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Patrons, Donors and Workshops: The Making of a Syriac Lectionary

Abstract: Illuminated gospel lectionaries stand out among the artistic productions of Syriac Christians during the Abbasid Period. The making of these luxurious books, however, remains partially shrouded in mystery. A series of clues shed light on the identity of patrons and craftsmen, the functioning of artistic command, the geographical location of workshops, and the materials employed by the scribes and painters. Based on the evidence of colophons, owners' notes, literary sources and material studies, this article aims to provide a synthesis of current knowledge about Syriac workshops and their practices.

1 Introduction: Spreading the lectionary

The many studies that have focused on Syriac illuminated manuscripts attest to the importance of transmitting sacred texts for the Christian communities of northern Mesopotamia. Unfortunately, literary sources rarely mention the technical conditions under which the books were written and adorned. The historian wishing to shed light on this essential aspect of Syriac culture must therefore rely on the testimony of the manuscripts themselves. Material evidence is indeed as precious as it is discreet. Yet, the scattered notes written by scribes and owners provide a wealth of clues as to the conditions in which manuscripts were commissioned and produced. Most of the Syriac copyists mentioned carefully the places and conditions in which they worked and the date of completion of their work; on the other hand, more than one book bears the marks of its successive owners. In doing so, both scribes and patrons provided precious clues to their social and religious status; what's more, they left enough traces to reconstruct, albeit partially, the genesis of luxurious manuscripts.

Such evidence coincides with a twofold revolution that occurred within the Syriac communities during the Abbasid era. From the early eleventh to the late thirteenth century, the unprecedented rise of lavishly illustrated manuscripts was indeed paralleled by the diffusion of a new type of liturgical book: the gospel lectionary. Usually referred to as 'gospel of the separate readings' (*ʾewangeliyōn d-purrāš qeryānē*), this book consisted of a collection of evangelical pericopes intended for vespers, matins, and the Eucharist of Sundays and feast days, following

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the ecclesiastical calendar.[1] By the end of the tenth century, the gospel lectionary had almost entirely replaced the Four Gospel book (*ṭeṭra'ewangeliyōn*) formerly used in the liturgy.[2] It is worth noting that this phenomenon affected simultaneously the two main Syriac churches that shared the vast highlands of northern Mesopotamia, i.e. the Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church.[3]

Admittedly, the twenty-six illustrated Syriac lectionaries preserved today seem few in number compared with the dozens of undecorated specimens that were written during the Abbasid era.[4] When adorned with miniatures, or copied with gold and silver inks, the high material value of these books turned them into jealously guarded treasures, sometimes offered to eminent prelates or prestigious churches. But the sacred status of the lectionary did not depend entirely on its eventual ornamentation. As part of a symbolic microcosm that condensed the universe to the dimensions of the church, the book that contains the Word of God was ceremoniously displayed on a lectern before the doors of the sanctuary. By recalling the Lord on the Cross, the lectionary embodied the silent presence of the Logos in the midst of the faithful, and was thus solemnly incensed, venerated and proclaimed.[5]

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1 The oldest Syriac readings system is attested in Mārūtā of Maypherqaṭ's recension of the *Apostles' Doctrine*, canons 2–4, 6–7, 9, and also in the manuscript London, BL, Add. 14528, quoted by Burkitt 1923, 303–304; see also Rouwhorst 2017, 208–210. As underlined by Brock 2006, 270 and Rouwhorst 2017, 205–208, the chronological reading of the gospels had been replaced early by the proclamation of sequences of variable length, closely linked with the liturgical calendar that developed from this time. Concerning the Old Testament readings in the Syriac tradition, see also Baumstark 1921; Jenner 1993.

2 Brock 2006, 270; Rouwhorst 2017, 214. Similar evolutions have been observed in Mesopotamia, the Caucasus and Byzantium. On the genesis of Armenian and Georgian gospel lectionaries, see Renoux 2001; Janeras 2005, 73–79; on Byzantine lectionaries, Burns 1982; on the liturgy of Jerusalem and Constantinople, Engberg 1987; Janeras 2005, 82. According to Rouwhorst 2017, 212–216, the Syrian Orthodox Church maintained the ancient practice of indicating the rubrics in the margins of Four Gospel books at least until the twelfth century.

3 From the sixth century onwards, East and West Syriac manuscripts attest to the development of two independent and increasingly divergent liturgical traditions. It seems, however, that reading practices evolved more freely in the West Syriac tradition: medieval lectionaries attest to the development of several local usages each with its own variants. On the contrary, the East Syriac calendar had been definitively standardised by the seventh century by the catholicos Īšō'yahb III (649–659).

4 An overview of the main collections gives an idea of this ample corpus, which includes manuscripts belonging to the West Syriac, East Syriac and Melkite traditions. See Appendix.

5 Concerning the role of the book in East and West Syriac liturgies, and its place within a cosmological conception of the church that spread throughout Mesopotamia from the seventh century onwards, see Loosley 2012, 88, 98–102.

Similar to any other liturgical book, making a lectionary involved various craftsmen charged with specific tasks that required long and patient training. Scribes, painters and binders, thus, formed a solid team which collaborated for weeks or even months, demanding an accurate and thorough organisation. A host of technical steps succeeded each other from the acquisition of the materials – parchment, inks and pigments – to the delivery of the book: the ruling of the pages, copying of the text, illumination, numbering of the quires and binding. Yet only eight of the twenty-six illuminated Syriac lectionaries preserved from the eleventh to the thirteenth century still contain a colophon or owners' notes that enable us to identify their authors, patrons or donors.[6] The origin, name and status of the craftsmen, just as their investment at each stage of the work, remain therefore difficult to determine. It is no easier to identify the patrons who commissioned the manuscripts or the places for which they were intended.

The scarcity of written sources encourages us to consider also some technical, iconographic and stylistic aspects of book illumination. Fortunately, the painted miniatures, frontispieces and quire marks provide additional clues about their authors, that sometimes confirm the colophons' evidence. Added to this is the occasional account of medieval chroniclers, who sometimes referred to renowned scribes or precious manuscripts. Taken as a whole, this diverse material enables a partial reconstruction of the issues revolving around the commission of liturgical books and the functioning of workshops.

2 The craftsmen: Monks, clerics or laymen?

2.1 The role of monasteries

Firstly, it is necessary to reconsider the widespread view of monastic scriptoria, shaped by the model of Western European monasteries. For almost a century, it was thought that monks were the main, if not the only actors in the production of liturgical books, be they copyists or painters.[7] Such an assertion can be explained by the prominent role played by the monasteries in the preservation and transmission of Syriac literature – as shown by the intense translation and editing activity that occurred in West Syriac circles from the seventh century onwards.[8]

6 Leroy 1964, 225–233, 261–332, 350–396; Pacha Miran 2021b, vol. 2, 15–423.

7 Leroy 1964, 432.

8 Debié 2010, 146–147; Farina 2018.

Indeed, some scribes and painters undeniably belonged to monastic communities. This fact is attested by two lectionaries from the mid-eleventh century: London, BL, Or. 3372, and Berlin, SB, Sachau 304 (Figs 1–2).[9] According to their colophons, they were both written by a hierodeacon (*dayroyō wa-mšammšonō*) named ʿAmmanūʾēl, from the monastery of Qarṭmin, in the region of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn. A hieromonk (*dayroyō w-qaššīšō*) called Peṭrōs, member of the same community, was among the craftsmen who helped ʿAmmanūʾēl with the making of BL Or. 3372:[10]

ܥܡܡܢܘܐܝܠ ܚܛܝܐ ܡܢܚܐ ܒܫܡ ܟܬܒ ܦܪܫܓܢ̈ܐ ܕܐܘܢ̈ܓܠܝܘܢ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܥܠ ܕܟܪ ܢܚ ܡܢ ܕܢܩܪܐ ܠܗ ܘܠܦܛܪܘܣ ܩܫܝܫܐ ܘܡܢܚܐ ܘܠܡܪ ܢܝܗܐ ܩܫܝܫܐ ܐܚܘܗܝ ܕܥܡܗ ܥܒܕܘ ܒܙܘܪ̈ܐ ܘܒܟܪܟܐ ܕܗܢܐ ܣܦܪܐ ܘܒܫܪܝܪܗ. (fol. 135ᵛ)

ʿAmmanūʾēl, a sinner, monk [only] by name, wrote this book of the separated readings of the holy Gospel. May anyone who finds it pray for him, and for Peṭrōs, monk and priest, and Mor Niḥē the secular priest, his brothers, who worked with him in the illustration of this book and its binding.[11]

The lectionary BnF syriaque 356, written in the region of Melitene in the early thirteenth century, also mentions several members of the monastic community for which it was intended.[12] At the beginning of the volume, the interlace frame that surrounds a prophylactic cross (fol. 1ᵛ) includes a severely damaged inscription. The names it contains, no longer legible, frequently follow the monastic title *rabban* ('our master'). The frontispiece of the first reading (fol. 2ᵛ), better preserved, also attests to the involvement of a monastic team (Fig. 3):

9 On BL Or. 3372, see Lee 1831, 22, no. 113; Margoliouth 1899, 16; Buchthal and Kurz 1942, 17, no. 43; Leroy 1964, 261–267, plate 65–66; Hunt 1985, 130; Snelders 2010, 393; Smine 2017. On SB Sachau 304, see Sachau 1899, vol. 1, 27–32; Köhnert 1932; Fiey 1963; Leroy 1964, 367–371, plate 125, 1–4 and 126, 1–4; Hunt 1985, 130; Palmer 1986; Palmer 1989; Balicka-Witakowska 1999; Raby and Brock 2014–2016; Pacha Miran forthcoming a.

10 An interesting fact is that the Berlin manuscript belongs to the East Syriac tradition, while ʿAmmanūʾēl and his brothers, as nephews of the Syrian Orthodox bishop of Qarṭmin, belonged to the West Syriac Church. This unparalleled example suggests that members of both Syriac Churches could have been involved in the making of liturgical books intended for the rival community.

11 Translation adapted from Raby and Brock 2014–2016. Unless otherwise stated, all transcriptions and translations are the author's; most of them have been revised after Leroy 1964.

12 On this manuscript, see Nau 1911, 310; Leroy 1944; Leroy 1964, 409–411, plate 5, 2; 16, 3; 57, 2; Briquel Chatonnet 1997, 21–23.

ܐܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ ܡܪܚܡ ܥܠ ܟܠ ܡܢ ܕܥܒܕ ܠܡ ܫܦܪ ܐ ܒܡܠܐ ܐܘ ܒܥܒܕܐ ܡܢ ܥܠ ܟܠ ܚܕ ܐܘ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܐܚܝܢ ܕܒܝܬ ܡܢ ܐܒܐ ܡܪܢ ܕܝܢܝܐܝܠ ܐܒܐ [...] ܘܥܠ ܪܒܢ ܨܥܝܕ ܘܥܠ ܪܒܢ ܕܘܝܕ ܘܥܠ ܪܒܢ ܒܪܨܘܡ ܒܪ ܐܬܘܢ ܒܪ ܐܬܘܢ ܐܝܬ ܠܟ ܝܫܘ ܐܠܗܐ ܒܛܝܒܘܬܟ ܐܬܪ ܚܛܝܐ ܝܫܘ ܕܟܬܒ ܘܙܟܪ ܠܗܠܝܢ ܟܠ ܡܠܝ ܐܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ. (fol. 2ᵛ)

Jesus God, sanctify by your goodness the sinner Īšōʿ who wrote and drew these things. And forgive, by your mercy, Rabban Barṣawmō and Rabban Dawīd and Rabban Ṣaʿīd and also the blessed Rabban Dānīʾēl [...], head of our monastery, and everyone who helped by word or in action. Amen, Amen.

Fig. 1: Ornament and colophon mentioning the scribe ʿAmmanūʾēl. East Syriac lectionary, Qarṭmin, Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, mid eleventh century. SB Sachau 304, fol. 195ʳ. © SB, Fotostelle.

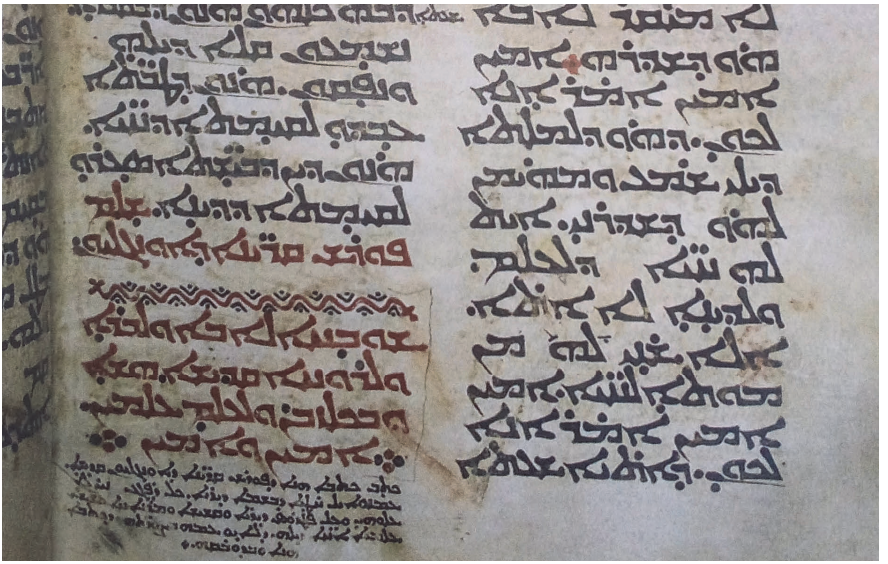

Fig. 2: Ornament and colophon mentioning the scribe ʿAmmanūʾēl and his brothers Peṭrōs and Nīḥē. West Syriac lectionary, Qarṭmin, Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, eleventh century. BL Or. 3372, fol. 135^{v}. After Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 48, plate 15.

