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

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3. Metalwork: The Liturgical Fan from Deir al-Surian

3.1 Introduction

The present chapter concerns Syrian Orthodox metalwork from the Mosul area. At the time of writing, only one piece of medieval decorated metalwork is known to me which can be ascribed with any certainty to the Syrian Orthodox community in general, and the community living in the Mosul area in particular: the liturgical fan currently preserved in the collection of the Musée Royal de Mariemont in Morlanwelz, Belgium (Pl. 10).[1] Along with the chalice, paten, and incense burner, this type of object is part of the standard set of liturgical implements.[2] In Greek it is called a *rhipidion*, in Latin a *flabellum*. In Syriac it is designated *maruḥā* or *marwaḥtā*.[3]

The difficulty in determining the exact provenance of portable objects of this kind, which often lack inscriptions mentioning either the name of the artist or the patron, was already remarked upon in the previous chapter. A small but significant corpus of inlaid metalwork with Christian scenes has survived from the period under consideration; however, the identification of such metalwork as Christian – let alone Syrian Orthodox – can prove extremely problematic (see Section 2.7.1). The fan is unique in that it includes a Syriac inscription mentioning the date, as well as the place for which it was intended. The latter information corroborates the Syrian Orthodox connection.

Other known pieces of metalwork with Syriac inscriptions include a liturgical fan said to have been found in Iran (see Section 1.4), which, apart from a short engraved inscription, is decorated only with a cross within a medallion; several bronze censers decorated with scenes from the life of Christ, which were found in Tur ᶜAbdin;[4] a silver-gilt dish from Semerichye, Central Asia, dating from the ninth or tenth century, which is commonly associated with the East Syrian community;[5] and a silver chalice and paten (c. 1200) from a hoard discovered in the Church of the Holy Cross at Resafa, displaying a mixture of Western, Byzantine, and Eastern Christian artistic traditions.[6] It is impossible, however, to determine whether any of these specimens, except perhaps for the fan, were originally commissioned by West Syrians.

Nevertheless, some metalwork objects may at least be assumed to have been used by Syrian Orthodox Christians, such as a small censer found at Deir Mar Musa in Syria,[7] and a larger one which was unearthed from the medieval citadel of Takrit.[8] Cast in bronze and decorated with scenes from the life of Christ, these two pieces, like the censers with Syriac inscriptions found in Tur ᶜAbdin, form part of a larger group of some 100 specimens, mainly

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[1] Inv. no. IIIG 76B 2: Leroy 1974-1975; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004; Immerzeel/Jeudy/Snelders, forthcoming.

[2] For a general introduction on the liturgical objects in the Syrian Orthodox Church, see Sader 1983, 51-70; Rabo 2000.

[3] For a general introduction on liturgical fans, see Braun 1973, 642-647; Mundell Mango 1986, 151-154; *RBK*, II, 550-555 (K. Wessel). On the use of liturgical fans in the Syrian Orthodox tradition, see Sader 1983, 67-69; Rabo 2000, 375-377; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 116-119.

[4] Hamilton 1974, 53-65, Pl. VIII.

[5] St Petersburg, The Hermitage, inv. no. ω 154: Catalogue Berlin 1978, no. 16, Fig. 37, Pl. 18; Gillman/Klimkeit 1999, 215-216, Pl. 21.

[6] Ulbert 1990, 21-42, Figs 17-18, Pls 3-4, 21-31 (chalice), 43-50, Fig. 29, Pls 6, 36-38 (paten); Catalogue Paris 2001, 106-109.

[7] London, British Museum: Richter-Siebels 1990, Pl. 47.

[8] Baghdad, Iraqi Museum, inv. no. 11243/1: Harrak 2006, 47-52, Pls 1-8. During the 1990s, Iraqi archaeologists also discovered a small metalwork box decorated with floral and animal figures from a Syrian Orthodox monastery at the site known as al-Chenisa or Kanisat al-'Abid ('Church of the Servants'). The box contained, among other items, coins struck by Caliph al-Nasir, who ruled between 1180 and 1225 (Harrak 2001, 14). Unfortunately, no photographs of this box have as yet been published.

dating from the period between the sixth and ninth century. More or less mass produced in the Syro-Palestinian region as pilgrim souvenirs, they are found scattered all over the Middle East, from Armenia in the north to Egypt in the south.[9] Since they were stock made to cater for a large Christian clientele, irrespective of the client's precise religious affiliation, they will be excluded from this discussion of Syrian Orthodox metalwork.

A preliminary study on the liturgical fan from Deir al-Surian was published by the present author, together with Immerzeel and Van Rompay, in 2004. It emerges that the fan is not only of considerable importance for a study on the relationship between Christian and Islamic art, but is also a unique illustration of the contacts between Syrian Orthodox communities living in Northern Mesopotamia and their coreligionists in Egypt. Although the fan's dedicatory inscription explicitly states that it was made for Deir al-Surian, iconographic and stylistic analysis, taking account of the wider historical context, suggests that it was originally produced in Northern Mesopotamia, most probably in the city of Mosul.

Before re-examining some of our preliminary observations, the present study will provide additional arguments in favour of a Mosul provenance for the fan from Deir al-Surian. After a general iconographic and stylistic analysis of the fan's decoration in the first four sections of this chapter, the discussion will be broadened in Section 3.5 to include an assessment of the possible role of the liturgical fan in the expression of Syrian Orthodox identity. To this end, the object is analysed in terms of the proper art-historical and ecclesiastical context in which it was intended to function, that is, a monastery with a mixed Syrian Orthodox and Coptic community.

3.2 General Description

The fan consists of a circular disk attached to a conical holder, which has a large spherical knob towards the end. It was designed to be mounted on a wooden staff. The total weight of the object is 1.95 kg, and the disk has a diameter of 46.7 cm. While the reverse of the disk was left unadorned, the obverse has been provided with an engraved decoration. It is divided into three concentric registers around a central medallion, which is 12.9 cm in diameter (Pl. 11). The outer register, from which two large parts have broken off, is 2.2-2.6 cm in width and has a row of tiny holes, which were probably meant to hold a series of tiny pendent bells.[10]

The second register is 2.5-2.7 cm wide and has been embellished with a Syriac inscription, which is set against a background of scrolling stems with hooked leaves. It reads as follows (in Van Rompay's translation): *To the glory and the honour of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, these fans were made for the Monastery of the House of the Mother of God, Mart(y) Maryam, in the desert of Scetis, the year 1514 of the Greeks*.[11]

The inscription, beautifully fashioned in *Estrangelo*, provides us with important historical information. The date is given at the end of the inscription: 'the year 1514 of the Greeks', which corresponds with A.D. 1202/03. The precise dedication on the fan clearly refers to Deir al-Surian in the Wadi al-Natrun (the ancient Scetis) in Egypt; the monastery and its main church were both dedicated to the Holy Virgin, al-ᶜAdra. The various components used in the inscription to designate the monastery can be found in manuscripts from the middle of the

[9] Richter-Siebels 1990.

[10] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 118. Another possibility, according to Leroy (1974-1975, 33), is that these perforations were meant to hold either feathers, pieces of ribbon, or another kind of cloth that would have increased the efficiency of the fan. No evidence remains to show, however, which of these materials was used.

[11] Van Rompay, Appendix in Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 134-136, including a transcription and notes.

ninth century onwards, as well as in inscriptions.[12] The plural form for the Syriac word for 'fan' in the dedicatory inscription clearly refers to more than one fan. Since the liturgical use of a pair, or even several pairs, of fans is well attested, the term used in the inscription may safely be assumed to refer to a pair of fans. One may speculate that the second fan had a similar inscription, although its decoration may have been different.[13]

The third register on the fan has been left plain, and the central medallion depicts the Virgin and Child Enthroned. A second Syriac inscription, written in vertical *Estrangelo* script and placed on either side of the throne (Pl. 11), reads as follows (in Van Rompay's translation): *Mother of God, Help me in (or: through) your prayer*.[14] The inscription and the image of the Virgin and Child Enthroned are set against the same regularly winding spirals that are used for the dedicatory inscription.

The Virgin depicted in the central medallion is shown sitting on a high-backed, cushioned throne, her feet resting on an arc. She looks straight at the beholder, supporting the Christ-child with her left hand and gesturing towards him with her right. Christ is depicted sitting sideways (although he seems to be standing), facing the viewer and raising his right hand. Contrary to common practice, this hand does not make the gesture signifying blessing, nor does the Child hold a scroll in his left hand. Two flying angels with outstretched arms hover above the throne, on either side of the head of the Virgin. Their right hands slightly overlap the edge of the Virgin's halo, suggesting they may be holding it. The throne has a rectangular backrest, the left-hand side of which has a looped upward protrusion, while the right-hand side is decorated with a triangular form projecting outwards. A horizontal frieze consisting of a simple zigzag pattern adorns the upper side of the backrest. The throne rests on two legs, which taper before the foot.

The engraver was not particularly skilful in his representation of the throne, since it has various elements that do not correspond with each other. For example, the frieze with the decorative zigzag pattern is level with the Virgin's left shoulder, but much lower on the right. The same is true of the cushion: it is much lower on the right than on the left. It looks as though the artist tried to correct his fault by placing the triangle on the right at the correct height. He then compensated for the resulting empty space by filling it with a decorative background, which gives the beholder the impression of looking through the back of the throne. Another strange feature is the way the wing of the angel on the right-hand side merges with the Virgin's halo.

Similar imperfections and incongruities can be found in the treatment of the clothing of both Mother and Child. The Virgin seems to have a sort of crown, represented by a headband with three points. She is wearing a long tunic and cloak, part of which falls over her right shoulder. This is probably meant to be a *maphorion*. The child, by contrast, is dressed in a simple tunic which reaches to his bare feet. It is not always immediately clear, particularly in the case of the folds in the centre of the picture, which is the Virgin's clothing and which is that of Christ. There is a similar problem with the representation of the small carpet spread over the cushion on which Mary is sitting. To her right, the carpet is clearly indicated by two vertical lines which fall from the cushion, and it appears to be decorated with a fringe represented by three small rectangles. However, this detail is completely absent on the other side and, even more surprisingly, the line indicating the outer edge of the carpet merges with the Virgin's clothing. On the other hand, it is clear that the vertical line running upwards from Mary's right foot should represent the border of her tunic.

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[12] Innemée/Van Rompay 1998, 182-183; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 136.

[13] Personal communication from Van Rompay. Cf. Van Rompay, Appendix in Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 136, where the inscription is translated as 'Mother of God, Help me in my prayer'.

[14] Van Rompay, Appendix in Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 136-137, Pls 6-7, including a transcription and notes.

All these incongruities show that the engraver did not fully understand his model. Whatever the reason, this clearly points towards the figural imagery being the work of a less skilled craftsman. This is in stark contrast with Van Rompay's observation on the high quality of the epigraphic craftsmanship visible in the dedicatory inscription, a matter to which we shall return in Section 3.4.

3.3 Iconography and Style

Usually, the decoration of these kinds of fans is closely related to their liturgical function. According to Syrian Orthodox commentaries on the liturgy, for example, the deacons holding the fans represent the seraphim and cherubim whose wings invisibly cover the altar during the performance of the Divine service.[15] In keeping with this symbolism, the fans were commonly decorated, either on both sides or only on the front, with images of these angelic beings. Other surviving examples show that this particular iconographic programme for liturgical fans, which was developed already in the Early Christian period, continues up to the present.[16] This is not surprising, given that the seraphim and cherubim are two of the nine orders of angels that guard the Throne of God: as such they are highly appropriate as decoration for an object used to symbolically protect the Eucharist during the liturgy. The fan from Deir al-Surian seems unusual in that it does not depict such six- or four-winged creatures. It may be argued, however, that the central medallion showing the Virgin and Child Enthroned was particularly apt for an object that was to be used in a church dedicated to the Virgin. The Mother of God is explicitly invoked as a mediator through the additional Syriac inscription.

The image of the Virgin holding the Christ-child in her left arm and gesturing towards him with her right is commonly referred to as the *Hodegetria*, which may be translated as 'she who points the way'. The name of this iconographic type does not originate from the gesture of the Virgin, but rather from the famous icon of the Virgin Hodegetria that was kept at the Monastery of the Hodegon in Constantinople. This monastery, in turn, took its name from the monks who led blind people to a miraculous spring that was able to restore sight.[17] Although the enthroned version of the Virgin Hodegetria was relatively rare in the Byzantine tradition, which apparently favoured the standing version, it enjoyed certain popularity in Eastern Christian art.[18]

Developed in the Early Christian period, perhaps in either the Syro-Palestinian region or Egypt, the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria continued to be depicted throughout the medieval period, especially, so it seems, in Armenia and Georgia.[19] Monumental wall paintings featuring this theme, dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, are nevertheless also found in Coptic Egypt,[20] Cyprus,[21] and Syria. A fresco (c. 1170) removed from the church

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[15] Illustrative in this respect are the commentaries on the Syrian Orthodox liturgy by Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), George Bishop of the Arab tribes (d. 724), Dionysius bar Salibi (d. 1171), and Barhebraeus (d. 1286): Varghese 2004b, 282; Connolly/Codrington 1913, 21-23; Varghese 1998, 23, 54; Kohlhaas 1959, 32. Cf. Sader 1983, 67-69; Rabo 2000, 375-376.

[16] Perhaps the most famous examples are the pair of silver-gilt fans dating from 577, which were found in Syria as part of the so-called Kaper Koraon Treasure (Mundell Mango 1986, nos 31-32). A more recent pair of silver fans from Edessa is, since 1924, found in the Church of St George in Aleppo (Rabo 2000, Fig. 3). For a detailed discussion of the function, development, and decoration of liturgical fans, see Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 116-118, with further references.

