

ANGELIC AND EARTHLY PRIESTHOODS:

Bar Hebraeus's *Candelabra V* and *VI* and West Syriac
Liturgical Commentary

BRIANA GRENERT¹

DUKE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between the celestial and earthly churches? This article analyzes Bar Hebraeus's ranking of angels and his analysis of the role of the priesthood in his Candelabra V and Candelabra VI. It is an exploration of his use of sacerdotal imagery in the angelic hierarchy, as well as an analysis of the sources that shape his understanding of the priesthood. Bar Hebraeus sees the ranks of angels as priests organized in three celestial churches, continuous with the human church. This interpretation diverges from Dionysius but developed through the West Syriac commentary tradition and is

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Sanctuaire de Grégoire Aboulfaradj Dit Barhebraeus Cinquième Base: Des Anges, ed. François Graffin, *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris: Fermin-Didot, 1963), 30:607; Hidemi Takahashi, "Simeon Of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2010): n. 45, <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463214098-004>. I use the edition by Antoine Torbey. The second work is Bar Hebraeus's sixth base, and I use the German edition: Radbert Kohlhaas, *Jakobitische Sakramententheologie Im 13. Jahrhundert: Der Liturgiekommentar Des Gregorius Barhebraeus*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen Und Forschungen 36 (Münster, Westfalen: Aschendorff, 1959). Neither base has been translated into English. The fifth base has been translated twice, first into French (prepared also by Torbey) and second into Italian: Bar Hebraeus, *Le Candélabre Du Sanctuaire de Grégoire Aboulfaradj Dit Barhebraeus Cinquième Base: Des Anges*, ed. Antoine Torbey and François Graffin, vol. 188, *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris: Fermin-Didot, 1963); Vittorio Berti, "L'angelologia siriana: Gregorio Abu-l-Farag Bar Ebraya, Della conoscenza delle essenze celesti, che sono gli angeli, nei loro differenti cori," in *Angeli: ebraismo, cristianesimo, islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben and Emanuele Coccia, La quarta prosa (Vicenza: Pozza, 2009), 1403–51. All of my translations are made from Torbey's Syriac edition, though I would not recommend his French translation (it has some fatal flaws in an attempt to harmonize with the Latin Dionysian tradition, thereby obscuring the Syriac) – the Italian translation is superior. The sixth base has been translated to German by Kohlhaas.

⁵ Candelabra VI.2.3.2 מלל, וזעא זעאלע וועבן א סוב. קיי קליי חסדא

Blood?”⁶ He answers questions about practice, like “whether the [communion] bread should be leavened or unleavened? And the wine mixed or not?”⁷ On theology, he considers “why, if [those who believe in the Lord] are not experiencing death, that is to say torment, why is there a need for prayer for believers?”⁸ However, before he can proceed to specific questions about the liturgy, he needs to address the people who conduct the liturgy and sacraments: priests and deacons. It is to the priesthood that this paper turns.

I consider the ecclesiology presented in his *Candelabra of the Sanctuary*, bases V and VI, to be on the celestial and earthly priesthoods, respectively. I explore how he (and the wider West Syriac tradition) expands on Dionysian angelology and ecclesiology to create a strongly sacerdotal reading of Dionysius and a sense of continuity between heaven and earth. In Christianity, the earthly priesthood has frequently mirrored the heavenly worship of angels.⁹ Further, there is a strong mystagogic component to Eastern Christian liturgies, beyond just the West Syriac tradition.¹⁰ However, as we will see in Bar

⁶ Candelabra VI.2.4.2 *חלף לו, ולסתו בו לו כסוף, וסתו לו וסתו, אבן*
פזו אבן וסתו וסתו

⁷Candelabra VI.2.4.5 ܕܝܫܘܐ .ܕܝܠܦܐ ܐܪ ܐܡܢ ܕܥܣܪ ܕܝܬ ܕܐܡܢ ܕܝܫܘܐ ,ܡܢ ܕܝܠ
ܕܐܪ ܕܐܡܢ ܕܝܠ ܕܐܡܢ ܕܝܠ ܕܐܡܢ

⁸ Candelabra VI.2.5.4 കൂടാതെ നമുക്ക് ഈ വസ്തുവിനെക്കുറിച്ച് അറിയുന്നതിനായി, മറ്റൊരു സ്മാരകം ഉപയോഗിച്ച്, നമ്മുടെ പഴയ ചരിത്രം.

⁹ *Candelabra* VI.2.2.2 he potentially goes back to Second Temple Judaism. For one analysis, see: Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 73–145. For analysis and development of the Syriac liturgy in particular, see: Baby Varghese, *The Early History of the Syriac Liturgy: Growth, Adaptation and Inculturation*, Göttinger Orientforschungen, Band 62 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2021).

¹⁰ Stefanos Alexopoulos and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies*, Alcuin Club Collection, no. 96 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press Academic, 2022), xxx–xxxi, 130–35; Baby Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, Liturgy, Worship and Society (Burlington, VT:

Hebraeus, the West Syriac tradition expanded on these two elements present in all Eastern Christian liturgical thought, and the fusion of liturgical mystery and hierarchy that originated with Dionysius himself.¹¹ Bar Hebraeus presents a unique framing and synthesis of Dionysian ideas, bringing them to bear on his understanding of the liturgy.

