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Interpolated stanzas in Ephraim's Madroshe LXVI-LXVIII on Faith

Volume VII of the collected lyric poetry of Ephraim of Nisibis (d. 373), according to a probably sixth-century index, contained "eighty-seven Madroshe on faith".¹ This volume has been preserved entire in two MSS (A and C) and in part in two more (B and D).² All four MSS are of the sixth century (A may be even older³), B being dated to 522, C to 552 and D to 519. Internal evidence, spread throughout the cycle, points to the last few years of Ephraim's life as the time of composition,⁴ so there was an interval of one and a half centuries between the day the ink dried on the last page of the autograph and the day on which the earliest dated MS (an anthology⁵) began to be written. Although A may be older and may come from Edessa, where the cycle was composed, none of the extant MSS appears to have been copied from it.⁶

1 A. de Halleux, 'Une clé pour les hymnes d'Ephrem dans le ms. Sinai syr. 10', *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 171-99 [edition]; *idem*, 'La transmission des hymnes d'Ephrem d'après le ms. Sinai syr. 10, f. 165v-178r', *Symposium Syriacum* (OCA 197; Rome 1974) 21-63; S. P. Brock, 'The transmission of Ephrem's *madrashe* in the Syriac liturgical tradition', *Studia Patristica* 33, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Leuven 1997) 490-505, p. 492f.

2 The *sigla* were assigned by E. Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de fide* (CSCO 154; Louvain 1955) ii f., whose description and illustrations (Pl. I = B[ritish] L[ibrary] Add[itional MS] 12,176 = A; Pl. II = Vat[ican] cod[ice] sir[iaco] 111 = B; Pl. III = Vat. cod. sir. 113 = C; Pl. IV = BL Add. 14,571 = D) are my source in what follows. Beck prints the text of A, except that he prints that of C wherever A has a lacuna (see the following note); he places all variants, including those which he identifies (with the word '*lege*') as better readings, in the apparatus criticus. Beck found B "frequently unreadable, especially in the first half"; it is one of the MSS which sank with the boat in which they were being transported from the Monastery of the Syrians in the Nitrian Desert and which the Vatican Catalogue describes as *e limoso Nili fluminis imo extractos*.

3 W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 2 (London 1871), p. 409 [DXXXVII = Add. 12,176]: "The writing [...] is evidently that of an Edessene scribe of the vth or vith cent.; after fol. 19 there is a leaf missing, creating a lacuna in the text from the second half of the first line of the second stanza of the fiftieth Madroshe to the second word of the fourth line of the fourteenth stanza of the fifty-second Madroshe, inclusive."

4 A. Palmer, 'Restoring the ABC in Ephraim's Cycles on Faith and Paradise', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55 (2003) 147-94. See also note 15.

5 Of the cycle on Faith, B contains nos. 10, 11, 12, 14, 21, 23 (on f. 60-67) and 32 (on f. 69-70).

6 Beck, *ed. cit.*, p. iii f.

"When the evidence of the various sources for the text has been collected and organized, apographa eliminated, hyparchetypes and archetypes reconstructed where possible, and so on, the time has come to try to establish what the author originally wrote. Sometimes this is a matter of choosing between transmitted variants, sometimes it is a matter of going beyond them and emending the text by conjecture."⁷ Beck collects and organizes the ancient MSS; he does not make a systematic search for excerpts from this cycle in later liturgical compilations.⁸ He shows that AC often go together against B in their transmission of the responses, though C was apparently not copied from A, since it shares some readings with B against A; but he does not reconstruct a stemma or decide whether D is an apographon. Here and there, he selects a variant from the apparatus as preferable to the reading transmitted by A, but he does not systematically try to establish what Ephraim originally wrote. In particular, he makes no attempt to identify the interpolated stanzas, the presence of which is betrayed by anomalies in the acrostics, or the interpolated lines which are shown up by anomalies in the metre. Besides, he does not always set out the lines correctly, according to the metre; and, while he occasionally rejects a reading on the basis of the metre, he nowhere investigates the principles of Ephraimic prosody. Lastly, techniques for reading erased writing have been greatly improved since the 1950s, when Beck tried unsuccessfully to read many portions of B. There is, then, reason enough to prepare a new edition. The present article is one of a series in which the principles of the new edition are to be threshed out, by trial and error.

The Ionians made the assumption that nature was subject to certain laws and that these can be discovered. These two assumptions have served us well in our attempt to acquire the means to control our environment. My assumptions are that Ephraim's lessons were originally so well constructed and so clearly expressed, that even a modern reader, provided he has patience, should be able understand them and commit them to memory. Let us see how far these assumptions – justified *a priori* by the judgement of the tradition which looks up to Ephraim as the greatest teacher of all time – will take us in distinguishing between the genuine and the spurious in works attributed to this author.

The alphabetical acrostic is a time-honoured mnemonic device. Another

7 M. L. West, *Textual criticism and editorial technique* (Stuttgart 1973), p. 48f.; Syriac editions would greatly benefit from the application of the principles clearly set out in this book.

8 Brock, *art. cit.*, p. 495: "Beck only made a rather limited use of these [medieval] liturgical manuscripts, and a wider use of them would undoubtedly prove worthwhile"; for example, Faith 40:2-3, 46:12, 47:11 and 48:10 were all reused in two Madroshe transmitted in the Syrian Orthodox *Fenqitho*. It is not impossible that individual stanzas transmitted in this way have preserved original readings lost in ABCD.

such device is numerology. It is a fair assumption that Ephraim, for whom letters also served as signs for numbers, originally constructed his acrostics and their numbers according to a regular pattern. Medieval readers read a book with an eye to memorizing it. Ephraim will have wanted to help his readers to do this. For that reason it is extremely unlikely that Ephraim ever wrote an acrostic in which there were two stanzas for the first letter, eight for the second and one for the third letter in the alphabet. Yet this is how Faith LXVI has been transmitted.

