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## **Paul Bedjan, Missionary for Life (1838-1920)**

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## Part II.

## Paul Bedjan, Missionary for Life (1838-1920)

Heleen Murre-van den Berg

## Introduction

One of the most fascinating Chaldeans of the nineteenth century is the missionary-scholar Paul Bedjan. He was born a Chaldean and became a Roman Catholic Lazarist, spent half of his life in Europe, but remained intimately connected with the affairs of his people in Iran and Northern Mesopotamia. His primary audience not only included the Chaldeans of his homeland Persia, but also those whose roots were in the traditional Church of the East, as well as those belonging to the Syrian-Orthodox and Syriac-Catholic Churches. A major aim of the present introduction into Bedjan's life and work is to show how Bedjan, despite his prolonged absence from the Middle East and his cordial and fruitful connections with the European orientalisks of his time, can be considered to have remained true to his early vocation, that of a missionary to his own people.

Rather than the result of a fresh inquiry into Bedjan's life and work, something that would deserve and require a scholarly monograph, this contribution offers an overview of what is known about Bedjan so far on the basis of published materials. In all likelihood, archival research, both in the Middle East and in Europe, would yield considerable additional materials, especially since Bedjan in his European years kept a lively correspondence with correspondents both in the Middle East and in Europe. The most important publication on Bedjan so far is Père Vosté's "Paul Bedjan, le lazarusse persan", that appeared in 1945.<sup>1</sup> Making use of unpublished sources and giving a detailed overview of Bedjan's publications, Vosté's "Notes" will remain unsurpassed for some time to come. Another important source is Aristide Chatelet's overview of the Lazarist mission in Persia, which, besides giving ample information on the Lazarist context, has a few interesting additions to make on Bedjan himself.<sup>2</sup> Chatelet, who like Bedjan was a missionary of the Lazarist mission in Urmia and Khosrowa, might even have met with Bedjan before the former left for Iran in 1903, although he does not explicitly say so.<sup>3</sup> A third source, which

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<sup>1</sup> J.-M. Vosté, "Paul Bedjan, le lazarusse persan (27 nov. 1838 – 9 juin 1920). Notes bio-bibliographiques", *OCP* 11 (1945) 45-102.

<sup>2</sup> Aristide Chatelet, "La Mission Lazariste en Perse", *Revue d'histoire des missions* 10-16 (1933-1939).

<sup>3</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 16 (1939), 264.

provides a different kind of insider perspective, is a small book by Nimrod Simono which was published in Tehran, in Neo-Aramaic and Persian, in 1984. Simono, a Syriac scholar in the Catholic-Assyrian tradition, although partly dependent on Vosté, apparently had access to independent sources as well.<sup>4</sup> I further employed the numerous and sometimes lengthy introductions that Bedjan added to his publications. In these, Bedjan not only introduces the texts in their historical and scholarly contexts, but often also indicates why and for whom he thought these texts of particular relevance. These introductions present the outlines of Bedjan's European agenda, whereas his Neo-Aramaic publications, most of which consist of re-writings rather than translations, provide insight in his theological and missiological concerns. An in-depth analysis of these publications, however, awaits further research.

### **Khosrowa in the first half of the nineteenth century**

Khosrowa, the large village where Paul Bedjan was born in 1838, is located on the Salmas plain in Azerbaijan, northwestern Iran, about 80 kilometers north of the city of Urmia, northwest of Lake Urmia. The Salmas plain is a fertile region, where the Qajar ruling family, with their background in Tabriz, had extensive possessions. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Khosrowa and neighboring villages, as well as the Urmia plain further south, had a considerable Christian population, alongside a majority of Kurdish and Azeri inhabitants and a small Persian-speaking elite. Most of these Christians belonged to the Church of the East, but also the Armenian Church was well represented, the region being close to the traditionally Armenian regions in the eastern parts of the Ottoman Empire and the southern parts of Russia, including what today is the Armenian state. The Uniate Chaldean Church, which had its origins in the sixteenth century, by the early nineteenth century had attracted a considerable part of the Church of the East, mostly so on the plains and lower mountain regions north of the

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<sup>4</sup> Nimrod Simono, *Paul Bedjan, 1838-1920*, Tehran 1984. Simono, born in the Salmas region in 1908, like Bedjan was trained by the Lazarist missionaries, in Tabriz, Urmia, Paris and Dax, after which he completed his studies in Rome. In his later years he was an influential teacher of Classical Syriac and Neo-Aramaic in Tehran. He passed away in July 2004.



city of Mosul in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>5</sup> In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a relatively small and somewhat isolated Chaldean community came into being on the eastern side of the Hakkari mountains, with its main center in Khosrowa.<sup>6</sup>

When after the preparatory work of Eugène Boré in the late 1830s, the Vincentian Fathers, or the Lazarists as they are usually called, commenced missionary work in Persia in 1840, the establishment of a post in Khosrowa, with its Catholic community, was a logical step. The first years of the Lazarist mission were marred by rivalry with the American Protestant mission that had been established in Urmia in the mid 30s. The 40s were rife with strife between the two missions, both making use of their diplomatic contacts in Tehran to hinder their opponents as much as possible. By the early 50s, both missions were well established and seem to have accepted each other's presence, although Catholic-Protestant rivalry would continue to influence much of their decisions in the second half of the century.<sup>7</sup> Both missions were active in the educational field and supported a network of village schools headed by a local teacher and complemented by a seminary that aimed at training the brightest boys as future pastors or priests. The Protestants had their seminary first in Urmia and later in a nearby village called Sir; the Lazarists founded a Catholic seminary in Khosrowa, in 1846.

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<sup>5</sup> On the catholic movement within the Church of the East, see David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318-1913*, Louvain: Peeters, 2000; for an overview see my "The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries", *Hugoye* 2,2 (1999), [<http://www.bethmardutho.org/hugoye>], both including further references.

<sup>6</sup> Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation*, 315-8.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the missions in Urmia, see my *From a Spoken to a Written Language. The Introduction and Development of Literary Urmia Aramaic in the Nineteenth Century*, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten [Publication of the "De Goeje Fund" 28], 1999; on the Lazarist mission in particular, see the recent thesis by Thomas O Flynn, O.P., "The Western Christian Presence in the Caucasus and Qajar Persia, 1802-70" [Ph.D. St. John's College, Oxford], 2003. Among the older literature, Chatelet, "La Mission", remains an important source, on the early years, see also Eugène Boré, *Correspondence et mémoires d'un voyageur en Orient*, Paris: Olivier-Fulgence, 1840 (2 vols.).

## Education and Persian years

It was in the Lazarist seminary that Paul Bedjan was received among the first group of pupils. Born in Khosrowa on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1838, in one of the wealthier, influential and Catholic families of the village, he entered the seminary in 1846, together with Désiré Salomon who was to become a life-long colleague and friend. In the seminary, the boy Paul received his first training from the missionaries Joseph Darnis (1814-1858) and Augustin Cluzel (1815-1882). They taught French and some Latin, whereas a Chaldean teacher is said to have taught them to write Neo-Aramaic, in which language Darnis also taught a course in theology.<sup>8</sup> The students were expected to live a life similar to that of the missionaries, including obligatory prayer and mass as well as supervised recreation. Despite certain Latin influences, the missionaries intended to make their students' lifestyle as close to local custom as possible, including the obligation to wear local dress. Of the first group of eighteen students, eleven became priests, four of which also entered the Lazarist congregation.<sup>9</sup>

At the age of seventeenth, Bedjan traveled to Paris to enter the novitiate of the Lazarist order.<sup>10</sup> When and why exactly he

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<sup>8</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934), 267; Neo-Aramaic by Chatelet is called "Chaldéen vulgaire". This attention to the vernacular may be attributed partly to the success of the American mission in writing and printing Neo-Aramaic, but has roots also in earlier Chaldean attention to the language of the people. Somewhat strangely, Classical Syriac is not mentioned among the subjects, but considering a later remark (*idem*, 431), where "chaldéen vulgaire et littéral" are mentioned in one breath, it seems likely that Classical Syriac was also taught in these early years. More striking perhaps is the absence of Persian, the official language of the country.

