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CHURCHMEN AND STATESMEN:
CHRISTIAN ECCLESIASTICAL EMBASSIES AND DIPLOMACY FOR NON-CHRISTIAN
EMPIRES DURING LATE ANTIQUITY AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD (4TH – 14TH)



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Ecclésiastical leaders, whether Byzantine or Persian, were involved in imperial political affairs during the late antique and medieval periods.

As early as the late fourth century, the Byzantines sent an embassy to Persia headed by Bishop Mārūthā of Maiphraqat, and thereafter several diplomatic missions were led by bishops and patriarchs on both sides of the borders. While ecclesiastical missions were not systematic during the Islamic period, there are references of some ecclesiastics who acted intermediaries between Muslim and Christian courts. Even during the early Mongol period, Christian monks were sent to Rome and European courts, and vice versa, to seek partnership in conquering Muslims countries. The present article surveys these diplomatic missions by periods, shedding light on the motifs of selecting ecclesiastics to solve internal and international disputes and to strengthen ties.

EMBASSIES
DURING THE SASSANIAN ERA

In Late Antiquity, embassies headed by ecclesiastics were systematically sent to Byzantine and Persian courts to present

well-wishes to kings ascending thrones, to establish long term peace and trade treaties, and to solve political relations issues between the two empires of the time.

Fourth and Fifth Centuries

The first ecclesiastical ambassador to the Persian Empire was Bishop Mārūthā of Maipharaqat, ancient Martyropolis and modern Silvan.¹ Mārūthā was a Byzantine governor, bishop and physician, who descended from a notable family that ruled the region near Amida² in the Roman Empire.³ After the death of his father, he succeeded him as the governor of the region during the reigns of Emperors Theodosius I (d. 395) and Arcadius (d. 408). In addition to being a clergyman, Mārūthā was also a physician. He was appointed bishop of Maipharaqat and participated frequently in Byzantine inter-church matters in Constantinople.⁴

Around 399, Mārūthā was sent by the Roman emperor, Arcadius, to carry out imperial wishes to the newly established Shah, Yazdagrd I (d. 420), reassuring him of the ongoing peace-treaty signed between Persia and Byzantium in 387.⁵ The bishop's mission seemed to have religious motives too.

He and the emperor desired to intervene on behalf of the Persian-Christians who were still living in uncertainty in Persia. Furthermore, his mission intended to fulfill the desire of the Persian Shah, who sought medical help to heal the sick son or daughter of the Shah,⁶ which Mārūthā succeeded to do after the failure of Persian physicians.⁷ The Greek Vita of Mārūthā says that “he healed the daughter of the king who was dominated by a demon;”⁸ the daughter’s disease called “demon” must have been a health ailment, which the bishop healed.

Mārūthā’s medical success gained him favour in the court of Shah Yazdgerd, which he utilized for political and religious objectives.⁹ He was successful in securing a peace treaty between the Byzantine and Persian Empires. Further, it is reported that he acquired relics of Christian martyrs, while he collected hagiographical and martyrological stories about them. He built a church to contain the relics and named his city Martyropolis “City of Martyrs.”¹⁰ Sources also indicate that Mārūthā played a decisive role in the appointment of Patriarch Isaac (d. 410) on the throne of The Church of the East in 399.¹¹

Mārūthā undertook at least one other diplomatic trip to Persia around the year 408, possibly to report the ascension of Emperor Theodosius II (d. 450) to the Persian court and ensure the continuation of the peace treaty.¹² During this visit, Mārūthā left his imprint on the future of ‘Persian’ Christianity, for he played a critical role freeing it from persecution and in helping to hold the first synod of the Church of the East ever in 410, the Synod of Isaac.¹³ In this synod, the Church organized its ecclesiastical structure, defined its theology, and secured its imperial approval of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon Isaac as the head and representative of the Church and community. More importantly, the imperial approval of holding the synod

included the recognition of Christianity as a legal entity in the Sassanian realm.¹⁴

The diplomatic-ecclesiastical embassies of Mārūthā seemed to set a precedent that would become a common practice by the Byzantine emperors. In 419/420 and 422, Bishop Acacius of Amida was sent by Emperor Theodosius II to the Persian Shahs Yazdgerd and Ardashir IV (d. 428) respectively.¹⁵ He seemed to have attended the Synod of the Church of the East under Patriarch Yahbālāhā I (420).¹⁶ He was also successful in the signing of a peace treaty in 422, an agreement which ensured freedom of trade, as well as rights to worship for Christians in the Persian Empire and Zoroastrians in the Byzantine Empire.¹⁷

The first mission of Bishop Acacius occurred in response to a Persian embassy sent to Emperor Theodosius II that was led by the newly-elected East-Syriac Patriarch Yahbālāhā I (d. 420).¹⁸ Its goal was to reaffirm the political peace treaty between the two empires.¹⁹ During the visit, the East-Syriac patriarch met the Byzantine emperor (and possibly Constantinople’s ecclesiastical leadership) and impressed them theologically, intellectually and diplomatically. He received a positive imperial response to the shah’s request, as well as many gifts. Upon his return, Bishop Mārūthā was allowed to accompany the patriarch on his last trip to Persia.²⁰

The international ecclesiastical embassy of Yahbālāhā I was not a unique case in which an East-Syriac patriarch served the Persian shah. The Persian embassy to the Wei dynasty in 455 might have contained Christians, if not even clergymen, who might have introduced the Christian faith to China, though that possibility remains remote.²¹ More affirmed cases involved local politics, as in the case of Patriarch Aḥai (d. 415), who was sent on behalf of the shah to the region of Fars to reconcile the regional governor, who was the shah’s

nephew. The Christian clergyman succeeded in his mission.²²

In the year 484/5, Baršawma, Bishop of Nisibis (d. ca. 458) led an embassy to Byzantium.²³ Baršawma was on good terms with the Persian and Byzantine authorities:²⁴ Shah Peroz I (d. 484) had appointed him as *marzban*-overseer of the Byzantine-Persian borders.²⁵ He furthermore served as a Sasanian ambassador to Byzantium to report to the Byzantine court the ascension of Shah Balash (r. 484-488) to the Persian throne.²⁶ His mission also included the opportunity to introduce East-Syriac theology to the Byzantine court.²⁷ After his return from the diplomatic mission, the shah ordered him to remain in Nisibis to work with the local Sasanian governor and with the Byzantine representatives, so as to deal with border disputes and demarcation.²⁸

Patriarch Acacius (d. 495/6)²⁹ was also sent by Shah Balash³⁰ to Emperor Zeno (d. 491) to establish a peace treaty between the two empires, a mission that seemed to have succeeded. Sources attribute the success of Acacius to many factors, including his intellectual skills, which impressed both the Persians and Romans.³¹

Sixth Century

This century is dominated by remarkable Persian ecclesiastical embassies from Mesopotamia and Iran to the Byzantine Empire and vice versa. The East-Syriac Patriarch Ezekiel I (d. 581),³² while still bishop, was first sent to the Gulf region to oversee the operation of extracting gems and jewels for Shah Khosrow I (d. 579).³³ His possible success may have led the Shah to recommend him for the ecclesiastical throne, which he accessed in 570.³⁴ Sources commend him for his high intelligence and education, including medicine and languages, in addition to his administrative skills and leadership.

In 573, Ezekiel, now patriarch, accompanied the Persian Shah on his military

campaign against the Byzantines with other Persian nobilities.³⁵ The military activities reignited after Emperor Justin II (d. 578) refused to continue to pay tribute as in previous years, and furthermore, after his formal support of the Armenian usurpers against the Persians. The decision of the emperor was communicated to a Persian embassy that was sent in 572. The failed embassy was led by a certain less known East-Syriac clergyman called Sabokht, who was a monk and disciple of Abraham of Kashkar (d. 588).³⁶ He was a Reader in the School of Seleucia and a civil servant at the Persian court.³⁷

During the following years of war, Byzantine emperors attempted to pursue peace through the embassies of the royal doctor-monk Zacharias of Sura (574-579), who was sent by Empress Sophia (d. 601) and Caesar Tiberius II Constantine (d. 582) in response to Khosrow I's request for a peace talk after 574. Records show his success in securing the peace on the first trip, as well as on later visits in 578 and 579,³⁸ which triggered a Persian embassy in response in around 581. Notably, sources point out that Zacharias of Sura was not only a doctor and monk, but was also an archdeacon, a churchman,³⁹ as well as a trained philosopher and rhetor—skills that impressed his Persian host.⁴⁰

The Persians responded to Zacharias' mission by sending Simeon of Nisibis⁴¹ and an unnamed bishop of Resh'ayna,⁴² as their emissaries in 581.⁴³ The negotiations took place on the borders near the city of Mardin.⁴⁴ On the other side of the table was none other than Zacharias of Sura, which highlights the critical role the churchmen played on both sides and in the middle of very tense moments. The negotiations failed, and a second attempt was made again in 586, led by Simeon of Nisibis on the Persian side, but again it was unsuccessful.

The failure of churchmen in political missions is also evident in the life of

Isho'yahb I (d. 595). The later Catholicos. Isho'yahb first engaged with the Byzantine court for religious reasons when he accompanied Paul, Metropolitan of Nisibis (d. 573), in 547 to seek theological unity out of the desire of Emperor Justinian I (d. 565), which was not successful.⁴⁵ A second failed mission happened in 579, when Isho'yahb was bishop of the border town of Arzun, north of Nisibis. He negotiated with General Maurice (d. 602), later an emperor, the prevention of conquering the region. The failure of the bishop led to his temporary imprisonment, the conquering of the region, and the later deportation of its mostly Christians inhabitants to Cyprus.⁴⁶

Shortly after this incident, upon the ascension of Khosrow II (d. 628), the diplomatic relations were restored between the two empires after a period of wars and inter-Sassanian political unrest. The latter fled to Roman territories for a period of time, where he sought the support of Emperor Maurice (d. 602) to reclaim his throne in 591.⁴⁷ Emperor Maurice sent two high-ranking clergymen to lead new negotiations for a peace treaty with the new Shah Khosrow II. The first was his cousin Domitian, Bishop of Melitene, and the second was Gregory, Patriarch of Antioch.⁴⁸

Yet, for the East-Syriac Catholicos Isho'yahb I, the ascension of Khosrow II and the restored relations were not good outcomes. The newly enthroned Shah was not pleased with a number of things the Catholicos did during the previous year: He refused to accompany the fleeing king to Byzantine territories or to allow other clergymen to do so;⁴⁹ he declined to take a political position against the usurper commander Bahram; and finally he did not welcome Khosrow upon his victorious return.⁵⁰

The patriarch justified his behavior through fear of possible harm that could be inflicted on his church and community by the usurper ruler, but he found himself in a

tough situation with the shah; even the Byzantines did not support him because of his earlier involvement in spying on their forces. Thus, he eventually experienced the wrath of the shah, which cost him his patriarchal seat and residence in the Persian capital. The patriarch fled and hid himself in the court of the Arab Lakhmid King Nu'man III ibn al-Mundhir (d. 602),⁵¹ who was new Christian convert. The patriarch eventually died in the latter's capital of Hira in 595.⁵² Regardless of such an unfortunate outcome, this episode, like others, highlights the value of Christian patriarchs to the Sassanian royal court, their images and objectives, internally within the kingdom or externally with the Byzantines.⁵³

Seventh Century

The seventh century witnessed the advent of the Arabs, the demise of the Sassanian Empire, and the shrinking Byzantine Empire.

