

# NESTORIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE CONDEMNATION, SUPPRESSION, VENERATION

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROLE OF  
HIS NAME IN EAST-SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY

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THEODORET OF CYRRHUS<sup>1</sup>

The name of Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople who became the object of an “ecumenical scandal”<sup>2</sup> in 431, was soon to become a symbol determining positions and attitudes in church-political and doctrinal contexts. It has remained such a symbol throughout history up to the present day. The example of Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus, is illustrative of the major attitudes to Nestorius emerging at an early stage in the development of the relations between various ecclesiastical communities. Theodoret was initially an ardent supporter of Nestorius, yet later on gave in to pressure and anathematized Nestorius after the latter’s deposition.<sup>3</sup> Theodoret’s extant letters allow us to trace the range of attitudes to Nestorius, which he both encountered in others and to a certain degree shared himself.

One such attitude, which ultimately allowed Theodoret to keep his own ecclesiastical rank, was one which condemns Nestorius.<sup>4</sup> A substantially

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<sup>1</sup> I use the commonly known transcription of the Greek toponym, though Prof. V. V. Bolotov remarks that ‘for the fifth century, Κύρρος is only a dead archaic superfineness’, and the town was locally called Κῦρος in the days of Theodoret. See V. V. Bolotov, *Theodoretiana* (Saint-Petersburg: Typ. A. Katansky, 1892), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> A. Grillmeier, ‘Das *Scandalum œcumenicum* des Nestorius in kirchlich-dogmatischer und theologischer Sicht’, *Scholastik*, 36 (1961), pp. 321-356.

<sup>3</sup> *Acta Conciliorum Œcumenicorum (ACO)*, ed. E. Schwartz and J. Straub (Berlin–Leipzig: Trübner – Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1914-1971), vol. II, 1, 3, p. [368] 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



## ATTITUDES AND TRADITIONS

The first such attitude – one that anathematizes Nestorius – is the position of Cyril’s supporters, the “Cyrillians”, as they would later be called in the Syriac East.<sup>9</sup> The stronger their commitment to Cyril, the more peremptorily did they condemn Nestorius. This is evidenced by the acts of the two Councils of Ephesus (convened by Cyril in 431 and by Dioscorus in 449) and the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon, especially, its eighth session, in which Theodoret’s “file” was discussed. Cyril accused Nestorius of destroying the faith in the Incarnation. He demonized Nestorius in such a way that one no longer felt obliged to take the trouble to understand the views of Cyril’s opponents. One felt, on the contrary, that casting doubt on Cyril’s position was tantamount to undermining the Incarnation itself. Rare calls for restraint within Cyril’s camp, such as Isidore of Pelusium’s Epistles 310 and 311, were left unheeded.<sup>10</sup> Cyril’s followers were driven by a fervent piety, and the accusations against Nestorius were then concocted so that they serve to enhance the feeling of repulsion toward the deposed bishop.<sup>11</sup> Opposition to the Council of Chalcedon gave additional impetus to this kind of inventive mythmaking:<sup>12</sup> stories about Nestorius’ alleged “Jewishness”<sup>13</sup> and his

<sup>9</sup> W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1871), Pt. 2, p. 968:1; J. P. Margoliouth, *Supplement to the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 298; J. Lebon, ‘Fragments syriaques de Nestorius dans le *Contra Grammaticum* de Sévère d’Antioche,’ *Le Muséon*, 36 (1923), p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Patrologia Graeca*, t. 78, col. 361-364.

<sup>11</sup> E. Goeller, ‘Eine jakobitische “vita” des Nestorius,’ *Oriens Christianus*, 1:2 (1901), pp. 276-287; P. Martin, ܕܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܢܫܘܬܐ, *Syro-Chaldaicae institutiones seu Introductio practica studium linguae Aramaeae* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1873), pp. 71-78; J. Tixeront, ‘La lettre de Philoxène de Mabboug à ‘Abou-Niphir,’ *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien*, 8 (1903), pp. 623-633; F. Nau, *Nestorius d’après les Sources orientales*, Questions historiques (Paris: Librairie Bloud & Co., 1911).