Fig. 3: Interlace frontispiece with the signature of the scribe Īšōʿ. Fragment of a West Syriac lectionary, Melitene or Edessa, early thirteenth century. BnF syriaque 356, fol. 2^{v}. © gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

The lectionary Midyat, MG, 5 (1226–1227 CE) was also signed by a hieromonk called Sohdō, who worked for the cathedral church of Mor Sobō in Ḥaḥ (Anıtlı).[13] His effort was apparently supported by the village's inhabitants, both clerics and laymen, who offered him gifts and help:

> ܐܬܟܬܒ ܗܢܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܠܚܐܚ ܩܣܛܪܐ ܩܪܝܬܐ ܡܒܪܟܬܐ ܠܥܕܬܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܗ̇ܝ ܪܒܬܐ ܕܡܪܝ ܣܒܐ ܣܗܕܐ. ܒܪܝܟܐ
> ܡܢ ܝܨܝܦܘܬܐ ܘܢܦܩܬ̈ܐ ܕܥܡܠ ܠܒܝܢܐ ܘܛܘܪܦܐ ܕܩܫܝ̈ܫܐ ܘܡܫܡ̈ܫܢܐ ܘܡܗܝ̈ܡܢܐ ܕܒܗ̇ ܒܩܪܝܬܐ. [...]
> ܟܬܒܗ ܐܢܫ ܚܛܝܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܘ̈ܡܐ ܘܟܐܒ̈ܬܐ ܣܗܕܐ ܕܘܝܐ ܘܚܠܫܐ ܡܣܝܒܐ ܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܣܢ̈ܝܬܐ. ܕܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܒܫܡܐ ܕܝܪܝܐ
> ܘܒܟܘܢܝܐ [...] ܩܫ ܘܒܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܘܒܡܘܫܚܬ̈ܐ ܪܚܝܩ ܡܢ ܫܡܗ̈ܝܗܘܢ، ܐܝܟ ܪܫܝܡ. (fol. 322r)

> This book has been written for the blessed village of Ḥāḥ Qasṭrō, for the great church of the blessed martyr Mor Sobō, thanks to the diligence and to the expenses and exhaustion assumed by the priests, deacons and faithful of this village. [...] [The one who] wrote is a sinful man full of faults and pains, the unfortunate and weak Sohdō, detestable in all things[14], monk [only] by name and priest [only] by his title, but far away from these titles through his acts and gestures.

Two years later, the lectionary Mardin, CFM, 38 (1229–1230 CE) was written in the same place by another hieromonk, whose name is unfortunately no longer legible.[15] He, nevertheless, asked for prayers for his brethren, the monks:

> ܟܬܒܗ ܕܝܢ. ܐ[ܢܫ] [...] ܡܠܐ ܡܘ̈ܡܐ ܘܟܐܒ̈ܬܐ ܘ[...] ܕܘ̈ܝܐ ܘܢܒܠܐ ܘܡܣܝܒܐ ܒܟܠܗܝܢ ܣܢ̈ܝܬܐ. ܘܐܝܬܘܗܝ، ܒܫܡܐ ܕܝܪܝܐ.
> ܘܒܟܘܢܝܐ ܩܫܝܫܐ. ܘܒܥܒ̈ܕܐ ܘܒܡܘܫܚܬ̈ܐ ܪܚܝܩ ܡܢ ܫܡܗ̈ܝܗܘܢ، ܐܝܟ ܪܫܝܡ. ܐܠܐ ܡܦܝܣ ܐܢܐ ܘܒܥܐ ܐܢܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܐܢܫ
> ܦܘܫܩܐ ܕܒܣܘܪܛܐ ܗܠܝܢ ܦܓܥ ܐܘ ܩܪܐ ܒ[...] ܕܨܠܘܬܐ ܚܘܒܢܝܬܐ ܒܦܘܪܫܘܬܐ ܢܨܠܐ ܥܠܝ.[...] ܘܥܠ ܐܚܐ ܕܝܠܝ
> ܪܒܢ ܐܝܣܚܩ ܕܝܪܝܐ [...] ܘܦܘܪܫܢܐ ܛܒ [...]ܘܡܬܛܦܪܫ ܘܡܥܕܪ ܠܝ ܒܟܠܡܕܡ. ܘܬܘܒ ܨܠܘ ܥܠ ܕܪ̈ܐ ܕܝܪ̈ܝܐ ܝܩܝܪ̈ܐ [...]
> ܘܪܒܢ ܡܘܫܐ ܐܟܘܬܗ ܘܟܠ ܕܚܘܣܝܐ ܢܨܠܐ ܥܠܝ [...]. (fol. 295v)

> [The one who] wrote, a [man] [...] full of impurity and pain [...], vile and despicable, priest hateful in that, is a monk [only] by name and priest [only] by his title, but through his acts and gestures far away from his names. But I beg and ask every wise man who finds or reads these lines, by the [...] of a loving and wise prayer, to pray for me [...] and for [...] my brother, Rabban Isḥoq, a [...] and very wise monk [who] [...] and spends himself and helps me in everything. And pray again for the generations of venerable monks [...] and Rabban Mūšē also, and may the Son of God forgive each one who, in his love, prays for me.

Finally, the lectionary Vatican City, BAV, Vat. sir. 559 (1260 CE) was written by a man apparently linked to the monastery of Mor Mattay, north-east of Mosul:[16]

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[13] On this manuscript, see Socin 1881, 257; Armalet 1913, 672; Leroy 1955, 414–416; Leroy 1964, 321–332, plate 102–110; Harb 1980; Anschütz 1982, 329; Hunt 2001; Zibawi 2009, 149; Bernabò 2017, 262–266, 325–338; Braida and Pavan 2017, 214; Pavan 2017, 51–52.

[14] Or 'guilty of all hateful things'.

[15] On this manuscript, see Bernabò 2017, 262–266; Braida and Pavan 2017, 206; Pavan 2017, 53–67; Pacha Miran 2021a, 157, fig. 1.

ܥܠ ܕܟܬܒ ܦܪܫ̈ܓ̈ܢ̈ܐ ܕܐܝܢ̈ܓ̈ܠ̈ܝܘܢ ܩ̈ܕ̈ܝܫ̈ܐ ܕܐܪ̈ܒ̈ܥ ܣ̈ܗ̈ܕ̈ܐ ܕܫ̈ܢ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܟ̈ܠ̈ܗ̈ ܫ̈ܠ̈ܡ̈ܐ ܗ̈ܘ ܕܐ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܠ̈ܣ̈ܘ̈ܦ̈ܗ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܒ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܒ̈ܪ̈ܫ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ܚ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܢ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܦ̈ ܘ̈ܫ̈ܒ̈ܥ̈ ܡ̈ܐ̈ܐ ܘ̈ܫ̈ܒ̈ܥ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ ܠ̈ܝ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܒ̈ܝ̈ܕ̈ ܡ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܡ̈ܘ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈ ܙ̈ܥ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܢ̈ ܡ̈ܬ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܕ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܨ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܒ̈ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܝ̈ܥ̈ܩ̈ܘ̈ܒ̈ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܝ̈ܬ̈ ܙ̈ܒ̈ܕ̈ܝ̈ ܕ̈ܡ̈ܕ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ܛ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ ܕ̈ܒ̈ ܢ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ܘ̈ܐ̈ ܫ̈ܠ̈ܡ̈ ܗ̈ܘ ܟ̈ܬ̈ܒ̈ ܫ̈ܠ̈ܡ̈ ܗ̈ܘ ܕ̈ܐ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܠ̈ܣ̈ܘ̈ܦ̈ܗ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܒ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܒ̈ܪ̈ܫ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ܚ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܢ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܦ̈ ܘ̈ܫ̈ܒ̈ܥ̈ ܡ̈ܐ̈ܐ ܘ̈ܫ̈ܒ̈ܥ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ ܠ̈ܝ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܒ̈ܝ̈ܕ̈ ܡ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܡ̈ܘ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ܟ̈ ܙ̈ܥ̈ܘ̈ܪ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܢ̈ ܡ̈ܬ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܕ̈ܐ̈ܝ̈ܪ̈ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܨ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܒ̈ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ ܝ̈ܥ̈ܩ̈ܘ̈ܒ̈ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܝ̈ܬ̈ ܙ̈ܒ̈ܕ̈ܝ̈ ܕ̈ܡ̈ܕ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ܬ̈ܐ ܕ̈ܒ̈ܪ̈ܛ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ ܕ̈ܒ̈ ܢ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ܘ̈ܐ̈ ܫ̈ܠ̈ܡ̈ ܗ̈ܘ ܟ̈ܬ̈ܒ̈ (fol. 250[v])

The writing of the separated readings of the holy separated and arranged gospel, of the four Evangelists, for the whole year, is achieved. It came to its end on Saturday, at the beginning of the month of ʾIyār, in the year 1571 of the Greeks [1260 CE], by the hands of Mūbārak, lesser among the servants of Mattiyē, son of Dawīd, son of Ṣalibō, son of Yaʿqūb, from the fortress named Barṭelli, around Nineveh.

Yet, the scribe modestly described himself as one of the 'servants' (*ʿaḇdē*) of Mattiyē – namely Mattay, the assumed founder of the monastery in the second half of the fourth century.[17] This unclear term might allude to a monk, but it could also refer to any other person working in the service of the monastic community, even temporarily.

Apart from lectionaries, other illuminated manuscripts intended both for liturgical and scholastic use were probably made by monks, though the evidence remains rare. The New Testament Paris, BnF, syriaque 30 (*c.* 1190 CE) and the Four Gospel book Paris, BnF, syriaque 41 (1188–1204 CE) were written and probably adorned by the hieromonk Šemʿūn, who belonged to a monastery of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn.[18] His name, status, and community are attested by the note he left at the end of the first manuscript and by the latter's colophon:

ܚܠ ܕܩܪ̈ܐ ܟ̈ܬ̈ܒ̈ ܗ̈ܢ̈ ܫ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܩ̈ ܠ̈ܐ̈ܠ̈ܗ̈ ܠ̈ܟ̈ ܠ̈ܝ̈ ܚ̈ܛ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܫ̈ܡ̈ܥ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ ܚ̈ܠ̈ ܕ̈ܟ̈ܬ̈ܒ̈ ܗ̈ܘ.ܫ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܩ̈ ܡ̈ܪ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܥ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ ܚ̈ܠ̈ ܫ̈ܡ̈ܥ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ ܠ̈ܐ̈ܠ̈ܗ̈ ܠ̈ܟ̈ ܠ̈ܝ̈ ܚ̈ܛ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܫ̈ܡ̈ܥ̈ܘ̈ܢ̈ ܚ̈ܠ̈ ܕ̈ܟ̈ܬ̈ܒ̈ ܗ̈ܘ (BnF syriaque 30, fol. 243[v])

May anyone who comes across this book pray, for God's sake, for the sinner Šemʿūn who wrote it.

16 Concerning the dating of this manuscript and the deciphering of its colophon, see Brock 2012, 41–42. Other references can be found in de Jerphanion 1939a; de Jerphanion 1939b; de Jerphanion 1940; Leroy 1964, 280–302; van Lantschoot 1965, 78; Fiey 1975, 23; Hunt 1985, 120; Smine 1995; Zibawi 1995, 70–71, plate 6–7; Snelders 2010; Smine 2013; Balicka-Witakowska 2015.

17 According to the West Syriac tradition, the monastery was founded in the 363 by a hermit named Mattay who fled from the city of ʾAmid (Diyarbakır) to escape the persecution of Julian the Apostate. Honigmann 1954, 98, doubted whether this story was authentic; he supposed that the monastery was named after Amitay's, father of Jonah the prophet. According to the manuscript Berlin, SB, Syr. 178, Mattay is said to have been martyred in 311, as recalled by Sachau 1899, vol. 2, 575; Baumstark 1922, 193, n. 1; Krüger 1937, 33.

18 On the manuscript BnF syriaque 30, see Zotenberg 1874, 12; Nau 1915; Leroy 1964, 256–257; Chaigne 2012, 258; Juckel 2012, 143, no. 12n2; Balicka-Witakowska, Briquel Chatonnet and Borbone 2015, 263; Juckel 2017, 143. Concerning BnF syriaque 41, see Zotenberg 1874, 14; Baumstark 1915; Nau 1915; Buchthal and Kurz 1942, 19; Leroy 1964, 254–255; Hunt 1985, 129.

ܗܘ ܕ݂ܟ݂ܬ݂ܒ݂ ܗܘ ܒ݂ܪ݂ ܫ݂ܘ ܚ݂ܛ݂ܝ݂ܐ ܘ݂ܫ݂ܡ݂ܫ݂ܐ ܫ݂ܡ݂ܥ݂ܘܢ ܩ݂ܫ݂ܝ݂ܫ݂ܐ ܘ݂ܪ݂ܗ݂ܝ݂ܡ݂ܐ ܒ݂ܫ݂ܡ݂ܐ ܒ݂ܠ݂ܚ݂ܘ ܠ݂ܐ ܒ݂ܥ݂ܒ݂ܕ݂ܘ݂ܗ݂ܝ݂ ܒ݂ܪ݂ ܚ݂ܝ݂ܐ ܡ݂ܢ ܡ݂ܕ݂ܝ݂ܢ݂ܬ݂ ܡ݂ܕ݂ܘ ܩ݂ܣ݂ܛ݂ܪ݂ܘ ܒ݂ܪ݂ܟ݂ܬ݂ܐ ܒ݂ܫ݂ܡ݂ ܕ݂ܡ݂ܢ ܒ݂ܝ݂ܬ݂ ܡ݂ܫ݂ܡ݂ܥ݂ ܕ݂ܡ݂ܪ݂ ܫ݂ܡ݂ܥ݂ܘܢ ܒ݂ܪ݂ ܩ݂ܛ݂ܪ݂ܡ݂ܝ݂ܢ݂ ܒ݂ܫ݂ܡ݂ ܕ݂ܡ݂ܢ ܒ݂ܝ݂ܬ݂ ܡ݂ܢ݂ܙ݂ܚ݂ ܕ݂ܝ݂ܪ݂ܘ݂ܫ݂ܠ݂ܡ݂ (BnF syriaque 41, fol. 177[r])

[The one who] wrote it is a weak and sinful man, Šemʿūn, priest and monk by name but not by his acts, son of the late Ḥayyō, by his lineage from Middo Qasṭrō, blessed [city], but [attached] by his [monastic] profession to the holy monastery of Bēt Mor Šemʿūn in Qartmin.

