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

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Citation

Snelders, B. (2010, September 1). *Identity and Christian-Muslim interaction : medieval art of the Syrian Orthodox from the Mosul area*. Peeters, Leuven. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/15917>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

4. Manuscript Illustration: Vatican Syr. 559 and British Library Add. 7170

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the close formal correspondence with contemporary Islamic art observed in the liturgical fan from Deir al-Surian. In the case of the Syrian Orthodox Gospel lectionaries Vatican Library Ms. Syr. 559 and London British Library Ms. Add. 7170, the similarities with Islamic art have long been recognized. These manuscripts are the main exponents of a flourishing of Syriac manuscript illustration from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, with various production centres located in Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Tur ʿAbdin area.¹ The two lectionaries are the most richly and lavishly decorated Syriac manuscripts, and have received abundant scholarly attention. Scholars such as Hugo Buchthal, Guillaume de Jerphanion, Jules Leroy and, more recently, Rima Smine, Lucy-Anne Hunt, and Mahmoud Zibawi, have stressed the manuscripts' importance for the study of Syrian Christian art, and have highlighted their artistic connections with both Byzantine and Islamic artistic traditions.²

Both manuscripts are written on paper in a fine *Estrangelo* script. They are each provided with an extensive series of miniatures representing scenes from the Life of Christ: the lectionary in the Vatican originally contained no fewer than 53 illustrations, and the one in the British Library did not lag far behind with 50. The colophon of Vat. Syr. 559 states that it was commissioned by Rabban ʿAbdallah ibn Khusho ibn Shimʿun for the altar at the Monastery of Mar Mattai, Mar Zakkai, and Mar Abraham situated on Mount Elpheph, that is, Deir Mar Mattai near Mosul (Fig. 1).

The Vatican lectionary was copied by the scribe Mubarak ibn David ibn Saliba ibn Yaʿqub, a monk at the monastery, who came from the nearby village of Bartelli.³ The date of completion is also given in the colophon, but it has been subject to debate. For a long time, the date mentioned was interpreted as A.G. 1531, corresponding to A.D. 1220. More recently, scholars have argued that it should perhaps be read as A.G. 1571, that is A.D. 1260.⁴ Pending the results of study by epigraphic specialists, it can be argued that this relatively slight chronological difference does not impact heavily on the aims of the present art-historical research.

Unfortunately, the colophon of BL Add. 7170 has not survived. Nevertheless, a scribal note informs us that the manuscript was written and decorated at the time of Patriarch John and Maphrian Ignatius, who may be identified as John XIV (1208-1220) and Ignatius III David (1215-1222), respectively. This suggests that the manuscript was finished sometime between the years 1215 and 1220.⁵ Whereas the origin of the Vatican lectionary has been more or less established – discussion limited to the question of whether the illustrations were executed at Deir Mar Mattai itself or in a workshop in nearby Mosul –, the origin and recipient of the one in the British Library has been debated.

Buchthal attributed BL Add. 7170 to Deir Mar Mattai on the basis of its stylistic and iconographic analogies with the Vatican lectionary.⁶ Assuming that both lectionaries were based on the same prototype, Leroy proposes that while Vat. Syr. 559 was produced at Deir

¹ Leroy's 1964 catalogue remains the standard reference work on these manuscripts.

² Buchthal 1939; de Jerphanion 1939; *idem* 1940; Leroy 1964, 280-313, Pls 70-99; *idem* 1971; Smine 1995; *idem* 1999; *idem* 2008; *idem* 2009; *idem*, forthcoming; Hunt 2000d, 160-162; Zibawi 2005, 346-347.

³ Fol. 250: de Jerphanion 1940, 6; Leroy 1964, 301-302.

⁴ Fiey 1975b, 59-64; Lenzi 2000, 309; Balicka-Witakowski *et al.* 2001, 160, 234; Hunt 2005, 201 n. 48; *idem* 2007, 55; *idem* 2009, 333, 339. Smine (forthcoming) postulates that the colophon of Vat. Syr. 559 has been tampered with. In view of the similarities with BL Add. 7170, she argues for a dating to around 1220.

⁵ De Jerphanion 1940, 61; Leroy 1964, 310.

⁶ Buchthal 1939, 137.

Mar Mattai, the official seat of the Maphrian at the time, the related manuscript in London may have been made for an affiliated monastery, presumably Deir Mar Hananya (better known as Deir al-Zaʿfaran) near Mardin, then one of the residences of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch.⁷ Reviewing the issues of provenance and patronage, Smine, finally, advances the hypothesis that both manuscripts were made by a joint, collaborating group of artists, led by one master, working together in the same workshop, which she locates in the city of Mosul.⁸ Although Smine questions Leroy's attribution of the London lectionary to Deir Mar Hananya, she concedes that the luxurious physical characteristics of the manuscript, which evidently surpass those of the Vatican lectionary, point towards it being the result of an episcopal commission.⁹

Despite differences in attribution, previous scholarship has commonly recognized that, though the iconography of the two lectionaries is essentially in keeping with the Byzantine artistic tradition, in stylistic terms the miniatures are closely related with contemporary illustrated Islamic manuscripts, which are often also referred to as 'secular Arabic manuscripts' when religious works such as illuminated Qur'ans are excluded from the equation.¹⁰ In the present chapter, the word 'illustration' is used specifically to refer to figurative imagery included in manuscripts, while non-representational or ornamental decoration added to the text is described as 'illumination'.

Two theories have prevailed until now for the strong stylistic analogies between Syrian Orthodox and Islamic manuscripts, but neither is entirely satisfactory. The first theory, promulgated from the early nineteenth century onwards, claims that illustrated Syriac manuscripts constitute one of the key sources of Islamic manuscript illustration.¹¹ The second theory, first formulated by Buchthal and followed by Richard Ettinghausen, takes a diametrically opposed position and argues that the miniatures in Syriac manuscripts were influenced by Islamic art, rather than the other way round.¹² The two theories are essentially complementary: they both relegate the Syrian Orthodox lectionaries to a secondary position without fully recognizing their internal significance. Scholars either view them as mere intermediaries between Byzantine and Islamic art, or, alternatively, as minor provincial Byzantine works of art that due to the impact of Islam were imbued with foreign elements. It remains to be seen, however, how 'foreign' these elements actually are.

The present investigation does not intend to be a comprehensive study of the two lectionaries. Subjects such as the codicology of the manuscripts, and the relationship between the text and the images, for example, still await further research.¹³ However, this research seeks to place the study of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 on a sounder footing by situating them for the first time in the broader context of art connected with the Syrian Orthodox community from the Mosul area. Rather than analysing each of the miniatures featured in the Vatican and London lectionaries in detail, the aim of the present chapter is to place them within the wider development of manuscript illustration in the Middle East during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

⁷ Leroy 1964, 313.

⁸ Smine 1995; *idem*, forthcoming.

⁹ Smine, forthcoming.

¹⁰ Hunt 2000d.

¹¹ Arnold 1928, 58-59; *idem* 1932, 1, 6; Monneret de Villard 1950, *passim*.

¹² Buchthal 1939, 146-150; Ettinghausen 1962, 96; Leroy 1964, 435-436.

¹³ These topics will be the subject of Smine's forthcoming PhD dissertation.

Starting with a general overview of the tradition of illustrating Islamic manuscripts, particularly with an eye to identifying the role of indigenous Christians within the overall production, the discussion continues with a more detailed examination of the iconography and style of the two lectionaries, with a focus on the nature and degree of overlap with contemporary Islamic manuscripts. In so doing, the hypothesis will be advanced that the development of Syrian Orthodox manuscript illustration in the Mosul area runs parallel with that of the illustrated Islamic manuscripts.

The final sections of this chapter will address identity-related matters, and focuses exclusively on the pictorial programme of the Vatican lectionary. Within the scope of the present study, it is not possible to discuss each miniature individually. In attempting to assess whether the expression of Syrian Orthodox communal identity played a governing role in shaping the manuscript's pictorial programme, it was therefore decided to focus on those images which have been given obvious prominence within the entire sequence of illustrations, more specifically the full-page miniatures. Additional attention is paid to miniatures featuring hieratic non-narrative or iconic imagery, as they may be presumed to have held particular devotional importance for the Syrian Orthodox community.

4.2 Illustrated Islamic Manuscripts and the Contribution of Local Christians

Although the emergence of the tradition of illustrated Islamic manuscripts still remains largely unclear, it is well known that the production of such books flourished during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially in Syria and Mesopotamia, presumably in major centres such as Baghdad and Mosul.¹⁴ Given that the convention of illustrating Islamic manuscripts started out initially with scientific and technical treatises, it seems important to emphasize that Syriac-speaking Christians played a central role in the translation and dissemination of Greek scientific and technical texts in the Islamic East.

In the period from the eighth to the tenth century, the demand for such texts resulted in the translation into Arabic of most non-literary and non-historical secular Greek works, including numerous works of ancient philosophy, medicine, and the exact sciences.¹⁵ The translation movement, which had begun in Baghdad, was sponsored by various sectors of Abbasid society, including not only the caliphs and their families, but also courtiers, state functionaries, military leaders, scholars, and scientists, both Muslims and Christians alike.¹⁶

The role of Christians as sponsors is well attested, but their contribution as translators is even more substantial. The vast majority of translations were made by Syriac-speaking Christians, who belonged to one of the three main Christian Churches that were able to maintain a presence under Abbasid rule: Melkites, Syrian Orthodox (e.g., ^cAbd al-Masih ibn Na^cima al-Himsi and Yahya ibn ^cAdi), and in particular East Syrians, such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq (808-837) and other members of his family. These translators were usually physicians serving in the caliph's court, or priests, whose linguistic education in Christian monasteries allowed them to make translations either directly from Greek into Arabic or through Syriac intermediaries.¹⁷

In some cases, Muslim patrons are known to have called in the help of the highest church dignitaries. At the request of Caliph al-Mahdi (775-785), for example, Aristotle's *Topics* were

¹⁴ Hoffman 1982, 168-169, 268-269, 308. Qur'ans decorated with illuminated frontispieces and headings are encountered from the ninth century onwards (James 1992; Bloom 2000, 17 n. 1).

¹⁵ For a general introduction to the 'translation movement', see Gutas 1998.

¹⁶ Gutas 1998, 121-136.

¹⁷ Gutas 1998, 118-119, 131-133, 136-141. On the contribution of Syriac-speaking Christians to the translation movement, see also Troupeau 1991; Watt 2004; Griffith 2007.

translated by the East Syrian Patriarch Timothy I in cooperation with Abu-Nuh al-Anbari, the Christian secretary to the governor of Mosul.¹⁸ Furthermore, the well-stocked libraries of monasteries such as Deir Mar Mattai appear to have played a pivotal role in the transmission of the classical tradition, as they provided the Christian copyists with the necessary books to be copied and translated.¹⁹

Hunayn ibn Ishaq informs us that many of the old manuscripts from which he translated Greek authors into Syriac and Arabic were decorated with author portraits.²⁰ Due to the scarcity of surviving material, it is presently unknown whether the early Arabic translations of scientific treatises were also provided with images, but this may well have been the case. In this respect, the contemporaneous development of biblical manuscripts in Arabic, especially Gospels, may perhaps be seen as a parallel. The first translations of biblical texts from Greek and Syriac into Arabic were made in Palestinian and Syrian monasteries from the ninth century onwards. Of particular interest here is the fact that in these translations, the texts and the accompanying illustrations were often transmitted simultaneously.²¹

It is conceivable that a similar process took place in the transmission of scientific texts through the translation movement. Whatever the case may be, there is some evidence to suggest that by the tenth century it had become common practice to furnish these manuscripts with illustrations, even though, as stated above, the earliest fully preserved examples date from the eleventh century.²² What matters here is that, as the following sections will show, in the twelfth and thirteenth century, Christians were not only still greatly involved in the translation and copying of these kinds of manuscripts, but arguably also in the execution of their miniatures. Incidentally, Christian calligraphers of the Zangids and Ayyubids were sometimes also involved in making copies of the Qur'an. One example is Muwaffaq al-Din Asad ibn Ilyas ibn al-Matran al-Salihi (d. 1189), who was also a physician, vizier, and author.²³

The contribution of the Christian copyist Behnam to the production of two thirteenth-century copies of Dioscurides' *De Materia Medica* was already discussed briefly in Section 2.7.2, but there are further examples of the involvement of Syriac-speaking Christians in the making of illustrated Arabic manuscripts at the order of a Muslim patron. In fact, the commissioning of the two manuscripts copied by Behnam was part of a more widespread interest in classical works displayed by Northern Mesopotamian rulers at the time.²⁴ One could even argue that these rulers started a small translation movement of their own, in which local Christians once again played a significant role.

At the order of Fakhr al-Din Kara-Arslan, for instance, the Artuqid ruler of Hisn Kayfa (1148-1174), a new Arabic translation of the *De Materia Medica* was made by Abu Salim al-Malti, a Christian who, in view of his name, may have come from Melitene (Malatya).²⁵ Another new translation was made by Mihran ibn Mansur, at the behest of the Artuqid Prince Najm al-Din Alpi, who was the ruler of Mayyafaraqin between 1152 and 1176. The work of Mihran ibn Mansur, a translation from Syriac into Arabic which was based directly on a Syriac translation from Greek to Syriac by Hunayn ibn Ishaq, is preserved in a volume now at the Imam Riza Shrine Library in Mashhad, Iran.²⁶

¹⁸ Gutas 1998, 61; Watt 2004, 17; Griffith 2007, 56.

¹⁹ Griffith 2002, xiv-xv.

²⁰ Hoffmann 1982, 100.

²¹ Hunt 2000a, 12.

²² Hoffmann 1982; Bloom 2000.

²³ James 2009, 354.

²⁴ Kerner 2004, 266-268.

²⁵ Sadek 1983, 10-13.

²⁶ Day 1949-1950, 274-280; Grube 1959, 171-172, Figs 12-14; Hoffman 1982, 154, 160-161.

The Mashhad manuscript, an autograph by Mihran himself, merits more detailed attention. Alongside the Arabic title there is a Syriac title written in *Estrangelo* script, and the text itself preserves many Syriac spellings of original Greek terminology.²⁷ That the anonymous painter, who in a scribal note is clearly distinguished from the scribe, may also have been a Christian is suggested by the fact that in some of the miniatures the names of the plants, alongside Arabic titles, are also identified by Syriac inscriptions written in vertical *Estrangelo* script.²⁸ It may be noted that these Syriac inscriptions are written in red, a practice familiar from contemporary illustrated Syrian Orthodox manuscripts, such as the Buchanan Bible from the early 1190s.²⁹ According to Leroy, the Syriac inscriptions identifying the scenes and figures in the Buchanan Bible were written by the painter rather than the scribe.³⁰ Further research is needed to ascertain whether this was also the case in the Dioscurides manuscript at Mashhad.

In addition to illustrated scientific and technical works, local Christians were probably also involved in the production and transmission of literary genres, including Arabic animal fables such as the *Kalila wa Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffa^c (d. 759), and belles-lettres such as the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri (d. 1122). Christian involvement in the production of the oldest presently known illustrated copy of the *Kalila wa Dimna*, BnF arabe 3465, is suggested by the fact that the manuscript is partly numbered in Coptic letters.³¹ The close formal correspondence with an illustrated Coptic-Arabic Gospel Book produced in Cairo in 1249/50, has led Hunt to presume that the artist who painted the miniatures of BnF arabe 3465 was a Christian.³²

As both Hunt and Nelson have each independently and convincingly demonstrated, these two manuscripts belong to a larger body of closely-related works of art dating from the first half of the thirteenth century, which are characterized by the use of what Nelson calls the 'Oriental damp-fold style'.³³ What is remarkable is that the same style is also found in a small icon of Christ Enthroned in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai,³⁴ the series of wall paintings featuring scenes from the life of the Virgin at Deir al-Surian (see Section 3.5.2), and the BnF arabe 6094 manuscript of the *Maqamat*, dated to 1222/23.³⁵

The observation that works of art produced for both Christian and Muslim patrons were created in exactly the same artistic environment, and in some cases perhaps even by the same hands, is crucial here. With Nelson, one can conclude that the syncretistic style in which they are painted is non-denominational. Hence, labelling the figural style of these works as either 'Christian' or 'Islamic' has become entirely meaningless.³⁶ As in the case of the decoration of the liturgical fan discussed in the previous chapter, it is therefore virtually impossible, and perhaps irrelevant, to try to establish the religious background of the artist who painted the Paris *Kalila wa Dimna* on the basis of style.

²⁷ Hoffman 1982, 160.

²⁸ Day 1949-1950, 275, figures on pp. 276, 280; Weitzmann 1952, 254, Fig. 10; Grube 1959, 171, Fig. 12.

²⁹ Cambridge, University Library, Ms. 001/002: Leroy 1952, 103-124, Pls XXXII-XXXIV; *idem* 1964, 241-253, Pls 61.3-64.4; Hunt 2000b, 23-77, Figs 1-17.

³⁰ Leroy 1964, 253. According to Hunt (2000b, 31-34), the miniatures were not painted by a single painter, but by a main artist and an assistant, one of which was supposedly also responsible for writing the manuscript.

³¹ Hunt 2000d, 159. On BnF arabe 3465, see also Buchthal 1940, 126-131; Nelson 1983, 208; O'Kane 2003, 58-68; Contadini 2009, 184-185.

³² Paris, Institut Catholique, copte-arabe 1/Cairo, Coptic Museum, Bibl. 94: Leroy 1974a, 157-174, 174-177, Pls 75-92, 93-95; Hunt 1998c, 248-278, Figs 15-16.

³³ Nelson 1983, 211.

³⁴ Nelson 1983, 201-212, Fig. 1; Catalogue New York 2004, no. 218; Folda 2005, 96, Fig. 52; Hunt 2007, 49-50, Fig. 1.

³⁵ Nelson 1983, 208; Grabar 1984, 8-9, 161; Contadini 2009, 182-184. Buchthal (1940, 126-131) attributed BnF arabe 6094 to Syria, more specifically Damascus.

³⁶ Nelson 1983, 208.