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*; on the seminary in later years, see Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934), 408-10, where Chatelet, with what seems to be a guilty conscience, notes that the teaching of Latin was intended merely to grant access to scholarly literature, not to encourage Latin to be introduced into the Chaldean liturgy.

<sup>10</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934), 267, 420, 431, 15 (1838) 98; the three other Chaldeans that became Lazarists were Désiré Salomon, Jean Dbi-Goulim and 'frère' Issa Mouchil. Chatelet writes that Dbi-Goulim returned from Paris in 1858, whereas Issa returned before taking orders because of eye problems. Salomon returned from Paris in 1862, and also joined the mission.



decided to enter the Lazarist congregation is not certain.<sup>11</sup> He arrived in Paris in October 1856 and received further theological training in the mission seminary of the Lazarists. His training was concluded by his ordination to priesthood on May 25, 1861, in the meantime also having taken his Lazarist orders and being incardinated into the Latin rite. Whether he was given a choice in returning to Persia is unlikely, but nothing indicates that he resented the fact that he was sent back almost immediately after he had finished his studies. At the age of twenty-two, almost five years after he left, Paul Bedjan returned to Khosrowa as a Lazarist missionary. He was warmly received by the people of his village, causing the 'turning' not only of heads but also of hearts,<sup>12</sup> described with what seems a tinge of jealousy by Cluzel, who by then was the head of the mission: "He puts us all into his shadow, we cast only a faint light compared to him."<sup>13</sup> To the admiration of the Khosrawis, Bedjan had not only brought with him a harmonium, but had also learned to use it. After he played it during mass, a woman friend is said to have remarked to Bedjan's mother "Oh, you must be happy to have given birth to a child that smart, who at the same time sings with his mouth, his feet and his hands; may he not loose his mind from all that intelligence"<sup>14</sup> Bedjan, who had traveled from Paris with a French Lazarist, also had brought a small "autographic" press.<sup>15</sup> By that time, the Lazarist missionaries in Persia had begun to resent the popularity of the publications of the American mission press,<sup>16</sup> and had begun to look for means to

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<sup>11</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 47.

<sup>12</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934), 420: "l'enfant gâté de Khosrovah, fit tourner toutes les têtes et tous les cœurs à sa venue."

<sup>13</sup> Idem.

<sup>14</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934), 421.

<sup>15</sup> Idem; Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 49.

<sup>16</sup> This press was at work since 1841 and by 1861 had produced a good number of printings, the most important of which were the New Testament in Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac of 1846 and the Old Testament, in a similar two-language edition, in 1852. On this press, see *From a Spoken to a Written Language*, 91-111, and J.F. Coakley, "Edward Breath and the Typography of Syriac", *Harvard Library Bulletin* 6/4 (1995), 41-64, and "Printing Offices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1817-1900: a Synopsis", *Harvard Library Bulletin* 9,1 (1998), 5-34.

supply their flock with suitable Catholic reading materials.<sup>17</sup> Bedjan's heavy French baggage, therefore, as was already noted by Vosté, largely symbolizes his future career: the press introducing us into the importance the Persian Lazarists attached to publishing and printing, and the harmonium alerting us to the latinizing tendencies in the mission and with Bedjan himself.<sup>18</sup>

However, not much in Bedjan's missionary years in Persia betrays his later interest in writing and publishing. He is praised by his superiors as a successful preacher, both in Khosrowa, where he spent his first year, as well as in Urmia, to which he, to his and the people of Khosrowa's regret, was transferred a year later. During his year in Khosrowa he also taught in the seminary. According to the sources, Bedjan succeeded in converting "Nestorians" to the Catholic faith, among others in Ardishay, a little village at the forefront of the Catholic-Protestant strife, as well as in the city of Urmia. Even Mar Gabriel, the 'fickle' bishop of Ardishay, in 1875 for a short period became a Catholic under Bedjan's influence. During the nineteen years of his work in Persia, Bedjan moved back and forth a few times between the missions of Urmia and Khosrowa, apparently liking Khosrowa more, but seen by his superiors as doing more good in Urmia, where mission work among the "Nestorians" under influence of the Protestant mission, in a predominantly Muslim context, was more demanding than in the tranquil surroundings of "Little Rome", as Khosrowa was sometimes called.<sup>19</sup>

There are no indications that Bedjan occupied himself with the printing press he had brought back from Europe. Indeed, although the dearth of books is mentioned several times by Cluzel in his correspondence with Paris and Rome, not much seems to have been undertaken in this respect. This was probably due to the fact that this first press, the "pitiable" lithographic press, was not

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<sup>17</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934), 414; he notes that Cluzel had urged both Rome (Propaganda Fide) and Paris several times to take responsibility for supplying reading materials for the missions among the Chaldeans. His last request, in 1860, to the Procureur général of the Lazarists, led to Bedjan's bringing the small press.

<sup>18</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 48.

<sup>19</sup> On this period, see Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 49-51, and Chatelet, "La Mission", 11 (1934) 567, 572 (successful preaching), 582 (Ardishay), and 12 (1935), 97-9 (Mar Gabriel).



functioning very well; in fact, so far only one booklet, a catechism printed in 1875, can be assumed to have been printed on Bedjan's press. The mission press in Mosul, where French Dominicans were active among the Chaldeans, was concentrating on Arabic-language materials, whereas ordering books from the Vatican presses was considered too expensive.<sup>20</sup> It was Bedjan's colleague Désiré Salomon who took steps to remedy the situation; during a visit to France and Belgium he not only perfected his printing skills, but also brought (two?) "beautiful presses" from Belgium, which arrived in Urmia in 1876.<sup>21</sup> From then on, Salomon succeeded in supplying the Lazarist mission with publications in Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac that could begin to compete with the publications of the Protestant press. Salomon was also involved in writing and translation, and one of his more important contributions was a translation of the New Testament. It was published in 1877, in a two-language edition, with the Classical Syriac (Peshitta) text in a large type at the upper two-thirds of the page, and the Neo-Aramaic translation in a smaller type at the lower one-third of the page.<sup>22</sup>

Salomon's successes in supplying Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac reading materials for the Lazarist mission, make it doubtful whether Vosté's suggestion that Bedjan went to France to engage himself with book printing, should be taken as anything more than an *a posteriori* reason given to a departure that was necessitated by other reasons.<sup>23</sup> There are no indications that Bedjan was very active in the printing and publishing business in Urmia, and neither was there, towards 1880, a very pressing need for additional

<sup>20</sup> Compare Chatelet, "La Mission", 12 (1935), 99, 16 (1939), 399-401 and *From a Spoken to a Written Language*, 111-3. At least one catechism printed in Rome (1861, edited by Joseph Guriel), seems to have been used in Persia, cf. R. Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neu-syrischen Literatur*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976, 399. Guriel (d. 1890) was another Rome-educated Chaldean from Khosrawa. Gabriel Oussani, in "The Modern Chaldeans and Nestorians, and the study of Syriac among them", *JAOs* 22 (1901), 79-96, apart from Bedjan, lists a number of other Assyrian writers of the time, most of which concentrated on Classical Syriac.

<sup>21</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 12 (1935), 95.

<sup>22</sup> *From a Spoken to a Written Language*, 112, Chatelet, "La Mission", 16 (1939), 399-400.

<sup>23</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 51, 56. At both places, Vosté does not refer to a concrete archival source.

missionary publications. Nimrod Simono gives a slightly different interpretation and attributes to Bedjan an interest in the rising orientalist profession, stimulated by the recent archeological excavations in the Mosul region and the interest of western orientalists in the history of the ancient Assyrians and the Syriac churches. According to Simono, Bedjan himself asked for transferal to Europe in order to be able to pursue his orientalist aims.<sup>24</sup> However, although Bedjan's connections with European scholars and his later choice of texts to be published indicate that Simono might have a point in seeing Bedjan's orientalist interests as a reason for his departure to Europe, it is Chatelet who gives a clue as to the immediate reason for Bedjan's departure from Persia in 1880. In 1877, Bedjan had been nominated interim-superior of the mission house in Khosrowa, a post that, considering his strong ties to his native town, must have been much to his liking. However, in 1879, Cluzel, the head of the mission, nominated Louis Bray, a somewhat younger and ambitious colleague, as the permanent superior of the mission in Khosrowa. Bedjan was not able to work under him, and requested a transferal to Paris. Although Cluzel had liked him to stay in Persia, his request was granted and in 1880, at the age of forty-one, Paul Bedjan left for Europe, never to return to his native country again.<sup>25</sup>

### Publishing in Europe

It is Bedjan's European years that gave him the fame that lasts into the twenty-first century. However, except for the mere outlines, not much is known about his life in Europe. Nor do we know much about the exact circumstances that led him to concentrate on editing and translating. Whether such a course was suggested to him by Lazarist superiors in the Paris headquarters, where he stayed the first five years after he left Persia, whether there were encouragements from the Propaganda Fide, or that perhaps Lazarists in Persia had come up with the plan, is difficult to say on the basis of the available materials.<sup>26</sup> His first interest seems to have

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<sup>24</sup> Simono, *Paul Bedjan*, 13-4.

