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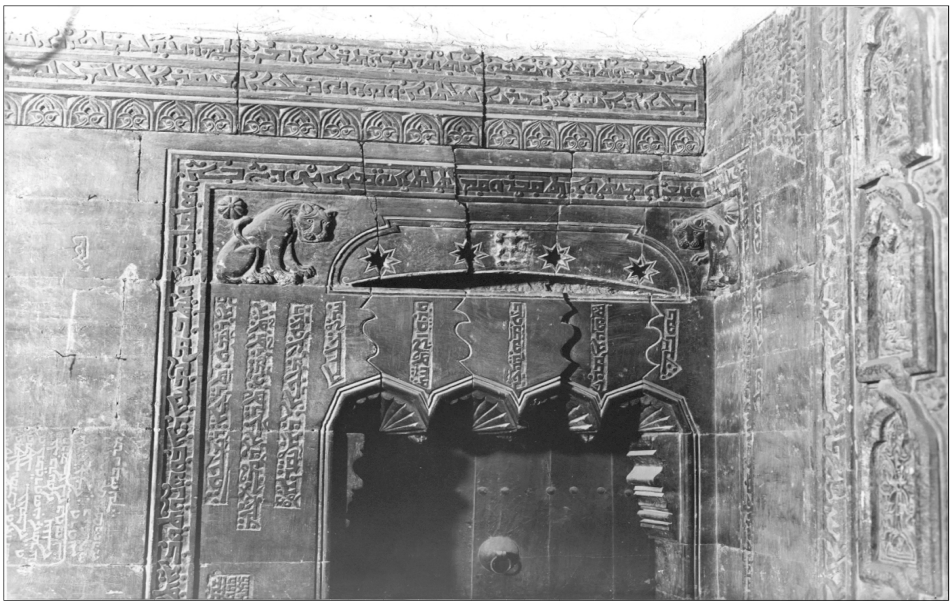

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The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies
La Société Canadienne des Etudes Syriaques

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The aim of the CSSS is to promote the study of the Syriac culture which is rooted in the same soil from which the ancient Mesopotamian and biblical literatures sprung. The CSSS is purely academic, and its activities include a series of public lectures, one yearly symposium, and the publication of its Journal. The Journal is distributed free of charge to the members of the CSSS who have paid their dues, but it can be ordered by other individuals and institutions for the following fees: $25.00 for individuals and $50.00 for institutions. Payment must be made in US dollars for orders from outside Canada. See the address of the CSSS on the back cover.

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Cover Picture

Monastery of Mar Behnam the Martyr (Iraq): The small gate leading to the sanctuary

The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies

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FROM THE EDITOR

The third issue of our Journal contains the transcripts of public lectures given at the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies in 2002 and 2003. Thanks to its members and the financial support of the online journal *Zinda*, the CSSS managed to invite our distinguished lecturers to share their academic research with us, and we are grateful to them for accepting our invitation to come to Toronto.

Professor John Corbett of the University of Toronto sheds additional light on the 4th century Syriac *Book of Steps*. Members will recall Dr. Robert Kitchen's lecture given at the CSSS Symposium I (2001) on the maturing of asceticism in the *Book of Steps* (see *J-CSSS* 2 [2002], pp. 30-45)—his English translation of this important source is also now in press. Corbett demonstrates that the biblical and New Testamental theme of Holy War provides a fundamental symbolic structure for the ascetic ideal in the *Book of Steps*. This is a welcome discussion since Fr. Robert Murray had already shown in his very useful book *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (1975) that the primary rationale for the ascetic life in the Syriac tradition in general draws extensively on the same theme, though this tradition seemed to him absent from the *Book of Steps*.

Professor Herman Teule of Nijmegen University (Netherlands) discusses the intellectual career of the 13th century author Gregory Bar-Hebraeus, who was also the highest Syriac Orthodox authority in the East. Bar-Hebraeus exploited Arabic treatises and was even influenced by some Muslim authors such as Ghazali, at the scientific, literary and religious levels. Teule's article highlights two facets of the personality of Bar-Hebraeus. His open-mindedness led him not only to accept all the other Christian denominations without reservation, but also to appreciate the virtues found in other religions, such as Islam. His encyclopedic intellect never prevented him from benefiting from sources of knowledge written in languages other than his native Syriac. While some modern scholars have dubbed him a "vulgarizer", he managed to write a Syriac encyclopedia of knowledge that covered all the sciences known in his time.

Professor Susan Ashbrook Harvey of Brown University discusses women in Syriac Christianity, gathering information from a variety of literary sources, none of them written by women. Her article clearly shows, nevertheless, that in the Syriac Christian culture women did not live on the margins of their society but played pivotal roles in the life of the church and in the community, as teachers, deaconesses, and

counselors. This picture contrasts sharply with the fact that Near Eastern culture was normally dominated by men, in which case women played no role other than being "bearers of sons".

Professor Kathleen McVey of the Princeton Theological Seminary discusses images of joy so numerous in St Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise*. This collection of poems is made accessible to the English-speaking public by Dr. Sebastian Brock of Oxford in his book *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (1990). McVey is particularly suited to talk about Ephrem since she published other Hymns of this great poet in her *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (1989). Her article explores specific analogies used by Ephrem in Hymns 9 to 11, where he invokes the bliss of infancy—mother, womb, breast, milk, etc.—so as to describe Paradise. She compares these themes with Near Eastern wisdom literature, Jewish-Christianity, and Stoic allegory, but finds Ephrem's vision to be unique in many respects, and a useful complement to contemporary theology.

Finally, the article by Dr. Geoffrey Greatrex of the University of Ottawa discusses the attitude of the 7th century Persian king Khusro II toward the Christians of his empire. After conquering the Roman Near East this king ruled over the largest Christian community on earth, and he was forced to deal with many conflicting Christian sects and denominations. Khusro remained neutral vis-à-vis the conflicts that occurred between quarreling Christian communities. A pragmatist, he favoured no one at the expense of another. Despite the fact that he is depicted by sources as a tyrant, he knew Christianity better than any previous Persian king.

And finally, on a celebratory note: our Society is three years old! We hope that it will continue to serve Syriac studies for many years to come.

A.H.

THEY DO NOT TAKE WIVES, OR BUILD, OR WORK THE GROUND: ASCETIC LIFE IN THE EARLY SYRIAC CHURCH

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Recent work on the *Book of Steps* (or *Liber Graduum*) has brought out the central role in the early Syriac Christian tradition of the search for Perfection in the ascetic life. What evidence does the *Book of Steps* give us for the origins and structure of these ascetic practices and values? More bluntly, do these practices and values have a scriptural basis in the Hebrew Bible and/or the New Testament, beyond the ever present teachings and example of Jesus (or the words of Paul)?

From the perspective of a historian of religion much of the belief and behaviour of the early Church seems to make a radical break with scriptural traditions in the Hebrew Bible and the practices of late Second Temple Judaism, for instance with regard to fasting, celibacy, redemptive suffering (self-sacrifice), or from another perspective what was described by non-Christians as "promiscuous affection".

Some time ago Father Robert Murray shone a bright new light on some central traditions of the very early Syriac Church in his study of an old midrashic homily embedded in the work of Aphrahat; he showed how these traditions drew on some central traditions in the Hebrew Bible (and the New Testament), in a seminal article which still has not received the attention it deserves.

For those who follow Murray's lead and link the ascetic practices and values of the early Syriac Church to scriptural antecedents in the Hebrew Bible, there remains the central question of the structure and function of the Gospel tradition, with respect on the one hand to the traditions of the Hebrew Bible and, on the other, to the beliefs and practices of the early Syriac Church. These beliefs and practices seem to richly reflect the Gospel tradition—but (with the exception of the homily in Aphrahat) only much more opaquely do they attest to the structuring presence of conceptions central to the Hebrew Bible; in both cases the central organizing structures are rather obscure.

Following Murray and extending his argument,[1] I will argue that conceptual structures associated with the Deuteronomic "Call to Holy War" underlie the tradition of the ascetic life in the early Syriac Church, as will be evident from a close reading of the *Book of Steps*. What is more, I will suggest that the Gospel traditions in this Syriac Christian ascetic literature are consistent with the older biblical conceptions evident

in the Deuteronomic call to holy war, both with regard to the vocation to abandon family and home and labour (for holy war) and with regard to the summons into the bridal chamber (for the messianic banquet). The study of early Syriac Christianity thus makes a unique contribution to our wider understanding of the continuity of Christian tradition with its biblical antecedents and with Jewish practices.

I. **An ancient ascetic tradition in Syriac Christianity**

A controversial passage in Aphrahat *Demonstration* VII has long attracted the attention of modern scholars: it seems to reserve baptism for celibate ascetics, either virgins or married people who had renounced sexual intercourse to become "children of the Covenant" (*bnay qyama*).[2] New work on the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the traditions of various early Christian dualists (Gnostics and Manichaeans), together with an increasing understanding of Jewish Christianity have led to the realization that Syrian asceticism was not derivative from Egypt but probably much older. It has now been recognized that the passage in Aphrahat *Dem.* VII is a traditional midrashic homily on Deuteronomy 20:1-9, Joshua's "Call to Holy War". Beck noted strong echoes of this tradition in Ephrem's *Epiphany Hymns*, and a wider search of early traditions (Syriac, Judaeo-Christian and Manichaean) has enable Murray to identify a "cycle of themes" (fixed phrases belonging to a common tradition rather than the creative work of a single writer). This cycle of themes is widely dispersed in early literature;[3] but passages from Aphrahat and Ephrem give the most comprehensive presentation.

Earlier discussions missed the true context of *Dem.* VII: not ecclesiastical penance but exhortation to those wounded in spiritual combat: they should return to their commitment. They are "single ones", children of the Covenant and the consecrated. Their lapses are essentially from celibacy.[4] In *Dem.* VII Aphrahat appeals to the memory of their past commitment, in words which closely follow Deut. 20:5-8.[5] There follows a midrashic homily on Gideon's test (col. 344, 2-9; cf. Judges 7:4-8) where it is explicitly asserted that Gideon's test of his men by their manner of drinking water prefigures baptism: "it is the type (*tupṣa*) of baptism, symbol (*raza*) of the contest and the likeness (*dmuta*) of the single ones (*iḥidaye*)" (col. 344, 22-25). Then Aphrahat addresses another exhortation to the "whole Covenant of God before baptism", to virgins and to the consecrated (with explicit reference to desire for marriage and love of possessions as causes of defeat and death in the contest in words which clearly echo the Deuteronomic Call to Holy War). We are reminded of other uses of this theme in later parts of the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish texts;[6] we are reminded, too, of ascetic celibacy in sectarian Judaism of the later Second Temple period, apparently an extension of the nazirate and the ritual purity required for Holy War, also of the NT imagery of ascetical *athlesis* and of warfare.[7]

Several texts of Ephrem show a very close connexion to Aphrahat's exhortation, especially the baptismal hymns in the collection *On Epiphany*. Epiphany Hymn 7 alludes to Gideon's test and his victory in battle (*qraba*) or contest (*agona*) as a type of baptism (esp. *EpiHymns* 7.8). In Hymn 8 Ephrem develops the image of the fire of the Holy Spirit (esp. 8.4-8; cf 8.15 for the

"hovering of the Holy Spirit) and that of the "living sword which makes division of the living among the dead" (esp. 8.16-17). And here there is explicit reference to people being baptized and becoming consecrated. Both Aphrahat and Ephrem in different ways suggest or state the special relationship of the *iḥidaya/monachos* to the *Iḥidaya*, Christ the "Single One".[8] And another passage in Aphrahat[9] gives a very developed midrash associating (through syncrisis = "mixing together") Jesus bar Nun, that is, Joshua, with Jesus the Saviour on the common themes of circumcision and the stones of witness. This midrash, in Murray's view, probably belongs to the same cycle of material as Aphrahat's exhortation on Deut. 20.[10]

The tradition which accreted around the Deuteronomic Call to Holy War had clearly reached its flowering by the time of Aphrahat and Ephrem (4th century). Murray has identified the main strands in this tradition: Baptism is the new circumcision (of the heart) achieved through the sword of the Word of God (cf. Heb. 4:12) – the antitype of Joshua's stone sword. This is the sword which Christ said he would send with fire and division to families and hearts (Matt. 10:34 & Luke. 12:49-53). Those who wish to follow Christ (in the athletic contest and in war) are challenged to return to marriage and possessions. Here, at the heart of the tradition we have explicit reference to the Call to Holy War in Deut. 20:1-9 esp. 5ff. Those who survive this challenge go down to the "waters of testing" (Gideon in Judges 7:5ff) and there they "take their *stand*". They submit to the dividing sword becoming "single ones" (*iḥidaye*) in a threefold way: as single from spouse or family (*monachos*), as single in heart (*monotropos*), as united with the Only Begotten "Single One" (*monogenes*). Thereby they join the *Qyama* (the "standers") in the "Covenant" of Christ's flock, putting on his crown and possessing him as treasure. When we go behind Aphrahat and Ephrem we find again and again in earlier texts from the Judaeo-Christian tradition more than one detail from this pattern coming together in a single context: in the Old Syriac and Old Armenian versions of the NT, in the Persian *Diatessaron*, in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Pseudo-Clementines* and in Tertullian (*Against Marcion*).[11] Common here is the fusion of Matt. 10 and Luke 12, which marks the crucial connexion to the Gospel tradition: Those separated from their families will "*stand* as solitaries" (*monachoi*); "*standing*" is a special word in the context of commitment to vows of celibacy: in the words of the *Gospel of Thomas* (Logion 75) "many are *standing* at the door but the solitary (*monachoi*) are the ones who will enter the bridal chamber".[12] Common, too, is the developed ethos of ascetical warfare.[13] Many of our major themes also are found in early Manichaean literature, probably borrowed from Syriac sources: warfare, contest (*agon*), standing, crowning, single-mindedness and the epithet "only begotten".[14]

Notable for my purposes in this paper is Murray's assertion (p.74) that "this complex of themes seems entirely absent from the *Liber Graduum*"; that work, so Murray believes, reflects a very different context, typically Syriac but distinct from both the world of the *Qyama* and that of the *Acts of Judas Thomas*. To anticipate my own conclusions very briefly, let me note that the *Qyama* is in fact known to the author of the *Book of Steps* (*LG* col. 265,19; 776, 14-15); even more important, the Deuteronomic Call to Holy War can be shown to have a primary

role in structuring the ascetic experience—though it would be correct to note that nowhere in the *Book of Steps* does this theme show the literary flowering so evident in the literature which Murray has studied. But then the *Book of Steps* is much more practical in its orientation.

Is there too much imagination at work in Murray's synthesis? The elements in the testimony tradition (Jordan, sword, fire, division), he admits, are only somewhat tenuously joined to the symbolism of warfare and *iḥidayuta*. But a thematic link is found in the fused quotation of Matt. 10 and Luke 12. Only Aphrahat and Ephrem unite the two parts of the tradition *in explicitly ascetical contexts* (but the fusion, once recognized, is reflected in Origen and Theodoret). The context, however, is explicitly established by Aphrahat; and it demands explanation. Murray has tried—successfully to my mind—to demonstrate that a range of traditional imagery in earlier authors was "technical" vocabulary in primitive Judaeo-Christian asceticism. There is no discontinuity, so he asserts, (at least in Aramaic areas) between the original discipleship of the homeless and celibate Jesus and the ascetical self-consecration so central in early Syriac literature. However it may be that our deficient understanding of Gospel traditions is a barrier here! The concept of *iḥidayuta* seems to grow straight out of primitive discipleship.[15] Three aspects are primary: singleness from our dear ones (through separation by the sword of Christ), singleness of mind (through spiritual circumcision, an association already made in James), and singleness of putting on the only begotten and sole beloved.[16]

What was the relationship of baptism to vows of celibacy? Aphrahat's rite was probably still in use; "but times were changing as regards married people".[17] Almost all early Syriac literature is written by consecrated ascetics. They never speak about holiness in marriage except, I would note, for the image of union with the heavenly bridegroom. Many Christians, even as late as the 5th century, remained unbaptized while sexually active—they were exhorted to believe that they could be restored to "virginity" by baptism.[18] Only for ascetics did baptism come to equal celibacy (that is, self-consecration)

In many particulars this world corresponds to the world which we know so well from the *Book of Steps*. There a self-consecrated elite define themselves in terms of the Deuteronomic Call to Holy War, leaving wife and family, possessions and home to follow their vocation. These Perfect are in the world, but not of it. As we shall see, they are to do no work – not even the work of charity; rather they should follow the law of love and humility, bringing the word of God to everyone, good and bad alike. Charitable work of every sort remains in the hands of the Just or Upright; these are married householders who work in the world for profit and devote much of their wealth to charity, that is, to social good work. The two groups are not always on the best of terms – but together they seem to make up the Church. But this is to anticipate our examination of the rationale for the ascetic life presented in the *Book of Steps*. First it will be useful to review what we know more generally of that work.

II. **The ascetic tradition in the *Book of Steps*: Becoming Perfect**

The *Book of Steps* (*ktaba dmasqata*) is a collection of 30 homilies (*memre*) first writ-

ten in Syriac by an anonymous author in the later 4th century, according to common scholarly opinion.[19] A single passage makes reference to the lower Zab River, the area known in ancient times as Adiabene (*LG* 896,2). The collection describes the life and behaviour both of the Just/Upright (*kene*) and of the Perfect (*gmire*), giving advice to guide their conduct in theological discourse supported by biblical exposition. We are not well informed regarding the later history of the *Book of Steps.*[20] It appears from the manuscript tradition that the *Book of Steps* was known in the Syriac world from the time of its composition to the 12th century – and so indeed to our own time. Many modern scholars have had suspicions regarding the orthodoxy of the *Book of Steps.*[21] I do not find very much in the *Book of Steps* which sets it apart from the mainstream of Christian tradition. And I must confess that in many particulars its faith seems to me to be exemplary.

The Just or Upright are ordinary believers, married householders, parents of children and active in the world. The standard of conduct expected of them would be judged very high by a fair-minded modern critic. Not only were they to be hardworking, productive and responsible; they were also expected to arrange for and support all charity in the community and the material activities of the Church. The Perfect, by contrast, were to be devoted to the word of God in preaching, teaching, and possibly in healing and exorcism though these activities find little explicit mention here. Both groups are engaged in a struggle at once internal and external, for self-development and in the larger world. The author appears to have been the leader of a (premonastic) Christian ascetic community in the wider context of a more inclusive Church. In the usual Syriac way these ascetics are commonly called "solitaries"[22]. The *Book of Steps* thus documents the social role(s) and struggles of the two elements which together make up the Church. The thirty homilies deal with a substantial range of topics: the rules of conduct for both Perfect and Upright (homilies 1-8), developed biblical exposition (9 & 23), advice for the larger faith community (10, 25 & 29), and current controversies on sexuality and marriage (12 & 15). Even more interesting are the sermons which encourage the ministry of the Upright (26, 27, 28, 30), guide the relationship between Upright and Perfect (14) and direct the latter on the path to advanced Perfection, in their growth as Perfect Ones (11, 13, 16-22, 24). These latter sermons are of especial interest and importance to modern students concerned, as we are, to understand the rationale for the ascetic life in the Syriac Christian tradition.

In any case the Perfect are no "cultural elite", but rather spirit-filled (or charismatic) ascetics, while the Upright, married and living in the world, use their resources to do good, feeding, clothing, helping and healing the needy in the wider community.[23] The Perfect, as we shall see, had no active ministry: they were forbidden to work and to acquire property; they begged and taught, mediated conflicts and prayed without cease. It is evident that many of the Upright were little short of Perfection – but the *Book of Steps* insists on the distinction between their two vocations. The Perfect, by contrast, found their major challenge in their own inactivity and the threat of spiritual complacency (or in the temptation to acquire property and with it social power).[24] The obligation to love others is primary here as elsewhere in the work. Rationalizing disobedi-

ence, spiritualizing ascetic practice—such wiles of Satan cause the would-be Perfect to forget that he is a "Child of the Covenant".[25]

The schemes of the evil one, so evident in the relaxed discipline of the ascetic, cannot be dealt with by routine. Satan convinces the Perfect to acquire property and a dwelling, or to plant a garden "under the pretext of providing comfort for the afflicted."[26] Next the evil one pulls down the Perfect even from Uprightness, through their anxiety for the safety of their house, garden and flocks (*memra* 25). These arguments evidently resonate with the single-minded devotion of those who have left wife, home and vineyard in response to the call to Holy War.[27] The mission of the Perfect is undermined by their failure to treat every one well, their refusal to speak with the unworthy, and the manifold distortions of their "Perfectionism". Only a spiritless faith underlies their action by rote. They do not fast and make supplication to the Lord to be set free: they are sick and sleepy, drunken and greedy (*memra* 29).[28] They teach others but not themselves: they eat meat and drink wine, dress lavishly, possess wealth and are suspicious of strangers. These Perfect have fallen below the Upright! God prefers the "fast" of the Upright who, even though they eat, "loose the bonds of iniquity" and set the oppressed free to the fasting of those who refrain from eating only to do evil (citing Isaiah 58:6).[29]

The same critical intelligence is evident in the author's reflections on marriage and sexuality (*memra* 15: "On Adam's marital desire"). Celibacy and freedom from possessions are central to the life of the Perfect.[30] The married Upright have their own vocation to self-improvement. Lust is not innate in their condition–it comes from Satan: lust (i.e. desire without love) comes together with marriage, as a consequence of the lapse from Perfection of Adam and Eve, evident in their arrogant desire to become like God.

III. **The ascetic tradition in the *Book of Steps***

1. **The Call to Holy War**

When you go out to battle … the officers shall speak to the people saying: "What man is there who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in battle and another man dedicate it. And what man is there who has planted a vineyard and has not enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. And what man is there who has betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house lest he die in battle and another man take her." Deut. 20:1, 5-7

Throughout the *Book of Steps* the call to the ascetic life is most commonly expressed as an injunction to leave home and work, wife and family in clear allusion to the Deuteronomic Call to Holy War. This injunction also echoes the words of Jesus in the Gospels enjoining his followers to leave family and give up possessions to be sure; but the three-fold injunction in the *Book of Steps* is much closer to the text of Deuteronomy, which in any case was taken in the early Syriac tradition to underlie the call of Jesus, as Murray has so conclusively demonstrated. In contexts of strong emphasis, the three-fold injunction often appears in full. Those who wish to go beyond even the great commandments of love will treat everyone as family (*memra* 16.2), as the Lord was familiar with women (5), as children do not look ill even on the wicked: Imitate the fool,

despise yourself, do not have home, wife and property—not even clothes (7). The end of the Law is love, partnership with Jesus in warfare with the armies of sin (9). Those will be Perfect who humble themselves and renounce the world. In the *Book of Steps*, the necessary first step to Perfection is renunciation of home, family and property. Just as Joshua's warriors must distance themselves from care for home and wife and vineyard, so the ascetics in the *Book of Steps* are repeatedly enjoined against the entanglements of the married householder. The first lust is for material goods: the Perfect do not take wives, build or work the ground, or have possessions (*memra* 15.2,12,13). This path, of course, is the same as that along which Jesus directs those who love him: "Who does not leave his wife and son and possessions is not worthy of me" (*memra* 19, "On the way of Perfection", 14, taken as echoing Matt. 10:37, where, however, there is no reference to wife or possessions!). And he adds an extra detail: the unmarried will be like angels; they cannot die (ibid cf. Matt. 22:30). In the final sections of the *Book of Steps* the author returns to these key injunctions of Jesus: Leave your home, property and family (cf. Matt. 10:37; 19:29; Luke 14:26, with explicit mention of wife in Luke)—and take up your cross (*memra* 30.25,26; cf. Matt. 10:38). That the words of Jesus echo the Deuteronomic Call to Holy War cannot be coincidence, given the ancient tradition in the Syriac Church which so richly develops the midrashic association of following Jesus with Joshua's Holy War. Murray may well be correct that the developed literary syncrisis of these themes is unknown to the *Book of Steps*. But there can be no doubt that the rationale for the ascetic life presented in the *Book of Steps* is based on the Holy War tradition, both directly and as refracted through the teaching of Jesus.

Possessions are consistently seen as a barrier to Perfection: the Perfect do not build or plant or own land or work for food and clothing (*memra* 14.1). Reconciliation with enemies, renunciation of possessions and purity of heart are three difficult steps on the road to Perfection (*memra* 20.1): unless the family of Adam leaves possessions they will not be as Adam was at the beginning (20.6). The Perfect do not desire land nor compete in the world, nor enter matrimony (*memra* 25.3). Marriage, children and family life are certainly seen as barriers to Perfection, as we have seen in the four passages cited above (*memra* 15.13; 16.7; 19.14; 30.25): even for the Patriarchs, Perfection required leaving home and family (*memra* 9.19). The first step along this path is saying goodbye to all your family (*memra* 19.9). The unmarried please the Lord (19.15). The culmination of this line of thought is evident, as we have seen: the unmarried will be like angels—they cannot die (19.14 cf. Matt. 22:30). Elsewhere we are told how the angels live: they don't cultivate the land (*memra* 25.8—but then again neither do they dress the naked or feed the hungry!). It was the Devil who lured people into working; the Devil fooled people into making houses and gardens (*memra* 25.4, 5—and he still works to corrupt even the Perfect with such a temptation). The blessed will separate themselves from house and possessions (*memra* 3)—the essential contrast is between charismatic ascetics and married householders (3, 4). The Just/Upright are imperfect because of their work and worry and marriage. Despite the above, it should not be concluded that the *Book of Steps* is unambiguously opposed to possessions,

marriage and family life. Marriage was given to men and women in compensation for the loss of Adamic innocence; work and possessions allow the Upright to do the social good work which falls to their lot. Those who have property can dwell with God if only they do justice (i.e. "charity": *memra* 30.29; cf. Psalm 15:1-2).

Like Joshua's Holy Warriors, those who would be Perfect humble themselves and renounce the world (*memra* 16.12). The solitaries or "single ones" (*iḥidaye*) who live in a state of Perfection do not eat meat or drink wine: like the prophets and nazirs of old they fast from food and wine (*memra* 18.5; 29.16). We reprobates in the larger community do consume meat and wine, ignoring the contrast between our privilege and our brothers' and sisters' pain (29.3). Ultimately the life of the solitary is built on love: love is the one thing greater than faith (see *memra* 30 for what follows). Perfection, leading to the purification and building up of the Church, is based upon love. Indeed the disciples of faith often attack the disciples of love (for their ignorance!)—a prophetic theme, I might add (e.g. in Amos); they even do violence to those whose vocation is love. There is much in the life of the Perfect which ordinary believers clearly do not understand. A most notable instance is the practice among the Perfect of drinking wine on occasion and, on occasion, talking with women (*memra* 30.18-20). We are explicitly warned that free eating and social intercourse are only for those trained in faith and love (30.20). If we suppose that the author of the *Book of Steps* follows the Bible in this matter of drinking wine and talking to women, we can recognize here the messianic banquet to which Israel aspires (see e.g. the conclusion of Amos) and the bridal feast celebrating the advent of the bridegroom. The messianic feast and its relationship to fasting is a dimension of biblical narrative often overlooked or undervalued by modern as well as ancient observers, understandably so for those whose lives, like ours, are swallowed up in the workaday world. The strict logic of biblical narrative, however, requires the opposition of holy feasting to the holy fast. And both holy feast and holy fast are articulated around the ascetic vocation to spiritual warfare. Let us now look more closely at some further passages in the *Book of Steps* where the ascetic life is represented as warfare.

2. **Ascetic Life as Warfare**

According to the account in Deuteronomy (20:1, 5-7), the warriors who would follow Joshua are enjoined to return home if their thoughts are on their houses, vineyards and wives. Only those who have chosen not to return, leaving possessions, home and family are suited for the Holy War. As we have seen, the *Book of Steps* consistently teaches that the ones who would be Perfect must leave home and wife and property. Like Joshua's warriors, they too have left the vineyard behind: the Perfect do not drink wine (apart from circumstances in which they anticipate the Messianic banquet). Their commitment is to the higher law of love: all men and women are members of our one family, even those who do wrong. The intention of the Perfect is to return to the innocence of Adam and Eve, the innocence of children. So Joshua's warriors–and the nazirs and prophets who follow them–aspire to bring all of Israel to the Messianic banquet (as represented in the conclusion of Amos). Joshua's warriors appear as the Holy Ones who follow God when he arises

to do battle, the human equivalent of the Host of Heaven. And thus, in the *Book of Steps*, the Perfect become like angels: they do not die.

Throughout the *Book of Steps* the ascetic life of the Perfect is presented as (spiritual) warfare. The repertory of themes in which their vocation is expressed draws on powerful symbolic structures central to the Hebrew Bible; preeminent among them are themes of standing up/arising, waging war against the powers of evil in the cosmos and in our life on earth, fasting, understood here as always in a very comprehensive sense, and not least the solitary life of the chosen "single ones".

3. **Standing up/arising**

In the Hebrew Bible God is very often manifest through his arising, as Lord of Hosts, with the Host of Heaven; on this model the prophets declare their allegiance by "taking a stand" for the Lord (always expressed by words derived from the verbal root *qayam*). This theme of standing as a sign of purposeful action and allegiance also proved powerfully attractive to the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Syriac Christian tradition, where it gives rise to the concepts of *qyama* (covenant) and *qyamta* (resurrection), the latter universal in Christian thought (*anastasis* in Greek, *resurrectio* in Latin —both with the meaning "standing up again")[31]. So in the *Book of Steps* we see this image consistently deployed to express the vocation of the ascetic Perfect. *Memra* 18 ("The Tears of Prayer") strongly expresses this vocation of the solitaries, the "Heroes in Christ", whose law is to follow Perfection. They are enjoined: "Let us arise and do battle (*agona*) against sin!" (18.3). Very commonly the Pauline term *agon*, taken up as a loan word from the Greek, displaces the Syriac *qraba* (itself cognate with the usual Hebrew word for "battle"), but the effect of this association of biblical *qraba* with the Pauline *agon* is to deeply enrich the symbolic expression of the ascetic vocation: already in Classical Greek usage *agon* denotes the redemptive struggle and suffering of the hero, a perspective unknown to Christian scholars.[32] Elsewhere the Perfect are described as "standing in the Lord and fasting from the world" (*memra* 4). They are to pray for their brothers and sisters: a long, apocryphal saying of Jesus is adduced as support for this step on the difficult road to Perfection. Jesus is represented as enjoining us: "pray for the wicked that they may arise!" (20, esp. 12). The same *memra* deploys the image of warfare for the struggle against sin—even to blood in the *agon*, to martyrdom, as it would appear (20.4). The athlete of the Lord is to stand up in the *agon* (20.4 with allusion to Hebrews 12:14).