The lectionary BAV Vat. sir. 559 indicates that the craftsmen who belonged to monastic workshops were not necessarily monks. Further examples are provided by different types of illuminated manuscripts, underlining the complexity of this issue. The psalter London, BL, Add. 7154 (1203 CE), the lectionary Damascus, SOP, 348 (1222 CE) and a collection of anaphoras in Oxford, BodL, Syr. Dawkins 58 (1238 CE), were all written in monasteries on the mountain of Edessa.[19] However, not a single scribe mentioned that he was a monk, nor whether he was linked to the community in anything other than a strictly professional way.

2.2 Deacons and secular priests

In light of these first examples, monks seem to have prevailed in Syriac manuscript production, at least as far as the most luxurious books were concerned. However, it seems that other clerics were sometimes involved. Regardless of whether or not they were also monks, the deacons particularly stand out for their role as copyists and painters. As previously stated, the lectionaries SB Sachau 304 and BL Or. 3372 mentioned above were written by ʿAmmanūʾēl, a deacon who belonged to the monastic community of Qarṭmin. However, we know of another manuscript that was written and adorned by a deacon: the lectionary Damascus, SOP, 353 (1054 CE).[20] The memory of its author, the deacon Peṭrōs of

19 On the psalter BL Add. 7154, see Rosen and Forshall 1838, 8; Wright 1870–1872, vol. 3, 1202; Leroy 1964, 259–261. On the lectionary SOP 348, see Baumstark 1904, 413; Baumstark 1906; Baumstark 1908, 29; Baumstark 1910; Baumstark 1911a, 106–107; Baumstark 1911b; Baumstark 1911c; Dolabani 1930; Hatch 1931, 64–81; Buchthal and Kurz 1942, 12, no. 15; Hatch 1946, 140, plate 90; Dolabani et al. 1994, 603–604. On the manuscript BodL Syr. Dawkins 58, see Payne Smith 1864, cols 229–231, no. 65; Buchthal and Kurz 1942, 18, no. 49; Leroy 1964, 338–341; Gulàcsi 2003; Doumato 2008.

20 On this lectionary, see Leroy 1964, 225–233; Dolabani et al. 1994, 604; Zibawi 1995, 65–67, plate 1–3; Zibawi 2009, 143–149; Snelders 2010; Pacha Miran 2021a, 158, fig. 3 and 159–162.

Melitene, has reached us by means of a note inscribed at the end of the Holy Week readings:

ܡܠܦܢܝܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܛܝܢܐ ܩܫܝܫܐ ܦܛܪܘܣ ܟܬܒ ܘܣܕܪ ܘܫܘܐ ܗܢܐ ܣܗܕܘܬܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ. ܒܫܢܬܝܢ ܒܬܪ ܕܫܠܡ ܐܬܥܒܕ ܐܬܩܛܠ ܒܝܕ ܥܡܐ ܩܛܝܠܐ ܕܬܘܪܟܝܐ ܒܙܒܢܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܕܐܬܘ ܠܡܠܝܛܝܢܐ. (fol. 347^{v})

The deacon Peṭrōs, from the city of Melitene, has written, arranged, and put in order this spiritual treasure. Two years after it had been completed, he was killed by the ferocious Turks the first time they came to Melitene.[21]

Nearly two centuries later, the lectionary Paris, BnF, syriaque 355 was also painted by a deacon from Melitene, named Yawsep^{h} (Fig. 4).[22] His name appears in the colophon that opens the book (fol. 1^{r}), then reappears as a hidden ornament in the interlace framing the cross on the verso (fol. 1^{v}):

[...] ܥܠܡ ܕܫܘܬܦܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܒܗܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܨܒܘ ܕܢܣܒܘ ܠܗ ܒܣܦܪܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܠܗܢ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܒܪܫ ܣܦܪ ܐܘܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܫܘܬܦܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܡܬܐ ܕܒܢ ܥܣܪ ܘܐܪܒܥ ܕܒܚܝܪܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܝܕ ܙܘܓܪܐ ܫܡܥܘܢ ܕܐܬܩܪܝ ܟܐܦ ܣܦܪ ܐܢ ܡܠܦܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܛܝܢܐ ܒܬܚܘܡ ܩܦܕܘܩܝܐ.

[May] God's mercies be upon all of those who took part in this volume of the images of the economy [of salvation] of Christ our God, which has been placed at the beginning of the readings of this venerable and holy Gospel, which are of the elected number of twenty-four, made by the painter Yawsep^{h}, deacon of the city of Melitene, in the confines of Cappadocia.

21 Further references to this event are found in Michael the Great, *Chronography*, XV, I (ed. Ibrahim 2009, 575; tr. Chabot 1899–1910, vol. 3, 159) and Barhebræus, *Civil Chronicle*, X (ed. Bedjan 1890, 238; tr. Budge 1932, 212–213).

22 On this manuscript, see Scher 1905, 13, no. 17; Nau 1911, 310; Omont 1911; Khoury-Sarkis 1958; Leroy 1964, 268–280; Hunt 1985, 118, 130, 141; Hunt 1991, 345; Hunt 2001, 198; Kominko 2010; Snelders 2010, 175–176.

Fig. 4: Full-page cross framed with the signature of the deacon Yawsep^{h} of Melitene. West Syriac lectionary, Melitene, early thirteenth century. BnF syriaque 355, fol. 1^{v}. © gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

Secular priests – who did not belong to any monastic community – may also have taken part in the making of illustrated liturgical books. Thus, the colophon of the lectionary BL Or. 3372 (fol. 135^{v}) refers to the binder as a 'priest in the world' (*qaššīšō ʿolmoyō*), a term commonly used to designate secular clergy.[23] This mention was most probably intentional, since the scribe and the painter were respectively named 'monk and deacon' (*dayroyō wa-mšammšonō*) and 'monk and priest' (*dayroyō w-qaššīšō*). The title *mor* ('My Lord'), which precedes the binder's name, was usually given to bishops, but could also distinguish eminent members of the urban clergy.[24]

However, even if clerics were dominant, nothing excludes the possibility that laymen were also involved in the manuscript production. The only clue regarding this hypothesis, though, involves a short marginal note in the lectionary London, BL, Add. 7169, probably written in the early thirteenth century (fol. 8^{r}). According to this note, 'the codex was achieved by the hand of Mūšē, son of Dānīʾēl'.[25] Nothing indicates whether he was solely a scribe, or if he also painted the miniatures. This meagre testimony is admittedly insufficient to confirm that Mūšē was a layman, even though he was neither identified as a monk, nor as a deacon or a priest.

2.3 A craftsmen's family

The evidence above demonstrates that urban clerics – both priests and deacons – were significantly involved in Syriac manuscript production. But if they did not belong to a monastic community, the question arises regarding their social relations, especially when they worked together in the same workshop. In this respect, an exciting hypothesis has been recently formulated by Sebastian Brock, who suggested the existence of families, if not dynasties, of craftsmen. Such networks, nevertheless, seems to have been quite uncommon: they are only revealed through three lectionaries, made in the same workshop during the first half of the eleventh century. We have already mentioned the manuscripts BL Or. 3372 and SB Sachau 304. The third one is the lectionary Damascus, SOP, 12/21, dated to the year 1041 CE.[26]

All their colophons describe the scribe's family relationships in similar terms. ʿAmmanūʾēl is identified as the 'nephew' (*bar ʾaḥō*) of Yūḥannōn, bishop of Ṭūr

23 Payne Smith 1903, 415.
24 Payne Smith 1903, 298.
25 Leroy 1964, 356.
26 Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 72.

ʿAbdīn and head of the monastery of Qarṭmin. More specifically, BL Or. 3372 emphasises the filiation between Yūḥannōn and ʿAmmanū᾽ēl, while his brothers Peṭrōs and Nīḥē are mentioned separately (fol. 135^{v}). One can find a similar order in SOP 12/21: Peṭrōs is described as the 'scribe's brother' rather than the bishop's nephew (fols 201^{v}–202^{r}). Admittedly, the polysemy of the term *᾽aḥō* (brother) might suggest that this fraternal relationship was rather more monastic than familial. The third colophon, though, invalidates this theory: Peṭrōs is clearly described as the scribe's 'brother according to flesh and spirit'.[27]

The fame of this brotherhood seems to have been significant to Syrian Orthodox communities, who kept their memory alive. In the late thirteenth century, Barhebræus (1226–1286 CE) mentioned ʿAmmanū᾽ēl, Peṭrōs and Nīḥē in his *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, turning them into a kind of archetypal workshop. According to him, Yūḥannōn would have restored the use of the ancient *eṣṭrangelō* script, which had been forgotten, and taught it to his nephews – maybe in the late tenth or early eleventh century.[28] Thus, the scribe's dominant role may have justified enhancing his name and strengthening his relationship with the head of the monastic community. But it should not be forgotten that the colophon of SB Sachau 304 was destroyed early and survives only as a note written in the late fourteenth century (fol. 195^{r}).[29] Since ʿAmmanū᾽ēl's talents as a calligrapher have remained famous – thanks in part to Barhebraeus's testimony –, it is not surprising that he was highlighted there as a privileged disciple of the bishop.

3 Monastic scriptoria?

The frequent mentions of monks and clerics might suggest that illustrated manuscripts were exclusively produced in monastic workshops, comparable to Western scriptoria. Such an assertion is supported by the large number of monasteries

27 The last part of the colophon reads ܐܚܘܗܝ ܒܣܪܐ ܘܒܪܘܚܐ ܡܠܐ ܗܘ (ʻhis brother corporally as well as spiritually').

28 Barhebræus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, I, 76 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 1, cols 417–418).

29 This note read as follows: ܫܡܥܘܢ ܗܘ ܕ ܩܛܝܢܐ ܒܝܘܚܢܢ ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܩܕܫܐ ܕܩܪܛܡܝܢ ܘܛܘܪܕ ܥܒܕܝܢ (؟) ܐ ܘܣܦܪ ܗܢ ܥܒܕ ܡܛܠ ܚܛܝ ܘܡܚܕܬ ܠܗ ܒܫܡ ܢܓܡܐ ܕܒܪ ܐܣܥܪ ܡܢ ܟܦܪ ܓܫܠܘܢܐ ܕܒܫܢܬ ܐܠܦ ܘܬܫܥ ܡܐܐ ܘܫܒܥܝܢ ܘܬܪܬܝܢ ܫܢܝܢ. ܫܘܠ ܒܥܘ ܠܡܪܝ ܥܠ ܡܚܘ ܘܚܕܬ ܠܗ ܠܡܪܝ ܐܡܝܢ. (ʻAmmanū᾽ēl, monk and deacon by name, nephew of Yūḥanon, bishop of the holy monastery of Qarṭmin and Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, wrote this book of the holy Gospel. The humble and sinner Nagmā, deacon by name, known as the son of ʿAsʿar, from the village of Gaṣlūnā, bound it and renewed it in the year 1697 [1386/1387 CE]. Pray for the scribe and the restorator').

mentioned by copyists, attesting to the essential role they played in the medieval book economy. At least six West Syriac manuscripts from the first half of the thirteenth century, including four lectionaries, were undoubtedly made in monastic workshops. Three of them come from the mountain of Edessa, one of the most famous centres of manuscript production since the fifth century.[30] The oldest one is the psalter BL Add. 7154 (1203 CE). It was written by the scribe Šemʿūn in a monastery dedicated to the Mother of God, known as Bēt ʾAksnoyē (the 'House of the Pilgrims').[31] The lectionary SOP 348 (1222 CE) and the collection of anaphoras BodL Syr. Dawkins 58 (1238 CE) were both written by a scribe named Bākʰōs, working in another Edessan monastery called Bēt ʾĪḥīdoyē (the 'House of the Solitaries').[32]

Two lectionaries from the same period also attest to the existence of monastic workshops in the centre of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn. Their testimonies, however, concern one and the same place, which seems to have been of particular importance for manuscript production. Two lectionaries from the same period also attest to the existence of monastic workshops in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn: MG 5 (1226–1227 CE) and CFM 38 (1229–1230 CE). Both were written by the monk Sohdō in the monastery of Mor Yaʿqūb Ḥbīšoyō ('Saint James the Recluse'), near the village of Ṣālaḥ (Barıştepe).[33] Thus, although the activity of this workshop seems to have been relatively brief (1226–1230), the manuscripts written by Šemʿūn and Bākʰōs on the mountain of Edessa suggest the dynamism of book production in this area during more than three decades (1203–1238).

