

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
104 (3), pp. 62-76, 2025

Theological Debates and Theft of Holy Relics: The Participation of the Church of Persia's Delegation in the Aleppo Conference of 630¹

David Gabriel CARPEN

David Gabriel CARPEN

Institute for Advanced Studies in Levant Culture and Civilization, Bucharest, Romania
Email: davidgabrielcarpen@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The present study analyzes the participation of the Persian Church's delegation in the Aleppo peace conference of 630, an essential episode for understanding the Byzantine-Persian relations in the 7th century. The analysis of the primary sources highlights the ambivalent character of the meeting: obtaining diplomatic benefits for Queen Boran and establishing peace with the Byzantine Empire, but also deepening the Christological divergences between the two Churches. This study emphasizes the double impact of the event – politically favorable, but theologically problematic – and the consequences for subsequent developments within the Syro-Oriental Church.

Keywords

delegation, negotiations, Persia, Byzantium, Christology

¹ Delivered at the Byzantine Studies Symposium "Diplomacy in Byzantium from the Fourth/Fifth to the Twelfth Century", Bucharest, 15.11.2025.

I. Historical and theological context

While numerous studies have been written on the history of the Christological controversies developed in the Byzantine Empire since the 5th century, both about the theological debates between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians² and about the split of the latter into an ecclesiastical structure separate from the Chalcedonian one patronized by the emperor³, the same cannot be said about the subject of the relationship between the Church of Persia (Syro-Oriental)⁴, on the one hand, and the Byzantine State and Church, on the other.

In recent decades, a series of monographs have been written on the emergence and institutional development of the Church situated in the Persian Kingdom⁵, but the subject regarding the relationship between this Church and the secular and ecclesiastical authority in the Byzantine Empire has been approached so far, as a separate study, in just a single work⁶, most often being only mentioned in the broad context of the history of the Syro-Oriental Church. The official head of this Church was the patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, according to Canon XII adopted at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410, a council that had the role of laying the institutional and theological foundations for the Church in the Persian Kingdom. The title of the canon in question is “The Honor

² Some notable examples: Patrick T. GRAY, *The defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-553)*, Brill, Leiden, 1979; Aloys GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 2, Part 1: The Development of the Discussion about Chalcedon*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville-Kentucky, 1987; Eugene Michael LUDWIG, *Neo-Chalcedonianism and the Council of 553* (Ph.D. Dissertation), University Microfilms International, Michigan, 1983.

³ Volker Lorenz MENZE, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008; Baby VARGHESE, *The Council of Chalcedon and the Syriac Orthodox Church. Efforts Of Reconciliation 451–631*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2025.

⁴ We will use the two names interchangeably throughout this study.

⁵ The most representative ones: Raymond le Coz, *L’Eglise d’Orient: chrétiens d’Irak, d’Iran et de Turquie*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1995; William A. WIGRAM, *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway – NJ, 2004.

⁶ Louis SAKO, *Le rôle de la hiérarchie syriaque orientale dans les rapports diplomatiques entre la Perse et Byzance aux V-VIIe siècles*, Selbstverl, Paris, 1986.

mained within the borders of the Byzantine Empire, the sovereigns of Constantinople making considerable efforts between 451 and 640 to bring them back under obedience to the imperial Chalcedonian Church¹², the Syro-Oriental “Nestorians” continued their isolated existence within the Persian Kingdom, developing an ecclesiastical structure that was completely outside the authority of the Byzantine emperors.

Fortunately, the ecclesiastical ties between the Byzantine and Persian spaces were not completely severed, but there were contacts between the two Churches throughout the 6th century, especially during the military confrontations between the two superpowers in the time of Emperor Justinian¹³, and at the end of the 6th century, during the diplomatic contacts that the Persian kings Hormizd IV and Khosrow II had with Emperor Maurice¹⁴. Queen Shirin, the favorite wife of Khosrow II and a Christian of the Syro-Oriental confession, and Patriarch Ishoyahb I of Seleucia-Ctesiphon were two very important figures in the political-religious landscape of the time, when the Christians of Persia and their Church represented a very important element in the negotiations between the Byzantine and Persian sovereigns¹⁵.

