I. The asfār al-asrār

1. Introduction

One of the great, fascinating theological compendia of the (“Nestorian”) Church of the East is undoubtedly the voluminous compilation, known as the Books of Mysteries (Asfār al-asrār). Its importance was acknowledged by G. Graf, who rightly characterized this work as a valuable collection of sources for our knowledge of the Nestorian theological literature. ¹ Some recent studies by S. Khalil Samir, ² Bo Holmberg, ³ and Bénédicte Landron, ⁴ however, correct Graf’s assumption – following Assemani ⁵ – that Books of Mysteries was only the title of a re-edition by the priest ʿAlībā of a Book of the Tower, composed in the 14th century by ʿĀmr ibn Mattā on the pattern of another Book of the Tower, written by Mārī ibn Sulaymān two centuries earlier. At present, we know that the Asfār al-asrār is an independent collect-

tion, – and no imitation of the 10th cent. theological compilation, the Book of the Tower – composed by Šalibā ibn Yuhannā, a priest from Mosul, in the year 1332, possibly on the isle of Cyprus.6 Depending on the copyists of the different manuscripts, it is also called Kitāb al-ta’rīh (Book of History), Kitāb al-tawārīh (Book of Dates) or Risālat al-burhān wa-l-irshād (Letter of Proof and of Guidance), though the latter title is more correctly only applied to the first part. The whole work has five main divisions or books (sifr) of varying length.7

The following description does not aim at completeness – which would require a careful analysis of each individual treatise –, but tries to understand the reasons why the compiler was interested in Išo’yahb bar Malkon and inserted some passages of his works in his Books of Mysteries.

2. Description

The first book consists of five introductions. The first of these, the Risālat al-burhān, is an original composition by Šalibā, which, in my opinion, sets the tone of the whole compilation: a stirring call for love among Christians, particularly the “Easterners” (= East-Syrians) and their “western brothers”, the Latins, but also an appeal to search for truth, by reading and examining the genuine traditions of the Church of the East and accepting the latter’s orthodoxy.8 This letter is to be understood in the context of the good rel-

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6 This assumption is based on the colophon of ms Paris Ar. 204, which notes that Šalibā was in Famagusta in the year 1336; cf. G. Troupeau, Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, manuscrits chrétiens, I (Paris, 1972), p. 173. The first Book of the Aṣfār al-asrār is directly addressed to the Roman Catholic Christians (see infra).

7 Detailed description by W. Wright, who already gives the correct title and expresses his doubts concerning the identification with the Book of the Tower, see W. Wright and S. Cook, A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts preserved in the Library of the University of Cambridge, II (Cambridge, 1901), pp. 754-792. My analysis is partly based on mss Par. ar. 6732 and 6744, see G. Troupeau, Catalogue des manuscrits arabes, manuscrits chrétiens, II (Paris, 1974), pp. 108-109.

8 See Gianmaria Gianazza, ‘Traité de la démonstration et de la direction. Kitāb al-burhān wa-l-irshād de Šalibā ibn Yuhannā al-Mawṣili. Édition critique et traduction’, Parole de l'Orient, 22 (1997), pp. 567-629. There is a small difference between the index of this work found in some mss and the factual sequence of the treatises. According to the index, the k. al-burhān would be a separate (introductory) work, followed by five muqaddimāt. In some mss, the k. al-burhān is the first muqaddima, followed by four other ones.
tions between the East-Syrians and the Latin Church in the period of the Crusaders, which saw several attempts by East-Syrian Church leaders at explaining their faith to the European Christians. Šaliba’s main concern is to invite the Europeans to reconsider their traditional views of the East-Syrians as Nestorian heretics and not to stick – “without investigation or consideration” – to their prejudices of old.

It is followed by a second introduction on the orthodoxy of the Easterners, their acceptance of the first two Ecumenical Councils, the conflict between Cyril and Nestorius and an explanation that the name Nestorians had been improperly imposed on them since the times of Patriarch Dadiš. The third introduction is devoted to the difference between traditional and rational belief, based on reason and free choice. Here, the author discusses the doctrinal positions of different confessional communities, including Islam (with quotations from the Qur’ān), the Jews and the three main Christian factions. The fourth introduction is directed against the Jews and especially the Muslims – without mentioning the latter by name – concerning the belief of the Christians that Christ is complete God and complete Man, and that death and crucifixion are to be attributed only to his human nature. The fifth introduction explains the meaning of the terms union (ittiḥād) and sonship.

