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**EAST SYRIAC POETRY OF THE 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES:  
THE WAYS OF EVOLUTION AND TRANSMISSION**

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## **General description**

The focus of this study is East Syriac poetry produced by Christian communities in the Middle East between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.

During this period, contacts between Christian communities of the Middle East and traditions of other religious and ethnic groups were very intense, which considerably enriched church literature (including Syriac) both in terms of content and poetic technique. Many historical events contributed to it: the conquest of the Near and Middle East by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, the conquest of these territories by the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and the establishment of contacts between Eastern Syriac communities and the Vatican in the mid-sixteenth century.

During this period, Christian communities already constituted a religious minority in the Muslim milieu, and the literary tradition in Classical Syriac (an eastern dialect of Aramaic) was markedly influenced by it. For this reason, until recently, scholars have neglected late Syriac poetry, apparently considering it secondary, in view of its very strong differences from the Syriac poetry of the classical period (4<sup>th</sup> –7<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Recent publications have demonstrated the fallacy of such an assessment of this material, which turned out to be very original and distinctive, and at the same time, an extreme insufficiency of its study became obvious. The author of this dissertation belongs to a scholarly direction, which believes that the poetry of this era is an important and promising material for the research.

## **Research topic**

Various aspects of the development and circulation of East Syriac poetry in the 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries are the main theme of this study. Each of the thematic chapters is devoted to the consideration of this problem on the material of different text-groups created in a particular historical era and transmitted during the following centuries. A significant place in the work is occupied by identifying the historical context of the composition of the works in question, as well as determining the

role of poetry in the cultural and religious life of Eastern Syriac communities. One of the key aspects of the study is the interaction of the Syriac literature with the Muslim poetic tradition in the 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

East Syriac poetry is understood here as poetry in classical Syriac written by representatives of the Church of the East ('Nestorian', localized mainly in Mesopotamia, Iran, Central Asia, and China), as well as poetic works composed within the Chaldean Church community (East Syriac Uniate Church), which was formed from the dioceses separated from the Church of the East after the Schism of 1552. As the study shows, the two communities were in close cultural interaction despite confessional and institutional opposition.

The study covers mainly medium and small poetic forms, for which the evolution and influence of contiguous traditions can be observed to the greatest extent. Moreover, most of these forms emerged in the Syriac poetic tradition precisely during the period in question. The chronological framework chosen for the study is not coincidental: this is the time-period in which the main stages in the evolution of East Syriac poetry can be traced.

The groups of texts analyzed in this research refer mainly to two periods of Middle Eastern history: Mongolian (second half of 13<sup>th</sup> century – beginning of 13<sup>th</sup> century) and Ottoman (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries). This is largely due to the history of Eastern Syriac communities, when two periods of heyday, the "Syriac Renaissance" (11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries) and the early Ottoman era (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries), were separated by more than a century of decline in manuscript tradition and books, following the devastation caused by the invasion of Timur (late 14<sup>th</sup> century) and other historical cataclysms.

### **Relevance of the dissertation**

The dissertation is relevant, because it is the first and only monographic study of the evolution of Syriac poetic forms in a Muslim environment. Syriac poetry of the late period has been little studied; the use of manuscripts from numerous Middle Eastern collections, previously inaccessible to researchers, seems

particularly relevant. In general, the texts studied in this work represent an important group of sources on the history of cultural interaction of Christian communities in the Middle East with other religious and cultural traditions.

### **Originality of the research**

The originality of the research can be characterized by the following main parameters:

- The work contains dozens of previously unstudied and unpublished texts, which are presented here in the original with a critical apparatus and in translation.
- These texts are for the first time brought into scholarly circulation, their poetic features and the historical context of their creation are investigated.
- The main directions and milestones of the evolution of East Syriac poetry in the 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries have been determined for the first time.

It may be noted that the most innovative in this dissertation is **Chapter 1**, which for the first time analyses in detail the *Wardā* book – a unique hymnographic collection, and **Chapter 4** that discusses the role of Eastern Syriac poetry in the design and manuscript circulation, basing on previously unstudied material.

### **Methodological basis**

The methodological basis of the dissertation is constituted by philological research methods: at the level of edition – palaeography and codicology (identification of manuscripts, their dating and attribution based on the analysis of writing and technological features of the manuscript), textual analysis (reconstruction of the history of the text, establishment of its editions, forms of circulation); as regards work studies – literary analysis (determining the poetic characteristics of texts, identifying the main features of individual style of different authors), comparative and historical analysis (comparing texts in diachronic sense, identifying the main stages in the evolution of poetic forms and

features of artistic style in each era), linguistic analysis (mainly in works that use unusual vocabulary, such as characteristic groups of borrowings). Along with philological methods, based on an integrated toolkit, a historical approach (defining historical and cultural context) and elements of art-historical analysis (attributing works of art based on their visual features) are applied, mainly in the section devoted to poems embedded in manuscript decorative compositions.

