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### What do we mean by Syriac?

The spread of Syriac was due to at least two factors: the spread of Christianity in the Semitic-speaking world, and commerce on the Silk Road, both activities sometimes combined. Today, a few million Christians in India of various denominations follow the Syriac tradition.

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### Syriac languages

Syriac is a form of Aramaic, a language whose many dialects have been in continuous use since the 11th century BC. Originally the language of the Aramean people, Aramaic became the *lingua franca* of the Near East by the 6th century BC. It was the native tongue of the ancient Chaldeans, a second language to the Assyro-Babylonians, an official language of the Persian Achaemenians, and a common language of the Jews replacing Hebrew. Jesus and the Apostles spoke and preached in Aramaic. Syriac is the Aramaic dialect of Edessa

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### Relat of Syriac to Arabic and Surrounding Region

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A matter of proximity, but not of the same genesis.

When the Arabs desired to transmit the Greek sciences into Arabic during the 8th and 9th centuries, they turned to their Syriac subjects to do the task. In most cases, these Syriac scholars translated the works first into their native language then into Arabic. As a result, many of the Arabic scientific terminology, including the names of plants, are rooted in Syriac. Scientific works and terminology from other cultures, such as Persian and Indian, passed to Arabic via Syriac; a noted example is the name of the chemical element Zirconium (via Syriac *zargono* 'color of gold').

In addition to the general decline in literature productivity in the Middle East during this period, the Syriac-speaking communities went through many hardships. Persecutions and massacres under Ottoman Turkey left the Syriac people in continuous fear. The persecutions culminated in 1915, what the Syriac people call 'The Year of the Sword' when hundreds of thousands were collectively massacred. The result was the migration

the Syriac people to other countries of the Middle East, as well as the Diaspora in the west.

Another new phenomenon appeared in the 17th and 18th centuries: the translations of western spiritual works into Syriac.

### **Who are the Syriac Fathers?**

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Joseph of Aramathea

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The churches of the Syriac tradition are: The Syriac Orthodox Church, The Assyrian Church of the East, The Maronite Syriac Church, The Chaldean Church, The Syriac Catholic Church, and the various churches of the St. Thomas Christians in India.

### **Modern Oriental Orthodox Churches**

Non-Chalcedonians:

- The [Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria](#) : the portion of the [Church of Alexandria](#) which broke from the Byzantine churches in the wake of the [Fourth Ecumenical Council](#) in [Chalcedon](#) in 451. Sharing a common heritage before with the Chalcedonian Church of Alexandria, it traces its origins to the [Apostle Mark](#). The church is one of the [Oriental Orthodox](#) churches. Its leader is the Coptic Pope of Alexandria, currently [Pope Theodore II](#). The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria cares for about 18 million Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt and abroad, besides being the Mother Church of both the [Ethiopian](#) and [Eritrean](#) Orthodox Tewahido Churches. More than 95% of the Christians of Egypt are Coptic Orthodox
  - The [British Orthodox Church](#), canonically part of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria since 1994
- The [Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch](#) (sometimes called 'Jacobite')
- **Slide 7**
  - [Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church](#), a branch and integral part of the Syriac Orthodox Church with the Oriental Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch as its supreme head.
- The [Church of Armenia](#) (sometimes called the Armenian Apostolic Church) Tradition tells us that the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew first brought Christianity to the land of the Armenians in the first century. However, it would not be for about 200 more years that Armenia would become the first country to

adopt [Christianity](#) as a state religion, in AD 301, when St. [Gregory the Illuminator](#), a missionary from [Caesarea](#), converted the king of Armenia, Trdat IV, to Christianity.

