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- Sebastian Brock - Oxford University
- John W. Watt - University of Cardiff
- George Saliba - Columbia University
- Marina Greatrex - University of Ottawa
- Adam Lehto - University of Toronto
- NIU Ruji - Xinjiang University
- Amir Harrak, University of Toronto, NIU Ruji

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**The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies
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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 Our Lady of Seeds, Alqosh, Iraq: Entrance to the Monastic Quarters

The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies

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FROM THE EDITOR



I am pleased to introduce the fourth issue of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies Journal which contains the transcripts of papers given in Toronto during the academic year of 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. The first articles are papers presented at the Society's Symposium II on the role of the Syriac people in the translation movement during the Abbasid period, whereas the rest of the papers were originally public lectures. The paper by Sebastian Brock surveys the history of translation before the advent of the Arabs. During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, translation practice developed from being an often free to a strictly literal rendering of the original text, a development also evidenced in early Christian translations. Syriac translators shifted from uneven and often free translations of the Hebrew and Greek Biblical texts to highly sophisticated "mirror-translations", a shift from a reader-oriented approach to translation to a text-oriented one. During the Abbasid period, the former approach dominated over the latter. At the end of the article, the author attempts to explain why virtually all Syriac intermediary translations of the Abbasid period have disappeared.

To appreciate the whole movement of translation, John W. Watt takes into account both the technical competence for the work on the Syriac side, and the demand for these translations from the Muslim-Arabic side,

that is the "supply-side" and the "demand-side". Without the enthusiasm of the Arab patrons for Greek philosophy, the movement would undoubtedly never have developed as it did, but neither could it have flourished, or perhaps even arisen at all, without the technical competence of the Syrians who performed the work. This technical competence was a product of the enthusiasm for Greek philosophy among the Syrians, which had a long history going back into late antiquity.

George Saliba acknowledges the fact that the Greek scientific and philosophical legacy cannot be explained without referring to the very important role played by Syriac translators who seem to have accomplished this massive transmission almost single-handedly. He finds the origins of the translation movement in the reforms of the Umayyad Caliph `Abd al-Malik who arabized the *diwan* and the currency, thus limiting the influence of the Christians who monopolized official jobs. This gave the Syriac-speaking people the incentive to exert even more influence over the state, through the translation of more sophisticated Greek texts into Arabic, especially in the fields of philosophy and medicine, a fact that indeed happened during the early Abbasid period.

Greatrex's article deals with a major figure in Syriac literature, Jacob of Edessa, who was an important translator and an author in his own right. He compiled an exhaustive cosmology in his *Hexaemeron*,

based on Christian exegesis of Genesis and Greek philosophical speculation, his sources being the Cappadocian Fathers, including Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Jacob discusses the angels intermediate position in a triadic hierarchy which includes the divine and the human, a position that points to their ambiguous nature. While he relies extensively on his Greek sources, Jacob does not hesitate to alter these sources, e.g. in his descriptions of the angelic orders so as to highlight the intermediary role of the angels. He also develops the triadic hierarchy of the angels and refines his discussion of the luminaries symbolizing this hierarchy.

Aphrahat occupies an important place in our Journal (see JCSSS 2 and 3, 2002 and 2003 subsequently), and in the present issue Adam Lehto discusses his concept of faith, comparing it with that of Philoxenus in his *Ascetic Discourses*. Budge had already compared the two authors, stating that Philoxenus wrote his thirteen *Discourses* on the Christian life as a “supplement” to Aphrahat’s *Demonstrations*; he found Philoxenus a “clearer and deeper” writer, whose command of the Syriac language was superior. Using their writings on faith as a basis, Lehto notices that Aphrahat and Philoxenus share numerous ascetic concepts and expressions but also observes substantial differences underlying these similarities. While Philoxenus lived in a heavily Hellenized region, and hence was influenced by Greek spiritual traditions, Aphrahat lived before this hellenization of the Syriac tradition gained force. Philoxenus can be shown to be not merely concerned to “supplement” Aphrahat but in fact to correct him in the light of a more sophisticated Greek spirituality and theology.

In winter of 2004, Professor NIU Ruji of Xinjiang University, Urumqi, China, visited Toronto, and was invited to address the local members of the CSSS and the students and faculty of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilization, University of Toronto. Being himself a specialist of Old Turkic (Uighur) and familiar with the Syriac language, we were all delighted to hear him discuss the most recent discoveries of Christian antiquities in China. His article on a new Syriac-Uighur Inscription found in Quanzhou, Fujian Province (China), was a section of his lecture, while other sections will be published in a future issue of our Journal. While in Toronto, he discussed with the President of the CSSS the only Uighur inscription extant in Iraq, in the mausoleum of the Martyr Mār Behnam, near Mosul, Iraq. The last article is the outcome of this fruitful discussion and at the same time an update in the decipherment and translation of the inscription.

In the summer of 2003, the CSSS Board of Directors proposed to grant Dr. Sebastian Brock, Oxford University, an honorary membership in the CSSS, in appreciation of his life-long dedication to Syriac studies. On November 22, 2003, at the annual meeting of the CSSS just before CSSS Symposium III, a motion was unanimously carried to approve the Board’s proposal. The unanimity of the vote and the enthusiasm of all the members for the proposal expressed the CSSS gratitude to this great scholar who has, from the beginning, supported the Society and enriched it with his scholarly lectures and articles.

A. H.

CHANGING FASHIONS IN SYRIAC TRANSLATION TECHNIQUE: THE BACKGROUND TO SYRIAC TRANSLATIONS UNDER THE ABBASIDS



SEBASTIAN BROCK
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By the late eighth century, when the translation movement under the Abbasids first got under way, there had already been some five hundred years of experience of translating Greek texts into Syriac, whereas there was as yet no experience at all of translating written literary texts from Greek into Arabic. This is why the vast majority (and perhaps all) of the earliest translations of Greek philosophical, medical and scientific texts into Arabic were made in two stages, first from Greek into Syriac, and then from Syriac into Arabic. For this purpose the role of scholars from the various Syriac-speaking Churches was essential during at least the early stages of the translation movement.

In this paper my aim is to explore the background against which these translators into Syriac in the late eighth and early ninth century were working: where had the art of translating from Greek into Syriac reached by their time, and how had this come about? At the outset I should stress that I shall not presume to say anything about the second step which these Syriac scholars took, translating from Syriac into Arabic. There are two reasons for this: firstly, a very practical one, I am not competent to do so; and secondly, the fact that very few of these Syriac translations actually survive makes such a

task difficult to undertake in any case. Why these Syriac intermediary translations should have disappeared is a matter which I shall consider and try to explain towards the end of this paper.

In the course of the half millennium prior to the translation movement under the Abbasids an astonishing number of Greek texts had been translated into Syriac, covering a very wide range of topics. It is not surprising that the first Greek texts to get into Syriac were biblical. Probably the Greek Gospels were amongst the earliest to be translated. Although the date when the Old Syriac version of the Gospels was made is not known for certain, it is likely to go back to the early third century; since the Old Syriac Gospels make use of the Peshitta Old Testament, translated from Hebrew probably in the course of the second century, this provides a terminus post quem. Probably by the early fourth century the whole of the Greek New Testament had been translated, apart from Revelation and the minor Catholic Epistles which did not form part of the canon of the early Syriac Church.¹

It is very likely that non-biblical texts were already being translated before the end of the fourth century, since a group of these, consisting of some works by Eusebius and Titus of Bostra (and others), are preserved in

a dated manuscript, whose colophon tells us that it was copied in Edessa in November 411 (British Library, Add.12,150). The translation of Greek patristic texts rapidly gained momentum in the fifth century: many of the translations of works by Basil of Caesarea (who died in 379) seem to have been made early in this century (one of them is preserved in a manuscript dated 509).² Fifth-century Greek theologians might even be translated in their own life time: this was certainly the case with Cyril of Alexandria, one of whose works was translated into Syriac by Rabbula, bishop of Edessa, who died in 435. It was also the case a century later, with many of the works of Severus of Antioch (who died in 538). By the time of the advent of Arab rule in the Middle East, when Syriac culture became cut off politically from the Greek-speaking world of Byzantium, an enormous number of Greek patristic texts had been translated into Syriac, in some cases more than once.³

Although it is sometimes said that Greek philosophical and medical texts were first translated into Syriac in the fifth century at the famous School of the Persians in Edessa, this is unlikely really to have been the case. In the late thirteenth-century verse catalogue of Syriac authors, 'Abdisho' mentions the name Proba alongside that of Qumi, who is associated with the Persian School in the first half of the fifth century. Since commentaries by this Proba on parts of Aristotle's *Organon* survive, at first sight it looks as if he should be linked with the Persian School. Two pieces of evidence, however, make this very unlikely: firstly, he is associated with Antioch in the heading of the earliest manuscript containing one of his works; and secondly, the internal evidence, of what he says about the Prolegomena, or

subjects to be studied when dealing with ancient philosophical texts, makes it very unlikely that he was writing before the end of the fifth century. This makes him at least a contemporary of the man who certainly did introduce Greek philosophical and medical texts to Syriac readers—and was very probably the first person to do so—namely, Sergius of Resh'aina, who died in 536.⁴

Sergius is likely to have been the translator of the mysterious corpus of influential theological texts issued under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite sometime in the late fifth century.⁵ But he was also both a translator of, and a commentator on, Greek secular texts as well. We know from Hunayn ibn Ishaq's famous letter about translations of Galen that Sergius translated a large number of Galen's works, and some fragments of these survive.⁶ Sergius also had a great interest in Aristotle, and even wrote of Aristotle's *Organon*, or treatises on logic, that "without these neither can the meaning of medical writings be attained, nor can the opinion of the philosophers be understood, nor, indeed, can the true sense be uncovered of the divine Scriptures, wherein lies the hope of our salvation—unless it should be [he adds!] that someone receives divine ability thanks to the exalted nature of his way of life, with the result that he has no need for human instruction. For education and advancement in the direction of all the sciences, as far as human ability is concerned, cannot take place without the exercise of logic."⁷

This passage in fact comes from one of Sergius's two introductions to Aristotle's logical works, both addressed to Theodore, bishop of Kark Juddan.⁸ In the course of the sixth and seventh century most of the books of the *Organon* were translated into Syriac,

often in more than one version, the earlier belonging to the sixth century, and the later one to the seventh or early eighth.⁹

In passing we have seen that biblical, patristic and secular Greek texts sometimes survive in two or more forms, the later translation often in fact being a revision of the earlier. In any society, ancient or modern, approaches to translation, and techniques of translating, are liable to change over the course of time and with changing circumstances. The fact that revisions of earlier Syriac translations from Greek were made, sometimes several times over, during the course of the subsequent centuries is simply testimony to this general phenomenon.

In order to understand the shifts that took place in Syriac translation practice during the half millennium or so prior to the Abbasid translation movement, it is necessary to take a wider perspective and look briefly at the phenomenon of translation in the Greco-Roman world in general.¹⁰ It is a remarkable fact that there was no large-scale translation of any literary text into Greek until the various books of the Hebrew Bible were put into Greek over the course of the third and second centuries BC. This meant that these earliest translators into Greek had no precedent to go on, and as a result, their work was rather uneven, sometimes opting for idiomatic renderings of Hebrew phrases, at others translating the same phrases literally. The situation was not helped by the fact that in the Hellenistic and early Roman period there developed a dichotomy of practice between literary translation (essentially, this was from Greek into Latin), and non-literary translation, practiced in the spheres of government, the law and commerce, for all of which very literal renderings were the norm. The Hebrew Bible, which contained

legal texts as well as literary, did not fit this pattern, but by the end of the second century BC, at least in some circles of Judaism, the ideal of literalness for translating the biblical text had started to take root, giving rise to revisions of earlier translations, bringing them into closer line with the Hebrew original. This particular approach to biblical translation was taken over by the Christian Church, and was given its classic statement in the late fourth century in one of Jerome's letters. In due time, this ideal of literal translation was extended from the sphere of biblical texts to virtually all literary texts, effectively replacing the earlier practice of free literary translation that had been advocated by Cicero and others. This new ideal was to hold sway right up to the time of the Renaissance, when for a whole number of reasons (including the invention of printing and the Reformation), the fashion changed radically.¹¹

Thus it happened that the pattern of development undergone by the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, moving from an uneven (and sometimes free) rendering to an ever more mirror-like reflection of the original, was repeated in the course of the history of almost all early Christian translations, whether it be of the Bible, or of other texts (whether patristic or secular). Nowhere more was this the case than in the history of Syriac translations, where we can trace a development from uneven, or free (sometimes very free) early translations to, eventually in the seventh century, highly sophisticated mirror-translations.¹² Put in different terms, we are witnessing here a shift from a reader-oriented approach to translation, to an approach that is essentially text-oriented. It is a move from dynamic to formal renderings, where the unit of translation steadily decreases in size from the sentence (or more)

to the phrase, and then to the single word (or even, bound morpheme). This atomizing approach reaches its peak in the seventh century.

As far as the Syriac translations are concerned, the process is a gradual one, and it happens to be well exemplified in the case of the Syriac Gospels, where we have available a series of revisions: even in the two extant Old Syriac manuscripts of the Gospels one can already find sporadic traces of revision, and the Peshitta simply represents the culmination of this process when, at a certain stage, around AD 400, a particular form of this revised text came to be widely circulated (quite how, remains a mystery), to become the canonical text of all the Syriac Churches. In the Syrian Orthodox Church, however, the process continued, with a further revision in the early sixth century undertaken by Polycarp at the behest of Philoxenus of Mabbug,¹³ finally, yet another, much more radical, revision was made in the early seventh century by Thomas of Harkel.

It is important to realize that this process of revision of biblical translations did not take place in isolation. Exactly the same process, reflecting very much the same translation practices, can be observed with numerous patristic texts: in some cases the earlier translation was so free that a revision was impracticable and so a new one had to be undertaken. This is strikingly so in the case of several works by Basil, where the original translation, probably of the early fifth century, is more an expanded paraphrase than a straight translation.¹⁴ Elsewhere, and notably with the collections of homilies by Gregory of Nazianzus and by Severus of Antioch, an earlier translation is radically revised in the course of the seventh century.¹⁵

We can observe exactly the same thing happening in the case of translations of Greek philosophical texts for which more than one version survives. This applies in particular to translations of several of the early books of the *Organon*, such as the *Categories*, and to Porphyry's influential *Introduction*: for these we have both a sixth-century translation and a seventh-century revision, bringing the text closer to the Greek original.¹⁶

For the seventh century in particular, we happen to know the names of several of the men who revised earlier translations, and often they turn out to be church leaders who were also important authors in their own right, as well as translators. Moreover, their translation work frequently covered both patristic and secular philosophical texts. Perhaps most remarkable of all was Jacob of Edessa (who died in 708): besides being the author of several major works, he undertook revisions of biblical as well as patristic and philosophical translations.¹⁷

It is one of the ironies of history that what one might term Syriac "philohellenism" reached its peak in a period during which changed political boundaries and circumstances effectively cut the Syriac-speaking world off from the Greek cultural world, though here it is important to remember that the real decline of Greek in Syria and Palestine came, not straight away after the Arab conquests, but from the time of Abdulmalik onwards, when Arabic replaced Greek as the language of the civil service. It is this changed situation which accounts for the change in attitudes towards translation that can be observed in the Syriac translations from Greek undertaken during the translation movement under the Abbasids. Basically, these new circumstances demanded a

move away from text-oriented translations to reader-oriented ones: the original language no longer enjoyed the importance and prestige that it had formerly had.

At this point it is necessary to recall the unfortunate fact that we have very little in the way of extant Syriac translations of this period available for study. All too often we know the names of the translators, but have no means of observing their handiwork.¹⁸ Even in the case of the most famous of all the translators, Hunayn ibn Ishaq, it is extremely difficult to identify with any certainty Syriac translations made by him. In passing, it should be mentioned that the same problem exists for his translations into Arabic: here, however, it is not a case of paucity of survival, but of a famous name attracting otherwise anonymous translations, for a large number of translations are attributed to him, but in very few cases is it probable that the attribution is correct.

Fortunately, however, there is some very important indirect evidence about Hunayn's approach to translation to be found in his famous letter about his own translations of Galen, in which he offers some—often very forthright and critical—comments about earlier translations.¹⁹ The *Risala*, or Letter, was written in 856, when Hunayn was 48, though it has some further material added in 864. In this Letter he sets out to enumerate his own translations of Galen's works both into Syriac and into Arabic: for his Syriac versions he lists over 90 items, and for Arabic, some 35. What is of particular interest, however, for our purposes are his comments both on the work of his predecessors and on his own translation practice.

In the case of difficult works a translator is likely to consult the work of earlier translations, and in the *Risala* Hunayn at one

point says that he found one particular work difficult to translate because there were no earlier translations (*Risala*, 28). But if earlier translations did exist, then, not surprisingly, Hunayn would make use of earlier translations and simply revise (and where necessary, correct) them. Indeed, in some cases, he was specifically requested, by the person who commissioned the translation, to revise an earlier rendering rather than to make a completely new translation. Hunayn mentions this to have been the case for several of Galen's works, where he based his work on the earlier translations of either Sergius of Resh'aina (*Risala*, 18-19), or Ayyub (*Risala*, 21, 68), who is probably his older contemporary, Job of Edessa. But, as any modern translator who is setting out to revise an earlier translation well knows, it is sometimes easier and quicker to retranslate the whole text afresh. Hunayn had exactly the same experience, as he himself says (*Risala*, 20): he had been asked by Salmawayh to correct the earlier translation, made by Sergius, of Galen's *Methodos*, rather than to do a new translation; no doubt the reasoning behind this was that this would be more economical of time (and so, too, of money). Hunayn then goes on to tell what they did: Salmawayh read out Sergius' Syriac rendering, while Hunayn had the Greek original in his hands; wherever Sergius's translation needed correcting, Hunayn would stop Salmawayh so that the correction could be made. In the end, however, this process proved unsatisfactory, as there was so much in need of correction that the commissioner of the work realized that it would be more practical and satisfactory to translate the whole thing again from scratch. Hunayn goes on to mention, in an astonishingly matter of fact way, that this had all

happened at Raqqa, and that, after Hunayn had made the new translation, Salmawayh had given it to a third person to take back to Baghdad to have it copied: however, fire broke out on the ship on which this person was travelling and Hunayn's work was lost. "A few years later", Hunayn goes on, "I translated the work again for Bokhtisho' (of Gundishapur)."

From other sections of the *Risala* we learn that Hunayn found that he had to do the same thing with several other of Galen's works that had previously been translated by Sergius (*Risala*, 15—where again he has originally been asked to revise Sergius's work) and by Ayyub (*Risala*, 24-27, 31, 37, 46, 88). Hunayn enumerates various reasons for being dissatisfied with earlier translations. In several cases, where his own earlier translations are involved, revision was needed simply because the earlier work had been based on inadequate Greek manuscripts (*Risala*, 3, 13, 43, 108). In the case of other translators he offers a number of criticisms. Those concerning Sergius are particularly interesting, since Hunayn was evidently aware of the chronology of Sergius' translations: in two cases he mentions two translations by Sergius (*Risala*, 14, 15), specifying (*Risala*, 14) that one was done before Sergius had studied in Alexandria and the other after. Elsewhere Hunayn comments that a certain translation of Sergius had been made "before he was well practiced" (*Risala*, 4), or when "he had had some experience, but was not yet at his height" (*Risala*, 6). One should probably assume that the various cases where Hunayn simply condemns a translation by Sergius as "bad" (*Risala*, 7, 13, 49; cp 17), or even "useless" (*Risala*, 80) all concerned Sergius' earlier productions.

Although Ayyub comes off better than Sergius (and likewise than the otherwise unknown priest Joseph [*Risala*, 53]), with whose work Ayyub's is favourably compared, nevertheless Ayyub too comes in for criticism, one of his translations being condemned as "incomprehensible" (*Risala*, 37), and another simply as "bad" (*Risala*, 88). No doubt similar criticisms underlay Hunayn's decision to retranslate, rather than revise, a considerable number of Ayyub's translations of Galen.

Hunayn's *Risala* offers a few hints about his own attitude to translation, and the most important of these is to be found in *Risala* 7, where he tells that, in translating Galen from Greek into Syriac, his aim was to make the author's thought as clear as possible, this being for the benefit of the person who had commissioned this. Here we have clear evidence that Hunayn aimed at a reader-oriented translation, thus representing a complete reversal of the seventh-century ideal of translation which was radically text-oriented. This is, of course, only what we should expect in the changed circumstances and environment of ninth-century translations, but it is good to have it specified so clearly by one of the great practitioners of the period. One might also point to Hunayn's statement (*Risala*, 87) that in one translation he had himself explicated obscure passages, while in another he had abbreviated the original and put it into the form of Questions and Answers (*Risala*, 95).

One of Hunayn's criticisms of his older contemporary, Ayyub, in fact points in exactly the same direction: as we have seen, Hunayn condemned one of Ayyub's translations as "incomprehensible"; this almost certainly implies that the reason for its being

incomprehensible was that it was excessively literal, or text-oriented. This suggests that, if Ayyub was at all representative of the earlier Syriac translators of the Abbasid translation movement, their translation practice had (at least originally) simply carried on from that of their late seventh- and early eighth-century predecessors, whose aim had been to provide highly sophisticated mirror-translations of the Greek originals. And this, after all, is exactly what one would have expected in the initial stages of the translation movement, before it had become clear that the completely different context and totally new outward circumstances in fact rendered this earlier approach both unsuitable and inappropriate.

In a famous passage on Hunayn's Arabic translation practice, the fourteenth-century author as-Safadi tells of two different approaches to translation.²⁰ The first, which he castigates as bad, is the atomistic approach adopted by certain translators of the Abbasid period (to whose names one might also, in the light of the above, add that of Ayyub). This approach proceeds word by word, in contrast to the method adopted by Hunayn and others, who take the whole sentence as the unit of translation. In the light of what I have described above, concerning Hunayn's Syriac translations, it would seem that as-Safadi's contrast between *verbum e verbo* and *sensus de sensu* Arabic translations in the Abbasid period could equally be applied to Syriac ones, the former representing the practice of the early days of the movement, the latter the altered approach of later translators, adopted to fit the completely new circumstances.