In his research, the author of the thesis has made extensive use of the digitized Middle Eastern manuscript collections available on the vHMML website since 2017. This resource made the writing of this dissertation possible by giving its author access to many previously unknown texts. It is particularly relevant for the study of short poems, which are often located between the main works, on the flyleaves, or the ‘paratextual’ parts of the manuscript (scribal introduction, colophon and flyleaves) and are not covered by cataloguing. A walk-through of the manuscripts in all available collections is therefore necessary to identify them. This operation also gives the researcher an idea, albeit preliminary, of statistical patterns of distribution and evolution of certain verse texts, their correlation with certain types of manuscripts. Previously, this view could not be drawn from the Syriac manuscript collections in Europe and the United States due to the random selection and comparative paucity compared to the total manuscript production in the Middle East.

### **Goals and objectives of the study**

The initial objective of the study was to introduce into scientific circulation numerous previously unknown East Syriac poetic texts of the 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries through critical editions with translations. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to address textual issues associated with these pieces, to reconstruct their textual history, the history of their use, to identify the main recensions of the works.

The search for solutions to these problems made it possible for the author to set more general goals and objectives, associated with the history of poetic forms and

defining the historical context that influenced the complex literary processes. The tasks defined by the research objectives can be formulated as follows:

- Identifying the corpus of the works under consideration, to determine the main recensions of the poetic texts and the types of collections and anthologies in which they occur.
- Analyzing the poetic features of the texts under consideration, characterizing the main verse forms of the 13<sup>th</sup> –17<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Revealing the historical context in which poetic works were created (events of political history, biographical features of poets and figures who are the subject of poems).
- Restoring the chronology of the main milestones in the evolution of poetic forms, their dissemination, and the role of each of the poets in this process.
- To establish links and relationships between the East Syriac poetic texts under consideration and the poetic tradition of the Muslim milieu (Arabic and Persian).

More briefly, the objectives of the study can be formulated as follows: a) identifying the corpus of texts; b) analyzing their features and ways of distribution; c) identifying the main stages of their evolution; d) establishing the reasons (historical and cultural) that influenced this process.

**Theses to be defended:**

- The *Wardā* hymnological collection is a multi-layered literary work, which took shape over several centuries. Presumably, at least three main stages can be distinguished: 1) the composition of a small number of hymns attributed to Gīwargīs Wardā (probably first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century); 2) the compilation of a hymnological collection for the entire liturgical year by adding new hymns; 3) the addition to the main body of the collection of

supplement of hymns dedicated to martyrs, founders of monasteries in Mesopotamia and Catholicoi of the Church of the East.

– The capture of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 and the establishment of the new Ilkhan (Hulaguid) dynasty, which was sympathetic to Christian communities, led to a change in poetry, introducing new themes and forms and experimenting with rhythm and rhyme. The structurally complex and innovative works continued to bear the names of traditional Syriac poetic forms, which have undergone a reinterpretation.

– The quatrain form became widespread in Syriac literature in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of Persian poetry. At the same time, the poetic stanza consisting of four lines was the most popular as early as in Syriac extensive strophic poetry of pre-Islamic times. Hence the term *tar'ā* came to be understood both as a quatrain and as a stanza of a larger poetic work. Later on, this seems to have contributed to the wide spread in the Syriac poetic tradition of small thematic quatrain collections related to each other in content.

– A distinctive feature of East Syriac poetry from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards was the fact that its main authors were priests, church hierarchs, and, at the same time, authoritative copyists of Church books. This determined the development of poetry for several centuries: copying of books and the work of the calligrapher became one of central themes of the poetic texts.

– For the above reason, author's poetry collections are not widespread, unlike in the Persian and Arabic traditions. Poetic hymns, which have gained popularity from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, are usually grouped in collections organised according to the church calendar; they often include texts by more than one author.

- Copying church books and developing the canon for their design, church hierarchs and priests, being poets, introduced verse passages in the paratextual parts of liturgical books: scribal introductions, colophons and notes.
- The main form of scribal poetry was quatrains, or small strophic verses, consisting of quatrains. According to extant manuscripts and indirect data, it can be observed that in Ottoman period, Syriac scribes imitated the works of church-poets and calligraphers from the late 13<sup>th</sup> – early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- East Syriac scribes of the Ottoman period expanded the use of poetic texts in the manuscript decoration. Innovations at this stage in the development of Syriac scribes appear to include quatrains incorporated into miniatures and decorative borders. They usually represent a request to pray for the scribe or the customers of the manuscript.
- It is possible to distinguish two stages in the development of the tradition of embedding scribal "decorative" quatrains: 1) their introduction into miniatures of illuminated manuscripts of Gospel lectionaries (16<sup>th</sup> cent.); 2) the intrusion of scribal quatrains into decorative geometric borders of other, more modestly decorated liturgical books, such as *Gazzā* and *Hudrā* (17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> cent.).

### **Practical significance**

The dissertation considerably enriches our knowledge of the literary and cultural life of Christian communities in the Middle East, and their interaction with the surrounding Muslim communities (Arabic, Persian, Turkish) over several centuries. The practical relevance of the dissertation as a didactic textbook on the history of Syriac literature and Middle Eastern literatures in general is also very important. Particularly valuable are the appendices, which contain and introduce into scholarly circulation dozens of previously unknown literary pieces. These



texts can be used for the future Syriac courses and at the seminars on the Syriac poetry.

