EPHREM THE SYRIAN

SELECT POEMS

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EASTERN CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Volume 2

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Ephrem the Syrian

Select Poems

Vocalized Syriac text with
English translation, introduction, and notes by

Sebastian P. Brock & George A. Kiraz

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Abbreviations

Cycles of Ephrem's *Madrashe*

Azym.	*de Azymis (On Unleavened Bread)*
Cruc.	*de Crucifixione (On the Crucifixion)*
Eccl.	*de Ecclesia (On the Church)*
Fid.	*de Fide (On Faith)*
Ieiun.	*de Ieiunio (On the Fast)*
Jul.	*contra Julianum (Against Julian)*
Nat.	*de Nativitate (On the Nativity)*
Nis.	*Carmina Nisibena (Nisibene* Madrashe*)*
Par.	*de Paradiso (On Paradise)*
Res.	*de Resurrectione (On the Resurrection)*
Virg.	*de Virginitate (On Virginity)*

Additional Abbreviations

ANP	Andrew N. Palmer (see p. ix)
Aphrahat, *Dem.*	J. Parisot, ed. and trans., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes,* 2 vols., Patrologia syriaca 1–2 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894–1907)
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Leuven)
Ḥudra	T. Darmo, ed., *Ḥudra,* 3 vols. (Trichur: Mar Narsai Press, 1960–62)
Mosul Fenqitho	C. J. David, ed., *Breviarium iuxta Ritum Ecclesiae Antiochenae Syrorum,* 7 vols. (Mosul: Dominican Press, 1886–96)
Pampakuda Fenqitho	A. Konat, ed., *Fenqitho d-Ḥudro shattonoyo,* 3 vols. (Pampakuda: Mar Julius Press, 1962–63)

General Introduction

Ephrem justifiably has the reputation of being a wonderful poet and at the same time a profound theologian. Although there are now a number of English (and other) translations of his works available for the general reader, there is no easy access for anyone who wants to go on to read him in the original Syriac. The excellent standard edition of his poetry, by Edmund Beck, remains daunting to all but the more expert Syriacist, seeing that the text is unvocalized and in the *estrangela* script. We have long felt the need for a selection of Ephrem's poems in vocalized *serto* script[1] that would serve to provide a stepping-stone, as it were, towards using Beck's edition. If this selection of poems encourages people to explore further Ephrem's poetry in its original language, then it will amply have served its purpose. In no way does this edition seek to advance scholarship on Ephrem.

The poems are deliberately arranged according to the outline of Ephrem's concept of salvation history, commencing with Paradise and continuing through the course of the incarnate life of Christ to the sacramental life of the Church.

We take the opportunity to thank Kristian Heal for much assistance, and in particular for seeing to the entering of our vocalized Syriac texts on computer. We are also grateful to our two readers, Dr. Andrew Palmer and Dr. David Taylor, for their valuable comments and corrections. Andrew Palmer very kindly provided us with numerous good observations on metrical matters, as well as other suggestions, many of which we have with gratitude adopted (in the text and notes these are indicated by the initials ANP).

1. For transcriptions, however, we have retained the older East Syriac vowels.

Life and Writings

Little for certain is known of Ephrem's life. He must have been born in the early years of the fourth century, in or near Nisibis, on the eastern edge of the Roman Empire. On the basis of the internal evidence of his own writings, it is likely he was born to Christian parents (in contrast to the later Life, which presents his father as a pagan priest). It was in Nisibis that he spent most of his life, as a deacon serving under a succession of bishops—Jacob, Babu, Vologeses (Walgash), and Abraham. Both on internal evidence and on the authority of Jacob of Serugh's panegyric on him,[2] he wrote many of his poems to be sung by women's choirs. In 363, as part of the peace treaty with the Persians, Nisibis was handed over to the Sassanian Empire and the Christian population had to leave. Ephrem ended up for the last ten years of his life in Edessa (modern Urfa, in southeast Turkey), where he found himself much more involved in the theological controversies of the time. He evidently acquired a surprisingly good knowledge of Greek philosophical concepts,[3] even though he expresses these in an essentially un-Greek way. He died in 373, very probably on June 9 of that year.

The scarcity of reliable biographical information about Ephrem served as an invitation to later generations to remedy this in an imaginative way. Thus, for example, by the mid-sixth century, when the influential Syriac Life of Ephrem was probably composed, he had anachronistically been transformed into a monk who paid visits to famous contemporaries in Egypt (Bishoi) and Cappadocia (Basil).[4]

Ephrem's extensive works fall into four main categories: in verse there is both stanzaic poetry (the *madrashe,* the sole category represented here) and the narrative couplets *(memre)*; and in prose there is both ordinary prose and artistic prose.[5] Famous names are liable to attract works by other people, and the corpus of writings under Ephrem's name includes many pieces that have been falsely attributed to him.[6]

2. Edited by J. Amar (1995).

3. This has been well brought out recently in Possekel 1999.

4. For the development of the biographical tradition, see Griffith 1989–90, Amar 1992, and Brock 1999c (appendix).

5. A list of editions will be found in Appendix 1.

6. Of the texts in CSCO listed in Appendix 1, the following partly or wholly contain poems which cannot be genuine: *de Epiphania, Soghyatha, Sermones I–IV, de Abraham Qidunaya, de Juliano Saba,* and *Nachträge.* The problem is even more acute in the very large corpus of works attributed to Ephrem in Greek.

As far as the *madrashe* in the present selection are concerned, however, one can be reasonably assured that they are all genuine.

Although Ephrem never offers a systematic presentation of his theology, it is clear that his writings are based on a clearly thought-out theological worldview, and different presentations of this can be found in de Halleux 1973 and 1983, Murray 1975–76 and 2004, Bou Mansour 1988, Brock 1992, and Griffith 1998. General information may be found in Ortiz de Urbina 1965, Beck 1960a and 1962a, Leloir 1963a, and Murray 1982 (for Ephrem Graecus, see Hemmerdinger-Iliadou 1960, Geerard 1974–87, 2:366–468, and Geerard and Noret 1998, 227–50).

Transmission

The survival of any of Ephrem's poems in a complete state is due to the preservation of fifth- and sixth-century manuscripts from the Syrian Monastery in the Nitrian desert, protected by the dry climate of Egypt. It is likely that the person who was originally responsible for collecting these was the monastery's abbot, Moses of Nisibis, in the early tenth century. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these manuscripts were acquired by the Vatican Library and the British Museum (the latter are now in the British Library). The importance of these early manuscripts lies in the fact that they alone preserve the *madrashe* in their full form, seeing that later manuscripts invariably abbreviate them, or even run together stanzas from different *madrashe.*[7]

In these fifth- and sixth-century manuscripts the *madrashe* are grouped into collections, or cycles, entitled "volumes" *(penqyata),* and it is by the titles of these cycles that the *madrashe* are regularly referred to. Within several of the cycles there are smaller groups, such as "On Oil and the Olive" in *de Virginitate,* and "On the Pearl" in *de Fide.* Whether the gathering of the poems into larger cycles goes back wholly, or in part, to Ephrem himself is uncertain. There is, however, definite evidence that the grouping into "volumes" was already in existence in the late fifth century, since references to several of them feature in an anthology of texts produced by Philoxenus of Mabbug in his *Discourses*

7. On this later transmission see Gribomont 1973, Brock 1997, and Ibrahim and Kiraz 1999. This situation is also reflected in the modern printed liturgical editions (the West Syriac Mosul Fenqitho and Pampakuda Fenqitho, and the East Syriac Ḥudra), as can be seen from the excerpts in these from Texts 8, 11, 12, 13, and 15 (*Res.* 1, *Azym.* 3, *Cruc.* 2, *Nis.* 41, and *Res.* 2).

against Habbib, which can be dated to ca. 482–84. Much more detailed information about the various "volumes" is to be found in an elaborate index to the *qale,* or melodies (see below), used for Ephrem's *madrashe,* preserved in Sinai Syr. 10. From this index the following list of nine volumes and their contents can be extrapolated:[8]

I. Of the Nativity (59 *madrashe*)
II. Of the Fast (67)
III. Of Nisibis (77)
IV. Of the King's Bride *(kallat malka),* against the Jews (66)
V. Of the Church (52)
VI. Of the Church (52)
VII. Of Faith (87)
VIII. Against Erroneous Doctrines and On Paradise (56 and 15)
IX. Of the Confessors and Departed

Of these, III, V, VII, and VIII correspond exactly with the surviving cycles in the early manuscripts; VI will be the extant *de Virginitate.* I and II are both much larger than the surviving cycles under those names (even if *de Azymis, de Crucifixione,* and *de Resurrectione* are included, as seems likely, in II). IV is completely unknown, though one incipit can be identified as a *madrasha* edited by Lamy. IX is also almost entirely lost, though it will include those *madrashe* on Abraham of Qidun and Julian Saba which are genuinely by Ephrem (some of those in the surviving collection cannot be by him). What emerges most clearly from this evidence is that a considerable number of Ephrem's *madrashe* have been lost.[9]

Dating the cycles is problematic. The small collection *de Paradiso* is usually thought to belong to the earlier part of his life in Nisibis, before 363, and many of the *madrashe* in the cycle on Nisibis (including Text 19 [*Nis.* 1]) will also date to this period, since they are clearly written in Nisibis; others, however, in the same cycle (notably 26–34) must have been written at Edessa. It seems very likely that the cycles *de Fide* and *contra Haereses* were also written during the last ten years of his life in Edessa.

8. On this subject see de Halleux 1972 and 1974, and Brock 1997.

9. It is of course possible that some stanzas from these lost *madrashe* are in fact preserved in the medieval liturgical collections.

Meters

The basic metrical principle of Syriac poetry lies in the syllable, rather than length or stress. There are two basic forms of poetry, the stanzaic and the couplet, and Ephrem makes use of both, the former being entitled *madrashe* (sometimes translated "teaching poems") and the latter *memre*. Ephrem employs the *memra* for narrative poetry, and the meter he uses (and which came to be known by his name) consists of couplets, each of 7+7 syllables. A number of other meters for *memre* are found in later writers, a particularly favored one consisting of 12+12 (or rather, 4+4+4 4+4+4) syllables, associated with the name of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521).

All the poems in the present collection, however, are stanzaic *madrashe*. In the *madrasha* every stanza in a poem follows the same metrical pattern, where regular word breaks, or caesuras, provide the demarcation between syllabic units. Thus in a simple meter such as that used in Text 11 (*Azym.* 3), the syllabic pattern for each stanza is four syllabic units, here set out in two lines each with two units, the first of five syllables and the second of four syllables (the whole stanza thus being designated as 5+4 5+4). Thus, for example, in stanza 3:

netqol wa-npaḥḥem neṣḥanayhon
d-haw ʾemar (ʾ)raza w-ʾemar qushta

In modern editions the *madrashe* are normally set out in lines, usually with two syllabic units to a line (depending on the length of the syllabic unit). The syllabic units mostly consist of 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 syllables, though occasionally 2- or 8- (and even, rarely, 9- or 10-) syllable units are found. Especially in the case of the more complex meters, the way in which the syllabic units are separated out into lines in modern editions depends on the editor's decision; in the present collection we have followed Beck's line divisions and layout, though we have altered it tacitly in a few cases where his line divisions are manifestly wrong (examples are in Text 17 [*Fid.* 10], stanzas 20 and 22, and Text 18 [*Fid.* 14], stanzas 8 and 9). A notable instance of how the same editor can set out the same meter in two different ways is provided by Texts 16 and 19 (*Virg.* 7 and *Nis.* 1).

Ephrem employs some forty-five different stanza patterns in his *madrashe,* ranging from simple to highly complex syllabic patterns. In contrast with the practice of modern editions, Syriac manuscripts do

not set out poetry in lines, but present it written continuously, with points denoting the metrical breaks.[10] With *madrashe,* the demarcation between stanzas is almost always clearly marked (e.g., by points in red), but the internal syllabic structure of a stanza, consisting of various syllabic units, may well be inadequately, or ambiguously, indicated, seeing that points may be omitted or misplaced. Furthermore, since points designate both metrical and sense breaks (which may not always coincide), there is yet further scope for confusion. However, it is only with the long and complicated meters that serious problems arise; an example of this can be found in Text 9 (*Ieiun.* 3), where it remains unclear exactly how the syllabic structure of the meter should be analyzed (and thus, how it should best be set out in lines).

An added complication is that there is a certain degree of metrical license, in that the vocalic *shwa* (historically representing a lost full vowel) can be treated as a full vowel for metrical purposes (e.g., *nṣur* in stanza 2 of Text 12 [*Cruc.* 2] is treated metrically as if it were *neṣur*). It is also likely that in the case of a cluster of three consonants an epenthetic vowel may be inserted in certain conditions (see Nöldeke 1904, §52B). Conversely a full vowel in certain circumstances is discounted from a metrical point of view—this is especially frequent with verbs whose first radical is *alaph* (thus in Text 17 [*Fid.* 10], stanza 12, *ʾekalton* is treated metrically as *ʾkalton*). In the introductions to the individual poems attention is drawn to some (but by no means all) of these cases of metrical license. It should be noted, however, that for the present edition we have normally provided the standard vocalization, even when this goes against the meter. It should also be kept in mind that the rules of Syriac versification have as yet been very little studied; furthermore, even though the text of Ephrem comes down to us in sixth-century manuscripts, it may well already have suffered from corruption in places.

Madrashe were sung (and still are in liturgical use), and in the manuscripts the melody, known as the *qala,* is regularly given: this consists of the opening words of a particular *madrasha* using the meter in question (the same practice is often used for western hymn tunes). In some, but not all, cases the *madrasha* that provides the *qala* title can be identified as one of Ephrem's own poems. Sometimes the same meter (and indeed

10. Palmer 1995, 161–76, argues (conjecturally) that the cycle *On Faith* in its original form was set out by lines.

the same poem) may have more than one *qala* indicated: whether these are alternative titles for the same tune or represent different tunes that fit the same meter is not entirely clear. In practice, the *qala* title also serves as a way of indicating the meter.[11] An index of the *qale* employed in the present selection is given in Appendix 2.

Alphabetic acrostics already occur in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Pss 111–12, 119; Lam 3–4). Ephrem employs a variety of different forms of acrostic (Palmer 2002, 278), several of which are represented in the present collection. Alphabetic acrostics of different kinds feature in the following poems:

Text 6 (*Eccl.* 37): This has the first six letters of the Syriac alphabet (*alaph* to *waw*); stanza 6, however, begins with *beth* (though British Library Add. 14574 tries to remedy the situation by prefacing it with *waw*—but against the meter). ANP nicely suggests that, since stanza 6 belongs closely with stanza 5 (and so is not likely to be an interpolation), the break in the pattern is deliberate and symbolizes "the failure of humanity, created in the sixth day, to live up to the perfection symbolized by the number six."

Text 18 (*Fid.* 14): The stanzas run from *zayin* to *nun,* but then *alaph* and *waw* follow.

Text 19 (*Nis.* 1): This provides alternate letters of the alphabet, *alaph, gamal, he,* etc.

In three other poems in the collection there are acrostics which provide Ephrem's own name *(ʾPRYM):*

Text 3 (*Fid.* 49): Here we have only *ʾPPRR,* but the rest of the name is to be found in *Fid.* 50 *(YMMMMMMM).*

Text 8 (*Res.* 1): The first five stanzas provide *ʾPRYM,* and *M* continues on from stanza 6 to the end, apart from a break in the sequence in stanzas 18 and 19, which begin with *lamadh* and *sadhe.*

Text 10 (*Ieiun.* 6): Here the first and last letters of his name are doubled: *ʾʾPRYMM.*

Irregularities in acrostic poems, such as some of those found in the poems mentioned above, may sometimes serve as indicators of later interpolations, although in other cases there may well be a specific reason lying behind the irregularity (as in Text 6 [*Eccl.* 37]). On this topic see Palmer 1995 and (especially) Palmer 2002; since these are

11. Beck provides basic information in the introductions to his text editions about the different meters employed.

problems that require detailed discussion, they are not dealt with further in the present collection.

The Present Edition and Translations

The texts are based on E. Beck's critical editions in CSCO, though in a few places we have preferred readings to be found in his apparatus. Beck's layout of the poems in lines has also been followed, though with a few modifications (see above). The translations are set out in lines corresponding to those of the Syriac texts. Although the translations have generally aimed to keep fairly closely to the originals, they avoid being overly literal. Wherever it has been thought helpful for the sake of the general sense, a few expansions have been made or names added (in brackets). The convention of using capital letters for personal pronouns referring to God (i.e., You, He, etc.) has been adopted since this often helps clarify the sense. Notes to the translation are simply meant to clarify what might otherwise have been obscure, and by no means are they intended to represent a commentary. For the sake of brevity, references in the notes (and elsewhere) to modern studies are by means of author's name and date of publication; the full bibliographic references will be found in the bibliography.

EPHREM THE SYRIAN

SELECT POEMS

◆

TEXT 1

On Reading the Paradise Narrative
(*Par.* 5)

In his cycle of fifteen poems on Paradise, Ephrem creatively explores various aspects of the narrative of Gen 2–3. Though he treats the topic in a manner that is very different from his exposition in the *Commentary on Genesis,* a reading of the latter provides some helpful insights into his much more poetic treatment of the biblical text in the poems (a complete English translation of the cycle, along with the relevant sections of the *Commentary,* is to be found in Brock 1990b).

Ephrem opens the present poem by comparing the biblical text with the miraculous rock that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 17:7): if treated rightly it comes alive, and from it flow streams of vivifying water (1 Cor 10:4). Ephrem then describes his own experience of being transported to Paradise, with the verses leaping out of the text to embrace him as he reads the narrative concerning Paradise in Genesis. Once transported in spirit to Paradise, Ephrem wonders whether Paradise is really capacious enough to contain all the righteous (stanza 7), but learns the answer from analogies in the New Testament (Mark 5:9; stanza 8) and in the natural world and the human heart (stanzas 9–10). Once back in this world after having experienced something of the beauty of Paradise, Ephrem reflects on the paradox that people lament departing from this world when in fact death should really be seen as a process of being born out of this world into "the Garden of splendors."

Meter

All fifteen of the *madrashe* in the cycle *On Paradise* are in the same meter, for which the *qala* is given as *dina d-sharbata,* which is also found

for *Eccl.* 21 and 28. In other cycles where Ephrem uses this meter, different *qale* are given: (1) *ʾestmek(w) ʿal qushta* (=opening of a single *madrasha* printed by Beck at the end of his edition of *de Paradiso*): thus *Jul.* 1–4; (2) *bayyaʾ(w) b-mulkane* (=opening of *Par.* 7): thus *Fid.* 31, 39–48 and *Nat.* 3; (3) *pardaisa* (=title of the cycle *de Paradiso*): thus appendix to *Ieiun.* and *Nat.* 3 (according to two manuscripts). In later *madrashe* collections, *pardaisa* is the normal *qala* given.

The metrical pattern is as follows: 5+5 5+5 5+5 5+2 5+5 5+5. It will be observed that there are a few irregularities, with six syllables instead of five (e.g., stanza 3, line 2; stanza 4, line 1). It should be noted that the meter indicates that *alaph* preserves its consonantal character in *wa-pʾe* (stanza 5) and *ba-mʾa* (stanza 8). In stanza 5, *ʿden* is treated as a dissyllable.

Text

The cycle *On Paradise* is preserved in three sixth-century manuscripts: British Library Add. 14571 (of 519 CE; Beck's D), Vatican Syr. 111 (of 522 CE; Beck's B), and Vatican Syr. 112 (of 551 CE; Beck's G). For this poem Beck also uses one later manuscript, British Library Add. 17141 (of eighth or ninth century; Beck's E), but like almost all manuscripts later than the sixth century, it preserves only select stanzas (1–2, 6–7, 12, 14–15).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܡܫܠ ܒܚܬܘܠܐ

1. ܚܟܡܬܐ ܒܢܘܬܐ ܫܪܐ ܒܐܣܬܘܢܐ
ܟܬܒܐ ܒܟܠ ܟܠܐ ܒܟܠܐ ܟܝܢ ܐܢܐ
ܘܟܐ ܡܢ ܐܣܬܘܬܐ ܘܥܡܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܘܐ
ܫܟܚ ܟܬܒ ܥܡܩܐ ܡܥܒܪܐ
ܘܐ ܟܠ ܒܗ ܥܡܐ ܡܬܩܡܐ ܒܟܬܒ ܫܡܗ
ܐܢ ܫܟܚܐ ܐܢܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܡܢ ܠܐ ܫܡܥ

ܟܬܒܐ : ܒܟܬܒ ܟܬܒ ܒܗܘܐ ܘܢܐܘܐ ܟܬܒܐ

2. ܟܬܒܐ ܒܟܬܒܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܒܐܟ ܒܬܒܐ
ܘܫܒܬ ܟܢܒܐ ܒܐ ܐܘ ܫܒܢ
ܒܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܒܐܟܐ ܟܬܒܐ
ܒܬܒܐ ܘܫܒܒܐ ܟܠ ܐܢ
ܒܬܫܐ ܟܠ ܐܬܐ ܐܬܐ ܟܠ ܬܟܐ
ܒܟܬܒ ܟܬܒܢ ܘܒܟܟ ܒܢܐ

1. I considered the Word of the Creator, and likened it
to the rock that marched with the people of Israel in the wilderness; Exod 17:6; 1 Cor 10:4
it was not from the reservoir of water contained within it
that it poured forth for them glorious streams:
there was no water in the [rock], yet oceans sprang forth from it,
just as the Word which fashioned created things[1] out of nothing.

Refrain: Blessed is that person accounted worthy
to inherit Your Paradise.

2. In his book Moses described the creation of the natural world,
so that both Nature and Scripture[2]
might bear witness to the Creator: John 8:17
Nature, through [man's] use of it, Scripture, through his reading of it.
These are the witnesses which reach everywhere;
they are to be found at all times, present at every hour,
confuting the unbeliever who defames the Creator.

---

1. created things (*ʿbade*): One of the manuscripts instead reads *ʿebraye*, in which case the previous verb is best taken as *debrat* rather than *da-brat*, i.e., "led the Hebrews"; the text and translation given here, however, are preferable (and alone fit the meter).

2. Nature and Scripture: Compare *Haer.* 28.11:

> Once Nature and Scripture had cleansed the land
> they sowed in it new commandments
> —in the land of the heart, so that it might bear fruit,
> praise for the Lord of Nature,
> glory for the Lord of Scripture.

3. ܚܙܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܢܐ ܒܪܡ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܢܫܐ
ܘܐܦܠܐ ܕܐܦ ܒܥܠ ܒܝܬܐ ܕܢܛܪ ܘܢܛܘܪ
ܕܡܬܒܥܐ ܟܠ ܫܥܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܢܫ ܐܢܐ
ܕܒ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܟܐ ܫܦܪ ܗܘ ܕܐܡܪ
ܐܢܬ ܘܩܛܠܢܝ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ
ܥܠ ܕܟܬ ܗܘ ܕܐܢܐ ܕܟܬ ܘܩܛܠܢܝ

4. ܚܫܟܐ ܐܡ ܙܝܢܐ ܟܠ ܐܢܫܐ
ܕܐ ܗܘ ܠܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܢܬ ܘܩܛܠܢܝ
ܘܟܠ ܕܐܢܫܐ ܐܚܕ ܕܢܦܠ
ܐܦܠ ܐܢ ܐܢܫܐ ܐܬܟܠ
ܕܟܠ ܥܠ ܢܦܠ ܘܒ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ
ܢܠ ܐܦ ܐܢܫ ܕܟܠ ܕܐܢܫܐ

5. ܙܝܢܐ ܐܢ ܐܢܬ ܙܠ ܘܩܛܠܢܝ
ܐܡܫ ܕܐ ܐܢܐ ܐܚܕ ܐܢܬ ܟܐ
ܟܠ ܕܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܫ ܕܐ ܐܢ ܟܐ
ܐܢܫ ܘܐܦ ܐܢ ܠܐ ܐܡܪ
ܐܢ ܒ ܙܠ ܐܦ ܒ ܐܦ ܐܢ ܐܠ
ܐܡܪ ܢܒ ܘ ܐܦ ܒ ܐܦ ܐܢ

3. I read the opening of this book and was filled with joy,
for its verses and lines spread out their arms [to welcome me];
the first rushed out and kissed me, and led me on to its companion;
and when I reached that verse wherein is written
the story of Paradise, it lifted me up and transported me
from the bosom of the book to the very bosom of Paradise.

4. The eye and the mind traveled over the lines
as over a bridge, and entered together the story of Paradise.
The eye as it read transported the mind;
in return the mind, too, gave the eye rest
from its reading, for when the book had been read
the eye had rest, but the mind was engaged.

5. Both the bridge and the gate of Paradise
did I find in that book. I crossed over and entered;
my eye indeed remained outside but my mind entered within.
I began to wander amid things not described.
This is the serene height, clear, lofty and fair:
Scripture named it Eden, the summit of all blessings. Gen 2:8

6. ܐܡܝ ܣܐܡ ܗܘܐ ܠܐ ܬܚܝܠܐ ܘܐܬܬܩܠ
ܟܬܫ ܚܛܩܫܬܐ ܗܘܫ ܕܣܫܬܐ
ܡܟܬܒ ܚܐܝܚܬܐ ܡܩܕܟ ܚܘܬܚܐ
ܐܡ ܟܡܟܗ ܘܐܘ ܗܘܟ ܡܠܟܐ
ܐܡ ܘܡܚܐ ܕܙܚܐ ܐܐܡ ܘܡܥܙܐ ܚܡܘܗ
ܐܡ ܘܗܚܐ ܟܗܘ ܐܐܡ ܘܪܫܐ ܚܡܘܫ

7. ܚܠܟܐ ܐܐ ܗܙܐ ܘܐ ܗܘ ܘܡܙܡܐ
ܗܗܐ ܕܐܬܬܩܠ ܩܐܗ ܘܐ ܬܡ
ܚܠܟܐ ܘܐ ܕܡܐ ܐܟܡ ܕܙܩܡ
ܣܐ ܟܡ ܕܗ ܟܐ ܘܐ ܗܘ
ܟܡܗ ܘܟ ܚܐ ܐܐ ܘܐ ܗܘ ܒܬܟ
ܘܣܐ ܗܘ ܘܐ ܐܗ ܐ ܘܡܥ ܡܩ ܐܐ ܡܗ

8. ܗܙ ܐܡ ܗܐ ܣܐ ܩܐ ܣܒ ܟܡܐ
ܣ ܟܐ ܐ ܐܐ ܡܩ ܐܐ ܐܐ ܡܗ
ܟܙ ܘܐܬܬܩ ܐ ܡ ܘܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ
ܘܡܐ ܗ ܘܙܐ ܐ ܡ ܐ ܐ
ܘ ܐ ܐ ܡ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ
ܘ ܐ ܐ ܗ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ

6. There too did I see the bowers of the righteous

dripping with unguents and fragrant with scents,

garlanded with fruits, crowned with blossoms.

In accord with a person's deeds, such was his bower:

thus one was lowly in its adornments,
while another was resplendent in its beauty;

one was but dim in its coloring, while another dazzled in its glory.

7. I enquired into this too, whether Paradise

was sufficient [in size] for all the righteous to live there.

I asked about what is not written [in Scripture],
but my instruction came from what is written there:

"Consider that man in whom there dwelt

a legion of all kinds of demons; Mark 5:9;
they were there although not apparent, Luke 8:30

for their army is of a stuff finer and more subtle than the soul itself.

8. "That whole army dwelt in a single body.

A hundred times more refined and subtle

are the bodies of the righteous
when they are risen, at the Resurrection:

they resemble the mind which is able,

if it so wills, to stretch out and expand,
or, should it wish, to contract and shrink:

if it shrinks, it is in some place, if it expands, it is in every place.

9. ܚܒܪ ܠܐ ܐܣܬܡܠ ܐܢܫ ܒܬܐ
ܡܟܠܐ ܐܟܣܐ ܡܢ ܚܒ ܚܠ
ܡܙܚ ܘܣܬ ܡܢ ܚܒ ܚܕ
ܡܚ ܡܢ ܚܒܙܐ ܘܣ ܒ ܚܐ
ܒܠܥܙܐ ܚܐ ܡܚ ܐ ܥܙܗ
ܚ ܡܠ ܒ ܘܣܬ ܘܣ ܒ ܚܥܘܐ

10. ܡܢ ܠܐ ܣܥܚ ܐܠ ܗ ܡܠ ܒ
ܚܟ ܒܙܥ ܒ ܚܐ ܚ ܘܣ ܒ ܟ
ܠ ܟܙ ܐ ܡܠ ܠܐ ܒܐܙ
ܚ ܟ ܥܙܗ ܚܥ
ܒ ܡ ܚ ܣܥ ܐ ܒ ܡ
ܐ ܠ ܐ ܣܥ ܒ ܥܒܥ ܡܥ

11. ܚܒ ܚ ܗ ܥ ܚ ܐ ܐ
ܐ ܟ ܒ ܥ ܡ ܚ ܐ ܥ
ܐ ܗ ܥ ܚ ܐ ܚ ܐ
ܠ ܟ ܐ ܥ ܐ
ܚ ܟ ܐ ܚ ܐ ܚ
ܚ ܡ ܟ ܐ ܥ ܐ

9. "Listen further and learn
how lamps with thousands of rays can exist in a single house,
how ten thousand scents can exist in a single blossom:
though they exist within a small space, they have ample room
to disport themselves. So it is with Paradise:
though it is full of spiritual beings,
it is amply spacious for their disportment.

10. "Again, thoughts, infinite in number, dwell
in the smallest [organ] of all, the heart,[3] yet they have ample room:
they neither constrict each other, nor are they constricted there.
How much more will Paradise the glorious
suffice for the spiritual beings that are so refined in substance
that even thought cannot touch them!"

11. I gave praise as far as I was able and was on the point of departing
when, from the midst of Paradise,
there came a sudden thunderous sound,
and, like the blare of trumpets in some camp,
voices crying "holy" thrice over. Isa 6:3
Thus I knew that the Divinity received praise in [Paradise]:
I had supposed it was empty,[4]
but I learn otherwise from the thunderous sound.

---

3. heart: In biblical and early Syriac anthropology the heart is the center of the intellectual faculties as well as of the emotions.

4. empty: Since body and soul will not be reunited (and so able to enter Paradise) until the final Resurrection.

12. ܐܳܕ ܚܙܺܝܢ ܟܠܳܗ ܚܡܺܝܬܗ ܐܰܡ ܙܰܚܡܳܐ
ܕܗ ܘܳ ܚܰܕ ܡܳܐ ܐܠܳ ܐܰܡ ܕܗ ܡܳܐ
ܕܗ ܘܳ ܡܙܳ ܚܰܝܠܳ ܐܠܳ ܐܰܡ ܕܗ ܩܳܐ
ܠܳܐ ܕܰܚܘܳ ܚܰܕ ܒܳܐ ܙܰܒܰܢܟܗ
ܐܠܳ ܚܰܝܳܐ ܐܳܦ ܚܰܡܚܳܐ
ܐܠܳ ܚܰܒ ܟܰܚܠܳ ܐܳܦ ܚܰܒ ܙܰܥ

13. ܐܰܡܳܐ ܒܰ ܟܰܙ ܠܳܐ ܫܰܡܗ ܒܰܙܰܒܳ
ܩܰܡ ܡܳܡܰܩ ܘܳ ܚܰܡ ܫܰܩܰܡܠ
ܡܰ ܩܰܡ ܚܰܡܳ ܐܰܙܰܟ ܐܰܡ ܒܰܩܰ
ܡܰܗ ܟ ܩܰܐ ܡܰܥ ܘܰ ܫ
ܟܰܩ ܒܰ ܐܰܡ ܐܰ ܘ ܟܰܫ ܡ
ܫܰܥ ܒܰ ܟ ܡ ܒܰܥ ܡ

14. ܐܰܡܳܐ ܐܰ ܚܐ ܟ ܡ ܚܰܩܰܡ
ܡ ܒܰ ܡܳ ܥ ܒܰܥ ܟ
ܡ ܟ ܫܰܥ ܐ ܒܰܥ ܚ ܐ
ܡ ܐ ܡ ܟ ܟ
ܐ ܘ ܡ ܒܰ ܡ ܡ
ܡ ܐ ܐ ܡ ܫ ܚ ܐ

12. [Paradise] delighted me as much by its peacefulness as by its beauty:
in it there resides a beauty that has no spot;
in it exists a peacefulness that knows no fear.
How blessed is that person accounted worthy to receive it,
if not by right, yet at least by grace;
if not because of labors, yet at least through mercy.

13. I was in wonder as I crossed the borders of Paradise
at how well-being, as though a companion,
turned round and remained behind.
And when I reached the shore of earth, the mother of thorns, Gen 3:18
I encountered all kinds of pain and suffering.
I learned how, compared to Paradise, our abode is but a dungeon;
yet the prisoners within it weep when they leave it!

14. I was amazed at how even infants weep as they leave [the womb]—
weeping because they come out from darkness into light
and from suffocation they issue forth into this world!
Likewise death, too, is for the world
a symbol of birth, and yet people weep because they are born
out of this world, the mother of suffering,
into the Garden of splendors.[5]

---

5. splendors: Lit. "luxuries." Behind this term there evidently lies an awareness of the Septuagint's translation of the Garden of Eden as "the Garden of luxury" *(truphē)*.

15. ܐܘܟܡ ܚܟ ܢܥܡܪ ܡܢܗ ܘܩܢܝܡܗܐ
ܗܝ ܗܝ ܒܟܠ ܕܢܗ ܘܐܚܕ ܚܩܢܝܡܪ
ܐܡܪ ܐܦ ܡܢ ܚ ܚܢܝܢܐ ܘܚܣܝܗ
ܟܕ ܗܐ ܕܐ ܕܗ ܚܡܐ
ܗܕܐ ܘܚܣܝܗ ܡܢ ܚ ܐܡ ܕܚܕܐ
ܬܗܢ ܚܫܘܐ ܘܢܣ ܚܡܚܕܐ

15. Have pity[6] on me, O Lord of Paradise,

and if it is not possible for me to enter Your Paradise,

grant that I may graze outside, by its enclosure:

within, let there be [spread] the table for the "diligent,"[7]

but may the fruits within its enclosure
drop outside like the "crumbs" Matt 15:27; Mark 7:28

for sinners, so that, through Your grace, they may live!

◆

6. have pity: The verb normally means "thunder" (as in stanza 11), but it can also have the meaning "feel sorry for." Alternatively, one might emend to *raḥḥem,* "have mercy" (ANP).

7. diligent: Although this term does not feature in any of the Syriac Gospel versions, it is regularly used by early Syriac writers in connection with the parables of the laborers in the vineyard (see Text 10 [*Nis.* 1.9] below) and of the talents.

TEXT 2

On Human Language about God
(*Fid.* 31)

This *madrasha* is of particular importance for the light it sheds on Ephrem's understanding of how the biblical text is to be understood, for it sets out to describe how God speaks to humanity through the biblical text, allowing himself, as it were, to become incarnated into human language. The starting point is the dilemma: how can human beings speak about the Godhead, seeing that the human mind is not capable of crossing the ontological gap (or "chasm," as Ephrem often calls it) which exists between Creation and its Creator? This might suggest that a holy silence is all that is possible. Ephrem, however, has a solution to the problem: God, stirred by love for his creation, has himself crossed this gap and entered the created world, allowing himself to be described in human terms and in human language in the Bible. Thus, before becoming incarnate in the human body, he first became incarnate in human language, or, in Ephrem's own homely metaphor of clothing, "God put on names," or metaphors, in the Old Testament, just as subsequently he "put on a body" at the incarnation. Of great importance for Ephrem in all this is the fact that God is not forcing himself on humanity; rather, he is deliberately encouraging the use of his gift to humanity of free will (stanza 5). Ephrem then goes on, with a delightful sense of humor, to compare God's action, in teaching humanity about himself, to that of a man teaching a parrot how to talk, using a mirror to deceive the parrot into thinking that it is a fellow parrot talking to it.

Humanity, on its part, must not abuse this divine condescension by taking literally these "names" or metaphors with which God has clothed himself; to understand these terms literally would be a total

misunderstanding of biblical language. The very fact that the biblical text moves from one metaphor for God to another should be a sufficient warning against any such misconception. Thus, instead of fixing one's mind on the literal meaning of the metaphors, one should allow these metaphors to act as pointers upwards, as it were, towards the hiddenness of God, whose true nature cannot be described by, let alone contained in, human language.

As usual, Ephrem employs many subtle verbal allusions to a variety of different biblical passages; amongst these it is interesting to find the "sapphire brick," which is a reference to Exod 24:10, a passage which gave rise to a great deal of mystical speculation among both Christian and Jewish writers.

An excellent study of Ephrem's approach to reading the biblical text is provided by Griffith 1997.

Meter

The *qala* is given as *bayya'(w) b-mulkane,* the opening words of *Par.* 7. This is the widely used *pardaisa* meter, for which see on Text 1 [pp. 2–3].

Text

The cycle *On Faith* is preserved in four sixth-century manuscripts: British Library Add. 12176 (Beck's A), Vatican Syr. 111 (dated 522; Beck's B), Vatican Syr. 113 (Beck's C), and British Library Add. 14571 (dated 519; Beck's D). The opening of the present *madrasha* is lost in C (which begins at stanza 9), and the whole poem is absent from D.

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܟܬܗ ܚܩܪܟܢܐ

1. ܫܡܥܘ ܟܠܗ ܥܡܐ ܒܬܘܒܐ
ܐܢܐ ܒܥܐܪܗ ܟܗ ܘܫܟܚ ܒܡܥܪܐ ܟܠ
ܟܬܒܐ ܒܚܣܝ ܟܗ ܘܫܡܥ ܒܣܝܡܐ ܟܠ
ܥܡܐ ܒܙܚܘܠ ܟܠܗ ܟܣܐ
ܗܘ ܟܠ ܚܠܡܘܗܝ ܫܥܐ ܫܠܡ ܫܥܡ
ܟܠܗ ܗܘ ܥܡܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ

ܚܘܫܒܐ : ܒܪ ܗܘ ܒܚܕ ܙܒܢ ܐܠܦ ܠܐܠܦܐ

2. ܫܒ ܘܟܬ ܠܐ ܟܠܗ ܗܘ ܥܡܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ
ܒܟܠܗ ܙܚܘܠ ܠܐ ܐܡܪ ܟܠ
ܟܬܒ ܐܠܦܐ ܒܪܟ ܡܢ ܙܒܢ
ܥܡܐ ܟܠ ܒܟ ܘܫܟܚ
ܒܟܗ ܚܒܝܒܬ ܐܫܬܟ ܥܠ ܟܠ
ܗܐ ܐܢܐ ܟܡ ܫܟܚ ܟܠ ܡܢ ܥܡܐ

1. Let us give thanks to [God] who has clothed Himself
in the names of the [body's] various parts:

[Scripture] refers to His "ears," to teach us that He listens to us; Ps 34:15

it speaks of His "eyes," to show that He sees us. Ps 34:15

It was just the names of such things that He put on,

and—although in His true Being there is no wrath or regret— Gen 6:6; 1 Sam 15:29

yet He put on these terms because of our weakness.

Refrain: Blessed is He who has appeared to our human race
under so many metaphors.

2. We should realize that, had He not put on the names

of such things, it would not have been possible for Him

to speak with us humans. By means of what belongs to us
did He draw close to us:

He 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, as a father with his children,
He spoke with our childish state.

