

Synodicon Orientale in COGD 5.2 and the MS Alqosh 169: [olim Baghdad 509]

I. Introduction

The Syriac manuscript located nowadays in Alqosh - North Iraq: Alqosh 169 [olim Baghdad 509] includes highly important collection of the East Syriac Church canons in addition to the General Councils of this Church since her early days under the Persians (starting from the year 410 until 790, but we continued tracing more Synods in COGD 5.2).

Possibly, one of the biggest achievements in COGD 5 is finding and accessing the original manuscripts of Synodicon Orientale (Baghdad 509: Alqosh 169).

The manuscript of Alqosh 169, was lost in Baghdad during the Iraqi war around 2013 and almost none of the scholars could know the fate of this unique manuscript. We could reach it after communicating with the Abbot of Rabban Hormizd monastery in Alqosh (North Iraq) and finding that it ended up in their library (the original provenance before it was moved to Baghdad in 1994 taking the new number of Baghdad 509).

Prof. Alberto Melloni, thankfully, made the photos to the whole manuscript Alqosh 169. Accessing this manuscript has been a dream for many scholars (one of them was Chabot himself, who only accessed Paris Syr. 332 and Borg Sir. 82 for his edition in 1902), and since 2018 it is accessible for scholar at our library!

The first thing I did once the images arrived at the library of Fscire, was to create a simple cataloguing excel database for each image (around 821 images). This helped me at the later stage, which looking for the texts we need for our COGD 5.2 edition.

Contributors of COGD 5, have visited Fscire library to access the digital images of the MS (with a special device to display the images in a high-resolution monitor and a secure tool to keep the images safe and not to be circulated according to the condition promised to the Abbot of Alqosh monastery). There was a chance to discuss several editorial issues with our scholars.

Previous Editions of Synodicon Orientale

The date of this manuscript is approximately between 13-14th Century. Western scholars who were highly interested in the contents of this manuscript could only access later copied manuscripts (scribed in 19th Cent.), which are located in Vatican (Borg. Sir. 81 and Borg. Sir 82 in addition to another one which was copied in Alqosh in 1895 but today is in Paris under the name: “Bibl. Nat. Syr. 332”). The latter contains only the Synodicon Orientale which Chabot had published in 1902, depending as well on the Borgia manuscript N. 82. Similar materials from the same collection was published in a German translation before Chabot by the German scholar Oskar Braun who published the Acts of the East Syriac Councils in his book: “*Das Buch der Synhadon*” in 1900.

“The Synodicon Orientale is an extremely valuable source for the study the history and theology of the Church of the East under the Sasanian Persians and early Islamic period” (Brock).

Both previous editions can be accessed online:

Braun, Oscar, *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale: Die Sammlung der Nestorianischen Konzilien, zusammengestellt im neunten Jahrhundert nach der syrischen Handschrift, Museo Borgiano 82, der Vatikanischen Bibliothek*. Stuttgart / Wien: Rothsche Verlagshandlung, 1900.

<https://archive.org/details/DasBuchDerSynhados>

Chabot, Jean Baptiste, ed. *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902.

<https://archive.org/details/ChabotSynodiconOrientale>

Lost Manuscripts

There was an important manuscript for the East Syriac Synodicon which is Seert 69, but unfortunately the whole Seert collection disappeared during the Sayfo genocide in 1915. Also, another missing manuscript from that period, was a unique West Syriac Synodicon manuscript which was witnessed by Patriarch Aphrem Barsoum in the village of Basebrin, which he could not find it again after the first World War. Missing these two highly important manuscripts is a big loss and reflects the significance of our forthcoming edition of Syriac COGD 5.

History of a Migrating MS

The later textual transmission of the Synodical and canonical tradition in the East Syriac Church is based on this unique manuscript in Alqosh (monastery of *Notre Dame des Semences*) which was originally under number 90 according to Scher's catalogue in 1906 and under another number NDS 169 in Voste's catalogue in 1929. The manuscript was taken from the original monastery library in Alqosh to Baghdad in 1994, which took another number "Baghdad 509". During the Iraqi war, the manuscript was missed and thought to be lost, but in fact it could successfully (and quietly) return to her mother monastery in Alqosh (North of Iraq). Unfortunately, the contemporary situation in that region is still unstable. This situation, would make it very urgent to save at least the text of this manuscript by digitizing it and publishing the text; and that is what we have been working on since 2018, when we could quickly act and photograph the MS for COGD 5.2.