### **Approbation**

The results of the current research have been presented at international conferences and symposia, such as the World Congress of Syriac Studies (Symposium Syriacum), the German Congress of Syriac Studies, the American Congress of Syriac Studies, the American Medieval Studies Congress and numerous conferences at St. Petersburg State University, the State Hermitage Museum, the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences and other Russian and foreign academic institutions.

The author has also given lectures presenting the main points of the study at scientific seminars ‘Cultures of the East’ held at Institute for Oriental and Classical Studies HSE University, as well as at the University of Venice, University of Pisa, Saint John's University (Minnesota) and Assyrian Cultural Heritage Society (Chicago).

*The Wardā: An Eastern Syriac Hymnological Collection* (see the list below), published by the author in 2015 on the subject of this study, has become over the past five years a frequently cited reference-book not only on Syriac hymnography, but also on the history of Syriac literature in general. Its scholarship and critical commentaries on the texts have been used in the teaching of Syriac language and literature courses in various universities around the world. The book has been favorably reviewed by Robert Kitchen<sup>1</sup> and Cragg Morrison.<sup>2</sup>

The author has also published numerous articles on the topic of this thesis in international and national journals, including those indexed in WoS and Scopus. The points outlined in these publications have found support in the works of specialists in the history of Syriac literature. In particular, the main textual and

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<sup>1</sup> Kitchen, R., [Review of: Pritula. A., *The Wardā ...*] // *Review of Biblical Literature*, August 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Morrison, C., [Review of: Pritula. A., *The Wardā ...*] // *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, LXXVII N° 3–4 (2020), pp. 363–366.

literary conclusions contained in the author's publications on the topic of this research have been taken into account in recently published reference works *The Syriac World* and *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, as well as in the latest revised edition of the *History of Yahḫalāhā and Rabban Ṣawmā* by Pier-Giorgio Borbone, 2020.

### **History of research**

The increased interest in the Syriac literature of the Mongol period (eleventh to fourteenth centuries) in recent years was marked by the publications of renowned Syriac scholars such as Herman Teule, Pier Giorgio Borbone, Hidemi Takahashi, Dorothea Welteke, Martin Tamcke, and David Taylor.

David Wilmshurst's fundamental monograph on Eastern Syriac church organization, which summarized data from hundreds of manuscripts, became a major reference book on the history of Eastern Syriac church communities of the 14<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Works by Heleen Murre-van den Berg are devoted to the history, literature and manuscript production of the Eastern Syriac Church in the Ottoman period, this scholar has been a pioneer in the study and synthesis of the eastern Syriac texts of this era.

Grigory Kessel has investigated East Syriac manuscript collections in a number of articles, studied the history of their formation and circulation, and identified many previously unknown manuscripts and texts.

Quite important are numerous publications by Alessandro Mengozzi, whose main subject is Syriac poetry of the period of interest. Individual poetic texts have been published and studied by A. Butts, N. N. Seleznyov, H. Younansardaroud, T. Carlson, S. Rassi, and M. Nicák.

Despite the emergence of interest in late Syriac poetry, most of the texts have remained unstudied and unpublished. This is largely due to the vast corpus of texts produced during this era because of the increased popularity of poetry. In addition,

many works were unknown to researchers due to the inaccessibility of most Middle Eastern manuscript collections.

This study attempts to address, at least in part, this gap, taking advantage of the information advances of the last few years. The HMML project (Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Minnesota, USA), led by Father Columba Stewart, digitized, catalogued, and downloaded manuscript collections from monasteries and church libraries in the Near East. This resource has made available over 150,000 manuscripts, including in Syriac, and has revolutionized the study of Eastern Christian literatures. Their digital preservation has become increasingly important because of their prolonged history of destruction starting in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and continuing now because of unrest in the Near East. Work on the online cataloguing of these vast collections, which involved Adam McCollum, Gregory Kessel, David Calabro and many others is still going on.

With so little studied of Syriac poetics, especially of the late period, the achievements of representatives of a closely related field, Iranian studies, appear to be very important. The detailed elaboration of the medieval Persian poetic tradition by Z. N. Vorozheikina, M. L. Reisner, and N. Yu. Chalisova has largely served as a model for the author of this study in terms of methodology, as well as a source for analogies. In the textual aspect, the works of O. F. Akimushkin were equally fundamental.

The period of the heyday of the Syriac literature after the Arab conquest has been recently characterized as *The Syriac Renaissance*. The term, first introduced by Anton Baumstark, originally included the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Moreover, it mostly concerned West Syriac literature. Later, the notion was expanded: the East Syriac circle of authors was included and the chronological limits extended. According to the periodization of Herman Teule, the Syriac Renaissance begins with Eliyā of Nisibis (975–1046) and ends with the outstanding East Syriac encyclopaedist ‘Aḇdīšō‘ bar Brīkhā (died 1318). The terms offered by this researcher are accepted also in the publications of the younger generation of scholars. The most detailed

analysis of the various genres of this period of Christian Syriac culture was presented in the volume *The Syriac Renaissance*, edited by Teule.

