

From Alexandria to Dvin

Non-Chalcedonian Christians in the Empire of Khusrau II

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1 Introduction

In the period from 603 to 629, the East Roman and Sasanian empires were plunged into a dramatic final confrontation, a period of protracted warfare which witnessed the expansion of the Persians across Roman Syria, Palestine, and Egypt; the Persian-Avar siege of Constantinople; and the final Persian defeat at the hands of a Roman-Turk alliance. A great wealth of scholarship has explored the rich evidence which details the shah Khusrau II's engagement with Christian leaders and culture both before and during the war,¹ and the Christian factionalism which arose around the court at Ctesiphon, as dyophysites and miaphysites competed for preference.² But rather less has been said about his policies within those territories which had long been the Christian heartlands of the Roman Empire.

As the Persians entered into Roman Mesopotamia from 603, and then crossed the Euphrates from 610, they entered into a world divided: between the dominant Chalcedonian church, with its plethora of urban bishops, and the far smaller and largely rusticated Severan church, established from the middle of the 6th century in Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt.³ We know that the Chalcedonian Church was decapitated across the conquered territories—in Antioch the patriarch Anastasius II had been murdered in violence in ca. 610; in Jerusalem the patriarch Zachariah was deported to Ctesiphon in 614; and in Alexandria the patriarch John the Almsgiver had fled before the invaders in 619, dying on Cyprus soon afterwards.⁴ No successors were permitted for the entire period of Persian rule and, as we shall see, at least some Chalcedonian bishops were deposed and replaced with miaphysite rivals. But the frequent

1 See e.g. Schilling 2008, 235–298; Payne 2015, 164–197.

2 See below n. 34.

3 See van Roey 1951; Booth 2017.

4 On Anastasius, see esp. *Chronicon Paschale* (ed. Dindorf 1832, 699); on Zachariah, see Strategius (ed. Garitte 1960); on John the Almsgiver, see esp. Delehaye 1927.

modern claim that the period of Persian rule was one of an inverse miaphysite ascent—framed as “an era of triumph for Miaphysite orthodoxy” in one important recent book⁵—is too simplistic. For there was no such thing as “Miaphysite orthodoxy” in the first place, and for some miaphysites, at least, the situation was far from triumphant.

2 The Union of 617

At some point in 617, the Severan patriarch of Antioch, Athanasius the Camel-driver, and several of his bishops were present at the Ennaton, a monastic complex to the west of Alexandria which now served as the seat of the Severan patriarchs of Egypt. Here Athanasius and his entourage entered into union with the representatives of the Severan Alexandrian patriarch Anastasius, thus ending a schism of the churches which had existed since 586, when the Antiochene patriarch Peter of Callinicum had broken communion with his Alexandrian counterpart Damian, on the suspicion that he had lapsed into tritheism.⁶

In recent literature the union of 617 has assumed a somewhat surprising status. It was, as we shall see below, remarkable for various reasons, but perhaps most remarkable of all is that it occurred at a time when the Alexandrian and Antiochene patriarchates existed within separate polities: the former in the Roman Empire, and the latter in the Sasanian Empire. It has now become commonplace to claim that the Sasanians were accepting towards existing Christian communities within the conquered territories, or at least towards the Severans, to whom the Sasanians are sometimes supposed to have lent their active patronage. In this perspective, therefore, the presence of Athanasius and his bishops in Alexandria becomes, for some, indicative of the freedom of movement and communication which the Sasanians permitted their bishops;⁷ while the union itself can even be cited as an example of the “ecclesiastical institution building” which “Iranian patronage” allowed, as an example of the “institutional coordination” between two churches “which the Roman state had kept separate”.⁸

Our knowledge of the union of 617 is dependent on two main narrative sources: first, the *Chronicle* of Michael the Great; and second, the *History of the*

5 Payne 2015, 186.

6 Date: *Chronicle to 724* (Brooks 1960), 146. Studies: Olster 1985; Müller 1994; Jankowiak 2009, 18–23. Schism: see esp. Ebied et al. 1981, 34–43.

7 See Foss 2003, 157, 165.

8 See Payne 2015, 186.

Patriarchs of Alexandria. The latter gives a somewhat impressionistic account of the union.⁹ But the *Chronicle* of Michael is far more detailed. It embeds four related letters. The first is the synodical letter announcing it, with an accompanying list of signatories. Those signatories are, on the Alexandrian side: Anastasius, an Athanasius, a Polycarp, a Theodulus, ‘and the other Egyptian bishops’; and, on the Antiochene side: Athanasius, a Cyriacus, two Pauls, a Sergius, and a Thomas.¹⁰

