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# The Doctrine of Addai and the Letters of Jesus and Abgar

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*Jacob A. Lollar*



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## Acknowledgments

READING THE *DOCTRINE OF Addai* was my first plunge into the abundant pool of Syriac literature and culture. It has occupied my thinking ever since and is one of the stories to which I continually find myself returning. At first, I suppose it was the startling realization, as a young seminary student, that there were traditions about Jesus writing something down in his own words—and it isn't even in the Bible! Now, I find myself captivated by the brilliance of the story as a peek into culture-building and mythmaking and how this resonates so well with what has taken place throughout the Christian tradition (and beyond) and is even now taking place in real time as people continually tell stories about themselves and their past. It is my persistent fascination with this story that ultimately compelled me to approach the editors about adding it to the *Early Christian Apocrypha* series. I am thankful for their support and trust in a young scholar to tackle this wondrously complex narrative.

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Jacob A. Lollar  
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# Introduction

In chapter 2 of the New Testament book of Acts, the followers of Jesus gather at Pentecost and begin speaking in tongues. The crowd around them is amazed to hear them speaking in their own languages. A list is given of all the different nationalities and languages present: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete, and Arabia (2:9–11). At first glance, it is obvious that one of these things is not like the other: Rome is the only European city represented in this list. Indeed, if we were to take Acts 2 as our only source for this period of Christian history, we might think that the future of the movement lay in the East, expanding out from Jerusalem into North Africa and continental Asia. Despite this first impression, however, the mission of Paul quickly takes over in the Acts narrative, and Paul heads west, stopping off in Greece and Macedonia and eventually heading to Rome.<sup>1</sup>

What about those Eastern peoples at Pentecost? What about the expansion of Christianity in the East? Acts gives some information about Syria, Asia Minor, and even about Galatia and Pontus, but tells us nothing about North Africa, Arabia, Mesopotamia, or Parthia—let alone about Media, India, or further still, China. Nevertheless, Christianity did make its way into these regions and flourished.<sup>2</sup> For more than a millennium Christians in the Middle East and Asia thrived and developed distinct

1. Later traditions and apostolic narratives have Paul reaching Spain before being executed in Rome. See, e.g., Lollar, “History of Paul.”

2. An approachable study of Christianity in Asia and North Africa can be found in Jenkins, *Lost History of Christianity*. More detailed scholarly treatments of this expansion may be found in Briquel-Chatonnet and Debié, *Le monde syriaque*; and King, *Syriac World*.



forms of Christian doctrine, piety, and literature.<sup>3</sup> They prospered, at times, alongside their Sassanian and Arab neighbors, well before the Western renaissance ushered in by the coronation of Charlemagne in 800.

Prior to the fourth century, we have precious little evidence of demographics of Christians in the eastern regions and Mesopotamia.<sup>4</sup> No New Testament figure ever writes to or visits any of the Mesopotamian cities<sup>5</sup> and the reference to the Middle Eastern and Mesopotamian locales in Acts 2 amount to almost nothing in the course of the narrative. The Christians in the East, in short, saw nothing of themselves and their heritage in this text. But this did not deter them. They began to make their own stories, placing themselves and their local histories within sacred history. By late antiquity, Christians in Asia and Mesopotamia began linking their communities and their heritage to various figures. Some wrote stories about the Magi who visit the infant Jesus (Matt 2);<sup>6</sup> others traced their lineage back to other apostles who play little or no role in the Acts narrative, such as Judas Thomas,<sup>7</sup> Thaddaeus,<sup>8</sup> and Philip.<sup>9</sup> One of the most famous of the apostles who worked in these eastern regions was known in Syriac as Addai.

3. See, e.g., Tannous, *Making of the Medieval Middle East*.

4. On this problem see the recent essay by Taylor, "Coming of Christianity."

5. One exception is 1 Peter, which is written to exiles in "Babylon"; however, this is likely a reference to Rome, the destroyer of the temple in the author's time.

6. See Jullien and Jullien, *Apôtres des confins*, 111–17; Landau, *Revelation of the Magi*, 28–34; and Vanden Eykel, *Magi*, 66–88.

