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Identity and Christian-Muslim interaction : medieval art of the Syrian Orthodox from the Mosul area

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2. The Syrian Orthodox in their Historical and Artistic Settings

2.1 Northern Mesopotamia and Mosul

The blossoming of 'Syrian Orthodox art' during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is mainly attested for Northern Mesopotamia. At the time, Northern Mesopotamia was commonly known as the Jazira (Arabic for 'island'), a geographic entity encompassing roughly the territory which is located between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and lies north of Baghdad and south of Lake Van.¹ In ecclesiastical terms, this region is called Athur (Assyria).² Early Islamic historians and geographers distinguished three different districts: Diyar Mudar, Diyar Bakr, and Diyar Rabi'ah. Today, these districts correspond more or less to eastern Syria, south-eastern Turkey, and northern Iraq, respectively.

Mosul was the capital of the Diyar Rabi'ah district, which 'extended north from Takrit along both banks of the Tigris to the tributary Ba'aynatha river a few kilometres north of Jazirat ibn 'Umar (modern Cizre) and westwards along the southern slopes of the Tur 'Abdin as far as the western limits of the Khabur Basin'.³ Other important medieval cities of the Jazira were Raqqa and Ruha or Edessa (Urfa), both situated in Diyar Mudar, and Amid (Diyarbakır), Mardin, Hisn Kayfa (Hasankeyf), and Hisn Ziyad (Kharput), all located in the Diyar Bakr district. During the period of interest, Northern Mesopotamia was the scene of great socio-political, economic, religious, and cultural changes, which form the background against which one should see the development of Christian art from the Mosul area.

In the eleventh century, the region was conquered by the Great Seljuks, a loose confederacy of primarily Turkish tribes originating from the plains of Central Asia, who had recently converted to Sunni Islam. Prior to the Seljuk conquest, Northern Mesopotamia and neighbouring Northern Syria were dominated by various Arab Bedouin tribes, including the Banu Kilab in Northern Syria, the Banu Numair in Diyar Mudar, and the Banu 'Uqayl, or the 'Uqaylids (990-1096), in the Diyar Rabi'ah district with its capital Mosul.⁴ These nomadic tribes had been able to extend their influence after the political and economic collapse of the Abbasid empire during the tenth century.

In 1055, the Great Seljuks captured Baghdad, liberating the Sunni Abbasid caliphs from the tutelage of Shi'i Buyids, thereby securing their right to bear the title of sultan. Syria was conquered in the period between 1070 and 1079. Around the same time, Anatolia was added to the Great Seljuk Sultanate after their decisive victory against the Byzantines at Manzikert in 1077. The city of Mosul, however, was not taken from the Shi'i 'Uqaylids until 1096. It was subsequently made to function as the capital of the western provinces of the Great Seljuk realm.⁵ At the height of their power, the Great Seljuks ruled an empire which covered Western Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia.

Proclaiming themselves as the defenders of Sunni Islam, the main thrust of the Great Seljuk's foreign policy was to wage war against the 'heretic' Shi'i Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo, which had been set up in the tenth century in direct opposition to the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate centred on Baghdad. The Great Seljuks were unable to maintain control over the vast territories under their rule, however, and within a few decades their empire disintegrated into a number of autonomous principalities. Most of these principalities were hereditary in nature,

¹ Heidemann 2002, Plan I; Whelan 2006, plate on p. xi; Catalogue Berlin 2006, plate on p. 4.

² Fiey 1968, 12, 36; Harrak 1999, 41.

³ Whelan 2006, 1. Cf. Catalogue Berlin 2006, 10-12 (A. von Gladiss).

⁴ Heidemann 2002, 30-33. On the 'Uqaylids of Mosul, see further Kennedy 1986a, 297-302; *idem* 1986b; Bosworth 1996, 91-92.

⁵ On Mosul under Seljuk rule, see Heidemann 2002, esp. 149-164, 173-175, 189-190, 197-211, 240-253.

which further contributed towards the political fragmentation of the Syro-Mesopotamian region.

Throughout their territories, the Great Seljuks had installed a group of *amirs* (military commanders) as *atabegs* (military tutors or guardians) to a number of underage Seljuk princes, who had been appointed as provincial governors. Amirs were selected from the high ranking military slaves (*mamluks*), who served in the immediate princely entourage. These amirs were usually Turks originating from Central Asia, but often also included Armenians from the Caucasus. After the decline of Great Seljuk power in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, some of the atabegs were able to set up their own local dynasties, together forming a rich spectrum of minor successor states. These dynasties were continuously vying for power and control over Syria and the Jazira, thereby inaugurating a long period of political instability.

Important Atabeg dynasties resulting from this political fragmentation were the Artuqids of Diyar Bakr (c. 1101-1409), and the Zangids of Syria and the Jazira (1127-1251), along with the Danishmendids in Northern and Eastern Anatolia (c. 1097-1178), and the Seljuks of Rum in Anatolia (1081-1307). The main branch of the Zangid family was established at Mosul and Aleppo in 1127 by the Turkish military commander Imad al-Din Zangi (1127-1146). Four minor branches of the Zangid family were subsequently set up at Damascus and then Aleppo, Sinjar, Jazirat ibn 'Umar, and Shahrazur.⁶ Like their Great Seljuk predecessors, the Artuqids, Zangids, and other Turkish dynasties were staunch supporters of Sunnism.⁷

In the meantime, the European Crusaders benefited from the political instability and religious disunity among the Muslims, conquering large territories and establishing four 'Crusader' or Frankish states in the Islamic Middle East: the County of Edessa (1098-1148), the Principality of Antioch (1098-1268), the Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099-1291), and, finally, the County of Tripoli (1109-1289).⁸ The Frankish territories in Northern Syria were situated adjacent to the only other Christian state in the region apart from the Byzantine Empire, the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1080-1375).⁹ Although the Crusaders never reached Mosul, the city was actively engaged in a series of systematic counter-attacks, first under the command of Imad al-Din Zangi, and then his son, Nur al-Din Zangi (1127-1174). In 1144, Imad al-Din heralded the end of the first Frankish state, when he captured Edessa from Count Jocelyn II. The Crusaders were never able to obtain a foothold in the Jazira again.¹⁰ The greatest prize, Jerusalem, was recaptured in 1187 by Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub, known in the Western sources as Saladin.

Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub had first risen to power in the service of Nur al-Din Zangi, who sent him on a military expedition in 1169 to take control of Egypt. Within two years, Salah al-Din succeeded in abolishing the Fatimid Shi'ite Caliphate, subsequently establishing the base of his own dynasty, the Ayyubids, in Cairo.¹¹ Re-acknowledging the religious authority of the Sunni caliph in Baghdad, Salah al-Din unified Egypt and Syria into a single Sunni Muslim state. It is also in this period that the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad experienced a short recovery in its effective political power and nominal religious influence. This was especially the case under the vigorous leadership of Caliph al-Nasir (1180-1225), who unsuccessfully sought to (re-)unite the Islamic world under the authority of the Abbasid caliph.¹²

⁶ *EF*², XI, 451-552 (S. Heidemann); Heidemann 2002, 245-253; Bosworth 1996, 190-191, 194-196.

⁷ Tabbaa 2002, 11-24; Berkey 2003, 189-202.

⁸ MacEvitt 2007.

⁹ Catalogue Paris 2007, 227-241.

¹⁰ Patton 1982, 99-100; Bosworth 1996, 191; Whelan 2006, 4.

¹¹ On the Ayyubids, see Humphreys 1977.

¹² *EF*², VII, 996-1003 (A. Hartmann); Bosworth 1996, 8-9; Berkey 2003, 182, 185.

Upon his death in 1193, Salah al-Din divided his territories in Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia between several members of his family. Loosely tied together by a sense of family solidarity, the Ayyubid empire witnessed a relatively peaceful period and remained more or less intact until the Egyptian branch of the family confederation was overthrown in 1250 by its own military slaves. The Mamluk Sultanate resulting from this usurpation was firmly established in Egypt and Syria under Sultan Baybars (1260-1277), whose successors eventually succeeded in both fending off various Mongol incursions and removing the Crusaders from Syria in 1291, thereby putting an end to nearly two centuries of Crusader presence in the Middle East.

Despite Salah al-Din's two unsuccessful attempts to take control of Mosul, in 1182 and 1185, the city remained securely under Zangid rule until 1233, when the throne was usurped by Badr al-Din Lu'lu', a former military slave of supposed Armenian servile descent. Lu'lu' had initially been appointed as the administrator of the state and as guardian to a succession of young Zangid princes. Having seized control over Mosul, he retained the title Atabeg.¹³ During his twenty-six years of independent rule, Badr al-Din Lu'lu' managed to expand Mosul's domain over the Jazira, adding, amongst others, the Zangid principalities of Sinjar and Jazirat ibn 'Umar to his territories. At the height of his rule, around the year 1251, the realm of Lu'lu' included Kurdistan, Sinjar, Jazirat ibn 'Umar, Nasibin or Nisibis (Nusaybin), and the Khabur district as far as Qarqisiya on the Euphrates.¹⁴

However, the continuing pressure of the Mongols, who had been raiding Iraq from 1221 onwards, forced Badr al-Din Lu'lu' to give up much of his independence and to submit to Mongol authority in the latter part of his rule. Lu'lu' attempted to pass on his power to his descendents, dividing his realm among his sons before his death, but when the armies of Il-Khan Hülegü swiftly conquered large parts of Iraq and Syria, occupying Baghdad in 1258 and capturing Damascus in 1260, Lu'lu's sons were forced to flee towards Mamluk Egypt. The Mongol occupation of Iraq was completed with the capture of Mosul in 1262, after which the Jazira passed firmly into their hands.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the political and military fluctuations, Northern Mesopotamia witnessed a remarkable affluence and cultural bloom during the Atabeg era. The geographic location and topography of the area have always contributed towards its relative economic prosperity. Already in ancient times, the region functioned as the main land bridge between the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia, and it continued to be one of the most important centres on the international trade routes during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, while Egypt under the Fatimids (969-1171) reached a cultural and economic peak during the eleventh century, Northern Mesopotamia and Northern Syria went through a period of a severe urban and agricultural decline throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries. Characteristic of this decline were the weakening of fiscal institutions, the expansion of pastoral lands at the expense of settled agriculture, and the shift of power from the city to the Bedouin camp, developments which were coupled with a near-complete absence of building activities during this period.

As nomadic pastoralists, the Arab Bedouin tribes dominating Northern Mesopotamia and Northern Syria largely neglected the region's existing urban network. With the conquest of the Great Seljuks referred to above, this situation was dramatically reversed. Implementing a thorough reorganization of the military, administrative, and fiscal systems, which were primarily aimed at strengthening the urban basis, the Great Seljuks inaugurated an urban and agricultural renewal. This 'renaissance' continued uninterrupted during the subsequent

¹³ On Badr al-Din Lu'lu', see Patton 1991.

¹⁴ Patton 1991, 46.

¹⁵ Patton 1991, 70-83; Bosworth 1996, 193.

Artuqid, Zangid, and Ayyubid periods.¹⁶ The cultivation of rural areas was improved, and fortified cities and fortifications became the new seats of power, as opposed to the nomad camp of their Bedouin predecessors. The dynamic economic growth resulting from these reforms allowed for, and was accompanied by, vast building programmes. These building programmes were developed not only in major urban centres, such as Aleppo and Damascus, but also in small and middle-sized cities like Raqqa and Mosul.¹⁷

As for Northern Mesopotamia, the Artuqids, Zangids, and their high officials were actively engaged in promoting the economy by constructing numerous roads, bridges, and caravanserais (*khans*). Contemporary sources describe the Jazira as rich agricultural land where mainly fruit, nuts, cereals, and cotton were cultivated. Much of this produce was exported over the trade routes towards Tripoli, Acre, and other important transit ports situated on the Levantine coast.¹⁸ The burgeoning agricultural and mercantile activities were not the preserve of Muslims. Christians from Mosul, for example, were involved in the trade in textiles with Europe. Others were engaged in grape cultivation, which seems to have been a speciality of Christian villages situated in the area around Mosul.¹⁹ Moreover, Christians participating in agriculture were not necessarily mere peasants working for Muslim overlords, as there were also Christian notables who owned vast country estates.²⁰

In addition to fostering economic prosperity through agriculture and both local and long-distance trade, the Artuqids, Zangids, and Ayyubids were actively engaged in the large-scale foundation of Sunni religious and educational institutions as part of their policy to spread Sunnism at the expense of Shi'ism, in particular the *madrasa*, an institute of higher learning where the traditional Islamic sciences were taught, and the *khanqah*, a Sufi convent or monastery. Although smaller than major urban centres like Aleppo, Damascus, and Cairo, Atabegid Mosul was equipped with the full gamut of political, civic, and religious constructions and institutions commonly associated with the medieval Islamic city, including city walls and gates, a citadel, great congregational and small neighbourhood mosques, major market places, *madrasas*, *khanqahs*, baths, and hospitals.²¹

The exact composition of the population of Northern Mesopotamia during the Atabeg era is unknown, but the many different ethnic and religious groups comprised Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Sunni and Shi'i Muslims, Jews, and Christians,²² the latter including East and West Syrians, Melkites and Byzantine Orthodox, Georgian Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox. Indeed, the Mesopotamian region still seems to have had a majority Christian population during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²³ Yet a distinction should be made between cities such as Mosul and Takrit (modern Tikrit), which certainly had large Christian communities at the time, but may actually have been predominantly Muslim, and the rural areas around these centres, which had a majority Christian population.²⁴

The city of Mosul was also truly multi-ethnic and multi-religious. In addition to a dominant Sunni Muslim community, the total population of Mosul included a significant Christian minority, Shi'i Muslims, and Jews.²⁵ In keeping with its religiously highly

¹⁶ On the urban decline and renaissance in Northern Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, see Heidemann 2002. On the economic structures behind this renewal, see further Heidemann 2009.

¹⁷ On the increased building activities under the Zangids, Ayyubids, and Seljuks of Rum, see Elisséeff 1967, 750-779; Tabbaa 1982; *idem* 1997; Humphreys 1989; Korn 2004; Wolper 2003.

¹⁸ Patton 1982, 16-25; von Gladiss 2006a; Whelan 2006, 1-2, 5.

¹⁹ Patton 1982, 16-17.

²⁰ Weltecke 2008, 319-320.

²¹ Patton 1982, 39-76.

²² Patton 1982, 25-33.

²³ C. Hillenbrand 1985, 15; R. Hillenbrand 2006, 19.

²⁴ Patton 1982, 25-26.

²⁵ Patton 1982, 320.

variegated population, Mosul, besides Sunni and Shi'ī Muslim religious institutions, housed a great number of churches (see Section 2.3), and at least two synagogues.²⁶

Apart from the Turkish rulers and members of the military ruling elite, the leading local group in cities throughout the Great Seljuk successor states were almost uniformly the *ulama*, the most highly educated element of the population. These civilian notables, or urban 'bourgeoisie', formed the main intermediaries between the non-Arab Turkish military aristocracy and the common people.²⁷ In order to cultivate the support of the *ulama*, the localised Atabeg regimes commonly funded extensive programmes to construct and endow pious religious institutions as well as revenue-generating urban real estate, such as shops in the markets, tenement buildings, and commercial complexes, thereby providing the notables with a financial structure supportive of their activities.

Amongst other things, this financial structure provided the bourgeoisie with the economic means to pursue activities that enhanced their social status. Like the ruling elite, wealthy urban notables were actively engaged in architectural patronage, commissioning various types of buildings, including minarets, *mashads* (mausoleums), *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*.²⁸ The renewed prosperity also allowed them to acquire or commission works of art, which provided them with yet another means to advance their prestige.²⁹

The *ulama* community of Mosul comprised mainly of native Mosulis, but also included a substantial number of individuals originating either from Mosul's own provincial centres, such as Jazirat ibn 'Umar and Arbela (Erbil), or other regions, in particular Baghdad and its vicinity. Professionally, the *ulama* of Mosul were engaged in numerous types of occupations, which roughly covered three major professional categories: learned careers, either in Islamic, linguistic, or rational fields (e.g., jurists, literati, and poets); civic and institutional positions, the most important and influential being those of judge of an Islamic law court (*qadi*), secretary or clerk (*katib*), and administrator; and, finally, trades and crafts, such as merchant, calligrapher, and copyist.

Religiously, Mosul's *ulama* population was dominated by Sunni Muslims, who held the overwhelmingly majority of Mosul's key positions at court and in the judicial and educational institutions, but this social class also included some Shi'īs, and apparently Christians as well.³⁰ Among the Christian civilian notables of Mosul there was a certain 'Isa ibn al-Fadl Abu'l-Hasan ibn Abu Salim al-Ra'is al-Nasrani, a twelfth-century poet whose title of *al-Ra'is* seems to indicate that he was the official chief of Mosul's Christian community.³¹ It is to the development of Mosul's large Christian community, which included primarily East Syrians and Syrian Orthodox, that we will now turn our attention.

2.2 The Establishment of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Northern Mesopotamia

The Syrian Orthodox Church, as present in the Mosul area during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, had its origin in the development of the Christian communities in Iraq at the time of the Persian Empire (224-651). According to tradition, Christianity had been introduced into the region east of Edessa in the early first century A.D. by the Apostle Thomas, together with Addai (Thaddeus) and his pupils Mari and Aggai; there is still no scholarly consensus,

²⁶ Patton 1982, 59-60.

²⁷ On the *ulama* and their social and political functions, see Hodgson 1974, II, 60-69, 91-98; Humphreys 1991, 187-208; Ephrat 2000. On the *ulama* of Mosul during the Atabeg era, see Patton 1982, esp. 176-297, 310-365.

²⁸ Tabbaa 1997, 39-44; Humphreys 1989, 165-169; *idem* 1991, 249-254.

²⁹ On the wealthy urban bourgeoisie as a new class of art patrons in the medieval Islamic Middle East, see Grabar 2001b; *idem* 2005b; *idem* 2006a; Shoshan 1991, 75-82; Jeudy 2009.

³⁰ Patton 1982, 262-297.

³¹ Patton 1982, 394.

however, as to the exact place and date of its arrival.³² Historical sources nevertheless suggest that Christianity was established there at least as early as the second century and was rapidly spreading during the Late Sassanian period.

Officially recognized by the Sassanian authorities in the early fifth century, the Christian community perhaps became one of the largest religious groups by the end of the sixth century, even outnumbering the adherents of the official state religion, Zoroastrianism.³³ Visual testimonies to the successful advent of the Christian religion include the numerous archaeological remains of early Christian churches, dating from approximately the sixth and seventh century, that have been found at sites scattered over a large territory, stretching from the Iraqi mainland to the islands in the Persian-Arabian Gulf, and the Iranian island of Kharg.³⁴

Particularly in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Christians following the Dyophysite doctrine, that is, those who spoke of 'two natures' in the incarnate Christ, were forced to flee towards the Persian Empire, where they joined with the independent ecclesiastical organization known as the Church of the East or East Syrian Church, and its adherents East Syrians (formerly called Nestorians).³⁵ As far as the establishment of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the Persian Empire is concerned, the number of Miaphysite Christians had been steadily increasing in the region from the late fifth century onwards, creating numerous communities, especially in and around Takrit in the south of Iraq, and in the Mosul plain, in the north of Iraq.