The second of Michael’s documents is a letter of Athanasius to the bishop Cyriacus of Amida, in which he describes how the union was realised. He recounts how, after numerous fruitless conversations with the “partisans of Damian”, there had arrived in Alexandria, from Arsinoe, “the most magnificent patrikios Strategius”, who then allied with “the glorious patrician Nicetas, with whom we had conferred over the affair from the beginning, but in whom we had lost confidence”.¹¹ Presiding over the union, therefore, were two of the most prominent Roman officials in the region: first, Nicetas, the emperor Heraclius’s cousin, who seems to have assumed, in the 610s, a role akin to that of the Alexandrian Augustalis;¹² and second, the patrician Strategius, a leading member of the Arsinoite aristocracy, known also from various extant documents.¹³

Michael’s *Chronicle* embeds two further letters. The first of these is an encyclical sent from Athanasius, in Alexandria, to the “bishops of the east”, asking them to accept the union; and the second is an extract from a letter of Anastasius to his Antiochene counterpart, celebrating the end of the schism and Nicetas’s role within it, and including a final wish for imperial victories over barbarians. It is certain that Nicetas (and perhaps also Strategius) was a Chalcedonian. But, nevertheless, the Severan patriarch Anastasius is able to celebrate his role in effecting the union, and even to hope for his subsequent victories against Rome’s enemies.

Let us recap, then, something of what Michael’s evidence tells us. The union was not a product of Sasanian patronage. It happened in Roman Alexandria, and its éminence grise was Nicetas, the emperor Heraclius’s cousin. The union, it therefore seems, was an imperial initiative brokered through the emperor’s highest and most trusted representatives. For Constantinople, indeed, it must have represented a significant coup, not simply because two substantial Christian factions had been reunited; but because the Antiochene patriarch, whose

9 Evetts 1904, 480–483.

10 Chabot, J.-B. (ed.) 1899–1910 (hereafter Michael the Great, *Chronicle*) 10.26, vol. 4, 392–399.

11 Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, 10.26, vol. 4, 392–399.

12 See Déroche 1995, 119 n. 66, 142–153.

13 See Palme 1997, 99–100.

territories were now subsumed within the Persian Empire, had submitted to the traditional mediation of the Roman emperor in doctrinal matters. All this raises the question, then, of what Athanasius and his bishops hoped to gain.¹⁴

3 The Ennaton as Refuge

It is probable that the union of the patriarchs was realised at the Ennaton, a complex of monasteries on the coast nine miles west of Alexandria.¹⁵ Indeed, the presence of Athanasius and his bishops at the Ennaton is also known through some remarkable subscriptions to certain Syriac manuscripts. Through these we ascertain that two of Athanasius's bishops—a certain Paul and another Thomas, who must also be amongst the aforementioned Antiochene signatories to the union—completed translations, into Syriac, of the Old and New Testaments while at the complex. Thus, certain manuscripts of Thomas's translation of the New Testament bear a transcription in which “poor Thomas” locates the composition of the text “at the Ennaton (ܐܢܢܐܬܘܢ) of the great city of Alexandria, at the holy Monastery of the Antonians (?—ܐܢܢܐܬܘܢ),” and places it “in the year 927 of Alexander, in the fourth indiction,” that is, in 615/6.¹⁶ From the extant subscriptions to Paul's translations, we can also locate him at the Ennaton in the same period.¹⁷ Of those, perhaps the most fulsome is that for 4 Kingdoms, as contained in a manuscript now in Paris (BN Syr. 27 f. 90):

This book was translated from the Greek tongue into Syriac from the version of the Seventy-Two, by the righteous father Mar Paul the bishop of the faithful, in the great city of Alexandria, by the command and encouragement of the holy and blessed Mar Athanasius, patriarch of the faithful in the Monastery of Mar Zakkai at Callinicum, while they were staying in Alexandria in the time of the God-loving Mar Theodore, head of the monastery of his community, in the year 928, fifth indiction [616/7].¹⁸

14 In what follows I develop an argument first made in Jankowiak 2009, 22–23, who also points to the relative weakness of Athanasius's position in 617, in the context of the Persian encroachment.

15 See Gasco 1991.

16 See Hatch 1937, 149–154.

17 For a useful guide, see Mercati 1941.

18 See de Lagarde 1892, 256 ll. 28–31. On the Syro-Hexaplar manuscripts and de Lagarde's edition, see Baars 1968, 1–27. For Paul's subscriptions, see also, for 3 Kingdoms (February 616): BL Add. 14437, with de Lagarde 1892, 222 n. 54, and Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 33; for

Later authorities suggest that our Thomas and Paul were the bishops Thomas of Harqel, bishop of Mabbug, and Paul bishop of Tella¹⁹—two Antiochene, Severan, bishops. But what brought them to Alexandria?