Although the excellent initiative of HMML (Hill Museum and Manuscript Library) had already digitized thousands of manuscripts in the Middle East; however, this manuscript library is among few other libraries which did not cooperate with HMML for reasons which are beyond the scope of these lines. This encouraged us to accept immediately the new permission that we are very lucky to access this manuscript and being allowed to digitize it.

History of Alqosh monastery

The monastery library which contained this manuscript has an important history. During the 16th Century, a group of East Syriac monks in the monastery Rabban Hormizd (which was built in 7th Century) decided to elect a new Patriarch Youhana Sulaqa who could gain a successful recognition

from Rome. This monastery is somehow considered the beginning of the Chaldean Catholic Church (the dominant Church community in Iraq, with over one million population before the Iraqi War). Later in 1858 when the old monastery of Rabban Hormizd was threatened many times by several attacks (because of its isolated location), a new monastery was built just one mile far from the old monastery but in safer location named “Notre Dame des Semences [Our Lady of the Seeds Monastery]”. The Rabban Hormizd monastic community had an important role in history of transmitting East Syriac literature, especially in manuscript tradition since the 14th century when the monks contributed noticeably in the revival to the East Syriac manuscript writings which continued until 16th cent. Afterwards in the 17th Century with the decline of the monks’ number, many families from Alqosh continued the tradition of producing manuscripts.

II. Manuscript Alqosh 169 [Baghdad 509]

1. *Content and Texts*

As mentioned previously, the rare East Syriac Councils and Synods are preserved in the authoritative collection of the “Synodicon Orientale.” The pivotal manuscript for the Synodicon Orientale, datable from 13th to 14th. The previous editions had to rely instead on 19th century copies, in particular on Borg. Sir. 82 and in Paris at Bibliothèque Nationale, Syr. 332 (dated 1895), which are both direct copies of the Alqosh-Baghdad manuscript. The edition by J. B. Chabot (1902) uses both manuscripts. O. Braun’s 1900 German translation is based on the Roman manuscript.

According to Chabot’s description, we can divide the content into three major parts (which he only published the second part of the manuscript):

- I. First Part: It contains many documents with various lacunas. These documents should be copied from original ones to create this comprehensive canonical collection. They include some fragments from the letters of Mar Aba (6th Cent.), canons of Nicaea, names of the bishops attended the Council of Nicaea, fragments from the letters of Mar Marutha (7th Cent.), story of Constantine and Helen, treatise against the heresies, history of Nicaean Council (325) and emperor Constantine and a redaction for the council of Chalcedon (451). The Council of Gangra, the second council of Nicaea, Condemnation of Eutychus, Pope Leo’s letter to defend the two natures of Christ, the letter written from the Councils of bishops in the East to give the name of Patriarchate to the Catholicos of the East, in addition to other letters some published by Braun.
- II. Second Part: which was published by Chabot. It contains mainly thirteen Patriarchal Synods (General Councils) for the Syriac Church of the East:
 1. Mar Isaac (410)
 2. Mar Yahbalaha (420)
 3. Mar Dadisho (424)
 4. Mar Barşawma (484)
 5. Mar Acacius (486)
 6. Mar Babai (497)

7. Mar Aba I (544)
8. Mar Joseph (554)
9. Mar Ezekiel (576)
10. Mar Isho'yahb I (585)
11. Mar Sabrisho' I (596)
12. Patriarch Gregory I (605)
13. Synod of 612 after the death of Gregory I
14. Patriarch Giwargis I (676)
15. Patriarch Giwargis I (680)
16. Mar Henanisho' II (775)
17. Mar Timothy I (782)

III. Third Part: Letter from Catholicos Patriarch of the East Mar Aba concerning instructions for the monks in cities in addition to canons concerning marriage. Letter of Mar Isho'yahb of Gedala Patriarch of the East confession of the two natures of Christ. Letter of Atticus of Constantinople to Euphesinus. Dogmatic letter against Apollinarism and Theophysite faith. Some translations to the Cappadocian Fathers: Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom. Letter concerning Nestorius' teaching. History and chronicle since the death of Hormizd until the end of the Persian empire. Canons concerning the monastic community in Mardin in the mountain of Izla. Canons to regulate the school of Nisibis. Canons and laws concerning monasticism, judgments, inheritance and marriage in addition to some liturgical rites. There is a genre of questions and answers, which were officially included in this canonical collection.

