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The Third Lung: New Trajectories in Syriac Studies

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Dialogue Elements in Late Syriac Poetry: The Ways of Transformation

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Sebastian Brock has a special interest and outstanding expertise in Syriac poetry, in particular, in all known forms of the dialogue genre. I owe special gratitude to Dr Brock, who has spent much time in correcting both the Syriac and English in my publications. Not having been privileged to study Syriac with him in person, I have been honored to benefit from the corrections and notes he was kind to send me, which were very helpful for my study of Syriac and also for developing the skills of translating Syriac poetry into English.

Brock has developed a detailed typology of Syriac dialogue poetry that shows the basic stages of its evolution.¹ Brock has identified over fifty such texts, many of which he has edited and translated.²

Most of these poems (*sōghūthā*, pl. *sōghyāthā*), being strophic and used for liturgical antiphonal singing, were composed in the fourth–seventh centuries. As is shown in numerous philological studies, the genre of the dialogue or dispute poem goes back to the Sumerian–Babylonian literary tradition.³ Later, the

- 1 See, for instance, S.P. Brock, “The Dispute Poem: From Sumer to Syriac,” *Journal of the Canadian Society for the Syriac Studies* 1 (2001): 3–11; S.P. Brock, “Syriac Dispute Poems: The Various Types,” in *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East. Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures*, ed. G.J. Reinink and H.L.J. Vanstiphout (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 109–119.
- 2 S.P. Brock, *Sughyotho mgabyotho* (ܣܘܓܝܘܬܘܡܓܒܝܘܬܘܬܐ) (Monastery of St. Ephrem, Netherlands, 1982); S.P. Brock, “Dramatic Dialogue Poems,” *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 229, IV *Symposium Syriacum. Literary Genres in Syriac Literature* (1984): 134–147; S.P. Brock, “Syriac Dialogue Poems: Marginalia to a Recent Edition,” *Le Muséon* 97, no. 1–2 (1984): 28–58; S.P. Brock, “Dispute of the Months and Some Related Syriac Texts,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 30, no. 2 (1985): 181–211; S.P. Brock, “The Sinful Woman and Satan: Two Syriac Dialogue Poems,” *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988): 21–62; S.P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1992); S.P. Brock, “Syriac Poetry on Biblical Themes. 2. A Dialogue Poem on the Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22),” *The Harp* 7 (1994): 55–72; S.P. Brock, “Syriac Liturgical Poetry – a Resource for Today,” *The Harp* 8 (1995): 62–67; S.P. Brock, *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1999); S.P. Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems on Abel and Cain,” *Le Muséon* 113 (2000): 333–375; S.P. Brock, “A Prayer Song by St Jacob of Serugh Recovered,” *The Harp* 16 (2003): 349–354; S.P. Brock, “The Dialogue Between the Two Thieves (Luke 23:39–41),” *The Harp* 20 (2006): 151–170; S.P. Brock, “A Soghitha on the Daughter of Jephtha, by Isaac,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 3–25.
- 3 See R. Murray, “Aramaic and Syriac Dispute-Poems and Their Connections,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Suppl. 4 (1995): 157–187. The scholar treats also the Sumerian and Akkadian

form was developed in Aramaic literature of the first millennium CE. Several dispute poems are known in middle-Persian, such as the famous “*Babylonian (Assyrian) tree*” (i.e. the date-tree).⁴ Brock believes that the traditional Syriac dispute poems also provided a connection between the ancient Mesopotamian tradition and the Arabic *munāẓara*,⁵ and he considers the fifth–sixth centuries to be the most fruitful period for the creation of *sōghīthā* in Syrian literature.⁶

Later on, after the Arabic conquest, the Syriac poetic tradition continued to produce different kinds of verse texts containing dialogue elements, representing the next stage of the evolution. Some of the pieces are strophic and were meant to be sung in church, while others formed small text-collections consisting of short poems and quatrains. These represented (or, rather, imitated) poetic correspondence between different Syriac authors or historical personalities. Most of these texts remain unstudied since they were not available until very recent times. The methodology and scholarly approach developed by Sebastian Brock open new opportunities for the research into this type of poetry.

