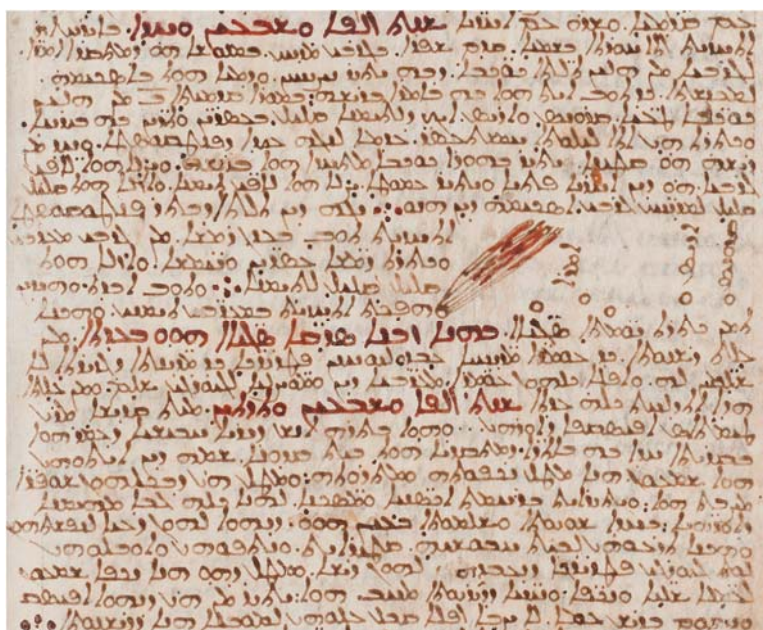


The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies

JOURNAL

Volume 18

2018



- Sebastian P. Brock - Oxford University
- Robert Kitchen - Canadian Society for Syriac Studies
- Demetrios Alibertis - University of Toronto
- Imad Syryany - St. Ephrem Theological Seminary (Syria)
- Antoine Nassif - Pontifical Oriental Institute
- D.L. and R. Neuhäuser - Jena University, and A. Harrak - University of Toronto

Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies/ de la Société Canadienne des Etudes Syriaques

The *JCSSS* is a refereed journal published annually, and it contains the transcripts of public lectures presented at the Society and possibly other articles and book reviews

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Publisher

Gorgias Press
180 Centennial Avenue, Suite 3
Piscataway, NJ 08854 USA

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

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The aim of the CSSS is to promote the study of the Syriac culture which is rooted in the same soil from which the ancient Mesopotamian and biblical literatures sprung. The CSSS is purely academic, and its activities include a series of public lectures, one yearly symposium, and the publication of its Journal. The Journal is distributed free of charge to the members of the CSSS who have paid their dues, but it can be ordered by other individuals and institutions through Gorgias Press (www.gorgiaspress.com).

Cover

Description and Drawing of Halley's Comet of AD 760
Chronicle of Zuqnin, Vat. Sir 162, Folio 136v—Courtesy the Vatican Library

The Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies

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FROM THE EDITOR



Four of the six papers published in JCSSS 18 (2018) were originally given in the CSSS Symposium XVII, which took place on November 11, 2017. Two other articles are written by members of the CSSS.

Dr. Sebastian Brock was kind enough to send us his paper entitled “Some Problems in Editing Liturgical Poetry,” which fits well with the major theme of the present issue of JCSSS. Poems intended for liturgical use are usually corrupted, and the corruptions include misunderstanding terms, omitting stanzas, and changing vocabulary. The article contains the edition and translation of an acrostic *soghita* for the Holy Week, which also highlights problems in textual transmission.

Robert Kitchen’s “Which One is He? Narsai of Nisibis on Moses and the Divine Name and Essence and a Few Plagues,” sheds light on Narsai’s practices in tackling Old Testament figures, like Moses, who do not usually prefigure Christ, unlike in the poems Jacob of Sarug where they are Christological types. Through *memra* 42, Kitchen uncovers several literary devices used by Narsai, including paradoxes, “double metaphor,” and *remzā* “sign, gesture, wink” as a literary characteristic.

“East Meets East in the Chaldean Furnace: A Comparative Analysis of Romanos’ Hymns and Jacob of Serugh’s Homily on the Three Children,” by Demetrios Alibertis, highlights the reliance of Romanos the Melodist on the *memrē* of Jacob of Sarug at least

in the topic the Three Children in the Fiery Furnace – a theme that they both deal with metrically. While other scholars stress the reliance of Romanos on the Cappadocian Fathers and on Ephrem the Syrian and even on Jacob of Edessa, Alibertis offers striking literary similarities, including motifs and metaphors, between the *Kontakion* of Romanos and Jacob’s *memrē* in the Fiery Furnace account (Daniel 3). This in turn tells much about intellectual interactions between Greeks and Syriacs in Late Antique Byzantium.

Imad Syryani, in his “The Ten Plagues of Moses in the Exegesis of Mor Jacob of Sarug,” describes how Jacob goes beyond the literal sense of biblical interpretation in favour of Christological exegesis, in which biblical typology plays a major role. In this case, Moses becomes a type of Christ; “He (Moses) depicted the Son in his envied birth as by his fleeing...” Although Jacob relied on Ephrem the Syrian in interpreting Exodus, the two authors differ in identifying types and associations, besides the fact that Ephrem’s commentary on Exodus is much shorter than that of Jacob.

Bishop Antoine Nassif, in his “Symbolisme et Théologie Biblique dans les *Bō’wōtō* de St Jacques de Saroug,” comments on *bō’wōtō* “petitions” attributed to Jacob of Sarug in the Syriac liturgy. Compared with Ephrem and Balai, Jacob’s “petitions” are much more numerous in daily prayers, and the author gives many illustrative examples in Syriac accompanied by French transla-

tions. These petitions are included by editors who “adapted” them to liturgical needs (see Brock’s article mentioned above). Are the *bō wōtō* drawn on Jacob’s *memrē*? The author does not confirm this association, but it would be worthwhile to examine this question.

The 8th century Chronicle of Zuqnān is exploited for its reports on celestial phenomena, including views of comets, meteors and eclipses. The article “Reports and Drawings of Celestial Observations in the 8th Century Syriac Chronicle of Zuqnān (Auroral and Meteoritic Phenomena)” by D. L. and R. Neuhäuser and

A. Harrak examines nine reports of such appearances and some corroborative accounts found in Chinese, Byzantine, Arab, and European literary sources. While this kind of research is of interest to scientific journals and publications, the inclusion of this article in *JCSSS* expands the horizons of Syriac Studies.

The publication of *JCSSS* is financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through its “Aid to Scholarly Journals” program.

A. H.
October 2018

SOME PROBLEMS IN EDITING LITURGICAL POETRY



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A poem, whether or not it was originally intended for liturgical use, is particularly liable to corruption of one sort or another if it is transmitted by liturgical manuscripts. This can be shown to be dramatically the case with many of Ephrem's *madrashē*, where we have the benefit of sixth-century manuscripts as well as later liturgical ones: the original poem can be abbreviated (often drastically), have the verses re-ordered, or interpolated with verses from a different source, etc.¹ This manhandling of an original poem makes the task of an editor highly problematic when the poem is only transmitted in liturgical manuscripts, which of course is normally the case.² In the following some of the main problems encountered are illustrated and discussed, by way of two particular examples, one a dialogue *soghitha* that has already been published, the other a *soghitha* that is published here for the first time; each has the advantage of having an alphabetic acrostic, for this will immediately indicate the loss of a stanza.³

1. *The West Syriac Dialogue between Satan and the Sinful Woman*

Two separate poems with a dialogue between Satan and the Sinful Woman of

Luke 7 come down to us; the earlier one, perhaps dating from the fifth or sixth century, is transmitted in a number of West Syriac manuscripts, while the later one, where the presence of rhyme indicates a date of at least the ninth century, and probably later, is known only from a few East Syriac manuscripts. Both were edited in *Oriens Christianus* a couple of decades ago,⁴ and both have an alphabetical acrostic beginning at the point where the dialogue commences; in the first poem the acrostic is double (that is, the acrostic proceeds aa bb cc etc), while in the second poem it is single. The presence of a broken acrostic immediately makes apparent any loss, though as will be seen below, this loss can lead to a secondary editorial problem.

It is the West Syriac poem whose transmission poses the most editorial problems, and so for our present purposes it is the more instructive to consider. It features not infrequently in liturgical manuscripts in the Night Office (*Lilyo*) of Thursday in Holy Week. Since the manuscript tradition becomes increasingly corrupted and confused over time, it is always important to base any edition of a *soghitho* on the earliest manuscripts available. My edition made use of ten manuscripts, ranging in date

from the 8th/9th century to the 12th/13th; all but one are liturgical manuscripts covering Holy Week, the exception being the oldest (British Library, Add. 17,141) which consists of a large collection of poems, no doubt intended for liturgical use, but not arranged according to the liturgical year. The manuscripts in question and their sigla are as follows (all Add. manuscripts are in the British Library):

A = Add. 17,141, ff. 101rv (8th/9th cent.), missing stanzas 1-5, 7-8, 34-end.

B = Add. 17,190, ff. 81v-83r (AD 893), missing stanzas 7, 16-23, 50-54, 56-57.

C = Add. 17,168, ff. 7v-9v (9th cent.), missing stanzas 34-39, 56-57.

D = Add. 12,147, ff. 236v-237r (AD 1007), missing stanzas 1-5, 7-8, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33-end.

E = Oxford, Dawkins 32, ff. 131r-132v (c.1165), missing stanzas 16-25, 35-37, 56-57; 32-34 and 46 are also missing in the main text, but supplied in the margin by a later hand.

F = Add. 14,179, ff. 19r-20r (AD 1184), missing stanzas 1-5, 7-8, 34-end; several stanzas are in the wrong order: 9, 10, 12, 14, 11, 13, 15 16 etc.

G = Harvard Syr. 30, ff. 200v-201r (c.12th cent.), missing all odd-numbered stanzas.

H = Harvard Syr. 103, ff. 237v-238v (12th/13th cent.), missing stanzas 1, 3, 5, 7, 9-10, 12, 14, 15cd, 16, 18 and all subsequent even-numbered stanzas till the end; between 8 and 11 H provides 15ab + 25cd (thus having 25cd twice over).

J = Harvard Syr. 140, ff. 145r-146r (c. 12th cent.), missing stanzas 1, 3-5, 9, 11, 13, 15-23, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35-39, 41, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53-58.

K = New York, Union Theological Seminary, Syr. 3, ff. 20r-21r, missing stanzas 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16-26, 28, 30, 32-38, 40-42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54-60.

As will at once be obvious, no manuscript has anything like a complete form of the poem (the dialogue and the acrostic begins at stanza 10 and ends at stanza 57). D, G, H, J and K are all manuscripts for the use of just one of the two *gude* or choirs; this practice means that only one of the two protagonists is present in the manuscript (though in D this is avoided by having Satan as the speaker up to stanza 22, and then turning to the Woman for the remainder).

How should an editor proceed with this sort of situation? In my earlier edition, in *Soghyatha mgabbyatha* (1982), published by the late Mor Julius Çiçek at the Monastery of St Ephrem in the Netherlands for a Syrian Orthodox readership, my text was based on A, as the oldest manuscript, where the dialogue comes to an end with *yodh*. At that time I had not yet come across C, which continued the dialogue from *nun* (40) as far as *shin* (55). In liturgical texts where there is a considerable amount of variation between the witnesses, it is usually preferable to base an edition on a single manuscript, chosen for its general textual quality, and only deviate from this manuscript where its text is clearly corrupted, deficient, or otherwise secondary. In the case of the present poem, its original form must certainly have had a complete acrostic, and so C's missing stanzas *kaph* to *mim* and *taw* need to be supplied. The witnesses with these missing stanzas turn out to be very limited, B (and alternately G and H) for *kaph* to *mim* (34-39), and only G/H for *taw* (56-57). The editor, whose aim is to provide a complete and readable text has no choice but to make use of these other witnesses.

A further serious editorial problem is posed by the fact that for *qoph* and *resh* (50-53) C has no other support, since the other witnesses (E G H J K) have completely different stanzas for these two letters. At some early stage in part of the manuscript tradition *qoph* and *resh* must

have been lost, and then, subsequently, the loss was made good with suitable new verses provided. Is it C or E G H J K which have preserved the original? Since any judgement in such cases is likely to be subjective,⁵ it would seem preferable to print the verses as given in the manuscript selected as the base manuscript, and relegate the alternative stanzas to the apparatus.

The manuscript tradition of this poem presents a further dilemma for an editor. At the beginnings and (especially) endings of dialogue poems there is a tendency towards expansion. This makes one wonder whether the shorter Introduction in A D F might not represent the original form of the poem; this would leave only two verses before the dialogue commences:

(6) The Sinful Woman heard the report / that Jesus was reclining at Shem'on's banquet. / She said in her heart, 'I am going, / and he will forgive me all that I have done wrong'.

(9) Satan saw and realised / that she was approaching repentance. / In his cunning ways he approached her / and began to speak as follows.

While the brevity has something to commend it, nevertheless the abruptness of the opening of stanza 6 is out of character with the norm of the introductory stanzas to the dialogue poems. In any case the principle of keeping where possible to a single selected manuscript would also lead to the choice of the longer opening in C (supported by B E G H and J).

Finally in connection with this poem, the general superiority of C can be nicely observed in stanza 28. In stanza 28 the Woman admits she is a prostitute, 'a sister of Rahab' who was saved by Joshua. To this Satan retorts:

I see that you have gone mad: / you do not know what you are saying; / you have never read the Scriptures, / and (now) you are expounding (ܡܬܠܡܝܢܐ) the words of the Scriptures!

A D and F evidently read ܡܬܠܡܝܢܐ as ܡܬܠܡܝܢܐ 'you are going to be stoned' and then, in order to make some sort of sense (and to provide seven syllables) also the whole line was altered to read ܡܬܠܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܬܠܡܝܢܐ 'and will you not be stoned at their words?' (F then avoids negative, which requires a question, erasing the negative ܕ and replacing it by ܐܠܐ 'behold').

The case of the West Syriac Dialogue between Satan and the Sinful Woman, where no single manuscript provides the entire acrostic, is by no means unique,⁶ and it is also the case with the second example, which now follows.

2. An unpublished acrostic poem for Holy Week

Another instructive case is provided by a poorly attested acrostic *soghiṯa* for Holy Week, to be found in BL Add. 14,503, f. 119r (= A), Harvard Syr. 31, f. 176r (= B) and 103, ff. 249v-250r (= C). The syllabic metre is 5 5 5 5. The first verse surprisingly also features as the initial verse of an otherwise completely different acrostic poem to be found in one of the scattered parts of Sinai Syr. 233, of the 9th century (= S).⁷ In neither poem, as transmitted, is the (single) acrostic complete, and in both the alphabetic sequence has also been corrupted. In the poem considered here, the text is best preserved in Add. 14,503, though the two Harvard manuscripts every now and then have superior readings. The acrostic has suffered in all three manuscripts: *dalath* and *he* have been transposed; *waw* is only found in C (which otherwise has many stanzas missing); *zayn* and *heth* are likewise transposed, and the two letters are separated in A by *yodh* (for which C provides a rival stanza). As is often the case, for the final stanza, *taw*, there are two rival stanzas.

In summary, the text (whose acrostic begins at stanza 1) is preserved in the three manuscripts as follows:

A: 21 stanzas, in the following sequence: ' b b g h d z y ḥ k-t

B: 22 stanzas, in the following sequence: ' b b g h d z ḥ k-t t y

C: 13 stanzas, in the following sequence: ' b d w ḥ y l n ' ṣ r t y

This situation happens to be a relatively simple one, since there are only three manuscripts; nevertheless it poses quite a number of important decisions that need to be taken by any would-be editor of the poem whose aim is to provide a reliable, and at the same time, a readable text. Among the questions needing answers are:⁸

- should the editor restore the acrostic, in this case also involving the re-ordering of some stanzas?

- how far should the text be based on what appears to be the best, or oldest manuscript (not of course necessarily the same)?

- to what extent should variants between manuscripts be indicated?

- should there be a special policy with regard to orthographic variations?

Prior to making any of these (or other) editorial decisions, however, it will be helpful to set out the textual evidence in tabular form, with Add. 14,503 (A) as the base text, while the two left hand columns give the variants in the Harvard manuscripts (B and C). The stanza numbers of B and C are given in square brackets, and purely orthographical variants are in round brackets. Those readings in B and C which seem superior to the text of A are underlined; in a final edition they will be adopted into the printed text (along with the stanza in C for *waw*, missing in A and B).

Harvard Syr. 103	Harvard Syr. 31	Add.14503
1 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	1	ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ
2 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	2	ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ
Stanza omitted	3	ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ
Stanza omitted	4 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	4 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ
Stanza omitted	5 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	5 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ
[3] ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	6 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	6 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ
[4] ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ	7	7 ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ ܐܘܬܝܬܐ

Stanza omitted	Stanza omitted	8 ܐܘܪܐ ܠܝ ܕܥܩܬܝܢ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ [9] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	[14]	15 ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
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[7] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	[10] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	11 ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	[11] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	[18] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	19 ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
Stanza omitted	[11] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	12 ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	Stanza omitted	[19] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	20 ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
[8] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	[12] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	13 ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ *ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	[12] ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ / ܐܡܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܐܡܐ / ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ *ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ	[21] ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ *ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ	21 ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ *ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ
Stanza omitted	[13] ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ *ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ	14 ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ *ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ ܐܡܐ			

ܣܠ ܕܥܡܐ [13] ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ~Add. 14,503 stanza 8	ܣܠ ܕܥܡܐ [22] ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ / ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ~Add. 14,503 stanza 8	
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COMMENTARY

The following textual commentary is largely confined to cases where the editor needs to make a choice. Stanza numbers are those of A; the lines in each stanza are designated a b c d.

2-3 It is not likely that *beth* originally had two stanzas; the first is clearly required by the sense, whereas the second does not play any necessary role.

4b A's reading is clearly superior: the rare use of this passive participle with active sense (cf. Nöldeke #280) is avoided in B.

4c In A the metre lacks two syllables, and *mara* has clearly fallen out and should be restored.

5-6 Stanzas 5 (*he*) and 6 (*dalath*) go against the alphabetic acrostic, and the correct sequence should be restored.

5b A's reading, which conforms with Isaiah 53:7 and Acts 8:32, is preferable to the banal alteration in B.

5d Although ܡܪܝܢܐ is a later spelling, it is best to retain it, rather than revert to the older ܡܪܝܢܐ. (If an older spelling had been attested in B, then it would be preferable to adopt it).

6a Although ܡܪܝܢܐ of B and C is attractive, it is probably a secondary development, avoiding an apparent dissyllable ܡܪܝܢܐ (but certainly read, as often in poetry, as a single syllable ܡܪܝܢܐ).

6c Probably the suffixed form is the more likely to be original. The line has six syllables which suggests that one should restore the line to read ܡܪܝܢܐ ܡܪܝܢܐ.

6d Since neither word order is obviously the preferable one, that of A should best be kept.

7 The stanza for *waw* is missing before A's stanza 7; it is supplied in C, and this should be restored.

8 A's stanza 8 (*yodh*), which is also to be found in B and C as the final stanza of the poem, is also displaced, though less dramatically; it should be restored to its correct place. C also provides an alternative stanza for *yodh* in approximately the right place, but it should best be regarded as a secondary substitution, made after the original verse had fallen out in its correct place.

9 After A's stanza 9 a stanza for *teth* is completely lacking in all three witnesses, and its absence should be denoted as a lacuna < >.

10a Considerations of metre indicate that B's ܡܪܝܢܐ should be followed, instead of A's ܡܪܝܢܐ.

10d Since there seems to be no obvious reason to prefer B's reading, that of A should best be retained.

11a A's singular conforms with John 19:28.

11cd Both A and B are awkward, and it is unclear whether *bra* is intended to be taken as 'Son' or 'he created': some sort of sense could be made either way. It is perhaps best to keep A's reading and take the two lines as a paradox: 'God (who is) also the Son (of Man) (originating as a human being) from the dust (Gen. 2:7) which he himself fashioned'.

16d B's ܡܪܝܢܐ (cf. Gen. 19:1, 8-9) should be preferred to A's ܡܪܝܢܐ; the alteration of ܡܪܝܢܐ to ܡܪܝܢܐ is much less likely to have taken place than the reverse.

17b A's ܡܠܟܐ should be retained as a *lectio difficilior*; the variant ܡܠܟܐ in B and C will be influenced by Matthew 23:31.

18d B's ܡܠܟܐ seems more satisfactory than A's bland ܡܠܟܐ; cf. Matthew 27:53.

19d The reading of A is to be preferred: ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ is probably here intended in the Jewish sense of the phrase, "the Spirit of the Sanctuary". Perhaps it was the apparent repetition of ܡܠܟܐ that lies behind the alternative line in B and C. In the Commentary on the Diatessaron (XXI.4), attributed to Ephrem, both expansions of the Gospel statement are already found.

21 A's single stanza for *taw* is certainly likely to be the original one; there is a tendency to multiply doxological stanzas at the end of alphabetic acrostic. The spelling ܡܠܟܐ, rather than the older ܡܠܟܐ, is probably best retained. The transference in B C of *yodh* to the end will be due to its apparent doxological character.

As will have become obvious from the commentary, my preferences in response to the first two questions set out above are as follows:

- in the case of poems with an acrostic which is not preserved complete in any manuscript, the acrostic should be restored as far as is possible.
- if a particular manuscript generally appears to provide the best readings, then it should be selected as the base manuscript for the edition, but not followed slavishly: manifest errors should be corrected, and each variant reading in other manuscripts needs to be considered, and any that seem superior should be adopted in the edition. In many cases, there will be no obviously superior reading, and in these circumstances it will be best to retain that of the base manuscript.

An answer to the other two questions will depend on the intended user of the edi-

tion. If the edition is aimed at more general readership,¹⁰ or perhaps is to serve as a basis for a translation into another language, then if variant readings are to be recorded at all, it is only worth indicating substantial differences, where a serious change of meaning is involved. Such an edition would naturally not pay any attention to orthographic variants.

In the case, however, of an academic edition, much will depend on the number of manuscripts collated, and the extent of the variation that they provide. If there is potentially a large quantity of material that could be included in the apparatus, there is something to be said for limiting the apparatus to variants that involve a change of meaning; this would exclude minor changes of word order, the addition or omission of *waw*, and many other minor differences, samples of which could, if required, be simply given in an Introduction.

For an academic edition orthographic variants can often be of significance since scribal practice changes over the course of the centuries. These variants, however, should be collected all together and analysed in an Introduction: they should not be included in the apparatus to the text unless they happen to alter the sense. The manuscripts of the text edited here happen to have very few orthographic variants, in sharp contrast to the situation with the West Syriac Dialogue between Satan and the Sinful Woman, where of course there are a large number of feminine forms where the orthography is particularly fluid. The information concerning these, and other orthographic features is much more helpfully given all together and analysed in an Introduction.¹¹

Besides collecting together and analysing the orthographical variants in an Introduction, the editor will need to make certain decisions concerning orthography in the edition to be printed, such as:

- should the orthography of the base manuscript be adhered to throughout, even if its own practice is inconsistent, (e.g. sometimes having 3rd fem. pl. perf, with final *yod*, and sometimes without)? Or, alternatively should the editor make the usage consistent throughout the text, adopting either the one or the other form. In the case of an early poem preserved only in late manuscripts, should the standard early orthography be restored (e.g. zero ending, instead of -y for 3rd fem. pl. perf.), even if all the manuscripts attest only forms in -y? Potentially, there can be a very large number of choices of this sort which will need to be made. For an edition intended for a wider readership, it would seem preferable to adopt spellings that will be familiar to the reader; thus, for example, the concessive particle ܐܝܢ 'if', is not infrequently written as ܐܝܢ in older manuscripts, but to adopt such spellings in the text would not be helpful, and even in an academic edition it would often be preferable to normalise such spellings in the text and relegate the non-standard form either to the apparatus, or (probably preferably) to the Introduction.

On the basis of the indications above, the following final edited text and translation may be offered. The corresponding stanza numbers of A are given in square brackets. In the translation, which follows the text edition, all readings adopted from B or C are indicated by italic; for the re-ordering of stanzas, see the textual commentary.

- [1] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [2] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ

- ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [4] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [6] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [5] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [7] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [9] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- < lost >
- [8] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
- [10] ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ
ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܐܝܢ

<p> 11] 11 ܠܝ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> 20] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 12] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> 21] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 13] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> APPARATUS </p>
<p> 14] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 15] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 16] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 17] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 18] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>
<p> 19] ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>	<p> ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ ܡܡܝܢ </p>

< ܐ > missing in A B C

, B C displace to the end

b C ܐܘܪܐ

cd B C ܐܘܪܐ ܕܐܘܪܐ ܕܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܕܐܘܪܐ ܕܐܘܪܐ

C provides a duplicate *yod* after *heth*:

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ om. C

a = B; A ܐܘܪܐ

d B ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ

a B ܐܘܪܐ

c C ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ om. C

a B ܐܘܪܐ

c B ܐܘܪܐ

d B ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ

c C ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ om. C

c B ܐܘܪܐ

d B

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ

a C ܐܘܪܐ

b C ܐܘܪܐ

d C, ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ om. C

c B ܐܘܪܐ

d = B; A ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ

b B C ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ om. C

d = B; A ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ

d B C ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ om. C

d B ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐ

a B ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ; C ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

b B ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ; C ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

c B ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ; C ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ

B precedes this stanza with a duplicate *taw*:

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ ܐܘܪܐ

TRANSLATION

- 1 [A 1] *alaph* O wretched tongue of mine,
speak, in so far as you are able,
of the glorious slaughter
that took place in Jerusalem.
- 2 [A 2] *beth* The Son and heir was sent
to his Father's vineyard
but the workers of shame
seized and crucified him.¹² Mt 21:39;
Lk 20:15
- 3 [A 4] *gamal* Gabriel was shaken
since they led off by night
Him who is *Lord* of all Nature,
and he wanders among the priests!
- 4 [A 6] *dalath* King David said
His garments will be divided, Ps. 22:19
and they will cast lots over
his coat woven in one piece. Jn 19:23-4
- 5 [A 5] *he* This is He concerning whom it
is written
that he was like a sheep to the slaughter
Is. 53:7; Acts 8:32
as they handed him over to Pilate to be
judged.
6. [A -] *waw*¹³ *Woe to Judas*
heaven and earth cried out,
for he sold his Lord Mt. 26:15
and handed him over to death.

- 7 [A 7] *zayn* A mighty commotion settled
upon all natures
since a body that had been fashioned
had turned round and condemned its
Creator!
- 8 [A 9] *heth* Hannan is the one who was
depicted Jn 18:13
through Jesus our Saviour
as having repaid a wage to his Lord
who was struck on the cheek in his
presence. Jn 18:22
- 9 [A -]. *teth* < lost >
- 10 [A 8] *yodh* Jesus to you be praises,
for you were standing there and being
judged
while that priest who condemned you
was proudly standing there.¹⁴
- 11 [A 10] *kaph* How many insults did they
cause him to hear!
they struck him too on the cheek.
How much did they clamour concerning
him
in order to crucify Jesus.
- 12 [A 11] *lamadh* He asked for water in.
his thirst,
they brought him
vinegar, so as to fulfil
all that is written concerning him. Jn
19:28-9
- 13 [A 12] *mim* Who will not be shaken
that he was standing and being judged
- He both God and the Son –
by the dust that he himself had
fashioned! Gen. 2:7
- 14 [A 13] *nun* The Light spoke to those
darkened men who had seized him,
for it was by his own will that he
endured
the suffering on behalf of the world.
- 15 [A 14]. *semkath* He opened the eyes of
the blind,
but they clamoured against him:
because he broke the Sabbaths
he is condemned to be crucified.
- 16 [A 15] *'e* The People was rich in
iniquity,
beyond what can be numbered,
so as to condemn
the Lord of all with their oaths.
- 17 [A 16] *pe* Jerusalem went mad
and condemned her Lord:
her wickedness rivalled that of Sodom
Gen. 19:1, 8-9
which had insulted the *angels*.
- 18 [A 17] *šadhe* Sion has acted wickedly
in everything,
rejecting the prophets, Mt. 23:31
stoning the apostles Mt. 23:37
and hanging the Son on the Wood. cf.
Acts 5:30
- 19 [A 18] *qoph* The Firstborn gave a cry
Mt. 27:46
and stones and rocks were split, Mt.
27:51-3
the graves too were opened
and the dead arose *and came forth*.
- 20 [A 19] *resh* The Spirit could not endure
that the Lord of all should be crucified:
She tore the veil Mt. 27:51
and the Holy Spirit departed.¹⁵
- 21 [A20] *shin* Praise to Christ
who because of our wickedness
endured insults innumerable,
because of our race which had died.
- 22 [A 21] *taw* Thanksgiving to the Son
who became a human being in his love
and he repaid the debt
that Adam had incurred in Eden.¹⁶

¹ This was demonstrated in my “The transmission of Ephrem’s *madrashē* in the Syriac liturgical tradition”, *Studia Patristica* 33 (1997) 490-505.

³ For the more complicated situation with a *soghitha* which does not have an acrostic, see my “An anonymous hymn for Epiphany”, *ParOr* 15 (1988/9) 169-200.

⁵ It so happens that in the present case my subjective preference is for the verses in C.

⁷ See P. Géhin and S.P. Brock, "Vestiges of a Syrian Orthodox liturgical collection", *Le Muséon* (forthcoming). Also originally belonging to Sinai Syr. 233 are four folios in Bryn Mawr College Library (Single Leaf Manuscripts Collection, nos 89 and 102) and two folios in Sinai Syriac New Finds M78N/B. The poem in question appears on Bryn Mawr 102, f.2rv.

⁹ S has ୫ ଲକ୍ଷ ଅର୍ଥ.

¹¹ This is done in my edition, 28-30.

¹³ The stanza is only attested in C.

¹⁵ B C 'and the holy Temple was ruined'.

¹⁶ B has an extra stanza for *taw*: 'Thanksgiving to you, O Son, / you left behind the angels above, / descended and became one of us - and you saved the Peoples with your blood'.

WHICH ONE IS HE?
NARSAI OF NISIBIS ON MOSES AND THE DIVINE NAME
AND ESSENCE AND A FEW PLAGUES



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Narsai of Nisibis is the most renowned poet of the Church of the East, but of the major Syriac poets, arguably the least translated and studied. This is a familiar situation in Syriac studies, but is now being remedied by a project to translate and publish all of the known metrical homilies of Narsai, along with accompanying studies of his work, art and theology.

Narsai: A Complete Translation, edited by Kristian Heal, Aaron Butts, and myself, is well underway, as a team of 38 translators have committed to translate at least one homily. Tentatively, these will be published in four volumes in *The Fathers of the Church* series of The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC. The first stage of this undertaking was concluded with a small conference, “Narsai: His Life and Works,” held at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, June 23–24, 2017. Twenty scholars attended, and the essays will be published by Mohr-Siebeck in its *Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity* series.

The intention of this long overdue project is to exemplify one missing element of the significant contribution of Syriac language and theology to Christian

world literature—its innovation and nurture of metrical homilies. Most notably in the early classical period of Syriac Christianity, yet continuing up to today, this genre became a vehicle for Biblical, theological, ascetical and liturgical exegesis and exposition. In Syriac, poetry has been composed typically in syllabic meter, many different meters at that, although around the 9th century some Syriac poets began employing rhyming schemes, likely following the Arabic lead.