Despite the military invasions, in the first place that of the Mongols, in the period of the 13<sup>th</sup> – early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries a whole constellation of outstanding poets appeared, such as Yōḥannān bar Zō‘bī, Yōḥannān of Mosul, Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē (see chapter 2), Gabriel of Mosul, ‘Aḇdīšō‘ bar Brīkhā. In this period, probably under the influence of Arabic and Persian poetry, the sphere of Syriac poetic usage expands. Many poets also composed commentaries on the Scripture, theological tracts, grammars in verse.

After Tamerlan’s invasion (late 14<sup>th</sup> century), the East Syriac manuscript production and literature seem not to have completely recovered until the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In recent publications – in first place by Heleen Murre-van den Berg and David Wilmshurst – the East Syriac manuscript tradition of the Ottoman period has been researched and analyzed, which has enabled other scholars in the field to make judgments about the text circulation in this period. Both works accumulate a huge bulk of material that is contained in hundreds and even thousands of manuscripts in numerous collections of the world. As Murre-van den Berg pointed out, it was in the Ottoman period – starting with the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century that the Syriac manuscript production recovered after previous social catastrophes of the late 14<sup>th</sup> – early 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. As shown in her work, surviving manuscripts produced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century clearly outnumber any produced before. The scholar explains it by a relative political and economic stability that was reached with the emergence of the Ottoman Empire that unified all the Near East.

### **Structure**

The dissertation consists of an introduction, four thematic chapters in chronological order and a conclusion that summarizes the main results of the study. It is also accompanied by four appendices, consisting of comparative tables of contents of the *Wardā* collection manuscripts (Appendix 1) and of Syriac

original poetic texts with the English translation (Appendices 2–4). The edition of the texts under discussion, using the extant manuscripts, forms an important part of the current study.

The work also includes eight color images of manuscript folia. The list of references includes over eighty manuscripts and over three hundred publications. **The first chapter** is devoted to the *Wardā*, the largest East Syriac hymnological collection (‘*ōnīthā*, pl. ‘*ōnyāthā*), intended for liturgical use throughout the liturgical year. It includes over 120 poetic texts attributed to various authors. According to the manuscript titles, most of the texts are by Gīwargīs Wardā (apparently, the 13<sup>th</sup> century), after whom the book is named, and about whose biography little information has been preserved. Hymns from this collection were used throughout the Eastern Syriac Church and thus are preserved in a multitude of manuscripts; usually total more than two hundred folios in large format.

The author of this study has made a preliminary classification of all existing manuscripts of the *Wardā*, and has identified its main recensions and types. An attempt has been made to reconstruct the main stages of evolution of this text collection. In general, the existing manuscripts can be divided into two groups: they represent either a short or a complete recension. The copies of the full one are much more numerous, however, and are distinguished by the presence of hymns dedicated to various saints. The short edition includes only hymns on feasts related to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, or commentaries on passages from the Gospel read at liturgy on the corresponding day. Of the feasts commemorating saints, only the hymns on Saint George, as the most venerated in the Church of the East, appear in the manuscripts of this recension. Textually, however, each of these groups has its own readings, which are invariant for each of them.

On the basis of a comparative analysis of the existing folios, it is possible to hypothetically reconstruct the textual history of the *Wardā* collection as follows: a certain core consisting of a limited corpus of ‘*ōnyāthā* ascribed to Gīwargīs Wardā was supplemented by hymns necessary for structuring the collection for

the entire liturgical year. This stage in the formation of the corpus occurred earlier than 1483 (the date of the earliest surviving manuscript). The collection was then supplemented with hymns dedicated to various saints. These texts were introduced into the main corpus of the collection (apparently, at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries), apparently in connection with the introduction and spread of their memorial services in the Eastern Syrian Church during this period. Further, no later than the middle of the 16th century, a supplement of several hymns was added to the main corpus of hymns.

Besides Gīwargīs Wardā, a number of other ecclesiastical figures and literati, such as Elias, Metropolitan Ṣubha (Nisibin) (975–1046), Sabrīšō‘ bar Pawlōs (2nd half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century), Catholicos Jahḅalāhā II (1190–1222), Šlēmōn of Akhlāt, Metropolitan of Basra (first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), Ḥakkīm of Bēth Qaššā (13<sup>th</sup> century), archdeacon Mārī bar Mšīḥāyā (13th century), Khāmīs bar Qardāḅē (second half of the 13th century, see chapter 2), priest Askō (Išḥaq) Šḅadnāyā (14th century), priest Šlībā (16th century) are mentioned in the book as authors of certain hymns. The authorship of many ‘ōnyāthā is not specified at all.

As a result of the study, the metrical features, rhyming schemes, the presence or absence of acrostics and their varieties, were established for the first time for all hymns in the collection. This data was compiled in special tables, which are appended to the dissertation. The main melodic-rhythmical models used for church singing (*echoi*) were identified, and the corresponding ‘ōnyāthā of the collection were supposed to be sung on them. The metrical pattern of the hymn, however, is in direct correlation with the *echos* (Syr. *qālā* ‘voice’). The hymns attributed in the manuscripts to Gīwargīs Wardā are written on the *echos* ‘O, you womb’, which is the most popular in the collection under consideration and the simplest from a rhythmic point of view. The language of the hymns is also usually simple. The introduction and conclusion of such a hymn, in most cases, have an alternation of seven and eight-syllable lines, while the main part of the hymn has a strophic structure, where each stanza consists of four lines, with a single end

rhyme, individual for each stanza. Some of these ‘*ōnyāthā* have an acrostic, while others have an additional common final rhyme in the last line of each stanza, thus giving the text more unity through a common rhyme.