My plan here is to argue, in Part One, for the rationalization of the two alphabets, Faith LXVI-LXVII and Faith LXVIII, which are transmitted with a total of seventy-two stanzas, by the removal of twenty-eight stanzas. I shall argue that Faith LXVI 2-9, 14, 23, 24, Faith LXVII 1, 3-7, 9, 10, 12, 14-17, 20, 22, 24 and LXVIII 22 were not included in the original composition by Ephraim, but added later. At the end of Part One, hoping to develop a generally applicable method for distinguishing a genuine Ephraimic stanza from a spurious one, I shall classify the instruments which turn out to be useful for this task. In Part Two I shall present a theory to explain how these stanzas came to be interpolated into these poems and suggest that the conjectural layout which forms the basis of this theory is confirmed by the numerological and otherwise symbolic interpretations to which it naturally lends itself. At this point it will emerge that the anomalies which remain in Faith LXVIII after the excision of one of the two stanzas on the last letter of the alphabet may have helped to produce a symbolic pattern of numbers on the page.

Faith LXVI-LXVIII, as transmitted in ABC (D contains none of these), cry out for rationalisation. The first two of these three Madroshe originally ran through the Syriac alphabet from Olap to Mim (the first thirteen letters, the numbers ten and three having for Ephraim a symbolic value) and from Nun to Taw (the last nine letters, nine being, as three times three, a symbol in its own right).⁹ Faith LXVIII covers the entire alphabet in a single acrostic poem, except that the initials Kap, Lomad and Olap there replace Olap, Waw and Yud, respectively. There is 'method' in the 'madness' of this substitution, as I shall suggest in Part Two. This apparently irrational alphabet should not, therefore, be rationalised. Besides, rationalisation would entail altering the text; and this would create a new problem: we should have to explain why any later scribe should have consciously irrationalised the text. It would be easier to explain why they should have rationalised an irrational alphabet.

⁹ Note that Faith IV originally ran through the first nine letters of the alphabet, while Faith V ran through the remaining thirteen, so that this two-Madroshe alphabet is the mirror-image of the two-Madroshe alphabet in Faith LXVI-LXVII.

Part One

Faith LXVI-LXVIII have acquired a number of stanzas in the process of transmission, as a boot gathers clay in walking over a field. This fact obliges the serious student of Ephraim, wherever he finds more than one stanza on a single letter of the alphabet, to investigate which stanza is genuine. This investigation can best be conducted on the basis of two assumptions. One is that Ephraim was a master of the Syriac language, an assumption justified by the judgement of all Syriac Christians (for if any stanza seems to lack that mastery, it is unlikely to be by him). The other is that he was a master of poetic composition, for then, if any stanza seems, by comparison with another stanza on the same letter, to be less well placed or less well integrated, it can be eliminated on that criterion. In addition, it is sometimes possible to eliminate a candidate which is otherwise anomalous or anachronistic, arguing either from what is known about the history of Ephraim's time, or from the outlines of his teaching, as credibly attested in a number of probably genuine passages.

The task which lies before us will be clearer if we set out in tabular form the sequence of acrostic initials in the three poems as transmitted and place beside it the unadulterated series Olap-Mim and Nun-Taw, which represent the presumed original forms of Faith LXVI and LXVII, and the twenty-two letter sequence with its three deliberate mistakes, which may be assumed to have belonged to Faith LXVIII (Table 1). This table makes is easy to see, for example, that the three poems were originally like three bottles, of which the first was half full, the second one-third full, the third seven-ninths full; and that these 'bottles of good wine' have been filled up with dirty water, in the process of transmission, on average to eight-ninths of their capacity. The 'bottles' of which I speak were presumably pages, as I shall argue in Part Two. The idea that the capacity of one page was twenty-seven stanzas derives from the observation – to be documented below – that the column-length was apparently fixed at nine stanzas of five lines each, with room for a response of the same length, where needed: a total of fifty ruled lines to the page, a limit which is approached by some early Syriac MSS, though it must be admitted that none of those that have been preserved respects the line-divisions of Ephraim's metres. Three columns of nine give twenty-seven.

Table 1. LEFT: Initial letters of the stanzas of Faith LXVI-LXVIII, as transmitted by the manuscripts ABC (Faith LXVI and LXVII 1-2 are missing from manuscript C). RIGHT: A rationalised version of the irrational series displayed in Table 1a. Beside the names of the letters are written their numerical values. ! = not to be rationalised. Olap can also have the value 1000.

| | LXVI AB | LXVII ABC | LXVIII ABC | | LXVI | LXVII | LXVIII |
|----|------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Olap | Nun (AB) | Kap | Rationalised: | Olap 1 | Nun 50 | Kap 20! |
| 2 | Olap | Nun (AB) | Bet | | Bet 2 | Semkat 60 | Bet 2 |
| 3 | Bet | Nun | Gomal | | Gomal 3 | Ayn 70 | Gomal 3 |
| 4 | Bet | Nun | Dolat | | Dolat 4 | Pe 80 | Dolat 4 |
| 5 | Bet | Nun | He | | He 5 | Sode 90 | He 5 |
| 6 | Bet | Nun | Lomad | | Waw 6 | Qup 100 | Lomad 30! |
| 7 | Bet | Nun | Zay | | Zay 7 | Rish 200 | Zay 7 |
| 8 | Bet | Semkat | Het | | Het 8 | Shin 300 | Het 8 |
| 9 | Bet | Semkat | Tet | | Tet 9 | Taw 400 | Tet 9 |
| 10 | Bet | Semkat | Olap | | Yud 10 | | Olap 1! |
| 11 | Gomal | Ayn | Kap | | Kap 20 | | Kap 20 |
| 12 | Dolat | Ayn | Lomad | | Lomad 30 | | Lomad 30 |
| 13 | He | Pe | Mim | | Mim 40 | | Mim 40 |
| 14 | He | Pe | Nun | | | | Nun 50 |
| 15 | Waw | Pe | Semkat | | | | Semkat 60 |
| 16 | Zay | Pe | Ayn | | | | Ayn 70 |
| 17 | Het | Pe | Pe | | | | Pe 80 |
| 18 | Tet | Sode | Sode | | | | Sode 90 |
| 19 | Yud | Qup | Qup | | | | Qup 100 |
| 20 | Kap | Rish | Rish | | | | Rish 200 |
| 21 | Lomad | Rish | Shin | | | | Shin 300 |
| 22 | Mim | Shin | Taw | | | | Taw 400 |
| 23 | Mim | Shin | Taw | | | | |
| 24 | Mim | Taw | | | | | |
| 25 | | Taw | | | | | |
| 26 | | | | | | | |
| 27 | | | | | | | |

Faith LXVI. Which of the two stanzas on Olap is genuine?