<sup>25</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 12 (1935), 437-8; cf. also 13 (1936), 415, where Chatelet summarizes: "Be it disappointment, be it incompatibility of characters, Bedjan, as we know, has taken refuge in Paris".

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps one clue is to be taken from a remark by Chatelet ("La Mission", 12 (1935), 444), where he notes that Cluzel's successor, Jacques



been the Chaldean breviary, which he proposed to edit to the Propaganda early in 1883 and which resulted in a publication, consisting of four volumes, in 1886 and 1887.<sup>27</sup> From that time onwards, we can be reasonably certain that literary matters were his prime concern, especially since his first publication in 1885, which preceded the breviary, the Neo-Aramaic translation of the *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas a Kempis, was received in Persia with great enthusiasm.<sup>28</sup> Between 1885 and 1912 no less than forty volumes, many of which contained over 300 pages of Syriac text (some even up to almost 1000 pages as is the case of the Jacob of Sarug volumes), resulted from his literary labors. All of these were printed by a specialist in oriental printing, the printing house W. Drugulin in Leipzig, in beautiful two-color (black and red), once even three-color (including gold), printing.<sup>29</sup>

One person that almost certainly encouraged Bedjan to pursue literary and historical researches was Rubens Duval, the French Syriac scholar who had just published his *Traité de grammaire syriaque*.<sup>30</sup> In 1883, Duval published a collection of Neo-Aramaic texts in the dialect of Salmas, in transcription and French translation. In the introduction, he thanks an anonymous Persian, who had supplied him with the texts and had assisted in their translation. In 1885, Duval published an article on Syriac inscriptions in the Salmas region, and from the introduction it becomes clear that it was Paul Bedjan who not only had attracted his attention to these inscriptions, but who also had asked his colleagues of the mission in Persia to search and copy the ancient inscriptions of the region, making use of ink rubbings. It is highly

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Thomas, during a visit to Rome in October 1883 discussed with the Prefect of the Propaganda Fide "the issue of the Chaldean publications which Paul Bedjan was about to undertake." This suggests that some pressure from the mission in Persia as well as from the Propaganda might have been exerted upon Bedjan. However, at that point he had already started to work on the breviary.

<sup>27</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 57-8.

<sup>28</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 78. Note that a Classical Syriac translation of the *Imitatio* had already been published by Joseph Gurriel (Rome, 1857), cf. Oussani, "The Modern Chaldeans and Nestorians", 90.

<sup>29</sup> Compare the list in the appendix. As far I could establish, Barhebraeus' *Chronicon* (1890) was the only publication in which also gold leaf was used.

<sup>30</sup> Rubens Duval, *Traité de grammaire syriaque*, Paris 1881.



likely therefore, that Bedjan was also Duval's informant in the first publication.<sup>31</sup> It might well have been Duval who alerted Bedjan to the possibility of a double track: not only to provide books for his compatriots in Persia, but to also contribute to western scholarship, not only by the edition of Classical Syriac texts, but also by providing texts in Neo-Aramaic.<sup>32</sup>

Bedjan's Paris-years were concluded with a visit to Rome between November 1884 and March 1885, in connection to the Chaldean breviary. According to Simono, it was in Paris that Bedjan met with Ignace Guidi, an Italian Syriac scholar who kept track of Bedjan's works over the years and according to Bedjan rendered him very valuable assistance.<sup>33</sup> Soon after his visit to Rome, Bedjan moved to a small town near Liège in Belgium, Ans lez-Lièges, where for fifteen years between 1885 and 1900, he was chaplain of the Provincial House of the Filles de la Charité. By this time, his literary career had taken off in full speed, and it seems likely that the relatively undemanding position of chaplain of a group of active Vincentian sisters was given to him to enable him to continue in this direction. His years in Belgium became the most productive of his life, resulting among other things in the seven-volume *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, published between 1890 and 1897. Other historically-oriented works that were published in this period were the *Histoire de Mar Yabalaha, Patriarche, et de Rabban Sauma* (1888/1895), Barhebraeus' *Chronicon syriacum* (1890), and the

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<sup>31</sup> Rubens Duval, *Les dialectes néo-araméens de Salamas. Textes sur l'état actuel de la Perse et contes populaires. Publiés avec une traduction française*, Paris: F. Vieweg, 1883, iv-v, and Duval, "Inscriptions syriaques de Salamas, en Perse", *Journal Asiatique* V (1885), 39-62, here 41-3. On the identification of the anonymous Persian with Bedjan, compare also *From a Spoken to a Written Language*, 115 (where I erroneously confuse Duval with Jacques Rhetoré, who was active in the Dominican mission in Mosul between 1873 and 1921 and published on Neo-Aramaic, cf. also Jacques Rhétoré, *Les Chrétiens aux bêtes Souvenirs de la guerre sainte proclamée par les Turcs contre les chrétiens en 1915*, Paris: CERF, 2005). Simono (*Paul Bedjan*, 14) supports this identification. In Duval's *La Littérature Syriacque* (Paris, Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1907, third edition) Bedjan is not mentioned explicitly.

<sup>32</sup> Duval and Bedjan appear to have remained in touch at least till 1903, when Bedjan, in the preface of the *Homilia S. Isaaci Syri Antiocheni* (xxii), thanks Duval who supplied him with detailed notes on Isaac the Great.

<sup>33</sup> Simono, *Paul Bedjan*, 14; Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 83, Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum* II, vii-viii.

Syriac *Histoire ecclésiastique* of Eusebius (1897). In the year 1898, three works by Barhebraeus were printed: the *Ethicon*, the *Book of the Dove* and the *Nomocanon*. During these years, Bedjan was in close contact with orientalists of the university of Louvain, A. Van Hoonacker, J.B. Abbeloos and Th. J. Lamy.<sup>34</sup> Bedjan mentions them in his prefaces, thanking them for their support and assistance. Also Jean-Baptiste Chabot, then a young priest and “a promising orientalist”, was among his contacts in his Belgium years.<sup>35</sup>

After a two-year period in the Collège de Theux, also in Belgium (Seraing), during which Bedjan prepared the editions of Thomas of Marga's *Liber Superiorum* (1891) and the *History of Mar Sabdona* (1902),<sup>36</sup> he was appointed as chaplain of another Vincentian sisterhouse, in Köln-Nippes, part of the city of Cologne, in 1902. Although constituting a very active community, which in Bedjan's time kept running a school, an orphanage and a hospital, the sisters probably took care of most of the work themselves, thus enabling Bedjan to continue his literary work. In his mid-sixties, he embarked on a new large-scale project, the edition of the homilies of Jacob of Sarugh, the first volume of which appeared in 1905 and the fifth volume in 1910, in total comprising almost 4500 pages of Classical Syriac poetry. In this period he further edited a volume of *Homilies of Isaac of Antioch* (1903), the *History of Isaac of Nineve* (1909), and the Syriac text of the recently discovered *Book of Heraclides of Damascus* by Nestorius (1910).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Vosté, “Paul Bedjan”, 57-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Acta Martyrum* II, vii-viii; III, vi-viii.

