THE ORIGINS OF THE MARONITES:
PEOPLE, CHURCH, DOCTRINE

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Introduction

The Maronite Church today stands as an independent Church with its own history and its own Patriarch, with its own culture and people. It can be called both a Church and a nation, and yet its manifestation within history is nothing short of surprising in terms of its ability to survive and thrive amidst a war driven Middle East, and especially Lebanon. The Maronite Church grows strong in Lebanon and outside of Lebanon and the Middle East, and for certain the growth of anything in life is a sign of the strength of the roots and foundations of that certain thing. But with the many contrasting claims accorded to the Maronite Church in its history and identity, there is a need for such a history to be seen with objectivity. The purpose of this research is to provide a concise and yet thorough account of the Origins and identity of the Maronite Church, presenting the findings of those historians who have studied this history, especially in regards to the origins of the Maronite Church and the situation of the formation of the Patriarchate with John Maroun. This research will also discuss the person of John Maroun and his place in history, as well as analyse the claim of the Maronite Church's constant orthodoxy and unity with Rome.

It is necessary first to identify and discuss the formation and growth of a Maronite people and the man who has given them their name and their identity as a monastic people.

Pre-Patriarchate: Maronite Roots

    a.   **Saint Maroun and Theodoret:**

The earliest source of the Maronite roots is the patron and father of the Maronite Church, the ascetic Saint Maroun. Maroun, (or Maron), is the ascetic as mentioned by Theodoret of Cyrrhus in his *Religious History* which is the main source of Syrian Monasticism in the fourth and fifth centuries. Theodoret was Bishop of Cyr and was from his youth a man fond of monastic life in Syria. Maroun is the ascetic who "embracing the open-air life… consecrating to God the (hill-top) honoured by the impious, pitching a small tent which he seldom used, practiced not only the usual labours but devised others as well".[1] This Maroun fits the profile of the typical Syrian Ascetic. We see that the asceticism of Syria had its 'usual labours' or a common set style, but typical of Syria also was the personal initiative and creativity in ascetic practices. Thus Maroun is a monk who follows a set system of monasticism but can also be regarded as a teacher of it too.

Theodoret's work is a profile of thirty ascetics that were under his jurisdiction in Cyr located in the province of Euphratia and Apamea, located in Syria Secunda. The book was composed either in 440 or 444 A.D.[2] It was during this time that Christological debate filled the Christian East of Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria, and even Rome itself. The main field of events took place in the Christian East of Asia Minor, where the Council of Chalcedon settled (only formally) the debate concerning the identity of Christ. It was the case as to whether Christ was two natures and two hypostasis' as claimed by Nestorius or whether he was two natures and one hypostasis as proclaimed first by Pope Leo the Great in his famous *Tome of Leo,* whereby he states the following:

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[1] *Religious History* of Theodoret of Cyrrhus, trans. By R.M. Price, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1985, pg. 117.
[2] See *Religious History* of Theodoret of Cyrrhus in the Introduction by R.M. Price who sets different propositions for the date of the works composition, pgs. xiii-xv, or Paul Naaman's *The Maronites: The Origins of an Antiochene Church,* where he writes on the circumstances of the books composition, pgs. 102-105.

"The proper character of both natures (human and divine) was maintained and came together in a single person… the one who retained the form of God when he made humanity, was made man in the form of a servant. Each nature kept its proper character without loss; and just as the form of God does not take away the form of a servant, so the form of a servant does not detract from the form of God".[3]

Theodoret's position in this Christological debate was one that was against the Monophysite focus of the school of Alexandria, and in favour of the Antiochan focus of the two natures. But this inevitably led him to be regarded as part of the school of Nestorius, who saw in Christ two natures and two persons. His tenure as Bishop saw him go from so-called Nestorian to the champion of Chalcedonian Christology in twenty-two years. Theodoret was among those Bishops of Antioch who, in the year 430, advised John of Antioch to write to Nestorius a letter "in which he urged him to do what the Pope was asking him to do and to abandon his opposition to the term Theotokos"[4], a letter which some believe was actually written by Theodoret. His alleged Nestorianism saw him anathemized and exiled by the 'Robber Council' of Ephesus in 449 as an adherent and teacher of what was called 'reborn Nestorianism'. Pope Leo however spoke in his favour, stating in his letter written to Theodoret the following: "blessed be our God, whose invincible Truth has shown you free from all taint of heresy in the judgment of the Apostolic See. To whom you will repay due thanks for all these labours, if you keep yourself such a defender of the universal Church as we have proved and do still prove you".[5] As such, Theodoret was reinstated to his seat and permitted to attend the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, a council which nullified the works and decisions of the 'robber council'.

At this council, Theodoret began as a shady figure and was refused by the party of Dioscorus and the Bishops of Egypt, Illyria and Palestine, who referred to him as the 'master of Nestorius'. And yet, during the council right to its end, Theodoret would then be regarded as the 'master of orthodoxy' due to his influence in elaborating the dogmatic definition as proclaimed by Chalcedon: Christ is "two natures inseparably united in one prosopon (person) and one sole hypostasis (subsistence)".[6] Theodoret was able to distinguish the terms hypostasis and nature/essence by stating that the hypostasis is what united the prosopon/person, and not the essence.[7] Naaman has the following to say:

> Modern historical research has established that the canon of the Chalcedonian faith was formulated according to the directives and under the influence of Theodoret in agreement with Pope Leo the Great's legates…Further, Theodoret probably deserves credit for introducing into the Chalcedonian Creed the term "hypostasis" (of Alexandrian usage), making it the equivalent of "prosopon" (person). In doing so, he paved the way for neo-Chalcedonianism, a system which would attempt to coordinate the respective expressions of both schools so as to unify the language.[8]

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[3] "Tome of Leo": Letter of Pope Leo the Great to Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, about Eutyches, 449, par. 5

[4] Naaman, Paul, *The Maronites: The Origins of an Antiochene Church,* Trans. By the Department of Interpretation and Translation, Holy Spirit University, Kaslik, a Cistercian Publications title published by Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2011, pg. 79

[5] C. L. Feltoe (trans). *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 12. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895, Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3604120.htm, par. V

[6] *Formula of the Hypostatic Union*

[7] Naaman, pg. 94-95.