- The [Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church](#) (sometimes called the Indian Orthodox Church)
- The [Ethiopian Orthodox Church](#) The Church of Ethiopia claims its origins from [Philip the Evangelist](#) ([Acts 8](#)). It became the established church of the Ethiopian Axumite Kingdom under king Ezana in the 4th century through the efforts of a Syrian Greek named [Fruementius](#), known in Ethiopia as *Abba Selama, Kesaté Birhan* ("Father of Peace, Revealer of Light"). As a boy, Fruementius had been shipwrecked with his brother Aedesius on the Eritrean coast. The brothers managed to be brought to the royal court, where they rose to positions of influence and converted Emperor Ezana to Christianity, causing him to be baptized. Ezana sent Fruementius to Alexandria to ask the Patriarch, St. [Athanasius](#), to appoint a bishop for Ethiopia. Athanasius appointed Fruementius himself, who returned to Ethiopia as Bishop
- The [Eritrean Orthodox Church](#)

### Slide 8 – Fathers of the Syriac Church

Anicetus of Rome

Gregory Bar-Hebræus

Basil of Beth Man'em

Cyriacus of Antioch

Elijah of Antioch

Ephraim of Antioch

Ephrem the Syrian

Eustathius of Kunnamkulam

Fruementius of Axum

George I of Antioch

Gregory III of Rome

Isaac of Syria

Jacob Baradaeus

Jacob of Edessa

Jacob of Nisibis

Jacob of Serugh

John of Mardin

John of Sedre

John the Cantor

Julius of Goa

Mar Awgin

Marutha of Tikrit

Moses of Beth Romon

Nine Saints Who Missionized Ethiopia

Palladius the Hermit

Paul of Edessa

Pelagia of Antioch

Severus Sabukht

Simon of Harran

Theodora (wife of Justinian)

Thomas of Mabugh

### Slide 9: Other Notable Figures of the Syriac East

**APHRAATES:** THE oldest Syrian Church Father Aphraates (or Afrahat), called the Persian sage, was an ascetic and probably also a bishop (in the monastery of St. Matthew near

Mosul?). Twenty-three treatises, wrongly called homilies, are extant, which were written in the years 337 (1-10), 344 (11-22) and 345 (23); they give a kind of survey of the whole body of Christian doctrine.

The author writes inter alia on faith (1), charity (2), fasting (3), prayer (4), exhortation to ascetics (6), penance (7), the resurrection of the dead (8), on "Christ, that he is the Son of God" (17). He frequently attacks the Jews and attaches great importance to asceticism. He is as yet hardly influenced by Greek philosophy and Nicene theology.

1. **CYRILLONAS**, a true poet, left six hymns, among them two on the Last Supper of Christ and a hymn of petition on the occasion of a plague of locusts and a threatening invasion of the Huns (396). Here the sacrificial character of the eucharist and the veneration of saints are also attested.

3. **Rabbula** (d. 436; acc. to Peeters), Bishop of Edessa, became a Christian c. 400 and a bishop c. 412. Shortly after the Council of Ephesus (431) he went over to Cyril of Alexandria and strongly opposed the followers of Nestorius who were numerous at the school of Edessa. In three short treatises he gives rules of life for priests and monks.

8. **Philoxenus of Mabbug** (Hierapolis), since 485 Metropolitan of M., Monophysite; exiled to Thracia in 518/9, d. in exile at Gangra c. 523, belongs to the classical Syrian theologians. Of his many writings (c. 80) the following have among others so far been printed : thirteen orations on the Christian life, five treatises on the Trinity and Incarnation and several letters. A translation of the Bible into Syriac has been named after him (*Philoxeniana*).

"Philoxenos of Mabbug, as we have already noted, was a strong critic of Nestorianism, which he believed had been subtly sanctioned by the Council of Chalcedon."<sup>1</sup> He saw no real difference between the Euthychians and Nestorians, since both denied the virgin birth and the consequences thereof. For him, "God the Son really became incarnate by uniting himself real and perfect manhood from the Virgin's womb. Any doctrine that denies or minimizes this truth is, for him a heresy which should be condemned."<sup>2</sup> While discussing the ideas that led to the rupture between Orthodox theology and the Monophysitic parties, we must take notice of the two ships passing in the night. "The dogmatic nature of Monophysitism is very much connected to Greek tradition – it is comprehensible only through Greek terminology, the Greek way of thinking and the

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel 260.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 261.

categories of Greek metaphysics. It was Greek theologians who worked out the dogma of the Monophysite church.”<sup>3</sup>

## Severus of Antioch

After Philoxenus, “It remained for the great sixth-century theologian Severus of Antioch to formulate the Monophysite positions in a more systematic way.”<sup>4</sup> Severus was not a Monophysite proper, but rather has been termed a diplophysite, which means that he believed “that there are two natures in Christ, but that this is only understood as being a “mental or analytical” understanding.

