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Interpolated stanzas in Ephraim's Madroshe III-VII on Faith

Thirty-six out of the eighty-two stanzas transmitted as Ephraim's (madroshe on) Faith III-VII originated as marginal glosses and were interpolated by an ancient editor into the text.¹ To some extent it is possible to infer the various stages of this process. These inferences justify the assertion that the poet used space to enhance the visual impact of his acrostic compositions. The layout of Faith III and VII can be restored with some confidence; the result is a thought-provoking juxtaposition of text and space reminiscent, by its implications, of the later Jewish Kabbalah.²

Faith III

The manuscripts ABC give sixteen couplets to Faith III (D contains none of the first nine madroshe). Here is a close translation:

1. Blessed is he, who has been privileged, my Lord, / to call You, with great Love, / the Beloved Son, as God Himself, / your Genitor, called You. (Matthew 3:17, cf. 16:16f.; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22.)
 2. Blessed is he, who has restrained, my Lord, / his mouth from all questions / and has called You the Son of God, / which [is what] the Spirit of Holiness called You. (Romans 1:4, cf. 8:16f.)
 3. Blessed is he, who has been privileged, my Lord, / utterly to believe / and to call You the Son, / as all the Prophets and Apostles called You. (e. g. Isaiah 6:9; Matthew 16:16.)
 4. Blessed is he, who has realised, my Lord, / that your Majesty cannot be interrogated, / and has rebuked his tongue a little, / that it might honour your Nativity with [its] silence.
 5. Blessed is he, who has acquired, my Lord, / that limpid eye by which he may see / how the Wakeful Ones stand in awe of You / and how bold humanity is.
 6. Blessed is he, who has exerted, my Lord, / his mental powers and has contemplated the fact / that creatures cannot contain You / and has given thanks that he is worthy to have You dwell in him.
 7. Blessed is he, who has realised, my Lord, / that You are God, the Son of God, / and has realised whose child he himself is, / namely that he is the mortal son of a mortal.
 8. Blessed is he, who has discerned / that Adonai is your Genitor, / and has also recalled his own birth, / that he is a son of Adam, made of soil.
- 1 I shall refer to the *madroshe* by the Roman numerals used by E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* [CSCO 154/155, Syr. 73/74], Louvain, 1955 (= Beck)
 - 2 The influence of Ephraim on Judaism is not a promising field of research, whereas the influence of Judaism on Ephraim was extensive, intimate and multifarious. Ephraim's references to empty space left on the page are indirect evidence of an early Jewish tradition which, orally transmitted to begin with, would later find literary expression in Kabbalistic texts.

9. Blessed is he, who has discerned / that the Wakeful Ones give thanks to You in silence, / and has quarrelled a little with himself / on account of the extent of his tongue's boldness.
10. Blessed is he, who has recognized / that heaven above is still, / but earth below is in turmoil, / and has made his soul still amid the waves.
11. Blessed is he, who has learned, my Lord, / that a seraph hallows and [at the same time] is still; / but as for learned men, decidedly, they just pursue inquiries. / Abandon [the way] of the learned men and choose [that] of the seraphim!
12. Who is there, though, that will not wonder at the fact / that You sit on the right, / but soil, which sits upon soil, / pursues an inquiry into You on his dung-heap?
13. Blessed is he, who realizes, my Lord, / that You are in the womb of Existence, / and has recalled that he, too, is going to fall / into the womb of the Earth, which gave birth to him.
14. Who is there, my Lord, that will not wonder at the fact / that You, the Creator of all creatures, / a human being intends to pursue and inquiry into You, / [one] who does not know what his soul is?
15. This is the amazing thing, that You, my Lord, / alone know your Father, / but despicable soil is arrogant enough / to pursue in You, my Lord, an inquiry into your Father, as well.
16. Blessed is he, who has been, my Lord, / godly in his way of life, / that, once he has sanctified his soul, he may call You / God, the Son of God.³

This text appears to be corrupt. The first thing that arouses this suspicion is the fact that all the couplets have as their initial the ninth letter of the alphabet, except for 12, 14 and 15 (the beginnings of which are underlined in the translation). These three break an otherwise unbroken series of beatitudes modelled on those of Jesus in Matt 5; they alone do not begin with the word *tūbaw[hy]*⁴ = "Blessed is he". If 12, 14 and 15 are to be removed, it may be that 13 and 16 are also spurious, since it is hard to see how they could have got mixed up with 12, 14 and 15, if they were part of the original poem.

In fact, once we begin to look critically at the text of this poem, we find reasons to suspect all but the first nine couplets. Stanza 10 shares a defect with 12 and 15: what is required at the beginning of the second line, in all three couplets, is the word *kad* = 'while', or 'although'; what we find is 'but' (underlined in the translation), expressed by the letter Waw. The reason for this is metrical necessity. A good poet such as Ephraim does not need to do such violence to the language in

3 Faith I can be read in the nineteenth-century translations by J. B. Morris, *Select works of S. Ephrem the Syrian* (Oxford, 1847) and H. Burgess, *Select metrical hymns and homilies of Ephraem Syrus* (London, 1853), Faith II in the recent translation by P. S. Russell, «A note on Ephraem the Syrian and «The poison of the Greeks» in *Hymns on Faith 2*», *The Harp* (Kottayam) 10:3 (1997) 45-54.

4 In my simplified system of transcription a circumflex accent marks a vowel which is represented in writing (initial vowels, which are always represented in writing, are not so marked), aspiration of *Beghadhkephath* consonants is not shown and the doubling of consonants is only shown where it is written. Letters written but not pronounced are enclosed in square brackets and hyphens are used to attach prefixes, suffixes and enclitics to words.

order to fit his words into his numbers. Stanza 11 lacks the symmetry of all the stanzas from III 1 to 9: the second line does not keep to the construction of the first, nor is it all of a piece, for it ends by addressing an admonition to a fellow human being, which is at odds with the fact that the first part of the stanza – like the rest of the poem – is addressed to Christ. What is more, this admonition can only be made to scan by adopting the reading of A, while removing from it the conjunction 'and'. Stanza 14 has other faults than the departure from the form of the beatitude and the omission of the initial *ṭet* (the ninth letter); after repeating the beginning of 12 almost word for word, it introduces the Creator as if He is to be the subject, then changes the construction and makes Him the object of an inquiry. The end of the stanza is also clumsy in the original.

The first nine couplets should also be critically evaluated. They contain no suspect elements and are tightly structured. The first three cite the witness of the First Person of the Holy Trinity, the Father, and of the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, together with all the human spokesmen of this Spirit, to the fact that Jesus is the Second Person of that same Trinity, the Son of God. The remaining six stanzas form a block that begins and ends with the thought that one ought occasionally to restrain oneself from talking and honour Jesus in silence. Framed by 4 and 9, couplets 5-8 fall into two pairs of which 5 and 6 are both about what one can see with the eye of the mind with the help of faith, while 7 and 8 both contrast the high birth of Jesus with the low birth of the human being who contemplates Him. At the same time 4 and 5 are both alluded to in 9, forming a second trio framing 6-8, which thereby become a third trio, in which the poet wonders at the fact that God consents to dwell in his creature, man. In stark contrast with this ordered beauty, the arrangement of ideas in 10-16 is chaotic; this chaos provides another proof that the last seven couplets are spurious.