The second book, composed by Šaliba himself, is divided into nine sections. Proud to be an easterner, he tries, in eight of them, to demonstrate with arguments based on tradition and reasoning (naqil wa-aql), that the East is superior to all other regions. We find here a series of classical biblical arguments (with precise references): God created Paradise in the east, etc. The beginning of civilization was in the east, from where it spread to the other regions of the earth. In section 2, Šaliba summarizes the story of Noah, who landed with the ark on Mount Judi ‘in the East, in the middle of the land of the Syrians (al-Suryān)’, where, at the foot of the mountain, he, his wife and their three children with their wives (eight persons) built the first village, which they baptized Thamān (Eight); in Saliba’s days, it was known as Thamānūn. For this reason, the region received the name of

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10 This was still the case by the end of the 19th century, see J. Sanders, Assyrian-Chaldean Christians in Eastern Turkey and Iran (Hernen, 1997), p. 56.
Diyar Bekr (Abode of the First-Born), since civilization began here. Şalibä also, of course, relates that the oldest language is Syriac, which was already spoken by Adam and his offspring before the flood and after it, by Noah and his children without interruption up till Saliba’s times (section 3).

This book ends with the text of the creed of the Easterners, which Şalibä himself translated from Syriac into Arabic. In the Christological part, it is stated that the Son of God is one person (ṣahṣ wāḥid wafrṣūf wāḥid) in two substances (jawharayn). In this passage, the expression uqnumān – two qnomē – is avoided, but not, as one might think in this period, in order to avoid hurting the feelings of possible Chalcedonian, specifically Latin, opponents.\footnote{Cf. Teule, ‘Saint Louis and the East Syrian Christians’, p. 118, n. 71.} The existence of two qnomē is presupposed, as appears from the passage of Jesus’ ascension, where the creed emphasizes that the uqnūm of his humanity is not being changed. Unfortunately, we do not possess the exact Syriac Vorlage, which would have enabled us to establish the exact meaning of jawhar.

Book III, in seven sections, is a theological-historical survey, which gives the list of the Patriarchs of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and of the Bishops of Jerusalem down to the Council of Nicaea. It is followed by a list of the pagan emperors of Rome since the birth of Christ up to Constantine. Section seven explains the reasons why the latter convened the Council of Nicaea. This passage attracted the attention of Assemani,\footnote{Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis III,1, pp. 587-588.} who was irritated to read that, of all the fathers of Nicaea, only the Easterners were in good bodily health. Şalibä gives the names of the Eastern fathers who attended the council. His list is different from the one given by Makki in one of his letters and inserted into the present compilation (see infra). Book III ends with a concluding section, which provides the names of the patriarchs and emperors since Constantine and the lengthy recording of some important events up to the iconoclastic struggle. The compiler adds two brief paragraphs on the veneration of the Holy Icons and Church Music.\footnote{An extract is given by Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis, III,1, p. 353-354.}

Book IV, also in seven sections, purports to be a book of Milal wa-nīḥal, a description of different beliefs and sects. The following confessional communities are discussed: the Jews, the Samaritans, the pagan Greeks and Romans and, finally, the Christian heretics ‘in the lands of the Romans and the Greeks’. Islam is not mentioned.

\footnote{Cf. Teule, ‘Saint Louis and the East Syrian Christians’, p. 118, n. 71.} \footnote{Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis III,1, pp. 587-588.} \footnote{An extract is given by Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis, III,1, p. 353-354.}
This section is followed by an extract from the “Annals” of Eutychius Sa’id ibn Baṭrīq, (Chalcedonian) Patriarch of Alexandria, on the Coptic Church of St Michael in Alexandria, which was formerly a temple of Saturn. For Ṣalibā, the festivities organized there (offerings to St Michael) prove that the Copts were still influenced by pagan customs. Next follows a list of the seven Ecumenical Councils and the Synods of Ancyra, Neocaesarea, Gangra, Antioch, Laodicea, Sardica and the 2nd Council of Ephesus and an explanation why the Easterners had no need for such a council since their acceptance of Christianity, for, in the words of Ṣalibā, ‘thanks to God, we Easterners base ourselves on the true faith, which did not undergo any change. We have received it from the pure apostles and it is in accordance with the Holy Gospel and the renowned Epistles of Peter, Paul and the other Holy Apostles. Among us, no dissension took place and no heresy (bid’ā) ever occurred …’. The fifth Book is the most important. It begins with the history of Jesus and the Apostles (including Addai and Mari) and the well known history of the Patriarchs of the Church of the East, edited with a Latin translation by H. Gismondi.

Next follows a selection of extracts of East-Syrian theological treatises, mostly originally composed in Arabic. Again, the intention of this selection is to prove the orthodoxy of the East-Syrian Church. As such, this work is not so much addressed to the members of his own community as to the adherents of other confessions, in the first place the Chalcedonians. From the selection, it will be clear that Ṣalibā is basically interested in Christology and intra-Christian issues rather than in discussions with Muslims or Jews, though a few quotations are only understandable in the context of Christian-Muslim apologetics or polemics.

