Michael Abdalla
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Syriac writers and their works from the 1st through the 5th century of Christianity[1]

The contribution of the peoples of Syria and Mesopotamia into the development of the Christian thought may be described as the continuation of the well-known and documented achievements of their ancestors in the ancient times. Putting aside the achievements of the Sumerians, Assyrians and Babylonians in a very distant past, the renowned American Arabist of Lebanese descent Philip Hitti writes, "The culture of the Aramaic-speaking population of Syria (and Mesopotamia) contributed to the Hellenistic culture more that it has taken from it." He enumerates the pioneering work of several scholars in the field of Stoic philosophy, chronicle writing, natural sciences and poetry written between the 2nd century BC and the 3rd century AD, stressing the fact that while the authors quickly assimilated the Hellenistic culture, the Roman culture remained "a closed book" to them. It is true that they had Greek first names but were the natives of the land, with the exception of those who lived in the Greek colonies, while the rest spoke or could speak Aramaic in their daily lives.[2]

[1] This subject is not foreign to the Polish literature. The information on many authors mentioned in this paper and on their work may be found in: J. M. Szymusiak, M. Starowieyski, *Słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa*, Poznań 1971; M. Starowieyski, *Słownik wczesnochrześcijańskiego piśmiennictwa Wschodu*, Warszawa 1999, and in other publications devoted to the Churches of the East, the majority of which are translations into the Polish language. The history of the Syriac literature was described in the monumental works written by world famous Orientalists and Syrologists such as Assemani, Baumstark, Brock, Brockelmann, Macuch, Pigulewska, Nöldeke, Sachau, Vöobus, Witakowski and others. Unlike in the majority of other Polish works, whose authors for understandable reasons limit their research almost exclusively to the Western sources, this paper has been written based on the Syriac and Arabic sources.

[2] Ph. Hitti, *History of Syria*, New York 1951. Arabic translation: *Tārīẖ Sūriyya wa Lubnān wa Filasṭīn*, Beirut 1958, vol. 1, pp. 281–287.

The first centuries of Christianity are abundant with the names of clergymen and other people from outside of the church hierarchy whose writing recorded in the Syriac language is still attracting the interest of researchers in numerous centres of scholarship all over the world. There is a common consensus that in the course of centuries this body of work played a role of a link between the Mesopotamian-Hellenistic-Arabic culture and the western world.

Casual renditions of texts from the Syriac language into the Greek language and *vice versa* were made as early as in the 3rd century AD, and perhaps even earlier. However, the "clashes" between various interpretations of different philosophical and theological trends in the Syro-Mesopotamian centres took place only in the 4th century. They were based on the Aristotelian logics, Platonic idealism and Neoplatonism. There is no doubt that the meanings of the Greek texts needed to be rewritten in their Syriac translations in line with the spirit and the message of the local tradition.

In the Syro-Mesopotamian region schools existed from as early as the 3rd century AD. Some of them were with time turned into monasteries, other retained their independence, and still other functioned next to neighbouring monasteries acting in a way as a resource base for theological studies. The teachers in these schools were bilingual and into their syllabi they included also Greek texts, which they interpreted for their students into their native Syriac language during the classes. Following the conquest of the region by the Arabs, lay subjects started to prevail but the process of indirect and direct translation of the Syriac and Greek works into Arabic and Syriac works into Greek was continuing and even gained on intensity.[3]

It needs to be stressed that intellectual contacts of the Syriac-speaking population with the Arabs were a fact before the rise of Islam. Among the major educational centres active before the arrival of the Arabs one can list

[3] A. Amin, *Faǧr al-islām*, 10th ed., Beirut 1969, pp. 131–134.

Edessa,[4] Gundishapur,[5] 'Riš'Ayna,[6] Nisibis,[7] Qennešrin,[8] and other.[9] When the Arabs conquered these areas the Syriac literature had already experienced a few centuries of dynamic development and was rich and well established. The city that played a very important role in the forming of the heterogeneous Syriac-Greek-Arabic was Al-Ḥīra, in southern Iraq. Its population, mostly Christian since the 5th and 6th centuries, spoke Arabic in everyday life but wrote in Syriac, similarly to the Nabateans.[10] The Syriac language was at that time a commonly spoken tongue. Besides Greek it was used by the elites. It is not a coincidence that the Arabic grammar was developed in southern Iraq and that is where the first Arabic grammar handbooks were written.[11] Continuous grafting of the

---

[4] Syriac Urhay, Arabic ar-Ruha, Turkish Urfa, nowadays in southern-central Turkey.

[5] The name J[Ǧ]undishapur used by the author in other publications was incorrect. Previously the author based his research mainly on the sources in the Arabic language in which non-existent phone (g) is usually replaced with phone (j = ǧ). In Persian "Gunde" means a village (settlement developed by Emperor Shapur, where he settled the captive Byzantine soldiers who found employment, for instance, in the construction of a bridge). The mistake was due to the misleading Arabic word "j[ǧ]undi" denoting a "soldier."

[6] A two-word name: ܪܝܫܥ rīša (head, beginning) and ܥܝܢ 'ayna (source), currently Ra's al-'Ayn in northern-central Syria, next to the Turkish border, the Greek name: Theodisiopolis.

[7] The name derives from the Syriac verb ܢܨܒ nṣāb (to plant), currently Turkish Nusaybin. On the 8 and 9 May 2010 the first international conference under the title *The City of Nusaybin (Nisibis) in the History of Mesopotamia* was held there.

[8] A two-word name: ܩܢܐ qēna (nest) and ܢܫܪ nešre (eagles), the Eagles' nest.

[9] Unlike in the schools operating in Gundishapur, Al-Ḥīra, Marru and in other places, teaching in Edessa and Nisibis focused mainly on subjects fringing on theology and philosophy. Learning in other fields was treated as less important. The interpretation of the Syriac version of the teaching of Diodor of Tarsus (d. ca. 390) and of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) developed in these academies based on the Greek schools of philosophy met with widespread interest in the region. It had a great influence in particular on the local Churches of the East, which became one of the main reasons of two successive divisions that occurred in these Churches in the 5th century, although one cannot disregard the ambitions and the fight for leadership between the Patriarch of Alexandria Cyril (d. 444) and the patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius (d. 451 in exile). One can risk a conclusion that those divisions resulted from the clash between the local culture and the Greek culture. The people committed to the Church of Mesopotamia split into two competing camps and wanted to argue for their beliefs, using philosophical arguments. Their texts display some traits of polemical works.