4. **Waging war**

Warfare is the essential expression of the ascetic vocation (whether expressed as *qraba* or as *agona*). This warfare has a cosmic dimension: it is warfare with the armies of sin (16.9), in which we fight and defeat Satan (12.7). This warfare is also a personal struggle, a battle for the way up, fought with vigils, fasting, tears and self-humiliation (20.8). Jesus showed us how we should fight with Satan, as we have seen (20.12, with the apocryphal saying attributed to Jesus, quoted above). This warfare is necessarily personal: in human life all wars come from the feeling that one has been wronged (22.3, where the context is a diatribe against the Jews, counseling forgiveness in place of

vengeance!). From the perspective of the believer, however, our personal struggle against sin and Satan is only one dimension of the cosmic war, the war which takes place in Heaven: God made Satan to do battle (23.2, with reference to Job 40:19)—a cosmic dualism very close to the worldview of the Dead Sea Scrolls sect!

5. **Fasting**

A principal weapon in our warfare is fasting: when we take a stand for the Lord, we commit ourselves to fasting from the world (*memra* 4). As *memra* 10 explains, fasting and humility are the rewards which we receive for suffering evil as we do good: fasting, prayer and humility cleanse us, body and soul (10.3). While it is good for the solitaries (single ones) not to eat meat and drink wine (with reference to Romans 14:21), the *Book of Steps* follows the great teaching in Isaiah 58 which describes true "fasting" as doing good to all (ibid; 29.5,12). As Isaiah suggests, fasting from food while doing evil is worthless. Fasting can be secret or open (12.1). It is the special vocation of the Perfect; the Just/Upright do not work on heavenly things by fasting (19.13). In its exposition of the way of Perfection addressed to the solitaries/single ones *memra* 19 thus establishes fasting as the central activity which distinguishes the Perfect from other believers. Above all, when we fast, we follow the example of Jesus, our model in fasting and prayer; he made himself a stranger (*xenios* = pilgrim) to the world, as the Perfect do, setting themselves off by their fasting (20.10). When the *Book of Steps* turns to teach us how to "castigate our bodies" (*memra* 19), fasting has a central role (29.3,5,12). Of course, the solitaries/single ones refrain from bread and wine – much greater than this is their fasting (29.16). Only to those who truly fast come the great qualities of "singleness" (*iḥidayuta*) and holiness (29.13): they humble themselves with fasting and prayer; they empty themselves and make themselves holy, "lifting up their crosses" (ibid). We see, thus, that fasting is a very comprehensive concept in the *Book of Steps*, as it is in the Hebrew Bible and the practice of ancient Judaism; it amounts to withdrawal from the world, becoming almost the central synonym for the ascetic vocation.

6. **The solitary life**

Thus it is the solitaries/single ones above all who do not eat and drink (10, 3; cf. 18, 3). *Memra* 9 argues at length that the prophets acted in conformity with the teaching of Jesus; the Perfection of the Patriarchs was evident in their leaving of home and family (*memra* 9, esp. 19 for the Patriarchs; cf. 9.12,13 for a whole series of apocryphal sayings attributed to Jesus on the Perfection of the Patriarchs): Elijah appears here as the model of Perfection—his charismatic virtue is evident in the effectiveness of his prayers for rain (echoing a central theme of the Hebrew Bible). And a rationale for the solitary ascetic life of the single ones is also offered here (*memra* 9) from Lamentations (3:26-8): those who wait for the Lord and his salvation will sit alone (*badad*), giving their cheek to the smiter. Those who persist in their vocation will receive blessing abundantly, rainfall and fruitful fields: "The sower and the harvester will rejoice together" (John 4:36) with an evident allusion to the messianic restoration foretold in Amos 9, a restoration to be celebrated in the messianic banquet! Only those who truly fast will deserve to attain the attributes of

"singleness" and "holiness" (29.13). And for those who attain that status an even greater reward remains: we are told that would-be solitaries/single ones are "children of the house of the Lord" (19.1). This ancient image, already well known to the Hebrew Bible, was adopted by Judaism and the early Church (both east and west) to describe the believer: he or she became a servant of the Lord, but also his foster child and intimate favourite.

7. The ascetic vocation: Hebrew Bible

Standing up, waging war, fasting, living the single or solitary life—all these actions are closely linked in the *Book of Steps* as stages or aspects of the ascetic vocation. Standing up, fasting and warfare are linked explicitly in *memra* 18 ("The Tears of Prayer"), fasting and warfare in *memra* 12. Leaving home is, of course, often associated with the single/solitary life (*memre* 9,16,19). *Memra* 16 suggests that leaving home, wife and property is the necessary preparation for warfare against the armies of sin. This scenario, so plausible in itself, is developed in great detail in *memra* 20, which outlines some difficult steps on the road to the city of God: renunciation of possessions (20.1) leads to standing up in the *agon* (20.3,4). The theme of warfare is represented at length (20.3,4,5,8,9,12). Fasting on the example of Jesus is a major weapon in the struggle (20.8,10). And this struggle, in turn, is clearly redemptive—it leads to the arising even of the wicked (as a result of the prayers of the Perfect on the model of Jesus; 20.12).[33] Many of the same elements are also closely linked in *memra* 25 (which counsels the Perfect to distinguish the voice of God from that of Satan). This core narrative in which the followers of God act as protagonists has its own intrinsic unity, but it is also firmly founded in the Hebrew Bible. As we have seen, a rationale for leaving home is drawn from Lamentations (3:26-8): Elijah is presented as a model, and the messianic banquet is held out as a reward (John 4:36, citing Amos 9). All these associations appear in *memra* 9 on the prophets and patriarchs. *Memra* 29 ("The Castigation of the Body") draws on Isaiah 58:5 for the essential distinction between false fasting —from food alone—and the true fasting which consists in (fasting and) doing good. As we have seen, *memra* 20 echoes the Psalms and prophets in promising God's children a return to their home. Imagery of standing up and waging war is so universal in the Hebrew Bible that it does not require detailed substantiation for the author of the *Book of Steps*—or for us.

8. The ascetic vocation: Gospel

On the other hand there are clearly elements in this symbolic complex which reflect their further development in the words of Jesus and the teaching of Paul. As the Syriac tradition clearly teaches, the words of Jesus counselling his followers to leave their families intentionally echo the Deuteronomic call to Holy War: the sword of his word, like the sword of Joshua, will bring division to families.[34] And, indeed, such an allusion is inherently plausible. But the call to Holy War, as the core of a powerful symbolic complex in the Gospel tradition, deserves close study in its own right: its role in shaping the teaching of Jesus cannot be said to be well understood in the modern Christian world. The *Book of Steps*, by contrast, understands these associations very well, as we have seen (e.g. *memra* 19.14, citing Matt. 10:37). The *Book of Steps* also understands

the central symbolic role of standing up/ arising in the Gospel tradition; standing up is commonly recognized as the first step towards battle: "Let us arise and do battle (*agona*) against sin!" (18.3; cf. 20.4 echoing Heb 12:14). This struggle is clearly redemptive: Jesus is represented as enjoining us to pray for the wicked—that they may arise (20.12). Those who stand up become "children of the standing", that is "members of the covenant", eligible for *re-surrection*, that is "standing up again". Warfare is sometimes denoted by the biblical *qraba* (e.g. 23.2), more often by the powerful Greek loan word *agon*, introduced by Paul to denote the redemptive struggle of Jesus and his followers (e.g. 20.3,4; cf. Heb. 12:14 with reference to martyrdom; cf. 18.3; 20.5,9). The whole homily in *memra* 20, "Difficult Steps on the Road to the City of the Lord", focuses on the *agon* as the ultimate redemptive struggle. Some other elements in this symbolic complex of Holy War in the Gospels appear uniquely Christian: in this tradition, the *Book of Steps* commonly identifies the followers of Jesus as those who take up the cross. Taking up the cross is associated with leaving home (30.25,26 in the powerful conclusion of the whole work); humility and the hard road to perfection are symbolized by the cross (25.7; 29.13). Only those who take up the cross and follow the Lord will be worthy of him (20.15). This symbolic complex seems foreign to the Hebrew Bible; but the author of the *Book of Steps* can adduce Enoch as a model of the one who renounces possessions and takes up his cross (13.4). And Martin Hengel has taught us to recognize in Jesus' injunction to take up the cross an echo of the religious propaganda of the zealots contemporary with Jesus.[35] Finally the designation of Christian ascetics as "single ones", which we find so commonly in the *Book of Steps,*[36] as elsewhere in Syriac tradition, does indeed have roots in the Hebrew Bible—in the designation of Isaac as only begotten, in which role he serves as the type of Jesus, and also in some puzzling references to "single ones" or solitaries who have a special relationship to the Lord.[37] The Dead Sea Scrolls community also recognized the special resonance of this complex when they chose a cognate term as their self-designation (i.e. *yaḥad* = the unique community).

9. The banquet of the King and the bridal chamber

Ascetic warfare, fasting and the solitary life (of the single ones) are the vocation of the followers of Jesus, in the Gospels and certainly in Syriac Christian tradition. But they are not the goal of our striving, as the *Book of Steps* understands very well: our goal is to come to the banquet of the king and to enter into the bridal chamber! Here, too, we have a symbolic complex rooted in the Hebrew Bible, which is appropriated in the Gospels to express our ultimate union with the Lord.

The goal of all believers is to stand up and approach the door of the bridal chamber, but the single ones (*iḥidaye*) have a special claim to enter in. In the *Gospel of Thomas* (logion 75) this tradition is expressed in the strong form characteristic of that text: "Many are standing at the door, but the solitary (*monachoi*) are the ones who will enter the bridal chamber." The *Book of Steps* recognizes this aspiration very clearly. *Memra* 7 sets out precepts to guide the conduct of the Just, beginning with the fundamental teaching of Jesus, here expressed in the for-

mulation of Hillel: "What you hate, do not do to your neighbour". Every believer is encompassed by this teaching. And the goal of every believer ("in his/her own grade," 7.21) is to come to the "kingdom whose marriage chamber will never be stripped". *Memra* 24 is more explicit: everyone who repents can "taste the sweetness of the world to come" (24.1 with reference to Heb. 6:5, already widely used by the Montanists). Even Judas Iscariot could have been saved by penitence (24.1). The path leads through the seal (of baptism) and taking on the covenant (24.2), repudiating anger (24.6). Everyone is summoned to the bridal feast, even those "without a wedding garment" (24.7). We must watch and take care, "castigating the body" with true fasting and humility (*memra* 29), for singleness (*iḥidayuta*) and holiness are the attributes of those who truly fast (29.13). We must watch and take care, for we do not know "when the thief will come" (29.9)—that is, in the Gospel idiom, we must watch and take care, for the bridegroom comes when we least expect it, "like a thief in the night". At the wedding feast we rejoice, celebrating with food and drink, as in the messianic banquet of the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Amos 9). Love is greater than all gifts: only the great commandments of love lead to the house of the Lord and to his bridal chamber, but the minor commandments never do so (*memra* 19, esp. 36). Only when the bridegroom is taken away, will the disciples fast (19.21; cf. Mark 2:20 etc.). This great homily (*memra* 19) expounding the road to Perfection is addressed to the would-be solitary. And this teaching is strongly extended in the next homily (*memra* 20), which outlines "difficult steps on the road to the city of the Lord". If we persist in evil, we will not be able to enter the bridal chamber (20.14 with specific mention of the bridegroom, wedding garment and the bridal chamber). Only those who take up their cross and follow the Lord will be worthy of him (20.15). They will come to the banquet of the king (20.16), having been saved from the slavery of sin and adopted as children (20.17). Penitence, true fasting, humility, and for the spiritual elite, the solitary life of a single one lead through the seal of baptism, the covenant and the great commandments of love to the wedding feast with the bridegroom and to the bridal chamber, where the experience of union with the Lord is left unexpressed, because inexpressible, not through any excessive discretion of the teacher, we may presume.

Here we have already entered into the Holy of Holies, that is, the erotic experience at the heart of the Song of Songs (as Akiva taught)—so clearly echoed in the teaching of Jesus. Sad to say, for many modern Christians this symbolic complex of the wedding feast, so central to Rabbinic Judaism and to the Gospel tradition, is even more obscure than the symbolic complex of Holy War. Modern scholarship may overcome this deficiency; just recently we have been reminded at great length of the central importance of this erotic imagery in the biblical traditions, ancient and medieval.[38] The Syriac tradition makes its own unique contribution to the articulation of these symbolic structures. The *Book of Steps* expounds these themes of Holy War and erotic feasting with an astounding clarity and detail, the more so since the aim of the work is strictly practical rather than midrashic or speculative.

IV. Conclusions

When Aphrahat summons his brothers and sisters to repentence, he makes use of a traditional midrashic homily, based on the Deuteronomic call to Holy War. In Aphrahat's time, quite probably, the commitment to separation from wife, home, and work was no longer a requirement for Christian baptism. But such a separation remained a prerequisite for the ascetic life understood as Holy War. From this we infer that the Holy War tradition was very old, indeed continuous with the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel, as Murray has demonstrated. Ephrem very clearly worked in the same tradition, applying his own poetic genius to develop an inherited symbolic structure. How much of what we read in Ephrem's poetry is original to him, it is difficult to say. But the widespread recurrence of the Holy War theme in at least fourteen text traditions attests that this symbolic structure was primary in the Syriac tradition and elsewhere in the Church –and this supports the assumption that it was ancient. I also believe that the narrative implicit in this tradition is primary, that is, generative of other narratives and symbolic systems in the Christian tradition. According to this primary (or core) narrative, those who most strongly love the Lord will separate from family, home and the workaday world; they will stand up for the Lord, undertake his holy warfare with fasting and the solitary life (as "single ones")—they will take up the cross and prepare for the *agon*, even if it leads to martyrdom and death. And according to the same narrative, they rise again, come to the banquet of the king and enter into the bridal chamber.

There can be no question that this primary narrative underlies—and, indeed, structures—the *Book of Steps*. As Kitchen has shown so well, the *Book of Steps* serves as a practical guide for both the Just/Upright (*kene*) and the Perfect (*gemire*) on the road to a more perfect love, faith, and way of life. Murray is quite correct to insist that the compressed and poetic form of this tradition seems "completely absent" from the *Book of Steps*. It is my hope that I have demonstrated here how all the essential elements of the Holy War tradition are well known to the *Book of Steps*. It is possible that they are known primarily by way of the Gospel midrash on Deuteronomy 20: Jesus' call for those who love him to separate from home and family certainly echoes the Deuteronomic call. But the careful way in which the *Book of Steps* deploys complex biblical themes such as standing up and fasting suggests strongly that the anonymous author has the Hebrew Bible very much in mind, as is indeed likely. Not only is the Holy War tradition well known to the *Book of Steps*; it serves as an essential symbolic system, underlying and structuring the whole teaching. Sufficient evidence has been presented to support that assertion.

My efforts, however, have produced only a preliminary analysis, which is far from complete or conclusive. Suffice it here to say that I have undertaken a much broader study of the Holy War tradition in the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic Judaism and the early Church. The evidence for the dominant role of this tradition is rich and convincing. Semeio-structural analysis will clearly demonstrate how the Call to Holy War (with its associated themes of standing up, ascetic warfare, fasting and the single life–together, of course, with the messianic banquet and the bridal chamber) generates the fundamental symbolic structure

underlying the complex text of the Book of Steps. In any case it will be clear that the Syriac tradition preserves and documents central Christian traditions linking the faith of Christians to biblical and rabbinic traditions, with a clarity and force unequalled elsewhere in the broad Christian world.

NOTES

[1] It should be noted that Murray believes the conceptual structures of the Holy War tradition to be "entirely absent" from the Book of Steps—a position with which I take issue below.

[2] Vööbus suggested that it was a "liturgical text" from an earlier period: "its restrictive implications were no longer in force"; for this and what follows see R. Murray "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," *NTS* 21, 1975, pp. 59-80, here p. 59.

[3] Echoes are found by Murray in 14 text traditions: see his Table on p. 69.

[4] In *Dem.* VI cols. 256-261, sons and daughters of the Covenant are told to marry rather than to live together, as they seem to be doing.

[5] With the substitution of *agona* from I Cor 9, 24ff etc.

[6] II Chron 20: Jehoshaphat; I Macc 3, 56: Judas Maccabaeus' call to holy war; *War Scroll* col. 10, 2ff; the *War Scroll* especially shows "the developed ideology of eschatological war" (Murray p. 63).

[7] For ascetical *athlesis* see e.g. I Cor 9, 24-27; II Tim 4, 7-8; for warfare Eph 6, 10-17; I Pet 5, 7-9.

[8] Cf *monogenes* = only begotten, Hebrew *yahid* as applied to Isaac; see Murray p. 65.

[9] *Dem.* XI 501,11-26; 504,14-21; Murray p. 66 for the translation.

[10] Unfortunately Joshua's "stone sword" is not explicitly present in the Epiphany Hymns; see Murray pp. 66-67 for details. But the association of the "Living Word" in Heb 4, 12 with Joshua's second circumcision by typological exposition is, beyond doubt, widespread and important (Murray, ibid).

[11] Murray gives an overview of the major themes as they are found in 14 texts; see Murray Table I p. 69.

[12] Murray p. 70. We should note that the tradition recorded in the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions (11, 28, 2) adds "husband against wife and wife against husband" to the Gospel account of division in families.

[13] See Murray pp. 71-72. Many, often complex, echoes of this tradition are found in the early and eloquent Odes of Solomon with reference to "holy ones" (*ḥasya* not *qaddisha*), "war", "covenant" and "victory" (Ode 9, esp. 6-12). And this theme is common throughout the Odes as are the themes circumcision of heart, the sword, standing up/arising, and separation of the living from the dead (details in Murray pp. 72-73). Though there is no explicit use of *ihidaya*/*monachos*, the Odes certainly do emphasize the special relationship with Christ, and the "undivided" spirit of the believer (ibid). Compare also the Acts of Judas Thomas with somewhat veiled allusions to "purity"/sexual abstinence and singleness (Murray p. 74).

[14] Murray pp. 74-77.

[15] Drawing directly on the conceptual system of the Hebrew Bible, which also underlies in a similar way the thought world of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

[16] Early Syriac asceticism, because of the "intensely personal focus of its aspiration to union with the heavenly bridegroom", suffered from a defective social sense, so argues Murray (p. 79)—a defect which weakened the cohesiveness of eastern Christianity. But precisely this biblical element, union with the heavenly bridegroom, is widely underrated in the western Church, as Murray has noted in an unpublished paper "What happened to love of the body"; cf. A. Green "Shekinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs; Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context," in *AJS* Review 61 (2002) pp. 1-52. The *Qyama* stands at the heart of the Church; "often the *Bnay Qyama* were not solitaries in the social sense", and sometimes *Qyama* almost comes to correspond to the Church. But only in one instance does self-consecration have a clearly social context (Murray p. 79, citing Ephrem Epiphany Hymns

8, 16-17.

[17] Murray p. 79.

[18] Murray pp. 79-80, citing the homily by Isaac of Antioch.

[19] For this and what follows see R.A. Kitchen, "Becoming Perfect: The maturing of asceticism in the *Liber Graduum,*" *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 2 (2002) pp. 30-45, here p. 30.

[20] One later work refers to the collection in an exegetical context (Ms British Library Add. 17193, ff 3a-3b; cf. Kmosko LG Praefatio xi-xiii for text and Latin translation), claiming that it was written by an otherwise unknown Eusebius the Solitary. In the 6th century Philoxenus of Mabbug refers to the institution of the Perfect and the Upright in his Ascetical Homilies—but the context of his work is already a monastic community very different from the world of the *Book of Steps*. Philoxenus gives no direct citation in his homilies, but the two works are joined in a major manuscript of the 12th century (BN de Paris Syrus 201).

[21] Kmosko, the editor of the standard modern edition, raised doubts a century ago. And more recently it has been argued anew that the *Book of Steps* "was the lost Asceticon of the Messalian movement" or, at least, tainted with Messalian attitudes and values: hostility to ecclesiastical institutions and to the sacraments, exclusive emphasis on ceaseless prayer (see Kitchen pp. 33-34 for these charges in modern scholarly literature, esp. the work of V. Desprez and B. Colless; Kitchen nn. 22 & 23). I do not share these suspicions. Already 50 years ago Arthur Vööbus argued against the assumption that the *Book of Steps* was Messalian. We must judge the work in an open-minded way, looking closely at its ideas and arguments—and even more so at its fundamental symbolic structure—against the background of the Bible and what we know of the early Church especially in the Syriac tradition. We have already seen that Father Murray at one time considered the *Book of Steps* to stand apart from the cycle of themes which he has identified in Aphrahat, Ephrem and elsewhere. On another occasion Murray noted the sectarian, isolated and defensive character of the book: "it protests too much to be a completely orthodox book" (Kitchen n. 25 citing Murray, *Symbols*, 35, cf. 34, 263-269). With all respect, I feel that these criticisms and concerns are exaggerated.

[22] Or "single ones", i.e. *iḥidaye*; cf. below for the evidence.

[23] Like any other "village patron", of the sort described by Brown; cf. Kitchen n. 12.

[24] Kitchen's further detailed examination of the teaching in the *Book of Steps* seems to emphasize its orthodoxy. Homilies 1-8 set out the fundamental rules for an ascetically oriented society, comparing and contrasting the major and minor mandates of Scripture (and exploring the evident dissonance between these categories in a very suggestive way). Here the author is concerned to define the characteristics and duties of both Upright and Perfect. In Homily 9 he defends the paradigmatic authority of the biblical prophets for the Perfect—a theme of some importance to my inquiry. The "first discordant note" is raised in *memra* 10, On fasting and humility of body and soul. Addressing his audience as "my brothers" the author attacks a "spiritualizing or quietistic approach to asceticism" (Kitchen p. 35). Some physical fasting is disdained by brothers who believe that they are superior to the body. In contrast he strongly emphasizes the benefits of fasting and prayer for soul and body (Kitchen p. 35): "one cannot declare that one … is fasting spiritually without fasting physically in the body" (ibid). No dualism of body and soul is admitted here: the soul fasts from evil while the body fasts from food and pleasure.

[25] *Bar Qyama*; cf. LG col. 265, 19.

[26] Kitchen p. 36.

[27] The mature commitment of the Upright is closer to Jesus' example of Perfection and to the holiness of Adam at creation. Such Perfection, indeed, is the goal of all mankind: if we had maintained our initial purity, God would have given us food and clothing—even children without marriage or lust! Marriage was given by God

for the worldly—and through marriage came adultery and fornication. The Upright by their actions will gain eternal life.

[28] Cf. Kitchen pp. 37ff.

[29] Cf. the apocryphal saying of Jesus denouncing the false fasting of evildoers: LG col. 844, 11-17.

[30] Cf. Kitchen p. 39 for the supposed "muting" of these values "for the sake of the developing Upright who live in the world"!

[31] Cf. Murray pp. 77-78: Excursus: Standing, *Qyama* and Baptism.

[32] Cf G. Nagy Pindar's Homer (Baltimore 1990) Chap. 5, esp. pp. 140-141.

[33] As we shall soon see, only those who take up the cross and follow the Lord will come to the banquet of the King, be saved from the slavery of death, adopted as children and returned to their home: 20, 15, 16 and 17; cf. Psalm 102, 17ff, Jer 31, 17.

[34] Cf. especially Matt 10 and Luke12, discussed by Murray pp. 67-8.

[35] M. Hengel, *The Zealots*, English edition (Edinburgh 1989)

[36] For single ones/solitaries, i.e. *iḥidaye*, see *Book of Steps* 9;10, 3; 18, 3; 19, 1; 25, 8; 29, 13. In *memra* 9 Elijah is adduced as a model of Perfection in a context which offers a rationale for the (ascetic) life of the solitaries/single ones; in *memra* 29, 13 "singleness" (*iḥidayuta*) is described as the attribute of those who truly fast.

[37] Cf. Brown, Driver, Briggs s. v. *yaḥid*.

[38] See Green cited in n. 16 above.

GREGORY BARHEBRAEUS AND HIS TIME: THE SYRIAN RENAISSANCE

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> When reading, exploring and meticulously investigating these books, one discovers the powerful language, the eloquence, art and ability of a writer, and how wise he was[1] and how much he excelled in sciences and the powerful way in which he had acquired wisdom as well as fame among those internal and external.[2]

It is with these words that Barṣaumō Ṣāfī concludes the impressive list of works—and more generally the biography—of his elder brother Gregory Barhebraeus, who had died shortly before (1286) and whom he would succeed as Maphrian of the Syrian-Orthodox Church.

"Exploring and meticulously investigating" Barhebraeus' works is not an easy task and it can certainly not be the objective of the present article to give an overall picture of the literary output of someone who was undoubtedly one of the most productive authors in the field of Syriac letters and who, in addition, contributed substantially to Christian Arabic literature. The main reason why it is too early to think of presenting an overall picture, and certainly of formulating a final judgment, is the fact that although the great majority of his more important works has been edited,—though not always according to modern scientific standards,[3]—a systematic study of some of these, e.g. the Chronicles or the collection of Poems, based on the precise identification of the sources, has not yet been carried out.[4]

A more modest aim of this article is, firstly, to make a few general comments on the sources used by Barhebraeus. Insight into the way he handles his numerous sources is one of the first steps on the way to understanding his writings. Secondly, we shall try to situate Barhebraeus within the context of his time. This will help us to better evaluate the originality of this "bishop-scholar', who all too often has been portrayed, mainly by western scholars, as a skillful compiler, but hardly an original thinker.[5]

1. Barhebraeus and his Sources

One of the first things that strike students of the work of Barhebraeus is the great number of quotations of and references to many different sources and authorities. In most cases, these sources are used anonymously or are indicated with not very precise appellations such as *malfōnō* or "one of the fathers". In

the case of Islamic sources, he is frequently even less precise and speaks vaguely of "some excellent person" or even "an Elder". Only very incidentally does he mention titles of books. How did these works, originally composed in different languages (Greek, Arabic, Syriac, Persian), covering various scientific and spiritual disciplines (theology, historiography, science) and originating in different cultural and religious contexts (East- and West-Syrian, Islamic, Hellenistic) reach Barhebraeus? Was he able to consult directly and personally the sources used in his writings or did he rely rather on compilations and translations?

1.1 **Languages known to Barhebraeus**

To answer this question, we should first investigate the problem of what languages were known to Barhebraeus. In the foreword to his so-called Civil Chronicle[6], we read that for the composition of this work, he had the opportunity to consult "many volumes of the Syrians, the Saracens and the Persians" in the library of Marāgha in Azarbayjan, capital of the Mongol Il-Khanids and one of his favorite places of residence.

Syriac was of course Barhebraeus' normal literary language, in which he composed most of his writings. Arabic comes in second place. At the time of Barhebraeus and in the regions where he lived,[7] it was certainly not normal for Syrian Orthodox ecclesiastics to know this language. We are told that Barhebraeus had to accompany his Patriarch to Damascus to assist him in his contacts with the Muslim rulers.[8] In his chronicles he gives some examples of the weak knowledge of Arabic among several dignitaries of his days.[9] Furthermore, the fact that he felt obliged to make a number of translations from Arabic into Syriac gives us a glimpse into the linguistic situation of the Syrian-Orthodox of his time, in which apparently not all *Suryōyē* knew this language. Barhebraeus himself was able to write directly in Arabic, e.g. his historiographical work *mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh al-duwal*, to translate from Arabic into Syriac, e.g. Avicenna's *kitāb al-Išārāt wa l-Tanbīhāt*,[10] or vice versa[11] and he made extensive use of Arabic sources.

His knowledge of the Persian language is confirmed by the fact that he knew 'Ala al-Dīn 'Aṭa Malek Jovaini's world chronicle, the *Tarikh-e Jahangoša*, which he calls a "marvelous work in Persian". However, the exact relationship of this work with Barhebraeus' civil chronicle has not yet been studied properly. He also seems to have been acquainted with the Malik-nāma[12], but especially his extensive use of the *Akhlāq-e Nāṣiri* of *Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī* in his Cream of Wisdom leaves no doubt as to his thorough knowledge of Persian.[13]

In the Life of Barhebraeus composed by Dioscorus d-Gōzartō, whom he ordained a bishop in 1285, we read that the "Paraclete, the giver of wisdom (or science) to the Apostles overshadowed him and imparted to him the knowledge of tongues, viz. the four languages of the Syrians, the Armenians, the Saracens and the Persians,"[14] thus also mentioning Armenian as one of languages available to Barhebraeus. There is however no evidence in his writings, e.g. in his historiographical work, that he used Armenian sources.[15] On account of the close relations between the Armenians and the Syrian-Orthodox at different levels and both positive and negative, he may have had some working knowledge of it.[16]

Though not mentioned by Dioscorus and

by Barhebraeus himself in his remark about the Library in Marāgha, on account of the great number of references to Greek sources, both pagan and Christian, we must raise the question whether Barhebraeus was able to consult these works in their original language. Recent research has demonstrated that at least in some of his most important writings, he used extant Syriac—and possibly Arabic—translations of originally Greek works. This is true for the Cream of Wisdom, where Barhebraeus used a Syriac version of the Compendium of Aristotelian Philosophy by Nicolaos of Damascus[17] and the Physiognomica by Polemon of Laodicea.[18] For the *Swōd Sufyā* and related works, Jansen observes that Barhebraeus knew the works of (ps-)Aristotle through the commentaries and Syriac translations of authors such as Paul the Persian or Athanasius of Balad or by the commentaries available in Arabic.[19] Both the Ethicon and the Book of the Dove (*kt. d-yawnō*) are characterized by a great many references to originally Greek spiritual and theological authorities, such as Gregory Nazianzen, John Klimakos, Basil the Great, Athanasius of Alexandria, the Apophtegmata Patrum and especially Evagrius of Pontus. For all quotations, it can be demonstrated that he used extant Syriac versions, which he had probably found in one of the numerous spiritual florilegia that circulated in the Syrian-Orthodox monasteries of his time.[20] The numerous patristic quotations of e.g. Gregory Thaumaturgus, Dionysius Areopagita, Athanasius of Alexandria, etc. in Barhebraeus' elaborate letter-poem addressed to the East Syrian Catholicos Denḥā I (d. 1281) also refer to extant Syriac translations.[21] In the field of exegesis he generally relies on earlier Syriac sources, such as the Hexaemeron of Moses bar Kiphō; this probably also holds true for his references to the Greek text of the Bible, since he knows of a Syriac version of the Septuagint. The patristic quotations in the Candelabrum of the Sanctuary and the Book of Rays are taken from the work of Moses bar Kiphō, as will be shown in the next paragraph.

In a recent study N. Serikoff proposes a new approach to this problem.[22] On the basis of an analysis of the transcriptions of Greek words in the *mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh al-duwal*, which he consulted in the first edition of Ṣalḥānī (Beirut, 1890), he observes that Barhebraeus' transliterations and sometimes interpretations are closer to the Greek original than is usual in his Arabic source texts. This brings Serikoff to the conclusion that Greek was "not unknown to him".[23] It is however problematic that his analysis is based on the unsatisfactory edition of Ṣalḥānī; especially in the case of transcriptions of loanwords one normally finds many variants between the different copyists, which may tell more about the copyist's familiarity with Greek words than the author's. Secondly, when comparing the Arabic text composed by Barhebraeus with the Arabic of his Muslim sources, one cannot rule out the possibility that Barhebraeus' rendering of certain words was influenced by extant Syriac transcriptions of Greek words, e.g. in Greek-Syriac lexica.[24] His explanation or use of certain terms may also just have been common knowledge or practice among Oriental Christians.[25] We cannot of course exclude the possibility, that, as in the case of Armenian, he had some practical knowledge of Greek, which he could have acquired, for example, in his native town of Melitene or through his contacts with the Greek-Orthodox in and around Antioch,

Tripoli and Aleppo, though most of them will have expressed themselves rather in Arabic, which had become the normal language of the Antiochian Melkites.[26]

There is at least no evidence that he was able to consult Greek sources directly.