<sup>12</sup> A. K. Shin, ‘The Images of Nestorius and the Factionalism after Chalcedon,’ *Studia Patristica*, 39 (2006), pp. 125-130.

<sup>13</sup> S. Gero, ‘The Nestorius Legend in the Toledoth Yeshu,’ *Oriens Christianus*, 59 (1975), pp. 108-120; D.J. Lasker and S. Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qiṣṣat Mujādalat al-Uṣqaf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1-2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1996).

abominable views grew over time to fantastic proportions.<sup>14</sup> This anti-Nestorian slant is most clearly represented by the Coptic tradition as well as the other “miaphysite” communities (labelled “monophysite” by their opponents), in proportion to the degree of their orientation toward Alexandria as their ecclesiastical centre. It is also represented by the neo-Chalcedonian tradition, i.e. by the supporters of Chalcedon who reinterpreted its doctrinal definitions in accordance with Cyril’s views.

The second attitude – one which *refuses* to condemn Nestorius – was shared in 431 by the “oriental” (Antiochene) bishops and has a complex afterlife. The Emperor’s demand to reconcile with Cyril, in the wake of the latter’s scandalous attempt to convene a council at Ephesus,<sup>15</sup> caused a split in Byzantine Syria into two parties, one of which was willing, and the other, unwilling to achieve a compromise (the former party was led by John of Antioch; the latter included Euthyrius of Tyana, Alexander of Hierapolis, Meletius of Mopsuestia, and others). The pressure of the authorities continued, and the uncompromising bishops were exiled. Via the schools of Edessa and Nisibis, the focus of the opposition to Byzantine policies toward Nestorius’ supporters shifted to Persia. There, outside the Byzantine Emperor’s reach, reverential attitude to Nestorius (and to the Antiochene tradition more generally) and rejection of Cyril’s actions, characteristic, as shown by Theodoret’s example, of the Antiochene bishops, became even more firmly established. The Bishop of Nisibis Bar Šawmā (d. 495?), who contributed to the transfer of the school of Edessa to Nisibis in Persian territory, played a significant role in this development,<sup>16</sup> as did the exegete and liturgical poet Narsai (d. 502),<sup>17</sup> who praised Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius of Constantinople as teachers of the Church.<sup>18</sup> The Antiochene

<sup>14</sup> G. Colin, ‘La notice sur Nestorius du Maṣḥafa Meṣṭīr de Georges de Saglā’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 50 (1984), pp. 107-125.

<sup>15</sup> V. V. Bolotov, *Lekcii po istorii drevnej Cerkvi* (Saint-Petersburg: M. Merkushev, 1907-1917; reprinted: Moscow, 1994), vol. IV, p. 221.

<sup>16</sup> S. Gero, *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 426, Subs. 63) (Louvain: Peeters, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> J.-B. Chabot, ‘Narsai le docteur et les origines de l’Ecole de Nisibe, d’après la chronique de Barḥadbešabba’, *Journal Asiatique*, 6 (1905), pp. 157-177; S.W. Sunquist, *Narsai and the Persians: A Study in Cultural Contact and Conflict* (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> F. Martin, ‘Homélie de Narsès sur les trois docteurs nestoriens,’ *Journal asiatique* 14:2 (1899): 446-492; 15:1 (1900): 469-525.

tradition, which refused to condemn Nestorius, found its continuation in Syro-Persian Christianity, represented by the Church of the East, with the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as its head. In “Cyrillian” circles, the Church of the East was consequently labelled “Nestorian”.

