Five Hundred Bones from Constantinople: Monks, Manuscripts, and Memory at the Eastern Borders of Byzantium[*]

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■ Abstract

This article traces the diachronic uses of the literary motif of "relics coming from Constantinople to monasteries in the East" in Syriac hagiography. Although this motif was seen in Syriac literature as early as the sixth century, there seems to be an increase in the employment of these stories around the twelfth century in saints' lives local to northern Mesopotamia. In light of two texts—the *Life of Abḥay* and the *Life of Aḥā*—the article argues that stories about Constantinopolitan relics (martyrs' bones or pieces of the True Cross) were oriented toward different modes of remembering Byzantium in the Syriac Church in the Middle Ages. The article further argues that these stories also created space to reflect on the Syriac Church's relations with the Armenian Church in the medieval Near East. The article thus shows the power of narrative in creating cultural memory, building communal identity, and catalyzing religious rivalry.

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■ Keywords

Syriac literature, hagiography, relic veneration, cultural memory

■ Introduction

According to the *Life of Abḥay*, the holy man, once a bishop of Nicaea, acquired five hundred pieces of relics in Constantinople and brought them to northern Mesopotamia.[1] A peculiar narrative episode in a Syriac hagiographical text thus places Constantinopolitan martyrs' bones in a monastery on the banks of the Euphrates, in the region of Samosata.[2] The original composition date of this text is unknown, but it was edited by the renowned patriarch Michael the Syrian (d. 1199).[3] In light of this and other Syriac hagiographical texts that narrate stories of relics coming from Constantinople, I will revisit the Syrian Orthodox Church's memories of Byzantium in the Middle Ages.[4] Building upon the voluminous scholarship on cultural memory in the premodern world,[5] I will analyze the ways in

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[1] *Life of Abḥay, the Bishop of Nicaea* (ed. Paul Bedjan, *AMS* 6) 557–614. For Saint Abḥay, see Jean Maurice Fiey, *Saints Syriaques* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin, 2004) entry 14; *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (ed. Paul Peeters, 1910) 3; Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent et al., "Abḥay," in *Qadishe: A Guide to the Syriac Saints*, http://syriaca.org/person/1105.

[2] The most recent and extensive research on the Monastery of Abḥay in Samosata (Gargar) in northern Mesopotamia has been conducted by Linda Wheatley Irving in her ongoing dissertation project, "Building the Monastic Life: Mar Abhai and Pesqin Monasteries on the Euphrates," Central European University, Budapest/Vienna.

[3] On Michael the Syrian and his works, see Dorothea Weltecke, "Michael I Rabo," *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary: Electronic Edition* (ed. Sebastian Brock et al.), https://gedsh.bethmardutho. org/entry/Michael-I-Rabo; eadem, *Die 'Beschreibung der Zeiten' von Mor Michael dem Großen (1126-1199). Eine Studie zu ihrem historischen und historiographiegeschichtlichen Kontext* (CSCO 594; Subsidia 110; Leuven: Peeters, 2003); eadem, "A Renaissance in Historiography? Patriarch Michael, the *Anonymous Chronicle ad a. 1234*, and Bar 'Ebroyo," in *The Syriac Renaissance* (ed. Herman Teule et al.; Leuven: Peeters, 2010) 95–112; Jan van Ginkel, "Michael the Syrian and His Sources: Reflections on the Methodology of Michael the Great as a Historiographer and Its Implications for Modern Historians," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 6 (2006) 53–60; idem, "A Man Is Not an Island: Reflections of the Historiography of the Early Syriac Renaissance in Michael the Great," in *Syriac Renaissance* (ed. Teule et al.) 113–22; Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (trans. J.-B. Chabot; 4 vols.; Paris, 1899–1924; repr. Brussels: Culture et Civilisation, 1963).

[4] I use the term "Syriac" to refer to the Syrian Orthodox (Monophysite) Church and community in this article. On the Council of Chalcedon's (451) role in the formation of the Syrian Orthodox Church, the foundational works are: W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Patrick Gray, "The Legacy of Chalcedon: Christological Problems and Their Significance," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (ed. Michael Maas; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 215–38; Volker Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

[5] Within the extensive body of literature on cultural memory, the following works have directly impacted my treatment of memory in this article: Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Le

which stories about "relics coming from Constantinople" were oriented toward new meanings by Syriac hagiographers.[6] Narratives about Constantinopolitan relics were employed in Syriac hagiography as early as the sixth century. Yet, in the Middle Ages, these stories were used in saints' lives to create local hagio-geographies in promoting particular monasteries, while reshaping memories of Byzantium in the Syriac Church.[7] Thus, with creative uses of the motif of Constantinopolitan relics, hagiography functioned as a tool for remembering different aspects of the Roman past in the Syrian Orthodox Church. The spatiotemporal frames these stories created, I will further demonstrate, also became interpretative tools for the cross-generational consumers of these stories to reflect on the broader political developments and religious rivalries of their times.[8]

I focus on two understudied texts in this article: the *Life of Abḥay*, edited by the aforementioned Michael the Syrian, and the *Life of Aḥā of Rīš ʿaynā*.[9] Like many Syriac hagiographical texts, the authorship and dating of these lives are obscured by multiple editorial layers. Nevertheless, with their inclusion of the narrative

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lieux de mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989) 7–24; Alan Kirk, "Social and Cultural Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (ed. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005) 1–24; Alon Confino, "Memory and the History of Mentalities," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010) 77–84; Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (ed. Erll and Nünning) 97–107.

[6] For relics in Syriac hagiography, see Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, "Bones in Bags: Relics in Syriac Hagiography," in *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium, Duke University, 26–29 June 2011* (ed. Maria Doerfler, Emanuel Fiano, and Kyle Smith; Leuven: Peeters, 2015) 439–54. More broadly on relics and relic veneration, see Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). General overviews of Syriac hagiography can be found in Sebastian Brock, "Saints in Syriac: A Little-tapped Resource," *JECS* 16 (2008) 181–96; idem, "Syriac Hagiography," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography* (ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011) 259–83.

[7] The term hagio-geography is used to refer to the study of topography of the churches and monasteries dedicated to a certain saint in Barbara E. Crawford, *The Churches Dedicated to St. Clement in Medieval England: A Hagio-Geography of the Seafarers' Saint in 11th Century North Europe* (Scripta Ecclesiastica 1; St. Petersburg: Axioma, 2008). I use the term in a broader sense, referring to the real and imagined landscapes in which a hagiographical text situates a saint's story.

[8] For a theoretical treatment of religious competition's role in the formation of religious identity, see Niels Reeh, "Inter-religious Relations as a New Foundation for Comparative Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 32 (2020) 47–73.

[9] Ms. Vatican Syriac 37, 173ᵛ–192ʳ (available at digi.vatlib.it). P. Peeters, "Le martyrologe de Rabban Ṣalība," *AnBoll* 27 (1908) 129–200, at 174, 187; Arthur Vööbus, *Quelques observations littéraires et historiques sur la vie syriaque inédite de Mar Aḥā* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1956); Fiey, *Saints Syriaques*, entry 35; idem, *Nisibe, metropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origins à nos jours* (CSCO 388; Subsidia 54; Leuven: Peeters, 1977) 187; Andrew Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990) 75, 93, 127; http://syriaca. org/person/1124. Not to be confused with Aḥā the Egyptian, the disciple of Awgen and the founder of the Monastery of Zarnuqa. Fiey, *Nisibe*, 194–97. For a recent study on the hagiographical dossier of Awgen and his disciples, see Sergey Minov, "The Syriac *Life of Mār Yāret the Alexandrian*: Promoting the Cult of a Monastic Holy Man in Early Medieval Mesopotamia," in *Syriac Hagiography: Texts and Beyond* (ed. Sergey Minov and Flavia Ruani; Leiden: Brill, 2020) 160–222.

episodes about Constantinopolitan relics, these lives contribute to three areas of study: Syriac hagiography, Syriac-Byzantine relations, and collective memory in the Middle Ages. Hagiographical narratives about Constantinopolitan relics localized the real and imagined connections to Byzantium within the broad Syriac landscape by discursively depositing the relics at particular sites. At the same time, these narratives reveal different modes of remembering Byzantium, since some give extensive accounts of the Royal City while others appear to have muted the memories of Byzantium, focusing only on the relics themselves. Such a complex understanding of the narrative, as a thread of literature that articulates in-group and out-group dynamics across different sociotemporal frames,[10] nuances our understanding of collective memories of Christian communities in the medieval Near East.

Stories about Constantinopolitan relics, like the martyrs' bones Abḥay brought from Constantinople, are rare in Syriac hagiography. Likely the earliest prominent example is an episode in the sixth-century *Life of Peter the Iberian* (d. 491) written by the Antiochene priest John Rufus, a story that we will analyze shortly.[11] The motif of Constantinopolitan relics found important articulations in later Syriac hagiography, as the *Life of Abḥay* demonstrates. Although the motif itself seems to have a long genealogy, extending from the sixth to the twelfth century and beyond, it was used in the creation of new hagio-geographies: while Peter translates relics from Constantinople to the monastery of Maiuma in Palestine, Abḥay brings a different set of Constantinopolitan relics to northern Mesopotamia. Thus, the story in the *Life of Abḥay* localizes the memory of Byzantium and anchors it to a new place, the upper Euphrates region. A story about Constantinopolitan relics is also found in the *Life of Aḥā of Rīšʿaynā*. In this text, the motif again reorients the reader toward a new hagio-geography, this time placing the relics at the borders of Armenia in northern Mesopotamia. In addition to this new localization, the story of Constantinopolitan relics also blurs the memory of Byzantium in the latter text, which barely speaks about the Royal City. The differences between these representations give a glimpse into the complex discursive methods of creating Byzantine memories in the Syrian Orthodox Church through the use of hagiography.