<sup>36</sup> In these years Bedjan also contributed to an ambitious project of his editor: Johannes Baensch-Drugulin, *Marksteine aus der Weltliteratur in Originalschriften*, Leipzig: Drugulin, 1902; he provided Neo-Aramaic sayings with translation (p. 58-60). These are commented on by Maurice Chamizer who notes that this language “bildet seit Erscheinen der verdienstvollen Publikationen von Paul Bedjan eine wohlgepflegte Specialität unser Offizin.” I want to thank Dr. J.F. Coakley who kindly drew my attention to this work, as well as to L. Yaure's article on Bedjan (cf. n.38).

<sup>37</sup> Bedjan also contributed to the French translation and annotation by F. Nau, which appeared in the same year under the same title: *Le livre d'Héraclide de Damas* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané).



In this last period, he also returned to publishing in Neo-Aramaic, which he had not done since the publication of *Histoire Sainte* in 1888. In 1904, he published a devotional booklet at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, *Mois de Marie*, whereas his the last volume to be published was another Neo-Aramaic rewriting based on the *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*: a collection of eastern and western Saint's lives in *Vies des Saints*, which was published in 1912, when Bedjan was seventy-four. At the request of his colleagues in Persia, he then started to work at an annotated translation of the bible in Neo-Aramaic, which he is said to have completed shortly before his death. Perhaps because lack of funding, especially during the First World War, the translation was never published.<sup>38</sup> June 9, 1920, at the age of eighty-two, Paul Bedjan died in Köln-Nippes. According to Simono, he was buried "in a spacious and well laid-out graveyard, among beds of violets—symbolizing his humble and fruitful life".<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 87-8 (basing himself on missionary correspondence and on a note by Anton Rücker, who knew Bedjan well in his later years – cf. Rücker, *Oriens Christianus* 10-11 (1920-21), 146-151), and Simono, *Bedjan*, 15. Simono adds that a manuscript of the translation of the New Testament is in Tehran. Bedjan's concerns about the manuscript are referred to in a letter he wrote to Lazar[us] Yaure on 28 May, 1920, shortly before his death: "I will send you the last page of the New Testament as an example, the only one that has been printed [sic], in the book language [Classical Syriac] and in the language of the lay people [*leššānā d-almāyē* > Neo-Aramaic], with commentary." It appears that Bedjan hoped that Yaure, who had recently visited him in Köln-Nippes, would be able to get his translation printed and distributed, cf. L. Yaure, "Le-dkārā d-Monseigneur Paul", in *Reviving a Famous Ancient Language* (New York: The Syriac Press, 1920), 2. On Yaure, see Martin Tamcke, "Eingeborener Helfer" oder Missionar? Wegen und Note des Lazarus Yaure im Dienste der Mission', in Tamcke e.a., *Syrisches Christentum weltweit. Studien zur syrischen Kirchengeschichte. Festschrift Prof. Hage* (Münster: LIT Verlag 1995), 355-85.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Bedjan, 16: "*Pagrūby pešlēb mothā b-xad bēyṭqūrā rwixā w-suqlā, b-peqxē d-bānapšēb, šurtā d-xayyūhy makekēkē w-ammāyē.*" Simono does not give the exact location, but includes a picture of the tombstone amidst the violets.

### Khosrowa, the Lazarist Mission and the Chaldean Church

Bedjan's literary output, to which I shall return in the last section, was not his only means of communication with the people he had left behind. Through a regular correspondence and the occasional visitor from Persia, he kept in close contact with his native village, the Lazarist mission, the Chaldean church and the wider circle of the Syriac-speaking Christians of the Middle East. The interest was mutual: although some of his former colleagues in Persia might have wanted to soon forget about him, the majority thought highly of him and wanted him to remain involved in matters of church and society.

The first indication of Bedjan's ongoing connections with Persia comes when less than a year after his departure, Cluzel not only informed him that his mother died in what was a particularly difficult year for Persia, marred by famine, war and the plague, but also asked him to collect money in Europe for the Chaldeans.<sup>40</sup> Bedjan apparently succeeded in doing so, and from then on he became an important benefactor of the Chaldean community in Persia, not only by regularly sending money from Europe to Persia, but also by distributing considerable numbers of free copies of his publications.<sup>41</sup>

In 1882, Mgr. Augustin Cluzel died, leaving the Lazarist mission without a superior and a vacancy for the post of Apostolic Prefect in Persia. Many Chaldeans objected to the most likely

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<sup>40</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 52. This was the season 1880/1881, the year in which the Kurdish sheikh Ubaydullah revolted against the Ottomans and the Persians, and advanced into the Urmia and Salmas plains, disrupting the harvest, causing many refugees from the mountains to come down to Khosrowa and Urmia, and threatening the villages and towns all along Lake Urmia, cf. John Joseph, *The Modern Assyrians of the Middle East. Encounters with Western Christian Missions, Archaeologists, and Colonial Powers*, Leiden: Brill 2000, 119-121.

<sup>41</sup> Compare e.g. Chatelet, "La Mission", 13 (1936) 409-10, where around 1885 he refers to a fund "Cluzel-Bedjan"; and Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 75-6 with statistics in n. 2; of the school books *Syllabaire chaldéenne* and *Doctrine chrétienne* Bedjan send 1700 copies to Mesopotamia and Persia, of other books up to 1000 copies; only very few of such donations were funded for by the Propaganda. On donations that contributed to the printing of his publications, cf. Rücker on Bedjan, 147, 150.



successor, the already mentioned Louis Bray, and they used Bedjan to plead their case before the Lazarist Superior General in Paris. Despite Bedjan's departure, Bray had not been able to build up a good relationship with the Chaldean community of Khosrowa. According to Chatelet, this should be attributed partly to Bray's lack of subtlety and understanding of the local situation, but at the same time it must be assumed that the persistent resistance from the side of Bedjan's family, supported by other influential members of the community, hardly gave Bray a chance to succeed. It seems likely that the Chaldean party would have preferred to see Désiré Salomon become Cluzel's successor. The combined effort of Bedjan in Paris and the Chaldeans in Khosrowa resulted in preventing Bray from becoming Cluzel's successor, but to avoid further conflicts, the Superior General appointed an outsider, Jacques Thomas, who had recently returned from a ten-year posting as the superior of the Lazarist mission in Alexandria (Egypt). Bray and Salomon both were given the rather vague (and newly created) position of "premier consultant" of the mission. In 1883, Rome confirmed the Lazarist decision by appointing Thomas also as Apostolic Prefect and Delegate.<sup>42</sup>

The next episode in Bedjan's ongoing connection with the Middle East became the edition of the Chaldean breviary. As indicated above, in May 1883 Bedjan put before the Propaganda a detailed plan for the first printed edition of the Chaldean breviary.<sup>43</sup> He proposed not only to edit the Syriac texts of the various liturgical books that together constituted the priests' manual (*ḥudrā, kaṣkūl, gaṣṣā, memrā d-baṇṭā, ktābā da-qdām wa-d-ḥātar*, and the Psalter), but to also combine them along the lines of the Latin division into the common and the proprium. After detailed investigations, the Propaganda agreed with the proposal towards the end of 1883, without, however, taking steps towards an official imprimatur. After Bedjan's superior Mgr Fiat, the Superior-General of the Lazarists, objected to have Bedjan work on a project that might not be of any use for the Chaldean church (lacking the imprimatur), it surfaced that Bedjan himself had tried to ward off interference of the Chaldean hierarchy – which of course would be needed as soon as the imprimatur was sought.

<sup>42</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 12 (1935), 437-9, 442-3.

<sup>43</sup> The following is based mainly on Vosté ("Paul Bedjan", 57-67) who gives a detailed description of the process.

