

POSSIBLE HISTORICAL TRACES IN THE *DOCTRINA ADDAI*

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ABSTRACT¹

The Teaching of Addai is a Syriac document convincingly dated by some scholars in the fourth or fifth century AD. I agree with this dating, but I think that there may be some points containing possible historical traces that go back even to the first century AD, such as the letters exchanged by king Abgar and Tiberius. Some elements in them point to the real historical context of the reign of Abgar 'the Black' in the first century. The author of the Doctrina might have known the tradition of some historical letters written by Abgar and Tiberius.

- [1] Recent scholarship often dates the *Doctrina Addai*, or *Teaching of Addai*,² to the fourth century AD or the early fifth, a date already

¹ This is a revised version of a paper delivered at the SBL International Meeting, Groningen, July 26 2004, *Ancient Near East* section: I wish to thank very much all those who discussed it and so helped to improve it, including the referees of the journal.

² Extant in mss of the fifth-sixth cent. AD: Brit. Mus. 935 Add. 14654 and 936 Add. 14644. Ed. W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents* (London 1864; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2004 repr.), 5-23; another ms. of the sixth cent. was edited by G. Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (London, 1876); G. Howard (tr.), *The Teaching of Addai*, SBL Texts and Translations, 16, Early Christian Literature Series, 4 (Chico: Scholars

indicated by Tixeront.³ This Syriac document, first published in the late nineteenth century, narrates the conversion of the Edessan king Abgar ‘the Black’ thanks to the apostle Addai, who was sent to Northern Mesopotamia directly by St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles; in his address to the people of Edessa, in the *Doctrina*, Addai says that he is from Paneas, on the river Jordan. His historicity, at least in its ground, is accepted by Segal and challenged by Desreumaux and by Drijvers, who thinks that this legend arose at the end of the third cent. for anti-Manichaean purposes; some years later, Eusebius found its documents in the Edessan archives (*HE* 1.13.5) and with his translation offered the oldest extant account of this legend; according to González Núñez, Addai is the same who evangelized Adiabene at the beginning of the II cent. (both in Edessa and in Adiabene people spoke Syriac).⁴

Press, 1981), with Phillips’ edition and a new English version; R. Peppermueller, “Griechische Papyrusfragmente der *Doctrina Addai*” (*VChr* 25 [1971]), 289-301; A. Desreumaux, “La Doctrine d’Addai” (*Aug.* 23 [1983]), 181-86; Id., *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993). On the Abgar legend see H.J.W. Drijvers, “The Abgar Legend,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 492-99; M. Illert, *Doctrina Addai; De imagine Edessena = Die Abgarlegende; Das Christusbild von Edessa* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), with my review in RBL 2009; I. Ramelli, “Bardesane e la sua scuola, l’Apologia siriana ‘di Melitone’ e la *Doctrina Addai*,” *Aevum* 83 (2009) 141-168. A dating about AD 400 is often found in encyclopaedia articles, such as P. Bruns, “Addai (*Doctrina Addai*),” in *Lexikon der antiken Christlichen Literatur*, Hrsg. S. Döpp-W. Geerlings (Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2002), 7, and C.&F. Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, *Res Orientales* 15 (Louvain: Peeters, 2002), 67ff. The Addai story is also known in Greek, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Georgian, and Slavonic.

³ L.-J. Tixeront, *Les origines de l’église d’Édesse et la légende d’Abgar* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1888), fixed the definitive redaction of the *Doctrina* to AD 390-430; *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, edd. R.A. Lipsius-M. Bonnet, I (Lipsiae 1891, repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1990), CIXff.; 279-83, give 360-90; see also L. Moraldi, *Gli apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento*, II (Torino: UTET, 1971), 1647. On the evangelization of Mesopotamia: Jullien, *Apôtres*; W. Baum-D.W. Winkler, *The Church of the East. A Concise History* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ J.B. Segal, *Edessa, “The Blessed City,”* Gorgias Reprints 1 (Oxford 1970; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2001 repr.); Desreumaux, *Histoire, passim* (rev. by J. La Fontaine, *Byzantion* 65 [1995], 266); H.J.W. Drijvers, “Edessa und

The *Doctrina* is full of anachronistic features; the author, who probably worked in the late fourth cent. in Edessa, claims that he used the local archives, and in particular some records written down by the scribe Labûbna, the son of Sennaq, the son of Abshadar, and says that the royal archivist, Hannân, had testified to their accuracy: in fact, he appears in the narrative as a contemporary of the events narrated. The introduction of the *Doctrina* presents this document as “paper of King Abgar son of king Ma’nu.” At the very end of the document Labûbna is referred to as “the king’s scribe [*sâprâ d-malkâ*], the one writing down these things of Addai, the apostle.” It is to be noticed that Labûbna is mentioned before as one of the aristocrats of Edessa; according to Traina, he was King Abgar the Great’s scribe, in the Severan age.⁵

das jüdische Christentum” (*VChr* 24 [1970]) 3-33: 31 = in Id. *East of Antioch*, II (London: Variorum Repr., 1984), 4-33; Id., “Addai und Mani,” in *II Symposium Syriacum 1980*, OCA 221, ed. R. Lavenant (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Orientali, 1983), 171-85; M. Sommer, *Roms orientalische Steppengrenze*, *Oriens et Occidens* 9 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 225-268 on Edessa, further on Palmira, Osrhoene, Middle Euphrates, cultural contacts between Greeks and Eastern peoples, Rome and Iran, pagans, Jews and Christians, the “Romanization” of the Near East. I acknowledge the first indication of this study and other helpful remarks to Andreas Luther, to whom I am very grateful. Eusebius mentions the mission of Thaddeus to Edessa also in his *Mart. Pal.* 2. 1. 7. See S.C. Mimouni, “Le judéo-christianisme syriaque,” in *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992*, OCA 247, ed. R. Lavenant (Roma: Pont. Ist. Studi Orientali, 1994), 269-80; J. González Núñez, *La leyenda del rey Abgar y Jesús. Orígenes del cristianismo en Edesa* (Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 1995), 31. The sources of the Abgar story in Eusebius are collected by M. Amerise, “La scrittura e l’immagine nella cultura tardoantica” (*OCP* 67 [2001]), 437-45. On the origins of Syriac Christianity see also M. Walsh, *Christen und Cäsaren. Die Geschichte des frühen Christentums* (Freiburg-Würzburg: Ploetz, 1988), 124-26.

⁵ G. Traina, “Materiali per un commento a Movsês Xorenaci, *Patmutiwn Hayoc*,” I (*Le Muséon* 108 [1995]), 179-333: 293. The Edessan leaders are named before Addai’s address to the people of the city: see my “Edessa e i Romani tra Augusto e i Severi” (*Aevum* 73 [1999]), 107-43: 125 n. 40. E.g. we find Paqor, a Parthian name (and that of an Edessan king who ruled about 30 BC), Abd Shamash (‘the Sun’s servant’, a name that appears in an Edessan mosaic: Segal, *Edessa*, 39-41), Shamashgram, also mentioned in the *Doctrina* as Abgar’s envoy; Abdû (see below); Bar

Hannān is mentioned at the end of the *Doctrina*, together with Labūbna, as “the king’s trustworthy archivist” (*tabūlārā šarrīrā d-malkā*), who “set down the hand of witness.” It deserves attention that he too has an important part in the story of Abgar’s alleged embassy to Jesus.

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Most recently, Alexander Mirkovic⁶ studied the *Doctrina* and, on the basis of language, images and social relations here depicted, convincingly demonstrated that this fiction was written in the IV cent., even though the narrative action is situated in the I cent. This pseudepigraphon, according to Mirkovic, reflects an important phase in the process of Romanization and Christianization of the Syriac aristocracy:⁷ for this reason Addai’s mission is chiefly directed to the members of the Edessan aristocracy and to the king himself, who in the *Doctrina* looks more like a Roman governor than a ruler of an independent kingdom. The author shows how

Kalbā (see González, *Leyenda*, 102 n. 119); Agustina and Shalmat, Meherdat’s daughter. The last appears two more times in the *Doctrina* and might be the Meherdates mentioned by Tac. *Ann.* 12. 12-14 as the Parthian king chosen by the Romans and betrayed by Abgar. In chap. 35, together with Labūbna’s one, we find the names of Awidā (Sennak in the *Doctrina* is son of Awidā), Labbū, Hafσαι, a name attested in Edessa and Doura Europos: see H.J.W. Drijvers, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osroene*, in *Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1.24 (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 1999), 237-48: nr. 6, 9, 55; Garmai, a name that occurs in Semitic inscriptions (*ibid.*, 33-34); Bar Shamash, ‘the Sun’s son’, attested in Edessan inscriptions (*ibid.* 23; 40); Hesron, a Semitic name also occurring in Edessan inscriptions (González, *Leyenda*, 104 n. 127); Piroz, the name of a Sassanid king (according to Moses of Chorene, Abgar was kindred with Ardashir’s family); in “Piroz of Patriq” *Patriq* is the transliteration of *Patrikios* or *Patricius*.

⁶ A. Mirkovic, “Political Rhetoric of Labūbna,” presented at the *Annual Meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, Nov. 22-25 2003*, section *Social History of Formative Christianity and Judaism*. See then his *Prelude to Constantine: The Abgar Tradition in Early Christianity* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2004).

⁷ These two processes in Mesopotamia seem to be strictly associated in several sources: cf. M. Sordi, *Il Cristianesimo e Roma* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1965), 478-79; my *Il Chronicon di Arbela*, Anejos de ‘Ilu VIII, (Madrid, Univ. Complutense, 2002), introduction. For this process at the beginning of the imperial age: R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000).

aristocratic circles became divided at the arrival of the apostle, but assures the Roman authorities that the Christian church is a good place for the young nobles and will make them into loyal Romans. In fact, Labûbna presents Syrians, whose political loyalty to Rome was doubtful,⁸ as Romans. So he seems to call his community to participate in the new Roman order of Constantine; this attitude fits the emperor's political platform of the restoration of Augustus' Golden Age (*reparatio saeculi*). The most evident allusion to Constantine's time in the *Doctrina* is the story, told by Addai to Abgar, of the *inventio crucis* by Protonike—the alleged wife of the emperor Claudius converted in Rome by Simon, who worked miracles in Jesus' name—, who clearly is a double of St. Helena, Constantine's mother.⁹

[3] Sidney H. Griffith too thinks that the author of the *Doctrina* probably wrote in the late fourth cent. or at the beginning of the fifth—he suggests the reign of Theodosius II, 408-450—, and sees in his enterprise “an apologetic, and perhaps even a polemical agenda, pertinent to the author's own time and place.”¹⁰ He thinks that the author's aim was to put forward a paradigm of normative

⁸ I show this in the case of Abgar the Black's foreign politics in “Edessa,” 107-43; “Abgar Ukkamâ e Abgar il Grande alla luce di recenti apporti storiografici” (*Aevum* 78 [2004]), 103-8. For the Oriental *gentes* and their relationship with the Roman Empire after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*: G. Traina, “Le *gentes* d'Oriente fra identità e integrazione” (*AnfTard* 9 [2001]), 71-80.

⁹ See J. W. Drijvers, “The Protonike legend, the *Doctrina Addai*, and bishop Rabbula of Edessa” (*VChr* 51 [1997]), 298-315. In Jerusalem, with Bishop Jacob's help, Protonike found three crosses, and her daughter, dead, revived when the third one touched her. Protonike gave this cross to Jacob and ordered to build a great church over Golgotha and Jesus' tomb. Then she returned to Rome: when Claudius heard of what had happened, “he commanded all the Jews to leave the country of Italy.” This is an echo of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in AD 49: “Claudius Iudaeos impulsore Chresto adsidue tumultuantes Roma expulit” (Suet. *Claud.* 25. 4; Horos. 7. 6. 15-16). See M. Sordi, *I Cristiani e l'Impero romano* (Milano: Jaca, 1983), 31-32; G. Jossa, *Giudei o Cristiani? I seguaci di Gesù in cerca di una propria identità* (Brescia: Paideia, 2004), 178-79.

¹⁰ Griffith, “The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century” (*Hugoye* 6:2 [2003]), §§ 1-46; I quote from § 1.

Edessan Christianity, supported by local ecclesiastical and historical lore: he hoped that this paradigm would play an authoritative role in the Christological controversies of his own time. In this perspective, the most important part of the document seems to be, not the Abgar legend, but the long accounts of Addai's sermons and speeches in which he delivers the Christian message in Edessa, and which appear more central from the narratological point of view.¹¹ It is not by chance that the author calls his work *malpanūtā* "teaching" (*Doctrina* in the Latin title), and not *tash'ūtā*, "history."¹² In fact, if Mirkovic focuses his attention more on the political aspect, Griffith seems to privilege the religious one. Thus, their points of view are largely complementary. Griffith mentions several anachronisms in the *Doctrina*, such as the author's assumption that a Caesar is subordinate to an Augustus in the Roman empire, a situation that is historically true from the time of Diocletian and Constantine onward. The mention of Tatian's *Diatessaron* ("Every day many people used to assemble to come to the prayer of the liturgy and to the Old Testament and the New of the *Diatessaron*")¹³ also suggests that the author of our document is alleging the historical authority of the *Diatessaron*, perhaps used for quotations also in the letters exchanged between Abgar and Jesus, and is

¹¹ Griffith, "The *Doctrina*," § 3.

¹² Griffith, "The *Doctrina*," § 46.

¹³ Griffith, "The *Doctrina*," § 31. In Cureton's ms., *Documents*, 15, the name is *dītonron*, which the editor, *ibid.* 158, identifies with the *Diatessaron*, on which see e.g. W. Henss, *Das Verhältnis zwischen Diatessaron, christliche Gnosis und 'western Text'*, Beihefte zur ZNW 33 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967); W.L. Petersen, *Diatessaron and Ephraem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, CSCO, Subs. 4 (Louvain: Peeters, 1985); K. Luke, "Tatian's *Diatessaron*" (*Indian Journ. Theology* 27 [1990]), 175-91; W. Petersen, "Diatessaron," in *Anchor Dict. of the Bible*, 2 (1992), 189-90; Id., *Tatian's Diatessaron* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Id., "The *Diatessaron* of Tatian," in *The Text of the NT in Contemporary Research*, Studies and Documents 46, edd. B.D. Ehrman-M.W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Wipf&Stock, 1995), 77-96; T. Baarda, *Essays on the Diatessaron* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994); J.P. Lyon, *Syriac Gospel Translations*, CSCO 548, Subsidia 88 (Louvain: Peeters, 1994); M.E. Boismard, *Le Diatessaron*, Études Bibliques 15 (Paris: Gabalda, 1995); R.F. Shedinger, *Tatian and the Jewish Scriptures*, CSCO 591, Subs. 108 (Louvain: Peeters, 2001). On the *Diatessaron* in Edessan milieu cf. N. Perrin, *Thomas and Tatian* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).

taking a position in the fifth-cent. controversy about the *Diatessaron*: at the time of bishop Rabbûlā of Edessa (411/2-435/6) a campaign was waged in the city to ban the *Diatessaron* and to replace it with the *Peshitta* version of the Gospels.¹⁴ Another interesting point is the author's concern to refute the claims of the Manichaeans in Edessa: it corresponds to Ephrem's polemic in the late fourth cent. in this city,¹⁵ though he does not mention either Mani or Bardaiṣan or Marcion, who were all dangerous, or regarded to be such, to orthodoxy.¹⁶ Another element can be taken from the Christology that emerges in the *Doctrina*. Even if no heresiarch is named, from many of Addai's assertions it seems clear that he preaches the Nicene faith, e.g.: "the Son of God is God;" "God was crucified for all people." Not only does Addai's preaching correspond to Ephrem's theological ideas,¹⁷ but the latter affirmation, according

¹⁴ See M. Blac, "Rabbula of Edessa and the *Peshitta*" (BJRL 33 [1951]), 203-10. Survey in B.D. De Lacy O'Leary, *The Syriac Church and Fathers* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Studies 1909; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2002), 94-98.

¹⁵ See H.J.W. Drijvers, "Facts and problems in early Syriac-speaking Christianity" (*SCent* 2 [1982]), 157-75, who reconsiders the *Doctrina* and related texts to investigate the historical basis of Syriac-speaking Christianity; S.H. Griffith, "The 'Thorn among the Tares': Mani and Manichaeism in the Works of S. Ephraem the Syrian," in *StPatr* XXXV, eds. M.F. Wiles-E.J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 403-35; Id., "The *Doctrina*," § 35.

¹⁶ Griffith, "The *Doctrina*," § 35. Drijvers, "Facts," 157-75, also notes the similarity between the Addai-Abgar relationship and the Mani-Shapur I one. Bardaiṣan's community flourished in Edessa till the early fifth cent. (U. Possekkel, "Formative Christianity in Edessa," delivered at the *Annual Meeting of the SBL*, Atlanta, Nov. 22-25 2003, section *Social History of Formative Christianity and Judaism*), so the author of the *Doctrina* may have been interested in mentioning him. A survey and reassessment of the sources on Bardaiṣan and his "heterodoxy" is offered by me in *Bardaiṣan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a Reinterpretation. Also in the Light of Origen and the Original Fragments from De India* (forthcoming in Piscataway: Gorgias Press). A recent valuable contribution to Bardaiṣan's self-understanding as Christian theologian is U. Possekkel, "Bardaisan of Edessa: Philosopher or Theologian?" (*ZAC* 10,3 [2007]), 442-461.

¹⁷ Griffith, "The Marks of the 'True Church' according to Ephraem's *Hymns against Heresies*," in *After Bardaiṣan: Studies* H.J.W. Drijvers,

to Griffith, seems to reflect the position of the miaphysites.¹⁸ So Griffith suggests that the author propounds the Christological views associated with Cyril of Alexandria's teaching, in the context of the controversies of his own day, and in particular in the time of bishop Rabbûlā of Edessa.¹⁹ Also the emphasis on some ascetical aspects and the care of the poor and sick seems to reflect conceptions of Aphrahat, Ephrem, and hagiographical texts of the fifth cent.: Addai doesn't accept wealth from Abgar, neither rich burial clothes, although the king supports the building of the local church and Addai's ministries; he recommends his disciples not to love "the profits of this world," and in fact "they did not take silver or gold from any man [...] they were splendidly chaste, pure and holy [...] splendidly engaged [...] in taking on the burden of the poor, in visiting the sick." So, Griffith concludes, "the period that in the ensemble they most immediately suggest is the first third of the fifth century, and perhaps, more specifically, the time of Bishop Rabbula."²⁰ Han J.W. Drijvers thinks that the final version of the *Doctrina* is probably due to Rabbûlā himself.²¹

Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 89, eds G.J. Reinink-A.C. Klugkist (Leuven: Peeters, Department Oosterse Studies, 1999), 125-40.

¹⁸ Griffith, "The *Doctrina*," § 40. For the Miaphysites in Syriac area now: L. Van Rompay, "Syrian Christianity in the Age of Justinian: Continuity and Redefinition," presented at the *SBL Annual Meeting*, Atlanta, November 25 2003.

¹⁹ On Rabbûlā see G.G. Blum, *Rabbula von Edessa*, CSCO 600, Subs. 34 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1969); H.J.W. Drijvers, "Rabbula, Bishop of Edessa," in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority*, eds. J.W. Drijvers-J.W. Watt (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 130-54; G.W. Bowersock, "The Syriac *Life of Rabbula* and Syrian Hellenism," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, eds. Th. Hägg-Ph. Rousseau (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 255-71.

²⁰ Griffith, "The *Doctrina*," §§ 41-42; 45; Id., "Asceticism in the Church of Syria," in V.L. Wimbush-R. Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (New York: OUP, 1995), 220-45; R.A. Kitchen, "The Pearl of Virginity" (*Hugoye* 7:2 [2004]), §§ 1-35; H.J.W. Drijvers, "The Man of God of Edessa, Bishop Rabbula, and the Urban Poor" (*J ECS* 4 [1996]), 235-48.

