East Syriac Literary Life in the mid-16th Century: ‘Abdišo’ of Gāzartā and Older Contemporary Poets

A. D. Pritula

State Hermitage Museum,
34, Dvortsovaya nab., St. Petersburg, 190000, Russian Federation

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The article discusses the East Syriac literary circle of the early Ottoman Empire period. Its most important representative is ‘Abdišo’ 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, Abrāhām 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. ‘Abdišo’ 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 ‘Abdišo’ of Gāzartā, the second Patriarch (1555–1570) of the East Syriac Uniate
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 Hōrmizd 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 ’Abdišō’ of Gāzartā, and might have been in poetic and personal communication with him, namely, Darwīš 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 Yōḥannān 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].
ʿAbdišōʿ Gāzartā: origin and early period of life

Little is known about ʿAbdišōʿ’s early life period that preceded his ordination into a bishop of Gāzartā in 1554 by Yōḥannān Sūlāqā [6, p. 102], the founder of the first East Syriac Uniate patriarchate line. As follows from the entry by Voste in the catalogue of the manuscript collection of the Chaldean monastery Notre-Dame des Semences near Alqosh, he was a monk in a monastery near Gāzartā, while scribing that copy in 1552 [7, p. 109]. The manuscript itself is not available to us, since it was not digitized, but according to the description its colophon reads that is was copied from a manuscript of the Book of splendors by Bar ʿEbrōyō produced by ʿAbdišōʿ Gāzartā in 1552 while being a monk in a monastery near Gāzartā.

Quite recently, an autograph letter by ʿAbdišōʿ was published by Margherita Farina [8]. It contains the famous list of the dioceses of the Chaldean Church, over which he claimed his patriarchate. The Latin version of this document was rendered in the book by Giamil [9]. But, besides, it provides us with very substantial information on ʿAbdišōʿ’s origin and start of his Church career. Thus, the beginning of this letter reads:

I am ʿAbdišōʿ bar Ḥanna from Bēt Marōn from the city of Gāzartā that is on the shore of the river Tigris, formerly a monk from the order of our father Antonios from the monasteries of the two natural brothers Mār Aḥḥā and Mār Yōḥannān [8, p. 245–247].

The exact reasons for making him a bishop of this very city in 1554 are not known. Bearing such a title he was not based there, but rather in Amid (Diyarbakir), as follows from the colophons of the manuscripts he wrote in that period: Diyarbakir 130 [10, p. 413–414], and SMMJ 116 (now in St. Mark Monastery, Jerusalem) [11, p. 339–344], both produced in 1554. Besides, the town of Gāzartā is reported to have long remained under traditionalist Patriarchate (Bar Māmā) Rabban Hōrmīzd line [6, p. 102–103]. It seems very likely though that the appointment of ʿAbdišōʿ to that diocese was more connected with his past than with any ecclesiastic situation.

Besides, very important information is found in a manuscript of Bar ʿEbrōyō’s Metrical grammar copied by ʿAṭāyā son of Faraj of Gāzartā in 1555 in this town. This particular one, presently in the Chaldean collection of Mardin (CCM 00024)⁴, used a copy by ʿAbdišōʿ as a Vorlage. As the colophon says, “This book was written from a manuscript and a copy produced by our blessed and blissful father Mār ʿAbdišōʿ, bishop of Gāzartā in Bēt Zabdai (CCM 00024, fol. 110v) “. The manuscript was written “in the blessed and blissful Gāzartā of Bēt Zabdaī” (CCM 00024, fol. 110r) in Summer of 1866 AG/1555 CE (CCM 00024, fol. 109v) Its copyist ʿAṭāyā, who worked mostly in city of Gāzartā, and is probably the most well-known East Syriac scribe of the early modern period. Twenty-five manuscripts of his production have survived in the chronological range between 1536 and 1594 [6, p. 114, 400–423]. Apparently, this manuscript was copied, while ʿAbdišōʿ’s staying in this city, when he might have delivered his autograph for copying. It is not known for sure, who commissioned this copy and which patriarchal line he was admitting. ʿAṭāyā

⁴ Available at vHMML site. Permanent link: https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/132226.
himself is known as a priest of the traditional East Syriac (Rabban Hörmízd) line, which makes mentioning of the Uniate bishop ‘Abdišō’ rather unusual and also requiring some explanations. I discuss in a separate paper manuscripts written by ‘Abdišō’ 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 ‘Abdišō’ originated from Gāzartā himself [8, p.245–247], it is quite natural that he had strong contacts and connections in his native town.