Early in 1884, the Chaldean patriarch Eliya Abu l-Yonan (1879-1894) learned of Bedjan's plans and immediately began to oppose them. The Propaganda, changing its plans and starting to work towards the imprimatur, invited Eliya to send to Rome Mar Khayyath, metropolitan of Diyarbakir and one of the clerics that was most opposed to the plan. He was to bring with him additional manuscripts and work together with Bedjan on the text of the breviary. The plan worked, and from November 1884 to March 1885 Khayyath and Bedjan established a text that would satisfy the Chaldean hierarchy. The result was printed, and the first volume, with the imprimatur, appeared in 1886. However, when the volumes arrived in Mesopotamia, the patriarch soon discovered that Bedjan had introduced quite a number of additional changes that had not been discussed with Khayyath. In Bedjan's opinion, the latter had not been critical enough about "the snake hiding among the beautiful flowers", and Bedjan felt compelled to further purify the Chaldean liturgy of whatever remnants of heresy he detected.<sup>44</sup> There can be little doubt that the rather strong latinizing tendencies in Bedjan's version of the Breviary were the main reason of the conflicts between the Chaldean hierarchy and Bedjan, although I assume that Chatelet is right in pointing also to the latent rivalry between the Persian and Mesopotamian parts of the Chaldean church that prevented the largely Mesopotamian-based hierarchy to appreciate Bedjan's efforts unbiased.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, Bedjan had not lost his support among the Chaldeans of Persia. In 1887, Isaac Khudabash, former pupil of the Propaganda, suggested to the Propaganda that Mar Augustin Bar-Shino, the bishop of Khosrowa, was not functioning well and that the community would greatly benefit from a coadjutor. For this post, he proposed Paul Bedjan, despite the fact that Bedjan formally did not belong to the Chaldean church anymore. Although it is likely that Bedjan himself would not have accepted the charge, the immediate negative response of the Chaldean patriarch, unhappy with Bedjan because of the execution of the breviary and probably also because of his incardination into the Latin rite, prevented any further discussion. After Augustin Bar-Shino died in 1890, the Persian Chaldeans again proposed Bedjan

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<sup>44</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 66.

<sup>45</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 13 (1936), 424-6.



as his successor. Much more so than a candidate from Turkey, Bedjan as a Persian would be able to lead his people in spiritual as well as temporal affairs, at a time when negotiations with the Persian authorities were often expected from the local clergy.<sup>46</sup> By this time, Bedjan had squarely opposed the Chaldean patriarch over the edition of the missal, causing the project, despite the support of the Propaganda, to be abandoned early in 1890. Not only Bedjan's latinizing tendencies (even more outspoken in the proposal for the missal than in the breviary) but also the tensions between Persian and Turkish Chaldeans became highly contentious.<sup>47</sup> It is likely therefore that neither the Propaganda nor the Chaldean patriarch favored Bedjan as candidate for the bishopric. Bedjan did not see himself as a candidate either, and probably advocated the candidature of the Persian Isaac Khudabash in Paris. Although Khudabash was young and inexperienced, being only thirty-five at the time, he was appointed in 1894, after a vacancy of four years.<sup>48</sup>

Bedjan's reluctance to return to Persia as a bishop did not prevent him from interfering with Persian affairs. In 1888, he warned the Chaldeans in Persia that Paris had plans to start a new mission among the Armenians, interpreted by Bedjan and the Chaldeans in Persia to be to the detriment of the mission in Khosrowa.<sup>49</sup> This discussion surfaced again in 1892, and again Bedjan in Europe and Salomon in Persia fought hard to prevent the establishment of the new mission. Soon afterwards, Bedjan opposed the candidate for the archbishopric of Urmia, Thomas Audo, probably because of his Turkish background that was considered to be a handicap in managing the temporal affairs of his Persian flock. Bedjan seems to have been so influential that in already in 1890 the superior of the mission in Persia, Hilarion Montéty, asked him to refrain from contacts with the Persian missionaries and not to meddle in the appointments of Chaldean clergy. Since it was Montéty himself who was opposed by Bedjan and his supporters, this request was not very effective. After years of conflicts between the "Chaldean" party in Persia and the missionaries, in which Bedjan continued to play a part, Montéty was forced to resign as head of the mission in 1896, leading

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<sup>46</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 52-5.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, 67-73.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, 54, Chatelet, "La Mission", 13 (1936), 580-1.

<sup>49</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 13 (1936), 575.

Chatelet to conclude that the "Chaldean party once again came out victorious".<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile Bedjan had become connected with Persia in another, somewhat surprising way. Around 1894, issues over tax, ownership of churches, and the administration of the civil affairs (somewhat unclearly divided over the bishop, Isaac Khudabash, and the Persian-appointed *mushabir*, 'mayor', involving also French consular protection), led the inhabitants of Khosrawa to devise a plan to buy the village. Khosrawa, according to Chatelet, was owned by the crown prince of Persia, who rented out the grounds and the houses to the inhabitants. Bedjan was willing to provide a mortgage, enabling the villagers to buy the village, but of course also binding them to pay a yearly rent.<sup>51</sup> It soon became impossible for the village to pay this rent, and within two years Bedjan became the sole owner of the village.<sup>52</sup> It is somewhat unclear what this meant in practice, but it certainly had Bedjan in the forefront of the affairs of the village, in the intricate interplay of temporal and spiritual aspects of it. Bedjan's involvement in the village induced the Khosrawis in 1903 to request Bedjan to return to Khosrowa for the third time. Bishop Isaac Khudabash had resigned, probably because he was not able to keep his ground between the Lazarist missionaries, the Persian authorities and the villagers, and Bedjan was thought to be the only person able to function under such complicated circumstances. Vosté suggests that at this time the Chaldean patriarch might have been willing to consider Bedjan's appointment, but Bedjan, sixty-four at the time, enjoying his literary activities and having recently moved to Köln-Nippes, appears to have not at all been tempted to spend his last years in his hometown. He remained in Europe, continued his literary

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<sup>50</sup> Idem, 14 (1937), 96-107, 246-7, 254-7.

<sup>51</sup> This loan raises a number of questions that have not been sufficiently answered so far. Bedjan is said to have come from a wealthy family, but it seems unlikely that the money he spent on supporting the Chaldeans in Persia (money, books, matrices for the press, and the loan) came from his family possessions. Some of the money he sent to Persia came from rich supporters of the mission (cf. n. 41), but it seems unlikely that they would have funded Bedjan's buying the village. The most likely source is the deeds of his books in Europe, and it would be worthwhile to investigate what profits in this business were made at the time.

<sup>52</sup> Chatelet, "La Mission", 15 (1938), 428-32.



production and supported the Chaldeans in Persia with money and books rather than with his actual presence.<sup>53</sup> In Europe, his last years were overshadowed by the First World War, whose consequences badly affected the Assyrians, decimating the population in the Hakkari mountains and causing ten thousands of refugees in Persia and northern Mesopotamia.<sup>54</sup>

Although the sources so far do not allow us to fully understand Bedjan's involvement in the affairs of the Chaldeans, the mission and especially the village of Khosrowa, there can be little doubt that he maintained a strong interest in what happened in his homeland, despite the fact that he never seems to have wanted to return in person. His interest was not only in the spiritual affairs of his people, but also in the actual political and economic situation. An interesting confirmation of these "worldly" interests can be found in the texts that Rubens Duval collected from him when he had only just left Persia. In these, Bedjan not only sketched the often-difficult situation of the Christians in Persia, but also put forward many proposals for general improvement of the country, in the agricultural, commercial and political domains. Although these proposals betray a somewhat exaggerated trust in modernity, education and westernization in general, they also testify to his real and enduring interest in the welfare of his country and its inhabitants—Christians and non-Christians alike.<sup>55</sup>

### **Bedjan's publications in context: readership and objectives**

Rather than discussing each of Bedjan's publications in detail, I would like to draw attention to some of the general themes and objectives that have made his oeuvre into a tightly knit and consistent life work. I will focus on two aspects: his intended readership and the overall aims of his extensive project of Syriac publishing. Before going into these themes, it is necessary to say a few words about a very visible sub-distinction in his work: between his works in Neo-Aramaic and his works in Classical Syriac.

The vast majority of his work, thirty-two of the forty titles, consists of editions of Classical Syriac texts. Very seldom Bedjan

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<sup>53</sup> Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 55-6.

<sup>54</sup> Simono, *Bedjan*, 15-16.

