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Source: *Church History*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Mar., 1978), pp. 23-26

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of the [American Society of Church History](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3164612>

Accessed: 20-08-2015 21:01 UTC

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*Discovery of a Treatise about the
Ecclesiastical Administration Ascribed
to Michael the Syrian: A Unique Document
in the Literary Genre of Canon Law*

ARTHUR VÖÖBUS

Manuscript research is an endeavor filled with suspense; often made more difficult by physical labor and severe weather, the scholar's research may prove fruitless, or it may yield an unknown text which reveals again the gaps in scholars' knowledge of ancient Christian texts.¹

The text under discussion here, a treatise on ecclesiastical administration ascribed to Michael the Syrian (1126–1199), is such a manuscript. It was found in a codex preserved for us in the collection of manuscripts which belonged to the famous Monastery of Mār Hanānyā² or Deir Za'farān³ in the mountains of Tūr 'Abdīn.⁴ Since this monastery has survived all the storms of suffering and destruction, its treasure house could preserve many priceless⁵ and unique⁶ manuscripts which could not be preserved in other places.⁷ Among them is a unicum, Ms. Dam. Patr. 8/11.⁸ Furthermore, it is highly unusual that one single manuscript

1. See A. Vööbus, "In Pursuit of Syriac Manuscripts," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 37 (in press).
2. About a new source for the history of the Monastery of Mār Hanānyā, see A. Vööbus, "Eine wichtige Urkunde über die Geschichte des Mār Hanānja-Klosters: Die von Johannan von Marde gegebenen Klosterregaln," *Oriens Christianus* 53 (1969): 246ff.
3. About the history of this monastery, see A. Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonessammlungen: Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde. I: Westsyrische Originalurkunden* 1,B (Louvain, 1970), CSCO Subsidia 35, pp. 379ff.
4. About particular efforts in Tūr 'Abdīn, see A. Vööbus, *The Hexapla and the Syro-Hexapla: Very Important Discoveries for Septuagint Research* (Stockholm, 1971), pp. 67ff. *The Pentateuch in the Version of the Syro-Hexapla: A Facsimile Edition of A Midyat Manuscript* by A. Vööbus (Louvain, 1976), CSCO Subsidia 45, Introduction.
5. Cf. A. Vööbus, *Catalogues of Manuscripts of Unknown Collections in the Syrian Orient 3: Syriac Manuscripts from the Treasure of the Monastery of Mār Hanānyā or Deir Za'farān* (in press).
6. Cf. A. Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Mēmrē-Dichtung des Ja'qōb von Serūg. I: Sammlungen: Die Handschriften* (Louvain, 1973), CSCO Subsidia 39, pp. 127ff.; 152ff.; 2: *Sammlungen: Der Bestand* (Louvain, 1973), CSCO Subsidia 40, pp. 40ff.; 176ff.
7. Cf. A. Vööbus, *New Important Manuscript Discoveries for the History of Syriac Literature* (in press).
8. The manuscript is now located in the library of the patriarchate of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Damascus.

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contains so many entirely unknown documents.⁹ Fortunately, the codex is furnished with a colophon,¹⁰ according to which the manuscript was completed on the 5th of 'Iyar 1515 of the Seleucid Era, i.e. on May 5, 1204 A.D.¹¹ The original part of the manuscript has preserved the document under discussion. Systematic search has unearthed another manuscript, namely Ms. Mardin Orth. 323¹² which included this text.¹³ However, it has no independent value, since this manuscript written by a late hand must be a copy of the above mentioned unique codex.

This document is extraordinary in several respects. First, it represents an uncommon genre. The work is devoted to the subject of cybernetics. The particular issue in canon law which has been submitted to an inquiry is the problem of jurisdiction of the metropolitan in a situation where, because of various complications, a counter-metropolitan has been set up. Thus in the entire history of ancient Christian literature this source is singular because it is a systematic treatment of a question taken from canon law. As such, its importance is demonstrated in a tangible way by the fact that this unique document has been included in the *Synodicon*,¹⁴ a collection of legislative documents and other related materials, ecclesiastical and civil, set up for the West Syrian Church.

Second, the document deserves special notice for its method and the procedure which is carried out in its execution: the subject matter is substantiated by evidence drawn from historical and other literary sources in such a way that the treatise rests heavily on documentation. Even a variety of genres of documents has been employed for the composition, and a brief review of them will be instructive. Ecclesiastical legislation is demonstrated by the acts of the ecumenical councils of Constantinople and those of Chalcedon.¹⁵ Of the annalistic sources the histories of Socrates¹⁶ and that of John of Ephesus¹⁷ have been copiously employed. The epistolary sources furnished evidence through the let-

9. Cf. A. Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonensammlungen* I,1,A, pp. 5ff.

10. Fol.194b.

11. The copyist was Daniel bar Jausep bar Sargis of Bartelli.

12. Cf. A. Vööbus, *Catalogues of Manuscripts of Unknown Collections in the Syrian Orient* 3.

13. Fol.110b–122b.

14. *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* 2, ed. A. Vööbus (Louvain, 1976), CSCO Scr. Syri 163, pp. 167ff.; *Translation* 2 (Louvain, 1976), SCSO Scr. Syri 164, pp. 173ff.