It is tempting to assume, of course, that Athanasius, Thomas, and Paul were present at the Ennaton for the simple purpose of attending the proposed discussions with the Alexandrians. The relationship between their presence and the union is, however, far from clear—that is, it is not obvious that the latter prompts the former rather than vice versa. Michael's *Chronicle* embeds a biographical passage on Thomas of Harqel which provides a potential answer. This informs us that Thomas, like the patriarch Athanasius, was trained at Qenneshre before becoming bishop of Mabbug (Hierapolis), but that during persecutions launched under the emperor Maurice (*d.* 602), he retreated to the Ennaton, where he completed his translation of the New Testament. After this, we read: "At this time, the bishops of Syria, who were persecuted by the Chalcedonians and took refuge in Egypt, returned to their sees, in Syria at the command of Khusrau, king of Persia, who ruled over Syria."²⁰ According to this source, then, Thomas had fled to Alexandria when Maurice had imposed Chalcedonian bishops (thus before 602), and was still there when he completed his translation (in 616, as we ascertain from its subscription). After this, however, he returned to his see, following a reported command of the conqueror Khusrau, who restored the Severan bishops to their sees.

The short *Life of Thomas* contained in Michael's *Chronicle* caps a section of text which, in its preceding sections, describes the fate of orthodox bishops within the conquered territories, and which raises some doubts as to the precise situation of Thomas. This reports that when the Persians conquered "Mesopotamia and Syria", Khusrau dispatched certain bishops "of the east (ܡܘܨܘܒܝܢ)" to take possession of the "cities of Syria". At first, this account continues, he sent to Edessa an East Syrian, who was not accepted, before replacing him with an "orthodox" bishop, named John (although his name seems to have been Isaiah, as we shall see). Then the shah ordered that all of the Chalcedonian bishops in Mesopotamia and Syria be chased from their sees, and that "the Jacobites" be granted all of the church and monasteries of which they had been deprived through the persecution of Maurice.²¹

the Minor Prophets and Daniel (January 617): Ceriani 1874, 114^r col. 2; 151^v col. 1; for Daniel again (616/7): BL Add. 12168, with Wright 1870–1872, vol. 2, 907.

19 See the evidence collected in Gwynn 1893a and 1893b.

20 Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 10.26, vol. 4, 391. Cf. Bar Hebraeus (ed. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, hereafter Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*), vol. 1, 267.

21 Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 10.25, vol. 4, 389–390; cf. Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, vol. 1, 263–265.

Amongst the persecuted bishops, we are now told, was Cyriacus of Amida, that is, that same bishop to whom Athanasius would later report the union of 617. But we are then also given the names of some of those “Jacobites” whom Khusrau dispatched to replace the Chalcedonians: Isaiah of Edessa, Samuel of Amida, and another (anonymous) of Tella. Thus, the Jacobite whom Khusrau appointed in Amida was not Cyriacus, but one Samuel. Indeed, we are now informed that the villagers around these towns would not accept the new incumbents, because they had not been ordained by their patriarch, but by “the Metropolitan of the region of Mosul” (ܡܩܬܒܐ ܕܩܝܫܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܨܠ), while the villagers were under the authority of the patriarch Athanasius. The latter, according to Michael, then requested that Cyriacus visit Amida and other places in Mesopotamia, and there perform ordinations, but Cyriacus was unsuccessful, for Samuel of Amida, with the support of Khusrau, opposed him.²²

Michael’s *Chronicle* now offers a famous comment to the effect that “the memory of Chalcedon” disappeared from the Euphrates to the Orient, a comment which those who consider the Sasanians to have patronised “the miaphysites” en bloc have often cited as proof of that point. But it seems quite evident that the same comment attempts to suppress an inconvenient fact: that is, that the so-called “triumph for Miaphysite orthodoxy” was in fact a disaster for those Roman, Severan bishops who had laid claim to those Mesopotamian sees under Maurice. Cyriacus, it is elsewhere claimed, died in A.G. 934 (= 622/3), and although we do not know when Samuel died, or who succeeded him, for some considerable time there must have been two rival Severan claimants to the throne of Amida.²³ At the same time, this must have represented a considerable affront to the authority of the patriarch Athanasius. For the Persians, while expelling the Chalcedonian incumbents, had also passed the power over appointments to a leading miaphysite bishop within Persia—the mysterious “Metropolitan of the region of Mosul” (to whom we shall return).

The same tensions are effaced to a far greater extent in another extant witness: Ps.-Cyriacus of Amida’s *On the Translation the Relics of Jacob Baradeus*. Written at some point ca. 629–ca. 634, this reports that during the patriarchate of Athanasius, the emperor Phocas (and not, note, Maurice) replaced the patriarch’s bishops with Chalcedonians, but that when Khusrau conquered Mesopotamia, and under the influence of his Christian wife Širin, he replaced them with “the orthodox”. The text then provides a list of these appointees which is

22 Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 10.25, vol. 4, 390–391; cf. Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, vol. 1, 265.