[10] In the Arabic literature the term 'Nabateans' is often used to refer to the Aramaic-speaking Christians in general, that is to any natives making their living from farming. The name *fellah* used by the Kurds to refer to Christians confirms the thesis on the settled life of the natives. There are opinions that this word is a slightly modified Aramaic word *fālōḥa* (Arabic *fellaḥ*) – farmer.

[11] The initial text of various versions of the Quran included no vocalization signs or dots being in fact a constituent part of half of the Arabic letters. As a result, many verses could be read and interpreted in different ways. It is believed that 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib was the first caliph to realize the need to develop the Arabic grammar. He commissioned the task to Abu al-Aswad ad-Du'ali (d. 686/687). The work started by ad-Du'ali was finished by Al-Ḫālil bin Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 781/782), during the rule of caliph Hārūn ar-Rašīd. The complementary grammar of the Arabic

elements of native culture, on the one hand, into the elements of the Greek and Indo-Persian thought, and of the elements of the Greek culture into the elements of the Syriac thought, on the other hand, resulted in the emergence of a universal culture. The first specialist terminology began to appear in the works written in the Arabic language during that period. When Baghdad was founded by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mansur in the years 762–764 the centre of scholarship was moved to this city and a new era of intensive translation and interpretation work on the Greek and Syriac writings began. This lasted till the end of the 11th century. The vitality and dynamics of the Syriac scholarship and the wide-spread use of the Syriac language are illustrated by the fact that among the great scholars whose names have been preserved in history there are also the names of Arab Christians, for instance from the city of Al-Ḥīra, and of the Sabeans from Ḥarran.

The following review, substantially abridged and narrowed down by necessity, does not include texts recognized as apocryphal ascribed to St. Thomas and St. Addai (Thaddeus) and their successors. Similarly, the alleged correspondence between the King of Edessa and Christ[12] has not been included, just like the text by many famous fathers of the Eastern Church who did not belong strictly to the Syriac culture. History has preserved tens of Syrian names or Syrian authors who wrote their works in the Syriac language in the period preceding the Arabic conquest, though sometimes they wrote them originally in Greek and only later translated into Syriac or the other way round. The works of these writers upheld the existing intercultural relations between the Middle East and Europe and formed the foundations for by all means mature civilisation that reached its prime in the 9th century.

1st and 2nd century

The early relics of literature in the Christian age written in Mesopotamia were the work of the authors unaware neither of Christian teaching nor of Greek

---

language was developed only by Abu Bašar ʻAmru bin Osman bin Qanbar, known as Sībāwe (d. 796/797). Due to standardization of grammatical rules ambiguity in the meaning of controversial terms and notions from the Quran was eliminated, however still many interpretations of a single word were possible.

[12] An effigy of Christ painted on canvas during the alleged meeting of the King's of Edessa delegation with the Messiah has become known to all Christians; as an icon it decorates many churches, both in the East and in the West. The apocryphal literature was a subject of many works in the Polish language, see: *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu*, pod red. M. Starowieyskiego, vol. 1: *Ewangelie apokryficzne*, parts 1–2, Kraków 2003; vol. 2: *Apostołowie*; part 1: *Andrzej, Jan, Paweł, Piotr, Tomasz*, Kraków 2007, part 2: *Bartłomiej, Filip, Jakub Mniejszy, Jakub Większy, Judasz, Maciej, Mateusz, Szymon i Juda Tadeusz, Ewangeliści, Uczniowie Pańscy*, Kraków 2007, vol. 3: *Listy i apokalipsy chrześcijańskie*, Kraków 2001.

philosophy. These include Māra bār Serapion of Samosata, a representative of the Stoic philosophy. His speech from prison addressed to his son, Serapion[13] has been preserved. The forty-two odes ascribed to the biblical King Salomon[14] and classified as apocrypha probably also belong to this period. The first and the most popular Christian figure in the 2nd century was Tatian the Assyrian (d. 172 or 180). He was born in 120 in a pagan family in Mesopotamia and travelled to Rome already as a well-educated man. In Rome he became a student in the school of St. Justin, also a man from the East, from the city of Nablus,[15] and accepted baptism from him. After Justin's death as a martyr in 165 Tatian took over the running his mentor's school. One of his alumni was Clement of Alexandria. Tatian became very famous owing to his compilation of the four Canon Gospels, known almost exclusively under the Greek title *Diatessaron*[16]. He wrote this work in Rome in the Greek language, translated it into Syriac upon his return to Assyria. Tatian was also the author of a letter denouncing the Greeks for their refusal to adopt Christianity.[17]

The second major figure of the 2nd century was Meliton, the bishop of Sardes (d. 170?). The first to have mentioned him was probably Policarpus of Ephesus, who in a letter to Pope Victor mentioned Meliton's death. Meliton is said to have written two famous speeches: in one of them he defended Christianity and denounced the multiplicity of gods, in the other one, allegedly delivered in the

---

[13] The translation of the speech into Arabic and the list of the European authors who published it and commented on it at the end of the 19th century are included in the work by M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, Cairo 1987, pp. 40–47. A summary of the speech based on the above book was made by Yūsuf Ḥabbe in his own work (no date or place of publication given), being a collection of his various articles in Arabic, *Al-Falsafa as-Suriāniyya*, pp. 35–37. An interesting detail from Māra bār Serapion's life can be found in the book by Patriarch Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, Baghdad 1976, 3rd ed., p. 154. A. Barṣōm quotes the answer of Māra bār Serapion to the prison guard's question. – Why are you always laughing? – I am laughing at this epoch; it pays me back with evil which I do not reciprocate!

