including his family, are swallowed up by the earth. After that Melchizedek spends seven years leading an ascetic life on Mount Tabor, wandering naked and eating plants. After seven years, God sends Abraham to the mountain in order to meet Melchizedek, to bring him back to the human world, and to receive a blessing from him. Obeying God's orders, Abraham meets Melchizedek, cuts his long hair and nails, and clothes him. After three days, Melchizedek descends from the mountain with a horn of oil and blesses Abraham, whose name at this point is changed from Abram to Abraham. The narrative concludes with an excursus in which the absence of information about Melchizedek's parents in the Bible and the typological

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\* I would like to express my thanks to Prof. Sebastian Brock as well as to the anonymous reviewer of this article for their valuable comments and corrections.

<sup>1</sup> On Melchizedek in the Bible, see A.K. Chan, *Melchizedek Passages in the Bible: A Case Study for Inner-Biblical and Inter-Biblical Interpretation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016). On the history of interpretation of this figure in ancient Judaism and Christianity, see F.L. Horton, *The Melchizedek Tradition: A Critical Examination of the Sources to the Fifth Century A.D. and in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Society for New Testament Studies, Monograph Series 30; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); B.A. Pearson, "Melchizedek in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Gnosticism," in M.E. Stone and T.A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1998), pp. 176-202; P. Piovanelli, "'Much to Say and Hard to Explain': Melchizedek in Early Christian Literature, Theology, and Controversy," in A.A. Orlov and G. Boccaccini (eds.), *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only* (Studia Judaica 4; Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 411-429; G. Bardy, "Melchisédech dans la tradition patristique," *Revue Biblique* 35 (1926), 496-509; 36 (1927), pp. 25-45.

<sup>2</sup> For general information, see S.E. Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story of Melchizedek," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 18:1 (1987), pp. 26-39; J. Doehorn, "Die Historia de Melchisedech (Hist Melch) – Einführung, editorischer Vorbericht und Editiones praeliminares," *Le Muséon* 117:1-2 (2004), pp. 7-48; Ch. Böttrich, *Geschichte Melchisedechs* (Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit, Neue Folge; Band II: Weisheitliche, magische und legendarische Erzählungen, 1; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010); P. Piovanelli, "The Story of Melchizedek with the Melchizedek Legend from the *Chronicon Paschale*: A New Translation and Introduction," in R. Bauckham, J.R. Davila and A. Panayotov (eds.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures. Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan–Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 64-84.

<sup>3</sup> The summary is based on the Pseudo-Athanasian version, on which see below.

significance of his sacrifice of bread and wine as a prefiguration of Eucharist are explained, and in which the council of Nicaea is evoked.

The Greek version of the *Story* survives in a considerable number of textual witnesses that reveal a great degree of variability. Jan Doehorn, who is preparing currently a critical edition of this work and who has carried out a most thorough overview of its diverse textual tradition so far, lists twenty-nine Greek manuscripts produced between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries, in which various versions of the *Story* appear.<sup>4</sup>

Among the most important and well-attested versions of the *Story* is the one, in which its authorship is ascribed to Athanasius, the famous fourth-century bishop of Alexandria. One early representative of this version become known to scholars as a result of its inclusion in the corpus of Athanasian writings by Jacques-Paul Migne.<sup>5</sup> Another important version of the *Story* is incorporated as a separate chapter into a larger historiographical composition, the *Palaea Historica* (ca 9th c.). Comparable in its length to the Pseudo-Athanasian version, it appears there under the title *Περὶ τοῦ Μελχισεδέκ*.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these main versions, two additional witnesses of the Greek tradition of the *Story* have been published. In his article, Doehorn has edited the Greek text entitled *Βίος καὶ ἱστορία τοῦ Μελχισεδέκ* from ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1083 (16th c.).<sup>7</sup> This composition is shorter in size than the Pseudo-Athanasian version, to which it exhibits certain affinity, although there is no explicit mention of Athanasius as the author. Another and, so far, the shortest Greek version of the *Story* comes from the so-called “Joshua Roll,” an illuminated Byzantine manuscript from the 10th century (Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Palat. gr. 431). On the back of this roll, there is a number of brief Greek texts added during the 13th century. One of these is a significantly abbreviated version of the *Story*, whose title and content likewise display no connection to Athanasius.<sup>8</sup>

It has been suggested recently by Pierluigi Piovanelli that one can single out three main recensions of the *Story*, i.e. the Pseudo-Athanasian one, that of the *Palaea* and that of ms. BNF, Gr. 1083.<sup>9</sup> Yet, taking into account that most of this material requires further investigation, it still remains to be seen whether such tripartite division does justice to the fluid textual tradition of this work.

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that Greek was original language of the *Story*. As for the milieu and time of its composition, their opinions differ. Whereas some scholars argued that it might be an originally Jewish composition that later on was reworked

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<sup>4</sup> Doehorn, “Die Historia de Melchisedech,” pp. 16-21.

<sup>5</sup> PG 28 (1857), cols. 523-530. Migne’s edition is based on ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gr. 1336 (11th c.). This text has been reedited, alongside with a number of variant readings, by Doehorn, “Die Historia de Melchisedech,” pp. 28-33. For an English translation, see Robinson, “Apocryphal Story,” pp. 28-31, and Piovanelli, “Story of Melchizedek,” pp. 77-81.

<sup>6</sup> For the Greek text, see A. Vassiliev, *Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina: Pars Prior* (Mosquae: Universitatis Caesariae, 1893), pp. 206-211. It has been republished, alongside with a number of variant readings, by Doehorn, “Die Historia de Melchisedech,” pp. 35-40. For an English translation, see W. Adler, “*Palaea Historica* (“The Old Testament History”): A New Translation and Introduction,” in R. Bauckham, J.R. Davila and A. Panayotov (eds.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures. Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), pp. 585-672 (613-616).

<sup>7</sup> Doehorn, “Die Historia de Melchisedech,” pp. 42-47.

<sup>8</sup> For the Greek text and German translation, see P. Schreiner, “Die Prachthandschrift als Gebrauchsgegenstand: theologische und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Notizen auf dem Verso des Josua-Rotulus (Vat. Palat. gr. 431),” *Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse* 134:1 (1997-1999), pp. 43-62 (47-50).

<sup>9</sup> Piovanelli, “Story of Melchizedek,” pp. 65-66.

by Christians,<sup>10</sup> a more prevalent opinion among the students of the *Story* seems to be that it is an originally Christian work that was composed in Palestine, most likely, during the late fourth or early fifth century.<sup>11</sup>

The *Story* enjoyed a remarkable popularity through the Christian world during the Middle Ages and deserves to be considered as one of the most widely attested apocryphal works. To that testifies the fact that besides Greek, it is attested in Latin and in almost every language of *Oriens Christianus*, namely Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic and Romanian.<sup>12</sup>

In the main part of this article, I would like to contribute to the history of reception of the *Story* among Syriac-speaking Christians. With that goal in mind, I am going to present for the first time the original Syriac text, English translation and discussion of three different witnesses to this apocryphal work in Syriac: the complete Pseudo-Athanasian version of the *Story*, the Pseudo-Athanasian excerpt found in ms. Vatican Syr. 159, and the brief discourse entitled *Melchizedek the Priest*.

## 1. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Story of Melchizedek*

The most important witness for the Syriac tradition of the *Story* is the complete version of this work, ascribed to Athanasius of Alexandria, which is found incorporated into the West-Syrian exegetical composition often referred to as *Catena Severi*.<sup>13</sup> Strictly speaking, not a representative of the genre of *catena* as it is known in Greek, this work is an exegetical compendium that was produced by the monk Severus from the Monastery of St. Barbara in the vicinity of Edessa in the year 861. This selective commentary on the books of the Old and New Testament is based mainly on the works of Ephrem the Syrian, Jacob of Edessa and John Chrysostom, but includes material from several other authors as well.