Ephrem of Nisibis and Edessa is the first and foremost poet and exegete of the Syriac tradition. While he utilized ca. 45 different meters, his most distinctive meter appears to have been 7+7 syllables per sense unit.¹ Distinctively, he wrote his *madrashē* and *mēmṛē* to be performed by a choir of women, the *bnāt qyāmā*.²

The most prolific Syriac metrical homilist was Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) who reputedly wrote 763 *mēmṛē*, of which approximately 400 are extant at the moment, and barely 100 have been translated. He wrote in 12-syllable meter which became identified with his name. He wrote about seemingly everything, but in particular, Biblical personalities, stories and parables, at least 22 *mēmṛē* on ascetics and saints,

liturgical seasons, theological themes and some historical events.

An older contemporary of Jacob, Narsai (d. ca. 500) came from 'Ayn Dulba in northern Mesopotamia in the generations after the ceding of the region to the Sasanians following the disastrous defeat and death of the Roman Emperor Julian (363). Narsai was educated by his uncle, the abbot of the Monastery of Kfar Mari, and then went on to Edessa to study and eventually become the head teacher and director (Rabban) of the School of the Persians which favoured the dyophysite theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Jacob of Serugh also went to this School during the 460's, implying that the two were acquainted and perhaps had some influence upon one another, but no documents make the connections. In 489 the School was closed by Emperor Zeno, but sometime before, Narsai had difficulties with the Edessan leadership, was expelled, and returned to Nisibis where he was invited by Bishop Barṣawma to establish a new school. Most believe that Narsai left several decades before the School of the Persians closed, Arthur Vööbus suggests 471, but again there is no conclusive evidence to pinpoint the date.³

Narsai initiated a rigorous restructuring of the academic and spiritual life of the students and monks, centering around scripture and its interpretation, and focused upon the writings and methods of Theodore of Mopsuestia. The head teacher was appropriately entitled the *mpaššqānā* or 'exegete.' The statutes and canons of the School of Nisibis, 496 and 602, have given scholars a unique early portrait of the structure of theological vocational education in this period.⁴ The last two chapters of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Barḥadbshabba⁵ present lives of Narsai, the founder of the School, Barṣawma of Nisibis, and Abraham of Beth Rabban, the head teacher during some decades in the 6th century. The *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools*, also by

Barḥadbshabba,⁶ provides further information regarding Narsai and his School.

Narsai's literary legacy is more tangible. Eighty-one *mēmre* are attributed to him, the authorship of a few still being contested, as well as four Pseudo-Narsai metrical homilies on the patriarch Joseph. Composed in several syllabic meters, especially 12 and 7 syllables, Narsai deals with a variety of topics, Old Testament and New Testament, liturgical, seasons of the church year, and theological themes. In a broad stroke, his style of interpretation is distinctive from that of Jacob of Serugh, especially in Old Testament-themed *mēmre* in which Jacob's persistent tendency to depict Old Testament characters as Christological types is much reduced. Narsai concentrates upon telling the story plainly, examining the internal, psychological dynamics of the events recorded. His legacy among the Church of the East endured, influencing a number of later authors, including the 13th c. poetry of George Warda, *The Rose*, edited and translated by Anton Pritula.⁷

Now to a good example of Narsai's poetry itself, number 42 in the standard list, "Concerning the Election of Moses, and about the fire that he saw in a bush, and about the salvation of the Israelites, and what was said on the Thursday of Pascha." It is written in 12-syllable meter, two-line sense/meaning units, and exactly 500 lines overall in length. The Refrain (*ōnītā*) is worth noting since it sets the context of the recitation of this poem. "Blessed is the one who through his being killed, killed death and resurrected our nature on the day of his resurrection."⁸ Despite Narsai's aversion to Christological typology, this famous Old Testament story is seen as a fundamentally Christian story, the Old/New Testament distinction virtually unrecognized.

There are no divisions marked in the manuscripts except to distinguish the two lines of each stanza. I have taken the academic liberty of dividing the text into 23

sections of varying length along thematic and dramatic lines. [See Appendix]

By the length of the sections, Narsai favours Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, and not surprisingly the Ten Plagues receive the greatest attention. The narrative begins by throwing the reader immediately into that remarkable theophany, the Burning Bush (Exodus 3). Narsai circumscribes the narrative to include the events only from Exodus 3–14. No earlier events in Moses' biography are given and the homily ends abruptly with the corpses of the Egyptians on the shore of the Red Sea.

Unlike many metrical homilies, there is no *proemion*, praising God and asking for assistance in writing this *mēmra*. The first line, "The son of Amran saw a new vision on top of the mountain, a fire in a bush, and a bush in a fire, yet it did not burn" (1-2),⁹ evinces the utter surprise and unpredictability of the encounter with the divine. No preparation is possible or advantageous – in the twinkling of an eye there is God.

It is impossible to describe God, so Narsai kneads the Biblical words to evoke a sensory image. The fire was real fire, and therefore dangerous and harmful, yet the fire seemed to have self-consciously bridled its normal character. "Ravenous Sheol, which covets as much as it can eat, became a faster on the mountain of Horeb, which was unusual" (7-8).¹⁰ Still at a distance, Moses hears the fire in the bush neighing in imitation of stallions (23-24), and decides "'I will turn aside to see the great sight,' said the tongue-tied one,"¹¹ – the first acknowledgement of Moses' speech impediment – and then asks himself, 'Why is the bush burning while not burning up?' (25-26). Despite God's dramatic theophany, human initiative is still required for one to fully encounter the Divine Presence—Moses has to leave the beaten path and investigate this unusual phenomenon. The Commandment called to him 'inwardly' to come closer. Moses is

cautious because he knows that he is not holy, so the voice tells him to remove his sandals because now it is holy ground, but even more, "so that it will increase the majesty of the sight before his revelation" (32-36).¹² Purity is necessary to be able to see such an impossible and holy sight.

A lengthy section (37-80) presents God's purpose for the bush. "The mystery of his harshness and his gentleness he depicted in the vision" (43). "Just as in the fire it was easy for his Sign to wipe out Egypt, yet he showed in the bush that he did not desire this through human destruction" (47-48).¹³ God calls the fire "the medicine of the vision," so that he may bind up the wounds of the grieving Israelites in Egypt (60). The divine voice in the bush directs Moses to bring the good news of salvation and freedom to his people. "Sow the name of the God of their fathers into their ears" (79).

A second time Narsai remarks that Moses stutters, "Within the fire he spoke with him who was hesitant in speech" (49),¹⁴ which soon will become the paradox of God's communication.

"Sow the name of God into their ears" elicits a simple question from Moses – "Look, I will proclaim the name of God into the ears of the people, but they will demand a precise name, and what shall I say? There are names of gods without number in creation, and if I bring the name of God, they shall say, 'Which one is he?'" (85-88).¹⁵

"The Creator saw that he was earnestly seeking the request of His name and revealed to him the name of Essence without beginning" (91-92).¹⁶ God's Essence is not something finite and controllable; it exudes power and deeds of creativity (95-96). "I am 'I Am', and the name of my Essence is incomprehensible, and no one should establish for me a strange name besides 'I Am' (97-98)¹⁷ ... But 'I Am' I confirm is the name of my Essence, and its double

shall be confirmed with the expression of two times” (101-02).¹⁸ How do you give a name that expresses the infinite? Narsai underlines the tautological character of “*I am I Am*” in the eternal present (see footnote 18 in which Narsai transliterates the Hebrew of ‘I Am’) and must certainly know the original Hebrew connotation that God is ‘I will be Who I Will Be’—‘God Alone’ who determines the nature of existence and essence.

Narsai knows that the brevity of Scripture clouds over what transpires in the human mind, so he supplies Moses’ obvious responses to this awesome revelation. “The son of Amram heard the name which is Essence and hidden, and pondered how the people will believe something that is hidden” (103-04).¹⁹ Now the doubts in Moses’ mind surface—he is a stutterer and does not want to speak and not be heard, especially in the ineloquence of stuttering. Besides, would Pharaoh give any credence to the Name of Essence?

The Creator recognized what Moses was thinking and applied the fearful medicine of His Name as signs for Moses’ mind (113-14). Two signs are given to Moses besides the Burning Bush. One is his shepherd’s staff, which God transformed into a changeable substance, a snake and then back to a staff. The second was Moses’ hand being rendered leprous, then changing back into purity and cleanliness. These were to be tools and signs for Moses, although even for him they were “difficult for his mind (to comprehend)” (144).

The most powerful sign, however, is one by which he is already afflicted, the stuttering of Moses, and in a 12-line section, Narsai addresses “the Reason for Stuttering” (145-56). God declares to Moses, “It is easier for me that you may proclaim my majesty through your stuttering (150)²⁰ ... for look, whether or not you want (to do it), you must go (152) ... I have become the liberating word through the stuttering

of your mouth” (155).²¹ Building upon the dichotomy of vulnerable bush and the destructive flame, Narsai perceives Moses’ stuttering as a disarming vulnerability, a strength through weakness that utters the Commandment of God by a voice that is utterly human, and which most humans could surpass in clarity.

Once Moses, his wife and son, move down to Egypt from Midian, he speaks first with the Hebrews about his commission, and Pharaoh gets wind of it—and neither party is impressed. “He entered and related to his own people the vision that he had seen, but they were quiet, although not really quiet, because they did not truly believe. Pharaoh also heard the name of God and trembled, although not really trembling, because he believed that there was no God who could prevail over him” (185-88).²² Indeed, Pharaoh bluntly refutes Moses, “Go away, Moses, do not lead your people astray, lest you add a double yoke upon their necks. Go away, you stutterer, you have stammered greatly in speech, do not speak any more lest you suffer dishonour” (201-04).²³ The Pharaoh mocks Moses’ pretensions to be able to actually speak a powerful word when he has difficulty speaking clearly. The significant omission from the canonical account by Narsai is that there is no mention of the presence of Aaron to speak Moses’ and God’s statements clearly (Exodus 4:10-16), which intensifies the role of Moses’ stuttering.

Moses turns to the signs and plagues by which his staff is empowered, initiating ‘the edict of the Name of Essence’ (211) with the transformation of his staff into a real snake, and while the court sorcerers were able to conjure up similar mirages of imagination, the real snake swallowed the imaginary, yet Moses’ opponents were not impressed (221-24). Then matters get serious through a series of increasingly harmful plagues. The Nile turns into blood, locusts and frogs and gnats swallow up the

stubborn of mind, Pharaoh, and then the people of Egypt. His staff provides the metaphor for his actions and their effects – he casts down the staff and whatever it becomes—snake, blood, frog, insects—“by the dumb staff the earth is swallowed up by eloquence” (267).²⁴ “The harsh plague swallowed the Egyptian by the Hebrew” (271), destroying the seeds and fruits of all the trees (283-84), distinguishing according to the Creator’s command between Egyptian and Hebrew (280).

The Pharaoh relents briefly, and deceitfully, to let the Hebrews go, but refuses once more. Once again Moses raises his hand and staff. All of the cattle of Egypt died, “but the iniquity of that one full of iniquity did not die” (295).²⁵ Then the Lord went directly after the comfort of their bodies. “Through the ulcer of boils the insolent ones fell to the evils of pride, but they did not wish to take off the evil ulcer of their minds” (301-02).²⁶ Hail and fire are next, opposites which willingly join forces on behalf of the Creator. Narsai comes back to the fulfillment of the declaration to Moses, “You shall be a god” (Ex 4:16, 7:1), for he is able to command nature and be heeded by the elements, just like the Creator (321-22).

Darkness filled the land for three days, anticipating the period after the Crucifixion, and then “During the night, the angel of death passed over the fullness of iniquity and killed at once the first born of human beings and of animals” (341-42), and “like a thief it broke into the members and seized the soul” (346). For the Hebrews, this gruesome death was the source of salvation. “With the blood of a lamb he inscribed the salvation of their emancipation, lest the angel of death have power over their first born. Silent blood sprinkles words above their doors, and the watcher saw and turned aside and passed over their houses” (355-58).²⁷

Through the image of the blood over the doors, Narsai shifts into a rare instance of unabashed Christological typology in his homilies, although there are certainly more. “The blood speaks, it comes to free all peoples, and depict before you the mystery of his coming in the salvation of the people. The mystery of the truth freed the sons of Jacob and taught them to hand it down until he comes. On the fourteenth day in the month of Nisan his memory was inscribed, lest they forget this salvation of their freedom. From the beginning, the mystery of this day was guarded, and he knew it before the creation would be established in the beginning” (365-372). Return to the Refrain (*‘onītā*) for this homily: “Blessed is the one who through his being killed, killed death and resurrected our nature on the day of his resurrection.”²⁸ Biblical scholarship of an earlier generation (Hans Conzelmann), called this the Middle of Time, *‘Die Mitte der Zeit*,²⁹ which Narsai doubly perceived.

Defeated, Pharaoh relents again and lets Israel go, but we remember it is a cunning decision, which Narsai interprets as a drama being played out with not all the actors visible, and especially with Pharaoh unaware that he has a role in a larger drama.

“Depart from among my people,” the son of Ham said to the son of Abraham, / and while he did not wish [to do so], he prayed and sought earnestly concerning his fault.

As much as he pressed from the beginning against the truth, / so was he persuaded at the end of the plagues to [allow] the People to depart.

Quickly, he urged them to an exodus, although it was not his own [thought], but the Sign (*Rēmzā*) that forced him.

The hidden Sign urged him to let them depart, / lest the day of mystery which was remembered be prevented” (379-86).³⁰

The use of the literary character *Rēmzā*—sign, gesture, wink—indicating an unspoken and unwritten divine presence—is favoured by Narsai to depict the flow of the Spirit, especially in Biblical stories in which something unusual occurs, but no direct indication of God’s involvement is noted in the Biblical text. Narsai’s use of *Rēmzā* assumes that in the scriptures God is always there, albeit in the shadows, hidden, inner, secret, and it will play the pivotal role in the rest of the story.

In the canonical narrative, the Hebrews are allowed to take some of the wealth of the Egyptians as a sort of ransom to please get out of town (Ex 12:35-36). Our exegete adds a psycho-economic note that sounds humorously modern. “They departed rejoicing because they had taken spoil of their persecutors’ wealth, and again Pharaoh became very angry that he had to stay behind poor” (389-90).³¹

Consequently, Pharaoh’s jealousy foolishly piqued him and he incited the Egyptian army to go vengefully after the Hebrews, but it was again “the hidden Sign (*rēmzā kasyā*) that gathered them to a single/total destruction” (396). Nothing happens under the sun without divine intention, yet that does not mean the Hebrews understood this, and trapped up against the sea, Narsai read their reactions and mood precisely, “The Hebrews saw their pursuers and died from fright, and they lost hope for it was impossible to be delivered again” (401-02).³² Their desperate response is a thematic thread through the Exodus narratives, “They turned to Moses to persuade him—not with love, but with murmuring and doubt in their minds. ‘Why have you made us depart from inside Egypt to die here? Human slavery was better for us than death’ (405-08).³³

Moses prayed regarding the foolish murmuring, and the Lord’s response was primeval darkness and light. “[The Lord] created a darkness in the likeness of a

wall behind them, and a great light like a pillar before them. In the eyes of the pursuers he made the darkness a double darkness; but in their [Hebrews’] eyes he doubled the light in the hours of darkness” (411-14).³⁴

Narsai has thus utilized the ‘double’ metaphor in this homily three times. First to describe the double name of God—*I am ‘I Am.’* Then when Pharaoh hardheartedly refused to acknowledge the authentic existence and authority of the Lord God in his first encounter with Moses and the staff which became a snake, Moses made the Nile flow with blood, so that “Pharaoh was guilty of a double plague because he did not heed your words” (235). Doubling is an intensifier that conveys the infinite power of the Divine Essence.

The Creator (*bārōyā*) – Narsai’s descriptive for God—lowers himself down to speak privately with Moses as with a child, and Moses raises his staff to divide the sea for the People to cross over. To refute hard-hearted Pharaoh who did not want to accept a God who truly controlled the universe, Moses is divinely enabled to restructure Creation to save the People. “Cry out at the sorcerer, and see, he will heed you as one eloquent; interpret my name to him, and see, he will comprehend the power of my Essence. The stutterer stutters with the silent one as he was commanded, and the sorcerer heard him and completed his word through actions” (435-38).³⁵

Narsai makes explicit the implicit use of *Rēmzā*—“A great wonder Moses had accomplished, [yet] it was not Moses, but the powerful Sign of the Creator who spoke through it” (441-442).³⁶ The pieces are gathered together several verses later, “That commandment which gathered the waters in the beginning divided them and cast them down to keep order” (447-448).³⁷ Narsai interprets the Passover narrative as an act of re-creation.

The climactic walk through the Sea is not simply a triumphal march, but a confrontation of faith and fear, and not just for the Hebrews.

“The walkers saw the new walk as not being normal, / for it was real, yet not real to their minds.

As if in a dream, they were seeing on that very Passover, / and thinking about its newness—there is and there is not.

The Egyptians too stood amidst doubts concerning its wonder, / in which they were thinking the Sea is divided, or perhaps not.

The hidden Sign that had made this incited / the People to cross over and for the Egyptians to be drowned.

*The Hebrews did not cross over with assurance in faith, / and the Egyptians were not afraid when they entered among the waves” (459-68).*³⁸

The paradox of faith and fear is played out to its fullest. The Hebrews demonstrate that authentic faith must cope with fear, while the Egyptians show that the arrogance of their own power is not really faith. Once more, the hidden *Rēmzā* is orchestrating all of this, not so much in nature, but in the minds of the Egyptians and the Hebrews.

The *mēmṛā* closes with the waters returning and the Egyptians perishing to the last man. The final image for the Hebrews is a typology of the entire ‘Israel in slavery in Egypt’ saga. “The Hebrews saw their (Egyptians’) corpses on the sea shore and remembered the corpses of infants that had floated upon the River (Ex 1:5-2:10)” (495-96).³⁹ Narsai ties all parts of the story together: the Israelites remember God’s Name and God remembers the suffering of Israel.

APPENDIX

Mēmṛā Forty-Two

Concerning the election of Moses, and about the fire that he saw in a bush, and about the salvation of the Israelites and what was said on the Thursday of Pāsḥā.

Narsai: Homiliae et Carmina, Vol. II, edit. Alphonse Mingana (Mosul, 1905) 288-302

Refrain (‘ōnītā): *Blessed is the one through his being killed killed death and resurrected our nature on the day of his resurrection. My brothers.*

1. *The Burning Bush That Did Not Burn* (lines 1-16)
2. *Moses Turns Aside to See* (17-36)
3. *God’s Purpose for the Bush* (37-80)
4. *Moses Asks for a Name* (81-90)
5. *The Name of God* (91-102)
6. *Some Doubt the Name* (103-114)
7. *Moses’ Staff* (115-126)
8. *The Leprous Hand* (127-144)
9. *The Reason for Stuttering* (145-156)
10. *Moses Goes Down to Egypt and Circumcision* (157-178)
11. *Moses Confronts Pharaoh with Staff in Hand* (179-198)
12. *Pharaoh’s Response and Moses’ Rebuttal* (199-210)
13. *Real and Imaginary Snakes* (211-226)
14. *Blood in the Nile* (227-248)
15. *Locust and Frogs* (249-284)
16. *Pharaoh Relents Briefly: Plagues of Boils, Hail, Fire* (285-332)
17. *Plagues of Darkness and First-Born* (333-374)
18. *Pharaoh Lets Israel Go* (375-390)
19. *Pharaoh Retaliates and Pursues* (391-408)
20. *Wall of Darkness, Pillar of Light* (409-422)
21. *Dividing the Sea* (423-454)
22. *Israel Walks Through the Sea* (455-476)
23. *The Sea Returns* (477-500)

NOTES

¹ Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem* (Cistercian Studies 124; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992). A recent resource is Jeffrey T. Wickes, transl., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: The Hymns on Faith (The Fathers of the Church)*; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, (2013) Introduction, 3-53.

² Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 8:2 (2005) 125-149.

³ Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (CSCO 266, Subs. 26; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1965), 34-47; Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 70-76.

⁴ Arthur Vööbus, ed. *The Statutes of the School of Nisibis (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 12)*; Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1962); Adam H. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* (Translated Texts for Historians 50; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

⁵ F. Nau, *La seconde partie de l'histoire de Barhadbesabba 'Arbai'a* (*Patrologia Orientalis* 9.5; 1913) Chapter XXXI, 588-615 and Ch. XXXII, 616-631.

⁶ A. Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles* (*Patrologia Orientalis* 4.4; 1908), 381-387.

⁷ Anton Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection. Study and Critical Edition* (Göttinger Orientforschungen, I. Reihe: Syriaca 47; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015).

⁸ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

⁹ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹⁰ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹¹ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹² ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹³ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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¹⁴ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

¹⁵ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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¹⁶ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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¹⁷ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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¹⁸ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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¹⁹ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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²⁰ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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²⁸ See above, footnote 8.

²⁹ Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas*, 7th edition (Tübingen 1993) (translated into English as *The Theology of St. Luke*).

³⁰ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

³¹ ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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[illegible]

EAST MEETS EAST IN THE CHALDEAN FURNACE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ROMANOS' HYMNS AND JACOB OF
SERUGH'S HOMILY ON THE THREE CHILDREN



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INTRODUCTION

From all the hymnographers to have ever sprung forth from the Byzantine church, Romanos the Melodist is by far the most renowned and celebrated. Being highly esteemed and recognized today in the Eastern Orthodox church for his ever-popular hymn for the feast of the Nativity of Christ, *Today the Virgin* (Ἡ Παρθένος σήμερον), Romanos composed many liturgical hymns (*kontakia*) throughout his lifetime. He wrote compositions for the various feasts, and for a variety of topics found in both the Old and New Testament.¹ From the various synaxaria, the main source of biographical information for Romanos, we know that he was born in Syria, in the city of Emesa (modern day Homs) in 485 CE and was of Jewish lineage.² During the reign of emperor Anastasius I (491-518 CE) Romanos first moved to Berytus where he was consecrated to the office of deacon and thereafter to Constantinople where he pursued an ecclesiastical career in composing liturgical hymns. He reposed at some point near 555 CE after a successful career wherein he had allegedly composed over 1000 *kontakia*.³

In the course of over a century, scholarship in the field of Romanos studies has made clear that Romanos' hymns rest on an intricate framework of ideas and sources. Despite the vast complexity of the relationship of the sources underlying his writings, it is possible to classify all the influences into two main groups. The first of these is Scriptural narrative from both canonical and extracanonical sources, while the second is patristic interpretation.⁴ In his edition of Romanos' hymns as preserved in the Patmos codex, Nicholas Tomadakis states:

A particular category of sources are the patristic writings, and in particular [those] of John Chrysostom (347-407), Basil of Seleucia (4th century) and others. These writings [i.e. of the fathers] interpret and expand (at times symbolically) the Old or the New Testament. The interpretations provided are intellectually closer to the sixth-century individual, whom Romanos is addressing; therefore, the central views of these fathers are whole with regard to the spirit of the times but this in no way means that Romanos returned any less to his pro-

totypes [i.e. Scriptural narratives and other historical events].⁵

This assessment by Tomadakis is important not only because it emphasizes the point that all the influences which serve as the basis for Romanos' poetry can be efficiently placed into two main categories, but also because his statements regarding the patristic milieu of the sixth century CE shed light on why the church fathers would have constituted one of the main sources utilized by Romanos for his writings. Romanos made use of the interpretations of the church authorities because it was in alignment with *the spirit of the times* (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἐποχῆς). Thus, in sixth century Byzantium, not only was it fashionable to reference the interpretations of the church authorities in one's own writings, but there was no need to consult any other source since the writings of the fathers offered a complete view of Scripture. Tomadakis, however, is careful to note that despite the comprehensiveness of the patristic sources, Romanos also made use of Scriptural and historical events for the construction of his hymns.

Initially, the item of interest for scholars in this field was deciphering whether the *kontakion*, first seen used by Romanos, had Greek or Syrian origins. In the process of investigating the possible sources for the poetical form of the *kontakion*, it became evident that parallels existed between Romanos' writings and those of the early Church fathers. Karl Krumbacher first noted the parallels between Romanos and the Cappadocian fathers Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, as well as with Greek Ephrem.⁶ Soon thereafter, Paul Maas noticed parallels between Basil of Seleucia and Romanos.⁷ Thus, the field of examining the patristic literary tradition underlying Romanos' poetry began to burgeon, especially as some scholars sought to use the literary dependence to determine what

the poetical form of the *kontakion* was.⁸ However, in his monograph entitled *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance*, José Grosdidier de Matons challenged the conclusions of Paul Maas and Constantine A. Trypanis by stating that the *kontakion* was not of Syriac but rather of Greek origins.⁹ What was all the more puzzling were his conclusions that Romanos had not used sources written in Syriac – not even the writings of Mar Ephrem – even though he speculates at some points on Romanos' dependence upon Syriac sources.¹⁰ This position came to be challenged and successfully refuted in the early 80s by William L. Petersen, who in a series of monumental articles showed the dependence of Romanos on the genuine writings of Ephrem and the important role this played in the formation of the *kontakion*. Petersen showed how Romanos was acquainted with and made use of both Ephrem's *Commentary* on the *Diatessaron* and a number of Ephrem's Syriac poems on at least 21 occasions.¹¹ In emphasizing the need to distinguish between the evidence for literary dependence and the evidence for agreement in poetic forms, Petersen states:

Our parallels, on their own, do *not* establish the Syrian origin of the *kontakion*. Rather, they merely establish that Romanos owes a debt – a *tremendous* debt – to Syriac sources, especially to Ephrem, the greatest Syrian poet. Romanos' choice of symbols, his exegesis, phrases and metaphors are often dependent upon the Syriac Ephrem.¹²

Petersen was indeed correct to emphasize the importance of Ephrem for Romanos, especially as Romanos had been born in Syria and would certainly have become acquainted with the writings of Syria's greatest church father at some point in his youth. Sebastian Brock, however, showed

the equal importance of other, non-Ephremic Syriac writings on Romanos' compositions. In his article, "From Ephrem to Romanos," Brock investigates parallels between Romanos' *kontakion* on the *Trial of Abraham* (Gen 22) and the anonymous verse homily on the same biblical episode (*Memra II*), ultimately concluding that Romanos must have either known this very *memra*, or a lost Syriac homily which contained similar features to those in *Memra II*.¹³ These findings of Brock subsequently opened the field to the investigation of other Syriac sources and influences underlying Romanos' compositions, further enhancing our knowledge of the interactions between the Greek and Syriac literary cultures.

In 2007, Manolis Papoutsakis further contributed to our understanding of Greek-Syriac interactions in the hymns of Romanos with his (re)assessment of the motif of the antagonism between the Lion and the Fox, which Petersen had initially investigated.¹⁴ In his critical study, Papoutsakis showed that while the motif originated with Ephrem, Romanos had in fact adopted the reworked version of this motif from Jacob of Serugh. His conclusions were based on the fact that Romanos coupled the motif of the Lion and the Fox with that of the Eagle and the Vultures in a *kontakion* just as Jacob had done in two *memras* on the very same topic – the *Massacre of the Innocents*. These findings are important for three main reasons. First, they make evident that Romanos was quite familiar with contemporary Syriac literature. Second, on account of Romanos' knowledge of contemporary Syriac sources, they shed light on the intellectual interaction between the Greek and Syriac literary cultures. Finally, they emphasize the need for scholarship to further investigate Romanos' hymns against the homilies of Jacob of Serugh. Being the younger contemporary of Jacob and having grown up in bilingual Emesa during the time in which Mar Jacob's liter-

ary activities were at a peak, Romanos was certainly acquainted with the writings of this church father who, very much like his predecessor Mar Ephrem, had gained great popularity during his own lifetime throughout the Syriac-speaking Christian world on account of his poetical homilies.¹⁵ While previous scholarship mainly focused on Romanos' relationship with the Greek fathers and Ephrem, Papoutsakis opened the doors to our looking beyond Ephrem and focusing on other Syriac sources, especially Jacob.

Following the path paved by both Sebastian Brock and Manolis Papoutsakis, this paper will conduct a comparative analysis of Romanos' hymn on the Three Children in the Furnace (Dan. 3) and Mar Jacob's *memra* on the same narrative. It will examine common literary motifs found in both works, as well as compare these against genuine Ephrem and other patristic sources, to determine the degree to which Jacob's writings served as a source for this specific liturgical composition of Romanos. It is hoped that this paper will (a) provide a tangible background for at least certain sections of the hymn composed by Romanos, (b) contribute to our understanding of the literary relationship between the two great poets Romanos and Mar Jacob, and (c) enhance our understanding of the intellectual interactions occurring between the literary cultures of the Greek and Syriac-speaking worlds in Late Antique Byzantium.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE *KONTAKION* AND THE *MEMRA*

I. Comparison of Egypt and Babylon

In the first strophe of his *kontakion* on the three children, Romanos implores God for deliverance from spiritual death. He asks God not to abandon His people but rather to save them as He once delivered His cho-

sen nation in both Egypt and Babylon. It reads:

Τάχυνον, ὁ οἰκτίρων, καὶ σπεῦσον,
ὁ ἐλεήμων, / εἰς τὴν βοήθειαν ἡμῶν,
ὅτι δύνασαι βουλόμενος· / ἔκτεινόν
σου τὴν χεῖραν, ἥς πάλαι ἔλαβον
πεῖραν / Αἰγύπτιοι πολεμοῦντες καὶ
Ἑβραῖοι πολεμούμενοι· / μὴ
καταλείπῃς ἡμᾶς καὶ καταπίῃ ἡμᾶς
Θάνατος ὁ διψῶν ἡμᾶς καὶ Σατὰν ὁ
μισῶν ἡμᾶς· / ἀλλ' ἔγγισον ἡμῖν καὶ
φεῖσαι τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν, / ὥς ἐφείσω
τῶν παιδῶν σου ποτὲ / τῶν ἐν
Βαβυλῶνι ἀπαύστως δοξαζόντων σε
καὶ βληθέντων ὑπὲρ σοῦ εἰς τὴν
κάμινον / καὶ ἐκ ταύτης κραζόντων
σοι· / “Τάχυνον, ὁ οἰκτίρων, καὶ
σπεῦσον, ὥς ἐλεήμων, / εἰς τὴν
βοήθειαν ἡμῶν, ὅτι δύνασαι
βουλόμενος.”¹⁶

Make haste, O Compassionate One,
and run quickly, O Merciful One, to
our help, / for You can do whatsoever
You desire. / Stretch out Your hand
which the Egyptians and Hebrews
experienced of old, / [the former]
while waging war, [the latter] while
being assailed. / Do not abandon us
lest Death, who thirsts for us, and Sa-
tan, who hates us, devour us. / But
approach us and save our souls, / as
You once saved Your children / in
Babylon, who ceaselessly glorified
You, / and were cast into the furnace
for You, / and from it cried out:
“Make haste, O Compassionate One,
and run quickly as a Merciful One to
our help, / for You can do whatsoever
You desire.” (Strophe 1)

In this *strophe*, Romanos reminds God—a paradox in and of itself – of the two times He miraculously delivered His nation from the enemy. While there are many instances in Scripture where God intervenes and saves His chosen people, Romanos singles out their deliverance from the Egyptian and Babylonian enemies on account of the supernatural manner by which they were saved in these accounts.

Romanos’ expression, “Stretch out Your hand which the Egyptians and the Hebrews experienced of old,” has two aspects to it as it is both a request for current deliverance but also a recollection of the biblical deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egypt. While there are several occasions in the Exodus narrative wherein the Hebrew people are delivered, the references to the warring Egyptians and the assailed Hebrews make it clear that Romanos is referring to the ultimate deliverance of the Hebrews at the Red Sea (Exod. 14:14-29). Later in the *strophe*, Romanos beseeches God to save the souls of the faithful as He once had saved the children in the furnace in Babylon. Thus, Romanos asks of God to deliver the faithful as He extraordinarily had done so in both Egypt and Babylon. By this, the hymnist juxtaposes the elements of water and fire, whose very natures were, through divine providence, miraculously altered and overcome in the respective narratives.

