

## Isaac of Antioch's Homily against the Jews

by

Stanley Kazan

Part two\*

### The attitude towards the Jews in Syriac Literature

#### Introduction

The writings of the Syriac-speaking Church Fathers have been discussed in several studies of Christian polemic literature. S. Krauss<sup>1</sup> stresses the strong animosity of Ephraem Syrus towards the Jews in his study on the Church Fathers. J. Juster<sup>2</sup> surveys Christian polemics against the Jews down to the fifth century, but he mentions only the writings of Aphraates and Ephraem Syrus.<sup>3</sup> G. F. Moore<sup>4</sup> surveys this literature down to the modern period, but he refers to Aphraates only in passing. J. Parkes<sup>5</sup> enumerates more writers than the aforementioned scholars, but his material is not always reliable. A. L. Williams<sup>6</sup> devotes an entire section to the polemic works of the Eastern Church. He summarizes the homilies of Aphraates and the treatise of Dionysius bar Šalibhi, speaks of the writings of "Pseudo-Ephraem," and calls attention to Jacob of Sarug and some fifth and sixth century authors of whose works only the titles have survived. However, the purpose of Williams' study is not purely academic. It also has as its avowed intention to present documents which "will not only recall to the minds of the readers their duty to the Jewish nation, but also supply arguments to be of assistance in their presentation of the faith."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this survey is a welcome addition to a field in which little work has been done.

The religious controversies between Christians and Jews in the Sassanian Empire are treated by G. Richter,<sup>8</sup> but F. Gavin<sup>9</sup> offers a more comprehensive and detailed study. I. K. Cosgrove<sup>10</sup> presents an interesting

---

\* Cf. OrChr 45 (1961) 30–53.

<sup>1</sup> *The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers* = Jewish Quaterly Review 6 (1894) 88–99.

<sup>2</sup> *Les juifs dans l'empire romain* 1 (Paris 1914) 43–76.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 59–61.

<sup>4</sup> *Christian Writers on Judaism* = HarvThRv 14 (1921) 199.

<sup>5</sup> *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (London 1934) 276–80.

<sup>6</sup> *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge 1935) 93–113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. XV.

<sup>8</sup> *Über die älteste Auseinandersetzung der syrischen Christen mit den Juden* = ZntW 35 (1936), 101–14.

<sup>9</sup> *Aphraates and the Jews* = Contributions to Oriental History and Philology 10 (Toronto 1923).

<sup>10</sup> *Three Homilies against the Jews by Jacob of Sarug*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, London University, 1931.) For a more detailed description of this work see OrChr 47 (1963).



comparative analysis of three of Jacob of Sarug's seven homilies against the Jews and the polemic writings of Aphraates, Ephraem Syrus, and many of the Greek and Latin Church Fathers.

In his monumental history of Syriac literature, A. Baumstark<sup>11</sup> makes mention of the polemic literature against the Jews that has come down to us in the Syriac language. A work by John Chrysostom (347–407)<sup>12</sup> and another by Philoxenus of Mabug (485–519)<sup>13</sup> are both very short texts. The homilies of Aphraates (ca. 345) have been published in two editions by Wm. Wright<sup>14</sup> and by J. Parisot.<sup>15</sup> "The Sermon against the Jews Delivered on Palm Sunday", by Ephraem Syrus (d. 373), has been published by P. Mobarrek and S. E. Assemani.<sup>16</sup> "Homily Two against the Jews," ascribed to Isaac of Antioch (d. 459) is presented in part one of this study with translation and notes. Jacob of Sarug (d. 521)<sup>17</sup> wrote seven homilies against the Jews which have been preserved. I. K. Cosgrove<sup>18</sup> has edited and translated homilies one, three, and four. The contents of all seven homilies are summarized in this study.<sup>19</sup> Sergius Stylites' (d. 547)<sup>20</sup> polemic against the Jews is a rather lengthy work. Its state of preservation is poor, and it has not received the attention it would seem to deserve. The treatise of Dionysius bar Šalibhi (d. 1171) has been published by J. De Zwaan.<sup>21</sup> The English translation promised by De Zwaan in the preface to his edition has not yet appeared.