²¹ H.J.W. Drijvers, "The Image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, eds H.L. Kessler-G. Wolf (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998), 13-31: 15-16. On uses of the Abgar legend in Syriac historiography see L. van Rompay, "Jacob of Edessa and the Early History of Edessa," in Reinink-Klugkist, *After Bardaisan*, 279-81.

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I agree with the late dating of the final redaction of the document, but I think that there may be also some historical traces in the *Doctrina*, mixed up with later fictional material. In particular, my attention is attracted by the correspondence between Abgar 'the Black' and Tiberius, the emperor.²² This section appears to be an isolated nucleus in the narrative texture, originally not belonging to the Abgar legend and integrated into it with difficulty: with a "laborieuse soudure" in the case of ms. Syr. Sin. 30.²³ This might be a historical trace integrated in the narrative frame. I shall point out that, while absent in Eusebius, it is present also in Moses of Chorene and, in an abbreviated form, in a Syriac *Transitus Mariae*.²⁴

²² Of Abgar's historical figure I endeavored to offer a thorough reconstruction in "Edessa" and "Abgar." On the possible historicity of his exchange of letters with Tiberius see also my "Alcune osservazioni sulle origini del Cristianesimo nelle regioni ad est dell'Eufrate," in *La diffusione dell'eredità classica nell'età tardoantica e medioevale*, eds. R.B. Finazzi-A. Valvo (Alessandria: Orso, 1998), 209-25.

²³ So Desreumaux, *La doctrine*, 185.

²⁴ *Mary's Getting out from the World and Jesus' Birth and Childhood*: Cureton, *Documents*, 110-12. On the *Transitus Mariae* tradition, fifth to eighth cent. AD, see S.C. Mimouni, *La tradition grecque de la Dormition et de l'Assomption de Marie* (Paris: Cerf, 2003); S.J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: OUP, 2002); according to E. Testa, "L'origine e lo sviluppo della *Dormitio Mariae*" (*Aug.* 23 [1983]), 249-62, the *Transitus Mariae*, typical of the literary genre of funeral praise, on the anniversary of a *dies natalis* (on which see my "Osservazioni sul concetto di 'giorno natalizio' nel mondo greco e romano" (*Ilu* 6 [2001]), 169-81) is composed by three groups of texts produced in different times by the Church of Jerusalem: Ebionite period (II-IV cent.), period of a faint miaphysitism (IV-V cent.), period of the *Henotikon* (V-VII cent.). This genre is closely related to the Apocalypses of the Virgin: S.C. Mimouni, "Les Apocalypses de la Vierge" (*Apocrypha* 4 [1993]), 101-12. According to M. Clayton, "The *transitus Mariae*: the tradition and its origins" (*ibid.* 10 [1999]), 74-98, the Syriac tradition is very important and has specific features. According to Bagatti and Manns, all these apocrypha might derive from a Jewish-Christian milieu and depend on one single document not later than the second cent. AD. Among the Syriac versions we can distinguish the *Transitus* A (V cent.); B (V cent.); C (V-VI cent.); D (VI-VII cent.). See B. Bagatti-M. Piccirillo-A. Prodrorno, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gethsemane*, *Collectio Minor* 17 (Jerusalem: SBF, 1975), 57-58; B. Bagatti, "Le due

It is set in the broader context of the legend of the correspondence²⁵ between Jesus and king Abgar ‘the Black’,²⁶ who ruled Edessa from 4 BC to AD 7 and then, after an interruption attributed to the usurper Ma^cnu IV, again AD 13 to 50. At least, this is the chronology of von Gutschmid and many other scholars,²⁷ based on the list of Edessan kings included in the Syriac

redazioni del *Transitus Mariae*” (*Marianum* 32 [1970]), 279-87; Id., “Ricerche sulle tradizioni della morte della Vergine” (*Sacra Doctrina* 69-70 [1973]), 185-214; S. Mimouni, “Histoire de la recherche relative aux traditions littéraires et topologiques sur le sort final de Marie” (*Marianum* 149 [1996]), 168-71. Id., “De l’Ascension du Christ à l’Assomption de la Vierge,” in *Marie*, edd. D. Iogna-Prat, E. Palazzo, D. Russo (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996).

²⁵ Regarded as spurious by Fathers and Councils: see my “Le origini,” 209-10; *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti*, ed. N. Geerard (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 65-89; I. Karaulashvili, “The Date of the *Epistula Abgar*” (*Apocrypha* 13 [2002]), 85-110; V. Ruggieri, “La flessione della scrittura,” in *Comunicazione e ricezione del documento cristiano* (Roma: Augustinianum, 2004), 75-87: 79-82; E. Giannarelli, “Quando a scrivere è Cristo,” *ibid.* 279-90: 279-87.

²⁶ Ukkamâ means “black,” or perhaps “blindness.” The Semitic name Abgar is an elative form of the ‘*a12a3* kind from BGR: cf. class. Arab ‘*abjar* = “pot-belly, with inguinal hernia:” J.K. Stark, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), 63a. The Armenian etymology in Moses, *PH* 2.26, from *awag-ayr*, “great man” (according to Moses misunderstood by Greeks and Syrians), is imaginary.

²⁷ A. von Gutschmid, “Untersuchungen über die Geschichte des Königreichs Osrhoene,” *Mémoires de l’Académie de St.-Pétersbourg*, 35 (St. Petersburg-Riga-Leipzig, 1887); H. Leclercq, “Édesse,” in *DAcL* IV (1921), 2058-110: 2064-65; E. Kirsten, “Edessa,” in *RAC* IV (1959), 555-97: 555 and 590; H.J.W. Drijvers, “Hatra, Palmyra und Edessa,” in *ANRW* II 8 (1977), 799-906: 872; Égérie, *Journal de voyage* ed. P. Maraval, *SCh* 296 (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 296 n. 1; M.L. Chaumont, *La christianisation de l’Empire iranien*, CSCO, Subs. 80 (Louvain: Peeters, 1988), 14-16; González, *Leyenda*, 26; C. Moreschini-E. Norelli, *Storia della letteratura cristiana antica*, II 1 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1996), 319; Griffith too (“The *Doctrina*,” § 1) and Giannarelli (“Quando a scrivere,” 280) and Jullien (*Apôtres*, 124) accept this chronology. In my “Edessa,” 109, I supposed two different, homonymic historical figures identified by ancient sources: one who ruled in the Augustan age and the other in the Tiberian and Claudian age.

chronicle of Ps. Dionysius of Tell-Mahre or *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, written in 776²⁸, and on a synchronism²⁹). But it is more probable that Abgar ruled AD 22 to 25, for three years and a month, and then, after Abgar Hewârâ's usurpation, again AD 31/2 to 65/6, according to Luther's recent hypothesis³⁰ based on the list of the kings (*yubâlâ d-malke*) of Edessa included in the *Chronicle* of Eliah of Nisibis.³¹ The latter dating fits the total 38 years of Abgar's reign attested by Moses, *PH* 2. 34.³²

[5] Shortly before Jesus' passion, Abgar sent two of his nobles, Maryahb and Shamashgram,³³ and his archivist³⁴ Hannân to

²⁸ W. Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahrê* (Uppsala: Universitas Upsaliensis, 1987). On Syriac chronography see E.I. Yousif, *Les chroniqueurs syriaques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

²⁹ The six-year interruption is attested in Ps. Dionysius; 4 BC was fixed on the basis of the Armenian version of Abgar's legend, according to which the supposed correspondence between Abgar and Jesus took place in the 32nd year of Abgar's reign = 14th year of Tiberius' reign = AD 27/8.

³⁰ A. Luther, "Elias von Nisibis und die Chronologie der edessenischen Könige" (*Klio* 81 [1999]), 180-98; cf. Drijvers, *Inscriptions*, 237-48, and my "Abgar."

³¹ Eliae Metropolitae Nisibeni *Opus Chronologicum, pars prior*, ed. E.W. Brooks, *CSCO* 62, Syri 21; tr. 63, Syri 23 (Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1954).

³² For a possible allusion in Juvenal, see my "Nota per le fonti della persecuzione anticristiana di Nerone" (*ETF* 14 [2001]), 59-67; Ead., "Dione di Prusa Giovenale, e l'impressione probabilmente suscitata da alcuni supplizi delle prime persecuzioni anticristiane" *Augustinianum* 45 (2005), 35-45.

³³ Theophoric names of Aramaic origin, respectively meaning: "the Lord gave" and "Shamash decided." For other names with "Shamash" (Syr. *shemshâ* = "sun"), see Drijvers, *Inscriptions*, 22; 47. Addai in the *Doctrina* blames the Edessan people because they adore the sun; according to Josephus, *AI* 18. 6; 19. 8, a *Sampsigeramos* was king of Emesa and Aristobulus' father-in-law.

³⁴ He is called *tabûlârâ sharrîrâ*: the first term corresponds to *tabularius*, "secretary," while Eusebius calls Ananias (= Hannân) *takbudromos*, like Moses, *PH* 2. 32: *surbandak*, "courier." See Traina, "Movsês," 293 n. 65, who proposes a different vocalization in Syriac, so to obtain the transliteration of *tabellarius*, "courier." In the narration Hannân seems to be both courier and secretary. According to Segal, *Edessa*, 20, *sharrîrâ* means the king's confidant: this is the interpretation

“Sabinus son of Eustorgius” (the Roman governor who ruled Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine and Mesopotamia) in Eleutheropolis in Palestine on political affairs. He received them with joy and honour and sent a letter to Abgar. On their way back home they took the road to Jerusalem, where they saw Jesus and heard of his miracles; according to Thomas Ardzrouni, an Armenian historian of the tenth cent., Abgar’s envoys belonged to the group of Gentiles who asked Philip to present them to Jesus according to John 12:20-22. González thinks that Thomas surely derived these data from ancient sources:³⁵ I suppose that he drew them from Moses, who in *PH* 2.31 says that Abgar’s envoys were the Gentiles of the Gospel episode. Back in Edessa, they informed Abgar, who stated: “These powers are not of men but of God. For there is no one who can revivify the dead, except God alone,” the first Christological statement in the *Doctrina*.³⁶ So Abgar sent envoys to Palestine with

given by Moses too, who describes Hannān as “confidant.” On bilingualism in ancient Syriac speaking area see D.G.K. Taylor, “Bilingualism and Diglossia in Late Antique Syria and Mesopotamia,” in *Bilingualism in Ancient Society*, eds. J.N. Adams-M. Janse-S. Swain (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 298-331; for Aramaic-Greek bilingualism in the I-II cent. AD see H.M. Cotton, “Survival, Adaptation and Extinction: Nabatean and Jewish Aramaic versus Greek in the legal documents from the Cave of Letters in Nahal Hever,” in *Sprache und Kultur in der kaiserzeitlichen Provinz Arabien*, ed. L. Schumacher and O. Stoll. Mainzer althistorische Studien 4. (St. Katharinen: Scripta Mercaturae Verlag, 2003), chap. 1. On the name Ananias see González, *Leyenda*, 75 n. 13. Ananias is also the Christian Jew who baptized Paul in Acts 9:10-19 and who is said to have preached in Eleutheropolis, where Peter ‘Abshlama’s martyrdom took place (the last name occurs in the *Doctrina*).

³⁵ González, *Leyenda*, 76 n. 19. In Acts 2:5 we read that in AD 30 in Jerusalem there were many Jews coming from everywhere, also from Mesopotamia and Cappadocia (ibid. 2:9-12): it is very probable that Jews from Osrhoene too (in Mesopotamia, near Cappadocia) visited Jerusalem in AD 30 and then, back home, related what they saw and heard. For the importance of these Jews who listened to Peter’s first preaching in Jerusalem in relation to the early spread of Christianity see C.P. Thiede, *Ein Fisch für den römischen Kaiser* (München: Luchterhand, 1998), 120 and *passim*.

³⁶ See Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” § 6; another is in Abgar’s letter to Jesus: “When I heard of the great wonders that you do, I decided either that you are God [...] or that you are the Son of God.” And then these

a letter for Jesus, written down by Hannān: the king, who was ill, asked Jesus to come to Edessa, in order to heal him and find refuge from the Jews, who wanted to kill him. Jesus received and read the letter on Nisan 12, in the house of Gamaliel, intended to be St. Paul's teacher, the rabbi who spoke to the Sanhedrin in favor of the Apostles (Acts 5:34; 22:3) and who in NT apocrypha is for Jesus and his disciples.³⁷ Jesus didn't go to Edessa, but sent a message to Abgar, written by Hannān,³⁸ in which he promised to

statements multiply in the words of Abgar and above all in Addai's teaching, addressed both to Abgar and to the people (see *ibid.*, § 14). The king himself instructed the apostle to address all the people, "that they might know that the Son of God is God." Cf. T. Anikuzhakattil, *Jesus Christ the Saviour. Soteriology according to East Syriac Tradition* (Satna: Ephrem, 2002); A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, II.3, ed. T. Hainthaler (Freiburg: Herder, 2002); *Dieu Miséricorde, Dieu Amour. Actes du Colloque VIII*, Patrimoine syriaque 1-2 (Antélias, CERO 2003); G. Thumpanirappel, *Christ in the East Syriac Tradition* (Satna: Ephrem, 2003). Relation to the Holy Spirit: E. Kaniyampampil, *The Spirit of Life. A Study of the Holy Spirit in the Early Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam: Oriental Institute Religious Studies, 2003); D.W. Winkler, *Ostyrisches Christentum, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 26* (Münster: LIT, 2003).

³⁷ See e.g. M. Erbetta, *Gli Apocrifi del NT*, I, 2 (Casale: Marietti, 1983²), 344-66. A little further in the *Doctrina*, Jesus replied to Abgar while he was in the High Priest's house (a similar version is in the *Acts of Mari*, 2, which at the beginning present a parallel account of the letters exchanged between Abgar and Jesus and Addai's coming to Edessa and his preaching there: see below). It would be Gamaliel, again: he was not hostile to Jesus and the Christians, but he was no High Priest; maybe the Syriac text means, more generically, an important priest.

³⁸ According to Eusebius, Jesus himself wrote the letter; according to Moses, Thomas wrote it for him. Moreover, in the *Doctrina*, the *Acta Maris*, 2, and the *Peregrinatio Aegeriae*, 19, 9, Jesus promises the invincibility of Edessa, a clause absent in Eusebius and Moses. On the *Acta Maris* see my *Atti di Mari* (Brescia: Paideia, 2007). On the *Peregrinatio* (381-4 or 385-8), see R. Gelsomino, "Egeria, 381-384 d.C." (*Helikon* 22-27 [1982-87]), 437-53; H. Sivan, "Holy Land Pilgrimage and Western Audiences" (*CQ* 38 [1988]), 528-35; Id., "Who was Egeria?" (*HTbR* 81 [1988]), 59-72; C. Weber, "Egeria's Norman homeland" (*HSPb* 92 [1989]), 437-56; F. Cardini, "Egeria, la pellegrina," in *Medioevo al femminile*, ed. F. Bertini (Bari: Laterza, 1989), 3-30; *Atti del Convegno sulla Peregrinatio Aegeriae*, *Arezzo* 23-25.X.87 (Arezzo: Accad. Petrarca, 1990);

send a disciple of his to Edessa after his ascension.³⁹ (This

P. Smiraglia, “Un indizio per la cronologia relativa delle due parti dell’*Itinerarium* di Egeria,” in *Studi G. Monaco*, IV (Palermo: Fac. di Lettere e Filos., 1991), 1491-96; Egeria, *Diario di viaggio*, trans. E. Giannarelli (Torino: Paoline, 1992); A. Palmer, “Egeria the voyager,” in *Travel fact and travel fiction*, ed. Z. v. Martels (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 39-53; H.J. Westra, “The pilgrim Egeria’s concept of place” (*MLatJb* 30 [1995]), 93-100; M. Mulzer, “Mit der Bibel in der Hand?” (*ZPalV* 112 [1996]), 156-64; Moreschini-Norelli, *Storia*, II, I (1996), 496-99; A. Doval, “The Date of Cyril of Jerusalem’s Catecheses” (*JThS* 48 [1997]), 129-32; D. Gagliardi, “Sul latino di Egeria” (*Koinonia* 21 [1997]), 105-16; A. López, “Mujeres en busca de la palabra” (*Florilib* 10 [1999]), 163-86; Egeria, *Pellegrinaggio in Terra Santa*, ed. N. Natalucci (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1999); M. Giebel, “Friedensbrief und Pilgerflasche” (*Anregung* 46 [2000]), 400-8; my “Edessa,” 127-28. Egeria visited Edessa (*Per.* 19. 2-19) and saw the church and the royal palace (“palatium Aggari regis,” probably that of Abgar the Great, also attested by the *Chronicon Edessenum*, 1 and 9) with the ancient marble portraits (*archiotepeae*) of Abgar (“rex Aggarus, qui antequam videret Dominum, credidit ei, quia esset vere filius Dei”) and his son Ma’nû (*Magnus*). She is informed by the bishop of the Abgar-Jesus correspondence, which took place *per Ananiam cursorem*. As evidence of the invincibility of Edessa, an episode of Abgar’s day is narrated, concerning the siege laid to Edessa by the “Persians” and the salvation of the city thanks to Jesus’ letter; many other times, later on, Edessa was saved by this promise (*Per.* 13). Egeria also visited Abgar’s tomb and was given a copy of Abgar’s and Jesus’ letters. Such was the veneration for Jesus’ letter in Edessa in the fourth cent. that the gate through which Ananias brought it into the city was kept in a perpetual ritual pureness (*Per.* 18); on ritual pureness in early Christianity: U. Volp, *Tod und Ritual in den christlichen Gemeinden der Antike*, VCSuppl. 65 (Leiden: Brill, 2002). The same clause of the invincibility also appears in five Greek inscriptions reproducing Abgar’s letter more ancient than the *Peregrinatio* and Eusebius: this leads to suppose that it was Eusebius who curtailed the Edessan material on which he was working, taken from the archives of Edessa (the same as that provided and checked by Labûbna and Hannân).

³⁹ The sources on the correspondence are in H. Leclercq, “Abgar,” in *DACL*, I (1924), 2058-110; also R.A. Lipsius, *Die edessensische Abgarsage* (Braunschweig 1880); E. von Rohden, “Abgar V Ukkama,” in *PW*, I (1894), 94; G. Eldarov, “Abgar V,” in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, I (Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1961), 75-76; M. Erbetta, *Gli Apocrifi del NT*, III (Casale: Marietti, 1966), 77-84; 78; Drijvers, “Abgar Legend;” W. Cramer, “Abgar,” in *LThK*, I (1993²), 48-49; my “Edessa,” 124; n. 35.

narration has many points in common with those of Moses and Eusebius: e.g. the envoys' names, their trip to Eleutheropolis, the figure of Sabinus son of Eustorgius, who becomes Marinus son of Storog in Moses, with the same powers of L. Vitellius in Orient in AD 35-37; the good reception given by the Roman governor to Abgar's envoys, present in Moses too; Hannān/Ananias as intermediary between Abgar and Jesus, in Eusebius as well.) Thus, Addai, "one of the 72 apostles,"⁴⁰ then called *sblāhā*, "apostle," himself throughout the *Doctrina*, was sent by Judas Thomas, one of the Twelve,⁴¹ to Edessa, where he dwelled "in the house of Tobias, the son of Tobias the Jew, who was from Palestine"⁴²—he appears

⁴⁰ Cf. Luke 10:1, where *duo* is after *hebdomēkonta* in Marcion, Tatian (Ephrem's commentary, Italian, Dutch tr.), P⁴⁵ (London, IIIrd cent.), B (Vatican, IVth cent.), D (Cambridge, VIth cent.), M (London-Hamburg, IXth cent.) 1604 (Athos, XIIth cent.) s (codex of the *Vetus Latina*, Milan, Bibl. Ambros. VIIth-VIIIth cent.), e (*Vet. Lat.*, Trento, IVth-Vth cent.) a (*Vet. Lat.*, Vercelli, IVth cent.) c (*Vet. Lat.*, Paris, XIIth cent.), l (*Vet. Lat.*, Breslau, VIIIth cent.) r² (*Vet. Lat.*, Dublin, IXth cent.), the *Vulgate*, the ancient Syriac versions, the Armenian version, Adamantius and Epiphanus; *duo* is missing in the other mss., in Irenaeus (Greek text) and Origen (Latin text). So, the Syriac *Doctrina* has the same text as Tatian and the ancient Syriac versions. Cf., *ad l.*, *Nuovo Testamento greco e italiano*, eds. A. Merk-G. Barbaglio (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1991²).