Patriarch Sabrisho' I (d. 604)⁵⁴ briefly joined Shah Khosrow II on his military campaign against the Byzantine forces in 604, during a time when the conflict was renewed after the death of Emperor Maurice. Once again, the ecclesiastical involvement in political affairs, desired or forced, was costly, but in different ways. It led to the death of the elderly patriarch, who was around 80 years old, on account of sickness and exhaustion from travels. Sources note the correspondence between this East-Syriac patriarch and the Byzantine emperor with the Persian Shah's approval, as well as the commissioning of one of his bishops (Bishop Milis) to undertake a diplomatic role under the direction of the patriarch in 596. The shah sent letters with Milis to give to Emperor Maurice and the patriarch of Constantinople Cyriacus II (d. 606). The bishop's mission was successful, in that Persian captives were freed and great gifts were given to the East-Syriac patriarch by the emperor.⁵⁵

The latest embassy occurred after the end of the last Persian-Roman war (602-629). After a period of inter-dynastic feud, Queen Buran (r. 630-631), the daughter of Khosrow II, sat on the throne of Persia in 630, but for just a year and a half. During this brief rule, the Queen immediately sought to reestablish the political relation with Constantinople, and thus she sent an embassy to Emperor Heraclius (d. 641), who was in Aleppo. The embassy was made of Catholicos Isho'yahb II (d. 645/6)⁵⁶ and seven East-Syriac bishops and metropolitans, including the future Patriarch Isho'yahb III (d. 659),⁵⁷ sources agree that the mission was successful.⁵⁸ But the Arab Muslims were about to invade the two empires, leading to a reshaping of the political map of the ancient world and its diplomacy.

In 635, a final Persian mission, which was led by the East-Syriac monk Alopen, reached the Chinese imperial court of the T'ang dynasty in the capital Chang'an (modern Xian). Sources do not state its political nature explicitly, but only attest to the monk's success in impressing Emperor Taizong (d. 649) at the religious level.⁵⁹ Imperial hospitality was given to the Syriac monk, along with permissions to use imperial resources, including the palace library, as well as the freedom to establish Christianity. These benevolent actions reflect the official attitude of the T'ang dynasty toward foreign allied envoys, not necessarily toward religious missionaries.⁶⁰ The mission of the East-Syriac monk took place after the ascension of Yazdagrd III in 632, when the Arab forces were at the gates of the empire at around 634. In 637, the Arabs captured the Sassanian capital, and the shah fled. Thus, this last-minute embassy sought Chinese military support to save the Persian Empire from collapsing at the hands of the Muslims, support that never materialized due Taizong's entanglement in other military conflicts and the lack of the Arabs' imminent threat to the empire.

Yet in 663, Yazdagrd's son, prince Peroz, received the imperial support to establish a Persian protectorate in central Asia, making him a governor until its conquest by the Muslims in 674. He was forced to flee to Chang'an where he was received; he was given permission to build a Christian chapel for his Christian aristocrats.⁶¹

As is clear, Christian patriarchs and bishops were key participants in internal and external state affairs, not only within Christian states but also within non-Christian ones. This direct participation in state's affairs is a testimony to the honour and value given by the crown to ecclesiastics. The Persian court's employment of Christian churchmen as emissaries seemed to be an imitation of the Byzantine practice, and both had their own reasons to do so, which will be highlighted later. Regardless of the factors, the Christian embassies on behalf of the Sassanian crown represent a new, intriguing, and important phenomenon. The differences in the religious affiliations of the Persian Shah and the East-Syriac Patriarch make their diplomatic partnership a more interesting case compared to the co-religionist Byzantine emperors and bishops. It also served as a precedent for a phenomenon that would repeat itself for the next millennium.

EMBASSIES DURING THE ISLAMIC ERA

By the mid-seventh century, the Sassanian Empire collapsed after the Arab invasion of the Near East. The Byzantine Empire suffered significant territorial losses, including the Levant, Egypt and North Africa, and retreated to its Asia Minor homeland. Consequently, the Persian-Byzantine diplomatic relations and ecclesiastical embassies ceased between them, but new ones with Muslims were created, involving, once again, Christian ecclesiastics.⁶² After all, diplomatic embassies were important, especially with the ongoing hostility between

Byzantines and Muslims and the well-noted mutual respect for each other's powers.⁶³ Thus, diplomacy and diplomatic embassies existed between the Byzantines and the Muslims, even during wars.⁶⁴

Nonetheless, diplomacy between the Byzantines and the Arabs differed from the Persian-Byzantine one in nature and in objectives because of certain factors, most importantly, Islamic ideology. Theoretically, Muslims saw the world in black and white, considering the dominion of the Islamic caliphate as the realm of peace, while the outside was the realm of war. Although the Muslims and Byzantines were engaged in an ongoing war, long periods of cease-fire dominated their relations for the next eight centuries.⁶⁵

Seventh Century

The earliest example of ecclesiastical embassies sent by Muslims occurred during the Islamic conquest of Persia in the seventh century. The Muslim commander and governor of Basra, Abū-Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. 662/672), exchanged a diplomatic embassy with the Persian commander Hormizd in response to his pursuit for a truce in exchange for paying a tribute. The exchanged embassy included the East-Syriac Bishop George of Ulay and Metropolitan Abraham of Furat, but it is not clear if they were sent initially by the Persians or by the Muslims. If the churchmen were sent as emissaries by the Muslims, then the Arabs might have adopted the practice in previous decades.⁶⁶

The Persian-Arab negotiations seemed to be successful in producing the desired ceasefire that lasted for two years before Hormizd broke it. He was unsuccessful in attacking the Arabs, a fact that led to his defeat. The breaking of the truce dealt a blow on the envoys too: Bishop George of Ulay was killed and Metropolitan Abraham of Furat was imprisoned by the Persians.

The death of diplomats during the Islamic conquest occurred also during the negotiations between the Arabs and the Byzantines, for Bishop Isho'dad of Hira was killed at the hands of Muslims.⁶⁷ It is neither clear why the Muslims killed the bishop, nor is it known why he was employed as a diplomat.

Sources do concur that such embassies became a practice among the Arabs, while the early accounts are not clear who initiated the embassies of George, Abraham and Isho'dad, whether the Arabs or their opponents, the Byzantines and the Persians. It might well be the latter as suggested by the previous examples. The Muslims might have adopted this long-attested practice in the Near East, believing it to be useful in dealing with foreign powers that they knew little about. Their Christian subjects, including their churchmen, were of course well-immersed in the Greek and Persian cultures, customs, and practices, including their politics, which stemmed from a long history of involvements in Byzantine-Sassanian diplomacy.

Eighth-Ninth Centuries

By mid-eighth century the Islamic conquests came to a halt, although military campaigns did not stop completely, especially near the frontiers of the caliphate. The political-military relations between the Arabs and their neighbours, especially the Byzantines, included the exchange of embassies. Ecclesiastics continued to participate in diplomatic missions, acting as envoys on behalf of the Byzantine emperors to the Muslim caliphs, but their participation was limited.⁶⁸

Patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople (d. 806) led an embassy around 775 and patriarch John VII the Grammarian (d. 867) led one around 825 or 829.⁶⁹ From the ninth century, an account discusses the trip of Constantine (d. 869), also known as St.

Cyril the Apostle to the Slavs. The account also contains information about his embassy to Baghdad, which seems more religious-political in nature, his engagement in theological debates with Muslim scholars, and his visit to the tomb of Saint Thomas in Edessa.⁷⁰ It also recounts the trip of the Cyprian Bishop Demetrianus, who visited the Abbasid court in Baghdad on a mission to free some of his people who were taken as prisoners in Muslim naval raids. Unfortunately, sources are silent on the events in the Muslim capital, aside from a note that he received hospitable treatment in Baghdad.⁷¹

Christians in Islamic lands also were involved in a range of state activities, being employed as civil servants, including scribes, administrators, tax-collectors, translators, etc. Evidence confirms the use of Christians as representatives of the Islamic authorities on national and international levels, including diplomatic missions.⁷² Those individuals were considered part of the court's high-ranking civil servants and part of the elites; state officials, especially diplomats (some of whom were royalty, military commanders, jurists, and even viziers), were part of the caliphate's high echelon.⁷³

The East-Syriac patriarch Timothy I (d. 823)⁷⁴ wrote in one of his ecclesiastical letters (Letter 48) to his lifelong friend, Sergius the metropolitan of Elam, that he accompanied the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809) to the Byzantine frontiers in 799 AD. He recounts that the caliph requested his company and granted him with a royal provision for the journey, including a means of transportation to quickly catch up with the caliph's entourage, which possibly highlights the urgency of the matter. He ends his note with a request from his friend to pray that his trip be fruitful without indicating in what sense.⁷⁵

Patriarch Timothy's immediate and positive response to al-Rashīd's request to ac-

company him on his military campaign may be explained by a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the patriarch's lack of ability to refuse the Muslim caliph's order to one of his subjects, even if Timothy was a prominent churchman. His acceptance can also be attributed to the fact that the caliph's request for his involvement in political matters was not a novel phenomenon, for Timothy must have been aware of the centuries-long practice of ecclesiastics engaging in diplomacy and politics.⁷⁶