3. ܗܘ ܕܐܢ ܐܬܐ ܒܫܘܠܡܗ ܕܟܠ ܡܕܡ
ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܒܗ ܐܦ ܚܕ ܡܢ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ
ܕܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܒܝܕܘ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܒܗ
ܒܫܘܠܡܗ ܕܐܢ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ
ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܐܬܐ ܒܫܘܠܡܗ ܕܟܠ ܡܕܡ
ܒܝܕܘ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܬܟܚ ܒܗ

4. ܐܝܟ ܕܒܪ ܐܢܫ ܡܬ ܐܟܠ ܡܬܬܐ
ܐܝܟ ܐܦ ܐܢܫ ܚܝܐ ܫܪܐ ܐܢܫܐ
ܕܡܝܬ ܐܝܟ ܡܬ ܕܚܝ ܐܝܟ
ܕܒܪ ܐܢܫ ܟܠܡܐ ܗܘ
ܕܒܪ ܐܝܟ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܕܒܪ ܐܝܟ
ܕܒܪ ܐܝܟ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܐܬܐ

3. 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 in exchange 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.

4. In one place He was like an Old Man and the Ancient of Days,[1] Dan 7:9

   then again, He became like a Hero, a Valiant Warrior. Exod 15:3

   For the purpose of judgment, He was an Old Man,
   but for conflict He was valiant.

   In one place He was delaying; elsewhere, having run,

   He became weary. In one place He was asleep, Isa 7:13; Ps 44:23; 78:66

   in another, in need: by every means
   did He weary Himself so as to gain us.

---

1. Ancient of Days: In Ephrem the Ancient of Days designates the Father (*Nis.* 4.7; *Haer.* 32.5), whereas in later Syriac (and Greek) poetry it more frequently refers to the Son: this is due to the indirect influence of the Old Greek text of Dan 7:13, where "a son of man" does not come *to* the Ancient of Days (so the Aramaic, Peshitta, and standard Greek Text ["Theodotion"]), but is "like" him.

5. ܗܘ ܕܐܝܟ ܠܐ ܒܪ ܡܢ ܒܚܝܠܗܝ
ܕܐܦ ܠܐ ܟܠܐ ܚܙܐ ܒܥܝܢ ܕܒܣܪ
ܒܥܐ ܕܒܪܝܬ ܒܐܢܫ ܪܒܐ ܗܘܐ
ܚܟܡܬܗ ܒܣܝܐܠ ܡܛܠ
ܐܠ ܗܘ ܡܪܝܡ ܟܕ ܚܙܝܬ ܒܗ ܐܢܫ
ܘܐܢܫ ܚܟܡܬܗ ܙܐ ܡܪܝܡ ܟܗ

6. ܐܠ ܗܘ ܒܟܟ ܟܗ ܡܛܠ ܚܟܡܬܐ
ܚܟܡܬܗ ܒܣܬܡܐ ܠܗ ܒܟܟ ܟܗ
ܗܘ ܐܠ ܐܦܠ ܚܟܡ ܒܗ ܡܛܠ
ܒܗܠܐ ܒܡ ܟܬܒ ܡܛܠ
ܒܗܘܐ ܒܚܢܐ ܒܗ ܡܛܠ ܟܗ
ܒܗܠܐ ܐܝܟ ܗܘܬ ܒܗ ܟܐ ܐܟ

7. ܗܘ ܕܐܬ ܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܒܫ ܟܬܒ
ܒܟ ܠܟ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܒܫ ܐܡ ܗܘ ܒܗܬ
ܟܗ ܟܐ ܒܟ ܒܟ ܟܟ ܟܗ ܒܗ ܟܟ ܟܐ
ܐܒܗܐ ܕܟܠ ܟܐ ܒܟ ܟܟ
ܟܟ ܟܐ ܒܟ ܟܟ ܟܟ ܟܐ
ܟܟ ܟܟ ܟܟ ܟܟ ܟܟ ܟܟ

5. For this is the Good One, who could have forced us to please Him,

without any trouble to Himself; but instead He toiled by every means

so that we might act pleasingly to Him of our own volition,
that we might depict our beauty

with the colors that our own free will[2] had gathered;

whereas, if He had adorned us, then we would have resembled

a portrait that someone else had painted,
adorning it with his own colors.

6. A person who is teaching a parrot to speak

hides behind a mirror and teaches it in this way:

when the bird turns in the direction of the voice speaking,

it finds in front of its eyes its own resemblance reflected;

it imagines that it is another parrot, conversing with itself.

[The man] puts [the bird's] image in front of it,
so that thereby it might learn how to speak.

7. This bird is related to man,[3]

but although this relationship exists, the man beguiles and teaches

[the parrot] something alien to itself by means of itself;
in this way he speaks with it.

The divine Being that in all things is exalted above all things

in Its love Its height bent down and
It acquired from us our own customs;

It has labored by every means so as to turn all to Itself.

---

2. free will *(he'ruta):* Lit. "freedom." Ephrem always gives great emphasis to the importance of the gift to humanity of free will.

3. related to man: That is, as a fellow creature.

8. ܘܡܫܐܠܗ ܘܗܘܐ ܒܗ ܫܡ ܐܗ ܗܘ ܘܟܝܒܘܢ
ܘܗܘ ܒܗ ܒܕܡܫ ܒܘܫܒ ܐܗ ܘܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܢܐܡ
ܘܗܘ ܒܗ ܒܕܡܫ ܒܠܐ ܐܗ ܘܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܠܐ
ܒܐܗ ܗܢܐ ܒܙ ܘܟܦ
ܒܟܐ ܘܦܦܠܐ ܐܡܦܦ ܡܡ ܒܟܫ
ܦܦܟ ܘܐ ܡܠܐ ܡܦܐ ܒ ܟ ܡܦܦܒܟ ܘܐ

9. ܢܦܦ ܫܦ ܒܐܦ ܡܫܦ ܒ ܟ ܘܦ
ܡܒܙܟ ܘܐ ܒܐܦ ܘ ܡܐ ܒܟ ܡܐ ܦܐ
ܐܒ ܘܟ ܢܦܦ ܫ ܒ ܟ ܒܐ
ܐܒ ܡܐ ܫ ܘ ܒ ܟ
ܐ ܒ ܐ ܫ ܐ ܒ ܟ ܦ ܒ ܟ
ܘܫܡܐ ܘܟܐ ܘ ܦ ܒ ܟ ܫ

8. His likeness is that of an Old Man, or of a Hero;

of Him it is written that He slept,
or again, that He slumbers not; Ps 120 (121):3–4

of Him it is written that He was weary,
or again, that He wearies not. Isa 40:28

By binding and loosing He has helped [us] in order to teach us:

in the case of the sapphire brick,
He contracted Himself and stood above it, Exod 24:10

then He extended Himself and filled the heaven,
everything being in the palm of His hand. Isa 40:12

9. He manifested Himself somewhere,
He manifested Himself everywhere;

we imagined He was somewhere, but everything is filled with Him.

He becomes small[4] that He might make us sufficient;
He became great in order to enrich us.

He becomes small, and then again great, in order to magnify us.

Had He become small and not become again great,
He would have been small and abused by us,

because He would have been thought to be weak.
Therefore He became small and then again great.

---

4. becomes small: "The Great One who became small" is a phrase to designate the incarnation that is quite frequently found in Ephrem and other Syriac poets; cf. Text 8 (*Res.* 1), stanza 22.

10. ܬܡܗ ܘܗ ܐܟ ܐܘܬ ܕܚܙܝܐ
ܘܐ ܗܦ ܒܬ ܐܕܙ ܕܡܙܟܐ
ܘܙ ܣܟܡ ܘ ܘܙ ܙܕ ܘܙ
ܐܡܐ ܘ ܐܟܕܚܙܐ ܠ ܗܦ
ܐܠ ܟܕܚܙܐ ܒܬ ܘܡ ܟ
ܗܟ ܐܟ ܚ ܟ ܚ ܗ ܟ

11. ܘܟ ܐ ܐܬ ܗ ܗ ܘ ܗ ܗ ܗ ܗ
ܟ ܟ ܐ ܚ ܟ ܘܟ ܗ ܘ ܒ ܟ
ܐ ܘ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܘ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܗ
ܒ ܗ ܟ ܘ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܘ ܟ
ܟ ܗ ܟ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܗ
ܟ ܗ ܟ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܗ ܟ ܗ

10. Let us wonder at how, when He became small,
He made our own small state great.

Had He not reverted and become great,
He would have made our opinion of Him small,

imagining Him to be weak—and by thus imagining,
our conception [of God] would be diminished.

He is an Essence whose greatness we are not capable of grasping—

no, not even in His smallness.
He grew great—when we had gone astray;

He grew small—when we had grown feeble.
In every way did He labor over us.

11. He wished to teach us two things: that He became [flesh],
yet He did not come into being. John 1:14

In His love He made for Himself a countenance,
so that His servants might behold Him;

but, lest we be harmed by imagining He was really like this,

He moved from one likeness to another, to teach us

that He has no likeness. And though He did not depart

from the form of humanity, yet by His changes[5] He did depart.

◆

5. changes: For a discussion of this term in Ephrem, see McVey 1988.

TEXT 3

The Symbols Depicted by Noah in the Ark (*Fid.* 49)

This comparatively short poem provides a good example of Ephrem's imaginative use of typology. Noah is an important figure in any typological understanding of the Old Testament. Just as Christ stands at the end of the Old Testament and at the beginning of the New, so Noah stands at another key turning point in the biblical history of humanity: he alone, because of his righteousness, survives the Flood, together with his family, and thus witnesses a new beginning. The Ark, which ensures his safety, is also laden with symbols: guided by Christ, its "steersman," it travels crosslike over the surface of the earth, foretelling the Cross; at the same time the Ark serves as a type of the Church and of Faith, while the Flood too points forward to the new waters of Baptism. But, whereas the waters of the Flood brought death to sinners, those of Baptism, by contrast, will bring salvation to sinners who take refuge in the Church, the new Ark. The dove, too, which conveys an olive twig back to Noah, announcing the recession of the waters of the Flood (Gen 8:11), symbolizes the Holy Spirit who anoints with olive oil all who are baptized. Ephrem's self-deprecatory words in the final stanza are a characteristic feature of many of his poems.

A number of these themes reappear in other texts in this collection, notably Text 16 (*Virg.* 7) and Text 19 (*Nis.* 1). A more literary translation of this poem (with a discussion of the imagery of the balance) is given by Palmer (1993b, 175–82).

Meter

The *qala* is given as *shehṛeh d-Bardaisan,* the opening words of *Haer.* 56. Ephrem uses the meter in *Fid.* 49–65 and *Haer.* 14, 49–51, and 53–56. The metrical pattern consists of six pairs of five syllables. For the acrostic, see the General Introduction (p. xv).

Text

The *madrasha* is preserved in Beck's manuscripts A, B, and C (see above, on Text 2 [p. 17]).

ܚ ܡܠܐ ܒܫܢܐ ܒܚܢܢܝ

1. ܐܘ ܡܕ ܐܠ ܗܘܐ ܒܫ ܙܝܢܐ ܚܫܘܫܐ
ܚܟܡܐ ܬܢ ܐܢܐ ܫܦܝ ܒܗ ܚܫܦܐ
ܘܠܐ ܚܫ ܡܢܟ ܫܠ ܬܗܐ ܚܝܐ
ܚܡܠ ܒܬܚܫܐ ܠܚܕ ܒܗ ܚܟܗܦܠ
ܘܐܕ ܒܗ ܚܫܡܐ ܘܠܐ ܚܩܠ

ܚܫܡܐ : ܐܡܬ ܚܢܐ

1. How splendid was Noah, whose example surpassed

that of all his contemporaries:
they were weighed in the scales of justice

and were found wanting; a single soul, with its armor of chastity,[1]

outbalanced [them all]. They were drowned in the Flood,

having proved too light in the scales, while in the Ark[2]

the chaste and weighty Noah was lifted up.
Glory be to [God] who took pleasure in Noah!

Refrain: Praises to Your dominion!

---

1. armor of chastity: Observing the chronological data in the biblical text, Ephrem and other Syriac writers deduce that Noah observed *qaddishuta,* or abstinence from marital intercourse, for the first five hundred years of his life. (See also Text 5 [*Nat.* 17], n. 6.)

2. Ark *(kewela):* This is the term found in Matt 24:38 (Peshitta) and in Luke 17:27 (Curetonianus and Peshitta); in Peshitta Genesis (and Sinaiticus at both Matt 24:38 and Luke 17:27) *qibota* is employed, and this is the term that Aphrahat always employs. Ephrem's use of *kewela* and its appearance in Curetonianus, however, indicate that the term had already come into use prior to the time of the Peshitta revision of the New Testament (ca. 400); perhaps the intention was to provide a distinction between Noah's Ark and the Ark of the Covenant (also *qibota,* alongside *arona*).

2. ܗܘ ܒܫ ܐܡܗܡܐ ܟܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܟܬ
ܐܘܗܡ ܐܝܟ ܠܐܩܫ ܫܐܡ ܟܐ ܐܟ
ܡܢ ܟ ܗ ܐܐ ܡܟܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܘܝ
ܗܡܗ ܐܝܟ ܐܝ ܐܐܟ ܟܒܗܐ
ܐܡܟ ܐ ܠܐܗܐ ܟܐ ܐ ܡܟ ܗܐ
ܐܝܟ ܟܟܐܐ ܐܡܟ ܟ ܟܟܗ

3. ܒܫܗ ܟܠܐܐ ܠܐܐ ܐ ܟ
ܒ ܡܒܗ ܒܡܗ ܐܟܡܟܐ ܗܡܗ
ܟ ܐܡܐ ܠܐܡ ܐܟܡܐ ܗܡܗ
ܒܫ ܟ ܒ ܐ ܟܐ ܟܟܐ
ܐܐܐ ܐܡܐܟ ܒ ܟ ܟ ܟ
ܐܟ ܐ ܟ ܒܐ ܐܡܟ ܟܐܐ

2. Noah extended his ministry either side [of the Flood],

depicting two types, sealing up the one that had passed,

opening up that which followed. Between these two generations

he ministered to two symbols,[3] dismissing the former,

making preparation for the latter.
He buried the generation grown old,

and nurtured the youthful one.
Praises be to the One who chose him!

3. Over the Flood the ship of the Lord of all[4] flew:

it departed from the east, it rested in the west,

it flew off to the south, and measured out the north;

its flight over the water served as a prophecy for the dry land,

preaching how its progeny would be fruitful in every quarter,

abounding in every region. Praises to its Savior!

---

3. symbols *(razaw[hy]): Raza,* of Persian origin, is capable of many senses in Syriac. In Biblical Aramaic it simply meant "secret," but in Syriac it normally means either "mysteries" (corresponding to Greek *musteria*), or (as here) "symbols," with a strong sense, in that for Ephrem (and early Christian writers in general) the symbol is understood as partaking in what it symbolizes, and is not simply just like (but essentially different from) it, as in the modern usage of the term. On Ephrem's use of this and related terms, see especially Murray 1975–76 and Beck 1982.

4. Lord of all: The title is already found in Peshitta Sir 24:8 and in Wis 6:7 and 8:3. It is very common in Ephrem, who is particularly fond of titles where the second element is *koll;* on this feature see Botha 1993.

4. ܐܲܗܟܲܠ ܚܲܘܟܘܟ ܫܲܡܗ ܘܢܗܲܘܢ
ܪܟܲܡܗ ܘܩܲܦܢ ܘܡܲܡܗ ܘܩܟܣܢ
ܘܐܠܐ ܡܙܩܚ ܟܝ ܟܒܠܐ ܚܝܗ ܩܬܐ
ܩܚܡܪ ܐܟܬܠܬܐ ܡܩܗܐܬ ܚܒܬܢ
ܘܙܩܣܐ ܣܟܗ ܫܘܐ ܡܩܡܩܐ ܡܡܣܩܠܐ
ܘܙܐܘܐ ܘܩܘܙܡܗ ܐܩܚܫ ܚܦܙܩܡ

5. ܩܐܘܘ ܚܐܩܙܠܐ ܘܠܩܩܗܘܘ ܚܩܩܠܐ
ܗܢܩܘ ܣܘܐ ܟܣܘܐ ܘܐܡܟ ܘܐܗܠܩܗ
ܚܩܬܗ ܘܩܩܠܐ ܗܟ ܐܗ ܐܗܠܩܗ
ܠܩܩܗ ܘܬܠܐ ܘܩܬ ܚܠܐܡܠ
ܙܐܐ ܘܢܗܩܗ ܗܡܟ ܚܬܘܐ
ܠܩܩܗ ܘܩܩܠܐ ܗܩܚܐ ܚܠܐܡܠ

4. [The Ark] marked out by its course the sign of its Preserver,
   —the Cross of its Steersman,[5] and the Wood of its Sailor
   who has come to fashion for us a Church in the waters [of baptism]:
   with the threefold name He rescues those who reside in her,
   and in place of the dove, the Spirit administers Her anointing[6]
   and the mystery of His salvation. Praises to its Savior!

5. His symbols are in the Law,[7] His types are in the Ark,
   each bears testimony to the other: just as the Ark's recesses
   were emptied out, so too the types in Scripture
   were emptied out; for by His coming He embraced
   the symbol of the Law, and in His churches He brought to completion
   the types of the Ark. Praise be to Your coming!

---

5. its Steersman *(sappaneh):* Thus also *Nis.* 1.3 (Text 19, stanza 3).

6. Her anointing: In early Syriac texts, including both Ephrem and Aphrahat, the Holy Spirit is treated grammatically as feminine, inviting the use of feminine imagery (though in Ephrem, in particular, this is by no means just confined to the Spirit). On the Holy Spirit as grammatically feminine, see Brock 1991a, and in general on female imagery in Ephrem, see McVey 2001.

7. Law *(ʾurayta):* Ephrem uses the Jewish Aramaic term here (and sometimes elsewhere) instead of the more normal Greek loanword *namosa* (from *nomos*).

6. ܐܲܚܺܝܼܫ ܗܳ ܡܳܐ ܒܲܥܶܐ ܚܲܣܺܝܢܳܐ
ܘܫܲܐܠ ܘܡܲܙܳܓ ܠܲܟܚܳܝ ܚܲܫ ܘܐܳܦ
ܠܳܐ ܚܲܣܺܝܢܳܐ ܐܲܠܳܐ ܡܲܩܫܳܐ
ܢܲܥܡܳܐ ܚܲܫܳܐ ܗܘܳܐ ܗܳܐ ܡܲܢ ܚܲܣܺܝܢܳܐ
ܐܲܠܳܐ ܚܫܽܘܟܳܐ ܗܘܳܐ ܠܲܚܲܫ ܫܲܩܠܳܐ
ܚܲܕܳܐ ܚܲܣܺܝܢܳܐ ܘܚܲܡܽܘܪ ܐܲܚܫܽܘ ܚܫܽܘܟܽܘܪ

6. My mind wanders, having fallen into the flood

of our Savior's power. Blessed is Noah who,

though his ship—the Ark—floated around over the Flood,

yet his soul was recollected. May my faith, Lord,

be a ship for my weakness, for the foolish are drowned

in the depths of their prying into You.[8]
Praises be to Him who begot You!

◆

8. prying into You: For Ephrem, the human intellect can legitimately investigate all that belongs to Creation, but he is always insistent that it is both impossible and blasphemous to try to cross over the "chasm" that lies between Creator and Creation. Since the Son lies beyond this chasm, any investigation, or prying into, his eternal generation from the Father (such as was undertaken by the neo-Arians) is utterly anathema to Ephrem. (For the important theme of the unbridgeable [except by God] "chasm" in Ephrem, see Koonammakkal 1998.)

TEXT 4

The Paradox of Mary's Birthgiving
(*Nat.* 11)

Mary features prominently in several of the *madrashe* on the Nativity, and Ephrem introduces a profusion of Old Testament symbols and types that illustrate the relationship between her and the wondrous Child she bears. In the present poem he only employs a few of these, as he ponders on the paradox of the virgin mother, the mortal being who bears the Godhead, the container who contains the Uncontainable.

Stanza 6 provides the title and words for John Tavener's "Thunder Entered Her."

Meter

The *qala* is given as *manu sapeq la-mmallalu,* a title taken from the opening words of *Eccl.* 38. The meter consists of 4+4+4 4+4+4+4 4+4+4 syllables. Ephrem employs this meter in *Nat.* 5–20, *Eccl.* 38–42 (where the *qala* title is given as *hanaw yarḥa,* the opening words of *Nat.* 5), *Fid.* 81–87, *Haer.* 41–44 and 46, and *Ieiun.* appendix 1 (for this, and for *Haer.* 46, the *qala* title is given as *hanaw yarḥa*). In later liturgical manuscripts this meter is sometimes also given the *qala* title *marganita* (based on *Fid.* 81–85, "On the Pearl").

Text

The poem is preserved complete only in Vatican Syr. 112 of 551 CE (Beck's G). Beck's edition also makes use of five later manuscripts, of the ninth to the eleventh century, but these only give select verses (thus, for example, the earliest of these, British Library Add. 14515 of 873 CE [Beck's M], has only verses 1–4 and 6).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܥܬܐ ܡܦܩܕ ܟܬܒܟܐ

1. ܠܐܘܪ ܕܢܝ ܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܫܒܚ
ܐܡܟ ܬܥܢܝܗ ܚܕܟܐ ܬܥܢܝܗ
ܟܒܝܗ ܡܠܐܡ ܐܘܪܚܐ
ܠܐ ܐܢܫ ܫܡܥܘܢ ܐܝ ܗܘ ܒܐܘܪ
ܠܐ ܡܚܝܢܐ ܟܘ ܟܡ ܬܡܦܩ

ܚܕܬܐ : ܟܘ ܐܡܚܕܬܐ ܒܝܟܠ ܟܗ ܟܐ
ܐܡ ܕܢܐ ܟܐ

2. ܐܘܪ ܒܝ ܫܝ ܟܐ ܟܠܬܒܝܗ
ܡܡܠܪ ܟܡ ܟܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܘ ܐܡܐ
ܗܘܐ ܟܘ ܡܐ ܡܦܢܐܪ ܒܝ ܠܐܟ
ܟܡ ܬܬܦܐ ܚܟܡܬܪ ܒܗ
ܗܐ ܪܚܡܐܢ ܚܬܢܐ ܒܐܡܗ

1. No one quite knows, Lord, what to call

   Your mother: should we call her "virgin"?

   —but her giving birth is an established fact; or "married woman"?

   —but no man has known her. If your mother's case

   is beyond comprehension, who can hope to understand Yours?[1]

   Refrain: Praise to You to whom all things are easy,[2]
   for You are Lord of all.

2. She alone is Your mother,

   but she is Your sister,[3] with everyone else. She became Your mother,

   she became Your sister, she was Your bride too,

   along with all chaste [souls].[4] You, who are Your mother's beauty,

   Yourself have adorned her with everything!

---

1. There is an underlying anti-Arian polemic implied at the end of this verse.

2. Perhaps based on Matt 19:26 and parallels; similarly Text 19 (*Nis.* 1), stanza 10.

3. sister: Since the baptized have become brothers and sisters to Christ at baptism (cf. Rom 8:29) and Mary's own baptism is understood as having occurred through the presence of Christ in her womb (see Text 5 [*Nat.* 17], n. 3).

4. bride . . . along with all chaste [souls]: See Text 18 (*Fid.* 14), where the soul is the bride of Christ (with the body as the bridal chamber).

3. ܡܫܒܚܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܚܝܐ
ܟܝ ܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܚܕ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܚܪ ܒܪ
ܘܠܐ ܚܫܒܬ ܚܕ ܒܠܒܗ
ܐܢ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܕܐܚܕ ܐܠܗܐ
ܟܝ ܡܟܒܫܢ ܡܬܒܥܢܐ

4. ܐܢܐ ܟܝ ܕܢܫܪ ܗܬܝ ܕܟܕ
ܒܚܬܟܐ ܚܝܐ ܟܐ
ܘܠܐ ܐܦܘܟ ܫܚܛ ܚܛܝܐ
ܘܠܐ ܚܫܒܬ ܠܐܘܚ ܪܘܡܐ
ܡܫܒܚܐ ܫܚܛ ܚܒܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ

5. ܐ ܟܝ ܐܝܟ ܒܥܘܪ ܒܚ
ܐܦ ܒܢܝ ܐ ܟܝ ܐܡܬ
ܡܒܥܐ ܒܚܕܐ ܐ ܟܝ ܐܡܬ
ܒܪܟܐ ܪܘܡܐ ܐ ܟܝ ܐܚܕܐ
ܟܦܐ ܘܫܚܐ ܗܢܐ ܚܛܐ

3. She was betrothed [to Joseph] in a natural way
   before You came; she conceived in a manner
   quite beyond nature after You had come,
   O Holy One, and was a virgin
   when she gave birth to You in a holy fashion.

4. With You Mary underwent all that
   married women undergo: conception
   —but without intercourse; milk [flowed][5] in her breasts
   —but against nature's pattern: You made her, the thirsty earth, Isa 53:2
   all of a sudden into a fountain of milk!

5. If she could carry You, it was because You, the great mountain, Dan 2:35
   had lightened Your weight; if she feeds You, it is because
   You had taken on hunger; if she gives You to drink, Matt 4:2
   it is because You, of Your own will, had thirsted;
   if she fondles You, John 4:7
   [You, who are] the fiery coal[6] of mercy,
   preserved her bosom unharmed. Isa 6:7

---

5. milk [flowed]: The miraculous nature of this is again brought out in Text 7 (*Eccl.* 36), stanza 4; compare also *Odes of Solomon* 35.6.

6. fiery coal: The term, taken from Isaiah's vision (Isa 6:7), is also used of the eucharistic host in Text 17 (*Fid.* 10).

6. ܐܵܡܹܝܢ ܒܶܝ ܐܲܒܘ ܠܵܐ ܟܹܐ ܗܲܘ̈ܠ
ܫܘܿܒܚܵܐ ܠܵܐ ܠܵܟ ܡܲܠܟܵܐ
ܫܡܵܫ ܟܲܘܟܒܹ̈ܐ ܠܵܐ ܟܹܐ ܢܲܚܫܵܐ
ܫܡܲ̈ܝܐ ܡܟܵܐ ܠܵܐ ܢܲܚܵܐ ܚܲܕ
ܐܲܡܝܢ ܐܘܿܡ ܟܹܐ ܒܥܲܠ ܒܲܪ ܐܲܚܵܐ

7. ܐܲܚܵܐ ܫܲܒܥܵܐ ܕܲܡܗ ܘܐܲܒܘ
ܫܲܡܝ ܚܲܠܵܐ ܠܵܐ ܠܲܡܢ
ܒܥܲܠ ܒܲܪ ܫܲܒܥܵܐ ܠܵܐ ܟܹܐ ܢܲܚܵܐ
ܒܥܲܠ ܒܲܪ ܫܲܒܥ ܠܵܐ ܟܹܐ ܐܲܡܵܐ
ܫܲܠܡܵܐ ܫܲܒܥ ܒܲܪ̈ܬܹ̈ܐ ܠܵܐ ܫܲܢܵܐ

8. ܠܵܐ ܠܹܐܝܢ ܫܲܠܡܵܐ ܫܲܢܵܐ
ܡܢ ܠܘ ܕܲܡܗ ܠܵܐ ܐܲܢ ܚܲܕ
ܫܲܢܵܐ ܚܲܢܵܐ ܠܵܐ ܫܲܢܬܵܐ ܚܲܕ
ܫܲܢܵܐ ܙܲܒܢܵܐ ܕܲܢܚܹ̈ܐ ܫܲܟܫ
ܒܥܲܠ ܒܲܪ ܐܵܐ ܫܲܢܵܐ ܫܲܠܡܵܐ ܟܵܠ

6. Your mother is a cause for wonder: the Lord entered into her
and became a servant; He who is the Word entered
—and became silent within her; Thunder entered her cf. Ps 29:3
—and made no sound; there entered the Shepherd of all,[7]
and in her He became the Lamb, bleating as He came forth.

7. Your mother's womb has reversed the roles:
the Establisher of all entered in His richness,
but came forth poor; the Exalted One entered her,
but came forth meek; the Splendrous One entered her,
but came forth having put on a lowly hue.

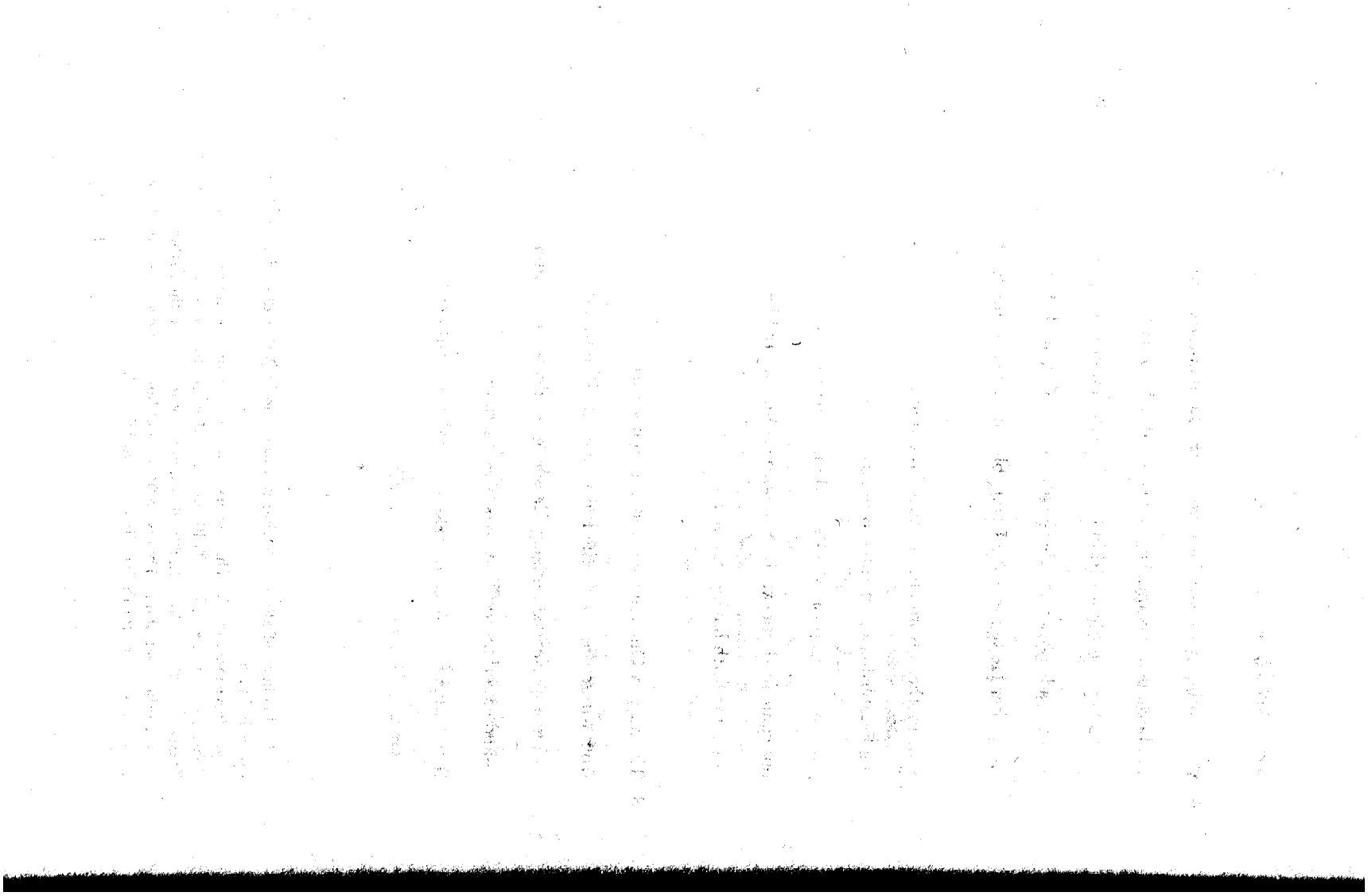
8. The Mighty One entered, and put on insecurity
from within the womb; the Provisioner of all[8] entered
—and experienced hunger; He who gives drink to all entered
—and experienced thirst: naked and stripped
there came forth from her He who clothes everything![9]

◆

7. Shepherd of all: A title that is also found in *Nat.* 4.128, 18.19, and elsewhere in Ephrem.

8. Provisioner of all: This occurs as a title of Christ a number of times in Ephrem's poetry, e.g., *Virg.* 23.10, 30.4, and 36.8; it already occurs in the *Acts of Thomas* 113 (Wright 1871, 1:280), although there it refers to the Father.

9. clothes everything: That is, in the case of human beings, with the "robe of glory" at baptism; for this see Text 5 (*Nat.* 17), n. 3.



TEXT 5

Mary's Invitation to Everyone (*Nat.* 17)

In the opening four stanzas it is Mary who speaks, describing her experience as the mother of such an extraordinary child. She ends by contrasting herself with Eve, who put on "leaves of shame," whereas she has put on a "robe of glory"—an allusion to the baptism she is considered to have received by virtue of the presence of Christ in her womb (see the notes below). In stanzas 5 and 6 Ephrem addresses Christ, but the speaker reverts to Mary again in stanza 7, where she begins to address various categories of women (including slaves), telling them what her Son can offer them. Her words continue at least to the end of stanza 11, after which the voice of the poet himself seems to speak directly. In stanzas 12–18 there is a polemical undercurrent, aimed against the Marcionites, who held that the world was created by a Just God (the Demiurge) who was different from the supreme God of love with whom the incarnation was associated. Ephrem understands that the blind man healed in John 9:6 had been born without any pupils. The miracle is thus not just of healing, but constitutes an act of creation—which makes nonsense of Marcion's views.

Meter

The phrase *bar qaleh* indicates that the *qala* is the same as for the previous poem; for this see on Text 4 (*Nat.* 11).

Text

The poem is preserved complete in two sixth-century manuscripts, British Library Add. 14571 (of 519 CE; Beck's D) and Vatican Syr. 112 (of 551 CE, Beck's G). The later manuscripts used in Beck's edition again only preserve select verses.

ܕ ܡܕܗ

1. ܟܬܫ ܚܙܠ ܘܟܚܢ ܐܢ
ܐܕܢ ܡܕܪ ܗܐܘܟ ܨܦܩܗ
ܗܡܒ ܗܡܫ ܚܢ ܟܦܩܘ
ܗ ܟܒ ܚܐ ܗܐܗܘ ܟ
ܘܘܗ ܗܚܙܗ ܘܚܟ ܬܗ

ܚܙܢ : ܟ ܐܚܙܢ ܕ ܙܢ ܘܟܒ ܡܫ

2. ܣܡ ܟܚܢܐ ܘܡܘ ܗܢ
ܗܟܟ ܚܙܗ ܟܚܐ ܗܚ
ܘܫ ܟܬܗ ܣܡ ܟܦܗ
ܕ ܡܗܕܒ ܗܟܙܘܗ
ܕ ܡܗܟܚ ܘܐ ܡܚ

1. "The tiny Child I carry Himself carries me,"
   said Mary; "He lowered His wings,
   took me and placed me between His pinions;
   He soared into the air, and promised me:
   Both height and depth shall be your Son's."

   Refrain: Praise to you, Son of the Creator,[1] Lover of all!

2. "I saw Gabriel, and he called Him 'Lord'; Luke 1:28
   and [Simeon], chief of the priests, an aged servant, Luke 2:25–28
   who carried Him in honor; I saw the Magi
   —they bowed down to Him; while Herod I saw Matt 2:11
   troubled, because the King had come. Matt 2:3

1. The title "Son of the Creator" given to Christ recurs in stanzas 14 and 18 and is deliberately anti-Marcionite. The same title occurs quite frequently in the cycles *On Faith* and *Against Heresies.*

3. ܐܘ ܗܘܝܠܐ ܘܣܢܐ ܚܕܬܐ
ܘܬܪܚ ܡܕܡܗ ܡܢܐ ܚܕܬܐ
ܒܥܡܐ ܣܝܡ ܚܪܙܐ ܐܚܕܐ
ܘܐܠܐ ܟܣܐ ܘܬܠܬܐ ܡܬܥܐ
ܒܚܪܒܐ ܚܝ ܒܪܐ

4. ܟܚܡܐ ܚܕܐ ܠܬܐ ܘܚܣܐ
ܟܚܡ ܣܐ ܐܡܪ ܟܚܡ
ܟܚܡܐ ܚܕܐ ܣܐ ܘܡܐ ܚܣܐ
ܒܚܕ ܗܘܡ ܕܢܗ ܪܚܐ
ܘܡܢ ܗܘܐ ܟܡܚܗ ܕ

3. "Satan, who slew the newborn of the Hebrews, Exod 1:16
wanting to destroy Moses, now kills the children, Matt 1:16
hoping that the Living One will die. To Egypt will I flee, Matt 1:13
as [Satan] has come to Judea to go toiling around,
trying to hunt his own Hunter.[2]

4. "In her virginity, Eve put on
leaves of shame, but your mother has put on, Gen 3:7
in her virginity, a garment of glory[3]
that encompasses all, while to Him who covers all
she gave a body as a tiny garment."

---

2. For Christ as the "Hunter" of Satan, compare *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 4.13, where he is "the Hunter of Death." Elsewhere Ephrem uses the title with a different emphasis: in *Sermo de Domino Nostro* 15 Christ is the Hunter who "hunts for the life/salvation of the lost," and in *Nat.* 4.36 and *Virg.* 32.8 he is "the Hunter for humanity" and "the Hunter for all."

3. The imagery of the Robe of Glory, deeply embedded in the Syriac tradition, is used to describe the various stages of salvation history: Adam and Eve are originally clothed in it in Paradise, but lose it at the Fall; Christ, the Divine Word who "put on the body," deposits humanity's lost Robe of Glory in the River Jordan at his baptism, and at each Christian baptism it is received in potential from the Font (often described both as the Jordan and as a womb; see Jones 2003); finally, at the Last Judgment, it becomes the clothing of the Righteous in reality (see Brock 1982 and 1999a). Since Christ's presence in the Jordan makes the Robe of Glory available again to humanity, his presence in Mary's womb is understood as constituting her baptism, thus providing her with her Robe of Glory (see Text 4 [*Nat.* 11], n. 3). Mary's giving Christ "a body as a tiny garment" and receiving in return a "Robe of Glory" is one of the ways in which Ephrem brings out the idea of exchange involved in the incarnation; this is expressed in *Fid.* 5.17 in epigrammatic form: "He gave us divinity, we gave Him humanity."

5. ܠܥܕܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܐܢܐ ܒܥܐ
ܕܐܬܝܬ ܒܝܬ ܡܠܟܐ ܗܘ
ܒܪ ܒܝ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܥܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
ܒܪ ܐܢ ܕܥܒܕܬ ܠܐ ܙܥܝܡ ܒܥ
ܐܢ ܠܐ ܠܡܐ ܘܒܐ ܡܫܬܐ

6. ܗܘ ܠܐܒ ܫܐ ܬܡܐ ܡܥܒܐ
ܚܫܒ ܒܫܐ ܘܟܠ ܕܥܒܕ ܒܥ
ܡܟܟܐ ܒܐ ܗܘ ܒܐ ܒܫܐ
ܐܗܘ ܒܥܐ ܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܒܫܪ
ܗܐܝܟ ܗܘ ܫܥܐ ܡܐܠܐ ܕܥܒܪ

7. ܘܐܡ ܒܥ ܕܥܘܡ ܐ ܕܢܫܐ
ܗܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܘܐܡ ܒܥ ܒܠܐ
ܗܐ ܡܒܥܐ ܘܐܡ ܒܥ ܕܐܐ

5. Blessed is she, in whose heart and mind
You are: she is a royal palace[4]
—because of You, O Royal Son. She is the Holy of Holies
for You, the High Priest. She knows no worries Heb 8:1
or cares of home—or husband.

6. Eve proved the cranny—and the sepulcher—
for the accursed serpent; there entered her and dwelt in her
its evil counsel; she became its bread
since she had become dust. But You are our Bread,
You are our Bridal Chamber,[5] our Robe of Glory.

7. "Is any woman living in chastity[6] afraid?
—He shall preserve her. Has any some wrongdoing?
—He shall forgive it. Has any some evil spirit?