If this interpretation of the hints given by Hunayn is correct, then it will mean that Hunayn's own ideal of translation practice in

fact had more in common with that of Sergius than with that of the seventh-century translators and revisers. This, at least at first sight, makes it puzzling why Hunayn should so often have criticised Sergius' translations. There would seem to be two main explanations for this. In the first place, Sergius was very much a pioneer in translating Greek medical texts into Syriac, and so inevitably later experience—including, as Hunayn points out, Sergius' own experience—led to improvements. Secondly, although the seventh-century fashion for literal translation was no longer practicable in ninth-century Baghdad, the seventh-century translators had facilitated translation from Greek into Syriac in other ways that were acceptable to their ninth-century successors. This was in the area of lexicon, and concerned at least two separate aspects: on the one hand, more satisfactory renderings of many recurrent Greek technical terms had been devised; on the other hand, the Syriac lexicon had been hugely enriched by a vast number of new word formations and neologisms. This second aspect had in fact been specifically commented upon in the late seventh century by Jacob of Edessa, who pointed out that many terms current in his own day were completely absent from authors writing in the sixth century.²¹ I mentioned earlier that one of the difficulties facing anyone who wants to study Hunayn's actual translation practice lies in the fact that so little survives in the way of translations that can safely be attributed to him. Happily, however, there does seem to be at least one extant Syriac translation for which it does seem likely that Hunayn was responsible, namely, that of Hippocrates' *Aphorisms*. A study of the translation technique employed in this translation would certainly seem to fit in well

with the picture painted above, on the basis of Hunayn's various comments in his *Risala*.²²

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The disappearance of virtually all the Syriac intermediary translations of the Abbasid period is doubly to be lamented; in the first place, and most obviously, because it would have been of great academic interest to have been able to study them, both in their own right as part of the Syriac literary heritage, and as witnesses to Greek originals which in some cases have not survived, and in almost all other cases have only survived in Greek in manuscripts dating from several centuries later and maybe belonging to a different textual tradition. The second reason why the loss of these Syriac translations is to be lamented is a more general one: in a subtle and no doubt often unconscious way the disappearance of these texts has led to a lack of appreciation—and sometimes even, a lack of awareness—of the important role played by these Syriac scholars in the earlier stages of the translation movement.²³ This is particularly unfortunate, seeing that without them it is difficult to envisage how the huge Abbasid programme of translation could ever have initially got under way.

Why, then, is there so little trace left of these intermediary Syriac translations? There would seem to be two main reasons. Firstly, the very fact that they were intended to serve as stepping stones on the path to translations into Arabic meant that, once this second stage of translation into Arabic had been accomplished, the Syriac “stepping stone” was no longer required. We know, however, that many of these translations into Syriac made under the Abbasids were

still available to Syriac scholars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—to men like Dionysius bar Salibi, Yohannan bar Zo‘bi, Ya‘qub bar Shakko, and Gregorios Yuhanon Bar ‘Ebroyo (Bar-Hebraeus), all of whom have quotations from them, or references to them. The second, and thus it would seem by far the more important, reason for their ultimate disappearance lies in the fact that, even in Syriac-speaking circles, Arabic very largely replaced Syriac as the language of science, medicine and philosophy, and so there was no longer any need felt to copy and transmit these Syriac translations, with the result that they rapidly disappeared from circulation. And even in the case of those who wished to consult such texts in Syriac, rather than in Arabic, the various thirteenth-century compendia of Bar ‘Ebroyo and others amply sufficed for their needs.

It is possible to confirm that this second reason for the disappearance of the Syriac translations is the more important of the two if one looks at the fate of works on medicine and science actually composed in Syriac that were written under the early Abbasids. Very few of these works survive to today, and some of those that do, do not survive in Syriac, their original language. Two examples will illustrate this. Yohannan bar Sarapion wrote two works in Syriac on medicine, the *Large* and the *Small Compendium*. The shorter work proved immensely influential: it was translated into Arabic no less than three times, and was used by many of the important medieval Muslim writers on medicine. One of the Arabic translations was subsequently rendered into Latin by Gerard of Cremona, in the 12th century; this was first printed in 1525, and then a revised translation was made by Andreas Alpagus,

published in Venice in 1550. All that survives today in Syriac of this influential work is a few brief excerpts in Bar Bahlul's *Lexicon*.²⁴ My second example illustrates a different trajectory: in the 1970s two medical works were published in Erevan, Armenia, which are Armenian translations of two otherwise unknown (it seems) Syriac medical writers, Abu Sa'id and Isho'.²⁵

Let me conclude by recalling the fact that only a small proportion of surviving

Syriac literature written from the eighth century onwards has yet been published, and some of this will almost certainly throw some further light on the subject. In particular, it is to be hoped that, once the great compendia of the thirteenth-century Syriac scholars have been properly edited and studied, more light will be thrown on the extent and character of the Syriac translations that had been made in the late eighth and ninth centuries under Abbasid patronage.²⁶

NOTES

¹ For the Peshitta Old Testament, see M. Weitzman, *The Peshitta Old Testament. An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999); and for the New Testament versions, B.M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1977), ch. 1. Overviews can also be found in my *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Kottayam, 1989), and *The Hidden Pearl: the Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage III* (Rome, 2001), ch. 9 "The Bible in Syriac".

² A survey of these is given in my "Traduzioni siriane degli scritti di Basilio," in E. Baudry, S. Brock, M. Cortesi et alii, *Basilio tra oriente e occidente* (Bose, 2001), pp. 165-80.

³ A summary list of the most important published Syriac translations, made from Greek, can be found in T. Muraoka, *Classical Syriac: a Basic Grammar with Chrestomathy* (Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 144-6. (Several further important Syriac translations have been published subsequently, notably Basil's *de Spiritu Sancto* (see note 14), and some of Gregory of Nazianzus' *Discourses* (ed. by J-C. Haelewyck, 2001, and A. B. Schmidt, 2002). See also note 15, below.

⁴ On Proba's date, see my "The Syriac Commentary tradition" (see note 9), p. 7.

⁵ See J-M. Hornus, "Le Corpus Dionysien en syriaque," *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970), 69-94.

⁶ R. Degen, "Galen im Syrischen," in V. Nutton (ed.), *Galen: Problems and Prospects* (London, 1981), pp. 131-66.

⁷ British Library, Add. 14,658, ff. 60v-61r.

⁸ See especially H. Hugonnard Roche, "Aux origines de l'exégèse orientale de la logique d'Aristote: Sergius de Resh'aina (+536), médecin et philosophe," *Journal Asiatique* 277 (1997), 1-17; "Les Catégories d'Aristote comme introduction à la philosophie dans un commentaire syriaque de Sergius de Resh'aina," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), 339-63; "Note sur Sergius de Resh'aina, traducteur du grec en syriaque et commentateur d'Aris-

tote," in G. Endress and R. Kruk (eds), *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism. Studies dedicated to H.J. Drossaart Lulofs* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 121-43; and "Comme la cigogne au désert. Un prologue de Sergius de Resh'aina à l'étude de la philosophie aristotélicienne en syriaque," in A. de Libera, Abdelali elAmrani-Jamal, A. Galonnier (eds), *Langages et Philosophie. Hommage à J. Jolivet* (Paris, 1997), pp. 79-97.

⁹ A summary survey of Syriac translations of books of the *Organon* can be found in my "The Syriac Commentary tradition," in C. Burnett (ed.), *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts* (London, 1993), pp. 3-18, repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot, 1999), ch. XIII. See also H. Hugonnard Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque dans la transmission de la philosophie grecque à l'arabe: le cas de l'*Organon* d'Aristote," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991), 187-209, and "Contributions syriaques aux études arabes de logique à l'époque abbaside," *Aram* 3 (1991), 193-210.

¹⁰ For what follows, see in more detail my "The phenomenon of the Septuagint," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 17 (1972), 11-36; "Aspects of translation technique in Antiquity," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 20 (1979), 69-87, repr. *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984), ch. III; "To revise or not to revise: attitudes to Jewish biblical translation," in G.J. Brooke and B. Lindars (eds), *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings* (LXX and Cognate Studies 33; 1992), pp. 301-38; and the sections on "Translation in Antiquity, and Translation: Greek and Syriac" in A. Ph. Christides (ed.), *Istoria tes Ellenikes Glossas* (Thessaloniki, 2001) pp. 649-61, 691-701 (English edition in preparation).

¹¹ W. Schwarz, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation* (Cambridge, 1955), and my "The phenomenon of Biblical Translation in Antiquity," in S. Jellicoe (ed.), *Studies in the*

Septuagint (New York, 1974), pp. 541-71.

¹² See my "Towards a history of Syriac translation technique," in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 221; 1983), pp. 1-14, repr. in *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (Aldershot, 1992), ch. X.

¹³ See my "The resolution of the Philoxenian/Harklean problem," in *Essays in Honour of B.M. Metzger* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 325-43.

¹⁴ Thus, notably, in the translation of Basil's *de Spiritu Sancto*, ed. D. G. K. Taylor, in CSCO Scriptores Syri 228-9 (1999); another example is discussed in my "Basil's Homily on Deut. xv 9: some remarks on the Syriac manuscript tradition," in J. Dummer (ed.), *Texte und Textkritik* (Texte und Untersuchungen 133; 1977), pp. 57-66.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus' Discourses survive in an incomplete sixth-century version and a complete early seventh-century revision (made by Paul of Edessa in the 620s): see A. Schmidt and M. Quaschnig-Kirsch, "Die syrische Handschriften der Homilien des Gregor von Nazianz. Repertorium mit Nachträgen und Siegelverzeichnis," *Le Muséon* 113 (2000), 87-114 (where references to important earlier studies will be found). Severus' 125 *Cathedral Homilies* are preserved in part in a sixth-century translation and in whole in Jacob of Edessa's late seventh-century revision; Jacob's revision is now published in full in *Patrologia Orientalis* (4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 22-3, 25-6, 29, 35-8; 1906-77).

¹⁶ The anonymous sixth-century translation is edited in my "The earliest Syriac translation of Porphyry's Eisagoge, I. Edition," *Journal of the Iraqi Academy, Syriac Corporation* 12 (1988), 316-66; for the relationship between this version and that of the seventh-century revision by Athanasius of Balad, see my "Some notes on the Syriac translations of Porphyry's Eisagoge," in *Mélanges en hommage au professeur et au penseur libanais Farid Jabre* (Publications de l'Université libanaise, Sections des études philosophiques et sociales 20; 1989), pp. 41-50.

¹⁷ For the wide range of Jacob of Edessa's

scholarship, see K. Jenner and B. Ter Haar Romeny (eds), *Jacob of Edessa: Symposium Volume* (Leiden, forthcoming).

¹⁸ Much information on this can be found in F.E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus* (Leiden, 1968).

¹⁹ G. Bergstrasser, *Hunain ibn Ishaq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen* (Abh. K.M. XVII.2; 1925), and *Neue Materialien zu Hunain ibn Ishaq's Galen-Bibliographie* (Abh. K.M. XIX.2; 1932). For what follows, see also my "The Syriac background to Hunayn's translation techniques," in *Aram* 3 (1991), 139-62 (repr. in *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot, 1999), ch. XIV).

²⁰ Translation in F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London, 1975), p. 17.

²¹ G. Phillips, *A Letter by Mar Jacob bishop of Edessa on Orthography* (London, 1869), p. 8.

²² See my "The Syriac background" (note 19).

²³ D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th century)* (London, 1998), pp. 3, 21-2 rightly emphasizes that the initiative for the translations came from the Abbasid Caliphs; at the same time, it should also be recognized that, without the Syriac scholars who made the initial translations from Greek into Arabic by way of Syriac, the translation movement could never have got under way.

²⁴ See M. Ullmann, "Yuhanna ibn Sarabiyun. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte seiner Werke," *Medizin-historisches Journal* 6 (1971), 278-96; and G. Troupeau, "Du syriaque au latin par l'intermédiaire de l'arabe: le Kunnash de Yuhanna ibn Sarabiyun," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4 (1994), 267-78.

²⁵ See S. A. Vardanyan, "Ancient Armenian translations of the works of Syrian physicians," *Revue des études arméniennes* 16 (1982), 213-9.

²⁶ Suggestive of what can be found in these compendia are the studies by M. Zonta, "Nemesiana Syriaca: new fragments from the missing Syriac version of the De Natura

Hominis,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36 (1991), 223-58, and his monograph *Fonti greche e orientali dell'Economia di Bar-Hebraeus nell'opera La Crema della Scienza* (AION, Supplement 70,

1992); and by H. Takahashi, “The Greco-Syriac and Arabic sources of Barhebraeus’ Mineralogy and Meteorology in Candelabrum of the Sanctuary, Base II,” *Islamic Studies* 41 (2002), 215-69.

SYRIAC TRANSLATORS AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY ABBASID IRAQ



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In the Syriac Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus, the great thirteenth century polymath gives an account of the Arab conquest of the Near East and then adds an interesting comment on the significance, in his view, of this turning point in the history of the region:

There arose among (the Arabs) philosophers, mathematicians, and physicians, who surpassed the ancients in subtlety of understanding. While they built on no foundation other than those of the Greeks, they constructed greater scientific edifices by means of a more elegant style and more studious researches, with the result that although they had received the wisdom from us through translators, all of whom were Syrians, now we find it necessary to seek wisdom from them.¹

Bar Hebraeus appears in this comment to be of the opinion that the “great men”, so to speak, were to be found among the Arabs, while the Syrians were merely the intermediaries, the translators. Viewing the situation from the perspective of the thirteenth century, and furthermore as an enthusiastic reader of the works of such Muslim scholars as Ibn Sina and al-Tusi, that is perhaps hardly surprising, and we may well wonder

if someone living closer to the time of the translation movement would not have expressed the matter a little differently and given it a nuance more favourable to the Syrians. Be that as it may, the remark does bring before us the question often discussed in modern scholarship of the forces which propelled this great movement, the two poles of the discussion as it pertains to philosophy focusing principally on the Syriac translators and the Arabic elite. One view is that the driving force of the movement was the desire of the Syrian translators to disseminate Greek thought in the Arabic world, and this desire happily found a ready response among the Muslim Arabic elite. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that it was rather the Muslim Arabic desire for Greek wisdom which provided the real impetus for the entire enterprise, and that the Syriac translators who were able to render Greek secular works into Arabic were merely an instrument which fortunately happened to be available at the time. As so often in human affairs, the truth may lie somewhere in the middle, and the task of analysis may be to determine the respective contributions of each to a complex whole.

Of the three areas mentioned above, philosophy, mathematical sciences, and medicine, philosophy is the least “practical”,

at any rate in the most obvious and usual ways. Since the most recent research emphasises the political history of the early Abbasid empire and the new social configuration created in Baghdad by al-Mansur and his successors as the engine of the translation movement,² philosophy would seem to be the least likely of the three to have benefited from the attention of the translators and their patrons. Indeed, this expectation is to some extent borne out for the very earliest phase, in that the earliest translations, executed during the caliphate of al-Mansur, are for the most part works of a mathematical nature; medicine and subsequently philosophy seem to have followed in its train, philosophy beginning in the caliphate of al-Mahdi. If the demand for translations was primarily utilitarian, it is not at first sight obvious why philosophy should have been included at all. Of course, this rather blunt way of expressing it does not do justice to the mutual interaction of pure and applied research. But the utility and potential application of philosophy was certainly not so clearly evident as that of mathematical and medical sciences.

As a result of the Arab conquests of the Near East, in Umayyad times there existed a group of “international” scholars throughout the whole region from the Eastern Mediterranean to India, including notable Syrians such as Severus Sebokt and Jacob of Edessa. The very multilingualism of these scholars meant that they had access to works in languages other than their own native tongue, and in the case of the Syrians this had also been true in pre-Islamic times. Greek philosophy first manifests itself in Syriac dress, at any rate among works still extant, in the school of Bardaisan, and on the eastern side of the old Roman-Persian border the multi-

lingual ability of the predecessors of these “international scholars” embraced not only Greek and Syriac but also Pahlavi. Nevertheless, while for these scholars translations were not strictly necessary, some were still made, and Graeco-Syriac translations of that period are of particular significance in the present context because they included not only theological and popular ethical works, but also “high” philosophy (Aristotle) and medicine (Galen). Whatever other factors may have been important in explaining the rise of the more extensive Abbasid translation movement, the fact of the earlier Graeco-Syriac translation activity should not be left out of the picture, reflecting as it does, albeit on a much smaller scale, some of the same subjects which figured so prominently in the output of the Abbasid period. It is certainly true that the earlier activity of “translation of Greek secular works into languages of the Near East ... should not be seen, *by itself*, as explaining the Abbasid translation movement” (my italics).³ But it is questionable whether the fact of this earlier translation activity should be given only a “descriptive function” in discussion of the Abbasid movement and denied any “explanatory function”; it is certainly not the whole explanation, but it may be part of it.

Unless we believe that the Syrians who engaged in the work of translation for Muslim patrons in the Abbasid period did so purely because such commissions were available, without any great interest in the subject matter of the works they were translating or any perception of a connection between their work and the earlier translation activity, the Syriac appropriation through study and translation of Greek philosophy and medicine in pre-Abbasid times is hardly

a negligible quantity in the explanation of the Abbasid translation movement. While the latter was clearly distinguished from the former by the special circumstances and policies of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, the very prestige and influence of the Syriac physicians, founded as it was on the Greek heritage and the possession of Syriac versions of Greek medical works, is likely to have been one factor igniting the enthusiasm of the Abbasids for Greek wisdom. Hunayn was certainly critical of the Galen translations made by Sergius of Reshaina, but Sergius was nevertheless his predecessor.⁴ Medicine was an eminently practical subject, but both Galenic medicine and Aristotelian logic featured prominently in the earlier Graeco-Syriac translation activity, and both remained prominent in the Abbasid Graeco-Arabic movement. With their knowledge of Greek medicine and their abilities as translators, Syrians were rather more than convenient instruments at hand available to fulfil the desire of Arabic speakers for Greek knowledge; they may also have been in some measure instrumental in igniting that desire on account of their success as physicians in the application of that knowledge. If philosophy, too, was perceived as having some practical application, Syriac expertise in it may likewise have been significant in stimulating interest in the subject among Muslim Arabs.

The earliest unambiguous evidence of interest in Aristotelian philosophy in the upper levels of Abbasid Muslim society⁵ is the commission of al-Mahdi to the East Syrian Catholicos Timothy I for a translation of Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac into Arabic. The commission is reported by Timothy himself in two letters, and the task was executed by Timothy and Abu Nuh, the Chris-

tian secretary to the governor of Mosul.⁶ Furthermore, al-Mahdi and Timothy themselves took part in a theological debate in 781 on Islam and Christianity, of which Timothy himself provided an extensive "report".⁷ Clearly, then, Aristotelian dialectic (and, we may assume, logic as a whole) was considered to be of relevance in Muslim-Christian dialogue. However, while the translation of the *Topics* by Timothy and Abu Nuh is the earliest translation of this treatise into Arabic, it was already familiar to Hellenophile Syrians, not only in Greek if they were capable of so reading it, but also in Syriac in a translation by Athanasius of Balad. Indeed, for around a hundred years before Timothy's Arabic translation, the entire "smaller *Organon*" (the seven volumes from Porphyry's *Eisagoge* to the *Sophistical Refutations*) had been available in Syriac,⁸ and perhaps also the entire larger Alexandrian *Organon* (nine volumes with the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*).⁹ It is likely that theological questions, notably biblical exegesis and christological debate, provided much of the incentive for Syriac logical studies.¹⁰

We are bound to inquire who or what might have induced the caliph to believe that a translation of the *Topics* would be useful to him in debate with Christians and others. It has been suggested that although the *Topics* "was somehow brought to the attention of al-Mahdi", which implies that he "must have had good advisors", he "was certainly not interested in the book because of its place, rather insignificant, in the Graeco-Syriac logical curriculum of late antiquity".¹¹ In the spirit of dialectic, recognising that certainty is hardly possible here, I suggest on the contrary that it is probable that it was precisely because this book had a

place, and perhaps a not so insignificant one, if not “in the Graeco-Syriac logical curriculum of late antiquity” at any rate in Graeco-Syriac logical studies in the years before the Abbasids, that al-Mahdi or his “good advisors” commissioned this translation. What better way to get on a par with your opposite number in a debate than to have at your disposal the same tool as he? The caliph or his advisors knew from whom they could get a good translation; is it not likely that it was from the very same people that they knew something of its content and value? Only those who had read the book in Greek or Syriac could tell them anything about it, and we have no evidence that any Muslim had done so before this. The earliest indication of Arabic interest in it is Timothy’s remark in one of these letters that others were engaged in its translation from Greek into Arabic, but that their efforts were pretty worthless and the caliph was more interested in the translation which he and Abu Nuh were making from Syriac.¹² By contrast, the work had been available in Syriac for a century before this, and the community with the greatest familiarity with Aristotle’s logical writings was the Syriac speaking community. If indeed it was some of al-Mahdi’s advisors who referred him to the *Topics* (and to Timothy as a possible translator), these advisors are most likely to have been East Syrians, of whom we know there were many at court among the secretaries and the physicians.¹³

The reason for suggesting that the place of the *Topics* in the Syriac logical curriculum was “rather insignificant” is that “as far as we know there were no Syriac commentaries on it (before this time).”¹⁴ There are, however, no Syriac commentaries extant from before this time on any book of the

Organon from the *Posterior Analytics* onwards, but the various Syriac translations of these books that were in existence by that time are sufficient to show that some Syriac scholars had both a knowledge of and an interest in them. Timothy himself asked Pethion to make enquiries at the monastery of Mar Mattai as to “whether there is some commentary or scholia by anyone, whether Syriac or not, to this book, (namely) the *Topics*, or to the *Refutation of the Sophists*, or to the *Rhetoric*, or to the *Poetics*,”¹⁵ i.e. to the latter part of the full *Organon*. Timothy therefore knew of these books (either in Greek or Syriac or both) and was interested in them, assumed that at the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Mattai they would know about them and any commentaries or scholia on them, assumed furthermore that such commentaries or scholia could exist in Syriac, and knew that these books belonged together as (part of) a collection, namely the *Organon*. By contrast there is no evidence that any Muslim Arabic scholar had made the acquaintance of the whole *Organon* by that time,¹⁶ so it would be a bold hypothesis to suggest that Timothy’s interest in them was engendered by al-Mahdi.¹⁷ The fact that he asked Pethion to make enquiries about commentaries on them at the Orthodox monastery of Mar Mattai—Timothy himself of course being an East Syrian—indicates that he assumed that it was among the Syrians who by means of their libraries had maintained a close connection with the Greek scholarly tradition that the fullest possible knowledge of these matters could be found.¹⁸ Timothy goes on to report that Job the Chalcedonian had told him that he had seen a small number of scholia on the *Topics*; this is the Melkite patriarch who died in 843.¹⁹ Presumably Job saw these scholia in

Greek, but it shows how easily the Syrians could acquire information about them. One can hardly suppose that the Melkite Job or the Syrian Orthodox monks at Mar Mattai would have known about such matters simply because al-Mahdi or his advisors had recently become interested in them. Finally, that no inference can be drawn from the lack of extant Syriac commentaries on the *Topics* from before this time is clear from the fact that Timothy was evidently interested in the *Posterior Analytics*, a passage from which (I. 13, 78^b31) he considers in some detail;²⁰ yet as with the *Topics*, we know of only one lost Syriac translation of the book from before this time (again by Athanasius of Balad), and no commentaries on it.²¹

In contrast to the clear evidence of Syriac interest in the study of Aristotelian logic over a period of about three centuries preceding this commission, the only indication of Arabic engagement with the subject before the time of al-Mahdi is the *Logic Compendium* of Ibn al-Muqaffa', encompassing the *Eisagoge*, *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics*.²² However, it too was written under the influence of Syriac logical studies and was not based on a Persian original or a Persian translation of Aristotle.²³ As Graeco-Syriac medicine and the Galen translations which supported it—no doubt supported by personal relationships between Syrian doctors and Abbasid caliphs—swept all competitors before it in that field,²⁴ so also in logic the Zoroastrian encounter with Greek thought bequeathed nothing to Abbasid society which could compete with the Syrian range of expertise in the subject.²⁵ In this case too, good personal relationships with the rich and powerful, such as that of Timothy with al-Mahdi, may also have been influential in stimulat-

ing among those at court an interest in the translation of the significant works in that field into Arabic. Al-Mahdi was also on good terms with his court astronomer Theophilus of Edessa, who made Syriac versions of the *Prior Analytics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*.²⁶ Graeco-Syriac logical studies certainly did not create the translation movement, but in all probability they were responsible for the fact that logic became an important feature of that movement. That was certainly of profound significance for the future direction of philosophical studies in Islam.