The latest dated manuscript, the lectionary BAV Vat. sir. 559, testifies to the survival of certain monastic workshops even after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258. Admittedly inspired by the very similar London, BL, Add. 7170 (1216–1220 CE), this luxurious book was achieved on the first day of ʾIyār (May) of the year 1260 CE, allegedly at the monastery of Mor Mattay, near Mosul. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the scribe actually worked there. The colophon (fol. 250ᵛ) only suggests that the scribe 'served' the monastery, and states that the lectionary was intended for its church:

ܕܫܡ ܥܠܝܠܐ ܡܫܘܫܒܢܐ ܕ[...] ܕܫܒܚܬ ܩܕܡܝܬ ܕܒܝܬ ܡ[...] ܥܒܕ ܒܥܒܕ ܕܥܒ ܕܫܡܐ ܕܚܕ ܒ
ܥ(ܕ)ܠܟ. ܕܝܠܗ ܡ[...] ܫܡ. ܠܡܕܒܚ ܕܫ[...] ܕܒܥ ܒܥ ܒܥ ܒܥ ܕܫܡܐ ܕܚܕ ܒ
(fol. 250ᵛ)

30 Brock (2012, 45) lists thirty-three manuscripts written in the mountain of Edessa out of five hundred and two manuscripts copied between 411 and 1238. Most of them were of West Syriac origin, while only two belonged to the Melkite tradition.

31 Leroy 1964, 259–261. One could also translate this as 'House of the Foreigners' (ܐܟܣܢܝܐ).

32 Leroy 1964, 318, 338–341.

33 Pavan 2017, 52, n. 197 and 53, n. 205.

> Rabban ʿAbdō ʾAlohō, son of Kūšū, son of Šemʿūn [...] took care of this gospel with the diligence and firmness of the zeal in the works [...] of virtue, and he offered it [...] to the holy altar of Bēt Mattay, Mor Zakkay and Mor ʾAḇrohom, on Mount Alfaf.

The lectionary BL Add. 7170, whose similarities with BAV Vat. sir. 559 have been abundantly studied, was produced some forty years before (1216–1220). Its exact place of production, however, remains unknown since the colophon is now lost. Jules Leroy was inclined to situate this workshop in the monastery of Mor Ḥananyō near Mardin, in western Ṭūr ʿAbdīn.[34] Although this hypothesis is debatable, it tends to prove that Mor Mattay was not the only centre of manuscript production in northern Mesopotamia during the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, and regardless of the uncertainties about the workshops' exact localisations, the examples above attest that illustrated lectionaries could have been made directly in the place where they were intended to be used. The making of such liturgical books then benefited from the skills of one or several members of the community, but could also involve external craftsmen.

The prevalence of monastic workshops is confirmed by non-illustrated lectionaries, particularly those belonging to the East Syriac tradition. The monastery of Rabban Hormizd, near Alqoš, is attested as a place of production in the colophon of the manuscript London, BL, Add. 17923 (1073–1074 CE) as early as the second half of the eleventh century.[35] This monastery was mentioned again several times at the beginning of the twelfth century: firstly, in London, BL, Egerton 681 (1206–1207 CE), then in Diyarbakır, Chaldean Archbishopric, Cod. 10 (1207–1208 CE) and, finally, in Harvard, Houghton Library, Syr. 141 (June 1208 CE).[36] Thus, the revival of Syrian Orthodox workshops at the turn of the thirteenth century seems to have been echoed in the Church of the East, where few dated manuscripts predate the 1180s. At this time, the monastery of Mār Mīkāʾēl in Mosul must have played a decisive role in this new impetus for book production. Two lectionaries were indeed produced there: Mosul, Chaldean patriarchate, Cod. 13 (1189 CE), and Harvard, Houghton Library, Syr. 3 (August 1226 CE).[37]

Some lesser-attested localities also suggest the dynamism and diversity of manuscript production in several other regions of northern Mesopotamia. An East

34 Also known as 'Dayrō d-Kurkmō', the 'Saffron Monastery' (Arabic Dayr al-Zaʿfarān, Turkish Deyrulzafaran Manastırı). Leroy 1964, 313, admitted the hypothesis that two experienced painters could have worked simultaneously at Mor Mattay, but on the other hand it seemed to him unusual that two such prestigious lectionaries were made for the same sanctuary.

35 Brock 2012, 29.

36 Scher 1907a, 335; Brock 2012, 31.

37 Scher 1907b, 231–232; Brock 2012, 32.

Syriac lectionary, once kept in the Chaldean patriarchate in Mosul, Cod. 12, was completed at the monastery of Mār ʾAwgēn on Mount Izlā in the year 1186 CE.[38] Its copyist Rabban Ṣlibā, helped by his brother Yaʿqōb, claimed to have written it at the time of Mār ʾĒliyā III ʾAbū Halim (1176–1190 CE) and Mār Yahbalāhā, metropolitan of Nisibis. He also mentioned the church 'of Mart Šmōnī and her sons, in the village of Telmahmad, in the diocese of Daqartā', as the place for which the lectionary was destined. Even if the fate of this manuscript is unknown, it offers a strong argument for the existence of East Syriac monastic workshops in southern Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, that fulfilled commissions intended for village churches during the last decades of the twelfth century. The latest mention of an East Syriac workshop, in the early thirteenth century, concerns the monastery of Mār Yaʿqōb d-Bēt ʿĀbē ('Saint James of the Woods') on the Upper Zab, north-east of Nineveh. This monastery housed the workshop where the manuscript Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Syr. 4 was written in 1217–1218 CE.[39]

However, monastic workshops could have gathered not only monks but also craftsmen of other origins and social statuses. Although part of these books were made by monks, it does not prove that their authors worked within the walls of the monasteries. While there is ample evidence of monastic book production, some lectionaries might have been written and adorned in urban workshops. The manuscript BnF syriaque 355 is an obvious example. This impressive West Syriac lectionary survives in two heterogeneous fragments that were later bound together: the text and reading tables (fols 6–285) are dated to 1514 AG (1202 CE), while the illustrated quire (fols 1–5) may have come from another book, probably made between 1208 and 1220 CE, whose text is almost entirely lost. The colophon (fol. 1^{r}) and the inscription surrounding the opening cross (fol. 1^{v}) indicate that the full-page paintings were completed 'by the deacon Yawsep^{h} in the city of Melitene'.

An additional quire, bound and preserved separately under the shelf mark BnF syriaque 356, contains the only remaining fragments of the original text (fols 2^{v}–4^{v}). The inscription hidden in the interlace that tops the vespers reading for the Sunday of the Sanctification of the Church (Fig. 3) mentions the scribe Īšōʿ as 'the sinner who drew and wrote' (ܚܛܝܐ ܘܟܬܒ ܗܠܝܢ ܡܫܚܐ). Īšōʿ has been convincingly identified as a famous Edessan monk who lived in the early thirteenth century and was elected as patriarch of Antioch under the name of Yūḥannōn XIV

38 Scher 1907b, 230. On Mār ʾAwgēn monastery and it crucial role in the history of East Syriac monasticism, see Mahon 1980; Brock 1981, 1–6; Jullien 2008.

39 Brock 2012, 32.

(1208–1220 CE).[40] Considering that Īšōʿ lived on the mountain of Edessa, the fragmentary text preserved in BnF syriaque 356 (fols 2–4) must have been written there or at a monastery in the area. Furthermore, the colophon of BnF syriaque 355 (fol. 1^{r}) states that the text quires, once written, were sent to Melitene to be bound together with the miniatures painted by Yawsep^{h} (Fig. 4). It seems, therefore, that two workshops, at least one urban, collaborated in this significant commission.

Once again, the evidence of non-illustrated lectionaries lends strength to the hypothesis of urban workshops. The most interesting topographical mentions are found in East Syriac manuscripts. The lectionary St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum, 22 (1243 CE) was produced in Urmiah, a town on the shores of the eponymous lake.[41] The lectionary BAV Borg. sir. 169 (1284–1285 CE) was produced at Sinjar, on the plain of Nineveh, and the lectionary London, BL, Add. 7173 (1288–1289 CE), in the city of Artok.[42] Of course, in such cases, the only evidence in favour of urban workshops is the lack of any mention of monasteries. Although caution is required, there is a high probability that the scribes would not have consciously forgotten to mention a monastery, if they had worked in such a place.

4 Bishops as patrons, scribes … and painters?

Along with the luxuriousness of the most prestigious lectionaries, some colophons and owners' notes occasionally suggest the involvement of bishops in the making of manuscripts. As heads of the local communities and eminent figures in the ecclesiastical networks, the bishops maintained close relationships with monasteries where they usually resided.[43] Being monks themselves, it would not be sur-

40 According to several colophons, Īšōʿ wrote a lot of manuscripts before being elected to the patriarchal see. His life was reported by Barhebræus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, I, 93 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 2, cols 618–640), quoted by Leroy 1964, 411. He is not the only patriarch to have borne the name Īšōʿ prior to his election, nor even to have been titled as a 'scribe'. Michael the Great's *Chronography* (tr. Chabot 1899–1910, vol. 3, 171) also referred to Patriarch Yūḥannōn X bar Šūšan (1064–1073) as 'Īšōʿ the Scribe'. Similarly, Michael attributed to Bar Šūšan the copy of many manuscripts, among them a very valuable gospel. This manuscript, now lost, is presumed to have served as a model for the one once preserved in the Syrian Orthodox patriarchate at Ḥoms (1168/1169 CE).

41 Brock 2012, 33.

42 Hatch 1946, 225, plate CLXXIV; Brock 2012, 35.

43 From the exile of Severus of Antioch (518 CE), the Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical authority turned gradually to an itinerant organisation. Patriarchs and metropolitans habitually stayed in

prising for them to take part in the writing or illumination of liturgical books, be it before, or even after, their episcopal ordination. Bishops, thus, are well attested as patrons and donors in the colophons of several illustrated manuscripts. The lectionary SOP 348 (1222 CE), for instance, was acquired after its achievement by the Syrian Orthodox metropolitan of ʾAmid (Diyarbakır):

ܗܢܐ ܡܫܚܪܐ ܕܡܪܝ ܝܘܚܢܢ ܡܠܦܢܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܡܦܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪ̈ܕܝܢ ܡܛܪܦܘܠܝܛ ܕܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܐܡܝܕ ܩܪܝܬܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܢܗܪ̈ܝܢ. ܠܫܠܡܐ ܘܠܬܫ̈ܡܫ̈ܬܐ ܕܩܘܪܒ̈ܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܐ ܘܠܟܠ ܫܢܬ̈ܐ ܕܫܢܝܢ ܘܠܟܠ ܫܢ̈ܬܐ ܕܫܢ̈ܬܐ ܠܗ ܘܠܒ̈ܢܝ ܒ̈ܝܬܗ ܠܕܟܪ̈ܢܐ ܘܠܫ̈ܒ̈ܝ̈ܩ̈ܬܐ ܕܥ̈ܠ̈ܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܡ̈ܝ̈ܢ. (fol. 199v)

This spiritual treasure belongs to the venerable saint [bishop] Mor ʾĪwānnīs, supreme metropolitan of ʾAmid, glorious city of Mesopotamia, for the accomplishment of the services and solemnities of the Lord's feasts, and of the whole cycle of the year, for his own liturgical commemoration and his lates', for ever and ever, Amen.

Similarly, at the turn of the thirteenth century, the Syrian Orthodox bishops of Aleppo, Rumnah and Melitene financed the lectionary BnF syriaque 355 alongside three monks and an Armenian nun. Their names, origins and statuses are mentioned in the colophon (fol. 1r) with the sums of money they invested respectively. The monetary term used by the scribe, *zūzē naṣrāyē* (ܙܘܙ̈ܐ ܢܨ̈ܪܝ̈ܐ), might translate the Arabic *dirham nāṣirī*: a silver and copper currency emitted by the Zangid rulers of Syria from 1175–1176 CE, which was usually minted in Damascus and Aleppo.[44] According to the text, the first – and most important – donation was made by a certain ʾAbū al-Fataḥ of Aleppo, who gave the sum of forty *zūzē naṣrāyē*. The title he bears, *ʾalōnō* (ܐܠܘܢܐ), indicates that he was a bishop or prelate, and suggests that his generous donation was linked to his high ecclesiastical rank.[45] After this, Mor Gregorios of Rumnah – himself a bishop – offered twelve *zūzē*. The colophon also describes the participation of four other figures: three monks from a monastery near Melitene, and an Armenian nun from the same area.

ܘܫܒܚ̈ܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕ[...] ܕܐܬ̈ܐ ܒ̈ܝ ܕܝܘܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܢ ܐܡܝܢ. ܘܫܒܚ̈ܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܒ̈ܝ ܕܝܘܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܢ ܐܡܝܢ. ܘܫܒܚ̈ܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܒ̈ܝ ܕܝܘܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܢ ܐܡܝܢ. ܘܫܒܚ̈ܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܒ̈ܝ ܕܝܘܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܢ ܐܡܝܢ. ܘܫܒܚ̈ܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܒ̈ܝ ܕܝܘܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܢ ܐܡܝܢ. ܘܫܒܚ̈ܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܒ̈ܝ ܕܝܘܡ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܠ̈ܝ̈ܢ ܐܡܝܢ.

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the great monasteries of northern Syria and Mesopotamia, particularly in the Ṭūr ʿAbdīn. Among the main patriarchal residences, before the early ninth century, Briquel Chatonnet and Debié 2017, 78 mention the monasteries of Qennešrē (the 'Eagle's Nest'), on the Euphrates, Gubbō Baroyō (the 'External Cistern'), on the west bank of the river, and Spekulōs (the 'Watchtower'), near Rešʿaynā / Theodosioupolis.