The *catena* of Severus, only parts of which have had been published until now, is preserved in a number of manuscripts. The oldest and best textual witness of Severus' work is ms. Vatican Syr. 103,<sup>14</sup> a monumental exegetical collection produced a few decades after the completion of Severus' project by the monk Simeon of Ḥiṣn Maṣṣur from the Monastery of the Seven Martyrs near the city of Perrhe. Simeon not merely copied the work of Severus further, but expanded it further by including the complete text of the *Commentary on the Octateuch* of Jacob of Edessa, and by adding in the marginal glosses extracts from various Greek and Syriac authors. The *Catena* is found in at least five more manuscripts: Dayr al-

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Robinson, "The Apocryphal Story," pp. 31-36; Böttrich, *Geschichte Melchisedeks*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>11</sup> See, most recently, Piovanelli, "Story of Melchizedek," pp. 69-73; for references to earlier scholars who held this opinion, see p. 70, n. 30.

<sup>12</sup> For overview of this material, see Dochhorn, "Die Historia de Melchisedech," pp. 21-27; Böttrich, *Geschichte Melchisedeks*, pp. 16-29. For the Latin tradition, see also S. Pelle, "A Preliminary Study of the *Historia de Melchisedech* in the Latin West," *Apocrypha* 24 (2013), pp. 57-90.

<sup>13</sup> On this work, see L. van Rompay, "Severos, Commentary of the Monk," in S.P. Brock et alii (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), p. 367; D. Kruisheer, "Ephrem, Jacob of Edessa, and the Monk Severus: An Analysis of Ms. Vat. Syr. 103, ff. 1-72," in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII: Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages, 11-14 August 1996* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 256; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998), pp. 599-605; R.B. ter Haar Romeny, "Ephrem and Jacob of Edessa in the Commentary of the Monk Severus," in G.A. Kiraz (ed.), *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock* (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 3; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), pp. 535-557.

<sup>14</sup> For a description, see S.E. Assemani and J.S. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus. Partis primae, tomus tertius, complectens reliquos codices chaldaicos sive syriacos* (Roma: Ex typographia linguarum orientalium, 1759), pp. 7-28.

Suryan Syr. 15 (10th/11th c.);<sup>15</sup> British Library Add. 12144 (copied from Vatican Syr. 103 in the year 1081);<sup>16</sup> Mingana Syr. 147 (1899 CE);<sup>17</sup> Harvard Syr. 116 (1899 CE),<sup>18</sup> and Harvard Syr. 123 (1903 CE).<sup>19</sup>

Among these, only four manuscripts contain the *Story of Melchizedek*.<sup>20</sup> In ms. Vatican Syr. 103, our text appears on ff. 20r-20v. It is preceded by another text dealing with Melchizedek, an excerpt from Jacob of Edessa, entitled “On Melchizedek, the priest of God, and on his race” (ff. 19v-20r), and is followed by another excerpt from Jacob, “On God’s visitation of the house of Abraham, and on what happened and was said there” (ff. 20v-21r). Its title, written in the red ink, introduces what follows as an abbreviated version of the “Story about Melchizedek” by Athanasius of Alexandria. On the left margin of fol. 20r, there is a long quotation from the work “On the Indications of Places” (ܐܬܚܬܐܝܬܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ) by Epiphanius of Cyprus, which discusses the geographical location of the city of Salem, over which Melchizedek ruled according to Gen 14:18. The quotation is similar in its content, though not in the exact wording, to §74 of the Syriac version of Epiphanius’ *On Weights and Measures*.<sup>21</sup> Presumably, it is one of the excerpts added to Severus’ work by Simeon of Ḥisn Manṣur.

In the three other witnesses of the catena, the *Story* occupies the same place as in ms. Vatican Syr. 103: mss. Mingana Syr. 147, ff. 61r-62r; Harvard Syr. 123, ff. 94v-95v; Dayr al-Suryan Syr. 15, ff. 7v-7r. One peculiar feature of the last manuscript is that the quotation from Epiphanius, which appears in the margin of ms. Vatican Syr. 103, is incorporated here into the main body of the *Catena* and seems to follow our text.<sup>22</sup>

In what follows, the Syriac text of the *Story* is given according to ms. Vatican Syr. 103. It is accompanied by variant readings from mss. Mingana Syr. 147 (M) and Harvard Syr. 123 (H). In order to make comparison with the Greek version easier, division of the text into paragraphs follows that of Doehhorn’s reedition of the Pseudo-Athanasian version.<sup>23</sup>

### **Syriac text:**

<sup>15</sup> See S.P. Brock and L. van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir al-Surian, Wadi al-Natrun (Egypt)* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 227; Leuven: Peeters, 2014), pp. 73-80.

<sup>16</sup> See W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, Acquired since the Year 1838*. 3 vols (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870-1872), vol. 2, pp. 908-914.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts now in the Possession of the Trustees of the Woodbrooke Settlement, Selly Oak, Birmingham*. 3 vols (Woodbrooke Catalogues 1-3; Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933, 1936, 1939), v. 1, cols. 335-340.

<sup>18</sup> See M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library: A Catalogue* (Harvard Semitic Studies 23; Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> See Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>20</sup> In its present condition, ms. British Library Add. 12144 lacks about twelve quires at the beginning. However, as has been established by Lucas van Rompay, the missing quires survived being incorporated into ms. Dayr al-Suryan Syr. 15; see Brock and van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts*, pp. 79-80. As for ms. Harvard Syr. 116, it seems to contain an abridged version of *Catena*. Thus, on fol. 33v the excerpt from Jacob of Edessa, identical to “On Melchizedek, the priest of God, and on his race,” which comes before the *Story* in ms. Vatican Syr. 103, is followed by the brief excerpt on “God’s promise to Abraham about Isaac” from Ephrem, identical to the one on fol. 18v of ms. Vatican Syr. 103.

<sup>21</sup> See J.E. Dean, *Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 11; Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1935), pp. 115 [Syr.], 75 [trans.].

<sup>22</sup> See Brock and van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts*, p. 74. Unfortunately, this manuscript was not available to me, so my observations are based on its description provided by Van Rompay.

<sup>23</sup> Doehhorn, “Die Historia de Melchisedech,” pp. 28-33. It is followed by Böttrich and Piovanelli in their translations of this version.