Besides the stylistic overlap, Eastern Christian and Islamic manuscript illustration have proven to be closely related in terms of composition and iconography. A good example is the rather informal representation of St John the Evangelist in the aforementioned Coptic-Arabic Gospel Book; his reclining position underneath a decorative curtain finds an eye-catching analogy in a miniature depicting an ascetic breaking a jar in BnF arabe 3465.³⁷ In this respect, another revealing miniature from BnF arabe 3465 is the one depicting the story of a man running away from a unicorn, also known as 'The Perils of Life'. This scene was commonly depicted in *Kalila wa Dimna* manuscripts from the thirteenth century onwards.³⁸ Strikingly, the image is mirrored almost exactly in an Arabic-Christian copy of the Romance of Barlaam and Joasaph, preserved at Deir al-Balamand, Lebanon.³⁹ On the basis of its stylistic correspondence with Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170, among other codices, this manuscript is assumed to have been made in the Syro-Mesopotamian region. Whatever the case may be, the common use of a regionally popular theme is indicative of a shared visual vocabulary among Christians and Muslims in the Middle East during the period under consideration, a phenomenon that will be encountered frequently throughout this study.

Usually, however, the iconographic and compositional correspondence between Eastern Christian and Islamic manuscripts appears to have been more subtle. One such more general parallel is pointed out by Hunt: on a fragmentary leaf depicting the Last Supper, from a thirteenth-century Syrian Orthodox lectionary that was perhaps produced in the Tur 'Abdin area, Christ is shown as a seated royal presiding over a feast, very much in the manner of seated rulers flanked by their courtiers in Islamic frontispiece miniatures.⁴⁰

It should be noted that the interaction between Christians and Muslims within the realm of manuscript illustration was a matter of mutual influence rather than a one-way process. Certain figures in the *Maqamat* were apparently derived directly from local Christian representations of priests,⁴¹ and some scenes were adaptations of Christian iconography. Ettinghausen, for example, argued that the composition of the image of Abu Zayd addressing an assembly in Najran depicted in BnF arabe 6094 was derived directly from the scene of Christ washing the feet of the Apostles.⁴² According to David James, a large proportion of the miniature paintings making up the elaborate cycle from the copy of the *Maqamat* in St Petersburg (c. 1225-1235) are 'thinly disguised' episodes from the Life of Christ.⁴³ Grabar questions such attempts to identify specific Christian scenes as models for the *Maqamat* illustrations, but concurs that the sources of certain figures, and some compositional devices, are derived from Eastern Christian models, especially in the case of BnF arabe 6094.⁴⁴

The artistic contacts and processes highlighted briefly in this section form the background against which we should view the production of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170. As will become clear from the following sections, similar stylistic and iconographic analogies can be observed between these two Syrian Orthodox manuscripts and contemporary Islamic manuscripts that are commonly ascribed to the Syro-Mesopotamian region.

³⁷ Nelson 1983, Figs 18-19; Hunt 1998c, 261, Figs 13, 33.

³⁸ Fol. 43b: O'Kane 2003, 59-60, Fig. 7.

³⁹ Deir al-Balamand, Ms. 147 (6): Smine 1993, 177-179, 206-207, Fig. 5; Catalogue Paris 2003, B34-B38 (with colour plate).

⁴⁰ Hunt 2003b, 192, Fig. 4. Now in a private collection, this leaf, together with four others, was formerly in the Kevorkian Collection in New York: Leroy 1964, 412, no. c.

⁴¹ Grabar 1984, 144; Guthrie 1995, 21.

⁴² Fol. 147r: Ettinghausen 1962, 80, illustration on p. 79. Buchthal (1940, esp. 126) lists a number of other such parallels.

⁴³ Academy of Sciences, Ms. S 23: James 1974, 318 n. 26.

⁴⁴ Grabar 1984, 138, 144.

4.3 General Description of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170

The lectionary in the Vatican Library consists of 250 folios in 26 numbered quires, and measures approximately 43.5 x 33.5 cm.⁴⁵ The quires are numbered at the bottom of the first and the last folios. Each page is divided into two columns varying from 23 to 25 lines. The text is written by a single hand and has been completely preserved, except for folios 210-213, which were rewritten at a later date.⁴⁶ Contrasting with the common black for the text itself, the rubrics and the titles of the lessons are written either in red or gold. The lectionary has double foliation: one in the original hand, and one modern. The luxurious character of the manuscript is enhanced by the fact that some sections, devoted to the main feasts, are also written in gold rather than the usual black ink. In addition to gold calligraphy, the manuscript exhibits two other forms of decoration: ornamental designs, and miniatures. The different types of ornamental decoration, usually consisting of simple interlace designs, were mainly used to fill up any remaining blank spaces at the end of a column, for example.⁴⁷ A number of empty spaces, occupied by a decorative heading at the corresponding places in the London lectionary, were originally reserved for ornamental decorations as well.⁴⁸

In keeping with the function of the manuscript, the miniatures are distributed throughout the text, introducing the main feasts and ceremonies of the liturgical year. The cycle originally comprised 53 miniatures, including the now lost portraits of the evangelists Luke and John, and the Dormition.⁴⁹ Table 1 lists the iconographic subjects of the miniatures in their present order of appearance, together with those of the London lectionary. In order to reveal any differences between the two cycles in the selection of iconographic themes, the subjects featured in Vat. Syr. 559 which are not shown in BL Add. 7170 are shaded in the left-hand column, while, vice versa, the scenes depicted in BL Add. 7170 but absent from Vat. Syr. 559 are shaded in the right-hand column.

The lectionary in the British Library currently consists of 264 folios in 29 quires, with the text written in two columns of 22 lines of text each.⁵⁰ Except for the first quire, which is devoid of text, each quire is numbered on the first and last folio, at the bottom of the page. Whereas the quire numbers of the Vatican lectionary are undecorated, the Syriac numbers in BL Add. 7170 are surrounded by ornamental decoration consisting of twisted ropes and the like. The manuscript is in poor condition, in particular the last fourteen folios, whose text – which probably contained the colophon – has become entirely illegible. During a modern restoration, the manuscript was rebound and repaired throughout. The old paper folios were pasted onto new ones to prevent them from further decay. In its restored state, the manuscript measures 47 x 39.5 cm, but Leroy estimates that it would originally have measured approximately 37 x 30 cm.⁵¹

The lectionary has double foliation, one on the original manuscript and a second on the margins of the new paper leaves. In line with previous publications, the latter numbering is retained for references here. As in the Vatican lectionary, the text of BL Add. 7170 starts on the verso of the full-page miniature representing the evangelists Matthew and Mark, with a reading of Matthew 16:13-19 (fol. 7v). Besides a modern front flyleaf (fol. 1), it is preceded

⁴⁵ For more detailed descriptions of the manuscript, see de Jerphanion 1940, esp. 3-5, 9-22, 69-114; Leroy 1964, 280-302; Lenzi 2000, 307-309; Smine, forthcoming.

⁴⁶ De Jerphanion 1940, 10; Leroy 1964, 297; Lenzi 2000, 307. The rewritten text contains a blank space, replicating the area in the original that most probably depicted the Dormition.

⁴⁷ De Jerphanion 1940, 10-11, Figs 1-3.

⁴⁸ Smine, forthcoming.

⁴⁹ De Jerphanion 1940, 10, 63; Leroy 1964, 297; Lenzi 2000, 307-308.

⁵⁰ A more detailed description of the manuscript can be found in Leroy 1964, 302-313; Smine, forthcoming. Cf. Wright 1870-1872, III, 1204; de Jerphanion 1940, 61-65.

⁵¹ Leroy 1964, 302.

by one of the surviving double full-page miniatures that together represented the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (fol. 2r), fragments of a decorated *capitula lectionum* (fols 3r-5v), and the portraits of the evangelists (fols 6r-7v). Although the text of the manuscript is in a bad state of preservation, most of the illustrations are in relatively good condition, except for the fact that the white pigment used in the execution of the miniatures has suffered severe deterioration. Due to oxidation, the white pigment has turned black in many parts of the illustrations; particularly the faces of the figures have suffered badly (Pl. 21).⁵²

Chemical analysis by Raman microscopy has shown that, in addition to gold leaf, six different pigments were used: lead white, vermillion, lapis lazuli, orpiment, realgar, and pararealgar.⁵³ The luxurious quality of the manuscript, which, as in the Vatican lectionary, is apparent from the large number of illustrations, is further evident from the liberal use of lapis lazuli and gold leaf throughout the manuscript. Rubrics and the titles of the lessons are written either in red ink or gold leaf with a red outline. Originally, the London lectionary contained some 50 miniatures (Table 1), including one of the two full-page miniatures that together depicted the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, now lost, and another showing the Healing of the Leper, which has been preserved on a detached page presently in the Mingana Collection, Selly Oak, Birmingham (Ms. Syr. 590).⁵⁴ In contrast to the Vatican lectionary, in which only a relatively limited number of miniatures have explanatory inscriptions, most of the miniatures featured in BL Add. 7170 are provided with Syriac inscriptions, alternately written in vertical and horizontal *Estrangelo* script. Some of these appear to have been later additions, however.

Vat. Syr. 559	Fols	BL Add. 7170	Fols
1. Evangelists' portraits (John/Luke)	lost	1. (Twenty of the) Forty Martyrs of Sebaste	2r
2. Evangelists' portraits (Matthew/Mark)	1r	2. (Twenty of the) Forty Martyrs of Sebaste	lost
3. Annunciation to Zachary	5r	3. Evangelists' portraits (John/Luke)	6r
4. Annunciation to Mary	8v	4. Evangelists' portraits (Matthew/Mark)	7r
5. Visitation	10r	5. Consecration of the Church	8r
6. Naming of John the Baptist	11r	6. Annunciation to Zachary	11v
7. Dream of Joseph	12v	7. Annunciation to Mary	15r
8. Nativity	16r	8. Naming of John the Baptist	17v
9. Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria	17r	9. Dream of Joseph	19v
10. Massacre of the Innocents	18r	10. Nativity	21r
11. Flight into Egypt	18v	11. Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria	24r
12. Saul guarding the vestments of St Stephen?	19v	12. Flight into Egypt	25r
13. Lapidation of St Stephen	20v	13. Lapidation of St Stephen	26r
14. Baptism of Christ	26r	14. Baptism of Christ	30r
15. Preaching of St John the Baptist	28r	15. Preaching of St John the Baptist	34v
16. Decollation of St John the Baptist	29v	16. Dream of Simeon	56v
17. Four Monastic Saints	45v	17. Presentation in the Temple	57r
18. Dream of Simeon	48r	18. Marriage at Cana	67r
19. Presentation in the Temple	48v	19. Healing of the Leper	lost
20. Marriage at Cana	57v	20. Prayer of the Centurion	82r
21. Healing of the Leper	67r	21. Raising of the Daughter of Jairus	83r
22. Prayer of the Centurion (unfinished)	72r	22. Healing of the Haemorrhage	83v
23. Raising of the Daughter of Jairus	73v	23. Healing of the Blind	98r
24. Healing of the Haemorrhage	73v	24. Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain	100r
25. Healing of the Blind	88r	25. Jesus visiting Simon the Pharisee	106r
26. Raising of the Son of the Widow of Nain	90r	26. Raising of Lazarus	110v
27. (Twenty of the) Forty Martyrs of Sebaste	93v	27. Entry into Jerusalem	115r
28. (Twenty of the) Forty Martyrs of Sebaste	94r	28. Miracle of Bethesda Pool	133r
29. Jesus visiting Simon the Pharisee	96v	29. Recommendation to the Paralytic	134r

⁵² Clark/Gibbs 1997, 1003, Fig. 1.

⁵³ Clark/Gibbs 1997, 1003.

⁵⁴ Leroy 1964, 311-312, Pl. 82.4; Hunt 1997, 59-60, Pl. 4 (colour).

30. Raising of Lazarus	101r	30. Washing of the Feet	139r
31. Entry into Jerusalem	105r	31. Last Supper	139v
32. Miracle of Bethesda Pool	121v	32. Communion of the Apostles	141r
33. Recommendation to the Paralytic	122v	33. Betrayal and Arrest	143v
34. Washing of the Feet	127v	34. Christ before Caiaphas	145r
35. Last Supper	128r	35. Denial of St Peter	146v
36. Communion of the Apostles	129r	36. Crucifixion	151r
37. Betrayal and Arrest	133r	37. Deposition	154v
38. Christ before Caiaphas	133r	38. Entombment	155r
39. Denial of St Peter	135r	39. Anastasis	156v
40. Crucifixion	139r	40. Women at the Tomb/Chairete	160r
41. Deposition	142v	41. Supper at Emmaus	163v
42. Entombment	143r	42. Incredulity of St Thomas	177v
43. Anastasis	146v	43. Ascension	188r
44. Women at the Tomb/Chairete	146v	44. Christ instructing the Apostles	197r
45. Supper at Emmaus	150v	45. Pentecost	197v
46. Incredulity of St Thomas	163v	46. Samaritan Woman at the Well	199r
47. Ascension	174v	47. Christ and his Disciples	225r
48. Christ and his Apostles	180r	48. Transfiguration	225v
49. Pentecost	181v	49. Dormition	231r
50. Samaritan Woman at the Well	183r	50. Constantine and Helena	244v
51. Transfiguration	206v		
52. Dormition	lost		
53. Constantine and Helena	223v		

Table 1. Iconographic subjects featured in Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170, arranged in their present order of appearance

4.4 Style

4.4.1 General Observations

Outlining the stylistic characteristics of illustrated Syriac manuscripts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Leroy distinguished two major groups.⁵⁵ The first group includes manuscripts with illustrations painted in a more or less provincial Byzantine style ('byzantino-oriental'), most of which apparently originated in Edessa, Nisibis, or the Tur 'Abdin area. The formal characteristics of the second group of manuscripts, codices associated with the region between Mardin and Mosul, of which the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries under discussion are considered the main exponents, have closer affinities with Middle-Eastern manuscripts painted in what has traditionally been called the Islamic style.

It should be emphasized, however, that this summary categorization does not do full justice to the complexity and richness of the artistic relationships that contributed to the making of these manuscripts. Even a cursory glance at the various codices that are stylistically defined as being essentially Byzantine, for example, shows that there are often marked differences between the two groups of manuscripts, that cannot be accounted for merely by different hands or workshops. This observation not only suggests that there were various degrees of Byzantine influence, but also that multiple Byzantine styles, as opposed to a single Byzantine style, were in use in the Syro-Mesopotamian region. Moreover, there is a considerable amount of overlap between the categories 'Byzantine' and 'Islamic', and some manuscripts are difficult to assign accurately to either.

In discussing the stylistic aspects of illustrated Syriac manuscripts, the categories 'Byzantine style' and 'Islamic style' should therefore not necessarily be seen as two diametrically opposed entities, but rather as two extremes of the same stylistic spectrum, in

⁵⁵ Leroy 1964, 433-436; *idem* 1971, 251-255.

which formal aspects are easily transferred from one side to the other. But the ‘Byzantine’ and ‘Islamic’ poles are not the only stylistic currents that contributed to the development of Syriac manuscript illustration, which complicates matters still further. Armenian and Western elements have also been recognized, the latter especially in manuscripts that were produced in, or had strong connections with, Northern Syria. This is not surprising, given the many processes of mutual exchange that took place between indigenous Christians and Westerners at the time of Frankish rule. A Syrian Orthodox lectionary (BnF syr. 355) illustrated in Melitene around the turn of the thirteenth century is exemplary in this respect.⁵⁶ Discussing the various cultural components that contributed to the character of the manuscript’s illustrations, Leroy summed up their complex nature as follows: ‘L’évangélaire de Mélitène n’est donc ni byzantin, ni arménien, ni islamique, ni latin, et il est en même temps tout cela’.⁵⁷

Despite these qualifications, a comparison between the Vatican and London lectionaries, on the one hand, and contemporary Syrian Orthodox manuscripts with ‘Byzantine-style illustrations’, on the other, may perhaps be a useful starting point to bring to light some of their basic characteristics. An illustrative example of a contemporary Syrian Orthodox Gospel lectionary painted in a Byzantine style is found at the library of the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin.⁵⁸ According to a detailed scribal note, the manuscript was written by Bishop Dioscorus Theodorus (d. 1273) of Hisn Ziyad (Kharput).⁵⁹ From a stylistic point of view, the artist responsible for these miniatures was trained in the Byzantine tradition of the late Comnenian period.⁶⁰

The Byzantinizing style of the lectionary of Dioscorus Theodorus is strikingly different from that encountered in Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170. Whereas the figures in the Dioscorus Theodorus Lectionary are delicately modelled, with subtle shading and highlights giving them a genuine sense of corporality, the depiction of the figures in the other two manuscripts is characterized by a tendency towards the flattening and simplification of forms. The rendering of the folds in the Vatican and London manuscripts is much simpler, and the soft gradation from light to shadow has given way to a much cruder rendering. These formal characteristics are somewhat comparable, albeit not directly, with thirteenth-century wall paintings in Greater Syria executed in the ‘Syrian style’ (see Section 2.6 and 5.4). Although the preference for strong contour lines is common to both groups, the figures in the manuscripts are painted with more tonalities and subtle shading, especially in the dress and the faces.

When it comes to the formal characteristics of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170, previous scholars have already pointed out a plethora of stylistic analogies with illustrated Islamic manuscripts generally ascribed to Northern Syria and Mesopotamia, especially with codices thought to have been produced in either Mosul or Baghdad.⁶¹ Parallels have been recognized in the depiction of human and animal figures, the treatment of the folds, the conventions for representing architectural and floral backgrounds, the composition of the miniatures, and the

⁵⁶ Leroy 1964, 268-280, Pls 67-69. Cf. Hunt 2000b, 37-39, Fig. 28.

⁵⁷ Leroy 1964, 279.

⁵⁸ Leroy 1964, 371-383, Pls 127-136. Cf. Doumato 1999; *idem* 2000.

⁵⁹ In 1264, the year that Barhebraeus was raised to the Maphrianal seat, Dioscorus Theodorus was proclaimed anti-Maphrian by a schismatic group of bishops in Hisn Ziyad (Fiey 1993, 216; Barsoum 2003, 20, 106, 462-463).