[14] They were compiled and analysed and described, and translated into Arabic by Behnam Hindo, Bishop of Hasake and Nisibin Dioeceses of the Syrian Catholic Church, ܫܒܚܬܐ ܕܫܠܡܘܢ *Anāšīd Sulaymān*, Manšūrāt Beth Zabday – Azeh 2004, pp. 207. This is a collective issue in the Arabic language, regrettably only part of the odes have been included in their Syriac versions. See also, Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 193–194.

[15] The biblical Sychem, nowadays within the Palestinian Autonomy.

[16] They were called ܡܗܠܛܐ Mḥalṭa and were used in the Churches of Mesopotamia for almost 250 years, at least till the year 430, when – according to common knowledge – Rappula, the bishop of Edessa ordered to resume the use of the separate Gospels. St. Ephrem knew Tatian's text and wrote an extensive commentary to it, which, however, is said to have survived only in an Armenian translation.

[17] A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, Beirut 1913, vol. 2, pp. 19–20; A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, Beirut 1996, 2nd ed., p. 30.

presence of Emperor Marcus Antonius or addressed to him, he made a plea for the persecution of Christians to be stopped and even induced the emperor to convert to Christianity.[18]

3rd century

In the Edessa school the main texts of the Bible were translated into the Syriac language as early as at the end of the 2nd century. The school attracted students from many regions. These included also Mesopotamia to which Edessa belonged both in the geographical and cultural sense. Within a short time the academy became an important centre of philosophical and theological studies, with focus on the teaching of Aristotle. One of its first pillars was BarDaiṣan (Bardesanes) (d. 222). Although only scarce information on this scholar has been preserved we know that he wrote his works in Syriac and had a very good command of Greek. His Syriac writings, rendered into Greek by his sons and disciples, were highly praised by Eusebius of Cesarea. Only one of his works, *the Laws of Countries* is believed to have survived. He also authored 150 songs (modelled on *The Psalms of David*) for which he also composed the tunes. They were sung and popularised by the Edessan youths in the streets and during celebrations. Some authors, probably wrongly, credit him with the authorship of above-mentioned Odes of Salomon. Bardesanes' teaching must have been very influential if St. Ephrem (d. 373) started to fight it after as long as one hundred years. Bardesanism survived, for instance in Persia till the 10th century AD and was denounced by the later Fathers of the Church.[19]

Among less popular authors of that period, whose Syriac works were mentioned for instance by Assemani, one should name two bishops of Busra[20]:

---

[18] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 79–80; A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 51–52.

[19] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 80, maintain that Bardesanes' parents were the natives of Irbil, the capital of the Assyrian province of Adiabene from which around the year 100 they moved to Edessa where Bardesanes was born. The authors do not conceal their admiration for Bardesanes and his literary works. They stress his great attachment to Christianity and argue that this outstanding thinker has been wronged by history. See also: A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 20–22; I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, Beth Zabdai-Azech, Beirut 1996, pp. 52–53; A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 41, 52–58, Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 191–193. A mention of the teaching of Bardesanes, called *Ad-Dayṣāniyya* in Arabic and its dissemination is made by the Arab chronicler Ibn an-Nadīm (died at the beginning of the 11th century), *Al-Fahrest*, 2nd ed., Beirut 1997, pp. 399, 411–412 and by Abī al-Fatḥ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm Ibn Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Šahrastānī in his famous book *Al-Milal wa-n-Niḥal*, Beirut [n.d.], pp. 250–251, focusing on the discussion of Bardesanes' doctrine.

[20] A town in contemporary southern Syria, not to be confused with the city of Basra situated in southern Iraq.

Apolitos and Berilos, the latter of whom was said to have had carried on lively correspondence with Origenes (d. 253). Also the polemic works in Syriac on the doctrine promulgated by Mani (d. 272), founder of Manicheism, which have been preserved in their Greek and Latin translations must have been interesting. They were written by Abdisho, the bishop of Kashgar (3rd–4th centuries).[21] Mani also wrote most of his treaties in Syriac.

4th century

The list of the 4th-century writers is headed by the famous philosopher Porphyry of Tyre (d. after 305), a student of the famous philosopher Longinus of Athens, called by St. Augustine "the wisest of philosophers." Porphyry wrote his texts in Greek and Syriac. Some of his Greek works were even included into the works of Aristotle.[22] The chronicles have preserved some other names from the first half of the 4th century such as Theophilus of Edessa (died in 309),[23] Iša'ya bār Ḥadābo (died in 327),[24] Millis, the bishop of Shushan (Sus) in Elam (died a marty's death in 341)[25] and Šem'un bār Ṣābō'e[26] (martyr, 341). Out of their works, including letters, chronicles, odes, elegies, and hymns, referred to by later writers only four songs authored by the last of the mentioned men have

[21] A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 22–23.

[22] Bar 'Ebrāya (Bar Hebraeus), *Tārīḫ muḫtaṣar ad-duwal* (no date and place of publication given), p. 78. In his book *Ishām as-Suriān fī al-ḥaḍāra al-'arabiyya*, Aleppo 2002, M. A. Alhamad devotes more than 40 pages of text to Porphyry, listing 17 titles of his works, based on the Syriac and Arabic sources. He also stresses the non-Greek origin of the scholar and reveals his real name: Malka, pp. 27–88. Ibn an-Nadīm, *Al-Fahrest*, op. cit., p. 313, maintains that he saw only chapter 4 of Porphyry's book News on philosophers. Porphyry is also mentioned by Al-Qifṭī (d. 1248/1249), *Aḫbār al-'ulamā' bi aḫbār al-ḥukamā'*, Cairo (no date), pp. 169–170.

[23] It is to him that we owe the first account of the martyrdom of the first people of the Church in Edessa, including Sharbel and BarSamia, based on eye-witness accounts (during Traian's rule), and Guria, Simeon and Habib (during Diocletian's rule), quoted by later writers. See: A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 14–15, 44; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 194.

[24] A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., p. 44; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 194.

[25] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 94; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 44, 73; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 194.