Of the two stanzas on Olap in Faith LXVI, the second is less likely to be by Ephraim, because the first stanza of an Ephraimic Madroshe usually contains, as it were, the seed, or programme, of the rest. The theme of LXVI is the theological dispute which was tearing the Church apart in the latter part of Ephraim's life. The dispute was due, Ephraim thought, to those who "set themselves to circumscribe the Creator" (LXVI 1). There is no hint of this in the second stanza on Olap (LXVI 2), which may be translated as follows: "Let him that has sensed / that he is earth / thank the finger / which moulded him / and established him!"

Faith LXVI. Which of the eight stanzas on Bet is genuine?

Here is a translation of the first of the eight stanzas on Bet (LXVI 3): "Amongst the debaters / a dispute has arisen (lit. fallen) / over (lit. by) the great sea, / that they might measure it / as [one might measure] a puddle." This, at least, is related to the theme of the Madrosho, but it does not seem logical (and perhaps the word-order and the choice of preposition are not those of a master): the dispute alluded to is presumably *whether* one should try to 'measure', i. e. define in rational terms, the 'ocean', i. e. God; and, if so, *how*. There might have arisen an *idea* that God might be defined in rational terms, but that idea is not a *dispute*.

The last stanza on Bet (LXVI 10) has as its subject "the Evil One" and the same subject is assumed in the stanza on Gomal, which begins "He incited human beings with [words] which have no use". The stanza on Gomal may be presumed genuine, because it has not been transmitted with a doublet. Of the first seven stanzas on Bet not one supplies a suitable subject for the stanza on Gomal. Faith LXVI 10 is therefore the genuine stanza on Bet.

Faith LXVI. Which of the two stanzas on He is genuine?

The stanza on Dolat, which – like that on Gomal – may be presumed genuine, since it is the only stanza on that letter, says that people "have torn the truth / as [one might tear] a cloth". The first stanza on He (LXVI 13) follows on well from this: "But as for the Truth, / He is not [or: cannot be] divided [understanding Truth as a name for Christ (cf. John 14:16)], / because it is those who tear Him / that He tears off / from the [cloth of the] Kingdom." The second stanza on He (LXVI 14) is not such a strong candidate: "Behold, they have put on armour, / as in war, / on account of a victory / in which is hidden / a defeat." Here, as in LXVI 3, the choice of preposition seems wrong: we expect 'for the sake of a victory'. The idea seems to come from LXVIII 10: "Where is the victor, / since even he that won the victory / has suffered a great defeat, / because he himself / has been defeated by pride?"

Faith LXVI. Which of the three stanzas on Mim is genuine?

The stanzas on Waw, Zayn, Het, Tet, Yud, Kap and Lomad have no doublets. There are three stanzas on Mim (LXVI 22-24). The first forms a suitable close to a poem which is about a theological dispute. The second and third both have as their theme the royal road, lined with milestones, which leads to the king, who is waiting to give the traveller a present. These two stanzas belong

together, so both must be removed. Faith LXVI 22 is therefore the original stanza.

Faith LXVII. Which of the seven stanzas on Nun is genuine?

Faith LXVII is transmitted with seven stanzas on Nun, three on Semkat, two on Ayn, five on Pe, one each on Sode and Qup, and two each on Rish, Shin and Taw. Here, to begin with, is the series on Nun:

1. The target of truth / is placed in the writings. / The fools have forsaken it / and have begun to shoot / the master of the target.
2. Let us enquire whether there are (some), / among the bows, / who have forsaken the target / and have directed their arrows / against their kings.
3. The target is this: / that the father is one, / without any doubt, / and the son is one, / without (any need for) investigation.
4. A manifest target / has been set up in the light, / but (the man) who has gone astray (reading: *w-d-askel*) shoots / haphazard arrows / into the dark.
5. Let stillness be / a boundary for orators / and let silence be / a boundary for those who (would) enquire / about hidden things!
6. Let the mouth (first) learn / how it should speak / and (only) then speak, / lest it should have regrets / after it has spoken!
7. Let us learn first / and then let us teach, / lest we should be / like a ferry, carrying people over / to [the place of words] which have no use!

The second stanza must be the original. It follows on well from Faith LXVI 22: "Who can stop them? For, whereas they pretend to seek the truth (*d-qûštô bo'ên*), they seek to quarrel (*d-našûn bo'ên*)." The first word of LXVII 2 picks up from the final stanza of the previous poem the repeated verb *bo'ên* and turns it into *neb'ê*; the fifth word, *qešotô* ("bows"), recalls *qûštô* ("the truth"); the seventh word, *nîšô* ("target"), seems to play on *našûn* ("to quarrel"). Perhaps there is an allusion, in the play on *qûštô/qeštô*, to the tradition (recorded by Herodotus) that the Persians raised their sons to "ride, shoot straight and speak the truth".¹⁰ Moreover, the words "Let us enquire" seem to inaugurate an argument.

Besides, the question posed in the second stanza – "whether there are (some) [...] who have forsaken the target and have directed their arrows against the kings" – would make no kind of sense, if it really followed LXVII 1, in which it is stated with confidence that some "have forsaken it (the target) and have begun to shoot the lord of the target".

The second stanza is therefore the clear favourite and the first is evidently intended to explain it. It is, in fact, a gloss, indexed by the acrostic initial Nun

¹⁰ Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.136 (2): "[From the age of five to that of twenty] they teach their sons just three things: to ride a horse and to shoot with a bow and to tell the truth." Does an Aramaic saying lie behind this passage?

to the stanza it hopes to elucidate. By the “target”, we are told, Ephraim means “the truth”. The glossator has read the previous Madrosho, in which this word occurs a number of times. The idea that “the target of the truth” is “set up in the scriptures” comes from LXVII 8 (initial Semkat), the second stanza of the original Madrosho, where we read that “The scriptures are set up like a mirror; he whose eye is limpid sees the portrait of the truth there.”

