

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT A. KITCHEN
REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN

From the Editor:

Many thanks are due to Dr. Amir Harrak for his initiating and shepherding the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies at the Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, as well as establishing and editing the *Journal of the Canadian Society of Syriac Studies*, its first number appearing in 2001.

I am pleased to assume the role of editor for *JCSSS*, for which there is a rich variety of articles and reviews on Syriac literature for its 24th issue.

Khalid Dinno, University of Toronto, “Bar Hebraeus and his Book: Mukhtasar Tarikh al-Duwal (Summary of The History of Nations)”

Dinno presents a summary of Bar Hebraeus’/Maphrian Gregory Abū-al Faraj’s (1226–1286) “The History of the Nations,” written in Arabic. A brief biography of the author is given, then the Ten Nations (States) are identified as the transitions of state and religious authority from one group of rulers to the next. The first three States are summaries from the Old Testament. The Fourth State is the transfer from the Kings of the Israelites to the Kings of the Chaldeans, continuing to the Tenth State, from the Kings of the Muslim Arabs to the Mongol Kings.

Sebastian P. Brock, University of Oxford, “The ‘interior limbs’ in St. Isaac of Nineveh and some other Syriac authors”

Brock compiles a creative essay illustrating the numerous rhetorical images of human limbs, physical and psychological, in Syriac literature, especially in the works of Isaac of Nineveh. Originally written as a contribution to a volume in memory of Père Robert Beulay, OCD, that did not materialize, the interior limbs issues from a concern for the ‘interior person’ (*barnasha gawwaya*).

These limbs, or members (*haddame*) are associated with the heart, soul, intellect, thought, mind and intelligence. Brock summarises the occurrences of these metaphorical images in two lists. Beginning with Isaac, and then other Syriac authors, are noted instances, such as “the eyes of the intellect,” the mouth of the mind.” A second list is of Syriac authors (Aphrahat to Joseph Hazzaya) with the terms and expressions they have used.

Adrien Zakar, University of Toronto, “Maloyan’s Will: Armeno-Syrian Solace in Arabic”

Zakar recounts the tragic details of the Ottoman oppression and massacre of Armenian and Syriac Christian communities initiated in 1915, relying upon the eye-witness reports of survivors in a collection compiled by Syriac Catholic priest Ishaq Sa’id Armaleh, written in Arabic Garshuni (Arabic written in Syriac script) to avoid confiscation by Ottoman authorities. Armaleh’s colleague, Louis Cheikho, a Chaldean Jesuit, gathered in Beirut and Mount Lebanon a large number of Eastern Christian texts and Arabic manuscripts, as well as founding the academic journal, *al-Mashriq*. Ground zero for both narratives was Mardin, the first onslaught occurring in 1895.

Joseph Chenard, University of Toronto, “A Composite Giant – A Confusion of Myths in a Syriac Historical Chronicle”

The Chronicle of 724, a West Syriac text found in a single British Library manuscript (BM Add. 14643), has a section recording ancient empires and rulers. Chenard focuses on a short text and translation regarding rulers of the legendary Near Eastern past. The very first king listed in *The Chronicle* is known as Sihon (*siḥon/sikon*), who appears to be associated with giants (*ganbarē*/ܓܢܒܪܐ). This implies a very ancient personality, and therefore from an earlier generation of human beings who were in essence giants. Chenard points to the reputed gigantic stature of Gilgamesh, along with the Sumerian king Eannatum who was five and a half cubits (ca. 8.5 feet tall). Add to this the inevitable characteristic that Sihon was semi-divine. Sihon is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament as an Amorite king, but this Syriac Sihon is not the same character, borrowing perhaps from Enochian literature and Zoroastrian mythology. This implies traditions becoming confused and garbled. Chenard concludes by observing that Syriac literature was at the crossroads of a number of literary and religious traditions.

Demetrios Alibertis, University of Toronto, “Introduction and Translation of Jacob of Serugh, Memra 36 on Daniel and Hananiah”

Alibertis introduces and translates the lengthy Syriac *mīmrō*/homily by one of the most renowned Syriac poet-theologians, Jacob of Serugh (d. 521). Written as a metrical homily in two-line couplets in traditional 12-syllable lines, this *mīmrō* features an imaginative narration and interpretation of the episode of the Three Young Men in the Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3).

Bogdan-Gabriel Drăghici, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations, The Aga Khan University (London), “Let your Loins be Girded and Keep Your Lamps Burning”: Priesthood and Priestly Vestments in the Syriac Orthodox Tradition”

Drăghici examines the theology of liturgical vestments and priesthood in the Syriac Orthodox tradition through a close study of an unedited chapter from Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī’s *Book of Theology*. Drawing on earlier Syriac sources (particularly John of Dara and Mushe Bar Kipho) Bar Ṣalībī synthesizes Late Antique traditions while offering original insights suited to the theological concerns of his time. The article situates the chapter within the broader structure of the *Book of Theology*, reconstructs Bar Ṣalībī’s theology of the priesthood, and examines his mystagogical interpretations of specific liturgical garments. By presenting a preliminary English translation of this overlooked text, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Syriac Orthodox sacramental theology and the symbolic role of ecclesiastical dress. In doing so, it highlights the creative theological activity of medieval Syriac authors and reaffirms the value of Syriac liturgical sources for the wider history of Christian ritual and theology.

Other contributions:

Memoriam for Paul-Hubert Poirier, one of the founding members of CSSS, written by **Eric Cregheur**, Université Laval.

Review of: *The Bird Who Sang the Trisagion of Isaac of Antioch: Becoming Parrot in a Late Antique Syriac Sermon*, by Robert A. Kitchen & Glenn Peers (Chan, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022). Reviewed by **Jonathan Loopstra**, Redeemer University, Ancaster, Ontario.

Major Conference:

The 14th World Congress of Syriac Studies (Symposium Syriacum) and the 12th Conference of Christian Arabic Studies will take place in Bucharest, Romania, from 3–7 August 2026. <https://symposium-syriacum-2026-bucharest.com>