[26] His name "son of the painters" refers to the profession of his parents. "They painted silk garments for the kings of Persia with foreign paints, and the garments of his son condemned to a martyr's death by Shapur II, were painted with blood" – writes A. Abūna, quoting some anonymous Syriac sources, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 60, Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 194–195.

survived till modern times.[27] This group also includes the known poet, monk Asuana whose death cannot be defined. All his poems started with the letter "a" and were recited in Edessa till the middle of the 6th century. Two of his elegies, included into the funeral liturgy, have been also preserved.[28]

The author whose life is relatively well known is Aphrahat (Pharhad) (d. after 346), known as the "the Persian sage." He was a Persian who adopted the name Jacob upon baptism. The preserved elements of his literary heritage include 22 (or 23) speeches in prose (each starting with the subsequent letter of the Aramaic alphabet), thorough analyses and interpretations, which have been written in different languages. He concluded his speeches with the poem entitled *Ṭūṭīṯa* (the last bunch of grapes on a vine tree), in which he referred to the Book of Isaiah (Is 65, 8).[29]

However, none of the Syriac clergymen's output received such a widespread response and received such good reviews as the works of St. Ephrem. This was due to their impressive volume, innovative style, moralistic character, varied subject matters, spiritual depth and historical value. This author is thought to have been the first Christian poet and the first to write in heptasyllabic verse. His works, translated into Armenian and Greek already during his life, are still highly popular.[30] Some fragments of his texts have been included into liturgies of many Churches, both Eastern and Western ones. In turn, very little information is available on the works of St. Ephrem's teacher St. Jacob of Nisibis (d. 338), the founder of the famous school of Nisibis, a participant of the council of Ephesus, and an "apostle-like" figure.[31] Perhaps this is so because he stayed

---

[27] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 59–63; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 43–44, 68–70.

[28] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 92–93; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 195.

[29] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 64–69; I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 101; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 95–96; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 45–46. In Poland the work of Aphrahat has been studied by Rev. Andrzej Uciecha: A. Uciecha, "Afrahat, mędrzec perski – stan badań," *Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne* 33 (2000), pp. 25–40; A. Uciecha, *Ascetyczna nauka w „Mowach" Afrahata*, Katowice 2002, p. 197. The list of publications by A. Uciecha also includes other subjects concerning the literary output of Aphrahat.

[30] On 5 October 1920, Pope Benedict XV declared him a doctor of the Catholic Church. M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī devoted to St. Ephrem 17 pages of text (pp. 96–112) including a translation into Arabic of his *Easter Song*. See also A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 70–84; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 46–50; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 196–202.

[31] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 93–94; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 41–43.

in Nisibis after the city's take-over by the Persians in 363, while St. Ephrem moved to Edessa,[32] where he taught students till the last days of his life.

Among the disciples of St. Ephrem one should distinguish Āba, the author of commentaries on the Gospels, homilies structured on pentameter, a speech devoted to Job and an epic poem written in the heptasyllabic verse; Zenobius Gzirtaya, the author of his mentor's biography, treaties against Marcion and Pamphili and speeches: on Judas' treachery and of the praise of Meletius preserved in the Armenian language translation; Āsūna, the author of the epic poems written in penta- and hexameter on the anointment of the sick and dying.[33] The group of less popular writers of that time includes Iša'ya of Arzun, the author of the book of elegies on the martyrs of Upper Mesopotamia murdered during the persecutions unleashed by Shapur II referred to as "the forty years' persecutions";[34] Teophilus of Edessa, the author of the Edessian fathers' patrology;[35] Tomais, who described the life of St. Fabronia and her martyr's death in Nisibis;[36] Gregorios of Ahvaz (Khuzestan), the author of a book on monastic life, who travelled to Cyprus in 366 in order to take over an Assyrian monastery, but as he did not speak Greek he learnt it working as a gardener for two years and only then became the prior. Several years later he returned to Mount Izlo (Tur Abdin, south-east Turkey) where he died;[37] Eusebius, bishop of Emesa[38] (Homs), the

---

[32] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., p. 97 maintain that St. Ephrem reached Edessa only in 365 as on his way to the city he had stopped off at the houses of his uncles who lived in Amida. It is an important detail enabling a researcher to realise that his activity in Edessa lasted merely 8 or 9 years.

[33] Other disciples of St. Ephrem are also mentioned. They include Aruaṭ, Paulona, Simeon, Abraham, Māra Agelāta, Āba, Ar'a, BarQosin, Isaac and Jacob; each of them is supposed to have written at least one or more works, most of which have been lost. See: A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 84–85; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 50–52; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 203–204. It is possible that Āsūna and the earlier mentioned Asuana are actually the same person.

[34] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 101.

[35] Ibid.

[36] According to the church sources she died in 304. A text on her life was based on a Syriac manuscript and issued in Arabic by L. Isshaq, Qāmišlī 2002, p. 216. In 2004 around the alleged grave of this saint visited for centuries by local, both Assyrian and Yazidi, population, situated in the town of Hīmo (5 km to the west from the Syrian city of Qāmišlī in northern-eastern Syria) a 3,500 sqm church was built. It became the destination of numerous pilgrimages. An extensive description of the very site and account of its consecration are included in the voluminous work by L. Isshaq, *As-Suriān fī abrašiyat al-Ǧazīra wa-l-Furāt: Tārīḫ-ḥaḍāra-turāṯ*, Qāmišlī 2006, part 2, pp. 622–633. See also: A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 58–59.

[37] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 117–118. The authors, however, classify "Agrigorios" among the 5th century clergymen. See also A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 88–90.

[38] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 95; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., p. 119. Today Emesa is a big city called Homs in Syria.

author of songs on fasts, elegies on St. Stephen's death and of many hymns; Titus of Bostra believed to be the author of as many as four books opposing the teaching of Mani and his disciples, and of a Christmas speech.[39]

5th century

The 5th century division in the Church contributed to an unexpected development of literature; according to some opinions this century actually witnessed the beginning of the golden age of the Syriac literature. The compulsory withdrawal of Nestorius' followers to the East after the year 431 to the benefit of those who within the next 20 years would also fall out of the official Byzantine-Roman Church's grace, with the Melkites remaining loyal to it,[40] did not only reveal two different schools and styles of thinking but also with time resulted in the formation of different spelling and vocalization systems. Besides the differences of the theological nature, an undeniable effect of geographical, environmental and political conditions on each of the above-mentioned Churches must be also taken into account.