The corruption of the text in this way can easily be explained on the hypothesis that the nine genuine couplets of the third *madroshe* in the book were set out in a column on their own, leaving a number of ruled lines blank beneath the text, on which extra couplets were later added by various hands. The author isolated this text on a page of its own in order to draw attention to the numbers three and nine, the serial number of the *madroshe* and the cruciform initial *ṭet*, signifying nine, which was probably rubricised at the beginning of each couplet; at the same time, the great quantity of empty space on the page represented the silence of which the poet speaks in couplets 4 and 9, while the number nine, in addition to being three times three, the number of the Holy Trinity, may represent the nine ranks of angels, the "Wakeful Ones" who "give thanks" to God "in silence" (couplet 9). Faith IV, which opens and closes with the angels, also has nine stanzas.⁵

5 The angels were traditionally identified with the ninety-nine sheep of Matt 18 and Luke 15. Ephraim nowhere numbers the ranks of the angels in his writings, but it is not impossible that he privately agreed with his exact contemporary Athanasius of Alexandria on this question, but did

In the next part of this paper it will be shown that a large number of interpolations can be identified by textual criticism in the series of *madroshe* which follow Faith III.

Faith IV-VII

Tables 1a and 1b show how Faith IV-VII, as transmitted in ABC, cry out for rationalisation. As can most clearly be seen from Table 1b, all but one of these *madroshe* are alphabetical acrostics, Faith VII being an acrostic on the name of the poet (Alaph, Pe, Rish, Yud, Mim). Table 1a shows how this onomastic acrostic is followed in the MSS by six stanzas with apparently random initials, while the other acrostics are inflated by extra stanzas on certain letters.

Table 1a. Initial letters of the stanzas of Faith IV-VII
as transmitted in the manuscripts ABC.

Nos. →	IV	V	VI	VII
↓ Stanza	ABC	ABC	ABC	ABC
1	Alap	Yud	Alap	Alap
2	Bet	Yud	Bet	Pe
3	Gomal	Kap	Bet	Rish
4	Dolat	Lomad	Bet	Yud
5	Dolat	Lomad	Bet	Mim
6	Lomad	Lomad	Bet	Taw
7	Kap	Mim	Gomal	Alap/Waw*
8	Kap	Nun	Dolat	Qup
9	Bet	Semkat	He	Lomad
10	Dolat	Ayn	Waw	Qup
11	Dolat	Ayn	Zay	Taw
12	Dolat	Pe	Ḥet	
13	He	Ṣode	Ṭet	
14	He	Qup	Yud	
15	Waw	Rish	Yud	
16	Zay	Shin	Yud	
17	Ḥet	Taw		
18	Ṭet	Taw		
19		Taw		
20		Taw		* <i>varia lectio</i>

not wish to express publicly his disagreement, on such an unknowable topic, with those who numbered them as seven or eight.

Table 1b. A rationalised version of Table 1a with numerical values.

The last column spells the name of the author, Ephraim.

Nos. →	IV	V	VI	VII
↓ Stanza				
1	Alap = 1	Yud = 10	Alap = 1	Alap
2	Bet = 2	Kap = 20	Bet = 2	Pe
3	Gomal = 3	Lomad = 30	Gomal = 3	Rish
4	Dolat = 4	Mim = 40	Dolat = 4	Yud
5	He = 5	Nun = 50	He = 5	Mim
6	Waw = 6	Semkat = 60	Waw = 6	
7	Zay = 7	Ayn = 70	Zay = 7	
8	Het = 8	Pe = 80	Het = 8	
9	Tet = 9	Šode = 90	Tet = 9	
10		Qup = 100	Yud = 10	
11		Rish = 200		
12		Shin = 300		[A+P+R+Y+M
13		Taw = 400		= 'Ephraim']

Faith IV

Faith IV can be rationalised by removing Beck's stanzas 5-13 *en bloc* (Table 2).

Table 2. Initial letters of the stanzas of Faith IV, as edited by Beck. Stanzas 5-13 are interpolated.

1 = 1	Alap	5	Dolat	10	Dolat	14 = 5	He
2 = 2	Bet	6	Lomad	11	Dolat	15 = 6	Waw
3 = 3	Gomal	7	Kap	12	Dolat	16 = 7	Zay
4 = 4	Dolat	8	Kap	13	He	17 = 8	Het
		9	Bet			18 = 9	Tet

There are altogether five stanzas on Dolat. I shall translate them literally, then comment on them one by one:

4. It is a wonder that the mind, / while it was gathering its regard / in order to fix it, through narrowed eyes, upon Your brilliance // – Your little flash, emerging, / scattered and threw it quite. // Who shall look upon the Baby? / His rays are so dreadful! // They are all so dense in the whole of Him! // He is the sun which the prophet heralded: // "There is > healing in His hem" (Malachi 4:2) / – but the search for him has suffering in its womb (cf. Matthew 9:20-22).

5. Of feeling with hands, / even the subtlest mind is / incapable of feeling and of seeking you, / for all that you are a great mountain. // As for listening to you with ears, / for all that you are more frightening than thunder, / you are a stillness which cannot be listened to / and a silence which cannot be heard. // As for seeing you with the eye, / for all that you are an effulgent light, / the sight of you is hidden from all.

10. For even your smallest mystery / is a fountain of mysteries // and who would be adequate to the task / of explaining mysteries which never dry up? // Because a person takes the likeness of you, / it becomes for him a spring / which gushes with all likenesses // and by which [of these] shall we be enabled so to look / that we may paint your image in our hearts? // In one revered icon of you / are packed ten thousand fine features.

11. You are a miracle all through: // in whichever direction we seek you, / you are actually both near and distant. // Who then can get to the place where you are? // The reach of searching is unable / to attain to the place where you are. // When it was reaching up to attain to it, / it was cut off and fell short: ///// it[s reach] is too short for your mountain. // Faith gets there and love with prayer.

12. It is easier for us to think / than to articulate in words: // it is thought which is able / to reach out to every place. // When it sets out to go / along your way towards the search for you, / its path disappears in front of it; // it is confused and stops short. ///// And if thought has been defeated, / how much more shall speech, / the path of which lies through the thick of confusion?

No. 4 is clearly the genuine stanza; this can best be shown by first discussing the shortcomings of 5-12, then the merits of 4. Couplet 5 is clumsy. "Of feeling with hands" is not properly integrated into the sentence, having clearly been forced by the need to begin with *Dolat*, which can be a pronoun meaning 'of'. The stanza moves from the sense of touch to the more subtle sense of hearing and ends with the sense of sight, but it is actually the intellect which seeks God in the first sentence and touch is simply a metaphor, a ridiculous one at that, when juxtaposed with the metaphor of God as a mountain.

Faith 10 appears to be a gloss on 9. We shall return to it in the discussion of that stanza. Here is the place to note the chief defect of 10. This lies in the poetic form. Table 3 displays the scansion of the definitely original stanzas 1-3 and 15-18.⁶

Table 3. Syllable-counts of Faith IV 1-3 and 15-18. A query represents a syllable-count of five which could perhaps be made up to six by emendation or by the application of an unfamiliar rule of prosody, such as that final *Alap* can be counted as a consonant. Black represents a silence breaking the melody.

1		2		3		15		16		17		18	
6	6/7	5/6	5/6	5/6	6	6	5/6	5/6	6/7	?	6	5/6	6/7
6	5/6	5/6	5/6	5/6	6/7	?	6/7	6/7	?	6/7	6/7	4/5/6	?
5/6	6	?	?	?	5/6	5/6	5/6	?	?	6	5/6	6/7	6/7
5/6	6	5/6	?	5/6	6/7	5/6	?	?	?	6/7	6/7/8	6/7/8	6/7
	6/7		6		6		5/6		5/6		6/7		5/6
6/7/8	5/6	6/7	6	6/7	6/7	5/6	6/7	?	6/7	?	6/7	?	6/7

6 In an earlier translation of Faith VII («Saint Ephrem of Syria's Hymn on Faith 7: an ode on his own name», *Sobornost / Eastern Churches Review* 17:1 (1995), 28-40, p. 34) I imitated what I then took to be the metre of the first stanza plus response: 6, 6, 5, 5, 6, 5, 5, 6, 5, 6 and (response) 6.