As for the “kings” at the end of LXVII 2, the glossator fails to do justice to the plural; he glosses this as “the lord of the target”. Since he has identified the target with the truth, he is now calling somebody (presumably God) “the lord (or perhaps the owner) of the truth”. Ephraim, however, in accordance with the Gospel (John 14:6), identifies the truth with Jesus, who has no lord, since he is “lord of all” (Faith XXIII 4).

Faith LXVII 3 is another inept attempt to explain the “target” mentioned in the original first stanza, LXVII 2; inept, because it mentions the Father and the Son, but not the Holy Spirit.

Faith LXVII 4 is no longer a gloss on LXVII 2, but a variation on the theme, inspired perhaps by Faith VIII 6 (“Now that the truth has dawned, why grope in darkness?”) or else directly by the source of this stanza, John 3:19 (“Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light”): darkness is substituted for the mysterious ‘kings’ at whom arrows are now directed.

It would be hard to read this cycle and fail to understand the metaphor. Archery (perhaps because the Aramaean Philosopher, Bar Dayṣon, was, as an eye-witness reports,¹¹ a consummate archer) is a trope for philosophy in Faith I, II, VII, XI, XV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXXIII and XXXVII, the “target” being the subject discussed. See, for example, Faith XV 11: “Do not string that bow, your mind, for shooting words!” and Faith XXVII 7: “By one target this great army / is ridiculed and put to shame. / All these forces, massed, cannot perceive / light, defenceless, beneath their noses.” That this target, or mark, the “light which shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5), is Christ is clearly stated in XXXIII 9: “Just as pigments fail / in portraying sound, / so the mind’s figments / miss their mark, the son. / He is subtler far / than our clumsy thought.”

The boundary between light and darkness is like the boundary between knowledge and ignorance; one may speak only of that which one knows, so day and night are like our speech and our silence (Faith XXXVIII 9).

This train of thought leads to LXVII 5, from which it appears that the

11 Julius Africanus: see J.-R. Vieillefond, *Les “Cestes” de Julius Africanus. Étude sur l'ensemble des fragments avec édition, traduction et commentaires*, Publications de l'Institut français de Florence (Florence and Paris, 1970), pp. 180-2.

glossators may, after all, agree with each other: they understand the plural "kings" of LXVII 2 to refer to the Holy Trinity, a mystery (*kasyotô*) and therefore a darkness to the human mind. This way of harmonizing the glosses with the original stanza leaves the reader uneasy, though; does it not go against the grain of John 1:5 and 3:5? The glossators of this poem were evidently not in full control of biblical imagery, as Ephraim was.

The last two glosses on Nun, LXVII 6 and 7, are variants on the proverbs "From hearing comes wisdom, from speaking repentance" and "He that passes judgement as he runs, overtakes repentance".¹² The image of the bad teacher as a ferry over to the Land of Unprofitable Activity (LXVII 7) is suggestive, but has no connection with the rest of this Madroshe.

Faith LXVII. Which of the three stanzas on Semkat is genuine?

Of the three stanzas on Semkat, the second and the third (LXVII 9 and 10) form a couplet: "Placed there is / the image of the Father. / Placed there is / the image of the Son / and of the Holy Spirit. // Placed [there] are the names / of all three of them, / one after the other / in faith / for baptism." This is a reference to the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 28, Verse 29: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Since only one of the three can be genuine, the original stanza must be LXVII 8.

Faith LXVII. Which of the two stanzas on Ayn is genuine?

The second of the two stanzas on Ayn (LXVII 12) is metrically incomplete in all three manuscripts: "In came interrogation, / in came disputation, / in came strife / and out went truth." The sense is complete, so it seems that this was all there ever was of this stanza. LXVII 11 must therefore be the original. This stanza, referring presumably to the scriptures which are the subject of the foregoing original stanza, LXVII 8, quotes an unnamed authority as saying "One has to probe them in order to make them one's own".

Faith LXVII. Which of the five stanzas on Pe is genuine?

There are five stanzas on Pe; they all begin in the same way:

13. It would have been better, though, / for them to acquire the truth / without debate, / and not to forfeit it entirely / by reason of debate.

12 *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, 3rd ed., rev. F. P. Wilson (Oxford 1970), pp. 363 and 415.

14. It would have been better, moreover, / for us to acquire life / simply, / and not to acquire death / by reason of wisdom.
15. It would have been better far, / in (this) time of drought, / to drink (supplying the conjunction Dolat) water, / and not to measure the source / instead of drinking.
16. It would have been much better / for the little child / to know his father / by sight itself / and not by probing.
17. It is better therefore / for us to learn the truth / by the (good) works / of faith, / without interrogation.

If the original stanza on Pe were the last of these, then Ephraim would have made the transition directly from the idea of making the Scriptures one's own (LXVII 8) to that of learning the truth, as if these two things were the same, the only difference lying in the use of logical enquiry or quasi-judicial cross-questioning. Faith LXVII 13 is therefore the original stanza, because it makes it clear that those (Arians) who use their debating skills to appropriate Scripture for their side may 'make the Scriptures their own', but they do so at the expense of the (Nicene Orthodox) truth. To acquire the truth is therefore something different from appropriating the Scriptures, even if the same verb is used in both cases. It so happens that LXVII 13 is also the pithiest of the five stanzas on Pe.

Faith LXVII. Which of the two stanzas on Rish is genuine?

That brings us to the last three letters in the alphabet, Rish, Shin and Taw. LXVII 19 (on Qup) and LXVII 21 (on Rish) together form a complete, though much abbreviated, History of Salvation; LXVII 20 (also on Rish) seems to have been designed to go between them. The trouble is that it describes the 'Harrowing of Hell', Jesus's descent to the Underworld after his death on the Cross, whereas LXVII 21 compresses into one image the Crucifixion and the General Resurrection. There was a criminal hanging on the cross next to that of Jesus who said to him, as we read in the Gospel according to Luke, Chapter 24, Verses 42 and 43: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And Jesus said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." LXVII 21 reads: "At a run, again He opened / the gate of Paradise / with a promise / and caused Adam to settle / on the Tree of Life." The second stanza on Rish is therefore the original stanza on that letter.

Faith LXVII. Which of the two stanzas on Shin is genuine?

