

Some Annotations on David Wilmshurst, *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Vol. 582, Subsidia 104. Leuven: Peeters, 2000.

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Two important East Syriac works by ‘Abdisho’ bar Brikha (*Kunasha d-qanone sunhadiqaye*—ed. by A. Mai, Rome 1838—and *Tukkās dine ‘edtanaye*, composed respectively in 1284 and 1315–1316) do not appear among the sources used by Wilmshurst. Their content is canonical and provides a picture of the ecclesiastical structure of the Church of the East at the beginning of the 14th century.

The facts of 1552, which eventually led to the East-Syrian Uniate movement, represent an important change in the history of the Church of the East. In this connection, it would have been worth mentioning the fact that the *primatus Petri* was a canonical principle fairly well established in the East-Syrian milieu a couple of centuries before Sulaqa’s rebellion. ‘Abdisho’ bar Brikha, e.g., attributes the *shultanutha* over all the patriarchs to the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome (*Kunasha d-qanone sunhadiqaye*—ed. by A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova et inedita collectio* X, Rome 1838, 327, 165). The patriarch Mar Yahballaha III addressed the Pope in similar terms in an Arabic letter dated 1304 (L. Bottini, ‘Due lettere inedite del patriarca Mar Yahballaha III (1281–1317)’, *Rivista degli studi orientali* 1992, 239–256).

In Chapter 2, some statements about the history of the 14th century need to be corrected or at least toned down. When the author comments upon the diplomatic mission of Rabban Sawma (1287–1288, not 1284–1285 as stated on p. 17) and says that ‘the Church of the East worked... to encourage a Mongol-Christian alliance against the Mamluk’ (p. 16–17), he is probably going too far. As far as we know, there is no evidence to support such an interpretation. The role of ecclesiastical ‘ambassadors’ sent by the Ilkhans was not a consequence of a specific interest of the Church in political and military alliance, and their position was subordinated to that of other ambassadors—Western, mainly Genoese, guests at the Ilkhanid court—who were sent with them. Of course, the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mar Yabballaha* might give us a different

impression, due to the origin and character of the narrative. But it should not be forgotten that, even though Rabban Sawma's mission is 'the best known Mongol initiative towards the Christian powers' (p. 17), it was only one of many and not necessarily the most successful.

The hypothesis that the synod of 1318 had to cope with the corruption and illiteracy of the clergy 'perhaps because Yahballaha III, who knew little Syriac himself, had been unable to control his bishops and visitors effectively' (p. 18) does not appear to be based on solid grounds. It was precisely during the patriarchate of Mar Yahballaha III that 'Abdisho' bar Brikha wrote his canonical works, which may bear witness to the patriarch's interest in setting up an 'up-dated' set of rules for the Church of the East, although he personally was not a scholar, an exegete, or a canonist as his predecessors and successor were. Wilmshurst refers to probable difficulties in the relationship between Mar Yahballaha and (some of) his bishops. This conjecture is in fact supported by evidence provided by Ricoldo da Montecroce, who attended a debate in Baghdad between Mar Yahballaha and some bishops about the permission to preach that the patriarch had given to the Latin missionaries (Ricoldo de Monte Croce, *Pérégrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient. Texte latin et traduction, Lettres sur la chute de Saint-Jean d'Acre*. Traduction par R. Kappler, Paris 1997, 152–155).

The 'humane emir Choban' had much more than 'an important moderating influence on the il-khan Abu Said'. Choban was in fact the real ruler at the beginning of the reign of Abu Said, who came to the throne as a boy. Indeed Amir Choban was a Muslim, and the good will he showed to the Christians according to the *History of Rabban Sawma and Mar Yahballaha* may have sprung more from political calculation than from 'humane' disposition.

Finally, the note about the Ms. Vat. Syr 622 (p. 390) needs correction: the princess Sara was not the daughter, but the sister of Giwargis, king of the Önggüd (autoptical check in Rome, 21-06-2002).