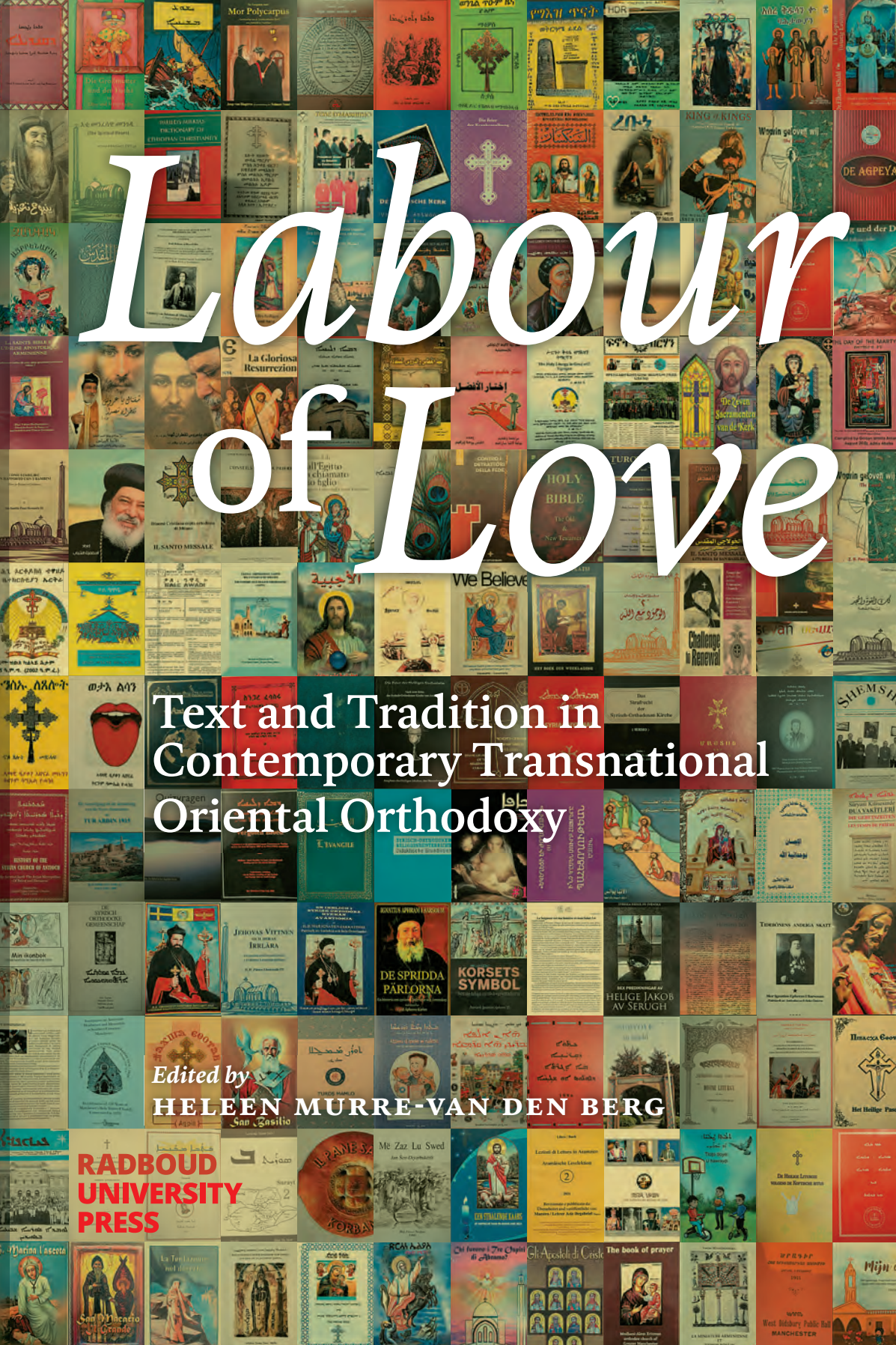
Labour of Love
Text and Tradition in Contemporary Transnational Oriental Orthodoxy
Edited by
HELEEN MURRE-VAN DEN BERG
RADBOUD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Labour of Love: Introductory Notes on Religion, Books, and Learning

HELEEN MURRE-VAN DEN BERG

In the writing of books, I love you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, am born and baptized.
In the building of souls, I exalt you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, was taught and promoted.
In the embellishment of churches, I praise you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, am firm and steadfast.
In the spreading of books, I adorn you
– in you, I, a *Suryoyo*, will die and be buried.
Refr: I delight in you, my Syriac church.[1]

These lines, taken from a long poem by Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek, state a straightforward truth that I overlooked even after I started the project on textual productions. This is, that the "writing"[2] and "spreading" of books for many in the Oriental churches is a primary expression of their commitment to the Christian community. In this poem, Mor Julius, the first bishop of the Syriac Orthodox Church in Europe (1979-2005), puts the writing and the spreading of books on a par with the "building of souls" and the "embellishment of churches." In his opinion, writing and distributing are crucial elements of building the church and, thus, a labour of love by those who belong to it.

In the current volume, we explore this commitment to the writing and distribution of books in the Oriental Churches from the 1950s onward. We trace how this process takes place in the various churches, who the actors are, what kind of books are being produced, and how this literary production relates to earlier types of literary output in the churches and to other kinds of religious cultural production in the past and present. These are the questions central to the group that worked at Radboud University on the ERC project 'Rewriting Global Orthodoxy: Oriental

1 Gabriel Rabo, "In Memoriam Mor Julius Yeshu Çiçek†, Metropolit der syrisch-orthodoxen Diözese von Mitteleuropa und den Benelux-Ländern, 1942-2005," *Kolo Süryoyo* 147 (2005), 2–26, here p. 101 (reprint from *Kolo Suryoyo* 94 (1993), p. 433).

2 Literally: the "copying" (√*srṭ*), a term used for manuscript writing, an art that Mor Julius also practiced and used in the early phases of bookmaking with a mimeograph machine.

Churches in Europe, 1970-2020'.[3] After an earlier conference focused on the visual culture of these publications, the 2022 conference concentrated on the texts. What texts were transmitted, why, how, and by whom? We invited a variety of participants to broaden our perspective, regarding the region, with several papers discussing North America in comparison to European developments, and regarding the timeframe, with many papers including the earlier part of the twentieth century in their analysis – thus situating our focus on Europe between 1970 and 2020 in a broader context. Their contributions formed the basis of the papers of the present volume.