The first of the two stanzas on Shin (LXVII 22) is a gloss on the words "He opened / the gate of Paradise / with a promise" (LXVII 21): "Glory to Him that forged / this key, / which, though it is only one [key], / itself opens / all

storehouses of treasure!" The second (LXVII 23) is a trinitarian doxology in which silence takes the place of the Holy Spirit: "Glory to the Father, / who is hidden by his essence! / Glory to the Son, / whose birth is hidden / under the seal of silence!" Since we are looking for the penultimate stanza of the Madroshe, a doxology is more appropriate than a meditation on Jesus's promise to the criminal. After the masterful summing up of God's merciful dealings with humanity in two compact stanzas, culminating in the image of Mankind, like a flock of birds, perching in the Tree of Life (and eating of its fruit), LXVII 22 seems not only uneconomical, but distinctly out of place: it does not focus sharply on the core of Christian doctrine. The second stanza on Shin, therefore, is the original stanza on that letter.

Faith LXVII. Which of the two stanzas on Taw is genuine?

That means that the first stanza on Taw (LXVII 24), which is a prayer of thanksgiving to the Holy Trinity – "Thanks to the Father, / who cannot be encompassed! / Thanks to the Son, / who cannot be interrogated, / with the Holy Spirit!" – is redundant. In any case, it ends rather lamely, as if what was really required were "Thanks to the Holy Spirit, who cannot be fathomed!" or words to that effect, but the writer had not been able to fit these into the five-line stanza (compare the incomplete trinity in LXVII 3). Once again, as in the cases of Rish and Shin, we are obliged to conclude that this is an inverted interpolation and the second stanza on Taw is the original close of the poem. The comparison between the lameness of LXVII 24 and the quality of LXVII 25 provides the decisive argument for rejecting the former in favour of the latter.

Here is a translation of Faith LXVII 25: "Give me, my Lord, in ever greater measure, / both silence and a voice, / that by these I may live / to restrain the search for You / and to utter praise of You!" There is a fine chiasm here: silence is mentioned first, before the voice; yet it is primarily with his voice, that is his written words, that Ephraim 'reproves' the (rationalistic) 'search' for Christ, so it must be primarily in silence (albeit not exclusively so) that he utters God's praise.

Faith LXVIII. Which of the two stanzas on Taw is genuine?

I begin with a translation of the whole Madroshe. This translation imitates the syllabic metre of LXVI, LXVII and LXVIII in the original Syriac: five units of four syllables each.

- (*Olap*) The books are all at one; it's men, because they're free, who disagree about the truth.
Bet Their cause is truth; their motive, love of headship : weaklings call on men to rally round.
Gomal They've chosen bands, become great men : if not the chiefs of thousands, then at least of ten.¹³
Dolet Since peace has filled the land with gangs, each gang of thugs takes captives from its fellow-gangs.
He They stab with words, as if debate were contest, shoot with arrows at their mother's sons.
(*Waw*) Their tongues unsheathed, the puny strike, are struck; & since there is no blood, they have no fear.
Zayn Who fears the sword, however weak, & scorns sharp tongues, although they kill, is lacking sight.
Het Ambition drives debaters, like prize-fighters, who, for crowns, will strike and groan in pain.
Tet Well beaten they, though they should win, because their cause is shamelessness – a crying shame!
(*Yud*) Where is he now, the victor, when the victor is defeated by his arrogance?
Kap How total is the double loss of losing to opponent and to envy, too!
Lomad The one who traps his fellow man by questioning is trapped himself in vanity.
Mim Full, one of heat, another of ten thousand feuds, they hold – what do they hold? No hope!
Nun Lamentably, their logic has assaulted God and Man, to make them both obscure!
Semkat Aggression here on earth about the things above! Earth seethes, their smokes are spiralling.
Ayn Quite barren, heav'n and heav'n-of-heav'n, of questioning, yet earth is full of blasphemy.
Pe Administered by heaven, dew and rain bestow on those below all benefits.
Sode Released by earth, a volley of debate directs at those above all blasphemies.
Qop Slung pebbles clash with pebbles in their slanging match, then fall to earth, reduced to dust.
Rish Ten thousand times ten thousand hold their angel-tongues, while body, soul – mosquitoes – whine.
Shin Hushed, Gabriel and Michael watch, while dust debates with dirt in great stupidity.
Taw The illness has declined, their words have been made idle and, thanks to the end, their interrogations and their debates.
Taw I thank You, Lord, that You have kept your servant free from questioning to live for You.¹⁴

The first stanza on Taw (LXVIII 22) would make a weak end to a strong poem. I find the language of this stanza clumsy; but even if I am mistaken about that, the suggestion that doctrinal disputatiousness is in decline is suspect.

13 Lit. "chiefs of thousands, chiefs of hundreds and of tens"; I have brought out the implicit irony of this biblical comparison in a way that is recognisable as ironical, even by one who does not think of Ex 18:21 while he reads it.

14 This translation and the following argument against stanza 22 are repeated here, with minor adjustments, from the article cited in note 4, 62 ff.

There is no place in the cycle on Faith where Ephraim says or implies that the crisis in which he wrote is coming to an end. He closes (Faith LXXXVII 23) with a prayer that the 'civil war' may end; but in the preceding stanza he has just said that "Kings have (now) begun to struggle with their walled cities". The *Chronicle of Edessa*, compiled in AD 540 from the official Episcopal archives of the city, records that the Trinitarians were expelled from the cathedral church and the Arians installed there six months after Ephraim's death on the ninth of June, AG 684 (AD 373).¹⁵

Tabular presentation of the criteria used in this analysis

At this point it is useful to draw up a table showing on which criteria, positive and negative, stanzas have been assessed in practice as likely to be genuine or spurious.

