

Andrew Palmer

## Paradise Restored

For that Will to which  
All things are easy  
Constrained the untrammelled  
Springs of Paradise,  
Shut them up in earth,  
Like pipes, and called them  
To us, that they might  
Emerge,  
As He pursed water  
In his clouds' own womb,  
Though it's sent through air  
At his Will's stirring.

[illegible]

(Ephrem of Nisibis, *Madrašā* on Paradise 2:9)

[illegible]

So then, the four rivers are the following: the Pishon is the Danube and the Gihon is the Nile; as for the Tigris and the Euphrates, here they are: we dwell between them. But if the places where they rise are known, this is still not the head of the source. Paradise is situated at a great height and for this reason they have been swallowed up around it and have gone right down into the sea as if from the high spout of an artificial fountain; and when they have travelled within the earth under the sea to this place, she has spewed out one of them in the west; and the Gihon in the south; and the Euphrates and the Tigris in the north *<and in the east>*.

(Ephrem of Nisibis, *Puṣṣāqā* of Genesis 2:6)



Why else did Earth need  
A stream which would flow  
From there and come out  
To Her divided,

If not that Blessing  
Might come out, mingled  
By the Sea, to wet  
The world

And to make lusty  
Its curse-mingled springs,  
As sickly water  
Grew lusty by salt?

(Ephrem of Nisibis, *Madrašā* on Paradise 11:11)

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ  
ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ  
ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

(MSS ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ)

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ  
(MSS ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ)  
ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ

If this is what Ephrem meant – and that remains to be shown – the picture he painted of the *pardaysā*, that is of the pleasure-garden of the King of Kings, after the expulsion from that garden of the first human couple, may be completed from what he says, or implies, elsewhere, like this:

There is a domed mountain with a ring of sea around it, like the halo we sometimes see around the moon.<sup>1</sup> From the top of this rises a great spout of

1 Paradise 2:6: ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ ܕܠܡܢ “girded with a great sea”. The participle is not active, as Beck, Lavanant and Brock all translate it (e. g. Brock: “encircling the great sea”), but passive, and the preposition L therefore indicates, not the encircled object, but the encircling subject. Compare Paradise 1:8:

In that ring the moon  
Can have,  
Let's see Paradise,  
Encircled likewise,  
With sea and dry land  
Included in it.

(This translation, like all others in this article, unless otherwise stated, is mine; my translations imitate the syllabic metre of the original.) The next stanza refers to Exodus 30:3, where the Aramaic of the Peshitta translation speaks of a golden crown placed around a square altar. This does not mean that the Mountain of Paradise is to be imagined as a cube; rather, it proves that Ephrem is concerned at this point with the ring of sea surrounding Paradise, not with Paradise itself. Paradise is circular, like the moon, and domed, rather than conical. So, at least, I understand Paradise 2:6: “It's the belt around / The world” – a section of a sphere surrounding not only the Ocean, but also the firmament. In Paradise 9:23 it is compared with a woman's breast (though this metaphor applies first and foremost to the nourishment which it gives; cf. 9:12, 11:1). In Paradise 1:5-7, Ephraim speaks of the arduous ascent of the Mountain, but concludes that it is easy for those who belong there – they can even dance on the surrounding sea and ride on the clouds. The Mountain cannot be scaled by those who are outside (Paradise 2:6); indeed, the vertical cliffs at the rim of its dome are perhaps its ‘fence’ (ܕܠܡܢ: on the background to this idea see Brock, *Paradise*, pp. 62-66). Ephrem says the ‘fence’ is the Cherub (Paradise 4:6) with



water, the ‘Tree of Life’. This ‘tree’ is like the sun, giving light to the whole garden.<sup>2</sup> It divides in the air into four separate spouts and these describe arcs away from the mountain towards the four cardinal points, then plunge vertically down into the sea and straight through it into the sea-bed, coming up in the Black Forest, Ethiopia, Armenia and the country north of the city now called Diyarbakır, in Turkey.

Our first task is to show that Ephrem’s picture must indeed have been like this; our second is to work out the implications of that discovery. If we are not mistaken, then either the tree of life, which is in the middle of the garden, grows beside the head of the source, or else – dizzy thought – it is itself the branching spout.

In studying a writer who believes that God teaches through Nature, as well as through Scripture, it is important to clarify his concept of the created world.

### The Aramaic texts<sup>3</sup>

We should begin with the Aramaic texts, which have been transmitted to us by very few witnesses. Ephrem’s fifteen *Madrašê* on Paradise (B35), ed./tr. Beck (b17)<sup>4</sup> [= Paradise], are preserved, in whole or in part, in five MSS. The first stanza quoted above (Paradise 2:9) is only preserved in one MS, Br. Libr. Add. 14,571, dating from 519 = D. The other stanza (Paradise 11:11) is likewise

the “sharpening of a blade” (Genesis 3:24: ܠܥܝܢܐ ܠܥܝܢܐ); but the word ܠܥܝܢܐ, if construed as a feminine noun in the absolute state, can also mean a vertical cliff (Awdo), and the ‘blade’ may have been taken by Ephrem to refer to the two sides of this cliff, inside and outside the dome. For although the sons of Seth lived for a time near the Cave of Treasures, which Ephrem must have understood to be a hollow in the thickness of the upper part of one of these cliffs (see the *Book of the Cave of Treasures* 5:15: “at the summit of a mountain”), the sons of Cain already lived in the Valley, which is our world, and that is like a dungeon underneath the dome (Paradise 5:13). It was from there that Noah’s contemporaries attempted to scale the Mountain and were unable to do so (*Cave*, 18:13). The Flood submerged the Cave of Treasures, but washed only the ‘heels’ of the Mountain (Paradise 1:4; cf. Genesis 7:19). These ‘heels’, ܠܥܝܢܐ, may be understood as referring to the back or interior surface of the vertical rim on which the dome stands, rather than as foothills, the conventional translation, for which there was perhaps no room in Ephrem’s picture.

2 Paradise 3:2: “Perhaps, however, / The blest Tree of Life / Was, thanks to its rays, / Paradise’s sun.”

3 Ephrem himself uses the word “Aramaic” to describe his language: PR 2, p. 49, ll. 6 & 16.

4 B-numbers refer to the works of Ephrem, as listed in Kees den Biesen’s *Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* (Grove in Umbria, 2002); b-numbers refer to the editions, translations and studies of Ephrem listed there in sequence. See the list at the end of this paper.



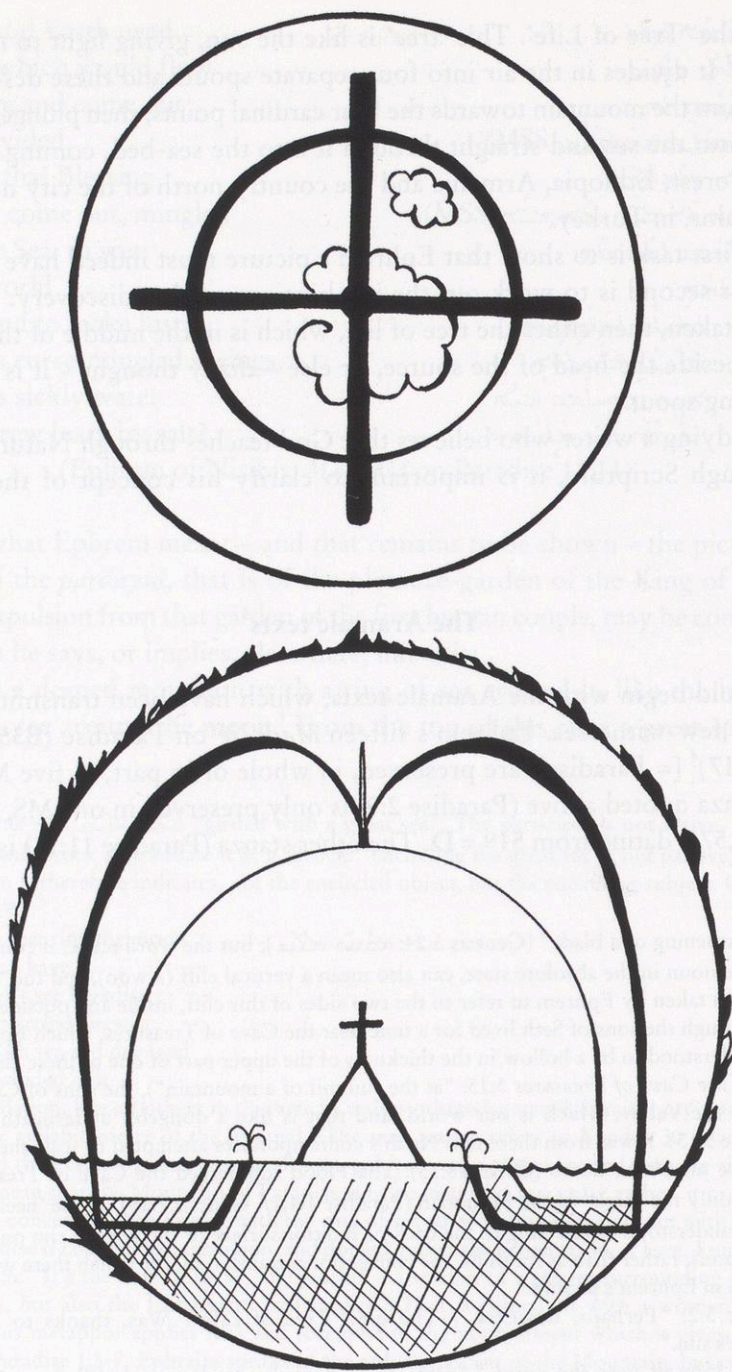


Figure 1 Paradise, (A) from above and (B) from the East, showing Golgotha beneath the summit of the Mountain from which the River springs.



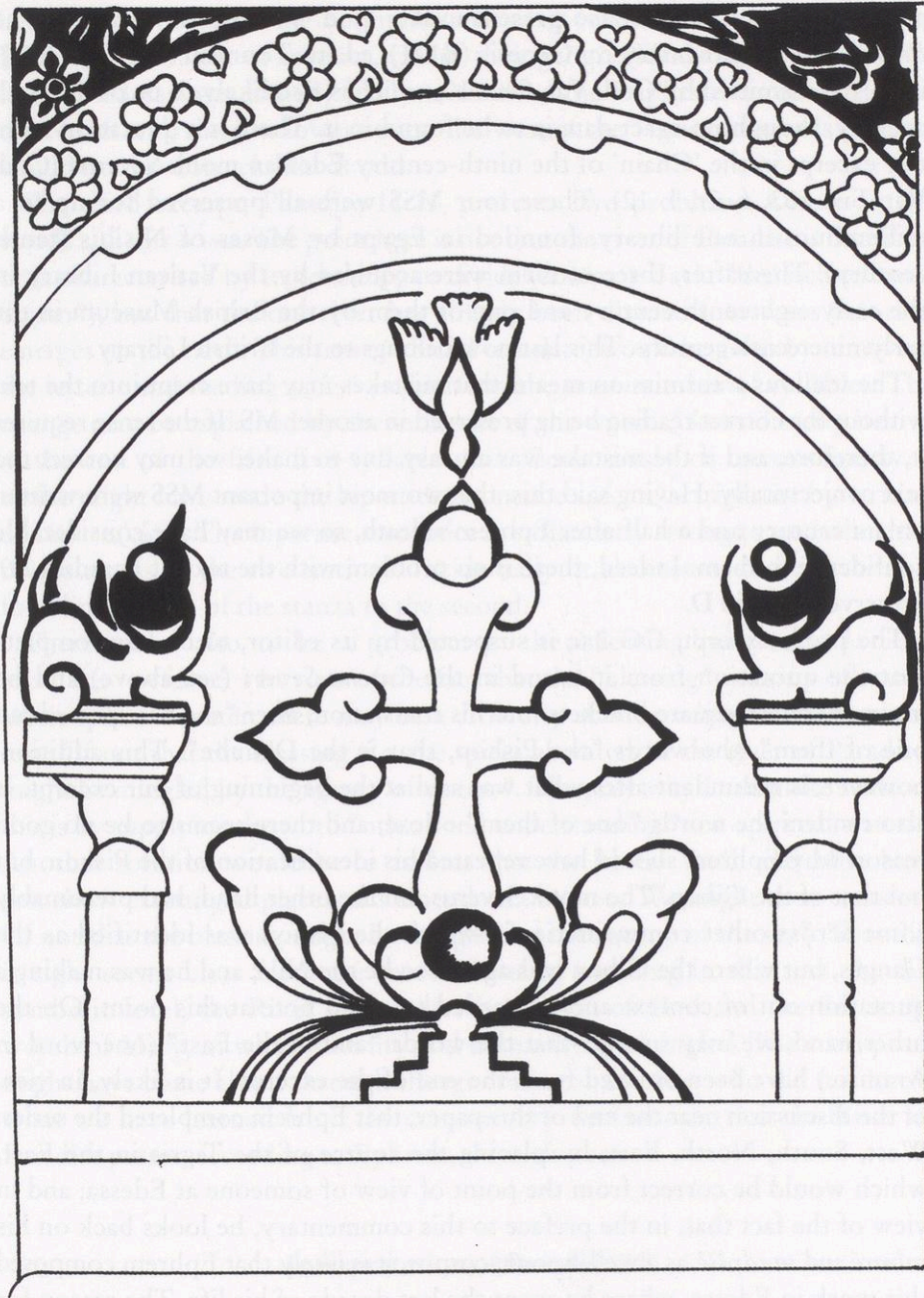


Figure 2 Drawing from a photograph of the ancient stone cross above the tomb of St. Thomas in the St. Thomas Mount Church at Mylapore, showing what might be four spouts of water issuing from the base of a 'tree of life' with budding arms.