If we knew enough about Syriac prosody, it might be possible to show that every metrical unit in these stanzas can be described as having six syllables for the purpose of singing. Two syllables can be counted as three for the purpose of singing, where there is a clustering of more than two consonants, which might generate a semi-vowel in speech; what is not clear is whether final Alap (read as a glottal stop closing a final vowel) can be counted as a consonant for this purpose. Some of the units (here marked with a query) which are apparently one syllable short can be scanned as six syllables in length without recourse to undiscovered rules of prosody. For example, *ma'lô* and *mapqô* in 2 can be vocalised as *ma'olô* and *mappoqô*. Awdo explains these alternative forms⁷ as referring to gradual or imperceptible entrance and exit,⁸ though Payne-Smith lists only the plurals *mappoqê* and *ma'olê*.⁹

For our present purpose a full understanding of Syriac prosody is not needed; the point at issue is the gulf of silence in the melody. In 1-3 and 15-18, as the table shows, the last three metrical units are divided by a strong caesura in the sense from the four couplets which precede it (shown by a black rectangle in Table 3); and, while the ninth unit (the one immediately following the silence) sometimes stands on its own, it always looks forward logically to the last couplet and is sometimes joined with that couplet syntactically.

Stanza 1, for example, begins by describing the thousand times a thousand angels standing still and the ten thousand times ten thousand angels racing backwards and forwards (A+B); then it says that these thousands and tens of thousands cannot probe the One in their midst (C+D); then it says that they all stand silently in service (E+F); and that the One has no companion on his throne, except for his own Child (G+H). Unit I comes next; while it is linked to the couplet formed from Units E and F by the word "silence" and to that formed from G and

7 T. Awdo, *Šimô d-lešonô sūryoyô* (Urmia 1896), pp. 108 and 231. BL Add. MS 14,506, fol. 119-235, was originally a separate codex (Beck's J), to which Wright gives the number CCCX, dating it to the ninth or tenth century; this codex offers a variant reading of the fourth couplet, recommended by the symmetry which it produces between the two members of the couplet, which can be made to scan without recourse to the vocalisation under discussion: *d-'alohâ-[h]w' b-ma'leh / w-barnošâ-[h]w' b-mapqeh*: see E. Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)* (CSCO 186, Louvain 1959), p. 109, note 33, ad IV, 2, 8. The third couplet could be emended likewise by the addition of enclitic *[h]û* after *šbîh* and again after *šî*, so that it would scan with *ma'leh* and *mapqeh*; but no variant has been transmitted to support this emendation, which may therefore only be adopted with a cogent argument in its favour, whereas the all but unanimously transmitted text of the third couplet (J has *b-* before the last word) displays an aesthetically pleasing variation, with *ma'oleh* and *mappoqeh* stating a grand theme echoed more softly by *ma'leh* and *mapqeh* in the fourth couplet.

8 No knowledge of this matter is to be found in T. Nöldeke, *Syrische Grammatik*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt 1977), pp. 70 f., 318.

9 R. Payne-Smith *et alii*, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2 (Oxford 1883), cols. 2426 and 2881; cf. K. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 2nd ed. (Halle 1928), p. 525 (e. g. *ma'olay šentô*).

and milestones / along your road, / that *swift*¹⁰ (i.e. intelligent) enquirers might travel along it in an orderly fashion.”

We have dismissed 5 on the grounds of clumsiness and incongruity; 10 on the grounds that there is no silence between the eighth and the ninth units (Units H and I); 11 on the grounds that Units B and C form a couplet, bridging without discernible purpose the regular division between two couplets at the beginning of a stanza; and 12 on the grounds that its philosophy conflicts with that of Ephraim. It is now time to argue the positive merits of Stanza 4.

One merit of IV 4, which was imitated successfully by the author of 12, is the unusual grouping of the units with expressive purpose. This is indicated in my translation by a double forward slash at the end of each group. The first three units are grouped together, mirroring the concerted effort described in them; then there is a break between the third and the fourth units, which would normally form a couplet, reflecting the emergence of the Child. This is described – together with its bowling effect on the mind – in a couplet ending between the fifth and the sixth units; another bridging couplet follows, albeit a disjointed one, before the poet gets back in step with an isolated unit. The stanza finishes in a regular way.

A similar expressive intention can be discerned in the anomalous syntax of the first sentence. This anomaly illustrates the contents of the stanza. The way the sentence builds up mirrors the preparation of the mind for the supreme effort of understanding God. The way it breaks off expresses the abandonment of that endeavour at the point where it is realised that even the birth of the Son of God as a human baby is incomprehensible. This realisation is due to another agency – the Son of God Himself – not to the intelligence of the theologian and this fact is thrust upon the reader by the change of subject and the reduction of the mind to a mere pronominal suffix.

There are two anomalies, therefore, in 4. The sense divides the metrical units in an irregular manner: A+B+C, D+E, F+G, H, I, J+K, as against the regular (though not invariable) A+B, C+D, E+F, G+H, I, J+K (or I+J+K); and the structure of the first sentence is abandoned half-way, a new subject being abruptly substituted for the old. Both anomalies illustrate the confusion of human rationality by an apparently irrational divine power. Far from being points which might tell against Ephraim's authorship, they are expressive devices which show the master at work. Therefore, the merits of 4, when balanced against the demerits of 5, 10, 11 and 12, indicate a clear decision in favour of 4 as the original stanza on the letter Dolat.

There are two stanzas on the letter He, only one of which can be genuine. Our next task is to decide which this is, 13 or 14. Here is a translation of both:

10 The text as edited by Beck has *blilê* 'confused', which I think should be *qalilê* 'swift', a difference of a short vertical stroke.

13. What is beneficial to the mouth / is to give glory and [otherwise] to be still; // and provided one refrains from hurrying, / one may hold out entirely in silence. // Later he will be able to understand, / provided he is not in a hurry to understand. // Quietness will succeed in understanding. // Who is this brash man who is in such a hurry? / Nobody but a feeble man trying to probe! // Look at that weakling, labouring / to measure the fearful sea!

14. After all, my Lord, if the mouth desists / from probing you, // it is doing no gracious thing, / for it is not as though it were able to probe, but refrains from doing so: // it is prevented from doing so by its weakness, / while it was getting carried away by its own presumptuousness. // It must have been granted grace / for it to have sufficient understanding to desist; // for silence has become its harbour / to save it from perishing in your sea / and in your powerful swell.

In 13, the sense divides the units in unusual places: G stands on its own and H and I, though they are separate sentences, belong together, bridging the gulf which Ephraim respects even in the structurally anomalous 4 (though he bridges it in VI 10, as we have seen, for special effect and without dividing I from J and K). But it is not only the outward form which disqualifies 13. The way it begins suggests that the mouth has already been mentioned, but no reference, direct or indirect, is made to the mouth in the first four stanzas; and the original stanza on He must have been designed to follow the stanzas on Alap-Dolat. If 13 was originally a gloss on 14, this problem disappears. There is another problem: 13 uses the word *rhet*, 'hurry', as a synonym of brash probing and inappropriate rationalisation of the divine mystery. This jars with the use of a form of the same verb in 1 to refer to the errands run by the lesser angels in obedience to the will of God, as it is transmitted to them by the greater. Another jarring note is struck by the verb *mrād*, 'hold out', which has strong overtones of rebellion, yet here it must be intended in a purely defensive sense. It also seems strange to use the verb *adrek* in the sense of 'understand' without an object, although 'understand' can be used without a stated object in English; the literal meaning of *adrek* is of catching up with something that has been pursued. An intransitive use does exist, but the examples Awdo gives are all in the sense of a time or a season *arriving*. The image which is introduced so casually in the last line is one that Ephraim, in Faith IX 14-16, takes great care to build up and explain (these stanzas are in the same metre – note the regular gap between Units H and I!):

For if Christ were either wakeful one or mere man,
it would have been easy to agree on what He was;
so the very dispute which has damaged his cause
backs the claim that He's great beyond all conception.