A famous text from a later phase of the movement attributes the appearance of philosophy in Arabic to a direct line of transmission from Alexandria to Baghdad. This is al-Farabi's treatise *On the Appearance of Philosophy*, which in one way confirms the importance of the Syrians in this historical development, albeit by-passing the figures just mentioned and many others.²⁷ In another way it downplays their role and has contributed to the perception that much of the *Organon* was of no significance in Syriac logical studies before the Abbasids. However, not only is al-Farabi's direct line from Alexandria to Baghdad through Antioch and Harran not credible, equally incredible is his assertion that bishops decided that logic could be taught from the books up to the assertoric figures (*Prior Analytics* 1.7) but no further, since the rest was harmful to Christianity.²⁸ The focus on the first part of the *Organon* certainly fits with the evidence that the extant early Syriac translations and commentaries are entirely devoted to the first few books,²⁹ but this has nothing to do with an episcopal decree. Al-Farabi himself went on to say that he studied to the end of the *Posterior Analytics* with his (Christian)

teacher Yuhanna ibn Haylan, and there is abundant evidence of Syriac and Christian Arabic interest, from Athanasius of Balad through to Abu Bishr and beyond, in all the books from the *Posterior Analytics* to the *Poetics*.³⁰ His statements about the “pre-Baghdadian” history of philosophy can safely be treated as legend or ideology, while the trustworthy historical information in his account comes down to the fact that a number of Syro-Arabic Christian philosophers—Isra’il, Quwayra, Ibrahim al-Marwazi, Yuhanna ibn Haylan—taught the subject in Baghdad immediately before his time.³¹ His assertion about the Christian “censorship” of part of the *Organon* might be an attempt to avoid it (and him) being closely identified with Christianity,³² or the whole account prior to the mention of the philosophers active in Baghdad could be a product of the anti-Byzantine philo-Hellenic ideology propagated in the reign of al-Ma’mun.³³ The latter hypothesis can be linked to the interesting suggestion of Lameer that Antioch and Harran are mentioned in the story on account of their importance for Nestorians and pagans respectively,³⁴ not only (as Lameer suggests) because Nestorians and Sabians were active as philosophers and translators in Baghdad, but also because, by appearing to patronise these communities which flourished outside the Roman Empire and in this manner are alleged to have preserved Greek philosophy, the Abbasids could demonstrate their superior enlightenment over against the Byzantines, who had outlawed and persecuted these very groups.

In his treatise on *The Attainment of Happiness*, al-Farabi explicitly acknowledged that philosophy (or at least what he considered to be genuine philosophy) passed from Greeks to Syrians and then Arabs:

It is said that this science [of demonstrative logic] existed anciently among the Chaldeans, who are the people of Iraq, subsequently reaching the people of Egypt, from there transmitted to the Greeks, where it remained until it was transmitted to the Syrians and then to the Arabs. Everything comprised by this science was expounded in the Greek language, later in Syriac, and finally in Arabic.³⁵

As in *The Appearance of Philosophy*, his presentation of the history of philosophy long before his own time is expressive of his conception of the place of philosophy in the Islamic civilisation to which he belongs. His statement, however, that true philosophy was expounded in Greek, then Syriac, and then Arabic is based on the knowledge and activities of his contemporaries and no doubt primarily has in view the Syriac and Syro-Arabic study and translation of Aristotle’s *Organon* with which he himself was acquainted as a pupil in the school of the Syro-Arabic Baghdad Aristotelians, and that of their Graeco-Syriac predecessors.³⁶

If that is so, he put aside as for the most part irrelevant to the bigger picture the work of al-Kindi and the Arabic translations executed for him.³⁷ Al-Kindi was not primarily a logician,³⁸ and al-Farabi therefore did not regard him as a predecessor,³⁹ but al-Kindi was greatly interested not only in Greek science, medicine, and mathematics, but also philosophy, especially metaphysics. There is, however, no tradition of pre-Abbasid Syriac metaphysical studies of Plato and Aristotle comparable to that of the logical, and the appearance of Greek metaphysical thought in Arabic culture cannot therefore be credibly attributed primarily to any stimulus from Syriac scholarship in this subject. To be sure some pre-Abbasid Syriac

writers were deeply influenced by Neoplatonic metaphysics,⁴⁰ and Sergius of Reshaina translated a (pseudo-)Aristotelian treatise outside the *Organon*,⁴¹ but the earliest attested Syriac versions of the *Metaphysics* and the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* bring us down to the ninth century, and the translations commissioned by al-Kindi, who knew no Syriac, may for the most part have been made directly from Greek.⁴²

It is thus all the more striking that it was in that very part of philosophy, namely logic and the Aristotelian *Organon*, where Graeco-Syriac scholarship provided a vital stimulus to the Abbasid translation movement in the early stages, that Syro-Arabic scholarship at a later stage of the movement decisively influenced the future direction of philosophy in Islam. Metaphysics and the *Weltbild* of Neoplatonism lay at the centre of al-Kindi's wide interests.⁴³ While there is some evidence from the *Fihrist* that Yahya ibn 'Adi concerned himself with Plato⁴⁴ (and that some Syriac translations were made from Proclus),⁴⁵ for the Christian philosophers of the Baghdad school of Abu Bishr the study of philosophy was based primarily and almost exclusively on Aristotle, including to be sure the Peripatetic commentators where available and the *Metaphysics*.⁴⁶ But the foundation of philosophy remained in their view the *Organon*, and it is hard to believe, though given the state of our sources impossible to prove, that the intensive study of this in Syriac, in part or in whole, for four

centuries before their time, eclipsing all other aspects of the Greek heritage except Galen, was not to a large extent responsible for their high estimation of logic.⁴⁷ Certainly they may have been influenced by those currents in late antique thought, whether or not engendered by Christian mistrust of Plato, which exalted Aristotle the logician over Plato, but these too may have reached them through Syriac intermediaries belonging to that earlier Syriac engagement with logic, such as Paul the Persian's *Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy*.⁴⁸ What is certain is that Graeco-Syriac scholarship for two centuries before the foundation of Baghdad had been devoted to Aristotle virtually alone of the Greek philosophers, and primarily Aristotle the logician; that Hunayn and his circle devoted much energy to the translation of Aristotle's logic; and that the Syro-Arabic Baghdad philosophers of the tenth century (together with their pupil al-Farabi) established the supremacy of Aristotelianism in Islam over all other philosophical traditions. Avicenna had no sympathy for any tradition other than the Aristotelian,⁴⁹ though he had no hesitation in believing he could make an advance over what he found in it, and Avicennan Aristotelianism later found expression in Syriac in the work of Bar Hebraeus, most notably in his *Cream of Wisdom*. There is therefore continuity as well as change in the long history of the engagement of the Syriac people with philosophy.

NOTES

¹ P. Bedjan, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum* (Paris, 1890), p. 98; cf. the English translation in E. A. W. Budge, *The Chronography of Barhebraeus I* (Oxford, 1932), p. 92.

² See the important recent study of D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London and New York, 1998).

³ Ibid. 20.

⁴ Cf. S. Brock, "The Syriac Background to Hunayn's Translation Techniques," *Aram* 3 (1991), 139-162 [reprinted in Sebastian Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot, 1999), chapter XIV]; G. Strohmaier, "Hunain ibn Ishaq - An Arab Scholar Translating into Syriac," *ibid.* 163-170. Brock observes (151-153) that Hunayn's criticisms of Sergius do not oblige us to conclude that the latter was a "bad" translator or that Hunayn dismissed the philosophical translations of the seventh century; rather we should bear in mind that the Syriac language itself underwent some evolution between Sergius and Hunayn, and that Hunayn, so far as we know, wrote no *risala* on translations of Aristotle along the lines of that on the translations of Galen. Cf. also H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Les traductions du grec au syriaque et du syriaque à l'arabe à propos de l'*Organon* d'Aristote," in J. Hamesse and M. Fattori (eds.), *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale. Traductions et traducteurs de l'antiquité tardive au XIVe siècle* (Louvain-la-Neuve/Cassino, 1990), pp. 135-136.

⁵ Muslim engagement with Aristotelian logic is reported to have begun with Ibn al-Muqaffa'; on his work, see below (nn. 22-25).

⁶ Syriac text of the two letters: O. Braun, "Briefe des Katholikos Timotheos I," *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 4-11 (Letter 43, text and German translation); H. Pognon, *Une version syriaque des aphorismes d'Hippocrate* (Leipzig, 1903), xvi-xix (Letter 43, text and French translation) and xxi-xxv (Letter 48). The text has

been studied anew utilising two further manuscripts (London, BL Or. 9361 and Birmingham, Mingana Syr. 587) and provided with a fresh English translation and commentary by S. P. Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999), 233-246. In the following I cite the translation and paragraph sections of Brock. Timothy's references to the translation of the *Topics*: Letter 43.2 (Brock 235-236 with commentary 240-241), and Letter 48.8 (Brock 239 and commentary 246).

⁷ A. Mingana, "Timothy's Apology for Christianity," *Woodbrooke Studies* II (Cambridge, 1928), pp. 1-162; R. Caspar, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le catholicos Timothée et le calife al-Mahdi," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), 107-175; H. Putman, *L'église et l'Islam sous Timothée I* (Beirut, 1975), pp. 169-277 and Arabic sequence 7-51. Cf. J. M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)* (CSCO 420, Louvain, 1980), pp. 38-39.

⁸ Cf. the tabulation of the Syriac translations and commentaries of Aristotelian logical texts in S. Brock, "The Syriac Commentary Tradition," in C. Burnett (ed.), *Glosses and Commentaries on Aristotelian Logical Texts* (London, 1993), pp. 3-5, 11-15 [reprinted in S. Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos*, chapter XIII]; Hugonnard-Roche, "Les traductions," pp. 133-134.

⁹ The scribe of the "Old Arabic" (i.e. pre-Hunayn) version of the *Rhetoric* preserved in the Paris manuscript of the *Organon* employed a Syriac version in addition to two Arabic exemplars. Cf. M. C. Lyons, *Aristotle's Ars Rhetorica: The Arabic Version* (Cambridge, 1982), i-vi. In a forthcoming edition of Bar Hebraeus' commentary on the *Rhetoric* in his *Cream of Wisdom* (to be published in the series *Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus*), I shall present evidence which indicates that Bar Hebraeus employed a Syriac

version, derived from Greek, which is very similar to the Old Arabic version. The similarity between the two versions makes it likely that the Syriac version was also made in the time before Hunayn; it could well have been (as Lyons thinks) the *Vorlage* of the Old Arabic. O. J. Schrier, "The Syriac and Arabic Versions of Aristotle's Poetics," in G. Endress and R. Kruk (eds.), *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 259-278, esp. pp. 264-265, considers that the Syriac version of the *Poetics*—from which two Arabic translations were produced—may have been made by Ishaq ibn Hunayn.

¹⁰ Cf. Putman, *L'église et l'Islam*, pp. 85-86; S. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation," in N. Garsoian, T. Mathews, R. Thomson (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington D.C., 1982) [reprinted in S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984), chapter V], pp. 20-22, 25-26; H. Hugonnard-Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque dans la transmission de la philosophie grecque à l'arabe: le cas de l'*Organon* d'Aristote," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991), 188. The text of Sergius cited by Hugonnard-Roche (ibid.) also makes clear, however, that theology was *not* the only incentive for the study of logic. Logic, according to Sergius, was not only necessary for a true understanding of the divine books, but was also a necessary apprenticeship on the way to the mastery of all sciences.

¹¹ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 62, 67.

¹² Letter 43.2 (Brock 236 with commentary 241); cf. P. Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa'," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 14 (1933/4), 11-13 (who, however, located the letter in the reign of Harun al-Rashid; cf. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 61, n.1).

¹³ Cf. Putman, *L'église et l'Islam*, pp. 92-105.

¹⁴ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 62.

¹⁵ Letter 43.3 (Brock p. 236, commentary 241-242).

¹⁶ The compendium of Ibn al-Muqaffa' (on

which see further below) encompassed only the works of the *Organon* up to the *Prior Analytics*, like the earlier Syriac translations and commentaries; cf. Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa'," 1-11, 13.

¹⁷ In Letter 40 (edited with introductory study and translation by H. P. J. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu. Lettre de Timothée I (728-823) à Serge* (Rome, 1983), Timothy refers to his debates with a Muslim Aristotelian philosopher on the subject of God. Cheikho (ibid. 58-59) considers it quite possible that this character was a literary invention of Timothy. R. J. Bidawid, *Les lettres du patriarche nestorien Timothée I*, Studi e Testi 187 (Rome, 1956), p. 32, n. 2) suggested he may have been the al-Hašimi alleged by 'Abd al-Masih al-Kindi to have been the author of the "letter" (*risala*) "cited" by him and refuted in his celebrated "Apology" for Christianity against Islam, since the alleged Muslim al-Hašimi refers in that *risala* to religious discussions he has had with Timothy (cf. G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, II (Rome, 1947), p. 137). However, al-Hašimi too is probably a literary fiction, created by the Nestorian al-Kindi, whose "Apology" in all likelihood stems from the tenth century; cf. ibid. pp. 142-143, P. Kraus, "Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 14 (1933-4), 335-341, and Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides*, p. 38, n. 40.

¹⁸ On the importance in general of the Graeco-Syriac literary culture of the (primarily Syrian Orthodox) ecclesiastical and monastic circles of Syria and northern Mesopotamia for the early Abbasid translation movement, not least in providing a network of libraries and scholarly informants on which East Syrians such as Hunayn could draw, see the contribution of L. I. Conrad to the present symposium, as also his article "Varietas Syriaca: Secular and Scientific Culture in the Christian Communities of Syria after the Arab Conquest," in G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan. Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J. W. Drijvers*

(Leuven, 1999), pp. 85-105. Cf. also Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation," 23-25.

¹⁹ Letter 43.3-4 (Brock 236, with commentary 242), and Letter 48.8 (Brock 239).

²⁰ Letter 48.4-8 (Brock 238-239 and commentary 245-246).

²¹ Brock, "The Syriac Commentary Tradition," 5, 14.

²² Edited M. T. Danišpazuh, *Al-mantiq li-Ibn al-Muqaffa'* (Teheran, 1978). Cf. G. Endress, "Die wissenschaftliche Literatur," in H. Gätje (ed.), *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie II* (Wiesbaden, 1987), p. 420.

²³ Cf. Hugonnard-Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque," 203-204; Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa'," 8-9.

²⁴ Cf. M. W. Dols, "Syriac into Arabic: The Transmission of Greek Medicine," *Aram* 1 (1989), 45-52.

²⁵ Cf. Kraus, "Zu Ibn al-Muqaffa'," 13-14: "Das von uns nachgewiesene älteste Stadium der aristotelischen Übersetzungsliteratur im Islam ist nur im Zusammenhang mit der westlichen (syrischen oder alexandrinischen) Beschäftigung mit den aristotelischen Schriften zu verstehen," Hugonnard-Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque," 204: "Le contenu des matières étudiées dans l'épitomé d'Ibn al-Muqaffa' ... place, en outre, cet épitomé dans la tradition des résumés de logique, dont Paul le Perse et Athanase ont laissé des exemples en syriaque."

²⁶ Cf. R. Walzer, "New Light on the Arabic Translations of Aristotle," [originally published in *Oriens* 5 (1953), 91-142 but reprinted with additions in, and cited here from] R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 69, 81-88; F. E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus* (Leiden, 1968), 14, 23-25; A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn, 1922), p. 341.

²⁷ Text in Ibn Abi Usaibi'a, *'Uyun al-anba' fi tabaqat al-atibba'*, ed. A. Müller (Cairo/Königsberg, 1882/1884), II, pp. 134-135; German translation in M. Meyerhof, "Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, phil.-hist. Klasse 23 (Berlin, 1930), pp. 394, 405; English

in F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London, 1975), pp. 50-51. Similarly in al-Mas'udi, *K. al-tanbih wa'l-išraf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1894), pp. 121-122; English translation in S. M. Stern, "Al-Mas'udi and the Philosopher al-Farabi," in S. Maqbul and A. Rahman (eds.), *Al-Mas'udi Millenary Volume* (Aligarh, 1960), pp. 39-41.

²⁸ Cf. G. Strohmaier, "Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad—eine fiktive Schultradition," in J. Wiesner (ed.), *Aristoteles: Werk und Wirkung. Paul Moraux gewidmet*, II (Berlin, 1987), pp. 380-389; F. W. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* (Oxford, 1981), xcix-cvii; Hugonnard-Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque," pp. 206-207.

²⁹ See the balance of the Syriac material exhibited in Brock, "The Syriac Commentary Tradition," 3-5, 11-15.

³⁰ In addition to what is mentioned in the present article about Athanasius, George of the Arabs, Theophilus of Edessa, and Timothy, cf. on the role of the Baghdad Aristotelians up to Abu Bishr, Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, cvi-cviii.

³¹ Ibid.

³² This is Zimmermann's view (*Al-Farabi's Commentary*, xcix, n. 3; cx-cxii).

³³ As proposed by Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 83-95.

³⁴ J. Lameer, "From Alexandria to Baghdad: Reflections on the Genesis of a Problematical Tradition," in Endress and Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition*, pp. 181-191, esp. 189-191.

³⁵ M. Mahdi, *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969/2001), p. 43 (§ 53); Arabic text ed. J. al-Yasin, *Tahsil al-sa'ada* (Beirut, 1981), 38.15-17.

³⁶ The pre-Abbasid Syriac translations definitely known to the Baghdad Aristotelians were those by Athanasius of Balad of the *Prior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*, and that by Jacob of Edessa of the *Categories*. They also knew the Syriac translations of the *Prior Analytics* and the *Sophistical Refutations* by

Theophilus of Edessa, and those of all the books of the seven-volume *Organon* by Hunayn and his circle. Cf. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, pp. 67-69, 71, 79, 81-88. There is no clear evidence that they knew any other pre-Abbasid Syriac versions (such as the anonymous early ones of the *Categories*, *De interpretatione*, and *Prior Analytics*, and those of the same books by George of the Arabs), but it is of course possible that they did so but made no mention of them. The information contained in the Paris manuscript of the *Organon* as to what the Baghdad scholars knew of the earlier Syriac translations and commentaries cannot be assumed to be complete; what is recorded there is essentially a matter of chance. Cf. Hugonnard-Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque," 190-192, and "Les traductions," 134, 140-143. On the translations cited and mentioned in the marginalia of the Paris manuscript, cf. in addition to the articles cited above also Hugonnard-Roche, "Remarques sur la tradition arabe d'après le manuscrit Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, ar. 2346," in Burnett, *Commentaries and Glossaries*, pp. 19-28, and his "Contributions syriaques aux études arabes de logique à l'époque abbasside," *Aram* 3 (1991), 193-210.

³⁷ Cf. G. Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindi," in Endress and Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition*, pp. 43-76.

³⁸ According to the *Fihrist* he did write on the *Categories*, *De Interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Sophistical Refutations*, and *Poetics* (cf. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus*, 7(11), 12(13), 14(16), 17(20), 23(25), 28(29)), and he commissioned a translation (by Ibn al-Bitriq) of the *Prior Analytics* (cf. Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindi," 58). However these works (now lost) had little or no impact on later Arabic (or Syriac) logic.

³⁹ Cf. Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, cxxv.

⁴⁰ Cf. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, pp. 166-169.

⁴¹ The *De mundo*; cf. H. Hugonnard-Roche, "Note sur Sergius de Reš'aina, traducteur du grec en syriaque et commentateur d'Aristote,"

in Endress and Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition*, pp. 126-130.