preserved in **D**, but it is also present in **B** = Cod. Vat. Sir. 111, of 522. The *Puṣṣāqā*, or Commentary on Genesis (**B121**), ed./tr. Tonneau (**b157**) [= CG], is only transmitted by Cod. Vat. Sir. 110, which is also likely to be of the sixth century, though no exact date is to be found in it. There is a quotation from our excerpt in the 'Chain' of the ninth-century Edessan monk Severus (Cod. Vat. Sir. 103, f. 2r, l. 12). These four MSS were all preserved for up to a millennium in one library, founded in Egypt by Moses of Nisibis (tenth century). Thereafter, three of them were acquired by the Vatican Library in the early eighteenth century and one of them by the British Museum in the early nineteenth century. This last now belongs to the British Library.

The tenuous transmission means that mistakes may have crept into the text without the correct reading being preserved in another MS. If the sense requires it, therefore, and if the mistake was an easy one to make, we may correct the text conjecturally. Having said this, the two most important MSS were written only a century and a half after Ephrem's death, so we may have considerable confidence in them. Indeed, there is no problem with the text of Paradise 2:9, preserved only in **D**.

The prose excerpt, CG 2:6, is suspected by its editor, to be less complete than the quotation from it found in the *Catena Severi* (see above) and he inserts between square brackets into his translation, after "she has spewed out one of them", the words "the Pishon, that is the Danube". This addition, however, is redundant after what was said at the beginning of our excerpt. It also renders the words "one of them" otiose; and there seems to be no good reason why Ephrem should have repeated his identification of the Pishon, but not that of the Gihon. The monk Severus, on the other hand, had presumably come across other commentaries in which the Pishon was identified as the Ganges, but where the Gihon was agreed to be the Nile; and he was making a quotation out of context and so needed to add a note at this point. On the other hand, we may suspect that the words "and in the East" (one word in Aramaic) have been omitted from the end of the excerpt. It is likely, in view of the discussion near the end of this paper, that Ephrem completed the series: West, South, North, East, by placing the source of the Tigris in the East, which would be correct from the point of view of someone at Edessa; and in view of the fact that, in the preface to this commentary, he looks back on his *mîmrê* and *madrâšê* as a well-known corpus, it is likely that Ephrem composed this work in Edessa, where he spent the last decade of his life. The reason for the omission would be the geographical literalness of a scribe who was unconscious of the symbolism in the cross-shaped pattern of compass-points (to which Ephrem himself alludes in Virginité 4:14: "Eden's river branches out / Four ways in a mystery [*rāzā*]") and regarded the information as incorrect,



because the sources of the Euphrates are in fact further East than those of the Tigris. As a matter of instinct, rather than geographical fact, a person who lived at Edessa was actually likely to think of the Euphrates as coming from the North and, since its lower course lies west of the Tigris, the words omitted would not have struck him as odd.

The third excerpt, Paradise 11:11, presents two problems. One is in the words ܐܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܗܪܐ ܕܥܕܝܣܐ. The point here is not that the river of Paradise is divisible, or is characterised by its tendency to divide (compare Beck: “der sich teilende Strom”), but that the one river has already been divided four ways before it emerges on the earth. This sense (which I translate) would be given by removing the letter t and reading ܐܢܝܢܐ, which has the same number of syllables. The change may be explained by the influence of the word ܐܢܝܢܐ directly below, at the end of the fifth five-syllable unit. Consciously or unconsciously, a scribe might have made the bipartite assonance ܐܢܝܢܐ / ܐܢܝܢܐ tripartite by writing ܐܢܝܢܐ / ܐܢܝܢܐ. The bipartite assonance is sufficiently strong to underline the oppositeness of the two notions. Incidentally, it also serves to bind the first four-line section of the stanza to the second.

There seems also to be a problem in the following lines: ܐܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܗܪܐ ܕܥܕܝܣܐ ܐܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܗܪܐ ܕܥܕܝܣܐ. In view of the fact that the “blessing” consists of water, albeit spiritual water, there may be a difficulty about reading the transmitted text: “if not that the blessing (i.e. the spiritual waters of the river of Paradise) might be mingled by the agency of waters”. The only way I can make sense of this is by supplying the word “other” and understanding “non-spiritual waters”. Another solution would be to assume that the letters Yudh and Mim have somehow exchanged places and emend ܐܢܝܢܐ to ܐܢܝܢܐ. We might then translate “if not that the blessing might be mingled by the agency of the sea”. That this is right seems clear from the second level of meaning in this text. At this symbolic level, the River of Paradise is the Son of God and the Sea is the womb of Mary, in which divinity and humanity are mingled. The corruption might have come about through the ignorance of a scribe, who did not know what we have learned from the commentary on Genesis, that the River of Paradise passes, according to Ephrem, through a sea.

### Interpretation of Paradise 2:9

The next question is how we should interpret the Aramaic texts. Paradise 2:9 is translated by Beck into Latin (b224) as follows (p. 18):



Illa enim voluntas cui omnia facilia sunt coegit fontes abundantes Paradisi et in terra interclusit eos sicut canales. Vocavit eos ut ad nos exirent sicut collegit aquas in sinu nubium emittendas in aerem nutu voluntatis suae.<sup>5</sup>

Here is Beck's German translation (b17, CSCO 175, p. 7) – I set out the lines as poetry (the lines run horizontally from one side of the page to the other):

Denn jener Wille,	dem alles leicht ist,
leitete die Quellen	des Paradieses, die freien, (herab,)
und schloss sie in die Erde ein	in Form von Kanälen.
Zu uns hiess er sie	hervorgehen,
so wie er das Wasser gepresst hat	in dem Schoss im Innern seiner Wolken
und es wird (daraus) in die Luft entlassen	auf den Wink seines Willens.

Lavenant (b653, p. 48f.) offers the following translation:

Car cette Volonté  
 À qui tout est facile  
 A capté les fontaines  
 Sortant du Paradis,  
 Et comme en des canaux  
 Les retint dans la terre  
 Pour qu'à son appel seul  
 Elles fluent jusqu'à nous.  
 En des nuées encore  
 Il rassembla les eaux  
 Pour les répandre en l'air  
 Au gré de Son Vouloir.

Brock (b326, p. 88) has this:

Indeed, that Will  
 for whom everything is easy  
 constrains these abundant  
 fountains of Paradise,  
 confining them with land,  
 like water channels;  
 He summoned them to issue forth  
 in our direction,  
 just as He bound up the waters (cf. Prov. 30:4)  
 in the bosom of his clouds,  
 ready to be sent forth into the atmosphere  
 at the bidding of His Will.

5 Note also p. 19: "Aus ihm [the theme of the sources of Paradise] geht noch einmal ganz klar hervor, dass Ephräm einen örtlichen Zusammenhang zwischen Paradies und Erde annahm. Denn die irdischen Flüsse und Ströme, deren Quellen anscheinend aus der Erde kommen, haben nach Ephräm nicht hier ihren eigentlichen Ursprung sondern im Paradies."



There is no disagreement about the first two five-syllable units. Brock's translation of the first main verb, ܠܚܕܝܬܐ, as "constrains" is more accurate than Beck's "leitete" and Lavenant's "a capté", except that the Aramaic has the past tense (in Latin, Beck has "coegit"). We may compare Ephrem's preface to his Commentary on Genesis, where he says that he was unwilling to write it, but "was constrained" (ܠܚܕܝܬܐ) to do so. On the other hand, Beck's "die freien" renders ܠܬܠܬܐ more exactly than Brock's "abundant" (= Beck's Latin "abundantes"). Compare Ephrem's *Madrašê* on Faith (B23)<sup>6</sup>, ed. Beck (b15) [= Faith], 84:14, where a drop of dew is described as ܠܬܠܬܐ ܠܬܠܬܐ "an untrammelled nature", as opposed to the fixed body of the solid pearl which it becomes. All three scholars translate ܠܬܠܬܐ as 'channels', even though it is clear from Ephrem's discussion – in the prose *mîmrâ* 'Against Bar Dayson's *Domnus*' (B167), ed./tr. Mitchell *et al.* (b122, vol. 2) [= PR 2] – of the way humans are enabled to see the stars at night (PR 2, p. 35, ll. 13, 23; p. 37, l. 11, *etc.*; see below), that he understands this Greek loan-word, σολήν, not in the first sense of a 'channel' or a 'gutter', but in the sense of a tube, or a pipe (Liddell, Scott & Jones [Oxford, 1968], p. 1748f.). Beck and Brock are precise in saying that God summoned the springs to issue in our direction, whereas Lavenant takes the liberty of attaching ܠܬܠܬܐ to the previous main verb, "he imprisoned them"; he also introduces a word which is not in the Aramaic: "seul". Lavenant is free in his translation of the last section. Here Brock's translation of the first couplet is best (Beck apparently does not recognize the quotation from Proverbs and his "gepresst" is a translation of ܠܬܠܬܐ, not of ܠܬܠܬܐ, the verb which is used at Prov. 30:4 – his Latin "collegit" was better); but Beck translates the last couplet more exactly, though the sense of ܠܬܠܬܐ ܠܬܠܬܐ would be better conveyed by "and it is propelled (into the air at a movement of his will)".<sup>7</sup> Compare PR 2, p. 35, l. 17: ܠܬܠܬܐ (cf. l. 15), translated on p. xvi as "consider also the force-pumps (σίφωνες), and see to what a height they *propel* and scatter the unstable water" (on σίφωνες, invented by Ktesibios, see J. P. Oleson in *Handbook of ancient water technology*, ed. O. Wikander, Technology and change in history, 2; Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 272-85; the word is also used for natural water-spouts, as raised by a typhoon: Liddell, Scott & Jones [Oxford, 1968], p. 1603). None of the three scholars brings out the difference of tense between ܠܬܠܬܐ and ܠܬܠܬܐ, which is surely meant to convey that water is sometimes "pursed up" in the clouds, while at others (note the adversative sense of ܐܢ) it

6 This entry should include, under "Syriac texts", a reference to b810, which lists parts of this text which are probably interpolations.