[8] *Ibid.* pg. 127

Thus, the Chalcedonian faith of Theodoret was set in stone. His previous writing of the *Religious History* was his way to promote not only Syrian Monasticism, but also Monastic adherence to Church authority and the orthodoxy of Antioch Christology. The heroes of this work are all those of orthodox faith, chosen deliberately by Theodoret, as he was able to include other great monastic figures of Syria during that time such as Rabbula (known for his opposition of Antiochan theology after the Council of Ephesus), Alexander, Jerome, Bar Sauma, and many others. Naaman states that "All Theodoret had to do to promote orthodoxy was display these simple men as they were".[9] Therefore, the religious history is a display of orthodoxy, both of the personalities and its author.

Considering such, we may say that Maroun, the personality of whom very little is known and to whom is referred the spiritual patronage of the Maronite Church, could be considered as holding to the orthodox faith as held and promoted by Theodoret, and not that held by Nestorianism or Monosphysitism. And so, the beginnings of the Maronites, pre-Church, were those of holiness and orthodox faith. That would also make Theodoret an early father of Maronite theology, though he himself was not a Maronite. But through him and through his work, the basis would be set for the identity of a man and subsequently a church.

Beith-Marun: keeper of Chalcedonianism

One year after the Council of Chalcedon, the Emperor Marcian of Byzantine is claimed to have built the Monastery of Maroun. This is written by famous Arab historian Abu l-Fida who writes the following: during "the second year of his reign Emperor Marcianus built the monastery of Mar Maroun in Homs".[10] Marcian was emperor from 450-457. Many place the year of the monastery's construction in 452, which would mean that it would be the third year of his reign. Marcian ascended the throne on the 24th of August, 450, which would make the construction of the monastery two years after his ascent. Other writers have also testified to this date of construction, such as Omar Ibn-Al Wardi, and Procopios who died around 562, stated that the emperor Justinian I (528-565) "restored the fence walls of the monastery of Mar Maroun which is on the outskirts of Apamea".[11]

The value of this monastery is that it was to be the very product of the Council of Chalcedon, i.e. a monastery and school that would defend Chalcedonianism and the orthodox faith. Antoine Khoury Harb in his work *The Maronites: History and Constants,* states that "In 452, at the request of Pope Leo and Bishop Theodoret, the Emperor Marcianus ordered a great monastery to be built near the Orontes River, north of Hama, *in order to strengthen and spread the Chalcedonian dogma*" (emphasis added).[12] Naaman observes that emperor Marcian sought monastic reform even prior to the Council due to the problems caused by Bar Sauma and Eutyches. Theodoret, who was exiled after the 'robber council' was recalled from exile by the then general Marcian who was assuming control of the empire after the death of Theodosius II. He also banished Eutyches. His desire for reform was realised in the sixth session of the council, which he and his wife Pulcheria attended. After the council, he sought to bring all clergy and monks who cause dogmatic unrest into order. He himself proposed plans and points of action regarding religious: firstly, that the founding of any new monastery

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[9] *Ibid*. pg. 103
[10] Abou al-Fida' *Al-Mukhtaşar fī Tārīkh al-Bashar* Vol. 1, p.81, (1960).
[11] Procopius (1888). *De oedificiis* (Vol. 8,p.328).
[12] A.K. Harb, *The Maronites: History and Constants,* The Maronite Foundation in the World, Beirut, 2009 (Special Edition), pg. 56.

would come under the competence of the emperor and local bishop, and secondly, all monks were under the authority of the Bishops. As a result, Bar Sauma and Eutyches were forbidden to found new monasteries and were obliged to leave the empire. Also, the emperor gave orders to build a monastery in the vicinity of Apamea which he called the monastery of Saint Maroun.[13] Lammens observes that the monastery was called after Saint Maroun "probably because the monks got Saint Maroun's relics or the whole body".[14] Harb notes that the monastery was called so because the ascetic Maroun had followers prior to the building of this monastery.[15] Naaman identifies the many disciples of Maroun that were famous ascetics in Syria, such as Jacob of Syria, Simon the stylite and Baradatus.[16] Through Theodoret, we can also decipher the names of Maroun's first disciples: Abraham, James (Jacob),[17] and Limnaeus. Price notes how Maroun was a pioneer in Syrian asceticism and attracted followers to his style of ascetic life:

> "He (Theodoret), knew that the first influential exponent of this pattern of life (i.e. open-air asceticism) was a hermit called Maron, who died before his arrival at Cyrrhus: 'it was he who planted for God the garden that now flourishes in the region of Cyrrhus' (XVI.3). Yet Theodoret's chapter on this major figure is exceedingly thin and slight. Clearly, Maron's disciples had been more concerned to imitate him than to transmit a detailed tradition of his life and labors".[18]

From this, we see that before the founding of the Monastery of Maroun, the famous ascetic had disciples who followed his style of asceticism, i.e. open-air asceticism. And it was these disciples who inspired the naming of the monastery which was to be the bulwark of orthodoxy. Anthony Salim states that "(the Maronite Church's) formation was the result of a desire to defend the orthodox teachings of the 5th-century Council of Chalcedon… Accordingly, Bishop Theodoret gathered the monks and hermits who followed the teachings of St. Maron into a monastery shortly after the doctrines of Chalcedon had been defined".[19] These Monks of Saint Maroun were therefore established in order to defend the faith of Chalcedon, the faith of the Catholic Church. Seely Beggiani notes thus, saying: "The Monks of St. Maron took the lead in preaching the true doctrine and stopping the propagation of heresy".[20] In 'taking the lead', it is suggested that the monastery of Saint Maroun was the reference and head monastery of the Chalcedonian Monasteries in Syria. This is what is gathered from the historical references, especially the letters of the monks of Beth-Marun which tells of its being persecuted for such faith. There is the letter of the monks of Syria Secunda to Pope Hormizdas written in 517 which tells of the martyrdom of 350 monks while on the way to the monastery of Saint Simon Stylite in Aleppo. They were persecuted by the onslaught of Severus of Antioch who was a staunch Monophysite, seeking to persecute those who upheld Chalcedonia. At the foot of the letter, we see the first signature reads: "I

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[13] *Naaman,* pg. 128.