⁶⁰ Leroy 1964, Pls 127-136; Doumato 2000, Fig. XVI (colour).

⁶¹ Previous scholarship, especially in the mid-twentieth century, often distinguished between a ‘Mosul school’ and a ‘Baghdad school’ of miniature painting. According to Hugo Monneret de Villard (1940, 88-95), for example, the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries under discussion belonged to the ‘Mosul school’, which was supposedly characterized by uniformly coloured backgrounds, especially red. They were contrasted to miniatures from the ‘Baghdad school’ that were said to display a tendency towards plain backgrounds. However, as Rice (1953c, 134) has shown, differences in the treatment of the background are not necessarily indicative of a manuscript’s origin.

use of strong colours and certain vegetal and ornamental patterns.⁶² Since these parallels are well documented, a few characteristic examples will suffice here to illustrate the distinct artistic overlap between the two groups.

The similarity is most obvious in the treatment of the faces, especially those which betray either 'Semitic' or 'Asiatic' ('Oriental') features. In the latter case, the faces are broad with elongated eyes, a very small mouth and nose, eyebrows marked by an s-line and, for males, a thin moustache. Compare, for instance, the figures of Constantine and Helena (Pls 21-22) from the two lectionaries, and the three Magi in BL Add. 7170,⁶³ with the people depicted in the frontispiece miniatures of the *Kitab al-Aghani*, which was probably made for Badr al-Din Lu'lu',⁶⁴ or the miniatures from the Paris and Vienna copies of the *Kitab al-Diryaq*.⁶⁵ Similar parallels are found for the figures with more triangular faces with a hooked nose and a pointed beard, a particular physiognomic type which has often been characterized as 'Semitic' or 'Arabic' and is omnipresent in the *Maqamat* manuscripts of the thirteenth century.⁶⁶ Exemplary is the figure of Caiaphas, depicted in the miniature of Christ's trial in BL Add. 7170 (Pl. 23),⁶⁷ whose facial features are almost exactly mirrored in those of the *qadi* in BnF arabe 5847, painted by al-Wasiti in 1237.⁶⁸

In addition, the stylistic correspondence with Islamic manuscripts is apparent in the use of the characteristically shaped 'scroll folds' ('Schnörkelfalten') in costume drapery. Assumed to have been developed in the Mosul area in the late twelfth century, this highly abstract manner of representing folds eventually became a hallmark of early Mamluk miniature painting in Egypt.⁶⁹ In the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, this system is most clearly to be seen in the costumes of the Magi,⁷⁰ and the garments of the three subsidiary figures in the miniature of Zacharias naming his son, John the Baptist.⁷¹

Another stylized system of representing folds, with obvious parallels in Islamic painting, which is also encountered in the two manuscripts, is depicting vestments with geometric or scroll-based patterns. Compare, for example, the scroll pattern that decorates the costumes of Constantine and Helena (Pls 21-22) with those on the garments of the military attendants in one of the surviving volumes of the *Kitab al-Aghani*.⁷² Strikingly, these scroll-based patterns were not limited to vestments, but were also commonly used to decorate other types of surfaces, including various furnishings and objects.⁷³ Similar types of scrolls were used to enhance the silver inlays of inlaid metalwork from Northern Mesopotamia, as on the famous Blacas ewer, which was made in Mosul in 1232.⁷⁴

The overlap with contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration is equally manifest in the case of the types of non-figural decoration used in the Vatican and London lectionaries. In both manuscripts, a number of miniatures have an upper frame, or a frame on three sides. Although probably derived from the Middle Byzantine picture frame, these are clearly

⁶² See the various publications referred to in the introduction to this chapter.

⁶³ Leroy 1964, Pl. 76.1.

⁶⁴ Rice 1953c, Figs 16-19; Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 65.

⁶⁵ Ettinghausen 1962, plates on pp. 84-85, 91; Pancaroğlu 2001, Figs 1-8, 10-13.

⁶⁶ Ettinghausen 1962, 96; Grabar 1984, 137-139.

⁶⁷ BL Add. 7170, fol. 145r: Leroy 1964, Pl. 89.4.

⁶⁸ BnF arabe 5847, fol. 107: Buchthal 1939, Pl. 23.2; Grabar 1984, Fig. 7B1.

⁶⁹ Buchthal 1939, 146-147; Nelson 1983, 212; Ettinghausen 1962, 145. One of the earliest representatives is the *Kitab al-Diryaq* in Paris (BnF arabe 2964), dated 1199: Pancaroğlu 2001, Figs 2a, 5, 8.

⁷⁰ BL Add. 7170, fol. 21r: Leroy 1964, Pl. 76.1.

⁷¹ BL Add. 7170, fol. 17v: Leroy 1964, Pl. 75.3; Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 11r: Leroy 1964, Pl. 75.2.

⁷² Vol. XVII: Istanbul, National Library, Feyzullah Efendi, no. 1566, fol. 1r: Rice 1953c, Fig. 18; Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 65; Roxburgh 2005, Pl. 54.

⁷³ See, for instance, the throne of Caiaphas: BL Add. 7170, fol. 145r and Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 133r (Leroy 1964, Pl. 89.4; de Jerphanion 1940, 99-100, Pl. 17).

⁷⁴ London, British Museum, inv. no. 1866 12-29 61: Nassar 1985, 92, Figs 2c-2d.

adapted to meet local fashionable decorative standards. The friezes framing the Evangelists' portraits (fol. 1r; Pl. 24), the Baptism (fol. 26r), and the Entry into Jerusalem (fol. 105r) in the Vatican lectionary are good examples.⁷⁵ Displaying a rinceaux of scrolls in which lotus flowers are alternated with stylized vegetal leaves, these types of frame decoration are virtually the same as those encountered in the various volumes of the *Kitab al-Aghani* and the Paris *Kitab al-Diryaq*.⁷⁶ The abstract floral motifs also resemble some of the crenellated friezes decorating elaborate buildings in several *Maqamat* manuscripts,⁷⁷ which, in turn, are similar to architectural decoration in medieval Mosul.⁷⁸

Similar types of foliate designs are also used for the vignettes or headpieces in BL Add. 7170. As we will see later in this chapter, the ornamental layout of the two full-page miniatures in the Vatican lectionary depicting the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (Pls 25-26) bears visual resemblance to certain medieval copies of the Qur'an made in Iraq. As Smine points out, the only major difference between the geometric and vegetal ornamentation of the Islamic manuscripts and that of the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries lies in the use of colour: whereas the former use gold abundantly, the latter substitute gold for ultramarine, vermillion, and light green.⁷⁹ The fact that the two Syrian Orthodox manuscripts use much less gold in comparison with the Islamic ones is the result not of a conscious stylistic choice, but of differences between the economic resources available to the Christian and Muslim patrons, respectively.

From the correspondences cited above, and those indicated by previous scholars, one may conclude that in terms of style, the Vatican and London lectionaries fit neatly within the wider corpus of illustrated manuscripts dating from the late twelfth and the thirteenth century, commonly ascribed to Northern Mesopotamia. For this group of manuscripts, two general stylistic approaches have traditionally been recognized. In the terminology of previous scholarship, there is a group of manuscripts painted in a 'Byzantine' style, and a group of 'Seljuk' style manuscripts.⁸⁰ At first sight the heterogeneous stylistic approach seems to attest to the existence of two very distinct schools of miniature painting active within the same geographical area. However, Nahla Nassar has shown that while there are some significant differences in the stylistic execution of the two groups, they simultaneously exhibit an overwhelming degree of stylistic similarity: in the depiction of human figures, the treatment of folds, and the conventions for representing floral and architectural elements, for instance.⁸¹ These similarities point towards a common pattern of artistic interchange in the Mesopotamian region, where a rich variety of artistic sources were merged, resulting in manuscripts painted with illustrations that are strikingly eclectic in character.

The multiplicity of stylistic and iconographic influences found in Northern Mesopotamian manuscripts from the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian and Islamic, highlights once again the cultural complexity of the region and period. The fluidity of these artistic relationships, in addition to the itinerant nature of artists and scribes, highly complicates the exercise of establishing the origins of each individual manuscript. Indeed, the issues of provenance and regional style in the field of early Islamic manuscript painting still remain very problematic.

⁷⁵ De Jerphanion 1940, 51, 93; Leroy 1964, Pls 70.1, 79.1, 86.2.

⁷⁶ Smine 1995; Ettinghausen 1962, 96.

⁷⁷ St Petersburg, Academy of Sciences, Ms. S. 23, p. 250 (Ettinghausen 1962, plate on p. 107; Guthrie 1995, 60, Pl. 3); Paris, BnF arabe 5847, fol. 5v (Grabar 1984, Fig. 1B8; Guthrie 1995, 116, Ill. 9).

⁷⁸ Guthrie 1995, 116, where she points out parallels with the stucco decoration of a *mihrab* from the al-Mijahidi Mosque, and the terracotta decoration on the exterior of the Mausoleum of Sitt Zubayda (al-Janabi 1982, Pl. 187, Fig. 6).

⁷⁹ Smine 1995; *idem*, forthcoming.

⁸⁰ Nassar 1985, 85-86, with references to earlier studies.

⁸¹ Nassar 1985, *passim*.

As both Eva Hoffmann and Jaclynne Kerner have stressed, the study of illustrated Islamic manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has to date seldom yielded secure attributions of individual works to specific locations in the Syro-Mesopotamian region.⁸² Consequently, the close formal analogies between the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries and contemporary Islamic manuscripts raise the question of the production of manuscripts on behalf of indigenous Christian communities in Northern Mesopotamia. Where were they produced, and who were their producers?

4.4.2 The Production of Illustrated Syrian Orthodox Manuscripts during the Syrian Renaissance

The distinct overlap between the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries and contemporary Islamic manuscripts has long been recognized, but the causes of this similarity have still not been sufficiently explained. Scholars have suggested different answers to this question. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, it has often been argued that the Syriac manuscripts were influenced by Islamic manuscript illustration. Buchthal and Ettinghausen consider some of the stylistic peculiarities of the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, such as the 'scroll-folds', to be 'foreign' elements in an 'otherwise Byzantine style'.⁸³ More recently, Hunt, in discussing Christian manuscript production in Greater Syria, Mesopotamia, and related areas during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, has pointed out numerous stylistic and iconographic similarities between illustrated Islamic manuscripts and religious Christian ones, describing the phenomenon as 'an urban-monastic overlap'.⁸⁴

Hunt argues that the 'Arabized style' of the Syrian Orthodox liturgical manuscripts under discussion was the result of an adaptation of Byzantine prototypes to the vernacular language of Arabic. According to Hunt, 'To produce this illustration, thinking and praying are arguably already taking place in Arabic, alongside the liturgical Syriac of the text'.⁸⁵ Although we may agree with Hunt's basic assumption that the artistic overlap can be described in general terms as a reflection of a shared common culture, the use of an 'Arabized style' should certainly not be explained as resulting from a shift from Syriac to Arabic as a spoken language. Christians and Muslims shared a painting style not because they largely spoke the same language on a day-to-day basis, but rather because the craftsmen were trained in the same way and used the same production techniques, which, in turn, resulted in the common features.

It may perhaps seem superfluous to emphasize that stylistic overlap signifies shared production techniques, but it is precisely this notion which has traditionally been overlooked. To be sure, it was not the linguistic background of the artists or patrons that determined the style of any manuscript illustration, but the methodology employed when the illustrations were made, that is, the distinct painting techniques applied by the artist. The technological training of the artist or craftsman responsible is decisive, not his religious or linguistic background. Of course, other factors, such as the materials used, or the time and money available, influenced the final result, but the training and skill of the artist were key.

If we accept the view that the style of the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries was determined by the technological training of the painters responsible for their illustrations, the stylistic overlap with contemporary Islamic manuscripts may be explained in terms of a shared artistic training, or perhaps even as common workshop identity (p. x). In other words, it is conceivable that Muslim and Christian patrons relied for the illustrations in their manuscripts on the same groups of miniature painters, who were either working on their own or

⁸² Hoffman 1982, 168; Kerner 2004, 259.

⁸³ Buchthal 1939, 146-149; Ettinghausen 1962, 96.

⁸⁴ Hunt 2000d, 160.

⁸⁵ Hunt 2000d, 161-162.

cooperating in a workshop construction. A more fruitful approach would therefore be a detailed study of the production techniques at the basis of the illustrations of both the Syriac and Islamic manuscripts.

Some initial groundwork in this respect is currently being undertaken by Smine, who, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, has advanced the hypothesis that Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 were produced in the same workshop, which she situates in the city of Mosul.⁸⁶ Although the recent re-dating of the Vatican lectionary, if correct, suggests a difference in date between the manuscripts of approximately forty years, Smine's hypothesis still deserves serious consideration. As far as her suggestion is concerned that the miniatures were painted in Mosul, as opposed to at Deir Mar Mattai itself, the strong stylistic overlap with contemporary Islamic manuscripts cannot be denied. According to Buchthal, these stylistic analogies suggest that the artists responsible for Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 had access to illustrated Islamic manuscripts, which would then have been more or less faithfully copied in terms of style. But it seems far more likely that both groups of manuscripts – Syriac and Islamic – were painted by the same groups of artists, or at least by painters that were trained in the same artistic tradition.

Significant in this respect is Smine's observation that the wide range of resemblances that link the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries with contemporary Islamic manuscripts ascribed to Northern Mesopotamia in general and Mosul in particular, such as the common stylistic features and shared vocabulary of fauna, flora, and architectural details, are complemented by technical affinities, for instance in the way certain frames and headpieces are made.⁸⁷ This raises the question of how the production of illustrated manuscripts in general and illustrated Syriac manuscripts in particular was organized in the Syro-Mesopotamian region during the period of the eleventh to thirteenth century.

Unfortunately, book production in this region and period is still not properly understood. As far as the illustrated Syrian Orthodox manuscripts are concerned, relatively little information can be gleaned from the surviving colophons and any additional scribal notes. They often lack specific information about the identity of the makers and patrons, or the places of origin. Furthermore, the names of the painters are seldom mentioned, especially in comparison with scribal signatures. This paucity greatly obscures our knowledge about the methods of production and patterns of patronage.

It has traditionally been assumed that the illustrated Syrian Orthodox manuscripts of the Syrian Renaissance were made in monasteries, by monks working side by side in a combined scriptorium and workshop. It should be observed, however, that there is no concrete evidence for the existence of such a monastery-based workshop anywhere in the Syriac world during the period under consideration. Moreover, despite the limitations of the information in the manuscripts, a brief survey of the colophons and scribal notes clearly suggests different patterns of production, rather than one single manufacturing procedure for all the illustrated Syrian Orthodox manuscripts.

In the case of illustrated Islamic manuscripts, there is some evidence pointing towards a clear division of labour, since in several colophons the scribe is clearly distinguished from the painter, but there are also indications that the text and the illustrations were sometimes the work of a single artist-scribe.⁸⁸ The idea of the artist-scribe has also been put forward for some of the Syriac manuscripts, albeit generally without any sufficient arguments. Lamia Doumato, for example, has credited Bishop Dioscorus Theodorus of Hisn Ziyad with having

⁸⁶ Smine 1995; *idem*, forthcoming.

⁸⁷ Smine 1995; *idem*, forthcoming.

⁸⁸ O'Kane 2003, 205. A good example is the *Maqamat* manuscript in Paris (BnF arabe 5847), which was completed in 1237. According to its colophon, the writing and the illustrations in the manuscript were both the work of Yahya al-Wasiti (Grabar 1984, 11).

not only ordered, but also written and painted the aforementioned Syrian Orthodox lectionary (c. 1250), which is presently preserved in the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin.⁸⁹

Although Dioscorus does indeed identify himself in a scribal note as the scribe of the work, there are no indications whatsoever that he also painted the miniatures. What is more, stylistic differences between some of the miniatures indicate that they were not all painted by the same hand.⁹⁰ It is perhaps also significant to observe that while at least five other works are known to have been written by Dioscorus, none of these appear to have been provided with illustrations.⁹¹ The only exception seems to be a lectionary at the Monastery of the Archangel Gabriel in Mardin, whose colophon states that it was written by Dioscorus in 1272 and donated by him to the church of the Monastery of the Mother of God near Hisn Ziyad.⁹² But even a cursory look at its miniatures shows that they are of a strikingly different character and were certainly not painted by the artists responsible for those in the lectionary in the Church of the Forty Martyrs, though this was nevertheless argued by Doumato.⁹³

Doumato further assumes that by that time there was already a well-established tradition in the Syrian Orthodox Church for ecclesiastical dignitaries to be both scribes and miniature painters at the same time.⁹⁴ She refers to Patriarch Michael the Syrian (1166-1199), who was involved in the creation of a richly decorated and illustrated Bible, which unfortunately has not survived.⁹⁵ Although Michael does not explicitly refer to this manuscript in his *Chronicle*, the coming into being and subsequent history of the manuscript can be partly reconstructed on the basis of two more or less contemporary accounts. A passage from the *Anonymous Chronicle of 1234*, which describes Michael's building and restoration activities at Deir Mar Barsauma, informs us that 'he also took care of the production of a magnificent Gospel Book, written throughout in gold and silver, and decorated with images. He provided it with a gold cover on both sides'.⁹⁶ An even more detailed description of the manuscript can be found in a fourteenth-century treatise entitled *History of the Monastery of Mar Barsauma: Treasure and Syriac Manuscripts*.⁹⁷

While these written sources credit Michael with all aspects of the manuscript's execution – that is, transcribing the text, painting the illustrations, and manufacturing the book cover – this does not necessarily mean that he actually did all the work himself. One should distinguish between the person who took the main initiative to have such a richly adorned manuscript made and those who were responsible for the actual execution. In this respect, it is telling to compare the situation with the naming of church dignitaries in official inscriptions commemorating building activities.