⁴¹ Thomas is the protagonist of a tradition of evangelization in the East (Parthia and India) linked to the Church of Edessa: see my "Note sulle origini del Cristianesimo in India" (*SCO* 47 [2000]), 363-78; C. Dognini-Ead., *Gli Apostoli in India nella Patristica e nella letteratura sanscrita* (Milano: Medusa, 2001), esp. my chap. 4 on Thomas and his *Acts* (connected with Edessa), on which see A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, NTSuppl 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2003²); A.D. Deconick, *Voices of the Mystics*, JSOT Suppl. 157 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 2001). On the *Gospel of Thomas* see e.g. B. Ehlers, "Kann das Thomasevangelium aus Edessa stammen?" (*NT* 12 [1970]), 284-317; S. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom* (New York: Seabury, 1983); R. Cameron, "The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins," in *The Future of Early Christianity. Essays H. Koester*, eds. B. Pearson-A. Kraabel et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 381-92.

⁴² This Jewish connection for early Christianity in Edessa seems to be in contrast with anti-Semitism in the *Doctrina* (see below). Our document says that after Addai's preaching in Edessa "even the Jews who were learned in the Law and Prophets, who traded in silk, submitted and

became followers and confessed that the Messiah is the Son of the Living God.” I think that all this might have a historical nucleus, especially if we consider the role of Jews, and in particular traders, in the first christianization of Eastern regions, as results from the *Acts of Thomas* and other documents concerning the arrival of Christianity in India (in which Edessa probably had an important part): see my chapters in Dognini-Ramelli, *Apostoli*; A. Harrak, “Trade Routes and the Christianization of the Near East,” in *The Origins of Syriac Christianity: First Symposium of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, Nov. 24 2001, according to whom Christianity first spread throughout Syria and Mesopotamia along trade routes thanks to merchants (whose importance in the ancient world is studied in C. Zaccagnini, ed., *Mercanti e politica nel mondo antico*, Roma: Erma, 2003; cf. K. Ruffing, “Wege in den Osten,” in *Stuttgarter Kolloquium zur historischen Geographie des Altertums* 7 [Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002], 360-78). See also Jullien, *Apôtres*; J. Yacoub, *Babylone chrétienne* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996); my *Il Chronicon*, introduction; my “Il *Chronicon di Arbela*: una messa a punto storiografica” (*Aevum* 80 [2006]), 145-164. On Jewish Christianity see S.C. Mimouni, “Judéo-christianisme;” Id., “Pour une définition nouvelle du judéo-christianisme ancien” (*NTS* 38 [1992]), 161-86; 184: Jewish Christians were Jews who recognized Jesus as the Messiah but still observed the Jewish Law; Id., *Le judéo-christianisme ancien* (Paris: Cerf, 1998); R.E. Brown, “Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity” (*CBQ* 45 [1983]) 74-79; J.E. Taylor, “The Phenomenon of Jewish-Christianity” (*VChr* 44 [1990]), 313-34; C. Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeit-Geschichte* 3 (Berlin: Inst. Kirche Judentum 1990); *Jews and Christians. The Parting of the Ways AD 70 to 135*, ed. J.D.G. Dunn (Tübingen: Eerdmann, 1992); Id., *The Parting of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism* (London: SCM-Philadelphia: Trinity, 1981); L.H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton: UP, 1993); S.G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); *Le déchirement. Juifs et chrétiens au premier siècle*, éd. G. Marguerat (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1996); Shoemaker, *Traditions*, 212-32, who thinks that the concept of a “primitive Jewish Christianity” is a scholarly construction developed by Italian and French scholars, esp. J. Daniélou; it is not to be confused with the broader category of “Jewish Christianity,” which is considered still useful. See also *Verus Israel. Nuove prospettive sul Giudeocristianesimo*, ed. G. Filoramo-C. Gianotto (Brescia: Paideia, 2001); T. Rajak, “Jews and Christians as Groups in a Pagan World,” in Ead., *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), part 3; D.K. Buell, “Race and Universalism in Early Christianity” (*J ECS* 10:4 [2002]), 429-68; cf. Ead., “Rethinking the

also in Eusebius' parallel passage as Tōbīas, and, with a slightly different name, Tūbanā, in the *Acts of Mari*, 4⁴³—, and he preached the Gospel in Abgar's kingdom. In the meanwhile Hannān, the archivist who accompanied the king's emissaries to Jesus, painted a portrait of Christ that he brought back to Abgar, who enshrined it in one of his palaces; Moses, 2. 32, asserts that Hannān brought the Saviour's image to Edessa, while Eusebius does not mention it, probably because he was hostile to representations of God. His silence is not a compelling argument against the supposition that the motif of Jesus' portrait belongs to the original version of the Abgar legend.⁴⁴ In Edessa, Addai healed both Abgar and Abdū, as we read in Eusebius and in the *Acts of Mari*, too. The picture is connected to the manifold legend of Jesus' portrait present in Edessa in later times, the *mandylion* or *achiropita* (here linked to the tradition of Edessa as "Blessed City," *mdintā mbarraktā*, a title that, according to the *Doctrina*, seems to be due to Christ's prayer for Edessa in his letter to Abgar: "As for your city, may it be blessed

Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition" (*HTbR* 94:4 [2001]), 449-76; M. Pesce, "Quando nasce il Cristianesimo?" (*ASE* 20 [2003]), 39-56; Eung Chun, *Either Jew or Gentile: Paul's Unfolding Theology of Inclusivity* (Westminster: J. Knox, 2003); Jossa, *Giudei*; a whole session was devoted to Jewish Christianity at the 2007 SBL Annual Meeting, S. Diego, Nov. 17-20.

⁴³ See C.&F. Jullien, *Les Actes de Mar Mari* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001); Id., *Les Actes de Mār Māri*, CSCO 602, Syri 234-5 (Louvain: Peeters, 2003); Id., *Aux origines de l'Église de Perse*, CSCO 604, Subs. 114 (ibid. 2003); an Italian transl. with essay and notes is my *Atti di Mari*; see also Ead., "The First Evangelization of the Mesopotamian Regions in the Syriac Tradition: the *Acta Maris* as a Continuation of the *Doctrina Addai*" (*Antiguo Oriente* 3 [2005]), 11-54; Ead., "The Narrative Continuity between the *Teaching of Addai* and the *Acts of Mari*: Two Historical Novels?" in *Framing Plots*, Proceedings of the London 2006 Conference, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 189 (2009), 411-450; Ead., "La *Doctrina Addai* e gli *Acta Maris*: Note storico-letterarie sui loro rapporti intertestuali" (*AION* 65 [2005] {2009}), 1-31.

⁴⁴ Drijvers, *Abgarsage*, 392. According to the *Acts of Thomas* (M. Geraard, *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 245. II, 1; Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller*, 90-91; 186) the painter was not able to portray Jesus, who thus impressed his own image on a canvas.

and may no enemy ever again rule over it”),⁴⁵ which is the subject of the Byzantine *Narratio* ascribed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus (X cent.). This work seems to preserve very ancient material, such as the information on the friendship between Abgar, correctly called *toparkhês* of Edessa, and the prefect of Egypt, in my view probably A. Avillius Flaccus, who ruled Egypt AD 32 to 38—just the years of Vitellius’ mandate in the Near East and of the Abgar-Tiberius correspondence—and is well known to us thanks to Philo, *In Flaccum*, 1-3; 25; 40; 116; 158. He was one of the most intimate friends of Tiberius; he was born and grew up in Rome with Augustus’ nieces, obtained the government of Egypt, a direct possession of the emperor, and probably helped the good relationship between Abgar and Tiberius that is evident in their correspondence.⁴⁶

[6] In fact, the core of this Abgar-Jesus legend seems to be common with the account provided by Eusebius, *HE* 1.13, who claims that his source was a Syriac document kept in the archives of Edessa: it is probably the same source of the *Doctrina*,⁴⁷ and,

⁴⁵ Analysis of the evidence in my “Dal *mandylion* di Edessa alla Sindone” (*Thu* 4 [1999]), 173-93. Also: E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1899); Id., “Der Briefwechsel zwischen Abgar und Jesus” (*Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 43 [1900]), 422-86; Drijvers, “The Image,” 13-31; Illert, *Doctrina*.

⁴⁶ See my “Edessa,” 128, to which, for prefects of Egypt in the Julio-Claudian age, I add L. Capponi, *Augustan Egypt. The Creation of a Roman Province* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁷ See Jullien, *Apôtres*, 67; on the Edessan archives *ibid.* 123ff. Discussion in S. Brock, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity,” in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, eds. H.W. Attridge-G. Hata (Leiden-New York: Brill, 1992), 212-34, with previous *bibl.*; Ramelli, “Bardesane e la sua scuola.” Already Lipsius, *Abgarsage*, and *Acta Apocrypha*, CVI-CXI, said that Eusebius and the *Doctrina* had, almost partially, the same Edessan sources; so Erbetta, *Apocriſi*, III, 80: the *Doctrina* depends on Eusebius but not only on him; Moraldi, *Apocriſi*, 1647, 1657-58 with *bibl.*: both Eusebius and the *Doctrina* depend on the documents of the Edessan archives, which the *Doctrina* amplifies. A common source is also supposed by Desreumaux, “La *Doctrina*,” 186; Brock, “Eusebius and Syriac Christianity,” 212-34 appears critical; further *bibl.* in González, *Leyenda*, 36 n. 41. On Eusebius as Church historian see F. Winkelmann, “Historiography in the Age of Constantine,” in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity*, ed. G. Marasco (Leiden 2003), 3-41. On

according to Moses of Chorene, as I shall show, those were the archives that Abgar himself, or more probably a homonymous predecessor of his, conveyed to Edessa, and the archives that preserved the Syriac document that was controlled by the witness Hannān as well, and on which the *Doctrina* is based. Eusebius says that still in his time in the Edessan archives there were the documents concerning Abgar, and that he translated them from Syriac (*ibid.* 1.13.5).⁴⁸ His report does not include the Abgar-Tiberius correspondence,⁴⁹ and this suggests that the source of this material may be different—but not necessarily later. Before recording Thaddeus' mission, he says that King Abgar, “who ruled over the peoples beyond the Euphrates,” was ill when the exchange of letters with Jesus took place, and that Jesus promised him to send a disciple: soon after the Resurrection, Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, sent Thaddeus (= Addai), one of the seventy disciples, to Edessa (*HE* 1.13.4); in the alleged letters of Abgar and Jesus, *Abgaros Onkhama* is called *toparkhēs*, the right title used, later, by Procopius too, who, moreover, explains it correctly. There is no mention of letters exchanged with Tiberius, but in Eusebius' account we find a very interesting trace of the same theme of the Abgar-Tiberius correspondence as recorded in the *Doctrina* and in Moses: in the conversation between Abgar and Thaddeus, when the apostle asks him to believe, in order to get cured, the Edessan king says: “I would have wished to take armed forces and to destroy the Jews who crucified him if I had not been prevented by the Roman Empire.”⁵⁰ We read these same words, together with a

the reliability of Eusebius' sources see K. Toyota, “The authenticity of Eusebius' sources” (*YCLS* 39 [1991]), 92-101.

⁴⁸ The document was in Syriac; Syriac texts with translations acclued have been found in Mesopotamia; on bilingualism in this region in late antiquity see Taylor, “Bilingualism,” 298-331.

⁴⁹ For a critical analysis of Eusebius' account see my “Edessa,” 121-22, and, with a new hypothesis, my “Bardesane e la sua scuola.” Eusebius goes on translating the Syriac documents that came after the letters in his papers taken from the Edessan archives (*HE* 1.13.11); so, he tells the story of Thaddeus' mission.

⁵⁰ The same words are in the parallel version of the Abgar story contained in the Syriac *Acts of Mari*, 4, in the context of the conversation between Abgar and Addai. The “Roman Empire” is here, just as in the Greek text, “the kingdom of the Romans.”

reference to Abgar's and his predecessors' loyalty toward Rome, also in the *Doctrina*, in the same context: "I would have wished to take armed forces myself and to destroy the Jews who crucified him, but because of the Roman Empire I had respect for the covenant of peace which was established by me, as by my forefathers, with our lord Caesar Tiberius."⁵¹ In fact, Tiberius punished those held responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus—as he says in his letter to Abgar—and thus did what Abgar had wished. In the Syriac letter to Abgar he says that he has already done something and promises to intervene again in this sense.

[7]

Whereas the legend of Abgar's letter to Jesus and of the latter's response is absolutely unhistorical—even the date given is incorrect,⁵² and Eleutheropolis did not have this name in the first cent.⁵³—, the correspondence between the Edessan king and the Roman emperor might contain some historical traces. Abgar's

⁵¹ Also see my "Edessa," 125.

⁵² The year in which Abgar sent two of his nobles and his archivist to the Roman governor, when on their way back they saw Jesus in Jerusalem for the first time, is said to have been "the year 343 of the Greeks," or AD 31/2, while Jesus probably died in the spring of AD 30 (see J. Blinzler, *Il processo di Gesù* [It. tr. Brescia: Paideia, 1966²], 85ff.; J.P. Lemonon, *Pilate et le gouvernement de la Judée* [Paris: Lecoffre-Gabalda, 1981], 133; C.P. Thiede, *Jesus. Der Glaube, die Fakten* [Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2003]), "Under the reign of our lord the Roman Caesar Tiberius and of king Abgar [...] the Black," according to the *Doctrina*, Abgar's appellative was known to Eusebius, too, who indicates the year 340 of the Greeks = AD 29.

⁵³ This Palestinian town, South-West of Jerusalem, also mentioned by Ammian. Marc. 14.8, took this name in AD 199/200, under Septimius Severus, in whose honour it was called Lucia Septimia Severiana Eleutheropolis in Severan coinage (Lucia Septimia Severiana was the name of Diospolis, too, founded in the same year): formerly it was Baetogabra. In the fourth-fifth cent. AD Eleutheropolis was the capital of *Palaestina Eleutheropolitana*, a wide district comprehensive of the *toparchiae* of Engaddis and Bethleptapha. Epitaphs and Church historians attest an early Christian presence (Vth cent.). See A. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford: OUP, 1971²), 220; my "Osservazioni," 212-13; Jullien, *Apôtres*, 65. Another interesting clue in this sense is, at chap. 68, the sequence Aggai-Palut-'Abshlamā-Barsamyā, which seems to reproduce the episcopal succession in Edessa in the third cent. Palut was bishop 192 to 209; see Kirsten, "Edessa," 569-70.

letter to Tiberius in the *Doctrina* stresses the Jews' alleged responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion: since Abgar could not proceed against the Jews himself—as we read in the *Doctrina*—, he wrote a letter to Tiberius, his “lord,” and related to him the crucifixion, with the darkness and the earthquake that accompanied it, even though he was aware that these facts were well known to Tiberius (“although nothing is unknown to your majesty”). He urges the emperor to take measures against the Jews, who, in his view, were responsible for the death of a man who did not deserve it. Tiberius, who shows himself happy at the loyalty of this vassal king (“I received the letter of your faithfulness towards me, and it was read before me”), in his answer says that Pilate had already informed his “governor Aulbinus” of this—indeed, Justin and Tertullian mention a report by Pilate on the Jesus story—, and that he, Tiberius, had already removed Pilate with infamy—as he really did through L. Vitellius—, because he had let a man be killed who rather deserved veneration. Finally, he promises a punitive action against those responsible: “to take legal proceedings towards those who acted against the law.” But first, Tiberius says, he has to settle “the war with the children of Spain, who have rebelled against me;” he concludes his letter rejoicing again because Abgar has written to him showing “loyalty towards me and the covenant of faithfulness, yours and of your forefathers.” Another passage, during the first dialogue between the king and Addai, in which Abgar professes his loyalty and that of his predecessors towards the Roman emperor, is perfectly in line with these words.⁵⁴ The continuation of the

⁵⁴ Soon after quoting Abgar's and Tiberius' letters, our document says that Aristides, Tiberius' envoy to Abgar, went back to Rome from Edessa with gifts from Abgar to Tiberius as further signs of his faithfulness and devotion to the emperor; he passed through *Tiqunta* (there was Claudius, “the second after the emperor”), and reached *Artiqā*: there was Tiberius, while Gaius supervised the regions near Caesar. Claudius' figure might be a reminiscence of Germanicus, who, during Tiberius' reign, but not after AD 19, acted as a plenipotentiary in Syria and in Orient with exceptional powers similar to those of Vitellius (so G. Firpo, *Il problema cronologico della nascita di Gesù* [Brescia: Paideia, 1983], 208ff.), after the *legatus* of Syria, Cn. Calpurnius Piso, had left his charge by order of Germanicus, who took his place with extraordinary powers. See my “Osservazioni,” 118; 224. The mysterious *Tiqunta* might be Thiunta, a town North of Hierapolis, in Asia Minor, on the “Persian road” from Edessa to the

document attests that Tiberius, after the war that involved those “children of Spain,” punished some Jewish leaders in Palestine: through the above mentioned Vitellius, in fact, he removed Caiaphas, as attested by Ios. *AI* 18.4.3. Moses, as I shall point out, integrates this same material with Tiberius’ motion before the Senate to recognize the Christians, an important element for the contextualization of our passage, and cites a second letter of Abgar, a reply to Tiberius.

- [8] The reference to the “children of Spain” in Tiberius’ letter is generally regarded as an anachronism: so e.g., Griffith⁵⁵ observes that after the Spanish wars under Augustus there was no serious imperial fighting in Spain until the Goths, Suevi and Vandals invaded the peninsula in 409. Thus, he suggests that the author of the *Doctrina* is here evoking Constantius’ operations against the Visigoths in Spain between 414 and 416.⁵⁶ He also notices,⁵⁷ with reason, that the first mention of Spanish rebels in the *Doctrina* occurs in the account of the Protonike legend, a double of empress Helena’s *inventio crucis*, and that Helena’s story first circulated in Greek only in the latter years of the IV cent.⁵⁸ This suggests that

West, or, less probably, Thilaticomum, located in Osrhoene, South-East of Edessa, where the *ala septima Valeria praelectorum* stood. It was placed on the main way that lead from Edessa to Hierapolis (in Syria) and to the sea, i.e. from Edessa to Italy. As for *Artiqa*, Cureton, *Documents*, 61, suggested to vocalize *Ortiqa* and understand Ortigia; it is also possible to suppose an identification with *Aricia* / *Aritia*, South-East of Rome, on the *Via Appia*: according to Tac. *Ann.* 6.32, Tiberius in 35-37 was *urbem iuxta*, and Josephus in *AI* 18.6.6 [179] says that from Capri he went to Tusculum, “about a hundred stadia from Rome.”

⁵⁵ Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” § 24 and n. 52.

⁵⁶ For a history of Iberia (from the fifth cent. onward) see E.M. Gerli, ed., *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003); from Caesar to Septimius Severus cf. E.W. Haley, *Baetica Felix* (Austin: Univ. of Texas, 2003).

⁵⁷ Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” § 24.