7 Beck's Latin gerundive "emittendas" (implicitly reading ܠܬܠܬܐ ܠܬܠܬܐ for ܠܬܠܬܐ) assumes that Ephraim is speaking about rain and excludes the possibility existing in the Syriac of understanding that water may be propelled in any direction.



is propelled through the air, whether downwards as rain, or upwards, as in a water-spout. Beck's "entlassen" has no directionality or purposeful thrust and suggests rather that God ceases to make an effort of his Will and allows the water to fall naturally as rain. We may note that Prov. 30:4 is quoted in Faith 10:15, where the water is interpreted as the "Source" (مُحْدِث) in Mary's womb, which is called مَحْضُ, a word which can also mean 'hem' and so solves Solomon's riddle: "Who has pursed up water in a cloth?" At the end of this paper we shall return to the role of water as a symbol of Christ, who was *sent* by his Father (Galatians 4:4, with my emphasis) to take a human body in Mary's womb, as the drop of dew takes a body in the womb of the oyster and becomes a pearl. This double application makes it preferable to keep the root meaning of أَرْسَلَ, 'send', in this context, since Christ can hardly be described as having been 'propelled' to earth by God's Will. It also means that مَحْضُ should be translated as 'womb'.

Looking back at the second section, we can now see that this, too, has symbolic potential. If the unbedded Mary was the "arid ground" in which grew the "shoot which springs from the stock of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1; 53:2), then her womb was like a cistern with a tube-like exit from which Jesus emerged, like a source, into this manifest world. Compare the description of the mechanism of what would appear to be a fountain-jet at PR, 2, p. 35, ll. 19-23 (discussed below). The word used for a cistern here is مَحْضُ, which is phonetically and visually similar to مَحْضُ.

### Interpretation of Genesis Commentary 2:6, final part

Tonneau (b157, vol. 2, p. 21) offers the following Latin translation: "Fluvii igitur illi quattuor sunt : Pison (est) Danubis; Gihon Nilus, Deqlat (Tigris) autem et Prat (Euphrates) ecce inter eos habitamus; et si nota sunt loca e quibus scatiantur, tamen non est hoc caput fontis. Nam, cum in monte excelso positus est paradysus, circumeuntes eum absorpti sunt fluvii et descenderunt in mare, quasi de alto *cantharo*, et postquam transierunt in terram, heic infra mare, (terra) evomuit unum eorum [Pison, scilicet Danubim] ad occidentem Gihonque ad meridiem, Prat et Deqlath ad septentrionem."

The crucial part of this passage, underlined above, is translated by J. S. Assemani (b1077), vol. 1, p. 85, as follows: "Quia verò editissimo in loco situs est Paradysus, subter ipsum Amnes conduntur, & in mare velut ex sublimi *scatebra* delabuntur."

T.-J. Lamy, *Commentarium in Librum Geneseos*, Vol. 1 (Mechliniae, 1883), p. 197, has: "Paradysus enim procul in editissimo loco positus est. Inde ergo



dilapsi, circa ipsum paradisum cuniculis recepti, se condunt, continuoque cursu velut e sublimi *scatebra* mare subeuntes, perque eius fundum transvecti, distinctis fontibus tandem prosiliunt.”

Beck (b224, p. 19) translates: “Nam in altitudine magna positus est Paradisus. Absorpta sunt (flumina) in circuitu (Paradisi) et descenderunt in medium maris sicut ex *aquaeductu* alto. Et cum pertransirent per medium terrae quae sub mari est, in hunc locum (terra) evomuit unumquodque eorum.”

The unpublished translation of Ephraim’s Commentary on Genesis presented to the Faculty Board of Oriental Studies in the University of Oxford on 9 October 1981 by K. L. Refson (Ms M. Litt. c 606 in the Bodleian Library) offers the following: “because Paradise is situated on a great height they [the rivers] are absorbed round about it and go down into the sea as it were from a tall water-pipe”. This has clearly influenced Brock (see below), who indeed refers to this thesis. Note 7 on p. 267f. of Katharine (ܟܬܝܪܝܢ) Refson’s thesis quotes the parallel passage from Philo’s Questions and Answers on Genesis I, 12; but Philo has no simile drawn from hydraulic technology, only a vague reference to ‘the rush of water’.

Brock (b326), p. 201, has: “for Paradise is situated on a great height, and the rivers are swallowed up under the surrounding sea, descending as it were down a tall *water pipe*”.

Janson & van Rompay (b574) write “Omdat immers het paradijs op grote hoogte lag, werden ze rondom opgezwolgen en ze vielen neer diep in de zee, als het ware vanuit een hoge *aquaduct*.”

Mathews & Amar (b708), p. 101, offer: “Because Paradise is set on a great height, the rivers are swallowed up again and they go down to the sea as if through a tall *water duct*.”

Van den Eynde, translating Išo’dad, who copies out this passage from Ephrem (*Commentaire d’Išo’dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament. I. Genèse*, ed. CSCO 126 [= Syr 67], p. 58; tr. CSCO 156 [= Syr. 75], p. 63)<sup>8</sup>, writes: “Le paradis étant situé à une grande hauteur, les quatre fleuves s’engloutirent aux environs, descendirent au sein des eaux comme par un profond *chenal*.”

Our first task is to find out what exactly Ephrem meant by the word *qathrînâ*, which is translated by Tonneau as “cantharus” [*sic*: a dung-beetle!]; by Assemani and Lamy as “scatebra” [a gushing source]; by Brock as “water pipe”; by Mathew & Amar as “water duct”; by van den Eynde as “chenal” [channel], by Beck and by Janson & van Rompay as “aquaeductus/aquaduct”; and by me as “spout” (of an artificial fountain).

<sup>8</sup> This reference should be inserted in a new edition of Van Biesen’s *Bibliography* and that new edition should not alter the b-numbers, which are as useful as the BWV-numbers for J. S. Bach or D-numbers for Schubert.







ܐܢ ܢܥܝܕ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܗܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ

But if the places where they rise are known, yet this is not the head of the source. Paradise is situated at a great height and for this reason they have been swallowed up around it and have gone right down into the sea, as if from a high *qathrinā*, and when they have travelled within the Earth, which is under the sea, to this place, she has spewed out one of them in the west; the Nile in the south; and the Euphrates and the Tigris in the north. (Tr. Palmer.)

Various published translations have already been cited above.

2) ܐܢܝܢ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ

This text is edited by Charles Wand Mitchell in the second volume of *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan transcribed from the palimpsest B. M. Add. 14623*, completed by A. A. Bevan and F. C. Burkitt after Mitchell's death (London, 1921) = **b122**, as 'The Discourse Called "Of Domnus"'. Ephrem's book (now partly illegible) was a refutation of a book written by Bar Dayṣān to challenge what he took to be a Platonist doctrine (though Ephrem says it is really a Stoic doctrine). At this point his purpose is to explain his 'tunnel-vision' theory, namely that darkness channels the rays which (according to most ancient philosophers) come out of human eyes, and thereby enables them to reach further, at night, and see the stars, which we cannot do, except from the bottom of a deep pit, in the daytime. (See the discussion of this theory in Ute Possekel's *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, CSCO 580 [Louvain, 1999] = **b837**, pp. 224-28.) My citation begins at line 12 of fol. 77a (in col. 1) and ends at line 30 (in col. 2), p. 35 (I add *syāmê*, vocalise and punctuate, in order to show what I read):

ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ  
 ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ ܕܢܦܝܬܐ

But in order that you may properly realise how much pipes concentrate scattered objects and project them, observe to what a height waterspouts project inert water, before they scatter it! Again, observe a *qathrinā* of water, and see how the water is pressurized by means of a







that the singular,  $\aleph_1$ , was read by Bedjan.

This text was edited by Addai Scher. I refer to vol. 1, CSCO 65 (Paris, 1910), p. 93, line 2. According to Brock, *BO*, p. 62f., Theodore's 'Book of the Scholion' was "Completed in 792 [...] [it] consists of 11 memre, 1-9 concern specific questions to do with the Old Testament (1-5) and the New Testament (6-9), arranged according to the sequence of the books [...] Memre 10 and 11 are probably later additions, 10 being an apology for Christianity directed towards Muslims, while 11 is an account of different heresies. [...] The work has come down in two recensions". Here I quote from *Mimrā* II, 93, on p. 92f.:

What is the story of that spring which “comes out of Eden and irrigates Paradise and from there (onwards) is divided into four heads”? That the nature of water is uncreated is evident, for otherwise the earth would [not] have been flooded in the early (earliest) time. For it is (water) which has always begun and finished (everything); and it circulates in the arteries of the earth as blood does in the veins (of bodies) and water in the roots (of trees). For the earth is pierced and ducts are fashioned in it – like *qathrînê* – in the mountains and in the plain, and (the water) rises to the height and descends to the depth at a signal from its Creator, so as to give to every living and sensible (nature) the use (of water in the measure) of (its individual) need of it. (Emend. and tr. Palmer.)

The translation by R. Hespel and R. Draguet, *Théodore bar Koni, Livre des Scolies (recension de Séert) I. Mimrê I-V*, CSCO 431 = Syr. 187 (Louvain, 1981) is as follows (p. 113): “Qu’est-ce le récit sur cette source qui sortait d’Éden, arrosait le paradis et de là se divisait en quatre têtes? Que la nature des eaux ne fût pas effectivement en cours de création, c’est clair, sinon la terre aurait déjà flotté (?). C’était en fait des eaux déjà en cours et en fonction et qui circulaient dans les fissures de la terre, comme le sang dans les artères et







reaches in the twinkling of an eye the leaves, flowers and fruits, as if through certain *ducts*, without holes or channels being pierced in them. Thus by a [...] miracle our Lord entered into heaven without cleaving it.”

7) The *Lexicon Georgii Karmasedinoyo Maronitae* (Rome, 1619) equates *qathrînê* with ܩܬܪܝܢܐ ‘ducts’, on the one hand, and with ܩܬܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܡܪܝܢܐ ‘springs with channels’, on the other.

8) Jessica Margoliouth, née Payne Smith, in *A compendious Syriac dictionary founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus* of her father, tentatively introduces, on p. 524, the etymology *κάνθαρος* [*kántharos*] and limits the semantic range to ‘water-pipe’ and ‘duct’, even though the *Thesaurus* itself cites the senses ‘source’ and ‘stream’ as well (compare Nos. 5 and 7, above).

### Discussion

Two of the eight references listed above are to Ephrem and these are also the earliest in date. It makes sense, therefore, to begin with them. In CG, Ephrem says that the rivers fall, “as if from a high *qathrînâ*,” into the Sea that surrounds the Mountain of Paradise. The Mountain might conceivably have overhanging cliffs, from which the four rivers plunge directly into the Sea. But then the one River of Paradise would divide into four before leaving the Garden of Eden. Ephrem specifically denies that it does so, interpreting the words ܩܬܪܝܢܐ, ‘from here’, in Genesis 2:10 as meaning ܩܬܪܝܢܐ ܕܐܡܪܝܢܐ, that is, ‘outside’ Paradise. Given that the river is headed for the sea, the *only place* which is outside Paradise, and not yet in the sea, is the air. We are therefore led by logic to understand that the *qathrînâ* is a fountain. Assemani’s choice of *scatebra* (from *scatêre*, to bubble up) was an intelligent one; he was followed in this by Lamy.

This interpretation is supported by the second passage, which shows that a reservoir and a pipe are needed to produce a *qathrînâ*. It thereby demonstrates that a *qathrînâ* is not, for Ephrem, a pipe, for which he uses ܩܬܪܝܢܐ. (Brock [b326], p. 225, is mistaken in thinking that Ephrem uses this word, which is derived from the Greek word *sôlên*, at CG 2:6; perhaps he was thinking of the parallel passage in Paradise 2:9.) The analogies Ephrem is collecting in his refutation are intended to support his theory about the visual ray being propelled upwards to a great height by the channelling effect of the surrounding darkness to allow us to see the stars at night. They are all examples of “the way tubes concentrate scattered things and propel them”. The example which features a



*qathrîṇā* distinguishes between this and a pipe. This gives us at least the certainty that a *qathrîṇā*, for Ephrem, is not itself a pipe. That “channel” is not a possible translation was implicitly admitted by van den Eynde when he changed the adjective which describes the *qathrîṇā* from “high” to “deep”.

