Jacob of Edessa has left behind a voluminous, impressive, and important collection of writings.\(^1\) We may unreservedly say that his œuvre is evidence of a great zeal for biblical study in general as well as for the preservation of a reliable biblical text. Jacob’s zeal and strenuous efforts in the field of biblical studies finally resulted in his revision of the Peshitta.\(^2\) In the light of basic studies, starting with A. Baumstark’s investigations, one may say that the Bible was of primary interest to Jacob. It is also the consensus that quite a few of the scholia of Jacob reveal ideas similar to those found in the commentaries of Ephrem. So it seems that Jacob was participating in an ancient and authoritative tradition of biblical interpretation.

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\(^1\) First and foremost, the present author is neither an expert in the canonical law of the Church and its history, nor in the juridical matters of any specific church. His contribution has but the very limited scope of drawing some firm conclusions about the relation between the Bible and the canonical lawgiving of Jacob of Edessa. He approaches this problem as an expert in the comparative and applied science of religion. So, this article is but to be taken as a short note, additional to the contributions of H. Teule, R. Hoyland, and B. Varghese in this book. The present author has benefited from some broader studies, including: K.-E. Rignell, A Letter from Jacob of Edessa to John the Stylite of Litarab concerning Ecclesiastical [i.e. Ecclesiastical] Canons Edited from Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14,493 with Introduction, Translation and Commentary (Lund 1979); W. Hage, Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit: nach orientalischen Quellen (Wiesbaden 1966); C. Kayser, Die Canones Jacob’s von Edessa (Leipzig 1886); A. Palmer, ‘Introduction’, in A. Palmer, S.P. Brock, and R. Hoyland (eds.), The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles (Translated Texts for Historians 15; Liverpool 1993), x–xiv; R. Hoyland, ‘The Historical Context’, in Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland (eds.) The Seventh Century, xi–xxviii.

Then, of course, two questions arise. The first question concerns the way in which and the extent to which Jacob may have used the Bible in his canonical lawgiving and the liturgical prescriptions this may have caused. The second question is whether the Bible in some way may have influenced his criticism on the moral conduct of the laymen and clergy of his day. To come straight to the point: I did not find any reference or allusion to the Bible in the canons of Jacob of Edessa that could be taken as an obvious citation. The number of vague allusions to the Bible seems limited to some twenty. This result is surprising. The aim of this contribution is to explain my initial amazement and to make it plausible that the lack of any full citation of the Bible in Jacob’s canonical lawgiving was a matter of shrewd religious policy and the individual attempt of a learned bishop who aimed at saving the identity and lifestyle of Orthodox Christianity in the cultural and religious processes of ingroup-outgroup mechanisms of a radically changing world.

Canons generally reflect the established decisions of the Church in matters of conflicting opinions or competing customs. They are required to:

3 See the collections as published and commented on by P.A. de Lagarde, Didascalica apostolorum, syriaca (Leipzig 1854); idem, Constitutiones apostolorum (Leipzig 1862); Th.J. Lamy, Dissertatio de syrorum fide et disciplina in re eucharistica; accedunt veteris ecclesiae syriacae monumenta duo: unum, Joannis Telensis, Resolutiones canonicae syriace nunc primum editae et latine redditae; alterum, Jacobi Edesseni, Resolutiones canonicae syriacae cum versione latina primum elaborata (Leuven 1859); Kayser, Die Canones; F. Nau, Les canons et les resolutions canoniques de Rabboula, Jean de Tella, Cyriaque d’Amid, Jacques d’Édesse, George des Arabes, Cyriaque d’Antioche, Jean III, Théodose d’Antioche et des Perses (Ancienne littérature canonique syriaque 2; Paris 1906); A. Vööbus, Syrische Kanonessammlungen. Ein Beitrag zur Quellenkunde 1. Westsyrische Originalurkunden 1A–1B (CSCO 307 and 317, Subs. 35 and 38; Leuven 1970). For a survey, see R.G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13; Princeton 1997), 601–610, as well as H. Teule’s contribution to the present volume.

4 A passage has been taken as a citation if it consists of an extensive string of words and is identically found in the Bible, be it in the Peshitta or the Septuagint. Jacob’s canons contain simple allusions to the following biblical passages: Lev. 2:13; 10:1–19; 15:16–33; 16:16–29; 22:30; 2 Macc. 12:40; Matt. 15:1–20; 18:7; Mark 9:48–49; Luke 5:34–35; Rom. 1:23, 28; 14:13–14; 1 Cor. 5:12; 1 Tim. 4:4; Jas. 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:8. Besides these allusions the canons of Jacob contain three very short passages which are spelled out, two from the Old Testament (Isa. 32:6 and Hag. 2:18) and one from the New Testament (Matt. 17:21). Since these are not identical with the Peshitta or the Greek textual tradition, I would not like to qualify them as citations. They would bring the total number of allusions to twenty.

5 Kayser, Die Canones, note on p. 74: ‘Wir machen in der Regel einen Unterschied zwischen “kirchlichen Entscheidungen” und “canones” je nach der Form, in der sie vorliegen, ob in Frage und Antwort oder als einfache Anordnung.’ The present author does not support the difference between the two categories.