In his *memra*, Mar Jacob juxtaposes the miracle of the Red Sea in Egypt with the miracle of the furnace in Babylon. While he dedicates twelve stanzas to the comparison of the miracles, I present only some of the more relevant ones for the purposes of this study. He writes:

(p117, L21+22)

ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ

Divinity made there in great Babel a
great deed, / just as in Egypt of great
renown. (245)

(p118, L3+4)

ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ
ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܬܐ

Then, in Egypt, the sea was divided be-
fore the Hebrews, / but within Babel,
the gate of fire is before the Hebrews.
(247)

(p118, L7+8)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

Just as in the sea, He [also] did a marvel
within the furnace. / That we may learn
that the Lord rules over creation. (249)

(p118, L9+10)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

He [=God] gave a lesson in the sea to
one region, / and [also gave a lesson]
to this other one in the glowing fire
which was raging. (250)

(p118, L17+18)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

In two regions which were gaining
force in idolatry, / He made signs and
astonished them that they would listen
to Him. (254)

(p118, L19+20)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

In these two fertile regions of the
soothsayers and the Chaldeans, / He
swiftly cast fear by the powerful
[signs] which He made. (255)

(p118, L21-119, L1)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

To Pharaoh the sea and to the Baby-
lonian the flame, / that it [=the sea]
would swallow the one [=Pharaoh],
and this one [=Nebuchdnezzar] ad-
mires the great vision. (256)

(p119, L6+7)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

He saved His own [=people] but those
who are not His own, He delivered to

death, / so that a lesson is established
through the chastisement. (259)

(p119, L8+9)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ
ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ ܕܡܕܢܚܐ

The flame killed the slanderers, / just
like the sea which suffocated Pharaoh
who was boastful. (260)

The comparison of the two miracles is un-
disputedly a very important theme in Mar
Jacob's homily, especially as it is the sub-
ject of so many stanzas. He does not, how-
ever, simply compare and contrast but also
appends a theological interpretation to the
Scriptural events. For Jacob, not only is the
respective element in each story the source
of punishment for the enemy, but also the
source of deliverance for God's own peo-
ple. Furthermore, the miracles functioned
to show and instruct the pagans as to who
the real God was, and also to cast down the
rulers of each respective nation since they
were boastful before God. What is of ut-
most relevance for this paper is the fact that
Mar Jacob, just like Romanos, does not
draw upon any other Biblical story against
which to compare the story of children in
the furnace. For both authors, Babylon and
Egypt are emblematic of all the divine,
salvific actions within Scripture. Thus, the
presence of only one, identical narrative
comparison in both works is indicative of a
relationship between the two texts.

The dependence of Romanos on Jacob
for the use of this motif is strengthened
when one observes the absence of such a
comparison in any other Greek or Syriac
patristic document. The only church father
who does juxtapose Babylon with Egypt is
Basil the Great in his *Homilia in Psalmum
XXVIII*. Basil, however, does not treat
these miracles as equal. Rather, he states
how the fire in Babylon was a far greater
miracle than the simple parting of the Red
Sea on account that burning flame was

shown to possess both caustic and refreshing properties.¹⁸ Basil's key focus is casting the event in Babylon as a prefigurement of things to transpire at the Second Coming, when fire shall simultaneously burn the iniquitous ones and refresh the righteous.¹⁹ While Basil's commentary may have served as a source for Jacob's identical remarks on the symbolism of the flame's dual nature in another section of his *memra*, it cannot have stood as a source behind Romanos' use of the motif for two reasons.²⁰ First, Romanos, like Jacob, does not treat one miracle as being greater than the other, but views both as equally redemptive. Second, while Jacob may offer an allegorical interpretation to the flame, he does this in a separate part of the *memra*. The stanzas examined above do not append an eschatological interpretation to the events which transpired in Egypt and Babylon but rather emphasize the miraculous and contrasting manner in which God redeemed His nation. Romanos, in likewise fashion, does not append some deeper meaning to the Scriptural events but simply focuses on their redemptive force. It is on the basis of these points that Basil's work could not underlie Romanos' hymn on the children with regard to the Egypt/Babylon motif.

II. Fragrant Scent of the Children and the Power of Fasting

In the third *strophe* Romanos uses a powerful expression, *thrice-perfumed fragrance* (τρίμυρος εὐωδία), to describe the children, who pray to God asking that He accept their sweet scent. It reads:

Ὑμνον οὖν ὑπὲρ πάντων προσέφερεν
ὥς ἐκ πάντων / ἡ τρίμυρος εὐωδία
τὸν δεσπότην ἱκευτεύουσα /
"Εὐρεγέτα ἐν πᾶσι καὶ ἄμωμε κατὰ
πάντα, / ὁ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας ὄχετος
μὴ παροξύνῃ σε / ἐκ θυσιῶν
δαιμόνων καὶ ἐκ παραπτωμάτων /

ὁρῶν τὴν γῆν σου γέμουσαν καὶ
παντόθεν ἐξόζουσαν / ἐσμέν γὰρ ἐν
μέσῳ βορβόρου ὡς θυμίαμα / εἰ
δοκεῖ σοι ὁσφράνθητι ἡμῶν / τῶν
σῶν δούλων, σῶτερ, καὶ τοῦ γνησίου
φίλου σου, / τοῦ εὐδόσμου Δανιὴλ ὃν
ἠγάπησας / σὺν ἡμῖν γὰρ κραυγάζει
σοι / Ὑάχυνον, ὁ οἰκτίρμων, καὶ
σπεῦσον, ὡς ἐλεήμων, / εἰς τὴν
βοήθειαν ἡμῶν, ὅτι δύνασαι
βουλόμενος."

Now, the thrice-perfumed fragrance [i.e. the Children] / offered to the Master a hymn on behalf of all as from all [saying], / "O Benefactor for all things and Blameless one in all things, / do not let the drains [i.e. sewage] of idolatry provoke You, / as You see Your earth filled with the sacrifices of demons and with transgressions, / and oozing stench from every place. / We are as incense in the midst of mire; / if it is desirable to You, smell us, Your servants, O Saviour, / as well as your genuine friend, the fragrant Daniel, whom You love. / For he cries out to You alongside us: / 'Make haste, O Compassionate One, and run quickly as a Merciful One to our help, / for You can do whatsoever You desire.'" (Strophe 3)

Besides the direct reference to the three children as being the embodiment of a sweet aroma, the prayer presented by the children to God continues to play on the scent motif by juxtaposing their fragrant selves with the stench of paganism. Romanos is using the scent motif to accentuate the themes of martyrdom, worship, and asceticism which are all woven into the fabric of the biblical narrative, especially as early and patristic Christian literature equates a sweet odour with the aforesaid themes.²¹ Given that the children in this *strophe* have not yet been placed into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, it can be said that Romanos wishes to especially stress the latter two themes in this section of his hymn. While the faith motif becomes evident when the children contrast

themselves with idolatry, that of asceticism becomes especially pronounced when Daniel is commemorated. While Daniel is absent from the events transpiring in chapter 3, his being mentioned in this *strophe* recalls the events of chapter 1 wherein he and the children in unison refuse to eat of the king's defiled food (Dan.1:8-15). It is their ascetical feat of fasting in chapter 1 which displays their loyalty and piety to the faith of their fathers. Thus, Romanos successfully links the fasting of the children with their sweet scent which they now offer to God. In turn, this also establishes a clear relationship between the fragrance of their fasting and their subsequent preservation in the fiery furnace. The relationship of these themes culminates in a later *strophe* when the angel comforts the children in the furnace saying:

μηδὲν πτοηθῆτε· τὸ πῦρ οὐκ ἐνοχλεῖ
 ὑμῖν, / τῶν ἐχθρῶν γὰρ ὑμῶν
 ἐπικρατεῖ· / ἐκέλευσα τοῦτο
 νηστεῦσαι, ὡς νηστεύετε, / καὶ
 ἀσώτως τοὺς ἀσώτους κατέδεσθαι
 τοὺς ὑμῖν μὴ συμψάλλοντας·

Fear nothing! The fire does not trouble you. / It prevails over your enemies. / I commanded it to fast, just as you fast, / and to gluttonously devour the reckless ones who do not chant alongside you... (Strophe 23)

Jacob also makes abundant use of the scent motif in his *memra*. He writes:

(p99, L5+6)

ܦܬܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Three censers whose choice scent spread out in the universe, / and the air was pleased by the attractive fragrance of their aromas. (49)

(p116, L2+3)

ܦܬܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

The censer of their love spread out and imbued me / with their good scent, for the whole earth is filled by it. (225)

(p121, L10+11)

ܦܬܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

The fragrance of the fast of the ascetical ones spread out and she [=the flame] was overcome, / [so as] to honour the brilliant bodies that they would not be blemished [by her]. (282)

(p121, L12+13)

ܦܬܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

She [=the fragrance] spread out and went out against the Chaldeans and the slanderers / in great power, to destroy them in the conflagration. (283)

In Stanzas 49 and 225, Mar Jacob makes a rather powerful use of the fragrance motif to show how the scent of the children permeates the whole of creation. What is especially significant is his use of a censer metaphor to create the visualization of the aroma spreading everywhere. There is no doubt that these couplets would have evoked for his audience the image of liturgical censuring, consisting of the movement of smoke and fragrance in every direction. It is on this point that there appears to be a strong correlation between the *kontakion* and the *memra* since Romanos also evokes this striking image in his hymn when he has the children describe themselves as incense.

While the incense motif is vivid, Jacob does not actually correlate the pleasant fragrance in stanzas 49 and 225 with one of the aforementioned themes generally associated with the scent motif. He does, however, make such a correlation in the remaining verses. In stanzas 282 and 283, there is a clear parallel between the fasting of Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael and the

spiritual fragrance which they exude.²² Again, the fasting is a transparent reference to the events in Daniel 1 where the children refuse to eat the king's foods and prefer, alongside Daniel, a meager diet of vegetables and water. For Jacob, the fragrance of the fast serves not only as a protective force for the children from the blaze of the furnace but also as a punishing agent for those who slandered them. He makes this all the clearer in two subsequent stanzas – which bear striking similarities with *strophe* 23 of Romanos' *kontakion* – where he writes:

(p122, L1+2)

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ

With the fasting ones, she [=the furnace] keeps fast distinctly, / but with regards to the gluttons, her throat is wide open to devour them. (288)

(p123, L19+20)

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ
ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܕܝܫܘܥ

The glorious bodies which were not defiled by desirable things, / the fire cherished when they crossed over her to God. (308)

The theme of the children's fast as being the cause of their redemption is also to be found in the patristic corpus. In the writings of Basil the Great, there are two works which mention this theme and in one of these this theme is only mentioned in passing.²³ While John Chrysostom mentions the three children as examples of faith, humility, and upright worship in many of his homilies, he does not correlate the fast with their triumph in any of these. In the *Pseudo-Chrysostom* corpus, we have two instances where a rather strong correlation is made between the fast and its role in preserving the children.²⁴ However, there is a

key point of deviation between all these texts and Romanos' hymn. At no point do these Greek fathers make use of the scent motif in their treatment of the children in the furnace. They simply write about the power which fasting had for the children and nothing more beyond this. Therefore, it can safely be assumed that none of these authors or writings had an impact on Romanos' composition. With regard to the Syriac patristic milieu, Ephrem's series of *madroshe* on the fast (*Hymni de Ieiunio*) does in fact contain the scent motif. Specifically, in Hymn VII, which revolves around the events of Daniel 3, Ephrem emphasizes that the fasting of the children had changed their very nature and on account of the fragrance which they exuded, the flames did not devour them.²⁵ While this work of Ephrem was clearly a source for Jacob, it lacks the one item which both Romanos' *kontakion* and Jacob's *memra* have in common. Ephrem's *madroshe* has no reference to the censer/incense motif and this is what annuls the possibility of it being the direct source for Romanos' use of the scent motif. Thus, in light of the fact that both Romanos and Jacob (a) append the notion of the children's bodily fasting to the fragrance motif and furthermore relate this ascetical feat to their subsequent deliverance, (b) make use of the censer/incense motif to describe the sweet smell of the children, and (c) employ themes that are either completely or partially missing in the writings of the Greek writers and Ephrem, it can safely be concluded that Jacob's *memra* was in fact the source for Romanos' use of the scent motif.

III. Tri-Prefixed References

In Romanos' *kontakion* we encounter several nouns and adjectives with the prefix *tri-* (τρι) added to the stem of the word. While this was already seen in the previous section with Romanos referring to the children as the *Thrice-perfumed fragrance*, his

subsequent use of words with this prefix are important for this investigation. He writes:

ὅμως καὶ κλονουμένης τῆς
Βαβυλῶνος ὅλης / ἔμεινεν
ἀκατάβλητον τὸ τῶν παίδων
τριώροφον· / ἐπὶ γὰρ τὴν πέτραν
καλῶς τεθεμελίωτο / καὶ οὐκ ἐβλήθη
ὠθούντων τῶν πολλῶν·

But even if all of Babylon was shaken
[by idolatry], / the Three-storied
structure of the children remained in-
destructible, / for it was firmly estab-
lished on the rock [of faith], and was
not cast down when many thrust upon
it. (Strophe 5)

Ἰσταντο οὖν οἱ παῖδες ἐνώπιον τοῦ
δολίου / καθάπερ τρίγωνος πύργος
ἐρρωμένοι τῷ φρονήματι· / ὅθεν
τούτους ἰδόντες οἱ δωρεὰν
πολεμοῦντες / ὥς βέλη ἠκονημένα
κατηκόντιζον τὰ ῥήματα
λέγοντες τῷ τυράννῳ·

Now the children stood before the
treacherous one, / being firm in spirit
like a three-sided tower. / Wherefore,
when those who were freely warring
[against them] saw them, / they began
to shoot words as though sharpened
arrows, / saying to the tyrant... (Stro-
phe 8)

Ἄραντες οὖν τοὺς παῖδας οἱ ἐπὶ
τούτῳ ταχθέντες / δεσμοῦσι χεῖρας
καὶ πόδος καὶ χαλῶσιν εἰς τὴν
κάμινον· / δέχεται οὖν ἐκείνη τὴν
τρίκλωνον αὐτῶν ῥίζαν / καὶ οὐ
φλέγει, ἀλλὰ φυλάττει φοβουμένη
τὸν φυτεύσαντα· / ἀλλὰ εἰς πνεῦμα
δρόσου ἢ φλὸξ μεταβληθεῖσα / θεῖον
ὅτι ἀνέψυχε τὰ στελέχη τὰ ἅγια. / καὶ
ἦν ἰδεῖν ξένον· τὸ πῦρ γὰρ ἐπελάθετο
/ τῶν ἰδίων καὶ γέγονε πηγὴ /
ἀρδεύουσα μᾶλλον ἢ φλέγουσα οὕς
ἔλαβε / καὶ φρουροῦσα ὥσπερ
ἄμπελον τρίφορον, / ἵνα δῶ καρπὸν
κράζουσι·

Now, they – who were appointed for
this [task] – took away the children, /

binding [them] hand and foot and
casting them into the furnace. / She
[=the furnace] receives their three-
stemmed root, / and does not burn it
but rather guards it, fearing the Plant-
er. / And the flame was altered in a
divine manner to a breeze of dew / for
it refreshed the holy stems. / And it
was a strange vision – for the fire for-
got / its violent heat and became a
fount which watered rather than
burned those whom it received. / And
she [=the furnace] protected [them] as
though it were a three-shooted vine, /
ready to give fruit to those crying...
(Strophe 21)

While the *tri-* prefix incorporated into a
word is certainly not something unique in
and of itself, as it is simply the numerical
prefix indicating a multiple of 3, it is the
metaphors which these prefixed words are
used to denote which is of interest for this
study. In *strophe* 5, Romanos uses the
word *three-storied structure* (τριώροφον),
to describe the faith of the children. In a
similar play on words, he portrays the chil-
dren's firm faith in *strophe* 8 as a *three-
sided tower* (τρίγωνος πύργος). In *strophe*
21, Romanos depicts the children as both a
three-stemmed root (τρίκλωνον ῥίζαν), and
a *three-shooted vine* (ἄμπελον τρίφορον).
It is evident that Romanos applies these *tri-*
words in a very specific context since in all
four instances the children are veiled under
the guise of either a plant or a building.
Specifically, an architectural metaphor is
applied when describing the faith of the
children while their persons in the furnace
are portrayed through the plant metaphor.

Mar Jacob also makes abundant use of
the word *three* (ܕܠܕܐ) in his *memra* in the
same context as Romanos. There are 18
stanzas in his poetic homily which equate
the three children with objects that embody
the strength of their character and project
the greatness of their achievements. For the
sake of brevity, only the following four

couplets are presented as they are especially relevant for this study. They read:

(p99, L9+10)

ܒܩܠܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Three fortresses which Truth built amongst the captors, / and through them, all the captives of the house of Abraham rebelled. (51)

(p99, L11+12)

ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Three city walls protected the entire exiled community, / from that Error which was reinforced by the captors. (52)

(p128, L17+18)

ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Three branches from that forest of the house of Abraham / he [=Nebuchadnezzar] transplanted into the furnace, and his land was satiated by their fruits. (360)

(128, L19+20)

ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

Three chosen vine-shoots were placed in the field of fire, / which he had gathered from that vine-sprout which Moses had grown. (361)

While Jacob portrays the children through a variety of objects in the 18 stanzas, these four couplets contain identical themes to those used by Romanos. In the first two examples we see the three children portrayed as fortresses (ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) and city walls (ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) on account of their faith, while in the latter two they are depicted as branches (ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) and vine-shoots (ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) in the furnace. What

is worthy of our attention is the fact that Mar Jacob, like Romanos, uses an architectural metaphor when depicting the faith of Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, and a plant metaphor when portraying them in the furnace. While their choice of words may differ, what is of relevance is the metaphor applied to each theme. There is, however, one instance where Romanos may be directly dependent on Jacob even on the verbal level. In stanza 361 Jacob uses the expression, *three vine-shoots* (ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ), while Romanos uses in *strophe* 21, *three-shooted vine* (ἀμπελον τριφύλον). While each writer uses the word in a slightly different manner, the motif is nevertheless the same and utilized in an identical context. What further solidifies the links between Romanos' *kontakion* and this *memra* is the fact that none of the four *tri-* words used by Romanos are used in the context of the story of Daniel 3 by any of the other Greek church authors. Romanos is the sole Greek church writer to use these words in his treatment of this biblical story. Furthermore, while Hymn VII of Ephrem's *De Ieiunio* deals exclusively with Daniel 3, it does not use similar wording as that by Jacob. Mar Ephrem does indeed use a plant metaphor for the children when they are in the furnace but (a) refers to them as *cedars* and (b) does not use the word *three* as Jacob does in all his examples.²⁶ Thus, Romanos' only possible source for his thematically dividing the *tri-* metaphors for the children is his elder contemporary Jacob.

IV. Conversion of the Furnace into a Bridal Chamber and a House of Prayer

Strophe 21 through 27 constitute the climax of the *kontakion*, as these deal with the children in the furnace and their miraculous deliverance from the fire. At three points within these *strophes* Romanos equates the interior of the furnace with

both a bridal chamber and a place of worship. He writes:

Λέλυτο παραχρήμα ἡ δύναμις τῆς
καμίνου, / ὁ ἄγγελος γὰρ ἐξαίφνης
οὐρανόθεν ἐπεδήμησε, / μέσον
ταύτης εἰσῆλθε καὶ κατεπράυνεν
ὄλην / καὶ ἔδειξε τοῖς ἀγίοις ὡς
παράδεισον τὴν κάμινον· / καὶ
κατεπάτουν τότε τοὺς ἄνθρακες ὡς
ρόδα / καὶ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ ἄνθεσι τοῖς
σπινθήρσιν ἐτέρποντο· / καντήριος
τόπος εὐκτήριος ἐγένετο, / καὶ εὐρέθη
ρόδόπαστος παστάς· / ὁ θάνατον
πνέων τοῖς κύκλῳ καὶ τοῖς πόρρωθεν
/ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ τὴν ζωὴν οὐκ ἐλύπησε
δειλιῶν ὅπερ ἔψαλλον·

Immediately, the power of the furnace ceased, / for an angel suddenly came down from the heavens, / entered into her midst and calmed her completely. / And he showed the furnace to be a paradise for the holy ones. / And they then trampled on the coals as though they were roses, / and they were rejoicing with the flames as though they were flowers. / The place of burning became a place of prayer, / and was found to be a rose-laden bridal chamber. / That which was breathing forth death to those surrounding [the furnace] and to those afar, / did not distress the life of those who were in her midst, fearing that which they were chanting... (Strophe 22)

Στήσαντες οὖν οἱ παῖδες χορὸν ἐν
μέσῳ καμίνου / οὐράνιον ἐκκλησίαν
ἀπειργάσαντο τὴν κάμινον /
ψάλλοντες μετ' ἀγγέλου τῷ ποιητῇ
τῶν ἀγγέλων / καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν
λειτουργίαν τῶν ἀσάρκων
ἐκμιμούμενοι· / εἶτα ἐκ τῆς λατρείας
ἐμφορηθέντες τότε / τοῦ παναγίου
πνεύματος εἶδον ἄλλο παράδοξον·

The children established a choir in the midst of the furnace. / They made the furnace a heavenly church, / chanting alongside the angel to the Creator of the angels, / and imitating the liturgy

of the fleshless ones. / After being satiated by the Holy Spirit from the service, / they then saw another wonder... (Strophe 25)

In *strophe* 22 Romanos specifically refers to the furnace's interior as a rose-laden bridal chamber (ρόδόπαστος παστάς). What needs to be emphasized here is that Romanos is the *only* author from the entire extant Greek patristic corpus who utilizes the bridal chamber imagery for the furnace in Daniel 3. While Romanos' reference to the coals (ἄνθρακες) becoming like roses (ρόδα) in the furnace is also to be found in a homily of his contemporary, Leontius the presbyter, the bridal chamber image is absent elsewhere.²⁷ However, it is found in two stanzas of Jacob's *memra*. It reads:

(p118, L13+14)

ܐܝܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

He draws out a camp in the fiery seas, as though on dry land, / and like a bridal chamber, He makes the young children enter the flame. (252)

(p120, L19+20)

ܐܝܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

It is admirable to say that while they stand within the furnace – bridegrooms of fire who entered the bridal chamber of the flame... (276)

While the bridal chamber motif is certainly widespread and quite popular in Syriac church writings, its use to depict the furnace of the Daniel story is unique to Jacob. Not even Ephrem, who makes extensive use of this motif in his various writings, portrays the furnace in this way. Thus, we must strongly consider the possibility that Romanos was not simply and randomly incorporating one of the Syriac church's most popular motifs into his *kontakion*, but

rather was adopting it from Jacob who uniquely used it in his *memra* on the same topic. That Mar Jacob neither refers to the coals as roses, nor specifically mentions a rose-laden bridal chamber, does not by any means annul the dependence of Romanos' hymn for this motif on the former's *memra*. Given that Romanos is writing in the very center of the Greek-speaking Byzantine world, he naturally adapts the motif not only on account of the parameters of his own poetical style and likings, but also to display his extraordinary and unparalleled grasp of the language by skillfully playing on two almost-identical words for bridal chamber, *pastos* and *pastas*, in his expression *rhodopastos pastas* (rose-laden bridal chamber).²⁸

For Romanos, on account of the praises which Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishaël offer to God in the furnace, it mystically becomes a place of holiness. In *strophe* 22 Romanos depicts the interior of the furnace as a place of prayer (τόπος εὐκτήριος) while in *strophe* 25 he refers to it as the heavenly church (οὐράνιον ἐκκλησίαν). Romanos creates a complete image of the church for his audience by making use of the term *choir* (χορὸν), as well as the expression “and imitating the liturgy of the fleshless ones” (καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν λειτουργίαν τῶν ἀσάρκων ἐκμιμούμενοι), to denote the fullness of their service to God. Through his use of these, he effectively conveys the theme of monasticism to his audience. On the literal level, his use of the expression “fleshless ones” (ἀσάρκων) clearly refers to the bodiless, angelic beings whose heavenly liturgy is being imitated by the children in the furnace. But on a secondary level, the language strongly suggests an image of the monastic life which the children seem to be mimicking in the furnace. In the early church, the term *asarkos* (ἄσαρκος/fleshless) and its equivalent *asomatos* (ἄσώματος/bodiless one) are used on many occasions to describe solitaries and monks, who on account of

mortifying their flesh through fasting had reached a state of dispassion like that of the angels.²⁹ The background for such an interpretation was already set from earlier on in the hymn when Romanos used the scent motif to describe the sweet smell of the children and their prayers. As we saw in section II of this paper, the use of this motif is related to the fasting of the children. As fasting is one of the core practices of the ascetical life, and as the children's fasting was alluded to through these earlier references, there is no doubt that Romanos' expression in *strophe* 25 has at least a two-fold interpretation, one aspect of which is to portray the furnace as the dwelling place of monks – a monastery. This idea is further strengthened with Romanos' use of the word *choron* (χορὸν/choir), for even though it denotes the choir of chanters in the church who lead the service, the term is found frequently used in a number of early church writings in conjunction with the word “ascetic” and all its synonyms.³⁰ Thus, for Romanos, the prayer of the children in the furnace essentially unites the narrative of the story with the heavenly and monastic services into the earthly liturgy of the faithful who are listening to his very *kontakion*.

Mar Jacob also views the interior of the furnace as a holy place on account of the worship which the children render to Truth against Error. He writes in a series of couplets:

(p124, L8+9)

ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

O how beautiful is the voice of
praise to the Lord, when it is uttered,
/ in the fire by the fair ones while
they were confined. (313)

(p124, L10+11)

ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

The lovers of truth entered and found a quiet dwelling place. / And on account that it was pure, they began singing spiritually. (314)

(p124, L12+13)

ܦܝܠܝܢ ܕܬܪܬܐ ܡܕ ܕܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ

They rejoiced in that quiet dwelling place which had attained them, / for they hated the great Babel which had shattered them. (315)

(p124, L14+15)

ܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ

The single ones encountered a cell which suited them, / and they attentively stood upon the service without interruption. (316)

(p124, L16+17)

ܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ

That labour within the furnace was desirable to them, / better than all the clamour of Babel which was agitated. (317)

(p124, L18+19)

ܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ
ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܡܕܝܢܐ

They found a monastery and encountered in it a spiritual being, / and perhaps they sought never to get out from it. (318)

Mar Jacob uses a series of terms in these verses which are clearly associated with monasticism.³¹ The first significant term is “quiet dwelling place” (ܡܕܝܢܐ). Specifically, ܡܕܝܢܐ does not only refer to a quiet dwelling-place but is also used to refer to monasteries, to the monastic way

of life as well as to the individual cell of the monk.³² Therefore, an alternate rendering of stanzas 314 and 315 would have the children entering a monastery or a monk’s personal dwelling and rejoicing in it. In stanza 316 Mar Jacob uses two words which clearly display the monastic motif. He refers to the children as the “singles ones” (ܡܕܝܢܐ) and to the furnace as their cell (ܡܕܝܢܐ). The word *ihidāyê* from a very early period came to denote consecrated celibates.³³ His use of this specific word to refer to the three children would most certainly have created for his audience a powerful image to which they could relate, especially as (a) hermitages and monasteries were in abundance throughout all of Syria and (b) both laypersons and monks would have been part of his audience. Thus, for Mar Jacob, the interior of the furnace has become the interior of a hermit’s cell and the three single ones, or hermits, have entered it to perform their service to God diligently and attentively. The children hymn God in the midst of their trial just as ascetics ceaselessly praise God through spiritual songs daily in the course of their own personal struggles and trials. This point is emphasized one last time in couplet 318 with Jacob’s use of the word ܡܕܝܢܐ which in addition to a simple dwelling place is also used metaphorically for a monastery.³⁴

It is clear that both Romanos and Jacob use the same motifs to describe the interior of the furnace. For these authors, the inside of the furnace is a bridal chamber and a place of prayer. While Jacob uses language that directly conveys the theme of monasticism to his audience, Romanos simply alludes to it. However, given Romanos’ previous use of the scent motif to describe the fragrance of the children, and given the direct relationship between fasting and asceticism, he successfully portrays the children as Proto-monks just like Jacob. All

V. Praises of the Children in the Furnace and the Angel

In *strophe* 22 the angel was seen present in the furnace with the children but in the subsequent verse, we find out more concerning the function of the spiritual being. Romanos writes:

As soon as he descended into the furnace and was in the company of Aza-

These verses make evident that the duty of the angel was both to instruct the children on how to praise God and also to incite them towards this holy action. The angel holds back the power of the flame so that the children could do as they are commanded. Additionally, as seen in our previous examination of *strophe* 25, the angel also sings praises with the children. He therefore occupies the role of both guide and co-worshipper. We find something very similar in Mar Jacob.

[illegible]

ב. אהבה רבה ונאמרה ליהוה:
ויהי כהן גדול ליהוה ויהי כהן

In stanza 241, the angel descends into the furnace on account of the joyful shouts of praise that he already hears. Jacob portrays him as mingling with the children in rendering praiseful songs to God. In the subsequent stanza, however, a different role is given to the heavenly messenger as he is shown to be a guide (ἡγούμενος) who guides the fair assembly in its singing. Consequently, we have a situation identical to that found in Romanos—an angel who both

guides the children in their prayers and also participates in the worship. What suggests the transmission of the guiding-angel motif from Jacob to Romanos is the fact that it is neither a part of the deuterocanonical portion of Daniel 3, nor is it present in the writings of other church authors. Jacob's *memra* and Romanos' *kontakion* are the only two works wherein it is to be found.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a number of strong parallels between Romanos and Mar Jacob in their respective poetical compositions on Daniel 3. The examples presented indicate that Romanos was very well acquainted with at least this *memra* of Jacob and used it as a source when composing his *kontakion* on the children. This dependence is especially evident since the majority of motifs and metaphors examined are altogether absent in the writings of the other church fathers, especially in those of Saint Ephrem. While not denying the possibility of Romanos having borrowed from other sources for other parts of his hymn, he is indebted to Jacob at least for the themes analyzed in this paper.

The findings presented in this paper will be of use to the fields of Syriac and Byzantine studies, especially in the area of interactions between the Greek and Syriac literary cultures. This study, in combination with all previous studies dealing with the influential sources of Romanos' hymns, provides one additional proof of Romanos' affinity to the great literary giants and hymnographers of his native land. However, it is also evident that while Romanos adopted motifs and themes for his own composition, he did not slavishly do so but clearly adapted these to the language and stylistic parameters of his music. Thus, his own poetic brilliance and creative genius is not diminished in the least. The next step in Late-Antique scholarship is to re(examine) Romanos' genuine hymns against Jacob's poetry on parallel topics so as to determine the overall degree to which literary motifs are being transmitted from the Syriac-language poet Jacob to the Syrian Greek-language hymnographer Romanos. Such an assessment would be invaluable as it would permit for more general conclusions on the eminence of Syriac poetry and church writings for the Greek hymnographers and writers of 6th century Byzantium.

NOTES

¹ According to the synaxarion of Romanos found in the 14th century Codex Phillipps 1622 (Berlin), the poet composed around 1000 kontakia during his lifetime. For a critical edition of the Greek text see: H. Delehay, "Saint Romanos le Mélode," *AB* 13 (1894) 440-42.

