

The Syriac Orthodox Church in the Time of the Syriac Renaissance



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The Syriac Orthodox Church in the Time of the Syriac Renaissance

In Concept and Reality

By

Peter Kawerau

Translated from the second,
supplemented edition by

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In memory of my brothers:
Erich Kawerau (1916–1943)
Friedrich Kawerau (1917–1944)

“The human being in this world is like a dream, or like the flight
of a bird whose path leaves no trace in the air, or a ship that
leaves no wake in the water...”
– Bar ‘Ebroyo (1226–1286)

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This project was born out of a “Hugoye” listserv chain where Andy Hilken, George Kiraz, and Hidemi Takashashi suggested having an English translation of this essential work on the Syriac Renaissance. I first encountered this book as a graduate student and was excited for the chance to revisit it and make it available to English readers.

Peter Kawerau (1915–1988) was a German scholar of church history, focusing on the eastern churches. He studied theology at the Universities of Wroclaw and Berlin. In 1949, after World War II, he earned his doctorate at the University of Göttingen, with this book being a version of his dissertation. He did his *Habilitationsschrift* in 1956 at Münster. He would go on to teach at the University of Marburg where he founded the *Ostkirchen Institut*. His corpus includes works on Protestant, Syriac, African, and Byzantine church history.

Die Jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance was first published in 1955, then updated with a second edition in 1960. The 1960 edition contains hundreds of footnotes absent in the first edition. I have striven for a literal translation of the text as far as possible, but I have updated many of the terms used. Kawerau, like most scholars of his time, referred to the Syriac Orthodox Church as “Jacobite,” as can be seen in the original title. I have replaced “Jacobite” with “Syriac Orthodox,” “Nestorian” with “Church of the East,” and “Orient” with “East(ern),” and other similar changes, partially because of modern, pejorative connotations of these terms but also because they are not entirely accurate descriptions of the Christologies and geographies of their churches. I have indicated the page

numbers from the 1960 edition in <angle brackets>. The spelling of proper nouns follows the Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of Syriac History, e.g., “Dayro d-Mor Matay” instead of “Mor Mattai Monastery,” etc.

I would like to thank George Kiraz for encouraging me to translate this work, Melonie and the team at Gorgias Press for not giving up on this project, de Gruyter for allowing Gorgias to publish this work, Hidemi Takahashi for his suggestion to do so, Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent and Deirdre Dempsey for inspiring my interest in Syriac Christianity, and my wife, Amanda, for her support and encouragement.

Patrick Conlin

FOREWORD

For the present second edition, a number of additional publications were consulted which can be seen in the completely revised bibliography. The text and the notes have been – in parts, considerably – extended, and occasionally corrected as well. I did not change the basic character of the work: the friendly reception that the small book received – especially abroad – did seem to allow that.

In August 1954, the head of the American excavations at Nemrut Dağ, Theresa Goell, B. A., from New York City, together with the head of the German excavations in Arsameia, the learned lecturer, Dr. Friedrich Karl Dörner, from Münster in Westphalia, while on a research trip through Commagene, also visited the ruins of the Dayro d-Mor Barşawmo. During her visit to Münster in the summer of 1959, Goell gave me detailed archaeological explanations of the passage from the Anonymous Chronicle, below. Dörner left three photographs of Barşawmo he had taken on August 29th, 1954. To both, I express my sincere thanks here.

As has been the case for years, I was also assisted by the university librarian Else Heyer from the circulation desk of the local university library in obtaining literature with the usual amiability and helpfulness. I thank her very much for that.

Münster in Westfalen, August 1959
Peter Kawerau

INTRODUCTION

<1> The Islamic empire of the caliphs had disintegrated in the 9th and 10th centuries and individual states again stood in its place. Around the year 1200, the picture was as follows:

In Egypt, the dynasty of the Sunni Ayyubids ruled since 1171, whose most important ruler, Sultan Saladin (1171–1193), soon extended his power over Syria and Mesopotamia. After his death, internal disputes broke out among his successors, and the Ayyubid Empire quickly disintegrated.¹

The remains of the Crusader States were on the borders of Palestine and Syria and their power continued to decline due to their disunity. In 1172, Henry the Lion was still a pilgrim in Jerusalem, but soon afterwards, Saladin put an end to the kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187. In 1268, Baibars besieged Antioch and in 1291, Acre, the final fortress, would be taken. Scattered incursions by the West – like the attack of King Louis IX of France in 1249 on Damietta – could not change this.²

¹ Claude Cahen, *La Syrie Du Nord à l'époque Des Croisades et La Principauté Franque d'Antioche*, Institut Français de Damas, Bibliothèque Orientale 1 (Paris: Paul Geunthner, 1940), 579ff.; Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951) Vol. 3, 79–84.