Narratives representing Byzantium and Constantinople in a positive light are common in Syriac literature.[12] While pre-Chalcedonian figures such as

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[10] Confino, "Memory," 81.

[11] John Rufus, *L. Peter the Iberian,* §26–§37, §49, §58 (*John Rufus: The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus* [ed. and trans. Cornelia Horn and Robert Phenix Jr.; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008] 35–49, 65–69, 82–85). On John Rufus, see Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of the Anti-Chalcedonian Culture* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2002); idem, "Heresy and Orthodoxy: The Anti-Chalcedonian Hagiography of John Rufus," in *Christian Gaza* (ed. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 130–47; idem, "John Rufus," *e-GEDSH,* https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/John-Rufus; Cornelia Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine: The Career of Peter the Iberian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[12] The bibliography on the Syriac Church's relationships with and perception of Byzantium is

Constantine I (r. 306–337) and Theodosius II (r. 402–450) were often praised as pious Christians or generous benefactors,[13] pro-Byzantine rhetoric was not limited to the portrayals of these emperors. Depending on the broader sociopolitical events, pro-Byzantine rhetoric periodically became prominent in Syriac literature. For example, with the Byzantine reconquests of the former provinces in the Near East in the tenth century, the empress Theodora (d. 548) was depicted in increasingly positive terms in Syriac historiography.[14] Roman emperors and empresses praising Syrian saints is also a well-known trope in Syriac literature.[15] Similarly, there are stories portraying Roman imperial figures as generous benefactors of Syriac churches and monasteries.[16] Despite this rich repertoire of representations of the Roman Empire, stories about relics transferred from Constantinople to the East are rare, the texts that I analyze in this article being sporadic examples. While the reasons behind this infrequent usage may be elusive to us, the instances of the employment of this motif shed great light on the ways in which the Roman Empire was remembered by Syriac communities. My aim is to show the nuances

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extensive, the following being the foundational works: Michael Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 372–80; Jan van Ginkel, "John of Ephesus on Emperors: The Perception of the Byzantine Empire by a Monophysite," in *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Divinity, 30 August–2 September 1992* (ed. René Lavenant; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994) 323–33; idem, "John of Ephesus: A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-century Byzantium" (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1995); idem, "Monk, Missionary, and Martyr: John of Ephesus, a Syriac Orthodox Historian in Sixth Century Byzantium," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 5 (2005) 35–50; Lucas van Rompay, "Society and Community in the Christian East," in *Companion to the Age of Justinian* (ed. Maas) 239–66; Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*; Kutlu Akalin, "Co-existence and Persecution: Sixth-century Constantinople according to John of Ephesus" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011); Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018) 58–67; idem, "Romanness in the Syriac East," in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities* (ed. Clemens Gantner et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018) 457–80; Philip Forness, "Faithful Rulers and Theological Deviance: Ephrem the Syrian and Jacob of Serugh on the Roman Emperor," in *The Good Christian Ruler in the First Millennium: Views from the Wider Mediterranean World in Conversation* (ed. Philip Forness, Alexandra Hasse-Ungeheuer, and Hartmut Leppin; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021) 141–67.

[13] E.g., Kyle Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016) 154–80; Jan Willem Drijvers, "Jovian between History and Myth," in *Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire* (ed. Diederik W. P. Burgersdijk and Alan J. Ross; Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean 1; Leiden: Brill, 2018) 234–56.

[14] Susan Harvey, "Theodora the 'Believing Queen': A Study in Syriac Historiographical Tradition," *Hugoye* 4 (2001) 209–34.

[15] See, e.g., Simeon bar Eupolemos and Bar Ḥaṭar, *L. Simeon the Stylite* ("The Syriac *Life*," in *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* [trans. and intro. Robert Doran, fwd. Susan Harvey; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992] §50, §77, §106, §122, §123.

[16] For example, the 4th-cent. emperors Arcadius and Honorius are narrated to have patronized the building of the Monastery of Mār Gabriel in northern Mesopotamia in the *Qartmin Trilogy* 27–30, microfiche supplement to Palmer, *Monk and Mason*.

of these processes with two diachronic articulations of the hagiographical motif of Constantinopolitan relics.

The interlaced relationship between hagiography and collective memory in premodern Christian communities barely warrants the ink. It has been well established in scholarship that oral and textual narrators of saints' stories enabled their audiences to contour their communities through real and imagined connections to the divine past.[17] The community-building function of the narrative is observed also in the stories about Constantinopolitan relics in Syriac hagiography. On the one hand, such stories contributed to the prestige of specific places where relics were buried;[18] on the other hand, they provided Syriac communities with a space to rearticulate their memories of the Roman Empire. In what follows, I will present a literary analysis of the two saints' lives that include stories about Constantinopolitan relics, and I will show how these texts contributed to Syriac memories of the Roman Empire in their comparable yet distinct ways.

■ Martyrs' Bones in the *Life of Abḥay*

A. The Narrative

The *Life of Abḥay* can be separated into three parts: 1) the youth of Abḥay and his early monastic career in northern Mesopotamia; 2) his travel to Constantinople and service at the court of Theodosius (probably referring to Theodosius II); and 3) his return to northern Mesopotamia and founding of a monastery. Let us take a closer look at the succession of events and the representation of relics: The *Life* opens with a praise of relics. After summoning his readers to listen to the story of Abḥay, the author says:

> Who is it that, when he sees the dead corpses in which the divine strength they wore is preserved, and while by nature they are dead and decayed, the

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[17] Some of the major works that analyze the role of hagiography in community formation are: Palmer, *Monk and Mason*; Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*; Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia*; Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories*. On identity in the Syriac Church in general, see *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam* (ed. Jan van Ginkel, Helen Murre-Van den Berg, and T. M. Lint; Leuven: Peeters 2005); Muriel Debié, "Syriac Historiography and Identity Formation," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89 (2009) 99–114; Bas ter Haar Romeny et al., "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89 (2009) 1–52; Mat Immerzeel, *Identity Puzzles: Medieval Christian Art in Syria and Lebanon* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009).

[18] For the relationship between landscape, memory, and hagiography, see David Frankfurter, "Hagiography and the Reconstruction of Local Religion in Late Antique Egypt: Memories, Inventions, and Landscapes," *Church History and Religious Culture* 86 (2006) 13–37; William R. Caraher, "Constructing Memories: Hagiography, Church Architecture, and the Religious Landscape of Middle Byzantine Greece; The Case of St. Theodore of Kythera," in *Archaeology and History in Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval Greece: Studies on Method and Meaning in Honor of Timothy E. Gregory* (ed. William R. Caraher, Linda Jones Hall, and R. Scott Moore; London: Routledge, 2008).

power that they received lives in them; and because of this, they help all who take refuge in them with undivided faith, giving healing to the sick and the weak; and those who are afflicted by demons, they grant them to be free from them; and those who are pressed in trials of chastisements, they redeem them from the scourging and sufferings; who does not believe and become firm by all these things that are written in the narratives about them which by their hands become strong and strong again? . . . Who then doubts, when he sees the many witnesses to the acts beyond nature, which the bones of the holy ones faithfully perform? For witnesses of martyrs [are] the miracle working of their bones.[19]

Following the opening passage, the author begins to narrate Abḥay's pious deeds, and we do not hear about relic veneration until the second half of the *Life*. Abḥay was born to a Christian family in the outskirts of Mardin.[20] He was well versed in Syriac and Greek, the language of the Arameans and the language of the Romans, respectively, the author says.[21] Abḥay and his brother Zuqā, after their parents die, sell their possessions and enter monastic life. The two brothers are first ordained deacons, then they are offered priesthood, which Zuqā refuses and Abḥay accepts.[22] Troubled by the fame and praise brought by the healings they perform, the two brothers leave their monastic community; Zuqā founds a small monastery in a nearby region, and Abḥay goes to Caesarea in Cappadocia.[23] Abḥay performs many miracles, which the Roman governor Proclus mentions to the emperor Theodosius. Upon Theodosius's request, in the second part of the *Life*, Abḥay goes to Constantinople, greeted there by the emperor himself.[24] Abḥay settles at a certain Monastery of St. John in Constantinople and becomes the spiritual protector of the city, especially after the city's defeat of the Bulgar attacks.[25] He is ordained as the bishop of Nicaea under the generous benefaction and patronage of the emperor.[26]

A short time after Abḥay took office in Nicaea, the author says, the miracle of the Youths of Ephesus took place.[27] The emperor goes to see the youths that had

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[19] *L. Abḥay* 558, lines 5–17:

ܗܢܐ ܓܝܪ ܣܪ ܟܬܒ̈ܘܗܝ ܡܬܠܐ ܘܒܝܢ ܗܘܐ ܣܠܠ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܘܟܬܒܗ؛ ܗܒ ܨܠܝܠܐ ܗܢܟܢ ܗܨܡܣܒܢ؛ ܣܒ ܗܘܗ ܣܠܠ ܘܒܚܟܗ؛ ܘܡܗܠܐ ܘܙܐ؛ ܟܚܠܐ ܘܡܠܚܝܨܡܝ ܗܘܗ ܗܨܡܣܘܗܐܠ ܠܐ ܗܠܐܦܚܝܒܐܠ ܗܚܙܢ؛ ܒܝ ܟܬܒܢܗܐ ܘܗܬܙܚܠ ܘܗܬܚܠܐ ܣܘܚܟܡܠ ܗܘܚܝ؛ ܗܚܪܡܗܠܢܒܡ ܡܝ ܗܐܙܐ ܟܗܠܣܢܙܗ ܗܢܣܗ؛ ܗܚܪܡܚܪܙܝ ܚܒܨܗܣܒܠ ܘܡܗܙܘܗܠܐ ܗܢܣܗ؛ ܘܗܟܚܠܐ ܗܐܬܚܟܒܠ ܡܗܡܘܚܝ. ܗܢܗ ܘܠܠ ܗܢܣܗ ܗܢܗܐܠܙܙ؛ ܘܗܚܟܗܝ ܐܚܟܝ ܘܗܟܚܬ ܚܠܚܕܚܠܐ ܘܚܟܚܗ؛ ܘܗܗܒ ܚܠܒܬܗܗ؛ ܗܢܬܝ ܗܠܚ ܗܢܬܝܨ [...] ܗܢܗ ܗܚܨܠܐ ܗܟܠܦܚܝ ܒܝ ܬܚܗܠܐ ܣܪܙ ܘܗܗܒܝܒܝ ܟܚܗܗܚܬܒܠ ܘܟܚܠܐ ܡܝ ܨܠܠ؛ ܘܐܗܨܠܟܠܐ ܗܗܟܢܝ ܝܬܗܣܗܗܝ ܘܗܒܬܗܐܠܗ؛ ܘܗܒܬܗܐܠܗ ܗܗܨܗܙܘܐ ܗܗܨܗܗܙܘܠ ܗܒܝܢ ܗܗܨܗܐܠ ܠܐܗܬܙܐܠ ܝܬܗܣܗܗܝ.