An illustrative example is the Syriac inscription on the wooden sanctuary screen of A.D. 914 at Deir al-Surian (Pl. 15), which commemorates the rebuilding of the altar room: 'Moses the Abbot took pains and built and erected this altar of the Church of the Mother of God'.⁹⁸ The refurbishment of the altar room referred to in the inscription included the application of rich ornamental stucco decoration on its walls and the setting up of wooden screens with

⁸⁹ Doumato 1999, 245-246; *idem* 2000, 144. On this manuscript, see Leroy 1964, 373-383, Pls 127-136.

⁹⁰ Leroy 1964, 380-381, who points out that the first miniature, the Annunciation, is painted by a different artist from the one responsible for the manuscript's other miniatures.

⁹¹ Doumato 1999, 246 n. 13; *idem* 2000, 144 n. 14; Barsoum 2003, 462.

⁹² Leroy 1964, 383-389, Pls 137-140.

⁹³ Doumato 1999, 246 n. 18.

⁹⁴ In support of her opinion, Doumato (1999, 245) refers to a statement made by the fifth-century Patriarch Isaac of Antioch in which he recommends scribal monks to always write as though they are painting images. Isaac's recommendation should not be taken as evidence for the phenomenon of artist-scribes, but rather as an incitement to maintain and secure a high quality of calligraphic craftsmanship.

⁹⁵ Leroy 1964, 428-429.

⁹⁶ Doumato 2001, 33, 35; Abouna 1974, 314-315.

⁹⁷ Chabot 1899-1924, I, xxi; Leroy 1964, 428.

⁹⁸ Evelyn White 1932-1934, III, 197; Leroy 1974c, 154; Immerzeel 2008, 65-66.

figural decoration at the entrance (see Section 3.5.1), but it is highly unlikely that Abbot Moses crafted these stuccoes and doors with his own hands.

Rather than mentioning the craftsmen and artists who actually performed the construction and decoration work, such inscriptions only credit the main instigator behind the project in question; most probably this is also the case for the richly decorated Gospel Book made for Deir Mar Barsauma. It makes far more sense to suggest that Michael took the initiative to have this manuscript made as part of the larger restoration activities that he developed at Deir Mar Barsauma, and he perhaps even wrote the text himself, as he is also known to have written other manuscripts,⁹⁹ but had it illustrated by a trained painter and bound by an experienced book binder, while a professional metalworker made the silver plates that were to decorate the cover.

Despite these qualifications, there is some evidence to suggest that certain scribes indeed occasionally also acted as painters, although rather as illuminators than proper illustrators who were trained in the art of painting figural imagery. Moreover, in the recorded instances we are dealing with manuscripts with relatively slight ornamentation, both in terms of quantity and quality. Illustrative in this respect is a Gospel Book in Paris (BnF syr. 41), which was probably made in Melitene around the year 1190.¹⁰⁰ On the basis of several scribal notes, it can be concluded that the scribe, a certain Šimʿun, painted the aniconic cross at the beginning of the manuscript.¹⁰¹ It remains uncertain, however, whether this Šimʿun also painted the portraits of Christ and an evangelist found at the end of the manuscript.¹⁰²

The apparent mediocre craftsmanship of the person responsible for these miniatures has lead Hunt to suppose that they were indeed the work of the scribe himself,¹⁰³ but given that we lack any hard evidence this has to remain a hypothesis.¹⁰⁴ Whatever the case may be, together with this example there is at least enough evidence to suggest that, in addition to their calligraphic work, some scribes did specialize in ornamental decoration. An inscribed headpiece in a lectionary in Paris (BnF syr. 356), probably made in the region of Edessa around the turn of the twelfth century, names a certain Yeshu^c (Joshua) not only as the painter of this headpiece but also as the scribe of the manuscript.¹⁰⁵

An exceptionally detailed scribal note in another Syrian Orthodox lectionary in Paris (BnF syr. 355, fol. 1), which was written at an unnamed monastery but completed in Melitene at the turn of the twelfth century, reflects still further possibilities of illustrated manuscript production at the time.¹⁰⁶ The note in question carefully outlines the coming into being of the manuscript. It mentions not only which scenes were illustrated, but also the names of those who contributed towards the expenses of the work: the bishops of Aleppo and Rumnah, three monks from Deir Mar Barsauma, and even an Armenian nun. The text comments on the specific amount of money that each of them bequeathed.

⁹⁹ Weltecke 2003, 122-123.

¹⁰⁰ Leroy 1964, 254-255, Pls 7.2, 56.

¹⁰¹ Fol. 10v: Leroy 1964, 120-121, 254, Pl. 7.2. The same Šimʿun also wrote Paris, BnF syr. 30, which similarly contains an ornamental cross by his hand (fol. 62): Leroy 1964, 120-121, 256-257, Pl. 4.1.

¹⁰² Leroy 1964, 254, Pl. 56.

¹⁰³ Hunt 2000b, 35, Fig. 26.

¹⁰⁴ It is perhaps interesting to note, as Hunt (2000b, 35, Fig. 27) has pointed out, that the style of these portraits, in particular the 'lopsided facial features', returns in a small Syriac Psalter which was also written by Šimʿun, at the Monastery of the Virgin near Edessa in 1204 (BL Add. 77154: Leroy 1964, 259-260, Pl. 59). In other words, if the figural imagery is not the work of Šimʿun himself, he must have worked together with exactly the same mediocre artist twice.

¹⁰⁵ Fol. 2v: Leroy 1964, 410-411, Pl. 16.3. Leroy identifies Joshua with the future Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church John XIV (1208-1220). Cf. Hunt 2000b, 32, Fig. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Leroy 1964, 268-280, Pls 67-69. For a photograph and F. Nau's French translation of this scribal note, see Omont 1911, Pl. XX.

Significantly, the scribal note also indicates that the scribe was responsible for the organization of the entire enterprise. He first copied the manuscript at the monastery and then made the arrangements to have it illuminated and bound elsewhere. The scribe dispatched the manuscript to Melitene himself, where, under the supervision of the city's bishop, it was illustrated by the deacon Joseph. The name of the binder is not mentioned, but he must have been an Armenian, since Armenian numerals were written on the first pages of each quire as a guide for the binder.¹⁰⁷ The unnamed monastery, which Leroy is inclined to identify as Deir Mar Barsauma,¹⁰⁸ apparently had the basic facilities for writing manuscripts but needed to call in the help of other artists and craftsmen to supply the illustrations and bind the manuscript.

The picture of book production which surfaces from a close reading of the scribal note in BnF syr. 355 is that of an essentially entrepreneurial organizational structure, consisting of more or less temporary groups of co-operating artists and craftsmen collaborating on an ad-hoc basis.¹⁰⁹ In other words, rather than being made in a scriptorium with a workshop attached, each individual commission appears to have been made by a loosely related group of artisans brought together for that specific project. In this respect, the production of illustrated Syriac manuscripts parallels that of Middle Byzantine manuscripts. As Jeffrey Anderson has shown, Byzantine manuscript illustration in this period was usually not carried out at large monastic scriptoria, but by individuals who finished books that were written by others. It emerges that the collaboration between scribes and painters consisted of 'ephemeral relations that were formed to execute a particular commission and were dissolved upon completion'.¹¹⁰

Further textual evidence suggests that manuscripts were commonly produced in cities such as Melitene, where they would be ordered, or perhaps even bought from stock, and subsequently donated to monasteries. This practice is suggested by a colophon from an eleventh-century lectionary at the library of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate in Ma'arrat Saydnaya, which informs us that it was 'written and completed' in Melitene. There it was acquired by a certain monk Lazarus, to be bequeathed to Deir Mar Barsauma. An additional scribal note adds that the manuscript was not only written by Deacon Peter of Melitene, but that he 'organized and completed it' as well.¹¹¹

On the basis of this documentary evidence, one is tempted to suggest that the role of the scribe in manufacturing illustrated Syriac manuscripts during the period under consideration is somewhat comparable with that of the coordinator, usually a *libraire* (bookseller), known from thirteenth-century manuscript production in the West.¹¹² Scribes such as Peter of Melitene, as the *libraire*, were apparently in charge of the production. It is conceivable that they similarly supervised the various stages of manuscript production, including subcontracting work to trained illustrators and bookbinders.¹¹³ The lack of information about the identity of those responsible for the paintings in Syriac manuscripts makes it impossible to assess whether most of this work was carried out by members of the clergy, or whether professional laymen were also involved in its execution.

4.4.3 The Production of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170

¹⁰⁷ Der Nersessian 1993, 40-41.

¹⁰⁸ Leroy 1964, 280.

¹⁰⁹ Weyl Carr 1985, 144.

¹¹⁰ Anderson 1992, 36-38. Cf. Lowden 2009, 89.

¹¹¹ Leroy 1964, 228.

¹¹² For recent insights into manuscript production during the Middle Ages in the West, mainly Paris, see Rouse/Rouse 2000, with further references.

¹¹³ A similar model of manuscript production has been suggested for the group of provincial Byzantine manuscripts produced in Cyprus and Palestine during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Weyl Carr 1985, 143-144), and manuscript production in Acre during the late thirteenth century (Folda 2005, 307-308).

Returning to the Vatican and London lectionaries, the idea of a scriptorium-cum-atelier has often been taken for granted as the model for their execution. In case of the Vatican lectionary, the mention of the monk Mubarak from Deir Mar Mattai as the scribe has led to the assumption that the manuscript was made at the monastery itself, even though the colophon does not explicitly state that the manuscript was actually written on the premises. In order to corroborate the assumption that both the text and the miniatures of Vat. Syr. 559 were executed at the monastery, de Jerphanion and Leroy have pointed out that on several occasions Syriac letters from a line or a column overlap the preceding miniatures. On the basis of these overlaps it can be positively concluded that the miniatures were completed before the *adjacent* text was written.¹¹⁴

This observation led de Jerphanion and Leroy to assume a production process in which the calligraphy and the miniatures were executed in tandem. They have suggested a step-by-step approach in which the scribe, instead of copying the text in its entirety and leaving blank spaces to be filled in with miniatures when the text was copied, handed the manuscript over to the illuminators directly after he had transcribed a single passage of text. Once the accompanying miniature was finished, the folio was given back to the scribe, who would start working on the next piece of text, and so on.¹¹⁵ But as de Jerphanion himself already pointed out, other such textual overlaps simultaneously show that a limited number of miniatures were completed even before the *preceding* text was copied by the scribe.¹¹⁶ These differences in the sequence suggest that the manuscript was thus not necessarily made according to a standard manufacturing procedure in which the successive stages of the work were carried out according to a fixed chronology. Further codicological and technical research is needed to clarify this matter. Whatever the exact chronology of procedures followed by the scribe and those responsible for the miniatures, then, what matters here is the fact that they may at least be assumed to have worked in close collaboration.

When it comes to the execution of the miniatures of Vat. Syr. 559, de Jerphanion suggests that the work was carried out by at least two individuals: a draughtsman who made the underline drawings, and who was thus responsible for the actual design, and an artist who subsequently applied the layers of paint. This hypothesis is based on a close examination of the miniatures, of which the underline drawing is visible in most cases, since the layers of polychrome are only thinly applied. A careful inspection of these miniatures shows that the underline drawing is often not followed closely by the painter, who sometimes appears to have consciously deviated from the original design made by the draughtsman.

Differences in workmanship between the draughtsman and the painter, according to de Jerphanion, are apparent in the way in which the polychrome figures contrast with those visible in the preliminary drawings. The latter are characterized by their outsized heads, which are framed by comparatively small haloes. Time and again, the painter, who was clearly the better skilled craftsman of the two, replaced them with figures with smaller heads and larger haloes.¹¹⁷ Finally, envisioning a clear division of labour, Smine has postulated that the non-figural decoration, such as the elaborate picture frames, was the work of yet another, specialized artisan.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ This can be seen, amongst other examples, in the case of the miniatures representing the Nativity, Healing of the Blind, Healing of the Paralytic, Washing of the Feet, and the Last Supper (de Jerphanion 1940, 22, 100 n. 7, Pls 4, 13, 15-16).

¹¹⁵ De Jerphanion 1940, 22; Leroy 1964, 299-300.

¹¹⁶ De Jerphanion 1940, 22 n. 1.

¹¹⁷ De Jerphanion 1940, 23-24.

¹¹⁸ Smine, forthcoming.

While de Jerphanion and Leroy have sought to situate the production of Vat. Syr. 559 at Deir Mar Mattai, Smine, as mentioned previously, has put forward the hypothesis that both the Vatican and London lectionaries were made at the same workshop, which she is inclined to situate in the city of Mosul. Although Smine's new approach to the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries is commendable, as she is the first to imply that they were decorated by artists who were also involved in the production of illustrated Islamic manuscripts of the region, both of her assumptions are nevertheless debatable. Whatever the outcome of the epigraphic study of the date mentioned in the colophon of Vat. Syr. 559, which either reads 1220 or 1260, the strongest argument against Smine's suggestion that both manuscripts were made at the same workshop lies in the obvious stylistic differences between them.

Such variations are particularly visible in the rendering of the human figures, which in the Vatican codex are generally painted more elegantly, with thinner bodies and smaller heads, in which the facial features are delicately rendered. Compare, for instance, the faces of Christ, St Peter, and the group of bystanders in the two corresponding images of the Entry into Jerusalem.¹¹⁹ While the figures in the London lectionary are characterized by their disproportionally large heads with broad, round faces, lending them a puppet-like appearance, the same figures in the Vatican lectionary are rendered in a far more naturalistic manner, with rectangular faces, and less wide open eyes. Distinctions are also found in the execution of the pleats, which in BL Add. 7170 are often emphasized through heavy hatching in a way that is not visible in the Vatican codex.

The dissimilarities between the Vatican and London lectionaries in terms of painting style, besides the fact that they were copied by two different scribes, clearly suggest that they were made by different groups of people.¹²⁰ In light of the close iconographic correspondence between the two manuscripts (see below), but bearing the stylistic differences in mind, one might perhaps be tempted to argue that they were made by two different teams from the same workshop. The previous discussion has made clear, however, that there are no indications that such large workshops, organized like a kind of factory to produce illustrated manuscripts, existed at the time. On the contrary, the evidence makes it far more likely that illustrated manuscripts such as Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 were made by individuals who only joined forces to accomplish one particular commission and disbanded upon its completion.

As for Smine's suggestion that both manuscripts were made at Mosul, the stylistic correspondence with contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration should not necessarily be taken to mean that the two Syrian Orthodox manuscripts received their painted decoration in the city. Yet again, there is no external documentary evidence to suggest that miniature painters necessarily worked in a workshop construction. The lectionaries attributed by Smine to Mosul could equally have been produced elsewhere, indeed even at Deir Mar Mattai. It is conceivable, for example, that the artists who made the illustrations received their artistic training outside the monastery, and returned as soon as they had finished their schooling.

In view of the lack of evidence for the existence of large and multifaceted monastic scriptoria, it seems more likely that the monk Mubarak copied the text of Vat. Syr. 559 at Deir Mar Mattai and made arrangements to have it illustrated and copied by professionals based in Mosul, but who were given lodgings at the monastery until the work was completed. On the other hand, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility that Mubarak and the anonymous scribe of BL Add. 7170 went to the city to accomplish their work there, in close collaboration with the miniature painters, rather than the latter having been invited at the monastery.

Whatever the precise location where the manuscripts were made, monastery or city, the striking similarities with contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration make it highly likely that the miniatures in the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries were carried out by artisans who

¹¹⁹ BL Add. 7170, fol. 115r; Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 105r; Leroy 1964, Pls 86.1-86.2.

¹²⁰ Cf. the remarks made by de Jerphanion (1940, 64-65).

were also catering for Muslim patrons, notwithstanding the fact that no specific Islamic manuscripts have as yet been identified that were made by them. Both groups of manuscripts were obviously painted in the same regional style. Further research is needed into the methods of production, style, and technology of both Syriac and Islamic manuscripts in conjunction in order to corroborate or contradict the assumption that the painters responsible for the execution of the miniatures in the Vatican and London lectionaries were also working to meet the demands of the Islamic part of the market.

4.5 Iconography

The subject matter depicted in the miniatures of Vat. Syr. 559 ranges from iconic portraiture to narrative scenes showing biblical episodes (see Section 4.3; Table 1). The hieratic non-narrative imagery includes the Evangelists' Portraits, the Virgin Enthroned, Four Monastic Saints, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, and Constantine and Helena. The biblical scenes, by far the largest group, primarily illustrate New Testament episodes, complemented with apocryphal themes. Together they provide us with an extended Christological cycle, and the scenes appear to have been carefully chosen so that they cover all periods of Christ's life equally, a matter to which we will return shortly.

Almost the same cycle of miniatures is featured in BL Add. 7170, except for some minor variation in the selection of scenes, which are arguably the result of differences in patronage. Variation is also found between some of the corresponding miniatures at the level of iconographic details. Time and again, the basic design of certain scenes is repeated in both manuscripts, with slight differences in, among other things, the particulars of dress, furnishings, architectural backgrounds, and landscape settings, as well as vegetal and ornamental decoration.¹²¹

One of the central questions underlying the cycles of the Life of Christ in the Vatican and London lectionaries is where their models came from. Closely related to this question is the issue of their place within the Eastern Christian tradition of narrative biblical illustration in general, and the place of narrative biblical illustration in the Syrian Orthodox tradition in particular.

4.5.1 The Byzantine Contribution

In assessing the possible prototypes for the miniatures in the Vatican and London lectionaries, it should first be pointed out that, on a regional level, extensive narrative Gospel cycles of this kind are not exclusive to Syrian Orthodox manuscript illustration. They are actually reflective of a more widespread development during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the Christian Middle East was marked by a proliferation of Gospel narrative in manuscript illustration.¹²² This burgeoning interest in Gospel narrative is equally attested among Syrian Orthodox, Copts, Armenians, Georgians, Latins, and Greeks.¹²³

¹²¹ In his lengthy description of the miniatures of the Vatican lectionary, de Jerphanion (1940, 69-114) has already conveniently highlighted the iconographic differences from parallel miniatures from the London lectionary. Cf. Smine, forthcoming.

¹²² Leroy 1974a, 219; Weyl Carr 1982a, 60; Hunt 1998b, 122-123.