² For the strophe of the hymn which reveals his Jewish roots, see: José Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les Origines de la Poésie Religieuse à Byzance* (Éditions Beauchesne: Paris, 1977), 165-75, esp. 169.

³ In addition to the aforementioned synaxarion, this information is also to be found in the synaxaria of the following codices: Codex 40, fol. 19^b of the Patriarchal Library of Jerusalem (10th/11th cent. C.E.), published by: A. Papadopoulos – Kerameus, "Mitteilungen über Romanos," *BZ* 2 (1893) 600; Codex 241, fol. 30^b of Patmos (12th cent. C.E.), published by: N. D. Tomadakis, "Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὴν βυζαντινὴν φιλολογίαν/An Introduction to Byzantine Philology," in *Ἡ βυζαντινὴ ὑμνογραφία καὶ ποίησις/Byzantine Hymnography and Compositions*, 2 [Greek] (Pournara Publishing: Athens, 1965), 86.

⁴ According to Marjorie Carpenter, apocryphal works such as the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Protoevangelium of James* also served as sources for several of Romanos' kontakia. Several of the kontakia dealing with the Crucifixion derive their materials from the former, while those of several Marian festivals are fashioned according to information derived from the latter. See: *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist I: On the Person of Christ* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1970), 205, 217, 227; *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist II: On Christian Life* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1973), 1, 7, 19.

⁵ N. B. Tomadakis, Ρωμανοῦ τοῦ Μελωδοῦ Ὑμνοὶ, ἐκδιδόμενοι ἐκ πατμιακῶν κωδίκων/*Hymns of Romanos the Melodist: Edited from the Patmian Codex* [Greek] (vol. 1; Mena Mirtide Publishers: Athens, 1952), η. Unless otherwise stated, all translations provided in this paper are my own. Statements in [] are clarifying statements by me and are not found in the original text.

⁶ *Miscellen zu Romanos* (24 Bd., 3. Abt. of Abhandlungen der Philosophisch-Philologischen Klasse der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; K. B. Akademie der Wissenschaften: München, 1907), 82-90.

⁷ P. Maas, "Das Kontakion," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 19 (1910) 285-306, esp. 298ff.

⁸ For an example, see: C. Emereau, *Saint Ephrem le Syrien. Son Oeuvre Littéraire Grecque* (Paris: Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1918), 101.

⁹ Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode*, 4.

¹⁰ Ibid. 253-54.

¹¹ William L. Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," *New Testament Studies* 29:4 (1983) 484-507; "The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39:2 (1985) 171-87.

¹² Petersen, "Dependence of Romanos," 183-84.

¹³ Sebastian Brock, "From Ephrem to Romanos," *Studia Patristica* XX, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1989), 139-151, esp. 146-50. See also: Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac," *Le Muséon* 99 (1986) 61-129, esp. 91-6.

¹⁴ Manolis Papoutsakis, "The Making of a Syriac Fable: From Ephrem to Romanos," *Le Muséon* 120 (1-2) 29-75.

¹⁵ According to Bar Hebraeus, Mar Jacob composed various hymns, expositions and letters, in addition to his 760 metrical homilies for which he is particularly known. It is not difficult to imagine the dissemination of these materials throughout the whole of the Syriac-speaking Christian world, especially as Mar Jacob had, according to this same chronicler, 70 amanuenses who recorded all his statements. See: J. B. Abbeloos and T. J. Lamy, *Gregorii BarHebraei: Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* (vol. 1; Peeters: Louvain, 1872), 189-92.

¹⁶ P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, ed., "On the Three Children," in *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 380-94. The strophe number is provided at the end of each translation. While there are some differences between this version of the hymn with that edited by Grosdidier de

Matons, these are minor and do not affect the themes analyzed in this paper. For his critical edition, see: *Romanos Le Melode: Hymnes*, Sources Chrétiennes 99 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 362-403.

¹⁷ Paulus, Bedjan., ed. "Daniel and his Three Companions in the Furnace," in *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* 2 (Leipzig: William Drugulin, 1905); Reprinted with additional material by S. P. Brock (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), 94-137. All references to the poem will be cited in text in the form of page and line number. The stanza number will be provided in the English translation for ease of reference in the analysis.

¹⁸ Basil the Great, *Homilia in Psalmum XXVIII* (PG 29:297ab).

¹⁹ Ibid., 297b.

²⁰ For Jacob's interpretation on the dual nature of the flame, see p. 123, line 7-21, p. 214, line 1-3.

²¹ For examples of such associations, see: Susan, Harvey. A. *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11-30, 162-69, 181-6.

²² For a possible source to the scent-motif used by Jacob, see: John Chrysostom, *Homiliae V in Epistolam Secundam ad Corinthios* (PG 61:427-36).

²³ Basil the Great, *Homilia de Gratiarum Actione* (PG 31:224b); *Asceticon Magnum Sive Quaestiones: Regulae Fusius Tractatae* (PG 31:960a).

²⁴ John Chrysostom, *In Genesim: Sermo III* (PG 56:527); *De Jejuni* (PG 61:789).

²⁵ Beck, E. ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ieiunio* [Textus], (vol. 1, 2 vol. Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1964), VII.8-9.

²⁶ Ibid., VII.7.

²⁷ Leontius, “In Mesopentecosten: Homilia 10,” in *Leontii Presbyteri Constantinopolitani Homiliae*, Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca 17, trans. P. Allen and C. Datema, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 331.

²⁸ For the definitions of these terms, see the lexical entries for *παστάς* and *παστός*(b) in: A. D. Alexopoulos, *Λεξικόν της Ελληνικής Γλώσσης/Lexicon of the Greek Language*, III

[Greek] (Athens: Π. Δ. Σακελλαρίου, 1887), 126.

²⁹ For such examples, see: Basil the Great, *Constitutiones Monasticae* (PG 31:1364c); G.J.M. Bartelink, *Palladio. La storia Lausiaca* (Verona: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1974), 86; This view of the monk living in imitation of the angels is quite dominant in Evagrius of Pontus. He even goes as far as to say that knowledge of the contemplative *nous* unites itself with the bodiless angels. For such references, see: P. Géhin, *Évagre le Pontique: Chapitres des disciples d'Évagre*, Sources chrétiennes 514 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007): 114:3 (200-1), 123:4 (206-7).

³⁰ While it is mostly applied in the patristic literature as a reference to the choirs of the angels, it is also used to denote the various ranks of saints. The most frequent application of this term outside of the angelic reference is to the choir of desert fathers. For examples of *choros* being applied to ascetics, see: John Chrysostom, *Cyriaco Episcopo Exsulanti* (PG 52:685); *Homilia XIII in Epistulam ad Romanos* (PG 60:517); *In Epistulam I ad Corinthios* (PG 61:52); A.-M. Malingrey, *Jean Chrysostome. Lettres à Olympias*, 2nd edn. Sources Chrétiennes 13. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 202; A.-J. Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971), 4-138.

³¹ See: Alison Salvesen, “Jacob of Sarug’s Mimre on the Book of Daniel,” in *The Harp* 29 (Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2014), 1-15, esp. 4-5.

³² CPD, s.v. “קִימָה.”

³³ See: Robert Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism," in *Christian Spirituality: Studies in Honour of E.G. Rupp*, ed. P. Brooks (London: SCM Press, 1975), 63-77, esp. 72-4; Sidney H. Griffith, "Asceticism in the Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism," in *Asceticism*, ed. V. L. Wimbush and R. Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 220-45, esp. 223-9.

³⁴ CPD, s.v. “𐎧𐎢𐎠 B.”

³⁵ John Chrysostom in one point only likens the interior of the furnace to the church. Given, however, the absence of both the bridal chamber and monastic references, it cannot be

viewed as a source for Romanos. See: *Cyriaco Episcopo Exsulanti* (PG 52:682).

³⁶ A very interesting remark by Polychronius of Apamea, the brother of Theodore of Mopsuestia, indicates that in the earlier Peshitta tradition this particular Deuterocanonical addition is in fact missing. He writes in his surviving commentary on the book of Daniel, “It should be made known that this hymn is not found in the Hebrew or Syriac books [of

Scripture]. It is said in the statements of some, that [this hymn] was constructed later.” See: E. Moutsoulas, Πολυχρόνιος Ἀπαμείας / *Polychronius of Apamea* [Greek], Βιβλιοθήκη Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων καὶ Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συγγραφέων/Library of the Greek Fathers and Church Writers 88, ed. G. P. Kounabi & D. C. Kallinteris (Athens: Ἀποστολική Διακονία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, 2007), 213.

‘THE TEN PLAGUES BROUGHT ON EGYPT BY MOSES’ IN THE EXEGESIS OF JACOB OF SERUGH¹



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Jacob of Serugh (521 AD), or Jacob the Teacher as known in the Syriac tradition, was an extremely prolific theologian and poet who is said to have written more than 760 homilies.² Among these homilies, Jacob has several cycles, one of which consisted of ten homilies on Moses, describes the most important events in the life of this major prophet. The present paper explores the third and longest³ homily in this cycle, entitled *The Ten Plagues Brought on Egypt by Moses* (cf. Ex. 5-12). Despite the cycle’s major importance in understanding the events of the Book of Exodus, which have been subject to many controversies over time, it is worth mentioning that the homily proposed here is one of seven homilies in this Mosaic cycle published for the first time in 2017 in *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*.⁴

The homily in question appears in four manuscripts,⁵ and is attributed to Jacob of Serugh. The oldest of these manuscripts is preserved in the Vatican library, and dates back to the year 523, two years after the death of Jacob! This, along with many other factors, certainly proves his authorship. The homily addresses several important theological questions, including how could

God, who is good, harden Pharaoh’s heart? How could he then strike him and all his people “unmercifully”, yet remain just and righteous? How could he accept the suffering of a whole nation, just to save his “chosen people”?

This paper introduces the structure of Jacob’s third Mosaic verse homily, and studies his exegesis of each of the ten plagues, in addition to the Christological typology applied to the homily. Moreover, the paper compares the present verse homily to a commentary of St. Ephrem the Syrian on the ten plagues.

SYMBOLISM IN THE EXEGESIS OF JACOB OF SERUGH

As a poet, theologian and exegete, Jacob is known through his works to have great imaginative power, nourished by typology and symbolism. Jacob sees most of the Old Testament events as Mysteries and symbols (ܡܝܫܬܐ ܡܝܫܬܐ), which can only be explained by the Only Begotten who came to fulfill them (cf. Jn. 19:30).⁶ Nevertheless, this does not in any way indicate that Jacob negates the literal meaning of the text. One can convincingly argue that Jacob always takes the literal sense as the basis for his

interpretation.⁷ In fact, it is because a specific event happened in a specific manner that it becomes a type.⁸

Likewise, the events of Exodus hold in the exegesis of Jacob Christological Mysteries (ܡܝܣܬܝܪܝܐ). In the fourth homily of his cycle on Moses, Jacob goes forth to say that Moses “did not make even a step on earth on his own; the Mystery drew him to prepare a path for the King, his Lord” (II 76/M4, 66, 345). In the second homily, Jacob considers that Moses “wore the Mystery at the bush and went forth without feeling that he had carried the passion of the Only Begotten” (II 74/M2, 22, 332). Nonetheless, one of the main rules of the Jacobean typological exegesis is that the symbol can never completely resemble the antitype. For instance, Jacob could not refer to David as a symbol of Christ in his homily on “King David and Uriah” (cf. v 162, 367-393). Similarly, Moses could not typify Christ in the act of killing the Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-15); thus, Jacob skips mentioning this story in his Mosaic cycle.

All the biblical events connected with the Divine Economy for Jacob are directly related to God’s plan of salvation.⁹ In the Mosaic cycle, Jacob imagines the Lord calling Moses: “I send you to the one people for salvation, whereas the captivity of peoples is kept for the King, your Lord” (II 74/M2, 22, 326). He sees in the ten plagues depiction of Christ’s victory over Satan (II 75/M3, 45, 641-650), and in the sprinkled blood on the doorposts, a resemblance of Christ’s blood: “the Mystery was shed on their doors through the weak blood, thus protecting people from destruction” (II 77/M5, 73, 159). In the crossing of the Red Sea, Jacob finds an image of baptism: “(Moses) depicted the image of our Lord’s baptism, for from the bosom of water man reaches the inheritance of life” (II 76/M6, 55, 47), and in the water of Marah, a figure of this bitter world to which Christ descended to give sweetness, “the world was

portrayed by the water, full of bitterness, and in that (piece of) wood, the image of our Lord was seen” (II 77/M5, 73, 154). Finally, in God’s descending on Mount Sinai, Jacob draws the image of the Bridegroom coming to take Israel as his wife: “He descended to make for her a great wedding, as for a free girl: with a procession of the watchers (angels), legions of fire, and crowds of lightning” (II 79/M9, 87, 31).

This final image of God and Israel, depicting the relation between Christ and the Church, is clearly revealed in the Mosaic Cycle. The ecclesiological typology is present in all ten homilies, and is most often chosen by Jacob to conclude each of these homilies. He sees in the Church the new Israel: “Moses left his people and took for himself the daughter of strangers, (typifying) the Mystery of the Son, Who engaged through His cross the Church of peoples” (II 73/M1, 9, 235). Besides, Zipporah’s act of circumcising her son and touching Moses’ feet is a sign of the Church of peoples, who is holding tight the feet of the Son, hung on the cross: “the wise (woman) said: ‘Surely you are a husband of blood to me’, and held tight to his feet as the Church of peoples did at the cross” (II 74/M2, 23, 354). Jacob finds in the protection of Israelites from the ten plagues an image of peace inside the Church, to where the corrupter has no authority to enter: “by its salvation, the congregation resembled the Mystery of the Church, for the corruptor had no authority to enter to it...” (II 75/M3, 51, 759-765). In fact, the salvation of the congregation was an image of that of the peoples: “(Moses) liberated and saved the troubled (congregation) from slavery, as Christ did with the Church of peoples, blessed is His comparison” (II 76/M4, 66, 348). Moreover, the twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees, where the Israelites camped, resembles the disciples and apostles on which the Church was built: “by

that (same) number, with which the Holy Church was built, the congregation found rest when it came to it in the desert” (II 77/M5, 75, 216). Likewise, the congregation and the rock are an image of the Church and Christ: “the congregation and the rock in the desert were like the Church and Christ, (for the Church) gave quenching while in security; that (rock) poured out a flow of water in the thirsty place, as also did the Church give life to the dead world” (II 78/M6, 84, 222-223). The imagery of the Church is also present in the fight with Amalek: “they took a stone and put it under (Moses) and he sat on it, and (so) the Church was established with the cross at its top; blessed is His salvation” (v 158/M7, 306). And as did the Lord descend on Sinai to give the law to Israel, so did He descend with humility to save the Church of peoples from the slavery of pagans (cf. i 2/M8, 36-37). Moreover, the descending of Moses from the mountain depicts the descending of Christ to the world to gather the Church:

“The Saviour descended as Moses from the mountain, and found the peoples acting wildly as was the people;

He saw the creation, and the evil statue fixed amidst it, and the crowds of humans dancing before it;

He took it and crushed it as the calf which Moses ground (into powder), He destroyed it and treaded it, thus ceased the noise of its glorifiers;

He casted it into the pigs and scattered it on the water as the calf, and gathered the Church by His strength; blessed is His power.” (II 78/M6, 84, 222-223)

Finally, Jacob ends his Mosaic Cycle with a Homily about the consecration of the Church; he concludes: “the congregation honored Moses (who was covered) with the veil, and (so) the Church accepted our incarnate Lord” (i 3/M10, 48).

STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENT HOMILY

I: Introductory Prayer (Couplets 1-46).

II: Moses asks Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go (c. 47-98).

III: God “wronged Himself” (لَحَرَ نَعْمَهُ) saying that He hardened Pharaoh’s heart (c. 99-138).

IV: God was wrangling softly with Pharaoh not to abolish him (c. 139-207).

V: The first five plagues: the Divine Grace is like a mother who consents to destroy her children’s properties yet save their lives (c. 208-430).

VI: Plagues six to nine: more powerful plagues that come from above (c. 431-622).

VII: Tenth plague was kept until the end to give chance to Pharaoh to repent and save his firstborn (c. 623-748).

VIII: Ecclesiological Conclusion: Salvation and peace can only be found inside the Church (c. 749-765).

STUDY OF THE MAIN THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN THE PRESENT HOMILY

Hardening Pharaoh’s Heart:

We come now to address Jacob’s interpretation of hardening the heart of Pharaoh (Ex 7:3). In order to explain this dilemma, Jacob gives the following metaphoric image:

“The Righteous was constrained between Egyptians and Hebrews, these divided and those hard; (so) what should be done?

He stood in the middle like a charioteer on a chariot, with one (chariot) driven after him and another before him.

The first one was slothful and slow, while the last was fast and in a hurry.

This last one was trying to pass enthusiastically, while the first was slow and cutting off its way.

If he delays, he’ll be passed by the hasty (chariot), yet if he moves, he’ll be entangled by the slow one.

And if he is diligent and urges the first so that he can pass, he feels pity for his horses not to be hurt.” (II 75, 29, 117-122)

This figure brings to our minds two similar scenes from Jacob’s homilies, both of which concern Elijah and King Ahab. The first scene portrays God constrained between King Ahab, who “made a wooden image, and did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger” (I Kings 16:33), and Elijah, who swore that there shall not be dew nor rain those years except at his word (cf. I Kings 17:1). The Lord was thus amidst Elijah the zealous and righteous, and Ahab whom He wants to give a chance for repentance:

“Neither did the house of Ahab want to come to repentance, nor did Elijah want to separate from righteousness.

The Lord stood amidst the pagans and the zealous; there was no space, neither to force nor to show mercy;

If He distressed Elijah, He would depart from His righteousness, for the great prophet was moved with zeal righteously;

If He distressed him not, He would stand ashamed of His Grace, which pleads for sinners: ‘Enough afflictions!’

The prophet does not submit and separate from his righteousness, and Jezebel does not accept to leave the love of idols.” (II 107, 361, 260-264)

The second scene shows the Lord constrained between Elijah’s judgment against Ahab and his wife Jezebel – who murdered Naboth for his vineyard, on one side; and Ahab – who tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning (cf. I Kings 21:1-27), on the other side:

“The Merciful wanted to forgive Ahab for his fasting, yet He was looking that Elijah not be distressed.

The prophet is precious and penance is much loved, and the Righteous Lord stood amidst both;

He did not want penance to turn her face, for she is deer to Him, and He is used to give her whatever she asks;

Yet, He did not leave Elijah to be distressed, for his life and deeds were eager to (fulfill) His will.

Because, chances to all those who are close to Him, are found with the Lord, He wanted to comfort both the prophet and penance.” (iv 113, 183).

According to Jacob, God dealt with each of the three cases following His Divine Grace, finding a way to give a chance for the guilty so that he may repent; yet, satisfying the righteous without wronging him.¹⁰

Back to the metaphoric figure portrayed by Jacob in the third Mosaic homily. How would the charioteer deal with his problem? And how would God behave between the Hebrews and Egyptians? Jacob illustrates:

“Having seen that there is no chance for his way to open, (the charioteer) despised the crown, withdrew and ceased the race.

He did not care to be blamed by many, for he saw that his horses were not hurt amidst the wheels.

By the safety of his horses he was happier, and he pushed away the praise of no use.

Therefore, he was praised much by the wise, for he has kept safe his property without any harm.” (II 75, 29, 123-126)

Finally, Jacob applies his poetic figure to the situation in Egypt. He finds that the Lord stood amidst the congregations in the land of Egypt, surrounded by Pharaoh whose heart is hard, and the Hebrews who are in a rush to go up to their land. If He thus abolishes the Egyptians and passes vigorously, He destroys the desirable seal of repentance. However, if He long suffers

Pharaoh without reason, the people may be afflicted by division. Hence, He cried out to the people: ‘I have hardened Pharaoh’s heart’, and so He hindered the vehemence of division, and found at the same time a reason to give Pharaoh a chance (cf. II 75/M3, 29, 128-135). Jacob concludes:

“While the Egyptian has become hard willingly,¹¹ the people were kept safe lest they doubt salvation.

And, while the people fixed their hope that this (act) is from the Lord, a chance for Pharaoh was made to abound by Grace.

(The Lord) hindered the people not to be in a rush for salvation, so that longsuffering could be given to the king that he may repent.” (II 75/M3, 29, 136-138)

Jacob then praises God Who accepted to wrong Himself in order to give Pharaoh a chance to repent:

“Thanks be to the Good One Who wronged Himself metaphorically, for (it is said that) He hardened the heart of Pharaoh while in fact He didn’t;

He would not have hardened and then blamed unjustly, for His judgment is right and is not pleased by hypocrisy;

He called His long suffering towards Pharaoh hardening, while His will was made a door for repentance.” (II 75/M3, 28, 99-101)

Merciful God Brings 10 Plagues on Egypt:

According to Jacob, the 10 plagues brought on Egypt do not show God by any means as unmerciful or unjust. On the contrary, he considers that the Divine Grace and Mercy are perfectly revealed in these plagues. The Lord could have easily abolished Pharaoh with His strong hand.¹² Yet, He wrangled with him softly that he may repent and let the people go. Jacob compares the plagues to the ten fingers of wrath that smote Pharaoh one at a time not to abolish him:

“The Merciful did not become tired of longsuffering; He was stretching out one finger at a time on the defiant.

The hands of wrath came down unto him slothfully; He was stretching and smiting yet not destroying!” (II 75/M3, 30, 148-149)

This explains the aim of the sign of transforming Moses’ rod into a serpent. Pharaoh could have saved Egypt if he had understood that a war against “The Lord of Israel” is certainly a lost war. However, Pharaoh called the wise men and the sorcerers of Egypt to confront Moses. Jacob describes how the magicians of Egypt assured Pharaoh that no nation has wise men like Egypt, and no magicians have the skills of the Egyptian magicians, whom even the sky couldn’t flee from their ruling. In doing so, Jacob uses poetic terminology similar to the text in the book of Job (cf. Job 38-41). Moses, thus, who has grown up in Egypt, has learnt from Egyptians and earned their wisdom; yet, he shall not surpass his masters¹³ (cf. II 75/M3, 31, 175-181).

Jacob goes on to explain how the magicians did in like manner with their enchantments. He considers that Satan casted his shadow over the rods and deceived those seeing with an illusion (فَيُضِلُّهُمْ) without actually changing the rods’ nature. However, Moses’ serpent swallowed all other serpents exposing the magicians’ falsehood (cf. II 75/M3, 31-32, 193-202). Jacob concludes his commentary on this sign by a counter poem, describing how Moses’ serpent returned back to be a rod by that same Power which placed a bound for the sea (cf. Jer 5:22; II 75/M3, 32, 204-206). Nevertheless, Pharaoh willingly hardened his heart and he himself brought the plagues on Egypt.

Jacob then describes the first plague, and how water turned into blood. He compares Moses’ rod to a sword that hit the neck of waters and slayed them, thus

changing them into blood (cf. II 75/M3, 32-33, 225-226). This plague occurred because the fish had eaten Hebrew male children and filled waters with their blood; as the Hebrew mothers were saddened by their children’s murder, so should the Egyptian women be enfeebled and tormented because of thirst (cf. II 75/M3, 33, 239-240). Jacob sees the magicians’ attempt to confront Moses as irrational. For, if Moses had already turned all waters into blood, which water they would have transformed then? Jacob also ridicules the idea that, instead of turning blood back into water, they tried to add wrath upon Moses’ wrath (cf. II 75/M3, 33-34, 245-259).¹⁴

The second plague was brought after Pharaoh hardened his heart again. Jacob sees that this plague attained equity between rich and poor, king and beggar, master and slave, for frogs filled all the land of Egypt indiscriminately (cf. II 75/M3, 34, 269-277). Again, Jacob makes fun of the magicians who multiplied the pains of Egyptians showing them false frogs; thus “the body was being tormented by the real (frogs), and the sight was being afflicted by the false (ones)” (cf. II 75/M3, 35, 289). Pharaoh, asking Moses to beseech his God to bring the plague to an end, showed the trickery of his magicians (cf. II 75/M3, 35, 296-300).

Jacob then describes the situation after the third plague of lice, and the magicians’ failure to face Moses. He considers this failure to be the defeat of Satan in front of the Lord (ܐܠܗܐ). The deceitful bow (ܩܚܝܬܐ) was broken upon its holder (cf. Psalm 78:57), whereas the rod of strength (ܩܠܬܐ) (cf. Psalm 110:2) was glorified for it has been clothed with all the Mysteries (cf. II 75/M3, 35-36, 304-327). Jacob, referring to Matthew 12:25, describes the defeat of the magicians and the side of evil who were divided against themselves. He says:

“The sorcery (ܩܠܬܐ) was despised by itself, and magic was ridiculed by its sorcerers;¹⁵

Deception was debased, because its secret sharers exposed its deceit, and its teachers became preachers of its defeat.

The fortress of wickedness was being destroyed by its builders; the wall of impiety was being ruined by its architects;

The tower of shame was being uprooted by its craftsmen, and the city of deceit was being crushed by its inhabitants;

The wall of guile was being broken down by its guards, and the fort of the devil was being shaken violently by those inside;

The house of deceit was being made to fall upon its dwellers, for magic was being despised by its sorcerers.” (II 75/M3, 37, 335-345; cf. Isa. 25:2, 32:14)

After that came the fourth plague, the flies, which Jacob describes with an eloquent literary description:

“It hovers hastily, creeps quietly, buzzes grievously, bites painfully, stings agonizingly, hits bitterly,

Perches abundantly, flies mingledly, runs fearfully, eats busily, gnaws silently, and corrupts evenly.” (II 75/M3, 37, 355-356)

Jacob compares this plague with a scourge of leather that smites with no mercy, and a whip of thorns that makes the beaten float in blood, and an evil that surrounds the disobedient, and the lit fire that licks up the dust (cf. II 75/M3, 37-38, 366-371). The toughness of this plague made Pharaoh repent finally and ask Moses to intercede for him so that the plague passes away. He promises Moses to let the people go and worship their God. The Lord hence gave Pharaoh another chance, but Pharaoh was deceitful and hardened his heart another time (cf. II 75/M3, 38, 382-385).

Egypt was then struck by the fifth plague where all livestock were diseased.

Although Jacob sees that this plague was tough, it does show God’s mercy, for the cattle died so that Pharaoh would not die. Furthermore, God’s Grace, who is like a mother who consents to destroy her children’s properties – yet saving their lives, accompanied God’s wrath, so that she may save Pharaoh from a certain abolition:

“Grace is a mother for humans, and it consented to destroy their properties for their sake;

She spread the cloak of mercy over the Egyptians, that they might not be tormented physically in due manner;

She saved Pharaoh’s body from tribulation, and took a rod to smite his animals for his sake;

He (God) struck the river so that the bold won’t be beaten, and chastened the water so that human’s body won’t be scourged;

He brought up the frogs to instruct the earth without pain, and made the lice to scourge them with small pain;

He called the flies to frighten them by its unpleasant appearance, and killed the cattle so that He does not corrupt humankind.” (II 75/M3, 39, 415-420)

Jacob concludes the first five plagues by saying that God has made the depth (ܕܥܡܝܩܐ) as His left hand which strikes weakly with one finger at a time, until Pharaoh repents. However, the king of Egypt did not quit the fight; on the contrary, he despised those plagues. This is why another five plagues were brought onto him, but this time from above (ܕܥܠܝܐ) which is like God’s right strong hand (cf. II 75/M3, 39-40, 423-430); after Moses was using his rod to strike the ground, he now raises it up high, for the air became for him like the bow (ܕܩܥܘܬܐ) and the arrow (ܕܩܝܬܐ)¹⁶ full of power (cf. II 75/M3, 39-40, 439-446).

Jacob then comes to describe the sixth plague: boils. The plague took over all of the land of Ham;¹⁷ for, while being a maid, it enslaved the free one (cf. II

75/M3, 40, 447-452). Jacob says that bodies were conceived from anger and gave birth to children of pain, i.e. boils; nevertheless, this plague was not a plague for destruction. God made Pharaoh stand up against Him in war, as a chance for him to live if he repents (cf. II 75/M3, 40-41, 454-473). Jacob marvels at God’s compassion and mercy:

“O Merciful! If you wanted to smite, why would your wrath be mixed with warning and intimidation?

If you wanted to strike the disobedient for loss, why would you send (to them) to save their cattle?

If you wanted to bitterly smite Pharaoh, suddenly throw (the hail) and stone his land without his knowledge.

If it were not that your compassion wanted to create excuses, it would not have been necessary to send (a warning) to the unworthy.

And, if you were determined to correct the earth according to its iniquity, why would you warn it to seek shelter from correction?

According to these mercies was the land of Egypt corrected by Moses who was sent to it by Grace.” (II 75/M3, 41, 474-479)

Afterwards comes the seventh plague: hail. Jacob skillfully illustrates how hail and fire darted together to the ground. He says that Divine command (ܕܡܠܟܐ) molded fire from the furnace of water to strike Egypt. Jacob goes forth to say that the opposite natures made peace together to take revenge from Egypt (cf. II 75/M3, 42-43, 501-527). Hail, according to Jacob, resulted in great damage for Egypt:

“It damaged its plants, shed its fruits, uprooted its forests, struck its trees, cut off its branches, and crashed its fields;

(It) consumed its vineyards, destroyed the vines, broke the cedars, made its plane trees to fall, casted down its palm trees, and ruined olive trees;

(It) seized the plantations, dug up shrubs, and made the earth barren; (thus, Egypt) the maid which disobeyed enfeebled while being stoned!” (II 75/M3, 42, 497-499)

Finally, Pharaoh confessed that he had sinned to the Righteous Lord. He thus asks Moses to entreat the Lord, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, and promises that he will let the people go. However, he broke his promise another time and hardened his heart. This made another stronger plague to be brought upon him: Locusts, which the Divine command conceived, the wind gave birth to, grew strong from anger, and consumed all remaining trees and plants. According to Jacob, this plague was harsher than the previous one; for, it destroyed the remaining plants and trees (cf. II 75/M3, 44-45, 557-587).

Moses, then, stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days, as if it has dressed the dress of black darkness, while its friends delight beautifully with their dresses (cf. II 75/M3, 45-46, 589-597). Jacob considers this long night unusual, for it is, unlike other nights, not decorated with the stars and the moon, and not dedicated to ensure rest (cf. II 75/M3, 46, 615-621). Nevertheless, Pharaoh chose not to let the people go!

Finally, the Mystery was taken from Moses and given to the lamb, for the lamb depicts the sacrifice of the Son:

Up until now did Moses serve the Mysteries of his Lord; when the time for sacrifice offering came, he was separated from the symbol.

The Father took the Mystery from him and put it in the lamb, for, it was not fitting that Moses dies for salvation.” (II 75/M3, 47, 631-632)

Thus, the lamb was killed and some of the blood was taken and put on the two doorposts, and on the lintel of the Hebrew

houses in the shape of a cross, a figure which we will explain later. Jacob then describes the tenth plague – the killing of the Egyptians firstborns. The firstborns’ killer took control all over Egypt, killing Pharaoh’s firstborn first, so that his falling may be like the falling of the leader of the people. Death struck all people and animals alike; the grooms and brides, the children and elderly, the wives and the virgins, the slaves and the masters, the maid and the lady, the poor and the rich! (cf. II 75/M3, 48-50, 680-732)

Jacob portrays in a very sympathetic way the sorrows of the tenth plague, where no one could even console his household:

“The pain that occurred there, among the Egyptians, was grieving, and the lamentation over the firstborns was severe.

The first fruit of the wombs was smitten by the sword of death, and the pain wounded bitterly all the soul.