⁵⁸ See J.W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Id., “The Protonike Legend and the *Doctrina Addai*” (*StPatr* 33 [1996]), 517-23; Id., “The Protonike Legend, the *Doctrina Addai* and Bishop Rabbula” (*VChr* 51 [1997]), 288-315; Id., “Promoting Jerusalem: Cyril and the True Cross,” in Drijvers–Watt, *Portraits of Spiritual Authority*, 79-95; C.P. Thiede-M. D’Ancona, *The Quest for the True Cross* (London: Routledge, 2000) with my rev. (*Aevum* 75 [2001]), 217-19; M.L. Rigato, *Il titolo della*

the full form of the *Doctrina* was composed after the beginning of the fifth cent. All this is perfectly correct, but the point is that in Tiberius' letter the "children of Spain" probably are not the Iberians (*Hiberi*) of the Iberian peninsula, but the *Hiberi* of the Caucasian region, the inhabitants of *Hiberia* (nowadays Georgia).⁵⁹ It is true that one would expect a Syriac translator just to represent the original form in transliteration, but in a Greek or Latin original there certainly was not the expression "children of Hiberia", so in this case the Syriac translator would provide something more than a mere transliteration: he found *Hiberi* or *Ibères* in Tiberius' letter, both terms already endowed with a double meaning, and translated "children of 'spny'", which in turn means both the Iberians of Spain and those of Caucasus. Indeed, very similarly, in the so-called *Book of the Laws of Countries*, the Syriac 'spny'—the selfsame word employed in our *Doctrina*—does not indicate Spain, but the Caucasian Iberia, since it is mentioned between Sarmatia and Pontus and the Caucasian peoples Alani and Albani.⁶⁰ This is all the more remarkable if not only the *Liberi*, but perhaps also the original nucleus of the Abgar-Addai legend was related to Bardaisan and his school.⁶¹ Now, these very *Hiberi* were employed by Tiberius and Vitellius in the conflict against the Parthians just in AD 35-37, according to Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.32-36.⁶² In fact, Vitellius accomplished a series of military operations in the Mesopotamian area in order to

Croce (Roma: Gregoriana, 2005²) with my review (*InvLuc* 27 [2005]), 361-364.

⁵⁹ See Schulten, "Hispania," in P.W., VIII, 1965ff., esp. 2029 on the identical denomination of Spanish and Caucasian Iberians.

⁶⁰ On Pontus and its inhabitants see now C. Marek, *Pontus et Bithynia*, *Orbis Terrarum* 2 (Mainz: von Zabern, 2003). For problems related to Syriac translations, which are not always *ad verbum*, see P.J. Williams, *Early Syriac Translation Technique* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias, 2004), who, in particular, studies variants probably created by the Syriac translators of the Greek Gospels, such as additions of Jesus' name (24-37), but also additions or omission of pronouns and nouns, changes of articles, particles and adverbs, alterations in number, person, voice or tense, or in word order, etc.

⁶¹ As I argued in "Bardesane e la sua scuola."

⁶² See my "Edessa," 118. On the relationships between Romans and Parthians in Oriental sources: Ead., "Mosè di Corene e i rapporti romano-partici" (*HAnt* 51 [2005]), 141-49; Ead., "Un tributo dei Parti a Roma agli inizi del I secolo a.C.?" (*RIL* 134 [2000]), 321-330.

stop the initiative of the Parthian king Artabanus, and to liberate Armenia from Arsaces, who was supported by Artabanus himself (Tac. *Ann.* 6.31). Tiberius chose at first Phraates, then Tiridates, as rivals of Artabanus, and made use of the Iberian Mithridates in order to reconquer Armenia, reconciling him with his brother Pharasmanes, king of the Iberians (ibid. 32). Mithridates then compelled his brother to support his plans of conquest “dolo et vi” (Tac. *Ann.* 6.33), and the consequent treacherous murder of Arsaces made it possible for the *Hiberi* to invade Armenia (ibid. 33). The most obvious translation of Tiberius’ phrase in his letter to Abgar, with reference to the Iberians, is “who have rebelled against me,” but we might also understand: “who have offered resistance, raised disorders, difficulties towards me,” or even “who have rebelled because of me” (or “have been stirred up by me”). This would fit the historical situation as well, since the Iberians were not immediately manageable, and were used by Tiberius against the Parthians.⁶³ The correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius should have taken place just in the years 35-36; seen in this light, the reference to the “children of Spain” (a Semitic periphrasis that stands for “Hiberi”) of Tiberius’ letter is not an anachronism,⁶⁴ but a precise historical detail.

⁶³ See my “Osservazioni,” 217.

⁶⁴ Anyway, there was tension between the Spanish and Tiberius: according to Velleius Paterculus, 2. 39, “Tiberius Caesar... certam Hispanis parendi confessionem extorserat;” at the end of AD 33, Tacitus mentions the *legatus* of Spain, Arruntius, together with that of Syria (so Suet. *Tib.* 41, too), who were detained in Rome and so prevented from reaching their provinces: for ten years Arruntius was forbidden to take possession of his province (*Ann.* 6.27: “Arruntium ne in Hispaniam pergeret decimum iam annum attineri”); he committed suicide in AD 37. Syria and Spain are again oppressed in the last years of Tiberius’ reign: “Hispaniarum Syriaeque... principes confiscatos. Plurimis etiam civitatibus veteres communitates et ius metallorum ac vectigalium adempta” (Suet. *Tib.* 49). Among those *principes confiscati* there was Sextus Marius, *Hispaniarum ditissimus*, who escaped a former accusation (Tac. *Ann.* 4. 36), but not the next: in AD 33 he was condemned for *incestum* and hurled down from the *rupes Tarpeia*; his wealth was confiscated by Tiberius (Tac. *Ann.* 16.19.1: “ne dubium haberetur magnitudinem pecuniae malo vertisse, aerarias aurariasque eius quamquam publicarentur sibimet Tiberius seposuit;” cf. Dio Cass. 58.22.2-3). It is not impossible

[9]

It is not so strange that an exchange of letters between the king and the emperor should be kept in the royal archives of the Mesopotamian city. These archives were also visited by the Armenian historian Movsês Xorenac'i (Moses of Chorene), who, according to tradition, lived in the fifth cent. AD and wrote the *Patmut'inn Hayoc'* or *History of Armenia*: scholars are generally critical of Moses' reliability as a historian, and place him in a later period,⁶⁵ but a reappraisal of his historical identity, of his importance as a historian, and of the traditional dating of his work has been offered, above all by Giusto Traina.⁶⁶ He mentions this correspondence in *PH* 2.33, in the context of the broadest biography that we have of Abgar 'the Black' (*PH* 2.26-34). He obviously cannot have derived this correspondence from Eusebius—even from the translation of his work—who does not know it. He claims that his source was in the archives of Edessa⁶⁷

that this bad situation caused disorders and tumults in Spain in the last years of Tiberius' reign.

⁶⁵ Esp. K. Toumanoff, "On the Date of Pseudo-Moses of Chorene" (*Handes Amsoreay* 10-12 [1961]), 467-76 (after the fifth cent.), with arguments developed by R.W. Thomson, ed., *Moses Khorenats'i. History of the Armenians* (Cambridge-London: Harvard UP, 1978), 1-61; V. Inglisian, "Die armenische Literatur," in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, I, 7 (Leiden-Köln: Brill, 1963), 156-250 (VIII-IX cent.); E.V. Gulbekian, "The conversion of king Trdat" (*Le Muséon* 90 [1977]), 49-62.

⁶⁶ S. Voicu, "Movsês Corenac'i," in *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, II (Casale: Marietti, 1983), 2324-25 new edition in the *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* II (Genova: Marietti, 2. 3390), of which an English edition is forthcoming in Cambridge, dates *PH* to the fifth cent. and supposes subsequent redactional interventions of the eighth cent. to explain anachronisms; G.X. Sarkisyan, *The History of Armenia by Moses Khorenatsi* (Cambridge: Harvard UP 1980); G. Traina, *Il complesso di Trimalcione. Movsês Xorenaci e le origini del pensiero storico armeno* (Venezia: Casa Editrice Armena, 1991), who demonstrates that some anachronisms that led to postdate *PH* are apparent and others are due to a subsequent rehash of the text; Id., "Materiali I," 179-333 (with bibliography 325-33); II (*Le Muséon* 111 [1998]), 95-138.

⁶⁷ A.H. Becker, *Devotional Study* (Ph.D. Princeton: Univ., 2004), 256-57 then published as *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: Penn Press, 2006), with my review (*Hugoye* 10,2 [2007]), §§ 1-18, admits that Moses in the fifth cent. derived information from the

and was due to “Lebubna⁶⁸ son of Ap̄shadar, who gathered all these facts of Abgar’s and Sanatruk’s time and put them in the archives of Edessa” (*PH* 2.36); in fact, Moses claims that he himself visited Edessa and its archives (*PH* 3.62), and may have drawn the information directly from Labûbna or perhaps through Mar Abas Katina, a Syriac writer, probably author of a chronicle, of the fourth cent. AD.⁶⁹ It is true that both Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* and the Armenian version of the *Doctrina* were among Moses’ sources, and that Moses can not always be taken as an independent witness, but in several details his reports differ from those sources and they might derive from another tradition that may provide reliable information; he claims to have, and may have, personally consulted the archives of Edessa. Moses, who probably confuses the historical figures of Abgar ‘the Black’ and a predecessor of his—like other ancient sources—, begins Abgar’s story from the accession of “Abgar, Arsham’s son,” to the throne, and from his hostility to Herod the Great in the Augustan age (*PH* 2.26); Jesus Christ’s birth is mentioned as well.⁷⁰ After Tiberius’ ascent to power, Moses recalls Germanicus’ mission in the Near East (*ibid.* 2.27) and the building of Edessa by Abgar, who conveyed there the local gods, the books of the schools annexed to the temples, and the royal archives. Moses correctly places Germanicus’ Syrian mission in AD 19 and calls him “Caesar” (so is

archives of Edessa, where a “School of the Armenians” is attested by the Acts of the Ephesian Council called *Latrocinium*. I am very grateful to Adam Becker for letting me read his work way before its publication.

⁶⁸ On this reading and the relative fluctuation in the ms. tradition of the Armenian text see Traina, “Materiali... I,” 294; the scholar declares: “since the Book 2 of *PH* derives material from the *Doctrina Addai* several times, the information [on Labûbnâ] appears to be fully grounded” (*ibid.*, my transl.). For the frequent mention of archival material in Moses see *ibid.* 292; on Moses using the *Doctrina* see Thomson, *Moses*, 39ff.

⁶⁹ He is mentioned by Moses and perhaps Jerome: so Traina, “Materiali... I,” 293 n. 70; *Id.*, *Il complesso*, 62 pays attention to Moses’ autobiographical statement that he visited Edessa.

⁷⁰ On its date see Firpo, *Il problema*; J. Winandy, “Sur l’année où naquit Jésus” (*ETbL* 75 [1999]), 419-20. J. Pastor, “Economic Policy as a Measure of Evenhandedness,” in *Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land*, eds. M. Mor-A. Oppenheimer-J. Pastor-D. Schwartz (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 152-64, defends Herod against the charge of treating Jews and gentiles unequally.

he also called in Tac. *Ann.* 2.71): he was entrusted by Tiberius with the control of the Roman Near East because of the disorders that upset those regions, above all the Parthian kingdom (*Ann.* 2.1-5): he received the *imperium maius* over the transmarine provinces, while Syria was entrusted to Gn. Piso “ad spes Germanici coercendas” (ibid. 2. 43). Moses also speaks of Germanicus’ “triumph,” which most probably was the ovation decreed by the Senators, when they learnt that he had elected Artaxias king of Armenia (Tac. *Ann.* 2.64). After Germanicus’ death (ibid. 2.71-73) there was a power vacuum that could not be adequately filled by C. Sentius Saturninus, supported by Germanicus’ friends and hostile to Piso (ibid. 2.74 and 77), who anyway died at the end of AD 20⁷¹. Then Moses mentions Abgar’s undefined “plans of rebellion” (*xorbi apstambut’inn*, PH 2. 28-29), that were never realized, but can be correctly placed in the context of a historically attested vacancy in Roman power in the Near East soon after Germanicus’ death,⁷² and a peace mission of this king to “Persia” that seems to date back to the period during which Germanicus in fact was in the Near East, in AD 19-20. Indeed, in PH 2.30 Moses says that this mission took place “more than seven years before” the alleged correspondence between Abgar and Jesus, which in the Armenian version of Abgar’s story is placed in AD 27-28. In Moses’ story,

⁷¹ Under Moses’ “Marinus” there might be an echo of Saturninus, who ruled Syria after Germanicus’ death and succeeded Piso. Tac. *Ann.* 2, 74, attests *legati* and *senatores* in Syria at the end of AD 19: perhaps they are the “Roman officials” of PH 2.29, whom Abgar informed of the aims of his Parthian mission. On Germanicus and Piso and the Roman Near East see e.g. D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, I (Princeton: UP, 1950), 468-500; J. Debeck, “Les Parthes et Rome” (*Latomus* 10 [1951]), 459-69; M.L. Chaumont, *L’Arménie entre Rome et l’Iran*, I, in *ANRW*, II, 9, 1 (1976), 71-194: 73-90; A. Barzanò, “Roma e i Parti fra pace e guerra fredda nel I secolo dell’Impero,” in *La pace nel mondo antico*, ed. M. Sordi, CISA 11 (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1985), 211-22: 214-16; W. Eck-A. Caballo-F. Fernández, *Das Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (München: Beck, 1996). Or else, beneath “Marinus” one may see a memory of L. Vitellius: in PH 2.30 Moses states that, during the war between Herod and Aretas, Tiberius appointed “Marinus” plenipotentiary in the Roman Near East, and that he ruled over “Phoenicia, Palaestina, Syria, and Mesopotamia,” the same territories controlled by Vitellius in 35-37 AD.

⁷² See my “Edessa,” 114-16.

“Persia” must mean “Parthia” and/or “Armenia.” Moses says that in AD 19-20 on the “Persian” throne Abgar found “Ardashes son of Arshavir” in conflict with his brothers.⁷³ As I tried to demonstrate,⁷⁴ this Ardashes seems to be a historical figure: in AD 19 on the Parthian throne there was Artabanus, well-disposed toward Germanicus and less toward Tiberius, and on the Armenian throne there was (put on by Germanicus) Zenon called Artaxias, i.e. “Ardashes.” Moses presents Ardashes as “son of Arshavir” perhaps because he confuses him with the homonymous Artaxias (“Artaxes” in Dio, “Ardashes” in Moses) son of Artavasd, i.e., “Arshavir” (?), linked to the Parthians and well known to Tacitus. Artaxias had begun his reign soon after the death of his father, who ruled in the Augustan age (Tac. *Ann.* 2. 4). According to Moses, who confuses Abgar and his homonymous predecessor of the Augustan age, Abgar ascended the throne precisely “during the reign of Arshavir,” around 4 BC. That Abgar went to Parthia with his army leads us to suppose that his mission had not only a diplomatic aim. Abgar actually aroused suspicions among the Romans that he might have gone there to procure armed forces: so he tried to soothe these suspicions and informed the “Romans’ prefects” (*gorcakals brovmayec’voc*)⁷⁵ of the aims of his mission at once, in order to avoid being suspected of betrayal. At first the Romans did not believe him, because of the hostility of his enemies, among whom were Herod the Tetrarch, Philippus (on whom see Ios. *AI* 18.137), and Pilate (*PH* 2.34). Indeed, the last was a Roman governor, and the other two were on good terms

⁷³ But Moses himself declares in *PH* 2.37 that these “brothers” are the result of a fictitious chronological retrojection intended to point out the Arsacid origin of Garêns, Surêns and Gamsarians, who subsequently settled in Armenia. A Suren is known to Tac. *Ann.* 6.42, around AD 35. Infigtings are attested in Parthia during Artabanus’ reign, soon after Germanicus’ death. See R.N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (München: Beck, 1983), 233-39, esp. 237-39.

⁷⁴ See Ramelli, “Edessa,” 116.

⁷⁵ *Gorcakals* derives from *gorc*, “work, deed; office” + compositional vowel *a* + *-kal*: on the meaning of the Armenian *-kal* compounds see G. Bolognesi, “Sull’origine iranica di alcuni composti armeni con *-kal(om)*,” in *Studi di dialettologia italiana in onore di M. Melillo*, a c. di C. Caratù-R. Piemontese (Bari 1988), 63-68. *Gorcakalkê* literally means: “holders of office.”

with Rome; so, they could easily put Abgar, their enemy, in a bad light in the eyes of the Romans. Given this hostility between Abgar and Herod, we can well understand Abgar's participation in the war between Herod and Aretas (whose daughter had been repudiated by Herod), that really took place in the early 30s of the I century AD.⁷⁶ Abgar sent auxiliary troops to Aretas against Herod, who was defeated (*PH* 2.29);⁷⁷ Aretas, too, had already been involved in the events of AD 19, when he had been for Germanicus against Piso (*Tac. Ann.* 2.66). Then Moses tells the story of two envoys of Abgar's, Mar Ihab and Shamshabram, together with their confidant Anan—the same name as in the *Doctrina*—to *Pet'kubin*, to the Roman plenipotentiary “Marinus son of Strog,” a sort of double of the historical L. Vitellius, in order to let him know the purpose of Abgar's mission and to ask for his support against his own enemies, because of whom the Romans suspected him of a plot. They met Marinus in Eleutheropolis, the same town as in the *Doctrina*: he treated Abgar's envoys “with friendship and regard” and exhorted Abgar not to fear anything from Tiberius, since he paid the whole tribute (*PH* 2.30). Here comes, then, the supposed trip of Anan (=Hannān) and the other envoys to Jerusalem, their meeting with Jesus, the alleged correspondence between him and Abgar (*PH* 2.31-32), the arrival of Jesus' portrait in Edessa, and then Thaddaeus' preaching, the conversion of Abgar and many other Edessan nobles, Thaddaeus' mission to Sanatruk/Sanadrug, Abgar's supposed kinsman,⁷⁸ and the correspondence between

⁷⁶ On this conflict see e.g. G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983), 65-68.

⁷⁷ Moses affirms that Aretas won “thanks to the help of the valiant Armenians,” i.e., the soldiers sent by Abgar, who is considered to be an Armenian by Moses. In fact, Moses provides an Armenian etymology of his name, and presents him, in the heading of his letter to Tiberius, as “king of Armenia” (*ark'ay Hayoc*). The name of the commander who led Abgar's troops against Herod is Armenian too: *Xosran Arcruni*. This confusion is probably due to the fact that in subsequent times Edessa really was under Armenia, and on its throne there was an Armenian dynasty. On the ancient Armenian territories: R. Hewsen, “Introduction to Armenian historical geography” (*REArm* 19 [1985]), 55-84.

⁷⁸ In *PH* 2.36, he is the apostate son of a sister of Abgar's who “ascended the throne in the twelfth year of Ardashes king of the Persians, and lived for thirty years:” he could be the Parthian king of Trajan's time,

Abgar and Tiberius. Finally, Moses declares that these letters were at once stored and kept in the archives of Edessa, and that Abgar wrote other letters to “Nerseh king of <As>syria” and “Ardashes king of Persia” and then died after a 38-year reign; his successors turned back to paganism and this caused the Christian preachers’ martyrdom (*PH* 2.34).⁷⁹ In the letters exchanged with Tiberius, recorded in *PH* 2.33, Abgar seems to be on good terms with the emperor, to whom Abgar’s loyalty was very important indeed, since he was seeking allies among Oriental kings against the Parthians (*Tac. Ann.* 6.31-37; 41-44). In these letters we can see precise references to the historical situation of AD 35-37 in the Near East and exact allusions to the historical actions of L. Vitellius, who, under Tiberius’ order, dismissed both Pilate and Caiaphas (*Ios. AI* 18.90-95).⁸⁰ These facts find a precise correspondence with what

Meherdates’ son (*Arr. Parth.* fr. 77) and Vologeses’ father (*Dio* 68. 30; 75.9.6: Vologeses is also known to Moses, *PH* 2. 36), or the homonymous king attested in AD 76-77 in an inscription of Hatra (Caquot, *Syria* 40 [1963], 7; Chaumont, *Recherches*, 13; on Hatra see also F. Vattioni, *Hatra*, *Annali Suppl.* 81 (Napoli: IUO, 1994); M. Sommer, “Hatra,” *Klio* 85 [2003], 384-98; U. Hartmann-A. Luther, “Münzen des hatrenischen Herrn *wrd*,” in *Grenzüberschreitungen*, Hrsg. Id. & M. Schuol [Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002], 161-68 on Hatra in Trajan’s time and the political situation of Mesopotamian states): these dates do not fit the old chronology of Abgar’s reign in Augustan age. See my “Abgar” and “Osservazioni,” 221 n. 35. Moses’ Ardashes might be Ardashir I, on whom see, e.g., Chaumont, *Recherches*, 22-23, 30-31, 49ff. On the Sanatruks attested in the ancient world see “Sanatruces,” in *PW* II A (1920), 2231-32 and *ibid.* “Sinatrukes,” *ibid.* III A 1. The *Sanatroukês* attested by the *Suda*, probably on the basis of Arrian (so Chaumont, *Recherches*, 13 n. 1), is “king of the Armenians,” just as in Moses, and is appreciated by Greek and Roman nobles.