15. *Die syrischen Kanones der Synoden von Nicaea bis Chalcedon nebst einigen zugehörigen Dokumenten*, herausgegeben von F. Schulthess (Berlin, 1908), *Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* NF 10,2; *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 1, ed. A. Vööbus (Louvain, 1975), CSCO Scr. Syri 161, pp. 85ff.; *Translation*, 1 (Louvain, 1975), CSCO Scr. Syri 162, pp. 101ff.

16. *Socratis Scholastici Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 67. The Syriac version of the work of Socrates preserved in Ms. Vat. Syr. 145 II is not complete.

17. *Iohannis Ephesini Historiae Ecclesiasticae pars tertia*, ed. E. W. Brooks (Louvain, 1935), CSCO Scr. Syri III, 3.

ters of Severus of Antioch¹⁸ and Philoxenos of Mabbug.¹⁹ Patristic sources are represented by Gregory Nazianzen²⁰ and the homiletical literature of John Chrysostom.²¹ Since the sources of Greek provenance have been drawn from their ancient translations made from Greek into Syriac, and since in our document they also have been quoted extensively, these sections are valuable for the history of the transmission of the text of these sources and for textual criticism. Thirdly this text has also employed some sources for its documentation which have not survived elsewhere, the most important of which is a letter by Philoxenos of Mabbug.²²

The question of authorship is beset with problems. In the upper margin of the folio page which introduces this document, there appears the following statement written by a hand which is similar in character to the handwriting in the original text: "From the discourse of Mār Mīka'el Raba."²³ According to this statement the document is ascribed to Patriarch Michael,²⁴ the greatest of all those who have occupied the patriarchal see of Antioch. However, nothing has been known as to that this renowned prelate, famous also in the field of literature,²⁵ composed such a work in the genre of canon law; furthermore, that this claim comes from a gloss does not instill confidence in the ascription. In addition, the text of the original manuscript introduces the document as a document of anonymous origin.

The next question concerns the date of the document. Of course, the terminus ad quem is the year 1204 A.D., the date given in the colophon. However, it seems that the intrinsic evidence allows us to put the date back for several centuries. A clue is furnished by the following statement: "And also Dionysios, the patriarch of Antioch, he who has fallen asleep, and this one of our day, accepted many bishops in selection and permitted them to serve."²⁶ Ms. Mardin Orth. 323²⁷ contains a marginal

18. *The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, in the Syriac Version of Athanasius of Nisibis*, ed. by E. W. Brooks (London, 1902–1904).

19. "The letter about the ecclesiastical affairs," fol. 187b, 190a.

20. *Oratio 6, Prima de pace*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 35.

21. *Commentarius ad Colosseos*, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 62.

22. No such letter of Philoxenos with this title is known. About the corpus of his letters, see A. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog, sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain, 1963), *Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis Dissertationes ad Gradum Magistri* III, 8, pp. 187ff.

23. Fol. 185a.

24. Michael Syrus occupied the patriarchal throne from 1166 until 1199.

25. About a discovery of an unknown work by Michael, see A. Vööbus, "Die Entdeckung des Panegyrikus des Patriarchen Mīka'el über Jōhannan von Mardē," *Oriens Christianus* 55 (1971): 120ff.; Id., "Discovery of an Unknown Work by Michael the Great: The *memra* on Mār Barsauma," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* (in press).

26. Fol. 190a.

27. Fol. 122a.

note that Abiram, who is mentioned as one of such bishops, was consecrated in 846 A.D. for the bishopric of Kephartuta. If, indeed, this datum rests on a reliable tradition, then the constellation created by all these data is such that the only way left is to see in the Dionysios "of our day" the Dionysios who came from the Monastery of Bet Batin in Har-ran and was consecrated on Nisan 23, 1208 of the Seleucid Era, i.e. on April 23, 897 A.D.²⁸ According to another annalistic source, the consecration of this prelate took place a year earlier.²⁹ Since this patriarch died in Nisan 18, 1220 of the Seleucid Era, i.e. April 18, 909 A.D., our document must have been composed under this Dionysios before this date.

It is always cause for great rejoicing to be able to add a new unearthed source to the treasure chamber of the literary legacy of the ancient church. It is particularly gratifying when it is a document which can enrich our knowledge in such a way as does the record which has come into our possession.

28. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)* 4 ed. J. B. Chabot (Paris, 1899–1910), pp. 757f.

29. *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum* 2, ed. J. B. Abbeloos et T. J. Lamy (Louvain, 1872–1877), col. 391, 393.