The priesthood and the rites of the Church are hardly self-explanatory, and Bar Hebraeus sets out to shed light on how the church's hierarchy sheds light on believers.

PART I: BAR HEBRAEUS, DIONYSIUS, AND WEST SYRIAC LITURGICAL COMMENTARIES

In this section, I introduce Bar Hebraeus and Dionysius's reception in Syriac, as well as the genres of the liturgical commentary. The 13th-century Syriac Orthodox Maphrian Grigorios II Abu 'l-Faraj bar Ahron (ܩܪܝܘܪܝܘܨ ܒܪ ܐܚܪܐܝܝܬܐ), known to us as Bar Hebraeus, was writing against the backdrop of extremely turbulent times and a renaissance of Syriac learning, thanks to the wider acceptance of the Islamic genre and subjects.¹² While sometimes accused of either a lack of

Ashgate, 2004), 16–29; Emmanuel Hatzidakis, *The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy* (Clearwater, FL: Orthodox Witness, 2008), 46–50, 341–44.

¹¹ Emiliano Fiori, "Mystique et Liturgie Entre Denys l'Aréopagite et Le Livre de Hiérothée: Aux Origines de La Mystagogie Syro-Occidentale," in *Les Mystiques Syriaques*, ed. A. Desreumaux, Études Syriaques 8 (Paris: Geuthner, 2011), 27–44.

¹² Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn, Weber, 1922), 285–95; Herman G. B. Teule, "Renaissance, Syriac," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Renaissance-Syriac>; Hidemi Takahashi, "Bar 'Ebroyo, Grigorios," *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition*, Beth Mardutho, The Syriac Institute/Gorgias Press, 2011, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Bar-Ebroyo-Grigorios>.

Pseudo-Dionysius (hereafter: Dionysius) was an influence on West Syriac understandings of the liturgy and, by extension, of the Church. Dionysius was a dominating voice on angelic and liturgical matters.¹⁷ Anonymous commentaries¹⁸ and the works of the tradition's most esteemed commentators, such as Jacob of Edessa (d. 708),¹⁹ George Bishop of the Arabs (d. 724),²⁰ John

Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite," in *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, ed. Charles M. Stang, Directions in Modern Theology (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1–10; Rosemary A. Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist: The Development and Purpose of the Angelic Hierarchy in Sixth Century Syria*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 11–24.

¹⁷ This was also true of the Greek Byzantine world. See: Germanus and Paul Meyendorff, *On the Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 23–48; Andrew Louth, "The Reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 4 (2008): 586–99; Suchla, *Dionysius Areopagita*, 64–73.

¹⁸ Sebastian Brock, "An Early Syriac Commentary on the Liturgy," in *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS863 (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Variorum, 2006), 387–403.

¹⁹ Gabriel Aydin and Ephrem Aboud Ishac, "Jacob of Edessa's Liturgical Commentary to George the Stylite of Serugh", *The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 60 (2022), 67–89.

²⁰ Of George, Heinz writes "Wie schön die Liturgieerklärung von Georg...zeigt, liess sich die syrischen Kommentatoren stark von Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita beeinflussen. Das gilt auch für das Kommentarwerk von Mose bar Kepha." Andreas Heinz, *Die Eucharistiefeier in Der Deutung Syrischer Liturgieerklärer: Die Liturgiekommentare von Georg Dem Araberbischof* ([d.] 724), *Mose Bar Kepha* ([d.] 903), *Dionysius Bar Šalibi* ([d.] 1171), *Sophia* 33 (Trier: Paulinus, 2000), 40.

Dara (d. 860),²¹ Moshe bar Kepha (d. 903),²² and Dionysius bar Šalibi (d. 1171),²³ show Dionysian influence and quote from “the great Dionysius” in their efforts to explicate the liturgy.

Dionysius’s project is to demonstrate what has been “revealed to us in a symbolic and uplifting fashion.”²⁴ He applies this heavily symbolic reading both to scriptural accounts of angels and to the contemplation of the liturgy. He wants to understand the significations of angelic names, as well as lay out how to understand imagery in Scripture through unlikenesses: how angels are both like and unlike the images we see in Scripture.²⁵ Dionysius also applies this symbolic reading to the elements of the liturgy, and the institution of both the legal priesthood and “our” hierarchy, in contrast to the celestial one:

Now the Word of God asserts that our hierarchy represents a more perfect imitation in that it is a fulfillment and completion of that [legal] hierarchy. It is both celestial and of the Law for it occupies a place halfway between two opposites. With the one it shares the contemplations of understanding; with the other it has in common the use of varied symbolism derived from the realm of perception, symbolism, by means of which there is sacred uplifting to the divine.²⁶

²¹ John Dara, *The Commentary of John of Dara on the Eucharist*, trans. Baby Varghese, Moran Etho 12 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011).