Mothers do know what I’m saying, that the firstborn is more dear to his parents than his brothers.

The love of the firstborn is so precious to his mother, for he has given her the taste of giving birth and (taught) her how to love.

He teaches her a strange tongue, thus she sings to him softly lullabies with much love.

He calls the virgin milk to come out from her, thus it multiplies and becomes babies’ first nurture.

[...] Egypt clamored by this pain and its walls trembled, Pharaoh thus enfeebled and quit the fight!” (II 75/M3, 50-51, 737-748)¹⁸

Jacob’s homily comes to its end here, (after the ecclesiological figure). However, Pharaoh’s fight against Divine Grace will not end until the next homily, where Grace finally finds that there is no way for Pharaoh to repent. Thus, she withdraws leaving a place for justice, her sister. At the end,

Pharaoh came to death willingly after he followed the Hebrews into the Red Sea:

“Grace, having seen that the unjust transgressed and behaved haughtily with no limits, withdrew from him.

She left him there between the waves and ran away from him; she called justice and handed him over to her vehemently” (II 76/M3, 64, 284-285)

CHRISTOLOGICAL TYPOLOGY IN THE HOMILY ON THE TEN PLAGUES

In his introductory prayer, Jacob tries to figure out how Moses could call the Son “a Prophet like me” (cf. Deut. 18:15). He comes to understand that Moses, who holds his rod, carries the Mystery of the Son, bearer of the cross. He thus could do such powers in Egypt, for creation obeyed him as if obeying the Son Himself. Moses was lifted by Grace to become like God, and God was lowered by the same Grace to become like man; Jacob says:

“Moses got ready to descend for salvation, and he carried in his hand the rod of strength (cf. Ps. 110:2), clothed with all Mysteries.

He made himself of no reputation (cf. Phil. 2:7) and headed to Egypt alone, and did not carry on his way but the sign of the cross.

He supplied himself on the way of the Son and descended to save; the earth saw him and trembled from him as if from the Lord.”¹⁹ (II 75/M3, 25, 11-13)

At a later stage of his homily, Jacob reveals the Christological typology of Moses life; he says:

“He (Moses) depicted the Son in his envied birth as well as by his fleeing, and in becoming a son of a virgin who was not known carnally.

He depicted Him again by the woman he took from the peoples, and we have written all of these at the beginning of our story.

He depicted His descent by his sending to Egypt, and so (he depicted) His cross by the rod of strength which descended with him.

He depicted His fight with Satan by his wrestling with Pharaoh, again, the accuser tried him as (he did) with our Lord.

He (the accuser) showed him a false power as (he showed) Jesus; he wanted to scare him by appearances as he also did with (Jesus).

He (Moses) was crowned by victory which was brought to him, as was Christ honored by the angels.

At the beginning of his plagues, he changed the water and instructed the earth, as did our Lord also manifest a new sign by water.

The Hebrew hit the rivers and made them rough, (and) our Lord blessed the water-pots and changed them.

Moses buffeted the Egyptians with wonders, for he changed water, brought up creeping animals, and swarmed lice,

He called the flies, killed the cattle, and puffed up wounds, he sent down hails and brought locusts and spread darkness.

In face of what Moses did by the Mystery he had put on, Our Savior did in the land of Judea when He humbled Himself.

He changed water, multiplied bread, and rebuked the winds, cleansed the lepers, straightened the bent, opened (the eyes) of the blind, casted out devils, drove out demons, and gave life to the dead, and those were plagues against the side of deceit.

By those, thus, the great prophet was raised to wear the image of the Son of God and call him ‘like me’.” (II 75/M3, 47, 638-651)

However, when the tenth plague arrived, the Father took the Mystery from Moses and gave it to the lamb, which by its sacrifice, people were delivered.²⁰ This depicts the Lamb of God who came to deliver the whole universe (II 75/M3, 47-48,

654-655). Jacob then emphasizes the fact that the blood of the lamb could not deliver the Hebrews if it did not resemble the pure blood of the Son. Moses therefore, while striking the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses with blood, drew the sign of the Cross, which frightened the destroyer (II 75/M3, 49, 690-704).

Jacob finally concludes his homily with an Ecclesiological typology. He compares the salvation of the Hebrew congregation to the Mystery of the Church. Throughout all the plagues, the Hebrews were saved and not hurt. Therefore, outside the Church there is trouble, wrath, pains, and death; yet, inside the Church there is peace, joy, security and life; Jacob illustrates:

“By its salvation, the congregation resembled the Mystery of the Church, for the corrupter had no authority to enter it.

Inside its doors, security rests with its inhabitants, while outside it, the sword is drunk (by the blood) of its enemies.

Inside, it enjoys the paschal lamb which Moses sacrificed, while outside, (enemies) cry out from trouble which surrounded them.

squabble of wrath is cast out throughout Egypt.

He who goes outside its doors is hunted by death, while he who enters it finds shelter from the murderers.

Inside it, rest is found, while outside it, clamor of anger; in its dwelling security is found, while those who surround it are in great pain.

The peace of the Church was dwelling in the daughter of Abraham; blessed is He, in Whose Mysteries, the Church was established from the beginning” (II 75/M3, 51, 759-765)

EPHREM’S COMMENTARY ON EXODUS: A MAIN SOURCE FOR JACOB

It seems that Ephrem’s commentary on the Book of Exodus²¹ is Jacob’s main source of interpretation for the ten plagues. A comparison between the two commentaries leads us to the conclusion that most of Ephrem’s ideas are included – though not literally, in Jacob’s verse homily, which was written about a century and a half after Ephrem’s.²² The following examples reveal this similarity:

Ephrem’s Exegesis	Jacob’s Exegesis
<i>They thought that they could change the natures [of things], but they were unable to save their staffs from the staff of Moses. (6:1, 238)</i>	<i>Who is in our likeness in ruling the lights (of heaven)? Even the orders of the powers of the high are in the hollow of our hand. Who knows how to survey the air with steps and to measure the orbit with spans as we do? Who could stop the planetary circulation? Or even could understand where, how, and how long they circulate?... (II 75/M3, 31, 175-181)</i>
First, [the Lord] told him to repent, but that did not happen. <i>Finally</i> , he struck [him] with [a plague] that was <i>more severe than all the others</i> (ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ). <i>If they had mended their ways as a result of the earlier [plagues], they would have been spared</i> (ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) [the plague] of the firstborn, which was <i>more severe than all those that came before it. (6:2, 238)</i>	He kept this great plague <i>after (the others)</i> (ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ), so that if he (Pharaoh) <i>repents</i> , he may <i>escape</i> from it (ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ) since it was (a plague) for pain. (II 75/M3, 46-47, 624-629)

Ephrem's Exegesis	Jacob's Exegesis
The fish that had grown fat on the corpses of little boys died. (7:2, 239)	Because the fish of Egypt ate the children of Isaac, they disappeared from Egypt's springs. (II 75/M3, 33, 239)
If [the magicians] had been [acting] against Moses (أَكْهَ بِي كَهْمَا مَعْمَا ٢٥٥), he would have stopped them with the first plague, the way he stopped the plague of ulcers, and drove them off., But since [the plagues] came from [Moses], and [were directed] against [the magicians'] own people, [Moses] did not stop them from striking Egypt with him (كَا كَلَّا أُنَّه، وَتَحْدُثُهُ) ... the magicians began striking their people along with Moses. (7:2, 239)	If you are against Moses O magicians (اِنْ اَنْتُمْ عَدُوٌّ لِّمُوسَى)، fix what he has ruined by his works... why do you add pain upon the pain of Egypt falsely (لِمَا نَفْسُهُ، مُعْتَبِرًا) (II 75/M3, 33-34, 252-259)
[Moses] did not stop them from striking Egypt with him, because a deceitful heart which is divided against God is not at peace with itself. (7:2, 239)	The sorcery (سِحْرٌ) was despised by itself, and magic was ridiculed by its sorcerers... (II 75/M3, 37, 340-345)
And although they turned water into blood and caused Egypt to suffer they might have turned the blood into water, to annoy Moses, but they did not do this because they could not do it (كَمَا تَوَقَّعُوا، خِلًّا دَخِيقَةً، حَتَّى لَا يَسْتَطِيعُوا جَرِّبَهَا بِحَرْفٍ آخَرَ). They could only do those things to which their skill was accustomed. (7:2, 240)	... He stroke and turned water into blood, thus the earth was inflamed with thirst; strike then and turn back blood into water (مَضَى بِي) (أَيَّدَهُ) فَوَقَّعَهُمْ كَيْدًا، وَنَادَى مَعْمَا اِنْ هُمُوعًا اُسُّ (كَاتِبَةٍ)، be not an addition to Moses wrath. (II 75/M3, 33, 252-254)
When Pharaoh was not convinced by this, Aaron again raised the staff with his hand -the staff, a sign of the cross (شُعْلًا تُغَمُّ بِرُجْحُلَا)، that caused all the plagues. (7:4, 240)	Moses got ready to descend for salvation, and he carried in his hand the rod of strength (cf. Ps. 110:2), clothed with all Mysteries (مَعْمَا) (خَالِسًا شِعْلًا، بِجَهْمَا حُرْمَةٍ قَدْ أَقْبَرِ). He made himself of no reputation (cf. Phil. 2:7) and headed to Egypt alone, and did not carry on his way but the sign of the cross (شُعْلًا رُجْحُلَا). (II 75/M3, 25, 11-12)
If they had loved Egypt, they would have done away with the frogs rather than add symbolic frogs (أَوْجِدَا، وَأُهْمَعَا) to the real frogs (أَوْجِدَا مَعْنَا) of Moses. (8:1, 240)	(Egypt), being filled with a multitude of real frogs (أَوْجِدَا مَعْنَا)، was covered by (the sorcerers) with false appearances (i.e. frogs) (سَلَا، وَيُؤْكَلَا). It was buried with those that can be seen and touched, and was filled with appearances that are not real (أَمْصَحْنَا، وَمَا أُهْمَعَا، فَتَقَالُ كَبْ كَد) (أَنْتَ). (II 75/M3, 35, 283-295)
And the Lord said to Moses: "Go to Pharaoh, and do not be afraid of his haughtiness, for it is I who have hardened his heart by the long suffering (فَمُدَّ كَحْمَ صَحْلًا، وَهُمَا) I showed to him during the plagues [that came] through your hands. If I believed in his repentance, it was not because I was unaware of his treachery. (10:1, 243)	He called His long suffering towards Pharaoh hardening (حَصْلًا، وَهُوَ مَا مَعْمَلًا، بِحَدَا) (فَدَحَا)، while His will was made a door for repentance. (II 75/M3, 28, 101-104)

Ephrem's Exegesis	Jacob's Exegesis
<i>The lamb is a type of our Lord</i> (ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܢܐ) (12:2, 246)	... He (Moses) depicted <i>the type of Christ with a silent lamb</i> (ܐܠܗܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܢܐ). (II 75/M3, 47-48, 630-637 & 668-673)
The firstborn of the Egyptians died in the middle of the night, <i>and every person, in the solitude of his own house, mourned the death of his firstborn, the first of his sons.</i> (12:4, 247)	<i>No one was consoled by his friend so that he may overcome his grief</i> , for all houses were suffering because of the corpses that fell there... <i>At home, everyone was embittered with great pain, and suffering because of the severe grief.</i> (II 75/M3, 50, 728-732)

As a matter of fact, Ephrem's exegesis is, on the contrary to that of Jacob, a short exegesis which might even be shorter than the chapters of the story in the book of Exodus itself. Although the exegeses of "the two harps of the Spirit" have a lot of common elements, they differ in other details. Differences in Ephrem's exegesis can be listed as follows:

1. The meeting between Moses and Pharaoh was calm; due to the presence of the elders of the people, and because he heard of the signs Moses had performed before the elders, Pharaoh did not strongly resist; however, as they continued speaking with him, he became enraged, and instead of asking for a sign to let the people go, he said: "Who is the Lord that I should hear his voice?" [...] It was [Pharaoh] himself who brought down the plagues with the bold statement: "Who is the Lord?" (cf. 5:1-2, 236-237)

2. Moses's request was during April, this is why Pharaoh thought that the people are asking to go and sacrifice to the Lord because they are lazy. His harsh nature was not satisfied with what he said, so he went further, and refused to give the people straw, so that faced with this necessity, they would not think about leaving any more. So the people spread out to look for straw, which was very difficult to find since it was *Nisan* (April), the season of flowers, and not *Tammuz* (July) or *Ab* (August), the season for threshing. (cf. 5:3, 237)

3. Ephrem asks whether Pharaoh went to the river early in the morning to pour out oblations, or simply to enjoy himself. He comes to conclude that, judging from Pharaoh's reliance on the magicians, it is likely that the king of Egypt went to pour out oblations at the river of Egypt. (cf. 7:1, 239)

4. As a result of the plague of the river, and of the frogs, and of the gnats, both the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were living, and the land of Egypt were afflicted. But with the plague of the insects, there was a distinction made between the two lands. (cf. 8:3, 241)

5. Moses justifies not offering sacrifices to God in Egypt, because Hebrews sacrifice bulls and sheep, which are worshipped by Egyptians; is it possible thus to sacrifice the gods of the Egyptians before their very eyes, without being stoned? (cf. 8:3, 241)

6. Moses warned the Egyptians of the hail plague, so that a miracle will be witnessed as hail kills the cattle of those who did not believe, while God may keep watch over the portion of the repentant. (cf. 9:2, 242-243)

7. Pharaoh's confession of his sins means that he was not completely hard hearted, because a heart that is hardened is a stranger to remorse. He prayed when he was punished, but became defiant when he was relieved. These two kinds of behavior testify to his free will (10:3, 245). Thus, this hardening of the heart was not from God, but from the innermost mind (10:5, 245).

8. Details of the Feast of Passover (Ex 12): On the tenth of April, when the lamb was confined, our Lord was conceived. And on the fourteenth, when the lamb was slaughtered, its type was crucified. The unleavened bread, which, he said shall be eaten with bitter herbs, is a type of his newness (i.e. of the Eucharist). The bitter herbs are a type of those who received him and suffered. The fact that it was roasted is a type of what is baked in the fire. The command: "You will wear your belts around your waists, and your sandals on your feet" is a type of the new company of disciples which prepares to set out and announce the Gospels. The staffs in the Hebrew's hands are a type of their crosses on their shoulders. Eating while standing up is because no one receives the living Body while seated. And "No stranger shall eat of it" is because no one eats the Body if he's not baptized. "No bone in him shall be broken" is a type of our Lord, who although his hands and feet were pierced and his side was opened, not a bone in him was broken. (12:1-3, 246-247)

CONCLUSION

Jacob, as many other Church fathers and exegetes, leads us to read the biblical events beyond their literal sense. He manages to find literal-poetical skillful answers to the most difficult theological questions in the Bible. Nevertheless, he Prefers to ponder the

Christological typology of the events. According to Jacob, questioning God's mercy in the ten plagues is not the main focus; on the contrary, the question that needs to be asked is regarding Pharaoh's hard heart, who stands refusing to repent and come back to God.

In fact, it is as if Jacob is placing before his disciples, and so before us, a question to ponder: Do we want to enjoy peace, happiness, and security, inside the Church? Or to stay bound to trouble, wrath, pains, and death outside?

Finally, it is due to mention that St. Philoxenus of Mabbug (523 AD) provides a Christological exegesis for the ten plagues in the introduction to his commentary on the Gospel according to John,²³ from a different perspective than Jacob; a study and comparison between both exegeses would be of great use. On the other hand, Narsai (502 AD) devotes a complete homily to describe the choosing of Moses, the fire in the bush, and the salvation of the Israelites,²⁴ which coincides with Ephrem's commentary on Exodus and Jacob's Mosaic Cycle. A study of the relation between the three exegetes would be of great significance. Moreover, this paper opens up new grounds for further research that may cover the whole Mosaic Cycle, or compare it with other Jacobean Cycles such as that of Joseph or Elijah, or even with other Church fathers from the various schools of exegesis.

NOTES

¹ This paper is a detailed overview of the thesis submitted by the author (in Arabic: ضريبات (سفر الخروج في تفسير مار يعقوب أسقف بطنان سروج) in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor Degree in Theology at St. Ephrem Theological Seminary, Maarat Saydnaya, Syria, September 2017. First published in Arabic in *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 56 (2018) 13-81.

² John-Baptiste Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy (eds. & trans.), *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum* (Louvain, 1872), vol. I, col. 191; for a complete index of the surviving homilies, see Roger Akhrass, “A List of Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh,” *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 53 (2015) 87.

³ It is mentioned at the end of this homily that it consists of 1552 lines; however, the scribe must have confused ٥٢ (52) with ٣٠ (30). The correct number of lines is 1530.

⁴ Roger Akhrass, and Imad Syryany (eds.), *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*; vols. I-II (Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies and Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017); Homilies on Moses: 1-6, and 9 (II, 73-79, p. 1-103); Homilies 7, 8 and 10 were published by Paul Bedjan (ed.), *Homiliae Selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris & Lipsiae, 1905, t. i; 1906, t. ii; 1907, t. iii, 1907; 1908, t. iv; 1910, t. v (= i-v); Homily 7 (v, 158, p. 290-306); Homilies 8 and 10 (i, 2-3, p. 3-48).

⁵ The four manuscripts are: Vat.sir.114, f. 15^{r-v}, 9^{r-v}, 19^{r-v}, 12^{r-v}, 6^{r-v}, 11^{r-v}, 16^{r-v}, 8^{r-v}, 36^{r-v}, 17^{r-v}, 21^{r-v} (523); SOP. 385 (Dam. Pat. 12/14), f. 356^v-363^v (11th c.); SOP. 360 (Dam. Pat. 12/16; Jer. Markusk. 156), f. 103^r-109^r (12th c.); CFMM. 136, f. 282^v-300^r (1725). For more information about these manuscripts, see: Arthur Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung Der Memre-Dichtung Des Ja' Qob Von Serug*, I, CSCO 344, SS 39 (Louvain, Secrétariat Du CorpusSCO, Waversebaan, 1973), 42, 141-143, 147-151, and 154-155.

⁶ cf. Tanios Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, t. II (Beyrouth: Bibliothèque de L'université Saint-Esprit, 2000; 2^{ème} édition), 321.

⁷ cf. Joseph Zingerle, “Eine ungedruckte Homilie Jakobs von Sarug: Über Jakob von Sarug und seine typologie,” in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 11 (1887) 94.

⁸ cf. Johns Abraham Konat, “Typological Exegesis in the Metrical Homilies of Jacob of Serugh,” *ParOr* 31 (2006) 109-110.

⁹ cf. Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug* (II), 392.

¹⁰ For the solution of the two scenes concerning Elijah and King Ahab, see: II 107, 361-369, 267-502, and iv 113, 185-187.

¹¹ cf. Ex. 8:11. Sometimes: Pharaoh’s heart grew hard (cf. Ex. 7:13-14, 22-23; 8:15; 9:7, 35).

¹² cf. Ex. 14:31; English translations of the Holy Bible replaced this term with “the great work”, and so did the Arabic translations الفعل العظيم; however, the Syriac and Greek translations kept it as it came in the original Hebrew text הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה, in Syriac: ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ, in Greek: χεῖρα τὴν μεγάλην.

¹³ Jacob is clearly referring to the Lord’s teaching: cf. Mt 10:24, Lk 6:40.

¹⁴ Jacob considers that the sea creatures came back to life as soon as Moses turned back waters into their original state “because, the bosom of water raised them from death” (II 75/M3, 34, 262). Certainly, Jacob is pointing to baptism; in the context of this verse, Jacob uses two special terms: “ܡܚܬܠܐ” (spring) and “ܕܥܡܠܐ” (dry places) (cf. II 75/M3, 33, 238-240). He uses the same terminology in a homily on the rich and Lazarus, which the church prays during Thursday evening prayer:

May baptism preserve me there from burning and spread its cloak over the flame while I pass;

May this spring (ܡܚܬܠܐ) of living water accompany me, and let me not suffer in the dry places (ܕܥܡܠܐ). (i 16, 422-423)

¹⁵ It is important to mention the agreement of the Church fathers of Antioch that the work of the sorcerers was fake. Besides Ephrem and Jacob, Eustathius of Antioch indicates in his work *Engastrimytho Contra Origenem* (The Medium of En Dor, against Origen) that the medium didn’t really call Samuel to appear from the dead; what she did instead, using her

trickery and craftiness, was something altogether false. To illustrate his point, Eustathius brings forward the account of the false prophets on Mount Carmel and the account of the enchantments of the Egyptian magicians at the time of Exodus; would anyone infer, he asks, that these prophets prophesied the truth, or that the magicians performed wonders like Moses and Aaron? Cf. R.V. Sellers, *Eustathius of Antioch and His Place in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, 1928), 77. Narsai, on the other hand, uses the same term (ܦܪܝܬܝܬܐ, illusion) employed by Jacob to describe the work of the sorcerers; cf. Homily 42 in Alphonse Mingana (ed.), *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina* (Mosul, 1905), 295. Moreover, Philoxenus of Mabbug refers to the work of the magicians stating that the miracles usually performed by the power of God were real and not a like nor hallucinations nor surmise, as were those performed by the magicians; cf. André de Halleux (ed.), *Philoxène de Mabbog: Commentaire du prologue Johan-nique*, CSCO 380 SS 165 (Louvain: Peeters, 1977), 106.

¹⁶ In the book of Psalms, the wicked bend their bow (ܦܥܡܐ) and make ready their arrow (ܢܥܡܐ) on the string that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart (cf. Ps. 11:2, 87:9); however, the opposite takes place in the war against the Egyptians; for, the deceitful bow (ܦܥܡܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ) has turned aside against its holder as Jacob declared earlier (II 75/M3, 36, 327).

¹⁷ The land of Ham is Egypt: cf. Ps. 78:51, 105:27, 106:22; see also: Gen. 10:6-20.

¹⁸ It appears from these verses that Jacob sympathizes with the Egyptians and does not say that they received what they deserved because they enslaved the Hebrews (cf. Ex. 1:13-14; 3:7-9) and participated in the killing of the Egyptians' firstborns (Ex. 1:22)

¹⁹ One can easily see the analogy between this verse and Ps. 77:16: "The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You, they were afraid; The depths also trembled."

²⁰ Jacob notes the same analogy in his homily on Abraham and his types:

Salvation won't come to realization through Isaac that you shed his blood, stop your knife from the weak and unbind him that he may come down.

The captivity of the world won't be saved by weak blood, why will you sacrifice Isaac if he cannot deliver?

If he were able to give life to the world, he would have died then; yet, since he cannot give life unbind him and let him go.

If there were use of his death, it would be necessary that he die; however, he cannot conquer death, why should he die then?"

For you have longed to see, I have shown you the day of the Son; nevertheless, it is not yours to sacrifice your only begotten. (P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae*, t. ii, 109, 100)

However, Moses does typify the Son in stretching his hands, Jacob says: "By spreading his (i.e. Moses's) hand, peace dwelt between the orders and by his command squabble between the height and the depth came to an end" (II 75/M3, 44, 549). Moses, by stopping to hold the Mystery of the Son, reminds us of one of the main rules of the Jacobean typological exegesis, that is, the symbol can never completely resemble the antitype, as mentioned before.

²¹ R.M. Tonneau (éd.), *Sancti Ephraem Syri In Genesin Et In Exodum*, Commentarii, CSCO 152 SS 71 (Louvain, Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1955), 133-142. English translation extracted from E.G. Mathews and J. Amar, *St Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, The Fathers of the Church 91 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1994), 217-265.

²² It is worth mentioning that Overbeck has published a collection of homilies attributed to St. Ephrem extracted from B.M. Add. 17189, a manuscript kept in the British Museum and dating back to the 6th century. One of these homilies is entitled "ܥܡܡܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܨܝ" (First Homily on the Signs Performed by Moses in Egypt), which leads us to a lost cycle of homilies about Moses. However, Overbeck, as well as many other researchers who studied the same manuscript, doubts its authenticity arguing that the name of St. Ephrem was added to the manuscript at a later stage. Moreover, the author of this homily uses the Greek translation of the Holy Bible instead of the Syriac Peshitta usually employed by Ephrem. This is why we decided

not to take the mentioned homily into consideration in our study. Cf. J. Josephus Overbeck, (ed.), *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni, Balaei Aliorumque Opera Selecta* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1865), 88-94; F. Crawford Burkitt & J. Armitage Robinson (eds.), *S. Ephraim's Quotations from the Gospel*

(1901; New York: Hardpress Publishing, 2012), 75-79.

²³ De Halleux (ed.), *Philoxène de Mabbog: Commentaire du prologue Johannique*, 106-118.

²⁴ Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*, 288-302.

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SYMBOLISME ET THÉOLOGIE BIBLIQUE DANS LES *BŌ'WŌTŌ* DE ST. JACQUES DE SAROUG



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INTRODUCTION

Ce qui distingue la liturgie syriaque est ses chants qui occupent une place très particulière. La liturgie syriaque d'Antioche a connu un développement remarquable depuis le IV^e siècle: les livres liturgiques sont chargés des œuvres littéraires des Pères de l'Église, en particulier saint Éphrem († 373) et Saint Jacques († 521). À côté des psaumes, des prières et des hymnes se sont ajoutés et ont été recueillis dans des ouvrages spéciaux, pour que le clergé puisse choisir ce qui était convenable pour la prière selon les fêtes liturgiques. Ces collections sont arrangées et organisées dans le soi-disant *Bēt-Gazō*, littéralement «la maison du trésor». La bibliothèque de Charfet au Liban conserve 58 manuscrits sous la catégorie de *Bēt-Gazō*.

Le *Bēt-Gazō* qui nous intéresse se trouve dans le manuscrit 1/5 du catalogue des manuscrits de la librairie Patriarcale de Charfet. Ce manuscrit est le plus ancien des recueils de cette bibliothèque, datant du XI^e siècle et est caractérisé comme étant le plus volumineux et le plus complet. Le manuscrit porte le titre *Bēt-Gazō al-Shaykh*,¹ ou le vieux. En effet, il contient 760 pages et couvre presque tous les genres de chants

récités dans les offices fériaux et du temps ordinaire.

Ce chef-d'œuvre unique rassemble toutes les catégories de chants liturgiques dont les mélodies dépassent les 2400. La mémoire n'a retenu que 900 mélodies que Dom Jeannin, lors de son séjour au monastère de Charfet entre 1886 et 1898, a rassemblées et présentées dans son fameux ouvrage, en deux tomes, intitulé *Mélodies Liturgiques Syriennes et Chaldéennes*².

Notre étude se limitera à l'une des 18 catégories d'hymnes liturgiques, à savoir «les *bō'wōtō*³ de Saint Jacques⁴». Le mot de *bō'wōtō* désigne étymologiquement des supplications ou des rogations, et détermine l'inspiration de l'hymne plutôt que sa nature propre. Il s'agit d'un genre poétique proprement syriaque, car il est assez difficile de trouver un équivalent exact dans le rite latin. Les *bō'wōtō* tiennent une place très importante dans le répertoire actuel des chants, du fait qu'on les trouve toujours dans tous les offices, et même dans tous les services et les sacrements. C'est un genre moyen entre le *mimrō* «homélie poétique» et le *madrōchō*,⁵ «des strophes séparées par un refrain», connues aussi sous le nom de *seblōtō*. Au

madrōchō il emprunte les strophes coupées par un refrain, et au *mimrō* la longueur des vers.⁶ Par son contenu, il accorde beaucoup de place à la supplication, à l'exhortation et à la pénitence, sans exclure la prière de louange, ni même la narration. Plus que d'autres, les *bō'wōtō* se rapprochent, par leur contenu et par leur fonction, des hymnes du Bréviaire romain⁷

Cet article n'est qu'une petite contribution qui pourra aider à mieux connaître quelques aspects cachés du génie de Jacques⁸, un des plus remarquables écrivains syriaques reconnu comme « flûte de l'Esprit Saint » et harpe ou cithare fidèle de l'Église, ou aussi « colonne spirituelle ». Sa souplesse poétique et sa richesse littéraire seront soulignées, et comme Dalmais disait : « Il est impossible de parler de la théologie, de la liturgie ou de la vie des Églises syriennes, sans être conduit à citer l'une ou l'autre pièce de leur riche trésor d'hymnes »⁹.

I. LES *BŌ'WŌTŌ* DE ST. JACQUES DU POINT DE VUE LITURGIQUE

a. Composition

Les *bō'wōtō* sont des supplications que l'église syriaque utilise dans sa liturgie¹⁰. Elles sont classées en trois séries :

- 1- Les *bō'wōtō* de Saint Éphrem (vers de 7 syllabes)
- 2- Les *bō'wōtō* de Saint Balai (vers de 5 syllabes)
- 3- Les *bō'wōtō* de Saint Jacques (vers de 12 syllabes)

L'usage liturgique de ces *bō'wōtō* s'étend sur toutes les heures de l'office aussi bien que sur tous les autres services liturgiques. Ainsi, ce genre envahit toute la liturgie et il est un élément indispensable d'une importance sans pareille, que l'Église a utilisé pour couronner ses prières et les clôturer convenablement par des supplications conçues comme réponse à la parole de Dieu à la fin des offices.

Tableau indiquant l'emploi des *bō'wōtō* dans l'office des heures :

		<i>bō'wōtō</i> d'Ephrem	<i>bō'wōtō</i> Balai	<i>bō'wōtō</i> de Jacques
Lundi	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			
Mardi	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			
Mercredi	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			

Jeudi	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			
Vendredi	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			
Samedi	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			
Dimanche	Vêpres			
	Complies			
	Matines			
	Laudes			
	Tierce			
	Sexte			
	None			
		11	21	30

On remarque facilement que les sup-
plications de Saint Jacques occupent une
position plus considérable tant en quantité
que par leur position dans les deux heures
cathédrales. Les *bō'wōtō* de saint Jacques
ont la même allure rythmée des *mimrē*.
Cette parenté des *bō'wōtō* avec les *mimrē*
est évidente, Jeannin défini les *bō'wōtō*
ainsi : « l'homélie transportée sur le ter-
rain de l'hymne grâce à la forme stro-
phique ». ¹¹

Ce genre poétique, conçu dans un but
exclusivement liturgique, non par leur auteur

original, mais par les rédacteurs des offices
religieux, a eu une vogue assez large dans
toutes les prières des heures de l'office sy-
riaque. Ainsi Jacques de Saroug ayant trait-
té tous les sujets et écrit sur les principaux
événements de l'histoire de l'Église, se
présentait naturellement à l'esprit de tous
ceux qui voulaient embellir les fêtes chré-
tiennes, car il était aisé d'adapter ses com-
positions aux usages liturgiques. Le procé-
dé se révélait tout simple ; il n'y avait qu'à
pratiquer quelques coupures. Les anciens
manuscrits portent encore les marques vi-

sibles du travail qui s'accomplit au VII^e et au VIII^e siècles et même à des époques plus récentes.¹² Leurs marges sont habituellement couvertes de traits, de croix ou d'autres signes auxquels on reconnaît bien vite le commencement et la fin des extraits que les hymnographes avaient l'intention de recueillir. Ainsi les *bō'wōtō* ne seront que des parcelles d'une homélie ou d'autre de Jacques, divisée de manière à former une série d'odes régulières.

Ces explications étaient nécessaires pour qu'on comprenne bien la portée et la valeur des commentaires qui vont suivre.

b. Valeur liturgique (éthique et éducative)

La supplication, en général, comme son nom l'affirme, manifeste le manque du suppliant et nécessite une réponse de la part de l'auditeur. Fondée sur l'appel à la pitié, la supplication a un potentiel pathétique extrêmement intéressant. Son caractère étonnant qui invite à l'abaissement total est en soi d'une valeur éducative de premier lieu.