[17] *ODB*, II, 939; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 119.

[18] On the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria, see Hadermann-Misguich 1975, 62-67; Lazarev 1995, 226-248; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 119-122.

[19] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 119-121.

[20] Deir al-Shuhada in Esna, church apse, twelfth century (Leroy 1975a, Pls 26-27); Deir al-Surian, Chapel of the Forty-nine Martyrs, central niche in the east wall, thirteenth century (Innemée *et al.* 1998, 81-82, Fig. 3); Deir

known as the Baptismal Chapel outside the Crusader fortress of Crac des Chevaliers, of which only a few poorly preserved fragments survive, represents the Virgin Hodegetria sitting on a throne, flanked in the background by two standing angels.[22] Folda has suggested that the painting was perhaps executed by a local Syrian Orthodox painter whose style and iconography were strongly influenced by Byzantine art.[23]

Although we may agree with Folda's opinion about the local origin of the artist, the formalistic traits of the mural, rather than betraying Byzantine influence, appear to be more closely related to those of a group of wall paintings in Greater Syria painted in the style known as the 'Syrian style'. The fact that this particular style is employed simultaneously in churches of the Latin Christian, Melkite, Maronite, and Syrian Orthodox denomination (see Section 2.6), not only suggests that different religious groups obtained the services of the same workshops or crews of artists, but also makes the specific attribution to a 'Syrian Orthodox artist' highly questionable. In case of the art of the Mosul area, it remains to be seen whether any formal characteristics are specific to one particular religious group or confession.

Apart from the more obvious resemblance between the examples of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria mentioned and the version depicted on the fan from Deir al-Surian, which do, after all, represent the same theme, there are no specific iconographic or stylistic parallels between them. Such similarities can be found, however, between the fan and two thirteenth-century Syrian Orthodox manuscripts produced in Northern Mesopotamia, a recently discovered stone relief from a Syrian Orthodox church in Mosul, and a near-contemporary piece of inlaid metalwork that is generally ascribed to the Syro-Mesopotamian region.

3.3.1 The Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria in Vatican Syr. 559 and British Library Add. 7170

Since the fan was used in Deir al-Surian, at that time a stronghold of the Syrian Orthodox Church (see Section 3.5), it is perhaps all the more significant that the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria depicted on it finds a close iconographic parallel in a version of the same theme featured in two manuscripts that were made for the Syrian Orthodox Church: a lectionary in the Vatican Library (Vat. Syr. 559), made for Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul, either around 1220 or 1260 (Pl. 12), and the related lectionary (c. 1220) in the British Library (Add. 7170; Pl. 13; Fig. 1), probably made for an affiliated monastery, most likely Deir Mar Hananya near Mardin.[24] These lectionaries will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Suffice it to mention here that the miniature painters who were involved in the production of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 clearly drew on a variety of sources.

All publications on these manuscripts have pointed out that while the iconography is mainly grounded in the Byzantine tradition, the miniatures simultaneously show a remarkable overlap with contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration.[25] Especially the stylistic features

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Anba Antonius near the Red Sea, church apse, A.D. 1232/33 (van Moorsel 1995-1997, 45-48, Pls 19-20; Bolman 2002, 65, 96-97, Fig. 4.28). Although it does not, strictly speaking, represent the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria, Paris BnF copte 13, dating from the late twelfth century, does contain a miniature of the Adoration of the Magi in which the Virgin is seated, similarly holding the Child with her left hand and gesturing towards him with her right (Leroy 1974a, 117, Pl. 44.3). According to Victor Lazarev (1995, 237), this scene echoes the Early Christian composition of the Adoration of the Magi, from which the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria later supposedly crystallized.

[21] Moutoullas, Church of the Panagia, south wall, A.D. 1280: Mouriki 1984, 191, Fig. 10; *idem* 1995, 403, Fig. 165.

[22] Folda 1982b, Figs 18-19; *idem* 1995, 403, Figs 9.37j-9.37k; *idem* 2005, 98, Fig. 53.

[23] Folda 1995, 404.

[24] Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 17r: Leroy 1964, 283, Pl. 77.4; Catalogue Paris 2001, no. 90. BL Add. 7170, fol. 24r: Leroy 1964, 304, Pl. 77.3.

[25] Buchthal 1939; Leroy 1964, 301, 399, 434-435; *idem* 1971, 253-254; Catalogue New York 1997, 385, no. 254; Hunt 2000d, 160-161.

betray a clear affinity with contemporary Islamic manuscripts which are ascribed to the Syro-Mesopotamian region, but there are also some distinct parallels in terms of iconography and the arrangement of scenes. The images of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria depicted in the two Syrian Orthodox manuscripts are illustrative of this eclecticism. Whereas the basic iconography clearly derives from Christian sources, whether Byzantine or Eastern Christian, the style and the setting of the images display the same characteristics as local Islamic manuscript illustration.

In the London lectionary (Pl. 13), the Virgin Hodegetria is set against a golden background and framed by a trefoil niche.[26] The Virgin is seated on a high-backed, cushioned throne, wearing a grey tunic and a red maphorion. She bends her head slightly in the direction of the cross-nimbed Child, supporting him with her left hand and pointing to him with her right. Christ is turned towards his mother. He is dressed in a dark grey tunic and a pink mantle. In his left hand he holds a scroll, and with his right he makes the sign of blessing. Although the Child is probably meant to be sitting, Christ looks as if he is standing. As there is no footstool, the Virgin's feet seem to dangle in the air. The lower half of the red throne is decorated with an arabesque, while the green rectangular backrest is ornamented with a decorative pattern. Both sides of the backrest end in a golden triangular form which projects sideways. On the seat is a cushion with golden ends, covered with a small carpet which has a lilac and purple border. The miniature has a Syriac inscription (*Estrangelo*) consisting of two words placed on either side of the Virgin's head. They are written from top to bottom and read: 'Mother of God'.

This image is repeated in the Vatican lectionary (Pl. 12), with some minor differences, mainly in the use of colour: the Virgin has a blue tunic and a brown maphorion, while the Child is dressed in a green tunic and a purple mantle.[27] The lower half of the red throne is decorated with alternating hexagons, while the green backrest is ornamented with crosses. The small carpet which is spread out over the cushion has a golden border. The miniature is not supplied with an inscription.

The correspondence with Islamic manuscript illustration is visible not only in the stylistic aspects, to which we will return in detail in Chapter 4; another obvious proof of 'Islamic' inspiration is the shape of the throne on which the Virgin is seated. Similar thrones appear several times in both lectionaries, usually in connection with a ruler or dignitary: Caiaphas, for instance, in the miniature depicting Christ's trial (BL Add. 7170, fol. 145r; Pl. 23),[28] or Herod in the Massacre of the Innocents (Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 18v).[29] The distinctive feature of the projecting triangles is also used for the throne depicted in the evangelist portrait of St John in BL Add. 7170 (fol. 6r).[30] Such thrones, with rectangular backs and decorated with these same protruding triangles, are unknown in Byzantine and Eastern Christian imagery, but widespread in Islamic art. They are a common feature in enthronement scenes, represented in all sorts of artistic media such as pottery, manuscript illustration, and metalwork.[31] Suffice it to refer to some characteristic examples from the realm of manuscript illustration, as featured in the various surviving illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, including three

[26] Fol. 24r: Leroy 1964, 304, Pl. 77.3; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 125, Pl. 4.
[27] Fol. 17r: Leroy 1964, 283, Pl. 77.4; Catalogue Paris 2001, no. 90.
[28] Leroy 1964, Pl. 89.4.
[29] Leroy 1964, Pl. 78.3.
[30] Leroy 1964, Pl. 71.1.
[31] For instance: Ettinghausen 1962, 91 (plate); Baer 1989, Pl. 104; Catalogue New York 1997, no. 287. Another type of throne that enjoyed relative popularity among Muslim dignitaries is the *sella curulis*, the folding stool formerly used by Roman emperors on state occasions. It is depicted in several manuscript illuminations from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bolman 2002, 124). In two frontispieces from the *Book of Songs* dating from A.D. 1218/19, for instance, a ruler, perhaps Badr al-Din Lu'lu', is shown sitting on such a seat (Vol. IV: Rice 1953c, Fig. 17; Farès 1961, Pl. 8. Vol. XVII: Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 65; Roxburgh 2005, Pl. 54).

volumes in Paris, BnF arabe 6094 (A.D. 1222/23), arabe 5847 (A.D. 1237), and arabe 3929 (1240s).[32] It should be noted that in contrast to the version featured on the fan and in the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, these thrones generally seem to be represented either with quite small legs, or with no legs at all, thus with the seat near the ground.

This brings us to another motif depicted on the fan from Deir al-Surian: the arc on which the Virgin rests her feet. No iconographic parallels are found in the contemporary Islamic context. Here we should bear in mind that the cross-legged seated position commonly encountered in the East makes such a piece of furniture highly unnecessary, especially in combination with low thrones. Footstools are widespread, however, within the Eastern Christian tradition. Although usually rectangular, they are occasionally arched.[33] Perhaps the most similar example is found in the wall painting in the apse of the church at Deir Anba Antonius, dating from 1232/33, which features Christ in Majesty. Here the enthroned Christ rests his feet on an arc inscribed with the following words from Isaiah 66:1: 'Behold, heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool'.[34] In short, whereas the type of throne on which the Virgin is seated on the fan and in the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries is firmly grounded in traditional Islamic royal iconography, the arc on which she rests her feet is drawn from the Christian pictorial tradition.

3.3.2 The Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria at the Church of the Virgin in Mosul

The popularity of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria among the Syrian Orthodox during the thirteenth century is further attested by a recent find of a sculptural relief that displays remarkable iconographic parallels with the liturgical fan from Deir al-Surian and the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries. During restoration activities conducted at the Syrian Orthodox Church of the Virgin ('Old Tahira Church') in Mosul in 2005, a large tile was lifted from the floor behind the altar in the sanctuary.[35] Much to the surprise of the restorers, the 'obverse' of the marble plate proved to be decorated with a sizeable representation of the Virgin and Child Enthroned, of which the lower part clearly has not survived (Pl. 14).

The Virgin is represented on a high-backed, cushioned throne, dressed in a tunic and maphorion. She looks straight at the beholder, holding the Christ-child with her left hand, while her right is raised in front of his chest. Christ, depicted in three-quarter view in front of the Virgin's chest, seems to be wearing a long tunic that reaches down to his feet. In his left hand he holds a scroll, the contours of which have only barely survived, and with his right hand he makes the sign of blessing. The large backrest is decorated with a pattern of scrolling stems in relief. It is flanked by two finials with ornamental patterns. On the seat is a cushion decorated with a series of hexagons that are each filled with a small cross.

The iconographic parallels with the images of the Virgin Hodegetria as featured on the fan and the two Syrian Orthodox manuscripts are obvious, even though the throne on the marble relief is slightly different. Nevertheless, as was the case with the fan and the lectionaries, the throne on the relief, with its three characteristically curved sides, also finds its closest parallels in Islamic manuscript illustration. This shape is common for thrones used by *qadis* and princes alike. Parallels for such thrones, with three curved sides and the finials ending in

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[32] BnF arabe 6094: Grabar 1984, Figs 2A12, 2D4, 4F11, 7F3, 8A6. BnF arabe 5847: Grabar 1984, Fig. 2B1; Catalogue New York 1997, Fig. 287. BnF arabe 3929: Grabar 1984, Figs 1F10, 2B11, 2B12, 2D3, 7F3, 8A6.

[33] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 127.

[34] Van Moorsel 1995-1997, 43, Pls 21-22; Bolman 2002, 65, Fig. 4.28. The same motif, again inscribed with the words from Isaiah 66:1, is represented in the wall painting with the Deisis Vision in the side chapel, which is almost identical to the Christ in Majesty in the sanctuary apse: van Moorsel 1995-1997, 170, Pls 102-103; Bolman 2002, 74, Fig. 4.38.

[35] www.syriaciraq.com/news/mar_2006/new_page_2.htm (accessed May 2008). The relief measures 92 x 86 x 7 cm.

points, are found yet again in thirteenth-century illustrated manuscripts of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, such as the one painted by al-Wasiti in 1237.[36] Stylistic analysis is greatly hampered by the fact that the surface of the sculpture has been severally worn, but in view of the close iconographic parallels with the liturgical fan and the Syrian Orthodox manuscript illustrations, the relief may provisionally be dated to the thirteenth century.

Finally, it should be observed that in terms of iconography, the relief also shows some remarkable analogies with a very primitive sculpture of the Virgin and Child Enthroned which is included in a large iconostasis screen, again at the Old Church of the Tahira.[37] This screen was made in 1745, in the course of the large-scale restoration activities executed two years after the church had been destroyed at the hands of the Persian Nadir Shah Tahmasp.[38] Despite the obvious differences in craftsmanship, the analogies found in the position of the Christ-child, the shape of the throne, and details such as the way in which the Virgin's maphorion is draped over her left arm, clearly suggest that the recently discovered relief was used as a direct model for the later stone carving. In this respect, it should be observed that one of the main characteristics of the eighteenth-century sculptural style of Mosul and the vicinity, known as the 'Jalili style', is its application of thirteenth-century models.

3.3.3 The Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria on the Freer Canteen

From the point of view of iconography and composition, the most striking analogies are not with the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, or the stone relief from the Church of the Virgin in Mosul, but with the piece known as the Freer Canteen, which dates from around the mid-thirteenth century (Pl. 9).[39] As we have already seen in Section 2.7.1, this object is part of a group of inlaid metalwork objects decorated with distinctly Christian themes, the sources of which are located in Syriac manuscript illustration, together with motifs from the Princely Cycle, a set of images based on the pastimes of the royal court. The Canteen has generally been assigned to Syria or Northern Mesopotamia, although recent scholarship tends towards locating its provenance in the former. The similarity to the fan is particularly noteworthy: the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria again features on a piece of metalwork, and is similarly placed within a central medallion.