The third position – one which *suppresses* the name of Nestorius (along with those of his predecessors in the Antiochene tradition) – is typical of those who were motivated by “ecumenical” expediency and strove to achieve social and political reconciliation of the parties by rising “above” doctrinal and ethical issues. It is no accident that Theodoret attributes the demand to suppress the name of Nestorius to the Byzantine Emperor, who was evidently concerned about the state of affairs in the “Oecumene”: Theodoret states explicitly that this demand was coming from the king himself.<sup>19</sup> Characteristically, when a century later, another Byzantine Emperor Justinian, known for his desire to establish Byzantine influence in both East and West, initiated negotiations with representatives of Syro-Persian Christianity, his main requirement presented to them was the excision of the names of “the Greek Doctors” – Diodore, Theodore, and Nestorius – from the liturgical books of the Church of the East. ‘What good is it’, he wrote to the head of the School of Nisibis, Aḇrāhām d-Bēt Rabban, ‘to commemorate these people? Why do you persist in this? We do not see in them anything but misery and deficiency. By [commemorating them], you separate yourself from the whole’.<sup>20</sup> Yet Aḇrāhām pointed out in his reply that these teachers’ names are deeply symbolic, and that rejecting them ‘is in reality a rejection of their teachings. If, however’, he continued, ‘we were to renounce their teachings, we would put ourselves, just like you, outside of any truth’.<sup>21</sup> A similar situation occurred also during the reign of Heraclius: when the Catholicos of the Church of the East Īšō‘ya(h)ḇ II, head of the Persian court’s embassy to Byzantium, decided, as Heraclius’ guest, to *omit* the names of “the Greek Doctors” during liturgy, this caused outrage in ecclesiastical circles in Persia.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> ACO I, I, 7, p. 80:3(5) (cf. CPG 6242).

<sup>20</sup> F. Nau, *La seconde partie de l’Histoire de Barhadbešabba ‘Arbaia et controverse de Théodore de Mopsueste avec les macédoniens (Documents pour servir à l’histoire de l’Église nestorienne)*, Patrologia Orientalis, 9:5, No. 45 (Paris, 1913; repr.: Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), pp. 629-630.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of this situation see my monograph (in Russian) *Nestorij i Cerkov’ Vostoka* (Moscow: Put’, 2005), pp. 47-50.

It must be pointed out that the names of Nestorius and the other “Greek Doctors” came to be suppressed every time some such “ecumenical” expediency was felt. Syriac manuscripts provide an impartial witness to such excisions in cases where their owners came into close contact with the “West”. Thus, in a collection of hymns and supplications (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ) of the year 1676, fol. 24v, the names of Diodore, Theodore, Nestorius, and Narsai were concealed with a leaflet, on which the names of Gregory, Basil, John, and James were written.<sup>23</sup> The Chaldean collection of services for holidays and memorial days (ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ) similarly features the names of Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom in lieu of those of Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Nestorius.<sup>24</sup> In a liturgical collection from the year 1538, coming from the library of the Chaldean patriarch Joseph I (patriarch 1681-1696) and containing the anaphora of Nestorius, the name of Nestorius has been crossed out.<sup>25</sup> The same has been done in the liturgical collection from Alqōš from the year 1684<sup>26</sup> and in another collection from 1785.<sup>27</sup> Such examples can be multiplied at will. It is noteworthy that the arguments of latter-day Western missionaries coincide completely with those of the Emperor Justinian: it is in order to reunite the faithful of the Church of the East with “the whole of Christendom” that one ought, among other things, “to erase the name of Nestorius”.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A. van Lantschoot, *Inventaire des manuscrits syriaques des fonds Vatican (490-631) Barberini oriental et Neofiti* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1965), p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> A. Scher, ‘Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques du Musée Borgia, aujourd’hui à la Bibliothèque Vaticane’, *Journal Asiatique*, 13 (1909), p. 269 (MS 87).

<sup>25</sup> Vat. syr. 83, fol. 59v.

<sup>26</sup> H. Zotenberg, *Manuscrits orientaux: Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandâtes) de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1874), p. 215: MS. 283, 4<sup>o</sup> (fol. 57).