It proclaims He is God,

uncompassed by worlds which are all at sea in Him.
No matter how many you take down to the sea,
your buckets can never measure out its water.
The ocean never fails; it swallows all your pails.
Your failure does not mean the sea does not exist.

It's because He is there
 that fools have tried, rashly, to measure his flood-tide.
 To explore a thing fully is to make that thing fail.
 A mind that was able to measure with its pails
 God, who minds everything, would be greater than He.
 One who knows both the Sire and the Son outgrows both.
 What a curse that would be,
 if Sire and Son were probed and dust and ash were proud!

So much for the demerits of Stanza 13 of *Madroshe* IV; 14, on the other hand, is not easy to criticise. The thought is clear and no mere repetition of what Ephraim says elsewhere. The word *ṭaybûtô* is used twice with different meanings: 'a gracious deed' or 'something that deserves thanks' the first time, 'Grace' or 'help from God' the second time. Far from it being a noble act to refrain from exposing God to rational enquiry, it is merely intelligent not to tackle a problem which, by definition, is insoluble to finite intelligence. Only the madness of conceit blinds people to this obvious fact. The kindness is done by God to man when, by his grace, man recovers his sight and sees the pointlessness of trying to fit God into human categories.¹¹

The original stanzas bearing the initials Dolat and He have been identified as 4 and 14. It is now time to discuss 6-9, which have the initials Lomad, Kap, Kap and Bet. Lomad and Kap, the twelfth and thirteenth letters, are out of place in a series which begins with the first and ends with the ninth letter of the Syriac alphabet; these might have originated as glosses linking *Madroshe* IV with *Madroshe* V by reference to the original stanzas on Lomad and Kap. The extra stanza on Bet ought to be a gloss on Faith IV 2, the original stanza on that letter.

6. It is not only the weakest / for whom the sight of you is too great / or from whom the search for you is hidden, // for the body's senses, / because they are in great need / of the other senses inside, / within the intellect, / have not encompassed even the most minute matters / within the search; // so let us ask the wakeful ones, / because they are close to your door!

7. Although the wakeful ones stand before you, / singing praises, / they do not know in which / direction to look for you. // They sought you above, in the heights: / they saw you below, in the depths. // They searched for you within heaven: / they saw you in the abyss. ///// They looked for you next to the revered one: / they found you in the created world. // They came down to you and praised.

8. When they began to seek / a sight of you within the created world, / they did not catch up by running / to insist on the search for you; // because they saw you in the depths, / they saw you above, in the heights; // because they saw you in the grave, / they saw you within the bridal chamber; ///// because they saw you dead, / they found you, the one who brings life; / they marvelled and stared and were adequate.

11 Further merits of this stanza are enumerated in A. Palmer, «The Fourth-Century Liturgy of Edessa Reflected in Ephraim's *Madroshe* 4 and 5 on Faith», in *The Eucharist in Theology and Philosophy*, ed. I. Perczel, R. Forrai & G. Geréby, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, Series 1, vol. 35 (Leuven University Press, 2005), 319-62.

9. Your mysteries, my lord, [are] in every place, / yet from every place you are concealed. // Although your mystery is on the height, / they have not perceived that it is you. // Although your mystery is in the depth, / it is not understood who it is. // Although your mystery is in the sea, / you are hidden from the sea. ///// Although your mystery is on the dry land, / they have not realised that it is you. // Blessed [is] the revealed-hidden one!

With respect to Stanza 6, Ephraim elsewhere speaks of the senses on the one hand and the intellect on the other; I have not been able to find another place in his works where the physical senses are opposed to "the other senses inside, within the intellect". The nearest parallel is perhaps Faith LXXXI 9, in which Ephraim speaks of the "new senses" with which he "hears" the mute pearl speaking. For Ephraim, it seems to me, the intellect is itself corporeal and dependent on the senses; see Faith XIX 4: "For the power of mortal thought has never touched him. Who has a hand of fire and a finger of spirit, that he should feel that One? For even our power of thought is flesh in the eyes of his Hiddenness." In Faith XLI 5 he says that human beings have no sense of their own which is akin to the divine. IV 6, by comparison with these statements, is implausible in its incoherence.

The initial of Stanza 6 indexes it to the original stanza on Lomad (Faith V 4), which ends with a condemnation of the "despised ranks of humans who barge past the ranks of the wakeful ones to get to a position from which they can probe the first-born son". The glossator reacts to this by saying that humans would do better humbly to approach the angels for information, just as the lesser angels in Faith V 3, "pass up enquiries to those who are higher than themselves".

Stanza 7 is grammatically implausible and absurd as to content: the Syriac verb *ḥor* means "look at" and it takes the preposition *b-* before its object. This glossator treats it as directly transitive. Not only that, he understands it to mean "look for", because he imagines the angels looking for the Son beside the Father ("the revered one") on the heavenly throne, as in stanza 1. The picture is a comic one. The 'wakeful ones' evidently nodded off and failed to notice the Nativity until they were told of it by their subordinates.

Stanza 8 is evidently by the same author. The initial of 7 and 8 indexes them both to Faith V 3, which begins, like them, with the letter Kap. The genuine stanza sets the scene: the lower angels pass up enquiries concerning the "story of the Son" to those above them. The 'glosses' seem to reverse this: the highest angels must have been informed by the lowest that the "story of the Son" has opened a new chapter on earth.

Stanza 9 is clearly much better than those which precede it. But the anonymous glossator divides the stanza in a way that cannot be paralleled from the indisputably Ephraimic stanzas (see Table 3): five couplets (ignoring the gulf of silence observed by Ephraim in all the indisputably genuine stanzas), followed by an isolated unit. What is more, the last unit is composed on the model of an Ephraimic refrain, although this *madrosho* already has a refrain.

Stanza 9 is indexed by its initial to the original stanza on Bet, which is about the Incarnation of Christ: the connection lies in the last line. This speaks of a mystery (*rozô*) on the height, presumably the sun, and of another in the depth, namely in the sea, which must surely be the pearl of Faith LXXXI-LXXXV, a tiny 'daughter' of the sun (Faith LXXXI 6); the mystery on the dry land is presumably the Eucharistic sacrament (*cf.* Faith LXXXV 8). It must be the unbelievers who do not perceive the significance of these three related mysteries. Against Ephraimic authorship is the woodenly repetitive structure and the lack of clarity about the sun, the pearl and the Eucharist and about the people who do not understand their significance.

Stanza 9 follows on naturally from 5 (on Dolat) and 13 (on He), which introduce the mystery of the mountain (often associated by Ephraim with the sun) and the mystery of the sea; 10, as noted above, reads like a gloss on 9, although its initial indexes it to 4. It contains a clear reference ("it becomes for him a spring") to the first stanza of Faith LXXXI 1 ("[the pearl] became a spring and I drank from it the mysteries of the Son"). The pearl is evidently what is meant by "your smallest mystery". Stanza 10 calls the pearl now a fountain of mysteries, now a spring from which flow likenesses. The Syrians often refer to the Host as *margonîto*, "the Pearl". The last sentence of 10 is very close to the second half of a couplet of Jacob of Serugh's concerning Ephraim:

Astonishingly, he beat the Greeks in rhetoric:

One utterance of his contained ten thousand thoughts.¹²

This raises the possibility that Jacob knew not only Ephraim's text, but also the glosses which were interpolated in it; and that he knew the latter to be glosses.

Concluding this investigation, Faith IV originally consisted of nine stanzas, forming an acrostic on the first nine letters of the alphabet. Nine glosses accumulated in spaces left below or beside these stanzas, indexed by their initials to various stanzas in Faith IV and V. These glosses were incorporated in the text by inserting them between the original stanzas on Dolat and He, the fourth and fifth letters of the alphabet.