[14] P.H. Lammens, *Tasrih al-absar,* Al Ra'ed Publishers, Lebanon 1982, Vol. II, pg. 90

[15] Harb, pg. 56

[16] Naaman, pg 121. Here Naaman notes: "Emperor Leo himself wrote in 457 to Jacob of Syria, called the 'miracle worker', to ask him his opinion about the Council of Chalcedon and about Timothy Elures, 'usurper' of the see of Alexandria. Leo wrote similar letters to Simon the Stylite and to Baradatus. It should be stressed that these were disciples of Saint Maroun.".

[17] *Religious History,* pg. 118, which states: "a product of his (Maron's) planting was the great James…".

[18] *Religious History,* pg. xviii (Rice's Introduction).

[19] Salim, A.J., *Captivated by Your Teachings: A Resource Book For Adult Maronite Catholics,* E.T. Nedder Publishing, Tucson, Arizona, 2002, pg. 103.

[20] Beggiani, Seely, *Aspects of Maronite History,* Saint Maron Publications, Glen Allen, Vancouver, 2003, pg. 7

Alexander, by the mercy of God, Priest and Archimandrite of the monastery of Saint Maron". With Alexander's signature the first, this shows his pre-eminence and that of Beth-Marun's over all the other monasteries of Apamea.[21]

From People to Church: The Maronite Patriarchate:

a. The Church of Antioch

Saint Luke's Gospel provides the first appearance of Christianity in Antioch. He states that there "the disciples were first called Christian" (Acts 11:26). Jerome, Origen and Eusebius all assert that Saint Peter founded the Church in Antioch.[22] It was recognised as a patriarchate officially in Nicaea I according to canon 6: "Let the ancient customs prevail, which are observed in Egypt, Lybia and Pentapolis, that the Bishop of Alexandria has authority over all these [provinces], since this is customary also for the Bishop of Rome. In like manner, the [ancient] rights of the churches must be preserved throughout Antioch and the other eparchies".[23] Thus, like Alexandria and Rome (as well as Jerusalem and Constantinople), Antioch was a Patriarchate. Of course the term 'patriarchate' was not in use at that time, neither in Antioch nor anywhere throughout the Church. The term is first used by Pope Leo I (440-461) and was applied to both Jerusalem and Antioch in 530.[24]

The territory of the Patriarchate began in Syria in 64 BC and extended to five different provinces during the reign of Constantine I: Arabia, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Coele-Syria and Syro-Phoenicia. These were known as the civil Diocese of the East. Splits and divisions within each province saw these dioceses increase to eight in 325, and then to fifteen towards the end of the fourth century. Antioch's jurisdiction also extended at times to central and southern Mesopotamia, Iraq and Persia (until 424) and even Georgia until the middle of the eighth century.[25]

Antioch was a famous intellectual centre, with five different schools covering its entire territory: Antioch, Beirut, Caesarea of Palestine, Edessa and Nisibis. Famous for its many intellectuals and Saints, it was also a springboard for Christian preaching which went through Persia and Babylon, reaching as far as central Asia and China.[26] Antioch was also the source of the Syrian monasticism that can boast a competing history and richness along with the monasticism of Egypt. From Antioch there came the Gospel of Matthew and the Didache. Saint Luke the Evangelist was originally from Antioch. Antioch therefore was both very active in the political and religious sphere.

b. The Vacant Seat: An Ecclesial Motive for Independence

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[21] Naaman, pg. 131

[22] Kirsch, Johann Peter. "St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles." <u>The Catholic Encyclopedia.</u> Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 8 Dec. 2016 http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11744a.htm, no. 3. Eusebius writes in his *History:* "And at the same time Papias, bishop of the parish of Hierapolis, became well known, as did also Ignatius, who was chosen bishop of Antioch, second in succession to Peter, and whose fame is still celebrated by a great many" (*Church History* III. 36).

[23] Skaff, E.B., *The Place of the Patriarchs of Antioch in church History,* Sophia Press, Newton Centre, Massachusetts, 1993, pg. 7.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid. pg. 10-12.

[26] Ibid, pg. 12.

The Church of Antioch not only experienced great strength and was a source of reform, but it also saw great tragedies. There schisms in the Church as well as the Christological controversies of Monophysitism and Nestorianism. After the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Church of Antioch was split doctrinally into Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians. The patriarchs themselves also were either Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian.

The Church and Patriarchate of Antioch was within the Byzantine Empire. Within this Empire there was also the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Chalcedonians became known as 'Melkites' (the king's men) as early as the fifth century, named by their counterparts the Jacobites because they adhered to the faith of the Byzantine Emperor Marcian and upheld Chalcedonia. This means that the Maronites as a people and not yet as a church were also called Melkite.