[20] Ibid., 560.

[21] Ibid., 560–61.

[22] Ibid., 565.

[23] Ibid., 569.

[24] Ibid., 574.

[25] Ibid., 578–79. This is an anachronism in the *Life*, since the first known Bulgar attack on Constantinople was in the early 8th century. Timothy E. Gregory, *A History of Byzantium* (2nd ed.; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) 211–13.

[26] *L. Abḥay* 580–81.

[27] Ibid., 581–86. For the essential bibliography and a recent treatment of the legend of the Youths of Ephesus, see Sebastian Brock, "Jacob of Serugh's Poem on the Sleepers of Ephesus,"

woken up from their miraculous sleep, converses with them, and builds a church upon the cave in which they had fallen asleep. Abḥay also travels with the emperor to see this miracle, performing numerous miracles on the way to Ephesus. The holy man even goes to Athens, where philosophers test his knowledge, before arriving at Ephesus.[28] In the rest of the text, the emperor continuously appoints Abḥay to heal the sick and preach to Christian communities in many cities of the empire. Abḥay thus becomes the spiritual advisor of the emperor and stays in the capital until the emperor dies. In this second part of the *Life*, the author returns to the veneration of relics in Constantinople.

In this episode, the emperor is distressed that not all of the relics in Constantinople bring healing to those who venerate them. "A certain thought arose in the emperor's mind about the bones of saints and relics of holy men which were venerated at the churches of Christians: why did some of them perform mighty deeds and miracles while some did not? Why indeed were they venerated by believers equally—those that do not perform mighty deeds together with those that do?"[29] Thus, the emperor suspects that some of the martyrs' bones venerated in the city are inauthentic. Not wanting to cause any schism in the city, the emperor keeps his thoughts about relics to himself. But the continued, unusual quietness of the emperor leads to confusion in the city, and the nobles summon Abḥay to learn what is distressing the emperor.[30] The latter reveals the reason of his distress to Abḥay, telling him that he had a dream in which he was ordered to test the relics in the city to sift out false martyrs' bones.[31] After much contemplation and supplications, the emperor, Abḥay, and other bishops collect all of the relics in the city: "The emperor, with imperial letters, and with a strict and urgent command, collected all the bones of the holy martyrs from every region. He ordered that their names would be written on reliquaries."[32] They then throw the relics into fire to test their authenticity. The majority of the relics (nine thousand pieces) do not burn; they prove real, and the emperor's faith in relics is

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in *'I Sowed Fruits into Hearts' (Odes Sol. 17:13): Festschrift for Professor Michael Lattke* (ed. Pauline Allen, Majella Franzmann, and Rick Strelan; Early Christian Studies 12; Strathford: St. Paul's Publications, 2007) 13–30.

[28] *L. Abḥay* 584.

[29] Ibid., 594, lines 16–20:

ܘܣܠ ܚܢ ܚܢܚܣܢ ܘܡܚܟܐ ܣܘܡܚܐ ܡܪܡ ܚܠܐ ܝܬܘܡܐ ܘܒܩܘܐ ܘܩܬܢܐ ܘܪܒܬܐ ܘܩܣܣܝ ܗܘܐ ܚܟܒܪܐ ܘܬܘܗܩܝܣܐ؛ ܘܐܢܣܐ ܗܢܘܣ ܡܢ
ܗܚܢܝ ܣܬܠ ܘܐܝܘܬܒܐܠ ܡܢܘܣ، ܘܒ ܠܐ ܗܚܢܝ؟ ܘܘܡܩܝܠܐ ܗܠܐ ܣܐ ܗܟܝܡܢܝ ܡܢ ܗܘܬܘܩܡܐ ܚܡܘܣܐ ܗܘܚܝ ܘܠܐ ܗܚܢܝ ܣܬܠ ܚܡ ܗܘܚܝ
ܘܗܚܢܝ؟

[30] Ibid., 596–97.

[31] Ibid., 598.

[32] Ibid., 600, lines 10–12.

ܘܡ ܡܚܟܐ ܚܒ ܠܝܬܐܠ ܡܚܟܬܟܐ ܘܘܡܡܒܠ ܣܢܩܠ ܘܙܘܢܚܐ ܣܢܩܠ ܡܢ ܚܠܐ ܐܠܩܢ ܝܬܘܡܐ ܘܒܩܘܐ ܘܪܒܬܐ ܚܢܐ؛ ܘܒܠܩܠܚܢ ܗܩܘܬܢܘܣ ܚܠܐ
ܝܚܩܗܡܡܐ ܩܡ؛

restored.[33] The relics are then distributed to many regions of the empire after this fire ordeal and confirmation, according to the story.[34]

Following Theodosius's death, in the third part of the *Life*, Abḥay and his disciple Andreas leave Constantinople, with nothing from the abundant treasure of imperial riches, but with five hundred pieces of relics.[35] Just as Moses carried the people of Israel from Egypt, the author says, Abḥay and his disciple carried the bones of the holy fathers. The two holy men travel to Alexandria, to the Holy Land, and to Syria with the relics from Constantinople. They eventually start dwelling at a cave near Samosata (in the Gargar region) on the banks of the Euphrates. At this location, the two holy men found the Monastery of Abḥay. They build a church and a "house of saints" (burial chamber) for the martyrs' bones.[36] The *Life of Abḥay*, with this lengthy account on relics, connects a monastery in northern Mesopotamia to Constantinople.

It is unclear when the *Life* was originally composed. The reference to the Bulgar attacks at Constantinople provides the eighth century as a *terminus post quem*, but the earliest manuscript witnesses to the *Life* are from the twelfth century: the manuscript Bodleian Syriac 163, dated to the year 1177 CE,[37] and the manuscript British Library Add. 12174, completed in 1197 CE.[38] The former manuscript includes the *Life of Abḥay* and ten other hagiographical narratives and ends with a story narrating the apparition of a fragment of the True Cross to a group of people.[39] The explicit of the manuscript says it was written by a deacon named Aaron "in the days of Michael, Patriarch of Antioch."[40] This note is significant in situating Bod. Syr. 163 in relation to BL 12174, since the latter is also associated with Michael the Syrian.

BL 12174 includes seventy-eight texts. The majority of the texts in the manuscript are saints' stories, but it also includes an account of Constantine's reign and two accounts of the discovery of the Holy Cross. In the explicit of the *Life of Abḥay*, we read that "Michael, patriarch of the apostolic see of Antioch," edited the story

[33] Ibid., 600–1. This fire ordeal found direct reverberations in later Syriac hagiography. For example, in the *Life of Azaziel*, the author says the holy man's relic was the first one to come out unburned from the fire. Frédéric Macler, ed., *Histoire de saint Azazaïl* (BEHEH 141; Paris: É. Bouillon, 1902) 23, 61–64.

[34] *L. Abḥay* 602.

[35] Ibid., 606.

[36] Ibid., 607–9.

[37] Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Syr. 163 (Marsh. 13) 1–61ᵛ; R. Payne Smith, *Catalogi codicorum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae, Pars Sexta. Codices syriacos, carshunicos, mendaeos, complectens* (1864), 541. I am grateful to Linda Wheatley Irving for generously sharing the digital copies of this manuscript.

[38] Ms. London, British Library, Add. 12174, 98ᵛ–110; William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838* (London: British Museum, Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, 1872) 1123, 1137. Bedjan's edition of the *Life* appears to be based on this version.

[39] Smith, *Catalogi codicorum*, 543.

[40] Ibid.

in the year 1496 of the Greeks (1185 CE).[41] In his *Chronicle,* Michael frequently mentions the monastery of Abḥay but does not mention a bishop of Nicaea named Abḥay.[42] Nevertheless, Michael is well known for his hagiographical writings,[43] and it is plausible that he edited the *Life of Abḥay*. One of the notes at the end of BL 12174, again, seemingly written by Michael the Syrian, states that the book was commissioned by the deacon Ṣalībā,[44] who, like Michael, was educated at the patriarchal Monastery of Barṣawmā near Melitene in northern Mesopotamia.[45] This note indicates that the British Library manuscript as a whole was produced upon commission, and Michael might have collated and edited all of the hagiographical texts in it, and not only the *Life of Abḥay*, during his controversial tenure as the Syrian Orthodox patriarch of Antioch (1166–1199).