12 Couplet 32 in J. P. Amar, *A Metrical Homily on Holy Mar Ephrem by Mar Jacob of Sarug: Critical Edition of the Syriac Text, Translation and Introduction*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 47:1, No. 209 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995). On this text, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, «Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: women's choirs and sacred song in ancient Syriac Christianity», *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 8:2 (July 2005) and, most recently, A. Palmer, «What Jacob actually wrote about Ephraim», in: *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and worship: New insights into its history and interaction*, ed. A. Gerhars and C. Leonhard, *Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, 15 (Leiden, 2007, 145-165.

Faith V

Faith V is an acrostic on the remaining thirteen letters of the Syriac alphabet, the first nine having been covered by Faith IV. The tenth letter, Yud, is represented by two stanzas with that initial at the head of the *madrosho*, one of which must be spurious:

1. The knowledge of the wakeful ones / enquires with moderation. // The knowledge of human beings / strays without moderation. // Your pity has placed inns and milestones / along your road, / that swift (Beck: confused)¹³ enquirers might travel along it in an orderly fashion. // Blessed is he, who has measured / his distance against his knowledge (C: his pace), / that he might arrive at the inn.

2. The knowledge of human beings / is like a weak glow / beside the knowledge of the wakeful ones; // and the knowledge of the wakeful ones / is like a tiny gleam / beside the knowledge of the Spirit. // The Spirit has said, concerning the Son: / 'Who shall tell of his generation?' // Insolence is determined / to rush past the limit, / but the Spirit has reached it and it has fallen still.

Stanza 1 has the four-square regular structure one expects at the beginning of a poem. In each of its four sections we find the idea of the right measure and in three out of the four the root used is a homonym of that from which the word Messiah is formed. The title 'Messiah' occurs in the response and the word 'measure' recurs in 3. This congruence between 1, the response and 3 rings true and the suggestion that the title 'Messiah', which is usually understood to mean 'the Anointed [King]', might alternatively be explained as 'the Measured [Way]' is worthy of the mind of Ephraim. Contrast this stimulating pun with the flatness of 2 and the decision is clear: Stanza 1 is genuine and Stanza 2 is an inferior gloss.

There follow a stanza on Kap, then three stanzas with the initial Lomad:

4. To this nature bears witness / by the ranks which exist in it: // order succeeds order, / right up to the Crown. // The advice of Jethro, as well, / brought ranks into existence, / from degree to degree, / right up to the place occupied by Moses. // The low degrees of human beings / overtake the ranks of the wakeful ones, / in order to get close enough to probe the first-born [Son].

5. It is not, my Lord, because you are jealous / that your slaves are smaller than you: // a slave is simply unable / to be equal to his maker. // It is a fearful blasphemy, / if he is able to be equal, / that the slave is the friend of his Lord / and the Lord is the fellow of his slave. // Blessed the man who has realised / that the Lord deigned in his love / to put on (the body of) a slave, his creature.

6. The maker's slave cannot be compared / with the maker; / for not even the names / of the two can be equated, // and the substances can be equated / even less than the names. // In his love the Lord chose / to enrich his slaves with his names: // priests and kings, by grace, / have been clothed in your appellations, / and Moses and Jesus in your names.

Stanza 3 has explained what is meant by the moderation of the angels in the first couplet of 1; now 4 explains what is meant by the immoderation of human beings in the second couplet of 1. As 3 refers to the degrees of the wakeful ones (i.e. an-

13 See note 16.

gels) in heaven,¹⁴ so 4 refers to the order inherent in nature on earth and to the hierarchy instituted by Moses (God's Anointed) on the advice of his father-in-law, Jethro (Exodus 18:13-26). Neither 5 nor 6 is so well integrated with the first two stanzas of the poem, or with the response. There is clumsiness in the way that "It is a fearful blasphemy" is followed (in 5) first by "if he is able to be equal", then by "that the slave is the friend of his Lord and the Lord is the fellow of his slave"; nor is it clear from the syntax that the latter is the contention of someone other than the poet, although it must be so. In 6 the distinction between the name and the substance is foreign to Ephraim and it is quite unnecessary to say that the names of slave and maker cannot be equated.

Stanzas 7-9 are the only ones with the initials Mim, Nun and Semkat, but there are two stanzas which start with Ayn (ʿE), one of which must be counterfeit:

10. Together with everything, again, is mixed / this air [*'oyar* = Greek: *aēr*] belonging to the community [of all creatures]. // On it hangs our breath, / without its bond hurting [us]. // It goes into us and comes out [of us] / and [it is] as [if] it were not with us. // On it a hand falls / and it is not felt beneath it. // It flees while not changing place. // Although it is in it, it is not there, / although it paints, it cannot be painted.

11. The breath of life [*sawqō*] passes through bodies. // They are tied to it, yet free, / since they turn in whichever direction they will – / they come and go within it. // All hang on the one breath of life [*sawqō*]: / it carries all without wearying. // They live within its fullness, / yet they dwell in empty [space]. // It is too big to be concealed by anything: // behold, it is hidden, even though it is not concealed, / because it covers itself up with itself!

There is no contest: the second is clearly the better. A number of words have had to be added to make the first intelligible. The word order at the beginning and in the fourth line seems forced; and the passive construction with which that line ends is clumsy. The epigrammatic fifth line, which in the genuine stanza carries the main weight of the stanza, contains a contradictory statement, which is certainly not an illuminating paradox. Considering that air is here a metaphor for God, it is odd, in any case, to speak of it fleeing. And what are we to make of the last half-line? It is evidently inspired by the beginning of stanza Pe, but it is as obscure as stanza Pe is clear.

The stanzas on Pe, Sode, Qop, Rish and Shin (12-16) are presumably genuine; but the madroshe ends with four stanzas on the last letter of the alphabet, Taw:

17. Thanks to Him who brought a blessing / and took from us a prayer! // Because the One who is worshipped came down to us, / He has caused worship to arise from us. // Because He gave us divinity, / we have given Him humanity. // Because He brought us a promise, / we have given Him the faith / of Abraham, his friend. // Because we have lent him alms, / let us demand [them] back from Him!

14 This is one of several indications that the 'Wakeful Ones' refers, at least sometimes, to all the angels, not just to one rank, pace G. Winkler, «Beobachtungen zu den im <ante sanctus> angeführten Engeln und ihre Bedeutung», *Theologische Quartalschrift* 183 (2003) 213-38. I am indebted to Gabriele Winkler for an offprint of this stimulating article.

18. Thanks be to the inaccessible Light, / through the Ray born of Him! // It is hard for the Eye of the soul / to see the secret Light. // By means of the Luminous One born of Him, / she is able to go to meet Him. // He sends the Brilliance born of Him / to those who are settled in the darkness. // He has turned our eyes aside / from pride (reading *šūbhorō* for *šūprō*), which has withered, / towards the beauty of his Sender.

19. Our generation is quite astonishing! // There are sores on our bodies, / stains on our souls, / disfigurements on our spirits. // So (*sic*), instead of enquiring / which medicine can do us some good, / we have examined our own physician, / to enquire into his nature and his genesis. // Oh, how cruel is our affliction, / that we have used the physician who is able to rid us of our sickness / to deal ourselves another blow!

20. May faith in you be / [like] rennet in my intelligence, // causing my intellect, spilt / by investigation and bewilderment, to coagulate! // Let me knock, my Lord, on your door, / that your gift may alight upon me of a sudden like alms! // Let it come to enrich my destitution, / for my debts amount to ten thousand talents! // O [my] creditor, you will bring it about in me / that I shall lend to you from your own!