At first I thought that the translation “aqueduct” was out of the question; but then Garth Fowden directed me to the following passage from George Bean’s *Guide to Turkey’s Southern Shore* (London 1968), pp. 53-54: “The most striking monument at Aspendus, after the theatre, is the very fine [c. 2nd-c. A. D. (inscription)] aqueduct ... On descending from the hills to the plain the water was carried on arches across half a mile of marshy ground to the acropolis ... The water channel was formed of cubical blocks of stone pierced through the middle, and was thus capable of withstanding a very considerable pressure. At the North end, close to the foot of the mountains, and again about 100 yards from the acropolis hill, the water was carried up on superimposed arches to towers some 100 feet high, from where it descended again on the other side. At the top of each of the towers, accessible by staircases in the masonry, was an unroofed basin; the purpose of this was to let water into the open, thus allowing the air to escape from the conduit and so reducing the friction which would otherwise impede the flow. The extra height was necessary in order to avoid loss of pressure on the far side. It was at one time doubted whether the ancients understood the principle of piping water up under gravitational pressure; if such doubts should remain, the aqueduct at Aspendus would effectively remove them.” The original publication of the aqueduct at Aspendos is by K. G. Lanckoronski in *Die Städte Pamphyliens und Pisidiens* (Vienna, 1890), but see now A. Trevor Hodge, *Roman aqueducts and water supply* (London, 1992); Fig 15a on p. 38 shows the stone pipeline block and the general discussion on pp. 158-60 is illustrated with drawings and photographs (Figs 112-114).

On the other hand, Ephrem is not speaking of a natural spring, either, since the mention of reservoirs and pipes makes it clear that it is some kind of hydraulic device. Perhaps a Greek word (root:  $\kappa\alpha\theta\alpha\upsilon$  ?)<sup>9</sup> corresponding to

<sup>9</sup> Such a word does not, however, appear in the indices to J. P. Oleson’s *Greek and Roman mechanical lifting devices: the history of a technology* (Toronto, 1984). For knowledge of this book I am indebted to Professor Kai Brodersen of the University of Mannheim. John Oleson (personal communication 27. 5. 2003) adds: »The Greeks and Romans could use force pumps to create spouting displays. More often, however, they simply connected a pipe to an elevated cistern, which is a much less labour intensive and reliable system.« Compare Ephraim’s description of a *qathrîṇā* in PR 2 (fol. 77a): »the water is pressurized by means of a reservoir and a pipe and [so] rises«. This suggests the etymology  $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$ : the proximity of R to T in the Syriac pronunciation of this word might have caused it to be written with Taw instead of the usual Tet.



*qathrîṇā* will be found in an ancient manual of hydraulics. This is a line of enquiry which would best be pursued by someone familiar with such texts.

Sahdona uses the image of a *qathrîṇā*, or of *qathrîṇê*, in the plural, to describe the way the sap rises from the roots of trees and is distributed to all its branches and its twigs. David Attenborough, in his television-series, 'The Private Life Of Plants', used the analogy of a fire-hose to describe the same process. The image of a fountain is better. Everything depends on whether we read the plural here, with Halleux, or the singular, with Bedjan, a difference of a single dot. I say that it was originally singular and meant 'a fountain'; but that the MS tradition was corrupted and it came to be read as a plural, in which case it must mean something like 'fire-hoses'. For fire-hoses, though, one might expect the Greek word *siphônes* to be used.

According to my theory, it was this misreading of Sahdona (plural for singular) which gave people the idea that *qathrîṇā* means a water-pipe, or (understanding the passage as a description of the inner structure of a tree) a duct. That is certainly the meaning in Theodore bar Koni, who, however, has evidently not read Ephrem's Commentary on Genesis, as we can see from what he says about the uncreated water, for this conflicts with CG 2:3.<sup>10</sup>

Solomon of Basra, on the other hand, evidently *had* read Sahdona, for like Sahdona he uses the analogy of a *qathrîṇā* to describe the way the sap rises from the roots of a tree (he thinks, for some reason, of the olive) to its leaves, its blossoms and its fruits in "the blink of an eye". (This specification as to time is probably inspired by the analogy of a fountain, rather than by the botanical example of a tree.) Equally evidently, he has not read Theodore bar Koni or the tenth/eleventh-century lexicographers, because he does not believe that there are any ducts inside a tree-trunk, but thinks the process is as miraculous as a virgin-birth.

Both Solomon and Sahdona seem to imagine a tree as a kind of branching vertical spout of water, clothed in wood. We shall see, as the exegesis unfolds, that Ephrem uses the names of 'source' and 'tree' for one and the same uncanny reality, and that the water clothed in wood is analogous to the godhead clothed in a body. A tree-like fountain, then, would be an appropriate image in the context of the first text. It is compatible with the second text as well, though the word ܩܬܪܝܢܐ there suggests a functional, rather than a merely aesthetic purpose. The word ܩܬܪܝܢܐ, 'difficult', attached to the height at which the

10 A. Guillaumont, 'Hébreu et Araméen', *Annuaire. École pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences historiques et philologiques* 105 (1972-3), 133-5; 106 (1973-4), 125-7; 107 (1974-5), 186-9, writes (*Annuaire* 106, p. 125) of Ephraim in his Commentary on Genesis: "Sa préoccupation dominante est de montrer que rien n'existait, hormis Dieu, avant la création décrite dans les premiers versets de la Genèse."



water carries out this function, whatever it is, suggests that it would be difficult, without this hydraulic device, to lift so much water to such a height.

As is often the case, the lexica, both ancient and modern, are more of a hindrance than a help. Even Brockelmann gives just one meaning: *aquaeductus* for *qathrînâ*. But his great virtue is to list the references which have enabled *us* to find out (or at least suspect) that the word originally meant 'fountain', or, more specifically, 'a vertical fountain-jet'. What we need is a dictionary which, like the great dictionaries of Latin and Greek (I am thinking particularly of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* which is being edited in Munich), will collect all the passages attesting a particular word and intelligently study the contexts in which that word is used, instead of just copying from other lexica without thinking.

If *qathrînâ* did mean a duct of some kind in CG, the singular would have to be emended to a plural, because there were four rivers, which is no great problem, as we have seen above, where I have assumed that a similar, erroneous emendation actually occurred in the text of Sahdona's 'Book of Perfection'. But then we should have to suppose that 'outside Eden' means 'under Eden'. The River of Paradise would have to plunge into the ground under the Garden and there divide four ways into four natural stone drains. But these drains would prevent the rivers from going "right down into the sea", as CG 2:6 says they do. And there would be no reason why their taste should be altered, as the preceding paragraph makes a point of saying that it is (*cf.* Paradise 11:11):

As for the four rivers which rise from that river, they do not resemble in their taste the taste of the head of the source. For if waters have various tastes in our lands, while all of them are placed under the sentence of that curse, how much greater must be the difference between the taste of the blessed land of Eden and the taste of the land which has been placed, by the transgression of Adam, under the curse of the Just One? (Tr. Palmer.)

The connection between the curse and the pollution even of the water which we drink at the source of a stream is made by Ephrem in Paradise 11:11.

## Excursus 2: On Moshe bar Kepha

Before turning to that passage, we should hear another important witness: Moshe bar Kepha. Moshe spent his life in what is now northern Iraq, becoming an unusually young bishop around 863; he probably completed his 'three score years and ten' and died in 903.<sup>11</sup> Like much of his work, the Syriac

11 Brock, *BO*, p. 69.



Commentary on Paradise, in three parts, has never been edited. Andreas Masius published a Latin translation: Mosis bar Cepha, ‘Commentaria de Paradiso ad Ignatium fratrem’, *Critici sacri*, Vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1569), p. 387 ff. This was reprinted in *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Vol. 111, cols. 479-608. It was van den Eynde (*Commentaire d’ Išo‘dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament. I. Genèse*, tr. CSCO 156 [= Syr. 75], p. 63) who directed me to this source. Moshe bar Kepha knew both the Commentary on Genesis and the *Madrašê* on Paradise:

(PG 111, col. 485C [Part 1, Chapter 1]) Quinto, necessum est corporatum esse paradisum, quod Enoch et Elias in eo manent, ut affirmat dominus Ephrem in eo opere, quod librum Geneseos, hoc est, de rerum ortu interpretatur, et in iis etiam sermonibus quos de paradiso conscripsit. Illi enim viri, cum corporati sint (ut qui vitae huius vinculis adhuc sunt colligati), consentaneum est ut in corporalibus quoque locis maneant.

[Fifthly, Paradise must be corporeal, because Enoch and Elijah dwell there, *as My Lord Ephraim affirms in the work which explains the Book of Genesis*, that is, on the origin of things, *and also in the discourses which he wrote on Paradise*. For since those men are corporeal (being still attached to the chains of this life), it follows that they dwell in places which are likewise corporeal. (My translation; it is safe to assume that ‘discourses’ here translates the Syriac ܕܡܬܬܠܚܐ.)]

Moshe considered one of these two books (certainly the poetic cycle is the one he means) to be a mystical, the other a literal commentary on this book, which (like everyone else in those days) he believed to have been written by the prophet whose name he bore.

(PG 111, col. 486A-B [Part 1, Chapter 1]) Deinde beatus Ephrem duplici interpretatione exposuit librum Mosis prophetae; quarum altera mystica est, atque arcana eruit sensa; altera res ipsas pertractat a Mose descriptas.

[Then the blessed Ephraim explained the book of the Prophet Moses by a twofold interpretation, of which one is mystical and elicits hidden meanings, while the other deals thoroughly with the actual things described by Moses. (My translation.)]

On Genesis 2:10, Moshe writes:

(PG 111, col. 511B-C [Part 1, Chapter 21]) Deinde hoc quoque responsum volumus, paradisum multo sublimiore positum esse regione, atque haec nostra exstet terra; eoque fieri ut illinc per praecipitium delabantur fluvii tanto cum impetu, quantum verbis exprimere non possis, eoque impetu impulsus, pressique sub oceani vada rapiantur, unde rursus prosiliant ebulliantque in hoc a nobis culto Orte.

[Besides, Paradise is situated in a much higher region than this earth of ours and for that reason the rivers pour down vertically from that place with such inexpressible force that under the pressure they are snatched away beneath the waves of the ocean, from where they gush and bubble up again in this region cultivated by us. (My translation.)]



In this passage, only the words “per praecipitium” are ambiguous, meaning either “vertically” or “over a precipice”. The next part is full of difficulties, which we must do our best to resolve provisionally (the only real answer lies in the unpublished Syriac original), because it is crucial to our investigation to do so. Moshe bar Kepha here tries to tell us what he understood by Ephraim’s commentary concerning the river of Paradise:

[Part 1, Chapter 21, continued] *Nam qui aquas in sublime ducere, atque ex altis erectisque canalibus veluti siphonibus profundere laborant, ii ex longo intervallo cataractam sive praecipitium ipsis quoddam alta devexitate abruptum atque difficile comparant, per quod deturbatae magno cum impetu sub terram condantur: sub qua postquam coactae, atque suo ipsarum impetu pressae aliquousque fluxere, tandem per canales illos magna vi qua ex praecipiti illo casu urgentur, sursum emicant. Haec ita se habere dominus etiam Ephraem, et cum eo doctores alii affirmant.*

[Those who labour to raise water to an altitude from which it can be projected from high vertical pipes, as though from siphons, prepare for it, by bringing it down from a height over a great distance, a sort of vertical and difficult cataract or precipice by which it might be propelled downwards with great force and so buried under the earth, beneath which, afterwards, it is forced and pressurized by its own momentum to flow through those channels in some other direction and at last, impelled by the great force generated by its vertical fall, it springs to the surface. That these things are so, is also affirmed by My Lord Ephraim, followed by other teachers. (My translation.)]

The trouble with this passage is that it begins by speaking, by way of analogy, of human hydraulic engineers and their achievements, and ends by speaking of the way God causes the rivers which come from Paradise to travel under the earth to the sources of the four terrestrial streams, without it being clear at which point the Syriac author made the transition from the human to the divine operation. It will be best to postpone further discussion of this passage until the Syriac text is known; if, nevertheless, I have quoted and attempted to translate this passage into English, my purpose is to demonstrate the need for an edition of this text.