<sup>55</sup> Duval, *Les dialectes néo-araméens*.

wrote Classical Syriac,<sup>56</sup> but his great love for the Syriac language is amply testified by his careful editions of a range of Syriac texts. It is through these texts that the majority of present-day readers have come to know and value Bedjan. The other eight volumes were written in "Néo-Araméen", "idiome d'Ourmiah", "chaldéen populaire" or "*leššānā d-almāyē*" ("language of the lay people"), the various terms Bedjan used for his mother tongue. To these eight volumes, we should add the texts he provided to Duval for *Les dialectes néo-araméens de Salamas*. These texts together constitute an excellent example of Literary Urmia Aramaic as it developed under the influence of the American missionaries in the nineteenth century; Bedjan was one of the first native-speakers to use it extensively and his books in this language became a classic example of good usage.<sup>57</sup> These texts range from relatively literal translations (*Imitatio Christi*), via easy-to-read re-writings of classical texts (*Histoire Sainte*<sup>58</sup> and *Vies de Saints*) to free writing in some of the prefaces and in parts of *Manuel de piété* and *Mois de Marie*, as well as in the Duval-texts. In addition to the differences in language and genre, the two groups of texts were published differently: most of the Neo-Aramaic texts were printed in a smaller type, in smaller volumes, and in cheaper editions, whereas the Classical Syriac editions were printed in larger volumes and larger types, and usually with hard-back covers. Generally speaking, the Neo-Aramaic texts appear to have been aimed primarily at a lay public, including

<sup>56</sup> Two editions have Classical Syriac prefaces, in addition to a French one: Barhebraeus' *Chronicon* (1890) and *Histoire complète de Josèph* (1891). Since Classical Syriac was used at the time in correspondence and other writings, especially in clerical circles, Bedjan might have used it in corresponding with his Chaldean colleagues in Persia, but he might as well have used Neo-Aramaic or even French. Simono has a few Neo-Aramaic quotes from letters written by Bedjan, as has Yauré ("*Le-dkārā d-Monseigneur Paul*", 2).

<sup>57</sup> Compare H.J. Polotsky, "Studies in Modern Syriac", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 6 (1961), 2-32 and Murre-van den Berg, "Paul Bedjan (1838-1920) and his Neo-Syriac Writings", René Lavenant, *VT Symposium Syriacum 1992* [OCA 247], Rome 1994, 381-92.

<sup>58</sup> According to Anton Rucker (Rucker on Bedjan, 148), *Histoire Sainte* is based on a French example, which I have not been able to identify so far. Whether this French text was simply translated or used as a muster, cannot be established at the moment.



children, which were educated in Neo-Aramaic more than in Classical Syriac.

In the West, Bedjan has become known mostly for his editions of Classical Syriac texts and there can be little doubt that from the beginning, Bedjan was aware of their importance for European scholarship: in the very first introduction he wrote, to the first edition of the *History of Mar Yabalaha* in 1888, he mentions the orientalists, "the scholars of the west", alongside his readers in the Middle East, "my dear countrymen of the East."<sup>59</sup> Similar expressions are found in many other prefaces; Bedjan almost always tries to mention the two readerships in one breath.<sup>60</sup> Over time, Bedjan began to see himself as part of this group of orientalists: he pays ample attention to the historical context of the texts he edited and he adhered to western methods of comparing and collating manuscripts as much as possible. He prepared new editions when he thought better manuscripts had turned up, whereas he used his numerous contacts in the Middle East and in Europe to acquire as many manuscripts of a given text as possible.<sup>61</sup> He prides himself with the appreciation of his work by European orientalists and mentions their support in his introductions.<sup>62</sup> He urges them to appreciate the beauty of Classical Syriac, especially as found in the poetry of Jacob of Sarugh: "The orientalists will also find here the most beautiful and correct style".<sup>63</sup> Although he was aware also of the interest of some orientalist scholars in Neo-Aramaic,<sup>64</sup> only *Mois de Marie* has a

<sup>59</sup> *Histoire de Mar Yabalaha* (1895), xiii.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. similarly in the *Nomocanon*, xiii: "Nous sommes heureux d'avoir pu l'achever dans l'intérêt du clergé de l'Orient et des savants de l'occident".

<sup>61</sup> Compare e.g. the introductions to his later works *Liber Superiorum* vi (1901) and *Mar Isaacus Ninivita* iv-v (1903). More research is needed to track the extent of his scholarly work, including his search for manuscripts in Europe and the Middle East. It is likely that his colleague Désiré Salomon played an important role in collecting MSS from Persia and Hakkari, compare *Histoire de Mar Yabalaha* (1888), ix.

<sup>62</sup> Compare especially the introduction of the various volumes of the *Acta Martyrum*.

<sup>63</sup> *Homiliae Selectae* I, ix.

<sup>64</sup> Certainly so via his contacts with Duval, and perhaps also judging from his remark in the preface to *Mois de Marie*, xvi-xv, where he stresses in the French preface that this is an original work, the first of this type in Neo-Aramaic, and "le plus beau modèle du style néo-araméen."

French preface, the other publications have no prefaces or a preface in Neo-Aramaic, in which no reference is made to a possible western audience. On the other hand, all of the editions of Classical Syriac texts, except for the breviary, have an introduction in French only or in Classical Syriac and French, and in these introductions, as indicated, many references are made to the orientalist reading public.

However, despite his strong awareness and appreciation of the European orientalist scene, he is clear about his ultimate aims: to provide books for his "compatriots", be it lay or clerical, in order to further the cause of the Catholic missions in Persia and Mesopotamia. In the end, scholarly concerns, however important, had to give way to missionary and theological concerns. This goes without saying for his books in Neo-Aramaic, the earliest of which went to press without a preface, but which because of the choice of language evidently were intended for a readership in the Middle East. Of these, the *Syllabaire chaldéenne* and the *Doctrina Christiana*, were expressly written for use in the mission schools, whereas the translation of the *Imitatio Christi* and the *Manuel de piété* probably were intended for a somewhat wider readership. The breviary, although for a while regarded as an academic project, was undoubtedly intended to ease the liturgical life of his fellow priests in the Middle East, whereas Barhebraeus' *Nomocanon* was edited with the "interests of the Eastern clergy in mind."<sup>65</sup> Also the other Classical Syriac publications were primarily intended for a Middle-Eastern readership, "my dear countrymen ("compatriots") of the East",<sup>66</sup> and similarly elsewhere "I am happy to be able to offer today to my countrymen ...".<sup>67</sup> In the introduction to the *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove*, Bedjan distinguishes a range of possible readers, most of whom can be situated in the Middle East, among his fellow clergy as well as lay Christians: the "theologian", the "mystique", the "preacher", the "historian", the "philologist" and the "simple believer".<sup>68</sup> In the introduction to the first volume of the homilies of Jacob of Sarugh, published in 1905, he is even more outspoken: "I work mainly for the missions."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Nomocanon*, xiii.

<sup>66</sup> *Histoire de Mar Yabalaba* (1895), xiii.

<sup>67</sup> *Chronicon*, v.

<sup>68</sup> *Ethicon*, v-iv

<sup>69</sup> *Homiliae Selectae* I, xii.



The last remark indicates that a certain tension between the two aims could not be avoided. In the introduction to the first volume of the *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, Bedjan makes this tension explicit. He stresses that in editing and collecting the lives of the Saints, the eastern audience comes first. It is for their spiritual benefit that these Lives are collected and because of that "we have been forced to abridge or to adapt ('rectifier') certain passages of these Lives"<sup>70</sup>, mostly because Bedjan did not agree with the theological contents. However, he adds: "While pursuing our aim, at the same time we wanted to cater for the wishes of our European readers, by maintaining scrupulously the details they might be interested in."<sup>71</sup> It is between the interests of the European readers and the spiritual benefit of the Eastern readers that Bedjan steers his course, choosing texts that could be appreciated by both groups, and using then current methods of editing only in so far they did not interfere with what he thought the primary object: "to put good books into the hands of our dear Easterners".<sup>72</sup>

What were the criteria of "good books" according to Bedjan? Taking into account both the contents of his volumes and the way he wrote about them in his introductions, I distinguish four important criteria: (1) the books should be dogmatically sound; that is, in accordance with Catholic doctrine; (2) the books should further piety and good morals; (3) the books should educate the readers in the history of the world-wide Christian Church, in particular with the history of the Syriac churches; (4) the style of the book should be accessible as well as elegant.