Table 2. Positive and negative criteria for the assessment of stanzas of doubtful authenticity with (in the right-hand column) examples from Faith LXVI-LXVIII, as analyzed in this article.

| POSITIVE CRITERIA | (Stanzas which fail to satisfy the positive criteria are added in brackets) |
|--|---|
| 1 Provides antecedent, grammatical or substantive, needed by a genuine stanza. | LXVI 10 provides subject assumed by LXVI 11. (LXVI 3-9 do not provide this subject); (LXVII 1 makes nonsense as antecedent of LXVII 2); (LXVII 20 anticipates a moment in Salvation History which is only appropriate at the midway point of LXVII 21). |
| 2 Follows on well from a genuine stanza. | LXVI 13 follows on well from LXVI 12; LXVII 13 follows on well from LXVII 8. (LXVII 17 follows on badly from LXVII 8). |
| 3 Makes, as final stanza, a good end to the poem. | LXVI 22 (on Taw) makes a good end to LXVI; LXVIII 23 makes a strong end to a strong poem. (LXVIII 22 makes a weak end to a strong poem). |
| 4 Follows on well, as first stanza, from the last genuine stanza in the previous poem. | LXVII 2 follows on well from LXVI 22. (LXVII 1 follows on badly from LXVI 22). |
| 5 Contains, as the first stanza, the seed of the poem. | LXVI 1 contains the programme of LXVI. (LXVI 2 does not). |

15 *Chronicon Edessenum*, ed. I. Guidi, XXX-XXXI, cf. XXXIII, in *Chronica Minora*, CSCO 1/2 = Syr. 1/2 (Louvain, 1907). See A. Palmer, 'The Prophet and the King: Mār Afrem's Message for the eastern Roman emperor', in: *After Bardaisan. Studies in Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity: Han J. W. Drijvers*, ed. G. J. Reinink and A. C. Klugkist (OLA 89; Leuven 1999) 213-36.

| POSITIVE CRITERIA | (Stanzas which fail to satisfy the positive criteria are added in brackets) |
|---|---|
| 6 Makes, as the first stanza, a good beginning. | LXVI 1 makes a good beginning for other reasons, besides its programmatic nature; LXVII 2 makes a good beginning for LXVII. (LXVI 2 and LXVII 1 do not make good beginnings). |
| 7 Makes a satisfactory unity with a genuine stanza. | LXVII 19 and 21, together, form a satisfactory thumbnail sketch of the History of Salvation. (The order of this History is confused by LXVII 20). |
| 8 Makes a good penultimate stanza for a poem. | LXVII 23, a doxology, fits well after LXVIII 19 and 21 and before LXVII 25. |
| 9 Possesses excellence as a literary composition. | LXVII 13 is pithy; LXVII 25 has a fine chiasm with fitting implications. |

NEGATIVE CRITERIA

| | |
|--|--|
| Linguistically inept. | LXVI 3, 14; LXVIII 22. |
| Philosophically inept. | LXVI 3. |
| Theologically/scripturally inept. | LXVII 1, 3-5. |
| Stylistically inept. | LXVII 22 is out of place in the company of the highly compressed stanzas LXVII 19 and 21; LXVII 24 is lame. |
| Anachronistic. | LXVIII 22 makes the doctrinal dispute decline, whereas in Ephraim's lifetime this did not happen. |
| Form an inseparable pair of stanzas sharing an acrostic initial with a third stanza which can be separated from this pair. | LXVI 23 and 24 on Mim; LXVII 9 and 10 on Semkat. |
| Insufficiently connected with the genuine stanzas of the poem. | LXVII 7. |
| Redundant. | LXVII 24 is a doxology: LXVII 23 has already provided a doxology. |

Part Two

A theory to explain the number and order of the interpolated stanzas

Faith LXVI 2-9, 14, 23, 24, Faith LXVII 1, 3-7, 9, 10, 12, 14-17, 20, 22, 24 and LXVIII 22 are spurious, then. That raises the question of the process by which such a quantity of extraneous material has found its way into the text of all our manuscripts of the Madroshe on Faith. Readers familiar with my other articles will expect my theory to follow the lines already set out more than ten years ago.¹⁶ They will not be disappointed, though my reconstruction of the original layout of the book there is certainly incorrect. There, for example, I assumed that the 'bottles' – to use the image suggested at the beginning of this article for the pages of the original manuscript – were filled to capacity, or nearly to capacity, with glosses; whereas in fact, if these glosses accumulated piecemeal over a period of time, it is most likely that space remained on the page for more at the time when the archetype of our manuscript tradition was produced.

Briefly stated, the theory is that Ephraim left a great deal of space blank, especially around his acrostics; and that this space gradually got filled up – though not always entirely so – with glosses indexed to the glossed stanzas by the same acrostic initial. The incrustated text was then reordered by a probably fifth-century editor working according to a method which evolved as he went along, but which in principle aimed to restore what appeared to be a disturbed alphabetical order.

As may be imagined the theory has been improved over the last decade.¹⁷ Its demonstration is made considerably more comprehensible by the use of figures representing the original layout of the pages.

The reconstruction in Figure 1 is made on the basis of the following assumptions: that one stanza on each letter was composed by Ephraim; that Ephraim set out his poetry in ordered stanzas; that glosses in the form of stanzas imitating the originals accumulated in the space left blank on the page beside them; that the glosses are indexed by their acrostic initials to the stanzas glossed; that the first gloss with a given initial was written beside or underneath the original stanza on that letter, with subsequent glosses on that stanza being written beneath it. That the response was written below the first stanza is

16 A. Palmer, 'Words, Silences and the Silent Word: Acrostics and Empty Columns in Saint Ephraem's Hymns on Faith', in *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995) 129-200.