¹²³ In addition to Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170, this burgeoning interest is reflected in the cycles of a Syrian Orthodox lectionary from Melitene (Paris, BnF syr. 355, c. 1200: Leroy 1964, 268-280, Pls 67-69), a Coptic Gospel Book from Damietta (Paris, BnF copte 13, A.D. 1179/80: Leroy 1974a, 113-148, Pls 41-74), a Coptic-Arabic Gospel Book from Cairo (Paris, Institut Catholique, copte-arabe 1, A.D. 1249/50: Leroy 1974a, 157-174, Pls 75-92), the Crusader Queen Melisende's Psalter from Acre (London, BL Egerton 1139, A.D. 1131-1143: Buchthal 1957, 1-13, Pls 1-19), the Georgian Gospel Book from Gelat (Tbilisi, Manuscript Institute of the

It is commonly assumed that the elaborate New Testament cycles encountered in Eastern Christian manuscript illustration of the medieval period, rather than being the result of a continuing internal development with direct links to their Early Christian predecessors, were shaped primarily by Middle Byzantine manuscript illustration.¹²⁴ As for the Vatican and London lectionaries, this derivation is particularly obvious in the case of subjects illustrating the main feasts of the ecclesiastical year. Conventional themes that are clearly grounded in Byzantine art include the Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism, Crucifixion, Anastasis, Transfiguration, and Dormition.

Previous publications on Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 have already pointed out a plethora of analogies with a variety of Byzantine works of art, ranging from Cappadocian wall paintings, to richly illustrated manuscripts from Constantinople.¹²⁵ Most recently, Smine has proposed limiting the comparisons to a group of provincial Byzantine manuscripts painted in the 'Decorative style', which were produced in Cyprus and Palestine during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. She also suggests that the narrative cycles of the Vatican and London lectionaries are based on a variety of Byzantine sources rather than a single model containing a grand cycle, arguing that while the main prototypes are commonly found in Gospel books and lectionaries, the artists reverted to other types of books, including menologia and Psalter books, when they did not find the required images in their primary sources.¹²⁶

Although the iconography of the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries is strongly influenced by Byzantine art, whether Constantinopolitan, provincial or both, some of their miniatures feature images that, albeit not entirely uncommon in Byzantine art, may perhaps reflect a certain preference among the Christians living in the Middle East. Illustrative in this respect is the image of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria (Pls 12-13), which, as we have seen in Chapter 3, was a popular theme among the Syrian Orthodox from Mosul. Another example is the particular rendering of the Incredulity of St Thomas.¹²⁷ In contrast with the common Byzantine and Latin versions of the theme, in which there is usually no physical contact between the two main protagonists, Christ here firmly grasps Thomas by the wrist and guides the apostle's finger into the wound in his side.

This unusual version of the Incredulity has been traced back to Early Christian Palestine.¹²⁸ A rarity in Middle Byzantine iconography, it came back into fashion in the art of the Christian Middle East during the twelfth century, one of the earliest examples being the mosaic of the Incredulity in the Church of the Nativity in Jerusalem (1167-1169), which was probably made by a group of local Christian craftsmen.¹²⁹ Once reintroduced, this version of the Incredulity was soon widely diffused among the various Christian communities living in the region, featuring in Syrian Orthodox,¹³⁰ Armenian,¹³¹ and Coptic manuscript illustration.¹³²

Academy of Sciences, Q 908, twelfth century), an Armenian cycle from Edessa (Venice, Mekhitarist Library, 141 and 888: Weyl Carr 1982a, 60), and a group of twelfth-century provincial Byzantine manuscripts attributed to Palestine and Cyprus (Weyl Carr 1982a, 55-60).

¹²⁴ Hunt 1998b, esp. 120-124.

¹²⁵ De Jerphanion 1940, 29-40; Buchthal 1939, esp. 137-139.

¹²⁶ Smine 1999. On the provincial Byzantine manuscripts painted in the 'Decorative style', see Weyl Carr 1982a; *idem* 1985.

¹²⁷ Leroy 1964, Pls 94.3 (BL Add. 7170, fol. 177v) and 94.4 (Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 163v).

¹²⁸ On this unusual type of the Incredulity, see Christoforaki 2000.

¹²⁹ Doumato 1999, 253, Fig. 12; *idem* 2000, 153, Fig. 5; Christoforaki 2000, 73-76, Fig. 9; Hunt 2005, 193-195, Pl. 108; *idem* 2009, 332, Pl. 15.3.

¹³⁰ Paris, BnF syr. 355, fol. 4r; Mardin, Syrian Orthodox Episcopate, Hah lectionary, fol. 240r; Mardin, Church of the Forty Martyrs, lectionary of Dioscorus Theodorus, p. 388: Leroy 1964, Pls 69.1, 109.3, 135.1. London, private collection, fragmentary folio: Hunt 2003b, Fig. 10. Cf. Doumato 1999, 248-251, 253-254, Figs 4, 7-8; *idem* 2000, 144-153, Figs, 2 XVI, XVIII-XIX; Hunt 2009, 332-333, Pl. 15.4.

¹³¹ Venice, Mekhitarist Library, 141, fol. 275r; Erevan Matenandran 10675, fol. 326r; Jerusalem, Armenian Patriarchate, 2563, fol. 368r: Christoforaki 2000, Figs 17-19.

Yet the most remarkable divergence from Byzantine manuscript illustration, besides the obvious stylistic one, does not seem to lie in the preference for certain themes that enjoyed particular interest in the Christian Middle East, but rather in the fact that certain iconographic details were clearly adapted to meet local fashionable standards.

4.5.2 The Middle-Eastern Contribution

The Middle-Eastern contribution to the iconography of the Vatican and London lectionaries is perhaps most clearly to be seen in the depiction of everyday objects of furniture, dress, and architecture that are found dispersed throughout the manuscripts. Like the formal characteristics, these iconographic details of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 once again reveal a remarkable overlap with contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration. A good example is the distinctive throne on which the Virgin Hodegetria is seated, which apparently draws on a type of throne that was used for princes and *qadis* alike (Pls 12-13). The furnishings represented in the Evangelists' Portraits (Pl. 24) are illustrative in this respect.¹³³ The evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke are portrayed sitting on an imitation *minbar*, the seat of the Imam in the mosque, which is greatly reminiscent, in its two-dimensional depiction, of the *minbar* painted by al-Wasiti in BnF arabe 5847.¹³⁴ The position of St John on the other hand, sitting on a throne with one leg extended and the other apparently pulled up underneath him, is more or less paralleled in the 'pendent leg' pose, a common posture among Turkish princes and their retinues, which features in a number of *Maqamat* manuscripts.¹³⁵ Finally, the lecterns in front of the evangelists are similar to the book stands used for Qur'ans of the period.¹³⁶

The most conspicuous element reflecting contemporary Middle-Eastern society in the miniatures is dress. A large variety of clothing can be found in the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, including such fashionable items as turbans and *tiraz* bands. These specific items of dress have often been considered markers of a Muslim identity.¹³⁷ Clothing did indeed serve as an identity marker that conveniently differentiated between various groups that lived side by side in the Middle East. But rather than reflecting any particular religious affiliation, the turban signalled the high social status of its wearer. At the time when the Vatican and London codices were produced, this type of headgear was mainly worn by members of the upper class, and was particularly associated with civil administrators, who were commonly known as 'men of the pen' or 'men of the turban', whether they were Muslim, Christian or Jewish.¹³⁸

Moreover, turbaned Christians are found depicted in Greater Syria, Egypt, Cappadocia (p. x), Armenia, and Georgia, both in monumental and minor works of art, with examples

¹³² Paris, Institut Catholique, copte-arabe 1, fol. 179r: Leroy 1974a, Pl. 134.

¹³³ Leroy 1964, Pls 70-71.1.

¹³⁴ Fol. 18v: Grabar 1984, Fig. 2A1; Guthrie 1995, 30, Ill. 1.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Paris, BnF arabe 5847, fols 26, 58v; Paris, BnF arabe 6094, fols 70v, 133, 139, 167: Grabar 1984, Figs 2D5, 4E1; 4F11, 7F3, 8A6, 9A11; Guthrie 1995, 64-65, Ill. 4, Pl. 7.

¹³⁶ De Jerphanion 1940, 53-55; Smine, forthcoming.

¹³⁷ Discussing the two frontispiece miniatures in the Topkapi Dioscurides copied by the scribe Behnam al-Mawsili, Ettinghausen (1962, 67, 70), for example, argued that the Roman writer Dioscurides, who is shown wearing a turban and *tiraz* bands, had been transformed into a Muslim.

¹³⁸ Although numerous references can be found in the Arabic legislative sources stipulating that Christians should distinguish themselves from Muslims, for instance by wearing a turban of a certain colour or a particular kind of belt (Bosworth 1979, 18; *EF*, X, 609), there is much evidence to suggest that such distinctive dress codes were not implemented by the Muslim authorities on any regular basis (Goitein 1999, 25, 295-296, 464; C. Hillenbrand 1999, 408-409, 411-415; Ward 2005, 315). Cf. Section 2.3.

ranging from the ninth century up to the present.¹³⁹ Although they even occasionally indicate the royal status of biblical figures, turbans are more often encountered in donor portraits. Written sources indicate that the colour of turbans worn by Christians was sometimes differentiated from that of those worn by other religious groups, such colour symbolism does not seem to have played a role in the arts.¹⁴⁰

Tiraz bands were similarly used to denote the social rather than the religious position of the wearer. In the Vatican and London lectionaries, such bands decorate the sleeves of, amongst others, the three Magi in the Nativity, Herod in the Massacre of the Innocents, the central couple in the Marriage at Cana, and Constantine and Helena holding the True Cross (Pls 21-22).¹⁴¹ Strikingly, neither the turban or the *tiraz* bands are given to saintly figures such as Christ, the Virgin, and the apostles, who are commonly shown wearing classical dress. In this respect, the miniatures contrast with some of the contemporary silver-inlaid metalwork vessels with Christian themes, such as the Freer Canteen, on which no such distinction is made between 'secular' and saintly figures. The indiscriminate use of *tiraz* bands on some of these pieces led Baer to conclude that the pieces in question were made by Muslims.¹⁴² However, the fact that *tiraz* bands are used to decorate the garments of angels, patriarchs, bishops, and Old Testament figures in the thirteenth-century wall paintings at Deir Anba Antonius in Egypt, which were executed by a team of artists under the direction of a Christian painter named Theodore, precludes such a conclusion.¹⁴³

As in the case of the depiction of the royal figures and other secondary personages, the outfits and attributes of the various soldiers depicted in Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 are adapted to meet contemporary fashionable standards of dress. David Nicolle has already studied the characteristics of their outfits in detail in several publications on arms and armour of the crusading era. Commenting on the spear carried by the centurion in the illustration of the Crucifixion in the London lectionary, Nicolle concludes that 'The weaponry it illustrates owes almost nothing to the Byzantine tradition but, being essentially the same as that seen in contemporary Islamic sources, almost certainly reflects the reality of time and place'.¹⁴⁴

Of particular interest to the present study is Nicolle's observation that even though the military equipment represented in both manuscripts is essentially the same, there are some minor differences between the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, for example in the introduction of the curved sabre as opposed to the straight sword, which seem to suggest that Vat. Syr. 559 was executed a little later than BL Add. 7170.¹⁴⁵ These differences may perhaps be related to the time difference of approximately forty years between the two manuscripts, which, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, has recently been suggested on epigraphic grounds (p. x).

In addition to parallels with Islamic manuscript illustration in terms of the representation of certain individual figures, their expressions, poses, and dress, de Jerphanion has pointed out numerous similarities in the depiction of certain groups of figures and occasionally even

¹³⁹ Greater Syria: Immerzeel 2009, 164-165. Egypt: Lyster 2002, 106. Cappadocia: Mathews/Daskalakis Matthews 1997, 310-311; Parani 2003, 68, 78, 242, 326-327; Ball 2005, 65-67. Armenia and Georgia: Jones 2007, 45, all with further references.

¹⁴⁰ Guthrie 1995, 23, 42-43.

¹⁴¹ Leroy 1964, Pls 76, 78.3, 82.1-82.2, 99.1-99.2.

¹⁴² Baer 1989, 38.

¹⁴³ Bolman 2002, 110-111. Here we may also refer to the Coptic-Arabic Gospel Book in Paris, which was made in Cairo in 1249 (Paris, Institut Catholique, copte-arabe 1/Cairo, Coptic Museum, Bibl. 94), in which Christ is commonly portrayed wearing golden *tiraz* bands (e.g., Leroy 1974a, Pl. G).

¹⁴⁴ Nicolle (1988, no. 455D) points out parallels with the large-bladed weapons with a primarily symbolic function that are seen in connection with authority figures in contemporary Islamic manuscripts from the region, such as the BnF arabe 5847 copy of the *Maqamat* painted by al-Wasiti in 1237.

¹⁴⁵ Nicolle 1988, 177.

entire compositions.¹⁴⁶ A case in point is the image of Christ's trial (Pl. 23), which is clearly an adaptation of the common model for representing the *qadi* in trial scenes, as seen several times in the Paris *Maqamat* painted by al-Wasiti in 1237.¹⁴⁷ One wonders whether this particular compositional model was used deliberately to promote a negative comparison between the persecutors of Christ and contemporary Muslim court judges. Such an attempt to assimilate the Jewish High Priest Caiaphas to the *qadi* through the use of the same iconographic type might arguably have been aimed at suggesting that the latter shared the same role as a persecutor of the Christian faith.

Whether those responsible for the commissioning or execution of the miniatures did indeed have such anti-Islamic thoughts in mind is impossible to determine. Although it is tempting to suggest that the comparison was made deliberately, it is equally possible, especially if we posit that the artisans involved in the production of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 were also involved in Islamic manuscript production, that the designer simply used a compositional model with which he was intimately acquainted, together with the facial type and elements of dress, and did not attach any great significance to this.

A final peculiarity that merits additional attention when discussing the Middle-Eastern contribution to the manuscripts' iconography is the reversed narrative of some of the scenes in the two Syrian Orthodox lectionaries. Smine considers the fact that certain scenes are to be read from right to left a distinctly Syriac element in the decoration of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170, arguing that typical Byzantine representations were consciously reversed in order to be in keeping with the way the Syriac script would be read.¹⁴⁸ Antony Eastmond has recently discussed the phenomenon of reversed narrative in his analysis of the long narrative frieze decorating the exterior of the Byzantine Church of Hagia Sophia in Trebizond (1238-1263).¹⁴⁹ The frieze depicts the story of the Fall of Man, and the narrative is unusual in starting at the right hand and continuing to the left. Eastmond correctly questions the traditional assumption that the right-to-left movement at Hagia Sophia should be ascribed to 'Oriental' influence in general and Syriac influence in particular. Though he admits that such reverse narrative is perhaps more prominently found in the arts of cultures that write from right to left, Eastmond points out that examples of this right-to-left movement can be found not only in Syriac and Islamic manuscripts, but also in Byzantine and Armenian art. Moreover, as Eastmond shows, even in Syriac manuscript illustration the right-to-left narrative movement is far from universal.

Although it is perhaps most plausible to explain the occurrence of reverse narrative in the Vatican and London lectionaries in strictly regional terms, as it appears to be found more regularly in Islamic and Eastern Christian art than in Byzantine iconography, this visual peculiarity should not be accorded too much weight in assessing the possible local contribution in the production of the manuscripts. In short, the reverse narrative should not necessarily be considered visual evidence of the 'Eastern' character of the two Syrian Orthodox manuscripts, let alone a typical Syriac feature.

4.6 Remarks about the Iconographic Programme of Vat. Syr. 559

It has long been recognized that the miniature cycles of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 are closely related to each other in terms of iconography. As was mentioned earlier, the close correspondence between the two codices leads de Jerphanion and Leroy to conclude that they

¹⁴⁶ De Jerphanion 1940, 42-60.

¹⁴⁷ Paris, BnF arabe 5847, fols 22, 107, 114v, 125; Grabar 1984, Figs 2B2, 7B1, 7E4, 8A7.

¹⁴⁸ Smine 1999.

¹⁴⁹ Eastmond 1999, 229-231; *idem* 2004, 75-76.

are either strongly linked in terms of execution, as was recently also suggested by Smine, or both hark back to the same, now lost prototype. There are, however, several differences in the selection of feasts that are illustrated, as well as the number of illustrations and their arrangement within the text. This suggests that if such a presumed model was indeed at their disposal, those responsible for the programmatic layout of each individual manuscript, whether the artists or the patrons, had a certain amount of freedom in selecting the subjects and arranging them into a cycle. This is not surprising, given that in producing Syrian Orthodox lectionaries there was nothing traditionally canonical about the selection of the lectionary text, nor the choice for the accompanying imagery.

When it comes to the contents of Syrian Orthodox lectionaries in general, Brock has already emphasized that, despite some overlap in the selection of certain biblical passages for certain feasts, the choice of the readings varied considerably from one manuscript to the other.¹⁵⁰ This variety can be seen at every level of the lectionary, from the choice for certain readings, the selection of particular feast and saints' days, to the cycle of illustrations. The basic hypothesis is that Syrian Orthodox lectionaries generally bear the stamp of local liturgical customs. It would therefore theoretically be possible to ascribe particular lectionaries to certain localities by studying the lectionary texts in detail, at least as long as the distinct liturgical customs are known. A similar observation underlies Mary-Lyon Dolezal's profound study on the Middle Byzantine lectionary, which, as in the Syrian Orthodox tradition, does not have a stable lectionary system.¹⁵¹

Discussing a number of closely related Byzantine lectionaries, Dolezal emphasizes that in order to fully understand the significance of any illustrated lectionary, one should always study its text and images in conjunction, as they are both an integral part of the manuscript. Other important factors that should be taken into account when interpreting the decoration programme of an illustrated lectionary are the liturgical customs of the locality for which it was intended, as well as the religious and political contexts in which it was utilized.

Furthermore, as Dolezal points out, detailed analysis of different lectionaries within a particular group of closely related manuscripts (for instance, Syrian Orthodox lectionaries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) is essential when it comes to understanding each individual exponent as this would reveal any possible differences or analogies between them. Singularities in the text of an individual manuscript, more specifically the exact collection of lections and feast days to be celebrated, may shed light on its function and patronage.¹⁵² Only when the exact function and the original user of a lectionary are known, can we begin to speculate about the possible motivations behind the selection of its images and the significance of its pictorial cycle.