1.2 **Christian Sources**

In his Book of Ethics, Barhebraeus gives quotations from no less than twelve different works of Evagrius of Pontus along with many other citations from spiritual authorities of his Church. In the 12th Base of the Candelabrum of the Sanctuary, "On Paradise", one finds a series of testimonies on the location of the Paradise in the East, which are borrowed from Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Severus of Antioch and Ephrem;[27] in the first Base, "On Knowledge", he mentions Basil of Caesarea, Ephrem, Jacob of Sarug, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Severus.[28] Indeed, the majority of Barhebraeus' writings abound with references to the Fathers. It is undoubtedly this aspect, as well as the faithful way in which he epitomizes his sources, which has led a number of western scholars to denounce his lack of originality. One must ask, however whether his originality is not be found elsewhere: in the selection of his sources.

In the case of the Base "On Paradise" in the Candelabrum, it can be demonstrated that Barhebraeus took most of these quotations —directly or indirectly (?)—from Moses b. Kiphō's commentary on the Hexaemeron.[29] For the Book of the Dove and the *Ethicon* it is not so easy to find a comparable common source. For the numerous juridical citations found in this latter work, he probably contented himself with using a single canonical compendium, though on account of our defective knowledge of the juridical literature in the times before Barhebraeus, the exact work used by him cannot be indicated.[30]

Trying to establish the immediate sources used by Barhebraeus will help us to evaluate where Barhebraeus makes his own contribution concerning a particular subject and where he just limits himself to following his predecessors or copies the general knowledge of his time. Thus, assuming that the numerous spiritual quotations in the *Ethicon*—Egyptian Fathers, Evagrius, ascetical works of Ephrem, John of Dalyatha, Isaac of Nineveh and others—can be accounted for by the fact that he used one of the spiritual anthologies circulating in the Syrian-Orthodox monasteries,[31] one discovers that Barhebraeus tries to give a new impetus to the spiritual life of the monks—and laymen—of his Church by introducing John Klimakos' Ladder of the Paradise. This work, originally composed in Greek, was popular reading among Melkite monks, who had translated it into Syriac.[32] In Syrian Orthodox circles, however, it does not seem to have enjoyed great popularity—it was not normally included in the spiritual anthologies of the 9th-13th centuries—until Barhebraeus discovered the importance of this major spiritual treatise and decided to use it in his *Ethicon*.

His independent approach, at least in spiritual matters, also appears from the fact that he used and, to a certain degree, appreciated the so-called Book of the Holy Hierotheos.[33] Patriarch Theodosius had composed a detailed commentary on this mystical work by Stephen Bar Sudaili in the 9th century. In later times, however, it sunk into oblivion and was certainly not included in the normal spiritual reading of the monks of Barhebraeus' times, as appears from the fact that no extracts are found in the common

spiritual anthologies[34] and that at the request of a monk of the monastery of Mar Mattay Barhebraeus had to search different libraries in order to find a complete copy.[35]

In the field of historiography, one might mention that he did not limit himself to updating the work of Michael the Syrian, the main source of his Syriac civil and ecclesiastical chronicles, but also described the vicissitudes of the Church of the East extensively and, especially for the later periods, with great objectivity. He thus appears to be the first West-Syrian author to have used East-Syrian historiographical material so extensively.

Only by comparing Barhebraeus' individual writings with the encyclopedias and compilations circulating in his time and the works of his immediate predecessors, such as the so far insufficiently studied Bar Shakkō, Dionysius b. Ṣalībī or Michael the Syrian, will one be able to determine his originality—or lack of it—in the choice of his sources.

1.3 **Islamic Sources. Overview**

In the 13th century the cultural and scientific standards were set by Muslims and no longer by Christians. This is recognized by Barhebraeus himself when he states in his civil chronicle that the Syrian Christians, who in the days of old had given wisdom and science to the Arabs through translators who had all been Syrians (*suryōyē*), found it necessary in his days to ask for wisdom and science from them.[36] The high esteem of Barhebraeus for Islamic culture appears clearly from the following passage:

> There arose among them philosophers, mathematicians and physicians who surpassed the Ancients by the acuteness of their comprehension. Placing them on no other foundation than on Greek basements, they perfected the buildings of wisdom and science *(ḥekmtōnōyē)*, which were great on account of their very refined language (*leksis*) and their most skilful investigations.[37]

Hence, it should not surprise us that in his younger years Barhebraeus received part of his training outside the monasteries—in Tripoli he studied logic and medicine with an East Syrian teacher (around 1245)[38]—and worked with Muslim teachers, such as at the famous Bimaristan of Nūr al-Dīn al-Zengī in Damascus.[39] As bishop and maphrian he remained in contact with Islamic scholars and learned institutions. His predilection for Marāgha as place of residence was possibly not dictated in the first place by political reasons—it was one of the capitals of the Mongol rulers—but by the fact that the renowned academy and observatory founded by Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī were established there. It seems probable that the scientific career of Khwāja Nāṣir inspired Barhebraeus to devote himself to similar studies.[40] In H. Koffler's introduction to his partial translation of the tenth Base of the Candelabrum, "The Resurrection of the Bodies", it is pointed out that Barhebraeus' literary output was to a large extent parallel to that of Ṭūsī,[41] and—may we add—was to a certain degree influenced by him. Both authors wrote extensively on theology, mysticism, jurisprudence and ethics, composed commentaries on Euclides, the Almagest of Ptolemaeus and wrote works in the field of practical philosophy, logic, and astronomy. In these latter writings Barhebraeus relied heavily on al-Ṭūsī, as can be demonstrated by the example of his Book on the

Ascension of the Mind (*Sullōqō d-hawnō*), which is based on Ṭūsī's *Tadhkira fī 'ilm al-hai'a*, or by parts of the Cream of Wisdom.[42] Also the fact that Barhebraeus undertook to make a Syriac translation of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-išārāt wa l-tanbīhāt* can partly be explained by the fact that this work was much studied in the philosophical circles of Marāgha and was commented upon by Nāṣir himself, but also by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Šīrāzī (1236-1311), a younger contemporary of Barhebraeus, whom he may have met in Marāgha.[43]

As for other Muslim authors, Takahashi has recently demonstrated Barhebraeus' dependence on Gazali's *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* for his philosophical treatise *Tegrat tegrōtō*, whereas much earlier Baumstark had already shown the relationship of this work to ibn Sina's *'Uyūn al-Ḥikma*.[44] In the field of science, we may further mention that he used the latter's *Kitāb al-Šifā'* in the Books of Minerals and Meteorology of the Cream of Wisdom as well as the *Kitāb al-mu'tabar* of Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī[45] and the *Mabāḥith al-mašriqiyya* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in the meteorological part of the Candelabrum of the Sanctuary. But also in the "Book of Incarnation" of the *Candelabrum* he sometimes follows the opinions of al-Rāzī as expressed in the latter's *Muḥaṣṣal*,[46] whereas the *k. al-Šifā'* was also largely exploited in the *Swōd Sufyā*.[47] In the field of medicine we may mention Barhebraeus' unfinished translation into Syriac of Ibn Sina's *Qānūn al-Ṭibb* and the compendium which he made of al-Ghāfiqī's *Book of Simple Drugs*.[48]

His familiarity with Islamic sources and Islamic culture in general appears most prominently in his Chronicles. For his Syriac Chronicle we have already mentioned Jovaini's world History. Other Islamic sources include al-Qifṭī and, in his Arabic History (see below), Ibn al-Athīr.[49] Using Islamic chronicles as sources in Syriac historiography is certainly not new. Elias of Nisibis (d. 1046), the author of a well-known bilingual (Syriac-Arabic) Chronicle, had already allowed himself to use Islamic material, such as the Annals of aṭ-Ṭabarī or works of Abū Bakr as-Sūlī, Abū Bakr al-Khwārizmī and others.[50] Michael the Syrian also referred to Arabic-Muslim material.[51] Innovative, however, is the systematic way in which Barhebraeus describes and, if appropriate, praises the work and achievements of a great number of Islamic scholars, sometimes even comparing them to the great Christian authorities in a particular field.

If on account of the cultural situation of his time it was normal for Barhebraeus to turn to the works of Muslim scholars, especially in the fields of the exact sciences (astronomy, medicine, mathematics), philosophy and historiography, it is much less a matter of course that this Muslim influence can also be found in other fields. One of these is the study of the Syriac language. Barhebraeus, much concerned about the language of the "Christian Arameans", is the author of several grammatical and lexicographical works, the most important being the so-called Book of Splendors (*kt. d-Ṣemḥē*).[52] It is astonishing to discover that this work, with its division into four parts, is modeled on the *kitāb al-Mufaṣṣal* of Zamakhšarī, one of the normative grammars of the Arabic language, thus, at least partly, abandoning the more traditional grammatical approach to the Syriac language. In the same way, in the field of *adab*, he composed a collection of "amusing stories" (*tunnōyē mgaḥḥkōnē*)

culled from different sources, e.g. biblical and patristic ones. Its main source is however the *kitāb nathr al-durr*, a work in Arabic by the Persian author Abū Sa'd Manṣūr b. Ḥusayn Abī (d. ca. 1030).[53] Under its influence, Barhebraeus' Syrian readership is treated to some tales, which, on account of their realistic and true to life character, one would not expect in the work of a monk and bishop, but are understandable when one realizes that Barhebraeus was also a physician and the author of some medical works. Barhebraeus excuses himself for this, by admitting that some stories may be "beyond the path of chastity", and are therefore not recommended reading in the houses of priests.[54] Also in the field of poetry, especially in his philosophical poems, he abandons tradition and introduces new styles and themes, which are traditionally not found in Syriac literature.[55]

In the same way, problems and customs pertaining to the field of daily life, such as education, marriage, hospitality, hygiene, health etc.,[56] are discussed not only on the basis of the classical Christian authorities, such as Gregory Nazianzen or Basil of Caesarea, but much more with the help of Islamic sources. One reason is undoubtedly that generally speaking the Christian spiritual authors, who were monks or solitaries, were hardly interested in issues of this kind and had only paid superficial attention to them. Barhebraeus is probably the first Syrian author to deal with them in such detail. Since this aspect of his work has not yet been studied, it is worthwhile, by way of an example, to translate such a passage about daily life, e.g. the fragment in the Ethicon on the way how food should be offered to guests, and to compare it with its Islamic source, the Book of Good Manners at Meals, which belongs to the Revival of religious Sciences (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*), the principal work of al-Ghazali (d. 1111). The juxtaposition of both texts speaks for itself.

Barhebraeus, *Ethicon, Memrō II,1.5*[57]

When someone is on a journey and comes to visit a brother, he should not expect to get to him at the time of his meal, for it is said: the food of anyone who eats from a meal at which he is not invited, comes from fraud and theft. But if, when he enters, he happens to find him eating, he should not eat as long as he is not given permission. After getting permission he should verify if he is invited with pleasure. If this is the case, he may accept. If someone invites him out of shame, he should apologize and not draw near.

But if somebody is hungry and he has a brother who is a real friend, and he knows that the latter would not be offended when he eats from what belongs to him, he is allowed to enter and to eat freely, even if such a master of the house should not be there.

But this host must not treat his visiting guest beyond his capacities. When a brother in Scete received a certain bishop, he offered him bread and salt, saying "forgive me, O my Father, that I have nothing else to put before you". The bishop said "I wish that when I come another year, I shall even not find this with you".[58]

When a host does not have anything, he should therefore not borrow something. In the same way, if he has only what is necessary for his own support and that of his family, he must not offer everything, but only a portion of it.

It is not becoming for a visiting guest to expect that his host has all kinds of food. It is told that when a traveler came to someone who offered him a cake of barley and

some ground salt, the traveler said "salt is delicious with thyme". Then the brother went out, pawned his cloak (*kutinō*) and bought thyme. When they had finished their meal, the traveler said: "glory to God who has nourished me according to my wishes". The hosting brother said to him: had you not eaten according to your wishes, then my cloak would not have been pawned.

When the master of the house exhorts and lovingly urges the traveler to tell him what he should prepare for him, the latter should ask for what he knows to be easy for him.

The host should not say to the traveler "do you wish to eat?", but, provided that he has something, offer it to him without asking.

al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn, Part II, 1.3*[59]

It is not *sunna* to visit people and to await the time of the meal (…). There exists a *ḥ adīth* who goes to a meal at which he is not invited goes as a sinner and eats forbidden food (*ḥarāman*). But the visitor who (…) happens to find him at his meal, is right when he does not eat as long he is not invited. And when they say to him "eat", he must look, and when he knows that they invite him to help him out of love, he may accept help, but if they invite him out of shame, he should not eat, but apologize.

But if he is hungry and goes to some brother in order to be given food by him, there is no objection that he does not wait for the time of the meal (…). When he enters and he does not find the master of the house and is sure of his friendship and knows that he would be glad if he would eat from his food, he may eat without his permission.

(…) *Adab* is (…) offering only what one has.

If [the host] does not have anything, he should therefore not borrow something (…) It belongs to affected behavior (*takalluf*) to offer everything one has in house but to harm one's own family.

The visitor must not suggest something or order it out of himself (…). Al-Aʿmaš told about Abū Wā'il that the latter has said: I went with a friend to visit Salmān, and he offered us barley bread and ground salt. My friend said: it would be better if there had been some thyme in this salt. Salmān went out and pawned his washing basin (*maṭhara*) and bought thyme. When we had eaten, my friend said: "glory to God who has given us satisfaction with what he has given us to eat. Salmān said: had you been satisfied with what has been given to you by God, my washing basin would not been pawned.

The visited person should arouse the appetite of the visiting brother and ask from him to indicate whatever would be good to prepare for him (…)

One should not say to him; "shall I offer you something?", but, if there is something, offer it (…).

Another field where Muslim influence is to be found is that of canon law. This is not surprising, since the Muslim authorities expected bishops and Patriarchs not only to be spiritual leaders, but also to be judges and to deal with matters which regulate all aspects of the internal life of the members of their ecclesiastical community. 'Abdišo' bar Brika, the East-Syrian bishop of Nisibis and a contemporary of Barhebraeus, mentions that he was stimulated to compose one of his collections of canon law, the *Ṭukkās dinē w-nāmosē 'edtānāyē*, by the fact that some Muslims boasted that the Christians did not posses detailed juridical compilations.[60] Barhebraeus seems to have cherished somewhat mixed feelings about these extensive juridical works. On the one hand, he mentions, in his Civil Chronicle, that:

> regarding their books of Law, viz. the canons of marriage, different kinds of separation and divorce (*furšōnē*), the ablutions, the manner of (performing) prayers, the amount of alms, the different kinds of merchandise and loans, the division of inheritances and the liberation of slaves, the (Muslims) have dilated upon these matters to such a degree that not one of them, even though he has occupied himself with these (subjects) during the whole period of his life, is able to make juridical decisions (*šu'ōlē w-funnōyē*) about these matters in a fitting way.[61]

On the other hand, he is himself the author of a very detailed juridical compilation, the second —"civil"—part of which is largely based on Islamic sources. He called this work *ktōbō d-Huddōyē*, the Book of Directions, in imitation of comparable Islamic works, such as the *k. al Hidāyā* of Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghinānī (d. 1197), one of the most popular handbooks of the Hanafite School of Law, which was the prevailing juridical *madhhab* in most of the territories where Barhebraeus lived.[62]

The main Islamic source of the *Book of Directions*, however, is al-Ghazali, possibly his *kitāb al-Wajīz*, an abridged compendium of law, which together with the more elaborate, but now lost, *kitāb al-Wasīṭ* was considered an important work of the Shafi'ite School of Law in Barhebraeus' times. Nallino has demonstrated that many decisions and regulations formulated in the second "secular" part of the *Nomocanon* (chapters 8-40) are based on especially Shafi'ite, but, if necessary or useful, also Hanafite jurisprudence.[63] This is of course understandable for those fields of life where traditional Christian material was lacking or unsatisfactory in an Islamic society, which had a great impact on certain aspects of the daily life of the Christians, such as trade or land property. However, we also find this Islamic influence in other fields, such as the law of inheritance, where Barhebraeus is the first Syrian author to accept the Islamic and even Qur'anic principle that men inherit the double of women in the case of the same degree of consanguinity.[64]

The last and the most astonishing field where we find this Islamic influence is that of Christian practice and spirituality.

Christian practice and asceticism are especially dealt with in the first memrō[65] of the *Ktōbō d-Itiqūn*, Barhebraeus' Book of Ethics, written for monks as well as lay people. It deals with subjects like prayer, fasting, the reading of spiritual books, vigils or the pilgrimage to the Holy City, themes that are of course also extensively treated in the writings of the traditional spiritual Fathers, both Greek and Syriac, and which were well known to Barhebraeus, who refers to Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, Evagrius and other monks of the Egyptian Desert, but also to Isaac the Syrian and John of Dalyatha, his most important Syriac sources. In many cases, however, Barhebraeus again prefers the insights of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazali, as formulated in the latter's opus magnum, the Revivification of Religious Sciences (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*). Thus, the remedies against distraction during prayer are not discussed in the first place with the help of, for example, the Collection of Homilies by Isaac the Syrian—a work known to him, be it only as a secondary source—but analyzed on the basis of the corresponding passage in the first Book of the *Iḥyā'*.[66]

The same holds true for his description of the different ways to acquire "pure prayer". This concept goes back to Evagrius

of Pontus,[67] but was taken over by the great East-Syrian Mystics, such as Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha. Barhebraeus was familiar with the writings of these authors, which were accessible to him in the already mentioned spiritual and ascetical compilations circulating in the monasteries of his days. It is therefore strange to discover that the six "spiritual matters" (purity of thoughts, understanding the words said during prayer, the soul praising the Lord on account of God's magnificence and one's own humble nature, awe [*deḥeltō*], shame, and hope), which characterize this "pure prayer", were borrowed from the Islamic spiritual tradition rather than from the Christian one, more particularly from Ghazali's Book of the Mysteries of Prayer (*kitāb asrār al-Ṣalāt*).[68]

Several other examples could be given. Especially noteworthy is that Barhebraeus develops a highly original spirituality of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem based on Ghazali's description of the Ḥajj. Though in the Syriac spiritual tradition the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was generally not considered as a recommendable act of devotion,[69] in the *Ethicon* Barhebraeus speaks approvingly of the "secular believers and the Members of the Covenant (*Bnay Qyōmō*), whose souls thirst after seeing the Holy Places". This is clearly an attempt to give the pilgrimage to Jerusalem a religious status comparable to the Muslim *Ḥajj*, the scenario of which is the basis of his description of the pilgrim's visit to Jerusalem. Another example is that he introduces a form of prayer, called *'uhdōnō d-Alōhō*, the remembrance of God, which resembles the later forms of Jesus-prayer in the Greek-Orthodox tradition, but which in the times of Barhebraeus was virtually unknown in the Syriac monastic world. It was undoubtedly inspired by the Islamic conceptions as well as the practice of *dhikr*.[70]

In the mystical field, dealt with in *memrō* IV of the *Ethicon* as well as in the Book of the Dove, his insights about the Love of God and of one of its most fundamental characteristics, "freedom of speech" (*farrhisiā*; Gr. parrhisia) are a combination of inspiring theories, which he found in the work of Ghazali and in the writings of Christian authors, such as Joseph Ḥazzāyā, John of Dalyatha and Stephen b. Ṣudaylī.[71]

And to conclude this incomplete survey, in order to describe the existential crisis which befell him at the end of his life, he again allowed himself to consider Ghazali as an example by imitating in his Book of the Dove the autobiographical description of the latter's spiritual crisis in his *Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*.[72]

1.4 **Faithfulness to the Sources**

As mentioned above, many scholars agree that Barhebraeus was a most skillful epitomist. Investigating the way in which Gregory generally deals with his sources, one cannot but conclude that he generally uses them in a most careful and respectful way. Hidemi Takahashi has recently demonstrated this for the Books of Minerals and Meteorology in the Cream of Wisdom. As a matter of fact, many important passages are literal, slightly abridged or paraphrasing quotations from the source-text. In the case of Arabic sources, the Syriac text is sometimes nothing more than a literal translation of the Arabic.

This faithfulness to his sources sometimes leads Barhebraeus into self-contradiction. Any author, of course, has the right to develop his way of thinking, to correct previous errors or simply to change his mind. In the case of Barhebraeus, however, one sometimes wonders whether certain new ideas, which contradict those formulated at other occasions, are rather to be attributed to his dependence on the sources used. This self-contradiction can be found within the same work or between different writings on the same theme.

An example of the first can be found in the *Ethicon*, where Gregory develops a political philosophy, dealing with the issue of the obligation to adopt a critical attitude towards morally corrupt leaders. It is, however, strange to find three contradicting views. Firstly, he recommends executing at all time the orders of the Prince or the King, whether they be good or bad. Secondly, in another passage he suggests to adopt rather a policy of restraint; in order to avoid a possible moral dilemma, one should avoid as much as possible any contact with the authorities. And, finally, it is the task of ecclesiastical leaders not to shun confrontation, but to denounce the bad deeds of the Prince, even at the risk of their own lives. It seems to me that an explanation for these differences can be found in the fact that Gregory develops the first attitude, that of compliance, under the influence of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, who managed to survive several political systems, the attitude of restraint under the influence of Ghazali, who had retired from public life himself, and finally the attitude of confrontation under the inspiration of the great examples of political criticism found in the writings of the Church Fathers, such as Athanasius or John Chrysostom.[73]

For different views or descriptions of events found in different writings, I give an example taken from the Chronicles. As mentioned earlier, Barhebraeus is both the author of the Civil Chronicle, the *maktbōnūt zabnē*, composed in Syriac around the year 1276,[74] as well as of a History in Arabic, entitled *mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh al-duwal,* which he wrote by the end of his life at the request of some Muslim friends in Marāgha.[75] On account of a passage in Barhebraeus' biography by his brother Barṣaumo, who mentions that some *Ṭayyōyē* had requested to translate the Syriac chronicle into the "Saracen language", it has long been thought that the *mukhtaṣar* was an abbreviated translation of the *maktbōnūt zabnē*. Recent research has demonstrated that the Arabic history not only describes certain events much more elaborately than the Syriac chronicle, but also contains material that is not found in the latter work. However, even in the case of Barhebraeus relating the same events or describing the same characters, one finds, surprisingly, some important differences. One of the reasons for this could be that Barhebraeus gives a different interpretation according to the public he has in mind. This is the thesis of A. Lüders.[76] Thus, the Crusaders would have been depicted negatively in the *Mukhtaṣar* in order not to shock—or from fear of—his Muslim readership, but positively in the Civil Chronicle, where they are considered as his coreligionists. But L. Conrad has recently argued that the *Mukhtaṣar* was written in the first place for Christians.[77] It would seem to me that a better explanation of these differences is the fact that in both Chronicles Barhebraeus relies very closely on the sources, which he had at his disposal and which were different for the Syriac and Ara-

bic chronicles. It was e.g. of no concern to him, that for his description of the skirmishes between Nūr al-Dīn and the Frankish knight Joscelin, the latter is portrayed as a man of courage and character in the *Mukhtaṣar*—a description based on b. al-Athīr's Complete Chronicle—but in the Syriac Chronicle as a fearful person.

Another more important example is his description of Muhammad and, consequently, the opinion he has about him. In the *Mukhtaṣar*[78] one finds an account, which is entirely based on yet to be identified Muslim sources, and hence depicts Muhammad in a most positive way. For example, the battle of Badr is considered to be a great event, where the Muslims, despite being a minority, routed the Mekkan polytheists. Apparently, God had helped Muhammad, who was an instrument in the hands of God. When, however, one studies the passage on Muhammad in the Syriac Civil Chronicle,[79] one finds quite a different picture. Though Barhebraeus admits that Muhammad had brought monotheism to the people of Arabia —and in this respect was an instrument in the hands of God—he also mentions the forced conversions "with the sword" and that many Arabs became followers of Muhammad for reasons of profit. In the *Mukhtaṣar*, it is emphasized that the Prophet of Islam participated personally in the first raids; in the *maktbōnūt zabnē* one only finds that he dwelt in honor in Medina. In this case, his information, and consequently the view he had of Mohammed, seems mainly based on Christian sources. These have not yet been identified, but must have been (partly?) the same as those used by Dionysius bar Ṣalibi in his treatise Against the Muslims (*Luqbal ṭayyōyē*).[80] It seems improbable that Bar-hebraeus, when he wrote the *Mukhtaṣar*, had entirely adopted a certain Muslim view of Muhammad and abandoned the criticism formulated in the Civil Chronicle. In the *Mukhtaṣar* he simply contented himself with transcribing his immediate, in this case Muslim, source, without bothering to harmonize it with his previous views.[81]

1.5 **Critical use of the sources**

The fact that Barhebraeus strictly follows his sources, limiting himself to the role of compiler and translator, should not obscure the fact that he frequently deals with them in quite a creative way. Many instances can be cited in which he combines different sources, thus creating a new and original work.

A good example of his independent approach to the sources is again the *Ethicon*, which follows, as mentioned earlier, the general pattern of Ghazali's *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn*, but which, for the elaboration of certain themes, uses both known Syrian tradition and less known Christian sources. The latter are sometimes referred to quite literally, but also critically. By way of an example, I come back to the passage on the Love of God and Freedom of Speech, mentioned earlier.

In order to describe the highest mystical state, Barhebraeus refers to the work known as the "Book of the Holy Hierotheos" composed in the 5th century by Stephen bar Ṣudayli, of which he had made a sort of compendium and systematized its ideas shortly before writing the *Ethicon* (1279). In order to describe the mystical union, Stephen uses two different terms (in the *Ethicon*, Bar-hebraeus considers Hierotheos, the putative disciple of Dionysius the Are-

opagite, to be the author): firstly *ḥadōyutō*, the state of unification, followed by another state, called *ḥbikutō*, meaning literally "commingling". This state is characterized by the disappearance of the distinction between the lover and the beloved. When Barhebraeus himself uses several strong expressions, saying, for example, that love and delectation will disappear, because the lover and the beloved become the same person, whereas love still presupposes a certain distinction, he seems to come quite close to the heretical, pantheistic notions of Stephen. However, this is not the case. Barhebraeus intentionally avoids the term *ḥbikutō* and states—and here he follows Ghazali—that mystic utterances and expressions such as "the son of God (i.e. the mystic) becoming as receiving all prayers and no longer as one who prays" or also the biblical "I and the Father are one" (John 17:21) are allowed, if one considers them as expressions of the "freedom of speech" (*farrhisyā*), which is a gift granted to the mystics, using a language of love, which may shock the ears of the common believers, but which is allowed of the Gnostics, who are capable of not interpreting them in a literal way.[82]

2. Barhebraeus and the Period of the Syrian Renaissance

2.1 Open Attitude to other Christian confessions

In order to be able to situate Barhebraeus in the general movement of the so-called Syrian Renaissance, it is important to mention briefly his ecumenical attitude as a corollary to what was said about his receptivity to the intellectual and spiritual world of Islam.

In his Book of Ethics, Gregory gives a very pointed description of the term *durrōšō*, which is normally translated as disputation, mainly a religious disputation. For Gregory, it means an attempt to overcome the adversary with verbal ingenuity. Hence, the love of *durrōšō* is one of the gateways through which sin can creep into the soul.[83]

This attitude is remarkable, since we know that disputations between the adherents of the different Christian communities were a regularly occurring phenomenon up to Barhebraeus' time. Barhebraeus alludes to this fact, when he states that novices—and monks—should refrain from discussions about "natures and hypostases" (*kyōnē wa-qnūmē*),[84] an allusion to Christological discussions, but that as a bishop he could not escape engaging himself in "disquisitions and disputations with the heads of other confessions".[85]

This is probably one of the reasons why he composed his important treatise on Christology as part of his general theological Summa, the Candelabrum of the Sanctuary. In this work, Gregory is still very much aware of the importance of the Christological differences between the Christian communities. When the West Syriac bishop of Gōzartō, Ignatius, was interrogated by the East Syriac Patriarch about certain dangers inherent to a "miaphysite" Christology and he dismissed this kind of discussions as being merely sophisms, Gregory reproaches him for this attitude and tells him exactly what he should have answered to the Patriarch.[86] A comparable attitude can be found in the already mentioned Christological letter addressed to Catholicos Denḥa I. Despite the very courteous tone, Barhebraeus reminds the Catholicos, that the only orthodox Christological position is to profess

only one nature in Christ. He even ascribes to Denḥa the intention to admit not only two natures, but even two sons (*trēn bnayō*), the classical–and utterly unfair—reproach to the East-Syrians in the mouth of their adversaries.[87]

At the same time, Barhebraeus tries to get out of the Christological deadlock which had kept the Christian communities divided for almost eight centuries. He did so by proposing an ingenious Christological compromise, that of the one "double nature out of two natures, divine and human" (Syr.: *kyōnō ʻaffifō*[88] *d-men trēn kyōnīn alōhōyō w-nōšōyō*),[89] thus trying to do justice to the Chalcedonian and East Syriac sensitivity about the duality of natures as well as to the West Syriac feelings about the oneness of the nature of Christ. That he, unlike many of his predecessors, did not treat as heretics the members of the other important Christian communities, such as the Franks, the East-Syrians and the Greek-Orthodox, appears from the last chapter of his treatise on Christology, where he states that the different extant Christian *tawdyōtō* of his time may use various terms (*kunnōyē*) to express the mystery of the union of Christ's humanity and divinity, but have basically sound and non-heretical Christological views.[90] This ecumenical intuition is even more explicitly expressed in the Book of the Dove, where he states:

"All (sc. the Christian communities, Maronites, Greek-Orthodox, East-Syrians, West-Syrians and Armenians) profess indeed that Christ our Lord is perfect God and perfect man, without mixture, confusion and corruption of natures. Some use the term nature for this type of conjunction, others call it substance and still others speak about person. Thus I discovered that all Christian peoples, notwithstanding their differences, are in concord with each other".[91]

Barhebraeus even devoted a few lines of poetry to the subject of debating and disputing (*ʻal-drōšō w-ōruʻūtō*) on christological issues. It is an admonition against someone who apparently had tried to bring confusion to the community of the faithful:

> Fervent in love for Lord Jesus is Theophilus,[92]
> but not in love for Nestorius or Cyril.
> How does err the one in whose ears Paul has cried:
> We are of Christ! Who is Paul and who Apollos? (cf. 1 Cor 1:12)
> No chains will ever separate me from the love of the Lord,
> no terror of fire nor sword, said Paul (cf. Rom 8:35).
> But see, in our times, the love of Nestorius and Cyril
> has separated from the Lord a multitude of fools.
> Who would not weep?[93]

After having established Barhebraeus' irenic approach to the traditional christological dissensions, we must again raise the problem of Barhebraeus' originality. Was his ecumenism, as is sometimes stated, new and original, or was he in this respect a product of his time?