The first author that we encounter in the 5th century is Absamia (in original version ʻAbdšmayya meaning the Servant of the Heavens (the other incorrect version of the name is Abshlama) (d. 404), St. Ephrem's nephew and a student of Zenobius. Following the example of his uncle who mourned the loss of his native city of Nisibis in 77 hymns, this author also wrote two lamentations on the dreadful effects of the Hun invasion on Syria and Mesopotamia in 395 and 404.[41]

Another author, Isaac of Amida (d. 418?), a graduate of the Edessa school, had a very turbulent life. In 404 he was sent to Rome by Emperor Arcadius, presumably in order to take part in the jubilee celebrations at the Capitol. On his return to Constantinople, he was put in prison for some unknown reasons. He reappeared in Amida as an old man and was ordained a priest. He wrote numerous hymns. His accounts of the jubilee Olympic games in Rome and of the Visigots' invasion of Rome in 410 are rated as works of high historical value.[42] One of Isaac's students, monk Dāda from the village of Samqa

[39] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., p. 119.

[40] The name ملكايه malkāye – royalists (from Syriac ملكا malka – emperor, king) was coined by the Christians called "Monophysites," who – using the modern language – could be referred to as patriots. See the monumental work by Rev. K. Kościelniak, *Grecy i Arabowie. Historia Kościoła melkickiego (katolickiego) na ziemiach zdobytych prez muzułmanów (634–1516)*, Kraków 2004, p. 447.

[41] M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., p. 120; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 204.

[42] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 87, 187; I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 161; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 204–205.

is probably the author of over 300 lost works, including commentaries to the Holy Books, homilies and writings on patrology. After a natural disaster that had struck Amida and its surroundings he travelled to Constantinople where he organized aid for the victims.[43]

Cyrillona (Qorillona), an Edessian monk was another talented literary master of that time. Out of his abundant literary work some poems have survived. These include works written in tetrameter describing the plague of locust that had struck the region of Edessa and the Hun invasion in 396. There are also speeches on the Last Supper and Christ's crucifixion and homilies on Easter, Christmas and on St. Thomas the Apostle as well as a poem on a grain of wheat written in heptameter.[44]

There was another graduate of the Edessa school that deserves to be mentioned in this review. His name was Ma'na (d. 420). What we know of him is just that for a short time he held the post of the Catholicos of the East and that apart from his native language he knew Greek and Persian and was one of the best known translators of the Syriac works into the Persian language.[45]

Among the particularly deserving figures of the 5th century one can indicate Mārūṯa, the bishop of Miparqat (Mayyaparaqin) (d. 421), a participant of the Council of Constantinople, a thoroughly educated man and esteemed doctor with a diplomatic charisma. He travelled a lot as a mediator in the Persian-Byzantine conflict. His achievements include the construction of fortifications around the city of Miparqat, to which he moved the bones of the martyrs killed during the "forty years' persecutions" and from that time on the city assumed the name of "Mdīnāṯ Sahde" (Martyropolis). Mārūṯa was also a distinguished writer, writing in beautiful style and praised for his broad horizons. One of his best works is a description of persecutions inflicted on his fellow believers by the Persians, and songs about the martyrs sung during church services up to this day. He is also thought to be the founder of the structure of the Church

---

[43] Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 205.

[44] Some authors maintain that Cyrillona and Absamia are the same person. See: A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 86; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 206. A Polish version of Cyrillona's poem *Wheat* was translated by Rev. Wojciech Kania, see M. Starowieyski, *Muza chrześcijańska*, vol. 1, Kraków 1985, pp. 273–275. M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 119–120, question the opinion that Cyrillona was the author of all the above-mentioned works. According to these authors the style of these texts is more representative of the works of another monk named Qiura who lived in the first half of the 5th century. The similarity of both names may also be an argument in support of this thesis as Hellenized or Latinized names are often a cause of great confusion being often so different from their original versions that even their owners would be unlikely to recognize them (e.g., Arabic Ibn Sina vs. its Latin version Avicenna).

[45] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 133; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., p. 106.

in Persia based on the resolutions of 318 fathers of the Council of Nice. Some part of the correspondence between him and John Chrysostom and Theofilus of Alexandria relating to the conflict that had erupted between the two latter scholars in 403 has been preserved. The great respect with which Mārūṯa was treated by Christians is reflected in the fact that his earthly remains were transferred to a Syriac monastery in Egypt.[46]

The Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon by the name of Āḥa, who died four years later, is said to be the author of another work on martyrs. Enjoying the trust of the king of Persia, Yazdegard I, Āḥa was sent to conciliate with the king's brother who was organizing a rebellion against him. During his journey he visited the graves of martyrs and recorded the accounts of their deaths he had heard from the local people. He also wrote the biography of his master, Abṯ, the prior of the monastery in which he had served before he became the catholicos.[47]

One cannot but mention monk Rappula, born in Qennešrin, the later bishop of Edessa (411–435) and a participant of the Council of Ephesus. He knew Greek very well and translated the works of Cyril of Alexandria from this language into Syriac. He gained widespread fame owing to over 700 homilies on holidays and penance. He is also the author of 89 observances for monks, priests and *bnāṯ qyāma* (Daughters of the Covenant) as well as of 46 letters. Furthermore, he was one of the most effective opponents of the use of *Diatessaron*, the four Gospels combined into a single narrative by Tatian. He was brave, strict and quick-tempered. He personally burnt a Syrian translation of the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and strongly persecuted the "Nestorians" in Edessa. He travelled to Constantinople where – as it is believed – he gave fiery speeches in the presence of Emperor Theodosius II. Cyril of Alexandria called him "the Pillar of Truth."[48]

One should also mention the Bishop of Balš, Bālāy[49] (d. ca. 450), very much respected in the Eastern Churches, a first rate poet and writer, considered to have

[46] Assemani (As-Sim'ānī) reports that during his visit to a Syriac monastery in Egypt (in the 18th century) when he was on a trip to purchase manuscripts on behalf of the Vatican, monks showed him the grave of St. Marūṯa and he regretted that he did not manage to buy the manuscript describing the life and works of this scholar deposited in that cloister. A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., p. 93. See also I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 123–124; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 114–116; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 99–101; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 207.