7. See Klijn, *Acts of Thomas*; and Andrade, *Journey of Christianity*. Judas Thomas is linked to the evangelization of Edessa as well as to India. Some modern South Indian Christian groups, such as the Malabar Catholic Church, the Chaldean Syrian Church, the Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church, the Malankara Catholic Church, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church still maintain their traditional links to Judas Thomas as the founder of Christianity in India.

8. See Palmer, "Logos of the Mandylion." In Eusebius's account (*Hist. eccl.* 1.13), the apostle Thomas sent Thaddaeus, named as one of the 72 sent out as missionaries by Jesus in Luke 10:1–20, as the evangelist to Edessa. This link is further established by the sixth-century *Acts of Thaddaeus*, which claims that Thaddaeus originally came from Edessa and then returned to evangelize.

9. See Bovon and Matthews, *Acts of Philip*. According to *Acts Phil.*, the apostle eventually settles and dies in the Syrian city of Mabbug (Hierapolis), which had ecclesiastical ties to Edessa. There is a unique Syriac legend of Philip (the *History of Philip*) that is distinct from *Acts Phil.* In *Hist. Phil.* the apostle sails to Carthage (or Carthagene) and performs a number of feats to rid the city of Jews and pagans. A new study of this text is forthcoming in the CSCO series. See Ruani and Villey, "Recherches"; and Ruani, "Peut-on parler de *testimonia*." See Kitchen, "History of Philip," for a recent English translation.

## INTRODUCTION

The *Doctrine of Addai* claims to be an official account of Christianity's arrival in Mesopotamia through the ministry of Addai (sometimes called Thaddaeus), one of Jesus' apostles (see Mark 6:18//Matt 10:3). The beginning of *Doctr. Addai* preserves the epistolary correspondence of Jesus with King Abgar of Edessa (known in Syriac as Urhay, modern Şanlıurfa, Turkey), an exchange that has captured the imaginations of Christians for centuries. Due in part to its longstanding popularity, the correspondence of Abgar and Jesus has played a prominent, albeit contested role in historical reconstructions of Christian expansion into Mesopotamia and the East. Whereas some scholars have dismissed nearly the entire narrative as a complete fabrication of a later period, others have attempted to tease out fragments of historicity from the story. Such disparities of opinion are hardly a product of modern skepticism. Church historians from late antiquity and the Middle Ages were just as divided as their contemporary counterparts regarding the authenticity of both the Abgar/Jesus correspondence and the narrative that follows in *Doctr. Addai* and other related texts. Many late antique and medieval believers were undeterred by the opinions of historians with regard to the significance and popularity of the letters and the story—and their popularity continued well into the modern period.<sup>10</sup>

While Edessa was an important city in many respects in the ancient world, nowhere does the New Testament explicitly associate it with the earliest stages of the Christian movement. The silence of the New Testament, however, did little to diminish the popularity of the story of Abgar and Jesus and the conversion of a chief city in the East. Christians on the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire created the correspondence to construct their past and forge new identities by writing themselves into the annals of Christian history. The final stage of that process was a narrative written in Syriac, the native language of the area around Edessa, called the *Doctrine of Addai*.

10. Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 1.13) seems to regard the letters as authentic and says he took them and the narrative epilogue from the archives of Edessa. Procopius (*Wars* 2.12.25–26) has some reservations about their authenticity, as does Evagrius Scholasticus (*Hist. eccl.* 4.27). Augustine (*Epist.* 230; *Faust.* 28.4; *Cons.* 1.7.11) regarded the letters as inauthentic and apocryphal. See Given, “Utility and Variance.” One British historian wrote in 1798 that “the common people in England have [the correspondence of Abgar and Jesus] in their houses, in many places, fixed in a frame with our Savior's picture before it; and they generally with much honesty and devotion regard it as the word of God, and the genuine Epistle of Christ” (Jones, *New and Full Method*, 2:2).

