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THE ECONOMY OF SYRIAN MONASTERIES (FIFTH–EIGHTH CENTURY)*

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

THE ECONOMIC ASPECTS of the monastic communities of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia have not previously received much scholarly interest.¹ This is

* The present study has been written as part of the project *Monks and Monastic Communities in the Eastern Mediterranean (4th–8th c.)*, a Maestro 7 grant financed by the National Science Centre of Poland (2015/18/A/HS3/00485).

¹ M. G. MORONY, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton 1984 (repr. 2005), a pivotal book for the history of the region, contains one chapter on administration and taxes, but none on the economy. In *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria. A Review of Current Debates*, J. HALDON (ed.), Farnham 2010, most of the chapters focus on the minting of coinage and the monetary activity. Other economic activities are not delved into to any great extent.

The most important works for this article have been: C. J. VILLAGOMEZ, *The Fields, Flocks, and Finances of Monks: Economic Life at Nestorian Monasteries, 500–850*, Los Angeles 1998, but the research (done, notabene, by Morony's student) remains as an unpublished dissertation at the University of California, although the author summarised it in two articles. Despite the title suggesting a synthetic approach to the economy of monasteries of the Church of the East, it is a study of one monastery, Beth 'Abe; although the monastery is presented in the context of others establishments, the latter are discussed only superficially. Another book: A. PALMER, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier. The Early History of Tur 'Abdin*, Cambridge 1990, is also primarily a study of one (very important) monastery, namely the monastery of Mar Gabriel in Qartamin. I have made recourse to both works extensively in this article. Finally, it is appro-

partially understandable, because it may seem (though wrongly) that the economic life of a monastery would be less significant than its social function or organisation, to say nothing of the spiritual sphere. There are also other reasons. The sources available to us are scattered and concern only a handful of monasteries. The notion that findings obtained from them can be applied to all monasteries can only ever be erroneous, as the functioning of communities in the economic sphere was strongly dependent on the geographical and climatic properties of the area in which they were located (arable zones, steppe borders, mountain ridges, or mountain valleys suitable for cultivation; the amount of precipitation, the presence of water sources, the distance from rivers; average temperatures; imminent vicinity of nomads). For this reason, each monastery should be analysed on its own terms. However, even if all the available pieces of the puzzle were taken into account and the microhistories of monasteries with appropriate sources were compiled, we would still not avoid the fundamental flaws of this material, namely that the data concerning only some monastic communities remains extant, that the selection of documentation made by time and people did not respect any rules, and that chance in terms of preservation usually played a significant role. The dossier of monasticism of Syria and North Mesopotamia in the eyes of an economic historian is full of lacunae.

Despite all these flaws in the material, I think that this research should still be undertaken, because the careful questioning of the sources brings about interesting answers even if some enquires cannot be undertaken. It is necessary to analyse the available pieces of information in order to deter-

priate to mention the work by Ph. ESCOLAN, *Monachisme et Église. Le monachisme syrien du IV^e au VII^e siècle: un monachisme charismatique*, Paris 1999 (especially chapter "Le financement du monachisme", pp. 183–225). Although cited in many bibliographies, it is a study that raises many questions. Escolan's reasoning is characterised by an honest aversion to monasteries and monks as a destabilising factor in the Christianity of Syria – Northern Mesopotamia, which distorts the view of the history of these areas. It also contains numerous errors from the professional point of view. Above all, the documentation of the author's statements is extremely flawed: references to sources are lacking in many places. The author rarely discusses the problems of source critique (the time of creation of the texts, later interpolations that appear in them, the probability of ascribing them to authors indicated in colophons, etc.), despite the fact that those texts usually require such critique. I am not the only person to have drawn attention to this; the reviewers of this work pointed it out to the author as well.

mine the economic and social context of the cases known to us so as to endeavour to reconstruct the budgets of communities, and to look for the ideological justification of a monastic economy. Years ago, I carried out with good results similar research related to monastic Egypt, making recourse to Egypt's extraordinary hoard of sources (papyrus documents, normative and literary texts, exceptionally abundant archaeological sources).² Syria is not Egypt, however, and there is a lack of sources comparable to Egyptian papyri. Since Syria is a vast region, for both geographical and political reasons it does not supply us with sufficiently numerous archaeological sources like those we would find in the land of the Nile. On the other hand, it has other categories of sources which are lacking in Egypt, such as monastic rules; and by proceeding carefully and critically, we can use these sources to increase our knowledge of the economic activity of Syrian monasteries.

'Syria' is a term that always requires clarification. Since the 64 BC, it meant a province expanded as a result of annexations and divisions into smaller units. In late antiquity, the eastern border of Syria shifted to the west or to the east during the wars with the Sasanians. However, political divisions were no barrier from a civilisational, as well as an ecclesiastical, point of view. When we examine the spread of Syriac language and culture in this area in the broadest sense of the word, it is necessary to recognise as a part of Syria not only the provinces of the Roman Empire, described by this name, but also Osroene and Northern Mesopotamia, and even those lands on both sides of the Roman-Sasanian border. Contemporary researchers often opt for the term 'Greater Syria', which will be used for the purposes of this article. One more point concerning geography must be mentioned: what we usually call 'desert' when speaking of the abode of Syrian monks, is the belt between the cultivated land and the steppe or the lower part of the mountains. The real desert (a big barren space, sandy or rocky, almost completely deprived of water, apart from the oases) was not fit for habitation, even for the most zealous ascetics.

² See E. WIPSYCKA, 'Resources and economic activities of Egyptian monastic communities (4th–8th century)', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 41 (2011), pp. 159–263; E. WIPSYCKA, *The Second Gift of the Nile. Monks and Monasteries in Late Antique Egypt* [= *Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement* 33], Warsaw 2018, chapters: 'Monastic economy' and 'Cellia – everyday life in hermitages and laurae'.

Fig. 1. The Sasanian Empire (drawn by Szymon Maślak)

Fig. 2. The patriarchate of Antioch (drawn by Szymon Maślak)

Greek-speaking cities concentrated primarily along the Mediterranean coast were submerged in the mass of the rural Aramaic-speaking population. Further to the east, there were cities dominated by an elite who were both Greek and bilingual. Language borders were thus intricate, and mutual influences between Greek and Syrian culture were strong. The expansion of Christianity, which went beyond linguistic, political, or social barriers, contributed to the strengthening of bonds between ethnic groups, although it did not remove their distinctness. Research in recent decades has brought to the fore this duality (or triplicity, if we take the Arabs into account).³

³ See S. FITZGERALD JOHNSON (ed.), *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity*, Ashgate 2014, and specially IDEM, 'Introduction', pp. 1–142. The recently published ambitious work of J. TANNOUS, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East. Religion, Society, and Simple Believers*, Princeton 2018, raises the topic of relations between ethnic groups in many places.

From the point of view of ecclesiastical structures, Greater Syria was subordinate to the Antiochene bishop up until the beginning of the fifth century; however, churches existing in the territory of the Persian state declared independence in 410 and acknowledged the supreme authority of the bishop of Seleucia/Ctesiphon. Later doctrinal disputes concerning the attitude to the creed adopted at the Council of Ephesus (431) and then at the Council of Chalcedon (451) consolidated this state of affairs. Although extremely important, however, the division between Churches accepting the doctrinal achievements of Chalcedon and Churches rejecting it did not lessen their civilisational unity.

Although I carefully read sources originating from the fourth century, they yielded little. Instead, I decided to include the first hundred years of Arab rule in the chronological scope of my research; I did so in line with the suggestions of many of today's historians who have placed a strong dividing line on the rise to power of the Abbasids and the changes they enacted in the structure of the state and their active religious policy, which would accelerate Islamisation.⁴ After years of Arab conquest, with the inevitable human and material losses, the situation of both the hierarchical Church and the monasteries seems not to have worsened, and may have even improved (the fall of the Sasanid state eliminated the danger of persecution of Zoroastrian converts to Christianity). This happened despite the fact that the taxes demanded by the new rulers increased significantly.⁵ We know this only from Arab sources as we find no complaints of fiscal oppression in Greek or Syriac sources. This is amazing if we consider the official history of the Alexandrian patriarchate to be found in the *History of the Patriarchs*, detailing as it does the deteriorating fiscal situation of Christians in Egypt; writing with emphasis on the persecutions suffered by successive patri-

⁴ See H. KENNEDY, 'Islam', [in:] G. W. BOWERSOCK, P. BROWN, O. GRABAR (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, Cambridge MA 1999, pp. 219–237; IDEM, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates. The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleven Century*, 3rd ed., London 2016, pp. 197–134.

⁵ M. G. MORONY, *Iraq after the Muslim*, Piscataway NJ 2005, pp. 99–124; H. KENNEDY, 'The Middle East in Islamic late antiquity', [in:] A. MONCON, W. SCHEIDEL (eds.), *Fiscal Regimes and the Political Economy of Pre-Modern States*, Cambridge 2015, pp. 390–403.

archs.⁶ Why do the sources relating to Greater Syria not record a change in the taxes that were levied? Certainly, the looted goods and the huge fiscal bounty obtained by the ruling Arab elite were used not only for the maintenance of troops and the luxurious consumption of leading clans, but also for investments that would bring about economic development: for irrigation works that would allow new areas to be cultivated.

The Christians of Greater Syria were painfully divided between three churches with different theological views.⁷ The monasteries were involved

⁶ B. EVETTS (ed. & transl.), *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 1, 5, 10], Paris 1904, 1909, 1914. M. N. SWANSON, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641–1517)*, Cairo 2010, analyses with great care and insight the vision of the Church and the role of its patriarch in this work, which constitutes the official interpretation of the image of the past as created in the circles of the patriarchy. The work was written gradually as a result of successive editions, its oldest part was written at the end of the eleventh century.

⁷ The terms commonly used nowadays for these Churches of late antiquity are, unfortunately, inconsistent and far from uniform. Being aware of this fact, I would like to lay out the rules which shall be adopted throughout this article.

The easiest solution is to use the terms ‘Chalcedonians’ or ‘pro-Chalcedonians’ and ‘anti-Chalcedonians’; these labels were also employed in late antiquity. Relatively late, namely in works of Timothy Ailouros, patriarch of Alexandria (457–477), we find the term ‘Dyophysites’ (from Greek *duo* – ‘two’ and *physis* – ‘nature’). Its mirror reflection – ‘Monophysites’ – emerges for the first time in writings of Anastasius of Sinai, a zealous Chalcedonian active in the middle of the seventh century. The term was used exclusively by opponents of anti-Chalcedonians and is thus marked by negative overtones. It is for this reason that some among the contemporary representatives of Churches which reject the theological output of Chalcedon – the Copts in particular – demand to abandon the use of the term and replace it with ‘Miaphysites’ (from Greek *mia* – ‘one’, and *physis* – ‘nature’): a word coined in imitation of ‘Dyophysites’ which, however, did not exist in antiquity.

Despite all reservations I decided to adopt the term ‘Monophysites’ on the grounds that it is frequently used in works of modern Church historians. It cannot be treated as synonymous with ‘anti-Chalcedonians’, as opponents of the Chalcedonian creed included also ‘Eastern’ (‘Persian’) Christians who were not Monophysites. This group is commonly called ‘Nestorians’, even though both the contemporary members of this Church and scholars who study its history consider this term inaccurate. The terms ‘Melkites’ (for Chalcedonians) and ‘Jacobites’ (for Monophysites) were not in use before the Arab conquests.

The correct contemporary terms for the two non-Chalcedonian dogmatic divisions are ‘The Syriac Orthodox Church’ (= Monophysites) and ‘The Church of the East’ (= Nestorians). Within them, there exist further divisions into variously named Churches.

The members of all dogmatic groups, obviously, labelled themselves as orthodox in contrast to all other Christians who, in their mind, were heretics.

in this conflict. While researching sources documenting economic phenomena, I looked for evidence that there were differences between the economic behaviours of the monasteries of the Chalcedonian Church, Orthodox (Monophysite) Church and the Church of the East (Nestorian), with negative results. Theological conflicts very rarely determine economic outlook.

It should be remembered that the monasticism of Greater Syria consisted of communities with very different structures, sizes, types of asceticism and the resulting limitations.⁸ For economic issues, this fact is of great importance. It would be wrong to treat large monasteries and small groups gathered around a master in asceticism together, not to mention independent hermits. I shall try not to make such mistakes.

Before delving into the subject matter, one more disclaimer is necessary. The toponyms of the broadly defined historical Syria and Mesopotamia had to be cited in a uniform manner. Some works of modern scholarship, like the fifteenth volume of *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, devoted to Syria, utilise puristic transcriptions of modern Arabic names. The present article makes use of the headwords for toponyms as featured in *The Syriac Gazetteer* as part of the Syriaca.org project. Wherever necessary, these have been supplemented with standardised orthography adopted in more recent English publications on the history and culture of Syria addressed to an audience wider than a narrow circle of specialists (of particular help here was the book by D. King, *The Syriac World*, London – New York 2018). These toponyms, for the most part, are historical. According to the adopted rules, the length of the vowels is not noted, but *tet* and *taw*, as well as *tsade* and *semkat*, are distinguished. Common names of well-known, large towns and cities are written according to the modern English usage (e.g. Antioch, Baghdad).

2. SOURCES

Hagiographical works constitute the main body of sources I have made recourse to for the purposes of this research. These works were usually

⁸ F. JULLIEN, 'Forms of the religious life and Syriac monasticism', [in:] D. KING (ed.), *The Syriac World*, London – New York 2018, pp. 88–104.

written in the Syriac language, although we also have works written in Greek and Arabic. They were mostly written by monks, all of whom were active members of their Churches. Their works require a critical eye, not only because they always had apologetic and polemic intentions, but also because of specific features of the handwritten records during the centuries under consideration. Hagiographical works lived under the quill of the copyists, who, for various reasons, changed the text by adding or removing pieces of information and comments according to the needs of the times in which they lived. Hence the obligation to seek interpolations, which does not mean that these interpolated inserts are indifferent to the researcher. They have often vital significance for historical research. For understandable reasons, the texts written a few years after the time in which the protagonists lived and acted are of greater value than those written later. However, it happens that these later authors had access to either documents or earlier, non-preserved works. They could use the oral tradition. Each case has to be considered on its own merits.

By using hagiographic sources, I took into account the specificity of various literary genres that make up the hagiography. A critical appraisal of the value of the messages will be found in those places in my discourse where I will refer to them.

Particularly important for researching monastic economic activity are the hagiographic works belonging to a particular kind that specialists call 'collective biography',⁹ and among those works, the histories of monasteries composed of biographies of their priors. It is mostly here that we can find evidence on investments, construction activity, and relations with patrons and rulers.

The texts known as the *Qartmin Trilogy* delved the most deeply in the past.¹⁰ They consist of *Lives* of the three priors of the Monophysite Qartmin

⁹ See M. DEBIÉ, 'Writing history as "histoires": The biographical dimension of East Syriac historiography', [in:] A. PAPACONSTANTINO, M. DEBIÉ, H. KENNEDY (eds.), *Writing 'True Stories'. Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, Turnhout 2010, pp. 43–75, esp. pp. 46–50.

¹⁰ They were published by A. PALMER in the form of microfiches added to the book *Monk and Mason on the Tiger Frontier. The Early History of Tūr Abdīn*, Cambridge 1990. About this trilogy, see: A. PALMER, 'The Life of Gabriel of Qartamin', [in:] D. THOMAS, B. ROGGENE (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. 1: 600–900*, Leiden 2009, pp. 892–897.

convent, known as Mar Gabriel, which was to be found the centre of the Ṭur ʿAbdin plateau.¹¹ The first two priors – Samuel and Simeon – were, according to tradition, the founders of this monastery, which was the first monastery encircled by a wall in this region. According to the *Life of Samuel*, it was founded in 396/397. The Emperors Arcadius and Honorius had endowed this monastery and ensured that it was constantly subsidised (I will comment on this passage of the *Life of Samuel* later, p. 216), and both Theodosius II and later Anastasius (in 512) sent gifts to this monastery. Simeon, Samuel’s disciple, died in 433. The third prior, Gabriel (634–648) governed the monastery during the time of the conquest of Syria by the Arabs. Andrew Palmer, who published the trilogy and researched the history of the monastery at Qarṭmin, dated the composition of the original text of the *Lives of Samuel and Simeon* to the period 550–650, and the *Life of Gabriel* between 758 and 969, probably during the ninth century. These three texts were combined and re-edited at the end of the ninth century, and this substantially re-worked version is available to us in the form of a manuscript copied partially in c.1000 and partially in the thirteenth century. It is possible to find reliable information in these *Lives*, despite modifications to the original texts; this information is supplemented and corroborated by mentions in the chronicles. Palmer, when writing about the trilogy, called it ‘a patchwork of old and new, tradition and fantasy, historical records and blatant plagiarism’ (*Monk and Mason* [cit. n. 10], p. 14). Fortunately for us, Qarṭmin can also be examined through a set of material remains reflecting subsequent extensions to the monastery.

¹¹ The limestone plateau of Ṭur Abdīn (‘Mountains of the servants’) is located between the Tigris and Nisibis. PALMER, *Monk and Mason* (cit. n. 10), pp. 107–108, describes it in the following way: ‘Seen from the satellite in orbit around the earth, Tur Abdin resembles the coat of a tiger. The bare limestone of the ridges, against which the hill-top villages are effectively camouflaged, alternates with the red-brown stripes of fertile wadis, snaking their way down towards the central stream, which having carved a deep canyon in the east, flows into the Tigris under the citadel of Fenek; other streams, deflected by the watershed, nose west to the Tigris below Sawro and south to the Hirmas at Nisibis and so, by the Khabur, to the Euphrates. Thick forests of oak in the south, producing edible acorns, are interspersed with village clearings, above which the peaks of the steep and craggy escarpment form a clear barrier to south and east. The plateau is effectively walled and moated on every side.’ See also A. PALMER, ‘La montagne aux LVV monastères: la géographie monastique du Ṭur Abdīn’, [in:] F. JULLIEN (ed.), *Le monachisme syriaque* [= *Études syriaques* 7], Paris 2010, pp. 169–210.

The collection of the *Lives* of ascetics and monks written by John of Ephesus (sometimes called John of Asia), an important writer of the Syriac language, is a crucial source of information for the sixth century, about the state of Monophysite monasticism.¹² John was born in northern Mesopotamia near Amida, and as a child he entered the renowned convent of Mar Yoḥannan Urṭaya in Amida, where he lived through the persecutions which affected his monastic community. He later spent time in various monasteries of the Near East, and in 540 he found himself in Constantinople in the circle of anti-Chalcedonian clergy and monks under the patronage of the Empress Theodora. When Justinian ordered him to direct activities against the pagans in Asia Minor, John proved equal to the task. In 559, Jacob Baradaeus consecrated John as the bishop of Ephesus, and John would play the part of an informal leader of the anti-Chalcedonians, becoming an important figure in the unfolding events of the next decades. In the years 566–568, he had written a large (in fact, very large) hagiographical work, in which holy monks of the East (that is, the prefecture of the Orient) were protagonists. John knew or had known a number of these figures personally; whereas with the others he had learnt about from persons of their acquaintance. The heroes of his works lived more or less in the years 520–560. Twenty-three *Lives* out of the fifty-eight describe characters from Amida; and other characters were those whom he had met during his wanderings. In contrast with the ‘histories of monasteries’, John’s attention was focused

¹² John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, E. W. BROOK (ed. & transl.) [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 17, 18, 19], Paris 1923–1925. This oeuvre is the subject of a research work which proposed new questions and new concepts to the study of Syrian hagiography: S. ASHBROOK HARVEY, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis. John of Ephesus and the Lives of Eastern Saints*, Berkeley 1990. A development of Harvey’s research is to be found in the acclaimed book by Ph. WOOD, ‘We have no king but Christ’. *Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c.400–585)*, Oxford 2010 (in the book, Wood deals also with other Syrian authors).

