"Let your Loins be Girded and Keep Your Lamps Burning". Priesthood and Priestly Vestments in the Syriac Orthodox Tradition[1]

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Abstract: This article 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.

Overview

Christian theologians have long reflected on the structure, meaning, and ritual life of the Church. Among the most symbolically rich elements of that reflection are liturgical vestments, which serve not merely as decoration, but as visual expressions of theological, moral, and ecclesial ideals. Vestments articulate specific identities or

[1] I am grateful to Dr Andy Hilkens, Yervant Kutchukian, and Lisanne Ophoff for their corrections and comments.

aspirations to identies that individuals or groups sought to embody.[2] This symbolic dimension becomes especially prominent in liturgical commentaries, where vestments often serve as a medium for reflecting on the nature of priesthood, the hierarchy of the Church, and the mysteries enacted in worship.

Despite the richness of these themes, many later texts that explore priesthood and liturgical mystagogy have received relatively limited scholarly attention. While some studies have addressed their significance within the Byzantine and Latin traditions, this research remains preliminary and uneven. Even more striking is the lack of attention given to non-European Christian traditions. For instance, the treatises on priesthood by John of Dara (d. c. 860)[3] and Mushe Bar Kipho (d. 903),[4] discussed below, remain unedited and largely unstudied. There are a few reasons for this still existing gap in research. First, connected to living and evolving traditions, liturgical studies tend to be done primarily within the denominational space of each Church. Second, given the multitude of yet underexplored topics in fields such as Syriac Studies, preference has been given to different subjects and especially earlier authors. Third, these texts often find themselves at the intersection of various fields such as theology, liturgical studies, history of art and archaeology, so that their study proves to be challenging.

Attempting to address some of these challenges, this study aims to further fill the research gap by sketching out aspects of Syriac Orthodox[5] ecclesiology and liturgics as outlined by the 12th century Metropolitan of Amid, Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī,

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[2] Ellen Victoria Swift, "Dress Accessories, Culture and Identity in the Late Roman Period", *An Tard* 12 (2004): 217–22, at 217–218. See also Alicia J. Batten, 'Clothing and Adornment', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 40:3 (2010): 148–159; Maria G. Parani, "Defining Personal Space: Dress And Accessories in Late Antiquity", in Luke Lavan, Ellen Swift, Toon Putzeys eds, *Objects in Context, Objects in Use* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 495–529; Kate Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 28–57; Jennifer L. Ball, "Textiles: The emergence of a Christian identity in cloth", in Robin M. Jensen, Mark D. Ellison eds, *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2018), 221–239.

[3] See Sebastian P. Brock, "Iwannis of Dara", in Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz, Lucas van Rompay, *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 224. The treatise on priesthood has been translated by Liza Anderson and is available on her academia.edu page. For his commentary on the Eucharist see Baby Varghese, *John of Dara. Commentary on the Eucharist* (Kottayam: SEERI, 1999).

[4] See James F. Coakley, "Mushe bar Kipho", in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 300. For his commentary on the Eucharist see Richard Hugh Connolly, Humphrey William Codrington, *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy by George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bar Kepha, together with the Syriac Anaphora of St. James and a Document Entitled 'The Book of Life'* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913).

[5] Out of the Christological disputes of the 5th and 6th centuries there emerged two ecclesiastical entities. The first Church emerged following the Council of Ephesus (431). In simple terms, this led to the consolidation of the East Syriac Church or, as it is known by its polemical name, the "Nestorian" Church which primarily consisted of Christians living in the Persian Empire. After the watershed of Chalcedon (451) another church emerged, the Syriac Orthodox Church or, as it is known in a primarily polemical context, the Jacobite Church. On monikers see Sebastian P. Brock, "The "Nestorian" Church: A Lamentable Misnomer", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78:3 (1996): 23–35; Nikolai N. Seleznyov, "Nestorius of Constantinople: Condemnation, Suppression, Veneration, With special reference to the role of his name in East-Syriac Christianity", *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 62(3–4): 165–90; Nikolai N. Seleznyov, "Jacobs and Jacobites: The Syrian Origins of the Name and its Egyptian Arabic

whose works have only been studied in a piecemeal fashion. More precisely, this study is centred around Bar Ṣalībī's mystagogical explanation of liturgical vestments preserved in his unedited *Book of Theology*.

In the following, I will situate the text within the framework of the *Book of Theokogy* (hereafter *BkTh*) and address some issues regarding the composition of the treatise. I will then outline Bar Ṣalībī's view of the priesthood as God's gift to rational beings, given that the meaning of liturgical garments is closely tied to the role of the clergy. Since Bar Ṣalībī unwaveringly drew on late antique sources in his writings, I will examine relevant themes in earlier Syriac authors. In this context, I will also situate his treatment of liturgical garments within a broader historical framework. As Karel Innemée has shown in his study of ecclesiastical dress in the medieval Near East, Syrian, Coptic, and Byzantine vestments share a common origin.[6] Finally, I will turn to his chapter on the mystagogy of liturgical vestments, for which I have prepared a preliminary English translation.[7]

This article aims to bring to light a previously unstudied Syriac text and to highlight its significance for understanding the development of liturgical tradition as a dynamic and evolving process. By examining Bar Ṣalībī's writings within their broader historical and theological contexts, the study seeks to highlight the richness of Syriac contributions to the interpretation of liturgical symbols and practices.

DIONYSIUS BAR ṢALĪBĪ AND THE *BOOK OF THEOLOGY*

Despite the importance of Bar Ṣalībī for the history of Syriac literature, there is little information available about his life.[8] Jacob was born at the beginning of the 12th century in Melitene (modern Malatya in south-east Türkiye) where he was also ordained deacon. In 1158, when he was appointed to the see of Marʿash (Kahramanmaraş), he adopted the name Dionysius. Sometime after 1157, he retreated to his hometown where he lived in relative solitude as a simple monk until 1166/7 when he was appointed to the see of Amid (Diyarbakır) by Patriarch Michael the Syrian (d. 1199). He remained Metropolitan of Amid until his death in 1171. Bar

Interpretations", *Scrinium* 9 (2013): 382–98; Dorothea Weltecke, "Michael the Syrian and Syriac Orthodox Identity", *Church History and Religious Culture* 89:1–3 (2009): 115–125.

[6] Karel C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, Studies in Textile and Costume History 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 181.

[7] I am grateful to Prof. David G. K. Taylor and Dr Salam Rassi for their help in perfecting this translation.

[8] Anton Baumstark described him as a distinguished figure representing a literary peak during the period of the Syriac Renaissance. Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber, 1922), 295. His contribution to the Syriac Orthodox Church had already been recognised by Patriarch Michael the Syrian, who referred to him as "star of his generation". Jean Baptiste Chabot ed., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899–1910), v. 3:344, t. 4 :699. For the most extensive Bio-Bibliography of Bar Ṣalībī see Gabriel Rabo, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi. Syrischer Kommentar zum Römerbrief: Einleitung, Edition und Übersetzung mit einem Verzeichnis der syrischen Handschriften zu seinen sämtlichen Werken*. Göttinger Orientforschungen, I. Reihe: Syriaca 56 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019).

Ṣalībī is best known for his biblical and liturgical commentaries, and to a lesser extent, his polemical corpus.[9] Until recently, his polemical works have received limited attention. The reason for this is because, in both Byzantine and Syriac studies, scholars have been captivated by the formative phases with later texts being disregarded because of their alleged unoriginality.[10] Aside from these writings, Bar Ṣalībī also composed philosophical and patristic commentaries, poetry, liturgical texts, and scientific works.[11]

One of his more elusive treatises is the *BkTh*. Bar Ṣalībī references this work in various ways throughout his corpus: in his treatises against the Arabs and Armenians, throughout *Against the Chalcedonians* (hereafter *AgC*), in his commentaries on Luke and Matthew, and in his *Commentary on the Eucharist*.[12] The treatise seems to be an encyclopaedia of Syriac Orthodox doctrine and profane knowledge. This (theological) compendium or *summa* it bears comparison to John of Damascus's (d. 749) *Fount of Knowledge*. As we shall see below, however, several issues concerning the treatise's contents remain unsolved.[13] One of these main issues is the lack of clarity regarding the precise scope and structure of the composition.

The only surviving copy of the treatise is preserved in an early-13th century manuscript from the library of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Damascus 4/35 (hereafter SOP 116).[14] SOP 116 contains the majority of Bar Ṣalībī's theological works: a treatise on the incarnation,[15] most of his polemical works,[16] commentaries

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[9] There are numerous Ph.D. theses on these commentaries as well as editions in the CSCO series. Most recently, Nahir Akçay edited his commentaries on the Gospels, Acts, Pauline epistles, Catholic epistles, and the Apocalypse for the publishing house of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus. Apart from the editions of Bar Ṣalībī's treatises against the Arabs published by Joseph Amar, and the Jews published in 1904 by Johannes de Zwaan (recently reedited and translated into English by Rifaat Y. Ebied, Malki Malki, and Lionel R. Wickham), his polemical treatises are the subject of research projects led by Bert Jacobs (Leuven), Anna-Simona Barbara Üzel (Berlin), and Branko Malešević (Paris).

[10] See Averil Cameron, *Arguing it Out: Discussion in Twelfth-Century Byzantium* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 47–48 *et passim*; Bogdan-Gabriel Drăghici, "Syriac Orthodox-Byzantine Polemics in the High Middle Ages: John Bar Šušan and Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 65:1–2 (2021): 87–152.

[11] See G. Rabo, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi*, 25–52.

[12] See Joseph Phillip Amar, *Dionysius bar Ṣalībī. A Response to the Arabs*. CSCO 614–615, Syr. 238–239 (Louvain: Peeters, 2005), t./v. 1; Alphonse Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus. Vol. 4: The Work of Dionysius Barsalibi against the Armenians* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1931), 498; Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde, *Dionysii bar Salibi Commentarii in Evangelia. Pars Secunda*. CSCO 95, 98, Syr. 47, 49 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1931–1933), t. 133, v. 106; Baby Varghese, *The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Eucharist* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 1–2.

[13] I am preparing a postdoctoral research project which will study this yet untranslated *summa*.

[14] See Filoksinos Yuhanna Dolabani, René Lavenant, Sebastian P. Brock, Samir Khalil Samir, "Catalogue des manuscrits de la bibliothéque du patriarcat Syrien Orthodoxe à Homs (auj. à Damas)", *Parole de l'Orient* 19 (1994): 555–661, at 572. Parts of *BkTh* are also preserved in Mingana Syriac 215.

[15] The text has not yet been studied. It is not yet clear whether the treatises against the Dyophysites and an additional treatise against the "Phantasiasts", are part of this work on the incarnation.