The first extracts are taken from the Kitāb usūl al-dīn. This work is ascribed by Ṣalibā to “the Father, Catholicos, Patriarch of the East, Elias”. According to the historical part of the Asfār al-asrār, the author is Elias I

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14 Cf. L. Cheikho, Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales, I, CSCO, 6 (Beyrouth – Paris – Leipzig, 1906), p. 124. The story already has long tradition in East Syrian anti-Coptic polemics and was already known to Elias of Nisibis, who refers to it in his Kitāb al-burḥān (about this work, see infra). This passage is on p. 55 of the German translation (see note 21).

d. 1049), but recent research has shown that the work must be attributed to a later period, probably to Elias II (d. 1131), though Elias III (d. 1190) cannot entirely be excluded. This work is an apologetic treatise addressed to Christians, Jews and Muslims. Saïb’s selection deals with: a. the existence of God and His essential attributes, based on scriptural and intellectual proofs; b. the union of the eternal Word with mankind; c. testimonies concerning Christ’s genuine human nature; d. testimonies concerning Christ’s divinity.

The extracts from the Usûl al-dîn are followed by the first chapter of the Kitâb al-burhân fi taṣḥîḥ al-îmân, by Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046). This work is explicitly addressed to the Muslims and the Jews, whom Elias mentions by name.

The next work is a treatise, written by a certain Mar George, Metropolitan of Mosul, entitled Imaân al-Nâsâra al-mâsâria. George’s identity is not easy to determine. Assemani and Graf identify him as the Metropolitan George of Arbil and Mosul (d. 938), who was active in the field of Syriac literature. The text selected for the Asfâr al-asrâr deals with Christology and uses the traditional East-Syrian imagery (the relationship between divinity and humanity is compared to a king and his vestments) and biblical proof-texts. He avoids speaking of two qunome.

The next maqâla was written by Patriarch Makkihâ ibn Sulaymân (d. 1109) and deals with the relationship between Father and Son. The au-

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16 See Gismondi, Amri et Salibae textus, p. 98.
19 Ibid., pp. 216-222.
20 Ibid., pp. 223-227.
21 Ibid., pp. 228-238.
23 Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis, III,1, p. 540.
24 GCAL II, p. 155.
25 A. Baumstark, Geschichte der syrischen Literatur (Bonn, 1922), p. 239.
The author tries to establish the particular modalities of the interpretation of fatherhood and sonship within Trinity, distinguishing them from a “human”, non-eternal approach. The Christological sections emphasize that Christ is one person (šahb wāhid) in two substances (jawhatayn) and two qnome (uqnumâyn).

It is followed by a confession of faith, originally written in Syriac by ‘Michael, Bishop of Amid and Mayyafariqin’, and again translated into Arabic by Şalibā, who held him in high esteem, calling him Saint, Father, virtuous, learned, etc. The identity of this Michael is again difficult to establish. He is not mentioned in Baumstark’s History of Syriac Literature. By the time of Şalibā, he must already have died, given the addition after his name ‘his memory be among the Saints’. According to Graf, he was ordained Bishop of Amid and Mayyafariqin by Katholikos Elias III (Abū Ḥalim), but later converted to the Chalcedonian faith. This would mean that he lived during the last quarter of the 12th century. The present creed would have been written after his conversion.

Though improbable in this period and in the region of Diyarbakır (Amid), one cannot a priori exclude that such a conversion took place. The Coptic theologian Severus b. al-Muqaffa mentions the case of a further unknown ‘Abdallāh ibn Sim‘ūn (sic), author of a small theological risāla, who was a Nestorian, but joined the Melkite madhab. Most problematic, however, is that Şalibā would be prepared to translate the creed of a renegade and include it in his compendium, the objective of which is to prove the orthodoxy of the Orientals. Closer investigation of the text reveals that the (incomplete) text published by Assemani is considerably different from the text as found in mss Par ar. 6732 and 6744. In the text of the latter manuscript, Michael reckons himself among the East-Syrians and defends the “Nestorian” expression, Mother of Christ, against the term theotokos. Pre-

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28 GCAL II, p. 207.
29 Assemani, Bibliotheca orientalis, III.1, p. 557-561.
cisely those dogmatic passages that lead Assemani to the assumption that Michael had become an adherent of the Chalcedonian Christology are lacking in the text of the Paris manuscripts. This is also true for the passage which concludes Assemani’s text, where Michael claimed to have established the truth of the Melkite faith against other Christians. Further investigation of the other manuscripts of the Asfār and especially of the text used by Assemani is needed.