En tant que telle, la supplication constitue un discours nécessaire qui rétablit un lien vertical direct rendu obscur par le péché. Cela est manifeste dans le langage des supplications. Ce genre se trouve d'ailleurs dans la tradition écrite et notamment dans les psaumes.¹³

Introduites dans la liturgie, qui à son tour joue un rôle d'instruction majeur, les supplications revêtent une valeur pragmatique, et incitent celui qui l'exécute autant qu'elles visent à engager celui qui l'entend. Voilà pourquoi un tel élément a pris autant d'ampleur et d'importance dans la liturgie syriaque, et est devenu un langage codifié et ritualisé.

Les textes des *bō'wōtō* témoignent de ce langage exceptionnel et de ses implications et offrent des formules de supplication comme:

Nous te supplions, perle sans tache.

ܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Intercède pour nous.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Venez à notre secours.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Puisez de Lui la richesse et comblez notre besoin.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

L'Église crie de tous les côtés: aidez-moi Apôtres du Fils par vos prières.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Donne-moi une parole.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Abonde ton Amour et lève ta lumière.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Ma langue te glorifie, ma bouche te remercie, mes lèvres louent ta parole.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

O Auditeur, donne-moi une voix sans protestation.

ܕܡܨܝܚܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

Ce qui rend ces supplications plus opérantes ce sont les expressions si tendres et si douces de Saint Jacques, qui favorisent la prière. Ses expressions sont souvent heureuses¹⁴ et paisibles. C'est, en effet, dans un langage poétique charmant et vivace, qu'il livre à ses lecteurs l'essentiel de l'enseignement biblique.

Dans ce cadre, la liturgie se sert des supplications pour instruire ses fidèles et les initier à la prière comme étant un lieu pour l'apprentissage de la foi.

Le contenu des *bō'wōtō* répondait alors à des besoins didactiques et pragmatiques. Il enseigne le récit biblique et l'interprète, pour expliquer la fête ou l'occasion et en tirer profit pour s'adresser à Dieu ou à ses Saints en glorifiant et suppliant. Les supplications de Jacques commencent habituellement par des éloges dans lesquels il se livre à des considérations générales sur la puissance de Dieu, sur ses merveilles, sur la pureté de Marie, sur les beautés de

l'Église, sur le courage des martyrs, etc., et se terminent par une doxologie trinitaire.

Un autre élément s'avère très utile et didactique, c'est la répétition et la fréquence des mêmes idées, qui pour certains observateurs peuvent paraître désagréables et fatigantes, mais pour les orientaux qui aiment les assonances et les consonances cela crée un charme qui les exalte et ranime.

En résumé, ce genre unique d'hymne, Jacques le composa dans le but d'enseigner. Et comme il faisait souvent une pause pour des invocations, des prières de pétitions et des exclamations d'émerveillement, l'Église a profité de ses vers, les choisissant un à un, pour l'usage sacré de la liturgie.

II. LA RICHESSE THÉOLOGICO-BIBLIQUE DES *BŌ'WŌTŌ*

Les *bō'wōtō* illustrent l'art poétique de Jacques ainsi que sa compréhension dynamique de l'interprétation biblique. Sa poésie est typologique¹⁵ et enracinée dans l'Écriture. Il propose, comme le note Sebastian Brock, une alternative à « l'approche critique libérale de la Bible » ou à une « approche excessivement fondamentaliste ».¹⁶

C'est la Bible, c'est l'Évangile qui lui fournissent ses idées, ses images et ses comparaisons. C'est à la Bible qu'il emprunte ses sujets, son langage, sa poésie. Il est doué d'un talent prodigieusement fécond. Ce qui le caractérise, c'est la diffusion, l'abondance de mots et le cumul d'images, le retour perpétuel des mêmes idées et des mêmes expressions, et la diversité des thèmes qu'il traite.

a. Les thèmes traités :

Les *bō'wōtō* de Saint Jacques dans notre manuscrit comptent 204 strophes pour 11 thèmes ou sujets repartis comme suivant :

1- Pour la Mère de Dieu et les défunts selon l'alphabet (15 x 4 strophes).

2- Pour la Mère de Dieu (3 x 4 strophes)

3- Pour les Martyrs (2 x 4 strophes)

4- Pour les Apôtres (4 strophes)

5- Pour un Saint (2 x 4 strophes)

6- Pour les défunts (4 strophes)

7- Sur la cloche (4 strophes)

8- Sur la pénitence (6 x 4 strophes)

9- Sur la Résurrection (10 x 4 strophes)

10- Sur l'Eucharistie (4 strophes)

11- Sur la Croix (2 x 4 strophes)

Il y a aussi des *bō'wōtō* faites de 7 x 4 strophes consacrées pour les jours de la semaine du dimanche au samedi. Tous ces textes sont imbibés de théologie dans toutes ses disciplines avec des citations bibliques directes et indirectes. Ainsi nous pourrions dégager à travers ces supplications une théologie biblique, morale, mariale, sacramentaire, trinitaire, christologique, pénitentielle, eschatologique...

Je me concentrerai, dans cette petite étude sur les 12 strophes dédiées à la Mère de Dieu, en essayant de dégager quelques aspects théologiques et bibliques.

b. *bō'wōtō* sur la Mère de Dieu

Cette supplication est une source abondante de théologie mariale. En présence d'une telle œuvre, la première réaction se traduit par un sentiment d'admiration plutôt que par le besoin d'analyse. Je ne prétends pas apporter une nouveauté ou ajouter quelque chose de remarquablement original, mais simplement méditer, signaler, admirer et partager un trésor caché dans la maison des trésors *Bēt-Gazō*.

La première strophe commence par une narration d'une scène où notre auteur décrit sa rencontre avec la vierge :

ܟܠܗܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ
ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ

La vierge de sainteté m'a appelé un jour pour lui parler / L'âme a écouté son histoire splendide sans être outragée.

Ce qui nous retient en premier lieu, c'est le titre donné à Marie comme la

« vierge de sainteté » (ἄσπερος ἁγιότητος). Cette appellation est difficile à interpréter à cause de son originalité. En comparant ce titre à d'autres titres donnés par Jacques à Marie, notre tâche s'atténue. Ne sera-t-elle l'équivalente du « voile¹⁷ » ? Le voile derrière lequel se cache le saint des saints ? et à travers lequel s'est inaugurée pour nous une nouvelle route ?

Une deuxième observation mérite notre attention : à l'écoute de l'histoire de Marie l'âme se libère de tout outrage. Elle entre dans une paix sainte.

[illegible]

(Marie est) le second ciel, dans le sein duquel le Seigneur des hauteurs a habité, et à partir duquel il s'est manifesté pour chasser l'obscurité de (toutes les) régions.

La deuxième partie de cette première strophe offre deux titres: « le second ciel » et « le Seigneur des hauteurs ». Jacques utilise deux titres complémentaires, un pour Marie et l'autre pour le Christ, comme pour rappeler que Marie n'est un second ciel que par ce que le Seigneur des hauteurs l'a habitée. Ce dernier titre, est propre à Jacques aussi, et souligne l'humilité du Seigneur qui possède les hauteurs mais qui a habité en Marie pour ôter de la terre toute obscurité.

La suite de la supplication donne le mérite à Marie, car elle est bénie entre les femmes. Elle la situe au centre de l'histoire de l'humanité: avant Marie et après Marie :

בַּחֲבֵלֵי נֶזֶק וְנִזְקֵי נֶזֶק וְנִזְקֵי נֶזֶק
וְנִזְקֵי נֶזֶק וְנִזְקֵי נֶזֶק וְנִזְקֵי נֶזֶק

*La condamnation de la terre est anéantie
par la bénie entre les femmes / La sen-
tence, à partir d'elle et après, a eu fin.*

Remarquons les oppositions : Fécondité (sous-entendue) / stérilité et Bénédiction/ condamnation.

Dieu n'a pas choisi Marie arbitrairement, mais parce qu'elle est pleine de vertus et de grâces.

١. ٢. ٣. ٤. ٥. ٦. ٧. ٨. ٩. ١٠. ١١. ١٢. ١٣. ١٤. ١٥. ١٦. ١٧. ١٨. ١٩. ٢٠. ٢١. ٢٢. ٢٣. ٢٤. ٢٥. ٢٦. ٢٧. ٢٨. ٢٩. ٣٠. ٣١. ٣٢. ٣٣. ٣٤. ٣٥. ٣٦. ٣٧. ٣٨. ٣٩. ٤٠. ٤١. ٤٢. ٤٣. ٤٤. ٤٥. ٤٦. ٤٧. ٤٨. ٤٩. ٥٠. ٥١. ٥٢. ٥٣. ٥٤. ٥٥. ٥٦. ٥٧. ٥٨. ٥٩. ٦٠. ٦١. ٦٢. ٦٣. ٦٤. ٦٥. ٦٦. ٦٧. ٦٨. ٦٩. ٧٠. ٧١. ٧٢. ٧٣. ٧٤. ٧٥. ٧٦. ٧٧. ٧٨. ٧٩. ٨٠. ٨١. ٨٢. ٨٣. ٨٤. ٨٥. ٨٦. ٨٧. ٨٨. ٨٩. ٩٠. ٩١. ٩٢. ٩٣. ٩٤. ٩٥. ٩٦. ٩٧. ٩٨. ٩٩. ١٠٠.

*Chaste, honnête, et pleine des beautés de la
sainteté / Ma bouche est trop petite pour
raconter son histoire.*

Jacques reprend les termes misent sur la bouche de l'ange Gabriel en appelant Marie. Elle est *bénie* entre les femmes, et est *pleine* de sainteté. C'est l'une des caractéristiques du style de Jacques, qu'il s'inspire de la Bible mais ne reproduit pas les mêmes termes, parfois pour la nécessité poétique, et parfois pour enrichir la scène. Des paradoxes sont également utilisés pour montrer l'incompréhensibilité du mystère de l'histoire de Marie :

၁၁။ အသံအလုံးစုံတို့ကို အသံအလုံးစုံတို့ကို
 အသံအလုံးစုံတို့ကို အသံအလုံးစုံတို့ကို

*La fille des pauvres, qui est devenue Mère
du Seigneur des Rois, / a donné la richesse
au monde besogneux pour en vivre.*

Ci-dessous un exemple typique de citations bibliques presque littérales formulées par Jacques :

فَمَنْ مَنَ.	خَدَّ كَيْ لَهْ أَكَا	بَعْدَ مَوْنِ عَمَلْ
مَنْ خَلْ.	أَمَّ عَاذِي لَمْ	مَنْ مَدَ لَمْ عَالَمْ
مَنْ مَنَ، خَدَّ.	خَدَّ مَنَ عَمَلْ	عَالَمْ عَمَلْ
خَدَّ مَوْنِ أَكَا.	أَكَا لَمْ مَنَ	أَمَّ مَنَ خَلْ

L'Ange descendait pendant que Marie se tenait en prière / Il lui a donné le salut qui lui était envoyé du Très Haut. / Le salut est avec toi, bénie entre les femmes, voici que le Seigneur est avec toi, / Tu concevras et enfanteras un enfant en ta virginité.

Dans la *bō'ūtō* sur la Mère de Dieu, comme dans les autres supplications, Jacques utilise beaucoup d'expressions imagées et il enrichi ses hymnes par des comparaisons et de métaphores. Cette technique didactique fait appel aux émotions plutôt qu'à la raison et rend le mystère plus tangible.

ܕܐܡܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

La colombe voyait alors l'aigle et elle s'effrayait, / Car il descendait chez elle, sans qu'elle s'aperçoive qu'il l'a envoyé.

En interprétant la scène de l'annonciation à Marie, Jacques développe la question que Marie a posée à l'Ange Gabriel, et il se permet d'amplifier l'ignorance de Marie concernant non seulement le « comment » mais aussi le « pourquoi » :

ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

Elle n'estimait pas ce qu'il voulait ou qui il était, / Et où était son lieu et quelle raison l'a appelé chez elle.

Une autre belle strophe, dans ce contexte de l'Annonciation, énumère les titres de Marie d'une manière exceptionnelle. Sept titres dans une même strophe sans compter les autres appellations dans le reste de ce même récit.

ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

Paix à toi Marie, mère du soleil de la justice, / La paix est avec toi, forteresse de Sainteté, dame des mystères, / Le port de la vie, et le navire qui porte une grande richesse, / Tu es bénie, et est béni le fruit de ta virginité.

Ici aussi Jacques développe la salutation de l'Ange, le « je vous salue Marie », pour en faire un refrain et une source d'autres titres de révérence et de vénération.

Jacques est habitué à clôturer ses hymnes par une doxologie trinitaire. La supplication sur la Mère de Dieu, formée de 3 x 4 strophes, conserve trois doxologies mariales finales presque semblables. Ces doxologies nous révèlent le rôle que

chacune des Personnes de la Trinité dans l'action salvifique accomplie en Marie.

C'est surtout l'harmonie entre les trois personnes qu'il faut retenir, et en deuxième lieu la dimension trinitaire et sotériologique de l'Économie divine. Le Père choisit et envoie, le Fils habite et l'Esprit Saint honore, purifie et accomplit toutes les joies.

ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ
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ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ ܕܥܠܝܐ

Gloire au Père qui a envoyé son Fils chez la fille de David, / Adoration au Fils qui a habité dans son sein saintement. / Remerciement à l'Esprit qui l'a purifiée et nettoyée, puis a demeuré en elle, / Et sur nous la miséricorde par ses prières, toujours et toujours.

CONCLUSION

Après cette brève étude, dans laquelle nous avons essayé de mettre en évidence des textes cachés par la barrière de la langue, et à cause de la rareté des chercheurs qui fouillent les abondantes sources syriaques, quelques conclusions doivent être faites :

Le manuscrit de Charfet 1/5 n'offre qu'une série de supplications. D'autres supplications de saint Jacques se trouvent dans d'autres manuscrits. Par conséquent, il serait utile de rassembler toutes ces supplications pour fournir des données liturgiques plus complètes.

Ce qui s'applique aux supplications s'applique aussi aux autres catégories d'hymnes de la tradition syriaque. Les richesses que contiennent ces hymnes est une mine de théologie et d'histoire sans pareille. Un travail de collection de ce trésor est nécessaire, à l'instar de la collection des sources liturgiques maronites publiée à l'Université du Saint-Esprit de Kaslik au Liban.

Les textes que nous avons étudiés sont imbibés de données scripturaires, ce qui confère au contenu des textes une crédibilité et une base théologique profonde.

Les textes nous fournissent des titres et des appellations, soit pour Jésus, soit pour Marie, soit pour d'autres personnages comme les Apôtres, les martyrs ou les défunts. Ce sont des références non équivoques qui font défaut aujourd'hui.

Le Christ est le seul axe autour duquel se concentre l'œuvre de Saint Jacques. Cette

théologie christocentrique est fort présente surtout quand Jacques parle de la Vierge, des Saints ou des défunts.

Les textes présentent une dimension eschatologique, en particulier dans les passages réservés aux défunts. Cette dimension est développée à travers quatre axes : la mort et l'espérance, la mort et le baptême, la mort et l'Eucharistie, la mort et la résurrection. Malheureusement, il ne m'est pas possible de l'étudier et l'exposer dans ce cadre.

NOTES

¹ Ishaq Armalet, *Catalogue of the Syriac and Arabic manuscripts at the Patriarchal Library of Charfet* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).

² J. Jeannin, *Mémoires liturgiques syriennes et chaldéennes*, I. Introduction Musicale, & II. Introduction Liturgique et recueil de mélodies (Paris: Leroux, 1924).

³ Notons aussi que ce genre est en usage dans le rite maronite ; le rite chaldéen a conservé certaines *bo'wōtō*, notamment dans la rogation de Ninive ; voir J. Mateos, *Lelya-Sapra : Essai d'interprétation des matines chaldéennes*, OCA 156 (Rome, 1959), 486 et aussi 147 svv. (la rogation de Ninive).

⁴ Sur les *bo'wōtō* en général voir Anton Baumstark, *Festbrevier und Kirchenjahr der syrischen Jakobiten*, SGKA 3, 3-5 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1910), 64-66. Pour cet auteur, les *bo'wōtō* ne seraient pas une indication de l'auteur, mais du mètre ; il est suivi en cela par Mateos, *Lelya-Sapra*, 486.

⁵ Le nom de Saint Éphrem se trouve lié à ce genre d'hymnes.

⁶ Voir Baumstark, *Festbrevier und Kirchenjahr der syrischen Jakobiten*, , 65.

⁷ Cf., A. Raes, « Les deux composantes de l'office divin syrien », *OS* 1 (1956) 70.

⁸ Il n'y a aucune étude systématique sur *bō'wōtō*, d'où l'importance de ce genre de travail qui ouvrira de grandes pistes aux chercheurs qui s'intéressent à la littérature syriaque.

⁹ I.-H. Dalmais, « L'apport des Églises syriennes à l'hymnographie chrétienne », *OS* 2 (1957) 243.

¹⁰ G. Khoury-Sarkis, « Note sur les mètres poétiques syriaques », *OS* 3 (1958) 63-72.

¹¹ Cf., J. Jeannin, *Mémoires liturgiques*, 9. Voir surtout la note 3 traitant des *mimrē d-bō'wōtō* ou homélies de rogations.

¹² J. P. P. Martin, « Évêque-poète au Ve et au Vie siècles: Jacques de Saroug, sa vie, son temps, ses œuvres, ses croyances », *Revue des Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 198 (1876) 323.

¹³ On distingue ainsi trois grands genres littéraires dans les psaumes : les hymnes, les supplications et les actions de grâce (sans compter d'autres genres mineurs), L. Monloubou, *Les Psaumes et les autres écrits*, coll. Petite Bibliothèque des sciences bibliques (Paris : Desclée, 1990), 41.

¹⁴ Jacques de Saroug n'est jamais agressif dans ses discours, préférant l'enseignement pastoral aux querelles théologiques. Il n'est donc pas un grand intervenant dans les controverses du V^e et du VI^e siècle, un rôle inférieur à celui que lui assignaient son génie et sa réputation. Cf. Martin, « Évêque-poète », 334.

¹⁵ T. Bou Mansour, *La théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, t. 2, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit vol. XL (Liban : Kaslik, 1999), 365-375.

¹⁶ Mary Hansbury, *On the Mother of God: Jacob of Serug* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 8.

¹⁷ Cf. Hébreux 10:20

REPORTS AND DRAWINGS OF CELESTIAL OBSERVATIONS
IN THE 8TH CENTURY SYRIAC *CHRONICLE OF ZUQNĪN*
(AURORAL AND METEORITIC PHENOMENA)



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CELESTIAL OBSERVATIONS IN
THE *CHRONICLE OF ZUQNĪN*

The Syriac Chronicle of ZuqnĪn offers a world history starting with the presumable creation and ending at around the time of writing, A.D. 775/776. It survives in one manuscript of 173 folios located as Codex Zuqninensis at the Vatican Library (Vat. Syr. 162), and the remaining six folios are found in the British Library (Add. 14.665 folio 2-7); in Codex Zuqninensis, 129 folios are palimpsest, one even a double-palimpsest.¹ Some of the folios in the British Library which cover the last years are worm-eaten and, hence, very fragmentary. Its first and last folios are lost together with the name of the author.² The Chronicle is divided into four parts, all translated to English³ and French.⁴

Shortly after the manuscript was found and bought for the Vatican, it was considered to be written by the West Syrian patriarch Dionysius I of Tell-Mahrē, so that this

chronicle was long known as Chronicle of Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē.⁵ Dionysius did write a world chronicle, but lived later (died A.D. 845). Since this mistake was noticed, the chronicle has been called the Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē⁶ or, better, the Chronicle of ZuqnĪn,⁷ because the text mentions the monastery of ZuqnĪn as the living place of the author; ZuqnĪn was located near Amida, now Diyarbakır in Turkey near the border of Syria.

The single manuscript that exists is very likely the autograph.⁸ Its author was probably the stylite Joshua, monk of Amida;⁹ a stylite is an early Byzantine or Syrian Christian ascetic living and preaching on a pillar in the open air, so that many atmospheric and celestial observations can be expected in his work.

The Chronicle of ZuqnĪn is made of four parts: Part I runs from the creation to Emperor Constantine (A.D. 272-337), Part II from Constantine to Emperor Theodosius II (A.D. 401-450) plus a copy of the so-called Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Sty-

lite (sometimes also called Chronicle of Edessa) which covers the years from A.D. 497 to 506/7, Part III from Theodosius to Emperor Justinian (A.D. 481-565), and Part IV to the time of writing, A.D. 775/776. The Chronicler used a variety of sources, some of them otherwise lost.¹⁰

The events reported in the text are dated using the Seleucid calendar; this era started on October 7, B.C. 312 (= Dios 1 = *Tishri* 1), the Macedonian start of the year B.C. 312/311, in which Seleucus I Nicator won the important battle of Gaza (afterwards, he returned to Babylon to rule his satrapy). There are several versions of the Seleucid calendar, including the Babylonian (Jewish), Macedonian, and West Syrian (Christian) ones. The author of our chronicle systematically used the latter version for reports during his lifetime – a solar calendar, in which the year ran from *Tishri*/October 1 to *Ehul*/September 30, applied since at least the fifth century.¹¹

The Chronicle of Zuqnān reports about a variety of celestial phenomena, which can be classified as northern lights, possibly meteor showers, meteorites, a bolide, comets, a close Saturn-Mars conjunction, halo displays, a solar eclipse, and other (atmospheric) darkenings. The author's eyewitness reports start around folio 128 in A.D. 743.¹² Since the Chronicle ends in A.D. 775/6, probably shortly before the death of the author, much of the eyewitness material is reported from memory years to decades after the events. For an 8th century manuscript, the Chronicle of Zuqnān is exceptional, being an autograph, which offers detailed eyewitness records and even realistic drawings of celestial observations from the chronicler's life-time, including Halley's Comet in A.D. 760 (its study is in preparation by Neuhäuser et al.).

Historical observations of celestial phenomena are important for a variety of studies: observations of historical comets and

meteor showers may be used to refine their orbits and connections; credible observations of northern lights (aurora borealis) can be used to reconstruct past solar activity (including the 8-14 years long Schwabe cycles with variations in sunspots and auroral activity and decades-long Grand Minima of lower activity);¹³ accurate dates and locations of solar eclipses are used to study small changes in the Earth rotation period;¹⁴ solar (and lunar) halo displays are atmospheric effects,¹⁵ and were of strong interest in ancient and medieval times, partly as weather indicators.¹⁶

Here, we report on phenomena situated in the atmosphere: especially northern lights (aurora borealis) including some dubious cases which could be either meteor showers or auroral displays, also one bolide (bright meteor exploding in mid-air) and one case where meteorites were fallen onto the ground. Historically, such atmospheric (meteorological) phenomena were all called "meteors".

The Chronicler will be quoted in English translation¹⁷ including the interpretation and the drawing by the chronicler if available. Then, we present parallel transmissions (both Near Eastern and worldwide, sometimes with complementary information) including the sources of our Chronicler, if known. We reflect on his reception and use of sources. Then, we discuss the observational information in detail and try to identify the nature of the observed event by close reading; for an overview, see Table 1. To correctly classify an old observational record using partly different terminology (historical descriptions are "pheno-typical"), one has to discuss the original text and wording as well as the translation, which is always somehow an interpretation; we also consider the context and the Chronicle writer's ideological background and his sources (e.g. apocalyptic). Clear scientific criteria are important

for the classification of the phenomena. Furthermore, the exact dating is often important, e.g. the lunar phase for identifying celestial observations, the correct year for solar activity studies, or the offset between the Julian and Gregorian calendar for comparing a meteor shower observation with today's showers.

In most historical records, when neither day-time nor night-time is mentioned, it has to be assumed that the bright day is meant; this holds also for celestial observations, which typically include atmospheric meteorological phenomena, like halo displays. Hence, we normally require explicit or indirect mentioning of night-time in order to classify a record as e.g. an aurora borealis; terms like “star(s)” or “(half) moon” do not automatically indicate night-time, because, e.g., parhelia (sun dogs) can also be called that way. However, the Chronicle of Zuqnān several times did not mention night, so that other circumstantial evidence has to be considered: sometimes description together with drawing leave no doubt that a night-time phenomenon is meant, see for example in this article the last two Events (aurora borealis), or we have to rely on his sources or parallel transmissions for possibly additional evidence.

Typical criteria to identify a historical observation as mid- to low-latitude aurora borealis are as follows: (i) night-time (excluding twilight), (ii) direction: mostly northern, sometimes from East over North to West (but not low in the south), (iii) colour and form: red or fiery (sometimes also tinged green, yellow, or blue), like “a fire”, an arc with rays, in form of a curtain, etc., (iv) dynamics like pulsating brightenings or rays (but aurorae can also be stationary), and (v) duration and repetition within one to few nights; normally northern lights are restricted to polar latitudes, but strong display can be seen further south; around the

7th and 8th centuries the geo-magnetic pole was in the (northern) West-Asian quadrant, so that we may expect observations of the aurora borealis (even though as a rare phenomenon) in the Near East during this epoch.¹⁸

Typical criteria to identify historical observations such as meteor showers are as follows: (i) night-time including twilight, (ii) direction: common direction of motion and origin (radiant) on sky (e.g. Perseids from Perseus), (iii) colour and form: tens to thousands of streaks/tails of white light (depending on composition of meteoroid and gases in the ionization trail, the trail can show colours, but they are not detectable by the naked eye at night, because the eye needs longer than the meteor duration to adapt for noticing colours), (iv) dynamics: very fast motion (time-scale of seconds), (v) duration: peaking over one or a few nights (appearance on typical phases during the tropical year, e.g. the Alpha Aurigids meteor shower occurring August 28 to September 5).

Individual meteors as small solid objects (meteoroids) falling through the Earth's atmosphere, and heated by collisions with air molecules, can be seen (as meteors) anytime also outside of showers. A bolide (“fireball”) is a large, resolved, very bright, sometimes disintegrating meteor visible for time-scales of minutes, sometimes with sound and/or touching ground (meteorites). The term “meteor” in today's sense is restricted to these cases, but was much broader in history.

A close reading under consideration of the criteria should help to identify the likely true nature (in the modern sense) of the observed phenomena – the criteria are indicative (and partly discriminative), but one always has to consider whether the record is consistent with a certain interpretation and whether nothing speaks against it.

EVENT 1

At “night ... on the north side in the likeness of a blazing fire” on *Āb* 22, SE 813 (aurora borealis, August 22, A.D. 502)

The Chronicle of Zuqnān for SE 813 (=A.D. 501/502): Part III, folio 87v, with a drawing (Fig. 1); square brackets are added to the translation of the Syriac text:

The year eight hundred and thirteen: ... On the same night of the earthquake [in Acco, Tyre, and Sidon, as specified before] that occurred in the month of *Āb* (August), on the twenty-second, at the dawn [or: “eve of”] of Friday, a sign was seen on the north side (of the sky) in the likeness of a blazing fire.¹⁹

This event is also mentioned in *Chronicon Edessenum* (written in Syriac, ending in SE 850, i.e. A.D. 538/9): “An. 813, a great fire appeared on the side of the north, which blazed all night on the 22nd of *Āb* (August).”²⁰ The 12th century Syriac Chronicle of Michael the Syrian reports this event (“large fire in the north”).²¹

For these years, the Chronicle of Zuqnān is actually largely based on the Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua from Edessa (A.D. 494/5 to 506/7), which is very accurate in dating;²² Pseudo-Joshua is quoted verbatim in Zuqnān’s Part II, although it is condensed and somewhat modified in Part III, a matter dealt with here. The original report from Pseudo-Joshua is found on folio 75r-v of Part II of the Chronicle of Zuqnān:

Now listen to the atrocities that were perpetrated in this year and to [f75v] the sign that was seen on the day when they occurred, because you required us (concerning it) too. On the twenty-second of *Āb* (August) of this year, on the night preceding Friday, a great fire was seen burning in the northern region during the whole night, such that we thought that the

entire earth was about to be wiped out by the conflagration of fire in that night. The mercy of our Lord protected us unscathed, but a letter was sent to us by some people of our acquaintances, who were travelling to Jerusalem, and the following was in it: In the same night in which that great burning fire appeared, the city of Ptolemais, which is Acre, was overturned, and nothing inside it remained standing; then after a few days, people from Tyre and Sidon came to us and told us that in the day the fire appeared and Ptolemais was overturned, in the same day half of their cities, that is part of Tyre and part of Sidon, collapsed ... [one sentence omitted] ... Now on the very day on which that fire appeared the king of the Persians, Kawad Son of Peroz, gathered the whole army of the Persians and, coming up by the northern (route), crossed the Roman border with the army of Huns which he had with him.”²³

The Zuqnān Chronicler omitted the positive sentence “The mercy of our Lord protected us unscathed” in his own version. Pseudo-Joshua uses the “fire ... in the northern region” on 22nd August to dramatically start a lengthy narration of the history of the war between the Persians under King Kawad, “coming up by the northern (route)”, and the Byzantine-Roman Empire, which is the main content of his report; peace did not return until the last (12th) year of the Chronicler’s report ending in November A.D. 506. This connection between a celestial sign and political events is also reflected in the first sentence from Pseudo-Joshua as quoted above: “Now listen to the atrocities that were perpetrated in this year and to the sign that was seen on the day when they occurred, because you required us (concerning it) too.” The person addressed as “you” could

be the possibly fictitious addressee of Pseudo-Joshua's letter, who presumably asked the author to compose his report: "Sergius ... I have received [your] letter ... in which you direct me to write you, as it were, the memorial of (the time) when the locusts came, the sun was dimmed, there was earthquake, famine, and plague, and the war of the [Byzantine-]Romans and the Persians".²⁴ Pseudo-Joshua considered the observation interpreted as aurora borealis as one of those signs, as part "of the Devine Economy".²⁵



Figure 1

Aurora borealis (northern light) reported for August 22, A.D. 502 on folios 75r-v and 87v with this drawing on 87v showing red lines (lower left, Event 1). The drawing by our Chronicler of coloured parallel lines (probably meant to be perpendicular to the horizon, here the edge of the folio) may not be based on the source, Pseudo-Joshua, who mentioned "the likeness of a blazing fire," but instead it is similar to the two cases of aurora borealis seen by our Chronicler himself as eyewitness (Events 8 and 9).

This report was interpreted as aurora borealis before, dated August 22, A.D. 502.²⁶ Several aurora borealis criteria²⁷ are fulfilled (see Introduction): night-time, northern direction, aurora-typical red col-

our ("fire"), and motion ("blazing") – duration of the "whole night", but no repetition in subsequent nights. Since Pseudo-Joshua used "we" and "us", he was an eyewitness (probably in Edessa). He also has information from several more independent eyewitnesses south of Edessa, towards Jerusalem, but it is unclear whether they also reported the aurora borealis, or whether Pseudo-Joshua connected their earthquake reports in the same night and on the same 24-hour-day with this aurora borealis; hence, the aurora borealis oval extended to Edessa, and possibly even further south.

In principle, the drawing in the Chronicle of Zuqnān (Fig. 1) with coloured parallel lines (similar as in Figs. 2 and 3 in the last two Events below) would be consistent with an aurora borealis, but here our Chronicler has drawn what he saw in his own lifetime – it does not look like "the likeness of a blazing fire" as reported by Pseudo-Joshua.