### Summary

*Doctr. Addai* takes as its starting point the Abgar/Jesus correspondence. The opening line of the story, as it has been preserved in the only complete manuscript of the composition, directly connects the narrative to the letters it claims to preserve: “The letter of King Abgar, son of King Ma’nu, when he sent it to our Lord in Jerusalem, and when Addai the apostle came to him in Urhay.” The story is set in the 343rd year of the Greeks which, following the Seleucid calendar (as many Syriac scribes did for generations), corresponds to the year 31/32 CE. It thus purports to take place during the reign of Abgar Ukkāmā (“the Black”) of Edessa and during the last few years of Jesus’ life and ministry.

Following this introduction, we learn that Abgar, having heard about Jesus, sends several messengers to Palestine to learn more about him. After these messengers—Māryāhb, Šmešgrām, and Ḥanan the archivist—report back to Abgar, the king then sends Ḥanan back to Jesus with a letter, begging him to come to Edessa and heal him from a long-term illness (gout, according to later traditions). Abgar also offers Jesus refuge in Edessa from the Jews who were seeking to kill him. Ḥanan delivers the letter to Jesus, who gives him a reply to pass on to Abgar (it is unclear if this reply was written down or just spoken). In his response, Jesus declines Abgar’s request, saying that he must remain in Judea to complete his mission for which he was sent by God. He promises, however, to send one of his disciples to Edessa to fulfill Abgar’s requests. After Jesus’ ascension, Judas Thomas sends one of the seventy-two disciples, a man named Addai, to Edessa, in order to bring Jesus’ promise to fruition.

Upon Addai’s arrival in Edessa, he stays at the home of a Jewish man named Tobia. When his presence is revealed to Abgar, Addai is brought before the king and heals Abgar as well as some others among the nobility, thereby proving he is Jesus’ messenger. Abgar rejoices and brings his family and the Edessene nobility to witness Addai’s powers. Addai is then invited to proclaim the gospel to the court. He begins with an anecdotal story about the finding of the True Cross by Protonike, the wife of Emperor Claudius, an example of another ruler who came to faith in Jesus. Abgar and the court are amazed at the story and marshal the entire city to come and hear Addai’s preaching.

Addai then lays out his teaching, which makes up the bulk of the narrative (chs. 36–61). He gives an account of Jesus’ deeds and, in particular, encourages all to come to faith by abandoning their ancestral worship. His

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message is well received and most of the city converts, including a number of the priests of local cults, who tear down the altars to their gods. Addai builds a church and then appoints several of the local leaders as priests. People from all over Mesopotamia begin to hear about Addai and his teaching, including merchants on the Silk Road and even King Narseh of the Persians. Abgar writes a letter to Emperor Tiberius encouraging him to investigate the situation of the Jews in Palestine who murdered Jesus. Tiberius writes back that he has already punished the Jews and acknowledges Jesus' significance.

Addai then establishes the episcopate in Edessa, building more churches and appointing people to various offices. Soon after, however, he falls ill and offers his final testament to the nobility (chs. 78–91). He then lays his hands on Aggai, one of Addai's first converts, ordaining him as his successor. After bidding farewell to Abgar, Addai dies. Abgar and the entire city mourn Addai and set up a memorial festival in his honor. The new church flourishes under Aggai, until one of the sons of Abgar comes to power and has Aggai killed. Since Aggai had not been able to ordain a successor, Palūt—another one of Addai's disciples—must travel to Antioch to be ordained by Bishop Serapion. The story ends with a note that the preceding account of the teaching of Addai had been written down by the scribe Leubnā and placed in the city's archives.

### Provenance, Date, Authorship

It is with Eusebius of Caesarea that the literary accounts of the Abgar/Jesus correspondence and, later, *Doctr. Addai* find their origins. When Eusebius composed his *Ecclesiastical History* in 325 CE he claimed to have seen an exchange written in the “language of the Syrians” (ἐκ τῆς Σύρων φωνῆς)<sup>11</sup> between Jesus and King Abgar the Black of Edessa (r. 4 BCE–7 CE and 13–50 CE) (*Hist. eccl.* 1.13). Eusebius presents the entire correspondence in Greek and then provides a short narrative that he says was appended to the letters, also in the “language of the Syrians” (τῇ Σύρων φωνῇ). In this narrative, Judas Thomas appoints Thaddaeus, said to be one of the seventy(-two) from Luke 10, to go to Edessa and heal Abgar and preach the gospel there.