With the Persian and Arab invasions of the Byzantine Empire in Syria in the first half of the seventh century, the Patriarchate of Antioch was empty after the death of Anastasius II (d. 609). It remained empty for a period of thirty years because of the Persian invasion of Syria and Heraclius' wars.[27] Asad Rustom however maintains that the See was not vacant, but was occupied by several patriarchs from Macedonius (628-631) right up until Theophilactus of Qanbara (748-?).[28] However, these patriarchs did not reside in Antioch, but in Constantinople. Opinions are divided as to whether such patriarchs were legitimate. Among them there were Monothelites who were denounced for their heresy, among them Macarius who was deposed and exiled to Rome by the sixth ecumenical Council.[29] Elias Skaff, historian and former patriarchal exarch, states that even Macedonius was denounced by Pope Martin I and the lateran Synod of 649.[30] Of this matter, Harb states that he was excommunicated because he "usurped the title of Patriarch".[31]

The divided debate that historians make seems to stem from whether the list of Patriarchs is accepted by specific independent churches or not. The current Syrian Orthodox churches, according to the list of Rustom, accept such Patriarchs as valid, but the Catholic and Maronite Churches do not accept these. Maronite historian Pierre dib treats the situation from a political-historical-geographical aspect and not from an ecclesial one. He states simply that "the new political state (in Syria) did not allow it (the Church of Antioch) to have a ruler. At Constantinople…they even went so far as appointing titular leaders of the capital of the East. Nevertheless, these patriarchs having established their residence in Constantinople, the See of Antioch in reality remained unoccupied".[32]

c. The Mardaites: A Political Motive for Independence

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[27] Harb, pg. 72.

[28] Rustom, Asad, *The Church of the City of God: the Great Antioch (Vol. 2),* Al-Nur Publications, Beirut, Lebanon, pg. 361

[29] Harb, Ibid.

[30] Skaff, pg. 157.

[31] Harb, ibid.

[32] Dib, Pierre, *History of the Maronite Church,* (trans. By Seely Beggiani,), Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut, Lebanon, 1971, pg. 43.

The Maronites would eventually form their own Church and the Patriarch of Antioch. Not only did the Maronite people find it necessary to impose themselves because of the empty seat as an ecclesial motive, but they also saw in it a political motive.

The Arab and Persian invasions in both Syria and Lebanon saw the rise of the Mardaite people, a people closely connected to the Maronites. These Mardaites (or the Jarajima) were Christians and Chalcedonians. They were originally Zoroastrians dwelling in Syria and Lebanon. Daou insists that their conversion took place at the hands of the monks of Beth-Marun,[33] "because the region of Cyrrhus, which was the cradle of monastic life and evangelization, was near Jarjouma, the capital of the Mardaites" (hence the name *Jarajima*).[34] These Mardaites were originally formed by the Byzantine government to fight the Ummayads. At the head of these people was a king named Youhanna. Patriarch Doueihi in his history states that the "the Prince of the Mardaites, whose name was Youhanna…was Prince of Mount Lebanon".[35]

These Mountain fighters were also described by the historian Ibn al-Qilai, and he sees no distinction between the Mardaites and the Maronites.[36]

With a constantly changing political atmosphere in Byzantium, Justinian II, the Byzantine Emperor, signed a peace treaty with Caliph Abdel Malek in 687. Part of the treaty meant the removal of 12000 Maronites from Lebanon.[37] This constricted furthermore the Maronite people's sense of independence, compromising their sense of freedom in the political and civil sphere.

d. John Maroun: First patriarch of the Maronite Church

It was in this context of ecclesial and civil difficulties that John Maroun was installed as the first Patriarch of the Maronite Church. He was born in the village of Serum, fifty kilometres from Antioch and forty kilometres from St. Maroun's Monastery. According to Doueihi and Qilai, he was the son of Agathon, and the nephew of Prince Carlo Magno of France, the conqueror of Antioch and Syria. He was sent as a young boy to Antioch to study Syriac and Greek. He entred the monastery of Saint Maroun and then afterwards sent to Constantinople to study further Greek and Patristics. Learning of the death of his parents, he returned to Antioch and retired to Saint Maroun's Monastery. There he was ordained a Priest. According to Qilai, John Maroun embraced at one time the Monothelite heresy from one Macarius. He was ordained a Bishop of Antioch but his title was not confessed by Pope Honorius because he was a Monothelite. Thereafter, he met with an ambassador of Pope Honorius in Tripoli. His faith there was examined and found to be orthodox. From there, he was taken to Rome and examined for his faith by a church council. Having been declared to be Chalcedonian, he was then consecrated by the Pope as Patriarch of Antioch.[38] Doueihi expands upon this to state how John Maroun defended the doctrine of the two wills in Christ

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[33] Daou, pg. 304

[34] Harb, pg. 66

[35] Hobeika, Arch. B., *History of Baskinta* (in Arabic), Beirut 1946, pgs. 8-9

[36] Ibn Al-Qilai, *Hurub al Muqaddameen,* published by Boulos Karali in the *Patriarchal Magazine* (المجلة البطريركية), 5th year, vol. 8, October, p. 522

[37] Bury, pg. 321

[38] Al Dahdah, Joseph, *The Geography of Syria Followed by the History of the Original Maronite Church,* Sydney Australia, 1899, pgs. 29-30.

and as a result was appointed metropolitan of Antioch by the Frankish Prince Eugene who was residing in Antioch and seeking to install a metropolitan who held the faith of Rome:

> "Maroun then stood up and agreed with the King of the Franks and said to him, "O King, we fear that the Melkites might convert Lebanon to their faith [of one will in Christ]. Go to the Cardinal who is staying with you and force him to ordain me a metropolitan in order to keep some people in the Frankish faith [of two wills in Christ] and I will no more preach the doctrine of Jacob [Baradaeus]".[39]

Daou states even more than this how John Maroun was first installed as Bishop of Batroun in 676 by the Pope's delegate/Cardinal in order to preserve the Roman Catholic Faith in Lebanon.[40]