23 See *Chronicle of Zuqnin* in Chabot 1927, 150.

more extensive than that of Michael's *Chronicle*—Samuel at Amida, Isaiah at Edessa, Adai at Reshaina, and Zakkai at Tella—before adding, “and he [Khusrau] did the same for every place and city, each adhering in all things to the patriarch” (which should be read as an apologetic statement constructed after the fact). The main part of the text then relates how Zakkai of Tella, in A.G. 933 (= 621/2), sent certain monks to steal the relics of Jacob Baradeus from their resting place in Egypt.²⁴ The details of this vignette—which suggest that Zakkai was a Severan—need not detain us here. But for our purposes it is evident that Zakkai of Tella was still alive when Paul, his Severan rival to the same see, was in Alexandria composing his translations of the Old Testament, calling himself “bishop”, and entering discussions with his co-confessionalists within the Roman Empire.

Let us note one further indication of complications around the see of Tella in this period. Consecutive notices in the *Chronicle to 819*—a pro-Severan, annalistic text associated with the Monastery of Qartmin in the Ṭūr ‘Abdīn—record how, in AG 916 [604/5], the Persians conquered “the fortress of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn”; but then how, in AG 926 [614/5], Daniel, abbot of Qartmin, was made metropolitan over Tella, Mardīn, Dara, and Ṭūr ‘Abdīn.²⁵ If the information is accurate, then it appears that Daniel presided over the old metropolitanate of Dara, now expanded to include Tella.²⁶ The *Chronicle* does not record *who* made Daniel metropolitan, but, given the alleged date of Daniel's elevation, it is of course tempting to associate it with the reported activities of Michael's “Metropolitan of the region of Mosul”.²⁷

It must remain unclear when Paul of Tella, Thomas of Harqel, and others arrived in Alexandria—although wider evidence, as we shall see, suggests a large-scale flight from the Persian advance. But it at once becomes clear that the status of Paul of Tella in 616–617 was far less secure than has often been supposed, and that while at the Ennaton he (like Cyriacus of Amida) faced a rival Severan claimant to his nominal see, and perhaps a new metropolitan in the Ṭūr ‘Abdīn.

4 Paul of Edessa

Cyriacus and Paul were not alone. In the *Chronicle* of Jacob of Edessa we discover alongside the tables for Olympiads 345 and 346 (= 601/2–608/9) a report

24 Brooks 1926, 268.

25 Chabot and Barsaüm 1916, 10.

26 Palmer 1990, 149–153.

27 See Palmer 1990, 153.

that “[t]he bishops of the region of the east fled before the Persians to Egypt, and with them monks and many people”; while alongside Olympiads 347 and 348 (= 609/10–617/8) we discover a frustrating, lacunose piece of text which reports, “The bishops are expelled ... the Persians from ... to take ... of the Romans ... the east; and he came ... little ... Isaiah is sent to Edessa as bishop from the realm of the Persians.”²⁸ The first piece of text seems therefore to report the flight of eastern bishops to Egypt, in the face of the Persian advance (as known also from the *Lives* of John the Almsgiver);²⁹ while the latter seems to relate to the replacement of Chalcedonian bishops with the candidates from Persia, including the aforementioned Isaiah at Edessa.

From Jacob’s *Chronicle* we also ascertain the name both of the earlier, Chalcedonian bishop of Edessa and of his Severan rival. Thus, alongside Olympiad 345 (601/2–604/5), we read, “The faithful of Edessa had Paul as bishop; but the Chalcedonians appointed Theodosius.”³⁰ This Paul is also known to have fled from the Persians, for Jacob, while acknowledging previous translators in his corrected edition of the Syriac hymns of Severus of Antioch, notes that “[t]hey have been translated from the Greek tongue into the Edessene or Syriac speech by the holy Mar Paul who was bishop of the city of Edessa, while he was on the island of Cyprus, in flight from the Persians.”³¹ We know, in fact, that while on Cyprus Paul translated more than the hymns of Severus, for two manuscripts of the Syriac versions of the *Homilies* of Gregory Nazianzen inform us that the translation was the work of ‘Abbas Mar Paula’, and was completed on Cyprus in A.G. 935 (= 623/4).³²

We perhaps have one more witness to Paul’s activities. This is a dossier of texts embedded in the later *Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council*, which claim that when the emperor Heraclius was campaigning in Armenia in 625, he had entered into a doctrinal dispute on Christ’s operations with a Severan bishop Paul, and later dispatched an imperial *keleusis* “to Arcadius the most holy archbishop of Cyprus against Paul the highest head of the non-bishops.” We are told that Paul “appeared in those places [in Armenia]”, as though he might be an outsider, and the connection with Cyprus perhaps suggests that he was resident there.³³ If he is indeed identical with the exiled Paul of Edessa, then his

28 Jacob of Edessa (ed. Brooks 1961), 324–325.

29 See e.g. Delehay 1927, 6–13.

30 Jacob of Edessa (ed. Brooks 1961), 324.

31 Brooks 1909, 801.

32 See Wright 1870–1872, vol. 2, 423, 431–432 (= BL Add. 12153 and 14457). Paul also translated the Ps.-Nonnus scholia; see Brock 1971, 28–29, suggesting his association with Qenneshre.

