

ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ

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**East Syriac Literary Life in the mid-16th Century:
‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā and Older Contemporary Poets***A. D. Pritula*State Hermitage Museum,
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The article discusses the East Syriac literary circle of the of the early Ottoman Empire period. Its most important representative is ‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā, the second patriarch of the new Church (1555–1570), and also an outstanding poet, whose legacy remains to a large extent unstudied, though. Even less is known about the works of his contemporaries, such as Darwīš of Gāzartā, Abrahām of Bēt Slōk and ‘Aṭāyā of Gāzartā. They communicated with him, and devoted his poems at least to the first two of them, despite their belonging to the traditionalist (“Nestorian”) patriarchate. Based on the texts and manuscripts unknown before, the paper shows in the article that the literary circle of that period was determined not by the Church affiliation, but rather geographically. ‘Abdišō’ as well as the poets he communicated with originated from the town of Gāzartā (North Mesopotamia, present Turkey) or from its neighbourhood, and some of them might have been his relatives. As a result of the long coexistence with Persian and Arabic Islamic culture, the sphere of use of poetry in the Syriac tradition was expanding in the next centuries. Its further development in the 16th century is one of numerous examples of wide use of the literary canons created in the period of so-called Syriac Renaissance (11th–14th centuries). In the Ottoman time, the extension of poetry use reached its apogee, taking into consideration also numerous short poems written by the scribes as verse additions to various manuscripts.

Keywords: Syriac poetry, Chaldean Church, Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire, Gāzartā literary circle, monastic literature, manuscript transmission.

Introduction

It is well-known that the 16th century saw the revival of the Syriac culture and manuscript production [see 1, p. 81; 2]. Besides, a lot of new verse texts emerged in that period, in which ‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā, the second Patriarch (1555–1570) of the East Syriac Uniate

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Church played a very important role. The Western dioceses — mainly, Mardin and Amid (Diyarbakir), — where its literary and ideological center was located formed the foundation of this new tradition. In the central ones — the Northern Iraq with their literary center in Alqosh and the neighboring towns — most of monasteries and parishes were remaining in the jurisdiction of the traditionalist patriarchal line that was based in Rabban Hörmīzd monastery located near this town¹.

The present article would attempt, based on various unpublished verse texts, to define some features of the literary life of the poetic circle that existed in the Western dioceses of the East Syriac Church, and seems to have influenced the further development of this tradition. Here, by these features we basically understand the communication of the literates and their relations². The paper would focus on two authors, who were apparently older contemporaries of 'Abdīšō' of Gāzartā, and might have been in poetic and personal communication with him, namely, Darwiš of Gāzartā and Abrāhām of Bēt Slōk. Texts composed by them, as well as the ones mentioning them are helpful also as an important source on the biography of this outstanding author, in particular on the early period of his life, when his literary and Church career was in its very start.

Most of the texts being discussed in the present article survive only in CCM 00398 (Chaldean Cathedral of Mardin). This amazing text collection is presently a subject of a special study by Helen Murre-van den Berg, the leading expert in the literature of the period³. The manuscript that contains the poems under discussion, as well as many other verse texts, was written in 1583 in the cloister dedicated to Mār Yōhannān the Egyptian, as follows from the colophon (CCM 00398, fol. 144v). This might be a monastery located near Gāzartā that was an important center of the Church culture in the 16th century, and was inhabited by monks till the 19th century, and during this period many manuscripts were copied there [6, p. 109, 116]. As follows from the document written by Abdīšō' that was recently published, this monastery was his abode before his consecration [see below in more detail; 8, p. 245–247]. May be, it is for that reason that the manuscript contains a unique anthology of his poems that are not found elsewhere [see 1, p. 322–326]. The value of this poetic anthology possibly copied from the poet's lost autograph is in a large number of unknown elsewhere poetic texts by various authors that lived in the 16th century, and thus it illustrates the life of the Syriac poetic circle of that period. The collection contains hundreds of unstudied poems ascribed to this author, many of which refer to different persons he might have known, and places he apparently visited. Thus, editing and translating these poems for the first time, incorporated in the main text of the paper or placed in an Appendix, is one of the main tasks of the current article.

¹ It is in this literary center that the poetry in Neo Aramaic first appeared by the end of the 16th century [see, for instance, 3; 4], unlike the Western literary circle.

² The article is meant as a one in a series of publications devoted to the poetry East Syriac literary circle of the 16th century; for more detailed characteristics of the genre forms, for instance, see another paper by myself [5].

³ It should come out in the nearest future, as the scholar told me. A mention of the same collection see also in an article by myself [5].

himself is known as a priest of the traditional East Syriac (Rabban Hōrmīzd) line, which makes mentioning of the Uniate bishop ‘Abdīšō’ rather unusual and also requiring some explanations. I discuss in a separate paper manuscripts written by ‘Abdīšō’ himself in different periods of his life, and the biographic information they contain [5]. Most substantial for the current paper is fact that these two persons might have had personal relations regardless to their belonging to the two rival patriarchal lines. Since it is clear now that ‘Abdīšō’ originated from Gāzartā himself [8, p. 245–247], it is quite natural that he had strong contacts and connections in his native town.