It is not clear what Michael's editorial process entailed. The *Life of Abḥay* was likely originally written earlier, but due to the dearth of manuscript evidence, it is difficult to sort Michael's editorial changes from the previous redaction(s) of the *Life*. The only extant earlier version, in Bod. Syr. 163, is different from Michael's edition in important ways. For example, the discourse about relics at the very beginning of the *Life* is not included in this earlier version, which is overall less detailed than Michael's edition.[46] However, the episode when the Constantinopolitan relics are tested with fire is included in the story, albeit with slightly different details.[47] Thus, the relics episode in the *Life of Abḥay* does not seem to be Michael's addition.

Aphram Barsoum states that the *Life* was originally written by the aforementioned John Rufus, yet he does not provide the source for this information.[48] Abḥay is not

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[41] *L. Abḥay* 615, lines 12–15.

ܠܘܡܩܐ ܒܝ ܘܡܚܟܐ ܚܡܝܐ ܠܠܩܐ ܘܐܘܚܡܝܐ ܘܐܡܚܝ ܘܡܐ [...] ܐܢܐ ܘܡܚܝܐܠܐ ܚܝܐܠ ܘܡܘܝܐ ܘܡܣܝܐ ܚܬܝܡܐ ܘܐܠܩܐ ܦܗܝܐܢܝܐܝܐ ܘܘܘܘܡܗܝܐ ܗܟܝܣܐ ܘܗ ܘܐܠܐܝܐܘܡܝܐ.

[42] Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 3:148, 170–71, 181, 246–47, 280, 283, 334. Michael's account of the reign of Theodosius II (during which Abḥay lived): ibid., 2:13–36.

[43] Weltecke, "Michael I Rabo."

[44] Wright, *Catalogue*, 1137–38.

[45] A second note mentions a certain monk Joseph as the scribe. Ibid., 1138. For an updated bibliography on the Monastery of Barṣawmā, see Hidemi Takahashi, "Barṣawmo, Dayro d-Mor," *e-GEDSH,* https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/Barsawmo-Dayro-d-Mor. For connections between Gargar and the Monastery of Barṣawmā, see Hidemi Takahashi, "Also via Istanbul to New Haven: Mss. Yale Syriac 7-12," in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas* (ed. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman; Leiden: Brill, 2015) 157–76. For the holy man Barṣawmā, see Volker Menze, "The Dark Side of Holiness: Barsauma the 'Roasted' and the Invention of a Jewish Jerusalem," in *Motions of Late Antiquity: Essays on Religion, Politics, and Society in Honor of Peter Brown* (ed. Jamie Kreiner and Helmut Reimitz; Turnhout: Brepols, 2016) 231–48; *The Wandering Holy Man: The Life of Barsauma, Christian Asceticism, and Religious Conflict in Late Antique Palestine* (ed. Johannes Hahn and Volker Menze; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

[46] Many of the explicit biblical parallelisms in the *L. Abḥay* (558–59, 570, 579) are also not found in the redaction in Bod. Syr. 163.

[47] Bod. Syr., 43ᵛ–52ʳ.

[48] "He revised the life story of Mar Abḥai the ascetic bishop, in 1185. This life story and other

mentioned in John Rufus's *Plerophoriae* or in his other works.[49] Therefore, until further manuscript evidence is available, John Rufus's authorship of the *Life of Abḥay* remains tentative. Still, even if John did not author the *Life*, his most famous work, the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, which is also included in BL 12174 shortly before the *Life of Abḥay*,[50] displays important parallels to the latter. Considering the narrative similarities, to which we will shortly return, Michael or the original author of the *Life of Abḥay* might have modeled the *Life* on John Rufus's work, albeit making some important modifications to situate Abḥay in his northern Mesopotamian context. The only secure information we have for the *Life* is that it was edited by Michael the Syrian in the twelfth century.

B. The Life of Abḥay *within Syriac Hagiography*

How does the representation of Byzantium in the *Life of Abḥay* relate to broader Syriac hagiographical discourses in the twelfth century? BL 12174, which witnesses the *Life of Abḥay,* includes a number of other Syriac texts that praise the history of Byzantium and highlight the connections between Constantinople and the Syriac Church. For example, an account of the baptism of Constantine by the bishop Sylvester,[51] the *Life* of Abraham—a native of Constantinople and the teacher of the Syriac holy man Barṣawmā[52]—and two accounts of the Invention of the Holy Cross by the Byzantine empresses Protonice and Helena[53] are among the stories about Constantinople in this manuscript. Thus, the *Life* was, to follow Aleida Assmann's theorization, canonized among other Syriac hagiographical works.[54] A collection of hagiographical texts is canonical not in being "immune to ups and downs of social taste"[55] but in keeping the cultural artifacts (in this case, saints' stories) in active circulation for the use and reinterpretation of future generations. BL 12174 is an attestation to the twelfth-century Syriac intellectual milieu that reinforced a memory of spiritual connections between the Syriac Church and the Royal City.

Such articulations of the memories of Syriac-Byzantine relations are seen in Syriac literature as early as late antiquity, as mentioned above. While the *Life of Abḥay* fits into this extended genealogy of stories that narrate the spiritual connections between the Syriac world and the Byzantine Empire, it appears to have

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narratives which he had abridged and recorded in his history were written by John Rufus. They contain unsubstantiated information." Ignatius Aphram I Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences* (trans. Matti Moosa; fwd. Mor Cyril A Karim; 2nd ed.; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2003) 447.

[49] F. Nau, "Plérophories. Témoignages et révélations contre le Chalcédoine," PO 8 (Paris, 1912) 1–208.

[50] Wright, *Catalogue*, 1124.

[51] Ibid., 1128.

[52] Ibid., 1128.

[53] Ibid., 1130–31.

[54] Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 100–102.

[55] Ibid., 100.

reshaped those memories in significant ways. The *Life of Abḥay* uses pro-Byzantine discourse to promote a particular monastery in the upper Euphrates. To illustrate this localization, let us return to the *Life of Peter the Iberian* by John Rufus.

In a vivid and detailed episode in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, Peter, while still a young boy, starts living at the palace of Theodosius II in Constantinople.[56] With his piety and asceticism, he becomes exemplary to those at the palace and to Constantinopolitans in general. He performs miracles at the palace with the martyrs' bones buried in his bed chamber.[57] The biggest of these miracles takes place when Peter and his disciple John decide to leave the Royal City and go to the Holy Land. The martyrs, whose bones were kept in reliquaries, come alive and lead the two holy men out of the city.[58] In the living company of an army of martyrs, Peter and John, with relics, a gospel book, and a piece of the True Cross, leave Constantinople and arrive in Palestine.[59] They bury the relics at the Monastery of Maiuma (which was under the care of Peter), and the piece of the Cross flies away, transforming into a white dove.[60]

Peter the Iberian's service at the palace and his relationship with the emperor Theodosius are similar to Abḥay's experiences in the Royal City. And, Peter and John's flight from the city with the relics closely resonates with Abḥay and Andreas's departure from Constantinople with five hundred martyrs' bones. Given these parallels, the *Life of Abḥay* might have been modeled on John Rufus's story, as Barsoum states. Yet, the former text has a completely different geographical orientation. While Peter's *Life* is mostly concerned with the geography of the Holy Land, Abḥay is born in northern Mesopotamia and he returns to northern Mesopotamia with the relics. With this geographical reorientation, the *Life of Abḥay*, while using the same motif in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, introduces a new context for Constantinopolitan relics. In other words, the *Life of Abḥay* shifts the geographical focus from the Holy Land to northern Mesopotamia, but it still remembers the Roman past as a time when Syriac holy men were inhabitants of Constantinople and significant members of the Theodosian court.

Since it is unclear when the *Life* was originally composed, it is difficult to speculate whether the episode about Constantinopolitan relics was included in the

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[56] John Rufus, *L. Peter the Iberian*, §24–§32.

[57] Ibid., §27. This is a group of relics different from those in the *L. Abḥay*.

[58] John Rufus, *L. Peter the Iberian*, §31–§34.

[59] For relics in Constantinople, see Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 206, 326; Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 38–39; James Howard-Johnston, "Heraclius' Persian Campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, 622–630," *War in History* 6 (1999) 1–44, at 28–29; Derek Krueger, "The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium," in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (ed. Martina Bagnoli et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) 5–17. On medieval relic translations from Constantinople to numerous centers in Europe and in the East, see A. Frolow, *La Relique de la Vraie Croix* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1961) 73–94.

[60] John Rufus, *L. Peter the Iberian*, §34–§36.

original version of the *Life* and how the author envisioned this story to function. Nevertheless, in its twelfth-century context, the *Life* participated in the promotion of northern Mesopotamian monasteries. The foundation story of the Monastery of Abḥay was written for another monastic community, the Monastery of Barṣawmā in Melitene, as the explicit of BL 12174 mentions. What can this context tell us about the ways in which the story of Constantinopolitan relics might have been read in the twelfth century? For this, let us briefly dwell on Melitene.

C. What Does Melitene Have to do with Constantinople?

The epitome of a frontier city, Melitene, on the banks of the Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia, served as the capital of the Roman province of Armenia II during and after the reign of Theodosius I (r. 379–395).[61] Although the autonomy of Armenian satraps fluctuated under changing Roman legislation, Melitene remained an important administrative, cultural, and military center for various Armenian provinces.[62] After the Islamic conquests in the seventh century, the region was ruled by local emirs appointed by Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs until the Byzantine reconquests of eastern Asia Minor in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This period of Byzantine control in and around Melitene ceased with the establishment of the Turkish Danishmend dynasty in the eleventh century.[63] Hereafter, northern Mesopotamia was ruled by Seljuk Turks, Crusader kingdoms, and Mamluks, until the Ottoman conquest of the region in the sixteenth century.