Other accounts remain silent as to whether Rome and the Franks had agreed to John Maroun's instalment. Dib moreover states that "the origins of the Maronite Patriarchate remain in shadows".[41] He says this in reference to all the details provided by Doueihi and Qilai. What Dib relies on though is the text by the ninth century historian Dionysius Tel-Mahre preserved by twelfth century historian Michael the Syrian. In the text which describes an incident that took place in 745, we read that "the Maronites remained as they are today consecrating for themselves a patriarch and bishops from their monastery".[42] Dib states based on this text (which speaks of an event in 745) that "the word *remains* implies that the Maronites were this way formerly and were governed by a patriarch and bishops. **Thanks to this document, the fact is incontestable** (bold added)".[43] The monastery of Saint Maroun was of such an influence that it was able to impose upon Antioch a Patriarch. What was a people had now become a Church. But as expected, this event would not have pleased many outsiders, most especially those of the Byzantine and Melkite circles. What transpired was war instigated by the Byzantine Emperor who saw the act of the Maronites as a violation of his authority. He sent troops to the Monastery of Saint Maroun where it is recalled that five hundred monks died during the attack. John Maroun had fled to Batroun, and there plans were made and troops were called to face the Emperor. The Patriarch's nephew Ibrahim gathered 12000 men who joined forces with the Maronites and the Mardaites under the leadership of Prince Massoud. A battle ensued in Amioun, north Lebanon, in 694, a battle won by the Maronites. This secured their independence, and the Patriarch established his residence in Kfarhay, Batroun. The Maronites then began to dwell in the montains of Lebanon as well as Syria. They already had a presence in Lebanon due to the preaching of Saint Maroun's disciples led by Abraham the hermit of Cyrrhus.

The Maronites insistence upon independence from Byzantium saw them gain favour with the Ummayad Arabs. Historian Ibn Acaker mentions that several Caliphs lived and died in Maronite monasteries, such as Abdul Malek bin Marwan and Omar bin Abdulaziz. Furthermore, the weddings of some Ummayad princes took place in Saint maroun's monastery in Damascus.[44]

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[39] Al Doueihi, *Tarikh,* pg. 62
[40] Daou, pg. .
[41] Dib, pg. 44.
[42] Tel-Mahre in Michael the Great, *Chronicle,* Book 11, Chapter 22, pg. 476.
[43] Dib, pg 43.
[44] Ibn Acaker, *History of Damascus,* Al Raouda press, Damascus, 1329, pg. 210-251.

But relations were to change between the Maronites and the Arabs with the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Tiberius, under whose leadership the relations between the Maronites and the Byzantines improved. According to Doueihi, the Maronites led by Simon the Mountain Prince, joined the Byzantine forces to defeat the Arabs in 699. Doueihi states that "As a token of gratitude, the Byzantine Emperor sent Patriarch John Maroun a royal flower along with a letter thanking his holiness and his brave followers".[45]

In 702, the Patriarch of Antioch residing in Constantinople, George II, died, and was not replaced instantly "because of the ban of travel imposed by the Arabs."[46] This made John Maroun the sole patriarch to the see of Antioch. Skaff notes that it was at this time that the the Monastery of Saint Maroun elected John Maroun.[47] Whatever the case, the Maronite patriarch was the sole Patriarch of Antioch for forty years, up until 742 when the Caliph Hisham gave the Melkites the right to elect their own Patriarch. And thus, they elected a Syrian monk who took the name Stephen III.[48] Here, we can identify the time when there became a clear separation between the Maronite Church and the Melkite Church.

John Maroun died in 707 in Kfarhay and was buried there. His feast was celebrated in the Maronite Church along with Saint Maroun on February 9th, up until Patriarch Youssef Estephan separated the feasts in 1787, moving John Maroun's to March 2nd.

e. **The Validity of the Patriarchate**

When speaking of validity, we refer to consensus among references and authorities, and in this case, we should not only consider the consensus of Maronite authorities, but of non-Maronite authorities. As was noted earlier, the testimony of Dionysius Tel-Mahre is the earliest source of authority in favour of the Maronite Patriarchate and its acceptance in the Church. But there are other references as well.

Within Maronite circles, there are lists of the Maronite Patriarchs from John Maroun onwards. Outside of these circles, we see that this Patriarchate was not condemned by Rome, whereas others were. Pope Martin condemned Patriarch Macedonius of Constantinople, for usurping the title of Patriarch of Antioch illegally and for upholding the Monothelite heresy:

> "This Macedonius is in no way recognized as a bishop of the Catholic Church, not only because he usurped the title to himself, outside the canons and without consent or any decree, but also he has consented to the heretics…"[49]

The Pope did not condemn the Maronite Patriarch, nor is there ever any evidence of Rome de-legislating it. In fact, on several occasions, Papal bulls and decrees have re-affirmed the presence of a Maronite Patriarchate and its rights to the pallium. They also recognised a foregoing independence from the Melkites in both name and tradition. The Patriarchate was gradually organized, but throughout the Patriarch exercised a political and ecclesial power for the Maronite people. The Patriarchate was relocated on several occasions due to changing circumstances, but was definitively tied to Lebanon in 939. The independence and freedom of the Maronite Church was one that was not experienced by any of the other eastern patriarchs,

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[45] Doueihi, pg. 91.
[46] Skaff, pg. 159
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Letter to John of Philadelphia, Concil., t. X, col. 811

and what seems to have been the cause of such an independence was the fact that the Maronite Church gained its status and favour from Rome and has never seen in its own people a non-Catholic counterpart, as is the case with the other eastern Churches.[50] Moreover, Benedict XIV was the first Pope to identify John Maroun as the first patriarch of the Maronite Church stating the following:

> "You are not ignorant that at the end of the seventh century, when the Monothelite heresy had spread and' corrupted the inhabitants of the Antiochene Patriarchate, the Maronites decided to save their Nation from that corruption and elect a Patriarch who would be confirmed by the Roman Pontiff."[51]

This address, made by Pope Benedict XIV to the Cardinals in 1744, states firstly that there was a known tradition within Rome of the origins of the Maronite Church dating to the end of the seventh century. It also notes that the head of the Maronite Church was a Patriarch of Antioch. It also notes that such a Patriarch was elected with the intention of Rome's approval. What it notes further is that the Maronites were not Monothelite. This much disputed fact will be treated later on.