John was also the author of an ecclesiastical history. It did not survive in its entirety, but we know the content of the first two books from extensive excerpts in the Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel Mahre and the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian. However, the third book of *Ecclesiastical History* (written in 577–588) survived in its entirety. The unfortunately unpublished doctoral dissertation of J. J. VAN GINKEL, *John of Ephesus. A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (Groningen 1963), helped me with this article, but unlike Harvey and Wood, it focuses on *The History of the Church*.

on personages as opposed to institutions, and with the exception of quite a long paragraph about the monastery of Mar Yohannan Urṭaya in Amida, he writes little about the monasteries in which his protagonists lived.

It is worth emphasizing that John's heroes were in close contact with people in the 'world', they looked after the poor, and they acted in cooperation with the laity. Susan Ashbrook Harvey points out that the self-mortification theme is marginalised (although it has not completely disappeared). The idea that one can better serve others if one does not punish oneself so cruelly created opportunities to provide information on economic matters. Miracles and wonders were a part of the everyday life of people as well, albeit John does not dazzle with 'great miracles'. Of course, the numbers in *Lives* are almost always suspect, as John's purpose is to praise his heroes.

Besides John's *Lives*, the work of an author belonging to the East Syrian Church, Thomas, bishop of Marga, is especially informative. As mentioned earlier (p. 179, n. 1), it was used by Cynthia Villagomez for the writing of the only substantial monograph devoted to the economic activity of a specific monastery.¹³ Thomas entered the famous Beth 'Abhe monastery in Marga in 832. He was the secretary of the *katholikos* Abraham II (837–850) and was consecrated as bishop of Marga in 850. Some time after 850, he wrote his *magnum opus*: *The Book of Governors* (the syriac term *reṣane* was translated by Ernest A. T. Wallis Budge in the sense of 'superiors' or 'priors'). His account is, in essence, dedicated to the history of his own monastery, but it starts with the story of Abraham of Kashkar (called 'father of fathers') whose disciple had founded Beth 'Abhe. The sixth book has a separate introduction and contains a story about the monastery of Rabban Cyprian in Birta (in the western part of Marga). Numerous pieces of information about *katholikoi* and the bishops of the period, synods, famous monks, and important events are interlaced in the narrative, along with many anecdotes.

¹³ Edition and English translation: *The Book of Governors. Historia Monastica of Thomas, bishop of Margā AD 840*, E. A. T. WALLIS BUDGE (ed. & transl.), London 1893. About this author, see the monumental work by M. DEBIÉ, *L'Écriture de l'histoire en syriaque. Transmissions interculturelles et constructions identitaires entre hellénisme et islam. Avec des répertoires des textes historiographiques en annexe*, Leuven 2015, pp. 620–621. About the sources of Thomas: Ph. WOOD, *The Chronicle of Seert. Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq*, Oxford 2013, pp. 153–156.

Thomas had read many lives of monks that are unknown to us, and these very readings also provided him with insights which he had not gleaned from his own experience. Moreover, he conversed not only with monks, but also with ordinary people. Thomas showed exceptional care for an author of hagiographic works to establish a chronology of events.

The second important source for the history of the monasteries in Northern Mesopotamia is the work of Isho'denaḥ of Baṣra, known under the title *Livre de chasteté* or *Livre des fondateurs*, which contains mostly short biographic entries for the founders of monasteries and schools, as well as lists of monastic authors together with the titles of their works.¹⁴ Isho'denaḥ wrote c.900, but he used earlier histories of the monasteries for his work (although unfortunately he does not mention their authors). This source primarily helps us to determine the geography of monasteries and the genealogical lines of priors.

I will mention other, smaller hagiographical texts in footnotes where relevant to the study.

To my disappointment, I also found little information for my research in the exceptionally numerous Syriac chronicles (even though they were often created in monasteries), with the exception of *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* dated to c.775¹⁵ as well *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn* from the end of the eighth century¹⁶). Although monasteries were very often mentioned in narratives devoted to the history of churches, the areas of interest of the authors of this literary genre did not generally include economic matters. The only subject matter related to economic activity that found its way to these texts were catastrophes of all kinds which affected the monasteries (and more precisely the areas in which the monasteries were located). The catastrophes themselves were very real, but assessing the reliability of contemporary accounts is not a simple matter (I will return to this at the end of this article).

¹⁴ Publication: 'Le livre de la Chasteté par Jésusdenah, évêque de Baṣrah', J.-B. CHABOT (ed. & transl.), [in:] *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, Rome 1896, pp. 225–291. Also Ph. WOOD, *The Chronicle of Seert* (cit. n. 13), pp. 150–153; DEBIÉ, *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (cit. n. 13), pp. 622–623.

¹⁵ *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, F. R. TROMBLEY, J. W. WATT (transl.) [= *Translated Texts for Historians* 32], Liverpool 2000.

¹⁶ *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV. AD 488–775*, A. HARRAK (transl.), Toronto 1999.

Finally, we have an important group of normative sources.¹⁷ It is thanks to these sources that the researchers of monasticism in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia find themselves in a privileged position in comparison to their colleagues dealing with Palestinian and Egyptian monasticism. The type of information included in the Syriac normative sources is absent from non-Syrian monastic dossiers.

Let us begin with the monastic rules. First, I must mention that even though the majority of Syrian monastic rules were written by bishops, this did not exclude the presence of later additions inserted by monks into the bishops' texts. That being said, bishops, who enacted regulations governing monastic communities, certainly had also their own monastic experiences, and were thus familiar with the needs of the monks under their authority.¹⁸ Bishops also had their own views about ascetic ideals and how to put them into practice, and could be more rigorous than the members of the communities to which they administered rules. Thus, the rules introducing us to the monastic world reveal it from a hierarchical perspective. Rules originating from monasteries are rare, the most important of which are the rules of Great Convent on Mount Izla, created by the three first priors: Abraham of Kashkar, Dadisho', and Babai, which I will cite often in later parts of this article.

There are two sets of documents called synodicons in the Syriac language (western – Monophysite, and eastern – Nestorian) focused primarily on the activities and legal needs of the hierarchical Church.¹⁹ Although monks and monasteries are only in the background, these documents still provide important nuggets of information about monastic activity.

¹⁷ Collected in A. VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism*, Stockholm 1960. Rules attributed to Rabbula have a newer translation: *The Rabbula Corpus Comprising the Life of Rabbula. His Correspondence, a Homily Delivered in Constantinople, Canons, and Hymns*, R. R. PHENIX JR., C.B. HORN (transl.), Atlanta 2017, pp. 94–125. A good article introducing the content of collections of canons and characterising their kinds was written by S. CHIALÀ, "Les règles monastiques syro-orientales et leur caractère spécifique", in *Études syriaques* 7 (cit. n. 11), pp. 107–121.

¹⁸ See CHIALÀ, 'Les règles' (cit. n. 17).

¹⁹ See A. IZDEBSKI, 'Persian Christians in Late Antiquity', [in:] E. WIPSYCKA, *Monks and the Hierarchical Church in Egypt and Levant during Late Antiquity*, Warsaw 2021, pp. 430–435.

Western Synodicon, published by Arthur Vööbus, contains texts of many different types.²⁰ First, there are canons adopted by the synods of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century. It is interesting to note that the canons of the Council of Chalcedon were included, despite the energetic condemnation of its doctrinal output by the Monophysites. Further, we find excerpts from the correspondence of Severus of Antioch and his bishops concerning pastoral problems. We also find the canons of two great authorities of the sixth and the seventh century, John of Tella and Jacob of Edessa, and the canons of patriarchs holding the office after the middle of the seventh century. There are also texts concerning the civil law of the Islamic period, lists of bishoprics, and the canons of two important monasteries Mar Mattai and Mar Ḥananya, as well as fragments of the letter of John Chrysostom to Pope Innocent, and even the excerpts of *The Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus.

The normative set of acts of synods and the canons of the Syrian Church of the East (Nestorian), preserved in a single codex from the thirteenth–fourteenth century, has a different character.²¹ It covers material from 410–775/776 and was partially published by Jean-Baptiste Chabot under the title *Synodicon Orientale*.²² The many texts not covered by this publication were published separately (e.g. the canons of Maruṭa, the monastic canons of Abraham of Kashkar, the canons of School in Nisibis, and letters to and from different patriarchs). In Chabot's edition of *Synodicon Orientale*, we find reports from synod sessions, their decisions, letters of bishops signing these decisions, confessions of faith, and finally, a substantial number of letters exchanged in relation to synods.

There is a vast number of archaeological traces of monasteries in the area which I have researched. The monasteries of the Limestone Massif near Antioch, the monastery of Qarṭmin in Ṭur ʿAbdin, and finally a steppe area in the

²⁰ *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, A. VÖÖBUS (ed. & transl.) [= CSCO 367–368, 375–376 / *Scriptores Syri* 161–164], Louvain 1974–1975.

²¹ W. SELB, *Orientalisches Kirchenrecht. 1: Die Geschichte des Kirchenrechts der Nestorianer*, Vienna 1981, pp. 59–63.

²² *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, J.-B. CHABOT (ed. & transl.), Paris 1902. It contains texts nos. 28–41 out of 80 from SELB, *Orientalisches Kirchenrecht* (cit. n. 21).

south-east from Mosul examined by Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée from Lyon are especially important for this study. Heinz Gaube, who examined the area of 30 × 30 kilometres in Jabal Hass in the 1970s, found the ruins of four cities, seventeen large settlements, sixteen smaller settlements, and fourteen monasteries scattered in the area south-east of Aleppo.²³ Jean Maurice Fiey, describing 'Christian Assyria' in the 1960s on the basis of personal experience (he was a Dominican friar working for a long time in Mosul before he was forced to leave the city by the Baathist regime) and comprehensive reading of Syriac and Arabic works, meticulously notes down the presence of monastery ruins, as well as active monasteries.²⁴ However, the monastic archaeology of northern Mesopotamia did not develop to the same degree as could be seen in Egypt at the end of the twentieth century.

There are many inscriptions, but unfortunately, there are still no corpora, and the publications are scattered. Documentary sources (other than monastic) for the period did not survive; unless that is they found their way into narrative texts and synodal acts.

3. INCOMES OF MONASTIC COMMUNITIES: A BASIC LIST

Based on a taxonomical survey of the sources, we know that monasteries financed sustenance, worship, charity, and the construction of outbuildings and religious buildings from the following sources:

- ✠ the labour of monks, regardless of their status in the community;
- ✠ wealth owned by future monks which was offered to the community at the moment of donning the habit or as a result of decisions made later;
- ✠ gifts from individuals not belonging to the communities, and also from institutions (representatives of the hierarchical Church, rulers);
- ✠ revenues obtained from administering the estate, which consisted of funds from previously mentioned sources.

²³ H. GAUBE, 'The Umyyad desert castles: some political and economical considerations concerning their origins', [in:] D. BUMAZHNOV, H. R. SEELIGER (eds.), *Syrien im 1.-7. Jahrhundert nach Christus*, Tübingen 2011, p. 98.

²⁴ J. M. FIEY, *L'Assyrie chrétienne*, vols. 1-3, Beirut 1965-1968.

3.1. The labour of monks

According to a view widely held by researchers of the history of monasticism of late antiquity, Syrian monks had a negative attitude towards all work which drew them away from their most important task, which was continuous prayer in accordance with the recommendation of Paul from the First Epistle to the Thessalonians.²⁵ Work was, in their eyes, the consequence of original sin (Adam did not work in Eden) and a sign of a lack of trust in God, who, after all, takes care of his servants.

Modern opinion about the reluctance of Syrian monks to take up work is rooted in attitudes typical for Syrian pre-monastic asceticism. This asceticism differed from others by the presence of wandering teachers and spiritual masters travelling among the Christian communities. They constituted elite and radical ascetic groups. The best literary evidence for their activity is the work entitled *Liber Graduum*.²⁶ The opinions on its date of composition are inconclusive: it might have been written between the second half of the third century and the middle of the fourth century. Even if we are to assume the second option, it is indisputable that the writing expresses much older views. Its author groups good Christians (sinners are not even included) into two categories: 'the perfect' ascetics, that is, teachers, and 'the upright' faithful, who had families, led normal social lives and provided essential resources and care for 'the perfect'. Therefore, 'the perfect' should not work, but not because there was something wrong with the activity (as believed by the *electi*, a similar group in the Manichaean communities assuming a dualistic worldview). 'The perfect' had to be fully focused on their mission of teaching others.

Messalian monks were against work entirely, and the hierarchical Church actively fought against this ascetic movement - which found its

²⁵ 1 Thess 5:14–18 (NIV): 'And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus'.

²⁶ *The Book of Steps. The Syriac Liber Graduum*, R. A. KITCHEN, M. F. G. PARMENTIER (transl.), Kalamazoo 2004.

inception at the end of the fourth century and developed in Syria and Asia Minor – partially because their attitude to work but mainly because Mes-salian dogmatic views differed from the orthodoxy of that time. A similarly negative attitude towards work was assumed by groups of wandering and begging monks, especially those associated with the movement of Alexander Akoimetos (approx. 360–427, founder of the Constantinopolitan convent of the Akoimatoi).²⁷ However, many monks of other denominations considered work to be an important part of their monastic life.²⁸

In the memory of the Church as an institution, a fear of wandering ascetics who did not submitting to the authority of priors or bishops, who did not want to work, remained. The warnings against them were often repeated. Whether they ever constituted a real threat to the prevailing order is impossible to determine.

3.2. Monks' gifts to their monastic communities

The fact that all monks gave gifts to the community in the moment of their inclusion does not require proving, since this practice of donation belonged to a universally accepted custom. Gifts were crucial in order for a community to come into existence; usually their founders covered the costs of

²⁷ *La vie d'Alexandre l'Acémète*, E. DE STOOP (ed. & transl.) [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 6.5], Paris 1911, pp. 645–703 (with Latin translation). English translation in D. CANER, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley – Los Angeles 2002, pp. 249–280. The original text was written perhaps in the Syriac language and can be dated to the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth century. In any event, it was the subject of interpolations and editorial changes in the tenth – eleventh century when it was integrated into the *menologion*. Identification of places mentioned in the biography was done by the archaeologist and epigraphist P.-L. GATIER, 'Un moine sur la frontière, Alexandre l'Acémète en Syrie', [in:] A. ROUSSELLE (ed.) *Frontières terrestres, frontières célestes dans l'Antiquité*, Perpignan 1995, pp. 435–457. See also P. L. GATIER, M. O. ROUSSET, 'Un moine dans la steppe syrienne. Deux étapes d'Alexandre Acémète', [in:] M. O. ROUSSET, B. GEYER, P. L. GATIER, N. AWAD, *Habitat et environnement. Prospections dans les marges arides de la Syrie du Nord* [= *Travaux de la Maison d'Orient* 71], Lyon 2018, pp. 119–128.

²⁸ E. WIPSYCKA, 'Monks at work in Eastern Mediterranean: Ideals and reality', *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 50 (2020), pp. 299–342.

erecting buildings and also endowed them with land. The sources available to us indicate that many founders, if not a clear majority, descended from elite families, both on the Orthodox Christian side and the Eastern Christian side. In the *Lives* of monks, their authors meticulously recount the genealogy of monks from distinguished families. All this points to the practice being true in the real world, and not merely in a literary convention; and that the wealth of the families of the monks was an important feature distinguishing this group.²⁹ A vital (though incalculable) group of elite Christian communities of the Church of the East descended from Persian families, having roots in the government apparatus of the Sasanians.³⁰

Those funds, handed over in good faith at the beginning of or during an ascetic life, were certainly needed by the monasteries; though it was recognised that these donations could create tensions between the monks, particularly if the wealthier monks lorded it over their poorer brethren by reminding them of what they had offered to the community:

And it is not permitted for anyone who has something from the house of his family to say: 'It is mine', or to scorn the brothers because he has given it to the monastery, or to have an authority over it greater than the rest of cenobium.³¹

In an introduction to the canons intended for the monastery of Mar Ḥananya (also known by the Arabic name Deir Za'faran), Mar Johannes, bishop of Marde, who had restored a long-abandoned monastery, wrote pertinent words addressed precisely to such monks:

²⁹ E.g. *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book II, chap. 12, pp. 80–81/179–80: 'Gewargis was the son of rich and noble parents; and his father possessed in this country (of Marga) two estates [...] When his father departed from this world, Giwargis entreated his brethren that the village of Beth Habba might be given to him as his share in the division of inheritance, and he gave it to this monastery of Beth Abe'. Gewargis was Catholicos in 660–680/681. Other analogical information in the same work: I 15, pp. 38/68–69; II 32, pp. 109/241; II 43, pp. 136/282; III 10, pp. 172/345; IV 2, pp. 194/378; IV 15, pp. 216/414–415; V 2, pp. 254/469; VI 13, pp. 372/637.

³⁰ WOOD, *The Chronicle of Seert* (cit. n. 13), pp. 143, 163–169.

³¹ This declaration is included in the canons attributed to Rabbula (bishop of Edessa, 412–435), but they come from later times. There are two sets of canons in the body of Rabbula's texts: *Admonitions for the Monks*, recognised as authentic and the *Canons for the Monks* having only six canons in common with the previous one. See *The Rabbula Corpus* (cit. n. 14); I quoted Canon 29, pp. 122–123.

But you, my blessed spiritual sons, I saw you in this Egyptian servitude, when each of you was troubling and tormenting himself in order to obtain for himself things in the cell, i.e. of food and ought else, according to your number, each one desiring this and that pot doubled, (taking) from the oven, something which was not just a little, that means bread in large amounts, lentils, dry pulse, *tarkine* (pearl barley), vetches, beans, wheaten flour, rice, other mixings, onions, garlic, cumin, coriander spice, garden-herb, (something) of that is dry and of that which is fluid. (All) these required vessels for their use, and fat and oil and honey and thickened juice, cheese, raisin, nuts. [...]

What do we learn afterwards? One makes for himself rich and celebrated friends, fills his chambers with honoured people calling them to come to him. And the other [the poor – EW] who desires empty honor but has nothing must act accordingly, being troubled and plagued by the torment of jealousy and begins to be a slanderer.³²

Johannes of Marde probably occupied himself with the restoration of the monastery of Ḥananya at the beginning of his episcopate (he was consecrated in 1124/1125). Thus about 500 years separate the texts I cite, but the phenomenon is undoubtedly still the same. Johannes' text itself is more colourful than the previous, and is both literary and homiletic; and yet not prescriptive, but this is a matter of rhetoric. The realities had not changed.

3.3.a. Monks and laypeople

By taking the habit, the monks renounced their place in the 'world', but they had to keep in touch with it. Establishing the rules governing this contact was not a simple matter. The oldest surviving Syrian monastic rule was authored by Rabbula, bishop of Edessa in 412–435.³³ He emphatically required monastic communities to be in complete isolation from the world. They could not be located in villages, much less cities. Their members could not go there, even if they were ill and could find medical help in the city.

³² *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* (cit. n. 20), vol. 2, pp. 216, 228, 229.

³³ G. G. BLUM, *Rabbula von Edessa, der Bischof, der Theologe* [= *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 300, *Subsidia* 43], Louvain 1969; H. J. V. DRIJVERS, 'The man of God of Edessa, bishop Rabbula, and the urban poor: Church and the society in the fifth century',

Rabbula deemed it advisable to create a small group of monks who could leave the monastery's premises at least so as to buy provisions and to sell monastic products in the nearest agglomerations. The rule regarding the isolation of a monastery made by Rabbula assumed that neither people from 'the outside world' nor their affairs would encroach on the monastery. With consistency, rarely seen in rule texts, Rabbula so admonished:

Admonitions 8: Monasteries may not have memorial [services for the dead] with a public assembly but only [with] the monastery's own brothers.

Admonitions 24: If a head of a monastery or a brother of one of the monasteries goes out from the world, only those brothers of the same monastery will bury him quietly. If they cannot, they will call over to them brothers from a monastery that is near them. Neither the peasants from the countryside nor secular people may be present for the procession.