Michael’s text is followed by some extracts from the Kitāb farā‘id al-fawā‘id fi usūl al-dīn by 'Abdišo’ of Nisibis. This important work was written to defend the Christians against Muslim accusations of kufr and polytheism. Hence, it is, at least partly, addressed to the Muslims and deals with themes like the veneration of the Cross, qibla, etc. The selection made by Šalībā deals with issues like tawḥīd and Trinity, hulūl and union (ittiḥad) and ends with a discussion on why the law of old – ʿarāʾit al-ʿadl, the law of justice – is to be abolished as opposed to the law of Christ, ʿarāʾit al-faḍl, the law of virtue.

'Abdišo’s work is followed by a brief ecumenical creed by Iṣoʿyahb bar Malkon, to which I shall return in the second part of this article. Next, one finds a letter by Patriarch Makkīhā which he addressed to a deacon in Ispahan, encouraging the Christians of this city to hold on in times of adversity. The references to the early East-Syrian martyrs resemble the examples given by Šalībā himself in his Risālat al-burbān.

The next part of the compilation consists of a number of miscellaneous texts, possibly partly written by Šalībā, explaining the Orthodox, East-Syrian Christology, answering to objections and refuting dissident opinions. In this respect, it is interesting to find a number of quotations from leading theologians belonging to the Miaphysite communities. The first is Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’, with passages from his Kitāb al-bayān al-muhtasar fi l-īmān and from his History. It is understandable that Šalībā considers Severus as one of the leading theologians of the opposite camp on account of the latter’s numerous refutations of the Nestorian creed. In Šalībā’s times, several East-Syrian authors had already composed answers to Severus, such as Elias

31 Landron, *Attitudes nestoriennes*, p. 138-139.
33 GCAL II, p. 312 and 301.
of Nisibis in his *kitāb al-Burhān* or Iṣo’yahb bar Malkon (see *infra*). They are followed by two quotations from a Letter by Jacob of Edessa to the Melkites of Harrān, the text of which is given in Syriac. Next, Ṣalībā gives the quotations from the creeds, composed by two 13th century Jacobite patriarchs, Ignatius II and John bar Ma’dani. Both creeds were sent to pope Innocent IV as proof of the orthodoxy (also from a Roman perspective) of the Jacobites and are preserved in Latin translations. It is not clear, why Ṣalībā selected these texts after those by Jacob of Edessa and Severus ibn al-Muqaffā’; the Christology of these creeds is not outspokenly miaphysite, but neutral, unless it were Ignatius’ general anti-Nestorian attitude, which was not appreciated by contemporary East-Syrian theologians.

In the next section, Ṣalībā again turns to East-Syrian theologians. The first is the 12th century priest, Sabriṣo’ bar Paulus, from the Monastery of St Michael near Mosul, who is the author of a disputation with a Jewish teacher. It is not difficult to understand why Ṣalībā inserted extracts from this work into his compilation. The numerous difficulties of the Jews with Christian doctrines, such as the issue of the *communicatio idiomatum* or the designation of Mary as Mother of God, are solved by answering that these objections, as a matter of fact, only apply to Jacobite theology. Thus, Sabriṣo’’s discussion with a Jew serves Ṣalībā’s anti-miaphysite argumentation. The next fragment is again addressed to Severus ibn al-Muqaffā’ and deals with the term *theotokos*, which is also the theme of a second extract by

35 Not identified.
37 Cf. H. Teule, “‘It is not right to call ourselves Orthodox and the Others Heretics’. Ecumemical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusaders’, in K. Ciggaar & H. Teule (eds.), *East and West in the Crusader States II*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 92 (Louvain, 1999), pp. 13-26, esp. pp. 24-25. Both creeds confirm the traditional Jacobite position that Christ is *from* and not *in* two natures, but show for the rest the ironic attitude of the Jacobites towards the Church of Rome and are in this respect comparable to Ṣalībā’s own *risālat al-Burhān*. I am currently preparing a critical edition of the Arabic text.
38 Cf. GCAL II, p. 209 (no. 4): Iṣo’yahb bar Malkon wrote a refutation of a letter of Ignatius, which the latter had addressed to an East-Syrian deacon and in which he criticized the Nestorian faith. Iṣo’yahb’s answer purports to deconstruct each of Ignatius’ arguments, see Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis*, III,1, pp. 297-301.
Išo’yahb bar Malkon, which will be discussed in the second part of this paper. This issue is pursued further in the next section, which intends to give logical proofs against the objections of the Jacobites. After this long treatise, Ṣalībā comes back to Severus ibn al-Muqaffā’.