As a result of its strategic position between various ruling powers throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the religious history of Melitene was characterized by diversity and multiculturalism. Greek (Chalcedonian), Armenian (non-Chalcedonian), and Syriac (non-Chalcedonian) Christians, as well as Muslims, were important components of Melitene's cultural texture.[64] While it is impossible to provide a full account of the religious history of the city in the given limited space, we should say a few words about the history of Syrian Orthodox Christianity in this region.

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[61] For an overview of the late antique history of Armenian communities, see Nina Garsoian, "The *Marzpanate* (428–652)," in *Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times* (ed. Richard Hovannisian; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004) 95–116.

[62] Clive Foss, "Melitene," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (ed. Alexander Kazhdan; Oxford University Press, 2005); Bern Andreas Vest, *Geschichte der Stadt Melitene und der umliegenden Gebiete. Vom Vorabend der arabischen bis zum Abschluß der türkischen Eroberung (um 600–1124)* (3 vols.; Hamburg: Dr. Kovac, 2007).

[63] Elizabeth Zachariadou, "Danişmendids," *ODB*.

[64] Nina Garsoian, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (ed. Helene Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou; Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1998) 53–124; Gilbert Dagron, "Minorités ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin à la fin du Xe et au XIe siècle. L'immigration syrienne," *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976) 177–216.

There was a Syriac bishopric in Melitene in late antiquity.[65] Although this indicates the presence of a Syriac community, the latter became prominent in the city in the Middle Ages, after the emperor Nikophoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) settled a sizeable Syriac population in Melitene and the broader region.[66] In the following centuries, Byzantine emperors patronized the Syriac Church in and around Melitene sporadically and most of the time nominally.[67] Despite the absence of continuous imperial support, the Syriac Church appears to have flourished in the region. Well-known clerics were educated in Melitene, held significant patriarchal and bishopric positions in northern Syria and Mesopotamia, and produced voluminous literature. It would not be an overstatement to say that medieval Melitene was among the centers of the Syriac Renaissance.[68] The settlement and flourishing of the Syriac Church from the tenth to the thirteenth century in this predominantly Greek and Armenian region resulted in ongoing theological controversies and competition among various religious communities for territory and patronage. Such broad developments were, expectedly, reflected in literature. In Syriac historiography, for example, from the eleventh century on, representations of the Roman history became more prominent in comparison to the ninth- and tenth-century historiographical works.[69] One must situate the edition of the *Life of Abḥay* within these broader sociopolitical developments. Hagiographical stories about Constantinopolitan relics, we may theorize, reinforced the memories of Syriac-Byzantine connections in the pre-Chalcedonian era, while there were important rivalries for Byzantine patronage between various churches in the Near East. We will return to these rivalries below, after incorporating the *Life of Aḥā of Rīš ʿaynā*, with a different articulation of memories of Byzantium, into the discussion.

Aḥā and the Piece of the True Cross

A. The Narrative

Abḥay brought a bag of relics from Constantinople and placed them at his monastery in the upper Euphrates. Another holy man from northern Mesopotamia, Aḥā of

[65] Hidemi Takahashi, "Melitene," *e-GEDSH*, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/Melitene; Garsoian, "Problem of Armenian Integration," 78.

[66] Foss, "Melitene."

[67] Baby Varghese, "The Byzantine Occupation of Northern Syria (969–1085) and the Renaissance of the Syrian Orthodox Church," *The Harp* 28 (2013) 37–74; Andrew Palmer, "Charting Undercurrents in the History of the West-Syrian people: The Resettlement of Byzantine Melitene after 934," *OrChr* 70 (1986) 37–68.

[68] Ray Mouawad, "The Syriac Renaissance Viewed from Ḥesnō Ziad (Kharpūt), near Melitene," in *Syriac Renaissance* (ed. Teule et al.) 265–292. For the Syriac Renaissance in general, see Herman Teule, "The Syriac Renaissance," in *Syriac Renaissance* (ed. Teule et al.) 1–30; Dorothea Weltecke and Helen Younansardaroud, "The Renaissance of Syriac Literature in the Twelfth–Thirteenth Centuries," in *The Syriac World* (ed. Daniel King; London: Routledge, 2019) 698–717.

[69] Van Ginkel, "A Man Is Not an Island," 114–17.

Rīšʿaynā, also traveled to Constantinople. Although his visit to the Royal City was much shorter than Abḥay's, he acquired arguably the most venerable of all relics: a piece of the True Cross. Comparing the *Life of Aḥā of Rīšʿaynā* to the *Life of Abḥay* illuminates how uses of the same motif can create different memories of the Roman Empire for Syriac communities.

The *Life of Aḥā* locates the holy man and his exploits on the sixth-century Roman-Persian frontier. The *Life* can be separated into three parts: 1) Aḥā's youth, separation from his family, and his time in the Persian army as a crypto-Christian; 2) his monastic foundations in northern Mesopotamia; and 3) his travels to the Holy Land, Athens, Constantinople, and Armenia. Although important turns of plot separate these three parts, there are also major overlaps. The story of his family, for example, continues after Aḥā founds multiple monasteries. His travels to Armenia, too, are interwoven with the stories of his monastic foundations. As Arthur Vööbus observes, the original text appears to have been expanded with simple additional narratives, which makes the editorial layers difficult to separate.[70] Aḥā's story begins at Rīšʿaynā (Rās al-ʿAyn in northern Syria), focuses mostly on northern Mesopotamia, and ends in Armenia; his relics are brought back to the highlands of northern Mesopotamia *post mortem*. The majority of the events in the story are placed in the northern Mesopotamian countryside. In this text, Constantinopolitan relics are given a brief but important narrative space.

After reviving a ruined monastery at Beth El in northern Mesopotamia, Aḥā tells his fellow monks that he had always desired to be blessed by the Cross on which Christ was crucified.[71] Thus revealing his intention, he travels to "the land of the Romans," and in this episode we read about his acquiring a piece of the True Cross in Constantinople:

> Then, he went to Rome and to Athens of the Philosophers, and he wandered all the lands of the Romans. After five years, he came to Constantinople, entered the Great[72] Church and prayed in it. The Lord made the steward of the church have mercy on him, and he gave him a cell and everything that he needed. And he [i.e. Aḥā] served with him [i.e. the steward] in the church and loved him greatly. And the steward brought a portion [of gifts] to him from the emperor, and Aḥā received the provisions together with the steward of the church. After he [i.e. Aḥā] spent four years with him, he revealed his secret [intention] to him and said to him: "If you want, trust me and give me a piece of the wood of the Cross, as the one who helps me." When the steward heard this, he got enraged and said to him: "Nobody should hear this word of yours, or you will die." And after this, such [happened]: He [i.e. the steward] called him at night, and the two of them entered into that place where the wood of the Cross was, and he gave him a piece as thin as hair. And he [i.e. the steward] made a golden amulet for it, wrapped it in pure silk

[70] Vööbus, *Quelques*, 13–14.

[71] *L. Aḥā*, VS 37, 184ᵛ.

[72] The term used for the church here is ܡܐܠܘܚܩܐ, a Syriac transliteration of the Greek term "Catholic."

and fine herbs, and he hung it around his neck. Then, he [i.e. Aḥā] went forth and came to the village of Ḥadas, to the house of Maksīmūs.[73]

Aḥā then returns to northern Mesopotamia, crossing the Arsenos River,[74] travels to Armenia, and converts pagan Armenians to Christianity by uprooting their cultic tree with the power of the Cross.[75]

The *Life of Aḥā* is a rare text in narrating the translation of a piece of the True Cross from Constantinople. In fact, the only text that includes a similar story, to my knowledge, is the aforementioned *Life of Peter the Iberian*. When Peter and his disciple leave Constantinople in the living company of the martyrs, they also carry a piece of the True Cross with them to the Holy Land.[76] Thus, the story of Aḥā, like that of Abḥay, participates in the tradition of Constantinopolitan relics, yet brings the latter to the upper Tigris, to the border between the land of Syrians and that of Armenians. While the relic blesses and sanctifies this region in the hands of the holy man, the memory of the Roman Empire fades into the background. Different from the *Life of Abḥay*, the *Life of Aḥā* does not mention the Roman emperor by name; the holy man does not meet anybody other than the steward of the "Great Church." Constantinople, in this text, is a vague background for the relic, and the Roman court is altogether irrelevant to the story of Aḥā.

B. Contextualizing the Life of Aḥā

The *Sitz im Leben* of the *Life of Aḥā* is as complex as that of Abḥay. The final version of the story is witnessed by Vatican Syriac 37, which also includes the *Life of Abḥay*.[77] It is a problematic manuscript in terms of dating. The majority of the folios in VS 37 were cut and rebound, certain sections are out of sequence, and many of the marginalia have been obscured in the process. Some of the texts in the manuscript are dated. For example, on fol. 139[r], the date 1890 of the Greeks (1579 CE) is given. Yet, because of the eclectic binding and the six different handwritings, one could not assume that a date given on one text also applies to the undated texts in this manuscript. Folia from earlier manuscripts were bound into VS 37, and the

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[73] *L. Aḥā*, VS 37, 186[r]–187[v].