Seriously concerned about the rapid expansion and growing influence of the Miaphysites, the advocates of the Dyophysite doctrine, headed by Bishop Barsauma of Nisibis (d. 496), intensified their campaign to 'Nestorianize' the Persian Church in the 480s.³⁶ Although their aim was to free the region from Miaphysitism, the result would finally turn out to be the exact opposite. Shared anti-East Syrian feelings triggered by the 'Nestorianizing' tendencies in the Persian Church, which added to a stronger sense of Miaphysite communal identity, persuaded disparate Miaphysite groups to join forces, in the same way as shared anti-Chalcedonian feelings among Miaphysites living in the Byzantine Empire contributed to the forming of a distinct community there.

In consecrating a significant number of bishops, priests, and deacons throughout Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, Jacob Baradaeus (c. 500-578), the Miaphysite bishop of Edessa, gave the initial impetus towards the creation of a separate ecclesiastical hierarchy on both sides of the Byzantine-Persian border. Around 557, Baradaeus consecrated Sergius of Tella as counterpart to the Chalcedonian Patriarchs of Antioch, thereby effectively creating the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate.³⁷ Although they assumed the title 'Patriarch of Antioch', the Syrian Orthodox patriarchs were usually forced to reside elsewhere. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the residence of the Patriarch was relocated several times between Deir Mar Barsauma near Melitene (now Malatya in Turkey) and Deir Mar Hananya near Mardin, both situated in Tur 'Abdin ('Mountain of Slaves'). From 1293 until 1933, the official Seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate was located at Deir Mar Hananya, which is better known as Deir al-Za'faran, the Saffron Monastery.³⁸

In 559, Baradaeus ordained Bishop Ahudemmeh of Beth Aramaye as the Metropolitan of Takrit, thereby laying the first foundations of the Syrian Orthodox Church within the realms

³² On the arrival and establishment of Christianity in the Persian Empire, see Fiey 1970a, 32-44; Baum/Winkler 2003, 7-13.

³³ Morony 1984, 332-342.

³⁴ Cassis 2002a; *idem* 2002b.

³⁵ For an introduction to the Church of the East, see Baum/Winkler 2003.

³⁶ Hage 1966, 22; Morony 1984, 372-373. On Barsauma of Nisibis, see Gero 1981; Schmitz 2004, 102-110.

³⁷ Hage 1966, 9-10; Flusin 2004, 678-681.

³⁸ Honigsmann 1951; Selb 1989, 187-188, 217-218; Balicka-Witakowski *et al.* 2001, 136-154, 165-166.

of the Persian Empire. In the wake of an explosive programme of conversions executed under the leadership of Ahudemme, the Miaphysites began to expand rapidly.³⁹ Moreover, the end of the Byzantine-Persian war in 628 enabled the Miaphysite Christians in the Persian Empire to team up with their co-religionists in the western regions of the Middle East. In 629 a formal union was effectuated between Athanasius I Gamolo (595-631), then the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Antioch, the Miaphysite monks of Deir Mar Mattai, and the bishops of Sinjar, Beth Nuhadra, Beth Ramman, and Shahrazur.

The eastern part of this newly created ecclesiastical hierarchy consisted of some twelve suffragan bishops falling under the jurisdiction of the 'Great Metropolitan of Takrit', who from the tenth century onwards bore the title 'Maphrian'. Literally signifying 'one who bears fruit', but metaphorically meaning 'consecrator', the term 'Maphrian' was used to designate the prelate who in the Syrian Orthodox Church held the second in rank after the Patriarch.⁴⁰ The city of Takrit remained the Seat of the Maphrianate until 1155, when the dioceses of Takrit, Mosul/Nineveh, and Deir Mar Mattai were merged.⁴¹ From then on, Deir Mar Mattai was the official residence of the Maphrian, albeit usually only nominally. Due to intra-community friction, for the majority of the time, the Maphrian was forced to take up his residence either in one of the Syrian Orthodox churches in Mosul or one of the villages in the Mosul plain, a matter to which we shall return in more detail in Section 2.4.

2.3 The Syrian Orthodox Church in the Mosul Area

At the dawn of the Arab conquest in the early seventh century, the site of what was to become Mosul comprised of a small garrison town, with a predominantly Christian population, that was built on the west bank of the river Tigris, directly across from the ruins of the ancient Assyrian capital Nineveh. It is generally assumed that a monastic complex was built on or beside these ruins in the late sixth century, precisely at the time when monasticism was rapidly spreading and many monasteries were founded in the region.⁴² After the site had been taken by the Arab forces in 637, it soon developed from a modest fortress into the chief city of the region.⁴³ From then on, the city was known as Mosul (al-Mawsil, 'Junction'), perhaps because it was situated near the confluence of several tributaries of the Tigris, or because it was located at the crossroads of several trade routes.⁴⁴

After the Arab conquest, the Christians, who were now living under Islamic rule, were given a new legal status, that of *dhimmis* or *ahl al-dhimma*, 'people subject to a guarantee of protection'. The relationship between Christians and Muslims was regulated by a body of rules known as the Pact of 'Umar.⁴⁵ In exchange for their submission to Islam, the covenant guaranteed the Christians protection from the Muslim authorities. They were promised freedom of religion, use of their own places of worship, and the right to visit their holy sites.

³⁹ Fiey 1970a, 113-143; Morony 1984, 374-375.

⁴⁰ Hage 1966, 22-31; Fiey 1963, 306-307; *idem* 1992, 113-126; Morony 1984, 377-378; Selb 1989, 182-183.

⁴¹ Kawerau 1960, 23-24; Fiey 1963, 324; *idem* 1974, 145, 150, 387; Schrier 1990, 221-222.

⁴² According to the *Chronicle of Siirt*, an eleventh-century history written by an anonymous East Syrian author, a monk named Isho'yab bar Qusra had built a monastery on these ruins. In the Syriac sources it is referred to as *ḥesnā 'ebrāyā*, which has often been translated as 'Fortress of the Hebrews', but most probably means 'Fortress on the Opposite Bank' (Fiey 1959, 11-12; Patton 1982, 35). On the historical verisimilitude of this foundation legend, see Robinson 2000, 63-72.

⁴³ Robinson 2000, 72-89.

⁴⁴ *EF*, IV, 899-901 (E. Honigmann/C.E. Bosworth); Khadduri 1987, 500-501; Bosworth 2007, 412-417.

⁴⁵ For an English translation of the most characteristic version of the Pact of 'Umar, which is found in al-Turtushi's twelfth-century *Mirror for Kings*, see Lewis 1974, II, 217-219. On the legal status of *dhimmis*, see *EF*, II, 227-231 (C. Cahen); Tritton 1930; Fattal 1958; Bosworth 1979; Humphreys 1991, 255-261; Cohen 1994, 54-72; Berkey 2003, 159-175; Edelby 2004.

The Christians were allowed to maintain their own independent judicial organization, at least as long as Muslims were not directly involved.

On the down side, Christians had to pay an additional poll-tax (*jizya*), and were not permitted to construct any new churches, monasteries or other religious buildings, or even to repair any old ones that had fallen into ruin. Christians were furthermore forbidden to ride horses or to bear arms, and prohibited from displaying their religious identity in public – it was not allowed, for example, to walk through the streets with crosses and Christian manuscripts, to use the wooden sounding board to summon the faithful, or to hold public processions on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday –, although they were simultaneously obliged to distinguish themselves physically from the Muslims by wearing distinctive types of dress. Obviously, the special social and juridical status accorded to Christians, which set them apart from their Muslim counterparts, contributed towards the formation of their distinctive communal identity.

It should be noted, however, that most of these discriminatory laws were not enforced on a day to day basis. On the contrary, at least up until around 1300, the Christians living under Muslim rule experienced long periods of tolerance, which were only occasionally interrupted by stricter enforcement of these covenantal decrees, usually at the whim of an individual ruler.⁴⁶ Moreover, when such discriminatory laws were applied more stringently, Islamic jurists commonly developed a rich variety of exceptions and qualifications to them. When it comes to the regulations regarding the construction and renovation of houses or worship, for example, various Islamic legal sources dating from the late Middle Ages, such as a pair of fourteenth-century treatises by the Egyptian jurist and chief *qadi* of Damascus, Taqi al-Din al-Subki, stipulate that Christians were prohibited to construct new religious institutions, but allowed to renovate those that had already been built prior to the Arab conquest.⁴⁷ In short, despite the occasional restrictions, the building and reconstruction of churches and monasteries continued virtually unchanged throughout the period under consideration.

During the first centuries of Islamic rule, in particular, the Muslim authorities appear to have taken a rather pragmatic approach towards their non-Muslim subjects, quickly recognizing that in order to secure and maintain their newly acquired position they were compelled to make use of experienced Christians. As they were often the most educated members of society, Christians were commonly placed in key positions in the governmental administration, but they were also widely employed for a variety of other professional and educational tasks. Indeed, in many regions the Christians were able to survive precisely because their knowledge and skills made them useful for the Muslims, not only as officials and civil servants, but also as merchants, doctors, craftsmen, and artisans, to mention but a few of the professions that were often held by Christians.⁴⁸

It is important to add that in many parts of the Middle East, the Muslims appear to have remained a small ruling class claiming sovereignty over a majority Christian population for centuries; in Northern Mesopotamia, the Christians, as mentioned above, may even have lost majority status only towards the end of the thirteenth century. To be sure, periods of relative tolerance alternated with occasional, but severe outbursts of Muslim persecutions of Christians. In addition to sporadic acts of violence, the confiscation of church property, the continuing burden of special taxation, as well as other – often very practical – considerations eventually persuaded many Christians to convert to Islam. Those who had chosen to remain

⁴⁶ Kawerau 1960, 63, 90-98.

⁴⁷ Ward 1989. Cf. Tritton 1930, 37-77; Fattal 1958, 174-203; Cohen 1994, 58-60. It has been pointed out that the word *haddeth* encountered in Syriac commemorative inscriptions encountered in churches and monasteries should not always necessarily be taken in its literal sense of 'renovate', because it was sometimes used as an euphemism for 'build anew' in order to sidestep Islamic regulations (Palmer 1987, 95; Harrak 2004, 96).

⁴⁸ Bosworth 1979, esp. 20-23; Jeudy 2009.

true to the Christian faith recognized that it was of vital importance to maintain good relations with the Muslim authorities.

Whatever the case, by the late thirteenth century, the social and political position of the Christians in the Mesopotamian region had irretrievably declined. In his *Chronicle*, Maphrian Barhebraeus (1264-1286) lamented that in Egypt at the time of Fatimid rule (969-1171) 'Christians could be made viziers ... without having to renounce their faith, but this is unfortunately not the case in our time'.⁴⁹ Although the number of Christians in public service was perhaps more limited at the time of Barhebraeus, there is some evidence to suggest that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Christians were still able to obtain important positions within Mosul's governmental administration.⁵⁰

Let us return to the development of Mosul's Christian population. The schism in the Persian Church that had ensued between the Miaphysite and Dyophysite factions during the late fifth and early sixth centuries largely determined the Christian religious landscape of the Mosul area in subsequent periods.⁵¹ Nineveh is known to have been a separate East Syrian bishopric from 554 until the early ninth century, when it merged with the see of Mosul, while Deir Mar Mattai became the see of the first Miaphysite metropolitan for the region of Mosul/Nineveh around 540.⁵² In the late sixth century, the majority of the monasteries and churches located in the Mosul area were still occupied by East Syrians, but by that time the Syrian Orthodox community had already firmly taken root in the region and was in fact rapidly extending its influence.

In addition to setting up their own cult sites, the Syrian Orthodox were now even in the position to start taking over monasteries that were originally founded by East Syrian Christians. One of the first monasteries to pass into their hands was Deir Mar Mattai on the Jabal Maqlub, a mountainous area located some 35 km to the northeast of Mosul, which is known in the Syriac sources as Mount Elpheph. Deir Mar Mattai soon became one of the main Syrian Orthodox centres in the eastern provinces of the Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical organization.⁵³

By the end of the seventh century, the Syrian Orthodox had not only been able to take control of numerous other East Syrian monasteries, including Deir Mar Yuhannon of Dailam, also known as the Mqurtaya near Qaraqosh, and Deir Mar Daniel or Deir al-Habshustyata ('Monastery of the Beetles') near Karamlish, but had also founded their own separate bishoprics in the region, Beth Nuhadra and Marga. The position of the Syrian Orthodox Church within this territory became so strong that the East Syrian communities remaining in the diocese of Beth Nuhadra were soon cut off from their fellow believers living in the villages in the direct vicinity of Mosul. The Syrian Orthodox Church, to a lesser extent, was also represented in the northern Mosul plain, where the East Syrians were able to maintain their powerbase at Deir Rabban Hormizd, as well as the nearby village of Alqosh. The eastern Mosul plain, on the other hand, was again dominated by the Syrian Orthodox Church; by the twelfth century, the Syrian Orthodox were firmly established in Deir Mar Behnam and approximately twenty villages, including Qaraqosh, located to the southeast of Mosul, and Bartelli, situated on the road between Mosul and Deir Mar Mattai.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Bosworth 1979, 22.

⁵⁰ It is known that in the years leading up to 1170, the citadel of Mosul was governed by a Christian captive from Antioch, named Fakhr al-Din 'Abd al-Masih (Patton 1982, 125, 333; Tabbaa 2002, 340-341). In 1262, Shams al-Din al-Ba'shiqi, the former governor of the Nineveh district, was installed as governor of Mosul, the first of several Christian governors of the city under early Mongol rule (Patton 1991, 80-81).

⁵¹ For a map of the Mosul area, see Wilmshurst 2000, Map 5.

⁵² Fiey 1965, II, 325; *idem* 1974, 373-376; *idem* 1993, 115-116, 239-240; Schrier 1990, 221.

⁵³ Fiey 1965, II, 759-764; *idem* 1974, 373-393; Vööbus 1970, 329-333; Balicka-Witakowski *et al.* 2001, 159-160.

⁵⁴ Fiey 1965, II, *passim*; Wilmshurst 2000, 188-192, 199-203.

Like most monasteries and villages in the Mosul plain, Mosul itself remained an East Syrian stronghold at least until around the middle of the seventh century. By this stage, the Syrian Orthodox had established such a considerable presence that, despite the attempts of the East Syrian Catholicos Isho'yahb III (649-660) to persuade the Muslim authorities to decide differently, they were officially permitted to build their own churches in the city.⁵⁵ By the beginning of the ninth century, there were numerous churches in Mosul, including at least two in the hands of the Syrian Orthodox Church. One of these was administrated by the Takritan community, the other by the monks of Deir Mar Mattai.⁵⁶

Fiey has estimated that during the Atabeg period, Mosul numbered no less than twelve churches, which were apparently evenly divided among the East Syrians and the Syrian Orthodox. The East Syrians occupied the churches of Mar Esa'ia, Sim'un al-Safa (St Simon the Elect), Mar Gorgis (St George), St Meskenta, Mar Pethion, and the Chaldean Church of al-Tahira (The Virgin). The Syrian Orthodox churches were the Old Church of al-Tahira, the Upper Church of the Tahira, and the churches of Mar Ahudemmeh (also known as Mar Hudeni), Mar Toma (St Thomas), Mar Zena, and Mar Tadros (St Theodore).⁵⁷ Most of these churches are still standing today, although it should be noted that the present buildings are often entirely modern or at least heavily reconstructed, containing few original architectural, art-historical, or epigraphic features (see Section 7.1). The fate of the churches of Mosul was bound up with the political and military events that affected the Middle East over the course of time, and the religious policies of the city's successive Muslim authorities.

During the twelfth century, the stability and unity of the Syrian Orthodox Church and its community was seriously endangered by the Crusades and the continuous warfare between the various Muslim rulers vying for power and control over the Syro-Mesopotamian region.⁵⁸ The disintegration of the Syro-Mesopotamian region into a rich spectrum of principalities, which were controlled by either Franks or Muslims, contributed to centrifugal forces within the ecclesiastical organization of the Syrian Orthodox Church. The patriarchs, who were responsible for the integration of Syrian Orthodox communities living in regions under rulers of different religions and denominations, were now confronted with the increasingly difficult task of binding these separate groups of believers together. Patriarch Michael the Syrian (1166-1199), especially, seems to have done virtually everything within his power to weld them together into a single coherent community, but, in view of the schisms that occurred within his Church throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, apparently to no avail.

One of the main weaknesses in the power structure of the Syrian Orthodox Church was that, defiant metropolitans and bishops seeking to enhance their own power were difficult to coerce into obedience, especially those in control of dioceses and bishoprics situated in regions that were outside the Patriarch's direct reach. Indeed, in most of the Jazira, inner Syria, Armenian Cilicia, and Palestine, the effective power of the central Church administration was limited. After the counter-Patriarch Theodore bar Wahbun (d. 1193) was elected in 1180, for example, the dioceses of Jerusalem, and soon also those situated in Cilicia, were lost to Patriarch Michael.⁵⁹ In the eastern provinces of the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Maphrian was confronted with similar acts of insubordination by the monks of Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul, a matter to which we shall return shortly.

⁵⁵ Fiey 1959, 18-19.

⁵⁶ Fiey 1959, 27.

⁵⁷ Fiey 1959, esp. 103-154. Cf. Harrak 2009.

⁵⁸ On the twelfth-century crisis in the Syrian Orthodox Church, see Kawerau 1960, 67-73; Weltecke 2002; *idem* 2003, 58-126.

⁵⁹ Kawerau 1960, 5-6, 53, 68, 70-71, 79, 89; Kaufhold 1990; Weltecke 2003, 62, 69-73, 102-107, 109-116; *idem* 2008, 313-316.