In recent years, several important publications on the history of dialogue poetry by Alessandro Mengozzi have traced its further development into modern times, several being translated into Neo-Aramaic. For the first time attention has been paid to aspects of the music and performance.⁷

In the centuries that followed the Arabic conquest of the Near East, the Syriac literary tradition had to accommodate to the new situation and meet new challenges. As a result, the traditional literary forms nurtured by the Syriac literary tradition absorbed the achievements of the neighboring Islamic – Arabic and Persian – traditions. Various kinds of dialogue poetry that were

dialogue poems, 158–160. Besides, dispute poems found in the Targums are mentioned, such as the disputation of the months, and sometimes acrostic is used (156). The dispute of the months is performed also at the Palestinian liturgy on Easter and is included into the Easter cycle (163–168). Several poems of this type are known in the Judeo-Persian tradition. See J.P. Asmussen, “A Judeo-Persian Precedence-Dispute Poem and Some Thoughts on the History of the Genre,” in *Studies in Judeo-Persian Literature*, Studia Post-Biblica 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 32–59.

4 C.J. Brunner and J. Christopher, “The Fable of the Babylonian Tree,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3–4 (1980): 191–202, 291–302.

5 Brock, “The Dispute Poem: from Sumer to Syriac,” 8.

6 Brock, “Dispute of the Months and Some Related Syriac Texts,” 188.

7 A. Mengozzi, and L.B. Ricossa, “Folk Spontaneity and Pseudo-Teretismata in East-Syriac Soghyāthā: Resurrection, Joseph and His Mistress, ‘Tell me Church!’ Moses and Jesus, and Great Rome,” *Christian Orient* 6, no. 12 (2013): 162–180; A. Mengozzi, and L.B. Ricossa, “The Cherub and the Thief on YouTube: An Eastern Christian Liturgical Drama and the Vitality of the Mesopotamian Dispute,” *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 73 (2013): 49–66.

very common in Syriac Christian poetry in the centuries before Islam were transformed according to new literary tastes. A re-consideration of the existing genre forms was especially active in the Ilkhanid period (late thirteenth–early fourteenth centuries) when the Christian communities obtained access to the royal court.

Among the most notable figures of that epoch is an East Syriac poet Khāmīs bar Qardāhē (late thirteenth–early fourteenth centuries), who experimented in creating new forms and rhythms. He used quatrains (analogous to the Persian *rubāʿī*) and short pieces resembling Persian *ghazals*, although he applied to them a traditional Syriac genre named *sōghūthā*.⁸ Alessandro Mengozzi has studied the general structure and contents of the book, defining its main forms and reductions presented in the extant manuscripts.⁹ Not much attention has been paid by scholars to this period of Syriac poetry until quite recently. One of the reasons may be an interdisciplinary gap in which most of these texts occurred. For most Syriac scholars, whose interests were focused on theology, historiography, Church history, or the earlier period of the literary tradition, this type of poetry might have appeared strange, and therefore considered secondary and non-original in relation to the contemporary Islamic one.¹⁰ On the other hand, Arabists and Iranists, who have had better acquaintance with these poetic methods, simply did not see this tradition as a part of their area. In this short essay, I wish to list and classify main types of Syriac verse texts of this period that have any connection to the dialogue form. More detailed shorter

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- 8 See, for instance, A. Mengozzi, “Persische Lyrik in syrischem Gewand: Vierzeiler aus dem Buch des Khamis bar Qardaḥe (Ende 13. Jh.)” in *Geschichte, Theologie und Kultur des syrischen Christentums: Beiträge zum 7. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Göttingen, Dezember 2011*, ed. M. Tamcke and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 155–176; A. Mengozzi, “Quatrains on Love by Khamis bar Qardaḥe: Syriac Sufi Poetry,” in *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. S.H. Griffith and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 331–344; A. Pritula, “Bar ‘Ebrōyō, Khāmīs bar Qardāhē: iz Ninevii v Fars,” in *Commentationes Iranicae: Sbornik statei r 90-letiyu V.A. Livshitsa*, ed. S.R. Tohtasiev, P.B. Lurje (St Petersburg, 2013), 508–514; A. Pritula, “Zwei Gedichte des Ḥāmīs bar Qardāhē: Ein Hochgesang zu Ehren von Bar ‘Ebrōyō und ein Wein-Gedicht für die Khan-Residenz,” in *Geschichte, Theologie und Kultur des syrischen Christentums: Beiträge zum 7. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Göttingen, Dezember 2011*, ed. M. Tamcke and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 315–328.
- 9 A. Mengozzi, “The Book of Khamis bar Qardaḥe: History of the Text, Genres, and Research Perspectives,” in *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium, Duke University, 26–29 June 2011*, ed. M. Doerfler, E. Maria and E. Fiano, *Eastern Christian Studies* 20 (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 415–438.
- 10 See, for instance, A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur, mit Ausschluss der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Weber, 1922), 319.

poems will be examined as a means of poetic communication, whether real or just as a literary method.