[16] Against: the Chalcedonians, Armenians, Arabs, Jews, Nestorians, and Catholicoi Kevork II (d. 1072) and Nerses IV Shnorhali (d. 1173).

on the liturgy and the rite of baptism,[17] and interspersed between, various treatises on theological and profane matters. Due to the arrangement of the chapters in the *unicum* and the loss of its first two quires, it remains unclear whether the *BkTh* is a self-standing encyclopaedia containing multiple subsections or itself is a part of a series. In addition, because Bar Ṣalībī employed various titles to refer to this treatise we cannot fully corroborate this information without the benefit of having his entire corpus edited and translated.

Most often, as he does in the beginning of *AgC*, Bar Ṣalībī refers to the *BkTh* in a fairly conventional manner: "because in the previous *Book on Theology, and the Incarnation, and the Intelligible and Sensible Natures* we have spoken at length concerning this topic, we will now speak briefly […]".[18] This reference would indicate that the *BkTh* is comprised of multiple chapters. However, in SOP 116, *AgC* follows only the discourse on the incarnation, and precedes various chapters on other theological and secular subjects.[19] Therefore, we would be led to understand that the sections following *AgC* are not in fact part of the *BkTh* (which would in turn consist of the two missing quires and the remaining chapters on the incarnation). Michael the Syrian, however, specifies in his world chronicle that Bar Ṣalībī only wrote a *Book of Theology*. He makes no mention of other works on the incarnation or the intelligible and sensible natures.[20] If these two latter treatises were indeed not related to the *BkTh*, they must have been listed separately. A 16th-century catalogue of Bar Ṣalībī's works preserved in Vatican sir. 37 seems to confirm that the *BkTh* does in fact consist of multiple subchapters. Under the apparent heading "Discourses on Theology", the anonymous author lists the same subjects as found in SOP 116: on the incarnation, the tree of life, angels, demons, etc.[21] If then the *BkTh* consists of a treatise on the incarnation and other chapters on the intelligible and sensible natures, why is *AgC* placed in the middle?[22]

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[17] Baby Varghese ed., *Dionysius bar Salibi. Commentaries on Myron and Baptism*, Mōrān 'Eth'ō 29 (Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2006); B. Varghese, *The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Eucharist*.

[18] ܗܕܐ ܕܟܬܒ̈ܐ ܕܝܘܢܣܝܘܣ ܕܒܪ ܨܠܝܒܝ ܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܢ ܒܗ ܡܠܦ ܒܫܘܠܡ ܒܟܬܒ̈ܐ ܕܝܘܢܣܝܘܣ ܒܪ ܨܠܝܒܝ ܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܗܠܝܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܢ ܒܗ ܡܠܦ ܒܫܘܠܡ SOP 116, fol. 17v[b]. It should be pointed out that whilst the most common title seems to be the one quoted above, there are also notable differences between manuscripts. For example, there are instances when in SOP 116 the compendium is referred to as either *The Book of Theology* or *The Book of Theology and the Incarnation*, whereas in Church of the Forty Martyrs 350 (hereafter CFMM) all these references are amended to: *The Book of Theology and the Incarnation, and the Intelligible and Sensible Natures*. See SOP 116, fols. 43v[a], 41r[b], 47v[a], and CFMM 350, fols. 211r[b], 216v[a], 222v[a].

[19] Aside from the two missing quires, up to fol. 17v[a] SOP 116 contains the rest of the treatise on the incarnation and a short piece on the tree of life. The treatise *AgC* is on fols. 17v[a]-93v[a] and is followed by chapters on the angels and demons, the human soul, priesthood, the planets, and natural phenomena on fols. 144r[a]-193v[a]. The rest of the manuscript consists of liturgical chapters, miscellaneous theological and historical works, and other polemical tracts.

[20] J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, t. 4:699, v. 3:344.

[21] Vat. sir. 37, fol. 192r.

[22] *AgC* stands out because it is considered to be part of Bar Ṣalībī's *Book of Disputations* (ܟܬܒ ܡܓܕܠܢܘܬܐ).

Gabriel Rabo credibly suggests that the *BkTh* is constituted of three works written over a longer period: (1) on the Trinity and the incarnation, (2) on the Hexaemeron/scientific treatises, (3) on liturgical mystagogy.[23] This seems to be confirmed by one of Bar Ṣalībī's later (re)workings,[24] a commentary on the Eucharist which he sent to his compatriot, Ignatius III Romanos (d. 1183), the Metropolitan of Jerusalem sometime between 1166/7 and 1171.[25] Bar Ṣalībī writes: "It seemed to me (good to send) not only the work of the ancients and the summary of their opinions so as to please our friend, but also something which we have studied and collected and arranged in a theological book, (that is), the teaching on the incarnation, and on the intelligible, visible and sacramental natures of the Church, and to help our faithful friend to share in it".[26]

Since Bar Ṣalībī refers to the *BkTh* as "the *book* of theology, *and* the mystery of the incarnation, *and* concerning the intelligible and sensible natures, *and* the sacramental mysteries",[27] it is clear he thought of these treatises as a unitary work. It is also likely that the various titles Bar Ṣalībī employs throughout his corpus to refer to the *BkTh* reflect the fact that he wrote this compendium over a longer period of time.

If true, then SOP 116's contents are not arranged haphazardly or chronologically but were placed in thematic order.[28] It may even be the case that this order was established by Bar Ṣalībī himself as we read in the beginning of the treatise *Against the Arabs* (hereafter *AgA*): "In the first volume, O our brother, we completed the treatise on the consubstantial Trinity, according to the illumination of our feeble mind; and thereafter, the treatise on the incarnation of the eternal Son; and related to it, the controversial treatise in response to the Chalcedonians; and immediately following these, the Phantasiasts; and then, briefly, on angels and demons, and on souls and the priesthood; likewise, on the upper regions and the elements and the planets, and on smoke and vapours and clouds and seas, and so forth, which are included there, part by part".[29]

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[23] G. Rabo, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi*, 39.

[24] It is clear from the beginning of the treatise that Bar Ṣalībī incorporated materials from his *BkTh* in his response to Ignatius.

[25] At the end of the treatise, Bar Ṣalībī confirms that he wrote this treatise from Amid, which would indicate that he wrote it sometime after he was elevated to the rank of metropolitan. Gabriel Rabo suggests the year 1169. B. Varghese, *The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Eucharist*, 94; G. Rabo, *Dionysius Jakob Bar Ṣalibi*, 33.

[26] B. Varghese, *The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Eucharist*, 1–2.

[27] ܪܒܐ ܪܒܝܥܝܐ ܕܥܠ ܬܫܒܚܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܘܪܙܐ ܕܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܐܝܟܢܝܐ ܘܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ Jérôme Labourt ed., *Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī. Expositio liturgiae.* CSCO Syr. II.93 (Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1903), 1.

[28] The scribe Ṣalībī placed after the first part of *BkTh* (*On the Incarnation*, fols. 1r-17v) all the polemical works which pertain to Christology: Against the Chalcedonians, Armenians, Kevork II and Nerses Shnorhali as well as answers to questions of the Armenians and the Greeks (fols. 17v-144r). The polemical Christological section is then followed by parts II and III of *BkTh*. I am grateful to Dr. Andy Hilkens for pointing out that the treatise is organised thematically rather than chronologically as I initially assumed.

[29] J. P. Amar, *Dionysius bar Ṣalībī*, t./v. 1. It should be pointed out that Amar's edition does not include the earliest witness for *AgA*, SOP 116.

Whilst beyond the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning that the above-quoted succession of works further frustrates our understanding of Bar Ṣalībī's polemical corpus. This is because there seems to be a parallel order to his works. Thus, the *BkTh* is a first volume, but each of his polemical treatises are numbered in such a way that it seems to contradict the sequence outlined above. In all surviving manuscripts *AgA* (possibly together with the treatises against the Jews and the Nestorians) is numbered as the second book, the first part of *AgC* as the third book, and the second part of *AgC* as the fourth book, and the treatise *Against the Armenians*, the fifth book. Bert Jacobs argues that the *BkTh* and the *Book of Disputations* – which is comprised of the polemical treatises – are all part of a larger encyclopaedic work.[30] Although this matter requires further attention, as suggested by the beginning of the *Commentary on the Eucharist*, it might be the case that throughout his life Bar Ṣalībī rearranged other parts of his literary corpus. So, this confusion regarding the exact contents of the *BkTh* might arise from such a restructuring.

Therefore, it is also possible that SOP 116 does not even contain the entire *summa* but might in fact be an abbreviated form. This possibility is based on the fact that the text of *AgC* preserved in SOP 116 is certainly shorter than the copies found in all other (later) surviving manuscripts.[31] Additionally, the title of the second book of *AgC* notes that the following is "from the second part" of *AgC*.[32] This reference would therefore indicate that the second part is a summary of a longer polemical tract against the Chalcedonians. Lastly, there seem to be independent chapters on theology and profane science that are not found in SOP 116.[33] It might be the case that Bar Ṣalībī produced abbreviated versions of these books which then circulated independently. This seems to be suggested by Bar Ṣalībī himself in the treatise *Against the Armenians* in which he refers to an abridged version of his *Sensible and Rational natures*.[34] However, no definitive answer can be provided without further research.

For now, we can conclude that the *BkTh* is a compendium whose constituting chapters which outline the basic tenets of the Syriac Orthodox Church were written over a longer period of time. Setting aside this complex matter, in the following section I will explore chapter 17 of the *BkTh*, "On priesthood".[35]

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[30] Bert Jacobs, "Preliminary Considerations on Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī's Islamic Sources", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 21:2 (2018): 357–389, at 359.

[31] In comparison to CFMM 350, SOP 116 seems to be missing nine chapters form the first book of *AgC*. It is also worthwhile to mention that SOP 116 contains a considerable number of scribal errors in comparison to the other surviving manuscripts.

[32] SOP 116, fol. 43v[a].

[33] See in Bodleian Marsh. 361 and Mingana Syriac 71, 215, 369, and possibly Sachau 116.

[34] I am grateful to Dr Andy Hilkens, who is currently working on this treatise, for pointing out this different title. See A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies 4: The Work of Dionysius Barsalibi against the Armenians*, 498. Mingana's translation is, however, imprecise. Instead of "rudiments", read: "abridged".

[35] It should be pointed out that the section on priesthood is also numbered the 226[th] chapter or heading (ܪܝܫ ܬܫܥ̈ܣ̈ܪ). It may be the case that this is the original numbering and that in SOP 116 the scribe added a parallel system.