Darwīš of Gāzartā: priest, poet and scribe; and ‘Abdīšō’s uncle?

Darwīš son of Ḥannā, son ‘Isā, of Gāzartā was a contemporary poet originating from the same town, of whose works at least one piece has survived. It is a ‘*ōnītā*’ hymn on the Consecration of Church [1, p. 163, 330] that is found in the Berlin Ms. Orient. Fol. 619 (fol. 224r–228v), which is a short recension of the Wardā hymnological collection [12, p. 10, 12–15], written in Darband in 1715 [13, S. 244–250, no. 65]. The hymn text has an interesting introductory that might have been composed by another person, apparently, by one of the copyists, and contains details on the poet’s name as well as his father’s. Its last two verses seems to have connection to scribal labor. It is not clear whether this passage was added when the latter was still alive. At least, there is no indication of the opposite.

- [1] ܕܘܚܒܝܕܐ ܠܚܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ
 ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ
 [2] ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ
 ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ
 [3] ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ
 ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ ܕܥܝܫܐ

[1] That is composed by a fine priest,
 true presbyter,
 Ephremian⁵ teacher,
 whose byname is Darwīš,
 [2] son of just and elevated,
 and righteous Ḥannā of Gāzartā.
 May the sublime King rejoice him
 in His kingdom forever.
 [3] May Christ settle him
 for the period of times and years.
 Thus, having begun from the beginning,
 we will finish by the force of the Trinity. (fol. 224r)

The ‘*ōnītā*’ itself has a standard meter strophic structure for this form: 7-7-7-7, with each stanza having its own end rhyme.

⁵ I.e. a teacher like Ephrem the Syrian (Ephrem of Nisibis), the founder and classical author of the Syriac Christian tradition (4th century).

It is noteworthy that in the same manuscript there are at least two poems by 'Abdišō' of Gāzartā (Patriarch 'Abdišō' IV) on St. Cyriacus (Qūriāqōs) (fol. 182v–186v, 195v–196v), and two more on other subjects (fol. 72v–74v, 107v–110r). According to the colophon, this copy was completed by a scribe named Wardā of B'ellāwin in the town of Darband, in the land of Tergāwār, during Patriarchate of Šem'ōn in 2026 AG (=1715 AD) (fol. 243r), who should be identified as Šem'ōn XIV (1700–1740), a hierarch of the same East Syriac line to which 'Abdišō' of Gāzartā had belonged, namely the one established by Yōḥannān Sūlāqā with the help of Rome [see, for instance, 2]. That may explain why so many poems by 'Abdišō' were included in a manuscript of the Wardā hymn collection, where they do not normally occur. That exemplifies text transmission within one patriarchal line. It the period the patriarchal residence of this line was based in the East, in Qudshanis, a village in Hakkari mountains, in South Eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire, close to Iran, and the town of Darband in Hakkari region becomes a substantial center of copying manuscripts. Thus, the scribe named Wardā of the village B'ellāwin, who wrote this manuscript produced about ten in total between 1707 and 1754, and died of cholera in 1757 [6, p. 308].

Like many other contemporaries, including 'Abdišō' IV, Darwiš was active both as poet and scribe. At least, three manuscripts written by him survive now, all three were produced in his native town Gāzartā, and there is no evidence he was active elsewhere [6, p. 113]. These copies provide us also with the dating of his activity. The earliest of them is a lectionary CCM 00060 written in 1847 AG (=1536 AD), according to the colophon (fol. 101v–102v)⁶.

The second manuscript, one more lectionary, is CCM 00089 (Chaldean Church of Mardin), formerly in Diyarbakir Chaldean collection⁷. As follows from the colophon (fol. 116r–118r), by Darwiš son of Ḥannā, son 'Isā, of Gāzartā (fol. 117r) in 1850 AG, 946 AH (=1539 AD). The identification of the person is quite certain because of the detailed way the name is rendered in the colophon. It is also mentioned that the manuscript was scribed in Gāzartā, the native town of the poet and copyist.

The third one is a *Gazzā* manuscript CCM 00139, also formerly in Diyarbakir Chaldean collection, written in 1542, as follows from the colophon (fol. 492r–494v)⁸, and purchased by the Church of Mār Petion in Diyarbakir in 1546 (fol. 494r). Unlike the rest two copies produced by this scribe, this one has a verse introductory that is an addition to the main text (fol. 2v). It is questionable whether this piece was composed by the copyist Darwiš himself. This is very likely, since he is known as a poet, and the extension of poetry use reached its apogee, taking into consideration also numerous short poems written by the scribes as verse additions to various manuscripts. The piece is composed in twelve-syllable meter, and has a mono-rhyme (-*tā*). It is also noteworthy that this poetic addition is made only in one of the three copies by this scribe. One may assume that the reason is the character of the manuscript. The rest two (CCM 00060, CCM 00089), being Gospel lectionaries, might have been considered inappropriate for any scribal verse ad lib. CCM 00139, in turn, being a collection of festal hymns, and having a clear poetic character, con-

⁶ Formerly, Mardin 12 [19, p. 9]. Available at vHMML site. Permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/132239>