Once again, comparison makes the choice clear. The second, 18, is the original stanza. Apart from anything else, it forms a perfect transition to Faith VI. The preposition 'through' in the first line translates *b-yad*, literally "by the hand/arm of". This is an allusion to the Yud with which the name of the Child (*yaldō*) begins in the first stanza of Faith IV and with which Knowledge (*ida'tō*), in the first stanza of Faith V, begins. Faith VI concludes with a stanza on this letter, which begins: "Jesus (initial Yud), glorious name!" The letter Yud was originally a picture of an arm.¹⁵ The beam of the sun which shows us an image of its disk is like an arm of that great celestial body, reaching out to the earth. The way that the author speaks of human sight as reaching out towards the sun through (*b-yad* once again) this beam is perfectly in accordance with the fifth and sixth stanzas of Faith XXV:

Light enables eyes to register itself
and to see its beauties by the beam it sends.
By the flash which travels from it people see the lightning in the sky.

Eye can't find her way towards the light at all,
but for Beam, who guides her up to Sun, his sire.
In the pitchy dark the blaze attracts benighted pupils to the fire.

These verses have to be understood in the light of the ancient theory of optics, which, as Ute Possekkel has reminded us,¹⁶ Ephraim subscribed to. According to this theory, sight is made possible by light entering the eye and emerging from it again as an optic ray, a kind of invisible feeler, by which the eye reaches out to "touch" the colours emitted by the objects around it. The epigrammatic ninth unit of Faith V, Stanza 18 – "He has turned our eyes aside" – daringly uses of Christ

15 S. P. Brock and D. G. K. Taylor, *The hidden pearl, 1: The ancient Aramaic heritage* (Rome, 2001), p. 29.

16 U. Possekkel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian* [CSCO 580 = Subsidia 102] (Louvain, 1999).

the verb which gives Satan his name: *astî*, to turn aside, or distract. What He distracts humans from is not "the beauty (*šûprô*) that fades", as the MSS have transmitted the first half of the sixth line, for that will not scan and is insufficiently pointed, besides. The original reading will have been *men šûbhorô da-ḥmô*, "pride, which has dried up", which has six syllables. The perfect *ḥmô* contrasts with the active participle *ḥomê* in Isaiah 40:8 and a number of similar passages in Scripture, to which the poet alludes ("the grass withereth"); compare the last lines of the last genuine stanza of Faith XXIX 5:

Who ever saw chaff which aspired to test / the force of the wind with questions?
 They die, those brash men, by trying / Him whose breath gave life to dead people.
 Cedars are uprooted, forests are overturned, / and a straw tries to poke the Holy Ghost's nature!
 From the gust of that Gale / it flies towards the mouth of the furnace.

The alluring flower of the field of pride has been blasted (*ḥmô*) by the heat of the sun. There is daring word-play here, too: *ḥmô*, understood as a substantive, is the father-in-law of a married woman. The eye is feminine in gender and she is 'married' to sin, whose father is the Devil. One can read the last line, in playful harmony with Ephraim's ideas, as: "from the pride of [her] father-in-law [the Evil One] to the beauty of the One who sent Him [that is, of God the Father]."

Stanza 17 cannot rival the excellence of 18. Besides, the ninth metrical unit 9 of 17 is attached to the seventh and the eighth, ignoring the gulf of silence observed at this point by Ephraim (see Table 3). As for 19, the inconsequential "So", in the second line is suspect. Ephraim does not elsewhere speak in terms of his adversaries "enquiring into the nature" of the Son. Someone living in the fifth century would have found this natural, since all the discussion then was about the divine and human nature or natures of Christ. In 20, the metaphor of the milk coagulating with the help of rennet (from the stomach of a suckling lamb) comes from Faith XXV 20, but the writer of 20 has interpreted that picture in a grotesque way. He imagines the milk was actually spilt, whereas *bûdoreh d-ḥalbô* in XXV 20 should surely be understood as "the inconsistency of milk". There follows another picture, that of a beggar knocking at a door and having alms thrown down to him unexpectedly from a window. This has no connection with the first, unless the alms took the form of the cheese made on the floor! The third metaphor in this tightly packed series does at least have a connection with the second: the beggar's plight is explained by his great debt. But the idea of a debtor borrowing money from his creditor in order to make a loan to him is too absurd; besides, the last sentence is awkwardly phrased.

The genuine stanzas of Faith IV and V imitate the choreography of the Eucharist up to the Offertory and contain elements of a commentary on the "Sanctification of the Apostles", the so-called Anaphora of Addai and Mari. The biggest problem about this ancient prayer is that it is addressed now to the Father, now to

"God said, 'Let there be light!' and light was created."
 Whom had he commanded? There was nothing before.
 Did he speak to the light? Then why not just say, "Be!"?
 But he said, "Let it be!"
 To say "Be!" is one thing, "Let it be!" another.

The original stanza on Bet must be either 2 or 3:

- 2 The eye's too weak to stare at the sun's great brightness.
 His exacting fierceness makes all else seem weak.
 His beam reaches right down to the eye's own level.
 None has seen what is veiled, except for its own child.
 Concealed from its creatures,
 Unseen being made itself visible in its child.
- 3 In the beam born of him his brightness was softened –
 To us-wards, of his grace, without real loss of strength.
 He's like a beam, we say; but that's not his likeness:
 No likeness represents exactly how he is.
 Likening is the means
 By which we may know him, so far as we have strength.

Stanza 3 is preferable, because the word 'likeness' provides a transition to Genesis 1:26, where the Father says, 'Let us make man in our image!'

Stanza 13 is a good candidate for the stanza on Tet:

- 13 Good, he reveals the truth to those willing to see.
 The six days correspond to creation's six sides:
 East and west; south and north; the zenith; the abyss.
 For he did not call on creatures to make themselves.
 All's made by one through one:
 Father called with a Voice; and Son finished the work.

The Voice by which the Father communicates with the Son could stand for the Spirit, completing the Holy Trinity. Another argument in its favour is that it refers to the six days and the six sides of Creation. The stanza on Tet is the ninth stanza and nine, like six, is a multiple of three. In the original third and sixth stanzas the poet refers to the sixth day of Creation and to what God said on that day. It would be appropriate if the third, sixth and ninth stanzas had all contained such references to the symbolism of numbers related to the three of the Trinity, especially if the third person of that Trinity was alluded to for the first time in the ninth stanza.

Stanza 17 (already quoted on p. 8 in a different layout to draw attention to its boldly expressive enjambements) forms a perfect conclusion:

- 17 Jesus, glorious Name! Hidden Bridge, over which
 We cross from death to life! Reaching Yud, Your Letter,
 I come to a stand-still. Bridge the gap with Your Love!
 May my speech cross over To the Truth about You,
 And I to Your Father,
 Whose Brightness reaches out to us / in His Offspring!

- No likeness represents exactly how He is.
 Likening is the means
 By which we may know Him, so far as we have strength.
- 3 (now 7) In creating Adam He revealed the Firstborn:
 'Let's make Man like Ourselves!' was not said to Adam,
 But to Him that gave life by a Tree, on Day Six,
 The last thousand-year 'Day' of the Six Millenia,²⁰
 To him, who, on Day Six
 Of Creation,²¹ brought wrath on himself by a tree.
- 4 (now 8) Was He calling on Those who never shut their eyes?²²
 The thought is offensive: they are not God's fellows,
 But His slaves, His creatures. The Son is His equal,
 Though He may minister to his Father's calling.
 Father could have finished
 Creation on his own, without calling on Son.
- 5 (now 9) It is this very thing calls for debate: why God
 Should have spoken before works came into being.
 Was His Will too feeble to create in silence?
 Or did the Voice that spoke take shape in creation?
 Both explanations fail,
 So the third must be right: He called on His Second.
- 6 (now 10) The suggestion that God called on the thing He made
 To come into being is disproved by Adam.
 Not to him did He say, 'Let's make man like Ourselves!'
 Nor to some fellow-god, nor to some angel-slave.
 By no fellow-creature,
 But, appropriately, by the Son were all made.²³
- 7 (now 11) A creature's too small to create with his Maker.
 No other being is a companion for Him.
 Creature? Fellow? – All wrong! Only Child stands, equal
 In fact, not just in name, no slave, taking orders.
 His Child can take His Voice:
 Bless the Being who made His Voice soft in His Child!