The chaos which accompanied the dynamic political and military changes at the time, contributed to the internal weakening of the Syrian Orthodox Church. Congregations living in cities such as Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Amid (Diyarbakır), Edessa (Urfa), Nisibis (Nusaybin), and Mosul were subjected to violent attacks and confiscation of church property.⁶⁰ In the aftermath of Imad al-Din Zangi's conquest of Edessa in 1144 (p. x), for instance, many of the churches and monasteries located in the city and its vicinity were taken over by Muslims and put to a variety of menial purposes; others were dismantled and their stones reused to build the citadel, the city walls, and mosques.⁶¹ Similarly, the Syrian Orthodox churches of Jerusalem were plundered when Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub recaptured the city from the Franks in 1187. The Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St Mary Magdalene was subsequently turned into a *madrassa*.⁶²

Syrian Orthodox and other Eastern Christian communities experienced a particularly difficult period under Salah al-Din's predecessor, Nur al-Din Zangi (1146-1174). Zealously involved in the military campaigns against the Franks, Nur al-Din, throughout his territories, adopted an increasingly stringent anti-Christian government policy. In Mosul, he deposed the Christian governor of the city's citadel, Fakhr al-Din ʿAbd al-Masih, and implemented multiple discriminatory measures against the local Christians in 1170. In addition to expanding the collection of tributes from various Christian villages located in the Mosul plain, and increasing the *jizya* poll-tax, Nur al-Din reinstated the rule that Christians should cut their hair short and wear a distinctive belt (*zinnar*). He also applied with new strictness the aforementioned Pact of ʿUmar, which upheld the safety of *existing* churches, but prohibited any new construction or even renovation. Moreover, violations to these prohibitions were subjected to immediate confiscation. In order to secure a strict observance of these discriminatory legislative and economic measures, Nur al-Din even appointed the prominent Sunni jurist Sharaf al-Din ibn Abi ʿAsrun as a special inspector of the Christian towns and villages of the Jazira, giving him the permission to demolish all new structures and confiscate their endowments.⁶³ It should be noted, however, that the Syrian Orthodox were often able to bribe the inspector to turn a blind eye.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, in 1171, Nur al-Din ordered the conversion of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin near Mardin into a mosque for Kurds, after one of its monks had converted to Islam.⁶⁵ He also mandated the destruction of all new additions in the churches and monasteries of Nisibis and several other places.⁶⁶ As pointed out by Yasser Tabbaa, Nur al-Din's anti-Christian measures created an atmosphere of fear among the Christians of Mosul and the Jazira and contributed to additional acts of pillage and confiscation.⁶⁷ In 1171, for example, Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul was attacked and pillaged by a group of Kurds, who killed a couple of monks and destroyed a great number of manuscripts in the event.⁶⁸ One year later, Muslims took over the just recently renovated Syrian Orthodox Church of Mar Tuma (St Thomas) in Mardin and converted it into a mosque, apparently on the pretext that a former patron of the church named Barsauma had committed adultery with a Muslim woman.⁶⁹ In 1173, Muslims confiscated a monastery in Jazirat ibn ʿUmar and imprisoned the

⁶⁰ Kawerau 1960, 94; Weltecke 2003, 103-104; *idem* 2006, 112.

⁶¹ Tarzi 2000.

⁶² Weltecke 2003, 114; Pahlitzsch 2009, 438-439.

⁶³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 340, 342. Cf. Fiey 1959, 38; Kawerau 1960, 93-95; Tabbaa 2002, 341. On the legislative measures taken by Nur al-Din in Mosul, see further Patton 1982, 333-336.

⁶⁴ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 340.

⁶⁵ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 340.

⁶⁶ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 339-340. Cf. Kawerau 1960, 57.

⁶⁷ Tabbaa 2002, 342 n. 20.

⁶⁸ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 340-342. Cf. Kawerau 1960, 45, 53, 104-105.

⁶⁹ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 347-349. Cf. Weltecke 2003, 89 n. 151.

city's Syrian Orthodox bishop Basilius in Mosul.⁷⁰ At around the same time, Muslim brigands pillaged the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin and destroyed the church at the Monastery of Qanqrat near Amid.⁷¹

Deeply concerned about the rapidly growing number of churches and monasteries that were either fully destroyed or turned into mosques, Michael the Syrian started a large-scale building and renovation campaign, which commenced in the early 1170s. It included the renovation of Deir Abu Ghalib near Amid, various renovation activities at Deir Mar Barsauma near Melitene (Malatya), the building of the Church of the Holy Ghost in Amid, and the construction of a new large city church ('Church of the Cursor') in Melitene.⁷² In 1171, Bishop Dionysius bar Salibi started with the construction of the Church of Mother of God in Amid.⁷³ Despite their efforts to counter the loss of church property, Michael and other members of the Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy must have been greatly worried about the possibility that many of their flock would convert to Islam in an attempt to safeguard themselves from further persecution, the burden of special taxation, and the ravages of war. It is perhaps no coincidence that the most extensive Syrian Orthodox refutation of Islam, Bar Salibi's twelfth-century treatise *Against the Arabs* (*Luqbal Ṭayyōyē*),⁷⁴ was written precisely during this turbulent period when the threat of widespread apostasy was mounting.

The anxiety and despair that many Syrian Orthodox must have felt throughout the twelfth century are succinctly brought to the fore in Michael's own *Chronicle* (in Dorothea Weltecke's German translation): 'Wieviel Spott und Spucken und Ungerechtigkeit die Muslime über das verfolgte Volk der Christen bracht, in Damaskus, in Aleppo, in Harran, in Edessa, in Amid, in Mardin, in Mossoul sowie im rest ihres Herrschaftsbereiches, kann das Wort nicht erfassen'.⁷⁵ A change for the better came with the death of Nur al-Din Zangi in 1174. In the case of Mosul, the conservative regime established there by Nur al-Din quickly collapsed and was eventually replaced by a more liberal and tolerant administration, which revoked the discriminatory measures against Christians. Under Badr al-Din Lu'lu' (1211-1259), who was a remarkably tolerant and even-handed ruler, the local Christians regained much of their confidence and were even able to partake fully in what in hindsight proved to be Mosul's golden age (see Section 2.8).⁷⁶ The same holds true for the Eastern Christian communities living in Syria under either Frankish or Ayyubid rule, especially during the relatively peaceful period which started around 1204, when a truce was signed between the Franks and the Ayyubids, and which lasted to the Mongol invasion of 1260.⁷⁷

When studying the history of Christian Mosul, one gets the overall impression that in maintaining and strengthening their position in the city and the vicinity, the Syrian Orthodox, in addition to trying to keep up good relations with successive Muslim authorities, were simultaneously forced to manoeuvre carefully on two separate Christian fronts. On the one hand, the Syrian Orthodox had to deal with pressure from the East Syrians, with whom they were continuously competing for Christian prominence in the region. In addition to East Syrian pressure, they had to cope with an internal struggle for ecclesiastical power that posed a constant threat to the unity of the Syrian Orthodox Church. Since this power struggle is important as a background to subsequent chapters, it will be detailed in the following section.

⁷⁰ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 350-351. Cf. Kawerau 1960, 103.

⁷¹ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 352, 355.

⁷² Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 341, 347-348, 350, 354-355, 370, 382, 393, 399, 409-410; Kawerau 1960, 119-120; Weltecke 2003, 88 n. 150.

⁷³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 370.

⁷⁴ Amar 2005; Teule 2009, 184-185; *idem* 2010.

⁷⁵ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 404; Weltecke 2003, 125.

⁷⁶ Patton 1982, 336-365.

⁷⁷ Immerzeel 2009, 18, 26, 39-40, 142, 175. On the position of Eastern Christians under Frankish and Ayyubid rule, see MacEvitt 2007; C. Hillenbrand 1999, 407-414; Pahlitzsch 2009.

2.4 Deir Mar Mattai versus Takrit

By the twelfth century, the stability of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the region of the Maphrianate in the East was not only threatened by outside political, military, and religious pressure, but also by internal struggles. From the seventh century onwards, the monks from Deir Mar Mattai had been engaged in a struggle for power with the Syrian Orthodox community from Takrit in general and the Maphrian in particular. The origin of this struggle lay in the decisions taken in 629, when Deir Mar Mattai united with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate.

In a famous letter addressed to the abbot of the monastery, a certain Christophorus, Patriarch Athanasius I Gamolo announced the new ecclesiastical organization of the eastern dioceses of the Syrian Orthodox Church.⁷⁸ Although Deir Mar Mattai was the leading Miaphysite metropolitan see in the Mesopotamian region, Athanasius was not inclined to acknowledge this primacy. On the contrary, in addition to restricting the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Deir Mar Mattai to the diocese of Mosul/Nineveh, Athanasius also took the metropolitan's former right to consecrate bishops of other dioceses. It was further decided that the metropolitan of Deir Mar Mattai had to acknowledge the authority of a newly established church leader, the Maphrian.⁷⁹ As the second man in rank after the Patriarch, the Maphrian was given the authority to appoint and install the metropolitan of Deir Mar Mattai, much to the dismay of the monks, who were not willing to submit without protest and continued to contest the authority of the Maphrian and the Takritan community in subsequent centuries.⁸⁰

Inevitably, the conflicts between the two Syrian Orthodox communities increased when, from approximately the early ninth century onwards, the Takritans started to emigrate to Mosul and the Christian villages in the Mosul plain, Qaraqosh in particular. From the written sources, it is known that there was a church in Mosul in Takritan hands at least as early as the year 817.⁸¹ The number of Takritan immigrants in the Mosul area appears to have increased considerably after the outbreak of heated unrest between the Muslim and Christian populace of Takrit in 1089, during which the great Church of Mar Ahudemme, the then residence of the Maphrian, was taken from the Syrian Orthodox Christians and turned into a mosque. Most of the Christians were forced to flee the city and to seek refuge elsewhere. Maphrian John IV Saliba (1075-1106) escaped to Mosul, where he took up residence in the Church of Mar Zena, one of the churches in the city that was looked after by the Takritans and which disputed the predominance of Deir Mar Mattai over the Syrian Orthodox community living in Mosul.⁸²

John Saliba's successor, Dionysius Musa (1112-1142), a Takritan by birth, met fierce opposition from the monks of the monastery and their abbot, Timothy the Sogdian. Besides demanding Dionysius to make a donation of no fewer than 150 manuscripts, the monks tried to enforce certain regulations on him which were aimed at limiting the authority of the Maphrian over the metropolitan of Deir Mar Mattai (see below). According to Barhebraeus,

⁷⁸ This letter has been preserved in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian: Chabot 1899-1924, II, 414-417.

⁷⁹ Fiey 1974, 375-376; Schrier 1990, 221-222, 225-226; Flusin 2004, 701-703.

⁸⁰ This is reflected in the fact that a number of Syrian Orthodox Church leaders were forced to endorse the subordinate position of the metropolitan of Deir Mar Mattai, such as Patriarch John III at the Synod of Kfartuta in 869 (Fiey 1974, 382-383; Selb 1989, 207, 223; Schrier 1990, 222), Patriarch Michael the Syrian at the Synod of Deir Mar Hananya in 1174 (Selb 1989, 209), and Maphrian Barhebraeus in 1270/71 (Fiey 1974, 387-388).

⁸¹ On the Takritan community of Mosul, see Fiey 1959, 25-31. At around the same time, the Takritans also established a presence at the Monastery of the Mother of God in the Desert of Scetis (Wadi al-Natrun) in Egypt, a Coptic monastery founded in the fifth century, that would henceforward be officially known as Deir al-Surian, the Monastery of the Syrians (see Chapter 3).

⁸² Fiey 1963, 322-323; *idem* 1974, 144-145.

the monks even physically attacked Dionysius at the altar of their monastery.⁸³ Several villages situated in the Mosul plain, such as Bartelli and Beth Sakhra, supported the monastery in its resistance, refusing to insert the name of the Maphrian in their diptychs, the lists of names of both living and departed people to be commemorated during the Eucharistic service.⁸⁴

These difficulties probably added greatly to the decision of Dionysius Musa to go back to Takrit, a choice which was facilitated by the fact that a more moderate ruler had become governor of the city in the meantime. Dionysius encouraged many of his flock to return to Takrit, and, because of his good relations with an Armenian amir of the city, Mugahid al-Din Bahruz, was even able to obtain a new special permission from the caliph to rebuild and restore the city's churches that lay in ruins. However, due to Christian-Muslim friction at the time, the living conditions of the local Christians again quickly deteriorated, and the position of the Maphrian in Takrit became more and more untenable, leaving Maphrian Ignatius II Lazarus (1142-1164) in 1155 with no other option but to move the Seat of the Maphrianate to the city of Mosul (p. x).

In an attempt to secure his position and maintain the unity of his community, Ignatius seized the opportunity to force through a structural solution to end the struggle for power that continuously troubled the relationship between the metropolitan of Deir Mar Mattai and the Maphrian: he annexed the diocese of Mosul/Nineveh and compelled the monks from the monastery to recognize him as the metropolitan of that diocese. From that time on, Deir Mar Mattai was the official Seat of the Maphrianate.⁸⁵

The merging of the dioceses of Takrit, Mosul/Nineveh, and Deir Mar Mattai in 1155 did not put an end to the dispute between the monks of Deir Mar Mattai and the highest Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities, however. In fact, the struggle for power seems to have reached yet another climax in the second half of the twelfth century, during the Patriarchate of Michael the Syrian (1166-1199), who is also known as Michael I Rabo ('the Elder'). At the time of Michael's ascendancy, the Syrian Orthodox Church found itself in an extremely difficult situation. Apart from external threats posed by contemporary political and military disturbances described above, the Church was weakened from the inside through the involvement of its members in acts of simony, nepotism, and other violations of ecclesiastical law.⁸⁶ Now that the Syrian Orthodox Church was rapidly losing its grip on the Takritan area, its traditional bulwark in the East, it became ever more important for the Syrian Orthodox church leaders to strengthen communal solidarity in order to maintain a strong position in the regions under threat.

One of the strategies employed by Michael to enhance group solidarity was the enforcement of ecclesiastical law, recognizing that it not only reinforced his position as church leader, but also provided him with the means to keep the ranks of his community closed. Incessantly committed to reforming the Syrian Orthodox Church, Michael convened several synods and formulated an extensive list of rules and regulations aimed at restoring church discipline.⁸⁷ He was also occupied with laying down a clear hierarchical structure, trying to regulate the juridical relationship not only between the two highest ecclesiastical authorities, the Patriarch and the Maphrian, but also between them and the lower echelons of

⁸³ Barhebraeus, *Chron. Eccl.*: Abbeloos/Lamy 1872-1877, II, cols 313, 315, 319. Cf. Fiey 1963, 323-324; *idem* 1974, 383-384.

⁸⁴ Fiey 1965, II, 418, 480.

⁸⁵ Kawerau 1960, 23; Fiey 1965, II, 338-339, 419; *idem* 1974, 145, 387; Selb 1989, 223; Schrier 1990, 221-222.

⁸⁶ Kawerau 1960, 72-75; BarAbraham 1998, 35-37.

⁸⁷ Vööbus 1970, 74-88, 254-256; Weltecke 2003, 86-88.

his church administration, which, from top to bottom, included the metropolitans and bishops, abbots, monks and nuns, and, finally, lay people.⁸⁸

In view of Michael's ardent pursuit of ecclesiastical law and order, the disobedience shown by Deir Mar Mattai throughout the centuries must surely have been a thorn in his flesh. In his *Chronicle*, Michael describes at some length the role of Deir Mar Mattai within the internal quarrels which ensued from the decisions taken in 629, implicitly pointing out that the monastery's relentless desire for ecclesiastical power and reluctance to accept the authority of the Maphrian posed a permanent threat to the solidarity of the Syrian Orthodox community in general and that of the Mosul area in particular.⁸⁹ In another passage, Michael argues that the Church would be able to safeguard itself from external threats and enjoy peace if it were only able to extinguish any internal quarrels.⁹⁰ Apparently determined to avoid any such problems arising ever again, and to crush Deir Mar Mattai's opposition once and for all, in 1174 Michael decided to summon its abbot and monks to Deir Mar Hananya near Mardin. In the presence of Maphrian John V Sarugh (1164-1188), Michael presented them with a newly formulated collection of canons underlining yet again their duty of obedience to the Maphrian.⁹¹

In the same year, Michael gathered a synod at Deir Mar Mattai itself, where he reaffirmed a collection of sixth-century rules and appended them with twelve new ones (see Section 6.2.1).⁹² Michael's actions would already prove to be in vain some fifteen years later. Despite his efforts to shape communal solidarity, Michael himself actually provoked discontent within the Syrian Orthodox community in 1189, by granting the office of Maphrian to his nephew, who held this office, under the name Gregory I Ya'qub, until his death in 1214/15. In reaction to this act of nepotism, and clearly rising to the occasion, the monks of Deir Mar Mattai ordained one of their own, Karim bar Masih, as counter-Maphrian (Dionysius; 1189-1192). He was soon backed-up by Michael's aforementioned counter-Patriarch, Theodore bar Wahbun (Yuhanon; 1180-1193).⁹³ Only by buying the assistance of the local Muslim authorities, was Gregory I eventually able to enter Mosul and establish himself as the one and only rightful Maphrian in 1192. Bar Masih was subsequently imprisoned and condemned in one of the churches of the Takritans in Mosul.⁹⁴

Continuously seeking new ways in which to oppose the Takritan primacy, the monks of Deir Mar Mattai, in addition to ordaining their own counter-Maphrian, adopted various strategies to defend the rights of their own metropolitan and to strengthen the monastery's position within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Syrian Orthodox Church. One of the strategies employed appears to have been the rewriting of history in favour of Deir Mar Mattai. Particularly revealing in this matter is a synodical legislative document entitled *The canons of the Monastery of Mar Mattai*, which Fiey was able to unmask as a forgery, mainly on the basis of several striking anachronisms.⁹⁵ It has been preserved in a manuscript of the *Synodicon*, a collection of Syrian Orthodox canonical texts which was transcribed in 1204 by

⁸⁸ On the organizational structure of the Syrian Orthodox Church, see Kawerau 1960, 13-54; Weltecke 2008, 313-321.

⁸⁹ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 29, 32-35, 38-39, 47, 85-87, 307. Cf. Vööbus 1970, 88.

⁹⁰ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 225-226. Cf. Morony 2005, 4.

⁹¹ Vööbus 1970, 84-88; Fiey 1974, 387-388.

⁹² Vienna, Mekhitarist Fathers, Ms. Syr. 1, fols 112r-116v; Vööbus 1970, 87-88, 387-292; Selb 1989, 166-167.

⁹³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 402-403, 406. Cf. Budge 1899-1924, I, xii-xiv; Kawerau 1960, 4, 52; Weltecke 2003, 112-113.

⁹⁴ Fiey 1959, 28; *idem* 1965, II, 420; *idem* 1974, 388-389.

⁹⁵ Fiey 1974, 376-377, 383-386, 388; *idem* 1992.

Daniel ibn Yusuf ibn Sarkis ibn Tuma from Beth Sakhra, a village known for its fanatical devotion to Deir Mar Mattai.⁹⁶

Although the text presents itself as an original account of a synod which took place at Deir Mar Mattai in 629, and is ascribed to Christophorus, the monastery's 'metropolitan' at that time, the acts provide us with an overtly biased version of the important historical events leading up to the establishment of the metropolitan see of Takrit, the founding of the Maphrianate, and the enthronement of Marutha as its first occupant. This pseudo-Christophorus does not fail to underline that Takrit was fully dependent on Deir Mar Mattai, not least chronologically: he states that Takrit was Christianized by Garmai, supposedly a metropolitan of the monastery. Appended to this introductory letter are twenty-four canons designed to regulate the relationship between the new see and the metropolitan see of Mar Mattai. Contrary to the actual situation, these canons provided the monastery with multiple privileges that limited the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Takrit considerably, and were on the verge of being downright humiliating.