The dogmatic criterion, the book being in accordance with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, is almost a *sine qua non* – if the book deviates too much of what by Bedjan is perceived as Catholic doctrine, it is not edited by Bedjan, whereas smaller 'mistakes' are either corrected or come with a warning. This accounts for the homilies of Jacob of Sarugh, for his editions of Barhebraeus, of Isaac of Nineveh and Isaac of Antioch. Some books, according to the introductions, were chosen primarily because of their dogmatic interest: the book of *St. Martyrius or Mar Sabdona* as an example of an "Anti-Nestorian" martyr within the

<sup>70</sup> *Acta Martyrum* I, v.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, vi.

<sup>72</sup> *Idem*, v.

early Church of the East,<sup>73</sup> as well as the *Compendium Conciliorum*, an overview of the eleven ecumenical councils up to the Council of Florence in 1439, which had been translated by the Chaldean patriarch Mar Yosep II Šliba Bet Maʿruf from Arabic into Syriac, on the basis of a Latin original.<sup>74</sup> This dogmatic interest might also have been one of the reasons for Bedjan to edit the *History of Mar Yabalaha*, which includes the description of Rabban Sauma's cordial contacts with Rome in the late thirteenth century.<sup>75</sup> The dogmatic criterion naturally was also decisive in the Neo-Aramaic translation of the *Doctrina Christiana*, for use in the Catholic schools, whereas the propagation of Catholic doctrine explicitly was among the reasons to compile *Mois de Marie*.<sup>76</sup> Bedjan also edited Nestorius' *Book of Heraclide*, proving, as he thought, that Nestorius was indeed a heretic who was justly condemned by the Council of Ephesus.<sup>77</sup>

Over and above Bedjan's interest in dogmatic issues, the furthering of piety and Christian morals constituted the primary aim of his texts. Bedjan refers to this aim many times in his introductions, and his emphasis on piety and morals is obvious when taking into account the texts he chose. His largest project, the *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, is perhaps the most outstanding example, providing the faithful with a huge collection of historical examples of practical piety, "la pratique de la vertu".<sup>78</sup> The edition of the homilies Jacob of Sarugh, his other large project, perfectly served this aim: "the instruction of the clergy and the faithful in

<sup>73</sup> S. Martyri, *qui et Sabdona*, vi-iii; cf. also André de Halleux, *Maryrius (Sabdona). Oeuvres Spirituelles I*, [SCCO 201, Script. Syri 87] Louvain: Peeters, iii-v.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Herman Teule, "Joseph II, Patriarch of the Chaldeans (1696-1713/14) and the *Book of the Magnet*. First Soundings", R. Ebied and H. Teule, *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage*, Louvain: Peeters, 226.

<sup>75</sup> A telling example of the type of notes Bedjan adds, can be found in *Histoire de Mar Yabalaha*, 84 n.5, where the fourteenth-century text describes the Pope as "Catholicos Patriarch of Romanya and all the Westerners", to which Bedjan adds in a note: "and also of the Easterners, because he is the substitute of Simon Peter, the head of the apostles on which the world-wide church is built and to whom were entrusted all the lamb and sheep of our Lord".

<sup>76</sup> *Mois de Marie*, v-viii.

<sup>77</sup> Nau, *Livre d'Héraclide*, xii.

<sup>78</sup> *Acta Martyrum I*: v.



dogma, morals and piety."<sup>79</sup> In Neo-Aramaic, *Histoire Sainte* provides another example: every bible story, re-told more or less according to the outlines of the bible text, is concluded by a few lines in which the main message is summarized, some of these of a dogmatic, many others of a moral and pietistic character. Note, however, that the inclusion of Barhebraeus' *Book of the Dove* and the edition of Isaac of Nineveh's *De Perfectione Religiosa* suggests that Bedjan also had an interest in the ascetic and mystical aspects of Eastern Christian piety.

In addition to his interest in practical piety comes his preference for works with a historical component. *The History of Mar Yabalaha* in two editions, Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History*, Barhebraeus' *Chronicon* and Thomas of Marga's *Liber Superiorum* are important historical works, which by Bedjan were recognized as such. In all likelihood, Bedjan considered the Saints' lives to be in more or less the same historical category. It is in these works that Bedjan seems to have found the best way to reconcile the interests of western scholars and eastern theologians, priests and lay people: historical texts as a source for historical enquiries, and at the same time as a never-ending supply of *exempla* of Christian life through the centuries, of great interest for the faithful and the clergy alike.

Last but not least Bedjan selected texts that in his opinion also stylistically and grammatically represented the best of Syriac literature, preferring texts that were elegant as well as accessible, clear as well as beautiful. Such texts, he supposed, would benefit readers in East and West, but perhaps even more so the Syriac scholars in the west, as he notes in his introduction to the homilies of Jacob of Sarugh: "The orientalist will find here the most beautiful and correct style."<sup>80</sup>

The above criteria, dogmatic, spiritual, historical and stylistic, perhaps in combination with his somewhat distanced position in Europe, also enabled Bedjan to include whatever he thought relevant from the Syrian Orthodox tradition, most importantly the works by Barhebraeus and Jacob of Sarugh's homilies. By this, he contributed to viewing Syriac literature as constituting one literary tradition, despite dogmatic, ecclesial and geographical differences.

<sup>79</sup> *Homiliae Selectae* I, ix.

<sup>80</sup> *Homiliae Selectae* I, ix.

Although further research into Bedjan's editing methods, his specific interests in dogmatic issues and the type of morality and piety he propagated is much needed and would certainly yield new insights, the general line is clear: his choice of texts reflects his wish to serve his own people, lay and clergy, with useful and well-written books, which further dogmatic and historical knowledge, as well as Christian piety and sound morals. At the same time, he was well aware of the growing readership of western orientalist scholars, and he tried to accommodate their interest in Syriac literature not only by choosing what he thought correct and beautiful examples of Syriac texts, but also by focusing on editing newly discovered and historically interesting texts.

### Conclusions

As indicated at the beginning of this article, the life and work of Paul Bedjan deserve more detailed attention than could be given in this contribution. Among the subjects that would certainly benefit from closer scrutiny are the details of his life in Europe and the aims and objectives of his *œuvre*, both in Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac. On the basis of what I have sketched so far, however, it is possible to summarize the most important outlines.

Within the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Paul Bedjan was an exceptional person. He was the only Assyrian who at that time was recognized as a Syriac scholar among the western orientalists, he was one of the few Chaldeans that studied in Europe and entered into the Lazarist order, he was one of the first to see his work published and distributed in Europe, and he was the only Chaldean Lazarist that was posted in Europe for most of his life. At the same time, he remained in close contact with his home country and village and devoted most of his time to supplying books for his own people. The missionary motivation that in his first working years was expressed in preaching and teaching, in his later years was expressed in writing and translating into Neo-Aramaic and by editing Classical Syriac texts. His was a missionary life, notwithstanding the fact that during his European years scholarly interests were added to his missionary vocation. These scholarly interests brought him fame in Europe and perhaps also a moderate income with which to support his townspeople at home.



His missionary convictions, in combination with his enduring love for his people was also expressed in a fighting spirit that surprised some of those who knew him well,<sup>81</sup> and which was not lessened by later years of scholarly retreat. Over the years Bedjan was willing to oppose the Chaldean hierarchy and the Lazarist missionaries, over two issues in particular: the 'Catholic' rather than 'Chaldean' character of the uniate church, and the spiritual and material welfare of the Chaldeans of Persia, especially those of his hometown Khosrowa. One of the interesting questions for further research would be to trace how Bedjan's latinizing efforts influenced the course of the Chaldean church. Some of his concerns and proposals, such as the introduction of the organ in the liturgy and a catholicized veneration of Saint Mary, seem to have been easily accepted, at least in the longer run. Even the breviary, despite strong protests against it in its early days, is still in use in the Chaldean church.