[14] 1. 1980-81 2. 1981-82 3. 1982-83 4. 1983-84 5. 1984-85 6. 1985-86 7. 1986-87 8. 1987-88 9. 1988-89 10. 1989-90 11. 1990-91 12. 1991-92 13. 1992-93 14. 1993-94 15. 1994-95 16. 1995-96 17. 1996-97 18. 1997-98 19. 1998-99 20. 1999-00 21. 2000-01 22. 2001-02 23. 2002-03 24. 2003-04 25. 2004-05 26. 2005-06 27. 2006-07 28. 2007-08 29. 2008-09 30. 2009-10 31. 2010-11 32. 2011-12 33. 2012-13 34. 2013-14 35. 2014-15 36. 2015-16 37. 2016-17 38. 2017-18 39. 2018-19 40. 2019-20 41. 2020-21 42. 2021-22 43. 2022-23 44. 2023-24 45. 2024-25 46. 2025-26 47. 2026-27 48. 2027-28 49. 2028-29 50. 2029-30 51. 2030-31 52. 2031-32 53. 2032-33 54. 2033-34 55. 2034-35 56. 2035-36 57. 2036-37 58. 2037-38 59. 2038-39 60. 2039-40 61. 2040-41 62. 2041-42 63. 2042-43 64. 2043-44 65. 2044-45 66. 2045-46 67. 2046-47 68. 2047-48 69. 2048-49 70. 2049-50 71. 2050-51 72. 2051-52 73. 2052-53 74. 2053-54 75. 2054-55 76. 2055-56 77. 2056-57 78. 2057-58 79. 2058-59 80. 2059-60 81. 2060-61 82. 2061-62 83. 2062-63 84. 2063-64 85. 2064-65 86. 2065-66 87. 2066-67 88. 2067-68 89. 2068-69 90. 2069-70 91. 2070-71 92. 2071-72 93. 2072-73 94. 2073-74 95. 2074-75 96. 2075-76 97. 2076-77 98. 2077-78 99. 2078-79 100. 2079-80 101. 2080-81 102. 2081-82 103. 2082-83 104. 2083-84 105. 2084-85 106. 2085-86 107. 2086-87 108. 2087-88 109. 2088-89 110. 2089-90 111. 2090-91 112. 2091-92 113. 2092-93 114. 2093-94 115. 2094-95 116. 2095-96 117. 2096-97 118. 2097-98 119. 2098-99 120. 2099-00 121. 2100-01 122. 2101-02 123. 2102-03 124. 2103-04 125. 2104-05 126. 2105-06 127. 2106-07 128. 2107-08 129. 2108-09 130. 2109-10 131. 2110-11 132. 2111-12 133. 2112-13 134. 2113-14 135. 2114-15 136. 2115-16 137. 2116-17 138. 2117-18 139. 2118-19 140. 2119-20 141. 2120-21 142. 2121-22 143. 2122-23 144. 2123-24 145. 2124-25 146. 2125-26 147. 2126-27 148. 2127-28 149. 2128-29 150. 2129-30 151. 2130-31 152. 2131-32 153. 2132-33 154. 2133-34 155. 2134-35 156. 2135-36 157. 2136-37 158. 2137-38 159. 2138-39 160. 2139-40 161. 2140-41 162. 2141-42 163. 2142-43 164. 2143-44 165. 2144-45 166. 2145-46 167. 2146-47 168. 2147-48 169. 2148-49 170. 2149-50 171. 2150-51 172. 2151-52 173. 2152-53 174. 2153-54 175. 2154-55 176. 2155-56 177. 2156-57 178. 2157-58 179. 2158-59 180. 2159-60 181. 2160-61 182. 2161-62 183. 2162-63 184. 2163-64 185. 2164-65 186. 2165-66 187. 2166-67 188. 2167-68 189. 2168-69 190. 2169-70 191. 2170-71 192. 2171-72 193. 2172-73 194. 2173-74 195. 2174-75 196. 2175-76 197. 2176-77 198. 2177-78 199. 2178-79 200. 2179-80 201. 2180-81 202. 2181-82 203. 2182-83 204. 2183-84 205. 2184-85 206. 2185-86 207. 2186-87 208. 2187-88 209. 2188-89 210. 2189-90 211. 2190-91 212. 2191-92 213. 2192-93 214. 2193-94 215. 2194-95 216. 2195-96 217. 2196-97 218. 2197-98 219. 2198-99 220. 2199-00 221. 2200-01 222. 2201-02 223. 2202-03 224. 2203-04 225. 2204-05 226. 2205-06 227. 2206-07 228. 2207-08 229. 2208-09 230. 2209-10 231. 2210-11 232. 2211-12 233. 2212-13 234. 2213-14 235. 2214-15 236. 2215-16 237. 2216-17 238. 2217-18 239. 2218-19 240. 2219-20 241. 2220-21 242. 2221-22 243. 2222-23 244. 2223-24 245. 2224-25 246. 2225-26 247. 2226-27 248. 2227-28 249. 2228-29 250. 2229-30 251. 2230-31 252. 2231-32 253. 2232-33 254. 2233-34 255. 2234-35 256. 2235-36 257. 2236-37 258. 2237-38 259. 2238-39 260. 2239-40 261. 2240-41 262. 2241-42 263. 2242-43 264. 2243-44 265. 2244-45 266. 2245-46 267. 2246-47 268. 2247-48 269. 2248-49 270. 2249-50 271. 2250-51 272. 2251-52 273. 2252-53 274. 2253-54 275. 2254-55 276. 2255-56 277. 2256-57 278. 2257-58 279. 2258-59 280. 2259-60 281. 2260-61 282. 2261-62 283. 2262-63 284. 2263-64 285. 2264-65 286. 2265-66 287. 2266-67 288. 2267-68 289. 2268-69 290. 2269-70 291. 2270-71 292. 2271-72 293. 2272-73 294. 2273-74 295. 2274-75 296. 2275-76 297. 2276-77 298. 2277-78 299. 2278-79 300. 2279-80 301. 2280-81 302. 2281-82 303. 2282-83 304. 2283-84 305. 2284-85 306. 2285-86 307. 2286-87 308. 2287-88 309. 2288-89 310. 2289-90 311. 2290-91 312. 2291-92 313. 2292-93 314. 2293-94 315. 2294-95 316. 2295-96 317. 2296-97 318. 2297-98 319. 2298-99 320. 2299-00 321. 2300-01 322. 2301-02 323. 2302-03

Again, another story about Melchizedek, by the holy Athanasius the Great of Alexandria. We recount in brief from what that one recounted at length.

- <sup>34</sup> Or “decreed”.

- [8] And he knelt, and he prayed and said, “I am calling you, O God, who made the heaven and earth (and) who alone is the true God, hearken to me this time and command concerning all those who are rising against my brother Malkel – let the place where they are standing become for them Sheol!” And the Lord heard the voice of Melchizedek, and the earth opened (its) mouth and swallowed them and the whole tribe of Melchizedek. And not even animals or buildings were left there.
- [9] And when Melchizedek saw that the Lord heard him, he entered the thicket of trees on that mountain and lived in it as a solitary for seven years, until his garments wore out, and his hair grew down to his loins, and his nails grew long, and his skin became like that of animals. He, then, used to sustain himself with the pith of trees and with roots, and instead of drinking (water) he used to lap up the dew.
- [10] And after seven years, the divine voice said to Abraham, “Abraham!” And when Abraham answered him, the Lord said to him, “Rise, take with you precious garments and a razor, and go up to Mount Tabor. And cry out three times ‘Man of God!’ And the man of God, having a wild appearance, will come out towards you. Shave him, and clip his nails, and clothe him in these garments that I have ordered you about, and be blessed by him.”
- [11] And when Abraham went up and cried out for him, he did to him everything that the Lord said to him.
- [12] And when after three days Melchizedek went down from the mountain, he took a horn of oil and signed it,<sup>35</sup> according to the word of God. And he blessed Abram and said, “Blessed are you, Abram, by God. From now on, your name will not be called Abram, but your name will be perfect, (i.e.) Abraham.”
- [13] Then Melchizedek set up an altar beneath the mountain, in that place that formerly was Šalem, and he built it, and he dwelt there. And he was offering bread and wine to the Lord. And he became the first prefiguration of the bloodless sacrifice.<sup>36</sup>
- [14] Such is the manner of life of Melchizedek, which was revealed figuratively through the holy Athanasius and the holy ascetics of that time, who were praying that the genealogy of Melchizedek would be revealed to them, because many erred and thought him to be the only-begotten son of God. And it is through the revelation from above that this gift came to them, that even though his generation was not written down in the holy Scriptures, his descent, however, was from the nations.

### ***Commentary***

As indicated by its title, the *Catena Severi* presents an abbreviated version of the *Story*. Indeed, a comparison between our text and the Greek version of Pseudo-Athanasius reveals that the former lacks a number of words, phrases and even whole sections found in the latter. The most extended parts of the narrative that have been omitted by the Syriac editor are the description of the second return of Melchizedek to his father (6.1-3), the exchange between Abraham and Melchizedek (11.3-6), and the second exchange between God and Abraham (12.3-8). It appears that the Syriac editor did not limit himself merely to abbreviating the original narrative of the *Story*. There are several occasions when he would augment or rework it. To bring an example, one could mention the identification of the city of Šalem as

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<sup>35</sup> I.e. made the sign of the cross over it.