Another passage of the same commentary by Moshe bar Kepha shows that he has no conception of the way in which the air might scatter and weaken the force of a falling column of water:

(PG 111, 491D [Part 1, Chapter 7]) *Praeterea idem Moses affirmat quatuor flumina e paradiso profluxisse, Tigridem, Euphratem, Gihoneum, et Phisonem: quae si e caelo delapsa essent, excavassent utique atque vasto halitu ipsam terram aperuissent, quippe quae sustinere nequivisset molem tantam, quanta aquae ex loco tam sublimi praecipites (et quidem dies noctesque continuato cursu) absque ulla intermissione ipsam pressissent, quare e terra promanasse illa flumina necesse est, et proinde paradysum quoque terrestrem fuisse. [...] Ephrem, in eo libro, quo paradysi conditionem exsequitur, deserte asseruit terrestrem esse.*

[Besides, the same Moses states that four rivers flowed out of Paradise, the Tigris, the Euphrates,



the Gihon and the Pishon, which, had they fallen from sky, would have hollowed out, as it were, and opened up with their great blast the earth itself, seeing that it would not have been able to sustain such a weight as that with which the waters would have pressed it, falling as they did without any intermission vertically from such a high place – day and night, in a perpetual stream; for which reason those rivers must issue from the earth and Paradise, consequently, must also have been terrestrial. ... Ephraim, in the book in which he investigates thoroughly the way that Paradise is, eloquently asserted that it was terrestrial. (My translation.)]

Not long after this, Moshe shows that he understood Ephraim to say that the four rivers fall separately into the ocean and are swallowed up by the sea-bed:

(PG 111, col. 494 [Part 1, Chapter 9]) Illud insuper asserimus, eam terram in qua est paradisu altiozem multo sublimiozemque exsistere hac quam nos colimus; id enim ita se habere, indicio sunt quattuor illa grandia flumina quae, orta in paradisi terra, per hanc nostram ab illa diversam feruntur. Nisi enim illa terra altior exstaret, fieri non posset, ut ea flumina illinc praecipiti cursu sub mare magnum delata, tandem per hanc a nobis cultam regionem erumpentia spargerentur. Certum igitur est, ea flumina, quae e sublimi loco promanant, ipsa sua praecipiti fluxione coacta strictaque, et proinde cum impetu delata sub terram et magnum mare rapi, atque ob ipsum etiam impetum, quo sunt delapsa, rursus prosilire in hac nostra terra, per eamque fluere. Nam quattuor illa flumina [...] sub mare ferri, atque in hac demum quam nos habitamus terra prodire, testatur etiam dominus Ephraem Commentariis in Genesim.

[In addition, we assert that land on which Paradise is, to be much higher and more exalted than this which we cultivate. The proof that this is so, is provided by those four great rivers, which, arising in the land of Paradise, flow through this of ours, which is different from that. For were that land not higher, it would be impossible for those rivers, carried from there by their vertical fall beneath the great sea, to break out at last and be distributed through this region cultivated by us. It is certain, therefore, that those rivers, which issue from a high place, are forced and constrained by the very same vertical flow with which they fell down, to leap up again in this land of ours and to flow through it. For that those four rivers ... travel under the sea and finally emerge in this land which we inhabit, is also witnessed by My Lord Ephraim in his Commentary on Genesis. (My translation.)]

In spite of the high regard which Moshe manifests for Ephraim's teaching, he disagrees with him on certain points (though he does not advertise the fact). For example, he (like the majority of ancient commentators) opts for the Ganges instead of the Danube as the best candidate for identification with the Pishon (PG 111, col. 512). Also, although he claims that Ephraim argues for a terrestrial location of Paradise, he does not quote that argument; and his statement that Paradise is corporeal is at odds with Ephraim's clear statements that the trees and the water there are spiritual. By making the categories of spiritual and corporeal mutually exclusive, he loses the possibility of a continuum between the two spheres, essential though that is to the theology of the Incarnation. His claim that Paradise is not in heaven contradicts Ephraim as well.

The last passage of Moshe's commentary which we shall look at here is one



in which he tries to grasp what Ephraim says about the relative positions of Paradise and the earth:

(PG 111, col. 497) Verum Ephraem dicit paradisum universam ambire terram, atque ultra Oceanum ita positum esse ut totum terrarum orbem ab omni circumdat regione, non aliter atque lunae orbis lunam cingit. Sunt autem haec eius fere verba, quibus in ea sua disputatione utitur: Quia procul extra conspectum dissitus est paradisus, neque tam acuta inest oculis nostris acies, ut illum assequi possimus; si de ipso periculum facere velis, facile contuleris eum circulo lunam ambiente, atque ita intellectu comprehenderis: nam ita ille et mare et terram intra se complectitur.

[But Ephraim says that Paradise encircles the entire earth and that it is so situated beyond the Ocean that it surrounds the whole world from every side, exactly as the circle of the moon girds the moon. These are the approximate words he uses in that disputation (*i. e. madrāšā, cf. drāšā*; the reference is to Paradise 1:8, quoted in Note 1, above): "For Paradise is situated far away, out of sight, nor is our eyesight sharp enough to perceive it; but if you wish to hazard a guess about it, you might well compare it with the moon surrounded by a circle, and so grasp it with your intellect: for just so it embraces within itself both the sea and the earth." (My translation.)]

Had Moshe realised that Ephraim's conception of Paradise is of a domed mountain above heaven, he would have concluded, as this paper does, that the rivers do not fall through our sky, nor into our encircling Ocean from vertical precipices on the other side, but into a Sea beyond that Ocean, which surrounds the vertical lower slopes of the Mountain of Paradise; and that the only way the four separate rivers can be envisaged as plunging from a great height directly into that Sea after leaving Eden, seeing that Ephraim identifies Eden with Paradise, is as the four branches of a great fountain which emerges from the summit of that Mountain. In Chapter 21 of Part 1 (the passage we deferred discussing until such time as the Syriac text should have been edited), Moshe bar Kepha is certainly talking about raising water to a height (as if by the action of a siphon) from which it may then be caused to fall vertically with great force. It would seem, then, that his understanding of the word *qathrînā* was not all that different from that proposed here.

### Interpretation of Paradise 11:11

Paradise 11:11 is translated into Latin by Beck (b224, p. 124) as follows:

Cur indignisset terra (Paradisi) inde fluere et exire fluvium, qui dividitur, nisi ut benedictio (Paradisi) misceretur per aquas (cum terra) et ut exiret ad irrigationem mundi et sanaret fontes eius mixtos cum maledictionibus, sicut sanatae sunt aquae corruptae per salem (Elisaei).

The same scholar translates the same passage into German (b17, vol. 2, p. 45) as follows:



Wozu bedurfte	die Erde, dass von dort
zu ihr hervorflesse	der sich teilende Strom,
wenn nicht dazu, dass durch das Wasser (ihr) beigemischt würde der Segen (des Paradieses),	
dass der Segen hervorkomme	die Menschen zu tränken
und ihre Quellen zu heilen,	denen der Fluch beigemischt ist,
so wie die Wasser geheilt wurden,	die ungesunden, durch das Salz.

Lavenant (b653, p. 149f.) offers this:

Quel besoin pour la terre  
 Que de là-bas afflue  
 Et s'écoule vers elle  
 Le fleuve aux maints rameaux,  
 Sinon pour que ces eaux  
 De la bénédiction (du Paradis) l'imprègnent,  
 Et qu'abreuvant le monde,  
 Cette bénédiction  
 S'en vienne ici guérir  
 Ses fontaines imprégnées de la malédiction  
 Comme furent par le sel  
 Guéries les eaux malades?

Kronholm gives the following (b631, p. 70):

What benefits the earth that from thence [*scil.* Paradise]  
 the river which is divided emanated and went out  
 if not that Paradisiacal blessing is intermingled through the water,  
 and goes out to water the terrestrial world,  
 and refreshes its founts mingled with curses,  
 like the sick water that was healed through the salt.

Brock's version (b326, p. 157f.) is:

What need was there  
 that from that land  
 a river should flow forth  
 and divide itself,  
 except that the blessing of Paradise  
 should be mingled by means of water  
 as it issues forth  
 to irrigate the world,  
 making clear its fountains  
 that had become polluted by curses -  
 just as that "sickly water"  
 had been made wholesome by the salt.

Being ignorant of Swedish, I regretfully omit Hidal's translation (b551) from this survey.

The first phrase  $\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\iota \text{ ὁ} \text{ ποταμὸς} \text{ ὁ} \text{ ἅγιος}$  is accurately rendered by Beck







other solution is to translate ܡܠܚܡܐ as “blessed and spiritual water” (cf. CG 2:6) and ܡܠܚܡܐ as “non-spiritual water”. Beck ‘solves’ the problem by adding the word “ihr”, which means that the blessing is mingled with the earth (Lavenant also finds he needs to add the feminine pronoun “la”, meaning the earth, before “imprégner”, but he does not show that he has added it). Brock and Kronholm simply avoid the issue of what the Paradise water was mingled with and of what it means to say that it was mingled “by means of water” (Brock), or “through water” (Kronholm). Lavenant’s ‘imprégner’ suggests a quasi-sexual mingling of the River and the Earth and seems informed by the symbolic dimension of this image. If the River is the Word of God and the Earth is humanity, then the agent of their mingling is the womb of Mary, which must be represented by the sea. My own solution, though, is to read this section closely with the last section and to understand that the divided river is mingled with salt by the agency of the sea through which it passes.

### Excursus 3: on the Diyarbakir Commentary

It seems best to interrupt this close comparison of translations at this point and to introduce, by way of relief, the anonymous Diyarbakir Commentator, who thinks that the River of Paradise is not mixed with salt, in spite of the fact that it passes through the salt sea. He tells of springs of fresh water in the middle of the sea (perhaps he knew of that near the Syrian island of Arados/Arwâd, or of another in the Persian Gulf, near Bahrain) and imagines the River plunging from such a height that it operates like such a fresh-water spring, only in the reverse direction, forming an uncontaminated column in the salt sea and hollowing out a passageway by which it may enter the sea-bed. In some respects this is exactly what I think Ephrem imagined the River doing, only I think that our passage proves that he imagined it as being mixed with salt water during its passage.

According to the editor, van Rompay (pp. xxiv-xxv), the Diyarbakir Commentator shows knowledge of CG (or possibly of traditions deriving from Ephrem’s teaching), overlaid with another teaching based on the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. This commentator does not grasp the subtler aspects of Ephrem’s treatment of this theme, but he does confirm that Ephrem was understood to say that the River of Paradise travels through the sea itself, not through a kind of “water-pipe” or “duct”, and this helps to confirm my interpretation of the word *qathrînâ* as ‘the vertical spout of an artificial fountain’.

Here is the passage: “Some people ask by what power these four rivers flow from Paradise without being mixed (rt. ܡܠܚܡܐ) with the sea-water of the seas and



of Okeanos and without being stopped by hills and mountains. Now even if the divine Power which established them for the use of human beings would have the capacity and would be able to do as He wills with what his hands have made, yet, however, we see that He does not actually act on them (reading ܥܡܐ instead of ܥܡܐܬ, on the assumption that the scribe who changed the preposition was unaware that the passive ܥܡܐܬ can be active in meaning) beyond (their) nature. For water has a natural way of pouring itself downwards from high places and when it is concentrated, it will make pits, that is, it will hollow (them) out for itself, so that (reading d instead of w) it may have room for its passage; and this happens to it all the more, when it pours itself violently from places that are steep. Now it is clear that the place of Paradise and of that source is a mountain; and in the same way as those who wish to bring water into cities by aqueducts (ܩܬܪܝܢܐ) are unable to do this, unless the source of the water is high, so (it is) there also. As for (the water) not mixing with the sea-water, (that is) by reason of the violence of its course, on account of its coming down from a high place, witness (those) springs which (rise) in the middle of the sea and make their passage, from the ground right up to above the sea, through the sea-water, without being mixed with it.” (Emend. and tr. Palmer.) See Lucas van Rompay, *Le commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22*, CSCO 483 = Syr. 205 (Louvain, 1986), p. 27 (French tr. in CSCO 484 = Syr. 206 [Louvain, 1986], p. 37).<sup>12</sup>

This passage clearly shows that the normal Syriac word for aqueduct is ܩܬܪܝܢܐ. That does not prove that *qathrîna* cannot also mean aqueduct, but it strengthens the case for looking at other possibilities.