An elaborate refutation of the Melkite theologians, John of Damascus (with important citations) and again the Alexandrian Patriarch Eutychius Sa’īd ibn al-Baṭrīq, and a long conclusion on the mode of the union of the two natures (directed against Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’ and Sa’īd ibn al-Baṭrīq) bring the compilation to an end. 39

3. Conclusion

Graf characterized this compilation as one of the important theological encyclopedias, which were composed in the appropriate period, sc. a few years before the cultural and theological decline of the Church of the East in the 14th century. By their work, compilers like Ṣalībā ibn Yuḥannā managed to preserve for later generations a number of theological texts, which otherwise would have been lost. 40 Though it is true that a number of works have only survived in Ṣalībā’s compilation – among them the text which will be analyzed in the second part of this article –, limiting his role to that of a compiler does hardly justice to him. As we have seen, he was also a translator from Syriac into Arabic and, more importantly, an independent theologian and author of an original risāla, put right at the beginning of the “Encyclopedia”. His personal contribution to the refutation of opponents like John of Damascus, Sa’īd ibn al-Baṭrīq and especially Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’ still has to be analysed, but we may assume that the passionate appeal which he addressed to the Latins not to accept the classical prejudices against the Church of the East without investigation, is characteristic of his attitude as an independent theologian, capable of analyzing the refutations by others or presenting the faith and traditions of his Church in a personal way.

In this way, the Asfār al-asrār is not a desperate endeavour by a 14th cent. East-Syrian theologian trying to save as much as he could of the heritage of

39 Refutations of Sa’īd ibn al-Baṭrīq are already found in earlier works, e.g. Elias of Nisibis’ Kitāb al-burhān. The reference to John of Damascus seems more original.
40 GCAL II, p. 107.
old before his community would undergo its tragic destiny under the Mongols. It is instead a conscious attempt to present the history and the theology of the Church of the East to the members of other confessions, especially the Christian communities, with, seemingly, a certain predilection for the Latin Christians. Within this context, he presents the views of a number of his predecessors, East-Syrian theologians belonging to the later period and mainly writing in Arabic. Among them, Išoʾyahb bar Malkon, the subject of the next part of this paper.

II. Išoʾyahb bar Malkon

1. Introduction

Since Išoʾyahb bar Malkon is relatively unknown, it seems useful to give a brief description of his life and works before analysing the two treatises incorporated into the Asfār al-asrār.41 According to the colophon of ms Charfeh Ar. 2/1, written in the year 1233,42 he was originally from Dunaysir, the modern Turkish town of Kızıltepe, in Ottoman times called Koç Hisar, situated 20 kms south-east of Mardin, in the direction of Nisibis.

In the last decades of the 12th century, which must have been the period in which Išoʾyahb was born, it was the place of residence of the Ayyubid governor of the Diyarbakır and Jezira region, Malik al-Aşraf, and a relatively important local Muslim intellectual centre with several mosques and some medreses.43 According to a note in manuscript Mardin 69, he became Bishop


42 The colophon of this ms gives two dates for the composition of this ms, according to both the Seleucid (1544 = A.D. 1232-1233) and the Muslim era (631 = A.D. 1233-1234). The combination of both dates gives 1233 A.D. For the text of this colophon, see Yusuf al-Ilyān Sarkis, ’Tarjama ṣarabiyya qadīma min al-Injil al-Tāhir’, al-Maʾrīq 11 (1908), pp. 902-907, esp. 906; cf. S. Kh. Samir, ’Les prologues de l’évangéliaire rimé de ’Abdishu’ de Nisibe’, Proche-Orient Chrétien, 31 (1981), pp. 42-70, esp. p. 47.

43 Cf. D. Sourdel, art. ’Dunaysir’, in EF, s.v.
of Mardin under the name of Joseph.\textsuperscript{44} Apparently, he changed his name into Išo’yahb, for we see him as 'Išo’yahb Metropolitan of Nisibis' participating in the elective synod of Catholicos Sabrišo’ IV in 1222.\textsuperscript{45} Assemani, followed by some modern authors,\textsuperscript{46} remarks that he must have died under the patriarchate of Sabrišo’ V bar Masihi, since a certain Makkīhā is mentioned as Metropolitan of Nisibis at the election of Bar Masihi’s successor, which took place in the year 1265/7. As a matter of fact, his death must already have occurred before 1233, since the copyist who wrote the colophon of ms \textit{Charfēh} arabe 2/1 in that year, added after his name: may God give rest to his soul and preserve us by his intercession.

