

Syriac Theology: Past and Present

Beiträge zur Komparativen Theologie

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Syriac Theology: Past and Present



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Warum wir Syrisch-Orthodoxe Theologie in Europa brauchen

Klaus von Stosch

Es ließen sich sicher eine ganze Reihe von Gründen dafür anführen, warum wir syrisch-orthodoxe Theologie in Europa brauchen. Da ist zunächst die offenkundige Tatsache, dass Jesus aramäisch gesprochen hat und damit in der Sprache gefühlt, gedacht und gelehrt hat, die bis heute die Liturgie der syrisch-orthodoxen Kirche prägt. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist es schon bewegend, wenn man zum ersten Mal das Vaterunser in dieser Sprache hört. Darüber hinaus ist die syrische Kirche eine der ältesten der Christenheit und führt uns damit an die Wurzeln des Christentums zurück. Viele der ersten syrischen Kirchenväter werden in der gesamten Kirche rezipiert und wertgeschätzt. Gerade die poetische Kraft von Gestalten wie Ephräm dem Syrer (306–373) oder Jakob von Sarug (451–521) beeindruckt bis weit über die Grenzen der orientalischen Kirchen hinaus und hat unsere Liturgien nachhaltig beeinflusst. Von daher kann man schon rein historisch dafür argumentieren, wie wichtig das syrische Christentum für die christlichen Wurzeln Europas ist.

Hinzu kommt, dass die in Deutschland und Europa lebenden syrisch-orthodoxen Christinnen und Christen in vielen Fällen als Flüchtlinge zu uns gekommen sind und schon deswegen unsere Solidarität und Unterstützung brauchen. Denn nicht erst die Grausamkeiten des IS haben zu einer Flüchtlingswelle syrischer Christen nach Europa geführt. Vielmehr wurden bereits in der Spätzeit des Osmanischen Reichs nicht nur armenische, sondern auch syrisch-orthodoxe Christinnen und Christen massenhaft getötet oder vertrieben. Wegen dieses Völkermordes, an dem auch Deutschland nicht unbeteiligt war, leben jetzt schon seit vielen Generationen syrisch-orthodoxe Christinnen und Christen in Europa – auch in Deutschland und in großer Zahl in Ostwestfalen.

Von daher könnte man denken, dass es schon aus historischer Verantwortung klar sein sollte, dass es in Deutschland und Europa syrisch-orthodoxe Theologie gibt und dass sie mit öffentlichen Geldern gefördert wird. Doch leider ist das in Deutschland bisher nicht der Fall, sodass wir mit diesem Buch noch einmal nachdrücklich für die Bedeutung syrisch-orthodoxer Theologie für Europa werben wollen. Geschehen soll das vor allem auf zwei Ebenen.

Auf der ersten Ebene argumentieren wir für die bleibende Bedeutung des exegetischen Erbes syrischer Theologie. Die in der syrischen Theologie stark

zur Geltung kommende typologische und allegorische Form der Schriftdeutung ist natürlich auch sonst in der Alten Kirche präsent. Aber sie ist in den westlichen Kirchen doch stark verdrängt worden und nimmt in der syrischen Tradition eine besonders eindrückliche poetische Gestalt ein, die es wahrzunehmen gilt. Neben dem exegetischen Erbe schauen wir auch auf die syrische Christologie und versuchen deutlich zu machen, wie weit inzwischen der Stand der ökumenischen Versöhnung zwischen syrisch-orthodoxer und römisch-katholischer Kirche gediehen ist. Auf diese Weise soll deutlich werden, dass die dogmatischen Streitigkeiten der Vergangenheit keinen Grund mehr darstellen, eine theologische Würdigung von syrisch-orthodoxer Theologie und ihrer genuinen dogmatischen Anliegen zu entwickeln. Zugleich soll dafür argumentiert werden, dass die exegetische Tradition syrisch-orthodoxen Christentums eine nachhaltige Bereicherung westlicher Theologie zu leisten verspricht – nicht zuletzt aufgrund von ihrer poetischen Kraft.

Auf der zweiten Ebene argumentieren wir für die Bedeutung des syrisch-orthodoxen Christentums für ein tieferes Verstehen der islamisch-christlichen Beziehungen. Schon lange ist bekannt, dass das Aufkommen des Islams im siebten und achten Jahrhundert für die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen im Nahen Osten durchaus positive Seiten hatte.¹ Denn in der Spätantike versuchten die byzantinischen Kaiser immer wieder, das byzantinische und damit das chalkedonisch geprägte Christentum im Reich durchzusetzen, sodass sich die nach dem Konzil von Chalkedon nach und nach neu entstehenden orientalischen Kirchen immer wieder im Konflikt mit dem Reich befanden. Von daher kann es nicht verwundern, dass viele syrische Christinnen und Christen in den siegreichen muslimischen Herrschern eine große Hoffnung für den Erhalt ihrer Kirche sahen. Deshalb räumte man den Muslimen einen Platz in der göttlichen Heilsgeschichte ein und entwickelte eine ausgesprochen islamfreundliche Schrifthermeneutik. Und viele syrische Kirchenväter, wie beispielsweise noch Bar Hebräus im 13. Jahrhundert, verweisen in ihren Schriften auf den gegenseitigen Dialog mit dem Islam und zeigen, dass es damals schon gegenseitigen Respekt und Achtung unter Muslimen und Christen gab.

Die gegenseitige Achtung hielten die muslimischen Herrscher und die christlichen Bischöfe in gemeinsamen Verträgen fest, die sicher nicht egalitär angelegt waren, aber der christlichen Minderheit im Gegenzug gegen Tributzahlungen den Schutz der muslimischen Herrscher zusicherten.² Die muslimische Haltung

1 Vgl. bereits Wolfgang Hage, *Die syrisch-jakobitische Kirche in frühislamischer Zeit: nach orientalischen Quellen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966), 65.

2 Vgl. ebd., 67.

gegenüber den christlichen Patriarchen wird deswegen schon in der älteren Literatur als freundlich und ehrenvoll bezeichnet. So erschien es nicht als verwunderlich, dass sie sich zu Glaubensgesprächen trafen und sich konstruktiv aufeinander zubewegten.³

Wie gesagt sind all diese Fakten schon länger bekannt und sie sind auch spürbar, wenn man mit Flüchtlingen aus Syrien spricht, die oft trotz der Gräueltaten des IS an die lange Tradition der friedlichen Nachbarschaft von Muslimen und Christen in Syrien erinnern. Auch der syrisch-orthodoxe Erzbischof von Deutschland hat das bei seinen wiederholten Besuchen an der Universität Paderborn immer wieder getan und diese friedliche Tradition gegen islamophobe Stimmen verteidigt. Erst in den letzten Jahrzehnten erfährt das syrische Christentum eine neue Aufmerksamkeit von Koranforschern, die immer genauer beweisen können, in welchem intensiven Austausch sich schon der Koran selbst mit dem syrischen Christentum befand.⁴ Immer mehr Forscherinnen und Forscher erkennen, wie fruchtbar und geradezu unverzichtbar das syrisch-muslimische Gespräch für eine historisch-kritische Lektüre des Korans und das Verstehen seiner Genese ist. Auch viele Glaubenspraktiken des Islams werden religionsgeschichtlich neu verständlich, wenn man ihre Wurzeln in der syrisch-christlichen Liturgie entdeckt. Zu nennen sind u.a. Niederwerfungen beim Gebet, die Anordnung gewisser Glaubensformeln, feste Gebetszeiten und bestimmte Fastenvorschriften. Sicher ist an dieser Stelle auch die jüdische Tradition wichtig, sodass gelegentlich von einer jüdisch-christlichen Rechtskultur gesprochen wird, in die hinein sich der Islam entwickelt hat.⁵ Hier ist noch viel an gemeinsamen Wurzeln und wechselseitigen Befruchtungen zu entdecken. Offenkundig steht das syrische Christentum in der Spätantike im Zentrum der Gespräche der monotheistischen Religionen und muss dringend wieder in seiner formativen Kraft erschlossen werden.

Doch kehren wir noch einmal auf die erste Ebene unserer Überlegungen zurück und bleiben zunächst im Kontext innerchristlicher Verständigung. In welcher Weise kann die syrisch-orthodoxe Tradition bereichernd für das Christentum insgesamt sein? Welche spezifischen Traditionsstränge des syrischen Christentums können für unseren Zugang zur Bibel fruchtbar werden?

3 Vgl. ebd., 69.

4 Vgl. zur Literatur die umfassende Übersicht von Andrew J. Hayes in diesem Band, aber auch die Hinweise bei Charbel Rizk.

5 Vgl. Holger M. Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Ders. (Hg.), *The Qur'an's reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the origins* (London: Routledge, 2019).

Der syrisch-orthodoxe Erzbischof der Niederlande *Mor Polycarpus A. Aydin* antwortet in seinem Beitrag für diesen Band auf diese Fragen, indem er zunächst einmal eine Bestandsaufnahme zu den syrischen Bibelübersetzungen in der Spätantike macht und zeigt, wie beeindruckend vielfältig und produktiv die Bibel in der Spätantike in verschiedenen syrischen Versionen zirkuliert und diskutiert wurde. Daraufhin geht er in diachroner Perspektive auf die Traditionen der Kommentierung der Bibel in syrischer Sprache ein. Mit Sebastian Brock spricht er von einer Kommentierung, die sich innerhalb der kirchlichen Tradition bewegt und den biblischen Text in religiöser Perspektive interpretiert. Während eine rein historisch-säkulare Sicht zu einer eindimensionalen Interpretation der Schrift tendiere, sei diese Exegese in der Tradition der Kirche immer eine, die die Vielstimmigkeit des biblischen Zeugnisses ernst nehme und ins Relief setze. Wichtig ist Mor Polycarpus Aydin allerdings die religiöse und die säkulare Sicht auf die Bibel nicht gegeneinander auszuspielen. Beide Perspektiven seien vielmehr als komplementär anzusehen und können sich wechselseitig befruchten.

Besonders eindrücklich ist sein Eingehen auf die typologische und poetische Bibelhermeneutik bei Ephräm und Jakob. Mor Polycarpus Aydin zeigt überzeugend, dass gerade der poetische Zugang die tieferen Bedeutungsschichten der Bibel freilegen kann, die ein rein historisch-säkularer Zugang zu übersehen droht. Der unausschöpfliche Reichtum der Schrift werde gerade in diesem theo-poetischen Zugriff sichtbar. Die innere Schönheit der Schrift erschließe sich eben nur in einer Haltung der Liebe – so Jakob.

Kenner der modernen Koranhermeneutik wird schon bei diesem ersten Zugang auffallen, wie nah diese ästhetisch konfigurierte Schrifthermeneutik neueren muslimischen Zugängen zum Koran ist, wie sie etwa Navid Kermani und Milad Karimi entwickelt haben.⁶ Auch bei den Diskussionen der diesem Buch zugrunde liegenden Tagung war auffällig, wie eindrücklich der Bischof und andere syrisch-orthodoxe Theologinnen und Theologen ihre exegetischen Argumente durch eine altsyrische Rezitation der Kirchenväter untermauern und dabei gerade die poetische Kraft ihres Schriftzugangs erfahrbar machen. Eine solche Art der Argumentation war mir bisher nur aus dem muslimischen Kontext bekannt, und es ist naheliegend hier eine gegenseitige Beeinflussung schon in der islamischen Frühgeschichte im Hintergrund zu vermuten. Vermittelt durch

6 Vgl. als erste Übersicht Klaus von Stosch, *Herausforderung Islam. Christliche Annäherungen* (Paderborn u.a.: Brill Deutschland, 32019), 28–33; Cordula Heufts, *Auf den Spuren der Herrlichkeit Gottes. Theologische Ästhetik im christlich-islamischen Gespräch* (Paderborn u.a.: Brill Deutschland, 2020).

die syrisch-orthodoxe Tradition können hier dem westlichen Christentum wichtige Aspekte der islamischen Tradition neu vertraut werden.

Die von Mor Polycarpus Aydin aufgegriffenen Differenzierungen des Oxforder Altmeisters der Syrologie *Sebastian P. Brock* werden in diesem Buch auch von ihm selbst noch einmal vorgetragen. Dabei bedenkt Brock zusätzlich eine Reihe von Fragen, die bei Mor Polycarpus Aydin nicht vorkommen, wie etwa die Frage nach dem Gewicht der verschiedenen von Mor Polycarpus Aydin übersichtlich benannten Traditionen und die Frage nach dem anthropomorphen Charakter der Gottrede in einigen biblischen Texten. Wichtig erscheint hier vor allem der richtige Geist in der Annäherung an den Text, aber auch eine methodisch adäquate Textrezeption. An zwei Beispielen zeigt Brock kurz, wie vielfältig solche Rezeptionsprozesse in der syrischen Tradition ausgesehen haben. Inhaltlich betont er wie Mor Polycarpus Aydin durchgehend die Komplementarität einer allegorisch-typologischen und einer historisch-philologischen Annäherung. Es sei falsch, die west- und die ostsyrische Tradition oder auch die alexandrinische und antiochenische Theologie auf einen der Zugänge zu reduzieren. Anders als bei der rein allegorischen Interpretation griechischer Mythen sei auch in jeder noch so allegorischen Interpretation der Bibel immer klar gewesen, dass die philologisch-historische Arbeit nicht einfach ignoriert werden dürfe. In einem kleinen Appendix führt Brock die bisher publizierten syrischen Übersetzungen griechischer Bibelkommentare auf, um auf diese Weise Ausrichtung und Breite der syrischen Bibelkommentierungen anzudeuten.

Nach diesen beiden Plädoyers aus der syrisch-orthodoxen Theologie bzw. aus der philologischen Rekonstruktion dieser Tradition heraus kommt mit *Robert A. Kitchen* erstmals ein westlicher Theologe zu Wort, der den Wert der syrisch-orthodoxen Form der Bibelexegese für seine eigene evangelische Tradition beschreibt. Kitchen beeindruckt an den patristischen Texten, dass sie sich nicht damit begnügen, die historische Wirklichkeit hinter den Texten zu rekonstruieren, sondern dass sie uns helfen, diese Texte selbst zu erschließen. Für die syrisch-orthodoxe Tradition sei die Schrift selbst und nicht das hinter ihr liegende Geschehen Gottes Wort. Kitchen gewinnt durch seine Rezeption der syrischen Patristik neue Zugänge zum persönlichen Erleben der Schrift statt der verobjektivierenden Distanzierung des biblischen Erbes, das sein eigenes Studium geprägt hat. Die typologische Lektüre erleichtere die Identifikation des Lesers bzw. der Leserin mit den biblischen Figuren und man könne besser in das biblische Geschehen hineingezogen werden.

Ephräm sei hier der erste Kirchenvater, der das poetische Singen der Verkündigung zur Sprache seiner Kirche mache und dadurch stilbildend auch für seine Nachfolger werde. An der Geschichte des Propheten Jona macht

Kitchen klar, wie gerne Ephräm Lücken lässt, die seine Hörerinnen und Hörer selbst füllen müssen. Gerade die christologische Deutung schwingt hier immer mit, auch dann, wenn sie nicht explizit thematisiert wird. Und auch die Begegnung von Jesus und Petrus auf dem See wird allegorisch gedeutet und so auf die existenzielle Situation der Kirche bezogen. Dabei nahmen sich die Kirchenväter die Freiheit, die biblischen Narrationen durch Auslassungen und Ergänzungen so zu verändern, dass sie auf die existenzielle Situation ihrer Hörer und Hörerinnen passten. In einem flammenden Schlussplädoyer fordert er, dass syrische Kommentierungen der Bibel in der westlichen Welt wieder mehr rezipiert werden müssen und dass sie uns dazu inspirieren sollten, die biblischen Texte auf unsere Situation hin zu lesen.

Eben eine solche Lektüre der Bibel auf die eigene Situation hin bietet der Beitrag von *Martina Aras*, in dem die Paderborner Theologin aus syrisch-orthodoxer Sicht die Heilung der syrophönizischen Frau in der Tradition Jakobs auf ihre Potenziale für Heilungshoffnungen in der Gegenwart befragt. Sie verwendet dabei einen zuerst von Eleonore Stump entwickelten hermeneutischen Zugang, der die Du-Perspektive im biblischen Text stark macht und Heilung in Kategorien personaler Begegnung versteht, um auf dieser Basis ihren eigenen, syrisch-orthodox geprägten Zugang zum Thema Heilung zu gewinnen. Im Anschluss an die östliche Theologie kann sie Erlösung als Vergöttlichung beschreiben und nutzt insbesondere die Auslegung der Heilung der kanaanäischen Frau bei Jakob von Sarug dazu, um die Bedeutung eines ungeteilten, ganzheitlichen Glaubens herauszustellen.

Doch bei aller Faszination, die durch die ersten vier Beiträge unseres Buchs für den theo-poetischen Reichtum des syrischen Christentums entstehen mag, ist es zu einer Rehabilitierung der syrisch-orthodoxen Tradition in Europa doch unerlässlich, auch auf die dogmatischen Differenzen zwischen den westlichen Kirchen und dem syrisch-orthodoxen Christentum einzugehen. Der Blick auf die erreichten Vermittlungsschritte macht an dieser Stelle offensichtlich, dass ein neues Zugehen auf die syrische Tradition auch aus der Perspektive katholischer Dogmatik verantwortbar ist.

Die katholische Theologin *Theresia Hainthaler*, die wie keine andere mit der Dogmenentwicklung in patristischer Zeit vertraut ist und die christologischen Streitigkeiten der frühen Kirche immer wieder akribisch nachgezeichnet hat, stellt in ihrem Beitrag den Stand der Forschung aus katholischer Sicht dar. Nach einigen terminologischen Vorklärungen und einem damit verbundenen Literaturbericht bietet Hainthaler einen historischen Annäherungsversuch an den Gehalt einer typisch syrisch-orthodoxen Christologie, indem sie die Christologien der wichtigsten syrischen Kirchenväter exemplarisch skizziert und jeweils luzide in ihren Debattenkontexten vorstellt. Zum Abschluss verweist sie noch

auf den Stand des ökumenischen Gesprächs zwischen syrisch-orthodoxer und katholischer Kirche, der unmissverständlich klarstellt, dass beide im Glauben an die Inkarnation verbunden sind. Ihr ist aber auch wichtig, immer die ganze Breite syrischen Denkens im Blick zu behalten und weitet die ökumenische Frageperspektive noch einmal hin zu den orientalischen Kirchen insgesamt.

Denn ökumenische Bemühungen beschränken sich nach Hainthalers Analyse nicht darauf, Hindernisse in der Lehre zu überwinden, die einem gemeinsamen Bekenntnis im Wege stehen. Um als Leib Christi besser zusammenzuwachsen, müssen Christen aus verschiedenen Kirchen auch Wege finden, gemeinsame Formen der Liturgie zu entwickeln und gemeinsam Gott anzubeten. Ausgehend von der jeweiligen Rezeption von Jakobs Werken scheint es, dass Kirchen aus dem gesamten Spektrum der orientalisch-christlichen Traditionen die Möglichkeit haben, ein sehr weites und tiefreichendes Reservoir an Traditionen, die sie bereits gemeinsam haben, als Bindeglieder wiederzuentdecken, stärker hervorzuheben und in den Vordergrund zu stellen. Von daher kann die katholische Annäherung an diese theo-poetische Tradition Folgen nicht nur für das Verhältnis zu dieser Teilkirche haben, sondern auch paradigmatisch für das Gespräch mit anderen orientalischen Kirchen sein und ihnen zur Kultivierung einer inneren Verbindung dienen.

Der Paderborner Ökumenikexperte *Johannes Oeldemann* macht die bei Hainthaler am Ende nur kursorisch angedeuteten Dialogbemühungen der letzten Jahrzehnte zwischen katholischer und syrisch-orthodoxer Kirche zum Hauptthema seines Beitrages. Dabei überlegt er, inwiefern der ökumenische Dialog Rückwirkungen auf das syrisch-orthodoxe Selbstverständnis hatte. Er zeigt, wie vielfältig theologische und kirchenpolitische Fragen durch den Dialog in Bewegung geraten sind und gerade in Deutschland neue Herausforderungen für die syrisch-orthodoxe Theologie mit sich bringen. Eine dieser Herausforderungen ist sicher der interreligiöse Dialog, sodass es folgerichtig ist, wenn dieser Aspekt im zweiten Teil des vorliegenden Bandes in den Mittelpunkt rückt.

Eröffnet wird dieser zweite Teil durch einen ausführlichen und ausgesprochen instruktiven Überblick von der in Halle lehrenden Vertreterin des Faches ‚Christlicher Orient‘ *Cornelia Horn* über die Chancen und Gefahren, die sich aus einer von Jakob von Sarug her bestimmten syrisch-orthodoxen Theologie für den Dialog mit Islam und Judentum ergibt. So diskutiert Horn ausführlich die Gefahren typologischer Textauslegung, die immer darauf hinauslaufen können, einen (womöglich antijudaistischen!) Superioritätsanspruch gegenüber dem Judentum zu begründen. Schon Mor Polycarpus Aydin hatte diese Gefahr in seinem Beitrag thematisiert und deutlich gemacht, dass sich die syrisch-orthodoxe Kirche von einer solchen Verwendung ihres

Erbes distanziert. Horn appelliert an dieser Stelle an die gemeinsame Verantwortung der Christen und fordert sie auf, die Ressourcen ihrer Traditionen daraufhin durchzusehen, wie sich das Verhältnis zum Judentum konstruktiv und wertschätzend neu bestimmen lässt.

Im Blick auf den Dialog mit dem Islam hält sie fest, dass die syrisch-christliche theologische Tradition, insbesondere in Form und Gestalt des Werkes und der Person Jakobs von Sarug, als Bindeglied verstanden werden kann, das uns helfen kann, die Beziehungsgeschichte von Islam und Christentum besser zu verstehen. Diese Frühgeschichte der islamisch-christlichen Beziehungen seien noch viel zu wenig erforscht und hätten ein enormes Potenzial nicht nur zur Klärung und Intensivierung interreligiöser und auch ökumenischer Dialoge, sondern sie böte „auch Chancen für die Weiterentwicklung kritischer, syrischer Theologie im akademischen und auch im weiteren, pastoralen Raum.“⁷

Der Tübinger Religionshistoriker *Holger Zellentin* mit einem besonderen Interesse für talmudische und koranische Studien wendet sich der Rezeption des syrischen Christentums im Talmud zu und nimmt dadurch den von Horn entwickelten Gesprächsfaden der Beziehungsgeschichte von Judentum und Christentum von der umgekehrten Seite auf. Nach Zellentin ist das Verstummen vor Gott ein wichtiger Bestandteil gerade der christlichen Tradition und es werde kritisch vom Talmud rezipiert. Für syrische Theologen wie Ephräm oder Philoxenos sei das Verstummen vor Gott die Voraussetzung, um überhaupt in Beziehung mit Gott einzutreten. Gerade die Paradoxien der christlichen Lehre werden hier zur Begründung für das Verstummen vor dem Größersein Gottes ins Feld geführt, das interessanterweise ausgerechnet vom Talmud hinterfragt wird. Von daher kann man für die Spätantike genau die umgekehrten Vorzeichen für die Theologie im Vergleich zur Moderne festhalten. Denn in der Gegenwart fühlt sich gerade das westliche Christentum ja als Anwältin der Rationalität und verstummt nur noch selten in seiner Gottrede. In der Gegenwart sind es eher Judentum, Islam und das östliche Christentum, die ein solches Verstummen fordern und die Grenzen des Sagbaren in Erinnerung rufen – nicht nur in der Mystik.

Es ist ausgesprochen anregend wahrzunehmen, wie anders die Diskurslage an dieser Stelle in der Spätantike war. Und wiederum kann uns hier also das syrische Christentum helfen, um den Dialog mit Judentum und Islam neu zu beleben und aus eingefahrenen Bahnen zu befreien.

Der an der University of St. Thomas in Houston lehrende Theologe und Syrologe *Andrew J. Hayes* rekonstruiert einen hochinteressanten historischen Gesprächszusammenhang zwischen Koran und syrischer Theologie, der uns

⁷ Vgl. Horn in diesem Band, 139.

eine fast diametral entgegenlaufende Konsequenz syrischen Denkens in Erinnerung ruft. Zu Recht macht Hayes deutlich, dass Propheten im koranischen Konzept keinen Zugang zu göttlichem Wissen haben und sein Wesen nicht kennen. Darin liege eine deutliche Zurückweisung der syrischen Tradition, die ein symmetrisches Wissen von Gott und Jesus ansetze und gerade darin einen wichtigen Beweis seiner Gottheit sehe. Aposteln und Propheten werden dann durch Christus vermittelt ebenfalls besondere Wissensbestandteile unterstellt. Dagegen wissen die koranischen Propheten nur, was Gott ihnen offenbart und unterscheiden sich von Engeln und allen anderen göttlichen Eigenschaften. Durch Gottes Beauftragung haben sie durchaus übernatürliches Wissen, aber eben keines, das sich auf Gottes Wesen erstreckt. Hier liegt ein bleibender Unterschied zur syrischen Tradition, die an dieser Stelle allerdings theologische Positionen vertritt, die man aus moderner Sicht auch als Christ oder Christin nicht unbedingt teilen muss. Denn in der häufig kenotisch strukturierten Christologie der Gegenwart würden wohl nur wenige zeitgenössische Theologinnen und Theologen noch behaupten, dass Jesus an der göttlichen Allwissenheit Anteil hat. Von daher kann die umsichtige historische Rekonstruktion von Hayes auch für eine moderne syrisch-orthodoxe Theologie Anlass bieten, traditionelle Theologumena der eigenen Tradition einer kritischen Überprüfung zu unterziehen. Aus katholischer Sicht halte ich die koranische Kritik an dieser Stelle jedenfalls für ausgesprochen gut nachvollziehbar und geradezu naheliegend.

Wie Hayes zeigt auch der in Paderborn gerade mit seiner Dissertation fertig gewordene syrisch-orthodoxe Theologe *Charbel Rizk*, wie deutlich der Koran im Dialog mit der Literatur der syrischen Kirchenväter steht. In einer ausgesprochen instruktiven Fallstudie zeigt er am Beispiel von Josef Auslassungen und Ergänzungen des koranischen Textes, die sich am besten erklären lassen, wenn man ihn im Dialog mit der christozentrischen typologischen Deutung der Jakobsgeschichte in den Predigten Jakobs von Sarug sieht. In seiner akribischen philologischen Rekonstruktion vermag er überzeugend zu zeigen, dass die koranische Josefsgeschichte einen Gegendiskurs gegen die typologische Deutung Josefs auf Christus hin darstellt. Allerdings lässt er dann ausdrücklich offen, ob der Gegendiskurs jede Form von hoher Christologie zurückweisen will oder sich lediglich an der imperialen Verzweckung dieser Christologie in Byzanz und an ihrer antijudaistischen Schlagseite abarbeitet.

So ist auch der Beitrag Rizks ein Beispiel dafür, dass uns die genaue Kenntnis der Tradition nicht die theologische Deutung des islamisch-christlichen Verhältnisses abnimmt. Durch seinen und die anderen Beiträge im zweiten Teil unseres Buches wird exemplarisch deutlich, dass die spätantike Debattenkultur, in der Talmud und Koran entstehen, nur verständlich wird, wenn man

sich auch dem Studium der Schriften der syrischen Kirchenväter widmet. Die syrische Tradition hat deswegen in jüngster Zeit zu Recht eine neue Aufmerksamkeit in der komparatistisch geprägten Forschung erhalten. Freilich sind Theologen und Theologinnen aus der syrischen Tradition in dieser Forschung bisher noch unterrepräsentiert. Wenn wir wollen, dass sich Theologinnen und Theologen aus dieser Tradition in diese Forschungsbemühungen einbringen, um die ausgesprochen produktiven Gespräche der Spätantike besser zu verstehen, aber eben auch, um derartige Gespräche heute führen zu können, braucht es dringend einen Neuaufbruch hin zu einer europäischen syrisch-orthodoxen Theologie in der Gegenwart. Es wäre schön, wenn dieses Buch einen Beitrag dazu leisten könnte, dass dieser Aufbruch in Deutschland endlich vorankommt.

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I. THEOLOGICAL PART

The Legacy of Syriac Exegesis and Christology

The Exegesis of Syriac Church Fathers and Modern Exegesis

Challenges and Mutual Learning Opportunities

Mor Polycarpus A. Aydin

In this article, I would like first to outline the different translations of the Bible in Syriac. Second, I will introduce biblical interpreters and their particularities of three different periods. Third, I will take a look at some interpretation features of the two prominent poet-theologians, namely, Ephrem the Syrian, and Jacob of Sarug. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

In his book, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions*,¹ Bruce M. Metzger surveying the ancient biblical versions and their significance observes: “Of the several ancient translations of both Old and New Testaments, the Syriac versions and the Latin versions are generally considered the most important, both for their own sakes and for their having become the bases of many daughter translations.”² In considering the different versions of the Bible in Syriac, one can recognize the vitality and scholarship of the Syriac Church Fathers. In the first seven centuries of the Common Era (CE), they translated no less than seven versions of the Bible in Syriac, ranging from dynamic or sense-for-sense translations to literal or ‘mirror-like’ translations. While the Peshitta (ܦܫܝܬܬܐ), or ‘simple, straightforward’ translation of the Old and New Testaments eventually prevailed and became the standard version of the Syriac Church, the different and distinct biblical translations remained part of the Syriac tradition.

The Syriac Bible

Old Testament, translated from Hebrew: Peshitta

The origins of the Peshitta Old Testament are rather obscure. Upon studying the translation itself very closely, scholars have observed that the Peshitta Old Testament was not the work of a single translator but the work of several

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

² *Ibid.*, 29.

translators produced sometime between the first to third centuries of the CE. The translators mostly worked from the Hebrew text but not all the books were translated simultaneously or by the same person. For example, the Pentateuch and Chronicles were translated earlier than others and this resulted in a diverse style and a variety of different translation techniques. One striking feature, especially in earlier books, is the remarkable link between the Peshitta and the Jewish Targums. Also, in some books of the Prophets and that of Wisdom, the translators seem to have consulted the Septuagint to seek help with obscure or difficult passages in Hebrew.³

The links with the Jewish Targums suggest that the early translators of the Peshitta were probably of Jewish origin since the translation would have required a knowledge of the Hebrew language. Michael Wietzman even argued that the Old Testament Peshitta “was put together about 200 C.E. by a small Jewish community estranged from the Rabbinic majority, and the community eventually embraced Christianity, bringing the Old Testament Peshitta with them.”⁴ While the translators of certain books of the Peshitta were probably of Jewish rather than Christian background, and in other books the evidence perhaps points to Christian translators, there is no overall consensus regarding the religious identity of these translators.⁵

Old Testament, Translated from Greek: Syro-Hexapla

Between the fifth and the seventh centuries, the Christian Greek literature gained popularity and prestige in the eyes of the Syriac churches. Greek was the main cultural language of the Eastern Roman Empire and thus the theological controversies of the time were conducted primarily in Greek. Since the Syriac readers wanted to keep current with theological developments, many theological compositions were rendered from Greek into Syriac including almost all the main Greek Fathers. By the seventh century, the Syriac translators developed highly complex techniques of word-for-word or ‘mirror-like’ translation to show all the details of the Greek original in Syriac translation.⁶

An increasing interest in this highly sophisticated technique of word-for-word literal translation from the Greek stimulated the seventh-century Syriac biblical translation of the Syro-Hexapla for the Old Testament.

3 Sebastian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Second edition; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 23.

4 Michael P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

5 Jonathan Loopstra, “The Syriac Bible and its Interpretation,” in Daniel King, ed., *The Syriac World* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 293.

6 *Ibid.*, 294.

The Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Athanasius commissioned Paul—a Syriac Orthodox bishop of Tella and scholar working at the monastery of the Antonines at Ennaton just outside Alexandria, Egypt—to undertake the translation of the Syro-Hexapla for the Old Testament. Paul completed a Syriac translation of the Septuagint column of Origen's Hexapla between 614 and 617. The Syriac writers call this version *d-Shab'in*/ܫܒܝܢܐ (the Seventy) based on the Septuagint. Modern scholars refer to it as Syro-Hexapla since Paul used Origen's revision of the Septuagint from the early third century and incorporated it into a massive six-columned Bible known as Hexapla (Six-fold).⁷

In the eighth century, another Syriac scholar and linguist named Jacob, the bishop of Edessa, revised certain books of the Old Testament with manuscripts from the Greek Septuagint and the Peshitta.

New Testament: Diatessaron

The earliest Syriac translation of the New Testament is the harmony of the four Gospels known as the Diatessaron or *ewangeliyon da-mḥalṭe*/ܐܘܢܓܝܠܝܘܢ ܕܐܡܚܠܬܐ (Gospel of the Mingled [Evangelists]), in Syriac. This is associated with Tatian, a native of Assyria and an important Syriac theologian who studied under Justin Martyr in Rome. It is believed the Diatessaron was written in the second half of the second century. It enjoyed a wide circulation in Syriac translation and was accepted as an authoritative form of the Gospel text until it was suppressed in favor of the separate four Gospels in the fifth century. Unfortunately, no full manuscripts of the Diatessaron in Syriac have survived except portions of the text quoted by later writers.⁸ Fortunately, St. Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatessaron*⁹ in the fourth century is extant and bears an important witness to the actual text of the Diatessaron.

Old Syriac Gospels

After the Diatessaron, sometime between the late second century and early fourth century, came the Old Syriac version of the New Testament. In Syriac, this

7 Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 28.

8 Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 31.

9 For the Syriac text with Latin translation, see Louis Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Texte Syriaque (Manuscrit Chester Beatty 709)* (Chester Beatty Monographs 8; Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1963); Louis Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Texte Syriaque (Manuscrit Chester Beatty 709), Folios Additionnels* (Chester Beatty Monographs 8; Louvain: Peeters, 1990); for an English translation, see Carmel McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Paul of Tella, Thomas worked from the monastery of the Ennaton just outside Alexandria and completed his work in the year 616.

While motivation for the Philoxenian was primarily theological, for the Harclean, it was philological. This is evidenced by every particle of the Greek original delivered in the translation. As Brock explains: “Thomas regularly strives to achieve a formal equivalence between the Greek and the Syriac text, with the result that it is possible for the modern scholar to reconstruct the Greek text which must have as the basis for his revision.”¹³ The result was a ‘mirror-like’ Syriac translation. Thomas even went a step further to include Greek variants in the margins.

The Harclean version enjoyed a wide circulation in the Syriac Orthodox Church and is often found in Lectionary manuscripts, instead of Peshitta. It was also employed as the basis for a harmony of the four Gospels covering the Passion narrative. The Harclean New Testament survived completely and covers the minor Catholic Epistles and the Book of the Revelation.

So, we have at least seven different versions of the Bible in Syriac, varying from dynamic renderings to literal, ‘mirror-like’ translations. These include in summary the following versions of the Old and New Testaments:¹⁴

<i>Old Testament from Hebrew</i>	→	Peshitta (c. 2nd cent. AD)
Greek	→	Philoxenian (Isaiah; early 6th century)
Greek (Septuagint)	→	Syro-Hexapla (616)
Greek and Peshitta	→	revision by Jacob of Edessa (certain books only; c. 700)
<i>New Testament from Greek</i>	→	Diatessaron (Gospel Harmony, 2nd cent. AD)
	→	Old Syriac (c. 3rd cent.)
	→	Peshitta (c. 400)
	→	Philoxenian (508)
	→	Harclean (616)

¹³ Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

Syriac Biblical Interpretation

Over the centuries, Syriac biblical interpreters have used a wide variety of genres to interpret biblical translations through the medium of poetic homilies such as *mimre*/ܡܝܡܪܝܢܝܘܬܐ (metrical homilies)¹⁵ and *madroshe*/ܡܕܪܫܝܘܬܐ (teaching songs),¹⁶ prose commentaries, liturgical commentaries, and even *sugyotho*/ܣܘܓܝܘܬܐ (dialog poems)¹⁷ of liturgical drama. Following Jonathan Loopstra, one may conveniently divide the Syriac biblical interpretation into three broad periods:¹⁸

- 1) the second to fourth centuries,
- 2) the fifth to seventh centuries, and
- 3) the eighth to thirteenth centuries.

The Second to Fourth Centuries

I shall briefly introduce each broad period of biblical interpretation in the Syriac tradition drawing on what Jonathan Loopstra observed about the methodology and characteristics of its interpretation.

Since translation is an interpretation to a certain degree, the earliest sources for Syriac biblical interpretation are these translations of the Bible. These earliest Syriac translations contain themes and features in common with their contemporary Jewish interpretations of the Bible.

15 For example, Jacob of Sarug (d. 521) and Narsai (d. 500) to name but two, have composed many metrical homilies (mostly of the dodecasyllabic meter) which deal with the biblical exegesis. Undoubtedly, Jacob has the largest corpus of metrical homilies in the Syriac tradition comprising over four hundred. There are nearly two hundred modern editions and translations of his works. The two well-known Syriac editions are: Paul Bedjan and Sebastian P. Brock, eds., *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, 6 vols. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); and Roger-Youssef Akhrass and Imad Syryany, eds., *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh* (Damascus: Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017).

16 Ephrem (d. 373) wrote a number of prose works such as commentaries on the biblical text but the majority of his poetic works were *madroshe* / ܡܕܪܫܝܘܬܐ (teaching songs). These were composed in more than 45 different syllabic meters, and were intended to be sung as part of the liturgy, as some still are. See also Lucas Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in Magne Saebø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

17 Sebastian P. Brock, *Treasure-house of Mysteries: Explorations of the Sacred Text through Poetry in the Syriac Tradition* (Popular Patristics Series 45; Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press), 2012.

18 Jonathan Loopstra, "The Syriac Bible and its Interpretation," 296.

Although a number of early non-biblical works such as the *Book of the Laws of the Countries*,¹⁹ the *Didascalia*,²⁰ the Odes of Solomon,²¹ and the *Acts of Thomas*²² contain references to the Syriac Bible, it is only in the fourth century that the Syriac biblical interpretation takes a definitive shape and character. The two prominent figures during this early period are Aphrahat²³ and Ephrem.²⁴ The former who is also called the ‘Persian Sage’ wrote from within the Persian Empire. The latter, called the ‘Harp of the Holy Spirit’ wrote from Nisibis on the edge of the Roman border. Both early Syriac Fathers were well-versed in the Holy Scriptures and both interpreted the Bible in light of the political, theological, and cultural issues facing their Christian communities.

In the second half of the fourth century, Aphrahat produced a series of 23 ‘Demonstrations’²⁵ to remind his Christian community of the basics of the

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- 19 William Cureton, “Bardaisan—The Book of the Laws of Countries,” in *Spicilegium syriacum, containing remains of Bardesan, Meliton, Ambrose, and Mara bar Serapion* (London: Rivingtons, 1855).
- 20 Arthur Vööbus, ed., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* (CSCO 401–402, 407–408; Louvain: Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1979).
- 21 James H. Charlesworth, ed. and transl., *The Odes of Solomon: The Syriac Texts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977; repr. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).
- 22 For the Syriac edition of the *Acts of Thomas*, see Paul Bedjan, ed., *Acta martyrum et sanctorum syriace*, vol. 3 (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1982), 3–167; Albertus F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003). For an English translation, see Gunther Bornkamm, “Acts of Thomas – Introduction and Translation,” in Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2 (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965), 425–531.
- 23 *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition 2018*, s.v. “Aphrahat,” <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Aphrahat> (last accessed 09 June 2022).
- 24 For good introductions on Ephrem, see Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992); and Kathleen E. McVey, “Ephrem the Syrian,” in Philip Francis Esler, ed., *The Early Christian World* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1228–1250. Ephrem’s poems are now available in excellent editions (with German translations) by Dom Edmund Beck, published in the Louvain Corpus of Oriental Christian writers (CSCO). The fullest collection of Ephrem’s Syriac poetry in English translation is by Kathleen E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns, Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989). A small selection is published by Sebastian P. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, 2nd ed. (Studies Supplementary to Sobornost; London: Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, 1983). The small cycle of fifteen poems on Paradise are also translated by idem, *St Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990). For a comprehensive bibliography of St Ephrem’s writings, relevant studies and translations, see Kees den Biessen, *Bibliography of St. Ephrem the Syrian* (Grove: self-published, 2002).
- 25 For the Syriac edition of Aphrahat, see Dom Jean Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes* (PS I, vols. 1–2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894; 1907). For English translation of Aphrahat, see Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

Christian life. Aphrahat’s Demonstrations composed in Syriac *Kunstprosa* reveal to us a self-professed “disciple of the sacred scriptures”²⁶ whose approach and reading of the scriptures is characterized as virtuous. In the words of Jeff Childers, “good Bible interpretation requires nothing less than the total person—the inner and the outer, in community and before God. This, for Aphrahat, is what it means to be ‘a disciple of the sacred scriptures.’”²⁷ Furthermore, what characterizes Aphrahat’s biblical interpretation is his insistence that the New Testament fulfils the Old Testament scriptures and the Gentiles have replaced the Jews as inheritors of the earlier promises of God. This is clearly stated in Demonstration 2, On Love:²⁸

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Here is the English translation:

The first Testament [i.e. the ‘Old Testament’] was fulfilled in the last [i.e. the ‘New Testament’],
and the actions that were (prescribed) in the Law aged and grew old,
and they came to corruption/destruction.
For from the time that the New (Testament) was given, the Old (Testament) failed/ceased.

26 Demonstration 22.26 (I, 1049:3–4). I follow the traditional method of citing Aphrahat by volume, column, and line numbers of Parisot’s edition.
27 Jeff W. Childers, “Virtuous Reading: Aphrahat’s Approach to Scripture,” in George Kiraz, ed., *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2008), 70.
28 Demonstration 2 (I, 60:10–14). Aphrahat’s statement clearly falls into the view of supersessionist/replacement theology. However, there is a different view conveyed by the later Syriac tradition which expresses more strongly the spirit of co-existence as attested in the dialog poem (ܐܘܠܡܝܢܐ/ܐܘܠܡܝܢܐ/sugitho) on the Synagogue and the Church. For this, see Sebastian P. Brock, ed., ܐܘܠܡܝܢܐ ܐܘܠܡܝܢܐ/Select Dialogue Poems (Glane: Bar Hebraeus Verlag, 1982), 83.

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It translates into English:

The Church says, The Son who was crucified has made me an heir together with you;
the House can hold us both, do not begrudge me, let us inherit together, I and you.

Finally, the Syriac Church today distances itself from the view of replacement theology and rather adheres to the spirit of ecumenism with Judaism and the view of joint inheritance.

Aphrahat quotes the Old Testament extensively, showing a surprisingly sophisticated use of typology. Throughout his writings, Aphrahat makes use of two key terms, *rozo*/ܠܘܘܝܐ (mystery)²⁹ and *tupso*/ܬܘܦܫܘܐ (type),³⁰ both of which are further developed by Ephrem. Like Aphrahat, Ephrem was also very familiar with the Bible and he adhered to it closely. Unlike Aphrahat, however, Ephrem uses a variety of literary genres to interpret the Bible. He uses exegetical commentaries (*turgomo*/ܬܘܪܓܘܡܘܗܘܬܐ and *pushoqo*/ܦܘܫܘܩܘܗܘܬܐ), poetic homilies (*mimre*/ܡܝܡܪܘܬܐ), and teaching songs (*madroshe*/ܡܕܪܘܫܘܬܐ).

The earliest extant biblical commentaries in Syriac are those by Ephrem. They likely date from the last decade of his life in Edessa. It should be noted that during this time commentaries were generally written on one particular book at a time. It was only from the eighth century onwards that the church fathers produced commentaries on the entire Bible.

The following commentary is usually attributed to Ephrem: Commentary on Genesis and Exodus.³¹ This has survived in Syriac in a single manuscript. In addition, part of the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* is attributed to him, though it is now argued that this work may have been written partially by the disciples of Ephrem.³² Other commentaries ascribed to Ephrem are only extant in Armenian, which include the Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles.

In addition to Ephrem's prose commentaries, we have received over four hundred of his *madroshe* (ܡܕܪܘܫܘܬܐ) and several *mimre* (ܡܝܡܪܘܬܐ). Ephrem employs this poetic literary genre very effectively for his biblical interpretation.³³

29 The Syriac word ܠܘܘܝܐ from the root ܠܘܝܐ is a Persian loan word and is usually translated as 'symbol', 'mystery', 'secret' or 'sacrament'. It is employed in a variety of senses in Syriac liturgical texts and commentaries. Cf. Jessie P. Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 524.

30 The Greek word for type, "τύπος – typos," does occasionally appear in Syriac. However, the usual term employed for type or symbol is *rozo*/ܠܘܘܝܐ, which correctly means 'mystery,' but which is usually best translated in this context as 'symbol'. As Brock explains, "the 'symbol' has a much stronger meaning than the one current in modern English, where a symbol is usually sharply distinguished from the thing it symbolizes. For the Syriac Fathers the link between symbol and the reality symbolized is intimate, for in the symbol there resides the 'hidden power' of the reality." Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 67.

31 For an English translation of the Commentary on Genesis and Exodus, see Edward G. Mathews, Joseph P. Amar and Kathleen E. McVey, eds., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (The Fathers of the Church 91; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994).

32 Christian Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron* (CSCO 616; Louvain: Peeters, 2005).

33 While Ephrem wrote in a variety of genres, the majority of his work is in the form of *madroshe*, a Syriac genre of musical poetry or hymn, which he greatly employs for his biblical

The Fifth to Seventh Century

In the second period during the fifth to seventh centuries, the West Syriac biblical interpreters were increasingly influenced by methods of biblical interpretation found in the writings of Cyril of Alexandria, Severus of Antioch, John Chrysostom, and the Cappadocian Fathers. All the while, they were careful to preserve the tradition and heritage of Ephrem and other elements of early Syriac Christianity. Three authors in particular stand out: Jacob of Sarug (d. 521), Daniel of Salah (6th cent.) and Jacob of Edessa (d. 708).

Jacob of Sarug, the most prominent poet-theologian after Ephrem in the Syriac tradition, was a student in the School of Edessa who rejected the interpretation of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Instead, Jacob embraced the use of typology and symbology in his preferred genre—the poetic *mimre*. Although Jacob opposed Theodore's method of biblical interpretation, there are signs of Theodore's influence in Jacob's writings.³⁴

The second well-known interpreter, Daniel of Salah, is famous for his commentary on the Psalms.³⁵ In his massive work on the Psalter, Daniel uses both historical and spiritual interpretation to expound the scriptures with excerpts from several writers, among them Ephrem and Aphrahat.

Our third writer, Jacob of Edessa, is a chief luminary in the area of Syriac biblical exegesis. His influence is critical for the development of West Syriac biblical interpretation in this period. Jacob was a linguist well-versed in Syriac and like many of his contemporaries, he was also very skilled in Greek. He also had some knowledge of Hebrew. Jacob of Edessa's major revision of the Syriac Bible and methods of interpretation are expressed in a number of different genres, including letters, scholia, and commentaries.³⁶

The Eighth to Thirteenth Centuries

West Syriac biblical interpretation of this later period reached its climax in the so-called renaissance of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. This is a period of consolidation in the Western and Eastern Syriac biblical interpretation alike. Toward the end of this period, West Syriac writers and biblical commentators demonstrate an increasing openness to East Syriac exegesis. At least

interpretation. On this, see Jeffrey Wickes, *Bible and Poetry in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Ephrem's Hymns on Faith* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

34 Loopstra, "The Syriac Bible and its Interpretation," 301.

35 On the life and works of Daniel of Salah, see David G. K. Taylor, "Daniel of Ṣalah," in Brock et al., *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition*, 2018, s.v. "Daniel of Ṣalah," <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Daniel-of-Salah> (last accessed 09 June 2022).

36 Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 76.

three authors emerge during this period: Mushe bar Kepha (d. 903), Dionysius bar Salibi (d. 1171), and Gregory bar 'Ebroyo (d. 1286). The first of these prominent biblical interpreters is credited with a variety of writings, including works on liturgy, theology and biblical interpretation. He includes East Syriac exegesis which is probably due to his close proximity to the East Syriac communities in his native town of Takrit in northern Iraq and his desire to look beyond confessional boundaries. In his works, Bar Kepha includes a large number of excerpts from Greek and Syriac writers alike.³⁷

The second prominent biblical commentator of this later period of revitalization is Dionysius bar Salibi. He is greatly influenced by Mushe bar Kepha. One major characteristic of his biblical interpretation is the use of the Syro-Hexapla rather than Peshitta for his commentary on Qohelet and for much of his commentary on Job. Another characteristic of Dionysius's commentary is his division of biblical books into factual (*su'rono'ith*/ܫܘܪܢܘܐܝܬܗ) and spiritual (*ruḥono'ith*/ܪܘܚܘܢܘܐܝܬܗ) sections.³⁸

Lastly, the Syriac polymath Gregory bar 'Ebroyo represents the climax of the West Syriac biblical commentary tradition during the late Syriac renaissance. Among his many writings, his commentary on the entire Bible, *Awṣar Roze/ܪܘܙܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ* (the Store-house of Mysteries) is a wide-ranging collection of excerpts taken from earlier biblical exegetes; insights from a variety of disciplines (including lexicography, phonology, and grammar).³⁹

Relating Secular and Religious Interpretations of the Bible

As one can see, there are numerous ways of reading and interpreting the Bible. However, there are two approaches worth mentioning. One sees the Bible from the point-view of faith while the other does not. The former approach is designated by Sebastian Brock of Oxford University as the religious and the latter as the secular. The secular includes both the academic and the purely literary approaches to the Bible without concern for any ideas of inspiration. Brock explains these two approaches of reading the biblical text:

By contrast, the former approach, which represents the tradition of reading Scripture within the Church, sees the Scriptures as in some way or other inspired, however this is understood—and there are a large number of ways

37 Loopstra, "The Syriac Bible and its Interpretation," 304.

38 Ibid.

39 Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005).

of understanding what is meant by inspiration in this context. Basically what is involved here is a recognition of the activity of the Holy Spirit. This role of the Holy Spirit should not only be understood as being an active one with reference to the original authors, but also as being of importance in the course of the transmission of the biblical text, and above all (as will become evident from the emphasis given to it by the Syriac Fathers) in the way that the Scriptures are read (or heard) by the individual reader, for the reader too needs to be open to the Holy Spirit in the same sort of way that the original authors were.⁴⁰

The fundamental difference between the two approaches of biblical reading and interpretation is that for the secular approach, there is in theory only one correct interpretation of any given biblical text or passage. It is a case of interpretations being either right or wrong: the Biblical text is univalent. For the religious approach, however, the biblical text has many layers and thereby is considered multivalent. In other words, there can be numerous meanings to a single passage; all of them are potentially acceptable, provided they are meaningful in a particular context. Moreover, it is very important that the reader is also accessible to the Holy Spirit and not knowingly or unknowingly trying to enforce his or her own belief upon the text. Brock continues:

Many different analogies have been offered for the different levels of meaning in the biblical text, but for our present purposes the most helpful is the analogy of the humanity and divinity of Christ: the outward humanity of Christ is there for everyone to see, but it requires the interior eye of faith to perceive his hidden divinity. The secular approach sees just the outward body, as it were, of the biblical text, but for the religious approach there is a completely different spiritual dimension as well.⁴¹

It is also essential that the two approaches of reading and interpreting the Bible, secular and religious, should not be considered as rivals: it is not a case of either/or. Instead, they are complementary: both are perfectly acceptable approaches but they function on different planes. It is also very possible for the one to be enlightening to the other. Conflict occurs when one approach claims that it is the *only* correct approach and no other one.

40 Sebastian P. Brock, "Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible," *Sobornost incorporating Eastern Churches Review* 33/1 (2011): 6–21.

41 *Ibid.*, 7.

Ephrem's and Jacob's Poetic-Theological Approach to the Bible

Now with a general overview of the three broad periods of the biblical interpretation and two different approaches of reading the biblical text, I would like to explore the reading and interpretations of the poet-theologians Ephrem and Jacob.

The Syriac Church uses a deeply contemplative hermeneutical method based on a close reading of the Scripture, with specific attention to typology. This method seeks to understand recurrent mystical symbols through which God makes his revelations to the Church. For example, in his *Hymns Against Heresies*, Ephrem asserts in Syriac:

ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܐܘܠܡܝܢ ܠܡܘܠܘܢ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܐܢܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܕܝܘܠܡ ܠܡܘܠܘܢ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܠܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ
 ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܠܚܐܘܢ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ ܡܘܨܝ

It translates into English:

In the Torah Moses trod
 the Way of the 'mystic symbols' before that People
 who used to wander every each way.
 But our Lord, in his testaments,
 definitively established the path of Truth
 for the peoples who came to the Way of Life.
 all the 'mystic symbols' thus travelled
 on that way Which Moses trod
 and were brought to fulfillment in the Way of the Son.⁴³

One of the characteristics of the early Syriac tradition is this use of symbolology⁴⁴ and typology to interpret the Bible primarily through the use of poetry.

42 Edmund Beck, ed. and transl., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses* (CSCO 169; Louvain: Durbecq, 1957), XXV:3.
 43 English by Sidney H. Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery': Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), 20.
 44 For Ephrem's 'symbolic thought' or 'symbolic theology', see the excellent study by Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).

For Ephrem, poetry was a better medium than prose to interpret the Bible. For poetry is able to go beyond definitions (from the Latin word *define*, i.e., the limit or border) and thereby explore the inner meanings of a subject. As suggested by Sebastian Brock, this type of poetic theology refined by the poet-theologian Ephrem constitutes the ‘third lung’ of the biblical interpretation in the ancient church alongside the two other components of the Christian tradition—the Greek East and the Latin West.⁴⁵

Sabino Chialà, a member of the Monastic Community of Bose (Monastero di Bose) in Italy, in his article “St Ephrem the Syrian as a Reader of Holy Scripture: A Witness of Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics,”⁴⁶ demonstrates this centrality of typology in the Syriac scriptural tradition. Chialà explains that the biblical text, beyond its apparent simplicity, is open to multiple meanings. Fourth century Syriac Father and Doctor of the Universal Church, Ephrem, is a creative interpreter of this complexity. In his *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four Gospels, Ephrem says:

ܐܠܗ ܘܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܝܫܘܥ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܩܝܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ
ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ
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ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ ܕܥܠܡ ܕܐܘܪܘܫܐܝܡ

It translates into English:

If there only existed a single sense for the words of the Scripture, then the first commentator who came along would discover it, and other hearers would experience neither the labor of searching, nor the joy of discovery. Rather, each word of our Lord has its own form, and each form has its own members, and each member has its own character. And each individual person understands according to his capacity, and he interprets the passages as is granted to him.⁴⁸

- 45 Sebastian P. Brock, “The Syriac Orient: A Third ‘Lung’ for the Church?” *Orientalia Christiana* 71 (2005): 5–20.
- 46 Sabino Chialà, “St Ephrem the Syrian as a Reader of Holy Scripture: A Witness of Plurality in Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 55 (2017): 39–49. In this section, I draw upon the line of thought of Sabino Chialà.
- 47 Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Texte Syriaque (Manuscript Chester Beatty 709), Folios Additionnels*, 106.
- 48 English translation by Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 66.

[T]his is the hermeneutical method by which our ‘theologian’ poet constructs his thoughts about God, to take up the triad mentioned at the beginning: exegete, theologian, and poet. Ephrem’s thought is dynamic, transfused through the power coming through his poetic verse... . We thus see all the coherence both of the formation of his thought and of its expression. This is a theology that leaves room for God’s and man’s complexity, as Scripture itself demands through its double fruitfulness, intrinsic (divine) and extrinsic (human).⁵⁶

Having considered Ephrem’s approach to reading and interpreting the Bible, I would like now to turn to Jacob of Sarug, the most prominent poet-theologian after Ephrem in the Syriac tradition. His reputation is due to his magnificent number of sermons delivered in verse in dodecasyllabic meter bearing his name. The majority of his *mimre*, or verse homilies, are on biblical topics.

Jacob, like Ephrem before him, insists that one must draw near to the Scripture with an attitude of love. Otherwise, the Scripture will not yield itself to the reader and consequently, he or she will miss the inner beauty and discovery of the true meaning of the biblical text. Jacob says:

ܐܘܟܠܝܢ ܠܦܘܪܬܝܢ ܕܚܝܒܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ
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 ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ
 ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܝܢ

It translates into English:

Approach Scripture with love—and you will see its beauty,
 for if you don’t approach it with love, it will not allow you to see its face.
 If you read it without love, you will not get any profit,
 for love is the gate through which a person enters into its true understanding.
 Scripture demands of you, when you take hold of it,
 that, if you do not love it more than yourself, you should not read it.
 It says to you, ‘If you read me reluctantly,
 I too will be reluctant to reveal to you my meaning.

56 Chialà, “St Ephrem the Syrian as a Reader of Holy Scripture,” 48.

Either love me, then open me and read, and see my beauties,
 or don't read me, for you won't get any benefit if you don't love me.
 To the person who shows love to me as he reads me, I will show love,
 and if he asks me, I will give over to him all my treasures.⁵⁷

Jacob, drawing on the Syriac ascetic and monastic tradition, imagines the Scriptures like an ocean and their spiritual meanings like pearls laying at the bottom of the ocean. Thus, the reader, like a spiritual merchant, must strip him or herself of worldly cares and dive into the ocean to excavate the pearls, that is to say, the spiritual meanings of the Scriptures. He explains:

ܐܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 * ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
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 : ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ
 * ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ

It translates into English:

The Scriptures of the Son are like the ocean
 and in this ocean there lies a pearl, hidden from merchants.
 The person who expounds the text is like a diver who dives down in search of
 the pearl;
 he gropes around in the depths, and brings up the pearl with him.
 Once the pearl has come up, it is handed over to the merchants
 and everyone can gain great benefit from it, once they have acquired it.
 The intellect goes down, like the diver, into the scriptural reading
 to bring up, with itself, the message of salvation, the pearl.
 You who listen, receive this message, like merchants;
 profit from it, all of you, and grow rich from it spiritually!⁵⁸

Furthermore, Jacob like other church fathers, specifies prayer as a requirement for the reader or the spiritual seeker to obtain spiritual understanding and thereby benefit from reading the Scriptures. He writes:

57 For the Syriac edition, see Bedjan and Brock, *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, vol. 4, 282. English translation by Brock, “Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible,” 15.
 58 Bedjan and Brock, *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, vol. 1, 328. English translation by Brock, “Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible,” 15–16.

ܡܠܟܘܢܐ ܕܘܨܰܟܘܢܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܘܢܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ❖ ܩܰܘܰܡܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ❖ ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ❖ ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ❖ ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ
 ❖ ܕܰܘܰܫܰܘܰܪܰܝܰܝܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܠܰܘܰܕܰܘܰܟܰܘܰܢܰܐ ܕܰܡܰܪܰܘܰܢܰܐ

It translates into English:

All the words in the Scriptures are full of light.
 May I become illumined, Lord, so that I may tell of your story with a sense of wonder.
 Mysteries (or Symbols) are concealed within the Scriptures.
 O Son of God, grant to the intellect the ability to bring up
 great wealth that lies within the divine Scriptures.
 Make me worthy, Lord, to gather in and partake of their treasures.
 The word of salvation is a pearl for someone who loves it.
 Approach, O hearer, hang it on your ear for your adornment!
 An ordinary pearl, brought at a price, will only adorn one ear,
 but the word of salvation (or Life) is far better than such a pearl
 since ten thousand ears can be equally adorned by it!⁵⁹

Throughout his verse homilies on biblical subjects, Jacob displays a wonderful gift of bringing out the riches that lie hidden beneath the surface of the biblical text.

Conclusion

The advice of the West Syriac Fathers such as Ephrem and Jacob is still relevant today for those who are considering the Bible from a perspective of faith as it was for the faithful more than a millennium ago. It is also important to note how much of the finest spiritual interpretation of the Bible by the Syriac Fathers is found in verse rather than prose. The two approaches of reading and interpreting the biblical text—the religious/spiritual and historical/secular—operate

59 Bedjan and Brock, *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, vol. 2, 197. English translation by Brock, "Three Syriac Fathers on Reading the Bible," 16.

to different ends. Historical interpretation provides us with the outer meaning while spiritual interpretation directs us towards the inner meaning of the biblical text. The one should not rival the other, but rather complement and thereby enrich the tradition of reading and interpreting the Bible as a whole.

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Biblical Exegesis in the Syriac Tradition

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Needless to say, there are many different ways of reading the biblical text, and in a modern context they can all be classified under two main headings, depending on the point of departure: one approach starts out from the standpoint of faith, the other does not. The latter corresponds to the secular approach of the various academic disciplines, such as philological, historical and literary studies, and is not concerned with any ideas of inspiration. The former represents the religious approach and in the early Church it was the starting point for virtually all exegetical undertakings in both Judaism and Christianity. A fundamental difference between these two approaches, secular and religious, lies in the fact that for the secular approach only one interpretation at a time can be correct (though of course there will often be many rival claimants, all incompatible with one another); by contrast, with the religious approach, it is not a matter of an interpretation being right or wrong, but whether it is meaningful, and since several different interpretations of a single passage may be thought meaningful, the text according to this approach can be described as polyvalent, whereas according to the other approach the text is univalent.

The approach of both Jewish and Christian exegetes in antiquity was thus an essentially holistic one which made certain basic assumptions: being regarded as the Word of God, the text is understood to be inspired in some way or other, and so its message is for all times. The message may often be cryptic, and so in need of interpretation. The books of the Bible are considered to form a unitary corpus, as a result of which a passage in one book can be interpreted or explained with the help of something in a different book. These basic assumptions underlie all the different ways in which the Syriac exegetes approach the biblical text.

* Excellent surveys of the material can be found for the Old Testament in Lucas van Rompay's contributions to Magne Saebø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 612–641, and vol. 2. (2000), 559–577; also Bruno Chiesa, *Filologia storica della Bibbia ebraica*, I (Brescia: Paideia, 2000), 109–132. And for the New Testament, see J. C. McCullough, "Early Syriac Commentaries on the New Testament," *The Near East School of Theology, Theological Review* 5/1 (1982): 14–33, and 5/2: 79–126.

Some Standard Terminology: 'factual' and 'spiritual'

Throughout Syriac writing on exegesis a basic distinction is drawn between 'factual' exegesis and 'spiritual' exegesis (*pushoqo su'ronoyo* and *pushoqo ruḥonoyo*). Thus Ephrem, in his Commentary on Genesis, provides two separate commentaries on Genesis 49 (the Blessings of Jacob), the first *su'rono'it*, the second *ruḥono'it*. Exactly the same division is found in some of Dionysius bar Salibi's commentaries some 800 years later, but in his case he provides these two levels of commentary throughout a book. There are a few alternative terms found in authors of the seventh century onwards; thus, besides *su'ronoyo/su'ronoit*, *tash'itonoyo*, 'historical', is found in Dadisho ' (7th cent.), Theodore bar Koni (late 8th cent.) and Isho'dad of Merv (9th cent.), while Mushe bar Kipho (d. 903) uses *gushmono'it*. Corresponding to *ruḥonoyo* one finds in these later writers *pele'tonoyo*, literally 'in parable fashion', but often translated as 'allegorical'.¹ Occasionally a third category is introduced: thus Dadisho' (7th cent.) introduces an intermediary term, *mtargmonoyo*, best rendered as 'homiletic', while Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) has a term for something even more exalted than *ruḥono'it*, namely *met'alyono'it*.

In modern scholarship these two basic approaches are sometimes crudely and unhelpfully designated as 'Antiochene' and 'Alexandrian', with the implication that in the Church of the East, due to its reliance on Theodore of Mopsuestia, exegesis is 'Antiochene', whereas the Syrian Orthodox tradition is more 'Alexandrian'. This, like so many other generalizations, is misleading, above all when applied to Syriac authors earlier than Diodore and Theodore.² The Syriac exegetes were well aware that different approaches were required for different audiences: this is well brought out by Dadisho'³ who associates *pushoqo tash'itonoyo* with Theodore, *pushoqo mtargmnoyo* with Basil and John Chrysostom, while *pushoqo ruḥonoyo* is aimed at *iḥidoye*, 'solitaries'. Although Theodore wrote a polemical work 'Against the Allegorists', which survives in part in Syriac translation,⁴ it seems that even he considered a spiritual inter-

1 The adverb *pele'tono'it* already occurs in Philoxenus. See J. W. Watt, ed., *Philoxenus of Mabbug: Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* (CSCO 392; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1978), 6 (the Church as Bride *pele'tono'it* from the side of Christ).

2 'Antiochene' properly refers to the exegetical approach of Diodore and Theodore, well described by Christoph Schäublin, *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der antiochenischen Exegese* (Cologne/Bonn: Hanstein, 1974).

3 René Draguet, ed., *Commentaire du Livre d'Abba Isaïe par Dadišo Qatraya* (CSCO 326; Louvain: Peeters, 1972), 155–156.

4 Lucas van Rompay, ed., *Théodore de Mopsueste. Fragments syriaques du Commentaire des Psaumes* (CSCO 435–436; Louvain: Peeters, 1982). Van Rompay's edition is based on a late

pretation more useful for monks. In fact, what Theodore was polemicizing against was the use of *pushoqo pel'etonoyo*⁵ to the *exclusion* of the literal sense, an approach which he associates with Philo and Origen who, he implies, are following the practice of the pagan exegesis of Greek myths, where the aim was to try to get rid of the literal meaning. Theodore of Mopsuestia's polemic is picked up at the end of the eighth century by Theodore bar Koni who has a section entitled 'What is the difference between historical interpretation (*tash'itonoyo*) and allegorical (*pel'etonoyo*), and who invented the latter?' He opens as follows:⁶

There is a considerable and no small difference between historical and allegorical interpretation in that the latter conveys wicked blasphemy and falsehood, whereas the former (conveys) truth and (right) confession. The erring Origen was the inventor of the device of allegory: he turned the narratives of the Scriptures upside down and cut them off from their natural true meaning, delivering them over to fanciful error, with the result that he was forced into a position of not thinking that there was either creation or a Creator. They do not interpret Paradise as it (really) is, nor Adam and Eve: they do not interpret a single created thing as it (really) is, for they say that a 'horse' anywhere is only to be taken as referring to the wicked, based on the reference to 'the chariots of Pharaoh' [Exodus 15:4].

Theodore bar Koni continues with a whole number of other examples, and ends up pointing out that they are doing exactly the same thing as the pagan interpreters of Greek myths. Isho'dad of Merv provides a similar polemic in the Preface of his Commentary on the Psalms.⁷ Nevertheless, in the very next section, he begins by saying:⁸

One should know that, while David wrote his prophecy *tash'itono'it*, and not *pel'etono'it*, he is seen as though he was uttering his prophecy *pel'etono'it*.

nineteenth-century manuscript; subsequently at least part of that manuscript's Vorlage has turned up as Princeton ms Syr. 7, of the sixth, or maybe even late fifth, century.

5 This precise term is found in the subscription to the work and is probably a later substitution for *pushoqo d-pel'oto*, the term found (8) in the treatise itself.

6 Addai Scher, ed., *Theodore bar Koni, Liber Scholiorum*, I (CSCO 55; Louvain: Peeters, [1910] 1960), 356.

7 Ceslaus van den Eynde, ed., *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament. VI, Psaumes* (CSCO 433; Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 11–15, 12.

8 Page 15. The ensuing passage is quoted almost verbatim by Mushe bar Kipho in chapter 29 of his Psalms Commentary. The author of the Diyarbakir Commentary (Lucas van Rompay, ed. [CSCO 483; Louvain: Peeters, 1986], 130) states that the biblical text not only benefits the (Jewish) People, but also—through types (*tupse*)—the (gentile) Peoples.

What follows is picked up almost word for word by Mushe bar Kipho in the opening lines of chapter 27 of the Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms, ‘On the ways Scripture speaks about God’, a topic which will be discussed below.

As Mushe bar Kipho was later to point out, the two approaches are complementary, and not in conflict: it is the sole reliance on the one or the other that is wrong. Thus in the Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms,⁹ he says that, unlike those who say that the interpretation should only be *gushmono’it wsu’rono’it*, ‘we say that just as the books of the Old Testament are interpreted *gushmono’it wsu’rono’it*, so it is also right that they should be interpreted *ruhono’it wpe’letono’it*, adding a little later (p. 123) that this is especially the case in the Psalms.

Questions of Biblical Text

Most Syriac commentators show an awareness, not only of the different Syriac biblical versions and their origin, but also of the Greek versions, in particular the Septuagint and its origins. They were aware that the Peshitta Old Testament was translated from Hebrew, and some commentators occasionally quote ‘the Hebrew’ (*’ebroyo*),¹⁰ though exactly what was meant by this is unclear. According to Jacob of Edessa the translation took place in the time of King Abgar, thus a century earlier than the estimate of modern scholarship.¹¹ The West Syriac tradition witnessed further translations of Old Testament books in the sixth and seventh centuries, all from Greek: the fragments of a sixth-century translation of Genesis, Exodus and Isaiah, sometimes attributed to the initiative of Philoxenus, the famous Syro-hexapla, covering the whole Old Testament, made c. 615, at the same time as the Harklean New Testament, followed less than a century later by Jacob of Edessa’s revision of certain books (Pentateuch, I–II Samuel, Isaiah, Daniel and Wisdom). Use of the Syrohexapla by East Syriac commentators is first found in the ninth century, in Isho’dad,

9 Gustav Diettrich, *Eine jakobitische Einleitung in den Psalter* (Giessen: Ricker, 1901), 119–121. The identity of the author only became known subsequently, cf. Jacques-Marie Vosté, “L’Introduction de Moïse bar Kepha aux Psaumes de David,” *RB* 38 (1929): 214–228.

10 Thus especially in the Diyarbekir Commentary, where *’ebroyo* is quoted 21 times.

11 Theodore bar Koni (I, 279–282) cites some as saying that the Syriac translation goes back to the time of Hiram(!), while others say the Apostles made it.

though earlier in that century Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823) had a copy made from a manuscript in the Monastery of Mar Mattai.¹²

Knowledge of the Septuagint and the later Greek versions came through Syriac translations of three main sources, Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* VI.16–17, Epiphanius' *Treatise on Weights and Measures*,¹³ and on occasion Pseudo-Justin's *Exhortation to the Greeks*.¹⁴ Epiphanius' account of the different Greek versions features in summary form at the opening of Isho'dad's Commentary on Genesis (pp. 1–3), but at much greater length in Mushe bar Kipho's Commentary on the Hexaemeron (chapter 44) and (in less detail) in that on the Psalms (chapter 28).

When Greek Commentaries started to be translated into Syriac, a problem would arise every now and then, when the Peshitta text of a verse differed from that of the Septuagint. The earlier practice was to substitute the Peshitta for the lemma, rather than translate the Greek; this, however, left a discordance between the lemma (= Peshitta) and the comment (on the LXX). Later practice was to translate the Greek of the lemma and so restore harmony between lemma and comment; at the same time the reader might be provided with a note concerning the differences between the two versions, Syriac and Greek. This, of course, gave rise to the question: which had the greater authority, Greek or Syriac. Largely because the New Testament was written in Greek and quoted from the Septuagint, it was generally agreed from the late fifth century onwards that the Greek had the greater authority in both Testaments. This was explicitly argued by Philoxenos,¹⁵ while East Syriac commentators simply followed Theodore (who in fact had a low opinion of the Peshitta Old Testament).

Syriac commentators were well aware that the various Syriac versions of the New Testament were all translated from Greek. It was above all the theological controversies which drew attention to the fact that the Peshitta did not always

12 Letter 47 in Martin Heimgartner, *Die Briefe 42–58 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 644–545; Louvain: Peeters, 2012); English translation in Sebastian P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 240–246.

13 A photographic edition of the Syriac translation was edited by James E. Dean, *Epiphanius' Treatise on Weights and Measures. The Syriac Version* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1935).

14 For these see Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, "Among the Christians of the Orient," in *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 132–173, esp. 136–139.

15 As reported by Mushe bar Kipho, Comm. on the Hexaemeron, 173 (Der Hexaemeronkommentar des Moses bar Kephar, Lorenz Schlimme, ed., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977) Comm. on Psalms, Preface, end of ch. 28; likewise Bar 'Ebroyo, *Auṣar Roze* 1–5.

represent key passages accurately;¹⁶ the person who saw to it that action was taken and the matter remedied was Philoxenus, who commissioned a revised translation of the whole New Testament for reasons he explains:¹⁷ the original translators of the Peshitta New Testament had given scope for 'Nestorian' interpretations as a result of their loose translation, whether willfully or unwittingly they erred in many matters, not only in passages which teach about the Economy in the flesh, but also in other things [...]. Because of this we have also now taken the trouble of having the holy books of the New Testament translated anew from Greek into Syriac.¹⁸

What in fact Polycarp, who undertook the work, produced in 507/8 was evidently much more a revision of the Peshitta, rather than a completely new translation. Apart from quotations this revision is unfortunately lost in its original form, though much of it seems to have been incorporated into the more philologically-oriented revision just over a century later by Thomas of Harqel, which does survive¹⁹ and even features in some Gospel Lectionaries. Unlike the situation with the Syrohexapla, Isho'dad does not appear to make us of the Harklean in his commentaries on the New Testament books.

Most commentators are aware of variant readings, whether these are in a different version, or in the text (usually Peshitta) upon which they are commenting. Thus already in the Commentary on the Diatessaron, attributed to Ephrem, notice is taken every now and then of readings in the *yawnoyo*, which can be identified as the Old Syriac. Normally variant readings are adduced for practical reasons: they provide a better sense, or offer an alternative understanding, and not as part of a critical assessment of the original meaning.

Prefaces²⁰

In Late Antiquity the medical and especially the philosophical schools produced commentaries which were provided with prefaces, and in these prefaces sets of initial questions were asked, such as what is the aim (Greek *skopos*,

16 Whether this was also the case with the Peshitta revision of the Old Syriac Gospels, undertaken c. 400, is unclear.

17 See further Sebastian P. Brock, "The resolution of the Philoxenian/Harklean problem," in Eldon J. Epp, ed., *New Testament Textual Criticism: Essays in Honour of B. M. Metzger* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 325–343.

18 André de Halleux, ed., *Philoxène de Mabbog. Commentaire du Prologue johannique (Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14, 534)* (CSCO 380; Louvain: Peeters, 1977), 53.

19 Best for the Gospels, while for Acts only a single manuscript survives.

20 For the genre in Syriac, see Eva Riad, *Studies in the Syriac Preface* (Acta Iniversitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia 11; Uppsala, 1988). Among the authors she discusses is Theodore bar Koni (157–172).