### Continued interpretation of Paradise 11:11

The next phrase ܩܬܪܝܢܐ / ܩܬܪܝܢܐ ܡܢ ܩܬܪܝܢܐ is translated by Beck rather freely, but more correctly than any of the others: “dass (der Segen) hervorkomme, die Menschen zu tränken”. The object should be ‘the world’, not ‘the human race’. Kronholm (with the wrong mood again) introduces another gloss at this point: “and goes out to water the terrestrial world”, rightly seeing that there is more than one world, but not showing the word “terrestrial” as a gloss. Lavenant, who does at least have “abreuvant le monde” is syntactically too free to be of use here. Brock makes one process of the two described here by writing: “that the blessing ... should be mingled by means of water as it issues

<sup>12</sup> This title should be added to the “Titles incidentally dealing with Ephrem” in the next edition of den Biesen’s *Bibliography*, though, again, without changing the existing sequence of numbers.



forth to irrigate the world". This shows that he does not understand the water by the agency of which the blessing is mingled to be that of the sea which encircles Paradise, but some water which the blessing finds already present at the source of the four earthly rivers. The violence which is thereby done to the sentence is another symptom of the difficulty felt by Brock in reading  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$  in this section. Had the MS. shown  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$  he would not have experienced such a difficulty.

The final section of Paradise 11:11 has not caused any conceptual difficulties to the translators. The only difference between them is in their choice of words, some (Beck, Lavenant) opting for consistency in translating the key-verbs  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$  ('beimischen'; 'imprégner') and  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$  ('heilen'; 'guérir'), others (Kronholm, Brock) translating them now one way, now another: 'intermingle' / 'mingle'; 'refresh' / 'heal' (Kronholm); 'mingle' / 'pollute'; 'make clean' / 'make wholesome' (Brock). All the translators are aware of the biblical reference here, but Brock's "had been made wholesome" inadvertently places the event referred to in a time before the River emerged in our world. It may be appropriate to bring this section to an end with a quotation of 2 Kings 2: 19-22:

The men of the town said to Elisha, 'The town is pleasant to live in, as indeed my lord can see, but the water is foul and the country suffers from miscarriages'. 'Bring me a new bowl,' said he 'and put some salt in it.' They brought it to him. Then he went to the place the water came from and threw salt into it. 'Thus speaks Yahweh,' said he, ' "I make this water wholesome: neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it any more".' And the water was made wholesome, and [it] is [still] so today, exactly as Elisha said it would [be]. (A. Jones, ed., *The Jerusalem Bible* [London, 1966], p. 455f., with three words added and four pairs of words inverted)

From this quotation it can be seen that the wordplay on  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$  and its reverse anagram  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$  preserves the symbolic reversal of consonants from the Hebrew original, which represents the transformation of the one substance from one state into another. We may compare Ezekiel 47:8: "He said, 'This water flows east down to the Arabah and to the sea; and flowing into the sea it makes its waters wholesome'." The reversal of the word 'salt' does not produce a word for 'regaining health' in English, but perhaps some effort should be made to choose a word which resembles 'salt' to translate the  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$ . I suggest 'make lusty', for the transitive, and 'grow lusty' for the intransitive. 'Lusty' is a synonym of 'healthy', but it also contains the word 'lust'; the root  $\text{ܠܠܝܚ}$ , too, has sexual affinities.



### Identification of the River of Paradise with the Tree of Life

In the picture presented by CG 2:6, as understood above, the River of Paradise resembles a tree with four branches, reminiscent of the Cross. Since the Cross is often called the 'Tree of Life', we have to ask ourselves whether the 'Tree of Life', in the very middle of the Garden of Eden, is not another name for the River of Paradise. In Paradise 3:1 Ephrem says that the summit of the mountain, "where dwells the Glory", is indescribable. He says that the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple represents the Tree of Life in Paradise. But then, in Paradise 3:2, he suggests: "Perhaps that blessed tree, the Tree of Life, is, by its rays, the sun of Paradise" (tr. Brock).

A huge, luminous, branching fountain in the sky (reminiscent of the significance attached to the similarity between the Syriac words for 'fire', 'river' and 'light' in the Faith 25:7) is only figuratively a tree; and it has no leaves. But such an objection can be turned into an argument in favour of the identity of the Tree and the River. After all, what we are trying to grasp is something strictly inconceivable: "Even thought cannot / Paint its simile [ܬܡܝܠܐ]" (Paradise 3:1). In this inconceivable reality all the apparently conflicting visions of the seers must somehow be harmonised (for example, Ezekiel 1 must be squared with Ezekiel 47). The Tree of Life is not itself a mere tree, but all trees, spiritual and material, are a lesser reflection of that inconceivable divine tree:

Helped by breezes, trees  
Bow, as in worship,  
To the Chief of Staff  
And King of All Trees.

(Paradise 3:2)

This image is reminiscent of Joseph's first dream (Genesis 37:7). It suggests that the Tree of Life may also be visualised as a great vertical sheaf of corn; and that the other trees may be compared with sheaves with the ears bent down towards the earth. The sheaf is a visual echo of the image of a fountain.

Perhaps, before the Fall, the Tree-River was a vertical column. Ephrem says elsewhere:

The tree of life was very sad,  
Seeing mankind concealed from him.  
He dived and hid in virgin earth,  
Then sprang, like dawn, on Golgotha.

(*Madrašbê* on Virginity [B39], ed. Beck [b22] = Virginity, 16:10, the first four lines)



If the Tree of Life is the River of Paradise, then this stanza solves two problems, and raises two more. CG 2:6 describes the Rivers of Paradise as going “right down into the sea”, then travelling “within the earth under the sea” to our world. This might be what is meant by “He dived [into water] and hid in virgin earth”. On this interpretation, the adjective ‘virgin’ implies that the feminine earth had not been penetrated by the masculine river before this time. Kronholm thinks Ephrem commits an anachronism in Paradise 11:11 when he speaks of the sources in our world being “curse-mingled”, but if Virginity 16:10 refers to the River under the name of the Tree of Life, then it would seem that Ephrem is speaking, both in Paradise 11:11 and in CG 2:6, about the course of the river after the Fall. This is the first problem which is solved. The second is that it is difficult to imagine the Tree of Life diving into water, burrowing underground, then springing up in another place, unless it is a river. The verb, ܒܥܕ, ‘spring up’, is used of water first, and then, by transference, of vegetation; another very similar verb, ܒܥܕ, is only used of water.

The first problem which the identification raises is that the Tree of Life does not rise again in our world at the sources of the Danube, Nile, Euphrates and Tigris, but on Golgotha; the second is that it rises again, not as a river, but as a cross of wood. We may endeavour to get round the first problem by saying that the sources of the Danube, Nile, Euphrates and Tigris, plotted on the map of the earth one after another: West, South, North, East (if my emendation be accepted), describe a zig-zag which, if completed by a line from its end to its beginning, would form a cross with its intersection at the centre of the earth, where Golgotha was supposed to be. This may be why Ephrem changes the order of the Bible, which names the Tigris before the Euphrates. Compare Faith 49:3-4: the Ark sailed from the East to the West, then to the South, and, finally, to the North, thus tracing the shape of the Cross (or of the reversed letter 𐤀) on the surface of the Flood; Ephrem here refers to the *Cave of Treasures* 19:5, ed. S.-M. Ri, CSCO 486 [= Syr. 207] (Louvain, 1987), where, however, the Ark traces the Cross from East to West, then from North to South.

The two visible manifestations of the Tree/River of Life on earth, as four sources and four beams of wood, are thus both signs of a huge invisible cross covering the whole earth, rising to heaven above Golgotha, like the crest of a tree, and going down to the Underworld below Golgotha, like the roots. Compare the *Cave of Treasures*, 4:3; 22:7-8; 23:16-17: Golgotha is at the centre of the earth and when the earth opened to receive the body of Adam, its four quarters parted, forming a cross-shaped trench across the surface of the earth. The spiritual reality cannot be fixed at any physical point. Both



physical manifestations are partial expressions of a greater truth in which they are integrated.

There is a possible solution to the second problem, also. It begins with Faith 58:1:

Who has seen water  
In the womb of trees,  
Changing there into  
A host of numbers?  
When, at a word of  
Command, it shapeshifts  
To take on body  
As building-timber,  
Water itself forms  
A boatbridge, so that  
By it we beat it.<sup>13</sup>

The *Cave of Treasures* 14:7 and 50:20-22, claims that trees (precisely, *buxus sempervirens*, according to Löw's interpretation of 𐤀𐤁𐤕 in Genesis 6:14) from the Holy Mountain of Paradise went to make Noah's Ark and that the Cross of Christ consisted of two pieces of wood which were originally part of the Ark. Ri has proposed the third century as the time of composition of the *Cave of Treasures*. Ephrem adopts several ideas from this book, which was later, for that very reason, wrongly attributed to him; e. g. in Faith 49, as we have seen above, and in Faith 31, where he is inspired by the *Cave of Treasures* 4:8-9 [cf. b1490]. To reconcile the picture of the Tree of Life diving [into water], then hiding underground, then emerging on Golgotha as the Cross, with that of the River of Paradise plunging into the surrounding sea, then tunnelling underground to the sources of the Danube, the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris, Ephrem might have modified the legend in the *Cave of Treasures* and said that the Ark was made of wood grown from all four rivers and that all four woods were used in making the Cross, in which the four branches of the River of Paradise were reunited. I have not yet found any positive evidence that he did so. But this idea agrees well, at a symbolic level, with the documented patterns of Ephrem's thought.

13 By using the rather forced idea that the water becomes vast *numbers* Ephrem draws the reader's attention to the fact that the word for 'numbers', ܚܝܬܐ, is written as ܚܬܐ, 'water', with the letter Nun (= 'fish') added on either side of the Yudh, preserving the symmetry suggested by Mim and Olaph, which are the mirror-image of one another. ܚܬܐ, 'building', another word in the stanza, can easily be made by rendering horizontal the diagonal stroke of the Mim. To get the word ܬܠܬܐ, 'tree', we have to reverse the Mim, so obtaining Olaph, take the first Nun, lengthen it to form Lomadh, and replace it after the Yudh. This chain of transformations mirrors the physical transformation described here.



The final stanza of Faith 6 says that God's Son took a body to become "a bridge of love" by which the Christian may "cross to the side where the Father is". In Faith 58, therefore, the water which "takes on body" to "form a bridge" refers to the Incarnation. The puzzling words "Changing there into / A host of numbers" are explained by the *Mimrê* on Faith (B64) = SF, ed. Beck (b20), 1:271: "The one juice sucked up through one tree becomes / The many different aspects (ܩܬܝܒܐ) of the whole". This is an illustration of the doctrine that "everything derives from one alone" (SF 1:193). Compare Faith 36:15: "Water's nature is likewise one, / But it divides into fruits and seeds and changes." If God is one and impossible to grasp, then He may be compared with water. By taking on body He likewise takes on plurality of aspect.

Another model of water taking on body is found in Bar Bahlul's dictionary, under the Syriac word for 'pearl': "This is a hard iridescent body which takes its origin from the impregnation of oysters by drops of the early rain (i.e. dew). (Oysters) are neither animals, nor do they possess sensation – though it is true that the fleshy substance which is found in them is classified as 'animal-vegetable', in that it resembles both of these. Nevertheless, they rise up to be impregnated and so conceive, dilating in an imitation of sexual yearning on the surface of the water. Upon being impregnated they contract and clam up, then plummet to the water's bed, where they get firmly lodged in hidden crevices. Inside them then that drop grows and hardens and from it is born this glorious body, the pearl." (*Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule*, ed. Rubens Duval, Paris: Presses Republicaines, 1888, vol. 2, col. 1151, closely paraphrased by Palmer.) The very same myth seems to provide Ephraim with a theological analogy in Faith 84:13-15.

Your scale evades  
a weighing-up  
with his, the Son's.  
Your birth was in  
the sea's abyss;  
on high was born  
your Maker's Son.  
Like you, yet not  
like you, but like  
his Father, He!