In the West-Syrian Christian calendar, the Seleucid month of *Āb* is identical to the Latin August. The "night preceding Friday" (Pseudo-Joshua) is the night we would designate as *Thursday/Friday night*, August 22/23 – and indeed, August 22 (= 22 *Āb*) was a Thursday;²⁸ Pseudo-Joshua's dating to "22 *Āb*" and the "night preceding Friday" would then point to the start of the observed phenomenon during the first half of the night, August 22/23; Pseudo-Joshua then adds that it was "seen ... during the whole night." The "eve of Friday" in the Chronicle of Zuqnān also points to the first half of that night. The new moon occurred on August 18, so that it was dark most of the night of August 22/23.

In the years around A.D. 502, no other likely cases of true aurora borealis are found in aurora catalogues,²⁹ but there were two credible reports on naked-eye sunspot observations in China in February and March, A.D. 502, also in the three years

before.³⁰ Together with this relatively low-latitude aurora borealis in Edessa, they indicate strong solar activity.

In the last two Events below (Events 8 and 9), northern lights will be reported again for Fridays like here, and our Chronicler then adds that such signs were seen three times, always on a Friday.

EVENT 2

“Stars ... leaping in the sky” reported for SE 843 (meteor shower or auroral display, probably September, A.D. 532)

Chronicle of Zuqnān for SE 843 (=A.D. 531/532), Part III, folio 100r:

The year eight hundred and forty-three: Rufinus came and made peace between the Romans and the Persians. On the same day, the stars were seen shooting in the sky.³¹

The Syriac phrasing translated here as “stars ... shooting in the sky” literally means “leaping stars”; Witakowski translated: “On the same day stars appeared leaping in the sky.”³²

This sighting was reported in two contemporary chronicles; although *Chronicon Paschale*, written A.D. 628, is quite detailed for these years, it does not report this observation:

(a) Pseudo-Zacharias shortened and translated into Syriac the Chronicle of Zacharias of Mytilene around A.D. 569 in Amida (he is called Scholastikos or Rhetor, lived around A.D. 465 to after 536): “... this Rufinus ... made peace; and a written treaty was drawn up and ratified. And the stars [*kawkbē*] in the sky had appeared dancing [*dāyṣīn*] in a strange manner [lit.: in a new way], and it was the summer of the year eleven. And it lasted about six or seven years, until the year three”; the former “year eleven” being A.D. 532/3 and the latter “year three” (of the respective 15-year-long indiction) being A.D. 539/540.”³³

(b) John of Malalas (Byzantium, born A.D. 490, chronicle written A.D. 565): “72. In that year [A.D. 531/2 or 532/3] Rufinus set out for Persian territory with a sacred memoranda to make a peace treaty with the Persians. 73. ... 74. ... 75. In that year [A.D. 531/2 or 532/3] there occurred a great shower of stars from dusk to dawn, so that everyone was astounded and said, ‘We have never known anything like this to happen.’ 76. In that year Hermogenes and Rufinus returned from Persia, bringing with them a peace treaty between the two states of Rome and Persia.”³⁴

The Chronicle of Zuqnān probably used Pseudo-Zacharias as his source: he uses the same sequence that first Rufinus achieved peace, then the “leaping stars” like “stars ... dancing” – and he does not copy the quotation from within the Malalas chronicle, nor its given time span “from dusk to dawn” nor his “great shower of stars”; there is no evidence in the sources (a) and (b) that the reported “shooting stars” were observed on the “same day” as the peace treaty, but in the same year (Pseudo-Zacharias: in summer). When Pseudo-Zacharias reported “it lasted about six or seven years,” he means the span of peace between the (Byzantium) Romans and the Persians (Malalas also has new hostilities by A.D. 540).

The *Chronicon Edessenum* gives SE 843 September for the peace treaty between the Romans and Persians,³⁵ so that, if the celestial event was on the “same day” (Zuqnān), it would have been in September, A.D. 532; this is not inconsistent with “summer of the year 11” (Pseudo-Zacharias) as the 11th year of the current indiction started September 1, A.D. 532.

Let us consider a meteor shower: the report by our Chronicler meet up to two meteor criteria (see Introduction), namely maybe dynamics (“shooting/leaping”) and probably night-time (“stars”, but parhelia were also often called “stars”); Malalas’

parallel account clearly indicates night time by saying “from dusk to dawn”; however, the wording by Pseudo-Zacharias “appeared dancing in a new way” does not necessarily sound like a typical meteor shower. In modern catalogues of meteor showers, this event might be listed via the late transmission by Cedrenus (11th century Byzantine historian): “*magnus fuit stellarum discursus*” (“there was a large move of stars”) for A.D. 532.³⁶

In East Asia, it was reported that in August 28, A.D. 532 (Julian) “stars fell like rain” in Korea and/or China. This has been interpreted as describing a meteor shower;³⁷ however, in this time the wording “stars fell like rain” is not as uniquely used for meteor showers as later, sometimes it is related to thunder or lightning, e.g. A.D. 586.³⁸ If the date September, A.D. 532 and the interpretation as a meteor shower is correct, this could point to Alpha Aurigids shower August 28 to September 5, peaking September 1 (Gregorian); the offset between Julian and Gregorian was only 1.5 days by A.D. 532.

Meteor streams are relatively frequent, and known also to laymen, so that a wording like “We have never known anything like this to happen” (Malalas) is unusual for a meteor shower (and it was not mentioned that this one was particularly strong). Also the wording “dancing in a new way” in Pseudo-Zacharias could point to some rare phenomenon.

If not a meteor shower, one could consider an alternative interpretation: the report of our Chronicler fulfils one or two aurora criteria, probably night-time (“stars”) and dynamics (“shooting/leaping”). The additional information by Pseudo-Zacharias and Malalas (“dancing in a new way”, “never known anything like this to happen”) allow an auroral interpretation: the observed phenomenon could be a pulsating auroral display with moving brightenings during a

strong geomagnetic storm; aurora borealis can appear in various forms and strengths, e.g. (almost) stationary (“fire”, e.g. Event 1) or with ordered, coloured rays (see in this article the last two Events as seen by the author of the Chronicle of Zuqnān), or otherwise irregular forms with many changes of shape. There is a credible aurora report from China slightly later, in A.D. 536 and also one from A.D. 522,³⁹ i.e. one Schwabe cycle earlier.

However, in sum, there is not sufficient information to classify this observation reported for SE 843 (A.D. 532 September) with certainty: doubts remain about its interpretation as a meteor shower, but an auroral display is also not certain.

EVENT 3

“Stars of the sky fell ... shot like arrows towards the north” reported for SE 937 (meteor shower or auroral display, A.D. 625/6 or maybe a few years later)

Chronicle of Zuqnān for SE 937 (=A.D. 625/626), Part IV, folio 122v:

The year nine hundred and thirty-seven: The stars [*kawkbē*] of the sky fell [lit.: to drop (like tree leaves)] in such a way that they all shot like arrows towards the north. They provided the Romans with a terrible premonition of defeat and of the conquest of their territories by the Arabs. This was in fact what happened to them almost immediately afterwards.⁴⁰

The death of Muḥammad, the founder of Islam, is reported next for A.D. 626/627, but as he died in June, A.D. 632, the falling stars may also have happened some five years later than reported in the Chronicle of Zuqnān (or its source).

“Falling stars” are often interpreted as meteors. Here, up to three criteria may be fulfilled (see Introduction for the criteria): night-time (probably fulfilled by “stars”),

form (“like arrows”), and dynamics or motion (“shot”; but see below for “fell”). The specification regarding the direction (“towards the north”) is doubtful for the meteor interpretation, because true showers fall *from* a certain area on sky (radiant) and not towards a direction.

The wording “stars [*kawkbē*] of the sky fell” or very similar is also found in a few more records below, where there are doubts as to whether they are meteoritic phenomena; we point to the discussion of the Events of A.D. 745 and 765 below.

“Arrows towards the north” could indicate an aurora borealis corona with “arrows” like stripes along the magnetic fields lines and “*kawkbē*” as brightenings along them. The report in the Chronicle of Zuqnān fulfils two to three aurora criteria: night time (probably fulfilled, because stars are mentioned), northern direction, and dynamics (see Introduction for the criteria).

No other reports concerning meteor showers occurring around A.D. 625/6 or 632 are known (Europe, Near East, Far East).⁴¹ Also, no other record about any aurora borealis is known for around A.D. 625/6 or 632.⁴² Again, a final classification may not be possible here, e.g. a meteor shower or an aurora borealis; as mentioned, “arrows *towards* the north” may be inconsistent with a meteor shower, but are consistent with an aurora borealis.

EVENT 4

“Stars in the sky fell ... like fiery balls in all directions” reported for SE 1054 Latter *Kānūn* 1 (meteor shower or aurora borealis, probably January 1, A.D. 745)

Chronicle of Zuqnān for SE 1054 (=A.D. 742/743), Part IV, folio 131v:

The year one thousand and fifty-four:
The stars [*kawkbē*] in the sky fell [lit.: to drop (like tree leaves)], at the beginning of Latter *Kānūn* [January 1], on a Friday, and they were seen like fiery balls [Syriac *’aspīrō* from Greek

“sphere”] in all directions. They predicted the calamities, sword, and plague that were to occur in the land afterwards, as well as the advent of the Persians.⁴³

In A.D. 743, January 1 was not a Friday; one can usually trust the given weekday more than the date; the closest year with January 1 being a Friday was A.D. 745, meaning the night December 31 to January 1;⁴⁴ this is consistent with Michael the Syrian, who reports the same event for January 1, either A.D. 745 or 746. The Chronicle of Zuqnān does not mention explicitly whether it happened during day or night (“stars” could be parhelia, as mentioned in the previous two Events).

Michael the Syrian (born ca. A.D. 1126, later patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church from A.D. 1166 to his death in 1199, lived in Melitene, today Malatya in Eastern Turkey) wrote for SE 1056 or 1057 (A.D. 744/5 or 745/6):

At the beginning of *Kānūn* II [January 1], *zīqē* were seen shooting/flying in the air [lit.: in all the air, i.e. in the whole sky] like stars, everywhere, violently and angrily in the likeness of a battle/war. Also in the night in the middle of the sky, something like a great pillar/column of fire was seen and during the day [lit.: 24h-day (generic)] these *zīqē* began shooting/flying. Near the Milky Way, a star big in look, like the moon, was seen and it remained/lingered four days.⁴⁵

Only the *zīqē* phenomenon seems to resemble the observation reported in the Chronicle of Zuqnān. Michael's source here is probably Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē (Patriarch of Antiochia A.D. 818-845, whose chronicle is lost). The rare Syriac term *zīqē* is used by Michael the Syrian only twice; the other location is in SE 1019 (A.D. 708/9), also from Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē, square brackets from us:

In the year 1019, in the month of *Tammūz* [i.e. July 16, A.D. 709], the portent of *zīqē* appeared in the air, shooting, I mean flying. Some people call them shooting/falling stars. They were seen in the entire sphere of the sky during the whole night flying, intensely and quickly, from the south side toward the entire north. This is something never heard of since the generations of the world. On that account, holy doctors wrote concerning them [*zīqē*], particularly Jacob of Edessa and Moses son of Kipho. What would the naturalists say now? They pretend that they [*zīqē*] are thick air, I mean condensed air, which when it goes up, it comes in contact with fire above and it burns. If someone asks them wherefrom does this condensed air go up and where was it hidden? Because they are unable to respond with anything, let them be persuaded that the Lord does everything that he wishes [Daniel 4:35, Psalm 135:6]. The happening of this affair shows that these flying things [Syriac: *kešē*] symbolize the Arabs who at this time invaded the lands of the north, destroying, burning down, and annihilating regions, along with their inhabitants.”⁴⁶ (Terms like “thick air” and “condensed air” remind us of Aristotle’s meteorology.)

While in A.D. 709, the *zīqē* phenomenon clearly happened “during the whole night”, a close reading of the A.D. 745 text could point to the bright day: in Michael’s next sentence, “Also” is related to “was seen,” and not to “in the night,” so that the “great pillar/column of fire” was seen at night and the *zīqē* during the 24hr-day; if *zīqē* were seen at night, one would normally not write something like “during 24hr-day” (but “at night”). However, neither Michael nor his source, Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē, were an eyewitness, and the wording in Michael is somewhat unusual (“like stars ... in the night ... during the [24hr-

]day”), so that we consider both night-time and day-time as possible. Similarly, in A.D. 502 (Event 1, aurora borealis), Pseudo-Joshua reported “In the same night in which that great burning fire appeared ... that in the day the fire appeared ...”, indicating that the term “day” here was also used in a generic way for the 24hr-day including the night.

In Michael’s texts, Syriac *zīqē* was translated to French as “bolides,”⁴⁷ but it is plural and means literally *radiance* or *big fires*. While *zīqē* and “great pillar/column of fire” (A.D. 745) were related to each other by the source, and may have been seen in the same night. The “star big in look, like the moon” mentioned in the next sentence (“four days”) seems to be a different phenomenon, probably not starting on the very same 24hr-day (i.e. date), but somewhat close in time.⁴⁸ The Chronicle of Zuqnān does not mention “star big in look, like the moon,” its “fiery balls” are best compatible with the *zīqē* [lit.: big fires] in Michael.

The Chronicle of Zuqnān brings the same wording as at the start of the event discussed here again for SE 1076, i.e. A.D. 764/765 (see below): “The stars [*kawkbē*] of the sky fell ... during the whole night,” i.e. here clearly at night. For this event (A.D. 765), it is quite likely that the author of the Chronicle of Zuqnān (died slightly after A.D. 775/6) was an eyewitness, because he reports in very much detail.

Michael’s reports for A.D. 709 and 745 are compatible with the reports from the Chronicle of Zuqnān reports for A.D. 745 and 765, so that they could point to a similar phenomenon, possibly happening typically during the night.

For January 1, A.D. 745, one could first consider a meteor shower: it was probably at night time, Zuqnān mentions “stars [*kawkbē*] in the sky,” Michael “*zīqē* ... like stars.” The description “in all direc-

tions” is typical of a meteor shower to coming from some radiant point and then seemingly to fly to all other directions given the peculiar sighting projection. This sighting cannot be explained with the bright and strong Quadrantids, the only meteor shower known to peak early January, if the Quadrantids have formed much later in the Ching-yang event in March/April, AD 1490.⁴⁹ “Fiery balls” (Zuqnān) and *zīqē* as “big fires” (Michael) do not fulfil the colour criterion, because meteors in a shower seen by naked eye should be a colourless bright white (see Introduction). Also, “fell [i.e. to drop like tree leaves]” (Zuqnān) and “shooting/flying” (Michael) does not automatically point to the typical velocity of a meteor shower, as in A.D. 709, where Michael reports *zīqē* to “go up” and to be “flying”.

One could then consider an auroral display (probably night-time, fiery colour, and dynamics); the “pillar/column of fire” (Michael) was seen at night and could be auroral, it was seen “in the middle of the sky,” which could point to the celestial rotation axis, i.e. the celestial North Pole. Since A.D. 745 January 7 was a new moon, the “great pillar/column of fire” (January 1, Michael) cannot be a lunar halo phenomenon, because it was shortly before the new moon, instead it would have been dark enough for an aurora borealis.

The *zīqē* reported for A.D. 709 by Michael is even more consistent with an auroral display, because it was definitely at night and probably north: first “from the south side toward the entire north” (i.e. a phenomenon seen in the “entire north” coming “from the south”) and later that this sign would have portended problems with the Arabs “who at this time invaded the lands of the north, destroying, burning down”. Similarly, in A.D. 502 (Event 1), Pseudo-Joshua finished his report of an aurora observation with such a portentous

connection, a problem from the north: “now on the very day on which that fire appeared the king of the Persian king, Kawad son of Peroz, gathered the whole army of the Persians and, coming up by the northern (route), crossed the Roman border with the Hunnish army which he had with him.”

There are no meteor shower records from East Asia for A.D. 709 or 744/5.⁵⁰

A similar sighting was reported for northern England by Simeon of Durham (A.D. 1060-1130) in his *Historia Regum* for A.D. 745: “Anno DCC.xlv visi sunt in aere ictus ignei quales numquam ante mortales illius aevi viderunt; et ipsi pene per totam noctem visi sunt, kal. silicet Januarii,”⁵¹ i.e. A.D. 745, fiery strokes were beheld in the air, such as no men of that generation had ever seen before; and were visible throughout almost all the night of January 1.⁵² Up to A.D. 957 Simeon used old Durham annals as sources, which are not otherwise preserved). The Melrose Chronicle (A.D. 745-1140 from Melrose Abbey in Scotland, partly using Simeon of Durham) has for A.D. 745 the following: “Anno DCC.xlv visi sunt in aere ictus ignei, quasi stellae discurrentes, tota nocte kalendarum Januarii, quod omnibus intuitibus magno fuit monstro,”⁵³ “A.D. 745, fiery strokes were beheld in the air, like moving stars, the whole night of January 1; for all who looked at it, it was a large (wonderous) sign” (our translation).

This observation was interpreted before an aurora borealis, but based on a later source.⁵⁴ In particular the wording “such as no men of that generation had ever seen before” may be inconsistent with a meteor shower, one or several of which can be seen each year, while it would be well consistent with an aurora borealis sighting: after very low activity for several decades (Dark Age grand minimum until about A.D. 690), there was

again stronger solar activity around A.D. 745;⁵⁵ there were more sightings of an aurora borealis in June and September A.D. 743 in the Near East.⁵⁶ Also, for July A.D. 709, Michael's report that "this is something never heard of since the generations of the world" is more consistent with an auroral display than with a meteor shower; in (July) A.D. 707 and/or 708, aurorae were seen in China.⁵⁷

Even though the records in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn and by Michael the Syrian first seem to sound like a meteor shower, there are several arguments pointing to an auroral display.

EVENT 5

"A large, terrible and dreadful star flew, broke through the sky and the air, and came down at sunset" reported for SE 1065 Latter *Tišri* 26 (bolide, probably November 26, A.D. 754)

Chronicle of Zuqnīn for SE 1065 (=A.D. 753/754) Part IV, folio 136r, with our additions in square brackets:

The year one thousand and sixty-five: ... The battle was fought for several days and many fell on both side, and in the end °Abd-Allah, son of °Alī, was defeated before the Persian Abū-Muslim [Persian general, died A.D. 755]. He was put to flight and he fled and disappeared on the 26th of Latter *Tišri* (November), on Tuesday, when Wednesday was dawning. ... In the same evening of the defeat of the son of °Alī, God made a great miracle. A large, terrible and dreadful star [*kawkbō rabō zī'ō wa-dhīlō*] flew, broke through the sky and the air, and came down at sunset in the middle of the camp of the son of °Alī, in the likeness of a fiery ball. When the Arabs saw this thing, their hope was shattered and lost. Their eyes were blinded and they could not hold out anymore because they clearly knew that this thing came from the Lord,

and therefore they could not bear it any longer.⁵⁸

°Abd-Allah, the son of °Alī, was defeated on A.D. 754 Nov 26, so that this is obviously the date meant above, which was indeed a Tuesday⁵⁹ ending in the Muslim calendar at sunset, the start ("dawning") of Wednesday, "in the same evening" it "came down at sunset". Therefore, the Chronicle of Zuqnīn is one year off.

Agapius (original Mahbūb son of Qūštāntīn, a 10th century Christian-Arabic Melkite bishop of Hierapolis, died A.D. 940's, wrote a world chronicle in Arabic using Byzantine sources) reported a "spear/lance" for the time of the insurrection of °Abd-Allah: "A sign appeared in the sky in the likeness of a spear (*ḥarbā*) of fire extending from the east to the west, and it was expanding and then decreasing. During this time the war of °Abd-Allah son of °Alī was expanding."⁶⁰ Given that Agapius used a different wording for the bolide (spear, *ḥarbā*), he probably used a different source, neither the Chronicle of Zuqnīn nor its source. The Chronicle of Zuqnīn is a good source for this event; it happened in the lifetime of its author, even though he probably was not an eyewitness.

The wording "large, terrible and dreadful star flew, broke through the sky and the air ... in the likeness of a fiery ball" (Zuqnīn) is best consistent with a bolide, in particular that something was flying for quite a distance through the air dissolving, if not exploding, as "fiery ball" seemingly coming down in the camp of °Alī (Arabs) – as seen from a distance by the winning Persians around Abū Ja'far. The narrative expression that the observers' "eyes were blinded" could be based on the experience of the large brightness in the moment of explosion. A bright bolide can be seen during day-time (as recently in Tscheljabinsk, Russia, on Feb 15, 2013), so that the night-time criterion does not need to be fulfilled.

The description as “likeness of a spear of fire extending from the east to the west” expanding and decreasing (Agapius) is also consistent with a bolide. That no other report from anywhere else like Europe or East Asia is known is consistent with the interpretation as bolide, because a bolide is a local phenomenon. (Cook, however, not considering the Chronicle of Zuqnān, interpreted this event from Agapius as comet and was then confused by the fact that it is not mentioned by the Chinese.⁶¹)

Our text with the bolide “coming down” may have been interpreted later as a heavenly confirmation of the defeat of the Arabs, or alternatively, it may have really broken the mood of the Arabs, as implied by the last sentences, e.g. “When the Arabs saw this thing, their hope was shattered and lost.” This defeat of the Arabs around ‘Alī against the Persians around Abū Ja‘far (2nd ‘Abbasid caliph, since A.D. 755) is part of the transition from the Umayyads to the ‘Abbasids. Interestingly, very close to the death of Caliph Abū Ja‘far Al-Manṣūr in A.D. 775, another bolide came down – observed by him and his party.⁶²

EVENT 6

“Two stars ... fighting ... all the stars fell in all directions ... the whole night” reported for SE 1076 Latter *Kānūn* 4 (meteor shower or aurora borealis, January 4, A.D. 765)

Chronicle of Zuqnān for SE 1076 (=A.D. 764/765), Part IV, folio 137r:

The year one thousand and seventy-six: The stars [*kawkbē*] of the sky fell [lit.: to drop (like tree leaves)] in the month of Latter *Kānūn* (January), the fourth day in it – a Friday. When it started to become dark and the stars [*ḥṣak*] began to rise, two stars [*kawkbē*] came out from the middle of the sky, fighting with each other, like people who fight or engage in a contest with each other. Thus they moved forward, while

fighting, and fell down toward the East. When they fell down and vanished, all the stars [*kawkbē*] in the sky began to fall [*le-mēppal*, lit.: to drop], shooting like fiery balls that fly in all directions. Thus they fell [like tree leaves] during the whole night, and the following statement of our Saviour was fulfilled ...⁶³ (then quotations from Mark 13:24, Acts 2:20, Matthew 24:6, 15).

The date given in Zuqnān, SE 1076 “Later *Kānūn* (January), the fourth day in it” (January 4, A.D. 765), was really a Friday,⁶⁴ as given, the night of January 3/4 is meant.

The observed phenomenon is clearly seen from astronomical twilight (“stars began to rise”) until the morning: “during the whole night.” For the observed “two stars” and “all the stars”, the general word “*kawkbē*” is used, which means “celestial objects” (used e.g. for stars, planets, brightenings etc.). Like in the Event of A.D. 745, the location (“middle of the sky”) should again be the area around the northern celestial pole (38° above horizon at Amida). The wording “fighting with each other” may describe dynamics; “like people” shows that the report includes narratives elements; a story of a fight between two phenomena with motion is not unusual for a celestial observation.⁶⁵ The duration appears to be longer than just a few seconds. The “two stars” then “fell down toward the East”, i.e. approaching the horizon. When “all stars” [*kawkbē*] are reported to “fall” or “drop” (downwards?), contradicts to “fly in all directions;” what is probably meant is that “stars” leave their position (“fly in all directions”) appearing like “fiery balls;” again, the author cannot mean “stars” in the modern sense, but again some celestial brightenings.

Let us check the meteor criteria: night-time (“during the whole night”); direction (“fell down toward the East” could be con-

sistent with meteors, while “all the stars ... in all directions” would not be possible for a meteor shower); colour/form (“fiery balls,” a red colour, would not be consistent with meteors); dynamics and motion (“two stars ... fighting with each other” seems to be longer than a few seconds, to “drop (like tree leaves)” would be too slow for meteors).

Parts of the first sentence of the above citation from the Chronicle of Zuqnīn citations were recently interpreted as illustrating a meteor shower: Uso & Castillo⁶⁶ list under the date A.D. 765 January 4 first a Latin citation from Assemani (*Bibliotheca Orientalis*, “*Stellae quasi e coelo cecidere visae sunt*,” our ref. 5), which is a Latin translation of the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, then a Latin citation from Simeon of Durham, which is dated A.D. 763 or 765 by Dall’Olmo (“probably a shower”),⁶⁷ see below for the Latin text. However, for the latter, neither month nor day is given, so that the date to January 4, A.D. 765 is unjustified. Furthermore, there are several mis duplications and dating problems around this time.

In early January, the only known meteor shower is the Quadrantids. However, several elements of the Zuqnīn report appear to be inconsistent with this shower: the Quadrantids shower with its radiant in Bootes is very low on the horizon in the evening after sunset, so that the above report in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn (“When it started to become dark and the stars began to rise ... two stars came out from the middle of the sky ... they fell during the whole night”) would hardly be consistent with this shower. In addition, this shower is considered to have formed much later in the Ching-yang event in March / April, A.D. 1490.⁶⁸

Let us also check the aurora criteria: night time (“during the whole night”); direction (“middle of the sky” may mean

around the northern pole); colour/form (“fiery balls”, a red colour); dynamics/motion (“fighting with each other,” and strong motion on large parts of the sky).

There are other reports from the Near East dated Hijra 147 (A.D. 764/5) without month or day:

(a) al-Azdī (historian of Mosul, Iraq, died in AH 334/A.D. 945): “In it [A.H. 147] the stars [*an-nujūm*] fell [*tanātharat*, lit.: to drop like tree leaves, to scatter, to disperse] as it is mentioned.”⁶⁹

(b) Ibn Taghrībirdī (Egyptian historian, A.D. 1411-1470): “In this [A.H. 147] year planets scattered from the beginning of the night until morning. People were afraid of what it might forebode”⁷⁰ (what is translated here as “planets” may well be *kawākib*, the plural of *kawkab*, which means “planets” in current Arabic, but which had a more general meaning of celestial brightenings including planets and stars in the past; we could not consult the original Arabic text).

(c) Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād (died A.D. 843): [A.H. 147] “Then we saw a star, which did not glow, rising from the right [of the *qibla*, i.e. the west], the opposite side of Syria: its blazing fire spreading from the south to the north, to Armenia. I noted this to an elderly learned man from the people of the Sakasik [Yemenite tribe], and he said: This is not the expected star.”⁷¹

Regarding the first two texts, we find similarities in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn: “from the beginning of the night until morning” (Ibn Taghrībirdī) is resonant of “during the whole night” (Zuqnīn) and “the stars fell” (al-Azdī) is resonant of “the stars of the sky fell” (Zuqnīn). Al-Azdī, writing in Arabic, used “*an-nujūm*” (“stars”). Although a word “*shihab*” (meteor) exists in Arabic (not found in Syriac), it is doubtful whether he meant meteors by using “*an-nujūm*” instead of “*shihab*”.

Also, there are a few reports on celestial observations from East-Asia dated to the

turn of the year A.D. 764/5, which may be relevant here: for December 30, A.D. 764 in China “stars fell like rain” (at night), “a multitude of stars fell”, “stars streamed like rain” (at night) were reported; for December 31, A.D. 764, in China “at night, stars streamed like rain”; and for January 7, A.D. 765, in Korea “there were meteors, some large, some small”.⁷² Interpreting this as a meteor shower is problematic: (i) the term “meteor” is not present in the original Korean text, but is an interpretation, night-time also is not given in the Korean text; (ii) at this time, the wording “stars fell like rain” in the Chinese texts, is not uniquely used for meteor showers, as it is later, but sometimes relates to thunder or lightning, e.g. A.D. 586;⁷³ (iii) as mentioned, the only known meteor shower for early January, the Quadrantids, is thought to have formed much later.

For A.D. 765, Simeon of Durham (A.D. 1060-1130) reports a sighting in northern England in his *Historia Regum*: “Anno DCC.lxv ignei ictus in aere visi sunt, quales quonquam apparuerunt tempore nocturno kal. Januarii, ut superius praenotavimus.”⁷⁴ i.e. “[A.D. 765] fiery strokes were seen in the air, such as formerly appeared on the night of January 1, as we have already mentioned [A.D. 745],”⁷⁵ interpreted as aurora borealis or meteor shower.⁷⁶ The previous similar sighting in A.D. 745, as mentioned by Simeon of Durham, was discussed above (see Event 4) with its description in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, which we found to probably indicate an aurora borealis, actually two Schwabe cycles before the A.D. 765 sighting (consistent with aurorae). The two observations in England in January 1, A.D. 765 and in A.D. 745 are compared to each other, so that both might have been a similar atmospheric phenomenon – possibly, because of the explicit comparison, we could speculate that the second sighting

may have also been in early January, A.D. 765 may have been seen early January. Zuqnīn gives Friday January 4, A.D. 765 and January 1, A.D. 745.

Considering all evidence, the classification of both the phenomena in January 1, A.D. 745 and January 4, 765 as aurora borealis is more probable than as meteor shower. After very low solar activity for almost a century (Dark Age grand minimum until about A.D. 690), there was increasing solar activity, as seen e.g. in dropping radiocarbon around A.D. 745 and 765.⁷⁷

In the last two events below, we will read about the aurora borealis cases seen in the years A.D. 772 and 773: “It was on Fridays that it used to appear during these three consecutive years.” Two of those are clearly narrated (Events 8 and 9), while a text about the third one is either missing or may possibly be identified with this report for A.D. 765, where the sighting was also on a Friday (but then, only two of them would have been “consecutive”).

EVENT 7

“Stones ... fell from the sky” reported for
SE 1080 (meteorites around
A.D. 768/769 or 760/761)

Chronicle of Zuqnīn for SE 1080 (=A.D. 768/769), Part IV, folio 145r:

The year one thousand and eighty: ...
Also in this year, stones—black stones
– fell from the sky. Many people really
saw them and touched them, and they
are still standing to this day. Did they
per chance ascend to the clouds or
where could they have come from?
God alone knows! But again, there are
no black stones whatsoever in the re-
gion in which they fell! But believe, O
reader, that God does in heaven and
earth all that he wishes.⁷⁸

This report quite clearly refers to meteorites (“black stones”) newly found on the ground, even seen while falling down (the

night-time criterion does not need to be fulfilled). Our Chronicler may not have been an eyewitness himself, as he states “many people saw them and touched them,” and he also does not mention their exact location. When he asks whether “they per chance ascend to the clouds,” he may refer to the old theory that meteorites first somehow have to ascend to high altitude (“clouds”) before they can fall down, but he also looks and asks for an alternative (“or where could they have come from,”) because such black stones did not otherwise exist in this region. His wordings “God alone knows” and “God does in heaven and earth all that he wishes” allows for alternatives: the extra-terrestrial origin of meteorites was not explicitly assumed at that time.