⁷⁹ For the Christianization of Iran, in addition to Chaumont, *Christianisation*, see Jullien, *Apôtres*, and my *Atti di Mari*.

⁸⁰ See my “Osservazioni” and C.P. Thiede, “Caiaphas: an innocent man?” (*The Church of England Newspaper*, March 11 [2004]), 23: Caiaphas was one of the longest-serving High Priests ever (AD 18 to 36); his family tomb shows traces of syncretistic tendencies. In addition to his role in Jesus’ condemnation, he collaborated with the occupying Romans to the disadvantage of the people: according to Thiede, it was he who let Pilate rob the treasury of the Temple, and fund an aqueduct into Jerusalem, which caused riots brutally quelled by Pilate (*Ios. BI* 2.175-77); he invited

we read in Abgar's and Tiberius' letters: to Abgar's requests the emperor replies that he has already dismissed Pilate—guilty of having yielded to those who wanted Jesus to die, whereas he was worthy of adoration—and promises to punish the Jews, in his view responsible for Jesus' death, as soon as he has settled some problems with the *Spaniak*, i.e. the Caucasian Iberians. This material is common with that of the *Doctrina* and seems to come from the same source, which cannot be Eusebius, who knows the rest of Abgar's story but not the letters exchanged with Tiberius.

[10] A pivotal point for the present research is that Moses correctly links Abgar's and Tiberius' letters to the mention of the *senatus consultum* of AD 35, absent from the *Doctrina* but historical, or at least attested in far more ancient sources: Moses derives this information from Eusebius, who, on his part, has it from Tertullian.⁸¹ In fact, in *Apol.* 5.2 Tertullian says that the condemnation of Christianity as *superstitio illicita* resulted from a decision of the Senators when Tiberius, informed by Pilate, in AD 35 proposed in front of the Senate to recognize the Christian religion: the Senators, failing the *probatio*, refused, and this *senatus consultum* was probably the first and main juridical basis of the persecutions against the Christians, who, as members of an illegal religion, were liable to death, if accused, tried and found culpable of *superstitio illicita*.⁸² Tiberius, according to Tertullian, vetoed the

vendors into the Temple precincts, too (Talmud, *Keritot*, 1.7). According to J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (London: Macmillan, 1925; Bloch Publishing 1989; 1997 repr.) and C. Cohn, *The Trial and Death of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), he survived in office under two prefects perhaps having bribed them. See H.K. Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (Louisville: J. Knox, 2004).

⁸¹ On Eusebius as Moses' source see Traina, "Materiali... I," 300ff. Documentation in my "Il s.c. del 35 contro i Cristiani in un frammento porfiriano" with preface by M. Sordi (*Aevum* 78 [2004]), 59-67.

⁸² It can be interesting to note, in this connection, that in the above mentioned *Martyrium Beati Petri*, chap. 3 (Lipsius, *Acta*, 5) it is precisely the Senators who opposed Christianity in Rome: "Surrexerunt quidam ex senatoribus in conventu Senatus [...] et incitabant alios ad tumultum et appellationem." Tertullian does not specify the date of this *senatus consultum*: the reference to AD 35 is made in Eusebius' *Chronicon* in Jerome's version (176-77 Helm) and in *Chron. Pasch.* 430. Tiberius probably learnt of Jesus and the first Christians thanks to Pilate, who sent

Senate's decision, so that there were no anti-Christian persecutions until the time of Nero, who was the first to give free play to accusations against the Christians. For this reason, Tertullian in the *Apologeticum* defines Nero as *dedicator damnationis nostrae*, and in *Ad Nat.* 1.13.4 speaks of *institutum Neronianum*, while after Tiberius' veto and until AD 62 the Christians were never condemned as such by any Roman authority. Tertullian would have had nothing to gain from inventing this episode, because it contradicts his apologetical line, according to which only bad emperors persecuted Christianity, and above all because he would have discredited the Christians by mentioning their condemnation due to the Senate, so authoritative an organ, which in fact during the Julio-Claudian age was empowered to decide whether to accept or to reject new deities. Moreover, the dedicatees of his *Apologeticum*, the *Romani imperii antistites*, who could consult the Senate's official records, would easily have been able to give the lie to Tertullian's words, if false. But Tertullian even invites them to check: *consulite commentarios vestros...* In fact, the historical reliability of Tertullian's passage on the *s.c.* of AD 35, maintained by Sordi,⁸³ seems to be confirmed today by a Porphyrian fragment, F64 Harnack, transmitted by Macarius of Magnesia's *Apocriticus* (2.14), which I brought to scholars' attention.⁸⁴ Porphyry is speaking of Jesus' apparitions

him a report well known to Justin (*I Apol.* 35; 48) and Tertullian (*Apol.* 5.2; 21.24). Its arrival at Rome is dated by the above-mentioned chronicles in AD 35. See my "Possibili tracce di conoscenza della religione cristiana nei romanzi antichi? Una contestualizzazione," in *Potere e religione nel mondo indo-mediterraneo tra ellenismo e tarda antichità*, eds G. Gnoli – G. Sfameni Gasparro, *Il Nuovo Ramusio* 9 (Rome: ISIAO, 2009), 257-298; Ead., "Il fondamento giuridico delle persecuzioni anti cristiane" *Laverna* 15 [2004], 47-62.

⁸³ Sordi, *I Cristiani*, chap. 1.

⁸⁴ In "Il senatoconsulto," with further bibliography. According to H. von Harnack, *Porphyrius gegen die Christen* (Berlin: Reimer, 1916), 12-14 and then, partly, to J.G. Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Graeco-Roman Paganism* (Tübingen: Hendrickson, 2000), 168-249, and, undoubtedly, to P.J. Hoffmann-G. Abramides, *Porphyrios neoplatonikos Kata Khristianón* (Thessaloniki 2000), 11-36 and 42, this fragment derives from Porphyry's main polemical work against the Christians. See G. Rinaldi, *La Bibbia dei pagani*, I (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1998), 124-75 with bibl. In Macarius' *Apocriticus*, the passage is attributed to the pagan

after his resurrection in AD 30: he criticizes Jesus because he appeared to obscure people,⁸⁵ instead of worthy and authoritative (*episēmoi, axiopistoi*) characters of that time (*hoi hama*) like Pilate or Herod, “and above all to the Senate and the people of Rome, so that they, astonished by his wonders, would not make, with unanimous decision [*dogmati koinōi*], liable to death, as impious, those who obeyed (or: were persuaded by) him [...] If he had appeared to worthy and influential men, thanks to them all would have believed, and no one of the judges would have punished them as inventors of absurd tales. For God surely does not like, but an intelligent man does not either, that many people have to undergo the most serious punishments owing to him.”⁸⁶ Here Porphyry is speaking of a unanimous decision of the Senate of Rome (*dogma [tēs*

character whose anti-Christian polemic is usually recognized as inspired by Porphyry and provided with a good knowledge of the Bible and Christianity. So we are faced by a fragment either of Porphyry or inspired by him: see Rinaldi, *Bibbia*, I, 271-78; F. Ruggiero, *La follia dei Cristiani* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2002), 151-67. The first hypothesis seems more probable: Porphyry studied in Rome, where he was a disciple of Plotinus’, but also attended Origen’s classes, probably in Caesarea, and may have had access to Origen’s rich library. See my “Origen and the Stoic Allegorical Tradition” (*InnLuc* 28 [2006]), 195-226; Ead., “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianization of Hellenism” (*Vigiliae Christianae* 63 [2009]) 217-263.

⁸⁵ This objection was already raised by Celsus, *ap. Orig. C. Cels.* 2. 59, and it must be ancient, since Tertullian refutes it in *Apol.* 21.22: Jesus after his resurrection “nec se in vulgus eduxit, ne inpii errore liberarentur, ut et fides, non mediocri praemio destinata, difficultate constaret.” Porphyry does not reply to this argument, and this lets suppose that he probably did not read the *Apologeticum*. This confirms that the two sources attesting the *s.c.* of AD 35 are independent of one another.

⁸⁶ The resurrection is today generally dated to AD 30: see e.g. Thiede, *Jesus*, 127-30. The condemnation of the Christians as inventors of absurd tales is parallel to the Senate’s declared impossibility of doing any *probatio* and the consequent refusal of Tiberius’ proposal in Tertullian’s account: so Christianity became a *superstitio illicita* and the Christians indictable for impiety, *asebeia*, the same charge we find against the Christians in the so-called Nazareth Edict of the Neronian age, which threatened them with “a trial *de diis [asebeia]* for the worship of a human being:” see E. Grzybek-M. Sordi, “L’édit de Nazareth” (*ZPE* 120 [1998]), 279-91: 284-87; its juridical basis was the *senatus consultum* of AD 35.

suglétou, tés boulés] was the regular Greek rendering for *senatus consultum*, differently from *pséphisma*, which indicated a decision of the people, and from *diatagma*, which designated one of the emperor) that, shortly after AD 30, fixed capital punishment for the Christians. Now, I think that this cannot but be identified with the *s.c.* of AD 35 attested by Tertullian. This is an extremely important confirmation, all the more in that it comes from a source that, unlike Tertullian, cannot possibly be labeled as “apologetic” or philo-Christian. Moreover, now the principle *unus testis nullus testis* can no more be used against the historicity of the *s.c.* of AD 35, which is attested by at least two independent sources.

[11] We have to consider the political meaning of Tiberius’ project,⁸⁷ which of course doesn’t mean that Tiberius converted to Christianity. Rather, the emperor, who wished to settle controversies without violence, if possible, but *consiliis et astu*, according to Tac. *Ann.* 6.32, probably wanted to legalize the new Judaic sect that had thousands of adherents in the popular classes of Judaea, as we know from the Gospels and the *Acts of the Apostles*, and was Messianic without being anti-Roman or insurrectional. Tiberius intended to remove from the Sanhedrin any jurisdiction over this sect—as had been already done in the case of the Samaritans, withdrawn from Judaic religious control and induced to be faithful to Rome—and to help to pacify a difficult province. The importance attributed by Tiberius to this project is shown not only by his immediate veto of possible accusations that the Senate’s refusal could give rise to, but also by the actions in Judaea in AD

⁸⁷ This project may be read as an anticipation of those that, according to the *Historia Augusta*, *Alex. Sever.* 43, were conceived by Hadrian, who would have wished to recognize and would have had temples without statues ready to be dedicated to Christ, and by Severus Alexander, who in his *lararium* had statues of Christ, Abraham, Orpheus, etc.: his purpose of recognizing Christianity juridically, and not only tolerating it as he already did, was prevented “ab his qui consulentes sacra [probably haruspices] reppererant omnes Christianos futuros si id fecisset et reliqua templa deserenda.” See my “La Chiesa di Roma in età severiana” (*RSCI* 54 [2000]), 13-29; Ead., *Cultura e religione etrusca nel mondo romano* (Alessandria: Orso, 2003), chap. 4; on Severus’ *lararium* see J. Rüpke, “Bilderwelten und Religionswechsel, in *Griechische Mythologie und frühes Christentum*, Hrsg. R. von Haehling (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005) 359-76: 362-64.

36-37 against Caiaphas and Pilate by the imperial *legatus* L. Vitellius. These are historically attested by Ios. *AI* 18. 89-90 & 122 and echoed in Moses and in the *Doctrina*, precisely in Abgar's and Tiberius' letters. Vitellius' *commentarii*, cited by Tertullian in *De anima*, 46, are probably the pagan source from which the apologist drew his information on Tiberius' proposal, perhaps known to him also via the apology of Apollonius, a Christian senator sentenced to death under Commodus in 183-185 "on the basis of a *senatus consultum*" (Eus. *HE* 5.21.4). The *Acts of Apollonius*, 171 Lazzati, record that the prefect of the praetorium, Tigidius Perennis, was willing to acquit Apollonius, but "the *senatus consultum* says that it is not licit to be Christian:" this formula, *mê exeinai Kbristianous einai*, closely corresponds to Tertullians' *non licet esse vos*, the direct consequence of the *s.c.* of AD 35. This may thus be considered even as a third independent attestation of the *s.c.* of AD 35.

[12]

An observation can also be drawn from the comparison of the disposition of the material in the *Doctrina* and in Moses: in our Syriac document Abgar's message to Tiberius is not quoted within the story of the king's envoys sent to Palestine and the exchange of letters between Abgar and Jesus, but at the end of the document, after Addai's preaching and the description of his arrangements for the church in Edessa, and before those for the evangelization of Assyria. Moreover, in Moses, *PH* 2.33, the letters to Nerseh king of Assyria and to Ardashes, king of Persia, are situated after the correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius, whereas in the *Doctrina*, 74-76, there is only the letter to Narsai, and this is placed before Abgar's and Tiberius' letters.⁸⁸ And Moses links this Abgar-

⁸⁸ In *PH* 2.33 Abgar, in his letter to Nerseh of Assyria, says that the apostle will reach Armenia, while one of his companions, Simon, will be sent to Persia: Abgar encourages Nerseh and his father Ardashes, king of Persia, to look for him. Soon after, Moses mentions the apostasy of both Abgar's son, who ruled Edessa, and Sanadrug, a son of a sister of Abgar's, who ruled Armenia and abandoned Christianity for fear of his pagan satraps. Abgar's son was responsible for the martyrdom of Addaeus' successor, Aggaeus (Syr. Aggai), whereas "to Armenia came the apostle Bartholomew," the traditional evangelizer of Eastern regions as far as India (cf. my chap. 4 in *Gli Apostoli in India*). Chaumont, *Recherches*, 82 & 167-171, admits the presence of Christianity in Armenia in the second cent., before St. Gregory the Enlightener's preaching. According to Tac. *Ann.* 13.7 and Ios. *AI* 20.158, *B.I.* 2.252, in AD 54 Nero entrusted

Tiberius correspondence to the account of the *s.c.* of AD 35, which is completely missing in the *Doctrina*. It seems that Abgar's and Tiberius' letters, absent in Eusebius, are really an independent nucleus, and it might be very old.

[13] The anti-Semitism that evidently characterizes these letters fits well the general anti-Semitic attitude of the *Doctrina*, of course⁸⁹— and not the criticism of pagans⁹⁰—, which might be reminiscent of

Aristobulus with the government of *Armenia Minor*; after AD 60, Aristobulus obtained to rule parts of *Armenia Maior* bordering *Armenia Minor*, too (see e.g. Magic, *Roman Rule*, I, 554-57; 574; II, 1435; Chaumont, *Recherches*, 83; R.D. Sullivan, *The Dynasty of Judaea in the I Century*, in ANRW 2.8, [1977], 296-354: 317-21). He was son of Herod of Chalcis and husband of Salome, Philip the Tetrarch's widow (Ios. *AI* 18.134-37; *B.I.* 2.221). Just in the house of Aristobulus (“an apostate from Judaism”: see Sullivan, *The Dynasty*, 320), according to St. Paul, Rom 16:10, before the end of AD 54 there was one of the earliest Christian churches in Rome. See M. Sordi, “La prima comunità cristiana di Roma,” in *Cristianesimo e istituzioni politiche*, eds. E. Dal Covolo-R. Uglione (Roma: LAS, 1996), 15-23: 18-19, and my “Osservazioni,” 223-24.

⁸⁹ E.g. Protonike in Jerusalem met Jacob, “administrator and prefect” in the church there (the correct rendering of *episkopos* for that early time); when she asked him to show her the place where Jesus was crucified, the wood of his cross and his grave, Jacob said that they were under the control the Jews, who didn't allow Christians to see them: “They persecute us that we not preach or proclaim in the name of the Messiah. Often they even confine us in prison.” In this farewell discourse to the Edessan hierarchs, Addai says: “Beware of the crucifiers, and do not be friends with them lest you be responsible with those whose hands are full of the blood of the Messiah;” they promise: “We shall not take part with the crucifying Jews.” Throughout the *Doctrina* the Jews are called *ἡραγῶπῆ*, “crucifiers.” On anti-Semitism in antiquity see e.g. P. Schäfer, *Giudeofobia. L'antisemitismo nel mondo antico* (Roma: Carocci, 1999); B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: UP, 2004), 440-91.

⁹⁰ E.g. Nebo and Bel, the main gods of Edessa, are the pagan gods most frequently mentioned in the *Doctrina*. Addressing the people of Edessa, Addai speaks against several pagan deities worshipped by them, in an accurate picture of pagan religion at Edessa. Among the gods mentioned by Addai there is also Taratha: see below. Cf. H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); an Edessan mosaic of the II-III cent. AD representing Orpheus shows a Hellenized pagan culture; on its dating: A. Luther, “Das Datum des Orpheus-Mosaiks aus Urfa,” (*WO* 30 [1999]), 129-37.

later polemics,⁹¹ but also corresponds precisely to the historical circumstances of AD 35-37. In his address to the people of Edessa, Addai states that Christ “is the God of the Jews who crucified him,” and Abgar is said to have written to Tiberius “since he could not pass over into a country of the Romans to enter Palestine and kill the Jews, because they crucified the Messiah.” But also Peter, according to the account of the *Acts*, in his pentecostal speech attributed to the Jews the responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion (Acts 2:22-23: “men of Israel [...] you nailed him to the cross [...] and killed him; (or had him nailed ... had him killed)” *ibid.* 36: “that Jesus whom you crucified”). Josephus too, in his *Testimonium Flavianum*, and Mara bar Serapion, a Syriac Stoic, say the same thing.⁹² In particular, in comparison with Abgar’s letter to Tiberius, it may be significant to notice a similar knowledge of Christ and early Christians, a similar hostility towards those who were held responsible for Jesus’ death and a similar confidence in the Romans in this letter (Brit. Mus. Add. 14658, seventh-eighth cent.),⁹³ which, according to some scholars, was written at the end of the first cent.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” § 37, mentions authors of *Adversus Judaeos* works such as Ephrem or Cyril of Alexandria (on whom: R.L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1971]), or John Chrysostom (Id., *John Chrysostom and the Jews* [Berkeley: UCP, 1983]).

⁹² See my “Stoicismo e Cristianesimo in area siriana nella seconda metà del I secolo d.C.” (*Sileno* 25 [1999]), 197-212; “Gesù tra i sapienti greci,” *Riv. Filos. Neoscol.* 97 (2005), 545-570. Ed.: Cureton, *Spicilegium*, 43-48; transl. J.B. Aufhauser, *Antike Jesuszeugnisse* (Bonn: Marcus-Weber, 1925), 4; 9; I devoted a whole section of my book *Stoici Romani Minori* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008) to the Letter of Mara Bar Serapion, with essay, translation, and commentary. On the *Testimonium*, for its authenticity see my “Alcune osservazioni circa il *Testimonium Flavianum*” (*Sileno* 24 [1998]), 219-35; C.P. Thiede, “What they knew about Jesus” (*The Church of England Newsp.*, May 13 [2004]), 31; Id., “The Jew Josephus and Jesus” (*ibid.* June 10 [2004]), 23. A. Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus*, Studies in Bibl. Literature 36 (New York: P. Lang, 2003).

⁹³ Analysis of these three aspects in my “Stoicismo,” 197-212.