But for now, it suffices to say that there are many witnesses and authorities who give to the Maronite Church its legal standing as a Patriarchate, one that began from the end of the seventh century with Saint John Maroun.

John Maroun: A historical problem

a. The case against John Maroun

And yet it is the very character of John Maroun that has been called into question throughout history, up until this very day. In contemporary times the question is raised as to whether john Maroun was a historical figure. Did he ever exist, or was he simply a legend invented by the Maronites in order to give historical basis as to their independent patriarchate?

Three historians contemporary writers in the field of Maronite history give three different views concerning the historical value of the person of John Maroun.

Matti Moosa, in his book *The Maronites in History,* gives the allusion that John Maroun did not exist, basing this as a mistake made by Doueihi. He makes the claim that because Doueihi states that John Maroun's successor Cyrus received the mitre and ring from Rome, and that Assemani states that the first Maronite Patriarch to receive the mitre and ring from the Pope was Jeremiah Al-Amshiti in 1216, then Doueihi "confused John Maroun with this thirteenth century Maronite Patriarch (Al-Amshiti)".[52] He claims also that Jibrael Ibn –al-qilai had made the same error.[53] Furthermore, what he concludes of John Maroun is that the stories of his origins, his ordination as Bishop and then as Patriarch, have no historical foundation. He states that the John Maroun that is present in the writings of Eutychius the Melkite Patriarch and historian is that of "a monk and not as a patriarch…in connection with

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[50] See Pierre Dib, pg. 45-50

[51] Benedict XIV quoted in Eid, Joseph, *The Catholic Maronite Church,* L'independant, Fall River Massechussets, 1941, pg. 9

[52] Moosa, Matti, *The Maronites in History,* Gorgias Press, New Jersey, USA, 2005, pg. 147.

[53] Ibid.

the doctrine of Monothelitism".[54] Eutychius wrote in the mid-ninth century and serves as the earliest historian to mention the name of John Maroun.

Mariam Cubbe hints to the fact that John Maroun may be part of the legends of Thomas Kfartaba, a Monophysite of the eleventh century. She does not say that he is a legend, but simply analyses that he is part of the legend. She also analyses the date of the text *Kitab al Huda* (the Book of Direction), which is known as the Constitution of the Maronite Church. This book whose acclaimed date is 1058, refers to John Maroun as the first Patriarch. Cubbe states that this book may not be as early as 1058, but could be anywhere between 1058 and 1402, and thus, may be seen as too old to be considered as a source for the historicity of john Maroun.[55]

Harald Suermann, in his book entitled *Histoire des origins de l'Eglise Maronite* (The History of the Origins of the Maronite Church), does not go so far as to say that there is no such person as John Maroun, but simply makes a catalogue of all the historians who have written on this man, concluding that the sources are not reliable enough to make a conclusive statement as to his existence. He makes several points as to why Dionysius Tel-Mahre does not mention the name of the Maronite Patriarch in his account of 745, and as to the lack of historical foundation in many of the historians whose work is not objective but rather apologetic and nationalistic. In the end, Suermann simply clarifies the main problem that John Maroun is problematic, and nothing conclusive can be said.[56]

b. Analysis of *Kitab Al Huda* and John Maroun

In reference to *Kitab al-Huda*, Cubbe states that it was written anywhere between 1058 and 1402, signifying the year in which a copy of this book was written. What we can say is that, should this book form the Constitution of the Maronite Church, its first publication cannot be after the first formal recognition from Rome of the Maronite Church and Patriarchate, because the book maintains and promotes the Monothelite heresy. This heresy, being in contradiction with the Catholic Church, would have therefore qualified the Maronite Church as heretical and disconnected from the Catholic Church and Rome. So we can say that this book would have been composed before the first formal recognition by Rome of the Maronite Church.

The Bull of Innocent III, *Quia Divinae Sapientiae,* written in 1215, at the time of Patriarch Jeremiah al-Amshiti, states the following: "By our apostolic authority, we grant to you and your successors the use of the pallium according to your approved customs, which you and your predecessors in the Antiochene Church have been known to have". This, addressed to the Maronite Patriarch al-Amshiti, is the first known source of Rome's approval of the Maronite Church. We can then conclude that *Kitab al Huda* was written prior to 1215.

When we analyse the text further, it notes that Jeremiah's predecessors were known to have the pallium which signifies Rome's approval. Jeremiah was elected as Patriarch in 1199. So Kitab al-huda would have to have been written before this date. Moreover, the term, 'predecessors' denotes that more than one predecessor was recognised before Jeremiah. Prior

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[54] Ibid, pg. 119.

[55] Cubbe, M.G., *Quelques réflexions à propos de l'histoire ancienne de l'Eglise Maronite*, printed in Parole de l'Orient, Vol. 26, 2001, pgs. 43-60

[56] Suermann, Harald, *Histoire des origins de l'Eglise Maronite,* PUSEK, Kaslik, 2010, pgs. 312-325

to Jeremiah was Patriarch Peter IV who reigned from 1189 to 1199, and prior to him was Peter III whose reign began in 1173.

Therefore, what we can say is that Kitab al-huda was written prior to 1173 based on the analysis of the contents of the book and the papal bull. The term predecessors here is being taken in the plural, and so it means that there is an indefinite number of predecessors referred to here. As a conclusion of the dating of Kitab al-Huda, we can safely say that it is anywhere between 1058 and 1173.