The first three decades of the 7th century were marked by the Byzantine-Persian War launched by King Khosrow II after the assassination of his benefactor, Emperor Maurice, by the usurper Phokas, in 602. In just a few years, the Persians managed to conquer the entire Byzantine East (the

¹² Standard monograph: John MEYENDORFF, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions. The Church AD 450-680*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1989 (especially pp. 165-361). Along with the recent work of Baby VARGHESE (note 2) strictly for the Syrian space.

¹³ Antoine GUILLAUMONT, “Justinien et L’eglise de Perse”, in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 23/24 (1969/1970), pp. 39-66.

¹⁴ *Chronique de Seert*, II.42., in *Patrologia Orientalis* 13, Adam Scher (ed.), Firmin-Didot, Paris, 1907, pp. 438-442. The chronicle is written in Arabic. For the present study we have used its French translation.

¹⁵ See details in: Wilhelm BAUM, *Shirin. Christian-Queen-Myth of Love. A Woman of Late Antiquity: Historical Reality and Literary Effect*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway – NJ, 2004, pp. 19-37; William G. YOUNG, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph. A Study of the relations of the Church of the East with the Sassanid Empire and the early Caliphates up to 820 AD.*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1972, pp. 1-124; Richard PAYNE, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2015, pp. 164-198.

Syro-Palestinian area, Egypt and a good part of Anatolia), and Emperor Phokas, as a result of the disastrous situation the empire had reached, was dethroned by Heraclius in 610, who would fight another two decades of battles with the Persian armies, until the final victory achieved in 628¹⁶.

After Byzantium's secular enemy had been definitively defeated and was now in a state of anarchy, following the assassination of King Khosrow II and the instability of the succession to the throne that followed, Emperor Heraclius turned his attention to the pacification of the newly reconquered Oriental regions. As we've mentioned at the beginning, these regions were marked by strong religious opposition to the Chalcedonian Christological doctrine promoted by the imperial Church and, at the end of the Byzantine-Persian war, parallel non-Chalcedonian ecclesiastical structures had already existed for several decades in these provinces, namely the anti-Chalcedonian Churches of Egypt and Syria, led by anti-Chalcedonian hierarchs who were in opposition to the imperial-Chalcedonian ones supported by the state. If the subject of Emperor Heraclius' religious policy, developed with the aim of putting an end to this schism regarding the Council of Chalcedon, has been approached so far in the form of monographs or articles¹⁷, the present study aims to expose and analyze another significant event of that period, namely the conference organized by the Byzantine sovereign in Aleppo, in the year 630.

The internal situation of the Persian Empire was completely destabilized after the defeat suffered against the Byzantines. After the assassination of Khosrow II by his son, Kavad II, a series of four Persian sovereigns followed within just two years: Kavad, who died of an epidemic in the same year he usurped the throne (628), then Ardashir III, his son, who was deposed and killed by the general Shahrbaraz in 630, who was

¹⁶ Primary sources that provide more detailed information about the events that took place: TEOFILACT SIMOCATA, *Historiae*, Charles de BOER (ed.), Leipzig, 1887; *Chronicon Pascale*, PG 92, 70-1028; GEORGE OF PISIDIA, *De Heraclii Expeditione Persica*, PG 92, 1198-1262. Monograph on the subject: Walter E. KAEGI, *Heraclius. Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 58-191.

¹⁷ Cyril HOVORUN, *Will, Action and Freedom. Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2008 (see especially pp. 53-102); J. D. C. FRENDO, "Religion and politics in Byzantium on the eve of the Arab conquests", in: *Florilegium*, 10 (1988-1991), pp. 1-23.

later assassinated himself, only 40 days after ascending the throne of the Persian Empire. After the assassination of the general, the helm of the declining Persian state was taken over by Queen Boran, one of Khosrow II's daughters¹⁸.

II. The Persian delegation's journey to Byzantium

In these unstable political and dynastical circumstances, Queen Boran decided that the best solution was to seek external support to secure her ascension to the throne, so she decided to send a delegation of bishops of the Persian Church to meet with Emperor Heraclius and negotiate a peace treaty that would ensure the queen's external stability in the relations with the secular enemy of the Persian kings. The Chronicle of Seert tells us that Queen Boran, by sending this delegation, was inspired by "the custom of the previous kings", namely Yazdegard, Balas and Khosrow I, who sent the patriarchs Yahbalaha and Acacius of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and the metropolitan Paul of Nisibis to Constantinople, to initiate diplomatic relations with the emperors Theodosius II, Zeno and Justinian¹⁹.