---

4. royal palace *(birta):* Perhaps based on Prov 9:1 (Wisdom built herself a house), though both Septuagint and Peshitta have "house." The description of Mary as a palace (based on the residence of Christ "the King" in her womb) becomes a commonplace in later Greek and Syriac liturgical poetry.

5. Bridal Chamber: Here evidently Christ's Body is meant, whereas in Text 18 (*Fid.* 14), stanza 5, it is the body of the communicant (though a variant reading identifies it, less appropriately there, as Christ's Body: see Text 18 [*Fid.* 14], n. 3).

6. chastity *(qudsha):* Lit. "sanctity." In early Syriac literature the term *qaddisha,* literally "holy," often has the technical sense of "continent," referring to married couples who refrain from sexual intercourse. The terminology is derived from Exod 19:10 (taken in conjunction with 19:15). In contemporary Judaism this was seen as a temporary ascetic practice, but in early Syriac Christianity as a permanent undertaking (see especially Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6, 7, and 18). On this topic in general, see Griffith 1995 and Brock 1992 (ch. 8).

ܗܘ ܙܘܥܩܗ ܐܘܨܚܬܗ ܀
ܗܘ ܚܪܘܚܐ ܟܡܚܬܗ ܀

8. ܘܐܡ ܟܐ ܒܟܝ ܠܐ ܬܗܐ
ܐܝܟ ܟܢܫܬ ܘܐܡ ܟܐ ܟܢܐ
ܐܘ ܟܝܢ ܒܩܗܬܐ ܐܐܐ ܬܗܐ
ܡܨܝܐ ܒܬܢ ܘܐܡ ܟܗ ܟܝܐ
ܬܡܙܗܘ ܠܐ ܬܥܟܬ ܡܢܗ

9. ܟܢ ܫܐܙ ܟܢ ܐܡܒ ܒܢܪ
ܫܒ ܘܬ ܐܟܗ ܡܟܝܐ ܐܠܟ
ܐܘ ܟܐ ܘܒܝܐ ܐܐܙ ܡܙܝ
ܐܟܒ ܡܘܟܫܬ ܐܙ ܟܗ ܒܩܝ
ܫܐܙ ܐܟܙ ܐܐܙ ܡܩܝ

10. ܟܝܐ ܫܐܙ ܟܢ ܐܡܫܪ ܘܝ ܠܩ
ܐ ܟܪ ܐܡܟܬ ܫܡܒܟܐ
ܟܪ ܟܝܐ ܫܐܙ ܘܝ ܟܪ ܐܠܟܐ
ܐܡܫܙܐ ܘܝ ܬܩܐ ܚܩܒܐ
ܡܟܬܟ ܩܒܩ ܐ ܟܪ ܐܙܫ

—He shall drive it out. For those with diseases
here is One who will bind up their fractured state.

8. "Has any woman a child? Let him come and be
brother to my Beloved. Has she a daughter or niece?
Let her come and become
the betrothed of my most precious one. Has any one a slave?
Let him release him to come to serve his Lord.

9. "My Son, the freeborn who bears Your yoke Matt 11:29
has a single reward, while the slave who carries
the double yoke of two masters,
in heaven and on earth—he shall have two blessings,
a double reward for his double burden.

10. "My Son, the freeborn girl is Your maidservant
if she serves You, whereas a girl who is in slavery
is freeborn with You: let her find comfort in You,
for she has been liberated with that hidden freedom
that is stored up in her bosom if she loves You.

11. ܐܘ ܢܛܦܐ ܗܦܣ ܟܗ ܟܢܣܦܡ
ܘܚܨ ܬܙ ܗܘ ܠܥܠܐ
ܘܥܒܗܨ ܐܘ ܟܒܐ
ܘܪܚܡܨ ܟ ܚܙܦܐ ܗ
ܘܐܐ ܘܬܗܦ ܟ ܬܙܐ

12. ܗܥܐ ܣܒ ܘܗܗ ܦܛܐ
ܟ ܢܦܬ ܣܒ ܐܙܟ
ܘܚܟܐ ܚܘܡ ܗܟܐ ܣܒ
ܗܘ ܙܦܦ ܗܘܟ ܦܦ
ܐܙ ܦܗ ܟ ܬܚܐ

13. ܐ ܗܛܐ ܕܘ ܚܦ
ܦܚ ܢܦܬ ܐ ܣܗ
ܦܚ ܬ ܟܚ ܘܩ ܡܬ
ܦܚ ܩܟ ܘܐ ܗܡ
ܗܛ ܬܚ ܐ ܐܬܗ

11. "Chaste women, yearn[7] for my Beloved
so that He may dwell in you; and you too who are unclean
He wishes to make holy. The churches too
He wants to adorn. Son of the Creator is He
who has come to restore all creation.

12. "He has renewed the heaven, because foolish men cf. Isa 65:17
had worshipped all kinds of stars; He has renewed the earth
which had grown old in Adam. With his spittle John 9:6
there took place a novel fashioning:
He who is capable of all things puts aright both bodies and minds.

13. "Come, all you who are blind, receive light
without payment; come, you lame, cf. Isa 55:1
receive back the use of your legs; you who are deaf and dumb,
receive back the use of your voices;
those whose hands are crippled shall also regain their use.

---

7. yearn: The manuscript has *swḥ*, but this must be a corruption for *swḥy* (imperative f. pl.), which alone fits the syntax.

14. ܟ̇ ܚ̣ܙ̈ܐ ܗ̣ܝ ܒ̈ܥ̈ܝ ܟ̈ܠ̈ܗ̣ܝ̈ܢ
ܦ̈ ܚ̣ܙ̈ܘ̈ܬ̈ ܠ̈ܐ̈ ܒ̈ܥ̈ܝ
ܡ̈ ܚ̣ܬ̈ܐ ܬ̈ܠ̈ܐ ܙ̈ܐ̈ܗ̣ܝ̈ܢ
ܠ̈ܡ̈ ܚ̣ܡ̈ ܐ̈ܡ̈ܡ̈ܟ̈ ܟ̈ܗ
ܡ̈ܗ̣ ܚ̣ܡ̈ ܟ̈ܬ̈ ܐ̈ܡ̈ܐ̈

15. ܚ̣ܠ̈ܡ̈ ܪ̈ܚ̣ܙ̈ ̈ ̈

14. "He is the Creator's Son, whose treasure stores are filled
with every benefit. He who needs pupils,[8]
let him approach him:
He will fashion mud, and transform it, John 9:6
fashioning flesh and giving light to the eyes.

15. "With a little mud He showed how, through Him,
our dust was fashioned; the soul of the dead man, too, Gen 2:7; John 11:43 [Lazarus]
bore witness to Him how, by Him, man's breath
is breathed into him. By these latter witnesses Gen 2:7
He is to be believed to be Son [of God], the First Principle.

16. "Gather together and come, you lepers, receive cleansing
without any trouble; for there is no need,
as in Elisha's case, of dipping seven times 2 Kgs 5:10 [Namaan]
in the river [Jordan]: [Christ] does not tire men out any more
with the sprinklings as the priests of old did."

8. pupils: Ephrem, along with several other early commentators, understood that the man whose sight was healed in John 9 had been born without pupils, thus making it a miracle involving creation, rather than just healing.

17. ܡܢ ܒܟܠܡܐ ܕܢܐܠ ܐܝܟ
ܐܡܬ ܬܫܒ ܗܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ
ܠܐ ܐܡ ܐܠܐ ܘܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܐ
ܕܫܘܚܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܢܬܚܙܐ
ܕ ܡܢܐ ܟ ܡ ܡܢܐ ܟ

18. ܐ ܡ ܕܐܠܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܢܐ
ܗܘ ܒܝܬ ܚܝ ܗܢܐ
ܗܘܘ ܕܗܢܐ ܗܘ ܘܡܠܘܗܘ
ܐܠ ܚܟܡܘܗܘ ܫܬܠ ܘܐܫܡ
ܡܟܗܘ ܒܚ ܕܫܐ ܗ ܐܝ

17. Elisha's "seven times" symbolizes the purification
of the woman with seven spirits; while the hyssop and blood — Luke 8:2; Heb 9:19 [Lev 14:6–7]
are powerful types too. There is no place here
for thinking that [Christ] is "alien":[9]
[Christ], the Son of the Lord of all,[10]
is not alienated from the Lord of all.

18. If it was the "Just God" who made a body leprous,
while You cleanse it, then the Fashioner of the body
hated the body, while You loved it;
but as it is, You fashioned it, and the bandages
that You put on it cry out that You are the Creator's Son.

◆

9. "alien": The last two stanzas contain a polemic against the Marcionites who held that the Creator God (Demiurge, or "Just God") was different from, and inferior to, the supreme deity (the "Good God"); it was knowledge of the latter that Christ was supposed to have brought. For Ephrem, Christ's miracle in John 9, creating the pupils of the blind man out of dust and spittle, shows that Christ is the Son of the Creator, who is accordingly to be identified—against Marcion—as the same as the supreme God.

10. Son of the Lord of all *(bar mare koll):* This is found in a few other places in Ephrem (e.g., *Nat.* 4.194); Aphrahat, *Dem.* 2.19, has the fuller form, *bar marya d-koll.*

TEXT 6

Mary and Eve as the World's Two Eyes
(*Eccl.* 37)

In the New Testament Paul had already introduced the Adam-Christ typology; to this was added in the second century its counterpart, Eve-Mary. In the course of time many different typological patterns were developed. In the present poem, after a brief invocation, Ephrem compares Eve and Mary to the world's two eyes. According to Ephrem's understanding of optics, the eye is enabled to see only when it is filled with light, and the more light, the more it sees. The left eye, Eve, malfunctions as a result of the Fall, and so does not let in the divine light of truth, with the consequence that the world goes astray. With Mary, however, who lets in the Light (that is, Christ in her womb), the world regained a right eye which functions as it should, thus allowing humanity to see the path to God again.

The poem contains the beginning of an alphabetic acrostic (*alaph* to *waw*); for the broken sequence in stanza 6, see the General Introduction (p. xv).

Meter

The *qala* title is given as *ʾaynaw d-naggira ruḥeh*, the opening words of *Eccl.* 2. The meter consists of 5+5 5+5 5+5 5+5 syllables and is used quite frequently by Ephrem: *Eccl.* 2–5, 10, 35–37, 43–44, 49–50; *Azym.* 1–2; *Fid.* 32–33; *Haer.* 29; *Ieiun.* appendix 3; *Nis.* 5–7, 25–33; and *Virg.* 11. For some of these, different *qala* titles are given, thus: *ʾurhay d-bet nahrin* (*Ieiun.* appendix 3), *malka shmayyana shayyen shigishuteh* (*Nis.* 25–33), and *ʿanak ḥnigaʾit* (*Haer.* 29, *Nis.* 5–7, and *Virg.* 11).

Text

This *madrasha* is preserved complete only in Vatican Syr. 111 (of 522 CE; Beck's B), though parts of it are also preserved in British Library Add. 14574 (of fifth or sixth century; Beck's F), to which a fragment in the Egyptology Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, belongs (21.148.11; see Brock 1997, 491 n. 2).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܐܡܗ ܒܟܝܢܐ ܙܡܝܪܐ

1. ܐܒܐ ܚܦܟܦܢ ܡܟܗ ܐܡܦܐ
ܗܘܬܗ ܒܡܥܦܟ ܚܢܢܐ ܒܬܡܐ
ܫܡܫܐ ܘ ܬܘܬ ܒܟܡܥܦ ܡܠܐ ܗܝ

ܚܦܫܐ : ܟܡ ܐܚܫܢ ܫܦܗܘ

2. ܚܟܡܐ ܒܟܢܐ ܫ ܚܦܡܐ ܗܦܟܟܗܝ
ܢܦ ܚܦܬܢܗܝ ܡܦ ܚܦܟܬܗܝ
ܡܪܟܐ ܦܟ ܫ ܚܦܗܝ ܗܢܫ ܚܦܘܦܗܝ

3. ܟܢܐ ܝ ܒܥܢܡ ܝ ܐܘܟܗ ܒܫܐ
ܒܚܟܡܐ ܐܒܐ ܟܡܐ ܗܡܦܘܗܝ
ܒܣܡ ܚܢ ܫܐ ܚܡܐ ܒܦ ܟܬܡ

1. Illumine with Your teaching the voice of the speaker
   and the ear of the hearer: like the pupils of the eye
   let the ears be illumined, for the voice provides their rays of light.

   Refrain: Praises to You, O Light!

2. It is through the eye that the body, with its members,
   is light in its different parts, is fair in all its conduct,
   is adorned in all its senses, is glorious in its various limbs.

3. It is clear that Mary is the land[1] that receives the source of light;
   through her it has illumined the whole world, with its inhabitants,
   which had grown dark through Eve, the source of all misfortunes.

1. land: This carries as a resonance Mary as the "thirsty land" (Isa 53:2), for which see Text 8 (*Res.* 1), stanza 3.

4. ܘܬܡܝ ܕܬܫܩܝ ܚܝܦܗܛܐ ܘܣܒܐ ܟܬܘܗ
ܗܡܝܢ ܘܫܡܫܛܐ ܘܟܬܘܗ ܐܣܬܠܐ ܐܕ̈ܐ
ܗܠܝܢ ܘܢܫܬܐ ܟ̈ ܟܘܘܐ ܚܛ̈ܠ

5. ܘܐ ܚܟܛܐ ܐܬܠܝ ܟܬܝܢ ܡܛܬܚ ܟ̈ܘ
ܫܐ ܘܐ ܟܬܘܗ ܗܡܫܐ ܘܫܡܠ
ܟܬܘܗ ܘܥܫܝܐ ܢܫܬܐ ܡܙܡ

6. ܚܟܝܐ ܘܫܡܐ ܘܐ ܫܩ ܚܟܛܐ ܟܟ̈ܘ
ܘ̈ ܡܫܝ ܐܢܐ ܚ ܐܫܡܟܐ ܘܐܡܟ̈ܘ
ܗܟ̈ܙ ܘ̈ܐ ܘܟܟ̈ܐ ܘ ܚ̈ ܚܙ̈ܐ ܙ̈ ܚܫܐ

7. ܘ̈ ܒ̈ ܚ̈ ܟܝܐ ܘܫܐ ܘܫܐ ܗܟ̈ܝܐ
ܘܐ ܟ̈ ܚܫ̈ ܘܫ̈ ܐ̈ ܘ̈ ܐ̈ ܘ̈ ܐ̈ ܘ̈ ܐ̈
ܘܡܫܐ ܘܐܡܟ̈ ܐ̈ ܘ ܘܬܫ̈ ܐ

4. [Mary and Eve] in their symbols resemble a body, one of whose eyes
   is blind and darkened, while the other is
   clear and bright, providing light for the whole.

5. The world, you see, has two eyes fixed in it:
   Eve was its left eye, blind,
   while the right eye, illumined, is Mary.

6. Through the eye that was darkened the whole world was darkened,
   and people groped and thought that every stone
   they stumbled upon was a god, calling falsehood truth.

7. But when it was illumined by the other eye and the heavenly Light
   that resided in its midst, humanity became reconciled once again,
   realizing that the discovery they had made
   was destroying their very life.

◆

TEXT 7

Christ as Light in Mary and in the Jordan (*Eccl.* 36)

In this *madrasha* Ephrem reflects on light as a symbol of Christ. The poem is elaborately constructed and falls into three sections: 1–5, 6–11, and 12–15. In each of these the stanzas go together in pairs, with each pair linked to the next by a common theme (stanza 5, however, is an exception, since it summarizes the previous two pairs). Thus, for example, in stanzas 1–4 we find the following pattern of relationships:

1–2	eye:	light
	Mary:	Christ
3–4	Jordan:	Christ
	Mary:	Christ

In the next section, stanzas 6–11, Moses and the sun, serving as representatives of Scripture and Nature, provide analogies: in Moses' case the radiance with which his face shone on Sinai came from outside, whereas in the case of both Mary and the Jordan the presence of Christ the Light is interior. The sun, which is the source of its own light, offers an illustration of the state of the righteous at the resurrection, when they will serve as the source of their own light, since they have allowed Christ the Light to shine within themselves. Ephrem will certainly have expected his readers to see Isa 60:19 as the background to what he is saying.

In the final section Ephrem, with the resurrection in mind, prays to be saved from the fate of the wicked who, instead of being robed in splendor, will "put on the garment of all their sins." (There is an earlier translation in Brock 1976a.)

Meter

For the *qala* and the meter, see on the previous Text 6 (*Eccl.* 37). In several cases a line has 6+5 syllables, rather than 5+5 (thus, for example, stanza 4, line 1a; stanza 6, lines 1a and 2a).

Text

The poem is preserved solely in Vatican Syr. 111 (of 522 CE; Beck's B).

ܕ ܡܕܟܐ

1. ܟܝܠܐ ܕܒܗܢܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܥܩܐ
ܡܫܠܝܫܐ ܕܐܡܬܐ ܡܫܡܥܢܐ ܕܒܫܐ
ܡܫܕܝܡܐ ܕܐܡܬܐ ܡܫܪܝܟܐ ܕܥܩܒܐ

ܥܩܒܐ : ܕܐܡ ܙܕܩܬܐ ܒܩܘܠܐ

2. ܡܢܬܪ ܕܐ ܟܝܠܐ ܒܩܘܠܐ ܗܐ ܟܝܥܐ
ܐܡܢ ܟܠܘܟܐ ܡܦܩ ܟܬܒܟܐ
ܘܡ ܟܬܢܐ ܡܙ ܥܒܕܟܐ

3. ܒܘܠܐ ܘܟܬܒ ܒܐ ܐ ܕܐܐ ܡܦܪ ܟܗܬܐ
ܥܩܟܐ ܙܝܐ ܒܬܐ ܟܗܬܐ ܕܒܥܩܐ
ܡܟܒܐ ܕܡܐܩܐ ܕܐܗܦܐ ܕܠܥܩܐ

1. When it is associated with [a source of] light an eye becomes pure,

   it shines with [the light that] provisions it,
   it gleams with its brightness,

   it becomes glorious with its splendor, adorned by its beauty.

   Refrain: Blessed is the Creator[1] of light!

2. As though on an eye the Light settled in Mary;

   It polished[2] her mind, clarified her thought

   and made pure her understanding, causing her virginity to shine.

3. The river in which He was baptized
   conceived Him again symbolically;

   the moist womb[3] of the water conceived Him in purity,

   bore Him in chastity, made Him ascend in glory.

---

1. Creator: The manuscript has *baryeh,* but for metrical reasons this needs to be corrected to *baroyeh.*

2. polished *(mraq):* The verb is often used in connection with the polishing of mirrors (which were of metal in antiquity and so needed to be kept in a high state of polish in order to be effective).

3. womb: Elsewhere Ephrem speaks of the three wombs that Christ entered: Mary's, that of the Jordan, and that of Sheol; compare also Text 8 (*Res.* 1), stanza 7, where Ephrem also speaks of the Father's womb. This imagery is preserved in several of the Syriac baptismal services where the font is described as a womb that gives birth to spiritual children.

4. ܚܕܘܟܐ ܒܚܐ ܒܪܘܙܐ ܐܡܟ ܚܙܝܐ ܐܢܘܢ
ܒܟܠܗ ܘܠܐ ܟܚܕܐ ܡܬܚܒܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܘܟܐ
ܒܟܗ ܚܒܪܘܟܐ ܚܙܘܢ ܘܒܪܘܟܐ

5. ܒܫܐ ܟܡ ܪܘܙܐ ܙܒܫܐ ܟܡ ܡܚܙܐ
ܐܟܝ ܚܫܐ ܠܘܙܐ ܪܘܫ ܟܡ ܚܙܐ
ܐܦܙ ܚܕܘܟܗ ܐܒܪܙ ܚܒܕܟܡ

6. ܐܘܐ ܒܟܡ ܡܕܡ ܡܢ ܚ ܚܡܐ ܘܐ ܟܗ
ܪܘܙܐ ܒܚܒ ܘܐ ܟܗ ܡܢ ܟܡ ܟܗ ܪܘܙܐ
ܩܙܐ ܒܙܐ ܟܡ ܡܢ ܟܡ ܐܒܪܡ ܘܐ

7. ܐܟܒ ܘܐܒܪܡ ܡܕܡ ܚܡܚܕܫܐ
ܘܡܐܩ ܫܐ ܡܟܫ ܚܐ ܨܐ ܐܒܪܡ
ܩܙܐ ܒܙܐ ܘܐ ܟܗ ܐܪܘܙܐ ܒܚܒ ܘܐ ܟܗ

4. In the pure womb of the river
   you should recognize the Daughter of man

   who conceived without any man, who gave birth without intercourse,

   who brought up, through a gift,[4] the Lord of that gift.

5. As the Daystar in His river, the Bright One in His tomb, Luke 1:78

   He shone forth on the mountain top[5]
   and gave brightness too in the womb;

   He dazzled[6] as He went up [from the river],
   gave illumination at His ascension.[7]

6. The brightness which Moses put on was wrapped on him from without, Exod 34:29ff.

   the river in which Christ was baptized put on Light from within,

   [Mary's] body, in which He resided, was made gleaming from within.

7. Just as Moses gleamed with the [divine] glory

   because he saw the splendor[8] briefly, how much more should the body

   wherein [Christ] resided gleam, and the river in which He was baptized?

---

4. gift: Probably Ephrem has in mind the gift of milk flowing in the breasts of Mary, a virgin (as in *Nat.* 11.4 [Text 4]). The wording is reminiscent of *Odes of Solomon* 35.5–6: "Like a child carried by its mother, He gave me milk, the dew of the Lord, and I was brought up by His gift, and found rest in His perfection." It seems unlikely, however, that Ephrem knew the *Odes of Solomon.*

5. mountain top: It is (perhaps deliberately) unclear whether this refers to the Transfiguration or to the Ascension.

6. dazzled: Ephrem probably has in mind the early tradition that at Christ's baptism there appeared above or in the Jordan either light (so some Old Latin manuscripts of the Gospels) or fire (so first in Justin Martyr). In Syriac tradition it is fire that is more commonly referred to, and this is depicted visually in the famous illuminated Rabbula Gospels, dated 586 CE. For a discussion of this tradition going back to the Diatessaron, see Petersen 1994, 14–20.

7. ascension: This could, alternatively, be taken as referring to Christ's "going up" from the Jordan after his baptism.

8. splendor: Lit. "exaltation."

8. ܐܡܐ ܒܚܟܡ ܗܦܗܐ ܩܐܡܐ ܟܝܠ ܒܚܢܐ
ܠܐ ܡܘܕ ܟܬܡܦܐ ܘܬܡܪ ܟܝܠ ܒܡܢ
ܘܦܗܘܐ ܘܡܝ ܐܦܩܘ ܗܦܗ ܡܒܡ ܬܟܘ

9. ܟܢܐܐ ܘܟܟܬܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܗܝܟܐ ܦܗܘܐ
ܐܣܬܐ ܟܬܬܣܗ̈ ܘܬܚܗܗ̈ ܦܗܘܐ
ܡܬܘ ܗܟܫܩ ܟܩܦܐ ܘܡܗܦܣܐ

10. ܐ ܟܡ ܐܝ ܡܗܡ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܐܣܬ ܦܗܘܐ
ܒܒ ܟܬܦܐ ܠܐ ܟܡ ܗܢܡ ܡܗܡ
ܦܗܘܐ ܟܠ ܬܦܐ ܘܬܟܐ ܘ ܗܟܫܩ

11. ܗܟ ܟܦܣܐ ܢܘܒ ܐܝ ܒܬܩ
ܒܟܦܗ̈ ܒܣ ܟܚܗ̈ ܐܡܐ
ܡܦ ܟܗ̈ ܗܒ ܦܗܘܐ ܟܬܐ

12. ܐܣܒ ܗܗ ܟܗ ܡ ܘܟܡܟ ܬܡ
ܟܦܡ ܘܟ ܡܦܡ ܟܡ ܟܡ ܟ
ܘܡܗ̈ ܟܗ̈ ܢܟ ܡܗ ܡܦܢ

8. The brightness that the stammering Moses
put on in the wilderness Exod 4:10

did not allow the darkness to darken the inside of his dwelling,

for the light from his face served as a sun[9] that went before his feet,

9. like the supernal beings whose eyes need

no other light, since their pupils

flow with light, and they are clothed in rays of glory.

10. For if the sun chases out darkness without using light

apart from its own—for the sun needs

no luminary for light, seeing it is the source of [its own] rays—

11. so too at the Resurrection the righteous are light,

for their clothing is splendor, their garments brightness:

they become their own light through the [source of] light.

12. Save me, Lord, on that day when the wicked put on

the garment of all [their] sins, clothing full of stains,

whence spring up for them darkness and torment,

---

9. served as a sun *(shammesh):* The double translation is intended to bring out the double entendre.

13. ܐܡܪ ܐܢ ܡܢܐ ܕܚܫܚܐ ܕܚܕܘܗܝ
ܠܚܟܡ ܚܙܘܬܐ ܫܡܐ ܕܐܡܝ
ܗܘܬ ܘܚܕܬܐ ܕܡܚܝ ܘܚܙܘܬܐ

14. ܠܐ ܘܠܡܢ ܟܝ ܡܕܡ ܕܐܡܪ
ܕܚܟܝܡ ܗܘܐ ܕܟܪ ܚܕܝ ܡܢܝ
ܢܫܡܥ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܐܘܐ ܘܚܕܝ

15. ܐܝܟ ܚܙܬܐ ܘܒܘܐ ܒܡ ܕܐ ܙ
ܒܘܐ ܡܚܝ ܚܟܡ ܚܙܚܬܐ
ܘܒܘܐ ܘܐܐ ܕܐ ܘܒܘܐ ܘܦܬܟ

13. just as from the body in times of sickness
there spring up bitter pain,[10] suffering, and fever,
as fetters for its wrongdoing and a rod to chastise it.

14. O Good One, who has prepared for us the sun by day
and by night the moon with the candelabra of the stars,
may Your glorious comfort reach me through Your grace.

15. Give thanks to the Creator of light because in it is depicted
the heavenly Light; give praise to the Maker
of light because it is a symbol of the Light of our Savior!

◆

10. bitter pain *(mraruta):* This form is not attested in the dictionaries; probably the text should be corrected to *mrarta* (ANP).

TEXT 8

The Paradoxes of the Incarnation
(*Res.* 1)

In this poem, the first part of which contains an acrostic with Ephrem's own name, the poet explores various aspects of the paradoxes that are involved in the incarnation. For the acrostic with Ephrem's name, see the General Introduction (p. xv).

Meter

The *qala* title is lost. The meter, which consists of 7 4+4 4+4 4+4 syllables, is elsewhere given the *qala* title *ʾo bar ḥire/ḥayya* (*Fid.* 36–38; *Nat.* 27).

Text

The poem is preserved complete solely in British Library Add. 14627 (sixth or seventh century; Beck's B). In this manuscript the opening of the first stanza is lost, but the text can fortunately be supplied from excerpts from the *madrasha* in the Mosul Fenqitho (6.162–64; see Slim 1967; Brock 1997, 504). In fact excerpts from this *madrasha* are to be found in two different places in the Mosul Fenqitho: 6.107 (stanzas 7–9, 12–13, 16) and 6.162–64 (stanzas 1, 6, 17, interspersed with stanzas of unknown origin).

1. ܐܠܐ ܟܝ ܐܢܐ ܡܢ ܫܡ ܒܪܡ
ܥܘܠܐ ܕܚܕܢܐ ܡܢ ܐܚܢܥܡ
ܕܥܐ ܟܝ ܐܢܐ ܕܥܐ ܟܝ ܚܕܢܐ
ܩܠܝܢܗ ܚܒܝܫܐ ܒܗܕ ܟܢܥܡܐ
ܚܙܝ ܗܕܡܟܬܗ

ܚܕܝܫܐ : ܚܙܝ ܚܕܟܝ

2. ܚܙܝ ܫܝܫ ܫܕ ܙܟܐ ܟ
ܫܚܟܘܗ ܠܐܡ ܡܢܟܐ ܒܠܐ
ܟ ܟܠܩܐܗ ܠܒܡܗ ܫܡܟ
ܕܥܐ ܚܩܙܟܐ ܚܡܙܐ ܟܢܐ
ܚܙܝ ܙܩܣܗ

1. The Lamb has come for us from the House of David, Matt 1:1
   the Priest and Pontiff from Abraham; Heb 9:11
   He became for us both Lamb and Pontiff,
   giving His body for sacrifice, His blood for sprinkling. Exod 12:6–7
   Blessed is His perfecting!

   Refrain: Blessed is Your rising up!

2. The Shepherd of all flew down
   in search of Adam, the sheep that had strayed; Luke 15:4–5
   on His shoulders He carried him, taking him up:
   he was an offering for the Lord of the flock.
   Blessed is His descent![1]

1. His descent *(ruḥḥapeh):* Lit. "hovering." The term (derived from Gen 1:2, for which see Text 16 [*Virg.* 7], n. 7) is normally used in connection with the Holy Spirit.

3. ܘܥܡ ܟܠܗ ܡܫܟܚܢܐ ܫܡܐ
ܟܠ ܗܘ ܡܢܥܡ ܐܘܟܐ ܪܘܚܡܐ
ܐܡ ܫܟܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܬ ܟܡܬܟ
ܗܟܡ ܐܡ ܟܦܐ ܡܟܣܡܐ ܫܒܐ
ܚܢܡ ܩܬܘܟܗ

4. ܫܒܚܗ ܙܘܩܗ ܠܩܚܫ
ܒ ܐܢܥܩܐ ܘܐܟܡܐ ܘܩܐ
ܠܟܐ ܒ ܟܡܐ ܗܐܠܘܐ ܒ
ܚܟܝܒܐ ܢܥܩ ܒ ܫܩܥܐ
ܚܢܡ ܡܚܩܒ

5. ܒ ܙܘܩܐ ܫܠܐ ܫܡ ܟ
ܗܒ ܟ ܒܢܐ ܩܚܐ ܪܡܫ ܟ
ܒ ܩܚܐ ܫܬܐ ܘܫܡ ܟ
ܗܟ ܫܫܐ ܡܚܟܐ ܢܐܒ ܟ
ܚܢܡ ܐܩܢܗ

3. He sprinkled dew and life-giving rain
   on Mary, the thirsty earth. Isa 53:2
   Like a seed of wheat He fell again to Sheol John 12:24
   to spring up as a sheaf, as the new Bread. Lev 23:11; John 6:36
   Blessed is His offering!

4. Knowledge of Him chased error away
   from humanity that had become lost;
   the Evil One was led astray by Him and was confounded.
   [Knowledge of Him] poured out all kinds of wisdom upon the peoples.
   Blessed is His fountain!

5. From on high did Power[2] descend to us, Luke 1:35
   from within a womb did Hope shine out for us,
   from the grave has Salvation[3] appeared for us,
   and on the right hand the King for us is seated. Ps 110:1
   Blessed is His glory![4]

---

2. Power *(ḥayla):* The "Power of the Most High" in Luke 1:35 was usually interpreted by Syriac writers as referring to the divine Word rather than to the Holy Spirit.

3. Salvation: *Ḥayye* in early Syriac texts means "salvation" as well as "life"; thus the Greek *sōtēria* is always rendered by *ḥayye* in the Old Syriac Gospels.

4. His glory *(iqareh):* Based on Ezek 3:12; cf. stanza 22 and *Nis.* 41.14 (Text 13). The phrase is occasionally found in later literature, e.g., the Syriac translation of the *Life of Antony* §12, 84 (Draguet 1980, T. 29, 134). In normal Syriac usage *iqara* has the sense of "honor" rather than "glory."

6. ܒ ܙܘܡܐ ܕܝܐ ܐܢ ܢܘܝ
ܘܒܗ ܘܒܢܝ ܐܢ ܒܚܝ
ܒ ܒܗܐ ܫܡ ܐܢ ܦܐ
ܗܟ ܒܡܐ ܐܢ ܙܡܗ
ܕܡ ܙܒܗ

7. ܒܟܗ ܐܒ ܠܐ ܒ ܚܕ
ܘܟܡ ܦܝ ܚܕܒ ܠܢ
ܒ ܚܕܒ ܚܕܒ ܒܡ
ܘܟ ܒܗ ܚܕ ܢܦ
ܕܡ ܙܗ ܒ

8. ܒ ܙܘܡ ܫܡ ܐܢ ܗ
ܘܒ ܒ ܒܗ ܦ ܐܢ ܒܚ
ܘܟ ܗܐ ܗܘܡ ܒ
ܘܚܕܗ ܫ ܗܝ ܟ
ܕܡ ܒܗ

6. From on high He flowed like a river,
   from Mary He [stemmed] as from a root, — Isa 11:1; Luke 3:32; Rom 15:12
   from the Cross He descended as fruit,
   as the firstfruit He ascended to heaven. — Col 1:18
   Blessed is His will!

7. The Word came forth from the Father's womb,[5] — John 1:18
   He put on the body in another womb;
   from one womb to another did He proceed,
   and chaste wombs are filled with Him.
   Blessed is He who has resided in us![6] — John 1:14

8. From on high He came down as Lord,
   from within the womb He came forth as a servant;
   Death knelt before Him in Sheol,
   and Life worshipped Him at His resurrection.
   Blessed is His victory!

---

5. The Word . . . the Father's womb *(ʿubbeh):* The word used in John 1:18 can mean both "bosom" (so the Greek) and "womb," and it is in the latter sense that Ephrem takes it, providing a parallel with the womb of Mary. In this line the Word *(mellta)* is treated grammatically as feminine, as sometimes elsewhere in early Syriac texts; normally, however, the masculine is preferred.

6. resided in us *(shra ban):* It is very likely that Ephrem has in mind John 1:14, even though all the known Syriac versions (Syriac Diatessaron, Peshitta, Harklean) have a different verb *(aggen)* here. References to (as opposed to citations of) both Luke 1:35 and John 1:14 in early Syriac writers regularly employ the verb *shra,* rather than *aggen;* possibly this usage may go back to the first oral kerygma in Syriac (see Brock 1989a and 1993).

9. ܡܢܬܪ ܠܟܢܗ ܐܡ ܒܚܕܐ
ܕܗܘ ܠܟܬܗ ܐܡ ܡܕܘܕܐ
ܪܟܫܐ ܠܟܬܗ ܐܡ ܟܡܗܝܐ
ܡܥܐ ܠܟܢܘܗܝ ܐܡ ܠܐܟܐ
ܡܕܫܐ ܠܐܚܘܗܝ

10. ܒܝ ܟ ܟܬܒ ܐܡܪ ܡܢܐ
ܐܘ ܫܕܥܐ ܟܡ ܡܕܥܐ
ܘܡܐ ܡܐ ܙܒ ܫܕܟܬܘܗܝ
ܘܡܐ ܩܕܡܐ ܙܒ ܬܕܟܐܘܗܝ
ܚܢܢ ܟܬܒ

11. ܒܝ ܡܕܡ ܒܕܐ ܐܡܢܐ ܥܝܕ ܗܘܐ
ܠܟܐ ܘܐܐ ܢܥܡܐ ܒܟ
ܒܝ ܡܕܡ ܠܟܐ ܫܠܐ
ܒܘܬܡܐ ܫܠܐ ܥܝܕ ܟ
ܚܢܢ ܢܕܕ

9. Mary carried Him as a child,
   the priest [Simeon] carried Him as an offering, Luke 2:28
   the Cross carried Him as one slain,
   heaven carried Him as God.
   Praise to His Father!

10. From every side He stretched out and gave
    healing and promises:
    children ran to His healings,
    the discerning ran to His promises.
    Blessed is His revelation!

11. From the fish's mouth He gave a coin Matt 17:27
    whose imprint was temporal, whose currency passing; cf. Matt 22:21
    from His own mouth He gave a new imprint,
    giving us the New Covenant.
    Blessed is its Giver!

12. ܡܢ ܟܠܗܐ ܟܠܗܐ
ܡܢ ܡܬܬܐ ܐܝ ܐܢܫܬܐ
ܡܢ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܐܝ ܚܕܪܬܐ
ܡܢ ܡܕ ܒܥܐ ܐܝ ܡܠܚܬܐ
ܕܢܫ ܫܠܡܗ

13. ܡܢ ܥܡܬܐ ܗܘ ܟܣܠܐ
ܡܢ ܙܥܘܪܐ ܥܕ ܢܫܬܐ
ܡܢ ܚܕܐ ܗܘ ܠܐ ܠܐܝܬ
ܡܠܚܡܐ ܗܘ ܡܕ ܚܕ ܚܕܐ
ܕܢܫ ܐܫܠܡܗ

14. ܡܢ ܟܠ ܐ ܠܐ ܡܬ ܗܘ
ܡܢ ܫܡܫܐ ܠܐ ܚܙ ܗܘ
ܡܐܬܥܒܕ ܠܘ ܫܒ ܗܘ
ܡܟܡܬܐ ܠܘ ܡܫ ܗܘ
ܕܢܫ ܫܠܡܗ

12. From God is His divinity,
    from mortals His humanity,
    from Melkizedek His priesthood, Heb 5:6
    from David's line His kingship. cf. Matt 1:6, Luke 1:32
    Blessed is His combining them!

13. He was one of the guests at the Wedding Feast, John 2:1–11
    He was one of the fasters in the Temptation, Matt 4:1–11
    He was one of the watchful in the Agony, Matt 26:26–36
    He was a teacher in the Temple. Mark 12:35
    Blessed is His instruction!

14. He did not shrink from the unclean,
    He did not turn away from sinners;
    in the sincere He greatly delighted,
    for the simple He greatly longed.
    Blessed is His teaching!

15. ܡܢ ܥܬܝܐ ܠܐ ܫܚ ܬܟܝܡ
ܐܘ ܠܐ ܬܟܝܡ ܡܢ ܗܘܬܘ̈ܢ
ܗܘ ܥܫܝܐ ܙܒ ܐܬܝ̈ܐ
ܗܐ ܥܗܝܡܐ ܙܒ ܬܟ̈ܐ
ܚܙܝ ܗܟܬܫ

16. ܥܝܟ ܟ ܒܬ̈ܐ ܗ
ܗܐ ܚܒ ܟ ܫܬ̈ܐ ܗ
ܐ ܥܝܬܐ ܟ ܫܬ̈ܐ ܗ
ܐ ܗܬܟ ܟ ܙܬ̈ܐ ܗ
ܚ̈ܐ ܢܒ ܟ

17. ܡܢ ܐܗܬ̈ܐ ܫܥ ܐܬ̈ܐ
ܗܡ ܒܬ̈ܐ ܐ ܟ̈ܐ
ܡܢ ܒ̈ܐ ܫܥ ܥ̈ܐ
ܗܡ ܬܬ̈ܐ ܥܡ̈ܐ ܟ̈ܐ
ܚܙܝ ܗܙܢܬ

15. He did not hold back His footsteps from the sick
    or His words from the simple;
    He extended His descent to the lowly,
    and His ascension to the highest.
    Blessed is His Sender!

16. His birth gives us purification,
    His baptism gives us forgiveness,
    His death is life to us,
    His ascension is our exaltation.
    How we should thank Him!

17. By the greedy He was considered a glutton, Matt 11:19
    but by those who know, the Provider of all;
    by drunkards He was considered a drinker, Matt 11:19
    but by the discerning, the One who gives everyone to drink.
    Blessed is His foresight!