When we look at one of Barhebraeus' predecessors, Dionysius b. Ṣalibi (d. 1171), bishop of Amida and held in high esteem by Gregory who portrayed him as "an eloquent doctor and the star of his times", we find a strong opponent of any overture towards people who did not belong to his own West-Syrian community. In his important Book of Refutations he not only attacks Jews and Muslims, but also the members of those Christian communities which were most

prominently found around Amida and Melitene, his native town, the Chalcedonians, as well as the East Syriacs and even the Armenians, who professed a miaphysite christology like the West Syrians.[94] At least in the sections against the Chalcedonians and the Armenians, his argumentation is very poor and a repetition of classical arguments, which are not always of a theological nature. The sharpness of Dionysius' language may be explained by the fact that he felt that a new period had dawned and that increasing numbers of Christians no longer considered the former christological dissensions as relevant for their times. An example of this new attitude is a certain Rabban Išu', who rejected the opinion that only the West Syriacs should be called orthodox and that all other Christians were heretics, a point of view which was not much appreciated by Dionysius. In the case of Rabban Išu', we can only speak of a certain ecumenical "intuition", since his convictions do not seem to have been based on a serious theological investigation of the christology of the chalcedonian church. However, this is different with Al-Arfādi. This West Syrian theologian of the 11th or 12th century and originating from Northern Syria is the author of a short treatise, written in Arabic, with the significant title: on the Concordance in Faith among the Christians and the Essence of Religion (*k. ijtimā' al-amāna wa-'unṣur al-diyāna*). In this work the author analyzes the different christological positions of the Chalcedonians, the West Syriacs and the East Syriacs and comes to a conclusion which resembles the statement formulated by Barhebraeus in the Book of the Dove: all agree in confessing the divinity and humanity of Christ, his unity (*ittiḥād*), and do not accept any separation (*firq*) or division (*infiṣāl*) between the two.[95]

A similar ecumenical attitude is also found in the Church of the East. Though not as outspoken as in the case of Arfādi and Barhebraeus, a number of East Syrian theologians seem to have been advocates of a certain openness to other Christian confessions, especially to the Latin Church. Some remarkable theological treatises seem to reflect the ecumenical spirit of this period.[96] Thus, Išo'yahb bar Malkon, the metropolitan of Nisibis in the first quarter of the 12th century, and especially his successor, 'Abdišo' bar Brika (d. 1318), have very balanced views about the theological terms of the other parties. In his Book of the Pearl 'Abdišo' explains that the difference between Chalcedonians and East-Syrians is partly a matter of language, due to the different connotations a term may have in a Greek or Syriac context. And Išo'yahb leaves some room for the use of the expression "Mother of God", since he states that the only reason why it is preferable to speak of Mary as the "Mother of Christ" is his concern about using a clear and unequivocal terminology, since "Mother of God" can be interpreted as meaning "Mother of the Trinity". Both authors seem to accept a certain pluralism with regard to the theological terms used by the different communities and thus come close to the opinion of Barhebraeus and Arfādi.

We may conclude, then, that while it is true that Barhebraeus is a remarkable representative of this open attitude towards the other Christian confessions—and this aspect of his character was very much appreciated by the members of the other Churches as appears from the presence of East Syriacs, Chalcedonians and Armenians at his funeral in Marāgha—his ecumenical attitude was

not unique. In this respect, Gregory is a worthy representative of the Syrian Renaissance, one of the characteristics of which seems to have been a willingness on the part of theologians and church leaders to put their own convictions into perspective and to promote a new approach to the traditional divisions among Christians.

2.2 **Openness to "Islam"**

In order to have more insight into Barhebraeus' openness to Islam, which stood out against the general contemporary attitude towards Islamic culture and religion, it is useful to distinguish different levels.

A first level is that of the knowledge of Arabic. We have already pointed out (supra 1.1) that in the time of Gregory it was not common for the people in the regions where he lived to know this language. Knowing this *leksis sqiltā*, this refined language, is, however, considered important by Barhebraeus for church leaders. He mentions how Bar Maʿdani (d. 1263) studied Arabic in Baghdad, when the latter was already Maphrian, and praises his good style.[97] When Gregory describes the career of Ṣaliba b. Yaʿqūb Wajīh, his former fellow student in Tripoli and probably in Damascus, he also emphasizes his excellent knowledge of Arabic.[98] In the field of literature, we find a number of authors who were able to write both in Syriac and in Arabic.[99] Besides John bar Maʿdani, the most prominent bilingual theologians were East-Syrians, such as Elias of Nisibis, Catholicos Elias III (Abū Ḥalīm), Išoʿyahb bar Malkon, ʿAbdišoʿ bar Brika or also Catholicos Denḥa I. Though Jacob b. Šakko, one of the outstanding representatives of the 13th century Syrian Renaissance,[100] only wrote in Syriac, he surely knew Arabic, since he studied with the Muslim philosopher Kamāl al-Dīn b. Yūnus. The same holds probably true for Dionysius b. Ṣalibi. His literary output is entirely in Syriac, but his information on the Islamic religion, including the Qur'an, is so precise and to the point, that it is difficult to imagine that he bases himself entirely on Syriac sources, especially since there exists no evidence of such works containing detailed information on Islam. Barhebraeus fits well into this category of scholars who were familiar with both Syriac and Arabic and some of whom were even capable of writing in both languages.

The second level is that of receptivity to Islamic learning and culture. The already mentioned fact that the scientific and cultural standards were no longer set by Christians not only explains why Syriac scholars, such as b. Šakko, b. Wajīh or Barhebraeus himself, received part of their training from Muslim teachers, but also why Gregory thought it important to make Syriac translations or adaptations of major Muslim scientific works, thus making Islamic science accessible to those students that did not know Arabic. The systematic way in which Barhebraeus devoted himself to this task distinguishes him from other Syriac scholars.

Another aspect is the influence of Islamic culture. Several examples can be given of how the Syrians imitated certain cultural expressions. In particular, one of Barhebraeus' contemporaries, ʿAbdišoʿ b. Brika, has to be mentioned here. His poem the Paradise of Eden rivals in complexity the Maqāmāt of al-Ḥarīrī. He is moreover the author of an Arabic translation of the Gospel in *sajʿ*.[101] Though one of the reasons to compose such a translation was probably

apologetic, (i.e. to counter the Islamic argument of *i'jāz*, the miracle of the inimitability of the Qur'an), it is also proof that some Christians authors tried hard to adapt themselves to Muslim *adab* and general cultural expressions. Bar Ma'dani is a good example on the West Syrian side.[102] Barhebraeus' acceptance of Muslim styles in his poetry, his composition of the Laughable Stories and even the fact that he based his Syriac grammar on the work of Muslim-Arabic grammarians are also expressions of this mentality.

The greatest originality of Barhebraeus, however, is situated on the third level, that of religion. Barhebraeus not only has a remarkable knowledge of the religion of Islam and of its great thinkers—this is to a certain extent also found in the works of other Christian authors, such as Elias of Nisibis or Dionysius b. Ṣalibi—but as seen above is also prepared to consider certain expressions of Islamic spirituality and piety as relevant for his own Christian tradition. Both his *Ethicon* and Book of the Dove explain certain aspects of the spiritual life of Christian monks and laymen with the help of formulations and ideas borrowed from Islam.

It is probable that Barhebraeus' personal admiration for Ghazali, whom he praises for his spiritual and non-legalistic approach to religion, plays a role in this attitude. As a matter of fact, it is this extraordinary openness to a representative of a "spiritual Islam" in whose work he was able to recognize some genuine religious and spiritual values, which made him an "original thinker" and not merely a skillful compiler.

Concluding remark

One of the objectives of this general survey of the Life and Works of Barhebraeus was to situate him in the general context of his time. Following Baumstark, I have characterized this period positively as a "Syrian Renaissance", the main characteristics of which are openness towards fellow Christians as well as receptivity to the world of Islam.[103] One should bear in mind however that this idea of flourishing and revival is not generally accepted. J.B. Chabot[104] has a different appreciation of this acceptation of foreign influences and speaks rather of a period of literary decline on account of the rapid increase of the use of Arabic.

These divergent judgments are of course only possible on account of the fact that the literary Syriac and bilingual (Syriac-Arabic) production of this time has not yet been studied sufficiently. Major works of important authors, such as b. Šakko, b. Ṣalibi, b. Wahbun, b. Ma'dani, the immediate predecessors or contemporaries of Barhebraeus, are only vaguely known to scholars and are often not yet available in critical editions.

It is clear that in order to come to a balanced judgment of Barhebraeus' originality, more research into the period of the so-called Syrian Renaissance is much needed.

NOTES

[1] Read: *etḥakam*, not *etḥakas* as found in the edition of Abbeloos and Lamy (see next note).

[2] Abbeloos J. and Th. Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum,* I-III (Paris-Louvain, 1872-77); abbr.: chron.eccl. For this passage of Barṣaumō, III, p. 481.

[3] Especially a reliable critical edition of his Poems as one of the as yet little explored sources of Barhebraeus' life is much needed.

[4] A most complete survey of editions, translations and studies of the works of Barhebraeus will be available in H. Takahashi, *Bibliography of Barhebraeus* (to be published, Gorgias Press).

[5] To give only the judgment of J.B. Chabot: "ses livres manquent d'originalité, mais c'est un vulgarisateur clair et précis;" *La littérature syriaque* (Paris 1934), p. 133. J.B. Segal: "his writings are not distinguished by great ability or by originality of thought or style;" EI2, s.v. Ibn al-'Ibri. J.M. Fiey portrays him as a "vulgarisateur de génie" (!) in his *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Mongols (Il-Khanat de Perse, XIIIe-XIVe s.)*, CSCO 363 (Leuven 1975), p. 101.

[6] Cf. E. Wallis Budge, *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l-Faraj Barhebraeus,* I, English Translation I (London 1932), p.3; for the Syriac text, see *Maktbōnūt zabnē*, ed. Monastery St Ephrem the Syrian (Glanerbrug 1987), p. 1b (abbrev.: *chron. civ.*).

[7] The situation was much different for the West-Syrians living more to the south, in Baghdad (cf. the literary production of authors like Yaḥya b. 'Adi, Ibn Zur'a and his pupil Yaḥya b. Jarīr, who seem to have written only in Arabic already by the end of the first millennium).

[8] *Chron. eccl*. I, 717. The patriarch is Dionysius 'Angur.

[9] E.g. *Chron. eccl,* I, 663.

[10] Apart from the works, which are meant to be translations, important parts of some of his other Syriac writings are in fact also literal renderings from the Arabic, see e.g. H. Janssens, "L'entretien de la sagesse. Introduction aux oeuvres philosophiques de Barhebraeus," *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège* LXXV (Liège 1937), p. 30.

[11] Cf. the request to Barhebraeus by some Arabs in Marāgha to translate his Syriac Chronicle into Arabic (*chron. eccl.,* III, 469). As a matter of fact, the Arabic chronicle rather seems to be an independent work, based on partly different sources than the Syriac chronicle, see infra par. 1.4.

[12] Cf. Cl. Cahen, "Le malik-nameh et l'histoire des origines Seljukides," in *Oriens* 2 (1949), p. 32

[13] Cf. especially M. Zonta, Fonti greche e orientali dell'Economia di Bar-Hebraeus nell'opera 'La Crema della Scienza*', Supplemento n. 70 agli Annali,* Vol. 52 (1992), (Napoli 1992), pp. 50ff. Many passages in the *Cream* are in fact very literal translations.

[14] Dionysius d-Gōzartō, *Mīmrō 'al- qaddīšō Grigoryos Mafriyōnō d-hū Bar 'Ebrōyō, (*Glanerbrug 1985), p. 39.

[15] In *chron. eccl.* (I, 689) one finds a quotation from a letter of the Cilician King Haythum to the West Syrian Patriarch, but it is not clear whether Barhebraeus quotes and translates directly from the Armenian original.

[16] Cf. H. Takhashi, *Aristotelian Meteorology in Syriac. Barhebraeus, Butyrum sapientiae, Books of Minerals and Meteorology. Edition, Translation and Commentary*, PhD thesis, ined. (Frankfurt a.M., 2002), p. 19f. Takahashi refers to the fact that the sermon of Barhebraeus on the occasion of his enthronement as Maphrian in Sis (!), was translated into Armenian by a different person. The fact that, in a passage of his Civil Chronicle, Barhebraeus understood the meaning of the Armenian word *khog* (thief) must not be interpreted as an indication of his knowledge of Armenian, since this seems rather general knowledge, cf. S. Dadoyan, "The Armenian Intermezzo in Bilad al-Sham between the fourth/ tenth and sixth/twelfth Centuries" in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam. The First Thousand Years (*Leiden 2001), p. 164. In *chron.*

eccl. III, col. 421 one finds an example that in the time of Barhebraeus at least some *dayrōyē* of the Monastery of Mar Mattay understood some Armenian.

[17] See Takahashi, *Aristotelian Meteorology*, p. 113.

[18] Cf. Zonta, *o.c.,* p. 26ff.

[19] H. Janssens, *o.c.*, p. 32f.

[20] See H. Teule, *Spiritual Sources in the Ethicon of Barhebraeus* (forthcoming).

[21] J.B. Chabot, "Une lettre de Bar Hébréus au Catholicos Denḥa Ier," in *Journal Asiatique*, IXe sér., XI (1898), pp. 75-128.

[22] N. Serikoff, "Einige Aspekte der griechischen Grammatik des Barhebräus," in *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 37 (Wien 1987), pp. 101-135.

[23] G. Furlani ("La psicologia di Barhebreo secondo il libro La Crema della Sapienza," in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* XIII (1931), pp. 24-52, here p. 51) uses the same argument, referring to the fact that Barhebraeus sometimes gives more precise transliterations of Greek technical terms than other Syriac authors.

[24] Takahashi, *Aristotelian Meteorology*, p. 22.

[25] E.g. the word *rasūl* was a normal term among the Arabic speaking Christians of Barhebraeus' time to indicate the Apostles and is not to be taken as an original literal rendering of the Greek *apostolos*, as suggested by Serikoff, p. 120. Also the fact that Barhebraeus knew the etymology of certain Greek biblical names, such as *Theophilus* (see *infra,* the poem quoted in par. 2.1) or even *Theos* is not an argument in favour of his knowing Greek, since these etymologies were common knowledge among West-Syrian exegetes.

[26] Cf. Kl.-Peter Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiocheia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit im Zeitalter der Kreuzzüge (969-1204),* vol. I (Wiesbaden 1998), p. 448f.

[27] "Le candélabre du Sanctuaire. XII. Du Paradis, suivi du livre des Rayons, traité X", ed./ transl. N. Sed, *Patrologia Orientalis* 40,3 (Turnhout 1981), pp. 12-15. Cf. Kh. Alwan, "Ba'ḍu maṣādir Ibn al-'Ibrī al-suryāniyya fī 'Manārat al-Aqdās'," in *Dirāsāt* 23 (1988), pp. 117-134. Alwan also raises the general problem of Barhebraeus' direct and indirect sources.

[28] "Le candélabre des Sanctuaires," ed./trans. J. Bakos, *Patrologia Orientalis* 22,4 (Paris 1930), pp. 596 (cf. p. 496).

[29] Alwan, *o. c.,* p. 133.

[30] H. Teule, "Juridical Texts in the Ethicon of Barhebraeus," in *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995), pp. 23-47.

[31] H. Teule, *Spiritual Sources in the Ethicon of Barhebraeus* (forthcoming)

[32] See H. Teule, "L'échelle du paradis de Jean Climaque dans la tradition syriaque: premières investigations," *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995), 279-293. The quotations in the *Ethicon* and the Book of the Dove correspond to this Melkite version.

[33] H. Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans l'oeuvre de Bar 'Ebroyo," in CERO (ed.), *Dieu Miséricorde, Dieu Amour,* Actes du colloque VIII (Antélias 2003), pp. 257-276.

[34] H. Teule, "Les compilations monastiques syriaques" in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 256 (Rome 1998), p. 249-264.

[35] See F. Marsh, *The Book which is called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with extracts from the prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosius of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebræus (*Oxford 1927), pp. 194f.

[36] Cf. *Chron. civ.*, p. 90b (transl. p. 92).

[37] *Chron civ.,* ibid.

[38] Cf. Chron. eccl. II, 667.

[39] *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh al-duwal* (ed. A. Ṣalḥānī, Beirouth 1898), p. 274, cf. Takahashi, *o.c.,* p. 12.

[40] But Janssens (*o.c.*, p. 31) ascribes to Barhebraeus the ambition to be the Avicenna of his people!

[41] H. Koffler, "Die Lehre des Barhebräus von der Auferstehung der Leiber," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 28 (Rome 1932), p. 30. Cf art. *Al-Ṭūsī, Nāṣir al-Dīn* (by H. Daiber/F.Ragep) in EI2.

[42] Cf. Takahashi, *Aristotelian Meteorology*, p. 63; for other examples of the influence of

Ṭūsī, see *supra* par. 1.1 and Zonta, *o. c.* (note 13).

[43] H. Teule, "The Transmission of Islamic Culture to the World of Syriac Christianity: Barhebraeus' Translation of Avicenna's *kitāb al-išārāt wa l-tanbīhāt.* First Soundings," in J. van Ginkel, H. Murre (eds), *Redefining Christian Identity (*Leiden, in press).

[44] H. Takahashi, "Barhebraeus und seine islamischen Quellen. Têgrat têgrata (Tractatus tractatuum) und Gazalis Maqāṣid al-falāsifa," in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Syriaca. Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen. 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium (Juli 2000, Wittenberg),* Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 17 (Münster 2002), pp. 147-175.

[45] Cf. Takahashi, *Aristotelian Meteorology,* p. 111.

[46] J. Khoury, "Le candélabre du sanctuaire de Grégiore Abou'lfaradj dit Barhebraeus. Quatrième base: de l'incarnation," *Patrologia orientalis* 31, p. 118.

[47] Cf. Janssens, *Entretien de la sagesse,* passim.

[48] Chron . eccl., III, p. 479

[49] A systematic study of the sources of the individual sections of Barhebraeus' historiographical work is still much needed. A general synopsis of both the direct and indirect sources of Barhebraeus' chronicles is found in Y. Isḥaq, "Maṣādir Abī l-Faraj al-Malaṭī al-*t*ārikhiyya," in *Aram* 1,1 (Oxford 1989), pp. 149-172, esp. p. 163ff.

[50] See E. Brooks, *Eliae Metropolitae Nisibinae Opus chronologicum*, Pars prior, CSCO 63 (Paris-Leipzig 1910), p. III.

[51] E.g. J.B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche West Syriac d'Antioche* (Paris 1899-1907); III, p. 213ff.; IV, p. 603ff.,

[52] Cf. A. Moberg, *Le livre des splendeurs*, *La grande grammaire de Grégoire Barhebraeus* (Lund 1922 [= ed.]), and id., *Buch der Strahlen. Die grössere Grammatik des Barhebräus. Einleitung und 2. Teil* (Leipzig 1907), 1. *Teil und Stellenregister* (Leipzig 1913).

[53] U. Marzolph, "Die Quelle der Ergötzlichen Erzählungen des Bar Hebräus," *Oriens Christianus* 69, 1985, pp. 81-125. For the possibility of other Arabic sources of this work, see P.G. Borbone, "Un Capitolo siriaco di fisiognomica tra gli *anedotti divertenti* di Bar Hebraeus," in *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* XXV (2002), pp. 189-202.

[54] *The Laughable Stories,* ed. J. Cicek (Glanerbrug 1984), p. 149 (cf. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Chron. civ.,* p. lii).

[55] G. Behnām, *Yuḥannā b. al-'Ibrī: Ḥayātuhu waši'ruhu*, Aleppo 1984 (= republished by Y. Ibrāhīm in *Dirāsāt Suryāniyya* 17). It is recommendable to consider some of Barhebraeus' poems not in the first place as *adab*, but to relate them to his philosophical and mystical writings, e.g. the poem on divine love compared to wine, comparable to Sufi poetry such as b. al-Farīd's *Khamriyya.*

[56] H. Teule, *Gregory Barhebraeus. Ethicon. Memra I*, CSCO 535 (Leuven 1993), p. XX-XXI.

[57] P. Bedjan (ed.), *Ethicon seu Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei* (Paris-Leipzig 1898), p. 128f.

[58] This quotation is taken from the *Paradisus Patrum* of 'Enanišo', ed. P. Bedjan in *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* VII (Paris-Leipzig 1897), p. 499 (nr 160) .

[59] Edition of Cairo, A.H. 1337, p. 9f. (cf. H. Kindermann, *Über die guten Sitten beim Essen und Trinken* (Leiden 1964).

[60] Cf. I-M. Vosté, "Ordo iudiciorum ecclesiasticorum collectus …a Mar 'Abdišo,'" in *Fonti* Ser. II Fasc. XV (Città del Vaticano 1940), p. 24.

[61] *Chron. civ.*, 90b (transl., p. 92). Budge translates *furšōnē* by "gifts". As a juridical term *furšōnē* indicates however the termination of marriage on account of natural (e.g. death) or legal grounds (adultery, etc.), see Barhebraeus' *Nomocanon* (ed. Cicek, 1986), p. 86. The juridical term for a donation is rather *mawhabtō*.

[62] See art. *Ḥanafiyya* (W. Heffening and J. Schacht) and *Marghināni* (W. Heffening) in EI2.

[63] Cf. C. Nallino, "Il diritto musulmano nel Nomocanone siriaco cristiano di Barhebreo," in *Rivista degli StudiOrientali* IX (Roma 1921-23),

p. 512-580 (rep. in M. Nallino [ed.], C. Nallino, *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti. IV Diritto musulmano. Diritti cristiani*, Roma 1942, pp. 214-290). Barhebraeus *Kt. d-Huddoye* was edited by J. Cicek, Glanerbrug, 1986 and by P. Bedjan, *Gregorii Barhebraei Nomocanon*, Paris-Leipzig, 1898.

[64] Cf. Nallino, *o. c.*, p. 266.

[65] Edited and transl. by H. Teule, CSCO 534-5 (Louvain 1993).

[66] *Id.*, p. 11f. (Syr. text), pp. 10 (transl.) and 113-115.

[67] Cf. R. Beulay, *La lumière sans forme. Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale*, Chevetogne n.d. [1987], p. 21 and *passim.*

[68] This belongs to the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn* (*o. c.*, I, pp. 144-46), where one finds: 1. "presence of the heart" (concentration), 2. understanding the meaning of the words of prayer, 3. praising God on account of His greatness and one's own lowness, 4. awe and fear (*haybah wakhawf*), 5. hope, based on God's mercy, and 6. shame on account of one's shortcomings. Cf. *Ethicon*, p. 115 (transl.)

[69] *Ibid.* p. 121 (Syr. text), pp. 104 and 142-145. Cf. H. Teule, "The Perception of the Jerusalem Pilgrimage in Syriac Ascetical Circles," in R. Lavenant (ed.), *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 247, p. 311-321.

[70] H. Teule, "Al-Ghazali et BarEbrōyō. Spiritualités comparées" in CERO (ed.), *Actes du colloque VII* (Antélias 2001).

[71] H. Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans l'oeuvre de Bar 'Ebrōyō," in CERO (ed.), *Dieu Miséricorde, Dieu Amour,* Actes du colloque VIII (Antélias 2003), pp. 257-276.

For a translation and study of the treatise of the Love of God in the Ethicon, see A.J. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove together with some chapters from his Ethicon (*Leiden 1919), pp. 85ff. Syriac text: P. Bedjan, *Ethicon*, pp. 473ff.

[72] Wensinck, *o.c.*, p. 60. Also in the treatise *On Incarnation* of the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* Barhebraeus gives proof of knowing Ghazali's *Munqidh*, cf. Khoury, *o. c.,* p. 118.

[73] See H. Teule, "La critique du prince. Quelques aspects d'une philosophie politique dans l'oeuvre de Barhebraeus" in G. J. Reinink & A.C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan. Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers,* Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 89 (Louvain 1999), pp. 297-294.

[74] Cf. Takahashi, *Aristotelian Meteorology.,* p. 60.

[75] Edited by A. Ṣalḥānī under the title *ta'rīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwal* (Beirut, 1890, 19582). For the correct title, see Kh. Samir, "Trois manuscrits de la chronique arabe de Barhébraeus à Istanbul," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 46 (1980), pp. 142-44.

[76] A. Lüders, "Die Kreuzzüge im Urteil syrischer und armensicher Quellen," *Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten* 29 (Berlin 1964).

[77] L. Conrad, "On the Arabic Chronicle of Barhebraeus: His Aims and Audience," in *Parole de l'Orient* XIX (1994), pp. 319-378. On this issue, see also H. Teule, "The Crusaders in Barhebraeus' Syriac and Arabic Secular Chronicles. A different approach," in K. Ciggaar, A. Davids and H. Teule (eds.), *East and West in the Crusaderstates. Context-Contacs-Confrontations,* Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 75 (Leuven 1996), pp. 39-49.

[78] Ed. Ṣalḥānī, p. 161. For an analysis of some passages on Muhammad in the *Mukhtaṣar*, see S. K. Samir, "The Prophet Muḥammad as seen by Timothy I and other Christian Arab Authors," in D. Thomas (ed.), *Syrian Christians under Islam. The first thousand years (*Leiden 2001), pp. 87-91.

[79] *O. c.*, p. 90ff. (Syr.: 89ff.)

[80] This treatise is still unedited. I used a manuscript (seemingly containing a number of lacunae), written by Skandar b. Safr from Ṭur-'Abdin in 1983. For the passage on Muhammad, see page 166ff. (with many thanks to G. Aziz and the monks of the St Ephrem Monastery in Glanerbrug [Netherlands], who provided me with a copy of this ms). A comparison of the relevant passages of the Civil Chronicle and Bar

Ṣalibi's treatise shows that Barhebraeus cannot have used Dionysius directly. For a first description of the latter's important work, see S. Griffith, "Dionysius Bar Ṣalibi on the Muslims" in H. Drijvers e.a. (eds), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984,* Orientalia Christiana Analecta 247 (1994), pp. 311-327.

[81] The differences and contradictions between Barhebraeus' philosophical and theological works (cf. Janssens, *Entretien de la sagesse,* p. 9ff.) might be explained in the same way. However, to a certain extent this is unsatisfactory, since Barhebraeus himself is very much aware of the different kind of knowledge and the approach of philosophers (*filōsufē barrōyē*) and "ecclesiastical doctors (*malfōnē 'edtōnōyē*), cf. *Ethicon* (ed. P. Bedjan, p. 212, the section on the different categories of persons possessing knowledge). See also Takahashi, *o. c.*, p. 29. The complicated relationship between Barhebraeus as a philosopher and theologian deserves closer examination.

[82] See H. Teule, *Dieu-Amour* (supra, note 71); for the popularity of the Book of Hierotheos in the time of Barhebraeus, see G. Reinink, "Origenism in thirteenth-century Northern Iraq," in J. Reinink & A.C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan. Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers,* Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 89 (Leuven 1999), pp. 237-252.

[83] Cf. *Ethicon*, ed. Bedjan, p. 221.

[84] *Ethicon*, ed. Bedjan, p. 230.

[85] Book of the Dove, ed. Bedjan, p. 577f./ transl. Wensinck, p. 60.

[86] Khoury, *o. c.*, p. 192.

[87] Cf. Chabot, *Lettre*, p. 86, l. 372. Unfortunately, the letter of Denḥa, which provoked Barhebraeus' reaction, is not preserved.

[88] *Kyōnō 'affīfō* is opposed to *kyōnō pšīṭō* (cf. Khoury, *o. c.*, p. 184). The same theory is expressed in the Book of Rays; cf. J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis clementino-vaticana* II (Rome 1721), p. 297.

[89] Khoury, *o. c.,* p. 190. Cf. W. Hage, "Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology," in *The Harp* IV, 1-3 (1991), p. 106.

[90] This last chapter of Barhebraeus' treatise on the Incarnation was edited separately by F. Nau in his "Textes monophysites," *Patrologia orientalis* XIII, 2 (1919), pp. 248-269; see esp. p. 264.

[91] Book of the Dove, ed. Bedjan, p. 577f. (cf. transl. Wensinck, p. 60).

[92] Apparently a symbolic name, referring to any God-loving Christian.

[93] Barhebraeus, *Mušḥōtō,* ed. H. Dolabani, Glanerbrug 1983 (reprint of Jerusalem 1929), p. 157 Cf. Takahashi, p. 32ff. These lines of poetry are to be compared with the end of the letter to Catholicos Denḥa I (lines 962-72): "be fervent in love for the Lord, God, *ho theos*, o [??] *Philos* (*sic*) **[**possibly to be corrected into Theophilos] and not in love for Cyril or Nestoryanos *(sic)*. No chains will separate me from Jesus nor oppress me, are the words of the apostle Paul, crying in a loud voice. And see, in our feeble days, how many fools did the love of Nestorius and Cyril separate from the Lord. Who would not weep or mourn?"

[94] The already mentioned treatise *luqbal Ṭayyōyē* belongs to this work. For Dionysius' inner-Christian polemics, see P. van der Aalst, "Denis bar Salibi, polémiste" in *Proche orient chrétien* IX,1 (1959), pp. 10-23. For his unexpectedly open attitude towards the Latin Christians and a survey of the ecumenical attitudes in the West-Syrian Church, see H. Teule, "It is not right to call ourselves orthodox and the others heretics. Ecumenical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusaders," in K. Ciggaar and H. Teule (eds), *East and West in the Crusader States. Context-Contacts-Confrontations II,* Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 92 (Leuven 1999), pp. 13-27.

[95] See G. Troupeau, "Le livre de l'unanimité de la foi de 'Ali ibn Dawud al-Arfadi", *Melto 2* (Kaslik 1969), pp. 197-219 (republished in G. Troupeau, "Etudes sur le christianisme arabe au Moyen Age," *Collected Studies Series* (Aldershot 1995), nr XII.

[96] See H. Teule, "Saint Louis and the East

Syrians, the Dream of a Terrestrial Empire. East-Syrian Attitudes to the West," in K. Ciggaar and H. Teule (eds.), *East and West in the Crusader States. Context-Contacts-Confrontations III,* Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven 2003) (in press).

[97] *Chron. eccl.* III, p. 411. Cf Barhebraeus' remarks about the "extraordinary knowledge of Arabic" of the East Syriac Patriarch Abū Ḥalīm (d. 1190), whose Arabic *turgāmē* were also appreciated by the West Syriacs (*Chron. eccl.* III, p. 369). This is strangely enough one of the rare passages, where Barhebraeus gives proof of a certain knowledge of the Christian Arabic literature. His works seem hardly influenced by the great West Syrian authors before him, writing in Arabic, such as Yaḥya b. Jarīr or Yaḥya b. 'Adī.

[98] *Chron. eccl.* III, p. 418.

[99] Cf. A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922), pp. 302-323; G. Graf, "Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur." II. Band, *Studi e Testi 133* (Città del Vaticano 1947), pp. 202-219; 267-281.