In this introductory essay, I will discuss three themes in more detail, explicating the keywords religion, books and learning from the title. The first is Oriental Orthodoxy as a specific group, the starting point of our project and this volume. Their groupness is not a given, not with the authors of this volume (most contributions focus on publications produced and distributed within one church) and not within the churches as communities vis-à-vis each other. However, there is reason to assume that Oriental Orthodoxy as such plays a role in how these churches are engaged in book production.

The second theme concerns the literary tradition we mostly took for granted during the conference. What are these traditions, and how do they play a role in assessing their various aspects? How do texts help create and sustain the social imaginaries that allow these communities to exist when their members are dispersed over more and more countries? How do texts contribute to maintaining the distinct Oriental Christian communities and the emerging creation of Oriental Orthodoxy? In this volume, most contributors focus on the contents of these texts rather than on their ongoing material presence in the form of printed books. However, the books' publishing processes and materiality are crucial in understanding what 'tradition' means in these churches. The research into these processes helps grasp how social imaginaries are sustained not only by the contents of the texts but also by the circulation of material objects – objects that embody the "aesthetic formations" of these churches, to use the term coined by Birgit Meyer.[4]

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3 The research group consisted, in addition to the author of this contribution, of Gaétan du Roy, Christopher Sheklian, Habtom Yohannes, Matija Miličić, Jan Gehm, Elise Aghazarian and Wessel Stoop. The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No. 834441 GlobalOrthodoxy). The corpus is made available via the database https://fourcornersoftheworld.ptrs.ru.nl/. See Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Rewriting Global Orthodoxy. Oriental Christians in Europe between 1970 and 2020," in *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities from the Middle East*, ed. by Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022), 15–29.

4 Birgit Meyer, "From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms and Styles of Binding," in Birgit Meyer (ed.), *Aesthetic Formations. Media, Religion and the Senses* (New York 2009), 1–30.

Thirdly, I will put the spotlight on the actors, those who are responsible for the physical objects and for their contents, many of whom, like bishop Julius Çiçek whom I quoted above, see the production and distribution of books as an integral part of their service to the church, regardless of their position in that church. The materials we have collected in the project database and the contributions to this volume allow us to sketch the lines of an extended transnational network that helps to understand better the contributions of individual authors, translators, and publishers as well as the broader network of supporters that labour together to safeguard and transmit their tradition to the next generation.

Oriental Orthodox Churches

In current ecumenical parlance, the term Oriental churches, despite the negative connotations of the term "oriental,"[5] became the shorthand for those churches that share a common history in their rejection of the Christology as formulated by the Council of Chalcedon (451).[6] With this term, they are distinguished from what in the same ecumenical vocabulary are called the Eastern Orthodox churches, which developed from the Eastern churches that accepted Chalcedon and developed out of the state church of the Byzantine Empire. According to the followers of the Alexandrian bishop Cyrill (d. 444), the divine and human natures were wholly united in Christ as "one nature." This earned this group the name *monophysites*, which today is usually replaced by *miaphysites*. These discussions over Christ's nature(s) led to the gradual separation of several distinct churches from the imperial Chalcedonian (later Byzantine) church in Egypt and parts of Syria and Mesopotamia. However, most of these communities, which we know today as the Coptic, Syriac-Orthodox, and Armenian Churches, and the Ethiopian and Eritrean Tewahdo Churches, differed from the churches in the centre of the East-Roman empire not only in terms of theological convictions. They represent distinct histories of Christianisation in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically different regions from the western Levant and Asia Minor, where the mostly Greek-speaking Chalcedonian church took priority.

5 As in the discussions over Europe's "Orientalist" bias in its dealings with the region, a discussion initiated by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Whereas this unpacking of the term Oriental led some to shun it in relation to this group of churches, most scholars and others involved – including those from the churches themselves – deem the term useful in distinguishing this group from the Chalcedonian Eastern Orthodox Churches.

6 See, e.g., the website of the World Council of Churches (https://www.oikoumene.org/), under "member churches"> "church families" (last seen, d.d. 28/2/2024).

Over time, this conflation of dogmatic, ritual, regional, and linguistic differences resulted in a group of churches that cherished their independence from the Byzantine church and each other and which, precisely for that reason, were well equipped to survive the transition of the region to Islamic political dominance in the seventh century.[7] Whereas in the long haul, all churches gradually lost visibility and numbers vis-à-vis the population that converted to Islam, until the end of the nineteenth century, these churches retained substantial and flourishing communities in all parts of the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the independent realm of the Ethiopian kingdom. Ottoman administration brought these churches together administratively when they subdivided their non-Muslim subjects into three groups: Jews, Armenians, and Rum Orthodox. In this set-up, which in the nineteenth century matured in the so-called "millet system," the head of the Armenians was considered to represent not only the Armenian church but also the other miaphysite churches. Notably, the millet system was decidedly less rigid than it has often been portrayed in earlier scholarship, and the Syriac and Coptic churches especially had several ways to approach the Ottoman administration directly, locally and centrally, circumventing the Armenian patriarch.[8] Despite such intra-Oriental quarrels, this administrative grouping confirmed and enforced a shared history.

In the meantime, the increased Western influences in the Ottoman Empire and beyond changed the dynamics fundamentally, ultimately leading to the migration of many of these Oriental Christians to European countries. The arrival of Westerners, including many Catholic and Protestant missionaries, initially led to an active exchange of literary traditions and stimulated learning, translation, and book production.[9] It also encouraged conversion to Catholic and Protestant forms

7 See Ter Haar Romeny, Bas, Naures Atto, Jan J. van Ginkel, Mat Immerzeel, Bas Snelders, "The Formation of a Communal Identity among West Syrian Christians: Results and Conclusions of the Leiden Project," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89,1–3 (2009): 1–52 and Volker Menze, *Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria: The Last Pharaoh and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2023).

8 For the Ottoman administration of religious minorities, see Heather Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), and Khalid S. Denno, *The Syrian Orthodox Christians in the late Ottoman Period and Beyond* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017).