According to Chabot, the final redaction to this canonical collection should be done in the days of Catholicos Eliya I of Tirhan (d. 1049), who should be responsible for the final revision of this "great East Syriac Synodicon", where he himself had issued several canons in the hereditary law.

Chabot's edition is missing the letter of Mar Išocyahb II, which was published by L. Sako (the current Chaldean Patriarch) in his PhD dissertation in Rome 1983.

For a general description about the collection of Synodicon Orientale, by L. van Rompay (GEDSH 2011) [pdf sent with the handouts]. Also see e-Gedsh:

<https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/entry/Synodicon-Orientale>

2. Codicology: Physical description

There are damages in the manuscript and there is an urgent need to restore it. There is other codicological issues in the MS, such as some black color on few folios, and a terrible way of binding have caused further damage.

Hidden words in the inner margins of the MS:

We have faced with our visiting scholars some challenges while reading from these manuscript images, such as the case of Alqosh manuscript which hides many words in the inner-margins and because of the damages in the past century. Nevertheless, we could solve this problem, thanks to

Prof. Melloni, by accessing an old photocopy of this manuscript (photocopied in B/W around 1920s) and before having many sever damages in the past century. Therefore, I have checked all the texts and read many hidden words, which were previously provided by the readings of the other manuscripts copied from Alqosh Manuscript.

According to catalogue of Addai Scher (the Chaldean Catholic archbishop of Seert in Mesopotamia who was martyred during the Sayfo Genocides by being beheaded in 15 June 1915), the manuscript of Alqosh contains 42 quires bound together and each quire is made of 10 folios.

So, we have about 840 pages. Each page is divided in two columns. Different hand writings because of various scribes (collected in different stages). The dimensions of the manuscript are 39 x 25 Centimeters. Moreover, we have more details in the catalogue of M. Vosté in 1929, that there are 41 lines in each page.

3. *Paleography: Scribal habits*

There are several remarks which are worth noticing with the scribe of MS Alqosh 169, such as some scribal errors (because of quick copying, so sometimes the scribe is not careful since there is no consistency in those orthographic variants of names and Syriac words).

The scribe also tries to find practical solutions to fill the gaps of unfinished lines, so making some letter longer than usual, to fill the gaps; *vice versa* if the space at the end of the line is too short, then abbreviation will solve the issue. Some orthographic variant can also solve the scribe's stress while reaching the end of the lines (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ = ܐܘܪܝܢܐ).

Sometimes the scribe forgot to put the plural remarks (syome), which can be very confusing.

Few other interesting palaeographical remarks could be noticed, when the scribe noticed the order of some words was not correct, so there are the letter (ܐ ܐ) above the words to indicate the correct order. Another remark, was when the scribe notice that he skipped counting (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) so he simply made a strike through (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ).

East Syriac COGD 5.2 (personal experience)

1- *Importance of Sources and MSS*

I have drawn the *stemma*, (you can see it in your handouts), which we are adopting as principle for COGD edition. Some of the contributors have different opinion, so we have to respect them.

Synod of Timothy II: the oldest MS of 'Abdisho''s Nomocanon is the MS of Trichur 64 from late 13th century which does not include the Synod (of course it was prior to it) but Vat. Sir 129 which is another copy from this Nomocanon copied in Baghdad 1332 AD, includes the work. Apparently, we have two traditions of this work in MSS. Those from the old copy of Trissur and those which are from Baghdad tradition which include the Synod of Timothy II (1318). Now we are clear that

will produce edition according to the oldest one of Vat Sir 129 in addition to few others to consult when there are lacunas and gaps in the oldest MS.

2- Importance of Consultations

In March 2019, we had at Fscire a critical discussion with some of our contributors. Since they are leading scholars in Syriac studies, many points were discussed such as those concerning English translations and the methodology of work, while dealing with a specific case of how to respect the original unique manuscripts and when to consider the variants of the later copies and editions. Because of this meeting, we could have a clear roadmap for our volume.

Also a discussion with Prof. Erich Renhart (Graz University) could lead to access the English translation of Birnie that we have used in COGD.