The leader of the delegation sent by the queen was Patriarch Ishoyahb II of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, a graduate of the renowned School of Nisibis²⁰ at the end of the 6th century, and who, although "he had married in his youth (ܐܝܬܗ ܕܘܨܝܗܘܬܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ)", was not prevented by this aspect from being ordained first as bishop of Balad and then, in 628, as patriarch of the Persian Church, being a man "beautified with all virtues (ܐܝܬܗ ܕܘܨܝܗܘܬܐ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ)"²¹. Information about this

¹⁸ Michael Jackson BONNER, *The Last Empire of Iran*, Gorgias Press, Piscataway – NJ, 2020, pp. 313-317.

¹⁹ *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., p. 557.

²⁰ See the main monographs: Arthur VOOBUS, *The History of the School of Nisibis*, Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, Louvain, 1965; Adam BECKER, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2006; and the articles: Jean Baptiste CHABOT, "L'école de Nisibe, son histoire, ses statuts", in: *Journal Asiatique*, VIII (1896), pp. 43-93; Jean Baptiste CHABOT, "Narsai le docteur et les origines de l'école de Nisibe", in: *Journal Asiatique*, VI (1905), pp. 157-177.

²¹ *Chronicon Anonimum*, 22, in CSCO 1, Ignatius Guidi (ed.), Otto Harrassowitz, Leipzig, 1903, p. 29.

mission entrusted to the delegation of Persian bishops is also found in Thomas of Marga's work, *Liber Superiorum* (Book of the Elders), but Thomas erroneously states that Sheroe-~~o~~ (Kavad II) was king at that time in Persia²², unlike the *Chronicle of Seert*²³ and *Chronicon Anonimum* (*Chronicle of Khuzistan*)²⁴ which both state that Queen Boran was on the Persian throne.

All three sources inform us that Patriarch Ishoyahb chose several hierarchs from whom he composed the delegation that was to appear before Emperor Heraclius, but only *Liber Superiorum* and *Chronicon Anonimum* provide us with the names of the most prominent delegates. The *Liber Superiorum*²⁵ records the metropolitans Cyriacus of Nisibis, Paul of Adiabene and Gabriel of Karkha d-Beth Seluk, along with the bishops Ishoyahb of Nineveh (the future Patriarch Ishoyahb III) and Sahdona of Mahoze d-Arewan, and *Chronicon Anonimum* lists only three metropolitans, Cyriacus of Nisibis, Gabriel of Karkha d-Beth Seluk and Marutha of Gustra²⁶. The *Chronicle of Seert* only states that Patriarch Ishoyahb was accompanied "by metropolitans and bishops". If we do not have significant biographical data regarding the four metropolitans (Cyriacus, Paul, Gabriel and Marutha), the two bishops mentioned by *Liber Superiorum* (Ishoyahb of Nineveh²⁷ and Sahdona²⁸) were two of the most prominent and enlightened theological minds of the Persian Church, both, along with the patriarch, being graduates from the School of Nisibis. This aspect brings to our attention the fact that the head of the Syro-Oriental (Persian) Church expected that not only issues of secular diplomacy, but also of theology would be addressed during the meeting with Emperor

²² THOMAS OF MARGA, *Liber Superiorum*, II.4., E. A. Wallis-Budge (ed.), Trubner&Co., London, 1893, p. 69.

²³ *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., p. 557.

²⁴ *Chronicon Anonimum*, 25, p. 30.

²⁵ THOMAS OF MARGA, *Liber Superiorum*, II.4., p. 70.

²⁶ *Chronicon Anonimum*, 25, p. 30.

²⁷ See his biography analyzed in: Jean Maurice FIEY, "Iso'yaw le Grand. Vie du catholicos nestorien Iso'yaw III d'Adiabene (580-659)", in: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 35 (1969), pp. 305-333, 36 (1970), pp. 5-46.

²⁸ See the biography in: Andre DE HALLEUX, "Martyrios-Sahdona. La vie mouvementée d'un 'hérétique' de l'Eglise nestorienne", in: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 24 (1958), pp. 93-128.

Heraclius, therefore he wished to be accompanied by hierarchs as well prepared as possible for this task.