SYRIAC ORTHODOX SACRAMENTAL ECCLESIOLOGY

Before exploring the mystagogy of liturgical vestments, it is worth glancing at the ecclesiology of the Syriac Orthodox Church as it was epitomised by Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī. Setting aside the issues relating to the exact contents of the *BkTh*, the section on the *Intelligible and Sensible Natures* begins with the origins of angels, demons, and the human soul and only afterwards treats the subject of sacramental ecclesiology.[36] The reason for this order is explained in the beginning of the subchapter on priesthood.[37] Bar Ṣalībī writes that although priesthood is prior to both angels and humans, he first wrote about the latter because angels and humans are subsistent, whereas priesthood is God's gift to rational beings and does not subsist independently. Priesthood was not given for its own sake; rather it serves as a means by which angels and humans may partake in God's greatest gift – deification (ܐܬܐܠܗܘܬܐ).

Like many authors who were active during the period of literary renewal sometimes referred to as the Syriac Renaissance (c. 11th–14th centuries),[38] in writing his treatises, most often, Bar Ṣalībī relied on previous works. Because of this, many researchers have disregarded the literary productions of this period due to their presumed unoriginality.[39] However, as it was already proven in the case of one of his fellow churchmen, Gregory Bar ʿEbrōyō, originality can also be found, for example, in the curation of his sources.[40] In the case of Bar Ṣalībī, there is also the matter of epitomising the tradition of the Church. During a period of cultural, political, and societal change, through his polemical, theological, biblical, and philosophical works, he undertook the significant activity of collating and summarising the Late Antique literary tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church. In the case of the chapter on priesthood, it seems that Bar Ṣalībī primarily drew on and abridged John of Dara's

[36] SOP 116, fols. 144r[a]-158r[b].

[37] The *mimro* on priesthood is on fols. 158r[b]-160r[a].

[38] See Herman G.B. Teule, "La renaissance syriaque (1026–1318)", *Irénikon* 95:2 (2002): 74–94; Herman G.B Teule, Carmen Fotescu Tauwinkl, Bas ter Haar Romeny, and Jan van Ginkel eds, *The Syriac Renaissance.* Eastern Christian Studies 9 (Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2010), esp. 1–30.

[39] It is worth quoting the pessimistic outlook of Syriac scholars regarding the literary productions of this period. "The 11th century was just as dry as tl1e previous one, and only rarely do we see signs of literary merit in what was otherwise a period of great decline. There were long stretches of time witl1out a learned scholar of some significance, and when one emerged to reignite the fading flame of erudition, it would usually benefit Arabic rather than Syriac science". Rubens Duval, *Syriac Literature*, trans. Olivier Holmey (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 345. "La première moitié de ce siècle [XII[e]] fut une période stérile aussi bien parmi les Nestoriens que parmi les Jacobites". Jean Baptiste Chabot, *Littérature syriaque. Bibliothèque catholique des sciences religieuses* (Paris: Bloud&Gay 1935), 121. "As the lamp flares up before it expires, so the 13th century witnessed a faint revival of Syriac literature before its extinction." William Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1894), 259.

[40] See Herman G. B. Teule, "Barhebraeus and his Time: The Syrian Renaissance", *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 3 (2003): 21–43.

treatises on priesthood.[41] Nevertheless, as we shall see below, there are instances in which Bar Ṣalībī introduces new elements or incorporates other sources.

Bar Ṣalībī distinguishes between celestial and earthly priesthood, the latter being further divided into Mosaic[42] and ecclesiastical priesthoods. Celestial priesthood, that is the priesthood of angels, is not much discussed. He simply notes that it is heavenly, angelic, and exalted beyond the world. Its members do not undergo change, nor do they advance from rank to rank (ܕܪܓܐ ܠܕܪܓܐ), meaning that a cherub cannot advance to the rank of seraph.

By contrast, earthly priesthood is subjected to change because humans come into existence and die, and others take their place. Probably referencing 1 Cor 13.11–12, Bar Ṣalībī notes that Mosaic priesthood was given to those childish in stature (ܥܠܡܐ ܕܛܠܝܘܬܐ) whereas ecclesiastical priesthood was gifted towards perfection. Through this, he wants to highlight the fact that before the incarnation of Christ, God gifted humans with the Mosaic priesthood because their understanding was limited due to the childish state of their faith. This representation of Mosaic priesthood is reminiscent of Ephrem's *Hymn on Faith 31*.[43]

Since the Mosaic priesthood of the Old Testament is also considered a gift of God, Bar Ṣalībī then highlights that human priesthood originates from Adam. As suggested by Ps 139.5, God first created Adam and then, by laying his hand upon him, he consecrated him. Whilst this interpretation originates from John of Dara's second treatise *On Priesthood*,[44] Bar Ṣalībī likewise adopts it in his *Spiritual Commentary on the Psalms*.[45] Adam's consecration, according to Bar Ṣalībī, does not come solely from the Father but it is also Christological. The hand that was placed upon Adam, he further clarifies, is the Son. Writing about the creation of Adam and his consecration, Bar Ṣalībī also briefly outlines different explanations of where Adam was created, one of the places he mentions being Jerusalem. We find the same explanation in other Syriac works such as the *Cave of Treasures* (c. 6th–7th century) as well as in the Jewish tradition.[46]

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[41] It should be noted that the authorship of these treatises remains a matter of debate. While further research is needed, Mushe Bar Kipho is considered a possible author.

[42] In Syriac, literally, it is "the priesthood of the law".

[43] "He borrowed and put on our form,/And like a father with children, he spoke with our childishness." Jeffrey T. Wickes trans., *St. Ephrem the Syrian. The Hymns on Faith* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 192.

[44] Elizabeth Lynn Anderson, "The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Works of John of Dara" (PhD dissertation, Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University, 2016), 264.

[45] "You formed me, that is, in the womb, and 'you laid the hand over me', that is, the hand of priesthood and of anointing [...] and [Adam] became a priest and prophet. Also, [the verse] symbolises the fashioning (ܕܒܗܝܠܐ) which is in baptism and the laying of the hand of priesthood in which the right hand of God is hidden." CFMM 66, fol. 195v.

[46] Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures: A History of the Patriarchs and the Kings, Their Successors, from the Creation to the Crucifixion of Christ, Translated from the Syriac Text of the British Museum MS. Add. 25875* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927), 53. On the date and provenance of the *Cave of Treasures* see: Sergey Minov, *Memory and Identity in the Syriac Cave of Treasures: Rewriting the Bible in Sasanian Iran*, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), ch. 1. For the Jewish traditions see: Adiel Kadari, "Interreligious Aspects in the Narrative of the Burial of Adam in Pirkei de-

From Adam priesthood was transmitted from generation to generation. Bar Ṣalībī outlines two lineages. From Adam to Moses and Aaron, to John the Baptist,[47] and from Adam, to Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Job and Melchizedek. This apparent double lineage probably stems from John of Dara's works. In the second treatise *On Priesthood*, John writes that Moses and Aaron became priests by laying of the hands, whereas Abel, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, and Job were ordained by their ministry.[48]

Christ serves as the pivotal link between the Old Testament and Christian priesthood, having been consecrated by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. The belief that Jesus was ordained by John does not have a parallel in the Dionysian corpus upon which John of Dara is expanding.[49] This is rather a peculiarity of the Syriac tradition.[50] Aphrahat (d. 345) wrote in his *Demonstrations* that Jesus received the laying on of hands and was anointed high priest by John in place of those priests who transgressed the Law.[51] Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), in his commentary on the Diatessaron, writes that Jesus received the priesthood of the house of Levi through a second birth, by the baptism of John, the son of Aaron.[52] According to Ephrem, when Christ ordained the apostles, he also abolished the Levite priestly order.[53] Similarly, Jacob of Sarug (d. 521) notes in his *Homily on Epiphany* that Jesus was baptized so that the dominion of the priests should be concluded in him. In Jordan, Jesus received from John the priesthood which God entrusted to Moses on the mountain.[54] Although here Jacob writes that priesthood was first given to Moses, in the homily on *Priesthood and the Altar* he writes that when the Lord created Adam, he

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Rabbi Eliezer", in Tamar Kadari, Marcel Poorthuis, Vered Tohar, *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 82–103, esp. 86–7. See also: Anthony Hilhorst, "Ager Damascenus: Views on the place of Adam's Creation", in *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 20:2 (2007): 131–144.

[47] John is included in this lineage because his parents came from the priestly line of Aaron (cf. Lk 1.5–7).

[48] E. L. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius", 296.

[49] E. L. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius", 44.

[50] See Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London / New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 178–9. See also Johns Abraham Konat, "Christological Insights in Jacob of Serugh's Typology as Reflected in his Memre", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 77:1 (2001): 46–72, at 63–7; Tanios Bou Mansour, *Le ministère sacerdotal dans la tradition syriaque primitive Aphraate, Éphrem, Jacques de Saroug et Narsaï*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 156 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), ch. 2.

[51] Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 27 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 191, 449, 504.

[52] Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron. An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes*. Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 2 (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 85.

[53] Edmund Beck ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*. CSCO 223–224, Syr. 94–95 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1962), t./v. 31. See also Dominique Cerbelaud, *Éphrem le Syrien. Le Christ en ses symboles: Hymnes de Virginitate*. Spiritualité orientale 86 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 2006), 64.

[54] Thomas Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on Epiphany. The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug fasc. 2* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 62. See also Sebastian P. Brock, 'Baptismal Themes in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh', in *Symposium Syriacum, 1976*, 325–47, at 328–9.

also ordained him priest so that he might serve God.[55] It seems that Bar Ṣalībī did not further employ or elaborate this interpretation of Christ's consecration in Jordan in any of his Gospel commentaries. Nor does he develop the idea of Christ being the linchpin of ecclesiastical priesthood. Rather than ending the priestly line of the Old Testament, John of Dara, however, clarifies that Christ perfected the priesthood which he received from John in his own person.[56]

Christ then bestowed priesthood upon his disciples on three separate occasions. Through this, Bar Ṣalībī offers an apparently novel interpretation.[57] He notes that the disciples were first ordained deacons when he gave them power over evil spirits.[58] Then, after the crucifixion, he made them priests and gave them the power to forgive sins.[59] Lastly, he ordained them bishops when he ascended to heaven.[60] Here, Bar Ṣalībī links the consecration of Adam through the hand of God – which is interpreted as being the Son – and the raising of Christ's hands at the ascension. Thus, both Adam and the apostles, through which all other priests have been ordained, were consecrated by Christ.[61] Bar Ṣalībī repeats and expands on this narrative in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. Commenting on Lk 24.50, he first explains that Christ consecrated his apostles as bishops at his ascension because during the ordination of bishops they open the Gospel lectionary at this passage and place it over the head of the ordinand.[62] Mushe Bar Kipho offers a similar interpretation of this passage in his *Commentary on the Sacramental Mystery of Ordination*. He writes that the imposition of the hands (ܫܘܬܐ ܕܐܝܕܐ ܫܡܝܐ) during the consecration of bishops is done "in the likeness of Christ when he ascended to the Father".[63] Having referred to the ordination of bishops, Bar Ṣalībī then explains that when he sent the apostles two by two and gave them power over illnesses and evil spirits, he made them deacons. The reason why this passage is interpreted as their ordination to this rank is because deacons purify. Lastly, he consecrated them priests in the Upper Room when he said that if they will forgive someone's sins they will be forgiven (cf.

