



Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches (Transformation of the Classical Heritage)

Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent

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Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches analyzes the hagiographic traditions of seven missionary saints in the Syriac heritage during late antiquity: Thomas, Addai, Mari, John of Ephesus, Simeon of Beth Arsham, Jacob Baradaeus, and Ahudemme. Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent studies a body of legends about the missionaries' voyages in the Syrian Orient to illustrate their shared symbols and motifs. Revealing how these texts encapsulated the concerns of the communities that produced them, she draws attention to the role of hagiography as a malleable genre that was well-suited for the idealized presentation of the beginnings of Christian communities. Hagiographers, through their reworking of missionary themes, asserted autonomy, orthodoxy, and apostolicity for their individual civic and monastic communities, positioning themselves in relationship to the rulers of their empires and to competing forms of Christianity. Saint-Laurent argues that missionary hagiography is an important and neglected source for understanding the development of the East and West Syriac ecclesiastical bodies: the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East. Given that many of these Syriac-speaking churches remain today in the Middle East and India, with diaspora communities in Europe and North America, this work opens the door for further study of the role of saints and stories as symbolic links between ancient and modern traditions.

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