A comprehensive survey of the polemic literature of the Syriac-speaking Church Fathers requires a thorough reading of all the published editions and known unpublished works of each writer. Unfortunately, many of these works are not available in this country, but even if they were, the large amount of material to peruse would make such an undertaking a lifetime task. Therefore, we must rely heavily upon the descriptions contained in the catalogues of Syriac manuscripts of the larger collections throughout the world, and upon Baumstark's invaluable study. These catalogues usually contain only the titles of an author's writing and a brief description

<sup>11</sup> *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922).

<sup>12</sup> Baumstark, *ibid.* 80, n. 9. British Museum add. 14,623, fol. 19a–19b. Wm. Wright, *A Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum...* 2 (London 1871) no. 781, p. 763.

<sup>13</sup> Baumstark, *ibid.* 142, n. 17. British Museum add. 14,726, fol. 10a–11b, Wright, *ibid.*, no. 815, p. 828.

<sup>14</sup> *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage...* (London 1869).

<sup>15</sup> *Aphraates Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes* = *Patrologia Syriaca* I and II, 1–489, Paris 1894 and 1907.

<sup>16</sup> *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri, opera omnia* 3 (Rome 1743) 209–24.

<sup>17</sup> Baumstark, *op. cit.* 152, n. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> OrChr 47 (1963).

<sup>20</sup> Baumstark, *op. cit.* 180, n. 2. British Museum add. 17,199, fol. 1–79a, Wright, *A Catalogue...* 2, no. 715, pp. 612/3.

<sup>21</sup> *The Treatise of Dionysius bar Salibhi against the Jews* (Leiden 1906).



of its contents. Baumstark's history is even more concise. All these works suffer from the limitations inherent in any study of Syriac polemic literature. It is difficult to summarize these polemics. The Syriac writers tend to be discursive, repetitions, and poorly organized in their presentation. Working in this field we are constantly perplexed by the problem of how to present the contents of a work logically without doing violence to the author's intention, for, of necessity, any such summary must eliminate much digressive material if it is to be understood by the ordinary reader. Yet, these digressions may be of value to a study on the attitude towards the Jews in Syriac literature. Bearing in mind the large number of Syriac writings that have not been thoroughly investigated, and the limitation of catalogues and secondary works because of the nature of the subject matter, we are painfully aware that in any attempt to investigate Jewish-Christian relations from the Syriac sources, much material has been overlooked.

In attempting to establish the historic circumstances that may have occasioned the composition of a work from writings other than those of the author, we are usually faced with a problem at the other extreme, the paucity of source material to which to turn. Sources concerned with early Eastern Christianity are frequently legendary in character, and we must exercise extreme caution in separating the husks of legend from the kernels of truth. Aphraates, Ephraem Syrus, and Jacob of Sarug all lived and wrote in Northern Mesopotamia during the Talmudic period when large Jewish communities were flourishing in Southern Mesopotamia. There must have been contact between Christians and Jews. We are reasonably assured of it in the Sassanian period. Nevertheless, Jewish sources maintain their customary silence on the nature and extent of Jewish-Christian relations, and Syriac-Christian sources do not offer much information either.

Antioch, where Isaac of Antioch lived, was a large and important Christian and Jewish center, and there are frequent references to it in Christian and Jewish sources. In addition, the material has been worked over in a number of studies. When we reach the twelfth century, the age of Dionysius bar Šalibhi, once again we are confronted with the familiar problem of the scarcity of materials. Once more we are reduced to the necessity of piecing together bits of evidence with the hope that we have not done violence to the historical realities of the period under consideration.