⁴² Cf. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus*, pp. 49-52, 72-74; Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindi," 52-58.

⁴³ Cf. Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindi," 49-64.

⁴⁴ Cf. B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim II* (New York, 1970), pp. 592-593; Arabic text ed. G. Flügel (Leipzig, 1871-2), p. 246. 5-6, 11-12, 16-17, 19. On the significance of Yahya ibn 'Adi, pupil of Abu Bishr and al-Farabi, and his pupil Ibn Zur'ah (mentioned in the last reference of the following note) in the "cosmopolitan humanism" of the tenth century in Baghdad, see J. L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam* (Leiden, revised edition 1992), pp. 104-123, and the article in this symposium by Sidney H. Griffith.

⁴⁵ Cf. Dodge, *Fihrist*, pp. 607-608; Arabic ed. Flügel, p. 252. 16-17, 20-23.

⁴⁶ To a certain extent this is also true of the school's greatest pupil, the Muslim al-Farabi. Farabi's political philosophy, however, was based on Plato, not Aristotle, and his trilogy headed by *The Attainment of Happiness* includes *The Philosophy of Plato* as well as *The Philosophy of Aristotle*. Cf. recently M. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago, 2001), esp. pp. 29-46, and on possible Greek and Syriac precursors of al-Farabi in political philosophy, J. W. Watt, "From Themistius to al-Farabi. Platonic Political Philosophy and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the East," *Rhetorica* 13 (1995), 17-41.

⁴⁷ On the Syriac versions of the *Organon* definitely utilised by the Baghdad school, cf. above, n. 36. The earliest of these are the translations by Athanasius of Balad, but the Baghdad philosophers presumably knew (as did Hunayn) that Syriac logical studies went back before his time. They may have known, *inter alia*, Paul the Persian's *Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy*; cf. below and the following note. Hugonnard-Roche, "L'intermédiaire syriaque," 199-200 notes that while we are unable to determine whether or not Hunayn and Ishaq made use of the earlier Syriac versions in

their own Syriac translations of Aristotle, the fact that Hunayn knew very well the earlier Syriac versions of Galen makes it natural to suppose that he would also have taken account of those of Aristotle. The early Syriac commentaries on the logic of Aristotle, e.g. that by Sergius of Reshaina, mined the Alexandrian commentators on Aristotle for ideas; cf. on Sergius, Hugonnard-Roche, "Note sur Sergius de Reš-^ʿaina," 130-139, and on George of the Arabs, G. Furlani, "La versione e il commento di Giorgio delle nazioni all' *Organo aristotelico*," *Studi italiani de filologia classica* 3 (1923), 305-333.

In the Baghdad school the most widely used commentators were Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, according to Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, c-cv.

⁴⁸Cf. D. Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Baghdad," *Der Islam* 60 (1983), 231-267, esp. 253-255 on the importance of this treatise for the Baghdad Aristotelians of the tenth century; idem, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden, 1988), pp. 200-206.

⁴⁹Ibid. 286-289.

REVISITING THE SYRIAC ROLE IN THE TRANSMISSION OF GREEK SCIENCES INTO ARABIC



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INTRODUCTION

No student of Islamic intellectual history could talk seriously about his/her discipline without directly confronting the translation phenomenon that took place mostly during the eighth and ninth centuries, and through which almost all of the scientific legacy of earlier civilizations became part and parcel of the Islamic intellectual make up. Whether from Sanskrit, or from Pahlavi, Greek or Syriac, one can hardly name a text of science or philosophy that was not rendered into Arabic by the middle of the ninth century or thereabout.

By the same token, any intellectual historian who attempts to understand the circumstances of this translation phenomenon will certainly have to answer a set of questions that are still mired in myth and legend up till this very day. We know, for example, that by the middle of the eighth century or even earlier scientific and logical texts in particular were sought from the eastern domain of the Islamic empire, and only later, sometime during the first half of the ninth century, was the attention directed to the

western domain. This shift is further marked by the types of texts that were translated. First, there were those literary, logical, and scientific texts that were translated either directly from Sanskrit, or through the Pahlavi intermediary. And then, some fifty years later, that is during the first half of the ninth century, we find a recognizable shift to Greek scientific and philosophical texts, that were systematically translated into Arabic either directly from Greek or through the intermediary of the Syriac language.

For this occasion, I will focus on this latter phase only, for it seems to have enough puzzles of its own that could barely be touched upon in any detail in the time allotted to me. We all know that during the first half of the ninth century, almost all of the translations that were produced for what looked like a highly vibrant intellectual market, centered around the newly built city of Baghdad, were done from Greek into Syriac, from Syriac into Arabic, or from Greek into Arabic by Syriac speaking people. The Syriac language and the Syriac speaking community seem to take the center stage at this very point in time. Why was that, and how did that come to pass?

WHY TRANSLATE IN THE FIRST PLACE?

The common answers to this question are multiple, and I have no time to list them all, much less elaborate on their inadequacy. I can only single out the most important of them and quickly refute them in order to save time for the more interesting speculation that I would like to propose.

Most people attribute the upsurge in the translation activity during the eighth and the ninth centuries, and the concomitant intellectual blossoming that accompanied it, to the political shift around the year 750 AD from the Umayyad dynasty to the Abbasid.¹ But in order for this explanation to account for the intellectual production properly one has to base it on the structure and nature of the Abbasid dynasty itself, and to clearly distinguish this dynasty from the Umayyads who ruled for almost a full century before. In pursuit of that some have already gone as far as attributing this flowering of intellectual production to official Abbasid policy and ascribed to the Abbasid caliphs some type of Persian leanings that would account for their encouragement of the translation movement, a leaning that was not found among the Umayyads.²

There are many reasons why this proposition could be entertained. But the main flaw in it is that for it to work it should also explain why those Persian-leaning Abbasids abandoned the earlier Pahlavi translations and with the start of the ninth century began to systematically sponsor translations from Greek instead. Furthermore, they also have to account for the fact that a similar activity took place in Umayyad Spain, almost a generation or two after the eastern counterpart, without having the benefit of the Persian

leaning Abbasids and their official policy. Also, out of the hundreds of books that we know were translated from Greek into Arabic or into Syriac and then to Arabic, only a handful (at the most) were directly patronized by an Abbasid caliph. All the others, were actually paid for by bureaucrats in the government administration or by practicing scientists who were neither Persian themselves nor Persian leaning as far as we can tell. In sum, I am very suspicious of racial ideological explanations, and also suspicious of official political policy that favors the Abbasids at the expense of the Umayyads.

The other frequently cited explanation for the rise of science in early Islam is the contact between the nascent Islamic civilization and the earlier Hellenistic civilization, mainly through such cities as Harran, thought to be Syriac speaking and mostly pagan.³

There are many reasons why this explanation too merits some attention, and should not be rejected outright. But here too, the main flaw is that we do not know of a single scientific or philosophical book that was written in the city of Harran before those contacts took place. Furthermore, the city of Harran pre-dated the Muslim conquest, and if there was any high Hellenistic culture in Harran to be transmitted to the Islamic civilization why did that culture have to wait till Abbasid times? And then again, there were no such Harrans in Andalusia and yet a similar activity managed to appear under Umayyad patronage.

In addition, there is yet another set of problems that has to do with the nature of the translations themselves. If Syriac as a language and the Syriac-speaking community as a group are to be made responsible

for the transmission of Greek thought into Arabic, then why didn't this activity take place during Umayyad times? And more importantly, if we compare the translations that were made in pre-Islamic or early Islamic times, such as the translations of Sergius of Resh-`aina (d. 536) and Severus Sebokht (ca. 661) with the translations that were produced by Ḥunain Ibn Ishāq (d. 873) and his son Ishāq (d. 910), or by Qusṭā b. Lūqā (ca. 900), or Thābit b. Qurra (d. 901) to name a few, one finds a qualitative difference in the technical sophistication in the later translations that could not be found in the earlier ones.⁴ One would look in vain in the earlier period for anything similar to the translations of such works like the non-logical works of Aristotle, the Galenic or Hippocratic works, or more importantly the mathematical works of Euclid or the astronomical works of Ptolemy. Instead, one would find astonishingly little. Only paraphrases of such minor authors as Paulus Alexandrinus, Aratus, and Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* seem to have been produced.

NEW PROPOSAL

When I started thinking about these problems some forty years ago, I was at the time accumulating microfilms of scientific Syriac manuscripts that I could have access to, and I was then under the impression that Greek science and philosophy was first translated into Syriac and then into Arabic. In particular I was, and am still, looking for Syriac renditions of such mathematical and astronomical texts as Euclid's *Elements*, or Ptolemy's *Almagest*. After years of search, I was astonished to find that there were no such Syriac translations. The closest that I

could find was a small fragment that looked like a paraphrase of a few propositions of the first book of Euclid. But that turned out to have been authored by the thirteenth century polymath Bar Hebraeus and to have been based on the Arabic translations of Euclid's *Elements*, rather than the Greek, as was already established by Furlani in 1924.⁵ Similarly, Bar Hebraeus's *Sullāqā hawnānāyā*, which was published by François Nau in 1899, under the title *Ascension de l'esprit*⁶ turned out to be inspired by Arabic writings on the subject rather than the Greek as is evident from the heavy usage of Arabic technical terminology in the Syriac text itself.

I was then led to the conclusion that such sophisticated scientific texts were never translated into Syriac, for had they been available in that language someone like Bar Hebraeus who was consciously trying to establish a scientific and philosophical Syriac language would have been the first to use such texts. The fact that he used Arabic texts instead was enough to convince me that such translations did not exist in Syriac. Then the question of which books were translated into Syriac and which books were not—but were rather translated directly into Arabic—became an interesting problem by itself. And when connected to the earlier remark that the pre-Abbasid translations were less sophisticated, the only solution that could explain the difference in quality, was to attempt a different reading of the intellectual and social conditions that prevailed during the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties.

It was then that I proposed, some twenty years ago, that we should pay a much closer attention to the historical events that took place during the reign of the Umayyad ca-

liph `Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (rl. 685-705) when he Arabized the *diwan* and the currency of the empire. I then realized that the term *diwan* was up till then misunderstood as it was taken to mean simply some administrative register.⁷

A closer investigation of the matter revealed that the *diwan* indeed meant a much more complex administrative unit of government, which must have included among its activities such things as surveying of the land, care for public health, building of roads and bridges, division of inheritance and thus assessment of taxes, and so on, all requiring some elementary knowledge of basic science, a science similar to the one that was indeed encountered in the works of such authors as Sergius, Severus and George Bishop of the Arabs who all lived before Islam or during the Umayyad period.⁸

I then realized that by Arabizing the *diwan* the Umayyads put a whole group of people out of jobs. That group included mainly the Syriac-speaking community of historical Syria who were up till then monopolizing the government jobs on account of their knowledge of Greek. It was those people who knew the elementary sciences that were required by the *diwan* functions just mentioned, but also knew of the more sophisticated Greek sciences that they could resort to if need be, just as their Byzantine masters were doing all along. Greek authors like Paulus Alexandrinus, and his translator Sergius of Resh-`Aina knew how to approximate the longitude of the sun by crude techniques, but they both say that if one needed better precision one should go to Ptolemy's *Almagest* or his *Handy Tables*. They had no need to do so themselves as their jobs did not require such precision.

But once the *diwan* employees lost their

jobs as a result of the reforms of `Abd al-Malik, around the first quarter of the eighth century, they must have pushed their children to learn the most sophisticated Greek sciences in order to make themselves once more indispensable to the government, and at a level higher than that of the *diwan*. At that level they hoped to create a new monopoly. But this time the monopoly was to be based on the acquisition of superior knowledge and not on language alone as was done in the past. For that purpose some of the texts were translated into Syriac *only*, while at other times, and under the force of the events, translations had to be also made into Arabic which had by then become the language of government. There is much evidence that such attempts at monopoly were indeed tried.⁹ In that environment the new expert generation could easily compete and win against the new *diwan* employees who only knew the newly Arabized elementary sciences. The Syriac-speaking experts could easily capture the advisory positions that a caliph would need on account of their advanced knowledge of the more sophisticated texts. That is how the old Bakhtīshō' became the personal physician to the second Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr.

With this new interpretation of the intellectual consequences of the Arabization movement, I could explain why the translation movement flourished in the early period of the Abbasid times, and why the Abbasids simply reaped the benefits of the Umayyad reforms by having a more competent group of competing employees that they could keep around them as advisors. Generations of Bakhtīshō', Nawbakhts and the like kept those posts for almost a whole century passing their court jobs from father to son. In this environment elementary scientific texts

were no longer sufficient, and all employees who had any hopes of improving their lot had to acquire the more sophisticated texts. This explains why only at that time such texts as Euclid's *Elements*, and Ptolemy's *Almagest* were translated about four or five times during this period, each translation attempting to outdo the other and thus lend more power to its owner.

Once such activities were set in motion, new creative talents also began to appear, and they would in turn compete for the same jobs by conducting original research and at times find fault with the Greek legacy. All the evidence that we have supports the claim of a genuine intellectual revolution sweeping the empire from the ground up at this very time. And it was in this revolution that such competent Syriac-speaking employees like Ḥunain and his son could compete and outsmart everyone else. But by their search for excellence they truly, and probably inadvertently, generated the best science that

was ever produced in about seven hundred years, and truly resuscitated the classical Greek legacy that had been lying dormant during the Byzantine times from the second century on.

CONCLUSION

If the main outlines of the story I just painted were true, then we could explain the real role played by the Syriac-speaking community in early Abbasid times as the true generators of a competitive movement that in turn generated the Renaissance of the Greek classical legacy. It was those same people who made the Greek legacy available in Arabic, and thus managed to integrate it into the general Islamic intellectual environment. In this fashion they also managed to set in motion an ever-progressing process of scientific research that finally became part and parcel of the rise of modern science in Renaissance Europe.

NOTES

¹ One such argument is made by Dimitri Gutas in his *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London and New York, 1998).

² *Ibid.*

³ See, for example, the argument made by Max Meyerhoff, in "Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des philosophischen und medizinischen Unterrichts den Arabern," *Sitzungsberichte der Berliner Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Philologisch-historische Klasse, 1930.

⁴ For a glimpse of this phenomenon, see George Saliba, "Paulus Alexandrinus in Syriac and Arabic," *Byzantion* 65 (1995), 440-454.

⁵ G. Furlani, "Bruchstücke einer syrischer Paraphrase der 'Elemente' des Euklides,"

Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete 3 (1924), 27-52, 212-235.

⁶ F. Nau, *Le Livre de l'Ascension de l'Esprit* (Paris, 1899).

⁷ See, G. Saliba, "The Development of Astronomy in Medieval Islamic Society," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 4 (1982), 211-225, now reprinted in G. Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 51-65.

⁸ Now see the full development of this argument in G. Saliba, *al-fikr al-ilmi al-arabi, nash'atuhu wa-tatawwuruhi* (Balamand, 1998).

⁹ Note the famous accounts of Ibn Māsawaih refusing to teach Ḥunain ibn Ishāq medicine on account of the fact that Ḥunain was not from Jundisapur.

THE ANGELOLOGY IN THE *HEXAEMERON* OF JACOB OF EDESSA



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This paper¹ will consider the creation and nature of the angels in selected extracts from *memre* I and IV² of the *Hexaemeron* (*Hex.*) of Jacob of Edessa. As I shall demonstrate, Jacob's sources for this material are the Cappadocian fathers, in particular the *Poemata Arcana* (*PA*) of Gregory of Nazianzus,³ and the *Celestial Hierarchy* (*CH*) of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.⁴

Jacob (*ca.* AD 640–708) can be located at a time of extensive Hellenization in the Syriac-speaking world, which started in the fourth century and included a wave of Cappadocian influence, spreading from Byzantium to Edessa, the focus of Syriac intellectual life. Large numbers of Greek works—Aristotle and scientific summaries—were translated or re-translated.

Michael the Syrian⁵ and Barhebraeus⁶ tell us that Jacob studied at the monastery of Qenneshre, the intellectual centre of the West Syrian church in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. His teachers there included Severus Sebokht, and Athanasius of Balad, who provided texts in Syriac on logic, natural science and astronomy to assist the monks in their study in the *paideia*. With this intellectual preparation they were then to proceed to Scripture and the fathers,⁷ of whom the Cappadocians had particular

pre-eminence. Gregory of Nazianzus was included in a curriculum of books studied in the seventh century.⁸ George of the Arabs, who also studied at Qenneshre and completed Jacob's *Hexaemeron*, shows in his homily on Severus that the Cappadocians were seen as authoritative in theological matters:

[Severus of Antioch] left behind teaching from pagans, and he began to meditate upon the divine teachings. He had taken and read the writings of the godly pair, Basil and Gregory the bishops.⁹

Jacob produced seven cycles of legal decisions, made translations from Greek, wrote on grammar and biblical exegesis, and put together an exhaustive cosmology in his *Hexaemeron*,¹⁰ which conforms to the “scientific” model as described by Robbins in his study of Greek and Latin *Hexaemera*. The scientific writers, e.g. Basil of Caesarea, use Aristotle and other works while the non-scientific writers, e.g. Theodore of Mopsuestia, are more concerned with matters of theology and Christology.¹¹

The overall structure and contents of Jacob's *Hexaemeron* is based on that of Basil of Caesarea.¹² Both, as scientific hexaemeral writers, seek to bring together the

two traditions of Christian exegesis on Genesis and Greek philosophical speculation,¹³ but the tone of their work is dictated by their respective audiences: Basil is writing a series of Lenten sermons for a congregation whom he is eager to remind of humanity's place in the world,¹⁴ so he is more homiletic in tone, whereas Jacob is compiling an exhaustive cosmology which seeks to demonstrate the truth of the Mosaic account of creation in the light of Greek philosophy, and it is to be an inheritance which will be handed down in the church (*Hex.* 2r-v), so he is more scholastic and formal¹⁵ in tone and adds more scientific material from the most authoritative sources of his day.¹⁶

Discussion of the angelic creation takes place in the prolegomenon to the day-by-day examination of the Mosaic creation account (Basil *Hex.* 1.1-3¹⁷ and Jacob *Hex. memra* I). The classic pattern of the prolegomenon was formulated by Philo,¹⁸ and, as the hexaemeral genre developed, and as we see in Jacob, the section on the noetic world was expanded to include such discussions as the angelic hierarchy, the nature of the angels, and the fall of Satan. These were not obvious topics to discuss in the early stages of hexaemeral writing, as they do not occur in the Genesis account and were thought of as preceding the creation of the physical world in the six days, following Job 38:7, where angels are witnesses of creation.¹⁹

This paper will show how Jacob explains the angelic nature within the context of the wider picture of God, angels and mankind. These three natures are set in a triadic hierarchy which reveals aspects of their nature. It will be clear that Jacob is dependent on the Cappadocian fathers for his discussion of their creation, physical

bodies, propensity to sin, and the fall of Satan. The paper will conclude with a brief examination of the triadic hierarchy within the angels themselves, which is reliant on the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

It seems that Jacob has the *Poemata Arcana* of Gregory of Nazianzus in front of him as he writes, who is trembling²⁰ because he is dealing with a difficult issue: that of angelic nature and propensity to sin:

Gregory:

My heart, I ask what you will do now.
Reason trembles (tromeʿi logoʿ) to
enter upon the beauties of the heavenly world (*PA* 4.441a).

Jacob:

Concerning [the angelic creation]
[God] allowed one man—because of
the request of his brothers who
wanted to ... learn ... to speak about
what they have of [the spiritual crea-
tion] ... and also [he allowed] his hu-
man mind ... both to obtain the power
to stammer (ܬܠܬܠܬܐ) about the things
beyond his reason (ܡܠܬܐ) and dare to
stammer a little concerning the ...
Mind (*Hex.* 4r).

Jacob will attempt to continue the work of this source:

Come, so that we too may stammer
concerning these created and second-
ary minds and rays of the light, their
creator, according to our power in the
account concerning these things ... as
we are confident concerning the sense
of it, as we received the sense of the
account from him (*Hex.* 4r-v).

THE CREATION OF THE ANGELS

This preceded the physical creation described in Genesis, which, following Plato, was the start of time.²¹ All works of creation commenced at the time of God's choosing, thus Jacob, following Gregory, speaks of the initial state of the Mind as first engaged in self-contemplation, and then becoming engaged in motion when the Mind wills the expression of its creative activity through the Word:

Gregory:

God exercised his mind and objects came into existence complete with their forms. (*PA* 4.217a)

[God] was active in contemplating his own splendour of beauty ... the world-creating Mind was stirred (ܩܝܡܘܬܐ ... ܢܘܘܝܬܐ) and gazed within his mighty thoughts (ܢܗܡܫܐ) upon the forms of the world to come into existence later ... Thus he willed (ܗܩܠܐ) to establish intelligent nature (*PA* 4. 420-422a).

Jacob:

[God] was alone, bearing himself grandly in his magnificence (*Hex.* 4v). When he wished it, at once ... the work came to be ... the movement of his thought (ܡܠܚܘܬܐ ܕܢܗܡܫܐ) towards something ... has no delay in passing from something that does not exist to something that does exist ... Thus the Word—the offspring of the generative Mind (ܚܕܐܬܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܠܚܘܬܐ)—acted (*Hex.* 5r-v).