44 Omont 1911, 204; Cahen 1984, 213.

45 Leroy 1964, 273.

> These paintings [...] have been made at the expense of the bishop ʾAbū al-Fataḥ of Aleppo: forty *zūzē naṣrāyē*; and of the monk Ḥabbīb from the monastery of Mor Barṣawmō, and of the monk Qūpʰar: twenty *zūzē*; and of the monk ʾĒramyō from the same monastery: seven *zūzē*; and of Mor Gregorios, the saint [bishop] of the city of Rumnah: twelve *zūzē*; and of an Armenian nun from Bēt Ḥesnō, named ʾAškenūrī [ʾAšxenūhi]: twelve *zūzē.*

Finally, the commission was achieved in Melitene, by the entourage of Bishop ʾĪwānnīs. Even if the exact role of this prelate remains unclear, particularly concerning his technical involvement, he, at least, oversaw the last steps of the production and provided his own financial contribution:

> ܘܒܬܪ ܡܢ ܕܐܬܠ[...]ܒ[...] ܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܕܙܘ̈ܙܐ ܡܐܐ ܢܨܪ̈ܝܐ ܕܗܘܘ ܥܠ ܨܘܪ̈ܬܐ ܘܡܟܬ̈ܒܢܘܬܐ ܕܕܗܒܐ. ܕܠܟܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܪ̈ܣܐ
> ܟܠܗܘܢ ܗܘ̇ ܕܟܬܒܐ [...] ܘܐܘܒܠ ܠܘܬ ܨܝܪܐ ܠܡܠܝܛܝܢܝ ܘܬܡܢ ܐܫܬܠܡܘ ܟܕ ܩܐܡ ܗܘܐ ܚܣܝܐ ܕܠܗ̇ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܡܪܝ،
> ܐܘܐܢܢܝܣ ܪܚܡ ܐܠܗܐ. ܘܗܘ̣ ܡܢ ܦ ܗܘܐ ܠܫܘܡܠܝܐ ܘܡܚܦܛ ܠܬܘܪܨܐ ܕܟܬ̈ܒܐ.

> Then, after having obtained the complement of hundred *zūzē naṣrāyē*, which were for the paintings and the gilded inscriptions that are on all the quires, the one who had written them [...] and brought them to the painter, in Melitene, and there, they were achieved, in the presence of Mor ʾĪwānnīs, saint [bishop] of this city, God-loving, and he took charge of the achievement and took care of the texts' correctness [correct execution].

The last part of this text, which places the end of the creation process under the tutelary figure of the holy hierarch, raises another, far more complex issue: the possibility of a personal, technical involvement of bishops in the making of manuscripts. Some scholars have postulated the existence of a strong tradition among Syrian Orthodox dignitaries to be both scribes and painters.[46] However, such an assertion rests uniquely on a prescription attributed to the fifth-century patriarch Isaac of Antioch, who recommended that his monks 'write as if they were painting pictures'.[47] The fact that calligraphy was compared to painting seems likely: it is not surprising in the case of Syriac writing, whose mastery required a solid training coupled with long-term experience. This evidence, nevertheless, remains insufficient to suggest the existence of bishop-painters. It is more probable that Patriarch Isaac urged the scribes to keep a high standard of copying, so as to guarantee the proper transmission of texts.

Actually, the hypothesis that illustrated manuscripts were entirely produced by a single person, and, moreover, a bishop, is hardly supported by medieval sources. Despite the scattered information provided by colophons, the many at-

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[46] Doumato 1999, 245–246, n. 18; Doumato 2001, 35–36; Mouawad 2010.

[47] Mathews 2011a and 2011b. Several *mēmrē* and *madrāšē* have been attributed to this controversial author, whose name certainly combines two or three roughly identified writers: some chroniclers have confused him with Isaac of Edessa.

tempts to attribute luxurious books to bishops or patriarchs have rarely come to fruition. The sumptuous lectionary allegedly made by Patriarch Michael the Great (1166–1199 CE) is a famous example of such a literary tradition. According to the *Anonymous Chronicle of 1234*, Michael the Great would have copied and painted himself a gospel lectionary, whose text was written in gold and silver.[48] Later mentions of the patriarch's munificence, in the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, said nothing about such a treasure; even though Barhebræus mentioned the financial support Michael granted to his own monastery.[49] Not a single trace of this manuscript has come down to us, and its identification with the lectionary Damascus, SOP, 12/7 (1169 CE) is hardly convincing.

Similarly, the miniatures of the lectionary Mardin, CFM, 41 have been repeatedly attributed to its scribe, Diosqoros Ṭeodoros. His name indeed appears on both sides of an elegant, framed colophon which follows the Easter readings (fol. 161^{v}; Fig. 5).[50] Diosqoros presented himself here as the one 'who inscribed the narrative of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection' (ܕܟܬܒ ܦܣܩܐ ܕܨܠܒܐ ܘܩܝܡܬܐ), imploring God to 'receive the work he offers as the widow' (ܕܬܩܒܠ ܥܒܕܗ ܐܝܟ ܐܪܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܩܪܒ).[51] Several scholars, including Leroy, have identified Diosqoros Ṭeodoros as Mor Dionysios, metropolitan of Ḥesnō d-Ziyād (Kharput) from 1238 to 1273.[52] This figure is actually not unknown to Syriac authors. According to Barhebræus, he was reputed to be 'a learned man, an excellent scribe, and a friend of books', and many works of art were attributed to his hands.[53] However, the stylistic analysis of CFM 41 suggests that the miniatures were most probably produced by a team composed of different painters with varying expertise.[54]

48 *Anonymous Chronicle of 1234*, II, 221 (ed. Chabot 1917, vol. 2, 314–315; tr. Abouna 1974, 235), quoted by Leroy 1964, 428–429; Snelders 2010, 173.

49 Barhebræus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, I, 90 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 2, cols 571–572).

50 On this manuscript, see Leroy 1955, 412–414; Leroy 1964, 371–383; Anschütz 1982, 329; Hunt 1997, 296, 298, 303–304, 309, 319, fig. 11, 322, fig. 14; Zibawi 2009, 149; Kaplan 2013; Bernabò 2017, 266–288; Braida and Pavan 2017, 207; Kaplan 2017; Pavan 2017, 69–70, 121–122.

51 Mark 12:41–44; Luke 21:1–4.

52 Leroy 1964, 380, n. 2–3; Doumato 1999; Mouawad 2010, 274–275; Kaplan 2013, 32; Kaplan 2017, 235–236.

53 Barhebræus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, I, 94 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 2, cols 724–725), 96 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 2, cols 695–696, 757–759).

54 Kaplan 2013, 33.

Fig. 5: Colophon signed by Diosqoros Ṯeodoros. West Syriac lectionary, probably Ḥesnō d-Ziyād, mid thirteenth century. CFM 41, fol. 161^{v} [HMML Pr. No. CFMM 0041]. Photo courtesy of the HMML, Saint John's University, Minnesota. Published with the permission of the CFM, Mardin. All rights reserved.

The involvement of bishops should not be totally excluded just because of this observation. However, the gap between literary sources and manuscript evidence requires us to challenge other obsolete attributions. Another illustrated lectionary: Mardin, CFM, 37 was indeed ascribed to the same Dionysios of Ḥesnō d-Ziyād. This hypothesis, first proposed by Leroy, rests on an inscription dated to 1272 CE that assigns the book to a certain Diosqoros (fol. 8^{r}).[55] Even if attractive, this attribution no longer holds. Palaeographical analysis reveals the intervention of at

55 Leroy 1964, 387–389; Barsoum 2003, 462–463; Mouawad 2010, 267–270. The inscription commemorates the donation of the manuscript: ܐܢܐ ܕܝܘܣܩܘܪܘܣ ܥܒܕ ܡܪܝܐ ܘܓܫܡܐ ܕܝܠܝ ܗܘ ܕܟܬܒ ܐܝܕܝ ܠܥܕܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܒܕܝܪ ܡܪ ܡܪܝ ܕܡܬܩܪܐ ܒܥܠ ܬܚܢܐ ܩܪܒ ܠܚܣܢܐ ܕܙܝܕ ܕܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܠܥܕܬܐ ܗܝ ܕܐܡܪ ܥܠ ܗܕܐ ܒܥܠ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܡܪ ('Me, Diosqoros, humble of soul and body, I gave this gospel book – which is a copy of my hand – to the holy church of the monastery of the Mother of God, known as "Sons of Supplication", situated near to Ḥesnō d-Ziyād, in order that it be the property of the aforementioned church').

least two different hands and contradicts the idea of one scribe writing the two lectionaries. In addition, the stylistic study of the miniatures of CFM 37 suggests that this manuscript was produced long before the note was written – perhaps by the last quarter of the twelfth century, around 1180–1200 CE. The style of its miniatures and the geometric ornaments that intersperse the readings contrast sharply with the decoration of CFM 41, which was probably painted more than half a century later, around 1250–1275 CE.

The same painter, even if he was a bishop, could hardly have contributed to these two lectionaries: both palaeographic and stylistic features clearly betray the work of different hands. Despite obvious stylistic differences between the manuscripts they concern, such attributions, which are often conveyed by the colophons themselves, are neither accidental nor trivial. More than a white lie, the aim was undoubtedly to place the book under the patronage of a revered figure: who better than the bishop, pastor and head of the community? The honorific attribution of precious manuscripts to eminent spiritual figures remains, to this day, the most convincing hypothesis to explain the presence of prelates' names in the colophons. In this way, even the liturgical books entered a longstanding, firmly anchored tradition that considered the bishops as the keepers of the Syriac heritage.

5 Within the workshop

5.1 Roles and co-ordination

After having defined the status of the donors and craftsmen, their relationships and the places in which they worked, there remains the question of the distribution of roles within the workshops. Most of the surviving evidence, not surprisingly, concerns the scribes. Nevertheless, some elements reveal the collaboration of several, specialised craftsmen, at least, within the main workshops. In this regard, as stated previously, the colophon of the lectionary BL Or. 3372 (fol. 135^{v}) is arguably the most important source. The scribe ʿAmmanūʾēl claims to have written the book and gives the names of his two collaborators: the deacon Peṭrōs and the priest Nīḥē, who were responsible for the 'illustration and binding of the book' (ܡܫܚܪܢܘܬܐ ܘܟܪܟܐ ܕܣܦܪܐ ܗܢܐ). However, although he mentions the material aspects they assumed, he does not give any precision concerning who oversaw each task.

Only a prudent deduction, based on a comparative study of miniatures and literary evidence, reveals that one of them has played a predominant role in the painting.[56]

Yet, Barhebræus, who spread the memory of this famous workshop, only mentioned one painter. According to the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, Niḥē had been granted with 'the grace of illumination' (ܪܫܡܐ ܕܝ ܪܫܡܬܐ).[57] Therefore, it is most probable that he painted the cross (fol. 3^{v}) and miniatures of BL Or. 3372 (fols 4^{r}–5^{v}).[58] The manuscript's colophon, however, suggests that the brothers shared painterly skills, as it recalls how Peṭrōs and Nīḥē worked together 'on the book's illumination' (ܪܫܡܬ ܣܦܪܐ ܕܝ).[59]

Consequently, following Julian Raby and Sebastian Brock's theory, it is most likely that Peṭrōs painted the frontispieces, headbands and quire marks, while Nīḥē executed the figurative miniatures.[60] The activities of craftsmen have been described in a similar way in the colophon of the lectionary SOP 12/21 (1041 CE). This manuscript, which was made in the same workshop, is devoid of miniatures but preserves a rich set of illuminated ornaments:[61]

ܣܠܡ ܪܒܐ ܪܫܡܠܐ ܡܢ ܣܝܦܐ ܕܥ. [...] ܠܥܡܢܘܐܝܠ ܪܫܝܡ ܩܫܝܫܐ ܘܪܗܒܐ ܕܝܪ ܒܝܬ ܬܪܥ
ܒܗ. ܘܥܠ ܐܚܘܗ ܕܒܣܪ ܘܪܘܚ ܕܝ ܫܡܥܘܢ ܦ̈ [...] ܕܗ ܪܫܡܬ ܣܦܪܐ ܘܣܝܡܐ ܕܝܢ

ʿAmmanūʾēl wrote this book of the separate readings of the holy Gospel [...]. And [may the reader pray] for Peṭrōs, monk and priest, his brother according to flesh and spirit, who [worked] on this book's ornamentation and binding.

In this instance, it is clear that at least two craftsmen collaborated in the main stages of book production: the writing, the painting and the binding. It also seems that the same person could be responsible for both ornamenting and binding, as was Peṭrōs. The evidence from this lectionary, however, is rather limited. Most other illuminated manuscripts which have retained their colophon do not contain any clear mention of a painter. Therefore, the question remains open concerning the lectionary SB Sachau 304, which was produced in the same workshop. Since

56 Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 63.

57 Barhebræus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, I, 76 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 1, cols 417–418).

58 Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 63–64.

59 SOP 12/21 (fol. 202^{r}); BL Or. 3372 (fol. 135^{v}).

60 Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 59. We do not know whether one of them took on a more significant part of the work, or if they worked together at different stages of the illumination.

61 Since the painter Nīḥē is not mentioned in this colophon, it is tempting to think that his career ended before 1041, and, therefore, predated the manuscripts BL Or. 3372 and SB Sachau 304. However, Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 63–64, did not consider this hypothesis relevant.

the colophon only mentions the scribe ʿAmmanūʾēl, only vague intuitions suggest that the miniatures were painted by someone else. The name of Peṭrōs has been proposed, as he was probably charged with the ornaments of BL Or. 3372.[62] Whatever one may think of this idea, obvious stylistic variations indisputably reveal that these lectionaries were illustrated by at least two different painters.

The colophon of the lectionary SOP 353 (1054 CE) claims that it was 'written and completed' (ܟܬܒ ܘܫܠܡ) in the city of Melitene (fol. 348^{r}). An additional note (fol. 347^{r}) states that the deacon Peṭros not only 'wrote' (ܟܬܒ) the text, but also 'put in order' (ܫܠܡ) and 'arranged' (ܣܕܪ) the book. This could mean that he also worked as a binder, or – more certainly – that he contributed to the layout of the readings. Once again, nothing was said about the painter. Nothing proves that the scribe painted the miniatures himself; nothing, on the other hand, proves that another craftsman was involved in the painting. All the more we can say is that the full-page miniatures must have been painted separately and added to the text after it was written: they form a separate quire at the end of the book, following the readings and the colophon (fols 349^{r}–351^{r}).