18. ܚܰܡܽܥܳܐ ܠܳܐ ܗܘܳܐ ܟܳܗܢܳܐ
ܐܰܟ̈ܚܙܰܢܳܐ ܥܡܳܐ ܐܰܟܽܪܗ
ܙܰܒ ܟܽܐܦܳܐ ܚܰܡܳܐ ܐܦܳܟܽܩܐ
ܐܰܚܰܠܚܰܫܬܳܐ ܐܰܡܳܐ ܚܦܳܟܽܬܐ
ܚܰܢܳܐ ܐܦܳܙܗܽܬܐ

19. ܙܰܒ ܡܽܟܦܳܐ ܚܰܙܳܐ ܟܰܪܗ
ܐܰܚܽܪܰܦܬܳܐ ܓܩܳܐ ܐܰܟܽܪܗ
ܚܬܳܟܽܬܳܐ ܐܦܳܐܰܠܳܐ ܗܘ ܚܳܐܳܐ
ܐܰܚܰܠܰܫܰܠܬܳܐ ܘܙܽܐ ܐܦܳܐܳܐ
ܫܰܠܰܡ ܚܦܳܦܽܩܐ

20. ܩܳ ܥܡܳܐ ܐܰܢܰܫ ܗܘܳܐ
ܐܩܳ ܗܳܐ ܟܳܐ ܐܰܐܰܠܰܐ ܗܘܳܐ
ܩܳ ܐܙܽܐܘܳܐ ܩܰܐܰܟܦܰ ܗܘܳܐ
ܚܦܰܐܳ ܟܰܐܩܳܐ ܙܪܳܐ ܘܬܚܰܪܰܐ
ܚܰܢܳܐ ܡܽܟܦܳܐ

18. To Caiaphas His conception was a scandal, Matt 26:63–65
but to Gabriel His birth was glorious; Luke 1:31–35
to the unbeliever His ascension is a source of difficulty,
but to His disciples His exaltation is a source of wonder. Acts 1:9–10
Blessed is His discernment![7]

19. With His Begetter His birth is certain,
but to the investigator it is fraught with difficulty;
to supernal beings its truth is crystal clear,
but to those below, a subject of enquiry and hesitation
—yet one which cannot be investigated!

20. By the Evil One He was tempted, Matt 4:1–11 and par.
by the [Jewish] people He was questioned, Matt 26:57ff.
by Herod He was interrogated:
He spurned him with silence when he wished to probe Him. Luke 23:9
Blessed is His Begetter!

---

7. discernment *(purshaneh):* The word could also be translated "separation," thus alluding to Luke 24:51, "he was separated *(etpresh)* from them" (sc. his disciples); if this is correct, then Ephrem will already have known the Peshitta reading there (the one surviving Old Syriac manuscript, the Sinaiticus, has "was raised").

21. ܡܶܢ ܚܲܛ̈ܳܗ̈ܶܐ ܚܲܛ̈ܳܗ̈ܳܐ ܫܲܚܚܳܐ ܘ̈ܡ
ܐܳ ܡܶܢ ܙܲܥܪܳܐ ܚܲܥܳܐ ܡܲܠܳܐ ܘ̈ܡ
ܐܲܢ ܘܟܲܡܳܠܳܐ ܚܲܡܫܳܐ ܠܳܐ ܘ̈ܡ
ܐܲܢ ܟܲܡܟ̈ܳܐ ܚܲܩܪܳܐ ܗܲܥܩܳܐ ܘ̈ܡ
ܚܲܢ ܡܲܩܘܳܛܳܐ

22. ܫܲܢܳܐ ܟܲ ܡܕ̈ܶܢ ܘܐܲܚܳܠܶܡ
ܙ̈ܳܥ ܙ̈ܲܟ ܟ̈ܲܢ ܙ̈ܶܡ
ܙ̈ܚܳ ܙ̈ܚܲܒ ܫ̈ܳ ܙ̈ܚܲܒ
ܫ̈ܲܚܥ ܙ̈ܲܟ ܙ̈ܲܥܩ ܚ
ܚܲܢ ܐ̈ܲܡ̈ܪ

21. They thought He was one of those baptized in the river [Jordan],
they accounted Him amongst those that sleep while at sea, Matt 8:24
they hung Him like a slain man on the Cross,
they laid Him like a corpse in the grave.
Blessed is His humiliation!

22. Whom have we, Lord, like You—
the Great One who became small, the Wakeful who slept,
the Pure One who was baptized, the Living One who died,
the King who bore disgrace to ensure honor for all!
Blessed is Your honor!

◆

TEXT 9

On the Fall (*Ieiun.* 3)

Ephrem here takes up the theme of the Fall and the immensity of God's compassion in sending "a robe of glory to cover Adam's naked state" (stanza 2)—where Adam is understood as the representative of the human race as a whole, and the "robe of glory" represents the new possibility of restoration and salvation provided by the incarnation. In stanza 3, he points out that the Tree of Knowledge has the potential to be either beneficial or harmful: it is beneficial to those who use it rightly, in obedience to God, but harmful to those who snatch at its fruit out of selfish presumption. In other words, knowledge in itself is neutral, neither good nor bad; it is only made good or bad by the way in which it is approached and by the uses to which human beings put it. Ephrem then applies this to the Lenten Fast (stanza 5): as examples in the Old Testament show, a fast that is accompanied by backbiting is abhorrent to God. The final verse expresses wonder at God's great love for humanity and his rigorous respect for human free will: it would have been easy for him to rescue fallen humanity by mere divine decree, but out of respect for the free will with which he has endowed human beings, God himself chose to "put on humanity" at the incarnation in order to invite humanity back to himself.

Unusually, there is no refrain given in the manuscripts.

Meter

The *qala* title for *Ieiun.* 1–5 is given as *hanaw nisan brika;* the same meter is used for *Res.* 4–5 where, however, it has the *qala* title *hanaw ṣawmeh d-bukra,* the opening words of *Ieiun.* 1. The meter itself is highly complex and has been variously analyzed, notably: (a) Douayhi (Hage 1987, 38a; no. 69) gives 6+5+5 5+5+5 4+4+5 4+7+7 6+4+6; (b) Lamy

(1902, 4:492; no. 48) has 6+5+5 5+5+6 8+5 5+7+5 6+10; (c) according to ANP it should be 6+5+5 5+5+6 4+4 5+5 7+5 (or 5+7) 4+4+4. (Beck simply describes the meter as "unklar.")

Text

The poem is preserved complete only in British Library Add. 14438 (sixth century; Beck's C), though stanzas 1, 3, 5, and 6 also occur in British Library Add. 14627 (of sixth or seventh century; Beck's B). Of the two rather later manuscripts which Beck employs, British Library Add. 14506 has only stanzas 1–2, and British Library Add. 14512 only stanza 5.

ܟ ܗܠܐ ܗܘܬܗ ܬܫܥ ܚܙܝܐ

1. ܥܠ ܕܒ ܐܒܥ ܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܐܒ ܐܚܫܐ
ܐܚܫܝܐ ܪܒܚܐ ܥܒ ܛܚܐ ܚܟܚܗ ܗܟܥܐ ܚܩܥܐܐ
ܐܩܐܗܒ ܐܥܒ ܐܒ ܗܟ ܐܫܐ ܚܙܐ
ܐܟܟܐ ܐܥܚ ܐܩܐܐ ܥܩܙ ܗܘܐ
ܥܥܟܐ ܐ ܙܟܐ ܐܩܝܐ ܐܗܐ ܐܟܙܐ
ܚܙܒ ܗܐ ܙܥܟ ܩܥܐ
ܘܙܥܐ ܚܒܗ ܛܐ ܥܒ ܫܐ

2. ܥܐ ܐܙ ܗܘܐ ܘܫܐ ܐܟ ܘܥܩܐ ܘܐܐܩܙܥ ܩ ܩܟ
ܐܒ ܛܥܐ ܐܐ ܟܗ ܫܐ ܚܙܫܐ ܫܐܗ ܐܟ ܥܐ ܐܗ
ܥܐ ܐܙ ܗܘܐ ܘܐ ܛܟܐ ܗܘܐ
ܥ ܫܐ ܐܐ ܙܟ ܘܐܥܐ
ܐܥܟ ܙܥܚ ܐ ܟܐܥܩܐ ܚܙ
ܚܙܒ ܗܐ ܘܫ ܚܟ
ܐܥܙ ܐܥ ܥܐ ܟܥܫܐ

1. Who has peered back to see Adam and Eve,

and the crafty serpent, with cunning in his heart but peace on his lips,

stretching out as he beguiles Adam [who] is childlike[1]
and Eve who is simple? Gen 3:1–6

The Tree is blossoming, its fruit glistens,

the fault is great, while Justice remains resplendent and mighty.

Blessed is He who mixed with His just sentence

a flood of mercy when He showed pity on the guilty.

2. Who would be able to look upon that honored pair
who were stripped naked all of a sudden?

The Evil One stood there, a happy onlooker,
while the Good One saw him and watched him.

Who could fail to weep

seeing the great Adam thus brought low,

the chaste man covering his shame with leaves? Gen 3:7

Blessed is He who had pity on him in his leaves

and sent a robe of glory[2] to cover his naked state.

---

1. childlike: Similarly in stanza 6 and in *Par.* 7.6 and 15.12, 14. In his *Commentary on Genesis* (2.14) Ephrem rejects the idea that Adam and Eve were childlike in the sense that they were inexperienced (and so less to blame).

2. robe of glory: See Text 5 (*Nat.* 17), n. 3.

3. ܟܬܐ ܕܡܚܬ ܐܢܫ ܠܟ ܗܘ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܘܐܦܘ ܚܛܝܬܐ
ܢܡܐ ܗܝ ܕܢ ܚܢܐ ܘܚܫܐ ܒܝ ܬܫܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܠܗܘܢ ܚܩܡܗܘܢ
ܐܘ ܘܒܪܚܡܐ ܗܝ ܗܘ ܒܪܚܡܐ ܗܝ
ܗܘܟܡ ܒܪܟܡܐ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܒܪ ܐܢܫ
ܗܘܐ ܗܝ ܟܬܒܐ ܘܐܚܪܐ ܗܘܢܘܬܐ ܘܚܟܡ
ܕܢܪ ܗܝ ܩܐܢ ܘܐܢܫ ܒܪܚܡܗ
ܘܐܝܟ ܬܬܐ ܟܝ ܛܥܬܐ

4. ܐܘܡ ܫܡܐ ܣܐ ܗܝܐ ܗܘܐ ܚܕܘܗܐ ܘܚܩ ܟܗ
ܗܩ ܢܥܡܗ ܟܗܘܐ ܗܬ ܣܢܗܘܐ ܗܘ
ܘܟܠ ܛܟܗ ܟܡ ܛܟܗ ܗܘܐ ܟܗ ܛܗܘ ܘܐܗܬ ܛܗ
ܬܟܡ ܗܝܐ ܟܗܘ ܘܐܟܡ ܫܬܬܐ
ܗܕ ܗܝܐ ܟܗ ܡܐ ܪܫܐ ܒܐܘ ܚܬܟܐ
ܕܢܪ ܗܬ ܡܟܗ ܘܐܟܐ ܒܫ
ܟܐ ܗܐܚܕ ܐܟܗ ܘܐܡ

3. Who is there who can expound concerning that Tree
which caused those who sought it to go astray?

It is an invisible target, hidden from the eyes,
which wearies those who shoot at it.

It is both the Tree of Knowledge, and of ignorance:

it is the cause of knowledge, for by it a person knows

what is the gift that was lost, and the punishment that took place.

Blessed is that Fruit[3] which has mingled a knowledge

of the Tree of Life into mortals.

4. The serpent peered out and saw that the dove in paradise was hungry;

the Pernicious One turned himself into a dove.

He who is utterly accursed became like her,
so that she might become his;

he put on her colors, so that she might put on his ugliness,

ⲁ he sang to her a pleasant song, so that she might fly off amid laments.

Blessed is that voice of the Father which came down

to give comfort and to remove our mother's woe.

---

3. Fruit: I.e., Christ.

5. ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܟܗ ܚܫܡܐ ܙܘܥܝ ܚܦܗܡܐ ܘܒܛܠ ܫܚܬܝ
ܙܘܥܐ ܫܡ ܐܙܐ ܘܟܗ ܘܙܚܦܘܝ ܚܢܚܦܐ
ܚܡܝ ܫܡܐ ܚܙܘܬܫܗ ܐ ܙܒܢܐ ܘܣܟܗ ܟܫܡܐ
ܐܟܗ ܫܡܐ ܘܐܢܡܐ ܚܙܘܡܐ ܘܐ ܚܟܗ ܘܟܗ
ܘܐܟܗ ܫܡܐ ܘܐܢܡܦܐ ܟܗ ܐܦܐ ܚܛܟܫܐ
ܚܫܝ ܘܗ ܘܢܦܫ ܥܝܢܗ
ܚܦܦܝ ܥܡܐ ܘܢܡܐ ܡܝ ܒܦܡܐ

6. ܐܘܡ ܣܢܐ ܣܐ ܘܗܐ ܒܥܐ ܚܝܗ ܟܐܐ ܐܐܦܙܡ ܟܘܟܗ
ܟܒ ܘܡܢܗ ܡܙܐ ܘܗܐ ܦܢܡ ܟܗ
ܙܘ ܣܦܟܗ ܟܠ ܟܡܟܗ ܚܫܡ ܐܢܡܦܐ
ܡܐ ܡܚܙܦܐ ܘܢܡܗ ܟܒܚܡܗ ܡܙ ܟܗ ܚܫܢܗ
ܫܢܐ ܡܟܫܘܝ ܡܫܫܐ ܘܐܐܐ ܚܙܦܡܙܐ
ܡܦܡܗ ܐܦܗ ܚܙܘܐ
ܘܫܡܦ ܬܚܒܗ ܘܣܐ ܚܐ ܬܚܟܫ

5. Let not our fast provide delight for the Evil One
as we use backbiting on our friends;

for of old they proclaimed a fast—and stoned Naboth to death: 1 Kgs 21:12–13

the Evil One was delighted with their fasts!

O fasters, who instead of bread devoured the flesh of a man;
during the fast they lapped up blood.

Because they devoured human flesh, they became food for the dogs. 1 Kgs 21:24

Blessed is He who gives His own Body

to our crazed mouths, so that we might cease from backbiting!

6. Mercy peered out, saw a soul in the pit, and devised how to draw it up.

Through His mere nod He could have saved that soul,

yet He girded up His love in readiness
for His labor and put on humanity.[4]

He acquired its childlike state so as to bring it to [true] knowledge;

He sung to it with His lyre lowly songs, inviting it to be raised up.

His Cross lifted Him up to the heights

so that Eve's children might likewise rise up [to join] the beings on high.

◆

4. put on humanity: Although "put on a body" is the most frequent metaphor for the incarnation in early Syriac literature, many other variations are found; for the present one, see also *Haer.* 35.7 and *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 2.14, and compare "he put on our humanity," found in the *Acts of Thomas* 80, 113 (Wright 1871, 250, 281); Aphrahat, *Dem.* 3.16; and the *Anaphora of Addai and Mari* (Gelston 1992, 50 [D24]). For this usage in general, see Brock 1982; also Text 16 (*Virg.* 7), n. 17.

TEXT 10

Eyes that are Blind and Eyes that are Opened (*Ieiun.* 6)

The abundant biblical lections during Lent offer to their hearers an infinite number of treasures. All too often, however, through the misuse of free will, human beings have blinded their own interior eye, so that they are no longer able to perceive these riches set before them in the biblical text. To remedy the situation, Ephrem begs Jesus to repeat the healing miracles he performed for the blind in the Gospels; in doing so Ephrem exploits the contrasted situations in a highly striking and imaginative way.

It will be noticed that the poem contains an acrostic, giving the author's name, ʾPRYM. Again there is no refrain given, though here the last line of each stanza serves as one. An interesting study of this *madrasha* is given by Botha 2000.

Meter

The *qala* title is given as *a(n)t mar(y) aktebtah,* the opening words of Text 17 (*Fid.* 10), which, however, has a different *qala* title, namely *izgadda haddaya.* The meter consists of the following syllabic pattern: 5+6 7+4 4+4 4+5 5+6. In the present poem it will be noticed that there are a number of irregularities. Ephrem uses the meter elsewhere for *Fid.* 10–25, *Eccl.* 29–30, and *Nis.* 50.

Text

Unlike the previous text from this cycle, the present poem is only found in British Library Add. 14571 (of 519 CE; Beck's D).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܐܝܡ ܡܢ ܐܡܬܐ

1. ܐܠܗܝܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢܐ
ܩܕܡ ܟܠ ܡܕ ܟܐ ܐܦ ܒܟܘܬܗ
ܕܡܬܡܟܝ ܡܠܐ ܗܘ ܒܪܡܐ
ܗܐ ܡܕܡܫܝ ܒܘܡܐ ܡܬܩܕܡ
ܕܢܫ ܒܚܐ ܒܐܡܬ ܡܕ ܟܬܘܒ ܟܗܢܘܬܐ

2. ܐܡ ܗܘ ܢܫܐ ܟܕܫܢܐ ܘܡܡܠܐ
ܐܡ ܗܘ ܒܐ ܒܡܐ ܘܬܚ ܟܠ ܐܬܐ
ܐܡ ܗܘ ܟܘܒܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ
ܐܘ ܐܝܟܬܗ ܡܟܝ ܐܦ ܒܐ ܒܪܟܐ
ܕܢܫ ܗܘ ܒܚܟܡ ܠܡܕ ܒܐ ܒܪܘܬܝ

1. In the midst of the Fast gather together and become merchants,

   for the scriptures are a treasure house of divinity.

   With that holy voice as the key

   they are opened up before those who listen.

   Blessed is that King who opened up His treasury to His people in need.

2. Here are to be found garments
   for those invited to the wedding feast, Matt 22:11

   here too are sackcloth and tears for all kinds of penitents,

   here in their midst is One to sustain[1] athletes too:

   with every kind of riches are they filled.

   Blessed is He who has prepared for everyone every kind of succor.

---

1. One to sustain: The meter requires *zayyana,* rather than *zayna,* "armor" (ANP). This form is attested in Audo 1897.

3. ܐܠܐ ܗܘ ܕܠܐ ܐܝܬ ܡܢܗ ܡܢܘ ܕܥܒܕ ܗܘ
ܘܠܐ ܫܠܝ ܗܘ ܘܫܒܚ ܗܘ ܟܬܒ ܐܢܐ
ܗܝ ܐܡܪ ܕܐ ܐܢܐ ܐܘ ܡܟܬܒ
ܐܡܪ ܫܠܝܚ ܐܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܬܒܥ
ܕܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܐܢܐ ܐܬܬ ܬܫܟܚ ܘܡܥܒܕ

4. ܐܟܐ ܗܘ ܡܢܝܚ ܘܡܒܐ ܥܡ ܡܨܥ
ܕ ܐܬܐ ܐܬܐ ܟܬܒ ܐܢ ܕܥܒܕ
ܒܟܬܐ ܐܢ ܒܐܐ ܗܘ
ܟܐ ܕܡܢܝܚ ܘܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܒܝ
ܣ ܐܢ ܟܕܒܐ ܒܐܟܐ ܗܘ ܟܐܣ ܐܬ

5. ܬܡܢ ܒܐܐ ܚܟܐ ܒܕ ܠܡܬܡ
ܐܢܐ ܐܬ ܘܐܡܟܒ ܗܒ ܕ ܠ ܒܟ
ܐܢ ܐܢ ܟܬܐ ܘܟܒ ܐܬ
ܕ ܒܟ ܝܒ ܘܐܒܒ ܠܡܥܐ
ܠܡܐ ܐܢ ܟܐ ܘܐܝܐ ܐ ܕ ܟܥܒ

3. Open up then, my brethren, and take from it with discernment,
   for this treasure house is the common property of everyone,
   and each person, as if he were treasurer, possesses his own key;
   who can now fail to get rich?
   Blessed is He who has removed the causes of our low estate.

4. Great is the gift which is cast[2] before our blind eyes: cf. Matt 7:6
   for even though we all have a pair of eyes each,
   few are those who have perceived that gift,
   [who are aware of] what it is and from whom it comes.
   Have mercy, Lord, on the blind, for all they can see is gold!

5. O Jesus who opened the eyes of Bartimaeus, Mark 10:46
   You opened his eyes that had become blind against his will;
   open, Lord, the eyes that of our own will
   we have rendered blind; thus shall Your grace abound.
   The mud [that You made then], Lord,
   tells us that You are the Son of our Maker. John 9:6

2. cast: Compare Matt 7:6, though the Old Syriac (Curetonianus), Peshitta, and Ephrem (*Commentary on the Diatessaron* 6.21b) all have a different verb (*rma*, "throw"). The *Liber Graduum*, however, quotes the verse using *shda*, the verb found in this stanza (Kmosko 1926, col. 888, ln. 22).

6. ܒܢܐ ܐܚܘܗܝ ܐܝ ܒܥܩܒ ܩܪܒܢܐ
ܚܙܟܐ ܗܘ ܙܒܢ ܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܚܩܠ ܘܐܘܡ ܙܟܝ
ܟܝ ܒܝ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܟܝ ܚܩܬ
ܐܠܗܐ ܟܬܠ ܘܫܒܐ ܣܒܘܬܐ
ܚܙܪ ܗܘ ܘܥܘܕ ܟܣܐ ܘܐܠܐ ܠܗ ܘܟܒܘܢ

7. ܒܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܢܡܐ ܚܘܡ ܐܚܦܘܫ
ܠܘܡ ܙܢ ܒܟܐ ܒܟܐ ܦܠܐ ܟܬܒܗ
ܟܝ ܒܝ ܡܢ ܒܟܐ ܟܒ
ܦܠܐ ܟܬܠ ܒܘܐ ܙܢ ܒܡܐ
ܚܙܪ ܘܫ ܐܠܗܐ ܟܬܠ ܒܟܒ ܗܘܐ

8. ܒܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܢܟܒܐ ܟܚܦܐ ܘܒܡܟ ܟ
ܒܒ ܐܠܗܐ ܟܬܒ ܘܡ ܐܣܐ ܙܟܢ
ܟ ܒܝ ܒܟ ܗܘܐ ܠܐ ܟܬܒ
ܒܟܐ ܢܫܡܗ ܟܦܒܢ ܙܐ
ܟܒܘܗ ܡܢ ܡ ܒ ܘܫ ܡ ܟܒ ܘܐ

6. Who is there like You, who gave such honor to our faces?

For it was upon the ground that You spat, and not upon his face, thus holding our image in honor. John 9:6; Gen 1:26

But with us, please spit on our faces, Lord,

and open the eyes which our own free will has closed.

Blessed is He who gave the mind's eye—
which we have managed to blind.

7. Who can fail to wonder at Adam, and how his eyes were opened: Gen 3:7

in Adam's case their opening proved harmful,

but we, Lord, are greatly benefited by the opening of our eyes,

seeing that it was the Evil One who closed them.

Blessed is He who gave succor and both closed and opened up eyes.

8. Who can fail to curse that Thorn[3] which betrayed us,

who by cunning opened up Adam's eyes
so that he beheld his own shame;

he has beguiled us too and smeared over our eyes

so that we might not see the enormity of our naked state.

Curse him, Lord, at the hand of all, so that You may be blessed by all.

◆

3. Thorn *(shpaya):* Based on 2 Cor 12:7. In the Peshitta the same word is also used in 1 Sam 29:4.

TEXT 11

The Two Lambs Compared
(*Azym.* 3)

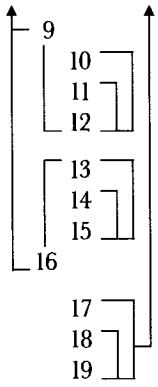
Ephrem here explores the typological relationships between the Passover lamb of Exod 12 and Christ, the new Passover Lamb. This "True Lamb" is seen as the fulfillment of the Passover lamb on two different planes: in the world of space and time he leads the "Peoples," or Gentiles, out of the error of paganism, while in the domain of Sheol, outside normal time and space, he leads out the dead, beginning at the very moment of the crucifixion (Matt 27:52).

This double Exodus brought about by the True Lamb is reflected in the very structure of the poem, as can be seen by the following diagram (based on Brock 1975–76):

Passover Lamb	*True Lamb*		
Egypt = A	Error = B	+	Sheol = C
Pharaoh = A′	Satan = B′	+	Death = C′
			Grave = C″

X represents the Passover Lamb (leading the Israelites out of Egypt)
Y represents the True Lamb (leading the Gentiles out of Error)
Z represents the Living Lamb (leading the dead out of Sheol)

STANZA	1	Resemblance	
	2	Comparison of	
	3	Achievements,	
	4	Differences (shadow: fulfillment)	
5		Old = single, New = double	
6		Jewish Exodus from Egypt	A X
7		Gentile Exodus from Error	B Y
8		Exodus of Dead from Sheol	C Z



9	Egypt as symbol for Sheol and Error	A: C + B
10	Egypt hands back the Hebrews	A X
11	Sheol disgorges the Dead	C Z
12	Error casts up the Gentiles	B Y
13	Pharaoh returns the Hebrews	A′ X
14	Death returns the righteous	C′ Z
15	Error returns the Gentiles	B′ Y
16	Pharaoh is symbol for Death and Satan	A′: C′ + B′
17	Egypt breached	A X
18	Satan foiled	B′ Y
19	Grave emptied	C″ Z

For some other examples of Ephrem's artistry, see Palmer 1993a.

Meter

The *qala* title is given as *ʾetkannash(w) neᶜbed b-iraḥ nisan,* which has some resemblance to the opening words of *Azym.* 13. The meter, which consists of 5+4 5+4 syllables, is used by Ephrem for *Azym.* 3–6, 8–21 (7 is lost) and *Nat.* 4. In later liturgical tradition the opening words of *Azym.* 3 are normally given as the *qala* title for this meter. In all the later excerpts from this poem (see below, under Text), the opening line begins *ha qṭil (h)u,* thus removing the need to take the vocalic *shwa* in *qṭil* as a full vowel metrically.

Text

Although the poem is preserved complete only in British Library Add. 14627 (sixth or seventh century; Beck's B), excerpts from it are found, not only at several places in the Mosul Fenqitho, but also in the East Syriac Ḥudra. The stanzas found are as follows:

1–4, 6–7	= Ḥudra 2.463
1–4, 9–10	= Mosul Fenqitho 5.158
1–4, 17–18	= Mosul Fenqitho 5.45
1	= Mosul Fenqitho 6.286 (the poem consists of *Azym.* 3.1, 5.1–2, 6.1)
11–12, 18–19	= Mosul Fenqitho 6.143 (the poem consists of *Azym.* 16.5–6, 2–3; 3.11–12; 4.2–7; 13.30–31; 3.18–19!)
18–19	= Mosul Fenqitho 6.167 (the poem is again built up from diverse sources)

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܘܐܠܐܦܗ ܬܚܬ ܟܢܫ ܫܡܥ

1. ܗܐ ܡܗܝܠ ܚܕܪܘܗܝ ܐܦ ܦܪܫܐ
ܐܨܛܦܐ ܚܙܝܡܐ ܐܦ ܡܦܗܠܐ

ܚܕܬܐ : ܐܗܚܦܫܐ ܟܚܐ ܡܢܐ ܘܐ
ܘܡܟܡ ܟ ܐܘܐ ܟܐܦܗܦܐ

2. ܟܠܘܗܐ ܐܡܬܐ ܫܦܐ ܐܫ
ܬܫܐ ܘܐ ܘܥܝ ܐܗ ܫܦܢܟ

3. ܬܠܡܦܐ ܐܨܦܡ ܬܪܫܫܐ
ܘܗܐ ܐܦ ܐܘܐ ܗܐܦ ܡܦܗܠܐ

4. ܬܫܬܗܘ ܠܐܘܐ ܐܡ ܠܐܠܐ
ܬܫܬܗܘ ܚܡܦܗܠܐ ܐܡ ܡܦܡܟܐ

1. In Egypt the Passover lamb was slain, Exod 12

   in Sion the True Lamb was slaughtered.

   Refrain: Praise to the Son, the Lord of symbols
   who fulfilled every symbol at His crucifixion!

2. My brethren, let us consider the two lambs,

   let us see where they bear resemblance and where they differ.

3. Let us weigh and compare their achievements

   —of the lamb that was the symbol,
   and of the Lamb that is the Truth.

4. Let us look upon the symbol as a shadow,

   let us look upon the Truth as the fulfillment.

5. ܡܛܠ ܕܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܩܪܝܒ
ܡܢ ܗܘ ܕܠܝܬ ܒܗ ܟܠ ܡܕ ܩܪܝܒ

6. ܐܢܐ ܗܘܝܬ ܒܝ ܒܪܙܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܩܪܝܒ
ܡܣܟܝܢܐ ܕܚܣܝܢ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ

7. ܐܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܝ ܒܟܝܬ ܕܐܡܪ ܣܟܝܢܐ
ܡܣܟܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܢܐ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚܐ

8. ܗܢܘ ܐܡܪ ܐܡܬ ܕܐܡܪ ܫܝ
ܡܣܟܝܢܐ ܕܚܫܝܐ ܐܢ ܒܝ ܒܪܙܐ

9. ܕܒܪܙܐ ܪܒܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܠܐ ܐܬܐ
ܟܡܬ ܡܟܟܒܝܬ ܐܢܐ ܡܣܟܝܢܐ

10. ܫܡܥܘܢ ܒܪܙܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܩܪܝܒ
ܫܟܝܒ ܐܬܐ ܠܐ ܫܡܥܘܢ

5. Listen to the simple symbols that concern that Passover,
and to the double achievements of this our Passover.

6. With the Passover lamb there took place for the People[1]
an Exodus from Egypt, and not an entry.

7. So with the True Lamb there took place for the Peoples
an Exodus from error, and not an entry.

8. With the Living Lamb there was a further Exodus, too,
for the dead from Sheol, as from Egypt;

9. for in Egypt a pair of symbols are depicted,
since it reflects both Sheol and Error.

10. With the Passover lamb, Egypt's greed
learnt to give back, against its wont;

---

1. People: The singular normally stands for the Jewish People in Ephrem, though sometimes (not of course here) it represents the Christian "People from the Peoples." On this theme in Ephrem, see Murray 2004, 41–68.

11. ܟܥܝܩܐ ܒܗܝܡ ܐܡܪ ܫܡܐ
ܐܝܟ ܕܐ ܬܗܘ ܘܠܐ ܟܝܢܐ

12. ܠܒܫ ܟܟܒܐ ܐܡܪ ܡܠܟܐ
ܗܘ ܕܟܠ ܡܐ ܒܐ ܟܝܦܐ ܒܫ

13. ܐܡܪ ܐܡܪ ܩܪܐ ܩܠ ܩܕܫ
ܟܐ ܘܐܡ ܡܐ ܥܡ ܟܟܘܬ

14. ܐܡܪ ܐܡܪ ܫܡܐ ܩܠ ܡܐ
ܐܬܐ ܒܥܐ ܒ ܡܬܘܬ

15. ܐܡܪ ܐܡܪ ܡܠܟܐ ܫܘ ܠܗܐ
ܟܝܦܐ ܘܐܡ ܩܕܫ ܥܡ ܟܟܘܬ

16. ܩܕܫ ܙܬܐ ܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܒܠܥ
ܟܡܐ ܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܐܠܡܐ

11. with the Living Lamb, Sheol's hunger
    disgorged and gave up the dead, against its nature.

12. With the True Lamb, greedy Error
    threw up, ejected, and cast out the Peoples who were saved.

13. With that Passover lamb, Pharaoh returned the People
    whom, like Death, he had held back.

14. With the Living Lamb, Death has returned
    the just, who left their graves. Matt 17:52

15. With the True Lamb, Satan gave up the Peoples
    whom, like Pharaoh, he had held back.

16. In Pharaoh a pair of types were depicted:
    he was a pointer to both Death and Satan.

17. ܐܠܠܘܟܗ ܡܪܘܒ ܚܕ ܩܪܫ
ܕܡܝܡ ܚܬܬ ܐܘܫ ܩܡܗ

18. ܚܘ ܐܕ ܩܡܐ ܐܘܫ ܘܩܡܐ
ܩܛ ܗܘܐ ܘܗܝ ܐܘܫ

19. ܗܘ ܐܕ ܫܬ ܘܙܗ ܟܡܚܬ
ܐܘܫ ܡ ܕܚ ܚܠ ܘܡܐ

17. With the Passover lamb, Egypt was breached

and a path stretched out before the Hebrews.

18. With the True Lamb, Satan, having fenced off all paths,

left free the path that leads to Truth.

19. That Living Lamb has trodden out,[2]
with that cry which He uttered, Matt 27:50

the path from the grave for those who lie buried.

◆

2. trodden out *(drash):* The phrase *drash ʾurḥa*, of Christ's action, is frequently found in early Syriac writers, but the phrase does not occur in the Syriac Bible and its source is unknown. The present passage probably reflects its original context, namely treading out (i.e., initiating) the path from death to life. A discussion of the phrase is given in Murray 2004, 299–301.

TEXT 12

Christ, the New Passover Lamb
(*Cruc.* 2)

This *madrasha* develops the theme of Christ as the True Lamb in a different way, bringing out a whole series of paradoxes. It was the preexistent True Lamb, that is, the divine Word, which gave Moses instructions for the slaughter of the Passover lamb. The True Lamb was at the same time a Shepherd to Moses, the shepherd of Israel (stanza 1). Thus it was that the True Lamb gave instructions about his own sacrifice to Moses, and so paradoxically the Sacrifice was the giver of instructions to the sacrificer (stanza 2).

All the details in Exod 12 concerning the Passover lamb turn out to be typologically significant: the roasting on a spit, the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread, and the consumption of the lamb without being seated (stanzas 2–6)—to which Ephrem adds a feature derived from Isa 61:1 (compare Luke 4:18).

Two further paradoxical symbols are introduced: Isaac the lamb (Gen 22:8) rescued by the ram (Gen 22:13), where both lamb and ram serve as symbols of Christ (stanza 7); and Abel, the shepherd who both offers a lamb as a sacrifice and is himself sacrificed (Gen 4; stanzas 8–9).

Meter

The *qala* title is given as *etqaṭṭal(w) (h)waw yallude,* the opening words of *Nat.* 24. The syllabic pattern consists of five pairs of 7+7 syllables. The refrain in effect constitutes the final unit of 7 syllables in stanza 1. Ephrem elsewhere uses this meter for *Res.* 2 (Text 15) and 3; *Haer.* 22–24, 48; *Nis.* 17–21 (all of which have the same *qala* title); and *Nat.* 23–24, where the *qala* title varies in different witnesses, the other

titles being *bak mar(y) metpaṣṣaḥ* and *manu kay kad mayota* (the opening words of *Nat.* 23).

Text

Like all the other poems in the Paschal cycle, this is preserved complete only in British Library Add. 14627 (sixth or seventh century; Beck's B), though the first three stanzas are also to be found in the East Syriac Ḥudra (2.477).

ܒܪ ܡܠܐ ܘܐܠܦܠܟ ܗܘ ܬܫܒܘܚܐ

1. ܐܘ ܐܢܐ ܚܫܝܐ ܒܥܒ ܐܢܐ ܟܝܐ ܒܪ ܡܪܝ
ܗܘ ܡܘܒ ܗܘܐ ܣܠܝܐ ܚܫܦܡ ܘܬܢܚܐ ܒܗ ܒܐܘܐ ܗܘܐ
ܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܐܘܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܘܐ ܐܢܐ ܟܡܬܗ
ܐܢܐ ܘܐ ܐܢܝܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܘ ܘܐ ܬܟܘܐ
ܒܘܟܐܗ ܘܐ ܐܦ

ܚܦܣܐ : ܒܪ ܐܢܐ ܘܐ ܒܐܬܗ

2. ܒܥܒ ܗܘܐ ܗܦܡ ܒܡ ܡܐ ܚܬܐ ܐܢܬ ܡܟܬܐ
ܗܒ ܠܒ ܫܟ ܠܐ ܒܘܪ ܘܐܒܥ ܬܚܦ ܣܒ ܒܚܫ
ܐܢ ܗܘ ܡܟ ܗܘܐ ܟ ܘܐܒܐ ܪܦ ܒܘܪ
ܟܟ ܒܚܫ ܚܦܫ ܘܐܒܥ ܠܒ ܐ ܬܐܦ
ܐܒܥ ܬܚܦ ܐ ܢܦ ܒܪ ܗ ܘܟ ܠܐܦܟܗ

1. O Hidden Lamb[1] who slaughtered
the visible lamb in the midst of Egypt, Exod 12:6

who gave the staff to Moses
with which the aged man might shepherd the flock; Exod 4:2

the aged [Moses] shepherded that aged flock,
but the Lamb shepherded them both.

The Lamb was both shepherded, and saw to the shepherding:
He shepherds His shepherds,[2]

for they shepherded Him, and He shepherds them.

Refrain: Blessed is the Lamb which shepherds His own flocks!

2. In the house of Jethro Moses slaughtered
sheep and lambs many times over; Exod 3:1

though he had learnt, he did not [yet] grasp
how he could slaughter but one sacrificial beast.

It was our Lamb who was teaching him
how he might depict His own symbol.

The Sacrifice instructed the sacrificer
how he should roast, and how he should eat, Exod 12:8

how to slaughter, and how to sprinkle [the blood].
Blessed is He who instructed those who were to consume Him! Exod 12:7, 22

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1. Hidden Lamb: Ephrem frequently uses the term *kasya,* "hidden," in connection with symbols and types of Christ.

2. His shepherds: I.e., bishops (cf. Murray 2004, 187–91).

3. ܐܰܕܢܳܐ ܣܒܺܝܠܳܐ ܟܽܠܗ ܗܘܳܐ ܚܙܺܝܢܳܐ ܘܰܗܠܳܐ ܟܶܝܳܐ
ܘܐܰܚܳܐ ܬܰܢܗܶܡ ܙܳܝܗ ܚܰܐ ܚܙܳܐ ܟܰܢ ܠܶܐ ܗܶܐ
ܕܢܽܘܳܐ ܗܶܒ ܟܗ ܡܟܽܠ ܗܘܳܐ ܘܐܰܟܗ ܬܰܥܰܫ ܚܰܫܟܶܗ
ܐܶܐ ܐܰܕܢܳܐ ܢܰܚܶܐ ܘܘܰܟܳܐ ܟܰܢܳܐ ܬܰܐ ܟܗ
ܗܶܐ ܟܪܽܘ ܟܰܐܰܫܬܳܐ ܐܰܘ ܟܳܐ ܟܪܽܘ ܟ

4. ܐܰܕܢܳܐ ܟܰܐܶܐ ܟܟܗ ܗܘܳܐ ܘܰܟܰܬܳܐ ܠܳܐ ܬܰܐܟܶܐ
ܘܟܶܐ ܗܘ ܢܰܐ ܘܡܶܐ ܐܠܳܐ ܠܶܐ ܘܟܰܐ
ܠܰܚܰܫܟܶܗ ܐܶܐ ܡܶܐ ܗܘܳܐ ܘܡܽܘ ܡܰܐ ܠܳܐ ܢܰܐ
ܘܘܰܟܳܐ ܬܰܐ ܐܰܚܠܳܐ ܐܰ ܐܶܐ ܗܰܫܰܐ ܟܰܚܰܫܘ
ܘܗܘܳܐ ܐܶܐ ܐܰ ܟܡ ܢܰܐ ܕܢܳܐ ܘܐܶܐ ܙܳܝܗ

3. The New Lamb[3] instructed
that shepherd [Moses] who had grown old with [his] flock

how he might mark out His symbol[4]
in a lamb taken from the sheep, [serving as] His type.[5] Exod 12:5

He gave orders for bitter herbs, gathering them
so that mourning for it/Him might be present[6] Exod 12:8;
in those who consumed it. Num 9:11

The Lamb admonished its slaughterer Exod 12:46; Num
that no bone should be broken within it, 9:12; John 19:36

for He Himself would bind up the broken.[7] Isa 61:1;
Thanks be the Lord who binds up all![8] Luke 4:18

4. The Lamb gave Moses instructions that it be not cooked in water, Exod 12:9

for the spit is a sign of His Cross,
and [an open fire for] roasting the symbol of His bread.

He bade those who ate it, too, to leave nothing over from it, Exod 12:10;
Num 9:12

so that it should not be despised as ordinary food that passes away,

for it has become resplendent, being the very Medicine of Life.[9]
Blessed is the Lamb who has made resplendent His symbol!