In poetry  
two wombs gave birth  
to you as well.  
From Heaven came down  
a liquid being;  
from Ocean rose  
a solid form.



Your second birth  
revealed your love  
for Humankind.

They pinned you, for  
your body made  
you tangible,  
upon the Crown,  
as on the Cross,  
for both of these  
mean victory,  
and spread you out,  
like words, attached  
to every ear.

From a cross-shaped lamp-stand above the lectern on the *bêma* in the centre of the church light fell on the Gospel-Book which was placed on that lectern and helped the reader to see the words which were written there. The light was visible from all four corners of the church, just as the words which were read from the *bêma* were audible to all the people. Faith 82:11 also addresses the pearl:

Your nature is  
as gentle as  
a silent lamb's.  
They pierce you, then  
they pin you high:  
the earlobe is  
your Golgotha.  
Thus lifted up,  
your rays reach out  
to many eyes.

The *bêma* represented Jerusalem, in the middle of the earth, and the lectern represented Golgotha. In these poems, water from heaven takes on body from a oyster and becomes a pearl, thus symbolising Christ's acquisition of a human body from the Virgin Mary. As the pearl is pinned to the 'leaf' of a human ear, so Christ was hanged, like a shining fruit, on the Cross, which is the Tree of Life. Faith 83:11 ends with these lines:

The earlobe is  
a tree of flesh,  
enshrining you,  
a fruit of light,  
as she that bore  
the Light enshrined  
Him in her womb.



The “blessed and spiritual” – and therefore invisible – water of Paradise (CG 2:6) must undergo a similar transformation before it can be manifested to the human senses in the world of the visible creation. This transformation occurs in the two ‘wombs’ of the sea and of the “virgin earth” (Virginity 16:10), where the ethereal “blessing” (ܠܒܠܐ) is mingled with salt and of fresh water, respectively (Paradise 11:11) and, mingling its refined nature with their coarse bodies, cures them of their sickness. This is another allegory of the Incarnation. Christ’s divine nature was mingled with humanity in the wombs of his mother and of the earth (Sheol), that is by being born and by dying as a human being. He is the Medicine of Life, which the faithful receive in the body of the church (which represents the earth), first in the form of Scriptural doctrine, then in the form of the bread and the wine.

That the latter were understood in the early north-Mesopotamian church as what Ezekiel meant when he described the river of life coming out from under the throne to water the trees on which grew the fruit which healed the people is shown, I think, by the report that two bronze trees were ‘planted’ on either side of the sanctuary entrance in the conventual church of the Abbey of Qartmin in 518.<sup>14</sup> Here the trees were a visible sign of the presence of an invisible river.<sup>15</sup>

The same may have been true of the “Cross of Light” above the Golgotha-lectern on the *bêma* of the sixth-century church of Edessa (*Sugithâ* on the church of Edessa, Stanza 16 [‘Ayn], most recently edited by K. E. McVey in *ARAM* 5 [1993], p. 355). To fulfil its obvious practical function, this lamp-stand must have had one branch which hung over the Gospel-Book. It was not, therefore, a Cross in the normal sense of the word, but more like a tree with five branches, one of which was vertical. Its six limbs, including the trunk of the tree, represented “the six directions” in which, according to Ephrem, the

14 A. Palmer, *Monk and mason on the Tigris frontier: the early history of Tur ‘Abdin* (Cambridge University Oriental Publications 39; Cambridge, 1990), p. 126f., referring to *The Qartmin Trilogy* LX.14–LXI.2, edited on the first microfiche.

15 Garth Fowden adds: “Compare the two trees that flank Adam enthroned in the mosaic fragment at Copenhagen. This figure probably was placed in front of the sanctuary step, like the similarly enthroned Adam found in the basilica of the Archangel Michael at Huarte near Apamea and published by the Canivets. Here, too, he is flanked by trees. Adam is, as it were, the forerunner of Christ on the heavenly throne, the altar. In the Hama Museum one can see the third in this brief series of 5th–6th c. enthroned Adams, and this one is labelled in Syriac as well as Greek. It, like the Copenhagen mosaic, is a fragment. But the Huarte floor is substantially preserved and provides a rich impression of Paradise (A. is naming the animals, who crowd round him.)” For a full description with photographs of all three Adams, a discussion, full references, and a plan of the Huarte floor, see Pauline Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban. Décor, archéologie et liturgie* (Publications d’histoire de l’art et d’archéologie de l’Université Catholique de Louvain, 69; Louvain-la-Neuve: Collège Érasme, 1988), p. 104ff., with Planche hors-texte 5.



created world is framed: North, South, East and West, Up and Down (Nativity 27:12). This shining tree was the visible sign of the invisible river which flowed into the church from the silent page of the Gospel, taking on voice, a kind of body, in the 'womb' of the reader's mouth (cf. Faith 2).

In Faith 48:10 Ephrem compares the fourfold Gospel (ܠܬܠܬܐ, 'the News') to the Four Rivers, taking them in the order South-North-West-East, another Cross (the Syriac puns on the names Gihon, Proth, Pishon and Deqlath):

The News, like the Nile,  
 Filled ears with water,  
 Bore fruit by teaching,  
 Like the Euphrates,  
     Dammed doubt (the Danube  
     Is stopped by the sea),  
     Made us Tigris-bright  
     By its speech,  
         That, swimming up it  
         To greet Paradise,  
         We might not transgress  
         Its life-giving limit.

The 'four rivers' of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John flow out from the *bêma*, which Ephrem describes, in his *Mîmrê* on Nicomedia (B78, VIII 621-34), ed. Renoux (b140, p. 151), as a source at which the people, like sheep, come to drink. This symbolic identification brings the sources of the four terrestrial branches of the River of Paradise together, in the sacred topography of the church-building, at Golgotha, and so confirms that what Ephrem says about the Tree of Life in Virginity 16:10 is compatible with what he says about the River of Paradise in CG 2:6.

The *Cave of Treasures* (Ch. 18) shows that the Christian *bêma*, which develops that of the Jewish synagogue, was a central feature of Aramaean church-buildings in the third century. By the fifth century stone *bêmata* were being built in many churches of Syria, presumably replacing the wooden ones which would have been used by Ephrem.<sup>16</sup> The *bêma*-liturgy described in a later commentary is already implicit in the famous 'Hymn of the Pearl' from the *Acts of the Apostle Judas Thomas*.<sup>17</sup> The letter which flies, like a bird, from

16 See most recently Emma Loosley, *The architecture and liturgy of the Bema in fourth- to sixth-century Syrian churches*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies. 2001. (Shortly to be published by the Université du Saint-Ésprit, Kaslik, Lebanon.)

17 This is noted neither by Paul-Hubert Poirier, *L'hymne de la perle des Actes de Thomas* (Homo religiosus, 8; Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d'histoire des religions, 1981), nor by Johann Ferreira, *The Hymn of the Pearl* (Early Christian Studies, 3; Sydney: St Paul's, 2002).



the east to the west and there wakes up the sleeping hero and reminds him of his vocation is clearly the Word of God. The *Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae* (probably written in the ninth century, but preserving a very ancient tradition of liturgical drama) describes the procession of the Gospel Book from the apse, where it has rested on the altar, to the *bêma*, in the mathematical centre of the church (where it will be placed on another altar, the lectern) as the procession of the Word from Heaven (where He is enthroned at the right hand of his Father) to Jerusalem (where He will be crucified on Golgotha, at the mid-point of the earth).<sup>18</sup> The codex may well have been held above the head of the carrier and could be imagined as flying of its own accord from East to West. The 'wings' of this 'bird' did not open, it is probably true, until it 'alighted' on the lectern. But the noise of rustling feathers by which the bird-letter wakes the man in the 'Hymn of the Pearl' corresponds exactly to the rustling of the leaves of the Gospel-Book when the reader is looking for the page at which to start.

We may therefore assume that the liturgy in Ephrem's time was likewise a drama in which was played out the history of salvation. The apse was Paradise and this explains why it is said, according to one interpretation of Genesis 2:8, to be in the East, whereas Heaven, which is identified with Paradise, is above. The westward-facing semi-circle of the apse complements the eastward-facing semicircle of the *bêma* in most late antique churches where a *bêma* has been preserved. In the same way, but in the vertical dimension, the downward-facing hemisphere of Heaven faced, as Christians probably believed, the upward-facing hemisphere of the Earth. The fact that Paradise is, in reality, above Jerusalem, not to the East of it, probably found expression in the church-buildings used by Ephrem in a difference of height between the platform in the apse and the platform of the *bêma*, the latter being distinctly lower, as it is in the slightly later *bêma*-churches which have been found in Syria. The journey of the Gospel from the apse to the *bêma* seems to have been mirrored, in Ephrem's thought, by the descent of the branches of the River and the Tree (or the River called the Tree of Life) into the earth and their emergence at the four corners and at the centre of its flat surface. The return journey of the Gospel from the *bêma* to the apse signified the return of the Word to His heavenly Throne, having accomplished his mission, which was to open the way for human beings to return to Paradise. The way this was expressed in the language of the two metaphors we are discussing is that human beings, by being baptized, become fishes swimming upstream to the source of the fourfold stream, or birds taking refuge in the branches of the tree (Virginity 16:10).

18 *Anonymi auctoris expositio officiorum ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta*, ed./tr. (Latin) R. H. Connolly, vol. 2. CSCO 72/76 = Syr. 29/32 (Louvain, 1960/1971), p. 7/10



Adam and Eve were banished from the Holy Mountain and a 'fence' was erected on its lower slopes to keep them out (Paradise 4:1, 4; as we have seen in note 1, this may simply mean that they were no longer able to scale the vertical cliffs at the bottom of the dome); but the Tree of Life, in its compassion, bent down long branches over the fence, so as to put its fruit within their reach (Faith 30:5; Paradise 7:26). If we visualise this, we see human beings just outside the cliffs surrounding the Mountain. But this is not possible: before the Fall, perhaps, as will be the case after the Restoration, immortal humans could dance on the surface of the waves (Paradise 1:6), but the human race was banished further from the Garden in the days of Noah and has since been housed in a dungeon underneath the dome (Paradise 5:13). When the Ark landed on Mount Qardu and the water subsided, Noah found himself in this region under the stars, which we still inhabit (Paradise 1:10). He gazed up at those stars and wished himself in the Garden, which he knew was above the firmament. But how could the Tree of Life reach him in this place, after bending its branches down over the 'fence'? Only by following the paths of the Rivers of Paradise, down through the sea surrounding those cliffs (paralleled in Christ's gestation, baptism, and suffering<sup>19</sup>), into the earth beneath the sea (his death and burial), and up into our world (his resurrection), from which it then shot back up (his ascension), like a vertical fountain-jet, to pierce the firmament<sup>20</sup> and open a way back into Paradise.<sup>21</sup>

Stanza 8 of what was probably, as Beck suggests in the foreword to his edition (b17, vol. 1, p. i-ii), the first of Ephrem's five *madrāšē* on Julian the Apostate, though it somehow got separated from the other four and is now classified as an isolated poem on the Church (B41), paints the image of a branch, apparently weighed down with fruit, which then springs back up, bringing with it the human beings who have taken hold of that fruit while the branch was bent down. Ephrem does not actually make the comparison Solomon

19 Luke 12:50.

20 Ephrem frequently calls the Cross by the name *سُفُون*, an adjective formed from the past participle of the verb 'to erect' and converted to a noun by the omission of the unknown masculine noun with which it originally agreed (e. g. the word for 'wood'). The word 'siphon' is used by Euripides as a name for the male organ of generation. The way Sahdona and Solomon of Basra describe a tree is reminiscent of the moment of ejaculation. The sexual associations which Ephrem's imagery prompted may be responsible for Solomon's analogy between the way Jesus re-entered the other world from which He came without tearing the firmament and the way he entered this world without tearing his mother's maidenhead.