<sup>27</sup> E. Sachau, *Verzeichniss der Syrichen Handschriften*, Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin, 23:1-2 (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1899), I, p. 151: MS. 40 (Sachau 64), fol. 31a.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Why, it may be asked, is this ancient Church, which has kept the light of Christianity alive amidst Mohammedan darkness, in outward separation from the whole of Christendom? The reason is its refusal to accept the decrees of the Council of Ephesus: the Assyrian Christians refuse to call the Blessed Virgin Theotokos (her who gave birth to God), and they commemorate Nestorius among the saints.... Mr. Badger believes that they might be induced, by proper explanations, to accept the statements made at Ephesus, and to erase the name of Nestorius’ – A. J. D. D’Orsey, *Portuguese Discoveries, Dependencies and Missions in Asia and Africa* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1893), p. 389.

Interestingly, this kind of “de-sainting” of Nestorius was performed, possibly unwittingly, even by some representatives of the scholarly community. Thus, F. Nau found it acceptable to translate ܘܢܝܫܘܨ ܢܥܘܨܐ ܕܢܥܘܨܐ ܐܦܘܠܘܨ as “le défunt Nestorius” (the “late” Nestorius instead of “among the saints”)<sup>29</sup> and ܘܢܝܫܘܨ ܕܡܪ ܢܥܘܨܐ ܕܢܥܘܨܐ as simply “L’histoire de Mar Nestorius” instead of “history of *Saint* Mār Nestorius.”<sup>30</sup> A. Scher rendered ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܡܪ ܢܥܘܨܐ ܕܡܪ ܬܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܡܪ ܢܥܘܨܐ, ܕܡܪ ܢܥܘܨܐ simply as “Mar Diodore, Mar Théodore, Mar Nestorius,” leaving the words “who aspired to the Truth” untranslated.<sup>31</sup>

Such intentional or subconscious attempts to excise Nestorius from East-Syriac Christian heritage cannot fail to attract a researcher’s attention, especially in an era when this heritage comes under increased scrutiny and when interfaith dialogue may once again lead to a wide consensus based on “ecumenical” expediency.<sup>32</sup> In order to provide a critical analysis of the nature of veneration accorded to Nestorius in the East-Syriac tradition, it is necessary to examine, first, to what degree reverential attitude to Nestorius as a saint and teacher of faith is present in the well-known authors and authoritative texts of the Church of the East, and second, whether Nestorius’ written legacy was known in that tradition.

### SAINTHOOD, DOCTRINE, INFLUENCE

As noted above, already Narsai, who had taught in the school of Edessa and later became head of the school of Nisibis, testifies to the veneration accorded to Nestorius and his predecessors in the Antiochene exegetical and theological tradition. ‘The fervent Nestorius served the people of Byzantium’, wrote Narsai in his *Discourse*, ‘he built wisely and fortified the word of the

<sup>29</sup> *Patrologia Orientalis*, 9:5 (1913), p. 510.

<sup>30</sup> *Patrologia Orientalis*, 13:2 (1917), p. 275.

<sup>31</sup> *Patrologia Orientalis*, 7:1 (1909), p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> A. V. Muraviev is correct in pointing out that some modern scholars exhibit the tendency to ‘rehabilitate the theological “mainstream” of the Church of the East by detaching it from Nestorius himself; see A. V. Muraviev, “Solnce Huzistana” ili Neponjatnyj svjatoj’, in *Mar Ishak s gory Matut (Prepodobnyj Isaak Sirin). Vosplamnenije uma v duhovnoj pustyne* (Smaragdus Philocalias) (Athos–Moscow–Saint-Petersburg: Novaja Fivaida, SPbGU, 2008), p. 40. Such “rehabilitation” is of course meant in relation to those confessions which condemn Nestorius; a critical scholar of course needs no rehabilitations.



