The Virgin depicted in the central medallion is probably wearing a tunic and a maphorion, although according to Baer, the Virgin wears a turban-like headdress instead of the traditional veil.[40] Sitting frontally, she holds the cross-nimbed Child on her left arm, while her right hand is raised in front of her chest. Christ, dressed in a long tunic, turns towards his mother, seeming to stand rather than sit on her lap. The infant's right hand is raised, but does not assume the usual gesture of blessing. It is also significant that the scroll that Christ usually holds in his left hand is not present here, since the same omissions were noted when describing the infant on the fan. The elaborate throne has drapery covering its legs, a large cushion on the seat, and two posts flanking the high back. The saint in attendance on the left wears a turban and has his hands raised, with open palms, in a gesture of adoration. The figure on the right is a bearded man who holds an undefined object. Below the throne, and holding it aloft, are two angels flying upwards in opposite directions.

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[36] Paris, BnF arabe 5847: Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 114; Grabar 1984, Figs 2C2, 2D5, 2D6, 2F10, 4G1, 7B1, 7F4, 8A7, 9A4.
[37] Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, II, 295-296, Pls CIII-CV^2.
[38] Fiey 1959, 138-140; Harrak 2009, cat. no. AA.08.6.
[39] Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Purchase F1941.10: Schneider 1973; Atil/Chase/Jett 1985, no. 17; Baer 1989, 19-21; Khoury 1998; Hoffman 2004; Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 127-130, Pl. 5.
[40] Baer 1989, 32.

A striking iconographic detail, which again links this rendering of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria to the one on the fan, is the pair of angels hovering above the throne. Whereas on the fan there is only the suggestion that they are holding the Virgin's halo, in this composition they are unmistakably holding it in both hands.[41] The pair of angels are clearly reminiscent of the winged flying figures holding a canopy or diadem above the head of a ruler, a very popular theme in contemporary Islamic metalwork and frontispiece illustrations from manuscripts commonly attributed to Northern Mesopotamia. For instance, no less than five of the six surviving volumes of a single copy of the *Kitab al-Diryaq*, which was probably made for Badr al-Din Lu'lu' during the second decade of the thirteenth century, contain frontispieces that feature paired winged figures spreading canopies above the heads of royal figures. These princes are either portrayed sitting on a throne or mounted on horseback.[42] In contrast to the angels on the liturgical fan and the Freer Canteen, the winged creatures in the frontispieces are depicted with pigtails dangling from their heads. In terms of their appearance and dress, the angels are more closely related to other examples from the realm of metalwork, including a pen case dating from 1220,[43] and a ewer made by Ahmad al-Dhaki al-Mawsili in 1223.[44]

A copper coin type issued in 1180/81 by the Artuqid ruler Nur al-Din Muhammad of Hisn Kayfa (Hasankeyf) and Amid (Diyarbakır) features the oldest currently known representation of this iconographic motif.[45] On the front, the coin displays a pair of winged creatures hovering above an enthroned ruler, who is seated within a tent-like structure that is borne aloft by these 'angels'. As on the liturgical fan and the Freer Canteen, the winged figures are dressed in knee-length tunics and depicted with their heads in three-quarter view, their legs in profile. It is generally assumed that the sources for this particular numismatic image are derived from Christian Ascension scenes, in which similar angels, sometimes one but usually two pairs, are shown bearing Christ heavenwards with the mandorla.[46]

Previous scholarship has often addressed the question of whether the flying figures on the Freer Canteen and other thirteenth-century inlaid metalwork vessels were derived directly from either Christian or Islamic sources. The matter of the origins of this particular motif is perhaps not of major importance, however. The important observation to be made here is that the subject was popular among both Christians and Muslims at the time. Developed already in classical times,[47] the motif of the pair of winged figures is an excellent example of a strong pictorial symbol whose multivalent quality meant that it could be appropriated throughout the centuries, by different communities and cultures, whether as personifications of victory, as genii, or as angels.

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[41] For a discussion of the possible iconographic sources of this particular motif, see Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 128-130.

[42] Whelan 2006, 205. Enthroned: vols IV, XI, XVII: Cairo, National Library, Adab Fârsî 579 (Rice 1953c, Figs 16-17; Farès 1961, Pls 1, 8); Istanbul, National Library, Feyzullah Efendi, no. 1566, fol. 1r (Rice 1953c, Fig. 18; Roxburgh 2005, Pl. 54; Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 65). On horseback: vols IX and XX: Istanbul, National Library, Feyzullah Efendi, no. 1565 (Rice 1953c, Fig. 19); Copenhagen, Royal Library, arab. 168 (Farès 1961, Pl. 12; Catalogue Berlin 2006, Pl. 1).

[43] Athens, Benaki Museum, inv. no. 13174: Baer 1989, Pl. 104.

[44] Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. no. 1956.11: Rice 1957, Fig. 3. Other examples of metalwork featuring this motif include: a tray in St Petersburg, Hermitage, inv. no. IR-1455 (Catalogue Amsterdam 1999, no. 123); a candlestick in New York, Metropolitan Museum, late thirteenth century (Kühnel 1939, Fig. 13); a basin in Tehran, Archaeological Museum, dated 1275 (Baer 1989, Pl. 91; Guest/Ettinghausen 1984, Figs 23-24); a stand, formerly in the Arthur Sambon collection, second half thirteenth century (Guest/Ettinghausen 1984, Fig. 21); a candlestick in the Keir collection, first half of the thirteenth century (Fehérvári 1976, Pl. 41b).

[45] Spengler/Sayles 1992, 28-30; Whelan 2006, 166-168, Fig. 138; Heidemann 2006, 101-102, no. 32.

[46] Spengler/Sayles 1992, 29; Whelan 2006, 167-168.

[47] Whelan 2006, 155, 205-206.

3.3.4 Stylistic Analogies with a Group of Manuscripts from Northern Mesopotamia

As was already pointed out in our preliminary study on the liturgical fan, the figural style of its decoration is most closely related to that of a group of illustrated Islamic manuscripts ascribed to Northern Mesopotamia, which date from the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.[48] These manuscripts, which are often thought to have been produced in the city of Mosul, include the following: a volume of the *Kitab al-Diryaq* in Paris, dated to 1199; a volume of the *Kitab al-Diryaq* in Vienna, dating from the first half of the thirteenth century; and six surviving volumes of a single copy of the *Kitab al-Aghani* (see Section 2.8).

The stylistic correspondence is most clearly to be seen in the modelling of the faces and the hair-styles. The facial features, especially those of the Virgin, are of an 'Asiatic' or 'Oriental' type (Pl. 11): one can note, for instance, her slit almond-shaped eyes, broad face, and small mouth. These characteristics are also visible in the physiognomy of the four winged figures and of the cross-legged female figure holding a crescent, a composition repeated twice on the double frontispiece miniatures of the *Kitab al-Diryaq* in Paris.[49] The faces of these figures are equally round ('moon-faced') with eyebrows formed by a semicircular line, which is placed relatively high above the eyes and slightly turned up at the ends. A straight line extends the slit-shaped eyes. Finally, the shoulder-length hair is parted in the middle, forming a pointed arch.

The same facial features appear in the Vienna version of the *Kitab al-Diryaq*,[50] and in the frontispieces of the six surviving volumes of the *Kitab al-Aghani*. One example can be seen on the frontispiece to volume 17 in Istanbul, which shows the enthroned ruler with attendants, and two flying figures holding a canopy over his head.[51] This facial type, which in stylistic terms has often been called 'Seljuk',[52] is also seen on Iranian lustre-painted pottery from Kashan dating from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries,[53] and can be traced back to Central Asian predecessors.[54] Its introduction into Mesopotamian manuscript illustration may have been related with the continuous infiltration of cultural and artistic elements from Iran into Mesopotamia that took place during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that is, after the Great Seljuk conquest of the region in the eleventh century.

While they are executed in different artistic media, the affinity between this group of manuscripts and the fan from Deir al-Surian is evident.[55] The stylistic analogies are found in the broad faces with slanted eyes, the typical eyebrows, and delicate mouths. It even seems as though the typical hair-style, in the shape of a pointed arch, has been transferred to the figure of the Virgin on the fan. This is particularly striking, given that the Virgin's hair is not usually visible because she wears a maphorion. One minor difference is that the line that forms both eyebrows is used to form her nose, while in the manuscripts only one eyebrow continues to shape the nose. Overall, it may be concluded that the manuscripts and the fan were produced in the same stylistic tradition.

Considering the stylistic overlap with illustrated manuscripts produced in Northern Mesopotamia, and the iconographic correspondence with works of art directly connected with the Syrian Orthodox community of the Mosul area, it makes sense to locate the production of

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[48] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 130-131.
[49] Farès 1953, Pls III-IV; R. Hillenbrand 1999, Fig. 99 (in colour).
[50] Ettinghausen 1962, 91 (plate), 92.
[51] Ettinghausen 1962, 64, 65 (plate); Roxburgh 2005, no. 54, plate on p. 97.
[52] Melikian-Chirvani 1967, esp. 5-6, 17-18, 21-22, 25; Ward 1985, 76-78; Nassar 1985, 86, 92; Raby 1994.
[53] Melikian-Chirvani 1967, 5-6, Figs 3-6; R. Hillenbrand 1999, 128-129. For an introduction to Iranian lustre-painted ceramics, see Watson 1985.
[54] Watson 1985, 48; Baer 2004, 13-15.
[55] For the close stylistic and iconographic analogies between metalwork and manuscript illumination produced in Northern Mesopotamia, see Nassar 1985; Allan 1994.

the liturgical fan in Mosul, especially since the city was renowned for its metalwork production in the first half of the thirteenth century (see Section 2.8).[56]

3.3.5 A Comparison with Mosul Metalwork

As far as any possible stylistic and compositional parallels with metalwork ascribed to Mosul are concerned, it should first be pointed out that the surface of the front of the disk is divided into three concentric circles, framing a central medallion; a relatively large part of the innermost concentric circle is left undecorated. As such, the decoration deviates from other liturgical fans, not only in terms of subject matter, but also in the organization of the decoration on the surface. As was observed above, in accordance with their symbolic function during the liturgy, liturgical fans are commonly decorated with angelic beings, which usually take up the greater part of the surface.

Notably, the closest parallels in terms of composition and layout are found in Islamic inlaid metalwork, such as a large tray made for Badr al-Din Lu'lu', which is preserved in London.[57] The tray is comparable in size (diameter 49 cm), and its decoration consists of a central medallion – containing fantastic animals against a background of winding scrolls – around which are grouped three additional medallions filled with arabesque designs. The rim of the tray features a circular Arabic inscription that, like the dedicatory inscription on the fan, forms a continuous band. Most significantly, however, the remainder of the surface of the tray, approximately two-thirds, is left undecorated, which, as pointed out by David Storm Rice, is rather unusual in Islamic art.[58]

Although Islamic metalwork is indeed characterized by a general tendency towards decorating every single millimetre of the surface (*horror vacui*), it is not entirely uncommon to leave parts of the surface undecorated. Comparable with the fan in this respect, despite their rectangular as opposed to a circular form, are for instance some bronze and brass caskets featuring a similar kind of organization of the ornamentation: they too feature a central medallion surrounded by a large undecorated area and, near the edge of the surfaces, a narrower band with an inscription set against a background of winding scrolls. One good example is a late twelfth-century casket from Iran, the back of which is decorated with a large central medallion containing two male figures against a background of scrolling stems, with an inscription band near the edge. The remainder of the surface is left blank, which, as in case of the liturgical fan, places further emphasis on the central medallion.[59]

What is of particular interest to the present study is the fact that Mosul metalwork from the first half of the thirteenth century, especially, seems to have been characterized by what James Allan has described as 'an inclination towards undecorated areas of background'.[60] Allan refers, as illustrative examples, to two closely related inlaid brass ewers: one made by Ibrahim ibn Mawaliya,[61] and another, perhaps from the same workshop, made for the Atabeg ruler of Sinjar, Mahmud ibn Sanjar Shah.[62] In addition to these, and the tray of Badr al-Din Lu'lu' referred to above, some other inlaid pieces of metalwork thought to come from Mosul also display large parts without decoration, including a cast brass bowl made for an officer of Badr al-Din Lu'lu',[63] and two miniature boxes, one of which was made in 1220 by Ismail ibn Ward

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[56] Rice 1953a; *idem* 1953b, 229-232; *idem* 1957; James 1980; Allan 1999, 18-19, 56-57.
[57] Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. no. 905-1907: Rice 1950, 632-634, Pl. 13; Baer 1983, 139, Fig. 118 (detail).
[58] Rice 1950, 633.
[59] Rice 1958, 227-236, Pls Ia, V.
[60] Allan 1999, 57, 75; cf. Auld 2009, 60.
[61] Allan 1999, 56-57; Rice 1953a, 69-79, Pls XII-XXII.
[62] Allan 1999, cat. no. 6.
[63] Bologna, Museo Civico: Rice 1953a, 232-238, Pl. III; Scerrato 1966, 99, Pl. 37.

al-Mawsili,[64] an apprentice of the aforementioned Ibrahim ibn Mawaliya. All in all, it may be concluded that the disposition of the decoration on the fan has its closest parallels in Islamic metalwork; moreover, and especially considering its other connections with Mosul, perhaps even more significantly, this style fits well within the broader framework of Mosul metalwork of the first half of the thirteenth century.