21 A question about the 'mechanism' by which Christ ascended into heaven prompted Solomon of Basra to offer as an analogy of the ascension the 'miracle' whereby "water rises in the roots of olives ... and arrives in the blink of an eye at the leaves and the blossoms and the fruits, as if by means of something like the spout of an artificial fountain". See Text 6 in the lexical excursus above, from 'The Book of the Bee'.



of Basra makes between the Ascension and a fountain of water, but the image of a powerful bough which is brought down to the ground, only to spring back up with enormous force, does express, at least, the upward thrust of that image. The River image has the advantage of corresponding better to the relative positions of Paradise and the earth.

Jesus, bend your love  
 Down within our reach!  
 Bough, weighed down with fruit,  
 Which ungrateful men  
     Ate their fill of, then  
     Foulmouthed, and it bowed  
     Right to Adam's place  
     In Sheol,  
         Rose and took him back  
         Up to Eden! Bless  
         Him who bowed that we,  
         Holding on, might rise!

### The restoration of Paradise

The title of this article, 'Paradise Restored', recalls that of Milton's 'Paradise Regained'. The first part, in which the Aramaic texts were emended and Aramaic words carefully examined in their various contexts, and retranslated, resembles the painstaking processes involved in restoring a painting which has been tampered with by daubers and discoloured by time. It enabled us to look at Ephrem's picture of Paradise, restored to something approaching its original outline and freshness. When we did so, we noticed that the branching spout of the Head of the Spring occupies the space reserved, on the summit of the Mountain, for the Tree of Life. "When you have eliminated every other possibility, what is left, however improbable, must be the truth." Anyone who takes exception to giving two names, that of 'river' and that of 'tree', to one and the same entity should reflect on the way, according to Ephrem, that God teaches his creatures. I quote the last stanza of Faith 31:

Love, that He might teach  
 Us that both it was  
 And was not Himself,  
 Made Himself a face  
     Maids might see, then seemed  
     This, now that, lest we,  
     Thinking He is thus,  
     Be harmed.



Out of human form  
 He came not, yet came  
 Out by change, to teach :  
 No form is his own.

A similar idea lies behind the following quotation, but this applies, not to the forms assumed by God Himself, but to the names given in Scripture to the features of Paradise:

There is no other  
 Way for a speaker,  
 Without using names  
 Of the things revealed,  
     To paint a likeness,  
     For his listeners,  
     Of the things concealed -  
 If He  
     That made the Garden  
     Dresses his Greatness  
     In names from our place,  
     Why not the Garden?

If you missed the point  
 And concentrated  
 On the names borrowed  
 By Greatness to help,  
     You'd slander It and  
     Misrepresent It, -  
     Betray that Goodness  
     Which bent  
         To your childish height,  
         Dressing in your forms,  
         To bring you to Its  
         Unrelated forms.

(Paradise 11:5-6)

Beck, Lavenant and Brock understand 'Greatness' in the last stanza to refer to God Himself. But if this is right, then Faith 31 contradicts Paradise 11; for the first says that "No form is his own" (ܐܠܐ ܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ), whereas the last speaks of "the forms [of goodness]" (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ) and uses goodness (ܐܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ) as another name for the greatness of which it speaks. It is true that greatness (ܐܠܐ ܕܡܝܢ) is sometimes a name for God in Ephrem (*e. g.* at the end of CG 2:4), but God's creature, humanity, according to Ephrem, is also very great, although his Maker cannot be encompassed in thought by a creature (Faith 69:18), so that the real greatness of humanity is only achieved when human beings admit that God is greater than they (Faith 1:18). Now the summit of the Mountain



of Paradise cannot even be represented by a metaphor in human thought (Paradise 3:1). From this it follows that the greatness of that mystery exceeds the greatness of humanity. It is the former greatness which is the subject of Paradise 11:6. Compare Faith 81:1, which speaks of the Kingdom as "that greatness". Exactly the same argument applies to the goodness of God, of Man and of the Garden.

Paradise, of its goodness, has borrowed the name of a tree for its central feature, but we would miss the point if we concentrated on the idea of a tree to the exclusion of other ideas. The idea of a tree is an idea from our place; it is not one of the forms of the greatness and goodness of Paradise itself. So that we should not fall into this error, we are given to understand that what is at the heart of Paradise may also be called a river. Ephrem says, in Paradise 12:15, that the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are:

The blest double springs	ܐܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ
Of all the good things	ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܡܢ

In this way we are brought, or introduced, to the unfamiliar form of that greater created goodness.

I knew an old lady who always plugged the holes in a power-socket with plastic plugs because she was afraid that the electricity might leak out. Somebody had explained electricity to her using the analogy of gas. She had missed the point by concentrating on the idea of gas. I told her that electricity is like gas in one way, but in another it is more like the mumps, because it is only communicated by contact.

The most sacred mystery of the greatness and goodness of Paradise is itself a spiritual expression of the greatness and goodness of its Creator, which, according to Ephrem, surpasses all our powers of comprehension. The reason why it is important to restore Ephrem's necessarily composite picture of the heavenly mystery of the Head of the Source, or the Tree of Life, which has no one analogue on earth, is that this picture is an expression of Ephrem's idea of God's Son and of what He did and what He does. It is an icon of Paradise restored.

The Nicene Creed provides the basic framework for this idea. Christ came down from heaven and took on body from 'holy spirit' and from a human virgin, Mary, who gave birth to God in the form of a human being. He was crucified under the governorship of Pontius Pilate, suffered agonies, died and was buried. But, after less than three days, He rose from the grave and went back up to the right hand of his Father.

The River, in Ephrem's icon, comes down from heaven and takes on body from the sea through which it passes. It is then buried under the earth, but







His side was opened by a Roman lance and there flowed out of it a double stream of water and blood. Earth opened again and Adam's skull was 'baptised', its cavity filled with the life-giving Blood of Christ. Thanks to the hole made in Jesus's side a hole was made in the fence of Paradise. Adam found himself back in the Cave of Treasures and there was no longer any impediment to his ultimate return to the Garden of Delights. The lance of Longinus had removed the Cherub's sword.

The symmetries of this complex icon are worked out in detail in passages which are collected by Murray (**b1412**) and Brock (**b326**, pp. 62-66, together with **b1122**, **b1124**, pp. 88-93, and **b321**, pp. 61-64). Nativity 8:4 may stand here for them all:

Bless his Mercy!  
He saw the Lance  
Near Paradise,  
Barring the way  
Back to Life's Tree,  
And came and took  
Our fragile flesh,  
To pierce a way  
Through his pierced side  
To Paradise.

But it is another of the *madrāšê* on the Nativity which forms the most fitting epilogue to this paper, for there the new-born Jesus is called "a new source, opened by Heaven for those on earth who were thirsty for life, but had not tasted" and then identified with the Tree of Life, of which Adam never tasted, under the name of a 'spring':

O spring untasted  
By Man,  
That opened twelve springs  
Of words, filling him  
With eternal life!

### Acknowledgements and Bibliography

My wife, Ludmila, illustrated this paper with a diagram of Paradise as it may have been imagined by Ephraim (Figure 1), seen from above (A), then from the East (B), showing Golgotha beneath the Summit from which the four-branched River springs; and with a drawing made from a photograph of the ancient stone cross above the tomb of Saint Thomas at Mylapore (Figure 2), showing what might be four spouts of water emerging at the base of a 'Tree of



Life' with budding arms. I wrote the first draft of this paper at the Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute in Kottayam, Kerala. I am grateful to the Director, Dr Jacob Thekeparampil, for his hospitality and to the MA students for stimulating me to answer their questions about Ephrem's Genesis Commentary. The library there, built up partly by the efforts of the Director and partly by donations from friends, enabled me to consult most of the relevant literature. Colleagues responded generously to my requests for help with completing my documentation. I am particularly grateful to Kees den Biesen for his invaluable *Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* (Giove in Umbria, 2002) and to Kristian Heal for giving me a copy of it. When I returned to England, I consulted all the titles listed there under the Commentary on Genesis, with four exceptions. U. Neri, *Biblia. I libri della Bibbia interpretati dalla grande tradizione: AT 1: Genesi* (Torino, 1986), lxxxix-xcii: "Efrem Siro", and M. Treppner, *Ephräm der Syrer und seine Explanatio der vier ersten Kapitel der Genesis* (Passau, 1893) were not to be found in Oxford or in the British Library. I had no time to consult, in Oxford, T.-J. Lamy, 'L'Exégèse en Orient au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, ou les commentaires de Saint Éphrem', *Revue Biblique* 2 (1893), 5-25; 161-81; 465-86. For those readers who do not yet have access to den Biesen's Bibliography, I list here, in the order of their B-numbers, the titles to which I have referred in this article.

**b15** = E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Fide* [CSCO 154/155, Syr. 73/74], Louvain, 1955.

**b17** = E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum* [CSCO 174/175, Syr. 78/79], Louvain, 1957.

**b20** = E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Sermones de Fide* [CSCO 212/213, Syr. 88/89], Louvain, 1961.

**b22** = E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Virginitate* [CSCO 223/224, Syr. 94/95], Louvain, 1962.

**b122** = C. W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan, of which the greater part has been transcribed from the palimpsest B. M. Add. 14623 and is now first published by C. W. Mitchell. Vol. I: The Discourses addressed to Hypatius*, London, 1912; reprint Farnborough, 1969.

**b140** = C. Renoux, *Éphrem de Nisibe. Mimre sur Nicomédie. Édition des*



*fragments de l'original syriaque et de la version arménienne. Traduction française, introduction et notes par C. Renoux* [Patrologia Orientalis 37/2-3], Turnhout, 1975.

**b157** = R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum commentarii* [CSCO 152/153, Syr. 71/72], Louvain, 1955.

**b224** = E. Beck, *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies: [lateinische] Übersetzung und Kommentar* [Studia Anselmiana 26], Rome, 1951.

**b239** = E. Beck, 'Ephräms Rede gegen eine philosophische Schrift des Bardaisan (übersetzt und erklärt)', in *Oriens Christianus* 60 (1976), 24-68.

**b321** = S. P. Brock, *The luminous eye: the spiritual world vision of St Ephrem* [Placid Lectures 6, Center for Indian and Inter-religious Studies], Rome, 1985.

**b326** = S. P. Brock, *St Ephrem, Hymns on Paradise. Introduction and Translation*, New York, 1990.

**b551** = S. Hida, *Efraim Syriern. Hymnerna om Paradiiset* [Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise], Skellefteå, 1985.

**b574** (out of alphabetical order in Biesen) = A. G. P. Janson & L. van Rompay, *Efrem de Syriër: uitleg van het Boek Genesis* [Christelijke Bronnen 4], Kampen, 1993.

**b631** = T. Kronholm, 'The trees of Paradise in the hymns of Ephraem Syrus', in *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 11 (1977-1978), 48-56.

**b653** = R. Lavenant, *Éphrem de Nisibe. Hymnes sur le Paradis*, [Sources Chrétiennes 137,] Paris, 1968 [introduction: F. Graffin].

**b708** = E. G. Mathews, Jr. & J. P. Amar, *Saint Ephrem the Syrian, Selected prose works: Commentary on Genesis; Commentary on Exodus; Homily on our Lord; Letter to Publius. Translated by E. G. Mathews, Jr. and J. P. Amar. Edited by K. McVey* [the Fathers of the Church, 91], Washington (DC), 1994.

**b837** = U. Possek, *Evidence of Greek philosophical concepts in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian* [CSCO 580, Subs. 102], Louvain, 1999.



**b1077** = J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana, in qua manuscriptos codices syriacos, arabicos, persicos, ... ex Oriente conquisitos, ... & Bibliothecae Vaticanae addictos recensuit, digessit, & genuine scripta a spuriis secrevit, ... Joseph Simonius Assemanus ...*, 3 volumes, Romae, 1719-1728.

**b1122** = S. P. Brock, 'The mysteries hidden in the side of Christ', in *Sobornost* 7:6 (1977), 462-472.

**b1124** = S. P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian baptismal tradition* [Syrian Churches Series 9], Poona, 1979.

**b1412** = R. Murray, 'The lance which re-opened Paradise – a mysterious reading in the early Syriac Fathers', in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), 224-234.

**b1490** = A. S.-M. Ri, 'La Caverne des Trésors et Mar Éphrem', in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII, Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages, 11-14 August 1996* [Orientalia Christiana Analecta 256], Rome, 1998, 71-83.