9 See the essays by Aurélien Girard ("Introduction. Livres et confession chrétiennes orientales (XVIe and XVIIIe siècles). Proposition pour une historie comparée et connectée," 9–84) and Bernard Heyberger (« Réseaux de collaboration et enjeux de pouvoir autour de la production de livres imprimés en arabe chez les chrétiens », 381–412), in *Livres et confessions chrétiennes orientales. Une histoire connectée entre l'Empire ottoman, le monde slave et l'Occident (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles),* ed. by Aurélien Girard and Bernard Heyberger, Vassa Kontouma (Turnhout: Brepols, 2023). See also Aurélien Girard, Cesare Santus, Vassa Kontouma, and Karène Sanchez Summerer (eds.), *Middle Eastern and*

of religion. Whereas actual converts comprised relatively small groups, these contacts began fundamental changes in the Christian communities. The division into denominational groups spurred discussions over communal identities, be they ethnic, linguistic, or religious, which questioned existing patterns of societal structure in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Western politicians and diplomats started to see the local Christians as potential allies, thereby undermining the stability of the Ottoman Empire. Over time, the relative strength that Christians found in this relationship turned against them when anti-Christian religious discourses fused with socio-economic concerns and resulted in local riots targeting Christians.[10] In the early twentieth century, similar lingering anti-Christian sentiments were joined with rival nationalisms and geopolitical concerns when the Young Turk rulers threw in their lot with the Central Powers (which included their long-term ally Germany) against the Allied Powers (which included Great Britain and Russia). This sealed the fate of Armenian and Syriac Christians in the Ottoman Empire when especially the Armenians were portrayed as a dangerous internal political enemy, betraying the Turks by fighting on Russia's side. The genocide of 1915 led to the first significant wave of Oriental Christian migration, with survivors being deported to Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Armenian survivors, however, also ended up further away from home, in Europe (mainly France) and the United States.[11]

The French Armenian communities thus make up the oldest Oriental Christian communities in Europe if we disregard the modest earlier Armenian presence in Rome, Venice and Amsterdam,[12] and the long-term Armenian presence in

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European Christianity, 16th-20th Century: Connected Histories. Essays by Bernard Heyberger (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

10 See Heather J. Sharkey, "History Rhymes? Late Ottoman Millets and Post-Ottoman Minorities in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50,4 (2018): 760–64, Feras Krimsti, *Die Unruhen von 1850 in Aleppo: Gewalt im urbanen Raum* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), and S.R. Goldstein-Sabbah, H.L. Murre-van den Berg (eds.), *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

11 The literature on the Armenian genocide is vast; see, e.g., the important work of Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2006) and the recent volume edited by Thomas Kühne, Mary Jane Rein, and Marc A. Mamigonian, *Documenting the Armenian Genocide: Essays in Honor of Taner Akçam* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). For the Syriac *saifo*, see David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia During World War I* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006) and David Gaunt, Naures Atto, and Soner O. Barthoma (eds.), *Let Them Not Return: Sayfo – the Genocide against the Assyrian, Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the Ottoman Empire* (New York – Oxford: Berghahn 2017).

12 René Bekius, Wout Ultee,"De Armeense kolonie in Amsterdam 1600-1800," *De Gids* 148 (1985), 216–224; Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011), Sebouh David Aslanian, *Early Modernity and Mobility: Port Cities and Printers across the Armenian*

parts of Eastern Europe. The majority of Oriental Christians, however, started to arrive in Europe from the late 1960s onwards. Initially, labour migration was the driving force, including highly educated Copts who went to the UK as medical doctors and engineers, as much as Armenian and Syriac workers from Turkey who came as part of labour agreements between Turkey and Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. These labour opportunities also allowed their families to leave the increasingly oppressive situation in South-Eastern Turkey, where economic and socio-political situations deteriorated quickly, especially after Turkish military operations against the PKK uprising became more numerous. Over the years, when labour opportunities decreased, more and more Syriac and Armenian Christians used asylum procedures to join the growing communities in Europe, further strengthening not only the Dutch, Swedish, and German communities but also those of the UK and France.[13] Additionally, Armenian communities grew as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union, whereas in 2015, Syriac and Armenian communities were augmented by those who fled Syria's civil war. Coptic Christians increasingly left Egypt, migrating to the US as well as to Europe, for a combination of economic and religious reasons.[14] From the 1990s onwards, Ethiopian and Eritrean Tewahdo Christians migrated to Europe and the US. The reasons were mainly political, with those opposing the new governments leaving the country. Over the years, new groups of Tewahdo Christians arrived, sometimes from opposing political parties, making it difficult for these communities to unite ecclesiastically in the diasporan context.[15]

Diaspora, 1512-1800 (Yale University Press, 2023), and Stephan Boghossian, *La communauté arménienne de Marseille: Quatre siècles de son histoire* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2009).

13 On European Armenian communities see Harutyun G. Harutyunyan (99–110), Christopher Sheklian (111–124) and Sevgi Çilingir (125–138) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*; and in the rich volume honoring pioneer diaspora scholar Khachig Tölölyan, edited by Talar Chahinian, Sossie Kasbarian, Tsolin Nalbantian: *The Armenian Diaspora and Stateless Power: Collective Identity in the Transnational 20th Century* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024). On Syriac migration see Naures Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Diaspora" (Dissertation, Leiden University Press, 2011), the contributions of Kai Merten (59–66) and Jan Gehm (67–78) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*, and Sarah Bakker Kellogg, *Sonic Icons: Relation, Recognition, and Revival in a Syriac World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2025).

14 See Matija Miličić (79–90), Gaétan du Roy (91–98) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*; Angela Bernardo, *Ricostruire una comunità, la Chiesa copta ortodossa in Europa* (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2020); Alistair Hunter, Fiona McCallum Guiney, *The Quest for Equal Citizenship. Middle Eastern Christian Narratives of Migration and Inclusion in the United Kingdom*, *Mashriq & Mahjar* 8 (2020), 1–39.

15 See Ancel Stéphan, Giulia Bonacci, Joachim G. Persoon, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church," in Lucian N. Leustean (ed.), *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (London/New York: Routledge 2014), 498-520, and Habtom Yohannes (145–160) in Tamcke, *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities*;

With the Tewahdo Christians constituting an increasingly important group of Oriental Christians in Europe, this often neglected but vital part of Oriental Christian history begs for further research and inclusion in the scholarly narrative. The Orthodox Christianity of the modern states of Ethiopia and Eritrea has a long history that is distinct from but intimately connected with the Oriental churches further north, in Egypt, the Levant, and Armenia. Earlier, Tewahdo Christianity depended on Coptic patriarchs to appoint and consecrate their hierarch, the *Abuna*. This connection was severed gradually from 1948 onwards, with autocephaly granted in 1959. In 1991, Eritrea became an independent country, and in 1993, its church was granted autocephaly. Along the historical connection with Coptic Christianity, Tewahdo Christianity shared early roots with Syriac Christianity, whose influence reached Ethiopia via the Arabian Peninsula. At the same time, the Tewahdo church has cherished its distinct character in language, rituals, iconography, and spirituality. It also became intricately connected to imperial rule in Ethiopia until the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. In the years following, the Tewahdo church gradually lost its privileged position in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Still, in both countries, it continues to enjoy the benefits of being the largest religious group in the country.[16]