---

3. New Lamb: Compare *Nat.* 4.123 where Christ is described as *emra sharwaya,* "initial Lamb."

4. His symbol *(rzh, razeh):* The term for "symbol" or "mystery" is variously spelled in early manuscripts. The later West Syriac norm is *rʾzʾ*, and in East Syriac, *ʾrzʾ*.

5. His type *(bar ṭupseh): Bar* often has the sense of "sharing in." The Greek loanword *ṭupsa (<tupos)* is common in Ephrem.

6. be present: Lit. "fly."

7. bind up *(ʿaṣeb)* the broken: Thus the Peshitta at Isa 61:1, but in the Gospel quotation of the verse in Luke 4:18 the Peshitta has "heal" (with Septuagint and Greek New Testament); the one surviving Old Syriac manuscript here (Sinaiticus) omits the phrase. A study of healing imagery in Ephrem can be found in Shemunkasho 2002.

8. who binds up all *(ʿaṣeb koll):* Ephrem is very fond of titles consisting of a participle + *koll,* and several other examples will be noticed in this selection of texts.

9. being the very Medicine of Life *(ʾa[y]k sam ḥayye):* The particle *ʾa(y)k,* like Greek *hōs,* can mean either "like" (but different from), or "in its role as" (the case here, as with the same phrase in *Nat.* 13.2) (Beck 1980). Medicine of Life is quite a common designation of Christ in Ephrem; for its Mesopotamian antecedents, see Widengren 1946, 129–38.

5. ܐܡܢܐ ܩܘܠ ܟܠ ܙܐܗ ܘܬܐܡܟܬܘܗܝ ܟܡ ܩܕܡܝܐ
ܟܣܦܐ ܣܒܐ ܡܚܣܝܐ ܣܒܐ ܒܪܟܐ ܙܐ ܘܣܒܐܬܐ
ܒܥܝ ܗܘ ܣܥܝܐ ܘܣܐ ܗܘ ܟܕܡܐ ܘܐܡܝ ܠ
ܗܐ ܗܘ ܟܗ ܠ ܐܟܟ ܚܠ ܚܘ ܩܕܡܐ ܘܣܒܐ ܚܠ
ܚܐ ܟܗ ܣܥܝܐ ܡܟܡ ܠ ܚܢ ܗܘ ܟܣܦܐ ܘܣܒܐ ܠ

6. ܗܢܐ ܐܐ ܘܩܒܐ ܩܘܠ ܗܘ ܐܢ ܚܩܡܐ
ܟܠ ܙܐ ܘܐܢ ܐܡܐ ܐܠ ܐܢ ܬܐܡܟ ܒ ܡܐ
ܙܐ ܘܩܝܐ ܒܫܐ ܘܢ ܬܐܟܗܘ ܒ ܡܐ
ܒܩܦܐ ܘܟܫ ܩܘܘܢ ܐܩܗ ܡܩܡ ܗܢ
ܘܟ ܐܡܒܗ ܢܩܦܐ ܚܢ ܒܟ ܙܐ ܐܡܐ

5. The Lamb gave orders concerning His symbol — Exod 12:8; Num 9:11
that they should eat it with unleavened bread—

new bread and new flesh to depict a symbol of His newness,

for gone was the old leaven of Eve which made all stale with age.

Everything had grown old and everything had wasted away,
but through the unleavened bread that renovates all

the leaven that ages all is made useless.
Blessed is that Bread who has made everything new! — 1 Cor 5:7

6. The remainder of the instructions did the True Lamb give

concerning His symbol, the temporary lamb:
no one was to eat it sitting down, — Exod 12:11

for it is a symbol of the Holy Body.
For who would consume sitting down

Him before whom the Seraphim tremble,
covering their faces from Him? — Isa 6:2

Those who receive Him are in awe and are made holy.
Blessed is He who gave instructions concerning
the resplendent symbol!

7. ܐܲܗ ܣܲܗ ܐܲܕܙܳܐ ܣܡܳܐ ܒܲܚܳܐ ܟܗ ܬܲܚܗܳܐ
ܗܲܚܳܐ ܟܗ ܐܲ ܢܲܚܬܲܗܳܐ ܘܐܲܫܒ ܠܐܲܕܡ ܗܲܫܫܳܐ
ܒܲܚܕܲܚܳܐ ܘܐܲ ܬܲܗܗܲܟ ܡܲܟ ܘܐܲ ܗܲܙܲܐ ܐܘܐ
ܗܲܙ ܐܲܕܙܳܐ ܗܲܡܟ ܒܲܚܙܳܐ ܚܐܐ ܘܐܲ ܦܲܙ ܗܘܳܐ
ܘܬܗܳܐ ܗ ܗܳܦ ܘܘܐ ܚܲܫ ܘܐܳܐ ܗܲܫܒ ܘܐ

8. ܗܘܳܐ ܐܲܕܙܳܐ ܡܲܒܡܳܐ ܒܲܚܳܐ ܟܗ ܙܲܚܡܳܐ ܡܲܒܡܳܐ
ܟܗܕܙܳܐ ܟܚܟܲܙܳܐ ܗܲܒܫܲܒ ܟܗ ܒ ܒܲܬܗܳܐ
ܗܡܟ ܟܗ ܒ ܪܗܘܳܐ ܗܲܙ ܚܟܗܘ ܦܐܐ ܡܡܟܗ
ܘܙܲܚܬܳܐ ܘܗ ܗܟܲܟ ܐܲ ܒܲܚܳܐ ܙܘ ܟܗ ܙܲܚܲ ܐܲ ܒܲܚ
ܙܲܚܗܳܐ ܗܲܒܟܲܚܳܐ ܟܲ ܚܗܟܲܚܳܐ ܙܐ ܐܘܐܗ

7. Come and behold the Living Lamb
who has chosen shepherds for Himself,

choosing, too, slaughterers
—who made Abraham hold the knife Gen 22:10

to kill His symbol, the sheep.
He both killed and delivered His symbol—

He saved [Isaac] the lamb, but slew the ram:
by His symbol He delivered His symbol,[10] Gen 22:12–13

so that He might become the summation of all symbols.
Blessed is He who came and summed up all symbols!

8. This primordial Lamb
chose for Himself [Abel] the first shepherd; Gen 4:4

the firstborn[11] [then chose] the firstling,
and He poured into him something of His likenesses,

imprinting in him something to portray Him,
spreading over him a parable of His own slaughter;

For Abel was both shepherd and sacrifice,
and so our Shepherd and our Sacrifice has depicted in him

His own role as both Shepherd and Sacrifice.
Praise be to You, Depicter of symbols![12]

---

10. He both killed and delivered His symbol: Early Syriac writers gave several different typological interpretations of Isaac and the ram in Gen 22, and two of these are used by Ephrem: (a) Isaac represents humanity, rescued by Christ the True Lamb (thus *Nat.* 18.30); (b) Isaac and the ram are both types of Christ, with Isaac representing Christ's divinity and the ram his humanity, or flesh. This is Ephrem's understanding here. It is earlier found in Origen and is taken up in many later Greek and (dyophysite) Syriac writers. On this subject in general see Daniélou 1947, and, for some later Syriac treatments, Brock 1986, 76–80.

11. the firstborn *(bkr', bukra):* Such defective spellings are not uncommon in fifth- and sixth-century manuscripts, but are very rarely found later.

12. Depicter of symbols: Ephrem employs some other divine titles with the element *ṣa'ar,* notably *ṣa'ar ʿule,* "Depicter, Fashioner of infants" (in the womb) (*Nat.* 4.161, 170), taken up later especially by Jacob of Serugh.

9. ܚܘܫܒ ܐܢܐ ܟܠ ܗܘ ܒܠܥܕܡ ܢܥܡܗ ܚܘܡܪ
ܘܐܢܐ ܠܐܢܐ ܒܥܕ ܗܘ ܫܒܥܕ ܚܘܡܪ ܢܥܡܗ
ܡܕ ܒܥܕ ܐܝ ܠܐܣܬܐ ܙܕ ܐܢܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܡ
ܘܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܫ ܒܥܕ ܡܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܫ ܘܐܠܥܕ
ܡܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܫ ܒܥܩܒ ܐܘ ܠܐܢܐ ܘܟܘ

10. ܚܩ ܒ ܚܘܙܐ ܡܠܐ ܗܘ ܚܕ ܩܠܐ ܘܒܘܩܗ
ܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܟܫܘܠ ܐܡ ܙܐ ܒܬܘ
ܡܐ ܒܚܠ ܚܘܗ ܐܝ ܙܫ ܡܢܚ ܗ
ܡܐ ܟܬܗ ܟܠ ܗܘ ܒܙ ܫܘܬ ܘܒ
ܒܬܗ ܒ ܒ ܚܘܙ ܐܟ ܗ ܐ ܒ ܚ ܗ

9. Our Lamb instructed Abel
to keep himself innocent first of all,

so that [as a] lamb he might offer up a lamb,
offering up first himself

and only then offering up the other.
Great is the wonder that took place there,

for it was a lamb who was making the offering
and a lamb that was being offered—

and it was the Lamb, too, who received it.
Thanksgiving be to the Lamb of God! John 1:29

10. In every generation the firstborn was killed,
acting as slain symbols of His righteous ones.

The lamb served in prophecy
as herald of the readings about Him:[13]

what was still to happen
became close, though still far off.

His servants clothed themselves first of all
with [His] names, and after [them] with His deeds,

so that [successive] generations might read of His names.
Blessed is He whom prophecy has proclaimed!

◆

13. readings about Him: Lit. "His readings/lections."

TEXT 13

Satan's Complaint (*Nis.* 41)

The second half of the cycle of *madrashe* entitled "of the Nisibenes" (also "of Nisibis") contains a series of poems where Ephrem treats the subject of the Descent of Christ into Sheol in a highly dramatic and lively fashion, with Satan and Death personified. In the present poem Satan is the speaker for the first nine stanzas: he has his suspicions that, although Jesus has successfully been crucified, He might somehow or other still wreck his own plans—despite all the care that Satan has taken ever since the time of Adam to ensnare the human race. In stanza 10 Satan's minions try to reassure him, using the example of Elisha, who like Jesus, raised someone from the dead, but nevertheless himself died. Satan, however, is quick to point out that Elisha also brought a dead person back to life *after* he himself had died. In stanza 13 Death appears on the scene, gloating over the crucifixion of Jesus, whom he addresses insultingly as "son of Mary" (implying he is illegitimate). In stanza 15 Satan comes along, wanting to take a look at Jesus, now in Sheol; it is now his turn to try and comfort Death, since Death is "all gloomy," having lost a whole lot of dead people who had risen from the dead at the moment of Jesus's own death (Matt 27:52). Satan requests Death to open up the gate of Sheol so that they can jeer at Jesus lying dead there. Death duly does so—"and out shone the radiance of our Lord's face!"

Ephrem neatly combines humor with serious theological issues when he puts into Satan's own mouth refutations of various erroneous views of Christ; a good example of this is provided in stanza 11, where Satan rebukes his underlings for supposing Jesus was just a prophet.

Meter

The *qala* title for *Nis.* 35–42 is *qarna w-shipura.* The metrical structure is a complicated one, with each stanza consisting of 4+4 4+4 9 7+7 7+7 4+7 7 10 syllables.

Text

The poem is preserved complete only in British Library Add. 14572 (sixth century; Beck's R), though stanzas 9 (end) through 16 also occur in British Library Add. 17141 (eighth or ninth century), and just stanza 13 in the Mosul Fenqitho (6.450).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܥܢܐ ܡܫܬܥܐ

1. ܐܡܪ ܚܡܐ ܒܫܡܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ
ܒܬܫܒܘܚܬܐ ܒܚܡܐ ܕܟܘܟܒܐ
ܗܐ ܫܡܫܐ ܕ ܟܬܒܐ ܐܢܐ ܒܥܬܝ
ܐܠܐ ܐܠܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܟ ܚܝܟܢܐ ܠܐ ܫܠܡ ܡܢܡ ܕ ܐܠܡ
ܐܘܡܢܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܙܓܠܐ ܐܠܐ ܟܐ ܡܬܚܙ ܟܬܠܐ
ܐܚܠܐ ܘܐ ܡܫܟ ܘܗܘ ܟܐ ܚܟ ܗܐ ܒܚܡܐ
ܫܟܚ ܟܬܟ ܟܡ ܐܚܒܝ
ܘܟܫܠܗ ܚܟܗ ܕܢܐ ܚܟ ܫܩ

ܚܒܢܐ : ܕܢ ܒܐܠܐ ܐܒܗ ܬܟܘܘ ܒܪܢܐ

1. The Evil One said, "I am afraid

of this Jesus, in case he wreck my plans.

Here I am, thousands of years old

and I have never had a moment free from activity:
I have not seen anything in existence

that I have neglected or let go.
And now along comes someone
who makes the debauched chaste,

causing me to lament from now on
because he is destroying all I have built up.

My labors have been many, along with my instructing,

for I have enshrouded the whole of creation in all kinds of evil."

Refrain: Blessed is He who has come and laid bare
the wiles of the Crafty One.

2. ܩܣܛܐ ܙܘܗܝ ܟܡ ܩܕܫܐ
ܡܚܝܢܐ ܐܢܐ ܫܒܚܘܗܝ ܒܝܡܐ
ܙܘܥܐ ܒܩܝܠܐ ܐܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܟ
ܚܙܘܥܐ ܒܟܥܐ ܣܒܐ ܒܝܡܐ ܒܡܫܘ ܒܗܐ ܐܠܐ ܡܟ
ܒܥܡܐ ܒܗ ܣܠܐ ܒܩܝܠܐ ܚܣܠܐ ܒܩܝܬܐ ܠܐ
ܙܥܐ ܐܡܩܐ ܡܝܠܐ ܟܡܥܐ ܫܒܫܐ
ܐ ܟܡ ܙܘܥܐ ܐܒܘܗܝ
ܥܐ ܬܒܩ ܠܐܡܐ ܒܟܘܟܐ ܒܗ ܐܒܩܫܗ

3. ܟܫܗ ܒܐܥܐ ܡܟܡ ܚܩܒܙܗ
ܫܒܘܗܝ ܐܢܐ ܦܙܩܡܐ
ܡܫ ܒܗܐ ܟܥܐ ܒܟܥܐ ܣܒ ܒܩ
ܚܟ ܟܗ ܗܩܠܐ ܒܟܥܐ ܡܙܐ ܟܚܙܗ ܒܟܥܐ
ܙܩܐ ܟܗ ܙܒ ܣܒ ܟܥܐ ܒܐܡ ܡܙܒܐ ܟܗ ܚܐܟܥܐ
ܗܐ ܦܩܙ ܟܗ ܡܐܡ ܠܠ ܬܙܩܫ ܫܗܗ
ܒܚܩܫ ܐܬܡܡ ܙܒܥܬܐ
ܬܡܐܚܣܩ ܒܙܐ ܟܥ ܐܡܐܫܩ

2. "I have matched my course with the swift

and outstripped them; I engaged in battle,

and the multitudinous throng served as my armor;

I rejoiced in the throng of the populace
for they gave me a little opportunity,

seeing that the impact of numbers is powerful:
with a huge army

I raised up a great mountain of a tower,
stretching it up to heaven. Gen 11:4

If they could wage war with the height

how much more will they defeat this man who fights on earth!

3. "Using whatever opportunity time offers

I wage war with discretion.

The People[1] heard that God was one, Deut 6:4

but they made themselves a multitude of gods;
but when they saw the son of God, Jer 2:28

they rushed back to the one God,
so that on the pretext of confessing God

they deny [his son];
pretending to show their zeal, they will run away from him.

Because they are perverse on every occasion,

they will be found to be godless.

---

1. People: I.e., the Jews. For Ephrem's polemic against the Jews, see especially McVey 1990 and Shepardson 2001.

4. ܗܘ ܕܢ ܒܩܪܢܐ ܐܢܐ ܒܥܩܬܐ
ܡܟܠ ܫܟܚܘܐ ܠܐ ܚܫܒܬ ܡܢ ܡܕܒܪ
ܠܒܬܐ ܗܝ ܒܡܚܬܐ ܫܡܥܟ ܫܝܫ
ܒܚܬܘܐ ܘܠܐ ܫܦܣܬ ܐܡܬܐ ܐܢ ܡܢ ܡܩܘܡܐ
ܘܬܪܚ ܟܚܕܐ ܡܩܫܚܐ ܐܡ ܒܝ ܐܬܘܐ ܩܛܠܐ
ܘܠܐ ܫܡܥ ܟܗ ܟܙܘܟܐ ܘܙܘܚܐ ܟܬܫܐ
ܗܐܡ ܘܐܡ ܐܬܘܐ ܠܘܟ
ܚܕܐ ܡܩܘܡܐ ܡܢ ܐܘܟܣܐ ܘܟܒܬܐ

5. ܣܟ ܫܡܫܐ ܚܙܐܝܐ
ܩܪܒ ܐܢܐ ܫܟܠܟ ܡܢܐ
ܟܠܐ ܩܚܫܐ ܡܢ ܦ ܠܘܟ
ܟܬܫܐ ܡܢ ܡܙܢܐ ܫܩܫܐ ܡܢ ܗܩܟܐ
ܫܒܚܐ ܡܢ ܩܟܐ ܚܩܐ ܬܪܟ ܗܟܡܐ
ܗܐ ܟܫܬ ܚܫܟܐ ܫܦܥܐ ܠܩܟܦ
ܐ ܢܟܐ ܡܟܐ ܬܪܐ
ܐܗ ܒܣܩܐ ܐܗ ܥܡܗ ܫܢܬ ܡܢ ܙܐܒܗ

4. "I've had a great many years' experience,
and no child have I ever disdained—
indeed, I have been most attentive to children,
making sure that they acquired bad habits from the very start,
so that their faults might grow as they grew up.
There are some stupid fathers
who do not cause harm to the seed which I have sown in their sons,
while others, like good farmers,
have uprooted these faults from the minds of their children.

5. "Instead of using a chain, I have bound men
with sloth, and they have sat down idle.
Thus have I deprived their senses from doing anything good:
their eyes from reading, their mouths from singing praise,
their minds from learning. How keen they are
for barren and useless tales; at empty talk they excel,
but should the word of life be mentioned in their presence,
either they will drive it out, or get up and go.

6. ܚܡܐ ܩܘܡܝܢ ܟܝ ܚܙܝܡܐ
ܡܟ ܒܡܢ ܟܠܫܘ ܠܐܠ ܠܐ ܐܝܢ
ܗܐ ܝܫ ܫܡܗ ܘܚܙܝܡܐ ܐܡܗ
ܚܐܘܐ ܘܟܫܘ ܡܫ ܟܗ ܒܬܐ ܫܡܒܘ
ܒܡܢ ܐ ܫܡܐܟܪ ܟܠ ܫܡܐ ܒ ܐ ܬܡ
ܠܐ ܒܬܐ ܠܐ ܫܡܟܡܐ ܡ ܐܐ
ܟܗ ܫܡܐ ܗܙܘ
ܚܐܘܐ ܚܝܐ ܡܟܡܐ ܗܐ ܠܐ ܐܝܢ

7. ܚܗ ܐܡܘ ܟܡ ܚܙܐ
ܘܟܬܘܗ ܡܚܡ ܠܟܘ
ܐܒܐ ܒܟܝܗ ܫܗ ܫܙܐ
ܘܟܗ ܟܝܗ ܠ ܡܡ ܣܝܐ ܐ ܐܡ
ܐ ܘܫܣܐ ܡ ܐܡܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܘ ܠܐܒܐ
ܚܘܟܐ ܡܣܐ ܠܘ ܚܫܐ ܡܐ
ܡܚܘ ܙܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܡ
ܡܡ ܚܟܘ ܘܟ ܐ ܐ ܚ ܐ

6. "How many satans there are in a person,

but it is I alone whom everyone curses.

A person's anger is [like]

a devil which harasses him daily. Other demons are like travelers

who only move on if they are forced to, but as for anger,

even if all the righteous adjure it,
it will not be rooted out from its place.

Instead of hating destructive envy,

everyone hates some weak and wretched devil!

7. "The snake-charmer is put to shame along with the enchanter

who daily brings snakes into submission;

the viper which is inside him defies him,

for he fails to subdue the lust within him:
hidden sin is like a snake:

when it breathes on him, he gets burnt right up.
Even when he has succeeded in catching the viper,

using his skill, delusion strikes him secretly:

he lulls the serpent with his incantations,

but by these same incantations he arouses against himself great wrath.

8. ܫܡܥܐ ܚܕܩܐ ܘܬܐܡܐ ܩܕܡܐ
ܟܬܒ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܙܚܝܬܗ ܟܡ ܟ
[...]
ܙܒ ܒܟܝ ܙܩܘܠܐ ܬܐܡܐ ܐܝܙܠ ܒܙ ܐܡܥܐ
ܘܠܐ ܚܦܝܠ ܙܚܝܠ ܠܐ ܘܚܕ ܒܚ ܫܩܛ
ܬܒܐ ܟܚܦܝ ܚܦܟ ܟܟ ܐܙܗ
ܚܒܐ ܐܝܐ ܠܫ ܢܠ
ܘܟ ܐܟܒ ܐܢ ܠ ܘܬܦܩ ܙܐ ܗܘ

9. ܙܚܐ ܩܫܠ ܒܟܝ ܙܩܠ
ܗܦܐ ܒܡܫ ܐܒܟܫ ܟ
ܚܐܚ ܐܨܠ ܠܐܡ ܒ ܗܘ
ܐܙܦܠ ܟܒ ܗ ܩܗܟ ܩܚܠ ܟ ܚܒ ܐܢ
ܘܠ ܬܟܟ ܟ ܒܟܐ ܠ ܗܠ ܘܩ ܗܦܠ
ܟܙ ܐܢ ܒ ܗ ܐܙܐ ܚܦܗ ܙ ܗܦܐ
ܟܬܟ ܐ ܗ ܐ ܒܟܝ
ܟ ܠ ܒܟ ܚܟܝ ܚ ܐ

8. "I set my stings, and sat and waited.

Who else has so stretched out his patience with everyone?

[a line is lost]

I sat beside the long-suffering and gradually bewitched him

until he was reduced to despair.
As for the person who shrinks from sin,

habit subdued him: little by little I wore him down

until he too came under [my] yoke;

once he had come and got used to it he did not want to leave it.

9. "I perceived and saw that the long-suffering person

is someone who can subdue everything.

When I conquered him, Adam was only one,

so I left him until he had fathered children
and I looked for some other work: Gen 4:1–2

so that idleness might not have experience of me
I started counting the sand of the sea, cf. Sir 1:2

to make myself patient and to test my memory,
to see if I could cope

with humanity once they had multiplied.

Before they had done so I had tried them in many things."

10. ܘܙܗ ܩܘܫܛܐ ܘܥܡܐ ܟܬܒ
ܗܢܐ ܡܟܬܒܐ ܕܩܘܕܫܐ
ܘܐ ܟܡ ܡܫܝܚ ܐܢ ܥܠܐ
ܠܐܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܢܐ ܟܬܒܬ ܘܐܘܕܝܬ
ܐ ܥܒܕܟ ܗܘ ܟܡܐ ܘܙܐ ܐ ܒܝ ܥܒܕܬܐ
ܘܥܡܐ ܗܝ ܕܡܟܬܒܐ ܗܢ ܡܟܬܒܐ
ܘܐܡܬ ܠܘ ܡܫܝܚ
ܘܐ ܟܡܐ ܐܢ ܥܠܐ ܕܒ ܟܬܒܘܗܝ

11. ܐ ܡܫܝܚ ܪܚܩܐ ܐ
ܙܕ ܐ ܠܐ ܫܟܚ ܕܟܪܐ ܒܡܐ
ܘܐ ܐ ܠܐ ܒܪ ܥܠܐ ܐܢ ܗܘ ܐ
ܕܐ ܕ ܫܡܥ ܥܠܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܒܡܐ ܚܙܐ
ܥܠ ܐ ܗܘ ܐܟܚ ܒܐ ܕ ܙܕ ܐ ܒܡܐ
ܥܠ ܫܬܩ ܗܘ ܕܚܠܐ ܐܫܬܐ
ܐ ܥܒܕܐ ܟܥܡܐ
ܙܐ ܒܫܥܐ ܟܬܒ

10. The servants of the Evil One disputed with him,

refuting his words with their rejoinders:

"Look at Elisha who brought a dead person back to life,

who overcame Death in the upper room, 2 Kgs 4:10,
reviving the widow's son; 34–35

he is now subdued in Sheol."
Because the Evil One was very quick-witted

he refuted their words by means of their own words:

"How can Elisha be defeated, seeing that he has,

in Sheol itself, brought the dead back to life by means of his bones? 2 Kgs 13:21

11. "If Elisha, who was insignificant,

had such great power in Sheol,

if he could raise up one dead man there,

how many dead will the death of the mighty Jesus raise?

You should learn from this, my companions, how much greater

this Jesus is than us, seeing that he has cunningly deceived you

and you failed to take in his greatness,

comparing him merely to the prophets.

12. ܐܚܕ̈ܘ ܐܢܫ̈ ܚܕ̈ܝܢ̈ܐ
ܐܦ ܟܡܐ ܟܬܒ ܐܢܬ
ܗܘ ܕܐܢܫ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܟܡ
ܐܠ ܬܗܘ ܟܗ ܗܘܐ ܐܢ ܬܐ ܟܗ ܗܘܐ
ܗܘ̈ܐ ܪܒ ܢܥܒܕ ܟܗ ܐܢ ܗ̈ ܪܒ ܢܥܒܕ
ܐܟܝܗ ܢܫܬ̈ ܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܠܐ
ܟ̈ܣܐ ܗ̈ ܙܒ ܟܒ ܟ
ܒܟ ܗܘܐ ܠܐܡ ܟܠ ܟ̈ܣܐ

13. ܐܝ̈ܡ ܗܘܐ ܡ̈ ܟ ܢܥܒ
ܗܐܗ ܝ̈ܐ ܟ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܐܡ
ܐܦ ܐ ܗܟ ܫ̈ ܐܟ ܐ ܐ
ܐ ܐ̈ ܟ ܡ̈ ܟ̈ ܟ̈ ܟ̈ ܟ
ܗ̈ ܠ̈ ܟ̈ ܟ̈ ̈ ̈

12. "Your consolations are of little help,"

said the Evil One to his followers,

"How can Death contain

the man who has raised up dead Lazarus;
and if Death does conquer him — John 11:44

it is because he willingly subjects himself
—and if he subjects himself to it willingly,

then you should fear[2] him all the more,
for he will not die to no purpose.

He will be the cause of great horror to us,

for when he dies he will enter in and bring Adam to life."

13. Death peered out from inside his cavern,

astonished to see our Lord crucified.

"Where are you now, O raiser of the dead?

Will you be food for me in place of the tasty Lazarus, — John 11:44

whose taste I still have in my mouth?
Let Jairus's daughter come and see — Luke 8:55

this cross of yours; let the widow's son gaze upon you. — Luke 7:15

A tree caught Adam for me, — Gen 2:17; 3:6

blessed is the cross which has caught the son of David for me!"

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2. fear *(dḥalun):* The two manuscripts have *dḥal(w),* but the longer form of the imperative is required by the meter.

14. ܗܘ ܡܢ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܐܘܕܝܢ ܠܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܗܘ ܒܥܠܡܐ

15. ܐܠܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܥܡ ܩܘܫܬܐ
ܘܫܠܡ ܥܠܝܢ ܒܝܘܡܐ ܥܡܟ
ܕܫܒܚ ܥܡܟ ܘܥܠܐ ܕ ܡܥܠܐ
ܐܫܬܡܥ ܗܘ ܒܥܡܢ ܐܦܫ ܥܠ ܫܠܡ ܒܥܠ ܥܕܬ
ܣܟ ܐܒܥܐ ܡܢܗ ܒܥܟ ܥܡ ܥܡܐ ܒܟܠ ܗܘ
ܥܠܐ ܐܣܬܐ ܐܠ ܐܡܪ ܐܢ ܥܠ ܐܢܥܫ
ܥܡܐ ܘܥܟ ܥܠ ܡܢ
ܠܐܡܪ ܐܠܝ ܐܢ ܒܣܟ ܐܘܫܛ

14. Death opened his mouth and further said,

"Have you never heard, son of Mary,

of Moses, how he excelled all men in his greatness,

how he became a god, performing the works of God — Exod 4:16;
by slaying the [Egyptian] firstborn and saving the [Hebrew], — 7:1; 12:29

how he held back the plague from the living? — Num 16:48;
Yet I went up with the same Moses to the mountain — Deut 32:49

and God—blessed be his honor— — Ezek 3:12;
handed him over to me in person.[3] — Deut 34:5

However great one of Adam's sons becomes,

he will return as dust to dust, for he comes from the earth." — Gen 3:19; 2:7

15. Satan came along with his soldiers

to look at our Lord lying in Sheol

and to rejoice with Death, his fellow counselor,

but he saw him all gloomy
and bewailing the dead who, at the Firstborn's cry,

had come to life and departed from Sheol. — Matt 27:50, 5
The Evil One began to comfort

Death, his relative,
"You have not lost as much as you have gained:

as long as Jesus is in your grasp

everyone who has lived and is living will come into your hands.

---

3. handed him over to me in person: Ephrem seems to refer to traditions about Moses's death and burial that underlay Jude 9 and are found in a different form in the late midrash *Petirat Moshe* (Jellinek 1967, 1.1:115–29).

16. ܗܠܐ ܟܝ ܬܫܡܫܘܢ ܐܘ ܢܗܠ ܗܘ
ܬܚܬܐ ܘܠܥܘ ܘܐܡܗ ܣܟܘ
ܗܐ ܝܫ ܫܩܘܠܐ ܐܟܠܐ ܗܘ ܗܘ
ܘܠܥܘ ܗܘ ܐ ܐܟܠܐ ܘܟܬܚܐ ܐܟܐ
ܐܫܠ ܐܫܐ ܟܣܩܘ ܗܠܐ ܥܠܐ ܐܬܚܐ ܘܡܩ
ܘܐܟܝ ܡܢܐ ܐܐ ܘܙܩܘ ܘܢ
ܘܐܡ ܗܒܩܬܐ ܟܟܗ ܘܗ
ܘܡܗ ܗܚܟ ܐܬܚܐ ܘܡܩ ܘܐܟ ܗ

16. "Open up, so that we can see him and jeer at him;

let us ask him, 'Where is your power?"

Three days have already passed,

so let us say to him,
'You, who are three days dead,[4]
raised up Lazarus, four days dead; John 11:39

raise yourself now!' " Death duly opened up the gates of Sheol

—and out from it shone the radiance of our Lord's face!

Like the men of Sodom, they were all smitten, Gen 19:11

they groped around looking for the gate of Sheol that had vanished.

◆

4. three days dead *(tlitaya):* See Text 19 (*Nis.* 1), n. 16.

TEXT 14

A Disputation between Death and Satan (*Nis.* 53)

Ephrem continues his imaginative treatment of the theme of the Descent of Christ into Sheol, but here he makes use of the ancient Mesopotamian literary genre of the Precedence Dispute, where two contestants dispute over their prowess. The genre (which continues to be popular in certain parts of the Middle East up to the present day) was adapted by Ephrem and later Syriac poets to biblical themes, the disputants either being personifications (as in the present poem) or characters taken from biblical narratives. The structure of the Syriac poems is fairly regular: following a short introduction, the dispute or dialogue, in alternating stanzas, takes up most of the poem, which ends with a brief conclusion or doxology; in the present poem, however, where Death and Satan are disputing which has the greater power over human beings, the conclusion is absent, and the two contestants simply end up by cursing each other. Ephrem portrays them as having an extremely good knowledge of the biblical text—no doubt putting to shame many a reader!

For the background to the genre and its use elsewhere in Syriac, see Murray 1995 and Brock 1991b and 2001.

Meter

The *qala* title given for *Nis.* 52–68 is *ʾo mawta la teshtaʿle,* the opening words of *Nis.* 68. The meter is a straightforward one, 7+4 7+4 syllables. The meter is not used elsewhere by Ephrem.

Text

The poem is found only in British Library Add. 14572 (sixth century).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܘܐܝ ܡܗܝܐ ܠܐ ܐܗܝܟܠ

1. ܐܘ ܐܡܪ ܕܒ ܡܗܝܡܢ ܟܠ ܐܦܠ
ܣܬܟܠ ܐܠ ܐܟ ܕܒ ܡܗܝܡ ܐܘ ܠܐ ܐܟܒ

2. ܡܗܝܐ ܚܫܒܐ ܐܢ ܟܗ ܚܫܝܐ ܒܗ ܐܦܠ
ܘܡܗܝܐ ܒܗ ܐܣܒ ܗܦܟܒܐ ܐܒ ܐܟܐ

3. ܡܗܝܐ ܗܙܝܐ ܗܘܐ ܐ ܐܡܪ ܐܒܗ
ܘܐܡܡܗܘܗ ܠܐܘ ܕܒ ܣ ܟܬܟܗܝܐ

4. ܐܢܐ ܘܡܗܝ ܗܐ ܣܐ ܐܢܐ ܠܟܐ ܗܡܩܐ
ܐܘܩܐ ܘܟܗܙܝ ܡܒܐ ܟ ܠܐ ܟܗܙܝ

5. ܗܘܐ ܡܗܝܐ ܘܩܙܐ ܐܢܐ ܐܒܐ ܒܗ
ܠܐ ܐܗܟ ܡܗܝܐ ܘܡܗܝܐ ܐܒܗ ܘܐܒ ܠܟܐ ܐܒܗ

1. Come let us listen as they contend for victory—
   the guilty[1] ones who have never conquered, nor shall they ever do so!

DEATH

2. Death says to the Evil One, Victory will finally be mine,
   for Death controls the final end as conqueror.

SATAN

3. This would be true, O Death, should you be able
   to bring someone to death, while still alive, by means of the lusts.

DEATH

4. I see amongst those who have died both the good and the bad.
   The just who spurned you, Evil One, did not spurn me.

SATAN

5. The body's dead state is but a sleep, lasting for a time:
   do not imagine, Death, that you are [really] death,
   for you are like a shade.

---

1. guilty: Or "defeated." Ephrem probably intends both senses.

6. ܟܝ ܨܡܐ ܪܚܡܪ ܨܐܬܐ ܐܗ ܐܦܝ ܟܝ
ܐܢܐ ܒܝ ܠܐܟܝ ܘܪܚܡܪ ܗܐ ܐܦܐ ܐܢܐ

7. ܐܗ ܚܨܐܬܐ ܘܥܨܡ ܐܒܐ ܟܐ ܘܟܝ ܒܝ
ܚܟܟܐ ܐܘܡ ܗܐ ܘܪܨܐ ܐܡܡܐ ܚܐ

8. ܗܐ ܡܡܐ ܨܟܢܐ ܗܒܘܬܢܐ ܐܠܐܘܬܐ
ܐܟܝܒܢܐ ܘܚܟܘܚܐ ܨܡܐ ܘܐܚܐ

9. ܗܟܝ ܬܟܐܐ ܐܗ ܨܐܠܐ ܟ ܒܐ ܡܟܝ
ܐܢܐ ܐܢܐ ܘܐܣܟܡ ܐܡܐ ܐܡ ܘܢܥܐܐ

10. ܨܥܫ ܘܪܚ ܪܨܡܐ ܐܗ ܗܚܐ
ܚܡܐܐ ܪܚ ܐܚܩܢܐ ܪܨܡ ܐܐܙܨܡܐ

DEATH

6. The upright have vanquished you, Evil One,
and they vanquish you still,

whereas those who have vanquished you, I myself vanquish.

SATAN

7. In the case of the Upright whom you bring to death,
it is no merit of yours,

for it is by reason of Adam whom I conquered
that they have drunken the cup.

DEATH

8. Look how Sheol is filled with the men of Sodom, the Assyrians, Gen 19:24; 2 Kgs 19:35

and the Giants from the time of the Flood. Who can rival me? Gen 6:2

SATAN

9. All these, O Death, had been slain by me:

I am the one who caused them to sin,
so that they should come to a bad end.

DEATH

10. That Joseph[2] who overcame you, Satan, I overcame: Gen 39:7–8

he vanquished you in the inner room,
but I vanquished him when I cast him into the tomb. Gen 50:26

2. Joseph: The name deliberately reflects the last word of the previous stanza, *nsupun* (ANP).

11. ܗܘܦܫܐ ܒܪܝܟ ܐܘ ܡܪܝܐ ܚܙܘܗ ܘܡܐ
ܐܟ ܚܣܪܢܝ ܠܟܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܫܠܝܐ ܒܪܝܟ

12. ܟܠܝܐ ܘܠܐ ܫܠ ܫܢܝ ܐܘ ܗܘܝܐ
ܒܝ ܡܝܡ ܐܬܝܠ ܚܙܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܣ ܒܫܠܡ

13. ܐܘܢܦ ܒܟ ܐܘ ܡܪܝܐ ܚܟܝܐ ܒܚܣܐ
ܡܝܩܐ ܒܒܘܐ ܫܠܡ ܟܗ ܫܡܠ ܟܠܐ

14. ܠܐܝܟܐ ܫܡܐ ܟܡ ܐܦܣ ܒܪܟ ܫܠܡ
ܐܐ ܒܝ ܒܝ ܟܠܦ ܒܪܟ ܒ ܗܦ ܪܫܠ

15. ܒܦܡ ܒܟܘܗ ܚܦܩܗ ܚܙܗ ܡܪܝܐ
ܟܠ ܐܝܐ ܪܫܠ ܚܙܗ ܒܪܟ ܚܦܟ

SATAN

11. Look at Moses who conquered you, Death,
with the sprinkling of the blood: Exod 12:22–23

he conquered you in Egypt—but at the Rock,
who was it who conquered him? Num 20:12

DEATH

12. Take Elijah, who had no fear of you, Satan:

he fled from Jezebel's presence, out of his fear for me. 1 Kgs 19:2

SATAN

13. Take Aaron, who held you back, Death,
by means of the fragrant incense: Num 16:46

I gave him the earrings of gold and he forged the Calf. Exod 32:2–4

DEATH

14. You went down to the contest with Job,
but he came up having vanquished you; Job 1:12

it was I who, after he had overcome you, then overcame him. Job 1:22; 42:17

SATAN

15. Take David, who by wearing sackcloth,
held back that pestilence: 2 Sam 24:18

on the roof I vanquished this man who had vanquished Goliath. 2 Sam 11:2;
1 Sam 17:4

16. ܐܗܘ ܒܚܩ ܕܠ ܟܠܗ ܗܘ ܫܡܐ
ܘܬܚܘ ܟܡܘ ܠܐ ܐܚܕ ܫܢܐ ܡܠܚܘ

17. ܡܟܡܘ ܘܐܒܪ ܒܝ ܘܘܡ ܠܐܗ ܒܫܐ
ܟܠܗ ܒܪܐ ܕܡܡܘ ܟܟܘ

18. ܡܘ ܐ ܒܪܘ ܟܗܢ ܐ ܗܘ
ܐܐ ܕܠ ܐ ܟܘ ܐ ܒܐ ܒܐ ܘ

19. ܡܡܘ ܒܟܘ ܘܐ ܟܗܢ ܟ
ܒܟܠ ܗ ܘܟܠ ܒܫ ܒ

20. ܘܡ ܒ ܠ ܗ ܟ
ܟ ܒ ܐ ܡ ܐ

DEATH

16. Take Jehu who eradicated the Temple of Baal,
the shrine of the Evil One: 2 Kgs 10:27

he could not eradicate Sheol, the citadel of my kingdom. 2 Kgs 10:35

SATAN

17. Take Solomon who snatched away from your mouth
the child by his judgment: 1 Kgs 3:27

I made him in his old age a worshipper at pagan altars. 1 Kgs 11:1–8

DEATH

18. Take Samuel, who spurned you in the matter of gold, Satan: 1 Sam 12:1–4

I vanquished this victor who had won a victory against bribery. 1 Sam 25:1

SATAN

19. Take Samson who, in the case of the lion's whelp, despised you,
O Death: Judg 14:15

by means of Delilah, a delightfully easy tool,
I harnessed him to the millstone. Judg 16:21

DEATH

20. Josiah from his youth up despised you, O Evil One, 2 Kgs 22:1–2

yet even in his old age he could not get the better of me. 2 Kgs 23:29–30

21. ܫܠܡܐ ܫܥܝܪ ܥܡܐ ܘܐܦ ܚܕܐ
ܘܩܘܠܗ ܘܚܟܡ ܠܐܘܢ ܡܫܟ ܟܠܗܘܢ

22. ܩܫܝܫ ܘܐܦ ܟܡܐ ܡܫܟ ܐܠܚܡ
ܐܘܚܠܗ ܚܩ ܗܢܐ ܘܟܪ ܩܢܛ ܗܘܐ

23. ܡܥܡܩ ܐܦ ܘܐܫ ܗܘܐ ܚܩܩܘܫܐ
ܚܠܝܐ ܐܦ ܩܒܪ ܐܝܐ ܐܦ ܐܠܩܢܗ

24. ܡܟܬܒܐ ܩܬܒܐ ܐܚܪ ܟܩܪ ܥܡܐ
ܘܐܡܐ ܗܝ ܐܩܗ ܘܥܡܐ ܡܩܥܡܩ ܘܡܩ

25. ܚܙܢܪ ܟܡܩ ܫܡܡܗ ܟܒܐ ܟܡܐ
ܡܢܪ ܟܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܚܐ ܢܥܡܪ

SATAN

21. Hezekiah got the better of you, O Death,
when he overcame his allotted span of life, Isa 38:5

but I upset him when he abandoned the due sense of awe
and disclosed his treasures. Isa 39:4

DEATH

22. Take John, who vanquished you, O Evil One, Mark 1:4;
by providing forgiveness and baptism: Luke 3:3

it was I who extinguished that lantern Matt 14:12;
which had laid you bare. John 5:35

SATAN

23. Simon defeated you when he revived the blessed woman: Acts 9:40

he vanquished you with a woman—and it was with a woman
that I vanquished him, making him deny [Christ]. Matt 26:69–72

24. Apostles and prophets alike have cursed you, O Death,

saying, "Where is Death's victory and the sting of Sheol?" Hos 13:14;
1 Cor 15:55

25. It is your own Master you have confined in Sheol,
O accursed servant:

both God and humanity abhor you, so silence yourself!