ܘܐܬܐ ܐܚܐ ܐܠܚܕܣ ܩܪܝܬܐ ܠܒܝܬ ܡܟܣܝܡܘܣ. ܘܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܬܡܢ ܡܟܣܝܡܘܣ ܘܒܢܘܗܝ. ܘܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܩܠܝܠ ܝܘܡܬܐ ܐܬܝܢ: ܐܠܐ ܕܝܢ ܦܪܨܘܦܝܗܘܢ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܡܠܘܟܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܐܝܬܝܗܘܢ ܗܘܐ ܡܗܝܡܢܐ. ܘܟܕ ܚܙܐ ܐܢܘܢ ܡܪܝ ܐܚܐ ܘܗܠܝܢ ܥܡܗ ܕܡܢ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܩܘܣܛܢܛܝܢܘܦܘܠܝܣ. ܘܐܦ ܟܕ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܥܠ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܢ ܡܪܝܡ ܡܟܬܒ ܕܥܡܗ ܗܘܐ ܐܬܬܥܝܪ ܪܡܙܐ ܘܐܬܚܫܒ ܗܘܐ. ܘܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܙܒܢܐ ܐܝܟܐ ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ: ܐܠܐ ܟܕ ܐܙܠܘ ܐܝܟܐ ܟܕܘ: ܐܘ ܪܒܐ ܐܝܬ: ܐܙܝܠܘ ܟܕ ܢܚܕܐ ܡܢ ܪܗ ܡܣܥܠ ܘܪܟܒܗܐ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܒܠܚܘܕܘܗܝ. ܘܡܢ ܒܬܪ ܗܘܐ ܐܬܚܫܒ ܐܠܒܥܩܬܐ. ܘܗܘܐ ܐܡܪ ܗܝ: ܐܢܫ ܩܕܡ ܚܝܠܐ ܡܚܝܠ ܠܬܗܪ ܐܝܟܐ ܟܕ ܐܝܢ ܕܗ ܡܣܥܠ ܘܪܟܒܐ ܒܥܒܕ ܟܕ ܥܠ ܗܘܐ ܐܪܥܐ ܐܝܣܪܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܗܘܐ ܚܙܝ ܟܕ ܐܬܝ ܡܪ ܘܗܘ ܐܬܚܕܬ ܘܣܥܪܬ ܟܕ ܐܡܪ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܚܠܐ ܘܛܘܒܗܐ ܘܡܬܚܠܦܐ.

[74] Also known as Arsenias, modern-day Murat Su in eastern Turkey.

[75] *L. Aḥā*, VS 37, 187[v]–188[v].

[76] John Rufus, *L. Peter the Iberian*, §34.

[77] *L. Abḥay*: VS 37, f. 156[v]–168[v]. *L. Aḥā*: VS 37, f. 173[v]–192[r]. On this manuscript, see Joseph Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus in tres partes distributus* (Paris, 1926) 2:244–74.

section in which the *Life of Aḥā* is found is one of these undated parts. Despite the lack of a date, this section seems to comprise copies of hagiographical works edited (or authored) by Michael the Syrian.

The handwriting seen in the *Life of Abḥay* (156ᵛ–168ᵛ) in VS 37 continues with an account of the death of Constantius II (r. 337–361) and the ascension of Julian (r. 361–363) to the throne. This account, as Joseph Assemani says, appears to have been excerpted from the *Chronicle* of Michael.[78] Although there is no verbatim parallel narrative in the *Chronicle*,[79] it is possible that this narrative circulated among Michael's writings in the late Middle Ages. The text that follows in VS 37 is a brief summary of the *Life of Jacob of Sarug* (Syriac poet and theologian, d. 521), a longer version of which is found in the aforementioned BL 12174.[80] Thus, in at least this section in the VS 37, covering the *Life of Abḥay,* the account of Constantius II, and the *Life of Jacob of Sarug,* the scribe appears to have copied a group of texts associated with Michael the Syrian. After these texts comes the *Life of Aḥā* (173ᵛ–192ʳ),[81] which indicates that the text might have been grouped with Michael's writings. The *Life* was transmitted together with the writings of Michael the Syrian in yet another manuscript, Mardin CCFM 176, tentatively dated to the fourteenth century.[82] Thus, although the earliest manuscript evidence is from around the fourteenth century, since the *Life of Aḥā* was transmitted with other twelfth-century texts, it might have taken its final shape by the twelfth century, given the organization of the extant manuscripts.

The *Life* is written in simple prose, and its linguistic features do not indicate any particular dating. The hagio-geography of the text is mostly northern Mesopotamian: the region of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, the river Arsenos, the "mountain of Turks,"[83] among other toponyms used in the *Life*, are common in northern Mesopotamian literary sources as early as the eighth century.[84] Moreover, most of the characters mentioned in the *Life* (Aḥā's disciples and patrons) appear to be fictional. Thus, the literary structure and the vocabulary of the text do not indicate a particular time period.

The cult of Aḥā flourished in northern Mesopotamia in the ninth century, for archaeological evidence suggests that the monastery associated with him was extensively renovated in this time period.[85] Therefore, an earlier version of the *Life*

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[78] Ibid., 2:248.

[79] Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 7:4–5.

[80] Wright, *Catalogue*, 1131.

[81] The *Life* begins on 176ʳ, but the final folia are misplaced, extending from 173ᵛ to 175ᵛ.

[82] Ms. Mardin CCFM 176, 76ᵛ–109ᵛ. Michael the Syrian mentioned in 153ʳ; the date "1666 of the Greeks" (14th cent. CE) is given on 123ʳ. My thanks to Kyle Brunner for bringing this manuscript to my attention.

[83] *L. Aḥā*, VS 37, 180ʳ. ܛܠ، ܐܨܡܘܢܐ. This toponym, to my knowledge, is not mentioned in another source.

[84] The river Arsenos (Murat Su) and toponyms mentioning Turks, for example, are used in the 8th-cent. *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 157, 168–69 (*The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV, AD 488–775* [trans. Amir Harrak; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999] 150, 159).

[85] Palmer, *Monk and Mason,* 54, 75, 101, 194–95.

might have been in circulation in the ninth century, parallel to the veneration of the saint. This is, however, not attested by any manuscript. The monastery served as the bishop's seat after the year 1088 and was referred to as *Dayrā d-ṣlībā* (Monastery of the Cross), which indicates that the tradition of Aḥā bringing a piece of the Cross to northern Mesopotamia was well known in the region by the eleventh century.[86]

In terms of external literary evidence, the holy man is briefly mentioned in the *Qartmin Trilogy* (the lives of the founding fathers of the Monastery of Mār Gabriel) as "the bishop of Arzon, who converted Armenians."[87] The earliest manuscript witness to the *Trilogy* is tentatively dated to the thirteenth century, although the text could have been compiled any time after the ninth century.[88] Moreover, in the thirteenth-century *Martyrology* of Rabban Ṣalībā, Aḥā is commemorated for having brought a piece of the True Cross and as a bishop of Arzon.[89] Thus, based on literary and material evidence, we can say that the *Life of Aḥā* took its final form between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

◼ Abḥay, Aḥā, and Constantinopolitan Relics

In order to highlight the different modes of remembering Byzantium, let us recapitulate the similarities between the *Life of Abḥay* and the *Life of Aḥā*. These two texts might have been originally authored in earlier time periods, completely separate from each other. Yet, their final versions, preserved together in the Syriac hagiographical tradition, display important parallels. As explained previously, the story of Abḥay bringing martyrs' bones from Constantinople resonates with a similar episode in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*. This is significant in that the latter also provides a close parallel to the fragment of the True Cross episode in the *Life of Aḥā*, since Peter the Iberian acquires a piece of the True Cross in Constantinople together with the martyrs' bones. Thus, the *Life of Aḥā* and the *Life of Abḥay* both include stories of relics that might have been based on a common source.

Both of the lives depict the holy men as going to Athens, which is associated with philosophers, another rare trope in Syriac hagiography.[90] Moreover, both of the saints develop intricate relationships with Roman patrons in the course of their monastic endeavors. Abḥay is protected by the Roman governor Proclus, who connects the holy man to the emperor. Aḥā has three Roman patrons: Theodoros, a landlord in northern Mesopotamia and Aḥā's lifelong patron;[91] Demetrius the

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[86] "Dayr al-Salib," *e-GEDSH*, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/al-Salib-Dayr. Michael the Syrian also refers to the monastery as the "Monastery of the Cross" in his writings. Afram Barsawm, *The History of Tur Abdin* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008) 29.

[87] *Qartmin Trilogy* 23. For the accounts of the evangelization of Armenians in Armenian historiography, see Robert Thomson, "Literary Interactions between Syriac and Armenian," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 10 (2010) 3–19, at 4–5, 7.

[88] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 13–18; Wright, *Catalogue*, 1140–41.

[89] Peeters, "Le martyrologe," 174, 187.

[90] *L. Abḥay* 584; *L. Aḥā,* VS 37, 186ᵛ.

[91] *L. Aḥā,* VS 37, 179ᵛ–180ʳ.

Roman, the commander of a fortress in northern Mesopotamia and a benefactor of Aḥā's monastery;[92] and Maksīmūs and Dursīlā, a Roman household who provided protection and patronage for Aḥā.[93] Last, Abḥay and Aḥā are both connected to the city of Melitene. Abḥay's monastery is geographically in the vicinity of Melitene. Aḥā is not in that region; but, after converting Armenians, he summons the bishop of Melitene to baptize the converts and ordain priests.[94] In addition to these parallels, as shown above, the *Life of Aḥā* was grouped together with other texts by Michael the Syrian in two manuscripts. Thus, based on narratological and material evidence, although the authorship and editorial layers of the *Life of Aḥā* are elusive, its connection to the *Life of Abḥay* goes beyond the mere use of the motif of Constantinopolitan relics.

Despite the parallels, the two lives portray the Roman Empire differently. The emperor Theodosius and the Royal City appear in a positive light in the *Life of Abḥay*. Michael, who edited the *Life*, did not, of course, have a one-dimensional view of the Roman Empire. He in fact portrayed post-Chalcedonian emperors as heretics in some of his other writings.[95] Still, during his editorial process he must have approved (if he did not add himself) the *Life of Abḥay*'s portrayal of pre-Chalcedonian emperors as pious Christians, Constantinople as a source of holy relics, and the connections of these to Syrian monasticism. The *Life of Aḥā* also perpetuates this ideal in broad terms, for the author of the *Life* depicts Constantinople as a source of holy relics. Yet the *Life*, rather than allocating extensive space to narrate the Roman Empire, focuses on the relic itself. This was likely not an active erasure of memory but a different mode of remembering, for the text connects the holy man to the Roman Empire through local Roman patrons.[96] Stories of Theodoros, Demetrius, and Maksīmūs and Dursīlā replace the memories of the Royal City and emperors while rendering the memories of the Roman Empire present in households, fortresses, and monasteries in the countryside.