<sup>36</sup> I.e. Eucharist.

Jerusalem (§1) and the explanation of how and why the genealogy of Melchizedek was revealed to Athanasius and his fellow ascetics (§14).

In the absence of a critical edition of the Greek text of the Pseudo-Athanasian version, it is difficult to establish with certainty whether any given case of the *Catena* version deviating from the Greek text is a result of the editorial intervention or reflects a different *Vorlage*. What could be said at this point with certainty is that the Syriac version of the *Catena* does not exhibit strong textual affinity to any of the Greek versions of the *Story* that have been published so far. For instance, the genealogical succession Šalem–Ašla–Malkel–Melchizedek and Malkel (§1) has no exact parallels in the Greek witnesses. Likewise, the explanation of the discovery of Melchizedek’s genealogy as a result of God’s revelation answering the prayers of Athanasius and his fellow ascetics (§14) sets the Syriac version apart from the Greek tradition of the *Story*.

The question of the Greek prototype behind our text thus remains open. Only publication of a proper critical edition of the Pseudo-Athanasian version of the *Story* may shed further light on this issue. Another question that cannot be answered at the present moment is whether the Syriac editor of the *Story* was abridging an already existing Syriac translation or he was doing it directly, while translating the work from Greek. Moreover, the absence of a critical edition of the *Catena Severi* as well as a detailed analysis of its compiler’s method prevents us from even trying to make a learned guess at whether this abbreviator might be Severus himself or he had included into his work an already abridged version of the *Story*.

*The city of Šalem as Jerusalem.* The Greek text of the Pseudo-Athanasian *Story* does not provide information about location of the city of Melchizedek, named Σαλῆμ. The Syriac editor removes this ambiguity by glossing Šalem as Jerusalem. In doing that, he is following a well-established exegetical tradition, both Jewish and Christian, that identified Salem of Gen 14:18 as Jerusalem. Thus, already Flavius Josephus, in his *Jewish War*, relates that Melchizedek “gave the city, previously called Solyma, the name of Jerusalem”.<sup>37</sup> The connection between Salem and Jerusalem is made explicit also in such later Greek versions of the *Story* as the ones incorporated into the *Chronicon Paschale* (74:12, 14) and into the *Palaea Historica* (38:2). In Syriac literature, this exegetical tradition is attested already during Late Antiquity, via the Syriac translation of the sixth book of *Jewish War*,<sup>38</sup> and of several other Greek works, whose authors quote Josephus, such as Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* and Epiphanius’ *On Weights and Measures*.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, there might be a genuine exegetical rationale for this gloss to be added, since there existed several alternative geographical traditions regarding the location of the biblical Salem in antiquity.<sup>40</sup> One of them located it in the vicinity of Shechem. Based on interpretation of the Hebrew adjective שֶׁמֶן in Gen 33:18 as toponym by the translators of Septuagint and of several other biblical versions, including Peshitta, this geographical notion

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<sup>37</sup> Bell. 6:438; ed. H.S.J. Thackeray et alii, *Josephus*. 10 vols (Loeb Classical Library; London: William Heinemann, 1926-1965), vol. 3, pp. 500-503. Cf. also *Ant.* I.10.2.

<sup>38</sup> See A.M. Ceriani, *Translatio Syra Pescitto Veteris Testamenti ex codice Ambrosiano sec. fere VI photolithographice edita*. 2 vols (Mediolani: J.B. Pogliani, 1876-1883), vol. 2, p. 679.

<sup>39</sup> For the former, see S. Timm, *Eusebius von Caesarea. Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 152; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), p. 106; for the latter, see Dean, *Epiphanius’ Treatise*, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> For references, see Dochhorn, “Die Historia de Melchisedech,” p. 12, n. 14.



gained some currency also among Syriac-speaking Christians, found in the Syriac translations of both Eusebius' *Onomasticon* and Epiphanius' *On Weights and Measures*.<sup>41</sup>

*Revelation of Melchizedek's genealogy.* The narrative of the Pseudo-Athanasian Greek version does not disclose its origin besides pointing out Athanasius as the author. The Syriac version goes beyond that by relating in §14 that the information about Melchizedek's genealogy was revealed by God to Athanasius and his fellow ascetics, who were praying to obtain this knowledge. While there seem to be no exact parallel to this claim in Christian sources from Late Antiquity or early Middle Ages, there are at least two similar narratives, in which the information about Melchizedek's human origins is obtained through divine revelation. Both these narratives were known to Syriac-speaking Christians already during Late Antiquity and, thus, could be used by the Syriac editor of the *Story* as a model for constructing his own version of this event.

One of them is found in the Greek collection of monastic sayings, known as *Apophthegmata Patrum*. In the *Alphabetical Collection* of this work (Δ.8), a story is told by Abba Daniel about a certain Egyptian ascetic "who in his simplicity, said that Melchizedek was the son of God." It was only the tactful intervention of Cyril of Alexandria that helped to extricate the venerable monk from this wrong belief. Aware that the holy man was "a worker of miracles and that all he asked of God was revealed to him," the archbishop of Alexandria pretended that he himself is troubled by the question whether Melchizedek is the son of God or not, and asked him to pray to God to reveal the truth. The monk agreed and after the three days, during which he withdrew and prayed, came with the answer that "Melchizedek was a man". The reason for that conclusion was that God shown him in a vision "all the patriarchs in such a way that each one, from Adam to Melchizedek, passed before me."<sup>42</sup> We know that a Syriac version of this story was in circulation from the sixth or seventh century on, since it was included into some Syriac versions of Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*.<sup>43</sup>

An alternative account of the revelation of Melchizedek's origins is found in Pseudo-Zacharias' *Ecclesiastical History*, a sixth-century chronicle, composed by a West-Syrian writer. In the beginning of this composition, while discussing the chronology of Abraham's life, the historiographer relates about Epiphanius that he wrote a tractate against the heresy of Melchizedekians, where the bishop of Cyprus claims that "he had a vision" (ܡܠܚܝܝܕܝܟܐ ܕܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܬܐ), in which the names of Melchizedek's parents were revealed to him, as well as his Canaanite origins.<sup>44</sup>

*Melchizedek as the Son of God.* Whereas the Greek narrative presents itself as directed against those, who might think that Melchizedek "has no beginning of days" (12.7), the

<sup>41</sup> See Timm, *Eusebius von Caesarea*, p. 104; Dean, *Epiphanius' Treatise*, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> PG 65, col. 160; trans. B. WARD, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Cistercian Studies 59; 2nd rev. ed.; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>43</sup> For the Syriac text, see P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*. 7 vols (Paris–Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1890–1897), vol. 7, pp. 313–314; for an English translation of Bedjan's text, see E.A.W. Budge, *The Book of Paradise, Being the Histories and Sayings of the Monks and Ascetics of the Egyptian Desert by Palladius, Hieronymus and Others: The Syriac Texts, according to the Recension of 'Anân-Ishô' of Bêth 'Abhê, Edited with an English Translation*. 2 vols (Lady Meux Manuscript 6; London: W. Drugulin, 1904), vol. 1, pp. 420–421. Cf. also E. Sachau, *Verzeichniss der syrischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*. 2 vols (Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin 23; Berlin: A. Asher & Co, 1899), vol. 2, p. 561. For a recent discussion of the Syriac versions of Palladius, see S.P. Brock, "Saints in Syriac: A Little-Tapped Resource," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16:2 (2008), pp. 181–196.