Emperor Haile Selassie (r. 1930-1974) played a crucial role in further consolidating the Oriental Churches as a group when, in the aftermath of the post-World War II decolonisation, he sponsored the Adis Ababa conference of 1965. With the support of the World Council of Churches and the leadership of Paulus Mar Gregorius (born Paulus Varghese), a metropolitan of the Indian/Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church,[17] Haile Selassie brought the leaders of the Oriental Orthodox churches together. Whereas the Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian churches from the Middle East were present, the initiative came from the Oriental Orthodox outside the Middle East, emphasising their non-Western and post-colonial perspective

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Victoria Bernal, *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

16 On the Tewahdo churches, see John Binns, *The Orthodox Church of Ethiopia: A History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), Tom Boylston, *The Stranger at the Feast: Prohibition and Mediation in an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Community* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), and Stanislau Paulau and Martin Tamcke (eds.), *Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in a Global Context: Entanglements and Disconnections* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

17 On Paulus Varghese, see Vlad Naumescu, "'A World to Be Transfigured': Shaping a Cold War Vision of Orthodoxy from the South," in Todd H. Weir & Hugh McLeod (eds.), *Defending the Faith: Global Histories of Apologetics and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Proceedings of the British Academy; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 231–248.

in the context of the Cold War.[18] A central topic of their meetings concerned the education of the youth, thus contributing to the renewal of the Sunday School movement, especially in Egypt and India, as well as in the other Oriental churches.[19] In 1973, perhaps inspired by these transnational gatherings, the bishops in the US established the "Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in America." The meetings were co-chaired by archbishop Torkom Manoogian, primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, and Mar Athanasius Yeshu Samuel, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of the United States and Canada. Until today, the Standing Conference has been an essential platform for the Oriental churches in North America. To date, there is no parallel organisation in Europe.[20]

Oriental Christians are a small part of many Christian groups that have migrated to Europe over the past half-century. Among these are Protestants and Catholics from all over the world, as well as a variety of Christians from the Middle East and North Africa. These include Maronites from Lebanon, Chaldean and Assyrian Christians from Iraq and Iran, Rum Orthodox Christians from Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, and small groups of Protestants and Pentecostals from all over the region. These communities – some now well established in Europe, some barely surviving as distinct groups – share essential characteristics with the churches included in the project. There were two reasons, however, not to include them in the basic comparative set-up. First, in taking the Oriental Christians as our starting point, we created a relatively homogenous group of churches with similar histories in the homelands and Europe. Because of these parallel histories, this group lends itself to comparative questions without overlooking their genuine differences. By including other Christians from the Middle East, the number of potential comparisons would have increased, making a comparative project challenging to manage. More fundamentally, there is a positive reason to delineate the group as we have done: whether and how these churches share a dogmatic starting point that affects how they act in the present, especially in the

18 See Naumescu, "'A World to Be Transfigured'," and the website of the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches: http://www.scooch.org/about/about-addis-ababa/ (last seen 11 April 2025).

19 See Fr. T. Paul Varghese (ed.), *Report of A Consultation of the Oriental Orthodox Churches on A Curriculum for Christian Nurture* (Kottayam, n.p., 1967). For the Sunday School movement in Egypt, see Wolfram Reiss, *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche: Die Geschichte der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Sonntagsschulbewegung und die Aufnahme Ihrer Reformansätze in den Erneuerungsbewegunen der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche der Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Lit, 1998), on clerical leadership see Magdi Guirguis and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2022).

20 See SCOOCH – Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (last seen 11 April 2025).

face of migration and transnationalism. Is this dogmatic affinity merely an element of the shared history I outlined above, or does it constitute an independent element that leads to similar or shared decisions about the present? As described above, there are clear signs of organisational communalities. Do these communalities affect how they position themselves in the Christian landscape of their homelands and of the countries in which they now find themselves? And is that reflected in the way they produce and use religious literature?

The most critical group towards which Oriental Christians in Western Europe position themselves is that of the Eastern Orthodox Christians.[21] Formal relations between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental churches have gradually improved since the fruitful process that started at a conference in Aarhus in 1864 was halted in the early 1990s.[22] However, despite considerable progress in mutual understanding, differences of interpretation barred the road to full intercommunion. These slow-moving theological dialogues, however, do not necessarily reflect what is happening on the ground, especially in Europe. The playing field – that globally tends to favour the more powerful Russian and Greek churches – has levelled up. Oriental and Eastern churches alike are newcomers dependent on the goodwill of other Christians and broader secular society. Even though Eastern Christians have larger and somewhat older communities overall, Oriental churches have succeeded in finding their place in the ecumenical context quite well, getting on a par with the Eastern Orthodox and engaging with them when needed vis-à-vis the government or other organisations.[23] This, then, puts the question of further cooperation on the table, mainly because believers tend to frequent other Orthodox churches, especially if and when their church parishes are too far away. To what extent are these practices endorsed rather than grudgingly accepted? To what extent do such interactions change how Oriental and Eastern Orthodox believers see themselves in the European context? And to what extent does the exchange of books and images – recognizable in our materials – reflect ecumenism on the ground that is little bothered by the official projects?

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21 On Eastern Orthodoxy in Western Europe, see Sebastian Rimestad, *Orthodox Christian Identity in Western Europe: Contesting Religious Authority* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021) and Maria Hämmerli, *Christian Orthodox Migrants in Western Europe: Secularization and Modernity through the Lens of the Gift Paradigm* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

22 See Christine Chaillot, *The Dialogue Between The Eastern Orthodox And Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Volos: Volos Academy Publications, 2016), which includes an overview of the history of the theological dialogues, actual cooperations in various countries, formal statements and agreements and perspectives from several key players in the formal and informal dialogues.

23 See, e.g., the cooperation related to theological education in Sweden (Sankt Ignatios; https://www.sanktignatios.org/college/) and the Netherlands (St. Irenaeus; https://irenaeus.nl/en/university/).

Alongside these developments within the Orthodox family, the Oriental Orthodox intensified their contacts with the Catholic and Protestant churches. Whereas in most Middle Eastern countries, Catholics and especially Protestants were small minorities alongside the more powerful Orthodox Churches, in the European context, they were the ones that could help the Oriental Churches find their way in a secular society, especially when developing ways to deal with the mostly secular governments. A varied array of informal cooperation was matched – at least on the Catholic side – with official dialogues, like the one set up in the US from 1976 onwards and those organized by Pro Oriente in Vienna from 1964 onwards.[24] These meetings resulted in formal "Christological agreements" between the Catholic Church and several Oriental Churches. Usually, the relationships with Protestant churches are cordial, and various informal and formal dialogues accompany practical cooperation.[25]

In one way or another, all contributions in this volume speak to the interactions with the religious and societal context in which these churches find themselves. They describe the intense cooperation of churches with the government in the German state Baden-Württemberg (Josef Önder), the importance of state-church relations in Ethiopia (Stanislau Paulau) and Armenia (Jesse Arlen), the tacit and sometimes explicit political support for minority religions in Sweden, Belgium, France and Egypt (Gabriel Bar-Sawme, Gaétan du Roy, Christopher Sheklian and Johannes Makar), and the self-conscious independence in the United States (George Kiraz). Though only Önder's article on Baden-Württemberg thematizes these relationships, the contributions suggest that despite similar starting points, especially when cast as diasporan minorities, the actual local political set-up – different within Europe as much as between Europe and other parts of the world – leads to marked differences in how Oriental communities are able to build their communities.