The brief treatment of Constantinople in the *Life of Aḥā* may be due to the fact that the relic episode was added later, as Vööbus suggests,[97] and that whoever edited

[92] Ibid., 184ʳ–185ᵛ. Commander Demetrios is mentioned in another well-known hagiographical text in the region, the *Life of Simeon of the Olives*. The hagiographer gives an account of Demetrios, who, with the command of *Qunstantinus*, built the fortress of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn. "He loved [the fortress] and cherished it more than all of his realm, and he subjected to it all the regions which were in the east." *L. Simeon of the Olives*, fol. 704ᵛ–705ʳ, Midyat ms. (the *Life of Simeon* extends from folio 698ᵛ to 763ʳ). On Simeon of the Olives, see Fiey, *Saints syriaques*, entry 412; Jack Tannous, "The *Life of Simeon of the Olives*: A Christian Puzzle from Islamic Syria," in *Motions of Late Antiquity* (ed. Kreiner and Reimitz) 309–30; Robert Hoyland, et al., *The Life of Simeon of the Olives: An Entrepreneurial Saint of Early Islamic North Mesopotamia* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2021).

[93] *L. Aḥā,* VS 37, 186ᵛ.

[94] Ibid., 188ᵛ–189ʳ.

[95] Andy Hilkens, "'Sons of Magog' or 'Thorgomians'? The Description of the Turks (Book XIV) in Michael's *Chronicle* and Its Armenian Adaptations," in *Syriac Encounters* (ed. Doerfler, Fiano, and Smith) 411; Teule, "Syriac Renaissance," 17.

[96] For active and passive memory and forgetting, see Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 97–99.

[97] Vööbus, *Quelques*, 13.

the text was interested in establishing the prestige of the holy man more than he was in remembering Byzantium. That is, the muted representation of Byzantium might have been a practical choice of the editor. Still, the story of a Syriac holy man acquiring a piece of the True Cross in Constantinople requires further attention, since the very inclusion of this story in the *Life* ties the latter to the *Life of Abḥay* and brings us back to the broader intra-Christian rivalries.

◼ Relics and Religious Rivalry

The period from the ninth to the thirteenth century witnessed important cultural encounter, literary exchange, theological debate, and political strife between the Syriac and the Armenian churches.[98] Although the two lives analyzed above might have been authored anywhere in this time interval, the memories of Byzantium highlighted in these texts were most effective around the twelfth century, during Michael the Syrian's patriarchate. Michael himself was among the prominent participants in the political developments. For example, the anti-patriarch to Michael, Theodore b. Wahbun (d. 1193), was supported by the Armenian Catholicos.[99] While such controversies took place, there were significant literary engagements between the two churches. Many texts were copied, translated, and interpreted between Syriac and Armenian communities.[100] Michael the Syrian gave extensive accounts of Armenian communities in his *Chronicle*, versions of which were translated from Syriac to Armenian.[101] Furthermore, a copy of Michael's *Chronicle*, together with other Syriac manuscripts from the library of the Monastery of Barṣawmā, were transferred to the See of the Armenian Catholicos in the thirteenth century.[102] Theological debates should also be highlighted here. The writings of numerous Syriac clerics, including the works of John bar Šūšan (d. 1073) and Dionysius bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171) refuting the doctrine of the Armenian Church, are witnesses of the theological controversies in the twelfth century and beyond.[103] The Syriac Church was intricately related to and closely familiar with the Armenian Church.

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[98] Lucas Van Rompay, "Armenian Christianity, Syriac Contacts With," *e-GEDSH*, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/Armenian-Christianity-Syriac-contacts-with; J. J. S. Weitenberg, "Armeno-Syrian Cultural Relations in the Cilician Period (12th–14th c.)," in *Syriac Renaissance* (ed. Teule et al.) 341–52.

[99] Weltecke, "Michael I Rabo."

[100] See, e.g., Edward G. Mathews, "The Early Armenian Hermit: Further Reflections on the Syriac Sources," *St. Nersess Theological Review* 10 (2005) 20–44; idem, "Syriac into Armenian: The Translations and Their Translators," *Etchmiadzin* 6 (2012) 12–40; Thomson, "Literary Interactions," 3–19; Sebastian Brock, "The Armenian Translation of the Syriac *Life of St. Ephrem* and Its Syriac Source," in *Reflections on Armenia and the Christian Orient: Studies in Honour of Vrej Nersessian* (ed. Christiane Esche-Ramshorn; Yerevan: Ankyunacar, 2017) 119–30.

[101] Van Rompay, "Armenian Christianity"; Andrea Schmidt, "Die zweifache armenische Rezension der syrischen Chronik Michaels des Großen," *Le Muséon* 109 (1996) 299–319.

[102] Hilkens, "'Sons of Magog' or 'Thorgomians'?," 401–14.

[103] Otto Lichti, "Das Sendschreiben des Patriarchen Barschuschan an den Catholicus der Armenier,"

Familiarity with the history of the Armenian Church entails familiarity with the prominent alliances between Byzantium and Armenia.[104] Discovery of Armenian martyrs' relics, particularly of the patron saint Gregory the Illuminator (d. 331) in the ninth century in Constantinople, were important "gestures of recognition [of the Byzantine Empire] toward the Armenian tradition."[105] Relic transmissions from Byzantium to Armenia continued in the following centuries. Basil II's (d. 1025) endowment of a fragment of the True Cross to the monastery of Aparankᶜ in Vaspurakan in Armenia was, for example, a well-known event.[106] There were earlier traditions of the True Cross in the Armenian Church,[107] yet the tradition about the *Constantinopolitan* relic appears to have developed in the eleventh century with Basil II's endowment.

The spiritual connections of the Armenian Church to Byzantium, alongside the periodic political alliances between the two, likely had strong reverberations in the broader social milieu of the Near East. It is worth noting that in the second half of the twelfth century the Armenian clerical hierarchy in Cilicia developed strategic alliances with Byzantium, Rome, and Latin Christians.[108] In this time period, stories circulated widely in Edessa about the Crusaders using the fragments of True Cross of Vaspurakan.[109] Although many of these events might have been literary constructions of the Armenian literature, the narratives of Constantinopolitan relics likely opened venues of conversation between various churches. I do not claim that such conversations started in the twelfth century; certainly, they took place in earlier time periods as well. For example, comparing the literatures of the Armenian and Georgian churches in the seventh century, Zaroui Pogossian suggests that the Armenian *Homily on the Cross of Varag* might have reflected

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JAOS 32 (1912) 268–342; François Nau, "Lettre du patriarche jacobite Jean X (1064–1073) au catholique arménien Grégoire II (1065–1105)," *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 17 (1912) 145–198; Robert Thomson, "Armenian Literary Culture through the Eleventh Century," in *Armenian People* (ed. Hovannisian) 199–239, at 224–25; Alphonse Mingana, *The Work of Dionysius Barṣalībī against the Armenians* (Woodbrooke Studies 4; 1931; repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010); Sebastian Brock, "Dionysios bar Ṣalibi," *e-GEDSH*, https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/Dionysios-bar-Salibi; Teule, "Syriac Renaissance," 15–17.

[104] Garsoian, "Problem of Armenian Integration," 53–124. For Armenian kings' relations with non-Byzantine states, see A. E. Dostourian, *Armenia and the Crusades: Tenth to Twelfth Centuries; The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993); J. J. S. Weitenberg, "Literary Contacts in Cilician Armenia," in *East and West in the Crusader States: Context—Contacts—Confrontations; Acta of the Congress Held at Hernen Castle in May 1993* (ed. Krijnie Ciggaar, Adelbert Davids, and Herman Teule; OLA 75; Leuven: Peeters, 1996) 63–72.

[105] Garsoian, "Problem of Armenian Integration," 73.

[106] Jean-Pierre Mahé, "Basile II et Byzance vus par Grigor Narekac'i," *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 555–73; Frolow, *Vraie Croix*, 85.

[107] Zaroui Pogossian, "Relics, Rulers, Patronage: The True Cross of Varag and the Church of the Holy Cross on Ałtʿamar," in *The Church of the Holy Cross in Ałtʿamar: Politics, Art, Spirituality in the Kingdom of Vaspurakan* (ed. Zaroui Pogossian and Edda Vardanyan; Leiden: Brill, 2019) 126–206.

[108] Charles A. Frazee, "The Christian Church in Cilician Armenia: Its Relations with Rome and Constantinople to 1198," *CH* 45 (1976) 166–84.

[109] Pogossian, "Relics, Rulers, Patronage," 128.

"a possible rivalry between these Caucasian [Armenian and Albanian] princes for obtaining Roman favours and/or asserting their political might and legitimacy through relics, especially one of the True Cross."[110] Agreeing with Pogossian's assessment, I argue that the Syriac Church *also* became a participant in this broader discourse about Constantinopolitan relics in the Near East by the twelfth century. Patronage of Roman emperors could bring protection, financial prosperity, and clerical authority to Christian communities in the East. Considering such high stakes, it is only expected that spiritual connections to Byzantium were narrated in the hagiographies of various communities.

The two Syriac *lives* analyzed above appear to reflect the concerns of the Syriac Church regarding the Armenian Church. In the context of the competition with the Armenian Church, the Syriac community reinforced memories with which the history of the Syriac Church was connected to the history of Byzantium. Pieces of the True Cross, or five hundred pieces of martyrs' relics, motifs embellishing the saints' lives*,* were the Syrian Orthodox Church's creation of a Roman past, while the Armenian Church was establishing its connections to the Roman Empire in the present.

