

THE MORNING SERVICE (*SAPRA*) ACCORDING TO GABRIEL OF QATAR: A SEVENTH-CENTURY WITNESS TO THE EAST SYRIAC DAILY LITURGY

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The British Library's Syriac language collection, containing more than 1075 manuscripts, one of the largest and most diverse in the world, contains a unique thirteenth-century manuscript, *British Library Or. 3336*, that preserves the earliest and most comprehensive liturgical commentary on the East Syriac daily liturgy, written by an early seventh-century author, Gabriel of Qatar. Although Anton Baumstark briefly mentioned this commentary in 1922, it was not until 1966 with the study of S. H. Jammo that it received any serious attention.² Besides a basic description of the Evening Service (*Ramsa*), Jammo provided the Latin translation of the chapters dealing with the Eucharistic liturgy.³ More recently, Sebastian Brock has given a more detailed description of its contents, with entire chapter headings and an English translation of the sections on the Eucharistic liturgy and *Trisagion*.⁴ Nevertheless out of 230 folios of the manuscript, more than two hundred still remain unexplored.

The *Commentary of Gabriel of Qatar* (hereafter abbreviated as CGQ) is distributed in five treatises (*memre*) of uneven length, and each is divided up into chapters. Their respective contents are: (1) the weekday Evening Service

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- 2 A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922), p. 200, n. 13; S. H. Jammo, 'Gabriel Qatraya et son commentaire sur la liturgie chaldéenne', *OCP* 32 (1966), pp. 39-52; *idem*, 'L'Office du soir chaldéen au temps de Gabriel Qatraya', *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967), pp. 187-210.
- 3 S. H. Jammo, *La Structure de la messe chaldéenne, du début jusqu'à l'anaphore: Etude historique*, OCA, 207 (Rome, 1979).
- 4 S. Brock, 'Gabriel of Qatar's Commentary on the Liturgy', *Hugoye: Online Journal of Syriac Studies* 6:2 (2003), pp. 1-13; *idem*, 'The Origins of the *Qanona* "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal" according to Gabriel of Qatar (Early 7th Century)', *The Harp* 21 (2006), pp. 173-185.

(*Ramsa*), (2) the weekday Morning Service (*Sapra*), (3) the Evening and Vigil Service of Sunday eve, (4) the Sunday Morning Service, and (5) the Sunday Service of Mysteries. We limit our study to the ferial Morning Service (*Sapra*), focusing mainly on the second *memra* of the commentary. At the outset we draw attention to the commentary itself, its author and his milieu.

1. *Rabban Gabriel Qatraya*

According to the manuscript, the author is Rabban Gabriel Qatraya (of Qatar), surnamed bar Lipah (fol. 229b). Qatraya refers to the location of Qatar in the Persian Gulf. In Syriac usage, Qatraya can also refer to the entire western coast of the Gulf, along with the islands, where Christianity was already well established by the early-fifth century.⁵ It is well attested that during the reign of Ishoyabh III (649-659) there existed tension between the catholicos and the bishops of Qatar on the question of ecclesiastical independence.⁶ At this difficult situation, the local monks of Qatar were the most loyal to the catholicos. The schism was soon healed, and already in 676 the local church of Qatar had the rank of metropolitan. This region was by now an intellectual centre for the Church of the East. Two famous monastic writers of the end of the seventh century, Isaac of Niniveh and Dadisho, were both from Qatar. A theological school similar to that in Nisibis must have existed in Beth Qatraya, but no information concerning its activity is available. The title ‘rabban’ can refer to the title of the ‘director’ or ‘teacher’ in the school.

Since quite a number of Gabriels described as ‘Qatraya’ are known, there is considerable confusion regarding the author’s identity. From a variety of different sources, Brock has found eight possible persons of that name, but reduces them to four distinguished Gabriels, providing by his proofs the identification of some of them as the same person.⁷ Fortunately, there is some

5 S. Brock, ‘Syriac writers from Beth Qatraye’, *ARAM* 11-12 (1999-2000), p. 85.

6 Most of the monks of the region were loyal to the Catholicos. Ishoyabh speaks of the monks as ‘a fragrant incense-burner for the Church of Beth Qatraye’, *ibid.*, pp. 85-88.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 85-96, esp. 89-92. In his opinion, the four Gabriels are: (1) Gabriel the Interpreter of Mahoze and relative of Isaac, who wrote the biblical commentaries and in this role was also known as Arya; (2) Gabriel Bar Lipah, author of the Commentary on the liturgy; (3) Gabriel who collated a New Testament manuscript at the School of Nisibis in 614/5; and (4) Gabriel, author of a Christological treatise against whom Babai wrote a book.



internal evidence from the Commentary itself, as Jammo already noted,⁸ for one exact date and identity of the Gabriel under discussion. The ms mentions at one point the holy Shubhalmaran, metropolitan of the city of Slok (fol.109a). Brock rightly suggests that, as the author uses the present tense, it is clear that Shubhalmaran is still alive, while the epithet 'holy' hints that he was quite old.⁹ Although Shubhalmaran's exact dates are not known, his '*floruit*' must belong to the early decades of the seventh century, and he certainly must have died in exile somewhere around 620, after incurring the displeasure of Shah Chosroes II.¹⁰ This means that Gabriel must belong to the early decades of the seventh century.¹¹ Jammo, however, identifies the author with the scribe of *British Library Add. 14471*, written at Nisibis by a Gabriel of Qatar and dated 615, already indicated by G. Margoliouth.¹² But according to Brock, Jammo's identification is very uncertain and unlikely, and he concludes that the author of the Commentary is not to be identified with any of the other Gabriels of Qatar.¹³ In any case, this earlier date is particularly important, since it provides us with the liturgical state of affairs of a largely unknown period before the prominent reforms of the Catholicos Ishoyahb III (649-659).

8 Jammo, 'L'Office du soir chaldéen' (see n. 1), p. 42.

9 Brock, 'The Origins of the *Qanona*' (see n. 3), p. 179.

10 For the life and works of Shubhalmaran, see *Subhalmaran: The Book of Gift*, trans. D. J. Lane, CSCO 613, *Scriptores Syri* 237 (Leuven, 2004), pp. 1-16. In 612 he was one of the bishops who took part in the disputation, organised by Shah Chosroes II, between representatives of the Church of the East and those of the Syrian Orthodox Church. He must have died certainly before 630, because his successor on the episcopal throne was already in office by that time: J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, III (Beirut, 1968), pp. 31-32.

11 Thus, we may correct the date accorded by Baumstark who, following the argumentation of A. Scher, considered all Gabriels of Qatar as the same person, consequently running into chronological difficulties. Baumstark, *Geschichte* (see n. 1), p. 200, n. 13; A. Scher, 'Etude supplémentaire sur les Ecrivains Syriens Orientaux', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 9 (1906), pp. 17-18.

12 Jammo, 'Gabriel Qatraya' (see n. 1), p. 42; G. Margoliouth, *Descriptive List of Syriac and Karshuni Mss. in the British Museum acquired since 1873* (London, 1899), pp. 53-54.

13 Brock, 'Syriac writers' (see n. 4), p. 92. Likewise, André De Halleux and Luuk Van Rompay do not identify the author of the Commentary with other Gabriels of Qatar. See A. De Halleux, *Dictionnaire d'Histoire de Géographie Ecclésiastique* 19 (1981), pp. 563-564; L. Van Rompay, *Le Commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22*, CSCO 484, *Scriptores Syri* 206 (Leuven, 1986), p. xxxii.



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