Theodore bar Kōnī's eighth-century treatise *Liber Scholiorum* has a compilatory character.<sup>58</sup> In this work, he devotes a special chapter to the "Cyrillian heresy" (ܕܩܝܪܝܠܝܐܢܐ ܫܝܘܝܐ).<sup>59</sup> He describes "Cyril's battle against Saint Nestorius" (ܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܘܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ), saying that as a result of this assault by the bishop of Alexandria, "the whole Greece (ܩܪܝܢܘܬܐ) became infected" with evil teachings, while the imperial court and Pope Celestine were seduced by Cyril's gifts. Another contemporary author, Šāhdōst, Bishop of Tīrhān (*d-Tarīhān*),<sup>60</sup> calls Nestorius "a saint" and "a victorious confessor, clothed in Christ, who was the patriarch of the capital city..." (ܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܘܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܘܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܘܫܘܬܐ <...> :ܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܘܫܘܬܐ ܕܩܝܪܝܠܘܫ ܕܥܝܢܘܫܘܬܐ). As L. Abramowski points out, "[Šāhdōst] has read Nestorius, making some unknown lines available, even the *Liber Heraclidis*."<sup>61</sup> An example is furnished by a passage from Šāhdōst's writings<sup>62</sup> where he follows Nestorius' thought based on the *Book of Heraclides*<sup>63</sup> – an important testimony to the use of Nestorius' apology in the eighth century.

Since we have mentioned polemics, including "internal" polemics occurring within the East-Syriac tradition, we must say that Nestorius' influence is often traceable in both polemicizing parties. A nice illustration of this situation is provided by the following observation of P. Bedjan, the editor of numerous Syriac texts, including Nestorius' *Book of Heraclides* and the works of Martyrius-Šāhdōnā, an opponent of Bāḫai the Great and a supporter of Chalcedonian Christology.<sup>64</sup>

'We publish here for the first time a very valuable treatise of the famous Martyrius or Sahdona on the Orthodox faith. In it, the author admirably

<sup>58</sup> Scher, 'Étude supplémentaire', p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> A. Scher, *Theodorus bar Kōnī, Liber scholiorum*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scr. Syr., Ser. 2, T. 66 (Paris: Typ. Reipub. – Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1912), Pt. 2, pp. 337-340 (Syr.); R. Hespel and R. Draguet, *Théodore bar Koni, Livre des scolies, II: Mimrè VI-XI*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scr. Syr., 188 (Louvain: Peeters, 1982), pp. 251-254 (Fr.).

<sup>60</sup> Abramowski-Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection*, II, pp. XXVI-XXXII.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. XXVII.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Nau and Brière, *Nestorius: Le livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, pp. 81-83.

<sup>64</sup> A. de Halleux, 'La christologie de Martyrios-Sahdona dans l'évolution du nestorianisme', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 23 (1957), pp. 5-32.





an opponent of Timothy and that after the latter's death he succeeded him as catholicos. It is remarkable, however, that both Timothy and ʿĪṣō' bar Nūn show veneration to Nestorius in their writings.<sup>68</sup> Timothy's personality has in recent years attracted the attention of scholars, in connection with the discovery and publication of lost texts of Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian). Timothy is sometimes pictured as a representative of the rigid "Babaian orthodoxy", in contrast to Isaac, who is alleged to be a supporter of Chalcedon. This view, however, fails to take into account the following remarks of A. Mingana, published as early as 1934:

'In 1909, the late Paul Bedjan published under the name of Isaac of Nineveh [*Mar Isaacus Ninivita de Perfectione Religiosa*] a section of the first part of the work which I am editing and translating in the following pages. In comparing the two texts, it is interesting to observe how the Jacobite copyists have modified the sentences in which a Nestorian author is clearly mentioned, or a Nestorian doctrine is expressly defined, or the writings of a Nestorian author are plainly quoted. Thus, on page 79, our author [i.e. Isaac] speaks of Mar Babai the Great, and of the work which he wrote for the novices. Seeing that Mar Babai was a Nestorian, the Jacobite copyist substituted for his name that of the Great Macarius, the Egyptian, but left in his text the statement concerning the "books for the novices," not realising that Macarius never wrote such a book [see p. 604 of Bedjan's edition]. [...] On page 93, our author writes: "and if possible, do not read anything else on a Sunday, except the works written by the blessed Theodore, the Interpreter, and the rest of the orthodox Doctors, on the honour and greatness of the body and blood of Christ." Here the Jacobite copyist simply changed "Theodore" into "Cyril," overlooking the fact that the epithet "Interpreter" which follows refers exclusively to Theodore, and that Cyril never wrote a work on the subject under consideration [Ibid., p. 624].'<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Timothy I, Letter 35 "to the beloved in the Lord, the faithful Mār Naṣr" – see O. Braun, *Timothei Patriarchae I Epistulae*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scr. Syr. LXVII, Ser. 2 (Paris: J. Gabalda – Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1914), p. 233; cf. also his letter to the monks of the Monastery of Mār Mārōn: *Studi e Testi*, 187 (1956): 42-44 (Syr.), 121-125 (Lat.); ʿĪṣō' bar Nūn, Letter to Macarius the "deacon and anchorite" of Hīrtā, Q. 62 (Mingana Syr. 586, fol. 431b-441b); cited from W.C. van Unnik, *Nestorian Questions on the Administration of the Eucharist, by Isho'yabh IV* (Haarlem: J. Enschede en zonen, [1937]), p. 271.