Išo’yahb belongs to the important group of 13\textsuperscript{th} century East-Syrian authors who were capable of writing both in Syriac and Arabic. 'Abdišo’ of Nisibis, in his Catalogue,\textsuperscript{47} acknowledges a number of poetical compositions ('\textit{ānyātā and mēmrē'), undoubtedly in Syriac, but the majority of his writings were in Arabic. Among his Syriac writings, we may mention some grammatical works, sc. a bilingual (Syriac-Arabic) grammar of the Syriac language, which, according to A. Scher, follows the grammatical system of the Arabic grammarians\textsuperscript{48} and a dictionary of Syriac ambiguous words, for which he gives an Arabic explanation.\textsuperscript{49} Both latter works show his interest in bridging the gap between the Syriac and Arabic cultural worlds and make him a typical representative of the period, known sometimes as the Syriac Renaissance.\textsuperscript{50} His familiarity with Muslim culture also appears from his use

\textsuperscript{44} A. Scher, \textit{Notices sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque de l’évêché chaldéen de Mardin} (Paris, 1908), p. 25.

\textsuperscript{45} This information is found in the Patriarchal History of the \textit{Asfār al-asrār}, see Gismondi, \textit{Amrī et Salībae textus}, p. 116. The members of the elective synod of Patriarch Sabrišo’ V (1226) are not known.

\textsuperscript{46} Cf. Samir, 'Prologues', p. 47.

\textsuperscript{47} Assemani, \textit{Bibliotheca orientalis}, III,1, p. 295, 297.

\textsuperscript{48} A. Scher, \textit{Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque épiscopale de Séert (Kurdistān)} (Mossoul, 1905), pp. 72-73. According to Scher, ms 99, the oldest copy of this grammar can be dated to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, which is the period of the author.

\textsuperscript{49} As an appendix to his grammar (see A. Scher, \textit{Catalogue}, p. 73), and, separately, probably in ms Vat. Syr. 150, 13 (\textit{ju”ālē} – viz. grammatical questions – d-Mar Išo yahb, only 5 folios), see St. and J.S. Assemanus, \textit{Bibliothecae apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscrip torum catalogus} III (Rome, 1769), p. 281.

of saj in some of his homilies and in the introductions to his translation of the Gospel\textsuperscript{51} and from his use of Islamic philosophy (see infra). As a theologian, he was not only interested in intra-Christian discussions – refutations of the West Syrians and the Copts –, but also wrote some apologetic works addressed to Muslims, on the truth of the Gospel and on the Veneration of the Holy Icons.\textsuperscript{52}

2. Is\textsuperscript{o}yahb bar Malkon and the Asf\textsuperscript{a}r al-asr\textsuperscript{a}: Text

Şalibā ibn Yuḥannā selected two of Iṣo\textsuperscript{y}yahb’s writings for his compilation. The first is a creed, which was translated into Latin and sent to Pope Innocent IV in order to prove the orthodoxy of the East-Syrian Church (and to receive help). It is a remarkable confession of faith, in which the author suggests that he has no objections of principle against the expression Mother of God. The East-Syrian term “Mother of Christ” is, however, preferable, since “Christ” is a term denoting both the complete divinity as well as the complete humanity of the assumed Jesus of Nazareth; it clearly says what it means and does not lead ignorant persons to believe that Mary is the Mother of the Holy Trinity or of the Holy Spirit. For the rest, the letter is traditional, apart from the fact that the author avoids speaking of two different \textit{qnome}.\textsuperscript{53}

The second text is an extract from his \textit{Risālat al-bayān}, presented by Şalibā as a refutation of Severus ibn al-Muqaffa’s criticism against the East-Syrians. It has not yet been published. The following presentation is based on ms Par. 6744, fol. 190v-192v.\textsuperscript{54}

The central theme is again the expression Mother of Christ, which the author tries to defend with scriptural and philosophical arguments. The philosophical argument runs as follows:

\textsuperscript{51} S. Khalil, ‘Prologues’, p. 47ff. This latter work was also known to ‘Abdišo’ of Nisibis who reckons Iṣo\textsuperscript{y}yahb among his predecessors in the field of Arabic translations of the bible, cf. Kh. Samir, ‘La préface de l’Evangéliaire rimé de ’Abdishū’ de Nisibe’, \textit{Proche Orient Chrétien}, 33 (1983), pp. 19-33, esp. p. 29. ‘Abdišo’ characterizes Iṣo\textsuperscript{y}yahb’s translation as simple and destined for the masses.

\textsuperscript{52} H. Teule, ‘Bar Malkon’s Treatise’.

\textsuperscript{53} The (this time) correct Arabic text can be consulted in Assemani, \textit{Bibliotheca orientalis}, III.1, p. 295-6. For an analysis, see H. Teule, ‘Saint Louis and the East Syrian Christians’, pp. 109-112.