Syriac *nisho*) of the work, to whom is it addressed, or what is its use (Greek *chresimon*, Syriac *ḥšaḥto*, also *yutrono*), etc. From the sixth century onwards such prefaces start to appear in Syriac commentaries, asking the same kind of questions. Mushe bar Kipho's learned Commentary on the Hexaemeron provides an exceptionally long preface, consisting of 50 chapters. These start off with a large number of theological questions, before asking what prophecy is, and how it is known that Moses was a prophet. Often the answer is given by means of a series of statements beginning 'we say', or if a different view is given first, 'but we say'. Only after three short chapters concerning the ordering of the books of the Pentateuch, does Mushe go on to describe at considerable length (chapter 44) the different Greek and Syriac versions, after which he asks which translation is the best (it is here that he cites Philoxenos on the superiority of the Septuagint).²¹ Another longer chapter (47), already mentioned, argues that it is right to interpret the Old Testament both *gushmono'it* and *ruḥono'it*, with a series of examples aimed against those ('certain heretics') who claim that it is not right to interpret the Old Testament in a spiritual and allegorical manner.²² Dionysius bar Ṣalibi's Introduction to his Commentary on the Gospel has 44 sections, variously entitled *kephalaion*, *rišo* and *bṣoto*. No. 42 lists the '7 *kephalaia* prefaced to a book', following the tradition of secular commentaries; these are listed as follows: [1] 'Aim (*nišo*): the aim of the Gospel is that it should trade (*nettagar*) Life in God for human beings; in word: faith in the Trinity, in deed: virtuous conduct. [2] Benefit (*ḥošaḥto*): benefit for the salvation of the soul. [3] Order (*tekso*): the order of its reading is after the Law and the Prophets, because in it all that was typified (*etṭapas*) in the Scriptures was fulfilled. [4] Reason for its title (*'elto d-rušmeh*): 'Gospel'; that is Good News. [5] Division into chapters (*pulogo dal-kepala'e*): it is divided into knowledge of the one God who is three Persons (*qnume*), to the performance of virtuous conduct, to knowledge of the heavenly powers and those who rejoice at sinners who repent, to the commandments, to the recollection of Judgement, to the reward of good things. [6] Whose is the book? (*dmanu itaw ktobo*): Christ's, who was proclaimed through two Apostles and through two Evangelists (*msabrone*). [7] Under what subject does it fall? (*ṭhet aydo ṣbuto nopel*): under *theoria*, or theology (lit: speech about the Godhead, *mmallut alohuto*), and under actions, or holy conduct'.

21 He quotes Philoxenus as saying that the Peshitta was translated 'into our Aramaic language' by Aquila and Symmachus; this surprising claim would seem to go back to an early confusion between Aquila and Onkelos, the traditional author of the standard Targum of the Pentateuch.

22 Ch. 44 features in a shorter form as ch. 28 in the Preface to his Commentary on the Psalms, and the opening of ch. 47 reappears as the opening of ch. 29 of that on the Psalms.

Language About God²³

The problem of anthropomorphic language used of God was met in a variety of different ways by both Jewish and Christian commentators in Antiquity. Ephrem, like John Chrysostom a generation later, spoke of the ‘condescension’ (*metnahtonuto*) of God in allowing himself to be clothed in human language as a means of disclosing to human beings something of his hidden being: *lbeš šmohe*, ‘he put on terms’, that is to say, metaphors. For the most part the terms, or names, that God ‘puts on’ are *š’ile*, ‘borrowed’, that is, metaphorical; only a few, like Father, Sovereign, are *ħatite*, ‘exact’. Ephrem warns:

If someone concentrates their attention solely
on the metaphors used of God’s majesty,
that person abuses and misrepresents His majesty
and thus goes astray by means of those very metaphors
with which God had clothed Himself for that person’s benefit,
and so he is ungrateful to that Grace
which had stooped down low to the level of his childishness.
(Hymns on Paradise 11:6)

God’s need to meet human ‘childishness’ in the process of his self-revelation is referred to again in another *madrosho* which deals with the subject of language about God:

We should realize that, if He had not put on these terms
it would not have been possible for Him
to speak with us human beings: by means of what belongs to us
He has drawn close to us; He has clothed Himself in our language,
so that He might clothe us in His mode of life.
He asked for our form, and put this on,
and then, like a father with his children,
He spoke with our childish state.
It is our terms that He has put on—though He did not literally do so;
He then took them off—without actually doing so:
when wearing them, He was at the same time stripped of them.
He puts on one when it is beneficial, then strips it off for another.
The fact that He strips off and puts on all sorts of metaphors
tells us that the metaphor does not apply to His true Being:
because that Being is hidden, He has depicted it by means of what is visible.
(*Madrosho* 31:2–3 of the cycle On Faith).

23 For the Patristic background, see Bernard Pouderon and Anna Usacheva, eds., *Dire Dieu. Les principes théologiques de l’écriture sur Dieu en patristique* (Paris: Beauchesne Editions, 2017).

Ephrem goes on to compare God's mode of teaching human beings to that of human beings teaching a parrot to speak, using a mirror. This idea of divine pedagogy was to prove especially popular in the later East Syriac tradition.

At the turn of the seventh to eighth century Jacob of Edessa likewise deals with the problem of how the biblical text speaks of God, picking up Ephrem's stress on human 'childishness'. Nearly a century later and in the East Syriac tradition, Theodore bar Koni approaches the matter in a different manner, while retaining the theme of divine pedagogy. He asks 'What are the customary ways in which the Book of Psalms, along with the remaining books (of the Old Testament), speak?' His answer is as follows:²⁴

David is not alone in employing literary usages, for so do the other Prophets as well. This has occurred because they composed their discourse in a riddling (ܐܘܪܘܚܐ) fashion. For this reason there are many examples in them of personification that are alien to the actual facts. For he speaks about God in a corporeal way, attributing to Him eyes, ears, sitting down, standing up, a front and a back, a face and a countenance, sleep and waking up, a throne, weapons, travelling and flying; that He is angry, mocks, laughs, and becomes wrathful. Through these he teaches about (God's) actions, whether doing good, or causing harm, taking as his starting point things that are familiar to us. He also speaks about other things, making objects that are dumb as though they were sentient, for example 'The mountains danced like gazelles and the hills like lambs' [Ps. 114.4].

The Right Approach to the Biblical Text

Several writers stress that it is important to approach the Bible in the right spirit. Comparing the biblical text to an abundantly flowing fountain, Ephrem wrote:

Your fountain, Lord, is hidden
from the person who does not thirst for You;
Your treasury seems empty
to the person who rejects You.
Love is the treasurer
to Your heavenly treasure-store.
(Hymns on Faith, 32:3)

24 Scher, *Theodore bar Koni, Liber Scholiorum*, I, 354. He follows Theodore in admitting that the Scriptures sometimes spoke 'uḥdono'it (van Rompay, *Théodore de Mopsueste, Fragments syriaques*, 4; 'métaphoriquement', translation, 5), and that such passages should be treated as the equivalent of similes, 'like a ...'.

Jacob Serugh puts the matter even more directly:

Approach Scripture with love—and you will see its beauty.
 If you don't approach it with love, it will not allow you to see its face:
 if you read it without love, you will not get any profit,
 for love is the gate through which a person enters its true understanding.
 (Ed. Bedjan, IV, p. 282)

Writing at the end of the eighth century Theodore bar Koni expresses himself more prosaically:²⁵

Although instruction and the soul's constant study (*hergo*; sc. of the Scriptures) add to *theoria*, yet if it is not done for the purpose of religious knowledge and a virtuous life, such labour turns out to be useless.

Scholarly Tools

The chapter and verse numbers so familiar to-day for referencing are in fact late-comers in the transmission of the biblical text, the former going back to the Middle Ages, and the latter to the sixteenth century. A great variety of different systems of chapter numbering are to be found in manuscripts of the Greek Bible, and examples of these are already to be found in the earliest manuscripts such as the codex Sinaiticus of the fourth/fifth century. In Syriac biblical manuscripts a division of the text of each book into numbered *ṣhaḥe* begins to appear in manuscripts, both Eastern and Western, from about the eighth century onwards. This system of reference, whose origins are unclear, proved to be remarkably stable,²⁶ and is duly recorded in the bilingual Antioch Bible, as well as in the British and Foreign Bible Society's edition of the New Testament. The system of *ṣhaḥe* is confined to the Peshitta: Syrohexapla and Harklean manuscripts take over a Greek system of *kephalaia*.

Prior to the introduction of the *ṣhaḥe* system, the use of an initial table of contents is already to be found in Ephrem's Commentary on Genesis and Exodus, while in early biblical manuscripts headings might be introduced at specific points in red: thus in the famous 7a1 in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana one finds headings such as ܩܘܠܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ at Gen. 11:1, or ܕܘܢܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ, ܕܘܢܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ, ܕܘܢܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ.

25 Scher, *Theodore bar Koni, Liber Scholiorum*, I, 3. *Theoria* here has more or less the sense of 'proper exegesis'. He goes on to quote Romans 10:9.

26 In some books, such as Isaiah, a few manuscripts provide a slightly different system of *ṣhaḥe*. For groups of Old Testament books and for the New Testament these *ṣhaḥe* were also given cumulative numbers.

at Gen. 36:43.²⁷ In some other early biblical manuscripts lectionary headings such as ‘Nativity’, ‘Pentecost’ may also be indicated in red, likewise within the biblical text.

For the Gospels the ‘Ammonian’ section numbers combined with the Canon Tables allowed the reader to discover where a passage in one Gospel had a counterpart in the other Gospels. This neat system was not only taken over into Syriac (evidently in the early fifth century), but it was also refined in the process. In a number of early manuscripts, such as the so-called Rabbula Gospels (dated 586) the Canon Tables are accompanied with elaborate decoration and illustration.

Among resources available to the Syriac commentators, three might be singled out here.

(1) A certain amount of basic critical information on Acts and the Epistles in the New Testament had been put together in Greek by a certain Euthalius whose identity and date (perhaps late 4th century) remain uncertain.²⁸ Euthalius had a particular interest in quotations and so, amongst other things he provided information about Paul’s quotations from pagan literature. His work was translated into Syriac early enough for it to have been known to both the East and West Syriac tradition, and in the early sixth century the translation was revised, perhaps in connection with the Philoxenian revision of the text of the New Testament.

(2) Ancient commentators showed a great interest in the etymology and significance of personal and place names, something which of course often required a certain knowledge of Hebrew. Lists of names and their alleged etymologies were probably already known to the Alexandrian Jewish author, Philo, in the first century AD; in later centuries these lists tended to proliferate and several collections survive, some of which were rendered into Syriac.²⁹ It is likely that most references in Syriac commentators to etymologies of names will have been based on such onomastica.

27 The various types of headings are classified by C. E. Morrison, “When copyists become authors: the headings in the Codex Ambrosianus (B.21 INF),” in A. Fideli et al., eds., *Gli studi di storiografia* (Orientalia Ambrosiana 6; Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 2019), 377–400.

28 See Louis C. Willard, *A Critical Study of the Euthalian Apparatus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); he discusses the two Syriac witnesses on 102–105. For the fragmentary East Syriac witness, see Sebastian P. Brock, “The Syriac Euthalian material and the Philoxenian version of the New Testament,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 70 (1979): 120–130.

29 These have been edited by Franz X. Wutz, *Onomastica Sacra: Untersuchungen zum Liber interpretationis nominum hebraicorum des hl. hieronymus* (Texte und Untersuchungen 41/1–2; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung 1914–1915), 792–841.

(3) 'Masora' is the modern name given (on the basis of Hebrew) by scholars to collections of philological and grammatical notes on individual words or phrases; in Syriac these are entitled *kurose dashmohe*, 'Booklets of names'. The need for them will have arisen when the spoken Syriac of the time had so far departed from Classical Syriac that help was needed in reading correctly. Manuscripts containing these collections (dating from the end of the ninth century onwards) are normally vocalized, providing at the same time indication of *qushoyo* and *rukoko*. Only one East Syriac manuscript of this type survives; this was written in Harran in 899 and covers only the Old Testament;³⁰ West Syriac manuscripts are more plentiful and several include the New Testament books (and even some translations of authoritative Greek authors). At the end of the more extensive manuscripts are a few short writings by Jacob of Edessa, such as his Letter on orthography, and another on points (*nuqze*). The West Syriac tradition is associated with the Monastery of Qarqaphto ('the skull'), near Resh'aina.³¹

Two Brief Case Studies

(1) *The interpretation of Genesis 1:2—wind/spirit or (Holy) Spirit?*

A random comparison of different modern translations of the Bible will discover that translators render *ruah Elohim*, active over the primordial water in Genesis 1:2, in basically two different ways: it is either taken as referring to the Spirit of God, or to 'a mighty wind'. Ancient interpreters were similarly divided in the way they understood the verse. Since their views were influenced by the biblical text they were using, it will be helpful to set out the relevant texts:

Hebrew	רוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים
LXX	καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος
Peshitta	רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל מַיִם
Syrohexapla	רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל מַיִם ³²

30 There is a photographic edition: Jonathan Loopstra, ed., *An East Syrian Manuscript of the Syriac 'Masora' dated to 899CE* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014).

31 *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, s.v. "shmohe manuscripts", 276–279.

32 This is probably the original translation of the Syrohexapla, witnessed by Isho'dad (van den Eynde Comm. Genesis, ed., 17), whereas the lectionary pericope (in a manuscript of 1569) printed by W. Baars, *New Syro-Hexaplaric Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 45, has רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, no doubt influenced by the Peshitta.

Eusebius of Emesa, in his Commentary on Genesis 1:2 observes that the Septuagint's *epophereto* does not represent at all well the sense of the underlying Hebrew verb, which he says has the sense of 'to foster' (*thalpein*), like a bird, or to stir into fecundity the water'. He goes on to ask 'Does the text speak of the Holy Spirit or of the wind?' Noting that the passive verb of the Septuagint is not appropriate for the action of the Holy Spirit, he opts for the sense of the Hebrew (and Syriac) verb, and concludes that the Holy Spirit is meant.³³ Ephrem, in his Commentary, took the opposite view and held that 'although some take *ruḥeh daloho* as the Holy Spirit, the faithful do not' (for reasons he goes on to specify). This was ignored by the author of the sixth-century Life of Ephrem, who identifies Ephrem as the person who had illuminated Basil of Caesarea on the meaning of the passage. In Basil's own Commentary on the Hexaemeron, to which the author of the Life refers, Basil in fact simply speaks of a 'Syrian' who had drawn his attention to the sense of the Hebrew verb; the true identity of the Syrian, namely Eusebius of Emesa, was pointed out by L. van Rompay.³⁴

The discordance between the claim of the Life of Ephrem and Ephrem's own Commentary was noted by Isho' bar Nun, who sharply dismissed the identification as being due to ignorance.³⁵ Opinions were, in fact, much divided between the two interpretations of the *ruḥeh daloho* in Gen. 1:2. East Syriac commentators not surprisingly followed Theodore's view, that it was not the Holy Spirit, while West Syriac authors mostly opted for the view of Basil's 'Syrian' (i.e. Eusebius of Emesa); there were, however, some exceptions, most notably Jacob of Serugh who (as so often) followed Ephrem on this point, though perhaps he also was recalling his education at the Persian School in Edessa, where Theodore's exegesis will have been promoted. Subsequently both Jacob of Edessa and Mushe bar Kipho opted for the identification with the Holy Spirit. The controversy even reached the wording of a prayer to be found in the Maronite and an early Syriac baptismal service preserved in two manuscripts: in one of these manuscripts all reference to the Holy Spirit

33 Françoise Petit, Lucas van Rompay and Joseph Weitenberg, eds., *Eusèbe d'Émèse, Commentaire de la Genèse* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 15; Louvain: Peeters, 2011), 32–33 and (for a Greek fragment) 262.

34 Lucas van Rompay, "L'informateur syrien de Basil de Césarée. À propos de Genèse 1,2," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 58 (1992): 245–251.

35 Ernest C. Clarke, *The Selected Questions of Isho bar Nun on the Pentateuch* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 23; Isho' bar Nun suggested Aphrahat instead. The discrepancy was also noted by Mushe bar Kipho in his Commentary.

'hovering over the waters at the establishment of creation' has been deliberately cut out.³⁶

(2) *Psalm headings*

The original translator of the Peshitta Psalms evidently did not include the Hebrew Psalm headings, and the present Syriac headings, different in the East and West manuscript traditions, are secondary; in both traditions they originate in a desire to find the precise historical context of each psalm. The headings in the East Syriac tradition mostly go back to Theodore of Mopsuestia's Commentary on the Psalms. Theodore, unlike many other Fathers, held that all the psalms were written by David, but that they sometimes referred prophetically to very much later events; in such cases Theodore would simply state that a psalm concerns (for example) 'the (Jewish) People in Babylon' (thus Pss. 141–2), or that it has been uttered *men paršopa d-N* 'from the person of so-and-so', that is to say, 'in the voice of N'. Although Theodore was very sparing in seeing New Testament prophecies, quite a number are allocated by him to the Maccabees: thus David is said to have spoken Psalm 143 'as from their person' (ܐܡܪ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܕܘܘܕ).³⁷ The historical contexts ascribed to these three Psalms are closely reflected in East Syriac Psalm manuscripts: Ps. 141 'The supplication of the People in Babylon asking of God release from their misfortunes'; Ps. 142 'Concerning the People in Babylon, supplicating and asking of God mercy and salvation'; Ps. 143 'Thanksgiving of the Maccabees for their victory when they overpowered their enemies and are asking of God complete salvation'.³⁸

The West Syriac tradition provides completely different Psalm headings and is usually happy to attribute a number of Psalms to certain authors other than David, as indicated in Psalm headings in the LXX (and Hebrew). While they frequently specify a particular historical setting, they usually also point to a spiritual interpretation as well. The earliest witness is the Psalm Commentary by Daniel of Salah, many of whose titles are very similar to those in the seventh-century Ambrosian manuscript of the Peshitta (7a1). In the later West Syriac

36 For details, see Sebastian P. Brock, "The *ruah elohim* of Gen. 1,2 and its reception history in the Syriac tradition," in Jean-Marie Auwers and André Wénin, eds., *Lectures et relectures de la Bible* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 327–349, esp. 346–347. The article is reprinted in Sebastian P. Brock, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), chapter 14.

37 For these Psalms, see van Rompay, *Théodore de Mopsueste, Fragments syriaques* [n.4], 61–64.

38 Willem Bloemendaal, *The Headings of the Psalms in the East Syrian Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 89–90; cf. also H. F. van Rooy, *The East Syriac Psalm Headings* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2013), 162–164.

manuscript tradition there is a good deal of variation (unlike in the East Syriac tradition); a late form of this can be found in Samuel Lee's edition (1823) of the Peshitta Old Testament, reprinted in the United Bible Society's edition. An edition of the West Syriac Psalm headings is in preparation by D. G. K. Taylor.

The Main Types of Biblical Commentary

Biblical commentary can take on many different forms in Syriac. All the earliest Syriac running commentaries on the biblical text are confined to single books; the earliest of these is Ephrem's *pushoqo* of Genesis (followed by what is described as a *turgomo* on Exodus). Only fragments of Philoxenos' *pushoqo* on Matthew and Luke survive, while from later in the sixth century comes Daniel of Salah's *pushoqo* of the Psalms. Although sometimes described as a 'commentary' on the Hexaemeron, or Six Days of Creation, the actual title of Jacob of Edessa's work is 'Volume of *mimre* on the establishment of creation (*tuqon beryoto*)'; while it follows the sequence of Genesis 1, it takes the form of compendium of scientific knowledge about the natural world. It is not until the eighth and ninth centuries that commentaries on all the books of the Bible begin to appear, first of all in the East Syriac tradition. It is uncertain whether to so-called Diyarbakir Commentary once extended beyond Genesis and Exodus 1–9:32, but its successors, the Anonymous Commentary and that of Isho'dad of Merv in the ninth century, cover both Old and New Testaments. Isho'dad's Commentary brings together a great variety of earlier traditions, and for the first time makes use of the Syrohexapla, as noted earlier. In his commentaries on the early chapters of Genesis (the Hexaemeron and Paradise), the Psalms, and most of the books of the New Testament, Mushe bar Kipho likewise brought together views of earlier commentators (including East Syriac), and this is also the case with the subsequent biblical commentaries by Dionysius bar Salibi and Bar 'Ebroyo, although the latter's commentary is considerably briefer and much more philological in character.

Quite a number of Greek commentaries were available to Syriac commentators through translations; for these, see the Appendix.

Besides commentaries that correspond in form to what one expects a commentary to look like today, mentioned above, it should be remembered that many other forms of commentary can be found in Syriac literature; these can be summarily categorised as follows:

(1)–(3) Homilies (*mimre*): these will deal with specific biblical passages, and can take on at least three different forms:

(1) the re-telling of the biblical passage in an imaginative and expanded form, with little or no specifically homiletic material. Examples in verse are

Ephrem's poems on the Repentance of Nineveh and on the Sinful Woman of Luke 7, and a number of anonymous poems (sometimes wrongly attributed to Ephrem), such as the two *mimre* on Genesis 22. In prose, the Life of Joseph, wrongly attributed to Basil.

(2) *mimre* in prose or verse similar to (1) but with an overt, and often strong, homiletic character. Verse examples can be found in many of the *mimre* by Narsai and Jacob of Serugh where they follow the sequence of the biblical text; notable examples are their respective *mimre* on Creation, while from a much later period comes Emmanuel bar Shahhare's verse Commentary on the Hexaemeron. In prose, John of Apamea's collection of short works on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5).

(3) *mimre* in prose or verse which focus on a biblical passage but deal with it in a general way. This would apply to many other *mimre* by Jacob and by Narsai, while as prose examples one might cite Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 5 (on Daniel's vision in Dan. 7), and the anonymous discourse on Melkizedek.³⁹

(4) Exegetical catenae: two important West Syriac catenae covering most books of the Bible are known. One (in British Library, Add. 12,168, of 8th/9th cent.) is largely based on Greek authors, while the other, known as the *Catena Severi*, completed by the monk Severus in the vicinity of Edessa in 861, has as its basis excerpts from Ephrem, Jacob of Edessa, and (for the New Testament) John Chrysostom; this was supplemented a little later by Shem'un of Ḥesna d-Manṣur (Vatican Syr. 103), who added further excerpts from both Syriac and Greek authors.⁴⁰

(5) Question and Answer: this was a very popular genre in Late Antiquity, and many examples of it dealing with a variety of topics can be found in Syriac.⁴¹ Exegetical Questions and Answers are best represented by Isho' bar Nun's extensive series covering both Old and New Testament, following the model provided in Greek by Theodoret; very often these are closely related in content to the standard East Syriac commentaries, where indeed one often finds specific comments prefaced by 'it is asked'.

39 François Graffin, ed., "HomélieS anonymes du VI^e siècle: dissertation sur le Grand-Prêtre, homélieS sur la pécheresse I, II, III," *Patrologia Orientalis* 41 (1984): 4.

40 Vatican Syr. 103 was used by Petrus Benedictus in the eighteenth-century Rome edition of works attributed to Ephrem. Many of Patriarch Severus' comments on biblical passages in his Homilies and Letters ended up in Greek Catenae: for these, see the collection of materials in Françoise Petit and Lucas van Rompay, *La Chaîne sur l'Exode, I. Fragments de Sévère d'Antioche* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999); and *Sévère d'Antioche, Fragments tirés des chaînes sur les derniers livres de l'Octateuque et sur les Règnes* (Louvain: Peeters, 2006).

41 R. B. ter Haar Romeny, "Question and Answer collections in Syriac literature," in A. Volgers and C. Zamagni, eds., *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question and Answer Literature in Context* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 145–163.

(6) Letters. These serve as the vehicle for many of Jacob of Edessa's comments on specific passages; these are usually presented as responses to particular questions posed by his correspondent, and so are close in character to '(5)'. Several Letters by Patriarch Severus of Antioch also take on this character.

(7) Scholia on particular passages. This is another genre favoured in particular by Jacob.⁴² Theodore bar Koni's *ktobo d-eskulyon*⁴³ is in fact a large-scale compendium of theological knowledge.

(8) *Gannat Bussame*. This East Syriac commentary on the Lectionary (of the church of Kokhe, Seleucia-Ctesiphon) is ascribed to the otherwise unknown 'Interpreter of the Turks'; its date is uncertain, and both 13th and 10th century have been proposed. It contains excerpts from several little- or unknown authors. So far only the part for the Sundays of Advent has been published.⁴⁴

(9) Salvation history retold in an embellished form: *Cave of Treasures* (6th century)⁴⁵ and the *Book of the Bee*, by Shleimun of Bosra (13th century).

By Way of Conclusion

The polemic against allegorical interpretation which the East Syriac tradition inherited from Theodore of Mopsuestia has sometimes led to the totally false impression that the East Syriac exegetical tradition was 'historical' and the West Syriac one 'allegorical' or 'spiritual'. As has been noted above, Theodore's polemic was not aimed at allegorical interpretation itself, but at its *exclusive* use, in the way that pagan allegorists allegorised away the literal meaning of the Greek myths. Though a few Christian exegetes may have been guilty of such an approach, it does not apply to any of the Syriac commentators; in reality, both traditions make use of both approaches. A short passage from Ephrem's Commentary on Genesis, and the ways in which it was followed up by later commentators, will help to illustrate this double approach.

42 A selection was edited, with English translation, by G. Phillips, *Scholia on Passages of the Old Testament by Mar Jacob, Bishop of Edessa* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864).

43 According to S. H. Griffith this should be taken as a singular (*scholion*; rather than a plural, *scholiōn*); see his "Theodore bar Koni's Scholion: a Nestorian *Summa contra gentiles* from the first Abbasid century," in Nina Garsoian, Thomas Mathews and R. W. Thomson, eds., *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Pub Service, 1982), 53–72.

44 Gerrit J. Reinink, *Gannat Bussame*, I. *Die Adventssontage* (CSCO 501–502; Louvain: Peeters, 1988).

45 Su-Min Ri, ed., *La Caverne des Trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques* (CSCO 486; Louvain: Peeters, 1987); cf. S. Minov, "Date and provenance of the Syriac Cave of Treasures," *Hugoye* 20/1 (2017): 129–229.

Ephrem's essentially 'factual' Commentary is an admirable example of a 'close reading' of the biblical text, above all in the sections on the opening chapters of Genesis: great attention is paid, not only to the details of what is said, but also to what is not said, or implied. Genesis 22, entitled 'the testing of Abraham' in the Milan Peshitta (7a1), has evoked a huge variety of different interpretations. Ephrem's Commentary on the chapter is quite short, but it proved to be the starting point for many subsequent developments.⁴⁶ Right at the beginning he notes the absence of any mention of Isaac's mother, a matter that requires an explanation, and he duly offers one. On reaching verse 13 he first quotes the text and then comments:

C.Gen XX.3: 'Then Abraham saw a ram in the tree [*b'ilono* = Targum; Pesh. *bsawkto*], took it, and offered it as a whole offering instead of his son'. That there was not a ram there (previously), Isaac's question about the lamb testifies; and that there was not a tree there, the (pieces of) wood on Isaac's shoulders certify. The mountain burst forth with the tree, and the tree with the ram, so that in the ram that hung on the tree, and had become the sacrifice instead of Abraham's son, there might be depicted the day of Him⁴⁷ who was to be hung like a ram upon the wood, and tasted death on behalf of the whole world.⁴⁸

Such was Ephrem's answer to the question 'where did they come from'; he also takes the opportunity to provide the link with a passage in the Gospel of John, whose reference was not entirely clear. The East Syriac Diyarbakir Commentary begins with a Christological reference, but then goes on to give two different views about the origin of the ram. Though Ephrem is not named, it is clearly his view which is rejected. Isho'dad expands on this, first of all referring to the Hebrew and Greek term for the tree, but at the same time giving it a specifically Christian interpretation. He then goes on to discuss the origin of the ram, in the course of which he quotes Ephrem's explanation, but rejects it, in part for a Christological concern:

On Gen. 22:13.⁴⁹ The tree on which the ram was hung, Hebrew and Greek: 'Behold, a single ram held in the plant Sabeq by its horns' [= LXX]. Sabeq: wood of forgiveness [cf. root *šbq*], that is, the Cross that absolves, and through Him who was crucified debts are remitted, etc. Now it was hung by its horns, with its

46 See, for example, the case of two remarkable *mimre* on Gen. 22, edited with English translation in Sebastian P. Brock, "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac" *Le Muséon* 99 (1986): 61–129.

47 John 8:56.

48 Cf. Hebrews 2:9.

49 J.-M. Vosté and C. van den Eynde, eds., *Commentair d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament, I. Genèse* (CSCO 126; Louvain: Durbecq, 1950), 175.

feet extended, and it marked out the type of the Cross.⁵⁰ Some (say) 'that ram was a new creation', but that is not true. Others (say) 'the ram was from somewhere else, or it was a mountain (ram)'. Mor Ephrem (says) 'that there was no ram there, Isaac's question about the lamb testifies; and that there was no tree there, the (pieces of) wood on Isaac's shoulder certify. The mountain burst forth with the tree, and the tree with the ram'. The tradition of the Schools (says) that 'an angel took it from the sheep of Abraham and placed it in that tree'. First, so that the offering which he made from his own (possessions) might be especially acceptable; secondly, so that it might be known that, just as it was a natural sheep, and not from that tree, or from somewhere else, so too Christ in His humanity was created from human nature, and not from any other nature.⁵¹

It is significant that, apart from Isho'dad's final point, typological exegesis, such as is frequently found in connection with this verse in liturgical poetry, is completely absent.

Appendix: Syriac translations of Greek Commentaries⁵²

Athanasius (d. 373). Both his long and short Commentary on the Psalms were translated into Syriac and have been edited by R. W. Thomson.⁵³ His Letter to Marcellinus, on reading the Psalms was prefaced to the Syrohexapla text of the Psalms.⁵⁴

Basil of Caesarea (d. 378). His Commentary on the Hexaemeron was translated into Syriac in the earlier part of the fifth century (and thence into Armenian); this too has been edited by R. W. Thomson.⁵⁵

50 This probably depends on a lost Syriac translation of Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis: see the Catena fragment in Petit, van Rompay and Weitenberg, *Eusèbe d'Émèse, Commentaire de la Genèse*, 320–321.

51 The section on Ephrem (but without the quotation) and the School is virtually identical with Isho' bar Nun's Question XXIX, ed. with English translation by Ernest G. Clarke, transl., *The Selected Questions of Isho bar Nun on the Pentateuch* (StPB; Leiden: Brill, 1962), 32 and f.15rv of the photographic edition (of Cambridge, Add. 2017). Isho' bar Nun died in 828, having been Catholicos of the Church of the East since 823.

52 Limited to those which have been published.

53 Robert W. Thomson, *Athanasiana Syriaca. Part IV, Expositio in Psalmos* (CSCO 386–387; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1977).

54 In the Milan Syrohexapla manuscript, ff.2v–5r. A separate fragment was published by Thomson, *Athanasiana Syriaca*, 189 (Deir al-Syrian Syriac Fragment 43 probably belongs to the same manuscript).

55 R. W. Thomson, *The Syriac Version of the Hexaemeron by Basil of Caesarea* (CSCO 550–551; Leuven, 1995). The Syriac translation was subsequently translated into Armenian.

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444). The extensive set of 156 Homilies on Luke, forming a commentary, survive (incomplete) in Syriac translation, edited by R. Payne Smith;⁵⁶ many single homilies were later incorporated into Homiliaries.

Eusebius of Emesa (d. before 359), *Comm. on the Octateuch*. Eusebius originated from Edessa and had a Greek education, studying in Antioch, Caesarea (Palestine) and Alexandria; he became bishop of Emesa (Homs) c.341. Though he wrote in Greek, all that survives, apart from fragments in Catenae, is in Latin or Armenian translation, the former consisting of homilies, the latter commentaries on books of the first half of the Old Testament, the longest (and most accessible) of which is his *Commentary on Genesis*;⁵⁷ in this he displays an interest in textual matters and several times quotes the reading of ‘the Syriac’ and (less frequently) ‘the Hebrew’.⁵⁸ It is very likely that a Syriac translation once existed, since many excerpts, quoted anonymously by Isho’dad, have been identified.

Gregory of Nyssa (d. c.395). Although the Syriac translation of Gregory’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (in Vatican Syr. 106) has not been published, it has been the subject of an important study by C. van den Eynde,⁵⁹ who also edits the supplement which completes Gregory’s unfinished *Commentary* by a certain Symmachus, together with part of a sixth-century Syriac translation of the LXX text; a further fragment of the latter has subsequently been edited.⁶⁰

56 Robert Payne Smith, *S. Cyrilli Alexandriae Archiepiscopi, Commentarii in Lucae Evangelium* (Oxford: Typographeo Academico, 1858) with a separate English translation, Robert Payne Smith, transl., *A Commentary upon the Gospel according to St Luke, by St Cyril of Alexandria. First Translated into English from an Ancient Syriac Version* (Oxford: University Press, 1859). For some further fragments of the manuscript (BL, Add. 14,552) were edited by W. Wright, ed., *Fragments of Homilies of Cyril of Alexandria on the Gospel of Luke edited from a Nitrian Manuscript* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1874); to the same manuscript belongs Fragment 4 in S. P. Brock and L. van Rompay, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir al-Surian, Wadi al-Natrun (Egypt)* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 227; Louvain: Peeters, 2014), 351, 372–373, and 607–610 (images). Homilies 1–80 were re-edited by J. B. Chabot, ed., *S. Cyrilli Alexandrini Commentarii in Lucam, I* (CSCO 70; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1961).

57 French translation in Petit, van Rompay and Weitenberg, *Eusèbe d'Émèse, Commentaire de la Genèse*.

58 For this aspect, see R. B. ter Haar Romeny, *A Syrian in Greek Dress. The Use of Greek, Hebrew and Syriac Biblical Texts in Eusebius of Emesa's Commentary on Genesis* (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 6; Louvain: Peeters, 1997).

59 Ceslas van den Eynde, *La version syriaque du commentaire de Grégoire de Nysse sur le Cantique des cantiques: ses origines ses témoins, son influence* (Bibliothèque du Muséon 10; Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1939).

60 Sebastian P. Brock, “Mingana syr. 628: a folio from a revision of the Song of Songs,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 40 (1995): 39–56; for the Sinai manuscript to which this belongs,

John Chrysostom (d. 407). Of John's extensive collection of homiletic commentaries on the Old and New Testament, many of which were translated into Syriac, only Homilies 1–43 on John have so far been published.⁶¹

Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428). The only complete commentary to survive in Syriac is that on John.⁶² For the Old Testament there are fragments for Genesis, Psalms and Qohelet.⁶³

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see P. Géhin, *Les manuscrits syriaques de parchemin du Sinaï et leurs 'membra disjecta'* (CSCO 665; Louvain: Peeters, 2017), 59–60.

- 61 With English translation, by Jeff W. Childers, transl., *The Syriac Version of John Chrysostom's Commentary on John, I. Memre 1–43* (CSCO 651–652; Louvain: Peeters, 2013).
- 62 Ed. with Latin translation by Jaques M. Vosté, *Theodori Mopsuesteni commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis Apostoli* (CSCO 115; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1940).
- 63 Genesis: Eduard Sachau, *Theodori Mopsuesteni fragmenta syriaca* (Leipzig: Sumptibus Guilelmi Engelmann, 1869), 1–34, supplemented by R. Tonneau, "Théodore de Mopsuesete, Interprétation du livre de la Genèse, Vat. Syr. 120," *Le Muséon* 66 (1953): 45–64 and T. Jansma, "Théodore de Mopsueste, Interprétation du livre de la Genèse. Fragments de la version syriacque (BM Add. 17,189, f.17–21)," *Le Muséon* 75 (1962): 63–92; possibly Deir al-Surian Syriac Fragments 26 and 110 may belong. Psalms: van Rompay, ed., *Théodore de Mopsueste. Fragments syriaques du Commentaire des Psaumes*. Qohelet: ed. W. Strothmann, *Das syrische Fragment des Ecclesiastes-Kommentars von Theodor von Mopsuestia* (GOFS 28; Wiesbaden, 1988).

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Exegeting a Drink of Water

The Means of Syriac Patristic Biblical Interpretation

Robert A. Kitchen

The First Word

In the beginning was and is the Word. The best place to begin with the Syriac Church Fathers is with their expositions and interpretations of the Biblical text, the Christ to whom the text points, and the kerygma of the Gospel.

A consensus exists among Christian traditions regarding what the Bible contains, give or take a few passages and even books. There is no consensus, however, regarding what method(s) should be employed in interpreting the Bible. Modern Biblical interpretation has developed a range of methods or critical tools which distinguish its concerns from early Christian and patristic interpretation. Yet in particular traditions, such as the Syriac-speaking churches, a variety of methods also exists.

Modern and Patristic Reading of the Bible

The key to distinguishing and evaluating interpretive approaches resides first in how the reader perceives the text, and then in the primary goals and interpretative principles with which an exegete examines the text, often without conscious awareness of what these goals and principles are.

Modern Biblical exegesis tends to dismiss pre-modern and patristic interpretation as pre-critical since it appears to accept the historicity of the narratives at face-value and deal with only the surface of the text.¹ The aim is to go behind the texts to determine the real historical events at play and discern why these bestow theological meaning. Pre-modern patristic exegesis is considered pre-critical because it does not ask the basic question of what gives meaning to a particular story.²

1 Walter Brueggemann, "The re-emergence of Scripture: post-liberalism," in Paul H. Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, eds., *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005), 153–173, here 153–154.

2 John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 12.

That is correct, for the pre-modern reader assumes that the text has authority and meaning because it is Scripture. “For the fathers, the scriptural text itself is the subject matter of interpretation; it is not the means to that subject matter.”³ Instead of looking behind the scripture for ‘what really happened,’ the early Christian reader reads into the text, looking for signs and hints about how this authority works and what meaning it gives to the reader.

Searching for the Mystery

The purpose of Syriac Biblical interpretation is to apprehend the *rāzā/rāzē* “mystery/ mysteries” of Scripture, that is, to experience the reality of the divine encounter depicted in the text which unveils renewed life to its readers and listeners. While modern interpretation aims to describe an event as if it had happened yesterday, and therefore is depicted objectively, Syriac interpreters desire to enter into this event and once more live the Biblical event subjectively. One experiences the reality of the text, not just understands its intellectual meaning.

Syriac exegetes do not perceive the Scriptures as infallible with only one meaning for each passage. Endowed with *rāzā*, Scripture is dynamic, adopting different shapes and meanings for different situations. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the original profane historical event, the interpreter perceives the typological/figural characteristics of the text—which are historical traits—as recurring and transformative at innumerable points of human history.

Syriac exegesis involves close reading which looks for intertextual and typological references and connections. All of Scripture, therefore, can be drawn in as testimony since all Scripture engages the *rāzā*. The congregation and reader hear Scripture as part of the liturgical drama in which each become actors in the Biblical text. If Adam is a type of Christ, then you and I may be a type of a Biblical character.

Narratives and Exegetical Techniques in Syriac Theology

Narratives figure predominantly in the Biblical references of the Syriac Fathers, generally in preference to single-verse citations of moral principles. Narratives embody the drama and complexity of human and divine relationships and thus evoke the event of the *rāzā*. The homilist only needs to make a short reference to a particular story—for the listeners already know the story and how it proceeds and is resolved.

The interpretive techniques used by Syriac interpreters in close reading of the Bible are legion. Several of the most common are illustrated in four

3 Ibid., 116.

well-known Biblical narratives to be rehearsed here. Two Old Testament narratives (Jonah and Gideon) utilize typology and allegory, especially as a vehicle for Christological depiction, to translate the mystery into scenarios that confront critical situations in the congregations. Two Gospel narratives (Jesus Walking on the Water and Zacchaeus) demonstrate the richness of close reading, utilizing the intentional devices of omitting and adding words and incidents to point to the exegete's primary meaning, and making an interpretive move based on something that did not happen in the text.

The exegesis of Gideon and Zacchaeus are targeted for identifiable situations and audiences, while the circumstances of Jonah and Walking on the Water are less discernable and so more universal in their application.

A Fish's Conception: Christological Typology Without Saying So

Ephrem of Nisibis, renowned as the Syriac language's premier author, wrote a lot for the church and its people, especially in the liturgy. His *madrāšē* or "teaching songs" are the model of a unique genre of worship, theology and education in the Christian Church—the poetic singing of the kerygma. Cyrillona, Jacob of Serugh, Narsai of Nisibis, the several Isaacs of Antioch, almost certainly Romanos' *kontakia*, and many later authors continued this poetic medium to express not just the content of Scripture, but also its Spirit, joy and passion. Ephrem's Biblical exegesis adopted many genres with his singular use of symbolism, imagery, metaphor and typology. Although he seldom systematically went through a Biblical text verse by verse, he would evoke a sense of the whole of the Gospel from a verse here and there.⁴

As a case in point, in the *Hymns on Virginity* Ephrem presents a cycle of nine relatively brief *madrāšē* on Jonah.⁵ The first and longest one, Number 42 has 33 stanzas and alludes to the whole story, but his imagery centers on one

4 Among innumerable studies of Ephrem, two overviews are worthy of mention regarding Ephrem's Biblical interpretation: Sebastian P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992); and Kees den Biessen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).

5 Kathleen E. McVey, transl., *Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns*, (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist Press, 1989); idem. *Hymns on Virginity*, 42–50, 438–460; no. 42, 438–440. Edmund Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Virginitate*, (CSCO 223–224; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1962). There is much debate about whether the several cycles of Ephrem's hymns assembled around specific themes were thematically organized by Ephrem himself, or by later students and scholars, somewhat imperfectly. The inclusion of this group of Jonah hymns not belonging to the Virginity theme is an example.

particularly famous part of the story—Jonah and the great fish, the whale, which undergoes a re-imagination, but not a reversal of their roles.

Jonah hired a ship and went down to sea.
 With silver he bought a watery drowning.
 A bare voice entered Nineveh.
 A hundred thousand souls were engaged in business there.
 The naked voice that sowed—
 Its harvest [was] a hundred-twenty-thousand-fold.
 On the boat human mouths tore him in pieces.
 In the deep the whale's mouth swallowed him up.
 (stanzas 1–4)

The congregation has heard this famous tale before, and knows how to fill in the gaps of the sprawling story. Ephrem conveys the sense that each part and character of the story is connected with the others, a hermeneutic that draws the listeners into the story.

Not all Syriac Biblical interpreters spend as much time with the great fish or whale as we do today, but Ephrem does here.

A whale in the sea swallowed him too.
 It conceived and brought him forth instead of females.
 In the sea it conceived him; on land it brought him forth.
 It delivered him to the all-suckling land.
 He was conceived and born as in nature,
 once more conceived and born unnaturally.
 ...
 When a woman endowed with speech conceived him,
 he took his beginning in her as a speechless one.
 But again when a speechless whale conceived him,
 inside him [the whale] had an advocate endowed with speech.
 ...
 But when he was conceived within a human woman
 he resembled an animal that was speechless.
 An animal conceived him in the womb of the sea;
 that silent one became endowed with speech.
 Within one endowed with speech he was quiet;
 within a silent one he became endowed with speech.
 (stanzas 12–14, 17–18, 21–23)

For a congregation immersed in the Scriptures, this symbolic imagery comes seemingly from all directions, not allowing them to think it all through rationally, but striking them with wonder at how animal and human being, mute natures and verbose speech and silence form a single trajectory. Scripture here does not function as a series of doctrinal propositions, but as a new world

Jacob utilizes Christological typology freely, involving two or more characters or events removed in time from one another to demonstrate the providence of God throughout the Biblical canon.⁹ In instances like this one, the typology suggests that these remarkable events can also take place in other people's lives, which might well mean someone in the pew. Literally, Jacob's immaculate conception refers polysemically as much to the second birth of John 3, which also does not involve sexuality.

While neither Ephrem nor Jacob states the virtually blasphemous idea, worshipers know it anyway. These worshipers know they have been disobedient like Jonah, but given his role as a prophet, he got his just reward. Yet, in a word, an unimaginable action by a whale, the Gospel explodes in your mind as you hear the Old Testament tale about someone being born again from the living dead, a dead man living in a living tomb, and yet the living tomb did not want something alive anymore and could not contain him, sending him back to life as a new immaculate conception. Can I too be reborn and reconceived—and then do what God has always wanted me to do? That's what Syriac exegesis does: dancing through Scripture and luring its listeners to be dancing partners with its implausible images. It is the treasure of the Syriac Orthodox Church, but even more importantly its gift and legacy to the Universal Church—a talent which should never be buried in a hole and not shared.

Exegeting a Drink of Water: Allegories of a Mystery (rāzā)

One of the most colourful and bewildering tales in the early period of Israel was Gideon's uprising against the Midianites, defined strategically and theologically by the selection of three hundred soldiers getting a drink of water at the Spring of Ḥarōd (Judges 7:2–8). Why those who knelt down and lapped up the water with their hands were considered by God to be worthier for the battle has challenged Biblical commentators ever since. Two early Syriac authors, Aphrahat the Persian Sage (ca. 345) and Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523), offer extensive exegeses of this famous story, and while their interpretations do not appear to resolve the meaning of Gideon's test, they do persuade their audiences that the story of Gideon's test is about them and their choices.

9 Sidney H. Griffith, "Disclosing the Mystery: The Hermeneutics of Typology in Syriac Exegesis" in Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin, eds., *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 46–64.

Aphrahat on Gideon's Test

Aphrahat's 23 *Demonstrations* (*taḥwyāthā*) were written from 337–345 in the Sasanian Persian Empire during the early stages of Shapur II's persecutions against Christians, although readers hear little of the persecutions, as Aphrahat focuses on the problems of the Persian Church, organizational, ethical and theological. He retells the Gideon tale in the *Seventh Demonstration: On the Penitents*.¹⁰ A generation ago, a flurry of articles by T. Jansma,¹¹ George Nedungatt,¹² Arthur Vööbus,¹³ and Robert Murray¹⁴ debated the occasion and function of this particular exegesis. From a different perspective, the Thirteenth Discourse, *On Fornication*, by Philoxenos of Mabbug,¹⁵ at the end of the fifth century, approaches this same Gideon passage.

Robert Boling, in his *Anchor Bible* commentary on Judges, succinctly describes the modern consensus. "The test in the story is one of alertness; the men who lap the water scooped up with their hands, instead of lying down, 'show themselves more watchful and ready to meet any sudden emergency, such as an attack from the rear.' The story thus gives even greater credit to Yahweh, who chose not only a smaller force, but also those less suitable to a military enterprise."¹⁶

Aphrahat interprets the function of this narrative as a call given to the *Bnay Qyāmā*, "Sons of the Covenant" or "Covenanters," who are invited to the ascetic struggle. The opening call, "Let he who is afraid turn back from the struggle," is amplified by a list of reasons why one would turn back. The three reasons—one has planted a vineyard, become betrothed to a woman, or is building a house—closely mirror Deuteronomy 20:2–9. The list is also similar to the

10 Adam Lehto, transl., *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), Demonstration Seven: "On the Penitent," 18–22; 210–213; Syriac critical edition: Ioannes Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae. Demonstrationes* (PS 1; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 7.18–22; columns 341.11–349:27.

11 T. Jansma, "Aphraates' Demonstration VII.18 and 20. Some observations on the discourse on penance," *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1974): 21–48.

12 George Nedungatt, "The Covenanters of the early Syriac-speaking church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 191–215, 419–444.

13 Arthur Vööbus, "The Institution of the Benai Qeiamā and Benat Qeiamā in the Ancient Syrian Church," *Church History* 30.1 (1961): 19–27.

14 Robert Murray, "The exhortation to candidates for ascetical vows at baptism in the ancient Syriac Church," *NTS* 21 (1974): 59–80.

15 E. Wallis Budge, *The Discourses of Philoxenus Bishop of Mabbôgh A.D. 485–519*, 2 vols. (London: Asher & Co., 1894) [Syriac text, vol. 1: 597–601]; R. A. Kitchen, *The Discourses of Philoxenos of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction* (Collegetown, Minnesota: Cistercian Publications, 2013) [English: 465–468].

16 Robert Boling, *Judges* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), 145–146.

excuses of the invited guests in Luke's rendition of the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Luke 14:16–24)—one who has bought a field, has bought five yoke of oxen, or has just been married.

The “solitaries/single ones” *ihīdāyē*, who are often interchangeable with the *Bnay Qyāmā*, are the ones ready for the struggle. Aphrahat identifies them as those who “set their faces toward what is ahead and do not call to mind what is behind them,” reflecting Philippians 3:13, but also the person who plows and does not look back (Luke 9:62).

Aphrahat addresses personally “those who sound the trumpets”—whom he identifies as “the preachers of the church.” They are charged with three tasks: keeping watch “over those who have returned”—those who could not maintain celibacy; “care for those who remain”—catechumens probably; sending down to the waters of testing “those who have vowed themselves to war.” A textual problem with the Biblical text becomes apparent in these crucial directives. “Whoever laps the water with his tongue will hasten and take courage in going to war. But whoever falls on his belly to drink the water will be slack and weak while going to war.” The *Pešittā* adds “with their hands” as part of the action of lapping the water—as in the Hebrew text (7:6): “and the number of those that lapped, putting their hands to their mouth, was three hundred men” (RSV). Aphrahat assumes that whatever the 300 selected men were doing, it exhibited their courage, and those who lay down on their bellies demonstrated their inadequacy for the battle.

Suggestions for the occasion of Aphrahat's exegesis are varied. This was a baptismal document hearkening back to an era of stricter standards no longer in effect (Vööbus); a “liturgical document” intended for the proper selection of candidates for the *Bnay Qyāmā*—an entrance rite, but not baptism *per se*, singling out and consecrating an elite force, the *Bnay Qyāmā*, wrestlers of the spiritual life (Jansma & Nedungatt); Aphrahat's concern over the numerous defections from the *Qyāmā*, “fallen Covenanters,” from which he calls for more stringent and better selection of candidates, while admonishing the pastors not to turn away penitent Covenanters (Nedungatt); and that “the sole subject of the Seventh Demonstration is the admission of lapsed solitaries to penance” (Jansma).

Aphrahat defines the entire sequence involving Gideon as a mystery (*rāzā*), which is in turn a type (*tūpsā*) of baptism, a mystery of the struggle and an image (*dmūthā*) of the single ones. The test is affirmed inter-textually for the contemporary church by Jesus' word, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14).

Aphrahat explains how this plays out in the church, reverting to God's initial call to Gideon to permit those who are afraid to go home before the battle

begins. The trumpet-blowers or preachers of the church are charged with warning those who enter into this covenant with God prior to their actual baptism about the issues of celibacy and marriage. The vow of the *Qyāmā*, typically adopted by young unmarried men and women, is to virginity and holiness. Evidently, there is some problem with those who enter the *Qyāmā* and lose the struggle and “there is only shame for the one who turns away from the struggle.” The one who turns away, but has not yet made a vow or put on battle armour is not to be blamed. The crucial sentence is: “Whoever has set his heart on the state of marriage, let him be married before the baptism,” indicating that baptism is not reserved only for the celibate.

Aphrahat then instructs the preachers to “bring those who have been chosen for the struggle to the waters of baptism in order to be tested. After baptism they will see who is strong and who is weak.” The different styles of drinking are the types of the strong and the weak or lazy, the signs distinguishing the character of one’s sin after baptism. Aphrahat embarks on an unusual midrash, relying upon an intertextual interpolation from Isaiah 56:10–11, on the fact that God’s selected ones lap the water like a dog, reflecting the virtue of a dog.

The strong are those who are distinguished by the waters: they follow after their master like dogs, give themselves over to death for his sake, take up his fight courageously, and keep watch over him day and night. *They bark like dogs* (Isaiah 56:10) *as they meditate on the Law, day and night*. They love our Lord and lick his wounds when they receive his body, setting their eyes on it and licking it with their tongues as a dog licks its master. Those who do not meditate on the Law are called mute dogs because they are unable to bark. And those who are not diligent in fasting are called greedy dogs, who do not know how to satisfy themselves (Isaiah 56:11). And those who are diligent in seeking mercy obtain the bread of children, which they leave for them (Matthew 15:26). (Demonstration 7.21, p. 213)

Here are new ascetical and anti-ascetical categories: “barking, mute and greedy dogs.”

Philoxenos on Gideon’s Test

Philoxenos of Mabbug approaches the exegesis of Gideon’s 300 as a vivid exhortation to the monks under his charge about how to conquer the passion and physiology of fornication. Philoxenos calls upon his monks to reduce their liquid intake—for moisture nourishes fornication—especially in tandem with gluttony, just as dehydration burns off desire. Philoxenos pointed to Gideon’s turning away those who drank their fill, but accepted those who “drank a little,” and this came not from Gideon’s ingenuity, but from God’s divine plan.

The root of this physiology derives from Evagrius Ponticus whom Philoxenos cites anonymously many times. Evagrius observes in the *Praktikos*, “The restrained use of water contributes greatly to chastity. You should be so persuaded by the three hundred Israelites in Gideon’s company who subdued Midian.”¹⁷

Philoxenos identifies the enemy of Israel, the Midianites, as the incarnation of fornication. The link with Midian goes back to Numbers 25:1–2, “the people fornicated with the daughters of Midian (Moabites actually!) and were initiated into the idols of their gods”—a conflation with the Midianite woman/Israelite man incident (Numbers 25:6–9).¹⁸ He employs inter-textual references to support this identification and interpretation, offering Paul’s warning regarding fornication (1 Corinthians 10:8) that refers to the incident in Numbers after which a plague swept over them, slaying 23,000 (Hebrew 24,000). Philoxenos interprets that the event in Numbers slew the fornicators, but not fornication itself. Instead, Gideon did not slay the fornicators, but made the act and sin of fornication itself perish. Gideon equipped each of his 300 men with horns, lamps and pitchers, around which Philoxenos links the sounding/breaking (Judges 7:15). “The sound of the trumpet is the signal of the commandment of God.”¹⁹

God protests again the passion of fornication, and Philoxenos again cites Paul (Hebrews 12:16) who warns against becoming a fornicator and dissolute person like Esau for the sake of one meal.²⁰ A catena of citations against fornication is presented as a “type” against fornication, the various trumpets sounding against the camp of Midian.

For the second time, Philoxenos reminds his listeners that “All these things are the type of our own spiritual life.”²¹ A Perfect one may use the sound of his soul as a trumpet to blare at the passion of fornication, indeed, as a form of the divine voice. With the hearing of the commandment (the trumpet), the desire of fornication is broken, just as the pitchers were broken. Then the hidden light inside the pitcher becomes visible, exposing and eliminating fornication as the light of the knowledge of Christ shines in the soul.

Philoxenos concludes with a summary of these three types. (1) The commandment of God is the sound of the trumpet; (2) the passion of fornication becomes the pitcher broken, because it is light and easy to break after the

17 Robert E. Sinkewicz, transl., *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) *Praktikos* 17, 101.

18 Kitchen, *The Discourses*, 13.53, 465–466.

19 *Ibid.*, 13.54, 467.

20 *Ibid.*, 13.55, 467.

21 *Ibid.*, 13.56, 468.

elimination of fornication; (3) The visible lamp is the light of divine knowledge. In presenting this summary,²² Philoxenos recognizes that his typology/allegory is complex and perhaps a bit strained and puzzling to his monastic audience, and wants to make them understand that the passion of fornication is physically and morally conquerable.

Gideon's Dog

Both Aphrahat and Philoxenos perceive the fundamental ascetic character of the Gideon text as “selection for the struggle.” Neither focuses his exegesis upon the characters in the text, but upon those hearing or reading the text, for these latter—pastors and *Bnay Qyāmā*, as well as novice monks—are now understood to be contemporaries of the Old Testament figures. The process of our reading the text has reversed, for the text is now reading us.

Philoxenos understands the narrative as an allegorical model for the new resident monks who are ostensibly celibate, but for whom the distracting ideas of the world are still active in their minds and souls. This is a prescriptive text, outlining how and why one should behave in the ascetic and monastic way of life. More precisely, this is a way of life moving from worldly Uprightness up to the spiritual realm of Perfection. The *Discourses* are seldom directed to the Perfect, but to the newly arrived monks, who Philoxenos is afraid may lapse into their worldly ways of thinking, even while living in the monastery. Jansma's focus on lapsed Covenanters in Aphrahat's depiction of Gideon has touched an important nerve in both authors' situations.

In terms of the method of exegesis, both Aphrahat and Philoxenos utilize fairly similar strategies of inter-textual analysis in order to direct their ascetical emphases. Aphrahat begins with Judges 7:3, the advising of those who were afraid or had certain excuses to go home, and then spells out the possible excuses using the list of Deuteronomy 20:2–9. Those who are meant to enter the struggle are described by Philippians 3:13, and the selection of the 300 is given emphatic closure by Matthew 22:14, “many are called, but few are chosen.” The various aspects of dog-ness are recalled from Isaiah 56:10–11, the source of “barking dogs,” and Matthew 15:26 regarding not throwing children's bread to the dogs.

Philoxenos' passage employs a few more inter-textual references than Aphrahat, establishing the context allegorically with the Midianite conflict in Numbers 25:1–2, 6–9. Philoxenos' only other Old Testament reference, besides Judges 7, is the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17), “do not desire/covet the

22 Ibid., 13,56, 468.

wife of your neighbour,” the closing argument to the listening monks that fornication is something to be avoided.

A final note about dogs. Aphrahat appears to drift into the adverbial phrase in the Biblical text, “like a dog,” and interprets this as a positive image of those elected—the dog as lowly and humble, obedient and self-denying. Philoxenos notably does not mention the dog. “With their hands to their mouths [they lapped up the water]” functions for Philoxenos as a variant to the dog, although in the Hebrew text both are included. These variants point to a basic difference in the purpose for ascetical exegesis on this passage. Aphrahat was interested in the manner of *how* one drank water as a criterion for selection, a matter of liturgical submission to authority for the *Qyāmā* to imitate and obey. Philoxenos interpreted the using of hands to drink as an indication of *how much/little* one drank as the exact measure of the monk’s discipline in the midst of the ascetic struggle.²³

Walking on Water: The Importance of Omission

On the methods of exegesis (*pūššāqā*) in Syriac Biblical interpretation, Tanios Bou Mansour’s two-volume *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug* provides a thorough examination. The second volume treats “la méthode exégétique proprement dite,” including a section on “les règles de l’interprétation.”²⁴

Bou Mansour begins with Jacob’s understanding of “the necessity of exegesis.” The literal sense of the text carries a hidden meaning, by which inspired persons could speak “something in place of something [else].” A text, therefore, requires a commentary in order to understand its true or full sense or meaning.²⁵ Jacob, however, declares that for those who are sufficiently discerning, the Good News does not need *pūššāqā*, since it is the essential light and all one

23 Since this conference devoted significant attention to Jacob of Serugh, it is fitting to point to Jacob’s reading of Gideon’s trial in “On Gideon and on that War of the Midianites,” no. 84 in Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryany, eds., *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017), 161–173. “And those who knelt down to drink water he rejected; and those who lapped [water] while standing he chose.” (line 272, 170). The verb for “standing” is **قَامَ** (*qāymīn*), certainly a unique variant that is counter to the normal mechanics of drinking water at a stream. “Standing (up)” is the opposite verb to “kneeling down,” but in Jacob’s tendency to convert Old Testament stories into Christological types, the chosen ones are depicted as standing, “being resurrected” (root *qūm*).

24 Tanios Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, 2 vols. (Kaslik, Lebanon: Bibliothèque de l’Université Saint-Esprit, 1993 and 1999), 317–350 and 330–333.

25 Bou Mansour, *La Théologie*, volume 2, 319–320.

has to do is to open the eyes of the heart.²⁶ Jacob does appear to identify this deep comprehension of the meaning of a text with an act of the human spirit that encounters a deeper sense or meaning which he compares to a pearl.²⁷

If the interpretation does not lift the veil from your story,
your word is obscured by the metaphors and is not visible.
If the questions do not dive into the sea of your story,
the pearl is not drawn up from your book.²⁸

The two characteristics of complete understanding involve multiple meanings/polysemic and deeper hidden meaning in the interpretation *pūššaqa*.²⁹

The Word of God does not limit itself to a single *pūššaqa*;
it is all light and full of the aspects of all parts.³⁰

Bou Mansour demonstrates how Jacob adheres to three fundamental rules of interpretation. First, he rejects any interpretation of a Biblical text that may derive from his own self-interest and ideas, that is, *eisegesis*; in other words, a respect for the integrity of the text and its meaning. Second, he grants foremost authority to the totality of the text, especially in instances when one passage seems to contradict another passage. It is the whole Scriptural text that ultimately decides its meaning. Third, interpretation consists of placing the text in its context, which includes the place and circumstances in which an event is reported.³¹ A parallel concept or principle which Jacob rarely noted consists of a distinction made between the kinds of audience to which his *mēmra* was targeted—basically, simple people, on one hand, and those more cultivated who were more capable of understanding the content of certain difficult texts, on the other. This happened with reference to Biblical texts in which the simple audience believed the literal sense, while the latter group recognized a metaphorical character to the story. Generally, Jacob's pastoral approach directed him to interpret Scripture to all believers.³²

26 Ibid., 321.

27 Ibid., 325.

28 Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, 13:6–9.

29 Bou Mansour, *La Théologie*, vol. 2, 327.

30 Paul Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, vol. 5 (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1910), 601:16–17.

31 Bou Mansour, *La Théologie*, vol. 2, 330–332.

32 Ibid., 333.

Jacob of Serugh's Exegesis: Interpreting What is Not Written

The recent publication of 160 *Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh* from the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Library, Damascus, edited by Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryany, has given us a “new” cache of Jacob’s work.³³ The two-volume edition contains critical editions of each text, but no translations, a more rigorous Bedjan. A number of the texts, however, are not complete, and there is a section of *mēm̄rē* attributed to Jacob which the editors observe are not authentically Jacob’s.

Many of the *mēm̄rē* treat topics of Biblical interpretation, and No. 10 is entitled “When Our Lord Walked upon the Waves of the Sea,” running to 288 couplets/576 lines in Jacob’s signature 12-syllable meter. Jacob examines here two stories he sees intimately connected, the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13–21) followed by Jesus Walks on the Water (Matthew 14:22–33). Through a close reading of the texts, he connects the two pericopes from something that is not said in the texts. As in many of his *mēm̄rē* on Biblical stories, Jacob follows the canonical order, but does not examine every verse. Nothing—almost—is left unnoticed in the text. As noted above by Bou Mansour, Jacob seldom can limit himself to just one theme, for the Biblical narrative is much richer than that, “thicker” in recent terminology, and spreads out connecting intertextually with other thoughts and Biblical passages.

Jacob begins the *mēm̄rā* not by offering a proemion or introduction bemoaning his inadequacy and sinfulness as author who now pleads with God to assist him in writing this homily faithfully, but instead with the climactic moment of the story. Three times he employs the plea of Simeon, “Give me your hand, so that I do not sink among the waves.” Jacob places this plea not just in the mouth of Simeon, but also in that of the reader, and indeed of his own.

The story begins with the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish, which precedes Christ’s walking upon the water in three of the four Gospels; it is Luke that opts out of that sequence. Bread is the main course; the two fish are mentioned only once. Jacob’s concern is not so much with the physical elements as the perceived apathetic response of the disciples to this remarkable phenomenon, for they expressed little emotion or awe. His miracles or signs were no longer sacred, it seems, but profane, quite ordinary and even “normal.” Jacob’s analysis derives from his close reading of the Biblical text which says nothing about the response of the disciples to what is going on around them and Jesus—an exegesis of an omission. Jacob observes, non-canonically, that Jesus did notice a tangible attitude that was unable to appreciate or even see a miracle. Is Jacob reflecting a current attitude among the congregants in his church?

33 For reference, see note 24.

Jacob and Jesus do not stop to consider this possibility further, as Jacob makes a one stanza transition in which Jesus sends the disciples ahead onto the Sea as a teaching lesson. Jesus presses them to enter the boat while he stays behind to dismiss the well-fed five thousand. Jacob notes a sense of urgency on Jesus' part, acknowledging that it will be a rough voyage.

The *mēmṛā* describes the distress of the disciples in the boat amidst the storm, a Dark Night of the Soul long before St. John of the Cross, the language evoking the images of the sea as the home of primeval chaos into which the disciples are thrown. Jacob extends the dreary and desperate gloom with the depiction of the disciples wrestling with the darkness in replication of Jacob's namesake at Penuel (Genesis 32), a wrestling match which endured 'the entire night,' a phrase that becomes the refrain in this section of the *mēmṛā*.

And just like Penuel, when daylight arrives and the wrestling angel relents with Jacob, so as daylight dawns upon the sea Christ appears on the water. The verb *denah* means 'to appear,' but also means 'to dawn.' Jacob continues with metaphors of nature, as the elements rush towards Christ and rejoice with him. The Son harnesses the sea and is borne by it as if on a chariot. Subtly, Jacob is affirming the Second Person as the Word/Logos: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3). Although the sea was carrying Christ, He had borne the sea in the beginning; just as Mary bore Christ, He had borne Mary in the beginning.

A curious omission from the canonical text is seen in the brief depiction of the disciples' initial fear of seeing Christ upon the water. The only specific observation Jacob attributes to them is their recognition that the sea 'road' upon which Jesus is walking is not normal. The Pešittā records their outcry, "It's a ghost" or *ḥēzwā*, an apparition. Perhaps Jacob wished to avoid an ambivalent image alluding to the nature of Christ, for an apparition would definitely not be human, and a ghost would not be fully divine either.

Then Simeon stands up in the boat. He is the First Disciple, not only in being the leader of the disciples, but also as the Initiator, the first one to act and do something. His first movement in the boat is a formal request, "Command me to come to you." Simeon confesses that he only has power through his obedience to Christ—I cannot do it by my own inadequate human power and skill. A brief mention of the fervency of Simeon's faith affirms that he was always the first one to take a risk. Jacob understands his subservience to Christ as a type for the Church, a type based in the recognition of his/its weakness.

Simeon begins to walk, but the Scriptures and Jacob never tell us how many steps he took. In a moment of eternity, who can count? Then the spiritual dynamics are turned around—Christ sees Simeon walking as a wonder, a miracle, which is ironic for the disciple who saw nothing to wonder at while

he was handing out the loaves and fish to the Five Thousand. At Christ's command to come to him, Simeon "descended from the boat and set out on his road among the waves, and he was a wonder to Christ because he was not a wonder." Jacob does not elaborate—better to leave some things unsaid—but appears to be raising the issue of human/divine powers and nature, or even an eschatological instant of *theosis* or deification. In a single line Jacob asks who saw Cephas walk except Christ—another instance of Jacob's close reading of the Gospel from which he draws a conclusion from what is not said. The other disciples saw Christ walking, so was eternity too short for them to see Simeon walking like Jesus?

Yet in that eternity of a moment, almost the same duration of timelessness as on the mount of Transfiguration, doubt enters Simeon's mind and body. The wind and the waves cause him to think and he begins to sink. Once again, Jacob interprets Simeon's sinking, the sin of doubt, as a dynamic type of the Church. "It was good for Simeon Cephas as he was sinking, so that in this same instance his Lord who rescues him would be exalted. He proclaimed the Gospel because he called out, 'My Lord, help me,' and he taught the world 'Who [else] is able to rescue [you]?"

Jacob turns towards the congregation now, imploring them to call upon Christ for help. The Simeon episode is transformed into an allegory for the Church, as a long section advises the Church and its people to imitate Simeon, for the sea in the story is the world—another sense of the chaos and amoral character of the world. Jacob appeals especially to penitents that they should call upon Christ while they are sinking into iniquity.

The concluding statement in the Gospel narrative is the exclamation and confession of the disciples that "You truly are the Son of God!" They have not only marveled at the wonders they have just seen, but finally are able to comprehend what these wonders mean, which is the presence of God among us, Emmanuel. The sea now has become the *malpānā* and they have learned its lesson. If we follow Jacob's approach to exegeting textual omissions, Simeon did not join with the other disciples in this confession, but will declare it on his own (Matthew 16:16) in answer to Jesus' question, as will also Thomas upon seeing the resurrected Christ (John 20:28).

Half Only: The Hermeneutic of Adding to Scripture

Biblical interpretation, especially in its role in proclamation and preaching, has frequently sought to interpret particular Biblical narratives to address and grapple with contemporary problems of the local congregation, involving

conflicts, wars, religious oppression and catastrophic events, as well as issues found within the local community and audience. Removed in time, it is often difficult to equate certain references in a homily with actual events or conflicts within the congregation.³⁴

In the fourth-century collection of 30 discourses, *The Book of Steps* (*kthābhā dmasqāthā*),³⁵ the context of some of the interpretations become apparent. Ironically, there are few external details given about the social situation of *The Book of Steps* (*BoS*): the author remains intentionally anonymous, his location in the Sasanian Empire comes from a single geographical detail, and while it was likely written following the great persecution of Christians by Shapur II (345–379), there are no indications if the collected works of this author are chronologically or randomly ordered.

The author's purpose in writing, nevertheless, is clear. As the spiritual leader of a Christian community in a town or village, he has constructed a system for a consecrated Christian way of life, built upon two levels of commitment. The lower level are the Upright ones (*kīnē*) who are married, have jobs, own property, and fulfill the minor commandments of Christ which include the active duties of charity to those in need: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick. The higher level are the Perfect ones (*gmīrē*) who are required to be celibate, own no property or home, do not work, and devote themselves to a rigorous life of prayer and teaching, fulfilling Christ's major commandments directing them to a deeper level of humility and reliance upon God.

The 30 *mēmre* in *BoS* are the collected writings of this author and range from rules for both levels, sermons, theological and Biblical discourses on controversial issues, and deeper discussions regarding the nature of the Upright and Perfect life. The synopsis is that the Perfect allow their discipline to erode against which the author remonstrates. At the same time, the author begins to notice that the Upright were spiritually progressing beyond his expectations. In several *mēmre* he encourages them to continue, and if only they would just adopt celibacy they would become Perfect, and in fact are almost there now. This may be the only witness in early Christianity to a spiritually-stratified society in which the original superior level is supplanted by the inferior level. While the order of the *mēmre* is not necessarily chronological, the final six

34 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "To Whom Did Jacob Preach?" in George A. Kiraz, ed., *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2010), 111–131.

35 Robert A. Kitchen and Martien F. G. Parmentier, transl., *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum* (Cistercian Studies 196; Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2004). Syriac critical edition: M. Kmosko, *Liber Graduum* (PS 3; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1926).

evidence a shift towards the promise of the Upright, with the Perfect barely being mentioned.

The final, 30th *mēmṛā*, “On the Commandments of Faith and the Love of the Solitaries,” concludes with a retelling of the story of Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus (Luke 19:1–10). The author has repeatedly said that not only will the Perfect receive salvation, but the Upright as well, although in some fashion a lesser, undefined degree of salvation. Whether this was intentionally the final *mēmṛā* cannot be determined, but there is a sense of conclusion, especially with this Zacchaeus midrash demonstrating that the Upright are more than vindicated in Christ’s eyes.

Understand from this that people are saved if they do as they were commanded: [following] that precept which is lower than that perfect and superior precept, [even] while they are married and possessing wealth. [This is clear] by that demonstration when our Lord entered the house of Zacchaeus, a sinner and an extortioner and doer of evil things, and admonishing him made him a disciple with these commandments which are inferior to Perfection. [Jesus] did not say to him, “Unless you leave your wife and your house and your children and empty yourself from everything you own, you will not be saved.” Look, the response of Zacchaeus makes it clear that our Lord admonished him in such a way that he need not empty himself, because he knew that he could not reach the power of that great portion. Zacchaeus said, “Everyone whom I have cheated I will repay four-fold, and half of my wealth *only* I will give to the poor.”³⁶ See, while he did not say to our Lord, “I will abandon everything I have,” our Lord did say the following to him, “Today salvation has come into this house.”³⁷ Zacchaeus shall be called a son of Abraham, he who when he promised to repay their lords what he had extorted had said, “half of my wealth *only* I will give.”³⁸ But whoever gives to the poor half of his wealth while not defrauding anyone, look, is he not greater than Zacchaeus, who was called righteous? When he gave two portions of his wealth, look, does not he grow greater still? Whoever gives all he possesses to the poor and the strangers, look, is [that person] not better and greater? (*The Book of Steps, Mēmṛā* 30.27, 361)

The author utilizes two interpretive moves to convince his congregation—who appear now to be predominantly the Upright—that despite the strict hierarchy previously maintained, the Upright are scripturally worthy and vindicated for salvation by Christ himself.

The first move in this close reading of the text *qua* text is to notice once again what has not been said. After 30 *mēmṛē* promoting the way of Perfection, frequently in superior contrast to the way of Uprightness, using the teachings

36 Lk 19:8.

37 Lk 19:9.

38 Lk 19:9.

and actions of Jesus, the author now makes note of the fact that Jesus did not say, “Unless you leave your wife and your house and your children and empty yourself from everything you own, you will not be saved.” The author had declared many times that unless one did these things, one could not become Perfect. But now Perfection is not as important as salvation, and the absence of what Jesus could have said to Zacchaeus is a critical part of the author’s argument. This interpretation of a purported omission is a strategy employed to convince the listeners that there could have been a different direction in the argument, but this is the intentional one. Jesus made no presumed or hidden requirements for Zacchaeus to earn his salvation.

The congregation likely had lingering doubts about Zacchaeus’s eligibility for salvation, and theirs as well. The author turns to Zacchaeus’ own testimony as the affirming evidence. Jesus already knew the tax collector could not really relinquish all his assets, and so allows him to commit to repaying all his fraudulent activities. Again, the crucial point lies in the exegesis of an omission “he did not say, ‘I will abandon everything that I have.’” Zacchaeus (and the author) then adds, “half of my wealth *only* I will give to the poor.” The author adds to the canonical text the single word *balhūd* ‘only.’

If those listening knew the Gospel story, they would have been startled immediately by the ‘only.’ Aphrahat used this same tactic, adding or changing a word or short phrase in the canonical text, to grasp the attention of the listener—and that addition or change would indicate Aphrahat’s principal interpretation.³⁹ The author of *BoS* does precisely the same thing. Zacchaeus was giving to the poor 50% *only* of his wealth—not 51% or even 49%. This means the Upright listeners were allowed to keep a good portion of their wealth—and like Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come into this/your/my house.” *Balhūd* may have been an addition to the sacred text, but it captured the *rāzā* of what Jesus said.