⁷ Formerly, Diyarbakir 19 [10, p. 338]. Available at vHMML site. Permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/132260>

⁸ Formerly, Diyarbakir 38 [10, p. 350]. Available at vHMML site. Permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/130011>

tains dozens poems of various content, and might have seemed a good opportunity for a poetic contribution. We are quoting the piece here, since it a very characteristic sample of scribal introductory invocation:

Text

CCM 00139, fol. 2v

[1] تَعِيْمٌ زَيْنٌ هَيِّبٌ يَلِيْبٌ . وَتَعْدٌ يَلِيْبٌ تَعِيْمٌ .
مَذْمُومٌ تَعْدٌ سَجْدٌ نَبِيْعٌ . مَسِيْبٌ لَسٌ هَدِيْبٌ ؛
[2] دِيْبٌ تَعْدٌ تَعِيْمٌ . وَتَعِيْمٌ تَعْدٌ تَعِيْمٌ .
حَلِيْبٌ مَعْدٌ هَجْدٌ شَقِيْبٌ . دِيْبٌ هَجْدٌ كِيْبٌ دِيْبٌ ؛
[3] دِيْبٌ دِيْبٌ دِيْبٌ تَعْدٌ . مَعْدٌ تَعْدٌ دِيْبٌ تَعِيْمٌ .
وَهَيْبٌ دِيْبٌ تَعِيْمٌ تَعِيْمٌ . حَلِيْبٌ تَعْدٌ مَعْدٌ هَجْدٌ ؛
[4] عِيْبٌ مَعْدٌ مَعْدٌ تَعِيْمٌ . لَسٌ تَعِيْمٌ مَعْدٌ تَعِيْمٌ .
مَسِيْبٌ تَعِيْمٌ تَعِيْمٌ . مَسِيْبٌ تَعِيْمٌ مَسِيْبٌ ؛
[5] دِيْبٌ دِيْبٌ تَعِيْمٌ تَعِيْمٌ . تَعِيْمٌ تَعِيْمٌ مَسِيْبٌ هَجْدٌ .
حَدٌ مَسِيْبٌ حَدٌ مَسِيْبٌ . مَسِيْبٌ مَسِيْبٌ مَسِيْبٌ حَدٌ ؛

Translation

[1] In the name of the venerable Father, the cause,
and the causing Son, the Word,
and the Holy Spirit, one essence,
that strengthens thought
[2] of the ignorant man,
who is smitten in exile,
full of spots of any sins,
that is writing the *Gazzā*⁹ of the days
[3] of the feasts of [God's] dispensation,
and of the Friday commemorations,
and besides, what was done for the whole
year in monasteries and churches.
[4] Lord, give support
to your servant that is defiled in sin,
and strengthen him with the strength of the grace
that strengthens the worlds and creatures.
[5] So that, just as he began with trustfulness,
so he would complete it by the force of the Trinity.
And Your force, having accompanied him as far as the middle,
would lead him to the finish.

There is a poem written by ‘Abdišō‘ of Gāzartā that is preserved only in CCM 00398 (fol. 224r; see Appendix 1). It consists of six four-line stanzas that have an acrostic making the name *Darwīš* (دَرْوِيْش). Each line has twelve syllables and a regular mono-rhyme

⁹ Available at vHMML site. Permanent link: <https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/132226>

(-īs). It is a panegyric, or, rather, a “correspondence poem”, i.e. an ode in a form of a letter praising the qualities of the addressee, whose name in this case might have been Darwīš. Though it was his second name, since the first one was Gīwargīs, and he was the poet’s maternal uncle, as follows from the refrain at the end of each stanza: my uncle Gīwargīs (شكك ابحه قبحه). It is clear from the allusions in the text that the addressee was a literate:

تَبْنِبْ اِحْدَ لَبْ لَبْ لَبْ تَفْهَذْ هَسْلَبِي اِحْبَبْ
 هُ مَفْهَذْ هَمْدَهْ شَكْ اِحْبَهْ قَبْهْ ❖

Console us soon by a lucidly worded scripture,
 oh, our rejoicer and entertainer, my uncle, Gīwargīs! (stanza 5)

دَهْهَمْ هَمْدَهْ حَتْدِ دَتْبَعِي مَسِيْ اَحْبَبْ دَهْهَمْ:
 هُ مَفْهَذْ هَمْدَهْ هَمْدَهْ شَكْ اِحْبَهْ قَبْهْ ❖

Let the shower of your scrolls make permanent sprinkling for us.
 Oh our fame, pride and glory, my uncle, Gīwargīs! (stanza 2)

The poem in general is concentrated on scriptures and book imagery, which is characteristic for a verse letter of one literate to another, a rather popular poetic form in that period of the Syriac literature [see 14]. Such panegyrics first appeared in the Syriac poetry in the period of so-called Syriac Renaissance, in particular, in the Mongol time (late 13th — early 14th century), being clearly an imitation of the Islamic poetic forms, such as *qaṣīda*. Further development of this kind of the literature of the 16th century is one of numerous examples of wide use of the literary canons created in the period of the Syriac Renaissance. More detailed, I discuss this issue in more detail elsewhere [2].