As such, the fake document stands in stark contrast to Patriarch Athanasius I Gamolo's letter of 629, in which he makes the new organization of the eastern provinces of the Syrian Orthodox Church known to the monks of Deir Mar Mattai (p. x). The authenticity of this letter has never been questioned.⁹⁷ As far as the date of the forgery is concerned, Fiey assumes that it was drawn up at Deir Mar Mattai and is inclined to identify these twenty-four canons with the regulations that the monks of the monastery tried to impose on the unfortunate Maphrian Dionysius Musa in 1112.⁹⁸ The struggle between Takrit and Deir Mar Mattai has been detailed in this section because, as will be argued in Chapter 6, the composition and writing down of the legend of Mar Behnam should perhaps also be seen as a conscious attempt on the part of the monks of Deir Mar Mattai to strengthen their position in the Mosul area.

2.5 The Syrian Renaissance

Despite the progressing Arabization and Islamization of all levels of Middle Eastern society, and the internal struggles for ecclesiastical power outlined above, the Syrian Orthodox Church, as an ecclesiastical organization, continued to grow under Muslim rule. After a period of decline in which Syrian Orthodox literary activities had virtually come to a standstill, Barhebraeus, writing around 1280, is able to inform us that the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, at that time, ruled over no fewer than twenty metropolitans and about 100 bishops in dioceses in Syria, Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia, and other western regions of the Middle East, while the Maphrian governed eighteen episcopal dioceses from Lower Mesopotamia and Persia to lands even further eastwards.⁹⁹ Concurrently with the spread of the Syrian Orthodox Church, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a flourishing of Syriac literature, especially – if by no means exclusively – in the West Syrian tradition. This is attested by the

⁹⁶ Ma'arrat Saydnaya, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Ms. 8/11, fols 207v-210r: Vööbus 1970, 89-104; *idem* 1975-1976, II, 197-208 (English translation); Selb 1989, 131-132. On the village of Beth Sakhra, see Fiey 1965, II, 479-482.

⁹⁷ Schrier 1990, 226 n. 53.

⁹⁸ Fiey 1974, 377; *idem* 1992, 125 (erroneously mentioning the year 1172 instead of 1112). Iskandar Bcheiry (2008), while agreeing with Fiey that 'The canons of Deir Mar Mattai' were a later forgery made by the monks of Deir Mar Mattai in order to legitimate their ecclesiastical authority in the face of Takrit, inclines to date the document to 914.

⁹⁹ Gillman/Klimkeit 1999, 71.

numerous surviving works of such prolific writers as Dionysius bar Salibi (d. 1171), Michael the Syrian (d. 1199), Jacob bar Shakkō (d. 1241), and Barhebraeus (d. 1286).¹⁰⁰

Their main works include commentaries on the Old and New Testaments, heresiologies, liturgical and theological treatises, epistles and homilies, but also works of philosophy, law, and physics. The best-known writings of Michael the Syrian and Barhebraeus are probably their extensive chronicles, some passages of which were referred to above.¹⁰¹ Written from a distinctly Syrian Orthodox perspective, they cover human history from the Creation up to their own times. Barhebraeus, arguably the most productive and diverse writer in the history of Syriac literature, is said to have written no fewer than thirty-one works, the great majority in Syriac, but some in Arabic. He also translated Greek works into both Syriac and Arabic, and Arabic works into Syriac.¹⁰² As Mark Dickens notes, the literary work of Barhebraeus 'was motivated by a desire to stimulate the interest of his Syriac-speaking brethren in their own history, language, and literature, as well as to help them realise the benefits of Greek and Arab learning, without which they would remain an insignificant religious sect in the changing world of the Middle East'.¹⁰³

In modern scholarship, this remarkable increase in literary output has been described as a 'Syrian Renaissance' (sometimes also called 'Syriac Renaissance'). As a period term, the 'Syrian Renaissance' acquired widespread currency after the publication of Peter Kawerau's 1955 study on the Syrian Orthodox Church, entitled *Die jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der syrischen Renaissance. Idee und Wirklichkeit*.¹⁰⁴ The term was first coined and defined, however, by Anton Baumstark in his history of Syriac literature, published in 1922.¹⁰⁵ In adopting the word renaissance, Baumstark unavoidably suggested that the output of Syriac literary works should be accorded a status and development that in a sense was comparable with the cultural development of the Renaissance in Italy. Indeed, Baumstark appears to have perceived this new vitality primarily as a rediscovery of the traditional Syriac heritage, though he did also acknowledge the importance of the renewed contacts with the Byzantine world, the crusades, as well as a certain influence of the cultural and intellectual world of Islam as important factors that contributed towards this efflorescence.¹⁰⁶

Both the use and actual concept of the word 'renaissance' in describing this remarkable literary development have recently been subjected to critical judgement. Herman Teule, amongst others, questions whether the 'Syrian Renaissance' was to any great extent a recapitulation of the Syriac literary tradition. Instead, he considers 'an ecumenical awareness with regard to the different denominations, the knowledge of Arabic and an attitude of openness to the intellectual and spiritual world of Islam' to be characteristic features of this 'renaissance'.¹⁰⁷ While the enormous output of Syriac works in this period is indeed probably best described in terms of a revival rather than a rebirth, it is doubtful whether this supposed raised ecumenical awareness was actually one of the main characteristics of contemporary Syrian Orthodox literature. Although an open attitude towards other religious groups, both

¹⁰⁰ For a general introduction to these writers, see Barsoum 2003, 432-414 (Dionysius), 445-448 (Michael), 454 (Jacob), 463-481 (Barhebraeus).

¹⁰¹ Barhebraeus actually wrote two separate chronicles, one covering universal history (*Chronicon Syriacum*: Budge 1932) and another the ecclesiastical history (*Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*: Abbeloos/Lamy 1872-1877. Cf. Dickens 2004, 16-18; Takahashi 2005, 73-75). In Michael's *Chronicle* (Chabot 1899-1924), secular and ecclesiastical history are ingeniously combined (Weltecke 2003, esp. 153-196; Dickens 2004, 9-12; van Ginkel, forthcoming).

¹⁰² Dickens 2004, 15-16. On the life and works of Barhebraeus, see Takahashi 2005.

¹⁰³ Dickens 2004, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Kawerau 1960 (2nd edn). Cf. Weltecke 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Baumstark 1922, 285, 290, 295, 326.

¹⁰⁶ On the historiography of the 'Syrian Renaissance', see Teule 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Teule 2010. Cf. Takahashi 2005, 99-104.

Christian and Muslim, can be perceived in the life and works of Barhebraeus,¹⁰⁸ one looks in vain for a comparable ecumenical mind-set in the other main representatives of the ‘Syrian Renaissance’, such as Dionysius bar Salibi and Michael the Syrian.¹⁰⁹

When it comes to the open attitude of Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical authors towards the Islamic cultural world, which is especially evident in the fields of grammar, historiography, literary styles, philosophy, and secular sciences,¹¹⁰ Jacob bar Shakko (d. 1241) is an excellent example. Bar Shakko was a native of Bartelli who, before becoming bishop and abbot of Deir Mar Mattai, studied logic, philosophy, and Arabic in Mosul with the liberal Muslim polymath Kamal al-Din ibn Yunus (1156-1242). Kamal al-Din taught subjects as diverse as Islamic law, the Gospels and the Torah, and the rational sciences derived from non-Islamic sources.¹¹¹ As pointed out by Teule, this contact with Kamal al-Din and perhaps other Muslim scholars greatly influenced Bar Shakko’s literary output. Illustrative in this respect is his *Book of Dialogues*, a treatise on language, metaphysics, science, and practical philosophy, which partly consists of a reworking of scientific theories elaborated by Muslim scholars.¹¹²

The literary work of Bar Shakko and other contemporaries shows that, at least as far as the cultural and scientific fields are concerned, the Syrian Orthodox community of Mosul was not a closed entity. On the contrary, the Syrian Orthodox community of Mosul shared in the common culture and science of its time.¹¹³ It should be noted, however, that Bar Shakko, in his 1231 *Book of Treasures* (*Ktōbō d-simōtō*) clearly marked the religious boundaries between his own Syrian Orthodox community and the Muslims.¹¹⁴ In other words, Bar Shakko participated fully in the surrounding Islamic culture, while retaining his exclusive Syrian Orthodox identity. It remains to be seen whether this phenomenon also comes to the fore in works of art sponsored by Syrian Orthodox Christians from Mosul.

This brings us to the observation that scholars interested in the ‘Syrian Renaissance’ have traditionally concentrated exclusively on the written evidence, perhaps the only exception being Leroy, who adopted the term to typify the remarkable flourishing of Syrian Orthodox manuscript illustration in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.¹¹⁵ Until now, works of art and other forms of material culture have been greatly neglected. Such a limited approach, based only on literary works, stands in the way of the larger picture. In order to enhance our understanding of the period, the present study seeks to expand the discussion to include the evidence of surviving art-historical material as well. Deliberate attempts to revitalize and strengthen the Syrian Orthodox community during the medieval period appear to have been pursued not only through the active sponsorship of literary works.

Cult sites were also much needed at the time, and literary and artistic activities often seem to have gone hand in hand. In addition to the tireless literary activities, which were echoed in

¹⁰⁸ Teule 2003; Takahashi 2005, 47-53.

¹⁰⁹ In fact, Teule (2007, 146; 2009, 187-188) himself mentions that Dionysius bar Salibi was famous for his harsh refutations of the East Syrians, the Byzantine Orthodox, and the Armenians, who he considers heretics, even despite their shared Miaphysite Christological outlook, while Michael the Syrian was known for his strong anti-Byzantine sentiments. Cf. ter Haar Romeny *et al.* 2009, 25, 50; ter Haar Romeny 2010.

¹¹⁰ Teule 2010.

¹¹¹ Patton 1982, 338, 408, 429-430. Yet another Syrian Orthodox student of Kamal al-Din ibn Yunus was the physician, philosopher, and astrologer Theodore of Antioch, who later served at the court of Emperor Frederick II (1220-1250) in Sicily (Weltecke 2006, 117-119; *idem* 2008, 324).

¹¹² Teule 2007a, 147; Takahashi 2005, 29.

¹¹³ Teule 2009, 181; *idem* 2010. On the influence of Muslim scholars on the literary output of Barhebraeus, see further Teule 2003, 25-33, 36-37; Takahashi 2005, 82-88.

¹¹⁴ Teule 2009, 181-182. Considering this dialectical relationship between cultural interaction and religious demarcation, it might also be noted that Bar Shakko studied grammar under John bar Zo⁶bi at the famous East Syrian Monastery of Qoqhe in Adiabene (Kawerau 1960, 57, 81), but simultaneously considered the East Syrian Dyophysite Christology heretical (Teule 2007, 148-153; *idem* 2009, 188; *idem* 2010).

¹¹⁵ Leroy 1971.

an enormous production of manuscripts, members of the Syrian Orthodox community were also actively engaged in extensive building campaigns, not only founding, reconstructing, and decorating religious edifices, but also erecting secular institutions. As mentioned above, Patriarch Michael the Syrian was actively engaged in the renovation and construction of churches and monasteries throughout the 1170s, most probably as part of a larger programme aimed at countering the loss of church property due to Muslim appropriation.

The efforts of Bishop John of Mardin (1125-1165) are particularly illustrative as to the employment of both literary and other cultural activities in a combined effort to preserve and maintain the Syrian Orthodox community and its tradition. He is credited with having revived the Syriac literary tradition after a period of nearly a century of serious decline.¹¹⁶ In order to counteract this process and to save Syriac from becoming extinct, John not only set up teaching projects in schools, but also provided monasteries and churches with books, both restored and newly written. Fostering a revival of the Syriac literary tradition in the Tur ʿAbdin region, John simultaneously set out to revitalize the Syrian Orthodox monastic tradition there.

According to the written sources, this indefatigable church leader was responsible for the restoration of a great number of churches and monasteries, among them Deir Mar Hananya, which, as mentioned, was to become the official Seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate in the thirteenth century. The restoration activities embarked upon involved the renovation of churches and monasteries, as well as the equipping of these newly reconstructed sanctuaries with the necessary liturgical and theological manuscripts, along with an array of liturgical implements, including crosses, patens, chalices, and fans made of gold and silver.

It is important to emphasize that these cultural developments were not limited either to the Syrian Orthodox Church, or to the Tur ʿAbdin region. The ‘Syrian Renaissance’ essentially comprised a widespread flourishing of Christian culture in the Middle East, and was not restricted to a particular Christian community or a specific geographical region. Indeed, given that similar developments have also been attested for East Syrians, Melkites, Armenians, and Copts, it would perhaps be better to speak of a ‘Christian Renaissance’ rather than a ‘Syrian Renaissance’.¹¹⁷ As far as the Syrian Orthodox Church is concerned, extensive building campaigns and refurbishment initiatives were developed in virtually all regions where members of this Church were relatively well represented. In his monograph on the Syrian Orthodox Church at the time of the ‘Syrian Renaissance’, Kawerau has listed some 26 building and reconstruction campaigns for the period between 1150 and 1300, limiting himself only to those instances that were recorded in the chronicles of Michael the Syrian and Barhebraeus.¹¹⁸ In addition to Tur ʿAbdin, the list also provides examples from Syria, Northern and Central Mesopotamia, and Iran.

As can be gleaned from Kawerau’s preliminary compilation, the initiatives to build were often taken by the highest members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, especially patriarchs, maphrians, and bishops. Michael the Syrian, for example, was engaged in numerous building and decorating works at Deir Mar Barsauma, while Barhebraeus founded Deir Mar Yuhanon bar Naggare in Bartelli near Mosul in 1282 and subsequently had it embellished with wall paintings by a Byzantine artist (see Section 5.6). Besides the clergy, such building and refurbishment projects were often also generated and sponsored by wealthy lay members of the community, either individually or as part of a cooperative venture. A church dedicated to Mar Barsauma was built by the doctor ʿIsa of Edessa in 1242, and in 1262 a group of fugitives from Mosul was responsible for the erection of a number of different religious

¹¹⁶ On the cultural contribution of John of Mardin to the Syrian Orthodox Church, see Vööbus 1975-1976, II, 212-222; *idem* 1988, 390-406.

¹¹⁷ Immerzeel 2004a, 13-15; *idem* 2009, 25-26.

¹¹⁸ Kawerau 1960, 63-67, 119-120. Cf. Weltecke 2003, 88-89.

institutions in Arbela, including a church dedicated to Mar Behnam, a house for the bishop, and a hospice for monks. In 1172, a number of merchants provided the financial means for the erection of a church in Tabriz, which was built at the instigation of the city's bishop.

Furthermore, financial contributions were not only the preserve of men; women, too, seem occasionally to have made donations towards the restoration of churches and monasteries, as is clear, for instance, from thirteenth-century inscriptions at Deir Mar Behnam near Mosul (see Section 6.2.2). Finally, there is some evidence, particularly in the field of manuscript illustration, that even members of a different Christian community sometimes contributed to the decoration of works of art which were made specifically for the Syrian Orthodox Church (see Section 4.4.2).

Along with the foundation and renovation of religious structures, the ecclesiastical authorities were actively involved in sponsoring and commissioning secular building projects. As in the case of churches and monasteries, these foundations were ultimately aimed at strengthening their own community, not least economically. Naturally, a strong economic position was not only desirable, but also critical for the survival of any Christian community in the Islamic world or elsewhere. Bishop John of Mardin is again a case in point. Having re-established the monastic community at Deir Mar Hananya, he provided it with a variety of public buildings, including mills, shops, and even houses in Mardin, which all undoubtedly contributed to the economic well-being of the local Syrian Orthodox community. Similar economic considerations may also have played a role in the decision of Patriarch Ignatius II David to build a bridge in Mopsuestia in 1246, and another one in Andria in the same year.

Kawerau's list attests to the great extent and widespread nature of the building activities developed throughout the Syrian Orthodox Church, but the majority of the structures he refers to have not survived, and we simply have no way of knowing what they actually looked like. Fortunately, the examples compiled by Kawerau can be supplemented with numerous other instances, not only from the written sources, but also from archaeological and art-historical records. Kawerau's inventory largely ignores, for example, the churches and monasteries from the Mosul area, a number of which are still standing today and have preserved some of their medieval characteristics.

The same holds true for Deir al-Surian, the Syrian Orthodox stronghold in Egypt, where Syrian Orthodox monks settled in the early ninth century and continued to cohabitate with Coptic monks until the sixteenth century, which has proven to be a particularly rich source of art-historical and epigraphic information. In addition to the decorated churches and monasteries from the Mosul area and Deir al-Surian in Egypt, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, a few examples of medieval Syrian Orthodox church decoration have also survived in Syria and Lebanon.

2.6 Medieval Syrian Orthodox Church Decoration in Syria and Lebanon

Since the 1970s, a considerable number of medieval wall paintings have come to light in churches and chapels in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt.¹¹⁹ Together with icons, illustrated manuscripts, woodwork, and sculpture, these murals are the visual exponents of the flourishing Christian culture in the Middle East in the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. The numbers of surviving wall paintings are remarkably high, especially compared with other regions in the eastern Mediterranean. Moreover, with an average of

¹¹⁹ Syria and Lebanon: Cruikshank Dodd 2001; *idem* 2004; Immerzeel 2009; Schmidt/Westphalen 2005; Zibawi 2009. Palestine: Kühnel 1988; Folda 1995; Pringle 1993. Egypt: Bolman 2002; Lyster 2008; van Loon 1999; van Loon/Immerzeel 1998; *idem* 1999.

approximately two new discoveries a year in Syria and Lebanon alone, this list is steadily increasing.

At present, over thirty sites are known in the region between Tripoli and Jbeil, in the Qadisha Valley, and in Beirut: in other words, in an area that was formerly situated within the borders of the Crusader County of Tripoli (1099-1289). Approximately ten more sites with medieval wall paintings have come to light in territory that was never occupied by the Crusaders, namely in the region between Damascus and Homs, which, at the time of the paintings' execution, fell successively under the authority of the Fatimids, the Burids, the Great Seljuks, the Zangids, and the Ayyubids. Apart from the Crusader fortresses of Marqab Castle and Crac des Chevaliers in Syria, all the surviving wall paintings are found in churches and chapels that were occupied by local Syrian Christians, in particular Melkites and Maronites. As we will see shortly, only one or two of the known sites can be ascribed a Syrian Orthodox denomination at the time of their refurbishment.¹²⁰

Stylistically speaking, the wall paintings from Syria and Lebanon have been divided into two main groups. On the one hand, there is a group of murals that were painted in a Byzantine style, either by Byzantine painters or local artists trained in the Byzantine artistic tradition; the second group on the other hand, though also influenced by Byzantine art, betray formal characteristics that have been described as a local 'Syrian style'.¹²¹ In relating the 'Syrian style' directly to the Syrian Orthodox, Cruikshank Dodd implicitly suggested that the formal characteristics of this style could be considered markers of Syrian Orthodox denominational identity.¹²² The research conducted by Immerzeel within the framework of the Leiden PIONER project, however, shows that neither of the two stylistic currents can be connected exclusively with a particular Christian group or a distinct geographical region.¹²³

Typical exponents of the 'Syrian style' in Lebanon are found in the Maronite churches of Mar Charbel in Ma'ad (Layer 2)¹²⁴ and Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun (Layer 2),¹²⁵ both painted in the second or third quarter of the thirteenth century by an anonymous artist who also worked in Bahdeidat (see below). A comparable style of paintings adorns several churches in Western Syria, such as the Melkite Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Qara,¹²⁶ and the second layer in nearby Melkite Deir Mar Ya'qub (c. 1200-1266).¹²⁷ Perhaps the most illustrative example of this style is encountered in Layer 3 (1208/09) at Syrian Orthodox Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi near Nebk, some 80 km northeast of Damascus.¹²⁸

A) Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi near Nebk, Syria

Originally, Deir Mar Musa was probably dedicated to the Old Testament prophet Moses rather than the Ethiopian hermit named Moses to whom its name presently refers.¹²⁹ The

¹²⁰ On the limited position of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria and Lebanon, see Immerzeel 2009, 78-82, 176. Contra Cruikshank Dodd (2004, 95-96, 102-103), who, assuming that the Syrian Orthodox Church was firmly established in the County of Tripoli, attributed several decorated sanctuaries to them (e.g., Church of Mar Charbel in Ma'ad, Church of Mar Tadros in Bahdeidat, Chapel of Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman, Church of Mart Barbara in Beirut).