[47] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 93–94; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., p. 116; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., p. 104.

[48] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 102–106; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 133–135; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 208–209.

[49] A small town between Aleppo and Ar-Raqqa in Syria, present-day Maskana(e) (ancient Greek name: Barbalisos).

invented the pentameter verse, even though such a verse structure had been earlier used by St. Ephrem. Bālāy left a legacy of famous hymns as well as occasional speeches and poems, some of which have been included in liturgy. Moreover, it is very likely that he is the author of famous twelve poems about Joseph the Just.[50]

The group of authors, whose lost works are mentioned by later writers, includes archdeacon Jacob of Edessa (d. 451); monk Samuel (d. 458), companion of BārṢōma of Samosata and the author of his biography; priest Samuel of Edessa (d. 467), who spent most of his life in Constantinople, and is mentioned by the Byzantine sources as one of "the famous people"; priest Quzma (d. 472), the author of the biography of Simeon Stylites, the Elder (d. 460), and finally two priests: Fetrus and Qayyuma, the authors of eulogies in praise of St. Ephrem.[51]

Aqqaq, the bishop of Amida, was more lucky. History has preserved the following episode from his life. When the Byzantines took captive some 7,000 people in the Persian region of Arzun and moved them to Amida, he decided to sell the gold and silver liturgical vessels from the churches in his city and to use the raised money to buy out the people from captivity and set them free. On their release he provided them with clothing and sent them back home. This gesture gained recognition of the Sassanid Emperor Wahran V (420–438), who thanked the bishop for his deed in person when the truce with Byzantium was called in 422. Aqqaq's literary output focused mainly on subjects related to charity and Church organization. Unfortunately, most of his works have been lost.[52]

The chronicles have also preserved the names of such authors as Irenaeus, the bishop of Tyre, the author of the five-volume history of the Church and of many letters written in 431 to the bishops of the East. He also wrote an elegy on himself while being in exile in Arabia. There was also the bishop of Samosata, Andrawos (Andrew) to whom a work from the year 429 praising Nestorius as well as commentaries to the Scriptures and eight letters are ascribed.[53]

When the above-mentioned Rappula held the post of the bishop of Edessa, the Persian School[54] in Edessa was headed by rector Yhība[55] (d. 457). Yhība's life was a subject of many works. Like Rappula he took part in the Council of Ephesus,

---

[50] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 37, 83, 96–97; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 137–139; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 209–210. See S. Bednarowicz, *Dzieje biblijnego Józefa w dwunastu syriackich poematach o Józefie Sprawiedliwym Pseudo-Efrema*, Poznań 2009, pp. 219 + 137 pages of the poem's text and its Polish translation.

[51] Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 210–211.

[52] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 124.

[53] Ibid. 126–127.

[54] The school was referred to in this way as its teaching staff was composed of the refugees from Nisibis (including St. Ephrem), after the city's take-over by the Persians in 363.

[55] The Greek version of his name is Ibas.

although he represented opposing views. Owing to his translations of the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodor of Tarsus as well as of the writings of Aristotle into Syriac, Yhība gained considerable fame and was referred to as "interpreter." The disagreement between the two hierarchs deepened so much that Rappula finally expelled Yhība from the city. He could do this as a bishop had more power than the rector of college (!). However, after Rappula's death Yhība was elected the city's bishop as he was popular amongst the people. Apart from translating works into Syriac Yhība wrote commentaries on some books of the Old Testament and many disputes and hymns. His speech representing his views on the debate on the nature of Christ pending at that time, divided into four chapters, was incorporated into the documents of the Council of Chalcedon in which he took part and was rehabilitated despite being a supporter of Nestorius.[56]

Among others one should mention a truly saintly figure of catholicos Dādīšō' (d. 457). His pontificate was a very dramatic one. He was imprisoned, found shelter among Arab Christians in the city of Al-Ḥīra, witnessed an upheaval in the Church. During the synod bearing his name held in 424, he made the Church in Persia independent by breaking away from Antioch. He wrote three volumes of commentaries on the books of the Old Testament (1 Kings and 2 Kings, and Si).[57]

Although it is commonly accepted that Theodore, the bishop of Qorš (died in 458), belongs to the Greek fathers of the Church, the Syriac sources often point out to his command of the Syriac language. We cannot exclude that part of his abundant literary output might have been written in this language. In the work on the life of the famous St. Simeon Stilites, the Elder there is a mention that he wrote four letters in Syriac and he delivered his sermons to the Syriac-speaking pilgrims as well as to the Arab Ghassanids and Himiarites as well as to Armenians and Georgians.

Theodore was born in Antioch in 387 and became bishop at the age of 33. He was a great philanthropist. As a participant of the Council of Ephesus he visited Rome where he met Pope Leo I whom he disposed against the Church of Alexandria. He is thought to author a five-volume chronicle covering the years from 320 to 428 and a description of the lives of 50 hermits and commentaries on the epistles of St. Paul and to the Book of Prophets. He was a talented speaker, often compared to John, the Golden Mouth.[58]

The closing decade of the 5th century witnessed the end of the active lives of many prominent people of the Church. One of them was Isaac of Edessa, the Younger called also Isaac of Antioch (d. 491?), a participant of the Council

[56] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 106–109; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 150–154.

[57] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 118–119; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 118–122.