- 20 Luke 23:54 tells us that Jesus was executed on a "tree" (a wooden cross) on the day of the preparation (Friday, the sixth day of the week); and Ps 90:4 says that a thousand years are no more than a day – "yesterday when it is past" – in the sight of God. Ephraim was one of those who extrapolated from these numbers, combined with Christ's prediction of an early end to the world, the theory that time would last for six thousand years, of which the last five hundred began with the Crucifixion, and be followed by the Kingdom of Heaven, in which the world would rest from its long history, as God rested on the seventh day from His Creation (Gen 2:2). Writing this in the early 370s Ephraim therefore anticipated only about one and a half further centuries of history.
- 21 The Hebrew for "In the beginning" stands without alteration – *brešît* – at the head of the Syriac Old Testament. In Ephraim's stanza it comes immediately after the gulf of silence, which must here represent the void which came before Creation. In Syriac, this cluster of letters can playfully be vocalised as *bar šêt* ("the son of six"): a suitable name for Adam!
- 22 Ephraim means the angels.
- 23 "Let us make Man!" was spoken, according to Genesis 1:26, on the sixth day of Creation (Genesis 1:31). This fact is meant to be remembered by the reader here, in the sixth stanza of the sixth madroshe of the cycle. The symbolism of the perfect number six is explored in what were originally the third and ninth stanzas.

- 8 (now 12) Just look at Firstborn Son: this is something other
Than fellows or creatures; both higher and humbler;
Higher than creatures, but lower than fellow-gods;
Not counted among these, nor reckoned among those;
Exalted above both:
- 9 (now 13) No creature because Child; no fellow because Firstborn.
Good, he reveals the truth to those willing to see.
The six days correspond to creation's six sides:
East and west; south and north; the zenith; the abyss.
For he did not call on creatures to make themselves.
All's made by one through one:
Father called with a Voice; and Son finished the work.
- 10 (now 17) Jesus, glorious name! Hidden bridge, over which
We cross from death to life! Reaching Yud, your letter,
I come to a stand-still. Bridge the gap with your love!
May my speech cross over to the truth about you,
And I to your Father,
Whose Brightness reaches out to us in his Offspring.

Faith VII

Ephraim's *Eighty-Seven Madroshe on Faith* contains four acrostics on Ephraim's name: VII, XXIX, XXXIX and XLIX-L. The second, third and fourth are variations on the theme: XXIX substitutes Qup (100) for Yud (10); XXXIX adds two Lomads, so that Ephraim becomes *aprî malel*, "he used words to make fruitful"; XLIX takes the first three letters separately and multiplies the second by two and the third by three to make a poem of six stanzas; L takes the last two letters and multiplies the last by five to make a second six-stanza poem.²⁴ In musical terms, a theme has to be stated plainly before variations are played on it, so VII should have been a straightforward acrostic. VII 6-11 are not, after all, so hard to distinguish from Ephraim's own work: the footnotes attached to the following faithful translation of all eleven stanzas show that the last six present problems, whereas the first five do not:

1. Which is he that has so far forgotten his identity / and is so ignorant of his thought,
as to discourse on the nature of the Firstborn, / the Lord of Natures?
Who is he that is able to probe / the natures which came to be by His Hand?
He (Man), in whom He (God) has been, / is unable even to probe his own nature.
By this alone we should feel chastened:
since he is unable to encompass himself, / how can he encompass his Lord?
Response: Glory to your hidden birth!
2. The target is spread out in front of us: / it is big and obvious and near;
yet whoever determines to hit it / glances away from it and falls.
And if there is none who is able hit / the target which is near,

24 Faith L 7 and 8 are uncharacteristically coarse and should be regarded as interpolations.

who is there that can hit / the hidden target in the distance?

We have been unable to encompass His Humanity:

who is there that is able to encompass / His hidden Divinity?

3. He lowered his brilliance by hiding it / under the cloak of the flesh.

The whole river Jordan lit up / with the radiance of his light.

He shone just a little on the mountain / and those three,

whom the Apostle counted as pillars, / quaked and trembled with trepidation.

According to the measure of their strength

He had granted them a glimpse / of his hidden splendour.

4. The sea saw Him and was shaken up, / its waves rearing up in alarm.

It lowered its back to bear his weight / and conveyed Him with more stateliness than the foal.

Because He slept in a boat, the crew thought He was human.²⁵

He got out and, with His Heels, subdued the sea, / and the sailors were amazed at Him.

What they were not, was inquisitive about Him;

Their response was sheer amazement: / they gave glory and were silent, with fear.

5. Again, the Magi enquired after Him / and, when they found Him in a manger,

they offered Him, instead of inquisitiveness, / worship, in silence.

Instead of inane controversies, / they gave Him [their] offerings.

You, too, ought to seek the Firstborn / and, if you find Him on high,

open, instead of disturbing investigations,

your treasures in front of Him / and offer Him your works.²⁶

6. Come, let us wonder at [those] people²⁷ / who saw the King at a disadvantage,

yet did not interrogate or enquire! / Not one of them debated.

In the silence [which reigned] there / pure faith triumphed.

He was at a disadvantage, / yet the Magi did not make bold to be inquisitive about Him.

Who will make bold to be inquisitive about Him,

now that He has ascended and is enthroned / on high at the right [hand of the Father]?

7. The thief did not question either; / he believed without inquisitiveness.

The one on the left *had* questioned; / it was his questioning that deprived him of his hope.²⁸

The questioning of the scribes was their downfall, / and Herod's inquiry [about] Him was his.

Satan tempted Him: / he wanted to interrogate Him as to who He was.

To none of these, who interrogated [Him],

25 For Ephraim, then, Jesus was not human, despite appearances. He was one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, clothed in a real human body. No qualification of this statement is required, as witness Faith LXXXVII 13: "Instead of that reed which the former nation made the Son hold, the Evil One exchanged one reed for another to attack our Saviour, in that the latter [nations] have dared to write with a reed in their books that He is also a human being." For criticism of the twentieth-century Roman Catholic scholars who, by forced translation and the insertion of the word «only» before «human» in these and other passages, make Ephraim agree with the two-nature formula of the Council of Chalcedon, see A. Palmer, «The influence of Ephraim the Syrian», *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 2:1 (January 1999) <http://www.acad.cua.edu/syrcom/Hugoye/Vol2No1>, § 34-39, now also in print.

26 This is where the original poem ended.

27 This refers not only to the Magi, but also to the Good Thief of Luke 23:39-43 and the Believing Centurion of Matthew 27:54, Mark 15:39 and Luke 23:47. It is one of several indications that Faith VII 6-11 was conceived as a unified appendix to VII 1-5.

28 What the thief who was crucified on Jesus's left is reported at Luke 23: 39 as having said is, "If thou art the Christ, save thyself and us." The Syriac of our text has *draš* which in Ephraim means 'he debated' or 'he disputed' and involves the use of *drošō*, or logic, but here it must mean something like 'he harboured doubts', hence my translation 'question' (four times in this stanza). This is another indication that Ephraim is not the author.

did Christ give Himself, / as He gave [Himself] to the little children.²⁹

8. The star stood over Him, / in order to prove beyond dispute
that He was the light of the [Gentile] nations, / because these saw the truth in Him³⁰.
Over Him stood, when He was baptized, / the Spirit in the likeness of a dove,
in order to show beyond question / that this was He who baptizes in fire.³¹

A Voice called out openly:

'This is my Son and my Beloved!' / that the Voice might put a stop to inquiry.³²

9. They were unresponsive³³ to these signs, / which were there to stop inquisitiveness
and to relieve the soul, / that it might believe without exertion.³⁴

But [as for] the Pharisees, [they] debated: / 'Who is this?' and 'Whose son is he?'³⁵
As³⁶ [people who] are inquisitive about the truth, / they had fallen from the truth.