33 Riedinger 1992, 528–530, 588–592.

conference with Heraclius points to the ongoing attempts of the exiled Severan bishops to court the Roman emperor, and indeed predicts, as we shall see, their later engagement with him following the Persian withdrawal.

The evidence related to Paul of Edessa seems, then, to complicate the evidence presented in Michael's *Chronicle*: first, it suggests that Paul, at least, had fled not from a persecution of Maurice or of Phocas, but from the Persians; second, that he remained in exile in 623/4, and had not been restored following the conquests (as Michael suggests for Thomas of Harqel); and third, that he perhaps courted the patronage not of the Sasanian shah, but of the Roman emperor Heraclius.

It should now be clear that an alternative perspective has opened upon the patriarch Athanasius's presence within the Roman Empire in ca. 615–617. As the Persians had expanded westwards, numerous persons had fled to Egypt, and this perhaps included the bishops present there for the union of 617. But their situation was far more complex than has been appreciated, for at least two of those present, Paul of Edessa and Paul of Tella, faced rival Severan challengers for their sees, challengers who could call upon the support of Khusrau himself. Rather than thinking of the subsequent union of the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians as an example of institutional bridge-building across political divides, we should instead see it as the desperate attempt of Athanasius and his bishops to shore up their position in a context of considerable encroachment upon their perceived prerogatives.

5 Dvin, Mar Mattai, and Tikrit

At the same time that Khusrau had extended his conquests over Roman Mesopotamia and was contemplating the conquest of the Levant, the East Syrians at his court had lost favour. Following the death of the catholicos Sabrišo' (ca. 604), the Church of the East had been divided into rival factions, and henceforth Khusrau had withdrawn his patronage, to the extent that upon the death of Sabrišo's controversial successor, Gregory of Pherat (608/9), the shah refused to approve a new catholicos. In 612, Khusrau gathered a disputation between the East Syrians and their Persian Severan rivals, but the former were defeated, and the catholicosate stood vacant for the remainder of his reign. Instead—under the influence of the Christian Queen Širin, and the archiatros Gabriel of Sinjar—the miaphysites at court became ascendant.³⁴

34 See e.g. Flusin 1992, vol. 2, 106–118; Greatrex 2003.

The significance of this shift has been much debated, but it is important that in interpreting it we not limit our vision to the immediate context of Khusrau's court. For soon after there occurred another dramatic event: an extensive union of certain Persian miaphysites with Armenian bishops to the north. In Ps.-Sebēos's *Armenian History* we discover a long letter which a Council of Dvin drafted in 649, in response to a command of the emperor Constans II to commune with Chalcedon. This recalls how Khusrau II, "after the capture of Jerusalem" (614) summoned "all the bishops of the regions of the east and of Asorestan" (i.e. northern Mesopotamia) to court, in order to debate the faith, in the presence also of Smbat Bagratuni and of "the royal chief doctor" (*sc.* Gabriel of Sinjar). The letter also then places amongst the attendees a somewhat varied cast: Zachariah, the captive Chalcedonian patriarch of Jerusalem (thus after 614); certain unnamed "philosophers" taken captive in Alexandria (thus after June 619); various Chalcedonians "from Greek territory"; Severans and East Syrians, including the catholicos of the latter (thus pre-609); the "chief Jew" (*sc.* the exilarch); and two Armenian bishops, Komitas of the Mamikonēik' and Matt'eos of the Amatunik'. As a result of discussions, the same letter reports, the king turned against the East Syrian catholicos and his bishops, and ordered their churches to be demolished; after, the patriarch Zachariah and the Alexandrian philosophers renounced Chalcedon, and announced the faith of the Armenians to be orthodox. At this point, according to the letter, Khusrau ordered all of the Christians under his dominion to hold to "the faith of the Armenians", and the text adds: "Those who conformed to the faith of Armenia in the regions of Asorestan were Kamyišov the metropolitan (Կամիշօ՞ւ 2՞ով մետրապօլիտ) and ten other bishops, and the pious queen Širin, and the valiant Smbat, and the great chief doctor [Gabriel]."³⁵