*Doctr. Addai* is probably an original Syriac narrative, even though the earliest traces of it come from the Greek text of Eusebius. The text undoubtedly originated in Edessa: the story is set in this city and the manuscripts

11. On the development of Syriac as a literary language, see Rigolio, “Syriac,” 167–78.

that contain the text were most likely copied there. The fictive author, Leubnā, claims it was placed in the civic archives (see ch. 103), the same place that Eusebius says he read the letters and translated them. Some modern historians have questioned Eusebius's claim. Recent linguistic comparisons, however, have supported the likelihood that Eusebius was telling the truth, even if he himself was not the one who actually performed the translation.<sup>12</sup> Further substantiating the claim that the letters were part of the civic archives of Edessa is the late fourth century travelogue of the Christian pilgrim Egeria. In her account of her visit to Edessa in 384 CE, Egeria says that the letters of Abgar and Jesus were in the city and the local bishop even read them aloud to her (*Itin.* 16). Egeria then reveals:

It also gave me great joy that I received from the holy man the letters of Abgar to the Lord and of the Lord to Abgar, which the holy bishop had read to us. While I have copies at home, it gave me great joy that I received them here from him also, since perhaps a lesser version has come to our home, because what I received here is in fact longer. If our Lord Jesus allows and I return home, you shall read it, my dear ladies. (*Itin.* 19, my trans.)<sup>13</sup>

Egeria's statement confirms that the letters of Abgar and Jesus had been copied and transmitted as far as Spain, likely due to their inclusion in Eusebius's *History*. Her comment also reveals that there were multiple versions of the letters in circulation—a fact that is borne out in the epigraphic evidence included in this volume. Additionally, Egeria's testimony substantiates Eusebius's claim that there were copies of the letters at Edessa. Since both Eusebius and Egeria testify that the letters were in Edessa, there is little reason to doubt that they were in the city. Moreover, there is no reason to doubt that the letters originated in Edessa (though perhaps not in the city's archive), since they are directly involved with the city's political and religious institutions. The "nationalistic" tone of the *Doctr. Addai*, with its clear interest in Edessa's ecclesiastical structure, strongly suggests that it likewise originated in Edessa.

12. See Polański, "Translation, Amplification, Paraphrase," 164–72, 175–86. Polański uses the versions from *Doctr. Addai* for his comparison. I am not convinced that the letters as they appear in *Doctr. Addai* are the earliest possible form of the letters in Syriac, but they are the earliest extant Syriac versions. Brock ("Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," 213) thinks it unlikely that Eusebius made the translation. Brock also doubts that these documents would have been kept in the city's archives, as Eusebius claims.

13. Excerpts from Egeria are taken from Appendix A in this volume; consult the appendix for information about the editions used for the translation.

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The date of the composition of *Doctr. Addai* requires further investigation. Most scholars are convinced that the final form of *Doctr. Addai* appeared in the first part of the fifth century. Its component parts, however, come from as early as the third century. Although it is a debatable issue, the origins of a story about a “King Abgar of Edessa” converting to “Christianity” may reflect the reign of Abgar VIII the Great, who ruled from 177 to 212 CE. This connection with Abgar VIII, the last prominent Abgarid ruler, might be further established by the role of Palūt in the story, who, as the successor of Addai and Aggai, receives ordination from Bishop Serapion of Antioch, who in turn had received his own ordination from Zephyrinus of Rome (ch. 102). This marks one of many serious chronological errors appearing throughout the text, since Serapion’s tenure at Antioch began in 189 or 192 CE, whereas Zephyrinus’s tenure at Rome began in 202 CE.<sup>14</sup> While the chronologies fail to establish a convincing link to the first century when Addai purportedly lived, they do coincide with the reign of Abgar the Great quite nicely. Several scholars have hypothesized oral traditions which (intentionally?) conflate Abgar VIII (the real first Abgarid convert to Christianity) with Abgar Ukkāmā who reigned during the lifetime of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