The question remains whether the actual miaphysite Christology, which emphasises the one-natured human-divine person of Christ, creates a distinct and recognizable Oriental way of being in the world. As argued by scholars such as Sarah Bakker-Kellogg, Rima Nasrallah and Ronella Sonnenberg, one could think along the lines of how Oriental theologies describe the world as similarly undivided as Christ is, with sacred and profane fused in ways that allow for little

24 For an overview, see https://www.usccb.org/committees/ecumenical-interreligious-affairs/ecumenical-documents-and-news-releases#tab--oriental-orthodox;
Pro Oriente: https://www.pro-oriente.at/en

25 See the websites of the Anglicans (https://www.anglicancommunion.org/ecumenism/ecumenical-dialogues/oriental-orthodox.aspx; last seen 5/6/24) and that of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, see https://www.ecumenism.net/archive/docu/2001_oriental_warc_report.pdf (last seen, 5/6/24).

differentiation between them.[26] This type of theology might set these churches apart from Western Catholic and Protestant theologies, often seen as maintaining clear boundaries between secular and profane. At the same time, it seems to me that a more blurred line can also be perceived in Eastern Orthodox worlds that are equally Chalcedonian but not "Western" in this sense. Put differently, is this a distinction between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian theologies, or between late, post-Enlightenment, European theologies on the one hand and other (Eastern/Oriental) theologies on the other? Or even one between societies more strongly influenced by the analytic and discursive linearity of literacy and print and those that have retained essential characteristics of a more integrated and narrative oral universe?[27] For now, in line with McLuhan and Ong (more on them below), I tend to go with this broader cultural explanation because it seems to allow for a more fine-grained analysis of the different choices between the various Oriental churches, depending on the specific socio-political contexts – in home and host countries – in which they find themselves.

Textual traditions and books

The second cluster of concepts important in this project and this volume is that of textual traditions and books as physical objects constitutive of those traditions. We use "textual traditions" for the vast collection of texts circulating, read, and engaged with, in the Oriental churches. These texts range from texts being used during prayers, like biblical and liturgical books, books for teaching the faith to adults and especially youth, theological and historical books written both for experts and the broader public in and around these churches, and all kinds of occasional writings, such as commemorative booklets on the occasion of anniversaries of clergy and parishes. Finally, we include texts that comment on, develop, update, translate, or engage with these core texts. All this, taken together over the longue durée, constitutes the textual tradition. In line with Alisdair MacIntyre, this approach takes tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[28]

This leads us not only to emphasise the malleability of tradition, with texts being added, centred, or decentred, but also the importance of the human actors,

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26 Bakker Kellogg, *Sonic Icons*; Rima Nasrallah & Ronelle Sonnenberg, "Oriental Orthodox Young Adults and Liturgical Participation: A Matter of Identity," *Exchange* 49 (2020): 358–378.

27 See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962) and Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002/2012; orig. 1982).

28 Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press: 1981), 222; see also Sheklian in this volume.

the "social embodiment" that makes and remakes this tradition, in home- and host countries, in the past and the present. When acknowledging the social embodiment of these textual traditions, these traditions of the Oriental churches allow us to see something of the social imaginaries that bind these groups together. Thus, in the project and this volume, the textual traditions are studied not only for the sake of the texts themselves but also for how these texts function as crucial building blocks of the social imaginaries that allow Oriental Christians to fashion their lives in diasporan transnational contexts. Here, Appadurai's thinking about mediascapes and ideoscapes helps to see how media in general and texts in particular – physical and online – are particularly effective in creating transnational communities.[29] This is as true for religious communities as for ethnic or national communities. Scholars like Elizabeth McAlister have used "religioscape" to indicate the combination of textual, aural, and visual elements that create a world that allows for multidirectional interactions within a transnational religious community.[30] This cluster of terms builds upon the work of Benedict Anderson, whose "imagined communities" rely primarily on printed matter to create a sense of national belonging over and above local, physical kinship communities.[31] Birgit Meyer, writing about religious communities, proposes to see these imagined communities primarily as "aesthetic formations" in which the physical and visual form of what is being shared is as important as the actual contents of what is printed.[32] The current volume, therefore, studies texts and their physical forms to understand how these Oriental Christians situate themselves in a transnational world, between past and present, simultaneously here and there. As we have seen in the previous section, violence and migration have cut off these communities from other parts of their material heritage, especially from their churches and pilgrimage sites. Textual traditions, therefore – material and immaterial – became increasingly important as enduring and portable witnesses to the social imaginaries of these groups, allowing communities to continue their story when other parts of their heritage had to be left behind.

In most of the contributions in this volume, a subgroup of the textual tradition of a particular Oriental church is being discussed. The contribution of Jesse Arlen focuses on ascetic texts, Christopher Sheklian and Gabriel Bar-Sawme on

29 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

30 Elizabeth McAlister, "Globalization and the Religious Production of Space," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44,3 (2005): 249–55.

31 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. ed. London: Verso, 2006; orig. 1983).

32 Meyer, "From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations."

liturgical texts and their commentaries and context, and Johannes Makar, Gaétan du Roy, and Stanislau Paulau focus on magazines. In other contributions, a broad perspective on the textual tradition of one of the Oriental churches constitutes the starting point. George Kiraz focuses on the Syriac Orthodox Church in the United States, and Josef Önder describes the publication activities in the Syriac Orthodox Church in Germany. My concluding contribution tentatively maps the broader history of publication activities in the Oriental churches in Europe. In all these articles, core religious texts are situated within an ongoing and ever-expanding tradition of commentary and translation. Many of these texts have a distinct educational focus, geared towards children, lay believers, or non-Oriental Christians. All these elements can also be recognized in the magazines, which more explicitly address the changing social imaginaries of the time. This is particularly true for the long-running Coptic journal *al-Kiraza*, which Makar analyses in-depth. In Paulau's article, the writings of an Ethiopian Tewahdo author are taken as the lens to study the role of the Ethiopian Tewahdo Church in the early ecumenical movement, showing how his transnational imaginary addresses not only the members of the church but also those outside it. Du Roy, finally, adds an essential counterpoint by focusing on digital publications of the francophone Syriac and Coptic communities in Europe, thus situating material books in the broader context of a digital culture which in all these churches undergirds the production and distribution of books. This digital culture, notably, has a robust textual element but adds the visual and the aural to the transnational religioscape.