The hymns in question have an important place in the collective parish singing, relevant also to the contemporary Church of the East, which has determined the morphology of these texts. The introduction and conclusion are recited by the priest, while the main section is sung in a corresponding *echos*, alternately by two choirs, including all members of the congregation, with two stanzas each in the modern practice. It is likely that the way in which the non-strophic introductory and concluding parts are performed (namely, recited by the priest) has influenced the degree of their rhythmic irregularity. The rhythm of these parts has a large number of deviations and irregular alternations. The metrics of the main part in the hymns attributed to Gīwargīs Wardā, however, are very stable, with lines of seven syllables each. The textual discrepancies in the lists and editions do not usually distort this rhythmic basis.

The hymns were sung during a special part of the Vespers service (on the Prayer of the Ninevites and on major feasts) or at the liturgy after the Gospel reading (all Sundays of the year). In the title of each hymn, there is also a precise indication in the manuscripts at which service and on what occasion it should be performed, including the name of a feast or a day in the church calendar. As A. Baumstark has suggested, the ‘*ōnīthā* poetic form is historically related to the *sōghīthā*, a traditional strophic dialogue poetic form of the Syriac literature, also sung in churches by antiphonal choirs. Numerous poems written in this form, produced in the Syriac tradition mainly in the 4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, were the result of a long evolution of earlier Middle Eastern literatures, and in turn influenced the development of other literatures in the region, such as Arabic and Persian. The ‘*ōnyāthā* represent a much later stage in the development of Syriac poetry, when, as a result of centuries of contact with Muslim literatures, regular rhyming became an integral part of it. This category of hymns encompasses not only the proper

hymnological sphere once occupied by the *sōghīthā*, but also often contains the narrative that was previously a feature of the exclusively non-strophic poetic form *mēm̄rā* (homily). Narrative *‘ōnyāthā* usually lack the alphabetic acrostic, previously an important element of Syriac strophic poetry. This phenomenon may also be due to the spread of regular rhyme (individual in each stanza), which became in *‘ōnyāthā* a means of uniting the stanza, a function previously performed by the acrostic. This expansion in the content and scope of the form indicates a great popularity of the form.

The author of this study was able to find in various *‘ōnyāthā* borrowings from the Homilies of Narsai (5th century), as well as parts of the *Book of the Bee* by Shlēmōn of Akhlāt (first half of the 13th century); the texts also contain borrowings from New Testament apocrypha and legends, common in the East Syriac tradition. In particular, one of the hymns for Christmas contains a detailed retelling of a version of the *Gospel of the Childhood*, which is not preserved in East Syriac tradition in prose version.

The *Wardā*, then, can be seen as a poetic arrangement of the basics of East Syriac church tradition in a form accessible to a wide range of parishioners, and as a body of texts suitable for choral singing throughout the church year. In other words, it can be characterized as a poetic popularization of the church tradition and its actualization by collective church-singing. The poetic tendencies of that period were taken into account in the creation of the collection.

A special place in the corpus of the hymns under consideration is occupied by the *Rogation of the Ninevites*, a three-day Lenten service, celebrated by the East Syriac Church two weeks before Lent. During the three-day service, the *Book of Jonah* and its commentaries are read in parts, along with hymns that present the biblical narrative in poetic form. The emphasis is on the prophet’s preaching history in Nineveh (northern Mesopotamia), and on the deliverance of its inhabitants from a catastrophe through repentance. The *‘ōnyāthā* from the *Wardā* book written for the Prayer of the Ninevites were – and still are – used as the



poetic part of this cycle, as the headings of these texts suggest, and constitute the most numerous group in the collection.

Thus, the *Wardā* hymnological collection is a traditional East Syriac Church book that is arranged for the liturgical use for the entire year, i.e. it is arranged according to the calendar principle. At the same time, from a poetic point of view, the ‘*ōnyāthā*’ hymns of this collection take into account advances in Muslim – Arabic and Persian – literature, such as regular rhyming.

**The second chapter** analyses the phenomenon of the transition of Syriac poetry into an unusual sphere, and the formation of a literary circle close to the royal court. Although this phenomenon was rather short-lived (second half of the 13th century), it led to significant changes in the field of poetry. This leap was caused by the fall of Baghdad, the capital of Abbasid Caliphate, in 1258 and the establishment of the Hulaguid (Ilkhan) Mongol dynasty (1256–1335) in the area of Iraq and Iran. The founder of the dynasty, Hulagu Khan (1217–1265), and his immediate successors, many of whom were married to Christian women, were sympathetic to this religion and maintained good relations with the hierarchs of various Churches.

A key figure of this period of Syriac literature is undoubtedly the eminent West Syriac encyclopedist Gregory (Grīgōrīūs) bar ‘Ebrōyō (Ar. Ibn al-‘Ibrī) (1226–1286), who proved himself in all fields of medieval knowledge: theology, philosophy, history, astronomy, ethics, and also poetry. It is noteworthy that this last part of his legacy remains almost unexplored, as it has long been considered the least important. Perhaps one reason for this is his attempt to use poetic forms, motifs, and techniques developed in the literature of the Muslim environment and to adapt them to the Syriac poetic tradition, such as the quatrains (*rubā‘ī*), extremely popular in the Persian literature.