Darwiš of Gāzartā: priest, poet and scribe; and ‘Abdišō’s uncle?

Darwiš 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 ḍōnitā 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.

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

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[1] That is composed by a fine priest, true presbyter, Ephremian teacher, whose byname is Darwiš, [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)

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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 (Qūriaqōs) (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 Yōhannān 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-

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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] 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 Darwiš (ܕܪܘܝܫ). Each line has twelve syllables and a regular mono-rhyme

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\(^9\) 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 Giwargīs, and he was the poet’s maternal uncle, as follows from the refrain at the end of each stanza: my uncle Giwargīs (شلهد جیوابجه). It is clear from the allusions in the text that the addressee was a literate:

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

Let the shower of your scrolls make permanent sprinkling for us. Oh our fame, pride and glory, my uncle, Giwargīs! (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 qaṣida. 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 bookkeeping as his duty:

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, Giwargīs! (stanza 6)

Although it is not clear who the addressee of the poem was, it seems very likely the same poet and copyist Darwiš son of Ḥannā b. ‘Isā, of Gāzartā. Obviously, the person meant in the text was a literate as well, and since he was ‘Abdišo’s relative, he might have been of Gāzartā origin, like Darwiš son of Ḥannā is known to have been. The fact that apart from this name, that addressee of the poem had the second name, Giwargīs — 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 حَمَدَة is used, rather than the word حَمَدَة (name) (fol. 224r). If such an identification is correct, that would mean that 'Abdišō' originatend from an educated Gāzartā family, and was a nephew of Darwīš son of Hannā, 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 'Abdišō'.

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 'Abdišō' 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 has contributed is so called Stanzas of the rite of the months (yer̈hora ܩܛܘܟܣ) [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 'Abdišō' 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 ( tremendı̈ẗum ܐܒܪܗܡ ܣܠܘܟܝܐ). 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 ʿEbrōyō 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 ʿEbrōyō. 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 (fol. 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 Awġēn, the abode of this literate, in 1553 [14, p. 190–191], when he might be still alive, of 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 یَح), the city in Palestine, about 80 km away from Jerusalem. It should be also mentioned the poet used a rhyme gaz/gāz (ܓܵܙ /ܓܼܲܙ), 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.
By Rabban Abrāhām

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 Abrāhām 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 (ชำ resets at 328), 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, Abrāhām 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 (ܓܪܒܢ ܒܪܗܝܡ) is mentioned that may be identified with Abrāhām 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 (إبراهيم), 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” (ܐܡܠܐ) 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 (ܡܬܘܢܐ), stole (ܐܘܪܡܐ) and altar-cover (ܐܘܪܡܐ ܕܠܡܕܒܚܐ), 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 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 (Yōhannān) the Arab, since “sacred altar of Mār Yōhannān” 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 ܐܒܠܡ (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]

ܒܕܠܗ [fol. 255r]

ܒܼܲܫܢܬ ܐܦܢܗ ܠܝܘܢ ܐܸܙܕܩܼܲܪ ܗܢ ܙܘܢܵܪܐ܇
ܬܡܝܼܗܵܐ ܕܡܝܼܪܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܢܟܦܐ ܘܟܗܢܐ ܡܝܬܪܐ.
ܡܪܝ ܦܠܢ ܕܢܨܝܼܚ ܘܼܲܛܒܝܼܒ ܒܟܠ ܕܘܼܟ ܐܬܼܪܐ܇
ܡܪܐ ܢܢܛܪܝܘܗܝ ܘܢܼܲܟܬܪܝܼܘܗܝ ܒܥܘܼܬܪܐ ܕܢܦܫܐ ܘܦܓܪܐ.