Du Roy's approach allows us to turn towards the printed books with a fresh eye. What do these books do – in transnational religioscapes and actual religious practice – that is not taken care of by the omnipresent and eagerly adopted digital culture? Why do believers continue putting time, effort, and money into producing physical books when digital publication is much easier and cheaper? However, the question of "why physical books" is concerned not only with the balance between printed and digital texts but also between textual and oral traditions. The production and transmission of knowledge is not restricted to using texts but employs all media, including the purely oral. This is true in various religious contexts but is undoubtedly true for Oriental churches, where printed books are relatively new. For most of their history, what we have styled as a "textual tradition" consisted of a smaller range of manuscripts than the current plethora of books. This core collection of bookish knowledge was grounded in an oral tradition whose contents and breadth are challenging to reconstruct. Therefore, when we probe into what books do in the contemporary period, we should not only compare the "age of print" with the present digital age but also with the much more

extended pre-print period. The work of Marshall McLuhan on the revolutionary effects of print in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and Walter Ong's work on orality and literacy (1982) remind us that printed books are a particular and contingent way of producing and transmitting knowledge, one that fosters a distinct way of organizing knowledge, with a focus on linearity, historicity, and visuality. This differs from manuscript culture, in which oral culture's repetitiveness, poetry, and flexible organisation have a substantial impact on how knowledge is organized and taught. However, as both McLuhan and Ong suggest, orality and literacy (like manuscript and print, and print and digital), though fostering and forcing distinct ways of organizing knowledge, should not be seen as closed systems that flourish independently in different periods. Orality remains an integral part of contemporary communication and influences how and what we write and what we do not write. Whereas in some domains, what is written constitutes the ultimate resource, in others, old and new types of oral transmissions (lyrics, poetry, movies, podcasts) indicate that orality is as strong as ever.[33]

This is certainly true regarding the making and remaking of religious tradition in the Oriental churches. First, the textual tradition is thoroughly enmeshed in an oral tradition of commentary, ad-hoc translations into vernacular languages, re-told bible stories, ever-changing varieties of saints' lives, and a vast collection of hymns.[34] Though not easy to prove, it is likely that the increasing literalisation of the religious tradition, starting in the sixteenth century, began to replace at least part of what previously was transmitted orally. This process was further stimulated by increasing literacy among all layers of the community, in combination with the availability of flexible and increasingly cheap ways of publishing. In the twentieth century, the loss of traditional communal forms of transmission in the homeland may have further stimulated the use of printed materials to safeguard and transmit the religious tradition.

Secondly, there is embodied knowledge without a counterpart in the textual tradition, that of the movements and comportments, the sounds, forms, colours, and smells of the practice of Oriental Christianity. Some find their way in pub-

33 Alessandro Mengozzi's work on the East Syriac literary traditions (Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Church) is particularly relevant, see, e.g., "Yazdandukht and Mar Qardagh: From the Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac to Sureth Poetry on YouTube, via a Historical Novel in Arabic," *Kervan. International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies* 24,2 (2020) and "'May I Treasure up the Words in My Heart!': Syriac Culture in Modern Aramaic Oral Tradition," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 11,1 (2011): 19–33.

34 Alessandro Mengozzi, *Israel of Alqosh and Joseph of Telkepe : A Story in a Truthful Language : Religious Poems in Vernacular Syriac (North Iraq, 17th Century)* [Vol. 1, 11] (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), Heleen Murre-van den Berg, *Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500-1850)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

lished materials, as pictures and symbols, as directions as to what to wear and how to move, and in newly devised ways to describe the correct tuning of the melodies.[35] Such directions or descriptions are a far cry from the actual practice itself and often only work when those using the directions are familiar with the embodied practice. Other parts of this embodied tradition continue to be transmitted without text in the daily life of Oriental families and the regular meetings of the community. However, like with the oral traditions of the first kind, there is a tendency to put to writing what in the past was transmitted without the interference of texts and books.

This brings us back to texts and books, especially to the question as to why books remain important in the digital age. I propose to see books as situated at the intersection of two strong concerns of the religious communities we speak of: the transmission of a distinct body of religious knowledge ("tradition") and religion's material and embodied practice.

As I argued above, the transmission of knowledge is not restricted to what is written and published. Both when manuscripts dominated the scene and when book publishing took over, traditional knowledge was transmitted in all kinds of oral and embodied ways. What manuscripts in the past and books in the present add to that is the fixation of the tradition. That is, they make sure that the knowledge of the church is systematically collected, organized, canonized, and controlled. As I will discuss below, most of those involved in the writing and publishing business are either in the ecclesial hierarchy or connected with it. Printed books, like manuscripts in the past, clarify *what* knowledge matters, what knowledge should be transmitted to the next generation, and who oversees this knowledge. This suggests that when we study what is being printed, in this volume and elsewhere, it is essential to see who writes and publishes, who is in charge, which books are widespread and well-executed, and which books are not. Even though printing has become much easier and cheaper over the past thirty years (thus blurring the lines between private initiatives and communally sanctioned projects),[36] publishing a printed book remains an act of defining and delimiting knowledge and, as such, is a public act of joining those who determine what tradition is.

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35 See, e.g. the introduction of western-style hymnals in the Syriac Orthodox Church: Gabriel Aydin, *Syriac Hymnal According to the Rite of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch* (N.p.: Syriac Music Institute 2018) and Tala Jarjour, *Sense and Sadness: Syriac Chant in Aleppo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

36 Alessandro Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894* (Eindhoven/Rotterdam: Onomatopee 77, 2012).

Material books, however, are more than a pragmatic choice for a reliable and durable medium. In all religious traditions, beliefs are expressed in practices that make up the daily lives of believers – ranging from the formal ritual behaviour in communal settings to the small practices that punctuate everyday life. From this perspective, books as objects are as much part of religious practice as their contents are used to undergird beliefs. This is particularly true in Christianity, where the codex became crucial to transmitting religious knowledge early on.[37] However, books also play a role in religious practices less closely tied to knowledge and knowledge transmission. Colleen McDannell, in her pioneer study into "material religion," shows how the bible as an object played a crucial role in the religious practice of nineteenth-century American Protestants.[38] Authors like Watts and Rakow recently explored the role of the Bible and other "holy books" in religion.[39] Watts, who uses the term "iconic" for the ritualized and sacralised role of the bible and other sacred scriptures of a particular tradition, emphasises how the materiality of such "iconic books" comes to stand for the holy, in a way that is related, but not confined, to its actual content. In Oriental Christian traditions, such specific and ritualized iconic usage can be recognized in the role of the Gospel Lectionary in the Holy Liturgy, where it is censed, carried around, lifted, bowed to, acclaimed with hymns, and kissed.