Kitab al-Huda has very little to say concerning John Maroun. It simply states the following: "The Maronite (Church) is attributed to Maroun John, Patriarch of the Great Antioch".[57] Why the text reverses the name is not known. Suermann sees this as a tradition conflicting with Gibrael Ibn al-Qilai. However, the text does not make any more mention of John Maroun. Its aim is not a historical defence of his existence nor of his legitimacy as Patriarch. It simply states his name and title and his person as a point of reference. To state this sentence in all simplicity without defence reveals that the writer does not invent a new fact, nor does he have any other motives. He simply states what seems to be known and accepted. Furthermore, since he is not inventing such a fact, the writer speaks of a tradition that precedes him. And should we speak of 1173 or the claimed 1058, then we speak of 350-450 years after the instalment of John Maroun as Patriarch. This is sufficient to make up accepted tradition. We may note too that there may be have been a wealth of resources that would have been used as references for the writing of this constitution, sources which have since been lost. It is based on this that the statement of Kitab al-huda cannot be refuted because it speaks of an accepted tradition, and cannot be a fact invented by the writer.

c. John Maroun: Maker of History

Amid all the problems indicated above, we can say that there are many events recalled by Maronite historians which today's modern criticism does not necessarily agree with, such as those presented by Gibrael Ibn al-Qilai and Estephan Doueihi. However, the analysis made above does not negate anything of the historical presence of John Maroun, and that as Patriarch.

In his Lenten address on the feast day of John Maroun, Father Michel Hayek stated the following in a stirring address concerning the existence of John Maroun:

> "We may speak of a foundation stone in every building. Some may say that the foundation stone is a granite stone. Others may say it is plaster. Others still may say that it is rubble, or gemstone. But no one can see the foundation stone and none can exhume it. What is for sure is that there is a stone in the foundation, even though we cannot know its shape and design, nor can we know its colour and weight. What is also for sure is that this stone (i.e. the foundation of the Maronite Church, the first patriarch) is solid and substantial. Were it not firm it would not have been able to carry the weight of the seventy-five building blocks built upon it, these blocks which represent the number of Maronite Patriarchs who have succeeded each other without interruption".[58]

[57] منشورات دار لحد خاطر، **كتاب الهدى: دستور الطائفة المارونية في الأجيال الوسطى**، تحقيق الاباتي بطرس فهد، بيروت 1985، ص 94

[58] الأب ميشال حايك، **المارونية: عقدة أم قضية؟** إعداد جاد القصيفي، مركز فينيكس للدراسات اللبنانية، جامعة الروح القدس، كسليك، 2012، ص 24

What Hayek states is that there is a beginning to the Patriarchate, a foundation, and a strong one. We cannot know for absolute certainty the minute details, but we know that there was a first Patriarch in order for there to be a Patriarch now. Traditionally, he has been called John Maroun. Whether he had a different name and a different life to the one recounted is of no big concern. We know that he was there.

Furthermore, history is not a science which states whether certain persons existed or not, this is because a lack of historical proof does not prove a lack of existence. It cannot be said today that John Maroun did not exist simply because, in order to make this claim, there must be enough proof. But because there is a tradition, it cannot be disproven absolutely.

We can also say for sure that it is not history that makes people, but rather, it is people that make history. John Maroun's history does not need to be proven necessarily by historical documents. These would indeed be of inestimable value, and yet, it depends on the way one measures the situation. History cannot be the final say if there is not enough evidence. But what is evident enough is the opinion of Hayek, and it is that the man we call John Maroun was the first patriarch and thus the first link in a Maronite Church and history that cannot be denied.

Maronites and Monothelite Heresy

Beth-Marun's Chalcedonianism though did not mean that that was the end of Orthodoxy, nor of Christological crisis. Somehow, an agreement had to be made between the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians. Disagreement over theology and philosophy did not have to lead to war, and yet it did. The only solution was that pertaining to theology and philosophy. And this once more would spark great war and struggle. Beth-Marun and the Maronites would once more be in the fold, and this time, they would not necessarily be heralded as the keepers and defenders of orthodoxy.

The continuous and unrelenting orthodoxy of the Maronites is questionable by many, especially when concerning Monothelitism, i.e., the heresy whereby Christ possessed one will rather than two. The teaching of Monothelitism was suggested as a point of agreement between the Monophysite and Chalcedonian parties. It was a solution which would affirm the doctrine of the two natures and one person whilst justifying in an indirect manner the united existence of Divinity and Humanity in Jesus Christ.

Of course, when one looks at the evidence, one cannot deny that the Maronites did in fact fall into the error of the Monothelites. Such evidence is suggested by several sources, including Dionysius Tel-Mahre, Eutychius, and even Kitab al-huda.

The first evidence given is from the *Annals* of Eutychius. He recounts the following:

"At the time of Maurice, Emperor of the Romans (582-602), there was a monk named Maroun, who affirmed in Our Lord Jesus Christ two natures but one will, one operation, and one person, and who corrupted the faith of men…The followers of this doctrine were called Maronites, from the name Maroun. At the death of Maroun, the inhabitants of Hama built a monastery at Hama, called it Dayr Maroun and professed the faith of Maroun".[59]

This is not time to analyse the text which seems to have many different errors. The main idea is that this text, speaking of an event as late as 602 to coincide with the reign of

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[59] See Dib pg. 231 no. 55

Maurice, is too early for Monothelitism which sprang in 616 at the time of Heraclius. So this text cannot really serve as true evidence.

Dionysius Tel-Mahre in his history gives more evidence as to the monothelitism of the Maronites. Dythelitism, the proper teaching taught by the Church as formed by Maximus the Confessor, was introduced into Syria via Byzantine prisoners of the Arabs in 727. This led to heated discussions that included the monks of Beth-Maroun:

> "The monks of Beth Maroun (Maronites) and the Bishop of this monastery, and some others, did not accept the opinion (of the two wills), but the majority of the people and their bishops did…In the discussions, the Chalcedonians of the party of Beth-Maroun insulted the Maximites (followers of the doctrine of maximus the Confessor): 'You are Nestorians, the companions of the pagans and the Jews. You do not say that Christ is God, that he was born of the Virgin, that he suffered and was crucified in the flesh, but that He is an ordinary man, an individual person, abandoned by God, who feared and dreaded His death and cried: 'My father! If it be possible, would that the chalice pass from me, nevertheless your will and not mine be done', as if one and another were the wills of the father and the Son; that is, there would therefore be in Christ two wills separated and opposed, or even enemies, and battle one against the other'".[60]

This text shows that the Maronites misunderstood dythelitism, and simply saw two wills as wills in opposition, as enemies. To claim that such Maximites were Nestorians was to say that the Maronites held fast to their Chalcedonian faith, not knowing that a sixth ecumenical council had taken place to condemn monothelitism. Dionysius himself states this fact.[61] The Sixth Council was a purely Roman-Constantinople one, and "it was natural, under these circumstances, that the Antiochians should neither be informed of what was taking place within the Sixth Council, nor of its resolutions until long afterwards".[62] In short, they rejected dythelitism without understanding what it meant, seeing it rather as neo-Nestorianism. They rejected it as a way to preserve their Chalcedonianism and as holding fast to the faith of the church, not knowing that the Church had held its sixth ecumenical council in 681 and denounced monothelitism.