[100] Cf. O. Schrier, "Name and function of Jacob bar Shakko. Notes on the History of the Monastery of Mar Mattay," in R. Lavenant (ed.), *V Symposium Syriacum*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 236 (1990). pp. 215-228, esp. p. 216 and *Chron. eccl.* III, p. 411.

[101] Kh. Samir, "Une réponse implicite à l'*i'ğaz* du Coran. L'évangéliaire rimé de 'Abdišu,'" in *Proche Orient Chrétien* 35 (1985), pp. 225-237. S. Khoury, "L'évangéliaire rimé de 'Abdišu' de Nisibe et son importance cultuelle et culturelle," in *Proche Orient Chrétien* 22 (1997), 381-390.

[102] S. Khalil Samir, "Cheminement d'Ibn al'Ibri (1226-1286)," in *Proche Orient Chrétien* XXXVII (1987), pp. 71-89, esp. p. 83.

[103] Cf. H. Teule, "La renaissance syriaque," in *Irenikon,*

[104] J.B. Chabot, *Littérature syriaque* (Paris 1934), pp. 114-115.

WOMEN IN SYRIAC CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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The study of women in Syriac tradition is highly problematic. For the period of the ancient and medieval Syriac churches, it seems that no known text written by a woman survives to us.[1] There is much general evidence about women, but none of it appears to come from women themselves. Instead, all of our evidence about the "many women" who were "also there"—to use the words of Matthew's Gospel (27: 55-6)—survives in texts written by men. What makes this problematic is that these writers often had a different focus of interest, or others agendas, and so mention women only in passing and without detail. Nonetheless, women made their mark on Syrian Christianity.[2] We may lack their own words, but their story can be told at least in part. It is a powerful one, indeed.

In this essay I will focus on three types of evidence for women in ancient Syriac Christianity. First, I will consider the evidence we have for women's activities in the churches—what roles they played, what official titles they held, and what work was ascribed to them. Second, I will consider a different type of material, that of the models of biblical women as imaginatively presented in Syriac hymns and homilies delivered to church congregations, and sometimes sung in town and village churches by women's choirs. Like the dramatic legends of women saints and martyrs, these presentations both exalted the memory of women's contribution to the history of holy works, and also provided models for how women should be ideally understood in the social community. Third, I hope to suggest that we can use both concrete and imaginative evidence in the effort to better understand the occasional accounts we have of women whose religious contributions to the civic life of ancient Syriac Christianity proved to be genuinely profound.

I. Women in the Christian Community

Perhaps the most important element of earliest Christianity as far as women were concerned was the emphasis on virginity. Marriage had been, in effect, the only life available to women in the ancient world. But the apostle Paul had advocated the celibate life of service to God (especially in 1 Corinthians 7). Early Christians understood Paul's words together with the model of Christ's own "singleness", and with the imagery taken from the marriage parables of the Heavenly Kingdom (Mt 25: 1-13, Lk 14: 7-14), saw Christ as the Heavenly Bridegroom to whom each believer was betrothed. From this perspective, virginity was a redirection

of sexuality, sexual faithfulness to one's true spouse.

For women, virginity held profound practical implications. Mortality rates in childbirth and in early childhood were high in the ancient world, and family duties were heavy for wives and mothers.[3] Freed from those dangers and responsibilities, women who chose to serve the church through a life of virginity also found themselves freed for new vistas of activity, made possible by valuing the individual apart from her or his sexual identity. Celibacy made possible a life of active service and works: the life to which Syrian women understood themselves to be called as Christians.

Into the third century and perhaps longer, celibacy was often a vow Syriac-speaking men and women took at baptism, or later after having one or two children. Two categories of celibacy were recognized: the *bthule* ("virgins"), and the *qaddishe* ("holy ones"), the married who practiced continence after their children were born. From this basic starting point, Syriac Christians developed a rich understanding of what the Christian life should be. In their view, it should be a life of singlehearted devotion to God, as Christ himself had been "single" and "single-hearted"; and that singleheartedness should be demonstrated through service to the community, enacted in village or city.[4] Lifelong virginity (*btuluta*) or chastity in marriage (*qaddishuta*); an ascetic life of simplicity in food, clothing, and possessions; a life of prayer, understood to include both the study of scripture and the providing of care for the poor, sick, and suffering—these were the active traits of early Syrian Christian devotion for women and men both. It was a public life: it required one's presence and active involvement with the people of one's community, far beyond one's own household. This same understanding of singleness, or singleheartedness, was carried in the basic concept of Syrian monasticism, *ihidayuta*, and applied to a much larger scale of Christian activity than that of the strictly contemplative life. Accordingly, it was not celibacy by itself that determined sanctity in Syrian tradition. Ephrem Syrus could speak of consecrated virgins who would be shut out of paradise because their virginity had not been adorned with good works among the poor and suffering, while married women who instead proved to be exemplars of the holy life would be let in, because their work among the needy expressed their perfect devotion to Christ.[5]

Syrian Christianity, like the wider church, developed a variety of defined positions for women. Thus we find women identified in "official" capacities as widows consecrated to the care and service of the church, women deacons, consecrated virgins of different types, and later as nuns.[6] Sometimes these ministries were specifically defined as ministries performed by women, for women. In different collections of church rules used in Syriac churches during late antiquity, both widows and women deacons were accorded two major responsibilities. The first was liturgical, to assist in the baptism of women. In this case, the concern was to maintain the social propriety of ritual requirements. Since adult baptism was the more usual form until the sixth century or later, and since baptism required an anointing of the entire body as well as full immersion under water, the role of the woman deacon (or, in some instances, the widow) was to assist the priest so that the ritual itself did not violate codes of sexual protocol: she would anoint the candidate before she en-

tered the font, and receive her as she came out. To this ritual function was added an instructional one, for women deacons also had the task of educating women in their faith. Women deacons and sometimes the widows also had the responsibility of visiting Christian women who lived in non-Christian homes, particularly in instances of illness. Here again there was a dual function, of practical works of mercy (bathing the sick woman) and the offering of spiritual instruction in a situation where a male cleric could not respectfully be present.[7]

By the sixth century, church canons prescribe increasing limitations for the activities of widows and women deacons, and the office of widow gradually disappears from the sources.[8] The work of the woman deacon is more clearly described in relation to the sacramental life of the church. In addition to assisting with baptisms of women and providing religious instruction for women, she further stood at the door of the women's section of the church during the liturgy, to prevent the unbaptized from entering. In some regions, women deacons served as abbesses in the convents of nuns, and in that capacity were also able to distribute communion in the absence of a bishop, priest, or deacon; in some areas, they wore a stole as did the deacons.[9] Other canons prescribe rules indicating how the women deacons should clean the sacred vessels and sanctuary of the churches.[10] Over the course of late antiquity, the work of the women deacons became increasingly interwoven with that of the consecrated virgins known as the Daughters of the Covenant.

A distinctive feature of Syriac Christianity was the development by the third century of an office known as the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant, the *Bnay* and *Bnat Qyama*.[11] The office was found throughout Syriac-speaking territories east and west, and lasted well into medieval times. These men and women took vows of poverty and celibacy, lived in separate households within the Christian community, and worked in the service of the parish priest or bishop. In times of persecution, whether in Roman territory or outside, the Daughters of the Covenant are named as having been specially picked out for imprisonment and martyrdom along with clergy and bishops.[12] Such singling out in times of crisis would seem to indicate a strong public profile for these women, and a position of high honor in the eyes of the townspeople.

In the fifth century, we find canons that explicate more clearly the roles and functions of the Members of the Covenant. The canons ascribed to the bishop Rabbula of Edessa (bishop c. 411-434/5) contain fairly extensive legislation for Sons and Daughters of the Covenant.[13] These canons might be viewed as restricting the role of the Daughters of the Covenant, for among their regulations are some which severely limit their public activity, their interaction with other people, and their rules of conduct. Yet, these canons also show a decisive concern to protect the essentially religious meaning of the work done by the Daughters of the Covenant. Canon 3, for example, admonishes that "priests, deacons, and Sons of the Covenant shall not compel the Daughters of the Covenant to weave garments for them by force," and Canon 4 flatly rules that "The priests and deacons shall not be served by women and particularly not by the Daughters of the Covenant."[14] From these canons we may guess that the Daughters of the Covenant were at times reduced to serving as mere housekeepers for the clergy and bishops

(and perhaps often, if the ruling was necessary in this form). The Rabbula Canons are concerned, in contrast, to maintain the religious integrity of the office. The Daughters of the Covenant are mandated in these canons to have the task of singing the psalms and especially the doctrinal hymns (*madrashe*) of the church (canon 20), and to observe the worship services of the church including the daily offices together with the other clergy and the Sons of the Covenant (canon 27). Elsewhere we are told that the Daughters of the Covenant also served in the women's hospital Rabbula founded, assisting the deaconesses in their ministry to women.[15]

The rise of monasticism did not absorb the Members of the Covenant until much later. Rather, these continued to be a visible and valued part of parish life, serving a different purpose than that of monks or nuns in their interactions with the Christian laity and ecclesiastical structure. Among the canons of the Persian Synod of 410, a number address the importance of cultivating the order of the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant particularly in the villages, to provide a pool for clergy and to assist in the maintenance of a devotional life for the churches in sparsely populated regions.[16] Further canons mandated that every town church must have an order (taxis) of sisters (canon 41). The Daughters of the Covenant were to be under the direction of a superior chosen from among them and made a deaconess for service at baptisms; under her supervision, they were to be instructed in Scripture and in the chanting of Psalms.[17]

Fifth, sixth and seventh century sources from both east and west Syriac territories make repeated references to Daughters of the Covenant singing psalms in the worship services or, as directed in the Rabbula canons, chanting the *madrashe*, the doctrinal hymns. Yet, women's singing was not an uncontested event in Syriac Christianity. In the late third century, Paul of Samosata had been disciplined for his use of women's choirs in Antioch. Canonical manuals like the Didascalia and Testament of Our Lord were translated into Syriac and widely circulated from the third century onwards; both repeated the apostolic injunction against women teaching and specified that doctrinal matters were especially forbidden.

But Syriac canons at least between the fifth and seventh centuries accorded Daughters of the Covenant and women deacons—consecrated women—the task of liturgical singing in civic churches, that is, in the village, town, and city churches that gathered the larger Christian community, male and female, together. Women's choirs, then, were a form of public ministry not restricted to women's communities or women's congregations. Other literature provides occasional glimpses of these women's choirs at work. St. Ephrem himself was credited with establishing the practice. In his panegyrical homily on St. Ephrem, St. Jacob of Serug claimed Ephrem had trained choirs of consecrated virgins to sing the *madrashe* in the liturgy explicitly for instructing the congregation in right doctrine.[18] Roughly contemporary with Jacob's discussion, the sixth century Syriac Life of Ephrem described Ephrem convening the Daughters of the Covenant for morning and evening services in the church and at the memorial services of saints and martyrs, saying that he trained these choirs to sing a variety of hymnography in order to compete with the choirs of heretics.[19] Both depictions are striking for their emphasis on the instructional role these

choirs played in educating the larger Christian community in matters of orthodoxy and heresy.

In fact, the Life of Ephrem goes on to explain that the Daughters of the Covenant were trained to sing on matters explicating the entire salvation drama, as well as the devotional life of Christians, and about the saints[20]—almost exactly the list of topics the Didascalia canons had forbidden women to teach.[21] Perhaps we might understand the prominent educational task of these choirs as a development of the canonical tradition that set women deacons and Daughters of the Covenant to be instructors in the faith for women—although if choirs in the regular liturgical cycles of the church were a medium for that task, then those instructed were not only the women but the gathered church community, men and women.

The importance of this situation, as well as its surprising nature, are addressed at length in Jacob of Serug's Homily on St. Ephrem. At one point, Jacob rhetorically addresses Ephrem himself:

> Our sisters also were strengthened by you to give praise;
> for women were not allowed to speak in church.
> Your instruction opened the closed mouths of the daughters of Eve;
> and behold, the gatherings of the glorious (church) resound with their melodies.
> A new sight of women uttering the proclamation (*karuzuta*);
> and behold, [these women] are called teachers (*malpanyatha*) among the congregations.
> Your teaching signifies an entirely new world;
> for yonder in the kingdom, men and women are equal.
> You labored to devise two harps for two groups;
> you treated men and women as one to give praise.[22]

Jacob cites Mary the Second Eve as justification for women's liturgical singing, and also the typology of Moses having led the Hebrew women in song after the crossing of the Red Sea. But he also ties this role to the sacramental life of the church, to the meaning of baptism and communion. He portrays Ephrem addressing the women:

> You [O women] put on glory from the midst of the waters like your brothers,
> render thanks with a loud voice like them also.
> You have partaken of a single forgiving body with your brothers,
> and from a single cup of new life you have been refreshed.
> A single salvation was yours and theirs (alike); why then
> have you not learned to sing praise with a loud voice?
> Your silent mouth which your mother Eve closed,
> is now opened by Mary, your sister, to sing praise...
> Uncover your faces to sing praise without shame
> to the One who granted you freedom of speech by his birth.[23]

Jacob's words from this homily are the boldest presentation we have in witness to the ancient participation of women in Syriac liturgical life. The musical ministry of the Daughters of the Covenant is confirmed in later canonical sources, but the evidence wears thin. In the Middle Ages, the term Daughter of the Covenant appears to have become synonymous with "nun". Yet these were choirs whose function had been to instruct the con-

gregation through hymnography in the substance and form of right belief.

II. Biblical Women

A second type of evidence must be added to the first. Canons and clerical admonitions tell us something about the activities women were urged, allowed, or recognized to do for the ancient Syriac churches. But what instruction came from religious poetry? Specifically, what did the women's choirs sing? For if the hymns chanted by Syriac women's choirs had the purpose of doctrinal instruction for the congregations, then their content was as important for guiding women in the faith as the canonical decisions of councils, or the exhortations of priests and bishops. In the ancient church, as in ancient Judaism, a favorite way of teaching scripture was through the elaboration of biblical stories: filling in gaps and exploring missing conversations, thoughts, or experiences that "must have" accompanied biblical events. Syriac preachers and hymn-writers were often especially interested in biblical women as characters, although often in the scriptures women have little if anything to say. Imagining what a biblical character might have said was an engaging way to tell a story, and a good story could be an effective way of teaching. Syriac writers sometimes chose to do this in verse homilies called *mimre*, or in *madrashe*, the stanzaic hymns of different meters that dealt with doctrinal matters. For these, the verses were sung by a soloist, punctuated with choral responses; or, the stanzas would alternate with verses of the Psalms, sung antiphonally by choirs. Among the favored devices of these Syriac liturgical pieces was the use of dramatic dialogue. Speeches or dialogues of different lengths were often incorporated into homilies and hymns.[24]

A much loved tradition of late antique Syriac hymns was the dialogue poem, the *soghitha*, a form of the *madrashe*. These were hymns in which two characters from a biblical story would be presented in alternate stanzas in a long dialogue—an argument, in which one character argued for God's truth and the other argued against until the first prevailed.[25] Of the many dialogue hymns that survive to us, most are of anonymous authorship; it is possible—but not certain—that women may have written some, or some of the verses. These dialogue hymns were sung antiphonally by two choirs. Often, in Syriac churches at least between the fourth and the ninth centuries, they were specifically sung by the women's choirs as part of their consecrated ministry.[26] There are numerous examples of these hymns, but I will focus on two groups: dialogue hymns about the Virgin Mary, and those about the Sinful Woman.

The Virgin Mary

In Syriac hymns, the Virgin Mary has a prominent place. She is often portrayed as speaking about matters of theological import concerning Christ her son, especially about the wondrous paradox of her condition as virgin and mother of God.[27] In some hymns, however, the act of Mary's speech takes on heightened significance. For Syriac writers, the power of Mary's speech lay in its contrast to Eve's alleged silence when the serpent came to tempt her. In their view, Eve had listened to the Serpent and received his words uncritically, that is, in silence. To undo the fall, a woman was needed who would listen, question, and speak in order to initiate God's saving plan. That woman was

Mary, the Second Eve.[28] In hymns that present what dialogue might have taken place between Mary and the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation, or between Mary and Joseph when he learns she is pregnant, we can see that Mary's story provoked social tensions among ancient Syriac Christians (and others) when they thought about what she must have said.[29]

In one anonymous dialogue hymn, for example, Gabriel arrives and Mary receives him with suspicion, asking how his words announcing her conception of a son can be true. The angel replies that Mary should keep silence, for God will act as He wills. Much to his chagrin, she will not halt her questioning until he has given her adequate explanation of the event to come.[30]

In some hymns, the dialogue between Mary and Gabriel takes on a humorous tone. In a dialogue hymn for the Sunday of the Annunciation,[31] the Angel greets Mary with gracious announcement. Mary is not impressed: "Who are you, Sir?/ And what is this that you utter?/ What you are saying is remote from me,/ and what it means I have no idea." (v. 12) Gabriel tries again; Mary is nonplussed. Gabriel cites the authority of God who sent him; Mary demurs and will not be moved. By this point, the Angel is exasperated: why, he asks, is she answering back? How can she deny the message he was sent to bring? Mary refuses to accept what sounds to her impossible. The angel pleads, "It is appropriate you should keep silence, and have faith too,/ for the will of the Father cannot be gainsaid." (v. 25) Mary wrestles until finally she receives the Holy Spirit overshadowing her, and by that action is convinced.

In an anonymous homily, God himself prepares Gabriel for exactly such a scenario. In his charge to the angel, God admonishes him bluntly:

> Do not stand up to Mary or argue,
> for she is stronger than you in argument;
> do not speak too many words to her,
> for she is stronger than you in her replies....
> If she starts to question you closely,
> disclose to her the Mystery, and then be off.[32]

However, in a dialogue hymn between Mary and Joseph, the roles are reversed as Mary now argues the position of faith and Joseph that of reason which cannot believe.[33] Unlike the humorous tones of the dialogue with the angel, here the exchange is heavy with pain. The verses are laced with the burden of a virtuous bride opposing her righteous husband. Mary explains her conception by the Holy Spirit; Joseph orders her to be silent. She will not: "I repeat the very same words—/ I have no others to say." Joseph replies, "You should not contradict;" Mary answers, "You should believe my words." The disputation continues in bitter if stately argumentation until Joseph finally is persuaded. In triumph Mary sings, "Now I shall pour out my words" (v 40).

Clearly Syriac hymn writers worried about the tension between "women keeping silent" and Mary "speaking up." The great Syriac hymnographer of the sixth century Jacob of Serug commented on this very problem. He said that it was Mary's words with Gabriel that brought us salvation: for if Mary had not asked Gabriel how her conception could happen, how a virgin could become a mother, then "We would not have learned the explanation of the matter of the Son Jesus Christ."[34]

Jacob himself wrote a homily depicting the scene of the Visitation between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth.[35] In it, he played

upon the paradox that in the biblical story the women speak and understand while their men are silent and uncomprehending (in the gospel account, Luke 1-2, Elizabeth's husband Zechariah is struck dumb in punishment for not believing the archangel Gabriel, and Joseph is simply absent). In Jacob's telling of the story, elaborating the short biblical account, not only do Mary and Elizabeth talk together, but they read the scriptures and interpret the prophecies. Speaking, reading, interpreting, telling, narrating, prophesying, revealing: with a multitude of verbal actions Mary and Elizabeth express and explain God's salvific plan in a celebration of words. When Mary returns to Joseph, she must then convince him, in ardent dialogue, of what she and Elizabeth know to be true about her pregnancy. Having laid out the jarring picture of Mary's strength of speech, Jacob then constrains her into a more appropriate mode. Mary's speech, he tells us, had in fact been in the privacy of domestic space. Had she dared to speak in public, she would surely have been castigated by people for her impudent boldness; therefore God had given her a just husband who would speak in public on her behalf and defend her innocence.

Thinking about what Mary might have said—imagining her speech—raised problems in the Syriac mind. Yet, in the dialogue hymns as in Jacob's homilies, Mary is canny, intelligent, thoughtful, independent. Her words are powerful: they can undo the work of Eve, they can bring about or stymie God's intended action. This was a profound model for women: in hymns and homilies Mary speaks, and her words were voiced to men and women both in the shared space of the gathered church community, intoned by homilist and sung by women's choirs.

The Sinful Woman

Another favorite subject for Syriac writers was the Sinful Woman of Luke 7: 36-50, who came to Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee, washed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with fine ointment. In the gospel, the Sinful Woman does not speak; she is silent, she weeps, she offers her tears and her perfume. Nor do we know anything about her: she is nameless. The gospel simply describes her arrival at the house of Simon and her penitent supplications at the feet of Christ. Syriac hymn writers filled in the silences, providing her words to speak, and even a story of her own: a past, a present and a changed future—all the result of the words they imagined she might have said.

A verse homily wrongly attributed to St. Ephrem (but probably written soon after his death in the later fourth century) proved immensely influential in this regard both for Syriac and Greek writers, and eventually medieval Latin. The homily retells the gospel story in a form that soon became popular throughout the Syriac speaking world, and then beyond. It begins with the moment at which the Woman first hears the news of Christ's visit to Simon the Pharisee.[36] Immediately she repents of her life and vows to seek healing—salvation—from Christ himself. Her words initiate her actions. Stripping off her garments of harlotry, the Woman clothes herself in the apparel of mourning. Taking her gold, earned in perdition, she vows in prayer, "With this, O Lord, that I have gained from iniquity, I will purchase salvation for myself."

The homily then presents the Woman in a series of dialogues with male characters who want to halt her course and prevent her

chosen goal: these are verbal battles she must win in order to gain entry to Christ's presence. First she seeks out the Perfume Seller, from whom to buy the precious ointment with which to anoint her Lord's feet. The Perfume Seller is astounded by her changed appearance and odd request: every day she had come to him in rich clothes and buying cheap perfume; now suddenly she is in "sordid weeds" seeking his most expensive scent. The Woman will not be deterred. Convincing him of her need, she fills her alabaster flask and moves on. Satan then stops her, taking the guise of a former lover; by turns pleading, wheedling, and upbraiding her, he threatens her with the thought that no one will believe she has changed her ways. With blunt speech and fervent faith, the Woman perseveres. Satan then moves to Simon's house, instructing the Pharisee on the public scandal that will ensue if the Woman is allowed to enter his house while Christ is there. The Woman must then do verbal battle with Simon, her final obstacle on the course. Finally she gains entry and her place at Christ's feet. The homily closes with Christ's forgiveness of her sins.

Here was a story rich in drama and dialogue both, and it gave rise to many versions in hymns and homilies. Two dialogue hymns focus just on the dialogue between the Woman and Satan.[37] In these, Satan represents "normal" social views. He insists that everyone knows the Woman's reputation, that no one will believe she has changed her life, that in fact she cannot change her life; he warns that a God as just and righteous as Christ will have no mercy on one so sinful as she is; he threatens that the disciples will try to kill her rather than allow the scandal of her presence with their Lord; he reminds her of the pleasures she enjoyed in his company; he begs her to return to him. To each statement of Satan, the Woman replies in steadfast argument. Her faith is unshakable that she can in fact change her life, that Christ will indeed receive her, that he will freely show compassion and mercy, that he will heal her of her sins; she declares that Christ is now her only lover and she is his betrothed; she will not be turned from her purpose. It is a classic tale: the fallen woman redeemed by love.

But consider again the imagined dialogues by which the gospel story was explored. The voices of opposition to the Sinful Woman's course of action are all male; all speak as representatives of standard theological and social positions. They are the obstacles to her conversion; they are the normative voices of their society. It is the Woman who takes the initiative and acts, and she acts most effectively through plain speech. Not only does she speak of faith as opposed to reason, she also voices the role of free will, the conviction that we can choose to change our lives. No archangel comes to guide her course; no divine power overshadows her to infuse her with strength beyond her own. There is no divine intervention to protect her. Christ is not present or active until she arrives at his feet—and she must arrive there by her own achievement. In many respects, hers was a character more challenging to social convention than the figure of the Virgin Mary.

In the Syriac dialogue hymns I have mentioned, the speech of women is imagined as a way to teach about scripture. In the instances of these biblical women, their imagined words are used to express right teaching, intelligent reflection, autonomy, agency, and free will, while the words spoken by men represent social convention,

restrictive tradition, and normative social roles—the dead weight of habit. Female speech argues the freedom of faith, male speech argues the constraining shackles of custom. Here is a profound and powerful model for women.

But what relation could these biblical women have to the real world—where women cooked, washed dishes, mended, cleaned house, and cleaned churches? And what authority did these imagined voices carry? In the liturgy, men and women heard these hymns, and heard them sung by women's choirs. In the ritual space of the church—not in the mundane space of marketplace or kitchen—women gave voice to models offered by scriptural tradition or by the saints. In that different space (of religious ritual, not daily life), and in these different voices (of biblical women, and not of ordinary women), we can sense the social tensions present in the ancient Syriac Christian community. The foundational model for Syriac Christianity was one of devotion to God exemplified through active service in the public domain. Such activity seemed to go against inherited social traditions regarding women's proper place and work: traditions we see reflected in "official" canonical prescriptions delimiting the roles and duties of designated women in church offices. In the "safe space" of ritual and hymn, those tensions were negotiated by the Christian community in terms that allowed for social critique through doctrinal lenses. Jacob of Serug had said (sung) that men and women stand equal "yonder in the Kingdom." Yonder was located somewhere else than here. However, we have a third area of evidence to consider, and therein, I would suggest, lies the bridge between the apparent restrictions designated to women's service by ecclesiastical authority, and the more visionary voice intoned by women's choirs. Indeed, the infrequent but not altogether rare accounts of personal memories have much to say in this regard.

III. The Public Quality of Women's Ministry

Two examples of women's ministerial services in the Syriac Christian communities of late antiquity will make the point. Both survive to us in accounts written by men who knew the women personally. Both are striking demonstrations of a publicly visible presence of women's religious activities in the civic communities of cities, towns, and villages. Both consequently tell us something about the social expectations of women's religious behaviour that accompanied this presence.

One was the holy woman Euphemia, of the city of Amida (modern Diyarbekr, in eastern Turkey) discussed at length by the bishop John of Ephesus in a collection of portraits he wrote in the late sixth century; John knew her well.[38] Euphemia had been widowed early in her marriage, and left with one daughter, Maria. Without apparently receiving any official ecclesiastical identity (Daughter of the Covenant, Widow as an office, woman deacon, or nun), Euphemia organized her home so that she and Maria effectively followed a monastic routine of daily prayer and scripture study; she also taught her daughter reading, writing, and how to chant the psalms.

At the same time, Euphemia began to conduct an extensive ministry among the poor and sick of Amida's streets. Keeping her daughter in seclusion at home, as befit a good mother at the time, Euphemia sold

yarn to the noblewomen of the city which she and her daughter wove. From the money they earned, Euphemia used some for their own needs and the rest to attend to the poor, the abandoned, the sick, and those in prison or hospital. Over time, she came to direct what appears to have been the entire social service network of the city, supplementing the earnings from Maria's yarn with donations from the city's wealthier population. She was criticized for leaving her daughter alone all day while she went out to work (the "working mother" syndrome, in antiquity!), but Maria herself defended her mother on the grounds of the importance of her work.

For roughly thirty years, mother and daughter continued in this shared life of household religious devotion and prayer routine combined with public ministry. When religious persecutions broke out in the eastern provinces, Euphemia opened her house as a refuge for exiled monks and priests seeking safe asylum. It was this activity that led to the arrest of her and her daughter on charges of heresy. However, officials were unprepared for the enormity of public outcry on behalf of the two women; the civic authorities complained, "These women are upsetting this city—why, the citizens revere and honor them more than the bishops!"[39] Officials had no choice but to exile the women from the city. For their part, Euphemia and Maria took up a life of wandering ascetic devotion for their remaining years, travelling about the Holy Land.

John of Ephesus emphasizes Euphemia's forceful and lively personality. However, it would also appear that Euphemia's ascetic practice followed the patterns familiar to the larger Syrian Christian community for women's devotional activities.[40] Her household arrangements with her daughter Maria accord with what was prescribed in canons for Daughters of the Covenant—the consecrated virgins who lived in the city with their families and worked in service to the local priest and parish. Her work among the sick and poor resembles the canonically assigned duties of the Daughters of the Covenant and the women deacons, although extending the more "normal" pattern of women's ministry to women, to include service to suffering men as well. In other words, while Euphemia may have been a particularly inspiring figure, her work was made possible by a public context in which the public presence and activity of women in the service of the church was a standard part of daily life. People expected that there would be women doing these things.

An equally notable example was the holy woman Shirin, who in the later sixth century lived in the village of Halmon in northern Iraq. We know about Shirin because the east Syriac monastic writer Martyrios (Sahdona) recalls her in his Book of Perfection as a significant influence on his childhood and subsequent religious life.[41] Martyrios remembers Shirin as already in her 80s when he knew her in his youth. Again, she is not identified as having been granted any religious office. She lived alone, following a life of simple asceticism and regimented prayer practice, chanting the psalms and the daily services, studying scripture and monastic literature as well as the lives of saints. But she also served as spiritual counsellor and guide for the people of the village and for the monastic communities of the region. Martyrios reports that monks and abbots would travel from throughout the vicinity to seek her counsel and receive her blessing

"as spiritual mother."

Honored by the male religious luminaries of the day, Shirin was also venerated by the lay community. Martyrios tells us, "Women in particular frequented her company, seeing that she was someone to whom they found access easy, in view of the status they had in common. They greatly profited from her, both from talking with her and from just seeing her; and they were drawn to imitate her zealously, insofar as was possible."[42] Martyrios' own mother was a frequent visitor, often taking him in his childhood and exhorting him repeatedly to take Shirin as his model in life—as he in fact claims to have done.

Once again, the account of Shirin's devotional activities shows great similarity with the practices and domestic patterns of the Daughters of the Covenant, women deacons, and nuns. She is not identified as any of these. Yet clearly the conduct of her life was familiar to the broader Christian populace, in many respects, because of the ministry of women in those offices. At the same time, she too seems to have exceeded the confines of those offices as canonically defined. Men as well as women came for guidance, instruction, and counsel—including monastic leaders and monks. Not one word of her teachings survives in written form, and yet here was a woman of unparalleled reputation in her day precisely for the wisdom of her words. What we have, instead, is the memory of someone whose life course was profoundly affected by the personal impact of her work.

Women could be, and were, visible, active, and venerable participants in the public and individual religious lives of the Christian community in its civic contexts in the late antique Syrian Orient. Their devotional work and ministry were clearly not confined to women's monastic communities, nor even to laywomen in the cities, towns, and villages where they lived. Accounts like those about Euphemia and Shirin, while not frequent, indicate a social situation in which women's religious service was a familiar part of Syrian Christian life in its broader social setting throughout the late antique period. It may well be that in their examples we see the fruits of a shared liturgical participation, one that gave voice to models of faith offered by women whose own voices have been silenced by the weight of time.

NOTES

[1] The authorship of ancient texts can be a complicated subject. We know of no women Syriac authors. However, an anonymous late antique *memra* may possibly have been written by a woman: there is a first person reference in the opening stanza that appears to be a rare form of the first person feminine singular. See S. P. Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," *Le Muséon* 99 (1986), pp. 61-129 at pp. 98-99. The sixth century *Life of Febronia* claims to have been written by Febronia's companion Thomaïs, but this text is an epic romance and the narrator's voice is necessary to the plot. See the discussion and translation in S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xiv-xv, 150-76. However, there is a huge body of anonymous literature in Syriac, including hagiography and hymns, for which "authorship" as such is a difficult concept. As with the apocryphal acts, this is literature generated by and within communities, and to which women may well have contributed.