Damascus paper, famous for its good quality in the whole Near East [see 15, p. 51], is mentioned in the initial line of the poem (Appendix 1, stanza 1). The text also says that he had deaconship, and it is probably because of this position that the text alludes to book-keeping as his duty:

ا حَفْهْ مَسْمُومْ دَسْبَكْ اَحْبَبْ تَدْبَعِي دَهْهَمْ دَهْهَمْ:
 هَمْدَهْ مَسْمُومْ هَمْدَهْ اَحْبَبْ اَحْبَبْ دَهْهَمْ دَهْهَمْ.
 اَحْبَبْ تَدْبَعِي مَسْمُومْ دَهْهَمْ دَهْهَمْ:
 هُ مَفْهَذْ هَمْدَهْ شَكْ اِحْبَهْ قَبْهْ ❖

Shin: May your name be terrible to your enemies like that of Ares,
 Be a skilled bookkeeper and a head of all merchants, like Hermes.
 Let your night be always shining without any eclipse,
 Oh, our companion, deacon, my uncle, Gīwargīs! (stanza 6)

Although it is not clear who the addressee of the poem was, it seems very likely the same poet and copyist Darwīš son of Ḥannā b. ‘Isā, of Gāzartā. Obviously, the person meant in the text was a literate as well, and since he was ‘Abdišō’s relative, he might have been of Gāzartā origin, like Darwīš son of Ḥannā is known to have been. The fact that apart from this name, that addressee of the poem had the second name, Gīwargīs — as far as we can conclude from the poem, — does not invalidate this suggestion. Even in

the introductory to the hymn composed by him (Ms. Orient. Fol. 619, fol. 224r–228v; also see above), it is mentioned that Darwīš is his byname or the second name, and the word **ܕܘܨܝܫ** is used, rather than the word **ܕܘܨܝܫܐ** (name) (fol. 224r). If such an identification is correct, that would mean that ‘Abdīšō’ originated from an educated Gāzartā family, and was a nephew of Darwīš son of Ḥannā, another literate that lived in this city. In this case the piece under discussion might have been composed by him in an early period of his career, since the former was already a priest in 1536 AD, as follows from the colophon of CCM 00060 written then (fol. 117r). Therefore, if the identification of the poem’s addressee is correct, this text mentioning his deaconship might have been written before that date, and therefore might have been a rather early piece by ‘Abdīšō’.

Syriac monastic poetry of the early 16th century: Abrāhām of Bēt Slōk (Slōkāyā)

Abrāhām of Bēt Slōk (Slōkāyā), i.e. of Kirkuk (a city in Iraq 238 km north of Baghdad) apparently belonged to the main spiritual authorities of the East Syrian Church of the 16th century. His liturgical and non-liturgical poems were copied in numerous manuscripts, and besides his influence on ‘Abdīšō’ of Gāzartā is notable, as follows from the latter’s own verses and manuscript autographs.

Abrāhām Slōkāyā was a monk in the monastery of Mār Awgēn on the mount Izla near Nisibin, at the western border or the spread of the East Syriac Church, being active as a scribe and a poet in early 16th century [1, p. 179]. This cloister was an important center of spiritual education and manuscript production [6, p. 45–47]. The Izla mount itself was famous for its numerous monasteries that were concentrated there since the fourth century [6, p. 43].

Heleen Murre-van den Berg has mentioned the texts ascribed to him in her book, and in particular in a special table of the pieces composed by the East Syriac authors in the Ottoman time [1, p. 321–322]. Thus, Abrāhām of Bēt Slōk is also reported as a composer of one of versions of the rites for the novices in the monasteries [1, p. 148, footnote 14]. Another liturgical text, to which he might have contributed is so called *Stanzas of the rite of the months* (**ܕܘܨܝܫܐ ܕܘܨܝܫܐ ܕܘܨܝܫܐ**) [1, p. 151, 236]. This is a set of short poems that were performed at the beginning of each month that was possibly introduced by him, since he even wrote a short treatise on it [1, p. 236]. They were apparently very popular and much appreciated by the contemporaries, since in one of the manuscripts written by ‘Abdīšō’ of Gāzartā this poetic text is written in his hand alongside his own poems in a manuscript that is now in St. Mark Monastery, Jerusalem (SMMJ 00159, fol. 133v–134v). It contains of two short introductory prayers that are followed by three short strophic poems with an alphabetic acrostic, using initial letters of the names of the months of the year (fol. 134r), letters that make the words sun and moon (**ܕܘܨܝܫܐ ܕܘܨܝܫܐ**) (fol. 134r), and on the days of the week (fol. 134v) correspondingly. As one can conclude from the introductory, the “Rite of the months” was possibly meant to be performed at the beginning the year, or even of each month, in order to obtain God’s blessing for all months of the year. Each poem has a clear attribution to Abrāhām in the heading: “by Rabban Abrāhām of Bēt Slōk (**ܕܘܨܝܫܐ ܕܘܨܝܫܐ**)”. Being a disciple and contemporary of the latter, the copyist should have exactly known about the authorship of the text, and therefore, its attribution is quite certain. Judg-

ing from the type of the service, one could reckon it the monastic prayer rites that might be served even in a cell.