<sup>69</sup> A. Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics*, Woodbrooke Studies, 7 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1934), pp. 74-75.

It is obvious that given this “tampered” state of Isaac of Nineveh’s writings, as a result of their popularity in the West-Syriac environment, any judgments about his views should be made with great caution, and only after a careful textual study.

In addition to Timothy, yet another East-Syriac author of the ninth century deserves mention: the well-known exegete Īšō‘dād, Bishop of Merv. In his Biblical commentaries, he does not only mention the “blessed Nestorius”, but also, significantly for our purposes, refers to his works.<sup>70</sup>

An interesting reference to Nestorius in connection with the history of Biblical exegesis is furnished by Job of Qaṭar. He provides a lengthy listing of authors, known to him as interpreters of Scripture, mentioning in the first place (ܩܬܪܐ) Diodore, Theodore, and Nestorius:<sup>71</sup>

ܩܬܪܐ ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ ܕܝܘܕܘܪܐ  
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‘(Porro scribimus nomina doctorum patrum orthodoxum, e quorum sensu confirmatus est hic liber et quorum interpretationibus declaratus est e ceteris libris sacris.) Primus Diodorus et Theodorus et Nestorius, Mar Ephrem, Johannes Chrysostomus, Īšōdād, Šēlībā qui est Şaḥr Boḥt, Michael explorator, et

<sup>70</sup> M. D. Gibson, *The Commentaries of Išo‘dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.), in Syriac and English*, vol. IV, *Horae Semiticae*, XI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), pp. XV, 20.  
<sup>71</sup> B. Vandenhoff, *Exegesis Psalmorum, imprimis Messianicorum, apud Syros Nestorianos e codice usque adhuc inedito illustrate* (Rheine: J. Altmepfen, 1899), p. 23 & 18-19 (Syr.).







Despite anti-Byzantine tendencies, however, which were quite widespread among Syriac-speaking Christians, Nestorius' affiliation with the Greek-speaking world and with the Church of Byzantium did not at all mean that he was "alien" to the tradition of the Church of the East. This is clear from the fact that from the time of Narsai up to the present day the Church of the East has always venerated "the *Greek Doctors*" (ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ).<sup>82</sup> An additional piece of evidence to the same effect can be furnished by a very popular East-Syriac hymn by Ṣlibā of Manṣūriya<sup>83</sup> (sixteenth century).<sup>84</sup> This hymn is composed for the day of commemoration of "the Greek Doctors," yet its main hero is "our venerable father, the head of all the exalted, who made his soul into a temple of the Lord, the Greek Mār Nestorius (ܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ)."<sup>85</sup> Ṣlibā's hymn is a poetic story about the life of Nestorius, his successorship to Theodore of Mopsuestia, his conflict with Cyril of Alexandria, and his subsequent suffering as a confessor. The hymn concludes with the following solemn praise to Nestorius:<sup>86</sup>

ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ  
 ❖ ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ  
 ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ  
 ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ  
 ❖ ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ  
 ❖ ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ

*Thought*, ed. J. F. Coakley and K. Parry, p. 35; K. Pinggéra, "Nestorius in der "nestorianischen" Kirche: Streiflichter zum Selbstverständnis der Apostolischen Kirche des Ostens", in *Prüft Alles, und das Gute behaltet! Zum Wechselspiel von Kirchen, Religionen und säkularer Welt: Festschrift für Hans-Martin Barth zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. F. Schönemann and Th. Maaßen (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag O. Lembeck, 2004), pp. 212-213.