Not the Last Word

Syriac Biblical interpretation has rarely made connections with so-called modern exegesis, which is primarily a Western Christian phenomenon. While the methods of historical criticism and its offspring, form and redaction criticism among others, are not used by Syriac interpreters, there has been a surprising

39 Craig E. Morrison, “The Bible in the Hands of Aphrahat the Persian Sage,” in Robert D. Miller, ed., *Syriac and Antiochian Exegesis and Biblical Theology for the 3rd Millennium* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 1–25.

turn in the last few decades in Western Biblical and homiletical studies towards what Syriac exegesis has practiced over the millennia, a distinctive and often poetic approach to a theological interpretation of the Scriptures. Through sermon and liturgy, Syriac exegesis is intended for the audience of all believers in the Church, not just “the educated layperson” or the scholar.

That modern Western Biblical interpretation has learned anything directly from Syriac exegetical traditions exegesis, or vice-versa, is not provable. These two exegetical world-views now have the opportunity to be enriched by one another through similar methods and perspectives that have emerged on the nature of Holy Scripture.

Rowan Williams observed that “the sacred text thus enacts its sacred character not by its transparency, but by its nature as unresolved, unfinished, self-reflexive or self-questioning.”⁴⁰ The examples shown certainly demonstrate the Syriac Church Fathers struggling with and appreciating the deep and unresolved nature of Scripture. Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh attempt to make sense of Jonah’s journey, in and out of the great fish, and on the road again to Nineveh, knowing that this cycle is the type Jesus himself identified for his journey on the road to Easter morning,⁴¹ and allow the paradoxical to remain. Aphrahat and Philoxenos draw deeply from the Spring of Ḥarōd to encourage and guide their congregations, but neither one was able to resolve why God wanted them to drink that way.

The return of Western Biblical commentaries to investigating narrative units of the canonical Scriptures for their theological intentions, rather than individual verses for their anomalies and historical remnants, injects an air of anticipation in each reading and sermon that there is something more here than the plain words seem to say. Jacob’s interpretive principle to rely upon the whole text for the meaning is seen in how he connects the Feeding of the Multitudes and Christ’s Walking on Water as one story that begins with the disciples’ absence of wonder and concludes with their ultimate declaration of faith.

Two concerns are contemporary. First, it is sadly the case that very few Western Christians are aware of the wealth and utility of Syriac interpretation and theology. Syriac exegesis should continue to be strengthened within the Syriac churches, but its light should not be kept under a basket. The gift of the Syriac Christian tradition to the Great Church is its distinctive, imaginative grappling with the mysteries of the Scriptures, and for its broad application

40 Rowan Williams, “Historical Criticism and Sacred Text,” in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 217–228; 227.

41 The Sign of Jonah: Mt 12:38–42, Lk 11:29–32.

to the enrichment of preaching world-wide. Through journal articles, Biblical commentaries, sermons, denominational and clerical educational publications, Syriac exegesis should be disseminated in Western Christian media—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical. It is no virtue to keep Syriac theology cloistered.

Second, what is required to enliven, even revive, Syriac Biblical interpretation is for contemporary Syriac exegetes and preachers to give voice to renewed interpretation. This begins as always by a deep acquaintance with and knowledge of Syriac historical theology—no way around that task—and then moving to construct sermons, Biblical exegesis and commentaries, and systematic theologies grounded in the Syriac engagement and encounter with the Bible. These renewed theological ventures may sound at first like Ephrem, Jacob, Isaac of Antioch, Narsai, Philoxenos, and Dionysius bar Šalibi, but in time they will be responding to the struggles and opportunities of today's situations in the Syriac Church and beyond.

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The Return of a Lost Daughter

Jacob of Serugh on the Healing of the Canaanite Woman

Martina Aras

Introduction

The concept of suffering and healing is self-evident in the writings of the early Syriac Fathers¹ which, by extension, show the importance of this concept to Syriac theology. A distinctive terminology for the concept of suffering and healing is fully developed in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian and in those of Jacob of Serugh.² Both Ephrem and Jacob played a significant role in the shaping of the early Syriac tradition, and even today, their metrical writings and liturgical hymns are used in the Syriac Orthodox Church.

In this paper, I will analyze one of Jacob's metrical writings on suffering and healing, namely, his homily on the Canaanite Woman as told in the Gospel of Matthew 15:21–28.³ My analysis will exemplify the Syriac concept of suffering and healing, shed further light on the elements of humility and boldness, and also draw on Eleonore Stump's methodological insights of how to approach narratives.⁴ Jacob's homily on the Canaanite Woman read as a narrative in light of Stump's methodological insights may guide the reader closer to the experience of the Canaanite Woman and engage the reader in the suffering and healing of the Canaanite Woman.

After a discussion of Jacob's suffering and healing terminology, I will analyze Jacob's reading of the story of the Canaanite Woman which focuses on the complex inner life of the Canaanite Woman and emphasizes the nature of suffering as essential to the healing process.

1 Cf. Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 99.

2 Cf. Aho Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004).

3 For an English translation of Jacob's homily on the Cannanite Woman, see Ashbrook S. Harvey and Sebastian Brock, eds., *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Women whom Jesus met* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 1–50. The translator of the homily in question is Reyhan Durmaz.

4 Cf. Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness, Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–80.

Methodology

In his theological thinking and biblical exegesis, Jacob is influenced by Aphrahat and even more by Ephrem. Jacob carefully interprets the tradition anew and breathes new life into it so that it is applicable and meaningful to his own audience. Like Ephrem, Jacob developed a homiletic language marked by distinctive dramatic poetry, which made his theological preaching aesthetically beautiful and appealing to his listeners. Jacob was a productive poet-theologian and contributed immensely to the dynamic tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church.⁵

The early Syriac theology of Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Jacob cannot be guided only by modern Western theological methods resulting from Scholastic theology. This is simply because the methodological nature of early Syriac theology is different from Scholastic theology. Unlike Scholastic theologians, early Syriac Fathers expressed theology in rich symbolism and dramatic poetry, with creative dialogues between dramatic figures. The dialogical character of early Syriac theology is particularly important, for an essential theological openness is made possible by it.

In his homiletical exegesis, Jacob explores interpersonal relationships through dramatic dialogues between certain biblical figures. For example, in his homily on the Canaanite Woman, the dialogue between the suffering Canaanite Woman and Jesus the healer generates insights of any interpersonal relationship. Therefore, anyone listening to Jacob's homily can relate either to the woman's suffering or to the healer's perspective.

In Stump's momentous work on the problem of suffering, the importance of the second-person perspective emerges. Stump develops and uses it in narratives in a way that is complementary to Jacob's homiletical exegesis. Stump approaches the problem of suffering by closely reading biblical narratives to detect what is not said. She pays attention to unnoticed connections present in the biblical narratives and tries to discover how these affect and change the suffering person.

What is the second-person perspective in narratives? The most frequent perspectives used in narratives are the first-person and third-person. As for the second-person, which is less common than the others, it is still relevant for the Syriac Fathers, and especially for Jacob. A person reading a story told in the second-person perspective stands to grasp a deeper understanding of the text

5 In her contribution to this volume, Cornelia Horn also describes the huge influence Jacob had for the Syriac Tradition and the impact and the potential he may have for today.

and the lived experiences of the narrative's figures. Through the second-person, which is commonly used in the homilies of early Syriac Fathers, the modern reader might grasp something existentially important about life. Stump says, "There are things we can know that are philosophically significant but that are difficult or impossible to know and express apart from stories."⁶

As noted, a story or a narrative could be told in third, second or first-person perspective. For Stump, the most important perspective is the second. Before taking a closer look at the second-person perspective, it is helpful to clarify that the knowledge gained from stories is not propositional knowledge (knowledge that), i.e. the impersonal knowledge of value-free facts that is the domain of the natural sciences, but rather a kind of experiential knowledge.⁷ For Stump, narratives are the medium for this knowledge because they give a reader access to aspects of reality that the analytical-philosophical method misses.⁸

Narratives can trigger the emotions of the reader. Certain nuances are highlighted by narrative storytelling. Aspects arise consciously which might have been ignored otherwise. The visualisation of certain situations is also a significant component. For this reason, this method is particularly important for ethics (for example, Nussbaum). The activation of emotions can educate morally and in this way also contributes to the cultivation of morality.

For example, people with certain diseases need to feel understood and to put their disease into a larger context, so that the experience of the disease can receive a meaning that did not exist before. Narratives possess more than a mere intellectual understanding of a situation. Stump sees potential in how they awaken or transform our sense of particular phenomena.

With perspectives, we have already noted that the first and the third-person are more frequent than the second. By first-person perspective, the reader experiences the direct consciousness of a person and that person is always "me". By contrast, with third-person perspective, the reader possesses indirect knowledge about a person other than "me" through the presence of a narrator, for example. Second-person perspective is fundamentally different from these two because it requires direct interaction with another person.⁹ In this context, Stump's enlightening words provide further clarity on the different reader perspectives in narratives:

6 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 40.

7 Cf. Christoph Ammann, "Moralische Bildung," in Matias Martinez, ed., *Erzählen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2017), 259–262.

8 Cf. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 67.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, 77.

In a first-person experience, I am directly and immediately aware of a person as a person, but that person is only myself. It is also clear that a second-person experience is different from a third-person experience. For a third-person experience, one person has knowledge of the states of another but not in virtue of being conscious of that other as a person. A second-person experience is, therefore, different in character from a first-person or third-person experience because it is necessary for a second-person experience, as it is not for a first — or third-person experience, that you interact consciously and directly with another person who is conscious and present to you as a person, in one way or another.¹⁰

As we shall see in his homily on the Canaanite Woman, Jacob makes frequent use of the second-person experience.

The Homily on the Canaanite Woman

The encounter of Jesus with the Canaanite Woman — a woman suffering for her daughter's sake and also social and gender injustices — is beautifully portrayed by Jacob in his homily on the Canaanite Woman. The homily addresses suffering, faith, and healing — in particular three distinctives on healing. In the present article, we examine two important themes in Jacob's homily related to suffering, faith, and healing: the theme of the Sun of Righteousness (vv. 1–34) and of the Canaanite Woman as a harp for the Undivided Faith (vv. 113–144).

The first theme is a healing metaphor that originated in ancient Mesopotamia but was commonly used by Christian authors of late antiquity as a metaphor for the healing work of Jesus. These Christian authors drew from a Mesopotamian wealth of linguistic images and enhanced them in a unique way with Christian ideas. The second example analyses the internal processes. We learn very little about the people Jesus had healed from the biblical healing stories. The language and the expansion of the biblical narrative provide the first clues for spaces and possible answers to questions the listener may ask.¹¹

10 Ibid., 76–77.

11 Why does Jesus initially ignore the suffering of the Canaanite woman who asks him for mercy and help? Apparently, the Canaanite Woman does believe that Jesus is the Lord, yet her Lord turns away from her, and in the same vein, his disciples reject her. Still, she does not give up. She kneels before Jesus, calls him Lord again, and asks for help. One is bewildered by Jesus reaction. He calls her a dog. At this point, Jesus exclaims, Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. In a word, why would Jesus ignore the suffering of the Canaanite Woman and call her a dog before answering her prayer? These are the main questions of my dissertation. For the length of this article is limited, I will focus on a few here, which I will list below.

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite Woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. (Mt 15:21–28)¹²

The Sun of Righteousness/ܠܗܘܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ (vv. 1–34)

In the first section (vv. 1–34), Jacob begins his homily with introductory words about the greatness of God, God's actions in the world, and his unbeatable power. Jacob describes the work of God using opposite pairings, such as light and darkness. Jacob describes human darkness and the power of God. On the phenomenon of darkness (ܠܘܘܐ) he mentions the cloudy/dark road (ܠܗܘܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ) and shadow (ܠܘܘܐ) among other things. These are broken by the incidence of light and the rays it emits.

What does Jacob mean when he speaks of darkness and light? Jacob uses darkness as a metaphor of the many sufferings of the human experience. This Darkness assumes different qualities and kinds related to the idea of "Satan". This darkness is often qualified as "being passive". It is the darkness which blinds us (v. 3), or which makes life gloomy (v. 4). Error and wrong thinking also originate from darkness (v. 9). Darkness makes us infirm and wounded (v. 11) and also weak, sick, and poor (vv. 13, 15). Furthermore, darkness makes one blind, one paralytic, one possessed by demons (v. 16ff). Darkness is related to sin (v. 20) and it kills the plants (v. 21). It harms us (v. 25), gives birth to hate (v. 28) and arguments (v. 29). Darkness makes us doubt (v. 30f).

The darkness versus light antithesis contrasts evil and good or Satan and God/Jesus. According to Jacob, the light "slays" the darkness that "blinds the world". And "great Light" (v. 1) is connected to the Lord. "The Radiance of the Father" illuminates the gloomy road (v. 3f). The "Sun of Righteousness" drove away the error and showed the "Way of Life" (v. 10). He also showered healings (v. 11) and sprinkled his medicine upon the sick (v. 13). He gave "forgiveness to sinners" (v. 20) and kept with his breath harm from many (v. 24). While darkness blinds us, light gives us sight again. The darkness is conquered by the light.

The ever-shining bright light illuminates the cloudy street and shadows. For Jacob, this does not negate the existence of darkness but rather it underlines

¹² New Revised Standard Version.

where the shadows lie. The presence of contrast provides recognition. Jacob illustrates these various manifestations of darkness. The world experiences these shadows and the night belongs to the rhythm of the day that God created. The light and darkness, which appears in Jacob's various homilies, describes Jesus as the source and medium of luminosity and a light for the salvation of the world.

Jacob views the ups and downs of the whole history of salvation through the imagery of light (*nuhrā*) and darkness (*hešūkā*). The aspects of darkness are wrong discernment, lack of the understanding of divine purpose, idols and idolatry.¹³

As the “Sun of Righteousness” (ܟܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܚܝܘܨܐ), Christ shows the “Way of Life” (ܐܘܪܐ ܕܚܝܘܢܐ)¹⁴ according to Jacob. The image of the “Sun of Righteousness” represents a name for Christ in the book of Malachi 4:2.¹⁵

Three verses later it is stated that the sun of righteousness will shine upon those who fear the Lord. According to MT [Masoretic Text], this sun will have healing in its wings. In P [Peshitta], however, the sun of righteousness will have healing ‘on its tongue’ and so may indicate the group's teacher.¹⁶

The “Sun of Righteousness” is already associated with the topic of healing in the Syriac version of the Old Testament (Peshitta). According to Othmar Keel, a look at the Biblical exegesis of the book of Malachi shows this metaphor has its origins in both ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt.¹⁷

Across the ancient East, the upper level of the universe was represented by a circle or disk with wings on either side. The disc symbolized the sun and the wings were the heavenly vault or the rays of the sun. In Mesopotamia, this winged sun disk was a representative of the sun god Shamash. A deeper look into this symbolism explains the concept of justice. Shamash as a deity

13 Cf. Thomas Kollamparampil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh. An Exegetico-theological Study on the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh on the Feasts of Our Lord* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 345.

14 Harvey and Brock, *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Women whom Jesus met*, v. 10.

15 Also Ephrem, in his fourth hymn on faith, describes Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. For a critical edition of the Syriac text of Ephrem's hymns on faith, see Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (CSCO 154; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955). For an English translation based on Beck's text, see Jeffery Wickes, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: The Hymns on Faith* (The Fathers of the Church 130; Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

16 Michael P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 230.

17 Cf. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 27–30.

worked with the principles of law, more precisely with the principle of justice and beneficence. The sun thus signified justice. These ideas were not foreign in ancient Israel. David L. Peterson explains that there was growing evidence of the worship of Yahweh through the use of solar metaphor in ancient Israel.¹⁸ It is this connection between healing and judgement or justice that Jacob also stresses throughout his homily. The report that the Canaanite Woman heard was in Jacob's words, "Behold, the Judge of the World is passing by" (v. 79). This led her to run to him. In any case, the sun deity was linked to the topic of healing.

With the "Sun of Righteousness" title, Jacob emblematically introduces healing. In the light of Jacob's understanding of healing, one can understand why he describes Jesus as "the Judge of the World". Suffering often arises from injustice and the situation of the Canaanite Woman was exactly this whether by the sickness of her daughter, her gender, or the belonging to the pagans. Diane Blachert describes her situation:

People understood the daughter to be possessed by a demon. She was now caught in the realm of death. It could be that she was being punished for her own sin or that of her parents (cf. John 9). Because she was in the realm of death, she was not part of the living community. This family is faced with the day to day stress of illness compounded by attitudes and beliefs which increase their isolation and, thus, their suffering. [...] The family is mute, isolated, dominated by the situation, turned in on itself and powerless.¹⁹

Note that the structure of the person's experience of suffering perpetuates the injustice, which explains the person's state of desperation.

The explicit introduction of the healing topic also includes the use of medical metaphors such as "healing" (ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ) or his "medicine" (ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ).²⁰ The miracles are an integral part of his idea of salvation:

ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ ܩܘܿܠܕܿܐ
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The blind saw and paralytics were healed. / Demons were driven out, so that the bent were made straight. / He gave sound to the deaf and light to those without light. / He cleansed lepers and gave forgiveness to sinners (vv. 17–20).

18 Cf. David L. Peterson, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 225.

19 Diane Blachard, "The Gentile Woman: Engagement with Suffering," *Consensus* 20/2 (1994): 13.

20 Harvey and Brock, *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on Women whom Jesus met*, v. 13.

Jacob underlines that Jesus’s healing miracles were free of charge and unconventional, and that he was in no way provoked by the oppression he himself experienced. Jacob illustrates through contrasting opposites the action and work of Jesus which brought healing and also exposed the ignorance, resentment, hatred and oppression on the part of the “circumcised” people. Jacob positions the healing experience of the Canaanite Woman alongside the scepticism and rejection of Jesus’s work on the part of the Jews, whom Jacob describes as circumcised.²¹ The list of miracles does not seem the main criteria for Jacob, but is synchronously in the service of the strengthening of faith, which is one of his main concerns:

כמו ים כים ירדו : חסם כמים דמסד רכירם ריפן ירדו ירדו
 : כחמסר ל מסם אפלוכרר ד מסם ירדו ריפן ירדו : רחמסר כ מסם מסמ
 . רכירם ריפן ירדו ירדו ירדו ירדו

He descended like rain on the land of Judah which was sick / and like plants the sick sprouted from their beds. / He cast out the evil spirits possessing human-kind, / and with the breath of His mouth He kept harm from many. (vv. 21–25)

The following example shows how Jacob explicitly and plausibly explains this healing metaphor, where he honors the faith and the inner attitude of the Canaanite Woman. Jacob relates this healing experience to the Canaanite Woman, insofar that it regards the possibility of the complete healing of her daughter. When Christ is able to cleanse lepers and forgive sinners, he can also heal daughters and release the oppressed from injustice. This passage provides a reason for her to become sensitive to God’s grace and run after Jesus when he crossed into the land of pagans (v. 35), which Jacob describes within the following passages.

The Canaanite Woman: A harp for the Undivided Faith (vv. 113–144)

In this section, the idea of the undivided faith, as developed by Eleonore Stump with reference to Aquinas, has application to Jacob’s account of the Canaanite Woman. I will develop the idea that the undivided faith of the woman in Jacob’s reception enables a deep understanding of the inwardness of the Canaanite

21 Thus, in their introduction to *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women whom Jesus met*, 2, Asbrook and Brock say: “Jacob contrasts the Canaanite Woman’s affirmation of Jesus’ powers with the skepticism and rejection of his works by the Jews, a familiar anti-Jewish rhetoric of late antique Christian authors.”

Woman. The idea of the undivided faith Jacob developed had an enormous impact on the healing process of the daughter, and the mother herself.

Although the explanations for these internal processes are characteristic of modern ideas, by immersing oneself in this narrative, the depth of faith and the inwardness of the woman can be recreated. In addition to reproducing the Bible into a coherent narrative form, the homilies offer a space for moral and ethical questions. In the case of Matthew’s periscope, the questions the listeners might have asked are how the mother asked for the healing of her daughter. Which form of prayer, which inner attitude, and which belief was required for the sufficient healing? These are questions that focus on the inner life of the mother and daughter.

Undivided faith is a recurring motif in this homily. Undivided faith stands to contrast the pagans with their many deities and divided faith with those who believe in one God and have a true undivided faith.

The section begins with the irony that the gospel was proclaimed by the Canaanite Woman and the prophecy was rejected by the daughter of the people. Those who were familiar with the scriptures dishonoured the revelations of prophecy while those who worshiped idols were among the first to preach. A pagan woman knew that Jesus was the Son of David and could cast out demons but the faithful congregation rejected him while he healed her. The pagan woman called out in the middle of the crowd with a loud voice so that the people would know how great he was. Jacob goes on to say that despite her pagan origins, she knew that only Jesus was able to cast out demons:

ܠܟܠܟܢ ܘܟܠܟܢ ܥܠ ܗܘܢܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܥܘܠܡܝܢ
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To the King she made accusation about the Rebellious One who increased her torment, / because He was able to bind the Strong One with His might. / She did not hasten toward the gods of the Canaanites, / because she knew that Jesus would destroy their idols. / She became a harp for the faith that was undivided, / when she cried out, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me! (vv. 124–128)

It is interesting that Satan is said to be “the Strong One” at this point (ܥܘܠܡܝܢ/v. 124), because Jacob previously used a similar title for Jesus (v. 83/gabār ܩܘܒܐ). What is striking is the use of different words in Syriac for the same association. The observation that a certain power is attributed to Satan through this title also seems an important remark by Jacob. So it is assumed that the daughter’s

sickness is not an easily curable matter. This motivated the mother to hurry in her pursuit of Jesus’s mercy.

These verses particularly express the mother’s inwardness and depth. The resulting strength of the Canaanite Woman is particularly obvious in Jacob’s homily. She knew how to deal with her adverse circumstances in a flourishing manner. The daughter’s sickness/demon which certainly would have been perceived by others as a threat did not prevent her from acting at the right moment. The woman’s apparent desperation and confusion in her situation did not deter her comfort in the news that Jesus would come.

The storyteller says a lot about this intruding message by repeating the arrival of Jesus, which almost becomes a refrain in the first half of the hymn: “He came to the border of Tīre and Sidon, as you have heard [...]” (v. 89).²² Finally, the Canaanite Woman takes the step toward Jesus and cries out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 128). This articulation is the first step of healing. The “crying out” (מרח) underlines the confrontation, which is connected with the articulation. Her long speech that follows not only reveals the depth but also her trusting relationship which we encounter as fiducial²³ resilience:

אַם זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע: אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע:
 אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע: אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע:
 אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע: אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע:
 אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע: אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע:
 אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע: אַז זײַנען אַז גאַנצע אַרומ: אַלע:
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The Rebellious One, evil of ways, cast forth a group of bandits, / and captured my daughter; come, lead her back from offense. / The demon who confuses beauties has attacked the young girl, / and drives her mad; command him to leave the

22 Also: “When he crossed into the land of pagans with His disciples” (v. 35); “He crossed the boundary of Tyre and Sidon and He astounded them” (v. 37); “The strong One entered ...” (v. 57); “The Good Physician walked in the world and visited it” (v. 73); “And when He hastened to the land of pagans, as we said, the news prompted the Canaanite Woman to come to Him” (vv. 75–76); and “the Strong One [Christ] came to the border of the discerning Woman” (v. 83).

23 Clemes Sedmak, *Innerlichkeit und Kraft, Studie über epistemische Resilienz, Forschungen zur europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, Bd. 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 40–41, introduces the term of the fiducial resilience as a trustworthy relationship which is achievable through the on holding of the absolute. This category of resilience is drawn by Meister Eckhardt.

wretched girl. / The tyrant who hates the human race—behold!—since Adam, / drives my daughter mad so that she loses her mind that was calm. / O King of the Land, drive out the foreigner from Your jurisdiction; / You are the Son of David, be zealous and kill him like Goliath. / Do not let the Uncircumcised One mock my daughter and revile her; / wrest her from him and she will be Yours when You have freed her. / David, Your father, freed the assembly and became king, / and he removed the reproach of the Philistine from the camp. / Again David, for the sake of a lamb, killed a wolf, / so that he might guard his flock diligently without harm. / For Your part, my Lord, You care for Your flock more than David did, / command the evil spirit to leave the girl who is under its control. (vv. 129–144)

Dorothee Sölle, a well-known German theologian, also speaks of the multidimensionality of suffering when she describes three dimensions of suffering “as the root of suffering in the physical and social body of man.”²⁴ From the three dimensions of suffering — physical, psychological, and social — the social dimension has received the least attention in theology.²⁵

If one pays attention to the situation of the Canaanite Woman before she went to Jesus, it is assumed that she was isolated, abandoned, and expelled. The only way to overcome her helplessness was to accept it and overcome it by meeting Jesus with a deliberate challenge. Sharing her suffering with him and the determination not to silence her scream changed everything. Sölle represents the overcoming of suffering in three phases. First, the suffering person isolates herself, is dumb and speechless (phase 1). Then she begins to accept her suffering and expresses it intensely and clearly in a psalmist language (phase 2) so that acceptance and overcoming then lead to solidarity (phase 3) and change.²⁶

The quoted part of the speech by the Canaanite Woman excellently expresses the language of the phase of expression/confrontation (phase 2), which Sölle regards as indispensable by naming it the “stage of articulation.”²⁷ The linguistic elements of the request and the expression of hope are clear. Jacob grants the Canaanite Woman a right to participation that she has fought for herself. The listener is confronted with a passion that does not come across as a testimony of submission but as a self-determined appeal to God’s justice and goodness.

At the same time, we counter the innocence of the woman and her daughter. The contrast of good versus evil, illness versus health, demons or Satan

24 Dorothee Sölle, *Leiden: Annehmen und widerstehen* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag GmbH, 1973), 25.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, 26.

26 Cf. *ibid.*, 94.

27 *Ibid.*, 95.

versus God clarifies the cause and the solution of the sickness. The terms by which the Canaanite Woman describes Satan, evil, and the demons testifies to Jacob's understanding of atonement. How are death, sin, and Satan related in Jacob's theology and how can they be overcome?

In addition to the understanding of atonement, the process of deification, which is linked to the idea of redemption, also offers an important trail in the direction of faith and healing. Within the Syriac Orthodox theology, deification is an integral part of the understanding of salvation. In the context of the subject of soteriology, divinization, and healing, Eleonore Stump offers an interesting approach with her healing course through justification and sanctification. It considers the two components of justification and sanctification as a moral and spiritual regeneration process. Hereby the integration of the will for good and learning to love oneself and God is displayed as the way to reach regeneration.²⁸

Deification as a Healing Process

One thought that is closely linked to soteriology in Orthodox theology is the understanding of *theosis* as sanctification or deification. In our homily, this understanding of Jacob is fundamentally linked to the healing process of the daughter and mother, too.

When discussing deification in Syriac theology, we must recognize that we are dealing with a completely different language than Greek. The Syriac world and the Syriac way of thinking are different from Greek-Hellenistic mindsets and consequently these affects the way *theosis* is framed.²⁹ For example Serafim Seppala says:

Deification of human nature is not only a doctrinal difficulty and existential challenge; it also opens linguistic and semantic problems. One might say that the deification-related thought in Greek and Syriac sources had a common direction but different roads that went parallel ways. Certainly, the idea of deification was a central thought for a big number of Syriac authors, like Ephrem and the

28 Cf. Georg Gasser, *Leid: Durch das Dunkel zum Heil? Eleonore Stumps Theodizee-Ansatz in Wandering in Darkness* (Innsbruck: Institut für Christliche Philosophie, 2013), 8.

29 Cf. Serafim Seppala, "The Concept of Deification in Greek and Syriac," *Ecumenical Journal Sibir (RES)* 11/3 (2019): 439–455, 444. Or as Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 148, says, "There is one feature in particular of Ephrem's spiritual world vision which excellently illustrates how close he is, when it comes to fundamentals, to some of the great theologians of the Greek-speaking Church. Although their manner and mode of expression is often far apart, yet the basic content of what they are saying is essentially the same."

East Syrian mystics, but still they all were reluctant to use a specific term for it. Instead, they expressed it either with an exchange formulas corresponding to those of Irenaeus, Athanasios and others, or with the commingling terminology, in the case of mystics.³⁰

The early history of deification in Syriac sources are roughly comparable to the Greek tradition, even if the early Syriac resources are not entirely patristic. In the Syriac sources, however, there is a conviction that the fate of Christians goes far beyond a simple restoration of the post-laparist state (the state after the Fall from Paradise) and that this is shared with God himself.³¹

The peculiarity of the Syriac approach lies in the retention of the poetic character. As with other subjects, this poetic language is set out in symbols and typologies. If deification is mentioned, then this is understood in the sense of a poetic image and not as a theological concept that is discussed and analysed.³²

A systematically developed doctrine of deification is found in the Byzantine tradition. The Russian theologian Sergej Sergeevic Choruzij emphasizes the tangible reality in the relationship between God and men in the doctrine of deification where there is primacy of the experience of communion with God.³³ In this context, deification from the Orthodox perspective is by no means only a theoretical and systematic concept, but a reality experienced in the earthly life.³⁴ As a result, the Romanian theologian Daniel Munteanu summarizes the statements of following Christ's love and deeds by Clement of Alexandria as the ethics of *Imitatio-Christi*.³⁵

In receiving and following the words of Christ, man steps up on the path of knowledge of God and communion with God. According to Clement of Alexandria, *Imitatio-Christi* is only done in harmony with the wisdom of the logos, when faith is put into practice. "The whole value of human freedom lies in the possibility of its use as medium towards that likeness of God [...] which is at once our destiny and our choice."³⁶

30 Seppala, "The Concept of Deification in Greek and Syriac," 454.

31 Ibid., 321.

32 Norman Russell mentions a book dealing with "systematic" exception which is linked to Stephen Bar Sudhaile. Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 321.

33 Cf. Jürgen Henkel, *Dumitru Stăniloae: Leben – Werk – Theologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 2017), 266.

34 Cf. *ibid.*, 266.

35 Cf. Daniel Munteanu, "Glaube, Bildung, Ethik und Theosis. Ostkirchliche Pädagogik anhand der Theologie von Clemens von Alexandrien," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 10:1 (2019): 196.

36 Cf. *ibid.*, 197.

Deification is about forming and maturing into one's authentic nature (or who one is meant to be) which is the person whom God created from the beginning (in the *Imago Dei*). To return there, God woos human freedom through an educational process and thereby enables man to achieve greater freedom. The divine archetype was revealed to man through the incarnation of God which enabled "the new dynamic ontological participation of man with God".³⁷

The Eastern ideas of salvation are therefore about the personal development of man and salvation is understood as a dynamic offer of man's developmental opportunities.³⁸ Jacob of Serugh expresses this similarly for Syriac theology and understands baptism as the basic prerequisite for Christian existence:

Jacob of Serugh repeats this theme when he says, "Baptism gives back to Adam the robe of glory which the serpent had stolen from among the trees". For Jacob, besides the robe, the baptized also put on *zayna*, protective armor, against the arrows of Satan.³⁹

In one of the oldest Syriac texts, the Odes of Solomon speaks of "putting on Christ" (putting on Christ, 7.4; 13.12) or that we *clothe* in his holiness (clothing ourselves in his holiness 13.3). Ephrem first formulated the metaphor in this formula: "He gave us divinity, we gave him humanity" (H. de fid. 5.7).

Ephrem even extends the idea of exchange in an original way to include God's self-communication in the anthropomorphic images of Scripture: "He clothed himself in our language, so that he might clothe us in his mode of life" (H. de Fid. 31; trans. Brock).⁴⁰

Adam and Eve were created with free will for a divine purpose. But they have abused their freedom in trying to hastily attain divinity by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. For this reason, the divinity that was promised by the fruit of the tree of knowledge has lapsed and instead they passed mortality on to their descendants. Yet, God took pity on humanity and exercised mercy by undoing the effects of the fall through the incarnation of the logos: "Divinity flew down to draw humanity up, with the result that now man has become a god just as he desired" (C. Nis. 48. 17–18; trans. Brock).⁴¹

37 Cf. Gisbert Greshake, "Der Wandel der Erlösungsvorstellungen in der Theologiegeschichte," *Erlösung und Emanzipation* (1973): 80.

38 Cf. *ibid.*, 69–101.

39 Cf. Chorbishop Seely Joseph Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology: With special reference to the Maronite Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2014), 113.

40 Cf. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 320–321.

41 *Ibid.*, 320–321.

Nevertheless, divinity in this lifetime can only be understood nominally: “God in his mercy called mortals gods by grace” (H. de fid. 29. 1; trans. Brock). Only at the resurrection will people be crowned with glory. In this life, however, they can keep their hearts pure and thereby approach the incomparable glory of God (H. de Par. 9. 26). As an example, Ephrem cites Moses:

Our model is Moses, who ascended to the mountain summit: “Nourished with the divine glory, he grow[s] and shone[s] forth” (H. de Par. 9.22; trans. Brock). At the resurrection our bodies will be spiritualized and our souls furnished with wings, enabling us to mount up to union with God.⁴²

Deification in the Canaanite Woman: Her Undivided Belief as an Indication of Unity with God

In the homily of Jacob, many of his linguistic images illustrate a striving for unity with God. In particular, the metaphor of “undivided faith” seems to offer an indication of the doctrine of deification. As a recurring motif in the homily and especially with regard to the teaching of *theosis* in the Syriac tradition, it can be interpreted that the Canaanite Woman achieved the healing of her daughter through her inner state. In his homily, Jacob hints at the process of personal development of the Canaanite Woman and refers to her aim, which was not only her daughter’s healing, but especially her daughter’s unity with God. Through her own development and maturation, the divine could initiate in the woman herself and thereby extend greater freedom and boldness to speak unhindered: “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (verse 128)

Eleonore Stump describes the state of man after the Fall from Paradise as “divided”. For this reason, the psychological structure shows a certain degree of disintegration. This state not only reduces the coherence of one’s own self-image and one’s own expressions of will, but also the ability to be close to oneself.⁴³ According to Aquinas, the ability to be close to oneself or to love oneself is a prerequisite for building closeness to another person. Aquinas thinks a successful and lasting integration of a person’s psychological structure only occurs if they want the good “with all their hearts” and strive for it.⁴⁴

Stump complicates the fulfilment of this condition by identifying that after the Fall, no one is sufficiently integrated around the good. The human

42 Ibid., 322.

43 Cf. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 150.

44 “Unlike Frankfurt, then, Aquinas holds that no one can be whole-hearted in evil. For Aquinas, it is not possible for a person’s mind or will to be internally integrated in moral warring. Rather, internal integration is possible only for a person single-mindedly understanding and whole-heartedly desiring the good.” Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 126.

condition is characterized by an inner conflict and a strong tendency towards being morally wrong. The desire to be first leads to a kind of willed loneliness, the tendency to close oneself to others and to experience strife.⁴⁵

This inner state is an obstacle to the fact that God can get close to a person (willed loneliness).⁴⁶ To overcome this conflict between people, Stump introduced the concept of sanctification. Man can ask God for help to strengthen his own will for the good and thereby become himself. This wish is only realized by giving up one's own resistance to God (justification) because man cannot do good by himself.

In the surrender of sanctification, a person lets go of the effort to bring her will through her own activity into the state she wants it to have. Instead, she seeks God's aid for her will, to strengthen her will in the good she herself wants to will. In the process of justification, a person lets go in a more radical way. In justification, she surrenders to God by letting go of activity in the will, so that God can regenerate her will without breaking it.⁴⁷

Justification and sanctification are part of the same moral and spiritual process because they are essentially based on successful interpersonal relationships.⁴⁸ Because the inner structures of man are already solidified and overcoming inner conflict is not easy, suffering also belongs to the process of healing. Suffering is sometimes a warning sign of even greater evil (separation from God). Regarding the multidimensionality of suffering, Stump points out the difficulty of recognizing the connections between suffering and human flourishing, which are often slight or hard to detect.

This sketched approach by Stump describes the process of sanctification close to how the Syriac fathers have illustrated it. The homily of the Canaanite Woman exemplifies this when Stump opens deeper insights into what is happening at the encounter between Jesus and the woman. As a result, both the methodological approach of Stump, which is explicit in the second-person experience, and her so-called "healing cure" (sanctification), open up a modern approach to the texts of the Fathers.

The "undivided" faith is a recurring theme in this homily. In verse 127, it is written: "She became a harp for the faith that was undivided." What does it mean? It is described as a contrast between the pagans with their many gods, who have a "divided" faith, and those of the true faith in one God which is

45 Cf. Gasser, *Leid*, 6.

46 Cf. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 150.

47 *Ibid.*, 171.

48 Gasser, *Leid*, 8; Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 171.

“undivided.” A closer look at the whole homily views the “undivided” faith as “healthy” faith (verse 184) which in love would “grant her that whatever she desired would be hers” (verse 335). We will find this description of “undivided” love/faith in Stump’s work as well.

Following Aquinas, one understands that only those who are internally integrated can truly love wholeheartedly.⁴⁹ The opposite is being divided within oneself. Stump refers to Aquinas’s account of the nature of love, which includes two steps: Firstly the desire for the good of another person or of oneself. Secondly the desire for the union with the other or with oneself. But a person can be double-minded and therefore be divided in him or herself. Then as Aquinas describes, the person wants and does not want at the same time. The union for this person is distracted.⁵⁰

Given Aquinas’s account, the “undivided” faith of the Canaanite Woman signals her internal integration. She desired the real good for her daughter because the ultimate real good is union with God.⁵¹ As true love is understood as wholehearted and integrated, Jacob clearly defines “the love that is true (as) not divided” (v. 156). Because of her love and faith, she was already healed from this internally divided condition. “If he wills whole-heartedly, he will ipso facto be integrated in will.”⁵²

The Canaanite Woman’s wholehearted integration could also explain why she was so brave and shameless in her demands. She genuinely desired union with God for her daughter while simultaneously desiring real good for herself. “With healing she will become yours” (v. 98) declared the Canaanite Woman. She knew by God’s healing her mind would be restored (verse 100) and he would also heal her daughter’s internally divided condition. The Canaanite Woman’s volitions and desires were not incompatible with the healing of her daughter. This is why her love was truly wholehearted and internally integrated around what is good.

As we have seen, it seems that Jacob’s metaphor of undivided faith points to a development in the Canaanite Woman that is reminiscent of the soteriological content of *theosis*.

49 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 125.

50 Cf. *ibid.*, 100.

51 Cf. *ibid.*, 101.

52 Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 130.

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The Remaining Legacy of Syriac Orthodox Christology

Theresia Hainthaler

At the beginning of dealing with such a topic, which was given to me, the terms have to be clarified. As Syriac Orthodox is a modern term, we have to reflect on the terminology; this will provide us also with some bibliography. Early Syriac Christology is a heritage of both, the West Syriac and the East Syriac tradition. We try to characterize the individual authors with the main lines of their Christological thought. Finally, we look at the Christological Declarations of 1971 and 1984, where the heads of the Catholic Church and of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch express “the deep spiritual communion” between their Churches and agree that “there is no difference in the faith” in the incarnation.

Terminology and some Bibliography

Syriac Orthodox or Jacobite

The term Syriac Orthodox was not in use in texts of the fifth or sixth century, the formative period for the Christological question to address here.¹ In the sources of this period, including the seventh century, West Syrian anti-Chalcedonians referred to themselves as “Orthodox” while their opponents called them Severans (after Severus of Antioch) or Theodosians (after Theodosius of Alexandria) or *akephaloi*—acephals² or *diakrinomenoi* etc.

The name “Jacobites” was coined originally for the followers of Jacob Baradaeus (Episcopal consecration in 542, † 578) in the sixth century controversy with Paul of Beth Ukkame,³ but later it became common for

1 For a general orientation, cf. *TRE*, vol. 16, s.v. “Jakobitische Kirche”, 474–485; Wolfgang Hage, *Das orientalische Christentum* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2007), 130–167.

2 By Leontius of Byzantium, Pamphilus, Scythian monks, Justinian, cf. Alois Grillmeier with Theresia Hainthaler, *The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century* (Christ in Christian Tradition 2/2; London, Louisville: Mowbray, Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) and 2/4 (1996), 2/3 (2013), indexes s.n.—Henceforth: Christ in Christian Tradition = CCT.

3 E. W. Brooks, *Iohannis Ephesini Historiae Ecclesiasticae IV* 39 and 40 [Versio] (CSCO 106; Louvain: Officina Orientali et Scientifica, 1936), 164,3; 165,10 speaks of the two parties, the Paulites and the Jacobites (Syriac: beth Ya’qōb, *ibid.*, CSCO 105, 220,14; 218,24; Brooks

anti-Chalcedonians in general, even in the Arab language.⁴ The faithful of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in India under the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch are called still today “Jacobites” and call themselves so.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, “Oriental Orthodox” (a term used in Addis Ababa 1965⁵) became the term for all Churches who share the recognition of the first three ecumenical Councils alone (Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, and Ephesus 431); these include, besides the Syrian Orthodox of Antioch, the Coptic Orthodox of Alexandria, the Armenian Apostolic, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo as well as the Malankara Orthodox Syriac Churches.

Christological Position

In Christology, Oriental Orthodox Christians emphasize the unity in Christ, and don't accept the definition of Chalcedon (the fourth ecumenical Council in 451), which declared “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord (κύριος), Only Begotten, in two natures (ἐν δύο φύσεσιν) made known (γνωρίζομενον) without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures having been taken away in no wise because of the union, but rather the properties of each [of the natures] being preserved, even in the concurring into one person (ἐν πρόσωπον) and one hypostasis (μία ὑπόστασις)”⁶. Instead of “in two natures” which they interpreted as a separation into two persons or subjects and thus as the heresy of Nestorianism, anti-Chalcedonians accepted only “from two natures” and confessed one nature and one *hypostasis* of Christ.

As weapon to exclude any separation of the divine and human natures in Christ, Cyril of Alexandria took the so-called *mia-physis* formula of the “one incarnate nature (or *hypostasis*) of the God Logos” (μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγου

translates Iacobitarum, Iacobitis); cf. E. W. Brooks, *Iohannis Ephesini Historiae Ecclesiasticae IV* 17 and 21 [Text] (CSCO 105; Paris: Typographeo Reipublicae, 1935), 204,7; 208,15 (Syriac: beth Ya'qōb; Brooks translates socii ... or pars Iacobitarum). See also Jean Maspero, *Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie. Depuis la mort de l'empereur Anastase jusqu'à la réconciliation des Églises jacobites (518–616)* (Paris: Champion, 1923), 188. Cf. T. Hainthaler, “The Establishment of the anti-Chalcedonian Hierarchy by Jacob Baradaeus,” *CCT* 2/3 (2013): 189–192.

4 The Muslim al-Jahiz (777–869) described Christians as Nestorians, “Melchites and Jacobites,” see T. Hainthaler, “Theological Doctrines and Debates within Syriac Christianity,” in Daniel King, ed., *The Syriac World* (London, New York: Routledge, 2019), 377–390, here 377.

5 In January 1965 a conference of the Heads of Oriental Orthodox Churches was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Cf. <http://www.scooch.org/about/about-scooch/> (last accessed 01 July 2022). The term was used especially in ecumenical dialogues.

6 Cf. analysis in T. Hainthaler, “A short analysis of the Definition of Chalcedon and some reflections,” *The Harp* 20 (2006): 317–331.

σεσαρκωμένη)⁷ against Nestorius from 430 onwards. The *mia-physis* formula as such became interpreted as a statement in favor of one single nature by anti-Chalcedonians. In the sixth century, the formula was also understood as expressing two natures ('one nature of the God Logos' – the divinity, 'incarnate' – the humanity) by so-called Neo-Chalcedonians, and it is this understanding (on the presupposition of Chalcedon) which the second ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553 in canon 8⁸ prescribed as orthodox.

For Chalcedonians, the statement of one single (*monos*) nature leads to a mingling of the natures of Christ (in violation of the divinity or disappearance of the humanity of Christ), and the term "Monophysites" came into use. Conversely, their opponents accused them of dividing Christ into two subjects and called them "Nestorians". East Syrians (called "Nestorians") would see in the "one nature" Theopaschitism and in the Chalcedonian definition an unclear terminology. The Christological controversy suffers from the problem of the different concepts of *physis* and *hypostasis* used by the opposing parties.

Monophysite – Miaphysite

The term "monophysite"—formed in analogy to the earlier term "dyophysite" or "diphysite"⁹ which was used with a pejorative meaning to denote Chalcedonian and "Nestorian" teaching—is documented from the beginning of the seventh century onwards;¹⁰ it was in use for a long time even by Syriac scholars until the end of the twentieth century. The term appears in the titles of important studies, which paved the way to a better understanding. This holds true for Joseph Lebon and his impressive thesis of 1909, the groundbreaking work which revealed the "orthodoxie foncière" of Severus of Antioch, based on at

7 Cyril, however, was not aware that this formula originated from Apollinarius of Laodicea in *Ad Iovianum*, a work, brought into circulation under the name of Athanasius by the followers of Apollinarius after the latter was condemned in Constantinople 381 ("Apollinarian fraud"). First quotation of the *mia-physis* formula in 430 in *Cyril of Alexandria, Oratio ad Arcadium et Marinam augustas de fide* (CPG 5219): *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* I, 1, 5, 65,25–30; *Patrologia Graeca* 76, 1212AB. Athanasius is mentioned in the introduction of the quote, ACO I 1,5, 65,22–24.

8 Can. 8: "If anyone ... does not understand [the expression "the one nature of God the Word made flesh"] according to what the Fathers have taught ... and tries to introduce one nature or substance made of the deity and human flesh of Christ: let him be anathema." English: CCT 2/2, 450.

9 Cf. Grillmeier, *CCT* 2/2, 153, n. 370.

10 In the 7th century, Greek μονοφυσίτης in *Anastasius of Sinai, Viae dux*, CCG 8, Turnhout, Leuven 1981, Index; in Latin: *Gregory the Great*, ep. XI 52 and XII 16: monophysitas, see DH 478; cf. *Encyclopedia Aethiopica* 3, s.v. "Monophysite": 1006–1009; T. Hainthaler, "art. Monophysitismus," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 7 (1998), 418–421. P. Allen, "art. Monophysitismus," *TRE* 23 (1994), 219–233.

that time still unedited manuscripts.¹¹ Thus, the term “monophysite” is part of the history of research¹² and does not always bear a heresiological meaning.¹³

Some scholars involved in ecumenical dialogues from the second half of the last century onwards, among them Alois Grillmeier, started with a different terminology. In 1989, in vol. 2/2 of “Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche” in the chapter on Severus, after the quotation of Eduard Schwartz¹⁴, Grillmeier wrote: “Here it is best if we speak of the post-chalcedonian supporters of the *mia-physis* formula or the *mia-physis* christology.”¹⁵

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- 11 Joseph Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien, étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'église jacobite* (Louvain: Van Linthout, 1909), comprising 551+22 pages. The editions of the writings of Severus in CSCO were published only in the years 1929–1949. Lebons long essay in 1951, too, has the heading: “La christologie du monophysisme syrien,” in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, eds., *Das Konzil von Chalkedon I* (Würzburg: Echter, 1951, 5th ed. 1979) 425–580, with 155 pages, densely written and very demanding. – The influential book of the English historian W. H. C. Frend, *The rise of the monophysite movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), or the often-used study Roberta C. Chesnut, *Three monophysite christologies. Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976) use the term in the title, to mention but a few. Still, Bernard Meunier, *Le christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie, l'humanité, le salut et la question monophysite* (ThH 104; Paris: Beauchesne, 1997).
- 12 Cf. older publication till 1940, like Wilhelm de Vries, *Sakramententheologie bei den syrischen Monophysiten* (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1940). See also Paul Krüger, *Das syrisch-monophysitische Mönchtum im Tur-Ab(h)din von seinen Anfängen bis zur Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Münster i. W.: Greve, 1937); Martin Jugie, *Theologia dogmatica christianorum orientalium ab ecclesia catholica dissidentium. – 5. De theologia dogmatica nestorianorum et monophysitarum* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1935); Hermann Fuchs, *Die Anaphora des monophysitischen Patriarchen Jôhannàn I., herausgegeben, übersetzt und im Zusammenhang der gesamten jakobitischen Anaphorenliteratur untersucht* (Münster i. W.: Aschendorff, 1926); Eduard Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus. Ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1912); Felix Haase, *Patriarch Dioskur I. von Alexandria, nach monophysitischen Quellen* (Breslau: Aderholz, 1908); Gustav Krüger, *Monophysitische Streitigkeiten im Zusammenhange mit der Reichspolitik* (Jena: Pohle, 1884).
- 13 Cf. the distinction between a heretical “real monophysitism” and a “verbal monophysitism” that can be interpreted in an orthodox sense, already by Lebon (*ibid.*).
- 14 Eduard Schwartz, *Publizistische Sammlungen zum Acacianischen Schisma* (München: Verlag d. Bayerische Akademie d. Wissenschaft, 1934), 171, n. 1: “Die Bezeichnung der gesamten Opposition gegen das Chalcedonense als ‘monophysitisch’ ist modern [not correct, T.H.] und höchstens in der Geschichte des Dogmas, nicht in der der Tatsachen erträglich, der es nicht auf eine begriffliche Formel ankommt, sondern auf die historischen Wirklichkeiten.”
- 15 A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus 2/2* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1989), 162, n. 370: “wir sprechen hier am besten von den nachchalcedonischen Anhängern der Mia-Physis-Formel oder

The Coptic Orthodox tradition was especially sensitive concerning the use of this term. In the last Christological Declaration from the revised version of the “Agreed Statement” from Cairo, Egypt on October 13–17, 2014 by the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission—the first version was made at the meeting in Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia on November 5–10, 2002 – paragraph seven reads:

7. The term ‘monophysite’, which has been falsely used to describe the Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, is both misleading and offensive as it implies Eutychianism. Anglicans, together with the wider oikumene, use the accurate term ‘miaphysite’ to refer to the Cyrilline teaching of the family of Oriental Orthodox Churches, and furthermore call each of these Churches by their official title of ‘Oriental Orthodox’. The teaching of this family confesses not a single nature but one incarnate united divine-human nature of the Word of God. To say ‘a single nature’ would be to imply that the human nature was absorbed in his divinity, as was taught by Eutyches.

However, the term “monophysite” still appears in lexica or theological writings—obviously it is not that easy to eradicate it, according to my own experience of more than 30 years in theological work. The alternative “miaphysite” constructed from the *mia-physis* formula, was challenged by Philippe Luisier in 2014.¹⁶ However, Brock has definitely objected¹⁷ and with him three other scholars.¹⁸

Syriac Translations of Greek Authors

Quite a number of texts originally written in Greek survived in Syriac translation and became highly influential to West Syrian anti-Chalcedonians. Above all, this concerns Severus of Antioch, and even authors like Theodosius of Alexandria—Grillmeier called him “spiritual heir of Severus of Antioch”¹⁹—as most of his writings survived in Syriac and impacted the anti-Chalcedonians in Syria. Followers like Jacob Baradaeus called him an “ecumenical patriarch”

der Mia-Physis-Christologie.” English version: A. Grillmeier with T. Hainthaler, *CCT* 2/2 (1995), 153, n. 370.

16 Philippe Luisier, “Il miafisismo, un termine discutibile della storiografia recente. Problemi teologici ed ecumenici,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* [= *CrSt*] 35 (2014): 297–307.

17 S. P. Brock, “Miaphysite, not monophysite!” *CrSt* 37 (2016): 45–52. The article of D. Winkler, “Miaphysitism. A new term for use in the history of dogma and ecumenical theology,” *The Harp* 10 (1997): 33–40, appeared in 1997 not 1977 (as Brock wrote 50, n. 16).

18 Philippe Blaudéau, Baby Varghese and Dietmar Winkler, see *CrSt* 37 (2016): 7–44.

19 A. Grillmeier with T. Hainthaler, *CCT* 2/4 (1996): 53.

indicating his universal responsibility for the anti-Chalcedonians. Theodosius called Severus “our father” and an “ecumenical light.”²⁰

Concerning Theodosius, we have to consult the *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas*, from B.L. add. 14602, edited by Jean-Baptiste Chabot in 1907,²¹ offering documents of the anti-Chalcedonians in the period from 564 to 575.²² The documents are partly written in Greek, but also in Syriac.²³ The dossier, completed in 580, is an important source for the whole Tritheist controversy,²⁴ but also on the Agnoetic debate for which Albert Van Roey (d. 2000) published the editio princeps of five texts against the Agnoetes written in the period 530 to 580 in Syriac with Latin translation.²⁵ The texts of the Agnoetic debate and the Tritheist controversy all date from the period 530 to 580.²⁶

Probably, more by accident, Van Roey in his editions and analyses to a great extent dealt with literature originally written in Greek but survived only in Syriac. This concerns the Tritheist controversy between Damian of Alexandria and Paul Callinicum, who brought the anti-Chalcedonian churches of Antioch and Alexandria into a schism for 30 years from 586 to 616.²⁷ There is a voluminous “Anti-Tritheist Dossier”, edited by Van Roey, Ebied and Wickham.²⁸ Besides, there is also the so-called Probus dossier around the debate between Probus and the Severan monks in 596 in Antioch under Patriarch Anastasius of Antioch, still unedited and studied first by Van Roey, and then also by myself.²⁹

20 I.-B. Chabot, *Documenta ad origines Monophysitarum illustrandas* (CSCO 103; Louvain: Istas, 1933), 68,16–17. *CCT* 2/4, 53, n. 1. For the Syriac text, see CSCO 17; Louvain: Istas, 1907.

21 CSCO 17 (T). For a list of Theodosius’ works see CPG III + Suppl., 7130–7159.

22 Albert Van Roey and Pauline Allen, *Monophysite Texts of the Sixth Century* (OLA 56; Louvain: Peeters, 1994), 265–303, offers a very helpful “overview of the documenta monophysitica” by P. Allen.

23 *Ibid.*, 300–301.

24 Cf. the analysis of A. Grillmeier in *CCT* 2/3, 268–280.

25 A. Van Roey, *Monophysite Texts*, 1–102.

26 *Ibid.*, p. IX. For analyses, see *CCT* 2/2 on the Agnoetes, and *CCT* 2/4.

27 Cf. T. Hainthaler, in: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* 2/4 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1990), 79–82; *CCT* 2/4, 78–79.

28 Rifaat Y. Ebied, Albert Van Roey and Lionel R. Wickham, *Peter of Callinicum. Anti-Tritheist Dossier* (OLA 10; Louvain: Departement Orientalistiek, 1981). Edition by R. Y. Ebied, A. Van Roey and L. Wickham, *Petri Callinicensis Patriarchae Antiocheni Tractatus contra Damianum I, Quae supersunt libri secundi* (CCG 29; Turnhout: Brepols, 1994); *II Libri tertii cap. I–XIX* (CCG 32; 1996); *III Libri tertii cap. XX–XXXIV* (CCG 35; 1998). *IV. Libri tertii cap. XXXV–I et addendum libro secundo* (CCG 54; 2003). The work was composed after Easter 588 in Alexandria (CCG 29, XX).

29 A. Van Roey, “Une controverse christologique sous le patriarcat de Pierre de Callinique,” in *Symposium Syriacum* 1976 (OCA 205; Rome, 1978), 349–357; T. Hainthaler, “Eine

What is Syriac-Orthodox Christology?

First, Syriac-Orthodox Christology is part of Syriac Christology which means a Christology expressed or written in East or West Syriac. The development in the first four centuries, therefore, is a heritage of the Syriac-Orthodox Christology, before the rejection of the definition of Chalcedon (451) eventually led to West Syriac Christology (in the Syriac-Orthodox Church of Antioch). This legacy of the first four centuries, however, is also shared by the East Syriac Christology (in the Assyrian Church of the East), which evolved in the Persian Empire already after the council of Ephesus (431). The richness of the Syriac theological literature goes far beyond classifications and formulas. In the following, we can only try to outline the main authors with their Christological characteristics, especially seen in the perspective of the development of Christology.³⁰

Syriac Christology before Aphrahat

Syriac Christology took its starting point from writings like the Syriac Odes of Solomon (40 Syriac *zmīratā* from the first quarter of the second century are preserved),³¹ the Syriac Didascalia from the fourth century, and the Acts of Thomas and the Liber Graduum. Through Tatian and Bardaisan, there is some influence of Hellenistic culture in the second century. However, fundamental contributions to the formation of Syriac Christology and terminology are due to Aphrahat the Persian Sage (* between 270 and 285, † after 345) and above all to Ephrem († 373). With the latter, the confession of faith of the

christologische Kontroverse Ende des 6. Jahrhunderts unter den Antichalcedoniern des Patriarchats Antiochien,” in Martin Tamcke ed., *Syriaca. Zur Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen. 2. Deutsches Syrologen-Symposium* (Juli 2000, Wittenberg) (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 17; Hamburg 2002), 197–211; enlarged and deepened in: *Jesus der Christus* 2/3 (2002), 403–437 (“Eine christologische Kontroverse unter den Severianern Ende des 6. Jh. Die Konversion des Probus und Johannes Barbur zum Chalcedonismus”). English Version: eadem, “A Christological Controversy among the Severans at the End of the Sixth Century. The Conversion of Probus and John Barbur to Chalcedonism,” *CCT* 2/3 (2013), 386–418; eadem, “The Christological Controversy on Proba and John Barbur,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 56 (2004): 155–170.

30 For detailed analyses, I may refer to the volumes *CCT* 1 (1975), 2/2 (1995), 2/3 (2013) and 2/4 (1996).

31 *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, s.v. “Salomo,” 542. Edition and Commentary by J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). Cf. the commentaries of Michael Latke, *Die Oden Salomons in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis* (OBO 25,1–2; Fribourg, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), and Majella Franzmann, *The Odes of Solomon. An Analysis of the Poetical Structure and Form* (NTOA 20; Fribourg, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991).

Syriac tradition, according to Bou Mansour, gains a certain equilibrium that excluded any earlier attempts at subordinationism: "In Ephrem the confession of faith in the Son as God and man finds an indisputable balance in the Syriac tradition."³² Ephrem defended the full humanity of the Son against Marcion, Mani and Bardaisan.

Until Aphrahat, the concern of Syriac Christological thought primarily was how to explain and to understand Christ as mediator (1 Tim 2:5: "There is one God and there is one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus"). "There does not yet seem to be any trace of reflection on the 'natures' in the Son or of their union"³³ in early Syriac works.

The Odes of Solomon point out the preexistence of the Son (and this fact may explain some passages, which sound docetic). The Acts of Thomas also emphasize the preexistence and the equality of the Son with the Father. Without doubt, however, they also take seriously that the Son became man and consider the historical dimension (of this event and of the earthly life of Jesus). The Syriac Didascalia, on the contrary, shows a Christology of subordinationism. The statements on the Son as mediator of salvation and his exaltation to the Father should be understood predominantly in light of the economy of salvation and not so much as ontological statements.

In the sources, a clear statement on the natures in the Son and on their union cannot be traced. Discussion on unity and on distinction in this union is related to the inner-Trinitarian relations, but not to Christ. There is no reflection on the constitution of the Son. Concepts like person, nature, *prosopon* are not used as technical terms, even less as terms for mixture and distinction.

Aphrahat the Persian Sage (between 270 and 285, † after 345)*

Though being a contemporary of the Council of Nicaea (325), Aphrahat virtually had no contact at all with the Greek theological problems, especially the Arian controversy.³⁴ His Christology developed in relative autonomy from the Greek West; his opponents were the Jews. Central statements of Nicaea, like 'identical in substance' (*homoousios*), 'true God of true God', are not mentioned. Against the Jews, he argued strongly for the divine sonship of Jesus, his Godhead. The main sources for his arguments are rooted in the Old Testament and the Gospel, the latter known to him only in the form of the Diatessaron.³⁵

32 T. Bou Mansour, "Introduction on Syriac Christology before Chalcedon," in *CCT* 2/3, 419–429, here 423.

33 So Bou Mansour, *CCT* 2/3, 420–423 ("The Problem of the Mediator"), here 423.

34 For Aphrahat, see A. Grillmeier, *CCT* 1 (London, Oxford: Mowbrays, 1975), 214–218.

35 *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, s.v. "Aphrahat," 37–38, here 38.

Aphrahat confesses Jesus as God (*alahā*), Son of God (*bar alahā*), king, prince, light of light, creator (*barē*), counselor, leader, way and redeemer.³⁶ Many titles for Christ, a richness of names, can be found (so-called name Christology).³⁷ However, there are also statements that indicate a marked spirit Christology.³⁸ His framework of a Christology of humiliation and exaltation is the foundation to assume his belief in the preexistence of the Son;³⁹ in this way, he avoids the charge of subordinationism. His language is deeply rooted in the Bible; in his theology, he makes use of symbols, without Hellenistic philosophical terminology.

Aphrahat introduced the word *kyānā* in the history of Christological language (the sources for this use could be the letters of the New Testament, the Odes of Solomon, and the Acts of Thomas).⁴⁰ In contrast to the Greek *physis*, which “always shows a tendency to define the essence of somebody or something”, in Aphrahat’s writings “k^ejān, the existence of somebody or something, is defined by the way it appears to men”⁴¹ (Bruns: “Seinsweise”, reality); the term lacks a metaphysical significance. It seems, that Aphrahat did not reflect the way of union of the divine and human in Christ; the words for mixture (*mūzagā*) or division (*pūlagā*) are lacking, only the terms for mingling, confusion (*hūltanā*) and, rarely, for cutting (*psaqā*) can be found, but not as technical terms.⁴²

Ephrem the Syrian († 373)

Characteristic for Ephrem with regard to his Christology is an immense and unparalleled richness of names, images, and titles for Christ. Marking his godhead and preexistence are statements like Christ is God (*alahā*), Son of God, child (*yaldā*), firstborn (*būkrā*), only begotten (*iḥīdāyā*), the beloved one (*ḥabībā*).⁴³ Names indicating functions are mediator (*meṣ’āyā*), revealer

36 Cf. Demonstratio XVII: 2 (Patrologia Syriaca I; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), 785–788. Main source for Aphrahat’s Christology is Dem. XVII; see Peter Bruns, *Das Christusbild Aphrahats des Persischen Weisen* (Bonn: Borengässer: 1990), 122–133.

37 See A. Grillmeier, *CCT* 1, 215.

38 Demonstratio VI: 14, 293–297. See I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Die Gottheit Christi bei Aphrahat* (OC 31; Rom: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1933), 124–138.

39 Dem. VI: 9, 275–278.

40 See Dem. VI: 10, 277–280; or Dem. VI: 9 (ref. to Phil 2:7).

41 A. J. Klijn, “The Word k^ejān in Aphraates,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 12 (1958): (57–66) 66. See P. Bruns, *Christusbild*, 144–149, 151–152.

42 T. Bou Mansour, in *CCT* 2/3, 425–426.

43 See A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche I* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1979, 3rd edition 1990, resp. 2004 with additional corrections) 516–527 (on Ephrem), here 520. Unfortunately, the available English version, *CCT* vol. 1 (1975), is outdated, and does not

(*mgalyanā*), saviour (*parūqā*), physician, medicine of life, rock and many more. Eschatological titles are king (*malkā*), judge (*dayanā*), way, and many others. These titles contain symbols partly referring back to the second century.⁴⁴

An approach oriented towards the economy of salvation seems to be typical for Ephrem: Christ follows us into the depths of our world in order to lead us back to the banquet of paradise.⁴⁵ By the incarnation of the Son, the human being is exalted to the glory. By his descent into Sheol, the life killed death. With the body of the virgin, he entered the Sheol. With the tree of the cross, he led the human race back into the realm of life.⁴⁶

All statements of humility in the Holy Scripture said of the humanity of the saviour. Against the Apollinarians (the controversies with them only started), Ephrem rejected attempts to diminish the perfect human reality of Christ.⁴⁷ Against Marcionite interpretations of a pure heavenly son, he defended the humanity of the Son, with reference to soteriology and sacraments, which would lose all meaning (similar against Mani and Bardaisan).⁴⁸

The term *kyanā* is ambiguous in Ephrem, according to Edmund Beck,⁴⁹ indicating at the same time the individual person and the essence (or nature). The term *qnōmā* is lacking; the word *ūtūtā* (for *ousia*) is used only for God. Ephrem is able to find in Christ two natures: a noble and a humble one,⁵⁰ and to distinguish between the fearful (*dḥilā*) and the weak (*mḥilā*) nature.⁵¹

When he insists on one nature of the Son, he is opposing the Arians and their refusal of a divine nature in Christ; a diphysite Christology was not yet a question of his time. The “one nature” in this context means the one reality, which is not affected by the multiple changes (*šūḥlafē*) in the earthly life of Christ.⁵² According to Alois Grillmeier, he could have subscribed to the

yet contain the chapter on Ephrem. For the whole cf. Robert Murray, *Symbols of church and kingdom. A study in early Syriac tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975) Table III, 354–363.

44 A. Grillmeier, *Jesus d. Chr. I*, 521.

45 See Edmund Beck, *Die Theologie des hl. Ephraem in seinen Hymnen über den Glauben* (StAns 21) (Rome: Libreria Vaticana, 1949), 54–55.

46 Cf. E. Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermo de Domino Nostro* (CSCO 270–271; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1966), CSCO 270, 3–4; CSCO 271, 3–5. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus I*, 522.

47 Ibid., 524.

48 T. Bou Mansour in: *CCT 2/3*, 427.

49 E. Beck, *Theologie*, 39–41.

50 A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus I*, 525, n. 37.

51 E. Beck, ed., *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de fide* [=Hymn. de fide] 19, 2–3 (CSCO 154–155; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955), CSCO 154, 72; CSCO 155, 56–57.

52 Cf. T. Bou Mansour in: *CCT 2/3*, 427–428, with reference to Hymn. de fide 10,3; 29,1; Virg 7,109; 28,1; Sermo Dom. N. 1,18–19.

mia-physis formula of Cyril,⁵³ but Ephrem can also express markedly each one of the two natures in itself.⁵⁴ On the other hand, he says that Christ has mixed the two natures like the mixing of colours;⁵⁵ *mūzagā* in this respect indicates a deeper kind of union than *ḥūlṭanā*.

Ephrem became the foundation and reference point for all the Syriac churches, whether they followed the Alexandrian or the Antiochian line of thinking.⁵⁶

Jacob of Sarug (* around 450, † 520/21)

It was not easy to classify the Christology of Jacob of Sarug,⁵⁷ as the history of research in the last century obviously shows, because of its irenic appearance. Meanwhile, it is clear without doubt that he was an anti-Chalcedonian. He represents an Alexandrian-inspired Christology of unity with some points of contact with the tradition of Ephrem.

Jacob insisted on the point that the acting subject is the same in all that the Son or the Logos performs as God or as man in his incarnation. Death and suffering belong to the divine hypostasis of the Son, as a condescension of his will. But statements like 'he remained God without losing to be God' are

53 A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus I*, 526.

54 Hymn. de fide 8,6; 29,2; 53,9.11; T. Bou Mansour in: *CCT* 2/3, 428. Cf. Sermo de Dom. Nostro 34; Beck, *CSCO* 270, 31–32; *CSCO* 271, 32f., a text to which even Antiochene theologians like Diodore could have subscribed; for reasons of authenticity see E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben: Ihr theologischer Lehrgehalt und ihr geschichtlicher Rahmen* (StAns 33; Rome: Herder, 1953), 93–95.

55 Hymn. de Nat. 8,2, *CSCO* 186, 59; 187, 51: "(both) natures he joined (*mzg*) like colors, and there was an image (*zalmā*): the God-man (*alah barnaš*).” See T. Bou Mansour in: *CCT* 2/3, 428.

56 A personal reminiscence: The first Syriac Consultation in the Syriac Dialogue, organized by Pro Oriente in 1994 June, 24–29, brought together participants from at least nine Syriac Churches (Chaldean, Syrian-Catholic, Maronite, Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Syrian Orthodox from Antioch and Malankara Orthodox from India, and Assyrian Church of the East), in other Consultations even 10 with the Mar Thoma Church. When the participants, at one occasion, were invited to start singing Syriac hymns from Ephrem or Narsai, all could join in. The participants realized their deep ties through these poets of the fourth and fifth century.

57 Cf. W. Hage, "Art. Jakob von Sarug," in *TRE* 16 (1987), 470–471. Jacob studied at the school of Edessa (470), was made *periodeutes* (περιοδευτής) in Ḥaurā in 502/503 and bishop of Baṭnān, the main place of Sarūg, in 519, less than one year after the beginning of the Chalcedonian restoration. Here, we give a summary according to the study of T. Bou Mansour, "The Christology of Jacob of Sarug," in T. Hainthaler, ed., *A. Grillmeier, The Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch from 451 to 600* (*CCT* 2/3; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 430–477.

valid beyond confessional borders (and are documented as well in the Western Latin tradition).

No doubt that Jacob opposes any kind of a Nestorian Christology, which sees the two natures as *hypostases* (and as Nestorians he took the Chalcedonians, too, as his correspondence with the monks of Mar Bassus revealed); he emphasizes the unicity of the hypostasis in Christ. His formula in the letters is: “the one nature that becomes a body” or “the one embodied nature”⁵⁸.

Because of Jacob’s insistence on the immutability of the Logos and his view of the incarnation, he was criticized as undervaluing the humanity of Christ. The new state of the Logos in the incarnation is explained by Jacob as ‘revelation’, ‘appearance’ with recourse to the respective biblical passages (1 Tim 3:16; 1 John 1:2; 3:5,8; Rom 9:5) according to the Peshitta. For Jacob, Nestorianism is so dangerous that he is hesitant to feature the human traits of the person of Christ alone without immediately emphasizing the divine aspect.⁵⁹

Jacob stresses the unity in Christ very much. In line with the early Syriac tradition, he appreciates the concept of the mediator (to be sure, only in his letters, in his *Mimre* this concept comes second)—but, just to mention, the concept of mediator (1 Tim 2:5) has a central place also in the Latin tradition. However, unlike the Latin tradition, Jacob states a becoming (of the Logos), whereby he wants to preserve the immutability of the Logos. He opts for a unity “out of two”. Repeatedly he is polemicizing against a prosopic union of the “Nestorians”, which, in his understanding, is the subsequent union of the Logos with the man Jesus, or against the idea of a “dwelling” of the Logos in the man. He also rejects the concept of conjunction or of the “clothing” in this context.

In the *Mimre*, Jacob speaks of the two births of the Son and of the title Emmanuel; but this title must not serve to exclude the Godhead and to maintain only his humanity. Often Jacob is tempted to exalt the Godhead at the cost of the humanity of the Son—as scholars thought. Abramowski, however, found that in this regard he is more indebted to the Antiochian thinking: The manner of speaking of the immutability [scl. of the divine nature] in the incarnation is the same as that of the Edessene Theodorians. Therefore, it seems that Jacob followed the explanation of the divine element of the Theodorians but left out their presentation of the human nature.

The late Luise Abramowski also found some other traces of Jacob’s Edessenian formation at the school of the Persians in Edessa during her studies on Narsai (not yet published). Among these traces, we can mention a rigid

58 Bou Mansour, *CCT* 2/3, 439–442, esp. 440, 442, and 461 (not in the *Mimre*), 467.

59 Bou Mansour, *CCT* 2/3, 448.

distinction between the Son's nature and his Incarnation, underlining the human element in Christ, the Christological use of *hypostasis* or *qnoma*; the descent by love and will; to reveal himself (*etglī*) and appear (*ethzi*); Christ as crucified King.

The concept "nature" is reserved in the Mimre nearly exclusively to the divine nature. The Son agrees to suffer with human beings, without his nature being attained by the passion. "Hypostasis" is identified with the divine nature; both terms are signifying the Godhead.

Biblical terminology and anti-Docetic expressions are characteristic also for the terminology in the Mimre. The will of the Son, to submit to the human affairs, is strongly accentuated. It is clear that Jacob does not pay homage to Docetism; this can be seen in statements like the one that the assumed body has soul and spirit and that it is able to suffer, especially in the mysteries of the life of Jesus. The Son truly became man and humbled himself to human proportions.

Repeatedly Jacob is polemicizing against "Nestorians" and Chalcedonians and any distribution of Christ's properties to both natures. "To divide" and "to distinguish" is for Jacob synonymous. The mediator is "out of two", but this fact does not allow again a distinction, and above all, the mystery of the Son's unicity is inscrutable.

With his strongly marked Alexandrian Christology of union, Jacob connects some elements of the Syriac tradition: the *docta ignorantia* of Ephrem, formulations like to become of the same kind etc. The clothing image is used in the Mimre, in the letters it is attacked.⁶⁰

Philoxenus of Mabbug († 523)

Philoxenus of Mabbug,⁶¹ likewise a disciple of the school of Edessa, never gave rise to doubts about his rejection of Chalcedon. The polemic against Nestorianism—Chalcedonians, too, are ranked as hidden Nestorians—is a constant theme in his whole work. The theology and Christology of Philoxenus

60 Philip M. Forness, *Preaching and Religious Debate: Jacob of Serugh and the Promotion of His Christology in the Roman Near East* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2016), published: *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East. A study of Jacob of Serugh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), argues that Jacob uses the pairing of miracles and sufferings—which is used also in Leo's Tome—in order to promote in his homilies the miaphysite position.

61 Here, we follow the results of the study by T. Bou Mansour, "The Christology of Philoxenus of Mabbug," in T. Hainthaler, A. Grillmeier, *CCT* 2/3, 478–544.

can be classified⁶² into two periods: first the period of his defense of the so-called Theopaschite addition to the Trishagion, and then his struggle against Chalcedon.

Against a doctrine of two sons—whether this was the doctrine of real opponents or whether this is only a hypothetical consequence of another Christology, is not very clear, but often it is the second case—Philoxenus emphasized the unity of the one incarnate subject. Kenosis and incarnation have to be ascribed to the will and not to divine nature. Divine nature and will are not in conflict with one another, since it is impossible that in God there is any opposition. It remains, however, inscrutable how one is related to the other. The incarnation took place—unlike to the other miracles—in the person of the God Logos by divine will.

The unity in the Trinity, and the unity in Christology—as he puts it: one nature and hypostasis—are different for Philoxenus. Despite the unity in the divine nature, Philoxenus can distinguish in the Trinity three *hypostases*. On the other hand, in Christology there is only one nature and one hypostasis for Philoxenus. De Halleux has brought out that Philoxenus used the concepts of nature and hypostasis in different ways in Trinity and in Christology. Therefore it is not the same concept of nature as in the doctrine of Trinity, when he speaks of one nature and one hypostasis in Christology. Philoxenus always understands the incarnate Logos as one hypostasis of the Trinitarian nature.

The formula “one of the Trinity was embodied” was chosen by Philoxenus against Nestorianism and Eutychianism. However, above all it is directed against Nestorianism to ensure that no addition to the Trinity comes into its being.

The characteristic terminology for Philoxenus is his concept of “becoming without change.” This needs some explanation. The best comparison for Philoxenus is the sacrament of baptism: a Christian remains human and corporeal, even though he becomes a son of God and filled with the Spirit. However, God’s becoming without change remains an absolute new mystery. The Logos came from the fullness, while we are filled in baptism. God’s becoming is a descent, while the baptism is an “ascendant movement.”