The figure of Palūt appears to have been a historical leader of one Christian sect in Edessa probably in the early part of the fourth century.<sup>16</sup> Ephrem mentions him as a principal figure of the Christians in Edessa whom Ephrem considered to be the “orthodox” Christians.<sup>17</sup> By introducing Palūt into the mythical story of Addai and Abgar, the “Palūtian” Christians (as Ephrem identifies them) sought to forge a link between the apostolic past and their more recent cultural memory. Steven Ross summarizes the situation nicely:

The best explanation is probably to assume that considerations of chronology simply buckled under the strong desire of the ‘Palutian’ Christians (who did have a connection with the Antiochene church) to enhance their status within the community by the claim to apostolic authority.<sup>18</sup>

14. See Brock, “Eusebius,” 227–28.

15. See Palmer, “King Abgar”; and Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity*.

16. Fiano, “Trinitarian Controversies.”

17. Ephrem mentions Christians going by the name “Palutians” in *Haer.* 22.5–6. See Griffith, “Marks of the ‘True Church’” 129–30.

18. Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 134.

We may suggest, therefore, that the parts of the narrative that feature Palūt originate from the fourth-century traditions and groups who venerated him as a leading figure of the “Palūtian” sect of Christianity in Edessa.

Another important name in the early traditions of *Doctr. Addai* is Thomas. Egeria makes no mention of Addai nor the events recorded in *Doctr. Addai*; however, she does discuss veneration of Judas Thomas in Edessa and her visit to his shrine in the city. Andrew Palmer suggests that, given the role played by Thomas in both the Eusebian story and *Doctr. Addai*, there may have been a version of the story of Edessa’s evangelization in which Thomas played the role of the apostle sent to the city (see also Figure 1 below).<sup>19</sup> Such a hypothesis is plausible, but the silence of Egeria regarding Addai and *Doctr. Addai* is not a sure indication of the absence of the Addai traditions in Edessa at that time.

Possibly more revealing about the date of at least part of the narrative is the appearance of an additional line in Jesus’ response to Abgar that is not mentioned by Eusebius. In *Doctr. Addai*, Jesus ends his reply to Abgar saying, “Now, for your city: may it be blessed and may no enemy ever again have authority over it” (5:6). This remark by Jesus came to be understood by late antique Christians as a promise of divine protection claimed by cities all over the empire against any kind of attack, be it enemies, sickness, or even the presence of demons.<sup>20</sup> The sixth-century historian Procopius recognized that this promise of Jesus was an addition not found in Eusebius’s version:

When the Christ says this message, he wrote in reply to Augarus (i.e., Abgar), saying distinctly that he would not come, but promising him health in the letter. And they say that he added this also that never would the city be liable to capture by the barbarians. This final portion of the letter was entirely unknown to those who wrote the history of that time; for they did not even make mention of it anywhere; but the men of Edessa say that they found it with the letter, so that they have even caused the letter to be inscribed in this form on the gates of the city instead of any other defense. (*Wars* 2.12.25–26; trans. Dewing, LCL)<sup>21</sup>

19. Palmer, “King Abgar,” 29. The inscription from the “Forty Caverns/Tombs” in Edessa (see item 3.2 in Appendix A) conflates the figures of Thaddaeus and Thomas, which gives credibility to Palmer’s theory about a Thomas version of the legend.

20. See Given, “Utility and Variance.”

21. It is worth noting that Procopius knows this additional line only from inscriptions he saw, not from a literary text.

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Procopius is correct that the earliest version from Eusebius lacks Jesus' promise. However, several of the inscriptions translated in the Appendices contain the promise of protection and appear to date to the fourth century, meaning that this addition was already spreading during this time. In fact, it was known by the time of Egeria, who writes:

Then the holy bishop told me the following story about this water: "After King Abgar wrote a letter to the Lord and the Lord wrote back through Ananias the courier, just as it is written in the letter, the Persians, at a much later time, came down upon us and surrounded the city. Immediately Abgar took the Lord's letter with his whole army to the gate and prayed aloud and said, "Lord Jesus, you promised us that no enemies would enter this city; see, now, how the Persians attack us!" After saying this, the king held up the letter openly in his upraised hand, and suddenly, outside the city, so great a darkness fell over the eyes of the Persians, who had already come three miles outside the city, and the darkness was so confusing to them that they could scarcely set up camp and patrol even three miles outside of the city. (*Itin.* 8–9; my trans.)