Since *Chronicon Anonimum* deals extremely briefly with the events that followed, limiting itself only to stating that the hierarchs “were received with great joy by the emperor Heraclius (ܠܗܪܐܩܠܝܘܣ ܩܝܫܪܝܢ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܩܝܫܪܝܢ ܕܩܝܫܪܝܢ), who granted them (lit. “did”) everything they desired (ܘܥܫܝܘܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܫܝܘܢ ܕܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ)”, we are therefore left only with *Liber Superiorum* and the *Chronicle of Seert* as sources of information regarding the interesting event that took place in the year 630. Thomas of Marga inserts in his *Liber Superiorum* a fragment of the letter (ܡܫܝܘܢ ܕܩܝܫܪܝܢ) written by the Persian king (in fact, by the queen – Thomas makes a confusion) with which the delegation of hierarchs was sent to the Byzantine territory: “Let all enmity and hostility (ܠܗܘܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ) that existed between the Persians and the Romans pass and perish (ܘܥܫܝܘܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܫܝܘܢ ܕܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ) and, through their wisdom (ܘܥܫܝܘܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܫܝܘܢ ܕܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ), [the delegates] to sow peace (ܘܥܫܝܘܢ) in the two countries”²⁹ is what King Khavad (Queen Boran) would have written, according to Thomas of Marga, in the letter handed to Patriarch Ishoyahb II, the leader of the Persian delegation.

The same literary source composed by Thomas of Marga informs us, in a very expressive rhetorical style, that Christ, “the ruler and guardian of the two countries (Persia and Byzantium) and of the whole world (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܩܝܫܪܝܢ ܕܩܝܫܪܝܢ ܕܩܝܫܪܝܢ)”, made the Greeks to be merciful towards the delegation of Persian bishops and to receive them and their request, “as if they were angels of God (ܠܗܘܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܗܘܢ)”,³¹ Unfortunately, however, Thomas does not give us any concrete information about how the meeting between Emperor Heraclius and the hierarchs of Persia took place, but he tells us two other important events during the stay of the delegates in the Byzantine territory, but after the peace conference had already ended. We will return to them in the following pages of this study.

The *Chronicle of Seert* is, therefore, the only source that provides us with information about the content of the discussions between Heraclius

²⁹ *Chronicon Anonimum*, 25, p. 30.
³⁰ THOMAS OF MARGA, *Liber Superiorum*, II.4., p. 70.
³¹ THOMAS OF MARGA, *Liber Superiorum*, II.4., p. 70.

and the Persian bishops. After informing us that the meeting took place in Aleppo, that Patriarch Ishoyahb handed Heraclius the letter from Queen Boran and that the emperor was surprised to find out that a woman was sitting on the Persian throne³², the Chronicle of Seert also tells us about the theological development of the peace conference.

When asked by Emperor Heraclius what his faith was, Patriarch Ishoyahb gave an intriguing answer, stating that he professes the same faith as “the 318”, i.e. the Fathers of Nicaea who composed the Nicene Creed³³, and then offering the emperor “the confession of faith of Saint Mar³⁴ Nestorius”³⁵ inscribed on a paper. Surprisingly, the Chronicle of Seert states that Emperor Heraclius was delighted with Ishoyahb’s answer and even asked the patriarch to serve the Holy Liturgy in his presence, which the patriarch did. Then, in an equally vague manner, the Chronicle of Seert mentions that the emperor presented Ishoyahb with “the Book of Mar Paul” and that the patriarch clarified all the concerns that Heraclius had about that writing³⁶. It is very possible that, by “the Book of Mar Paul”, the Chronicle refers to the writing of Metropolitan Paul of Nisibis, who, like the Patriarch Ishoyahb himself, was also the leader of a delegation of Persian bishops who traveled to Constantinople during the time of Emperor Justinian³⁷, Metropolitan Paul composing *The Disputation with Caesar*, a writing in which he expounds and defends the Syro-Oriental Christological doctrine³⁸.

³² *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., p. 557.

³³ See note 8.

³⁴ Address form for hierarchs used in the Syriac Christian environment.

³⁵ Because of the vagueness of the wording, we do not know exactly what the author of the *Chronicle of Seert* is referring to, since Nestorius made numerous “confessions of faith” in different circumstances. For example, his second letter to Cyril of Alexandria: NESTORIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *Epist. ad Cyrillum*, PG 77, 49-57, or his autobiographical apology written during his exile, after he was condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council of 431: NESTORIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *Le livre d’Héraclide de Damas*, Paul Bedjan (ed.), Gorgias Press, Piscataway – NJ, 2007 (see Bedjan’s analysis in the preface to the work, pp. xi-xxxiii).