¹²¹ The term 'Syrian style' was first coined and defined by Cruikshank Dodd 1997-1998; *idem* 2001, 109-114; *idem* 2004, 95. Cf. Westphalen 2005, 120-124; *idem* 2007, 114-115; Immerzeel 2004a, 24-26; *idem* 2009, 171.

¹²² Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 109-114; *idem* 2004, 95. Cf. Immerzeel 2009, 12.

¹²³ Immerzeel 2009, 170-172; ter Haar Romeny *et al.* 2009, 33-34.

¹²⁴ Cruikshank Dodd 2004, cat. no. 18; Immerzeel 2009, 105-108, Pls 73-75, 79.

¹²⁵ Cruikshank Dodd 2004, cat. no. 15; Immerzeel 2009, 108-111, Pls 82-83.

¹²⁶ Zibawi 1995, 92-93, Pls 18-19; *idem* 2009, 91-95; Westphalen 2005, 117-124, 173, Pls 12a-12b; Immerzeel 2009, 68-69, Pl. 38.

¹²⁷ Westphalen 2005, 120-124, Pls IX-XI, 4-12, 15; Immerzeel 2009, 70-71, Pls 42-43; Zibawi 2009, 96-97.

¹²⁸ On Deir Mar Musa, see Cruikshank Dodd 2001; ter Haar Romeny *et al.* 2007; Immerzeel 2007b; *idem* 2009, 56-67; Westphalen 2007; Zibawi 2009, 99-138.

¹²⁹ Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 22-24; Immerzeel 2007b, 127; *idem* 2009, 57.

monastery appears always to have been connected with the Syrian Orthodox Church, at least from the sixth to the nineteenth century, when it was finally taken over by the Syrian Catholics. No fewer than three main layers of paintings have survived on the walls of its church, making it one of the richest sources of medieval Christian art from the Middle East. Greatly adding to its art-historical importance are the numerous Syriac and Arabic inscriptions that have come to light in this monastic complex, including several dedicatory inscriptions. On the basis of these inscriptions, the successive layers of decoration can be more or less securely dated, which is virtually unique for wall paintings in the region.

In addition to shedding light on the chronology of the different decoration programmes, the inscriptions furnish the names of the artists that were in charge of the two most recent refurbishments. An anonymous painter was responsible for the oldest layer of paintings, the date of which could be fixed between 1058 and 1088 (Layer 1). For reasons unknown, his work was already covered by a new layer of paintings only a few decades later, in 1095 (Layer 2). They were executed by a certain Hunayn (John). While the first layer of murals is painted in a rather crude style, which is perhaps reflective of a local tradition of which no further traces remain, the paintings on the second layer are essentially a local Syrian adaptation of Byzantine models. They are considered to represent an early phase of the fully developed 'Syrian style', as featured in the third layer at Deir Mar Musa.¹³⁰ Painted in 1208/09 by an artist named Sarkis (Sergius), Layer 3 comprises the most extensive Christian decoration programme that has come to light in Syria and Lebanon.

Like most other medieval wall paintings from Syria and Lebanon, the third layer of decoration at Deir Mar Musa, though strongly influenced by Byzantine art in terms of iconography, betrays a certain preference for themes that enjoyed a particular popularity in the countries in the East and South of the Byzantine Empire.¹³¹ Illustrative in this respect is the depiction of the Deisis Vision, an iconographic type that is also encountered in Georgia, Armenia, Cappadocia, and Egypt, fragments of which have survived in the dome of the apse (Pl. 2). This scene consists of a combination of a regular Deisis with a Theophany, portraying the Virgin and St John the Baptist on either side of Christ enthroned within a mandorla, surrounded by the four apocalyptic creatures and two seraphs.¹³² The Deisis Vision is flanked on the triumphal arch by the angel and Virgin of the Annunciation, and surmounted at the top by the bust of Christ Emmanuel in a medallion.

Underneath these subjects is a rendering of Christ Pantocrator between the apostles. A row of church fathers is placed in the lower part of the apsidal niche, four on either side of the Virgin, who holds a tondo with the bust of Christ; this theme is known either as *Maria Platitera* or the *Blachernitissa*. Syriac inscriptions written in *Serto* preserve the names of Sts Cyril of Alexandria, Basil, Athanasius, and John Chrysostom on the left, and Ignatius and James on the right. The thematic programme of the eastern side of the church can be seen as a theological summary of time, stretching from the First Coming of Christ, that is, the Incarnation of the Logos, to His Second Coming.¹³³

The eschatological theme of the eastern section of the church is continued directly opposite in the large representation of the Last Judgement, which covers the entire west wall (Pl. 3). The Last Judgement is divided into five horizontal registers, of which the top one is occupied by St Peter and St Paul, who are placed to the left and right of a window.¹³⁴ Below this

¹³⁰ Westphalen 2007, 105-107, 111, 114-115.

¹³¹ Immerzeel 2004a, 20-23; *idem* 2009, 144-145.

¹³² Hélou 1998; Immerzeel 2004a, 20-21; *idem* 2009, 64-65.

¹³³ Westphalen 2007, 112-113.

¹³⁴ Westphalen (2007, 114, Fig. 4) argues that they were part of a combined image of the *Traditio clavium* and the *Traditio legis*, assuming that the window was cut through an image of Christ handing down the keys to St Peter and the Law to St Paul, respectively.

window, the vertical axis down the middle of the wall contains, successively: the *Hetoimasia* as a symbol of the Second Coming; Adam and Eve as intercessors; the archangels Michael and Gabriel blowing their trumpets for the souls to rise up from the graves; and finally, at the bottom, the Weighing of the Souls. Scenes of Heaven and Hell with the Blessed and the Damned are correspondingly allocated to the left and right of this central axis. This binary left-right division has created an ingenious visual and thematic cross-reference between the Last Judgement and the theme of the Wise and Foolish Virgins that is painted on the west side of the stone templon screen that separates the nave from the sanctuary. Emphasizing the entrance to the sanctuary as the Gate of Heaven, the five Wise and five Foolish Virgins may indeed be seen as symbols of the Saved and Damned, respectively.¹³⁵

While the Last Judgment at Deir Mar Musa essentially conforms to the standard depiction of the theme in Byzantine art, it has been adapted to include the image of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Paradise, holding the souls of the Blessed on their laps. Introduced into Byzantine and Western art around the twelfth century, this iconographic subject was already depicted in churches in the eastern periphery of the Byzantine Empire from approximately the early tenth century onwards, in Cappadocia, Palestine, and Egypt, among other places, either as an independent representation or as part of Last Judgement scenes.¹³⁶ A second iconographic adaptation seen in the Last Judgement is the inclusion of Moses holding the Tablets of the Law. Moses' prominent position among the Blessed in the fourth register from the top can best be explained as resulting from his probable position as the monastery's original patron saint. Since equestrian saints are more or less a standard element in the decoration of Eastern Christian churches, irrespective of religious denomination (see Section 6.4.2), it is not surprising to find them at Deir Mar Musa. No fewer than six mounted saints are painted in the upper zone of the side walls of the nave. In addition to two anonymous horsemen, they include the paired representations of saints George and Theodore and Sergius and Bacchus.¹³⁷

A particularly interesting detail in the depiction of Sts Sergius and Bacchus is the characteristically crossed banner that is attached to their lances (Pl. 4), a type of banner familiar from a number of decorated churches in former Frankish territory.¹³⁸ Similar banner carriers are also encountered on a few thirteenth-century icons that were most probably produced in the County of Tripoli.¹³⁹ These icons have traditionally been seen as illustrative examples of 'Crusader art', primarily on the basis of precisely this iconographic feature.¹⁴⁰ It should be noted, however, that such 'Crusader banners' were also commonly adopted by artists working for indigenous Christians living in Muslim-ruled territory, for horsemen carrying similarly crossed banners are also featured in the Melkite Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Qara.¹⁴¹

In view of the fact that this motif was not limited to Frankish patronage, but widely diffused among the various indigenous Christian communities, their depiction cannot be regarded as a marker of the denominational identity of either the artists or the patrons. Their

¹³⁵ Snelders/Jeudy 2006, 124.

¹³⁶ On the Three Patriarchs in Paradise with Souls on their Laps, see Cruikshank Dodd 2000; *idem* 2007, 18-20; van Loon 2003.

¹³⁷ Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 50-56, Pls 27-28, 30-32; Immerzeel 2009, 65, Pls 25-26, 33, 35-36.

¹³⁸ Equestrian saints carrying the crossed banner are encountered in, amongst others, the Melkite Church of Mar Mtanios (St Anthonios) in Deddé (Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 390-393, Pls XCI, 24.1-24.3; Immerzeel 2009, 87, Pl. 50), and the Maronite Church of Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun (Immerzeel 2009, 109, Pl. 81), both dating from the thirteenth century.

¹³⁹ Immerzeel 2007c, 78-79, Fig. 5; *idem* 2009, 128-129, 131, 147-149, Pls 108, 110. Cf. Zibawi 2009, 154-157.

¹⁴⁰ Catalogue New York 2004, nos 374-375; Folda 2005, 339-340.

¹⁴¹ Leroy 1975b, 96-99, Figs 1-3; Westphalen 2005, 117-118, Pl. 12b; Immerzeel 2009, 69, Pl. 40; Zibawi 2009, 94, plate on p. 93.

inclusion in Deir Mar Musa should be regarded as a visual underlining of the victorious reputation of the eastern equestrian saints, which may perhaps even be considered as a visual reminder of their 'military or spiritual battle against Islam, in which they and the Latins fought side by side'.¹⁴²

Apart from the four enthroned evangelists in the spandrels of the four piers, the side-walls of the nave are entirely reserved for a rich collection of Christian saints, which has been arranged hierarchically. Only a few of these saints can be identified on the basis of accompanying Syriac inscriptions. Starting with the mounted warrior saints in the upper level, the heavenly congregation continues first with an assembly of female martyrs on the soffits of the arches, including Sts Elizabeth, Julia, and Catherine, followed by male saints painted on the piers, including Sts John the Baptist and Julian Saba. A relatively small number of monks and anchorites form part of this compilation of saints, which is all the more remarkable given that we are dealing with a monastic setting. On the other hand, it should be observed that precisely this part of the decoration programme is most badly damaged, and one cannot therefore rule out the possibility that more monastic saints were originally depicted. Those that have survived are allocated to the lower regions of the nave, thus level with the monastic community celebrating in the church: a pair of monastic saints with knotted beards and hand crosses, for instance, are painted opposite one another on the south-west and north-west piers, on either side of the Last Judgement. According to Cruikshank Dodd, they are meant to represent St Antony and St Euthymios, the two fathers of monasticism, who are commonly represented on the walls of Byzantine churches and icons.¹⁴³ The only other monastic saint uncovered from Layer 3 is rendered next to the supposed St Euthymios, but the image is heavily damaged, and as no clarifying inscription survives, it is no longer possible to identify this saint.¹⁴⁴

It is important to note that none of the saints depicted at Deir Mar Musa, whether monks or martyrs, can be considered as specifically Syrian Orthodox. This holds true not only for the third layer of paintings, but also for the two earlier decoration programmes. Layer 1a (c. 1060-1095) does include a unique depiction of the rather obscure medical saint Mar Asia, who is known to have enjoyed a certain popularity among the Syrian Orthodox.¹⁴⁵ His cult does not seem to have been limited exclusively to the West Syrian community, however, for Asia was also venerated by the Maronites.¹⁴⁶ The only reference to a genuine Syrian Orthodox saint as yet encountered at the monastery is an Arabic inscription situated in the southern aisle, dated 1131, which contains an invocation to Mar Barsauma.¹⁴⁷

One might perhaps have expected to encounter a depiction of Barsauma at Deir Mar Musa, especially given that he is considered the father of Syrian monasticism. As such, Barsauma is depicted in two thirteenth-century Coptic wall paintings, at Deir Anba Antonius (A.D. 1232/33) and Deir al-Baramus.¹⁴⁸ But within the medieval Syrian Orthodox context, his effigy has only survived in a Gospel Book (A.D. 1055) made in Melitene for Deir Mar Barsauma (Pl. 5), which is also purported to have possessed an icon of its patron saint,¹⁴⁹ and in a Psalter (A.D. 1204/05) written at the Monastery of the Mother of God near Edessa.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴² Immerzeel 2009, 148; Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

¹⁴³ Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 68, Pls 51-52; cf. Westphalen 2007, 124.

¹⁴⁴ Westphalen 2007, no. 74.

¹⁴⁵ Westphalen 2007, 107, Pl. 11; Immerzeel 2009, 145, Pl. 29; Zibawi 2009, 107, plates on pp. 106, 169.

¹⁴⁶ On Mar Asia, see Fiey 2004, 58.

¹⁴⁷ Ter Haar Romeny *et al.* 2007, inscr. no. B33.

¹⁴⁸ Bolman 2002, 53, 55, 95, 222-223, Figs 4.22, 14.3; van Loon 1999, 65, 188, Pls 75, 77, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Ma'arrat Saydnaya, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Ms. 12/8, fol. 350v: Leroy 1964, 226, Pl. 52.2; Zibawi 1995, 58, Pl. 3; *idem* 2009, 144-148, plate on p. 146; Doumato 2001, 32, Fig. 1. As pointed out by Palmer (1990, 86 n. 70), Leroy has slightly miscalculated the date of this manuscript, computing it as 1054 instead of 1055.

¹⁵⁰ London, BL Add. 7154, fol. 2v: Leroy 1964, 259-261, Pl. 60.2.

B) Church of Mar Tadros in Bahdeidat, Lebanon

A second site with medieval wall paintings that is known to have been used by a Syrian Orthodox community around the time that they were executed is the Church of Mar Tadros (St Theodore) in Bahdeidat, a small village located in a predominantly Maronite area of Lebanon.¹⁵¹ The decoration of this church was executed sometime during the second or third quarter of the thirteenth century by an anonymous artist, whom Immerzeel refers to as the 'Master of Bahdeidat'. This artist was also responsible for the refurbishment of several Maronite churches in the region.¹⁵² In the Church of Mar Tadros, as at Deir Mar Musa, the half-dome of the apse is occupied by a Deisis Vision, depicting Christ enthroned within a mandorla, surrounded by the four apocalyptic beasts and a cherub and seraph holding standards with the *trishagion* written in Syriac, alongside the Virgin and St John the Baptist (Pl. 6). This apocalyptic vision of Christ's Second Coming is flanked on the triumphal arch by scenes that were primarily chosen for their Eucharistic connotations, as they are closely related to the altar area: the Annunciation (left and right), the Sacrifice of Isaac (left), Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law (right), and at the top the bust of Christ Emmanuel in a medallion flanked by the effigies of the sun and the moon.

A row of twelve apostles is placed in the lower zone of the apsidal niche and completed by a prophet and a martyr, St Daniel and St Stephen, who are allocated to the left and right foot of the triumphal arch, respectively. At the east end of the nave, directly in front of the altar area, a pair of equestrian saints function as sanctuary guardians: St Theodore killing a snakelike dragon with a human head on the north wall (Pl. 7), and, on the opposite side, St George rescuing a young slave from captivity (Pl. 8). Both are accompanied by supplicating donors whose vestments characterize them as representatives of the Frankish nobility. But, according to Immerzeel, rather than being markers of the denominational identity of the church, these figures should be seen as *ex-voto* images, as visual reflections of Frankish financial support towards the refurbishment initiatives that were developed by their local Christian subjects.¹⁵³ If we accept this to be the case, we may conclude that the religious identity of a donor is not always compatible with the denominational identity of the church in which he or she is depicted. A similar dichotomy is seen in the fact that the religious background of the artists responsible for the medieval Christian wall paintings in Syria and Lebanon does not necessarily reflect the religious identity of users of the churches in question, a point already made above.

When it comes to the specific religious background of the indigenous community supposed to be responsible for the refurbishment initiative at the Church of Mar Tadros, we know that it was in West Syrian hands at least in the year 1256, when according to a thirteenth-century Syrian Orthodox manuscript containing the *Ordination of Priests*, Maphrian Ignatius IV Saliba (1253-1258) ordained a certain Behnam as a bishop there.¹⁵⁴ However, since the 'Master of Bahdeidat' was already working in the region during the

¹⁵¹ On the Church of Mar Tadros, see Cruikshank Dodd 2004, cat. no. 19; Immerzeel 2009, 101-105; Zibawi 2009, 30-37.

¹⁵² The Church of Mar Charbel (Layer 2) in Ma^cad; the Church of Mar Saba in Eddé al-Batrun; the Hermitage of St Simeon (Mar Sem'an) near Jbeil; the Church of Mart Shmuni near Hadchit: Immerzeel 2009, 107-108, 110-111, 114, 120, 171.

¹⁵³ Immerzeel 2009, 102-103, 157-169; Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming. Frankish aristocrats are also considered to have sponsored redecoration campaigns of other local Christian churches, such as the Melkite Church of Mar Fauqa in Amiun.

¹⁵⁴ The manuscript, which contains a list of bishops that were ordained by Maphrian Ignatius IV Saliba in the Church of Mar Behnam in Tripoli, is currently preserved at Syriac Catholic Deir al-Sherfe, Lebanon. The relevant text is only known through a quotation made by Philippe de Tarazi: Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 20; Immerzeel 2009, 78, 79-80; Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

earlier decades of the thirteenth century, one cannot exclude the possibility that the wall paintings in the Church of Mar Tadros were executed prior to 1256. The uncertainty about the date of the execution of the paintings leads Immerzeel to suggest that they might have already been *in situ* when the Syrian Orthodox took over the Maronite church.¹⁵⁵ This may well have been the case, especially considering that one of the main characteristics of the production of medieval wall paintings in Syria and Lebanon is the remarkable uniformity in terms of iconography.