<sup>44</sup> *Hist. Eccl.* I.3; ed. E.W. Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*. 4 vols (CSCO Syr. III.5–6; Louvain: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1919, 1921, 1924), vol. 1, pp. 13–14. More on this account, see in the commentary to the Pseudo-Athanasian excerpt below.

Syriac version relates that God revealed the origins of the priestly king because many in the times of Athanasius “erred and thought him to be the only-begotten son of God” (§14). While the former could refer to any of those, who claim for Melchizedek a divine status, the latter’s wording is aimed more specifically against those, who equate him with Christ. These two different descriptions could be understood as referring to two different groups within the broad spectrum of Christian heterodox movements from antiquity. Thus, the Greek version makes one recall those heterodox teachers, who ascribed Melchizedek a divine status but did not identify him with Christ, such as the Roman banker Theodotus (2nd c.), who taught that Melchizedek was “the greatest power, and that he was greater than Christ,”<sup>45</sup> or certain Hierax from Egypt (3rd c.), who thought him to be the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> As for the Syriac version, it is concerned with the Christians, who identified Melchizedek with Christ and to whom the orthodox heresiographers and polemicists from the fourth century on would habitually refer using the umbrella term “Melchizedekians”.<sup>47</sup> It appears that at some point this heterodox notion made its appearance in Syria-Mesopotamia, where its earliest mention is connected with the name of certain John of Apamea, who was active during the fifth or early sixth century.<sup>48</sup>

## 2. Pseudo-Athanasian excerpt

Another example of the reception of the *Story* in Syriac comes from ms. Vatican Syr. 159, a West-Syrian anthology that was produced in several stages during the period from 1622 to 1628.<sup>49</sup> The part of the manuscript that contains our text was written by Ephrem Phigānā, a monk and presbyter from the West-Syrian convent of Abu Galeb in the region of Gargar in Northern Mesopotamia, during the years 1622-1623.<sup>50</sup> The anthology comprises a large and diverse assortment of theological, liturgical, hagiographical, exegetical and apocryphal works in Syriac and Garshuni, including the *Book of Treasures* by Jacob bar Šakko, homilies of Ephrem, John Chrysostom and Moses bar Kēphā, *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, *Apocalypse of Paul* and *Apocalypse of Peter*. Besides these and other large compositions, a significant part of the collection is occupied by what Paul Peeters characterizes as “un pêle-mêle de pièces disparates,”<sup>51</sup> that is an assemblage of short excerpts of various thematic focus. One of such pieces, which appears on ff. 241r-241v (originally numbered ff. 108r-108v), is an excerpt

<sup>45</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* VII.36; trans. F. Legge, *Philosophumena, or The Refutation of All Heresies*. 2 vols (Translations of Christian Literature, Series I: Greek Texts; London: SPCK, 1921), vol. 2, pp. 94-95. Cf. also Pseudo-Tertullian, *Adv. haer.* 28.

<sup>46</sup> See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 55.5.2-5.

<sup>47</sup> See on them G. Bardy, “Melchisédiens,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928), vol. 10, pp. 513-516; H. Stork, *Die sogenannten Melchisedekianer, mit Untersuchung ihrer Quellen auf Gedankengehalt und dogmengeschichtliche Entwicklung* (Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur 8, Historische Studien zum Hebräerbrief 2; Leipzig: D. Werner Scholl, 1928); Horton, *Melchizedek Tradition*, pp. 90-114.

<sup>48</sup> See J.M.F. van Reeth, “Melchisedech, le roi qui n’a pas d’âge et son grand interprète Jean d’Apamée,” in *Vieillesse, Sagesse et Tradition dans les civilisations orientales* (Acta Orientalia Belgica 13; Bruxelles: Société Belge d’Études Orientales, 2000), pp. 135-150. For more evidence on this group in Syriac sources, see S. Minov, *Syriac Christian Identity in Late Sasanian Mesopotamia: The Cave of Treasures in Context* (Ph.D. dissertation; The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2013), pp. 85-86.

<sup>49</sup> Written in Serto script, the text is laid out in 2 col; contains 470 folios. For a description, see Assemani and Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, pp. 307-319.

<sup>50</sup> See P. Peeters, *Évangiles Apocryphes II: L’Évangile de l’Enfance. Rédactions syriaques, arabe et arméniennes traduites et annotées* (Textes et documents pour l’étude historique du christianisme; Paris: Auguste Picard, 1914), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>51</sup> Peeters, *Évangiles Apocryphes*, p. xiv.

Existence of this witness of the *Story* has been signaled by Stephen Robinson.<sup>54</sup> Whereas the Syriac text of the excerpt was never published, its German translation, made by Stefan Schorch, has been included in the anthology of the various versions of the *Story* published by Christfried Böttrich.<sup>55</sup> In what follows, the Syriac text is presented according to ms. Vatican Syr. 159.

മലയാളം ഭാഷയിൽ തിരുത്തലുകൾ

**Translation:**

[1] The name of the father of Melchizedek is Malkel and the name of his mother – Šalim, and the name of his brother – Malkel. And his father loved Malkel and his mother loved Melchizedek. And his father wanted to offer Melchizedek as a sacrifice to the idols in Jerusalem, because he was a pagan.<sup>56</sup> And his mother was distressed, because she loved Melchizedek. And his father Malkel said, “Come, let us cast lots, and the one that falls to me – him I will sacrifice.” And the lot fell to Malkel, the brother of Melchizedek. And his father went up (and) sacrificed him to the demons in Jerusalem. And Melchizedek prayed, and Jerusalem sank. And he went and dwelt on Mount Tabor for seven years, and he saw no human being. And God said to Abraham, “Go up to Mount Tabor and cry out three times. And that man, who will come to you, – shave him, and bless him, and be blessed by him.” And he was priest of God.

## Commentary

<sup>57</sup> Read **ኃኢ** instead of **ኃኢኢ**.



*The Canaanite origins of Melchizedek.* The idea of the Canaanite descent of Melchizedek could be traced back to the Jewish exegetical tradition of the late Second Temple Period. Thus, Josephus characterizes him as “a Canaanite chief” (Χανααίων δυνάστης).<sup>65</sup> This notion becomes well entrenched in the Christian exegetical tradition from the fourth century on. One finds it in the treatise *On Melchizedek* by Eustathius of Antioch, who relates that the biblical monarch was “a Canaanite by race” (Χανααῖον τὸ γένος).<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Jerome expresses a similar opinion concerning Melchizedek’s ethnicity in one of his letters (*Ep.* 73.1). The earliest mention of Melchizedek’s Canaanite pedigree in Syriac sources seems to be found in the writings of John of Apamea, a monastic author from the first half of the fifth century. In the *Fourth Dialogue with Thomasios*, John rejects the identification of Melchizedek with Shem (espoused, among others, by Ephrem the Syrian) and claims him to be “from the stock of Ham” (ܡܢ ܕܢܚܠܝܬ ܚܡ) and “from the descendants of Canaan” (ܡܢ ܕܢܚܠܝܬ ܕܚܡܐ).<sup>67</sup> Later on, in the sixth century, in addition to the passage from Pseudo-Zacharias, quoted above, we see Jacob of Serugh referring to him as “a Canaanite” (ܚܡܐ) in his *mēmra* *On Melchizedek*.<sup>68</sup> During the medieval period, one finds this exegetical tradition in the works of West-Syrian (cf. Dionysius bar Šalībī, *Comm. in Gen.* 14:18;<sup>69</sup> Barhebraeus, *Schol. in Gen.* 14:18<sup>70</sup>) as well as East-Syrian (cf. ʾĪšōʿdād of Merv, *Comm. in Gen.* 9:25-27;<sup>71</sup> ʾĪšōʿ bar Nūn, *Quest.* 197<sup>2</sup>) interpreters.