<sup>82</sup> The "Greek Doctors" are commemorated on the Friday after the fourth Sunday following the feast of the Theophany of Our Lord (ܡܠܝܟܐ ܕܗܘܪܝܢܐ). On this day, a liturgy with the Anaphora of Nestorius is celebrated. See ܘܢܝܘܨܬܐܝܢ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / *Hudrā*, 1960, vol. 1, pp. 757-776.

<sup>83</sup> Qaššā Ṣlibā bar Qaššā David b. Qaššā Meqbel from Manṣūriya of Gazarta became famous for his hymns on church feasts and memorial days, preserved in numerous manuscripts. The hymn cited here usually appears as an appendix to the collection of hymns "Wardā," also preserved in many manuscript copies.

<sup>84</sup> Scher, 'Étude supplémentaire', p. 30; A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, pp. 331-332.

<sup>85</sup> *Patrologia Orientalis*, 13:2, No. 63, p. [180]/290.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. [205]/315.





formed while he was still an active participant of the ideological and church-political clashes in Byzantium in the mid-fifth century, had a continuation in the traditional attitudes to his name. Three such attitudes, traceable throughout centuries, can be distinguished: condemnation, suppression, and veneration.

The first attitude (condemnation) has its origin in the polemical interpretation of Nestorius' statements by Cyril of Alexandria. In the course of time, it led to a totally fantastic (and, needless to say, repulsive) image of Nestorius, as exemplified by stories about his alleged "Jewishness,"<sup>88</sup> his attitude to women,<sup>89</sup> and his ignominious death.<sup>90</sup>

The last of the three positions (veneration) has its origin in the attitude to Nestorius among the Antiochene clergy who knew him personally, in their appraisal of the Council of Ephesus, and in doctrinal documents, obtained at first hand, which included, *inter alia*, Nestorius' apologetic treatise *The Book of Heraclides*. This position develops into ecclesiastical veneration of Nestorius in the East-Syriac tradition.

Finally, the attitude of suppression was motivated by a desire to achieve an "ecumenical" reconciliation, for the sake of which one was encouraged to "forgo" and "sacrifice" Nestorius. This position vis-à-vis the East-Syriac tradition was, and remained, characteristic of the "West" in the broad sense of the term – i.e. the Christian world lying to the West of the Eastern frontiers of the Byzantine Empire. In recent times it manifested itself in the "Western" (again, in the broad sense) missionary activity in Mesopotamia and India – a milder form of "ecumenical" interaction. Even so, Nestorius' name was often suppressed only nominally, while his legacy remained a part of the heritage of the suppressors.

The foregoing analysis of written sources on the attitudes to Nestorius in the Church of the East shows that he was traditionally venerated as a saint and teacher of faith. As already indicated, this attitude was grounded in the

<sup>88</sup> Cyril himself compared the views of Nestorius to "the blasphemies of ancient Jews," calling Nestorius "an imitator of their madness and impiety." See *ACO* I, I, 2, p. 93. This accusation became a common place among miaphysite authors and gave rise to bizarre stories. See the studies of Gero and Lasker-Stroumsa mentioned above.