What to make of this report? We must, of course, bear in mind that the letter was produced in a particular context in 649, and perhaps never sent, and that it has then been reproduced, again in a particular context, in the narrative of Ps.-Sebēos. The potential for distortion, at various levels, is therefore quite high. Besides the somewhat fantastical list of attendees, the vignette also presents us with several obvious chronological inconsistencies, and those scholars have accepted the basic occurrence of such a council have sometimes dated it to the period 605–609, sometimes to the period ca. 615.³⁶ Whatever the solution, we have several indications that Armenian influence was expanding in this period, in particular under the aforementioned Komitas, who became catholicos in

35 Sebēos (ed. Abgaryan 2005), ch. 46, 228–234, trans. adapted from Thomson 1999, 114–118.

36 See Flusin 1992, vol. 2, 115–116; cf. Jankowiak (forthcoming).

615. Thus, the *History* of Ps.-Sebēos contains a letter of Komitas to the Chalcedonian patriarchal *locum tenens* Modestus at Jerusalem, in response to a request for monies for reconstruction after the Persian sack of 614;³⁷ while the later Georgian chronicle of Arsen Sapareli claims that Komitas brought the catholicos of the Caucasian Albanians back into communion, and then expanded the size of the episcopates of both Albania and Siwnik'.³⁸

Perhaps the most striking example of Komitas's heightened influence, and his expanding communion, is however a letter embedded in the Armenian *Book of Letters*, sometimes called the *Letter to the Persians*.³⁹ The letter is a statement of faith which was sent from Komitas and his synod after an apparent council at Dvin, and which contains some striking echoes of the council described in Ps.-Sebēos. It is notable for three things: first, its acknowledgement of the oversight of Smbat Bagratuni; second, its clear statement of apthartist doctrine (i.e. that Christ's flesh was incorruptible by nature); and third, a subsequent anathematisation of Severus of Antioch, "who said that the flesh was corruptible until the resurrection, and after the resurrection was incorruptible". The letter does not give the list of Armenian signatories besides Komitas. But it includes a list of eight signatories from scattered sees in northern Iraq and northwestern Iran, all under the leadership of the metropolitan "Kamišoy (Կամիշոյ մետրապոլիտ)"⁴⁰—no doubt identical with the Kamišov whose presence, alongside ten bishops, is also alleged at the council which Ps.-Sebēos reports.⁴¹ The letter is not dated, but there also survives an apparent response to it, presented at Dvin to Komitas from two bishops of the region of Asorestan, Maroutha and Peter, and dated to the 27th year of Khusrau, that is, to 616/7.⁴² As Komitas was appointed in 615, the *Letter to the Persians* must have been sent soon after his election.

At the same time that Athanasius the Camel-driver and his bishops were gathering at the Ennaton at Alexandria, then, we find Komitas expanding the Armenian communion into northern Mesopotamia and Iran, in part upon the

37 Sebēos (ed. Abgaryan 2005), ch. 36.

38 Aleksidzé and Mahé 2010, 6.1., 107–108.

39 *Girk' T't'oc'* (ed. Izmiranc' 1901), 212–219. The complete version of the text was published in Tēr Mik'elean 1894–1896, 300–310.

40 *Girk' T't'oc'* (ed. Izmiranc' 1901), 218.

41 On the council, its signatories, and its relation to that in Ps.-Sebēos, see Tēr-Minassiantz 1904, 62–67; Mahé 1993; van Esbroeck 2001.

42 Ed. Tēr-Mik'elean 1892, 290–291. Note, however, that the response contains a pointed anathematisation of Zachariah, Saba, and George, three 'bishops of the Zoulianites [i.e. Julianists]'—perhaps a critique of the council, but perhaps based in a distinction of Julianism from Armenian apthartism.

basis of apthartist doctrine. Since the Council of Dvin in 555—which had also involved the co-operation of Armenian bishops with the Persian bishop ‘Abdišo’—the Armenian miaphysite church had been committed to the doctrine of Christ’s natural incorruptibility, which set it apart from its Severan equivalents in the Roman world.⁴³ That Komitas indeed defended this position finds some confirmation in the Armenian florilegium called the *Knik’ hawatoy* (*Seal of Faith*), which was perhaps assembled under him, and which advocates apthartism.⁴⁴

Whether this doctrine can be called “Julianist” is a matter of some dispute.⁴⁵ But for our purposes what is important is that this position, at least in 617, also involved the anathematisation of Severus of Antioch. It is impossible not to see the repeated emphasis on Severus which we find in the documents from the union at Alexandria—which met at the Ennaton, a place with profound associations with the man himself—as somehow being in dialogue with events in Armenia, that is, with the concomitant rise, under the patronage of Smbat Bagratuni and perhaps also of Khusrau himself, of a miaphysite communion which was confessing apthartism and anathematising Severus.⁴⁶