Given the presence of Jesus' promise of protection in the letter read to Egeria, it must have been added sometime between Eusebius's completion of the *Ecclesiastical History* (around 325) and 384.<sup>22</sup>

The insertion of this line into Jesus's letter probably occurred in Edessa. A likely catalyst for its addition was the failed campaign into Persia by the emperor Julian in 363.<sup>23</sup> The Roman army was cut down and Julian was fatally wounded, forcing the army to retreat to the fortress city of Nisibis. Upon his ascension, the new emperor Jovian ceded Nisibis and a number of other territories to the Persians. At this point, Nisibis was a bastion of Christianity, producing leaders like the bishop Jacob who attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 and, of course, Ephrem, one of Jacob's deacons. After the city was ceded to the Persians, Shapur II allowed the Christian population to leave peacefully with the Roman army. Many of these Nisibene refugees, including Ephrem, ended up in Edessa.

Among the many famous stories about Nisibis was one involving Bishop Jacob and the Persian army. Shapur II besieged Nisibis in 337/338,

22. It is possible, of course, that this line was present in some versions of the letters prior to 325, in which case Eusebius either had a version in which the promise was omitted, or he omitted the promise himself.

23. See Mirkovic, *Prelude to Constantine*, 35–36.



but his efforts resulted in failure. The story is recounted by the fifth-century historian Theodoret:

The next day [Shapur II] attacked [Nisibis] in full force, and looked to enter the city through the breaches that had been made. But he found the wall built up on both sides, and all his labour vain. For that holy man (i.e., Jacob), through prayer, filled with valour both the troops and the rest of the townsfolk, and both built the walls, withstood the engines, and beat off the advancing foe. And all this he did without approaching the walls, but by beseeching the Lord of all within the church . . . the excellent Ephraim (he is the best writer among the Syrians) besought the divine Jacobus to mount the wall to see the barbarians and to let fly at them the darts of his curse. So the divine man consented and climbed up into a tower but when he saw the innumerable host he discharged no other curse than that mosquitoes and gnats might be sent forth upon them, so that by means of these tiny animals they might learn the might of the Protector of the Romans. On his prayer followed clouds of mosquitoes and gnats; they filled the hollow trunks of the elephants, and the ears and nostrils of horses and other animals. (*Hist. eccl.* 2.30; trans. Jackson, modified)

This story sounds remarkably similar to the one told to Egeria about Edessa. In both cases, the Persians surrounded the city, a Christian leader appealed to God, and God routed the enemy in a miraculous way. Nisibis had procured a reputation for divine favor, a prestige that was even a source of pride for Ephrem.<sup>24</sup> God would not allow Nisibis to be taken, until, Ephrem argues, their judgment lapsed by allowing “pagan” cultic sites to be reopened at Julian’s command (*Jul.* 1.8–15). Their city was gone, and with it the pride of the Nisibene Christians. Their new city, however, offered a hopeful opportunity. The Nisibene refugees provided the idea of God’s protection over Edessa for the myth of Abgar. They synthesized the prestige of Nisibis’s perpetual divine protection and the foundation myth

24. Cf. *Nis.* 1.11 where Ephrem compares Nisibis to Noah’s ark sheltering the inhabitants from the deluge, and to Christ’s resurrection on the third day—this being the third siege against the city in Ephrem’s lifetime: [Nisibis speaking] “Grant not victory over Your beloved to the Evil One || whose avarice you [defeated] twice and three times. || Allow my victory to fly over the whole world || to acquire glory for You in the whole world. || O He Who was revived the third [day], || put me not to death in the third [trial]!” (trans. from McVey, *Ephrem*, 16–17).