ANGELIC CORPOREALITY

The fundamental problem for Christian exegetes was that angelic bodies cannot logi-

cally be physical if their creation preceded the physical world. Total incorporeality, however, is an attribute of the Godhead alone,²² and so they are neither truly one thing nor the other. Those who wished to maintain the complete incorporeality of the angels could not avoid a suggestion of the slight and subtle body described by Tertullian, who said that the angelic substance is made of a light, spiritual material (*Adv. Marc.* II.8.);²³ Origen later maintained the ambiguity when he described them as “incorporeal... naturally fine and thin as if formed of air” to the extent that their subtle and light body is not perceived by the senses (*De Prin.* proem, 8). Thus when the angels were called spirits without flesh, this really meant that their bodies were composed of a material more subtle than our flesh, not that they were wholly incorporeal.²⁴

Gregory's cosmology is described by Moreschini as a “reformed Origenism” (omitting creation of physical world as a consequence of the angelic fall): thus the angels are without visible form (ܐܝܕܥܐ) (*PA* 6.439a), simple, noetic (ܢܗܬܐܝܬܐ), radiant, emanating not from flesh (*PA* 6.440a), pure (ܕܡܝܬܐ) (*Or.* 2, 76), immaterial (ܐܘܪܐ) and incorporeal (ܐܫܡܡܐܬܐ) (*Or.* 38, 9), subtle (ܠܝܦܬܐ) (*Or.* 31, 29).²⁵ However refined the angelic body might be, Gregory does not describe them as “bodiless” (ܐܫܡܡܐܬܐܝܬܐ), for they are not part of the Godhead.²⁶

Jacob maintains this ambiguity:

[They are] noetic beings (ܕܡܝܬܐܝܬܐ) comprehended with the intelligence alone, intelligible beings grasped with the mind (ܕܡܝܬܐܝܬܐ) alone, invisible (ܕܡܝܬܐܝܬܐ ܕܠܐ) beings observed with knowledge alone, wholly imperceptible beings that can barely be seen with thought alone. They are imma-

They are apparently capable of physical movement (although this very swift and light movement is not like movement on earth), which indicates that they must have some kind of corporeal nature, however subtle:

[They are] moving swiftly on high in heaven (*PA* 4.418a). They are nimble intelligences (now *eijɬɪ. ej ʌfɹoɪ*, ... running swiftly through the air (*di j hɪɹoV wka qeɹn-telV*), eagerly obeying God's great behests (*PA* 4.439a).²⁷

[They are] light, swift and ready of movement (قليل سقيم قليل) ... they pass by and journey easily both through each other and through the solid nature of bodies ... they fly to all ends swiftly when they are commanded (*Hex.* 6r-v).

For Gregory their physical nature is all a question of degree:

This intermediate positioning of the angels is echoed in *memra* IV, where Jacob likens the sun, stars and moon to God, angels and mankind:

Here we see a triadic hierarchy in terms of height,²⁹ composition of the elements (the sun is composed of fire, the lightest element, the stars of air, a heavier element than fire, and the moon, which is compounded of all four elements, is the heaviest and is the furthest from the sun) and receptivity to light and illumination. Nothing more is said about the physical nature of the angels except to confirm that “angelic nature is both simple and incorporeal” (*Hex.* 182v). Jacob is not here claiming that the angels are made of air any more than Gregory is seriously claiming that they are made of fire when he says “as fire and divine spirits they run swiftly through the air” (*PA* 6.440a) or made of ether when he states “in the second place, are the great servants of the first luminary, as close to the first Good one as the ether is to the sun; and in the third place, the air, which is us” (*Or.* 1.1.7).³⁰

ANGELIC MUTABILITY

The Cappadocians tried to incorporate this concept of mutability into a consistent doctrine of God, angels and mankind, but without Origen's conclusion that the physical world was created as a consequence of angelic sin, which denied the goodness of creation.³² They maintained, however, the Origenistic association of sin with fleshly passion because of their fundamentally Greek concept of sin, in which it is unthinkable to sin in full knowledge. Thus they associated sin with fleshly passion, yet asserted that the angels have no flesh,³³ so their intellect is unhampered by flesh, which makes their doctrine of angelic sin inherently inconsistent.³⁴

I would say that angels are immobile towards evil, if Lucifer's fall did not compel me to describe them not as immobile (akinhtoʊv), but hard to move (dusknhtoʊv) (*Or.* 38.317b).

Gregory:

If, however, simple angelic beings are at all capable of sin, then it cannot be composite nature as such which causes sin. Although Gregory was obviously reluctant to admit it, there is no logical possibility of being "almost sinful" any more than there is of being "almost physical:" the angels stand on the same side as man in being subject to change, with God alone on the other side.³⁵

I want to state and determine that these beings are mutable and prone to evil, moveable in will, and perhaps also in nature, because only one is completely in everything and every way immutable (لَا يَتَغَيَّرُ) in nature ... Thus in conclusion, it is necessary

that the account considers that they are mutable (ܡܬܠܝܠܐ) in nature like creation (*Hex.* 14r-v).

Despite this, they are immutable because (i) God has overcome this by the divine gift of immutability, despite their natural mutability as created beings and (ii) they have the freewill to choose whether to move and in which direction:

They are by their nature mutable (ܡܬܠܝܠܐ), as created beings, but they are immutable (ܡܬܠܝܠܐ ܠܐ) and immortal from the goodness which was given to them by their creator, so that they are both immutable in nature,³⁶ but changeable in will³⁷ if they wish (*Hex.* 6r).

It is with God's unceasingly support that they are capable of steadfast contemplation of him:

With the guidance of his care and in the illumination of his goodness, they obtain substance and firm stability, and the eternal and unmoving propensity ... to fix their gaze towards the brilliance from his light ... and they remain immutable and firm towards his glory (*Hex.* 7v).

Thus they are both mutable and immutable, and this paradox perhaps echoes classical "monophysite" doctrine: one nature in Christ, divine and human.

Jacob clearly wishes to preserve a larger distance between God and creation,³⁸ which is generally characteristic of the Cappadocians. The angelic creation "resembles God as much as it is possible" for creatures to be like the creator" (*Hex.* 6v), so the gulf between the creator and creation is emphasized. Jacob, furthermore, consistently seeks

to emphasize God's overall control of the cosmos: throughout the *Hexaemeron*, even though purely physical explanations are given for natural phenomena like rainfall, God is ultimately responsible: nothing happens without his command. Each *memra* starts by reminding the reader that all is created by, and is dependent on, God. The omnipotent God has overcome this matter of their mutability.

This gift of God and the exercise of freewill³⁹ echoes Gregory of Nyssa's description in *Con. Eun.* 1.22 of the angels as

perfect, but their perfection is contingent, depending on the grace of God and their own wills. Their will necessarily moves towards something. Created intelligible nature stands on the border between good and the reverse, so as to be capable of either ... it is more or less in the heights of excellence only in proportion to its removal from the evil and its approach to the good.⁴⁰

THE FALL OF SATAN⁴¹

The doctrine of angelic sin, which culminated in the fall of Satan, was an attempt by Christians in the second century to explain the presence of evil in a world created by God, who is good and therefore unable to create evil (cf. Plato, *Tim.* 29e-39a).

The fall is not described in the Genesis account, and so writers such as Origen⁴² used Isaiah 14:13 (on fall of the Day Star, son of Dawn), which indicated that pride had been Satan's downfall. This interpretation became normative, appearing in Basil (not in his *Hexaemeron*),⁴³ Gregory of Nazianzus and Jacob,⁴⁴ whose description of the fall is based on the *Poemata Arcana* and

expanded with material from other Cappadocian works.⁴⁵

Satan fell from the highest point of creation, where he dwelt among the highest heavenly lights, to the lowest point, the depths of the earth, and lost thereby access to divine enlightenment:

Gregory:

Thus it was that first of all Lucifer, raised on high (for he aspired to the royal honour of the mighty God, though already granted outstanding glory), lost his radiant splendour and fell to dishonour in this world, becoming total darkness (Skotov), rather than God ... Although of light composition, he yet slipped to this lower earth ... he did not slip alone when his pride (uþriV) ruined him (PA 6.443a.53-444a79).⁴⁶

He who was first among the heavenly lights and who by his insolence forfeited his glorious light (PA IV. 419A).

Jacob:

[One of them] fell and was mutable and turned away from his position and became the adversary and rebel against God ... [He was] with the Cherub ... he shone brightly among the fiery stones, and like the morning star he was shining and radiant among all the rational (ܡܠܬܝܬܐ) stars receiving the divine light... When pride⁴⁷ (ܐܝܫܬܝܬܐ) and haughtiness sickened in his will (ܡܝܬܝܬܐ) and with an intellect hostile to God, he said ... "who is divine like me?"⁴⁸ ... He was struck down from his mountain by God ... [and] became dark (ܡܠܬܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܐ) and was deprived of angelic contemplation and receptivity to the light and knowledge of God. He was cast out

on the earth ... and was called Satan ... he was [transformed] from light to dark (Hex. 13r-14r).

The darkness deprived Satan of angelic understanding of God, just as the darkness of physicality, which is at the opposite end of the cosmos, is a barrier to the human soul or mind:

Gregory:

The soul... for all its heavenly form, has endured mingling with that which is earthly, like light hidden in a cave (PA 7, 446a)

Jacob:

How can he who is imprisoned and confined in darkness (ܡܠܬܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܐ) and mud ... and cannot gaze or receive even a little light, seek the word of enlightenment which is remote and does not partake of darkness? ... how may he go out from the clay and from the darkness which surrounds the human mind? (Hex. 3v).⁴⁹

It is important for Jacob to emphasize that angels have free will, as Satan has chosen to turn from God and the other angels have learnt from this:

When they saw [Satan's] fall and that he was condemned to darkness and ignorance ... they became firm, stable and more vigilant, for it is usual for this to happen ... also among us, that many things are corrected and reformed out of fear of being chastised (Hex. 14v).

THE ANGELIC HIERARCHY

The angelic hierarchy, as first devised by Pseudo-Dionysius is made up of nine orders, divided into three ranks. The only scriptural

basis for this hierarchy is the biblical names, which Pseudo-Dionysius arranged according to his own inventiveness in etymological word plays.⁵⁰ As seen below, Jacob uses this hierarchy, correcting the orders and adapting the word plays as, perhaps, seems fit to him.

The divine illumination descends from the Godhead through the angelic ranks to mankind, which thereby ascends through divinization (*CH* 120b-168b). This image of light being passed down is reflected in Jacob:

[They] first receive the bright light which goes out to them from the great Light and first Mind and they teach one another spread out the flashes of the intellect to those who come after them (*Hex.* 9r-v).⁵¹

The first level in the following table contains those heavenly beings which are nearest us, and the third, those who are highest and nearest to the revelations of God:

<u>Pseudo-Dionysius</u> (<i>CH</i> 200D-201A)		<u>Jacob</u> (<i>Hex.</i> 8v-9r)	
1.			
Angels	aggel oi	Angels	ܐܠܗܐ
Archangels	apcaggetvoi	Archangels	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
Principalities	arconteV	Principalities	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
2.			
Authorities	ejousiāi	Authorities	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
Powers	dunamēnoi	Thrones	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
Dominions	kuriothtoī	Dominions	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
3.			
Thrones	qronoi	Powers	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
Cherubim	ceroubim	Cherubim	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
Seraphim	serafim	Seraphim	ܐܠܗܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

Jacob has clearly replaced the Powers with the Thrones, thereby raising the status of the Powers. This may be a decision made

on an etymological basis: he seems to emphasize the superiority and might inherent in the very name “Powers”:

The Powers [are] the leaders of the companies, perhaps because they are superior to many, or because they have great and valiant power, strength and might. From this they are very rightly ordained the powerful ones, who are described as having power, as the psalmist Spirit handed down to us⁵² (*Hex.* 10r-v).

The *CH*, on the other hand, describes the Powers as looking “undeviatingly towards the transcendent Power which is the source of all power” (*CH* 240a), which does not dwell on the nuances of the name itself.

Jacob perhaps felt justified in demoting the Thrones because the *CH* did not offer a suitably convincing explanation for their position in the order nearest God. There is no such implication of superiority in the name of the Thrones; merely of stability and transcendence:

The title of the most sublime and exalted thrones conveys that in them there is a transcendence over every earthly defect, as shown by their upward-bearing toward the ultimate heights, that they are forever separated from what is inferior, that they are completely intent upon remaining always and forever in the presence of him who is truly the most high, that, free from all passion and material concern, they are utterly available to receive the divine visitation, that they bear God and are ever open, like servants, to welcome God (*CH* 205d).

Jacob, on the other hand, compares the Thrones to earthly thrones and seems, thereby, to make them less impressive than the Powers:

[The Thrones] are renowned as those who rest (ܡܨܬܝܚܝܢ) and give honour, as

the throne is of repose (ܡܨܬܝܚܝܢ) and honour among us (*Hex.* 10r).

The above descriptions of the ranks reveals another change Jacob makes to the material: although he uses mostly the same word play found in the *CH*, while Pseudo-Dionysius tends to show through word play that the ranks are inferior versions of God, Jacob uses the same word play to show that they are superior versions of mankind. Jacob is perhaps both showing some imagination here and making a point: having established earlier in the *memra* how alike they are to God (“the minds ... are like God ... secondary lights, images and exact likenesses of the first light” [*Hex.* 4r]), he now wants to emphasize their closeness to mankind, to illustrate their role as intermediaries, located between the divine and the human.

Thus the *CH* emphasises the intermediary function of the Archangels between the Angels and Principalities (*CH* 257c-d), while Jacob compares them to leaders among mankind: there are leaders of the angels, just as there are among us leaders of men (*Hex.* 10r); the Principalities turn toward the ultimate Principle (*CH* 257b), or correspond to “intelligent principles” (*Hex.* 10r) on the earth; the Authorities resemble “the source of authority” (*CH* 240a), or “various authorities on earth, both great and small” (*Hex.* 10r); the Dominions “receive ... the semblance of that true Dominion” (*CH* 237c), or may be compared to those “in high estate of power” whom we call “lords” (*Hex.* 10r).

For the remaining ranks, however—the Angels, Cherubim and Seraphim—Jacob keeps close to the explanation in the *CH*, clearly considering they need no change: the Angels are so named because they were “sent” from God;⁵³ the Cherubim have

“fullness of knowledge” (*CH* 205b), or an “abundance of intellect” (*Hex.* 10v); and the Seraphim are “fire-makers”, that is to say, “carriers of warmth,” who are superior beings, closest to God, and disperse darkness (*CH* 205b-c), or “fervent and burning (ܫܪܦܝܢ ܕܥܡܪܢܐ) and are destroyers of evil matter,” nearest to God, and lighter and more shining than the lower orders (*Hex.* 11r).

CONCLUSION

Basil’s *Hexaemeron* made only brief mention of the spiritual creation, but such discussion was usual in hexaemeral writing by the time of Jacob, and so, as we have seen, he consulted the recognized authoritative sources for his material: Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Poemata Arcana* and Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchy*, with additional material from the Cappadocians. His use of the *CH* resembles his use of sources such as Theophrastus’ *De Lapidibus*, in that he includes all the lists of phenomena that

he can find in his efforts to be as exhaustive in his cosmology as possible. He does, however, alter many of the descriptions of the orders to highlight the intermediary role of the angels between God and mankind (e.g. they are noetic like God, but the leaders of angels—the archangels—are, in the role that they play, like leaders of men), which emphasizes the relationships between the levels of hierarchy of divine, angelic and human nature he found in the *PA* and related Cappadocian sources. This triadic hierarchy is developed and refined in Jacob’s discussion of the luminaries, in which God’s exalted position at the farthest reaches of creation is symbolized by the sun, but the specific mention of a hierarchy of mutability in the *PA* is replaced by the assertion that the omnipotent God has achieved the impossible: he has overcome a natural tendency to sin which is inherent in all created nature. With this selective use of hierarchy, the life-giving and illuminating nature of God is thereby symbolized and the great division between creator and creation is maintained.

NOTES

¹Jacob of Edessa, *Iacobi Edesseni hexaameron seu in opus creationis libri septem*, ed. and trans. I.B. Chabot & A. Vaschalde, CSCO 92/97, Syr. 44/48 (Louvain 1928/1932). This paper was given in Toronto and Leiden, and I would like to thank the participants at both occasions, and in particular Dirk Kruisheer for his helpful comments with an earlier draft.

²*Memra* I deals with the angelic creation and nature (2r-17r), and scriptural references to the angels (17r-44v). *Memra* IV deals with the creation of the luminaries on the fourth day of creation.

³Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata Arcana*, ed. and trans. C. Moreschini & D.A. Sykes (Oxford, New York 1997).

⁴Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste*, ed. and trans. G. Heil, SC 58 (Paris 1958).

⁵*Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, vol.2, ed. J.-B. Chabot (Paris 1899-1910), pp. 445-446.

⁶*Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum*, vol.1, eds. J.B. Abbeloos & Th. J. Lamy (Louvain 1872-1877), pp. 289-293.

⁷D. Miller describes the foundation and educational programme of the Qenneshre monastery briefly in "Jacob of Edessa: A Seventh Century Intellectual," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day*, eds. K.D. Jenner and R.B. ten Haar Romeny (MPIL 14; Leiden; forthcoming). I am very grateful to him for sending me a copy of his paper.

⁸*The Life of Rabban Bar 'Idta*, ed. E.A. Wallis Budge (New York 1976), pp. 175-176 (trans).

⁹George, bishop of the Arabs, *A homily on blessed Mar Severus, patriarch of Antioch*, ed. K. E. McVey, CSCO 530/531, Syr. 216/217 (Louvain 1993), p. 9.

¹⁰For a survey of his writings and career as a bishop, cf. R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* (Princeton 1997), pp. 160-168.

¹¹F.E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: a Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago 1912), pp. 36-37. In the Syriac world the scientific writers were Western Syrians and the non-scientific were the Eastern Syrians, although there was some overlap over time.

¹²*Basile de Césarée. Homélie sur l'Hexaéméron*, ed. and trans. S. Giet, SC 26 (Paris 1950) (Greek version), and *The Syriac Version of the Hexaameron by Basil of Caesarea*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson, CSCO 550-551, Syr. 222/223 (Louvain 1995). It is likely that Jacob used both versions.

¹³Cf. N.J. Torchia, "Sympatheia in Basil of Caesarea's Hexaameron: a Plotinian Hypothesis," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996), 363.

¹⁴Cf. Ph. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley 1994), pp. 319-320. Basil, for example, reproves his listeners who would rather go back to their work (*Hex.* 3.1).

¹⁵He follows the classical dialogue form: his account is solicited by his pupil Constantine's request for a more detailed description of the position and nature of the angels "for enlightenment and instruction" (*Hex.* 2r).

¹⁶Cf. M. Greatrex, "Jacob of Edessa's Use of Greek Philosophy in his Hexaameron," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day*, eds. K. D. Jenner and R. B. ten Haar Romeny (MPIL 14; Leiden, forthcoming); and *idem*, "Jacob of Edessa's use of Theophrastus' *De Lapidibus*," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001), 391-394.

¹⁷The Greek version of Basil's *Hexaameron* is more detailed here, adding references to their rational natures and names (*Hex.* 1.5).

¹⁸It includes (a) an introduction concerning the necessity of a detailed exposition of the Genesis account; (b) God as the active cause of creation; (c) the problem of time; (d) the noetic world; and (e) the goodness of the creator and the wisdom of the architect (Philo, *De Opificio Mundi*, ed./transl., F. H. Colson & G. H. Whitaker

(Loeb Cl. Libr. 226. London 1962), pp. 1-25. Cf. E. ten Napel, "Some Remarks on the Hexaemeral Literature in Syriac," OCA 229 (1980), 59.

¹⁹Ten Napel, "Some Remarks," 59. The School of Theodore of Mopsuestia was said to have discussed the angelic hierarchy, although in the Syriac fragments of his Genesis commentary there is nothing before Gen.4:15. Cf. T. Jansma, "Théodore de Mopsueste: Interprétation du Livre de la Genèse," *Le Muséon* 75 (1962), 63-92.

²⁰Although there is some rhetoric in this trembling, Gregory is certainly concerned by the possible moral effects of his discourse on his readers; cf. Moreschini & Sykes, *Poemata Arcana*, p. 201.

²¹Plato thus asserted that time was made together with the universe and did not previously exist (*Tim.* 38b). Aristotle, on the other hand, maintained that the world was ungenerated and eternal (*De Caelo* 283b26, 279b18). In the *Hexaemera* eternity (that in which God and the angels dwell) is distinguished from time (which is of the world), and the statement is made that time did not exist before creation (cf. Philo *Op. Mun.* 8,5; Origen, *Hom. in Gen.* 147a, Ambrose, *Hex.* 132a; Augustine, *De Gen. ad Litt. Libri XII* V.5). Thus Basil says that the foundation of heaven and earth is the beginning of the course of time (*Hex.* 1.3, Syr. 5, transl. 4). Cf. Robbins, *Hexaemeral*, p. 7.

²²Cf. Origen, *De Prin.* 1.6.4.

²³Origen says that they are immaterial and incorporeal in *Comm. in Jo. Tom.* I.17.

²⁴J. Turmel, "L'Angélologie depuis le Faux Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue d'Histoire et de Littérature Religieuse* 4 (1899), 413-414.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Moreschini & Sykes, *Poemata Arcana*, p. 201.

²⁷Gregory also says elsewhere that they "traverse all space, readily present to all at any place through their zeal for ministry and the agility of their nature" (*Or.* 2.31). Basil also describes them as able to move from one place to another in a supernatural way (*De Spiritu Sancto*, 168 c-d).

²⁸They "pass by and journey easily both through each other, and through the solid natures of bodies, since they do not cut them, nor are cut by those in the form of bodies, because of the subtlety (ܡܠܬܬܐ), incorporeality, and immateriality of their natures, which are not crushed together in any small or narrow place, nor do they extend widely and spread out in what is spacious" (*Hex.* 6r-v).

²⁹For the problems with astronomy that this placing of the sun creates and how Jacob maintains that the sun, representing God, must be the farthest luminary, cf. M. Greatrex, "Jacob's use of Greek Philosophy."

³⁰The angels and mankind are positioned according to their relationship to God, just as ether and air is to the sun. It is clearly an analogy: angels are better receptors of God than men, as ether receives the sun's light more purely than the air. Angels are no more made of ether, than are men made of air. He seems to follow the tradition of Christian writers claiming that the angels are composed of the fifth element, ether, so that they can be part of the universe without participating in the materiality of the other four elements, but he only uses ether as a metaphorical way of explaining the spiritual nature of angels. See A. Richard, *Cosmologie et Théologie chez Grégoire de Nazianze* (Paris 2003), p. 147.

³¹Form and matter cannot exist apart (*gen. et corr.* 2.335b9ff). The Platonic notion of eternally pre-existing matter (*Tim.* 30a1-6) would be problematic for Gregory, who would not want God to be limited by working with material he did not create himself. See Moreschini & Sykes, *Poemata Arcana*, pp. 145-146.