[2] I use the terms "Syriac Christianity" or "Syrian tradition" to refer to those churches which since the early Christian centuries have used the Syriac language (a dialect of Aramaic) as their primary means of expression and liturgical celebration. In the early Christian era, the Syrian Orient—territory including a large population of Syriac-speaking peoples—comprised a large portion of the Middle East, then under Roman dominion, as well as Persia (areas now spread over Syria, Lebanon, Israel, eastern Turkey, Iran and Iraq). Over the course of the first seven Christian centuries, Syriac missions spread Christianity beyond these territories to India, Ethiopia, the Arabian peninsula, and to the far east, through Turkistan, Mongolia, and into China, establishing a long and thriving Christian community. Syriac Christianity thus developed in inherently multicultural contexts, yet forged its own distinct and rich cultural traditions.

[3] Although focused on the Greek and Roman worlds, there is much overlap for the Syrian Orient in the useful study of Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[4] See, e.g., Sidney H. Griffith, "Monks, 'Singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant': Reflections on Syriac Ascetic Terminology," in *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft*, ed. Ephrem Carr et alii, Studia Anselmiana 110 (Roma: Centro Studi S. Anselmo, 1993), pp. 141-160; S. A. Harvey, "Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 43 (1999), pp. 105-130.

[5] Ephrem, *Letter to Publius*, 15. Trans. Edward G. Mathews, Jr., and Joseph P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, Fathers of the Church 91 (Washington, DC: the Catholic University of America Press, 1994), at p. 350.

[6] See S. A. Harvey, "Women's Service in Ancient Syriac Christianity," in *Mother, Nun, Deaconess: Images of Women according to Eastern Canon Law*, ed. Eva Synek, *Kanon* 16 (Egling, 2000), pp. 226-41, for discussion as well as further references. I will draw from this article for part of what follows.

[7] Most important for the early legislation is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, ch. 14-15 on widows, and ch. 16 on women deacons. *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, Vols. 1 and 2, CSCO 401-402/Scr. Syr. 175-176, and 407-408/Scr. Syr. 179-180 (Louvain, 1979).

[8] Various collections were edited together and added to over time. For this discussion I use the canons as preserved in the West Syriac Synodicon: *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition* 1, ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, CSCO 367-368/ Scr. Syr. 161-162 (Louvain, 1975).

[9] "Chapters Written from the Orient," 9, 11, trans. Vööbus, *Synodicon*, pp. 159, 242.

[10] "Testament of Our Lord," 40, trans. Vööbus, *Synodicon*, p. 62; "Answers of Johannan to Sargis," 32-41, trans. Vööbus, *Synodicon*, pp. 202-4; "Answers of Ja'qob to Addai," 41, trans. Vööbus, *Synodicon*, p. 242.

[11] See, e.g., Naomi Koltun-Fromm, "Yokes of the Holy-Ones: The Embodiment of a Christian Vocation," *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001), pp. 205-218; G. Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the Early Syriac-Speaking Church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), pp. 191-215, 419-444; Griffith, "Monks, 'Singles', and the 'Sons of the Covenant';" Harvey, "Women's Service."

[12] E.g., in the *Martyrdom of Shmona and Guria*, sec. 1, sec. 70, in F. C. Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth with the Acts of the Martyrdom of the Confessors of Edessa* (Oxford, 1913). For examples from Persia and Najran, see Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, pp. 63-121.

[13] The Rabbula "Rules for Clergy and Members of the Qeiama" are edited and translated in A. Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1960), pp. 34-50.

[14] "Rules for the Qeiama," p. 38.

[15] *Vita S. Rabbulae*, ed. Paul Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* 4 (Paris, 1894), pp. 396-450, at p. 444.

[16] Ed. and trans. Arthur Vööbus, *The Canons Ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqat and Related Sources*, CSCO 439-440/ Scr. Syr. 191-192 (Louvain, 1982). See, e.g., CSCO 440/ Scr. Syr. 192, p. 65f.

[17] Vööbus, *Canons Ascribed to Maruta*, CSCO 440/ Scr. Syr. 192, p. 72.

[18] "A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug," ed. and trans. Joseph P. Amar, *Patrologia Orientalis* 47 (Turnhout, 1995), pp. 5-76.

[19] Joseph P. Amar, *The Syriac "Vita" Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1988), pp. 158-159 (Syriac), 298-299 (trans.).

[20] Amar, *The Syriac "Vita"*, pp. 158, 298.

[21] *Didascalia*, ch. 15, especially in reference to widows. Ch. 16 does mandate that women deacons should teach women converts.

[22] Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Ephrem* , 40-45, trans. Amar, *Patrologia Orientalis* 47, p. 35.

[23] Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on Ephrem*, 102-13, trans. Amar, *Patrologia Orientalis* 47, p. 49-53.

[24] I draw much of what follows from S. A. Harvey, "Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), pp. 105-131, where fuller discussion and further references may be found.

[25] For an introduction see S. P. Brock, "Dialogue Hymns of the Syriac Churches," *Sobornost/ Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1983), pp. 35-45.

[26] As indicated in the Rabbula canons, "Rules of the Qeiama," canon 20.

[27] Although not in the form of *soghyatha*, the *madrashe* of Ephrem Syrus known as the *Hymns on the Nativity* are notable for giving Mary lengthy speeches and monologues on the theological significance of her son. These are edited with German translation by Dom Edmund Beck in CSCO 196-187/ Scr. Syr. 182-183 (Louvain 1959); and translated into English by Kathleen McVey, *in Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 61-217,

[28] This general perspective is classically formulated in Jacob of Serug's Homily 1 on the Blessed Virgin Mary, trans. Mary Hansbury, in *Jacob of Serug, On the Mother of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), pp. 17-42.

[29] I will draw from the anonymous hymns collected in Sebastian P. Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, Mōrān 'Eth'ō 6 (Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994).

[30] Brock, *Bride of Light*, Hymn 27, at p. 94.

[31] Brock, *Bride of Light*, Hymn 41, pp. 111-118.

[32] Brock, *Bride of Light*, Hymn 45, pp. 134-140.

[33] Brock, *Bride of Light*, Hymn 42, pp. 118-124.

[34] Trans. Hansbury, *Jacob of Serug on the Mother of God*, Homily 1, at p. 38.

[35] Jacob of Serug, Homily 2, trans. Hansbury, pp. 43-64.

[36] There is an English translation by John Gwynn, in the *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* second series, Vol. 13, pp. 336-341. I have adapted the Gwynn translation where I quote from the text.

[37] Edited and translated in Sebastian P. Brock, "The Sinful Woman and Satan: Two Syriac Dialogue Poems," *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988), pp. 21-62.

[38] John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ch. 12. There is a translation in Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, pp. 122-133.

[39] Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, at p. 131.

[40] See Harvey, "Women's Service in Ancient Syriac Christianity."

[41] The account is translated in Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, pp. 177-181.

[42] Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 181.

IMAGES OF JOY IN EPHREM'S HYMNS ON PARADISE: RETURNING TO THE WOMB AND THE BREAST

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THE PARADISE HYMNS AND THEIR STUDY TO DATE

Ephrem's fifteen *Hymns on Paradise* belong to the earlier, Nisibene, phase of his life.[1] They abound in appealing images of bliss—most of them clearly rooted in the first chapters of the Biblical book of Genesis. Ephrem superimposes the images of mountain and enclosed garden, both traditional images across a broad swath of Near Eastern culture, to provide a rich and dazzling mix of metaphors. In an enlightening article, Nicolas Séd has sketched the resultant topography, and he has suggested links with rabbinic and Kabbalistic literature.[2] Tryggve Kronholm has identified substantial further materials shared with rabbinic exegetical traditions.[3] Sebastian Brock has identified parallels in Greek patristic literature to certain aspects of Ephrem's portrayal of paradise,[4] and he and others have found similar concepts in a variety of later religious literature—Jewish, Syriac and western Christian, and most recently Baha'i.[5] Finally, many of the concepts and metaphors central to Ephrem's theology are present in these hymns.[6] Among those concepts and metaphors are the maternal images of the womb ܟܘܟܐ or ܟܘܟܒܐ, the act of giving birth ܝܠܕ, and suckling of infants ܢܩܡ or ܢܝܩ the participle—in the Pe`al or Ethpe`el of the infant's action; in the Pa`el or Af`el of the mother's—ܡܢܩ and ܐܡܢܩ respectively. These images figure prominently in every aspect of Ephrem's theology: the inner life of the Deity, creation, the incarnation, mariology, biblical history, the sacraments, and spiritual development.[7] More important than the mere occurrence of this symbolism in a wide variety of contexts is the vital integrative role these symbols play for his entire theological system. They have gained attention in his corpus in general, but their presence in the *Paradise Hymns* has not yet been fully explored. That is my subject here. After a brief excursus on Ephrem's use of metaphor, our question will be threefold:

1) What is the particular content of the female imagery in this group of hymns?

2) What is its contribution to his vision of paradise?

3) How is it related to female imagery elsewhere in Ephrem's writings?

METAPHOR AND LITERALISM IN EPHREM'S PARADISE HYMNS

Ephrem is careful to emphasize that his descriptions of Paradise, and by implication, the underlying Biblical portrayals, are not to be construed literally. He begins the first hymn with this emphasis, and he returns to it repeatedly. Scripture is, he observes, a "treasure house of revelations, wherein is revealed the tale of the Garden—described by things visible, but glorious for what lies hidden" (I.1). Torn between "yearning for Paradise" and "awe at its majesty," he decides to combine reverence for the hidden with meditation on what has been revealed (I.2).[8] Playing on the image of ascent both literally and figuratively, he describes being transported to Paradise while reading the Scriptural text: "My tongue read the story's outward narrative, while my intellect took wing and soared upward in awe."[9]

Ephrem is quick to stress that neither this inner, spiritual experience nor its description can be taken literally, for his intellect "perceived the splendor of Paradise—not indeed as it really is, but insofar as humanity is granted to comprehend it." Yet immediately following this word of caution, he launches into a vivid portrayal of Paradise as a mountain:

> With the eye of my mind I gazed upon Paradise;
> The summit of every mountain is lower than its summit,
> The crest of the Flood reached only its foothills (I:4.1-3).

His stern warning of the limits of human words and experience is easily forgotten as he proceeds to describe the resplendent beauties of Paradise, its fragrance, the abodes of the children of light, who "dance on the sea's surface and do not sink" and "fly through the air" on their chariots, the clouds (I:5-7). So he reiterates his conviction that our senses are fundamentally incapable of perceiving the world that awaits the blessed: "But because the sight of Paradise is far removed, and the eye's range cannot attain to it, I have described it over simply, making bold a little" (I:8.1-3). As soon as he has re-issued this warning not to take him literally, he leaps back into a description of the circular character of Paradise: "we should look upon paradise as being circular too, having both sea and dry land encompassed within it" (I:8.5-6).

Séd has shown that the poet's descriptions of mountain, circular enclosure, temple and garden, if superimposed and imagined on intersecting horizontal and vertical axes, are compatible on a literal level, and indeed they resonate among themselves, each image enriching the rest through multiple associations. But this does not mean that Ephrem gives a literal description of Paradise.[10] We can best understand his intention by consulting the fourth hymn. There he resumes the theme of the indescribability of Paradise—again in his paradoxical fashion. First he appears to describe a feast for the senses:

> For the colors of Paradise are full of joy,
> its scents most wonderful,
> its beauties most desirable,
> and its delicacies glorious (IV:7.5-6).

Then he insists that, although his tongue cannot describe it, no mirror can reflect its beauty, no paints can portray it, still he has done so for the profit of all who may be inspired to live a manner of life that will bring them to Paradise.[11]

Even a casual acquaintance with Ephrem's poetry makes it clear that there is more to his view than this apparently utilitarian explanation would allow. The senses, their perceptions and verbal descriptions all play too central a role in his art for this to be the case. His manner of argument, both in these hymns and elsewhere, shows that the world perceptible to our senses is replete with intimations of its Creator.[12] Similarly, despite the fact that Paradise is not susceptible to any literal description, Ephrem seems to claim that his rich and sensually diverse imagery has what might be called "evocative validity". That is, while not literally true, his portrayals are anagogically true. Although he does not use this term characteristic of later Platonic mysticism, he suggests a similar notion by his habit of alternating vivid descriptions with warnings against literalism. The images are neither literally true nor are they simply scaled-down models of heavenly counterparts, yet they are not false or misleading. They are intimations of ineffable truth. Or as he phrases it: Like the wind, powerful yet invisible, Paradise is "both hidden and manifest: while it can be perceived to exist, what it really is cannot be perceived."[13] This intellectual framework must be kept in mind as we enter the world of rich female metaphors in Ephrem's Paradise.

1.a. **The Womb(s) of Paradise: erotic and maternal themes**

For Ephrem Paradise itself may be imagined as having a womb. He portrays himself as transported through reading the Scriptural account of the Creation from the "womb of the book to the Womb of Paradise" ܡܢ ܟܪܣܐ ܕܣܦܪܐ ܠܒܛܢ ܓܢܬܐ ܕܒܛܢ.[14] That womb—echoed by others within Paradise and in the rest of creation—has both erotic and maternal overtones. For the sake of clarity, we will consider these two emphases *seriatim*, beginning with the erotic.

In the thirteenth hymn Adam is portrayed as king and the garden as his ܟܠܝܠܐ ܕܡܥܪܘܣܐ "chaste bridal chamber" (XIII:3). Instead of living in the sanctified and glorious royal manner for which he was destined, Adam (like Nebuchadnezzar) chose to live like an animal. We, following him, have all "gone out from the glorious bridal chamber of Paradise" ܢܦܩ ܡܢ ܟܠܝܠܐ ܕܥܕܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܠܡܚܝܘܬ ܒܪ to "live with wild beasts".[15] Here Ephrem has applied to the beginning of the drama of paradisal loss and restoration the traditional Near Eastern motif of royal marriage, skewed in an ascetic direction by the notion of the "chaste bridal chamber."[16] We might expect to see this theme return when our poet portrays the restoration of the saints to Paradise at the end of time. We will not be disappointed in this expectation.[17]

The second hymn begins with a vivid portrayal of Paradise itself as a woman who yearns for her lover,[18] "the man whose goodness makes him beautiful:"

> it engulfs him at its gateway,
> it embraces him in its bosom, it caresses him in its very womb;[19]
> for it splits open and receives him into its inmost parts.[20]

ܡܫܬܘܩܩܐ ܠܗ ܒܬܪܥܝܗ ܘܡܬܚܒܩ ܠܗ ܒܚܝܠܗ ܘܡܦܢܩ ܠܗ ܒܡܥܝܗ ܕܡܫܬܘܩܩ ܠܗ ܒܬܪܥܝܗ ܘܡܬܚܒܩ ܠܗ ܒܚܝܠܗ ܘܡܦܢܩ ܠܗ ܒܡܥܝܗ ܕܡܫܬܘܩܩ ܠܗ ܒܬܪܥܝܗ ܘܡܬܚܒܩ ܠܗ ܒܚܝܠܗ ܘܡܦܢܩ ܠܗ ܒܡܥܝܗ

Having set forth this provocative image in these first lines, Ephrem does not continue to explore it in the rest of this hymn.

Instead he finishes the strophe by introducing a judgment motif:

> But if there is someone it abhors, it removes him and casts him out;
> This is the gate of testing that belongs to Him who loves humankind.[21]

The refrain, which follows upon this first strophe, announces the Christological theme that resolves the tension between the erotic motif and that of judgment: "Blessed is he who was pierced and so removed the sword from the entry to Paradise." The female embracing, caressing and splitting open to receive the beloved into her inmost parts is now re-interpreted to point to the piercing of Christ upon the cross.[22] His suffering, unconditional love re-opens the entry to Paradise and to loving intimacy with God. The cross of Christ is the key that opens the way into Paradise through the Door, which is Christ.[23] The threats of harsh judgment ("if there is someone it abhors, it removes him and casts him out") are reconciled with the one "who loves humankind" through the image of Christ "the Door that welcomes you smiles radiantly upon you; the Door, all discerning, conforms its measure to those who enter it ... It shows by its dimensions whether they are perfect, or lacking in something."[23]

A third and final instance of erotically charged imagery is, again, in the context of the reward of the saints. In *Parad.* VII: 18 the man who in his earthly life has abstained from wine is promised a greeting from the (grammatically feminine) vines of paradise. These will offer him their clusters of grapes, and they will "welcome into their pure womb (ܒܛܢܗ)" the man who has chosen the life of virginity:[24]

> The man who abstained, with understanding, from wine,
> will the vines of Paradise rush out to meet, all the more joyfully,[25]
> ܕܡܫܬܐ ܚܟܝܡܐ ܒܪ ܡܢ ܚܡܪܐ ܠܐ
> as each one stretches out and proffers him her clusters;[27]
> ܕܢܦܩ ܠܗ ܓܦܝ ܟܠ ܚܕ ܘܚܕ
> or if any has lived a life of virginity,
> him too they welcome[28] into their pure womb,[29]
> ܘܠܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܟܒ ܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܒܪ ܡܢ ܕܐܦ ܠܗ
> for the solitary such as he
> has never lain in any womb[30] nor upon any marriage bed.
> ܘܠܐ ܒܥܠ ܒܟܠ ܚܕ ܒܪ ܡܢ ܕܐܦ ܠܗ

On the one hand, Ephrem here strikingly echoes the language of the *Song of Songs*, where the bride's breasts are compared to the clusters of a palm tree and of a grape vine:[31]

> ... ܘܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܣܠܩ ܒܬܡܪܐ ܐܚܙܐ ܒܣܥܢܝܗ

The erotic intent of the Biblical passage is clear, and since it provides a plausible background for our Syriac poet's personified grapevines, the erotic implication of his imagery seems assured as well. Still, to be certain of his intent, we must consider the larger context of this arresting image. The personified vines appear here in the midst of a crowd of anthropomorphic trees and fruits, who welcome various groups of saints—each group being received in a manner befitting its lifestyle. In turn, this broader scene must be viewed in the context of personification of trees and plants in general in these hymns and always with the poet's *monitum* against literalism in mind.

Ephrem personifies the trees of the Garden several times in the *Hymns on Paradise*.[32] In the third hymn he begins by observing that the summit of the mountain of Paradise, the place which is innermost as well as highest, the place where "the Glory dwells" is impossible to describe or imagine:

> Not even its symbol
> can be depicted in man's thought;
> for what mind has the sensitivity to gaze upon it,
> or the faculties to explore it, or the capacity to attain to that Garden
> whose riches are beyond comprehension (III:1.3-6).

Here we find the Tree of Life, which is sun, sovereign and leader of the other trees:

> Perhaps that blessed tree,
> the Tree of Life,
> is, by its rays,
> the sun of Paradise ...
> In the breezes the other trees
> bow down as if in worship
> before that sovereign
> and leader of the trees (III:2. 1-2, 5-6).

Later in the same hymn the Tree of Knowledge is personified as judge, commissioned by God to show Adam the consequences of his choice once it had been made (III:10). Finally, after Adam's fall, all the trees of the Garden are presented as "clothed each in its own glory" yet all veiling themselves at the Glory [of God], covering their faces with their branches as the Seraphim with their wings to avoid gazing upon their Lord, and "blush(ing) at Adam who was suddenly found naked" (III:15).

In the seventh hymn, as Ephrem contemplates the joys that await the just in Paradise, he depicts the moment of arrival as it will unfold for various sorts of Christians. Young and old, married and single, men and women, the poor, the lame, blind and deaf all enter into this portrayal. Again, personified trees appear, this time to greet certain groups of Christians (or personifications of their chosen manner of life) as appropriate to their ways of life. "Virginity" is greeted by the fig tree ܬܐܢܬܐ (fem.) which "rushes up to her and full of joy exclaims: 'Put away your ignorant childhood—the day when you became naked and hid in my bosom.[33] Praise to Him who has clothed your nakedness with the robe!'" (VII:6). To the "fasters" who, like Daniel, have chosen a "meager diet of vegetables" the trees of Paradise will bow down as kings did to Daniel; then they will "invit(e) them to turn aside to the place where they grow, and take up their abode amid their boughs, bathe in their dew and rejoice in their fruits" (VII:16). Likewise honored and soothed will be those who have given hospitality, alms and care to the poor and sick (VII:17):

> Whoever has washed the feet of the saints
> will himself be cleansed in that dew;
> To the hand that has stretched out
> to give to the poor
> will the fruits of the trees
> themselves stretch out;
> The very footsteps of him
> who visited the sick in their affliction
> do the flowers make haste
> to crown with blooms,
> jostling to see
> which can be the first to kiss his steps.

Here the trees, their fruits and flowers, all are given lively personification. And it is just at this point in the hymn that we see the personified grapevines welcoming ascetics to intimate joys. What then, may we con-

clude? Ephrem does use erotic imagery in VII:18, but it is clearly in a poetic, almost whimsical, setting in which his evocative (and not literal) intent is obvious.

1.b. **Maternal images of womb and nursing in the *Paradise Hymns***

Ephrem explores maternal as well as erotic dimensions of womb imagery, and he frequently extends his consideration of this aspect with corresponding portrayals of nursing mothers. Here, too, we see examples of a correlation between maternal symbolism in this world and in Paradise, between the visible everyday created order—now a fallen world—and the invisible ineffable Paradise to come.

Just as the womb of the clouds encloses and restrains the rain, he observes, so the earth encloses and channels the rivers of Paradise. Whereas there in Paradise those "fountains delight with their fragrance, when they issue forth toward us they become impoverished in our country, since they put on the savors of our land as we drink them" (II:8-9). This change of the rivers of Paradise for the worse is explained by the curse of the earth along with Adam, and so it will be reversed at the end of time. Ephrem expresses these ideas by introducing the image of Mother Earth, who nurses us, her children, (presumably with the founts flowing from within her). Long ago disgraced along with Adam,[34] at the End she will be blessed. Both in the curse and in the blessing we are intimately linked with our mother:

> Upon our mother Earth ܐܡܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ,
> along with us, did He lay disgrace
> when He placed on her, with the sinner, the curse;
> so together with the just, will He bless Her too;
> this nursing mother, along with her children, ܗܕܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܝܠܕܬ ܘܕܝܢܩ
> shall He who is Good renew (IX: 1.4-6).

The images of birth, rebirth and infancy extend to many dimensions of life now and in the future. In the eighth hymn Ephrem elaborates the intimate relationship between soul and body and argues that neither the soul nor the body alone would be able to experience Paradise. Since it can function only through healthy bodily senses, the soul in the body resembles an embryo. Just as the fetus is unable to speak or think since it is not exposed to the needed stimuli, neither is the soul able to perceive except through the bodily senses (VIII:5-6). Since even intellectual experience is dependent on sense perception, there is no way for a disembodied soul to experience Paradise. Thus, souls will be denied entrance to Paradise until they have been rejoined to their resurrected bodies.

The moment of birth again captures Ephrem's attention (in the fifth hymn) as a paradoxical model of death and entry into Paradise. The earth, this world, is "mother of thorns" ܐܡ ܣܘܟܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ and "mother of suffering" ܐܡ ܚܫܐ ܕܐܪܥܐ. Yet just as "infants weep as they leave the womb—weeping because they come out from darkness into light and from suffocation they issue forth into this world"—so also "people weep because they are born out of this world, the mother of suffering, into the Garden of splendors" (V: 13-14).

The final example of maternal imagery of the womb, which occurs in his description of the dwellings of the just, brings us back into the company of personified trees. In the fifth hymn, when Ephrem portrays

himself as transported through reading the Scriptural account of the Creation from the "womb of the book" to the "Womb of Paradise," he proceeds to describe his entry across the bridge and through the gate into Eden, where he sees the dwellings of the just. These are not, as might perhaps be expected, vast and elegant structures,[35] but fragrant little enclosures—huts or tents ܟܠܝܐ (fem. pl.):

There too did I see the huts[36] of the just
ܟܠܝܐ ܕܙܕܝܢ ܒܫܡܐ ܒܪܝܫ ܚܕܐ ܗܢܐ
Dripping with unguents and fragrant with scents,
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܡܪܝܚܐ ܒܣܝܡܐ ܘܒܫܘܡܗܐ
Garlanded with fruits, crowned with blossoms.
ܟܠܝܠܐ ܕܦܪܝܐ ܘܡܟܠܠܐ ܒܙܗܪܘܪܝܐ
In accord with a person's deeds[37] such was his hut;[38]
ܟܡܐ ܕܒܢܝ ܐܢܫܐ ܗܟܢܐ ܗܘܬ ܟܠܝܗ
Thus one was humbly adorned,[39] while another was resplendent in its beauty;
ܐܚܕ ܒܙܝܘܬܐ ܡܬܟܠܠ ܘܐܚܪܢ ܒܫܦܪ ܒܫܘܒܚܗ
One was but dim in its coloring, while another dazzled in its glory.
ܒܫܘܒܚܗ ܕܐܚܕ ܡܫܬܒܚ ܘܒܫܘܒܚܗ ܕܐܚܪܢ ܡܫܬܒܚ

Ephrem returns to the description of these fragrant little huts in his ninth hymn. There he adds a crucial association with personified trees.

That ninth hymn begins, as we have seen, with the image of Mother Earth and her fate entwined with ours. As he continues, Ephrem alludes to the New Testament parable of the sower[40] in order to reinterpret the curse on the earth in terms of inner, ethical struggle:

The evil one mixed his cup, proffering its bitterness to all;
in everyone's path has he set his snares, for everyone has he spread out his net;
he has caused tares to spring up in order to choke the good seed. (IX:2.1-3).

This moral suffering, too, will have its resolution and reward in Paradise:

But in His glorious Paradise He who is Good
will sweeten their bitter trials; their crowns He will make great;
because they have borne their crosses, He will escort them into Eden (IX:2.4-6).

Since Ephrem's subject here is not principally the suffering and strife that precedes Paradise but rather the bliss that awaits the just, he elaborates on life in the garden renewed by the Divine blessing. Thus he again describes the dwellings of the just. As in the fifth hymn, they are fragrant and luxurious enclosures with flowers.[41] Now he adds that they are up in the branches of the trees of Paradise (IX:3):

Should you wish to climb up a tree (m.),
ܐܢ ܨܒܐ ܐܢܬ ܠܡܣܩ ܐܝܠܢܐ ܕܐܝܟ
with its branches[42] (m.) it will provide steps before your feet,
ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ
and up in its womb[43] it will coax you to lie down
on the couch that (is) the summit of its[44] boughs.
ܥܠ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ
ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ ܐܝܟ
It is bent low and cupped, but thick with blossoms—

ܘܠܡܢ ܕܒܗ ܡܬܟܠ ܐܝܟ ܒܛܢ ܘܥܘܠܠ ܐܝܟ ܡܗܦܟ

and for the one who reclines in it, it becomes a womb, an infant's cradle.

ܠܥܠܠ ܕܥܠ ܕܥܠ ܕܥܠ ܒܝ ܡܫܟܒ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܒܛܢ

For any tree climber, young or old, this is an appealing picture: a tree that makes it easy to climb up by providing lower branches like steps, a tree in which one may safely and comfortably lie down upon upper branches like a couch or bosom—since he uses ܒܛܢ here we may even imagine this cozy and safe bed as a womb.[45] And indeed Ephrem encourages us to imagine it this way as he proceeds to describe the couch among the branches as "bent low and cupped" and, he adds, "for the one who reclines in it, it becomes a womb, an infant's cradle." Here we might even translate an "embryo's resting place" since ܥܠ may mean "embryo or fetus" as readily as "infant".

But just as readily the mind might wander to an image of a young child climbing into the lap of his/her mother, resting there safely. From the child's perspective she would be "eager to make you recline in [her] bosom above" and she would make it easy to climb up. Perhaps, too, a mother's perfume might be brought to mind by the image of resting safely in a cozy perch "dense with flowers". Given the extended portrayal of personified trees in the seventh hymn, it is reasonable to infer that such a maternal-arboreal place of refuge is our poet's intent in the ninth hymn.

1.c. **Suckling images in Paradise**

Ephrem's maternal imagery does not end with the moment of birth. Just as his consideration of Mother Earth led from protective womb to nursing mother, so also his paradisal vision includes both maternal wombs and flowing breasts. He portrays both himself and the happy residents of Eden as suckling infants. In the first hymn he introduces this theme by depicting himself as a nursing infant:

> And because my tongue overflows as one who has been suckled on
> the sweetness of Paradise, let us portray it in diverse forms.[46]
> ܡܛܠ ܕܠܫܢܝ ܡܦܩ ܐܝܟ ܕܝܢܩ ܒܛܥܡ ܕܦܪܕܝܣ ܢܣܝܪ ܠܗ ܒܨܘܪ ܫܓܝܐ ܒܗ

He does not, however, pursue the theme in detail until the ninth hymn, where, as we have just seen, he portrays the paradisal abode of the just as a fragrant enclosure aloft in the branches of a tree. There "in the very bosom (or womb) of a tree" ܒܛܢ ܕܐܝܠܢܐ the "saints" dine at their ease: "with fruit of every savor ranged for the hand to pluck. . . fruit to eat, and fruit to quench the thirst; to rinse the hands there is dew, and leaves to dry them with after . . . below them are blossoms, above them fruit; fruits serve as their sky, flowers as their earth." Again, the trees come to life as gentle parental figures, perhaps even as mothers sharing the task of nursing an infant:

> Such is the flowing brook of delights that, as one tree takes leave of you,
> The next one beckons to you; all of them rejoice
> that you should partake of the fruit of one and drink the juice of another,
> wash and cleanse yourself in the dew of yet a third,
> anoint yourself with the resin of one and breathe another's fragrance,
> listen to the song of still another. Blessed is He who gave joy to Adam! (IX:6).

Since the grammatical gender of "tree" is masculine, the pronouns and verbs are all masculine so perhaps these must be viewed as male personifications, hence fathers rather than mothers. But whatever their gender, their behavior is much like that of adults celebrating the presence of an infant in their midst, and it is described from the child's viewpoint—being passed from one to the next, being freely given food and drink, breathing in their scents and listening to their songs.

Soon Ephrem begins to describe the "delightful spirits" or "spirits of the banquet" ܪܘܚܐ ܕܣܥܪܐ[47] that provide nourishment for the just in Paradise. At first he describes them as if they were women serving the food: "like Martha and Mary they hasten with delicate foods". Unlike "weary Martha" or any other human who waits on tables, however, these breezes (or spirits) are tireless: "they never weary in their service"(IX:7-8). Soon he portrays them as nursing mothers:

> In a spiritual way do these spirits suckle spiritual beings;
> ܒܪܘܚܐ ܚܢܝܩ ܠܐ ܒܐܝܕܐ ܪܘܚܐ
> this is a feast where no hand labors or ever grows tired (IX:9.1-2).