In the East Syriac tradition, the credit for developing a new poetic style goes to Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē. The time of Khāmīs’ life was first established in an article by David Taylor on this poet’s ‘wine’ poems, which the author himself attributed

to the *sōghīthā* form. The Christian poet's participation in festivals and ceremonies held by the khans, as mentioned in his work, indicates that this text was written before the adoption of Islam by Ghazan Khan in 1295. Khāmīs lived in Arbela (northern Iraq), being apparently a clergyman, and was a member of the literary circle of this important centre of the East Syriac community's cultural life of the Ilkhan era.

Interest in this author has increased in recent years, and several articles on his works have appeared. These are primarily publications by A. Mengozzi. One of them reviews the poetic heritage of Khāmīs, taking into account all manuscripts available to the researcher. The scholar classifies them and discusses the sections of the collection as well as its surviving folios. Two other articles by Mengozzi examine the quatrains by Khāmīs, which are close to the Persian *rubā'ī* in content and the topoi used. In addition, the article contains an edition and translation of a bilingual Syro-Persian lyric poem showing a stylization of the Persian *ghazal*.

*The Book of Khāmīs* is structurally similar to Persian poetry divans, where a variety of poems by a single author are grouped into sections according to their form. One of the aims of such compilations is to demonstrate the versatility of an author's talent. The book opens with a section of 'ōnyāthā hymns followed by non-strophic poems of *mēmṛā*. The 'ōnyāthā section does not cover the entire liturgical year, since the *Book of Khāmīs* is an author's poetry collection in which liturgical hymns occupy only one of the sections.

The author, apparently an accomplished experimental poet, reconsidered understanding of the traditional forms of Syriac poetry, seriously transforming them in terms of both content and poetic technique. Having borrowed much from Arabic and Persian literature, he nevertheless retained the traditional Syriac names of the forms.

Thus, the *mēmṛē* and *turgāmē* in the *Khāmīs*' 'divan' can be considered the Syriac equivalent of the *qaṣīda*, and the *sōghyāthā* can be considered *ghazals*. The form of quatrains (*tar'ē*), new to Syriac literature, presented in the collection is a

parallel of the *rubāʿī* of the Persian tradition. Thus, the *Book of Khāmīs* differs greatly from the *Wardā* collection (see chapter 1) in terms of its objectives and principles of composition. The compilers of the latter seem to have sought to create a single corpus of hymns for the entire liturgical year. In this respect, the *Book of Khāmīs* can be considered innovative for the East Syriac poetic tradition, as it is the first and the only known author's collection of poems of various forms, that is, a 'divan'.

The poems of Khāmīs have two main lines of emphasis: a) liturgical hymns 'ōnyāthā intended for church singing, where he follows Wardā in keeping language simple and clear; and b) elitist poetry, strongly influenced by the Persian one, where he uses complex rhythmic patterns and poetic figures.

The author of this study has succeeded in discovering and investigating two previously unknown odes by Khāmīs dedicated to Bar 'Ebrōyō. One of these has two acrostics (an opening and an ending) expressing a wish for Gregory's longevity.

One of the poems by Khāmīs included in the *sōghyāthā* section is an example of 'wine' lyricism where the poet praises the intoxicating and sanctifying properties of wine, and the context makes it clear that this is not an ordinary feast, but the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the blood of Christ is offered according to Christian doctrine. This work was first published in part in an article by David Taylor, who noted in it the influence of Arabic 'wine' poetry. However, the poem is clearly the Syriac Christian equivalent of the Persian mystical 'wine' *ghazals*, which flourished specifically in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Syriac poet uses the *ghazal* element called *takhalluṣ* (the author's introduction of his name at the end of the poem) in the text. In mentioning his name, he states that he composed this *sōghīthā* on the mount of Ālā-Ṭāq while entertaining the Mongols. It can be assumed that the author, being a clergyman, participated in the worship service arranged on this mountain, the Ilkhans' summer residence, where he composed the poem at their request. Most manuscripts of this poem contain a line of praise

to an unnamed patriarch (“Lord so-and-so, glorious Father, Patriarch of the East...”), which is how the text was reproduced in Taylor’s article. However, the two earliest manuscripts (which we have taken into account when publishing this text) report the patriarch's name: Lord Denḥā. This is another example of the common method in Persian *ghazals*: introducing the name of the patron. Patriarch Denḥā I (1265–1281), who appears to be mentioned in the text, was formerly a monk at the monastery of Bēth Qōqā, near Arbela, and later became metropolitan of that city. He was probably personally acquainted with his countryman Khāmīs, whom he took with him to the ceremony at the Mongol residence.

West Syriac contemporaries of Khāmīs developed strophic poems as well, but the introduction of wine theme into them under the influence of Persian mystical *ghazals* seems to be an individual feature of his work. In the West Syriac tradition, including the legacy of his contemporary Bar ‘Ebrōyō, this peculiarity is not evident.