[58] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 125–126.

of Chalcedon, the author of numerous hymns about saints, martyrs, fasts, penance, the Crucifixion, the Samaritan woman, of works polemical with the teaching of Nestorius and Eutyches and of at least one chronicle as well as of a description of the destruction caused by the earthquake that struck Antioch in 459. A description of an interesting episode of his life has been preserved in literature. In order to induce the hierarchs of Antioch to include the stanza, "Lord Jesus crucified" into the song, "Holy is God, Holy and strong, Holy immortal one," he travelled to this city. On his way he was said to have met a traveller carrying a parrot. To his surprise the parrot kept repeating the stanza which the Nestorians refused to accept. This incident inspired him to write the 2,136-verse-long ode on a parrot.[59]

The great fame of Narsay (died in the 6th century) shaded somewhat quite extraordinary achievements of his companions from the Edessa school. One of them was Aqqaq (different than the man of the same name mentioned before), who, however, did not go to Nisibis but to Mdīnāṯa (Arabic: Al-Madā'in) following the closure of the school in Edessa. In the period of religious freedom announced by the Persian Emperor Kavad I, son of Peroz I (459–484), he was elected the catholicos in place of the secretly murdered Babbay. The chroniclers stress his mission to the Byzantine Emperor Zeno. Its purpose was to return to grace the bishops expelled by the Byzantines. Aqqaq's pontificate lasted 11 years and a few months. He died in 496 and was buried in the city of Al-Ḥīra at the request of this city's bishops, which proves that at the end of the 5th century the city was an important Christian centre.

Aqqaq's literary heritage includes hymns about fasts and numerous treatises in support of Nestorius' doctrine. At the request of Emperor Kavad I he translated into Persian a speech about faith delivered by Elish (Hosh) who was elected the bishop of Nisibis after Barṣōma's death. Aqqaq is linked with certain organisational changes in the Church. During the synod he convened in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 486 the hierarchs were granted the right to start families and monks were prohibited from giving up their monastic status.[60]

---

[59] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 161; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., pp. 211–212; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 145–151 (including a fragment of one of the poems on pseudo-fasting translated into Arabic). Although the sources name another Isaac (the Younger) of Antioch, who died at the beginning of the 6th century, this Isaac should be regarded as the author of an elegy about the devastation in the village of Bēṯ-Ḥūr near Edessa following the seizure of the village in 457 by the Arabs and the ensuing introduction of the cults of their gods, and after the village had been regained by the Persians.

[60] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 124; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 156–157; A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 126–128. Quoting a number of Uniate authors, Abūna, a Uniate himself, criticises Assemani's opinion who considered Aqqaq to be a Catholic.

Barṣōma, the already mentioned bishop of Nisibis (d. 496?) had big achievements, especially in the field of education. When the Persian School of Edessa was closed by Emperor Zeno in 489, Barṣōma requested the school rector and other teachers to move to Nisibis and offered them to resume their work in the old school of Nisibis. As a host he prepared the list of school subjects, syllabus and school regulations specifying the duties of teachers and students. Barṣōma was born in Upper Mesopotamia and was a student in the school run by Yhība in Edessa, which he left in 449. As a bishop and scholar he enjoyed great respect from the Sassanid Emperor Peroz I, who made him the most prominent person in this part of the empire which enabled him to play the role of a mediator between Persia and Byzantium. As an ardent supporter of Nestorianism Barṣōma tried to impose the doctrine on other Christians, including the natives of Armenia, but with no success. Most of Barṣōma's literary output has been lost and the works that have been preserved concern mainly the organisation of the Church in Persia, including the resolutions adopted at the synod held under his leadership in Bēṯ-Lāpāṭ in April 484. The other surviving writings include a liturgy and single speeches, hymns, letters and songs.[61]

The next writer that must be mentioned in this review is Ma'na,[62] who prior to leaving Edessa along with other scholars in 457 managed to translate almost all the works of Diodor of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia from Greek into Syriac. He was also very much committed to translating selected Syriac works into Pahlawi. However, he had to discontinue the work after he was elected the bishop of the Persian city of Rewardashir. He is also said to make a translation into Syriac of a biography of Alexander of Macedon from its Pahlawi version being itself a rendition from Greek, and of a collection of Old Indian fables *Kalila-i-Dimna.*[63]

The next scholar living in the 5th century, whose birth and death date we do not know, was Andrauos (Andrew), the bishop of Samosata. He was also an ardent supporter of Nestorius and wrote on the subject in his work from 429. He is also thought to have written commentaries on the holy books, eight letters and other unidentified works.[64]

---

[61] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 112–117; A. Šēr (Scher), *Tārīḫ Kaldo wa Āṯūr*, op. cit., pp. 147–156; M. Kāmil, M. H. Al-Bakrī, Z. M. Rušdī, *Tārīḫ al-adab as-suriānī*, op. cit., pp. 145–151. He is the author of the stanza included into the morning liturgy for non-holiday Tuesdays: ܠܐ ܡܫܟܡ ܘܡܝܡ ܕܡܝܡ (heights and valleys do not suffice), probably also the stanza repeated during the service: ܐܝܟ ܕܫܟܚܬ ܘܡܫܟܚ ܠܝ ܡܫܟܚ (Glory to You, the Finder of the lost).

[62] A. Abūna, *Adab al-luġa al-ārāmiyya*, op. cit., pp. 111, 128. This is a person different than the above-mentioned one, with the same name.

[63] This is also true of Pahlawi tales of Sindbad translated into Syriac in the 8th century. A. Amin, *Fağr al-islām*, op. cit., p. 131; Afrem I Barṣōm, *Al-Lu'lu' al-manṯūr fī tārīḫ al-'ulūm wa-l-ādāb as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 168. An Arabic translation of *Kalila-i-Dimna* was made in the 8th century by Abdullah ibn al-Muqaffa'. Both works are highly ranked in the Arabic literature.

[64] I. Armala, *Tārīḫ al-kanīsa as-suriāniyya*, op. cit., p. 127.