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[55] Micheline Albert, "Mimro inédit de Jacques de Saroug sur le sacerdoce et l'autel", *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1981–1982): 51–77, at 54.

[56] E. L. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius", 264.

[57] See E. L. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius", 265.

[58] Mt 10.1, Mk 6.7.

[59] Jn 20.23.

[60] Lk 24.50.

[61] Bar Ṣalībī makes a note of this discrepancy in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. He writes that although everywhere people are blessed by means of the right hand, in this case Christ uses both his hands because he blessed soul and body of the apostles. Nahir Akçay ed., *The Commentary on the Gospels by Dionysius Jacob Bar Salibi, Metropolitan of Amid († 1171)* (Damascus: Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2020), 792.

[62] Mateusz Rafał Potoczny, "Ordination to the Presbyterate in the Syrian Churches: History and Structure of the Rite", *Roczniki Teologiczne/Annals of Theology* 65:8EV (2018): 95–109, at 100; Paul F. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination. Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 69–72. On the rite of the ordination in the Syriac Orthodox Church see: Wilhelm de Vries, *Sakramententheologie bei den syrischen Monophysiten*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 125 (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1940), 222–243.

[63] Mardin, Dayr Za'farān 65 (hereafter ZFRN), fol. 42; ZFRN 236, pp. 307–308.

Jn 20.23). Bar Ṣalībī, quoting Jacob of Sarug, then also adds that Christ bestowed another gift upon the apostles in the Upper Room. When he breathed upon them the Holy Spirit, he also baptised them.[64]

Prompted by the digression on Adam's creation and ordination, Bar Ṣalībī strays again from John of Dara's narrative and notes that Adam was consecrated outside of Eden, Aaron in the desert and Christ in Jordan. Although this chapter is meant to sketch the Syriac Orthodox teaching on priesthood, Bar Ṣalībī never loses sight of the polemical potential of his material. For this reason, he links these consecrations to a recurring theme from his anti-Greek Chalcedonian treatises,[65] that of the worthiness of a certain see or city. Writing against those who take pride in the glory of their cities and "circumscribe priesthood" (i.e. the Byzantines) he states that "Adam was not consecrated in Rome, neither Moses in Constantinople nor Aaron in Alexandria".[66] Similarly, in chapter fifteen of his treatise *AgC*, Bar Ṣalībī rejects the claim that all Syriac Orthodox are rustics and points out that Christ himself was born in a village.[67] In chapter 20 he also criticises the Byzantines for the fact that the city of their pride, Constantinople, is a den of thieves, fornicators and extortioners.[68] Likewise, in the letter *Against Rabban Yeshuᶜ*, he criticises the bishops of Constantinople for their covetousness and lavishness.[69]

The power of priesthood does not depend on the qualities of the priests themselves but, since it is a grace (ܙܒܥܬܐ) and a gift (ܡܬܬܐ), it relates to the operation or the activity (ܡܫܬܚܠܬܐ). The process of deification, or being made partakers of the divine nature, is concretely made possible through the mediation of the priestly orders. Because priesthood is a gift handed down from God, that is the Father of lights (1 Jm 1.17), the lights being according to Bar Ṣalībī, the Son and Holy Spirit, the concrete manifestation of these gifts differs. The mention of the Holy Spirit is important since its mediation facilitates these gifts as exemplified in 1 Cor 12.9 to which Bar Ṣalībī makes reference. Each of the three priestly ranks – deacons, priests, and bishops – therefore have particular powers. Deacons purify, priests enlighten, and bishops perfect. This threefold mission also stems from John of Dara. He writes that bishops have the power of perfecting both laity and priests because they have

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[64] N. Akçay, *The Commentary on the Gospels*, 792–3. See also Arthur Adolphe Vaschalde ed., *Dionysii bar Salibi Commentarii in Evangelia II (2)*. CSCO 113–114, Syr. 60–61 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1939–1940), t. 410 v. 335.

[65] In the case of Bar Ṣalībī's anti-Chalcedonian treatises, a distinction needs to be made between the Latins or Franks and the Byzantines. Although aware of the fact that both Franks and Byzantines uphold Chalcedonian Christology, Bar Ṣalībī only refers to the Greeks as heretical Chalcedonians.

[66] SOP 116, fol. 159v[a]. For obvious reasons, Antioch is not included.

[67] SOP 116, fols. 23[b]-24r[a].

[68] SOP 116, 24r[b].

[69] Alphonse Mingana ed., *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus. Vol. 1: Barsalibi's Treatise against the Melchites; Genuine and Apocryphal Works of Ignatius of Antioch; A Jeremiah Apocryphon; A New Life of John the Baptist; Some Uncanonical Psalms* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1927), 39–40.

received the fullness of the priestly office in a perfect measure. They enact this process of perfecting both through administering the mysteries as well as through ordaining other deacons and priests.[70]

Having established the ecclesiological framework within which Bar Ṣalībī operates, that is the foundation already established by John of Dara, in the following we will look at the explanation of some important liturgical vestments.

THE MYSTAGOGY OF LITURGICAL VESTMENTS

All liturgical words and actions, particularly those pertaining to the Eucharist, have been interpreted in a mystagogical way. It should therefore come as no surprise that theologians also dedicated their attention to an important part of Church ritual – liturgical vestments. The second part of subchapter forty-four of Bar Ṣalībī's work on the *Sacramental Mysteries* is dedicated to the explanation of liturgical vestments (ܠܒܫ̈ܐ ܕܟܗܢܘܬܐ).[71] Like the subchapter on priesthood, the section on vestments is preserved in SOP 116.[72]

The text survives in two other manuscripts: Mingana Syriac 215 and Syrian Catholic Archdiocese of Baghdad 115 (hereafter ASCBN). The former is a modern manuscript primarily containing Bar Ṣalībī's polemical works. The *Vorlage* is a now lost 14th century manuscript from the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop's library in Mosul.[73] However, the second manuscript, copied in the 20th century, raises some issues regarding the authorship of this work.

ASCBN 115 contains miscellaneous liturgical works by Mushe Bar Kipho and John of Dara. In the beginning of the chapter on church processions and liturgical vestments, the author is not indicated. The title simply reads: "From the rest of the sacramental mysteries and concerning the vestments of the priesthood and the procession, that is, the encircling".[74] Because text is preceded by a chapter on the feast of the saving cross by Mushe Bar Kipho, we could infer that the author is Bar Kipho. The colophon, however, seems to ascribe authorship to John of Dara.[75] It is indeed possible that Bar Ṣalībī simply borrowed this chapter from one of the two authors. I believe this to be unlikely. Rather, evidence points towards Bar Ṣalībī as the author of the text. First, whilst a compiler, in his other treatises Bar Ṣalībī weaves passages from other authors with his own arguments. Second, there appear to be no other

[70] E. L. Anderson, "The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius", 241.

[71] For the translation of this section see below. The numbering probably belongs to the scribe of SOP 116 since some chapters have double numbering.

[72] SOP 116, fol. 230v-231r.

[73] Alphonse Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts now in the Possession of the Trustees of the Woodbrooke Settlement, Selly Oak, Birmingham*, Woodbrooke Catalogues 1 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1933) 451–457.

[74] ܡܫܚܐ ܕܨܠܒܐ ܘܡܫܬܐ ܕܟܗܢܘܬܐ ܘܠܚܓܐ ܕܥܓܠܐ ܕܝܢ ASCBN 115, fol. 75r.

[75] In the colophon the scribe seems to have listed the works by their authors, so he notes that Bar Kipho wrote the explanation of the Lord's prayer and the Trisagion, the commentary on baptism and ordination and concerning what Jews wrote on the cross, and John of Dara wrote the commentary on the Creed, on the feast of the showing of the cross and Pentecost, on the vestments of the priests, and a commentary on the Myron. ASCBN 115, fol. 107v.

copies of this text attributed to either John or Bar Kipho.[76] Furthermore, the title of the chapter from ASCBN 115 is exactly the same as in SOP 116 and Ming. Syr. 215. Lastly, the following two chapters from ASCBN 115, on icons and stones, correspond to the following chapters from the other two witnesses.

Without going into much detail, it is worth outlining Bar Ṣalībī's mystagogical approach. Referring to the commentary of Cabasilas, René Bornert distinguishes between historical (ἱστορία) and contemplative (θεωρία) aspects.[77] Bar Ṣalībī primarily follows this twofold approach in his biblical commentaries. Distinguishing between a practical (ܫܘܬܦܢܝ), and a spiritual (ܫܘܡܝܐ) approach or interpretation, he often wrote two separate commentaries for each biblical book, one for each type of exegesis.[78] It has been argued that this approach was determined by the intended audience. The literal commentary is meant for those who are spiritually immature and the spiritual commentary for those more advanced in faith.[79] Whilst this interpretation might be true, the intended audience most probably does not constitute the determining factor for this distinction. I contend that the difference is rather self-explanatory. The literal commentary outlines a historical or practical explanation of the biblical book. The spiritual commentary, on the other hand, is meant to convey a higher, theological sense.[80]

In his liturgical works, however, Bar Ṣalībī does not directly follow this twofold approach. The second part of his *BkTh* dedicated to the sacramental nature of the Church (i.e. church rituals) statedly only conveys the mystagogical, theological or, as Bar Ṣalībī refers to it, the contemplative (ܫܘܝܘܪܝܐ) sense. The tradition of the *theoria* is not unique to the Syriac tradition. The contemplation of heavenly realities hidden beneath the visible elements of the liturgy can be found in the works of many late antique authors, especially Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.[81]

Bornert writes that the historical interpretation makes reference to the acts of the economy and the term history is most often synonymous to that of icon (εἰκών).[82] The contemplative meaning refers to a spiritual understanding of liturgical prayers

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[76] In his *Commentary on the Eucharist* John of Dara does explain the meaning of certain liturgical items but does not mention any vestments. If the author would have been either John of Dara or Bar Kipho, one would have expected to find some trace of sartorial mystagogical explanations in their liturgical commentaries.