While Severus was patriarch of Antioch (512-518), he deposed Epiphanius, Bishop of Tyre, who was repeating against theopaschism the precise argument Theodoret himself has proposed after Chalcedon in his *Epitome*. Christ’s soul was immortal, and therefore, a fortiori, so was his divinity; consequently it was impossible to say that “God suffered.” That the Chalcedonians should have had recourse to such arguments in order to defend the council was in the eyes of the Monophysites justification enough for the accusation of Nestorianism. In spite of the distinction between ..... and ‘..... established at Chalcedon, the Chalcedonians continued to identify these two terms in practice.<sup>5</sup>

Severus believed he was following St Cyril’s formulations by saying “that Christ was a single essence (‘.....). This would exclude all duality in the qualities (‘.....) and all possibility of conceiving Christ as consubstantial with us. He explicitly intended to maintain a real duality within the one being designated by the words “one nature,” while avoiding confusion. He was thus led to speak of a composite (.....) nature or hypostasis.”<sup>6</sup> To avoid confusion, he went outside the bounds of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and came up with an alternate theology – not exactly parallel, and not exactly antithetical. He was unique in his theology, and “was the only Monophysite theologian to speak of “composition” within the single nature of Christ.”<sup>7</sup> He believed himself to be Cyrillian, and not Chalcedonian, which he thought to be a heresy to Christianity.

To further substantiate his own legitimacy, “Severus wrote against the Eutychians and Apollinarians. The Council of Chalcedon had had one beneficial effect on the non-Chalcedonians – it revealed to them that Apollinarius and Eutyches, and any theological

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<sup>3</sup> Florovsky 37.

<sup>4</sup> Eastern 40.

<sup>5</sup> Eastern 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> Eastern 41.

<sup>7</sup> Eastern 41. “His doctrine of “two natures” en theoria corresponds to that of Cyril, who uses precisely these terms to designate the duality of Christ, and like Cyril, he always preserves the synonymous character of ‘υποστασις and φυσις, whenever he speaks of the concrete being of Christ.” 42.

tendency in that direction, failed to explain adequately the mystery of salvation. The effect was to bring serious theologians such as Severus, Philoxenus and Peter the Iberian to reject the extremist faction of the Monophysite faction,"<sup>8</sup>

Each of the steps of Severus' theology were tolerated inasmuch as he had supporters at various times on each of the patriarchal thrones. But with the ascent of Justin I, his time had run out. The final blow from Severus, which led to his banishment was the "fact that the strict Dyophysites, who understood the Chalcedonian '.....' in the sense of the Antiochene "prosopon of union," were the council's main adherents between 451 and 518 did not encourage Severus and his disciples toward conciliation."<sup>9</sup>

They claim to not be monophysites of the Chalcedonian definition, but miaphysites. Miaphysitism holds that in the one person of [Jesus Christ](#), Divinity and Humanity are united in one "nature" ("[physis](#)"), the two being united without separation, without confusion, and without alteration.

Miaphysitism has often been considered by [Chalcedonian](#) Christians to be a form of [monophysitism](#), but the Oriental Orthodox Churches themselves reject this characterization, a position which the [Eastern Orthodox](#) and [Roman Catholic](#) Churches have begun to take more seriously.

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### Relat of Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches

Prior to the [Council of Chalcedon](#) in 451 the Church of Antioch was united, but after the Council two lines of patriarchs arose, one supported by the East Roman Empire that favored Chalcedon and another persecuted by the East Romans that rejected Chalcedon. The Church is also known as the *Jacobite* Church after one of the more prominent leaders of the movement against Chalcedon, [Jacob Baradaeus](#),

### On Slide 10: Prayer Service for abducted Syrian hierarchs to be held April 21

HAWORTH, NJ [Assembly of Bishops Communications]: The [Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America](#) and the [Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in America](#) [SCOOC] will hold a "Common Prayer Service" for the safety of the two Syrian hierarchs held in captivity—Antiochian Orthodox Metropolitan Paul Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Archbishop John Ibrahim—and for all who

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<sup>8</sup> Florovsky 105.