The third case of the reception of the *Story* among Syriac-speaking Christians is that of the anonymous brief discourse entitled *Melchizedek the Priest* that appears in a number of West-

In his dissertation on the *Festal Homilies* of Moses bar Kēphā, James Coakley has pointed out four manuscript witnesses for this work: British Library Add. 21210; Harvard College Library, Syr. 41; Mingana Syr. 112; Mardin, Orthodox A.<sup>74</sup> To these one should add also mss. Mardin, Dayr al-Zafaran 236 and Midyat, Bar Saumo Library 7. It has to be noted, however, that a systematic examination of all existing textual witnesses for Moses' homilies,<sup>75</sup> especially those in non-Western collections, may bring forward additional examples of this discourse.

There are two points to be made in connection with the work in question. First, in distinction from the preceding and following compositions that are explicitly attributed to Moses, neither its title nor its content make such an attribution. Second, similarly to another brief account on fol. 53v, entitled *On the Wood of Which the Holy Cross Was Made*,<sup>77</sup> *Melchizedek the Priest* is written by the scribal hand that differs from that of the main body of the anthology. William Wright, who distinguishes three different scribal hands at work in the manuscript, characterizes it as “a more modern hand,” without trying, however, to date it with a greater precision.<sup>78</sup> What could be said so far, thus, is that these two texts, each a page long, were added to the main body of the manuscript at some point later than the 13th century, in order to fill out the two blank folios.

Our discourse is attested in two other West-Syrian manuscripts, both of which are dated to the beginning of the 20th century. One of them is ms. Mingana Syr. 112, produced in the year 1905 by the scribe Malke bar Gawrēye Šmuni in in the town of Midyat, in Mardin

<sup>79</sup> For a description, see Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts*, p. 53.

province of Turkey.<sup>80</sup> It is a collection of West-Syrian liturgical works, the largest part of which is occupied by the festal homilies of Moses bar Kēphā. *Melchizedek the Priest* appears on ff. 65v-66r, placed between the same two homilies of Moses as in ms. British Library Add. 21210, i.e. *On the Leprous Man* and *On the Woman That Had an Issue of Blood*. Like the latter manuscript, Mingana Syr. 112 also includes the short anonymous account on the origins of the Wood of the Cross among Moses' homilies (ff. 54v-55r). Likewise, in distinction from the surrounding them *turgāmē*, neither of these texts contains references to Moses as their author.

*Syriac text:*

82 ملخص حواشي

[illegible]

<sup>80</sup> For a description, see A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts now in the Possession of the Trustees of the Woodbrooke Settlement, Selly Oak, Birmingham*. 3 vols (Woodbrooke Catalogues 1-3; Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933, 1936, 1939), vol. 1, cols. 271-273.

<sup>81</sup> I am most grateful to the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at Saint John's University, Collegeville, MN (<http://www.hmml.org>) for the permission to access this manuscript and ms. Dayr al-Zafaran 236 via their Vivarium web site. The information about the manuscripts' date and contents is based on their description in the Library's on-line catalogue.

[illegible]

83 H 2023

<sup>84</sup> D כזק

[illegible]

Melchizedek the priest.

[1] The name of his father is Raqlem, and that of his mother – Šalti’el. And he was from the Canaanite nations, that is Melchizedek, who is the king of Šalem, as (was) the name of his city. Šalem begot Ašila, and he begot Malkel, and he begot two sons, one – Malkel, after his name, and another – Melchizedek. And his father loved the elder one, while his mother – the younger one. And when they cast lots to sacrifice (them), the lot fell to Malkel. And Melchizedek fled to the mountain and prayed to God. And the whole city of theirs was swallowed up inside the earth. And he dwelt alone in a cave for a long time, while eating fruits of the trees and drinking the dew of heaven. And after seven years a voice came to Abraham, “Take the garments, and bread and wine, and ride your donkey. And go up to Mount Tabor, and call the man of God. And behold, a man dressed in hair will come out toward you, do not be afraid of him.” And he (i.e. Abraham) went up, and called, and he (i.e. Melchizedek) went out, and he cut his hair. And he (i.e. Melchizedek) offered a sacrifice of bread and wine, in accordance with the command of God, – the mystery of the body and blood of Christ. And Abraham gave him a tenth part of his possessions, and received from him priesthood.

 $^{100}\text{M} + \text{علم و محاسن}$



[2] If you wish to learn about the manner of (his) offering, he took, after the manner of the New (Testament), a portion of wine, and likewise heavenly dew, and leavened bread, and put them in a cup upon the altar. And the Holy Spirit descended and breathed upon the wine and the bread. As for how the sons of Aaron offered sacrifices,<sup>101</sup> i.e. that former priesthood, which is a prefiguration of the deacon's office: one<sup>102</sup> would pour oil upon one-tenth of the measure of fine (flour),<sup>103</sup> and bake from it cakes, and would soak in it pieces (of bread), and everyone who was there would eat. Another former ministry of the sons of Aaron – a bull and two rams. And one would sprinkle the blood of the bull upon the altar, and the blood of one of the rams would be sprinkled upon the base of the altar, and upon the people and the scribes. As for the second ram, one would take some of its blood and some of the anointing oil, and besmear his right ear, together with the thumbs of the right hands and the big toes of the right feet. And one would put on them turbans, and gird them with sashes, and tie headdresses on their heads, and put the golden crown of the great priest and high-priest on their head.<sup>104</sup> The priesthood of the great priest Melchizedek and of the righteous Job, however, has nothing to do with the succession of the priesthood of Hebrews, because they were from the nations and were much earlier (in time) than Moses. And, again, it is written that when Melchizedek offered bread and wine, he took from the offering and from the blood, and ate and drank from both of them, after the manner of the New (Testament).

### **Commentary**

The discourse could be divided into the two main parts. The first one provides a concise biography of Melchizedek, which follows the main narrative outline of the *Story* and includes most of its elements, such as: (a) the genealogy of Melchizedek; (b) the casting of lots to sacrifice one of their two sons by his parents; (c) the flight of Melchizedek to Mount Tabor and destruction of his native city; (d) the ascetic way of life of Melchizedek; (e) God's order to Abraham to visit Melchizedek; (f) the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek.

In the second part, an exposition on the nature of Melchizedek's sacrifice is offered, based on the typological relationship between this biblical episode and the Christian sacrament of Eucharist. The main message of this section, which includes an elaborate description of the sacrifices performed by the Aaronite priests, is that of superiority of the primeval non-Jewish priesthood, reinaugurated by Jesus, over that of the Jews. It is conveyed through the hierarchical dichotomy of the Levitical priesthood and the alternative pre-Mosaic priesthood, embodied in such figures as Melchizedek and Job.

Like in the previous case of the Pseudo-Athanasian excerpt from ms. Vatican Syr. 159, it does not seem likely that the author of *Melchizedek the Priest* made a direct use of the Syriac version of the *Catena Severi* in his portrayal of this biblical figure. There are several discrepancies between the two accounts that make such scenario improbable. Thus, while describing the ascetic life of Melchizedek on Mount Tabor the discourse relates that he was living in a "cave" and eating "fruits," whereas according to the *Catena* version he was living in the "thicket of trees" and eating the "pith of trees and roots" (§9). In the former, Melchizedek is said to be "dressed in hair" when he meets Abraham, whereas in the latter he is described as having "a wild appearance" (§10). Finally, while the discourse does refer to Abraham giving tithes to and receiving priesthood from Melchizedek, the *Catena* version is silent about this aspect of their encounter.

<sup>101</sup> Read ܡܠܚܝܙܝܕܝܩ instead of ܡܠܚܝܙܝܕܝܩ.