[77] René Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle*. Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 9 (Paris: Institut Français d'Etudes Byzantines, 1966), 217–221.

[78] See for example the 12th century manuscript CFMM 66 in which the practical and spiritual commentaries of Old Testament books are placed in parallel columns. This distinction is discussed in most studies on Bar Ṣalībī's commentaries. See Stephen Desmond Ryan, *Dionysius bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73–82*. Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 57 (Paris: J. Gabalda, 2004), 39–44.

[79] S. D. Ryan, *Dionysius bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary*, 44.

[80] For example, Ps 75.4 ("The earth will be brought low") is interpreted in a literal sense as God bringing low the land of the Assyrians and its inhabitants, whereas spiritually it means that the high ones are changed from pride and wickedness to goodness and humility. See S. D. Ryan, *Dionysius bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary*, 121, 165.

[81] Robert Taft, "The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980/1981): 45–75, at 61–62.

[82] R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 219.

and rites.[83] Upon analysis, we encounter these (artificial) categories in Bar Ṣalībī. The historical or typological sense is then indicated by the verb "to depict, represent, typify" (ܐܝܩܢ). For example, the cope depicts (ܡܝܩܢ) Elijah's cloak. By extension, we could interpret this as meaning that the liturgical cope is the icon of that cloak. The contemplative sense is indicated most often by the usage of the verb "to signify mystically" (ܪܡܙ). Hence, the bishop's head covering symbolises the fact that he is free from evil thoughts. It should be pointed out, however, that this is a formal or formalised distinction. Bornert ultimately concedes that the historical and contemplative perspectives interfere constantly.[84]

Setting aside this conceptual difference between the historical and contemplative interpretation, in the following I analyse more closely most of the liturgical vestments discussed by Bar Ṣalībī. Whilst his account is by no means exhaustive, it provides us with important insights into the development of Syriac Orthodox liturgical vestments.

Before engaging with Bar Ṣalībī's practical information and mystagogical exegesis, it is worth sketching a brief overview of the Syriac Orthodox liturgical outfit. The four liturgical garments common to all priestly ranks are: (1) the *kutino* (a white tunic), (2) the *esoro* (girdle), (3) the *uroro* (a long and narrow strip of material arranged differently on the shoulders of the wearer depending on their rank), and (3) the *fedioto* (sleeves worn over the *kutino*). Priests and hierarchs wear a *fayno*, a piece of cloth similar to a cloak, and a headcover. Bishops, metropolitans, and patriarchs also wear a second *uroro* and carry a *murnito* (episcopal staff).[85]

The Kutino

The main garment for deacons, priests, and bishops is the *kutino* (ܟܘܬܝܢܐ). The term is derived from χιτών (tunic).[86] It is the equivalent of the Greek στιχάριον (tunic) or Latin alb.[87] In the Byzantine rite, the deacons' and priests' *sticharia* differ, the former being more ornate and not covered by an outer garment.

In the Syriac Orthodox order of service, it is the second liturgical item to be put on after the slippers.[88] Although most liturgical vestments have been interpreted in various ways and have accumulated multiple meanings over time, at least one mystagogical interpretation is already conveyed by the text of the liturgy.[89] Therefore,

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[83] R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 219.

[84] R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 218.

[85] K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 80–82.

[86] See Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879–1901), 927. On Greek loanwords in Syriac see Sebastian P. Brock, "Greek Words in Syriac: Some General Features", *Scripta Classica Israelica* 15 (1996): 251–262.

[87] W. Henry, "Aube, in *DACL* 1.2, 3118; Athanasios Papas, "Liturgische Gewänder", in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst 5*, 741–75, at 743–745.

[88] Clerics in the Syriac Orthodox tradition, during the liturgical services, wear special liturgical slippers. Bar Ṣalībī criticises the Greek Chalcedonians for not respecting the holiness of the church and wearing shoes that cover the shinbone like the Turks, Arabs, and pagans. CFMM 350, fol. 181r. This chapter is omitted in SOP 116.

[89] See Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology* (London: Ashgate, 2004), 17.

when the *kutino* is put on, the celebrant prays: "O Lord God, clothe me with the robe of incorruptibility by the power of Your Holy Spirit, and grant that I be pleasing unto Your will by virtuous and upright conduct all the days of my life, our Lord and our God, forever".[90]

Bar Ṣalībī explains that the *kutino* signifies, because of its white colour, the virtue and purity of priests. As a matter of fact, most of the liturgical vestments discussed in this short section are interpreted in a moral sense. He also writes that it signifies the "undivided life, freeness from divisions and disputes". It is not entirely clear why he ascribes this meaning to it. He first refers to it as the "round *kutino*" (ܟܘܬܝܢܐ ܓܠܝܠܝܐ), which might indeed indicate that it was in some way seamless and therefore symbolises unity. Thus, there would be a clear association with the seamless robe of Christ.[91] This link seems implied in Bar Ṣalībī's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*.[92] Nevertheless, the roundness of the *kutino* refers to its shape as we shall see below in the case of the *fayno*.

We encounter a similar explanation in the Byzantine tradition. The prayer for vesting the *sticharion* quotes Is 61.10: "My soul shall exalt in the Lord, for He has endued me with the robe of salvation, and with the garment of joy has He clothed me. He has set a crown on my head like a bridegroom, and like a bride, He has adorned me with comeliness".[93] Byzantine liturgical commentaries paid little attention to the allegorical mystagogy of vestments. Perhaps since the *sticharion* was employed by clerics of all three ranks, it was not given much attention. Although Bar Ṣalībī dedicates a few lines to its mystagogical interpretation, the *kutino* is seldom mentioned in liturgical commentaries or indeed ordination rites.[94]

The Esoro

The Syriac word usually employed for the girdle is *zunoro* (ܙܘܢܪܐ) but Bar Ṣalībī only uses the verb *esar* (ܐܣܪ) and the construction *esar haṣe* (ܐܣܪ ܚܨܝ). The term *zunoro* is a loanword originating from the Greek ζώνη (belt, girdle, via the diminutive ζωνάριον).[95] In the Syriac Orthodox Church, it is worn by all the orders of the clergy, whereas in the Byzantine tradition it is only employed by priests and hierarchs. During the reigns of Diocletian (d. 311) and Constantine I (d. 337), it was adopted as

[90] Julius Yeshu Çiçek, *Anaphora: The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch* / ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܫ ܥܪܝܟܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܣܘܪܝܝܐ ܕܐܢܛܝܟܝܐ ܕܡܪܕܬ ܡܢ ܐܝܪܘܫܠܡ (Holland: St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery, 1985), 7.

[91] Jn 19.23.

[92] "It was not bound with a suture, but it was woven in the likeness of these tunics whose long sleeves are woven, like those fabrics (ܟܬܢܐ) which are made today." N. Akçay, *The Commentary on the Gospels*, 1033.

[93] F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 355; Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon. Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium*. Oxford Studies in Byzantium (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 287. See also R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 252.

[94] K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 77.

[95] See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 1104.

part of the Byzantine official dress and later monks and clerics included it as part of their liturgical vestments.[96]

On the basis of secondary literature, Karel Innemée suggested that the girdle as a priestly vestment was only introduced in the 13th century.[97] However, Bar Ṣalībī's explanation of liturgical vestments indicates that they were already employed by priests in the 12th century.

When vesting the girdle, both Syriac Orthodox and Byzantine clerics recite Ps 44/45.3–4: "Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Most Mighty, with Your glory and Your majesty. Your majesty triumphs".[98] Whilst this psalm was most probably employed due to its reference to girding, the general mystagogical interpretation of the girdle is moral. Bar Ṣalībī notes that only bishops and priests use the *zunoro* whereas deacons do not gird their *kutine*. The explanation for this difference seems contradictory. He writes that those belonging to the higher clerical orders gird the *kutino* because through this they curb all evil desires since desire is framed in the kidneys. The kidneys are believed to be the place where emotions are stored.[99] In the Hebrew Bible, they are depicted as a vital part of the body that houses the innermost emotions.[100] For Origen, for example, the heart is the rational part of the soul whereas the kidneys represent the passive part from which desire originates.[101] Deacons, however, do not gird their loins because this indicates that the only power ruling over them is that of Christ. This difference in interpretation might lead one to think that deacons do not need to bridle their passions because they are somehow saintlier than the priests and hierarchs. Or perhaps, due to their lower rank, they are less exposed to worldly threats. Most probably, as Bar Ṣalībī notes, the difference in interpretation is because deacons do not wear a girdle to indicate the fact that they belong to a lower priestly rank.

Like in the Syriac tradition, the Byzantines saw liturgical girdles as "a symbol of purity, temperance, and manliness".[102] In his commentary *On the Divine Liturgy*, (Pseudo) Germanus of Constantinople (d. 730),[103] referring to the girdles of the monks, writes that they signify the fact that monks wear the mortification of the

[96] Alexander P. Kazhdan, "Belt", in Alexander P. Kazhdan, *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 1991), 280. See also Henri Leclercq, "Ceinture", *DACL* 2.2, 2770–794.

[97] K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 82.

[98] J. Y. Çiçek, *Anaphora*, 7; F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 355; W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 288.

[99] Giovanni Maio, "The Metaphorical and Mythical Use of the Kidney in Antiquity", *American Journal of Nephrology* 19:2 (1999): 101–106.

[100] Esther Grushkin, "Emotions and Their Effect on the Human Body in the Hebrew Bible" (PhD dissertation, New York University, Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, 2000), 66–70.

[101] See Róbert Somos, "Origen on the Kidneys", in M. Vinzent, J. Secord, H. Marx-Wolf, C. Markschies, *Studia Patristica LXXXI: Papers presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2015. Volume 7: Health, Medicine, and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 65–77.

[102] A. P. Kazhdan "Belt", 280.