The opposite situation occurs in the manuscripts BnF syriaque 355 and syriaque 356, two separate codices which originally constituted one single book.[63] The colophon of BnF syriaque 355 (fol. 1^{r}) defines the deacon Yawsep^{h} as 'the one who painted' (ܙ̈ܝ) the twenty-four miniatures that once adorned the volume. This assertion is confirmed by the inscription running around the majestic cross which opens the volume (fol. 1^{v}). Yet, the frontispiece of the first reading (BnF syriaque 356, fol. 2^{v}) contains another inscription which describes the scribe ʾĪšōʿ as 'the one who painted and wrote' (ܟܬܒ ܘܙ̈ܝ). This contradiction is not, however, as annoying as it sounds. The stylistic comparison of the manuscripts' decorations suggests, in fact, that ʾĪšōʿ probably did not paint the miniatures, but rather took charge of the geometric ornaments. Therefore, the same word (ܙ̈ܝ) could simultaneously refer to the person who painted the figures, to the one who drew the ornament, or even to the scribe. This confusion between 'writing', 'drawing' and 'painting' might be due to the influence of Greek terminology, which defines the making of an icon or miniature as 'writing' (γράφειν). By combining these three tasks in this way, the Syriac colophons thus underlined the equal contribution of scribes and painters to the genesis of illuminated books.

However, it is notable that most of the colophons give more importance to the scribe without ever giving the name of the painter(s). The emphasis on the main

62 Raby and Brock 2014–2016, 58.

63 Concerning the codicological and palaeographical observation that led to this conclusion, see Pacha Miran 2021b, vol. 1, 160–171 and Pacha Miran forthcoming b.

aspect of book production – the writing – could certainly be explained by the extreme importance that the Syriac culture attached to the preservation and transmission of texts.[64] Yet, the high value of an illustrated manuscript could have justified the indication of the name of the artist who had created a decoration as prized as it was expensive. In some cases, it is possible that the scribe illustrated the book himself; but if he had undertaken such an ambitious task, he would certainly not have neglected to mention his feat. Does it mean that the scribes had little interest in being remembered as painters, or that they wanted to undermine the painters' involvement? The reality is undoubtedly more complex. As we shall see, it is quite probable that the miniatures, at least in some manuscripts, were painted after the text. Since the scribe wrote the colophon after completing his work, the images that were to be added afterwards did not yet exist – in some manuscripts, they were never executed at all.[65] This is especially true of certain manuscripts, which were copied and illustrated in different places and by different teams: so the scribe probably never knew the name of the painter.

5.2 Writing and painting

There is little evidence to suggest how the writing and illumination phases were coordinated. The problem is solved fairly quickly in the case of manuscripts whose paintings were produced separately and added to the text leaves when they were bound. Thus, the scribe of the lectionary BnF syriaque 355 records that the book was sent to Melitene after it was copied; once there, it was bound together with a quire of painted leaves (fol. 1^{r}). Since the colophon only mentions the gathering of the text and images, it is difficult to determine whether the miniatures were painted while the text was being copied, or if they were made afterwards, when the volume arrived in Melitene. In any case, Bishop ʾĪwānnīs must have been responsible for the entire production process, for which he provided a sort of stewardship.[66] It is probable that a similar process was in place in the workshop that produced the lectionary SOP 353: although the miniatures appear at the end of the text, the various components of the book seem to have been produced in the same place.

By contrast, the succession of the writing and painting phases is particularly interesting in the case of lectionaries whose miniatures are scattered throughout the

64 Mundell-Mango 1980; Debié 2010.

65 See, for example, the lectionary Damascus, SOP 356 (1212 or 1263 CE), which contains a set of painted frames that remained empty.

66 Probably more than the scribe himself, as stated by Snelders 2010, 175.

text, according to the liturgical calendar. Once again, because of the lack of literary sources, our conclusions must be deduced from the manuscripts themselves. The three main options available to the craftsmen do not seem to have changed based on whether the scribe and the painter were the same person or two different people. In the first instance, writing and painting followed one another step by step: the scribe wrote, then gave the leaves to the painter, who inserted the miniatures in the places left empty. The reverse is also attested, with the images being sometimes painted before the copying of the text. In fact, both methods could be employed simultaneously. Such a reciprocal progression can be observed in the lectionaries BL Add. 7170 (1216–1220 CE) and BAV Vat. sir. 559 (1260 CE). As noticed by Guillaume de Jerphanion and Jules Leroy, some of the letters extend beyond the writing surface and partly cover the frame of the images, suggesting that a part of the miniatures had been painted before the text was written (Fig. 6).[67] It appears, therefore, that the scribe worked passage by passage, handing the finished leaves to the painter before starting to copy the following ones. The overlap between writing and painting means that the opposite method was also used: in a few places, it is the painting that partially covers the text.[68]

Fig. 6: Unfinished miniature of the centurion's prayer. West Syriac lectionary, Mor Mattay, 1260 CE. BAV Vat. sir. 559, fol. 72^{r}.

Thus, the creation of a lectionary did not necessarily follow a set and immutable rule, which could vary itself throughout the work. However, there is no evidence to sug-

67 de Jerphanion 1940, 22; Leroy 1964, 299–300; Snelders 2010, 177–180. See also BAV Vat. sir. 559, fols 88^{r}, 121^{v}, 133^{r}.

68 See, for example, BAV Vat. sir. 559, fol. 150^{v}.

gest that all the lectionaries which present a similar layout followed the same method. Most of the time, the frames surrounding the miniatures are far enough from the text that it is impossible to distinguish which were made first: such is the case in the lectionary CFM 38, for example. Only a few miniatures might have been made before the text was copied, or, at least, before the punctuation marks and the gilded letters were added. In the lectionary MG 5, the blue line framing the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* has been partially overlapped by the gilded rubric of the matins (fol. 44^{v}). The punctuation marks sometimes went over the frames, as on the miniatures of the Nativity (fol. 26^{r}) and the Betrayal of Judas (fol. 198^{r}). Elsewhere, the frames seem to have partially covered the end of certain letters. Such is the case on the miniatures of the Annunciation (fol. 20^{v}) and the Incredulity of Thomas (fol. 178^{v}) in the lectionary CFM 41.[69] The same phenomenon might have occurred for at least one miniature of the lectionary Damascus, SOP, 348. The wing of the angel which appears to the myrrhophores (fol. 132^{v}) goes beyond the red frame and covers the end of the preceding text, merging with the punctuation and diacritical marks: the image was clearly painted after the text was copied.

Overpainting and restorations seem to have sometimes disrupted the work. The image of Saint John the Baptist (fol. 350^{r}) in the lectionary SOP 353 bears the trace of a curious modification that might have happened during the painting phase (Fig. 7). At first glance, it seems that the initial composition was not correctly proportionate to its frame. The large blank circle of an unachieved nimbus in the upper third of the miniature crosses over the saint's face and shoulders, betraying the previous outline of a stocky, long-haired man. The restoration, consequently, was surely intended to give the figure a higher, slenderer silhouette. The painter then focused on the upper part of the body, i.e. his head, shoulders and chest, moving the nimbus closer to the frame, which was, thereby, partially covered. Unfortunately, the new outline caused the destruction of the lower part of the figure's face, perhaps because the preparatory bowl layer prevented the proper adherence of the successive pictorial layers. Despite its strange appearance, this miniature offers an incomparable example of the inconveniences with which a painter might have been confronted. His careful effort also gives an idea of the material cost of each illuminated leaf: it was better to do everything possible to rectify a mistake than to waste parchment, gold and pigments.

69 On the contrary, the word that overflows the frame of the Prayer at Gethsemane (fol. 156^{v}) was clearly omitted by the scribe and added by another hand after the painting.

Fig. 7: Reformed miniature of Saint John the Baptist. West Syriac Four Gospels, Melitene, 1054 CE. SOP 353, fol. 350^{r}. © SOP, Department of Syriac Studies, all rights reserved.

Fig. 8: Unfinished miniature of an Apostle. West Syriac New Testament, Mor Yaʿqūb Malp^{h}onō, Mount Izlā, 1188–1204 CE. BnF syriaque 41, fol. 177^{r}. © gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

Further evidence regarding the painting is to be found in the manuscript BnF syriaque 41. The last two leaves bear two miniatures depicting Jesus Christ and an Apostle facing each other (fols 178^{v}–179^{r}). The empty background, the austerity of the setting and the hasty treatment of the drapery indicate that these images were never achieved (Fig. 8). Yet, their unfinished state allows us to appreciate how the painter applied the colours. The colourful mosaic tesserae which constitute the frame were applied gradually, starting with the blue and brown pigments. These were the only colours used. Everywhere else, the surface of the frames was left blank, revealing the preparatory lines of the tesserae that should have been painted. There is every reason to believe that a sudden interruption to the commission, perhaps due to a lack of funds, put a stop to the painter's work. However, the sorrowful colophon that ends the manuscript could explain the incompletion of the paintings in a sadder way (fol. 177^{v}). The one who wrote it was not the scribe Šemʿūn but his own brother, the priest Yūḥannōn, who was mourning Šemʿūn's death: perhaps this tragic event brought to term the making of the book.[70]

5.3 Dyes and pigments

The combined evidence of written sources and the technical study of manuscripts leave, however, an important lacuna: the chemical nature of the inks, pigments and dyes. Fortunately, recent advances in the physico-chemical analysis of ancient manuscripts allow us to shed a new light on these technical aspects of book production in medieval Mesopotamia. As part of the four-year research plan at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and a post-doctoral project supervised by the Institut national d'histoire de l'art (Paris), several campaigns of analyses have been carried out by an international team led by Maurizio Aceto.[71] Three main

70 The last part of the colophon begins as follows: ..ܥܩ ܩܛܥ ܒܫܡ ..ܟܬܒ ܐܢܐ ܟܬܒܬ ܟܬܒܐ ܗܢܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܕܗܘܬ ܠܚܛܐ ܒܝܕ ܚܛܝܐ ܕܐܢܐ ܝܘܚܢܢ ܩܫܝܫܐ ܒܫܡ ܒܠܚܘ ܚܫܝܟ ܕܐܚܝ ܪܒܐ ܫܡܥܘܢ ܣܦܪܐ ܒܬܪ ܡܘܬ ܐܚܝ ܪܒܐ ܫܡܥܘܢ ܣܦܪܐ ܟܕ ܥܝܢܝ ܡܠܝܢ ܒܕܡܥܐ ܒܦܘܡܝ ܘܒܟܪܝܗܐ ܒܟܪܣܝ ('I wrote this memory with my own hands, [me], Yūḥannōn, a priest [only] by name, after the death of my brother, Rabban Šemʿūn the scribe, when my eyes are full of tears, [with] lament in my mouth and sorrow in my mind').

71 Professor of analytical chemistry (Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale). Apart from the author, other members of this project are Guido Frison† (University College London), Angelo Agostino (Università degli Studi di Torino), Dafne Cimino (Università degli Studi di Verona) and Francesca Robotti (Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale). The equipment, methods and instrumental parameters are described in a detailed way in Aceto et al. 2012; Aceto et al. 2014; see also Pacha Miran 2020, 66–82; Pacha Miran 2021b, 334–354; Pacha Miran forthcoming b.

techniques were employed: ultra-violet visible diffuse reflectance spectroscopy,[72] fluorescence spectroscopy[73] and X-ray fluorescence spectrometry.[74] An optical microscope was also used to examine and photograph the pictorial layers.[75] Among a corpus of thirty-eight manuscripts dating from the sixth to the fourteenth centuries, three gospel lectionaries have already been analysed: BnF syriaque 355 and syriaque 356 (*c.* 1220 CE) and BAV Vat. sir. 559 (1260 CE). Although this work is still in its early stages, the first results gathered from 2018 to 2023 enable us to get a glimpse of the palette of the Syriac painters.

Blue samples particularly reveal the diversity and quality of the colorants used within the workshops. Thus, the different shades of blue in BnF syriaque 355 and syriaque 356 mainly use ultramarine, a costly pigment obtained from lapis lazuli.[76] Indigo, obtained from *Isatis tinctoria* (woad) or *Indigofera tinctoria* (dyers'

72 Optic fibre analysis was performed with an Avantes (Apeldoorn, the Netherlands) AvaSpec-ULS2048XL-USB2 model spectrophotometer and an AvaLight-HAL-S-IND tungsten halogen light source; the detector and light source were connected with fibre-optic cables to an FCR-7UV200–2-1.5 × 100 probe. The spectral range of the detector was 200–1160 nm; depending on the features of the monochromator (slit width 50 µm, grating of UA type with 300 lines/mm) and of the detector (2048 pixels), the best spectra resolution was 2.4 nm, calculated as full width at half maximum. The distance between the probe and the sample was kept constant at 1 mm in all measurements. The probe contained a USB endoscope to visualise the area on the sample investigated. The instrumental parameters were as follows: 10 ms integration time, 100 scans for a total acquisition time of 1.0 s for each spectrum. The system was managed by means of AvaSoft v. 8™ dedicated software, running on Windows 7™.

73 An Ocean Optics (Dunedin, FL, USA) Jaz model spectrophotometer was employed to record the molecular fluorescence spectra. The instrument is equipped with a 365 nm Jaz-LED internal light source; a QF600–8-VIS/NIR fibre fluorescence probe is used to drive excitation light onto the sample and recover the light emitted. The spectrophotometer works in the range 191–886 nm; according to the features of the monochromator (200 µm slit width) and detector (2048 elements), the spectral resolution available is 7.6 nm calculated as full width at half maximum. Instrumental parameters were as follows: 2 s integration time, 3 scans for a total acquisition time of 6 s for every spectrum. The system is managed with SpectraSuite™ software under Windows 7™.