Unfortunately, such a comprehensive study of illustrated Syrian Orthodox lectionaries falls beyond the scope of the present study. The following discussion will therefore be limited to the miniature cycle of the Vatican lectionary, since here the original context in which it functioned – Deir Mar Mattai around the mid-thirteenth century – is firmly established through the manuscript's colophon. Sections 2.4 and 3.5.2 already highlighted the important position of the monastery within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Syrian Orthodox Church. After Deir Mar Mattai became the official Seat of the Maphrian by the 1150s, many activities of the monks in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as in previous periods, appear to have been aimed at consolidating and strengthening its powerful position. It is conceivable that works of art were also appropriated to this end. As was argued in the previous chapter, the liturgical fan of A.D. 1202/03 may actually have been an official donation made by the monks of Deir Mar Mattai to the monks of Deir al-Surian to secure their support in the continuing

¹⁵⁰ Brock 2006, 134-137.

¹⁵¹ Dolezal 1991. Cf. Lowden 2009, esp. 15-40, 77-89.

¹⁵² Dolezal 1991, esp. 3, 67, 127, 149-153.

struggle for power within the Syrian Orthodox Church. Was the commissioning of Vat. Syr. 559 perhaps prompted by similar propagandistic considerations?

The central question that needs answering here is whether the iconographic programme of the Vatican lectionary conveys any meanings of special Syrian Orthodox significance. In other words, does the iconography of the individual miniatures or their assemblage into a cycle contain any elements that may be considered specifically Syrian Orthodox? Studying the selection of images alongside the text they illustrate, which in the limited scope of the present study means assessing which feasts and saints' days are mentioned in the text and which of these have been given an image, may perhaps shed some light on this matter. Useful in this respect is the study of de Jerphanion, who has already conveniently tabulated the miniatures of Vat. Syr. 559 together with the texts they illustrate.¹⁵³ From his table it can also be gleaned which feasts' and saints' days are included in the text but not provided with an image.

The following sections should be considered preliminary, but will hopefully serve as an impetus towards further research into the significance of the miniature cycles encountered in Syrian Orthodox lectionaries. Before we turn to the imagery of the Vatican lectionary itself, I shall make some introductory remarks on the function of the manuscript and any possible practical reasons behind its decoration programme.

4.6.1 Function and Practical Purposes

Questions concerning the motivations behind the selection of the lectionary's imagery and its possible relevance to the expression of Syrian Orthodox identity must first be analysed against the background of the specific purpose of the manuscript, as well as the religious context in which it functioned. Who were the users of the codex and what was its intended audience? As a lectionary, Vat. Syr. 559 contains a collection of Gospel readings (from both the Harklean and Peshitta versions) arranged in liturgical sequence, and intended to be read on a given Sunday or on certain feast days. In keeping with the Syrian Orthodox tradition, the liturgical calendar year in this lectionary starts on the first Sunday of the Consecration of the Church, which falls on the eighth Sunday before Christmas, and has the Confession of Peter from the Gospel of Matthew (16:13-19) as its first reading.¹⁵⁴

The colophon of Vat. Syr. 559 explicitly states that it was produced for the altar at Deir Mar Mattai, arguably the main altar situated in the sanctuary of the monastic church. As a service book to be used during the performance of the liturgy at the monastery, the lectionary may be presumed to have had a mixed monastic and lay audience, at least as far as the contents of the text are concerned. During the services, Gospel readings were read in the presence of lay people visiting the monastic church, for whom the lectionary must have symbolised the Word of God. But besides a general audience, such richly decorated manuscripts commonly had a more private and restricted audience.¹⁵⁵

In the case of Vat. Syr. 559, it were probably only the monks from Deir Mar Mattai themselves, more specifically those who were appointed to read the pericopes during the service, who would have had the chance to see the illustrations with their own eyes, and to reflect further on their significance. Cogently, any potential propagandistic messages conveyed by the symbolic images found in the interior of the manuscript would only have reached a fairly limited audience, especially in comparison with monumental wall paintings

¹⁵³ De Jerphanion 1940, 14-22. Cf. Smine, forthcoming.

¹⁵⁴ De Jerphanion 1940, 4, 15; Smine, forthcoming. On the lectionary in the Syrian Orthodox tradition, see Vööbus 1985, 1-24; Varghese 2004, 155-156; Brock 2006, 50-51, 134-137, 164-165.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Dolezal 1991, 302-303.

found in the naves of churches. This should be borne in mind when discussing the possible role of Vat. Syr. 559's illustrations in expressing Syrian Orthodox denominational identity.

In view of the liturgical function of the Vatican lectionary, one cannot exclude the possibility that the miniatures were, at least to some extent, meant to serve a rather practical application within the text. In keeping with its main purpose, the lectionary is subdivided into sections to be read each day, and these divisions are conveniently marked by rubrics and titles to guide the reader through the manuscript. Written in red or gold, as opposed to the usual black of the readings themselves, they immediately catch the eye of the beholder and thus greatly facilitate his search for the pertinent readings. The miniatures also play a significant role within the hierarchy of decoration, as they visually emphasize the most important passages in the text, that is to say, the readings for the pivotal feasts of the liturgical year. Like the rubrics and titles, the cycle of images is essentially a structural feature which made it easier for the appointed readers to find their way through the manuscript. In line with the manuscript's liturgical function, the miniatures are distributed throughout the text, introducing the main feasts and ceremonies of the ecclesiastical year.

The suggestion that practical motivations played a role in the compilation of the decoration programme of Vat. Syr. 559 seems all the more plausible given that the series of miniatures in its entirety provides us with a well-balanced portrayal of the Life of Christ. As de Jerphanion points out in his monograph on the manuscript, the programmatic cycle is made up of three groups of imagery that are each almost evenly represented numerically (Table 1): the Infancy of Christ (nos 3-19), Miracles or Works of Christ (nos 20-32), Passion and Resurrection (nos 33-49).¹⁵⁶ Moreover, as regards the rationale behind the choice of scenes to be depicted, it should be pointed out that despite the numerous possibilities for variation, some basic principles appear to have been taken into account in compiling the decoration programme. In keeping with the liturgical function of the manuscript, the distribution of images, for example, is governed by the liturgical calendar rather than any chronological considerations. This is seen, among other things, in the disposition of the Transfiguration, which is placed after the Last Supper, thus in its liturgical rather than its chronological position.¹⁵⁷

This particular position of the Transfiguration, which is encountered in other Syrian Orthodox lectionaries as well, is in striking contrast with the Byzantine tradition, in which the liturgical position of the scene actually corresponds with the temporal chronology.¹⁵⁸ As such, the miniature of the Transfiguration is illustrative of a more universal difference between the two lectionary traditions. While, as mentioned above, the liturgical calendar year in the Syrian Orthodox tradition commences on the eighth Sunday before Christmas and prescribes readings from the Gospel of Matthew, the Byzantine liturgical calendar year starts on Easter Sunday, with the feast of the Resurrection and readings from the Gospel of John.¹⁵⁹ This liturgical difference explains the dissimilarities in sequence between the miniature cycles of the Syrian Orthodox lectionary and those encountered in illustrated Byzantine lectionaries.¹⁶⁰

The liturgy, besides governing the distribution of scenes, also largely determined the choice to provide certain feasts with imagery, as well as the iconographic subjects to be represented. In the majority of cases, the reason for illustrating certain feasts is easy to determine: most miniatures are associated with readings for the most important feasts of the liturgical year. The Syrian Orthodox liturgical year is divided into seven cycles based on six main feasts, which in the Vatican lectionary are each provided with a fitting symbolic image: Christmas (Nativity), Epiphany (Baptism), Resurrection (Anastasis, Women at the

¹⁵⁶ De Jerphanion 1940, 12-13; Leroy 1964, 299; Lenzi 2000, 308.

¹⁵⁷ De Jerphanion 1940, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Leroy 1964, 275.

¹⁵⁹ Dolezal 1991, 95-98; Anderson 1992, 2; Lowden 2009, 15.

¹⁶⁰ Smine, forthcoming.

Tomb/Chairete), Transfiguration (Transfiguration), Assumption of the Mother of God (Dormition), and the Holy Cross (Constantine and Helena holding the True Cross).

Likewise, in such a lavishly decorated lectionary it is not surprising to find the representations illustrating the twelve central feasts of the liturgical year familiar from Byzantine art (*Dodekaorton*): Annunciation, Nativity, Baptism of Christ, Presentation in the Temple, Transfiguration, Entry into Jerusalem, Raising of Lazarus, Crucifixion, Anastasis, Ascension, Dormition of the Virgin (now lost), and Pentecost. The importance of several of these feasts is further emphasized by the relatively large size of the accompanying miniatures in comparison with most others.¹⁶¹ In some cases, the symbolic meaning is depicted rather than the content of the reading with which the miniature in question is linked: the Virgin Hodegetria accompanies a reading on the Adoration of the Shepherds (Luke 2:15-21) for the feast of the Virgin (Pl. 12), for example, and Constantine and Helena holding the True Cross accompanies the reading from Luke 9:18-27 for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (Pl. 22).¹⁶²

Although the exact choice of subjects and their sequence is more or less unique, the general shape of the miniature cycle in Vat. Syr. 559 corresponds with those found in most other medieval lectionaries, especially in terms of a shared tendency to favour the most important passages of a text.¹⁶³ Nothing in the layout of the narrative cycle of the Vatican lectionary appears to be particularly indicative of a conscious expression of Syrian Orthodox denominational identity. Presenting a balanced picture of the Life of Christ, the outline of the narrative cycle does not seem to contain any peculiarities that cannot be found outside the Syrian Orthodox context, except, perhaps, for the fact that the sequence of imagery runs according to the Syrian Orthodox liturgical calendar. At the same time, the cycle is very nearly the same as that of BL Add. 7170. In fact, when compared to the cycles featured in other Syrian Orthodox lectionaries, these two manuscripts are clearly idiosyncratic.

As mentioned above, the close correspondence between the two miniature cycles has led scholars to conclude that they were either the work of the same groups of artists, who are then assumed to have essentially repeated the same scenes from one commission to the other, or that they both hark back to the same, now lost prototype. If the new date (i.e., 1260) proposed for the completion of the Vatican lectionary turns out to be correct, one could even posit the hypothesis that the miniatures of the London lectionary (c. 1220) functioned as its main iconographic model.

4.6.2 Possible Propagandistic Intentions

If we go along with the hypothesis that the London lectionary was made for Deir Mar Hananya near Mardin (p. x), the striking similarities between the two miniature cycles add another possible attribute to the practical function of the Vatican lectionary. Here it should first be pointed out that precisely in the period when BL Add. 7170 was produced, Deir Mar Hananya started to become a force to be reckoned with in the Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy. After a period of decline, the monastery was resuscitated around the middle of the twelfth century by Bishop John of Mardin, who, in addition to carrying out renovation work, established an important library there. Soon it was able to rival monasteries such as Deir Mar Barsauma and Deir Mar Mattai. Deir Mar Hananya's powerful position is confirmed by the fact that Holy Synods of the Syrian Orthodox Church were successively convened there by John of Mardin and Michael the Syrian. Michael further underlined the importance of Deir

¹⁶¹ Nativity, Baptism, Entry into Jerusalem, Crucifixion, Ascension, Pentecost, Transfiguration (de Jerphanion 1940, 11; Leroy 1964, 298, Pls 76.2, 79.1, 86.2, 90.1, 95.2, 97.2, 98.2).

¹⁶² De Jerphanion 1940, 13; Leroy 1964, 299.

¹⁶³ Cf. Anderson 1992, 26-28.

Mar Hananya by travelling to the monastery immediately after his election as Patriarch and issuing 29 monastic canons there.¹⁶⁴ In 1171, Michael moved the Seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate from Amid to Mardin.¹⁶⁵

Deir Mar Hananya appears also to have played an important role in the various struggles for power within the Syrian Orthodox Church at the time. As recounted in Section 2.4, Michael, in trying to settle the juridical relationship between the highest Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities once and for all, convened a synod at Deir Mar Hananya, where he presented the disobedient monks from Deir Mar Mattai with a set of canons stipulating that they should obey the Maphrian. Deir Mar Hananya was the stage of yet another important event some years later, when Maphrian Gregory I (1189-1214/15), the nephew of Patriarch Michael the Syrian, ordained his own brother Josuah as his uncle's successor, Michael II (1199-1215), an act of nepotism which led to a schism (Section 3.5.2).¹⁶⁶

The powerful position of the monastery within the ecclesiastical hierarchy was finally consolidated in 1293, when the monastery became the official Seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, which it would remain until the early twentieth century (p. x). Bearing in mind the struggle for power within the Syrian Orthodox Church, one is tempted to conclude that the correspondence between the Vatican and London lectionaries may well have been intentional, not so much on the part of the artists, but rather on the part of the patron who commissioned the later manuscript.

As one considers the possibility that propagandistic intentions motivated the creation of Vat. Syr. 559, one wonders whether its patron, in emulating the miniature cycle as found in the London lectionary, was deliberately trying to underline the importance of Deir Mar Mattai within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Syrian Orthodox Church, second only to the Seat of the Patriarch. Whether the Vatican lectionary was indeed meant to compete directly with the London lectionary or not, it would certainly have contributed to the prestige of both its patron and the monastery for which it was intended. In addition to a practical liturgical function, the lectionary may thus be assumed to have served a purpose as a showpiece that contributed to the prestige of both the patron and the recipient. The possession of such a lavishly decorated manuscript as Vat. Syr. 559 would certainly have emphasized the importance and status of Deir Mar Mattai.

In summary, even though the miniatures featured in Vat. Syr. 559 are arranged according to the Syrian Orthodox liturgical calendar, nothing in the lectionary cycle as such suggests that either the patron or the artists intended it to convey any particular Syrian Orthodox meaning. In order to shed some more light on this matter, a further evaluation of the iconography of the individual miniatures is needed. To this end, the full-page miniatures and miniatures featuring icon-like images have been singled out for a more detailed analysis. The following discussion will start, however, by highlighting what was *not* represented in the manuscript.

4.7 Questions of Identity

The meaning of the Vatican lectionary could only properly be understood if the selection of images were studied alongside the text they illustrate, but this falls beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, a first important indication as to whether Syrian Orthodox denominational identity is marked in the manuscript's decoration programme can be derived

¹⁶⁴ Selb 1989, 132.

¹⁶⁵ Weltecke 2003, 89-90.

¹⁶⁶ Honigmann 1951, 67.

by comparing the contents of the lectionary, more specifically the distinct assemblage of feast days, with the particular selection of illustrations.

Vat. Syr. 559 contains not only the readings for the main liturgical feasts of the year, but also, albeit less extensively, the readings for the annual commemorations of saints. As is the case with the choice of specific readings, the compiler of a lectionary had a great amount of freedom in selecting the saints to be granted a place among the lectionary's commemorative feasts, depending on local liturgical practices, unconscious influences inherent in copying manuscripts, and sometimes perhaps even personal preferences.¹⁶⁷

On the whole, the saints' days that appear in Syrian Orthodox lectionaries may be distinguished into three different groups: days devoted to saints that were revered universally throughout Christendom; days devoted to saints with a particular regional attachment; and, finally, days devoted to saints that were of local importance and occasionally even denomination-specific. In the present context, we are mainly interested in the third group, for it is here that one would expect to find Syrian Orthodox identity markers, that is, commemorations devoted to specifically Syrian Orthodox saints.

Turning to the contents of the Vatican lectionary, as conveniently tabulated by de Jerphanion, only a fairly limited number of days are celebrated as saints' days. In addition to the customary saints commemorated in the text (Group 1), such as the protomartyr St Stephen, the church fathers Basil and Gregory, the Virgin Mary, St Theodore, and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (see below), there are a number of saints with a distinctively Syrian pedigree or attachment (Group 2), including Syrian saints such as Simeon Stylites. Sts Sergius and Bacchus, who, according to the hagiographical sources, were martyred in Syria in the early fourth century, also belong to this second group. They were buried at Resafa Sergiopolis on the Euphrates and their cult continued to be popular throughout the Middle East.

Another martyr saint commemorated in the text who, because of his regional attachment also belongs to this group, is St George, whose relics according to Christian tradition were translated to a martyrium in Lydda (Ramla) near Jerusalem in Palestine, from where his cult quickly spread. Despite their specific links with Syria, these saints are also very popular outside the region; they occur frequently in Byzantine lectionaries, for example. The inclusion of such generally popular saints in the Vatican lectionary, therefore, does not reveal anything particular about the Syrian Orthodox context in which the manuscript functioned. However, a few saints whose commemoration is included in Vat. Syr. 559 are relatively uncommon; their presence may be considered indicative of a Syrian Orthodox context.

A genuinely Syrian Orthodox saint whose commemoration is found among the saints' days in Vat. Syr. 559 (Group 3) is Mar Ahudemmeh, a Miaphysite confessor who is thought to be from a family with an East Syrian background.¹⁶⁸ In 559, Jacob Baradaeus consecrated him as the first 'Great Metropolitan of the East', the future Maphrian (see Section 2.2). Actively involved in the spread of Miaphysitism in the Persian Empire, Ahudemmeh was imprisoned in Takrit after baptizing the son of Khusrau I (531-579). He finally died there in 575, supposedly on August 2. Although popular within the entire Syrian Orthodox Church, Mar Ahudemmeh, a former monk from Deir Mar Mattai and traditionally seen as the first Maphrian, had a special connection with that monastery.

The only other saints mentioned in the lectionary text whose commemorations are typical of the Syrian Orthodox Church in general, and Deir Mar Mattai in particular, are Mar Mattai and Mar Zakkai, two of the three patron saints of the monastery. Here we have to bear in mind that although the monastery is presently known as Deir Mar Mattai, medieval sources, including the Vatican lectionary itself, occasionally refer to the monastery as that of Mar

¹⁶⁷ De Jerphanion 1939, 211.