[103] For the authorship of the treatise see R. Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins*, 142–148.

body and chastity.[104] This interpretation is also facilitated by the act of girding the loins which can be taken as an effective representation of curbing one's (sexual) passions. Nicolas Cabasilas writes that by means of the girdle, through the practice of virtues and curbing of carnal desires, priests must tie this grace onto themselves and make it melt into them.[105] Pseudo-Dionysius, writing about the vestments and instruments attributed to angels, also mentions their cinctures and attributes a similar meaning. He writes that they are "an indication of the control exercised by these intelligent beings over their generative powers."[106]

The Uroro

Common to all three priestly orders, the stole is a *sine qua non* liturgical vestment. As it was the case with the previous pieces, the term *uroro* (ܐܘܪܘܪ) is of Greek origin and derives from ὀράριον.[107] In both the Syriac Orthodox and Byzantine traditions, the deacon's stole is a narrow band worn either on one or both shoulders. The higher priestly orders would have worn the stole around the neck with both ends hanging parallel in front. It should be pointed out that in the Syriac Orthodox Church, however, the episcopal *uroro* was only introduced in the 11th century following the Byzantine custom.[108]

In both traditions the stole for the higher orders undertook some minor changes which also led to a change in name. Thus, in the Byzantine tradition, beginning with the 15th century, the two hanging ends of the *orarion* were sown together at intervals along their parallel edges by buttons or bells.[109] This piece then came to be known as ἐπιτραχήλιον (*epitrachelion*) from ἐπι-τραχήλος ("on the neck").[110] Similarly, sometime after the 13th century, the priestly *uroro* developed into the *hamniko* (ܚܡܢܝܟܐ), which is translated as "necklace, neckchain." Instead of being joined at intervals along the parallel edges, it is made from a single broad strip of fabric with a hole for the head at one end.[111] The original shape of priestly *uroro* is still preserved in the

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[104] Paul Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople. On the Divine Liturgy*. Popular Patristic Series 8 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 69.

[105] Bornert, who edited and translated the text, does not doubt the authenticity of the text. See Sévérien Salaville, René Bornert, Jean Gouillard, Pierre Périchon, *Nicolas Cabasilas. Explication de la divine liturgie*, Sources Chrétiennes 4bis (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 364–5, for the authenticity of the text 357–358.

[106] Colm Luibheid et al., *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 186.

[107] See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 100–101.

[108] K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 65. It is possible that some of these changes were introduced through the cultural exchanges that took place during the "Syriac Renaissance". It has already been proven that the Syriac Orthodox borrowed elements from Byzantine music, art, and liturgy. See Mat Immerzeel, "Medieval Syrian Orthodox Church Decoration: Deir al-Surian and Deir Mar Musa", in *Syriac Renaissance*, 223–38; Baby Varghese, "The Byzantine Occupation of Northern Syria (969–1085) and the Renaissance of the Syrian Orthodox Church", *The Harp* 28 (2013): 37–74.

[109] W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 11.

[110] Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 667; James Diggle, *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*. vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1389. See also Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 538.

[111] K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 77.

rite of the ordination. The bishop places the *uroro* of the recently ordained deacon as described above. This is the only time when the priest would wear the *uroro* in this fashion after which it is replaced with the *hamniko*.

The primary mystagogical meaning of the *uroro* is given by Ps 18.39–40, which serves as the vesting prayer: "Gird me with strength unto the battle, and subdue under me those that rise up against me, defeat my enemies before me and I will silence them who hate me".[112] Hence, Bar Ṣalībī explains that the episcopal *uroro*, which is laid under the *fayno*, indicates that he is adorned with the fear of God as if arrayed with armaments. By contrast, the Byzantine vesting prayer is taken from Ps 132/3.2: "Blessed be God who pours out (ἐκχέων) his grace upon his priests like balm upon the head, which flows down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron, which flows even to the hem of his garment". Like Bar Ṣalībī, Cabasilas bases his mystagogical explanation of the *epitrachelion* on the vesting prayer. He writes that it symbolises the grace of priesthood which is poured over the priest. Taking advantage of the vestment's etymology, Cabasilas takes the *epitrachelion* to symbolise the fact that the priest has accepted the yoke of Christ, which in this case has the benefit of conferring the grace of priesthood. The moral interpretation of the *epitrachelion* is that, by conferring God's grace, the priest's heart is tamed, and his body sanctified.[113] According to (Pseudo-) Germanus of Constantinople, however, the *epitrachelion* is "the cloth which was put on Christ at the hands of the high priest, and which was on His neck as He was bound and dragged to His passion".[114] Bar Ṣalībī also makes use of this comparison when referring to the *maṣnafto* (ܡܨܢܦܬܐ), the episcopal hood.[115] He writes that it indicates Christ's shroud and symbolizes the bishop's purity and freedom from evil thoughts.

In a baptismal context, George Bishop of the Arabs (d. 724), writes that the *uroro* placed over the head of the baptised resembles a crown and symbolises the freedom which the baptised received through Christ.[116] Bar Ṣalībī, probably taking after Mushe Bar Kipho, follows the same interpretation.[117] In his *Commentary on the Liturgy*, George writes that the deacon's *uroro* signifies their subjection to the priests because they only wear it on one shoulder. Priests and bishops, who have more authority, wear the *uroro* on both shoulders.[118] Bar Ṣalībī seems to have also employed the commentary of George, since he also writes that the *uroro* symbolises a crown. As a king is crowned when he begins to rule and a bridegroom is crowned on the day of his marriage, so also is the baptised crowned because they have now become

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[112] F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 355; W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 288.

[113] S. Salaville et al., *Nicolas Cabasilas*, 364–365.

[114] P. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople*, 67.

[115] See K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 80–81.

[116] Richard Hugh Connolly, Humphrey William Codrington, *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy by George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bar Kepha, together with the Syriac Anaphora of St. James and a Document Entitled The Book of Life* (London/Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1913), 14. See also Baby Varghese, "Moses bar Kepha Commentary on Baptism", *The Harp* 24 (2009): 55–82.

[117] Baby Varghese, *Dionysius bar Salibi. Commentaries on Myron and Baptism*. Mōrān 'Eth'ō 29 (Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2006), 166.

[118] R. H. Connolly, H. W. Codrington, *Two Commentaries*, 19.

siblings of Christ.[119] The reason for this interpretation is because the one baptised has become a brother to Christ.[120] This imagery of the crown is not unique to either George or Bar Ṣalībī but rather stems from earlier liturgical commentaries from the 5th to the 7th centuries.[121]

Bar Ṣalībī speaks of two *urore* worn by hierarchs, one under the *fayno* – that is the later *hamniko* – and another placed above the *fayno*. The former is also known as the inferior *uroro* (ܥܘܪܘܪ ܬܚܬܝܐ) as attested in Vatican sir. 51 dated to 1171/2.[122] The latter is similar to the Byzantine ὠμοφόριον.[123] According to Bar Ṣalībī, it is placed around the neck, over the *fayno*, with the right hanging end coming over the left shoulder. At least up until the 13th century, this piece was known as the *uroro* as attested in Vat. sir. 51,[124] and Bibliothèque nationale de France syriaque 112 (dated to 1239).[125] The fact that the episcopal *uroro* was placed in a manner similar to the Byzantine *omophorion* is confirmed, for example, by illuminations from the 13th century missal, Bodleian Dawkins 58[126]. With time, this *uroro* came out of use and was replaced by the *baṭrashil* (ܒܛܪܫܝܠ), a stole that extends down the back as well as the front.[127]

The prayer for this vestment is taken from Ps 27.5–6: "For in the day of trouble, He shall hide me in His shelter; in the shadow of His tabernacle He shall hide me; he shall set me upon a rock; and from now shall my head be lifted above my enemies".[128] Typically, the deacon's stole would have been likened to the wings of the seraphs, however, Bar Ṣalībī writes that the *uroro* above the *fayno* symbolizes the seraphic aid which strengthens the left side which is considered to be weaker. This dichotomy between right and left is universally shared[129], though in the case of Bar

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[119] B. Varghese, *Dionysius Bar Salibi*, 168.

[120] B. Varghese, *Dionysius Bar Salibi*, 166.

[121] See Sebastian P. Brock, "Some Early Syriac Baptismal Commentaries", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 46 (1980): 20–61.

[122] Vat. sir. 51, fol. 85r. On the dating see Jacques-Marie Vosté, "Note sur la date du manuscrit Vat. sir. 51", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 12 (1946): 205–207.

[123] On the *omophorion* see Christopher Walter, *Art and Ritual of the Byzantine Church* (London: Variorum Publications, 1982), 9–13.

[124] Vat. sir. 51, fol. 97v.

[125] BnF syr. 112, fol. 84r. On dating see Hermann Zotenberg, *Manuscrits orientaux. Catalogues des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandaïtes) de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1874), 75.

[126] Bodl. Dawkins 58, fols. 39r, 47v. See Robert Payne Smith, *Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae. Pars sexta: Codices syriacos, carshunicos, mendaeos, complectens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1864), 229–231. The illuminations of BnF syr. 112 also seems to depict the same manner of wearing the *uroro*. BnF syr. 112, fols. 68v, 180v. It is not entirely clear whether the other illuminations (fols. 28r, 32v, 61v, 67r, 69r) indicate that the *uroro* was also worn in a similar manner to the *batrashil*.

[127] The earliest surviving *batrashil* is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund (14.137). See Helen Evans ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004) 441–43; Jennifer L. Ball, "A sixteenth-century *batrashil* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 9:1 (2006): 3–35.

[128] J. Y. Çiçek, *Anaphora*, 9.

[129] See Robert Couzin, *Right and Left in Early Christian and Medieval Art.* Art and Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe 16 (Leiden: Brill 2021), esp. 3–7; Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, "Right and Left in Greek Philosophy", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82 (1962): 56–66.

Ṣalībī's interpretation it most probably stems from the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with references of both the power of the right and inferiority of the left.[130] The deacon's role is often understood as being akin to that of angels. For this reason, their stole is interpreted as a symbol of their angelic ministry and, in the Byzantine tradition, it is decorated with the seraphic hymn, "Holy, holy, holy".[131] This image is articulated by (Pseudo) Germanus who writes that the "deacons are images of the angelic powers who go around with their thin wings of linen *oraria* as ministering spirits".[132] Although, not directly obvious, Bar Ṣalībī draws the mystagogical meaning of the *uroro* from the prayer since it refers to the fortification conferred by God. It is not entirely clear, however, what he means by the fact that the *uroro* is "a sign of their subordination because just as he is granted authority, he places the *uroro* upon his two shoulders". Most probably, as we have seen with the interpretation of the deacon's orarion, Bar Ṣalībī refers to the subordination of the bishops since their authority does not stem from themselves, rather it is granted to them.