⁹⁴ Blinzler, *Il processo*, 43-48, dates it short after 73; so also S. Mazzarino, *L'Impero Romano*, II (Bari: Laterza, 1991), 887; later date according to K. Mc Vey, “A Fresh Look at the Letter of Mara Bar Serapion,” in *V Symposium Syriacum, Leuven 1978*, ed. R. Lavenant (Roma: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Orientali, 1990), 257-72 and C.M. Chin,

[14] Moreover, the memory of L. Vitellius (Tac. *Ann.* 6.32.3ff.)⁹⁵ might be seen behind Moses' Marinus, governor of "Phoenicia, Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia,"⁹⁶ and the Sabinus of the *Doctrina*, a Roman imperial official in "Eleutheropolis," and perhaps the Albinus⁹⁷ mentioned as a "proconsul" by Tiberius in his letter to Abgar in the *Doctrina*⁹⁸ (and also behind the

"Rhetorical Practice in the Chreia Elaboration of Mara Bar Serapion," Hugoye 9,2 (2006), §§ 24: *contra*, my "La lettera di Mara Bar Serapion" (*Stylos* 13 [2004]), 77-104; Ead., "Gesù tra i sapienti" and *Stoici Romani* with new arguments. E.I. Yousif, *La floraison des philosophes syriaques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003), 27-32; D. Rensberger, "Reconsidering the Letter of Mara bar Serapion," forthcoming in a volume of the Duke Judaic Studies Monograph series, which the author kindly let me read: I am very grateful to him. A confirmation of the Stoic ideas and the early date of Mara's letter comes also from T. Tieleman and A. Merz, "The Letter of Mara Bar Serapion: Some Comments on its Philosophical and Historical Context," in *Festschrift P.W. van den Horst*, Leiden 2008.

⁹⁵ During his mandate he passed beyond the Euphrates, probably reaching Osrhoene, too (*ibid.* 6.37). See my "Il senatoconsulto," with bibl.; Ead., "Edessa;" Ead., "Osservazioni."

⁹⁶ A reminiscence of Saturninus, too, might lie under Marinus (see above). A Marinus was a friend of Tiberius' (Tac. *Ann.* 6.10.2), who had him killed in AD 32. Julius Marinus, Philip the Arab's father, had powers in Orient as *legatus inferioris Moesiae* in AD 97. Cf. my "Osservazioni," 218; "Edessa," 114-15.

⁹⁷ That Aulbinus/Albinus is here confused with Vitellius was already supposed by Cureton, *Documents*, 159-60. We know that Luceius Albinus succeeded Porcius Festus as governor of Palestine, but only in AD 55 according to Jerome. Cf. my "Le procuratele di Felice e di Festo" (*Rendiconti Istituto Lombardo* 138 [2004]), 91-97.

⁹⁸ In the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* (of the II cent., but containing, among legendary features, ancient traditions too, such as those concerning noble families of Rome converted to Christianity, who are said to have helped Peter) A(u)lbinus is *praefectus urbi* and close friend of the emperor. This could be significant, even if the emperor here is Nero. González, *Leyenda*, 139 n. 263, proposes the identification of "Sabinus," "A(u)lbinus" and "Marinus" (the same character in the different versions of the *Abgarsage*) either with Clodius Albinus, or with Albinus governor of Judaea in 62 and the following years, or the above mentioned A(u)lbinus of the *Acts of Peter*. In the apocryphal *Martyrium Beati Petri Apostoli a Lino episcopo conscriptum*, 3, Albinus is *amicissimus Caesari*, and his wife Xandips is convinced by Peter to refuse any intercourse with him, so that Albinus

Licianus/Lucianus of the *Paradosis Pilati*⁹⁹). In a Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, similarly, we find a Sabinā¹⁰⁰ as the governor entrusted by Tiberius, whose power extended as far as the Euphrates and who acted as intermediary between Abgar and the emperor. All those figures, in fact, are presented as having the powers of Vitellius, and are often mentioned in connection with the contacts between Abgar and Tiberius. It is worth noting that the *legatus Syriae*'s control over Palestine according to our Syriac and Armenian documents fully corresponds to the historical situation of the Tiberian age; in fact, only before AD 70 was Palestine under the supervision of the *legatus Syriae* or plenipotentiaries like Germanicus in AD 19 or Vitellius in 35; according to both Moses and the *Doctrina*, the *legatus Syriae* is located in Eleutheropolis, i.e. Baethogabra, near Jerusalem.¹⁰¹

seeks to take vengeance upon Peter (Lipsius, *Acta*, 4). In the *Paradosis Pilaton* it is an Albius who decapitates Pilate at Caesar's order. On the *Gesta Pilati* see Geraard, *Clavis*, CA 62; H.J. Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller. Verzeichnis und Siegel* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995⁴), 190, Ap E-Pil.

⁹⁹ Licianus/Lucianus is here "chief of the region of Orient;" his name recalls Lucius, Vitellius' *praenomen*. In the *Paradosis*, 6-7, a letter of Tiberius to Licianus echoes some details of the Abgar-Tiberius letters: the emperor is intentioned to punish the Jews, who forced Pilate to put Jesus to death, and wants to bring Pilate to trial. See e.g. F. Spadafora, *Pilato* (Rovigo: IPAG, 1973), 187, and the whole book for Pilate's legend, on which see also J.D. Dubois, "Les *Actes de Pilate* au quatrième siècle" (*Apocrypha* 2 [1991]), 85-98, my "Il senatoconsulto" and "Possibili tracce".

¹⁰⁰ Cureton, *Documents*, 110. Ios. *AI* 17.9.3, mentions a Sabinus who was *Kaisaros epitropos tôn en Suriai pragmatôn*; he was imperial *procurator* in P. Quintilius Varus' entourage (see Firpo, *Il problema*, 218), but in the Augustan age. See C.P. Thiede, *Jesus und Tiberius* (München: Luchterhand, 2004), 131. Better: Tac. *Ann.* 13. 45 mentions Sabinus, Poppaea's grandfather and Tiberius' friend, who died at the end of AD 35 and was *maximis provinciis per quattuor et viginti annos impositus* (*ib.* 6.39, 3; *cf.* 4.47 & 49; 5.10).

¹⁰¹ For his supervision over Palestine see e.g. E. Schürer, *Storia del popolo giudaico al tempo di Gesù Cristo*, I, transl. C. Gianotto (Brescia: Paideia, 1985), 311ff., 441ff., 555f.; B. Lifshitz, "Étude sur l'histoire de la province romaine de Syrie," in ANRW, 2.8 (1977), 3-30; S. Applebaum, "Judaea as a Roman Province," *ibid.* 355-96; C. Marucci, "Romani e diritto romano nel Nuovo Testamento," in *Da Roma alla terza Roma* (Roma: Herder, 1992), 37-74, esp. 41.

[15]

It is also very interesting to observe the loyalty motif in the letters: shortly after the correspondence with Tiberius, in the *Doctrina* Abgar protests his loyalty to Rome: once Addai had performed some miracles in Edessa, he was recognized as the man whom Jesus had promised to send to Abgar, and so was introduced to the king, who, as we have already mentioned in brief, before expressing his faith, explains to the apostle the reason why he did not travel to Palestine himself to see Jesus: “Because that kingdom belongs to the Romans, I have respect for the covenant of peace which was established by me as by my forefathers with our lord Caesar Tiberius.” Of course it is not historically true that the Romans did not want Abgar to travel to Palestine, a notion that the author has already presented to explain the reason why the king sent a letter to Jesus instead of going to Jerusalem himself: he did not want to trespass into the territory of the Romans and to precipitate an international incident in this way. The historical situation was not such, and in fact this phrase does not belong to the correspondence, but Abgar’s desire to protest his loyalty is historically grounded, and the author of the *Doctrina* could have found it in the letter of Abgar to the emperor. Moreover, the suspicion that a trip of Abgar to Palestine might raise could have a historical basis in Abgar’s immediately previous participation in the war between Herod and Aretas, as an ally of Aretas—an Arab as well¹⁰²—against Herod, according to Moses, *PH* 2.29.¹⁰³ This conflict took place—Moses says in *PH* 2.34—between the death of John the Baptist in AD 29 and the Abgar-Tiberius correspondence (AD 35-36). Moses seems to derive his information from Ios., *AI* 18.109-150 and another source concerning Abgar and the part that he played in the war between Herod and Aretas. Thanks, again, to Josephus—who gives us precious information on this conflict, its causes and the interpretation of Herod’s defeat as a punishment for the murder of John the Baptist—, we know that in AD 34 Herod and Aretas were fighting (*stasiázousin*), and in fact the cause of the conflict was the repudiation of Aretas’ daughter by Herod, so it began not after AD 29. From Josephus we also learn that the real

¹⁰² He is “King of Arabia” in Ios. *AI* 16.294; he ruled Arabia Petraea, inhabited by the Nabataeans: Abgar is *rex Arabum* in Tac. *Ann.* 12.14. According to J.F. Healey, “Were the Nabataeans Arabs?” (*ARAM* 1 [1989]), 38-44: 43-44, Abgar’s dynasty may have had Nabataean origins.

¹⁰³ Analysis of the source in my “Edessa,” 111ff.

war between the two ended precisely in the years of Vitellius' mission in the Roman Near East (*AI* 18.106), in AD 35-37: Vitellius gave up the punitive expedition against Aretas when he heard of Tiberius' death in AD 37 (Ios. *AI* 18.120-124). So the problem of the war and of Abgar's position as an ally of a royal enemy of Rome was contemporary with the correspondence between him and Tiberius. Because of the hostility of Herod, Philip and Pilate, Abgar's protestation of loyalty to Rome was not believed by the Romans, and so in his letter to Tiberius he strongly asserted his and his fathers' faithfulness. This fits the political purpose of the author of our document, as rightly shown by Mirkovic, but also corresponds very well and precisely to the historical and political situation of AD 35-36. And this may constitute a reason why the epistolary material was absorbed in the *Doctrina*.

[16]

There is another point connected with Abgar's attitude towards Rome, that deserves to be noticed. The *Doctrina* presents two figures at Abgar's court in the days of Addai's preaching: Abdu and Sennak; the first is mentioned also by Eus. *HE* 1.13.18-19: *Abdos* son of *Abdos*, and in the *Acts of Mari*, 4, where he is *Abd bar Abdá*, one of Abgar's ministers, is healed by Addai together with the king, and is converted. An *Abdos* is also present in the *Narratio ex diversis historiis collecta* ascribed to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, where he informs Abgar of Addai's arrival at Edessa. Well, they are historical figures precisely of the time of Abgar 'the Black'. They are well known to Tacitus, who attests that Abdus and Sinnaces, a powerful eunuch and a rich noble, were linked both to the Romans and to Abgar's court (*Ann.* 6.31-32). They played an important role in the events of AD 35-37 as promoters—without king Artabanus' knowledge—of a Parthian embassy to Tiberius intended to request Phraates as a king instead of Artabanus: in fact, Tiberius supported Phraates. Then, maintaining the same political conduct, according to Tac. *Ann.* 6.36, Sinnaces persuaded his father Abdageses to desert Artabanus, who was in difficulties because of the *Hiberi* and of Vitellius, and in AD 37, with his troops, he joined Tiridates, Artabanus' rival, chosen by Tiberius himself (*Ann.* 6.32), after Tiridates had crossed the Euphrates together with Vitellius (*ibid.* 37) and before Vitellius went back to Syria. It is evident that the political conduct of Abdus and Sinnaces, who frequented Abgar's court, was philo-Roman. These two notables subsequently

had a large fortune in Christian hagiography thanks to the legend or their conversion, supported by Eusebius and the *Doctrina*. In some ancient sources they appear as martyrs: the *Depositio Martyrum* and *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* under “III Kal. Aug.” record: “Abdos et Semnes in Pontiani quod est ad Ursum Pilatum;” later sources, among which the legendary *Passio*, set their story under Decius and describe them as “subreguli in Persia” charged of burying martyrs and transferred to Rome, where they appeared before the Senate, and there was also a certain Galba: spared by the wild beasts, they were beheaded and buried in the Pontianus cemetery, where a painting of the sixth cent. bears the inscription “De donis Dei et sanctorum Abdo et Senne Gaudiosus [fieri fecit].”¹⁰⁴ Allard¹⁰⁵ remarks that Abdos and Sennes surely are not to be set under Decius, who, among other things, never went to Persia, whereas the *Passio* says that he was there, but suggests no alternatives. I would like to point out the exact correspondence between the supposed martyrs and Abdus and Sinnaces, mentioned by Tacitus as Oriental envoys at the end of Tiberius’ reign and by the *Doctrina* as notables who listened to Addai’s preaching in Edessa. The hagiographical legend of Abdos and Sennes might be a development of the story of these two men who really lived in the first cent. AD, knew Abgar, and were in Edessa during his reign. It seems interesting to me that the earliest Latin redaction of one of the most ancient sources on Abdos and Sennes, the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, probably derives from a Syriac text of the fourth

¹⁰⁴ See e.g. W. Böhne, “Abdon und Sennen,” in *LThK*, I (1957), 12; V. Saxer, “Abdon und Sennen,” in *LThK*, I (1993²), 19; D. Calcagnini, “Abdon e Sennen,” in *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane*, I (Genoa: Marietti, 2006), coll. 7-8. According to G.N. Verrando, “Alla base e intorno alla più antica *Passio* dei Santi Abdon e Sennes” (*Aug.* 30 [1990]), 145-83, who studies the authors of the IV-V cent. and the iconographical and liturgical documents, the *Passio uetus* dates back to the second half of the fifth cent. and has Roman origins. For other sources (the *Martyrologium Romanum*, the marble calendar of Naples, the Roman Gelasian and Gregorian Sacramentaries...), see *AASS*, nov. II, 98. The catalogue of Roman churches of Pope Pius V mentions a church consecrated to A. and S. in the place where they suffered martyrdom according to the legend, where the Colossus of Nero was placed, between the Flavian Amphitheatre and and the Temple of Venus.

¹⁰⁵ “Abdon et Sennen,” in *DAcL*, I (1924), 42-45.

cent. AD.¹⁰⁶ So, in the years of Vitellius' oriental mission, the king and the court of Edessa seem to be in good terms with the Roman emperor.

[17]

In the *Doctrina* the loyalty of Edessa to Rome from the political point of view, stressed throughout the document, might also be a retrojection of the political situation of Edessa under the Romans' rule in the first half of the third cent. AD¹⁰⁷ back into the first cent., and correspond to the religious communion with the see of Rome: in the final section of our document the author describes how the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Edessa became suffragan to Antioch and ultimately connected with Rome: in fact, the *Doctrina*, after mentioning Aggai's death by the breaking of his legs on order of Abgar's apostate son—whose apostasy is also mentioned by Moses, *PH* 2.34—, and after explaining Aggai's inability to lay his hand upon Palut for the succession, says that Palut received the ordination to the priesthood from Serapion, bishop of Antioch, who himself had received his ordination from Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome, “from the succession of ordination to the priesthood of Simon Peter who received it from our Lord, and who had been bishop there in Rome 25 years in the days of our Caesar who reigned there 13 years.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, in Addai's farewell discourse

¹⁰⁶ See L. Cracco Ruggini, “Il primo Cristianesimo in Sicilia,” in *Il Cristianesimo in Sicilia*, edd. V. Messina-S. Pricoco (Caltanissetta: Seminario, 1987), 85-125: 88. On the *M.H.* see B. de Gaiffier, “Les SS. Castus et Aemilius,” *RAC* 42 (1966), 155-65 (on historical traces of African martyrs in the *M.H.*); A. Momigliano, “Interpretazioni minime” (*Athenaeum* 55 [1977]), 186-90; J.M. McCulloh, “Martyrologium Hieronymianum Cambrense” (*AB* 96 [1978]), 121-24; G. Lucchesi, “Ancora sull'antico calendario italico” (*RSCI* 32 [1978]) 140-52: a source of the *M.H.* is the *Italic Calendar*, a guide to the martyrs' tombs with subsequent additions of liturgical indications, from 425-30 ca.; L. Ferragina-A. Masullo, “La situazione documentaria concernente S. Felice vescovo di Nola” (*Impegno e dialogo* 6 [1990]), 79-104; F. Amsler, “Remarques sur la réception liturgique et folklorique des *Actes de Philippe*” (*Apocrypha* 8 [1997]), 251-64.

¹⁰⁷ See my “Edessa” and “Abgar Ukkamâ” with bibliography, and F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337* (Cambridge-London: Harvard UP, 1993), esp. 472-81.

¹⁰⁸ So according to Cureton's text: Phillips' text, instead, presents Zephyrinus as bishop of Antioch. See Howard, *Teaching*, 52; 105; Griffith,

to the hierarchs he mentions “the Letters of Paul, which Simon Peter sent to us from the city of Rome,”¹⁰⁹ together with “the Acts of the Twelve Apostles, which John the son of Zebedee sent to us from Ephesus.” Also in the Protonike story we can see a special relationship of the queen with Peter himself, in Rome: Protonike is said to give glory to the Messiah “with those who were followers of Simon, whom she held in great honor,” and when she came back to Rome from Jerusalem “she told Simon Peter that which had happened.” In this passage a particular conception of the relationship between imperial and ecclesiastical power is clearly involved: it is also the case of Addai’s address to Aggai, Palut and Abshlama (he recommends them “to love rulers and judges who have attained to this faith [...] but if they go astray, rebuke them justly”).¹¹⁰ What Griffith rightly calls “the Roman connection,”

“The *Doctrina*,” n. 46. Besides the idea that the see of Antioch depends on that of Rome, we can also notice the conception of a continuous episcopal succession from the apostles onward, typical of fourth-century ecclesiology (see now on this idea R.L. Williams, *Bishop Lists* [Piscataway: Gorgias, 2005]). Griffith, *ibid.*, § 28 points out that the author of the *Doctrina* retrojects the political and ecclesiological ideas of his time into the early Christian period of Edessa’s history, and consequently concludes that he incorporated earlier legendary traditions in his work, in order to make a historical and doctrinal claim in his own time: I quite agree; yet, I think that, in addition to these legendary traditions, he might have incorporated some historical traces, too, even very ancient.

¹⁰⁹ For a connection of Peter’s paradigmatic role and Ephrem’s ecclesiological ideas see S.H. Griffith, “Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire,” in T. Halton-J. Williman, eds., *Diakonia: Essays* R.T. Meyer (Washington: CUA, 1986), 22-52; Id., “Ephraem the Syrian’s Hymns *Against Julian*” (*VChr* 41 [1987]), 238-66; Id., “Setting Right the Church of Syria,” in W.E. Klingshirn-M. Vessey, eds., *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays in Honor of R.A. Markus* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1999), 97-114; Id., “The *Doctrina*,” § 28.

¹¹⁰ Here the relationship between ecclesiastical and civic power is described in terms that would fit Eusebius’ theory, as noted by Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” § 27. We know the interpretation of the nails of the Cross put in Constantine’s crown and in the bit of his horse: they symbolize both the imperial power and its submission to Christ (and his representatives): this is Ambrose’s idea. See my review of M. Sordi, *L’impero romano cristiano* (*RSCI* 55 [2001]), 215-17, and my “Unconditional forgiveness in Christianity? Some reflections on ancient

noticing that it has both civil and ecclesiastical dimensions in the *Doctrina*, has also a historical basis in the letters exchanged between Abgar and Tiberius. Abgar was the king of a little buffer state placed in a strategic position between the Roman empire and the Parthian kingdom in a period during which Tiberius strongly wanted to secure the loyalty of the states situated near the Parthian border. While in the rest of the *Doctrina* Abgar is a client king of Tiberius and then of Claudius, in the letters the matter is not of tributes¹¹¹ or submission, but of loyalty. We know in fact that these kings of buffer states between the Romans and Parthians were often scarcely trustworthy:¹¹² Abgar himself, according to Tac. *Ann.* 12.12-14, in the Claudian age first supported and then, having been bribed with money, abandoned the Parthian king imposed by the Romans, as I shall document. An evocation of the Parthian kingdom and its relations with Abgar's Edessa can perhaps be seen in the mention of Narsai as "king of the Assyrians," whose subjects went into the territory of the Romans to see Addai (and here Edessa seems, rather unhistorically, a Roman city, while in other passages of the *Doctrina* Abgar is said not to be allowed to trespass into the territory of the Romans!).¹¹³ It is worth noticing that Narsai's "Assyria", which in the *Doctrina* seems to be evangelized soon after Edessa and by people coming from Edessa, is considered to be situated outside the territory of the Romans (*bêth*

Christian sources and practices," in *Aspects of Forgiveness*, ed. Christel Fricke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹¹¹ For the problem of the tribute due to Rome by its clients see my "Un tributo dei Parti a Roma agli inizi del I sec. a.C.?" (*Rendiconti Istituto Lombardo* 134 [2000]), 321-30.