## Chapter I

### Aphraates

The subject of Aphraates (ca. 345) and the Jews has been admirably treated by Frank Gavin.<sup>1</sup> His work contains a detailed description of the historical setting of the "controversial homilies" dealing with the Jews and an excellent analysis of the influence of Jewish thought upon the

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, n. 9. For an excellent bibliography see pp. XI-XVI.



writings of Aphraates. This brief summary relies heavily upon the conclusions reached by Gavin.

### The Jews in the Homilies of Aphraates

Of the twenty-three homilies written by Aphraates, the "Persian Sage," four contain a critique of details of Jewish religious observance, Homily XI, "On Circumcision," Homily XII, "On the Paschal Lamb," Homily XIII, "On the Sabbath," and Homily XV, "On the Distinction of Foods." Three deal with Jewish objections to basic Christian doctrine, Homily XVI, "On the Nations that have succeeded the Nation," Homily XVII, "On the Messiah that he is the Son of God," and Homily XVIII, "On Virginity and Chastity." One deals with the Jewish claim concerning the redemption and restoration of Zion, Homily XIX, "That they are destined to be gathered in," and one deals with a Jewish taunt, Homily XXI, "On Persecution," Gavin<sup>2</sup> also includes Homily XXIII, "On the Cluster," in this group although it is primarily a theodicy designed to hearten the Christians in a time of persecution. All these homilies, according to the testimony of the author himself, may be dated 343/5.<sup>3</sup>

For each homily, Aphraates makes clear the circumstance which occasioned its composition. At the conclusion to Homily XV, he explains the reason for having written Homilies XI, XIII, XV.

I have written you these brief thoughts, my friend, because the nation of the Jews who declare food unclean and keep it away, are proud and boast and brag. With these three, then, do they boast, with circumcision, and with Sabbath observance, and with the distinction of foods.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning Homily XIII, "On the Sabbath," Aphraates makes the following additional observation:

I have written this explanation because of the conflict which arose in our day (ḥeryānā ḍaḡdaš byawmātan).<sup>5</sup>

Concerning Homily XII, "On the Paschal Lamb,"<sup>6</sup> he writes:

I have written you these few words of instruction as a justification against the Jews because they set the time of the festival of the paschal lamb in violation of the commandment, contrary to the manner in which they are commanded.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit. 8/9.

<sup>3</sup> Wm. Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage, edited from Syriac Manuscripts of the fifth and sixth centuries, in the British Museum, with an English Translation*, vol. I, The Syriac Texts (London 1869) 440:19–441:2; 507:10–14. All my references are to this edition. I follow Gavin *ibid.* 7, n. 4, in interpreting these passages.

<sup>4</sup> Wright 319:11–14.

<sup>5</sup> Wright 440:5/6. On the nature of the conflict see *infra* pp. 93 f.

<sup>6</sup> Aphraates more fully describes the content of this homily in his summary at the conclusion of Homily XXII, Wright 440:3/4, "On the Paschal Lamb and the Fourteenth Day."

<sup>7</sup> Wright 227:16–20.



Concerning Homily XVI, "On the Nations that have succeeded the Nation," he writes:

I have written this short thought concerning the nations because the Jews boast and say: "We are the nation of God and the sons of Abraham."<sup>8</sup>

Concerning Homily XVII, "On the Messiah that he is the Son of God," he writes:

I have written this short explanation, my friend, so that you will be able to justify yourself against the Jews, because they say that God has no son, while we call him god and the first born of all creatures.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning Homily XVIII, "On Virginity and Chastity," he writes:

With this thing which I have written you, justify yourself against the Jews, who, in their licentiousness, do not recognize the strength of virginity and chastity.<sup>10</sup>

Concerning Homily XIX, "That they are destined to be gathered in," he writes:

Therefore, I have written this short explanation so that you will be able to justify yourself when a situation requires you to make a reply, and so that you will strengthen the faith of one who listening.<sup>11</sup>

That this homily is directed against the Jews is clear from the title "A Letter against the Jews."

Concerning Homily XXI, "On Persecution," he writes:

I heard a taunt which hurt me deeply... And even more does darkness befall me when also the Jews taunt us and behave insolently toward the children of our nation<sup>12</sup>.