²² Moses bar Kepha’s *Commentary on the Eucharist*, see Heinz, *Die Eucharistiefeyer in Der Deutung Syrischer Liturgieerklärer*, 54.

²³ Dionysius bar Šalibi, *Expositio liturgiae* IV. See: Jérôme Labourt Dionysius bar Šalibi, *Expositio liturgiae* (E Typographie Reipublicae, 1903), <http://archive.org/details/expositioliturgoolabogoog>.

²⁴ Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy* 1.2, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

²⁵ *Celestial Hierarchy* 15.

²⁶ Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* V.1.2, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

As such, the ecclesiastical hierarchy is the more perfect successor of the legal hierarchy because it shares more with the celestial hierarchy, according to Dionysius. And that which is farther from God is less perfect: “The final ranks lack the full and complete power of the more senior ones. But they do have a partial, proportionate share in that power and they do so as part of that one, harmonious, intertwined communion of all.”²⁷ As such, even human hierarchs (or high priests) can be called angels, because “it is characteristic of him that like the angels he is, to the extent of which he is capable, a messenger and that he is raised up to imitate, so far as a man may, the angelic power to bring revelation.”²⁸

There is a “triple power connected with the holy work of the sacraments”²⁹ Dionysius argues that

From scripture it has been shown that the sacred divine birth is a purification and an illuminating enlightenment, that the sacraments of the synaxis and of the Myron ointment provide a perfecting knowledge and understanding of the divine workings and that it is through this that there is effected both the unifying uplifting toward the divine and the most blessed communion with it.³⁰

The triad of purification, illumination, and perfection is key to Dionysian ascent.³¹ From there, Dionysius endeavors to show how the three clerical ranks are three harmonious orders, “the one which purifies, the one which illuminates, and the one

²⁷ CH 12.2, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

²⁸ CH 12.2, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

²⁹ Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* V.1.3, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

³⁰ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* V.1.3, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

³¹ Though these are not exclusively Dionysian – see Paul Rorem, “Negative Theologies and the Cross,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 101, no. 3/4 (2008): 451–64.

which brings about perfection.”³² As such, the place of the priesthood is that of the hierarchy on earth, which uses the perceptible symbols of the liturgy to uplift congregants to the extent that is possible for humans. In this, the ecclesiastical hierarchy has the same function as the celestial hierarchy, and indeed all hierarchies.

Dionysius was extremely influential in Syriac, but translation and redaction led to a few important differences between the Greek and Syriac Dionysii.³³

Syriac Dionysius

This earliest Syriac reception of Dionysius takes the form of a late sixth/early seventh-century translation by Sergius of Reshayna, accompanied by his introduction. The introduction circulated also with a later revision of the translation by Phocas in 684/686 CE. Notably, in both of these translations, the Greek Celestial Hierarchy is rendered as the Syriac *Angelic High Priesthood*.³⁴ Bar Hebraeus also refers not to the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* but to the *Priesthood which is On Earth*.³⁵ In many ways, this is significantly neater than the Greek tradition: “Ecclesiastical” is mentioned only once in the body of the Dionysian corpus, and even then it does not refer to the

³² Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* V.1.3, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

³³ Scholarly consensus today is that Dionysius probably comes from a Syrian (though not necessarily Syriac) milieu, see for example Arthur, *Pseudo-Dionysius as Polemicist*. Sebastian Brock wonders if Dionysius could be a reader of Ephrem because of their shared interest in the theology of names, see Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Cistercian Studies Series 124 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 147.

³⁴ Περὶ τῆς Οὐρανίας Ἱεραρχίας as ܠܗܘܬܐ ܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܐܥܝ ܕܥ.

³⁵ Περὶ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱεραρχίας as ܠܗܘܬܐ ܝܢ ܠܝܢ ܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܥܝܢ.

hierarchy itself.³⁶ Normally, Dionysius simply says “our hierarchy”.³⁷

Later commentators, particularly John Dara, expand on this heightened emphasis on priests, a point that Bar Hebraeus repeats: angels are organized in churches, priestly imagery in the Old Testament is read to understand the angelic hierarchy, and the function of each rank is understood in Aristotelian terms.³⁸ Consider John Dara’s explanation:

The heavenly high priesthood is divided into three churches, and every church has three ranks, and every rank has three orders, that is, a highest, a lowest, and a middle. And each order is divided into many hypostases, and every hypostasis has three things- essence and power and operation. And essence is what is inside of each one of them, and power is the ability that each one of them possess, and its capacity for receiving the rays, and for moving to those things that have been given to them by God. Likewise, the operation that is within each is its own proper thing that it performs rightly when it receives the gifts and rays and enlightenments from God.³⁹

This is the essential nature of all the entities in the hierarchy, which is imaged by churches and understood in terms of their

³⁶ Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, Studies and Texts 71 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 28–31.

³⁷ Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis*, n. 6.

³⁸ Elizabeth Anderson, “The Interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius in the Works of John of Dara” (PhD diss, Yale University, 2016).