² For the history of the Crusaders, René Grousset, *Histoire Des Croisades et Du Royaume Franc de Jérusalem*, 3 vols. (Paris: Perrin, 1934); Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Kenneth Meyer Setton, ed., *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1955).

On the southeast coast of Asia Minor, known as Cilicia in ancient times, was the kingdom of Lesser Armenia, dominated by the dynasty of the Rubenids. It represented a rather small power in the Middle East and was mostly dependent on the powerful neighboring states.³ In the north it bordered on the empire of the Rûm Seljuk sultans of Asia Minor, who consumed their strength in internal struggles.⁴

Farther to the east was what remained of the state of the Prophet's successors: in Baghdad, the Abbasid caliphs <2> tried with less and less success to defend their empire against the attacks of eastern and northern neighbors. In the interior, their supremacy was usually only nominally recognized by the governors. Thus, the caliph empire existed almost only in name.⁵

The advance of the Mongols into the west began to threaten these states in 1220. In 1258, Baghdad fell into the hands of the Mongols: the last caliph was executed by them. The ruler of Egypt offered the only stop to their further advance west: in the

³ Cahen, *La Syrie Du Nord à l'époque Des Croisades et La Principauté Franque d'Antioche*, 582ff.

⁴ Claude Cahen, "Le Problème Ethnique En Anatolie," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* 2, no. 2 (1954): 347–62; Claude Cahen, "The Turkish Invasion: The Selchûkids," in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth Meyer Setton, The Art and Architecture of the Crusader States 4 (London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 135–76; Jacques Laurent, "Byzance et Les Origines Du Sultanat de Rum," in *Melanges Charles Diehl*, vol. 1, *Études Sur l'histoire et Sur l'art de Byzance* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1930); Bruno Lehmann, *Die Nachrichten Des Niketas Choniates, Georgios Akropolites Und Pachymeres Über Die Selçuken in Der Zeit von 1180 Bis 1280 n. Chr.* (Gräfenhainichen: C. Schulze, 1939); Osman Turan, "Les Souverains Seldjoukides et Leurs Sujets Non-Musulmans," *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953): 656–100; See also "Die Steppenreiche" in Alexander Randa, ed., *Handbuch Der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter Olten Verlag, 1954) 359–390.

⁵ Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "The Caliphate and the Arab States," in Setton, *A History of the Crusades*, 81–98.

Battle of ʿAin Jālūt in 1260, the Mongol troops were decisively beaten by Sultan Qutuz. In Persia, the Mongol Empire of the Ilkhans, founded by Hulagu (d. 1265) was formed in the course of these battles.⁶

On this soil, which was unevenly influenced by Hellenistic culture,⁷ Eastern churches had already sprung up in Christian antiquity. Their common origins were in the christological doctrinal disputes and in the pursuit of national isolation.

In Egypt, the separation of the Coptic Church from the Orthodox imperial Church was due mainly to Alexandria's opposition to Constantinople, and less to dogmatic causes.⁸ In christology, the Coptic Church held the "verbal monophysitism [miaphysitism]" of Severus.⁹ Their patriarchs resided in Alexandria until Christodulus (1047–1077) moved the residence to Cairo.¹⁰

The apostolic chair at Antioch¹¹ was the center of the Syriac Orthodox (West Syriac) church. It was also miaphysite and sometimes called "Jacobite" after Jacob Baradeus (d. July 30, 578), who reorganized its hierarchy, which was broken up in

⁶ Bertold Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung Und Kultur Der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: E. J. Brill, 1955), 59.

⁷ For examples, Ludwig Mitteis, *Reichsrecht Und Volksrecht in Den Östlichen Provinzen Des Römischen Kaiserreichs, Mit Beiträgen Zur Kenntnis Des Griechischen Rechts Und Der Spätromischen Rechtsentwicklung* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1891), 15–60; Anton Baumstark, "Ostsyrisches Christentum Und Ostsyrischer Hellenismus," *Römische Quartalschrift Für Christliche Altertumskunde Und Für Kirchengeschichte* 22, no. 2 (1908): 17–35.