Each of these homilies directed against the Jews is written with the express purpose of serving as a justification or defence (*mappaq brūhā* = "apology") against arguments advanced by Jews. These works are clearly apologetic in character intended to strengthen the faith and bolster the morale of Aphraates' beleaguered co-religionists in a time of great danger.<sup>13</sup>

#### Judaeo-Christian Origins in Edessa

F. C. Burkitt<sup>14</sup> has suggested that Christianity in Edessa started among Jews when it was first preached there by Addai, a Jew from Palestine, in the middle of the second century. The period of the Bar Kochba rebellion, ca. 135 C.E., seems, to Burkitt, to be the most likely date because "those who disapproved of the policy of political revolt and the theology of Aqiba might more likely then, than at a later period, accept the solution offered by Christianity."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wright 331:2/4. This idea is expressed again in 331:14/5.

<sup>9</sup> Wright 344:13/7.

<sup>10</sup> Wright 356:4/6.

<sup>11</sup> Wright 374:17/9.

<sup>12</sup> Wright 394:1,4/5.

<sup>13</sup> Gavin, op. cit. 31.

<sup>14</sup> *Early Eastern Christianity* (London 1904) 34, also H. Leclercq, »Édesse« = DACL 4,2082.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 76.



R. Duval<sup>16</sup> has shown that the Doctrine of Addai lacks real historical value because it was written in the sixth century or later. Although the work possesses a legendary flavor, J. Labourt<sup>17</sup> feels that Addai was an historical personality. A. Harnack<sup>18</sup> suggests that Christianity in Edessa began with Tatian and Bardaisan (b. 154). Esward J. Duncan<sup>19</sup> points out the difficulty of establishing the origin of Christianity in the Persian Empire because of the legendary nature of much of the oriental source material, but he ignores the evidence of the Peshitta.

This evidence strongly suggests that the early Christian community of Edessa was, in fact, composed of converted Jews. The Syriac version of the Old Testament which they used was the Peshitta, a vernacular rendition of the Hebrew scriptures. Although the question of authorship is still unsettled, the work shows very strong Jewish influence. In several studies, A. Baumstark has reiterated his conviction that "the Peshitta to the Pentateuch stemmed from a very old Palestinian Targum which had been adapted to Eastern Aramaic, possibly in Adiabene, in the time of the conversion of the royal household to Judaism."<sup>20</sup> O. Eissfeldt<sup>21</sup> suggests that the Peshitta was prepared in the beginning or middle of the second century soon after the founding of the Church of Edessa.

#### Aphraates in Relation to Jewish Methodology and Thought

The striking similarities between the homilies of Aphraates and Jewish thought have been carefully examined by Gavin.<sup>22</sup> They lend additional weight to the arguments favoring a Jewish origin for Northern Mesopotamian Christianity. The method of argumentation of Aphraates is Jewish.

<sup>16</sup> *La littérature syriaque* = *Anciennes littératures chrétiennes* 2 (Paris 1907) 118. Cf. R. Duval, *Histoire politique, religieuse et littéraire d'Édesse jusqu'à la première croisade* = *Journal Asiatique* VIII. 18 (1891) 234–55, on the legend of Abgar, and J. Tixeront, *Les origines de l'église d'Édesse et la légende d'Abgar* (Paris 1888).

<sup>17</sup> *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse, sous la sassanide, 224–632* (Paris 1904) 15. This also is the view of Burkitt, *ibid.* 34.

<sup>18</sup> *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, edited and translated by James Moffat (New York 1908), II, 142/3.