17 Most recently in A. Palmer, 'Nine more stanzas to be banished from Ephraim's *Paradise*', in: *Festschrift für Arafat Mustafa*, ed. Jürgen Tubach (forthcoming, Halle University Press, Halle/Saale). See also the article cited in note 4.

suggested by the manuscript tradition. The same assumptions explain the reconstructions in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 1 explains the order in which the glosses on Olap, He and Mim were incorporated into Faith LXVI, namely after the original stanzas. The glosses on Bet were presumably inserted before the genuine stanza on that letter because the latter provides a subject for the stanza on Gomal. An ancient editor, who presumably lived in the fifth century, since all the extant manuscripts derive from his edition, decided to incorporate the glosses into the poems glossed. He probably did this because he had decided to save space on the page (as most – perhaps all – Syriac copyists were to do from the fifth century onwards) by disregarding the line-divisions in the poetry. This decision meant that the relationship between the glosses and the stanzas glossed would have been difficult to see, because an acrostic initial would no longer be placed at the beginning of a line opposite or underneath a related stanza.

| | | |
|-------|------|-----------------|
| Yud | Olap | Olap |
| Kap | | <i>Response</i> |
| Lomad | Bet | Bet |
| Mim | Bet | Gomal |
| Mim | Bet | Dolat |
| Mim | He | He |
| | Bet | Waw |
| | Bet | Zayn |
| | Bet | Het |
| | Bet | Tet |

Figure 1. Conjectural layout of Faith LXVI.

| | | |
|----------|-----------------|--------|
| | Nun 2 | Nun 1 |
| Semkat 3 | <i>Response</i> | Nun 3 |
| Semkat 2 | Semkat 1 | Nun 4 |
| Ayn 2 | Ayn 1 | Nun 5 |
| Pe 2 | Pe 1 | Nun 6 |
| Pe 3 | Sode | Nun 7 |
| Pe 4 | Qup | |
| Pe 5 | Rish 2 | Rish 1 |
| | Shin 2 | Shin 1 |
| | Taw 2 | Taw 1 |

Figure 2. Conjectural layout of Faith LXVII.

Figure 2 explains the order in which the glosses were incorporated into Faith LXVII. The first gloss on Nun was placed before its stanza in obedience to the direction of Semitic writing, from right to left; the second and subsequent stanzas with the same initial were placed after the original stanza in obedience to the rule that one reads from the top to the bottom. The glosses on Rish, Shin and Taw precede their stanzas in the fifth-century edition, because they, like the first gloss on Nun, were originally situated to the right of them. The glosses on Nun, Rish, Shin and Taw almost fill the space to the right of the original poem. The glosses on Semkat, Ayn and Pe must therefore have been written to the left of it. That explains why they were incorporated after the stanzas glossed. Exceptionally, a second gloss on Semkat must have been written above the first, unless perhaps the gloss on Ayn and the first gloss on Pe were written afterwards, so that they were diagonally opposite the stanzas glossed.

There is no need for a third figure illustrating the hypothetical reconstruction

of the original layout of Faith LXVIII. This poem would have been set out in two columns of nine and one column of four stanzas, the first column being augmented by the Response, which would have been written after the first stanza. The gloss on the last stanza would have been written in the blank space below that stanza. It was incorporated into the poem before it, because the editor saw that the original stanza made a much better end to the poem and the cluster of three.

The reconstruction is based on a number of assumptions, but it is not without value. It offers at least a provisional explanation for a very curious pattern of corruption in transmission. Moreover, it happens to produce a numerical pattern which is open to a symbolic interpretation; and that interpretation is in agreement with the content of the great cycle of the Eighty-Seven Madroshe on Faith in general and, in particular, with the group of Madroshe which share the metre of Faith LXVI-LXVIII.

The *Madroshe on Faith* constitute a manifesto of belief in the Holy Trinity. That manifesto reaches its climax in the development of analogies with the sun and a tree. The fire of the sun produces light and heat which make the life of human beings possible; the root of a tree produces fruit in which its sap is transformed into juice, by which the life of those same human beings may be sustained. Fire, light and heat; root, fruit and sap. These are two manifest life-giving trinities which illustrate – though they cannot really describe – the hidden third life-giving Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Gale. This demonstration takes up Faith LXXIII-LXXV (a cluster of three Madroshe on the sun) and LXXVI-LXXVIII (a cluster of three Madroshe on the image of a tree), the last six Madroshe in the group of three-times-six which begins with the cluster studied in this article.

The assumptions made above lead mechanically to a reconstruction which suggests that the whole of this cluster was laid out with nine stanzas to a column, wherever a column was filled. As three-times-three, the number nine is a suitable symbol of the Trinity. The reconstruction also produces three columns to a page and three pages which make one cluster. The first Madroshe in the cluster of three is numbered sixty-six in the cycle of eight-seven. If Faith LXVI and LXVII are counted as one, however, on the grounds that they constitute together one alphabet, then the empty spaces left on these pages may be imagined to contain an invisible third alphabet, which might notionally be numbered sixty-nine. Three alphabets would occupy sixty-six of the eighty-one notional stanza-spaces on these three pages, leaving fifteen, which is a multiple of three and five. Five, being the number of letters in Ephraim's name and the number of the human senses, may be held to be a suitable symbol of mankind, of whom Ephraim is a representative. The whole

pattern would thereby become an icon of the integration of God with his human creation.

There is a further numerical symbol in the reconstructed layout which makes good sense of the anomalies in the alphabet of Faith LXVIII (see Figure 3).

| Recto | | LXVIII | | LXVII | Verso | Recto | | LXVI |
|----------|-----------|-----------------|--|-----------------|-------|----------|--|-----------------|
| Qup 100 | Olap 1! | Kap 20! | | Nun 50 | | Yud 10 | | Olap 1 |
| Rish 200 | Kap 20 | <i>Response</i> | | <i>Response</i> | | Kap 20 | | <i>Response</i> |
| Shin 300 | Lomad 30 | Bet 2 | | Semkat 60 | | Lomad 30 | | Bet 2 |
| Taw 400 | Mim 40 | Gomal 3 | | Ayn 70 | | Mim 40 | | Gomal 3 |
| | Nun 50 | Dolat 4 | | Pe 80 | | | | Dolat 4 |
| | Semkat 60 | He 5 | | Sode 90 | | | | He 5 |
| | Ayn 70 | Lomad 30! | | Qup 100 | | | | Waw 6 |
| | Pe 80 | Zayn 7 | | Rish 200 | | | | Zayn 7 |
| | Sode 90 | Het 8 | | Shin 300 | | | | Het 8 |
| Recto | | Tet 9 | | Taw 400 | Verso | Recto | | Tet 9 |

Figure 3. Conjectural layout of Faith LXVI-LXVIII, with the acrostic initials and their numerical values (Olap can stand for either 1 or 1000).