Was there a connection between the expansion of the Armenian communion and the rivalries over former Roman sees further west, where Severan rivals were contending for the same sees? A possible hint is contained in the statement of Michael the Great that the bishops whose consecrations offended Athanasius the Camel-driver were appointments of the “Metropolitan of the region of Mosul”. It seems certain that Michael is referring to the Monastery of Mar Mattai, whose metropolitans would assume a prominent role in the Severan politics of the Islamic period. Later historians will claim that the metropolitanate was a creation of the Armenian catholicos Christopher (539–545) and will also provide a list of earliest incumbents stretching to 629, with no suggestion that those incumbents were in communion with Antioch.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is not impossible that its acquisition for the Severans, and elevation as a metropolitanate, were far more recent phenomena than those historians were willing to confess. A report in the *Life of Rabban Bar ‘Idta* suggests that,

43 See e.g. Garsoïan 1999, 135–239.

44 *Knik’ hawatoy* (ed. Tēr-Mkrtč‘ean 1914), with Cowe 2004, 40–42.

45 See e.g. Cowe 1993.

46 Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, vol. 4, 394, 396, 397, 399, 401–402, where the union is also signed in the ‘Monastery of Patricia Caesaria’, perhaps the correspondent of Severus; Evetts 1904, 481.

47 See Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, vol. 2, 87, 103 and Michael the Great, *Chronicle* 11.4, vol. 4, 413 (cf. 427), placing the appointment after the persecution of Barsauma of Nisibis, which strains the chronology; see the comments of Garsoïan 1999, 201–204.

in Khusrau's earlier reign, the monastery had belonged to the Church of the East, but that with the support of Gabriel of Sinjar a certain Severan, Zakkai, had seized control of it.⁴⁸ Gabriel is elsewhere said to have engineered a similar transfer of two other monasteries (Mar Pethyon and that of Sergius/Širin).⁴⁹

Who then was the Persian metropolitan Kamišoy/Kamyišov whom both Ps.-Sebēos and the *Letter to the Persians* present as a crucial player in the union with the Armenians? From John of Ephesus we know that Jacob Baradaeus had created an "orthodox" metropolitanate in Persia under one Aḥūdemmeḥ in the late reign of Justinian.⁵⁰ Bar Hebraeus's *Chronicle* dates its creation to A.G. 870 [558/9], but also claims that Aḥūdemmeḥ was an earlier episcopal appointment not of the Antiochene patriarch but, again, of Christopher, catholicos of Armenia.⁵¹ Aḥūdemmeḥ's successors are then named as Qamišo' and Samuel, who are presented as metropolitans of Tikrit.⁵² Bar Hebraeus places Qamišo's death in A.G. 920 [= 608/9], and implies he was a Severan—but both claims are suspicious. For Qamišo' is no doubt identical with Kamišoy/Kamyišov, the same prominent metropolitan whom Armenian texts present as a protagonist in the *anti-Severan* union of ca. 615–617. Whether the sees of Mar Mattai and of Tikrit were creations of the Armenian catholicos, as per Bar Hebraeus's remarkable claim, must remain uncertain. But that claim nevertheless corroborates the impression of an initial independence of those sees from Antioch.

In the Persian heartlands, therefore, we appear to find the two sees, Mar Mattai and Tikrit, exploiting the conquests of Khusrau II to expand their influence, independent of the Antiochene patriarch. But we also find them competing with each other and adopting quite different doctrinal stances in pursuit of that end. Thus, the bishop of Mar Mattai appoints Severan bishops, and perhaps a new metropolitan, to sees in former Roman Mesopotamia; whereas the bishop of Tikrit, along with various bishops from Sasanian Mesopotamia and northwestern Iran, aligns with the long-standing apthartist doctrine of the Armenians. Just as the idea of a "triumph for Miaphysite orthodoxy" under-

48 Wallis Budge 1904, 158–165. The same Zakkai perhaps appears in Denha, *Life of Marutha* (ed. Nau 1909a), ch. 3, where he is called a bishop.

49 See *Khuzistan Chronicle* (ed. Guidi 1960), 22; also Denha, *Life of Marutha* (ed. Nau 1909a), ch. 4; *Histoire Nestorienne* (ed. Scher, A. et al. 1908–1919), 86.

50 John of Ephesus (ed. Brooks 1952), 3.6.20, calling Aḥūdemmeḥ catholicos of Persia (cf. Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, ch. 9.30, 10.16).

51 Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, vol. 2, 99, stating that the metropolitan Aḥūdemmeḥ was earlier bishop of Beth 'Arabāye. His extant *Life* (ed. Nau 1909b, 20) makes him bishop and metropolitan of the same see, but does not mention Christopher.

52 Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, vol. 2, 101, 109–111.

timates the tensions which existed between Roman and Persian miaphysites, then, so too does it underestimate the extent to which the latter were themselves divided into rival factions.