<sup>102</sup> I.e. an Aaronite priest.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Lev 5:11.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Exod 29:1-28; Lev 8:1-30.

*The names of Melchizedek's parents.* Similarly to the excerpt from ms. Vatican Syr. 159, our author augments the original genealogical framework of the *Story*, where the father of Melchizedek bears the name “Malkel,” with an alternative tradition, which identifies his father and mother as “Raqlēm” and “Šalti’el,” the former being a corrupt form of “Heraqlēm”.

*Melchizedek's offering as a prototype of Eucharist.* The discourse elaborates further the typological link between the sacrifice of Melchizedek and the sacrament of Eucharist, found in the Pseudo-Athanasian Greek text of the *Story* (13.3) as well as in the Syriac version of the *Catena Severi* (§13). Among the earliest Christian authors to make such connection one should mention Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 4.25).<sup>105</sup> In the Syriac Christian tradition, this interpretation of Melchizedek's offering is attested from the 5th/6th century on (cf. Jacob of Serugh, *On Melchizedek*;<sup>106</sup> *Cave of Treasures* 28:11). During the Middle Ages, it becomes quite common in the West-Syrian tradition (cf. Jacob of Edessa, *Comm. in Octat.*;<sup>107</sup> Dionysius bar Šalībī, *Comm. in Gen.* 14:18;<sup>108</sup> the *Book of Life*<sup>109</sup>), while, occasionally, it is found also in the works of East-Syrian writers (cf. Īšō‘dād of Merv, *Comm. in Heb.*;<sup>110</sup> *Gannat Bussāme*<sup>111</sup>).

In distinction from the version of the *Catena*, in which the relationship of Melchizedek's sacrifice to Eucharist is conceptualized in terms of prefiguration, our discourse seems to put an even greater emphasis on the sacramental character of the former by referring to it as *rāzā*, “mystery,” a loaded Syriac term which among other things serves as a *terminus technicus* for the sacrament of Eucharist.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the details of the description of the sacrifice performed by Melchizedek, who is said to mix in the cup three different components, i.e. wine, “heavenly dew” and leavened bread, likewise betrays indebtedness of the author of the discourse to the Syriac liturgical tradition. Thus, the use of leavened bread (ܠܚܝܡ ܥܥܥܝܬܐ) in the sacrament of Eucharist is common to both West-Syrian and East-Syrian sacramental tradition.<sup>113</sup> As for the enigmatic “heavenly dew” (ܠܚܝܡ ܥܥܥܝܬܐ), this component alludes most probably to the water, with which the communion wine is

<sup>105</sup> For more examples, see E. Grypeou and H. Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 24; Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 225-226.

<sup>106</sup> Bedjan, *Homiliae selectae*, vol. 5, pp. 165-166.

<sup>107</sup> As preserved in *Catena Severi*, ms. Vatican Syr. 103, fol. 19v.

<sup>108</sup> Boyes, *Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi*, p. 154.

<sup>109</sup> R.H. Connolly and H.W. Codrington, *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy by George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bar Kepha: together with the Syriac Anaphora of St. James and a Document Entitled The Book of Life* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), pp. 125 [Syr.], 121 [trans.].

<sup>110</sup> M.D. Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho‘dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.), in Syriac and English*. 5 vols (Horae Semiticae 5-7, 10-11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911, 1916), vol. 5.1, p. 154 [Syr.], vol. 5.2, p. 111.

<sup>111</sup> G.J. Reinink, *Gannat Bussame. I: Die Adventssonntage*. 2 vols (CSCO 501-502, Syr. 211-212; Louvain: Peeters, 1988), pp. 70 [Syr.], 84 [trans.].

<sup>112</sup> See E. Beck, “Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm,” *Oriens Christianus* 42 (1958), pp. 19-40; I.H. Dalmais, “‘Raza’ et sacrament,” in P. de Clerck and E. Palazzo (eds.), *Rituels. Mélanges offerts à Pierre-Marie Gy, O.P.* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), pp. 173-182.

<sup>113</sup> On an alternative tradition, current among Armenians, according to which Melchizedek offers unleavened bread, see M.E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham* (SBL Early Judaism and its Literature 37; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 99-100.

diluted.<sup>114</sup> A similar tripartite division of Melchizedek's offering is found in some versions of the Pseudo-Athanasian Greek version of the *Story*.<sup>115</sup>

*Priesthood of Abraham.* In the concluding sentence of part 1, the scriptural statement about Abraham giving Melchizedek tithes (Gen 14:20) is augmented with the claim that after this the patriarch "received from him priesthood" (ܠܡܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܝܬܐ). Whereas the Hebrew Bible does not refer to Abraham as priest explicitly, on more than one occasion the patriarch is depicted performing acts, which could be classified as priestly, such as the building of an altar between Bethel and Ai (Gen 12:7-8) or the offering of animal sacrifice (Gen 15:9-11). Under the influence of these biblical passages, as well as of the episode of Aqedah (Gen 22), the image of Abraham as priest began to develop in Jewish circles already during the Second Temple period.<sup>116</sup> Although not very common in Christian exegetical tradition, application of the priestly imagery to Abraham does appear in works of several Greek Fathers, including John Chrysostom.<sup>117</sup> As for Syriac Christianity, there is a number of poetical compositions from Late Antiquity, whose authors cast Abraham as priest in the context of the Binding of Isaac. One of the first to do so was Narsai (5th c.), who refers to Abraham as "new priest" (ܠܡܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܝܬܐ) in the *mēmra On the Revelations to Abraham*.<sup>118</sup> Slightly later, Jacob of Serugh describes the patriarch as "courageous priest" (ܠܡܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܝܬܐ) and imagines him to be "dressed in the attire of priest" (ܠܡܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܝܬܐ) in the *mēmra On Abraham and His Types*.<sup>119</sup> Likewise, the author of the anonymous *mēmra On Abraham* calls him "priest" (ܠܡܠܚܝܬܐ),<sup>120</sup> whereas in the anonymous dialogue poem *On Abraham and Isaac*, the latter exhorts his father to build a pyre for his sacrifice "like a priest" (ܠܡܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܝܬܐ).<sup>121</sup>

*Melchizedek's priesthood vs Aaronite priesthood.* In part 2, the author presents a hierarchical dichotomy between the priestly ministry of Melchizedek (and Job) and that of the Aaronite priests, where the former is independent of and more ancient than the latter. It includes a detailed description of the sacrifices performed by Aaronite priests, based on such biblical passages as Lev 5:11, 8:1-30, Exod 29:1-28. Although not stated explicitly, this dichotomy is meant to demonstrate superiority of the bloodless spiritual offering performed by

<sup>114</sup> For the West-Syrians, cf. Dionysius bar Šalībī, *Comm. in liturg.* 6.10; ed. J. Labourt, *Dionysius Bar Šalībī. Expositio liturgiae*. 2 vols (CSCO Syr. II.93; Paris: Typographie Reipublicae, 1903), pp. 27-28 [Syr.]. For the East-Syrians, cf. ʾIṣḥāq IV, *Quaest.* 48; ed. W.C. van Unnik, *Nestorian Questions on the Administration of the Eucharist, by Isho'yab IV: A Contribution to the History of the Eucharist in the Eastern Church* (Haarlem: Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, 1937), pp. 170-171.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. ms. C, where Melchizedek offers "bread, wine, and water" (ἄρτον καὶ οἶνον καὶ ὕδωρ); Dochhorn, "Die Historia de Melchisedech," p. 33, n. 64.