³⁶ *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., p. 558.

³⁷ The exact date is unknown to us: L. SAKO, *Le Role de la hierarchie syriaque orientale...*, pp. 93, 94.

³⁸ A single fragment has been preserved, edited and translated in: A. GUILLAUMONT, “Justinien et L’église de Perse”, pp. 62-66.

The next paragraph of the narrative provides significant details, unlike the previous one, and we learn from it that Heraclius asked Ishoyahb to serve the Holy Liturgy again³⁹, so that “the emperor, together with all the patriarchs, bishops, his courtiers and all those present, would receive the Eucharist from the hands of Patriarch Ishoyahb”. To this proposal of liturgical co-serving, which would leave us with the impression that there was no discrepancy between the Church of Byzantium and that of Persia, Patriarch Ishoyahb responded with one condition: in order to agree to do this (to co-serve), Ishoyahb requested that, at the time of mentioning the hierarchs’ names from the diptychs⁴⁰, the name of Archbishop Cyril of Alexandria not to be spoken. The Chronicle of Seert informs us that Emperor Heraclius accepted this condition and, as a consequence, Patriarch Ishoyahb fulfilled the sovereign’s wish, namely to serve the Liturgy in common with other Byzantine hierarchs⁴¹.

We cannot continue our analysis without dwelling on this surprising, even shocking, detail in the chronicle’s account. The fact that the hierarchs of Persia (especially the Patriarch Ishoyahb, educated at the Theological School of Nisibis) felt a particular aversion towards Cyril of Alexandria is not surprising. The Egyptian hierarch was seen as the main antagonist in the Christological controversy of the 5th century, as a result of which Nestorius, one of the most respected hierarchs and theologians of the Persian Church, was condemned as a heretic, deposed and exiled⁴². The “Nestorian” antipathies towards Cyril are very explicitly displayed in the letter attributed to Theodoret of Cyrus, another renowned 5th century “Nestorian” hierarch and theologian. In this letter, written by Theodoret (as it is assumed) shortly after Cyril’s death, the author clearly does not shy away from expressing his joy at the death of the archbishop of Alexandria⁴³.

³⁹ Obviously, on a different day than the one previously served, because the canons prohibit a cleric, even a patriarch, from serving the Liturgy more than once a day.

⁴⁰ Plaques on which the names of deceased and living hierarchs were inscribed, to be commemorated during the Holy Liturgy. For more information, see: Robert TAFT, *A History of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Volume 4: The Diptychs*, Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Rome, 1991.

⁴¹ *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., pp. 558, 559.

⁴² A detailed analysis in: John Anthony MCGUCKIN, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy, its History, Theology and Texts*, Brill, Leiden/New York/Koln, 1994, pp. 20-106.

⁴³ THEODORET OF CYRUS, *Epist. CLXXX ad Domnum episcopum Antiochiae*, PG 83, 1489.

If, therefore, the refusal of Patriarch Ishoyahb to mention Cyril's name during the service of the Liturgy does not surprise us at all, the same cannot be said about the agreement of Emperor Heraclius to this condition set by the patriarch. Already at that time, the consideration towards Cyril of Alexandria among the Eastern and Western Christianity was at the highest level, bordering on veneration⁴⁴, and the acceptance without any reservation of his non-mention at the Liturgy served by Patriarch Ishoyahb seems to us an extremely difficult detail to believe. The service of a Liturgy during which Cyril's name would not be mentioned was one of the most serious affronts that the Byzantine hierarchs could have endured, an equivalent of it for the Western Christianity being, for example, the refusal to mention the name of Pope Leo the Great during a Liturgy celebrated in the Church of Rome. Why would Emperor Heraclius have been willing to make such a compromise, at the risk of alienating a good part of his Byzantine hierarchs, given that the liturgical co-service was not an imperatively necessary element in the peace negotiations conducted at the political level between the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Kingdom?