<sup>9</sup> Eastern 44.

are suffering calamities in the Middle East at Saint Gabriel Syriac Orthodox Church, 750 Sunset Avenue, Haworth, NJ at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 21, 2016.

Metropolitan Paul—brother of His Beatitude, Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East—and Archbishop John were abducted on the morning of April 22, 2013 as they were traveling together on the road between Antioch (Antakya, Turkey) and the north Syrian city of Aleppo. While the driver of the vehicle in which they were traveling was killed in the attack, the hierarchs were taken captive. Their fate remains uncertain.

This gesture of prayerful solidarity between the Assembly of Bishops and SCOOCCH also marks the commencement of the formal dialogue and cooperation between the two bodies.

Distinguished speakers will include His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Chairman of the Assembly of Bishops and Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; His Eminence, Archbishop Khajag Barsamian, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America [Eastern] and Chairman of SCOOCCH; His Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America; and His Eminence, Archbishop Mor Dionysius Jean Kawak, Patriarchal Delegate of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern USA.

The Assembly of Bishops and SCOOCCH invite all residents of and visitors to the New York City Tri-State area to attend.

### **Slide 11: Trisagion Differences**

Various additions or modifications made to the Trisagion at certain points in history have been the subject of considerable controversy. According to Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, the phrase 'who wast crucified for us' was added to it by [Eustathius of Antioch](#) to combat the [Arians](#), although this is dismissed by some scholars.<sup>[3]</sup> It was more likely written during the time of [Peter the Fuller](#) who enforced its use as a sort of "test of orthodoxy against Nestorianism".<sup>[4]</sup> Those who understood the hymn as being addressed to the trinity (such as [John of Damascus](#)<sup>[5]</sup>), censured Peter for propagating the teaching of the [Theopaschites](#). Emperor [Anastasius I](#)'s attempt to adopt the addition in 512 at Constantinople resulted in a riot

Later [Severus](#), who was the [Non-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Antioch](#), wrote to prove the correct ascription of the hymn to the Son of God, and made the use of the emended version standard in his diocese. It is this form *Holy art thou, O God, Holy art thou, O Strong One, Holy art thou, O Immortal, crucified for us, have mercy on us* that is in use in the [Oriental Orthodox Churches](#).

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### St Ephraim the Syrian

"Whenever I have meditated upon You I have acquired a veritable treasure from You; whatever aspect of You I have contemplated, a stream has flowed from You; there is no way I can contain it. Your fountain, Lord, is hidden from the person who does not thirst for You" (Faith 32:2-3).

### Life of St Ephraim the Syrian

The most celebrated writer of this period, however, is Ephrem the Syrian. He is the theologian-poet *par excellence*, and "perhaps, the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante". Ephrem produced a wealth of theological works in prose and artistic poetry. His fame resulted in many writings of later centuries to be attributed to him. Of his genuine works, however, we have received many commentaries, expositions, refutations, letters, and above all poetry.

306 (Nisbis) - 373 or 379 (Edessa)

Evidence from Ephrem's hymnody suggests that both his parents were part of the growing Christian community in the city, although later hagiographers wrote that his father was a pagan priest.

Nisbis became Roman right before his childhood, under Diocletian, and the persecution came to his town.

St. [James](#) (Mar Jacob), the first [bishop](#) of Nisibis, was appointed in 308, and Ephrem grew up under his leadership of the community. St. James is recorded as a signatory at the [First Ecumenical Council](#) in 325. Ephrem was [baptized](#) as a youth, and James appointed him as a teacher (Syriac *malpânâ*, a title that still carries great respect for Syriac Christians). He was [ordained](#) as a [deacon](#) either at this time or later. He began to compose hymns and write biblical commentaries as part of his educational office. In his hymns, he sometimes refers to himself as a "herdsman" (*`allânâ*), to his [bishop](#) as the "shepherd" (*râ`yâ*) and his community as a "fold" (*dayrâ*). Ephrem is popularly credited as the founder of the School of Nisibis, which in later centuries was the centre of learning of the [Assyrian Church of the East](#) (i.e., the [Nestorians](#)).

Ordained a deacon in the later 320s.