The other preserved texts written in this century are the Syriac translations of edicts and decrees issued by three Byzantine emperors: Constantine the Great, Theodosius and Leon I.[65]

Summing up

The conviction prevails that Rappula's translation of the New Testament was an undertaking characterised by great conscientiousness and maturity that became a model for similar translations of texts from Greek into Syriac in the following centuries. Such undertakings were carried out in the Hellenistic part of Mesopotamia, where the Fathers remained under a strong influence of the methods of study and research established in the school of Alexandria. It is not unlikely that it is the very fact of drawing from the Hellenistic school of interpretation that lead to the 5th-century split of the Church, as both parties to the conflict tried to present their arguments and to defend their positions using Greek philosophical notions and Aristotelian logic. Such Greek terms as "nature," "person," "being" and their more or less precise Syriac counterparts were also of significance.[66] Some scholars treated Greek commentaries to the Bible as a guiding light in their studies. The most important works of that time include the Syriac translations of the works written by famous theologians such as Theodore of Mopsuestia, Gregory of Nazianza, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and others. The interpretations of these texts which were in the 5th century "in common circulation" were stretched by both sides in their dispute on the nature of Christ to lend credence to their views and to refute the arguments of the opponent.[67] In this period there were also known the Syriac translations of the seven letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Barnabas' speeches, sermons by Gregory the Theologian (miracle man) *On the Soul* and part of his letters, whose Greek originals had been lost, homilies of Julius the African and most of the works of Hippolyte of Rome. Apart from those translations of the Greek codes of laws, the Council documents, the works and biographies of the fathers of the desert and other hermits and ascetics were also available. It is believed that the texts

[65] They are said to have been translated by a monk of Mabbug in the years 475–477. Various later copies were found in the archives of Paris and in Cambridge. There are also Armenian, Georgian and Arabic versions translated from Syriac.

[66] In "the profession of faith" the Syriac Churches still use Greek phrases adopted at the Councils of Nice and Constantinople, not translated into the native language ܡܫܘܐ ܒܥܕܬ ,ܐܒܐ wašwe b-'ūsiyya l-ābūy – "one in Being with the father" (here it is the Greek word *ousia* – being), ܘܒܚܕ ܠܥܕܬܐ ܩܬܘܠܝܩܝܬ w-baḥḏo 'īdto qāṭūlīqoyto – "in one Catholic church" (here it is the Greek word *katholike*). In the Syriac language "church" both in the meaning of a building and of a community, is a feminine gender noun, hence the ending (to).

[67] In any case the term translator (ܡܦܫܩܢܐ ma'brāna, ܬܪܓܡܢܐ targmāna) in the Syriac language is understood as the one who explains.

written by "the fathers of the desert," even though in Mesopotamia a slightly different model of monastic life prevailed, with monks living closer to human settlements or even among the people. Prior to the Church schism there were translations made into Syriac through Greek, of Coptic letters of St. Anthony, which were subsequently translated from Syriac into Arabic, of the text by the hermit and ascetics Palladius of Galatia, who travelled around Egypt in the 4th century, a depiction of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, the lives of the majority of the Fathers of Antioch, Samosata, Cappadocia, Alexandria, Rome and Thessaloniki. The school in Edessa played a leading role in this area. The first texts translated in this school into Syriac included the text on wind by Clement of Alexandria, the treaty by Titus of Bostra (dated to 371) on Manicheism, the story of Eusebius of Cesarea (d. 340) on the Palestinian martyrs and his History of the Church as well as the earliest translations of an isagoge by Porphyry. It must be stressed that most of the translations were made during the authors' lifetimes or shortly after their deaths. This may be explained by the fact that teachers in Syriac schools were in touch with the external world, intellectuals visited one another and were aware of the work of other translators. The first stage of the translation work ended along with the closure of the Edessa school in 489, but in the next centuries each of the existing or newly established schools had its own distinct style. The preserved information concerning the texts and translators comes from different centres, sometimes very distant from one another. The first translator from among those we know who recorded his name in the text he had worked on was a man by the name of Ma'na. He came from Persia and he initiated his intellectual life in the school of Edessa where he translated the texts written by Theodore of Mopsuestia from Greek into Syriac. Later he pursued his career in Persia where he settled after Yhība's death in 457. The most efficient period in his translation work fell on the time of Peroz's I rule during which he translated speeches and homilies in Persian for liturgical needs and eight books in Syriac on astrology and astronomy. Due to his clearly pro-Nestorian sympathies bishop Simeon d-Bēṯ-Aršam called him a "Sand Swallower."[68]

Besides purely theological and philosophical texts there were many novels, short stories and legends written in the Syriac language in the discussed period. Their authors, both known and unknown by name, sometimes let their imagination run free. Examples of such works include the texts like "the story of finding the Cross by Hēlāna, the mother of Constantine the Great," the legend on "the sleeping brothers of Ephesus," which is said to have had two versions initially, the "Nestorian one" and the "Jacobite" one, the story of "the Tresure Cave,"[69] the story of "the circumstances of the Constantine the Great's

[68] This Ma'na is the other out of the two men bearing this name mentioned in this text.

[69] This was said to be the cave in which Adam stayed, following the expulsion from the Paradise.

conversion to Christianity,"[70] short stories "about martyrs in different times and places," short story "Alexios – the man of God," the story "King Joseph and his teacher Barlam,"[71] the story "on the mystery of the Constantine the Great's victory over his enemies" and others. Some of these texts were translated into different languages, mostly into Greek and Latin very early, but also into Ge'ez and Armenian, and later also into Arabic (although in Arabia they could have been known by oral transmission, owing to the local Christians; Sura 18 of the Quran bears the title "the Cave" and refers to the sleeping brothers of Ephesus, however, out of the 110 verses of this sura only verses 9 to 27 actually refer to the Christian legend and mention neither the place nor the religion of the characters). It should be stressed that some stories, in various versions and with modifications, survived also in the folk culture of modern Assyrians[72] and probably also among some other Middle East communities.

[70] "Constantine suffered from leprosy. When he arrived in Rome all the citizens escaped for fear of contracting the disease. Some people hostile to the Christians paid the emperor a visit and advised him, 'the only cure to your disease is to take baths in Christian children's blood.' However, the crying of the children and their parents' lamentations softened the emperor's heart. That night in his dream he beheld two men who told him, 'the only one who can heal you is Eusebius, the bishop of the city who escaped for he fears you.' The emperor sent for him. When he heard about the dream, the bishop told the emperor that the two men were Peter and Paul and showed him their effigies. The emperor confirmed they were the men he had seen in his dream. Then Eusebius baptised the emperor. Leprosy fell off his body like scales fall off the body of the fish."

[71] Its plot is set in the Hindu and Christian culture, hence it is presumed that it could have been written by a Mesopotamian missionary active in India.

[72] M. Abdalla, "Z kręgu folkloru chrześcijańskich Asyryjczyków," *Literatura Ludowa* 1986 no. 4–6, pp. 63–76.