¹⁶⁸ On the life and cult of Mar Ahudemmeh, see Nau 1905; Fiey 1968; *idem* 2004, 32, no. 36; Vööbus 1988, 246-254.

Mattai, Mar Zakkai, and Mar Abraham.¹⁶⁹ The lives of Mar Mattai and his disciple Mar Zakkai, and their importance to the Syrian Orthodox community in the Mosul area, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Given that saints bound to a single community, as opposed to saints that are universally revered, are highly suitable as markers of denominational identity, it is all the more revealing that none of these specifically Syrian Orthodox saints mentioned in the text are depicted in the manuscript illustrations. The only saints accorded such special prominence are from the first two groups, thus without any specific Syrian Orthodox connections. The only exception might perhaps be found in the image of the Four Monastic Saints that accompanies the feast of St Antony, but, as we shall see below, this remains highly speculative. Whatever the case may be, the lack of images unequivocally depicting genuinely Syrian Orthodox saints is a first, but telling indication of the role iconography as a marker of Syrian Orthodox denominational identity in the case of the Vatican lectionary.

It is informative, in discussing the question of the possible role of denominational identity in the development of the decoration programme to consider what was *not* represented; now, however, we will turn to some of the themes and motifs that *were* depicted in Vat. Syr. 559. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the following discussion will be limited to iconographic subjects whose size reveals their prominence within the entire cycle of miniatures, that is, the full-page miniatures. This will be complemented by a short survey of the miniatures featuring iconic portraiture, starting with a brief discussion of the Evangelists' portraits, followed by the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Four Monastic Saints, and, finally, Constantine and Helena holding the True Cross.

The iconography of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria was already examined in detail in Chapter 3, and will therefore not be discussed here. Suffice it to mention here that the subject appears to have enjoyed certain popularity among the Syrian Orthodox of Mosul. In an article devoted to the miniatures of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria in the Vatican and London manuscripts, in which they precede the readings at Vespers dedicated to the Mother of God, Smine argues that in the context of these Syrian Orthodox lectionaries they were meant to represent both the celebration of the Glorification of the Virgin and the celebration of the Incarnation of Christ Emmanuel in conjunction.¹⁷⁰

A) The Portraits of the Evangelists

The pictorial programme of Vat. Syr. 559 originally commenced with two full-page miniatures featuring the portraits of the evangelists, of which only those of Sts Matthew and Mark have survived (Table 1; Pl. 24). Given that the corresponding miniatures in the Vatican and London lectionaries are usually the same in terms of design, as is also the case for the two Matthew and Mark compositions,¹⁷¹ a similar image may conveniently be reconstructed for Vat. Syr. 559. In the latter manuscript, the portraits of Sts John and Luke were most probably featured on the recto of a first folio that has since then been lost.¹⁷² The fact that the portraits of the evangelists are treated as full-page miniatures, unlike virtually all other miniatures in the manuscript, is in itself not very remarkable. Indeed, the obvious prominence they receive should be explained not so much as the result of any particular Syrian Orthodox considerations, but rather in light of their function as frontispieces, a role which they also commonly have in Byzantine manuscripts.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ The same name returns in a legislative document preserved in a manuscript of the West Syrian *Synodicon* (see Section 6.2.1).

¹⁷⁰ Smine 2009.

¹⁷¹ Leroy 1964, Pls 70.1 (Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 1r), 70.2 (BL Add. 7170, fol. 5v).

¹⁷² De Jerphanion 1940, 69; Smine, forthcoming.

¹⁷³ De Jerphanion 1940, 11.

In Byzantine lectionary illustration, in which the evangelists' portraits are sometimes the only form of decoration, the images are usually found dispersed throughout the manuscript, functioning as visual markers dividing between the so-called Johannine, Matthaean, Lukan, and Markan portions of the synaxarium section, respectively. Nevertheless, in keeping with an older tradition, in which author portraits adorn the opening pages of a manuscript, the evangelists are occasionally also grouped together at the beginning of the Byzantine lectionary.¹⁷⁴ Within the hierarchy of the decoration in Vat. Syr. 559', the evangelists' portraits may thus be considered as structural features marking the start of the manuscript. In her detailed study of the iconography of these portraits, Smine draws attention to the fact that the evangelists are all seated to the side on a piece of furniture resembling a *minbar*, except for John, who is shown sitting on a proper throne which is placed at the centre of the upper register.¹⁷⁵

The prominent position accorded to St John as the first among the four evangelists is remarkable, all the more so given that in both lectionaries the readings start with a text taken from the Gospel of Matthew, followed by a similar one from the Gospel of Mark. In view of the Syrian Orthodox lectionary tradition, one might perhaps have expected the images of Matthew and Mark to precede those of John and Luke. It therefore makes sense to suggest, as Smine does, that the placement of St John in such a pre-eminent position follows the Byzantine tradition, in which the lectionary commences with a reading taken from the Gospel of John, especially considering that the first folio introducing Middle Byzantine lectionaries commonly displays a portrait of him.¹⁷⁶

In short, despite the fact that the style and the furnishings have, as we have seen earlier, been adapted to meet Middle-Eastern fashionable standards, there is nothing typically Syrian Orthodox in the evangelist's portraits, either in their distinguished treatment as full-page miniatures or in the iconographic details. Notably, the only other full-page miniatures encountered in the manuscript are those that together represent the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (fols 93v-94r), which accompany the readings for the commemoration of this group of martyr saints. Unlike the evangelists' portraits, though, they do not mark any particular division in the text. Therefore, the reason for the elaborate attention lavished on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste merits closer examination.

B) The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste

According to their hagiography, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste were forced to stand on an icy lake, where they froze to death, refusing to renounce their Christian faith. Apart from cycles consisting of scenes drawn from the hagiography of the Forty Martyrs, two modes of representing the Forty Martyrs may be distinguished. The main iconographic type, which focuses on the actual act of martyrdom, became one of the most popular subjects in Byzantine art from the tenth century onwards. It shows the forty half-naked men, dressed only in loincloths, standing huddled on the lake and waiting for the deadly hypothermia to set in.¹⁷⁷

A second manner of representing the martyrs comprises a 'portrait' type, which features half figures dressed in civilian clothing and enclosed within medallions. This type appears to have been particularly popular in Cappadocia, where numerous examples have been found in wall paintings dating from the ninth to eleventh centuries.¹⁷⁸ Such portrait types of the Forty

¹⁷⁴ Anderson 1992, 10-11.

¹⁷⁵ Smine, forthcoming.

¹⁷⁶ Dolezal 1991, 154.

¹⁷⁷ On the iconography of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, see Demus 1960; Schiemenz 1979-1980; Peers, forthcoming.

¹⁷⁸ Schiemenz 1979-1980, 178-184.

Martyrs seem to have been less common outside Cappadocia, but examples dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are found in Sicily, Thessaloniki, and Russia.¹⁷⁹

A similar mode of representing the Forty Martyrs was used in the Vatican and London lectionaries (Pls 25-26).¹⁸⁰ In both manuscripts, the martyrs are again depicted as busts, dressed in civilian clothing, and each holding a martyr's cross. But while the martyrs' portraits in BL Add. 7170 are framed within a design familiar from Byzantine art,¹⁸¹ the artists responsible for Vat. Syr. 559 have adapted the centuries-old tradition to a distinctively local fashion. Rather than being enclosed in medallions proper, the half-length representations of the Forty Martyrs are framed in a series of octagons that alternate with a series of smaller octagons. In terms of layout, the double full-page miniatures closely resemble aniconic carpet pages found in thirteenth-century Qur'ans that were produced in Mesopotamia.

A close parallel for the overall design in general, and geometric patterns in particular, has been found in the decorative frontispiece miniatures of a Qur'an, which was written in Baghdad in 1289 by the calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta^csimi.¹⁸² Apart from the difference in size between the two manuscripts, which explains the dissimilarity in the number of rows and octagons in the respective miniatures, the only real divergence is found in the fact that the figurative imagery of the Vatican lectionary in the Qur'an has given way to stylized vegetal designs. Such geometric compositions are found in the earliest surviving illuminated Qur'ans, and, as pointed out by James, this is one of the features common to both Christian and Islamic art.¹⁸³

Seeking an explanation for the special prominence accorded the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in the Vatican lectionary, de Jerphanion has pointed out that one of the chapels at Deir Mar Mattai is dedicated to the Forty Martyrs.¹⁸⁴ Although this chapel already existed in the thirteenth century,¹⁸⁵ it is not known whether it was actually dedicated to this group of saints when the manuscript received its decoration. Whatever the case may be, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Forty Martyrs were particularly revered in the Syrian Orthodox Church at the time. This is perhaps most clearly indicated by the fact that they are invariably mentioned in Syrian Orthodox liturgical calendars, dating from the seventh to the seventeenth century.¹⁸⁶ Their popularity can also be inferred from the numerous churches and chapels that were dedicated to them, including the Monastery of the Forty Martyrs in Bartelli, near Mosul.¹⁸⁷

Moreover, a continuing tradition of depicting the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in the Syrian Orthodox Church is attested by their depiction in a wall painting at Deir Mar Musa in Syria, where they covered the triumphal arch in Layer 1 (c. 1060). The painting, of which now only few traces remain, originally displayed the Archangel Michael in the centre of the arch, flanked on either side by twenty martyrs dressed in loincloths. The remarkable inclusion of Michael in the midst of the martyrs may perhaps ultimately derive from Syriac versions of the hagiography of the Forty Martyrs, according to which the Archangels Michael and Gabriel help Christ to distribute the crowns of martyrdom to the forty.¹⁸⁸ Be that as it may, the image of the Forty Martyrs as represented in the Vatican and London lectionaries does not contain any specific Syrian Orthodox elements.

¹⁷⁹ Schiemenz 1979-1980, 179, 180-181; Parani 2003, 94-95.

¹⁸⁰ Leroy 1964, Pl. 72.

¹⁸¹ De Jerphanion 1940, 92 n. 1.

¹⁸² Paris, BnF arabe 6716, fols 1v-2r: de Jerphanion 1940, 89, Figs 36-37; Catalogue Paris 1987, no. 29.

¹⁸³ James 1992, 17. Cf. Leroy 1974a, 64-66; Nelson 1983, 213-216; Hunt 2000a, 13-21.

¹⁸⁴ De Jerphanion 1940, 8, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, II, 334-335.

¹⁸⁶ Nau 1915, *passim*.

¹⁸⁷ On this monastery, see Fiey 1965, II, 435-437.

¹⁸⁸ Immerzeel 2007b, 127-130, Fig. 1, with further references.

Like the image of the Enthroned Virgin Hodegetria, which was already discussed in detail in Chapter 3, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste enjoyed particular popularity in Syrian Orthodox circles, but the fact that their depiction is equally common in the artistic traditions of other Christian denominations precludes assigning them an exclusively Syrian Orthodox significance, or seeing them as genuine markers of denominational identity. Nevertheless, the obvious prominence they receive within both Syrian Orthodox lectionaries – in BL Add. 7170 they originally even served as frontispieces – may perhaps be seen as a reflection of a more widespread interest in martyrs in Greater Syria at the time.

It is probably no coincidence, for example, that most of the Syrian Orthodox churches and monasteries in the Mesopotamian region are dedicated to martyrs, including the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, Mar Behnam (see Chapter 6), and Mart Shmuni (see Chapter 7), but with St George as the undisputed leader of the pack. The popularity of martyr saints has similarly been observed in the case of the medieval wall paintings in Lebanon and Syria, where the effigies of Mart Shmuni, Sts George and Theodore, and Sts Sergius and Bacchus are prominently featured among the community of saints in Syrian Orthodox, Melkite, and Maronite churches alike.¹⁸⁹

As observed by Glenn Peers in his discussion of a representation of the Forty Martyrs in Muslim Syracuse, the subject acquires particular meaning in a context where Islam is encroaching or dominant, where the martyrs become paradigmatic figures of righteous resistance and self-sacrifice for the proper faith: ‘In a period in which conflict with Islam in the eastern Mediterranean was ongoing and volatile, the Forty provided models for resistance and sacrifice. Their commemoration at Syracuse, in other words, was invested not only in the historical glories of the Christian past, but also in its contemporary relevance for Christians caught in impossible situations where their lives and souls were at stake’.¹⁹⁰

The same may be assumed to hold true for the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste within the medieval Syrian Orthodox context, and the universally understood message of the resistance and eventual triumph of Christianity in the face of oppression goes some way to explain the widespread interest in Christian martyrs observed within the Christian Churches situated in countries under Islamic rule or in regions that were under direct Islamic threat.

Finally, this interest in martyrs may perhaps equally explain the more detailed significance of the feast-day of St Stephen the Protomartyr in the Vatican lectionary. The importance of this feast-day is enhanced by the use of two miniatures (fols 19v and 20v), which sets it apart from the single representations of most of the other illustrated feasts in the Vatican lectionary. In short, rather than serving as markers of an exclusive Syrian Orthodox communal identity, the prominence accorded to the commemoration of St Stephen and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste should be seen in terms of a more widespread inclination to celebrate martyr saints in the Greater Syrian region.

C) Four Monastic Saints

Among the miniatures representing hieratic non-narrative imagery in the Vatican lectionary, there is one (fol. 45v) showing four bearded monastic saints, divided over two registers, each saint standing frontally in a separate archway (Pl. 27).¹⁹¹ Their costume consists of a *sticharion*, a black *phelonion*, and a black monastic hood decorated with three vertical stripes with four white spots on each side. The two figures in the lower register also each wear an *omophorion* decorated with black crosses, an episcopal vestment which identifies them as bishops. Both bishops are shown carrying a book; the others do not hold any additional attributes. The image of the Four Monastic Saints is placed directly underneath the heading

¹⁸⁹ Immerzeel 2009, 177.

¹⁹⁰ Peers, forthcoming.

¹⁹¹ De Jerphanion 1940, 80-81, Pl. B1 (colour); Leroy 1964, 285-286, Pl. 71.2.

identifying the text as the Vespers readings from St John's Gospel. It introduces the readings for the feast of St Antony the Great, which is celebrated on January 17.

Although the identification of the four saints is hampered by the absence of inscriptions, the miniature's position in the lectionary leads de Jerphanion to hypothesize that at least one of them, more specifically the monk at the left in the upper register, was meant to represent St Antony.¹⁹² Traditionally seen as the father of monasticism, he would of course be highly suitable subject matter for an image in a manuscript specifically made to function in a monastic context. In trying to reveal the identity of the three other anonymous saints, de Jerphanion refers to a Syrian Orthodox liturgical calendar dating from 1210, in which the commemoration of St Antony is directly followed by the commemoration of Sts Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria on January 18, and that of St Macarius the Egyptian on January 19.¹⁹³ In view of the chronological proximity between these feast days, de Jerphanion suggests that the monk at the right in the upper register and the two bishops below were meant to represent St Macarius, and the patriarchs Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, respectively.¹⁹⁴

Most recently, Smine has argued for a slightly different reading. She agrees that Sts Antony and Macarius are the two monks represented in the upper register, pointing out that in Vat. Syr. 559, the feast of Antony on January 17 is directly followed by the feast of Macarius on January 19. While de Jerphanion resorts to an external source for his identification of the two bishops in the lower register, Smine proposes to identify one of them on the basis of the textual evidence from the Vatican lectionary itself. She draws attention to a heading following the readings for St Antony and St Macarius which introduces the readings for the feast of the Three Hierarchs, Sts Basil, Gregory, and John Chrysostom, celebrated on January 30.

As Smine observes, this heading announces the commemoration of Basil and Gregory, but omits John Chrysostom. His name is substituted by that of 'Sawira', that is Severus of Antioch (d. 538), the sixth-century patriarch who had been exiled to Egypt because of his anti-Chalcedonian position. In the Syrian Orthodox Church, Severus of Antioch is celebrated on February 8. Apparently, the patron and scribe replaced Chrysostom with Severus, using the proximity of Severus' feast day to that of the Three Hierarchs. Postulating that the artist of Vat. Syr. 559 represented the two bishops for the feast of the Three Hierarchs, Smine suggests that the scribe's annotation allows us to identify one of them as Severus of Antioch.¹⁹⁵

Considering the possible Syrian Orthodox identity markers in the Vatican lectionary, St Severus, who in the Syrian Orthodox tradition is seen as one of the main authorities on Christology, would indeed be a likely candidate for an image. After being condemned in 536, Severus was subject to a perpetual *damnatio memoriae* both in the Byzantine Orthodox Church and in the West, but continued to be revered in the Syrian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches.¹⁹⁶

Moreover, as we have seen in Chapter 3, the image of Patriarch Severus of Antioch is actually used as a marker of Syrian Orthodox communal identity at Deir al-Surian in Egypt, where he is paired with Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria (d. 454) on the wooden sanctuary screen of the tenth century (Pl. 15), and on two column paintings of the thirteenth century (Pls 19-20). At Deir al-Surian, the visual pairing of the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria was clearly meant to bolster the good relations between the Syrian Orthodox and Coptic Churches in general, and to highlight the intercommunal character of the monastery in particular.

In Egypt, Severus of Antioch is also depicted in the early thirteenth-century wall paintings at Deir Anba Antonius, where he is featured as one of a series of five patriarchs. It is

¹⁹² De Jerphanion 1940, 80-81; Leroy 1964, 286.

¹⁹³ London, BL Add. 17232; Nau 1915, 118.

¹⁹⁴ De Jerphanion 1940, 81.

¹⁹⁵ Smine 2008.

¹⁹⁶ On Severus of Antioch, see Fiey 2004, 173, no. 405; Allen/Hayward 2004; Van Rompay 2008b.

interesting to observe that Severus is here yet again portrayed standing next to Dioscorus of Antioch.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, the fact that of the five patriarchs Severus and Dioscorus are the only ones framed within an arcade enhances the iconographic and symbolic link between the two. It should be observed that this is not the only pairing of Syrian and Coptic saints encountered at Deir Anba Antonius. In the nave of the church, the image of St Antony the Great is represented facing Mar Barsauma, who is holding a scroll inscribed with a Syriac and Coptic inscription. In this way, the father of monasticism is conveniently linked with the father of Syrian monasticism.