\textsuperscript{54} I am currently preparing a critical edition of this \textit{risālā}. 
'In as far as by articulating a word the intellect intends to signify some meaning, it does so according to one of three modes: either by complete correspondence or by way of implication or by way of concomitance. “By complete correspondence” means that the expression refers to all aspects of the articulated concept, such as the expression “house” referring to the floor, the walls and the ceiling in complete correspondence. This is the most specific, prominent and powerful way of indicating something. “By way of implication” means that an expression only signifies a part of the articulated concept, such as in the case of “house” referring to only the wall by way of implication, since it is a part of the totality of the house. This mode is weaker than the mode of complete agreement. “By way of concomitance” means that the expression signifies something which is exterior, (but) concomitant with the articulated concept and not a part of it, such as the expression “ceiling” signifying the wall by way of concomitance, since the (ceiling) is exterior to (wall), but concomitant with it and not included in its reality neither according to the mode of complete agreement nor according to the mode of implication. This is the weakest and less adequate way of indicating something and must not be used at all.

Among us, Christians, the expression Christ refers, according to the mode of complete agreement, to the eternal Son whose divinity is united with the humanity taken from the Virgin Mary, about whom the Gospel says that he is the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. It refers to the divinity – united (with the humanity) – separately only according to the mode of implication.

The expression God Most High – glory be to Him- refers, according to the mode of complete agreement, to the Holy Trinity. It refers to one of the Father, Son or Holy Spirit in separation (only) according to the mode of implication. It only refers to the humanity taken from the Virgin Mary, about which it had been promised that it would appear from the seed of Abraham and from David’s offspring, the eternal son being united with it, according to the mode of concomitance, which is the weakest and less adequate way of indicating something (...).

Consequently, their speaking of Mary, Mother of God, could make some hearer suspect that she had given birth to God the Father or to the Trinity in its totality'.
In the second and most developed part of his *risāla*, Išoʾyāhḥ tries to argue that the expression “mother of Christ” has biblical roots and that Jesus is most appropriately called *al-masīḥ*. His proof texts are the following:

1. Mt 1,1: Record of the ancestry of Jesus (Īṣū) *Christ*.
2. Mt 1,16: Jacob gave birth to Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called *Christ*.
3. Mt 1,18: Such was the manner of *Christ’s* birth.
4. Lk 2,11: This day, in the city of David, a Saviour has been born for you, the Lord *Christ*.
5. Mt 16,16: The confession of Peter: “You are the *Christ*, Son of the living God”, revealed to him by the Father.
6. Lk 24,26: Was it not that *Christ* should accomplish this and then only enter his glory?

Next, he quotes Heb 2,16 (‘God did not assume/take what he assumed, from the Angels, but from Abraham’s offspring’), adding, ‘i.e. the complete humanity, in which God dwelt (*ḥalla*). The Arabic rendering of this verse goes back to the Pšittā and can, in this form, – distinct from the Greek text – conveniently be used in Christological discussions. For Išoʾyāhḥ, it means that the properties of the one born from Mary and whom He assumed from Abraham’s offspring, such as being in the womb, wrapped in swaddling-clothes, growing in wisdom etc. cannot be ascribed to God, but only to Christ in his humanity. The objection of his opponents, that they only apply bodily expressions to God in a metaphorical way, is dismissed by Išoʾyāhḥ, stating that metaphorical speech is not allowed in the field of religion and is contrary to tradition and scripture. He urges them to give up passion and clinging to partisan feelings (ʿasabīyya), which only lead to a negation of the Truth, and not to use a language where the apparent expression is different from the inward meaning and where ‘your tongues disagree with your minds’.

The rest of the argumentation is devoted to an explanation, that the term *masīḥ* has a two-fold meaning: *māsiḥ* and *mamsūh*, anointer and anointed, or *ilāh* and *malūh*, divinity and what was made divine. The latter only suffered and died, whereas God, united with him, raised him from the dead. His argumentation is based on a number of biblical passages such as Acts 10,37-40; 4,7-10, Rom 8,11; 10,9-11, which conclude this chapter.
3. Interpretation

From the above description of the second *risāla*, it appears that Išoʿyahb defends a traditional East Syrian Christology. His philosophical argumentation is, however, most original and not found in the writings of his East Syrian colleagues or predecessors.