Syriac-Armenian competition could be interpreted through other literature as well. For example, one can take the Armenian historian Matthew of Edessa's (d. 1144) depiction of the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX's (d. 1055) greeting and veneration of the Armenian patriarch Petros Getadarj in Constantinople:

> Learning of his arrival, the entire city of Constantinople, together with the great nobles, rushed in excitement to meet the lord Petros and brought him with awesome pomp to Hagia Sophia. There the emperor [Constantine IX] and the patriarch [Michael Keroularios], having come to meet him, brought him to a magnificent palace. And the king ordered that all of lord Petros' expenses should be covered. . . . The next day, lord Petros went to call on the emperor at the palace. The king, having heard of his coming, went forth to meet him and ordered that lord Petros be seated on a golden throne. And in this manner, lord Petros lived four years gloriously in Constantinople among the Romans, and every day he grew in glory and honor among the Greeks.[111]

This scene, embellished with details such as the emperor and the Greek patriarch's excitement to receive the Armenian patriarch, their seating the latter on a golden throne, and their continuous glorification of him, closely resonates with Abḥay's arrival at Constantinople and reception by the emperor Theodosius:

> And when they entered the city and were seen by the archbishop and the emperor, the emperor said to the blessed one, "Pray for me, o God's servant, because for this I wished to see you, this way you would pray for me. Let the truth unfold before you, o God's chosen one, that the God who chose you for His service, also to me, a sinner, made known and showed how you

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[110] Ibid., 151.
[111] Excerpt and translation in Garsoian, "Problem of Armenian Integration," 80.

separated (yourself) from your monastery and from your blessed brother, and how you came to this region. Therefore, now I ask from you that you don't distance yourself from me for all the rest of my life." When the blessed one saw the humility of the words of the righteous emperor and saw also that he deserved true revelations, he thanked God and was happy and rejoiced. The emperor commanded, and they made them dwell at the Monastery of Blessed Yuḥanān.[112]

An emperor venerating a saint is certainly a generic, conventional trope of Christian hagiography, and I do not suggest any direct intertextuality between these two texts quoted above. Moreover, the passage from Matthew of Edessa's chronicle does not fully capture the complex (and often negative) attitudes of the Armenian historian toward the Byzantine Empire.[113] Nevertheless, the use of this episode in Syriac and Armenian churches' contemporaneous literatures is noteworthy. The two communities were aware of the claims the other was making, and the way they were making them, for there were voluminous translations between the two communities, as mentioned above. These literary strategies, which played a significant role in the making of Syriac and Armenian identities, were shared between the two Christian communities, not in isolation from each other, but in response and conversation.

One also finds tropes directly mentioning the Armenian communities in medieval Syriac hagiography. Armenians, especially "pagan Armenians," is a rare motif in Syriac hagiography.[114] Aḥā, as mentioned above, is said to have converted a community of tree-worshiping Armenians, who were in the end baptized by a bishop from Melitene. In the *Life of Jacob the Recluse*, another text included in both BL 12174 and VS 37,[115] the holy man exchanges letters with King Stephen of Armenia but refuses his gifts.[116] Armenia is more prominent in these narratives relative to

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[112] *L. Abḥay* 576, line 18–577, line 6:

ܘܡܢ ܕܝܢ ܚܕܝ ܚܕܝܒܝܗ܆ ܘܐܠܨܝܘܗܝ ܚܙܝܢ ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܘܚܢܒܚܟܐ܆ ܐܡܪ ܚܕܘ ܗܘ ܡܚܕܐ ܟܐܡܬܐ܆ ܠܐ ܚܟܬ܆ ܐܘ ܚܕܪܐ ܘܐܠܐܗܐ܆ ܘܡܗܝܐ ܗܘܐ ܚܕܝܬ ܘܐܣܒܝ܆ ܐܬܒܠ ܘܐܒܠܐ ܚܟܬ. ܐܝܗܘܐ ܘܝ ܗܢܙܐ ܚܕܐܠܝ܆ ܐܘ ܝܚܣܐ ܘܐܠܐܗܐ܆ ܘܝܗܘ ܐܠܐܗܐ ܗܘ ܝܚܒܝ ܚܐܡܥܡܚܠܐ܆ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܚܕ ܟܣܗܠܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܚܠܐ ܚܟܝܒ܆ ܘܐܬܣܚܐ ܐܠܐܙܢܐܒܐ ܡܢ ܘܢܒܝ ܗܡܝ ܐܣܗܝ ܘܗܚܕܬ܆ ܐܢܐܚܟܐ ܐܠܐܠܟ ܚܚܒܝܢܐ ܗܘܘܐ. ܚܪܝܝܡܝ ܗܗܐ ܚܚܐ ܐܒܐ ܚܒܝ܆ ܘܠܐ ܐܠܐܢܣܚ ܡܢ ܚܠܐܢܒ ܚܚܕܟܗ ܗܢܙܚܐ ܘܣܬ. ܠܚܕܐ ܘܝ ܚܙ ܣܐܠ ܡܚܣܚܡܐ ܦܠܝܡܚܥܗܘܒ ܘܗܚܕܟܐ ܚܐܒܐ: ܘܐܕܙ ܗܐܗܘ ܘܐܗܥܐܠܗܒ ܚܚܝܚܢܬܐ ܗܢܙܬܐ: ܐܗܘܒ ܠܠܚܥܗܐ ܡܒܝܗ ܗܘܗܝ. ܘܗܚܡ ܡܚܚܐ܆ ܘܐܗܥܢܒ ܐܠܝ ܚܒܝܙܐ ܘܡܚܢܒ ܢܒܝܚܝ.

[113] On Matthew of Edessa's view of the Byzantines, the Crusaders, and others, see Christopher MacEvitt, "The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa: Apocalypse, the First Crusade, and the Armenian Diaspora," *DOP* 61 (2007) 157–81; Frazee, "Christian Church in Cilician Armenia," 177.

[114] The Syriac *Life of Simeon the Stylite*, for example, briefly mentions Armenians among a group of peoples who came to visit the holy man (Simeon bar Eupolemos and Bar Ḥaṭar, *L. Simeon the Stylite* [trans. Doran] §77). In John of Ephesus's *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (6th cent.), again, there is no particular trope about Armenians. In this text, there are only two holy men, a certain Thomas and Sergius, who, John says, were from Armenia; John of Ephesus, *L. Eastern Saints*, 1:283; 2:659 ("John of Ephesus: *Lives of the Eastern Saints*" [ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks; PO 17, 18, 19; Paris: Firmin Didot, 1923–26]).

[115] BL Add. 12174, 411ᵛ–424ʳ; Wright, *Catalogue*, 1135–36; Assemani, *Codices*, 245.

[116] *L. Jacob the Recluse* ("St. Jacob the Recluse," in *Monks of Mount Izla* [trans. Dale Johnson; Lulu Press, 2004] 168–69). This detail was probably added to the *Life* in the 12th cent. since there is no Armenian king known by the name of Stephen prior to the 12th-cent. king Stephen of Armenia (d. 1165). For a summary of the *Life*, see François Nau, "Résumé de monographies syriaques.

late antique Syriac hagiography in which there are rare and vague mentions of Armenia and the Armenians. This quantitative change in stories about Armenia in Syriac hagiography might be due to the ongoing competition with the Armenian Church. This is a preliminary observation, which must be followed by an in-depth comparative analysis of Syriac and Armenian hagiographical traditions to see how religious rivalries are reflected in hagiography. Still, I suggest considering these rivalries while reconstructing the ways in which stories about relics coming from Constantinople were interpreted in the Middle Ages.

■ Concluding Remarks

Abḥay brings five hundred pieces of martyrs' bones from Constantinople to the east in the fifth century. A century later, following Abḥay's itinerary, Aḥā also travels to Constantinople and brings a piece of the True Cross to northern Mesopotamia. Such stories about Constantinopolitan relics first appeared around the sixth century and became prominent by the twelfth century in the Syrian Orthodox Church. By comparing two underexplored Syriac texts that include stories about relics coming from Constantinople, this article demonstrated how hagiography served in the creation of memories of Rome for Syrian Orthodox communities. In the *Life of Abḥay*, with the holy man's bringing five hundred pieces of martyrs' bones from Constantinople, vivid memories of Byzantium, the Royal City, the palace, and the Roman emperor were anchored to a monastery in the upper Euphrates region. In the *Life of Aḥā*, while a piece of the True Cross was brought to monasteries at the borderland between Syria and Armenia, Byzantine memories faded to the background. With this comparative analysis I have demonstrated the different modes of remembering Byzantium in the Syrian Orthodox Church, highlighting how the motif of Constantinopolitan relics was a literary tool to narrate the past and potential future relationships between Byzantium and the Syriac Church. The motif, I further argued, also rendered Syriac hagiography a space for interpreting the relationships with the neighboring Armenian Church. The latter was often in rivalry with the Syriac Church for Byzantine patronage, patriarchal acknowledgment, and communal presence. Stories like that of Abḥay and Aḥā catalyzed that rivalry. Overall, through the stories of Abḥay and Aḥā, we see a medieval Syriac community that engaged in conversations with various churches near and far and connected its history to a mythical Constantinople from which holy relics came to the monasteries in the East.

Barṣauma, Abraham de la Haute Montagne, Siméon de Kefar ʿAbdin, Yaret l'Alexandrin, Jacques le reclus, Romanus, Talia, Asia, Pantaléon, Candida, Sergis et Abraham de Caščar," *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, ser. 2, 10 [20] (1915–1917) 3–32. Also see Fiey, *Saints syriaques*, entry 227.