74 X-ray fluorescence measurements were performed with an EDXRF Thermo (Waltham, MA, USA) NITON spectrometer XL3T-900 GOLDD model, equipped with an Ag tube (max. 50 kV, 100 µA, 2W), a large area SDD detector, energy resolution of about 136 eV at 5.9 keV. Each spot analysed had an average diameter of 3 mm and was focused by a CCD camera, with a working distance of 2 mm. Total time of analysis was 120 s. The spectra obtained have been processed with the commercial software BAxil, derived by the academic software QXAS from IAEA.

75 A USB Dino-Lite (New Taipei City, Taiwan) AM411 3 T-FV2W model microscope was used to acquire digital images at 50× and 200× magnification ratios. The instrument is equipped with 375 nm and visible LED lights and a digital camera with 1.3 Megapixel resolution.

76 BnF syriaque 355, fols 1^{v}, 2^{r-v}, 3^{r-v}, 4^{v}, 5^{r}; syriaque 356, fols 2^{v} and 3^{v}. Concerning the characterisation of ultramarine in late antique and medieval manuscripts, see Frison and Brun 2016.

indigo), was only used marginally in the miniatures, but it is much more common in peritextual ornamentation as frontispieces and quire marks.[77] In much the same way, the painter of BAV Vat. sir. 559 used two different blue dyes. Ultramarine was favoured for the deepest shades, ranging from midnight to sky blue.[78] Although pure indigo was used more sparingly, a few mixtures of indigo and orpiment sometimes gave a pale blue tinged with green.[79]

A wide variety of green tones range from a pale almond to a dark forest green, including many shades of copper and emerald green with bluish undertones. However, this diversified palette used a limited range of mineral, vegetal or mixed colourants. The most frequent mixture that occurs in the miniatures of BnF syriaque 355 was made up of indigo and an undetermined yellow dye.[80] A similar combination of orpiment and indigo has been observed in BAV Vat. sir. 559.[81] On the other hand, two occurrences of pale green have been identified as verdigris in the liminar folios and peritextual ornaments of BnF syriaque 355.[82] This pigment, derived from copper, clearly differs from the mixture of indigo and yellow that was only found on the figurative miniatures. Verdigris, however, is entirely absent from the miniatures, frontispiece and quire marks of BnF syriaque 356, as well as the paintings of BAV Vat. sir. 559.

Shades of brown, orange and red also required both pure and mixed dyes. Both in BnF syriaque 355 and BAV Vat. sir. 559, the most common brown mixture combines indigo with cinnabar.[83] This bright red mercury sulphide attests to the financial wealth of the manuscript's patrons, since it was as expensive as lapis lazuli. The dark reddish brown in BAV Vat. sir. 559 also derives from cinnabar which occurs relatively frequently, sometimes associated with red and orange

77 BnF syriaque 355, fols 1^{v}, 132^{v}, 205^{v}, 219^{r}.

78 BAV Vat. sir. 559, fols 5^{r}, 18^{v}, 94^{r}, 223^{v}. On fol. 18^{v}, the retouching of the damaged painted layer as made with Prussian blue, a ferric ferrocyanide attested by the concentration of iron (Fe), mercury (Hg), sulphur (S) and lead (Pb). Since this synthetic pigment had been discovered in the early eighteenth century, the restauration probably just predated the acquisition of the manuscript by the Vatican Library in 1938.

79 BAV Vat. sir. 559, fols 11^{r}, 223^{v}.

80 BnF syriaque 355, fols $2^{r–v}$, $3^{r–v}$, 4^{v}, 5^{r}.

81 BAV Vat. sir. 559, fol. 223^{v}.

82 BnF syriaque 355, fols 6^{r}, 7^{r}, 14^{r}, 52^{v}. Syriac ink recipes call this substance *zangārā*, borrowed from the Persian word *zangār* quoted in Gignoux 2011, 40. Boutrolle and Daccache 2015, 266, underline that the same term could refer to different substances: an artificial, basic copper acetate (which was used here) and a natural pigment, issued from the degradation of copper through contact with air and water.

83 BnF syriaque 355, fols $1^{r–v}$, 2^{r}, 5^{r}; syriaque 356, fols $1^{r–v}$, 2^{r}; BAV Vat. sir. 559, fol. 223^{v}. Boutrolle and Daccache 2015, 263, mention this substance under the Syriac name *zngpr* (ܙܢܓܦܪ).

shades.[84] Similar to the lapis lazuli, variations in hue were obtained by diluting expensive pigments to a greater or lesser extent. It should also be noted that the painter of BAV Vat. sir. 559 used two red dyes: cinnabar and cochineal, which were sometimes mixed together.[85] Cochineal was also widely used to obtain different shades of pink, and appears in remarkable proportions in purple, purplish blue and brown tones.[86] On the other hand, red ochre, coloured with haematite, was frequently used in BnF syriaque 356, but is absent from the two other manuscripts.[87]

The identification of yellow and orange shades raises more uncertainties, while revealing further analogies between the manuscripts analysed. Generally speaking, it was not possible to determine with any certainty the nature of the pigment ranging from golden to pale lemon yellow in BnF syriaque 355 and syriaque 356. The use of pararealgar (As_4S_4), chemically close to orpiment (As_2S_3), remains the most probable hypothesis.[88] Yellow ochre could also have been part of the Syriac palette, although its possible occurrences are rare and difficult to characterise. Orange hues were apparently due to the use of ochre or red earths;[89] cinnabar also appears in the miniatures and peritextual ornaments of BnF syriaque 355, although it was only used minimally.[90] The identification of the yellow dyes in BAV Vat. sir. 559 has only given uncertain results, no matter the shade analysed. The pale, earthy yellow could have come from pararealgar, as suggested by the presence of arsenic and sulphur.[91]

Notwithstanding the likely cost of rare dyes such as cinnabar and lapis lazuli, gold and silver are the hallmarks of the most luxurious manuscripts. The somewhat poor state of preservation of the pictorial layers, in the lectionary BAV Vat. sir. 559, complicates the observation of gold. However, gold powder has been clearly detected several times, both in the miniatures and the text – the most important pericopes being entirely written in gold ink. On the other hand, it is gold leaf, not powder, that covers the background of the miniatures in BnF syriaque 355 and

84 BAV Vat. sir. 559, fol. 223^{v}.

85 BAV Vat. sir. 559, fols 18^{r}, 26^{r}, 94^{r}, 223^{v}.

86 Generic name for several species of silkworm belonging to the genera *Kermes* or *Dactylopius*. The colouring substance could take the form of a mixture of alum and an organic dye, as indicated by Desreumaux 2015, 178.

87 BnF syriaque 356, fols 1^{v}, 2^{r}.

88 BnF syriaque 355, fols 1^{v}, 2^{v}, 6^{r}; syriaque 356, fol. 1^{v}.

89 BnF syriaque 355, fol. 2^{r}.

90 BnF syriaque 355, fols 2^{r}, 3^{r}, 219^{r}.

91 BAV Vat. sir. 559, fols 1^{r}, 5^{r}, 11^{r}, 223^{v}.

syriaque 356.[92] The chemical composition of gold leaf betrays different techniques, sometimes used simultaneously. The gold samples analysed from BnF syriaque 355 contain either lead, barium and strontium traces,[93] or mercury, sulphur, lead, potassium and barium,[94] while BnF syriaque 356 mainly contains gold and sulphur only.[95] The use of silver leaf is also well attested in these two lectionaries, either on the figures' nimbus and on the backgrounds. This technique distinguishes them from the rest of the corpus, where silver was used exclusively for the writing of significant texts.[96] Similar to gold leaf, the silvered areas contain traces of either barium and lead,[97] or mercury and sulphur.[98]

As shown by these preliminary observations, the painters of the early thirteenth century active in Melitene (BnF syriaque 355 and syriaque 356) and in the Mosul area (BAV Vat. sir. 559) appear to have used a broadly similar palette. The composition of the main dyes identified in lectionaries is also confirmed by the other types of Syriac manuscripts analysed in Rome and Paris. The intensity of each colour seems to have reflected the importance of certain patterns, particularly in relation to the figure of Christ. Yet, expensive dyes were used throughout the whole iconographic programmes without any attempt to replace them with less costly substances – even to depict minor motifs. The massive use of precious materials, such as lapis lazuli, cinnabar, gold and silver, suggests that the brilliance of shades took precedence over their cost: as a genuine work of art, the commission of liturgical books must have involved wealthy patrons.

Although literary sources remain silent on the cost and circulation of dyes, the fact that rare materials are much more common in medieval manuscripts than in those of Late Antiquity also bears witness to the evolution of trade routes and economic networks after the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia.[99] The scientific study of colours, moreover, reveals many common artistic practices between Syriac and neighbouring communities during the Abbasid era. Analyses carried out simultaneously on Arabic, Coptic and Greek manuscripts produced in Mesopotamia and the eastern Mediterranean already attest to many technical similarities

92 BnF syriaque 355, fols 1^{v}, 2^{v}, 3^{v}, $4^{r–v}$, 5^{r}, 52^{v}, 53^{v}, 205^{v}; syriaque 356, fol. 2^{r}.

93 BnF syriaque 355, fol. 1^{v}.

94 BnF syriaque 355, fol. 5^{r}.

95 BnF syriaque 356, fol. 2^{r}.

96 Silver ink was mainly used to write some of the rubrics, as well as certain readings for major feasts. See, for example, the lectionaries CFM 37, 38, and 41. An owner's note has been written with silver ink on a blue background in the lectionary SOP 353 (fol. 328^{r}).

97 BnF syriaque 355, fols 1^{v}, 5^{r}.

98 BnF syriaque 356, fol. 2^{r}.

99 Bernabò, Fedeli and Garosi 2008; Lanterna, Piccolo and Radicati 2008; Pacha Miran 2020, 76–78.

between Byzantine, Eastern Christian and Islamic workshops.[100] Further research should enable us to refine these initial observations, by systematising the analysis of dated and located manuscripts and comparing the results already available.

5.4 The binding and the cover

The penultimate stage in the making of a lectionary was the binding of the quires into a volume. Mentions of bookbinders, however, are even rarer than painters' names. The deacon Peṭrōs probably oversaw this technical aspect of the production within the workshop of Qarṭmin in the first half of the eleventh century. The colophons of the lectionaries SOP 12/21 and BL Or. 3372 actually describe him as responsible for the 'binding' (*dūbōqō*). This task might have also included the acquisition of materials, such as parchment, inks and dyes. Both colophons agree on this point with the later testimony of Barhebræus: the *Ecclesiastical Chronicle* indeed reports that Bishop Yūḥannōn had sent Peṭros to Melitene to purchase parchment.[101]

The binding itself, however, can be perceived through a codicological study of the manuscripts. The leaves were certainly bound after being written, as we now assume that Syriac scribes usually turned the page to write the text vertically.[102] Binding in ten-leaf quires (quinions) was the most common use.[103] The first and last folios of each quire were numbered with Syriac letters, frequently surrounded by geometric patterns, in the middle of the lower margins. Such illuminated quire marks sometimes left discreet allusions to the binders' activity. In the lectionary BnF syriaque 355, an inscription was hidden in the meander which frames the mark at the beginning of the second quire (fol. 23^{r}). The text mentions the ones who 'finished the seams', i.e. the craftsmen who sewed the bifolios into quires and bound the quires into a volume:

ܗܠܝܢ ܣܦܝܪ̈ܐ ܐܬܬܫܠܡܘ ܒܝܕ ܚܒ̈ܪܝ ܚܛ̈ܝܐ ܠܝ ܐܝܬ ܕܝܩܘܢ ܘܬܠܡܝܕ ܕܐܒܢ ܐܒܘܢ.

These seams were achieved by my brothers, sinners [brothers in sins], to me, namely a deacon, and disciple of our father.

100 Such similarities are confirmed by current research led on Arabic manuscripts of the British Library and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Concerning the analyses of the manuscript BL Add. 7170, see Clarks and Gibbs 1997. Paul Garside, from the Scientific Conservation Department of the British Library, describes the analyses of London, BL, Or. 2784 in Contadini 2012, 165–166.

101 Barhebræus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, I, 76 (ed. and tr. Abbeloos and Lamy 1872–1877, vol. 1, cols 417–418).

102 Briquel Chatonnet and Borbone 2015.

103 Briquel Chatonnet and Borbone 2015.

The binder's name, however, remains a mystery. One can only suppose that he was an Armenian since the quires were numbered in both Syriac and in Armenian characters. This hypothesis is amply confirmed by the close relations forged between the West Syriac and Armenian communities in Melitene and the surrounding region.[104]

A cover made of leather, wood or even silver, sometimes adorned with geometric patterns or biblical images, was finally put on the volume. The boards, mostly made from wood of various species,[105] were usually upholstered in leather, sometimes textile,[106] and stained in dark shades of red, tawny brown or black. Leather cover plates were stamped very soberly with geometric compositions, among which the cross on a pedestal was particularly popular.[107] The preserved decorations, which are relatively simple, seem to have received more or less attention depending on the book's destination and, in all likelihood, the financial resources of its patron. Thus, the existence of precious metal covers, such as silver or gilded silver, seems all the more attractive. Such pieces, which are attested in northern Syria as early as Late Antiquity, were actually widespread throughout Armenia and Byzantium during the medieval period.[108] Nothing excludes that Syriac lectionaries, displayed on a lectern at the entrance to the sanctuary, were themselves covered with a silver binding, possibly embossed with biblical images.