Another important text also illustrating the religious and literary life of the Ilkhan era, a bilingual strophic work written in Syriac and Turkic, has been researched and published by the author of this study for the first time.

One more previously unknown work of Khāmīs considered in the course of the study occurs in the *sōghyāthā* section as well. It represents a dialogue between a man and a ringdove bird. As noted in the manuscript headings, the dove is symbolic of the human soul that is leaving the body. The work is an original transformation of the *sōghīthā*, a traditional dialogue poem in Syriac literature. One of the subjects of such poems is the dialogue of soul and body. However, in the poem by Khāmīs this motif is not expressed directly, but through an allegory, apparently borrowed from the Muslim tradition. The bird as a symbol of the human soul is a very popular image there in both philosophical and poetic works. **The third chapter** examines the phase of the next rise of Syriac literature and manuscript production, which came during the Ottoman period after nearly two centuries of decline.

This part of the dissertation examines the poetic legacy of ‘Aḅdīšō’ of Gāzartā (d. 1570), the founder of the Chaldean (East Syriac Uniate) literary tradition. A highly prolific poet, this churchman left an extensive legacy that has nevertheless remained almost entirely unexplored and unpublished.

An exception is his poetic trilogy, published by J.-M. Voste in a French translation in 1931 (without the original text) on the history of the foundation of the Chaldean Church.

After the death of the first patriarch of the new Church in 1555, ‘Aḅdīšō’ was elected to take his place. However, this title was not officially confirmed by the pope until 1562 during his visit to Rome. The patriarch chose the monastery of Jacob the Recluse near Seert (Is‘ird) as his residence, where he apparently remained until his death in 1570.

‘Aḅdīšō’ of Gāzartā’s autograph manuscripts identified by the author of this study contain important biographical information about the scribe. In particular, the colophons report that despite his title as bishop of Gāzartā, which remained under the control of the traditionalist (‘Nestorian’) church line, his residence was a cell located in the church of Mār Pēthiōn, in Amid (Diyarbakir). He appears to have travelled extensively and maintained contact with the monks of the Western Syriac (‘Jacobite’, Syriac Orthodox) Church, who assisted him in working on a copy of Bar ‘Eḅrōyō’s *Metrical Grammar* in Mardin. This close communion between the Syriac Churches of the two denominations continued the trends that had emerged during the ‘Syriac Renaissance’ (see chapter 2).

In terms of form, ‘Aḅdīšō’ of Gāzartā follows the canons developed by poets in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> – early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as the prominent East Syriac literati Khāmīs bar Qardāḅē and ‘Aḅdīšō’ bar Brīkhā. Many of his quatrains, six-lines, as well as strophic and non-strophic poems of various lengths have survived. Overall, the literary heritage of ‘Aḅdīšō’ of Gāzartā can be characterized as a development of poetic models created during the Syriac Renaissance and using them in a new historical and cultural context.

Several of his works are dedicated to the Popes, his contemporaries. One of these poems is a panegyric to Paul IV (1555–1559) entitled *turgāmā*. It adheres entirely to the standards inherent in this form from the late 13th century: monorhyme in twelve-syllable, alphabetic acrostic. This ode, sent by the author to Rome in 1556, was apparently dedicated to the accession of Paul IV to the papal throne the year before. Several shorter poems were dedicated to other popes: Julius III (1550–1555), Pius IV (1559–1565) or Pius V (1566–1572).

Some poems, probably composed by the poet in his early years, are dedicated to his contemporaries, including literati with whom he was in communication. Among them is a mournful elegy on the death of Aḅrāham of Bēth Slōkh (Kirkuk), a famous spiritual poet of this period. It is clear from the poem that the author considered the deceased an important spiritual authority and mentor. This man of letters was a monk at the Mār Awgēn monastery on Mount Isla, near Nisibin in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Another contemporary to whom ‘Aḅdīšō’ dedicated the poem is a certain famous literary man whose fame and literary talents are extolled in this panegyric. The refrain informs us that the addressee is the author’s maternal uncle. The acrostic contained in the work forms the name of the addressee: ‘Darwīš’. It can be assumed that this is Darwīš of Gāzartā, a fellow countryman and contemporary of ‘Aḅdīšō’, a priest, famous poet and manuscript copyist of the first half of the 16th century.

A large number of poetic texts written by ‘Aḅdīšō’ have survived in his manuscript autographs. We have been able to identify three manuscripts written by the scribe in different years (between 1552 and 1567), as the colophons suggest.

Many short poetic texts (mainly quatrains) written in the hand of ‘Aḅdīšō’ are placed on the flyleaves of a copy of Bar ‘Eḅrōyō’s *Metrical Grammar* (DCA 65), now in the collection of the Chaldean Church of Alqosh, which he scribed.

**The fourth chapter** of the dissertation is devoted to the analysis of a large, previously unexplored group of poetic texts related to the design and usage of manuscripts. These short works, created by scribes, donors, owners and readers, were widespread in Eastern Syriac bookmaking in Ottoman times. The most probable reason for the wide circulation of such poetry included in the paratextual manuscript parts is that in the period in question church hierarchs were often both poets and authorized copyists of church books. They often copied them for the abbots of monasteries and churches, introducing the poetic scribal texts into the canon of church books. Gradually, such poetic insertions into liturgical books have become widespread.