¹¹² C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2000); B. Levick, *The High Tide of Empire: Emperors and Empire AD 14-117* (Kingston-upon-Thames: LACTOR, 2002), chapp. 2 (Roman imperial expansion towards the East), 3 (client kings' conduct towards Rome).

¹¹³ Narsai is said to have asked Abgar for a written account of Addai's signs, and to have been satisfied. But it is to be noticed that Narsai lived in the third cent. and, according to González, *Leyenda*, 73, and Jullien, *Apôtres*, 216, is probably identifiable with the Persian king, son of Shahpur I, who succeeded Bahrâm III in AD 293/4. This is another clue of the late redaction of the document. Eusebius does not mention the letters to Narsai and Ardashir.

rhômayê); the author calls its inhabitants “orientals.”¹¹⁴ It is probable that this “Assyria” ought to be regarded as located in the territory under Persian hegemony and it may be identified with the region of Adiabene.

[18]

We know that some traces of Christianity in this region might go back to the very time of Abgar ‘the Black’, with the possible conversion of king Izates of Adiabene and his mother Helena, presented by Josephus as a conversion to Judaism.¹¹⁵ According to Ios. *AI* 20.2.4-5, Izates, in the first years of Claudius’ reign, together with his mother, was converted by a certain Ananias—who had the same name as the Christian who in Damascus played an important role in Paul’s conversion to Christianity (Acts 9:10-11; 22:12), and as the archivist/courier in Eusebius and the *Doctrina*—to a particular form of Judaism without circumcision.¹¹⁶ Now, in the self-same years, among the Christians it was an object of lively debate whether to maintain circumcision or not:¹¹⁷ in AD 49 the

¹¹⁴ See Millar, *Near East*, 100-01; Desreumaux, *Histoire*, 98 n. 155; 126. Howard, *Teaching*, 74-75; Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” n. 41; B. Hemmerdinger, “Assyria” (*BollClass* 16 [1995]), 15-16.

¹¹⁵ The identification of Narsai’s “Assyria” with Adiabene is supposed by Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” n. 41. On Izates’ conversion see my “Osservazioni,” 209-225; Jullien, *Apôtres*, 218-19.

¹¹⁶ In fact, though Josephus presents the event as a conversion to Judaism, some details let us suppose that Helena and Izates might have become Christians: Helena’s and Anania’s opposition to Izates’ circumcision is significant in this sense: “He said that Izates could venerate the divinity even without circumcision, if he decided to follow the Jewish customs, for this was more important than circumcision” (Ios. *AI* 20.2.5). Helena feared the Adiabeniens’ hostility to circumcision: we’ll see that, according to Bardaisan, Abgar the Great, after his conversion, forbade a similar ritual mutilation under the appearance of Romanization of local customs. Helena’s and Izates’ conversion to Christianity was supposed by S. Mazzarino, *Il pensiero storico classico*, II 2 (Bari: Laterza, 1974), 104; see already J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und Ostasiatische Streifzüge* (Stuttgart: Dieterich, 1903), 300; F. Haase, *Altchristliche Kirchengeschichte nach orientalischen Quellen* (ibid. 1925), 86. According to Moses, *PH* 2.35, Helena was a wife of Abgar’s: Moses seems to be the first who links her with Abgar: Kirsten, “Edessa,” 569.

¹¹⁷ On Jewish Christianity and the question of circumcision see B. Bagatti, *The Church from the Circumcision* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1971; 1984 repr.); *Nourished with Peace. Studies S. Sandmel*, ed. F.E.

council of Jerusalem discussed this problem and the decision was taken not to impose circumcision on men converted to Christianity.¹¹⁸ Izates in those same years was friends with Abgar and took decisions in foreign politics together with him (Tac. *Ann.* 12.12-14).¹¹⁹ Indeed, in AD 49-50 Abgar, *rex Arabum Acbarus*,¹²⁰

Greenspahn-E. Hilgert-B.L. Mack (Chico: Scholars, 1984); F.W. Horn, "Der Verzicht auf die Beschneidung im frühen Christentum" (*NTS* 42 [1996]), 479-505; J.R. Wagner, "The Christ, Servant of Jew and Gentile" (*JBL* 116 [1997]), 473-85; T.W. Berkley, *From a Broken Covenant to Circumcision of the Heart*, Ph.D. Diss. Marquette University (Milwaukee, Wis. 1998).

¹¹⁸ For controversies on circumcision within Judaism see e.g. L.H. Feldman, in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (London: Harvard UP, 1965), 410-11; L.H. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene," in *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity*, eds. L.H. Feldman-G. Hata (Detroit: Brill, 1987), 81-94; M. Frenchkowski, "Iranische Königslegende in der Adiabene zur Vorgeschichte von Josephus Antiquitates XX 17, 33" (*ZDMG* 140 [1990]), 213-33; Also: S. Weitzmann, "Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology" (*HTbR* 92 [1999]), 37-59. On circumcision in the Jerusalem Council, in St. Paul and the NT see J. Daniélou, *La teologia del Giudeocristianesimo* (transl. Bologna: Mulino, 1974), xxvi; F. Bruce, "Galatian problems, 3. The 'other' gospel" (*BRL* 53 [1971]), 253-71; R. Jewitt, "The agitators and the Galatian congregation" (*NTS* 17 [1971]), 198-212; P. Borgen, *Paul preaches circumcision and pleases men and other essays on Christian origins* (Trondheim: Tapir, 1983); J. Paget, "Barnabas 9:4: a peculiar verse on circumcision" (*VChr* 45 [1991]), 242-54; J.M. Lieu, "Circumcision, Women, and Salvation" (*NTS* 40 [1994]), 358-70; J.S. Vos, "Paul's Argumentation in Galatians 1-2" (*HTbR* 87 [1994]), 1-16; D.C. Allison, "Exegetical Amnesia in James" (*ETbL* 76 [2000]), 162-66; L. Troiani, "La circoncisione nel Nuovo Testamento," in Filoramo-Gianotto, *Verus Israel*, 95-107. For a comparison between Paul, Rom 2:29 and Philo's thought on circumcision, on which he limits his allegoresis in *Migr. Abr.* 89-93; *Spec. leg.* 1. 1-11: J. Barclay, "Paul and Philo on Circumcision" (*NTS* 44 [1998]), 536-56. For Paul's thought in early Christianity see M. Simonetti, *Ortodossia ed eresia fra I e II secolo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1994).

¹¹⁹ Analysis in my "Edessa," 109-11.

¹²⁰ Pliny, *NH* 5.85-86, considers the region of Osrhoene, with Edessa and close to Commagene, as *Arabia*: its inhabitants are the *Arabi Orroeni* or *Orroei*. In 5.86, near Edessa, he mentions Carrhae ("Arabia supra dicta

together with Izates who ruled over Adiabene, first supported Meherdates, the Parthian ruler imposed by the Romans, and, together with some *inlustres Parthi* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.12), requested Meherdates as king in front of C. Cassius, “qui Suriae praeerat” (*ib.* 12.11), but then, together with Izates, decided to betray him and, bribed with money by Gotarzes, Meherdates’ rival, abandoned the latter. Cassius, who suspected this at once, said to Meherdates that “barbarorum impetus acres cunctatione languescere aut in perfidiam mutari” (*ibid.*). In fact, for many days Abgar detained Meherdates in Edessa (“fraude Acbari, qui iuvenem ignarum et summam fortunam in luxu ratum multos per dies attinuit apud oppidum Edessam”), and deprived him of precious armed forces, his own army and that of his friend Izates, and so caused Meherdates’ defeat. Tacitus comments: “Izates Adiabeno, mox Acbarus Arabum cum exercitu abscedunt, levitate gentili, et quia experimentis cognitum est barbaros malle Romam petere reges quam habere” (*ibid.* 14). Moreover, *Ios. AI* 20.3.3. attests that Izates too, just like Abgar, was initially loyal to Rome: he records that when Bardanes, a son of the Parthian king Artabanus, who had been helped by Izates to recover his realm (*ibid.* 1-2), was going to take up arms against Rome, Izates strongly tried to dissuade him, at the cost of incurring Bardanes’ hostility. Abgar, too, was loyal to Rome—like his homonymous predecessor—before Meherdates’ affair, as we know from Moses¹²¹ and from

habet oppida Edessam [...] Carrhas”), where Izates ruled (*Ios. AI* 20.2.2). On ancient Arabia see R.G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹²¹ Analysis of Moses and Procopius in my “Edessa,” 111ff. Moses, *PH* 2, 26, attests some kind of submission of Edessa to Rome in the Augustan age, when he says that “in the second year of Abgar’s reign” (probably a predecessor of Abgar the Black) all the Armenian territories became tributary of Rome;” we know that in Moses’ view Edessa was an Armenian city. It is not sure that Edessa paid a tribute to Rome in the I cent., but Moses is right when he mentions a bond of loyalty that linked the Edessan kings to Rome. We know that Osrhoene passed under Roman control through Lucullus’ victories (69 BC against Tigranes king of Armenia) and the occupation of Armenia in 66-65 BC, but it seems that local kings were granted a relative independence. In the I cent. AD Edessa was under Adiabene for a period; only in AD 114 Trajan conquered Armenia, Mesopotamia and Adiabene, set Edessa on fire and gave it to a Parthian king; in 213 Edessa became a Roman colony under

the name of *Antonina Edessa Colonia Metropolis Aurelia Alexandra*, the Abgarid dynasty disappeared in AD 242. From the recently discovered PMesopotamia A we learn the existence of an Aelius Septimius Abgar, unknown before, who in AD 239/40 was “honored with the *hupateia* in Orhay,” i.e. Edessa. See J. Teixidor, “Les derniers rois d’Édesse d’après deux nouveaux documents syriaques” (*ZPE* 76 [1989]), 219-22; Id., “Deux documents syriaques du III^{ème} siècle après J.-C., provenant du moyen Euphrate” (*CRAI* [1990]), 144-66; Desreumaux, *Histoire*, 18-19; Millar, *Near East*, 553-62; M. Gawlikowski, “The Last Kings of Edessa,” in *Symposium Syriacum VII*, ed. R. Lavenant, OCA 256 (Roma: Pont. Ist. Studi Orientali, 1998), 421-29; T. Gnoli, *Roma, Edessa e Palmira nel III sec. d.C.* (Pisa-Roma: IEPI, 2000), 73-74 and my “Abgar.” In fact, before these recent discoveries, Ps. Dion. 131 Ch. fixed the end of the Edessan dynasty in 220/1, without mentioning Aelius Septimius Abgar’s reign, whereas today we know that Aelius lost his power only in 242; from then to 248 Luther supposes an interregnum up to the complete abolition of the monarchical institution in Edessa, according to Jacob of Edessa, 281-82 Brooks, who records that the Edessan dynasty lasted till year 560 of the Greeks = AD 248, when the Romans deposed Abgar Severus, because he wanted to defect, and created Aurelianus, son of Habsay, *begemôn*, laying Edessa under tribute: “and so the Edessan monarchy ended:” see *Chronica Edessena. Chronica Minora*, III, eds. E.W. Books-I. Guidi-J.B. Chabod, CSCO Syri 5 (Paris: 1905; repr. Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq), 282-82; Gnoli, *Roma*, 78-79; A. Luther, “Marcopolis in Osrhoene und der Tod des Kaisers Caracalla” (*Electrum* 7 [2003]), 101-10, on the end of the kingdom of Osrhoene in the Forties of the third cent.: from then on, Marcopolis was no longer a place of residence for the Osrhoene kings. But also before the creation of that *begemôn*, the Roman intervention is to be seen in the assignment of the kingdom, for some time, to Abgar the Fair and Aelius Septimius Abgar (Luther, “Elias,” 194-97; Gnoli, *Roma*, 79-80) and to others referred to as *diepontes tén hupateian* (on this title cf. Gnoli, *Roma*, 89-123; S.K. Ross, *Roman Edessa* [London-New York: Routledge, 2001], 75-81 and *passim*), governors who were *equites Romani*, mentioned in four documents of the Mesopotamian *dossier*: one of them, who appears in PMesopotamia A, is “King Aelius Septimius Abgar, son of Ma^cnu, the Crown Prince [*pasgribā*], son of King Abgar, who is honoured with the *hupateia* in Edessa.” Such *hupateia* seems to indicate the monarchical power in Edessa after its transformation into a Roman colony, a sort of *enclave* in the procuratorial province of Osrhoene, governed by *equites Romani*: during the vacancy of the Edessan throne, the power was entrusted to a Roman *eques* (on these *equites* governors cf. Gnoli, *Roma*, 82-83; 87). Other hypotheses on the nature of this *hupateia*

Procopius,¹²² even if before AD 35 he may have done something that made him suspect to the Romans. So Izates' conduct reveals deep similarities with that of Abgar: both were allies of Rome before this episode, both seem to have at least known something about Jesus—even if we do not accept the story of their conversion to Christianity, legendary in the case of Abgar, possible for Izates—, and later, in the Meherdates affair, both decided, together, to make a political choice that did not favor Rome. Moreover, Meherdates is certainly mentioned in the *Doctrina* as father of a wife of Abgar's, Shalmat,¹²³ and is also said to have attended Addai's preaching. Izates too is perhaps referred to in the *Doctrina*, which mentions a Bar Zati, i.e. a son of a certain "Zati" who is probably identifiable with our Izates.¹²⁴ His son, according to the *Doctrina*, was among the nobles who attended Addai's preaching and were converted. That Izates transmitted his faith to his sons is known thanks to Josephus (*AI* 20.3.3), according to whom Izates' sons learnt Hebrew (*glóttan par' hémín patrion*) and

seem less probable: a caretaker government of Coelesiria (so W. Eck, "C. Iulius Octavius Volusenna Rogatianus" (*ZPE* 90 [1992]), 199-206: 201); consulate or consular rank (so Millar, *Near East*, 478); a sort of *imperium maius*: so D. Feissel-J. Gascou, "Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate. III^{ème} siècle après J.-C." (*Journal des Savants* 65 [1995]), 65-119: 81.

¹²² In the sixth cent. Procopius (on whom see M. R. Cataudella, "Historiography in the East," in Marasco, ed., *Historiography*, 391-447: 391-417), *Bell. Pers.* 2.12.8-19, knows, probably from Eusebius, the correct title of Abgar (the homonymous predecessor of 'the Black'), *toparkhês* (he explains: "this was the title of those who ruled over a people [*tous kata ethnos basileis*]), and describes his pro-Roman conduct. He presents him as "closest friend of Augustus" and records the story of his voyage to Rome intended to reinforce the alliance with the emperor. Augustus was so pleased of Abgar's company that he would not part from him, and Abgar had to invent an expedient in order to go home. Then Procopius tells a story very similar to that of Eusebius and the *Doctrina* about Abgar's illness, his alleged correspondence with Jesus, the promise that Edessa would never be conquered (this point is absent in the other two sources but present in the *Peregrinatio Aegeriae*, cf. above) and mentions the siege unsuccessfully laid to Edessa by Chosroes in 544 (2.26). Procopius, as Moses, identifies the Abgar of the Augustan and that of the Tiberian age.

¹²³ Moses, *PH* 2.35, says that Helena was not the only wife of Abgar.

¹²⁴ See already Cureton, *Documents*, 162.

received an education (*paideia*) characterized by Jewish customs. Moses too in *PH* 2.35 links Abgar's Christianity with that of the kings of Adiabene (he tells that Helena, the first of Abgar's wives, was converted to Christianity like her husband and after the latter's death was sent to Kharan, *Carrhae*, by the new Armenian king, Sanadrug, but, as she did not want to live in a pagan land, under Claudius' reign she went to Jerusalem, where, during a famine, she furnished the people with grain from Egypt: here Moses mentions Josephus' authority).¹²⁵

A further detail might be interesting with reference to the relationship between Adiabene and the Jewish-Christian world. I have shown that, according to the *Doctrina*, Jesus received Abgar's envoys in Jerusalem in Gamaliel's house: the Jewish *Bereshit Rabba* attests that Gamaliel maintained close relations with the kings of Adiabene. Besides, Nineveh, the main town of Adiabene, was on the road that passed through Osrhoene and was linked to Edessa; then, through Hierapolis in Syria, this road crossed the Euphrates

¹²⁵ It is evident that Abgar's death in 64/5 does not fit with the Claudian age: in fact, according to Ios. *AI* 20.2.1, Helena married, not Abgar, but Monobazus of Adiabene. Moses, like Horosius (7.6), is persuaded that Helena was a Christian and depicts her as the Christian Abgar's widow. However, the points of contact between Moses' narration and Josephus' one are several: in *AI* 20.2.2 Izates, Helena's son, begins to rule over the *khôran*... *Kharrhôn*; *ibid.* 2.4: they are both converted; *ibid.* 2.6: in Jerusalem, during the (historical) famine of AD 46, Helena provides grain from Egypt and Izates supplies money; Moses draws from Josephus the detail of Helena's monument just outside Jerusalem. It would be more probable that Moses derived his information from Eusebius, who cites Josephus in turn, and records that Helena provided the grain during the famine, and that she was the queen of Adiabene (*HE* 2.12); nevertheless, in Eusebius some details are absent, such as the mention of *Carrhae*, Helena's Christianity, or the monument "in front of the gate of Jerusalem" rather than *en proasteiois tês nun Ailias* (Eusebius, *ibid.*). On the other hand, the identification of Helena queen of Adiabene with Abgar's Christian widow is due neither to Eusebius nor to Josephus, but only to Moses. Anyway, that germs of Christianity were present very early in Adiabene seems to be attested by the *Chronicle of Arbela*, too (see my *Il Chronicon*), and by the already mentioned *Acts of Mari* (cf. my *Atti di Mari*).

and reached the Roman territory.¹²⁶ So, in order to reach Adiabene, following the main road, one had to cross Osrhoene; on this road there was Carrhae, too, where Izates ruled according to Ios. *AI* 20.2.2.

[19]

Another interesting historical trace in the *Doctrina*—a trace probably dating back not to the age of Abgar the Black, but to that of his later namesake Abgar the Great, *raḅ*, who ruled AD 177 to 212¹²⁷ as “a client of Roman power from the beginning of his

¹²⁶ On roads in Roman Syria and Mesopotamia: T. Bazou, “Les routes romaines de Syrie,” in J.M. Dentzer-W. Orthmann, *Archéologie et histoire de la Syrie*, II (Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei, 1989), 205-21; Jullien, *Apôtres*, 93, 196.