Constantine dies in 337. Nisibis was besieged in 338, 346 and 350. During the first siege, Ephrem credits Bishop James as defending the city with his prayers.

After 359, Julian the Apostate, sole emperor, tries to consolidate his power in Mesopotamia and persecute the Christians. Julian dies on this campaign. Emperor Jovian, a Christian, cedes Nisibis back to Persia. The Christians had to leave as a result. Ephraim settled in Edessa in 363.

Ephrem comments that Orthodox Nicene Christians were simply called "Palutians" in Edessa, after a former bishop. [Arians](#), [Marcionites](#), [Manichees](#), [Bardaisanites](#) and various [Gnostic sects](#) proclaimed themselves as the true Church. In this confusion, Ephrem wrote a great number of hymns defending Orthodoxy. A later Syriac writer, [Jacob of Serugh](#), wrote that Ephrem rehearsed all female choirs to sing his hymns set to Syriac folk tunes in the forum of Edessa.

EPHRAEM is the great classic writer of the Syrian Church the "lyre of the Holy Spirit". He was born at Nisibis c. 306, very probably of Christian parents, and educated by James, the bishop of his native city.

The story that he accompanied his bishop to the Council of Nicaea and met Basil the Great at Caesarea and the report that he visited the Egyptian monks are probably later legends. Before 338 he became a deacon and remained one throughout his life. After Nisibis had been occupied by the Persians in 363 he left the city, together with many other Christians, and finally settled at Edessa, on Roman territory. The so-called "Persian School" at Edessa is probably connected with his teaching activities there (d. 373). Feast Day: June 18th. Doctor of the Church since 1920.

Ephraem is a brilliant exegete, controversialist, preacher and poet. It is almost impossible to survey the mass of writings he has left, for they have so far been neither critically edited nor have their contents been sufficiently examined and evaluated. The moral and devotional element predominates in them. Very early, many of his writings, which are for the greater part in metrical form were translated into other languages, especially into Armenian and Greek. From these translations other versions were made in Latin and the various oriental languages. Much material bearing his name is spurious, dubious or has been altered.

### **Slide 13:** *Points of Doctrine*

1. On the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology. His eighty hymns on the faith devoted to the struggle against Arianism show how little Ephraem is influenced by the Greek Fathers and their ideas derived from philosophy. Hence no really clear presentation of

the philosophical and theological problems of Trinitarian and Christological doctrines is to be expected. Even in theology the Syrian remains a poet using a language rich in images. Ephraem's notions are still vague and his terminology is imperfect. *Physis* (*Kyânâ*), e.g., may mean individual, but also approaches the meaning of essence. Naturally the distinction between *hypostasis* and *physis* finally established only by the Cappadocians is as yet non-existent in his theology. There is at the most a beginning to equate the term *quomâ* with *hypostasis* = *persona*. The Holy Spirit is never actually called God, though the baptismal formula and the liturgical doxologies could leave no doubt on his homoousian nature. Ephraem uses the strange expression *ignis et spiritus* for the Holy Spirit, a phrase also applied to the angels; it is also employed in his Christological statements and his teaching on the Eucharist (Beck 1949, 35ff., 49ff., 81 ff.).

2. He says about Mary: "You alone (Jesus) and your Mother are more beautiful than all, no stain is in you, Lord, and no blemish in your Mother" (*Carm. Nisib. 27f., 44f.; EP 719*). This statement, however, cannot yet be understood in the sense of the immaculate conception; this is ruled out by Ephraem's view of *iustitia originalis* and original sin. Cf., however, Ortiz de Urbina (v. infra).

3. In the eucharist "the living and life-giving Body is consumed" (ibid. 3, 77). In another passage Ephraem puts these words into the mouth of the city of Nisibis: "Be reconciled (O God) by the sacrifice on my altar" (1, 24). In his will he makes the following request: "When thirty days have passed after my death, offer the holy sacrifice for me; for the dead profit by the sacrifices offered by the living" (EP 741).

#### **Slide 14: Prayer of St Ephraim**

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art thou unto ages of ages. Amen.

O God, be gracious to me, a sinner.

#### **Slide 15:**

#### **Assigned Reading**