The positioning of unframed inscriptions on either side of a centrally placed figure, however, as found on the liturgical fan, is an extremely rare phenomenon in Islamic art in general and Islamic metalwork in particular, whether from the Mosul area or elsewhere. The only other examples from the realm of metalwork broadly speaking are perhaps found in coinage, more specifically in a group of twelfth- and thirteenth-century copper coins issued by Turkish rulers of Northern Mesopotamia. At variance with the long-standing Muslim tradition of providing coins with inscriptions only, the decoration on these coins comprises inscriptions and images side by side (see Section 2.7).[65] A coin type issued in 1230/31 by Nasir al-Din Artuq Arslan of Mardin, for instance, depicts a cross-legged seated ruler on a throne, flanked by two unframed lines of Arabic script stating his name.[66] Closely related to the central medallion of the liturgical fan, in terms of the disposition of the inscriptions as well as composition and iconography, is an earlier Artuqid coin type issued at Hisn Kayfa in 1180/81, which features an enthroned ruler framed by a baldachin-like structure that is borne aloft by two winged figures. A four-line Arabic inscription placed on either side of the throne, in the space directly underneath the feet of the two winged figures hovering above the throne, gives the year in which the coin was struck.[67]

Despite these parallels, it is tempting to relate the placement of the two-line Syriac inscription on either side of the throne in the fan's central medallion to the common Christian epigraphic practices of placing legends and explanatory inscriptions beside saints and other subjects in wall paintings, icons, and manuscript illustrations. Suffice it to refer to the miniature representing the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria in the London lectionary, where a two-word Syriac inscription is placed on either side of the Virgin's head: 'Mother of God' (Pl. 13).[68] Van Rompay has pointed out the analogy between the outline script used in this inscription, which leaves empty spaces within the perimeter of the script, and the letters on the fan.[69] Most of the inscriptions in outline script encountered in Syriac manuscripts appear to have been originally intended to be filled with another colour, as in rubrics: mainly red or occasionally gold and silver. In case of the fan, on the other hand, the 'outline script' appears to have been used to enhance legibility, though with only partial success. Whereas the dedicatory inscription in the second concentric frame is clearly legible, the inscription inside the central medallion is hardly distinguishable from the floral background. This observation brings us to some brief technological considerations.

As far as the method employed by the craftsman to decorate the liturgical fan is concerned, it is remarkable that he used the technique of engraving only. At first sight, this does not seem

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[64] Athens, Benaki Museum, Case 65, no. 17: Rice 1953a, 61-65, Pl. IX. Berlin, Museum for Islamic Art, inv. no. I. 589: Catalogue Berlin 2006, no. 29.

[65] Apart from the Turkish copper coins, this phenomenon is only otherwise encountered on the so-called transitional coins from the seventh century. Hybrid Arab-Byzantine and Arab-Sassanian coins displayed, among other elements, standing figures with Arabic and/or Greek or Latin inscriptions, or the portrait of a Sassanian ruler with inscriptions in Pahvli and Arabic, respectively (Bates 1986).

[66] Spengler/Sayles 1992, 147-149; Whelan 2006, 127-129, Figs 85-86; Heidemann 2006, 102, cat. no. 33.

[67] Spengler/Sayles 1992, 147-149; Whelan 2006, 166-168; Heidemann 2006, 101-102, cat. no. 32.

[68] Fol. 24r: Leroy 1964, 304, Pl. 77.3. For Syriac and Greek inscriptions in thirteenth-century wall paintings from Lebanon and Syria, for instance, see Kassis/Yon/Badwi 2004, 37-40 (Church of Mar Tadros in Bahdeidat); ter Haar Romeny *et al.* 2007 (Deir Mar Musa near Nebk).

[69] Van Rompay, Appendix in Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 135. Other examples of outline script used in Syriac manuscript illustrations include New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, no. 774, twelfth-thirteenth century (Leroy 1964, Pl. 54.2); London, BL Or. 3372, c. 1200 (Leroy 1964, Pls 65-66).

to be in keeping with what is generally known of the Mosul metalworking industry. In current scholarship, Mosul is famed almost exclusively as a centre of silver-inlaid metalwork, because of the fact that all metalwork objects which could be positively ascribed to Mosul until now are characterized by the extensive use of inlay, mainly silver. Nevertheless, some cast pieces without inlay decoration, such as door handles and knockers, have also been associated with the city, mainly because of the stylistic parallels they reveal with architectural reliefs and stuccowork from the city (see Section 6.3.2).[70]

It should be noted, however, that the engraving method was widely practised in Mosul, as in any other production centre in Northern Mesopotamia, if not only as a mere foundation for the richer technique of inlaying.[71] Here we should perhaps also bear in mind that the inlay technique was introduced into the Mosul metalwork industry around the turn of the twelfth century,[72] thus around the time that the liturgical fan was produced. If the assumption is correct that the fan from Deir al-Surian was produced in the Mosul area, it would be the only presently known metalwork object of this quality produced at that time to feature engravings only.

The posited origin in the Mosul area raises the question of why the fan was not silver-inlaid. Was this simply a matter of cost, any additional silver inlay being much more expensive than the cheaper engraving, or a conscious choice governed by the particular use of the object? Although many of the surviving silver-inlaid objects seem originally to have been intended for daily use, the specific purpose of the liturgical fan would conceivably have posed too great a risk of the inlay peeling off: after all, it would have been used intensively, with the deacons waving it continuously above the altar.

Whatever the case may be, one possible indication that the engraver was accustomed to enhancing his decoration with inlay work is perhaps the fact that he did not make a clear distinction between the short inscriptions in the central medallion and the decorative background, consisting of the whirling scroll pattern; additional silver inlay would of course have brought out the text more clearly.[73] On the other hand, the illegibility of the text, especially in comparison with the dedicatory inscription, may also have been due to the limited space available under the feet of the angels, forcing the engraver to squeeze in the text. A closer examination of the production and decoration techniques used for the liturgical fan, especially in comparison with other objects, is needed to shed further light on this matter.

3.4 Language of the Inscriptions and Religious Background of the Artist

As mentioned, the fan is decorated with Syriac inscriptions. This detail seems to be important within the scope of a study on the relationship between Christian and Islamic art, as Syriac was a literary and theological language used only by Christians and not by Muslims. This may lead to the conclusion that the craftsman who made this object was a local Christian. Van Rompay's observations on the mastery of the artist who engraved the dedicatory inscription also seem to suggest that this engraver was intimately acquainted with the Syriac script.[74] Some additional comments should be made, however, on the hypothesis of the artist being a local Christian.

First, since he did not include his name in any inscription, it cannot be ascertained that a single craftsman produced the object. The fan could well have been made by two or more

[70] Allan 1987, cat. nos 94-96; Folsach 2001, 289, cat. nos 504-505; Mols 2006, 33-34.
[71] On the inlaying technique, see Rice 1953a, 237-238; *idem* 1953b, 498-499.
[72] Allan 1999, 18-19.
[73] I would like to thank Dr Luit Mols for this observation.
[74] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 134.

artisans: for instance, a decorator and a person who formed the basic artefact. In fact, such division of labour seems to have been common practice in the metalworking industry in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Several contemporary inlaid metalwork objects are supplied with inscriptions in which the craftsman who constructed the shape and the design of the object is differentiated from the one who executed the inlay, that is, the decoration.[75]

Moreover, even the decoration of the liturgical fan may have been the responsibility of two craftsmen, a suggestion borne out by the striking difference between the skilful application of the dedicatory inscriptions and the less skilled craftsmanship apparent in the execution of the figural imagery. A second alternative to bear in mind is the possibility that a Muslim craftsman traced the various letters on the disk, using a model prepared by someone familiar with the Syriac language, perhaps the person who commissioned the work.

Be that as it may, establishing the religious background of the artist(s) who produced the fan is not of major importance. What matters here is the observation that the formal characteristics of the fan's decoration were common to Christians and Muslims alike. Together with the evidence presented in the following chapters, this strongly suggests that workshops and individual artists producing artefacts for Christian patrons were identical to those working for a Muslim clientele. Moreover, it has already shown that, in case of the small corpus of inlaid work with Christian imagery, the same artistic motifs could enjoy popularity among different religious groups. If one accepts the notion that individual workshops produced metalwork for Christian and Muslim costumers at the same time, it becomes irrelevant to speculate further about the possible religious background of the craftsmen, for – whether Christian or Muslim – they worked according to the same technological and aesthetic standards set by the Northern Mesopotamian workshops.

The art-historical research on the fan has supplied enough elements to support the suggestion that Northern Mesopotamia, most probably Mosul, was its place of origin; from the dedicatory inscription it can be deduced that the object and its probably counterpart were produced for Deir al-Surian. Although the inscription does not explicitly describe the fan and its now-lost counterpart as a donation, this does seem probable; the fact alone that this elaborate text was applied, including the name of the monastery for which it was made and the date, suggests that the fan was more than just a liturgical object. However, the notion that the monastery itself, or one of its richer inhabitants, ordered and paid for the fan cannot completely be discarded. In this respect, it should be observed that it was not uncommon among the Syrian Orthodox to order liturgical implements from famous centres of metalwork abroad.[76] Additional research on the nature of inscriptions on other pieces of metalwork from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may shed more light on this matter.

Since the fan was bought by Warocqué in Egypt in the early twentieth century (p. x), it seems likely that the object did indeed reach its destination. The proposed provenance from the Mosul area accords well with what is known of the history of Deir al-Surian's contacts with Mesopotamia, which intensified markedly around the turn of the twelfth century. This brings us to the matter of the origins of Deir al-Surian's inhabitants and their relations with Syrian Orthodox communities in other parts of the Middle East, in particular Northern Mesopotamia.

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[75] Atil/Chase/Jett 1985, 11-12; Blair 1998, 119, 121. Cf. Auld 2009, 46-47.

[76] This practice is confirmed by a passage from Maʿarrat Saydnaya, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Ms. 8/11, which describes the activities undertaken by Bishop John of Mardin (1125-1165) in building and repairing the churches and monasteries in Tur ʿAbdin (see Section 2.5). According to this text, John 'in his diligence sent to Alexandria and bought through merchant friends of his, two patens, a pitcher for the consecration of the divine oil, three chalices of silver, … vessels so amazing, pleasing and precious that the like cannot be found except in the treasuries of kings' (Vööbus 1975-1976, II, 220. Quoted from Allan 1999, 17).

3.5 Cultural Contacts between Deir al-Surian and Mesopotamia

The survival of the Syrian Orthodox community in the Wadi al-Natrun always depended on a steady influx of new monks from Syrian Orthodox centres abroad. For centuries Mesopotamia was its most important supplier. The Syrian presence in Deir al-Surian started in the early ninth century with the arrival of monks from the city of Takrit in Central Mesopotamia (Fig. 1).[77] As can be inferred from colophons from manuscripts and a monumental inscription inside the Church of al-ᶜAdra, the Takritans played an important role in rebuilding the monastery in 818/19, and in establishing its library through the acquisition and donation of manuscripts. Some scholars have argued, however, that Deir al-Surian, the Monastery of the Syrians, was bought by Takritan merchants in the early eighth century, at which time the ownership was allegedly transferred from the Coptic Orthodox Church to the Syrian Orthodox Church.[78] They base their assumptions on the standard work on the monastery by Hugh G. Evelyn White, who refers to later Syrian Orthodox sources, dating from the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, which claim that Takritan merchants living in Fustat, headed by a certain Marutha son of Habbib, purchased the monastery. Evelyn White situates this supposed purchase around the year 710.[79]

Recent studies on the history of Deir al-Surian have shown, however, that there is no evidence supporting the assumption that Syrians settled there prior to the ninth century, nor that the monastery was ever part of the Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical organization.[80] Van Rompay points out that in three ninth- and tenth-century inscriptions, which occupy prominent positions in the church, and which explicitly mention both the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox patriarchs, the Patriarch of the Coptic Church is invariably named first (see below).[81] Johannes den Heijer also draws attention to the fact that there was never a Syrian bishop in Egypt, despite the presence of a large number of Syrians.[82] It appears that Deir al-Surian was never formally associated with the Syrian Orthodox Church, but was created within the ecclesiastical organization of the Coptic Church, of which it remained an integral part. Although the mixed community was commonly headed by a Syrian abbot, as far as the official jurisdiction was concerned, it remained subject to the Patriarch of Alexandria.

It is important to note that the two Miaphysite Churches had already entered a formal alliance in 615/16. Hubert Kaufhold points out that the text of the alliance document, which was signed by the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, explicitly speaks in terms of 'union' and the 'communion' of Churches.[83] At the end of the formalities, Patriarch Athanasius I Gamolo of Antioch summarized the union between both Churches as follows: 'Egypt and Syria share one Doctrine, Alexandria and Antioch are one Church'.[84] The formal alliance between the two Churches was confirmed each time a new Patriarch took up either patriarchal throne, by means of a document known as a synodical letter. In this official letter, the new Patriarch made himself known to his ecclesiastical counterpart, and proclaimed his orthodox

[77] Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001, 46-47.
[78] Balicka-Witakowski *et al.* 2001, 162; Brock 2004, 15.
[79] Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 312-315, PL. VI. Cf. Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001, 41-42.
[80] Innemée/Van Rompay 1998; Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001.
[81] Van Rompay 2004, 62.
[82] Den Heijer 2004, 936.
[83] Kaufhold 2001, 107-108. This event has been recorded in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (ed. Evetts 1904, II, 480-483), and Michael the Syrian has incorporated it in his *Chronicle*, partly *ad verbatim* (Chabot 1899-1924, II, 381-393).
[84] Kaufhold 2001, 108.

creed.[85] From the ninth century onwards, the names of both patriarchs were also often mentioned simultaneously in manuscript colophons[86] and inscriptions on church walls; moreover, in some instances, as we will see shortly, the two patriarchs were even depicted side by side.