Internally, the Abbasids used Christian clergymen as their emissaries specifically in negotiation with local Christians. The West-Syriac Patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē (d. 845)⁷⁷ received an order from Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 833) to accompany him to Egypt in 830/1 to deal with Coptic revolts. Dionysius was sent with a delegation of Coptic churchmen, including Patriarch Joseph (d. 849). In their capacity as ecclesiastical leaders and caliphal envoys, they were commissioned to convince the Copts to end their armed revolt and avoid the imminent military suppression. This last-minute, local-level diplomacy came after many years of Coptic revolts against their socio-economic and religious mistreatment on a provincial level. The ecclesiastical embassy did not achieve its objective, and thus, harsh military quashing of the rebellion took place, though it did succeed in warning the caliph about the mistreatments of the Copts at the hands of local authorities.⁷⁸

Internationally, Patriarch Dionysius was also involved in welcoming a Nubian delegation sent to Baghdad. The Nubian Prince George I of Makuria (d. 920) visited the Abbasid capital around the year 837/8 to (re)negotiate the long-standing peace treaty between the Muslims and the Nubians—a peace-treaty from the mid-seventh century. Although the Syriac accounts do not mention a direct role of the patriarch in the polit-

ical discussions, they note his cordial encounters with the Nubian prince, for both sides were Miaphysites and Caliph al-Mu‘tašim (d. 842) was well-aware of this. Dionysius might have played an indirect role in improving the outcome of the political mission by pleasing the Nubian prince’s religious interest.⁷⁹ A similar encounter happened between the visiting of Nubian royalty and the Coptic Miaphysite Patriarch Joseph (d. 849) while he was travelling through Egypt, an event likely approved by the Islamic authorities.⁸⁰

The Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius I (d. 891), travelled to Baghdad, possibly around 855. In his letter to his brother he says: “After our appointment as ambassador to Assyria had been confirmed by the assent of the embassy and approved by the emperor...”⁸¹ The letter does not mention his diplomatic objective. It does note the presence of the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Islamic caliphate, although some scholars doubt its historicity.⁸² Photius is known for his controversy with the Catholic papacy (Photian Schism, 863-867). The controversy led to a council in Constantinople, which forced him to request from the Chalcedonian (Melkite) Patriarchs Theodosius I of Antioch (d. 890) and Elias II of Jerusalem (d. 907) to send representatives to support him in the council in 867. They responded positively, sending Thomas of Tyre, which, most likely required Muslim approval for his trip outside the caliphate. Photius previously had communicated with Thomas noting his mission to Baghdad, although the letter containing this note is now lost.⁸³

The later Patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas I Mysticus (d. 925), exchanged diplomatic messages with the Abbasid court and the local emir of Crete to negotiate the status of Cypriots and the exchange of war prisoners.⁸⁴ The exchange of letters between Christian clergymen and Muslim

rulers is evident in the example of Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085), who sent a letter to the Muslim Berber ruler al-Nasir ibn ‘Alennas in 1076. The purpose of the letter was to thank the Muslim ruler for freeing Christian prisoners. Although this time the clergyman was acting in an ecclesiastical, not political, capacity, he still was involved in international politics.⁸⁵ In short, the Byzantines kept their ancient practice of involving their ecclesiastical leaders in imperial politics and international diplomacy.

Tenth-Eleventh Centuries

Syriac clergymen were not the only Christians who were involved in Abbasid foreign politics; the Muslims also used Melkite Christians, especially in relation with the Byzantines. Around 913 or 922, the Abbasid vizier ‘Ali ibn ‘Isa (d. 946) commissioned the Melkite Patriarch of Jerusalem, Leontius I (d. 929), and Patriarch of Antioch, Elias I (d. 934), to negotiate the conditions of Muslim prisoners of war in Constantinople.⁸⁶ Although the two patriarchs did not travel to Constantinople, they sent a letter to the Byzantine Emperor, highlighting the unchristian treatment of the prisoners. The letter was not valued by the Byzantine Emperor, but the Byzantine court assured the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir (d. 932) in a reply letter that the Muslim prisoners were treated well.⁸⁷

By late tenth century, the once powerful and centralized Islamic caliphate was gone and its Abbasid dynasty lost control over many parts of the vast empire, leading to the rise of new independent powers such as the Fatimids in Egypt and North Africa and the Umayyad in the Iberian Peninsula. The new dynasties and local powers also engaged in diplomatic relations with their surrounding Christian kingdoms, both Byzantine and Latin ones.

The Fatimids of Egypt, like the Abbasids, used non-Muslims, including Chris-

tians, in state administration. In relation to diplomatic emissaries, we encounter the mission of the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Orestes (d. 1006),⁸⁸ who was sent to Constantinople by Caliph al-Ḥakīm (d. 1021) with full caliphal authority to negotiate with the Byzantines a ten-year peace treaty in the year 1000.⁸⁹ The Christian clergyman travelled to Constantinople, representing the Fatimid caliph. His political and religious engagement with the Byzantine officials and clergies produced some success in securing the peace treaty. Eventually, Orestes decided to stay in the Byzantine capital, where he died four years later.⁹⁰

The next Patriarch of Jerusalem, Nicephorus I (d. 1048), went into embassy in 1022 under the commission of al-Ḥakīm's sister, Sitt-al-Mulk (d. 1023). Nicephorus was commissioned with the task of reestablishing the strained ties with the Byzantines after al-Ḥakīm's period of Christian persecutions that led to the destruction of churches, including the Church of Holy Sepulcher. The Melkite patriarch carried the news of the reconstruction of the Holy Sepulcher (and other churches) and the return of confiscated Christian property. He also presented the Fatimids' desire to resume trade and enter a peace treaty with the Byzantines, although his long-lasting negotiations might have failed with the death of Sitt-al-Mulk in 1023. Hence, his diplomacy involved politics, economy and religion.⁹¹

The diplomatic embassies were prestigious,⁹² given the fact that Byzantine and Islamic courts had adopted many aspects of Persian court etiquette in their diplomatic relations.⁹³ Sources highlight the guaranteed religious-political and even socio-economic privileges of the envoys. For example, Byzantine ambassadors had free and safe access to travel within the caliphate, freedom to practice their religion,⁹⁴ and even to conduct trade. However, they

were under state surveillance on account of spying, for which death was the ultimate punishment, although rarely.⁹⁵

The Iberian Peninsula, under the Umayyad caliphate, had a significant Christian presence from which envoys emanated. Dulcidio II (c. 921), possibly Bishop of Salamanca, was previously taken captive to Cordoba in 920 (Battle of Valdejunquera), but later, he represented Alfonso III in the Muslim court of Cordova, acting on matters of inter-Iberian Christian-Muslim political relations.⁹⁶ Likewise, the case of an unnamed bishop of Seville in 973 played a similar role. Another ecclesiastical emissary was a bishop known as Hisham ibn Hudhayl (unknown diocese), who travelled with the returning Byzantine envoys to Constantinople on behalf of Caliph 'Abd-al-Raḥmān III (d. 961). His mission seemed to have lasted for two years, and upon his return, he was accompanied by a Byzantine envoy.⁹⁷

A more significant person was the famous Bishop Rabi ibn Zayd, also known as Recemundus (fl. mid-tenth century), Bishop of Elvira, who held a high position in the Islamic court in the 950s. He travelled to Frankfurt in 955/956 as an emissary of Caliph 'Abd-al-Raḥmān III to Emperor Otto I (d. 973), the Holy Roman emperor. Recemundus' mission was a response to the arrival of the monk John of Gorze (d. 974) in Cordoba around the year 953. His task was to deliver the imperial letter of Otto I to 'Abd-al-Raḥmān, but due to the caliph's suspension, John spent three years in the caliphal prison until the return of Rabi ibn Zayd from Frankfurt in 956. After his diplomatic role and mission to Otto I, Rabi ibn Zayd became a bishop in 956, maybe as an act of appreciation of the Muslim ruler for his service to the caliphate and as a token of his trust in him. While he was holding the ecclesiastical office, he continued his diplomatic role, travelling later that year to Byzantium,

which might have also included a trip to the Holy Land on his returning journey. Bishop Ibn Zayd seemed to have succeeded in this trip, since reports note that he brought back with him 140 marble pillars as a gift from the Byzantine emperor to the Umayyad caliph.⁹⁸

The examples from Andalusia highlight the acculturation of the society and its interconnections that incorporated the indigenous Christians in the Muslim world, more than Baghdad and Cairo. The Arab names adopted by those Christian clergymen attest to the integration of diverse communities in Cordoba. Like in eastern contexts, Christians held high offices in the Muslim caliphate, including being international diplomats. They played key roles in other domains, including cultural and intellectual ones. Thus, the usage of Christians as diplomats is not a sign of the limitations of Muslim dignitaries, but rather, is an indication of the place of Christians in such Islamic realms and their interconnections with its highest echelon.

Two-fth-Thirteenth Centuries

In 1161, the West-Syriac Metropolitan Ignatius I (d. 1164) was sent by the vizier Jamīl-al-dīn of Mosul to the Iberian (=Georgian) King George III (d. 1184) to redeem Muslim prisoners of war during the caliphate of al-Mustanjid (d. 1170). The Syriac emissary included two other bishops, along with a few Arab notables. According to literary sources, the Iberian king received the ecclesiastics in great honour, offering them residence and a church to celebrate the feast of Epiphany. The Metropolitan succeeded to free the prisoners. Upon his return to Mosul with the redeemed Muslim captives, a grand reception and celebrations awaited him. He was accompanied by Georgian knights, who protected him on his trip, while the Georgian king sent the Muslim vizier gifts.⁹⁹

A final example of embassy took place in the reign of its last Caliph al-Mustaʿsim (d. 1258) during the Mongol siege of Baghdad (1258). On the eve of the fall of the capital to the Mongols, the caliph, after his military failure, attempted one last diplomatic maneuver to reach a peaceful resolution to save his life and that of his family. He sent some of his elites, along with the East-Syriac Patriarch Makkikha, to the Mongols to negotiate peace, but the embassy failed to do so, despite precious gifts and the release of the Mongol envoys who were previously mistreated by the Muslims. Hulegu (d. 1265) refused the embassy's requests. Not only did he hold them in his camp, he eventually sacked Baghdad a few days later, ending the five-hundred-year of Abbasid caliphate with the death of the caliph.¹⁰⁰

It is evident from these examples taken from different Islamic eras and contexts that the practice of sending Christian churchmen as envoys on behalf of Muslims was a continuous and widespread phenomenon. The practice transcended time and geography, as well as dynastic-political and religious-confessional Islamic differences.