³²B. Otis, "Cappadocian Thought as a Coherent Thought System," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), 102. Gen.1:1 ("In the beginning, God made heaven and earth") according to Origen signified two creations: "heaven" was the prior spiritual creation (*De Prin.* II.9.1) and the "earth" was created as result of their sin and was where they had their corporeal life (*De Prin.* III.5.4). Their diversity (the ranks of angels,

mankind and devils) was due to the degree of their fall (*De Prin.* II.4.6).

³³ Otis, "Cappadocian Thought", pp. 110, 98.

³⁴ Basil asserts that angels cannot say that Jesus is anathema, but this is what they did, so they are balanced between vice and virtue, but he also says that angels possess perfection not by progress but immediately at their creation (*Hom. on Psalm 32.* 333c-d). Cf. Otis, "Cappadocian Thought," p. 111.

³⁵ See Moerschini & Sykes, *Poemata Arcana*, p. 206.

³⁶ They are "forever kept in the good and alter only towards the good" (*Hom. 6 on the Canticles* 886 c-d).

³⁷ Thus Jacob maintains that their mutability is both inherent in their created nature and their own choice, while Basil says that "evil is from self-determination, not by nature" (*Hom. Quod Dues non sit auctor mali* 9.349 d-352a).

³⁸ The first cause "is invisible, incomprehensible, and above the knowledge, power and comprehension of all rational creatures" (*Hex.* 3v).

³⁹ Cf. Origen: "These rational creatures had free will and could turn towards or away from God" (*De Prin.* II.4.6), and Plotinus: "living beings which have a self-willed movement incline sometimes to the better things, sometimes to the worse" (*Enn.* 3.2.4.36-37).

⁴⁰ In the same way, Basil asserts that holiness is not part of the essence of the angels, but is accomplished in them through the communion of the Spirit (*De Sp. Sanc.* 16.38). Elsewhere he contradicts himself by saying that they received their sanctification with their first constitution as a mix in their essence (*Hom. in Ps. 32.* 333c-d).

⁴¹ Otis, "Cappadocian Thought," p. 114.

⁴² *De Prin.* I.4.5.

⁴³ *Hom. quod Deus non sit auctor mali* 8.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, however, differed from the other two Cappadocians in that he preferred the explanation of jealousy (*Or.* 6), as did Philoponus: "If the angels were made at the same time as heaven and earth, it would be amazing that the devil stayed for five days in his own order, and he immediately at the beginning fell because of

great spite and envy of mankind" (*De Op. Mun.* 1.13). Gregory of Nazianzus elsewhere describes a similar account of the fall: "Now that angelic power ... was created and able to choose what it liked by the movement of its own free-will. It closed its eyes to the Good ... apprehended the opposite of good. It is that which is called envy ... He was like a rock which once it has been broken off from a mountain ridge is carried down headlong by its own weight" (*Or.* 6). In Syriac literature, Narsai describes the fall of the initially good devil, whose motive was the envy of man (*Homélies de Narsai sur la création*, ed. and trans. Ph. Gignoux (Turnhout 1968) IV, pp. 223, 101-125; I, 221-240. Cf. L. Schlimme, "Die Lehre des Jacob von Edessa vom Fall des Teufels," *OC* 61 (1977), 50-52.

⁴⁵ Schlimme, in his translation and examination of this passage, sets Jacob in the context of other references to the fall, but does not try to identify his possible sources. Neither does he mention the *Poemata Arcana* in his survey of Satanologies, although it has a detailed account of Satan's fall and, as will become clear, gave Jacob the basic outline. Schlimme also states that Jacob's light and astral terminologies in his descriptions of angelic nature are influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius. The final part of this section will demonstrate that these descriptions (the angels as "secondary lights, rays of the first light," and "lights and shining lights") are, in fact, taken from Gregory's account, although Jacob would also have been familiar with such concepts from his reading of Pseudo-Dionysius. He observes that Jacob is the first Syriac writer to formulate a systematic Satanology (Schlimme, "Die Lehre", 47).

⁴⁶ This account was first set out by Origen: "You were in the midst of the fiery stones ... your heart was elated because of your comeliness ... I cast you forth to the earth before kings (Ezekiel 28:11-19) ... Lucifer, who used to rise in the morning ... 'I shall ascend into heaven' (Isaiah 14:12-22) ... If, as some think, he was a nature of darkness, how is Lucifer said to have existed before? ... at one time he was light (Luke 10:18) ... he had his glory turned to

dust” (*De Prin.* 1.4.4-5).

⁴⁷ A similar description is found in Gregory of Nyssa: pride and envy “like a rock, torn asunder from a mountain ridge” dragged him away “from his original natural propensity to goodness” (*Or. Cat.* 7).

⁴⁸ Gregory says elsewhere that God “made Lucifer dark, who fell down because of arrogance, for he could not tolerate that he, being divine, should not also be thought of as a God” (*Or.* 36. 269).

⁴⁹ This light and dark dichotomy came from Origen: “Those plunged into the darkness of profound ignorance have been placed beyond the reach of any light of understanding” (*De Prin.* II.10.8). This ignorance is a result of “the fetters of flesh and blood ... on account of its participation in such material substances” (*De Prin.* 1.1.5). Basil must have had this in mind when he exhorts his listeners: “how could a soul be pre-

pared to encounter appropriately the things which we are about to hear? Only when it is purified of the passions of the flesh” (*Hex.* 1.1). Gregory of Nazianzus also sees “the darkness of this world and the thick covering of the flesh” as “an obstacle to the full understanding of the truth” (*Or.* 2.28).

⁵⁰ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Text and an Introduction to their Influence* (NY, Ox., 1993), p. 65

⁵¹ Gregory of Nazianzus similarly says that they are “illuminated thence with the purest illumination, or one in one degree and one in another, proportionately to their nature and rank” and “enlighten others by the overflowings and largesses of the First Light” (*Or.* 2.2.30).

⁵² Ps.102:20 LXX

⁵³ From ḁḡḡelw (*CH* 260.A). Interestingly, Jacob uses the root ܝܠܡ (*Hex.* 9v) rather than ܝܠܡܝܬ.

APHRAHAT AND PHILOXENUS ON FAITH



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This essay will explore a topic that has long been recognized but not necessarily pursued in any great detail. Or rather, to be more precise, it will examine one small part of a very large topic that could be pursued in many different ways. Over a century ago, in his critical edition and translation of the *Ascetic Discourses* of Philoxenus, the great British scholar of Syriac E. A. Wallis Budge suggested that Philoxenus wrote his work as a supplement to that of Aphrahat. It is quite clear that Budge himself thought that Aphrahat, with his extensive prooftexting and polemic against Judaism, suffered in the comparison with Philoxenus, whose thought, says Budge, is “clearer and deeper”, and whose command of the Syriac language is obviously superior.¹ I have no intention of disputing the latter claim, since there are many passages in Aphrahat that translators wish were less ambiguous. As for the claim of greater depth in the writings of Philoxenus, this too may be true but I would want first to distinguish depth from complexity, and note that beyond the polemics and prooftexting in Aphrahat a depth of moral and spiritual conviction reveals itself that is not diminished for lack of philosophical sophistication.

Such general claims, however, are beyond the scope of the present essay. Rather, as a preliminary foray into a comparison of two substantial early Syriac texts, I would like to draw attention to each of our authors’ notions of faith, as well as certain concepts that are directly related to faith in each text, and to explore a few of the continuities and discontinuities across the hellenistic divide that stands between them. As Sebastian Brock has pointed out, “From the fifth century onwards... such had become the prestige of the Greek world and of Greek ways of thinking and conducting theological discourse, that from about AD 400 onwards no Syriac writer fails to come under strong Greek influence of one sort or another.”² Aphrahat wrote his only surviving work, conventionally called the *Demonstrations* because they make use of extensive ‘demonstrations’ of truth from scripture, between 337 and 345 C.E., thus predating the beginning of this hellenization.³ Philoxenus probably wrote his *Discourses* some time at the end of the 5th century, about 150 years after Aphrahat. Both authors were ascetics, but Aphrahat represents a form of asceticism that is not yet monastic; as far as we can tell, the women and men who had taken vows of celibacy in Aphrahat’s church

were not separated from worldly affairs in the comprehensive way that later monasteries would require. I will look at each author in turn and then reflect on the similarities and differences in their notions of faith. In particular, I will look for evidence of ways in which Philoxenus has consciously 'supplemented' and/or perhaps corrected Aphrahat's account of faith.

The prominent role that faith plays in the structure of the *Demonstrations* cannot be denied. Faith is the topic of the first demonstration, where Aphrahat's starting point is the metaphor of faith as a building. This particular building is unique in the fact that Christ not only serves as its foundation and capstone, but also lives within it as divine king. In honour of the king, the house of faith needs to be properly adorned, and Aphrahat supplies a long list of virtues, none of which, he says, can be obtained without faith. It is interesting to note that our ascetic author mentions virginity only in sixth place, after "pure fasting", "pure prayer", love, almsgiving, and humility. Many more virtues are then listed after virginity. The phrases "pure prayer" and "pure fasting" have strongly ethical connotations for Aphrahat, so that the best kind of fasting is abstaining from wickedness, while the best kind of prayer is showing compassion to those in need. As he says in demonstration 4 ("On Prayer"):

Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, and provide for the poor: this is prayer... Watch out, my friend, that, when an opportunity for giving rest to the will of God comes to you, you do not say, 'The time for prayer is at hand. I will pray and then I will act.' For while you are trying to finish your prayer, the opportunity for bringing

about rest will have slipped away from you, and your ability to bring about the will and the rest of God will have been diminished. Through your prayer you will be guilty of sin. However, if you bring about the rest of God, it will be [considered] prayer.⁴

Here we have an activist spirituality that may not always be associated with the ascetic life.

Behind all of the virtues that Aphrahat says are facilitated by faith lies purity of heart expressing itself in good works. This is the meaning of the adjective in the phrases "pure prayer" and "pure fasting". Thus the gold, silver, and precious stones which in Paul's formula survive the testing of judgement, are identified as the "good works of faith".⁵ These are the good works which adorn the house of faith in which Christ dwells. Aphrahat's demonstration on faith closes with a reminder to the reader that only a small sample of the resources available in scripture have been utilized. A brief discussion of the parable of the sower then follows. "When you have read and learned the works of faith," (and by this he means, 'When you have explored further the scriptural examples of the good works of faith'), "you will be like," he says, "that ploughed land upon which the good seed fell, which produced a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold. And when you go to your Lord, he will call you a good, diligent, and faithful servant, who, because of his great faith, enters into the kingdom of his Lord."⁶ Here faith is no abstraction, but rather is called "great" because of its resulting good works, which are modeled in scripture.

Besides this link between faith and good works, to which we will return shortly, there are two further dimensions to faith that

Aphrahat emphasizes in this first demonstration. First, faith is what makes possible any supernatural act of power on the part of God's people. After a long list of biblical examples of such supernatural acts, Aphrahat exhorts the reader to "draw near to faith... since it has so many powers".⁷ No connection is made here with good works; faith is portrayed simply as the means by which God's power is let loose in the world. Secondly, faith can be expressed in propositional terms, and Aphrahat does just this in section 19 of the first demonstration. Faith affirms that God is Creator of all things, including humans in God's own image. Faith also affirms the basic elements of salvation history, which for Aphrahat include the giving of the Law to Moses, the giving of the Spirit to the prophets, the sending of Christ into the world, as well as baptism and the resurrection of the dead.

This simple creed is followed immediately by a list of the works of faith. Unlike the previous list earlier in the demonstration, these works of faith are all avoidances, whether of false religious practices (Jewish or pagan), sins of the flesh, or sins of the spoken word. The idea that faith could exist on its own without any accompanying moral or spiritual transformation is quite foreign to Aphrahat. If faith can be expressed in propositional, supernatural, and moral terms, it is the last category that he seems most interested in. Acknowledging God's existence and actions in history must lead to a corresponding response to God's will in the life of the individual. Or, as Aphrahat puts it in one passage, "[F]irst a person has faith, and when he has faith he loves".⁸ This conviction on the part of Aphrahat can be seen in a number of key passages from later demonstrations.

For example, following Jesus' teaching in the gospels, the second demonstration argues that all of the commandments found in the Law and the Prophets are included in the twin commandments of love for God and love for neighbour, both of which are found in the Law itself. Aphrahat reiterates his conviction that faith is required to fulfill these two all-important commandments when he says that "through faith true love is established".⁹ It is as if once faith determines that God exists, it then asks what God's will is, which leads to the keeping of the two commandments of love. An interesting addition to the metaphor of faith as a building in which Christ dwells is given near the end of the second demonstration:

Faith is placed upon the rock of the structure, and love represents the beams of the structure, and through them the walls of the house are held together. But if a defect is found in the beams of the house, the whole structure will fall down. It is the same with love when dissension is found in it: all of faith falls. Faith was not able to drive away jealousy and controversy until the love of Christ came, just as a structure cannot be well-built until the walls are held together by beams.¹⁰

Here we have a qualification of the power of faith, in contrast to the examples of supernatural power unleashed by faith in the first demonstration. The edifice whose construction begins with faith cannot be built up without love.

Further examples of Aphrahat's emphasis on the good works of faith are found in his polemic against Judaism. In the course of his argument against the need for physical circumcision, the appeal is made to the

standard early Syriac theme of the circumcision of the heart. But before this theme is explicitly mentioned, he says that "circumcision is of no use without faith," and then, a few lines later, adds the statement that "when the Law was not kept, circumcision did not benefit" the Israelites.¹¹ We may conclude from these two formulations that when Aphrahat thinks of faith, he is thinking of the observance of the Law, now defined, as we have already seen, in terms of love for God and neighbour. Just as the physical rite of circumcision has been replaced by an internal disposition, so too the Jewish Law, for Aphrahat, is now defined by what is taken to be its essence. When circumcision of the heart is first mentioned, it is equated with submission to the Law. Aphrahat says, "When the Holy One saw that they said, 'By this we live: we are descendants of Abraham and circumcized', yet they did not bend their stiff necks in submission to the Law, he said to them through the prophet, '*Circumcize the foreskin of your heart, and do not stiffen your necks again.*'"¹² Here, what Aphrahat is calling the Law does not include the requirement of circumcision. In contrast to physical circumcision, the circumcision of the heart cannot be performed without faith expressing itself in love, which is the true submission to the Law.

Likewise, in his argument against Sabbath observance, Aphrahat internalizes what he sees as a merely external observance. "The Sabbath is no benefit," he says, "to the wicked or murderers or thieves, but [only] to those who choose what God desires and who keep their hands from what is evil. God lives in them and dwells in them..."¹³ This construction is parallel to the claim that circumcision without faith is useless, and also

echoes the idea that Christ lives in the house of faith that is adorned with good works. Abraham kept the Law but did not keep the Sabbath, and was justified through faith. In short, faith justifies precisely because it leads to the keeping of the Law.¹⁴ Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were justified, says Aphrahat, not because of literal Sabbath observance but because they followed the moral commandments of God: a prime example is Joseph's refusal to commit adultery with Pharaoh's wife.¹⁵ Upright behaviour is required of true faith.

In demonstration 14, church leaders in Seleucia-Ctesiphon are subjected to harsh criticism because they fail to obey God's Law, which they claim to preserve. They are more concerned with flattering titles than good works, says Aphrahat, but this is not all. It is clear that in his opinion, these leaders (or at least some of them), are guilty not only of negligence but also of acts of injustice:

There have arisen leaders among our people who have forsaken the Law and have adorned themselves with evil. They have acquired possessions, and greed has conquered them. They have lent at interest and demanded advance interest, and none [of them] remembers that it is written, "*Do not take a prepayment [of interest] or a profit,*"¹⁶ and, "*Whoever wishes to live in the tent of the Lord does not lend money at interest*"...¹⁷ There are at this time men who lead through coercion and pervert justice. They are respecters of persons, [who] declare innocent the guilty, and condemn the innocent. They love riches and hate the poor. They feed themselves and scatter the flock. The world has regard for them. They love bribes, excommu-

nicate truth, hate admonition, and love impiety. They hate the humble but love those who are haughty, proud, and boastful. In their days the light has grown dim, the salt has lost its flavour, doctrine has been obscured, and the Law has grown cold.¹⁸

They are being criticized not for lack of commitment to an ascetic lifestyle, but for moral lapses. Implicit in this criticism of their failure to observe God's Law (which here seems to be equated with scripture) is a questioning of the authenticity of their faith.

Our final passage dealing with faith and good works makes this clear. It is final for Aphrahat as well, placed as it is near the very end of his work. In fact, the *Demonstrations* have at least two endings. Since they are arranged as an alphabetic acrostic, the twenty-second demonstration was originally intended to be the final word. Near its end, Aphrahat provides a list of all the demonstrations, and declares, "this is my faith that is written in these chapters; I have laid it out from the beginning and written it [down]. Faith is the foundation, and on faith [rest] the works that are proper to it." Another demonstration was written, however, and the passage of interest to us also comes near its end. In both cases one senses that Aphrahat is consciously returning to the subject with which he began: faith and the good works that must accompany it. A strong claim is made in this twenty-third demonstration: no acknowledgement of God is genuine if it is not accompanied by the keeping of God's commandments:

If a person believes that there is one God, but does not do what God commands, [this belief] that there is one God is not established in him... It is

clear that whoever does not keep the commandments of God has denied him, for the Lord of the commandments is not established in him... For the person who believes that God judges the murderer does not murder, and in the person who murders, it is not established that God exists... The person who believes that God judges thieves does not steal, and in the person who steals, it is not established that God exists. All the commandments are likewise.¹⁹

It is quite clear, then, that faith and good works are inextricably linked in the thought of Aphrahat. Not only in the metaphor of the house of faith that must be adorned in order for Christ to dwell within, but also in his emphasis on the proper observance of the Law, our author is at pains to emphasize that true faith cannot exist without expressing itself in good works, or, if you will, acts of love. This observance of the Law is only possible for the one whose heart has been circumcised. As an aside, one could hardly ask for clearer evidence that Aphrahat did not know the New Testament Letter of James, or else he surely would have quoted its famous formula, 'faith without works is dead.'

I would like to make one last observation before we turn to Philoxenus, and that is that the most likely candidate for another virtue of fundamental significance for Aphrahat, beyond faith and love, is humility. Like faith and love, it is given its own demonstration, the ninth. The long descriptions of the humble found in that demonstration cannot be easily summarized, but it is precisely the sheer quantity and intensity of material which suggests that humility should be placed alongside faith and love as major

virtues in the *Demonstrations*. In one passage, Aphrahat returns to the metaphor of the Christian life as a building, and says that “[t]he Restful and Humble One lives in the person in whom humility is found, and he becomes a dwelling place for Christ.”²⁰ Likewise, in a detailed description of the characteristics of the humble, it is affirmed that they have “received the good seed which is from their Lord... Their seed yields fruit a hundredfold, since it is watered by the spring of life. Humility is planted in the midst of them, and it causes the fruits of faith and love to grow.”²¹ We have already noted that at the end of his demonstration on faith, Aphrahat equates the good works of faith with the fruit of the good seed planted by Christ. Here the same theme reappears, only now humility is added to the mix, which suggests that, like faith and love, humility is of fundamental importance for Aphrahat. I shall be returning to this theme later.

Let us turn now to Philoxenus. At first, as we begin to read the “Prologue” to his *Ascetic Discourses*, the atmosphere seems similar to what we encountered in Aphrahat. “In his living gospel,” Philoxenus says, “our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ invited us to draw near in wisdom to the work of keeping his commandments, and to lay firmly within ourselves the foundation of his discipline, so that the edifice of our life and character might rise up straightly.”²² Here at the beginning we encounter the same metaphor of the ascetic life as a building constructed through the observance of God’s Law. And just as Aphrahat is clear that no faith in God is true unless accompanied by good works, so too Philoxenus has harsh words for those whose read but do not act: “[A]s for the man who is constant in reading yet far from

action, his reading is his own condemnation. He is all the more deserving of punishment, since while he listens every day, he also mocks and is contemptuous every day, and is thus like... a corpse which has no feeling.”²³

Like Aphrahat, Philoxenus makes use of Paul’s discussion of Christ as the foundation upon which gold, silver, and precious stones may be laid. Several new elements enter the picture at this point, however. Whereas for Aphrahat the gold, silver, and precious stones are not differentiated but all equally represent the good works of faith, for Philoxenus gold represents faith itself (rather than its works), while silver stands for the “restraining of the passions and desires.”²⁴ As for the “precious stones” of Paul’s metaphor, Philoxenus takes these to represent not only love, peace, hope, and pure thoughts, but also, as he puts it, “an understanding which keeps silent in trembling before the inexplicable and inexpressible mysteries of God.”²⁵ In this exegesis of 1 Corinthians 3, we witness a basic shift away from the relatively simple moral context that Aphrahat reflects to a more ascetic orientation in Philoxenus.

The complexity of this ascetic orientation, when compared to that of Aphrahat, quickly becomes apparent. Just as a builder follows a blueprint, or a farmer follows the seasons, or a teacher follows a curriculum, so too, says Philoxenus, those who have set out to follow Christ need to know what to expect. The beginning, middle, and end of the period of youth each bring their own challenges, and the same holds true for adulthood and old age. This nine-fold division of the ascetic life is then elaborated in a long discussion of the various feelings generated by various spiritual activities, in order

to know, as Philoxenus puts it, “all the ways, and paths, and signs, and marks of the mysteries of this divine manner of life.”²⁶ Every vice can be countered with an appropriate virtue; every spiritual sickness has its proper antidote. And all of this is merely the prologue! Aphrahat’s *Demonstrations* are completely devoid of anything close to this progressive view of the unfolding of the ascetic life. In its place, however, is a certain moral immediacy that is lacking in the discussion of Philoxenus.

An obvious structural similarity between the two authors is that they both begin their discussions with an emphasis on faith. The first three of the thirteen *Ascetic Discourses* of Philoxenus deal with this theme. Running throughout his discussion, and the first major point to be made by Philoxenus, is the idea that faith does not question God’s word or will or ways. True faith “trusts that God is, and does not inquire. It affirms his words, and does not investigate his nature. It listens to his words and does not judge his actions. For faith trusts God in everything that he says without requiring testimonies and proofs of the certainty of his word, the certain proof that it is God who speaks being sufficient for him.”²⁷ Like a young child who does not question the words of his parents, so too the person of faith accepts God’s words without first asking if they are trustworthy. These words, of course, are found in scripture, for both of our authors. Aphrahat would say that the scriptures are the treasury of the wisdom of God, mediated by Christ.²⁸ Philoxenus compares the scriptures to the sun, which only the spiritual eye can see.