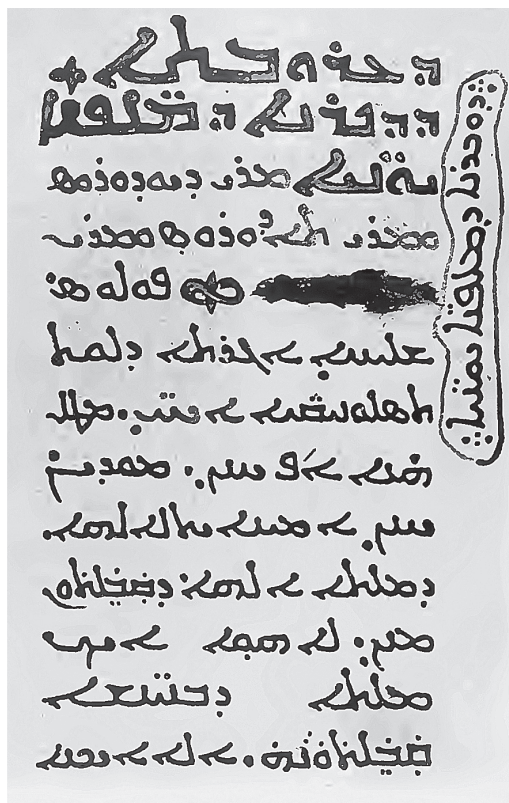
<sup>89</sup> See e.g. the text of George of Saglā referenced in n. 14 above.

<sup>90</sup> Nau, *Nestorius d'après les sources orientales*, pp. 52-53.

actual knowledge of his views. Nestorius' influence was considerable: his apology, which is preserved in Syriac and whose impact is attested for the sixth to eighth centuries at the very least, was employed by Bābai the Great in his treatise *Liber de Unione* – the most influential doctrinal composition in the history of the Church of the East. It is striking that Nestorius' influence is evident in the heritage of those representatives of the East-Syriac tradition who otherwise held opposing positions on doctrinal issues.

One can distinguish the following stages in the development of Nestorius' legacy in the Church of the East. (1) In the fifth century, an outrage of Antiochene clergy in the frontier schools of Edessa and Nisibis at the actions of the Alexandrian ecclesiastical circles and the imperial administration led to a widespread opposition to the Byzantine policy vis-à-vis Nestorius and his supporters. (2) In the sixth century, the position of the School of Nisibis (the School of Edessa had been in the meantime closed by Emperor Zeno in 489) was adopted by the monastic centers of the Syriac East. Nestorius' teachings were recognized as conforming to the ancient tradition, while those of Cyril of Alexandria, recognized in the Byzantine Empire, were rejected. (3) At the beginning of the seventh century, as part of the controversy against the "theopaschites," of both Justinian and miaphysite persuasions, the veneration of Nestorius was evident in the conciliar decrees, in the formulation of which the monastic centers of the Church of the East played a decisive role. (4) In the eighth century, the internal struggle within the Church of the East between Timothy I and ʾĪšōʿ bar Nūn did not lead to a reconsideration of Nestorius' role, given that both Catholicoi show evidence of his veneration. (5) The established positions remained unchanged until the arrival of Western missionaries who demanded a renunciation of Nestorius and excision of his name from books. (6) The modern period is characterized by increased contacts between the "East" and the "West", leading to repeated attempts to suppress Nestorius' name and to present Nestorius as a marginal figure in the East-Syriac tradition.

Written heritage of the Syriac East requires a serious, first and foremost textual and philological study. Ideological clashes often resulted in tampering with texts, which obstructs the scholarly reconstruction of historical and literary connections. This study of Nestorius' legacy in the East-Syriac tradition and of perceptions of Nestorius in West-Syriac circles has detected numerous problematic cases of precisely this kind.



A fragment of the Epistle (1 Thess. 2:13), read on the day of the commemoration of “the Greek Doctors” (Vat. syr. 22; year 1301). In the list of names “Mār Diodore, Mār Theodore, Mār [Nestorius]” the name of Nestorius has been effaced. The image is reproduced from: E. Tisserant, *Specimina codicum orientalium*, Bonnæ: A. Marcus et E. Weber, 1914, where it is given the title “Epistularium pro Nestorianis” (Table 34a; cf. also p. XXVII).

### Abstract

This article offers a historical analysis of different attitudes toward Nestorius of Constantinople which became “traditional” and which formed opposing tendencies in various branches of Christianity. The main focus of the article is on the origins of veneration of Nestorius in the East-Syriac tradition as well as on the frequent attempts of those who condemn Nestorius to erase his name from the books of the Church of the East.