Prof Lucas van Rompay visited Fscire and checked his Synod and the Synod of Kyle Smith for the edition. During that week, we had a meeting with him, also with R. Kitchen and H. Kaufhold. The meeting could offer some significant discussions for the volume. Kaufhold spoke about his forthcoming edition of 'Abdisho' Bar Brikha's *Tukas Dine* (Book of Judgments) where he could find some citations of the Synods (he suggested that the manuscripts of Bar Brikha was better than Alqosh 169). So, he proposed including these citations, in our edition. He added also the letter of Elias which includes other citations. He also indicated to the importance of including Trischur 65 MS, because it is another copy of Alqosh MS. So, I had to look for a way to get it. Later, I got the MS of Trichur 65, thanks to Mar Aprem (Indian bishop of the Assyrian Church) for sharing it with me, which is also now included in the critical edition.

Since some contributors did not submit and then apologized so I had to find a practical solution by working with a daily consultation (and weekly ZOOM meeting) with Dr. Robert Kitchen to find solutions for our editions. He thankfully, have been offering the best help especially in controlling the English for the introductions and the translations.

3- Technical issues

Creating a Textual Corpus: 1) **manual transcription**, 2) **OCR Syriac**, 3) **Simtho Corpus**

Keep in mind we are dealing with Syriac scripts (for those who had worked with Syriac know well the situation) which means that there were a lot of technical challenges. For example, CTE does not convert it properly to pdf in addition to many other issues which the software cannot fit in. So thanks to many Syriac colleague with whom I had corresponded to find out solutions and tricks.

Another technical issue, was using Syriac on Mac (which is a great software but not for Syriac) so there was a lot of confusion with few texts and I had to reorganize them.

Also a confusion between Syriac diacritical remarks and vowels, so I had clean up the texts and being very careful since these are small remarks and sometimes it is hard to notice if you are not an expert. To secure and a quality control of the texts I have checked all these texts again alone on

the original MS. Indeed, there were some extra remarks, which were not noticed by the scholars during their visit which was under the stress of limited time.

In addition to following up the progress of the contributions, I kept looking for new possible Synods which may fit in our volume. For example, while consulting MSS at Vatican Library for the Synod of Timothy II, I found another Synod but while consulting Prof. Kaufhold, who is the best reference in this field, he presented a study that it does not fit our volume.

So next to my work, I have been always digging for possibility of finding new Synods since we have remnants but no Acts. Wars and the fate of Syriac MSS (Adai Scheer of Seert and Aphram Barsoum of Basebrin MSS).

Conclusions

Living under the pressure of wars, the Syriac Churches in the Middle East had to suffer because of various catastrophes which led to lose important authentic and rare canonical tradition. For example, under the Persian rulers the East Syriac Church was isolated from the Roman-Byzantine Ecumenical conciliar movement. Later, the Church could gain some connections and reception of the Ecumenical Councils when the historical times allowed her to join the sister Churches. However, successive difficult times by Chalcedonian Byzantines (regarded as heretic Nestorians), Islam, Crusaders, Moguls, Mamalik, Ottomans etc... put this Church under very difficult circumstances and thousands of churches including important libraries were destroyed (as we have witnessed just a few years ago in the Iraqi war where many important manuscript libraries were burned, and we lost many unique manuscripts). Just to give an example, the late Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Aphrem Barsoum (an outstanding Syriac, who published with Chabot important sources on the Syriac Chronicles), says in his Catalogue on the Syriac manuscripts in Tur Abdin, that he had witnessed and took notes about a very rare manuscript from the 9th Century, which included some rare texts of Syriac Councils and Synodical letters with seals of the Patriarchs and bishops. Unfortunately, and according to Barsoum, this manuscript was lost during the First World War. Therefore, we can imagine how many important canonical documents were lost during the second Millennium because of the tragedies that the regions in the Middle East has been witnessing. But the hope that we are not going to lose more materials. The very recent gesture by Pope Francis, during his visit to Iraq/Mosul, where he handed back to the bishop of Qaraqosh a Syriac manuscript which was rescued as 'a refugee' during the ISIS atrocities, is so important to show an international awareness about protecting the Syriac manuscript heritage. We in Fscire, have proudly contributing by preserving this unique collection of the Synods in COGD 5.