And what does Philoxenus think that faith can affirm from scripture? It affirms, he says, that God is eternal, self-existent,

and three Persons in one Nature. Each of the three Persons, moreover, are eternal and indivisible. That these things are so can be affirmed by faith, and only by faith. Why they are so cannot be determined, however; faith knows its own limits. A faithful reading of scripture also yields information about spiritual beings, according to Philoxenus. Thus faith teaches that these spiritual natures experience sensation, understanding, and desire in all parts of their being, and “each one of them,” he says, “is wholly and entirely one thing in all its motions.”²⁹ It is no coincidence that Philoxenus turns to the nature of God and created spiritual beings as examples of what faith teaches, since for him the defining characteristic of faith is that it can see the spiritual world. The power of faith is such that it can make God himself cease to exist, in a manner of speaking, since without faith no one can perceive God.³⁰ Likewise, faith sees the kingdom of heaven and is already living within it, enjoying the spring of life and the company of the saints.³¹ What is more, in Philoxenus we encounter the idea that faith perceives even worldly things in a spiritual way. Thus the physical buildings within which the faithful meet on earth is a reflection of the community of saints in heaven, and all the objects that are used in worship represent spiritual realities.³²

But Philoxenus goes beyond merely saying that faith can perceive the spiritual world. It might be said, in fact, that he divinizes faith itself by describing it as a quality of God that God shares with his creatures. In a passage that reminds us of Aphrahat’s list of the miracles wrought by faith, Philoxenus states succinctly that “faith gives the power of God to human beings.”³³ Like God, it has the power to bring things into

and to take things out of existence. "Faith is the tongue of God, and the command of the Creator," says Philoxenus.³⁴ There is nothing that faith cannot see through, except the Creator. Philoxenus even goes so far as to say that faith itself is self-existent, which amounts to saying that faith is an aspect of God's own nature that somehow extends to his rational creatures.³⁵ Just as God experiences no uncertainty, so faith is never unsure of its commands or decrees. Though God, in his self-existent nature, may be described as remote from and beyond everything, yet God is always near to faith, and vice versa.³⁶ This is another way of expressing the idea that faith is a dwelling-place for God.

Once again, as in the case of his description of the stages of the ascetic life, we are witnessing, in this discussion of faith, another example of the way in which Philoxenus introduces a degree of complexity not seen in Aphrahat. It is clear that faith has a higher status, or at least more refined powers, in the later author. We have already seen how faith itself, rather than any good works arising from it, is equated with the gold of Paul's metaphor. Another shift in thinking is reflected in the fact that for Philoxenus, Christ establishes faith as a foundation for the spiritual life, whereas in Aphrahat the foundation is always Christ himself. This too is a reflection of the higher status that Philoxenus assigns to faith. His discussion of the construction of the tower of the spiritual life almost certainly recalls Aphrahat's, yet here it is faith that cannot be shaken by the waves and winds rather than the rock of Christ. It was because he foresaw its great power that Jesus, says Philoxenus, made faith the foundation of the Church. While I do think that this is a shift

in emphasis that is worth noting, it must be kept in mind that, for Philoxenus, the whole point of Christ establishing faith as the foundation is so that those who become his disciples will be able to follow his "rule and conduct of life."³⁷ Faith is the foundation only because it looks naturally to Christ for instruction. Furthermore, if faith itself is a kind of extension of God's nature, then having faith as a foundation is little different from having Christ play that role. Thus the contrast between the two authors may be less than it first appears.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that when Philoxenus describes the construction of the building within which Christ lives, faith plays a more prominent role than is the case with Aphrahat. "Faith is the foundation, and faith is the architect," says Philoxenus. "Faith is laid out under the structure, and it rises up with the structure."³⁸ There is no mention of Aphrahat's metaphor of love as the beams which hold the structure of faith together. Where Aphrahat had said that faith would fail without love, Philoxenus asserts that "faith is everything, for faith is sufficient to be everything."³⁹ Or, as he puts it in another passage, "as the foot is guarded from stumbling-blocks so long as the eye is open to see, so will the soul be remote and free from sloth as long as the sight of faith is whole, and it looks upon and regards heavenly things."⁴⁰

In addition to a greater prominence for faith in the building up of the spiritual life, and as can be seen in the reference to sloth in the previous quotation, Philoxenus places faith in a more fully-formed ascetic orientation. After a long list of wrong motives for entering the ascetic life, Philoxenus urges his readers to "flee from such things as these, and let faith alone be the cause of

your going forth from the world... [W]hen your actions have received strength from your faith, which is laid down first, and which has brought you from the world, all things will be completed and preserved by faith in sound condition.”⁴¹ In contrast to this emphasis on faith as that which takes a person out of the world into ascetic seclusion, Aphrahat associates faith primarily with the observance of God’s law of love, to which is added a further set of ascetic commandments.

If it is faith that provides the foundation for the ascetic life, what is it that keeps the eye of faith healthy? ‘Simplicity’ (ܐܫܬܚܬܐ) Philoxenus would say. Simplicity is that quality of soul which allows faith to receive and to respond to God’s word without asking questions. In one place it is even said that “simplicity is anterior to faith because faith is the daughter of simplicity.”⁴² The opposite of simplicity is cunning (ܐܫܬܚܬܐ) which is the tendency of the mind to be constantly entertaining contrary opinions, not really affirming any of them. Simplicity is a very important concept for Philoxenus, since without it, a kind of false version of faith develops, faith’s evil twin, if you will, which is not directed toward the truth of God but toward error. In one important passage Philoxenus says that “desire is the governor of faith”,⁴³ and without simplicity one cannot have the proper desire for God’s truth. We catch a trace of Greek philosophical theology when we hear Philoxenus say that the virtue of simplicity reflects the simplicity of God himself, “because there are in him,” he says, “neither structures nor parts of limbs.”⁴⁴ When God first created humans, he implanted simplicity within them. Each person, depending on their desires, can choose to either rise up from this starting

point and acquire the wisdom of the spiritual world through faith, or descend into the world of cunning and error.⁴⁵

The term (ܐܫܬܚܬܐ) does occur in Aphrahat, but only twice, and in neither case is it given any particular significance. I would argue that the analogous term in Aphrahat is (ܐܫܬܚܬܐ) ‘humility’. I would add, however, that the concept of humility in Aphrahat is much richer than the concept of simplicity in Philoxenus. Perhaps this is as it should be; it would not do, after all, to have a highly complex notion of simplicity! At any rate, the virtue of humility attracts some of Aphrahat’s most impassioned prose. One of the first things he says about humility is that it brings forth “integrity” (ܐܫܬܚܬܐ) which Philoxenus sometimes uses as a synonym for “simplicity”. It is clear, however, that the role assigned to humility is multi-faceted in a way that simplicity is not in Philoxenus. If faith affirms both the existence of God and the obligation to follow God’s Law of love, it is, for Aphrahat, humility that gives life to this affirmation. As he puts it, “The humble are able to do all these things that our Saviour taught.”⁴⁶ From the wealth of description that Aphrahat provides, I can afford to focus on only one set of prominent and related themes.

First of all, there is a recurring refrain which emphasizes the connection between humility and meditation on God’s Law, which is referred to five times in various ways. Two representative passages are as follows:

[The humble] journey and walk on the straight and narrow path, and they enter by the narrow gate of the kingdom. Their inclination compels them to keep the Law, upon which they

meditate at all times...Their names are written in the Book of Life, and they pray and groan so that they might not be blotted out from it... And on their hearts they write the Law of their Lord, so that they will be inscribed in this eternal book.⁴⁷

Love humility: it is like a wall as strong as iron. Love modesty: it is like fruit which causes the one who eats of it to be satisfied and rejoice and exult. All trees are discerned by their fruit. The thoughts of a person are discerned through his mouth. The sage perceives the intellect of each person he approaches through his tongue, since from the overflow of the heart the lips speak. The person who fears God says good things at all times, and he learns and recites the Law of his Lord. And if he hears the words of a mocker, he does not stand up to listen to them. He speaks every good word, but damaging words are not in his mouth, since his mind does not conceive anything hateful. In this way is the person who meditates on the Law of his Lord discerned.⁴⁸

This fits into the fundamental paradigm of faith expressing itself in acts of love out of obedience to divine Law. In this sense humility can be equated with circumcision of the heart. The role that humility plays in receiving God's word is similar to that assigned to simplicity by Philoxenus.

Secondly, and related to the point just mentioned, for Aphrahat it is humility more than anything else that makes possible the acquisition of wisdom. As he says in one passage:

Instruction is found with the humble, and their lips pour forth knowledge.

Humility brings forth wisdom and understanding... The humble one drinks instruction like water, and it enters into him like oil into his veins. The humble one humbles himself, but his heart rises to the highest height; his mind meditates on the place where his treasure lies. The eyes of his physical sight behold the earth, but the eyes of his intelligence behold the highest height.⁴⁹

In contrast, Philoxenus emphasizes the role of faith in penetrating the mysteries of divine wisdom, but of course this is a faith infused with simplicity.

Thirdly, a strong connection is established by Aphrahat between humility and the avoidance of conflict, particularly verbal conflict:

[R]un after humility, which overcomes jealousy (ܐܝܢܐ) and removes controversy (ܐܝܢܐ) and join silence and moderation to it, so that you might be free from great controversy... Do not open your mouth in anger, and do not allow your face to be filled with rage. Do not make an exhibit out of your tongue, lest evil fruit be born from it. Let not the beginnings of anger be born in you, lest a multitude of thoughts be conceived from their children" [9.9].⁵⁰

The role of jealousy as the antithesis to humility is paralleled in Philoxenus by the contrast between simplicity and cunning.

Despite these similarities between the two authors, I am inclined to think that the differences are more substantial. Beyond the common ground of the need for receptivity to God's word which is taken to imply a commitment to the ascetic life, the two au-

thors are quite different. Philoxenus gives the impression that morality is secondary to ascetic observance, while Aphrahat tends to see morality and asceticism side by side as obedient responses to God's Law. Aphrahat's notion of faith is directly related to the moral requirements of this Law, while Philoxenus tends to see faith in much more exalted terms as an extension of God into rational creatures, a power that enables us to see into the spiritual world and the divine mysteries. Faith allows us to understand something of the nature of God and of spiritual beings, who are described using Greek philosophical terms. The introduction of the term 'simplicity' (ܐܝܬܐܢܐ) to describe a precondition for the operation of faith is at best an imperfect parallel to Aphrahat's notion of humility.

In Philoxenus, the emphasis on simplicity goes hand in hand with continual warnings against trying to analyze mysteries that only God understands; it is enough that we accept God at his word. For his part, Aphrahat does not seem overly concerned that his readers will engage in subversive intellectual activity. To be sure, he argues at length against what he takes to be the Jewish theology of his day, which evidently held some attraction for some of his readers. But this concern does not translate into any warnings against illicit theological investigations. In fact, it is only in his final demonstration that Aphrahat issues two warnings against theological excess. First, at the beginning of the demonstration, he places his own attempts to respond to theological questions in the context of the fear of God and purity of heart: "[T]hough investigation into words is good in order to learn and understand," he says, "what is better is to fear God, the Giver of words, with a pure heart."⁵¹ Then,

near the end, he returns to the same theme:

We are of Adam, and here [on earth] we know little. This alone we know: there is one God, one Christ, one Spirit, one faith, and one baptism. To say more than this is of no use to us. If we speak we will fail, and if we investigate we will be harmed. There are many who have forgotten the path and left the road and travelled in a trackless waste, in a path of difficulties. They have conceived and meditated on corrupt words; they have prophesied falsehood and forsaken God. They wish to understand, but they have lost discernment. Their intelligences are in the dark, groping in the gloom.⁵²

Clearly Aphrahat does share with Philoxenus a sense of the dangers of wrong thinking, but the fact that these warnings are so infrequent in Aphrahat points to a rather different environment.

It is well-known that Philoxenus was heavily influenced by Greek Christian authors, in particular Evagrius of Pontus and Cyril of Alexandria, but the list could be extended much further. At first, when we read material such as the *Ascetic Discourses* and find no substantial christological arguments along with an emphasis on keeping God's commandments through faith, we may get the impression that Philoxenus is fairly close to Aphrahat in approach to Christian spirituality. We have seen, however, that substantial differences underlie the similarities. There can be little doubt that these differences are mainly a product of the hellenization of the Syriac tradition, though one has to make detailed comparisons to know just what this means. A more extensive look at Philoxenus would reveal just how much he is indebted to Greek theology.

In the context of discussion of the contrast between knowledge of creation and spiritual knowledge in Philoxenus, André de Halleux makes the following observation:

Ces considérations nous paraissent révélatrices du caractère «intellectualiste» ou «idéaliste» d'une mentalité philosophique que notre auteur héritait du monde grec; si Philoxène peut indifféremment dépeindre la *recapitulatio* des créatures en Dieu dans un langage à la fois ontologique et gnoséologique, c'est bien qu'il considérait l'être spirituel comme le réel par excellence, et l'essence de l'être spirituel comme la pensée...⁵³

A little later in his study, de Halleux elaborates on this claim in the following way:

Notre auteur partage avec toute l'antiquité la conviction foncière que le semblable n'est connu que par son semblable et que, partant, le monde spirituel étant par essence simple, c'est-à-dire sans composition ni parties, sa connaissance n'est accessible qu'à un être également spirituel, capable de

saisir son objet dans l'unité d'une intuition globale... Cette inéluctable inadéquation ne saurait être surmontée que par l'établissement d'un contact direct entre l'âme spirituelle et le monde de l'esprit, esquivant pour ainsi dire, la médiation du monde matériel et des sens...⁵⁴

These observations from de Halleux are congruent with my own small investigation into the differences and similarities between our two authors. I am inclined to think that Budge was not quite correct in stating that Philoxenus wished merely to 'supplement' Aphrahat. Rather, it would appear that part of his aim was to produce a discussion of the ascetic life that corrected Aphrahat's imperfect notion of faith. Of course, it is a matter of personal, and perhaps communal, preference as to which author is more appealing today. And yet both authors take their place in the development of the Syriac tradition, a development whose very existence makes us realize that the task of interpretation, and more fundamentally, the task of finding a place for faith in our complex human lives, continues.

NOTES

¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Discourses of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbôgh, A.D. 485-519*, vol. II (London, 1894), lxxiv. All quotations of Philoxenus below are from Wallis Budge's translation, henceforth referred to as "*Discourses*".

² Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamzoo, 1992 [rev. ed. of the 1985 original]), p. 14.

³ This is not to say that Aphrahat was not influenced by some aspects of hellenization, but only to affirm that his religious ideas show no familiarity with Greek Christian authors. Hervé Inglebert has argued, for example, that echoes of Greek historiography can be found in Aphrahat's fifth demonstration ("On Wars") (see "Aphraate, le 'Sage Persan': la première historiographie syriaque", *Syria* 78 (2001), pp. 179-208).

⁴ Dem. 4.14. *PS I*, 169.19-21; 172.6-14. See also dem. 3.8 for a discussion of "fasting from wickedness", which prioritizes ethics over asceticism. All translations of Aphrahat are my own.

⁵ Dem. 1.12. *PS I*, 29.10-12.

⁶ Dem. 1.20. *PS I*, 45.11-17.

⁷ Dem. 1.18. *PS I*, 41.23-24.

⁸ Dem. 1.3. *PS I*, 8.21-22.

⁹ Dem. 2.11. *PS I*, 72.17-18.

¹⁰ Dem. 2.16. *PS I*, 84.14-24.

¹¹ Dem. 11.2. *PS I*, 472.18-19, 26-27.

¹² Dem. 11.5. *PS I*, 481.4-10.

¹³ Dem. 13.13. *PS I*, 569.25 – 572.3.

¹⁴ For an insightful discussion of Aphrahat's use of Paul, and the way in which he has departed from the apostle's view on Law and grace, see Stephen S. Taylor, "Paul and the Persian Sage: Some Observations on Aphrahat's Use of the Pauline Corpus", in *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, eds. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield, 1998), pp. 312-331.

¹⁵ Dem. 13.8.

¹⁶ Leviticus 25:36

¹⁷ Psalm 15:1,5

¹⁸ Dem. 14.3. *PS I*, 577.1-22.

¹⁹ Dem. 23.62. *PS II*, 129.5-23.

²⁰ Dem. 9.9. *PS I*, 429.2-4.

²¹ Dem. 9.4. *PS I*, 413.20-24.

²² *Discourses*, 1.

²³ *Discourses*, 3.

²⁴ *Discourses*, 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Discourses*, 15.

²⁷ *Discourses*, 26.

²⁸ Cf. Dems. 10.8; 14.35; 22.26.

²⁹ *Discourses*, 31.

³⁰ *Discourses*, 32.

³¹ *Discourses*, 36-37.

³² *Discourses*, 60-61.

³³ *Discourses*, 35.

³⁴ *Discourses*, 38.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Discourses*, 36.

³⁷ *Discourses*, 45.

³⁸ *Discourses*, 47.

³⁹ *Discourses*, 48.

⁴⁰ *Discourses*, 68.

⁴¹ *Discourses*, 67.

⁴² *Discourses*, 80.

⁴³ *Discourses*, 64.

⁴⁴ *Discourses*, 77.

⁴⁵ *Discourses*, 101.

⁴⁶ Dem. 9.6. *PS I*, 420.13-15.

⁴⁷ Dem. 9.4. *PS I*, 416.17-19; 416.27-417.2; 417.4-6.

⁴⁸ Dem. 9.11. *PS I*, 432.22 - 433.12.

⁴⁹ Dem. 9.2. *PS I*, 409.8-11; 409.25 - 412.4.

⁵⁰ Dem. 9.9. *PS I*, 429.13-16, 21-26.

⁵¹ Dem. 23.1. *PS II*, 4.4-8.

⁵² Dem. 23.60. *PS II*, 124.10-21.

⁵³ André de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog: sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain, 1963), 427.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 438.

A NEW SYRIAC-UIGHUR INSCRIPTION FROM CHINA (QUANZHOU, FUJIAN PROVINCE)



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INTRODUCTION*

The Chinese town of Quanzhou is located between the cities Fuzhou and Xiamen in Fujian province, bordering the bay of Quanzhou in south-east on the downstream of the Jinjiang river. Its old name in Chinese was Citong 刺桐, phonetic transcription of Arabic زيتون *Zaitūn* “olive, olive-tree,”¹ (see also زيت *zayt* “oil” and compare with the root زيت *zayyata* “to coat”).

Emmanuel Diaz, a 17th century Catholic missionary working in China, was the first to notice the existence of a cross in Quanzhou. He mentioned it in his book *The Comment on the Nestorian Inscription of Xi'an fou in the Years under Dynasty of Tang* (唐景教碑颂正铨 *Tang jingjiao beisong zhengquan*)² where he published drawings of three crosses found there.³ In 1906, Serafin Moya discovered a stone in Quanzhou bearing an inscription and depicted with a cross and an angel.⁴ Wu Wenliang was the first to gather and classify these Nestorian inscribed steles from Quan-

zhou beginning in 1927. He published them in 1958 in the monograph *Religious Inscriptions and Funerary Stones in Quanzhou*.⁵

Between 1927 and 1957 Wu Wenliang discovered more than thirty “Nestorian” (=Ärkägün⁶ in Turkic and Mongolian) tombstones, some eighty Islamic tombstones, several Manichean carved stones and numerous stone relics belonging to Indian Brahma Religion all in Quanzhou. Among the Nestorian collection of relics, there are about nine tombstones bearing Syriac inscriptions, four tablets with the 'Pags-pa script,⁷ three tablets in Chinese and one tablet with a Uighur inscription. According to Wu Wenliang, about 160 tombstones were either crushed in a stone factory in eastern Quanzhou or were reused in other building projects in the 1930s. In the 1980s several other Nestorian tombstones were found in the same region, including one Uighur inscription.⁸

A new bilingual inscription (figure 1) bearing Syriac and Uighur texts came to light in Chidian 池店 of Quanzhou city as late as May 2002. This is a fragment of a

tombstone measuring 23.5 x 41.5 cm. The upper part shows a flying angel with facial features proper to Chinese art, and wearing a tiara surmounted by a cross. To the right side of the angel a cross stands above a depicted lotus. Below this scene, twenty-one lines of texts are incised in Syriac and Uighur, the first three being in Syriac whereas the remaining ones are in Uighur. The right part of the tombstone was mutilated in antiquity and the severed piece was lost. Unfortunately, no archaeological report exists to tell us about the discovery of the inscribed fragment. My friend Professor Xie Bizhen visited the Historical Museum of Southern Constructions in Quanzhou in April 2003 where he took a digital picture of the surviving inscription, which he quickly sent to me. At this point I would like to edit this inscription, providing in the Syriac script my reading of the bilingual content, followed by its transliteration, transcription, and translation into English. A brief commentary will conclude the paper.

THE SYRIAC-UIGHUR INSCRIPTION

1. ܬܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
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3. ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
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18. ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
19. ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
20. ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
21. ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ

TRANSLITERATION

1. bšm 'b'
2. wbr' wrwh'
3. dqdš' l'imyn
4. mqdwyn'
5. b'lyq-lyq
6. pylypws k'n
7. 'wkly 'lksndrws
8. 'ylyg k'n s'qyšy
9. yyl myng 'lty
10. ywz yygyrmy
11. t̄wrt̄ yylynt̄'
12. t̄wrq saqyšy
13. 'wwd yyl
14. 'wnwnč 'y
15. 'lty y'ngyt̄'
16. t̄wyz y'rynt̄'
17. prq'mč' kwšn'č
18. mšyḥa-nyng y'rlyky
19. pwyṭwr̄dy 'wyzwty

20. ʾwštyṁʾkdʾ ʾr
21. r yʾd pwlzwn ʾmn

TRANSCRIPTION

1. bšem abbā
2. wabrā werūhā
3. deqūdšā lʾālmīn
4. maqadonya
5. balīq-līq
6. pilipus qan
7. oyl-ī alksandros
8. ilig qan saqīš-ī
9. yīl mīng altī
10. yūz yigirmi
11. tört yīlīn-ta
12. türk saqīš-ī
13. ud yīl
14. onunčī ay
15. altī yang-ī-ta
16. tōz yār-**in**-ta
17. barqamča **kušnač**
18. mešihā-nīng yarlīq-ī
19. bütürdi **özüt-i**
20. uštīmaq-da **är**
21. -ür yat bolzun **amen**

TRANSLATION

“(lines 1-3 in Syriac:) In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, forever.”