Though the surviving examples do not predate the seventeenth century,[109] some literary evidence attest to the existence of precious bindings even during the Abbasid era. The note written in 1272 CE at the beginning of the lectionary CFM 37 (fol. 8^{r}) states that the book was covered with an expensive binding, presumably

104 Kominko 2010, 64; Greenwood 2017.

105 Dergham and Vinourd 2015, 279. Cardboard plates have been documented in recent times; see Dergham and Vinourd 2015, 283.

106 The distinction between different animal skins is not always obvious, but it seems to indicate the preponderance of *basane* (sheep) and goat, while calf remains very rare; see Chahine 2013, 109–110. Dergham and Vinourd 2015, 289, describe the calf binding of the manuscript Sharfeh, monastery of Our Lady of Deliverance, Rahmani 15, and the textile cover of Sharfeh, monastery of Our Lady of Deliverance, Rahmani 72.

107 van Regemorter 1969; Briquel Chatonnet 1998, 168. The manuscript London, BL, Or. 8729 (1230 CE) is the best example of a cover adorned with a cross that offers striking similarities with the crosses that illustrate the introductory leaves of many liturgical manuscripts. See, for example, BnF syriaque 30 (fol. 10^{r}), syriaque 31 (fol. 1^{r}), syriaque 40 (fol. 5^{r}), syriaque 41 (fol. 10^{r}), syriaque 154 (fol. 3^{r}), syriaque 355 (fol. 1^{v}) and syriaque 356 (fol. 1^{v}).

108 Brown 2006, nos 66–67, 230–231.

109 Leroy 1964, plate I, 1, reproduces a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century silver binding depicting two saints on either side of the cross against a background strewn with flowers. This cover was among the treasures of the church of Mār ʾAḥūdemmēh in Mosul.

at the time of its restoration. But this cover was not made for this particular manuscript: it had been taken from another book, under conditions that were murky, to say the least. Although no trace of such covers remains today, the note attests that they were made of silver plates:

ܗܢܐ ܕܐܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܗܢܐ ܟܕ ܐܬ ܠܗ ܟܣܝܐ ܒܫܘܒܚܢ ܕܠܐ ܢܬܒܛܠ ܡܢ ܐܝܕܝܢ ܐܠܐ ܐܦ ܐܢ ܐܚܠܦ ܠܗ ܥܡ ܗܘ ܕܗܘ ܟܣܝܐ ܕܥܠ ܐܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܡܪ ܫܡܗ ܨܠܝܒܘ ܡܢ ܡܬܢܬܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܗ ܡܢ ܡܬܢܬܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܗ ܡܢ ܡܬܢܬܐ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܗ [...]. ܐܦ ܕ[...] ܕܟܣܝܐ ܕ[...] ܕܗܘ ܕܝܢ ܕܐܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܗܢܐ ܕܐܚܕܢ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܕܐܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܗܢܐ ܕܣܒܢ ܠܗ ܘܣܡܢ ܥܠ ܐܢܓܠܝܘܢ ܕܢ.

Since this gospel has been covered by us with a cover, we did not want it to be withdrawn, but we swapped it with the one which was on the gospel that the monk named Ṣalibō had made with the gifts from the convent. [...] [We feel] that the silver of [that which covers] this one is of a higher price than the one we have taken and put on our gospel.

Rather than a binding in the strict sense of the word, which unites the quires and gathers them into a volume (*kūrōsō*) the polysemic word *pāṭō* refers simultaneously to the 'face' or 'forehead', as well as the 'appearance' or 'surface' of any artefact.[110] At the same time, the idea of 'dressing' and 'making visible' implies that the lectionary was not only perceived as a vehicle for the text, but also as the face of the divine Logos within the church. Only the mention of silver (*sēmō*) attests that this cover took the form of movable metal plates, probably embossed. Fixed over the binding, they could, therefore, be removed without damaging the book itself. As well as providing evidence regarding the material used for the cover, the inscription shows that precious plates may have adorned several different manuscripts over the course of their existence. Even though very few manuscripts prior to the ninth century retain their original covers, the practice of adapting new bindings to older books seems to have been widespread.[111] The Four Gospel BAV Vat. sir. 13 (736 CE), for example, was given a gilded silver cover in the thirteenth century, which was later removed.[112]

The book with its cover being a major piece of liturgical furniture, it must have been one of the most prestigious items in church treasuries. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the chroniclers emphasised the preciousness of such gifts to

110 Payne Smith 1903, 433.

111 The leather binding of the manuscript Milan, Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C 313 inf. (sixth–seventh century), reproduced in Petersen 1954, 54, fig. 21, offers an interesting point of reflection on this subject. Leroy 1964, 106, n. 1, was concerned about the presence of Greek inscriptions on its cover, made at Dayr al-Suryān, which made him hesitate as to whether it belonged to the Syriac culture. Nevertheless, the frequency of Greek inscriptions, both on miniatures and in the text of the lectionaries following the Harklean version, attests that the use of this language was widespread among Syriac elites during the Abbasid Period.

112 Stefanus Assemani and Joseph Assemani 1758, vol. 2, 47.

celebrate the prodigality of major ecclesiastical figures. Thus, Michael the Great was told to have covered a gospel book he wrote with an awesome cover made entirely of silver.[113] Such a luxurious binding would have obviously caught the interest of looters: the author of the *History of the Convent of Mor Barṣawmō* lamented the fact that the silver plates were snatched from the book during the sacking of the monastery, towards the end of the thirteenth century.[114] Similarly, when Barhebræus accused the Kurds of stealing the gold and silver binding kept at Mor Mattay, he might have been inspired as much by historical reality as by the desire to endow the community with expensive liturgical objects, in order to demonstrate its financial wealth.[115]

6 Conclusions

The various ways in which liturgical manuscripts were produced, reflecting their iconographic and stylistic originality, reveal the extraordinary artistic diversity of Syriac Christianity during the Abbasid era. Although we cannot be certain of the exact organisation of each workshop, the elements gathered in this article give a clearer portrait of the people involved in the making of illuminated lectionaries. Nevertheless, the various situations examined here remind us that it is impossible, at this stage, to give a faithful vision of a 'typical Syriac workshop'. No single, uniform model can be applied to the many production centres we have encountered throughout northern Mesopotamia.

The predominant role of monks clearly emerges in light of written sources, though the contribution of secular clerics or even laymen should not be overshadowed. While most of the workshops seem to have been situated in monasteries, the colophons also suggest the existence of urban workshops. Some manu-

113 *Anonymous Chronicle of 1234*, II, 221 (ed. Chabot 1917, vol. 2, 314–315; tr. Abouna 1974, 235). The *History of the Convent of Mor Barṣawmō*, a Syriac treatise of 1360 quoted by Leroy 1964, 428, reveals some technical aspects of this manuscript: 'in place of the wooden boards, there was silver; inside in the text, and outside on the frontispiece, there was only gold, without black ink, with the varied and multicoloured preparations of the royal painters'.

114 Leroy 1964, 428. According to Jean-Baptiste Chabot, this sacking probably occurred during the expedition of Baybars (1260–1277 CE) or Al-Ašraf Khalīl (1263–1293 CE), the Mamluk sultan who laid siege to Rumnah in 1292. In any case, the *History of the Convent of Mor Barṣawmō* reports that Yaʿqūb bar Ḥaddad, around 1360, described this manuscript as 'no more than a heap of leaves stripped of their binding'.

115 Barhebræus, *Civil Chronicle*, XI (ed. Bedjan 1890, 597; tr. Budge 1932, 508). The translator hesitated between a gospel 'bound' or 'inlaid' with gold and silver (ܟܬܒ̈ܐ ܕܥܡ ܟܣܬܐ ܕܕܗܒ ܘܟܣܦ ܒܥܘ ܠܡܫܚܠܒ̈ܢ).

scripts were also written, illuminated and bound in several different places, reflecting the three essential skills involved in the making of books. Yet, the scribe, the painter and the binder might have been the same person or even different people; it is unclear whether they worked simultaneously or in successive stages. The text seems to have been perceived as the essence of the book, which could include the presence of images, but not necessarily. Although the copy generally preceded the painting, the reverse was also possible. Thus, the scant mention of painters could indicate that the miniatures were mostly painted by the scribes, or that the latter attached little importance to the painters. This notable silence, in fact, might unveil the sequence of the writing and painting phases: most of the images were undoubtedly painted after the text had been completed.

What is sure is that the process differed from one workshop to another. Therefore, we cannot assume at face value the few sources that describe the bishops as scribes or painters – although their implication cannot be entirely dismissed. Everything shows that these prelates were regarded as tutelary figures of the manuscript production, which they often helped to finance and preserve. Whatever the case, commissioning an illustrated lectionary must have been a costly and important initiative: the material value added to the time required to produce the book, but also to its great spiritual significance. Embodying the presence of God during the liturgical services, adorned with miniatures and covered with a precious binding, the gospel lectionary took a privileged place amongst the church furniture. Dyes and pigments, gold and silver ink, parchment and luxurious covers thus contributed to turning sacred books into authentic treasures, preciously enshrined and piously revered.

Abbreviations

BAV = Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
BL = London, British Library.
BnF = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
BodL = Oxford, Bodleian Library.
CBL = Dublin, Chester Beatty Library.
CFM = Mardin, Church of the Forty Martyrs.
HL = Harvard, Houghton Library.
HMML = Collegeville, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.
MG = Midyat, Mor Gabriel monastery.
SB = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz.
SOP = Damascus, Syrian Orthodox patriarchate.

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Appendix: Short list of Syriac lectionaries known to date

Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz
– Syr. Diez A. Oct. 161, eleventh century (Sachau 1899, vol. 1, 19–20, no. 10)
– Sachau 304, eleventh century (Sachau 1899, vol. 1, 27–32, no. 14)
– Sachau 322, 1241 CE (Sachau 1899, vol. 1, 32–42, no. 15)

Damascus, Syrian Orthodox patriarchate
– 12/2, 1313 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 603–604)
– 12/4, 1149 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 604)
– 12/5, undated (Dolabani et al. 1994, 604)

– 12/6, undated (Dolabani et al. 1994, 604)
– 12/7, 1170 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 604)
– 12/9, 1099 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 604)
– 12/21, 1041 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 606)
– 348, 1222 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 603–604)
– 353, 1054 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 604)
– 356, 1212 or 1263 CE (Dolabani et al. 1994, 605)

Diyarbakır, Chaldean Archbishopric
– Cod. 13, 1196–1197 CE (Scher 1907b, 230)

Dublin, Chester Beatty Library
– Syr. 4, 1217–1218 CE (Hatch 1946, 222, no. CLXXI)

Harvard, Houghton Library
– Syr. 141, 1208 CE (Brock 2012, 31)

Jerusalem, Mor Marqos
– unnumbered manuscript, 1209 CE (Brock 2012, 31)

London, British Library
– Add. 7169, twelfth-thirteenth century (Rosen and Forshall 1838, 32–37, no. 25)
– Add. 7170, 1216–1220 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 3, 1204, no. XXVI)
– Add. 7171, 1173 CE (Brock 2012, 30)
– Add. 7173, 1288–1289 CE (Hatch 1946, 225, plate CLXXIV)
– Add. 12139, 999–1000 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 154–159, no. CCXXIV)
– Add. 14485, 824 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 146–149, no. CCXX)
– Add. 14486, 824 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 149–152, no. CCXXI)
– Add. 14487, 824 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 152–154, no. CCXXII)
– Add. 14490, 1089 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 159–161, no. CCXXV)
– Add. 14686, 1255 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 3, 169–172, no. CCXXVIII)
– Add. 14687, 1256 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 3, 172–173, no. CCXXIX)
– Add. 14689, 1221 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 3, 167–169, no. CCXXVII)
– Add. 17218, ninth–tenth century (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 154, no. CCXXIII)
– Add. 18714, 1214 CE (Wright 1870–1872, vol. 1, 161–167, no. CCXXVI)
– Egerton 681, 1206–1207 CE (Hatch 1946, 220, no. CLXIX)
– Or. 3372, eleventh century (Margoliouth 1899, 16)

Mardin, Church of the Forty Martyrs
– 37, twelfth–thirteenth century (Leroy 1964, 383–389, no. XXVIII)
– 38, 1229–1230 CE (Braida and Pavan 2017, 241)
– 40, thirteenth century (Bernabò and Pavan 2018, 407–408)
– 41, *c.* 1250–1275 CE (Leroy 1964, 371–383, no. XXVII)

Midyat, Mor Gabriel
– 5, 1226–1227 CE (Leroy 1964, 321–332, no. XXI)
– 6, 1201 CE (Pavan 2017, 50)

Mosul, Chaldean patriarchate
– Cod. 12, 1186 CE (Scher 1907b, 230)
– Cod. 13, 1189 CE (Scher 1907b, 230–233)
– Cod. 1225, 1237–1238 CE (Brock 2012, 33)

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France
– syriaque 51, 1138 CE (Hatch 1946, 132, no. LXXXI)
– syriaque 59, undated (Zotenberg 1874, 21)
– syriaque 289, 1206 CE (Chabot 1896, 239–240)
– syriaque 355, *c.* 1190–1220 (Nau 1911, 310)
– syriaque 356, *c.* 1190–1220 (Nau 1911, 310)
– syriaque 382, twelfth–thirteenth century (Briquel Chatonnet 1997, 21–23, 81)

St Petersburg, Hermitage Museum
– 22, 1243 CE (Brock 2012, 33)

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
– Borg. sir. 169, 1284–1285 CE (Brock 2012, 35)
– Vat. sir. 20, 1216 CE (Stefanus Assemani and Joseph Assemani 1758, 103–136)
– Vat. sir. 24, undated (Stefanus Assemani and Joseph Assemani 1758, 195–212)
– Vat. sir. 37, 1164–1165 CE (Brock 2012, 29)
– Vat. sir. 556, undated (van Lantschoot 1965, 75)
– Vat. sir. 559, 1260 CE (van Lantschoot 1965, 78)