Admonitions 15: Monks may not forsake their dwellings and take on lawsuits on behalf of others and go to the cities or before judges.

A consistent realisation of the requirement of isolation for the two 'worlds' must have had serious economic consequences, since it entailed the resignation from all forms of gaining the favour of laypeople. Of course, there is no reason to imagine that donors did not present themselves, but the total absence of monks from public life could have had unfavourable effects. Rabbula wanted to counter this possibility, as is seen from canon 15, a set of rules for priests and the *Children of Covenant*:

The priest and the deacons must show concern for monks who are in their districts. They must take care of them like their own members, and they must encourage also the laity that they share with them what is [necessary for] the body, but women may not enter inside the doors of their monasteries.³⁴

Rabbula did not want an expansion of monastic economic activity (animals should not be raised, with an exception of one donkey, which limited

Journal of Early Christian Studies 4 (1996), pp. 235–248; C. RAMMELT, *Ibas von Edessa. Rekonstruktion einer Biographie und dogmatischen Position zwischen den Fronten* [= *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* 106], Berlin 2008.

³⁴ *The Rabbula corpus* (cit. n. 14), pp. 106–107.

the possibility of the transport of raw materials and finished products), and a strict control of sales and purchases was kept. Therefore, what did monks about whom Rabbula writes live on? How did they pay for the building of cells, oratories, and churches? With the fruits of craft labour of the monks and, maybe, crops from small gardens inside the monasteries? We know well that the revenue originating from these sources was too modest to provide a livelihood for the monks, which would have allowed them to do charitable works which was the duty of every Christian. Rabbula was a man of ascetic austerity; and accordingly he created his ideal image of a community.

Laics participated normally both in the construction phase of monasteries and in their subsequent upkeep and maintenance. Their contribution was crucial to the creation of a monastery if its founder (and also his companions) did not have more significant funds, as the monks would not have been able to create a monastery complex with the labour of their own hands. Some gifts found their way to monasteries by way of testaments, which sometimes led to dissatisfaction amongst the donors' heirs, who were forced to carry out bequests, thus diminishing their own inheritance.

The most important gifts came from the families of the local elite, for whom building and maintaining monasteries was not only an effort to obtain salvation, but also constituted an important element in the strategy of power-wielding at a local level and establishing oneself among other families competing for this power.³⁵ They offered land, which provided the best kind of sustainability for monasteries. Unfortunately, we rarely know exactly how much land was offered.

It was not only the elite who endowed the monasteries. Our texts emphatically highlight the participation of the rural population in the building of small monasteries. John of Ephesus, in a story about Addai and Abraham, so writes:

And so, as they were going about, they found a certain place that was a convenient site for the monastery, and they place their cross there, and made a cabin; and they asked for iron tools, and began to dig out a site for a mar-

³⁵ For an interesting article on the elite's involvement in supporting monasteries, see R. PAYNE, 'Monks, dinars and date palms: Hagiographical production and the expansion of monastic institutions in the early Islamic Persian Gulf', *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 22 (2011), pp. 97–111.

tyr's chapel. And when the people of the district saw and heard it, they repaired to them from all quarters, providing money and wood and everything that was useful. And in one year they erected an extensive convent in that place, and they also gained disciples.³⁶

John of Ephesus also notes in the *Life* of Simeon and Sergius that:

But afterwards, he asked his master's permission to go and build a monastery in a certain mountainous district belonging to a village called QLW-FYTE; and he gave him permission and blessed him. And he took his cross there and recited the service. And he knelt down and prayed for three days night and day: and then some people saw them and gave information in the village, and they came to him. And on his informing them of his purpose to bestow upon the blessed man's prayer in proportion to his ability, while by common efforts also a monastery was erected in that desolate mountainous region in a few days.³⁷

In the *Life* of Rabban Hormizd we find:

And the village of believers, Al-Kôsh, was the one which was nigh unto that mountain wherein the holy man Rabban Hormizd had taken up his abode, and the people thereof were the first to go up unto this holy man and to be blessed by him. And by his prayers he delivered them from their diseases and sicknesses, and they rejoiced in him with an exceedingly great joy because God had held their village worthy for Rabban Hormizd to be his neighbour, and sojourner therein. Then they answered all together and said unto him, 'Take up thine abode in our neighbourhood, O Rabban, for we love thee and thine arrival in our district is acceptable unto us even as that of an angel of God. And if you wish to build a monastery for thyself the carrying out of the plan and the cost thereof shall be ours Behold, we are all thy sons, and men who are ready to be obedient unto thy will'.

Whereas work on the monastery had begun apace:

Then the people of the country who possessed goods of various kind [suitable] for offerings and oblations began to bring them up to that holy monastery and give them as gifts towards the expenses, and those who pos-

³⁶ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (cit. n. 12), p. 299.

³⁷ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (cit. n. 12), p. 106.

sessed neither gold nor silver, nor furniture, nor brass, would work like workmen with the members of their body.³⁸

Of course, these are the words conveyed by the authors of the lives of holy monks (I could cite many similar texts): they also present the prevailing mentality of the time. Similar stories are to be found in other works about monks. Thus, we are dealing in this case with a literary *topos*; but this should by no means make us doubt that the people of the village reacted to the suggestion of building a monastery in exactly this way. When great complexes sponsored by bishops and the representatives of great families were involved, inhabitants of the neighbourhood were also called on in order to gain credit with God and to ensure, in their belief, safety from all misfortunes from which they were not spared by nature.

Probably not all poor people willingly participated in the construction of monasteries, but it is hard to expect from hagiographic sources that they would reveal such attitudes (although they could have mentioned the punishments faced by such ungodly people, and the fact that they do not do so can be considered as significant).

The participation of ordinary people in monastic building works is also documented by inscriptions. As an example I cite an inscription, the translation of which Palmer inserted in an appendix to his book *Monk and Mason on Tigris Frontier* (pp. 206–207). The inhabitants of the village took part in the building of a church in Mar Jacob Monastery in Ṣalaḥ. Another inscription from the same set allows us to date the text to c.752–755.

B.3 May the Lord be Giver of good rewards to every individual who has had a part and has given a blessed gift in this House, and especially to those who are from this village, whose names are written on this tablet: Sovo, the son of Elijah: 130 (*zuze*);³⁹ Daniel, the son of Aho; 120; Sergius, the son of Peter:

³⁸ *The Histories of Rabban Hōrmīzd the Persian and Rabban Bar-Idtā*, E. A. W. BUDGE (ed. & transl.), London 1904, p. 79. Rabban Hormizd founded a monastery on a mountain ridge in an unapproachable place about forty-five kilometres from Mosul. The *Life* published by Budge draws on a manuscript dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century.

³⁹ *Zuze* (Syriac) were silver coins called *dirham* in Arabic; their weight varied from 3.9 to 4.16 grams and the worth reached 1/25 of a golden coin – *dinar*, rarely in circulation; taxes were paid in *zuze*).

150; Gabriel, the son of Lazarus: 150; Aho, the son of Elijah: 100; Gabriel, the son of [...]: 50; Shayno, the son of Athanasius: 100; John, the son of Sergius: 60 (or 30); Qatuno Hayay: 20; [...] the smith: 15; Lazarus, the son of [...] 10; Jacob, the son of Elisha: 10; [Jo]b, the son of the priest: 5; [Rube], the son of [...]: 6; Simeon, the son of Zuto: 10; Abraham, the son of Zuto: 10; [Theophilus, the a]bbot, the son of Sergius: 5; Iyor, the son of Matthew: 6; Jesse, the son of [...]: 5; G[...] the son of Jo[hn]: 8; Elijah: 5; Elisha: 10; Joshua, the son of [...]: 125; Abo, the son of Elijah: 4; Abo, the cobbler: 5; and there are some who (gave) one (*zuze*) each; and may God bless every one who participated in it.

To illustrate the extent of the contributions of individual inhabitants of the village, Palmer (p. 186) used the *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, which quotes the prices of farm animals at the time: ox – five *zuze*, sheep and goat – one *zuze*, donkey – four *zuze*.⁴⁰ These mentions of a group of (relatively) wealthy inhabitants of the village are noteworthy, and it is just a pity that we do not know how many paid one *zuze*. Our sources, though they often mention laypeople as donors, are unfortunately extremely vague. We learn nothing about the type of gift, although we suspect that land was primarily given by wealthy people, while people of modest means brought produce (grains, olive, wine, fruits) and worked for the monastery. The quantitative aspect of the gifts is difficult to assess. Words like ‘rich’ and ‘generous’ tell us nothing. Quite paradoxically, it is the size of buildings (especially churches) that is often looked at by scholars in order to assess monastic revenues and economic activity.

The gifts of people from ‘the outside world’ were thus an essential part of the monastic economy, and without them monasticism could not have achieved the degree of development which we observe in the periods of late antiquity and early Islam; nor would monasteries have been able to perform their pastoral function in the broad sense of the word. However, these gifts were seen sometimes as inappropriate by certain monks, who felt that they should be rejected. This stance is supported by a number of testimonies.

The aversion to accepting gifts from the faithful is broadly dealt with in the *Life of Simeon Stylite the Younger*, about which I shall write later on (see

⁴⁰ *The Chronicle of Zuqnān* (cit. n. 16), p. 245.

pp. 224–235). In the *Life of Rabban Bar Edta*, it is mentioned that a father of a son from whom a demon was cast out, bought land for the monastery in the middle of the Marga plain ('a piece of five miles in extent', which is considerable), but the saint did not accept this gift. This episode is entirely artificial and has only a rhetorical function, because gifts were accepted in other places of the same text.⁴¹ Maruṭa, the future Monophysite metropolitan bishop of Tagrit (629–649), as a very young man entered a convent in which forty monks lived, 'holy and wonderful people striving to be perfect'. They did not allow women to enter the monastery, they did not sow and were provided for by the faithful, which was clear evidence of the sanctity of the monks.⁴² One of the priors of the important monastery of Beth 'Abhe, Kyriakos (living in the eighth century), healed the son of an Arab from Mosul, who in gratitude offered a large sum of 10,000 *zuze* to the monastery. The prior refused to accept it, so saying: 'If I take all this money, the gift will become a loss [...] it is not good that the healing which our Lord has given us should be [sold] for money.' Eventually, however, the money was accepted: 8,000 *zuze* was used to pay a debt, the remaining 2,000 *zuze* was accepted as a direct gift to the monks, according to Thomas' account.⁴³

3.3.b. The role of bishops in monastic economy

In the hagiographical stories written by monks about the founding of monasteries in Greater Syria and North Mesopotamia, nothing is said about the role of a bishop in the formation of a community.⁴⁴ In normative texts,

⁴¹ *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd* (cit. n. 38), pp. 644–665/208–209.

⁴² See the life written by Denha, his successor in the office, published by F. NAU, *Les histoires d'Ahoudemmeh et de Maruta* [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 3.1], Paris 1905, pp. 64–65.

⁴³ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book IV, chap. 19, text p. 224/ transl. p. 425.

⁴⁴ In the Qartmin trilogy (see pp. 187–188), in the *Life of Samuel*, we find the following information: 'After he [Samuel – EW] had been in this abbey seven years, he had thirty brothers with him, and there came to this place the bishop of the city of Sawro, and he ordained the blessed Mor Samuel priest. This was the reason for this bishop's coming to this monastery'. PALMER, *Monk and Mason* (cit. n. 10), the text of the *Life of Samuel* on microfiches, p. VIII. Never mind whether the information is authentic; it is important for us that the

however, we find an order to consecrate the monastery after its inception. This was clearly formulated in the collection of seventy-three canons attributed to Maruṭa, bishop of Maypherqaṭ, a historical figure who participated in an important event which was the creation of the Seleucia-Ctesiphon patriarchate in 410. The collection certainly has nothing to do with him, it was created later, we do not know exactly when or where. It was an attempt to create a legal system for Christian communities, with an emphasis primarily on the regulation of the activities of the hierarchical Church. He was popular in both Churches of Greater Syria, also outside of Syria.

In canon 56 of the collection it was stated:⁴⁵

When churches, martyria, and monasteries are built in a town and in the vicinity, the bishop shall consecrate them. But when these are far off outside, (yet) in the jurisdiction of the see, and if matter deserves it, that the bishop shall go, so this is right. But if not, the chorepiscopus shall go and consecrate them.

Consecrating an already founded monastery was not the same as the decision to do so before its construction. The fact that legal provisions about a bishop's participation in the founding of monasteries were not formulated in a fashion that bound all monastic communities does not mean that efforts to obtain a bishop's approval did not take place. In an introduction to the rule of Abraham of Kashkar, we find a significant information

In the month of Haziran of the fortieth year of King Kosrow [=571], under the instruction of the God-loving Mār Šem'on, bishop metropolitan of Nisibis, we brothers who dwell in the monastery of Mardē, gathered ourselves.⁴⁶

It was only when the process of the construction of the monastery was completed (which is described later in the introduction) that the rule is adopted. Although the intervention of the metropolitan bishop (and not the local bishop) follows after, not precedes, the creation of community, Abra-

author of the text considered it possible that the bishop would appear at the monastery only seven years or more after its establishment.

⁴⁵ *The Canons Ascribed to Mārūtā of Maipherqat and Related Sources*, A. VÖÖBUS (ed. & transl.), [= *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 439–440, *Scriptores Syri* 191–192], Louvain 1982, p. 84.

⁴⁶ See VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic Documents* (cit. n. 17), p. 152.

ham considers it important to emphasise his role, since it confirms the validity of canons. We also know of another case in which a monastery which had already been built did not obtain the bishop's permission in the form of a consecration, and the result was that the monastery failed in its establishment.⁴⁷ In any event, the bishop consecrated an altar in a church and ordained presbyters and deacons who ensured the autonomy of the monasteries in the sphere of worship. Not all communities strived to obtain this autonomy (if they were located in settlements or in the vicinity of settlements, monks could make their way to the holy mass in ordinary churches), although large monasteries always had clergymen in their circle. Archaeological research of monastic sites (which I will discuss later) makes it certain that churches comprised an essential part of the monastic complexes. The churches could be very large if the monastery was wealthy or benefited from the aid of wealthy benefactors, and an ostentatious church often corresponded to the desire for religious ostentation. Hagiographical texts also eagerly mention the building of churches. We can assume that for the bishop, the moment of consecrating a monastic church represented an opportunity to meddle in the internal affairs of the community, but our sources are silent about such cases.

Canons rarely mention the decisive role of the bishop in appointing someone to the post of prior. One of these rare cases is the admonition included in the collection ascribed to the already mentioned Maruṭa of Maypherqaṭ (canon 40):

The brothers shall have no authority to elect for themselves an abbot in the absence of the bishop. If, however, during his lifetime the abbot has decreed concerning the man who shall be his successor, and this is neither his relative nor his fellow villager, it is lawful for him to be made an abbot according to the order of the predecessor.

This entry, with its added admonition, explicitly indicates that its author was aware that bishops must take into account solidly rooted customs that did not leave much room for their interventions.

⁴⁷ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book II, chapter 43, pp. 136–137/282–283. The one who made this decision was the metropolitan bishop of Adiabene, Abe.

The customs were probably different; if the community threw their weight behind a candidate, even if he were not palatable to the bishop, the monastery could prevail in this power play. The might of monasteries, their customs, and the profiles of candidates for priors (their personal piety, studies undertaken in famous schools, as well as their personal estates all counted) were all part of the decision-making process. On the other hand, much depended on the position of the bishop of a diocese in the ecclesiastical world, his personality, and his role in internal conflicts that acutely afflicted the Church. The place in which bishops resided also had some significance. Bishops, especially in the Syriac Orthodox Church, often resided in monasteries, which might have influenced their attitude towards monasteries other than their own. We are navigating through the realm in which normative arrangements did not have to be binding, and they yielded to the forces which created a local network of dependencies.

In principle, bishops were the superiors of monasteries of their dioceses, unless the monastery was directly subordinate to the patriarch (about which I will speak later). The bishops were judges of monks who committed petty offences, and they had the right to intervene if events conflicting with the good order of the Church took place. They supervised the economy of monasteries and took care of their economic interests in clashes with people from 'the outside world'. According to the above-mentioned canons of Maruṭa, a prior could not buy or sell *ousia* – landed estates – without the order of the *chorepiskopos* as a bishop's representative (canon 48).⁴⁸ Those bishop's rights were solidly rooted in tradition ('in custom'); they could be confirmed by prescriptive decisions, but these decisions did not have causative power.

We know that the suggestion to found monasteries often came from bishops. In Northern Mesopotamia (the only place for which we have this information), bishops sometimes established residential buildings and churches, and monks were summoned to monasteries which had already been prepared for them. Let us take a look at some interesting accounts in the sources.

⁴⁸ It is worth remembering that various legal ecclesiastical regulations drastically limited the possibility of transfers of the land belonging to monasteries.

The first example is to be found in the *Life of Mar Aḥudemmeḥ of Balad* (d. 575), 'the Apostle of the Arabs' and the first bishop of Beth 'Arabaye. In 559, he was consecrated by Jacob Baradaeus as 'metropolitan bishop of the East' (it is difficult to say what the rights and responsibilities of 'metropolitan bishop of the East' were, and the term appears to be an honorific epithet). Taking advantage of the position gained during his missionary work among the Arab sheikhs, he convinced them to support monasteries.⁴⁹ The author of his *Life* wrote that tribes 'made the generous gifts that would sell at high prices'. What had these gifts been? A herd of sheep or camels? The bounty of banditry? We certainly know that Aḥudemmeḥ built a shrine of Saint Sergius (popular amongst the Arabs) in 'Ayn Qena (today Qasr Sarij in the east from Jabal Sinjar, near Balad) and a monastery next to it.⁵⁰ He also founded a monastery in the desert located on the route to this religious centre. This monastery was to serve pilgrims, whom it provided with water (not of the best quality, but water was water). Two wells were dug: one inside, the other outside the walls. The initiative to create the shrine of St Sergius for the Arabs was important to Chosroes I as a factor unifying and stabilising the turbulent world of Beth 'Arabaye. It also explains why he became involved in its restoration when the Nestorians demolished it. Undoubtedly, the rivalry between the shah and the Roman emperors played a vital role as well, since the latter enlarged the shrine of St Sergius in Resafa located in the west.

Maruṭa, bishop of Tagrit (629–649), a hero of the Monophysite Church, who lived after the time of Aḥudemmeḥ, also built a monastery of St Sergius, 'in the middle of Mesopotamia', on the route from the Euphrates to the Tigris. He found a spring in the desert, which he used to irrigate the surrounding area. Near the spring, he erected a monastery with beautiful buildings. The church was equipped with all the necessary furnishings, altar covers, expensive curtains, and liturgical books (let us keep in mind the list of objects which a good bishop should offer to a monastery). Maruṭa also gave

⁴⁹ *La vie d'Alexander Ahoummadeh apôtre et martyr*, F. NAU (ed.), *Patrologia Orientalis* 3, Paris 1905, pp. 7–51. About his activities on behalf of monasteries: pp. 28–32. The manuscript published by Nau carries the date 936.

⁵⁰ E. K. FOWDEN, *The Barbarian Plain. Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, Berkeley 1999, pp. 121–128; regarding Aḥudemmeḥ and his shrine, see pp. 124–125.

‘material endowment’ (perhaps land in an arable zone?) so that the monastery could function. It was a haven for those travelling across the desert.⁵¹ He also built a cloister for women. The similarities to the *Life of Aḥudem-meh* are slightly suspicious, but, as François Nau noted, there were many places dedicated St Sergius.