<sup>19</sup> *Baptism in the Demonstrations of Aphraates, the Persian Sage* = *The Catholic University of America, Studies in Christian Antiquity*, edited by J. Quasten, no. 8 (Washington, D.C. 1945) 16–21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ps.-Jonathan zu Deuteronomium 34,6 und die Pentateuchzitate Afrahats* = *ZatW* 59 (1929) 101. J. van der Ploegg, *Recente Pešitta-Studies* = *Jaarbericht van het vooraziatisch-egyptisch Genootschap* = *Ex Oriente Lux* 10 (1948) 392/9, lists all the Baumstark articles as well as those of C. Peters as he surveys two decades (1927–46) of Peshitta study supplementing L. Haefeli, *Die Peschitta des Alten Testaments, mit Rücksicht auf ihre textkritische Bearbeitung und Herausgabe* = *Alttestamentliche Abhandlungen* (Münster 1927). I have not seen M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the Peshitta* = *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1957).

<sup>21</sup> *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Tübingen 1956) 852.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.* 29–72.



His arguments are supported only by Biblical texts interpreted according to Talmudic principles of hermeneutics. His homilies consist of an almost endless string of Biblical quotations frequently introduced by the word *kṭīb*, "it is written," in the manner of the rabbis who produced the Talmud. His concept of creation, man, the soul, the fall, death and the curse, as well as his concepts of sin and eschatology rely heavily on rabbinic tradition.<sup>23</sup>

For Aphraates, Christianity does not stand as an independent unit apart from Judaism. It is the fulfilment of those prototypes which find their initial expression in Jewish religion. His whole concept of Christianity flows from the matrix of the Jewish tradition, and the ties between the two are very apparent in his homilies. All Christian teachings, practices, and dogmas have their type in the Old Testament. Aphraates contrasts the mystery (*rāzā*) of the Old Testament with the fulfilment (*šrārā*) in the New Testament. "Thus Circumcision, the type, gave way to its fulfilment Baptism; the Passover, to the Eucharist; the *knešet yisrā'el*, to the Church; the Law, to the Gospel. Christianity was essentially the flowering of the plant of Judaism. He could not conceive of the New Testament without the Old, the Gospel, without the Law; Fulfilment without Prophecy."<sup>24</sup>

The greatest distinctively Christian element in the theology of Aphraates is his doctrine of the sacraments, and even this is predominantly ethical in character.<sup>25</sup>

#### Sapur II and the Christians

In 330, Constantine embraced Christianity. The years following this conversion saw no change in the status and treatment of the Christian community within the Persian Empire. Eusebius<sup>26</sup> makes mention of a letter in which Constantine praises Sapur II for his benevolence towards the Christians. The situation, however, changed rapidly when Sapur II felt himself strong enough to attempt a reconquest of the territories which Narse had surrendered to Rome under the terms of the treaty of 298.

Profiting from the indecision which followed the demise of Constantine in 337, Sapur II proceeded to attack Nisibis<sup>27</sup> which defended itself for sixty-three days.<sup>28</sup> Learning of the imminent arrival of Constantius, Con-

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 37–58.

<sup>24</sup> Gavin 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Cited by Labourt 43, and n. 3; for additional references, also Gavin 6, and n. 1.

<sup>27</sup> On the significance of Nisibis as a commercial and military center, see J. B. Segal, *Mesopotamian Communities from Julian to the Rise of Islam* = Proceedings of the British Academy 41 (1955), passim, and M. Reinaud, *Relations politiques et commerciales de l'empire romain avec l'Asie orientale* (Paris 1863) 268.

<sup>28</sup> On the legends of the miraculous deliverance of the city by Jacob of Nisibis, see P. Peeters, *La légende de saint Jacques de Nisibe* = AnBoll 38 (1920) 285–373.



stantine's successor, and his legions, Sapur II, withdrew behind his borders. This was the beginning of a war which was to continue through the reigns of Constantius and Julian.