THE MONGOL PERIOD

The Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century reshaped international politics, in that we rarely encounter embassies during the Mongol rule of the Near East. Nonetheless, sources indicate that diplomatic relations during the late medieval period were a common reality between Europe and Mongols. After all, the European Crusaders of the Levant and the Mongols, who were sympathetic to Christianity, found themselves having a common interest in developing a military alliance against a common enemy, the Muslims, especially the Mamluks of Egypt after 1260. This common interest led to a series of diplomatic exchanges during the thirteenth and early

fourteenth centuries, but without actually ever forming a real military alliance.¹⁰¹ In the midst of these new geopolitical relations, churchmen and monks played roles as diplomats.

Multiple communications between Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254) and the Mongols existed, namely after Mongol incursion into Eastern Europe and the fall of Kiev (1240). Innocent sent a letter that was carried by the Franciscan monk John (Giovanni) of Plano Carpini (d. 1252) in 1245 and the Mongols responded in writing in 1246. A second papal diplomatic embassy was led by the Dominican Ascelin of Lombardy, who met the Mongol khan in 1247, then returned with a reply in the following year.¹⁰² These papal initiatives attest that religious motives combined with political ones, such as the papal objective to Christianize the powerful Mongols, were reasons behind sending monks in diplomatic missionary works.

Andrew (Andre) of Longjumeau, who spoke Arabic and Syriac, led two embassies to the Mongols on behalf of Pope Innocent IV in 1245; he also represented the French King Louis IX (d. 1270) in 1249 in the Mongols' court. His latter trip, which included Dominican monks, had a political agenda of establishing a military alliance, but there was possibly an implicit religious missionary objective to evangelize the Mongols. Neither the papal interventions nor royal embassies had a positive response from the Mongols. The latter's military superiority and political ideology often produced replies that mainly called for the Europeans to submit in exchange for military support, as were the previous responses to the papal envoys.¹⁰³ In 1253, Louis IX sent another embassy to the Mongol Khan Mongke (d. 1259); this time it was led by the Franciscan monk William (Guillaume) of Rubruck (d. 1255), but he also returned with a cold reply from the Khan in 1254.¹⁰⁴

Andrew's second trip to the Mongolian court was in response to an embassy that was sent by Guyuk Khan (d. 1248) to Louis IX in 1248, which was made up of two East-Syriac Christians known as Mark and David (also known as Saif-al-Din Muzaffar). The two eastern Christians previously met Andre in Tabriz, Iran, when he was on his first mission in 1245. In 1249, David and Mark met King Louis as well as the papal legate after celebrating Christmas. They then returned with the Dominican monks under the leadership of Andrew. Andrew met another East-Syriac monk in Tabriz by the name of Simeon (also known as Rabban Ata), who was sent by Ogedei Khan (d. 1241) as his ambassador to Cilician Armenia between 1235 and 1240.¹⁰⁵

In the mid-1260s, the diplomatic relations were renewed with a change in perspective in the minds of the Mongols. After experiencing a defeat at the hands of the Muslim Mamluks during Battle of 'Ain Jalut in 1260, the Mongols began to value the potential contribution of European forces in their fight against the Mamluks. Sources point to multiple embassies, which were exchanged between the famous Mongolian ruler Hulegu (d. 1265) and his later successors of the Persian Ilkhanate on one side and the papacy, European kings, and the Crusaders of Levantine kingdoms on another side.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the later part of the thirteenth century, these long-range diplomacies continued, such as during the reign of Abaqa Khan (d. 1282), who sent multiple embassies to Rome to meet Popes Clement IV (1267), Gregory X (1274) and Nichols II (1277), as well as sending embassies to the French (1267, 1274) and the English (1274) crowns. The Mongols' delegation attended the Second Council of Lyon in 1274, in which three of them got baptized.¹⁰⁷

Christian clergymen and monks represented Arghun Khan of Persia (d. 1291) in the Latin kingdoms.¹⁰⁸ Among the secular

emissaries was ʿIsa Kelemechi, who was an astrologer in the Mongol court of Kublai Khan (d. 1294); he met Pope Hornrius IV (d. 1287) in 1285, carrying the letter of Arghun Khan. His embassy was followed by the more famous mission of Rabban (= monk) Barṣawma (d. 1294)¹⁰⁹ in 1287.¹¹⁰

Rabban Barṣawma was a Turkic-Mongolian (=Uighur) monk from the Church of the East, who embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land with his friend and student, Rabban Mark, an Onggūt Turk. Due to military conflicts, they never reached their destination. The younger monk Mark (35 years old) was in Baghdad when the late Patriarch Dinḥa I died in 1281, and one year after, he was elected patriarch of the Church of the East, taking the name Yahbālāhā III (d. 1317).¹¹¹ The native of Beijing was the first East Asian to ascend the throne of Mār Mārī.¹¹²

Rabban Barṣawma, the older mentor of Mark (=Yahbālāhā III), became a bishop and Mongolian diplomat. His appointment was on the recommendation of Patriarch Yahbālāhā III. Sources indicate that the ruler of the Mongols consulted the patriarch, seeking his advice for a potential diplomatic candidate, and Yahbālāhā III suggested his trusted friend Barṣawma. The monk-bishop was then sent to the European courts and Roman papacy on behalf of Arghun Khan, who adamantly pursued a political-military alliance with the Western Europeans. He also represented the East-Syriac patriarch in Rome, carrying his letter to the pope.¹¹³

Barṣawma travelled with a large entourage, which included other churchmen, both East-Syriac and European. He first met the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II (d. 1332), before reaching Rome to meet Pope Hornrius IV, but the latter died and Barṣawma arrived during a papal interregnum. There, he presented his confession of faith and observed the papal election process. He left Rome before the new pope

was elected, and after visiting Genoa, he reached the court of King Philip IV (the Fair) of France (d. 1314). There he spent a month and after receiving a great welcome, he left with many presents and positive promises for his king's political requests. On his way back to Rome, he met in Gascony, southern France, King Edward I of England (d. 1307), since Gascony was in English hands. Although Edward was pleased with the Mongol ambassador, he was not willing to join the military effort. Eventually, Barṣawma stopped in Genoa, then Rome where he met Pope Nicholas IV (d. 1292). He celebrated Palm Sunday in 1288 and took communion from the pope's hands. He was able to establish a theological agreement between the Church of the East and the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹⁴

Barṣawma's embassy was partially successful in re-establishing diplomatic relations between the Mongols and the Europeans, which resulted in European missions among the Mongols' court in the following years. These embassies included new waves of Christian clergies, especially the Franciscan missionary John (Giovanni) of Montecorvino (d. 1328/1330). He was in Tabriz sometime around 1280 before he returned to Rome in 1289. John then left again in that year for the East with papal letters to Arghun Khan of Persia and Kublai Khan of China. He visited Tabriz before leaving permanently for Peking, China, in 1291. John's mission was successful religiously, in that he established a notable Catholic follower in China who became the first Archbishop of China, but his diplomatic impact on politics was not as fruitful.¹¹⁵ Such Euro-Mongolian diplomatic exchanges continued for a few more decades, possibly as late as the 1330s,¹¹⁶ but failed to build a military alliance on the ground. As a result, Mongol khans of Persia, among them Ghazan Khan, began to embrace Islam and signed the Mongols-Mamluks peace treaty in 1323.¹¹⁷ Relations

were briefly but fruitlessly revived during the reign of Tamerlane (d. 1405),¹¹⁸ but there is no evidence that Christian clergymen were involved in them.

The Euro-Mongol diplomatic exchanges, which heavily utilized religious figures on both sides, had some similarities to what had happened in previous eras. The Mongols, like the Persians and Muslims, might have imitated the Europeans in sending churchmen as diplomats and missionaries, knowing their impact on the Christian audience. After all, the Christian Europeans were involved in religious-political strife with Muslims through crusades, in which religious figures played pivotal roles. Furthermore, the Mongol court contained influential Christians with close ties to the Church of the East, which led to the utilization of Syriac churchmen in diplomacy, because of their ability to deal with difficult situations. The survival of the Church of the East depended on its ability to build cordial relationships with the non-Christian regimes, including Mongol rulers, which it did well.

WHY WERE EMBASSIES LED BY ECCLESIASTICS?

The surveyed embassies led by ecclesiastics highlight some of the reasons behind the appointment of religious personalities as ambassadors.

Political and Social Connections

Bishop Mārūthā's biography highlights the man's noble background. He was a regional governor as well as a bishop, facts that point to his connections with the political establishment, as a servant of the empire. His main mission was to secure good relations between Persia and Byzantium, hence a political objective. Similar cases of statesmen-churchmen are attested in the Persian context. Barṣawma, Bishop of Nisibis (d. ca. 458) who led an embassy to the

Byzantines, was appointed as *marzban*-overseer of the Byzantine-Persian borders by Shah Peroz I. The unknown East-Syriac clergyman called Sabokht worked at the Persian court, which might have qualified him to become an intentional diplomat, even though he was not a high-ranking churchman. The same might be said about the Syriac monk Alopen, who was sent by the Sassanians to China, where he was received honourably as an elite diplomat by the imperial court of the Tang dynasty.

The connections between diplomatic and religious careers are attested during the Islamic era. The Abbasid vizier 'Ali ibn 'Isa's commissioning of Patriarch Elias I of Antioch in diplomacy resulted from Elias' previous connection to the Islamic court. Previously, the patriarch worked as a secretary for the Abbasid authority before taking his ecclesiastical office in 906/907. This secular career was the defining factor that qualified him in the eyes of the Muslim authority to become the patriarch in the first place. This was also the case of his successor Theodosius II (d. 943), who also served as an administrator in the Abbasid court of Baghdad before ascending to the patriarchal throne.¹¹⁹ Hence, the selections were not an arbitrary act.

These latest appointments of Melkites in Abbasid court were less common since East-Syriac members of the Church of the East often dominated the Abbasid court. However, by the early tenth century, the Melkites had the influential mother of Caliph of al-Muqtadir (d. 932), Shagab (Umm al-Qāsim) in the royal court. She was a Byzantine Chalcedonian like the Melkites, which made her a good asset to the Melkite cause in Abbasid court.¹²⁰

Cordial relations with the royal courts also made many Syriac ecclesiastics trusted civil servants and diplomats, as was the case of Patriarch Isho'yahb I. When he was still in Nisibis, he served as a Persian spy at Shah Hormizd IV's request. He therefore

won the trust of the Persian royalty, which possibly helped him, later on, to ascend the patriarchal throne. Ezekiel's ascension to the patriarchal seat out of the influence of King Khosrow I is another example. The two had a cordial relationship that stemmed from Ezekiel's political service to the Persian shah.