The East Syriac scribal verse texts under consideration can be divided into the following main groups: 1) versified paratextual parts (poetic introductions to the main text of the manuscript as well as colophons); 2) poetic texts incorporated into the manuscript decoration; 3) poetic scribal notes on flyleaves.

The emergence of verse paratextual parts is noted from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, during a period of general rise in manuscript production after the preceding century of decline caused by the destruction of Eastern Syrian churches by Tamerlane at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Poetic introductions appear at least in the manuscripts of the *Ḥudrā* and *Gazzā*, the two major liturgical books of the East Syriac Church. Poetic colophons found in manuscripts from the same period can in turn be divided into two subgroups: a) fully versified, and b) containing poetic insertions (most often quatrains) into a prose colophon text.

However, on the basis of available data, it is possible to assume that this tradition as a whole emerged during the Syriac Renaissance, more precisely in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is probably correct to speak about the influence of the style and tendencies of the Syriac Renaissance on the development of this scribe line in the next centuries.

Perhaps the only group of scribal poetic texts which emerged in the Ottoman period are short poems (usually quatrains) inscribed in decorative elements:

miniatures and decorative borders. At present, there are no evidence of miniatures painted in the East Syriac tradition earlier than the 16th century.

Apparently, the initial reason for incorporating scribal quatrains in miniatures was an attempt to draw the attention of readers to the prayers about the scribe. Handwritten miniatures usually attract much attention, unlike colophons, which are not read by everyone.

Later, scribal quatrains also began to be incorporated into the decoration of more modestly decorated church books, such as the *Hudrā* and the *Gazzā*. Since these manuscripts traditionally did not contain miniatures, scribal quatrains were inserted into ornamental borders, which decorated these types of church books. The priest, poet and scribe Gīwargīs of Alqōš, from whom forty-six manuscripts have been preserved, seems to have played a very significant role in the development of this trend between 1676 and 1727.

The **conclusion** summarizes the main results of the thesis research, the main stages in the evolution of East Syriac poetry in the period under consideration and lists the groups of texts corresponding to them.

In the 13<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, one can distinguish two periods when Syriac poetry flourished. The first occurred during the Ilkhan domination over the Middle East and the second, during the Ottoman period, starting from the 16th century. During the first heyday, there were serious changes in the style, character and poetic forms, which were connected with the changes in the position of Christian communities in the Middle East. Syriac poets of this period were close to the khan's court and tried to create examples of a new, more refined style of poetry, using the achievements of the Muslim (Arabic and Persian) poetic tradition. Some authors, followed primarily Persian prototypes, as their poetic forms and imagery suggest.

In the second period, the forms developed by the poets of the Mongolian period were taken as a standard. At that time, it was not a question of developing the forms, but rather of using them in a new historical context.



Poetry gradually became more and more popular. Since many church hierarchs were copyists and poets, scribal poems became a part of the church book canon. This distinguishes them from similar scribal poetic texts in the Muslim tradition, where they were optional.

There are four **Appendices** in the dissertation, each relates to the relevant chapter, and also eight color **illustrations**. **The list of references** includes over 80 manuscripts as well as some 300 books and articles in Russian, European and Eastern languages.

**The following works on the topic of the study were published by author**

**Monographs**

A. Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection. Study and Critical Edition*. Göttinger Orientforschungen, I. Reihe: Syriaca 47. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015, 559 pp.

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1. A. D. Pritula. К вопросу о датировке ‘Onit vostochnosiriiskoi (tak nazyvaemoi nestorianskoi) tserkvi // *Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета*. Серия 9: Филология. Востоковедение. Журналистика. Выпуск 4 (Декабрь, 2009), с. 184–189.

2. A. Pritula, “The *Wardā* Hymnological Collection”, *Scrinium*, 9 (2013), pp. 309–365.

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10. A. Pritula, “Reading and Writing on Reading and Writing: Short Poetry on Flyleaves in a Manuscript of the *Metrical Grammar* (DCA 00065)”, *Scrinium*, 10 pp. (forthcoming).
11. A. Pritula, “‘Scribal’ Quatrains in Poetry Collections: A General Typology and the Question of Origin”, *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 9 pp. (forthcoming).
12. A. Pritula, “From Nineveh to Fars: The Poetic Program of Bar ‘Ebrōyō and Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē”, *Scrinium*, 8 pp. (forthcoming).
13. A. Pritula, “From Tigris to Jerusalem: East Syriac Poetic Notes from the Ottoman Time”, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 22:1 (2019), pp. 193–234.

14. A. D. Pritula. Vostochnosiriiskii lektsionarii Sir. 26 v sobranii IVR RAN: “starye” i “novye” stihy i izobrazheniia] // *Письменные памятники Востока*, 2020, том 17, № 2 (вып. 41), с. 87–101.

15. A. D. Pritula. Grammatika — eto most ko vsem znaniiam: korotkie stihotvoreniia na pereplyotnyh listah v rukopisi “Metricheskoj grammatiki”] // *Письменные памятники Востока*, 2021, том 18, № 1 (вып. 44), с. 44–52.