³⁹ *Commentary on the Angelic High Priesthood* 10, 11v-12r, 26 of Anderson’s revised translation. That is “and each order is divided into many hypostases, and every hypostasis [ܡܚܝܬܐ] has three things- essence [ܥܫܐ] and power [ܫܠܬܐ] and operation [ܥܡܠܐ]”.

operations. As such, the Angelic high priesthood of the Syriac Dionysius was expanded and expounded overtime, including in the work of Bar Hebraeus. This leads to a stronger connection between priestly imagery in the Old Testament and Syriac angelology: while Dionysius mentions that “the priestly vestment signifies the capacity to guide spiritually to divine and mysterious sights,” both John Dara and Bar Hebraeus consider the nitty-gritty of priestly adornment and read even the order of the stones on the priest’s breastplate as signifying the angelic hierarchy.⁴⁰

Other differences between the Greek and Syriac versions have been identified, in part because of the interests of the first translator, Sergius of Reshayna.⁴¹ Sergius’s translation circulated with an introduction from his “Discourse on the Spiritual Life.”⁴² In his introduction, Sergius presents the stages

⁴⁰ John of Dara, *Commentary on the Angelic High Priesthood* 6; Bar Hebraeus, *Candelabra* V II.1.2. There is a long history of Syriac reflection on priestly clothing, since Ephrem uses clothing imagery to tell salvation history, see Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 85–98. Other Christian traditions also interpret the stones, for example as representing the martyrs in the Coptic Ps.-Sevarian of Gabala’s *Encomium on the Twelve Apostles* 31 (CPG 4281).

⁴¹ Emiliano Fiori, “Un Intellectuel Alexandrin En Mésopotamie. Essai d’une Interprétation d’ensemble de l’œuvre de Sergius de Rēš’aynā,” in *De l’Antiquité Tardive Au Moyen Âge Études de Logique Aristotélicienne et de Philosophie Grecque, Syriacque, Arabe et Latine Offertes à Henri Hugonnard-Roche*, ed. Martini Bonadeo and E. Coda (Paris: J Vrin, 2014), 59–90; Emiliano Fiori, “Mélange Eschatologique et ‘Condition Spirituelle’ de l’intellect Dans Le Corpus Dionysiacum Syriacque: Un Cas Remarquable de Divergence Entre Le Corpus Dionysien Grec et Sa Traduction Par Serge de Rēš’aynā,” *Parole de l’Orient* 35 (2010): 261–76.

⁴² Fiori, “Un Intellectuel Alexandrin En Mésopotamie. Essai d’une Interprétation d’ensemble de l’œuvre de Sergius de Rēš’aynā,” 77–78. “Discourse on the Spiritual Life” is available in Sherwood’s edition, with French translation or in Fiori’s more complete Italian translation (mostly based on Sherwood’s edition): P Sherwood, “Mimro de Serge de Reayna Sur La Vie Spirituelle,” *L’Orient Syrien* 5,6 (1961 1960): 433–59; 95–

of spiritual life according to Evagrius (whom he does not name).⁴³ The image Sergius gives us is of the soul's original oneness which exists as pure mind and contemplates God. It falls from the state of pure mind, and, as Perczel phrases it "acquires the spirited and desiderative faculties of the soul, while its rational faculty is also darkened."⁴⁴ The healing of the soul must come both for the lower faculties and the high faculties. The lower faculties are purified by following commandments, but the mind is healed and brought back to its original state through contemplations.

The rational beings (i.e., angels) make divine contemplation possible for humans, and a part of the healing of the rational faculties. This is how Sergius understands the Dionysian Corpus's aim, and this is how he introduces and orders it for his audience and the subsequent Syriac tradition.⁴⁵ He establishes a connection between *the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and ascetic and sacramental life. The "lost" *Symbolic Theology* is connected

115, 121–56; Sergius of Reshayna, *Trattato sulla vita spirituale*, trans. Emiliano Fiori (Magnano: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2015).

⁴³ Fiori resists the use of "Origenist", which Perczel uses, for Sergius, cautioning against using the term because the "catégorie très vague d' 'origénisme' dont se servirent certains écrivains après 553 et encore beaucoup de savants aujourd'hui, qui a été utilisée pour condamner ou simplement indiquer des tendances intellectuelles très diverses." Here is a particular set of tendencies he would label as Origenism, such as those "anathématismes contenus dans les canons de 553". Fiori, "Un Intellectuel Alexandrin En Mésopotamie. Essai d'une Interprétation d'ensemble de l'œuvre de Sergius de Rēš'aynā," 65. Perczel also proposes an "Origenist" reading of the entire Syriac Dionysian corpus which I did not find particularly convincing (and neither did Fiori). For an alternate reading, see: Emiliano Fiori, "Dionigi l'Areopagita e l'origenismo siriano. Edizione critica e studio storico-dottrinale del trattato sui Nomi divini nella versione di Sergio di Res'ayna" (PhD Dissertation, Università di Bologna, 2010), 47–76, 426–68.

⁴⁴ Perczel, "The Earliest Syriac Reception of Dionysius," 560.