⁸ The name "Coptic" goes back to the Arab conquerors of Egypt. "Copt" is an abbreviation of Αἴγυπτος.

⁹ Friedrich Heiler, *Urkirche Und Ostkirche*, Die Katholische Kirche Des Ostens Und Des Westens 1 (Munich: E. Reinhardt, 1937), 456ff.

¹⁰ For the characteristics of the Coptic Church, see *ibid*, 471–493.

¹¹ For its history and that of the resulting patriarchate, see Jean Michel Alfred Vacant, Eugène Mangenot, and Émile Amann, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 3rd ed., vol. 1–15 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1903), 1:1425–1430.

the course of the christological struggles.¹² With his ordination of Patriarch Pawlos of Beth Ukome in 600,¹³ the series of the Syriac Orthodox patriarchs of Antioch also began to reorganize the scattered parishes in Persian Mesopotamia <3> and place them under the metropolitan of Tagrit on the Tigris.¹⁴

The Armenian church already successfully gained independence from the Byzantine imperial church before the Chalcedonian controversy. Their head, the catholicos, resided in Hromklay (Syriac: Qal'ā Rumayta) from 1147 until 1293 when he moved to Sis in Cilicia.¹⁵

In Sassanid Persia, the Church of the East (East Syriac) declared its complete independence from the “Western” Churches in 424 at the Synod of Markabta d-Tayyaye. Since about 484, it

¹² On Archbishop Jacob Baradeus of Edessa, see Ernst Honigmann, *Évêques et Évêchés Monophysites d'Asie Antérieure Au VI^e Siècle*, CSCO 127 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1951), 168–177, etc.; Hendrik Gerrit Kleyn, *Jacobus Baradaeüs de Stichter Der Syrische Monophysitische Kerk*, Academisch Proefschrift Leiden (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1882); William Ainger Wigram, *The Separation of the Monophysites* (London: Faith Press, 1923), 133ff., 137 on the name “Jacobite” – especially in the West; Joseph Simonius Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, 4 vols. (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719), 2, 65–66; Overviews of the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Ernst Honigmann, *Le Couvent de Baršaumā et Le Patriarcat Jacobite d'Antioche et de Syrie*, CSCO 146 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1954), 93–105; Anton Baumstark, *Festbrevier Und Kirchenjahr Der Syrischen Jakobiten*, vol. 3–5, *Studien Zur Geschichte Und Kultur Des Altertums 3* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1910), 1–24. They identify themselves as the “Syriac Orthodox Church.”

¹³ On him, see Ernst Honigmann, *Évêques et Évêchés Monophysites d'Asie Antérieure Au VI^e Siècle*, CSCO 127 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1951), 195–205, etc.

¹⁴ Friedrich Heiler, *Urkirche Und Ostkirche*, *Die Katholische Kirche Des Ostens Und Des Westens 1* (Munich: E. Reinhardt, 1937), 459–470.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 510–530.

has officially professed “Nestorian” [dyophysite] christology.¹⁶ The seat of their head, the catholicos, had initially been Seleucia-Ctesiphon and was moved to Baghdad in 780.¹⁷ Their most significant achievement was a great missionary activity that extended to China and Sumatra.¹⁸

¹⁶ The East Syriac synodal acts of 424 (declaration of independence from the West) and 484/486 (introduction of the dyophysite confession) in Jean Baptiste Chabot, trans., *Synodicon Orientale Ou Recueil de Synodes Nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 43–53/299–307 (Syriac text with French translation); Oskar Braun, *Das Buch Der Synodos: Nach Einer Handschrift Des Museo Borgiano Übersetzt Und Erläutet* (Stuttgart / Vienna: Rothsche Verlagshandlung, 1900), 44ff., 57–59 (German translation); see also Eduard Sachau, *Zur Ausbreitung Des Christentums in Asien* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1919), 7; Heiler, *Urkirche Und Ostkirche*, 427ff.

¹⁷ Exact details of the residence of the Catholicos in Sachau, *Zur Ausbreitung Des Christentums in Asien*, 26–27; see also Thomas of Margā, *The Book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Margā A. D. 840*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols. (London: K. Paul. Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893); Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, 3:2:622–629.