Another sign of the close relationship between the two Churches is the fact that some patriarchs of Antioch were included in the Coptic synaxarium and, vice versa, patriarchs of Alexandria were featured in the Syrian Orthodox calendar of saints.[87] Recounting the lives of the saints venerated by the Coptic Church, the synaxarium contains no less than fifty-five accounts related to Syrian saints or to the Syrian Church, the most often commemorated being Patriarch Severus of Antioch. Two major monastic saints, Mar Barsauma, a genuine Syrian Orthodox saint who is considered the father of the Syrian monks, and St Simeon the Stylite, a more universally acclaimed saint but with a distinct Syrian pedigree, are also particularly venerated. Since at least one of these synaxarium accounts is read in the Coptic liturgy per week, the Copts are continuously reminded of the close relationship between the Coptic and Syrian Churches.[88] All these endeavours were apparently aimed at emphasizing the Coptic Orthodox Church and Syrian Orthodox Church as one confessional community. In short, ecclesiastically speaking no differences were felt between the Syrian Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox Christians. According to their own perception, both the Coptic and West Syrian Churches were 'Orthodox'.

Since the fan was intended to be used at Deir al-Surian, which was inhabited simultaneously by Coptic and Syrian Orthodox monks, it is important to establish the ways in which it might have functioned within this particular context. This is especially relevant when it comes to studying issues of identity. In the following sections, the fan and its possible relevance to the expression of Syrian Orthodox identity at Deir al-Surian will be analysed against the background of the intercommunal character of the monastery. The focus will also be on the cultural and artistic contacts that existed between the monastery and Mesopotamia, taking into account the wider historical context of the period, that is, the situation within the Syrian Orthodox Church and the underlying political conditions at the time.

The aim of the following survey is not to trace the entire history of cultural contacts between Deir al-Surian and Mesopotamia in detail, but to highlight two distinct periods for which the Syrian factor has been sufficiently attested. The question of whether there is a tradition of using art as a Syrian Orthodox identity marker at Deir al-Surian is accorded particular importance in this analysis.

3.5.1 Moses of Nisibis: Cultural Contacts in the Ninth and Tenth Century

Deir al-Surian witnessed a remarkable flourishing during the lifetime of Moses of Nisibis, who was abbot from approximately 906/07 until around 943, a period which has often been characterized as 'the most Syrian period' in the history of the monastery.[89] Moses came from Nisibis (Nusaybin), situated some 250 km northwest of Mosul.[90] He continued the traditional contacts with Baghdad and Takrit in Central Mesopotamia. In 932, Moses returned to his monastery from a voyage to this area, bringing with him about 250 manuscripts. Besides providing the library with a rich collection of Syriac manuscripts, Moses also played an

[85] Hage 1966, 16, 79; Kawerau 1960, 18, 76; Kaufhold 2001, 108-109. In Coptic historical writing, the exchange of synodical letters is attested from the sixth until the thirteenth century (den Heijer 2004, 924-925, 933).
[86] Kaufhold 2001, 109-110, 113-115.
[87] Fiey 1972-1973, 315-316; Kaufhold 2001, 115.
[88] Farag 2008.
[89] Innemée/Van Rompay 1998; Van Rompay 2000a; *idem* 2000b; Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001; den Heijer 2004; Immerzeel 2008, all with references to older studies.
[90] On Moses of Nisibis, see Leroy 1974b; Brock 2004.

important role in the refurbishment of the monastery's main church. He was responsible for the erection of two bone or ivory-inlaid ebony doors: one between the *khurus* (room linking the nave with the altar room) and the *haykal* (sanctuary), and a second, smaller one between the nave and the *khurus* (Pls 15-16).

In both cases, the lintel and the jambs of the framework are inscribed with Syriac inscriptions, stating the name of their donor, with the dates 914 and 926/27, respectively. In addition, the first inscription mentions the Patriarch of Alexandria, Gabriel I (910-920), and the Patriarch of Antioch, John (910-923). The second inscription mentions Cosmas III of Alexandria (920-932), and Basil II of Antioch (923-935).[91] As discussed above, the fact that both patriarchs, Coptic and Syrian Orthodox, are mentioned simultaneously in the inscriptions is of particular interest for the present survey, as it underlines the intercommunal character of monastic life at Deir al-Surian. It should be noted that the tradition of referring to the background of the two communities is already encountered at the monastery in the monumental inscription recording the building activities of 818/19.[92] Besides these three inscriptions, in which the Coptic church leader is named before his Syrian Orthodox counterpart, there is a fourth inscription, from the thirteenth century, where two patriarchs are mentioned in the opposite order (see Section 3.5.2).

Significantly, the inclusion of both church leaders is not limited to the Syriac inscriptions; a similar kind of juxtaposition is also depicted in the decoration programme of the two doors themselves. The door leading to the *haykal* has forty-two rectangular panels altogether, six in each of the seven horizontal rows; the door leading to the *khurus* has twenty-four panels, four in each of the six horizontal rows. While most of the panels are decorated with mere ornamental patterns, including foliate crosses, the top row of each door is adorned with single figures of saints. The first door (Pl. 15) has Christ Emmanuel and the Virgin in the centre, flanked by St Dioscorus (the Patriarch of Alexandria) and St Mark on the left, and St Ignatius and St Severus (the Patriarch of Antioch; Pl. 17) to the right, all with their names written in Greek.[93] On the second door (Pl. 16), Christ Emmanuel and the Virgin are flanked by St Peter and St Mark, the traditional founders of the patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria, with their names written in Greek/Coptic captions.[94]

The same crew of woodworkers were arguably also responsible for the production of a large wooden chest that is currently preserved in the exhibition room of the monastery.[95] Apparently functioning as a reliquary, the chest is thought originally to have been placed inside the church, most probably in the niche situated in the short east wall adjacent to the northern wall of the nave.[96] Numerous graffiti and dipinti in Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic have been found in direct proximity to this niche, suggesting that this spot was particularly favoured among pilgrims and other visitors to the church.[97] These include a Coptic inscription in which the mediation of 'St James the Persian' is invoked, suggesting that the niche was

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[91] Evelyn White 1932-1934, III, 187-190, 197-200, Pls LVIII-LIX, LXIV-LXV; Leroy 1974c, 154-155, 159, Figs 3-5; *idem* 1982, 63-64; Innemée/Van Rompay 1998, 187; Innemée/Van Rompay/Sobczynski 1999, § 30-32; den Heijer 2004, 929-930.

[92] Innemée/Van Rompay 1998, 179-180, 201, Fig. 8; Van Rompay 2004, 64-66, Pl. III.1; den Heijer 2004, 927-929.

[93] Evelyn White 1932-1934, III, Pl. LXIV; Innemée/Van Rompay/Sobczynski 1999, § 30; Jeudy 2006, 75-86, Pl. 4b; *idem* 2007, 121, Fig. 1; Bolman 2006, 91-92, Fig. 24.

[94] Evelyn White 1932-1934, III, Pls LVIII-LIX; Innemée/Van Rompay/Sobczynski 1999, § 30; Jeudy 2006, 75-86, Pl. 4c; *idem* 2007, 121-122, Fig. 2.

[95] Evelyn White 1932-1934, III, 194-196, Pl. LXIII; Weitzmann 1972, 86-87, Fig. 30; Jeudy 2006, 217-223, Pl. 50; *idem* 2007, 123-124, Fig. 3.

[96] Innemée 1998b, § 21, who points out that the measurements of the niche (164 x 60 cm) are compatible with those of the chest (149 x 34 cm). Cf. Van der Vliet 2004, 201-202, Fig. 1, n. 4.

[97] Innemée 1998b, § 21, Fig. 5; van der Vliet 2004, 200.

dedicated to this saint.[98] St James the Persian, who is also known as St James Intercisus and St Jacob of Beth Lapat, was an official at the court of the Persian King Bahram V Gur (420-438), who was cut into pieces because he refused to submit to pagan religious practices.[99]

What is important for the present context is that he is thought to be featured among the saints depicted in the figural panels on the front of the chest. Identified by Greek inscriptions, these saints include, from left to right, St Eustacius, St Theodore, the Virgin, Christ Emmanuel, St John, St James, and a saint whose name has been lost. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this decoration programme, iconographically speaking, is the fact that St Theodore, rather than with his traditional counterpart St George, is paired with a certain St James. In view of the probable location of the chest, it seems highly likely that we are dealing with St James the Persian. Considering this iconographic innovation, it is tempting to suggest that the inclusion of St James among other more universally revered Christian saints was a conscious attempt by the Syrian Orthodox monks to emphasize the Syrian component at the monastery. It may even be suggested that the Syrians, among whom the cult of St James enjoyed certain popularity from the ninth century onwards, brought the relics of the saint to Deir al-Surian, but here one enters the realm of speculation.

As far as the stylistic aspects of the inlay work of the two doors and the chest are concerned, Immerzeel has recently suggested that the general style of the panels, in particular those displaying saints, is rooted in the Coptic rather than the Syrian artistic tradition.[100] Kurt Weitzmann has recognized the influence of contemporary Islamic art, mainly for the ornamental panels, pointing out analogies with Islamic examples of marquetry work, a technique that was employed especially in Egypt, where it was used to adorn doors, minbars, and chests.[101] Jeudy, on the other hand, points out that in terms of technology and style, the inlaid panels, rather than being related to contemporary works of marquetry, are more closely linked with works executed in this technique dating from the Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods.[102]

Furthermore, considering the figural panels in particular, Jeudy reveals parallels with a tenth-century marble panel depicting three apostles from an iconostasis beam found in Thessaloniki, which is crafted according to the method known as 'flat-relief', in which the carved surface is likewise filled with another substance.[103] Stylistic parallels are found in the monumental poses of the figures, as well as the style and placement of the Greek inscriptions. Whatever the distinct religious or ethnic identity of the group or groups of artists who contributed to the erection of these doors, the works' eclectic character, with their use of three languages and visual reference to the Coptic and Syrian patriarchates, reflects the high degree of Syrian integration within the monastery.

Other improvements dating from this period include ornamental stuccowork and wall paintings. Just as with the woodwork, they attest to a significant Syrian contribution in the refurbishment of the main church. The extensive stucco decoration in the Church of al-ᶜAdra is mainly distributed in the *haykal*, and to a lesser degree in the *khurus*.[104] In the altar room, rectangular panels cover the upper part of the east, north, and south walls, where they alternate with windows which have since been blocked up (Fig. 2). The large rectangular units include compositions comprising either vegetal or ornamental motifs. Below this zone, a frieze filled with a continuous pattern of geometric and plant designs extends along the three

[98] Van der Vliet 2004, 200-202.
[99] On the hagiography and cult of St James the Persian in the Syriac tradition, see Fiey 2004, 107-108; Schmidt/Westphalen 2005, 23-26; Walker 2006, 223-224.
[100] Immerzeel 2010.
[101] Weitzmann 1972, 87-88.
[102] Jeudy 2006, 82-84; *idem* 2007, 123-124.
[103] Athens, Byzantine Museum, inv. no. T 150: Catalogue New York 1997, 43, no. 9.
[104] Hunt 2003a; Immerzeel 2008, both with references to older studies.

walls, only interrupted by the central niche in the east wall. Other important foci of decoration are the niches and doorways located in the lower half of the walls, whose frames display the same kinds of motifs.

The main focus of attention is the eastern apsidal niche, the architectural framework of which consists of several bands of stucco decoration, including two half-columns with capitals with acanthus leaves, each bearing a vase of flowers. The spandrels are adorned with vine scrolls and a blank disk, which may originally have been inlaid or painted, while the jambs are decorated with long small leaves. In the *khurus*, the wooden doorway leading to the altar room is framed by two rectangular strips in low relief, filled with stylized vases and vegetal ornamentation. Other stucco elements are found in the adjacent Chapel of the Forty-nine Martyrs, where two shallow niches on either side of a larger central niche are also surrounded with plaster ornaments, similar to the ones in the *haykal*.[105] In the thirteenth century, the inner surfaces of the three niches were provided with murals, covering older layers of painting (see Section 3.5.2).[106]

Apart from the few crosses interspersed with the vegetal ornamentation in the rectangular panels on the upper east wall,[107] the stucco decoration does not contain any distinctively Christian aspects. It has long been recognized that the stucco decoration at Deir al-Surian is part of a larger body of purely ornamental plasterwork from the Abbasid period, dating from the ninth and tenth century. This type of stucco carving was developed between 836 and 883 in Samarra, the Abbasid capital, from where it quickly spread over a large area, decorating palaces, mosques, and churches alike. In the area of Takrit, situated approximately 100 km to the north of Samarra, fragments of stuccowork have been preserved at the site of the Muslim sanctuary of al- Arbaʿin, which may once have been the site of a Christian building.[108]

In addition, during excavations conducted in the 1990s at the site of the Monastery of al-Chenisa near Takrit, several fragments of Samarra-style stuccowork came to light,[109] and similar fragments were discovered in a number of churches, probably of East Syrian denomination, situated on the shores of the Persian Gulf.[110] Abbasid stuccoes are also found as far as Iran and Afghanistan.[111] In Egypt, comparable stucco ornaments are featured in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, which was completed in 879.[112] In addition, plasterwork of a similar kind has been found in Fustat and Deir Abu Maqar (Monastery of St Macarius) in the Wadi al-Natrun.[113] On the whole, all these stuccoes reflect the visual language of the stucco wall panels covering most of the palaces and houses at Samarra.