To maintain this costly war, Sapur II resorted to heavier taxation and conscription. The refusal of the Christians to co-operate with the war effort marked the beginning of a religious persecution which continued until the death of Sapur II in 379. According to the "Passion of St. Simeon bar Šabba'e," Sapur II was angry with the Christians who "live in our territory, and share the sentiments of Caesar, our enemy."<sup>29</sup>

"Persecution was usually sporadic, and localized in town and center of government or religious center. A Christian was accused and denounced, then arrested, 'questioned,' and upon failure to recant, executed."<sup>30</sup>

Aphraates recognized that the cause of Rome was the cause of Jesus. Homily V, "On Wars," contains many references to the war between Persia and Rome. Gavin<sup>31</sup> has succinctly summarized the contents of this homily which clearly shows that Aphraates' sympathies lay with Rome and his co-religionists.

#### Sapur II and the Jews

While the Christians suffered severe persecution under Sapur II, the position of the Jews had remained relatively quiet and undisturbed since the time of Samuel, an Amora of the third century. Samuel enjoyed friendly relations with Sapur I.<sup>32</sup> His principle that the law of the land was supreme in civil matters<sup>33</sup> had much to do with the favorable treatment accorded him. As a result of this principle, pagan Persia and monotheistic Israel achieved a *modus vivendi*. The Jews could remain faithful to their God and loyal to the throne at the same time.

Jewish scholarship flourished during the reign of Sapur II. Under the brilliant leadership of Raba, Maḥoza became the leading academy in Babylonia, supplanting Pumbeditha in importance. When R. Zeira rendered a decision in Maḥoza which was unfavorable to proselytes, he was pelted with citrons by the masses. Thereupon, Raba commented: "Who would expound such a law in a place where converts are so numerous."<sup>34</sup> B. Bamberger<sup>35</sup> conjectures on the basis of this passage that "Maḥoza must have been the center of extensive proselyting."

<sup>29</sup> Labourt, op. cit. 46.

<sup>30</sup> Gavin, op. cit. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 4-5. See also G. Bert, Aphrahat's, des persischen Weisen, Homilien = TU 3 (Leipzig 1888) 69, n. 1.

<sup>32</sup> J. Horowitz, *Mar Samuel und Schabur I* = Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums 80 (1936) 215-31.

<sup>33</sup> Baba Bathra 55a: *dīnā d'malkūtā dīnā*.

<sup>34</sup> Qiddushin 73a.

<sup>35</sup> *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (Cincinnati 1939) 257.



Ephra Hormiz<sup>36</sup>, Queen Mother of Sapor II, was openly partial to the Jews. Her gifts to R. Joseph<sup>37</sup> and to Raba<sup>38</sup> are mentioned in the Talmud. When a man whom Raba had found guilty of violating Jewish law died during the flogging administered as punishment, only the intercession of Ephra Hormiz would still the wrath of the King<sup>39</sup>. Living under generally favorable political conditions with a powerful ally in the court, the position of the Jews was far better than that of the Christians.

It is clear why it was necessary for Aphraates to provide his co-religionists with a suitable defense against Jewish proselytising efforts. Gavin<sup>40</sup> succinctly summarizes the evidence.

The Jewish argument was cogent. Christian and Jew had the same one God. Christian and Jew recognized the same Old Testament and used the same text. If some of the members of the church of Aphraates had been Jews, a return to their original faith would not be difficult, especially under the conditions of the time when Jews were comparatively free from the sort of persecution to which the Christians were exposed... Persian Christians felt the force of the demands of loyalty to the Persian emperor, since all were of the same blood. Furthermore, the Latin and Persian were natural enemies. Judaism offered a compromise... They could still be monotheists; they could still retain their ethical standards, and their religion would be of the same general type as Christianity. By becoming proselytes of Judaism they could in a measure save their consciences and, at the same time, clear themselves of the stigma of disloyalty to their government and declare themselves on the side of their fellow-countrymen against the hated foreigner.