⁴⁵ Perczel, 561.

to natural science and the Celestial Hierarchy is a second natural science, contemplation of the Intelligibles. Then, both the “lost” *Theological Outlines* and *The Divine Names* concern “substantial knowledge.”⁴⁶

Bar Hebraeus is receiving Dionysius as introduced by Sergius, with a particular view of contemplation. More importantly, though, he is receiving a tradition in which the *Celestial Hierarchy* is understood particularly as an angelic priesthood, and in which priestly imagery is the key to understanding Dionysius. In summary, the Syriac Dionysius links angelic and earthly hierarchies as priesthoods and connects contemplation with the rational faculties. The Syriac tradition uses Aristotelian terms to understand how hierarchies function.

West Syriac Liturgical Commentary

As influential as Dionysius was on Bar Hebraeus, he is not Bar Hebraeus’s only source. There was a rich tradition of commentaries on the liturgy, which employed typological and allegorical methods by the fourth century, and figures like Ephrem, Aphrahat, Jacob of Serugh, and Isaac of Antioch mobilized typology to comment on the mystery of the liturgy.⁴⁷ Systematic allegory used to explain doctrinal issues and to link liturgical events to the life of Christ first appears in Theodore of Mopsuestia, who is important and almost as a pole, pulling

⁴⁶ It is unlikely that the Symbolic Theology ever existed, it seems to have been created lost. See: Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), n. 89.

⁴⁷ Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, 17. The addition of Isaac of Antioch to this list was suggested to me by Ephrem Ishac, citing the fascinating “The Memra on the Parrot” which comments on the Trisagion. See: Michel van Esbroeck, “The Memra on the Parrot by Isaac of Antioch,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 47, no. 2 (1996): 464–76.

liturgical understanding towards details, vis-à-vis the decontextualized reading of Dionysius.⁴⁸ And while, as I have said, Dionysius influences and is quoted by Syriac liturgical commentators, most commentators (with the exception of John Dara) are not Dionysian, in the sense that they follow Theodore of Mopsuestia's more Antiochian mystagogical tradition grounded in the details of Christ's life.⁴⁹ John Dara is the exception here, and while he shows more interest in the details (he comments on architecture, liturgical texts, and liturgical implements), he applies the hermeneutical scheme that appears in Dionysius more consistently than any author before (or after) him.⁵⁰

Bar Hebraeus's treatise considers, in depth, many rites at once. While other authors have done this, such as George Bishop of the Arabs in his *Exposition of the Mysteries of the Church*,⁵¹ it is more common for authors to consider one sacrament at a time.⁵² Further, while other authors reflect on the role of priests within a Dionysian framework in their liturgical commentaries, Bar Hebraeus is unique in how he

⁴⁸ Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, 18–19.

⁴⁹ Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, 16–34. For Theodore, catechesis is the process whereby Christians become citizens of heaven, see Daniel L. Schwartz, *Paideia and Cult: Christian Initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington DC.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013), 37–47, <https://chs.harvard.edu/book/schwartz-daniel-l-paideia-and-cult-christian-initiation-in-theodore-of-mopsuestia/>.

⁵⁰ Varghese, *West Syrian Liturgical Theology*, 29–34; John Dara, *The Commentary of John of Dara on the Eucharist*.

⁵¹ George Bishop of the Arabs, *An Exposition of the Mysteries of the Church*

⁵² Cf. George Bishop of the Arabs's *Memra* on the Consecration of Myron; John Dara's *Commentary on the Eucharist*; Moses Bar Kepha's *Commentary on the Eucharist* in *The Explanation of the Mysteries of the Oblation*; Dionysius bar Salibi's commentaries on the Myron and Baptism.

brings the angelic reality to bear on his liturgical interpretation.⁵³

It is not that angels had no place in the liturgy. In fact, angels frequently attend and participate in terrestrial liturgies across the eastern Christian world.⁵⁴ There are moments when they appear specifically in the liturgy, such as the Cherubic hymn in the Greek Divine Liturgy or the Syriac Liturgy of St. James.⁵⁵ However, they are not just the subject of prayers, but also active participants in the proceedings. The 14th century Byzantine Nicholas Cabasilas, writes, for example, in his *On the Divine Liturgy* that even the Latins pray that the offerings “may be carried to the altar...for this, they have need of the hand of an angel, in the sense in which the great Dionysius speaks when he says that the first hierarchy, that of the angels, comes to the aid of the second and human hierarchy.”⁵⁶ Contemporary 14th-century iconographic developments showed Christ presiding over a heavenly liturgy, replete with angelic ministers dressed in priestly garb.⁵⁷ However, despite this common backdrop of liturgy and angels in the eastern Christian world, Bar Hebraeus has a unique synthesis of West Syriac angelology, the Syriac reception of Dionysius, and his liturgical commentary tradition.

⁵³ Cf. the introductory part of George Bishop of the Arab's *Exposition of the Mysteries of the Church*, or Dionysius bar Salibi *On Baptism* 9.2

⁵⁴ For the Coptic tradition, see: Ibrahim Saweros, “Angels in Coptic Tradition,” *Shedet* 6, no. 6 (December 2019): 76–77, <https://doi.org/10.21608/shedet.006.05>.