Although the Mesopotamian character of the stuccoes at Deir al-Surian has been commonly recognized, and the hypothesis concerning the involvement of the prosperous Takritan community living in Fustat has been accepted by most scholars, the date of the stuccoes is still a matter of discussion.[114] While Hunt ascribed them a late ninth century dating, directly linking them with the stuccoes in Samarra and in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun,[115]

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[105] Immerzeel 2008, 60, 62, Pl. 9.
[106] Van Loon 1999, 73, 74, 194, 198.
[107] It should be remarked that the crosses featured on the three rectangular panels blocking the original windows date from the 1780s, when the stuccoes were repaired (Immerzeel 2008, 60, 66).
[108] Hunt 2003a, 109.
[109] Personal communication from Prof. Amir Harrak. On the Monastery of al-Chenisa, see Harrak 2001.
[110] Calvet 2005-2006.
[111] Iran: the Friday Mosque in Isfahan (Creswell 1989, 347); the Mosque of Nayin, c. 960 (Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina 2001, 107, 115, Pls 161-162). Afghanistan: ninth-century Mosque of Masjid-I Nuh Gunbadh near Balkh (R. Hillenbrand 1999, 46, Fig. 30).
[112] Flury 1913, 421-432; Creswell 1989, 392-406; Behrens-Abouseif 1989, 51-57; Ettinghausen/Grabar/Jenkins-Madina 2001, 31-33, 57.
[113] Hunt 2003a, 104-105, Figs 15-16; *idem* 2004, 71, 76, Figs 6-7; Immerzeel 2008, 63, Pl. 11.
[114] On the Takritan community in Fustat, see Fiey 1972-1973, 326-327; den Heijer 2004, 934-935.
[115] Hunt 2003a, 110.

Immerzeel has ascribed them to the time of Moses of Nisibis. Taking Leroy's interpretation of the Syriac word for altar (*madbḥā*) as denoting the entire altar room, Immerzeel connects the stuccoes with the erection of the wooden doors leading into the *haykal*, and considers A.D. 914 as a *terminus ante quem* for the wooden door as well as the stuccoes.[116]

An argument in favour of Leroy's interpretation may be found in a Syrian Orthodox commentary on the liturgy dating from the Abbasid period, attributed to Bishop John of Dara (c. 825).[117] In his second chapter, devoted to the symbolism of liturgical objects and church architecture, John explicitly distinguishes between the word for sanctuary (*madbḥā*), and the word for altar (*pāturā*; table).[118] More important evidence for connecting the stuccoes with the sanctuary screen may be found, however, in the sequence of layers of plaster on the wall surrounding the doorway and their exact relation with the doorjambs. Recent research into the plaster behind the doors and stucco of the doorjambs has revealed that the execution of the doorway and the application of the stuccoes were not carried out at the same time.[119] This means that for the time being, at least, it is only possible to date the stuccoes with any certainty to the last quarter of the ninth or the first quarter of the tenth century. Future research may reveal additional arguments for a more exact dating.

Considering the Samarran style of the stuccoes, it is tempting to view their application at Deir al-Surian as a deliberate attempt to emphasize and strengthen the Syrian element within its mixed Coptic-Syrian monastic environment. One should be cautious, however, in assuming that contemporary artists and patrons used stylistic aspects as identity markers and that modern scholars can therefore identify these aspects as such. Often the emergence of a particular style is more a reflection of reciprocal patterns of trade, material and cultural exchange, and sometimes the shifting of political boundaries. The occurrence of Mesopotamian-style stuccoes at Deir al-Surian probably should also be explained in these terms, but not as a conscious expression of Syrian identity. In order to elucidate the origin of the monastery's stuccoes, we have to turn briefly to the history of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun and its ornamental plasterwork, with which the stuccoes have close stylistic similarities.

Ibn Tulun was educated at the Abbasid court in Samarra and sent to Egypt in 868 as the governor of Fustat, probably bringing with him a range of court functionaries, architects, and specialized craftsmen. In view of the fact that the architectural features of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, as well as its stucco and woodwork, clearly reflect Mesopotamian building traditions, it has been assumed that Mesopotamian architects and craftsmen, rather than local artists, were responsible for its execution. According to some later sources, of which the oldest dates from the early eleventh century (al-Balawi's *Sirad Ahmat ibn Tulun*), the architect of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun was a Christian, but it has been suggested that this may well have been a later attempt to explain the occurrence of some unusual architectural features to contemporary audiences.[120]

Whatever the case, the emigrated Mesopotamian stucco-workers, or their successors, apparently also worked in the Wadi al-Natrun, where they were not only responsible for the plaster decorations at Deir al-Surian, but also for those in nearby Deir Abu Maqar. The latter observation is of major importance, since it shows that the same style of stuccowork was also applied within a distinct Coptic context, again raising the question of the adequacy of stylistic analysis for the study of issues of identity. Of course, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility that the appearance of the stuccoes at Deir al-Surian reminded the immigrant monks of the churches back in their homeland, but unfortunately no explicit information has

[116] Leroy 1974b, 467-468; *idem* 1974c, 161; Immerzeel 2008, 65-66; *idem* 2009, 30.
[117] Syriac text edited with French translation: Sader 1970; English translation: Varghese 1999.
[118] Sader 1983, 39-40.
[119] Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, § 16. Cf. Immerzeel 2008, 66.
[120] Creswell 1989, 392 n. 4; Behrens-Abouseif 2007, 71.

survived in the historical sources that reveals how the stuccoes were viewed by the monks or others visiting the church.[121]

Considering the Mesopotamian connection in terms of stucco decoration, the characteristic shape of the eastern section, with its straight-backed altar room flanked by two annex rooms, is in itself also of particular interest. This architectural setting does not seem to belong to the original eastern section, which according Innemée may originally have been in the shape of a triconch.[122] Notably, the closest architectural parallels are not found in Coptic Egypt, but yet again in the Mesopotamian region: these include a late sixth-century church that was excavated in Kokhe, the residence of the East Syrian Catholicos, situated in the vicinity of the Sassanid capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon near Baghdad.[123] Other characteristic examples of churches with eastern sections consisting of three rooms and a straight-backed eastern wall, as opposed to an apsidal niche in the centre, are encountered in Hira in southern Iraq, but also in the Persian-Arabian Gulf region.[124] In view of the fact that the *haykal* of Deir al-Surian follows a number of Mesopotamian building and decorative patterns, Immerzeel is inclined to ascribe its construction to the Syrian inhabitants of the monastery.[125] It remains unclear whether this was carried out as part of the reconstruction activities conducted at the time of Moses of Nisibis, thus shortly before the application of the stuccoes, or already a century earlier when Takritans were actively engaged in rebuilding the monastery.

In 1999, a number of wall paintings and inscriptions were uncovered in the *khurus*, some of which appear to be more or less contemporary with the wooden doors and the stuccoes. In these paintings the 'Syrian connection' is established by means of language, and perhaps even through iconography. A large dedicatory inscription written in Coptic runs around the inside of the dome, directly beneath painted decoration that has not yet been brought to light.[126] The text includes the name of a certain *papa* Moses, also called *higoumenos* and *oikonomos*, who may be identified as Moses of Nisibis.[127] Judging from the overlaps, the paintings directly underneath, including two representations with Syriac inscriptions, must be contemporary with the large dedicatory inscription, and may therefore be dated to the early tenth century. The two representations with Syriac inscriptions are part of a wider iconographic context featured on the upper zone of the wall, entirely devoted to the common theme of the conversion of foreign peoples. Both are placed on the upper east wall, over the entrance to the *haykal*, and depict royal conversions: to the left King Abgar of Edessa holding the *mandylion* (inscription: 'and he sent him the image'), and to the right, Emperor Constantine on horseback before a cross in the sky (inscription: 'The king, when he saw the sign (of) the cross [in h]eaven, believed in Ch[rist].').[128]

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[121] In a recent study on architectural style and identity in Egypt, Doris Behrens-Abouseif (2007, 71-72) has raised questions about whether the Samarra style of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun was consciously adopted by Ibn Tulun in order to express any particular associations with the Abbasid capital. Discussing two medieval chronicles in which the building of the mosque is recounted, she argues that contemporary audiences do not seem to have been aware of the fact that the mosque was built in the architectural style of Samarra.

[122] Innemée 1995.

[123] Immerzeel 2008, 65, Fig. 3; *idem* 2009, 28-30. On the church in Kokhe, see Cassis 2002b, 64-69, Fig. 2.

[124] Cassis 2002b, 66-68, with further references.

[125] Immerzeel 2008, 33.

[126] Innemée/Van Rompay/Sobczynski 1999, § 8, Figs 3-4; Van Rompay 2000b, 84, Pl. 3.

[127] Innemée 2001, § 10; Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, § 12; van der Vliet 2004, 194-195; Immerzeel, forthcoming. Van Rompay (2000b, 84) draws attention to the fact that the inscription also mentions a certain *papa* Aaron. Both names return in an unfortunately undated colophon in a Syriac manuscript from Deir al-Surian (BL Add. 17181), in which they are designated as 'priests and directors of the Monastery of the Syrians'. As pointed out by Van Rompay, it is currently uncertain whether the two pairs are identical.

[128] Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, § 13-16, Figs 6-8, § 28-40, Figs 1-3; Van Rompay 2004, 61, nos C.1-C.2. Rather than referring to the dream of Constantine, as it was first recounted by Lactantius (c. 250-320), the latter image is ultimately grounded in a textual tradition that can be traced back to Eusebius. In his *Vita Constantini*, Eusebius

Innemée has argued that the pairing on an equal level of Abgar and Constantine, the first Syrian king and the first Roman emperor, respectively, to embrace Christianity was a clear Syrian statement.[129] Seen in this light, it may be suggested that the painting was made at the instigation of Syrian monks in order to strengthen their position at the monastery, especially as it is placed at a location of the most important symbolic significance. Notwithstanding the potential Syrian influence in the painted decoration of the *khurus*, the two paintings with Syriac inscriptions are part of a wider context in which paintings with Coptic inscriptions abound. Apart from the monumental Coptic inscription mentioned above, they are bordered underneath by a series of representations from the life of the Virgin (Dormition, Assumption, and Glory of the Virgin), probably painted only a few decades later, all featuring Coptic rather than Syriac inscriptions.[130]

This brings us to the matter of the language of the inscriptions. The coexistence of both languages at the monastery again attests to the high degree of cultural interaction at the monastery at the time. In a recent survey of the Syriac inscriptions at Deir al-Surian, Van Rompay points out that linguistic politics at the monastery leaned towards Coptic in the ninth and tenth century and towards Syriac in the thirteenth.[131] It is to the latter period that we will now turn our attention.

3.5.2 Monks from Deir Mar Mattai: Cultural Contacts in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century

The remarkably high quantity of data recorded in manuscripts from Deir al-Surian and available from inscriptions on the walls of its church from the second half of the twelfth century and the first half of the thirteenth suggests that this was a second flourishing period with an important influx of Syrian Orthodox monks from Syria and Mesopotamia. Further evidence for the cultural importance of Deir al-Surian at the time follows from a number of contemporary works of art at the monastery, mainly wall paintings. Before turning to these murals, it is imperative to take a closer look at the written evidence concerning the arrival of these Syrian Orthodox monks at the monastery, and their subsequent activities there, especially focusing on the monks who came from Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul, for it appears that they played a catalysing role within this material and spiritual revival. The references to these monks are, summarized in chronological order, as follows:

- 1165/1166 or 1155/1156 (A.G. 1477 or 1467): an incomplete text in the nave, to the left of the doorway giving access to the *khurus*, seems to refer to restoration works after a period of difficulties, in which there was no Syrian priest in the monastery for a full ten years.[132]
- 1190: on the final page of a manuscript from Deir al-Surian containing the *Homilies* of Patriarch Severus of Antioch, a note is added by Patriarch Michael the Syrian. He had this

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(c. 260-338) recounts that Constantine had a vision before and during the battle at the Milvian bridge, in which he saw a cross of light in the heavens bearing the words 'in this sign conquer' (Baert 2004, 16-17). An iconographic parallel is found in a miniature from a copy of the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus (Paris, BnF cod. grec. 510, fol. 440r), which was produced in Constantinople in the late ninth century, in which both the dream and vision of Constantine are illustrated (Baert 2004, 84-86, Fig. 9; Walter 2006, 56-57, Fig. 47).

[129] Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, § 15.

[130] Innemée/Van Rompay 2002, § 17-22, Figs 9-11. A wall painting on the eastern part of the south wall, dating from around 1000, shows the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Paradise, seated together, with souls of the righteous represented as small children on their lap. No inscriptions have been found on the mural (Innemée 1998b, § 3.2, Fig. 1; van Loon 2003, 68, Fig. 1). On the iconographic theme of the Three Patriarchs in Paradise, see van Loon 2003.

[131] Van Rompay 2004.

[132] Jenner/Van Rompay 1998, 99-101, Fig. 16, Innemée/Van Rompay 1998, 175-176, 189; Van Rompay 1999, §5, inscr. g.

copy sent from Egypt to Deir Mar Barsauma near Melitene, now Malatya in Turkey.[133] This text testifies to intensive contacts between the monks of Deir al-Surian and Syrian Orthodox at long distance, and it also seems to demonstrate Michael's familiarity with the monastery's important manuscript collection. The manuscript was apparently brought back to the Wadi al-Natrun afterwards.