Abrāhām is also known as a composer of one of the funeral *madrāšē* that is included in a text collection [1, p. 179].

Apart from the above mentioned pieces, there are some shorter poems that were never described or studied, but might be obviously popular to some extent, since they were included in 16th century poetic anthologies. One of them includes 52 quatrains by different authors, as well as anonymous, and one final ode [CCM 00113; see 14]. The earliest of them, such Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē, and Bar ‘Ebrōyō were active in the second half of the 13th century and are utmost celebrated representatives of so-called Syriac Renaissance. The final ode is ascribed to Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē and addressed to Bar ‘Ebrōyō. It is well-known that they had poetic correspondence, as was typical for their time for both Islamic and Christian educated elite in the Near East. Apart from that, the collection contains a quatrain that is ascribed to this author, where he is called *Rabban* (literally: our lord) Abrāhām (fōl. 118v). The first epithet is normally used for monks, priests and abbots, and is well-known to have been applied to him. This short text is of some importance, since the manuscript was written in the monastery of Mār Awgēn, the abode of this literate, in 1553 [14, p. 190–191], when he might be still alive, or shortly after his death. Thus, this is most likely, the earliest surviving copy of his poem ever, apparently, collected by his pupils from the same monastery. That is obviously, how calling him the *Rabban* (literally: our lord, often without the proper name, quite usual for monastic authorities) might have appeared: first in use among his disciples, and then spread wider together with the popularity of his poetry.

The quatrain may be reckoned to the group of pilgrim poetry, since the text clearly alludes to the way to Jerusalem.

It is well-known that such pilgrimages were very popular among the East Syrians at least since early Ottoman time, when a relative stability was established in the Near East [1, p. 81]. An East Syrian monastery with a church of Virgin Mary (Mārt Maryam) in the Holy city was visited by numerous pilgrims that used to make their way from the Eastern provinces of the Empire, such as Iraq and South-East Anatolia [see 16]. Their short poems relating about it survive as later additions to various manuscripts donated by them to the monastery library. It is likely that the poet, Rabban Abrāhām visited Jerusalem himself, since this kind of activity seems to have become a common business in the Ottoman time. The final line of the poem obviously alludes that the route is open after the winter is over. Also could mean that visiting the Holy City was most popular in spring, especially to stay in the on the eve of the Lord’s Resurrection feast and to be present at the festive service [2]. The same line apparently mentions Gaza (Arabic غزة), the city in Palestine, about 80 km away from Jerusalem. It should be also mentioned the poet used a rhyme *gaz/gāz* (گز / گاز), having placed the homographs at the end of each line in a way the letter may be distinguished only due the vocalization and the context. This is very likely to have been done deliberately as playing with all possible homographs, to demonstrate poetic skills. Such a technic, or rather, a poetic figure is well-known in Islamic — Arabic and Persian — poetry (Arabic *tajnīs*), from which it might have been borrowed by the Syriac authors of the late period. To follow this pattern, all the rhymed nouns stand in *Status Absolutus*, without the final postpositive article –ā, which is unusual, and even odd in some cases, for instance, for such words as *gazz(ā)*, of Persian origin.

ܦܝܫܢܐ ܕܚܝܝܬܐ ܕܢܘܨܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ
 ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ
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By Rabban Abrahām

The universe is pleased that the winter is over, and the snow failed
 The flowers sprout and blossom, and a shepherd has rejoiced and shorn his sheep.
 The kings are delighted and share the diadems from the treasury.
 And the way to Jerusalem is glad, and the one that leads to Gaza.

Other short poems by Abrahām of Bēt Slōk are found in the following manuscripts:

CCM 00398: 2 quatrains on fol. 255v, 1 quatrain on fol. 259r, a six-line poem on fol. 260v (**ܕܕܢܐ ܕܢܘܨܐ ܗܠܗ ܗܠܗ**), 5 quatrains on fol. 261r, 1 quatrain on fol. 261v, 2 quatrains on fol. 263v.

They are ascribed to “Rabban” in the headings, so that the identification is quite certain.

Apart from poetry, he collected the letters from correspondence with the Syriac Church bishops in India and wrote an introduction to it [1, p. 179, 254–255]. Thus, Abrahām of Bēt Slōk was a type of East Syriac literate of his time, which is characterized by a combination of spiritual position, ascetic authority, poetic and scribal activities. That might be partially a result of the multiple centuries of the coexistence with the Islamic majority, for which such a combination was quite traditional since the emerging of the Sufi culture [17]. In all likelihood, he had an utmost authority among the contemporary educated clerics and hierarchs.

A few extremely important poems survive only in the collection in CCM 00398 (fol. 255r). They are most likely three independent quatrains on similar subjects in the manuscript grouped together with equal intervals. Were they stanzas of one strophic poem, the spaces in between would not be that large. In one of them the name *Rabban Brahīm* (**ܕܕܢܐ ܕܢܘܨܐ**) is mentioned that may be identified with Abrahām of Bēt Slōk (see below, poem 2). The first vowel of the name is apparently omitted to fit the twelve-syllable meter used here, like in most Syriac quatrains. It also shows Arabic influence, rendering *Ibrāhīm* (ابراهيم), an Arabic version of the name.