The food and drink they offer is also miraculously free of drawbacks: "the teeth do not weary, the stomach never grows heavy" (IX:9.3). Although he stresses that this is "spiritual" food,[48] it is hardly coincidental that Ephrem has re-introduced the theme of suckling in his description of food and drink effortlessly provided: "Who has ever reclined and enjoyed himself without anyone slaving away? Who has eaten to satisfaction without any food, or drunk and become merry without any drink? One breeze ܪܥܛ sates his thirst, another his hunger."[49] For more than in any other human context, it appears as if embryos in the womb and infants at the breast receive their food without any work.

As with paradisal wombs so also paradisal suckling is foreshadowed not only by the example of human maternity but also by a host of other examples drawn from a broad natural context. So Ephrem finds a metaphor of maternal care in wheat and ears of corn nourished by the wind ܪܘܚܐ ܪܥܝܢܬ ܚܕ (IX:10.1-3). Like them "the seedlings of Paradise" will be suckled by "winds full of blessing" ܪܘܚܐ ܕܒܪܟܬܐ ܢܩܝܡ (IX: 10.4-5). "For that which is spiritual has the Spirit as its nourishment" ܡܕܝ ܕܗܘ ܪܘܚܢܝ ܡܬܟܠ ܥܡ ܪܘܚܐ (IX:10.6). Although Ephrem briefly changes course to pursue a paternal metaphor when he states that the earthly wind impregnates the spikes of wheat to produce new grain (IX:12.1-3), he quickly returns to the image of the nursing mother: The breeze "nurtures [the seedlings] like a breast ܐܝܟ ܒܪ, so that herein may be depicted a type of how spiritual beings are nourished ܪܘܚܢܝܐ ܡܬܬܟܠ" (IX:12.5-6). Yet one more earthly model hints at the nature of the spiritual food of Paradise: the need of fire to be nourished by air:

> Learn too from the fire how the air is all-nourishing;
> If fire is confined in a place without air ܐܝܪ
> Its flame starts to flicker as it gasps for breath ܥܠ ܢܦܫܗ ܕܢܫܬܥ ܕܠܗܒܗ (IX:14.1-3).

When he reaches for the larger meaning of this everyday example, Ephrem seems to describe a cosmic being who sustains the universe as if she were a suckling mother.

Who has ever beheld a mother who suckles everything with her whole being?

ܡܢ ܚܙܐ ܐܡܐ ܕܡܝܢܩܐ ܟܠ ܒܟܠ ܓܘܫܡܗ

ܕܒܗ ܬܠܝܐ ܟܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܘܗܝ ܒܗ ܬܠܝܐ ܒܡܢ ܕܡܦܪܢܣ ܟܠ

Upon her depends the whole universe, while she depends on the One Who is the Power that nourishes all.[50]

This maternal figure gives life to everything from reptiles to humans and even to the stars since they, like other fires, need air ܐܘܪܐ for nourishment (IX.15). Even our souls need air ܐܘܪܐ to sustain their life in our bodies (IX.16). The nourishment of Paradise is a higher form of air—a "blessed air" ܐܘܪܐ ܕܒܪܟܬܐ that will "give pleasure to spirits ܕܢܚܝܢ ܠܪܘܚܐ as they partake and drink of it, fly about and swim in it—this veritable ocean of delights" (IX:16). It is a "fragrance" ܪܝܚܐ that nourishes in place of bread, a "living breeze" ܢܫܡܬܐ ܕܚܝܐ that quenches thirst—all to the delight of the senses ܠܟܠ ܚܘܫ̈ܒܐ ܕܒܪ̈ܝܬܐ (IX:17). By it the soul ܢܦܫܐ will be "sustained on the waves of joy as its faculties are suckled at the breast of all wisdom" ܕܬܬܙܢ ܢܦܫܐ ܒܓܠ̈ܐ ܕܚܕܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܬܝ̈ܬܐ ܕܚܟܡܬܐ (IX:23).[51]

2. **Female metaphor, infancy and childhood themes and Ephrem's vision of Paradise**

To summarize, Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise* include a broad array of female imagery, both erotic and maternal. In rare instances erotic imagery is used to suggest the joys of paradise. Each of these occasions is subject not only to the poet's warning not to take his vivid descriptions literally but also to his introduction of contextual elements that mute or radically reinterpret the eroticism. When Adam is portrayed in his paradisal bridal chamber, it is a "chaste" bridal chamber. The loving womb of Paradise that awaits the good man is a mystery best understood through the unconditional sacrificial love of Christ on the cross. The female personages who greet the ascetics in Paradise and invite them to intimate joys are envisaged as grapevines and constitute one of several vividly imagined groups of personified trees and fruits there.

Ephrem uses maternal images of womb and breast in many contexts of reality whether envisaged as salvation history or as cosmology. Thus earth is a mother who accompanies us in our drama of loss and return to Paradise. Paradise itself contains personified trees with fragrant womblike enclosures in which we will be effortlessly nourished. Tireless spirits will also suckle us with spiritual food. These spirits are prefigured at several levels in the cosmic order, where seedlings are nourished by the wind, both fire and human souls are fed by air, and a cosmic mother nourishes the stars perhaps with another sort of air. The air of Paradise will replace every need for food and drink while delighting our senses spiritually.

In addition to these images of maternal womb, birth and suckling, Ephrem brings other references to childhood into the Paradise Hymns. He assumes the view that Adam and Eve were children and hence more easily deceived by Satan.[52] He extends this idea to introduce restoration of youth as a dimension of salvation. In this life the process begins since through participation in the Eucharist, Christ restores our youth.[53] Our exploration of maternal themes of resting in the womb and suckling implies a new

dimension of the motif of Adam and Eve as children. For he promises, in effect, that our final state will be like the blissful rest of infancy. Without effort or concern we will experience repose and satiation of our desires. We will be safe not only from outward threats but also from even the inward anxiety of concern for others. No one need wait on the table to satisfy our hunger and thirst. We will be free to rest as if in the self-absorbed contentment of an infant. Of course, even infants at the breast may stop to gaze adoringly at their mothers, so the solipsism should not be pressed too far.

There are many images of eating and drinking associated with Paradise in biblical tradition and elsewhere—eschatological banquets, wedding feasts, fruit trees in the garden. Ephrem, who never allows one image to exclude others entirely, includes these themes in his hymns. But in the ancient world and even today, images of festive social gatherings with food call to mind the need for servants to wait upon the reclining guests. A unique feature of the maternal imagery of nourishment—of wombs and breasts—is that it appears to be effortless both on the part of the one feeding and the one being fed. This is evident and attractive to Ephrem. Especially in the ninth hymn where images of suckling and feeding in a sheltered womb abound, we find an emphasis on the effortlessness of the process and on the absence of any need for someone to wait on the guests. The women who have given food to the poor are promised that they, like the widow who fed Elijah and was rewarded with inexhaustible supplies of food and drink, will be fed from the bountiful boughs in Paradise.[54] Thus the social and communal dimension of Paradise is not excluded from his view. But it ought to be balanced over against the infancy theme to provide mental rest for the conscientious. No one needs to worry about the needs of anyone else at the end. Concerned parents, solicitous hosts and hostesses may all rest fully from their cares as if they were infants again.

3. Unique aspects of Ephrem's use of female imagery in these hymns

As we have noted, female imagery pervades Ephrem's theological-poetic world. Yet these *Hymns on Paradise* present certain images which are unusual or, perhaps, unique in his extant corpus. The first of these is his use of erotically charged womb imagery. Although it is infrequent, muted and re-interpreted through Christology and asceticism, the mere presence of this imagery sets this collection of hymns apart from the rest of Ephrem's poetry. Of the three passages noted here, only *Parad.* VII:18 has received scholarly attention for its apparent eroticism. This vivid anthropomorphic portrayal of the (grammatically feminine) vines welcoming the worthy ascetic to intimacy was, Tor Andrae contended, the forerunner and source of the *houris* of the Qur'anic Paradise.[55] Edmund Beck refuted this view, arguing that Ephrem's ascetic emphasis clearly contradicted any notion of Paradisal joys of a sexual nature.[56] Scholarly opinion remains divided as to the possibility of Ephrem's influence on the *Qur'an*[57] for two reasons: first, because authorial intention (i.e., Ephrem's) does not necessarily determine the reader's (or the listener's) impression; second, because the original meaning of the *Qur'an*'s *houris* is obscure. The latter issue remains to be resolved within a broader discussion of

the text of the *Qur'an* and the traditions underlying it.[58] Perhaps our discussion here of *Parad.* VII:18 in the context of Ephrem's use of female imagery, erotic and maternal, in these hymns will make a small contribution to this larger discussion.

A second unusual aspect of the female imagery in this collection of hymns is its association with personified trees, vines and fruits. This, too, obviously, is linked to *Parad.* VII:18, its personified female grapevines, and the complex and unresolved relationship between Ephrem's Paradise and the *Qur'an*'s. But it may be useful to look also to the more remote background of Ephrem's vision. Particularly if *Parad.* IX:6 is understood to portray trees personified as nursing mothers, his notions may be related to the widespread but much earlier archaeological evidence of female figures portrayed as trees giving water and trees which suckle animals, usually caprids; these figures have been found engraved on cylinder seals, metal pendants, scarabs, and painted on pottery throughout the Bronze Age.[59] Othmar Keel and others have argued that these trees represent the life-giving maternal goddess known variously as Ašratum, Athirat and Asherah.[60] Early inscriptional evidence associates Asherah with Yahweh,[61] but it is debated whether these references are to the goddess as His consort, to her sacred tree or grove of trees, to her wooden cult pole—perhaps carved to represent her image—or to a wooden *cella* or chapel.[62] These materials would seem to be far too remote in time to be relevant to Ephrem were it not for their association with rabbinic materials on the Feast of Tabernacles, as we shall see.

Another feature of the female imagery within Ephrem's corpus unique to these hymns is the portrayal of the dwellings of the saints as fragrant, hut-like enclosures. These are, as we have seen, closely related to the personified trees of Ephrem's Paradise. His description of the huts is also strikingly reminiscent of the booths in which pious Jews made their homes during the Feast of Tabernacles.[63] Aromatic branches of palm, myrtle and willow ornamented with citron were used to construct them. Ephrem mentions fragrant boughs ornamented with fruits and blossoms. The *Peshitto* names the feast ܚܓܓܐ ܕܣܟܝܟܐ —using the very word Ephrem chose for these little shelters.[64] Since the feast commemorates the early days of Israel's intimacy with Yahweh,[65] these booths or huts would be apt dwellings for the saints in Paradise. Further, the *Mishnah* provides evidence that the booths constructed Feast of Tabernacles were related, whether by imitation or by competition, to the cult of Asherah as tree goddess. In the discussion of the Feast of Tabernacles, the pious are warned that in the construction of their booths "no palm ..., no myrtle ..., no willow branch..., nor citron" can come from an Asherah.[66] Here it seems clear that the "Asherah" is a tree, apparently one dedicated to the goddess and related to her cult.

Thus, the personified tree mothers of Ephrem's Paradise may be descended from the ancient Asherah, perhaps through customs or notions preserved in the Jewish community in relation to the Feast of Tabernacles. Previous scholarship indicating the influence of rabbinic Judaism on Ephrem's Hymns on Paradise lends plausibility to this hypothesis.[67] Indeed, I present it only as an hypothesis, but as one which merits further discussion.

Finally, we come to Ephrem's arresting notion that air, wind or spirit constitutes a

sort of "milk" on which living beings are suckled at various levels of reality: in the mundane world, air is life-giving for plants, fire and human souls; in Paradise spirit or air will provide spiritual nourishment. Ephrem seems to intend a distinction between the foods of these two realms (and perhaps another distinction for the air provided to the fiery stars) since he specifies that "that which is spiritual has spirit[68] as its nourishment" (*Parad.* IX:10.6). But unlike the English his Syriac terminology does not provide a clear distinction between "wind" (or "breeze") and "spirit". In both realms there seems to be a mother who suckles, but again, Ephrem gives no clear indication whether these are distinctive beings, nor is it clear whether he intends only a simile or some sort of cosmic or divine being(s). In Ephrem's fourth *Nativity Hymn* a similar concept appears to be identified both with Wisdom and with the Son of God:

> The Lofty One became like a little child, yet hidden in him was
> a treasure of all wisdom ܟܠ ܚܟܡܬܐ[69] that suffices for all.
> He was lofty, but he was suckled with Mary's milk,
> and with His blessings all creation is suckled.
> He is the Living Breast of living breath;
> by His life the dead were suckled, and they revived.
> Without the breath of air no one can live;
> without the power of the Son no one can rise.
> Upon the living breath of the One Who vivifies all
> depend the living beings above and below.
> As indeed he was suckled with Mary's milk,
> He has suckled the universe with life (Nat. IV:148-153).[70]

The association of Christ with Wisdom is well-established in Christian literature long before Ephrem's time.[71] Likewise both Wisdom and Christ are attested in the role of suckling mother in the Alexandrian context.[72] Although explicit reference to Christ as Wisdom is rare in the Greek and Latin Christian theological literature of the fourth century, it continues in devotional literature.[73] The *Odes of Solomon* attest the theme of suckling in the Syriac Christian theological context.[74] Ephrem himself often uses this theme, but he, like the author of the nineteenth *Ode*, uses the image without explicit mention of a female personification of Wisdom.[75]

But what of the association of maternal imagery with the notion of air as life-sustaining? For this the Stoics come to mind for two reasons: First, they understood breath or air (Greek *pneuma*) as the principle of vitality both in the human being and in the universe.[76] Second, they associated air with a female deity, Hera, and they ascribed cosmogonic allegorical meaning to ancient texts and images concerning her.[77] There are other indications of Stoic influence on Ephrem's worldview.[78] Again, I suggest a possible and partial explanation of the Syriac poet-theologian's imagery here.

Like his subject, the Paradise awaiting the faithful followers of an ineffable and mysterious God, Ephrem himself defies analysis. His use of female imagery in the *Hymns on Paradise* is unique not only with respect to the recorded views of his Christian contemporaries in other cultural environments but also with respect to his own rich imagery in the rest of his corpus. Yet despite his insistence on the elusiveness

of these mysteries, we know that he wrote these hymns in Nisibis in the early fourth century. Historians will continue to look for evidence of mundane influence on his thought. When that fails, the process may be reversed to use his words to provide evidence of the intellectual environment of Nisibis in his time.

NOTES

[1] Edmund Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, CSCO 174-175 (Louvain: Peeters,1957), and Sebastian Brock's fine English translation, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), constitute the basis for the citations in this article; alternative readings or translations will be noted as such. The early dating and presumption of authenticity are based on their presence in early (6c.) manuscripts in association with the *Hymns against Julian*, with which they also share a melody; cf. Beck, CSCO 174 (1957), pp. I-VII; Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 35.

[2] Nicolas Séd, "Les hymnes sur le paradis de saint Ephrem et les traditions juives," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968), pp. 455-501.

[3] Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with particular reference to the influence of Jewish exegetical tradition*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament series 11 (Uppsala: Almquist & Wiksell, 1978), esp. pp. 15-134, 215-224.

[4] See Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 49-57.

[5] *Ibid*., passim; Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). Further on Ephrem's thought in the broader Syriac Christian environment, cf. Robert Kitchen, "Syriac Additions to Anderson: The Garden of Eden in the Book of Steps and Philoxenus of Mabbug," *Hugoye* 6.1 (January 2003). Christopher Buck, *Paradise & Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 259-311.

[6] Beck, *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies, übersetzung und Kommentar*, Studia Anselmiana 26 (1951); François Graffin, *Ephrem de Nisibe: Hymnes sur le Paradis*, Sources Chrétiennes 137 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1968), esp. pp. 7-32; Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, esp. pp. 49-74, 189-227; Edward G. Mathews, Jr., and Joseph P. Amar, eds. and trans. *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, Fathers of the Church 91 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), esp. pp. 59-123.

[7] Tanios Bou Mansour, *La Pensée symbolique de Saint Ephrem le Syrien*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Sainte-Esprit 16 (Kaslik: Université Sainte-Esprit, 1988), pp. 81-83, 531 et passim; Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992), pp. 25, 143-44, et passim; Kathleen E. McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian's Use of Female Metaphors to Describe the Deity," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 5 (2001), pp.261-288.

[8] A similar dynamic is at work in Ephrem's reluctance to speak of God, especially as represented in his anti-Arian polemics; cf. Paul S. Russell, *St. Ephraem the Syrian and St. Gregory the Theologian Confront the Arians* (Moran Etho, 5; Kottayam, Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1994), esp. 121-45.

[9] Similarly reading the text of *Genesis* transports him to Paradise in *Parad*. V:3-5 and VI:1-5.

[10] Nor do I imply that this is Séd's inference.

[11] *Parad*. IV:9 and cf. XV:17.1-3.

[12] I have used this phrase before in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1989), p. 41; and I have developed the concept extensively in "Ephrem the Syrian: A Theologian of the Presence of God" Chapter 49 in *The Early Christian World*, 2 vols. ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 2000) pp.1228-1250.

[13] *Parad*. XV:1.

[14] This is my translation; Brock translates, "from the bosom of the book to the very bosom of Paradise." *Parad*. V:3.6.

[15] ܫܒܚܐ *Parad*. XIII:10.

[16] Cf. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp.28-29,

72, for a brief account of the concept and its background in the New Testament and early Syriac materials.

[17] Brock has noted (*ibid.*) two examples where the bridal chamber is explicitly mentioned in an eschatological setting: *Hymns on Faith* XIV:5 and the *Letter to Publius* 12; my concern in the present context is to find the eschatological dimension of this theme in the *Hymns on Paradise*.

[18] The Syriac is passive: "Blessed is the one desired (emphatic state) by Paradise."

[19] Although I have followed Brock's translation here, both vocabulary and immediate context suggest synonymous parallelism in this line; that is, both verbs mean "caress," and both nouns mean "womb." The Syriac is intensely erotic.

[20] *Parad.* II:1.1-4.

[21] *Parad.* II:1.5-6: Brock translates "mankind" rather than "humankind".

[22] More on this theme of the piercing of Christ, based on *John* 19:34, and its importance for Ephrem's understanding of baptism and typological exegesis, cf. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 64-66, and further references *ad loc*.

[23] On Christ the Door, cf. *John* 10:7-9. Brock has drawn attention to this theme: *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 190: Key and door in *Parad*. II:2. The "keys of doctrine" open the Scriptural account of Creation in *Parad*. VI.1. The Refrains of *Parad.* VI and VII show that the "keys" are also equated with the Cross, which has opened up Paradise, "the Garden of Life". In *Parad.* VIII:2 the thief is said to have "freely received the keys to Paradise". In XV:4 bread is the "key" that opened the eyes of the disciples at Emmaus. "Tree of Knowledge symbolizes the gate of Paradise" (XV:2 and cf. XV:5) "Intelligence ... like a treasurer ... carries ... the keys to learning, fitting a key to each locked door…" XV:6.

[24] *Parad.* II:2.2-6.

[25] Brock's translation follows here with a few significant modifications and observations —all in defense of a more erotically charged reading of the strophe.

[26] Here the Syriac participle might legitimately be rendered with more erotic nuance: "to long for, earnestly desire; to eagerly meet, or await;" J. Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth), *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), p. 364a.

[27] Brock chooses the more neutral but less literal "its clusters."

[28] Again, a more literal translation of the Af`el "to make enter" would give a stronger erotic nuance.

[29] Brock translates "bosom" rather than "womb". Unlike other languages such as French (*sein*) or Latin (*sinus*) which maintain the ambiguity of the Syriac ܚܝܩܐ, English forces a choice between "bosom" and "womb"; my choice is consistent with the explicit mention of the marriage bed in the last line. Brock has himself noted the difficulties of rendering this particular word; cf. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 75.

[30] See previous note.

[31] *Song of Songs* 7:7-9, *Peshitto* version; cf. RSV *Song of Songs* 7:6-8. I believe this allusion has gone unnoticed until now.

[32] For a consideration of the creativity and coherence of Ephrem's interpretation of the trees here, see Tryggve Kronholm, "The Trees of Paradise in the Hymns of Ephraem Syrus," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* XI (1977-1978), pp. 48-56.

[33] Again, the "bosom" of the tree might equally be rendered as "womb."

[34] Cf. Gen. 3:17-19.

[35] As were, for example, the palaces Thomas built in heaven for King Gundaphor according to the *Acts of Thomas* 17-24.

[36] Brock renders this more poetically as "bowers."

[37] Or "labors, efforts."

[38] Again, Brock translates "bower."

[39] Brock renders less literally "had few adornments."

[40] Mt. 13:25 and par.

[41] No fruits are mentioned this time.

[42] Brock renders: "lower branches."

[43] Ignoring the plural in Beck's text: ,ܚܝܩܐ..

From this point onward, my translation of this strophe differs considerably from Brock's: "eager to make you recline in its bosom above, on the couch of its upper branches. So arranged is the surface of these branches, bent low and cupped—while yet dense with flowers—that they serve as a protective womb for whoever rests there."

[44] I.e., the tree's—but this requires interpreting as if the line were: ܕܡ ܒܫܝܬܗ ܕܢܫܟܒ ܚܕ ܒܥܠܬ ܥܠܘܗܝ.

[45] This, despite the masc. gender of "tree" ܐܝܠܢܐ.

[46] *Parad.* I:9.1-2. This is a slightly modified version of Brock's translation.

[47] *Parad.* IX:7.1. Rather than Brock's translation here, "scented breezes", a more anthropomorphic concept seems to be implied by the other appearances of these spirits in IX:8.1 ܪܘܚܐ ܕܦܪܕܝܣܐ "spirits of Paradise" and IX:8.4 ܪܘܚܐ ܕܡܫܡܫܢܝ "spirits that bring"—i.e., who wait on the tables.

[48] *Parad.* IX.9.1 and 5 and again in IX.11.

[49] *Parad.* IX:9.4-6. The last line is missing from Brock's translation, but lines 4-5 are his.

[50] *Parad.* IX:14.4-6 in Brock's translation with small changes.

[51] Note that the Syriac rendered by Brock as "all wisdom" is (confusingly!) plural.

[52] Notably in *Parad.* XV:12 and 14. On this theme, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 304-306; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis* 1-11, pp. 98-107; and McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, pp. 117, 208, 312 (on Nat. 7:11, 26:8, Virg. 12:12).

[53] François Graffin, "L'Eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem," *Parôle de l'Orient* (1973), pp. 93-116, esp. 110.

[54] *Parad.* VII:20.

[55] *Mohammed: Sein Leben und Sein Glaube* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), esp. 71-72; in the English translation by Theophil Menzel, *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1936), 120-121.

[56] Beck, "Eine christliche Parallele zu den Paradiesesjungfrauen des Korans?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 14 (1948), pp. 398-405; idem, *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies, übersetzung und Kommentar*, Studia Anselmiana 26 (1951), p.71; idem., "Les Houris du Coran et Ephrem le Syrien," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'Etudes orientales du Caire* 6 (1961), pp. 405-408.

[57] Syriac scholars, such as Graffin and Brock, have accepted Beck's opinion and have further emphasized that the joys of Ephrem's Paradise are clearly spiritual; cf. Graffin, *Hymnes sur le Paradis*, pp. 103f.; Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, pp. 54f., 193, et passim. Andrae's view lives on, nonetheless; cf. Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, trans. from the French by Anne Carter, 2 English ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 244-46 (the French version was cited by Graffin, loc. cit.), and Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm*, p. 7. Surely it is interesting that the strophe immediately following (*Parad.* VII:19) concerns the fate of martyrs, specifically the Maccabean mother and her seven sons (cf. 2 Macc. 7).

[58] See especially Christoph Luxenberg, *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000), esp. 221ff.; and cf. Günther Lüling, *Über den Urkoran. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion der vorislamischen-christlichen Strophenlieder im Koran* (Erlangen: Verlagsbuchhandlung H. Lüling, 1993) as well as the very instructive review by Sebastian Günther in *Al-Qantara* 16 (1995), 485-90. I am very grateful to Professor Sebastian Günther for informing me of this aspect of the discussion and for providing these bibliographic references.

[59] Othmar Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh; Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 261, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), esp. 20-36, figures 1-52.

[60] John Day, "Asherah," *Anchor Bible Dic-*

tionary, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) I, 483b-487a, esp. 483b-484b. For a recent overview, cf. Judith M. Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence for a Hebrew Goddess*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[61] From Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the northeast Sinai and at Khirbet el-Qom near Hebron; all date to approximately 800 BCE. Day, "Asherah," *ABD* I, 484b-485a. Hadley, *Cult of Asherah*, pp. 84-105.

[62] Each of these meanings is supported by texts from the Hebrew Bible or early translations of those texts (LXX and Vulgate): cf. Deut. 12:3; Exod. 34:13; Judges 2:13 and 3:7; Hos. 14:9. Day excludes both the goddess herself (due to the use of the pronominal suffix, unattested on a proper name) and the *cella* or chapel (unattested in Hebrew although found in other Semitic languages), Day, "Asherah," *ABD* I 484b.

[63] Lev. 23.33-36; for the rabbinic regulations, cf. Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 172-181 (*Moed: Sukkah*).

[64] ܟܘܠܠܐ. The same word is used of the dwelling awaiting the good thief in Paradise: ܟܘܠܠܐ ... ܟܘܣܝܐ ܕܡܫܟܢܐ *Parad.* VIII:2.1, in contrast to the "lodgings" (Brock "mansions") ܡܕܝܪ which the souls of the just await their bodies "on the borders of Paradise". *Parad.* VIII:11.1-3.

[65] Cf. Lev. 23.39-43.

[66] Danby, *Mishnah*, 172-81, esp. 176 (*Moed: Sukkah* 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5).

[67] Cf. notes 2, 3, 5 above.

[68] Here Brock helpfully translates "the Spirit's breath" clarifying Ephrem's probable intent to communicate that the "winds" or "spirits" of Paradise are both like their earthly counterparts and unlike them. But the Syriac is more confusing throughout *Parad.* IX: 5-21 where ܪܘܚܐ ,ܢܫܡܬܐ and ܐܘܪ appear in a manner that is not literally and consistently reflected by Brock's renderings of "spirit," "breeze" and "air." In short, his translation is clearer than the Syriac original, and while it may be the best rendering of Ephrem's intended meaning, in each instance the Syriac text must be consulted directly for a full appreciation of the ambiguities.

[69] Here as in *Parad.* IX: 23, the Syriac for "wisdom" is plural, thwarting (deliberately?) identification with a female personification of Wisdom; cf. n. 51 above.

[70] Edmund Beck, *Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186 (Louvain: Peeters, 1959), p. 39; cf. also Nat. IV:6-7 and 183-85 (Beck, pp. 25-26, 42), and McVey, "Ephrem The Syrian's Use of Female Metaphors," 279-80. I have modified my translation slightly from the version in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, p. 100.

[71] For an overview of the subject and recent scholarly literature, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad-Herder, 1992), 94-100; other work not cited by Johnson includes: M. J. Suggs, *Wisdom Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament," in R. Wilken, *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 17-41; Martin Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, JSNT 71 (Sheffield, 1992); Celia Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus and the Sages* (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1996); Frances Gench, *Wisdom in the Christology of Matthew* (New York: University Press of America, 1997).

[72] For an overview which includes Philo and Clement, see Ritamary Bradley, "Patristic background of the motherhood similitude in Julian of Norwich," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1978, pp. 101-113; further on Philo, see Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002),

esp. pp. 39-57; further on Clement, see McVey, "In Praise of Sophia: What the Early Church Can Teach Us," *in Women, Gender, and Christian Community*, ed. Jane Dempsey Douglass and James F. Kay (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), pp. 34-45.

[73] Bradley, *Motherhood Similitude.*

[74] See the discussion of Ode 19 by H. J. W. Drijvers, "The 19th Ode of Solomon: its interpretation and place in Syriac Christianity," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 31 (1980), 337-55.

[75] McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian's Use of Female Metaphors."

[76] David E. Hahm, T*he Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), esp. 157-74; Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology," *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 161-185, esp. pp. 168-185.

[77] Hahm, *Origins*, esp. pp. 71-72.

[78] Ute Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, CSCO Subsidia 102 (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), esp. pp. 230-35.

KHUSRO II AND THE CHRISTIANS OF HIS EMPIRE

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INTRODUCTION

In the early seventh century, by conquering the entire Roman Near East, the Sasanian king Khusro II built up what was undoubtedly the largest empire of Christians in the world; moreover, there can be little doubt that the majority of his subjects, at the height of the Persian advance, were Christians. Never before had such a situation arisen, and it is the aim of this brief paper to examine more closely the policies adopted by the king to respond to these circumstances.[1]

The Christian constituency of Khusro's empire was diverse. In the heartlands of the Sasanian empire, the Persian church—commonly called Nestorian—was steadily strengthening its adherence to the doctrine of 'two natures' and its loyalty to the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. This development was not smooth, and certain members of the church, notably Henana, head of the School of Nisibis, preferred to remain closer to the Chalcedonian and Monophysite positions and thereby incurred the hostility of the *catholicos*, based in Seleucia-Ctesiphon.[2] Over the sixth century, the opponents of the Council of Chalcedon generally referred to as Monophysites had steadily been gaining ground within the Persian empire, particularly in northern Iraq; Persarmenia, of course, had been consistently Monophysite since the Council of Dvin in 505.[3] The wave of persecutions along the Roman eastern frontier in the 590s will have further swelled the numbers of Monophysites on Persian territory.[4] Once the Persians had overrun the Roman Near East, however, the Monophysites will have been far more numerous than the Nestorians overall. Lastly, there are the Chalcedonians. Before the Persian conquests in the 600s and 610s, the only Chalcedonians under Persian control were to be found in Iberia, but in the wake of the annexation of the Near East, many more will have become subjects of the king.[5]

How was a non-Christian king to administer such a community? There is no need to elaborate on the fierce divisions between these three groups, which are well known. Various interpretations of Khusro's policies have been put forward, both by ancient and modern writers, and it is our aim

here to find which, if any, is the most convincing. Perhaps the most common is that which sees Khusro as transferring his favours from the Nestorian church to the Monophysite, a rupture crystallised in his failure to approve the nomination of a new *catholicos* of the Persian church in 609. Influenced by the chief doctor, Gabriel of Sinjar, and his wife Shirin, as well as by the Monophysite loyalties of the newly conquered provinces, the king determined to give his whole-hearted backing to the opponents of Chalcedon. This interpretation has foundation in the primary literature, most notably in the account of Michael the Syrian—a source whose evidence, particularly concerning the Monophysite community, is however subject to caution.[6] On the other hand, at least one ancient source—Theophanes—considers the king to have remained a backer of the Nestorians and even to have aided their cause in the conquered provinces of the Roman empire. This evidence is generally disregarded in the modern literature.[7] Finally, there are those scholars, such as Fiey and Morony, who regard Khusro as a prevaricator, who played off one side against the other in order to further his own interests.[8]

A closer examination of the evidence will offer a rather different conclusion: Khusro, it will be argued, prudently adopted an essentially pragmatic policy in dealing with the Christians of his empire. He was amenable to influence from both Nestorians and Monophysites but chose, insofar as it was possible, to maintain an equilibrium between the two sides. Before we begin our scrutiny of the sources, however, it is necessary to consider briefly the background against which Khusro was operating, i.e. the relationship which had developed between the Persian church and the Sasanian king since the first council held in 410 under the patronage of Yazdgerd I. In this way, we shall be better able to elucidate the policies of Khusro and to compare them with those of his predecessors.