- 1190: Rabban Zakhe from Deir Mar Mattai, a native from Takrit whose proper name was Jacob, buys a manuscript with *Hymns* from Rabban ᶜAziz of Bartelli, who purchased it at the Monastery of Khandak near Cairo.[134]
- 1194 (A.G. 1505): a scribal note in a manuscript mentions the arrival of 'a monk with many companions'.[135] This anonymous monk, according to Evelyn White perhaps Zakhe from Deir Mar Mattai who was already in Egypt in 1190, restores many of the manuscripts in the library and orders new ones.
- 1199 (A.G. 1511): Zakhe copies a collection of *Histories of Saints and Martyrs*, the first vita included being that of the Northern Mesopotamian martyr Mar Behnam (see Section 6.2.1).[136]
- 1202/03 (A.G. 1514): dedicatory inscription on the fan.
- 1206 (A.G. 1517): a scribal note in a manuscript refers to the arrival of another group: 'In 1517 in the month Nisan we, twelve brethren from Syria, entered the Monastery of the Syrians in the desert of Scetis'.[137]
- 1208/09: the monks Zakhe Yaᶜqub and Yuhannon (John) of Deir Mar Mattai donate several manuscripts to the library, perhaps as an official gift from the Northern Mesopotamian monastery to the Egyptian monastery.[138]
- 1209: the presence of forty Syrian monks in Egypt is mentioned in a letter from Patriarch Michael II the Younger of Antioch (1199-1215) to Patriarch John VI of Alexandria (1189-1216). Furthermore, Michael II states that the Monastery of the Syrians in the Scetis, and its superior, are under John's orders and subject to his judgements.[139]
- 1211: the monk and priest Lazarus from Tur ᶜAbdin donates an eighth-century Gospel manuscript that he has renovated, perhaps on the occasion of an official mission from the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch John XIV of Antioch (1207/08-1219/20) to the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch John VI of Alexandria: 'And he renovated it and bound it out of its deteriorated state; and he overlaid it and decorated it with gold and silver; and he made a chest for it to be in. And he donated it to the holy church of the Monastery of the House of the Mother of God in the holy desert of Esqiti, which is known as the Monastery of the Syrians …'.[140]
- c. 1235-1245: according to a scribal note, Rabban Mattai of Tur ᶜAbdin was the author of several texts.[141]
- 1237: the presence of forty Syrian monks and a Syrian superior is mentioned in a letter addressed by Patriarch Cyrillus III of Alexandria (1235-1243) to Patriarch Ignatius III David of Antioch (1222-1252).[142]
- 1248-1257: the activities of the scribe Rabban Bacchus al-Bakhdidy (= Qaraqosh) from the Monastery of the Hermits in Edessa are set down in several manuscripts.[143]

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[133] London, BL Add. 14599: Wright 1870-1872, II, 574. Cf. Van Rompay 2000b, 85.
[134] London, BL Add. 14503: Wright 1870-1872, I, 257-258.
[135] London, BL Add. 12151: Wright 1870-1872, II, 497. Cf. Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 383, 448.
[136] London, BL Add. 14733: Wright 1870-1872, III, 1139-1140. Cf. Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 448.
[137] London, BL Add. 14442: Wright 1870-1872, I, 15. Cf. Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 383.
[138] London, BL Add. 17224: Wright 1870-1872, III, 1198. Cf. Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 448; Bigoul el-Suriany 2004, 289; Van Rompay 2008a, 743.
[139] Fiey 1972-1973, 354, 360; den Heijer 2004, 937 n. 67; Van Rompay 2008a, 743.
[140] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ms. Vat. Syr. 13: Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 448; Van Rompay 2008a, 737.
[141] London, BL Add. 14632: Wright 1870-1872, II, 579-580. Cf. Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 389 n. 2, 449.
[142] Fiey 1972-1973, 356 n. 295; den Heijer 2004, 937 n. 67.

- 1264: two quires in a copy of the Gospels are written by ᶜAziz of Bartelli, a monk from Deir Mar Mattai.[144]

It should be noted that during the period under consideration, Coptic scribes were also active in Deir al-Surian.[145] Evidently the monastery still had a mixed population, but all inhabitants fully depended on the Coptic Patriarch. As stated above, this administrative arrangement may have been created in the ninth century. For the present period it finds confirmation in Patriarch Michael II's letter from 1209, in which he puts 'his' monks in the monastery in the hands of his Coptic colleague, Patriarch John VI.[146]

Immigrants from Northern Mesopotamia whose names have been preserved came from Tur ᶜAbdin, Edessa, and Deir Mar Mattai. With regard to the date on the fan, the records from the years preceding and after 1202/03 are particularly instructive. In 1199, the monk Zakhe from Deir Mar Mattai worked as a scribe in Deir al-Surian. We do not know with certainty whether he indeed arrived in 1194, as suggested by Evelyn White, but his name turns up again in 1209 in connection with a donation of manuscripts, together with the name of John, also from Deir Mar Mattai. Apparently Zakhe was in Deir al-Surian between 1199 and 1209 at least. One may suggest that he, and perhaps some other fathers, maintained contacts with their previous community in Deir Mar Mattai. The peaceful situation around 1200, when Egypt and Syria were unified under Ayyubid rule (see Section 2.1), created circumstances favourable enough to facilitate the travelling of monks from Northern Mesopotamia to Egypt.[147] Some of them brought manuscripts from their homeland to enrich the famous library of Deir al-Surian, and it therefore makes sense to suggest that one of them perhaps arrived with the fan, or both fans, in his luggage.

Zakhe's concern with his homeland appears to have guided his choice of manuscripts to donate to the monastery, as well as his selection of contents of the manuscripts to be copied there. As the production of books was rather expensive,[148] these choices were certainly not taken lightly. In 1199, Zakhe copied a hagiographical manuscript containing a selection of lives, the first of which was devoted to Mar Behnam, a Syrian Orthodox saint from the Mosul area. The great significance of this fact becomes clear if one bears in mind that accounts of the life of Mar Behnam were not widely available in Zakhe's day. Only a few decades earlier, Bishop John of Mardin complained that he did not have any written versions of the story of Mar Behnam, and had to rely completely on oral tradition (see Section 6.2.1).

In fact, Zakhe's copy is the second-oldest account known, the oldest one being found in a Syrian Orthodox manuscript dating from 1197 in the British Library (Add. 12174), which was written at Deir Mar Barsauma near Melitene (Malatya), then the Seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch.[149] BL Add. 12174 is one of the manuscripts that were purchased in 1839 at Deir al-Surian by Henry Tattam for the Trustees of the British Museum.[150] It is tempting to suggest that this manuscript was thus also transferred to Deir al-Surian around 1200, especially considering the contacts between Deir Mar Barsauma and Deir al-Surian are attested in this period, but one should not exclude the possibility that BL Add. 12174 arrived at Deir al-Surian at a later date.

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[143] Wright 1870-1872, I, 141 (BL Add. 17257), 142 (BL Add. 17256), 171 (BL Add. 14686), 380 (BL Add. 14715); Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 449; Bigoul el-Suriany 2004, 285.
[144] Evelyn White 1932-1934, II, 450; Bigoul el-Suriany 2004, 285.
[145] Bigoul el-Suriany 2004, 285.
[146] Den Heijer 2004, 933-938.
[147] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 133.
[148] Martin 2003, 230.
[149] Wright 1870-1872, III, 1123-1139, 1146.
[150] Wright 1870-1872, III, xiii.

What is important here is that, according to the hagiography of Mar Behnam, the origins of the monasteries of Mar Behnam and Mar Mattai are closely linked (see Section 6.2.1). It is conceivable that Zakhe, in deliberately transmitting a story pertaining to the two most famous monasteries of his heartland, intentionally tried to emphasize his distinct monastic heritage. Furthermore, the monks Zakhe and John of Deir Mar Mattai have a good chance of being identical with the brothers Zakhe and John who are mentioned in a twelfth- or thirteenth-century manuscript containing a selection of saints' lives, which was presented to a certain monastery in Egypt, the name of which has unfortunately not survived.[151] Several scribal notes inform us that the manuscript was transferred from the East, from the Monastery of Mar Mattai, the Monastery of Mar Zakkai, and from the Monastery of Mar Behnam and his sister Sarah, by a monk John from Qaraqosh. One may speculate that the manuscript was taken from Northern Mesopotamia to Egypt, where it was perhaps presented to Deir al-Surian by the two monks who are already known to have donated manuscripts to the monastery. Finally, the good relationship that existed between the Syrian Orthodox Church in Northern Mesopotamia and the Coptic Church in Egypt at the time is attested by a monumental Syriac inscription at Deir Mar Behnam, dating from 1164, which mentions the patriarchs Mar Athanasius VIII of Antioch (1139-1166) and John V of Alexandria (1146-1166), respectively (see Section 6.2.2).

Since the monks of Deir Mar Mattai appear to have played an important role in the extension of Deir al-Surian's library, its importance in the period under discussion deserves further consideration. In the thirteenth century, Deir Mar Mattai was a major centre of learning and ecclesiastic power. This was also a period in which the intellectual and artistic life of the monastery flourished, a matter to which we will return in Chapter 4. According to the famous Arab geographer Yaqut (c. 1225), there were around a hundred monks at the time.[152] As we have seen in Section 2.4, the monastery also played a role in the difficulties that divided the Syrian Orthodox Church at that moment. In 1155, the dioceses of Takrit, Mosul/Nineveh, and Deir Mar Mattai were merged, and from that moment onwards the monastery was the see of the Maphrian, the second in authority after the Patriarch. Until then, the Maphrian had resided in Takrit.[153] The Maphrian at the turn of the century was Gregory I (1189-1214/15). He was a nephew of Patriarch Michael the Syrian, and one of several members of Michael's family placed in strategic positions within the hierarchy of the Church.[154] This appointment led to a schism, because the Patriarch ignored the preference of the local church authorities, the monks of Deir Mar Mattai, and the civil dignitaries of Takrit and Mosul.[155]

Nepotism did not end with the death of Michael, since Maphrian Gregory I ordained his brother Josuah as his uncle's successor, Michael II the Younger (1199-1215).[156] This again led to disagreement; the bishops selected Athanasius IX (1199-1207),[157] and as a result of this struggle for power there were now two competing patriarchs. Whereas Athanasius IX was in control of the 'Western' regions, including Syria, Cilicia, Cappadocia, and Tur ᶜAbdin, Michael II was in command of the 'East', that is the ecclesiastical territories that were officially under the jurisdiction of the Maphrian.[158] Athanasius was succeeded by John XIV (1208-1220), though here too not without difficulties: the candidate, clearly reluctant to

[151] Wright 1870-1872, III, 1079-1080 (BL Add. 17263).
[152] Fiey 1965, II, 770 n. 1; Balicka-Witakowski *et al.* 2001, 160.
[153] Kawerau 1960, 23; Fiey 1963, 324-325; *idem* 1974, 145, 150. Cf. Section 2.2.
[154] Kawerau 1960, 4-5, 6, 29, 52, 71-72, 81-82; Weltecke 2003, 112-113.
[155] Kawerau 1960, 26, 52.
[156] Kawerau 1960, 72; Kaufhold 1990, esp. 125-127; *idem* 2001, 101-103, 115.
[157] Kawerau 1960, 16.
[158] Kaufhold 1990, 125-127; *idem* 2001, 101-103, 115.

become Patriarch, tried to escape and had to be consecrated by force.[159] In 1214, the schism came to an end after the death of Michael II, for whom no successor was elected. Patriarch Ignatius II David (1222-1252) had no competitors and received a letter from his Coptic counterpart in 1237 (p. x).

It should be noted that the letter from 1209 quoted above, concerning the Coptic jurisdiction over the Syrian Orthodox monks and their abbot in Deir al-Surian, was written by Michael II, not the weak Patriarch John XIV. It has been suggested that Michael's effort was an ingenious attempt to establish his own authority in the Syrian Orthodox Church by trying to persuade the Coptic Patriarch to recognize Michael rather than John XIV as his official counterpart.[160] The donation of manuscripts by monks of Deir Mar Mattai to Deir al-Surian in the same year may also have been related to the internal struggle for power in the Syrian Orthodox Church. As recently suggested by Van Rompay, the donation may actually have been an official gift from Deir Mar Mattai to Deir al-Surian, emphasizing that the former was situated in the territory of Patriarch Michael II and his brother, Maphrian Gregory.[161]

Van Rompay suggests that, especially during such a period of internal division, Deir al-Surian played a central role in both inner-Syrian and Syrian-Coptic ecclesiastical networks: 'As a vital link between the Syrian-Orthodox and the Coptic-Orthodox, the monastery in the desert was a factor to reckon with for those who wanted to assert their power in the Syrian-Orthodox Church'.[162] Seen from this perspective, one is inclined to view the official visit of delegates of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch John XIV to the Coptic Patriarch in 1211, and the donation of a manuscript by the monk Lazarus to Deir al-Surian in the same year, as a counteraction to 'reconnect with the Coptic Patriarch and to win the sympathy of the Deir al-Surian monks'.[163] One wonders if the liturgical fan and its now lost counterpart, which, as suggested above, may have been donations as well, were similarly meant to gain the support of the monks from Deir al-Surian.

On the basis of scribal notes in Syriac manuscripts and on inscriptions on the walls of Deir al-Surian's main church, it has been established that the period around 1200 was a fertile one. The monastery must have housed a considerable community that, in addition to receiving precious gifts from the outside, was itself actively engaged in various cultural activities. The importance of Deir al-Surian as a centre of both Syriac manuscript production and manuscript preservation is highlighted by Ms. Vat. Syr. 117, which was written there in the period roughly between 1211 and 1221/22. In addition to being exceptionally large in size (559 folios in 52 quires), this liturgical manuscript contains a particularly rich collection of texts from ancient manuscripts that were apparently all preserved at the monastery's library – illustrating the richness of its stock.[164] Further evidence of the cultural importance of the monastery in the first half of the thirteenth century is found in the refurbishment of the church at that time.