During the early Abbasid period, Patriarch Timothy I developed cordial relations with five caliphs, including Caliphs al-Mahdī and al-Rashīd, which got him involved in Islamic military campaigns during al-Rashīd's reign. Timothy was also much appreciated by al-Rashīd's wife Queen Zubayda, who supported his ecclesiastical objectives.¹²¹ The same can be said of Patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē, who had respectful friendships with Caliph al-Ma'mūn and his commander 'Abd-al-Allah Ibn Ṭāhir, who often supported him even in his inter-ecclesiastical conflicts.¹²² Such close connections qualified him to be the caliphal emissary to the rebellion of the Copts and later to meet the Nubian Prince George I.

Belonging to social elites and the upper echelon of society sometimes was the product of the ecclesiastics' familial ties to the crown. Emperor Maurice sent his cousin Domitian, Bishop of Melitene, as his ambassador to Shah Khosrow II. Although such familial relations are expected among the Byzantine Christians, they also are attested in the Islamic context. Even though the earlier Fatimids of North Africa were zealous Shi'ites, they ruled over Egypt and the Levant, the populations of which included large non-Muslim communities. This heterogeneous society produced familial ties between the Muslim rulers and their Christian subjects, which impacted the place of Christians in the caliphate. Caliph al-'Azīz (d. 996) had a Melkite concubine named Maria, who gave birth to the famous Caliph al-Hakīm and his sister Sitt-al-Mulk. Such relations gave the Melkites advantages and access to the royal court and allowed them

to be its trusted diplomatic representatives in the Byzantine court.¹²³

Maria's brother Arsenius (d. 1010) became the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria under the rule of his nephew Caliph al-Hakīm in 1000, while his other uncle, Patriarch Orestes of Jerusalem was sent as his ambassador to Constantinople. Orestes' ascension to the patriarchate of Jerusalem might have been the work of his brother-in-law, Caliph al-'Azīz, who might have also used him in diplomatic missions to Byzantium. As for the next patriarch of Jerusalem and envoy of Sitt-al-Mulk to Constantinople, Nicephorus, sources point out that he might have had friendly relations with the Fatimid royals. His father was a cabinet maker in the royal palace, which made him a familiar, suitable and effective person for both the ecclesiastical office and the diplomatic role, as seen in other examples.¹²⁴

Finally, racial background is another determining factor in appointing ecclesiastics in political affairs. The Mongol court, which contained influential Christians with close ties with the Church of the East, led to appoint Syriac churchmen in diplomacy. Rabban Barṣawma, who was a Uighur monk, became the imperial ambassador to the papal and European royal courts. He was recommended by his Onggut friend, Patriarch Yahbālāhā III. The latter's ascension to the patriarchal throne of the Church of the East reflects a strategic racial choice of the Church. The new patriarch had strong relations with the Mongol elites, whom he accompanied during their military campaigns and whose camp and court he visited often.

Cultural and Geographical Context

Mārūthā was a learned man who spoke the languages of the region: Greek, Persian, and Aramaic. Prelates were generally highly cultured and some had multilingual abilities. This is true in Persia where prelates, like Simeon Bishop of Rev-Ardashir, wrote

in Persian while they mastered Syriac. Prelates living near the Byzantine-Sassanian borders probably knew Greek, in addition to Syriac and Persian. This knowledge of languages lacked in Zoroastrian diplomats and thus Syriac prelates were the choice in diplomatic relations. Patriarchs Acacius and Ezekiel impressed both the Persians and the Romans with their high intelligence, skills in medicine and languages, administrative abilities and leadership. Patriarch Isho'yahb I gave his profession of the Christian Faith before Emperor Maurice probably in Greek, which he must have learned while studying theology.

Like the Persians, the Muslims employed their Christian subjects, including their churchmen, who were often highly cultured, polyglottal, and trustful, required assets in international politics. They were well immersed in the cultures, customs, and practices of the inter-caliphal Christian population and external Muslims' foes and friends. For example, it is doubtful that Patriarch Dionysius knew Coptic when he visited Egypt with Caliph al-Ma'mūn to negotiate with revolting Copts, but he must have talked to the Coptic hierarchy and rebels in Arabic. Likewise, his conversation with the Nubian Prince most likely was in Greek and/or Arabic. The latter linguistic and cultural knowledge of Greek made many Melkites international diplomats of the Muslims, like Patriarchs Leontius I, Elias I, Orestes and Nicephorus I. Likewise, around 992 and 995, a Melkite merchant, Malkuta al-Suryani [or Malkuna al-Nasrani], was sent by Emir Sa'īd-al-dawla of the Hamdanid dynasty of Aleppo as an envoy to Emperor Basil II (d. 1025). Although he was not a clergyman, his involvement was likely the product of his knowledge of Greek culture and language.¹²⁵

The geographical reality of ecclesiastics, who resided in border cities, was also a factor behind embassies. Barṣawma,

Bishop of Nisibis and *marzban*-overseer of the Byzantine-Persian borders, was the shah's ambassador. In the latter capacity, he dealt with border disputes and demarcation issues. Some ecclesiastics residing in border cities were involved in spying on Byzantine military forces on behalf of the Sassanian state. This was the case of Patriarch Isho'yahb I, when he was still the Master of the School of Nisibis (579-581). Shah Hormizd IV asked him to report on the movements of Byzantine forces.¹²⁶

Intellectual and Professional Skills

Mārūthā's medical career seemed to be a crucial factor for his diplomatic role. The wellbeing of royals, especially kings, and aristocrats was a critical factor for the stability of empires. Kings appointed skilled and trusted physicians in their services, regardless of their racial-religious background, seeking them from around the world. The Persian court esteemed such skilled individuals. Sources attest to the employment of many Greek and Syriac doctors at the shahs' service, some of whom also held clerical offices in their churches and played political roles in the empire's affairs.¹²⁷

The royal doctor Zacharias of Sura serves as another example, demonstrating the value of those Byzantine clergymen-diplomats-doctors. Being a physician, he led an embassy to Persia, while his mandate was diplomacy. During the reign of Shah Khosrow I (d. 579), Stephanus, who was not a clergyman but a physician, acted as spokesman for the city of Edessa during the siege of 544, seeking to persuade the shah to leave it. He was chosen in this role of ambassador because he previously healed the shah's father, King Kavad I (d. 531).¹²⁸ Another Byzantine state-sanctioned embassy sent the Syrian physician Uranius, another diplomat-physician who was not a churchman. Although the purpose and outcome of this embassy are not clear, the physician

established a cordial relationship with the shah and exchanged letters after the embassy.¹²⁹ Thus, Byzantine emperors frequently employed them as diplomats to the Persian court due to their medical skills, which were valued by the royal elites.

Acacius is commended for pleasing the Byzantine emperor (and possibly Constantinople's ecclesiastical leadership) theologically while impressing them intellectually. The same can be conjectured about the monk Alopen, who amazed the Chinese emperor intellectually; he thus gained access to the imperial library, established a monastery in the capital, and secured the legalization of Christianity. Barṣawma left a similar impact on the Roman papacy and European kings centuries later. One can argue that the sending of churchmen as emissaries was as the result of their intellectual abilities, as they were trained in secular fields, including philosophy and medicine. They also had multi-lingual skills, in Greek, Persian, Arabic and Syriac, in addition to leadership and administration.

Ecclesiastical and Confessional Positions

The case of Mārūthā also highlights that his ecclesiastical position and religious interests led to his engagement in politics. He is known for participating in resolving Byzantine inter-church matters in Constantinople, which made him valuable to the empire. So was his mission to Persia that seemed to reflect the Christian emperors' interest in affairs of Persian Christians. Mārūthā further played a major role in holding the first Synod of the Church of the East in 410, impacting its patriarchal elections and its legalization in Persia under the shah's authority, which seems to have pleased the Persian throne. He is also credited with gathering accounts of martyrs and their relics.

Religion played an essential role in ancient states, Zoroastrianism for the Sassanian Empire, Christianity for the Byzantine

Empire, and Islam for the Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid Empires. During the Sassanian period, the selection of bishops and patriarchs as ambassadors to Byzantium was partially motivated by the fact that these prelates shared the religion of the Byzantines, a fact that contributed to the success of embassies. Ecclesiastics were highly honoured in the Byzantine empire and court. Bishop Acacius impressed Emperor Theodosius II with theology, and Emperor Maurice examined the theology of Isho'yahb I, when he asked him to give his profession of the Christian Faith.

In the early Abbasid era, Patriarch Dionysius accompanied al-Ma'mūn to Egypt because of the theological accord between Copts and West Syrians (Miaphysitism), and therefore, the Syriac patriarch could have had some influence on the revolting Copts. On that occasion, the patriarch attained a theological union with the Copts, and thereafter, both patriarchs (Coptic and Syriac) are mentioned together in inscriptions.¹³⁰ The same reason led to Patriarch Dionysius' involvement in welcoming the Nubian Prince George I when he visited the Abbasid capital. Sources note Caliph al-Mu'taṣim's awareness of the confessional similarities, hence his suitability to welcome the prince. One can say the same reason led to the sending of West-Syriac metropolitan Ignatius I by the vizier Jamāl-dīn of Mosul to the Georgians.

In the later Abbasid era, the East-Syriac Patriarch Makkikha, being part of the caliphal delegation to the Mongols in 1258, is not surprising since there were noteworthy Christians among the Mongols, belonging to the Church of the East. The mother and wife of Hulegu, the grandson of the Great Genghis Khan (d. 1227) and who was besieging Baghdad, were Christians too. The first was named Sorkakhani-beki (or Sorghaghtani), and the second Dokuz Khatun. Likewise, Hulegu's army commander, Ked-Buka (or Kitbuqa), was also Christian.

Sources note that a mobile Church with all its sacred ritual vessels accompanied the Mongol royal entourage in their invasion of the Middle East.¹³¹

Syriac ecclesiastics were not the only Christians who were involved in Islamic foreign politics; due to their Christological affiliation, Muslims also used Melkite Chalcedonian Christians in their diplomatic relation with the Byzantines for the same reason. The Abbasid vizier ‘Ali ibn ‘Isa commissioned Patriarchs Leontius I and Elias I to negotiate the conditions of Muslim prisoners of war in Constantinople because of their co-confessional affiliation with the Byzantines. The Muslim vizier was aware of the patriarchs’ ecclesiastical authority over the Byzantine emperor, including their ability to anathematize him. The same might be said for the later Fatimids’ utilization of Melkite patriarchs in eleventh century.