For the same year (SE 1080, A.D. 768/9), the Chronicle of Zuqnān reports the transition from Bishop Zachariah of Edessa to Elijah of Qartmīn, which was A.D. 760/1, so that the meteorites may have fallen in that year (mentioned at the end of the report for that year). The dating of the next report in the Chronicle of Zuqnān (at the start of the next year) differs by up to several years in other chronicles.⁷⁹

EVENT 8

“Northern side ... red sceptre ... moving”
reported for “harvest time [SE 1083]”
(aurora borealis, late spring or summer,
A.D. 772)

Chronicle of Zuqnān: Part IV, folio 150v
with drawing and headline:

Concerning another sign which was
also seen in the northern region during
this year: [headline]

Another sign appeared in the northern
side, and its appearance gave testimony
about the threat and menace of
God against us. It was seen at harvest
time, while occupying the entire
northern side, from the east end to the
west end. Its likeness was as follows:

a red sceptre, a green one, a black
one, and a yellow one. It was moving
up from below, while one sceptre was
vanishing and another one appearing.
When someone looked at it, it would
change into seventy shapes. For the
intelligent person the sign indicated
menace. Many people said many
things about it; some said it announced
bloodshed, and others said other things.
But who knows the deeds of the Lord? ‘I
will give signs in the heaven, and wonders
on the earth’ (Acts 2: 19).⁸⁰

Both the report and the drawing shown
on the right margin toward the bottom of
folio 150v (Fig. 2) are consistent with an
aurora borealis observation, fulfilling several
criteria: (i) north: the phenomenon was
widespread on “the entire northern side”
and “from the east end to the west end,” (ii)
colour/form: rays (“sceptre”) in different
colours red, green, yellow, and even black
– red is typical for mid-latitude aurorae
(geomagnetic latitude of 43-50° at that
time⁸¹); green/yellow indicates a stronger
geomagnetic storm, it is indeed possible to
describe parts of an aurora borealis as
black as lines without colour and brightness
in between brightly coloured lines and
areas can appear black or dark (this description
is found in other historical examples); (iii)
dynamics: descriptions like “moving up
from below ... one sceptre was vanishing
and another one appearing ... it would
change into seventy shapes” indicate a strong
geomagnetic storm. Even though it is not
explicitly mentioned that it was at night,
the whole text would hardly be consistent
with anything other than an aurora borealis
and the drawing strongly supports this
interpretation.

The original drawing (Fig. 2) on the
more than 1200 year old autograph (completed
in A.D. 775/6) still shows different colours
including red and green/yellow. The coloured
lines (“sceptre,” Fig. 2) show

aurora borealis rays, which follow the textual description: “moving up from below, while one sceptre was vanishing and another one appearing.”



Figure 2

The aurora borealis rays reported for corn harvest time (late spring to summer) of A.D. 772 from folio 150v with red and yellow/green lines.

When looking at the folio, the lines appear horizontal, but they are meant to be perpendicular to the folio edge (the horizon): as seen in Fig. 2, one word is written next to the drawing (and also one unrelated word written further below on the bottom margin toward the right). The word directly beside the red lines is the Syriac word *saggiyē* meaning “many” (see above: “Many people said *many* things about it”); it is an insertion that was forgotten in the text and written perpendicular to the main body of the text (landscape format).

The aurora borealis recorded in this paragraph of the Chronicle of Zuqnān is found after a section with several more celestial observations; the words “which was also seen” in the headline relate to those previous phenomena, and not to the “northern region” mentioned next.

We have discussed the dating before (ref. 13): between SE 1078 (A.D. 766/7) and SE 1084 (A.D. 772/3) the author does not report in a strict chronological order. After the formal heading for SE 1078 (A.D. 766/7), several headings are found

without explicit dates, but some are datable, e.g. shortly before the aurora borealis the text states that the Caliph rebuilt the Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem, which was in A.D. 771.⁸² After several paragraphs, the next year – the first of “three years of affliction” – is given explicitly: for SE 1084 (A.D. 772/3), an additional aurora borealis event is reported (see next Event); since that later description also mentions the “sign that was seen a year ago in the northern region,” we can conclude that the earlier aurora borealis was clearly seen in A.D. 771/2.⁸³

The time of the year is given here as *harvest time*, where *corn harvest* is meant, as the Syriac word for *harvest* means *corn harvest*, if not otherwise specified, i.e. in A.D. 772 in late spring to summer (on a Friday as specified in the next Event).⁸⁴

EVENT 9

“Northern ... change into many shapes ... red ray” reported for SE 1084 *Ḥazīrān* (aurora borealis, June, A.D. 773)

Chronicle of Zuqnān: Part IV, folio 155v with drawing and headline:

Concerning the previous sign which was seen in the northern region; it was also seen in this year: [headline] ... Signs appeared to us in the sky, threatening disobedient people, and their mere appearance testified to the intelligent ones about the magnitude of our evil and about the wrath with which justice is menacing us. The sign which was seen a year ago in the northern region was seen again in this year, in the month of *Ḥazīrān* (June), on a Friday. It was on Fridays that it used to appear during these three consecutive (lit.: “three years one after another”) years, stretching itself out from the eastern side to the western side. When seen by someone, it would change into many shapes, in such a way that as soon as a

red ray vanished, a green one would appear, and as soon as the green one vanished, a yellow one would appear, and as soon as this one vanished, a black one would appear. It announced that the land would not merely suffer one affliction but several, as in fact happened to us. The shape of this sign is as drawn above.⁸⁵

Red and yellow/green lines are drawn again on the right margin of folio 155v (Fig. 3): here explicitly connected with the text. As in the previous Event, the lines are meant to be vertical, so that the drawing as well as the report are consistent with aurora borealis rays. The report again fulfils three aurora borealis criteria: northern direction, colour, and dynamics.⁸⁶ As in the previous Event, the night-time criterion is not fulfilled, but text and drawing are hardly consistent with anything other than aurora borealis.

Given that the description of this Event is quite similar (but shorter) than in the previous text (Event 8), it is possible that part of the description was copied from the former report, and that the latter aurora borealis was not as strong as the earlier one; also in the drawing, the later event has less stripes (“rays”) than the earlier one.

Only in connection with the weekday, the author mentions that the same phenomenon was observed for three years: “it was on Fridays that it used to appear during these three consecutive years.” The Chronicler is now strictly chronological calling the year SE 1084 (A.D. 772/773) the “first year of affliction;”⁸⁷ after some other matter is narrated for that year, also the above headline (“seen in this year”) means that we are still in SE 1084 (A.D. 772/773); after this aurora borealis, the next mention of a year then says “concerning the second year of affliction which is the year [SE] 1085”⁸⁸ (A.D. 773/774); see also note 1 in ref. (1), p.

253. Therefore, this second observation can clearly be dated to SE 1084 (A.D. 772/3), a Friday in June.⁸⁹ Since it is mentioned that another similar event “was seen a year ago,” the previous event was in SE 1083 (A.D. 771/2) harvest time, i.e. A.D. 772 late spring or summer (Event 8).

If “three years” is not an error for “two years” and is meant in a strict consecutive sense, one could consider A.D. 771 or 774 for the third event; however, the manuscript is largely incomplete for the next year SE 1085 (A.D. 773/4) and thereafter. The Chronicle’s wording “to appear during these three consecutive years,” as found in the report for June, A.D. 773, more likely means A.D. 771, 772 and 773, since our author makes recourses to the past (like on these pages and in this very paragraph). But neither in A.D. 771, nor in the remains of A.D. 774, is a report about an aurora found. Alternatively, the author may mean the aurora borealis A.D. 502 Aug 22/23, which was also on a Friday and for which he presented a similar drawing (Fig. 1). His criteria to identify the signs as being from the same type might have been night-time, northern direction, red/fiery, motion (rays going up and down, or “blazing”), and may be Fridays. All three cases of aurora borealis (Events 1, 8, and 9) are similarly drawn (Figs. 1, 2, 3), as coloured vertical lines next to each other. Alternatively, the third event could be the January 4, A.D. 765 observation (see above), also on a Friday, because the writer was probably an eyewitness. However, that event is described with different wording, so that it was of a different type of aurora borealis (if auroral at all), and therefore possibly not identified by the author as one of those three similar signs; this (and other, similar additional ones like in A.D. 745) also were not drawn.



Fig. 3

The aurora rays reported for a Friday in A.D. 773
June from folio 155v with red and
yellow/green lines.

The author, even though apocalyptic in tone, does not equate the “three years of affliction” exactly with the three consecutive years (“three years one after another”) with aurora borealis observations. This shows that his dates are credible. When describing the first case (A.D. 772 harvest), he mentions that people considered it to be a portent (“menace”) for some “bloodshed and ... other things,” but he does not specifically mention which unfortunate events followed. The next aurora borealis (A.D. 773 June) is then considered as portent for further affliction (“It announced that the land would not merely suffer one affliction but several, as in fact happened to us”), obviously his second and third year of affliction are meant. This indicates that this part was written later. In retrospect, he considers the first aurora borealis (Event 8, A.D. 771/2) as a portent for the first affliction year (A.D. 772/3). If a third aurora borealis would have happened in A.D. 773/4, he would have used it as a portent for the third year of affliction, but this is not the case as his wording shows.

Since we could confirm the weekdays to fit to the given dates in several cases, we can trust the author that both (or even all three) aurora borealis events were on Fridays. As a negative portent, this may have reminded our Christian author of the Friday crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

SOME ASTRONOMICAL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE AURORAL AND METEORITIC OBSERVATIONS IN THE CHRONICLE OF ZUQNĀN

The celestial observations in the Chronicle of Zuqnān are credible. Here, we concentrated on auroral and meteoritic observations only. We suggest clear criteria for the identification of meteor showers and auroral displays in historical records. Literal translation and close reading are necessary for a correct understanding and classification of an historical observation. Other sources and also parallel observations from other locations should be considered. In some cases, doubts may remain regarding the classification, so that newly found records may resolve such cases in the future.

In some Events (2, 3, 4, 6) the Chronicle of Zuqnān reports on what may be either a meteor shower or an auroral display. We have argued that wordings like “stars fell” do not automatically point to a meteor shower: there may be information in the records (Zuqnān or others), which can be contradictory. However, if Events 4 and/or Event 6 were a meteor shower early January, then the claim that the Quadrantids, which peak early January, would have formed much later in the Ching-yang event in March/April, AD 1490⁹⁰ would be in doubt, when a planetoid formed the dust cloud (now producing the meteor shower). If the phenomena in A.D. 745 and 765 were meteor showers, this would support the alternative suggestion that the Quadrantids were created by comet 96P/Machholz some 2000 years ago, when a parent comet had a close Jupiter fly-by and a partial break-up.⁹¹ It would be necessary to revisit all presumably eighth-century A.D. meteoritic observations in history, which are dated to the end of December and the beginning of January (even though we con-

sider an auroral interpretation for A.D. 745 and 765 as more likely).

The drawings and reports of auroral displays on a Friday in A.D. 772 harvest and 773 June are exceptional: the reports and drawings are from an eyewitness, found in an autograph; texts and drawings are consistent and complement each other. In Event 9 (June A.D. 773), the author pointed in the text to his drawing: “the shape of the sign is as drawn above”; while the drawings visualize the main impression of the features in one depiction, the texts underline the changes and evolutions of the shapes. The drawing for August 21/22, A.D. 502 (Event 1) aurora borealis by our Chronicler is just modeled by those he saw, even though that particular earlier aurora borealis may have looked differently.

The two mid-latitude aurorae in A.D. 772 and 773 as observed in Amida, Turkey, indicate relatively strong solar activity at that time. Indeed, after the Dark Age grand minimum of lower than normal activity ending around A.D. 690, the Sun slowly became more active for eight Schwabe cycles with more and more aurorae per cycle until about mid A.D. 773, but then activity dropped for a few decades (the first new aurora after A.D. 773 occurs in A.D. 786, then normal to higher activity after about A.D. 800, e.g. a naked-eye sunspot observation, the first in more than 200 years in A.D. 807, is witnessed from Aachen,

Germany). This scenario is consistent with the radiocarbon data measured in tree rings: the stronger the solar activity, the stronger the solar wind blowing through the solar system, the less cosmic rays that can enter the solar system and, hence, less radiocarbon is created in the Earth’s atmosphere by such cosmic rays. After high radiocarbon in the Dark Age, it decreased slowly until its minimum around A.D. 773, when it suddenly increased strongly for some four years, to stay high (low solar activity) for a few decades. This scenario can explain the strong radiocarbon variation around A.D. 774/5, for which a nearby supernova, a Galactic gamma-ray burst, a cometary impact, and a super-strong solar flare are also to be considered. The two aurorae observed, described, and drawn by the author of the Chronicle of Zuqnān for A.D. 772 and 773 would be too early to constitute a strong solar flare as a cause for the radiocarbon variation after A.D. 774, but instead these descriptions are an important clue for showing the long- and short-term solar activity variation in the 8th century with the activity drop since about A.D. 773.⁹²

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the Vatican Library for providing the manuscript with its drawings in digital form and for allowing us to show the drawings here.

Table 1. Auroral and Meteoritic Phenomena as Reported in Parts II, III, and IV

Date given SE	Prob. A.D.	Page Date	Page (Harrak*)	Part / Folio	Phenomenon	Event + Figure	Source(s)
813 Āb 22, Friday	501/2 Aug 22	502 H17/400	H99/40	III/87v II/75r-v	aurora borealis	1 Fig.1 (87v)	Pseudo-Joshua (Chro. Edess.?)
Zuqnān Part III: 4 aurora criteria: “night”, “on the north side”, colour (“fire”), dynamics (“blazing”) Zuqnān Part II: 4 aurora criteria: “night”, “northern region”, colour (“fire”), dynamics (“burning”)							
843	531/2 September	532	H99/74	III/100r	meteor shower or aurora bor.	2	Pseudo-Zacharias or John Malalas
Zuqnān: 0-2 meteor shower criteria: night-time (“stars”)?, dynamics (“shooting/leaping”)? Zuqnān: 1-2 aurora criteria: night-time (“stars”)?, dynamics (“shooting/leaping”) Malalas/Ps-Zacharias: 2 aurora criteria: night-time “dusk to dawn”, dynamics (“dancing in a new way”)							
937	625/6 -630/1	625/6	H99/ 142	IV/122v	meteor shower or aurora bor.	3	
1-3 meteor shower criteria: night-time (“stars/ <i>kawkbē</i> ”)?, form (“like arrows”), dynamics (“shot”, “fell”?) 2-3 aurora criteria: night-time (“stars/ <i>kawkbē</i> ”)?, direction (“towards north”), dynamics (“drop/shot”)							
1054 <i>Kānūn</i> II, 1, Fri	742/3 Jan 1	745	H99/ 180	IV/131v	meteor shower or aurora bor.	4	
1-3 meteor shower criteria: night-time (“stars/ <i>kawkbē</i> ”)?, direction (“in all directions”), dynamics (“fell/drop”)? 2-3 aurora criteria: night-time (“stars/ <i>kawkbē</i> ”)?, colour (“fiery”), dynamics (“fell/drop”)							
1065 <i>Tišri</i> II, 26, Tue	753/4 Nov 26	754	H99/ 196/7	IV/136r	bolide “large, terrible, dreadful star flew, broke...came down”	5	
1076 <i>Kānūn</i> II, 4, Fri	764/5 Jan 4	765	H99/ 201/2	IV/137r	aurora borealis ?	6	Ibn Taghrībirdī (?) Zuq. Eyewitness (?)
1-3 meteor shower criteria: “whole night”, direction?, dynamics (“shooting”, “fell”?) 3-4 aurora criteria: “whole night”, direction (“middle of sky”)?, colour (“fiery”), dynamics (“fighting”)							
1080	768/9	768/9?	H99/ 223	IV/145r	meteorites “black stones fell from sky”	7	?
1083 Harvest, Friday	771/2 772	mid 243/4	H99/ 243/4	IV/150v	aurora borealis	8 Fig. 2 (150v)	Zuq. eyewitness
3 aurora criteria: “northern side”, colour (“red sceptre, green, yellow”), motion (“moving up, change, 70 shapes”)							
1084 <i>Ḥazīrān</i> Friday	772/3 June	773	H99/ 262	IV/155v	aurora borealis	9 Fig. 3 (155v)	Zuq. eyewitness
3 aurora criteria: “northern region”, colour (“red ray, green, yellow”), motion (“change into many shapes”)							
(*) H99 = Harrak, <i>Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts III and IV</i> ; H17 = Harrak, <i>Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts I and II</i> .							
NB: Regarding whether and which criteria are fulfilled, please see texts for full discussion; for the classification of the observation, the whole texts (plus the drawing and other sources, if available) are to be considered.							

NOTES

- ¹ A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts III and IV A.D. 488-775* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*; A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts I and II from the Creation to the Year A.D. 506/7* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017); Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts III and IV*.
- ⁴ J.B. Chabot, *Chronique de Denys de Tell Mahré* (Paris, 1895).
- ⁵ J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, Vols. I-III, 1, 2 (Rome, 1719-28).
- ⁶ R. Abramowski, "Dionysius von Tellmahre, jakobinischer Patriarch von 818-845," *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 25 (1940) 2.
- ⁷ Chabot, *Chronique de Denys de Tell Mahré*.
- ⁸ Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 9-17.
- ⁹ Ibid, 9-17.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 20-21.
- ¹¹ W. H. Hatch, *Dated Syriac Manuscripts* (Boston: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1946), Plate I.
- ¹² Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 30-31.
- ¹³ R. Neuhäuser & D. L. Neuhäuser, "Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon," *Astronomical Notes* 336 (2015) 225.
- ¹⁴ R.R. Newton, *Medieval chronicles and the rotation of the Earth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); F. R. Stephenson, *Historical eclipses and Earth's rotation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); F. R. Stephenson, L. V. Morrison, C. Y. Hohenkerk, "Measurement of the Earth's Rotation: 720 BC to AD 2015," *Proceedings of the Royal Society A*, vol. 472, issue 2196 (2016).
- ¹⁵ M. G. J. Minnaert, *Light and Color in the Outdoors* (New York: Springer, 1993).
- ¹⁶ D. L. Neuhäuser & R. Neuhäuser, *Halo-Code und Halo-Vergessenheit*, in: Wolf-schmidt, G. (Ed.) *Proc. 'Der Himmel über Tübingen'*, *Nuncius Hamburgensis* 28, 470-518 (Hamburg: tredition, 2014); D. L. Neuhäuser & R. Neuhäuser, "A red Cross Appeared in the Sky and Other Celestial Signs: Presumable European Aurorae in the Mid AD 770s were Halo Displays," *Astronomical Notes* 336 (2015) 913.
- ¹⁷ Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*.
- ¹⁸ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, "Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon."
- ¹⁹ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 40.
- ²⁰ I. Guido, *Chronicon Edessenum*, (in) *Chronica minora I* (Paris, 1903), p. 8 (Latin translation); English translation available on www.tertullian.org/fathers/chronicle_of_edessa.htm (R. Pearse), interpreting it as aurora borealis.
- ²¹ G. Y. Ibrahim (ed.), *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 260.
- ²² F. R. Trombley & J. W. Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), liv.
- ²³ A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān Parts I-II*, 400; see also Trombley-Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 49.
- ²⁴ Trombley-Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 1.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 3.
- ²⁶ J. J. de Mairan, *Traité physique et historique de l'aurore boréale* (Paris: De L'Imprimerie Royale, 1733); H. Fritz, *Verzeichnis beobachteter Polarlichter* (Wien: Gerold, 1873), 15 (quoting the *Chronicon Edessenum*).
- ²⁷ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, "Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon."
- ²⁸ H. Grotfend, *Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* (Hahn: Hannover, 1891).
- ²⁹ H. Fritz, *Verzeichnis beobachteter Polarlichter* (Wien: Gerold, 1873), 15 (for Europe), he cites the 17th century Hevelius (Poland) for the time before and after A.D. 502, but without source nor details; Z. Xu, D.W. Pankenier, Y. Jiang, *East Asian archaeoastronomy* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 2000), none for East Asia.
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- ³¹ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 74.

- ³² W. Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tell-Mahre, Chronicle, Part III* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), 49.
- ³³ R. Pearse (ed.), *The Syriac Chronicle of Zacharias Rhetor in Early Church Fathers – Additional Texts* (1899); the source is available in www.tertullian.org/fathers/zachariah09.htm, book 9, chapter 7.
- ³⁴ E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffries, R. Scott et al., *The Chronicle of John Malalas: A Translation* (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986), 282 (text), 275 and 284 (for dating).
- ³⁵ Guido, *Chronicon Edessenum*, p. 11.
- ³⁶ U. Dall’Olmo, “Meteors, Meteor Showers and Meteorites in the Middle Ages: From European and Medieval Sources,” *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 9 (1978) 123, giving A.D. 531 citing Theophanes, but not found by us; M. J. M. Uso & F. J. M. Castillo, “A review of Dall’Olmo Survey of Meteors, Meteor Showers and Meteorites in the Middle Ages: From European and Medieval Sources,” *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 48 (2017) 62–120, correcting Dall’Olmo to A.D. 532.
- ³⁷ S. Imoto & I. Hasegawa, “Historical Records of Meteor Showers in China, Korea, and Japan,” *Smithonian Contributions to Astrophysics* 2 (1958) 131; Z. Tian-shan, “Ancient Chinese Records of Meteor Showers,” *Acta Astr. Sinica* 14 (1966) 37; D.W. Pankenier, Z. Xu, Y. Jiang, *Archeoastronomy in East Asia* (Amherst: New York, 2008), 312; S. H. Ahn, “Catalog of Meteor showers and Storms in Korean History,” *Journal of Astronomy and Space Sciences* 21 (2004) 39–72, revising Imoto & Hasegawa.
- ³⁸ D. W. Pankenier, Z. Xu, Y. Jiang, *Archeoastronomy in East Asia* (Amherst: New York, 2008), 313.
- ³⁹ Z. Xu, D. W. Pankenier, Y. Jiang, 2000, *East Asian archaeoastronomy* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach 2000), 196; R.R. Newton, *Medieval Chronicles and the Rotation of the Earth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), none for Europe.
- ⁴⁰ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 142.
- ⁴¹ Imoto-Hasegawa, “Historical Records of Meteor Showers in China, Korea, and Japan,” Tian-shan, “Ancient Chinese Records of Meteor Showers,” Pankenier-Xu-Jiang, *Archeoastronomy in East Asia*; Ahn, “Catalog of Meteor showers and Storms in Korean History,” 39–72 (revising Imoto & Hasegawa); Newton, *Medieval Chronicles and the Rotation of the Earth*.
- ⁴² Xu-Pankenier-Jiang, *East Asian archaeoastronomy*, 196.
- ⁴³ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 180.
- ⁴⁴ Grotefend *Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, tables II and III.
- ⁴⁵ Ibrahim (ed.), *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*, 464; translated by Amir Harrak.
- ⁴⁶ Ibrahim (ed.), *The Edessa-Aleppo Syriac Codex of the Chronicle of Michael the Syrian*; translated by Amir Harrak.
- ⁴⁷ Chabot, *Chronique de Denys de Tell Mahré*.
- ⁴⁸ In his world chronicle written around A.D. 942 in Arabic, Agapius also mentioned this observation (“The same year, in the month Kanoun II (January), there appeared another sign in the shape of the moon”) without any reference to the *zīqē*; see A. Vasiliev, *Kitāb al-‘Unwān: Histoire Universelle érite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj*, seconde partie, PO 7, 536 (1911); English translation is available at www.tertullian.org/fathers/agapius_history_02_part2.htm.
- ⁴⁹ P. Jenniskens, “2003 EH1 Is the Quadrantid Shower Parent Comet,” *Astronomical Journal* 127 (2004) 3018.
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- ⁵¹ J. H. Hinde (ed.), *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, Publications of the Surtees Society Vol. 51 (Durham: Surtees Society Andrews, 1868), 18.
- ⁵² Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, “Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon.”
- ⁵³ J. Stephenson, *Chronica Mailros, e Codice Unico, ed. 1270* (Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Club, 1835), 4.
- ⁵⁴ F. Link, *Geofysikalni Sbornik* 10 (1962), 316, citing the later Roger de Hoveden (died 1201) with the same text as above from Simeon of Durham; the same report is dated A.D. 743 January 1 in the *Matthaeus Westmonasteriensis*

(Matthew Paris, died 1259) Chronicle, but that is misdated; U. Dall'Olmo, 123, interpreted it as meteor shower and noticed the duplication, but thought that A.D. 743 would be the true year; Uso-Castillo, "A review of Dall'Olmo Survey of Meteors, Meteor Showers and Meteorites in the Middle Ages: From European and Medieval Sources," 62-120, present both as meteor shower, but do not mention the duplication.

⁵⁵ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, "Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ K. Yau, F.R. Stephenson, D. Willis, *A catalogue of auroral observations from China, Korea, and Japan (193 BC - AD 1770)*, Technical report (London: Rutherford Appleton Lab, 1995).

⁵⁸ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 196-197.

⁵⁹ Grotefend, *Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, tables II and III.

⁶⁰ Vasiliev, *Kitāb al-'Unwān*; this quotation from Agapius was translated slightly differently by D. Cook, "A survey of Muslim material on comets and meteors," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 30, 131 (1999) 136, in particular "and this persisted as long as the war ... persisted" (which sounds like a long-term event) instead of "During this time, the war ..." (which is consistent with a short-term event like a bolide).

⁶¹ Cook, "A survey of Muslim material on comets and meteors," 136.

⁶² R. Neuhäuser & P. Kunitzsch, "A transient event in AD 775 reported by al-Tabarī: A bolide – not a nova, supernova, or kilonova," *Astronomical Notes* 335 (2014) 968-980.

⁶³ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 201-202.

⁶⁴ Grotefend, *Zeitrechnung des deutschen Mittelalters und der Neuzeit*, tables II and III.

⁶⁵ Yau, F.R. Stephenson, D. Willis, *A Catalogue of Auroral Observations from China, Korea, and Japan (193 BC - AD 1770)*, for AD 858 July 16, i.e. just one day after new moon: "Tonight ... it appeared as if there were two cocks fighting each other in the sky north of Kitamo [Japan], above the Inari shrine. Their color looked scarlet and while they were fighting their feather scattered and fell. Although far away, they appeared as if before

one's eyes. After a long while they stopped" (from Montoku jitsuroku), interpreted as aurora borealis.

⁶⁶ Uso-Castillo, "A review of Dall'Olmo Survey of Meteors, Meteor Showers and Meteorites in the Middle Ages: From European and Medieval Sources," 62-120.

⁶⁷ Dall'Olmo, "Meteors, Meteor Showers and Meteorites in the Middle Ages: From European and medieval sources," 126.

⁶⁸ Op. Cit. (ref. 49) Jenniskens 2004.

⁶⁹ 'Alī Hubayqa (ed.), *Yazīd ibn Muḥammad ibn Zakariyya al-Azdī: Tārīkh al-Mawṣil* (Cairo, 1967), 200.

⁷⁰ W. S. Rada & F. R. Stephenson, "A catalogue of Meteor Showers in Medieval and Arab Chronicles," *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 33 (1992) 11, translation to English from Arabic in Ibn Taghribirdī, *Al-nujūm al-zāhira*, vol. II, p. 7.

⁷¹ Cook, "A survey of Muslim material on comets and meteors," 137, translation to English from Arabic in Nu'aym b. Hammad, *Kitāb al-fitan* (Beirut 1993) 132-3.

⁷² Op. Cit. (ref. 38) Pankenier-Xu-Yiang, *Archeoastronomy in East Asia*; Ahn, "Catalog of Meteor Showers and Sorms in Korean History."

⁷³ Pankenier-Xu-Yiang, *Archeoastronomy in East Asia*, 313.

⁷⁴ Hinde (ed.), *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, 18.

⁷⁵ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, "Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon."

⁷⁶ F. Link, *Geofysikalni Sbornik* 10 (1962), p. 316, citing the later Roger de Hoveden (died 1201) with the same text as above from Simeon of Durham, and Neuhäuser & Neuhäuser (ref. 13) interpreted it as aurora borealis; Dall'Olmo (ref. 67) interpreted it as meteor shower and noticed the duplication, but thought that A.D. 743 would be the true year; M.J.M. Uso & F.J.M. Castillo (ref. 66) present both as meteor shower, but do not mention the misduplication.

⁷⁷ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, "Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon."

⁷⁸ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 223.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 223, notes 2 and 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 243-244.

⁸¹ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, “Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon.”

⁸² Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 240 and note 4.

⁸³ This aurora borealis event was previously considered to have happened in A.D. 766, the last formal headline with a year, by D. J. Schove, *Chronology of eclipses and comets AD 1-1000* (Bury St. Edmunds: Boydell, 1984), 324; and U. Dall’Olmo, “An additional List of Auroras from European Sources from 450 to 1466 A.D.,” *Journal Geophysical Research*, 84 (1979) 1525.

⁸⁴ H. Hayakawa, Y. Mitsuwa, Y. Fujiwara et al. “The Earliest Drawings of Datable Auroras and a Two-Tail Comet from the Syriac Chronicle of Zuqnān,” *Publications of the Astronomical Society of Japan* 69 (2017) 17, follow Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, “Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon,” in the interpretation as aurora borealis and in the dating (SE 1083 = A.D. 771/2) without mentioning it. They do not discuss the different dating in Schove and Dall’Olmo (see note 83); then, they argue that “harvest time” could also refer to some winter crops, but as we mentioned above, if only “harvest” is given, Syriac means “corn harvest”—the Syriac term for “harvest” is only for summer crops, and specifically “barley” and “wheat”, grains that are harvested in late spring to summer. Also, Pseudo-Joshua reported for SE 812: “In June and July, after the harvest ... the wheat of the new harvest” (ref. 22, p. 46). Hayakawa et al. also misinterpreted the record of comet Halley in May A.D. 760 with its detailed drawing in the Chronicle of Zuqnān as indicating a “two-tailed comet”, while the text and the drawing (see cover page of Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*) clearly present a normal comet with one tail (to the upper right), the plasma tail blown by solar wind directed away from the Sun (the Sun is located to the lower left below the horizon). We are currently reconstructing dated positions of comet Halley from the *Chronicle of Zuqnān* (plus a few more from Chinese records for A.D. 760 and 837) in order to improve the orbital solution (presented first

in D. L. Neuhäuser, R. Neuhäuser, A. Harrak, M. Mugrauer as poster paper on “Celestial signs in the 8th century Syriac Chronicle of Zuqnān – their cultural and scientific relevance,” at Focus Meeting 5 of the General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union, August 2018 Vienna, Austria, soon to be published in detail elsewhere, and later also here together with the other Halley observations in the Chronicle of Zuqnān. For detailed critique on Hayakawa et al. papers, see D. L. Neuhäuser, R. Neuhäuser, J. Chapman, “New Sunspots and Aurorae in the Historical Chinese Text Corpus? Comments on Uncritical Digital Search Applications,” *Astronomical Notes* 339 (2018) 10-29, and also J. W. McAlister, “Scientists’ Reuse of Old Empirical Data: Epistemological Aspects,” in: *Conf. Proc. ‘Data in time: the epistemology of historical data’*, 25th biennial meeting, Philosophy of Science Association, DOI: 10.1086/699695 (2018).

⁸⁵ Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, 262.

⁸⁶ Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, “Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon.”

⁸⁷ Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*, p. 253.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The second event (dated here to A.D. 773 June) was previously considered to have happened in A.D. 770 by Schove, *Chronology of eclipses and comets AD 1-1000*, 324, and A.D. 770-772 by Dall’Olmo, “An additional List of Auroras from European Sources from 450 to 1466 A.D.”

⁹⁰ Jenniskens, “2003 EH1 Is the Quadrantid Shower Parent Comet.”

⁹¹ B. A. McIntosh, “Comet P/Machholz and the Quadrantid Meteor Stream,” *Icarus* 86, (1990) 299; L. Neslusan, Z. Kanuchova, D. Tomko, “The Meteor Shower complex 96P/Machholz revisited,” *Astronomy & Astrophysics* 551 (2013) 87.

⁹² Neuhäuser-Neuhäuser, “Solar Activity around AD 775 from Aurorae and Radiocarbon.” R. Neuhäuser & D. L. Neuhäuser, “Variations of 14-C around AD 775 and AD 1795 – due to solar activity,” *Astronomical Notes* 336 (2015) 930-954; and references therein.