An impressive number of wall paintings have been uncovered at Deir al-Surian during several campaigns since 1991; of particular relevance to this study, however, are the paintings related to the life of the Virgin which can be found painted in the half-domes in the *khurus* and in the half-dome at the south end of the nave. The half-dome in the southern apse of the *khurus* is decorated with two scenes in conjunction: the Annunciation and the Nativity (Pl. 18) (with inscriptions in Syriac and Greek, the latter written in Coptic letters); the one in the

[159] Kawerau 1960, 21, 75; Van Rompay 2008a, 742-743.
[160] Kaufhold 2001, 15.
[161] Van Rompay 2008a, 743-744.
[162] Van Rompay 2008a, 745.
[163] Whether as an official member or not, Lazarus may well have joined the official delegation, the members of which included Bishop John of Damascus, Rabban Abraham, the abbot of the Monastery of Paksimet, and Rabban Cyriacus, who was the son of Lazarus' sister (Van Rompay 2008a, 741-742).
[164] Van Rompay 2008a, 746-748.

west end of the nave depicts the Ascension (Syriac inscriptions), and the chronological sequence ends, in the half-dome in the northern apse of the *khurus*, with the Dormition (Syriac inscription).[165] In a profound study on the style and the iconography of these paintings, Hunt has demonstrated the formal relationship between the murals and Coptic and Syriac manuscripts dated in the twenties and thirties of the thirteenth century. This leads her to conclude to a dating for the murals around 1225.[166] According to Hunt, the murals were most probably the work of an important Coptic atelier which was active in the first half of the thirteenth century.[167]

Some other discoveries appear to belong to the same decoration campaign, and may even be attributed to the same crew of painters. On the easternmost column on the northern side of the nave is a representation of Dioscorus the Patriarch (of Alexandria), wearing a remarkable costume consisting of both monastic and liturgical elements, with his name written in Greek and in Syriac (Pl. 19). A similar figure is painted as a counterpart on the column at the opposite side of the nave (Pl. 20). Even though this figure is unnamed, we may assume that he is meant to represent Patriarch Severus (of Antioch), who already features as Dioscorus' counterpart on the wooden doors between the *khurus* and the *haykal*; after all, the monastery possessed the relics of both saints.[168] In addition, a representation of an enthroned Virgin between two angels with the Child sitting frontally on her lap is featured in the central apse of the Chapel of the Forty-nine Martyrs. In the shallow niches to her left and right are two apostles. These paintings were executed by another thirteenth-century Coptic artist, who apparently also decorated the Church of al-ᶜAdra in nearby Deir al-Baramus.[169] The southern niche of the east wall is painted with the standing figure of St Mark the Evangelist, identified by a Syriac caption.[170] Although there are no features which offer clues to the identity of the saint in the northern niche, it may be argued that he is meant to represent St Peter, who is already paired with St Mark on the wooden doors between the nave and the *khurus*.

In short, the thirteenth-century wall paintings, most probably made by Coptic artists but provided with trilingual inscriptions, highlight yet again the cultural symbiosis between Copts and Syrians at Deir al-Surian, a phenomenon already encountered in the decoration campaigns of the tenth century. There is nothing in the iconography which typifies the decoration programme as distinctly Syrian Orthodox, or as Coptic for that matter. This should not lead to the conclusion that iconography did not function as an identity marker at Deir al-Surian, however. On the contrary, the traditional pairing of the patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria once again emphasizes the Syrian and Coptic background of the monastery. Within this particular context, the visual pairing of Dioscorus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and Severus, the Patriarch of Antioch, as well as the juxtaposition of St Mark and St Peter may be considered as iconographic markers of the intercommunal character of the monastery.

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[165] Leroy 1982, 65-74, Pls 107-146; Hunt 1998c, 218-248, Figs 1-3; van Loon/Immerzeel 1998, 14-15; Van Rompay 2004, 59.

[166] Hunt 1998b, 125, 142.

[167] Hunt 1998c, 218-248.

[168] Innemée 1998a, 145, 149, Fig. 6; *idem* 1998b, § 3.7; Innemée/Van Rompay 2000, § 2.2.4, Fig. 9.

[169] Innemée *et al.* 1998, 79-83, Figs 3-5; Immerzeel 2010. On Deir al-Baramus, see van Loon 1999, 72-73. The artist from Deir al-Baramus was probably also responsible for the mural of the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace painted on the southern wall at Deir al-Surian (Innemée/Van Rompay 2000, § 2.2.2, Figs 4-7). In addition to the paintings in the three half-domes, the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace, and the paintings of Sts Dioscorus and Severus, the only other known murals from the thirteenth-century layer of plaster at Deir al-Surian comprise the small fragments of three mounted saints and a standing figure, and the representations of the Prophets Daniel and Habakkuk, all on the southern wall of the nave (Innemée/Van Rompay 2000, § 2.2.1, Fig. 3 and § 2.2.3, Fig. 8, respectively). Finally, a small pedestal with a stucco decoration depicting an angel, situated in the nave to the left of the entrance to the *khurus*, apparently also belongs to the thirteenth-century layer of plaster (Immerzeel 2008, 66, Pl. 12).

[170] Innemée *et al.* 1998, 82, Fig. 4; Hunt 2003a, 97, Fig. 9; van Loon 1999, 3 n. 16, 198 n. 900, Pl. 87.

As such, the depictions of Sts Dioscorus and St Mark on the one hand, and Sts Severus and Peter on the other, function as markers of Coptic and Syrian Orthodox communal identity.

While the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox traditions appear to be equally highlighted in iconographic terms, it nevertheless appears significant that the Syriac language takes precedence in these wall paintings, relegating Coptic and Greek to second place. Apparently, after a period of decline in the eleventh and twelfth century, the cultural and spiritual activities of the monastery were clearly revitalised at the end of the twelfth century. A certain prosperity was regained, and the contacts with Syrian Orthodox communities in Mesopotamia were intensified. In a study of the Syriac inscriptions at Deir al-Surian, Van Rompay argues that one should not exclude the possibility that within this material and spiritual revival, the Syriac language may have played a certain role as an identity marker.[171]

Seen from this perspective, one is inclined to believe that, in addition to the wall paintings, the liturgical fan with its Syriac inscriptions also played a role in the language politics at Deir al-Surian. Here we should perhaps bear in mind that the fan and its lost counterpart took central stage during the performance of the liturgy, when they were held by the deacons standing behind or beside the altar; when not in use, they were placed adjacent to the altar.[172] It therefore seems all the more significant that the only other inscription known to have come from the altar room is again written in Syriac, as opposed to Coptic or Greek. Found on a small marble column that is currently on display in the monastery's exhibition room, it informs us that this column, together with three others, was donated 'for the holy altar of the house of the Mother of God which is in the desert of Scetis'.[173] It may thus be assumed that these columns were either intended to support the altar canopy or the altar itself. Unfortunately, the inscription cannot be more securely dated than to a broad period between the ninth and the thirteenth century. If the columns were in place when the fan(s) functioned at the monastery, this would mean that the Syriac language dominated the Holy of Holies, the most important and sacred place at Deir al-Surian.

The emphasis on the Syriac language seems to indicate that the position of the Syrian Orthodox community at the monastery gained importance during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, probably due to the influx of West Syrian monks from Syria and Mesopotamia. A Syriac inscription dating from 1285/86, in which, for the first time, the Patriarch of Antioch is mentioned before the Patriarch of Alexandria, also seems to point in this direction.[174] Whereas the use of the Syriac language on the fan highlights the important position of the Syrians at the monastery, its contents appear rather to express integration. The text of the dedicatory inscription makes use of several standard components (see the general description) in order to designate the monastery. Van Rompay has pointed out that one important element that is usually an integral part of the official name, is missing here: 'of the Syrians', as in 'Monastery of the House of the Mother of God of the Syrians'. He suggests that this may have been a deliberate omission by the patrons, who perhaps wanted to avoid describing the monastery as belonging to one specific ethnic and ecclesiastical community.[175]

To summarize, most of the artistic activities at Deir al-Surian in the thirteenth century seem to have been directed towards underlining the importance of the Syrian component at the monastery, while simultaneously always respecting its mixed Syrian/Coptic background. Of particular significance for the present study is the observation that, on the whole, language appears to have played a far greater role as identity marker than iconography and style. Here

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[171] Van Rompay 2004, 61.

[172] This arrangement is depicted in a miniature representing the consecration of the altar in BL Add. 7170 (fol. 8r): Leroy 1964, 303, Pl. 74.1; Doumato 2000, 141, Fig. XV (in colour).

[173] Martin 2002; Immerzeel 2009, 33.

[174] Van Rompay/Schmidt 2001a (with Plate); Van Rompay 2004, 58, 62, no. A.9.

[175] Snelders/Immerzeel 2004, 136.

we should also take into account the fact that the symbolic strength of Syriac (and Coptic for that matter) increased as the language was superseded by the use of Arabic in daily practice. We will return to this matter in more detail in Chapter 8.

3.6 Conclusion

Based on the foregoing analysis, certain conclusions may be drawn as to the iconography, style, and provenance of the fan from Deir al-Surian. The central medallion of the fan is embellished with an image of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria, an iconographic type which enjoyed relative popularity in Eastern Christian art during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although this theme is shared with other Christian denominations, it is significant that the most striking iconographic parallels are with the Syrian Orthodox lectionaries in the Vatican Library and the British Library dating from c. 1220 or 1260, and the Freer Canteen in Washington D.C. from the middle of the thirteenth century; the provenance of the two manuscripts is well attested (Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul/Deir Mar Hananya near Mardin), while the piece of inlaid metalwork can be attributed to a workshop in Syria or Northern Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the stylistic similarities between the fan and a group of Islamic manuscripts contribute additional evidence for attributing the fan to Northern Mesopotamia, possibly Mosul, which was also a main centre for the production of sophisticated metalwork in the thirteenth century. The artist(s) responsible for the decoration was/were clearly trained in the artistic tradition of the region.

Nothing in the fan's style or iconography characterizes it as Syrian Orthodox. The interest in the object here lies in the integration of different artistic traditions in a single object. A comparative analysis brought to light iconographic parallels with both Christian and Islamic art, which have all too often been considered as two diametrically opposed entities. The artist who was responsible for the decoration of the fan mixed traditional Christian motifs with motifs recognizable from the Islamic context, thereby creating a new kind of imagery. In the central medallion, the Virgin Hodegetria is sitting on a type of throne which is usually reserved for an Islamic ruler. Instead of the two flying figures holding up a canopy over the head of the Muslim prince, the Virgin here finds heavenly support from two attending angels hovering above her throne. Taken together, this example demonstrates the hybrid nature of 'Syrian Orthodox' art from the Mosul area. As such, this work of art evidently reflects the multi-religious world in which it was produced.

The fan was made at a moment of flourishing cultural activity in Deir al-Surian, mainly involving monks from Northern Mesopotamia. The art-historical research on this object has provided several elements in support of the theory that the latter region was its place of origin. The references in various manuscripts to Monk Zakhe, from Deir Mar Mattai in the vicinity of Mosul, are revealing in this regard. He may have arrived in 1194, but is mentioned for the first time explicitly in 1199; he also played a role in the donation of manuscripts in 1209. Given the date inscribed on the fan, 1202/03, Zakhe and/or other monks from the Mosul area may have been involved in some way in the production or transfer of this object. Perhaps it was a present from relatives, friends, or even the community of Deir Mar Mattai to the brothers living far away from their homeland, in a monastery whose reputation had been established in the West Syrian tradition for centuries. It has been suggested that the fan may have been an official gift that was meant to secure the support of the monks of Deir al-Surian, which in ecclesiastical terms functioned as an important bridge between the Syrian Orthodox and the Coptic Church.

Considering the fan's Northern Mesopotamian origin, it is tempting to suggest that it was used to express Syrian identity at Deir al-Surian. It has been shown, however, that the Syrian cultural contribution at the monastery traditionally expressed integration within the Coptic community. The Syrians used their own language, and mentioned the name of their Patriarch together with the Coptic one; however, apart from the stuccoes from the time of Moses of Nisibis and the fan itself, the Syrian monks fully depended on local Coptic artists. If the fan indeed played a role in marking Syrian identity within the mixed Syrian/Coptic environment, which of its distinctive features would have contributed most to this? It was suggested above that the Syriac language probably played a certain role in this respect, while the assumed use of style as an identity marker was questioned. The appearance of the Mesopotamian style of the stuccoes and the fan should be explained in terms of reciprocal patterns of material and cultural exchange, and socio-political circumstances, rather than as a deliberate attempt to express aspects of identity. The same conclusion appears to hold true for iconography: as stated, the fan's iconographical features are not typically Syrian Orthodox. This is not to say that iconography did not play any role as an identity marker at Deir al-Surian. The representations of the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria in this particular context can be considered as emblems of Syrian Orthodox and Coptic communal identity, respectively.

Finally, it was argued that it is not imperative to try to establish the religious background of the artist(s) who made the fan. There is every reason to suppose that Christians and Muslims worked side by side in the same metal workshops to produce works of art for their local patrons, Christian and Muslim alike. As they worked according to the same techniques and styles, it is impossible for the modern scholar to establish the religious background of the artist. The common features shared by works of art should be explained as 'common workshop identity'. In Chapter 9, it will be argued that most Christian art from the Mosul area originated in the same workshops that also produced works of art for Muslim costumers. I thus hope to show that, from a technical and aesthetic perspective, Christian material culture in thirteenth-century Mosul was inextricably bound up with the contemporary artistic production of the region in general. The implications of the phenomenon of common workshop identity for the study of issues of identity will be explored in more detail in Chapter 9.