⁵⁵ Hatzidakis, *The Heavenly Banquet*, 22, 163–65.

⁵⁶ Nicolaus Cabasilas, *On the Divine Liturgy* II.30.7, trans. Hussey and McNulty. It is not clear to which Dionysian passage Nicholas is referring – perhaps *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* V:501?

⁵⁷ Hans-Joachim Schulz, *The Byzantine Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression*, 1st ed, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co, 1986), 111–14; Vasileios Marinis, “On Earth as It Is in Heaven? Reinterpreting the Heavenly Liturgy in Byzantine Art,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 114, no. 1 (February 2021): 255–68, <https://doi.org/10.1515/bz-2021-9012>.

PART II: CANDELABRA V AND VI

⁶⁰ *Candelabra* V.II.1.2 There are many other ways of conceptualizing the celestial hierarchy. Thomas Aquinas, for example, uses civil imagery of princes. See: ST I.108.5 ad 2-4.

			and in that prefigured.” ⁶⁶
8	Archangels ἀρχάγγελος ܐܪܚܢܐܠܐ (riši malake)	It has relationship with both the turning principalities and the angels, bringing order to them.	“also taken from the high priest. For as the name of the Principalities is above the name of the Archangels, so to the order of the archangels is above that of the angels” ⁶⁷

There are four places at which we see this at play in the explanation of the origins of different angels in the hierarchy, or four places at which Bar Hebraeus diverges from Dionysius: in his description of the Thrones, in his description of the powers, and in his descriptions of the Principalities and Archangels.

Bar Hebraeus makes his link with the Thrones from the world of men. Potentially, there is a liturgical link in that hierarchs repose on thrones during the liturgy. This link is not in Dionysius, and it is not in John of Dara's *Commentary on the Celestial High Priesthood*, but he does make similar comments in his *Commentary on the Eucharist*. He says that the priests "should be like the Thrones, that is, he shall be a resting place for the Holy Spirit."⁶⁸ Perhaps, in the tradition of Aristotle, he is simply incorporating information from observation into his

[illegible][illegible]

⁶⁸ John Dara, *Commentary on the Eucharist* 1.19 trans. Varghese.

understanding of the universe: in this case, seeing people, or hierarchs in particular, reposing. John Dara adds that what characterizes the Thrones “is that it avoids wandering, that is toil over earthly things and illegitimate things.”⁶⁹

The second difference is also an Aristotelian one. The word Bar Hebraeus gives for Powers (ܩܕܝܫܐ, ḡaylawoto) comes from ܩܕܝܫ (ḡaylo)– which itself also translates δύναμις, but the Aristotelian δύναμις, i.e. power in action (i.e. not the potentiality of inactivity). The rank, then, is intertwined with the philosophical principle.

The final divergence comes from the infusion of priestly imagery into Bar Hebraeus’s understanding of the Principalities and the Archangels. A lot of the connection rests on a repetition of the root resh-shin, the same word that gives us “head” ܪܝܫܐ (rišo) (cognate with the Hebrew רִאשׁוֹ). The ܪܝܫܐ (rišo) can be *head, source, summit, ruler*/ἀρχων. It is the word that translates “ἀρχοντα” in Exodus 2:14a/Acts 7:35⁷⁰, as well as the anatomical head in 1 Cor 12:21 (κεφαλή)⁷¹ and “beginning” (Ἀρχή) in Mark 1:1.⁷² Syriac ܪܝܫܐ (rišo) appears very frequently with the sense of chief or ruler (e.g., Matthew 12:24, Matthew 20:25, Acts 3:17, Revelation 1:5). ܪܝܫܐ (rišo) for source or beginning and often translates the Greek ἀρχή for origin (e.g. Matt 24:8, Mk 13:8, Col 1:18, Heb 5:12), and it is a compound derivative of ܪܝܫܐ (rišo) that begins John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, ܒܪܝܫܐ (berišit). Importantly for our purposes, ܪܝܫܐ (rišo) also translates the Aristotelian ἀρχή, meaning starting point or principle.⁷³ All these different senses

⁶⁹ John Dara, *Commentary on the Eucharist* 1.19, trans. Varghese

⁷⁰ “ὁ δὲ εἶπεν τίς σε κατέστησεν ἀρχοντα καὶ δικαστὴν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν” (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).

⁷¹ “ἡ πάλιν ἡ κεφαλή τοῖς ποσίν” (Sy: ܕܠ ܐܝܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).

⁷² “Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου” (Sy: ܒܪܝܫܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ).