The symbol illustrated by Figure 3 lies in the numerical value of the letters of the Syriac alphabet. Thanks to the substitutions of Kap for Olap and Olap for Yud in Faith LXVIII the multiple of the numbers on the top line is $1 \times 10 \times 50 \times 20 \times 1 \times 100$, which is a thousand times a thousand, the number of those who minister to 'the Ancient of Days' (God) in heaven, as described in the first part of verse 10 of chapter 7 of the book of the prophet Daniel. This might seem to be mere chance, were it not (a) for the substitutions and (b) for the fact that Faith LXVIII 20 (the stanza on Rish) mentions the number of those who 'stand before' the Ancient of Days, namely 'ten thousand times ten thousand', as described in the second part of Daniel 7:10.

As for the third substitution, it may be significant that the number thirty, written as Lomad, is made the acrostic initial of the sixth stanza in the poem.

The first line of Faith LXVIII, literally translated, says: "There are disputes [arising] from freedom."¹⁸ By reversing the first two phrases, Ephraim could have made the poem begin with the first letter of the alphabet: *'nošo pligin / ktobe šolmin*. As it is, the poem begins with the letter Kap, which stands for twenty, instead of the letter Olap, which stands for one. This cannot be accidental. It is typical of Ephraim that he induces the pupil to wonder why the teacher is behaving strangely. A necessary condition for the success of this heuristic strategy is the pupil's readiness to learn from such riddles. But it is also necessary that the pupil knows that this is the teacher's way and that the answer will not be far to seek, because Ephraim is a good teacher, who puts knowledge within reach of his pupil, then gives him a hint where that knowledge may be found.

In this case the substitution of the twentieth letter for the first illustrates the theme of the stanza: many voices intrude in the place of the one.

The tenth stanza, at the beginning of which we look for the letter Yud, begins with the Olap of *'aykaw*:

Where is he now, the victor, when the victor is defeated by his arrogance?

Here, again, there is an explanation. Yud stands for Jesus. Jesus is the Victor who is not defeated. The reader's initial confusion, on seeing that the acrostic initial is Olap, raises in his mind the question: 'Where is Yud?' This question is reflected in the words: 'Where is he now?' In the battle which Ephraim is describing, a battle of words about Jesus, Jesus himself is difficult to find. The question acquires a second meaning: "Where is He now, Christ, the Victor over Death and Satan, in this war which people claim to be waging on His behalf?"

18 I have taken a certain liberty in order to achieve the rhyme between 'disagree' and 'free', which represents the similarity between the Aramaic roots of the words *ḥeryone* and *ḥiruto*.

In a sense, then, Ephraim will not take sides in the war. At the end of the poem he takes refuge, as so often, in silence. Yet there is a further meaning hidden in the word *'aykaw*, which reveals which side he is on: that of the Trinitarians. Olap has been removed from its place and juxtaposed to Yud. That is an icon of the union of the Father and the Son. The place of Yud after Olap is a reminder that the Son comes after the Father in the order of the Names. But the fact that Olap shares the tenth stanza with Yud, instead of having the first stanza to itself, teaches that the Son does not come after the Father in time, but exists together with Him eternally.

Where, then, is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity? If we look for him in his rightful place, after Olap and Yud, we find Kap. Kap is the letter which fills the place of Olap at the very beginning of the poem. That is an icon of the fact that the Holy Spirit was also present at the very beginning, before Creation began (Genesis 1:2). The first word in the poem, which has this initial, is *ktobe*, the Books. By this is meant the books collected in the Bible. It is an article of the Faith that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Scriptures. Two of the anomalies in this poem form an icon of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial and coeternal, but nonetheless existing in an order of essential priority reflected in the formula 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.

But what of the fact that the first word in the tenth stanza has four letters, not three? Does this not disqualify it as an icon of the Holy Trinity? Knowing Ephraim, this is a further riddle which we are invited to solve. Perhaps the solution has something to do with the third anomaly. After all, an icon of the Holy Trinity which consists of three anomalies is surely better than one which consists of two!

The fourth letter in *'aykaw*, in Syriac writing, is Waw. The fact that the sixth stanza in Faith LXVIII does not begin with Waw, but with Lomad, is unlikely to be a coincidence. The initials Olap and Yud, which stand for the Father and the Son, have been gathered together with Kap at the head of the tenth stanza, and Kap seems to stand for the Holy Spirit, which speaks through the Scriptures (*ktobe*), the word with which the poem begins. The Waw is gathered with them makes, not so much a fourth, added to the three which represent the Trinity, as another number based on three: for Waw, as the sixth letter of the alphabet, is the sign for the number six. The juxtaposition of an alphabetical icon of the Trinity with the sign for six may suggest adding three to six to get nine. The number six is a perfect number, consisting of the sum of its divisors, one and two and three. Adding these produces an icon of the unity of God. Multiplying them, perhaps, may express the diversity of His Persons.

Divorced from its context, the first phrase in the sixth stanza, *lešonayhun*,

could refer to the diverse Scriptures as "their tongues". The substitution of Lomad for Waw would then be precisely analogous to the substitution of Kap for Olap in the first stanza. In both cases a word referring to many voices is substituted for an icon of God, whether in His Unity, or in His Perfection. Perhaps even the substitution of Olap for Yud may possess an analogous dimension. Olap, understood as the sign for one thousand, is a symbol of the many tongues of the diverse Scriptures; Yud, understood as an elementally simple form, resembling a tongue, may be a symbol of the one voice of Jesus.

It may also be significant that the letters Tet, Taw and Tet form a row of three at the bottom of the three pages, for these two letters resemble the Cross, another important Christian symbol. The first and the last Madroshe of the Eighty-Seven on Faith evoke the Cross, the first by using the word *nišo*, the eighty-seventh by comparing the Arian crisis with the Crucifixion. It may be that the layout of Faith LXVI was intended to suggest the cross: a vertical bar in the middle, a horizontal bar under the final stanza less than half-way down the page.

These speculations are generated by the conjectural layout. No doubt more significant patterns are there to be found, or are to be found there. It is in the nature of things that one cannot prove that Ephraim intended his reader to find them. It is as little susceptible of proof as a play on words, or some other striking poetic device; or as the interpretation of the blank space which (whatever reconstruction is suggested) must have exceeded the inscribed surface on the page on which Faith LXVII was written, a poem which ends, as we have seen, with the suggestion that it is primarily in silence that the poet utters praise.