Against the diphysite idea of assumption, Philoxenus polemicizes unremittingly. For him, the becoming indicates the mystery itself while the assumption marks only one aspect of it (namely the origin). He argues that the diphysites distorted the assumption, and he underlines that not a man was assumed, but the human nature (i.e.: not an individual but the non-individualized nature).

62 See André de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog. Sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie* (Louvain: Impr. Oriental., 1963), 50.

The reality of the incarnation, of the body and soul of Christ, is fully preserved in his approach; Philoxenus defended this point especially in his books against Ḥabib. It was his first great theological writing composed during his exile (under the Patriarchate of Calandion, 482–84),⁶³ *De uno e sancta trinitate incorporato et passo* in 10 books, or *Memre* against Ḥabib. Maurice Brière began to edit this opus in 1920. It was only in 1982 that François Graffin could complete the edition. The campaign of the young Philoxenus in favor of the liturgical Theopaschite formula (perhaps by order of Peter the Fuller) under the Syriac monks on both sides of the Roman-Persian Limes in North-Mesopotamia summoned the counter-reaction of the East-Syriac “Theodorians.” The most important among them should have been Ḥabib,⁶⁴ a distinguished monk of a venerable monastery, who spoke Syriac like Philoxenus and originated from the Sassanid Persian Empire. In this discourse, Ḥabib attacked the dogmatic letter of Philoxenus to the monks. Philoxenus, in his turn, refuted the discourse of Ḥabib.

The dossier of these two opponents⁶⁵ presents, in words following André de Halleux, “two great Eastern Syriac theologians of the first post-Chalcedonian generation”⁶⁶ and is done in a polemic in which both are equal. Ḥabib qualified the statements of Philoxenus as Eutychian and Manichean, Arian and Apollinarian, or as propositions of the young Arian dialectician Eunomius. Conversely Philoxenus called Ḥabib a Manichean and Marcionite, and interpreted his statements as Nestorianism. Both theologians attribute to one another the teachings of Bardaisan.⁶⁷

63 Ibid., 238.

64 It is not sure whether this is his real name or simply an ironic address “my dear friend”, cf. A. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog*, 234 with n. 29.

65 Ibid., 227.

66 A. de Halleux, “Le mamlēā de ‘Ḥabbib’ contre Aksenāyā: Aspects textuels d’une polémique christologique dans l’Église syriacque de la première génération postchalcedonienne,” in *After Chalcedon* (OLA 18; Louvain: Peeters, 1985), 80: “deux grands théologiens syriaques orientaux de la première génération post-chalcedoniens.”

67 Among new research, we have to mention David A. Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); for a review see T. Hainthaler, *JThS* 68 (2017): 379–381. Musa Aktas composed a monograph, based on the three treatises on Trinity and Incarnation (often called “Sententiae”), with new Syriac edition and a German translation of this voluminous and demanding text: Musa Aktas, *Die Christologie des Philoxenus von Mabbug (450–523). Studien zu den drei Traktaten über die Trinität und die Menschwerdung des Gott Logos* (GOF.S 57; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2020).

Christology according to Severus of Antioch († 538)

In his volume 2/2 on the Church of Constantinople in the sixth century, Grillmeier put Severus of Antioch at the beginning as “the anti-Chalcedonian Pole,” and dealt with him together with his opponents in the first part (21–173). This simple fact underlines already the importance of Severus, who can be taken as church father of the anti-Chalcedonians. Zachhuber called Severus “probably the most important Greek speaking theologian at the turn from the fifth to the sixth century” and an “impeccable opponent of the council of Chalcedon.”⁶⁸

Severus did not write a Christological treatise, but his writings, even homilies, are often densely written expositions on Christology. Soon his writings became translated into Syriac and were widely used in the controversies of the sixth century and beyond. One example is the controversy between Probus and John Barbur with the Severan monks in Antioch in 596.⁶⁹ Forty-three quotations from Severus exist in the two books preserved of the debate—more than from Cyril of Alexandria—the two most frequently used patristic authorities.

Following my paper at the Salzburg Conference in February of 2018,⁷⁰ I would like to characterize Severus’ Christology as follows. Severus presents a clear Trinitarian terminology with distinction between *ousia* – *hypostasis*:

68 J. Zachhuber, “Grillmeiers Darstellung des 6. Jahrhunderts – Leistung und Grenzen,” in T. Hainthaler, Dirk Ansorge and Ansgar Wucherpfennig, eds., *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der einen Kirche. Christologie – Kirchen des Ostens – Ökumenische Dialoge* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2019) 409: “dem wahrscheinlich bedeutendsten griechisch-sprachigen Theologen an der Wende vom fünften zum sechsten Jahrhundert, ... diesem unversöhnlichen Gegner des Konzils von Chalcedon.”

69 See T. Hainthaler, “The Christological Controversy on Proba and John Barbur” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 56 (2004): 155–170, here 166–167: “Regarding Severus, there are 21 quotations in libellus VII, taken from *Contra impium Grammaticum* (against John the Grammmairian) II and III, *Philalethes*, *Oratio II ad Nephaliu*, first and third letter to Sergius the Grammmairian, letters to Maron and Eleusinius. In libellus VIII, we can find 22 citations from Severus taken from all three *Orationes Contra impium Grammaticum*, third letter to Sergius, *Philalethes*, letter to Eleusinius. In summary, we have 43 citations from Severus, which means Severus is used more than Cyril. It is striking that we have many quotations from the writings against John the Grammmairian, an increasing number in libellus VIII. We have also quotations from the controversy with the anti-Chalcedonian Sergius (the one with a leaning towards a Eutychian view), but those from the controversy with John are much more. This could be already an indication, that the monks felt their opponents arguing more like Chalcedonians than anti-Chalcedonians. The first citation from Sergius is in the middle of lib. VII, and in lib. VIII we have only once a citation from the Sergius correspondence.”

70 T. Hainthaler, *An Orientation to Severus of Antioch’s Christology* (in print). Cf. also T. Hainthaler, “Severus von Antiochien (gest. 538). Kirchenvater der Anti-Chalcedonier,” in Martin Tamcke, ed., *Profile gelebter Theologie im Orient. Sidney Harrison Griffith zum*

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three different *hypostases*, not mingled with each other, in one unique essence (*ousia*)... . We say that essence and *hypostasis* are concepts which indicate the existence of existing things. The essence brings to notice that the subject exists, and the *hypostasis* that it subsists ... (Hom. 125: PO 29, p. 234/235)... . The essence indicates a commonality (*gwnywt'*); the *hypostasis* a peculiarity (*dylhnywt'*) (p. 236/237)... . With regard to the Trinity the essence is the godhead, for the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; none of them is more God than the other on account of the identity and equality of the honour of the essence (*ousia*). With regard to the *hypostasis*, that of the Father, that of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is in each case another (p. 238/239).⁷¹

Severus' Christology as a whole is a Christology aimed at unity. "He is one without division and without mingling of the two natures, namely of divinity and humanity."⁷² He expressed himself repeatedly against the two-natures doctrine and against any duality. The term "two" has to be avoided at any cost. Because Chalcedon did not make "from two" its main formula, essentially "it renounced the possibility of hindering the division of Christ into two."⁷³ If the formula of "one Christ from two" is rejected, for him the duality of sons and of christoi is the outcome.⁷⁴

Severus struggled against the two-natures doctrine without compromise. Every duality has to be excluded since it is already taken as division or separation by Severus. At the same time, Severus held a clear anti-Docetic position; suffering and death on the cross were real, even necessary, because of soteriological reasons.

Severus used the body-soul-analogy—like many church fathers including Cyril of Alexandria—as an image showing how a single nature and hypostasis arises out of two.

We say that the human being, ours, which is composed from a soul and a body and which is in a single hypostasis (*qnwm'*), is a mortal, rational animal; still on the one side it is mortal through the body, on the other side rational through the soul; nevertheless it is still the whole animal which is called mortal and which as whole is characterized as rational; and the elements from which it is composed in a natural way are not mingled and it is not at all divided into two. It is also this way with the Emmanuel, because he is one from two natures, and one single

80. *Geburtstag* (GOF.S 55; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 51–64. For all details, cf. A. Grillmeier, *CCT 2/2* (1995), 28–175.

71. *CCT 2/2*, 71, n. 149.

72. Severus of Antioch, *Hom.* 14, 17, M. Brière, F. Graffin, eds., *Patrologia Orientalis* 38, Turnhout: Brepols, 1976, 410, 23–25. *CCT 2/2*, 133.

73. Grillmeier, *CCT 2/2*, 161; *Jesus d. Chr.* 2/2, 170.

74. *Ibid.*, n. 392.

hypostasis (*qnmw'*) and one single incarnate nature of the Logos, without in any way the elements having to be mingled, from which the ineffable unity comes to pass, and also, while one remains, without furnishing access to the duality from which the division arises. For he, who is really one, will never be two; and if he proceeds to become two, he has necessarily ceased to be one. (Hom 44: PO 36, p. 96–98)

According to Norman Russell, Severus “strengthens the image, making it more an exact description than an analogy.”⁷⁵ The weakness of this image was outlined by Maximos Confessor in the seventh century, but already by Justinian, as Meyendorff⁷⁶ explained, referring to Justinian’s *Confessio rectae fidei*:

Justinian perceives all the inconveniences of this image [scl. of the human individual, within whom the soul and the body, two distinct natures are united in one hypostasis] ...; he therefore states that the image may be used to describe the hypostatic unity of Christ but not that of its composite character, for the two natures of Christ are neither complementary, as the soul and body are, nor simultaneously created, since his uncreated divinity pre-existed the incarnation.

A consequence of the *mia-physis* formula is the one activity, the *mia energeia*, stressed by Severus in several contexts. Against John the Grammarian, eventually the first neo-Chalcedonian, Severus wrote: “There is only one single activity (*energeia*), only one single operative motion (*motus operativus*), as there is also only one single speaking of the incarnate Logos, be it that the actions and the words have been different.”⁷⁷

The God-human action and speech of Christ is conceived in such a way that everything is deduced by the divine Logos as nature principle. Every activity flows from the Logos, even when human activity is engaged.⁷⁸ Severus interpreted the phrase *καινή θεανδρική ἐνέργεια*⁷⁹ in Dionysius the Areopagite as a witness for the *mia energeia*. In the seventh century, Maximus Confessor

75 Norman Russell, “Cyril of Alexandria’s Mia-physis Formula in the Christological Debates of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries,” in Christine Chaillot, ed., *The Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Volos: Academy Publications, 2016), (94–112) 101–106, here 102.

76 John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian thought* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975), 82; with reference to Justinian’s *Confessio rectae fidei*: Schwartz, *Drei dogmat. Schriften Justinians*, p. 80–82.

77 J. Lebon, ed., *Severi Antiocheni Liber contra impium grammaticum* III, cap. 38 (CSCO 102; Louvain: Impr. Orientaliste Durbecq, 1952), 175,6–7; *Syr. IV* 6, 238,4–8. *CCT* 2/2, 163.

78 Cf. Grillmeier, *CCT* 2/2, 163, *Jesus d. Chr.* 2/2, 173.

79 Severus Ant., ep. 3 ad Johannem abbatem (CPG 7071,28); *Doctrina Patrum*, ed. Diekamp, Münster, 1907, 309 XXIV. Cf. *CCT* 2/2, 170.

criticized Severus' interpretation of the "new" energy as the "one" as not fitting,⁸⁰ for "it is not permitted to say that there is simply 'one' or a 'natural' energy common both to Christ's divinity and His flesh, since divinity and flesh are not identical in natural quality."⁸¹

In the context of the new divine human energy of Dionysius, Severus came also to the "one composite energy," *mia energeia synthetos*, and concluded a *mia physis (kai hypostasis) synthetos*.⁸² Later, Maximus Confessor states that the "theandric energy" is not ... that of a composite nature ... instead it is the energy that belongs most naturally to 'God made man' to Him who became perfectly incarnate."⁸³ Also, the weaknesses of this concept of *synthesis* are indicated by Maximus Confessor.⁸⁴ The concept violates the humanity and divinity of Christ.

Contrary to Leo's formulation '*agit enim utraque forma ...*' in his Tome, Severus wrote against John the Grammarian:

If he [= Leo] in spirit were to hold and confess the hypostatic union, he could not say that each of the two natures keeps its propriety (*proprietaem*) without detraction, but he would say, like Cyril, that the Logos now and then permitted the flesh to suffer what is proper to it and to operate according to the laws of its nature. Thus the Logos would bear that as its own which is of the flesh, and still not relinquish what he has according to his essence (*ousia*), also not the superiority to suffering and his highest nobility.⁸⁵

For sure, this is a different image of Christ to the one of Leo. Nevertheless, the context of such writings needs to be considered: while Leo wrote his Tome against Eutyches (and could write differently in other contexts), Severus wrote against a neo-Chalcedonian and wished to limit any autonomy of the human nature in Christ.

80 Maximus Confessor, "Ambiguum 5, 22–26" in Nicholas Constas, *On difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 52–59.

81 Ibid., 53, 55.

82 See Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien*, 319–326, and Grillmeier, *CCT 2/2*, 336–338. For the background and origin of *synthesis* see Grillmeier, *CCT 2/2*, 458–461.

83 Maximus Confessor, *Amb. 5, 21, 53*.

84 See Juan-Miguel Garrigues, "La personne composée du Christ d'après saint Maxime le Confesseur", *Revue Thomiste* 74 (1974): 181–204, 189–196. On the problems of the Severan *mia physis synthetos* cf. Maximus Confessor, *Ep. 15*, PG 91, 573A; he defended the necessity of the Chalcedonian distinction.

85 Severus Ant., *Severi Antiocheni Liber contra impium grammaticum* III, cap. 29, 79,18–25. Cf. Grillmeier, *CCT 2/2*, 162.

Severus criticized other fathers and even his great master (of the dogmas), Cyril of Alexandria, when he found a language of two natures. Then, for Severus, a purification of language was needed.⁸⁶

Severus alone among the great anti-Chalcedonian fathers like Timothy Aelurus and Philoxenus developed and formulated the doctrine of the miaphysites regarding this question of the properties in Christology.⁸⁷ He did it while relying on Cyril and was forced to treat this question above all because of his controversy with Sergius the Grammarian.⁸⁸

Perspective on the Development in the Later Sixth Century

Daniel of Şalah's voluminous 'Great Commentary on the Psalms'⁸⁹ dated by Daniel himself to 542 is not yet edited, but David Taylor gives some insights in several articles. Concerning the Christology of Daniel, Taylor gives examples that Daniel emphasized the real humanity of the incarnate Word. "Daniel cannot resist telling us everything he knows about the growth of the foetus, even his emphasis on the caul, or amniotic membrane, which seems entirely irrelevant in this context. But you could not ask for a more explicit passage to underline the real humanity of the incarnate Word."⁹⁰

The Christological writings of the philosopher and theologian John Philoponus (c. 490–c. 575) in Alexandria are mainly preserved in Syriac. Although originally written in Greek, only some Greek fragments in John of Damascus survived. Based on the manuscript tradition, Lang thinks that he was in Syriac "occasionally read even in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries."⁹¹

The Christology of Philoponus was centered on the formula of the *mia physis synthetos*: "he repeats it almost like a refrain again and again in his *Diaetetes*. Most of the deliberations serve to demonstrate the philosophical basis of this

86 See Grillmeier, *CCT* 2/2, 72–79, 174.

87 Joseph Lebon, "La christologie du monophysisme syrien," in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon I*, 534–576; cf. controversy on Proba and John Barbur and my analyses (above note 30).

88 On the controversy with Sergius, cf. Ian R. Torrance, *Christology after Chalcedon. Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1988); Grillmeier, *CCT* 2/2, 111–128.

89 David Taylor, "West Syrian Christology in the Sixth century. The Psalm Commentary of Daniel of Şalah," in T. Hainthaler, D. Ansorge and A. Wucherpfennig, eds., *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der einen Kirche*, 251–268, here 252: "divided into three volumes and contains more than 1200 manuscript pages."

90 Taylor, "West Syrian Christology in the Sixth century," 263–264.

91 Uwe Michael Lang, *John Philoponus and the controversies over Chalcedon in the sixth century. A study and translation of the Arbiter* (SSL 47; Louvain: Peeters, 2001), 15–20, here 20.

formula and its rooting in tradition.”⁹² I may refer to my “final evaluation”⁹³ and will highlight a few points.

In his Christology, Philoponus starts from the Severan *mia-physis* doctrine, which he received as tradition, and it is for him a given presupposition. He did not use much the *mia-physis* formula in his main Christological writing, the *Diaetetes*, yet the formula is a witness for him that a union of natures or *hypostases* has taken place. Philoponus gave a new reasoning for the *mia energeia*.

For Philoponus the synonymy of “nature” and “hypostasis”⁹⁴ is substantiated with Aristotelian conceptuality. He understands nature as φύσις μερική (particular nature) and hypostasis as an individual (ἄτομον) that realizes the corresponding φύσις κοινή through the acquisition of individualizing characteristics. However, the Philoponian approach consolidated also the Tritheist party and helped another schism among the anti-Chalcedonians regarding the resurrected body of Christ.

Another debate among anti-Chalcedonians in Alexandria with the Severan deacon Themistius started in the time of Timothy of Alexandria (517–535) and reached Constantinople when Theodosius of Alexandria was exiled there. The texts of the controversy are from the period after Severus. Many of them written in Greek survived only in Syriac, which implies that the controversy had a certain impact in the Syriac-speaking world. Themistius ascribed ignorance to Christ in his humanity. He started from an anti-Julianist position: since Christ’s humanity was consubstantial to us and subject to natural needs and passions, consequently it is subject also to human ignorance. In the words of Pauline Allen:⁹⁵ “The humanity of Christ is fully consubstantial with ours—it is also subject to suffering and death. Christ suffered as we suffer, and took upon himself all our natural and blameless passions. It was, however, in complete freedom that he permitted his humanity to undergo suffering.” In his theological reflection, Themistius remained within the *mia-physis* doctrine. It was especially Theodosius who refuted Themistius and stated that it is not possible after the union in Christ to speak of ignorance in Christ.⁹⁶

92 T. Hainthaler, “John Philoponus, Philosopher and Theologian in Alexandria,” in *CCT* 2/4, 107–146, here 112.

93 *Ibid.*, 142–146.

94 *Ibid.*, 142.

95 A. Van Roey and P. Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 302, summarizing texts of the *Documenta monophysita*.

96 For these debates, cf. T. Hainthaler, “Theological Doctrines and Debates within Syriac Christianity,” 377–390.

Final Remarks

This overview, a rather rough sketch, may nevertheless suggest something of the richness of the theological reflection in the Syrian tradition. The reliefs of the individual authors can only be understood by keeping in mind their respective interlocutors or opponents and contrasting them with the Christological development in the East Syrian tradition.

Recently, more interest in the philosophical dimension of the miaphysite Christology emerged. Thus, Johannes Zachhuber⁹⁷ tried to compare the miaphysitism of Severus and John Philoponus with the approach of the Cappadocians (which had its ambiguities⁹⁸), and to investigate the notion of individuality and personality. Another recent field of research is the study of the term *differentia* in Philoponus' approach and Christology, and this put in dialogue with Maximus Confessor.⁹⁹

Important steps were made by the heads of the Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch in signing the Common Declarations of 1971 and 1984. In their 1971 Declaration,¹⁰⁰ one of the earliest Christological declarations,¹⁰¹ Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Yacoub III recognized a "deep spiritual communion" already existing "between their Churches." This communion is based on a number of shared elements: the celebration of the sacraments, the common profession of the faith [in the Lord

97 Johannes Zachhuber, "Personhood in Miaphysitism: Severus of Antioch and John Philoponus," in Alexis Torrance and Symeon Paschalidis, eds., *Personhood in the Byzantine Christian Tradition: Early, Medieval, and Modern Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2018), 29–43.

98 Cf. already noted in Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* I, 768.

99 Sebastian Mateiescu, "John Philoponus and the Interpretation of the Differentia in the Aftermath of Chalcedon," in Mikonja Knežević, ed., *Aristotle in Byzantium* (Alhambra, California: St. Sebastian Orthodox Press; Podgorica: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2020), 125–166; Christophe Erismann, "John Philoponus on Individuality and Particularity," in Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber, eds., *Individuality in Late Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 143–160. Now Sebastian Mateiescu, "Providence as Judgment in Maximus the Confessor. Some Christological Implications," in T. Hainthaler et al., eds., *Pronoia. The Providence of God in East and West* (2017) (Pro Oriente 42; Wiener Patristische Tagungen VIII; Innsbruck, Wien: Tyrolia, 2019), 351–364.

100 Joint Declaration Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Mar Ignatius Yacoub III, Rome, 27 October 1971. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1971/october/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19711027_dichiarazione-comune.html (last accessed 01 July 2022).

101 T. Hainthaler, "Christological dialogues with the Oriental Churches. A survey," in Luca Ferracci, ed., *Toward a History of the Desire for Christian Unity. Preliminary Research Papers. Proceedings of the International Conference at the Monastery of Bose (November 2014)* (Wien, Zürich: LIT, 2015), 243–254, esp. 246.

Jesus Christ, the Word of God, made man for the salvation of humankind], the apostolic traditions, the great fathers and doctors of the Church [including St. Cyril of Alexandria] who are their common teachers of faith. Both church leaders agree that there is “no difference in the faith” in the incarnation despite the “different theological expressions” of this faith.

An even greater step was made in 1984 between Pope John Paul II and Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka Iwas. They called each other “sister Churches” (nrs. 1 and 9). They wished to “to widen the horizon of their brotherhood,” affirmed this “deep spiritual communion” already uniting them and made an effort to find “a wholly common ecclesial life” (2). They declared, “In words and life, we confess the true doctrine concerning Christ our Lord, notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon” (3). “Solemnly” they reaffirmed their “profession of common faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (4).

The “common profession of faith” mentioned in 1971 is now clarified in 1984; it is “the Nicene Creed” of 325. In addition, the declaration specified that the later differences in history do not “affect or touch the substance of their faith” (3). The reason is that “these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter.” Therefore, they see “no real basis for the sad divisions and schisms” which arose concerning the doctrine of Incarnation (3). The subsequent Christological statement follows surprisingly clear the Christological declaration of 1973 between the Catholic and Coptic Orthodox Church, also signed by the church leaders (Pope Paul VI, Pope Shenouda).¹⁰² The Christological and hermeneutic explanation of the official Coptic-Orthodox—Catholic dialogue commission in Vienna from 1976¹⁰³ was not used in 1984.

102 Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and of the Pope of Alexandria Shenouda III, May 10, 1973, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1973/may/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19730510_dichiarazione-comune.html (last accessed 01 July 2022). For the details see T. Hainthaler, “Die Gemeinsame Erklärung vom 23. Juni 1984. Theologische Aussage und ökumenische Bedeutung,” in Johannes Oeldemann, ed., *Gemeinsamer Glaube und pastorale Zusammenarbeit. 25 Jahre Weggemeinschaft zwischen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche* (Epiphania Egredia 6; Basel: Reinhardt, Friedrich, 2011), 24–51. – Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, June 23, 1984, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1984/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19840623_jp-ii-zakka-i.html (last access 29 July 2022).

103 In this “Christological Declaration” (29 August 1976) in ISPCU 76 (1991/I), 21, it is explained by both parties: “When the Orthodox part rejects all duality in Jesus Christ, it is intended to say that every act of Jesus Christ is in fact the act of God the Word incarnate and not

In view of the sacramental life shared in the two churches, the two heads envisaged practical steps on this basis: to collaborate in pastoral care and theological education. They authorized the faithful to receive the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick “from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches, when they need them,” that is, in cases where it is materially or morally impossible for the faithful to find access to a priest of their own Church. In addition, Pope and Patriarch encouraged the Churches “to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education” (9).

In fact, this Declaration led to a number of initiatives in this regard, which, nevertheless, could be continued and enlarged! There is still a fruitful field of theological work yet to make known the rich heritage of Syriac Christology. We must further develop it and help it to interact with the results of modern theological research and ecumenical dialogues. This will shed new light also to the Western theological tradition.

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that some of His acts be attributed to His Divinity alone as it might seem. When the Catholics confess their faith in Jesus Christ, then they do not deny what the Orthodox say, but they want to emphasize that in Him are preserved all the properties of the Divinity as well as all the properties of the Humanity, a fact which the Orthodox profess incessantly. When the Orthodox confess that Divinity and Humanity of Our Lord are united in one nature, they take “nature”, not as a pure and simple nature, but rather as one composite nature, wherein the Divinity and Humanity are united inseparately and unconfusedly. And when Catholics confess Jesus Christ as one in two natures, they do not separate the Divinity from the Humanity, not even for the twinkling of an eye, but they rather try to avoid mingling, commixtion, confusion or alteration.” See T. Hainthaler, “Christological Declarations with Oriental Churches,” in Geoffrey D. Dunn and Wendy Meyer, eds., *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium. Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 426–456, esp. 431–433.

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Ecumenical Dialogue – a Challenge of Identity?

Reflections on the Impact of Theological Dialogues and Interchurch Encounters on the Relationship between the Syriac Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches

Johannes Oeldemann

I would like to start my reflections on the interrelationship between identity and reform in Syriac Christianity by recalling that both the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church derive their Christian identities from Apostolic times. Despite constant endeavours of both churches to keep this Apostolic tradition alive, a scholarly approach to church history reveals that it is difficult to consider the identity of our respective churches as unchanging. It is quite obvious that the identities of different Christian communities have changed throughout history. Such changes appear to contradict the belief that the church of the twenty-first century is essentially the same as the church in the third century. But our identity as Christians is preserved despite changing expressions of Christian life and faith. Reforms in church life, in liturgy, and even in dogmatic formulations are nothing new in the course of history and are a continuous process. Therefore, identity and reform are not contradictory terms but complementary elements of a living tradition.

In this paper, I will reflect on the impact of ecumenical dialogue on the identity of the Syriac Orthodox Church and its relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. As ecumenical dialogues comprise more than theological conversations, I will begin with the significance of theological dialogues and end with reflections on the impact of interchurch encounters between the clergy and the faithful.

The Impact of Theological Dialogues

Theological dialogues between Syriac Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians mostly took place in the context of the family of Oriental Orthodox churches when representatives of both churches met on unofficial and official levels. The theological conversations started with unofficial consultations organized by the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna in the 1970s and

'80s.¹ These conversations prepared the ground for the official dialogue, starting only 18 years ago, in 2004. In the meantime, a series of "common declarations" between popes and patriarchs affirmed some points of consensus, especially regarding Christology which was the main point of contention in the fifth century.² They declared officially that those differences which have separated the churches for centuries are no longer church dividing. Such declarations could be a profound challenge to the identity of churches shaped by age-long traditions. But obviously they were not. I will share some considerations about the conditions which made this rapprochement between our churches possible.

There are different aspects which played an important role in this process. The first important aspect is the fraternal atmosphere in the Vienna consultations. Their unofficial nature made it possible for Oriental Orthodox theologians to confer frankly with their Roman Catholic colleagues. In this open-minded atmosphere, it was possible to share important insights from recent historical and theological research and also to deepen mutual understanding through personal encounters. The Vienna consultations focused on the Christological disputes between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians. The first consultation in September 1971 had already arrived at a Christological consensus that was later called the "Vienna Christological Formula". This formula is framed by an affirmation of the Holy Scripture, the Apostolic tradition, and the dogmatic decisions of the first three Ecumenical Councils as the common basis of our faith. Based upon this common tradition, the Christological Formula underlines:

We believe that our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is God the Son Incarnate; perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity. His divinity was not separated from his humanity for a single moment, not for the twinkling of an eye. His humanity is one with his divinity without commixtion, without confusion, without division, without separation. We in our common faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ, regard this mystery inexhaustible and ineffable and for the human mind never fully comprehensible or expressible.³

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- 1 Cf. Dietmar W. Winkler, "Ökumene zwischen Stolper- und Meilensteinen: Der Dialog von PRO ORIENTE mit den orientalisch-orthodoxen Kirchen," in J. Marte and R. Prokschi, eds., *Denkwerkstatt PRO ORIENTE: Erfolgsgeschichte eines Ost-West-Dialogs (1964–2014)* (Innsbruck/Wien: Tyrolia, 2014), 100–123.
 - 2 Cf. Peter Hofrichter and Johann Marte, eds., *Documents on Unity in Faith between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church* (Innsbruck/Wien: Tyrolia, 2013), 21–64.
 - 3 "Communiqué of the First Vienna Consultation," *Wort und Wahrheit*, Suppl. no. 1 (1972): 182; reprinted in Hofrichter and Marte, *Documents on Unity in Faith between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church*, 13–16, here 13.

This formula contains the essential elements of the Christological faith of both traditions but avoids the disputed terms of the Chalcedonian definition like *physis*, *hypostasis*, and *prosopon*. This observation leads to the second important aspect which enabled the rapprochement at the Vienna consultations, namely, the language. The participants' commitment to a common hermeneutics of language was necessary to overcome formerly irreconcilable antagonisms. Although dogmas are binding doctrinal statements of the church, they are also historically conditioned reactions to specific theological challenges in a concrete context and in a given language. Therefore, we must distinguish between the formula of a dogma (what is said) and the statement intended (what is meant). Dogmatic formulations are limited both formally and in content because they are not and can never be an exhaustive expression of what they witness to.

The Vienna Christological Formula is an excellent example of how to deal carefully with dogmatic formulations. It is often argued that the formula uses a new language to express our common faith in Christ. Dietmar Winkler, a Roman Catholic theologian engaged in dialogue with the churches of the Syriac tradition for many years, proved in his studies that the language of the Vienna Christological Formula is not a new one but, on the contrary, an "old" one embedded in the tradition.⁴ The first sentence refers to the Formula of Union of 433. The second sentence takes elements from the Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil and the "Life of Dioscorus", a source from the sixth century which is preserved only in Syriac. And the famous four adverbs of the Chalcedonian definition in the third sentence are also found in the letters of Cyril of Alexandria; thus, they could be regarded as part of our common tradition, too. Indeed, "it would be problematic to use a totally new language and loose the link to tradition".⁵ But the Vienna Christological Formula succeeded in combining traditional expressions of faith in a new synthesis describing the common faith of both traditions. It "reveals how much the Churches preserved in common, despite the theological stereotypes and accusations prevalent in the post-Chalcedonian struggles".⁶

Only a few weeks later the head of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III, made a visit to Rome and signed a common declaration with Pope Paul VI underlining that "there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really

4 Cf. Dietmar Winkler, "Growing Consensus. The dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches," *Ortodoksia [Finland]*, 53 (2013): 84–112, here 87.

5 Theresia Hainthaler, "Christological Declarations with Oriental Churches," in Geoffrey D. Dunn and Wendy Meyer, eds., *Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium. Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 426–453, here 447.

6 Winkler, "Growing Consensus," 88.

man, even if over centuries difficulties have arisen out of different theological expressions by which the faith was expressed".⁷ This common declaration was a pioneering statement opening the way to deeper relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church. As a first result of the unofficial Pro Oriente consultation, it encouraged similar declarations of the Roman popes with heads of other Oriental Orthodox churches.

The second Vienna consultation in 1973 expressed quite clearly the necessity of a common hermeneutical approach to the dogmatic formulations of our respective traditions:

We recognize the limits of every philosophical and theological attempt to grasp the mystery in concept or express it in words. [...] We saw that what appears to be the right formulation can be wrongly understood, and also how even behind an apparently wrong formulation there can be a right understanding.⁸

This quotation underlines that every human expression is always preliminary and needs further interpretation.

This leads to a third important aspect concerning theological dialogues: the methodology. It is not only necessary to explain to each other how we understand certain formulations of our respective traditions, but also to overcome former misunderstandings. This is important because both churches involved in ecumenical dialogue usually want to keep their identity. Thus, it is necessary to explain why certain terms and convictions which were once regarded as divisive are no longer contentious. A methodology that strives toward this goal is the method of "differentiating consensus."⁹ This methodology was adopted by the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, especially in connection with the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" signed by representatives of the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999.¹⁰

7 "Common Declaration of H. H. Paul VI and H. H. Ignatius Yacoub III, 27 October 1971," in Hofrichter and Marte, *Documents on Unity in Faith*, 23–24, here 23.

8 "Communiqué of the Second Vienna Consultation," *Wort und Wahrheit*, Suppl. no. 2 (1974): 175.

9 Cf. Peter De Mey, "Die Hermeneutik des differenzierten/differenzierenden Konsensus: Einmaliges Zugeständnis oder breit einsetzbare ökumenische Methode für die römisch-katholische Kirche?" in André Birmelé and Wolfgang Thönissen, eds., *Auf dem Weg zur Gemeinschaft: 50 Jahre internationaler evangelisch-lutherisch/römisch-katholischer Dialog. Theodor Dieter zum 65. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018), 385–403.

10 Cf. Pieter De Witte, *Doctrine, Dynamic and Difference: To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification* (Ecclesiological investigations; London: T&T Clark, 2012).

When I studied the documents of the official dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, I recognized that the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue was not the first one to use this methodology. Though not explicitly reflecting it, the members of the Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox Commission already in the 1980s employed the principles of “differentiating consensus”. Let me illustrate this by quoting from the First Agreed Statement of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, signed in 1989 in the Anba Bishoy Monastery in Egypt. It refers to the four adverbs of the Chalcedonian definition:

The four adverbs used to qualify the mystery of the hypostatic union belong to our common tradition—without commingling (or confusion), without change, without separation and without division. Those among us who speak of two natures in Christ do not thereby deny their inseparable, indivisible union; those among us who speak of one united divine-human nature in Christ do not thereby deny the continuing dynamic presence in Christ of the divine and the human, without change, without confusion.¹¹

This paragraph is important from a methodological point of view because it addresses widespread mutual misunderstandings by explaining that the doctrine of one church does not necessarily denote what the other church assumes: The doctrine of two natures does not deny their union, while the doctrine of one nature does not deny that Jesus Christ is true God and true Man simultaneously. It is useful for both traditions to clarify their own terminology and to explain to each other what it stands for and what it does not connote. A common interpretation of dogmatic terms is necessary to find a common language. It avoids misinterpretation and implies an acceptance of the position of the dialogue partner. Thus, it will be possible to overcome the mutual condemnations of the past.

The different priorities of the respective teachings do not destroy the common faith in Jesus Christ, but could be seen as “salutary warnings” against a certain one-sidedness as the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” expressed it. “You can learn from the arguments and the objections of your partner in the dialogue where there is a—perhaps hidden, or not realized—danger in your own tradition.”¹² Thus, the dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches already employed a

11 “Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, First Agreed Statement (1989),” in Hofrichter and Marte, *Documents on Unity in Faith*, 91–96, here 94.

12 Hainthaler, “Christological Declarations with Oriental Churches,” 433.

“differentiating consensus” without reflecting its methodology on an epistemological level.

Briefly, a final and fourth aspect important for theological dialogues should be mentioned: the question of reception. Results of unofficial consultations, like documents published by official dialogue commissions, are only preliminary agreements until they are “received” by the churches. Signing a common declaration is only the first step in the process of reception. From a Roman Catholic point of view, the pope’s signature might be sufficient to make the consensus “official”. Yet from an Orthodox point of view, it is necessary that the respective Holy Synods agree upon the results, too. In addition, the common understanding expressed in agreed statements must be incorporated into the teaching, the self-understanding, and the practice of both churches, including catechesis and liturgy. Right at this point church identity is affected. And therefore, the process of reception is an important, although often unattended aspect of ecumenical dialogues.

In this connection, I should mention another important initiative of the Pro Oriente Foundation: the so called “Syriac dialogue” which started in 1994. This dialogue includes all churches of the Syriac tradition: the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Oriental Catholic Churches of Syriac origin. Leading scholars like Sebastian Brock and Luise Abramowski supported this unofficial dialogue, comprising six consultations between 1994 and 2004.¹³ After an interruption due to the start of the official dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches, it was resumed as “Forum Syriacum” in 2006 which also developed scientific conferences called “Colloquium Syriacum.”¹⁴ These are important places of encounter for theologians from different churches of the Syriac tradition and contribute significantly to a deepening of mutual understanding. But mutual understanding between bishops and theologians alone will not reestablish communion between our churches. The process of

13 Syriac Dialogue, vol. 1–6, Vienna 1994–2004. PDF-files of these documentary volumes are available online: <https://www.pro-oriente.at/?site=st20050118185248> (last accessed 01 July 2022). For a preliminary evaluation cf. Dietmar W. Winkler, “Dogmatic and Historical Results of the First Three PRO ORIENTE Syriac Consultations,” in Johann Marte and Gerhard Wilflinger, eds., *Syriac Dialogue: Fourth Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 2001), 121–137.

14 Series: Pro Oriente Studies in Syriac Tradition, vol. 1–4 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012–2021); cf. Dietmar W. Winkler, “Ökumenischer Fortschritt, theologisch-historische Studien und politische Realität. Zur Arbeit mit den Kirchen syrischer Tradition,” in Johann Marte and Rudolf Prokschi, eds., *Denkwerkstatt PRO ORIENTE. Erfolgsgeschichte eines Ost-West-Dialogs (1964–2014)* (Innsbruck, Wien: Tyrolia, 2014), 145–169.

reception should include the faithful as well. I will focus on this important aspect in the second part of my paper.

The Impact of Interchurch Encounters

Ecumenical dialogue is promoted not only by theological conversations, but also by interchurch encounters. The migration of Syriac Christians into Western Europe—especially to Germany and Sweden—increased interactions between Catholic and Syriac Orthodox Christians. Military conflicts between Turks and Kurds in the Southeast of Turkey in the 1970s forced many Syriac Christians to leave their homeland in Tur Abdin. The second declaration between a Roman pope and a head of the Syriac Orthodox Church, signed in June 1984 by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, should be interpreted in this context. It opened the way for collaboration between both churches in pastoral care and sacramental life.

The declaration of 1984 is the most extended and substantial agreement of the Roman Catholic Church with an Oriental Orthodox Church. The document reaffirms the doctrinal agreement on Christology and underlines a common understanding of sacramental life, including the Holy Eucharist. Although concelebration of the liturgy is not yet possible, the declaration opens up the possibility of receiving the Eucharist in the other church in case of pastoral need. The declaration explains this possibility:

It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own church materially or morally impossible. Anxious to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister churches, when they need them.¹⁵

It seems necessary to interpret the meaning of this paragraph. First of all, I should mention the context. Immediately preceding this paragraph it is mentioned that a common celebration of the Eucharist “supposes a complete identity of faith” which “does not yet exist between us”. Immediately following this paragraph, it is underlined “that we must still do all in our power to achieve full

15 “John Paul II and Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Common Declaration: Vatican, 23 June 1984,” in Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch, eds., *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998* (Geneva: Eerdmans Pub Co 2000), 691–693, here 692; cf. also in Hofrichter and Marte, *Documents on Unity in Faith*, 37–38.

visible communion". Therefore, the provisions are clearly marked as rules for an intermediate period, based upon the conviction that the Roman Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church recognize one another as "sister churches". The term is used here for the first time in a common declaration of a Roman pontiff and a Syriac Orthodox patriarch.

For the "spiritual benefit" of the faithful, it is permitted to receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick from a priest who is officially recognized and not affected by canonical penalties (that is the meaning of "lawful"). Why these three sacraments and not the others? Penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick are sacraments which every faithful may receive a number of times; the others: baptism, confirmation, matrimony, and holy orders only once during life. Sacraments received only once during a lifetime should necessarily be received in one's own church. The others we may also receive in sister churches in exceptional cases.

What are these exceptional cases? The paragraph mentions the situation where it is "materially or morally impossible" to access a priest of one's own church. "Materially impossible" indicates situations where a priest is inaccessible due to far distance, while "morally impossible" denotes serious obstacles to approaching a priest for reasons of conscience. This could include an employee of a priest or bishop concerning the sacrament of penance or family obligations in mixed marriages, e.g. in celebrations that are relevant for the whole family like baptism, marriages, or funerals.

The partial communion in sacramental life facilitated by the 1984 Common Declaration was appreciated by the majority of theologians, but also raised some questions. In his paper during a symposium in the Syriac Orthodox monastery in Warburg on the 25th anniversary of the Common Declaration in 2009, Aho Shemunkasho addressed pastoral experiences, critiques, and perspectives on the declaration. He emphasized that the agreement already presupposes "mutual appreciation and esteem, respect and recognition."¹⁶ Not theological debates, but the spiritual needs of the faithful are the primary focus of this agreement.

On the other hand, Aho Shemunkasho mentioned that speaking about a partial communion is theologically controversial: "How can it be theologically explained that someone is permitted to receive Eucharist who does not

16 Aho Shemunkasho, "Die Gemeinsame Erklärung vom 23. Juni 1984. Pastorale Erfahrungen, Kritik und Perspektiven," in Johannes Oeldemann, ed., *Gemeinsamer Glaube und pastorale Zusammenarbeit. 25 Jahre Weggemeinschaft zwischen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2011), 52–83, here 60.

belong to the communion of the church? What is he or she: a guest, a visitor, a stranger?"¹⁷ Another critical aspect which he mentions is participation in the Eucharist without appropriate preparation or receiving Holy Communion only in one species rather than in two. These examples show that there are still open questions regarding liturgical and ecclesiological implications of such a limited *communicatio in sacris*.

Nevertheless, the declaration of 1984 inaugurated a closer collaboration between Roman Catholic and Syriac Orthodox parishes and encouraged personal encounters between Catholic and Syriac faithful. Children from Syriac Orthodox families participated in Catholic catechesis preparing for the first communion and sometimes, as I know from my own parish, Syriac Orthodox children engaged as altar servers in Catholic parishes—especially the girls who are not permitted to do that in their Orthodox parishes. Of course, this was not the intention of the 1984 Agreed Statement and one may question the legitimacy of this practice. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that this agreement has contributed positively to interchurch encounters between the faithful and deepened mutual understanding.

Before concluding, I will mention another remarkable document highlighting the importance of interchurch encounters at a regional level. It pertains not to the Catholic—Oriental Orthodox dialogue but to the Orthodox—Oriental Orthodox dialogue. In November 1991, Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and Patriarch Ignatios IV of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch signed a "Synodal and Patriarchal Letter." The letter outlined quite a broad field of collaboration between the two churches of the Antiochian tradition. It spoke about the common heritage of the two churches "within the Holy See of Antioch" and underlined "that we belong to one faith even though history had manifested our division more than the aspects of our unity."¹⁸ In conclusion, the patriarchal letter informed the faithful about a number of decisions taken by the Holy Synods of both churches regarding interchurch relationships. I will quote only three of the 14 points which aim at a closer collaboration on all levels of church life, namely those concerning liturgical life:

17 Ibid., 69.

18 "Patriarch Ignatios IV and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka Iwas, To All Our Children, Protected by God: A Synodal and Patriarchal Letter of the Holy See of Antioch. Damascus, Syria, 12 November 1991," in Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best and Lorelei F. Fuchs, eds., *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005* (Geneva: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 2–3, here 2.

In localities where there is only one priest, from either church, he will celebrate services for the faithful of both churches, including the divine liturgy, pastoral duties and holy matrimony. He will keep an independent record for each church and transmit that of the sister church to its authorities. If two priests of the two churches happen to be in a locality where there is only one church, they take turns in making use of its facilities. [...] Godfathers, godmothers (in baptism) and witnesses in holy matrimony can be chosen from the members of the sister church.¹⁹

Openness to mutual support in pastoral care for the faithful and readiness to share church properties in places where communities of both churches reside are noteworthy elements of this agreement. This collaboration is not restricted to the clergy but includes the faithful who may serve as witnesses during holy baptism and matrimony. Thus, the guidelines of 1991 strengthened the communion between the two churches emerging from the Antiochian tradition. They are an example of how interchurch encounters help to rediscover one's own identity because they contribute to the preservation of their "authentic Oriental heritage whereby the one Antiochian church benefits from its sister church and is enriched in its traditions, literature and holy rituals".²⁰ Interchurch encounters, therefore, are just as important as the development of ecumenical relations in theological dialogues.

Conclusion

Finally, I will summarize the most important results of my reflections on the impact of ecumenical dialogue on the relationship between the Syriac Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. The theological dialogues led to a rediscovery of the common roots of our respective traditions. "Little by little a new awareness developed, leading gradually to the discovery that the various traditions were in fact trying to express the same faith with different and sometimes apparently contradictory concepts and expressions."²¹ The consultations' fraternal atmosphere, a careful hermeneutical approach to the dogmatic formulations of both traditions, the methodology of the "differentiating consensus", and the reception of the results by the church leaders enabled a rapprochement which for centuries seemed impossible.

19 Ibid., 3.

20 Ibid., 2.

21 Winkler, "Growing Consensus," 105.

In my paper, I tackled only the Christological question. Of course, this must be validated for other issues like ecclesiology or sacramental theology as well. From my point of view, the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches is progressing toward substantial agreement on these questions as well. Their first two documents on “Nature, Constitution, and Mission of the Church”²² (2009) and on “The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion today”²³ (2015) reveal extensive convergences in the field of ecclesiology.

What remains to be done to improve our relations? Notwithstanding a number of bilateral Christological declarations signed by the heads of particular Oriental Orthodox Churches and the respective Roman popes, there is still no common Christological declaration of the Roman Catholic Church with the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches. Although, from a Catholic point of view, the orthodoxy of the Christological faith of the Oriental Orthodox Churches is recognized by the signature of the pope under the respective common declarations, a Christological agreement with the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches would confirm mutual acceptance.

Furthermore, interchurch encounters between the clergy at the diocesan level and between the faithful at the parish level will help to deepen our mutual understanding. To advance in this direction, cooperation in theological education and priestly formation is both useful and necessary. Face-to-face encounters will help to overcome preconceived opinions and outdated prejudices. They will reveal not only the treasures of other traditions, but also the riches of our own tradition. Catholics could learn from the Syriac Orthodox tradition how to preserve the spiritual heritage of one’s own tradition, for example, by introducing the younger generation to the liturgical prayers and hymns in Old Aramaic. Furthermore, Catholics could learn how to support a vivid parish

22 “International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Nature, Constitution and Mission of the Church,” in Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, ed., *Information Service*, No. 131 (2009/I–II), <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese1.html> (last accessed 12 June 2022), 14–22; reprinted in Hofrichter and Marte, *Documents on Unity in Faith*, 65–89.

23 “International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches: The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion today,” <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-orientali/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese.html> (last accessed 12 June 2022).

life by combining liturgical worship with a subsequent common meal which keeps alive the Apostolic tradition of sharing an “agape” after celebrating the Eucharist.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that theological dialogues and inter-church encounters can indeed challenge our identity, but they do not necessarily lead to an estrangement from our respective traditions. On the contrary, they help us to rediscover our own heritage, can enrich our traditions, and in this way contribute to deepening our identity which is rooted in our witness to Jesus Christ. A common witness of our churches is the main challenge of today in a postmodern and multicultural society. Ecumenical dialogue, therefore, can help us to face this challenge and to reform our identity in a fruitful and innovative way.

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II. COMPARATIVE PART

In Dialogue with Judaism and Islam

Jakob von Sarug im Spannungsfeld des interreligiösen Gesprächs

Cornelia Horn

Einführung

Dieser Artikel bemüht sich um eine erste Annäherung an die Frage, welche Möglichkeiten und Herausforderungen sich für syrischsprachige Christen ergeben, wenn sie sich im interreligiösen Gespräch der abrahamitischen Religionen untereinander ihrer eigenen Verwurzelung und Verortung in einer syrischen, theologischen und religiösen Landschaft, die von der Person und dem Werk Jakob von Sarugs stark mitgeprägt sind, bewusst werden.¹ Dieser Artikel erhebt nicht den Anspruch, das Gesamtwerk Jakobs bereits auf sein Potential für die Befruchtung wie auch für eine mögliche Belastung der Beziehungen zwischen syrischsprachigen Christen einerseits und Juden und Muslimen ausgewertet zu haben. Eher geht es hier um eine erstes Aufzeigen und anfängliches Erörtern wichtiger Dimensionen einer Gesamtproblemlage, die gerade dann deutlicher sichtbar wird, wenn syrischsprachige Christen im Kontext eines wachsenden Eingebundenseins in westliche, gerade auch europäische Lebens- und Erfahrungskontexte durch ökumenische Gespräche und Erfahrungsaustausch mit Christen der protestantischen, katholischen und auch chalkedonisch-orthodoxen Kirchen auf zum Teil historisch gewachsene und bedingte, zum Teil sich durch aktuelle Bevölkerungsverschiebungen ergebende Fragestellungen verstärkt aufmerksam und sensibilisiert werden.

1 Bei der Erarbeitung der Inhalte, die in diese Untersuchung eingeflossen sind, konnte ich sehr guten Nutzen aus den hilfreichen Anmerkungen und Rückfragen ziehen, die ich bei zwei Vorträgen zu Jakob von Sarug erhielt, einmal bei der Internationalen Tagung „Prospects and Challenges of Syriac-Orthodox Theology in Europe“ an der Universität Paderborn im März 2019 und ein weiteres Mal bei einem Vortrag und Gespräch, das vom Kreis Aramäischer Studierender Heidelberg, e.V. an der Universität Anfang Mai 2019 organisiert wurde. Den Zuhörern und Gesprächspartnern bei diesen beiden Veranstaltungen bin ich für ihr kritisches, wohlwollendes und produktives Feedback sehr dankbar. Eine detailliertere und umfangreichere Untersuchung erscheint unter dem Titel „Kritische, syrisch-orthodoxe Theologie als Aufgabe: Perspektiven zu Jakob von Sarug und dem Beitrag seiner Dichtung zur Gestaltung einer modernen Glaubenspraxis im innerkirchlichen, ökumenischen und interreligiösen Raum.“ Den Herausgebern der hier veröffentlichten Konferenzbeiträge, sowie meinem wissenschaftlichen Mitarbeiter, Herrn Dr. André Höhn, bin ich für Anregungen, Korrekturvorschläge und fürs Mitdenken dankbar.

Dieser Artikel untersucht nach einer einführenden, historisch orientierten Darstellung der Person und des Lebens Jakobs die Verbreitung seines Werkes, aus denen sich unter anderem Perspektiven für dessen Wirkmächtigkeit ergeben. In einem zweiten und dritten Teil wendet sich die Untersuchung dann unter dem übergreifenden Hauptkenntnisinteresse der Schriftauslegung der Frage zu, welches Potential und welche Problemlage sich aus Jakobs Dichtung für das interreligiöse Gespräch der abrahamitischen Religionen miteinander aus der Perspektive des Umgangs mit dem Erbe der syrischen Christenheit, kristallisiert auf Jakobs Werk und seine Relevanz für Beziehungen zum Judentum und zum Islam ergibt. Das sich ergebende Spannungsfeld ist für die syrischsprachige Christenheit hierbei auch durch die Konditionierung eines Lebens im westlichen und vor allem europäischen Kontext mit seinen speziellen historischen und in jüngerer Zeit verstärkt durch Migrationsbewegungen mitbedingten Voraussetzungen geprägt, auf die es auch von syrischer Seite aus einzugehen und die es mitzuberücksichtigen gilt. Es mag sich nach anschließenden, noch weiterführenden und tiefergehenden Untersuchungen ergeben, dass ein interreligiöses Problembewusstsein durch ökumenischen Austausch mit protestantischen, katholischen und chaledonisch-orthodoxen Christen von syrischsprachigen Christen nicht nur schneller und leichter wahrgenommen wird, sondern gleichzeitig auch produktiv in fruchtbringende, interreligiöse Beziehungen umgesetzt werden kann.

Was zu Jakob von Sarug und seinem Leben bekannt ist

Jakob von Sarug lebte von ca. 450 bis 521 n. Chr. und wirkte als einer der Leiter der christlichen Kirche in den östlichen Teilen des Römischen Reiches. Im späten fünften und frühen sechsten Jahrhundert, nach einer längeren Zeit des Friedens mit Persien, begann das Oströmische Reich erneut turbulente Zeiten zu erleben.² Als der sassanidische König der Könige Kavad I. (488–497/499–531)

2 Zur Geschichte der Auseinandersetzungen zwischen dem Römischen Reich und dem Persischen Reich in der Spätantike, besonders der für Jakob von Sarug relevanten Zeit, siehe unter anderem Muriel Debié, „The Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity,“ in Daniel King, hg., *The Syriac World* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 11–32, besonders 22–30; die Quellen mit kurzen Kommentaren in Geoffrey B. Greatrex and Samuel N. C. Lieu, hg., *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars. Part 2: AD 363–630. A Narrative Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), besonders 62–81; Engelbert Winter und Beate Dignas, *Rom und das Perserreich: Zwei Weltmächte zwischen Konfrontation und Koexistenz* (Studienbücher Geschichte und Kultur der Alten Welt; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001); Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War: 502–532* (ARCA: Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 37; Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998); und Alexander Demandt, *Geschichte der*

Angriffe auf Rom unternahm, 502 Martyropolis eroberte, 503 die Stadt Amida einnahm, die Bewohner in den Iran deportierte und die Stadt drei Jahre lang belagerte, litten die Menschen in der Region nicht zuletzt auch zunehmend an Hoffnungslosigkeit. Während spätantike Chroniken der Nachwelt etwas distanzierter über Kriegsgründe, Belagerungsabläufe und -zustände und sich anschließende Maßnahmen des Wiederaufbaus berichteten,³ liegen mittlerweile drei in dichterischer Form verfasste Predigten zur Belagerung Amidas und ihres Kontextes sowie ein Brief Jakobs an die Einwohner von Edessa vor.⁴

Spätantike: Das Römische Reich von Diocletian bis Justinian 284–565 n. Chr. (Beck's Historische Bibliothek – Alte Geschichte; München: C. H. Beck, 1998).

- 3 Zu Behandlungen des Themas in zeitgenössischen Chroniken siehe Procopius von Caesarea, *Geschichte der Kriege*, Bücher 1–2 (Perserkriege), hg. Jakob Haury, *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia. Vol. 1. De bellis libri 1–4* (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Lipsiae: In aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1905), 1–304; Text und englische Übersetzung Hugh B. Dewing, *Procopius in seven volumes. Procopius I. History of the Wars, 1–2* (LCL 48; Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press and Heinemann, reprinted 1992); *Chronik Josuas des Styliten* 50–63, Text und Übers. William Wright, *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite, Composed in Syriac, A.D. 507* (Cambridge: At the University, 1882), 46–63 [syrisch] und 38–54 [englisch]; übers. Frank R. Trombley und John W. Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Translated Texts for Historians 32; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 53–82; übers. Andreas Luther, *Die syrische Chronik des Josua Stylites* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 49; Berlin und New York: De Gruyter, 1997), 65–77; Zachariah Rhetor, *Kirchengeschichte* 7.3–5, hg. Ernest Walter Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta* (CSCO 83–84; Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1919–1921), CSCO 84, 21–34; übers. Karl Ahrens und Gustav Krüger, *Die sogenannte Kirchengeschichte des Zacharias Rhetor* (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. Scriptores Sacri et Profani 3; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1899), 103–115; hrsg. und übers. Geoffrey Greatrex, Robert Phenix und Cornelia Horn, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity* (TTH 55; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 232–247; und Johannes von Ephesus, *Heiligenleben* 58, hrsg. und übers. Ernest Walter Brooks, *John of Ephesus. Lives of the Eastern Saints III* (Patrologia Orientalis 19.2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1926), 206–227, hier 217–222.
- 4 Jakob von Sarug, „Über das [Gottes]haus des Märtyrers Stephanus, das sie in einen Feuer-tempel umwandelten, als sie Amida angriffen,“ in Roger Akhrass und Imad Syryany, hg., *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 1 (Homilies 1–72) (Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017), 42–51; französische Übersetzung Muriel Debié, „Guerres et religions en Mésopotamie du Nord dans l'Antiquité tardive: un *mimro* inédit de Jacques de Saroug sur l'église Saint-Étienne que les Perses ont transformée en temple du feu à Amid [Diyarbakir] en 503 è.c.,“ *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 56 (2018): 29–89, hier 60–89; Jakob von Sarug, „Über Moses' ausgestreckte Hände,“ in Akhrass und Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 193–199; und Jakob von Sarug, „Über die Verwüstung der Stadt Amida,“ in Akhrass und Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 2 (Homilies 73–160) (Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017), 344–351. In der Liste der erschienenen und der bislang noch unveröffentlichten Homilien Jakobs, die Roger-Youssef Akhrass, „A List of Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh,“ *Syriac*

In diesem Schriftgut ist noch heute die Stimme des Seelsorgers zu hören, der den Menschen Mut und Zuversicht zusprechen wollte, um sie zu ermuntern, ihren angestammten Wohnort und ihre Stadt nicht aufzugeben und zu verlassen.⁵ Doch Kriegsdrohungen und Aggressionen aus dem Osten, auf die Rom gleichfalls militärisch reagierte, bildeten nicht die einzige Herausforderung. Verhängnisvoll für den inneren Frieden des Imperiums waren auch die Streitigkeiten verschiedener theologischer Gruppierungen, die sich über christologische Fragen des Konzils von Chalkedon, das im Jahr 451 n. Chr. stattgefunden hatte, uneins waren, sowie die Gräben, die solche Glaubenskämpfe in die Strukturen der lokalen Gemeinden rissen.⁶ Als Wanderprediger und später als Bischof östlich und nördlich von Antiochien gewann Jakob Einblicke in die materielle Not und die geistlichen Schwierigkeiten der Gläubigen unter der ländlichen Bevölkerung und den Bewohnern der Dörfer, kleinen Städte und kleineren Großstädte. Jakob selbst lässt in einigen wenigen Texten erkennen, dass er auf der Seite der Gegner des Konzils stand.⁷ Doch es mag sein, dass sein pastoraler Sinn es ihm nahegelegt hatte, sich nicht noch eindeutiger und vehementer zu äußern, um die Spaltungen in seinen Gemeinden nicht zu forcieren und keine noch tieferen Wunden der Uneinigkeit unter den Gläubigen seiner Gemeinden zu verursachen.

Orthodox Patriarchal Journal 53 (2015): 87–161, hier 127, 131 und 145, vorlegte, tragen diese drei Homilien die Nummern 248, 267 und 351. In den Ausgaben, die Akhrass und Syryany im Jahr 2017 veröffentlichten, wird die Homilie 248 als Nr. 5 gezählt, Homilie 267 als Nr. 24, und Homilie 351 als Nr. 106. Zur Motivik der neu edierten Homilie Nr. 24, siehe auch die in Akhrass, „A List of Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh,“ 114 als Homilie 158 gezählte Homilie, mit Herausgabe des Textes in Paulus Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, Band 5 (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1910), 290–306.

- 5 Jakob von Sarug, *Briefe* 20, in Gunnar Olinder (hrsg.), *Iacobi Sarugensis Epistulae quotquot supersunt* (CSCO 110; Paris: E Typographeo Reipublicae, 1937), 129–135; übers. Micheline Albert, *Les Lettres de Jacques de Saroug*, Patrimoine Syriaque 3 (Kaslik, Libanon: Parole de l'Orient, 2004), 177–185. Auch spätantike Autoren erinnerten an Jakobs bestärkende Stimme. Siehe die *Chronik Josuas des Styliten* 54 (Text und Übers. Wright, *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, 51–52 [syrisch] und 43–44 [englisch]; übers. Trombley und Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 63–64; übers. Luther, *Die syrische Chronik des Josua Stylites*, 69).
- 6 Die Auseinandersetzungen lassen sich an verschiedenen Orten nachzeichnen. Ein wichtiger Schauplatz war das Heilige Land, in dem die Grenzen zwischen den Parteien auch durch monastische Kreise hindurch verliefen. Siehe, unter anderem, Cornelia Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-Century Palestine: The Career of Peter the Iberian* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Die Verfestigungen oppositioneller Positionen führten letztlich zur Etablierung der syrisch-orthodoxen Kirche als eigenständiger Einrichtung. Siehe hierzu Volker L. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 7 Siehe zur weiteren Besprechung unten mit Fußnote 15.

Jakob lebte als ein Mönch und war ein überaus produktiver Dichter zu einer Zeit, als die syrisch-orthodoxe Kirche die Frühphase ihres Entstehungsprozesses durchlief. Was von Jakobs Dichtung erhalten geblieben ist, macht es heute noch möglich, Einblicke in die geistlichen Strömungen und die Spiritualität dieser frühen Jahre zu gewinnen. Die Offenheit und durchaus recht freie Gestaltbarkeit von Ideen, die sich beispielsweise in typologischen Ansätzen zur Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift ausdrücken, zeigen noch heute den Leserinnen und Hörern seiner Dichtungen die Macht und Ausdruckskraft einer solchen Kreativität des Anfangs. Die Tradition liefert Hinweise und Belege, dass Jakob Interesse daran hatte, biographische Details zu kommentieren, wenn auch weniger zu seinem eigenen Leben als eher zum Leben anderer. Es liegt beispielsweise noch ohne Edition des syrischen Textes, jedoch in armenischer Übersetzung bereits herausgegeben, eine Lebensbeschreibung Mar David von Galaschs vor, die Anton Baumstark und François Nau ohne größeres Zögern der Feder Jakobs zuschrieben.⁸ Auch die Biographie Ḥanninas stammt von ihm.⁹ Grundlegender Ausdruck für Jakobs Interesse an Ephräm, wenn auch nicht lediglich aus biographischen Gründen, ist Jakobs Predigt in Versen zum Genannten.¹⁰ Jakob selbst war ebenfalls Gegenstand biographischer Werke, die von anderen verfasst wurden. Weiterhin ist hier auf einige anonyme Biographien hinzuweisen, die in verschiedenen Handschriften

- 8 Siehe Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber Verlag, 1922), 149. Eine Zusammenfassung des syrischen Textes findet sich in François Nau, „Hagiographie Syriacque. Saint Alexis, Jean et Paul, Daniel de Galaš, Ḥannina, Euphémie, Sahda (1). Récits de Mélèce sur le vendredi, sur Marc et Gaspar, et sur un homme riche qui perdit tous ses enfants. Légendes de Pierre le publicain, d'une veuve et d'une vierge de Jérusalem, de Jean, moine d'Antioche,“ in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 1910, vol. 15 (London: Forgotten Book, 2019), 53–72 and 173–197, hier 54 und 60–62; und in Andrew N. Palmer, „Sisters, Fiancées, Wives and Mothers of Syrian Holy Men,“ in René Lavenant, hg., *Symposium Syriacum V, 1988, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 29–31 août 1988* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 236; Rome: Pontificum Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990), 209–214. Für den armenischen Text siehe Levon Ter-Petrossian, „Jakob von Sarugs ‚Leben des Mar Daniel von Galasch‘,“ [armenisch] *Ējmiadzin* 36.3 (1979): 22–40.
- 9 Nau, „Hagiographie Syriacque,“ 54 und 62–64. Akhrass, „A List of Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh,“ führt weder die Homilie auf David von Galasch noch die auf Ḥannina auf.
- 10 Eine Edition und Übersetzung legte Joseph Amar vor. Siehe Joseph Philip Amar, *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug: Critical Edition of the Syriac Text, Translation and Introduction* (Patrologia Orientalis 47.1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1995). Eine weitere englische Übersetzung findet sich in Andrew Palmer, „What Jacob Actually Wrote about Ephraim,“ in Albert Gerhards und Clemens Leonhard, hg., *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship. New Insights into Its History and Interaction* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 15; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 145–165, hier 156–165. Akhrass, „A List of Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh,“ 125, weist Jakobs Homilie auf Ephräm die Nummer 236 zu.

überliefert und zum Teil ediert sind.¹¹ Biographien zu Jakob wurden auch in dichterischer Form verfasst, zum Beispiel die syrische metrische Lebensdarstellung, die Saʿīd bar Ṣabūnī im elften Jahrhundert über ihn schrieb.¹² Doch verlässliche biographische Daten, die aus den Quellen gewonnen werden können, bleiben immer noch eher dürftig. Wenn auch die enorme Wirkung der Dichtung Jakobs in der syrischen Liturgie ersichtlich ist und sich unter anderem auch daraus erklärt, dass für Jakob die Teilnahme an der Liturgie ein wichtiges Instrument war, die moralische Ausrichtung der Gläubigen, um die er sich mühte, zu formen, können wir aus seinen eigenen Schriften nur recht wenige Details über sein Leben und seine Karriere gewinnen.¹³

Jakobs frühe Erziehung in seiner Herkunftsfamilie und seine spätere weiterführende Schulausbildung hatten ihn gut auf die Aufgaben vorbereitet, mit denen er sich im Laufe seines Lebens konfrontiert sehen sollte. Aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach hatte Jakobs Vater als Priester in Kurtam, einem Dorf am Euphrat in Mesopotamien, einer Gemeinde vorgestanden. Jakobs Geburtsjahr wird auf das Jahr 451 n. Chr. geschätzt. Zur höheren Bildung war er wahrscheinlich nach Edessa geschickt worden. Doch die Schule der Perser in Edessa, wo er vor der Flucht der Schulleitung nach Nisibis studiert haben müsste, und die theologischen Lehren dieser Schule, die eine Christologie der zwei Naturen propagierten, hinterließen keine erkennbaren Spuren eines Einflusses in Jakobs Werk. Wohl seit seiner Zeit in Edessa hatte Jakob jedoch eine Vorliebe für die Auslegung biblischer Texte entwickelt, ein Interesse, das mit dem Namen Ephräms als wichtigster praktischer Instanz verbunden ist. Wenn Ephräm auch schon fast hundert Jahre vor Jakobs Aufenthalt in der Stadt gestorben war, entwickelte sich Jakob doch zu einem der treuesten Erben und Überlieferer der wesentlichen Charakteristika der theologischen Vision und symbolischen Vorstellungskraft dieses wohl berühmtesten der frühchristlichen syrischen

11 Siehe die Zusammenstellung zu veröffentlichtem Material und bislang noch nicht herausgegebenen handschriftlichen Zeugnissen, die Sebastian Brock, „Jacob of Serugh: A Select Bibliographical Guide,“ in George Anton Kiraz, hg., *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 8; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 219–244, hier 237–239, bietet.

12 Siehe Robert A. Kitchen, „A Poetic Life: Metrical Vita of Jacob of Serug by Saʿīd bar Ṣabūnī,“ in Maria Dörfler, Emanuel Fiano und Kyle Smith, hg., *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium, Duke University, 26–29 June 2011* (Eastern Christian Studies 20; Louvain, Paris, Bristol, Connecticut: Peeters, 2015), 65–78.

13 Zu Jakobs Verständnis von Liturgie in Gegenüberstellung zu und im Vergleich mit dem Ephräms siehe Susan Ashbrook Harvey, „Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms,“ *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26.3 (2013): 300–316.

Lehrer.¹⁴ Demnach kann die Konzentration auf Jakobs Werk und sein Potenzial für die Entwicklung des syrischen theologischen Denkens für sich in Anspruch nehmen, einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Erforschung des Erbes Ephräms in der syrischen Kirche zu leisten. Doch eine solche Ausrichtung und Fokussierung des Forschungsinteresses ermöglicht auch etwas, das vielleicht wichtiger ist als einfach die Erinnerung an eine frühere Gestalt wach zu halten. Jakob bewahrte nicht einfach Ephräms Gedanken und Theologie. Er machte sie sich zu eigen, indem er sich von ihnen inspirieren ließ und gleichzeitig auf dieser Grundlage Neues schuf. In Jakobs Werken begegnet man nicht einfach Ephräm. Jakobs Kompositionen sind seine eigenen, auch wenn das Publikum Anspielungen auf Ephräms Dichtung mitzuhören vermag. Jakobs Werke können daher als ein hervorragendes Beispiel für eine lebendige, aktive, umformende und kreative Tradition und traditionelle Theologie gelten.

Wenn man über die Herausforderungen und Möglichkeiten der syrischen Theologie in der modernen westlichen Welt nachdenkt, scheint eine solche Haltung hilfreich, ja auch nötig zu sein, um den Anforderungen des Hier und Jetzt sowie der Zukunft gerecht werden zu können. Mehr denn je ist es auch für alte und ehrwürdige Traditionen wie die der syrischsprachigen Kirchen wichtig, die Vergangenheit als die eigene zu akzeptieren, aber dabei aktiv die Vergangenheit durch das Mittel einer bewusst und kritisch gelebten Gegenwart anzupassen und in eine vielversprechende und produktive Zukunft zu verwandeln. Ein sehr guter Weg, dies umzusetzen, ist die Bereitschaft, den Mut zu zeigen, eigene Fragen zu stellen und dann das aus der Vergangenheit Überlieferte in einen aktiven und engagierten Prozess einzubinden, um Antworten auf diese Fragen zu finden. Ein solcher Prozess erfordert es, Fragen zu stellen,

14 Literatur, die sich mit der Rückbeziehung Jakobs auf Ephräm und dem Verhältnis der beiden zueinander aus der Sicht der Tradition beschäftigt, umfasst neben der Veröffentlichung der Verspredigt auf Ephräm durch Joseph Amar hinaus beispielsweise auch noch Taeke Jansma, „Die Christologie Jacobs von Serugh und ihre Abhängigkeit von der alexandrinischen Theologie und der Frömmigkeit Ephräms des Syrers,“ *Le Muséon* 78 (1965): 5–46; Kathleen Elizabeth McVey, „Jacob of Sarug on Ephrem and the Singing Women,“ *The Syrian Antiochian Perspective* 1.1 (1992): 36–41; Jean-Louis Simonet, „Les citations des Actes des Apôtres dans Sur Étienne premier des serviteurs et prémices des témoins, œuvre présentée sous le nom de Jacques de Saroug en syriaque et sous celui d’Éphrem en arménien,“ *Le Muséon* 111.1–2 (1998): 59–94; Andrew Palmer, „What Jacob Actually Wrote about Ephraim,“ in Albert Gerhards und Clemens Leonhard, hg., *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into Its History and Interaction* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 15; Leiden und Boston: Brill, 2007), 145–165; Kathleen E. McVey, „Ephrem the Kitharode and Proponent of Women: Jacob of Sarug’s Portrait of a 4th c. Churchman for the 6th c. Viewer and its Significance for the 21st c. Ecumenist,“ in Steven T. Kimbrough (Hrsg.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007), 229–253.

sich mit alten Quellen zu beschäftigen, den Wert und das Potenzial ebenso wie die Grenzen dieser Quellen zu erkennen und trotz dieser Begrenztheit mit ihnen zusammen nach Antworten zu suchen. Doch kehren wir zu unserer kurzen Betrachtung einiger Details aus dem Leben Jakobs zurück.

Jakob beschäftigte sich, zumindest in seiner Dichtung, nicht besonders intensiv und häufig mit den theologischen Auseinandersetzungen seiner Zeit. Dennoch deuten die eher wenigen Angaben, die man seinen Schriften entnehmen kann, darauf hin, dass er das Konzil von Chalkedon nicht akzeptierte und stattdessen einer miaphysitischen Christologie anhing.¹⁵ Die theologischen Streitigkeiten doktrinärer Natur gehörten allem Anschein nach nicht zu seinen Hauptinteressen. Stattdessen offenbarten seine Schriften, dass er es für wichtiger hielt, oder dass ihm durch die praktischen Umstände seiner Arbeit in den Gemeinden und bei den Gläubigen deutlich wurde, dass es für ihn produktiver sei, seine Bemühungen auf die Entwicklung von Anweisungen und Vorbildern zu konzentrieren, die die christliche Spiritualität förderten. Jakob sollte somit eher nicht als systematischer Theologe betrachtet werden, sondern als Lehrer und Erzieher in spiritueller und praktischer Theologie. In diesen beiden Bereichen des theologischen Unternehmens glänzte er. Hier sind auch das Verdienst und der Wert seiner zahlreichen gedichteten Predigten im Syrischen zu suchen. Aufgrund der schieren Quantität, aber auch wegen der hohen Qualität, dieser Homilien ehrte ihn die syrische Überlieferung unter anderem dadurch, dass sie ihm den Titel „Flöte des Heiligen Geistes und Harfe der gläubigen Kirche“ verlieh.

Man weiß nicht genau, wann Jakob als Seelsorger zu wirken begann, oder wann er zum Priester geweiht wurde. Sehr wahrscheinlich war er schon seit einigen Jahren in diesen Ämtern tätig und diente als geistlicher Führer und Hirte der christlichen Herden in ländlichen Gebieten, bevor er in den frühen Jahren des sechsten Jahrhunderts, wohl um 502/503 n. Chr., wahrscheinlich von Paul von Edessa zum Wanderbischof / Chorbischof (periodeutes / chorepiskopos) von Ḥawra geweiht wurde.¹⁶ Nachdem er eine Zeit lang in

15 Aus der recht umfangreichen Literatur zum Thema siehe in jüngerer Zeit unter anderem Sebastian Brock, „The Syrian Orthodox Reaction to the Council of Chalcedon: Jacob of Serugh’s Homily on the Council of Chalcedon,“ in *Texts and Studies: A Review for Hellenism in Diaspora* 8–10 (1989–1991), 448–459; Christian Lange, „Jakob von Sarug, † 521,“ in Wassilios Klein, hg., *Syrische Kirchenväter* (Urban-Taschenbücher 587; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2004), 217–227; und die detaillierte Besprechung der vorausliegenden Diskussionen um Jakobs Christologie, einschließlich der zahlreichen Artikel Paul Krügers in Philip M. Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9–18.

16 *Dictionnaire archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* vol. 14, s.v. „Periodeute,“ (1939): 369–379.

dieser Funktion als Wanderprediger unterwegs gewesen war, diente Jakob in den letzten beiden Jahren seines Lebens als Bischof von Batnan, einem Bistum, das dem Erzbischof von Edessa unterstellt war. Batnan war die Kreisstadt des Bezirks Sarug, südwestlich von Edessa gelegen, dem heutigen Şanlıurfa im Südosten der Türkei, nahe der Grenze zwischen der Türkei und Syrien. Als exaktes Lebensdatum Jakobs ist nur das Jahr 519 n. Chr. bekannt, als er den Auftrag erhielt, als Bischof von Baṭnan zu wirken. Doch er konnte die Aufgaben dieses Amtes nur etwa zwei Jahre lang offiziell wahrnehmen. Im Jahr 521 starb er und hinterließ nicht Dutzende, sondern Hunderte von Predigten, die in dichterischer Form gestaltet waren.