⁷³ Importantly for our purposes, ܪܝܫܐ also translates the Aristotelian ἀρχή in the works of Sergius of Reshayna, meaning starting point or principle. See: Sami Aydin, *Sergius of Reshaina: Introduction to Aristotle and His*

Jacob of Edessa's *Hexameron*.⁷⁶ There is also wordplay, already present in Greek (ἀρχάγγελος, ἀρχιερεύς, ἄρχων/ἀρχός, ἀρχή), mobilizing multiple levels of ἀρχή: the Aristotelian and ruler-sense. The priestly imagery pervades Bar Hebraeus's reading of the angelic hierarchy. The consequences of this difference are significant. As Berti explains in his introduction to his translation Bar Hebraeus's *Candelabra V*,

If the work of the Areopagite was all aimed at incorporating the structure of the church together with the monastic experience (which was problematic from the standpoint of politics in Palestine at the end of the fifth century, where [the Areopagite's] work originated) into the framework of the Neoplatonic Emanation which had in heaven its most perfect symbol, then Bar Hebraeus instead lived in a time when the connection between the life of the church and the hierarchical structure is a completely established fact, which could then be re-projected onto heaven, since the church has become the perfect symbol of the cosmic hierarchy.⁷⁷

For Bar Hebraeus, there is a powerful and intimate connection between the church on earth and the church in heaven. However, what does this connection mean for the earthly priesthood and the place of the church in the universe?

⁷⁶ Marina Greatrex, "The Angelology in the Hexameron of Jacob of Edessa," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 4, no. 1 (2009): 33–46, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcsss-2009-040106>. Jacob of Edessa's main influences were Gregory Nazianzus and Pseudo-Dionysius, but he was also involved in the translation and study of Aristotle. See: Henri Hugonnard-Roche, "Jacob Of Edessa And The Reception Of Aristotle," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day* (Brill, 2008), 205–22, https://brill.com/display/book/9789047426936/Bej.9789004173477.i-314_014.xml.

⁷⁷ Berti, "L'angelologia siriana: Gregorio Abu-l-Farag Bar Ebraya, Della conoscenza delle essenze celesti, che sono gli angeli, nei loro differenti cori," 1408. My translation from Italian.

The priests, and even more so the high priests, are those whose activity wakes up the sleepers to a higher reality. There are two kinds of priesthoods: "Either the celestial, which is the same as the angels, or the earthly."⁸⁵ While Dionysius does say that God modeled the "our most pious hierarchy" on "the sacred institution and source of perfection" that is the celestial hierarchy, he does not conceptualize the angelic activities as an angelic priesthood in the way Bar Hebraeus, following John Dara, does.⁸⁶ Bar Hebraeus writes that "the celestial priesthood is endowed with the possibility of mediation of similarity which is in it to God, without the material veil (that is to say, a persistent cloud over the faces of intellectual eyes) constantly occupying the created nature of angels."⁸⁷ This key difference shapes how Bar Hebraeus understands the place of the ecclesiastical priesthood in the cosmos: as a middle ground between the legal priesthood, which was given through Moses by God, and this angelic priesthood. "The legal priesthood," Bar Hebraeus explains, "is the dimmer and more distant one, endowed with the mediation of similarity to God and that which was known and was given and established in limits and

[illegible]

The process of elevation is “through a threefold birth,”⁹⁵ where the one higher in the hierarchy “takes pains to carefully draw the inferior thing to association with that which is excellent (as much as is possible).”⁹⁶ The process happens:

- 1) Through the purification of despicable fornicators [or ways] who are aliens to the imitation of its own similarity and,
- 2) The illumination, which is after purification

[illegible]

- Once again, we see the threefold process: purification of that which is foreign to godliness, illumination, and then the individual is drawn, though exemplars, to imitate what about those exemplars is imitable and drawn near to perfection. This is the scheme of purification, illumination, and perfection accomplished by the ranks of the priesthood. Purification happens through the deacons: “through the deacons, [the soul] is guided and on account of this, the deacons are dubbed ‘purifying ones’.”⁹⁸ Illumination happens through the priests: “and through the priests, [the soul] is filled, and on account of this, the priests are named ‘enlighteners’.”⁹⁹ Finally, perfection happens through the high priests: “through the high priest, the soul is perfected, and on account of this, the high priests are called ‘perfectors’.”¹⁰⁰ In summary, Bar Hebraeus says, “And thus are the three ranks of the fourth and earthly church, I have said: the deacons, priests, and high priests, each one from the churches which are in heaven.”¹⁰¹

[illegible]

given rank shares one charisma.¹⁰⁵ Its perfection, illumination, or purification, and “no way do they surpass one another concerning the sort of charisma.”¹⁰⁶ So all three of the last rank (lectors, cantors, and exorcists) are one charisma, though they are specifically appointed to different functions. Bar Hebraeus elaborates: “they are not made perfect through the laying of hands – instead, permission is given to them so that he might read, and that he might sing, and that he might exorcise those who are baptized.”¹⁰⁷

With this, he concludes his introductory chapter, though Bar Hebraeus himself begins his commentary on the particular rites of the liturgy. It is with this reflection on and interpretation of Dionysius that Bar Hebraeus uses to introduce his commentary on the liturgy, grounding the activities the clergy do in what the clergy are: mediators, in the fourth and earthly church, imitating God.