26. ܙܚܢܗ ܗܝ ܗܡܫܐ ܕܠ ܫܚܦܗ ܚܫܟܠ
ܐܝܠ ܗܝ ܡܢܠܡܘ ܚܘܙܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܣܟܠ

27. ܚܠܡܗ ܘܢܚܠ ܐܚܙܐ ܙܟܝ ܡܙܗ
ܫܡ ܚܘܡܪ ܗܝ ܘܐܡܢ ܟܗ ܘܩܠ ܐܗܝܘ ܟ

DEATH

26. It is the will of the Life-Giver of all
that has confined Him in Sheol—

and it is you who invited Him to do this by making Adam sin.

27. O companion of Nabal who, in the wilderness,
reviled his own master, 1 Sam 25:10

accursed is your mouth which said to Him,
"Fall down and worship me." Matt 4:9

◆

[redacted]

TEXT 15

Joy at the Resurrection (*Res.* 2)

Unlike the first *madrasha* in this cycle (Text 8), this one focuses on the feast of the Resurrection. The feast falls in Nisan, or April, the time of year when thunderstorms are common in northern Mesopotamia. Ephrem accordingly describes how the elements of Nature join in with the Church's shouts of joy as she celebrates this feast of feasts, where everyone can join in with his or her appropriate garland of praise. The reference to devastation in the final stanza indicates that this *madrasha* was composed while Ephrem was still in Nisibis, and he will have in mind one of the various sieges of Nisibis by the Persians (see the introduction to Text 19 [*Nis.* 1] [p. 222]). There is no separate refrain, but the last line of each stanza evidently is intended to serve as one.

Meter

The *qala* title is given as *etqaṭṭal(w) (h)waw yallude,* for which see on Text 12 (*Cruc.* 2).

Text

The poem is preserved complete only in British Library Add. 14627 (sixth or seventh century; Beck's B). Select stanzas, however, can be found in both the Mosul and the Pampakuda editions of the Fenqitho, as follows:

1, 8–10, + unknown	=	Mosul Fenqitho 6.167–68
2, 7, 3, 8	=	Mosul Fenqitho 4.801
2, 4, 7, 12	=	Pampakuda Fenqitho 2.407–8

This happens to be the only madrasha in the present anthology from which stanzas can be found in the Pampakuda Fenqitho.

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܐܡܬܟܐ ܕܐܬ ܬܫܒܘܬܐ

1. ܒܚܕܐ ܕܐ ܟ ܢܥܒܕܗ ܐܢ ܒܝܠܐ ܟܠ ܩܢܘܡܗ
ܐܡܟܪܐ ܕܐ ܟ ܐܡܪ ܒܐܦܐ ܩܠܝܫܐ ܚܩܢܘܡܗ
ܒܝ ܟܬܒ ܬܪܝܢ ܠܚܝܐ ܚܩܡ ܐܠܐܡ ܒܝ ܩܢܘܡܗ
ܐܘܒܐ ܐܦܩܢ ܬܟܠܐ ܕܐ ܪܒܬܐ ܟܐ ܟܪܟܪ
ܚܡܬܠܐ ܟܠ ܐܢܡܐ ܪܒ ܐܢ ܘܟܠ ܐܠܐܡܟ

2. ܕܐ ܟܐܘܐ ܗܪܝܣܐ ܐܠܐܘܢ ܚܩܟܐ ܐܩܬܐ ܐܟܬܐ
ܬܬܦܠܐ ܐܬܬܩܐ ܐܐ ܒܗ ܐܡ ܡܥܒܕܘܬܐ ܐܬܪܠܐ
ܡܚܬܠܐ ܐܡܚܬܐ ܐܐ ܒܗ ܐܡ ܒܬܬܐ ܐܩܠܘܬܐ
ܒܪܟܐ ܩܠܐ ܚܩܠܐ ܐܟܟܐ ܐܟܐ ܩܐܐ ܟܡܡܠ
ܒܘܐ ܐܦܚܠ ܚܙܐ ܐܦܚܠ ܪܒ ܐܘܟܐ ܒܗ ܡܠܬܩܐ

1. Your law has been my vehicle,
revealing to me something of Paradise,

Your Cross has been to me the key which opened up this Paradise.

From the Garden of Delights[1] did I gather
and carry back with me from Paradise

roses and other eloquent blooms
which are here scattered about for Your feast

amid songs [as they flutter down] on humanity.
Blessed is He who both gave and received the crown!

2. This joyful[2] festival is entirely made up of tongues and voices:

innocent young women and men sounding like trumpets and horns,

while infant girls and boys resemble harps and lyres;

their voices intertwine as they reach up together towards heaven,

giving glory to the Lord of glory.
Blessed is He for whom the silent have thundered out!

---

1. Garden of Delights *(ᶜedne):* An obvious play on *Eden* (not present in the Septuagint's rendering of *gan ᶜden* by *paradeisos tēs truphēs,* "Garden of Delight" [Gen 3:23]).

2. joyful: There is a word play between *p̣siḥa,* "joyful," and *peṣḥa,* "Passover."

3. ܗܵ ܙܚܟܐ ܐܵܘܟܵ ܡܢ ܟܠܵܗ ܐܡܛܘܿܬܵ ܡܢ ܟܬܵ ܙܚܟܐ
ܣܟܝ ܢܨܒ ܩܠܵ ܚܩܠܵ ܬܟܘܬܵ ܐܘ ܐܬܝܵܬܵ
ܣܟܗ ܩܘܫܢ ܒܟܒܵ ܗܦܝܗܵ ܟܡ ܙܚܡܢ ܒܟܘܗܵ
ܗܫܐ ܐܗܙܵܬܵ ܒܟܬܦܬܒܢ ܐܟܬܩܵ ܒܟܬܩܵ ܣܟܢܵ
ܟܡ ܡܗܝܵ ܚܡܘ ܒܣܵ ܗܟܡ ܙܚܘ ܪܗܘܵ ܒܩܪܘ

4. ܚܩܩܘܵ ܢܚܗ ܗܟ ܩܘܟ ܡܟ ܩ ܗܦܩ
ܟܟ ܡܢܗ ܟܬܠܵ ܒܣܬܠܵ ܐܟܟܗ ܩܠܵ ܙܟܟܐ
ܢܩܬܘ ܐܙܟ ܟܗ ܟܬܗ ܚܘ ܐܡܒ ܒܡܘܐ
ܠܦܗܡܘ ܒܗܘ ܟܒܟܒ ܒܚܗܦܠܵ ܐܚܐܦܟܘ
ܐܡܙܗ ܚܗ ܦܒܡܘܐ ܗܦܚܘ ܚܡܢܗ ܒܩܘܘ

5. ܚܗ ܟܘ ܒܙܬ ܩ ܐܢܐ ܬܪܫܢܗ ܐܡ ܗܦܙܢܗ
ܙܢܐ ܟ ܙܚܦܟ ܒܣܐ ܒܡܡܢܘ ܘܡ ܐܢ
ܐܘܙܟ ܟܟ ܙܚܢ ܗܗܘ ܟܗ ܢܨܒ ܒܘܙ
ܗܗ ܟ ܦܡܫܗ ܗܦܙܢ ܗ ܟܒܟ ܙܟܟ
ܟܟ ܐܙܟ ܒܘܐ ܫܨܟ ܚܢܘ ܚܢ ܒܡܨ ܟ

3. The earth thunders out below, heaven above roars with thunder:

Nisan[3] has mingled together the two sounds—
of those above and those below.

The shouts from the holy Church
are joined with the Divinity's thunder,

and with the bright torches lightning flashes intermingle;

with the rain came the tears of sorrow,
with the pasturage,[4] the Paschal fast.

4. It was in a similar way that in the Ark all voices cried out:

outside [the Ark] were fearsome waves, but inside, lovely voices;

tongues, all in pairs, uttered together in chaste fashion,[5]

thus serving as a type of our festival now
when unmarried girls and boys

together in innocence sing praise to the Lord of that Ark.

5. At this festival when each person offers his fine actions as offerings,

I lament, dear Lord,[6] that I stand here so impoverished.

But my mind grows green again with your dew:
for it a second Nisan is come,

whose flowers serve as [my] offerings,
garlanded in all kinds of wreaths,

placed on the door of each ear!
Blessed is the Cloud which has distilled in me its moisture!

---

3. Nisan: I.e., April.

4. pasturage: Provided by the fresh green grass of spring.

5. in chaste fashion: Lit. "purely." Ephrem probably alludes to the tradition (of Jewish origin) that both Noah's family and the animals preserved *qaddishuta* (see Text 5 [*Nat.* 17], n. 7) and refrained from intercourse in the Ark.

6. dear Lord *(rabuli):* Ephrem uses this word, taken from John 20:16 (Mary Magdalene's recognition of the risen Christ), as a term of intimate relationship to Christ.

6. ܟܬܘ ܣܥܐ ܩܕܫܐ ܒܚܕܐ ܕܐ ܕܐ ܫܡܬܐ ܐܡ ܕܐ ܠܥܘܐ
ܐܡܟ ܕܐܡܐ ܬܩܦܥܐ ܚܩܘܐ ܬܘܫܐ ܘܙܚܝܐ
ܐܥ ܥܠܐ ܐܡ ܐܡܥܐ ܟܠ ܙܕܐ ܩܕܫܐ ܟܒܐ
ܐܘܟܐ ܐܢܘ ܡܒܬܐ ܚܒܐܡܘ ܡܟܐ ܐܢܘ
ܐܡ ܥܙ ܕܐܡܐ ܘܐܡܢܐ ܚܙܡ ܘܐܡܟ ܚܬܐܥܐ

7. ܩܕܫܐ ܩܐܬܐ ܐܬܟܐ ܚܒܙܐ ܐܡܬܐ ܐܩܘܐܡ ܡܟܐ
ܟܠܐ ܕܐܡܐ ܐܡܟ ܐܘܫܐ ܕܐܡܐ ܡܟܐ ܐܘ
ܐܩܟܐ ܚܒܙܐ ܐܡ ܩܕܫܐ ܐܐܬܐ ܐܡ ܐܩܬܐ
ܐܐ ܐܥܐ ܟܐ ܟܒܟܐ ܕܐܡ ܐܡܬܐ ܚܒܙܐ ܟ ܥܙ
ܐܩܟܐ ܐܡ ܐܘܟܐ ܚܙܡ ܘܐܡܟ ܟܠܬܐ

8. ܐܥ ܡܡܥܟܐ ܐܡ ܕܐ ܡܟܐ ܩܐ ܒܟܩܘ
ܡܟ ܐܘ ܥܙ ܚܩܘܐ ܘܐܒܟ ܬܐܐ ܬܐܐ ܐ ܬܩܦܐ
ܟ ܩܫܡ ܕܐܩ ܟ ܐܡ ܐܡܐ ܕܐ ܕܐ ܐ ܡ ܘܟ
ܐܘܟܐ ܘܟ ܐܘܟ ܟܐ ܒܟܐ ܟ ܐ ܐ
ܡܟܐ ܘܟ ܕܒܐ ܟ ܐ ܙ ܐ ܟ

6. Who has ever beheld blossoms
gathered from the Scriptures, as though it were from the hills?

With them have chaste women
filled the spacious bosom of the mind.

The sound of songs, like a servant, has scattered
blossoms all over the crowds:

these flowers are sacred, catch them with your senses,

just as our Lord [caught] Mary's unguent. John 12:1–3
Blessed is he who is garlanded with his handmaids!

7. Fair and eloquent flowers
have the children strewn before the King: Matt 21:7

the colt was garlanded with them, the path was filled with them;

they scattered praises like flowers, their songs [of joy] like lilies.

Now too at this festival
does the crowd of children scatter for You, Lord,

halleluiahs like blossoms.
Blessed is He who was acclaimed by young children. Matt 21:15–16

8. It is as though our hearing [has embraced]
an armful of children's voices,

while songs coming from chaste women, Lord,
fill the bosoms of our ears.

Let each of us gather up a posy of such flowers,
and with these let each intersperse

blossoms from his own piece of land, so that, for this great feast,

we may plait a great garland.
Blessed is He who invited us to plait it!

9. ܙܚܝܐ ܙܟܐ ܬܒܪܟ ܗܘ ܐܠܗܘܬܟ ܐܝ ܕܫܘܚܢܟ
ܡܩܕܡܐ ܬܫܒܚܘܬܟ ܡܢ ܦܘܡܐ ܕܛܘܒܢܐ
ܥܒܕܘ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ ܫܒܚܐ ܡܕܡܗܝܢܘܬܟ
ܢܬܟܠܐ ܡܪܘܡܝܟ ܘܗܠܐ ܡܫܒܚܬܟ
ܕܡܣܬܟܠ ܒܟܘܬܟ ܕܢܢ ܒܐܝܟ ܕܟ ܢܬܒܐ

10. ܒܪܡ ܢܥܒܕ ܒܪܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܟܬܐ ܕܫܘܐ
ܘܐܚܘܗܝ ܕܫܘܚܟ ܒܪܫܡ ܠܗ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ
ܕܟܠܡܢ ܠܗ ܕܘܝܗ ܠܐ ܙܝܐ ܒܗܕܐ ܕܫܘܐ
ܡ ܟܠܗ ܐܒܐ ܚܩܐ ܕܡܠܟ ܗܕܐ ܒܕܫܘ
ܕܚܕ ܚܐ ܕܐ ܡܕܡ ܟܡ ܗܕܐ ܕܐ ܒܩܫܘ

11. ܩܕܝܫ ܫܒܚܐ ܐܡܪܗ ܕܫܡܫ ܚܕܐ ܘܩܕܝܫ
ܕܒܪܐ ܕܐ ܒܚܕܐ ܒܪܗ ܕܐ ܕܡܢܐ
ܙܗܪܐ ܕܐ ܕܫܚܐ ܗܠܠܐ ܕܐ ܕܒܚܐ
ܒܪܫ ܕܐ ܫܐ ܙܟܐ ܫܒܚܐ ܙܟܐ ܒܕܫܘ
ܗܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܐ ܘܩܕܝܫ ܕܫ ܗܕ ܟ ܕܒܚܘ

9. Let the chief pastor[7] weave together his homilies like flowers,

let the priests make a garland of their ministry,
the deacons of their reading,

strong young men of their jubilant shouts, children of their psalms,

chaste women of their songs, chief citizens of their benefactions,

ordinary folk of their manner of life.
Blessed is He who gave us so many opportunities for good!

10. Let us summon and invite the saints,
the martyrs, apostles and prophets,

whose own blossoms and flowers shine out like themselves—

such a wealth of roses they have, so fragrant are their lilies:

from the Garden of Delights do they pluck them,
and they bring back fair bunches

to crown our beautiful feast.[8]
O praise to You from the [saints who are] blessed!

11. Royal crowns appear poor compared with the wealth of Your crown

into which purity is intertwined, in which faith shines out,

humility shines forth and holiness is mingled in,

and great love is resplendent. O great King of all flowers,

how perfect is the beauty of Your crown.
Blessed is He who gave it us to weave!

---

7. chief pastor: I.e., bishop.
8. Delights . . . feast (*ʿedne . . . ʿidan*): Note the word play (ANP).

12. ܡܢ ܡܢ ܡܫܬܐ ܕܐܢ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܠܡܐ ܕܥܒܕܬ
ܡܢ ܐܢܬ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܫ ܐܢܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܒܫܪ
ܐܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܫ ܐܢܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܒܫܪ ܐܢ
ܐܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܫ ܐܢܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܒܫܪ ܐܢ
ܐܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܫ ܐܢܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܒܫܪ ܐܢ

12. Receive our offering, O our King, and in return grant us salvation;

give peace to the land that has been devastated,[9]
rebuild the churches that were burnt,

so that when deep peace has returned
we may plait You a great wreath,

with flowers and people to plait it, coming in from all sides

so that the Lord of peace may be crowned.
Blessed is He who has acted and is able to act!

◆

9. devastated: It is not clear to which of the sieges of Nisibis Ephrem refers.

TEXT 16

Oil and Its Symbols (*Virg.* 7)

Within the cycle entitled *On Virginity* there is a small group of four *madrashe* (4–7), "On Oil and the Olive," in which Ephrem explores the many different associations that exist between oil *(meshḥa)* and Christ *(mshiḥa)*. The last *madrasha* of this group, in particular, explores a variety of typological aspects, several of which are of considerable importance for the understanding of the prebaptismal anointing (known as the *rushma,* or "mark") that was characteristic of the early Syriac baptismal tradition.

In the opening stanzas Ephrem points out that human beings possess both a physical and a spiritual side and that they need to cultivate these two aspects equally: physical labor on the land receives its reward in October, with the ingathering of its produce and the arrival of the rain after the long hot summer months of drought; spiritual toil, however, is rewarded in April, the month of the Feast of the Resurrection—and it was on Easter eve that in many places it was the custom for baptisms to take place. Agricultural labor and spiritual toil turn out to be closely interrelated, for October provides the oil for the baptismal anointing in April.

Stanzas 3–5 make use of examples from the life of Elijah in order to illustrate how moral wrongdoing in connection with the working of the land has serious consequences which can only be rectified by the effects of oil, namely, the miraculous cruse of oil in Elijah's case (1 Kgs 17), and the baptismal oil in the context of the Christian dispensation.

Ephrem goes on in the next four stanzas to explore various different aspects of the baptismal oil: as a constituent of paint it repaints the portrait, or the divine image (Gen 1:27) in which humanity has been created, seeing that this had become disfigured at the Fall (stanza 5). In the next stanza the close links between the baptismal oil and the

action of the Holy Spirit at baptism are brought out: by means of the anointing with oil the Spirit imprints the mark of Christ's ownership on the "sheep" that is entering Christ's flock. In the early Syriac Church, anointing preceded the baptism in water, and so it is only in stanza 7 that Ephrem turns to this, describing the font as a "second womb" that gives new birth to God's children. Stanza 8 provides an overall view of the baptismal rite, covering all its main constituent elements: the anointing, the sanctification of the baptismal water, with the Holy Spirit "hovering" over it (using a term taken from the Creation narrative in Gen 1:2), the baptism in water, officiated by the chief priest (or bishop) and assisted by the deacons, and culminating in Communion (seen as an integral part of the baptismal rite, as remains the case in all the Eastern Churches).

Stanzas 9 and 10 continue the significance of oil in the context of baptism. First, in order to bring out the dramatic nature of its action at baptism of "drowning" sin, Ephrem compares this to the action of the Flood, thus preparing the way for the introduction (in stanza 13) of the olive leaf that announced to Noah the end of the Flood (Gen 8:11). Whereas the Flood represents the aspect of God's justice in dealing with sin, baptismal oil depicts the aspect of his compassion, and in stanza 10 the salvific roles of oil and water are brought together. Just as a diver oils himself, so too the person being baptized is accompanied by oil as he buries himself in the water (using the imagery of Rom 6:4). Similarly, just as oil *(meshḥa)* does not sink, so Christ *(mshiḥa),* as God, cannot die, yet he "clothed himself with a mortal body" and was himself baptized, thus providing the paradigm for Christian baptism and thereby the means for raising fallen humanity. Lurking behind stanza 10 is the imagery of Christ acting like a pearl diver, where Adam/humanity is the pearl which he brings up from the depths (compare Text 20 [*Fid.* 82]).

In stanzas 11–12 Ephrem touches on the various benefits provided by oil. Playing on the double sense of *ḥawbe,* both "debts" and "sins," he introduces the miracle of 2 Kings 4:1–7, where the sale of the miraculous oil saves the widow's sons from being reduced to debt bondage, and compares this to Christ who became a slave (Phil 2:7) who was sold (Matt 26:14 and par.) in order to liberate humanity, which had become enslaved to sin.

The tightly packed poem ends with yet further links between oil and Christ (stanza 13), which become visible to the spiritual eye as it gazes

on a bowl filled with oil (stanza 14). In a typically self-deprecatory final stanza, Ephrem, overwhelmed by the waves of associations caused by the interaction between oil and Christ, cries out, like Simon Peter (Matt 14:30), to Christ, asking him to rescue him from drowning.

Meter

The *qala* title (covering *Virg.* 4–7) is given as *eptaḥ pum(y) b-idaʿta,* which is also found for *Eccl.* 7–9, 11, 22, *Haer.* 37, and *Nis.* 1. The meter has the following syllabic pattern: 7+7 7+8 7+7 7+4 7+7 7+7 7+7. In the present *madrasha* the refrain serves as the seventh line. The meter is in fact the same as that for Text 19 (*Nis.* 1), but Beck has chosen to set the two poems out differently.

Text

The poem is preserved complete only in Vatican Syr. 111 (522 CE; Beck's B). Beck also uses two later manuscripts containing just excerpts: British Library Add. 17141 (stanzas 1–4, 15) and British Library Add. 17245 (stanzas 5–7).

ܟ ܡܠܐ ܘܐܚܠܡ ܗܘܐ ܒܪܝܫܐ

1. ܐܡܗܐ ܕܒܪܢܫܐ ܟܠܗܝ ܒܟܬܒ ܒܗܒܟܐ
ܒܗܘܒܝ ܐܘܟܐ ܒܪܬܐ ܒܗܘܒܐ ܘܙܘܫܐ ܐܬܟܐ
ܒܪܬܐ ܕ ܠܐ ܢܒܠ ܒܗܘܐ ܒܢܗܐ ܡܠܐ ܗܘ
ܘܐܟܐ ܕ ܠܗ ܢܫܘ ܒܐ ܗܘ
ܓܠܐ ܘܫܗܐ ܒܒܗܘܗ ܒܒܐ ܒܐ ܒܗܐ
ܫܗܐ ܒ ܒܓܠܐ ܐܒܫܗܐ ܒܐ

ܒܘܫܐ : ܒܐ ܘܢܗܐ ܕ ܗܙܘ
ܐ ܗ ܗܘܒܫ ܒ ܒܗ

2. ܐܢ ܐܘܫ ܒܠܐ ܒ ܫܐ ܙܐܐ ܗܐ
ܒܗ ܘܒܫܐ ܒܠܐ ܗ ܐ ܐ ܒܒܐ ܒܒܘ
ܫܗ ܐܘܫ ܙܒܐ ܗܒ ܒܒܐ ܐܘܫ
ܙܗ ܙܐܐ ܐܫܗܐ ܒ ܒܒ
ܐܢ ܒܐ ܕܙ ܟ ܫܐ ܫ ܟ
ܒܐ ܓܐ ܒܐܗܒ ܫܒܐ ܒܗ

1. Repentance and diligence are requisites for both worlds:

for working the land the diligent [are needed],
for spiritual toil the repentant.

Though the diligent may not become rich,
his diligence stands by itself,

and though the penitent may be utterly guilty,
he belongs to those who have conquered,

whereas the sluggards and sinners have clothed themselves
in a name that is utterly evil:

there is reproach for the idle, and for sinners reproof.

Refrain: However great is our wonder for You, our Savior,
Your glory exceeds what our tongues [can express].

2. October gives rest to the weary
after the dust and dirt of the summer,

its rain washes, its dew anoints the trees and their fruit.

April gives rest to the fasters,
it anoints, baptizes and clothes in white;

it scours off the dirt of sin from our souls.

October presses out the oil for us, April multiplies mercies for us;

in October fruit is gathered, in April sins are forgiven.

3. ܘܠܚܕ ܗܘܐ ܐܡܬ ܡܫܡܫܐ ܠܚܕ ܐܢܐ ܬܚܫܒ
ܕܢܫ ܛܠܠܐ ܟܕܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܬܐ ܘܐܡܪ ܟܢ ܐܡܪ
ܫܒܥ ܫ ܐܬܐ ܟܝܢ ܘܟܬ ܡܫܡܫܐ ܟܫܘܬܗ
ܡܟܒܐ ܗܘܐ ܚܙܐ ܘܠ ܟܫܒ
ܡܫܚܐ ܡܙܐ ܟܬܐ ܐܟܒ ܐܦܙ ܘܠ ܟܫܐ
ܘܡ ܡܠܐ ܘܟܙ ܠܐܢܐ ܗܫ ܐܦܙ ܚܩܐ ܟܬܐ

4. ܘܢܠ ܗܘܐ ܒ ܟܫܐ ܚܐܢܐ ܡܥܡ ܬܡܠܗ ܘܐܫܬܐ
ܘܐܪܒܐ ܒܟܟ ܐܫܡܥܡ ܡܐܫܡܐܡ ܠܫ ܐܙܒܐ
ܡܟܝܐ ܥܫܐ ܡܫܫ ܐܩ ܗܘܐ ܐܟ ܒܚܙܐ
ܡܫ ܘܐܟܟ ܚܙܟܚܐ ܫܐܐ ܚܥܡܐ
ܐܫ ܟܥܫܐ ܟܡܬ ܬܐܐ ܗܘܐ ܫܢܐ ܠܫܩܐ ܘܢܡܗ
ܘܐܡܢ ܟܡ ܡܙܐ ܟܣܐ ܟܝܐ ܘܥܟܐ ܡ ܢܥܟܡ

3. Because Jezebel defrauded Truth, the earth refused its produce, 1 Kgs 21:5ff.

the womb [of the earth] held back, as a reproof,[1]
the seeds that the farmers had lent it,

it suffocated the seeds within itself,
because its inhabitants had deceitfully held back truth.

Mother [earth] became barren against her custom, 1 Kgs 17:1

while the cruse and the horn [of oil] gave birth
and bore fruit against their nature. 1 Kgs 17:16

The same prophet's voice that had deprived the earth
also caused barren wombs to be fruitful.

4. Famine took its course in the land,
and the flow [of corn] to the granaries stood still;

the [grain] stores that had been full were emptied,
the oil-cellars[2] became bare.

But Elijah joined together the flour and oil as with a yoke,

and he who was lifted up in the chariot and conquered death 2 Kgs 2:11

conquered the famine, using these two symbols.
The rain provided the limit for the course of his life 1 Kgs 18:45

when the Lord of the clouds stretched out to him
a crown of plenty from His floodwaters.

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1. reproof *(k³ata):* Beck's suggested correction to *ki³nta* seems unnecessary.
2. oil cellars *(amdane):* Evidently a bye-form of *maddane.*

5. ܚܦܝܥܬܐ ܕܡܫܬܐ ܕܡܪ̈ ܪܚܡܐ ܘܡܚܕܐ̈
ܐܚܡܐ ܟܠܐ ܕܡܪ̈ ܪܚܡܐ ܕܐܒܐ ܘܡܚܕ ܒܐ
ܬܬܒܥܐ ܘܡܚܡܕܢܐ̈ ܘܡܫܒܚܐ ܕܐ ܚܕ̈ ܐ
ܒܝ ܪ̈ܘܙܐ ܘܢܘܡ ܡܒܐ ܐ ܘܢܫܬ̈ܚ
ܪ̈ܒܐ ܐ ܪܚܡܐ ܫ̈ܒܐ ܡ̈ܟܐ ܐ ܕܫܬ̈ܚ ܐ
ܘܡܕ̈ܐ ܡܬ̈ܬܐ ܐ ܘܐ̈ܐ ܐ ܕ̈ܐ ܐ ܕ̈ܘܙ ܡ̈ܘܐ

6. ܢ̈ܣ̈ܐ ܐ ܒ̈ ܐ ܕ̈ ܡܐ ܐ ܕ̈ ܡ̈ ܘܙ ܡ̈ܘܐ ܡ̈ܡ̈ܐ
ܐ̈ ܐ̈ܡ̈ ܐ̈ ܐ ܒ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ
ܘܙ ܡ̈ܘܐ ܒ̈ ܕ̈ ܡ̈ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ
ܕ̈ ܐ̈ ܐ̈ ܐ ܒ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ
ܐ ܣ̈ ܐ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ
ܘܡ̈ ܐ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ ܢ̈ ܡ̈ ܐ

5. A royal portrait is painted with visible colors,

and with oil that all can see
is the hidden portrait of our hidden King portrayed

on those who have been signed:
on them baptism, that is in travail with them in its womb,

depicts the new portrait, to replace the image of the former Adam 1 Cor 15:45

who had become corrupted; it gives birth to them with triple pangs,[3]

accompanied by the three glorious names,
of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6. The oil is the dear friend of the Holy Spirit, it is Her[4] minister,

following Her like a disciple.
With it the Spirit signed priests and anointed kings;

for with the oil[5] the Holy Spirit imprints Her mark on Her sheep.

Like a signet ring which leaves its impression on wax,

so the hidden seal of the Spirit is imprinted by oil on the bodies

of those who are anointed in baptism;
thus they are signed in the baptismal [mystery].

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3. corrupted . . . pangs *(eṯḥabbal . . . ḥeble):* Note the word play (ANP).

4. Her: The Holy Spirit is treated as grammatically feminine in early Syriac writers; for this feature see Text 3 (*Fid.* 49), n. 6.

5. oil: The manuscript has *ba-mshiḥa,* but Beck is no doubt right in correcting the text to *b-meshḥa* (the *shwa* being treated metrically as a full vowel).

7. ܚܫܡܐ ܗܘ ܕܢ ܒܩܘܡܗ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܫܡܝܢ ܫܟܝܢ
ܩܕܝܫܐ ܒܡܟܝ ܚܝܠܐ ܡܠܐܟܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܢܝܢ
ܢܣܒ ܫܘܚܐ ܐܡ ܙܝܐ ܗܘܬܟ ܒܩܐ ܐܡ ܟܬܐ
ܒܗܘ ܕܗ ܡܚܫܒܢܐ ܕܗܐ ܐܢܫܐ
ܡܢ ܚܝܐ ܡܟ ܒܗ ܐܘ ܢܗܘ ܠܟ ܫܬܚ
ܐ ܕܗܐ ܒܟ ܡܟܐ ܩܕܡ ܐܠ ܫܬܐ ܕܡܚܒܐ

8. ܟܘܒܐ ܗܘ ܡܥܡܟ ܟܐ ܕܒܐ ܕܗܐ ܕܡܟܝ
ܡܥܣܩܐ ܡܢܗ ܒܗ ܒܢܡ ܘܦ ܒܐ ܒܟ ܡܢܟ ܟܠ ܡܩܫ
ܟܠ ܟܐ ܟܢ ܟܐ ܘܐ ܟܒ ܟܐ ܕܥܡ ܡܟ
ܟܢ ܢܒ ܚܬ ܒ ܘܡܫܟ ܟ
ܐ ܕܗܐ ܒܟ ܒ ܒܢ ܗ ܡܚܐ ܡܢ ܐܡ
ܐ ܕܐ ܒ ܡܟ ܡ ܡ ܟ ܟ ܡ

7. With the oil of discernment bodies are anointed for forgiveness,
bodies that were filled with stains are made white without effort:[6] Isa 1:18
they go down sordid with sin, they go up pure like infants,
for baptism is a second womb for them.

Rebirth [in the font] rejuvenates the old,
as the river rejuvenated Naaman. 2 Kgs 5:14

O womb that gives birth every day without pangs
to the children of the Kingdom!

8. It is the priesthood which ministers to this womb as it gives birth;
anointing precedes it, the Holy Spirit hovers[7] over its streams, Gen 1:2
a crown of Levites[8] surrounds it, the chief priest is its minister,
the Watchers[9] rejoice at the lost who in it are found. Luke 15:10

Once this womb has given birth,
the altar suckles and nurtures them:
her children eat straight away, not milk, but perfect Bread![10]

6. without effort: Ephrem has in mind the energetic beating of clothes.

7. hovers *(mraḥḥpa):* Although Ephrem disapproved of identifying the "spirit of God" which hovered *(mraḥḥpa hwat)* over the primordial waters (Gen 1:2) as the Holy Spirit, he nevertheless was happy to use the verb (clearly derived from this passage) of the Holy Spirit's action over the baptismal water. For Ephrem's views and the controversy over the identity of "the spirit of God," see Brock 1999b.

8. Levites: I.e., deacons; the terminology is commonly found.

9. Watchers *(ʿire):* Besides *malʾake* for angels, Syriac frequently employs the term Watchers, found in Daniel.

10. perfect Bread: Communion is the culminating feature of all the Eastern Christian baptismal rites.

9. ܡܢܝܫܐ ܡܚܫܒ ܚܕ̈ܘܬܐ ܕܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܡܚܫܒ ܛܥܝܬ
ܡܢܝܫܐ ܕܡܢ ܟܘܠܗ ܫܩܠ ܐܢ ܡܥܒܕܐ ܒܟܘܠ ܟܘܬܐ
ܠܗܦܟ ܕܡܢ ܐܢ ܛܥܐ ܛܥܐܝܬ ܟܘܠ ܚܣܝܪ
ܐܠ ܐܟ ܫܦ ܙܟܝܐ ܠܗ ܐܠܗܐ ܟܦ
ܡܢܝܫܐ ܒܝ ܟܒܥܐ ܠܟ ܟܘܠ ܫܠܚ ܚܡܟܡܬܐ
ܐܐ ܫܡܥ ܫܡܐ ܚܛܐ ܠܐ ܐܫ ܟܬܟܝܐ

10. ܡܢܝܫܐ ܚܫܦܗ ܐܦ ܟܡ ܚܟܡܬܐ ܒܟܡܬܐ
ܫܦܐܗ ܐܢܐ ܐܢܫ ܐܟܝܗ ܡܢܐ ܢܥܡܗ ܡܟ
ܡܢܝܫܐ ܚܢܐ ܐܠ ܠܟ ܟܝܢܐ ܐܟ ܡܥܐܗ
ܐܟܡ ܡܗܡ ܒ ܚܦܥܐ ܫܡܥ ܚܦܐ
ܡܫܡܫܐ ܚܢܐ ܐܠ ܐܠܐ ܟܗܡ ܟܝܢܐ ܡܦܐ
ܚܡܟ ܐܗܡ ܒ ܫܐ ܫܡܥ ܫܐ ܐܡ

9. Oil, the beneficial fountain, accompanies the body, that fount of ills;

for oil wipes out sins,[11] just as the Flood wiped out the unclean; Gen 6

for the Flood, acting in justice, wiped out the wicked:

those who had not subdued their lusts drowned,[12]
having brought on the Flood through these lusts;

but oil, acting in goodness,[13] wipes out sins in baptism,

for sin is drowned[14] in the water and cannot live with all its desires.

10. Oil in its love accompanies the baptized[15] in his need,

when, despising his life, he descends and buries himself in the water;

oil by nature does not sink,
but it accompanies the body on which it imprints [its mark].[16]

Once baptized, it raises up from the deep a treasure of riches.

Christ by nature cannot die,
yet He clothed Himself with a mortal body,[17]

He was baptized, and so raised up from the water
the treasure of salvation for the race of Adam.

---

11. sins: Or "debts"; there is a double entendre here, since the sale of olive oil pays the farmer's debts.

12. drowned: Lit. "floated" (as corpses in the Flood).

13. in justice . . . in goodness: This could equally be translated "like the Upright (God) . . . like the Good (God)," balancing God's two aspects of *ki'nuta* (righteousness) and *ṭabuta* (goodness), or *ṭaybuta* (grace); this balance (which can be compared with the Rabbinic *middot*, or measures, of justice *[din]* and mercy *[raḥamayim]*) is one which Ephrem frequently exploits.

14. drowned: I.e., at baptism.

15. baptized: There is a deliberate double entendre here, for the word can also mean "diver."

16. mark: The prebaptismal anointing, or *rushma* ("mark"), is a mark of ownership, among other things; see stanza 6 and *rshime*, "marked, signed," in stanzas 5 and 6.

17. clothed Himself in a mortal body *(lbesh pagra mayota):* The phrase also features in Ephrem's *Prose Refutations* (Mitchell 1912–21, 2:146). See also Text 9 (*Ieiun.* 3), n. 4.

11. ܡܘܕ ܢܥܡܗ ܫܡܫܐ ܟܕܝܢܐ ܣܟܟ ܢܗܦܟܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܝܟ
ܗܝܡ ܒܪܟܐ ܗܘܐ ܟܬܝܒܐ ܐܠܐ ܡܫܬܐ ܘܟܠ ܘܢܥܡ
ܒܟ ܟܒܐ ܘܫܘܬܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܫ ܐܝܟ ܐܟܬܝ
ܗܟܒܐ ܘܟܪܒܐ ܟܗܐ ܢܚܡ ܗܘ
ܗܐܢܟ ܫܡܫܐ ܡܟ ܡܢܐ ܘܟܠ ܢܬܚ ܒܟ ܗܘ
ܗܡܡ ܐܦ ܘܐܡܝ ܗܘ ܟܡܡܡ ܐܒ ܒܟ ܢܟܒ

12. ܫܡܫܐ ܣܒܟܗ ܕܘ ܡܫܡܫܐ ܕܢ ܫܗܒܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܟܗ
ܡܡܢܐ ܘܒܝ ܐܡܟܣܐ ܒܒܐ ܘܫܪܒ ܟܬܒ
ܐܝ ܡܡܢܐ ܘܐܡܟܣܐ ܐܟ ܟܟܝܛ ܒܒ ܐܢܟ
ܫܡܫܐ ܗܘ ܟܒܐ ܟܒܐ ܣܒܘ ܫܘ
ܡܫܡܫܐ ܗܘ ܟܒܐ ܟܒܐ ܣܒܘ ܟܬܐ ܐܡܡܐ
ܐܗ ܟܡܫܐ ܐܗ ܟܒܐ ܙܘ ܫܡܫܐ ܟܡܫܡܫܐ

11. The oil gave itself for sale in place of the orphans,
to prevent their being sold; 2 Kgs 4:1–7

it acts as a guardian to the fatherless,
having restrained the fate that had tried to sever

the two brothers, like shoots, from the stock of freedom

and graft them on to the stock of slavery. cf. Rom 11:17

The price of the oil made an end to the bonds [of debt]
that cried out against the debtors; Col 2:14

it tore up the bonds that had come to tear away
a mother from her son.

