Besides the anecdotal fact that Romanos the Melodist was perhaps of Jewish origin, there is more than one reason for comparing the huge corpus of his hymns with the poetic production of Palestinian Jews, and more specifically with Yannai’s *piyyutim*. Indeed, Yannai and Romanos are exactly contemporaneous and they undoubtedly belong to the same cultural context of Byzantine-dominated Near East. Throughout Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, Hellenism and the ancestral languages and cultures of the Orient competed with each other according to a dynamic that can be compared, *mutatis mutandis*, with contemporary confrontation between globalization and antiglobalization. The rise of Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac literacy, as well as the affirmation of a rabbinical culture using Hebrew and Aramaic as upper languages are to be replaced in a broader context, where Hellenism was simultaneously an object of rejection and a model of emulation for the non-Hellenic cultures.

Although Romanos’s resort to Greek has to do with his acceptance of official Orthodoxy and his implicit rejection of the Syriac blend of Christianity, one could ask what were the political and social motivations of the religious and cultural opportunities taken by this Syrian poet. In a certain sense, his acceptance of Orthodoxy is inseparable

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1 Romanos was born ca. 482 and he died ca. 560. As for Yannai, he is thought to belong to the middle of the sixth century, exactly like Romanos. See E. Fleischer, *The Yoser: Its Emergence and Development* (Jerusalem, 1984), 18.


3 Let us remember that in 489 the Syriac blend of Christianity had been condemned by Byzantium. Concretely, this condemnation had been expressed by the closing of the Academy of Edessa.
from his choice of the Greek language. Indeed, both Hellenism and Orthodoxy were part of an indivisible entity that can be globally designated by the term ἑλληνορθόδοξος. Instead of considering Romanos’s choice as a default option, it is more interesting to view it as the reflection of his particular social and geographic background. Indeed, his birthplace Emesa (the modern Homs) in Central Syria was triply marginalized. First, it was far away from Constantinople, the center of both Orthodoxy and Hellenism. Second, it was also at a distance from Antioch, the main center of Hellenism in Northern Syria. Lastly, it was quite remote from the northeastern city of Edessa, the cradle of classical Syriac culture. This threefold outsidership may explain why between the three centers, Constantinople, Antioch, and Edessa, Romanos chose the first, that is, the most attractive one in terms of political power and social prestige.

One could almost adopt a post-colonial grid and interpret Romanos’s choice of Hellenism and Orthodoxy at the expense of the Syriac linguistic, cultural, and religious identity as the consequence of an inferiority complex quite characteristic of provincial people or colonized nations. This theory accords well with the traditional legend according to which Romanos started his career as a bad poet and as an even worse singer until the Virgin Mary visited him in a dream on Christmas eve. If we read this myth with an euhemeristic spirit, the miraculous transformation of a failed cantor into the major hymnographer of the Byzantine liturgical tradition may convey another significant issue. It could be a metaphorical way of narrating the process by which an oriental Barbarian succeeded in durably imposing his style over the literary horizon of the Metropolis.

Thus, it appears that Romanos’s integration into Hellenism was far from being a unilateral process. Indeed, he or the poetic tradition of which he is the main representative was instrumental in the transfer of the tradition of Syriac poetry to the Byzantine world. Both his translations of St. Ephrem’s hymns and his original compositions exerted a crucial impact on the subsequent development of Hellenic hymnography. Though written in a relatively high register of Greek, Romanos’s hymns display many generic and formal features that can be ascribed to the Oriental cultural context in which both Syriac hymnography and the Jewish school of Hebrew classical Piyyut flourished in parallel. However, the gap between the recipient culture and the oriental importation was perhaps lesser than it appears at first sight, since the literary productions written in the local languages of Byzantine-dominated