However, as Rakow argues, the role of the materiality of books is not limited to the specific iconicity of the Gospel Lectionary. In Oriental liturgical practice, not only Gospel Lectionaries but also liturgical prayer books, bibles, and hymnals are given extra attention in how they are executed, with expensive materials, well-printed images, and other extras. This suggests they share some of the iconicity attributed to sacred scriptures. Phrased differently, books used in devotional contexts tend to become part of the sacred vessels used to approach the divine and thus come to embody something of the sacred in their material form.[40]

However, they may also stand for other aspects of religious life, the two most important of which are *learning* and *community*. By producing, gifting, selling,

37 Mark Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

38 Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Yale University Press, 1995).

39 James W. Watts (ed.), *Iconic Books and Texts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013) and Katja Rakow, "Books in Religious Studies: From Relentless Textualism to Embodied Practices," in P. Tamimi Arab, J. Scheper Hughes, & S. B. Plate (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Material Religion* (London: Routledge, 2023), 113–127.

40 See my upcoming article "Situating the Sacred: Images and Style in Oriental Christian Publications in Europe." (*Oriental Orthodox Visual Cultures in Europe,* Christopher Sheklian and Gaétan du Roy (eds.) (in preparation; exp. 2025).

and collecting books, and thus, by being seen with books, community members explicitly connect themselves with the body of learning of the church. This practice references learning and belonging in general: shelves filled with books – be it in the church bookshop or a private home – suggest that the owner values learning, collects books from various sources, and is able and willing to consult these books when needed. Whether or not this is the case – if indeed and how often these books are consulted – is not the point: collecting, possessing, and sharing these books constitutes a particular form of participation in a world of knowledge and learning that is inherently part of Oriental Christian practice. It is not something everyone practices, but it is widespread and greatly valued, also by those who merely cherish the gifts of those who produce these books.[41] It is also a practice that might reference a particular type of learning and knowledge that is now *en vogue* in the European communities, addressing today's specific needs.

In this way, books visualize the community in which they are produced and circulated. At one level, this is the community of those involved in the regular practice of learning, distinct from the broader community of faith. At another level, the books, in their material presence, represent the church and its learned traditions to all, whether they are active readers or not. Thus, to possess books produced by the church, with characteristic lettering, images, and colours sitting on one's shelves or coffee tables, symbolizes belonging to the non-visible community of the church, locally and transnationally, by virtue of the varied origins of the books, their contents, their authors, and their publishers. Thus, these books are crucial building blocks in the transnational imaginary of the religioscape, built on the double pillars of a tradition of knowledge embedded in religious practice.

Actors and networks

This brings us back to bishop Mor Julius and all others who initiated, wrote, produced, published, and spread the publications, the actors creating these religioscapes through what Ludovico calls the "publishing gesture."[42] Who are those imagining the transnational community? What networks can we detect, and how do these networks relate to the churches we study? Based on the contributions to this volume and the broader work of the project, we can start sketching the network of producers that carry the publishing venture. In the analysis of these networks, we rely on a combination of participatory observation and the study of

41 This has not yet been systematically studied, but see Matija Miličić, "Rooting the Coptic Diaspora: Mediating Familiarity and Adapting Churches in the Netherlands," *Etnofoor* (2023) 35/2: 67–83.
42 Ludovico, *Post-Digital Print*, 67.

Genette's "paratext," i.e., all the text around the core text of the publication, the texts that situate the core text in a broader social context, deliberately guiding the readers in their interpretation.[43] Paratext includes straightforward elements such as titles, author names, publishers, and translators. It also contains prefaces and forewords, blurbs on the back cover, recommendations, and, in its broadest sense, other texts written about the text, before or afterward, in separate publications. The analysis of these materials suggests that four groups can be distinguished among those that produce and distribute these texts: clergy, educated lay, scholars in the field, and a large group of supporting lay members from the churches.[44]

Of these, the clergy undoubtedly are the most important: they dominate the list of authors, they write introductions, prefaces, and endorsements, and they are often involved in the creation and maintenance of printing presses. The majority of these are from the higher clergy, that is, bishops and patriarchs. The Syriac Orthodox Mor Julius, whom I introduced above, is exemplary rather than an outlier, even though few bishops have been as active in all domains of the book business as he has been. Heads of churches are particularly visible as authors. This is especially the case in the Syriac Orthodox Church, of which all patriarchs since 1933 are attested to in our corpus: Mor Aphrem I Barsaum (1933-1957), Mor Ignatius Yacoub III (1957-1980), Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (1980-2014), and the current patriarch, Mor Ignatius Aphrem II (2014-). For the Armenians, Catholicos Karekin I Sarkissian (1994-1999) is among the authors, accompanied by active priests such as Rev. Fr. Vatché Iknadiossian (Marseille; d. 2003). Among the Copts, a range of bishops and priests are active as authors, like Anba Kirolos (Milan, d. 2017), Anba Arseny (Amsterdam), and Rewis Anba Pola (Spain). However, all are dwarfed by the towering figure of the late Pope Shenouda III (r. 1971-2012). In our database, he is the author with the most publications to his name (27). Among these are texts in the original Arabic and in translation, in English, Dutch, French, Swedish, Italian, and Tigrinya – indicating that his texts are distributed far over the boundaries of the Coptic community.

Higher clergy also oversee publishing houses, like the current Dutch Syriac Orthodox bishop Mor Polycarpus, who took over from Mor Julius in 2007. They

43 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

44 Somewhat surprisingly, from the list of known authors in our corpus, only nine pre-date the twentieth century: Athanasius (4th c.), Jacob of Sarugh (5th-6th c.), Isaac of Nineveh (7th c.), Moses bar Kipho (9th c), Gregory of Narek (10th c.), Yaqub bar Shakko (13th c.), Bar ʿEbroyo (13th c.), Mor Basilius Shemʿon bar Malke (18th c.) and Sayat Nova (18th c.). These authors represent just a fraction of the wide range of known historical authors, most of whom apparently are not actively studied in the churches today.