Seen from a historical and religious perspective, one might perhaps have expected to encounter marked differences between the monumental decoration of churches located in Crusader and Muslim-ruled territory on the one hand, and between the churches that were used by various Christian communities on the other. Immerzeel's study shows, however, that there were no marked differences between the wall paintings of any of these churches, either in terms of style or iconography. As far as the murals in Syrian Orthodox Deir Mar Musa are concerned, Immerzeel concludes that in many respects they are 'representative of the embellishment of the mainstream Melkite and Maronite sanctuaries in the Qalamun and the County of Tripoli. The iconographic, and to some extent also stylistic, differences between the works of art produced by these three groups are incidental and therefore negligible. As a result of this regional uniformity, there is no defining characteristic which would enable us to ascertain the denomination of the Christians who embellished the Church of Mar Tadros in Bahdeidat in the second or third quarter of the thirteenth century. All that can be concluded is that they were either Maronites or Syrian Orthodox'.¹⁵⁶

The general stylistic and iconographic uniformity that characterizes the Christian wall paintings in Syria and Lebanon clearly suggests that in this region the monumental art of the Syrian Orthodox, as that of the other Christian groups, was grounded in a shared common visual Christian vocabulary. As yet, there are no signs that the various Christian communities were concerned with marking the boundaries between them in visual terms. In short, the development of the art of the Syrian Orthodox in Syria and Lebanon should be seen in regional terms, perhaps as a visual expression of their common *Christian* identity rather than a specifically *Syrian Orthodox* identity. In this respect, differentiation from Muslims may have played an important role, especially considering that these wall paintings came into being in a surrounding Muslim environment. We will return to this matter in Chapter 9 of the present study, while the possible role as identity markers of the languages used in the inscriptions (Greek, Syriac, or both) will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

It remains to be seen whether this shared Christian vocabulary also typifies the art of the Syrian Orthodox in other areas of the Middle East, or whether this art is similarly characterized by a strong regionalism, that is, distinct from its Syrian and Lebanese counterparts. In order to shed some light on this matter, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the contemporary artistic and cultural developments in Northern Mesopotamia in general, and the Mosul area in particular.

2.7 Artistic Developments in Northern Mesopotamia and Related Areas

The renewed economic prosperity experienced by Northern Mesopotamia during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which, as we have seen above, was based on a combination of agriculture and trade, created sufficiently favourable circumstances for arts and crafts to flourish. Among the non-agricultural specialities of the Jazira mentioned in contemporary sources are metalwork and luxury cloths from Mosul, balances and inkwells from Nasibin,

¹⁵⁵ Immerzeel 2009, 171, 177; Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

¹⁵⁶ Immerzeel 2009, 176-177; ter Haar Romeny *et al.* 2009, 31-32.

and pens from Raqqa.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, art production reached a peak in the period between approximately 1150 and 1250. This is attested, amongst others, by the large number of surviving decorated manuscripts, pieces of metalwork inlaid with silver and gold, and richly painted glass and ceramics.¹⁵⁸ In addition to the long-standing tradition of royal patronage, the emergence in the Islamic Middle East of a wealthy urban 'bourgeoisie' as a new class of art patrons, which included Muslims, Christians, and Jews, must have had a catalysing effect on this development.¹⁵⁹

This explosion of artistic production, which is also attested for Ayyubid Syria and Egypt at the time, as well as Anatolia under the Seljuks of Rum, was paralleled by an unprecedented proliferation of figural imagery.¹⁶⁰ Inlaid pieces of metalwork, for example, which were produced in cities such as Mosul, Siirt or Is'ird, and Damascus, were commonly decorated with animals, both real and fantastic, genre scenes, and anthropomorphic representations of the planets and constellations. Particularly popular were a set of images based on the pastimes of the royal court, known as the Princely Cycle, which included scenes of hunting and representations of cupbearers, musicians, and dancers.¹⁶¹ As we will see in the following section, these courtly figural scenes were sometimes directly combined with Christian iconographic themes.

The depiction of figural imagery was not restricted to portable objects, but also widely employed for public display in the form of architectural reliefs. Although there was a clear preference for real and fantastic animals, especially lions, bulls, eagles, and dragons, human beings were also depicted.¹⁶² Prevalent among the rich figural repertoire were scenes of animal combat and representations of men triumphing over wild beasts or monsters, which Estelle Whelan has aptly called 'dominance imagery'.¹⁶³ Perhaps except for the human figures, all these motifs were featured in both secular and religious contexts. The most common setting for these figural reliefs was entranceways, such as gateways to cities and portals to important urban institutions, but they are also encountered on defensive towers and city walls.¹⁶⁴ Given that the figural reliefs were usually positioned in close connection with political inscriptions, it may be assumed that they were primarily appropriated in order to assert the legitimacy of the sponsoring rulers, although they may simultaneously have been intended to convey apotropaic, and astral and mythological connotations.¹⁶⁵

It has been suggested that the increased popularity of figural iconography in this period, especially that of the human figure, was motivated by the prosperity and aristocratic aspirations, or *nouveau riche* attitude, of the growing urban bourgeoisie.¹⁶⁶ Although it is generally accepted that a sizeable and prosperous population of urban notables gave an impetus to artistic production as such, some scholars question the supposed crucial role in of this particular group in the explosion of figural imagery, arguing that the multiplicity of courts throughout the Seljuk successor states and their mutual competition for cultural

¹⁵⁷ Patton 1982, 25.

¹⁵⁸ For exhibition catalogues, general surveys, and essay collections on the artistic production during the Artuqid, Zangid, and Ayyubid periods, see Catalogue Paris 2001; Catalogue Berlin 2006; Raby 1985; Hillenbrand 1994b, 111-137; Wieczorek/Fansa/Meller 2005; Hillenbrand/Auld 2009; Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina 2001, 215-265.

¹⁵⁹ Shoshan 1991, 75-82; Grabar 2001b; *idem* 2005b; *idem* 2006a; Jeudy 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Pancaroğlu 2000, esp. 23-36; Whelan 2006; von Gladiss 2006b; Hillenbrand 2009, 33-34.

¹⁶¹ Hagedorn 1992; Ward 1993, 80-85; Catalogue Paris 2001, 127-130 (A. Collinet); Catalogue Berlin 2006, 73-90 (A. von Gladiss); Hillenbrand 2009, 27-32; Auld 2009.

¹⁶² Whelan 2006, 31-40. On the medieval animal reliefs from Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia, see Gierlichs 1996.

¹⁶³ Whelan 2006, 39.

¹⁶⁴ Gierlichs 1996, 64; Whelan 2006, 31-32.

¹⁶⁵ Gierlichs 1996, 115-128; Whelan 2006, 36-39.

¹⁶⁶ Grabar 1968, 648; Shoshan 1991, 77.

prestige was the main motivating force behind this development.¹⁶⁷ The interest in figural iconography was arguably the result of a synergetic combination between courtly and wealthy urban types of patronage. Whatever the case may be, the popularity of figural iconography was apparently shared by most strata of society.¹⁶⁸

In addition to the sculptural reliefs and metalwork, the popularity of figural imagery in the region during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries can perhaps be seen most clearly in a remarkable group of copper coins that were issued by the various Turkish dynasties that ruled Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia, such as the Artuqids, Zangids, and Danishmendids.¹⁶⁹ In striking contrast with the already longstanding Muslim tradition of providing coins with inscriptions only, the decoration of these coppers, which were intended for local distribution, comprised a combination of inscriptions and figural imagery. The models for the figural themes were directly derived from a richly variegated assembly of non-Islamic coins that circulated in the region, ranging from ancient Greek, Roman, and Sassanian types to more or less contemporary Middle Byzantine mints. Christian subjects that were appropriated on the earliest types include images of the Virgin crowning the Emperor, the Archangel Michael, and Christ Enthroned. Taken together, the wide variety of images depicted on these copper coins are indicative of the eclecticism and cultural and religious interaction typical of art production during the Artuqid, Zangid, and Ayyubid periods.

Initially, the Christian models were initially taken over virtually unchanged, many of the new coppers even retaining such Christian symbols as the cross in the halo and the Greek abbreviation IC XC ('Jesus Christ'), but these emblems were soon omitted to adapt the images to the rhetorical needs of the Muslim rulers. A similar deliberate process of de-Christianization of Christian source types can be seen in the adoption and subsequent adaptation of the image of St George killing the dragon: the figure was transformed from a distinctively Christian warrior saint to a more anonymous horseman, and the whole was Islamized through the addition of the titles of the Muslim ruler issuing the coin in question (see Section 7.3.2).

A variety of reasons have been put forward in order to explain the occurrence of distinctively Christian themes on these copper coins – ranging from the die-cutters themselves being Christians, to the decoration being some sort of concession to the large Christian population – but a more likely reason is simply the availability of Byzantine coins in the region at the time.¹⁷⁰ Adopting Christian imagery in a process of reverse acculturation, the new Turkish leaders tried to identify themselves with their predecessors by continuing to use older coin types, despite the fact that they were Christian.¹⁷¹ Once the new leaders had more or less secured their rule, the Christian symbols were subsequently omitted in favour of images that were either more ambiguous, albeit still recognizably grounded in Christian art, or with themes that were known from the courtly arts, which in themselves also lacked clear religious overtones. Indeed, the symbolic nature of the images on these coppers could serve a range of audiences. This brings us to the phenomenon of a common Christian-Muslim visual culture, which is encountered throughout the Islamic Middle East, including the Syro-Mesopotamian region.

2.7.1 A Common Christian-Muslim Visual Culture

¹⁶⁷ Pancaroğlu 2000, esp. 254-265; Whelan 2006, 41-48.

¹⁶⁸ Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina 2001, 264-265; Hillenbrand 2009, 33 n. 81.

¹⁶⁹ Lowick 1985; Spengler/Sayles 1992; *idem* 1996; Whelan 2006, 15-30, 49-337; Heidemann 2006, 97-113.

¹⁷⁰ Particularly revealing in this respect is the fact that Christianizing types were not issued in Mosul, where Byzantine coins were never widely available, or in any other city south of Aleppo (Lowick 1985, 168).

¹⁷¹ On the process of acculturation and reverse acculturation, see Vorderstrasse 2005a, 5-6.

The Muslims were not the only ones who benefited from the economic prosperity in the Great Seljuk successor states. Apart from a few short interim periods when they were more or less restricted in their freedom, such as during the reign of Nur al-Din Zangi (1146-1174), the local Christians enjoyed a great deal of tolerance and protection from the Muslim authorities. They participated fully in the political, economic, and cultural life of the time. Besides the blossoming of Islamic art, the production of Christian art also reached a peak. It has been remarked that the building and reconstruction of monasteries and churches is as conspicuous as the construction of mosques and mausoleums.¹⁷² Moreover, throughout this artistic activity there was apparently fruitful interaction between Christians and Muslims.

Illustrative in this respect is a well-known group of some eighteen silver-inlaid metalwork objects, including candlesticks, ewers, cylindrical boxes, incense burners, trays, a basin, and a large canteen (Pl. 9), which are generally assigned to Syria and Northern Mesopotamia.¹⁷³ Dating from around the mid-thirteenth century, these vessels are decorated with Gospel scenes, images of the Virgin and Child, and friezes of saints and clerics, together with scenes familiar from Islamic art such as the standard set of images of the Princely Cycle. More or less the same visual vocabulary is encountered on a number of closely related works of gilded and enamelled glass.¹⁷⁴

The convergence of Islamic and Christian art exemplified by these pieces has raised important questions concerning the identity of the people who produced, commissioned, and used them, and about the possible functions of these kinds of objects. For what audience were these vessels intended and how were they viewed? As most of them lack identifying inscriptions mentioning either the name of the patron or the artist, these questions have proved notoriously difficult to answer. Only two pieces contain inscriptions that help us to clarify their original context and ownership: a tray in Paris and a basin in Washington D.C. bear the name and the titles of the Ayyubid Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din, who ruled in Diyar Bakr (1232-1239), in Damascus (1239 and 1245-1249), and in Egypt (1240-1249).¹⁷⁵

It has been suggested that the more precious pieces of fine workmanship were acquired by members of both the Muslim upper class and the Crusader nobility, and served as luxury goods. The more humble pieces of minor craftsmanship, which were mass-produced as household utensils, are traditionally thought to have been intended for indigenous Christians.¹⁷⁶ This point of view fails to acknowledge, however, that the luxurious objects with rich decoration could equally have been commissioned or bought by wealthy indigenous Christians. Whether used by Muslims, Crusaders or local Christians, it seems that most of these artefacts belonged in the public or private sphere, that is, in a broadly secular context.

It is unknown whether any of the above-mentioned objects were originally ever destined for a church or a monastery, although this could well have been the case. An inlaid chalice dating from the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century, and thought to have been produced in either Syria or Egypt, suggests that some of these pieces may indeed have been used in a Christian religious setting. The chalice is not decorated with figural imagery, but contains an Arabic inscription informing us that this piece was made 'at the order of the reverend father of the monastery of Dayr al-Madfan'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina 2001, 217.

¹⁷³ Baer 1989; Schneider 1973; Katzenstein/Lowry 1983; Khoury 1998; Hoffman 2004; Hillenbrand 2009, 31-32; Auld 2009, 50-68.

¹⁷⁴ Carswell 1998, 61-63; Georgopoulou 1999, 289-321; Carboni/Whitehouse 2001, 198-207, 240-260, cat. nos 121, 123-124; Hillenbrand 2009, 27.

¹⁷⁵ Louvre, inv. no. MAO 360; Ward 2005, 314-315, Fig. 18.1. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, inv. no. 55.10; Baer 1989, 18-19, Pls 63-68; Ward 2005, 315-321, Figs 18.2-18.7; Khoury 1998, 65-67, Figs 2, 2a-2f; Hoffman 2004, 132, Figs 5-6; Auld 2009, 60-67, Pls 3.5-3.7.

¹⁷⁶ Baer 1989, 48; C. Hillenbrand 1999, 388-391, following the conclusions of Baer.

¹⁷⁷ London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. 761-1900; Stanley 2004, 29, Pl. 27.

As far as the manufacture of these works is concerned, it is virtually impossible to establish the exact amount of input from the different religious groups. Eva Hoffman has correctly argued that 'the identities of the makers, patrons, functions, and meanings of many of these works of art remain speculative'. She further adds that 'there is probably no single answer to these questions and that these works speak to a multiplicity of engagements among all these populations'.¹⁷⁸ Hoffman concludes that the existence of this distinct group of objects is explicable from their intrinsic appeal to both Muslim and Christian clientele. Considering that most of the inlaid brasses with Christian scenes are provided with inscriptions of rather neutral content, it seems most likely that they were not the result of a specific commission but, certainly in the case of the less luxurious pieces, were made for the public market, where they were bought by those who could afford them, regardless of their religious affiliation.

The specific meanings attached to these pieces depended on the context in which they were viewed, or perhaps more specifically, the religious background of the viewer. For the Crusader nobility, the expensive pieces must have appealed to their taste for exotic luxury goods, and as such they belong to a larger body of objects and things that were acquired primarily as items for display. Produced by local craftsmen, these objects may have been appropriated by the Frankish elite in order to emulate their Muslim counterparts.¹⁷⁹ A variety of possible readings have been proposed for the Muslim viewer. Eva Baer has suggested that these vessels reminded the Muslims of their authority over the Christians.¹⁸⁰ Rane Katzstein and Glenn Lowry, on the other hand, argue that the representations of Christ may be seen as the conscious juxtaposition of Christ and the Muslim ruler, pointing out that Jesus in contemporary Islamic literature was portrayed as a 'just and divinely inspired king'.¹⁸¹

Nuha Khoury proposes that the scenes represented on al-Salih's basin are a visual equivalent of the *Merits of Jerusalem* (*Fada'il al-Quds*), a particularly popular and widespread literary genre in which Jesus son of Mary (Isa ibn Maryam) is featured as one of the Muslim prophets preceding Mohammed and as the Messiah.¹⁸² Assuming that the artefacts were made for the general market, scholars have argued that certain scenes which Muslims would have considered either offensive, or at least inappropriate, such as the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, or the Ascension, were consciously omitted in order not to put off any possible buyers.¹⁸³ Oleg Grabar, finally, is probably correct in suggesting that Christian iconographic subjects 'simply became one of the possible options in the standard imagery available within the Muslim world'.¹⁸⁴

Whatever the exact meanings attached to this class of objects, the important observation to be made here is that the presence of Christian symbols and subjects on a work of art does not necessarily reflect the religious identity of its owner. Muslims and Christians apparently shared the same fashionable taste, which was connected with their social position rather than their religious affiliation. Notably, the distinct overlap between Christian and Islamic art is not confined to the realm of private display, nor to portable objects of which the origins and intended audience are usually difficult to ascertain. It can also be detected within distinctively Christian religious contexts. In Egypt, for example, Coptic sanctuary screens dating from between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries are virtually interchangeable with contemporary *minbars* and *mihirabs* in mosques.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁸ Hoffman 2004, 129-130. In addition to the problems mentioned by Hoffman, Folda (2005, 362-366) emphasizes the difficulty of establishing the exact provenance of these kinds of objects.

¹⁷⁹ Vorderstrasse 2005a, 124-128.

¹⁸⁰ Baer 1989, 48.

¹⁸¹ Katzstein/Lowry 1983, 65-66.

¹⁸² Khoury 1998, 67-68.

¹⁸³ Jacoby 2004, 109; Grabar 2001a, 240.

¹⁸⁴ Grabar 2001a, 241.

¹⁸⁵ Jeudy 2006; *idem* 2007; Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

This remarkable uniformity may at least be explained by the use of similar decorative models, which, as in the case of the inlaid pieces of metalwork discussed above, reflects a shared taste among Christians and Muslims, but there is also every reason to suggest that they were actually produced in the same workshops, a matter to which we shall return shortly. As will be clear from the following chapters, thirteenth-century church architecture, sculptural reliefs, illustrated manuscripts, and liturgical objects from the Mosul area show evidence of the same degree of syncretism. In contrast with the anonymous objects referred to above, the intended audience for these works of art, and the particular context in which they originally functioned, is firmly established.

In short, the distinct overlap between Christian and Islamic art, which can be observed in virtually every region where Christians and Muslims lived in close proximity to each other, should thus be explained as a result of their membership of the same visual culture.¹⁸⁶ The application of a variety of iconographic themes and decorative patterns in various contexts, both Christian and Muslim, reflects the cultural symbiosis between the two religious communities at the time.