While Barsauma is the only non-Egyptian of the monastic figures represented in the nave, Severus of Antioch is the only non-Egyptian patriarch of those depicted in the sanctuary. Considering the depiction of Mar Barsauma among a larger assembly of Coptic monastic saints, Bolman argues that he was included because these saints all share the same position in the doctrinal struggle against the Chalcedonian faction, but assumes that Barsauma was depicted also because he reflects the long-standing ties between the Syrian Orthodox and Coptic Orthodox Christians.¹⁹⁸

In view of the traditional pairing of these two saints, one is tempted to suggest that if one of the bishops in the Vatican lectionary was indeed meant to represent Severus of Antioch, the other might perhaps have been identified with Dioscorus of Alexandria, although this remains a mere hypothesis. Smine's reading of the image of the Four Monastic Saints seems reasonable, but it is nevertheless important to note that it cannot be corroborated by the imagery itself. When it comes to vestments as possible identity markers, for example, one should remember that during this particular period, the Syrian *omophorion* does not seem to have been different from its Byzantine counterpart.¹⁹⁹

De Jerphanion may have been correct in assuming that the miniature simply reflects a Byzantine source, which the artist adapted by placing the monastic figures within a framework reminiscent of local architecture.²⁰⁰ As far as Syrian Orthodox manuscript illustration is concerned, it was indeed not uncommon for artists to copy Byzantine saints and their ecclesiastical dress without further ado, as is the case, for instance, in a liturgical manuscript (A.D. 1238) in Oxford containing the anaphoras of Sts Jacob, John the Evangelist, Bishop Eustachius of Antioch, and Patriarch Sixtus of Rome.²⁰¹

Taking into account the possibility that the miniature painter unconcernedly copied a Byzantine model together with genuine Byzantine Orthodox elements of dress, it is perhaps also revealing to refer to the thirteenth-century wall paintings in the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Mar Musa in Syria. In the large painting of the Last Judgement (Pl. 3), several prelates are shown wearing a *polystaurion*, that is a *phelonion* covered with crosses; this liturgical vestment was introduced into the Byzantine tradition in the eleventh century.²⁰² In pointing out that both saved and damned prelates are shown wearing these Byzantine Orthodox vestments, Immerzeel argues that the artist responsible for this painting simply copied a Byzantine model without taking any Syrian Orthodox 'dress codes' into consideration.

Apparently, the *polystaurion* had become 'a widely accepted marker of rank in the saintly hierarchy'; it served as an iconographic clue to the identity of Church Fathers and other highly

¹⁹⁷ Bolman 2002, 71, 94, 98, 176, Fig. 7.14; van Moorsel 1995-1997, 77-79, Pls 29-30. Van Moorsel draws attention to the fact that Severus and Dioscorus are also paired, in this case textually, in the Coptic synaxarion. According to the synaxarion, both saints appeared in a vision to a monk during the ordination of Patriarch Jacob.

¹⁹⁸ Bolman 2002, 53, 54.

¹⁹⁹ Innemée 1992, 81.

²⁰⁰ De Jerphanion 1940, 63 n. 2.

²⁰¹ Bodleian Library, Dawkins 58; Leroy 1964, 338-341, Pl. 114.

²⁰² Innemée 1992, 56.

esteemed episcopal saints'.²⁰³ A similar manner of reasoning may here be applied to the vestments of the four monastic saints in the Vatican library codex: the *omophorion* worn by two of the monastic saints was used to mark their episcopal identity, rather than serving as a sign of their religious affiliation.

In short, nothing in the physiognomy of these saints, their dress, or the attributes they carry can help us to establish their personal identity, nor their precise religious affiliation. As such, the imagery is highly ambiguous. Although it is conceivable that the Syrian Orthodox community would have considered the four saints as representatives of their Church, as champions of Syrian Orthodoxy, or perhaps more generally speaking as advocates of the Miaphysite doctrine, in iconographic terms, they are standardized images of monks, two of which are bishops. Furthermore, considering that we are dealing with a manuscript intended for monastic use, and that the miniature relates directly to the feast of the founder of monasticism, one might argue that the four monastic saints depicted served as markers of a general monastic identity rather than a specific denominational one.

D) Constantine and Helena

A final miniature which one can single out for a more detailed discussion is that on fol. 223v, accompanying the readings for the feast of the Cross (Pl. 22).²⁰⁴ It shows Constantine and Helena standing on either side of an erect cross with three crossbars, which they are holding up. They are dressed in richly decorated costumes, which are complemented with a crown. This particular subject was frequently depicted in Byzantine art from the tenth century onwards. By the thirteenth century, it had become the traditional image for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14, and was a standard feature in Byzantine church decoration. Constantine and Helena were considered the patron saints of the Cross, protectors of an ideal society in which Church and State were united, and as such the image conveniently expressed the imperial power of the Christian Empire.²⁰⁵

This standard iconographic type continued to be used, virtually unchanged, throughout the centuries. Differences are found only in the details, in particular in the character of the costume of the two protagonists, which could be altered according to contemporary developments in Byzantine imperial costume.²⁰⁶ Outside the Byzantine Empire, the vestments of the imperial couple were sometimes adapted to meet local fashionable trends, as for instance in the West, where the theme was introduced during the period of the Crusades.

A similar assimilation to local fashion may be presumed for the representation in the Vatican lectionary, in which the genuine Byzantine imperial dress worn by Constantine and Helena has been somewhat transformed in its appearance to meet the dress code of local rulers. Although the image has retained the traditional imperial Byzantine *loros-costume*, the usual headdress of the imperial couple has been replaced by a type of crown reminiscent of that worn by rulers in the Great Seljuk successor states and encountered in contemporary Islamic art.²⁰⁷ In the study of Byzantine art, such assimilations of the imperial couple to

²⁰³ Immerzeel 2009, 169-170.

²⁰⁴ Fol. 223v: Leroy 1964, Pl. 99.2; Lenzi 2000, 308-308, with colour image.

²⁰⁵ On the iconography of Constantine and Helena bearing the True Cross, see *LCI*, 7, 336-337; Baert 2004, 4, 124-129; Walter 2006.

²⁰⁶ Parani 2003, 38-41.

²⁰⁷ See, for example, the crowns worn by rulers in a number of thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Kalila wa Dimna* (Istanbul, Topkapi Sarayı Müzesi, H. 363, fol. 118r: O'Kane 2003, Fig. 22; cf. Roxburgh 2005, cat. no. 37, Pl. 37, detail on pp. 84-85. Paris, BnF 3465, fol. 14v: O'Kane 2003, Fig. 20.), King Ardashir enthroned in an early fourteenth-century manuscript from Shiraz (Schmitz 1994, 157, Pl. 154), two angels that once surmounted one of the gates of the Konya citadel, and the cross-legged seated prince on the Talisman Gate in Baghdad (Sarre/Herzfeld 1911-1920, II, 260, Fig. 257).

contemporary rulers have occasionally led to the assumption that this was a deliberate strategy to allow for favourable alignments with local rulers.²⁰⁸

The interest in the miniature here lies precisely in the fact that several scholars, assuming that the Vatican manuscript was made in 1260 as opposed to 1220 (see the introduction to this chapter), have sought to identify Constantine and Helena with the Mongol Il-Khan Hūlagū (1256-1265) and his East Syrian wife Doqūz Khatun. In this, they view the execution of the manuscript in relation to the political and military situation at the time, that is, in the period around 1260. As we saw in Chapter 2, the news of the sack of Baghdad gave rise to new hope among Eastern Christians. When Hūlagū's army conquered Baghdad in 1258, only two years prior to the supposed production of the Vatican lectionary, the Mongols had plundered and killed the Muslim community but largely spared the Christians and their property.²⁰⁹ Many were now convinced that the Cross was finally about to triumph over Islam and that the establishment of a new Christian Empire in the Middle East was near. The Armenian chronicler Stephanos Orbelian (d. 1309) hailed Hūlagū and Doqūz Khatun as the new Constantine and Helena of the era. Barhebraeus, who saw the fall of Baghdad as the most important turning point in history after the advent of Islam in the seventh century, may also have considered Hūlagū as a new Constantine, for in his *Chronicle* he compares Hūlagū's mother with Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine.²¹⁰

Fiey was the first to suggest that providing Constantine and Helena in the Vatican lectionary with supposedly 'Mongol' facial features, together with costumes with Middle-Eastern elements was a deliberate strategy to give visual expression to comparisons made by contemporaries such as Barhebraeus and Orbelian.²¹¹ Although Fiey's suggestion is very appealing, and as such has convinced many subsequent scholars, it must be rejected that these facial features and elements of dress were deliberately chosen by the artists or the patron to express the wish for a Christian coalition under Mongol rule.

The first important observation to made here is that precisely the same physiognomic type and elements of costume are encountered in the representation of Constantine and Helena holding aloft the True Cross in the London lectionary, which was produced in the period between 1215 and 1220 (fol. 244r; Pl. 22). Bearing in mind that the Mongols only started raiding Iraq from 1221 onwards (see Section 2.1), Constantine and Helena were thus already provided with 'Mongolized' facial features decades prior to the formulation of any hopes for a Christian Empire to emerge under Ilkhanid rule. Besides, if the hope that the Mongols would definitively convert to Christianity is assumed to have underlain any aspects of the decoration programme, why were the three Magi in the scene of the Nativity not provided with 'Mongolized' facial features, as was indeed the case in the London lectionary?²¹²

Moreover, as we have seen earlier in this study (see Section 3.3.4), the typical facial features of Constantine and Helena, that is, their broad faces ('moon-faced') with slanted almond-shaped eyes, and small noses and mouths, were already introduced into Mesopotamian manuscript illustration and metalwork as early as the twelfth century. Exemplary in this respect are the *Kitab al-Diryaq* in Paris from 1199 (BnF arabe 2964), and the frontispiece miniatures in the six surviving volumes of a single copy of the *Kitab al-Aghani*, which was probably made in the period between 1217 and 1219 for Badr al-Din Lu'lu', the Atabeg ruler of Mosul. The same 'Asiatic' or 'Oriental' facial type recurs in the

²⁰⁸ Parani 2003, 40-41.

²⁰⁹ Kawerau 1960, 98-102; Fiey 1975a, 21-22.

²¹⁰ Takahashi 2005, 63.

²¹¹ Fiey 1975a, 18-32; *idem* 1975b, 59-64; *idem* 1992, 973. Cf. Balicka-Witakowski *et al.* 2001, 160; Folda 2005, 322 n. 719; Hunt 2005, 201; *idem* 2009, 339-340.

²¹² Leroy 1964, Pls 76.1 (BL Add. 7170, fol. 21r) and 76.2 (Vat. Syr. 559, fol. 16r).

representation of the Virgin and Child on the liturgical fan from Deir al-Surian, which was probably made in Mosul in 1202/03 (Pls 10-11).

These stylistic analogies, however, should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the appearance of Constantine and Helena was the result of an unconscious *stylistic* trait, especially considering that no other figures in the Vatican lectionary are represented with these 'Asiatic' facial features and items of dress. Support for this hypothesis is found in contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration, more specifically thirteenth-century manuscripts of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, in which a similar iconographic differentiation can be found. In a number of these manuscripts a careful distinction is made between royal and non-royal figures, both in terms of physical appearance and dress. Whereas princes and governors are commonly represented with the same 'Asiatic' or 'Oriental' facial features, and dressed in Turkish military garments like fur-trimmed caps (*sharbush*) and short close-fitting tunics, most other figures are depicted with 'Arab' or 'Semitic' facial features, and dressed in long robes and turbans.²¹³ Apparently in keeping with the contemporary political and social makeup of the region in which these manuscripts were produced, a visual distinction was made along ethnic and social lines, between the non-Arab Turkish ruling elite and the indigenous Arab bourgeoisie.

To be sure, Fiey's interpretation should not be replaced with the alternative hypothesis that the facial features of Constantine and Helena in the Vatican and London lectionaries were deliberately chosen to effectuate positive parallels between the imperial Christian prototypes and Badr al-Din Lu'lu' or any of the other rulers that were in control of the Mesopotamian region during the thirteenth century. Admittedly, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility that such a comparison did indeed arise in the minds of more contemplative beholders such as Barhebraeus, who may perhaps even be assumed to have handled the Vatican lectionary himself during one of his stays at Deir Mar Mattai. However, if we posit that the miniature painters responsible for the execution of Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 were also involved in the production of illustrated Islamic manuscripts like those of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri, it makes more sense to suggest that they simply made use of an imperial model with which they were intimately acquainted. In other words, the appearance and dress of Constantine and Helena should rather be seen as *iconographic* markers, which were merely intended to underline their royal identity.

4.8 Conclusion

Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 have often been considered mere provincial works of art, that were imbued with 'foreign' elements due to the impact of Islamic art. In view of the above, it may be argued that when the manuscripts are placed in their proper context, that is, thirteenth-century manuscript production in Northern Mesopotamia and related areas, the evidence clearly suggests otherwise. The concepts of 'influence' or 'impact' are now considered completely inadequate to explain the phenomenon of artistic correspondence between the Syriac manuscripts and contemporary Islamic ones; moreover, the common characteristics between the two groups should certainly not be taken to reflect direct influence of a Muslim ruling class over a subordinate Christian population. Such a view would not do justice to the complexity and richness of the evident artistic relationships. When viewed in their proper regional and stylistic context, these features are far less surprising and certainly not 'foreign'.

²¹³ Nassar 1985, 88; Grabar 1984, 22, 141; *idem* 2006a, 178-181. On Turkish military vestments as represented in Islamic manuscript illustration, see Stillman 2000, 62-71.

The assertion of an ongoing primacy of Byzantine art over Syriac manuscript illustration has led scholars like Buchthal and Ettinghausen, for instance, to conclude that certain stylistic and iconographic features that are uncommon in Byzantine manuscript illustration are by definition foreign to Syriac manuscripts. It proves much more fruitful to discuss the problem in terms of close interaction in cultural and artistic matters. This new framework starts from the notion that followers of different religions from the Mosul area were part of the same visual culture, with artistic techniques shared by Muslims and non-Muslims, Christians and non-Christians alike. As argued in the previous chapter, the commissioning of the same crews of artists and craftsmen by Muslim and Christian patrons results in a distinct overlap between the artistic traditions of the two religious groups. The manuscript illustrations featured in Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170 should be seen in the same perspective.

The stylistic analogies with contemporary Islamic manuscript illustration should be explained not as the result of a shift from Syriac to Arabic as a spoken language, or as a conscious choice to emulate the art of the ruling community, but rather in terms of shared painting techniques applied by the artists or craftsmen responsible. The hypothesis is therefore advanced above that the artists who executed the miniatures in these lectionaries were also involved in the production of illustrated manuscripts for Muslim consumers. This would explain not only the distinct stylistic overlap, but also the smooth transference of iconography and composition between both groups. In discussing the liturgical fan from Deir al-Surian, the term ‘common workshop identity’ was used to explain the artistic overlap between Christian and Islamic art. While there is some textual evidence to suggest that the production of metalwork indeed involved organized workshops, consisting of a skilled master and less experienced assistants, the production of illustrated Syrian Orthodox manuscripts appears to have depended rather on individuals who joined forces to accomplish a particular commission and disbanded upon its completion. Further research, which should take both Islamic and Syriac manuscript illustration into account in conjunction, is needed to corroborate these hypotheses.

When it comes to the role of Vat. Syr. 559 in the expression of a Syrian Orthodox communal identity, no distinctively Syrian Orthodox elements have as yet been found in the iconography and the choice of feasts that are illustrated. The present study considers what was *not* represented as important as what *was*. Although the Vatican lectionary includes commemorations typical for the Syrian Orthodox Church in general and Deir Mar Mattai in particular, including Mar Ahudemme, Mar Mattai, and Mar Zakkai, none of these is enhanced through the addition of a miniature, the only exception perhaps being the image of Four Monastic Saints. Studying the lectionary text and the image in conjunction, there is some evidence to suggest that one of these monks was meant to represent St Severus of Antioch, who may be considered a genuinely Syrian Orthodox saint. The imagery itself is highly ambiguous, however, and does not allow for any certain conclusions in this respect. The most eye-catching iconographic features of the manuscript are actually the two full-page miniatures together depicting the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. It is argued here that besides being indicative of the loosely shared popularity of their cult in the Greater Syrian region, the lavish attention devoted to theme may perhaps have been a conscious attempt to emphasize the importance of martyrdom as a road towards salvation. The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste are therefore a particularly appropriate, albeit certainly not exclusive, theme for Churches under Muslim rule.

In the above, several different functions have been suggested for Vat. Syr. 559 and its pictorial cycle. Although the expression of Syrian Orthodox communal identity does not appear to have played a dominant role in the coming into being of Vat. Syr. 559, it is suggested here that its creation might have been motivated by propagandistic motivations that were aimed at bolstering the prominent position of Deir Mar Mattai within the Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy. Since it was lavishly decorated, Vat. Syr. 559 would

certainly have contributed to the prestige of the patron who commissioned it and the monastery for which it was intended. Besides enhancing the luxurious character of the lectionary, the miniature cycle is also considered to have played a practical role within the hierarchy of decoration.

The formal correspondence between Vat. Syr. 559 and BL Add. 7170, on the one hand, and contemporary illustrated Islamic manuscripts from the region, on the other, shows yet again that the style in which such manuscripts are painted is not bound to a single religious community. Rather than an expression of communal or denominational identity, the stylistic characteristics of the Vatican and London lectionaries should be considered an essentially regional phenomenon. In this respect, it is also important to refer to the Syrian Orthodox manuscripts with illustrations painted in a provincial Byzantine style, which appear mainly to have been produced in Northern Syria and the Tur ʿAbdin area. The appropriation of a Byzantine style by Syrian Orthodox patrons should probably not be regarded as a deliberate attempt to align themselves in one way or another with the Byzantine Orthodox. Rather than any conscious expression of identity, the availability of artists appears to have been the decisive factor in determining the style of illustrated Syriac manuscripts, a hypothesis which finds corroboration in a recorded instance from the realm of ecclesiastical wall painting, the subject of the following chapter.