Jakobs Werke und ihre weitreichende Rezeption

Jakobs Werke lassen gut erkennen, dass er im Oströmischen Reich unterwegs war, wobei er den ihm anvertrauten Menschen an vielen Orten und in zahlreichen Kontexten predigte, sich um sie kümmerte und auch brieflich mit ihnen den Kontakt suchte und aufrechterhielt.¹⁷ Er besuchte Klöster und Gemeindekirchen, sowohl in Dörfern auf dem Land wie auch in größeren Städten. Seinen Fähigkeiten als Dichter ist es zu verdanken, dass das umfangreiche Werk, das er geschaffen und rezitiert, vielleicht während seines Vortrags auch intoniert hatte, einen der bedeutendsten Beiträge zur Entwicklung des Genres der liturgischen Dichtung in der syrischen Überlieferung darstellt.¹⁸ Mit seinem kraftvollen, rhetorisch hoch entwickelten und kreativen Stil behandelte er eine Vielzahl von Themen, die sich von biblischem Material über aus der Liturgie gewonnene Inhalte bis hin zu Aussagen erstrecken, die sich zuweilen auf die christliche Lehre, aber auch auf das Leben in allen möglichen Lebensbereichen, vom klösterlichen und kirchlichen bis zum christlichen Leben in Familie und Haushalt, beziehen. Sowohl der enorme Umfang seiner Predigten, als auch die große Resonanz, die sie hervorriefen, sind beeindruckend. Sie sind zwei der Hauptindikatoren dafür, dass sein Werk für die Aufgabe relevant ist,

17 Zu Jakobs Zuhörerschaft siehe Susan Ashbrook Harvey, „To Whom Did Jacob Preach,“ in Kiraz, *Jacob of Serugh and His Times*, 115–131. Zu seinen Kontakten mit monastischen Kreisen und Asketen siehe Sidney H. Griffith, „Mar Jacob of Serugh on Monks and Monasticism: Readings in His Metrical Homilies ‚On the Singles‘,“ in Kiraz, *Jacob of Serugh and His Times*, 71–89.

18 Zur Vortragsweise unterschiedlicher Kompositionen in liturgischen Kontexten siehe auch die Anmerkungen in 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 (2005): 125–149, hier 137, Paragraph 14.

in Gemeindeversammlungen, einschließlich der Liturgie, gesungen wurden, setzte Ephräm eine große Vielfalt von mehr als fünfzig verschiedenen isosyllabischen Versmaßen ein, die man auch als *qālē* bezeichnet. In einem wesentlich geringeren Maße schrieb Ephräm auch erzählende Dichtung, also *mēmṛē*, für die er jedoch nur einen Typus des Versmaßes, nämlich Einheiten von siebensilbigen Verspaaren, verwendete. Jakob hingegen verwendete das zwölfsilbige Versmaß in allen seinen *mēmṛē*. Aus Jakobs Feder sind auch einige Strophengedichte erhalten, jedoch nur relativ wenige.²² Angesichts dieser stärker eingeschränkten Variation in Jakobs Werk werden die Aufmerksamkeit des Publikums und die Fähigkeiten des Interpretierenden beim Vortrag weniger durch Anforderungen an die musikalische Kunstfertigkeit bei der Aufführung herausgefordert. Wenn auch vielleicht die Gefahr der Eintönigkeit durch Wiederholung bestehen mag, unterstützt das von Jakob regelmäßig verwendete gleichförmige Versmaß die Zuhörer bei der Aufgabe, den Inhalt der rezipierten Wörter genauer zu beachten, und hilft ihnen so, sich nicht allzu leicht von Melodievariationen ablenken zu lassen. Man könnte auch sagen, dass Jakobs dichterischer Stil, auch wenn er als etwas monotoner wahrgenommen werden könnte, durch die ausgeprägte Charakteristik des einen angewandten metrischen Modells für größere Segmente der Gemeinden leichter zugänglich ist.

In jüngerer Zeit konnten die Editionsarbeiten Roger Akhrass' und eines Teams von mitarbeitenden Mönchen und Seminaristen des Theologiseseminars des Heiligen Ephräm in Māarrat Saydnaya in Syrien die Gesamtzahl der veröffentlichten Predigten Jakobs von 243 auf 408 erhöhen.²³ Die restlichen 352 der insgesamt etwa 760 Homilien, von denen Barhebräus und Jakobs Biographen wussten, könnten vollständig verloren gegangen sein. Die Einschätzungen des Werks Jakobs in seiner Bedeutung für die syrischsprachigen

22 Siehe Sebastian Brock, „Jacob's Forgotten Sughyotho,“ in Kiraz, *Jacob of Serugh and His Times*, 39–50.

23 Eine Auflistung der Titel, Incipits und abschließenden Verse ist in Akhrass, „A List of Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh“ zu finden. Das Inhaltsverzeichnis auf den Seiten xiii–xxi in Paul Bedjan, Sebastian Brock und Heleen Murre-van den Berg, hg., *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug/Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobii Sarugensis*, Band 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006) verzeichnet alle *mēmṛē*, die in Paul Bedjan, hg., *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, 5 Bände (Paris und Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1905–1910) und in Bedjan, Brock und Murre-van den Berg, hg., *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug* veröffentlicht wurden. In Akhrass und Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 1 (Homilies 1–72) bzw. *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 2 (Homilies 73–160) finden sich die Veröffentlichungen des umfangreichen, neu zugänglichen Materials. Zur Ausgabe, die Akhrass und Syryany besorgten, siehe auch die Besprechung, die Robert A. Kitchen im *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 56 (2008): 159–161 publizierte.

Kirchen weisen ihm lediglich hinter Ephräm die zweite Stelle zu. Quantitativ scheint seine Produktion die aller anderen liturgischen Dichter übertroffen zu haben. Während beide, Ephräm und Jakob, wesentlich zum Bestand der spätantiken syrischen liturgischen Dichtung beitrugen, lassen sich ihre unterschiedlichen Anteile bereits anhand der poetischen Form einschließlich des Metrums deutlich voneinander unterscheiden. Die schiere Menge an Jakobs *mēm̄rē* spricht eindeutig für seine Priorität als Modell für die Produktion poetischer Erzählungen innerhalb und außerhalb liturgischer Kontexte. Diese dienten als Hauptquelle, durch die biblische und traditionelle narrative Inhalte in den christlichen Gemeinden und wohl auch darüber hinaus vermittelt und empfangen wurden.

Auch in Bezug auf die Wirkung, die durch Überlieferung und Rezeption erreicht wurde, waren die Predigten Jakobs sehr erfolgreich und erlangten einen weitreichenden Einfluss, sowohl innerhalb als auch außerhalb der syrischsprachigen Kirchen.²⁴ Hier scheint es, dass Jakobs Werk das von Ephräm sogar noch übertrifft. Jakobs Werke wurden weithin gelesen, rezitiert, überliefert und übersetzt, sowohl in syrischsprachigen Gemeinden als auch über verschiedene Sprachgrenzen hinweg. Recht deutlich sind Hinweise auf eine breite Rezeption seiner Werke durch Übersetzungen in christlich-orientalische Sprachen, darunter Arabisch,²⁵ Äthiopisch,²⁶

24 Für die Wirkung innerhalb der syrisch-orthodoxen Kirche siehe zum Beispiel die Rezeption im Werk Johannes von Daras. Aho Shemunkasho, „Jacob of Serugh and His Influence on John of Dara as Exemplified by the Use of Two Verse-Homilies,“ in Kiraz, *Jacob of Serugh and His Times*, 163–197. Die Wirkung außerhalb der christlichen Kirchen wird auch von Sidney H. Griffith in den Blick genommen. Siehe Sidney H. Griffith, „The Poetics of Scriptural Reasoning: Syriac *Mēm̄rē* at Work,“ in Markus Vinzent, Jeffrey Wickes und Kristian S. Heal, hg., *Literature, Rhetoric, and Exegesis in Syriac Verse*, Studia Patristica LXXVII, vol. 4 of Papers Presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2015 (Louvain, Paris, and Bristol, Connecticut: Peeters, 2017), 5–24; and Sidney H. Griffith, „Syriac *Mēm̄rē* and the Arabic *Qurʾān*: Late Antique Biblical Exegesis in Counterpoint,“ Manuskript des Vortrags zur Konferenz *Prospects and Challenges of Syriac-Orthodox Theology in Europe*, Paderborn, März 2019.

25 Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur. Erster Band: Die Übersetzungen* (Studi et Testi 118; Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), 444–452.

26 Für die äthiopische Rezeption, die auf Jakobs Dichtungen zurückgeht oder zurückgehen könnte, siehe zum Beispiel Max Wurmbrand, „Homélie de Jacques de Saroug sur la mort d'Aaron,“ *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961): 255–278; Max Wurmbrand, „Le ‚Dersâna Sanbat‘. Une homélie éthiopienne attribuée à Jacques de Saroug,“ *L'Orient Syrien* 8 (1963): 343–394; Siegbert Uhlig, „Dərsan des Yaʿqob von Sərug für den vierten Sonntag im Monat Tahśās,“ *Aethiopica* 2 (1999): 7–52; *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica. Vol. III*, s.v. „Jacob of Serug,“ 262–263, der einen ersten Einstieg mit Angaben zu einigen Übersetzungen ins Gēez bietet;

Armenisch,²⁷ Koptisch²⁸ und Georgisch.²⁹ Die frühesten Handschriftenbelege für die Übersetzung seiner Werke ins Arabische stammen aus dem Katharinenkloster auf dem Sinai und werden auf das neunte Jahrhundert datiert.³⁰ Seine

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- Aaron Michael Butts, „Embellished with Gold: The Ethiopic Reception of Syriac Biblical Exegesis,“ *Oriens Christianus* 97 (2013/2014): 137–159; Tedros Abraha, „Jacob of Serugh in the Ethiopic Tradition under Review and New Clues about the Background of the *Gəʿəz* Anaphora Ascribed to Jacob of Serugh,“ in Rafal Zarzeczny, hg., *Aethiopia fortitudo ejus. Studi in onore di Monsignor Osvaldo Raineri in occasione del suo 80° compleanno* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 298; Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2015), 463–478; und Aaron Michael Butts und Ted Erho, „Jacob of Serugh in the Ambrosian Homiliary (ms. Ambros. X.198 sup. and its membra disiecta),“ *Δελτίο Βιβλικῶν Μελετῶν* 33B (2018): 37–54.
- 27 Die Untersuchung der Rezeption der Werke Jakobs in der armenischen Tradition hat großes Potenzial, kommt aber erst in den letzten Jahren etwas mehr in Gang. Siehe Jean-Louis Simonet, „Les citations des Actes des Apôtres dans Sur Étienne premier des serviteurs et prémices des témoins, œuvre présentée sous le nom de Jacques de Saroug en syriaque et sous celui d’Ephrem en arménien,“ *Le Muséon* 111.1–2 (1998): 59–94; Mathews, Jr., „Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Good Friday* and Other Armenian Treasures: First Glances“; und Andy Hilkens, „The Armenian Reception of the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh: New Findings,“ in Madalina Toca und Dan Batovici, hg., *Caught in Translation: Studies on Versions of Late-Antique Christian Literature* (Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity 17; Leiden: Brill, 2020), 64–84. Wissenschaftler haben bislang Homilien Jakobs im Armenischen hauptsächlich in Material identifiziert, das in der armenischen Tradition Ephräm dem Syrer zugeschrieben wurde. Sehr viele Texte, z.B. die *Homilie auf Johannes den Täufer* (BHO 487) oder die *Homilie auf den Protomärtyrer Stephanus* (BHO 1095), wurden noch nicht ediert. Die Forschung an dieser syrisch-armenischen Schnittstelle könnte durchaus Predigten Jakobs zutage fördern, für die kein syrisches Original mehr vorhanden ist.
- 28 Zur Rezeption in der koptischen Tradition siehe zum Beispiel Alin Suciu, „The Sahidic Version of Jacob of Serugh’s *memrā* on the Ascension of Christ,“ *Le Muséon* 128 (2015): 49–83.
- 29 Bislang sind in der Forschung wenigstens zwei Homilien Jakobs von Sarug in georgischer Übersetzung bekannt. Das *mēmrā* auf die Geburt Christi wurde direkt unter Jakobs Namen überliefert. Es ist im Homiliar bzw. Mravalt’avi von Tbet’i in der Handschrift MS Tbilisi A-19 aus dem späten zehnten Jahrhundert enthalten. Eine französische Übersetzung des Textes mit einleitender Diskussion findet sich in Tamara Pataridze, „La version géorgienne d’une homélie de Jacques de Saroug *Sur la Nativité*. Étude et traduction,“ *Le Muséon* 121 (2008): 373–402. Bernard Outtier veröffentlichte außerdem eine französische Übersetzung der georgischen Version der *Homilie zu Elias und dem Erzengel Michael*, die von Jakob stammt, jedoch unter dem Namen Ephräms in der Handschrift MS Tbilisi A-144 überliefert wird. Siehe *Le saint Prophète Élie d’après les Pères de l’Église*, Textes présentés par les carmélites du Monastère Saint Élie (Collection Spiritualité orientale et vie monastique / Spiritualité orientale 53; Bégrolles-en-Mauges, Maine & Loire: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1992), 433–451.
- 30 Die ältesten arabischen Handschriften mit Texten Jakobs kommen aus melkitischen Kreisen in Palästina und auf dem Sinai und datieren ins neunte, zehnte und elfte

Homilien fanden bei der Schaffung der liturgischen Hymnen mehrerer östlicher christlicher Kirchen, sicherlich der syrischen, arabischen, koptischen und äthiopischen, Verwendung. Auch auf andere hymnographische Traditionen, z.B. die der armenischen und georgischen Kirchen, haben Jakobs Homilien Einfluss ausgeübt. Es lässt sich ohne Zweifel argumentieren, dass gerade diese breite Rezeption der Texte Jakobs in allen orientalisch-christlichen Kirchen eine willkommene Grundlage und hervorragende Gelegenheit dafür bietet, die Zusammenarbeit und Interaktion dieser Kirchen und ihrer Anhänger untereinander in der Gegenwart zu stärken. Ökumenische Bemühungen beschränken sich nicht darauf, Hindernisse in der Lehre zu überwinden, die einem gemeinsamen Bekenntnis im Wege stehen. Um als Leib Christi besser zusammenzuwachsen, müssen Christen aus verschiedenen Kirchen auch Wege finden, gemeinsam zu beten und Gott anzubeten. Ausgehend von der jeweiligen Rezeption von Jakobs Werken scheint es, dass Kirchen aus dem gesamten Spektrum der orientalisch-christlichen Traditionen die Möglichkeit haben, ein sehr weites und tiefreichendes Reservoir an Traditionen, die sie bereits gemeinsam haben, als Bindeglieder, die sie bereits seit Jahrhunderten miteinander teilen, wiederzuentdecken, stärker hervorzuheben und in den Vordergrund zu stellen. Die Konzentration auf Jakobs Werke bietet eine Gelegenheit für die geistliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen den syrischen Kirchen untereinander und mit weiteren orientalisch-christlichen und ostchristlichen Kirchen, um wichtige Aspekte ihrer gemeinsamen Tradition auch in neuen Umgebungen im Westen auszubauen und sich miteinander zu verbinden.

Jahrhundert. Zu nennen sind hier beispielsweise MS Sin. Arab. 514, MS Sin. Arab. 457, MS München Arab. 1066 und MS Hiersemann 14. Siehe für weitere Handschriften und Besprechungen Joseph-Marie Sauget, „La collection homilético-hagiographique du manuscrit *Sināi arabe 457*“, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 22 (1972): 129–167; Samir Khalil Samir, „Un exemple des contacts culturels entre les églises syriaques et arabes: Jacques de Saroug dans la tradition arabe,“ in René Lavenant, hg., *III. Symposium Syriacum, 1980: Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures (Goslar, 7–11 Septembre 1980)* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 221; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1983), 213–245; und Tamara Pataridze, „Patristique et hagiographie palestino-sinaïtique des monastères melkites (IX^e–X^e siècles),“ in Barbara Roggema und Alexander Treiger, hg., *Patristic Literature in Arabic Translation* (Arabic Christianity 2; Leiden und Boston: Brill, 2020), 53–88, besonders 75–77.

Schriftauslegung und interreligiöse Beziehungen

Jakobs *mēmṛē* leisteten einen nachhaltigen Beitrag im Prozess der Entwicklung der Vorstellungs- und Gedankenwelt, in deren Rahmen Christen im Nahen Osten in der Spätantike die Heilige Schrift und die christliche Lehre verstanden, auslegten und weitergaben. In der Vorstellungswelt und Konzeption der vorreformatorischen Kirchen und christlichen Traditionen hängen diese beiden Gebiete des Wissens von und der Einsichten in theologische Realitäten, Schrift und Lehre, klar voneinander ab, befördern einander und entwickeln sich, sich gegenseitig befruchtend, weiter. Jakob selbst war ein eifriger und intensiv suchender Leser und Ausleger der Heiligen Schrift. Es lohnt sich, ausführlich und im Detail auf seine Themen, seine Methode und sein Vorgehen bei der Annäherung an die Heilige Schrift, auch und gerade mit Blick auf Anwendungen im pastoralen Bereich, einzugehen. Im Rahmen dieses Beitrags muss nun jedoch eine Konzentration auf eine kleinere Schnittmenge, die aus Jakobs Interesse an der Schrift, dem kontextuellen Verständnis der Schrift in der christlichen Gemeinde und der Frage nach der Relevanz des Werkes Jakobs für die interreligiösen Beziehungen besteht, genügen.

Diese thematische Schnittmenge soll aus zwei Perspektiven heraus betrachtet werden: einmal durch das Aufzeigen von Aspekten, die deutlich machen, dass Jakobs Umgang mit der Heiligen Schrift auch für moderne Theologie immer noch oder vielleicht auch in einer neuen Weise eine ganz eigene Herausforderung sein kann; und weiterhin durch das Aufzeigen von Chancen, die sich aus der interreligiösen Wirkung seiner Schriftauslegungen ergeben. Die erste Perspektive soll diskutiert werden, indem kurz auch kritisch auf Jakobs Verwendung der Heiligen Schrift im Umgang mit den Juden und dem Judentum eingegangen wird. Die zweite Perspektive nimmt die Relevanz des Werkes Jakobs, besonders seiner Homilien, für die christlich-muslimischen Beziehungen in den Blick.

In der Form konzentrierter Beiträge zu Fragen der Beziehung des syrischen Christentums zu Juden und dem Judentum sind aus der Feder Jakobs von Sarug sieben *mēmṛē* oder Predigten überliefert, die ihre Herausgeberin und Übersetzerin ins Französische, Micheline Albert, auf die Zeit zwischen 490 und 494 n. Chr. datierte.³¹ Weiterhin findet sich in der Sammlung der Briefe

31 Micheline Albert, hg. und übers., *Jacques de Saroug: Homélie contre les Juifs* (Patrologia Orientalis 38.1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 23. Siehe zuvor auch die Arbeiten von Rev. Isaac K. Cosgrove, „Three Homilies against the Jews by Jacob of Serug. Edited with Introduction, Translation and Notes“ (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1931); und Micheline Albert, hg., „Mimro de Jacques de Saroug sur la Synagogue et l'Église,“ *L'Orient syrien* 7 (1962): 143–162.

Jakobs als Brief Nr. 18 ein an die Himyariten in Südarabien gerichteter Brief, der den dortigen Christen angesichts der jüdischen Verfolgungen der Christen Mut zusprach.³² Beide Textbestände thematisieren explizit das Verhältnis des Christentums zur jüdischen Religion und zu den Juden, wenngleich sich die Umstände in Nordsyrien und Südarabien dahingehend voneinander unterscheiden, dass die Juden im Süden mächtig und einflussreich waren, während ihre Glaubensgenossen im Norden eine Minderheit bildeten. Eine detaillierte Studie über Jakobs Haltung gegenüber den Juden auf der Grundlage einer umfassenden Untersuchung aller seiner Werke steht noch aus.³³ Dennoch ist die Perspektive Jakobs als die einer wichtigen Stimme im Bereich der jüdisch-christlichen Polemik zu sehen, deren Wurzeln bis in die frühesten Jahre des Christentums zurückreichen, und deren Hauptthema von christlicher Seite aus darin bestand, die Substitution des „alten Israels“ als Gottesvolk durch das „neue Israel“ zu behaupten. Als Feld wissenschaftlicher Forschung hat die jüdisch-christliche Polemik im Verlauf des letzten Jahrhunderts wachsende Aufmerksamkeit erlangt. Die spezifischere Rolle der syrischen

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- 32 Jakob von Sarug, *Briefe* 18, Olinder, *Iacobi Sarugensis Epistulae quotquot supersunt*, 87–102; französische Übers. Albert, *Les Lettres de Jacques de Saroug*, 129–144; deutsche Übers. Robert Schröter, „Trostsreiben Jacob's von Sarug an die himyaritischen Christen,“ *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 31 (1877): 360–405, hier 369–395.
- 33 Neben Micheline Albert und Stephen Benin, deren Arbeiten in diesem Artikel berücksichtigt werden können, haben bislang nur wenige weitere Forschungen Aspekte der Sicht Jakobs auf das Judentum und die Juden sowie Jakobs Verankerung in jüdischem Schriftverständnis angesprochen. Hierzu zählen Joseph Halévy, „Examen critique des sources relatives à la persecution des chrétiens de Nedjran par le roi juif des Himyarites,“ *Revue des études juives* 18 (1889): 16–42 und 161–178; Cosgrove, „Three Homilies against the Jews by Jacob of Serug“; A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 105–106; Stanley Kazan, „Isaac of Antioch's Homily against the Jews,“ *Oriens Christianus* 45 (1961): 30–53, 46 (1962): 87–98, 47 (1963): 89–97, und 49 (1965): 57–78, hier 60–65; Alexander Golitzin, „The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug's Homily ‚On That Chariot that Ezekiel the Prophet Saw,‘“ *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47.3–4 (2003): 323–364; Alexander Golitzin, „The Image and Glory of God in Jacob of Serug's Homily, ‚On That Chariot That Ezekiel the Prophet Saw,‘“ *Scrinium* 3.1 (2007): 180–212; Sebastian Brock, „Creating Women's Voices: Sarah and Tamar in Some Syriac Narrative Poems,“ in Emmanouela Grypeou und Helen Spurling, hg., *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 18; Leiden und Boston: Brill, 2009), 125–141; Andrew J. Hayes, „The Manuscripts and Themes of Jacob of Serugh's Mémrà ‚On the Adultery of the Congregation,‘“ *Studia Patristica* 78 (2017): 61–72; und Andrew J. Hayes, „The Incident of the Golden Calf in Pre-Islamic Syriac Authors,“ in Eric F. Mason und Edmondo Lupieri, hg., *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Themes in Biblical Narrative. Jewish and Christian Traditions 23; Leiden: Brill, 2019), 238–263.

Literatur innerhalb dieser Polemik ist schon aus verschiedenen Richtungen beleuchtet worden, wenn sie auch immer noch nicht ausreichend untersucht ist.³⁴ Das Themenfeld stellt auch weiterhin eine Herausforderung dar

34 Aus vorhergehenden Jahrzehnten kann hier nur sehr selektiv auf die Artikel von Samuel Krauss, „The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers, IV,“ *Jewish Quarterly Review* 6.1 (1893): 82–99; Gustav Richter, „Über die älteste Auseinandersetzung der syrischen Christen mit den Juden,“ *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 35.1 (1936): 101–114; Klaus Deppe, „Die Rolle des Alten Testaments im Streit zwischen Christen und Juden nach dem Zeugnis Afrahats,“ in Gernot Wiessner, hg., *Erkenntnisse und Meinungen I* (Göttinger Orientforschungen, I. Reihe: Syriaca 3; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 83–107; Sidney H. Griffith, „Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century,“ *Jewish History* 3.1 (1988): 65–94; Jean-Maurice Fiey, „Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient syriaque,“ *Hispania Sacra* 40.2 (1988): 933–953; David Michael Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Middle Ages Series; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); und Jean-Noël Guinot, „Les fondements scripturaires de la polémique entre Juifs et chrétiens dans les commentaires de Théodore de Cyr,“ *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 14.1 (1997): 153–178 verwiesen werden.

Zu den in neuerer Zeit auffallenden Arbeiten gehören besonders die Beiträge von Jean-Louis Feiertag, „À propos du rôle des Juifs dans les traditions sous-jacentes aux récits de l’Invention de la Croix,“ *Analecta Bollandiana* 118.3–4 (2000): 241–265; Christine C. Shepardson, „Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Intra-Christian Conflict in the Sermons of Ephrem Syrus,“ *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001): 503–507; Adam Becker, „Anti-Judaism and Care of the Poor in Aphrahat’s *Demonstration* 20,“ *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10.3 (2002): 305–327; Christine C. Shepardson, „Exchanging Reed for Reed: Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem’s Hymns on Faith,“ *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 5.1 (2002), <https://hugoye.bethmardutho.org/article/hv5n1shepardson> (last accessed 01 July 2022); Andreas Heinz, „Antijudaismus in der christlichen Liturgie? Das Beispiel der syrischen Kirchen in der ‚Großen Woche,‘“ in Martin Tamcke, hg., *Syriaca II. Beiträge zum 3. deutschen Syrologen-Symposium in Vierzehnheiligen 2002* (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 33; Münster: LIT, 2004), 307–325; Yaron Dan, „On Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Fifth Century: A Jewish Reaction to the Council of Chalcedon,“ in Yaron Dan, hg., *Studies in the History of Palestine in the Roman-Byzantine Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 2006), 32–35; Adam Becker, „The Discourse on Priesthood (BL Add 18295 137b–140b): An Anti-Jewish Text on the Abrogation of the Israelite Priesthood,“ *Journal of Semitic Studies* 51.1 (2006): 85–115; Rifaat Y. Ebied, „Prejudice and Polarization towards Christians, Jews and Muslims: The Polemical Treatise of Dionysius Bar Šalibi,“ in Martin Tamcke, hg., *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages* (Beiruter Texte und Studien 117; Beirut: Orient-Institut, und Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2007), 171–184; Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Greek Culture in the Roman World; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Marie-Joseph Pierre, „Thèmes de la controverse d’Aphraate avec les tendances judaïsantes de son Église,“ in Christelle Jullien, hg., *Controverses des chrétiens dans l’Iran sassanide (Chrétiens en terre d’Iran II)* (Cahiers de Studia Iranica 36; Paris: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 2008), 115–128; Christine C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem’s Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (Patristic Monograph Series 20; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008); Geoffrey Herman,

und bietet zugleich eine Entwicklungschance für die syrische Theologie im Westen.

Der Rahmen dieses Beitrags reicht bei Weitem nicht dafür aus, eine erschöpfende Betrachtung der Sichtweise Jakobs auf das Judentum und Jakobs Einstellung zu den Juden zu bieten. Dennoch kann man auf der Untersuchung Stephen Benins aufbauen, der sich in einem Aufsatz und einem Buchkapitel dazu geäußert hat, wie Aphrahat, Ephräm und Jakob von Sarug die Gebote, Gottes Bund mit seinem Volk und die Juden aus der ihnen eigenen,

„Note on the Recently Published Discourse on Priesthood (BL Add. 18295, ff. 137b–140b),“ *Journal of Semitic Studies* 54.2 (2009): 389–391; Pierluigi Lanfranchi, „Entre construction liturgique et polémique anti-juive: la collection de bénédictions d'origine juive des Constitutions Apostoliques,“ in Christophe Batsch und Mădălina Vărtejanu-Joubert, hg., *Manières de penser dans l'Antiquité méditerranéenne et orientale. Mélanges offerts à Francis Schmidt par ses élèves, ses collègues et ses amis* (Supplements to the JSJ 134; Leiden und Boston: Brill, 2009), 215–229; Marcie E. Lenk, „The Apostolic Constitutions: Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Construction of Christianity“ (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2010); Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Jewish-Christian Conversation in Fourth-Century Persian Mesopotamia* (Judaism in Context 12; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011); Dominique Côté, „Le problème de l'identité religieuse dans la Syrie du IV^e siècle: Le cas des Pseudo-Clémentines et de l'Adversus Judaeos de S. Jean Chrysostome,“ in Simon Claude Mimouni und Bernard Pouderon (hrsg.), *La croisée des chemins revisitée. Quand l'Église et la Synagogue se sont-elles distinguées?* (Patrimoines Judaïsme antique; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2012), 339–370; Alberto Camplani, „Declinazioni dell'antigiudaismo nel cristianesimo siriano delle origini,“ *Quaderni di Vicino Oriente* 6 (2013): 15–39; Sidney H. Griffith, „Ibn al-Maḥrūmah's Notes on Ibn Kammūnah's Examination of the Three Religions: The Issue of the Abrogation of Mosaic Law,“ in Ryan Wesley Szpiech, hg., *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean* (Bordering Religions; New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 40–57 und 225–229; Adam Becker, „The ‚Evil Inclination‘ of the Jews: the Syriac Yatsra in Narsai's Metrical Homilies for Lent,“ *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106 (2016): 179–207; Adam Becker, „L'antijudaïsme syriaque: entre polémique et critique interne,“ in Flavia Ruani, hg., *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque* (Études syriaques 13; Paris: Paul Geuthner, 2016), 181–207; Patricia A. Duncan, „The Case for Tolerance in the Early Christian (Pseudo-Clementine) Novel,“ in Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, Wolfgang Grünstäudl und Matthew Thiessen, hg., *Perceiving the Other in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 394; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 83–94; Dominique Cerbelaud, „Les Pères syriens et les juifs,“ in Jean-Marie Auwers, Régis Burnet und Didier Luciani, hg., *L'antijudaïsme des Pères. Mythe et/ou réalité?* (Théologie historique 125; Paris: Beauchesne, 2017), 183–196; Alyssa M. Gray, „The People, Not the Peoples: The Talmud Bavli's ‚Charitable‘ Contribution to the Jewish-Christian Conversation in Mesopotamia,“ *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 20.2 (2017): 137–167; und Sergey Minov, „Jews and Christians in Late Sasanian Nisibis: The Evidence of the Life of Mar Yāreth the Alexandrian,“ in Julia Rubanovich und Geoffrey Herman, hg., *Irano-Judaica VII: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2019), 473–506.

syrisch-christlichen Perspektive betrachtet haben.³⁵ Der kritische Nachvollzug der Untersuchung Benins lässt sichtbar werden, dass Jakobs Schriften zur Gruppe der spätantiken und traditionsstiftenden syrischen Stimmen gehören, welche die Entschlossenheit unterstrichen, mit der die Juden an der Einhaltung ihrer Rituale festhielten, und die betonten, dass die Juden sich geweigert hätten, jede Erfüllung des Gesetzes und seiner Gebote durch die Existenz und das Wirken der christlichen Kirche anzuerkennen.³⁶

Benins Studie kann aufzeigen, dass „syrischsprachige Christen das Judentum auf bemerkenswert ähnliche Weise verstanden haben wie griechisch- und lateinischsprachige Christen.“³⁷ So sind syrische Polemiken gegen Juden ein „Teil der größeren polemischen Tradition“ innerhalb des gesamten Christentums und haben gleichberechtigt Anteil an dessen Angriffen gegen die Juden und den sich hieraus ergebenden Verantwortlichkeiten. Damit tragen sie jedoch auch mit an der gleichen Last, die sich andere Mitgliedsfamilien der christlichen Religionsgemeinschaft aufgebürdet haben. Die Informationen, die sich aus den sieben Homilien erheben lassen, die Jakob verfasst hat und die als „Gegen die Juden“ gerichtet betitelt sind, reichen nicht aus, um feststellen zu können, welche Umstände oder Zustände die jüdisch-christliche Begegnung ermöglicht, begünstigt, ausgelöst oder begleitet haben, die diesen Predigten und ihrer Entstehung zugrunde liegen. Es lässt sich jedoch mit Benin beobachten, dass Jakobs Darstellung seiner eventuell historischen Wahrnehmungen jüdisch-christlicher Begegnungen, auf jeden Fall jedoch seiner Gedanken und theoretischen Einschätzungen solcher Kontakte, sich in recht erheblicher Weise von denen Aphrahats und Ephräms unterscheidet. Aus Benins Sicht teilte Jakob weder die etwas moderatere Haltung Aphrahats noch griff er die Juden so erbittert an, wie Ephräm dies getan hatte.³⁸

35 Stephen D. Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews in Aphrahat, Ephrem, and Jacob of Sarug,“ in David R. Blumenthal, hg., *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times* (Brown Judaic Studies 54; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), 135–156; und Stephen D. Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion; Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 75–91, wobei das Buchkapitel keinen beachtlich größeren Erkenntniswert im Vergleich mit dem zuvor erschienen Artikel aufweist.

36 Siehe Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews,“ 135.

37 Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews,“ 136.

38 Siehe Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews,“ 137 und 145. Zur Wahrnehmung der Juden und des Judentums im Werk Aphrahats siehe weiterhin Danielle Abel, „Early Syro-Mesopotamian Christian writers, Jews and Judaism: Influence and Reaction (*With a study of a selection of Aphrahat's Demonstrations*)“ (PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2005), 148–233; Becker, „Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor“; Koltun-Fromm,

Nichtsdestotrotz fehlte es Jakob nicht an polemischem Geist und einer entsprechenden Wortwahl und Auswahl literarischer Bilder und Motive. Was Jakobs Haltung kennzeichnete, war sein intensives und unermüdliches „Hinterfragen und Erstaunen über die jüdische Weigerung, Christus zu verstehen und anzunehmen.“³⁹ Benin argumentierte, dass Jakobs Predigten gegen die Juden eher nicht als Ergebnis einer Reaktion auf spezifische und konkrete historische Konflikte zwischen Christen und Juden zu verstehen seien. Zu einer genaueren historischen Verortung fehlen ausreichende Quellen.⁴⁰ Vielmehr habe Jakob in einem historischen Umfeld gewirkt und gepredigt, in dem die Juden über einen Großteil ihres Schicksals und ihrer Handlungen selbst entscheiden konnten, während das Christentum von Spaltungen und Kämpfen im Inneren heimgesucht wurde, die seine Position gegenüber Allem, was sich am Rande oder außerhalb der Gemeinde befand, schwächten. In einer solchen Situation konnten sich die kritischen Aussagen zum Judentum und den Juden leichter in Werkzeuge und polemische Traditionen entwickeln, die sich nicht so sehr an echten Juden und ihren Handlungen orientierten, sondern die als Mittel der theologischen Selbstbestätigung eingesetzt wurden und so auch funktionieren konnten. Doch eine solche Selbstbestätigung war dann auch nur um den Preis der Kritik und Erniedrigung des Anderen erreichbar. Der Preis, der zu zahlen war, bestand darin, „jede andere religiöse Tradition“ kritisieren und herabwürdigen zu können, ja sogar zu müssen, um sich selbst zu erkennen und sich selbst zu konstituieren.⁴¹

Während Aphrahats und Ephräms Polemiken gegen Juden auf bestimmten historischen Ereignissen und Umständen beruhten, die zumindest ein gewisses Maß an Interaktion mit Juden mit einschlossen, soweit sich dies aus ihren Texten ableiten lässt, konnte Benin solche historischen Dimensionen aus dem Werk Jakobs nicht herleiten und sah Jakob daher als den „professionellen Polemiker“, der „seine jüdischen Strohleute behutsam und methodisch [...] aufbaute, um sie umso effizienter niederzuschlagen.“⁴² Ein solches Urteil dürfte zu verallgemeinernd sein. Dennoch bieten Jakobs pastorale und pädagogische Interessen hinreichend Gründe, die erklären können, warum er den Diskurs gegen Juden methodisch und didaktisch betrieb. Er hatte

Jewish-Christian Conversation; Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Studia Post-Biblica 19; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971). Zur Sicht Ephräms auf das Judentum siehe Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy* mit weiteren Literaturangaben vor Ort.

39 Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews,“ 137.

40 Siehe auch ebd., 137.

41 Ebd., 137–138.

42 Ebd., 145.

vielleicht keine eigenen Interaktionen mit Juden oder sah nicht, wie die christlichen Gemeinden, die er betreute, direkten Kontakt und Interaktionen verschiedener Arten mit Juden hatten. Doch Jakob war zu einem Zeitpunkt im christlichen pastoralen Raum aktiv, als die christliche Reaktion auf das Judentum ein solches Maß an Frustration gegenüber jüdischem Widerstand gegen alle christlichen Bemühungen, Juden freiwillig zur Annahme der christlichen Position und Auslegung der Schrift zu bringen, erreicht hatte, dass die christliche Seite schließlich entschlossener als bisher die Juden verurteilte. In Jakobs Werk zum Beispiel beobachtet man, vielleicht etwas überraschend, nicht eine Verurteilung des Gesetzes und seiner Anforderungen, sondern ein durchweg positives Verständnis und eine positive Einstellung zum Gesetz. Jakob konnte vom Gesetz als einer Krankenschwester sprechen oder als einem Kraut, das medizinische Eigenschaften hatte, und als einer Lampe oder Fackel, die in der Welt leuchtete.⁴³ Dennoch besaß das Gesetz nur eine vorläufige Funktion, die, so dachten die Christen in Jakobs Umwelt und er selbst, als vorläufig und im Sinne eines typologischen Zwecks zu interpretieren war. Das Problem war nicht das Gesetz, sondern eher der Umstand, dass die Juden sich hartnäckig weigerten, sich von ihm zu trennen, nachdem es seine nur bedingte und vorübergehende Aufgabe erfüllt hatte, vorbildhaft oder typologisch auf Christus hinzuweisen. „Das Gesetz ist vom Berg Sinai herabgekommen,“ wie Jakob in einer Predigt „auf den Sabbat schrieb, „um als Lampe in der Nacht zu sein, damit er [i.e. Moses] [unterstützt] durch sie [i.e. „durch die Lampe,“ oder „in ihr,“ i.e. „in der Nacht“] gehe, wie eine Feuersäule, die in der Mitte des Lagers sich befindet, so ist das Gesetz Gottes [nun auch] in der Welt. Damit der Mensch weder über Götzen noch über gehauene Steine stolpere, trug Mose in der Nacht die Lampe und zeigte sie.“⁴⁴ Doch in späteren Jahren, wie Benin Jakobs Ansicht zusammenfasste, war das Licht, das Christus ausgegossen hatte, stärker und voller als das Gesetz. So verwandelte sich das Bild des Juden, der weiterhin dem Licht des Gesetzes folgte, für Jakob ins Absurde. Ihm schienen Juden sich in einer Sphäre zu bewegen, die hell vom Licht Christi erleuchtet wurde. Doch sie trugen weiterhin eine nutzlose, kleine Lampe, das Gesetz, mit sich und nahmen es als Maßstab, weil sie annahmen, dass die Welt, in der sie lebten, noch dunkel sei.⁴⁵ Hier hatte Jakob, wie auch Benin beobachtet hatte,

43 Jakob von Sarug, *Homilien gegen die Juden* 7.151, 3.73–74 und 7.433–518 (hrsg. und übers. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 190–191 [Krankenschwester], 90–91 [Heilkraut] und 210–215 [Lampe und Fackel, Licht]); siehe auch Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews,“ 145, 146, 147 und 149.

44 Ebd., 7.449–454 (hrsg. und übers. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 210–211; deutsche Übers. Horn).

45 Siehe Benin, „Commandments, Covenants, and the Jews,“ 147.

das Gesetz auf nichts anderes als einen Schatten reduziert, einen bloßen Typus und Hinweis auf das, was kommen sollte.⁴⁶ Gleichzeitig wurden die Juden angesichts wiederholter christlicher Bemühungen um die jüdische Bekehrung als starrköpfig wahrgenommen und dargestellt. Man sah sie als auf ewig in Blindheit und ohne das Licht der Erkenntnis verbleibend.⁴⁷ Dies führte zu einem stärkeren Gefühl der Resignation und einer entschiedenen Distanzierung des christlichen, seiner selbst bewussten Ichs vom jüdischen „Anderen.“

Das Erbe des Antijudaismus, das Teil der syrischen theologischen Traditionen ist, das aber auch Teil anderer christlicher, einschließlich katholischer und protestantischer, Traditionen, besonders auch im Westen ist, stellt eine Herausforderung und zugleich eine Chance für syrischsprachige, theologisch informierte und bewusst sich als solche verstehende und in eine entsprechend geprägte Zukunft auf dem Weg seiende Christen und die Kirchen, in denen diese sich versammeln und beheimatet fühlen, dar. Die ausgesprochen starke Betonung der Typologie in Jakobs Werk ist bemerkenswert.⁴⁸ Auch in seinen

46 Siehe ebd., 147–148.

47 Siehe ebd., 143 und 148–149.

48 Mehrere Wissenschaftler haben sich bereits mit Fragen der Typologie im Werk Jakobs beschäftigt. Zu nennen sind hier unter anderen Armando Elkhoury, „Types and Symbols of the Church in the Writings of Jacob of Sarug“ (Th.D. Dissertation, Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, 2017); Sidney H. Griffith, „Disclosing the Mystery: The Hermeneutics of Typology in Syriac Exegesis,“ in Mordechai Z. Cohen und Adele Berlin, hg., *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 46–64, hier 52–64; Emmanuel Thelly, „Abraham and his Types: Homily of Mar Jacob 109,“ *The Harp* 24 (2009): 179–188; Robert A. Kitchen, „Jonah’s Oar: Christian Typology in Jacob of Serugh’s Mêmra 122 on Jonah,“ *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 11.1 (2008), <https://hugoye.bethmardutho.org/article/hv11n1kitchen> (last accessed 12 June 2022); Johns Abraham Konat, „Typological Exegesis in the Metrical Homilies of Jacob of Serugh,“ *Parole de l’Orient* 31 (2006): 109–121; Christian Lange, „The Mystery of the Son Did Not Journey without the Church: A Study on Jacob of Serugh’s Memra on the Vision of Jacob at Bethel,“ *The Harp* 20 (2006): 209–220; Johns Abraham Konat, „A Metrical Homily of Jacob of Serugh on the Mysteries, Types and Figures of Christ: Authentic or Compilation?“ *Le Muséon* 118.1–2 (2005): 71–86; Johns Abraham Konat, „Christological Insights in Jacob of Serugh’s Typology as Reflected in his Memre,“ *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 77.1 (2001): 46–72; Johns Abraham Konat, „The Old Testament Types of Christ as Reflected in the Select Metrical Homilies (Memre) of Jacob of Serugh“ (Th.D. dissertation, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1998); Richard E. McCarron, „An Epiphany of Mystical Symbols: Jacob of Sarugh’s Mêmra 109 on Abraham and His Types,“ *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 1.1 (1998), <https://hugoye.bethmardutho.org/article/hv11nmccarron> (last accessed 12 June 2022); und Behnam M. Boulos Sony, „La méthode exégétique de Jacques de Saroug,“ *Parole de l’Orient* 9 (1979–1980): 67–103.

Predigten gegen die Juden wandte Jakob diese typologische Methode an. Doch während die Typologie von einer bestimmten Perspektive aus als etwas Positives gesehen werden kann, wenn sie dem Zweck dient, die Realität, auf die die Typen verweisen, zu erhöhen, trägt sie gleichzeitig dazu bei, die konkreten und spezifischen Wirklichkeiten, die die Wörter und Bilder repräsentieren, die von Objekten und Ereignissen im wörtlichen Sinne sprechen, abzuwerten. Das Opfer Isaaks, des Sohnes Abrahams, als einen Typus Christi zu betrachten, dient in den Schriften eines christlichen Autors dem Zweck, dem christlichen Publikum die überaus große, aufopfernde Liebe Gottes des Vaters nahe zu bringen, der bereit ist, seinen einzigen Sohn für die Erlösung der Welt darzubieten. Doch die Behauptung, dass die Geschichte des Opfers Isaaks nur typologisch verstanden werden darf und lediglich als ein Typus Christi dient, beraubt das jüdische, aber auch das christliche Publikum der Fähigkeit, Abraham und seinen jungen Sohn als außergewöhnliche Gestalten, als historische Figuren und als Beispiele eines absoluten Glaubens an und Vertrauens auf Gott und sein Wort sehen zu können. Der immer wiederkehrende typologische Interpretationsansatz Jakobs von Sarug in der Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift nimmt den Juden den Wert der Thora aus den Händen. Gleichzeitig nimmt Jakob damit aber auch seiner eigenen syrischsprachigen, christlichen Zuhörerschaft einen Teil der Fülle der Schrift und ihrer Botschaft, da die Heilige Schrift selbst über ihre eschatologische Ausrichtung hinaus betont, dass die Heilsgeschichte durch alle Zeiten hindurch ein ständiges und beharrliches Anliegen Gottes für das Volk Gottes war und ist und bleibt. Im heutigen Kontext, in dem sich syrische Christen im Westen in engem Kontakt mit Christen im Westen, sowohl mit Christen aus westlichen christlichen Traditionen wie auch aus anderen religiösen Traditionen, befinden, ist es wichtig zu verstehen, dass gerade solche Entscheidungen und oder auch Vorentscheidungen und Zwänge, die Thora nur typologisch zu lesen, wesentlich dazu beigetragen haben, Juden abzuwerten, sie ihrer eigenen Identität und ihres eigenen Erbes zu berauben, was schon vor der Moderne begann und weit zurück bis ins Mittelalter und die Spätantike reicht, und Gewaltakte gegen sie zu verüben.

Zwei bildliche Darstellungen aus der sogenannten Goldenen Haggada, einem Meisterwerk jüdischer Handschriftenilluminationen aus Katalonien, vielleicht auch direkt aus Barcelona in Spanien aus der Zeit um 1320–1330 n. Chr., bieten für diesen Artikel lediglich eines zahlreicher anderer möglicher Beispiele einer typologischen Bibelinterpretation in bildlicher Form, die entweder als Glanzstück antichristlicher jüdischer Polemik zu verstehen ist oder die darauf abzielte oder es in Kauf nahm, die Juden ihres eigenen Erbes zu

berauben.⁴⁹ Die Goldene Haggada befindet sich heute in der British Library in London, wo sie unter der Signatur BL MS Add 27.210 eingesehen werden kann.⁵⁰ Die Handschrift setzt mit sieben ganzseitig illuminierten Bifolia ein, bei denen jeweils vier Illuminationen pro Folio und damit acht pro Bifolium die Seiten füllen. Die dargestellten Szenen bilden Ereignisse aus den Büchern Genesis und Exodus, begleitet von zeitgenössischen Szenen, ab.⁵¹ Folio 10v eröffnet die Darstellungen aus dem Buch Exodus. Auf dieser Folioseite illustrierte der Künstler in der oberen Bildhälfte zwei Szenen aus Exodus 3 und 4 auf der Basis von Szenen aus dem Leben Christi, auf die hier ein wenig genauer einzugehen ist.⁵² Ein christlicher Künstler oder Ratgeber könnte an diesen Illuminationen mitgewirkt oder sie sogar ausgeführt haben. Exodus 3, das die Geschichte von Moses am Brennenden Busch erzählt, wird als eine Variante der Verkündigung der Geburt Christi durch den Mund eines Engels an die Hirten auf dem Feld dargestellt. Die Illustration des Textes Exodus 4, des Kapitels, das die Rückkehr Moses' mit Frau und Kindern nach Ägypten erzählt, ist der Geschichte der Flucht der Heiligen Familie nach Ägypten nachempfunden. Mit solchen Bildern, die den Betrachtenden in die Ikonographie christlicher Geschichten einführen und die hebräische Bibelerzählung als Illustration eher verbergen als offenlegen, wird die Phantasie des jüdischen Lesers oder der jüdischen Leserin für eine christliche Interpretation präkonditioniert und dazu gedrängt, diese Geschichten der Thora eher wegen ihres typologischen Wertes anzuerkennen, falls ein solcher Leser oder eine solche Leserin jemals auf Darstellungen der Szenen aus dem Zyklus der Geburt Christi stoßen sollte.⁵³ Eine kritische Würdigung der syrischen Typo-

49 Zu Studien, die einzelne Illuminationen der Handschrift eher aus der Sicht antichristlicher jüdischer Polemik betrachten, siehe zum Beispiel Julie Harris, „Polemical Images in the Golden Haggadah (British Library, Add. MS 27210),“ *Medieval Encounters* 8.2–3 (2002), 105–122.

50 Siehe auch Marc Michael Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 129–200; Bezalel Narkiss, *The Golden Haggadah* (London: British Library; and Rohnert Park, California: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1997); Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts in the British Isles: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Jerusalem: Oxford University Press, 1982), Nr. 11; und Joseph Gutmann, übers. Brigitte Sauerländer, *Buchmalerei in hebräischen Handschriften* (Die großen Handschriften der Welt; München: Prestel, 1978), 61–64.

51 Siehe auch Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah*, 151.

52 British Library MS Add. 27.210, folio 10 verso. Siehe Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah*, plate 35.

53 Epstein, *The Medieval Haggadah*, 167, handelt nur kurz zu diesen Bildern. Siehe dagegen Peter von der Osten-Sacken, „Weltliche Macht, Kirche und Jüdische Gemeinden im Mittelalter,“ in *Evangelische Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg-schlesische Oberlausitz und Touro College Berlin*, hg., gefördert von der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, *Martin*

logie, insbesondere im Werk von Autoren wie Jakob von Sarug, und der Typologie in westlichen Gefilden, erfordert Reflexionen darüber, wie man mit solchen Aspekten des sonst so hoch geschätzten literarischen Erbes umgehen sollte. Man wird ernsthaft die Frage stellen müssen, was beim typologischen Lesen der Schrift gewonnen werden kann und was verloren geht. Natürlich muss man auch kritisch fragen, ob das Abwerten und die Entwertung einer religiösen Tradition jemals akzeptabel sind, und ob man diesen Preis bezahlen will, um einen nur teilweisen Einblick in einige Aspekte der Heiligen Schrift zu gewinnen.

Doch die Typologie ist nicht der einzige schwierige Aspekt, mit dem man sich im Werk Jakobs von Sarug und bei Jakobs Positionierung angesichts des Judentums kritisch auseinandersetzen hat. Fragen der Themenauswahl und deren schriftlicher Ausarbeitung sind ebenfalls von Bedeutung. So besteht Jakobs Homilie Nr. VI „Gegen die Juden“ aus einem Dialog- oder Streitgedicht, einer Art Disput zwischen der jüdischen Synagoge und der christlichen Kirche.⁵⁴ Micheline Albert argumentierte, dass sich diese Predigt etwas von den übrigen Homilien „Gegen die Juden“ unterscheidet und vielleicht nicht wie diese anderen als Teil einer Sammlung konzipiert worden sei.⁵⁵ Das in Homilie Nr. VI verwendete Genre des Dialoggedichtes könnte ein Indikator dafür sein. Die wiederholte, wenn auch nicht durchgehend separate Überlieferung des Textes in den Handschriften wäre als ein weiteres Indiz zu werten. Doch

Luther und das Judentum: Rückblick und Aufbruch. Katalog zur gleichnamigen Wanderausstellung. (Berlin: Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, zweite, verbesserte und erweiterte Auflage, 2016), 40–51, hier 46–47.

- 54 Jakob von Sarug, *Homilien gegen die Juden* 6 (hg. und übers. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 160–181). Siehe auch Hiram Pflaum, „Der allegorische Streit zwischen Synagoge und Kirche in der europäischen Dichtung des Mittelalters,“ *Archivum Romanicum* 18 (1934): 448–464; Heinz Pflaum/Hiram Peri, *Die religiöse Disputation in der europäischen Dichtung des Mittelalters: Studie. Der allegorische Streit zwischen Synagoge und Kirche* (Genf und Florenz: L. S. Olschki, 1935) (mit den Besprechungen von Arthur Långfors [*Romania* 254 (1938), 264–266]; und Leo Spitzer [*Speculum. A Journal of Medieval Studies* 13.3 (1938), 356–360]); Alfred Raddatz, „Die Entstehung des Motivs ‚Ecclesia und Synagoge.‘ Geschichtliche Hintergründe und Deutung“ (Dissertation, Humboldt Universität Berlin, 1959); und Benedikt Oehl, „Die *Altercatio Ecclesiae et Synagogae*: Ein antijudaistischer Dialog der Spätantike“ (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, 2012).
- 55 Siehe Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 11, 20–21, 22–23 und 31. Mit Jakobs Homilie Nr. VI „Gegen die Juden“ wäre auch das akrostichische Streitgedicht zwischen Synagoge und Kirche zu vergleichen, das sich in Bruno Kirschner, „Alfabetische Akrosticha in der syrischen Kirchenpoesie,“ *Oriens Christianus* 6 (1906): 1–69, hier 22–43, findet. Siehe auch Bruno Kirschner, „Alfabetische Akrosticha in der Syrischen Kirchenpoesie“ (Dissertation, Universität Heidelberg, 1907; gedruckt: Rom: Tipografia poliglotta, 1907).

während die Homilien „Gegen die Juden“ eindeutig dazu bestimmt waren, während der Liturgie gelesen und rezitiert zu werden, und auch dazu beitragen sollten, die Gläubigen in der Gemeinde zu erbauen, deutet nichts darauf hin, dass für Homilie Nr. VI „Gegen die Juden“ ein anderer Verwendungszweck oder „Sitz im Leben“ gefordert werden müsste. Über eine Verwendung in der Liturgie hinaus hätte der explizitere dialogische Charakter dieser Predigt sie auch für Aufführungen in weiteren Kreisen geeignet gemacht. Ein Einsatz dieses Textes zum Beispiel als Lesung, die zur Unterhaltung oder zum Unterricht im schulischen Milieu Verwendung finden könnte, wäre auch möglich. Albert betonte die doch recht starke Bezeugung dieser Predigt in den Handschriften, auch wenn sie selber nur zwei Zeugen für ihre Edition heranziehen konnte. Die insgesamt beachtliche handschriftliche Überlieferung spricht in der Tat für eine relativ weite und intensive Rezeption des Textes.⁵⁶

Ohne hier auf sehr viele Einzeldetails einzugehen, kann man feststellen, dass Homilie Nr. VI „Gegen die Juden“ im Wesentlichen einen Dialog oder auch Disput der Kirche mit der Synagoge der Juden bietet. Nach Jakob sei die Synagoge einstmals herrlich gewesen, eine achtenswerte Jungfrau, die jedoch von Christus, ihrem Bräutigam, wegen ihrer mangelnden Treue später abgelehnt wurde. Im Gegensatz dazu sei die christliche Kirche, die sich früher Götzen und falschen Göttern unterworfen habe, da sie als Kind in ihren jungen Jahren hierzu von ihrer Herkunft verführt worden sei, nun zur Braut und wahren Ehefrau Christi auserwählt worden.⁵⁷ Die allegorische Personifizierung von Synagoge und Kirche war in der syrischen Tradition bereits aus früheren Werken, einschließlich derer Aphrahats und Ephräms, bekannt.⁵⁸ Dennoch sind die detaillierte Darstellung und Ausführung dieser Figuren und ihres Gespräches miteinander in Jakobs Dichtung in diesem Fall bemerkenswert. Während die allegorische Personifizierung in Werken früherer Autoren ein eher untergeordnetes Motiv darstellte, wurde sie in Jakobs Werk erweitert und zu einer einzigen, für sich stehenden Komposition erhoben, die unabhängig zirkulierte. Die Reichweite und Wirkmächtigkeit dieses Motivs war damit

56 Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 31.

57 So der Hauptinhalt in Jakob von Sarug, *Homilien gegen die Juden* 6 (hg. und übers. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 160–181). Siehe auch Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 11 und 19; sowie François Graffin, „Recherches sur le thème de l'Église-épouse dans les liturgies et la littérature de langue syriaque“, *L'Orient syrien: revue trimestrielle d'études et de recherches sur les Églises de langue syriaque* 3 (1958), 317–336.

58 Siehe zum Beispiel Material, das Robert Murray bei der Besprechung der Darstellung der Kirche als Braut und Mutter in unterschiedlichen Autoren und Texten im vierten Kapitel seines Buches *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, revised edition, 2006), 131–158 bot.

intensiviert und deutlich gesteigert worden. In seiner Homilie Nr. VI „Gegen die Juden“ charakterisierte Jakob die Synagoge nicht übermäßig negativ, etwa durch erniedrigende oder abwertende Adjektive. In der Gesamtheit der Sammlung der Predigten gegen die Juden jedoch nahm er auf die Juden als ganze Gruppe als „das Volk“ oder „die Nation“ Bezug, im Gegensatz zu den Christen, die er, wie auch Ephräm und andere vor ihm schon, als „Nationen“ bezeichnete.⁵⁹ Nicht explizit in der Homilie Nr. VI, doch an anderen Stellen der Sammlung dieser Predigten „Gegen die Juden“ stellte Jakob die Juden als Nation wiederholt als schmutzig, aufmüpfig, geistesgestört und vor allem als „blind“ dar.⁶⁰ Gerade durch den prägnanten Hinweis auf die Blindheit der Juden ergibt sich aus dem Formulierungsschatz Jakobs für syrischsprachige Christen im Westen eine problematische und bedenkliche Überlieferungstradition im Werk eines syrischen Kirchenvaters, wenn man Fragen der Anschlussfähigkeit an Traditionen im Blick hat, die auch im Westen bekannt sind.

Mit der Identifizierung der jüdischen Starrköpfigkeit und Blindheit nicht als einem vorübergehenden Fehler, der verändert oder behoben werden kann, sondern als einem dauerhaften, nicht heilbaren, körperlichen Mangel, kommt Jakobs Darstellung des Judentums in der Gestalt einer Jungfrau, die an Blindheit leidet, den recht häufig anzutreffenden Darstellungen der Synagoge als Jungfrau oder junge Frau mit verbundenen Augen, die mittelalterliche Skulpturen an westlichen Kirchengebäuden und Illuminationen in Handschriften abbilden, recht nahe.⁶¹ Aus der westlichen, im öffentlichen

59 Siehe zum Thema zum Beispiel Robin Anne Darling, „The ‚Church from the Nations‘ in the Exegesis of Ephrem,“ in Han J. W. Drijvers, René Lavenant, Corrie Molenberg und Gerrit J. Reinink, hg., *IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen – Oosterhesselen 10–12 September)* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 229; Roma: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 111–122.

60 Jakob von Sarug, *Homilien gegen die Juden* I.18, I.230, I.232, II.9, VII.88, VII.246 und VII.403 (hrsg. und übers. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 44–45, 58–59 [2x], 68–69, 186–187, 196–197 und 208–209).

61 Zur Besprechung der Gegenüberstellung von Synagoge und Ekklesia in der Bildenden Kunst, mit Bemerkungen zu den Anfängen dieser Tradition in frühkirchlicher Literatur, siehe zum Beispiel Adolf Weis, „Ekklesia und Synagoge,“ in *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte* IV (1957), 1189–1215, eingesehen in RDK Labor unter <https://www.rdklabor.de/w/?oldid=93171> (last accessed 01 July 2022). Siehe auch Pflaum, „Der allegorische Streit“; Pflaum, Peri, *Die religiöse Disputation*; Wilhelm Maurer, *Kirche und Synagoge. Motive und Formen der Auseinandersetzung der Kirche mit dem Judentum im Laufe der Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1951); Edith Wenzel, „Synagoga und Ecclesia: Zum Antijudaismus im deutschsprachigen Spiel des späten Mittelalters,“ *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 12 (1987): 57–81; Edith Wenzel, „Synagoga und Ecclesia. Zum Antijudaismus im deutschsprachigen Spiel des späten Mittelalters,“ in Hans Otto Horch, hg., *Judentum, Antisemitismus und europäische*

Raum recht leicht zugänglichen Kunst mag man beispielsweise auf die Darstellungen aus dem Skulpturenschatz hinweisen, die das Südportal des Münsters in Straßburg, das Portal der Kirche Notre Dame de Paris, die Nordvorhalle des Magdeburger Doms, die Südfassade der Kathedrale in Reims oder das Fürstenportal des Doms in Bamberg, um nur einige zu nennen, zieren.⁶² Doch auch Material, das heute eher in Museen und Bibliotheken aufbewahrt wird, zu seiner Entstehungszeit jedoch durchaus auch zur Präsentation für weitere Kreise gedacht war und verwendet worden sein mag, ist heranzuziehen. Beispiele für diese weitere Kategorie finden sich in den Bebildnerungen der Predigtsammlung Bedas aus Verdun vom Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts und des Missales von Noyon (1250 n. Chr.).⁶³ In ersterer Illumination findet sich die Abbildung der gekrönten Kirche als junger Frau, mit Kelch in der Hand, die triumphierend auf der horizontal ausgestreckten, mit verbundenen Augen auf dem Boden liegenden Synagoge, gleichfalls als junge Frau dargestellt, steht. Im Missale von Noyon sind Kirche und Synagoge, beide als junge Frauen, rechts und links eines Medaillons mit Christuslamm platziert, wobei die mit verbundenen Augen präsentierte Synagoge mit einem spitzen Stock in die Seite des Christuslammes sticht und die Kirche das herausströmende Blut in einem Kelch auffängt. Für beide Kategorien könnten noch zahlreiche weitere Beispiele angeführt werden. Die öffentliche Sichtbarkeit solcher Kunstwerke im größeren oder kleineren Kreis, sei es in leicht zugänglichen Räumen im Umfeld

Kultur (Tübingen: Francke, 1988), 51–75; und Helga Scirie, „Ecclesia und Synagoge an den Domen zu Strassburg, Bamberg, Magdeburg und Erfurt. Körpersprachliche Wandlungen im gestalterischen Kontext,“ *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 46/47 (1993/1994): 679–687.

- 62 Siehe die Abbildungen in Peter von der Osten-Sacken, „Ecclesia und Synagoga,“ in *Evangelische Kirche Berlin-Brandenburg-schlesische Oberlausitz und Touro College Berlin, Martin Luther und das Judentum*, 52–59, hier 55. Siehe auch Paul Weber, *Geistliches Schauspiel und kirchliche Kunst in ihrem Verhältnis erläutert an einer Ikonographie der Kirche und Synagoge. Eine kunsthistorische Studie* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ebner & Seubert [Paul Neff], 1894), Tafel 1; Adolf Weis, „Die 'Synagoge' am Münster zu Straßburg,“ *Das Münster* 1 (1947): 65–80; Herbert Jochum, hg., *Ecclesia und Synagoga: das Judentum in der christlichen Kunst*, Ausstellungskatalog, Alte Synagoge Essen, Regionalgeschichtliches Museum, Saarbrücken (Ottweil: Ottweiler Druckerei und Verlag, 1993); Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); und Bernward Dörner, „Ecclesia und Synagoga (Darstellungen des Mittelalters),“ in Wolfgang Benz, hg., in Zusammenarbeit mit Werner Bergmann, Rainer Kampling, Juliane Wetzel und Ulrich Wyrwa, Redaktion Brigitte Mihok, *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart Band 7: Literatur, Film, Theater und Kunst* (Berlin, München und Boston: De Gruyter – Saur, 2015), 85–87.
- 63 Siehe die Abbildungen in von der Osten-Sacken, „Ecclesia und Synagoga,“ 54 und 57.

von Kirchengebäuden im Westen, bei Lesungen aus den Predigtsammlungen oder im Gottesdienst, oder auch bei der öffentliche Darbietung der Predigten Jakobs während der Liturgie und in Lesungen, stellt eine besondere Herausforderung für diejenigen dar, die sich mit einer Tradition identifizieren, die das Werk Jakobs von Sarug als wertvollen Teil der syrischen Theologie schätzen und gleichzeitig in einem westlichen Kulturraum mit weit zurückreichender, durchaus auch schwieriger Geschichte in Europa leben. Es wird nötig sein, Strategien zu finden, die fragwürdigen Aspekte des Traditionserbes, das eine Abwertung und Herabwürdigung des Judentums und der Juden artikuliert, zu benennen, dessen historische Bedingtheit zu erforschen, angemessene Kritik zu üben, sich von Nichtvertretbarem zu distanzieren und Tradition nur kritisch reflektiert und wo nötig nur selektiv weiterzugeben. In diesem Orientierungs- und Entscheidungsprozess, der auch die Aufgabe hat, Tradition zu gestalten, werden viele Faktoren eine Rolle spielen. Der Erfahrungsaustausch mit westlichen Christen, die sich gleichfalls im kritischen Umgang mit ihrem eigenen Erbe, das vergleichbar problematisch und an ungewünschten Stellen involviert ist, könnte bei dieser Herausforderung von Nutzen sein. Die Notwendigkeit eines kritischen Prozesses der Auseinandersetzung mit Tradition für syrischsprachige Christen ist gerade auch dann besonders wichtig, wenn man bedenkt, dass negative Darstellungen und Herabsetzungen Anderer, hier der Juden, die im Blick sind, gerade in Kunstwerken und in zentralen Texten bedeutender theologischer Schriftsteller vermittelt werden, beispielsweise eben in den Schriften Ephräms und Jakobs, zweier der wohl am meisten verehrten und gefeierten Persönlichkeiten der syrischen Tradition.⁶⁴ Mit klar erkennbarem Bezug auf den ererbten Antijudaismus in den Werken grundlegender Autoren, die aus einem Kontext historischer Ereignisse geschrieben hatten, die zu negativen Erfahrungen führten, aber die auch, wie im Falle Jakobs, eine Polemik gegen Juden als Teil einer theologischen Methodik entwickelt hatten, stehen Christen der syrischsprachigen Tradition vor komplexen Herausforderungen, die jedoch durchaus gemeistert werden können: im westlichen Kontext und im Dialog mit anderen theologischen Traditionen, die mit ähnlichen Konflikten wie auch mit der Notwendigkeit konfrontiert sind, sich

64 Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit problematischen Aspekten der Theologie Ephräms findet sich beispielsweise in der Untersuchung von Carmen E. Maier, „Poetry as Exegesis: Ephrem the Syrian's Method of Scriptural Interpretation Especially as Seen in his *Hymns on Paradise* and *Hymns on Unleavened Bread*“ (PhD dissertation; Princeton Theological Seminary, 2012), 233–234 *et passim*, die klar Ephräms Theologie gegenüber dem Judentum als eine Theologie benennt und offenlegt, die das Christentum und die Kirche als Überbietung, Überwindung und restlosen Ersatz des Judentums und der Synagoge versteht.

mit einem widerspenstigen, schwierigen theologischen Erbe auseinanderzusetzen. Für Kirchen und Glaubensgemeinschaften, die stark oder wachsend im westlichen Kontext und in der westlichen Lebenswirklichkeit aufgestellt sind, in denen der Antisemitismus auf dem Vormarsch ist, insbesondere in Teilen der Gesellschaft, die Ansprüche auf die Wahrung von Tradition und Identität erheben, ist eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen Tradition ein dringendes, nicht vermeidbares Thema und eine nicht zu unterschätzende Herausforderung.

Das Werk Jakobs von Sarug hat für die Erforschung der Auswirkungen der syrischsprachigen Schriftauslegung auf interreligiöse Beziehungen neben seiner Bedeutung für das Verhältnis zwischen Christentum und Judentum auch beachtliche Relevanz für die christlich-islamischen Beziehungen. Hierbei geht es natürlich nicht um einen unmittelbaren historischen Kontakt Jakobs mit Muslimen. Historisch ist für den Anfang des sechsten Jahrhunderts, genauer noch für die Jahre 502 und 503 n. Chr., lediglich die Existenz von Belegen für arabische Übergriffe auf die Gebiete, in denen Jakob wirkte bzw. mit denen er Kontakt hatte, festzuhalten. Während der Belagerung Amidias in den Jahren 502/503 griff der Lakhmidische Führer Nāmān das Gebiet von Ḥarrān, Edessa und Sarug an, von wo er Tausende der Bewohner in die Gefangenschaft wegführte und schwere Plünderungen verursachte.⁶⁵ Zumindest lässt sich aus dieser Beobachtung ableiten, dass die Regionen, in denen Jakob seinen Gemeinden diente, bereits zu Jakobs Lebzeiten einen geografischen Raum bildeten, in dem Araber mit Sprechern der syrischen Sprache und mit der Zuhörerschaft Jakobs homiletischer Verkündigungen in Kontakt kamen. Somit könnte, auch angesichts der sarazenischen Präsenz in verschiedenen Gebieten der weiteren syrisch-palästinischen Landschaft in der Spätantike, die Übersetzung christlicher Predigten in andere Sprachen zumindest eine Option und Verbreitungsmöglichkeit für die Vermittlung syrisch-christlicher Ideen aus der Feder Jakobs an arabischsprachige Menschen gewesen sein.

Durch die Werke Jakobs von Sarug und ihre äußerst breite Rezeption entstand bereits früh Gelegenheit zum Kontakt und Gedankenaustausch zwischen den Syrisch und Arabisch sprechenden religiös und kulturell interessierten Gruppen. Solche Gelegenheiten manifestierten sich wiederholt. Nicht allein,

65 Siehe *Chronik Josuas des Styliten* 51–65 (Text und Übers. Wright, *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, 47–64 [syrisch] und 39–55 [englisch]; übers. Trombley und Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 55–83; übers. Luther, *Die syrische Chronik des Josua Stylites*, 66–77); Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century. Vol. 1, Pt. 1: Political and Military History* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 12–16; und Debié, „Guerres et religions en Mésopotamie du Nord dans l'Antiquité tardive,“ 29 und 36–40.

aber doch auch hierdurch wurde der Einzug syrisch-theologischer Ideen auch in Regionen und Gebiete ermöglicht, in denen Araber in größerer Anzahl lebten. Somit lässt sich argumentieren, dass Mohammeds frühes Publikum aus Zuhörern mit unterschiedlichem religiösem Hintergrund bestand. Zu diesen gehörten neben syrischsprachigen Christen auch arabischsprachige Menschen, deren Wissen und Traditionen sich im syrischen Milieu gebildet und entfaltet hatten, einem Milieu, das auch von Jakobs homiletischer Verkündigung mitgestaltet worden war. Weiterhin waren in diesem Einzugskreis auch Äthiopier, Kopten, Armenier und andere Zuhörer präsent, die Jakobs Ideen bereitwillig und aktiv entweder durch mündliche Vermittlung oder das Lesen von Texten aufnahmen. Ein solch breites Spektrum an potentiellen Zuhörern Jakobs konnte syrisch-christliche Ideen und Auffassungen zur Begegnung mit dem aufkommenden Islam, d.h. zur Begegnung mit einer aufstrebenden Religion, die ihre eigenen Ansprüche auf das Erbe der Heiligen Schrift entwickelte, mitbringen. Gerade hier lohnt es sich, die Bedeutung der Bibelauslegung und des Austauschs von Vorstellungen zu biblischen Geschichten unter den Gläubigen zu untersuchen und für deren Formung und Vorbereitung auf die Begegnung mit den Ideen und Vertretern des Islams als einer neuen religiösen Bewegung im siebten Jahrhundert zu berücksichtigen.

Für die Begegnung und den thematischen Ideenaustausch zwischen Christen, die mit Jakobs Schriftauslegung vertraut waren, und Muslimen ist es beispielsweise bemerkenswert, dass Jakobs metrische Predigten, etwa die über die Geburt Christi, in der Tat an verschiedenen Stellen umfangreiche Überlieferungen zur Geburt und Kindheit Jesu enthalten. Recht offensichtlich sind die Menschwerdung und die Geburt und Kindheit Jesu wichtige Themen in der Darstellung Jesu und seiner Mutter im Qur'an, besonders deutlich in den Suren 3 und 19. Nun ist es der Fall, dass Jakobs Predigten über die Geburt Christi in einem sehr weiten Zuhörererkreis aufgenommen und rezipiert wurden. Unter Jakobs Predigten, die in die verschiedensten orientalisch-christlichen Sprachen übersetzt wurden, wird diese Betonung des Themas und damit das Interesse an der Geburt und Kindheit Jesu in der Jakob'schen Verkündigung auch daran deutlich, dass die einzige Homilie Jakobs, die bis ins Georgische übersetzt und unter dem Namen Jakobs überliefert wurde, seine Predigt über die Geburt Christi ist. Diese wurde also im georgischen Sprachraum bewusst als Teil des syrischen dichterischen Erbes Jakobs weitergegeben.⁶⁶ Was Jakob

66 Pataridze, „La version géorgienne d'une homélie de Jacques de Saroug *Sur la Nativité*. Étude et traduction.“ Auch wenn mindestens eine weitere Predigt Jakobs ins Georgische übersetzt wurde und in die weiter abgelegenen Kaukasusregionen gelangte, wurde dabei die Zuordnung durch pseudonyme Zuschreibungen verwischt. Siehe oben, Fußnote 29.

zum weiteren Umfeld der Thematik der Menschwerdung Christi gedichtet hatte, wurde nicht nur in weiter entfernt liegende Regionen weitergetragen, sondern auch aktiv, intensiv und bewusst übertragen und aufgenommen.⁶⁷ Im Armenischen sind beispielsweise Übersetzungen von Jakobs Homilien zum Stern, der das Kommen des Herrn anzeigte, zum Stern und den Magiern und zur Geburt Christi, unseres Gottes, erhalten.⁶⁸ In arabischen Sammlungen der Predigten Jakobs finden sich Homilien zum Besuch Mariens bei Elisabeth, zur Verkündigung an Zacharias, zur Verkündigung an Maria, zum Stern der Magier, zur Geburt Christi und zu Lukas 2:34.⁶⁹ Diese arabischsprachige Weitergabe der Homilien Jakobs ist Zeugnis für die syrische wie auch für die koptische Rezeption.⁷⁰ Arabische Übersetzungen der Homilien stellen gleichfalls auch relevante Zwischenstücke in der Überlieferung aus dem Syrischen ins Äthiopische dar. In der äthiopischen Überlieferung der Homilien Jakobs sind Themen, die zur weiteren Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu gehören, ebenfalls vertreten.⁷¹ Hierzu gehören Homilien zur Verkündigung an die Jungfrau Maria, zur Verkündigung, die der Engel Zacharias über die Geburt Johannes des Täufers brachte, zum Besuch Marias bei Elisabeth, zur Geburt Jesu, zur Geburt und Taufe Jesu, und zu Simeon dem Priester, der Jesus im Tempel empfing.⁷²

Wenn die Diskussion an dieser Stelle betont, dass die Vermittlung biblischer und an die Bibel angelehnter Inhalte in die islamische Welt durch die Rezeption der Homilien Jakobs geschah, soll das nicht so verstanden werden, als ob Christen nicht auch die Verkündigungen der biblischen Texte direkt im Verlauf

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- 67 Zum Thema der Verkündigung der Menschwerdung Christi siehe auch Sr. Nora Q. Macabasag, *The Annunciation (Lk 1:26–38) in the Writings of Jacob of Serugh and early Syriac Fathers* (Mōrān 'Eth'ō 34; Kottayam, Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute [SEERI], 2015).
- 68 Mathews, Jr., „Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Good Friday* and Other Armenian Treasures: First Glances“, 153, 155 und 159; und Andy Hilken, „The Armenian Reception of the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh: New Findings“, 79.
- 69 Aaron Michael Butts, „The Christian Arabic Transmission of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521): The *Sammlungen*“, *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 16 (2016): 39–59, hier 44–46, 52 und 54.
- 70 Siehe auch Butts, „The Christian Arabic Transmission of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521): The *Sammlungen*“, 54–55.
- 71 Hinweise zur bisherigen Forschungsgeschichte zur Überlieferung der Werke Jakobs im Äthiopischen finden sich oben in Fußnote 26. Weitere Erkenntnisse sind von der Neusichtung des Materials zu erwarten, die Aaron Butts und Ted Erho sich als Aufgabe gesetzt haben.
- 72 Siehe die Hinweise in Witakowski, „Jacob of Serugh“; und Butts und Erho, „Jacob of Serugh in the Ambrosian Homiliary“, 40–50. Siehe auch den Hinweis auf Homilien zur Ankunft Christi (I Advent, II Advent und III Advent), auf die Abraha, „Jacob of Serugh in the Ethiopic Tradition under Review“, 467, verweist.

der Liturgien gehört und die aus dieser Form der Verkündigung gewonnenen Ideen und Vorstellungen direkt weitergegeben hätten. Doch einige der Details biblischer Texte, wie auch Leerstellen in biblischen Texten, an denen die Hörer vielleicht gerne mehr gewusst hätten als das, was der Text überlieferte und Details, an denen der biblische Text in etwas größeren Schritten über Ereignisse hinwegging, wo jedoch die Vorstellungskraft der Zuhörer zum Teil auf andere Quellen zur Ergänzung zurückgriff, zum Teil kreativ und erfinderisch arbeitete, und zum Teil einfach weitere Details von anderen hören wollte, gerade an solchen Stellen und in solchen Situationen hat die schöpferische und dann auch verbindliche Tradition werdende Nacherzählung solcher biblischen Geschichten durch begabte, dichterisch fähige Prediger wie Jakob von Sarug Entscheidendes, Formendes und Bleibendes geleistet und ist zu einem prägenden Einfluss geworden. Jakob, der mit seiner dichterischen Begabung Texte produzieren konnte, die besonders eingängig waren, und die man gut auswendig lernen und in Erinnerung behalten konnte, beeinflusste die Ideen und Vorstellungen der Gläubigen vom Verlauf, den Details und der Bedeutung der Aussagen biblischer Geschichten sehr erheblich und sorgte damit dafür, dass sich die von ihm vorgetragenen Versionen der biblischen Erzählungen in den Herzen der Menschen einschrieben und dann von ihnen auch aus eigenem Impuls mündlich und vielleicht auch in anderer Form an andere weitergegeben wurden.