2.7.2 Mixed Workshops and Christian-Muslim Collaboration

Besides a shared common visual culture, the correspondence and interchangeability between the artistic traditions of the different faiths seems to point to the possibility of mixed workshops, where artists of different religious backgrounds produced works of art using the same techniques and styles for their local patrons, both Muslim and Christian alike. Written evidence from the medieval Eastern Mediterranean in support of this assumption can be found in the texts known as the Cairo Geniza documents. These Jewish written sources, more specifically those dating from the period between 1061 and 1240, confirm that Christians, Muslims, and Jews cooperated in various kinds of commercial activities, such as the metalwork, glass, and textile industries. They evidently organized fairs together, at which local Christian and Muslim merchants traded their goods.¹⁸⁷

Although the subject of interreligious workshops still needs further research, it is at least clear that there existed formal partnerships between artists from different faiths, whether organized into workshops proper or not. This is clearly suggested by an example from the realm of manuscript production, more specifically an Arabic manuscript of the *De Materia Medica* of Dioscurides, presently in Istanbul, which was made at the order of Shams al-Din Abu'l-Fada'il Muhammad, an Ayyubid ruler of Northern Mesopotamia.¹⁸⁸ The manuscript is dated to A.H. 626 (i.e., A.D. 1229); the date is followed by the phrase 'glory to God' in Syriac. The medical text was copied by a Christian scribe, Behnam ibn Musa ibn Yusuf al-Mawsili. In view of his name, one is tempted to suggest that he was a Syrian Orthodox Christian originating from Mosul.¹⁸⁹ Whatever the case may be, this same Behnam was also responsible for the transcription of another illustrated Arabic Dioscurides manuscript, in

¹⁸⁶ Hunt 2000d, 154-197; Hoffman 2004, 131-133; Snelders/Jeudy 2006, 138-139.

¹⁸⁷ Goitein 1967, 85, 254; Georgopoulou 1999, 295-296.

¹⁸⁸ Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Library, Ahmet III 2127: Catalogue New York 1997, no. 288; Hunt 2000d, 154-157, Figs 2-3.

¹⁸⁹ It should be noted, however, that the *nisba* al-Mawsili ('from Mosul') does not always necessarily refer to a person working in Mosul, or even originating from the city. The *nisba* al-Mawsili is found on some thirty metalwork objects dating from the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century. While a number of these can be ascribed to Mosul with certainty on the basis of additional inscriptions (e.g., the Blacas Ewer in London, British Museum, inv. no. 66.12-29.61), others were produced in cities such as Damascus and Cairo. As emphasized by Sheila Blair (1998, 114), 'This *nisba* does refer not to a geographical site, but rather to a product of technique associated with that city or to a group of artisans who traced their lineage back to metalworkers in Mosul'.

which he signs himself not as ‘al-Mawsili’ but ‘al-Masihi’, which may be translated as ‘the Christian’.¹⁹⁰

Even though the colophon of the Istanbul Dioscurides does not mention the names of the painters who executed its miniatures, it may nevertheless be assumed that at least one of them was a Muslim, in view of the signature that he left on the roots of two plants which he illustrated: he signed himself ‘Abd al-Jabbar ibn ‘Ali.¹⁹¹ Another instance of such inter-religious craftsmanship, this time from Crusader-ruled territory, follows from the written description that canon Wilbrand of Oldenburg made of the new palace of John of Ibelin in Beirut, which he visited in 1212. After giving a detailed description of the lavish decoration of the palace’s interior, which included marble wall panels, mosaics, and paintings, Oldenburg adds that ‘in all this work the Syrians, the Saracens, and the Greeks vied with each other for distinction’.¹⁹²

In these two cases, we are dealing essentially with works of art produced for broadly secular contexts, but this is not to say that Christians and Muslims did not meet each other in the religious sphere. In his *Chronicle*, Patriarch Michael the Syrian recounts that during building activities at Deir Mar Barsauma in 1169, the monks of the monastery were assisted by members of both the Christian and Muslim communities.¹⁹³ The work comprised the building of an aqueduct, needed to supply drinking water for the large number of pilgrims – ‘Christians, Muslims, Turks and other peoples’ – who visited the site, especially during the commemoration of Mar Barsauma. At the time, the fame of this Syrian Orthodox saint was widespread; the monastery was an important centre of pilgrimage and a famous place of healing, apparently for both Christians and Muslims alike.¹⁹⁴

The above discussion shows that in the Islamic Middle East, Muslims and Christians collaborated on a daily basis, producing works of art irrespective of the distinct religious affiliation of their clients. The surviving Eastern Christian patrimony nevertheless seems to suggest that this artistic collaboration, which was arguably based on a combination of shared and complementary skills, was largely limited to certain types of media. As far as Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon are concerned, the distinct overlap between Christian and Muslim art and the artistic interaction between artists and commissioners of the different faiths seems to have been largely restricted to metalwork, woodwork, and manuscript illustration.

The execution of wall paintings appears to have been the sole responsibility of Christian artists, either Byzantine or indigenous.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, the limited number of monumental paintings that have survived from the medieval Islamic context does not allow for any definite conclusions in this respect (see Section 9.2.2). It remains to be seen whether such a distinction can be observed in case of Christian art from the Mosul area.

2.7.3 Religious Convergence and Joint Christian-Muslim Veneration

During the period under consideration, joint veneration by Christians and Muslims, as attested for Deir Mar Barsauma, was a common phenomenon throughout the Middle East, as it still is today. Perhaps the best recorded instance of such a site of religious convergence is the Melkite Monastery of Our Lady at Saydnaya in Syria.¹⁹⁶ A detailed description of the

¹⁹⁰ Paris, BnF arabe 4947: Grube 1959, 170, no. III; Hoffman 1982, 161-164; Leroy 1974a, 100 n. 4; Catalogue New York 1997, 433 n. 6.

¹⁹¹ Fols 29v and 29r: Ettinghausen 1962, 74; Hunt 2000d, 154, 157.

¹⁹² Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 16; Jacoby 2004, 108; Folda 2005, 136-137.

¹⁹³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*: Chabot 1899-1924, III, 321-332.

¹⁹⁴ Honigsmann 1951, 46, 48, 64; Kawerau 1960, 46, 103.

¹⁹⁵ Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

¹⁹⁶ For an introduction to Christian-Muslim convergence, focusing on Saydnaya, see Kedar 2001; Meri 2002, 210-213.

religious practices taking place at the monastery in the twelfth century is given by Burchard of Strassbourg, the ambassador of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa at the court of Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub (Saladin) in 1175: 'To this place on the feast of the Assumption of the glorious Virgin and on that of her Nativity all the Saracens of that province flock to pray together with the Christians, and the Saracens perform their devotions there with great reverence'.¹⁹⁷ The main attraction for both Christian and Muslim pilgrims was the famous icon of the Virgin, known as the *ṣahurā* (Syriac for 'illustrious', 'celebrated', or 'renowned'), which was believed to represent the Virgin suckling the Child.¹⁹⁸

Burchard refers to the icon, stating that 'on this panel a likeness of the Blessed Virgin had once been painted, but now, wondrous to relate, the picture on wood has become incarnate and oil, smelling sweeter than balsam, unceasingly flows from it. By which oil many Christians, Saracens and Jews are often cured from ailments'.¹⁹⁹ According to the European pilgrim Thetmar, who passed through Damascus in 1217, an unspecified Atabeg ruler of Damascus visited the site in order to be cured from his blindness: 'It reached him about the miracles which God worked through [Christ's] mother the Virgin. He went there; his faith (*Islāmuḥu*) did not prevent him from visiting her shrine (*maqām*) because of his reliance on God and his hope of being cured. He prostrated himself before it and prayed. When he finished supplicating he raised his eyes to the sky. He saw the light of the lantern glowing before the icon. Then he gazed at those around him and praised God with those present. In view of the fact that his eyes first landed on the light of the candle, he made a vow to God to visit the shrine (*maqām*) annually and bring along nine measures of oil which were carried there ... down to the days of Nūr al-Dīn'.²⁰⁰

The custom of Muslims visiting Christian churches and monasteries should be seen within the broader context of the Muslim practice of pilgrimage or pious visitation of holy shrines, known in Arabic as *ziyara* (lit. 'a visit', 'visitation'), which proliferated throughout the Islamic world especially from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁰¹ Reflective of the growth of the performance of *ziyara* and the veneration of holy persons is the twelfth-century *Guide to Knowledge of Pilgrimage Places* (*Kitab al-Ishara ila Maʿrifat al-Ziyarat*), the first comprehensive guide that mentions pilgrimage places throughout the Islamic world and the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁰² The guide, which was intended for a Muslim readership, was written by the prominent mystic ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakr al-Harawī (d. 1215), a native of Mosul. In addition to Muslim shrines, al-Harawī's guide contains many references to Christian, Jewish, and common holy shrines and tombs, like those of shared prophets and patriarchs. In representing Jewish and Christian sites as integral aspects of the sacred landscape of the Islamic world, the guide seems to replicate the inclusive and eclectic character of Sufism, a mystical religious movement in Islam which had a widespread appeal among the common people.²⁰³

Indeed, the proliferation of *ziyara* culture, which was accompanied by a rapid growth of pilgrimage sites and shrine complexes throughout the Islamic Middle East, was probably greatly influenced by Sufism.²⁰⁴ Displaying a general tendency towards blurring the boundaries between Islam and other religions, Sufi ecumenism at the time appears to have reached its peak in Northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia, especially. As we have seen above, these regions were melting pots with richly variegated populations, comprising various

¹⁹⁷ Immerzeel 2007a, 15; *idem* 2009, 44.

¹⁹⁸ Immerzeel 2007a, 16-18.

¹⁹⁹ Immerzeel 2007a, 15; Immerzeel 2009, 44.

²⁰⁰ Meri 2002, 211.

²⁰¹ *ET*², XI, 524-529 (J.W. Meri); Meri 2002, esp. 251-272.

²⁰² Meri 2004.

²⁰³ For an introduction to Sufism, see Hodgson 1974, I, 359-409; II, 201-254; Berkey 2003, 231-247.

²⁰⁴ Hodgson 1974, II, 218; Meri 2002, 261.

religious and ethnic groups after the Great Seljuk conquest of the eleventh century. Here we might refer to the well-known verses of Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), an influential Sufi who worked and lived in Konya, then the capital of the Seljuks of Rum: ‘What is to be done, O Muslims? for I do not recognize myself. I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Zoroastrian, nor Muslim’.²⁰⁵

Whatever the exact role played by Sufism, syncretistic elements and patterns were relatively pronounced among the religious practices of the Muslim common people at the time.²⁰⁶ As argued by Douglas Patton, ‘The emerging trend toward the veneration of shrines, along with the growing popularity of Sufism, are signs of a developing requirement for a more personal, immediate religious experience – one which did not require literacy or the credentials of a scholar to understand and participate in it. Shrine veneration was a popular phenomenon, indicative of the increasing accessibility of Islam to the illiterate masses’.²⁰⁷ For the Muslim commoners, in particular, Christian and Jewish shrines appear simply to have become an additional object of pilgrimage. Like the Muslim shrines proper, these sacred places were considered repositories of the blessing that inhered in the saints buried therein. Muslim pilgrims visited the tombs of the saints to ask for blessing (*baraka*), to seek their intercession to cure an illness, or to ensure the goods of life, such as marriage, children, and prosperity.²⁰⁸

For similar reasons, Christians and Jews frequented the sacred places of Muslims. In Damascus, for example, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians visited the tomb of the Sufi saint Shayk Arslan (d. 1155), who defended Damascus against the Crusaders, to make supplication there.²⁰⁹ In Damascus, Christians would also have been attracted to the Great Mosque, one of the most venerated Muslim pilgrimage sites at the time, which contained a shrine dedicated to Yahya ibn Zakkarya (St John the Baptist).²¹⁰ Moreover, adherents of the different faiths sometimes also cared for the same religious institutions, such as in Iraq, where Muslim and Jewish custodians worked together at the Jewish shrine of the Prophet Ezekiel in the town of al-Kifl.²¹¹

In addition to numerous other examples, joint Christian-Muslim veneration took place at the Church of St George or Kirk Dam Altı Kilise at Belisırma in Anatolia, where in the thirteenth century Christians and Muslims came together to venerate St George.²¹² It might be noted that the church’s dedication scene, which was painted between 1282 and 1298, when the area was in the hands of the Seljuks of Rum, represents St George as a military saint standing between the donor portraits of amir Basileios Giagoupis (Basil Jacob) and a certain Lady Thamar. Basileios, who is dressed in a white kaftan and a turban, was probably a local Byzantine Orthodox dignitary serving in the administration of the Seljuks; Thamar may have been a princess of Georgian royal descent.²¹³ But what concerns us here is that St George, one of the most popular saints among the Christians of the Middle East, enjoyed particular popularity among the Muslims as well.

An Islamic version of the legend of St George (Arabic Jirjis) is attested already from the ninth century onwards. A detailed account of Jirjis life, which was probably based on a Christian Arabic version dating from the seventh or eighth century, is encountered, for

²⁰⁵ Berkey 2003, 232-233; Wolper 2003; Shukurov 2004, 744-746.

²⁰⁶ Berkey 2003, 249.

²⁰⁷ Patton 1982, 28.

²⁰⁸ On *baraka*, see *EF*², I, 1032 (G.S. Colin); Meri 1999b; *idem* 2002, esp. 17-18, 101-119.

²⁰⁹ Meri 2002, 3, 209-210.

²¹⁰ Meri 2002, 44, 200-201, Fig. 6; Hillenbrand 1994a, 267. Strikingly, the Great Mosque of Aleppo contains a shrine for Yahya ibn Zakkariyya as well (Tabbaa 1997, 25, 105 n. 1).

²¹¹ Meri 2002, 3, 229-240.

²¹² Vryonis 1977.

²¹³ Restle 1967, I, 174-175; III, Pls 510, 515; Walter 2001, 127; Immerzeel 2009, 158, 164-165.

example, in the encyclopaedic work of the Muslim historian Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839-923), entitled *Prophets and Patriarchs*.²¹⁴ Moreover, this version of the legend of St George became an integral part of the *Lives of the Prophets* (*Qisas al-anbiya*), an Islamic collection of lives and miracles of prophets and saints, such as the one compiled by Abu Ishaq Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Tha'labi (d. 1036).²¹⁵ According to the Islamic version, St George was martyred in Mosul under the mythical king Dadiyana, in whom we recognize the otherwise unknown Persian king Dadianus of the earliest Greek versions of St George's *vita*.²¹⁶

Considering that the Muslim tradition holds that Mosul was the site where St George suffered his martyrdom, it comes as no surprise that the city, in addition to a number of churches dedicated to St George (p. x), also houses an Islamic shrine containing the saint's tomb, known as the Mashad al-Nabi Jirjis. Arguably built on the vestiges of an ancient Christian church, this shrine was one of the most important pilgrimage sites of Mosul, visited by pilgrims and travellers from all over the Islamic world, including the Spanish Muslim traveller Ibn Jubayr, who passed through the city in 1184.²¹⁷ Although the sources are silent on this point, one inclines to assume that the tomb of St George also attracted Christian worshippers who were seeking his intercession.

Moreover, in popular Muslim culture, St George is associated with the mythical figure al-Khidr (Arabic for 'the green one'), who is identified as the anonymous companion of Moses during his search for knowledge, as recounted in the Qur'an (18:60-82).²¹⁸ The cult of al-Khidr was widespread in the Middle East during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially in Syria and Palestine, where he was venerated at various sites and in various religious contexts – Christian, Jewish, and Muslim.²¹⁹ In fact, St George and al-Khidr appear to have been mutually interchangeable, mainly in their ability to intervene directly in the lives of men and their power to perform all sorts of miracles; the two had different connotations, depending on the religious background of the worshipper visiting these sites. The success of al-Khidr may be explained from the fact that his cult and identity easily adopted the formal characteristics of other holy figures, whether Islamic, Jewish or Christian, which in turn might account for his popularity among audiences of different faiths. Al-Khidr even acquired St George's function of dragon-slayer, perhaps already during the period under consideration, but this is only attested from the middle of the sixteenth century, at least in the written sources.²²⁰

The interchangeability of al-Khidr also applies to other saints, in particular the Prophet Elija, Qur'anic Ilyas. Amongst other sites, al-Khidr was probably venerated by Muslims at the Melkite Cave Chapel of Mar Elias in Ma'arrat Saydnaya, Syria, which is dedicated to the Prophet Elijah.²²¹ The close association between al-Khidr and Elijah also gave rise to a composite saint known as Khidr-Ilyas, who was much venerated in Anatolia and Northern Mesopotamia.²²² By the early fourteenth century, when the Moroccan Muslim Ibn Battuta (c. 1333) travelled along the well-known north-south pilgrimage route, which stretched from

²¹⁴ Perlmann 1987, 173-186; Shukurov 2004, 734.

²¹⁵ Brinner 2002, 715-725; Shukurov 2004, 734-735.

²¹⁶ *EF*², II, 553 (B. Carra de Vaux); Shukurov 2004, 734-735.

²¹⁷ Broadhurst 1952, 244. It is also referred to in al-Harawi's pilgrimage guide (Meri 2004, 178). On the Mashad al-Nabi Jirjis, see Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, II, 236-238; Patton 1982, 465-466. Today, the shrine is situated within the Mosque complex of al-Nabi Jirjis, which was built in 1393.

²¹⁸ On al-Khidr, see *EF*², IV, 902-905 (A.J. Wensinck); Hasluck 1929, I, 319-336; Meri 1999a; Franke 2000; van Lint 2005.

²¹⁹ Meri 1999a; *idem* 2002, 177-183; Shukurov 2004, 735-774; Immerzeel 2009, 54-56.

²²⁰ Hasluck 1929, I, 47-49; Wolper 2000, 314-316; Pancaroğlu 2004, 157-158; Shukurov 2004, 743-744.

²²¹ Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

²²² *EF*², V, 5 (P.N. Boratav); Wolper 2000, 315-316; Pancaroğlu 2004, 157-158.

Sinope on the Black Sea through Elbistan in Anatolia to either Aleppo in Syria or Mosul in Northern Mesopotamia, many former Christian sites dedicated to St George and other important churches and monasteries had been taken over by Muslims and rededicated to either al-Khidr or Khidr-Ilyas.²²³ Although these holy sites were now occupied by Muslims, they continued to be frequented by Christians. One such example is the hermitage of Khidr-Ilyas in Sinope, which, according to Ibn Battuta, was never without a resident devotee.²²⁴

There may also have been sites that were associated with al-Khidr or Khidr-Ilyas, but remained in the hands of Christian communities. A good example is Syrian Orthodox Deir Mar Behnam near Mosul, where the monastery's patron saint is invoked under the name of Khidr-Ilyas in an Uighur inscription (A.D. 1300) placed above his tomb (see Appendix B, inscr. no. AF.02.1C).²²⁵ The association between Mar Behnam and Khidr-Ilyas at Deir Mar Behnam might perhaps be seen as the result of a Muslim intrusion on the site, as a Muslim attempt to lay claim to the monastery in general and the tomb of Mar Behnam in particular, especially considering that in fourteenth-century Anatolia the association between Christian sites and al-Khidr or Khidr-Ilyas often seems to have marked an intermediate step in the transformation of a Christian building into a Muslim cult site.²²⁶

On the other hand, it has also been suggested that the connection was consciously forged by the monastic community itself, as a precautionary measure after the monastery had already been looted by Mongol raiders in 1295 (see Appendix B, inscr. no. AE.0120).²²⁷ Seen from this perspective, the association between Mar Behnam and Khidr-Ilyas, a holy figure that enjoyed great popularity among Muslims at the time, is the result of an ingenious endeavour to safeguard the monastery from any possible future Muslim attacks. We now know that Deir Mar Behnam was never taken over or ruined by Muslims, but at the time the monastic community's concern for preserving their monastery in the face of continuing Islamic pressure must have played an important role in their daily lives and arguably affected their internal and external policies.