CONCLUSION

For Bar Hebraeus, the earthly church is one of four, and the earthly priesthood of the church is one of three, finding itself between the rational celestial high priesthood of the angels and the perceptible legal priesthood of Moses. He does not, in contrast to contemporary writers, discuss schisms within the church and instead discusses one earthly priesthood.¹⁰⁸ Bar Hebraeus closely reads and follows Dionysius, integrating Syriac Dionysian thought and liturgical commentary tradition into a new synthesis. He has an unacknowledged debt to John

¹⁰⁵ *Candelabra* VI.I.2.3.

¹⁰⁶ *Candelabra* VI.I.2.3 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ.

¹⁰⁷ *Candelabra* VI.I.2.3 ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ. ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ. ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ. ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*.

Dara and many other commentators before him, who lay down the principles by which Bar Hebraeus opens up the world of Dionysius to his 13th-century audience. Bar Hebraeus envisions a world of heavenly participation through the priesthood, liturgy, and sacraments through which, priests, like angels, guide humanity towards similarity to God through Types and symbols. However, there is one more unique aspect of his approach: he follows Dionysius in avoiding overt polemic in his *Candelabra V and VI*.

In the Dionysian world, the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* serves to smooth divisions and differences into union. When describing the work of the eucharist, Dionysius says “Every sacredly initiating operation draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like divinization. It forges a divine unity out of the divisions within us. It grants us communion and union with the One.”¹⁰⁹ Reading Dionysius’s work, there are no overt polemics against the author’s contemporaries or acknowledgement of multiplicity of churches. There are hierarchs, deacons, and presbyters – but no patriarchs, named schisms, or councils. The author, writing under the pseudonym of Paul’s convert in Athens, Dionysius the Areopagite, would certainly have revealed he was not a first-century disciple. Dionysius’s vagueness about the doctrinal disputes of his day also enabled his popularity, and the enduring significance of his work for Christians who were otherwise not reading the same new work.

Bar Hebraeus was a famously ecumenical leader.¹¹⁰ He considers the history of the Church of the East in his ecclesiastical chronicle, and even while holding his ground about his own Christological beliefs and refuting heresies (as in *Candelabra IV*), he claims that the pernicious heresies have

¹⁰⁹ Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1, trans. Luibheid and Rorem.

¹¹⁰ Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography*, 1st Gorgias Press ed (Piscataway, N.J: Gorgias Press, 2005), 47–53.

passed and that the modern divisions of the church are a matter of terminology.¹¹¹

In *Candelabra* V Bar Hebraeus considers the question of when angels were created. His conclusion is definite: “all anteriority and posteriority must be within time” and cannot be considered outside of time.¹¹² Angels were created beyond the determination of time, and Bar Hebraeus insists that all the Bible’s temporal associations with the creation of angels must be taken metaphorically.¹¹³ However, in contrast to his predecessors in the Syriac liturgical commentary tradition and in contrast, indeed, to a preoccupation that is common when Christians considered the sacraments and priesthood, Bar Hebraeus chooses to write a work of liturgical theology in the tradition of Dionysius, where there is one Ecclesiastical Hierarchy mediating between heaven and earth.

In this paper, I have only really considered the first part of Bar Hebraeus’s *Candelabra* VI and V. Analysis of the rest of the work, compared to other West Syriac liturgical commentaries as well as more Byzantine and East Syriac liturgical commentaries, could reveal more about what is common to the West Syriac and wider Eastern Christian liturgical tradition and ecclesiology.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Takahashi, *Barhebraeus*, 50. A similar approach has been attempted by scholars today, see: Sebastian Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, no. 3 (September 1996): 3, <https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.78.3.3>.

¹¹² Bar Hebraeus, *Candelabra* V.III.1.1 More research is needed to understand Bar Hebraeus’s acceptance (or not) of the idea of the eternity of the world, something he seems to accept in some of his works but not in others. See: Hidemi Takahashi, “The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac: The Case of Gregory Barhebraeus,” in *Before and After Avicenna*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 52:272.

¹¹³ Bar Hebraeus, *Candelabra* V.III.1.

¹¹⁴ Wilhelm de Vries, SJ, has already done considerable work West Syriac sacramental theology and some work on ecclesiology. His analysis of the

Bar Hebraeus, much more so than any West Syriac liturgical commentator other than John Dara, integrates Dionysian thought in a meaningful way into his liturgical commentary. However, unlike Dionysius, he sees the earthly church as the fourth and final church, continuous with the three heavenly churches.

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mysteries of the Church and the particular sacraments draws on many West Syriac authors, and is sensitive to the development of various idea. See: De Vries, *Sakramententheologie Bei Den Syrischen Monophysiten*. However, he is a Catholic scholar which shapes the sorts of questions he considers. For example, he has an entire section on the concept of "transubstantiation" (142-155). Another example is in paper on ecclesiology, where he considers Syriac perspectives on the primacy of Peter, rejection of the jurisdiction of the Pope, and issues of ecumenism (e.g. "die monophysitische Kirche die allein wahre Kirche Christi?"), heretics, and schismatics. See: Wilhelm De Vries, "Zum Kirchenbegriff Der Späteren Jakobiten," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 19 (1953): 128–77.

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