The direct involvement of the bishops of Northern Mesopotamia (the only area for which we have evidence of this phenomenon) in creating new monasteries came as a surprise to me: in Egypt and Palestine, the communities which we know about arose from the initiative of monks, not hierarchs, and hierarchs then helped monks. The explanation of this difference lies in the situation of both Churches dominating the area under examination. From the sixth century to the middle of the seventh century, the anti-Chalcedonian hierarchy was strongly connected to monasteries due to the persecutions launched by secular authorities and the pro-Chalcedonian Church, which often resulted in the anti-Chalcedonian bishops residing in monasteries. In the area where the Eastern Church (Persian) was powerful, the anti-Chalcedonians saw monasteries as the best missionary tool. In response, the Church of East defended itself from the active and effective expansion of their opponents by creating and supporting its own monasteries.

Bishops (including metropolitan bishops and patriarchs) acted as donors in relation to already existing monasteries, primarily by founding ostentatious churches, the construction of which required significant funds.⁵² Monks of a given monastery who became bishops and metropolitan bishops usually felt obliged to increase the resources of the community from which they had come. For example, in the *Life of Rabban Bar ‘Edta* we find a story about Sergius, the future metropolitan bishop of Adiabene, who, despite his young age, was accepted into a monastery (later called by his name), and when he sat on a bishop’s throne, he bought land, mills and vineyards, ‘and all his care he devoted wholly to the maintenance of the monastery’.⁵³

⁵¹ FOWDEN, *The Barbarian Plain* (cit. n. 50), pp. 125–126.

⁵² *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book II, chap. 7, pp. 73/131; book IV, chap. 9, pp. 203–213/393–411. See also book II, chap. 33, pp. 114/247, regarding land given by two *katholikoi* to the monastery of Beth ‘Abhe mentioned in a speech in honour of its founder, Jacob (7th c.).

⁵³ *Histories of Rabban Hormizd* (cit. n. 38), section 32, verses 1326–1335, transl. pp. 256–257.

Some cases of episcopal donations are particularly worthy of our attention. *Katholikos* Isho'yabh III (649–659) decided to establish a school in the monastery of Beth 'Abhe, and he was willing to erect a building and bring in teachers of different subjects. But the monks did not want to have students within the monastery walls and actively voiced their objections. The *katholikos* tried to convince them by pointing out the glory that possessing a school would bring to the monastery, since they could obtain novices from the circle of former students. Finally, we are told, he said:

I have the power [to build] for two reasons which must overcome all obstacles; first, because I adorned and endowed this monastery with property and earthly possessions, and second, because spiritually, I am master of all monasteries and convents [...].

As a result of this declaration, the monks decided to leave the monastery to find a new abode, and the *katholikos* withdrew his command.⁵⁴ In the same monastery at the end of the eighth century, the metropolitan bishop of Adiabene decided to demolish the old church built by *katholikos* Isho'yabh III, and to build in its place a more ostentatious, stone church (the previous was from adobe brick). Despite the scepticism of the monks, who worried that the church would not be finished, he achieved his goal, though it was not easy for him to gather the necessary funds.⁵⁵

I suspect that monasteries (at least those that were well off) gave a part of their revenues to the bishops. We do not have evidence for this in the sources, but we know that churches of different rank were obliged to do so.⁵⁶ It would have been strange if bishops had left monasteries outside the system of financing diocesan expenses.

Bishops were to take special care to ensure that gifts for monasteries found their way there. We are aware that this concerned gifts bequeathed in a will when some time had elapsed between the decision of the testator and his death. Heirs might not wish to execute the provisions of the will (or

⁵⁴ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book II, chap. 7–8, pp. 74–78/132–153.

⁵⁵ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book IV, chap. 9–14, pp. 204–215/392–413.

⁵⁶ Canons ascribed to Maruṭa of Maypherqaṭ (cit. n. 45) mention this, e.g. canon 7 (about payments of metropolitan bishops to patriarch) and 25 (about payments for the bishop).

would not execute them in full). To counter this, the 'Nestorian' patriarch Ezekiel insisted in canons from 576 that acts confirming donations should be deposited in the archive of the church (which was obviously supervised by the bishop).⁵⁷ Problems with families of overly zealous testators were universal in the period of late antiquity, and frequently occupied lawmakers.

Hagiographical texts do not speak about it, but normative texts tell us that the biggest threat to monastic assets were unfair and authoritarian bishops, and to a lesser extent presbyters and deacons.

The eleventh canon from 554 adopted in the times of Patriarch Joseph is one of the more important testimonies relating to the reprehensible actions of bishops and other clergymen. It is important enough to cite it in its entirety:

Again, it was said that some among bishops and presbyters, because they are entrusted with the deeds of properties of churches and monasteries, contrive schemes and register them to themselves, and they bequeath them to their sons and daughters. And it happens that when pagans marry⁵⁸ their wives and daughters and (thus) take possession of the properties of churches and monasteries, and not only does it leave (the hands of) the churches and monasteries, but of the whole Christian community.

Also, concerning these things we have determined by canon that those who have been put in charge over a community have no authority to make a will without the counsel (of) the assembly of the community. And if they make a will in secret, it should be dismissed and made void by ecclesiastical verdict.⁵⁹

The fact that testaments and acts of donation were to be kept in church archives in order to protect the monasteries' interests might have made it easier for dishonest clergymen to falsify documents; they had easy access to them. In the next stage, testaments of clergymen drawn up without public oversight for the benefit of their own family allowed seized goods to be retained. No one had access then to authenticated legal acts, and no one

⁵⁷ *Synodicon orientale* (cit. n. 22), Canon 26, pp. 125/384, canon 26.

⁵⁸ Literally 'sleep with, cohabit with'.

⁵⁹ *Synodicon orientale* (cit. n. 22), pp. 102/360. I thank very much Sergey Minov, who translated at my request the two canons that I quote.

knew what was in them. In 585, a synod presided over by Isho'yabh I once again heard the case of falsifying acts of donation by clergymen (canon 6).

In 576, a synod headed by the Patriarch Ezekiel made decisions supposed to protect assets of churches, monasteries and hospices (canon 26):

It was said in the synod that there are among bishops, clergy, and believers those who purchase properties as if for churches, and monasteries, and hospitals, and make deeds in their own name and place them in their houses. And for (different) reasons it happens that while these deeds are kept in their houses, they get lost.

The synod has declared that if metropolitans, or bishops, or presbyters, or deacons, or believers purchase during these times property for churches, or monasteries, or hospitals, and make deeds in their own name, [or write down ownership of these places in their own name,] they have no authority to keep these deeds in their own houses or in other places, but they should be placed in the archive of the church. And they should promptly write a waiver of that property and place it in the archive of the church.⁶⁰

The synod ordered an investigation and the restitution of property. Although in the first part of the canon stewards are mentioned (never mind how Syriac titles sounded), the canon forbade metropolitan bishops, bishops, presbyters, deacons, and laypeople to sell and pawn property belonging to churches, monasteries, and hospices in the future without the consent of the communities concerned. The appearance of metropolitan bishops in the list of personages constituting a threat to monasteries is astounding. I doubt whether there existed a congregation of brothers of a monastery that was capable of defying such a hierarchy.

To me, the idea of falsifying acts of donation seems to suggest that this subterfuge was employed for the donations of people of modest fortune. It is difficult for me to imagine that members of wealthy and influential families accepted such irregularities with their offerings without protest. It would have undermined their position in the local community, and only a very powerful and very brutal bishop could dare to do so.

The texts which I cited all came from *Synodicon orientale*, and thus from the Church of the East. It happens that we do not have parallel texts from

⁶⁰ *Synodicon orientale* (cit. n. 22), pp. 125/384; transl. S. Minov.

the Monophysite side (synodal acts for my period did not survive in the *Western Synodicon*). This is not significant, however, for the economic historian. The greed of bishops and other members of the clergy is an economic and social fact, not a religious one. Preventing them from causing harm was not easy, as the Church did not have yet a lot of instruments to act effectively. The entire 'ecclesiastical machine' was based on bishops: their control and their jurisdiction over clergy and laypeople. Synods representing these bishops could rebuke, shame, or threaten them with punishments rather than decide to apply those punishments. All conflicts inside the Church hierarchy, resulting from ambitions of more important bishops and causing divisions among bishops, only magnified the impunity of those who did not fear heavenly punishments. A bishop could be and often happened to be a saint, but they just could as easily happen to be a tyrant.

Wealthy and famous monasteries were able to defend themselves against violence of various kinds. One way was to submit to the direct protection of the patriarch, freeing themselves from the jurisdiction of local bishops. Patriarch could be authoritarian, but resided too far to damage monasteries at a local level. I wonder what happened to the part of the income that normally belonged to the bishops; probably it went to the patriarch. Much depended on whether the brothers agreed in their decisions; divisions within the monasteries (and they happened often) opened the way to episcopal interventions.

The conflicts I have mentioned here contrasted specific bishops with specific monastic communities on specific, often economic issues. It is worth considering whether there was a more serious conflict behind them between the church hierarchy and monks as a category of Christians with separate views on what was happening in the Church and separate interests. Many of today's historians are convinced that we can find such disputes which, although not presented by our sources as disputes between bishops and monastic circles, were in essence. It is relatively easy to capture them in the Church of the East, as the material provided by the *Synodicon orientale* points to the relations of institutions, not individual actors. And so the bishops, presided over by Patriarch Acacius in 486, so resolved (canon 1):

And again as regards the above-mentioned false people, who through their deceptive dress, covered in black habit which is the sign of their aberration,

deceit simple people under the pretence of fasting and Nazirate, of religion and asceticism, [seemingly similar to the asceticism that was] long ago practised by the ancients who established their abodes in uninhabited desert, far away from human affairs, from towns and villages, in order to serve and praise the God – [in their case] we prescribe the following: if they really are the children of those [ancient] blessed ones, and if they want to follow them in their deeds and in their dress, then they shall not leave the places that is appropriate for their habit [sc. dress]. They are not allowed to enter neither towns nor villages, where the bishops, presbyters or deacons reside, in order to live there and [thus] become the cause of dissension, enticing divisions between the clergy and their flock, between the teachers and the students. Let them neither gather in these places nor celebrate the sacrifice. Let them not have there their own baptisteries, thus imitating the church hierarchy, as they do until this day. Instead let them go to monasteries and desolated places, let them make their abodes in these places and stay there. They shall remain under the jurisdiction of and obedience to bishops, priests and superiors, who have power and were installed to oversee the monasteries and other places where such people abide. And if after the proclamation of these regulations, which forbid them to live in those towns and the villages where there are priests, they came again to the town in which the priests live, or if they were discovered building their own abodes close to villages, or celebrating the sacrifice, or gathering the people outside of churches, or administering baptism, and [thus discovered] at other places than monasteries and above-mentioned places [of isolation] – then they shall be punished and deprived of priesthood and communion with Christians. And every bishop, presbyter, deacon or individual faithful who would accept them, offer sustenance, or support them in their town, village or house, [and thus support them] in doing what is forbidden and causing dissent in the Church – each such person shall be punished and deprived of their office, if he is a priest, while a layman shall be kept away from entering the church and participating in the sacred mysteries.⁶¹

The order to live outside the settlements was not unequivocally contrary to the wishes of the monks, Rabbula, with his rigor in this matter, remained the model legislator for monks. What is more important is that which is contained in the second part of the canon: the withdrawal of clerics living in monasteries of the right to liturgical service for lay people. In order to fully

⁶¹ *Synodicon orientale* (cit. n. 22), pp. 55–56; transl. A. Izdebski.

understand this canon, one needs to read it in the context of the situation of the Eastern Church in those years when its clergy had to contend with the activities of monks who hailed from the West representing anti-Chalcedonian circles. They posed a serious threat to the Eastern Church.

We should not be under the illusion that it was sufficient for the canons to be enacted at the synod in order for them to be immediately implemented. It is hard to imagine that bishops would be able to drive monks out of towns and villages. Certainly, the older and especially the larger monasteries were able to find defenders among secular notables. Canons, as often with statutory law, express the desires of those who created them; and if these desires collide with social reality, they do not become effective. We should also remember that monastic communities were established on the outskirts of settlements or within short distances of them, and not within built-up areas.

The second time the synod spoke about the relationship between the hierarchical Church and monks was in 554, under the Patriarch Joseph (canon 20):

Our predecessors decided that it is not allowed to build monasteries and martyria in towns or in their vicinities. However, at the assembly of the bishops it was said that this idea contradicts Christianity. Indeed, pagans and Jews rejoice that Christianity does not spread and that the glory of God does not increase. Now then, following the prescriptions of the Holy Scriptures, and in accordance with the tradition and custom that exists in the Holy Church since the times of the blessed apostles, we strongly desire that churches, monasteries, temples and martyria were built in towns and in their vicinities. It is, however, allowed to offer the sacrifice and administer baptism in them only with the bishop's permission, on specific days. On all other days, the faithful shall receive Communion in the main church, [that is] where it is constantly celebrated.⁶²

We can see here a sharp change in policy: the bishops decided that monastic life could have a place the centre of church life in urban areas (obviously under the close supervision of bishops, who exercised control in matters related to pastoral care).

⁶² *Synodicon orientale* (cit. n. 22), pp. 106–107; transl. A. Izdebski.

Did conflicting economic interests lie behind the decision to ban monks from liturgical service (in other words, the Church did not want to share its revenues derived from masses and baptisms)? Sources do not suggest this, although it is probable; indeed, the history of the Church of other territories assures us of this fact.

However, I do not think that in the epoch I am researching, we are dealing with a conflict between charismatics and an institution that does not accept them – a conflict identified and described by the great sociologist Max Weber, which at the end of the twentieth century inspired some sociologists of religion, mainly American sociologists. In Greater Syria, except for the Messalians, wandering and begging monks (like Alexander's monks, see p. 196), and the hermits described by Theodoret in *Historia religiosa*, the monks were not charismatics as a group. Certainly not in the second half of the fifth century, the sixth century, or indeed the following centuries.

3.3.c. The gifts of rulers

Accounts have been preserved about two monasteries which received great gifts from the emperors of Constantinople.

The first case is Qarṭmin, situated on the south-east side of Ṭur 'Abdin, located on the border between the Roman and Sasanian empires. In the *Life of Samuel* (mentioned above, p. 188), in chapter 15, we are told that Honorius and Arcadius sent a 'chief eunuch' with gold for the extension of the existing monastery and to dig cisterns. The community received a constant subsidy. Palmer, who wrote an in-depth study of the history of Qarṭmin, opines that one can trust this testimony.⁶³ The monks also mentioned the emperors Theodosius II and Anastasius as benefactors of Qarṭmin. Palmer explains that there were strategic considerations in the interest of the emperors in a monastery located almost on the border of the Roman world. The monastery was enclosed by a wall, with towers and a well-guarded gate, and became a small fortress, one of the many fortresses located at a short distance from the Persian border.

⁶³ PALMER, *Monk and Mason* (cit. n. 10), pp. 49–53.

The other monastery, located in a similar territory, and also subject to imperial generosity, was described by John of Ephesus in his account of the history of the monastery founded near Amida by Mar Yoḥannan Urṭaya. John of Ephesus was a monk in this monastery; thus, we can trust his account even in relation to events in which he did not participate, because older monks always passed on stories about the beginnings of the community to the younger. According to John of Ephesus, the fame of the monastery reached the capital of the empire, and the emperor (probably Zeno) invited the prior to speak with him, gifting him with a village that the prior has petitioned for. This village was located in Ingilene and was named Narda, and it was surrounded by forested hills. The fortunate prior shared this village with another monastery located in the village of Zuqnin.⁶⁴ Both stories remind us of the journeys of Saba from the Judaeen Desert, first to Anastasius and then to Justinian, and the gifts received by him (although in Saba's case the gifts consisted of money).⁶⁵ I am convinced that there were more gifts similar to those imperial largesses to the monasteries which I have researched. Certainly, any monastic delegation that managed to find themselves in the presence of a ruler went back loaded with donations. The travel, however, was not easy for the priors of poorer communities, and being in the capital did not guarantee them an audience.

The most impressive example of an imperial donation for a monastery is the great architectural complex built by Leon (or perhaps Zenon) around the place where the column of Simeon Stylites the Elder stood, on the hill which today is called Qal'at Sim'an, together with a settlement for pilgrims (Dayr Sim'an) at the foot of the hill.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (cit. n. 12), pp. 558/212.

⁶⁵ E. SCHWARTZ (ed.), *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, Leipzig 1939: *Vita Sabae* 51–52, 54, pp. 71–73.

⁶⁶ G. TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*, vols. 1–2 (maps, plans, photographs), Paris 1953; also see a kind of supplement to this work consisting of materials left out by Tchalenko: E. LOOSLEY LEEMING, J. TCHALENKO, *Notes on the Sanctuary of St Symeon Stylites at Qal'at Siman*, Leiden 2019. Archaeological researches on this complex: J.-L. BISCOP, 'Le chantier du martyrium de Saint-Syméon. Du dessin à la mise en oeuvre', [in:] F. BARATTE (ed.), *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Sodini* [= *Travaux et mémoires du Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance* 15], Paris 2005, pp. 11–36; J.-P. SODINI, J.-L. BISCOP, 'Qalat Seman et Deir Seman: Naissance et développement d'un lieu du pèleri-

4. SIMEON OF THE OLIVES:
A SPECIAL CASE OF THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES
OF A MONK AND A BISHOP

Simeon of the Olives, bishop of Harran in 700–734 was one of the more interesting and well-known figures of the Monophysite Church of Northern Mesopotamia in the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth century. He was extremely active in Church politics and participated in the Syrian-Armenian synod at Manzikert. We can piece together his biography from different sources, and most importantly, by examining his *Life* the first version of which was written several years after the protagonist's death, but was later subject to various changes and interpolations that introduced entire episodes into the narrative. Unfortunately, this text, although it is often mentioned in academic literature, is still unpublished. Andrew Palmer and Sebastian Brock promised to publish this text, but they have not fulfilled this promise yet (the task is extremely difficult due to a very complicated manuscript tradition). What we know about the contents of the *Life* comes from the summary published by Brock and a detailed, excellent study by Jack Tannous analysing various redactions of the text and subjecting them to critical analysis.⁶⁷

Simeon first attended a school affiliated with the local church. When he was ten years old, he was sent by his father to the monastery of Qarṭmin and donned the habit there at fifteen. At twenty-five he was ordained a presbyter. He played an important role early on among the monks who ran the monastery. At one point he decided to become a stylite, but according to the *Life*, he continued to run the affairs of Qarṭmin. In 602 (I still summarise the life of Simeon), during the war between the Roman Empire and

nage durant l'antiquité tardive', [in:] J. M. SPIESER (ed.), *Architecture paléochrétienne*, Strasbourg 2011, pp. 11–55. See also L. A. SCHACHNER, 'The archaeology of the stylite', [in:] D. GWYNN, S. BANKERT (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 2010, pp. 329–397.

⁶⁷ S. BROCK, 'The Fenqitho of the monastery of Mar Gabriel in Tur 'Abdin', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 28 (1973), Appendix: Shem'un 'of the Olives', pp. 174–179; PALMER, *Monk and Mason* (cit. n. 10), pp. 159–165; J. TANNOUS, 'The Life of Simeon of the Olives: A Christian puzzle from Islamic Syria', [in:] J. KREINER, H. REIMITZ (eds), *Motions of the Late Antiquity. Essays on Religion, Politics, and Society in Honour of Peter Brown*, Turnhout 2016, pp. 309–330.

Sasanid Persia, Ṭur ʿAbdin was found in the hands of the Persian commander, Shahbaraz. Cured of his disease by Simeon, this general was to convert to the Christian faith and free the Christian prisoners. One of them, the nephew of Simeon named David, stayed with Shahrbaraz, gaining the sympathy of the chief. Once, while participating in a hunt with his master, David accidentally found a great treasure in a cave. He covered it with soil and said nothing about it to anyone other than his uncle Simeon. The latter took advantage of the treasures sending David to the cave from time to time. Treasure found by chance (but by divine inspiration) is a common idea used by hagiographers when it is necessary to explain the origins of particularly large amounts of money that the saints used for their charitable work. Incidentally, Shahrbaraz's appearance in Ṭur ʿAbdin, not to mention his conversion, also belong to the layer of fiction; note that the author of the *Life* heard of this from a commander who was an important figure in the great war, the last war of late antiquity, as today's historians call it; he had conquered Jerusalem in 614, ten years before Simeon was born.