Today, Deir Mar Behnam is often referred to as the Monastery of Khidr-Ilyas and the relics of Mar Behnam preserved there attract a variety of religious groups – Christians, Muslims, and Yezidis. Considering the long-standing tradition of joint veneration, it is conceivable that this was already the case during the Middle Ages. In his thirteenth-century gazetteer of the Middle East, the Muslim geographer Yaquṭ al-Hamawī refers to Deir Mar Behnam under its Arabic name, Dayr al-Jubb: 'To the east of Mosul, between the latter and Erbil; a famous monastery visited by people on account of epilepsy from which they are cured'.²²⁸

What these examples of joint veneration show is that the demarcation lines between Christians and Muslims are often difficult to draw, at least on the level of popular Islamic culture. The written sources reveal that ordinary Muslims commonly participated in Christian festivals such as Palm Sunday and Easter.²²⁹ Muslim commoners regarded Christian saints, prophets, and other holy persons as divinely inspired miracle workers from whom they could obtain blessing and intercession.²³⁰ Scores of Muslims visited monasteries, which were known for their healing qualities. These practices were often criticized and condemned by medieval Muslim legists and theologians, especially those of the Sunni Hanbali legal school, such as the renowned Syrian theologian and polemicist Ibn Taymiya (1263-1328), who considered the veneration of Christian saints and the religious convergence taking place at

²²³ Wolper 2000; *idem* 2003, 97.

²²⁴ Gibb 1962, 465-466.

²²⁵ Harrak/Ruji 2004; Harrak 2009, inscr. no. AF.02.1C.

²²⁶ Wolper 2000, 314-315.

²²⁷ Fiey 1965, II, 575-578; *idem* 1970b, 5, 19; cf. Section 6.2.2.

²²⁸ Harrak 2009.

²²⁹ Shoshan 1991, 86; Meri 1999a; Kedar 2001, all with further references.

²³⁰ Meri 1999b, 46-69.

Christian sacred sites as a threat to 'orthodox' Islam.²³¹ However, together with works of art such as the brass vessels with Christian scenes, these accounts clearly suggest that the adherents of the two faiths collaborated and interacted closely on a day-to-day basis.

2.8 The Golden Age of Mosul

As in other regions of the Middle East, the Mosul area was the scene of great cultural and artistic activities during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. An influential factor in this efflorescence can be found in the historical and economic circumstances at the time. As mentioned previously, the city of Mosul reached its political and cultural apogee in this period, first under the Zangid dynasty (1127-1233) and then under its successor Badr al-Din Lu'lu' (1211-1259), who reigned initially as an atabeg of the last Zangids, and, from 1233 on, as an independent ruler. He cultivated close relationships with the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad, the Ayyubids of Syria, and the Mongols, respectively, shifting his loyalty depending on the political situation of the day. In 1245, he recognized the authority of the Mongols and supported their invasion of Mesopotamia, thus saving Mosul from being sacked by Mongol invaders, a fate suffered by so many cities at the time.

Due to his excellent political and diplomatic skills, Badr al-Din Lu'lu' was able to maintain a relatively peaceful regime, during which the economy and prosperity of the region grew tremendously. Because of its strategic position on the banks of the Tigris, linking it up with Baghdad to the south and main cities to the north, and its position on the main caravan routes that linked Persia and India with the Mediterranean, the city was a major commercial centre where all sorts of luxury goods were traded. Christian merchants and commercial agents from Mosul operated in the main transit ports for merchandise transported from the East, such as Acre and Tripoli.²³²

This thriving trade situation also created favourable circumstances for Mosul's arts and crafts to prosper, including the ceramic,²³³ textile,²³⁴ and metalwork industries.²³⁵ In his *Geography*, the Spanish Muslim geographer Ibn Sa'id, who travelled in Mesopotamia in 1250, records the following: 'Mosul ... there are many crafts in this city, especially inlaid-brass vessels, which are exported (and presented) to rulers, as are the silken garments woven there'.²³⁶

The general rise of royal patronage under the various dynasties ruling in Northern Mesopotamia also seems to have acted as a catalyst for the flourishing of the local artistic tradition. Badr al-Din Lu'lu' and members of his court actively supported the metalwork industry in commissioning a number of silver-inlaid bronze vessels, of which at least six have survived in European collections.²³⁷ In addition to featuring the Princely Cycle, these kinds of vessels are generally decorated with astrological subjects, such as signs of the zodiac, along with real and fantastic animals, inscriptions, and intricate arabesque designs. Illustrative of the high degree of craftsmanship that was reached in Mosul at the time is the famous Blacas

²³¹ Shoshan 1991, 86, 91-92; Meri 2002, 130-132; Berkey 2003, 251-252.

²³² Richard 1999, 384-385; Jacoby 2004, 103.

²³³ Reitlinger 1951, 11-22.

²³⁴ Serjeant 1942, 91-92.

²³⁵ Rice 1953a; *idem* 1953b, 229-232; *idem* 1957; James 1980; Baer 1983, 300-301; Ward 1993, 80-84; Allan 1999, 18-19, 56-57.

²³⁶ Rice 1957, 283-284; Allen 1999, 18.

²³⁷ Rice 1950; Baer 1983, 77, 118, 139, 211, Figs 56, 95, 118; Ward 1993, 80, Fig. 58; Catalogue Berlin 2006, no. 30; Auld 2009, 47, 49, 70.

Ewer, which was produced in the city in 1232.²³⁸ The most important expression of royal patronage, however, was architecture. Both the members of the Zangid dynasty and Badr al-Din Lu'lu', but also the *ulama* community of Mosul, engaged in major building activities, which included the construction of new buildings and the renovation and reconstruction of older ones.²³⁹

In Mosul, Badr al-Din Lu'lu' restored the city walls, repaired the Sinjar Gate (1243/44),²⁴⁰ and rebuilt the Government Houses (*dar al-mamlaka*), an assembly of political structures to which he added his own palace known as the Qara Saray. Erected at the site of a former Zangid palace in 1233, the year in which the caliph officially recognized Lu'lu' as the independent ruler of Mosul, the Qara Saray was apparently meant to exemplify the change of political power. The interior decoration consisted of painted stucco work that featured popular political iconography, including a variety of animal figures and a frieze of small trilobed arches, each of which contained a nimbed human being. The propagandistic message was further enhanced by means of an elaborately sculptured Arabic inscription bearing the titles of Badr al-Din Lu'lu', which, in view of the fact that it is twice as high as the figural band, was clearly intended to be the centre of attention. The most eye-catching features of the decoration programme, however, are the long horizontal inscriptions that, in accordance with contemporary epigraphic fashions in Iraq, extended along the entire surface of the façade.²⁴¹

In addition to a number of political and military institutions, Badr al-Din Lu'lu' was responsible for the erection of some fourteen religious shrines in the city.²⁴² As part of a social policy towards creating more general acceptance of Shi'ism among his primarily Muslim Sunni subjects, Lu'lu' introduced several shrines dedicated to the martyred descendants of 'Ali into the Sunni educational institutions of Mosul, including the Badriya Madrasa, now the Mashad of the Imam Yahya ibn al-Qasim (A.D. 1239).²⁴³ Apart from the edifice itself, which consists of a rather squat square building surmounted by a pyramidal roof, the tomb has preserved a number of its original features and furnishings, including a wooden sarcophagus inscribed with verses from the Qur'an that are set against an arabesque design, intricate stucco decorations alongside the windows, and marble intarsia work.²⁴⁴ This highly developed technique of inlaying marble was one of the city's main artistic specialities during the period of interest.²⁴⁵

The same architectural shape, which is characteristic of mausolea in northern Iraq at the time, also features in the Mashad of Imam 'Awn al-Din, which was built by Badr al-Din Lu'lu' in 1248/49. Besides numerous inscriptions, Lu'lu' provided it with a dome with a rich *muqarnas* decoration, a highly sculptured *mihrab*, and a teakwood sarcophagus decorated

²³⁸ London, British Museum, inv. no. 66.12-29.61; Hagedorn 1992; Ward 1993, 80, Figs 59-60; Catalogue Paris 2001, no. 122; Auld 2009, 47, 49, Pl. 3.1. For a pen box with an inscription specifying that it was made in Mosul in 1255/56 (Copenhagen, David Collection, inv. no. 6/1997), see Folsach 2001, cat. no. 506; Catalogue Berlin 2006, no. 28.

²³⁹ Patton 1982, *passim*. On the building activities conducted by Badr al-Din Lu'lu', see van Berchem 1906, 197-210; Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, II, 238-288; al-Janabi 1982, 53-54.

²⁴⁰ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, I, 28-29, no. 34 (M. van Berchem); II, 212-214, Fig. 228; III, Pl. CVI 2; Whelan 2006, 431-433.

²⁴¹ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, I, 18-20, inscr. nos 15-19 (M. van Berchem); II, 239-249, Fig. 246; III, Pls VI-VII, XCIV-XCVII, CVI 1; R. Hillenbrand 1999, 419-421.

²⁴² For a list of shrines of Atabegid Mosul, see Patton 1982, 71-73, Table 2.2.

²⁴³ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, I, 22-23, inscr. no. 25 (M. van Berchem); II, 249-263, Figs 250-256, 258-260; III, Pls IX 1, XCIII 1, IC 1-CII; al-Janabi 1982, 53, Pls 23, 169a, Fig. 10; Wirth 1991, 642, Pls 71a-72.

²⁴⁴ Al-Janabi 1982, 254, Pl. 169a; Patton 1982, 490.

²⁴⁵ Al-Janabi 1982, 248, 254-255; Hillenbrand 2006, 21-22.

with arabesques and a large inscription containing the name of its patron.²⁴⁶ He also renovated and reconstructed the Friday Mosque or Mosque al-Nuri, the large congregational mosque that had been built by the Zangid ruler of Aleppo, Nur al-Din Mahmud, during his brief control of the city between 1170 and 1172.²⁴⁷

Outside Mosul, Badr al-Din Lu'lu' constructed a bridge over the Khabur River at 'Araban near Qaraqisya,²⁴⁸ a shrine at Sinjar (Maqam al-Sitt Zainab),²⁴⁹ a caravanserai east of Sinjar,²⁵⁰ and the Mosul Gate in 'Amadiya, situated some 100 km northeast of the city.²⁵¹ In keeping with the contemporary Jaziran preference for dominance imagery, the latter two monuments are each decorated with a pair of dragon slayers. These sculptures will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Mosul appears to have been one of the main centres of illustrated manuscript production in the Middle East during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries,²⁵² alongside other major cities such as Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo. A volume of al-Sufi's *Kitab Suwar al-Kawakib al-Thabita* ('Treatise on the Constellations'), copied by a certain Farah ibn 'Abd Allah al-Habashi, was produced in Mosul in 1233.²⁵³ Manuscripts ascribed to the city, or to the Jazira more broadly, include two copies of the *Kitab al-Diryaq* ('Book of the Theriac', usually called 'Book of Antidotes'), a medical treatise on antidotes used as a remedy against snake venom.²⁵⁴ Badr al-Din Lu'lu', who is known to have commissioned several literary texts, may also have been actively engaged in sponsoring manuscript illuminations. It is commonly assumed that an originally 20-volume set of the *Kitab al-Aghani* ('Book of Songs') was made for Lu'lu' in the period between 1217 and 1219.²⁵⁵ Some of the frontispieces depict a ruler wearing an armband that is inscribed with his name.²⁵⁶

Patton argues that in addition to Badr al-Din Lu'lu''s ordering and sponsoring the foundation of numerous social and religious institutions in Mosul, his energetic patronage of the arts was probably part of a conscious policy aimed at securing the loyalty of the city's population and ensuring that they would not turn their backs on him in favour of one of his opponents.²⁵⁷ This egalitarian treatment of the Muslim Sunnis and Shi'is should certainly be seen in this light, but also his comparatively tolerant attitude towards Mosul's large Christian

²⁴⁶ Van Berchem 1906, 200-201; Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, I, 20-22, inscr. nos 20-24 (M. van Berchem); II, 263-270, Figs 261-265; III, Pls VIII, IC e; IV, Pls CXXXIV-CXXXV; al-Janabi 1982, 53-54, Pl. 169b; Patton 1982, 476; Wirth 1991, 641-642, Pl. 71b.

²⁴⁷ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, II, 226-227; III, Pls V, XC-XCII; Tabbaa 2002.

²⁴⁸ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, I, 6-8, inscr. no. 6 (M. van Berchem); III, Pl. II.

²⁴⁹ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, I, inscr. no. 8 (M. van Berchem); II, 308-311, Figs 285-289; III, Pls III-IV, LXXXVII; Reitlinger 1938, 143-156.

²⁵⁰ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-20, I, 13-15, inscr. no. 13 (M. van Berchem), 205; al-Janabi 1982, 253, Pl. 51; Reitlinger 1938, 149-150, Figs 9-12; Gierlichs 1996, cat. no. 65; Whelan 2006, 429-431, Figs 405-406.

²⁵¹ Al-Janabi 1982, 253, 294, Pl. 175; Gierlichs 1995, 195-206, Fig. 1; Pls 17-22; *idem* 1996, cat. no. 66.

²⁵² Smine, forthcoming, Ch. 3.

²⁵³ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. 5658 (Landberg 71); Contadini 2009, 189, Pls XXXIV, 9.12. An earlier copy of al-Sufi's *Treatise on the Constellations* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hunt. Ms. 212), dating from 1171, may also have been produced in Mosul. The manuscript is apparently dedicated to Saif al-Din Ghazi II, the Zangid ruler of Mosul between 1169 and 1176 (Contadini 2009, 188).

²⁵⁴ Paris, BnF arabe 2964, A.D. 1199; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. A.F. 10, thirteenth century; Ettinghausen 1962, 86, 92; Kerner 2004, 12-13, 259-275; Pancaroğlu 2001; Contadini 2009, 188-189, all with further references.

²⁵⁵ Rice 1953c; Farès 1961; Ettinghausen 1962, 61-65, 147; Nassar 1985, 85; Roxburgh 2005, cat. no. 54; Contadini 2009, 189. Today, only six volumes survive, five of which have retained their original frontispiece: vols II, IV, and XI are in Cairo, National Library, Adab Fârsî 579; vols XVII and XIX are in Istanbul, National Library, Feyzullah Efendi 1565 and 1566; vol. XX is in Copenhagen, Royal Library, arab. 168. Volumes XI and XX are dated 1217 and 1219/20, respectively.

²⁵⁶ Vols XI and IV (Rice 1953c, Figs 14, 17); vol. XVII, Istanbul, National Library, Feyzullah Efendi, nos 1566 and 1565 (Rice 1953c, Figs 18-19; Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 65; Roxburgh 2005, Pl. 54).

²⁵⁷ Patton 1982, 171-173, 364.

community. As Patton argues, 'Lu'lu''s skill at maintaining the support of all groups while especially favouring none is a remarkable achievement which explains not only the duration of his reign, but probably the great efflorescence of the arts in his reign as well'.²⁵⁸ After the death of Badr al-Din Lu'lu' in 1259, however, the prosperous period and cultural bloom in the Mosul area soon came to an end.

Clearly lacking the political tactics of their father, the sons of Badr al-Din Lu'lu' joined the Egyptian Mamluk general Baybars against the Mongols in 1259, a fatal mistake which eventually resulted in the Mongol capture of Mosul 1262. During the siege, which had already started in 1261 and lasted for almost a year, many churches in the capital were either severely damaged or destroyed. The political disturbances of early Mongol rule also entailed difficulties for the numerous Christian villages situated in the Mosul plain. Various bands of Mongol and Kurdish raiders freely roamed the region, attacking and plundering villages and monasteries on their way. In 1261, Kurdish raiders attacked Deir Mar Mattai as well as Qaraqosh – the first of the numerous attacks the village was to suffer in subsequent centuries.²⁵⁹ In his *Chronicle*, Barhebraeus recounts that the raiders occupied a 'nunnery of the sisters' and massacred its occupants, killing many women and children in the act.²⁶⁰ As a result of the instability and the dangers with which they were confronted, many Syrian Orthodox Christians fled Mosul towards Arbela in 1262.²⁶¹

Nevertheless, when dealing with undated medieval Christian works of art from the Mosul region, the years 1261-1262 should not necessarily be taken as a *terminus ante quem*. Despite all the setbacks mentioned, cultural activities, including the building and restoration of churches and monasteries, were still in process in the Syrian Orthodox Church during approximately the first thirty years of Mongol rule. An important factor in this respect was the initially open attitude of the Mongols towards their Christian subjects, which was part of their overarching religious policy of tolerating all faiths as long as they did not rival or challenge Mongol rule.²⁶² Some of the first Mongol rulers even had Christian wives, who were converted by East Syrian missionaries, and a large contingent of their army, including a number of generals, was also made up of East Syrians. When the army of Il-Khan Hülegü (1256-1265) conquered Baghdad in 1258, the Mongols had plundered and killed the local Muslim community, but largely spared the Christians and their property.²⁶³

The news of the sack of Baghdad gave rise to new hope among the Christians. Many were convinced that the Cross was finally about to triumph over Islam and that the establishment of a new Christian Empire in the Middle East was nigh. The Armenian chronicler Stephanos Orbelian (d. 1309), for example, hailed Hülegü and his East Syrian wife Doquz Khatun as the new Constantine and Helena of the era.²⁶⁴ On the Syrian Orthodox side, Barhebraeus, who himself was a frequent visitor to the Mongol court in the 1260s and had even been one of the personal physicians of the khan, saw the fall of Baghdad as possibly the most important turning point in history since the advent of Islam in the seventh century.²⁶⁵

Within a few decades, however, Middle Eastern Christianity suffered a series of blows from which it would never recover. With the Crusaders being dislodged from the Holy Land by the Mamluks in 1291, and the final conversion of the Mongols to Islam in 1295, any reasonable hopes for the establishment of a Christian Empire in the Middle East were

²⁵⁸ Patton 1982, 364.

²⁵⁹ Fiey 1965, II, 444; *idem* 1975a, 28.

²⁶⁰ Budge 1932, I, 441.

²⁶¹ Fiey 1959, 47; *idem* 1975a, 28-29.

²⁶² On the position of Christians under Mongol rule, see Fiey 1975a; Gillman/Klimkeit 1999, 139-142, 236-237.

²⁶³ Kawerau 1960, 98-102; Fiey 1975a, 21-23.

²⁶⁴ Fiey 1975a, 23; *idem* 1975b, 63.

²⁶⁵ Takahashi 2005, 102.

shattered. The now rapidly declining position of the Christians in the area also dealt the deathblow to the 'Christian Renaissance' and the 'Golden Age' of Syrian Orthodox culture.