The Byzantine prayer for the *omophorion* is taken from the Matins Kanon of the Ascension: "Having raised upon our shoulders, O Christ, our nature that had strayed, you presented it to God the Father".[133] The earliest reference to the *omophorion* is found in Isidore of Pelusium (d. 449), who writes that it is made out of wool and represents the lost sheep which Christ brought back upon his shoulders.[134] (Pseudo) Germanus likens it to Aaron's stole which the Old Testament priests wore on the left shoulder.[135] Cabasilas also uses the language of power to explain the meaning of the *omophorion*. He writes that it signifies the administration and tending (ἐπισκοπὴν) of those subjected to them. Thus, he compares the bishop to a mother who guides and carries her children on her shoulders.[136]

The Fayno

In the Syriac Orthodox Church, the cope is common to both priests and hierarchs, whereas in the Byzantine tradition the *phelonion* is only worn by priests. Both Syriac and Byzantine copes were circular pieces of cloth with an opening in the middle. For this reason, Bar Ṣalībī writes that the shape of the *fayno* indicates the "unity of the undivided life". Probably because the shape of the cope limited one's freedom of movement it was modified so that in the Syriac Orthodox Church its shape is similar

[130] See Walter Grundmann, "δεξιός", in Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1964), 37–40; John M. Court, "Right and Left: The Implications for Matthew 25.31–46", *New Testament Studies* 31:2 (1985): 223–233.
[131] W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 108.
[132] P. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople*, 67.
[133] W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 289.
[134] Cf. W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 16.
[135] P. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople*, 67.
[136] S. Salaville et al., *Nicolas Cabasilas*, 367.

to that of a cape open in the front.[137] Originally, in the Byzantine tradition, hierarchs also wore a *phelonion*. Towards the 11th century, the episcopal cope became more ornate and was decorated with repeating patters of crosses and right angles. Eventually, this *polystaurion phelonion* was replaced by the *sakkos*, a dalmatic-like vestment first attested in the 12th century.[138]

In the Byzantine tradition, (Pseudo) Germanus writes that the *phelonion* symbolises Christ's cross.[139] Cabasilas, like Bar Ṣalībī, relates the symbolism of the phelonion to its shape. In comparison with the *sticharion* of the deacon, the *phelonion* does not have any sleeves. This, according to Cabasilas, indicates that priests are free from human activities. On the one hand, priests live in the world without belonging to it, on the other, during the liturgy, the only directing power is that of God whilst the priests do not have any human input.[140] Following a similar logic, Bar Ṣalībī writes that the deacons who serve at the altar do not gird their *kutinos* in order to indicate that they are set free from sin and Christ alone has authority over them.

Both Syriac Orthodox and Byzantine vesting prayers are based on Ps 132. In the Syriac Orthodox, verses 9–10 – "Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness and Your righteous with glory. For Your servant David's sake, turn not away the face of Your anointed" – are said when making the sign of the cross over the *fayno*. Verse 10 – "Adorn Your priests with salvation and Your righteous with glory" – is prayed when putting it on.[141] In the Byzantine tradition verse 9 – "Your priests, O Lord, will be clothed in righteousness, and your holy ones will rejoice with joy" – is employed together with the exclamation: "Always, now and for ever, and to ages of ages. Amen".[142]

Apart from this brief mystagogical interpretation, Bar Ṣalībī also links the *fayno* with four biblical robes as well as with the garments with which angels are clad. He writes that the *fayno* depicts Aaron's robe (ܟܠܝܐ ܕܗܘܢ), the robe (ܟܠܝ) which Christ wore at his crucifixion and the robe (ܟܠܝ ܕܚܢܢܐ)[143] which the afflicted woman

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[137] K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, 78. On the change of the *phelonion* see W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 12.

[138] W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 20–28. See also Elisabeth Piltz, *Loros and Sakkos. Studies in Byzantine imperial garment and ecclesiastical vestment*. BAR International Series 2556 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2013), 65–84.

[139] P. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople*, 67.

[140] S. Salaville et al., *Nicolas Cabasilas*, 365.

[141] J. Y. Çiçek, *Anaphora*, 9. The Syriac Orthodox prayer is different because it draws on the *Peshitta* version. See Donald M. Walter, Adalbert Vogel, Rifaat Y. Ebied eds, *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version*. Part II, fasc. 3: The Book of Psalms (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 156.

[142] F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, 289; W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 356.

[143] It is interesting to note that the term only appears in the Syriac Sinaiticus (S) of Mt 9.20, whereas the Peshitta (P) and the Harlkean (H) read ܟܣܐ. See George Anton Kiraz ed., *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshîṭṭâ and Ḥarklean Versions*. New Testament Tools and Studies 21.1 (Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill, 1996), 118. S of Lk 8.44 reads ܟܣܐ, P ܫܘܠܝ, and H ܫܘܫܝ. G. A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels*. New Testament Tools and Studies 21.3, 159. For Mk 5.27, P reads ܟܣܐ and H ܫܘܠ. G. A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels*. New Testament Tools and Studies 21.2, 62.

touched, as well as Elijah's cloak (ܚܠܠܐ, ܣܕܝܐ, ܡܚܚܐ).[144] It is not clear whether Bar Ṣalībī had a particular biblical passage in mind when mentioning the spiritual robes of the angels (ܣܕܝܐ ܕܠܐܓܪܐ). Regarding the robes of the angels, Pseudo-Dionysius writes that their fiery and shining robes symbolise the divine form.[145]

Syriac clothing terminology has received little attention. As Bar Ṣalībī's vocabulary shows in this chapter on vestments as well as in his treatise *AgC*,[146] our dictionaries are somewhat deficient. Whilst outside of the purview of this study, it is worth highlighting a term he employs to refer to the Greek copes. He writes that the Greeks make their *fayne* out of ܒܘܨܐ. The noun *buṣo* is usually translated as "fine white linen" or, following the Greek, "byssus".[147] As we can read in Greek dictionaries, the term βύσσος is of Semitic origin, however, it has been most often mistranslated as "flax and the linen woven from it".[148] Ḥasan bar Bahlul, the 10th century East Syriac linguist, writes that the term refers to linen and very fine silk which resembles the air and snow[149]. *Byssus* (sea silk) is in fact a rare and very valuable textile fibre produced from the filaments by which some molluscs and mussels attach themselves to the surface of rocks. It has been argued that the original meaning of the word was obscured by ancient authors. Byssos is an originally Phoenician innovation which by the 6th century had been imported into China and was produced up to the 19th century.[150]

Apart from vocabulary, Bar Ṣalībī also provides puzzling information, presumably, regarding the copes of the Byzantines. He writes that the Greek copes have written on them the three letters of the noun "earth" (ܟܬܝܒ ܒܬܪ ܘܡܢ ܐܪܥܐ) on the front and back, because in Greek there are three letters in the noun "earth" (ܒܝܢ ܓܐ ܘܝ ܐܪܥ).[151] Aside from the lack of evidence for such a practice, the text is problematic because the Greek noun "earth" (γῆ) has only two letters. If we take into consideration the explanation for this practice, that is, to remind the wearer that they are mortal, it is possible that the word Bar Ṣalībī refers to is the genitive form γῆς, "of the earth". This is reminiscent of the *akakia*. Byzantine Emperors have been depicted as carrying and are known to have carried on ceremonial occasions pouches in containing handful of dust. This was taken to symbolise the mortality of

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[144] In his treatise *Against the Chalcedonians*, Bar Ṣalībī refers to it as ܚܠܠܐ. The spelling here is closer to that of the Greek. SOP 116, fol. 23v[a].

[145] C. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 186.

[146] See SOP 116, fols. 23r[b]–23v[a].

[147] Jessie Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 39. See also R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 472–473.

[148] Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 334; James Diggle ed., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon*. vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 295.

[149] Rubens Duval ed., *Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassano bar Bahlule: voces syriacas græcasque cum glossis syriacis et arabicis complectens*. Collection orientale 15–17 (Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1888–1901), 372.

[150] Stephanie Dalley, "Ancient Assyrian Textiles and the Origins of Carpet Design", *Iran* 29 (1991): 117–35 at 121–3. See also Felicitas Maeder, "The project Sea-silk – Rediscovering an Ancient Textile Material", *Archaeological Textiles Newsletter* 35 (2002): 8–11.

[151] SOP 116, fol. 230v[b].

its bearer.[152] Regardless, I was unable to find any traces of this practice. We do know about the practice of *gammation*, that is to embroider or weave an ornament shaped like the letter Γ into ecclesiastical vestments.[153] Whilst widely used, the meaning of this practice seems to have been lost, though we can assume it is somewhat unlikely that this is what Bar Ṣalībī is referring.

The Muronito

One of the most important accessories of the higher priestly order is the staff or crosier. Representation of authority, the episcopal staff was first mentioned as an episcopal attribute in the 9th century.[154] Although the use of the episcopal staff is attested by Bar Ṣalībī, most manuscript illuminations of the time do not depict this accessory.

In the Syriac Orthodox Church, when the hierarch takes the *muronito* from the (arch)deacon he recites Ps 110.2: "The Lord will send forth the sceptre of His power out of Zion, and He will rule over your enemies". Bar Ṣalībī evokes this exact imagery of power in explanation of the liturgical vestments. Unsurprisingly, he associates the *muronito* with Moses' rod through which he received the power of priesthood. At the same time, the staff of Moses is also interpreted by Church Fathers as a prefiguration of the cross.[155]

As it has been pointed out, sceptres and rods are seen as symbols of secular or religious authority. In this sense, Bar Ṣalībī refers to kings of the world who, as a sign of their dominion and power, hold a sceptre in their hands. This is something which he also references in his treatise *AgC* when criticising the Byzantines for their heretical adoration of angels. In chapter eighteen he writes that in their legalism, the Greek Chalcedonians depict the incorporeal angels as bodily and draw on them wings like those of birds. Furthermore, they put in their right hand the power and authority of the whole inhabited world by depicting them holding an orb. They also give to kings and angels, that is creatures and servants, the power which rightfully only belongs to God by placing in their left hand a sceptre.[156]

In his *Commentary on the Sacramental Mystery of Ordination* Mushe Bar Kipho also refers to Moses' rod through which he saved the people from bondage. He also writes that the rod symbolises the Son who through his redemptive economy led the human race away from sin and saved them. In this sense, the bishop is the type

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[152] Alexander P. Kazhdan, "Akakia", in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Vol. 1, 42. See also W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 150.

[153] See Samuel Cheetham, William Smith, *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities Comprising the History, Institutions and Antiquities of the Christian Church, from the Time of the Apostles to the Age of Charlemagne* (London: John Murray, 1875), 709; Henri Leclercq, *DACL* 6.1, 610–3. See also John W. Welch, Claire Foley, "Gammadia on Early Jewish and Christian Garments", *BYU Studies Quarterly* 36:3 (1996): 253–258.

[154] Ch. Walter, *Art and Ritual*, 27–28.

[155] See for example Christopher A. Hall, "Moses and the Church Fathers", in Jane Beal, *Illuminating Moses. A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 81–101. See also Cyril Aphrem Karim, "Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers" (PhD dissertation, St Patrick's College, 1994), 95–99.

[156] CFMM 350, fol. 182v[b]. This chapter is missing from SOP 116.