Simeon, dipping into the treasury, undertook unusual economic initiatives. He bought agricultural land with a source of water, and he planted 12,000 olives, protecting them with a high stone wall and a palisade of reeds. He hired agricultural workers to look after the trees, and after five years they began to bear fruit. This is a bit too fast for ordinary olives, but the information is given in a hagiographical text, and thus a miraculous element is necessary. The olive oil produced by them, the majority of which was intended for sale, was one of the fundamental sources of wealth of Qartmin. It probably provided the means for Simeon's economic activities, at least in the first phase when urban investments in Nisibis (of which I will speak below) were not yet functional. The planting of the olive plantation was remembered as Simeon's greatest deed, and is the reason why he is called 'Simeon of the Olives'.

At a certain point, Simeon extended his building activity to Nisibis, a large and important city about forty kilometres from Qartmin; the *Life* does not explain what prompted him to do so. He gained the approval of Piroz, the Arab governor of the city (we do not know of such a personage, the name is Persian, which is likely to have been another fictional element), in unknown circumstances. Simeon received permission from him to buy and

rebuild the ruined monastery outside the city, and the churches in the older (and maybe also ruined) part of the city. He equipped them, buying five mill-stones and three orchards.

Wanting to continue his construction activities, Simeon went to the king (caliph al-Ma'mūn) to the city of Babel (undoubtedly the author of *Life* was thinking about Baghdad), where he participated in theological debates in the presence of the ruler and achieved both victories and prominence. He returned home with 'a wondrous imperial diploma' in which the king (caliph) ordered that all should esteem and pay tribute to Simeon and his monastery. So he was respected by the governors of Nisibis, Harran, Edessa and Amida, while Christians brought money so that he could distribute it to the poor. Samuel built not only a great church in honour of the martyr Theodore but also a large mosque next to the church, as well a madrasa.

Like the introduction to Shahrbaraz stories, the story of the visit to Baghdad is a fictional account: Baghdad did not yet exist (it was founded in 762); whereas al-Ma'mun ruled in 813–830. This episode was supposed to prove that Christians were guaranteed special protection by the caliph himself, and such accounts were probably referred to in their relations with the Islamic authorities.

By contrast, the creation of a substantial olive grove, coupled with extensive construction activities seem to be free from suspicions of inauthenticity. Wherever we find specific descriptions of Simeon's activities, we can trust the testimony of the text. Tannous thinks the same in the study I have quoted above; but I wonder if Simeon actually built a mosque and a madrasa (Tannous did not raise suspicions about it). It is not excluded as the mosque was a price paid for an excellent relationship with the Muslim city authorities. Simeon's situation was typical for many leaders of the churches of the Near East. Arabs in the period of the Umayyads did not have any explicitly defined policy towards churches; they favoured one or the other in accordance with the local situation and the personal preferences of the local governors. Christians in Nisibis mostly belonged to the Church of the East, and its representatives tried to block Simeon's actions. These attempts were unsuccessful, due to Simeon's local connections; and, of course, the financial superiority of the monastery of Qarṭmin, with its vast olive grove, and finally the gifts of the Monophysite elite of Nisibis and the Monophysite new-

comers to the city. The numbers of the Nestorians in the city explains why the support of the Arab authorities at local and central level was necessary for Simeon. I would like to add that the message itself is something unique; and there is no correspondence in the sources. But just as well, this story, like the document issued by al Ma'mūn, was to prove the hero's excellent relations with the Arab authorities.

Three monasteries founded by Simeon in Nisibis were endowed with shops, courtyards and houses. Simeon also erected a building in Nisibis for the great mill-stone, adjacent to the fortifications, with its own wall and tower. The building became the property of the monastery of Qarṭmin. For another monastery, Mar Elisha', Simeon allocated revenues from baths (although income surpluses over the needs of Mar Elisha' were to go to Qarṭmin).

In 700, Simeon was made bishop of the important city of Harran (it was the seat of the caliphate in the times of the last Umayyad caliph, and also, periodically, of the Monophysite patriarch of the East). Over the course of the next thirty-four years, he conducted visitations to monasteries, built new ones, and oversaw the care of their libraries. Simeon would build monasteries, gardens, houses, shops, mills, baths and what the *Life* describes as a courtyard, which is probably a kind of inn for tradesmen and their animals – a *khan*-like structure. The diversity of Simeon's activities with regard to Nisibis is astounding, and although our other sources about Syrian monasticism say nothing about similar initiatives, I see no reason to doubt the reliability of the account. Other priors might not have conducted activities as widely as Simeon, but they certainly attempted to generate those sources of income for the monastery which the *Life* ascribes to its hero.

The connection between churches and monasteries of Nisibis built by Simeon and the monastery of Qarṭmin is also striking. We find an important statement on this subject in the *Chronicle of 819*:

Lord Simeon, bishop of Harran, built and completed the church of the orthodox in Nisibis, all the necessary expenses and outlay for it being provided by the same bishop, out of the monastery of Qarṭmin.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*. 1: *Praemisum est Chronicon anonymum ad AD 819 pertinens curante Aphrem Barsaum*, J.-B. CHABOT (ed.) [= *Corpus Scriptorum*]

We find an additional explanation in the *Life*:

He (Simeon – EW) wrote and decreed that everything that was beyond the needs of these monasteries that he had built, and the church of Mar Theodore, should proceed to the monastery of Qartmin, and that the monks of the monastery should receive the first fruits of every believer who went down and participated in the feasts of that church.

An immensely complicated economic system formed as a result of Simeon's activities. It was managed by the stewards of Qartmin, and revenues flowed both to and from the monastery. It is doubtful that such a system could have existed for long after Simeon's tenure, but for us, what is important is that monasteries, both those in urban areas and those located outside the city, could use their financial means to buy (and not receive as a gift) houses, shops, mills, baths and gardens.

The information about the creation of the olive grove is worthy of additional comment.⁶⁹ Researchers have not questioned the number of 12,000 planted trees; it is impossible to check the reliability of this number. Simeon bought this land in the valley of Serwan, in which a spring was located, and there were exceptionally good conditions for olives, although today in this region the cultivation of trees has not been successful (today in Ṭur ʿAbdin there are only single trees, and no plantations can be seen, according to Palmer, *Monk and Mason* [cit. n. 10], p. 109, n. 190). Fruits were taken off the branches manually (not by striking the branches with sticks as it is usually done), since this resulted in a better quality of olive oil. Hired hands were employed for the work in establishing the grove and in later cultivation works, while the monks gathered the ripe olives. I suspect that monks from Qartmin (and the chapters dependent on it) were hired for the labour involving the picking of olives from the 12,000 olive trees. In any event, the crop was

rum Christianorum Orientalium, ser. III, 14], Paris 1920. The chronicle was begun in the monastery of Qartamin some time after 819.

⁶⁹ This investment was broadly discussed in different places in M. DECKER, *Tilling the Hatful Earth: Agricultural Production and Trade in the Late Antique East*, Oxford 2009. This work served me a number of times during the writing of this article when cultivation of land came into play. I grasped the complexity of olive cultivation thanks to T. WALISZEWSKI, *ELAION. Olive Oil Production in Roman and Byzantine Syria–Palestine*, Warsaw 2014.

transported to Qartamin, and the olive oil was extracted there. Michael Decker, taking into account the average amount of olive oil obtained today from the fruits of one tree in the Near East (from a spectrum of data he chose a low value of: 3.85 kg per tree), proposed an average yield of Simeon's grove to have amounted to 46,200 kg.⁷⁰ The market value of this olive oil depended on its quality. Referring to prices in late antique sources, Decker calculated that common oil from Simeon's plantation would have been worth 418 and 1/2 solidi, while first-quality oil would have been worth 1,535 solidi. This second tally is more probable, taking into account the manner in which the fruits were gathered (p. 214). To acknowledge those calculations, it is, of course, necessary to accept the basic information about the number of olive trees.

The plantation of Simeon 'of the Olives' in Northern Mesopotamia was undoubtedly something exceptional, but we also know that, climate allowing, monasteries planted smaller olive groves. They did so at the very least in accordance with the rule of self-sufficiency; even if during numerous fasting periods less oil was used per capita than in neighbouring villages (stories about monks living only on bread and salt alone concerned small number of monks, and the rest used olive oil except on fasting days).

Somehow similar to the story about Simeon 'of the Olives' (although not so striking) is a story about Addai, told by John of Ephesus in his *Life of the chorepiscopus Addai*, who became the abbot of a monastery in Anzetene (Hanzit), near the frontier between Syria and Armenia.⁷¹ When Chalcedonians began their persecutions (we do not know which wave of persecutions is meant), Addai was summoned to the bishop, who required him to accept the Chalcedonian creed. He refused, left his monastery and hid in inaccessible mountains in the Eastern part of Anzetene. His monastery was going through a difficult period, it was plundered more than ten times. Addai decided to help it: he got 'the blessed men' (we do not know who they were) to go to it in order to plant a vineyard for the monks and the poor living in the neighbourhood.

And they brought men [outsiders? Wine-growing experts as well as non-qualified workers? – EW] and dug; and there in the first year they put about

⁷⁰ DECKER, *Tilling the Hateful Earth* (cit. n. 69), p. 212.

⁷¹ John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (cit. n. 12), pp. 124–135.

twenty thousand [plants – EW], and a like number also in the second, and the third; and the vineyard reached a great size on the mountains. And the news went out everywhere: ‘Such-and-such a monastery has covered the mountains with vineyards’.

After six years, there was enough wine to export it for sale to nearby Cappadocia. Addai could allot from forty to fifty *denarii* (this was the denomination used in a Syriac text, but this term meant *solidi*, and thus we are dealing with a considerable amount) for the purchase of clothing, grains, and olive oil for the needy. We also are not told where the funds for the purchase of 60,000 plants and the hiring of the outside labour came from, although benefaction is in this instance most probable. John overlooked this detail, seeing as it did not serve to elevate the hero of the story. There is, of course, no guarantee that the amount of grape-wine cuttings indicated by John was real, as he often (though not always) gave fantastical numbers.

I have no doubt that vineyards were always found in well-off monasteries that had good conditions for vine-growing,⁷² since monks frequently drank wine on various occasions.⁷³

5. MONASTERIES IN PILGRIMAGE CENTRES:

TWO CASE STUDIES OF SAINTS STYLITES: SIMEON STYLITES THE ELDER AND SIMEON STYLITES THE YOUNGER

Monasteries tasked with organising worship in martyria and taking care of newcomers in major pilgrimage centres constitute a separate category in

⁷² *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book II, chap. 23, pp. 98–99/223–224, tells a story about Mar John of Delum who was a monk in Beth ‘Abhe and became the keeper of the vineyard located in a nearby village. At that time he lived in a cave, thus the vineyard was on the hillside.

⁷³ They were able to drink a considerable amount of wine, especially during celebrations which gathered numerous guests. Thomas of Marga tells an amusing story of a banquet in Beth ‘Abe, during which the consumption of wine was so considerable that it was going to run short for the celebration of the Eucharist the next day. Attempts to make a hasty acquisition of wine from travelling merchants were not successful, but the pious prior Cyriacus (end of the 8th c.) performed a miracle by turning water into wine (*The Book of Governors* [cit. n. 13], book IV, chap. 19, pp. 232–234/437–441).

Fig. 3. The sanctuary of Simeon Stylites the Elder (Qal'at Sim'an)
(drawn by Mariusz Gwiazda)

this analysis of the economy of monasteries. Their unique nature results from the influence the gifts incidentally given during visits had on the funds available to monastery managers.

Fortunately for us, we have good sources for two veneration centres connected with two famous stylites: Simeon the Elder (d. 459) and Simeon the Younger (d. 591). We have rich hagiographical dossiers⁷⁴ and the results of archaeological research of extensive and well-preserved ruins for both at our disposal.⁷⁵ In the period that is the subject of my research, many other pilgrimage centres existed in Greater Syria, but we know substantially less about them.

In both cases, the monasteries were founded within the stylites' lifetimes. They were indispensable for satisfying the basic needs of both saints, stuck on their pillars, and organising worship for pilgrims, deciding who and how could come into contact with the saint (e.g., coming closer to the pillar, talking to the saint while standing at the foot of the pillar, climbing a ladder to get as close as possible to the saintly person). Judging from the

⁷⁴ Simeon Stylites the Elder (end of the 4th c. – 459). There is a sizeable corpus of Greek and Syriac Lives written about him already in the fifth century. They are available in a convenient anthology of translations compiled by R. DORAN, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* [= *Cistercian Studies* 112], Kalamazoo 1992.

We know about Simeon Stylites the Younger primarily from two Lives: his own and that of his mother, Martha, who had become an object of veneration in the same shrine. Edition of both texts: *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–592)*, P. VAN DEN VEN (ed. & transl.), vols. 1–2, Brussels 1962–1970 [*Subsidia Hagiographica*]. The comprehensive introduction in the first volume should be used cautiously. The editor's statements about the author of the *Life* and the sources used by him were rightly criticised in the review written by D. J. CHITTY in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 15 (1964), pp. 170–181, and in the article of V. DÉROCHE, 'Quelques interrogations à propos de la *Vie de Syméon le Jeune*', *Eranos* 94 (1996), pp. 65–83. Van den Ven, commenting on the content of the work he was editing, had insisted on taking all its information at face value. Today, researchers of hagiographic texts are far from Van den Ven's attitude. His way of interpreting the text was already anachronistic in the 1960s. The *Life* had come into being at the beginning of the seventh century during the rule of Phocas (602–610). It is a compilation of various materials: previous texts about the saint, oral tradition, and stereotypes circulating in hagiographical literature. One should examine it with a very critical eye. The *Life* of Martha, Simeon's mother, is probably a work of another author writing in the same period.

⁷⁵ What archaeologists add to the information originating from the literary sources about stylites was discussed in a comprehensive article by SCHACHNER, 'The archaeology' (cit. n. 66).

Fig. 4. The sanctuary of Simeon Stylites the Younger (Mons Admirabilis)
 (drawn by Mariusz Gwiazda)

description in the *Lives* of Simeon Stylites the Elder, narrating the visits of entire villages and Bedouin tribes, the crowds of people gathering near the pillars during feast days and spending more than one day there (the remoteness of Qal'at Sim'an from large population centres required this), organising worship for pilgrims must have been an important task.

Monastic communities in both centres expanded as time passed. The cult of Simeon Stylites the Elder was served not only by the sanctuary but also by the settlement of Telanissos (Greek) / Tel Neshe (Syriac) at the foot of the hill. Pilgrims and probably also labourers working at the hilltop stopped at the settlement. The frequent visitors changed the place's character: it transformed from a small village into a centre in which stone hospices and stalls were built. They offered night's lodgings, meals, the opportunity to do some shopping, and help for the sick pilgrims.⁷⁶ The monks taking care of pilgrims had their own monastery there (another monastery was located in the area of the sanctuary and probably had another function, but we do not know this for certain), and a church was also built at the foot of the hill. The great complex of ruins of this settlement is called Dayr Sim'an today.

The scale of construction both on the top (in Qal'at Sim'an) and on the bottom (Dayr Sim'an) required employing thousands of stonemasons and common workers, who worked surprisingly fast. In the opinion of Georges Tchalenko (whose book is still the fundamental publication on the building process of the centre), the complex's essential framework had come into being in only two decades, beginning from the mid-seventies of the fifth century.⁷⁷ The magnitude of funds spent, according to Tchalenko, forces us to acknowledge that they originated from the imperial treasury (the texts we have access to do not state this, but Tchalenko's hypothesis is convincing and has been universally accepted). The idea of building the centre might have come from Emperor Zeno, who, after suppressing the usurpation of Basiliskos (476), could have afforded to make such a grand gesture, which would have strengthened the image of him as a pious ruler able to support the popular cult generously. However, the works might have already been started during the rule of Zeno's predecessor, Leo (457–474).

⁷⁶ A bibliography of Deir Siman can be found in n. 66.

⁷⁷ TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques* (cit. n. 11), vol. 1, pp. 223–234.

The proximity of Antioch, one of the empire's capitals, the seat of the civil and military powers of the East, and a city from which numerous pilgrims came, was highly important. I wonder whether the emperor established a constant subsidy for the shrine – it would have been an initiative in line with the epoch's customs. I do not know the answer to the question of who directed the works at Qal'at Sim'an and at the foot of the hill: monks, members of the clergy subordinate to the patriarch of Antioch, or maybe secular officials delegated by the ruler?

The shrine of Simeon Stylites the Younger was founded on the top of the mountain (height: 490 m), later called, due to miracles he performed, *Thaumaston Oros* / *Mons Admirabilis* (today Samandağ).⁷⁸ It rose along the western bank of Orontes River and was located about eighteen kilometres from Antioch (as the bird flies; pilgrims to this sacred place travelled a much longer distance). Only the lowest parts of the mountain could be cultivated. Simeon the Younger (521–592) began his ascetic life in a small monastery situated in a lower part of the mountain, under the direction of John, another other stylite living there. In 541, he moved to the top of the mountain, just after the disastrous conquest of Antioch by Persians. The decision to found a new place of worship was probably related to this event; the crisis caused by the destruction of the city and the deportation of part of the city's population to Persia must have been lying heavily on the local inhabitants and required religious initiatives to appease God, who undoubtedly was thought to be angry at the sinful city.⁷⁹ Antioch had been enduring very difficult times since the first decades of the sixth century. Consecutive earthquakes had taken place in 526, 528, between 531 and 534, and in 551. Further, in 542, a plague pandemic had begun.

⁷⁸ Excavations in the sanctuary of Simeon Stylites the Younger were conducted in the 1930s by J. S. J. Mécérian (published only in short reports) and then in 1962–1965 by W. Z. DJOBADZE (final publication: *Archeological Investigations in Region West of Antioch on-the-Orontes*, Stuttgart 1986). In 1965, J. LAFONTAINE-DOSOGNE conducted a survey (*Itinéraires archéologiques dans la région d'Antioche*, Brussels 1967).

A comprehensive, unpublished doctoral dissertation, A. HENRY, *The Pilgrimage Center of St. Symeon the Younger: Designed by Angels, Supervised by a Saint, Constructed by Pilgrims* (University of Illinois, 2015), constitutes the newest work about this centre (to my knowledge). I have benefited a lot from reading it.

⁷⁹ See HENRY, *The Pilgrimage Center* (cit. n. 78), p. 86.

The *Lives* of Simeon the Younger and his mother tell us nothing about where the funds to build the complex originated. Researchers judged that imperial intervention is out of the question (the size of this sanctuary is smaller than Dayr Sim'an, and Justinian had provided significant funds to restore Antioch). Instead, one might wonder whether Simeon the Younger had not availed himself of the material support of the Patriarch Ephrem (on the Antiochean throne in 527–545), who had treated the stylite very kindly, had visited *Mons Admirabilis* several times, and had taken part in 533/4 in a grand ceremony consecrating Simeon as a deacon (even though he had not been the one ordaining Simeon: *Mons Admirabilis* was located in Pieria in the diocese of Seleucia).⁸⁰ However, the patriarch could not have afforded to commit significant funds to build a grand sanctuary during a crisis. The patriarch's whole effort had been focused on restoring the city and taking care of its inhabitants. On the other hand, he could have helped Simeon in another way, at least by supervising the logistics of the venture; he had definitely shown faith in the holiness of Simeon, the effectiveness of his prayers, and his ability to perform miracles. Thanks to Ephrem, the idea that Simeon the Younger was one of the holy patrons of the city grew stronger as the years went by. Ayşe Henry, the author of a recent monograph of the sanctuary (*The Pilgrimage Center* [cit. n. 78], pp. 155, 160), pointed out that when Simeon moved from the small monastery to the top of *Mons Admirabilis*, he already had a clear plan to build a very big centre, serving a considerable number of pilgrims. I would not rule out the possibility that it was Ephrem who decided that this enormous project should be undertaken. And it was he who somehow guaranteed its success.