## Chapter II

### Ephraem Syrus

Ephraem Syrus (d. 373) was one of the most prolific writers in the Syriac language. Duval<sup>1</sup> describes him as "écrivain d'une rare fécondité." Wm. Wright<sup>2</sup> calls him "the most celebrated father of the Syrian Church and certainly one of its most voluminous and widely read writers." His works are listed and described in T. J. Lamy,<sup>3</sup> A. Baumstark,<sup>4</sup> and

<sup>36</sup> She is mentioned in the Talmud: Baba Bathra 8a, 10b; Ta'anith 24b; Nidda 20b; Zebahim 116a. Cf. Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leyden 1879) 51, n. 3, who remarks »die erste Hälfte dieses Namens ist mir unklar«. E. R. Hayes, *L'école d'Édesse* (Paris 1930) 37, makes mention of the Queen by name but cites no sources.

<sup>37</sup> Baba Bathra 8a.

<sup>38</sup> Ta'anith 24b.

<sup>39</sup> Baba Bathra 10b.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit. 31/2.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit. 330.

<sup>2</sup> *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London 1894) 33.

<sup>3</sup> *S. Ephraem Syri Hymni et Sermones* (Mecheln 1882) I, pp. XXXII–LXII.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. 31–52.



O. Bardenhewer.<sup>5</sup> While an analysis of all the genuine extant writings of Ephraem Syrus would be desirable in order to determine his attitude towards the Jews, it is outside the scope of this rather limited study. We, therefore, confine ourselves to those of Ephraem's works which not only reflect his attitude towards the Jews, but which also contain information that makes it possible for us to determine the circumstances that may have occasioned their composition.

### The Jews in the Writings of Ephraem Syrus

Material to study Ephraem's attitude towards the Jews is provided by the third of his "Sermons on Faith,"<sup>6</sup> his "Hymns on Unleavened Bread,"<sup>7</sup> and his prose refutations.<sup>8</sup> The "Sermon against the Jews delivered on Palm Sunday,"<sup>9</sup> is largely a glorification of Jesus and Christianity. While it clearly reveals Ephraem's animosity towards the Jews, it contains little more than a repetition of the traditional Christian theme of God's rejection of the Jews because of their rejection of the son. His poems "On Julian, the Apostate, his False Teachings and the Jews"<sup>10</sup> again reveal his dislike of the Jews, but this may be explained by the fact that Julian frequently favored the Jews to the detriment of the Christians and Christianity.

In the third of the "Sermons on Faith," Ephraem argues that there are commandments specifically ordained for one generation which are not binding upon another generation.

For the benefit of the children of (each) generation

Were the voices spoken in (each) generation.

(Ed. Rom. III, 185E)

There is a voice that demands sacrifices,

And there is a voice that rejects burnt offerings.

There is a voice that commands to use clean food,

And there is a voice that commands to mix and eat.

<sup>5</sup> *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 4 (Freiburg 1924) 342-75. This work contains an excellent appreciation of Ephraem's writings. Of special interest to this study is Bardenhewer's section on Ephraem's dogmatic and polemic writings, pp. 359-64.

<sup>6</sup> Mobarrek and Assemani, *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri, opera omnia*, III, 164-208. In Ed. Rom., III, these sermons bear the title "Three Sermons on Faith". By comparing the Vatican Syriac manuscript 117 with the British Museum add. 12,166, fols. 2-19, E. Beck, *Ephraems Reden über den Glauben* (Rome 1953), p. VIII, and n. 1, has shown that there are, in fact, six sermons, and that the third sermon, Ed. Rom., III, 183:1-191:8, is primarily a polemic against the Jews.

<sup>7</sup> Lamy, op. cit., cols. 567-636.

<sup>8</sup> C. W. Mitchell, *Ephraim's Prose Refutations* (London 1912) I.

<sup>9</sup> Ed. Rom. III, 209-24.

<sup>10</sup> J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque, opera selecta* (Oxford 1865) 3-20, German translation by G. Bickell, *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 2 (1878) 335-56. On Julian's attitude towards the Jews, see M. Adler, *The Emperor Julian and the Jews* = *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5 (1878) 591-651, and Baron, op. cit. II, 392, n. 41, for additional bibliography.