Die Dichtung Jakobs von Sarug ist mittlerweile auch schon monographisch verstärkt in den Fokus der Wissenschaft gerückt.⁷³ Dennoch gibt es weiterhin Aspekte seines Werkes und seiner Bedeutung, die noch keine nachhaltige und umfangreiche Aufmerksamkeit erfahren haben, diese aber durchaus verdienen. Einer dieser noch zu wenig behandelten Bereiche ist die Relevanz des Werkes Jakobs für die genauere Untersuchung und Einschätzung der Bedeutung der Schnittstelle zwischen spätantik-christlicher Literatur und frühislamischen Ideen, besonders unter dem Blickwinkel der Interaktionen zwischen diesen beiden Bereichen. Einerseits ist dies ein Thema, bei dem es um historische Forschungen geht, um historische Theologie, aber sicherlich auch um die Geschichte von Ideen. Doch es bedarf mittlerweile keiner langen und weiter ausholenden Argumentation mehr, um auch eine weitere Öffentlichkeit davon zu überzeugen, dass das Feld des interreligiösen Dialogs in der modernen Welt und ganz gewiss auch im europäischen Kontext wichtig ist, und dass dies nicht nur für die Gemeinde derjenigen gilt, die zur syrischen Tradition gehören.

73 Siehe zum Beispiel Forness, *Preaching Christology*; Elkhoury, „Types and Symbols of the Church“; und Macabasag, *The Annunciation*.

In den Jahren 639–640, etwas mehr als hundert Jahre nach Jakobs Tod im Jahr 521, gingen die Regionen, in denen Jakob geboren worden und tätig gewesen war, in den Kämpfen um Obermesopotamien unter der Leitung 'Iyād ibn Ghanm ibn Zuhayr al-Fihri in die Hände der arabischen muslimischen Eroberer über.⁷⁴ Spätestens seit dieser Zeit konnte Jakobs liturgische Dichtung, wie sie in den Gottesdiensten syrischsprachiger Christen verwendet wurde, in den Regionen ihrer Erschaffung direkt mit Arabern, in deren Gemeinden Kommentare zum Qur'ān produziert wurden, in Kontakt kommen. Doch diese Daten zu Beginn des siebten Jahrhunderts und die Gebiete Nordsyriens um Sarug, Batnan und Edessa markieren nur eine äußere Grenze für die Diskussion der Plausibilität eines literarischen und direkten, praktischen Ideenaustauschs zwischen syrischsprachigen Christen, arabischsprachigen Christen und frühen Anhängern des Islams und der Faktoren, die diesen möglich gemacht und unterstützt haben könnten. Der sehr beachtliche Umfang und die weite Verbreitung der Werke Jakobs im spätantiken mehrsprachigen Nahen Osten liefern bereits von sich aus deutliche Hinweise auf die zeitlich frühe und geographisch umfangreiche Möglichkeit solcher Kontakte.

In Jakobs Werk finden sich Vorstellungen und Ideen, die sich auch im Qur'ān und in der islamischen Kommentarliteratur zum Qur'ān identifizieren lassen. Die Belege, die die Forschung zutage fördert, vermehren sich in jüngerer Zeit zunehmend. Angesichts Jakobs umfangreichen Schaffens, das bereits seit dem sechsten Jahrhundert schnell und weit rezipiert wurde, liegt es nicht allzu fern, dass syrisch-, arabisch- oder auch äthiopischsprachige Christen, die auf die Verkündigungen des Qur'āns und auf die Artikulation der Botschaft Muhammads trafen, angesichts der wahrnehmbaren Vereinbarkeit, ja sogar Ähnlichkeit oder Parallelität gewisser Ideen vielleicht auch überrascht gewesen sein mögen, wenn sie eine deutliche Nähe an manchen Punkten feststellen konnten zwischen dem, was sie einerseits in den neuen islamischen Verkündigungen und ihren Erklärungen durch islamische Exegeten vernahmen, und dem, was sie in ihren Gottesdiensten hörten und sangen, wenn Jakobs *mēmre* vorgetragen wurden, oder wenn sie sich selbst an solchen Vorträgen beteiligten.

Mit der Frage nach dem Zusammenspiel zwischen Jakobs Werk und einigen der Ideen, die sich im Qur'ān aussprachen, betritt dieser Artikel nicht völliges Neuland. An anderer Stelle habe ich bereits Aspekte relevanter Fragen zum

74 Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 67. Zu 'Iyād ibn Ghanm siehe auch Leif Inge Ree Petersen, *Siege Warfare and Military Organization in the Successor States (400–800 AD). Byzantium, the West and Islam* (History of Warfare 91; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 434–438.

Werk Jakobs angesprochen.⁷⁵ Doch solche Untersuchungen arbeiten nicht in einem Vakuum. Andere Religionshistoriker und Historikerinnen der spätantiken Ideengeschichte haben ihrerseits die gelegentliche Übereinstimmung in Einzelpunkten zwischen den Werken Jakobs und dem Qurʾān bemerkt und Details in ihren Studien festgehalten. Recht grundlegend sind zum Beispiel Beobachtungen zur Parallelität zwischen dem literarischen Medium der *mēmre* und der poetischen Struktur qurʾanischer Suren.⁷⁶ Einige Forscher betonen allgemeiner die Existenz von Parallelen zwischen Jakobs *mēmre* und Themen, die in einzelnen Suren behandelt werden. Zum Beispiel wurden bestimmte Motive im Qurʾān hervorgehoben, die die Juden in ein negatives Licht rücken, indem Passagen im Qurʾān narrative Details verwenden, deren Ursprünge außerhalb des neutestamentlichen Zeugnisses zu liegen scheinen. Dies ist beispielsweise der Fall, wenn der Qurʾān von jüdischen Anschuldigungen gegen einen fragwürdigen moralischen Status Mariens zu wissen scheint (*Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* [4]:156), oder wenn nach dem Zeugnis des Textes die Juden behaupteten, sie hätten Jesus getötet (*Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* [4]:157). Diese Ideen werden als Hinweise auf die Vertrautheit des Qurʾāns mit einer zeitgenössischen antijüdischen Rhetorik verstanden, die in der syrisch-christlichen Polemik gegen Juden greifbar wird. In diesem allgemeineren Kontext hat Gabriel Reynolds auf Homilien Jakobs von Sarug „Gegen die Juden“ hingewiesen. Tatsächlich könnte man einen Teil der Formulierung in *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (4):157, die besagt, dass „die Juden (in Prahlerei) sagten: Wir töteten Christus Jesus, den Sohn Marias, den Gesandten Allahs – doch sie töteten ihn nicht, noch kreuzigten sie ihn, doch so erschien es ihnen,“ und Jakobs chronologisch vorausgehende Charakterisierung der Juden als „ein Volk, das sich rühmt, einen Menschen an das Holz gefesselt zu haben,“ nebeneinanderstellen.⁷⁷ In anderen Fällen haben Gelehrte Teile der Homi-

75 Beispielsweise in mehreren Vorträgen zu einzelnen Zugangsweisen zum Thema. Siehe Cornelia Horn, „Jacob of Sarug’s Work as a Conduit for the Transmission and Reception of Hagiographical and Apocryphal Traditions in the World of Emerging Islam“ (gehalten beim *Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature* in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA; November 2009); „The Role of Jacob of Serugh in the Transmission of Infancy-of-Jesus Traditions from Syriac into the Milieu of the Qurʾān and the Islamic *Lives of the Prophets*“ (gehalten auf der *Texts and Contexts. A Conference at the Ohio State University* am Center for Epigraphical and Palaeographical Studies in Columbia, Ohio, USA; November 2009); und „Die Dichtung des Jakob von Sarug und die Rezeption hagiographischer und apokrypher Themen in der frühen arabischen Literatur“ (gehalten an der Universität Tübingen, Februar 2011).

76 Siehe Griffith, „The Poetics of Scriptural Reasoning.“

77 Jakob von Sarug, *Homilien gegen die Juden* 1.17 (hrsg. und übers. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug. Homélie contre les Juifs*, 44–45; deutsche Übers. Horn). Siehe Gabriel Reynolds, „The Muslim Jesus: Dead or alive?“ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*,

lien Jakobs als Zeugnisse für Tendenzen unter syrischen Kirchenvätern in der patristischen und spätantiken Zeit gewürdigt, die hebräische Bibel typologisch zu lesen und – da diese Kirchenväter von antijüdischer Rhetorik getrieben gewesen zu sein schienen – die Juden daher eines Vergehens zu beschuldigen, dass sie nicht den christologischen Folgen einer solchen Art von Exegese zustimmten. Wenn Wissenschaftler solche Beobachtungen machen, neigen sie zur Erklärung, dass der Qurʾān sich einer solchen „etablierten literarischen Technik“ bediente, um die Ideenwelt seiner eigenen Lehre zu fördern und voranzubringen.⁷⁸ Doch weitere Belege lassen noch deutlicher erkennen, dass der Qurʾān Ideen und deren Formulierungen, die man in Jakobs Werk findet, ohne größere oder sogar ohne Veränderungen teilt.

Mit Verweisen auf diverse Abschnitte des Qurʾāns und verschiedene Homilien Jakobs haben Wissenschaftler unterschiedliche Ebenen von Entsprechungen zwischen diesen beiden Textkorpora festgestellt. Sidney Griffith untersuchte *Sūrat al-Kahf, Über die Gefährten der Höhle*, vor dem Hintergrund syrisch-christlicher Traditionen. Hierbei diskutierte er die Bedeutung mehrerer Details in Jakobs *Homilie über die Siebenschläfer von Ephesus*.⁷⁹ Joseph Witztum beschäftigte sich mit dem Zusammenhang zwischen Genesis 22, wo Abrahams Beinah-Opferung Isaaks dargestellt wird, und dem Kommentar über die Fundamente des Hauses, die Kaʿba, in *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):127. Dabei schlug Witztum vor, dass Jakobs Verspredigt auf Genesis 22 als Zeuge dafür dienen könne, dass eine Geschichte, die der Erzählung Jakobs sehr ähnlich war, „den Hintergrund für die Koranszene geboten hat, in der Ibrāhīm und sein Sohn (Ismāʿīl) gemeinsam die Fundamente des Hauses errichteten.“ Die Ähnlichkeit manifestierte sich in dem von Jakob geschilderten Detail, dass Abraham „zusammen mit seinem Sohn (Isaak)“ „einen Altar baute, der zugleich auch ein

University of London 72.2 (2009): 237–258, hier 257. Siehe auch Gabriel Said Reynolds, „On the Qurʾān and the Theme of Jews as ‚Killers of the Prophets‘“, *Al-Bayān: Journal of Qurʾān and Hadith Studies* 10.2 (2012): 9–32.

78 Gabriel Said Reynolds, „On the Qurʾānic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic“, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.2 (2010): 189–202, hier 202.

79 Sidney H. Griffith, „Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān: The ‚Companions of the Cave‘ in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition“, in Gabriel Said Reynolds, hg., *The Qurʾān and Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 109–137. Zum Thema siehe auch Mark Whitters, „The Source for the Qurʾānic Story of the Companions of the Cave (*sūrat al-Kahf* 18)“, in Cornelia Horn, hg., *The Bible, the Qurʾān, and Their Interpretation: Syriac Perspectives* (Eastern Mediterranean Texts and Contexts 1; Warwick, Rhode Island: Abelian Academic, 2013), 165–185.

Haus war.“⁸⁰ Hier lässt sich im Einklang mit Witztum plausibel argumentieren, dass eine syrische, narrative, exegetische Tradition, die auf der biblischen Erzählung aufbaute und das Detail einer gemeinsamen Bautätigkeit von Vater und Sohn hinzufügte, im Qurʾān bekannt war und dergestalt modifiziert wurde, dass sie das Motiv des gemeinsam errichteten Gebäudes beibehielt, aber der Vater im Qurʾān mit seinem älteren und nicht mit seinem jüngeren Sohn zusammengebracht wurde. Andere Wissenschaftler wie Kevin van Bladel haben das Werk Jakobs, zum Beispiel in Jakobs *mēm̄rē* über das Hexameron, eher als Zeuge für die Auffassung der Welt und des Kosmos als eines Gebäudes oder Hauses angesehen. Dieses Konzept und diese Perspektive auf die Welt ähneln dem Weltbild des Qurʾāns.⁸¹ Brandon Wheeler schließlich hat zuletzt die frühere Deutung der Predigt Jakobs über Alexander den Großen als mögliche Parallele oder als Quelle der Geschichte des Fisches und seiner Wiedererweckung vom Tod, die in *Sūrat al-Kahf* (18):60–65 und in islamischen Kommentaren zum Abschnitt zu finden ist, kritisch diskutiert.⁸² In einigen dieser Fälle ist die Identifizierung der Texte als Werk, das ursprünglich von Jakob oder Pseudo-Jakob verfasst wurde, für die Bestimmung der Stoßrichtung und Bahnen historischer Ideenbeziehungen entscheidend. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass die Bearbeitung des Werkes Jakobs in einer kritischen Textausgabe eine wichtige Forschungslücke ist, die geschlossen werden muss, wenn man die Entstehungsgeschichte des Qurʾāns genau und richtig verantwortet verstehen will. Hier sind ohne Zweifel Arbeiten an der historisch-kritischen sowie textkritischen Untersuchung der Geschichte der christlichen Predigten, gerade auch im Bereich der in syrischer Sprache vermittelten Inhalte, im sechsten und siebten Jahrhundert ein unverzichtbarer Teil der historischen Qurʾānforschung.

Die genannten wissenschaftlichen Beobachtungen, die Verbindungspunkte zwischen der syrischen liturgischen Dichtung, insbesondere derjenigen mit Wurzeln in Jakobs Werk, und dem Qurʾān festgestellt haben, stellen noch lange keine vollständige Aufführung des relevanten Materials dar. Andere und detailliertere Beispiele könnten angeführt werden. Immerhin ist bislang

80 Joseph Witztum, „The Foundations of the House (Q 2:127),“ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 72.1 (2009): 25–40, hier 32.

81 Kevin van Bladel, „Heavenly Cords and Prophetic Authority in the Qurʾān and Its Late Antique Context,“ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 70.2 (2007): 223–246, hier 226.

82 Siehe Brandon Wheeler, „Moses or Alexander? Early Islamic Exegesis of Qurʾān 18:60–65,“ *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 57.3 (1998): 191–215; und Brandon Wheeler, „The Jewish Origins of Qurʾān 18:65–82? Reexamining Arent Jan Wensinck’s Theory,“ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118.2 (1998): 153–171, hier 162.

schon deutlich geworden, dass Wissenschaftler jeweils ein oder zwei Wörter oder Details in einem entsprechenden Predigttext Jakobs gefunden haben, weitgehend jedoch höchstens einige wenige Punkte, die als Grundlage für die Behauptung der Existenz einer Beziehung zur Welt des Qur'āns dienen können. Doch solche Erkenntnisse und Einsichten sind nicht zu unterschätzen. Einige meiner weiteren Forschungen zu strukturellen Parallelen zwischen dem Qur'ān und frühchristlichen apokryphen Texten deuten darauf hin, dass Parallelen tiefer und wesentlich detailreicher verlaufen können.⁸³ Genauere Untersuchungen hierzu sind jedoch noch nicht abgeschlossen. Somit ist es hier zunächst wichtig, auf die prinzipielle Relevanz solcher Studien hinzuweisen, da sie die Breite und Tiefe der Schnittstellen zwischen syrisch-christlichen und islamischen Ideen, auf jeden Fall für die Anfangs- und Gründungsphase des Islams, aufzeigen und untermauern. In dem Maße, in dem solche Überschneidungen klar erkannt werden und in dem ihnen der angemessene Raum in den Diskussionen zugestanden wird, wird eine solche Anerkennung der Beziehungen, in ihrer historischen Verortung, zu einem besseren Verständnis der tief miteinander vernetzten syrisch-christlichen und frühen islamischen Traditionen führen. Diese grundlegende Erkenntnis und Akzeptanz bedeuten auch, dass wichtige frühe und grundlegende Schichten dieser jeweiligen Traditionen schon in gemeinsamen Ideen verbunden sind. Die deutliche Artikulation solcher frühen Beziehungen trägt dazu bei, ein stärkeres Bewusstsein unter den Gläubigen auf beiden Seiten zu schaffen, dass sie auch historisch gesehen eine solide Grundlage der Interaktion und des fruchtbaren Einflusses aufeinander miteinander teilen, die als Basis für den weiteren Aufbau einer besseren gemeinsamen Zukunft dienen könnten. Diese Basis ist von gemeinsamen Vorstellungen zu wichtigen Themen geprägt und auch von gemeinsamen Details in der Betrachtung zentraler biblischer Figuren. Es ist durchaus vorstellbar, dass in einigen Bereichen die Anerkennung einer solchen langen traditionellen Überschneidung von Ideen eine Bedeutung für die Entwicklung neuer, engerer Beziehungen haben könnte, z.B. in Bereichen religiöser Feiern, in denen bedeutende Persönlichkeiten der Bibel eine Rolle spielen, und in denen beide Seiten erkennen können, dass sie gemeinsam bestimmte Details der relevanten Traditionen schätzen. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass die Feier der Geburt Christi ein wichtiges Ereignis für einen solchen Austausch und eine Begegnung im Miteinander sein könnte.

83 Siehe zum Beispiel Cornelia Horn, „Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels Regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: the ‚Book of Mary‘, the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur'ān,“ *Apocrypha: Revue internationale des littératures apocryphes* 19 (2008): 267–291.

In einem Umfeld im Westen, in dem weder der Islam als die Religion des Feindes verstanden werden muss, noch auch der Islam das Christentum als die Religion des feindlichen Gegenübers begreifen muss, kann eine neue Anerkennung der gemeinsamen Ideengeschichte zu grundlegenden Gestalten eine solide und nützliche Basis für neue gemeinsame Ansätze über interreligiöse Kluften hinweg bilden. Hier kann die syrisch-christliche theologische Tradition, insbesondere in Form und Gestalt des Werkes und der Person Jakobs von Sarug, als notwendiges Bindeglied in einer Weise wirken, die für keine der Traditionen möglich ist, die aus westlichen christlichen Traditionen entspringen, also dem Protestantismus und dem römisch geprägten Katholizismus.⁸⁴ Inwieweit orientalisch-christliche Traditionen, die Anteile am syrischen Erbe aufweisen und die inzwischen bereits engere Verbindungen zum westlichen Christentum aufgebaut haben, wie z.B. die maronitische oder die melkitische Tradition, ebenfalls eine solche Stellung als zentrale Schauplätze für die Organisation und Konstituierung des Schnittpunktes interreligiöser Aktivitäten einnehmen könnten, wäre gleichfalls überlegenswert.

Abschließende Anmerkungen

Wie eingangs bereits angedeutet, ist mit der hier vorgestellten Problemanzeige sowie mit dem dargestellten Aufzeigen des Potentials des Werkes Jakobs von Sarug für das Engagement syrischsprachiger Christen im interreligiösen Gespräch, bei dem sie auf die eigenen Quellen verwiesen sind und bleiben und bei dem sie gleichzeitig auch selbstverständlich aus diesen schöpfen müssen, sollen und können, sicher noch lange nicht alles Notwendige erfasst oder gesagt. Es bleibt jedoch auf jeden Fall der Eindruck, dass mit der hier aufgenommenen Untersuchung ein erster Schritt in ein Gebiet unternommen werden konnte, das fast möchte man sagen wie Neuland wirkt, vielversprechend ist, und neben dem Potential zur Klärung und Intensivierung interreligiöser und auch ökumenischer Dialoge gleichzeitig auch Chancen für die Weiterentwicklung kritischer, syrischer Theologie im akademischen und auch im weiteren, pastoralen Raum birgt.

84 Pim Valkenberg, „Confessing One God Amidst Muslims and Jews: An Ecumenical-Theological Conversation (II),“ *International Review of Mission* 89, issue 352 (2000): 105–114, hier 109–110, erkennt gleichfalls, dass östliche und orientalische Christen auf Grund ihrer langen und vielfältigen Geschichte der Begegnung und Auseinandersetzung mit dem Islam und mit Muslimen in einer von westlichen christlichen Traditionen nur schwierig oder kaum einholbaren vorteilhaften und manchmal auch vorbelasteten Positionierung für das Gespräch mit dem Islam stehen.

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“Honour with Silence the Words of Your Creator”

Moses’ Silence in bMenaḥot 29b in Light of its Jewish and Christian Context

Holger Zellentin

אמרי במערבא אכול תמרי ושדי קשייתא לבר

They say in the West:

“eat the date and throw away the stone”

– Bavli *Hagiga* 15b (Ms. British Library 400)

One of the most famous narratives in the Babylonian Talmud relates how Moses, before receiving the Torah, ascends onto Mount Sinai, towards God, while God descends from heaven (see esp. Ex 19). Here, he witnesses a peculiar scribal practice: instead of fully spelling out the laws Himself, God “binds coronets to the letters” of the Torah, and thereby leaves the task of Scripture’s full interpretation to Rabbi Aqiva. Moses is then permitted to visit the future and witness this famous rabbi’s intellectual prowess. Moses is utterly overwhelmed by this experience and musters strength only when he hears Aqiva connect a particular law to Moses himself. Moses then asks God two questions: first, why He chose him rather than the intellectually far more accomplished Rabbi Aqiva, and second, why God eventually let Aqiva’s life end in gruesome martyrdom, a scene which Moses was equally permitted to witness. God both times refuses to answer, twice reprimanding Moses with the words: “Be Silent! For so it has arisen in my mind.” The Neoplatonic theme of silence as a form of dealing with the inadequacy of speech when facing the divine has deep roots in Judaism and Christianity, and was especially prevalent in late antique Syriac Christian discourse. In the following, I will introduce the story of Moses’ visit to Aqiva along with current scholarship and then briefly sketch the development of Jewish and Christian views of silence in the face of God, arguing that the Talmud both critically engages and incorporates aspects of this Jewish and especially Christian tradition.

The Rabbinic Story in Current Research

The narrative of Moses’ ascent towards heaven has been discussed from innumerable angles in previous literature, yet very few of these discussions have focused on the historical context of the Babylonian Talmud (henceforth: “the

Bavli,” or simply “the Talmud”) beyond the confines of Jewish or even rabbinic culture itself.¹ However, few recent articles diverge from this inward-looking path.² Michal Bar Asher-Siegal has pointed to the marked contrast between, on the one hand, the way in which the rabbinic story portrays Moses as coming to earth in order to learn from Rabbi Aqiva and, on the other hand, the way in which monastic literature portrays Moses as coming to the earth in order to instruct the Christian desert fathers.³ Yakir Paz has further broadened our understanding of the story’s central image by illustrating the use of “crowns” in various scribal traditions, including not only Jewish, but also Greek and Coptic (though not Syriac) Christian manuscripts.⁴ I myself have argued that the story

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- 1 The most noteworthy studies, in my view, include Azzan Yadin-Israel, *Scripture and Tradition: Rabbi Akiva and the Triumph of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 103–118; idem, “Bavli *Menahot* 29b and the Diminution of the Prophets,” *JAJ* 5 (2014): 88–105; Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 182–202; Nachman Levine, “Reading Crowned Letters and Semiotic Silences in *Menachot* 29b,” *JJS* 53 (2002): 35–48; and Yonah Fraenkel, “Hermeneutic Problems in the Study of the Aggadic Narrative,” *Tarbiz* 47 (1977–1978): 139–172 [Hebrew]; see also the following note. For a discussion of the text’s hermeneutics in relationship to contemporary discourse, see, e.g., Laurence I. Edwards, “Rabbi Akiba’s Crowns: Postmodern Discourse and the Cost of Rabbinic Reading,” *Judaism* 49 (2000): 417–434. On the rabbis’ penchant for self-criticism in relationship to this story see also Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), esp. 231–236; Boyarin’s contribution, though valuable, should generally be seen in light of criticism such as that offered by Adam Becker, “Review: Positing a ‘Cultural Relationship’ between Plato and the Babylonian Talmud,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011): 255–269.
 - 2 Yadin-Israel rightly criticizes the early contextualization of the story in the third century offered by Yair Furstenberg in idem, “The *Agon* with Moses and Homer: Rabbinic Midrash and the Second Sophistic,” in Maren Niehoff, ed., *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 299–328; see Yadin-Israel, “Bavli *Menahot* 29b,” 95–101. Yet Yadin-Israel’s own contextualization of the story in Second Temple literature is equally not unproblematic, as he freely admits (*ibid.*, 101). In my view, both the Second Sophistic and Second Temple Judaism should be considered as preparing the broader intellectual climate which the Talmud inhabits several centuries later, especially since the rabbis themselves perpetuated some aspects of Hellenistic culture in Mesopotamia as argued with some justification by Daniel Boyarin, “Hellenism in Jewish Babylonia,” in Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 336–363 (see also the previous note).
 - 3 See Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, “Moses in the Apophthegmata Patrum and in Rabbinic Literature,” in Michael Sommer et al, eds., *Mosebilder: Gedanken zur Rezeption einer literarischen Figur im Frühjudentum, frühen Christentum und der römisch-hellenistischen Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) 403–414.
 - 4 See Yakir Paz, “Binding Crowns to the Letters’ – A Divine Scribal Practice in Its Historical Context,” *Tarbiz – A Quarterly for Jewish Studies* 86 (January–June 2019): 233–267 [Hebrew]. Paz develops previous suggestions by Shlomo Naeh, “The Script of Torah in Rabbinic Thought (B): Transcriptions and Thorns,” *Leshonenu* 71 (2010): 89–123 [Hebrew].

can best be appreciated as told in deliberate and measured contradistinction to Christian typological models, especially those emphasizing the visual. Of special importance for the story of Moses’ visit to Aqiva is the narrative of Moses’ visit to Jesus, the so-called “transfiguration,” which shaped both the oral as well as the material worldview of many Late Antique Christians from Rome to Ctesiphon and beyond.⁵ In the following essay, I will briefly present the story in Bavli *Menahot* 29b and summarize the most salient aspects of my previous results, and then consider how the Jewish and Christian tradition, and especially the East and West Syrian patristic record, can help us appreciate further nuances of the Talmudic story when it comes to the role of reverent silence vis-à-vis the Holy One, Blessed be He.⁶

The Talmudic passage in Bavli *Menahot* 29b (here cited according to Ms. Vatican 118), relating Moses’ ascent towards the heavens during the giving of the Torah on Sinai, narrates the following:⁷

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav,	אמ' ר' יהוד' אמ' רב: ⁸
At the moment when Moses ascended on high,	בשעה שעלה משה למרום,
He found the Holy One, Blessed be He, sitting	מצאו להקב"ה שהיה יושב וקושר
and binding coronets to the letters.	כתרים לאותיות
He said to Him: “Lord of all the worlds,	אמ' לפניו רבונו של עולם
what impedes your hands?”	מי מעכב על ידיך? ⁹
He said to him: “One man (<i>adam ehad</i>) there is,	א"ל ¹⁰ אדם אחד יש
who will be in the future (<i>she'atid</i>)	שעתיד להיות
after several generations	בסוף כמה דורות

5 See Holger Zellentin, “Typology and the Transfiguration of Rabbi Aqiva (Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 4:7 and Bavli *Menahot* 29b),” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 25 (2018): 239–268.

6 The final compilation of the Babylonian Talmud remains disputed, with dates ranging from the fifth to the seventh century; see e.g. Jeffrey Rubinstein, ed., *Creation and Composition: the Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). I hold that the Bavli’s deep acculturation within Sasanian Persia, along with its intense cultural affinities to the Late Roman *Diocese of the East* that stretched from Palestine to Mesopotamia, make both the East and the West Syrian tradition relevant for its contextualization; see also note 28 below.

7 In addition to Manuscript Vatican 118, which preserves an important reading regarding Aqiva’s “glory” (see note 23 below), I have consulted the Vilna and Venice prints, as well as manuscript Vatican 120, Munich 95 and Paris AIU 147A. The texts do not show wide variations; notable variants are given in the footnote. Where Vatican 118 abbreviates the text, I have provided the reading of the Vilna print in the footnotes. All translation of rabbinic texts are my own, often based on the Soncino and Donaldson versions.

8 The Vilna print spells out אמר רב יהודה אמר רב.

9 All other witnesses have “Your hand” in the singular, as ידך.

10 The Vilna print spells out אמר לו.

and Aqiva the Son of Joseph is his name,
 who will interpret each tip and tip [of the
 coronets or letters]
 as heaps and heaps of laws.”
 (Moses) said to Him: “Lord of all the worlds, show
 him [to me (*hare’hu lo*)]!”
 He said to him: “Turn around.”
 (Moses) went and sat at the end of eighteen rows.
 And he did not comprehend what they said (*lo
 hayah yode’a mahen ’omrim*).
 His strength dwindled.
 As they came to an issue,
 His disciples said to him: “Whence do you know?”
 He said to them: “It is a law of (lit. “to”) Moses from
 Sinai.”
 (Moses) was set at ease.
 [He returned] and came before the Holy One,
 blessed be He.
 He said to Him: “Lord of the World,
 You have a man (*adam*) like this and you give Torah
 through me?”

ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו,
 שעתידי לדרוש על כל קוץ
 קוצץ וקוצץ¹¹
 תילי תילים של הלכות
 אמ’ לפניו רבנו של עולם הראהו לו,¹²
 א’ לו חזור לאחוריד.
 הלך וישב בסוף שמונה עשרה שורות,¹³
 לא היה יודע מהן או¹⁴
 תשש כח
 וכיון שהגיעו לדבר,¹⁵
 אמרו לו תלמידיו¹⁶ מניין לך?
 אמ’¹⁷ להן הלכה למשה מסיני,
 נתיישבה,¹⁸
 ובא¹⁹ לפני הקב“ה,
 אמ’²⁰ לפניו רבנו של עולם,
 יש לך אדם כזה ואתה נותן תורה עי²¹?

- 11 The witnesses vary widely on the precise terminology here; see also *Eruvin* 21b. On the “tips of letters,” which may originally have indicated a “biblical periscope,” see Paz, “Binding Crowns to the Letters,” Naeh, “Script of the Torah,” 108–111, as well as the criticism of Yadin-Israel, “Bavli Menahot 29b;” see also the earlier pertinent views of Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 196–197.
- 12 Manuscript Vatican 118, which nonsensically reads “show him to him,” seems faulty here: all other witnesses indicate “show him to me,” הראהו לי.
- 13 The number of rows varies between eight and eighteen in the witnesses, see the discussion in Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 198.
- 14 The Vilna print spells out *הן אומרים* ולא היה יודע מה הן אומרים.
- 15 The Vilna print reads “as he (i.e. Aqiva) came to one issue,” כיון שהגיע לדבר אחד.
- 16 The printed versions here have the students address Aqiva as “Rabbi,” רבי.
- 17 The Vilna print spells out *אמר*.
- 18 All other witnesses here add “his,” i.e. Moses’ “mind,” דעתו. The expression is used elsewhere for Moses in the Bavli: his strength first wanes (and then recovers) when he expects God to dismiss Israel, soon after Moses warns God that the nations may think His, i.e. God’s, strength had waned if He did not save his people (both in *Berakhot* 32a). The link between intellectual prowess and strength of the mind is made when the waning of Joshua’s strength leads him to forget three hundred of the laws that Moses has taught him, in *Temurah* 16a.
- 19 All other witnesses here read “he returned and came,” חזר ובא.
- 20 The Vilna print spells out *אמר*.
- 21 The Vilna print spells out *ידי* על.

He said to him: “Be silent, for so it came in My thoughts.”	א“ל שתוק כך עלתה בי במחשבה. ²²
He said to Him: “Lord of the World, you showed me (<i>hir’itany</i>) his Torah, now show me (<i>hare’ny</i>) his glory (<i>shevaḥo</i>).”	א’ לפניו רבונו של עולם הראיתני תורתִי הראיני שבחו, ²³
He said to him: “Turn around!” (Moses) turned around.	אמר לו חזור לאחורך. ²⁴ חזר לאחוריו,
He saw (<i>ra’ah</i>) as they weighed (Aqiva’s) flesh in the marked stalls,	ראה ששוקלין בשרו במקולין,
He said to Him: “Lord of the World, this is Torah and this is his reward?”	אמ’ לפניו רבונו של עולם, זו תורה וזו שכרה?
He said to him: “Be silent, for so it came to [my] thoughts.”	א“ל: שתוק, כך עלה במחשבה לפניו. ²⁵

I have previously argued that the Bavli’s story uses and transforms aspects of Christian typology in order to tell a rabbinic story that is both open and apprehensive towards aspects of Syriac Christian culture. A number of narrative, paradigmatic, and verbal markers strongly suggest that a typological paradigm was both on the mind of the one(s) telling this story (or its Babylonian redactor) and on the mind of the implied audience.²⁶ The focus in the Bavli lies on

22 All other witnesses here (in a variation of wordings) specify that the thought came up “before me, in my [i.e., God’s] thoughts,” כך עלה במחשבה לפני. The expression of “thoughts arising” is firmly linked to God’s plans for creation, both in the Palestinian and in the Babylonian rabbinic tradition, see e.g. *Vayiqra* Babla 29a; *Pesikta deRav Kahana* 23:1; *Midrash Tehilim* 92:2; *Bavli Berakhot* 61a, *Pesaḥim* 54a; *Ketubot* 8a.

23 All other witnesses read “his reward,” שכרו, as below, a change likely made in line with Exodus 33:18, הראיני נא את־כבודך, see note 45 below. Moreover, all other witness correctly read תורתו instead of the corrupted תורתִי.

24 The printed versions here omit לאחורך.

25 Manuscript Vatican n8 reads “for so it came to *His* thoughts,” all other witnesses have “my thoughts,” לפני, see also note 22 above.

26 For my previous study, see note 5 above. There is no proof that the classical rabbis would have been aware of any given patristic text, or of any given church father; recent studies on this contentious issue include Arkady Kovelman, “Rabbi Meir as a Messiah,” *Jewish Studies* 51 (2016): 1–19; Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and Eyal Ben Eliyahu, “The Rabbinic Polemic against Sanctification of Sites,” *JSJ* 40 (2009): 260–280. See also the important, yet exaggerated concerns raised, e.g., by Adiel Schremer in his *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Despite our lack of definitive proof, I have previously argued for the relevance of specific aspects of patristic discourse in as far as it permeated popular Christian discourse more broadly, see, e.g., Holger Zellentin, “Rabbi Lazarus and the Rich Man: A Talmudic Parody of the Christian Hell (Yerushalmi *Hagiga* 2.2, 77d and *Sanhedrin* 6.9, 23c),” in Asaph Ben-Tov and Martin Mulso, eds., *Knowledge of*

Aqiva's "glory," according to Ms. Vatican 118, or his "reward," according to all other witnesses: his martyrdom along with the cannibalistic communion of those who slew him and sold his remains for human consumption. At the same time, the Bavli scales back some of the even richer claims about some rabbis' role in the giving of the Torah that are found in the Palestinian rabbinic tradition. The Bavli's story, I argued, must be read in dialogue with other Talmudic statements and narratives that feature visits not of Moses but of Elijah to earth, such as the famous story of the Oven of Akhnai in *Bava Metsi'a* 59a–b.²⁷

The central Christian tradition with which the story of Moses' ascent towards heaven in *Menaḥot* 29b enters into dialogue, I sought to illustrate in my previous study, is that of the transfiguration of Christ (see Luke 9:28–36, Matt 17:1–9 and Mark 9:2–8). I emphasized the importance of this Gospel narrative as a living tradition when it comes to considering its rabbinic reception history, yet I equally argued that the account in the Gospels itself provides a clear starting point. In this story, the themes of human incomprehension of divine realities, as well as the theme of silence, both play a noteworthy role that will co-determine the present inquiry as well. I will therefore briefly present the gospel narrative of the transfiguration and expand on my previous study by illustrating how it helps us better to understand the Bavli's use of the theme of silence.

Religion as Profanation (New York, London: Springer Publishing Company, 2019), 23–94; idem, "The Rabbis on (the Christianization of) the Imperial Cult: Mishna and Yerushalmi *Avodah Zarah* 3.1 (42b, 54–42c, 61)," in Catherine Hezser, ed., *Jewish Art in its Late Antique Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 319–355; and idem, "Jerusalem Fell After Betar: The Christian Josephus and Rabbinic Memory," in Ra'anan Boustán et al., eds., *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, 2 vols. (Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2013), 1:319–367.

- 27 See Zellentin, "Typology and the Transfiguration of Rabbi Aqiva," esp. 256–268. My arguments are based on a close comparison of the even starker typological language found in the Talmudic story's Palestinian precedent in *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 4:7; my study engage two studies of Eyal Ben Eliyahu, "The Rabbinic Polemic against Sanctification of Sites," *JSJ* 40 (2009): 260–280 and idem, "Mount of Olives-Between Jews and Christians during the Roman and Byzantine Periods," *New Studies on Jerusalem, Proceedings of the Fourth Conference* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998), 55–63 [Hebrew]. On the importance of typological thought for the rabbis see also Zellentin, "Moses' Arms and the Brazen Serpent: A Sense of Typology in Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism," which has been submitted to a volume edited by Angelika Neuwirth and Islam Dayeh that is currently under review with Routledge.

The Relevance of the Syriac Tradition for the Bavli

I hold that any inquiry into the relevance of Christian narratives for rabbinic culture must at least include, if not be focused on, the Syriac gospel tradition.²⁸ In their translation of the transfiguration scene, the Syriac gospels use the central term describing the emanation of the “divine glory,” *shūbhā*, in order to depict Jesus as appearing with a radiant glow, as witnessed by his disciples.²⁹ Here is the story according to Luke 9, in the Peshitta’s translation:³⁰

- 28 And it came to pass about eight days after these words, Jesus talked to Kafa (Peter) and Ja'kov (James) and Yohanan (John), and he went up (*wa-sleq*) on a mountain to pray.
 29 And while he prayed, the appearance (*hezwā*) of his face changed, and his clothes became white and dazzling.
 30 And behold, two men were speaking with him: Moses and Elijah,
 31 who appeared (*d-ethzīw*) in glory (*b-teshbūhtā*), and spoke concerning his departure which he was in the future about to accomplish at Jerusalem.
 32 And Kafa and those who were with him were heavy with sleep; and when they awoke they saw (*wa-ħzaw*) his glory (*shūbhēh*), and the two men that were standing with him.
 33 And when they [i.e. Moses and Elijah] began to leave him, Kafa said to Jesus: “Rabban, it is better to remain here; and we will make three shelters, one for

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- 28 The gospel version that is most relevant for the Babylonian Talmud, I have previously argued, is the Syriac Peshitta. The witness of the Diatessaron has of course equally permeated Syriac culture, especially through the exegetical works of Aphrahat and Ephrem, yet the Peshitta offers the most relevant witness to the oral gospel traditions with which the rabbis may have been at least rudimentarily, and sometimes intimately familiar; see Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, esp. 138–143.
- 29 The transfiguration appears in Luke 9:28–36, Matt 17:1–9 and Mark 9:2–8, see also 2 Peter 1:16–3:18; on the typological character of the transfiguration, see already Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982 [1939]), esp. 62–63. On the central image of “glory” in the Syriac tradition (which builds on Biblical imagery such as Exod 34:29) see e.g. Hannah M. Hunt, “Clothed in the Body’: The Garment of Flesh and the Garment of Glory in Syrian Religious Anthropology,” *Studia Patristica* 642 (2013): 167–176 and Sebastian P. Brock, Sebastian, “The Robe of Glory: A Biblical Image in the Syriac Tradition,” *The Way* 39 (1999): 247–259.
- 30 Peshitta translations in this essay are based on that of George Lamsa, *The Four Gospels According to the Eastern Version* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1933), with major modifications. Needless to say, this does not imply an endorsement of Lamsa’s more adventurous theses on the importance of the Peshitta as a witness to the historical Jesus. The Syriac text of all Gospel citations, unless otherwise noted, is that of the Peshitta cited according to George Anton Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshitta and Harklean Version* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004). My gratitude to Ana Davitashvili for assisting me with the vocalization of Syriac transliterations.

- you, one for Moses and one for Elijah;” because he did not know what he [probably Jesus, possibly Kafa] was saying (*w-lā yāda‘-wā mānā āmar*).
- 34 And when he had said these things, there came a cloud and overshadowed them; and they were afraid when they saw (*h-zaw*) Moses and Elijah go up (*d-‘al*) in the cloud.
- 35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved Son (*hānaw ber ḥabbībā*); listen to him.”
- 36 And when the voice came, they found Jesus alone. And they kept silent (*w-hennon shteq*), and they did not tell any man in those days what they saw.

In this scene, Late Antique Christians saw the fulfilment of the Old Testament (symbolized by Moses for “the law” and by Elijah for “the prophets”) in the New Testament more broadly, and in Christ specifically, just as the Bavli sees the fulfillment of Moses’ Written Torah in Aqiva’s Oral Torah. There are two arguments for the importance of this narrative for the story of Moses’ ascent towards heaven in the Bavli: first, the thematic and structural similarities between the two stories, and second, the sustained message the Talmud generates by diverting from the story about Jesus in specific and recurrent ways.

In order to calibrate the heuristic value of the similarities between the narrative in the Talmud and that in the Gospel, of course, we should note that just like our Talmudic story, the narrative of Jesus’ transfiguration is equally modelled on Moses’ own ascension to Mount Sinai. Jesus ascends to the mountain just like Moses once ascended Mount Sinai; later in the Christian narrative, Moses and Elijah later go up in a cloud, evoking the cloud from which God spoke on Sinai (see e.g. Exod 24:16). Jesus shines, just as light once emanated from Moses (see e.g. Exod 34:29–30), and the divine command to listen to Jesus seems to evoke the similar command to listen to Moses (see e.g. Deut 18:15). The key message of the transfiguration of Christ, most simplistically put, is to elevate his importance vis-à-vis Moses and Elijah, who seek him out.³¹

31 For a recent discussion of the passage within its compositional context in the Greek Gospel of Luke see François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 369–379.

The transfiguration is well received in Greek, Latin and Syriac patristic literature,³² at some point also in the liturgies,³³ and of course in Christian art, which features the scene from at least the fourth century.³⁴ A passage in the Syriac fathers, namely in Ephrem’s *Hymn on the Nativity*, may best illustrate the evocative power of the transfiguration scene for later Christians. Ephrem’s hymns, written in the fourth century, in turn, formed the core of the Syriac tradition and were received and performed widely throughout Late Antiquity; his thoughts on silence will prove central here as well.³⁵

Ephrem opens his *Hymn on the Nativity* by claiming that the nativity of Christ “gladdens kings, priests and prophets, for in it [the nativity] were fulfilled and realized all their words,” i.e. the words and actions of many of these biblical characters, including Moses and Elijah, as we will see.³⁶ Ephrem’s typology goes as far as claiming that the Hebrew Bible in its entirety foreshadows Christ’s coming, and attacks “the Jews” who believe in the Scriptures but not in its Christological reading: “put to shame is the people that holds the prophets

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- 32 To give but a few select examples, see Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 22; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 12:16; Augustine, Letter 55.15 (28); John Chrysostom, *Homily* 56 on Matthew (2), and Jacob of Sarug, *Homily on the Transfiguration of the Lord*. See also Colette Pasquet, “Révélation de la divinité du Christ dans le mystère de la Transfiguration chez Jacques de Saroug,” *Connaissance des Pères de l’Église* 135 (2014): 42–52; Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 133–139; Emmanuel Khoury, “Mimrō de Jacques de Saroug sur la Transfiguration de Notre-Seigneur,” *Parole de l’Orient* 15 (1988–1989): 65–90; Thomas Kollampampil, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Transfiguration of our Lord*, 1 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 1–4; cf. also P. Yousif, “La Croix de Jésus et le Paradis d’Éden dans la typologie biblique de Saint Ephrem,” *Parole de l’Orient* 6–7 (1975–1976): 29–48, and Goppelt, *Typos*, 62–63, 72 and 89.
- 33 On the transfiguration in the Eastern liturgy, which in Byzantium was officially introduced in the eighth century yet celebrated in Palestine much earlier, see, e.g., John Baggley, *Festival Icons for the Christian Year* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), 58–71; also Jean Tomajean, “La fête de la Transfiguration,” *L’Orient Syrien* 5 (1960): 479–482.
- 34 See, e.g., Sabine Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos in der frühchristlichen Kunst (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum)*; Münster: Aschendorff, 1995); Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis*, and my arguments in Zellentin, “Typology and the Transfiguration of Rabbi Aqiva,” 243–250.
- 35 On Saint Ephrem and his impact, see, e.g., Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: the Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992).
- 36 Hymn 1.1; see Edmund Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen De Nativitate (Epiphania)* (CSCO 186; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1959), 1; trans. Kathleen McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 63. I follow McVey’s fine translation (with minor adaptations).

to be true; for if our Savior had not come, their words would have become lies. Blessed is the True One who comes from the True Father. He fulfilled the words of the true [prophets], and they are complete in their truth.”³⁷ For Ephrem, the Hebrew Bible must be read as typology not merely when exegesis allows for it, but its anticipation of Christ must be posited at all times—a reading which he then illustrates by finding Christ in dozens of biblical narratives.³⁸

Throughout this entire *Hymn on the Nativity*, Ephrem dozens of times follows the same pervasive pattern of a biblical figure “seeing” (*h-z-y*) something good or evil, and then “anticipating” (*s-k-y*) or longing for (*r-g-y*) Christ as the one to come (*ʿ-t-y*) and fulfil (*sh-l-m*) the good or conquer the evil. The refrain and answer to each verse is “glory to you (*lek shūbhā*), son of our Creator.” In a first summary, Ephrem summarizes his typological thinking with a rhetorical question, asking “Who is able to glorify (*d-nshabbah*) the true Son who rises for us, Whom just men (*zaddiqē*) yearned (*etragrag*) to see (*nehzūneh*) in their lifetimes?”³⁹ Ephrem, in short, reads the actions of all the Israelite prophets entirely as yearning for Christ.

The transfiguration serves as a climax in Ephrem’s pattern. Moses and Elijah are among those who do also “long for” (*r-g-y*) or “anticipate” (*s-k-y*) Christ as the one “to come” (*ʿ-t-y*), yet in contrast to the other Biblical characters who only see their own reality, these two prophets actually do “see” (*h-z-y*) Christ, the one to whom the refrain states “glory to you” (*lāk shūbhā*). The transfiguration is then understood in the following way:

34 Elijah yearned for him (*leh etragrag*) and without having seen (*hẓāy*) the Son on earth, He believed and increased his prayers that he might ascend (*d-naseq*) and see Him (*nehzēw*) in heaven (*ba-shmayyā*, cf. 2 Kgs 2:11).

35 Moses and Elijah saw Him (*leh hẓaw*); the humble one (i.e. Moses, cf. Num 12:3) ascend (*sleq*) from the depth, and the zealous one came down from the height (*men rawmā*), and they saw (*wa-hẓaw*) the Son in the middle.

36 They represented a symbol of His coming: Moses was a typos (*tūpsā*) for the dead, and Elijah a typos (*tūpsā*) for the living who will fly to meet Him when He comes.

37 Hymn 1.18–19; see Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem, Nativitate*, 3; McVey, *Ephrem*, 64–65. See also Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessarion*, 16:2.15.

38 On Ephrem’s hymn, see David Bertaina, “Christmas with Mar Ephrem: The Nativity Feast in Early Syriac Tradition,” *The Harp* 22 (2007): 49–92; Phil J. Botha, “The Poet as Preacher: St. Ephrem the Syrian’s Hymn *De Virginitate* XXXI as a Coherent, Aesthetic, and Persuasive Poetic Discourse,” *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19 (2008): 44–72; see also see Andrew J. Hayes, “The Transfiguration of Moses: A Survey and Analysis of St. Ephrem’s Interpretation of Exodus 34,29,” *Oriens Christianus* 97 (2013–2014): 67–99 and Zellentín, “Moses’ Arms.”

39 Hymn 1.40, see Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem*, 6; and McVey, *Ephrem*, 68.

37 Because the dead have tasted death, He will repair them first, but those not yet buried will be snatched up to meet Him at the end (cf. 1 Thess 4:17).

38 Who will bring me to the end of enumerating the just men who anticipated (*d-sakkyeh*) the Son, whose number cannot be encompassed by our weakness (*da-mhīlūtan*) of mouth?

39 Pray for me, my friends, that I may be strengthened (*d-ethayyal*) once more to set forth their qualities again in another account as much as I am able.

40 Who is able to glorify (*d-nshabbah*) the true Son Who rises for us, whom righteous men (*zaddiqē*) yearned (*etragraḡ*) to see (*nehzūneh*) in their lifetimes?⁴⁰

Ephrem here describes the spatial displacement of Moses and Elijah, from heaven and from below respectively, to meet Christ in the middle. In addition to functioning as symbols of the Old Testament, the two figures have become the representatives of the dead and the living: while Moses died and was buried like any other human being (see Deut. 33:1–34:12), Elijah had been taken up to God without dying (2 Kings 2:11–14). What Ephrem clearly adds to the exegetical tradition of understanding the transfiguration is his sense of longing for Christ, attributed to all of the biblical figures, and his heightened emphasis on the visual (repeatedly using the root *h-z-y*), in line with the broad Christian tradition of visualizing the transfiguration in material culture.⁴¹

In light of his prominence in Syriac culture, Ephrem’s hymn allows us to state that in the course of Late Antiquity, Christian culture had normalized typology and the example of the transfiguration, to a degree that it became an essential and ever-present part not only of patristic, but also of later Christian readings of the Bible, as well as of material culture. While individual typological strategies vary among the Greek, Latin and Syriac fathers, it is their common denominator that we can assume is representative of popular Christian discourse in general. They all preserve narratives of their Old Testament, all the while explicitly shifting their symbolic importance away from the Israelite past and towards the coming of Christ.

With this in mind, we can turn to the conceptual and verbal affinities between the Bavli story and the transfiguration scene in the Syriac Gospel, which range from the general to the specific. Some of the words and concepts shared by both stories are rather common, and some aspects may be due to

40 Hymn 1.34–40, see Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem* 5, and McVey, Ephrem, 68.

41 On the role of the visual aspects of revelation in Ephrem’s hymns on the nativity, see Bert Daelemans, “Le Caché nous relève en se révélant. La révélation rédemptrice dans les Hymnes sur la Nativité de St. Éphrem,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 78 (2012): 29–80, and “Dieu sauve en se montrant. La révélation rédemptrice dans la troisième Hymne sur la Nativité de St. Éphrem,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 77 (2011): 351–398; on the transfiguration in material culture see note 34 above, on the visual in Judaism see note 46 below.

both of the stories having a simultaneous engagement with the Biblical episode of Moses' ascent to Sinai. Intriguingly, some of the elements Ephrem highlighted in his reading of the Transfiguration equally seem relevant for the Bavli's story. The affinities between the stories I have previously indicated are the following, with some elaborations; note that the final two points of overlap will prove especially important for the present study:

- In both stories, Moses “goes up” towards heaven as expressed by the root *‘l-h* in both texts (see Luke 9:34, cf. 9:28, where *s-l-q* is used). Moses' ascent itself, of course, is well attested in rabbinic literature, see, e.g., Bavli *Sanhedrin* 111a–b.⁴² While both the story of the Bavli and that of the gospels are thus based on Moses ascent to Sinai in the Hebrew Bible, their respective “reenactment” of this episode is not dissimilar. Note that in his hymn on the transfiguration, Ephrem displays a heightened focus on vertical motions. Moses “ascends” from the depth and Elijah descends “from the heights in heaven” in Ephrem. Similarly, the Bavli describes the hour in which Moses “ascended to the heights;” both texts use the root *r-w-m*.
- Both stories, moreover, relate the biblical past of Moses to the action of a typologically conceptualized “man” at a future time as expressed by the word *‘atid* in both texts (see Luke 9:31)—a future time which is already in the past at the moment of telling the story. Based on this chronological parallel I argued for the particular importance of the Syriac typological tradition for our understanding of the Bavli.⁴³
- Both stories depict this “man” as a “son” and in messianic terms as expressed by the word *ben* in the Bavli and *bar* in the Gospel (see Luke 9:35).⁴⁴

42 See Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 200–201.

43 On the importance of relating the Biblical past, the “old,” to the more recent rabbinic or messianic past, the “new old,” see Zellentín, “Typology and the Transfiguration of Rabbi Aqiva,” 240–242. The term *‘adam ‘ehad* in and of itself is inconspicuous; it is already attested (negatively) in Qohelet 7:28 and quite broadly in the Bavli (see, e.g., *Sanhedrin* 97b)—it is merely its broader typological acumen that makes it relevant for the present consideration. On the importance of comparative approaches to Adam see Zellentín, *ibid.*, 251–253 and *idem*, “Triological Anthropology: The Qur‘ān on Adam and Iblis in View of Rabbinic and Christian Discourse,” in Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin Çiçek (eds.), *The Quest for Humanity – Contemporary Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of the Qur‘ānic Anthropology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), esp. 72–116.

44 As Rubenstein aptly states, the name “Akiba” alone appears over 1,300 times in the Bavli, but the full name “Akiba ben Yosef” only about twelve times, less than 1 percent. So the appearance of the full name seems to be motivated by the desire to alliterate Yosef with *sof* (end). There is also an intriguing resonance of *me‘akev* [sic] (restrains) and *akiva*,” see *idem*, Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 185. The repeated use of the term

- Both stories place a strong emphasis on the visual; the “seeing” of this future man, as expressed, in the Bavli, by the root *r-ʿ-h* and the repetition of Moses’ request for a vision of Aqiva, and of his glory (or reward), and in the Gospel by the pervasive prominence of the root *h-z-y* (see Luke 9:29, 31, 32, 34 and 36).⁴⁵ An emphasis on the visual itself, of course, is not remarkable, given its importance in rabbinic and Syriac culture, yet Ephrem increased the Gospel’s emphasis on longing and the visual further, as we have seen above (using, like Luke, root *h-z-y*).⁴⁶ In the Gospel, it is merely the disciples that “see” Jesus in his glory, yet in Ephrem, Moses and Elijah “saw” him, just as in the Bavli Moses several times asks God to “show him” (Aqiva), and his reward.
- If we follow ms Vatican 118 of the Bavli, both texts speak about the “glory” of the future man, expressed by the root *sh-b-h*, as in the gospels (see Luke 9:32 and cf. 9:31). While the Gospel already emphasized that Moses and Elijah appeared “in glory” (*b-teshbūhtā*), Ephrem repeatedly emphasizes the “glory” (*shūbhā*) of the “Adam,” just as the Bavli, in manuscript Vatican 118, depicts “his glory” (*shevaḥo*), both using the root *sh-b-h*.⁴⁷
- Both texts make it very clear that the future man awaits martyrdom, as expressed by the events awaiting Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30–31) and the weighing of Aqiva’s flesh in the market, respectively. The gruesome image of “weighing the flesh” of humans in the market is an element encountered elsewhere in the Bavli.⁴⁸ In the present context, however, the Bavli’s

“tip,” *qots*, whatever its ultimate meaning in the story, equally evokes the idea of the eschatological “end,” *qets*.

- 45 Menahem Fisch has suggested reading our story in light of Exod 33:12–23, which includes Moses’ request, to God, “to let me behold Your glory” (*kebodekha*, Exod 33:18), a line of reading which Rubenstein has developed further; see Fisch, *Rational Rabbis: Science and Talmudic Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 192–195, and Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 190–192. Yet the biblical parallel only points to the typological contrast between Talmud and Bible, for in the former, as in the New Testament, the gaze is now turned towards the man, and away from the deity, which Moses longed to see in Exodus.
- 46 For the visual in Christian culture, see note 41 above, for the rabbis, see Rachel Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
- 47 On the centrality of the term “glory” in Syriac Christian culture see note 29 above; on the biblical notion expressed through a different term see note 45 above.
- 48 The phrase used here, of weighing Aqiva’s flesh in the market, constitutes an ironic inversion of the statement made by Rav Ulla in Bavli *Hullin* 91a–b that the Gentiles would not “weigh the flesh of the dead in the markets.” On Aqiva’s martyrdom, see also Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 93–126.

depiction of Aqiva's flesh being offered for sale and presumably consumed after martyrdom is difficult to dissociate from the eucharistic consumption of Jesus' body—especially since Christians had long seen themselves confronted with accusation that recast the eucharist as cannibalism.⁴⁹

- In both stories, the scene plays out in front of the “disciples,” as expressed by the word *talmyd* in the Bavli and in the Gospel (the root is mentioned in Luke 9:18, the disciples are named in 9:28, 32 and 33). While the presence of disciples is ubiquitous in both New Testament and Talmudic texts, the students play specific roles as observers in both texts.⁵⁰
- Two final similarities are central for the present inquiry. First, in both stories, one of those in the role of disciple is depicted as not being able to follow the events: in the Bavli, Moses, who joined the ranks of the disciples, “did not know what they (the rabbis) were saying,” whereas in the Gospel, Kafa “did not know what he (presumably Jesus) was saying.” The idea is expressed in very similar terms in Aramaic and Hebrew, *lo hayah yode'a mahen 'omrim* and *w-lā yāda'wā mānā āmar* (the main difference being the shift from the third person plural to the singular). The statement about incomprehension, to the best of my knowledge, has only one close parallel in rabbinic literature, Bavli *Hullin* 137b, to which we will presently turn in our consideration of the incomprehension of divine discourse in the Syriac tradition and in the Bavli.
- In both stories, the one depicted in the role of the disciple is eventually reduced to silence (employing the root *sh-t-q*): James and Peter “kept silent” after witnessing the transfiguration, in the Bavli, God twice tells Moses to “remain silent”—the statement to which this article is dedicated.

While none of the similarities between the Talmud and the Gospel would be striking on its own, their collective weight, especially in light of the typological drift of both narratives, seems to surpass the accidental by far.

Accordingly, the Bavli does not “cite” the Gospel narrative here, rather, the Bavli merely alludes to it, and even so it is more likely an oral rendering rather than the written version that matters for our reconstructions, as I stated

49 While the accusation of cannibalism in the context of the eucharist started in the second century (see e.g. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9), it was well and alive throughout late antiquity, see e.g. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26:5,4–6 and Bart Wagemakers, “Incest, Infanticide, and Cannibalism: Anti-Christian Imputations in The Roman Empire” *Greece & Rome (Second Series)* 57 (2010): 337–354; see also Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 92–93, 101–102 and 112–113.

50 In addition, students address Jesus as “Rabban” (see Luke 9:33); Aqiva's disciples address him as “Rabbi” only in the Vilna print.

above.⁵¹ One could use the Bavli’s imprecision as an argument against the relevance of typology and of the transfiguration for reading it—if it was the story’s Bavli’s main aim to evoke the transfiguration, why not be more concrete? Yet one can also turn this argument on its head and state that the pervasiveness of typological reasoning in Christian and rabbinic culture, and of the transfiguration scene in patristic literature, material culture and likely in Christian popular culture, allows the Bavli to keep its allusions oblique and understated, while relying on its audience to grasp its playful use of Christian typology in a rabbinic story, without the need to contaminate the textual surface with a clumsy or heavy-handed direct appeal to an outside tradition. It may well precisely *not* be the Bavli’s main goal to “evoke” the transfiguration; perhaps it merely does so in order to eclipse it, *en route* to make a different point altogether. In my view, the Bavli’s typological reading of Aqiva comes as close as possible to the Christian model, without, however, overstepping the line: Aqiva is perhaps “the one,” but not a new Adam; he is a messianic figure, but not the Messiah; and he is martyred and his body consumed, but he is not yet resurrected. The way in which the Bavli constructs Aqiva here, in other words, may be the closest it can get to incorporating Christological claims without abandoning its commitment to rabbinic collectivism.

Incomprehension and Silence

With these general arguments in mind, we can now turn to the themes of Moses’ incomprehension, and to the silence God orders him to keep, in light of a broader Jewish and Christian context. Kafa, in the transfiguration narrative, “did not comprehend what he said” (*wela yada’ wa mana ’amar*), a saying closely parallel when Moses, in Rabbi Aqiva’s Bet Midrash, “did not comprehend what they said” (*lo hayah yode’a mahen ’omrim*). The parallel is a close one, yet Jeffrey Rubenstein has equally noted that this phrase has a close Talmudic parallel in Bavli *Hullin* 137b, where it equally describes the incomprehension of the highest echelons of legal debate:

51 Bavli *Menaḥot* 29b does not even allude to the gospels in the approximate way in which it comes close to doing so in Bavli *Shabbat* 116a–b, on that passage see Zellentin, “One Letter Yud shall not Pass Away from the Law’: Matthew 5:17 to Shabbat 116a–b,” in *Religious Identities in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Walking Together & Parting Ways*, ed. Ilkka Lindstedt, Nina Nikki, and Riikka Tuori (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 204–58 and Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, 137–166, and the literature cited there; on this passage see now also Yakir Paz, “The Torah of the Gospel: A Rabbinic Polemic against The Syro-Roman Lawbook,” *Harvard Theological Review* 112 (2019): 517–540.

(Rabbi Yoḥanan) said to (Isi): “Who is the head of the yeshiva in Babylonia?”

(Isi) said (to Rabbi Yoḥanan: “It is) Abba the Tall (i.e., the amora Rav).”

(Rabbi Yoḥanan) said to (Isi): “You call him “Abba the Tall”? I remember when I sat seventeen rows behind Rav (who sat) before Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi), and fiery sparks emerged from the mouth of Rav to the mouth of Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi, ונפקין זיקוקין דגור מפומיה דרב לפומיה דר, and from the mouth of Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi) to the mouth of Rav (רב לפומיה דר), and I did not know what they said (ולא ידענ' מהן אומרות). And yet you call him Abba the tall?”⁵²

The Bavli’s depiction of Moses, sitting in Aqiva’s house of study and not being able to comprehend the halakhic debate clearly evokes Isi’s vivid depiction of the intense exchange between Rav and Rabbi Yehuda haNasi, the heads of the Babylonian and Palestinian academies, respectively.⁵³ What Isi has witnessed, sitting like Moses in the last row, and like him “not knowing what they said,” is the type of quasi-divine discourse symbolized by speechless fire emerging from the rabbis’ mouth, an image likely deriving from God’s “words” that are “like fire” (דברי כאש, see Jeremiah 23:29).⁵⁴ The inner-Talmudic parallel thus illustrates that the content of the communication in both passages belongs to a higher realm. The discourse between Aqiva and his disciples, just like that between Rav and Yehuda haNasi, belongs to a higher sphere, which a normal person—Isi or Moses—cannot comprehend, just as Kafa cannot follow the conversation between Moses, Elijah and Jesus in the transfiguration scene. In the account of the transfiguration, Kafa’s incomprehension leads to the fact that the disciples remained “silent,” whereas in the Bavli, God commands

52 Cited according to Manuscript Munich; other witnesses offer slight variants to the main phrase: Ms. Vatican 120–121 follows the cited version almost verbatim, Ms. Vatican 122, the Vilna and Venice prints have וליית אנא ידע מה הן אמרין.

53 See Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud*, 198. Note the slight manuscript variance regarding Moses’ incomprehension in the Bavli in note 14 above. While there are many instances of the phrase “he did not know” in the Bavli (see, e.g., *Megillah* 13b and *Bava Qamma* 103b), the phrase “he did not know what they were saying” is, to the best of my knowledge, paralleled only the present Bavli *Hullin* 137b (a reference which is missing in Zellentín, “Typology and the Transfiguration of Rabbi Aqiva,” 266 n. 74), adding weight to the extra-rabbinic affinity.

54 Based on Jeremiah 23:29, God’s fiery words become like sparks (ניצוצות) through their interpretation in Bavli *Sanhedrin* 34a and *Shabbat* 88a, see already David Stern, “Literary Criticism or Literary Homilies? Susan Handelman and the Contemporary Study of Midrash,” *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 5 (1985): 102–103; see also Tanḥuma *Vayakhel* 7:12, where sparks emerge from the Cherubim, and Yerushalmi *Berakhot* 5.1 (9a). While sparks emerging from the mouth is a negative image associated with Leviathan in Job 41:11 and with punitive angels in the *Vision of Paul* 11, the image of a fiery divine outpouring appears equally in the Christian tradition, see e.g. Acts 2:3.

Moses thus. The inner-Talmudic parallel thus helps us contextualize the affinity between the transfiguration scene and the story in Bavli *Menahot* 29b. I will now argue that a fuller understanding of God’s command to Moses to remain silent in the Bavli can only be gained in dialogue with a long Jewish and Christian tradition on silence and the divine, which I will briefly lay out before returning to our story.

Many of the types of silence we encounter in the Hebrew Bible or in Late Antique discourse, marking mourning or defeat, are less relevant for our story.⁵⁵ The Bavli’s image of communication through fiery sparks in *Hullin* 137b, as well the context of God’s command to remain silent in the face of incomprehension of the divine in *Menahot* 29b, both ultimately build on Middle- and Neo-platonic discourse. Already Plato speaks of thought as the “silent (ἄνευ φωνῆς) inner conversation of the soul with itself” (*Sophist* 263e–264a).⁵⁶ Based on such views, Plutarch stipulates that Socrates received silent (ἄνευ φωνῆς) communications from his personal *daimon* (see *De genio Socratis* 588 E), whereas Philo, likewise, suggests that one should approach God “without utterance of any voice” (Philo *De gigantibus* 52). Philo in particular developed theories of intellectual contemplation and silent prayer that proved fundamental for late antique pagans and Christians, yet rarely occur in late Jewish traditions.⁵⁷

Such a train of thought does not generally stand in line with rabbinic inquiry. An exception may be the saying of Shim’on ben Gamliel in *Pirqe Avot*: “All my life

55 Silence, for example, is used to denote quiet suffering (see, e.g., Ps 32:3, Lamentations 3:27–31), or reducing someone to silence (e.g., Ps 31:18–19). Both types of silence are well-attested in rabbinic literature as well, see e.g., *Ekha Rabba* 1.1, where humans and God sit in order to mourn, and Bavli *Keritot* 12b, where a rabbi regrets to have remained silent during a legal disagreement. On silence in the Psalms and its Christian reception history see Hermann Spieckerman, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel; Anregungen aus Psalter und Weisheit für die Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 232–246, as well as Massimo Cacciari, “Silence biblique, silence néotestamentaire,” in David Banon, ed., *Héritages d’André Neher* (Paris: Éclat, 2011), 167–178. A particular case of silence is the quietness of God in certain situations, as laid out perceptively in Eric D. Raymond, “The Hebrew Word דממה and the Root d-m-m I (“To Be Silent”),” *Biblica* 90 (2009): 374–388.

56 Cited according to Harold N. Fowler, *Theaetetus and Sophist* (Loeb Classical Library 123; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 440–441.

57 See Menahem Luz, “Philo on Prayer as Devotional Study,” in John Dillon and Andrei Timotin (eds.), *Platonic Theories of Prayer* (Brill: Leiden, 2016), 46–57; Tatjana Alkniéné, “La prière à l’Un dans le traité 10 [V,1] de Plotin et la tradition philosophique grecque,” in Filip Karfik and Euree Song (eds.), *Plato Revived: Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O’Meara* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 339–340; and Anna Pawlaczyk, “The Motif of Silence in Philo of Alexandria’s Treatise ‘Quis rerum divinarum heres sit’. Some Remarks,” *Polish Journal of Biblical Research* 1 (2000): 125–130.

I grew up among the Wise, and I found nothing better for a person (or “body”) than silence (הַשְׁתִּיקָה אֵלָא טוֹב אֵלָא שְׁתִּיקָה, *Avot* 1:17, see also *Wayiqrah Rabba* 16:5).⁵⁸ Philo’s ideas fell on more fertile ground among Neoplatonists; in the third century C.E., Plotinus and Porphyry further developed the theory of “silent prayer” as a way of communicating with God.⁵⁹ The notion of “silence and praying for mercy” (שְׁתִּיקוּתָא וּמַבְעֵי רַחֲמֵי), in turn, can equally be found in the Bavli, yet it is rare (see *Berakhot* 62a, here to rid a bathhouse of demons).⁶⁰ Hence, no matter what one makes of the platonic tradition of communicative silence, in *Menahot* 29b, God’s order to Moses to remain silent—rather than to ask about God’s hidden reasoning in choosing Moses instead of Aqiva as the recipient of the Torah and in allowing Aqiva’s gruesome death—does not demand legal agreement, quiet suffering, or even silent prayer. Rather, God demands silence in order to indicate the end of the inquiry into His reasons: just as acts of creation, the matter simply arose in his mind.⁶¹

Such a tradition to limit intellectual inquiry is well attested in the Jewish and Christian tradition, and it will help us further to calibrate our understanding of God’s silencing of a befuddled Moses. Ben Sira (in chapter three) had already enjoined his audience as follows:

- 17 My child, perform your tasks with humility;
 then you will be loved by those whom God accepts.
 18 The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself;
 so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord.
 20 For great is the might of the Lord;
 but by the humble he is glorified.
 21 Seek not things concealed from you (פְּלֵאוֹת מִמֶּךָ אֶל תְּדַרֹּשׁ),
 nor search those hidden from you (וּמְבוּסָה מִמֶּךָ אֶל תַּחְקֹר)
 22 Reflect on that which is permitted to you (בְּמָה שְׁהוֹרֵשִׁית הַתְּבוּנָה),
 you have no business with secret matters (וְאִין לְךָ עֵסֶק בְּנִסְתָּרוֹת).
 23 Do not meddle in matters that are beyond you,

58 Cited in accordance with Mss. Kaufman and Parma de Rossi. Amram Tropper, in his discussion of the saying of Shim’on ben Gamliel, does not explore its philosophical context, instead stipulating that its message may be “ironic”; see Amram Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics, and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 82–83.

59 Andrei Timotin, “Porphyry on Prayer: Platonic Traditions and Religious Trends in the Third Century,” in John Dillon and Andrei Timotin (eds.), *Platonic Theories of Prayer* (Brill: Leiden, 2016), 103. For a perceptive history of platonic and neo-platonic thought on silence, see, e.g., Nicholas Banner, *Philosophic Silence and the ‘One’ in Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

60 On the meaning and the textual tradition of *Berakhot* 62b, see David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 166–167. A treatise on rabbinic views of silence, to the best of my knowledge, remains a desideratum.

61 See note 22 above.

for more than you can understand has been shown to you.
 24 For their conceit has led many astray,
 and wrong opinion has impaired their judgement.⁶²

In general, Ben Sira’s advice not to investigate into divine secrets thus clearly shares more with the wisdom literature of his time, or perhaps with the Stoic tradition, than with middle-Platonic or even rabbinic thought.⁶³ While the rabbis more than occasionally evoke Ben Sira, they do not in general share his reluctance towards divine inquiry.⁶⁴ There are, however, clear exceptions, such as the rabbis’ strict sanctioning of mystical inquiries. The Bavli thus cites Ben Sira’s saying in *Hagigah* 13a, when commenting about the details of the heavenly realm:

Until here, you have permission to speak;
 from this point forward you do not have permission to speak,
 as it is written in the book of Ben Sira:
 Seek not things concealed from you (במפלא ממך אל תדרוש)
 nor search those hidden from you (ובמכוסה ממך אל תחקור).
 Reflect on that which is permitted to you (במה שהורשית התבונן);
 you have no business with secret matters (אין לך עסק בנסתרות).
 It is taught (in a Baraita):
 Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai said: What response did the Divine Voice provide to
 that wicked man, Nebuchadnezzar, when he said:
 “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High”
 (Isaiah 14:14), thereby intending to rise to heaven?
 A Divine Voice came and said to him:
 “Wicked man, son of a wicked man, descendant of Nimrod the wicked, who
 caused the entire world to rebel against Him during the time of his reign.”⁶⁵

God’s stern response to Moses’ inquiry into His reasons for choosing, and then martyring Aqiva in *Menaḥot* 29b, can thus be argued to hearken back to a tradition of limiting inquiries into ultimate secrets elsewhere in the Bavli.⁶⁶ Yet

62 Cited according to Manuscript Cambridge T-S 12.863, folio A I recto, translation following the NRSV with modifications.

63 See e.g. Sharon Lea Mattila, “Ben Sira and the Stoics: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 473–501.

64 On the intriguing relationship of the rabbis to Ben Sira see Vered Noam, “Ben Sira: A Rabbinic Perspective,” in J. K. Aitken, R. Egger-Wenzel and S.C. Reif (eds.), *Discovering, Deciphering, and Dissenting: Ben Sira Manuscripts after 120 Years* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 201–217; and Jenny R. Labendz, “The Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature,” *AJS Review* 30 (2006): 347–392.