¹⁸ For this, see P. van der Aalst, “Denis Bar Salibi, Polémiste,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 9 (1959): 10–23; Laurence F. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia: From the Time of Muhammad till the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933); Columba Cary-Elwes, *China and the Cross: Studies in Missionary History* (London: Longmans, Green, 1957); Jean Dauvillier, “Les Provinces Chaldéennes ‘de l’extérieur’ Au Moyen-Âge,” in *Mélanges Offerts Au R. P. Ferdinand Cavallera, Doyen de La Faculté de Théologie de Toulouse, à l’occasion de La Quarantième Année de Son Professorat à l’Institut Catholique* (Toulouse: Bibliothèque de l’institut catholique, 1948); Arthur Christopher Moule, *Christians in China Before the Year 1550* (London, 1930); Arthur Christopher Moule, “The Nestorians in China,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1933, 118–20; Paul Pelliot, “Les Nestoriens En Chine Après 845,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1933 (1933): 115–16; Gerhard Rosenkranz, *Die Älteste Christenheit in China in Den Quellenzeugnissen Der Nestorianer-Texte Der Tang-Dynastie*, 2nd ed., Schriftenreihe Der Ostasien-Mission 3, 4 (Berlin: Verlag der Ostasien-Mission, 1938); P Yoshio

The conquests of the crusaders had temporarily led to the establishment of Latin patriarchates in Antioch (1099–1268)¹⁹ and in Jerusalem (1099–1187).²⁰

Those who wish to know about the Syriac Orthodox Church in the time of the Syriac Renaissance²¹ may at first think that they are in a favorable position with regard to sources. There is no shortage of historical works from this period. However, Islamic histories²² provide no explanation of the internal conditions of the Christian churches. The Armenian sources,²³ which have a similar point of view as the Syriac Christians, are charac-

Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: The Academy of Oriental Culture, 1937); John Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: The Story of a Church on Fire* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928); Heiler, *Urkirche Und Ostkirche*, 419–452; Albert Hauck, ed., *Realencyklopädie Für Protestantische Theologie Und Kirche*, 3rd ed., vol. 1–24 (Leipzig: R. Besser, 1896), 13:727f.

¹⁹ Vacant, Manganot, and Amann, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 1:1420–25.

²⁰ Wilhelm Hotzelt, *Kirchengeschichte Palästinas Im Zeitalter Der Kreuzzüge: 1099–1291*, *Kirchengeschichte Palästinas von Der Urkirche Bis Zur Gegenwart* 3 (Cologne: Bachem, 1940), 42–139.

²¹ For this term, see Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte Der Syrischen Literatur Mit Ausschluß Der Christlich-Palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn: A. Marcus and E. Weber, 1922), 285 and 290.

²² Cahen, *La Syrie Du Nord à l'époque Des Croisades et La Principauté Franque d'Antioche*, 33–93.

²³ Édouard Dulaurier, trans., “Les Mongols d’après Les Historiens Arméniens; Fragments Traduits Sur Les Textes Originaux,” *Journal Asiatique* 5, no. 16 (1860): 273–322; Édouard Dulaurier, *Recueil Des Historiens Des Croisades*, vol. 1: Documents Arméniens (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1869); Rabun Vahram, *Chronique Du Royaume Arménien de La Cilicie à l'époque Des Croisades*, ed. Sahag Bedrossian (Paris: Benjamin Duprat, 1864); Zyriak von Gänçä, “Auszüge Aus Der Armenischen Geschichte 300–1264 Über Die Mongolen,” ed. Édouard Dulaurier, *Journal Asiatique* 5, no. 11 (1858): 197–255, 426–508; see also Cahen, *La Syrie Du Nord à l'époque Des Croisades et La Principauté Franque d'Antioche*, 97–100.

terized by a strong sense of nationality,²⁴ <4> and focus on the history of their state. What people learn from them about the Syriac Orthodox is but little: usually it is the occasional mention of outlying details.

Essentially, therefore, only the Syriac Orthodox sources themselves remain.²⁵ They provide precise descriptions of their own ecclesiastical conditions which are so unfavorably portrayed by them that their statements do not raise any doubts. Doubts about the reliability of the sources arise only where the authors themselves are involved in the church events described by them.

The great, 21-book, historical work²⁶ of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Michael I Rabo (1166–1199),²⁷ concludes with a detailed chronicle of the religious and political events witnessed by the author himself. The external arrangement of the work is determined by the desire for the highest possible chronographic accuracy; the objective three-part material (church history, secular history, *varia*) should be presented simultaneously for each period of time. Michael, therefore, divides his report into three columns; but because of the different scope of the material, this leads to a very irregular arrangement of the text.²⁸

²⁴ Of which one does not notice much among the Syrians, because the Syriac-speaking community had become extinct except for small areas of refuge, and the differences between them and Arab-speaking Muslims had become much smaller.