Otherwise, this piece, or to be precise, similar pieces standing one after another, judging from the headings, were written by ‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā. Although his name is not mentioned directly, and has the common “by the same one” (**ܕܕܢܐ**) the attribution must be clear, since the last author mentioned in a heading of a preceding poem before is ‘Abdišō’ (fol. 251v). Using such a construction is typical of the Syriac poetry collections, and is meant to avoid numerous repetitions of the same author’s name. Each piece was composed on an occasion of consecrating church utensils: priest’s belt (**ܕܕܢܐ ܕܢܘܨܐ**), stole (**ܕܕܢܐ ܕܢܘܨܐ**) and altar-cover (**ܕܕܢܐ ܕܢܘܨܐ**), respectively. Such a use of short verse texts, especially quatrains, demonstrates an extreme popularity of this poetic form and a custom of present them on several occasions, including the Church practice. They first appeared

in the Syriac literature in the period of so-called Syriac Renaissance, and obviously spread even wider in the following centuries [2].

All three were probably composed for presenting in the monastery on the of Mār Awgēn, which is mentioned in the text (see below, poem 3), a cloister, where Rabban Abrāhām lived. The author of the verses might have been present at a church service there, at which, or, more likely, after which, each poem was presented. Although one cannot rule out that the second poem was written for the church in the monastery of John (Yōḥannān) the Arab, since “sacred altar of Mār Yōḥannān” is mentioned there (see below, poem 2). This monastery was located on the mountain Izla near the monastery of Mār Awgēn and might have had with the latter close contacts [6, p. 43].

It is not entirely clear, though, whether the first text was composed for that monastery as well, since neither the abode's nor the addressee's names are mentioned there (see below, poem 1). But still, this seems to be very likely, since these poems are grouped together, and might have been kept in the same monastery before then. The first quatrain mentions that “the belt was woven in year 1855 of Greece”, i.e. of the Seleucid era (see below, poem 1), which corresponds to 1543/4 AD. This text doesn't tell us the name of the priest, who was supposed to wear it. Instead of the latter, the word **ܦܠܟ** (so and so) is used, which must be a later scribal change, as usual in the Syriac poetry [for instance, see 18, p. 325]. The cleric meant was possibly serving in the same monastery, but we don't know, whether Rabban Abrāhām was still alive at that time, since he is not mentioned in this poem, but rather in the last one (see below, poem 3). He could have invited the poet to his monastery for that service, but we don't know that for sure. In any case, the text gives us the dating of composing the poem, which is the earliest dated piece composed by ‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā known to us, which is ten years before his ordination to a bishop by Sūlāqā in 1554 [6, p. 102].

[1]

ܦܠܟ

[fol. 255r]

ܦܠܟ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ
ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ
ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ
ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ

By the same one

This belt was woven in year 1855 of Greece¹⁰,
Amazing and wonderful for the pious one and a priest,
Mār¹¹ so-and-so, who is illustrious and famous in any place and country.
May Lord keep and enrich him with the richness of the soul and body.

[2]

ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ
ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ ܕܟܘܢܐ

¹⁰ I.e. 1543/4 AD.

¹¹ I.e lord.

ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܬܘܠܩܘܫܐ ܡܫܫܦܐ ܠܫܘܢܐ ܫܘܒܬܐ ܡܫܫܦ.

This stole was woven and also made
at an order of Rabban Brahīm, who ministers in all glory
Enthroned in the sacred altar of Mār Yōhannān.
May the clement one make us worthy of forgiveness of debts though his prayers.

[3]

ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.

By the same one

This stole was woven for the altar,
Which is the throne of the dweller¹² of the inner sanctorum, inhabited by the Spirit,
lord, Mār Awgēn, who is glorious and glorified in every place.
Let Lord Christ forgive our debts though his prayers.

One more poem by ‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā mentions the name of Abrāhām Slōkāyā. This is a mourning elegy on the death of the latter that reveals close relations of these two literates and Church actors. The poem has survived just in one copy, namely, as a part of the unique poetic anthology (CCM 00398, fol. 252r–253r, see *Appendix 2*). Nevertheless, it doesn’t necessarily mean that was not popular and didn’t have a wide circulation. Many Syriac poems, especially short ones, survive just in one copy, which is nothing but consequence of a long process of the destruction of the manuscripts caused by numerous calamities in the period of the last thousand years.

The poem contains an alphabetic acrostic, and therefore has 22 stanzas,¹³ each starting with a different letter. The stanzas consist of two twelve-syllable lines, each made of three four-line feet (12 (4+4+4) + 12 (4+4+4)). The rhyming is rather complex, where each foot has a rhyme at the end. Thus, each line has two internal rhymes that are individual for each one, and a common end-rhyme, general for the whole poem (=hā, for instance: ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ).

It is rather important that the text — a lamentation addressed to deceased person — is composed in 1st person plural, rather than in singular. Such a poetic method might mean that the author was intending to express the feeling of the whole grieved community, or his generation to which Abrāhām’s death might have been a great loss. As follows from the text, the author considered the deceased person his teacher, which means the latter might have belonged to an older generation.

ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.
ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ ܡܘܕܝܢܝܢ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ ܡܫܫܦ.

¹² Or: “house, inhabitation”, if ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ is St. Constr. of ܘܢܝ ܕܠܗܘܢܗܘܢ here..

¹³ Or, rather 23 stanzas, if to count the introductory as a strophe.

Mim: Who would then show your shining, glittering beauty that instructs us, please and rejoice us with your cheerful company? (stanza 14)

It is also clear that the author claims himself to be a part of the group of Abrāhām's students, and obviously knew him in person:

ܘ ܫܗܝܕ ܠܒܝ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ. ܘ ܕܡܝܢ ܘܠܝܬܝܬܝܢ. ܘ ܠܗ ܫܗܝܕ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ.
ܘ ܫܗܝܬ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ. ܘ ܫܗܝܬ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ. ܘ ܫܗܝܬ ܠܚܝܬܝܢ. ❖

Semkath: Turn to your students as you used to, and be our guest!
And take off the suffering of your beloved by your communication and joyful talk!
(stanza 16; fol. 253r)

Conclusion

In the first half of the 16th century, the literary life of the East Syriac Church became more intensive than ever since the great destruction caused by massacres of Timur in late 14th-early 15th centuries. It is believed that this activity was connected with the formation of the Ottoman Empire that granted certain stability to the Near Eastern economy and culture. At the same time, the role of poetry in the Syriac tradition was constantly increasing. By that period, it became an important means of transmission ideology, theology, and even a generally accepted way of communication within the educated Church elite. Geographically, the center of this poetic life was located in the North Western dioceses of the East Syriac Church that included Gāzartā, Nisibin, with the neighboring churches and monasteries actively involved in the process.

This literary circle was producing both liturgical and non-liturgical poetry, generally following poetic forms and canons created in the time of the Syriac Renaissance, mostly in the Mongol time (13th-14th century). As a result of the long coexistence with Persian and Arabic Islamic culture, the sphere of use of poetry was further expanding in the next centuries.

By that time, copying manuscripts became an important part of the activities of the educated Church elite in preserving the cultural heritage, alongside composing poetry. For that reason a large amount of scribal poetry started its circulation in various types of manuscripts produced. Its correlation with the main text of the latter is still to be studied.

Such a revival of Syriac literary and manuscript production anticipated the emerging of the early Chaldean (East Syriac Uniate) poetic tradition and prepared a number of authors with necessary skills for it, most famous and the very first of whom was 'Abdīšō' of Gāzartā (Patriarch 'Abdīšō' IV). This outstanding literate originated from this town and started his Church career in a monastery in its neighbourhood. The Western dioceses, where this literary and ideological center was located formed the foundation of this new tradition. The central ones, in the Northern Iraq with their literary center in Alqosh and the neighboring towns were remaining in the jurisdiction of the traditionalist patriarchal line that was based in Rabban Hōrmīzīd monastery located near this town. Despite this, the two East Syriac patriarchates — the Uniate and the traditional one — were never isolated from each other, but remained in permanent communication, thus, creating one literary and cultural space.

Based on the results of the present study, one can conclude that the Gāzartā literary circle of the second half of the 16th century was contributing to the literary development of both East Syriac patriarchates. Thus, its most well-known poet, ‘Abdīšō’ of Gāzartā, was a hierarch and a founder of the East Syriac Uniate literary tradition. At the same time, Darwīš, his fellow townsman and apparently his maternal uncle belonged to the traditionalist patriarchal line. Another literate from the same town, ‘Aṭāyā son of Faraj, was at the same time one of the best known East Syriac scribes of the Ottoman time. Having moved to Alqosh, the main center of the traditionalist Patriarchate, he contributed to establishing its manuscript tradition there. As far as one can judge from the information found in the manuscript colophons, the literates were still in contact, regardless to their belonging to the rival Churches. Thus, one may assume that the literary circle at that period was multi-denominational, it was mostly grouped around geographic, cultural centers, and to a certain extent around families.

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Востоносирийская литературная жизнь в середине XVI века: ‘Авдишо’ Газартский и старшие поэты-современники

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Статья посвящена востоносирийскому поэтическому кругу времен раннего периода Османской империи, основным представителем которого был ‘Авдишо’ Газартский, второй патриарх новой Церкви (1555–1570), а также незаурядный поэт, наследие которого тем не менее остается в значительной степени неизученным. О творчестве его старших современников, таких как Дарвиш Газартский, Абрахам из Бет Слока и ‘Атайя Газартский, известно еще меньше. Он посвятил стихотворения по крайней мере первым двум; все трое находились с ним в личной коммуникации, хотя принадлежали к традиционалистской («несторианской») патриаршей линии. На основании ранее не изученных текстов и рукописей в статье делается вывод о том, что литературный круг того времени был обусловлен не столько конфессиональной принадлежностью, сколько географической. ‘Авдишо’, как и литераторы, с которыми он общался, происходили из города Газарта (Сев. Месопотамия, совр. Турция) либо его окрестностей, а некоторые из них, по-видимому, были связаны с ним узами родства. В результате долгого сосуществования с персидской и арабской культурами сфера употребления поэзии расширялась в сирийской традиции в течение нескольких столетий. Дальнейшее ее развитие в XVI в. — один из многочисленных примеров широкого применения литературных канонов, возникших в период так называемого сирийского ренессанса (XI–XIV вв.). В Османскую эпоху распространение поэзии достигло апогея, судя по многочисленным коротким стихотворениям, написанным писцами в качестве поэтических приписок в различных рукописях.