12. Oil in its love, like Christ, pays debts that are not its own.

The treasure that of its own accord turned up
for the debtors in the pottery vessel

is like the Treasure that also turned up for the Peoples
in a body made from earth.[18]

The oil became a slave for sale to free the freeborn,

and Christ became a slave for sale
to free those who were enslaved to sin. Phil 2:7

In both name and deed[19] does the oil depict Christ.

---

18. a body made from earth: I.e., Christ's human body.

19. In both name and deed: Ephrem of course plays on the similarity between *meshḥa,* "oil," and *mshiḥa,* "Christ."

13. ܐܵܘܿܝ ܫܡܫܐ ܕܟܘ ܚܕܟ ܫܡܫܐ ܥܡ ܡܢܫ ܚܕ
ܡܟܘ ܟܡܡܫܐ ܡܫܐ ܚܕ ܚܩܥܝܐ ܘܩܘܝܐ ܘܠܬܦܐ ܙܘ
ܚܩܘܟܘܝ ܡܟܘ ܡܟ ܡܝܬܐ ܚܩܥܟܘܝ ܡܫܘ ܡܢ ܡܢܟ
ܚܠܙܘ ܐܘ ܡܟ ܐܘܐ ܠܘܘ ܡܟ
ܚܩܘܟܘܝ ܙܘ ܘܐ ܐܚܠܐ ܚܩܥܟܘܝ ܙܘ ܘܐ ܡܫܠܘܐ
ܚܠܙܘ ܙܘ ܘܐ ܒܘܫܐ ܘܐܢ ܡܟܐ ܥܡܘ ܡܥܘܠ

14. ܡܙܪܘܐ ܐܡܐ ܘܫܐ ܚܫܐ ܫܡܫܐ
ܪܟܡ ܒܟܘ ܫܐ ܐܡ ܐܘܫܐ ܟ ܟܫܫܐ
ܟܡܡܫܐ ܫܐ ܚܐܐܘܝ ܘܫܡܡܫܐ ܡܟ ܡܘܬܐ ܘ
ܐ ܐܡܐ ܡܟ ܘܐܐ ܘ ܟܘܐ ܟ
ܡܡܫܐ ܟܘ ܡܙܪܘܐ ܘܫܡܫܐ ܟܘ ܡܫܐ
ܘܟ ܟ ܙ ܘܐܫܐ ܟ ܡܡܫܐ ܡܒܡ ܟ ܡ ܟ

13. Let oil in all its forms acknowledge You
in Your entirety, for oil gives rest to all.

[The olive] served Christ, who gives life to all,
depicting Him in its abundance, its branches and its leaves:

with its branches it praised Him—through the children; John 12:13; Matt 21:16; John 12:3
with its abundance it anointed Him—through Mary;

with its leaf again, through the dove it served [Noah], His type; Gen 8:11

with its branches it depicted the symbol of His victory,
with its abundance it depicted the symbol of His dying, John 12:7

with its leaf it depicted the symbol of the resurrection
and the Flood disgorged it, as Death [disgorged Christ].

14. The face that gazes on a vessel filled with oil

sees its reflection there, but he who gazes in a hidden way

sees Christ in its symbols: and as the beauty of Christ is manifold,

so too the olive's symbols are manifold.

Christ has many facets, and the oil acts as a mirror to them all:

from whatever angle I look at the oil, Christ looks out at me from it!

15. ܟ ܣ ܟ ܚܫܟܡܐ ܣܗ ܕܝܬܐ ܐܬܬܚܐ ܠܡܙܢ
ܘܡܐ ܘܡܚܕܐ ܕܝܬܟ ܣܡܫܐ ܙܗܕܐ ܚܡܬܚܗ ܘܡܡܫܐ
ܠܙܐܐ ܕܝܬܟܗ ܘܡܡܫܐ ܐܚܬܐ ܣܡܫܐ ܙܗܕܐ
ܗܐ ܐܘܟ ܕܝܬܐ ܚܝܬܐ ܗܐܐ ܟܪܚܐ
ܐܟ ܐ ܐܐ ܐ ܡܚܕ ܘܟ ܡ ܐ ܘܚܡܚܕ
ܐ ܟܚܕܐ ܘܐ ܕܝܬܟ ܫܐ ܘܟ ܚܫܟܡܐ

15. Who has overwhelmed me in my weakness
with these insistent waves?

For when the waves of oil lift me up,
they hand me over to the subject of Christ,

and then the waves of Christ bear me back to the symbols of oil.

The waves meet each other, and I am in their midst:

I will say as Simon said: Draw me up, Lord, as you did Simon, Matt 14:30

for the innumerable waves have worn me out;
O Compassionate One, draw me out who am so feeble!

◆

TEXT 17

The Mysteries of the Eucharist
(*Fid.* 10)

This is probably the most important of the *madrashe* where Ephrem considers the Eucharistic Mysteries. At the outset he asks for inspiration, being all too aware of his inadequacy in the face of such a theme. If John the Baptist held even Christ's sandal straps in awe, how can he hope to approach Christ's very Body? Ephrem takes refuge in the example of the woman who gained healing just through touching Christ's garment—which in another sense is indeed his body, being the garment of his divinity. The Hidden Power that lay in Christ's garment is also present in the Bread and the Wine (stanza 8), consecrated by the fire of the Spirit. The awesome nature of this fire, which can either sanctify or destroy, is illustrated from various episodes in the Old Testament (stanzas 10–13). A quotation from Prov 30:4 provides the transition to the presence of Fire in Mary's womb, which is then linked to the womb of the River Jordan and the womb of the baptismal font (stanza 17). In the final self-deprecating stanza Ephrem draws on the reply of the Syro-Phoenician woman to Jesus (Mark 7:28). (There are earlier translations in Murray 1970 and Brock 1987.)

Meter

The *qala* (covering *Fid.* 10–25) is given as *izgadda haddaya.* The meter is the same as that for the *qala* title *a(n)t mar(y) aktebtah,* which are in fact the opening words of *Fid.* 10. The syllabic pattern is as follows: 5+6 7+4 4+4 4+5. The same meter is found for *Eccl.* 29–30, *Ieiun.* 6 (Text 10), and *Nis.* 50. The vowel on the first radical *alaph* verbs *ekal* and *eḥad* is treated as absent for metrical reasons in stanzas 12 (line 4), 13 (line 4), and 14 (line 1).

Text

The poem is preserved in four early manuscripts: British Library Add. 12176 (fifth or sixth century; Beck's A), Vatican Syr. 111 (522 CE; Beck's B), Vatican Syr. 113 (552 CE; Beck's C), and British Library Add. 14571 (519 CE; Beck's D).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܘܐܡܪܝܗ ܕܝܘܡܐ

1. ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܐܡܬܚܐ ܒܚܠܡ ܕܩܘܡ ܥܡܟܝܘ
ܗܐ ܚܠܡ ܟܝ ܕܩܬܗ ܒܟܒܪ ܟܡ ܙܚܝܬܗ
ܐܝܟ ܥܟܝܘ ܡܢ ܒܝ ܥܕܕܚܠܡ
ܘܐܡ ܙܚܝܬ ܐܢܐ ܠܡܚܕܫܠܡ

ܚܕܫܐ : ܐܡܪܝ ܒܝܫܐ ܐܢܕܐ ܟܐ ܚܥܕܕܚܠܡ

2. ܚܠܡܟܠܡ ܒܙܟܐ ܘܠ ܕܩܫ ܟܠ ܐܢ
ܚܙܝܐ ܠܫܠܡ ܐܢܕܐ ܒܝ ܥܡܢܫ ܐܢܐ
ܟܐ ܒܝ ܗܠܐ ܫܠܡ ܥܡܟܒܪ
ܘܐܡܐ ܕܩܐ ܘܥܡܢܫ ܗܘܡܕܐ ܗܘ

3. ܒܝ ܫܒ ܕܐ ܙܝܬ ܕܩܩܘܝ ܥܟܫܠܡ
ܥܬܐ ܙܐ ܕܡܬܚܐ ܐܐ ܥܩܬܐ
ܟܟܐ ܥܩܐ ܐܡ ܒܢܐܠ
ܐܡܪܝ ܙܠܟܕܐ ܫܐ ܘܙܩܨܠܡ

1. You have had it written, Lord,
"Open your mouth and I will fill it." Ps 81:10

Look, Your servant's mouth is open, and his mind as well;

fill it, Lord, with Your Gift,

that I may sing Your praise in accordance with Your will.

Refrain: Make me worthy to approach Your gift in awe!

2. Each, according to the level of his own measure, can tell of You;

in my boldness I approach the lowest step.

Your Birth is sealed up within silence—

what mouth then dares to meditate upon it?

3. Your nature is single, but there are many ways of explaining it;

our descriptions may be exalted, or in moderate terms, or lowly.

Make me worthy of the lowest part,
that I may gather up, as crumbs,

the gleanings from Your wisdom's [table]. Matt 15:27; Mark 7:28

4. ܗܢܘ ܟܠܗܝ ܕܐܦ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܒܪܝܬܐ
ܟܝܢ ܕܚܕ ܡܢ ܫܪܝܪܐ ܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܫܐ
ܒܗ ܐܬܝ ܘܐܙܠ
ܒܗ ܐܫܬܐ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܗܘ

5. ܘܐ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܫܘܠܛܢ ܗܘ ܒܟܠ ܡܕܡ ܗܘܐ
ܘܠܐ ܟܡ ܡܢ ܐܢܐ ܕܟܬܒ ܡܢ ܥܠܡܐ
ܐܝܟ ܫܠܝܡܐ ܕܗܘ ܒܟܠܗ
ܘܫܠܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܡܢܗ ܐܡܝܢ

6. ܐܝܟ ܡܐ ܘܐܠܘܗܟ ܐܠܟܟܗ ܘܐܠܫܟܗ
ܐܠܐ ܘܩܒܠ ܡܢ ܩܠܐ ܐܡܪ ܐܠܟܟ
ܡܢ ܒܗ ܫܠܡ ܐܠܫܟ ܐܕ
ܒܗ ܐܡ ܩܢܐ ܘܐܝܟ ܫܟ ܐܠܟܗܘ

7. ܫܠܡ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܘ ܟܗܟܐ ܘܩܛܠܐ
ܟܟܗܟ ܟܐ ܐܡܐ ܡܐ ܟܗ ܫܐ ܟܗܐ
ܒܗܐ ܐܕ ܘܡܢ ܟܟ ܐܕ
ܒܗ ܟܐ ܘܒܟܗ ܟܡ ܐܡܢ

4. Any elevated account of You is hidden with Your Begetter;
   at Your lesser riches the angels stand amazed,
   while a small trickle of words describing You, Lord,
   provides a flood of homilies for [mortals] below.

5. For if the great John cried out and said,
   "I am not worthy, Lord, of the straps of your sandals," Mark 1:7
   then I should seek refuge, like the sinful woman, Matt 9:21; Luke 8:47
   in the shadow of Your garment, and there begin.

6. And as she was affrighted,
   but took courage because she was healed,
   so do You heal my fear and fright,
   and so I may take courage in You
   and be conveyed from Your garment to Your own Body,
   so that I may tell of it according to my ability.

7. Your garment, Lord, is a fountain of medicines:
   in Your visible clothing there dwells a hidden power.
   Again, a little spittle from Your mouth John 9:6
   became a great miracle of light,
   for light was in the clay [it made].

8. ܚܟܣܘܪ ܩܥܡܐ ܕܗ ܙܩܝܦܐ ܘܠܐ ܕܡܐܚܠܐ
ܚܣܥܢܪ ܚܙܝܐ ܕܗ ܒܙܘܐ ܘܠܐ ܕܥܡܐܠܝܐ
ܙܩܝܦܐ ܚܟܣܘܪ ܒܙܘܐ ܚܣܥܢܪ
ܐܘܙܐ ܗܙܡܐ ܘܒܩܕ ܩܩܥܐ

9. ܘܥܙܐ ܫܡ ܗܘܐ ܟܗ ܠܐܘܟܐ ܙܒ ܥܬܩܐ
ܙܡܐ ܣܒܐ ܙܐ ܐܦ ܐܡ ܘܚܟܬܐ
ܒܙܘܐ ܙܩܝܦܐ ܚܥܐ ܚܕ ܗܘܐ
ܘܒܙܘ ܙܒܩܝܦ ܫܥܐ ܩܥܡܐ

10. ܗܙܐ ܟܥܩܙܐ ܠܐ ܡܙ ܟܗ ܙܬܟܐ
ܚܩܩܗ ܘܐܟܐ ܩܡܙ ܩܙܟ ܟܚܩ
ܠܐ ܗܩ ܐܒܙ ܠܐ ܗܩ ܐܟܗ
ܟܝ ܙܒ ܗܐ ܣܘ ܥܙ ܐܘܐܩܥ

11. ܚܟܬܐ ܩܩܝܐ ܩܐܩܚܐ ܘܥܝܬܐ
ܡܙ ܐܙܗܡ ܙܐܟܗ ܐܩܗ ܒܐ
ܘܥܙ ܙܟ ܘܚܥܝܬܐ
ܒܙܘܐ ܗܙܩܐ ܩܗܥ ܐ ܩܩܥ

8. In Your Bread there is hidden the Spirit who is not consumed,
in Your Wine there dwells the Fire that is not drunk:
the Spirit is in Your Bread, the Fire in Your Wine—
a manifest wonder, that our lips have received.

9. When the Lord came down to earth to mortal men — 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15
He created them again, a new creation, like the angels,
mingling within them fire and spirit,
so that in a hidden manner they might be of fire and spirit.

10. The Seraph could not touch the fire's coal with his fingers, — Isa 6:6–7
the coal only just touched Isaiah's mouth:
the [Seraph] did not hold it, [Isaiah] did not consume it,
but us our Lord has allowed to do both!

11. To the angels who are spiritual Abraham brought — Gen 18:8–9
food for the body, and they ate. The new miracle
is that our mighty Lord has given to bodily man
Fire and Spirit to eat and to drink.

12. ܒܰܘܿܐ ܚܰܫܘܿܟܬܳܐ ܕܒܰܪ̈ܝܳܐ ܬܫܰܥ̈ܬܳܐ ܘܐܰܡܟܰܝ̈ܢ
ܒܰܘܿܐ ܝܰܫܘܿܥ ܚܟܰܝܡ ܬܫܰܥ̈ܬܳܐ ܗܳܢܳܐ
ܫܟܰܚ ܗܘ̈ ܒܰܘܿܐ ܘܐܰܡܟܰܝ̈ ܐܝ̈ܢܳܐ
ܒܰܘܿܐ ܚܟܰܝܡ ܐܰܟܳܐ ܕܰܫܬܳܐ

13. ܚܒ̈ܝܫ̈ܐ ܘܟ̈ܠ̈ܗ ܒܰܘܿܐ ܬܫܰܥ̈ܬܳܐ ܘܐܰܡܟܰܝ̈ܢ
ܒܰܘܿܐ ܘܬ̈ܫܥ̈ܐ ܗܘ̈ܳܐ ܟ̈ܘ ܟ̈ܝ ܝ̈ܚܫ̈ܐ ܫ̈ܬ̈ܐ
ܒܰܘܿܐ ܐ̈ܡܟ̈ܐ ܚ̈ܦ̈ܘ̈ܙ̈ܐ
ܗ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܙ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܢ̈ܟ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܟ̈ܢ̈ܐ ܚ̈ܦ̈ܘ̈ܙ̈ܐ

14. ܙ̈ܘ̈ܫ̈ܐ ܚ̈ܫ̈ܦ̈ܗ̈ܘ̈ܝ̈ ܟ̈ܡ ܟ̈ܢ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܢ̈ܒ̈ ܐ̈ܐ ܟ̈ܫ̈ܐ
ܐ̈ܗ ܗ̈ܟ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܐ ܟ̈ܢ̈ܡ ܝ̈ܚ̈ܟ̈ ܟ̈ܢ̈ܗ ܘ̈ܐ̈ܚ̈ܟ̈ܡ
ܘ̈ܒ̈ܘ̈ܐ ܗ̈ܙ̈ܘ̈ܫ̈ܐ ܘ̈ܐ̈ ܟ̈ܚ̈ܢ̈ܗ
ܟ̈ܢ̈ ܟ̈ܗ̈ܟ̈ ܚ̈ܫ̈ܦ̈ܗ̈ ܘ̈ܐ̈ܚ̈ܟ̈ܬ̈ܗ̈ܘ̈ܝ̈

15. ܟ̈ܢ̈ܐ ܙ̈ܘ̈ ܟ̈ܬ̈ ܚ̈ܡ̈ܦ̈ܟ̈ ܚ̈ܡ̈ܦ̈ܟ̈ ܗ̈ܐ̈ ܗ̈ܘ̈ ܗ̈ܘ̈
ܗ̈ ܚ̈ܡ̈ܦ̈ܟ̈ ܟ̈ܚ̈ܦ̈ܟ̈ ܟ̈ܗ̈ ܟ̈ܢ̈ ܘ̈ܟ̈ܢ̈ܟ̈
ܟ̈ܡ ܟ̈ܗ ܫ̈ܬ̈ ܒ̈ܦ̈ܟ̈ ܫ̈ܬ̈
ܟ̈ܗ ܚ̈ܦ̈ܟ̈ ܙ̈ܩ̈ܟ̈ ܐ̈ܬ̈ܗ̈ܙ̈ܐ

12. Fire descended in wrath and consumed the sinners; Gen 19:24; 2 Kgs 1:10–14
the fire of mercy has now descended and dwelt in the Bread:
instead of that fire which consumed mankind
you have consumed Fire in the Bread—and you have come to life!

13. Fire descended and consumed Elijah's sacrifices; 1 Kgs 18:38
the Fire of mercies has become a living sacrifice for us:
fire consumed [Elijah's] oblation,
but we, Lord, have consumed Your Fire in Your oblation!

14. Who has ever held in his cupped hands the wind? Come and see, Prov 30:4
Solomon, what the Lord of your father has done: cf. Ps 110:1
against nature, He has mingled fire and spirit
and poured them out in the hands of His disciples.

15. "Who has gathered up water in a veil?" he asked. Prov 30:4
Here is a Fountain in a veil—Mary's bosom.
And Your maidservants receive, within a veil,
the drop of salvation from Salvation's cup.

16. ܗܘ ܫܠܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܚܡܫܐ ܒܬܫ ܡܐܡܪܐ
ܫܠܐ ܐܢ ܠܐ ܐܙܓܠܐ ܥܡܕܐܡ ܫܟܠܗ
ܐܙܕ ܫܐܟܗ ܐܫܠܐ ܙܫ
ܟܠ ܡܐܡܪܐ ܒܟܒܫ ܐܙܓܐܐ

17. ܗܘ ܒܙܐ ܐܙܫܐ ܟܠ ܚܐܟܐ ܒܟܒܐ
ܗܘ ܒܙܐ ܐܙܫܐ ܚܠܐܙܐ ܒܗ ܟܡܕ ܐܡܐ
ܒܙܐ ܐܙܫܐ ܚܟܚܡܐܙܐ
ܚܟܫܐ ܐܟܐ ܒܙܐ ܐܙܫ ܡܐܡܪܐ

18. ܟܫܡ ܡܢܐ ܟܗ ܚܬܐ ܒܟܚ ܟܫܡܗ
ܟܐܡ ܡܐܟ ܟܗ ܚܡܐܐ ܐܗ ܗܢܗ ܟܟ
ܐܟܟܒ ܡܙ ܐܐ ܐܐܡܒ
ܠܐ ܐܗ ܒܟܡܫ ܐܠܐ ܒܬܐ ܟܒ

19. ܚܙܐܗ ܒܡܐܒ ܡܙܙܐ ܐܐ ܚܐܒܡܐ
ܕܡܐ ܒܡܢܡܐܒ ܒܫܐ ܐܐ ܙܒ ܒܒܕܚ
ܒܙ ܡܐܠܐ ܚܒ ܚܙܐܒ
ܗܘ ܐܡܐܙܐ ܒܙܐ ܚܡܢܙܐ

16. There is hidden power in the sanctuary's veil,
a power that no mind has ever confined:
it brought down its love, descended and hovered
over this veil on the altar of reconciliation.

17. See, Fire and Spirit are in the womb of her who bore You,
see, Fire and Spirit are in the river[1] in which You were baptized.
Fire and Spirit are in our baptismal font,
in the Bread and Cup are Fire and Holy Spirit.

18. Your Bread slays the greedy one who had made us his bread,
Your Cup destroys death who had swallowed us up;
we have eaten You, Lord, we have drunken You
—not that we will consume You up,
but through You we shall have life.

19. The thong of Your sandal is something fearful to the discerning,
the hem of Your cloak is awesome to those who understand,
yet our foolish generation, through its prying into You,
has gone quite mad, drunk with new wine.[2]

---

1. Fire . . . in the river: For the tradition of fire appearing in the Jordan at Christ's baptism, see Text 7 (*Eccl.* 36), n. 6.

2. drunk with new wine: Ephrem is here accusing the Arians of what the disciples had falsely been accused of by the mockers at Pentecost (Acts 2:13).

20. ܐܵܘܿܐ ܚܲܩܩܘܿܡ ܘܟܠ ܡܬܐ ܡܟܝ ܕܐ
ܥܡܐ ܙܟܐ ܡܚܒܝܘ ܠܫܡ ܩܝܡ
ܟܬܘܐ ܐܚܕܐ ܐܐ ܗܘ ܙܡ
ܐܡܚܟܒ ܗܘܐ ܙܘܟ ܡܚܟܒ ܗܘ

21. ܟܘܐ ܘܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܚܦܣܘ ܘܐܚܒ ܗܘ
ܐܬܡܘ ܟܬܒܐ ܙܢܝ ܟܐܚܦܘܐ
ܟܬܘܐ ܐܚܕܐ ܡܟܒܐ ܡܫܠ
ܐܡܚܟܒ ܗܘܐ ܗܢܐ ܙܐܬܡܘ

22. ܗܐ ܡܟܘ ܗܢ ܚܩܟ ܗܝ ܠܗܐ ܘܩܬܚܟܡ
ܘܟܠ ܐܐ ܚܬܩ ܐܘ ܟ ܗܝ ܐܢ
ܡܟ ܡܘܘܚܡ ܘܐ ܟܚܟܢ
ܟܡ ܟܢܢ ܘܟ ܐܘ ܐܩܢ

20. There is wonder in Your footsteps, which walked on the water: Matt 14:25

You subjected a great sea beneath Your feet,

yet Your very head was subject to just a small river,

in that it bent down and was baptized therein.

21. The river resembled John, who baptized in it:

each reflects the other in its smallness;

yet to the small river and to the weak servant

was the Master of them both subjected!

22. Look, Lord, my lap is now filled Matt 15:27;
with the crumbs from Your [table], Mark 7:28

there is no more room in the folds [of my garment],

so stay Your Gift, as I worship [before You]:

keep it in Your treasure house in readiness
to give us on another occasion.

◆

TEXT 18

The Eucharistic Marriage Feast
(*Fid.* 14)

Ephrem considered praise to be an essential element of Christian life. He here invites Christ to a wedding feast, but since the wine of praise has run out, he asks Christ to repeat the miracle he performed at the Wedding at Cana. In the fourth stanza it emerges that the wedding feast to which Ephrem is inviting Christ is in fact the wedding feast of the Eucharist, where Christ is no guest, but the Bridegroom himself. The Bride turns out to be, not only the Church, but also, on another level, the individual soul who, at Communion, receives the Bridegroom in the bridal chamber of the body (stanza 5). At this point Ephrem recalls how Moses had prepared the former Bride, the Synagogue, at Sinai, but she had proved unfaithful "in her own bridal chamber," by worshipping the Calf instead (stanzas 6–7). Ephrem shudders with dread at the thought that he might ever himself be guilty of infidelity (stanza 9). The poem concludes with the paradox of the combination of divinity and humanity in Christ.

Meter

The *qala* is *izgadda haddaya,* for which see under Text 17 (*Fid.* 10). Vocal *shwa* is treated as a full vowel in stanza 4, line 3, and in stanza 10, line 2. For the partial alphabetic acrostic, see the General Introduction (p. xv).

Text

Like the previous one, this poem has the benefit of being preserved in four sixth-century manuscripts (see under Text 17).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܘܐܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܡܐ

1. ܐܬܫܠܡ ܡܢܐ ܟܣܘܬܐ ܘܡܪܘܬܗ
ܫܦܪ ܟܗ ܫܒܥܐ ܟܣܘܬܟ ܡܠܐܡ ܗܦܟܣ
ܐܡܬܐ ܘܐܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܝܟܬ
ܫܒܥܐ ܠܟ ܐܟ ܦܡ ܠܡܦܫܡ

ܚܦܫܐ : ܗܦܟܣ ܟܪ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܘܐܙܝܡ ܟܗ ܟܡܙܘܪ

2. ܫܒܥܐ ܘܟܠܝܬ ܐܫܬܐ ܗܘ ܐܝ ܟ ܠܦܗܡܐ
ܘܐܐ ܫܒܥܐ ܡܟܠܐ ܘܡܡܟ ܗܦܟܣ
ܘܐܝ ܗܡ ܫܒܥܐ ܗܦܟܣ ܐܡܟ
ܡܢ ܚܠܐ ܘܫܡ ܠܘܦܙܐ

1. I have invited You, Lord, to a wedding feast of songs,
   but the wine—the utterance of praise—at our feast has run out. John 2:1ff.
   [You are] the guest who filled with good wine the jars;
   fill my mouth with Your praise.

   Refrain: Praise to You from everyone
   who has perceived Your truth.[1]

2. The wine that was in the jars was akin and related to
   this eloquent wine that gives birth to praise
   seeing that that wine too gave birth to praise
   from those who drank it and beheld the wonder.

1. A different refrain is given in two of the manuscripts: "Praise to You who have poured out Your gift upon Your servant."

3. ܠܘ ܕܵܐܠܵܐ ܘܐܲܢܵܗ̈ ܘܟܲܣܝܵܐܠܵܐ ܘܠܵܐ ܒܲܥܝ
ܗܵܐ ܐܲܝܟܲܢܬ ܡܟܲܣܝ ܟܵܗ̈ ܫܲܥܢܵܐ ܠܘܟ
ܟܵܗ̈ܢܵܐ ܣܟܵܐܠܵܐ ܣܘܟ ܐܲܝܟܲܬܵܐ
ܙܟܵܐ ܐܘܲܬܢ ܡܟܲܣ ܡܢ ܟܵܐܗ̈ܘܟ

4. ܫܟܵܐ ܘܐܵܘܲܟ ܟܣܟܵܐܠܵܐ ܘܐܲܣܬܵܐ
ܗܵܐ ܣܟܵܟܘ ܒܲܟܵܐ ܗܵܐ ܐܵܪ̈ܡ ܟܟܵܐܬ
ܘܗܵܐ ܗܲܢܬܲܥ ܡܢ ܐܵܐ ܗܲܢܬ
ܟܘ ܦܲܬܢܵܡ ܫܲܘ ܙܢܵܡ

5. ܟܵܡܵܡ ܗܲ ܫܟܵܐ ܐܵܐ ܥܲܝܢܵܐ ܟܣܵܢ ܗܲ
ܗܲܢܬ ܐܵܡܵܗ̈ ܙܟܵܐ ܟܡ ܣܙܵܟܵܐ
ܗܙ ܣܒ ܥܲܝܢܵܐ ܣܟܵܐܠܵܐ ܗܗܵܐ ܟܘ
ܫܟܵܗ̈ܵܡ ܗܲ ܟܒܵܐ ܒ ܫܟܟܵܐ

6. ܟܨܵܙܟܵܐ ܫܲܘ ܗܗܵ ܦܲܒܟܵܐ ܟܙܵܙ ܫܲܣ
ܐܙܢ ܥܲܝܢܵܗ ܨܣܵܙܵ ܫܣܟ ܟܵܗ
ܨܢܲܝܠܵܐ ܟܢܵܐ ܫܵܗ̈ܢ ܙܵܐ
ܫܵܐܟ ܨܙܵܫ ܟܵܐ ܙܟܵܗ̈

3. You who are so just, if at a wedding feast not Your own
   You filled six jars with good wine, John 2:6
   do You, Lord, at this wedding feast, fill, not the jars,
   but the ten thousand ears with its sweetness.

4. Jesus, You were invited to the wedding feast of others,
   here is Your own pure and fair wedding feast: gladden Your worlds[2]
   for Your guests too, O Lord, need
   Your songs; let Your harp utter!

5. The soul is Your bride, the body[3] too is Your bridal chamber,
   Your guests are the senses and the thoughts.
   And if a single body is a wedding feast for You,
   how great is Your banquet with the whole church!

6. The Holy One[4] took the synagogue up on Sinai:
   he made her body shine with garments of white,
   but her heart was dark; Exod 19:14
   she played the harlot with the calf,
   and so the Exalted One rejected her, Exod 32:1ff.
   breaking the tablets, the book of her covenant. Exod 32:19

---

2. Your worlds: I.e., both angels and human beings; but perhaps the text should be emended from *ʿlmyk* to *ʿlymyk*, "Your young (people)."

3. the body: One manuscript has "Your body"; although this conforms to Text 5 (*Nat.* 17), stanza 6, it does not fit the context nearly so well here.

4. The Holy One: Ephrem deliberately reflects Jewish usage.

7. ܡܢܐ ܣܠܐ ܕܡܫܚܐܡ ܚܫܝܠܐ ܕܟܗ ܗܐܕܘܙܐ
ܡܟܠܐ ܒܟܝܫܐܢܐ ܗܢܫܐ ܕܒ ܙܘ ܡܟܢ
ܚܡܪܙܝ ܚܡܙܐ ܡܝ ܗܘ ܬܟܐ
ܡܙܠܗ ܒܗܗܐ ܐܡܟܐ ܕܒ ܗܢܫܐ

8. ܒܐܗܙܗ ܒܟܡܐܘܐ ܒܐܘܐ ܐܗ ܐܚܘܬܐ
ܡܐܗ ܒܗܐ ܙܐܘܗܒ ܐܟܡܐܐܒ ܟܒܡܐ ܗܡܡܐ
ܗܐ ܐܣܡܪ ܒܗܐ ܚܡܗܐ ܐܡܟܐ
ܡܟܚܐ ܗܐܟܐ ܗܐܙܡܢܐ ܐܣܙܐ

9. ܐܡܟ ܡܙܐ ܬܠܐ ܬܢܐ ܡܝ ܠܗܚܐܣܠܪ
ܐܡܟ ܗܐܕ ܟܠܗ ܚܡܡ ܠܟܐܡܐܐ
ܡܐܕ ܣܐܡ ܟܡܐ ܐܩܐ
ܚܡܗܐ ܐܩܬ ܙܚܡ ܠܟܐܡܐ ܒܗ

10. ܗܠܐ ܒܬܗܐ ܟܢ ܐܡܐ ܐܟܗܐܠܪ
ܗܠܐ ܚܬܟܬܐ ܚܡܟܪ ܐܡܐܐܠܪ
ܐܗܙܗ ܚܟܬܐ ܐܡܐ ܒܗ ܐܟܙܐ
ܐܗ ܐܬܡܬܐ ܐܡܐ ܠܙܐܡܙܗܡ

7. Who has ever seen such horror in a shameful deed—

   a bride who has played false in her own bridal chamber,
   raising her voice?

   When she dwelt in Egypt she learnt it from

   the mistress of Joseph, who cried out when she played false. Gen 39:15

8. The light of the pillar of fire and of the cloud Num 14:14

   drew into itself its rays like the sun

   that was eclipsed on the day that she cried out, Matt 27:45

   demanding the King, a further crime. Mark 15:13

9. How can my harp, O Lord, ever rest from Your praise?

   How could I ever teach my tongue infidelity?

   Your love gives to my shamefacedness confidence,

   —yet my will is ungrateful.

10. It is right that humanity should acknowledge Your divinity,

    it is right for the supernal beings to worship Your humanity;

    the supernal beings were amazed to see how small You become,

    and those below to see how exalted!

◆

TEXT 19

Nisibis under Siege in Comparison with Noah's Ark (*Nis.* 1)

In this *madrasha* the personified town of Nisibis is the speaker throughout. The historical setting is the third siege of Nisibis by the Sassanian shah, Shapur II, in 350 CE, when Shapur blocked the river Mydonius, causing a flood to encircle the walls of the town. (The scene is described by the Emperor Julian in his Second Oration, 62B–D [trans. Dodgeon and Lieu 1991, 198–202].) Ephrem imaginatively has Nisibis address God, comparing herself to Noah's Ark in the Flood. In the course of the poem Nisibis adduces various parallels and contrasts between her situation and that of the Ark, as she pleads for God's protection. Reference to the olive branch of Gen 8:11 in stanza 7 serves as a starting point (thanks to the association with oil) for a number of allusions to baptism (compare Text 16 [*Virg.* 7], above): in Ephrem's time the two main elements of the baptismal rite were the prebaptismal anointing, or *rushma* ("mark," a term taken from Ezek 9:4), and, following that, immersion in water. There is an alphabetic acrostic, but missing out every other letter.

Meter

The *qala* is given as *eptaḥ pum(y) b-idaʿta*. The meter (set out in fourteen lines by Beck) is the following: 7 7 7 8 7 7 7 4 7 7 7 7 7 8 (or 7); there are a number of minor irregularities, some of which simply involve elision (e.g., in stanza 10 *ʾeḥadt* is treated as a monosyllable); in stanza 7 *ḥadwteh* represents the older form where the *waw* retains its consonantal value (later, *ḥaduteh*). The refrain consists of the last pair of syllabic units of the first stanza. The same meter is used elsewhere by Ephrem for *Eccl.* 7–9, 11, 22, *Virg.* 4–7, and *Haer.* 37.

It will be noticed that, although the meter is the same as for Text 16 (*Virg.* 7), Beck has set out the syllabic units in individual lines, rather than having two syllabic units to a line.

Text

Like the rest of the collection of seventy-seven *madrashe* on Nisibis, this poem is preserved complete in the single manuscript, British Library Add. 14572 (sixth century).

ܟܠ ܡܠܐ ܒܐܚܕ ܡܕܡ ܕܒܪܚܡܐ

1. ܟܠܗ ܬܫܥܐ ܒܢܫܐ ܚܛܐ
ܢܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܐܦ ܗܘ ܚܬܫܒܚ
ܡܢ ܒܛܢ ܚܠܐ ܡܚܫܒܬܐ
ܫܘܒ ܡܬܘܚܢܐ ܒܫܒ ܗܦܗܘܡܐ
ܕܪܚܬܐ ܡܚܝܢܐ ܙܚܝܪ
ܚܫܟܬܚܐ ܡܦܫܐ ܫܡܥܘܢ
ܗܐܡܐ ܒܗܘܐ ܡܚܫܒܬܐ
ܘܢܛܗ ܠܐܙܐ
ܦܫܐ ܚܦܬܟܗ ܦܫܦܫܐ
ܒܟܗ ܐܙܒܬ ܗܠܐܙܐ ܐܟܚܟ
ܘܫܦܬܥܡ ܐܝܟ ܫܐ
ܡܦܫܥܡ ܐܡܢ ܟܡ ܙܬܐ

1. O God of mercies[1] who gave rest to Noah,[2]
   who himself gave rest to Your mercies:
   by offering sacrifices he stayed the Flood, Gen 8:20
   he made offerings and received a promise, Gen 8:21–22; 9:9–17
   he pleased You with his prayer and incense;
   You acted graciously to him by means of oaths and the rainbow. Gen 9:16–17
   [As a result], where the flood threatens
   to harm the earth,
   the rainbow is stretched out against it
   so as to chase it away and give comfort to the earth.[3]
   You have sworn, may You preserve peace
   and may Your bow fight against Your wrath.

---

1. God of mercies *(alah raḥme):* Modeled on Dan 2:44, *alah shmayya,* "God of heaven." Ephrem also has *alah kulla,* "God of all" (*Fid.* 46.12), particularly common in Narsai, and *alah qushta,* "God of truth" (*Nis.* 62.16; *Haer.* 40.12).

2. gave rest to Noah: A play on the etymology of Noah's name (another is in stanza 10).

3. the earth: For reasons of meter the *alaph* must be elided here (as in later West Syriac usage), i.e., *wl-arʿa* rather than *wal-ʾarʿa.*

ܚܕܝܫܐ : ܡܕܝܫ ܩܡܘܪ ܚܕܡܐ ܩܠܐ
ܘܐ ܐܦ ܟܟܘܒ ܚܕܡܐ ܗܕܝ

2. ܟܟܠܡ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܟܡ
ܕܘܐ ܡܫܠܐ ܘܕܗ ܒܫ
ܚܠܐ ܙܕܐ ܚܒ ܘ ܩ ܒ
ܡܐ ܒܡ ܫܡܐ ܘܩ ܘܡܒܪ
ܘܩܐ ܙܗܩ ܡܩܕܟ
ܘܐ ܚܐܐ ܘܕ ܐܒ ܫܠܐ
ܕܩܫ ܡܫܠܐ ܘܒܐ ܒܫ
ܐܩܐ ܙܕܐ
ܡܩܕܘ ܒܡ ܐܠܗܟ
ܐܩܒ ܩܫ ܩܡܕ ܫܫ
ܐܙܗܕ ܐܟ ܘܒܫ
ܒ ܟܫ ܐܩܒ ܩܡܘܪ
ܟܫ ܙܗܕ ܫܡܙ ܐܡ ܘܫ
ܩܡܘܪ ܐܠ ܩܡܕ ܩܗܕ

Refrain: Stretch out Your rainbow against the deluge,
for its waves are lifted up against our walls.

2. It was openly rumored,[4] Lord,

that the feeble blood which Noah sprinkled

held off from everyone in every generation the wrath [of judgment]

—how much mightier is the blood of Your only-begotten [Son],

[and able] to prevent our [present] flood by its sprinkling;

for Noah's feeble sacrifices gained their effectiveness

by being a symbol of Him,

and it was this which stayed the wrath.

Do You accept the offering of my altar

and stay the deadly[5] flood from me,

so that both Your signs preserve [intact]—

Your Cross in my case, Your rainbow in Noah's.

May Your Cross cleave the ocean of waters, cf. Ps 78:12

and Your rainbow restrain the flood of rain.

---

4. It was . . . rumored: The verb could equally be taken as 1st sg. impf. (so Beck), "I will murmur."

5. deadly: The text has "Flood of life" *(ḥayye)*, perhaps in the sense of "destroying life." Other possibilities are (1) to take *ḥayye* as "living people," i.e., the Persian besiegers; or (2) to treat *mamol ḥayye* as a vocative, "Flood of Salvation," with an object such as "the wrath" understood. Beck suggests emending to *ḥashshe,* "sufferings"; another possible emendation might be *mayya,* "water."

3. ܗܘ ܡܢ ܕܐܬܪ ܠܐ ܫܬܩܬ ܒܗ
ܡܕܡ ܕܐܬܝ ܠܥܠܡܐ
ܘܟܠ ܡܢ ܕܐܬܐ ܒܗ ܫܒܚ ܘܫܒܚ
ܠܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܒܗܬܐ ܘܠܒܪܗ ܕܐܒܗܬܐ
ܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܒ ܫܡܫܐ ܒܪܗ
ܘܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܫܡܫܐ ܩܛܢܐ
ܗܘ ܕܫܟܚ ܘܥܒܕ ܠܟܠ
ܘܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܒܥܒܕ
ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐܒ ܠܒܪ
ܐܠܗܐ ܚܕ ܗܘ ܠܟܠ
ܐܫܬ ܡܠܐ ܡܢ ܫܘܐ
ܡܟܣܐ ܘܗܘ ܥܠܡܐ
ܗܘ ܫܦܝܪ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܚܕ
ܕܗܘ ܐܢܫ ܕܚܫܒ ܠܗ
ܘܟܠ ܐܢܫ ܕܚܫܒ ܗܘ

3. In my case, all kinds of storms have troubled me,

and I count the Ark fortunate:

only waves surrounded it,

[whereas siege-]mounds and arrows [as well as] waves surround me.