Religion was behind the appointment by the Mongols of Christians, especially those of Near Eastern extraction, in their diplomatic engagement with Asian (i.e. Armenian) and European Christians. They knew the potential impact Christian ambassadors could have on the papal and royal courts of Europe and Armenia. The involvements of Eastern clergymen in politics with Europe were also the products of their urge to establish close ties with Western Christianity after the age of the Crusades. Christian ecclesiastical diplomats often visited the papacy in Rome, carrying patriarchal communications, engaging in theological conversations, and undertaking pilgrimages to European holy sites, as in the case of Barṣawma mentioned above.

Religious reasons also manifested themselves differently when the Western Church sent European monks to the Mongol courts.

In partnership with the European courts, the Roman papacy was as interested in evangelizing the Mongols as it was in establishing diplomatic relations with them. Thus, European religious missions headed to the East, often through diplomatic channels, a fact which explains why Franciscan and Dominican monks were often chosen as emissaries. With their zeal and intellectual abilities, they became excellent missionary diplomats.

Finally, the honouring of ecclesiastics among the Christian population was a reality in the early and late medieval worlds. The episode of Patriarch Ezekiel accompanying the Shah on a military campaign was greatly celebrated by the Christian residents of the border city of Nisibis. During military conflicts and sieges, Caliph al-Rashīd likely requested from Patriarch Timothy I to serve as a mediator with the Christians, whether with foreign officials or with local populations. His job was to negotiate with them terms of surrender and paying tributes. Notably, he was accused during the reign of Caliph al-Mahdī during the reign of Caliph al-Mahdī of communicating with and showing compassion toward the Byzantines.¹³² The later Caliph al-Rashīd might have been aware of Patriarch Timothy’s influence over populations and local officials, and hoped to exploit it in dealing with warfare and diplomacy. The appreciation of ecclesiastical relations with Christian populations led Caliph al-Ma’mūn to send Patriarch Dionysius as a suitable envoy to the revolting Copts of the Delta. Refusing such invitations to accompany kings produced undesirable consequences to the clergymen. This is the case of Patriarch Isho‘yahb I, who often requested Christian populations to have uncooperative attitude toward the political elites.

NOTES

¹ Albert Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā al-Ārāmiyya*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1996), 90-95; Albert Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah al-Suriāniyah al-Sharqiyya I* (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 2007), 40-41; Sebastian Brock et als. (eds.) *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 273 (hereafter *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*); Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Saints syriaques*, *Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 6 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2004), 136-137; Jean-Maurice Fiey, “Maruta de Martyropolis d’après Ibn al-Azraq (gest. 1181),” *AB* 94 (1976) 35-45.

² *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 18-20.

³ Mari ibn Sulayman, *Akhbar Fatarikat Kursi al-Mashriq min Kitāb al-Majdal*, in H. Gismondi, H., *Maris Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria ex Codicibus Vaticanis*, vol. 1 (Rome: C. de Luigi, 1899), 29-31; ‘Amr bin Matta, *Akhbar Fatarikat Kursi al-Mashriq min Kitāb al-Majdal*, in H. Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria ex Codicibus Vaticanis*, vol. 2 (Rome: C. de Luigi, 1899), 23-25; Addai Scher, *Histoire Nestorienne II*, *PO IV* (1950) 318 [206]; Bar Hebraeus, *Tārīkh Mukhtasar al-Duwel* in A. Salihani, (ed.), *Tārīkh Mukhtasar al-Duwel* (1st ed. Beirut, 1890; 4th ed. Beirut, 2007), 84; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 91; Louis Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie, Orientale dans les Rapports Diplomatiques entre la Perse et Byzance aux Ve –VIIe siècles* (Paris, 1989), 60.

⁴ One visit to Constantinople related to the controversy of patriarch John I Chrysostom (d. 407) of Constantinople that led to his deposit and exile see *Histoire Nestorienne*, 319-321 [207-209]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 92.

⁵ Mari, *Majdal*, 29-30; Matta, *Majdal*, 23-25; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 317-319 [205-207], 323-324 [211-212]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 91; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah I*, 40-41, 45-46; Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Beginning to 1500*, vol. I (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 151-157; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 60-71.

⁶ Matta, *Majdal*, 24; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 318 [206]; R.C. Blockley, “Doctors as

Diplomats in the Sixth Century A.D.,” *Florilegium* 2 (1980) 89-100, 95. Primary and secondary sources differ on who is healed.

⁷ Mari, *Majdal*, 29-31; Matta, *Majdal*, 23-25; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 317-318 [205-206]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 91; Blockley, “Doctors as Diplomats,” 95; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 63.

⁸ Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 64.

⁹ Matta, *Majdal*, 24-25; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 91; Blockley, “Doctors as Diplomats,” 95.

¹⁰ Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 91.

¹¹ Mari, *Majdal*, 29; Matta, *Majdal*, 24; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 323 [211]; J.B. Abbeloos, and T.J. Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, Vol. 2 (Paris/Louvain: Maisonneuve/Peeters, 1872-1873), 47; David Wilmshurst, *Bar Hebraeus The Ecclesiastical Chronicle: An English Translation*, (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016), 322-323; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 92-93; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah I*, 45-56; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 64.

¹² Mari, *Majdal*, 30-32; Matta, *Majdal*, 23-26; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 92-93; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah I*, 56; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 66-67.

¹³ J.-B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902), 17-22 (Syriac); 254-262 (French trans.); Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 8, 68-70.

¹⁴ Marūthā also played a role in electing the next patriarch, Aḥai, in 411, and might have visited again during the patriarchate of Yahbālāhā I (d. 420). Mari, *Majdal*, 32; Matta, *Majdal*, 24, 26; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 324 [212]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 93.

¹⁵ Mari, *Majdal*, 32; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah I*, 51; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 75-80.

¹⁶ Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah I*, 51.

¹⁷ Upon the treaty, patriarch Dadisho‘ I (d. 456), who was imprisoned in 421, was released. *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 110; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 78-80.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 429.

¹⁹ Mari, *Majdal*, 32; Matta, *Majdal*, 27; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 326-328 [214-216]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah I*, 51; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 71-74.

²⁰ *Histoire Nestorienne*, 327 [215].

²¹ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* I, 280; Daniel Yeung, "The Multiple Identities of the Nestorian Monk Mar Alopen: A Discussion on Diplomacy and Politics," 37-49 in Paulos Z. Huang (ed.), *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2018*, (Boston: Brill, 2018), 45.

²² Matta, *Mcjdal*, 26-27; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 324-325 [212-213]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 50.

²³ *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 59; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 112-117.

²⁴ For example, Emperor Theodosius II invited him to attend Council of Ephesus in 449.

²⁵ It is reported that he intercepted a messenger between patriarch Babowai (d. 484) and the Byzantine Emperor Zeno (d. 491), which led to the execution of the patriarch by the Persian authority; Mari, *Mcjdal*, 41-43; Matta, *Mcjdal*, 29-31; *Histoire Nestorienne* 2/I, 99-102 [7-10]; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:63, 65 [Wilmshurst, 326-327]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 113-114; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 77-88; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 19.

²⁶ Mari, *Mcjdal*, 43, 46; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 83; Nina G. Garsoïan, "Le rôle de la hiérarchie chrétienne dans les rapports diplomatiques entre Byzance et les Sassanides," *Revue des études arméniennes* NS 10 (1973-1974) 119-138, 120-121; Stephen Gero, *Barṣauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, CSCO 426, Subs. 63 (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 33-34; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 21, 81-86.

²⁷ Theological discussions with the emperors and/or ecclesiastical leaders in Constantinople were frequent in these occasions. In fact, sometime the intention of the visit was more religious than politics, although out of political authorities' desires. For example, see the trip of Paul metropolitan of Nisibis (d. 573) in 547 out of the desire of Emperor Justinian I (d. 565) for Christological unity; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 91-95. For Paul of Nisibis see *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 324.

²⁸ Gero, *Barṣauma of Nisibis*, 122.

²⁹ Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 126-128; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 27.

³⁰ This embassy did not happen during the reign of Shah Peroz I (d. 484), but during the

reign of his son Shah Balash (d. 488). Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 127.

³¹ Mari, *Mcjdal*, 46; Matta, *Mcjdal*, 35; *Histoire Nestorienne* 2/I, 113 [21]; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:75 [Wilmshurst, 330-331]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 127; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 21, 87-89.

³² Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 158-162; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 117-120; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 193-194.

³³ *Histoire Nestorienne* 2/I, 178, 192 [86, 100]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 159; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 117-118.

³⁴ Mari, *Mcjdal*, 54; Matta, *Mcjdal*, 44; *Histoire Nestorienne*, 193 [101]; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:97 [Wilmshurst, 338-339]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 117-118.

³⁵ Mari, *Mcjdal*, 54; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 118; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 40.

³⁶ Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 153; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 8-9; Fiey, *Saints syriaques*, 25-26.

³⁷ Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 96-97.

³⁸ Blockley, "Doctors as Diplomats," 91-93.

³⁹ Zacharias' ecclesiastical-diplomatic skills and role are evident in his effort to amend the growing breach between the Chalcedonian Emperor Justin II (d. 574) and his maiphysite bishops, whom he had imprisoned. *ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 93-94. Blockley notes other philosophers-rhetoricians who served as diplomats, although none were doctors.

⁴¹ *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 310-311.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 351.

⁴³ Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 98-100.

⁴⁴ *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 267-268.

⁴⁵ Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 91-95, 101.

⁴⁶ Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:103, 105 [Wilmshurst, 340-341]; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 102.

⁴⁷ *Histoire Nestorienne*, 443-444, 465-467 [123-124, 145-147]; I. Guidi, ed., *Chronica Mionra [Text]*. Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1903, 15; Abūnā, *History of East-Syriac Church*, 120-121, 123; Arthur Christiansen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: Ejnar

Munksgaard, 1944), 425-429; Richard Frye, "The Political History of Iran Under the Sasanians," Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), *The Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods* (Cambridge University Press: 1983), vol. 3/163-173; Parvaneh Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran* (London and New York: 2008), 131-137; Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Iran: the Portrait of a Late Antique Empire* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2008), 83-92.

⁴⁸ Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, pp. 120-121, 123; Christiansen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 425-429.