(ܫܘܛܐ) of Christ. The staff is also the visible sign of God's power and the apostolic charism which Christ gave to his disciples.[157]

As we have seen, the role of each one of the three priestly ranks is closely related to the explanation of their vestments. As such, the externals of the dress reflected and contributed to the prestige and power of the hierarchical office. Particularly in the Byzantine Church, from which most of the Syriac Orthodox vestments are inspired, imperial court costume was imported into the ecclesiastical dress. These adaptations are considered to be an effort to articulate the theological teaching of Christ as present through the ministration of the bishops rather than the emperor.[158] In this sense, Bar Kipho further writes that the bishop is a king (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܒܝܬ ܐܠܗܐ ,ܘܡܘܕܒܪ ܫܠܛܢ) and the governor of the church of God. Through his rod (ܫܒܛܐ) he indicates that he travels and leads the flock on the orthodox path in a smooth journey, free from rocks, stones, stumbling blocks, and blots of sins.[159]

CONCLUSION

The mystagogical exegesis of liturgical vestments is not suspended in a theological void. Rather, it is connected to reflections about the nature of the Church, and the role and place of its clergy – that is, (sacramental) ecclesiology. Earthly ecclesiastical priesthood was gifted by God through the mediation of Christ and the Holy Spirit for the perfection of humans – i.e. deification and union with God – although they are undeserving. This union is mediated by deacons, priests, and bishops who purify, enlighten and perfect. The degree to which this perfection can be achieved depends on each one's measure. Earthly ecclesiastical priesthood is also life-giving by means of administering perceptible elements such as water, oil, and wine. Through each of these earthly elements a more exalted reality transpires, a reality which Bar Ṣalībī sketches in his *BkTh*.

Throughout time and across cultures clothing and adornment communicated important messages. Conveyors of meaning, liturgical vestments reflect to both lay and wearers the theological and moral importance of priesthood. Originally derived from the secular context, with time these pieces of clothing were imported into the Church, modified. Most importantly, they gained layers of interpretation which were grafted onto preceding sacramental theologies, as we have seen above.

In the foregoing we have seen a glimpse into the ecclesiology and mystagogical exegesis employed by the 12th century author Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī. Until his entire corpus will be fully studied, such insights are meant to contribute to the ongoing theological and liturgical discussions and elucidate some questions relating to the development of Syriac Orthodox liturgical vestments. Whilst "post-formative", Bar Ṣalībī's synthesis of the late antique theological tradition and own original insights are important for developing a deeper understanding of Syriac Orthodox theology.

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[157] ZFRN 65, fol. 45v-46r.

[158] W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon*, 209–210.

[159] ZFRN 65, fol. 46v.

Admittedly, however, this study only represents a small window into a still under-explored "post-formative" theological world.[160]

TRANSLATION

[**230v**[a]] As we have set off in the contemplation [of the divine mysteries], we [now] come to the subject of priestly vestments.

The round *kutino* which the priests put on during the sacraments[161] signifies the undivided life, freeness from divisions and disputes, and the binding and coming together of virtue. Its whiteness signifies the purity[162] of the priestly conduct.

Bishops and priests gird[163] [the *kutino*] because, through the girding of the loins, they curb and scatter every evil desire. They also gird it according to that [verse]: "Let your loins be girded and [keep] your lamps burning,"[164] and because desire is framed in the kidneys.[165] Through girding the loins,[166] they bridle all passions so that they might not progress and harm the inner man.[167]

The deacons of the altar do not gird the *kutino* because by loosing their loins they teach that it sets them free from sin and that there is no authority over them apart from that of Christ. Another [explanation is] that they have not yet attained the rank of priest, who with the *kutino* are also bound by the girding of the loins.

The sleeves over the *kutino* teach the mystery of preparedness for [**230v**[b]] the holy commandments, for when servants fulfil the will of their lords, they also roll up their sleeves, that is, they fasten them so that they should be unincumbered for work. Also [the verse] "he has made my arms strong like a bow of bronze",[168] that is, with a weapon of the right hand. Another [explanation] is that it is not seemly to fasten profane garments around the arms during the holy sacraments.

The *fayno* depicts that robe of Aaron and the spiritual robes in which angels appeared,[169] and also the raiment, that is, the *fayno* of our Lord, that is, that cope which the afflicted woman touched and was cured.[170] It also depicts the cloak,[171] that is, the coat and hood of Elijah. "Cover me with the mantle of glory."[172]

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[160] On this term see Salam Rassi, *Christian Thought in the Medieval Islamicate World. ʿAbdīshōʿ of Nisibis and the Apologetic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2021), 242 *et passim*.

[161] The term employed is ܪܙܐ, which also means "mysteries".

[162] Lit. clearness, brightness, splendour.

[163] The verb employed is ܙܢܐ, meaning "to bind, make fast, tie". Given the liturgical context it can also be translated as "to ceinture".

[164] Lk 12.35.

[165] Cf. Job 19.26–7, Ps 73.20–1.

[166] The phrase ܙܢܐ ܣܛܪܐ can also be translated as "fastening, tying", or "binding the waist", however, considering the moral context and the link between the practical sense and its more metaphorical meaning of submission, obeisance, I opted for the "girding the loins".

[167] 2 Cor 4.16, Eph 3.16, Rm 7.22–23.

[168] 2 Sam 22.35.

[169] Mt 28.3, Mk 16.5, Jn 20.12, Ac 1.10.

[170] Mt 9.20–22, Mk 5.25–34, Lk 8.43–48.

[171] Bar Ṣalībī employs here the Greek loanword μηλωτή, which in Syriac is ܡܝܠܘܬܐ. Cf. Heb 11.37.

[172] Possibly reference to Is 61.10, Ru 3.9, 1 Cor 15.53, or Rev 19.7–8.

The roundness of the *fayno* indicates the unity of the undivided life and a state undivided by association with material matters. They also say that the Greeks, on the front and back of their *fayne* of sea silk[173] spun with gold, write the three letters of the noun "of the earth" because in the Greek tongue there are three [letters] in the noun "[of] the earth." Through this, they symbolise that even though you are in [arrayed] these adornments and in this splendid garment you are [nevertheless] mortal[174] and earthly, so then you should never exalt with your office.[175]

The *maṣnafto* which is placed on the head of the bishop indicates the cloth that was placed on our Lord's head when he was enshrouded by Joseph and Nicodemus. Its whiteness symbolises the purity and freedom[176] from thoughts caused by evil things, which are typified by the colour black. Its transparency and cleanliness symbolise the purity of a mind that is free from the deceit of earthly things.

The *uroro* depicts the mystery of the wings of the seraphs. That which is under the *fayno*, placed over the two [**231r**^{a}] shoulders of the bishop, indicates that he is adorned with all the fear of God as [if arrayed] in the left and right armaments. That which is above the *fayno*, on the left shoulder, is placed in order that the portion of the body that is supposed to be weak, I mean to say the left shoulder, is strengthened and reinforced, just as the right portion, through seraphic aid, that is, through the spiritual wing. It is a sign of their subordination because just as he is granted authority, he places the *uroro* upon his two shoulders.

The *muronito* which he holds in his hand depicts the rod of strength that was sent to him from Zion, the power of priesthood that was given to him through which he might shepherd the rational flock. Earthly kings also hold a sceptre in their hands through which they declare their dominion and power.

The *finko*[177] which is placed upon the altar depicts that table that was set before the disciples in the upper room upon which was laid out the heavenly bread. "You prepared before me a table in front of my enemies".[178]

That vessel, that is, the cup, in which the absolving blood is mixed, [depicts] that divine side from which the spiritual drink flowed to us and the jug which was mixed with divine wisdom.

That spoon in which we receive the consecrated bread depicts the pincers with which the seraph picked up the coal and placed it in the mouth of Isaiah.[179]

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[173] The term employed is ܣܝܡܐ which is habitually translated as "fine linen". See above the section on the *fayno*.

[174] The word primary meaning of the word is "earthly". It is worth highlighting that the adjective is derived from the noun ܥܦܪܐ, meaning "dust, earth, soil".

[175] The noun ܬܘܕܒܐ also means "gift, grace".

[176] Both manuscripts have *ḥuruto* ("whiteness"), however it is possibly a scribal error for *ḥiruto* ("freedom").

[177] The term ܦܝܢܩܐ refers to the *paten*.

[178] Ps 23.5.

[179] Is 5.5. The same image is used by (Pseudo-) Germanus of Constantinople. P. Meyendorff, *St. Germanus of Constantinople*, 67.

The utensils of the altar hold the mystery of the vessels of the typological tabernacle. Just as the altar is adorned with high-quality vessels, so also the soul should be adorned with spiritual virtues.

The *burkto*[180] which was ordained by the Teachers that after the Eucharist it should be given to the people, firstly because it is not appropriate that after the heavenly food and spiritual drink someone should immediately use ordinary food. Rather, being refreshed with that which is neither sublime like sacramental food nor unworthy like ordinary food, afterwards let him approach the customary food and drink. Secondly, because not everyone can receive the holiness of the sacraments, either because of sins or on account of failings or from whatever other reason, in order that they might not leave the church unprofitably and without benefit, whatever it may be. The Teachers devised and arranged the prayer over the *burkto* in order that those guilty of sins and defilements might share in it so that they should not become entirely alienated from paternal intimacy and spiritual sustenance.

The *froso*,[181] that is the veil that is spread before the altar after the mysteries, is the likeness of this firmament between us and the heavenly place.[182] The end.

[180] The term ܒܪܟܬܐ means "blessing" and refers to the non-consecrated blessed bread offered in place of the Eucharist. In the Byzantine tradition it is referred to as *antidoron* (instead of the gift) or *eulogia* (blessing). See Robert F. Taft, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. Volume 5: The Precommunion Rites*. OLA 261 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Orientale, 2000), 404–412.

[181] The term ܦܪܘܣܐ means "cover, curtain".

[182] There are two veils in use during the liturgy, the *anaphora* and the *froso*. The former refers to the covering placed over the Chalice and Paten. Bar Ṣalībī refers to the latter in his commentary on the Eucharist. See B. Varghese, *The Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi on the Eucharist*, 50–1. The *froso*, somewhat like the byzantine *ikonostasis*, separates the altar from the rest of the church. Bar Ṣalībī also refers to this veil in chapter seventeen of *AgC* in which he alleges that the Byzantines accuses them because they hang veils in their churches, like the Jews did. He argues that the curtains mentioned in the Old Testament typify the veil drawn between the congregation and the altar. The *froso* symbolises heaven and the firmament which is between humans and heavenly beings and between the things of the law and those of the Church. See CFMM 350, fol. 181v^{b}–182r^{a}.