We should search for a large number of donors in the circle of the elite, not necessarily in its highest stratum. Their interventions must have been dispersed in time, for the sanctuary developed slowly (the first phase took place from 541 to erecting the last, highest pillar for Simeon; the next phase, in the 560s and the 570s): this is what the *Lives* tell us, and this is confirmed by the results of archaeological research. In this area, where Christians were painfully divided by dogmatic differences, supporting a clearly pro-Chalcedonian centre made sense for the pro-Chalcedonian elite. The sanctuary

⁸⁰ This is narrated in chap. 34, p. 33.

on Qalʿat Simʿan was already in the hands of Monophysites at the beginning of the sixth century. This does not mean that pro-Chalcedonians did not go to it as pilgrims, but large donations made by pro-Chalcedonians are likely to have been directed to the centre that represented the same dogmatic option. We know that the sanctuary's visitors came from both Syria and eastern Asia Minor. Hagiographical sources do not say much about the material side of the care for the faithful for either centre. Was food and water in places waterless by nature available only to poor people or all who asked for it?⁸¹ Did small merchants (probably) operating in both centres give a part of their incomes to the monasteries?⁸²

Undoubtedly, the pilgrims made offerings. Taking into account the significant numbers of visitors, these offerings would have added up to a substantial amount. They must have constituted the most important source of income for covering running expenses and carrying out construction works. Admittedly, the author of the *Life* of Simeon the Younger stubbornly tells us how his hero rejected all gifts. In chapter 56, a crowd of pilgrims asked the saint to accept offerings, but he refused. The monks, greatly worried about their income, took them on the sly. Simeon made a speech full of biblical references, telling them about the punishment for greed, and the monks dropped to the ground and begged for forgiveness.⁸³ The motif of accepting a gift in secret (this time from a man healed of leprosy) is repeated in chapters 92 and 93. Likewise, in chapters 122 and 222, the statement that Simeon refused to accept offerings is repeated.⁸⁴ The author of this *Life* lived in the

⁸¹ Today, in Coptic monasteries (I know this from my own experience), the visitors can eat a frugal meal free of charge, but leaving a gift is an obvious obligation.

⁸² French archaeologists discovered and identified such stalls on both sides of the processional way in Qalat Siman before the third gate: D. PIERI, 'Saint Syméon-le Stylite (Syrie du Nord). Les bâtiments d'accueil et les boutiques à l'entrée du sanctuaire', *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres* 2009.4 (2011), pp. 1393–1420.

⁸³ Van Ven's commentary on this passage of the *Life* (cit. n. 74, vol. 1, pp. 49–50) is placed in the second volume (pp. 60–61, n. 3). It is quite peculiar in that Van Ven treats the story (like the following stories) as a simple report of real facts. He also thinks, without providing any evidence (there is nothing about this in the texts), that Simeon forbade the monks to avail themselves of gifts, but that they could be accepted by the monastery for the pilgrims.

⁸⁴ See the commentary of V. DÉROCHE, 'Vraiment anagyres? Don et contredon dans les recueils de miracles protobyzantins', [in:] B. CASEAU, J.-C. CHEYNET, V. DÉROCHE (eds.), *Pèle-*

monastery on *Mons Admirabilis*; his story that the saint refused to accept gifts should sound implausible when we consider the huge stone monastery complex and the crowds of people being served, but literary reality and the praise of a holy man were more important than things seen with one's own eyes. Other passages in the *Life* prove the opposite: the saint punishes a man who had been bringing an offering to him but had eaten a part of it on the way due to hunger (chapter 215); eight Armenians working for two years put aside a part of their earnings as an offering to the saint, and when the money purse was dropped into water, the saint helped to retrieve it (chapter 237). Though the *Life* does not say so, the reader can easily conclude that the contents of the purse were given to the monastery.

The monastery on *Mons Admirabilis* owned land situated in the lower part of the mountain, where an artificially irrigated orchard was located.⁸⁵ It already existed when Simeon lived in the lower monastery, thus before he founded the sanctuary on the top. Traces of the walls, which divide the lower slopes into horizontal terraces, are visible today and indicate that this lower part of the mountain was cultivated. Did this whole area belong to the monastery? It is likely. Did the monastery own other lands? It is highly likely. Of course, the *Life* does not provide us with such information, as this would not serve the goals the author set for himself. We know that monks worked in the orchard, but the *Lives* do not mention their engagement in craft production anywhere. This is understandable: their tasks were serving pilgrims and keeping the sanctuary and water cisterns tidy. They also took part in construction works.

We know nothing about possible lands belonging to Dayr Sim'an. I must repeat: this centre likely had some land, taking into account everything we know about the sources of incomes of monasteries in general, but the texts say nothing about this, and archaeology cannot help.

Pilgrimage sanctuaries made use of pilgrim labour, as it constituted a form of offering to the saint. Interesting snippets of information about this phe-

rinages et lieux saints dans l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge. Mélanges offerts à Pierre Maraval, Paris 2006, pp. 153–158.

⁸⁵ *The Life of Simeon* describes how a bear stepped *eis tous potizomenous kepous*, but only ate colocynth (cit. n. 74, chap. 176, p. 155); likewise, another time, a wild boar coming out of the forest destroyed crops and was not bothered by the sound of irrigation machines or the shouts of people (chap. 182, pp. 161–162).

nomenon are to be found in the *Life of Simeon Stylites the Younger*, which mentions Isaurians – stonemasons and carpenters – working on the construction of a monastery on *Mons Admirabilis*. People healed by the stylite also remained in the monastery for some time, working to serve its needs.⁸⁶

I noted the following passage in chapter 96, which describes the work of the Isaurians:

God set in motion the men of Isaurian land and many multitudes from other places and they kept coming to the saint bringing their sick, men afflicted by various infirmities and tormented by unclean spirits and all of these he cured by his word. Giving thanks to the Lord through his saint, they laboured in the work of quarrying and constructing the monastery, setting time-limits for themselves and providing for their own necessities. Two or three days before the appointed time-limit had been completed, others came in greater numbers. [...] and everyone came running to be blessed and cured [...] bringing along their own provisions and the tools they needed for such work (transl. C. Mango).

Mango proposed an undoubtedly correct interpretation of this surprising sequel of teams working on the construction site. Crews of Isaurians, primarily contracted to restore Antioch, worked in the neighbourhood, and the monastery concluded fixed-term contracts with them. However, Mango took the information that workers arrived with their own provisions at face value, so he concluded that their contribution to erecting the monastery buildings constituted a thanksgiving offering for the blessings and cures. I suspect that the author of the *Life* mentioned that the men had their own provisions for the duration of the works, not because he was interested in this type of data but because he wanted to emphasise the zeal of Simeon's worshippers and their generosity. If it had been necessary to feed crowds of workers during these decades, the monastery's construction would have been less miraculous than our author intended. Did this type of unpaid work suffice to build the whole centre (which the title of Henry's dissertation suggests)? I seriously doubt that.

⁸⁶ *La vie ancienne* (cit. n. 74), chap. 96, 172, 188, 192, 228; *ibidem*, in the *Life* of St Martha, chap. 49. For the Isaurians as builders and stonemasons working at different building sites, see C. MANGO, 'Isaurian Builders', [in:] P. WIRTH (ed.), *Polychronion. Festschrift für Franz F. Dölger*, Heidelberg 1966, pp. 358–365.

At the end of this double ‘case study’, it is appropriate to warn the reader that not every pilgrimage centre was served by a monastery or by monasteries. The well-known veneration centre of St Sergius in Reşafa (Sergiopolis) certainly did not have any monastery. This is shown not only by the silence of written sources but also by extensive and well-executed archaeological research in this centre. We do not know any ruins of one pilgrimage sanctuary, namely that of Saints John and Cyrus in Menuthis near Alexandria (the rising sea level flooded the area), but we see that the description of miracles of the saints written by Sophronios does not mention the presence of monks. In the case of this sanctuary, we are not dealing with a place that became pilgrimage site in the saints’ lifetime. Ascetics might have settled within the confines of the sanctuaries or in their vicinity.⁸⁷ Monastic communities also might have arisen there, but they did not administer those centres. Not every stylite originated a pilgrimage centre. Judging from field research, the pillars of some stylites were located in small monasteries with oratories and outbuildings (also olive presses).⁸⁸ Simeon Stylites the Elder’s fame was determined by the fact that he was the first to practise this type of asceticism; Simeon Stylites the Younger (probably) owed his great success to the involvement of Antiochian patriarchate in the time of Ephrem and to the heap of calamities that afflicted Antioch in the sixth century.

Beyond Syria, in Asia Minor, a monastery transformed into an important pilgrimage centre in Syceon, in a place created by St Theodore (his comprehensive *Life* illustrates this).⁸⁹ Of course, we all remember the role of monks

⁸⁷ See the relation of Egeria on the visit to the sanctuary of Thecla: ‘On the third day I arrived at a city that is called Seleucia in Isauria. When I have arrived there, I went to the bishop, truly holy from the time he was a monk; I also saw a very beautiful church there in that city. And as from there to holy Thecla, which place is outside the city on a hill, but flat, is about fifteen hundred paces from the city, so I preferred to go there to make the stay there that I was going to make. But there is nothing else there at the holy church except numberless monastic cells of men and of women’. After A. MCGOWAN, P. F. BRADSHAW, *The Pilgrimage of Egeria. A New Translation of the Itinerarium Egeriae with Introduction and Commentary*, Collegeville MN 2018, chap. 23, pp. 146–147.

⁸⁸ O. CALLOT, P.-L. GATIER, ‘Les stylites de l’Antiochène’, *Topoi, Supplement* 5 (2004), pp. 573–596.

⁸⁹ Edition: *La Vie de Théodore de Sycéon*, A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE (ed.) [= *Subsidia Hagiographica* 48], Brussels 1970. An extensive commentary in S. MITCHELL, *Anatolia. Land, Men, Gods in Asia Minor. 2: The Rise of the Church*, Oxford 1993, pp. 122–150.

in taking care of pilgrims arriving at the purported sites of theophany on Sinai (the Burning Bush, the peaks of Jabal Musa and Jabal Musa Subsula, identified as Mount Horeb), and the grand monastery built there at Justinian's suggestion, called later St Catherine's Monastery.

6. THE CULTIVATION OF LAND

Everything we know about the economy of Greater Syria allows us to assume with a degree of certainty that it was the cultivation of land that gave monasteries the foundation of a sustainable livelihood. Gifts were important, but they were not always possible to predict, and were more likely to be used to cover large expenses, such as erecting churches, hospitals, xenodochia, and perhaps also large irrigational projects. The monastic community would have been able to manage in poverty without gifts, but not without ensured influx of food. It is important to note that mentions about establishing systematic subsidies in kind or in money for monasteries are extremely rare, although we know these took place in Egypt, where they constituted a considerable source of income.⁹⁰

The agriculture of the Near East was flourishing at the time with which I am concerned. We owe this knowledge to the progress made in archaeological research, which contradicted scholarly dependence on the written sources, which were full of bitter accounts of incursions, civil wars, bad harvests, and epidemics, which painted a dismal picture of the economic circumstances.⁹¹ The climate, though not exclusively, also contributed to the successful economy of this area. Climate research, a novelty of the last few years, registers an important trend for the period: the increase of precipitation and

⁹⁰ J. WEGNER, *Monastic Communities in Context: Socio-Economic Links Between Monasteries and Laypeople in Late Antique Egypt*, forthcoming.

⁹¹ Chris Wickham's acclaimed book, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800*, Oxford 2005, is still the most important work presenting the results of archaeological research. In the last fifteen years, the conclusions included in it have not been challenged, and researchers have delivered additional strong evidence for similar practices Syria. Wickham writes about the Near East and its condition in many places. Fortunately, this vast book has an excellent index which can be used to find the needed information.

average temperatures. Greater precipitation increased crops, and thus the wealth of Near Eastern communities, their resources, total population, and, in consequence, this resulted in the capacity to invest in agriculture.⁹² Thanks to that, people were able to undertake expansion into the territory situated beyond the isohyet of 250–200 mm, in other words within the steppe, or as the French researchers called this strip of land, *marges arides*. This strip of land separates the zone of cultivated land with sufficient water and the densely populated zone from the true desert. This area was the ‘desert’ of Syrian monks.

We owe an in-depth understanding of settlement movement in *marges arides* primarily to the research conducted by the Maison de l’Orient et de la Méditerranée (MOM) in Lyon in 1993–2010 in the form of sixteen archaeological campaigns on a selected area of about 10,000 square kilometres south-east from Mosul.⁹³ Of course, we are dealing with research done not on the whole steppe area (which is unfeasible), but on a selected area which was surveyed and verified by excavations in important settlements. The analyses were carried out by specialists from different disciplines and showed the state of settlement of *marges arides* and its complex geographic nature. The Syrian steppe was not a homogeneous area, since it was located next to flat terrains, hills and mountain ranges reaching the height of 500 metres, segmented by valleys (Ar. *wadi*). Access to water changed depending on topography; land on the bottom of the valleys covered with soil

⁹² The results of the research are compiled in two articles: A. IZDEBSKI, J. PICKETT, N. ROBERTS, T. WALISZEWSKI, ‘The environmental, archaeological and historical evidence for regional climatic changes and their societal impacts in the Eastern Mediterranean in late antiquity’, *Quaternary Science Reviews* 2016, journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/quascirev, and I. LABUHN, M. FINNÉ, A. IZDEBSKI, N. ROBERTS, J. WOODBRIDGE, ‘Climatic changes and their impacts in the Mediterranean during the first millennium AD’, *Late Antique Archaeology* 12 (2018), pp. 65–88.

⁹³ Publications of those studies came out in the series *Travaux de la Maison d’Orient* 36 (2001); 43 (2006); 55 (2010); 71 (2016). For their summary, see B. GEYER, ‘The steppe: human occupation and potentiality, the example of Northern Syria’s Arid Margins’, *Syria* 88 (2011), pp. 7–22, and also M. RIVOAL, M.-O. ROUSSET, ‘Les aménagements agricoles dans le Marges arides de la Syrie du Nord (V^e–X^e siècles). Des témoins des modalités d’appropriations et d’exploitation des campagnes’, [in:] A. DELATTRE, M. LEGENDRE, P. SIJPESTEIN (eds.), *Authority and Control in the Countryside from Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6th–10th Century)*, Leiden 2019, pp. 210–264.

(washed away during the autumn and winter rains from the hillsides) may have been fertile and irrigated, and there was also no lack of sources at the foot of the hills. Better lands (from a farmer's point of view) did not require large investments, and even the less desirable lands could be irrigated by a system of qanats, beginning in springs and wells, over which mechanical devices for raising water (*sakiye*) were set up. The needs of the farmer and his animals during the months of complete drought were met by cisterns gathering rainwater of autumn and winter.

People creating new households within *marges arides* had to have financial means at their disposal, because the construction and then the maintenance of irrigation networks were costly. They sowed grain on the land they acquired, planted olive trees and vineyards in convenient places; there was no lack of fruit trees. The bounties of place were exploited, while challenges were overcome. Running a successful household required knowledge and cooperation among inhabitants of those 'settlement islands' of a very different character. It was not a case of individual colonisation, but communities, including peasant communities, putting down roots on the steppe, as is visible on the plans of settlements found in MOM's publications. There were villas with luxurious residential buildings and even palaces next to villages, especially in the Umayyad period, when the new Arab elite had substantial wealth at their disposal and created estates on the steppe for themselves, investing in construction of an irrigation system. The investments made during the first hundred years of Arab domination widened the area of cultivable land.⁹⁴

Archaeologists who conducted the surveys within the framework of MOM's project found monasteries of different sizes on the area of *marges arides*. Their founders (or secular patrons) had to ensure a good start for their communities: buildings (with a church), wells, cisterns, and qanats. Our sources say nothing about investments in an irrigation network (since

⁹⁴ We know this from the Arabic sources collected by H. KENNEDY, 'The impact of Muslim rule on the pattern of rural settlements in Syria', [in:] P. CANIVET, J.-P. REY-COQUAIS, A. DE HALLEUX (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VII^e-VIII^e siècles, actes du colloque international, Lyon – Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris – Institut du Monde Arabe, 11-15 Septembre 1990*, Damascus 1994, pp. 291-297. Kennedy thought that before the interventions of the Umayyads Syrian agriculture had been in decline. He could think so because the results of archaeological research, which I mentioned before, were not yet generally accessible at the time.

it was not part of the discursive praise of either monks or monasteries); but there is no doubt that irrigation took place, since otherwise the cultivation of land would not have been possible.

The second area which was subject to detailed archaeological research, and in which we observe a similar phenomenon of new colonisation, was the Limestone Massif, a region that spans the area between the cities of Antioch and Chalcis, as well as Cyrrhus and Apamea. The region was called Belus in Antiquity. More than 700 archaeological sites are located in the Massif, including approximately 60 well-preserved villages. There are also numerous monasteries to be found here.

In the 1930s, Georges Tchalenko began an archaeological survey of the Limestone Massif and published its results in an exemplary manner.⁹⁵ This published work constituted a great event in the research of the economy of Late Antiquity. Tchalenko was convinced that the Limestone Massif has been an area with a monoculture of olive trees and production of olive oil, which was exported to Western Roman Empire. This thesis did not hold following the research of the next generation of archaeologists. The most important of them, Georges Tate, who knew the area well and conducted excavations in Dehes, a sizeable settlement in the Limestone Massif, was able to prove that agricultural activity would have satisfied the needs of the inhabitants; as well as husbandry on a limited scale, in addition to the cultivation of olive trees.⁹⁶ Tate was also convinced that olive oil was sold mostly in nearby Antioch and a range of other nearby cities and towns (Seleucia, Laodicea, Apamea, Chalcis, and Beroia), although this did not exclude an export of a certain amount overseas.⁹⁷ The examination of numerous presses (there were a total of twenty-nine in Dehes itself) produced astounding results: for the most part, they were installations for the production of wine (twenty-six out of twenty-nine in Dehes), and not olive oil. In the period of late antiquity, wine was the second most important crop

⁹⁵ TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques* (cit. n. 66). The third volume (Paris 1958) collects Greek and Syriac inscriptions, a list of Syriac texts in which monasteries are mentioned compiled by A. Caquot, and a list of monasteries of the Limestone Massif.

⁹⁶ G. TATE, *Déhès. Campagne I–III (1976–1978). Recherches sur l'habitat rurale*, Paris 1981.

⁹⁷ G. TATE, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du Nord du II^e au VII^e siècle. Un exemple d'expansion démographique et économique à la fin de l'Antiquité*, Paris 1992.

of the region after olives, and its production was intended for cities surrounding the Massif. Tate emphatically emphasised the presence of a thriving peasantry in the Massif, as they built with stone, had ostentatious and decorated house reliefs, and engaged in land cultivation.

In his book, Tate published a table (n. 54) containing a list of forty-eight monasteries identified in different places of the Massif. The overwhelming majority were small monasteries with presses for olive oil or wine. According to Tate, there was probably little difference between the peasant household and monasteries which lived (again 'probably') off agricultural income: 'En toute rigueur, on ne peut parler à leur propos de «parasitisme»: ce sont des exploitants et non seulement des préleveurs de rente' (p. 340). Tate used the word *parasitisme* to dissociate himself from the traditional understanding of monasteries as groups of people doing nothing and exploiting the local inhabitants, rightly reminding us that monks did in fact work.

In the Limestone Massif, there were also larger monasteries, which could have had incomes from land received as a gift, but also incomes derived from the pious monetary offerings of laypeople. There is of course a special case in this group, Dayr Sim'an, which I have already discussed: it had a large pilgrimage centre founded in the place where Simeon Stylites the Elder had stood on a pillar.