Ключевые слова: сирийская поэзия, христианские общины в Османской империи, литературный круг Газарты, монашеская литература, рукописная передача.

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- דִּבְעָ דִּבְעָ. דִּבְעָ חַבְלָהּ. מַהֲמָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ *
 [9] שִׁעָרָהּ בְּמִדָּהּ. בְּיָמָהּ תִּמְדָּהּ. זֶה דָּוִד דִּבְעָהּ.
- דְּמִסְמָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. זֶה חַבְלָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. תְּהִיבָהּ דִּבְעָהּ *
 [10] חַבְלָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. מִכְּחַבְלָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. בְּכָל מִיָּמָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ.
- דְּכִסְתָּהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. בְּחִיבָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. בְּכָל חַבְלָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ *
 [11] חַבְלָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. בְּחִיבָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ. בְּכָל מִיָּמָהּ חֲבִיבָהּ.
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Translation

[fol. 252r] **Another one, by the same one, of consolatory character, composed on the decease of Rabban Abrāhām Slōkāyā**

- [1] Terror captured us since Rabban departed from our closeness.
 And suffering has weighed us down, and the perforating fire has burnt in our heart.
- [2] Aleph: The tears flow down, like streams, at your death, brother!
 [fol. 252v] And horrors of the terrible death grasp us in any hour and moment.
- [3] Beth: With your demise, our lord, the mouth of our hurters has got loose at us.
 And our spirit is sobbing, and the horrible death has ended our life.
- [4] Gamal: Time has deprived us of you glorious company.

And so, our eye looks to meet you, and desires you.
 [5] Dalath: Sufferings have disturbed us like the corrupt ones, and we started the way.
 And the guards of our mind made us imprisoned among ashes.
 [6] He: Our watchful mind without you, oh the noble one, has got cold [even] in heat.
 Since love to writing is like an ignorant one that is naked of [any] wit.
 [7] Waw: Sorrow has grieved us, since the crown of our head has turned into dust.
 And our soul has diminished, and our breath has weakened, and there is no rest for it.
 [8] Zayn: Long time has lessened our joys and increased our griefs,
 since the horrible death has led the head of the cloisters¹⁹ away from us.
 [9] Heth: Show us your place that we may come after you, oh the spirit of the Spirit,
 so that we would see your abode and your fragrant dwelling!
 [10] Teth: Death has oppressed us, and payed evil to us that is unmeasurable,
 Having imprisoned the friend of the truth in a house where there is no light.
 [11] Yodh: We are orphans, as you have departed from us, oh glorious father.
 And so we are shipwrecked in the sea of our misery, disturbed and oppressed.
 [12] Kaph: Our concern has abounded, and our weeping has increased to abundance.
 Our lament has become lasting, and the garment of our joy has got ragged.
 [13] Lamadh: The soul seeks your beautiful figure and much desires it.
 It watches your appointed place, asks for your beauty, to rest in it.
 [14] Mim: Who would then show your shining, glittering beauty that instructs us,
 refresh and make us rejoice with your desirable company?
 [15] Nun: Our soul has pined away and has become powerless because of desiring you,
 [fol. 253r] since it has wished and desired to fly to your presence.
 [16] Semkath: Turn to your students as you used to, and be our guest!
 And take off the suffering of your beloved by your communication and joyful talk!
 [17] ‘E: Our grief has strengthened, our force weakened, and our voice
 gave moaning speech about you, our leader, and worker of the truth.
 [18] Pe: Separation from you has confused our mind and pierced it as with spear.
 What is left after you, the one who touched the depth of any manuscript?²⁰
 [19] Šade: Show us your beautiful image in sleep, like in reality,
 So that our being that is dead from sorrow comes to life again.
 [20] Commemoration and memory of you is set in the board of the hearts
 of the lovers of your company, your companions, oh the glorious one!
 [21] Resh: May the sublime one, who sent an angel that lead your soul to the procession,²¹
 settle him in a place, where his²² happiness never ceases.
 [22] Shin: His rule is glorious, and glorification of His dispensation is suitable,
 since He exalts the sons of His way with His praised doxology.
 [23] Taw: Thanks be to our Lord, who refreshes our clod, rotten and turned to dust!
 And may He infuse our ashes into the burning furnace and dress in glory!

¹⁹ Usually, the term **رَئِيسُ الْبَيْتِ** (“head of the cloister”) designates an abbot of the monastery. Here nevertheless is used in plural (“head of cloisters”) as a trope that emphasizes the importance and significance of the deceased person for the monastic circles.

²⁰ Apparently, a metaphor that plays with the literal volume of a book, and the depth of knowledge that reaches one who has read it.

²¹ Apparently, a motion of angels accompanying a human soul during its departure from the body.

²² Most likely, that of the deceased person.

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