<sup>116</sup> For references and discussion, see J.S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 25-27; M. Himmelfarb, *A Kingdom of Priests: Ancestry and Merit in Ancient Judaism* (Jewish Culture and Contexts; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 56-57; A.A. Orlov, *Heavenly Priesthood in the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 138-141.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Hom. 2 Cor. 3* (PG 61, col. 417); *Hom. Matt. 9:37* (PG 63, col. 517). For more examples and a discussion, see D.E. Tonias, *Abraham in the Works of John Chrysostom* (Emerging Scholars; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), pp. 116-123. For more references to this motif in Greek sources, see S.P. Brock, "An Anonymous Syriac Homily on Abraham (Gen. 22)," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 12 (1981), pp. 225-260 (252).

<sup>118</sup> A. Mingana, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*. 2 vols (Mosul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905), vol. 1, p. 65.

<sup>119</sup> Bedjan, *Homiliae selectae*, vol. 4, pp. 71, 84.

<sup>120</sup> Brock, "Anonymous Syriac Homily," p. 234, §4.

<sup>121</sup> S.P. Brock, *Soghyatha mgabbyatha* (Holland: Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Central Europe, 1982), p. 10.

*Aaronite priesthood as a prototype of the deacons' ministry.* One of the earliest Christian authors to make a connection between Aaronite priests and Christian deacons was Origen, who links the latter to the Levites of the Old Testament.<sup>128</sup> In Syriac tradition, this motif is attested in the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, whose author on several occasions draws a parallel between the two ministries, while claiming at some point that “the priests and Levites now are the presbyters and deacons” (ch. 9).<sup>129</sup> This typology appears also in the tenth-century West-Syrian reworking of the Syriac *Commentary on the Liturgy* from the fifth century, according to which “the deacons fulfil the place of the former Levites, and for this reason they fulfil all the roles in the church”.<sup>130</sup>

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[illegible]

Finally, the question of the authorship of our discourse should be addressed in brief. As noted above, neither its title nor its text provide information about its possible author. One might think, as a working hypothesis, that since in all examined manuscripts this text is transmitted together with the works of Moses bar Kēphā, it might also come from the pen of this West-Syrian writer. In fact, Abraham, the scribe of ms. Dayr al-Zafaran 236, did regard it, as well as the account on the origins of the Cross, to be authored by Moses. That could be inferred from the note he makes on fol. 342, introducing the last piece of his anthology, a brief biographical text about Moses, “Until now – interpretations of Moses bar Kēphā”.<sup>132</sup>

It remains to be seen whether he was right or not. There are several preconditions for making any further progress in verifying this identification. One of the major obstacles impeding such an undertaking is the fact that many works that comprise Moses’ *œuvre* are still unpublished.<sup>133</sup> Of particular importance would be a critical edition, accompanied by a thorough investigation into its complex textual tradition, of the tractate *On Priesthood*, one of several West-Syrian theological compositions that were transmitted under the names of both Moses bar Kēphā and his contemporary John of Dara, interchangeably.<sup>134</sup> Only the Maronite recension of this important work, ascribed to John Maron, has been published so far.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, given the fact that Melchizedek plays such an important role in Hebrews 7, it would be obligatory to examine how this biblical figure is dealt with in the commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews by such West-Syrian authors as Lazarus of Qandasā, Moses bar Kēphā and Dionysius bar Ṣalībī, all of which are still unpublished.<sup>136</sup>

## Conclusion

A number of recent studies have addressed the question of how extra-biblical and non-canonical material about biblical figures that originated in antiquity continued to be transmitted and used by Syriac-speaking Christians during the medieval period.<sup>137</sup> My

<sup>132</sup> .ܡܘܨܝܐ ܒܪ ܟܝܦܗܐ, ܡܘܨܝܐ ܒܪ ܟܝܦܗܐ

<sup>133</sup> For a comprehensive inventory of Moses’ works, accompanied by the list of manuscripts, see Reller, *Moses bar Kēphā*, pp. 63-79.

<sup>134</sup> See M. Breydy, “Les compilations syriaques sur le Sacerdoce au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle: Jean de Dara,” in F. Graffin and A. Guillaumont (eds.), *Symposium Syriacum, 1976: célébré du 13 au 17 septembre 1976 au Centre Culturel “Les Fontaines” de Chantilly (France)* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 205; Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1978), pp. 267-293.

<sup>135</sup> M. Breydy, *La doctrine syro-antiochienne sur le Sacerdoce dans sa version Maronite* (Jounieh, Liban: Institut für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie Internationales Forschungszentrum für Grundfragen der Wissenschaften Salzburg, 1977). The Syriac text and English translation of a portion of this work that features polemic with a Jew has been published in Becker, “The Discourse on Priesthood”. For the identification of this text as a part of the tractate *On Priesthood*, see G. Herman, “Note on the Recently Published *Discourse on Priesthood* (BL Add. 18295, ff. 137b–140b),” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 54:2 (2009), pp. 389-391. Becker’s text corresponds to ch. 29 of the Maronite recension (ed. Breydy, *La doctrine syro-antiochienne*, pp. 65-71).

<sup>136</sup> See on these J.C. McCullough, “Early Syriac Commentaries on the New Testament,” *Near East School of Theology Theological Review* 5 (1982), pp. 14-33, 79-126.

<sup>137</sup> See W. Adler, “Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Jacob of Edessa’s Letters and Historical Writings,” in R.B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day* (Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden 18; Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 49-65; D.G.K. Taylor, “The Patriarch and the Pseudepigrapha: Extra-Biblical Traditions in the Writings of Kyriakos of Tagrit (793–817),” in F. Briquel-Chatonnet and M. Debié (eds.), *Sur les pas des Araméens chrétiens. Mélanges offerts à Alain Desreumaux* (Cahiers d’études syriaques 1; Paris: Geuthner, 2010), pp. 35-61; L.I. Lied, “*Nachleben* and Textual Identity: Variants and Variance in the Reception History of 2 *Baruch*,” in M. Henze and G. Boccaccini (eds.), *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 164; Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 403-428.

investigation into the afterlife of the Greek *Story of Melchizedek* in Syriac Christian tradition contributes to this field of research. The three examples of the *Story*'s reception bear witness to the lasting interest in this apocryphal composition among the Syriac Christians of the Muslim Near East.

We have seen that the *Story* was available to Syriac readers at least from the second half of the ninth century, when its abbreviated version was incorporated into the *Catena Severi*, and continued to hold their interest, at least in the case of the discourse on *Melchizedek the Priest*, well into the twentieth century. All three cases, discussed above, demonstrate that far from being passive transmitters Syriac editors approached the *Story* creatively and did not feel constrained to rework it, adapting the received narrative to the needs of the moment, exegetical as well as theological. It is noteworthy that there seem to be more than one channel of transmission of the *Story* in Syriac. In favour of that speaks the fact that neither the Pseudo-Athanasian excerpt nor the discourse on *Melchizedek the Priest* provide evidence of textual dependence on the *Catena* version of the *Story* in their presentation of Melchizedek's biography.

Finally, there are several aspects of the *Story*'s reception in Syriac that deserve further exploration. One of them is related to the fact that all three cases under consideration come from the West-Syrian tradition of Syriac Christianity. So far, I was not able to find convincing evidence for any East-Syrian exegete or theologian to be acquainted with this apocryphal work. It remains to be seen whether this disparity is accidental or it might reflect some deep-lying differences between exegetical approaches of the two confessional communities. Another venue of research worth of pursuing in connection with the Syriac versions of the *Story* is how they, especially the Pseudo-Athanasian version, are related to the Christian Arabic witnesses to this work, none of which has been published so far.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> For the references to manuscripts, see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur. Band 1: Die Übersetzungen* (Studi e Testi 118; Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), pp. 204-205. To Graf's list one should add also ms. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syr. 206, ff. 5v-7v; see H. Zotenberg, *Manuscripts orientaux. Catalogues des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandaites) de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1874), pp. 156-159. I thank Flavia Ruani for making this manuscript available to me.