KING AND CHURCH

The first point which must be stressed is the closeness of the relationship between king and church, notwithstanding occasional bouts of persecutions. Right from the council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410, the church gave its allegiance to the king, while he reciprocated by agreeing to enforce the decisions of the assembled bishops.[9] There were obvious advantages to this for the Persian church. No longer would their loyalty to the crown be in doubt, at any rate not after their severing of their ties with the western church at the council of 424. Better still, the secular power could be employed to combat the naturally fissiparous tendencies of the church: *catholicoi* could now turn to the king and his ministers to ensure that schismatics and heretics were forced to back down or be ejected from their churches. One example among many may suffice: the *catholicos* Joseph (552-67), nominated, one may note, by Khusro I, was able to arrange the imprisonment of his adversary, Simon of Anbar (Pirisabora) through the intervention of the *marzban*.[10] Over time, royal influence over the catholicate grew, to the point that kings would tend to recommend candidates for the position—a recommendation that the assembly of bishops could hardly fail to ratify.[11] The interest of the Persian king in the position of *catholicos* should occasion no surprise: as the number of Christians in the kingdom grew, so the power of the head

of the church increased. And just as the king began to exercise a greater influence on church affairs, so the *catholicos* became more involved in secular matters. Christians were suspected of involvement in the uprising of Khusro I's son Anoshazadh in 551, and the *catholicos* Mār Aba was obliged by the king to declare to the Christians of Beth Lapat (Gundeshapur) that they should on no account back the rebel.[12] *Catholicoi* likewise would accompany the king on his military expeditions, as in both 573 and 603 when the king crossed into Roman territory in Mesopotamia.[13] We even hear of supplies being furnished to Khusro I's army at the start of his reign by the future *catholicos* Paul.[14]

But there were other, less positive, consequences of this rise in the status of the *catholicos* and his church. To be sure, the popularity of the official church was greatly strengthened; better still, its adversaries were weakened. Already in the fifth century, the energetic bishop Barsauma of Nisibis capitalised on his good relations with king Peroz to persecute Monophysites in his see.[15] Inevitably, however, not all members of the official church were so out of conviction: it must have been clear to any ambitious young Christian that a successful career would greatly be facilitated by involvement in the official church, and more particularly by a medical and perhaps monastic training, leading either to a position among the king's doctors (many of them trained at Nisibis)[16] or among the church hierarchy—with all the power and influence this entailed. For the official status of the church gave bishops considerable power in the local community, e.g. in dealing with inheritances, dowries and marriages, as well as control of the wealth of the church itself. This could not but lead to rivalries and competition for these offices; the acts of numerous councils clearly offer evidence of corruption in the administration of sees as well as in the conduct of elections to the episcopal office.[17] We may accurately summarise the situation by characterising church politics as being, to some degree, an extension of court politics, in which both sides would vie for influence with the sovereign by appeals to ministers and confidants. The schism which erupted upon the death of Shila in 523 provides a good example: both Elishe and Narsai sought the catholicate, and a fierce struggle ensued. The former, a doctor, was a friend of Kavadh, as well as the son-in-law of Shila, and obtained a decree favourable to his candidacy through the influence of a fellow doctor. Both men considered themselves to be *catholicos* and appointed bishops; the schism was only ended with difficulty when, following the death of Narsai, the Persian bishops elected Paul, another favourite of Khusro, to the position to supplant Elishe.[18] It is not our brief here to analyse these power struggles more closely. We may however note in passing that issues of doctrine were far from paramount in the disputes which wracked the Persian church; rather, we are dealing with interest groups, some perhaps linked more with northern Iraq and the see of Nisibis, others more connected to Lower Mesopotamia and the Persian élite. Again, a case may readily be cited, this time from the reign of Khusro II. In the 590s, the bishop Gregory of Nisibis, known as Gregory the Kashgarite, was involved in a bitter struggle with Henana, the head of the School of Nisibis, whose teachings were clearly at odds with those of the Persian church. When some of the Nisibene nobility complained to the *ca-*

tholicos Sabrisho about Gregory, one would have expected him, whose (Nestorian) orthodoxy was unimpeachable, to have given his wholehearted support to the zealous bishop. Instead, however, he withheld his backing and hindered his activities, to such an extent that Gregory chose to abandon his see.[20] Clearly, political issues and rivalries lie at the heart of this matter, even if we can only dimly perceive them; one year after Gregory's departure, the fractious Nisibenes broke out in open revolt. Called upon by Khusro to ensure the swift termination of the uprising, Sabrisho accompanied the army sent to retake the city and managed to persuade the citizens to offer no further resistance.[21]

KHUSRO II AND THE CHRISTIANS OF HIS EMPIRE

We come now to the attitude adopted by Khusro II towards the Christians of his empire. Although many sources paint a bleak picture of the monarch, portraying him as a power-hungry tyrant, bent on the elimination of the Roman empire, there can be little doubt that he was better acquainted with Christianity and its divisions than any other Persian king hitherto; he was, after all, the only Persian king to have set foot on Roman soil as an individual, rather than at the head of an army. During the 590s he had founded churches and dedicated offerings to Saint Sergius.[22] One would therefore expect him to be in a good position to judge the best course to be followed in dealing with his Christian subjects. His preference, we suggest, was for a genuine tolerance of both Monophysites and Nestorians, the better to exploit the talents of members of both communities. Several points favour such an interpretation. First, and most obviously, the luminaries of his court. Much is made of the influence of Gabriel of Sinjar and his machinations against the Nestorians, but there is no evidence that Yazdin, Khusro's head of tax collection and the most important lay figure of the Nestorian church, ever suffered through Gabriel's influence.[23] Both continued to serve the king through the 600s and 610s. Gabriel is believed to have died before Yazdin, who was probably executed at some point in the 620s, when the war had turned against Khusro. His fall from favour is attributed in the sources to Khusro's desperate need for funds rather than any doctrinal reason.[24] Second, the peaceful co-existence of Nestorian and Monophysite monks at Shirin's monastery near Hulwan should be stressed.[25] It was only after 614, therefore following Gabriel's evidently unsuccessful attempt to expel the Nestorians from the monastery, that the new (Monophysite) head, Marutha, put a stop to the communion which had existed between the two parties.[26] For some years therefore, despite the continuing annexation of the Roman provinces and the manoeuvres of Gabriel, a monastery built by the king and associated with his wife maintained an equilibrium, favouring neither Monophysites nor Nestorians. When the end came, furthermore, it was brought about neither by the king nor one of his ministers, but by a hard-line Monophysite churchman.[27]

Now the suspension of the Nestorian catholicate from 609 seems at first sight to contradict the interpretation offered here. But in fact it adds further weight to our arguments. There can be no doubt that the Persian church had become prey to constant struggles between factions, as we have seen,

culminating in the deception surrounding the election of the unpopular and ineffectual Gregory of Porath in 605. These struggles were at their most intense when it came to choosing a new *catholicos*, as had repeatedly been demonstrated.[28] Even the appointment of a new *catholicos*, however effective he might be, was not guaranteed to bring harmony. There would be calls for the king to intervene, to back up the *catholicos* with decrees and troops and/or to depose him; the *catholicos* might even try to initiate persecutions against non-Nestorians. Given the ever closer ties which had evolved between king and *catholicos*, as we have noted, such a situation presented obvious dangers. Church rivalries would naturally have an impact on politics at court. Insurrections might even be triggered. It would be simpler therefore to short-circuit the whole issue by leaving the catholicate in abeyance, thus reducing the stakes for the Nestorian church and tensions within it.[29] Equally importantly, it allowed the king to rally Monophysites to himself, both in Iraq and in the conquered provinces. Naturally, rivalries between the two communities persisted, but the absence of a *catholicos* took away an obvious source of strife and freed the king from having to intervene repeatedly in church affairs. That Khusro did not suspend the catholicate because, as is so frequently asserted,[30] he had shifted his favour decisively to the Monophysites at the expense of the Nestorians is clear, for instance, from the license he gave (c.610) to Yonadab of Adiabene, allowing him to take charge of all the monasteries in the vicinity of Mosul, the heartlands of the Monophysites in Persia. Only through the intervention of Gabriel was Yonadab prevented from taking control in this region.[31] Furthermore, later in Khusro's reign, following the death of Gabriel but before 623/4, Monophysite monasteries close to the royal palace were destroyed, forcing Marutha to move elsewhere for his own safety.[32] There were, of course, some martyrs during Khusro's reign, most notably George, one of the Nestorian debaters who sought to persuade the king to restore the catholicate in 612 and who zealously counteracted the efforts of Gabriel to seize control of Shirin's monastery. Gabriel riposted by laying accusations against George and his fellow disputant, Shubhalmaran, pointing out to the king that George was a convert from Zoroastrianism. It was this which led to George's martyrdom in 615.[33] Saint Anastasius, martyred in 628, was also a victim of the law against apostasy rather than a whim of Khusro, even if the situation for Christians in his empire does appear to have deteriorated towards the end of his reign.[34] The imprisonment and subsequent execution of Nathaniel, bishop of Shiarzur, belongs also in this category: his see was one in which the Christians were in a minority, and it is likely that he had been infringing the rules on conversions when the local governor called upon Khusro to take action (in 603/4).[35]

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion therefore is that Khusro's neutrality was basically both passive and benign. It was passive, in that the king would respond to initiatives proposed by individuals of either denomination, not infrequently acceding to their requests, thereby giving rise to considerable inconsistencies. What must be stressed, however, is that the king himself did nothing to persecute either Nestorians or Monophysites. In the conquered provinces, moreover, no effort appears to have been made to promote

Zoroastrianism in any active way, unlike during the invasions of Shapur I in the third century.[36] Of course, the capture of Jerusalem in 614 was accompanied by bloody massacres and deportations, but here too Khusro's involvement may be doubted. The sources, admittedly biased, pin much of the blame on the Jews for the harsh treatment meted out to the Christians. Whatever the truth of these assertions, it is certain that soon after the sack, a Chalcedonian leader, Modestus, was able to rebuild many of the buildings which had been destroyed, with help both from Yazdin and from Egypt, i.e. from both Nestorians and Monophysites.[37] Khusro's neutrality was benign in that the support offered to one side or the other at various times was not, so far as we can see, exclusive: there was room for both Nestorians and Monophysites in his empire. Thus, although Michael the Syrian and other sources emphasise the support given to Monophysite bishops who had been expelled from their sees under Maurice, we know from the letters of the *catholicos* Isho'yahb of Gadala (and other sources) that the take-over of the Near East also brought with it a spread of Nestorianism: Isho'yahb's letters show clearly the presence of Nestorians in Edessa (with a bishop) and at Jerusalem.[38] Others are attested at Carrhae (Harran), Damascus and in Palestine and Egypt.[39] There is little sign then that Khusro fomented discord among the Christians of his empire; as we have seen, already in the sixth century, they were quite capable of bitter divisions among themselves anyway. On the contrary, Khusro had nothing to gain by furthering such disputes: in order to maximise the revenue gained from his expanding territories and to stabilise a society constantly at war, he naturally preferred the path of pragmatism.

NOTES

[1] The only possible parallel might be the reign of Julian, although it is unlikely that the majority of the Roman empire had converted to Christianity by then. A much abbreviated version of this article will appear in *Studia Patristica* in 2004/5. I am grateful to Josef Wiesehöfer for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[2] J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide* (Paris, 1904), 217-19; I. Gillman and H.-J. Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500* (Ann Arbor, 1999), 123-5; G.J. Reinink, "Babai the Great's *Life of George* and the propagation of doctrine in the late Sasanian empire," in J. Watt and H. Drijvers, eds., *Portraits of Spiritual Authority* (Leiden, 1999), 182-3.

[3] On the rise of the Monophysites in Persia see W.S. McCullough, *A Short History of Syriac Christianity to the Rise of Islam* (Chico, CA, 1982), 153-4; W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972), 321; M.G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton, 1984), 350-1, 372-8; and B. Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VII siècle* (Paris, 1992), vol.2, 110-11. All references to Flusin henceforth are to vol. 2. On Persarmenia, see (e.g.) N.G. Garsoïan, "L'Arménie," in L. Pietri, *Histoire du Christianisme des origines à nos jours*, vol. 3. *Les églises d'orient et d'occident* (Paris, 1998), 1142-4.

The term Monophysite is far from satisfactory, but is used here for the sake of clarity. See S. Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East," in *Tradition and Heritage of the Christian East: Proceedings of the International Conference* (Moscow, 1996), 163-4, where he suggests the alternative terms 'miaphysite' and 'henophysite'. The former seems to be gaining in popularity.

[4] Cf. G. Greatrex and S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, A.D. 363-630*, henceforth *REF* (London, 2002), 176 and Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 332-4. Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, ed. and tr. J.-B. Abbeloos and T.J. Lamy, vol. 3 (Louvain, 1877), 85-110, paints a picture of growing anti-Chalcedonian numbers, particularly (87-8) in the wake of deportations from the eastern Roman provinces during Khusro I's invasions. Cf. however, Morony, *Iraq*, 372, downplaying the significance of the deportations.

The term Nestorian is no less problematic than 'Monophysite'. Again, it has been used here merely because it is the most familiar label for the Persian church. As S. Brock has pointed out, Nestorius himself was of little consequence in the development of the doctrine of the Persian church. See Brock, "The Church of the East in the Sasanian empire up to the sixth century and its absence from the councils in the Roman empire" in *Syriac Dialogue. First non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac tradition* (Vienna, 1994), 79-84, "The Christology of the Church of the East," 176-7 and "The 'Nestorian' church: a lamentable misnomer," *BJRL* 78.3 (1996), 23-35.

[5] Cf. B. Martin-Hisard, "Le christianisme et l'église dans le monde géorgien," in L. Pietri, ed., *Histoire du Christianisme*, vol. 3, 1229-33. Most of Palestine, for instance, had remained consistently Chalcedonian throughout the sixth century; cf. Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 223, 230-1, even if Egypt and Syria were largely Monophysite. See also H. Kennedy, "Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia," in A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins and M. Whitby, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol.14 (Cambridge, 2000), 598-601, on divisions in the region.

[6] Michael the Syrian, ed. And tr. J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1899-1924), X.25 (tr. vol.2, 379-80) with the remarks of J. van Ginkel, "Making History:

Michael the Syrian and His Sixth-Century Sources," in R. Lavenant, ed., *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome, 1998), 351-8 and J. Watt, "The portryal of Heraclius in Syriac historical sources," in G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte, eds, *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation* (Louvain, 2002), 73-4. Cf. George of Pisidia, *Contra Severum* in *PG* 92, 1625, 47-55. Among modern scholars, see Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 337-9 (albeit suggesting differing policies of the king for different zones); N. Garsoïan, *L'église arménienne et le grand schisme d'orient* (Louvain, 1999), 375-8; and G. Dagron, "L'Église et la chrétienté byzantines entre les invasions et l'iconoclasme (VIIe-début VIIIe siècle)," in G. Dagron, P. Riché and A. Vauchez, eds., *Histoire du christianisme*, vol.4, *Évêques, moines et empereurs (610-1054)* (Paris, 1993), 16-17.

[7] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), tr. C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford, 1997), A.M. 6116, p. 314 (on the imposition of Nestorianism in the East) and A.M. 6120, p. 329 (on the churches at Edessa being taken back from the Nestorians after the Roman reconquest). One might also note in this context the continuing loyalty and praise to Khusro expressed by the Nestorian delegates in 612, cf. *Synodicon Orientale* (henceforth *Syn. Or.*) ed. and tr. J.-B. Chabot (Paris, 1902), 580-1 with Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 226.

[8] J.M. Fiey, *Jalons pour une histoire de l'église en Iraq* (Louvain, 1977), 136, Morony, "Sasanids" in *EI*^{2} X (1995), 79.

[9] See Morony, *Iraq*, 87; Garsoïan, "La Perse: l'église d'orient," in *Histoire du christianisme*, vol. 3, 1109; R. Le Coz, *Histoire de l'église d'Orient* (Paris, 1995), 36; cf. Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 34 (with further references). For details of the council in *Syn. Or.*, 253-75 (tr.), cf. McCullough, *Short History*, 121-4.

[10] Chronicle of Seert (= *Histoire nestorienne inédite*), ed. A. Scher, tr. l'abbé Pierre, *PO* 7 (1911), 176-7; Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 194-5; and Morony, *Iraq*, 348. On the council of 424 see Labourt, *op. cit.*, 121-4 and Garsoïan, "La Perse," 1110.

[11] E.g. Paul, cf. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 7 (1911), 153, Joseph (see n.10), Isho'yahb I, cf. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1919), 438-9 and Sabrisho, *ibid.* 481-5.

[12] Cf. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 7 (1911), 153 with A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*^{2} (Copenhagen, 1944), 426, Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 189-90 and P. Peeters, "Observations sur la vie syriaque de Mar Aba, Catholicos de l'église perse," in *Recherches d'histoire et de philologie orientales* (Brussels, 1951), vol.2, 157-8. It is surely no coincidence that Mar Aba had had recourse to the civil governors to bring into line the church at Beth Lapat (Gundeshapur) which had been in turmoil only a few years before Anoshazadh's uprising. Cf. Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 172-4 with the details in *Syn. Or.*, 328-30. Noteworthy is the advice given to Khusro I in the 540s when the king was deliberating about the fate of the *catholicos* Mār Aba: it was pointed out to him that it would be dangerous to execute the chief Christian of his kingdom; cf. *V. Mar Aba*, ed. P. Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha, de trois autre patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques, nestoriens*^{2} (Leipzig, 1895), 256-7 with Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 189 and Peeters, "Observations," 154. Less than a century earlier, Peroz had not hesitated to have the *catholicos* Babai executed; cf. Labourt, *op. cit.*, 129-30. See Flusin, *Anastase*, vol.2, 97-8 on the improvement in the fortunes of the Christians following the peace concluded by Justinian and Khusro in 561; cf. Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 133-4, 162.

[13] For 573, cf. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 7 (1911), 193 with J.M. Fiey, *Nisibe, métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragans des origines à nos jours* (Louvain, 1977), 54-5; for 603, cf. *Chronicon Anonymum*, ed. and tr. I. Guidi, *CSCO* Scr. Syr. 1-2 (Leipzig, 1903), henceforth *Chr. Khuz.*, 20-1 (tr. M. Greatrex in Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 232).

[14] *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 7 (1911), 153.

[15] Cf. S. Gero, *Barsauma of Nisibis and*

Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century (Louvain, 1981), 36-7; Gillman and Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia*, 118; Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 135-9.

[16] On doctors see R. Blockley, "Doctors as diplomats in the Sixth Century A.D.," *Florilegium* 2 (1980), 89-100.

[17] This is a large issue. See (e.g.) Morony, *Iraq*, 364-9; McCullough, *Short History*, 139-40; and V. Erhart, "The development of Syriac Christian Canon Law in the Sasanian Empire," in R.W. Mathisen, ed., *Law, Society and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001), 115-29. The council of 576 provides a wealth of information on the abuses rife at this time; cf. Chabot, *Syn. Or.*, 368-89 with McCullough, *Short History*, 144. Articles 20, 29 and 34 are particularly relevant. Cf. also Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 159, on the alienation of church property by the *catholicos* Shila; 182-3 on clashes which arose with civil officials over jurisdiction; 193 on the involvement of lay people in elections.

[18] *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 7 (1913), 147-52 with Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 160-2 and McCullough, *Short History*, 135-6. Paul became *catholicos* in 539.

[19] The suggestion of Morony, *Iraq*, 346-7; cf. W. de Vries, "Die Patriarchen der nichkatholischen syrischen Kirchen," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 33 (1984), 27-8; Garsoïan, "La Perse: l'église d'orient," 1106; Fiey, *Jalons*, 118-19. J.B. Segal "Mesopotamian communities from Julian to the rise of Islam," *ProcBrAc* 41 (1955), 133-6 ascribes the antipathy between Nisibis and the catholicate partly to geographical factors (proximity to the Roman empire) and partly to linguistic differences.

[20] *Chr. Khuz.*, 17-18, tr. M. Greatrex, *REF*, 230-1; *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 507-10; cf. Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 215-16, M. Tamcke, *Der Katholikos-Patriarch Sabrišo` I. (596-604) und das Mönchtum* (Frankfurt, 1988), 36-8, and Flusin, *Anastase*, 108-9.

[21] *Chr. Khuz.* 18-19, tr. M. Greatrex, *REF*, 231; *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 513-14, cf. Fiey, *Nisibe*, 58-61, and Tamcke, *Sabrišo`*, 38.

[22] Cf. Flusin, *Anastase*, 99-103, E. Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain* (Princeton, 1999), 134-41, Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 176-8.

[23] On Gabriel, see M. Hutter, "Shirin, Nestorianer und Monophysiten. Königlice Kirchenpolitik im späten Sasanidenreich," in R. Lavenant, ed., *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome, 1998), 377, and P. Goubert, *Byzance avant l'Islam. I. Byzance et l'Orient sous les successeurs de Justinien. L'empereur Maurice* (Paris, 1951), 178 (emphasising the political nature of his conversion to Monophysitism). According to Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 220, he had originally been a Monophysite before converting to Nestorianism in order to further his career. See also G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten persischer Märtyrer* (Leipzig, 1880), 118-19 on Gabriel. Denha, *Vie de Marouta*, ed. and tr. F. Nau, *PO* 3 (1905), 76 likens him to Constantine in his patronage of the Monophysites. On Yazdin, see J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne. Bét Garmaï, Bét Aramayé et Maišan nestoriens*, vol.3 (Beirut, 1968), 23-8; Christensen, *L'Iran*, 490-1; and *Chr. Khuz.* 23-7, tr. M. Greatrex, *REF*, 233-5. He is likened by the chronicle's author to Constantine and Theodosius, p.23/233. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 524-5, offers a list of Nestorian ministers who flourished at Khusro's court: Yazdin was but one among several; cf. Flusin, *Anastase*, 104.

[24] Gabriel is usually thought to have died in the 610s, c. 615; cf. Le Coz, *Histoire*, 63, and Hutter, "Shirin," 382. Yazdin's death probably occurred in the 620s, once Heraclius' counter-attacks had proved their effectiveness; cf. Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 234, and Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, vol.3, 27.

[25] See Denha, *Vie de Marouta*, *PO* 3 (1905), 76 for this communion. Given this coexistence, Hutter, "Shirin," 382, is rightly hesitant about the queen's doctrinal affiliation. On the location of this monastery, a matter of some controversy (whether near Ctesiphon or in Media), see Flusin, *Anastase*, 103 n.42 and now Reinink, "Babai the Great", 189 and n.87.

[26] See Denha, *Vie de Marouta*, *PO* 3

(1905), 76-7 on the crackdown. It took place under the metropolitan Samuel (614-24); cf. Nau's notes, *ibid.*, 54, with Hutter, "Shirin," 382, and Morony, *Iraq*, 377. On Gabriel's attempts to seize control of the monastery (c. 609) see Reinink, "Mar Babai," 189.

[27] We may also note the co-existence in Ctesiphon, as no doubt elsewhere, of churches of both denominations; cf. Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 218. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 554 reports that the future *catholicos* Isho'yahb II of Gadala got into trouble with the local Persian governor, while he was bishop of Balad, for failing to admit some "Arians"—presumably Monophysites—into church; cf. L. Sako, *Lettre christologique du patriarche syro-oriental Išo`yahb II de Gdala (628-646)* (Rome, 1983), 65.

[28] Cf. e.g. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 7 (1911), 147-52 (Elishe and Narsai); 192-3 (Isaiah and Ezekiel); *PO* 13 (1918), 483-7 (disputes before the election of Sabrisho). Note also the attempt by a certain Peter Gurganara to depose and assassinate Mār Aba c.548; cf. *V. Mar Aba*, ed. Bedjan, 249, with Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 187, and Peeters, "Observations," 149-50. On the election of Gregory of Porath see *Chr. Khuz.* 22, tr. M. Greatrex, *REF*, 233, *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 521-2, and Flusin, *Anastase*, 107-9.

[29] Arguably, the position of the Nestorians actually improved in the absence of a *catholicos*, thanks to the vigorous activity of Mar Babai of Nisibis in the north and the archdeacon Mar Aba in the south; cf. *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 524, and Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 229-30. We hear of no conflicts between these two individuals. The need to present a common front, e.g. for the debate at Khusro's court in 612, must have helped; cf. Reinink, "Mar Babai," 178-88 on the debate. One of the points made by the Nestorian representatives to Khusro concerned the multiplicity of heresies which had flourished in the Roman empire, *Syn. Or.*, 585. They argued from this that the king should uphold the correct doctrines of the Persian church. Having become aware both through his visit to the Roman empire at the start of his reign and by the debate which had already taken place at his court between 605 and 609, Khusro was in an excellent position to realise the danger of accepting the delegates' requests: no Roman emperor had yet succeeded in imposing doctrinal unity on his empire, and to seek to establish just one orthodoxy in his new empire could only lead to instability and bloodshed. See Pseudo-Sebeos in R.W. Thomson and J.D. Howard-Johnston, tr. and comm., *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos* (Liverpool, 1999), ch.46, 114-16 with comments at 263, and Flusin, *Anastase*, 114-18, on the debate. On the possibility of insurrections, cf. nn.12, 21 above (Gundeshapur and Nisibis).

[30] E.g. by the sources noted above, n.6, but also by Flusin, *Anastase*, 117-18.

[31] *Chr. Khuz.* 22, tr. M. Greatrex in *REF*, 233. It is significant also that Khusro initially despatched a Nestorian bishop to occupy the see of Edessa; cf. Mich. Syr. X.25, tr. Chabot, vol.2, 379-80. The date of Edessa's fall is uncertain (cf. Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 185), but W. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2003), places it in 610. At any rate it took place around the time that no successor was appointed for Gregory. When the bishop, Aheshima, proved unacceptable, Khusro despatched a Monophysite candidate in his stead; however, because he came from Persia, rather than being nominated by Athanasius, patriarch of Antioch, this too caused some resentment; cf. Flusin, *Anastase*, 112-14.

[32] See Barhebraeus, *Chron. eccles.* 111-12; cf. Fiey, *Jalons*, 138. Barhebraeus, *loc. cit.*, reports that the Monophysites had to wait five years before appointing a head, cf. 119-20.

[33] Cf. Reinink, "Mar Babai," 185-90; Hutter, "Shirin," 381. Others are discussed by Flusin, *Anastase*, 118-27.

[34] Cf. Flusin, *Anastase*, 236-7. The large deportations of Christians, e.g. following the sack of Jerusalem (on which see Flusin, *Anastase*, 164-5), need not be ascribed to a wish to persecute Christians: as is clear from the description of this deportation, the aim was rather to take advantage of Roman craftsmen for projects

in Persia. Such had been Sasanian policy right from the third century; cf. S.N.C. Lieu, "Captives, Refugees and Exiles: A study of cross-frontier civilian movements and contacts between Rome and Pesia from Valerian to Jovian," in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy, *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* (Oxford, 1986), 475-505, and E. Winter and B. Dignas, *Rom und das Perserreich. Zwei Weltmächte zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz* (Berlin, 2001), 257-67.

[35] *Chr. Khuz.* 21, tr. M. Greatrex, *REF*, 232; *Chr. Seert*, *PO* 13 (1918), 520. Cf. Labourt, *Le christianisme*, 210-11, noting how Sabrisho had protected the Christians of Shiarzur before he became *catholicos*; Flusin, *Anastase*, 120-1. It is possible, as Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 337, and Flusin, *loc. cit.*, suggest, that Khusro applied somewhat different rules in the various parts of his empire, e.g. where the Christians remained in a minority. *Chr. Khuz.* seizes upon the incident as proof of Khusro's fundamental hostility to Christianity, cf. Watt, "The portrayal of Heraclius," 67, but his assessment is no doubt coloured by the support given by the king to the Monophysites.

[36] Cf. Winter and Dignas, *Rom und Persien*, 232-7, on the promotion of Zoroastrianism by Shapur I and Kartir; J. Wiesehöfer, "Geteilte Loyalitäten: Religiöse Minderheiten des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rom und dem sasanidischen Iran," *Klio* 75 (1993), 362-82, esp.373-5, is however sceptical about proselytism on the part of Kartir. Flusin, *Anastase*, 232-3, notes the efforts evidently made by the Persian garrison at Caesarea not to offend local religious sensibilites by their rites.

[37] See Flusin, *Anastase*, 158-64 (on the sack); Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 190-2. On the rebuilding of the city at the initiative of Modestus, see Flusin, *Anastase*, 172-81, R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (Princeton, 1995), 46, and Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Sebos*, ch.35-6, 70-3 and notes, 208-10. See *Chr. Khuz.* 27, tr. M. Greatrex, *REF*, 235, on Yazdin's role in the rebuilding; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 340 on the part played by John Eleemosynarius, patriarch of Alexandria.

[38] Cf. W. Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 81-2, who assembles the evidence (from the letters of Isho'yahb and the *Book of Governors* of Thomas of Marga). This may lie behind the assertions of Theophanes noted above (n.7). The choice presented to the Edessenes in 624/5 by Khusro narrated by Agapius (*Kitab al-`Unvan*, part 2.2, ed. and tr. A. A. Vasiliev, *PO* 8 [1912], 459, also to be found in P. Kawerau, *Christlich-arabische Chrestomathie aus historischen Schriftstellern des Mittelalters*, vol.2 [Louvain, 1977], 19-20) also fits this context: according to Agapius, the king obliged the inhabitants of Edessa to choose between Nestorianism and Monophysitism in that year. They preferred the latter. Mich. Syr. XI.1 (vol.2, 402) offers a similar narrative, but with no reference to the choice forced on the Edessenes. Ps.-Sebeos' claim, ch.46, tr. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, 117, that Khusro ordered the destruction of Nestorian churches as a result of the debate of 605/9 (on which see n.29 above) is plainly an invention. The portrayal of Khusro as a bitter foe of Christianity, found (e.g.) in Sebeos, tr. Thomson and Howard-Johnston, 80, and *Chronicon Paschale*, 729 (tr. in Greatrex and Lieu, *REF*, 220), on which see Watt, "The Portrayal", 67-9, must be treated with caution, emanating as it does from sources outside Persia. Cf. n.27 above for an instance of Persian intervention against an attempt to bar Monophysites from a church.

[39] Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche*, 81-2.

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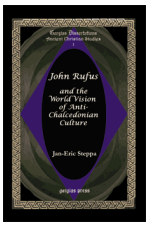

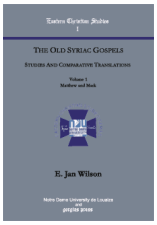

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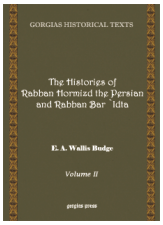

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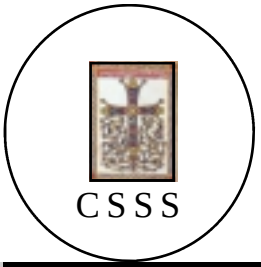

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