The period of dynamic growth in terms of the exploitation of the Limestone Massif, also represented in architecture, ended near the middle of the sixth century, and this was followed by a period of stagnation that would last until the ninth century. The wars of the first half of the seventh century, involving mainly the incursions of Persians and Arabs, did not cause visible (that is permanent) damage to the settled population of this region, because, in contrast to cities, no one was able to fight the invaders, thereby minimising combat-related damages. It is only in the ninth century that we witness the civilisational collapse of the area (as with the whole of 'Greater Syria').

We can discern very little about animal husbandry in the monasteries, although there is no doubt that drought animals were needed for all monasteries. The question is: if the monastery was on the edge of the steppe, did sheep and goats grazed there in large numbers?⁹⁸

⁹⁸ One of those rare testimonies in *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13): 'Now, when I [the author, Thomas, speaks about himself – EW] lived in the service of the monastery I used to

Did the monks work in fields belonging to the monasteries? Did they plough, sow, dig cultivate the vines, prune the trees? The sources available to us are scarce, so my answer is pure hypothesis. I contend that the participation of monks was significant, especially when it was necessary to collect grain, olives and fruit. The story of Simeon 'of the Olives' convinces us of this. In small monasteries that had so little land that hiring workers – let alone buying slaves – for cultivating it could not be profitable, monks certainly worked. In large monasteries that accumulated a great deal of land over a series of generations, often in the form of scattered plots of land, people from outside the monastery were certainly also used for this purpose. We know nothing about their legal status, different forms of geneational dependence existed regarding peasants connected with a given owner and his land for generations. It is also impossible to determine how often the leases of land occurred and on what conditions (short-term agreements or *emphyteusis*) as well as who accepted it (landless peasants not owning land, free peasants – landholders wishing to earn additional income). It is sound to refrain defend oneself from a belief that peasants were a homogeneous mass of poor people; we know that relatively well-off farmers also lived in villages of dependent peasants. Villages of free peasants in Greater Syria also existed, which I already had an opportunity to mention when characterising the Limestone Massif and *marges arides*.

7. LARGE AND SMALL MONASTIC GARDENS

The authors of the descriptions of monasteries very often mentioned smaller or larger gardens located inside monastery walls, or in the vicinity of monastery buildings. We have an impression that gardens existed anywhere they could be planted, where monasteries had enough land, and where water was found in sufficient amounts was found or could be supplied by canals, drawing water from springs or rivers as well as wells, over which water raising machines were installed.

pasture a few cattle which we had in the monastery [Beth 'Abe – EW] in the woods (which were) in the valley near the cemetery'. Book V, chap. 17, pp. 322/567.

This relation of monasteries to gardens was reflected in the literary genre of ‘the books of monasteries’ (*kitab al-Diyārāt*) written by Arab authors in the tenth century. These are poetic works on romance themes praising love and wine-drinking which had Christian monasteries as a background.⁹⁹

Vine, fruit trees (especially fig trees and nut trees), and olives were planted in (real) gardens. We hear nothing about vegetables, but they must have been cultivated in such gardens because they played a significant role in the monastic diet. If there existed a spots for flowers mentioned in the *diyārāt*, we do not know of it. Vases with flowers never appear in descriptions of churches’ furnishings, although we find their likenesses on mosaics and frescoes in abundance. Perhaps monks would have also sown medicinal herbs? Or plants used in the process of dyeing yarn? Certainly, wherever it was possible, water was supplied, which points indirectly to the importance of gardening on monastic premises. There is no doubt that the yields of those gardens had a vital place in the economy of the monasteries; they were not the small decorative gardens of Western medieval monasteries, in which monks recited their prayers while strolling.

Monks living in seclusion in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia planted gardens, even very small ones. If the monastery lay on a flat terrain, small houses were built for monks who were more advanced in their asceticism, and if the coenobitic part was located at the foot of the hills, natural or artificially created grottoes were used by the elder monks. Small patches were created before such eremitic cells, and olives, figs, and nuts were planted.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ H. KILPATRICK, ‘Monasteries through Muslim eyes: The *Diyārāt* books’, [in:] D. THOMAS (ed.) *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule. Church Life and Scholarship in ‘Abbasid Iraq* [= *The History of Christian–Muslim Relations* 1], Leiden – Boston 2003, pp. 19–37; J. TANNOUS, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East. Religion, Society, and Simple Believers*, Princeton 2018, pp. 469–475.

¹⁰⁰ *Chronique de Séert*, A. SCHER (ed.), [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 13], Paris 1918, pp. 447–448: Rabban Simon who lived in the first half of the seventh century in the monastery of Rabban Bar ‘Edta ate only vegetables that he grew personally himself on a small patch by his cell; *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book V, chap. 17: Abba Joseph, contemporary of Thomas of Marga (mid-9th c.) lived alone in a cell before which lay a small patch on which he sowed wheat (transl. p. 562). Both mentions belong to the category of *topoi* praising the modest life of the heroes of the story, so they do not have to inform us about actual monks, but the emer-

On the slopes, the soil was protected from erosion by low ledges made from rock shards. People worked the land (especially on terraces) with mattocks. They were even able to supply water to such gardens by way of small canals. One of the stories of Thomas of Marga indicates that the yield of those crops provided monks with a principal part of their food. Its hero had an olive tree next to the entrance to his cell, and the fruits of this olive tree after extraction satisfied the requirement for olive oil for the year and beyond.¹⁰¹ If we add vegetables, the yield of other trees, and grain, we start to draw near to a nutritional minimum, although we can still suspect that the image of a monk sustaining himself on the work on such a small patch of land is an ideal vision, which dates back as early as Athanasius' *Life of St Anthony*. Late antique Sinai provides us with a contemporary analogy in real time. When Egeria visited the area in 383, she found monks living in scattered hermitages, and grouped in tiny *laurae* in the various *wadi* in the massif of Jabal Musa; these *wadi* were sometimes significantly distant from the social centre (usually with a church, a tower, and probably storehouses) at the entrance to Wadi al-Dayr, in the place where the Burning Bush was situated, and where later there would be a fortified monastery built on the initiative of Justinian.¹⁰² The monasticism of this region would retain this

gence of such a *topos* proves that the situations described in the sources were a well known element of monastic life.

¹⁰¹ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book IV, chap. 19, transl. pp. 426–428, tells about a monk who had an olive tree before his cell. He secretly watered it at night, making a hole in a canal leading from a spring (or a cistern) to the monastery. The olive tree gave thirty measures of olive oil annually, which seems plausible: *xestarius*, the commonly used measure of olive oil, had about 1/2 litre, and the tree might have given a yield of about twenty litres. It was more than sufficient for the individual needs of the monk.

¹⁰² Égérie, *Journal de voyage*, P. MARAVAL (ed.) [= *Sources chrétiennes* 296], Paris 1982, chap. 1–6, is a text about a journey to Sinai with an extensive introduction that is important for the identification of places and their Biblical message. The new English translation and an extensive new commentary is *The Pilgrimage of Egeria* (cit. n. 87). Concerning the specific geographical conditions of Sinai, see: B. FLUSIN, 'Ermitages et monastères. Le monachisme au mont Sināi à la période protobyzantine', [in:] D. VALBELLE, C. BONNET (eds.) *Le Sināi durant l'Antiquité et le Moyen-Âge*, Paris 1998, pp. 133–138; M.-J. PIERRE-BEYLOT, 'Raïthou, Pharan, La Sainte Montaigne et le trois Moïses. Éléments d'histoire monastique à l'époque de Jean Climaque', [in:] F. JULLIEN, M.-J. PIERRE (eds.), *Monachisme d'Orient. Images, Échanges, Influences. Hommage à Antoine Guillaumont*, Turnhout 2011, pp. 65–122 (esp. pp. 65–75).

loose structure for almost the whole period of late antiquity. This structure resulted, at least in part, from the terrain's properties. Water, without which monks could not live, was on the bottom of valleys, where small springs gushed, as well as in rock crevices that were flooded in the period of autumn and winter rains. Where there was water, flora grew in a natural way, and thus it was possible to cultivate small amounts of grain, plant vegetables and tend fruit trees (we know this because Egeria received fruits from monks as *eulogia*). Utilising such natural locations, the monks strengthened them by constructing low ledges that protected against ground shifts and built reservoirs, and they were able to create new 'green islets' by installing artificial irrigation using water gathered in the rainy season. All these were very small, but they made survival possible for the groups of monks usually living in caves on cliff slopes that descended to the bottom of valleys. Traces of approximately forty such monastic sites survive in the mountainous complexes of Jabal Musa and Jabal Katherina, which have been the subjects of archaeological surveys.

8. MANAGING INCOMES

All monasteries had their economic representatives: people who organised work inside the monastery and managed the storehouses of foodstuffs, as well as people who engaged in transactions with the outside world. These people went by various names. If we recall the *Life of Simeon* 'of the Olives' here, we understand that those representatives were numerous in Qarṭmin, and the work was laborious.

Brothers to whom the task of managing economic matters was entrusted were of course subordinate to the prior. Surprisingly, there is nothing in our sources about the dangers which the prior's authority might have provoked; with the exception of the rule of Dadisho' (canons 3 and 25):

The head of the community has no power to take for himself that comes to the body (of the monks), except what is given especially to him, but it shall be given to the *rabbaita* and will be managed for the body.

(About that) what is needed to be done with what God's grace brings to the

body (of monks) for its sustenance: the head alone from himself shall not decide without the counsel of the brothers of the community; and this shall not be stored for months and long periods but from day to day it shall be distributed justly to those who need, as our Lord said: 'Be not anxious about tomorrow',¹⁰³

We are told in *The Book of Governors* that land situated at a significant distance from monasteries, including whole villages received as a gift (with dependent peasants living in their area), could be entrusted to monks, who organised works on their areas and were responsible for them in front of the managers of the monastery. The most interesting case is described in *The Book of Governors* in book V, chapter 2, where Thomas tells the story of a certain monk who convinced the community to entrust Beth Habba (a village located at a short distance to the monastery of Beth 'Abhe) to him, which had been offered in the past.

And he built a house for the ploughmen, (i.e., a farm) to the south of this one of to-day, the site of which is well known, and he bought yokes of the oxen, and hired ploughmen, and he began to sow and to reap, and to be kind to, and to give gifts to the monks of his congregation, and to strangers, and to the poor. [...] And when the blessed man had laboured in this course of life for many years, and was pleasing Christ by means of his Saints, certain wicked men in this congregation, through the working of Satan, the father of lies, and the hater of the love Christ left to His disciples, rose up craftily against him. [...]. First of all they began to make measures which were greater and fuller than those which were in current use everywhere among merchants, now this he endured cheerfully.

Finally, his enemies, since they could not defeat him by economic means, decided to kill him. But the monks, 'who had the matters of the community in hand' sent a messenger (this gives us a measure of divisions in the circle of the monastic elite) to warn the protagonist of the tale. The monk escaped to the city with only with three loaves of bread, offered to him by the messenger in a bag, and he went with his complaint to the *katholikos*.

Let us note a few things at this point. The aforementioned monk was active within an existing village, but everything points to the fact that he

¹⁰³ VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic Documents* (cit. n. 17), p. 168.

extended the range of fields under cultivation: he had bought oxen, built a house for workers, ploughed, sown, and the yields were high. He gave what should have been divided between monks to the prior of Beth 'Abhe. Our protagonist was given a free hand in administering a part of the yields (he gives alms to the poor, but also presents to monks – we can guess that it was only to some of the monks, as his generosity did not help him at all). Information about the manipulation of the measure intended to disgrace the monk in the eyes of the community is unique, since bigger measures meant that a smaller amount of delivered yields had been noted in the bookkeeping and this undermined trust in the monk.¹⁰⁴

9. MONKS AS AUTONOMOUS ACTORS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Thus far, I have presented snippets of information that have allowed us to reconstruct the economic activity of monastic communities, leaving aside an important part of what individual monks belonging to these communities did in the economic sphere. We know that they retained the right to dispose of some part of any property that they owned before their entry into the community, and this obtained also for inheritance following entry into the monastery. These assets were endowed to the monastery in later years, especially in wills, and were a part of the monastic community's material basis. I will take the liberty to re-state that monastic communities within Syria did not demand a vow of poverty.

Not all leaders of monastic groups were ready to allow monks to have financial means and act on their own account. We find the most important declaration on this subject in Rabbula's *Admonitions* 12: 'No one of the brothers who are in the monasteries may possess anything solely for himself other than whatever is common to the brotherhood and on the authority of the head of the monastery.' This was in accordance with the model of strict asceticism which Rabbula tried to implement, but later canons did not continue his rigorous policy. We know this from the second set of canons ascribed to Rabbula,

¹⁰⁴ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book V, chap. 2, pp. 254–258/469–478.

Canons for the Monks Attributed to Rabbula, for which it is claimed that, despite having much in common with *Admonitions* (the first six canons repeat rules from *Admonitions*, but twenty-eight canons are completely original), it was compiled later; we do not know exactly when or where, but certainly before the Arab conquest.¹⁰⁵ There was not much left of the rigor that had previously been imposed by Rabbula. An approval for the running of one's own business, as long as the prior agreed to it, is striking: 'It is not permitted for any of the brothers to buy or sell anything without the permission of the abbot and of the three [monks] who come after him [in rank]' (canon 7). However, when a monk has the prior's permission, he may engage in such operations, and what is more important, he has the means (money, goods) to make these transactions. The person who compiled this set of canons and presented it as Rabbula's work did not seem to care about canon 12 of *Admonitions*.¹⁰⁶

Canon 13 states:

It is not permitted for a monk staying in the monastery to loan anything with interest, even if he has some [capital] from his own activity.¹⁰⁷

Setting aside the prohibition to lend at interest (repeated many times in monastic dossiers), the compiler confirms that monks have their own capital and they probably could activate this capital as long as they did not demand interest.

Pieces of information contained in *Canons which are Necessary for the Monks* (Arthur Vööbus changed the title in his anthology [see n. 17] to *Anonymous Rules for the Monastic Communities*) are extremely interesting; it is a compilation of rules drawn from various sources, and later than the compilation ascribed to Maruṭa:

A monk who shall seed for himself sugar and farmlands – it is not lawful for him to have more than there is a ground of *sasā* in the monastery for the necessity of the brothers; if he is a disciple of the Messiah, he shall not make for himself worldly burdens; if he becomes subject to the love of money – this is the worship of idols (canon 2).

¹⁰⁵ *The Rabbula Corpus* (cit. n. 31), pp. CCXXVI–CCXXVII.

¹⁰⁶ *The Rabbula Corpus* (cit. n. 31), pp. 118–119.

¹⁰⁷ *The Rabbula Corpus* (cit. n. 31), pp. 120–121.

A monk who shall possess oxen, donkeys, sheep and fowl like peasants, it is not permitted from God; that one who transgresses and possesses -his lot- shall be with them and not with the holy monks¹⁰⁸ (canon 3).

It is not lawful for a monk to take secular affairs and charges in the village and become a supervisor of the granaries and the vine presses; if he dares, he is left by the Messiah, who did not divide the possession of the brothers (canon 11).

In the next canon (no. 12) the compiler presents the analogous case of a monk-priester acting on his own account in a city. It is curious that in the editor's eyes, only ordained monks, not just any having an estate, and not random monks, commit such a sin. It is understandable: the greater prestige resulting from clerical ordination made it easier to obtain a profitable commission from the circle of urban people who were wealthier than village notables.

Rules for the Nun, an absolute *unicum* in canon literature, originating from the interval between the second half of the seventh century and the eighth century, and from an unknown place, show that nuns might also dispose of their means:¹⁰⁹ 'It is not lawful for any of the sisters to borrow from somebody or to lend' (canon 9).

Nuns also had to remain in the convent, but they could go out in company with the knowledge of prioress (canon 1, but in canon 11 it is stated that they are allowed to leave the convent without asking if it is a distance of less than one mile).

[...] And they shall not [visit the solitaires] on the mount or recluses or the stylites with the pretext to make alms to them, and to bring them the offering; (except) an old *sā'urtā*, who has been appointed by each monastery for the purpose that through her hands the alms shall be sent (canon 7).

Nothing indicates that alms were to be offered by the convent, and the author's recommendations to use an appointed intermediary were intended to limit occasions that could involve communication with the outside world.

¹⁰⁸ VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic Documents* (cit. n. 17), pp. 70–71.

¹⁰⁹ VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic Documents* (cit. n. 17), pp. 62–68. The sole manuscript originates from the eighth century.

We find rules imposing various fines (for striking a brother – half a dinar; five *zuze* and twenty fast days for falsely accusing a brother; one dinar for lying against a brother) in a collection of canons of the Mar Mattai monastery near Mosul. Admittedly, the canons originate from 508–509, but the rules mentioned here are from the later period of Arab rule (the manuscript originates from twelfth–thirteenth century).¹¹⁰

In Thomas of Marga's *The Book of Governors* (book 2, chapter 236, pp. 106/236), we find a description of a monk's cell in the monastery of Beth ʿAbhe, and we learn that everything its owner possessed would be inherited by his nephew. This certainly was not an isolated event, as monks living in the hermitages of this monastery were the very owners of the same.

It is appropriate to wonder how the two economic spheres – communal and individual – worked together in monasteries. The discernible interaction is not at all straightforward, and since there is nothing written about such matters in the sources, everything we know comes from incidental data.

Determining the rules governing these relationships was especially important for numerous communities which adopted the model created by Abraham of Kashkar that envisioned a dual structure: coenobium for novices, which was obligatory for more or less three years, and a complex of hermitages for experienced and proven brothers living in their cells (small houses and caves). These experienced monks participated in communal meals on holy days together with monks from the coenobium. Hermits, who incurred part of the costs of building their cells, kept their own household, as it appears in canon 15 of Dadishoʿ (second prior of the monastery after Abraham):

About that, that the brothers of the cells shall not bake bread in the cenobium, except because of sickness or because of the works the brother has (to do), or because (he has) to build a cell or because of the pressure of distress.¹¹¹

Dadishoʿ does not explain why he introduced such a rule. We also do not know whether the monks, who previously baked bread in the coenobium,

¹¹⁰ The rule is not yet published and my information is taken from A. BINGELLI, 'La vie quotidienne des moines en Syrie-Mésopotamie au miroir déformant des sources littéraires (IV^e–X^e siècle)', [in:] O. DELOUIS, M. MOSSAKOWSKA-GAUBERT (eds.), *La vie quotidienne des moines en Orient et en Occident (IV^e–X^e siècle)*, vol. 1, Cairo 2015, pp. 188–189.

¹¹¹ VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic Documents* (cit. n. 17), p. 172

brought their own flour, or whether they used flour from the coenobium's storerooms.

We can assume that the hermits participated in the costs of communal meals, in works undertaken by the coenobium in order to build and maintain common buildings, water intakes, and the celebration of common worship in a church or chapel. If the monastery undertook works requiring the mobilisation of a larger workforce (as in the case of the harvest of olives in the grove planted by Simeon 'of the Olives'), hermits were not exempted from them. On the other hand, the type of work carried out by the hermits (work, let us remember, was obligatory in all variant types of monasteries) as well as their sources of income if the work did not provide the necessary means of support, remain a complete mystery. What happened when monks (as I mentioned) had livestock and worked the land on a larger scale than in small gardens? It is impossible to know.

Monasteries certainly regulated this area of life differently, but certainly according to local conditions and the views of the prior on what a good monk should do. We must consider it significant that they did not feel the need to write resolutions down in the rules.