His explanation that a term (*laʃz*) signifies (*dalāla*, *yadullu*, etc.) a concept or an idea (*maʾna*) according to three different modes, that of complete agreement (*mutābāqa*), of implication (*taḍammun*) or concomitance (*ištizām*) was, most probably, borrowed from Ibn Sinā (980-1037), who developed this threefold division in several of his works. One of these is the *Kitāb al-išārāt wa l-tanbihāt*, which was available to the Syriac Christians in a Syriac translation, made by the West-Syrian scholar and bishop Barhebraeus.55 Apparently, Avicenna enjoyed some popularity in Syriac philosophical circles of the 13th century. It is obvious, however, that Išoʿyahb read Avicenna in Arabic,56 since the terminology used by him corresponds exactly to what we find in the work of the Sheikh al-Rāʾīš.57 Išoʿyahb unambiguously expresses his preference for the first mode and rejects the use of the third one in the field of religion, but leaves some room for the second one.

These theories put into perspective some almost casual allusions in his creed addressed to the Pope, where, as said above, he also urges theologians...
to use an unequivocal terminology. His remark that any expression signifies a concept (al-lafz ‘abîratun ‘an al-ma‘âni) is to be read against his Avicennian background, as is confirmed by the fact that, applied to Christ, the author explains, that only this term signifies ‘complete God and complete Man’, whereas “God”, in the proper sense of the word, corresponds (muṭâ-biq) to the “Holy Trinity”.

The consequence of applying these Avicennian theories to the East Syrian Christological discourse is that, though he postulates that the traditional East Syrian wording is by far preferable, he does not reject as heresy the expression *Mother of God*, which is, in his eyes, only ambiguous. However, it has to be recognized that this moderated tone is more prominent in the creed addressed to Rome than in the letter to Severus ibn al-Muqaffâ’, in whose writings he only seems to recognize a christological discourse which is according to the mode of concomitance.

The scriptural part is more traditional. His list of biblical verses can be found in the treatises of contemporary theologians. This is also the case for some technical terminology, such as: ḥalla (the humanity in which God dwelt), *ahadalittabada*, to assume, and also his explanation that Masîḥ means both anointer and anointed, which is already found in the work of Eliās II. A term which attracts attention is *asabiyya*: Išoʿyahb urges his opponents, the Copts, to give up all partisan feelings and not to use a language where the apparent expression (zâhir) is different from the inward meaning (bâtin) and where ‘your tongues disagree with your minds’. ‘Asabiyya is used in some more or less contemporary writings to explain what really lies behind the Christological discussions: partisanship. As such, it is found e.g. in the famous “ecumenical” treatise (‘on the concordance of faith’) composed by the West-Syrian author Alî ibn Dāwud al-Arfādî, who ascribes the stubbornness of sticking to traditional terminologies precisely to the spirit of *asabiyya*. The conclusion drawn by Al-Arfādî is, however, different from that of Išoʿyahb. Ibn Dāwud declares that, though the christologies of the three main Christian communities seem contradictory on account of the use

of a different terminology, on closer inspection all Christians (including Miaphysites and “Nestorians”) agree with each other on the same fundamental idea, that Christ is complete God and complete Man. As a consequence, Christians should not blame each other for using Christological concepts which are different from those found in their own tradition. Apparently, he is not bothered by the disagreement between zāhir and bāṭin.\(^{62}\)

Išo’yahb’s use of Avicenna’s theories on speech does not allow him to take this step. For him, it is not possible that the same truth is expressed in its fullness in different ways and with the help of different terminologies. The best way of expressing an idea is where term and concept cover each other as completely as possible, which is the case of the East-Syrian Christological formulas. Other approaches are certainly less satisfactory, but can sometimes be tolerated. The traditional miaphysite Christology as defended by Severus ibn al-Muqaffā’ seems to fall, however, into the category of unacceptable speech.

Though a step forward in comparison with the classical refutations, where there was no room for any understanding of the Christology defended by rival communities, Išo’yahb’s approach in his Risālat al-bayān is much different from the ecumenical attitude prevailing in the writings of some earlier and especially contemporary West-Syrian authors, such as al-Arfādī, Barhebraeus and others.\(^{63}\) One of the reasons might be that in this treatise he felt obliged to refute a Coptic author who had lived almost three centuries earlier and who was notorious in East Syrian circles for his intransigent miaphysite views.

In this way, he fits particularly well into the concept of Salibā’s compilation, the Books of Mysteries, the aim of which, as we have demonstrated above, was to promote love between eastern and western Christians, but, at the same time, to vindicate the correctness of the East-Syrian Christological terminology.

\(^{61}\) It is important to underline that al-Arfādī’s ecumenism is based on a thorough study of the christologies and ritual practices of the different Christian communities.

\(^{62}\) Cf. ‘The Christians differ in the manner in which they express themselves; they agree, however, as regards meaning. They seem to contradict themselves externally (fi l-zāhir); basically (fi l-bāṭin) there is agreement’.

\(^{63}\) See H. Teule, “It is not right to call ourselves orthodox”, pp. 14-16.