There is a voice that commands to celebrate festivals,  
 And there is a voice that commands to profane festivals.  
 There is a voice that commands to sanctify the day,  
 And there is a voice that commands to reject Sabbaths.  
 There is a voice that commands to circumcise males,  
 And there is a voice that rejects circumcision.

(Ed. Rom. III, 184F-185A)

The "malady" (kēbā) of circumcision was necessary for the members of the middle generations, from Moses through Jesus, because they mingled with pagans and might lapse into idolatry. Therefore, a distinctive "mark" was placed upon them to separate them from their neighbors. But this is no longer necessary for Christians today, because they are sound in faith.

At the present time, the commandments  
 Of Sabbath, of circumcision, and of purification are invalid.  
 They are superfluous for those of the latter days,  
 But for those of the middle days they were necessary.  
 For those of the first days they were unnecessary,  
 Because they were sound in knowledge.  
 Neither are they necessary for those of the latter days,  
 Because they are sound in faith.  
 They ministered to those of the middle days alone,  
 Because they were struggling with paganism.

(Ed. Rom. III, 186C-D)

And it was necessary to keep the Jews from lapsing into paganism because Jesus was being preserved in their midst. Now that he has come, God has rejected the Jews, and He has elevated the Christians to a position of primacy.

His entire reason for preserving the flock  
 Was because of the something in its midst.  
 The something which was hidden in it has come forth,  
 And has become the shepherd of mankind.  
 In the contemptible flock, he hid  
 The prince of the shepherds.  
 He has left the foolish flock,  
 For the nations have become His pasture.

(Ed. Rom. III, 187F; cf. Beck, op. cit. 119)

But the Jews persist in their practice of circumcision, thereby, angering God.

Wroth is the lawgiver,  
 Because He untied, and you, then, bind.  
 The commandment which He has given you, is invalidated,  
 And that which He has untied, you observe.

(Ed. Rom. III, 187C; cf. Beck, loc. cit.)

A new circumcision has replaced the old, because the Lord prefers circumcision of the heart to circumcision of the flesh, a removal from sin to a removal of the foreskin.

Inquire a little, O foolish one,  
 Concerning the observances of the law.  
 What can circumcision do  
 For the sin that dwells within?



Sin dwells in your heart,  
And you circumcise your foreskin?  
(Ed. Rom. III, 187D; cf. Beck, loc. cit.)

But the Jew is not content to confine the observance of the law to himself. Through cunning and pretense he seeks to dishonor the Christian by enslaving him to the yoke of the law as well. Under the guise of drawing the Christian to Moses, he separates him from the Messiah.

Shackles and fetters and bonds  
Which were established for his servitude,  
He cunningly (tries) to cast  
Upon the freedom (resulting from) his Lord's love.  
The wicked servant is swift  
To cast fetters upon the free.  
While flattering freedom,  
He binds it with the yoke of the slave.  
Under the guise of honor, he seeks  
To disgrace free men.  
While drawing us towards Moses,  
He separates us from the Messiah.

(Ed. Rom. III, 188E-F; cf. Beck, op. cit. 120)

The Jew is a determined man who will not stop until he has achieved his goal of converting the Christian.

After he<sup>11</sup> had tasted much blood,  
He could not be quiet from killing.  
The he killed openly.  
Now he kills secretly.  
He encompasses sea and land  
To lead an adherent into Gehenna.<sup>12</sup>

(Ed. Rom. III, 189C; cf. Beck, loc. cit.)

Ephraem concludes by urging his co-religionists to flee from the Jew lest they be converted.

Flee from him, O weak one.  
Your blood and death are nothing to him.  
He took the blood of God.  
Will he be terrified of your blood?

(Ed. Rom. III, 189F)

Flee and rescue yourself from the mad one.  
Run and take refuge in the Messiah.

(Ed. Rom. III, 190C)

(To be continued)

<sup>11</sup> The slave, i.e. the Jew.

<sup>12</sup> The last two lines are an allusion to Matthew 23:15. Lwāyā, "adherent", is parallel to giyyōrā, "proselyte" in Matthew.