## INTRODUCTION

of Christian Edessa, so that, in Drijvers' words, "Edessa is presented as the true heir of Nisibis's glorious Christian past."<sup>25</sup>

If the letters of Abgar and Jesus had been in Edessa since before Eusebius wrote his history, it was not until after the arrival of Nisibene refugees in 363 CE that the letters began to take on new meanings for the Christians there. It is likely at this time that the myth of Christian origins in Edessa that would become *Doctr. Addai* began to take shape. The story is a quasi-nationalist retelling of Edessa's Christian history that legitimizes a particular brand of Christianity within the city while both overtly and symbolically delegitimizing other religious groups, including other Christianities.<sup>26</sup> The specific mention of the fall of the cults of Bel and Nebo (ch. 67), the cult of Sin (ch. 50), and Atargatis (ch. 50), all of whom were prominent deities in Edessa into the fifth century, are overt examples of *Doctr. Addai*'s interest in promoting Christianity over other cults at the time of the text's composition.

There are thus elements of *Doctr. Addai* that reach back probably into the third century and others that develop in the fourth century. The text as we know it must have developed at the end of the fourth century at the earliest, but more likely reached its final form in the first half of the fifth century, as the contextual elements I analyze below suggest. Despite what Eusebius and the author of *Doctr. Addai* would have readers believe, the

25. Drijvers ("Syriac Romance of Julian," 211) argues that the *Julian Romance* was produced by the Nisibene refugees in the late fourth century. This date can no longer be defended (see Mazzola and Van Nuffelen, "*Julian Romance*," for the date). Drijvers is certainly right in his observations concerning the projection of Nisibis's past onto Edessa's. See also the comment by Segal (*Edessa*, 75): "The thought of Nisibis was probably present in their minds, if we may judge from the bishop's account to Egeria of the miraculous deliverance of Edessa from the Persians. His story is wholly inappropriate to Edessa." The imported reputation of Edessa became a lasting symbol. The *Julian Romance* (123–24) maintains the idea that Edessa will never be conquered in its reflection on this period of Edessa's history: "Christ is the king of Edessa, and He dwells in its citadels. No foreigner is exalted above Him. If Edessa did not open its gates to the strong kings of Assyria, when they besieged it for three years and did not subdue it, will Edessa open its gates and greet you, the Mad One, the contemptible foreigner, the worshiper of idols? Heaven forbid, that your unclean feet which trod the thresholds of pagan temples should step in the streets of the 'Blessed One'. Draw your sword against us and stretch your bow as much as you wish. We will not be weary in your war. We have someone who stands at our head and who fights in our stead" (trans. Sokoloff).

26. On the inter-religious and intra-religious conflicts in Edessa during the fourth century, see Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism*.

authenticity of the Abgar/Jesus correspondence in the first century cannot be maintained.

Alexander Mirkovic argues for two basic phases of composition: pre-Great Persecution (303 CE) and post-Great Persecution (313 CE). The first phase was essentially an oral phase, though it may have included a (now lost) written form of the legend which Mirkovic calls the Early Syriac Version (ESV). In this phase are included traditions associating Judas Thomas with the conversion of Edessa (known by Egeria);<sup>27</sup> traditions about the conversion of a “King Abgar” (known from Bardaisan’s *Books of the Laws of the Countries*); and traditions about Addai, who was a disciple sent before a king to preach a new doctrine (known from stories of Mani’s disciple Addai; discussed below).<sup>28</sup> All of these traditions influenced the formation of the ESV. Mirkovic’s second phase is essentially the fourth century, in which we find abundant written testimony to the story by Eusebius and Egeria. Eusebius borrows from both the Thomas traditions and from the ESV in constructing his version of the story, whereas Egeria also shows influences of the Thomas tradition and her account contains the added line about Edessa’s divine protection. Mirkovic argues that several other parts of the story were added in the course of the fourth century, including the Abgar/Tiberius correspondence (chs. 74–75), the Abgar/Narses correspondence (ch. 73), the Protonike legend (chs. 16–30), Addai’s sermons (chs. 36–61; 78–97), and the mention of Aggai and Palūt as Addai’s successors (chs. 97, 102). Mirkovic leaves out of his analysis the epigraphic references to the Abgar/Jesus correspondence from the fourth century, some of which include the formula of protection. The editorial process culminated in the final version of *Doctr. Addai* probably before the death of Rabbula in 435 CE (see Figure 1).

27. Palmer (“King Abgar,” 29) argues that Thomas was the apostle in the “original” version of the legend.

28. Mirkovic, *Prelude to Constantine*, 21–22.