¹²⁷ For his chronology see my “Abgar.” For the years 177-212 see Drijvers, “Hatra,” 870-79, accepted by Luther, “Elias,” 180-98, and Gnoli, *Roma*, *passim*. The deposition of an Abgar in AD 212/3, when the Edessan reign was abolished for the first time by Caracalla, is referred to Abgar Severus by Gnoli, *Roma*, 74-79; by Teixidor, *Rois*, 221 and *Documents*, 160, to Abgar the Great (who, according to S.K. Ross, “The Last King of Edessa: New Evidence from the Middle Euphrates” (*ZPE* 97 [1993]), 197-206: 194-95, is identical with Abgar Severus; according to Gawlikowski, *Kings*, 428, instead, Abgar Severus was a successor of the Great). Millar, *Near East*, 561, puts a question mark near 212, because the 26 years of Maḅnu’s rule, soon after Abgar’s one, according to Ps. Dionysius, 128 Chabot, would lead us to 213. In fact, after the transformation of Edessa into a Roman colony, Abgar’s son ruled for 26 years with the title of *paṣgribá*, “Crown Prince,” attested by PMesopotamia A (Teixidor, “Documents,” 144-66). At the end of this period, in AD 239/40, the same document attests the rule of the son of Abgar’s son, Aelius Septimius Abgar, who then was deposed by Gordianus III in AD 242 according to PMesopotamia B (ed. J. Teixidor, “Un document syriaque de fermage de 242 ap. J.-C.,” (*Semítica* 41-42 [1993]), 195-208; Gnoli, *Roma*, 73-75; Ross, *Edessa*, 69-70; 73-82). For recent discoveries (papyri and parchment) on Edessa and Osrhoene in the late II-III cent. AD see the editions of P.Mesop.: Feissel-Gascou, “Documents” (*Journal des Savants* 65 [1995]), 65-119; (67 [1997]), 3-57; (70 [2000]), 157-208; also Gnoli, *Roma*; Ross, *Edessa*, esp. 46-82; 185-95; with the review art. by A. Camplani-T. Gnoli, “Edessa e Roma: a proposito di un libro recente” (*Mediterr. Ant* 4 [2001]), 41-68. On the papyri: H.M.Cotton, W. Cockle and F. Millar, “The Papyrology of the Roman Near East. Survey,” *JRS* 85 (1995), 214-35.

reign”¹²⁸—is the mention of the church built by Addai with Abgar’s generous support. In fact, besides the maintenance of the poor and the sick, the only gift of wealth that Addai accepts from Abgar is devoted to the building of a church in Edessa, which finds a parallel in the big church that Protonike ordered to be built over Golgotha and Jesus’ tomb in Jerusalem.¹²⁹ Moreover, we are said that “Some years after the Apostle Addai had built the church in Edessa, [...] he built churches in other districts as well, both far and near [...] set up deacons and presbyters in them, taught those who were to read the Scriptures [...] and the orders of ministry.” This suggests a spread of Christianity from Edessa to the nearby regions, but what is of the highest interest here is the mention of the church in Edessa. From the *Chronicle of Edessa*, chap. 12, we know that “in the year 624 [= AD 313] bishop Qûnê laid the foundations of the Edessan church; but it was bishop Sa’ad, his successor, who built it wholly and completed the edifice.” So, soon after Constantine’s victory and conversion a church was built in Edessa. But in the same *Chronicle*, chap. 1,¹³⁰ we find that already in AD 202 (“513 of the Edessan era”), under the reign of Abgar the Great, there was a church in Edessa, the first ever attested in that city: I suppose that Addai’s church, as mentioned in the *Doctrina*, could be reminiscent of this church, although some scholars have a more skeptical approach to its existence and think that the first Christian building in Edessa was in fact that of Qûnê.¹³¹ Indeed, the *Chronicon* records a big flood due to the overflowing of the river Daişan—that from which the name of Bardaişan, “son of the Daişan,” derives—at the very beginning of the third cent.: “in the

¹²⁸ Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 46; 70: likewise, “Abgar X not only acted on Rome’s behalf, but actually received his throne—and some sort of official position in the Roman imperial structure—from the hand of Gordian himself.”

¹²⁹ See also Griffith, “The *Doctrina*,” § 43.

¹³⁰ This *Chronicle* is a document of the sixth cent. AD, but the account of the flood is taken from a record contemporary to the event and kept in the Edessan archives: *Chron. Edess.* 1, 3 ll. 11-15 ed. Guidi: *Chronica Edessena*, cit.: “Those who wrote these records and King Abgar’s edict are Mâryabh Bar Shemesh and Qâyômâ Bar Magartat, notaries in Edessa; those who put them in the Edessan archives are Bardîn and Bôlidâ, superintendents of these archives, and also officers of the city.”

¹³¹ See discussion in the last section of my “Edessa.”

month of *tesbrîn herây*”, i.e. in November, the waters flooded Abgar’s palace and also “the area of the sacred building of the Christians that was open to the congregation” (p. 2, l.4), in Syriac *b-haykêlâ d-’idâtâ d-krîst’yanê*. *Haykal* (absolute state), *haykêlâ* (emphatic state) is the part of the sacred building open to the congregation of the believers, the laymen: Guidi (p. 3 ll.23-24) translates *templum* and explains: “h.e. partem ecclesiae ubi populus locum habebat”; Brockelmann translates 1) *palatium*; 2) *templum*; 3) *sacrarium templi*, *sacellum templi*, *navis ecclesiae*; 4) *ecclesia*.¹³² So not only is the presence of Christians attested in Edessa at the time of Abgar the Great, but also a building dedicated to their religious ceremonies.¹³³ And if the Christian local community had a place of public cult, the destruction of which by the flood was recorded in the local chronicles, it certainly was with the king’s consent.

[20]

In fact, it is even probable that Abgar the Great was a Christian himself: his conversion is much debated among scholars; I provided a full discussion of this issue in a previous work.¹³⁴ He forbade a ritual practice of masculine mutilation—in some sources assimilated to circumcision¹³⁵—in honor of Taratha-Atargatis,

¹³² C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halis Saxonum: Niemeyer, 1928), 174 col. 2, s.v. *haikl*.

¹³³ A. Hamman, *I Cristiani nel II secolo* (Milano: Saggiatore, 1973), 34 reads this passage of the *Chronicon* as a sure attestation of the existence of a Christian church in Edessa in the Severan age. On Christianity under Abgar the Great also see Ross, *Edessa*, 133-34; F. Millar, “Paul of Samosata, Zenobia, and Aurelian” (*JRS* 22 [1971]), 2-17; Drijvers, “Hatra,” 863-85; Id., “Edessa und das jüdische Christentum”. As recalled e.g. by Moraldi, *Apocriſt*, II, 1657-58, the Christian church was organized in Edessa by the bishop Qûnê in AD 313, when, soon after Constantine’s victory, he built a church, according to the same *Chronicon Edessenum*.

¹³⁴ Ramelli, “Edessa,” part II.

¹³⁵ We can remember Hadrian’s ban on circumcision in AD 119/20 (J. Méléze Modrzejewski, “Filiis Suos Tantum’-Roman Law and Jewish Identity,” in Mor-Oppenheimer, *Jews and Gentiles*, 108-36: 121-23), and Antoninus Pius’s rescript of the ban after Bar Kochba’s war: only children could be circumcised (ibid. 132), so that an adult male could not convert to Judaism without violating Roman law. For the sometimes difficult distinction, in the sources, between various kinds of mutilation and circumcision: M. Knight, “Curing cut or ritual mutilation?” (*Isis* 92 [2001]), 317-38. For pagan views on circumcision cf. D.S. Barrett, “Martial, Jews, and circumcision” (*LCM* 9 [1984]), 42-46; further

mentioned also in the *Doctrina* as a local pagan deity: the episode is attested in the *Book of the Laws of Countries* by Bardaisan's school¹³⁶ and by Eus. *PE* 6.10.44. From the first, who was a contemporary of Abgar, or more probably from his school that recorded his information, we know that the king's decision was due to his conversion to Christianity: "In Syria and in Edessa the men used to excise their virility in honor of Atargatis, but when king Abgar believed [*hymn*], he ordered that every man who was circumcised should have his hand cut off." Of course there is a difference between emasculation and circumcision, but firstly it disappears in Eusebius' parallel text, which in both cases speaks of a "mutilation" (*apokoptein*),¹³⁷ and secondly it is evident that the *Book of the Laws of Countries* says that Abgar's decision was due to his new faith. In Syriac *m'hayn'ná*, "believer," is usually synonymous of *m'sb'hayá*, "Christian,"¹³⁸ and for Bardaisan, who undoubtedly was a Christian, just as for his followers, "to believe" obviously refers to the Christian faith. Besides, the historian and chronographer Sextus Iulius Africanus, who lived at Abgar's court as an instructor of his son and was a Christian, too,¹³⁹ defines Abgar as a "holy man,"

documentation in my "Elementi comuni della polemica antigudaica e di quella anticristiana fra I e II sec. d.C." (*Studi Romani* 49 [2001]), 245-74.

¹³⁶ PS, ed. F. Nau, I 2, 607 = *FHG* V 2, 92 = Cureton, *Spicilegium*, 20. See Ramelli, "Edessa," 137-43 on the probable Christian faith of Abgar the Great. On Bardaisan see my "Linee generali per una presentazione e un commento del *Liber legum regionum*, con traduzione" (*Rendiconti Ist. Lombardo* 133 [1999]), 311-55; "Bardesane e la sua scuola tra la cultura occidentale e quella orientale," in *Pensiero e istituzioni del mondo classico nelle culture del Vicino Oriente*, edd. R.B. Finazzi-A. Valvo (Alessandria: Orso, 2001), 237-55, all with bibl.; Possekkel, "Formative Christianity"; Ead., "Bardaisan;" my *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment*.

¹³⁷ On the cult of Atargatis in Edessa see A. Desreumaux, "Les titres des oeuvres apocryphes chrétiennes," in *La formation des canons scripturaires* ed. M. Tardieu (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 84 n. 110; T. Green, *The City of the Moon God* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 159-60; Drijvers, *Cults*, 121, 143.

¹³⁸ See P. Kawerau, *Die Chronik von Arbela*, CSCO Syri 199 (Louvain: Peeters, 1985), xii.

¹³⁹ See T. Rampoldi, "I *Kestoi* di Giulio Africano," in *ANRW*, II.34.3 (1997), 2451-70: 2452-53 & 2468; Ramelli, "Edessa," 134-37. Sextus in his *Kestoi*, 1. 20, describes a scene of everyday life at Abgar's court that he himself saw: the king's son killed a bear with his bow and arrows: he was instructed by Sextus in archery. Sextus went to Edessa probably on the

hieros anēr (ap. Eus. *Chron.* a. 220 Chr. 214 Helm; Sync. *Chronogr.* I 676, 13 Bonn; 359B, from Africanus' chronographical work), and probably means that Abgar was a Christian; it is significant, too, that Abgar entrusted his son to a Christian instructor as Africanus, who moreover was a Roman. And from Dio, 72.12.1, we know that Abgar's decision to forbid those ritual mutilations was presented by him as an attempt to make his subjects adopt Roman customs.¹⁴⁰

occasion of Septimius Severus' expedition and then was friends with Alexander Severus, for whom he planned the Pantheon Library and to whom he dedicated his *Kestoi*, the first non-religious work written by a Christian. He was also a friend of Origen's, whom he met and with whom he exchanged letters. Sextus may have promoted the meeting of Origen and Julia Mamaea, of Syrian origins, to whom Hippolytus also dedicated his *De resurrectione*. In Edessa he knew Bardaisan, another Christian, whom he calls *ho Parthos* and describes as an excellent archer (ibid. 1. 20). The Osrhoenes were able archers and Abgar himself furnished selected archers to Septimius Severus (Herodianus, 3.9.2) and then Alexander Severus had Osrhoene archers as body guards, who then rebelled against Maximinus Thrax, who repressed the revolt just while he persecuted the Christians (ibid. 7.1.9-11). For a probable presence of Christians in these Osrhoene cohorts see my "Edessa," 137.

¹⁴⁰ See Sordi, *Il Cristianesimo*, 477-479; Ramelli, "Edessa," 131-133 and 138-39. Mazzarino, *L'impero*, 463-464 n. 18, supposes that Abgar's state was the first officially Christian state and, moreover, the first state that persecuted pagans. See also Id., "La democratizzazione della cultura nel Basso Impero," in *XI Congrès International de Sciences Historiques, Stockholm* (Assen: Van Gorcum-Prakke, 1960), 35-55. Dio speaks of Abgar the Great and his realm in three passages: in 75.1-2 he records that in AD 195 Septimius Severus defeated the Osrhoenes and the Adiabenes, who assured their loyalty to him after Pescennius Niger's death. In 77.12.1 (our passage) on Abgar he says that, "as soon as he began to rule his fellow countrymen," he inflicted heavy impositions on the nobles under the pretext of converting them to Roman customs. In 79.16 Dio speaks of Abgar's Roman stay, after Septimius' Oriental expedition: his entry into Rome was *hupo pompês aplétou*. Abgar granted him the rule, despite the creation of a *provincia Osrhoena* (only in 213 or 216 did Edessa become a Roman colony, *Marcia Aurelia Antoniniana Edessa*. For the historical reconstruction of the end of the Abgarids see Millar, *Near East*, 553-62; Gnoli, *Roma*, 74-79; Luther, "Elias," 194-98; Ross, *Edessa*, 150-85, and here, above). In fact, we know from Herodianus, 3.9.2 that in 195 or 197 he gave himself *in fidem* and his sons as hostages to the victorious Septimius: his sons were educated in Rome (so, e.g., the Herodian princes

Eus. *HE* 5.23.2-4; 24.1 says that in the time of Pope Victor, a local synod was held in Edessa on the problem of the Easter date, which was the object of a lively debate in those days. All the *paroikiai* of Osrhoene took part in it, and its proceedings were communicated to Victor.¹⁴¹ And a *libellus synodicus* published by Mansi, I, 727-728, relates that at the end of the second cent. AD, in the time of the Roman emperor Commodus, the metropolitan bishop of Edessa had eighteen suffragan bishops, among whom were also those of Adiabene, a nearby region.¹⁴² We must remember that the *libellus* is mostly considered unreliable about the number of the suffragan churches—even if it includes the suffragan bishops of both Osrhoene and Adiabene—, that it probably retrojects an institutional situation of later times, and also that the full historicity of Eusebius' account has been challenged. Anyway, from Abercius' Epitaph,¹⁴³ a precisely datable and reliable document, we know that at the very beginning of the third cent. AD Christianity had already spread in the regions situated East of the Euphrates. For Abercius, who was a Christian, says that he saw all the Syrian cities, including Nisibis, and that he crossed the Euphrates, and “everywhere” he “met brothers of the same religion,” i.e. Christians.¹⁴⁴ In an Edessan inscription of the third cent. the mention of baptism and faith in resurrection makes its Christian character fully evident.¹⁴⁵

were educated in Rome, as sign of loyalty: see M. Hadas-Lebel, “L'Éducation des princes hérodiens à Rome et l'évolution du clientélisme romain,” in Mor, *Jews and Gentiles*, 44-62). See *Hist. Aug., Vita Severi*, 18, 1: “Abgarum subegit; Arabes [= Osrhoenos] in dicionem accepit; Adiabenos in tributarios coegit.”

¹⁴¹ The historicity of this account is accepted by Jullien, *Apôtres*, 124, where it is also maintained that Abgar the Great may have become a Christian himself.

¹⁴² See my “Edessa,” 140.

¹⁴³ See my “L'epitafio di Abercio” (*Aevum* 74 [2000]), 191-206. Already I. Ortiz de Urbina, “Le origini del Cristianesimo in Edessa” (*Gregorianum* 15 [1934]), 82-91 admitted that Abercius' inscription confirms the presence of Christians in Osrhoene in the second half of the second cent. AD.

¹⁴⁴ *Epitaphium Abercii*, ll.10-12: he kept “Paul” on his chariot, i.e. Paul's epistles. On Paul in second cent. Asia see M. Simonetti, “Paolo nell'Asia cristiana del II secolo” (*VetChr* 27 [1990]), 123-44.

¹⁴⁵ See my “Un'iscrizione battesimale edessena del III sec. d.C.” (*Ilu* 8 [2003]), 119-36; M.C.A. Macdonald, “Some Reflections on Epigraphy

[21] I think that it is probable that in the Severan age not only were there Christians in Edessa (at least Bardaisan was a Christian and his disciples were Christians), but the king himself perhaps converted to Christianity. So, Abgar the Black's alleged Christianity has often been seen as a retrojection of the possible conversion of the Great,¹⁴⁶ and I think that the *Doctrina* might contain traces and echoes of this, such as the conversion of the Edessan king and the building of the first church. Abgar the Black's correspondence with Jesus is not historical, whereas I believe that his exchange of letters with Tiberius might contain historical traces, especially if put in the historical context of Tiberius' knowledge of Christ and Christians (perhaps thanks to Pilate), of his proposal to the Senate, and of Vitellius' political and military mission in the Near East soon after the *s.c.* of AD 35, precisely in the years of Abgar's and Tiberius' letters.

[22] Moreover, the new chronology proposed by Luther for Abgar the Black fits the relationship between Abgar and Tiberius better than the old one: the period of Abgar's removal from his reign, AD 26 to 30, coincides with the years of Seianus' greatest power, and the second time he ascended the throne in AD 31 exactly corresponds to the year of Seianus' downfall and to the very date given by the *Doctrina* (year 343 of the Greeks = AD 31/2) for the beginning of the relationship between Abgar and Tiberius that led to their exchange of letters.¹⁴⁷ In addition, this date perfectly fits the above mentioned friendship of Abgar and Avillius Flaccus, prefect of Egypt AD 32 to 38. Like Abgar, Avillius was hostile to the Jews and Herod; just like Abgar, he was a friend of Tiberius', and, soon after his death, he was removed by Caligula. Abgar's first acts of foreign politics are characterized by an evident good will towards Tiberius, who, attentive to the situation in the Near East at the beginning of the thirties,¹⁴⁸ in AD 31 probably helped him to

and Ethnicity in the Roman Near East," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 11 (1998), 177-190: 181-82 for the link with ethnicity.

¹⁴⁶ See e.g. Rahner, "Abgar," 43; Chaumont, *Christianisation*, 16 (the story of Abgar "est tout à fait anachronique et s'inspire en grand partie de celle d'Abgar VIII le Grand"); Drijvers, "Abgarsage," 393.

¹⁴⁷ See my "Abgar."

¹⁴⁸ See M. Sordi, "Linee per una ricostruzione degli ultimi anni di Tiberio" (*Stylos* 1 [1992]) 27-35 = Ead., *Scritti di storia romana* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2002), 447-54: 449-51 and 453.

recover his throne after Abgar Hewârâ's usurpation, in order to secure an ally against Herod. We have seen that Abgar supported Aretas against Herod just at the beginning of the thirties of the first cent. AD, in a conflict that ended precisely in the years of Vitellius' mission in the Orient and of Abgar's and Tiberius' letters, in which we see their uniformity of views, in respect to the Oriental situation, and Abgar's loyalty towards the emperor. Under Caligula, Avillius, Abgar's friend, fell into disgrace, and under Claudius Abgar's conduct toward Rome became more ambiguous: we have mentioned his defection together with Izates of Adiabene. Claudius, *nobilitatibus externis mitis* (Tac. *Ann.* 12.20), didn't punish this disloyal act, and so Abgar remained on his throne till the time of Nero. The son of Gotarzes' successor, Vologeses (ibid. 14), continued ruling the Parthians, and took part in the war between Armenians and Iberians that also involved the Romans (ibid. 44), when he tried the invasion of Armenia before AD 54 (ibid. 50) and again in AD 55 (*Ann.* 13.6), when Nero had entrusted the government of Armenia to Domitius Corbulo and sought to create a net of allies among the Oriental kings. "Socii reges, prout bello conduceret, parere iussi" (*Ann.* 13.7-9): among these kings, according to the new chronology, there probably was Abgar too, whose support was to be precious, because the situation near the Oriental border was unstable. In AD 58 the Armenians, *dubia fide*, called now an army, now another, and inclined to submit to the Parthians, whose king Vologeses sacked the lands of those whom he deemed loyal to the Romans (ibid. 34; 37). All this may have contributed to remove Abgar from loyalty towards Rome.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ For the events linked to the conflict between Romans and Parthians, which involved Abgar too, see now E. Winter, *Rom und das Perserreich: zwei Weltmächte zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz* (Berlin: Akademie, 2001), 1-36. In AD 62 Vologeses attacked the Hyrcanians, who asked the Romans for an alliance (*Ann.* 14.25), and also attacked pro-Roman Armenia with the support of Adiabene (ibid. 15.1-2), which about ten years before betrayed Rome together with Abgar's Osrhoene. It is probable that now too Abgar stood by the Parthians' side. The king of Adiabene was present at the negotiations between Vologeses' *praefectus equitatus* and the Roman general Paetus (ibid. 14). Abgar died a couple of years before Nero's death, while the situation in the Near East kept being unstable. The silence of the sources about his foreign politics in the last

- [23] In conclusion, I suppose that the *Doctrina* might contain some historical traces, especially in the correspondence between Abgar and Tiberius, even though wrapped in a legendary dress.

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years of his life is probably due to the fact that his advanced age did not longer allow him to accomplish brilliant military acts.

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