The final text comes from *Kitab al-huda* which states the following concerning the faith of the Maronite Church:

> "One should speak of the Incarnation of the Son…We believe that He is one of the three glorious persons, the Son, the Word born of the Father…He descended from heaven…He became incarnate, by the Holy Spirit, of the pure Virgin Mary… He took from her a body… this body is animated by an intellectual soul, with a mind and endowed with knowledge. He resembled us in all things except sin…He has one person and two intellectual natures; He is God and man…**We do not believe however that He is two, two Christs two persons, two wills and two energies.** Far from it! There is one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word who became incarnate for us; one eternal person, without beginning, a man from Adam, having an animated body. He is perfect God and perfect man. The Melkites and the Maronites are divided on the question of the will (in Christ). The Melkites profess two wills, the Maronites one; and each party brings forth arguments to support its thesis…the Maronites say (to the Melkites): These two wills that you profess in Christ ought to be either conformed or opposed to each other. If they are conformed to each other one ends up with one will; but if they are

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[60] Dib, pg. 20
[61] *History of the Great Michael the Syrian*, op. cit., p.348.
[62] Khalife, Elias, *The Birth of the Maronite Church in the 5th to 8th Centuries,* pg. 8

opposed to each other, it follows that the divine nature wills what the human nature does not will, and the human nature wills what the divine nature does not will. If this is so, there would be division and opposition, resulting in two (persons in Christ); and therefore the (hypostatic) union would not exist anymore, the Trinity would become a quaternity and one would find himself reduced to the point of view of Nestorius and his opinions on Christ. The Maronites cited for the support of certain words of Christ, contained in the holy gospels-His words to the lepers: 'I will it'; when they came to Him saying, 'If you will, you are able to heal me' (Mt 8:2-3)…another statement: 'No one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son has *willed* to reveal him' (Mt 21:27)…these words show that there is only one will in relation to the matters indicated".[63]

Once more, we see in this text much similarity to the previous one, but here there is greater detail. We understand moreover, other than that the Maronites decided to hold fast to Chalcedonianism, that here they see that two wills means opposing wills, which is not what dythelitism maintains. Rather than reading two wills from a philosophical and theological perspective, the Maronites regarded it from a moral and psychological one. Two wills means opposition. Two wills means something akin to schizophrenia or a double-personality. But the Maronites were open to the idea of the two wills being in conformity to each other, in that they become one will. The humanity of Jesus is not necessarily removed altogether. But what it does reveal is that the Maronites referred the will to the person, not to the nature. For them, it is a person who wills, not a nature. Furthermore, in the very next paragraph, we read the following: "**This is the faith the faith of the Catholic and Apostolic Church and the essential belief of all its faithful children in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God**".[64] For the Maronites, this is the faith of the Church. Their adherence to monothelitism is an adherence to the Church. This was their intention. Their belief was incorrect, but their intention and their insistence on being with the Church is on the mark.

Furthermore, Dib states that the Sixth Council's condemnation of monothelitism was not the monothelitism of the Maronites.[65] The Maronite's monothelitism as stated above was moral, not theological.

The question then remains: when exactly did the Maronites renounce their monothelite stance? We know that when the Frankish Crusaders entered Lebanon in 1099, the Maronites welcomed them with open arms, convinced that they shared with them the same faith. The account of William of Tyre who states that they converted in 1180 is very unlikely because they received the Franks in 1099 and because of the Papal bull written at the time of Jeriah al-Amshiti which admits Roman approval of the Maronites prior to Jeremiah al-Amshiti. This research set forth the strict date of 1173, a date which is prior to 1180, thus ruling out William of Tyre's claim of 1180. The circumstances in which the Maronites revised their faith is unknown, and yet, it cannot be said that the Maronites were unrelenting in their monothelite stance.

What can be said in summary is that the Maronites were not formal monothelites, i.e. monothelites in spite of Church teaching. But rather, they were tied to the faith of the Church above all else. If even Pope Honorius (625-638) accepted the monothelite heresy, then it shows that the entire church was once monothelite, both East and West.

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[63] **كتاب الهدى**، ص 102-103
[64] المرجع نفسه، ص 104
[65] Dib, pg. 23

Conclusion

This research may be considered quite long for those who seek quick answers to the subject of the origins of the Maronites. In reality, there are no quick and easy answers, nor should one expect such answers. As for the historian, this research may be considered a summary of all that can be written, as the topic carries within itself much more than what has been presented. This research aims to appeal to both the everyday reader and the historian. Its aim is to provide an objective view of the situations of the origins of a Maronites, a people whose origins are monastic going back to Maroun, a faith that is orthodox because of its adherence to Chalcedon as taught and inspired by Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and a church of Antioch, whose first patriarch was John Maroun. This three-fold vision of the Maronite Church makes it unique amongst all the churches of the east which are united to Rome. The three figure-heads mentioned symbolize further the spirituality, theology and ecclesiology of a Church that faced much persecution and struggle for existence. And yet, due to the strength of its roots, the Maronite Church has flourished and grown faithful and strong, in spite of such struggle, like a Cedar of Lebanon.

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