Old and ailing monks were supported by the community, in a similar fashion that obtained for the numerous recluses and rather less numerous stylites.¹¹²

10. THE 'BUDGET' OF MONASTERIES

When I began the present research, I hoped to be able to find evidence that would allow me approximately to calculate the budgets of some Syrian monasteries. This kind of calculation is feasible in the case of some Egyptian monasteries. Unfortunately, it turned out that nothing of the sort can be done for Syrian monastic communities, since we lack reliable figures for

¹¹² 'As concerning those who dwell in graves, they have no care whatsoever, either to gardens, or to trees, or to beds of green herbs. Moreover, many of them never came to the congregation, and the monks who lived together used to carry food to them and set it in the windows.' After *Life of Rabban Bar-Idtā* (cit. n. 38), pp. 140–141/210.

both individual monasteries and groups of monasteries. As we can see from the results of my research, we can determine the sources of revenues and the type of outlays, but not their sum total.

I want to point out one type of expense which until now I have chosen not to mention: charity. We have no doubt that all monastic communities practised charity. It constituted their primary social function, both in cities and in villages. It must have consumed a significant part of a monastery's income surplus during fair-weather periods, and when misfortunes struck, the inlays to the accumulated store must have been significant. Did urban monasteries or monasteries located in the vicinity of cities ('suburban') spend more on charity? Probably yes, but let us remember that there were many more potential donors to be found in the cities than in the villages.

Monasteries in need occasionally borrowed.¹¹³ Did they, in turn, deal in loans? It is probable, but there is nothing about this fact in the sources.¹¹⁴ Monks (individual monks) were able to keep private deposits, but the practice was not common or approved of:

About that, that the *paratqos* i.e. deposits shall not be accepted from any of the laymen, nor in the coenobium nor in the cells because there may be vexations and temptations for us for this reason; and if someone is found who violates these (rules), he shall know that he is foreign to our community.¹¹⁵

Clearly, this monastery had already had bad experiences with deposits. However, people 'from 'the outside world' (especially those of modest means) regarded the monks as trustworthy and were ready to entrust their money and valuables to them.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book IV, chap. 19, pp. 224–225/425.

¹¹⁴ On the other hand, the phenomenon is attested in the papyri for monasteries and monks in Egypt. Documentary evidence is compiled in T. MARKIEWICZ, 'The Church, clerics, monks and credit in the papyri', [in:] A. BOUD'HORS, J. CLACKSON, C. LEWIS (eds.), *Monastic Estates in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt. Ostraca, Papyri and Essays in Memory of Sarah Clackson* [= *American Studies in Papyrology* 46], Cincinnati 2009, pp. 178–212.

¹¹⁵ VÖÖBUS, *Syriac and Arabic documents* (cit. n. 17), p. 127, canon 18. See also, in the same collection, *Anonymous Rules for the monks*: 'No one of the monks shall allow himself to receive a deposit from his relatives nor from the strangers, so that he may not draw a scandal or guilt upon the monastery' (canon 14).

¹¹⁶ I know of cases of deposits in literary texts, such as the Qartamin trilogy, the *Life of*

Information about the existence of a dense network of monasteries should not deceive us: many monasteries did disappear. Economic considerations were often responsible for this fact, particularly if the monks no longer had any means of sustaining themselves. We have testimonies of this in the *Synodicon orientale*, which is especially important because it concerns monasteries in general and not specific monasteries. It was recorded in canon 35, during a synod called by Patriarch Ezekiel in 576, that when people (clearly laypeople) had built monasteries but did not provide them with sufficient financial means, these monasteries fell into ruin. The bishops decided that future monasteries would not be consecrated if they were not suitably provided for. In 585, in canon 11 of the synod, Isho'yabh repeats this order, adding that, instead of building new monasteries, those that had been ruined should be rebuilt. Can it be concluded from the appearance of this provision that the number of monastic communities in Greater Syria had noticeably decreased in the second half of the sixth century?

11. FACTORS POSING A THREAT TO MONASTIC COMMUNITIES

There were many factors which threatened the monasteries. Internal conflicts, often without a doctrinal or economic basis, but resulting from a rivalry of groups with common interests that emerged in communities, played a substantial role; especially when priors did not have enough authority to impose their will on the brothers. Our authors repeatedly mention 'weak' hegumens and the disastrous consequences of their rule. In such situations, monks transferred to other communities. *Stabilitas loci* was admittedly an ideal state, but one has only to familiarise oneself with the biographies of important Syrian monks to find that they wandered from monastery to monastery. Did they always ask priors for permission? It seems doubtful; and in any event, the sources speak of this phenomenon extremely rarely.

Although these threats were important, my focus in this study is on the external factors threatening the life of monks, especially the factors that

Gabriel; PALMER, *Monk and Mason* (cit. n. 10), text on microfiches, pp. LXVIII–LXXI; *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book IV, chap. 12, pp. 213/410.

deprived them of collective financial means. Of course, war posed the greatest threat. The chronicle, traditionally called the *Chronicle of (Pseudo-) Joshua the Stylite*, is one of the best sources for this; particularly as it shows what war meant for monasteries located in what was an area of intense conflict. The title found in a sole manuscript, *A Historical Narrative of the Period of Distress which Occurred in Edessa, Amida and All Mesopotamia* corresponds exactly to the manuscript's contents; half of the narrative is dedicated to a description of the war between Rome and Persia in 502–506, which was fatal for numerous monasteries of the two important monastic centres: Edessa and Amida.¹¹⁷ In late antiquity, Syria was a crucible of hostility between the Roman Empire and the Arab allies of Persia, who were still attacking after the principal players had made peace. The formation of the caliphate by no means eliminated the danger from the nomads of desert and steppe areas, since drought could push the tribes in the direction of the settlement zone, and monasteries suffered at the hands of bandits whom they were unable to repel. Kurds, attacking from the north, were dangerous neighbours for the communities of northern Mesopotamia. The register of their documented attacks, compiled by Jean Maurice Fiey in his work *L'Assyrie chrétienne* is long. The new Arab rulers of 'Greater Syria' also waged war against each other. This warfare certainly would have had a negative impact on monasteries and their economic status.

Judging from records (primarily chronicles), misfortunes in peacetime seem to have been even more dangerous than war.¹¹⁸ Mass locust invasions

¹¹⁷ *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua* (cit. n. 15). An important article about the literary aspects of the chronicle is J. W. WATT, 'Historiography and the Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite', [in:] G. J. REININK, A. C. KLUGKIST (eds.), *After Bardaisan. Studies on Continuity and Change in Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. Drijvers* [= *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 89], Leuven 1999, pp. 317–327.

¹¹⁸ M. G. Morony compiled a detailed list of these peacetime calamities, using primarily the information contained in the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian, who drew from the works of John of Ephesus and the un preserved work of Dionysius of Tel Maḥre, as well as from the Syrian chronicles: M. G. MORONY, 'Michael the Syrian as a source for economic history', *Hugoye* 3.2 (2000, publ. 2010), pp. 141–172. While very useful, it is a fairly mechanical compilation of the data without any greater appreciation of its value (primarily for chronicle figures). See also two studies in L. K. LITTLE (ed.), *Plague and the End of Antiquity. The Pandemic of 541–750*, Cambridge 2007: M. G. MORONY, 'For whom the writer write. The first bubonic plague pandemic according to Syriac sources', pp. 60–85, and H. N. KENNEDY, 'Justinianic plague and archaeological evidence', pp. 87–94.

covering large areas did not occur very often, but when they did, they were exceptionally destructive. We know of a five-year (*sic*) period of their occurrence in the reign of Justin I (518–527).¹¹⁹ In 591–595, in the vicinity of Marga and Nineveh, locusts not only destroyed grain, fruit trees, forests, but they also caused water contamination by drowning in sources of water.¹²⁰ It was no coincidence that authors describing communal misfortunes listed not only famine just after locusts, but also epidemics which swept through the populations weakened by starvation.

Climatic disasters also took their toll: there were prolonged droughts, scorching winds blowing from the desert in the period just before harvest which were able to burn the crops; and finally hail which damaged not only crops but also other plants.¹²¹

Famine, the result of all possible catastrophes, could have led to the abandonment of monasteries. Thomas of Marga recalls the situation of the monastery of Beth 'Abhe from the first half of the seventh century:

And when the famine had become very severe, and there was no help to alleviate it from anywhere, Abba Simon, who had three disciples, gathered them together, and said to them: 'Come, my children, let us depart from this place and go to the country of the mountains, and let us eat the leaves of the trees and not die'; and he took them and they departed [...].¹²²

Monks suffered due to those plagues along with everyone else. Wealthier monasteries had provisions allowing them to survive, but helping the surrounding communities, potentially camped at the monastery gates, must have dwindled monastic resources to a critical extent. We find many descriptions of such misfortunes and the efforts intending to ease the suffering of those miserable people in works such as Thomas of Marga's *The Book of Governors*, *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd* *The Persian* and *Rabban Bar 'Edta*.

¹¹⁹ *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua* (cit. n. 15), pp. 37–39. *Chronique de Séert* (cit. n. 100), pp. 119, 134, 140.

¹²⁰ *Life of Rabban Bar-'Idtā* (cit. n. 38) 22, p. 227.

¹²¹ A very meaningful description in *Life of Aḥo* (an unpublished work; the paragraph of interest is cited by PALMER, *Monk and Mason* [cit. n. 10], p. 96).

¹²² *The Book of Governors* (cit. n. 13), book II, chap. 24, transl. p. 225.

Catastrophes triggered population movements. In 750–751, a famine in Armenia caused thousands to march south:

They marched out and filled the entire land: cities, monasteries, villages and fields. They sell all they possessed and bought for themselves bread, causing famine in the land [North Mesopotamia – EW]. Moreover, abscesses and ulcers, diarrhoea, and then ulcers overpowered them. Wherever they arrived, they used to occupy porticoes, shrines, churches, towers, and any other place. Pestilence also overpowered them and most of them died to such extent that people were not able to bury them.¹²³

Forty-two brothers, not counting those not belonging to the community, died that year in Zuqnin monastery due to the spreading epidemic. We should also note that Armenian refugees, when they undertook the march south, had had some financial means, and the poor probably did not accompany them. However, the food reserves of northern Mesopotamia were not sufficiently large to safeguard against the sinister sequence of famine and epidemic that affected not only refugees but also permanent inhabitants.

The chronicles are full of descriptions of misfortune, because this is one of the characteristics of the genre. We must keep in mind the characteristic style of the chronicles, which was subject to the influence of the Old Testament's prophetic books (especially Jeremiah). Their reading pulls at the heartstrings, which is not conducive to objective criticism of the accounts.

It is usually difficult to judge the real extent of the catastrophes; most of them (locusts, hail, storms, etc.) affected limited areas. Drawing up a list of the years in which locusts destroyed crops without determining the place in which this occurred makes little sense, as those years might have been good years somewhere else. It is all too easy to conclude that places overwhelmed by misfortune did not have a chance for survival at all because damaged vineyards and olive groves could not recover immediately. If the repeated attacks of locusts over the years are consistent with the reality, new vineyards, groves and orchards required new seedlings, followed by years of care and patience, provided that famine or plague didn't wreak their havoc

¹²³ *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn* (cit. n. 16), p. 188.

once again. If sheep, goats and camels were killed, there was no chance at all of reconstituting their flocks and herds. The same applies to human losses due to hunger and disease. If the settlements did not depopulate permanently, it took long years for them to rebuild.

However, nothing indicates that monasteries in the period I have researched (that is, up until the middle of the eighth century) suffered from manifold catastrophes in a permanent way, nor did these concern all the monasteries in a given region. Some monasteries might have disappeared (not only due to catastrophes), but many were founded during this era.

CONCLUSIONS

In attempting to summarise my reflections, some important matters are worthy of emphasis.

There is no doubt that after the victory of the Arabs, the process involving the degradation of monasteries began, one that lasted for many years. It was not a consequence of the disasters mentioned above, but of the growing dechristianisation. Monasteries could only exist where there were strong Christian communities with whom they lived in close symbiosis. We do not know how many monasteries were abandoned, or indeed the timeframe in which this happened, but we do know how the Islamization of Greater Syria proceeded. We have no doubt that at the beginning of the eighth century this process had advanced. First of all, the elites of all levels converted to Islam or lost their property, and without their economic, social and administrative support, many monasteries were doomed to collapse in the long run.¹²⁴

The strong, bureaucratic Abbasid state probably increased its fiscal exploitation. It managed tax collection more efficiently with all the negative consequences that that entailed. The Chronicle of Zuqnin seems to prove this. It relates in detail the times of the rule of Musa, son of Ka'b al-Khatami,

¹²⁴ On the fate of the late antique ruling elite in Greater Syria and the formation of a new elite, see H. KENNEDY, 'Syrian elites from Byzantium to Islam: Survival or extinction?', [in:] J. HALDON (ed.), *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria. A Review of Current Debates*, Farnham 2010, pp. 181–200.

nominated to the post of governor of northern Mesopotamia, with a seat in Mosul. His actions would lead to the ruination of the region.¹²⁵

Was Musa's fiscal and police tactics typical for the world under Abbasid rule? That we do not know. To answer this question, we would need more sources than the Zuqnin Chronicle itself.¹²⁶

Monasteries continued to exist – less numerous (we do not know how much), but still extremely important in the life of Christian communities. They collected and kept books, they constituted live centres of religious culture.

The reading of texts and analysis of archaeological evidence have confirmed my intuition that a difference between the economy of the 'Western' and 'Eastern' monasteries did not exist. Individual monastic communities may have organised their economies differently, but differences arose as a result of size, geographical context, the reputation for holiness (on which, for example, the gifts depended), and the personal abilities of the prior and economic representatives. If we knew better the histories of monasteries, perhaps we would be able to discern differences arising from the character of Church organisation, and the increasing rights of bishops and the role of synods in the sphere of legal regulations. Nevertheless, the basic economic model (or rather economic models) was identical.

While reading the stories of famous monks, usually priors, or bishops, I noticed that the authors very carefully inform us where their heroes had come from: and here we find that they are almost always villages, not cities. This is extremely interesting as hagiographers almost always emphasised that they came from wealthy, and even very wealthy families (in *The Book of Governors* by Thomas of Marga we find such contentions). The property inherited by them then served the communities (and the poor). It sounds almost like a *topos*, although it is undoubtedly not the case. These holy men

¹²⁵ In *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* (cit. n. 16) the story of Musa occupies a Harrak translation of pages 223–316! The author of the chronicle (p. 323) places Musa taking office in 769, but the Arab historian al-Tabari (VII 511) gives another date – 771–772. According to al-Tabari, Musa held this office until 774–775 (see the translator's and commentator's comment, p. 223 n. 3).

¹²⁶ See: R. S. HUMPHREYS, 'Christian communities in early Islamic Syria and northern Jazira: The dynamic of adaptation', [in:] HALDON (ed.) *Money, Power and Politics* (cit. n. 124), pp. 45–56.

did come from the elite; that part of the elite that lived in the countryside had smaller or larger estates. In the Sasanid region, some of them came from Persian families who were a part of the apparatus of power, from which they could obtain large financial resources. On the other hand, representatives of the Christian elite serving the Arabs at the top of the administrative hierarchy were patrons, but not monks. The new order introduced by the Arabs, which entailed a drastic change of governance at its upper echelons may have created a new situation for the hierarchical Church but did not affect the logistical activities of the monasteries to the same extent.

Let me finally point out what is missing in this reconstruction of the economic activities of the monasteries: our sources tell us almost nothing about handicrafts in monasteries, except for the copying and binding of books.¹²⁷ Only one hagiographic text whose hero produced baskets and mats is known to me,¹²⁸ and I know no text mentioning weaving or producing wooden or leather ware, whereas these kinds of craftsmanship often appear in the descriptions of monastic work that can be found in the Egyptian and Palestinian sources. It is hard to imagine that craftsmanship would be absent from Syrian monasteries, rather Syrian authors did not consider it worth writing about. Praising the efforts of labour, these chroniclers did not stoop to giving details; and did not specify what the work was supposed to be for.

¹²⁷ On this kind of activity there is plenty of evidence. M. DEBIÉ recently wrote about monasteries as centres for the production of manuscripts: 'Livres et monastères en Syrie-Mésopotamie d'après les sources syriaques', [in:] JULLIEN (ed.), *Le monachisme syriaque* (cit. n. 11), pp. 123–168, with a very extensive bibliography of the subject.

¹²⁸ It is a text concerning the abbots of the monastery Beth Qoqa in the Adiabene, founded by Sabrisho' (late sixth – early seventh c.). It was published by A. MINGANA, *Sources syriaques*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1908, p. 241. According to the editor, it was written at the beginning of the eighth century.

THE ECONOMY OF SYRIAN MONASTERIES (FIFTH–EIGHTH CENTURY)

Abstract

The economy of the monasteries of Greater Syria is not a subject of interest to researchers of the three Churches of this vast area (pro-Chalcedonian, Monophysite, and Nestorian) for a very prosaic reason: few sources make it possible for us to research it. To make matters worse, the sources are dispersed both territorially and chronologically. Despite the flaws in the documentation I have gathered, the comparison of information included in it gives us an image of the economy of various centres. Thanks to such case studies, divided by *terrae incognitae*, we draw closer to the answers to primary questions: about the incomes of the monasteries, their expenses, and their cooperation with clerical hierarchy and secular elite, the authorities of the Roman Empire, the Sasanian Empire, and the Arab Empire on an economic level. I paid particular attention to the involvement of (great and small) monasteries in land cultivation. The land offered to monasteries by monks joining them and by the representatives of the secular elite, as well as purchased land, underpinned the monastic economy. I also compiled data indicating that, contrary to popular belief, the monks of Greater Syria worked in the fields and workshops, helped erect buildings, and assisted in producing wine and olive oil.

Keywords: Greater Syria, hagiography, the histories of monasteries, monastic rules, cenobia, semianachoretic laurae, relationships of monastic communities with hierarchical Church and the laypeople, bishops, pilgrimage centres, agricultural expansion into the steppe area, natural disasters (epidemics, locusts, droughts, famines, migrations)

EKONOMIA KLASZTORÓW SYRYJSKICH (V–VIII W.)

Abstrakt

Ekonomia klasztorów Wielkiej Syrii nie jest przedmiotem zainteresowania badaczy trzech Kościołów tego rozległego obszaru (prochalcedońskiego, monofizyckiego, nestoriańskiego) z prozaicznego powodu: niewiele źródeł pozwala nam na jej badanie. Sprawę pogarsza fakt, że źródła są rozproszone, zarówno terytorialnie, jak i geograficznie. Pomimo wad zebranej przeze mnie dokumentacji, porównanie

zawartych w niej informacji daje nam obraz gospodarki różnych centrów życia monastycznego. Dzięki studiom przypadków, które przeplatają się z niewiadomymi, jesteśmy bliżej odpowiedzi na podstawowe pytania o dochody klasztorów i ich wydatki, a także współpracę, jaką utrzymywały w dziedzinie gospodarki z hierarchią kościelną, elitami świeckimi oraz władzami Cesarstwa Rzymskiego i imperiami Sasanidów i Arabów. Szczególną uwagę poświęciłam zaangażowaniu klasztorów (dużych i małych) w uprawę ziemi. Ziemia – ofiarowywana przez mnichów klasztorom, w których realizowali oni swoje powołanie, darowana przez przedstawicieli elit świeckich oraz nabywana poprzez kupno – była podstawą monastycznej gospodarki. Zestawiłam również dane, które wskazują na to, że w przeciwieństwie do tego, co się powszechnie uważa, mnisi Wielkiej Syrii pracowali w polu i w warsztatach rzemieślniczych, pomagali we wznoszeniu budowli i asystowali przy produkcji wina i oliwy z oliwek.

Słowa kluczowe: Wielka Syria, hagiografia, historie klasztorów, reguły monastyczne, cenobia, laury semianachoretyczne, relacje wspólnot monastycznych z Kościołem hierarchicznym i świeckimi, biskupi, centra pielgrzymkowe, ekspansja upraw na tereny stepowe, katastrofy naturalne (epidemie, szarańcza, susze, głód, migracje)