The following accounts in the *Chronicle of Seert* raise even more questions about this issue. The *Chronicle* reports that Patriarch Ishoyahb drafted a confession of faith which he handed to Heraclius and, after going through it, the emperor reproached the patriarch with the following question: "Why do you deviate from the clearest way of affirming something and, instead of saying «Mary gave birth to God», you say «Mary gave birth to Christ, who is God and man»?" According to the narrative, Ishoyahb's response that, by this expression, he is only affirming the presence of the human element in the person of Christ satisfied Emperor Heraclius and the Byzantine sovereign concluded the peace conference with the Persian delegation on a positive note. Heraclius offered the hierarchs gifts and provisions for the return journey, promising to assist Queen Boran with military forces whenever the Persian sovereign would need them⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ See: Norman RUSSELL, "Apostolic Man and Luminary of the Church: The Enduring Influence of Cyril of Alexandria", in: Thomas WEINANDY, Daniel KEATING (eds.), *The Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, T.&T. Clark Ltd., London/New York, 2003, pp. 237-257.

⁴⁵ *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., pp. 558, 559.

After reviewing the above details, a question that naturally arises would be the following: If the recognition of the Virgin Mary as “Mother of God” was something that concerned Emperor Heraclius so deeply (so much so that he drew Ishoyahb’s attention to this aspect), why did the Byzantine sovereign give up so easily the liturgical mentioning of Cyril of Alexandria, the hierarch and theologian who fought the hardest for the appellation “Mother of God” to gain unanimous acceptance within the Church⁴⁶?

As previously stated, the other source that provides us with important information regarding the presence of the Persian delegation in Byzantium is the *Liber Superiorum* of Thomas of Marga. Although it does not report anything about the dialogue between the delegates and Emperor Heraclius, Thomas’ work presents in detail two significant events that took place after the hierarchs left Aleppo, the place of their meeting with the Byzantine delegation. These events didn’t have Patriarch Ishoyahb in the foreground, but two other members of the Persian delegation, mentioned at the beginning of this study, namely the bishops Ishoyahb of Nineveh (the future Patriarch Ishoyahb III) and Sahdona of Mahoze d-Arewan.

Thomas’ writing informs us that, while the Persian hierarchs “were passing through the city of Antioch (ܐܢܬܝܘܚܐ) and stopped at one of the churches of that city (ܟܢܝܫܬܐ ܕܥܢܬܝܘܚܐ)”⁴⁷, Bishop Ishoyahb of Nineveh saw in that church a golden chest inlaid with the sign of the cross. Learning that the chest contains parts of the relics of the Holy Apostles and “being inflamed with love (ܕܘܫܘܥܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ)” for it, Bishop Ishoyahb decided to steal it from that church and bring it to his homeland, and for this he prayed to God and asked Christ that, through His divine (ܕܘܫܘܥܐ) help, he would be able to carry out what he had planned. The bishop’s intention was fulfilled, Ishoyahb managing to steal the chest with the relics of the Apostles from the Antiochene church, bringing it to Persia and donating it to the Beth Abe Monastery⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ See: Eirini ARTEMI, “The Term Theotokos in the Writings of Cyril of Alexandria”, in: *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, 13:3 (2022), pp. 53-67.

⁴⁷ A sign that the delegation did not return to the Persian Kingdom immediately after the conference with the Byzantines ended.

⁴⁸ THOMAS OF MARGA, *Liber Superiorum*, II.5., pp. 70, 71.

If this event was a happy one for the delegation of Persian bishops, the same cannot be said about the one that had Sahdona, the bishop of Mahoze d-Arewan, in the foreground. Thomas of Marga reports that, after the delegation of hierarchs left Antioch and traveled to the region of Apamea, three of the bishops, namely Ishoyahb of Nineveh, John of Damascus and Sahdona, decided to visit a monastery of “heretics (ܠܗܪܝܩܝܘܬܐ)”⁴⁹ and debate with the monks there. According to Thomas, when those monks found themselves defeated by the Persian hierarchs in the theological debate, they asked their abbot to discuss with Ishoyahb, John and Sahdona, hoping that he would be able to convince the three bishops from Persia about the correctness of the Christological dogma he and his monks were professing. Ishoyahb and John, knowing that the abbot was old and very cunning, thought that “meeting him was like meeting the Devil himself (ܠܩܝܝܡܐ ܠܕܝܘܢܐ ܠܗܘܐ ܡܝܢ ܠܗܪܝܩܝܘܬܐ)”, so they refused the monks’ invitation to enter and discuss with their abbot. However, Sahdona, “trusting in his enlightened mind (ܡܗܘܝܘܬܐ)”, agreed to dialogue with the abbot and, after that meeting and discussion, his thinking was “corrupted” and he abandoned the Syro-Oriental Christological doctrine that he had professed until then⁵⁰. This change in Sahdona’s Christological perspective would have significant consequences in the following years, as the bishop of Mahoze d-Arewan would become the black sheep of the Persian Church and would engage in a conflict even with his former colleague in the delegation, Ishoyahb of Nineveh, the quarrel starting from 649, when Ishoyahb became patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon⁵¹.