²⁵ Cahen, *La Syrie Du Nord à l'époque Des Croisades et La Principauté Franque d'Antioche*, 96–97; Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung Und Kultur Der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350*, 469–470 with the additions on pages 571–572 of the second edition.

²⁶ Michael I, *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, trans. Chabot Chabot Jean Baptiste, 4 vols. (Paris: E. Leroux, 1899).

²⁷ On him, see E. Tisserant in Vacant, Mangenot, and Amann, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (1929), 10:2:1710–1719.

²⁸ Michael I, *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, xxiv (introduction by Chabot).

This striving for objective accuracy is contrasted in the *Chronicle* itself with the subjective way in which Michael writes.²⁹ It is especially observed where he himself has a share in the events. He insists that his report is true and accurate;³⁰ but sometimes deviates from this standard. Thus, after the death of Maphrian John V (d. 1188), the “Easterners”³¹ chose the monk Dionysius bar Masih as maphrian.³² At the insistence of two monks and a priest who had not been consulted, Michael immediately ordained his own nephew Jacob to the maphrianate (Gregorios I, 1189–1214).³³ In his account of this quite inadmissible process,³⁴ he says that “all the believers” have written to him that they would by no means accept bar Masih as maphrian. Therefore, in a “rightful choice, through the power and compulsion of the Holy Spirit,” his nephew Jacob was chosen and appointed,³⁵ of whose merits and virtues he lacks description. <5> He disregards the procedure to be followed in the choice of maphrian, and his account of it stands in contrast to the emphasis with which he otherwise insists his behavior is done merely out of respect for tradition³⁶ or his civil duties.³⁷

His style is strongly influenced by theological reflections³⁸ and the use of biblical expressions.³⁹ The flood of Dayro d-Mor

²⁹ He usually speaks of himself in the first person or says “My base-ness,” while Bar ‘Ebroyo applies the third person to himself.

³⁰ Michael I, *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, 3:382/721.

³¹ For this term, see below p. 23.

³² Bar Hebraeus, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, ed. Joannes Baptista Abbeloos and Thomas Josephus Lamy, 3 vols. (Louvain: Peeters, 1872), 2:379.

³³ *Ibid.* (So the *Chronicle* of Bar ‘Ebroyo).

³⁴ See the section, “The Maphrian,” below on p. 21.

³⁵ Michael I, *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, 3:403/732.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3:357f./707.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 3:358/708.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:345/700.

Matay,⁴⁰ Arabic and Turkish rule over Christians,⁴¹ earthquakes and crop failures,⁴² and a defeat by the Frankish army⁴³ are reported by him with the phrase, “this happened because of our sins.”⁴⁴ His choice of his words is constantly influenced by biblical usage,⁴⁵ and he often finds an opportunity to quote his favorite Scripture (Jeremiah 17:5): “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.”

The theological guiding principle that dominates his whole presentation is the idea of the unlimited power of God, who can do what he wants.⁴⁶ After a series of natural disasters in 1173, the astrologers had declared that all this had happened as a result of a particular position of Saturn and Mars. Now that this calamitous constellation was over, there was no danger of a repetition of such accidents for years. Prayers and alms were therefore unnecessary. In spite of all astrological predictions, the catastrophes were repeated in the following year: God acted as he wanted; “We’ve recounted all this,” Michael remarks, “so that the wise people take advantage of the faith.”⁴⁷ To awaken faith is the purpose of his historiography and, in keeping with that purpose, he often finds occasion to reprove the unbelief of his Christian contemporaries.⁴⁸

³⁹ Ibid, 3:362/710.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 3:340/696.

⁴¹ Ibid, 3:345/700.

⁴² Ibid, 3:350/703.

⁴³ Ibid, 3:404/734.

⁴⁴ For such expressions, see Werner Philipp, *Ansätze Zum Geschichtlichen Und Politischen Denken Im Kiewer Rußland*, Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas 3 (Breslau: Priebatsch, 1940), 52ff. and 63ff.

⁴⁵ e.g., Michael I, *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, 3:383/722.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 3:352/705.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3:352/705.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 3:352/705; 348/700.