Everything depends on faith:³⁷

As [people who are] searching for the truth, / they lost it by [their] very searching for it.³⁸

10. The centurion gained in status, / because he was amazed at Him, as [at] God.

He honoured Him by faith, / yet He did not permit him to enter [Paradise?].

That [man] honoured His entrance: / so you ought to honour inquisitiveness about Him.

Today, because there is no [way for anyone] to hinder / His open entrance,

hinder and honour the inquiry into Him,

so that He may praise your faith / in front of the Wakeful Ones on high!³⁹

29 Scribes: Matthew 12:38-45; Herod: Matthew 2:4; Satan: Matthew 4:3, 6; Luke 4:3, 9; children: Mark 9:36f.; 10:15f.

30 Star: Matthew 2:9; light: Luke 2:32, citing Isaiah 42:6.

31 Matthew 3:11; cf. Malachi 3:2, Acts 2:3 f.

32 Matthew 16f.; Luke 3:22.

33 The reintroduction of a plural verb, which must refer to the men who interrogated Christ, without a noun to indicate who they are, cries out for the addition of an allusion to these people at the end of the previous stanza, but it is not there. The last plural subject mentioned was the Gentiles in stanza 8, but they cannot be meant here.

34 Faith XLV 10 speaks of giving relief to the soul (the previous stanza has *re'yonô*, the intellect). Yet it is not like Ephraim to recommend the avoidance of intellectual exertion. His own work is sufficient evidence of that; and, commenting on his effort, he says at Faith V 13: «We have painted, for our life's sake, impalpable Being.»

35 John 8:12-29.

36 *a[y]k bošên-e šrorô / npal[w] [h]waw men-e šrorô // a[y]k bo'ên leh l-qûštô / boh ba-b'otêh awbdû[h]y*: the construction with *a[y]k* + active participle without a connecting Dolat seems to be intended, not just a mistake, because it is repeated and because the addition of Dolat would bring the total number of syllables above six in the second case; but it is a construction which I do not believe Ephraim ever used.

37 MS A transposes this unit to the end of the stanza.

38 This is repetitive; in any case, Ephraim does not teach that one should not seek the truth, but that one should seek it in the right way.

39 The syntax and the thought in stanza 10 is obscure, as can be seen from the added words in the first two couplets with the query at the end of the second. The key seems to lie in the idea that the centurion's lance opened the way into Paradise, which had been barred by the fiery sword of the Cherubim (Genesis 3:24), by causing blood and water to gush out (John 19:34) and baptize the repentant thief crucified on the right hand of Jesus (for otherwise how could he have entered Paradise (John 3:5), as Jesus promised that he would (Luke 23:43)? The first, implicitly royal entrance of which this stanza speaks may perhaps be that of Jesus into death, which was accompanied by an earthquake and other signs, by which the centurion recognized His divine Paternity (Matthew 27:54); the second, "open" (*i. e.* openly royal?) entrance may perhaps be the adoption of Christ as divine patron by the Roman emperor Constantine, an adoption reaffirmed, after the apostasy of Julian, by all the successors of this emperor.

zas, each stanza consisting of six lines, most probably comprising a total of sixty-six syllables (compare Table 3); the right-hand column was filled by the genuine poem, the left-hand one, balancing it exactly, by the spurious continuation.

Faith VII, as we can now see, was originally intended as an act of verbal worship, balanced exactly by an empty space. It is a fair inference from the end of the fourth and the beginning of the last stanza that this space was intended to represent a silent act of worship.

What they were not, was inquisitive about Him;

Their response was sheer amazement: / they gave glory and were silent, with fear.

5. Again, the Magi enquired after Him / and, when they found Him in a manger,
they offered Him, instead of inquisitiveness, / worship, in silence.

Silence is polyvalent: the empty column can also be interpreted as an icon of the "hidden birth" of the divine Christ (see the response), who is called, in the first and last stanzas, "the Firstborn". A blank column in a blank frame is an appropriate illustration not only of the unknowable mystery by which the Invisible was begotten of the Invisible, but also of that which we mentioned before, the act of wordless worship which it elicits. The manner of the Son's begetting by the Father outside time is totally incomprehensible to Man and the only appropriate response to this, Ephraim is telling us, is silence.

The white of the parchment in the unruled and so 'unmeasured' margins was no doubt measured (Syriac: *mšīḥ*; cf. *mšīḥā*), in the empty column, by the lines ruled with a pointed stylus for writing. That is potentially an icon of the Messiah, 'the Anointed One', whose Syriac name, *mšīḥā* / *mšīḥō*, by a play on words, also means 'the Measured One' (see Stanza 1 of Faith V with the response to that stanza; also VI 4 with the note there). As such, the empty column can also represent the 'hidden target' of the second stanza of Faith VII.

2. The target is spread out in front of us: / it is big and obvious and near;
yet whoever determines to hit it / glances away from it and falls.

And if there is none who is able hit / the target which is near,
who is there that can hit / the hidden target in the distance?

We have been unable to encompass His Humanity:
who is there that is able to encompass / His hidden Divinity?

The manifest 'target' of Line 1 of this stanza can be the column of writing, the poem itself of which this stanza is a part. This target cannot be hit, because it is not solid black. The black of the letters is a thin line analogous to a thread; an arrow shot at a net of threads will go right through it without harming it; in other words, it will miss. By 'arrows', in this cycle, are usually meant thoughts. Thoughts fail to 'hit' the target of a text, in that words cannot be nailed securely to specific meanings. An 'arrow', for example, may be interpreted, in different contexts or indeed in one and the same context, as 'a thought', or 'a passion', or 'a sudden death', and so on. So a text is a good icon of human nature; for even the ordinary

human body, let alone the body assumed (according to Ephraim) by the divine Christ, cannot be fully understood. Even today, for example, when the brain itself and many of its functions have been charted, consciousness remains a mystery.

Finally, the column of writing, which can be described as a stream of wavy lines of ink between the two banks of its margins, can function as an icon of the river Jordan; the black ink is the water, the white space around the letters the light (Syriac: *nūhrā*) with which the river (Syriac: *nahrā*) is filled (according to Tatian's account of Christ's Baptism) on contact with the human Body inhabited by God.⁴⁴ The empty column may then stand for both Theophanies alluded to in Stanza 3; the unsullied parchment made from cleansed animal skin can represent the 'cloak' of Christ's sinless human flesh, partially hiding His Divinity, as a piece of parchment can filter sunlight. In the case of the second Theophany, which is the Transfiguration witnessed on Mount Tabor by Peter, James and John (Matt 17:1), the column of thirty-six (three times twelve) lines will then stand for the three Apostles, whom Saint Paul (Gal 2:9) calls 'pillars' (there were twelve Apostles in all, see Mark 3:14). By making this column an acrostic on his not-quite-six-letter Syriac name, Ephraim identifies himself with those Apostles, imperfect as they were.

The case of Faith IV, V and VI is different from that of Faith III and VII; in Faith IV-VI we find spurious stanzas in amongst the genuine ones. This is due to the fact that these poems are alphabetical acrostics. The confusion created by the copyist who mixed up the genuine and the spurious stanzas makes it more difficult to be sure how they were originally arranged on the page. My attempt at a demonstration will involve reconstructing the processes by which three successive texts came into being: the original poems; the spurious stanzas, which can be seen as glosses indexed to individual stanzas of the original poems; and the text as it has been transmitted to us. The presentation of that intricate enquiry may be postponed; the present article is long enough already.

44 See William L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron. Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance and History in Scholarship* = *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 25 (Leiden, New York, Cologne: Brill, 1994).