By the same one

This belt was woven in year 1855 of Greece\(^\text{10}\),
Amazing and wonderful for the pious one and a priest,
Mār\(^\text{11}\) 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]

ܟܘܦܝܘܗܼܠܢ ܒܡ ܕܡ ܠܡܓܪܼܝܼܪ ܠܗܝܼܐ:
ܫܒܚܒܚ ܕܡܓܪܼܝܼܪ ܠܗܝܼܐ.

\(^{10}\) I.e. 1543/4 AD.
\(^{11}\) I.e. lord.
This stole was woven and also made
at an order of Rabban Brahim, 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.

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). Neverthe-
less, 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 start-
ing 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 (=ḥā, for instance:  genç — submenu). 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.

12 Or: “house, inhabitation”, if ܥܡܘܪ is St. Constr. of ܥܡܘܪܐ 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 Abrâhâm’s students, and obviously knew him in person:

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 ‘Abdišō’ of Gāzartā (Patriarch ‘Abdišō’ 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 Hōrmizd 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, ‘Abdišō of Gāzartā, was a hierarch and a founder of the East Syriac Uniate literary tradition. At the same time, Darwiš, 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 aat 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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Восточносирийская литературная жизнь в середине XVI века: ‘Авдишо’ Газартский и старшие поэты-современники

А. Д. Притула

Государственный Эрмитаж, Российская Федерация, 190000, Санкт-Петербург, Дворцовая наб., 34

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Статья посвящена восточносирийскому 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 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.

Контактная информация:
Притула Антон Дмитриевич — канд. филол. наук, ведущий научный сотрудник; pritulanna@gmail.com
Appendix 1
CCM 00398, fol. 253r

[Poem on Darwīš by 'Abdīšō of Gāzartā]

By the same one

[1] If the way of my desires were written down verbally, the paper of Damascus would not suffice it, although it is abundant.
That call has made me feeble, meek and helpless,
Oh, spirit of our spirit, and light of our eyes, my uncle, Gīwargīs!

[2] Daleth: The one weak of you, desiring you, eager of you, wishing you coaxes your love

Translation

[1] If the way of my desires were written down verbally, the paper of Damascus would not suffice it, although it is abundant.
That call has made me feeble, meek and helpless,
Oh, spirit of our spirit, and light of our eyes, my uncle, Gīwargīs!

[2] Daleth: The one weak of you, desiring you, eager of you, wishing you coaxes your love

14 The letters of the acrostic are placed horizontally in the margin.
15 First letters of each stanza form an acrostic with name: Darwīš.
16 Here and further: maternal uncle.
so that your quiddity demonstrates itself openly.\footnote{17}  
Let the shower of your scrolls make permanent sprinkling for us.  
Oh our fame, pride and glory, my uncle, Giwargis!  
[3] Reš: The veil of your gifts covers all heights,  
Since the Lord set this property in your declaration.\footnote{18}  
Moisten our heart that has withered from desire with the dew of your closeness!  
[fol. 253v] Oh, crown of our head and diadem of our beauty, my uncle, Giwargis!  
[4] Waw: Our sorrows would strengthen, increase, reinforce, if you would not consent  
For the meeting that pleases by seeing you and makes the enemy trampled.  
An acceptable time is found for you to come, and no hindrance is allowed.  
Oh, our consoler and pleaser, my uncle, Giwargis!  
[5] Yoḏh: The sea of passions has overflowed me with its overflow, and we stayed  
shattered.  
And so, grief, concern and despair are choking us.  
Console us soon by a lucidly worded epistle,  
oh, our rejoicer and entertainer, my uncle, Giwargis!  
[6] 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, Giwargis!  

Appendix 2  
CCM 00398, fol. 252r–253r  
[By ‘Abdišō of Gāzartā, on consolation about the death of Aḇrāḥām Slōkāyā]  

Text

\footnote{17} Literally: “in apodeixis”. The term reflects the popularity of Greek terms that were widely used in poetry as a kind of philosophical jargon.  
\footnote{18} Which probably means: “Lord gave your speech this attribute”.

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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!

[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] Ḥeth: 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] Ṭeth: 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] Šemkath: 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 ܳܦܙܳܪܳܐ ("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.