“(lines 4-21 in Uighur:) In the Year 1624 (= 1312 A.D.) of the reckoning of King Alexander son of Emperor Philip of Macedonia, in the Ox year of the Turkic reckoning, the tenth month, on the sixth day, in her native

place, the lady-teacher Barqamča fulfilled the command of the Messiah; her soul will take rest in Paradise! May it be remembered! Amen!”

COMMENTARY

13. 𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪:

ʾwwd / ud “cattle, ox”.

16. 𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪 𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪:

twyz yʾryntʾ/tōz yār-**in**-tā “in her native place”. 𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪 /twyz /tōz = yiltiz “native, original” in Turkic-Uighur; see G. Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford, 1972), p. 57.

17. 𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪𐰸𐰪 (𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪𐰸𐰪):

prqʾmčʾ (mrqʾmzʾ) / barqamča (or: marqamza), female personal name.

𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪𐰸𐰪:

kwštʾč / quštač = quštanč = qušnanč (?) “lady-teacher, instructress;” from Sogdian. The word 𐰽𐰪𐰸𐰪𐰸𐰪 xwštʾnč, /quštanč/, was found in the inscriptions edited by D. Chwolson, *Syrisch-Nestorianische Grabinschriften aus Semiretschie*, Nebst einer Beilage: Über das türkische Sprachmaterial dieser Grabinschriften von W. Radloff, mit drei phototypischen Tafeln und einer eben-solchen, von Julius Euting ausgearbeiteten Schrifttafel, St. Pétersbourg (Mémoires de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg, VIIe série, Tome XXXVII, No. 8; 1890), Nos. 42, 61, 65, 85, xxvi, and D. Chwolson, *Syrisch-Nestorianische Grabinschriften aus Semiretschie*. Neue Folge. Vorgelegt der Akademie am 28. Februar 1896 (l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg, 1897), pp. 1-62, pl. IV,

Nos. 5, 28, 104, 155, 310, 312.

Nevertheless, in the same corpus, we find the form ܡܫܝܚܐ *xwštnč*, /*quštanč* in the inscriptions of D. Chwolson (1890), No. 19, 42, 80, VI and D. Chwolson (1897), No. 32, 40, 71, 195 and the form ܡܫܝܚܐ *xwšt'č*, /*quštač*, in the inscription of D. Chwolson (1897), No. 4. It seems that there are several Syriac transcriptions containing the same word (three are attested in Semirietchie and the fourth in Almalīq). The term seems to correspond to Sogdian **xwšt'nc* "lady-teacher, instructress;" cf. Werner Sundermann, "Soghdisch **xwšt'nc*,

'Lehrerin'," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, t. 48 (1995), p. 225-227. It would have been also borrowed by Turkic Uighur in the form *qoštranči*, cf. P. Zieme, *Manichäisch-türkische Texte*, Berliner Turfantexte V (1975), p. 84. The word *qušnanči* is also used in modern Uighur, meaning "clergywoman (in Islam), instructress". The same word is found in Nestorian inscriptions from Bailingmiao and Wangmuliang.

18. ܡܫܝܚܐ :

mšyh' / mešthā "Messiah".

NOTES

* This is a section of a paper entitled “Nestorian Inscriptions and Relics from China” which I presented at the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, on January 13, 2004, at the kind invitation of the President of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies.

¹ The old name *Zayton* was used in the reports of Peregrino da Castello, Odoric, Marignolli and on the chart of the Catalan. The name *Zaitūn* was employed by Waśśāf, Abū-’l-Fidā and Rašīd, whereas Marco Polo used the name *Zaiton*. The word *zaytūn* found in Arabic and Persian sources means “olive”. I found the name in an inscription of Quanzhou 泉州 *Zaiton* or *Zaytun* for old Quanzhou. Cf. also A. C. Moule and P. Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. I (1938), pp. 586; P. Pelliot (ed. Par L. Hambis), *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. III (Paris 1973), pp. 303-304; Department of the Eastern Languages of the University of Beijing, *Persian-Chinese Dictionary*, Shangwu yinshuguan Press 商务印书馆 (1997), p. 1263-1264. Niu Ruji 牛汝极, quanzhou xuliya huihu shuangyu jingjiaobei zaiyanjiu 泉州叙利亚-回鹘双语景教碑再研究 “A new edition of Syro-Uighur bilingual Nestorian Inscription,” *mingzu yuwen* 民族语文 *Minority Languages and Scripts*, N° 3 (1999), pp.33-34.

² The book was printed in Hangzhou in 1644, and reprinted in Shanghai in 1878.

³ A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before the Year 1550* (London, New York and Toronto: 1930; repr. New York 1972), pp. 78-79, figure 9-10.

⁴ A.C. Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 80, fig. 11.

⁵ Wu Wenliang 吴文良(*Quanzhou zongjiao shike*) 泉州宗教石刻 (*Religious Inscriptions and Funerary Stones in Quanzhou*), (Beijing: Scientific Presses, 1958).

⁶ *Ārkägün* also means “Nestorian”. ܐܪܟܝܓܘܢ *rkygwn* in Syriac, *ärkägün* in Uighur, and *archaon* in Latin derive from the Greek form ἀρχιϋου, the accusative of ἀρχιϋος “chief, commander, initiator”. Compare with the other Greek word ἀρχων “chief, lord, sovereign”; cf. J. Hamilton, “Le texte turc en caractères syriaques du grand sceau cruciforme de Mār Yahballāhā III,” *Journal Asiatique* 260 (1972), pp. 163-164 ; J. Hamilton-Niu Ruji, “Deux inscriptions funéraires turques nestoriennes de la Chine orientale” *Journal Asiatique*, N° 1, Tome CCLXXXII, 1994, pp. 155-163. An inscription in Uighur contains *ärkägür* of Quanzhou: *qup-luy xußily-an ärkägün-nīng xatun-i marda tärīm qoyñ yil čaxšaputa ay man iki-kä tängri yarlıy-i bütürdi ayır čšmd-qa ayar ol* “The fortunate and holy Nestorian noblewoman Marthe Tärīm, in the Sheep year, in the twelfth month, *man*, on the second day (= December 31, 1331), fulfilled the command of God; she will take rest in Paradise!” Cf. James Hamilton & Niu Ruji, “Deux inscriptions funéraires turques nestoriennes de la Chine orientale”, *Journal Asiatique* 282 (1994), pp. 147-164.

⁷ Junastu 照那斯图, “元代景教徒墓志碑八斯巴字考释 (yuandai jingjiaotu muzhibei basibazi kaoshi “Study on Nestorian Inscriptions in Pag’sba Script,”) *haijiaoshi yanjiu* 海交史研究 *Studies on Maritime History* 2 (1994), pp. 119-124.

⁸ James Hamilton and Niu Ruji, “Deux inscriptions funéraires...,” pp. 147-164.



Figure 1
The new inscription in Syriac script found in Chidian 池店 of Quanzhou in May 2002
Photographed by Mr. Xie Bizhen, April 2003.

THE UIGHUR INSCRIPTION AT THE MAUSOLEUM OF MĀR BEHNAM, IRAQ



AMIR HARRAK—UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
NIU RUJI—XINJIANG UNIVERSITY

The mausoleum of Saint Behnam, a martyr of the Sassanian period and native of Athor (Assyria), is located beside the saint's monastery, some 30 km south-east of Mosul and a few km north-east of the ancient Assyrian capital Kalhu (Nimrud). The octagonal building contains the martyr's elaborate

grave built against the wall and surmounted by a half-vault in the shape of a honeycomb. The monumental façade of the grave (figure 4) is dated to the end of the 13th century, according to the Syriac and Arabic inscriptions found along and inside this structure (figure 1—broken lines). Noteworthy here is the unique inscription carved in Old Turkish (Uighur) and placed at the top of the semi copula dominating the grave (figure 1—grey area). In this position, the inscription, in relief and 1.5 m in length, is prominent and its contents testify to its importance.

The Uighur inscription is not unknown to scholars, since J. Halévy edited it more than a century ago and published it along with an excellent hand copy of the text (fig. 2).¹ Surprisingly, though, no scholar seems to have questioned Halévy's publication since the end of the 19th century, despite progress in Uighur, Syriac, and Arabic studies. In 1907, H. Pognon passively referred to Halévy's publication when he discussed the inscriptions of the mausoleum;² as late as 1970, the late Fr. J. Fiey adopted Halévy's translation,³ and went as far as rendering the latter's French translation into English.⁴ It is therefore worthwhile to review Halévy's work, and we begin by providing his transcription and French translation of the one-line Uighur inscription:

Ghidir ilias yarghoudi alghiši il-ghan
ghabirlar ghadounlar-ka ghonsoun
ornašsoun

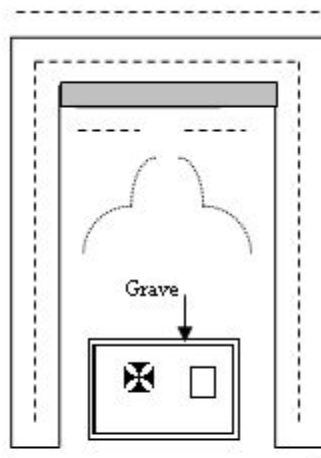


Fig. 1
The Mausoleum of Mār Behnam
Position of the Uighur Inscription (grey
area)

grave built against the wall and surmounted by a half-vault in the shape of a honeycomb. The monumental façade of the grave (figure

“Que la bénédiction de Khidir-Ilias (Saint George) ...demeure et reste avec l’Il-Khan (titre des rois mongols de la Perse), ses grands et ses épouses.”

Though Halévy’s understanding of the inscription is mostly sound, it still needs improvement as is shown in the following new edition of the text. The transliteration and transcription of the inscription will be immediately followed by a detailed analysis of its contents and by a final translation:

qdyr ’’lys-nyng qwt-y ’’lqyš-y ’ylq’n-
q’ b’g-l’r q’twn-l’r-q’ qwn-zwn
'wrn'š-zwn

qīdīr alīyas-nīng qut-ī alqīš-ī ilqan-qa
bāg-lār qatun-lar-qa qon-zun ornaš-
zun

qīdīr alīyas:

Turkic rendering of Arabic *Khidr Aliās* خضر الياس, a double-name conveniently given to Mār Behnam probably at the end of the 13th century, though originally both elements of the name were not associated as such. Khidr “the green one, the maker of green” is the mysterious personality referred to in the Koran (Sūrat al-Kahf, 60-82), who is also associated with Aliās, among other holy personalities of the past. Alias is the biblical prophet Elijah (see esp. 1 Kings 18:41-45) who shares with Khidr a connection with water and fertility. A little village nearby the monastery of Mār Behnam is also called al-Khidr wa-al-Baṣaṭliyya, but whether it received the name Khidr from the monastery or if the monastery gave it this name is not known. St George is also often called al-Khidr. Halévy’s association of “Khidr Ilias” with the popular St George is out of the question at least in this case, since

the Il-khan invoked none other than Mār Behnam, given the fact that this saint’s monastery was looted by the king’s soldiers in 1295. Pognon was also wrong in identifying the depiction inside the monastery’s church of a man mounting a horse as St George. This depiction, in high relief in gypsum, is that of St Behnam, since another high relief standing opposite depicts his martyred sister Sarah. Moreover, a lengthy Syriac inscription placed inside the monastery recounts the Mongols’ looting of the saint’s monastery and grave (see below). According to the inscription, the abbot complained to the “victorious king Khan Baidu”, and the latter regretted the incident and in repentance made a donation to the monastery.⁵

-nīng:

Genitive suffix in Turkic and in Uighur “of Khidr Elias...” Halévy’s *yar* is unintelligible.

qut:

Noun, “happiness, the favour of heaven, good fortune, divine favour.”⁶

-ī (/i):

Third masculine singular pronominal suffix “his”.

Alqīš:

Noun, “praise, blessing”.⁷

Ilqan:

Name of kingdom Ilkhan. *qan* is also the Syriac transcription of the noun in the inscription that discusses the looting of the monastery.⁸

-qa:

Dative suffix in Turkic and Uighur.

Bāg:

Noun, “noble, official” (rather than *ghabir* of Halévy).

-lar/-lär:

Plural suffix.

qatun:

Noun, “queen, noblewoman, wife” in Turkic and Uighur; Arabic خاتون .

qon-:

Verb “to settle, to settle down, to stop.”⁹

-zun

(= -sun): Third person desiderative suffix in Turkic and Uighur.

orna-:

Verb “to take one’s place, to dwell, to settle, to rest, to be situated.”¹⁰

-š-:

Suffix for acting together in verbs in Turkic and Uighur.

The detailed analysis presented above allows the Uighur inscription to be translated as follows:

“May the happiness and praise of Khiḏr Elias befall and settle on the Il-khan and the nobles and the noblewomen!”

One might wonder how a Uighur inscription made its way into a Christian mausoleum in Mesopotamia, and who the “Il-khan” that it refers to actually was. A Syriac inscription placed inside the monastery’s church, between the gate of the shrine of St. Matthew and the gate of the shrine of St. Sarah on the south wall (fig. 3), answers both questions. The following is the text in Syriac with a translation:¹¹

(A)

1. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ
2. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

3. ܐܝܬܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

4. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

5. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

6. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

7. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

8. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

9. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

10. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

11. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

12. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

13. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

14. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

(B)

15. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

16. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

17. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

18. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

19. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

20. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

21. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

22. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

23. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

(C)

24. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

25. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

26. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

27. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

28. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

29. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

30. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

31. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

32. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

33. ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ ܕܝܠܝܐ

(Il. 1-5) In the year one thousand six hundred and six of the Greeks, the victorious king Khan Baidu attacked

the land about Athor (=Assyria), the town of the holy Mār Behnam, seized it, (ll. 6-10) and made a massacre. He went to Mosul but did not invade it. Afterward, he left for the region of Erbil, leaving his chiefs behind him, who sacked the countryside (ll. 11-15) and the monasteries. The chiefs sent (their men) to the Great Monastery (of Mār Mattā) and took away the mules of the mill, as well as much silver and gold. One of them came to the Monastery (ll. 16-20) of the Pit, opened its gate and entered. He put his hands on the sacred vessels, the veils and the rest. Nothing remained on the altar (ll. 21-25) except for the Gospel and the reliquary of the Saint—God obscured their eyes! The monk Rabban Jacob went to the Victorious King, (ll. 26-30) and brought back to the Monastery everything that the latter had carried away. The Khan even gave to the Saint a gift from his own wealth, (ll. 31-33) paying the Saint homage. Thus the king was sorry.

The looting of the monastery and the

mausoleum of Mār Behnam in A.D. 1295 at the hands of the invading Mongol army explains the origin of the Uighur inscription. The mishap was subsequently reported to the Il-khan by the monastery's Abbot Jacob, and the Mongol king not only regretted the event but also made an offering to the monastery's patron saint. As is clear from the Syriac inscription, the Il-khan was Baidu, who must have also ordered the Uighur inscription to be placed in the mausoleum, though the inscription did not personally name him. The dates also corroborate these bits of historical facts. The year 1295 witnessed the Mongol raid of the monastery and the mausoleum. The Syriac inscription carved along the three arms of the monumental façade of the grave date the building of this façade, including the Uighur inscription, to the Seleucid year 1611, which corresponds to A.D. 1300. Thus the Mongol raid, the complaint by Abbot Jacob followed by the regrets of the Il-khan, and the order of the Uighur inscription and its integration within the entire new structure of the grave all took place within five years.

NOTES

¹J. Halévy, "Déchiffrement et interprétation de l'inscription ouïgoure," *Journal Asiatique*, Septembre-Octobre 1892, pp. 291-292.

²H. Pognon, *Inscriptions sémitiques de la Syrie et de le Mésopotamie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1907), p. 140.

³J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne*, vol. II (Beirut, 1965), p. 678.

⁴J. Fiey, *Mar Behnam*, Touristic and Archaeological Series 2 (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1970), p. 19.

⁵Pognon, *Inscriptions Sémitiques*, pp. 135-136.

⁶See Sir Gerard Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish* (Oxford 1972), p. 594.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

⁸Pognon, *Inscriptions Sémitiques*, pp. 135-136 lines 3 and 29.

⁹Clauson, *An Etymological Dictionary*, pp. 632-633.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 235.

¹¹Pognon was the first to edit this inscription; see his *Inscriptions Sémitiques*, pp. 135-136, and pl. X 76 (copy).

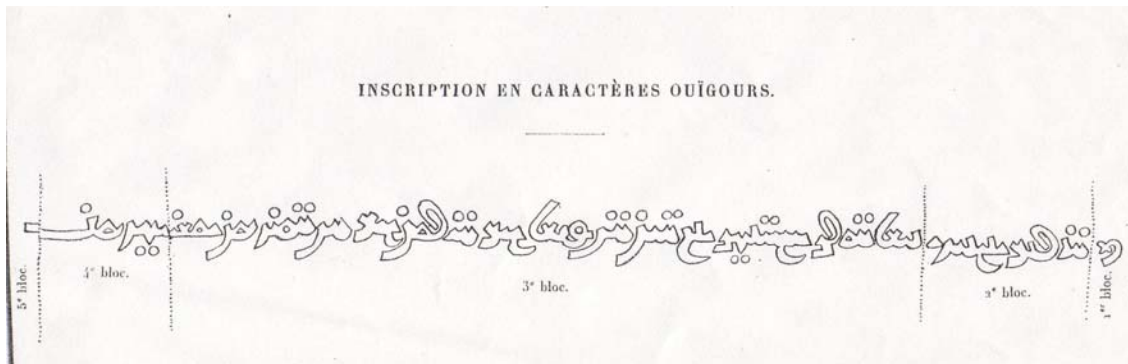


Figure 2
The Uighur Inscription in the Mausoleum of St Behnam
From *Journal Asiatique* 1892, p. 343



Figure 3
Syriac Inscription Describing The Mongol Raid of 1294

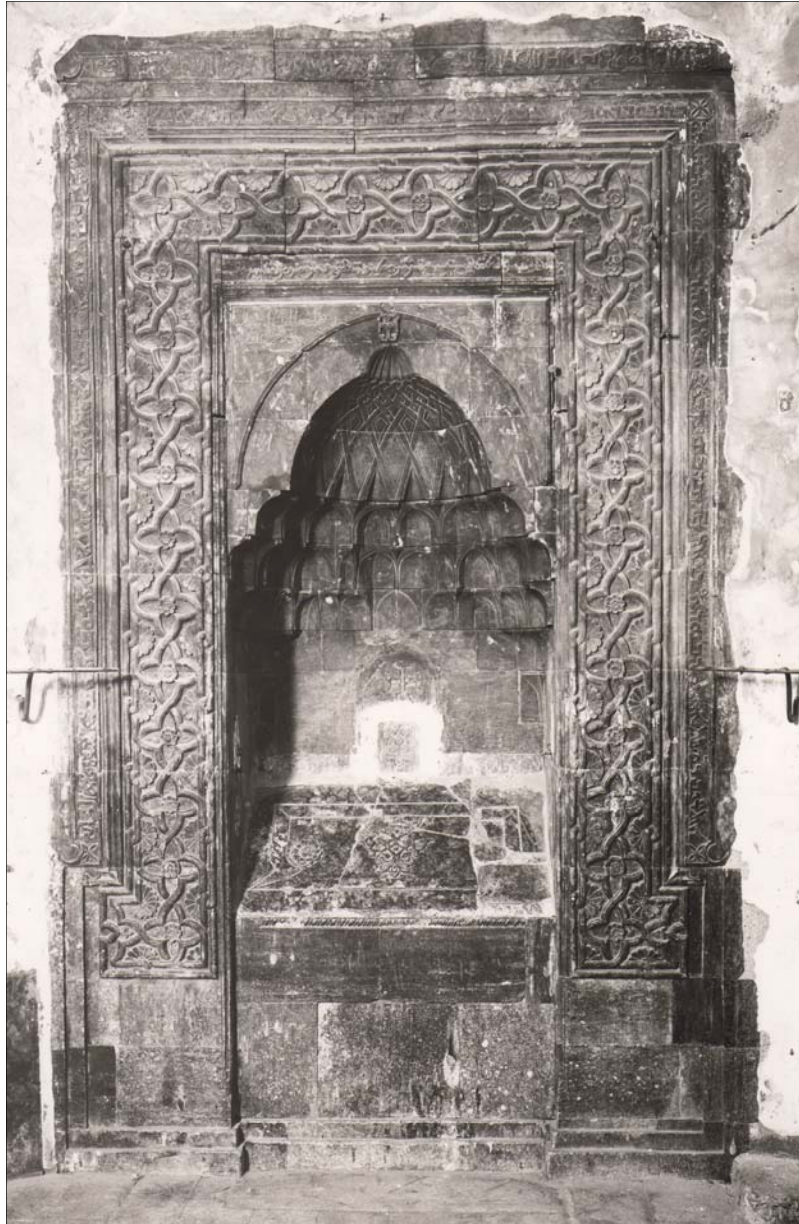


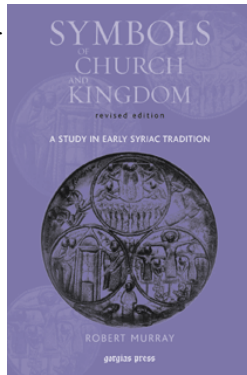
Figure 4
The Façade of the Mausoleum of St Behnam

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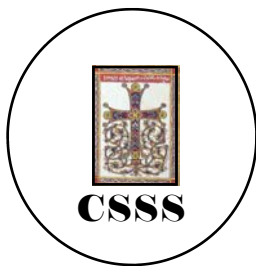
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