[The Ark] became a store of treasures for You,

but I have become a deposit of sins.

It subdued the waves through Your love,

whereas I have been blind amidst the arrows of Your wrath.

The flood escorted [the Ark],

while me the river [Mygdonius] has troubled.

O Helmsman of that Ark,

be my pilot on dry land!

You rested [the Ark] on the haven of a mountain,[6] Gen 8:4

give rest to me too in the haven of my walls.

---

6. mountain: Qardu (in southwest Turkey), rather than Ararat, in the Peshitta (Gen 8:4) and Targum.

4. ܐܵܡܥܵܐ ܘܝܼܫ ܟܲ ܚܩܼܥܚܵ
ܐܲܚܘܿ ܫܼܚ ܚܲܫܼܐ ܟܼܬܼܠܵ
ܝܵܪܚܵ ܢܲܫ ܟܼܬܼܠܵ ܘܙܼܥܵܐ
ܘܼܣܼܥܗ ܗܲܗ ܚܒܼܙܗ ܟܼܚܲܫ ܗܲܐ
ܘܼܡܙܘ ܫܼܗܙܗ ܟܼܐ ܬܲܐ ܐܲܠܲ
ܚܼܥ ܙܚܲܫܼܗ ܣܪܵܐ ܘܟܼܬܼܠܵ
ܘܵܐ ܠܼܗܐܼܘܿ ܫܼܩܵ ܐܲܒ
ܗܲ ܚܲܫܼܬܲܐ
ܘܚܘ ܚܩܼܫܵܐ ܟܲ ܐܲܩ ܟܼ
ܗܲܘܼܟ ܐܲܒ ܗܲ ܘܲܐ ܟ
ܐܲܡܵܐ ܘܫܼܗܫܗ ܐܲܥܪ ܐܲܩܵ
ܚܼܢܩܗ ܐܼܥܪ ܩܲܪܙܲܩܗ
ܟ ܢܲܙܵ ܘܲܢܙܵ ܫܼܗܫܗ
ܗܵ ܐܲܢ ܐܲܚܲܢ ܟ ܐܲܚܲܩܗ

4. Me the just [God] has punished with overflowing waters,
   while He cherished the Ark amidst the waves;
   for Noah overcame the waves of lust
   that drowned the children of Seth[7] in his lifetime.
   Because [Noah's] flesh stood fast against Cain's daughters,
   his vessel tamed the surface of the waves;
   because women had not defiled him,
   he made the animals continent[8]—
   the animals that were in the Ark in pairs;
   himself married, he made marriage continent![9]
   The olive whose oil brightens the countenance
   brightened their faces with its plucked leaf; Gen 8:11
   as for me, the river whose irrigation once brought joy,
   now, Lord, it makes me downcast with its flooding.

---

7. children of Seth: According to an interpretation of "the sons of God" in Gen 6:2, 4, which is widely current in early Christian literature, these are the descendants of Seth, who descended from higher ground and mingled with the daughters of Cain, thus producing the corrupt generation drowned by the Flood; see Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 6.3. This exegesis is first attested in Christian writers in the second century CE, in Julius Africanus, but it seems already to be known to Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.69–71; it replaced the interpretation of "the sons of God" as the fallen angels (thus especially in *1 Enoch* 6); for this, see Alexander 1972 and Wickham 1974.

8. made . . . continent *(qaddesh):* See Text 5 (*Nat.* 17), n. 6.

9. made marriage continent: See previous note.

5. ܠܥܘܠܐ ܒܬܫܒܚ ܣܝܐ ܕܐܢܫܐ ܡܪ
ܐܢ ܡܢ ܟܬܒ ܒܚܬܝ ܐ
ܕܡܐ ܬܡܐ ܕܒ ܠܥܐ
ܒܟ ܒܐ ܐܚܕ ܒܘܣ ܫܩܠ
ܟܐ ܒܐ ܐܚܕ ܐܘܣ
ܐܠܐ ܒܐ ܐܫ ܐܘܒ
ܒܟܠܐ ܫܢܐ ܟܪܐ
ܒܐܡܝ ܬܒܟ
ܣܐ ܘܫܟܐ ܐܐ
ܐ ܟܐ ܟ ܫܡܒܐ
ܫܐ ܢܐ ܒܐ ܟܣܘܡ
ܫܥܐ ܡ ܒ ܬܐ ܟܬܒ
ܟܫܐ ܒܘ ܫܐ ܟ
ܟܐ ܒܘ ܣܘ ܫܐ
ܟܘ ܣܘ ܫܐ ܟ

5. You in Your righteousness have seen my sordid guilt,
and Your pure eyes abhor me;
You gathered the waters [acting] through the unclean [Shapur],
so as to effect for me the purification of my wrongdoings—
not that You will submerge and purify me through them,
but [simply] to make me afraid and to chasten me.
For waves will arouse [people] to prayer
which itself will wash away my sins;
the very sight of them—a sight that brims with repentance—
has become a [form of] baptism to me.
O Lord, may [Your] mercy drown [my] sins
in the sea that was meant to drown me:
You drowned bodies in the Sea of Reeds, Exod 14:28
drown sins instead of bodies in this one!

6. ܚܩܠܐ ܕܬܫܚܐ ܐܦܝܗ
ܘܐܠܝܢ ܕܗ ܟܐ ܚܬܘܬܝ
ܘܠܐ ܐܟܙܐ ܐܢܘܢܐ ܕܢܩܝܐ
ܚܕ ܣܢܘ ܐܢܘܢܐ ܘܡܗܘܐ
ܚܦܩܗ ܐܢܝ ܣܒܐ ܟܣܒܐ
ܩܫܗ ܐܢܝ ܣܒܐ ܟܣܒܐ
ܐܢܘܗ ܘܝܟ ܐܟܗ ܐܬܝ
ܡܟ ܗܐܚܩܗ
ܗܘܗܐ ܚܟ ܗܘܝ ܟܬܐ
ܘܬܚܗ ܗܙܒܐ ܘܚܟܗ ܟ
ܚܩܠܐ ܠܗܢܐ ܚܙܢܐ
ܐܢ ܟ ܢܙ ܐܗ ܟ ܣܥܙܐ
ܚܩܠܐ ܚܗܘܐ ܬܚܒܐ
ܚܐܢܗ ܟܟ ܐܐ ܟܬܟܡ

6. In Your mercy You fitted out the Ark
in order to preserve in it survivors of all kinds;
so as not to bereave the earth in [Your] anger,
Your compassion made a [substitute] earth out of wood!
You emptied them out, [pouring] one into the other,
and You [poured] them back, one into the other.
But my lands have been filled and emptied
three times over,[10]
and now the waves batter against me,
[trying] to wipe out what remnants have survived in me.
You preserved a remnant in the Ark,
preserve in me too, Lord, some leaven.
The Ark gave birth on the mountain,
may I give birth in my own lands
to those who have been enclosed within me!

10. three times over: By the Persian army in 337 (or 338), 346, and 350 CE.

7. ܗܘ ܡܕܡ ܕ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܫܡܝܐ
ܘܟܫܘܦܐ ܕܐܒܐ ܡܪܝܡ
ܚܙܘ ܐܝܟ ܕܡ ܐܢܐ
ܟܬܒܐ ܘܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܠܟ
ܟ ܐܘܪܚ ܠ ܕܐܬܐ
ܘܡܪܝܡ ܕܟܝ ܕܒܐ
ܗܠܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܢܐ
ܗܝ ܙܕ ܫܠܐ
ܐܘ ܕܐܘܟ ܟܬܒܐ
ܐܙ ܙܒܢ ܐܝܬ ܙܒܢ
ܠܡ ܟܬܒ ܫܠܐ ܘܐܡܪ
ܗܘܐ ܕ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟ
ܐܝ ܐܡܐ ܕܟܝ ܐܢܐ
ܘܫܡܥ ܕ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܫܡܝܐ

7. Lord, give joy to those who are enclosed within my fortresses,

You who gave joy to those enclosed [in the Ark]
by means of the olive [leaf]; Gen 8:11

You sent a healing doctor by means of the dove

to those who were languishing and afflicted by all kinds of waves;

he entered and drove out all their pains,

for joy at his [coming] swallowed up [their] grief;

he dismissed sorrow by means of the comfort [he brought]

and like a captain

he gave encouragement to those afraid,

sowing a word [of courage] in a place [hitherto] deserted.

[Their] eyes tasted the sight of peace

and [their] mouths were quick to open and praise You. Ps 51:15

Preserve me, like the olive [branch], on the waves,

and make those enclosed within my walls rejoice at me.

8. ܗܟܐ ܫܠܐ ܘܐܠܗܝܢ ܚܒܪ̈ܐ
ܬܠܬܝܗܘܢ ܣܠܐ ܡܫܟ ܒ̈ܟ
ܠܐ ܒܥܐ ܐܢ ܫܡܥ ܣܠܐ
ܘܠܐ ܚܢܐ ܒܚܟܡ ܟܐ ܣܠܐ
ܒܚܕܐ ܒܐ ܟ̈ ܗܢܐ
ܘܟܐ ܒܚܕ ܚܢܐ ܒܥܒܕܐ
ܗܢܐ ܚܫܐ ܘܒܚܟ
ܐܠܐ ܒܚ̈ܐ
ܒܥܐ ܫ ܒܚ̈ܐ ܘܐܢܫ
ܘܟܐ ܣܠܐ ܚܢ ܒܚܟ
ܚܢ ܒܚܐ ܒܚ̈ܐ ܫܥܐ
ܘܟܐ ܒܚܕ ܚܢ ܫܚܢ
ܗܢܐ ܘܒ ܟܐ ܒܚܕ
ܒܪ̈ܐ ܘܒܐ ܚܥܢ ܠܫܢ

8. The flood has surged and dashed against our walls—
may the Power that supports all hold them up!
They have not fallen like the house built on sand — Matt 7:26
for I have not built my teaching on sand.
May my foundations be of rock
since I have built my faith on Your rock; — Matt 16:18
may the hidden foundation of my trust
support my walls.
Jericho's walls fell — Josh 6:20
because it had built its trust on sand;
Moses built a wall in the midst of the sea, — Exod 14:22
since his mind was founded on rock;
Noah's foundation was on rock,
hence it bore the wooden habitation over the seas.

9. ܩܫܡ ܢܥܩܘܗܝ ܒܚܟܡ
ܚܫܬܘܗܝ ܒܚܩܦܠܗ
ܐܣܟܡ ܢܦܫ ܘܐܬܠ ܗܘܐ ܟܘ
ܗܐ ܐܒܚܣ ܘܐܬܠ ܐܡܥܩܚ
ܣܟܡ ܬܩܐ ܘܐܡܒܡ ܟܘ
ܗܐ ܚܡܩܟܡ ܘܠܐ ܐܒܩܐ
ܣܟܡ ܣܡ ܒܢܦܡ ܗܘܐ ܩܙܡ
ܒܚܐ ܘܐܚܩܗ
ܗܐ ܟܚܩܒܐ ܘܒܩܐ
ܘܢܟܡ ܐܟܟܡ ܟܩܟܫܐ
ܚܩܐܚ ܐܡܐܫܡ ܐܟܟ
ܟܢ ܠܐ ܐܚܒܩܠ ܘܐܒܝ ܫܟ
ܚܩܡܫܐ ܒܙܠܡ ܐܡܐ
ܣܩܫܡ ܟ ܐܡ ܠܐܫܬܐ ܒܡܟ ܗܩ

9. Compare the souls that are within me
with the animals in the Ark:
instead of Noah mourning in the Ark,
here Your altar is mourning and humiliated;
instead of the [married] women who lived in continence,[11]
here are my unmarried virgins;
instead of Ham who uncovered his father's shame Gen 9:22
after leaving [the Ark],
here are the givers of alms,
people who have modestly clothed the naked.
In my pain I have spoken like a madman,
do not blame me, Lord, if my words have provoked You;
You silenced the diligent[12] workers who complained; Matt 20:11
have mercy on me, as upon the "last" who kept silent.

11. lived in continence *(etqaddash):* See Text 5 (*Nat.* 17), n. 6. In early manuscripts (fifth/sixth century) the 3rd f. pl. of the perfect does not have the affix *-y* (as in the later West Syriac orthographical tradition, followed by many modern grammars).

12. diligent: See Text 1 (*Par.* 5), n. 7. For Ephrem's unusual interpretation of the parable, see Valavanolickal 1996, 122–31.

10. ܗܘܿܡ ܙܰܩ̈ܝܳܐ ܚܰܒܳܐ ܥܡ ܟ̈ܘܿܗܳܐ
ܫܰܐܢ̈ܘ ܘܰܘ ܥܡ ܟ̈ܠ ܫܰܩ̈ܘܿܥ̈ܝ
ܙ̈ܘܿܥ ܘܳܐ ܒ̈ܣ ܥܡ ܒ̈ܘܿܫ
ܙ̈ܒ̈ܢ̈ܝ ܫܰܐܢ̈ܬܐ ܐ̈ܡ ܚ̈ܙ̈ܘܿܬܐ
ܐ̈ܣ̈ܐ ܐ̈ܬ̈ܚ̈ܐ ܘ̈ܐ̈ܠ̈ܗ̈ ܚ̈ܐ̈ܐ
ܗ̈ܠ̈ܥ ܢ̈ܩ̈ܛ̈ܐ ܙ̈ܐ̈ܫ̈ܥ ܫ̈ܐ̈ܐ
ܗ̈ܘ ܘܳܐ ܒ̈ܣ ܚ̈ܥ̈ܘ ܟ̈ܐ̈ܐ
ܘ̈ܫ̈ܐ̈ܐ ܘ̈ܗ̈ ܚ̈
ܚ̈ܫ̈ܙ̈ܐ ܫ̈ܚ̈ܐ ܘ̈ܗ̈ ܟ̈ܗ
ܐ̈ܥ̈ܙ̈ܘ̈ ܟ̈ܐ̈ܐ ܫ̈ܟ̈ܗ̈ܘ̈ ܙ̈ܫ̈ܐ
ܫ̈ܥ̈ܘ ܚ̈ܙ̈ܗ ܟ̈ܩ̈ܐ
ܫ̈ܙ̈ܚ̈ ܙ̈ܘ̈ܫ̈ܘ̈ ܚ̈ܩ̈ܐ
ܫ̈ܥ̈ܚ̈ ܚ̈ܟ̈ ܚ̈ܫ̈ܩ̈ܗ̈
ܫ̈ܟ̈ܚ̈ ܚ̈ ܗ̈ܢ ܫ̈ܠ̈ܚ̈ܗ̈

10. You made a place of refuge in the face of [Your] wrath,
and every kind [of living thing] withdrew into it.
Noah refreshed himself in a place of quiet,
his dwelling place giving rest in accord with his name.[13]
You closed the doors so as to preserve the righteous man, Gen 7:16
You opened the floodgates to destroy the impure. Gen 7:11
Noah stood up between the fearful waves outside
and the destructive mouths [of the wild animals] within;
the waves tossed him, the mouths disturbed him.
With him You pacified[14] those within,
You calmed those outside before him;
You quickly changed [his] troubles,
since to You [all] difficult things are easy, Lord.

13. name: A play on *Nuḥ* and *nawḥa*.
14. pacified: Or "tamed."

11. ܡܢ ܐܝܟ ܐܢܫ ܕܐܬ ܒܗ ܒܫ
ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܠܡܐ ܒܟܠ
ܫܘܒ ܥܡܐ ܕܐܬܘܢ
ܐܝܟ ܕܐܢ ܬܒܪ ܒܪܐ
ܠܐ ܫܟܚܬ ܫܘܬܦ
ܡܢ ܐܢܐ ܒܟ ܒܥܝ
ܡܦܠ ܐܬܘܒ ܕܝܢ
ܡܟܠ ܐܟܠ
ܐܝܟ ܐܦܠ ܐܢܫ ܒܥܠ
ܒܟܠ ܫܘ ܟܡܘ
ܠܐ ܢܕܥ ܕܡܐ ܕܬܫܦܟ
ܐܠܐ ܡܟܠ ܐܒ ܒܪܘܚ
ܐܢܫ ܐܟܠ ܒܕܟ
ܐܠܐ ܟܠ ܐܦܫܐ ܒܕܟ
ܐ ܐܠܐܫܡ ܟܡܟܘ
ܠܐ ܐܫܡܫ ܟ ܒܡܟܘ

11. Listen and weigh up the comparison between me and Noah,
and [though] my pain is lighter than his,
may Your mercy make our deliverances the same.
You see, my children stand, like him,
between the angry [within] and the destructive [outside]:
with me, Lord, give peace to those who are within,
and bring down before me the [enemy] outside,
and so make my victory a double one.
And because my slayer[15] has tripled his fury,
may Your Three-day One[16] triple His grace.
Let not the Evil One vanquish Your mercies;
overcome him who has [attacked me] twice and three times.
May my victory fly through the world,
that it may buy praise for You in the world.
You, whose resurrection was on the third day,
do not slay me at this third danger!

◆

15. my slayer: Ms. *qtwl*, but the sense and syntax require *qtwly*.

16. Three-day One *(tlitaya):* This title of Christ (absent from Aphrahat) is found a number of times in Ephrem: *Nis.* 2.5, 5.14, 14.25, 41.16 (Text 13); *Fid.* 22.7, 42.5, 75.6; *Commentary on Genesis* 34.5. Besides referring to Christ's three days among the dead, it can also have the sense of "intermediary."

TEXT 20

The Pearl and Its Symbolism
(*Fid.* 82)

At the end of the cycle *On Faith* there is a group of five poems (81–85) with the title "On the Pearl," in which Ephrem discovers a whole series of symbols of the incarnation. The symbolic potentiality of the pearl was enhanced for Ephrem by his awareness of the view that pearls came into being in the mollusk when lightning struck the mollusk in the sea: from this conjunction of disparate elements, fire and water, the pearl is born. The possibilities for analogy with the birth of Christ from Mary and the Holy Spirit are obvious.

In this poem Ephrem addresses the pearl directly as he explores different facets of the pearl's symbolism. In stanza 6 the reference to the crown of the King of kings (here Christ) may be intended as a deliberate contrast to the elaborately jeweled crown of the Sassanian king of kings, Shapur II, who by now ruled over Ephrem's town of origin. Stanza 10 contains a play on words between "diver" and "baptized," and for this the translation resorts to a double rendering. A similar comparison between divers who anoint themselves with oil and the baptismal candidates who are anointed with oil before being baptized has already been found in Text 16 (*Virg.* 7), stanza 10. In the last three stanzas it turns out that the pearl even symbolizes various aspects of the Passion. An English translation of all five poems on the pearl is given in Mathews 1994.

Meter

The *qala* is given as *manu sapeq,* the opening words of *Eccl.* 38. This meter, consisting of five lines each of 4+4 syllables, is known by a variety

of *qala* titles (see under Text 4 [*Nat.* 11]). In stanza 7, line 5, the *shwa* implicit in *b-taga* is treated metrically as a full vowel.

Text

The poem is preserved in three sixth-century manuscripts: Vatican Syr. 111 (of 522 CE; Beck's B), Vatican Syr. 113 (552 CE; Beck's C), and British Library Add. 12176 (fifth or sixth century; Beck's A).

ܠܐ ܡܠܐ ܒܥܬܐ ܡܦܩܕ

1. ܚܕܐ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܐܝܟ ܗܠܝܢ
ܠܒܡܥܠ ܠܢ ܚܫܘܐ ܡܠܟܐ
ܡܠܟ ܠܥܠ ܒܐܬܐ ܒܡܥܠ
ܙܝܢܐ ܒܗܠܦܢ ܐܘܪܚ ܡܢܐ
ܗܠܝܢ ܠܐ ܦܘܩܕ

ܚܫܝܫܐ : ܕܡܪ ܗܝ ܒܗܠܟܐ ܚܥܠܚܫܐ ܙܒܐ ܚܥܢܝܫܐ

2. ܐܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܚܫܟܐ ܥܐ
ܕܒ ܠܐ ܢܫܒܐ ܚܫܘܐ ܢܥܠ
ܕܒ ܠܐ ܒܒܐ ܠܗܢܐ ܙܐܒܝ
ܕܒ ܠܐ ܡܒܐ ܚܫܫܘܬܐ
ܢܢܐ ܗܘܦܐ ܕܒ ܐܒܝ ܠܐ

1. What is it you resemble? Let your silence speak
   to one who listens to you; with silent mouth
   speak with us, for to him who hears
   the whisper of your silence
   your symbol proclaims in silence our Savior.

   Refrain: Blessed is He who compared
   the Kingdom on high to a pearl!

2. Your mother is the virgin [bride] of the sea
   —without its having married her; she fell into its bosom
   —without its being aware; Your conception was in it
   —though it knew her not. Your symbol
   will rebuke the Jewish girls when they wear you.

3. ܐܝܟ ܗܝ ܘܐܡܬ ܟܬܒ ܟܬܒܐ
ܕܐ ܕܠ ܢܬܟ ܘܐܡܪ ܗܘ ܟܐ
ܟܬܟܐ ܙܐܐ ܘܫܒܥܐ
ܟܬܒ ܙܐ ܢܬܟ ܟܬܐ
ܠܐ ܬܟܬܐ ܟܬܒ ܘܐ

4. ܟܬܒ ܟܐ ܘܟܙܐ ܨܐ
ܐܙܐ ܙܐ ܟܐ ܟܐ
ܘܐ ܕܐ ܐܙܐ ܘܐ ܐܙܐ
ܟܬܒ ܙܐ ܟܐ ܐܘܐ
ܐܙ ܨܟܬܒ ܘܫܒܥ ܗ

5. ܟܙܐ ܐܬ ܐܘܐ ܗ
ܘܫܒܥ ܗ ܐ ܟܟܡܒܐ
ܐܙܐ ܙܐ ܘܫܒܥ
ܐܡܗ ܠܩܟ ܟܐ ܘܟܟ
ܐܡ ܟ ܐܬ ܐ ܐܬܐ

3. You of all gems are the only one
whose begetting[1] resembles that of the Word on high,
whom, in unique fashion,
the Most High begot, while other engraved gems
symbolically resemble the supernal beings, themselves created.

4. O visible offspring of a hidden womb!
O mighty symbol, your pure conception
required no seed; your chaste birth needed
no intercourse; you have no brothers
for your birth is unique.

5. Our Lord has brothers—and yet He has none,
for He is the Only-begotten. O solitary [pearl],
great is the mystery, for your symbol
stands all alone, yet on the royal crown
you have brethren and sisters!

1. whose begetting: I.e., by lightning striking the mollusk in the water (see the introduction to the poem [p. 246]).

6. ܠܟܝ ܠܝ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܡܪ
ܠܟܘܢ ܕܐܬܝܬ ܘܐܫܬܘܕܥ
ܐܢ ܫܬܝܢ ܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܡܪ
ܐܢ ܕܐ ܒܥܝ ܠܡܫܬܘܕܥ ܠܝ
ܟܠ ܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܟ

7. ܐܝ ܡܢ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ ܕܐ ܠܟ ܐܝ
ܕܐ ܫܡܥ ܠܡ ܐܢ
ܕܐ ܡܠ ܒܥܐ ܠܡ ܐܢ
ܒܥܝ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܐܬܝ
ܐܢ ܒܥܝ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܐܬܝ
ܐܝ ܡܢ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ ܕܐ ܠܟ

8. ܐܢ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܐܬܝ ܠܟ ܐܢ
ܐܝ ܡܢ ܒܢܝ ܐܢܫ ܕܐ
ܐܢ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܐܬܝ ܠܟ
ܐܢ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܐܬܝ ܠܟ
ܐܢ ܡܢ ܕܐ ܐܬܝ ܠܟ

6. The fair gems shall be your brothers,
   along with the beryls; and other pearls
   are as your companions, while gold shall be,
   as it were, your relative: the King of kings shall have
   a crown constituted out of your dear friends.

7. When you came up from the depths of the sea
   —the living grave—you acquired[2] this
   glorious band of brethren, relatives
   and kinsmen. As wheat on the stalk,
   so are you on the diadem, set amongst many.

8. As a debt is justly
   returned to you, so you are raised from that depth
   to the glorious height. The stalk in the field
   bears the wheat: you the king's head,
   as though on a chariot, carries about.[3]

---

2. acquired: *qanyat(y)* is the abbreviated form of *qanya (an)t(y)*.
3. carries about: I.e., on his crown.

9. ܐܘ ܟܝܢܐ ܡܬܠ ܒܚܟܡܐ ܡܐ
ܒܟܪܐ ܕܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܚܟܡܐ
ܒܢܫܐ ܕܐ ܐܢܫܐ ܣܟܠܐ
ܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܐܡ ܐܢ ܟܒܐ
ܒܢܫܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܕܐ

10. ܚܙܘܐ ܐܦܟܐ ܒܡ ܟܬܒ
ܡܢ ܥܡܩܐ ܚܟܡ ܟܬܒܐ
ܐܟܬܐ ܡܐ ܚܙܘ ܐܦܟܐ
ܟܬܒ ܐܦܟܐ ܚܟܬ ܢܐ
ܣܟܠ ܡܢ ܐܦܐ ܕ ܡܐܢ

11. ܟܬܒ ܒܐ ܠܐ ܡܐ
ܟܦܣܐ ܒ ܒܢ ܟܬܐ
ܐܦܟ ܐܦ ܟ ܡܟܐ
ܐܡ ܥܡܩܐ ܠܐ ܗܒ
ܟܐ ܟܬܒܐ ܒ ܥܒ

9. O daughter of the waters, who left the sea
in which you were born, who went up to the dry land
in which you were cherished: people cherished you, seized you,
and were adorned with you: so too with the Child
whom the gentiles cherished, being crowned with Him.

10. In symbol and in truth Leviathan is trodden down Ps 74:14
by mortals: the baptized, like divers,[4] strip
and put on oil, as a symbol of Christ
they snatched you and came up: stripped,
they seized the soul[5] from his embittered mouth.[6]

11. Your nature resembles the Silent Lamb
with his gentleness: even though a man pierces it,
takes it and hangs it on his ear,
as it were on Golgotha, all the more does it throw out
all its bright rays on those who behold it!

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4. the baptized, like divers: The Syriac text just has *ʿamode,* which can mean either "divers" or "baptismal candidates"; Ephrem certainly intends both to be understood here. A similar double entendre is to be found in the last of the *madrashe* on the Pearl (*Fid.* 85.6), where *shliḥe ʿmad(w)* designates simultaneously "naked (divers) dived down" and "(baptismal candidates) stripped (of their clothes) were baptized."

5. seized the soul: It is conceivable that Ephrem has in mind here the Hymn of the Pearl (in the *Acts of Thomas*), where the Royal Son goes down to Egypt to rescue the pearl (i.e., soul) from the dragon (Wright 1871, 1:274).

6. embittered mouth: Possibly this may reflect Isa 14:9 ("Sheol was embittered"), since (ironically, in view of the original context) this passage was regularly understood as illustrating the Descent of Christ into the underworld.

12. ܙܢ ܚܡܫܚܬܐ ܗܫܟܬܗ ܐܚܕܐ
ܐܟܬܐ ܫܡܐ ܬܬܐ ܚܙܗ ܬܗ
ܚܫܡܐ ܚܙ ܬܐ ܘܐܘ ܟܐ ܟܠܟܗ
ܐܢ ܐܠܐܒܕܘ ܗܘܫܐ ܐܡܟܢ
ܐܢ ܐܚܫܡܐ ܗܘܐ ܗܫܟܬܐ

13. ܗܐ ܫܗܐ ܚܟܟܐ ܗܐ ܠܐ ܐܫܗܫܐ
ܘܐ ܫܗܐ ܐܡܟܗܐ ܘܡܗܚܫ ܕܐ
ܫܗ ܟܐ ܕܐ ܘܐܫܐ ܐܫܗ
ܗܫܫ ܟܟ ܬܐ ܡܐ ܫܡܗ
ܐܘܗܐ ܗܫܫܗܐ ܐܚܐ ܗܫܟܬܗ

12. In your beauty is depicted the beauty of the Son
who clothed himself in suffering: nails went through Him. cf. John 20:25
Through you the awl passed, you too did they pierce,
as they did His hands. But because He suffered He reigns
—just as your beauty is increased through your suffering.

13. If they had spared you, then they would not have cherished you,
for, if you have suffered, you now reign. Simon Peter
had pity on the Rock by which all who struck it Matt 16:22; 21:42–44
were wounded. It is because of His suffering
that His beauty now adorns both height and depth.

◆

APPENDIX 1

The Main Editions and English Translations of Ephrem's Works

TITLE	CSCO	OTHER EDITIONS	ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS[1]
In Genesim et in Exodum commentarii	Tonneau 1955	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 4	Mathews and Amar 1994; Salvesen 1995 (Exod only)
Hymnen de Fide [87]	Beck 1955	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 6	Morris 1847; Russell Forthcoming 1
Hymnen contra Haereses [56]	Beck 1957a	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 5	
Hymnen de Paradiso [15]	Beck 1957b	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 6	Brock 1990b
Hymnen contra Julianum [4]	Beck 1957b	Overbeck 1865	Lieu 1989; McVey 1989
Hymnen de Nativitate [28]	Beck 1959	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 5; Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 2	Morris 1847; Gwynn 1898; McVey 1989

1. Selections translated into English include Brock 1983 (earlier translations of Texts 4, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18, and 20) and Brock 1989b (earlier translations of Texts 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 13). Forthcoming English translations are promised for *Haer.*, *Ieiun.*, and the Paschal cycles. For a detailed guide to available English translations up to c. 1989, see Brock 1990a.

TITLE	CSCO	OTHER EDITIONS	ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS
Hymnen de Epiphania [13]	Beck 1959	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 1	Gwynn 1898
Soghyatha [6]	Beck 1959		Brock 1994 (nos. 1–4)
Hymnen de Ecclesia [52]	Beck 1960b	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vols. 5 and 6	
Sermones de Fide [6]	Beck 1961b	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 6	Morris 1847; Russell Forthcoming 2
Carmina Nisibena [77]	Beck 1961a; 1963	Bickell 1866	Gwynn 1898 (nos. 1–21, 35–43, 52–68)
Hymnen de Virginitate [52]	Beck 1962b	Lamy 1882–1902, vols. 2 and 4	McVey 1989
Hymnen de Ieiunio [10]	Beck 1964a	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 2	
Hymnen de Azymis [21]	Beck 1964b	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 1	
Hymnen de Crucifixione [9]	Beck 1964b	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 1	
Hymnen de Resurrectione [5]	Beck 1964b		
Sermo de Domino Nostro	Beck 1966	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 1	Gwynn 1898; Amar 1992
Sermones I [8]	Beck 1970a	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vols. 5 and 6; Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 2	Malan 1866 (no. 7)
Sermones II [4]	Beck 1970b	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vols. 5 and 6; Lamy 1882–1902, vols. 1 and 2	Burgess 1853 (no. 1); Morris 1847 (no. 3); Gwynn 1898 (no. 4)

TITLE	CSCO	OTHER EDITIONS	ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS
Sermones III [5]	Beck 1972b	Mobarak and Assemani 1732–46, vol. 5; Lamy 1882–1902, vols. 2 and 3	
Sermones IV [4]	Beck 1973	Zingerle 1869; Overbeck 1865	Miller 1984 (no. 2); Gwynn 1898 (no. 4, partial)
Hymnen de Abraham Qidunaya	Beck 1972a	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 3	
Hymnen de Juliano Saba	Beck 1972a	Lamy 1882–1902, vol. 3	
Nachträge zu Ephraem Syrus	Beck 1975		Brock 1994 (nos. 1–2)
Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam	Beck 1979		
Letter to Publius		Brock 1976b	Brock 1976b; Amar 1992
Prose Refutations 1–2		Mitchell 1912–21	Mitchell 1912–21
Commentary on the Diatessaron		Leloir 1963; Leloir 1990	McCarthy 1993
Commentary on Acts (Armenian)		Akinian 1921	Conybeare 1939 (Lat. tr.)
Commentary on the Pauline Letters (Armenian)		*Srboyn Efremi* 1836, vol. 3	*S. Ephraem Syri commentarii in Epistolas* 1893 (Lat. tr.)
Mēmrē sur Nicomédie (Armenian)		Renoux 1975	Renoux 1975 (Fr. tr.)
Hymnes conservés en arménien [51]		Mariès and Mercier 1961	Mariès and Mercier 1961 (Lat. tr.)

There are also a number of recent translations of hymn cycles into other languages, e.g.:

Azym., Cruc., Res.:	In French in Rouwhorst 1989 and Cassingena-Trevédy 2006; in Italian in De Francesco 2001, with extensive introduction and notes.
Eccl.:	In French in Cerbelaud 2004.
Epiph.:	In French in Cassingena 1997; in Italian in De Francesco 2003.
Ieiun.:	In French in Cerbelaud 1997.
Nat.:	In French in Cassingena-Trevédy 2001; in Italian in De Francesco 2003.
Par.:	In French in Lavenant 1968; in Italian in De Francesco 2006.
Virg.:	In French in Cerbelaud 2006.

APPENDIX 2

Index of *Qale* Employed in the Present Collection

Note: Where text numbers are given in parentheses, the *qala* is an alternative found elsewhere.

TEXT	QALE
8	ܐܘ ܟ݂ ܣ݂ܡ݂ܠ/ܣ݂ܠܘ̈
14	ܐܘ ܟ݂ܗ݂ܐ ܠ݂ ܐ݂ܗ݂ܟ݂ܠ
(6)	ܐ݂ܘ̈ܘ݂ ܘ݂ܟ݂ܗ ܬ݂ܗ݂ܘ̈
(10), 17, 18	ܐ݂ܡ݂ܟ݂ܒ݂ܐ ܗ݂ܘ̈ܡ݂
6, 7	ܐ݂ܡ݂ܐ ܘ݂ܬ݂ܟ݂ܣ݂ܐ ܘ݂ܐ݂ܣ݂ܗ
10, (17)	ܐ݂ܝ݂ܗ ܡ݂ܢ ܐ݂ܗ݂ܟ݂ܗ݂
(1)	ܐ݂ܗ݂ܗ݂ܟ݂ܗ ܟ݂ܗ ܐ݂ܐ݂ܗ݂
16, 19	ܐ݂ܗ݂ܠ݂ ܐ݂ܐ݂ܗ ܟ݂ܒ݂ܟ݂ܗ݂
11	ܐ݂ܐ݂ܟ݂ܐ ܬ݂ܟ݂ܗ ܟ݂ܢ݂ ܬ݂ܐ݂
12	ܐ݂ܐ݂ܠ݂ܟ݂ ܗ݂ܐ ܬ݂ܟ݂ܐ̈
(1), 2	ܟ݂ܬ݂ܐ ܟ݂ܐ݂ܟ݂ܗ݂
(12)	ܟ݂ ܡ݂ܢ ܗ݂ܗ݂ܐ̈

TEXT	QALE
1	ܐܡܝܢ ܒܚܬܘܢ
(11)	ܗܘ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܐ ܚܙܝܐ
(4)	ܗܘ ܒܪܢܫ
9	ܗܘ ܫܡܥ ܙܥܘ
(9)	ܗܘ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܒܚܕܘ
(6)	ܡܚܘ ܡܢܝܢ ܡܢ ܡܫܬܐ
(12)	ܡܢܐ ܘ ܒ ܡܬܐ
4, 5, 20	ܡܢܐ ܡܩܡ ܟܡܡܟ
(4)	ܡܙܟܝܐ
(6)	ܚܢܢ ܫܝܠܐ
(1)	ܩܒܐ
13	ܡܢܐ ܡܫܬܐ
3	ܫܡܐ ܒܒܐ

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Bibliographic Resources

There is now a complete bibliography on Ephrem compiled by Den Biesen (2002). Previous bibliographies on Ephrem can be found in *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973), supplemented by Brock 1996, 78–94, Brock 1998, 273–79, and Brock 2004, 304–11.

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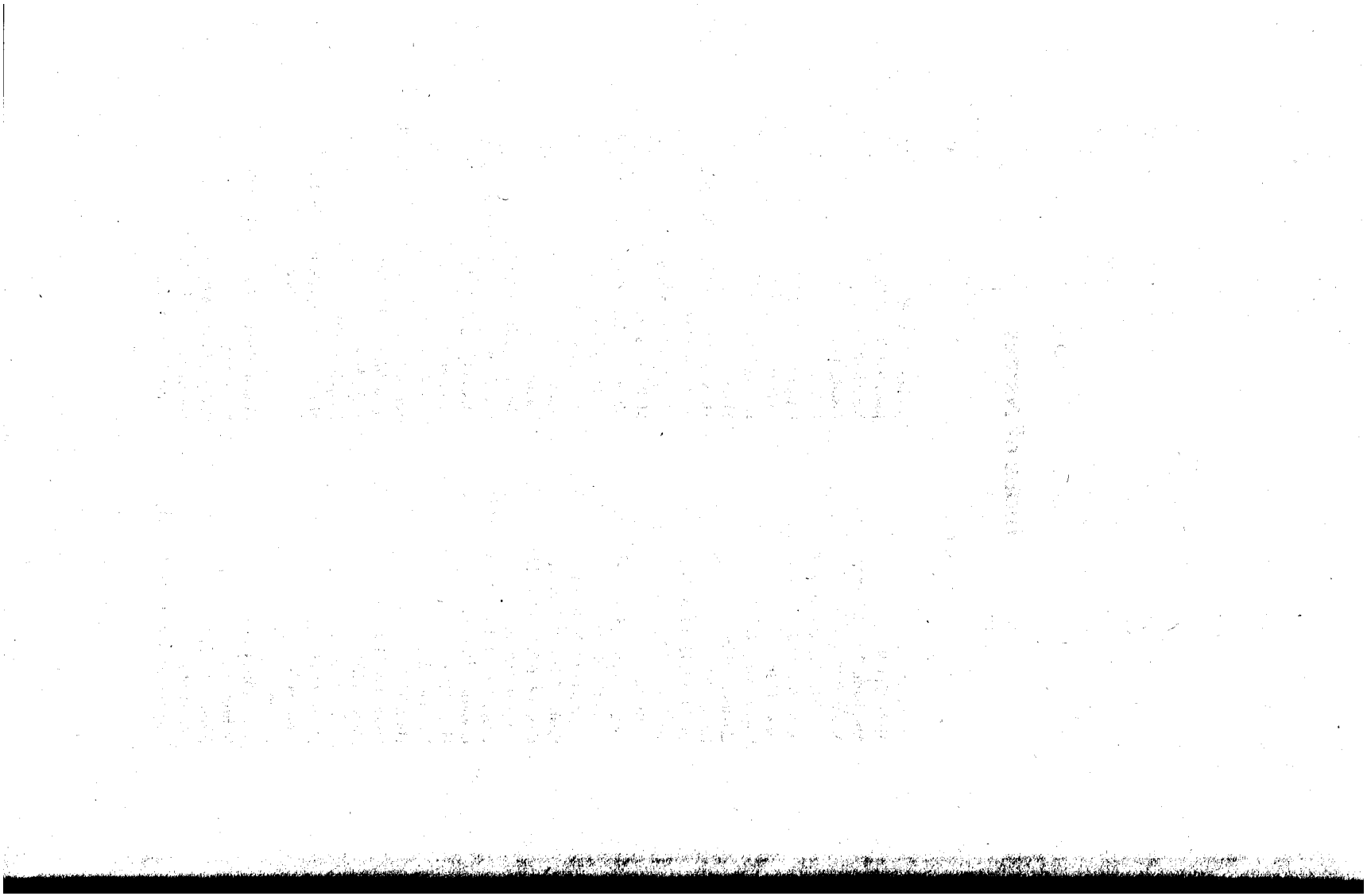

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