65 Cited according to the Vilna Print, see also *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:2.

66 On the prohibition to inquire beyond the limits of the creation, see already Mishna *Hagigah* 2:1 and its Talmudic commentaries in Bavli and Yerushalmi; also Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. 209–210.

the saying of Ben Sira which the rabbis incorporated, merely demands an end to the inquiry, and the Bavli has God sharply rebuke Nebuchadnezzar—there is no talk here of silence.

In order fully to comprehend the use of God's command to Moses, then, we should take not only the Jewish and Platonic views on silence into account, but also the Syriac Christian view on silence when faced with divine mysteries. Again, a close look at Ephrem allows for a solid foundation in order to approach this tradition. In Hymn 70:7, Ephrem admonishes his audience as follows:

Approach inquiry (*la-bšātā*) based on your strength (*mesat ḥaylāk*)
And when your heart wanders and gets lost
Remain in silence (*b-shetqā*)⁶⁷

While it is difficult to establish whether or not Ephrem here had the passage of Ben Sira quoted by the Bavli in mind specifically, it is clear that he, just like Ecclesiasticus and the Talmud, links the limits of inquiry to mental strength.⁶⁸ What Ephrem adds to this equation is the theme of silence, which he explores in detail throughout his extant oeuvre. For example, in another one of his *Hymns on Faith* (39) that opens with a condemnation of pagans and Jews who derided Jesus, Ephrem again equates that which can be interpreted to the mysteries beyond it, which must be treated with silence:

5 That which is spoken and can be interpreted (*wa-mšē d-nettargam*)
And explained (*wa-pshīq*),
so that it can be discussed (*d-net'aqqab*), debated (*w-metdarrash*), and declared
(*w-metpashshaq*)
Belongs to the mouth, and interpreting (*metargem*) is related to it.
But what cannot be debated (*metdarrash*) or declared (*w-metpashshaq*)
is marked off by silence (*shetqā thūmeh-ū*, lit., silence is its border).
for our mind is not akin to its hiddenness.⁶⁹

67 See, Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (CSCO 154–155; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955), 1.215 (Syriac) and 2.187 (German trans.); see also Jeffrey T. Wickes, *St Ephrem the Syrian: The Hymns on Faith* (The Fathers of the Church 130; Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 340 and Paul S. Russell, “Ephraem the Syrian on the Utility of Language and the Place of Silence,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 28.

68 Ephrem regularly cites Ben Sira, see Wido van Peursen, “Ben Sira in the Syriac Tradition,” in *The Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 146–147. In the present case, however, his plausible allusion cannot be linked with any certainty to the extant Aramaic versions of Ben Sira, see Paul de Lagarde, *Libri Veteris Testamenti Apocryphi Syriace* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1861), 4.

69 See Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem, Fide*, 1.129 (Syriac) and 2.106 (German trans.); the translation of this passage and the following is my own, in consultation of Beck Wickes, *St Ephrem*, 224. On the hymn, see also Russell, “Ephraem,” 28. The theme of silence (*shetqa*)

When trying to contextualize God’s command to Moses, we thus have to consider the rabbinic discourse on the limits of inquiry, limited as the evidence may be. Yet we must equally note that the specific formulation in the Bavli may communicate to its audience that it here employs the fully developed discourse on silence as the only appropriate *response* to the limits of inquiry, which is a specifically Christian tradition.

The prominence of the Syriac discourse on silence, when compared with the scant rabbinic evidence, helps us gauge the Bavli’s hint. Ephrem’s hymns and *mīmrē* more broadly furnish central evidence for the Syriac understanding of the uses of silence in light of the limits of human understanding. Ephrem, in the words of Russel, held the following:

While useful in and of itself, the range and power of language is increased when it is accompanied by its counterpart: silence. Proper use of these two tools in balance with each other allows humans to respond to any topic that confronts them in an appropriate and reverent manner, while still engaging with it actively as far as their ability allows.⁷⁰

In light of the centrality of the notion of silence in Ephrem (and in the Syriac tradition more broadly, as we will see), reading God’s unique command to Moses to remain silent, in *Menaḥot* 29b, takes on a new significance. The story may well allude to the Gospel’s statement that James and Peter kept silent after witnessing the transfiguration in incomprehension, as I have argued above. More centrally, however, it rather seems that the Bavli, in presenting a typological counter-narrative to the transfiguration, portrays God as implementing specifically Syriac teachings on silence, which can be illustrated with a couple of further examples from Ephrem. It is, again, not one passage, but the entirety of the Syriac tradition against which we should read this aspect of the Talmudic story.

as marking the end of inquiry is central to Ephrem’s hymns on faith. Ephrem’s *Hymn on Faith* 38:13, for example, is dedicated to the juxtaposition between silence and speech: here, God is portrayed as having added silence and having given “areas in which we could inquire,” yet at the same time, God “held back other (areas) in which we could keep silence”; see also verses 2–4, 8–10, and 18–20; see Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem, Fide*, 1.127 (Syriac) and 2.104 (German trans.); see also Wickes, *St Ephrem*, 220, and Russell, “Ephraem,” 27–28.

⁷⁰ Russell, “Ephraem,” 30, see also *ibid.*, 21–37 and Pierre Yousif, “Parole et silence chez Saint Éphrem de Nisibe,” *La Maison-Dieu* 226 (2001): 95–114. Among Ephrem’s hymns on faith, many others focus on silence (*shetqa*): 1:18–19 (which enjoins to keep silent before God); 2:4; 3:9 (which depicts the angels as praising God silently, a theme further developed in 4:1, 5, 14 and 17); 8:2 (on the silence of the Jews when faced with Moses’ splendor); 10:2; 11:5–9 (on God’s silence, a theme further developed in 54:2); 13:10; 16:12–13 (on prayer in silence); 20:1; 23:15; 37:18 (on the silence of the son); 43:3; 70:18 and 74:18.

Perhaps most relevant for our reading of the Bavli is the following excerpt from Ephrem's *Hymn of Faith* 57, which, after ruminations on the mind, sleep, and memory, ends as follows:

(10) "From this, your own lowly word,
 You should miraculously learn the glorious word:
 the Word of God.
 If your own word ever does not know to tell itself,
 honor with your silence (*b-yad shetqāk*) the Word of your Creator,
 Whose silence cannot be inquired into (*d-lā metbšē shetqā*)."⁷¹

The Bavli, in a sense, has God remind Moses to honor the decisions of His Creator with his own silence, quite precisely as Ephrem and many others after him had taught. The importance of the issue of silence in Syriac patristic thought only increased in centuries subsequent to Ephrem, both in the West and in the East Syrian tradition.⁷² A final illustrative example from the former tradition is the *Letter of Exhortation Sent to Someone Who Left Judaism and Came to the Life of Perfection* written towards the end of the fifth century by Philoxenus of Mabbug. Here, we read the following about silence:

8. Stillness of place (*shelyā d-dūkkā*) leads one into (a state of) stillness of the mind (*shelyā d-re'yānā*), and stillness of the mind raises a person up to converse with God (*la-mmallā d-'am alāhā*). For even if a person has fallen silent (*shteq*)

71 See, Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem, Fide*, 1.154 (Syriac) and 2.155 (German trans.); see also Wickes, *St Ephrem*, 291; and Russell, "Ephraem," 29; see also *Hymn on Faith* 1.19. Ephrem's hymns are often laced with anti-Jewish tropes, in 57:1, for example, Jews again appear as "the crucifiers."

72 On John of Apamea (first half of the fifth century), see, e.g., Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "More Interior than the Lips and the Tongue': John of Apamea and Silent Prayer in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20 (2012): 303–331; on Philoxenus (turn of the sixth century), see B. Bitton-Ashkelony and Sergey Minov, "A Person of Silence': Philoxenos of Mabbug, Letter of Exhortation Sent to Someone Who Left Judaism and Came to the Life of Perfection," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 82 (2016): 101–125; on Dadisho Qatraya (late seventh century), see Francisco del Río Sánchez, "Dadišo' du Qatar et la quiétude," in Alain Desreumaux, ed., *Les mystiques syriaques* (Paris: Geuthner, 2011), 87–98. On the elaborate discourse on silence in the Greek Christian tradition, see Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986); note also Sebastian Brock, "Secundus the Silent Philosopher: Some Notes on the Syriac Tradition," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie N.F.* 121 (1978): 94–100; see also Gabriele Winkler, "Ein bedeutsamer Zusammenhang zwischen der Erkenntnis und Ruhe in Mt 11,27–29 und dem Ruhem des Geistes auf Jesus am Jordan: Eine Analyse zur Geist-Christologie in syrischen und armenischen Quellen," *Le Muséon* 96 (1983): 267–326 and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 105–131.

from having conversation with one (i.e., humanity), he is not (yet) going to converse with the other (i.e., God). Therefore, as long as the mind does not become silent (*shteq*) from all agitations of the worldly commotion, it will not begin to stammer (*d-nlagleg*) in the conversation with God.⁷³

Philoxenus, much like Ephrem, insists on silence as a precondition to engage in a conversation with God. On one level, I would argue that the Bavli agrees with the church father, and does not shy away from attributing such a view of silence to God himself. However, and this is a central caveat, the Bavli is a deeply dialectical text, and must always be thus understood. Attributing a certain view to God, in the Bavli, is not necessarily the same thing as condoning it, as it points out quite clearly in the previously mentioned parallel story of the Oven of Akhnai in *Bava Metsi'a* 59a–b.⁷⁴ The rabbinic story of Moses' ascent towards heaven, in clear contrast to the Syriac tradition on silence *generally* portrays God as engaged in intimate and exoteric conversation with his creatures, be they angels or men. Yet precisely at the point when the rabbis wonder, on the one hand, about the election of Moses over Aqiva, and on the other about the reasons for the latter's martyrdom, they portray God Himself all of a sudden as commanding silence rather than inquiry into His mysteries. Does the Bavli then portray God, in having Moses be silent, as instructing him to “honor with your silence (*b-yad shetqak*) the Word of your Creator, whose silence cannot be inquired into (*d-lā metbšē shetqā*),” as Ephraim has it? Does it demand Moses' mind “to become silent from all agitations of the worldly commotion,” as Philoxenus puts it?

The Bavli, in having Moses remain silent, I would argue, here integrates what it considers to be a valuable lesson from Christian thought. It marks this lesson as such, probing the limits of orthodoxy all the while reinforcing them: yes, silence is a meaningful response to the Divine unknown, yes, Moses does visit the living, yes, there is value in martyrdom, even if neither Aqiva nor anyone else have been transfigured. Yet by portraying God's proclivity to silence, the Bavli does by no means endorse God's action. The rabbinic storyteller, in my view, shares the stupefaction he projects onto Moses. It uses the Christian hermeneutical tools of typology and silence in the face of incomprehension of the divine. It elevates Aqiva at the same time as debasing Moses, situating its own discourse squarely in the middle—firmly committed to the memory of both, and firmly committed both to Aqiva's halakhic genius and to Moses' two simplistic, though existential, questions: why me and why this?

73 Cited according to Manuscript British Library Add. 14,726, as edited and translated by Bitton-Ashkelony and Minov, “A Person of Silence,” 116–117, for its date see 103.

74 See note 27 above.

There is, to conclude, no reason to posit that any rabbi ever heard any of Ephrem's hymns sung in a neighboring church or expounded in a debate, as likely as this may have been. The rabbis did not likely spend much time reading Philoxenus' letters to a Jewish convert to Christianity. Our story may or may not reflect any specific aspect of Syriac teaching on silence. Rather, the Syriac literature here cited illustrates the importance of silence as a response to the limits of understanding as one of the broader aspects of Syriac culture permeating the world of the Late Ancient Diocese of the East and of Mesopotamia, against which we can best understand this aspect of the Bavli story.

We can thus conclude that the notion of limiting one's inquiry may well occur in the rabbinic tradition, yet when it comes to silence in the face of incomprehension of the divine, we are dealing with a distinctly "Christian" tradition. The Bavli's story in *Menahot* 29b heaps paradox upon paradox, just as Aqiva would heap interpretation upon interpretation: God requires Moses to honor him in a rather Christian manner at the very moment that Moses is faced with his incomprehension of his own, rather than Aqiva's election and with his incomprehension of Aqiva's gruesome and non-triumphal martyrdom. Two types of hearing Moses' silence now emerge as false: hearing it within the confines of the rabbinic tradition alone on the one hand, or hearing it as engaging some reified form of "Christianity" on the other hand, are two extremes that would both be guilty of the same reductionist fallacy. Such a reading would construct a false dichotomy not so much between "us" and "them," between "Jewish" and "Christian," which clearly (?) remains in place in the Bavli, but between "aspects of our thought" and "aspects of their thought"—a distinction the Bavli does not always seem to uphold. As it clearly states, "eat the date and throw away the stone" (*Hagiga* 15b according to Ms. British Library 400). There is no reason not to use a good teaching just because it is Christian, just as it is permitted to use a good teaching from a flawed rabbi, provided this rabbi is like an angel (אם דומה הרב למלאך), as we learn here (*ibid.*). There is, however, also no good reason to let that teaching stand unexamined or unmodified.

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The Treasury of Prophecy

The Role of Knowledge in Salvation History for the Qurʾān in the Light of Syriac Tradition

Andrew J. Hayes

Questioning Prophetic Knowledge in the Qurʾān

Arguments about human knowledge of God form a recurrent and prominent theme in the Qurʾānic corpus. One of the Qurʾān's most recognizable tropes is the figure of the dutiful prophet, rejected by his people even though they ought to have known better.¹ In such narratives, the people often debate with their messenger over his knowledge and truthfulness. The Qurʾān's perspective on these debates is ironic, for it knows the denouement of each case: the punishment for rejection of the message. In short, the peoples question their prophets' knowledge: how can we be certain that you *know* what you are talking about? And generally, the Qurʾānic prophets claim a special, albeit circumscribed, knowledge: they know from God what others do not know and they have been taught "the wisdom" as part of their being given the gift of prophecy,² but they also explicitly disclaim access to the heavenly *treasures*—specifically treasures of knowledge, as contextual clues suggest—which their peoples seem to have expected of them.³

In the case of Jesus, the Qurʾān amplifies the recurrent pattern. It places in his mouth a stark admission of his own ignorance of God. Speaking in response to God's rhetorical question to Jesus whether Jesus had bidden his followers to adopt him and his mother as gods, Jesus replies:

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1 The sequence nearly always exhibits the stages of admonition, dispute, rejection, and punishment.

2 Such language and imagery appears in Q 2.129, 2.151, 2.231, 2.251, 3.48, 3.79, 3.81, 3.164, 4.54, 4.113, 5.110, 6.89, 12.22, 19.12, 21.74, 21.79, 26.21, 26.83, 28.14, 33.34, 38.20, 43.63, 45.16, and 62.2. Translations of the Qurʾān are generally taken from that of Majid Fakhry: *An Interpretation of the Qurʾān: English Translation of the Meanings: A Bilingual Edition* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), though I have occasionally chosen to offer my own rendering instead.

3 These passages will be fully commented on below. They include Q 6.50, 6.59, 11.12, 11.31, 25.4–8, 38.7, 52.37–38.

Glory be to you! It is not appropriate for me to say what is untrue. If I had said that, you would definitely have known it. You know what is in me (lit., my soul), and I do not know what is in you (lit., your soul). You are assuredly the Knower of the Unseen. (*ta'lamu mā fī nafsī wa-lā a'lamu mā fī nafsika. Innaka anta 'allāmu al-ḡuyūbi.* Q 5.116)

The rhetorical symmetry of this statement merely serves to highlight the harsh asymmetry of its doctrine, thereby rejecting all the more emphatically the idea that Jesus is divine. It is not simply that Jesus is ignorant of when God will punish people or when the resurrection will take place; he asserts wholesale ignorance of God himself.⁴ The final portion of the just-cited passage is rather unusual compared with the other narratives because when the Qur'ān wishes to identify the prophets' human limitations, it typically focuses on their mortality and their ordinary human activities, such as frequenting the market or eating regular food (activities which are duly asserted of Jesus as well).⁵ But what might account for the amplification of the pattern as regards Jesus, to the point that his ignorance of God is so stridently expressed? And why in general do Qur'ānic prophets insist that they lack access to the *treasures* of God?

I argue that these aspects of the Qur'ānic corpus, that is to say, its view of prophetic knowledge and ignorance, form a deliberate partial rejection of a distinctively Syriac theological tradition regarding the role of knowledge in salvation history.⁶ Both the Qur'ān in the early seventh century, and the Syriac tradition, in the sixth century, give special prominence to salvific knowledge, and they share an abundance of the same imagery for the knowledge of prophets and messengers, above all the image of the heavenly treasury and its keys. Yet the two traditions reach radically different conclusions because of their different premises as regards knowledge. For the Syriac tradition, human access to

4 At first, this appears to contrast with Q 43:57–64, which could be taken as saying that Jesus is “knowledge of the hour”: that is, knowledge of when the final judgment will occur. Strictly speaking, however, the passage is ambiguous because the reference of the pronoun in the sentence in question (*innahu la-ilmun lis-sā'ati*) is vague. Given that the larger context of the passage emphasizes Jesus' status as an example for the Israelites (43:59: *maṭalan li-bani isrā'īl*), the point seems not to be that Jesus knows when the hour will occur, but that his prophetic activity should have instructed them, but they did not heed it.

5 Gerald Hawting, “Has God Sent a Mortal as a Messenger?” (Q 17:95): Messengers and Angels in the Qur'ān,” in Gabriel S. Reynolds, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 375–377.

6 It may be possible to see this also in connection with the E. Syrian school system, but that is too large a topic to explore in this chapter. For the importance of knowledge in the E. Syrian worldview, see Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

the heavenly treasury of divine knowledge and wisdom (often described as radiance) is vitally important. By it, via Christ's mediation, God divinizes us and bestows life and intimacy with himself. For the Qur'ān, such access to God's inner knowledge is an exaggeration both audacious and superfluous. Mortal prophets and messengers suffice to impart to mankind the knowledge necessary for true religion. Thus, the former insists on the symmetrical knowledge of the Father and Jesus, while the latter necessarily rejects it. In short, the Qur'ān's own distinctive position on this point emerges out of a dialogue with Syriac speaking Christians, who would have known and used the ideas and imagery of Jacob of Serugh († 521) and Philoxenus of Mabbugh († 523).

In pursuit of this claim, the first half of the argument turns to the Qur'ānic accounts of prophets and their debates with their peoples. In these accounts, the Qur'ān relies principally on its own *prophetic typology*: the sequential pattern of prophets and messengers, as an argument for how one ought to recognize the truth of their message. This pattern serves, moreover, to rebut expectations that the proof of prophets' veracity is found in their quasi-angelic access to heavenly treasuries of divine wisdom. Such expectations, the Qur'ān seems to argue, amount to a misreading of the pattern. Thus, the Qur'ān's rejection of Jesus' knowledge is not simply, in negative terms, an anti-Christian reaction. Rather, the Qur'ān proposes an alternative pattern of salvation history that has no need for and does not culminate in intimacy with God's own knowledge. Finally, both aspects, the prophetic typology more generally and the denial of heavenly treasures of knowledge more specifically, exhibit the Qur'ān's tendency to *ironic reduction*, that is, it often reduces its opponents' positions to exaggeration, an example of which appears to be its portrayal of Jesus' ignorance.

The second half of the argument looks to the Syriac authors of the sixth century, with roots in Ephrem's writings in the fourth. This tradition thematized the question of knowing about God by articulating a distinctive symbolic theology. Consonant with that view, Ephrem, Philoxenus, and Jacob all elaborate and develop the *symmetry of knowledge argument*: namely, that Jesus' divinity is proved not only by miracles, but especially by the perfectly symmetrical knowledge shared by Father and Son. In the case of Jacob's *mêmre* in particular, (again with roots in Ephrem) he situates this thesis within a rich and variegated tableau in which prophets and messengers have access to the treasuries of heavenly wisdom via the keys given by Christ. In Jacob's account of the pattern of salvation history, in fact, the prophets' possession of the treasury culminates in the imagery of Christ himself as the treasury of prophecy and the source of our divinization.

The Qur'ān calls attention to its own numerous similarities with other theological and scriptural traditions of Late Antiquity. Yet the Qur'ānic accounts often differ significantly from what adherents of the selfsame traditions expressly profess. What is one to make of these similarities in difference? The argument just proposed depends on the approach one takes to answer that question.⁷ Hence, the present essay proves to be an opportunity to test a particular hypothesis about the best way to interpret such similarities: namely, the hypothesis of critical engagement. Before analyzing the opposing arguments and shared imagery between the two traditions, it is necessary briefly to discuss this hypothesis: that one can read the Qur'ān as knowing about and engaging in theological debate with adherents of other traditions in its milieu, and in particular the theological debates and ideas current in the Syriac tradition.

The Hypothesis of Critical Engagement, with Some Notes on Prior Scholarship

The attempt to illuminate the historical, literary, and theological context of the Qur'ān by appealing to the similarities between it and other religious traditions has a long history. Indeed, many have turned to Syriac Christianity in particular as a useful resource, to the point that one scholar has identified such authors (not entirely sympathetically) as the “Syriacist school of the Qur'ān's origins.”⁸ But the arguments of this diffuse Syriacist school have taken many directions. Some have looked to Syriac for loanwords and other clues to philological

7 See Sidney Griffith, “Al-Naṣārā in the Qur'ān: A Hermeneutical Reflection,” in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān*, 305, for a hermeneutical reflection on this problem as related to the *naṣārā* or “Nazorenes” described in the Qur'ān. In analyzing the views of François de Blois and Joachim Gnilka on the likely Syriac origin of the term *naṣārā*, he points out that they “presume, on the basis of comparability and parallelism, that the Qur'ān got that it says about Christians and their doctrines from pre-existing sources, not from the logic of its own religious and rhetorical purposes, based on its own awareness of the doctrines and practices of the Christian communities actually known from other sources to be contemporary with it.”

8 Süleyman Dost, “An Arabian Qur'ān: Towards a Theory of Peninsular Origins” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2017), 232. A convenient and relatively recent overview of the inquiry into the role of Syriac in relation to the Qur'ān can be found in Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013), 18–23. It is hardly my intention here to offer a complete bibliography, but only to highlight some relevant features of previous discussions against which my own hypothesis may be delineated.

puzzles.⁹ An extreme version of this view posits a sort of *Mischsprache* of Syriac and Arabic to explain the idiosyncrasies of the Qurʾān.¹⁰ In some cases, these efforts claim or suggest that the Qurʾānic text was originally Christian, or at least not directed at what we now regard as orthodox Christianity.¹¹ Some regard its original form as substantially different from the later redacted form that we now possess, in which polemics against Christianity are a late addition.¹² The hypothesis of a Jewish-Christian background for the Qurʾān remains

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- 9 Walid A. Saleh, “The Etymological Fallacy and Qurʾānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity,” in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, eds., *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 649–698, has summarized this research and cogently exposed its past foibles. More positively, Joseph Witztum, “Joseph Among the Ishmaelites: Q 12 in Light of Syriac Sources,” in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān*, 425–448, helps to illuminate both vocabulary and narrative features, as well as examining their rhetorical function in the Qurʾānic corpus.
- 10 This, most famously, is the position of Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiller, 2007). See also Christoph Luxenberg, “Al-Najm (Q 53), Chapter of the Star: A New Syro-Aramaic Reading of Verses 1 to 18,” in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān*, 279–297. In the latter study, Luxenberg summarizes his approach in the following way, on 296, note 46: “By ‘Syro-Aramaic,’ the Syro-Aramaic elements of the ‘Arabic’ [*sic*] language of the Qurʾān is intended. The philological analysis of the Qurʾān’s language has thus far led us to the following conclusion: the language of the Qurʾān is composed, apart from Arabic, in part of Aramaic elements of different eras, some of which stem from ancient Aramaic (Altaramäisch), imperial Aramaic (Reichsaramäisch)—like Biblical Aramaic (Biblich-Aramäisch)—and others (the great majority) from the Aramaic of the Christian era, above all Syriac, but also Judaeo-Aramaic and late Babylonian Aramaic dialects such as Mandaean and other Neo-Aramaic dialects (including vernacular Eastern Syriac). Consequently we designate those linguistic elements of the Qurʾān that have references in Syriac literature ‘Syro-Arab,’ and those elements that we find among other Aramaic speaks or literatures ‘Arabo-Aramaic.’ Hence the term, the ‘Syro-Aramaic’ Reading of the Qurʾān.”
- 11 See Corrie Block, “Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of ‘Thalatha’ in Qurʾān 4. 171 and 5. 73,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2011): 50–51, 56–60; Corrie Block, “Expanding the Qurʾānic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qurʾān in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends” 2011, 291–292. See also Manfred Kropp, “Tripartite, but Anti-Trinitarian Formulas in the Qurʾānic Corpus, Possibly Pre-Qurʾānic,” in Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān*, 247–264. If it is true that the Qurʾān is responding to or influenced by heterodox Christian or Jewish Christian groups, that fact has obvious implications for contemporary dialogue, not least of which is that some of the Qurʾān’s criticisms of Christianity might not apply to contemporary adherents.
- 12 Carlos Andrés Segovia, *The Qurʾānic Jesus: A New Interpretation* (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – Tension, Transmission, Transformation 5; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), chap. 3.

evergreen.¹³ Others, such as El Badawi and Reynolds, have focused in particular on the distinctive features of the Syriac biblical canon and para-biblical literature as a sub-text¹⁴ or something between an intertext and sub-text of the Qur'ān.¹⁵

The hypothesis I test here instead may be outlined as having the following components:

- 1) It is likely that the Qur'ānic milieu would have been permeated by ideas, images, and religious expressions characteristic of miaphysite Syriac Christianity, among other traditions,¹⁶ perhaps orally via missionary, mercantile,¹⁷ or liturgical contact.¹⁸
- 2) The Qur'ān seems to have ironically and critically¹⁹ reduced some Christian positions to what it views as their logically consequent absurdities or

13 See Joachim Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: eine Spurensuche* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007); François De Blois, "Islam in Its Arabian Context," in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, 615–624. De Blois summarizes much of his previous research on the Jewish-Christian hypothesis. More recently, see Patricia Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 2 (2015): 225–253; Patricia Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part Two)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75 (2018): 1–21. Crone's two-part article lucidly summarizes the history of scholarship on the question of a putative Jewish-Christian background. It is not principally my purpose in this article to argue for the utter absence of Jewish-Christian elements in the Qur'ān's milieu. Nevertheless, one should note that Crone's list of Qur'ānic features that are "extremely hard to explain without recourse to the hypothesis of a Jewish Christian contribution" (228) contains at least three that are, in my view, adequately explained by my hypothesis of critical engagement with Syriac Christology. These are, as Crone describes them: the subordination of Jesus to Moses, the rejection of Jesus' divinity, and the divinization of Mary. In fact, I suspect that all of the features Crone offers on behalf of the Jewish Christian hypothesis might be at least equally well explained by critical engagement with Syriac (and perhaps also Ethiopic) Christian traditions on the eve of the Qur'ān's formation.

14 Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'an; London: Routledge, 2010).

15 See Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'an; London: Routledge, 2016); Emran El-Badawi, "The Impact of Aramaic (Especially Syriac) on the Qur'ān," *Religion Compass* 8 (2014): 220–228.

16 See Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 11–15 and the literature cited there.

17 On the likelihood of mercantile contact between Mecca and the larger Near Eastern world, see Mikhail D. Bukharin, "Mecca on the Caravan Routes in Pre-Islamic Antiquity," in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, 115–131.

18 Irfan Shahid, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610–622 AD," in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas, eds., *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 9–31.

19 The Qur'ān should not be separated out from the great theological debates and conversations that dominated the Late Antique Near East. The fact is that theological arguments in late antiquity did not typically adopt the irenic tone that modern sensibility might now prefer. Describing the Qur'ān as critical of other traditions, however, does not here

exaggerations. Such irony helps to explain the more striking divergences from what Christian factions known to have existed in its milieu expressly claimed.

- 3) It is better to conceptualize this critical engagement in terms of intersection, dialogue, and confrontation between Syriac Christianity and Qur'ānic monotheism than to think of parallels and borrowing from the former by the latter. This has the methodological advantage of allowing the Qur'ān to speak in its own voice as a participant in the debates rather than as a sort of *Eranistes* adorned with a patchwork of ill-fitting Christian or Jewish hand-me-downs.²⁰

In short, the Qur'ān, particularly its interesting claims about prophetic ignorance, can be better understood if we see it as responding in an informed way to late antique theological arguments, particularly Christological debates in Syriac.

And as regards the first point of the hypothesis, it is unclear that one can go so far as to claim miaphysites in Mecca—at least as a persistent organized group. But it is certainly credible to think that ideas like those of Jacob of Serugh and Philoxenus of Mabbugh would be known in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly since we know that Philoxenus ordained bishops for South Arabia and that Jacob wrote to the community in Najran,²¹ with the result that oral contact in missionary, mercantile, and liturgical contexts is conceivable. In any case, it is true that we have the sources for “the composition of a more or less continuous narrative of a Christian presence in Arabia and its environs from the fourth century to the time of Muḥammad.”²²

Although the approach taken in the present argument is essentially synchronic, the plausible chronology of the surahs also lends some weight to the hypothesis of critical engagement. Most of the Qur'ānic disputes over

imply any particularly negative judgment against it, but only that it deserves to be taken together with the literature of its age.

- 20 The engagement is a matter of arguing about similar topics, often couched in similar language or imagery, but without sharing all the same premises and thus coming to different and largely opposite conclusions. Lexical similarities between the Qur'ān's Arabic and Christian Syriac undoubtedly exist, but that linguistic similarity alone is inconclusive in most cases. Instead, one must seek in the Qur'ān a conjunction of characteristic *formulae and imagery* with characteristic theological *ideas* that belong to them, in order to defend critical engagement with the Syriac tradition. The theological ideas need to be sufficiently distinctive to assure us more particularly that they mark a particular Christian liturgical, doctrinal, or literary tradition and argumentative context rather than simply characterizing late antique Christianity as a whole. This, in turn, yields a better sense of the Qur'ān's distinctive emphases and arguments.

- 21 Irfan Shahid, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979): 23–94.
 22 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 12.

prophets' knowledge and ignorance occur in late Meccan surahs, and the same is true of the imagery of the heavenly treasure and its keys.²³ It is also noteworthy that such surahs (particularly 6, which is one of the principal witnesses to the imagery of the treasure and its keys) are, as Nicolai Sinai has noticed, more "heavily tinged with a polemical quality."²⁴ Though such surahs, he thinks, are not obviously "in direct conversation with Jews and Christians" he also notes that surahs 19 and 43, also late Meccan, do begin to take aim at Christ's divine sonship (the same is also possible for surah 18, since it is filled with Christian lore²⁵ and also takes aim at those who claim "God has adopted a son"²⁶ while not mentioning Christians by name). Indeed Q 6 is an example, Sinai thinks, of Meccan/Medinan "hybridity": that is, it appears to exhibit the later polemical features more typical of Medinan surahs. He suggests "the possibility that certain thematic and phraseological features that come to prominence in the Medinan texts may well have an embryonic presence in earlier surahs."²⁷ Given that the prophetic typology rising to prominence in the late Meccan surahs also underlies Medinan texts such as surahs 2, 3, and 5, as the argument will show, it seems that the Qur'anic discourse gradually engages more and more directly with its opponents, among whom were those familiar with Christian ideas and traditions. The specific passages of interest in the present argument seem to belong to the beginning of that process of engagement.

Knowledge and the Qur'an's Prophetic Typology

Knowledge of God is central to theological debate as the Qur'an represents it. It is the cardinal point that the Qur'an expects its audience to comprehend and the principal topic about which it accuses them of willful ignorance, with the typical refrain: "But most of them do not know." (*akṭarahum yajhalūnā*; Q 6.111; see also Q 7.138.) or "they are unaware" (*wa mā yaš'urūnā*; Q 2.9, 2.12). The Qur'an is often quite direct about this ignorance, which is also longstanding: "They have no knowledge thereof, nor do their fathers" (*mā lahum bihi min 'ilmīn*; Q 18.5). Sometimes, the Qur'an expresses it as an admonitory question:

23 In classifying surahs, I follow Sinai's views. See, in particular, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 124–32, and 176–192.

24 *Ibid.*, 176–177.

25 Sidney Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'an: The 'Companions of the Cave' in Sūrat Al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian Tradition," in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2007), 109–137.

26 Q 18.4.

27 Sinai, *The Qur'an*, 127.

“Don’t you get it?” (*aflā ta’qilūnā*; Q 2.44). It often adds the ironic jab that such disbelievers will eventually figure it out, once the judgment comes: “For every event there is a fixed time, and you shall certainly know” (*wa sawfa ta’lamūnā*) (Q 6.67). It even describes disbelievers as deaf, dumb, and blind, lacking in knowledge (*lā ya’qilūnā*; Q 2.171; cf. Q 3.66.).

In making the argument that people ought to know better, the Qur’ān appeals to its own distinctive prophetic typology. By this phrase I mean the pattern of prophets as it occurs throughout salvation history from Adam up to the Qur’ānic prophet himself. According to the Qur’ān, people should recognize a prophet or messenger precisely because he fits the “type” or pattern to which the Qur’ān appeals, and it is the failure to recognize prophets who clearly fit the type or pattern that elicits its condemnation. In what does this pattern consist? In fact, the pattern is self-referential. Its principal feature is coherence relative to the message that preceded it. The Qur’ān both expresses the coherence in positive fashion and appeals to it to criticize those who fail to recognize the pattern, and those who make distinctions between the prophets and messengers. In the Qur’ān’s view, all prophets and messengers are functionally equivalent.²⁸ Finally, the pattern of prophetic typology allows the Qur’ān to reject as superfluous the supposition that prophets can access the heavenly treasures. For such access is not needed as a confirmation of the truth.

Of course, I am hardly the first to recognize that the Qur’ān relies on a pattern of messengers and prophets, although the character of this pattern seems more often acknowledged than expressly studied in its own right.²⁹ Mohsen

28 This does not mean that the Qur’ān regards prophets (*anbiyā*) and messengers (*rusul*) as exactly the same. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the latter may have a more exalted status than the former. See Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 208–209, and Hawting, “Has God Sent a Mortal as a Messenger?” 385–386. But it does mean that as far as humankind’s knowledge of God is concerned, any differences of rank or divine favor between them do not affect the fundamental sameness of the message.

29 For a recent brief reprise of the pattern, see Todd Lawson, “Duality, Opposition and Typology in the Qur’ān: The Apocalyptic Substrate,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008): 35–41. Lawson focuses on typology closely akin to the phenomena of duality and apocalypticism in the Qur’ān. My focus in the present context is quite different. One key difference is that Lawson argues that typology in Q 12 exposes or uncovers that there is “no end of the world.” On the other hand, my approach is undoubtedly influenced by that of Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 54–96, who generally prefers to speak of prophetology or the “typology of Qur’anic prophetology” where I have used “prophetic typology.” As Griffith notes, the prophetology of the Qur’ān “exemplifies the features of prophetic experience that ... determine which specific aspects of a given biblical story are selected for recollection” (64). I certainly agree with this, but wish also to show that the Qur’ān’s prophetic typology elucidates its views on theological epistemology and its hermeneutic of prior scriptures.

Taghanaki has recently challenged the consensus that the Qur'ān's account of that pattern is cyclical or repetitive: a succession of basically equivalent prophets or messengers delivering a fundamentally equivalent message. He argues instead that it is "bimodal": that is, the pattern is punctuated by two uniquely comprehensive revelations: the Torah of Moses and the Qur'ān of Muhammad that confirms it.³⁰ All other revelations, he thinks, are only partial, including the prophetic work of Jesus and other prophets in the Qur'ān. On the one hand, Taghanaki's proposal, if true, would tend to confirm the argument below, inasmuch as it provides further evidence for why the Qur'ān would want to de-emphasize the comprehensiveness of Jesus' knowledge. In Taghanaki's account, what makes the Mosaic and Qur'ānic kitāb respectively unique is the comprehensive character of the wisdom and guidance they impart to mankind.³¹ His work also highlights (following Madigan) the importance of knowledge and guidance for the Qur'ānic view of salvation history.³² Taghanaki's concerns, however, are different from the present argument, inasmuch as he is concerned with the "scripturology" of the Qur'ān: what, in other words, it considers to be divine scripture in the proper sense. Thus the argument I make here about prophetic typology would stand regardless of whether Taghanaki's proposal is ultimately correct, because the pattern of a confirming prophetic sequence is not itself in question, only whether certain parts of the sequence play a special role. As I argue below, Jesus' role in the sequence is clearly made equivalent to other prophetic figures whom Taghanaki would consider minor. Ultimately, prophetic typology, I argue, has the specific function of assuring us of the *veracity* of the message, but it does not seem necessarily to imply anything about the relative *rank* of prophets and messengers, or their scriptures and messages.

The following survey examines the argumentative function of the sequence across its various and sundry manifestations: prophetic name series, prophetic story series, explicit affirmations of confirmation, and what one might call prophetic confirmation dialogues, in which prophets or messengers argue directly in favor of the pattern.³³ One notices that such dialogues extend beyond the

30 Mohsen Goudarzi Taghanaki, "The Second Coming of the Book: Rethinking Qur'anic Scripturology and Prophetology" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018), 324–330.

31 Ibid., 279–272.

32 Ibid., 85–89, and 261–275.

33 See Majid Maaref, "Various Types of Dialogues and Features of a Corrective Dialogue in the Qur'an," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (2018), for an effort to categorize Qur'ānic dialogue forms more generally.

canonical boundaries of the *Tawrāh* and *Injīl* to include the Arabian prophets and that they employ the technique of repetitive storytelling to make the point.

Expressions of Prophetic Typology in the Qur'ān

Sometimes, the Qur'ān's reliance on this argument leads to a kind of shorthand, a *prophetic name series* of varying lengths. For instance, Q. 4.163 connects the Qur'ānic prophet to a list of predecessors: "Noah and the prophets after him," and then "Abraham, Ismā'il, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon" and David. Other examples are, Q 42.13 or Q 6.84–86, which lists Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elias, Ismā'il, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot. One infers that the exact chronology matters less than the pattern itself.³⁴ That is to say, the prophets are alike in being given "Book, wisdom, and Prophethood" (Q 6.89) and guidance on the "straight path" (Q 6.87). In many other cases, the Qur'ān presents a *prophetic story series* rather than a bare list of names. Q 21 forms such a series of stories of the prophets: Q 21.51ff (Abraham), 21.71ff (Lot), 21.76ff (Noah), 21.78ff (David and Solomon), 21.83ff (Job), 21.85 (Ismā'il, Idrīs, Dhū Kifl), 21.87 (Dhū Nūn, i.e., Jonah), etc.³⁵

Other passages explicitly emphasize the prophetic sequence's *coherence*:

After them, we sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming what he had before him of the Torah, and We gave him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, confirming what he had before him of the Torah. (Q 5.46; cf. 2.87–89, 5.48, and 13.43)

Jesus also expresses this confirmatory sequence in his own words: "O Children of Israel, I am God's messenger to you, confirming what came before me of the Torah, and announcing news of a messenger who will come after me" (Q. 61.6). In 6.92, the Qur'ān describes itself as "confirming what is before it" (*muṣaddiqu llaḍī bayna yadayhī*). A little later in the same surah, after reflecting on the stubbornness of peoples who insist: "We will not believe until we are given the like of what God's messengers have been given" (Q. 6.124), the Qur'ān reaffirms the sequence: "this is the path of your Lord, perfectly straight. We have expounded the revelations to a people who take heed" (Q. 6.126). In this way,

34 Other such lists include Q. 57.25–27, and 33.7–8.

35 Names with commonly recognized biblical spellings will be spelled accordingly. Non-biblical prophets' names will be spelled using the Arabic transliteration employed throughout the chapter.

the people are convicted, because the message is indeed “the like” of what was given before, but in their stubbornness, they refuse to heed the correct exposition of the pattern.

The ideal of prophetic typology as evidence for prophetic truthfulness, however, is clearest in stories where the prophets themselves argue directly with their audiences. In fact, Q 21, just alluded to above, presents its story list as part of such a dialogue. The people object: “Is this not a mortal (*bašarun*) like you?” (Q 21.3) They continue in the same vein: “It is just a load of dreams... . Let him bring us a sign, just as the former were sent with” (Q 21.54). But the Qur’ān insists that no sign will be given, only the pattern of prior punishment:

And they say: “When will this threat come to pass if you are truthful?” ... Many messengers before you were mocked; then those who scoffed at them were afflicted by that which they used to mock. (Q 21.38–41)

It is at this juncture in surah 21 that the Qur’ān tells its sequence of prophetic stories to prove its point. Past rejection of prophets fits the pattern.

Another combination occurs in Surat Yūnus Q 10.37–39 (cf. 10.94). When challenged, the Qur’ān doubles down on the confirmatory sequence as its evidence:

Or do they say: “He has forged it.” ... No. They deny that whereof they have no knowledge (*yuhīṭū bi-‘ilmihī*), and whose interpretation (*ta’wīluhu*) has not yet come to them. In the same way those who were before them made it out to be false. So pay attention to how it turned out for those wrongdoers. (Q 10.38–39)

In other words the fact that the Qur’ān and its prophet experience rejection is but evidence of its truthfulness, just as the other prophets were rejected before (see also Q 13.32). People have not understood the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of their own scripture. That is, they fail to grasp the prophetic typology operative within it.

The pattern of prophetic typology in earlier scriptures is even called a “clear proof” in one such debate:

They say, “If only he would bring us a sign from his Lord.” Has not a clear proof come to them in the previous scriptures? And had We destroyed them with a punishment before him, they would have said: “Lord if only you had sent us a messenger, we would have followed your Revelations before we were humiliated and disgraced.” Say: “Everybody is waiting, so wait; and then you will know who are the people of the Straight Path (*aṣḥābu aṣ-ṣirāṭ as-sawīyyī*.)” (Q 20.133–135)

The testimony of the prophet's truthfulness resides in the pattern of fulfillment of prior threats of punishment. To the extent that a prophet conforms to this pattern, his people ought to have known better.

The same notion occurs in the stories of Hūd, Sālih, and Shu'ayb. The Qur'ān recounts their stories in repetitive terms to make the coherence obvious. First Hūd's debate with his people:

They said: "O Hūd, you have not brought us any clear proof, and we will not abandon our gods ..." He said: "I call God to witness and call you to witness that I am innocent of what you associate ... Then if you turn away, I have actually delivered to you what I was sent forth to you with, and my Lord will raise up as successors a people other than you... . And when Our decree came, We saved Hūd and those who believed in him, by a mercy of Ours and delivered them from a harsh punishment." (Q 11.53–58; cf. the shorter but otherwise similar narrative of Hūd in Q 7.65–72)

Shu'ayb's experience is nearly identical, conforming to the prophetic pattern:

O my people, let not my disagreement with you bring upon you what the people of Noah, the people of Hud or the people of Salih brought upon themselves. The people of Lot are not far away from you ... They said: "O Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say; and surely we see you weak in our midst ..." O my people ... wait and see, and I shall be waiting with you." ... And when our decree came, We delivered Shu'ayb and those who believed in him by a mercy of Ours, and the wrongdoers were overtaken by the Cry, and they lay prostrate in their own homes, as if they never dwelt therein. Away with Midian. [It perished] as did Thamud before. (Q 11.89–95)

In the prophetic dialogue, the Qur'ān appeals to an ongoing story of salvation history, often in identical terms of fidelity and patience to a path that has existed before (indeed, it goes back to Adam—see Q 7.16), and a pattern of punishment that serves as the principal witness to the truthfulness of the message (cf. Q 12.110–111). Always, the people profess some sort of ignorance, to which the Qur'ānic response is that they had every means of guidance in the straight path of prophetic typology and ought therefore to have known better. Their ignorance is culpable.

Formally speaking, therefore, the Qur'ān's account of prophetic typology, with the interlocked elements of story series, confirmation assertions, and confirmation dialogues offers many different angles of vision on the same reality. Inasmuch as the revelations of later prophets confirm their predecessors in the chain, each prophecy's truth lies hidden in what came before, a fact which

is as true of Muhammad as it is true of Jesus. They are all “the companions of the straight path” (Q. 20.135). That is, they have been given “a direction and a path” (*šari‘atan wa minhājan*; Q 5.48; cf. 16.125) to follow, a path whose termination or “return” (*marji‘ukum*) is God himself in the eschaton (Q 5.48). Indeed, the Qur’ān puts into the mouths of the prophets themselves an awareness of this basic dynamic, and so they argue with their peoples using the examples of punishments in bygone times to warn those in the narrative present.

As a warning the prophetic typology has a critical function. In commending the pattern of the prophets, the Qur’ān also ironically convicts those who reject them. Such descriptions are hardly mere reports of what the rejecters say, but highly charged retellings that reveal to the Qur’ān’s hearers the hypocrisy of previous generations. In Q 8.31, for instance

When our revelations are recited to them, they say: “We have heard. Had we wished, we would have uttered the like of this; this is nothing but the fables of the ancients.”

From the perspective of the Qur’ān’s prophetic typology it is precisely the fact that its admonitions are consistent with the “ancients” that they ought to be believed. So the refusers are condemned out of their own mouth. Indeed, elsewhere, in 15.13, the Qur’ān laments that people still do not believe despite having the “*sunnah* of the ancients.”

Another form of ironic reduction via prophetic typology is effectively to flatten the distinctions between the various messengers, *and therefore of the groups to which they belong*. Despite the differences of their prophetic careers, they conform to the same pattern, and thus the Qur’ān concludes one of the prophetic name series quoted above with saying “we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we submit” (*lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin minhum* Q 2.136). In the preceding verse it is no accident that the Qur’ān also rhetorically conflates Jews and Christians. In reporting its opponents’ speech, the Qur’ān unrealistically describes them saying “become Jews or (*aw*) Christians.” The Qur’ān’s Jewish and Christian opponents, of course, would not themselves say this: one expects the Jews to say, “be Jews,” and the Christians to say, “be Christians.” Yet the critical summary the Qur’ān offers suggests ironically how both Jews and Christians commit the equivalent error of privileging some portion of salvation history over another.³⁶ Rather, the Qur’ān commends the

36 Edouard-Marie Gallez, “Gens du Livre et Nazaréens dans le Coran: qui sont les premiers et à quel titre les seconds en font-ils partie?” *Oriens Christianus* 92 (2008): 176, sees the expression “or Christians” (*aw naṣārā*) as a later polemical redaction in an originally anti-Jewish context. That’s certainly possible, but it seems to me that Gallez has not accounted for the possibility that the Qur’ān is critically adapting the speech of its opponents from

fundamental equivalence of messengers in the story of salvation: “Those who believe in God and his messengers and do not discriminate (*wa lam nufarriqū*) between any of them, those He will grant them their rewards” (Q 4.152). As a result, the Qur’ān’s prophetic typology not only expresses how people should come to know God’s truth, it also rebukes those who disregard the pattern of the ancients or treat one prophet as more truthful than another.

Prophets and the Treasury

A key part of these debates over the prophetic pattern touches on whether prophets have access to a heavenly treasury. In the same prophetic confirmation dialogues that articulate the pattern of revelation, the Qur’ān often describes arguments between prophets and their peoples about the knowledge and status such prophets are expected to have. The peoples seem to expect prophets to be angelic or to possess some sort of superhuman access to divine mystery. G. R. Hawting summarizes this expectation of angelic status in the following way:

God’s messengers or apostles (*rusul Allāh*) were frequently rejected on the grounds that they were merely men or human beings ... In response, God’s messengers are presented as disavowing any claim to a superhuman status, sometimes expressed as a denial that they were angels (*malak*, pl. *malā’ika*).³⁷

He also analyzes the motives that appear to underlie the expectations of the prophets’ opponents. According to him,

- 1) on the one hand, it seems that the ability to produce angels would be a miracle attesting to the truth of the prophet’s message.
- 2) On the other hand, it seems that some expected the coming of the angel to the mortal messenger should transform him into something more than a human being.³⁸

What then do the Qur’ānic prophets or messengers typically say when their peoples complain that they are mere mortals? The response sheds light on the thought world of the people the Qur’ān addresses. For instance,

its own vantage point within salvation history. In any case, as written, the received text clearly flattens the differences between Jews and Christians. Given the emphasis in the next verse, it is difficult not to regard the conflation in verse 235 as tinged with sarcasm.

37 Hawting, “Has God Sent a Mortal as a Messenger?” 372.

38 Ibid., 377.

"I do not tell you that I have the treasures of God (*khazā'īnu llāh*), and I do not know the unseen (*wa lā a'lamu l-ġayb*); nor do I tell you that I am an angel (*mal-akun*). I only follow what is revealed to me." Say: "Are the blind man and the one who sees alike? Do you not reflect at all?" (Q 6.50)

The Qur'ānic messenger not only disclaims angelic status, but the things that he expects accompany it: the treasury of God and knowledge of what is hidden. In the Qur'ān, the knowledge of what is hidden often seems to refer to God's future plans, but in any case, it is reserved to God alone. Thus, a few verses later in the same surah, the prophet retorts to a request for revelation of when the future punishment will occur:

With him are the keys of the unseen (*wa 'indahū mafātiḥu l-ġayb*); only He knows them, and He knows what is on land and in the sea. (Q 6.59)

These two passages together attest that the prophet rejects knowledge of the *ġayb*. To that metaphorical treasury only God has the keys. The treasure itself seems to refer to knowledge, specifically of God's own proper secrets.

The imagery of a prophet having access to the treasury of revelation also appears in the prophetic confirmation dialogues of Surah 11. The Qur'ānic prophet fears

lest they should say: "If only a treasure was sent down upon him (*law'lā unzila 'alayhi kanzun*) or an angel accompanied him!" You are only a warner (*naḍīrun*), and God is the guardian of all things. (Q. 11.12)

The imagery of a treasure being "sent down" along with an angel clearly suggests that the treasure itself is that of divine knowledge conveyed by revelation, since the language of sending down (*tanzīl*) normally applies to revelation. The Qur'ān's audience expects this as part of a messenger's quasi-angelic status. As with the Qur'ānic prophet, so too, Noah is said to make a similar protestation of ignorance when his veracity as to the coming judgment is questioned:

I do not say to you that I possess God's treasures (*khazā'īnu llāh*), and I do not know the unseen (*wa lā a'lamu l-ġayb*). I do not claim to be an angel. (Q 11.31)

Clearly then, a crucial part of the prophetic typology itself is that a genuine prophet does *not* have the keys to the treasury of revelations. That is, he does not know the divine secrets.

One of the most telling passages illustrating this aspect of prophetic typology is found in surah 25. At issue is the authenticity of the Qur'ān itself:

Unbelievers say: “This is nothing but deceit which he has invented and was assisted therein by other people.” ... And they say “Legends of the ancients (*asāṭiru l-awwalinā*) whose writing down he solicited.” ... And they say: “What is the matter with the Messenger? He eats food and strolls in the markets. If only an angel had been sent to him to be a warner with him; or a treasure had been cast upon him (*yulqā ilayhi kanzun*), or he was given a garden (*jannatun*) from which he could eat.” (Q 25.4–8)

The insistent anaphora of this passage “and they say ... ” seems to collect the various criticisms to which Muhammad’s claims were subjected, namely that

- 1) a messenger should not eat normal human food, but is expected instead to eat the food of paradise;
- 2) a messenger should be, if not angelic, at least the companion of angels;
- 3) a messenger is expected to possess a divine (or perhaps paradisiacal) treasure cast from above.

That the audience speaks ironically of legends of the ancients, in whose stories according to the Qur’ān’s typology they ought to have seen the prophet’s message foreshadowed, strongly suggests that these are not merely pagan idolaters, but Christians who would have been expected to know the earlier stories. Indeed, the surah opens (Q. 25.2) with a protestation that “God does not adopt a son” (*lam yatakhid waladan*) and that “he has no partner in dominion” (*lam yakun lahu šarikun fī l-mulk*), which can certainly be read as a critical rejection of Christian assertions about Jesus. These same Christians expect heavenly messengers to have access to heavenly *treasures* and *paradisiacal food*.

Here too the typology is operative in the argument. The Qur’ān contends that the prophet’s opponents have not recognized the pattern, made fallacious comparisons, and as a result lost their way:

See how they invent parables for you (*ḍarabū laka al-amṭāla*), and so they err, and then cannot find their way (*fa-lā yastaṭīʿūnā sabīlan*). (Q 25.9)

These Christians or Christian sympathizers have gone astray from the true path of prophetic typology precisely by their erroneous comparisons (*amṭala*). That is, they haven’t read the similarities of the typological pattern correctly and thus expect angelomorphic messengers with access to the treasures of heavenly wisdom and food. In another passage, the Qur’ān turns the Christians’ own critique upon themselves: They claim not to have heard about this “in the latest religion” (*fī l-millati l-akhira*; Q 38.7),³⁹ to which the Qur’ān retorts: “Or

39 Given the chronology, the “latest religion” most likely refers to Christianity.

do they possess the treasures (*khazā'īnu*) of your Lord's mercy?" to which it subjoins an ironic challenge that they should "ascend the rungs" (*fa-l-yartaqū fī l-asbābi*) of heaven and earth (Q. 38.9–10).⁴⁰ Clearly the language of the heavenly treasury suggests some sort of prophetic or apocalyptic ascent. A similar rhetorical question about whether its opponents possess the treasures of God appears in Q 52.37–38. Rather, from the Qur'ān's point of view, only God is the knower of the *ḡayb* and possesses the keys to the heavenly treasury of his knowledge (see Q 39.63 and 42.12, both with *maqālīd*; cf. Q 6.59: *mafātīḥ al-ḡayb*). Indeed, as Walker points out the Qur'ānic epithet knowledgeable (*'ālim*) refers only to God, specifically his knowledge of the *ḡayb*.⁴¹

In the passages above, the peoples never identify the exact character of the heavenly treasure (*kanz*) or the treasures (*khazā'in*). One has the impression that everyone in the conversation knew what these shorthand expressions would have meant. Nevertheless, the contextual clues strongly point to reading the term metaphorically as knowledge of divine mysteries. The Qur'ān almost always associates the treasure and the keys with *al-ḡayb*, that is, the hidden or unseen, which is described as the preserve of God's *knowledge*. The language of "sending down" (*tanzīl*) also strongly suggests the same domain. Even the language of "eating" in Q 25.8 is most likely cognitive, as the discussion of the Syriac tradition will show.

Prophetic ignorance is not absolute, of course. Prophets often describe themselves as knowing what others do not. Thus Noah insists "I know from God what you do not know" (Q 7.62). Abraham makes a similar point in Q 19.43: "To me has come knowledge (*'ilm*) that has not come to you." The Qur'ān describes Joseph in similar terms: "He was full of knowledge (*innahu la-ḏū 'ilm*) from our teachings, but most people don't get it (*aktara an-nāsi lā ya'laminā*)" (Q 12.68). Jacob too in Q 12.86 claims "I know from God what you do not know." Indeed, in one of the prophetic name series, the Qur'ān describes the prophets as being "men of might and perception (*abṣāri*)" (Q 38.45). That the Qur'ān regards this perceptive knowledge as characteristic of prophets even occurs in the case of the anti-prophet as-Samīrī:

He said: "I perceived what they did not perceive (*baṣurtu bimā lam yabṣurū bihi*), and so I grasped a handful of dust from the messenger's trail." (Q 20.96)

40 These "cords" or as Fakhry translates "rungs," have been studied by Kevin Van Bladel, "Heavenly Cords and Prophetic Authority in the Qur'ān and Its Late Antique Context," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, no. 2 (2007): 223–246. He shows that the imagery and cosmology of heavenly cords suggests the notion of heavenly ascent via these pathways.

41 Paul E. Walker, "Knowledge and Learning," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: J-O* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 102.

That is, Samīrī claims to have a special knowledge and inspiration. As Michael Pregill argues, the expression “grasping a handful of dust” suggests that he has deliberately claimed for himself prophetic authority.⁴² We might translate it into the contemporary idiom by saying that Samīrī claimed to follow in Moses’ footsteps. Even a false prophet, that is, couches his claim to prophecy in terms of special insight.⁴³

There exists, therefore, a tension between prophetic wisdom imparted from God that clearly surpasses the ordinary capacities of mankind, and perhaps even angels, and knowledge of God’s inner being and secrets, which the Qur’ān repeatedly implies is irrelevant to the prophetic mission. Yet prophetic ignorance of divine secrets, while striking, is not absolute. God makes exceptions. Indeed, He says to the Qur’ānic prophet that the story of Noah is “part of the tidings of the unseen (*tilka min anba’i l-ġayb*) that we reveal to you. Neither you nor your people knew it before this” (Q 11.49). A nearly identical expression appears in Q 12.102, with reference to the story of Joseph. In Q 53.35–36, there is a hint that perhaps Muhammad has received knowledge of the *ġayb* along with being told about what is in the “scrolls of Moses” (*ṣuḥuf mūsā*). All these cases suggest that occasional prophetic knowledge of *al-ġhayb* includes special revelations of what is in prior scriptures, but not necessarily of God’s future plans or inner being.

Just as the Qur’ān’s prophetic typology allowed it to pursue ironic reductions of its opponents’ positions, and to insist on the equivalence of all prior confessional groups, so too the imagery of divinizing treasure as part of that typology serves a similar argumentative purpose. It should not surprise one, then that the Qur’ān says that, in effect, both Jews and Christians claim divinized status via the claim to adoptive sonship (Q 5.18), even though Jews at least would not expressly claim this. Even more to the point, the Qur’ān’s stark assertion of Jesus’ ignorance is but another way of taking its prophetic typology to its logical conclusion. The knowledge of all messengers is functionally

42 Michael Pregill, “A Calf, a Body That Lows’: The Golden Calf from Late Antiquity to Classical Islam,” in Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri, eds., *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 284–288.

43 David and Solomon are also singled out as the recipients of a super human knowledge: “And We gave David and Solomon knowledge (*‘ilman*). They said: ‘Praise be to God who preferred us over many of his believing servants.’ Solomon inherited David, and he said: ‘O people, we have been taught the speech of birds (*‘ulimna mantiqa ṭ-ṭīri*) and have been given part of everything” (Q 27.15–16). The Qur’ān even illustrates Solomon’s knowledge with a lively narrative in which Solomon speaks to the Hoopoe and uses it as a messenger to the Queen of Sheba. David too seems to have been given the capacity to understand birdsong (Q 21.79). Adam had knowledge of the animals’ names, because God himself taught him (see, e.g., Q 2.30–34), a knowledge that explicitly surpasses angelic knowledge.

equivalent, and none can claim privileged access to the divine treasury and the divine status it would imply.

The Qur'ān's approach to the question of knowledge can therefore be summed up as follows. First, in arguments about knowledge of God prophetic typology has three functions: confirming the truth of revelation by rendering it knowable and recognizable to those of good will, refuting those who fail to see the pattern, and criticizing those who privilege one prophet or messenger over another in the sequence. Second, a key part of the typology is the limitation of prophetic knowledge. The Qur'ān directs its typological argument to Christians who clearly expect prophets to have a quasi-divine or angelic status, and access to the heavenly treasures of wisdom. In the same vein, it rejects the Christian claim that Jesus should have any special intimate knowledge of God that would distinguish him from the rest. Qur'ānic prophets do enjoy a special knowledge and wisdom from God, but it does not extend to knowledge of God's inner life or explicit future plans. Whatever knowledge they possess, prophets remain mortal. There is no need to exaggerate by claiming a divinizing knowledge.

Christology and Knowledge in Syriac Theological Literature

Thus, the Qur'ān's insistence on Jesus' ignorance compared to other prophets fits within its overall view of divine knowledge, to whose treasury the prophets do not have the keys. And in this way, it also suggests that it knows Christians who place a special emphasis on Jesus' uniquely comprehensive knowledge of the Father, the same Christians who also expect prophets and apostles to have access to that treasury of knowledge in a dependent way. For the Syriac Christological tradition as expressed in the writings of Philoxenus of Mabbugh, and Jacob of Serugh, with deep roots in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian, one of the foremost arguments for Jesus' full divinity was distinctly cognitive—that is, it is based on Jesus' knowledge. These authors argue that we know Jesus is divine because he alone is fully and intimately knowing of what is in his Father, whereas God's messengers do not have natural access to that knowledge, and can only receive it, in limited form, from Christ. Just as the Qur'ān's argument in favor of Jesus' ignorance coheres with its typology, Syriac Christian arguments in favor of Jesus' perfect knowledge cohere with the cognitive emphasis of the Syriac symbolic theological tradition taken as a whole.

Background: Ephrem's Symbolic Theology and the Equality of Knowledge Argument

The articulation of a symbolic theology, particularly in relation to the Christological debates of the sixth century, in fact constitutes the Syriac tradition's distinctive achievement. This symbolic theology revolves around the basic problem of how a God who is in himself infinite and inaccessible nevertheless comes to be accessible in human language and thought. Ultimately, the Syriac tradition came to offer an entire paradigm of thought conducted in symbols (*rāzê*) pointing to Christ, the Lord of the *rāzê*. The symbolic paradigm dominates the whole conception of Syriac theology from Ephrem the Syrian onward to his heirs in the fifth and sixth centuries. Griffith sums this up best,

These symbols and types, names and titles, which for Ephrem are the very contents of the scriptures, are also the idiom of his own religious discourse. They are the basic elements of the narratives of the patriarchs and prophets read through the lens of the Gospel... . In turn they become the paradigms for the Christian's own understanding of God and the world, the terms of one's theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation, of Christology, sacramentology, ecclesiology, anthropology and eschatology... . For this reason some scholars have used the expression "symbolic theology" to characterize Ephrem's approach to religious discourse, and they often contrast it to Greek or Latin modes of thought.⁴⁴

Such signs and symbols, the elements of the narrative of nature and scripture, constitute "the very idiom of human thought" itself.⁴⁵ They also "point forward from Nature and Scripture to Christ, who in turn reveals his Father to the eye of faith, or they point from the church's life and liturgy back to Christ, who in turn reveals to the faithful believer the events of the eschaton."⁴⁶ A rich sequence of types and symbols that exist in the scriptural narratives and in creation itself culminates in Christ who fully reveals the Father's hidden divinity by reason of his equality with him.

Given the cognitive emphasis of symbolic theology, the Syriac tradition's interest in Jesus' perfect knowledge comes as no surprise. The interest seems to begin with Ephrem, who combines Matthew 11.27 with Matthew 16.17. The

44 Sidney Griffith, *Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997), 28–29.

45 *Ibid.*, 29.

46 *Ibid.*, 31.

former affirms that “no one knows the Father except the Son.” The latter exclaims, “Blessed are you Simon, Son of Jonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.” Matthew 16 appears numerous times in Ephrem’s poetry, particularly his *mêmre*, almost always with reference to Peter’s revelation and blessing rather than the founding of the church *per se*.⁴⁷

Speaking of the Son, Ephrem says that the Father and the Son are equally incomprehensible to creatures: “All go astray in the knowledge of him, whom one alone knows (*d-haw d-ḥad [h]û yāda‘ leh*).”⁴⁸ Indeed, Ephrem goes on to point out with some irony that “If you can investigate the Father, then in him and with him you can investigate the Son... . The one alone is adequate to the other (*ḥad [h]û l-ḥad sāpēq balḥôd*).”⁴⁹

Importantly, however, just as the Father creates through his Son, so too he imparts knowledge of himself only through the Son:

The powers of heaven are all commanded by *him*
They cannot see the Father without the Firstborn, the Commander
...
Thus in the Son who is from his bosom, the Watchers see the Father.⁵⁰

In fact, for Ephrem, the Son is to the world as the senses are to the body. The human race experiences the light of divine wisdom via the Son. For this reason, the prophet Moses serves as a likeness for the intense and incomprehensible radiance of the Son:

The Watchers cannot look on him. Moses who became radiant (*ezdhî*) will persuade you.
If the people could not look on Moses though he was human,
who can look on his Essence? Only one who is of him can look on him (*ḥad d-menneh mṣê ḥā‘ar beh*).

47 There are at least five instances in Ephrem’s genuine works and another in the disputed *mêmre* on Holy Week: *SiHS* 5.97–101. The undisputedly authentic references are *SdF* 2.67–110 (an extended treatment), *SdF* 4.154, *SdF* 6.130, *HdF* 84, refrain, and *HdV* 17.5–7. See Edmund Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones de Fide* (CSCO 212–213; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1961); *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (CSCO 154–155; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955); *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate* (CSCO 223–224; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1962); *Ephraem Syrus. Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam* (CSCO 412–413; Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1979). Citations of Ephrem’s works employ the line or stanza numbers of Beck’s editions for the CSCO. Each edition will be cited in full at the first reference. Translations of all Syriac sources are my own.

48 *SdF* 1.25–28.

49 *SdF* 1.73–78.

50 *SdF* 1.41–54.

Since the Father's radiance (*zâweh*) is intense, only the one can see the other (*had [h]û l-had hâzê balhōd*); only one is able to see the other (*had [h]û l-had meškaḥ hâzê*), and through him all creatures (*kôll beryâtâ*) see.

...

By him he teaches (*mallep̄*) and by him he enriches (*m'attar*); his wisdom (*hekmteh*) is with all his possessions.

By [that Wisdom, the Father] distributes to the needy his good things from his treasury (*tābāteh men bayt gazzeh*).⁵¹

Moses thus opens the treasury of radiant wisdom via the Son, who appears both as key and the treasury itself. The Son alone, by virtue of his sonship, knows the Father, but by that same token, it is the Son that distributes God's enriching knowledge. Notice that Moses shares in the radiance in such a way as to become unbearably like God. Ephrem carefully adds the qualification "even though he was human (*kad barnaša [h]w*)."

Christ, then, is an epistemological paradox, incapable of being investigated, yet also the treasury of divine riches. Ephrem applies the paradox to interpret Matthew 16.17, a move that both Philoxenus and Jacob will significantly develop. Ephrem points out that Jesus' divine identity required a divine revelation for Simon to know it. He could not have inferred it naturally.

Our Lord did not presume to teach his generation to Simon.
 He became a stranger to himself and instead his Father revealed him.
 It is not that our Lord was incapable of revealing himself,
 but in order to give an example in his own self for the audacious
 that if he were silent concerning his own generation, who would dare [to talk]
 about his generation?
 And if he were quiet about his own revelation, who would inspect his being
 begotten?
 He was confirming that word [of scripture]: that the Father knows the Son
 ...
 The Father in whose bosom is his offspring, knows how to teach about him.⁵²

For Ephrem, creatures have no ability to reach up to the hidden mystery of divine generation, to the point that Jesus himself emphasized such knowledge had to come via divine gift. But for Ephrem that gift is not simply the revelation of a fact, it beatifies and nourishes the person in a paradisiacal way:

51 *SdF* 1.83–104.

52 *SdF* 2.67–84.

The revelation which flowed from above quenched [Simon's] great thirst.
 The sweet stream that came to him has streamed from him and come to you.
 It is greater than the wellspring of Eden.⁵³

This knowledge that Christ is the Son of God is “too great for any being whether higher or lower”⁵⁴ and yet it beatifies its recipient: “That blessing which our Lord gave makes him [truly] blessed.”⁵⁵ But such a divine revelation is also the means whereby an honest enquiry comes to know who Jesus truly is: “The enquirer finds him by the revelation which was revealed to Simon.”⁵⁶ This is not a just a position taken on a single occasion. Ephrem elsewhere, in two separate passages, treats this heavenly blessing given to Simon as the paradigm of how one ought to know God: *HdF* 84,⁵⁷ refrain, and also in *HdV* 15.5–7.⁵⁸ In this latter passage, Ephrem describes the Word’s generation as a treasury (*bayt gazzâ*) to which John and Peter were both given the keys and through whom “the revelation of the Father (*gelyânâ d-men âbâ*) is heard” in the church.

Ephrem’s exegesis of the mutual knowledge of Father and Son thus has three characteristics:

1. focus on the Son’s unique incomprehensibility (only the Father can reveal the Son), and hence the Son’s divine status;
2. conversely, only the Son can reveal the Father;
3. Christ is thus uniquely the treasury for knowledge of the Father.

Ephrem finds each of these three aspects illustrated in the Father’s beatifying revelation to Simon, a treasure that the Father bestows and that the Son alone can consequently interpret for Simon.⁵⁹ In this way, he sets the stage for the more detailed Christological discussions of Philoxenus and Jacob, both of whom are more explicit, and who develop one or more of these three aspects, while also amplifying the imagery of a nourishing heavenly treasury and its keys.

53 *SdF* 2.43–47.

54 *SdF* 2.103–104.

55 *SdF* 2.109–110; also emphasized in *SdF* 4.154.

56 *SdF* 6.129–130.

57 Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*.

58 Beck, *Hymnen de Virginitate*.

59 Note that this argument for Jesus’ divinity relies on biblical testimony in a way that the argument from miracles does not. It requires us to accept the premise from Matthew 11 interpreted in a particular way, namely that only the Father knows the Son comprehensively and vice versa. Jesus’ divinity follows as a logical consequence of that view. Such an argument is plausible only to “insiders” who antecedently accept the validity of the Gospel.

Philoxenus on the Implications of the Symmetry of Knowledge

Philoxenus († 523), in his fragmentary *Commentary on Matthew* engaged in controversy with the thought of Theodore of Mopsuestia, against whom he is keen to insist on Jesus' fully divine status. Like Ephrem, he takes up the argument for Jesus' divinity in cognitive terms, finding an indication of it in the unique character of Peter's confession. Even more than Ephrem, Philoxenus insisted that Peter's ability to recognize Jesus' divinity required the paternal revelation, which in turn required Jesus' own explanation of that heavenly blessing.

First, he sharply distinguished Peter's divinely revealed confession of Jesus from all other confessions, which rely on an interpretation of Jesus' miraculous actions. Many of his disciples, such as Nathaniel, the Samaritan woman, Andrew, and Martha, confessed that Jesus was the Christ. But, according to Philoxenus, "he was confessed by Simon Peter not in the same way as these confessed but rather by revelation (*ak da-b-gelyānâ*). For these [others] had confessed him to be Christ and Son by choice and grace... . exalted above all mankind by his way of life (*dûbbārê*), his knowledge (*idâ'tâ*), his revelations (*gelyānê*), and his honor (*îqārâ*)."⁶⁰ In short, Philoxenus sharply distinguishes between Simon's confession (subsequently identified explicitly as "orthodox" – *urtûdûksû*) from confessing Christ as, in effect, a righteous prophet. Even Jesus' other disciples confessed him in this way. Confessing Jesus as a prophet comes from the natural observation of his actions. Confessing him as Son of God comes by paternal revelation.

Indeed, Philoxenus sees Peter's "blessing" as marking the key difference. None of these other disciples, he notices, received the blessing for their confessions, in spite of the fact that Martha uses nearly identical words ("son of the living God" – John 11.27⁶¹), which Philoxenus identifies as the confession of a merely human Christ. For Philoxenus the paternal revelation was "necessary" (*metb'ê*) for the confession of Christ's divinity.

But in reciprocal fashion, just as the Father's revelation was necessary, only Christ was competent to explain the paternal revelation about himself. Such explanation was needed to ensure that Peter's confession was not simply classified with the other confessions of Christ as prophet:

60 J.W. Watt, ed., *Philoxenus of Mabbug: Fragments of the Commentary on Matthew and Luke* (CSCO 392–393; Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1978), 24, text volume.

61 Note that Philoxenus even adds the word "living" to the Peshitta text to make it identical to that of Peter. See *ibid.*, 26.

Because the revelation and way of thinking that Simon had did not come from his own mind, but rather from the revelation of the Father, and lest they should think [that] as they had proclaimed him up to that point in time as Christ, and son of God, and king of Israel, so also Simon had proclaimed him in the same way, Jesus bestowed upon him a blessing at the same time as he straightened out the thinking (*mtarreṣ l-tar'yātā*) of those who heard it.⁶²

Jesus' special intimate knowledge of the Father's mind makes him also the solely adequate communicator of it. Philoxenus sharply contrasts the apostles, who do not see the unseen Father, and Christ, who does:

For the Father who gave it is unseen (*lā methzē*), and the disciples did not see (*lā hāzēn [h]waw*), and Simon who received [the revelation] did not perceive (*lā argeš*). For this reason the "Blessed are you, etc." was necessary (*etba'yat*).⁶³

Such imperception constitutes in fact the general state of the world, specifically ignorant of the "mysteries of the new economy" (*rāzē da-mdabbrānūtā ḥdattā*) of the Son of God by nature:

For mankind knew nothing (*lā meddem*) of spiritual things, and everything was entirely hidden from us of the knowledge of the world to come (*koll kolleh mkasyā mennan idā'tā d-'ālmā da-'īd*), just as is hidden from an infant the knowledge of this world.⁶⁴

As the imagery of gestation suggests, Philoxenus hints that the new birth of baptism is necessary to be able to see the knowledge of the world to come. Inaccessible to natural vision, it requires grace.⁶⁵

Thus Philoxenus appears to concede that were it not for this special paternal revelation, the logical conclusion would be to reduce Jesus to a prophet, which he sees as the position, in fact, if not in name, of the Jews, Nestorians, and pagans (*ḥanpē*). In other words if one denies the symmetry of knowledge, the logical result is that one views Christ as prophet, and further that one makes no distinction between Jews, pagans, or even Jesus' own disciples during the course of his earthly path.

Philoxenus develops the symmetry of knowledge between Father and Son in various ways that appear significant for the Qur'ānic arguments and discussions.

62 Ibid., 27.

63 Ibid., 27.

64 Ibid., 28.

65 Throughout his writings, Philoxenus appears to reject or at least severely limit the role of rational inquiry in coming to knowledge of God. See Edmund Beck, "Philoxenos und Ephrām," *Oriens Christianus* 46 (1962): 66.

First, he sharpens the distinction between confessing Jesus as Son of God and confessing him as a prophet, describing the latter as the position of pagans, and even of many of Jesus' own disciples. Second, having drawn the contrast so starkly, he additionally characterizes the latter view as that of the world afflicted by ignorance, and with inability to see the unseen God, one requiring the special beatitude of revelation from the Father and only explicable by Christ. Thirdly, he spells out the reduction of various Christological views to the same ignorant result. As we have seen, the Qur'ān offers much the same language, but given its prophetic typology, rejects the need for Christ's special knowledge or the beatitude it confers. The Qur'ān's position on Jesus as a prophet looks rather like it has, in polemical fashion, accepted Philoxenus' logical alternative to the fully knowledgeable divinity of the Son.