often feature as supporters of texts written by others by supplying forewords, recommendations, and official permits and seals.[45] All of this suggests that the higher clergy see book production as part of their duties in leading the church and that book production in these churches is closely connected to establishing authoritative and canonized knowledge, as was suggested by Bernard Heyberger in connection to the early phases of book production in the Middle East.[46] Lower clergy, such as priests and monastics, also contribute to book production, though in lower numbers than the higher clergy. Those who do, tend to have some higher education, like most of the higher clergy who often have PhDs in theology from recognized institutions. This is true, e.g., for the Coptic priest Fr. Tadros Malaty, a prolific writer on theological subjects. Women clergies are absent among the authors, as in the churches unless one counts ad choir members and few female deacons. Female monastics are relatively common in the churches but – at least in the European context – have not been very active in the publishing business. Our database includes a translation of the *Paradise of Monks*, a classical text in Tigrinya by Welete-Meskel Hadgu and Tsebele-Mariam Gebremedhin, two Eritrean nuns who found refuge in a Coptic monastery in Egypt. In the acknowledgments, they note the encouragement and support of the late Pope Shenouda for their translation work. Though not included in our database yet, we might also mention the books of Hatune Dogan, a Syriac Orthodox nun who writes about her work for refugees.[47]

The second most important group comprises laypeople who produce books as initiators, publishers, authors, and translators. Here, too, learning in some form is essential. As among the clerical authors, most authors and translators have academic training, though not necessarily in theology. Women are better represented here since they, like men, have profited from broader educational possibilities in European countries. In line with the educational thrust of many of the publications, many authors in this category are directly involved with the educational programs of the churches. Some of these include textbooks for formalized education, like the works of Syriac Orthodox Augin Yalcin and Josef Önder for German schools. They also include children's books with an educational thrust or saints' lives in contemporary formats, such as those by Eliyo Aydin. Mikhael Maksi Eskander writes on Tewahdo saints. Elham Khalil's works on Coptic history are

45 See Murre-van den Berg, this volume.
46 Heyberger, « Réseaux de collaboration » 411.
47 Hatune Dogan, Cornelia Tomerius (eds.), *Es geht ums Überleben – Mein Einsatz für die Christen im Irak* (Verlag Herder: Freiburg 2010); with Tonia Riedl, *Ich glaube an die Tat. Im Einsatz für Flüchtlinge aus Syrien und dem Irak* (Brunnen Verlag: Gießen, 2015).

translated into Dutch for the Copts, Susan Paul Pattie wrote on Armenian topics, and Salam Somi on the Dutch bishop Polycarpus. The immediate paratexts suggest that, generally, these authors are in close contact with the clerical hierarchy and exert crucial roles in the church as deacons, choir members, and teachers, with most of their work being explicitly authorized by the higher clergy. In this volume, Paulau introduces Blatta ("scholar") Mersea Hazen Wolde Qirqos, another example of a scholar who through his writings was influential in the church.

This pattern of learning and commitment to the Oriental Orthodox communities can also be seen among those who are not – or not by birth – community members. Several scholars who study these churches' history, language and theology have been incorporated into the network of book producers. They contribute to communal and clerical publication ventures, and sometimes their scholarly work is appropriated by the community by selling and distributing their academic works or by including parts of their work in other publications. Our database contains some prominent examples, including the renowned Syriac scholars Sebastian Brock and Martin Tamcke, Armenian scholar Theo van Lint, the Dutch Coptologist Clara ten Hacken, and Syriacist Kees den Biesen, who have translated and introduced necessary liturgical materials. In Sweden, Tony Larsson plays a similar role. These examples underline the high regard for learning in Oriental Christian circles, with much appreciation for those outside the community who have immersed themselves in the sources of Oriental orthodoxy.

Around these three distinct groups that produce most of the texts – including translations, introductions, and commentaries – is a much broader group that commits to this venture with moral, practical, and financial support. Most of these church members remain anonymous, like those who sell, buy, and gift the materials. Some make large donations and are mentioned in the publication, thus continuing a long tradition of meritorious contributions to the work of the church. Others play active roles in youth groups or other church organisations and initiate specific publications, such as those from the *Syrisch Orthodox Jongerenplatform* (SOJP), the *Armeense Jongeren Organisatie Amsterdam*, the *Youth of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Milan,* and the *Syriac Orthodox Youth Association Germany* (SOKAD). Here, as with the groups of active producers, the networks transcend not only local communities but also those who are active members of the churches.

This quick survey of what we know so far about the producers of these texts acquaints us with a group of mostly learned authors and translators who, with different emphases and motivations, are committed to adding to and spreading knowledge about these churches – their histories, their theology, their liturgical life, to insiders and outsiders. What is not always immediately visible from the

paratextual materials is that many of those involved in this process know each other, influence each other, and cooperate on new projects. Books produced in the Middle East were brought to Europe in the early phases of migrations (see, e.g., the contributions by Gabriel Bar-Sawme and George Kiraz). Still, they continue to circulate – some return to the Middle East, or others are produced in the Middle East (Egypt and Israel) to be used in Europe. Yet others are co-productions, partly done in Europe, printed in Turkey (because of cost efficiency), and used both in Europe and Turkey. As described by du Roy, Coptic Sunday School materials, especially those in English, are shared among communities in the United States, the UK, and Australia, especially when published online. All of this suggests that there are extensive networks that allow various parts of the community to be in touch with each other, see each other's publications, and use these for their own contributions. Most of this remains within the boundaries of the individual Oriental churches. However, some publications transcend these boundaries because the author is valued in other circles (with Shenouda as the prime example) or because the book is a co-production.

In conclusion

This volume hopes to serve as the first mapping of Oriental Orthodox publishing in the contemporary period. I have argued that despite a surge of the digital, material book production remains an essential element of traditional learning and knowledge production in the Oriental churches. Books embody the traditional knowledge of the community in a material form that establishes and maintains its authority and canonicity. Because of this, physical books play a role in religious practices, also when they are not read or explicitly venerated. More generally, the presence of religious books in the churches' pews and on bookshelves in community halls and private homes signifies the importance of knowledge and learning within the community. The material presence of these books – born out of and re-inserted in transnational networks of the community of learners – connects those who own them with this transnational community. These types of connections are associated with, but not completely identical to, those established by other types of networks in the churches – be they clerical, regional, or familial networks, or the networks created by the online presence of the Oriental communities. Therefore, they provide essential insights not only in knowledge production and knowledge transmission but also in the fragile and fragmented lives of Christian migrants in Europe.

These books also allow us to trace the intensely personal commitment of those that maintain these networks. Over time books become actors in and of them-

selves, separated from their creators. However, the snapshot of this introduction and of the articles in this volume show how these books originate in the hard work of authors, publishers, donors, church leaders. These books exist through the labour of those that commit generous amounts of time and money to study, to collect, to write, to edit, to illustrate, and to distribute so that these books become part of the community, part of the intricate network that binds these churches together. And so their labour of love provides sustenance and comfort to fragile and fragmented lives.

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