⁴⁹ Most likely, it is Isho'yahb II (d. 646), who visited the Byzantine Empire and not Isho'yahb I (d. 595), although there might be two trips in 587 and 630 by the two churchmen. Compare Mari, *Majdal*, 56-57; Matta, *Majdal*, 45; *Histoire Nestorienne*, I/2, 187 [95] with Mari, *Majdal*, 61; Matta, *Majdal*, 53; *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 237-241 [557-561]; *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 30; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:113 [Wilmshurst, 342-343]. See Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 246, 256; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 142; Labourt, Jérôme, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224-632)* (Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1904), 201; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 103-107, 121-129 for modern discussion of the issue.

⁵⁰ *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 440-444 [120-124]; *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 15-16; Mari, *Majdal*, 56; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 162; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 123.

⁵¹ *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 468-469 [148-149].

⁵² *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 442 [122]; *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 17; Abunna, *Adab al-Lughā*, 162; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 123.

⁵³ Though entanglements in political affairs cost Isho'yahb I heavily, they also benefited him previously. The patriarch functioned as a Persian spy when Shah Hormizd IV (d. 590) asked him to report on the movements of Byzantine forces on the borders when he was still the master of School of Nisibis (579-581). Having been entrusted with such a task developed their cordial relationships, which in turn benefited the clergyman when the shah nominated him to the patriarchal throne, like in the case of

Patriarch Ezekiel's ascension to the patriarchal seat out of the influence of Khosrow I. Mari, *Majdal*, 55; *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 438-439 [118-119]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 163; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 121; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 101.

⁵⁴ Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 124-126; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 355.

⁵⁵ Mari, *Majdal*, 59-60; *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 492-493 [172-173]; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 108-113.

⁵⁶ Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 244-248; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 140-143; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 218.

⁵⁷ Abūnā, *Adab al-Lughā*, 255-261; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 65-67; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 218-219.

⁵⁸ Mari, *Majdal*, 61; Matta, *Majdal*, 53; *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 237-241 [557-561]; *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 30; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:113 [Wilmshurst, 342-3]; Jullien, Florence, "Des chrétiens engagés pour la paix entre la Perse et Byzance: l'ambassade du catholicos Išō'yahb de Gdala," in Florence Jullien (ed.), *Guerre et paix en monde iranien: revisiter les lieux de rencontre*, Cahiers de Studia Iranica 62 (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 199-222; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*, 121-129; Yeung, "The Multiple Identities of the Nestorian Monk Mar Alopen," 41-42.

⁵⁹ Alopen received imperial permission to build a monastery in the capital's vicinity with imperial funds. Three years later (636) Emperor Taizong issued an edict of universal tolerance that officially established Christianity in China. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* I, 291-293.

⁶⁰ The monk was sent by his patriarch Isho'yahb II, who himself was involved in successful diplomatic missions to Byzantium. He was also successful in pressuring the Arabs to sign a peace treaty with his church. Yeung, "The Multiple Identities of the Nestorian Monk Mar Alopen," 41-42.

⁶¹ Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* I, 293; Yeung, "The Multiple Identities of the Nestorian Monk Mar Alopen," 37-39, 41-42, 46-49.

⁶² One thing that we did not examine in this article is the involvement of churchmen in the

long-attested task of negotiating capitulation of cities. Churchmen often were key representatives of their people in negotiations with the invaders. This diplomatic role is attested during the Byzantine-Sassanian era and continued through the dawn of Islamic conquests. The most famous example from the Islamic era was Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638), who surrendered the city of Jerusalem to Caliph 'Umar I (d. 644) in 637.

⁶³ A. Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam (9th-10th Centuries) A historical Evaluation of the Role of Religion in Byzantine-Muslim Relations;" PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, (2000), 130-131; Daniel J. Sahas, "Byzantium and Islam: an encounter of two theocracies mutual admiration and exclusion," Constantinople and its legacy annual lecture. The Greek-Canadian Association of Constantinople, (Toronto, 1993).

⁶⁴ No permanent truce was allowed and signed, but Islamic law allows a maximum of ten years truce; Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam" 132-134; Alexander Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors in Byzantine-Muslim Relations in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries" 371-400 in Audrey Becker & Nicholas Drocourt (eds.) *Ambassadeurs et ambassades au coeur des relations diplomatiques: Rome – Occident médiéval – Byzance (VIIe s. avant J.-C. - XIIIe s. après J.-C.)* (Université de Lorraine, site de Metz, 2012), 373ff; C. E. Bosworth, "The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran Studies in Early Islamic History and Culture," *Variorum Collected Studies* (1996), 5; Nicolas Drocourt, "Arabic speaking Ambassadors in the Byzantine Empire (from the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries), 57-69 in Z. Chitwood & J. Pahlitzsch (eds), *Ambassadors, Artists, Theologians Byzantine Relations with the Near East from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries* (Mainz: 2019), 57; N. Dorcourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations: An Overview of the Main Sources and Themes of Encounter (620s-1000);" in D. Thomas et al. (eds), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History 2 (900-1506)*, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 40-42, 64-65, 69-70; Nicolas Drocourt, "Passing on Political Information between Major Powers: The Key

Role of Ambassadors between Byzantium and some of its Neighbours," *Al-Masaq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 24/1 (2012) 39-40; Hugh Kennedy, "Byzantine-Arab diplomacy in the Near East from the Islamic conquests to the mid eleventh century," in J. Shepard and S. Franklin (eds.) *Byzantine Diplomacy* (Aldershot, Ashgate 1992), 137.

⁶⁵ Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 132; Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors," 371; Canard, Marius, "Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques Arabo-Byzantines Au X^e siècles," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 13 (1949-1951) 51-52, 62; Dorcourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 29, 40-41, 55; Drocourt, "Passing on Political Information," 39.

⁶⁶ *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 36.

⁶⁷ *Chronicle of Khuzistan*, 37.

⁶⁸ Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors," 375; Canard, "Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques," 51.

⁶⁹ Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors," 378; Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "The Relations between Byzantium and the Arabs: Report on the Dumbarton Oaks Symposium of 1963," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18 (1964) 364.

⁷⁰ Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 138, 235-236.

⁷¹ Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 138; 239; Canard, "Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques," 63-69; R. Jenkins, "The Mission of St. Demetrianus of Cyprus to Bagdad," *AIPHOS* 9 (1949) 267-275.

⁷² Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīseh* II, 76-78, 147-163.

⁷³ Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors," 374-375; Dorcourt, "Arabic-speaking Ambassadors, 57-61; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 59-61; Abdurrahman El-Hajji, *The Andalusian Diplomatic Relations with the Vikings During the Umayyad Period (A.H. 138-366/A.D. 755-976.)* (Dar Al-Irshad, 1970), 75-79; M. McCormick, "From One Center of Power to Another: Comparing Byzantine and Carolingian Ambassadors," in C. Ehlers (ed.), *Places of Power – Orte der Herrschaft – Lieux de Pouvoir*. (Göttingen 2007); 45-72; M. Vaiou, *Diplomacy in the early Islamic world. A tenth*

century treatise on Arab-Byzantine relations, (London, 2010).

⁷⁴ Abūnā, *Adab al-Lugha*, 300-308; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 113-118, 129-145; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionar*, 414-415.

⁷⁵ Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 142; Raphael Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I: Etude critique avec, un appendice, la lettre de Timothée I aux Moines du couvent de Mar Maron (traduction latine et texte chaldéen)* (Citta del Vaticano, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1956), 37, 77; Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriques sous les Abbassides Surtout à Bagdad (749-1256)* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1980), 50; A. S. Tritton, *The Caliphs and their Non-Muslim Subjects: A Critical Study of the Covenant of 'Umar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 78-88.

⁷⁶ Garsoïan, "Le rôle de la hiérarchie chrétienne," 119-139; Sako, *Le Rôle de la Hiérarchie*.

⁷⁷ Abunna, *Adab al-Lugha*, 354-355; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 188-189; *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 127-128.

⁷⁸ J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche, 1166-1199* (Paris, 1899-1924), vol. IV, 522-525, 527-529 (Syr.); vol. III, 74, 76-80, 82-83 (trans.); Also in G. Kiraz, & G.Y. Ibrahim, *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Great*, (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2009), 525-528, 530-532; J.-B. Chabot, *Chronicon Anonymi Auctoris ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1917), vol. 2, 266-267 (Syr.); Albert Abūnā, *The History of the Unknown Edessan II (1234 AD)* (Baghdad: Shafiq Press, 1986), 300-302 (Ar.); P. Bedjan (ed.), *Chronicon Syriacum, e Codd. mss. Emendatum ac Punctis Vocalibus Adnotationibusque Locupletatum* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1890), 145, 147-148 (Syr.); A. W. Budge (ed.), *The Chronography of Gregory Abū 'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus: Being the First Part of his Political History of the Word: Translated from the Syriac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932; Piscataway NY, 2003), 133-135 (trans.); Ishāq Armala, *Tārīkh al-Zamman* (Beirut: al-Mashriq Press, 1986), 28-31; Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, vol. 1, 373-374 [Wilmshurst,

130-131]; Basil Thomas Alfred Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria (Mennas I to Joseph, 767-849)*, PO 10 (1915) 492-496; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 145; Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriques sous les Abbassides*, 68-71; Fiey, "Coptes et Syriques, contacts et échanges," *Studia Orientalia Christiana, Collectanea* 15 (1972-1973) 295-365, 321-322; Amir Harrak, "Dionysius of Tell-Mahre: Patriarch, Diplomat, and Inquisitive Chronicler," in M. Doerfler, E. Fiano, & K. Smith, *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium, Duke University, 26-29 June 2011* (Leuven-Bristol, Ct: Peeters, 2015), 213-215, 220-221.

⁷⁹ Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 4, 530-533 (Syr.); vol. III, 90-94 (trans.) [Kiraz, 533-536]; *Chronicle of 1234*, vol. 2, 30-33 (Syr.), [Abūnā, 2:45-48 (Ar.)]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 169; Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriques sous les Abbassides* 80; Harrak, "Dionysius of Tell-Mahre," 220-21.

⁸⁰ Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs*, 503-508; Giovanni Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften; Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1975), 194-195.

⁸¹ Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 234; Gibb, "The Relations between Byzantium and the Arabs," 364.

⁸² Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 137-138, 233-235.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

⁸⁴ Canard, "Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques," 63-69; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 32.

⁸⁵ H. E. J. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085: An English translation*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002), 204-205; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 34; Drocourt, "Passing on Political Information between Major Powers," 40.