His most enduring legacy, however, is in the field of Syriac literature. It is here that he made his most important contribution. His editing of thousands of pages which before him were only accessible in manuscript to a small number of Syriac clergy or European scholars, contributed significantly to the study of Syriac literature and, through that, to the study of the history and theology of Syriac-speaking Christianity. In addition, his contribution to Neo-Aramaic writing had a huge impact both on the scholarly discourse and the lives of the faithful. Bedjan's careful and elegant style of writing gave readers in East and West an excellent example of how the vernacular language could be used in literary texts, putting the language in the same league as the venerated Classical Syriac. What perhaps contributed most to his long-lasting popularity among readers of Syriac, is the form in which Bedjan published his work. All editions, both in Classical Syriac and in Neo-Aramaic, are beautifully executed and by this significantly enhance the pleasure of reading Syriac. This might explain why even today, despite the fact that from a scholarly perspective one might criticize his editing methods, his editions are much sought after by scholars and other readers of Syriac alike. It is therefore Bedjan's genuine love for the language in its classical and modern

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<sup>81</sup> Cluzel, in the period of Bedjan's leaving Persia, found him "étonnement combattif", cf. Chatelet, "La Mission" 12 (1935), 438.

forms, as well as for the rich and diverse contents of Syriac literature, that distinguish his work from that of others who contributed to this field.



### Appendix. Bedjan's Publications

The following list of publications by Bedjan is taken literally from an undated brochure of the Drugulin Press, kept in the National Library in Jerusalem, which I could use thanks to Prof. Gideon Goldenberg of the Hebrew University. The brochure is nicely decorated by a border decoration along all 8 pages. An annotated list of Bedjan's publications can be found in Vosté, "Paul Bedjan", 78-88. Vosté's list has 36 items, counting re-editions as one with the first edition and taking Barhebraeus' *Book of the Dove* (1898) and the *Ethicon* (1898), bound in one volume, as one. We may add to this list the texts that Bedjan contributed to Duval's *Les dialectes néo-araméens de Salamas. Textes sur l'état actuel de la Perse et contes populaires. Publiés avec une traduction française* (Paris 1883).

[Title page]

LA LISTE  
DES  
PLUS BELLES ÉDITIONS SYRIAQUES  
ET NÉO-ARAMÉENNES  
PUBLIÉES PAR  
P. BEDJAN,  
PRÊTRE DE LA MISSION LAZARISTE;  
PARIS, RUE DE SÈVRES, 95  
ET EXÉCUTÉES  
PAR LA CÉLÈBRE IMPRIMERIE  
W. DRUGULIN  
SOUS LA SURVEILLANCE DE SON SAVANT DIRECTEUR  
M. LE DOCTEUR MAURICE CHAMIZER  
DE LEIPZIG

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1. **IMITATIO CHRISTI**, nunc primum ex latino in chaldaicum, idiomatis Urmiae Persidis, translata. 1885, in -8°. 254 p.
2. **MANUEL DE PIÉTÉ**, ou livre de prières, de méditations et des offices, en Néo-araméen. 1886, in-12. 515 p.
3. **MANUEL DE PIÉTÉ**, ou livre de prières, de méditations et des offices. (Seconde édition, revue, corrigée, considérablement augmentée, particulièrement par cinq instructions sur la Vraie Eglise.) en Néo-araméen. 1893, in-12. XI + 685 p.
4. **BREVIARIUM CHALDAICUM**, (editio prima et unica). Pars prima, ab Adventu ad Quadragesimam. 1886, grand in-8°. XII + 1042.
5. **BREVIARIUM CHALDAICUM** . . . Pars secunda, a Quadragesima ad Pentecosten. 1887, grand in-8°. XII + 1015 p.
6. **BREVIARIUM CHALDAICUM** . . . Pars tertia, a Pentecoste ad Dedicationem. 1887, grand in-8°. XII + 987 p.

7. **LIBER PSALMORUM, HORARUM DIURNARUM, ORDINIS OFFICII DIVINI, ET HOMILIARUM ROGATIONUM**, ad usum scholarum. 1886, grand in-8°. 336 p.
8. **DOCTRINA CHRISTIANA**, lingua chaldaica, idiomatis Urmiae, Persidis. 1886, in-18. 147 p.
9. **SYLLABAIRE CHALDÉEN**, idiome d'Ourmiah. 1886, in-8°. 70 p.
10. **HISTOIRE DE JOSEPH, PAR SAINT EPHREM**, poème inédit en dix livres. 1887, petit in-8°. IV + 265 p.
11. **HISTOIRE COMPLÈTE DE JOSPEH, PAR SAINT EPHREM**, Poème en douze livres. 1891, petit in-8°. XI + 369 p.
12. **HISTOIRE SAINTE**, en Néo-araméen. 1888, in-12. 377 p.
13. **HISTOIRE DE MAR YABALAH, PATRIARCHE, ET DE RABAN SAUMA**. 1888, petit in-8°. XII + 187 p.
14. **HISTOIRE DE MAR YABALAH** . . . revue et corrigée. 1895, petit in-8°. XV + 205 p.
15. **HISTOIRE DE MAR YABALAH, DE TROIS AUTRES PATRIARCHES, D'UN PRÊTRE ET DE DEUX LAÏQUES NESTORIENS**. 1895, petit in-8°. XVI + 574 p.
16. **COMPENDIUM CONCILIORUM ŒCUMENICORUM UNDECIM**. 1888, in-8°. 242 p.
17. **GREGORII BARHEBRÆI CHRONICON SYRIACUM**. 1890, grand in-8°. VIII + 606 p.
18. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus primus. 1890, in-8°. X + 550 p.
19. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus secundus. 1891, in-8°. XIII + 688 p.
20. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus tertius. 1892, in-8°. VIII + 688 p.
21. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus quartus. 1894, in-8°. XV + 668 p.
22. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus quintus. 1895, in-8°. XI + 705 p.
23. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus sextus. 1896, in-8°. XI + 691 p.
24. **ACTA MARTYRUM ET SANCTORUM**. Tomus septimus (seu Paradisus Patrum). 1897, in-8°. XI + 1019 p.
25. **HISTOIRE ECCLÉSIAST. D'EUSÈBE DE CÉSARÉE**. (Version syriaque, manuscrit de l'an 462!!!) 1897, petit in-8°. VIII + 598 p.
26. **ETHICON, SEU MORALIA GREGORII BARHEBRÆI**. 1898, in-8°. VII + 517 p.
27. **LIBER COLUMBÆ**, seu Directorium Monachorum **GREGORII BARHEBRÆI**. 1898, in-8°. II + 88 p.
28. **NOMOCANON**, (seu jus ecclesiasticum et civile) **GREGORII BARHEBRÆI**. 1898, in-8°. XIII + 551 p.



29. **LIBER SUPERIORUM**, seu Historia Monastica, auctore **THOMA MARGENSI** .... **HISTORIA FUNDATORUM MONASTERIORUM IN REGNO PERSARUM ET ARABUM, HOMILIÆ MAR NARSETIS IN JOSEPH, ET DOCUMENTA PATRUM**. 1901, in-8°. XV + 711 p.
30. **S. MARTYRII, QUI ET SAHDONA QUÆ SUPERSUNT OMNIA**, et Homiliæ Mar Jacobi Sarugensis. 1902, in-8°. XXI + 874 p.
31. **HOMILÆ (67) S. ISAACI SYRI ANTIOCHENI**. 1903, in-8°. XXII + 885 p.
32. **MOIS DE MARIE**. En Néo-araméen. 1904, in-18. XV + 386 p.
33. **HOMILÆ SELECTÆ MAR JACOBI SARUGENSIS**. Tomus primus. 1905, in-8°. XVII + 839 p.
34. **HOMILÆ SELECTÆ MAR JACOBI SARUGENSIS**. Tomus secundus. 1906, in-8°. XVIII + 892 p.
35. **HOMILÆ SELECTÆ MAR JACOBI SARUGENSIS**. Tomus tertius. 1907, in-8°. XIV + 914 p.
36. **HOMILÆ SELECTÆ MAR JACOBI SARUGENSIS**. Tomus quartus. 1908, in-8°. XIV + 916 p.
37. **HOMILÆ SELECTÆ MAR JACOBI SARUGENSIS**. Tomus quintus. 1910, in-8°. XIX + 905 p.
38. **MAR ISAACUS NINIVITA, DE PERFECTIONE RELIGIOSA**. 1909, in-8°. XVIII + 646 p.
39. **NESTORIUS**, le livre d'Héraclide de Damas. 1910, in-8°. X + 634 p.
40. **VIES DES SAINTS**, en Néo-araméen. 1912, in-12. XI + 687 p.