Jacob on the Symmetry of Knowledge

Philoxenus' explanations of Matthew 16 owe a clear debt to Ephrem's symmetry of knowledge thesis, refracted through Christological struggle against the partisans of Theodore. But the surviving evidence for Philoxenus is fragmentary. Jacob of Serugh († 521) by contrast, dedicates an entire homily to this pericope, the *Homily on the Lord's Revelation to Simon*, in which he not only addresses the Christological issues, but he also substantially develops the imagery of heavenly treasure that had also marked Ephrem's interpretation of the symmetrical knowledge of the Father and the Son. Nor is this an isolated case in Jacob's writings. His reflections on Christ as the treasury of the Father's revelation appear throughout his extensive corpus. In what follows, I look at the *Homily on the Lord's Revelation to Simon* and then at further examples selected from his works.

In the *Homily on the Revelation to Simon*, Jacob begins by insisting, just as Ephrem had, on the symmetry of divine knowledge between Father and Son:

Whoever confesses that he knows the Son (*yāda' la-brâ*), let him explain his name. For except for the Father (*d-ellâ abâ*), no one knows who the Son is. And regarding the Father, who is it that rushes to speak? For the Son alone knows the Father who is like him (*da-brâ balhōd yāda' l-abâ d-akwāteh [h]u*)⁶⁶

66 Paulus Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. Tomus I* (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1905), 463–464.

And when he turns to explain the paternal revelation itself in Matthew 16, Jacob returns to the same symmetry of knowledge, arguing, much as Philoxenus and Ephrem, that only the Son could reveal the Father:

The Father revealed to the elect Simon regarding his beloved,
 But hidden was the identity of the one who had revealed to him the great mystery.
 The Son who knows the hidden Father and his revelations (*brâ d-yâda' l-abâ kasyâ wa-l-gelyânaw[hy]*),
 showed Simon who had revealed to him the character of his name.

...

"It was not your own knowledge that knows (*law îdâ' tāk dîlāk yed'at*) to proclaim me in this way.

It was my Father that revealed to you, for if it were not he, you would not know me (*d-ella en hû lâ yâda' lî*)."⁶⁷

In this way Jacob stresses the symmetry of knowledge between Father and Son. But he also draws the explicit conclusion that, therefore, they are equal: "He showed that he was equal with his father, in revelations (*da-šwê 'am yâlôdeh b-gelyânê*), / in hidden secrets, in explanations of every sort of wisdom (*wa-b-kasyâtâ, wa-b-pûššâqê d-koll hekmâtâ*)."⁶⁸

These are but the most salient passages illustrating ideas that recur throughout the homily. But what is of particular interest for Christian intersections with the Qur'an's own prophetic typology is that Jacob does not merely amplify Ephrem's thesis of symmetrical knowledge. Rather, in pursuing that argument he frames the entire homily to focus imaginatively on how mortals can access the treasury of the Father's wisdom. Peter becomes the paradigm for accessing that treasury, a paradigm Jacob then applies to himself, as poetic teacher. He positions himself as a prophet seeking and obtaining access to the heavenly treasury like Peter did. And of course, he carefully discusses Christ's super-prophetic status. In short, the *theologoumenon* of symmetrical knowledge has blossomed into a whole theological epistemology explaining how prophets, even contemporary ones, access the treasury of divine wisdom through Christ.

Peter as Heavenly Messenger With Keys

Jacob reminds his listeners that the purpose of Jesus' dialogue with Peter and the apostles was to contrast his identity with the prophets:

One said he was Elias because of his miracles, and another said that he was Jeremiah because he was elected [by God].

67 Ibid., 474.

68 Ibid., 475.

...
But others called him one of the prophets who was unnamed.⁶⁹

Indeed, Jacob also highlights the fact that people were in profound debate about Jesus' prophetic status,⁷⁰ thinking that he is "another prophet from among the ancients" and that everyone "thinks of [Christ] according to his own surmise" (*aykân da-sbar*) leading to "disputes and divisions" (*heryânê ap pûlâgê*).⁷¹ But even as Jacob denies that the Son is a prophet, he appeals to the typological consistency of salvation history to explain why the omniscient Jesus is asking questions: "Things hidden and things revealed," he says, "are equivalent, and one and the same are those things which are past and which are coming."⁷² But the continuity has to be read correctly.

Jacob sees Christ calling his disciples to such a correct typological reading, namely "the way of thinking of messengerhood" (*hušābāh da-šlîhûtâ*) to prepare them all to receive "the key of the treasury of God's house" (*qlîdâ d-gazzâ d-bayt allâhâ*).⁷³ But it is Peter above all whose mind makes the heavenly trip and enters into dialogue with the Father:

He ascended from the earth and from created things which can be seen,
and he left behind him all that is subject to becoming, the worlds and all that is
in them.
In his mind he stepped from the building of the temple of this world,
and he left even heaven to those lower down while he was further exalted.⁷⁴

Once Peter enters into the presence of the Father, he addresses him as "Lord," seeking the name of his Son. As a result of this dialogue Peter obtains what he seeks, not only for himself but for the whole church:

He opened to her the gates unto the radiance of messengerhood (*zahrâ da-šlîhûtâ*),
that she might come to dwell in the brightness of the light (*b-zâwâ d-nûhrâ*),
mightily.
...
He gave her the "blessed" as a gift filled with wealth (*ûtrâ*)
that she might be constantly delighting in his divine light (*b-nûhreh allâhâyâ*).⁷⁵

69 Ibid., 466.

70 Debates over Jesus' status are also alluded to many times in the Qur'ân. See, for instance, Q 19.34ff.

71 Ibid., 470.

72 Ibid., 468.

73 Ibid., 472.

74 Ibid., 472–473.

75 Ibid., 479.

The gift in the treasury is the divine light itself, the same *z'wâ* that has brightened the face of Moses. In fact, the Father's heavenly blessing of revelation and divine light is a sort of downpayment of the bridal dowry of the church: "The Gracious One [i.e., the Father] saw that she loved the Heir [i.e., the Son] and that she was not dissuaded, / and immediately he gave her all his treasures and their keys (*kollhôn gazzaw[hy] wa-qlîdaw[hy]*)."⁷⁶ The Son in his turn reciprocates: "He saw what she had taken from the Father's house by that revelation / and he gave to her the keys of great wealth and of the whole treasury (*d-ûtrâ rabbâ w-gazzâ kolleh*)."⁷⁷ The language is reciprocal, evoking the symmetry of the knowledge and action of the Father and the Son, but it is also quite bold: Jacob emphasizes that the church possesses *everything* that is in fact the proper possession of God.

Jacob as Prophet With Keys

Since this was a gift to the whole church and not simply a special prerogative of Simon, Jacob envisions his own teaching in the homily itself in terms of accessing the treasury.

Only One, who has given us the entire wealth (*kolleh 'ûtreh*) of his Father, by the wealth of your symbols (*b-'ûtreh d-[?]râzayk*), may my word be stirred up for those who listen.⁷⁸

In this connection, he even calls upon the "Spirit, treasury of prophethood and messengerhood" (*gazzâ da-nb'ÿûtâ wa-šlîhûtâ*) to grant him "riches" (*ûtrâ*) from his "stores" (*sîmâtāk*).⁷⁹ The ability to speak of such "riches"⁸⁰ comes from the incarnation itself. More precisely, it comes, as Jacob explicitly acknowledges, from his adoptive share in the divine sonship. Jacob puts himself in the position of the Son, asking the Father to give him this revelation:

Father who sent his beloved son to become our brother,
open my lips to speak of him, your unique one.⁸¹

Jacob's view that mankind, both the ancient prophets, and the contemporary church, can share in the treasury of heavenly radiance appears throughout

76 Ibid., 48o.

77 Ibid., 48i.

78 Ibid., 46i.

79 Ibid., 46i.

80 Ibid., 463.

81 Ibid., 46o.

many of his *mêmre*, and it often appears that the divine brightness has a divinizing effect on those who receive it.

Heavenly Treasure in Jacob's Overall Typology

Jacob does not limit himself to using the language of treasuries only because Matthew 16's mention of keys has suggested it. For him, treasury language is the traditional way of speaking about prophets and their ascent to divinization through knowledge of God. It has become a constitutive part of his symbolic theology in, among other texts, his *Homily on the Transfiguration of our Lord*, the *Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face*, the *Homily on Moses' Saying: The Lord Will Raise Up a Prophet*, the *Homily on the Adultery of the Congregation*⁸², and the *Homily on the Canaanite Woman*.⁸³

In the first of these, Jacob considers Moses' keys—subsequently bestowed on the Church. Jacob speaks of how our Lord wished to give the “keys of Moses” (*qlîdê d-môšê*) to John the Apostle “in order that he write spiritually” and become “the great scribe of the hidden mysteries of the divinity.”⁸⁴ In fact, Jacob connects Elijah with Peter's keys, and Moses with John's:

That authority which Elijah had, he gave to Simon to loose and to bind in god-like fashion (*alâhâ'ît*) as stewards. He joined the people of Simon (*bayt šem'ôn*) to the people of Moses (*bayt môšê*) so as to make equal in proclamation the new and the old. He sought to exchange the stewards and bring them that the elder stewards might give the keys (*qlîdê*) to the younger.⁸⁵

82 Recently edited for the first time: Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryany, eds., *160 Unpublished Homilies Jacob of Serugh*, 2 vols. (Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017).

83 Taniou Bou Mansour, *La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, 2 vols. (Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit (Kaslik: L'Université Saint-Esprit, 1999), vol. 2, 95–101, has studied this image from a broader perspective in Jacob's work as a whole. Consonant with the conclusions offered here, his research shows that Christ himself is ultimately the salvific treasure, but that this is rooted in his relation to his Father. The Son as Treasure is “au coeur du mystère de la Trinité” (100). Though Bou Mansour does not seem to accent the fact, many of the examples he adduces attest to the cognitive and contemplative character of the Christ Treasure in Jacob's thought.

84 Thomas Kollampampil, ed., *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Transfiguration of Our Lord* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 31; This undoubtedly goes back to Ephrem's *HdV* 15.7, where he explicitly links Peter and John with this image.

85 *Ibid.*, 31.

In this passage, Jacob combines the idea of prophethood and messengerhood as stewards of the keys of the heavenly treasures.⁸⁶ He connects them typologically while also giving them quasi divine status.

In his *Homily on The Lord will Raise Up a Prophet*, Jacob focuses abundantly on Moses himself. First he personifies Prophecy as “the ancient nurturer who bears your wealth (*‘útrayk*)” and Jacob asks God to be enriched “out of the store of your treasures (*men sîmâtāk*)”⁸⁷ Moses himself possessed this “deep of prophecy” (*thômâ da-nbîyûtâ*) in his soul. In possessing this treasure, Moses resembles God and thus foreshadows the divine status of Christ who was to come. Specifically, the token of Moses’ divine status is his key. Moses, Jacob says,

became a god to Pharaoh even though he was a man,
in the same way that the Son became a man, even though he was God.
He received from God power to become a god (*men allāha d-nehwê allāh*),
and so he became and worked mighty deeds, striking things, and wonders.

...

And he gave to the synagogue the bread of Watchers (*lahmâ d-‘îrê*)

...

And wherever his glance fell, Moses shook creation,
and however he wanted, he changed them and commanded them.
With the rod of mysteries (*hûtrâ d-râzê*) he struck the sea and made it dry,
and he commanded the ground to become a sea for the assemblies.
He drew up onto dry land and he plunged the audacious into the sea,
and in his hands was placed the great key of all creation (*qlîdâ rabbâ d-koll
beryâtâ*).⁸⁸

86 Cf. also the “great treasure” (*gazzâ rabbâ*) mentioned on *ibid.*, 45.

87 Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. Tomus I*, 104. The evidence found in this homily goes some part of the way toward answering the objection of Crone, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ân (Part One),” 230, that mainstream Christian sources would not present Jesus as a prophet to the Israelites. Indeed, it seems to me that this is precisely what Jacob is saying: that Moses presented Jesus as a prophet to and for the Israelites, even though he was of course much more than that, and Moses knew it. The point is that *when discussing salvation history*, particularly in terms of typological confirmation, describing Jesus in this way is hardly strange. Since the Qur’ân offers its own competing typology, it isn’t surprising that it might wish to accept Moses’ portrayal of Jesus as a prophet to the Israelites and reject him as incarnate Word. Apparently “Jewish-Christian” doctrines in the Qur’ân might simply be a logical consequence of its typological reading reacting against putative excesses of Christianity. It is probably impossible to rule out some sort of prior Jewish-Christian influence on Qur’anic typology, but the evidence can also be read as a reaction to known Christian positions.

88 Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. Tomus I*, 109. See Q 42.12: “To him are the keys of the heavens and the earth. He extends provision to whomever he wills and measures it. Surely he has knowledge of everything.” A similar expression occurs in Q 39.63.

Notice that Moses' key gives him access to heaven (so that he has the bread of angels) and to earth, such that he controls all that is on it. In this latter case, keys become an image not only of wisdom but of the power of divine providence. Indeed, there is evidence that the Syriac tradition, going back to Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise* especially, even viewed the light of divine revelation as a kind of provision of heavenly food.⁸⁹ Jacob takes a similar position. In Jacob's *Homily on the Adultery of the Congregation*, he explicitly describes the revelation of divine brightness as food and drink. "Thus it is written that they saw God and ate and drank. Seeing him is food. His radiance is drink. His light is life."⁹⁰ For this reason, Jacob points out that "Moses resembles the Son of God, in the totality of his path (*dāmê môšê l-bar allāhâ b-kôllah ûrḥeh*), in the same way that a shadow imitates the size of the body."⁹¹ In other words, for Jacob, the imagery of the heavenly treasury and its keys is the way to express both divinization and the path of prophetic typology from Moses to Jesus. In his status, Moses himself becomes "the treasury of prophecy" (*gazzâ da-nbîyûtâ*)⁹² The Qur'ân used the same imagery to affirm God's power over all creation, and to reject a heavenly, divinized status for its prophets.

Of course the ultimate owner of the treasury is Jesus himself, and the divinized status of Moses or any prophet for that matter, finds its source and typological fulfillment in Jesus. Thus, in the *Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face* Jacob says,

Apart from [Jesus], there is neither word nor revelation (*gelyânâ*)
in the prophets, for he himself is the treasury of prophecy (*gazzâh da-nbîyûtâ*).⁹³

The prophets possess the heavenly treasure, that is, Christ, who in turn fulfills the pattern of the divinized prophet. In the *Homily on the Canaanite Woman* Jacob puts it once again in cognitive terms, describing Christ as

89 See Andrew J. Hayes, "The Transfiguration of Moses: A Survey and Analysis of St. Ephrem's Interpretation of Exodus 34,29," *Oriens Christianus*, 2013, 67–99.

90 Mardin Orth. 130f. 18rb, l. 17–18va, l. 1. For a complete discussion of the mss. see Andrew J. Hayes, "The Manuscripts and Themes of Jacob of Serugh's Mêmrà 'on the Adultery of the Congregation,'" in Jeffrey Wickes and Kristian S. Heal, eds., *Studia Patristica LXXVIII: Papers Presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2015. Volume 4: Literature, Rhetoric, and Exegesis in Syriac Verse* (Louvain: Peeters, 2017), 61–71.

91 Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. Tomus I*, 112.

92 *Ibid.*, 568.

93 Sebastian Brock, ed., *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 45.

the great treasury (*gazzâ [h]w rabbâ*) on which all the needy grow rich,
[and] the path (*ûrĥâ*) on which someone progresses to the vision of his Father.⁹⁴

In this way, Jacob unifies the imagery of the path of prophetic types, which leads to the vision of God, and the treasury of that knowledge.

Summative Analysis

Having examined the two accounts of divine knowledge: the arguments of Qur'anic monotheism, and of sixth century Syriac Christianity, the latter clearly sheds light on the arguments and concerns recorded in the Qur'anic corpus. The Syriac tradition on the heavenly treasury of knowledge emerges with a high probability as one of the Qur'an's most significant interlocutors in debates on knowledge and ignorance of divine mysteries. This debate between Christians and the Qur'an on divinizing knowledge also helps to explain to whom the Qur'an responds when it strongly asserts Jesus' ignorance. The two traditions appear to be arguing in the same intellectual space.

The Qur'an proposes a patterned sequence or path of disparate prophets and messengers (its prophetic typology) as the ordinary means by which humankind accesses knowledge of God. This typology extends into the narrative present. In making that case, it has to argue against people, some of them clearly Christians or Christian sympathizers, who hold that mankind is capable of being at least quasi-divinized by a special access to and intimacy with divine knowledge, and who symbolically express that divinized access in terms of ascending to the heavenly treasury, opening it with a key or keys, and partaking of a divine knowledge that also nourishes the human person like food does. These same people seem likely to have emphasized the symmetry of knowledge between Jesus and God, to the point that the Qur'an adjusts its typical characterization of prophets and messengers in order to deny that symmetry.

The Syriac tradition, particularly as it developed in the sixth century christological disputes in the writings of Philoxenus and Jacob, proposes a pattern of mystic symbols as the content of prior scriptures, but extending into the narrative present, according to which humankind progresses toward intimate, divinizing knowledge of God. It symbolically expresses that access as ascending to the heavenly treasury, opening it with a key or keys (which have been entrusted to the Church), and receiving from the treasury the divinizing light and radiance of divine knowledge which also serves as a kind of spiritual food

94 Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis. Tomus I*, 443.

and drink. Prophethood and Messengerhood hold the keys to this radiance. Whereas the Qur'ān denied that such knowledge (and its consequence: becoming like God) was necessary, the Syriac tradition held firmly that it was, and that a divine Jesus is necessarily the source and goal from which the radiance of God is shed upon his servants. Hence, the Syriac tradition of Christological reflection developed an exegesis of Matthew 16.17 that was, as far as I can tell, unique to it, and which highlighted the perfect symmetry between the knowledge of the Father and the Son, such that he becomes the path and way to vision of the Father.

One must emphasize that, in the Qur'ān, the Christians who expected the keys to the heavenly treasures, and who seem to have regarded Jesus as the unique instantiation of divine knowledge, have not been presented neutrally, but rather as making exaggerated claims, such as the claim that there are others beside Jesus who are also gods or godlike, which the Qur'ān tends to condemn as a claim of adoptionism (see in particular Q 39.3–4 and 21.26–36).⁹⁵ They are also presented as having failed to comprehend the true pattern of prophecy and messengerhood in which divinization is superfluous. The Qur'ān even reproaches Christians for presuming to hold the keys, something it regards as proper only to God. It seems likely therefore that the Qur'ān's reports that its interlocutors expected angelic messengers may also be a sarcastic paraphrase of their claim to divinized status. Such a claim, from the perspective of the Qur'ānic worldview, would amount to being quasi-divine, that is, something like an angel.⁹⁶

And within the Syriac tradition, particularly as represented by Philoxenus, failure to accept Christ's full divinity, and hence his symmetrical knowledge with the Father, necessarily results in an amalgam of the Jewish, Nestorian, and pagan position to the effect that Christ is an exalted prophet noteworthy for his revelations, but ultimately a man like the rest. Such a position is not dissimilar to that of Qur'ānic monotheism. Though it cannot be pursued here, one wonders if the Qur'ān's positive commendation of *ḥunafā'* in contrast to Jews and Christians represents an awareness of what the logically available alternatives

95 Both passages refer to multiple entities as "adopted" by God. What is particularly interesting here is that in the former passage, the Qur'ān's opponents protest that they do not literally place them on the same rank as God himself, and that these quasi-divine beings serve as a means to help their adherents become closer to God in rank, that is, quasi-divine as well. This strikes me as more likely to reflect Christian notions of divinized saints than what one usually thinks of as a pagan pantheon.

96 Here further research into the presentation of angels or "Watchers" as they are called, in the writings of Ephrem and Jacob may prove to be illuminating, but space does not permit pursuing it here.

were. This would open the way to assigning to pagan supporters of Jesus a more positive valence and regarding even Abraham in this light since he predates the Mosaic covenant.⁹⁷ On this admittedly speculative point, one must ask why the Qur'anic *ḥanīf* is opposed to Jews as well as Christians, whereas Philoxenus associated the pagans with the Jews. One could hazard that Qur'anic criticism of the Jews applies to those who rejected Jesus as prophet, but those described by Philoxenus actually approved of him.

The evidence offered above strongly suggests the fruitfulness of reading the Qur'ān as a late antique document,⁹⁸ and hence as a knowledgeable participant in the theological debates of Late Antiquity. As with other literature from that time, it can be challenging to distinguish what an author or text reports from what its opponents themselves would expressly claim. But in this respect the Qur'ān is unremarkable. Indeed, exploring the engagement between the Qur'ān and Syriac Christian tradition (among other interlocutors) presents us with a more reasonable picture of the Qur'ān overall, as a text with a coherent argument of its own. But like any such argument, it is constituted by reflecting upon and responding to what has gone before, a procedure the Qur'ān expressly adopts as its own and invites its hearers also to do. Taking this invitation seriously permits us to read the Qur'ān not simply as a hodgepodge of “borrowings” from other traditions but as a theological position in its own right. The articulation of this theology need not have had an especially erudite or academic setting. As Griffith has pointed out, “the ‘interpreted Bible’ as we find it in these homiletic compositions [i.e., the Syriac *mēm̄rê*] bears an uncanny resemblance in many of its details to the reminiscences of Bible history as we find them in the Qur'ān”⁹⁹. In short, the homily, and liturgy in general is also a site for theological dialogue, perhaps even in practice its ordinary site. The evidence offered above serves to bear out features of the “uncanny resemblance” between *competing* typologies.

What is one to make of the theological position itself? Qur'ānic monotheism rejects certain key theses of the Christian faith. But it does not reject them

97 François De Blois, “Naṣrānī (ναζαραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἕθνικος): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 1 (2002): 16–27.

98 Cf. Pregill, “A Calf, a Body That Lows,” 265–267. After finishing this paper, I had the good fortune to discover and read Angelika Neuwirth, “The Qur'an's Enchantment of the World: 'Antique' Narratives Refashioned in Arab Late Antiquity,” in Majid Daneshgar and Walid Saleh, eds., *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 125–144. Her remarks on typology offer a sketch of a more expansive setting in which the argument I have made might be placed. My argument, one might say, reveals only a part of the typological thinking of the mind of the Qur'ān.

99 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 94.

per accidens, nor simply *in cursu* as it eyes other goals. Rather the rejection emerges from a thoughtful, if tendentious, dialogue with Christians of the Syriac tradition. The Qur'ān's dialogic genesis must be taken seriously as an integral part of its thought if we are to reflect on contemporary opportunities for dialogue. It may be that a better understanding of the Qur'ān's dialogue with Syriac Christianity could support contemporary attempts to revive or articulate a Christian hermeneutic of the Qur'ānic text,¹⁰⁰ which would, of necessity, involve articulating a new typological reading of it. In any case, such a better understanding certainly delineates with greater clarity the kinship and distance between the two traditions.

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100 Consider, e.g., the pioneering work of Louis Massignon. See Sidney Griffith, “Sharing the Faith of Abraham: The ‘Credo’ of Louis Massignon,” *Islam and Christian – Muslim Relations* 8, no. 2 (1997): 193–210. The phrase “Christian hermeneutic of the Qur'ān” was recently used in a paper by Elias Kattan at the inaugural Conference of the International Orthodox Theological Association in Iasi, Romania, to represent the point of view of Sidney Griffith. The phrase seems so apt that I have elected to borrow it here.

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The Joseph Story in the Qur'ān and in the Syriac Tradition

Qur'ānic Prophetology as a Counter-Discourse to Christocentric Typology

Charbel Rizk

Introduction

The Jewish and Christian Milieu of the Qur'ān

Even a quick reading of the Qur'ān is sufficient to disclose that the Qur'ān emerged in a religious milieu deeply informed by biblical literature—by which I mean the Bible, apocrypha, and post-biblical Jewish and Christian works—and that the audience of the Qur'ān included Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians.¹ Against this backdrop, it is not at all surprising that the Qur'ān recalls many narratives, themes, motifs and notions from biblical literature. In the scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the appearance of Jewish and Christian literary traditions in the Qur'ān was viewed in terms of borrowing, and scholars usually examined parallels in biblical literature and in the Qur'ān with the intention of discovering the Jewish and Christian “sources” of the Qur'ān. While some scholars emphasized the Jewish setting of the Qur'ān,² others stressed its Christian background,³ but neither acknowledged that the Qur'ān is an original religious proclamation that participates in Jewish and Christian literary traditions for the purpose of voicing an alternative

- 1 Throughout the Qur'ān, Jews and Christians are alluded to and addressed which presupposes their presence in the audience of the Qur'ān. For a further reading on the Jewish and Christian presence in Arabia by the time of the emergence of the Qur'ān, and even centuries before that, see Uri Rubin, “Jews and Judaism,” in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 21–34; Gordon Newby, *A History of the Jews in Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1988); Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001); Sidney Griffith, “Christians and Christianity,” in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:307–316; Gabriel Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 121–133, 153–166; Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, “Arabs and Christianity,” in Greg Fisher, ed., *Arabs and Empires Before Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 276–372.
- 2 Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Muhammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: Baaden, 1833); Charles Torrey, *The Jewish foundation of Islam* (New York: Bloch, 1933).
- 3 Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Frank Cass, 1926); William St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'ān* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1905).

reading of them, a reading that ultimately conforms to its particular message.⁴ Today, however, the Qur'ān is read not as a book of Jewish and Christian borrowings but as a distinctive voice in dialogue with both Jewish and Christian literary traditions, or in the words of Mun'im Sirry:

In the last few years we have witnessed a new development in scholarly studies on the Qur'ān's relation to the Bible. Instead of arguing that elements of other religions were co-opted and integrated into the Muslim scripture, scholars contend that the Qur'ān is in conversation with biblical literature, both Jewish and Christian.⁵

The Syriac Background of the Qur'ān

The scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who put considerable effort into discovering the Jewish and Christian "sources" of the Qur'ān have in varying degrees demonstrated the Syriac background of the Qur'ān.⁶ Other scholars, such as Arthur Jeffery, Alphonso Mingana and Josef Horowitz, working on the vocabulary and language of the Qur'ān, have identified a great number of Syriac loanwords in the Qur'ān, and they have also showed that most proper names of biblical figures in the Qur'ān follow the Syriac form and that the writing of Qur'ānic words and the structure of Qur'ānic sentences reflect Syriac orthography and syntax.⁷ Luxenberg has put forward the controversial thesis

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- 4 The sources-hunt that started with Abraham Geiger in 1833 began to attenuate a century later with Heinrich Speyer who, in his comprehensive and detailed work *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1931), collected most of the parallels to the Jewish and Christian material in the Qur'ān. For surveys of the century-long sources-hunt, see Gabriel Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), 3–22; Trygve Kronholm, "Dependence and Prophetic Originality of the Koran," *Orientalia Suecana* 31–32 (1982–1983): 47–70; Joseph Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives* (PhD Dissertation: Princeton University, 2011), 10–17.
- 5 Mun'im Sirry, "Introduction," in Mun'im Sirry, ed., *New Trends in Qur'ānic Studies: Text, Context, and Interpretation* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2019), 3–4.
- 6 Besides the scholars referenced in notes 2–4, see Samuel Lee, *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1824), 124–138, who highlighted thematic and linguistic similarities between the Qur'ān, on the one hand, and the writings of Ephrem and the Syriac Bible, on the other hand, in order to substantiate his claim that Muhammad had acquired his knowledge of Christianity in Syria; and see also Tor Andrae, *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glaube* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), who examined the Syriac background of the Qur'ān's eschatology and piety, and like Lee, he explored similarities between the Qur'ān and Ephrem. For a critical review of both Lee's work and Andrae's work, see Witztum, *The Syriac milieu of the Qur'ān*, 18–42.
- 7 Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kuran," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927):

that the Qur'ān was originally a Syriac lectionary written in a Syriac-Arabic hybrid language.⁸ John Bowman has argued that Muhammad's monotheism, his view of the Old Testament and much of the Qur'ān's vocabulary are in debt to the West-Syriac tradition.⁹ Erwin Gräf has argued that the literary style of the Qur'ān was shaped against the background of liturgical and homiletic texts of the Syriac tradition.¹⁰

The aforementioned scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have certainly demonstrated the Syriac background of the Qur'ān, but only recently have a growing number of scholars begun to show that the Qur'ān is not simply a passive recipient of Syriac literary traditions, nor a reservoir of misread theological dogmas and ideas of Syriac Christianity, but a creative participant in the Syriac tradition.¹¹ Based on such an understanding of the Qur'ān, Sidney Griffith has aptly described how one should approach the Qur'ān:

77–98; Joseph Horowitz, "Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925): 145–227. On page 80, Mingana estimates that about "70 percent of the foreign influences on the style and terminology of the Kuran" come from "Syriac (including Aramaic and Palestinian Syriac)." In a similar vein, on page 19, Jeffery notes that Syriac, including Christian Aramaic (Palestinian Syriac), "is undoubtedly the most copious source of Qur'ānic borrowings."

- 8 Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Schiler & Mücke, 2000). Several critical reviews of Luxenberg's work have appeared. In his article, "A Christian Qur'ān? A Study in the Syriac background to the language of the Qur'ān as presented in the work of Christoph Luxenberg," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 3 (2009): 44–71, Daniel King considers Luxenberg's work from the perspective of Syriac philology and summarizes eight reviews of Luxenberg's work.
- 9 John Bowman, "The Debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 19 (1964–1965): 177–201. He, moreover, made much effort to demonstrate that the *Injil* in the Qur'ān refers to Tatian's second-century harmony of the Gospels, known as the Diatessaron, written in Syriac and used by Syriac communities up to the fifth century but was extant even later. For a critical review, see Witztum, *The Syriac milieu of the Qur'ān*, 43–50.
- 10 Erwin Gräf, "Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran," *Al-Bahit: Festschrift Joseph Henninger* (1976): 111–144. For a critical review, see Witztum, *The Syriac milieu of the Qur'ān*, 50–52.
- 11 Andrew J. Hayes, "The Treasury of Prophecy: The Role of Knowledge in Salvation History for the Qur'ān in the light of Syriac Tradition," in this volume; Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*; Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān*; Michael Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'ān: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious Political Debate," in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx, eds., *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 533–564; Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (London: Routledge, 2013); Kevin van Bladel, "The Alexander Legend in the Qur'ān 18:83–102," in Gabriel Reynolds ed., *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 175–203; Sidney

Hermeneutically speaking, one should approach the Qurʾān as an integral discourse in its own right; it proclaims, judges, praises, blames from its own narrative center. It addresses an audience which is already familiar with oral versions in Arabic of earlier scriptures and folklores. The Qurʾān does not borrow from, or often even quote from these earlier texts. Rather, it alludes to and evokes their stories, even sometimes their wording, for its own rhetorical purpose. The Arabic Qurʾān, from a literary perspective, is something new. It uses the idiom, and sometimes the forms and structures, of earlier narratives in the composition of its own distinctive discourse. It cannot be reduced to any presumed sources. Earlier discourses appear in it not only in a new setting, but shaped, trimmed and re-formulated for an essentially new narrative.¹²

Guided by his defined approach to the Qurʾān, Griffith goes on to study the qurʾānic story of the youths of the cave (Q 18:9–26)—originally a Christian legend about the miraculous life of some youths in Ephesus—in the light of earlier Syriac retellings, particularly the retelling of Jacob of Serugh. After a careful study, involving a comparison of motifs and diction, Griffith concludes that the Qurʾān evokes the Christian legend, “as it must have circulated orally among the Arabic-speaking ‘Jacobite’ Christians of Muhammad’s day in Arabia,” but removes its “Christian framework” and provides instead a “Qurʾānic horizon within which the legend takes on a whole new hermeneutical significance.”¹³ To put it differently, while the youths in the Syriac tradition are persecuted because of their faith in Christ as Lord and miraculously saved from persecution by him, the youths in the Qurʾān are persecuted because of their faith in God as Lord and miraculously saved from persecution by him. Obviously, the mention of Christ as Lord is removed in the qurʾānic story. It seems, then, that the Qurʾān evokes the Syriac story but reacts to its Christian framework or, more precisely, to its christocentric framework.

Another interesting example of how the Qurʾān evokes Syriac literary traditions but reacts to their christocentric framework is provided by Michael Marx.

Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān: ‘Companions of the Cave’ in Surat al Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition,” in Reynolds, *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, 109–137; Sidney Griffith, “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qurʾān’: Who Were Those Who Said ‘Allah is Third of Three’ according to al-Maida 73?” in Meir Bar Asher et al., eds., *A Word Fittingly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān – Presented to Haggai Ben Shammi*, (Ben Zvi Institute, 2007), 83–110.

12 Griffith, “Christian lore and the Arabic Qurʾān,” 116. As noted by Griffith, “oral versions in Arabic of biblical literature of earlier scriptures and folklores” must have been circulating in Arabia by the time of the Qurʾān because—as he shows in *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 41–53. There is no clear evidence that the Bible, or any other biblical literature, had been translated into Arabic by the seventh century.

13 Griffith, “Christian lore and the Arabic Qurʾān,” 130.

Noting that, in the Syriac tradition, Mary is described as the Temple, in that she carried God the Son in her womb, and as the blooming Rod of Aaron, in that she as a virgin gave birth to him, Marx argues that the Qur'ān evokes both notions by relating Mary to the Temple and to Aaron but removes their christocentric framework by placing Mary in the Temple (Q 3:37, 42–46; 19:16–22) instead of describing her as the Temple and by calling her the sister of Aaron (Q 19:28) instead of the blooming Rod of Aaron.¹⁴

Here is not the place to try to summarize the recent studies, some of which have been referenced in note 11, that explore the Qur'ān in the light of the Syriac tradition. Suffice it to say, however, that several of these studies, like those of Griffith and Marx, show that the Qur'ān evokes Syriac literary traditions but reacts to their christocentric framework. Furthermore, note that the studies of Griffith and Marx demonstrate that the Qur'ān reacts to the christocentric framework of Syriac stories of Christian saints (the youths of Ephesus) and New Testament figures (Mary). How about the christocentric framework of Syriac stories of Old Testament figures? For example, does the Qur'ān react to the christocentric framework of the Syriac story of Joseph?

The Joseph Story

The Joseph story in Genesis 37–50, probably written in the Solomonic court around the tenth century BC or in the Northern kingdom in the eighth century BC, intends to depict Joseph, the ruler of Egypt, as the ideal power figure and to bridge the traditions about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Canaan and those about the Israelites in Egypt.¹⁵ At least from the third century BC and on, the Joseph story caught much attention and was frequently retold and significantly expounded by various authors not only in the Jewish tradition¹⁶ but also in the Christian tradition.

14 Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology," 533–564.

15 George Coats, "Joseph," in David Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol.3 (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 976–981; Richard Blum and Kristin Weingart, "The Joseph Story: Diaspora Novella or North Israelite Narrative?" *ZAW* 129/4 (2017): 501–521. For a historical-critical reading of the Joseph story, see Ephraim Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 285–378; John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60–67.

16 For the Joseph story in the Jewish tradition, see James Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Harvard University Press, 1990); James Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 438–458; Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post*

The Joseph Story in the Syriac Tradition

As Grypeou and Spurling note, in the Christian tradition, “Joseph was the biblical figure *par excellence* that represented a type for Jesus,”¹⁷ and they go on to remark that “the typological approach to Joseph is particularly prominent in the Syriac tradition.”¹⁸ Already in 1923, Heinrich Näf offered a study of the Joseph story in the Syriac tradition, based largely on the twelve homilies of Ps Ephrem, the two homilies of Ps Narsai, and the ten homilies of Jacob, but he discussed the typological approach to Joseph only briefly.¹⁹ More recently, in 2008, Kristian Heal offered an in-depth study of the Joseph story in the Syriac tradition, and he too used, besides other sources, the homilies of Ps Ephrem and Ps Narsai.²⁰ In his study, Heal devoted one chapter to the typological approach to Joseph,²¹ and in an appendix to his study, he listed 53 comparisons drawn by several Syriac authors between the life of Joseph and the life of Christ.²²

The Joseph Story in the Qur’ān

In chapter 12 of the Qur’ān, entitled Sura Yusuf, Joseph appears as the prophet of God proclaiming the same religious message that all of the prophets of God, including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, proclaimed, namely, that God is one,

Biblical Jewish Literature (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 323–336; Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 327–431; Dirk Rottzoll, *Rabbinischer Kommentar zum Buch Genesis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 429–537.

- 17 Grypeou and Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity*, 336. Not only Joseph but most of the Old Testament figures were construed as types of Christ. In fact, the typological reading of the Old Testament was the primary, but not the only, hermeneutical approach to the Old Testament in the early Church. For surveys of patristic exegesis, see John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Charles Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 165–269; Frances M. Young, *Biblical exegesis and the formation of Christian culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 18 Grypeou and Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity*, 337.
- 19 Heinrich Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte: Mit Uebersetzung des Gedichts von Narsai und Proben aus Balai und Jaqob von Sarug* (Zürich: Schwarzenbach, 1923). His main discussion on the typological approach to the Joseph story is found on pages 50–52.
- 20 Kristian Heal, *Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources* (PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2008).
- 21 Heal, *Tradition and Transformation*, 81–110. See also Kristian Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature,” *Brigham Young University Studies Quarterly* 41/1 (2002): 29–49.
- 22 Heal, *Tradition and Transformation*, 269–272.

worthy of worship, has no equals, and will reward good and punish evil on the Day of Judgment. Yet in the Bible, neither Joseph nor Abraham, Isaac or Jacob appears as a prophet. Interestingly, in the Syriac tradition, like in the Qur'ān, Joseph, as well as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, appears as a prophet, but unlike the Qur'ān, the Syriac tradition depicts Joseph and other Old Testament figures, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as prophets because they either saw the types of Christ or themselves were his types.²³ Evidently, the Qur'ān agrees with the Syriac tradition that Joseph is a prophet but not that he is the type of Christ. Against this backdrop, can it be that the Joseph story in the Qur'ān functions inter alia as a counter-discourse to the Joseph-Christ typology in the Syriac tradition? Although many scholars have studied the Joseph story in the Qur'ān,²⁴ none has, to the best of my knowledge, explored this question.

The Joseph Story in the Qur'ān as a Counter-Discourse to Christocentric Typology

In his dissertation from 2011, Joseph Witztum offered an insightful study of the qur'ānic Joseph story in comparison with both Jewish and Syriac sources, in which he demonstrates that the qur'ānic Joseph story “is closely related to the Syriac tradition,” that “the evidence suggests that the Qur'ān was aware of Christian Syriac traditions concerning Joseph,” that the Syriac tradition “played a major role” in the formation of the qur'ānic story and that without the Syriac tradition “we cannot truly understand what the Qur'ān is doing.”²⁵ What, then, is the Qur'ān doing in telling its own Joseph story? As Witztum and others have noted, the qur'ānic Joseph story was meant to encourage Muhammad and his believing followers in Mecca in the face of tribulation, to let his unbelieving opponents know that the final triumph will be his and to confirm that his

23 For example, compare Jacob's homily *The Mysteries of our Lord in the Old Testament* in Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryany, eds., 160 *Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 1. (Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, 2017), 121–127.

24 See, for example, Shalom Goldman, “Joseph,” in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 55–57; Gabriel Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 361–386; Ayaz Afsar, “Plot Motifs in Joseph/Yusuf Story: A Comparative Study of Biblical and Qur'ānic Narrative,” *Islamic Studies* 45/2 (2006): 167–189; Mustansir Mir, “The Qur'ānic story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, And Characters,” *The Muslim World* 76/1 (1986): 1–15; Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, “We Will Tell You the Best of Stories: A Study on Surah XII,” *Studia Orientalia* 67 (2015): 7–32; Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 138–157; Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān*, 188–256.

25 Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān*, 255–256.

religious message stands in line with that of Joseph.²⁶ I do not disagree with such a reading of the qur'ānic story. In fact, the closing verses of the qur'ānic story make such a reading apparent (Q 12:102–111). However, I believe that the qur'ānic story is doing more than that. It seems to me that the qur'ānic story is also reacting to the typological reading of the Joseph story in the Syriac tradition.

As we have seen, Syriac authors from the fourth to sixth centuries construed Joseph as the type of Christ, a typological construal that the Qur'ān must have been familiar with because, as Witztum has demonstrated, the Qur'ān was certainly aware of the Joseph story in the Syriac tradition. Hence, my thesis, which I will try to demonstrate in the case study below, is that the Qur'ān not only participates in the Joseph story in the Syriac tradition but also reacts to the typological construal of Joseph in the Syriac tradition. Why the Qur'ān reacts to the Joseph-Christ typology is a question that I will discuss in the conclusion of this paper.

Recall that neither the Bible nor any other biblical literature was available in Arabic by the time of the emergence of the Qur'ān, yet centuries before that, oral versions in Arabic of Jewish and Syriac literary traditions were circulating in Arabia.²⁷ Consequently, the Joseph story and its various Jewish and Syriac retellings were certainly widespread in Arabic throughout Arabia, including Mecca, in the seventh century, in which the Qur'ān participated so as to voice its own understanding of the Joseph story. A close reading of the qur'ānic story reveals, on the one hand, that it follows the general storyline of the biblical story but, on the other hand, that it departs from the biblical story in terms of narrative details. For example, the qur'ānic story does not mention the biblical detail that Jacob made a robe for Joseph, a detail that is frequent in our Jewish and Syriac sources. Why would the Qur'ān omit this detail? This omission calls for an explanation, and, as I will try to show in the case study, my thesis seems to explain why the qur'ānic story omits the biblical detail that Jacob made a robe for Joseph. To give another example, in the qur'ānic story, Jacob takes Joseph's second dream to mean that God will choose Joseph to be his prophet, a narrative detail that is nowhere to be found in the biblical story. Why would the Qur'ān have Jacob interpret Joseph's second dream as a confirmation of Joseph's future prophethood? This addition, too, calls for an explanation, and, again, as I will try to show in the case study, it seems that my thesis provides a

26 Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān*, 251–255; Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3–16, 31.

27 See note 12.

reasonable explanation of why the Qur'ān has Jacob interpret Joseph's second dream as a confirmation of Joseph's future prophethood.

Jewish and Syriac sources on Joseph

Before presenting my case study, I will outline the Jewish and Syriac sources that will be used in the case study, and I will also explain why and how I will use Jewish sources in my case study.

Jewish sources on Joseph

The Jewish sources on Joseph that will be used in my case study are the following:

1. *On Joseph*: Retelling of the Joseph story written in Greek by Philo of Alexandria (d ca 40 or 50).²⁸
2. *Jewish Antiquities*: Multivolume work written in Greek by Josephus (d ca 100). The first four books retell the events of the Pentateuch, and as for the Joseph story, it is retold in the second book.²⁹
3. *Genesis Rabba*: Collection of rabbinic exegesis on Genesis written predominantly in Hebrew in Palestine. *Genesis Rabba* is usually dated to the fifth century.³⁰

My main reason for using Jewish sources, besides Syriac sources, is to trace how widespread the literary traditions concerning Joseph, in which the Qur'ānic story is participating, were by the time of the emergence of the Qur'ān. This is of particular importance when I am dealing with Qur'ānic omissions of biblical narrative details concerning Joseph. Take for example the Qur'ānic omission of the biblical detail of the robe that Jacob made for Joseph. How do we know that the Qur'ānic story is deliberately omitting the detail of the robe? Maybe the detail of the robe had fallen into oblivion by the time of Muhammad, and therefore, the Qur'ānic story is simply not aware of it. Such a conclusion is not convincing because the detail of the robe is, as noted above, frequent in our Jewish and Syriac sources.

28 For the Greek text with English translation, see F. H. Colson, transl., *Philo*, vol. 6 (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 136–271.

29 For the Greek text of the first four books with English translation, see Henry Thackeray, *Josephus*, vol. 4 (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

30 For the Hebrew/Aramaic text, see Julius Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, eds., *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965). For an English translation, see H. Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, vol. 2 (London: The Soncino Press, 1939), 770–1003.

Syriac Sources on Joseph

As for the Syriac sources on Joseph that will be used in my case study, they are the following:

1. *Demonstrations*: Artistic prose work written by Aphrahat between 337 and 345. The *Demonstrations* consists of 23 demonstrations. In the twenty-first demonstration, Aphrahat develops a remarkable Joseph-Christ typology by means of a rather complex syncrisis.³¹
2. *Commentary on Genesis*: Prose commentary on Genesis written by Ephrem (d 373).³²
3. *Syriac History of Joseph*: Prose retelling of the Joseph story written in Syriac and wrongly attributed to Basil of Caesarea (henceforth Ps Basil). The *Syriac History of Joseph* dates to the late fourth century or early fifth century.³³

In addition to the sources on prose, I will use four other sources on verse, namely, homilies on Joseph by four Syriac authors:

4. Ps Ephrem (fourth century or early fifth century) who composed a cycle of twelve homilies.³⁴

31 For the Syriac text, see Jean Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes* (PS I, vols. 1–2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894; 1907). For an English translation of Aphrahat, see Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

32 For the Syriac text, see R. M. Tonneau ed., *Sancti Ephraem Syri In Genesim Et In Exodum Commentarii* (CSCO 152; Louvain: Durbecq, 1955). For an English translation, see Edward G. Mathews, Joseph P. Amar and Kathleen E. McVey (eds.), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (The Fathers of the Church 91; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994).

33 The first edition of the *Syriac History of Joseph* was published in two parts—the first in 1893 by Magnus Weinberg, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Casarea* (Berlin: Itskowski) and the second in 1895 by Samuel Wolf Link, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea* (Berlin: Itskowski)—on the basis of one manuscript, Berlin Syriac 74, dated to 1695. The text of *Syriac History of Joseph* begins on folio 24r and consists of 28 leaves. Due to the loss of a leaf after folio 37, there is a lacuna in the text of *Syriac History of Joseph* and thus in the published edition of Weinberg and Link. Since the *Syriac History of Joseph* is preserved in four other manuscripts, dated to a time between 1600 and 1800, Kristian Heal was able to fill the gap in the edition of Weinberg and Link. For an English translation of the *Syriac History of Joseph*, see Kristian Heal, transl., “The Syriac History of Joseph: A New Translation and Introduction,” in Richard Bauckham, James Davila and Alexander Panayotov, eds., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Non-Canonical Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 85–120.

34 For the Syriac text, see Paul Bedjan, ed., *Histoire complete de Joseph par Saint Ephrem: Poeme en douze livres* (Paris: Harrasowitz, 1891).

5. Ps Narsai (fifth century) who composed two homilies.³⁵
6. Narsai (d ca 500) who composed one homily.³⁶
7. Jacob of Serugh (d 521) who composed a cycle of twelve homilies.³⁷

Case Study

In this section, I will consider four qur'ānic departures from the biblical Joseph story—two omissions (Joseph's robe; Joseph's first dream) and two additions (Jacob's interpretation of Joseph's second dream; Joseph's religious proclamation in prison)—and I will argue that each departure can be explained by my thesis. I will close this section with a discussion of two important concepts in the qur'ānic Joseph story—the concept of *qur'ān* and that of *āya*—and I will argue that these concepts not only reflect similar concepts in the Syriac homilies on Joseph but also reinforce my thesis.

The First Qur'ānic Omission: Joseph's Robe

In the opening of the Joseph story in the Bible, we are told among other things that Jacob made a robe for Joseph (Gen 37:3). The biblical detail that Jacob made a robe for Joseph is mentioned in our Jewish and Syriac sources.³⁸ The Qur'ān, however, omits this detail.³⁹ Why? I suggest that the qur'ānic omission of Joseph's robe has to do with the typological construal of it in the Syriac tradition.

In his twenty-first demonstration, Aphrahat uses Joseph's robe to proclaim the Christian belief of the incarnation: “The persecuted Joseph was the image of the persecuted Jesus: the father of Joseph clothed him in a long-sleeved

35 For the Syriac text, see Paul Bedjan, ed., *Liber Superiorum seu Historia Monastica auctore Thomas episcopo Margensi* (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1901), 521–606.

36 For the Syriac text, see Alphonse Mingana, ed., *Narsai Doctoris syri Homiliae et Carmina*, vol. 2 (Mausilii: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905), 265–288.

37 For the Syriac text, see Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 1, 493–579.

38 *Genesis Rabba* (Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah*, 775); Philo (Colson, *Philo*, 157); Aphrahat (Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 405); Ps Basil (Heal, “The Syriac History of Joseph,” 94); Ps Ephrem (Bedjan, *Histoire complete de Joseph*, 19); Narsai (Mingana, *Narsai*, 269); Jacob (Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 494).

39 The motif of Joseph's *qamīš* ‘shirt’ is mentioned more than once in the Qur'ānic story (Q 12:18, 25–28, 96), but there is nothing in the context of these mentions that suggests that the shirt is the robe that Jacob made for him. Be that as it may, the Qur'ān omits the notion that Jacob made Joseph a robe.

tunic, and the Father of Jesus clothed him in a body from the Virgin."⁴⁰ In his first homily on Joseph, Jacob uses Joseph's robe to proclaim the Christian belief of the crucifixion:

The truth compelled Jacob to depict the crucifixion in Joseph / so he made a long-sleeved robe and clothe him in it. / In his love, he made a long-armed garment for his son / in order to portray the great cross of the Son of God. / In a great mystery, he stretched out the long sleeves on the young one, / and that was as if he extended him on a cross while clothing him.⁴¹

Both Aphrahat and Jacob construe Joseph's robe typologically. In Aphrahat's demonstration, the robe typifies the incarnation of the Son of God, that is, the beginning of Christ's salvific life, whereas in Jacob's homily, the robe typifies the end of Christ's salvific life, that is, his crucifixion. By omitting the biblical detail that Jacob made a robe for Joseph, which our Syriac sources construe typologically, the Qur'ān seems to react to the typological construal of it.

Interestingly, elsewhere in its text, the Qur'ān discloses its awareness of the christocentric significance of the imagery of clothing in the Syriac tradition, and if this is the case, then we should not be surprised that the Qur'ān is aware of the christocentric significance of Joseph's robe which is thematically related to the imagery of clothing. Let me spell this out.

The qur'ānic story of the fall of Adam and Eve states that Adam and Eve were wearing clothes before the fall but lost them at the fall as a result of their sin (Q 7:20–27; 20:116–123). This notion is contrary to the biblical narrative which clearly states that Adam and Eve were naked before the fall (Gen 2:25) and that they realized their nakedness at the fall as their eyes were opened (Gen 3:7). Now, the notion of Adam and Eve wearing clothes before the fall but losing them at the fall is the starting point of the Syriac imagery of clothing.⁴² The Syriac imagery of clothing was developed by Syriac authors, such as Ephrem and Jacob, in order to yield a creative and complete expression of the course of salvation history,⁴³ which, according to the imagery, consists of the following elements:

40 Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 405.

41 Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 494. Translation mine.

42 For a detailed treatment of the imagery of clothing in the Syriac tradition, see Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," in Margot Schmidt, ed., *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982), 11–38.

43 Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," 11, notes that "while individual elements of this imagery are indeed quite often to be found

1. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were clothed in robes of glory and light.
2. At the fall, Adam and Eve were stripped of their robes of glory and light.
3. At the incarnation, the Son of God became man in order to reclothe the naked state of mankind in the robe of glory and light.
4. Through his baptism, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, sanctified all baptismal water and placed the robe of glory and light there for each Christian to put on at his or her baptism.⁴⁴

Some conclusions are in order. First, elements (1) and (2) are undoubtedly reflected in the Qur'ānic story of the fall of Adam and Eve, and therefore, we can conclude that the Qur'ān is aware of the Syriac imagery of clothing. Second, elements (3) and (4) are obviously christocentric,⁴⁵ and since they are inseparably related to (1) and (2), of which the Qur'ān is aware, we can conclude that the christocentric significance of the Syriac imagery of clothing is known to the Qur'ān. Third, given that the Qur'ān is familiar with the christocentric significance of the Syriac imagery of clothing, we should not be surprised that the Qur'ān is aware of the christocentric significance of Joseph's robe which is thematically related to the imagery of clothing.

The Second Qur'ānic omission: Joseph's First Dream

In the biblical story, Joseph is said to have had two dreams, both of which he told to his brothers. In the first dream, Joseph saw himself and his brothers binding sheaves in the field, and suddenly, Joseph's sheaf rose and stood upright, and the brothers' sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to it (Gen 37:6–7).

Although Joseph's first dream is mentioned in our Jewish and Syriac sources,⁴⁶ the Qur'ān omits it. Why? Is it, perhaps, because the dream, according to which the brothers (represented by their sheaves) bowed down to Joseph (represented by his sheaf that rose in the midst), implies an embarrassment to the Qur'ānic belief that God alone is worthy of worship? I do not think so, for it is clearly implied elsewhere in the Qur'ānic story (Q 12:99–101) that bowing

in Greek and Latin writers, it would appear that it is in the Syriac tradition that the imagery is the most consistently and fully developed.”

- 44 Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” 12.
- 45 Aphrahat even calls Christ “the Garment and the Coat of Glory in which the victorious are clothed.” (Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 323.)
- 46 Philo (Colson, *Philo*, 143–144); Josephus (Thackeray, *Josephus*, 173); *Genesis Rabba* (Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah*, 776–777); Aphrahat (Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 405); Ephrem (Mathews, *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 182); Ps Basil (Heal, “The Syriac History of Joseph”, 94); Ps Ephrem (Bedjan, *Histoire complete de Joseph*, 7–10); Ps Narsai (Bedjan, *Liber Superiorum*, 520); Narsai (Mingana, *Narsai*, 270–271); Jacob (Akrhass and Sryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 497–498).

down to Joseph is an act of revering a future ruler, not an act of worshipping a deity. Besides, in the Qur'ānic account of the second dream (Q 12:4), Joseph is bowed down to by celestial bodies, which means that the Qur'ān does not seem to find it problematic to ascribe such reverence to Joseph. Why, then, would the Qur'ān omit the first dream? It seems to me that a possible answer is found in Jacob's first homily on Joseph, for in it, he interprets Joseph's sheaf as the type of the eucharist, that is, the body of the Son of God, which is said to give life to the world:

Revelation depicted the body of our Lord by means of Joseph's sheaf / of which all longing nations were satisfied. / "I am the bread and whoever eats of me will not hunger again / for in me is fullness and life for the one who is worthy of me." / This bread came down from above for the hungry nations / and there is no fullness in any bread other than in him. / Joseph's sheaf rose up / in order to show where the lifegiving bread is.⁴⁷

I suggest that, by omitting Joseph's first dream, the Qur'ān seems to react to Jacob's eucharistic interpretation of the dream.

In their co-authored book about Christ in the Qur'ān, Mouhanad Khorchide and Klaus von Stosch argue that Q 5:112–115, the so-called table episode of the Qur'ān, refers to Christ's institution of the eucharist.⁴⁸ In this, Khorchide and von Stosch are in line with the scholarly consensus.⁴⁹ Given that the Qur'ān alludes to Christ's institution of the eucharist, we should not be surprised that the Qur'ān is aware of and perhaps responding to Jacob's eucharistic interpretation of Joseph's first dream.

The first Qur'ānic Addition: Jacob's Interpretation of Joseph's Second Dream

Joseph's second dream, in which the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him, is similarly recounted in the biblical story (Gen 37:9) and in the Qur'ānic story (Q 12:4), but Jacob's interpretation of the dream is different in each story:

47 Akhrass and Syryany, 160 *Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 498–499. Translation mine.

48 Mouhanad Khorchide and Klaus von Stosch, *The Other Prophet* (London: Ginko Library, 2019), 106–109.

49 Matthias Radscheit, "Table," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 188–191.

Jacob's interpretation in Gen 37:10

What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?

Jacob's interpretation in Q 12:6

This is about how your Lord will choose you, teach you to interpret dreams, and perfect His blessing on you and the House of Jacob, just as He perfected it earlier on your forefathers Abraham and Isaac: your Lord is all knowing and wise.

As we can see, the biblical story has Jacob explain that the dream is about how the entire family of Joseph will bow down to him, which seemingly means that Joseph will become a ruler, a meaning clearly expressed by the brothers' interpretation of Joseph's first dream (Gen 37:8) and disclosed later in the story (Gen 42:6; 43:26). By contrast, the qur'ānic story has Jacob explain that the dream is a divine declaration that God will choose Joseph and perfect his blessing on him, which apparently means that God will choose Joseph to be his prophet. In this, the Qur'ān is creative, for none of our Jewish and Syriac sources has Jacob interpret the dream as a divine declaration of Joseph's future prophethood. Why would the Qur'ān, in contrast to the biblical story and to the Jewish and Syriac sources, take Joseph's dream to be a divine declaration of his future prophethood? I suggest that this qur'ānic addition to the biblical story has to do with the following typological reading of Joseph's dream in Jacob's first homily:

The sun and the moon bend their heads and bowed down to Joseph, / for they beheld the mystery of the Son in the virtuous one. / Celestial bodies assigned honor to the one bearing the mysteries, / and from their places, they bowed down to him as to a ruler. / Through sheaves and celestial bodies, heaven and earth bowed down to him, / for all of this is due to the Son whose rule has no end. / The day and the night bowed down to Joseph because they beheld / that he had put on the types of the great sun of righteousness. / The dream summoned celestial bodies and had them surrender to the servant / who had put on his Lord's image so that he would be held in honor because of the image.⁵⁰

By having Jacob interpret Joseph's dream as a divine declaration that he will become the prophet of God, the Qur'ān seems to react to Jacob's typological reading of Joseph's dream. In his homily, Jacob argues that Joseph was revered in the dream because he was the type of Christ. The Qur'ān, not agreeing with such a typological reading, responds that Joseph was revered in the

50 Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 497. Translation mine.

dream not because he was the type of Christ but because he would become the prophet of God.

The Second Qur'anic Addition: Joseph's Religious Proclamation in Prison

A remarkable Qur'anic addition to the biblical story is found in a later episode of the Joseph story: when Joseph is imprisoned in Egypt alongside two other men. Both the biblical story and the Qur'anic story recount that the two men, who were the Pharaoh's servants, had troublesome dreams which they told to Joseph so that he would interpret them. In the biblical story, after hearing their dreams, Joseph interprets them immediately (Gen 40:9–19), but in the Qur'anic story, before interpreting their dreams, Joseph voices his religious proclamation:

I reject the faith of those who disbelieve in God and deny the life to come, and I follow the faith of my forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because of God's grace to us and to all mankind, we would never worship anything beside God, but most people are ungrateful. Fellow prisoners, would many diverse gods be better than God the One, the All Powerful? [No indeed!] All those you worship instead of Him are mere names you and your forefathers have invented, names for which God has sent down no sanction. Authority belongs to God alone, and He orders you to worship none but Him: this is the true faith, though most people do not realize it. (Sura Yusuf 37–40)

Interestingly, Joseph's religious proclamation in prison, which is an addition to the biblical story, seems to participate in a similar narrative development in Jacob's homilies. In his fifth homily on Joseph, Jacob says that, by means of being the type of Christ, Joseph proclaimed the Gospel in prison:

The wronged one, who was innocent, entered prison, / and likewise, the Son, who was free, dwelled in Sheol. / Our Lord poured mercy and grace on Joseph in prison, / for our Lord's descent to Sheol was depicted in him. / In his virtuous freedom, Joseph entered prison / in order to abundantly care for the prisoners. / With his soul, the only begotten Son entered Sheol, / and in his divine providence, he cared for them in their dwelling place. / ... / The prison became like a grave for Joseph proclaiming / that the firstborn [= Christ] would descend to Sheol to the dead ones. / Joseph is in prison in Egypt, although he had not committed any crime, / and this is, as it were, our Lord, who gives life to all, in Sheol. / ... / Neither did Joseph neglect to do good in prison / nor did our Lord neglect to proclaim the Gospel in Sheol. / Although he was imprisoned, he cared for the prisoners wisely, / for he resembled his Lord who died and gave life to the dead ones.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibid., 529–530. Translation mine.

Through his death, Christ entered Sheol, proclaimed the Gospel and gave life to the dead ones. Christ's salvific descent to Sheol, which is part of the Gospel, was typologically proclaimed by Joseph as he entered prison and cared for the prisoners. Furthermore, in his sixth homily on Joseph, Jacob turns the prison, in which Joseph interprets the dreams of the two prisoners, into Golgotha, at which Christ judges the two thieves. Thus, Jacob strengthens the notion that Joseph, by means of being the type of Christ, proclaimed the Gospel in prison:

In prison, Joseph was entirely immersed in the image of the Son / as he was in the midst of the two thieves at Golgotha. / Joseph separated the king's servants apart, / judging one to life and the other to death. / He made one enter the kingdom and the Pharaoh's residence, / and delivered the other to become food for birds. / ... / Our Savior was in the midst of the two thieves at Golgotha, / condemning one and justifying the other, just like Joseph had done. / He made one enter the kingdom because of his faith, / and threw the other into Gehenna because of his offence. / ... / Joseph proclaimed these things, as in a mystery, / by making a chasm between the right side and the life side. / ... / Through Joseph's mouth, death and life came forth, / for by means of interpretation, he had the power to give life and death. / Similarly, by our Lord's word, the kingdom of heaven came forth, / for he has the power to give life to anyone who seeks him.⁵²

As we can see, the qur'ānic story agrees with Jacob that Joseph proclaimed a religious message in prison, but at the same time, it disagrees with him that the religious message of Joseph was typologically linked with Christ. In this, we perceive that the Qur'ān participates in Jacob's reading of Joseph's religious proclamation in prison but reacts to his typological construal of it. To be sure, my explanation of Joseph's religious proclamation in prison does not discard the quite obvious observation that, by means of Joseph's words, the Qur'ān was addressing the polytheists in Mecca and its surroundings, but my explanation does suggest that Joseph's religious proclamation was equally efficient to address the Christians in Mecca and its surroundings who were aware of the Joseph-Christ typology in the Syriac tradition.

The Concept of Qur'ān

On the basis of a structural analysis of the Meccan chapters of the Qur'ān, Angelika Neuwirth has demonstrated that the middle and late Meccan chapters betray a liturgical development of the qur'ānic community in Mecca towards a liturgical structure that is reminiscent of the liturgy of the word of

52 Ibid., 535. Translation mine. A similar, though less developed, typological connection between Joseph in prison and Christ at Golgotha is found in Narsai (Mingana, *Narsai*, 279).

the Christian Church. Structurally, the liturgy of the word consists of three parts: an appellatory beginning part, a narrative middle part, and an appellatory closing part. The narrative middle part includes the event of scriptural reading and homiletic commentary, and this middle part is introduced and concluded by other liturgical events, such as prayer, litany, and credo formula.⁵³ Interestingly, the three-part structure of the liturgy of the word is apparent in Sura Yusuf, which opens with a beginning part (Q 12:1–3), continues with a narrative middle part (Q 12:4–101), and ends with a closing part (Q 12:102–111). With this in mind, the Arabic word *qurʿān*, which appears twice in the opening of Sura Yusuf as a self-designation of the qurʿānic Joseph story, takes on a new significance. Many scholars have pointed out that the Arabic *qurʿān* comes from the Syriac *qeryānā*, meaning liturgical reading that takes place in the narrative middle part of the three-part liturgical structure,⁵⁴ but none has, to the best of my knowledge, recognized that *qeryānā* appears in the opening of Jacob's homilies on Joseph, which confirms that the Joseph story in Sura Yusuf parallels, on a conceptual level, Jacob's homilies on the Joseph story. Compare the opening of Sura Yusuf with that of Jacob's ninth homily on Joseph:

Sura Yusuf 12:1–3

Alif lam ra. Those are the signs of the clear scripture. We have sent it down as an Arabic *qurʿānan* so that you [2nd p plur] might understand. We tell you [2nd p sing] the best of stories in that we have revealed to you [2nd p sing] this *qurʿāna*, and before it, you [2nd p sing] were among the uninformed.⁵⁵

Jacob's ninth homily on Joseph

Joseph the virtuous, who triumphed in Egypt / has given me much to say about him in this homily. / He opened his *qeryānā* and placed it before me as an entrance into its mystical findings, / and behold, he has put me in labour so that I might disclose the mysteries hidden in it. / His story is indeed a treasure that he has opened before me abundantly / and behold, he has prompted me to gain from it diligently.⁵⁶

53 Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qurʿān and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 277–312; Angelika Neuwirth, “Structure and the Emergence of Community,” in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʿān* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 140–158.

54 Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, 234; Mingana, “Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kuran,” 88.

55 Translation mine.

56 Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 552. Translation mine.

Moreover, in the opening of Jacob's seventh homily on Joseph, we learn that the mysteries hidden in any *qeryānā* are ultimately from Christ and about Christ:

The mysteries of our Lord lead me to the *qeryānā* in order for me to proceed / through them towards a discourse about the only begotten Son. / The prophetic writings are written about the Son / and there is not even one page in any *qeryānā* that does not carry his image. / He is the cause of every true revelation / and whatever does not come from him is false.⁵⁷

Comparing the opening of Sura Yusuf with that of Jacob's seventh and ninth homilies, we recognize remarkable similarities between them pertaining not only to their nature of being liturgical readings but also to their intention of being divine interpretations of the Joseph story. The opening of Sura Yusuf and that of Jacob's homilies inform their addressees that what they are about to hear, that is, the interpreted Joseph story, contains mysteries or signs, originates from a divine source and reveals unknown or hidden things. Yet, there is at least one important difference between the opening of Sura Yusuf and that of Jacob's homilies. While Jacob's homilies, divinely inspired by the mysteries of Christ, are read out so as to disclose the Joseph-Christ typology, Sura Yusuf is revealed by God to Muhammad so as to unfold a reading of the Joseph story that, inter alia, seems to disclaim the Joseph-Christ typology.

The Concept of āya

Note that the opening of Sura Yusuf informs its addressees that the first three letters of the chapter (alif lam ra) are *āyāt* 'signs' of the heavenly scripture that has been sent down to them as an Arabic *qur'ān*. In Q 12:7, the Joseph story itself is said to contain *āyāt*. The concept of *āyāt* in the Qur'ān, which basically has to do with the ways in which God reveals his existence, omnipotence and message to humanity, has been studied by several scholars.⁵⁸ It is commonly held among them that the Arabic word *āya* (singular of *āyāt*), which appears

57 Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 542. Translation mine.

58 See, for example, Binyamin Abrahamov, "Signs," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2–14; Ian Netton, "Nature as Signs," in McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 528–535; Neuwirth, *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, 80–103, 264–277; Sidney Griffith, "The 'Sunna of Our Messengers': The Qur'ān's Paradigm for Messengers and Prophets; a Reading of Surat ash-Shu'ara (26)," in Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Sells, eds., *Qur'ānic Studies Today* (London: Routledge, 2016), 207–227; William Graham, "The Qur'ān as a Discourse of Signs," in Alireza Korangy and Daniel Scheffield, eds., *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.'s 70th Birthday* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 263–275; Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 96–103.

almost four hundred times in the Qur'ān, derives from the Syriac word *āthā* (singular of *āthwāthā*). In this, they follow Jeffery who notes that *āya* has no root in Arabic and is a loanword from Syriac.⁵⁹ What is more, some of them point out that the concept of signs in the Qur'ān seems to reflect the concept of signs in the writings of early Syriac authors.⁶⁰ According to the Qur'ān, God reveals his existence, omnipotence and message to humanity by means of his various signs which are found in nature, as textual units of the Qur'ān and in human history. As for the first kind of signs, those in nature, Q 2:163–165 serves as a representative example. As for the second kind of signs, those pertaining to textual units of the Qur'ān, scholars point to qur'ānic passages in which the verb *talā* 'to recite' appears in connection with the word *āyāt*.⁶¹ The third kind of signs has to do with God's involvement in human history through his prophets who were chosen by him in order to proclaim his message and whose stories are told in the Qur'ān as a reminder for all times of God's message. This kind of signs is not only evident in the qur'ānic Joseph story but also reminiscent of the usage of signs in the Joseph story in the Syriac literature. Let us take a closer look at this.

In the qur'ānic Joseph story, in which there are signs (Q 12:7), we find that Joseph, who was chosen by God to be his prophet (Q 12:4–6), proclaimed God's message throughout his prophetic life, and therefore, God's message which Joseph proclaimed is understood as the sign that he carried as God's prophet.⁶² Interestingly, in the Syriac works on Joseph, particularly in the liturgical homilies, the idea that Joseph carried signs throughout his life is very frequent, to say the least. However, there is a crucial difference between the signs carried by Joseph in the qur'ānic story and in the Syriac homilies. In the Qur'ānic story, the signs are related to the qur'ānic message of God, whereas in the Syriac homilies, the signs are typologically linked with Christ. In the preceding

59 Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, 72–73.

60 Neuwirth, *The Qur'ān and Late Antiquity*, 274–275; Griffith, "The Sunna of Our Messengers," 210, 221. For an overview of the concept of signs in the writings of Ephrem and Jacob, see Robert Murray, "The Theory of Symbolism in St Ephrem's Theology," *Parole de l'Orient* 6 (1975): 1–20; Thomas Kollampampil, *Salvation in Christ According to Jacob of Serugh: An Exegetico-theological Study on the Homilies of Jacob of Serugh on the Feasts of Our Lord* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 49–75.

61 Q 2:129, 151, 252; 3:58, 101, 108, 113, 164; 8:2, 31; 10:15; 19:58, 73; 22:72; 23:66, 105; 28:45, 59; 31:7; 34:43; 39:71; 45:6, 8, 25, 31; 46:7; 62:2; 65:11; 68:15; 83:13. This enumeration of references is taken from Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 96, n 56.

62 This does not mean that God's message which the prophets proclaimed is the only sign that they carried. Needless to say, God's message is the most important of his signs, but he provided his prophets with other signs, as well, such as miracles, extraordinary deeds, wisdom, and revealed scripture.

sections, we saw some examples from our Syriac authors of how Joseph carried the signs of Christ, that is, typified Christ. Construing Joseph as the type of Christ, our Syriac authors use several terms, such as *rāzā* 'mystery' or 'symbol', *ṭupsā* 'type', *ṣurtā* 'picture', *ṣalmā* 'image', *dmūtā* 'figure', *yuknā* 'likeness' and *nīšā* 'emblem', all of which are equivalent to *āthā* 'sign', and some of which are used more than others and appear in the same context. For example, in Jacob's sixth homily on Joseph, we read:

The *ṣurtā* of the Son, which Joseph put on, is above any limit, / and he is greater than and not defined by whatever I say. / The living fire is hidden in the story of Joseph, / and as I seek to approach him, its flame blazes against me. / The story of Joseph is ineffable unless it is told in our Lord, / for through him, Joseph seized the land of Egypt, once he had gone down to it. / He brought the *nīšā* of the king in order to place it among the Egyptians /and the *āthā* seized the rebellious land of Egypt. / The Son of God set his witness in his servant Joseph / and sent him to Egypt so that he would depict the *ṣalmā* in it.⁶³

While the signs carried by Joseph in the Syriac homilies point to Christ,⁶⁴ the signs carried by Joseph in the Qur'ānic story point to the religious message of the Qur'ān.

Conclusion

In my case study, I have tried to demonstrate my thesis that the Qur'ān, which is aware of Syriac literary traditions concerning Joseph, reacts to the typological construal of Joseph in the Syriac tradition. In this, we perceive that the Joseph story in the Qur'ān functions, inter alia, as a counter-discourse to the Joseph-Christ typology in the Syriac tradition.

Due to limited space allowed in this paper, I could only present four cases in support of my thesis. In each case, however, we saw that the Qur'ānic Joseph story follows the general storyline of the biblical Joseph story but departs from it either by omitting narrative details in the biblical story (Joseph's robe; Joseph's first dream) or by adding narrative details to the biblical story (Jacob's interpretation of Joseph's second dream; Joseph's religious proclamation in

63 Akhrass and Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, 534. Translation mine.

64 This kind of usage of signs is also found in the homilies of Ps Ephrem (Bedjan, *Histoire complète de Joseph*, 4), Ps Narsai (Bedjan, *Liber Superiorum*, 559–561), and Narsai (Mingana, *Narsai*, 268, 279, 287), who use *rāzā* and *ṭupsā*, but not *āthā*, when they construe Joseph as a type of Christ. Jacob alone uses *āthā*, besides *rāzā* and *ṭupsā*, when he construes Joseph as a type of Christ.

prison). Each one of the four Qur'anic departures could be explained by my thesis that the Joseph story in the Qur'an reacts to the typological construal of Joseph.

Now, the question is, why would the Qur'an take issue with the Joseph-Christ typology? One answer could be that the Qur'an, which does not seem to affirm high christology, reacts to the christocentric reading of the Joseph story because Syriac authors use the Joseph story to proclaim high christology, and so, by reacting to the Joseph-Christ typology, the Qur'an disclaims high christology. However, there is at least one main problem with this answer. If we read the Qur'anic passages about Christ in their historical context, taking into account political factors (such as the imperial policy of the byzantine empire) and religious factors (such as Christian claims of salvific exclusivity), and without uncritically accepting the later Islamic tradition (which interprets the Qur'an as rejecting high christology), then a new understanding of the Qur'anic passages on Christ may appear.⁶⁵ Hence, if the proclaimer of the Qur'an was addressing the imperial policy of the byzantine empire, which evidently was misusing high christology to justify its imperial war and persecution on both Christians and non-Christians, then could it be that the Qur'anic passages about Christ are responding to the misuse of high christology by the byzantine empire and not per se to high christology?⁶⁶ Or, perhaps, the Qur'an's reaction to the christocentric reading of the Joseph story has to do with Christian claims of salvific exclusivity which is a soteriological position that many early Christian authors held. These authors did not only believe that Christ is the savior of the world, which was and still is the view of the Church, but they were unreservedly convinced that no one outside the Church, or their specific ecclesiological body, had any possibility to be saved by Christ. This soteriological position could be the underlying reason as to why the Qur'an reacts to the christocentric reading of the Joseph story, for in this view, by reacting to the Joseph-Christ typology, the Qur'an disclaims the view of salvific exclusivity which could be implied in the typological construal of Joseph or any other Old Testament figure.⁶⁷ To sum up, there seems to be more than one possible answer as to why the Qur'an take issue with the Joseph-Christ typology. I have offered three possible answers. Based on the literary evidence, it seems to me

65 As a first step in this direction, see Khorchide and von Stosch, *The Other Prophet*, 157–201.

66 The anti-imperial and anti-byzantine character of the Qur'anic proclamation is highlighted at length in Zishan Ghaffar, *Der Koran in seinem religions- und weltgeschichtlichen Kontext. Eschatologie und Apokalyptik in den mittelmekkanischen Suren* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2020).

67 See Vahid Mahdavi Mehr, "Can there be an Islamic comparative theology?" in Pim Valkenberg, ed., *Handbook for Comparative Theology* (forthcoming).

that the Qur'ān most likely reacts to the typological construal of Joseph in the Syriac tradition, but I am not sure why the Qur'ān would do so. Before drawing conclusions in that regard, I suggest that we have to await further research on Christ in the Qur'ān that takes into account political and religious factors of the seventh century.

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