Coming to the end of this study, in which we wanted to analyze the performance of the delegation composed of Persian hierarchs sent in the Byzantine Empire, we will again turn to the Chronicle of Seert, wishing to expose another consequence of the Persian visit to Byzantium and, at the same time, to provide explanations regarding a previous confusion. The chronicle informs us that, upon the delegation’s return to Persia, the other hierarchs of the Syro-Oriental Church were extremely critical

⁴⁹ We do not know whether the author is referring here to Chalcedonians or Miaphysites.

⁵⁰ THOMAS OF MARGA, *Liber Superiorum*, II.5., pp. 71-73.

⁵¹ A. DE HALLEUX, “Martyrios-Sahdona. La vie mouvementée d’un ‘hérétique’ de l’Eglise nestorienne”, pp. 95-105.

of Patriarch Ishoyahb due to the fact that he served the Holy Liturgy in communion with the Byzantine hierarchs. At the end of the chapter (from the *Chronicle of Seert*) regarding the visit of the Persian delegation to Aleppo, it is reported that not only Ishoyahb set conditions for the co-servicing of the Liturgy (that Cyril's name should not be mentioned), but the Byzantine hierarchs also had their own requests. They asked the patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to refrain from mentioning three names during the service, that of Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius of Constantinople, the three renowned teachers of the Syro-Oriental Church of Persia, who in Byzantium were considered among the most notorious heretics⁵². Ishoyahb's compliance with this requirement and his acceptance of the compromise with the Byzantine hierarchs (which explains how the co-servicing between a "Nestorian" and the Chalcedonians was possible) brought significant criticism to the patriarch upon his return to Persia⁵³.

III. Conclusions

In conclusion, the participation of the delegation of Persian hierarchs in the Aleppo peace conference of 630 was one with mixed results, both positive and negative. If we analyze the situation strictly from a geopolitical perspective, then the consequences were among the best, the delegation obtaining from Emperor Heraclius guarantees of peace and even mutual assistance, in case Queen Boran would need it. However, if we also refer to the theological side of the problem, because, ultimately, the delegates were all hierarchs of the Persian Church, we observe several negative consequences that resulted from their trip to Byzantium. First of all, on the occasion of this meeting, both camps (Byzantines and Persians) noticed that the Christological doctrinal gap between them had deepened more and more. The condemnation of Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius as heretics by the Church of Byzantium, on the one hand, and the exacerbation of the

⁵² The first two were also officially condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, in 553, after Nestorius had already been condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, in 431. See: John BEHR, *The Case Against Diodore and Theodore. Texts and Their Contexts*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2011.

⁵³ *Chronique de Seert*, II.43., p. 560.

dualistic Christology promoted by the Persian Church⁵⁴, on the other, made any possible reconciliation between the two camps doomed to failure from the start.

Although the situation presented itself in this manner, we see that Patriarch Ishoyahb did not shy away from the liturgical compromise that was proposed to him in order to co-serve with the Byzantine hierarchs, but this decision brought him more problems than benefits, considering the strong criticism he received from the other bishops upon his return to Persia. In addition to this oppositional reaction towards Patriarch Ishoyahb, the Syro-Oriental Church also faced, in the following decades, the crisis caused by Bishop Sahdona's abandonment of the Christological doctrine professed within the Persian Church, which was also a consequence of the Persian delegation's trip to Byzantium, a trip that proved as beneficial from a geo-political point of view as it was so problematic from a theological one.

⁵⁴ The best example being the writing of the Persian chief theologian BABAI THE GREAT, *The Book of Union of Babai the Great*, Mar Awa III (ed.), Michael Birnie (tr.), Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2024. For context, see the introduction by Theresia Hainthaler, pp. 1-20, and the article Bishara EBEID, "The Christology of the Church of the East. An Analysis of Christological Statements and Professions of Faith of the Official Synods of the Church of the East before AD 612", in: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 2 (2016), pp. 353-402.