6 The Aftermath of War

We know nothing of Athanasius the Camel-driver's activities after the Alexandrian union of 617—although one suspects that he might have remained within Roman territories. But he re-emerges again in the aftermath of the Roman triumph over the Persians in 628, and here we encounter him in two revealing contexts. First, in 628/9, he summons to Antioch the Metropolitan of Mar Mattai, Christophorus, four of his bishops, and three monks, and there appoints one of those monks, Marutha, as a new vicar in Tikrit, with wide-ranging powers over the Persian church—that is, the office later known as the maphrianate.⁵³ According to his *Life*, this Marutha had been higoumen of the Monastery of Širin at Ctesiphon, when Gabriel of Sinjar had arranged its transfer to the Severans; but the same *Life* also claims that he had before that spent a decade in Mar Zakkai at Callinicum—the same place named as the residence of Athanasius⁵⁴—and it is possible that he was somehow a prior acquaintance of the patriarch.⁵⁵ One of Athanasius's first acts at the end of the Last Great War, therefore, was to assert himself over the upstart Severans of Mar Mattai, and to subordinate the entire Persian episcopate through the appointment of a new patriarchal vicar at Tikrit, the former see of Qamišo, leader of the Persian apthartists.⁵⁶

Soon after this, in the winter of 629/30, we encounter Athanasius again, and in a perhaps unexpected context—as an aspirant to the vacant throne of Antioch, that is, the former Chalcedonian throne. According to the narrative and documentation in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Great, Athanasius attended upon the emperor Heraclius at Hierapolis, alongside twelve of his bishops—Thomas of Tedmor, Basil of Emesa, Sergius of 'Arac, John of Cyrrhus, Thomas of Hierapolis, Daniel of Harran, Isaiah of Edessa, Severus of Qeneshrin, Ath-

53 See Denha, *Life of Marutha* (ed. Nau 1909a), 5; Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, ch. 11.4; *Histoire Nestorienne* (ed. Scher, A. et al. 1908–1919), 88.

54 See above n. 18. It was also the alma mater of Cyriacus of Amida (Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, ch. 10.26).

55 See Denha, *Life of Marutha* (ed. Nau 1909a), 3.

56 For this point see also Jankowiak 2009, 54–55.

anasius of Arabissus, Cosmas of Epiphania, and Severus of Samosata.⁵⁷ How such bishops had fared during the period of Persian rule, if not new appointments, is not clear. But let us note that Thomas (who is Thomas of Harqel), and perhaps Sergius of 'Arac, had been at the Ennaton, alongside Athanasius, Paul of Edessa, and Paul of Tella in 615 and 616; and that of those sees in Mesopotamia whose bishops were reported appointments of the "Metropolitan of Mosul", all are absent except Edessa, whose bishop Isaiah now appears allied to Athanasius. Our most reliable sources report that the emperor demanded that Athanasius recognise a confession of the one operation and will in Christ, and that the patriarch refused, and soon entered into self-imposed exile. But what is significant for us is the simple but quite striking fact that Heraclius would consider recognising Athanasius, the Severan patriarch of Antioch, as the sole legitimate claimant to the vacant throne—a fact of some evident disquiet to Chalcedonian contemporaries.⁵⁸ It suggests that there was more to Athanasius's candidature than his possible doctrinal inclinations; it suggests that he was regarded not as some Sasanian stooge, but rather as a devoted servant of the Roman emperor.

7 Conclusion

In this brief paper I have tried, above all, to make two simple points: first, that the presence of Athanasius the Camel-driver and his bishops at Alexandria in ca. 615–617 was bound up with the unwelcome encroachment of Persian-nominated bishops within Athanasius's territories; and second, that the same encroachment occurred within a context in which two Persian metropolitans—one Severan and one apthartist—were competing to expand their influence. Both points complicate current understandings of ecclesiastical politics in Khusrau II's expanded empire, which seems far more fragmented than has hitherto been appreciated. It has often been suggested—in connection both with the suppression of the East Syrian catholicate in 612, and with the patronage afterwards extended to their rivals—that the shah perceived in "the miaphysite church", with its networks across his new enlarged empire, and its frequent friction with the emperor at Constantinople, a more fitting foundation for the establishment of an imperial Sasanian church. But we have seen that this picture is too simplistic. For in the remarkable unions of the period

57 Michael the Great, *Chronicle*, ch. 11.1–3; cf. Theophanes (ed. de Boor 1883), AM 6121; *Histoire Nestorienne* (ed. Scher, A. et al. 1908–1919), 88.

58 See Jankowiak 2009, 62–74; Booth 2014, 203–205.

from 615 to 617, the one at Dvin and the other at Alexandria, we see two competing visions of what miaphysite orthodoxy in fact was, and therein the challenge for those observers, whether mediaeval or modern, who would aspire to imagine a “miaphysite church”.

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