⁸⁶ Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 166; Canard, "Deux épisodes des relations diplomatiques," 69; Bettina Kronung, "The Employment of Christian Mediators by Muslim Rulers in Arab-Byzantine Diplomatic Relations in the Tenth and Early Eleventh Centuries," in Z. Chitwood and J. Pahlitzsch (eds) *Ambassadors, Artists, Theologians Byzantine Relations*

with the Near East from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries, Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident Veröffentlichungen des Leibniz-Wissenschafts Campus Mainz, (Mainz: 2019), 72-74; J. Nasrallah, *L'église melchite en Iraq, en Perse et dans l'Asie centrale* (Jerusalem, 1976), 67.

⁸⁷ Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 33.

⁸⁸ Orestes also had his own personal communications with King Hugh of France (d. 996) and his son Robert II (d. 1031). He also visited pope John XV (d. 996) to reconcile the maiphysites with the Catholic Church. Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099*, Translated by Ethel Broido, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 448, 463.

⁸⁹ Yahya b. Sa'id al-Antaki, *Histoire de Yahya ibn Sa'id d'Antioch*, ed. I. Kratchkovsky with French translation, A. Vasiliev, *PO* 23, 460-462; Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 167; Drocourt, "Arabic-speaking Ambassadors," 61; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 46, 60; Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 371; Kennedy, "Byzantine-Arab diplomacy," 143; Kronung, "The Employment of Christian Mediators," 74-76; Paul E. Walker, "The Fatimid Caliph al-Aziz and His Daughter Sitt al-Mulk: A Case of Delayed but Eventual Succession to Rule by a Woman," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 4 (2011) 30-44, 31.

⁹⁰ Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors," 373; Walker, "The Fatimid Caliph al-Aziz and His Daughter Sitt al-Mulk," 31.

⁹¹ *Histoire de Yahya ibn Sa'id d'Antioch*, *PO* 23, 415, *PO* 47, 468-471; Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 167; Drocourt, "Arabic-speaking Ambassadors," 61; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 46, 60; Kronung, "The Employment of Christian Mediators," 74-76; Kennedy, "Byzantine-Arab diplomacy," 143.

⁹² For example, gift exchanges included not only material things (e.g. swords, spears, luxurious clothing, fabrics, wild and domestic animals, eunuchs, slave-girls, architects, artisans and translators, as well as manuscripts, arts, and religious relics) but even prisoners of war. Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 135-

136; Drocourt, "Arabic-speaking Ambassadors, 61-63; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 65-69; El-Hajji, *The Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*, 83.

⁹³ Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 63.

⁹⁴ Theologically, this is a temporary permission for a year. A longer stay made them subject to *Dhimmi* laws. Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 136-137; Canard, "Deux episodes des relations diplomatiques," 52-54.

⁹⁵ Abou-Seada, "Byzantium and Islam," 136-140; Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors," 374-5, 377; Marius Canard, "Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes" *DOP* 18 (1964) 35-56, esp. 37; Drocourt, "Arabic-speaking Ambassadors," 63; Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 60-62, 70; Drocourt, "Passing on Political Information between Major Powers," 39-40, 45-48.

⁹⁶ Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 60; El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*, 68.

⁹⁷ Kronung, "The Employment of Christian Mediators," 76-77.

⁹⁸ Drocourt, "Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations," 39, 60; El-Hajji, *Andalusian Diplomatic Relations*, 93, 207-227, 213, 218-225; Kronung, "The Employment of Christian Mediators," 76-77.

⁹⁹ Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:353, 355 [Wilmshurst, 426-427]; Bar Hebraeus, *Secular Chronicle*, 328 [Armala, 174-175 (Ar.)]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 252; Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 234.

¹⁰⁰ Bar Hebraeus, *Secular Chronicle*, 504-505 [Armala, 307-309 (Ar.)]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 273-274; Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 273.

¹⁰¹ Christopher P. Atwood, "Western Europe and the Mongol Empire" in Atwood, C. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, (New York, Facts on File, 2004), 583-584; Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West: 1221-1410* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Longman, 2005), 4.

¹⁰² Atwood, "Western Europe and the Mongol Empire," 583; Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, v.1, 406-414; Jackson, *The*

Mongols and the West, 88-90; Jean Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," *Journal of Asian History* 3/1 (1969) 45-47; David Morgan, *The Mongols*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 102; Jean-Paul Roux, *Les explorateurs au Moyen-Âge* (Fayard, 1985), 97-98; Jean-Paul Roux, *Histoire de l'Empire Mongol* (Fayard, 1993), 313; D. James Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia," *JRAS* 8 (3) (1998) 412-413.

¹⁰³ Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 48-51; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 412; Denis Sinor, "The Mongols and Western Europe," in Kenneth M. Setton & Harry W. Hazard, (eds.). *A History of the Crusades: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. 3 (Madison, Wisconsin, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 520-522.

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Maurice Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols (Il-Khanat de Perse, XIIIe–XIVe s.)*, CSCO 362, Subs. 44 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1975), 6-12; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 99, 181; Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 49-50; Roux, *Les explorateurs au Moyen-Âge*, 96; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 412; Sinor, "The Mongols and Western Europe," 522-525; Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 798.

¹⁰⁵ Sinor, "The Mongols and Western Europe," 521-523.

¹⁰⁶ Atwood, "Western Europe and the Mongol Empire," 583; Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 52-53; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 413.

¹⁰⁷ Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* III, 12-14; Atwood, "Western Europe and the Mongol Empire," 583; Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols*, 36; Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 53-54; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 414; Kenneth Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571. The sixteenth century to the reign of Julius III*, Vol. 3, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society* 114 (Philadelphia, USA: American Philosophical Society, 1984), 116; Tyerman, *God's War*, 815-818.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange*

from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 125-126; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 169.

¹⁰⁹ *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 360-361.

¹¹⁰ Bar Hebraeus, *Secular Chronicle*, 578 [Armala, 365 (Ar.)]; Atwood, "Western Europe and the Mongol Empire," 583; Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols*, 47; Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 54; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 414-415; Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, 532-533.

¹¹¹ *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 429.

¹¹² Bar Hebraeus, *Ecclesiastical Chronicle*, 2:451, 453 [Wilmshurst, 462-463]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* III, 30-33, 36-38; Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols*, 48; Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* I, 430-432; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 415. The election of Yahbālāhā III was a strategic choice of the Church of the East. The new patriarch had strong relations with his people's elites, such as the Mongol ruler, whom he accompanied during his military campaigns and whose camp and court he visited often. The impact of such a cordial relation between the ecclesiastical leader and political ruler had positive effects on the Church and its community.

¹¹³ Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* III, 35-37; Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols*, 48-49; Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* I, 433-435; Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 54; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 415; Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, 532-533.

¹¹⁴ Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 54; Ryan, "Christian Wives of Mongol Khans," 415.

¹¹⁵ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 170; Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, v.1, 456-459; Setton, *A History of the Crusades*, 541-542.

¹¹⁶ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 314.

¹¹⁷ Atwood, "Western Europe and the Mongol Empire" 584; Richard, "The Mongols and the Franks," 56.

¹¹⁸ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, 330.

¹¹⁹ Fiey, *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 141; Kronung, "The Employment of

Christian Mediators,” 73; Nasrallah, *L'église melchite en Iraq*, 81.

¹²⁰ Syriac historians noticed the rise of Melkite status and population in Baghdad during this period, including their ecclesiastical influence and claim to authority, which clashed with the authority of the patriarch of Church of the East, who was traditionally considered the head of all Christians in the Islamic caliphate since the reign of al-Mutawakkil (d. 861) in 852; see Mari, *Mcjdal*, 92; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 193; Canard, “Les relations politiques et sociales,” 44-45; Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 127, 129-130; Fiey, “Rum’ à l’Est de l’Euphrate,” *Le Muséon* 90 (1977) 365-420, 387-389; Hugh Kennedy, *The Court of the Caliphs: When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World* (London 2004), 192-197; Id., “The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades: Continuity and Adaption in the Byzantine Legacy,” in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers* (New York 1986), 295-337-338; Kronung, “The Employment of Christian Mediators,” 73-74; Nasrallah, *L'église melchite en Iraq*, 58-59, 65.

¹²¹ Mari, *Mcjdal*, 73-75; Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 57-60.

¹²² Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 69-70.

¹²³ Abou-Seada, “Byzantium and Islam,” 167-168; Drocourt, “Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations,” 59-60; Drocourt, “Passing on Political Information between Major Powers,” 40-41; Kronung, “The Employment of Christian Mediators,” 75-76.

¹²⁴ These familial-friendship links might even be a factor in reducing the time of the mad persecution of Christians by al-Halim, as well as ending his reign and life by his sister Sitt-al-

Mulk, as some claim; *Histoire de Yahya ibn Sa‘id d’Antioche*, PO 23 (1932) 415, 462; Drocourt, “Arabic-speaking Ambassadors,” 61; Drocourt, “Christian-Muslim Diplomatic Relations,” 60; Kronung, “The Employment of Christian Mediators,” 75-76; Walker, “The Fatimid Caliph al-Aziz and His Daughter Sitt al-Mulk,” 31-32.

¹²⁵ Abou-Seada, “Byzantium and Islam,” 66; Beihammer, “Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors,” 389-390; Drocourt, “Arabic-speaking Ambassadors,” 60-61; Kronung, “The Employment of Christian Mediators,” 71.

¹²⁶ Mari, *Mcjdal*, 55; *Histoire Nestorienne* II/2, 438-439 [118-119]; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lugha*, 163; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* I, 121.

¹²⁷ Blockley, “Doctors as Diplomats,” 94-95; Christiansen, *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, 396, 419-425.

¹²⁸ Blockley, “Doctors as Diplomats,” 90-91; David Frendo, “The Religious Factor in Byzantine-Iranian Relations,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute New Series* 11 (1997) 105-122, 120, n. 56.

¹²⁹ Blockley, “Doctors as Diplomats,” 91.

¹³⁰ Amir Harrak, *Syriac and Garshuni Inscriptions of Iraq* (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belle Lettres, 2010), AE.01.34.

¹³¹ Bar Hebraeus, *Secular Chronicle*, 491 [Armala, 298 (Ar.)]; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 273-276, v.3, 21-23; Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* I, 400-404, 422-428; Ryan, “Christian Wives of Mongol Khans,” 416.

¹³² Mari, *Mcjdal*, 72; Abūnā, *Adab al-Lugha*, 302; Abūnā, *Tārīkh al-Kanīṣah* II, 140-141; Fiey, *Chrétien Syriaques sous les Abbassides*, 37-38, 48-50; Garsoïan, “Le rôle de la hiérarchie chrétienne,” 132-135, 139 n. 69.