‘*Ōnīthā* as a Development of Earlier Dialogue Poetic Forms

‘*Ōnīthā* (pl. ‘*ōnyāthā*) reached its highest popularity in the thirteenth century, being performed by two alternating choirs at in the liturgy.¹¹ This literary form is generally believed to have originated from the Syriac dispute poems of *sōghūthā* type.¹² Like *sōghyāthā*, ‘*ōnyāthā* were performed at *mautbā* of the night service. It is significant that in some manuscripts of collections of ‘*ōnyāthā*, there are also *sōghyāthā* in the same context.¹³

In the main corpus of the liturgical strophic ‘*ōnyāthā* known as the *Book of Wardā*, especially among the hymns of the days of the *Rogation of the Ninevites*,¹⁴ some represent a kind of dialogue. The general feature of the group is a very detailed description of different calamities, such as famine, locusts, plague, foreign invasions etc.¹⁵ The terrible devastation and massacre and other calamities make the author doubt God’s justice. This is expressed in a number of questions, as in the hymn in the *Devastation of Tiflis* that happened in 1225 CE (N^o 44 a,¹⁶ stanzas 50–55). At the end, the Just One (i.e. God) reproaches the author and explains to him God’s will, i.e. the testing of people before the transition to eternal life (N^o 44 a, stanzas 56–61). Similar compositions can be found in other hymns attributed to Wardā, where the role of expositor and interpreter is assumed by God’s Justice. One of the hymns on natural disasters (N^o 57),¹⁷ or the author’s Reason in the hymn on *People’s inequality*

11 See A. Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection. Study and Critical Edition*, Göttinger Orientforschungen, 1. Reihe: Syriaca 47 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015).

12 See, Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, 102. Although there are some exceptions, as for instance, the famous *sōghūthā* on the Edessa cathedral, which does not have a dialogue form. See H. Goussen, “Über eine ‘Sugitha’ auf die Kathedrale von Edessa,” *Le Muséon* 38, no. 1–2 (1925): 117–136.

13 See Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection*, 13–14.

14 A three-day fasting two weeks before the Lent. See also Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection*, 88–92.

15 M. Tamcke, “Die islamische Zeit in Giwargis Wardas ‘Onita über die Katholikoi des Ostens,” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. E. Grypeou (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 139–140.

16 The numbers of the hymns from the *Wardā* are given following the table in Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection*, 19–81.

17 Cf. H. Hilgenfeld, ed., *Ausgewählte Gesänge des Giwargis Warda von Arbel* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1904), 16–20.

(N^o 64), demonstrate this motif.¹⁸ Thus, this type of hymn may be considered apologetic, although in all these hymns the description of the disasters occupies the majority of the hymn.

In the manuscript Vat. Syr. 653, we may see the development of this kind of *ʿonyāthā* describing the terrors of the foreign invasions. Beside the hymn under discussion (fol. 98^v–103^r), and the one on Karmlīš (fol. 213^r–218^v), Vat. Syr. 653 also contains a hymn on the conquest of Bēth Garmay in 1224 CE (fol. 95^r–98^v). It follows the same compositional plan: the description of the massacre, followed by the author's doubts, and then the voice of God's Justice. This text has been not published and needs scholarly attention.

Among a number of *sōghyāthā* published by Brock, there is a poetical dialogue with the soul, written apparently by Jacob of Serugh.¹⁹ It consists of three parts, each of which is a long speech by one of the characters, and so the alternation of the personalities' speech is not regular. In his typology of the dispute-poems, Brock relates such poems to the fourth and fifth type.²⁰ Apparently, the composition of this *ʿonyāthā* descends genetically from the fifth type of dispute poems, which includes an apologetic element and an irregular division of the characters' speeches, along with the dramatic development of events, is characteristic of the latter type.²¹

Transformation of the *sōghīthā* Genre Form: A *sōghīthā* on the Ringdove (ܘܕܥܘܕ) Ascribed to Khāmīs

In the *sōghīthā* section (short strophic poems) of the manuscripts of poetry by Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē (late thirteenth–early fourteenth centuries), there is a dialogue representing an appeal to the bird ܘܕܥܘܕ (ringdove) symbolizing a human soul, according to the manuscript rubrics. The central motif of the poem is the bird's departure, i.e., the soul's take-off, also noted in the headings. This *sōghīthā* is composed on behalf of the dying body, which is complaining of the death to come as it fears the uncertainty of its future destiny. This *sōghīthā* was first published, based on a late manuscript,²² then later studied,

18 See Pritula, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection*, 457–464.

19 Brock, "A Prayer Song by St Jacob of Serugh Recovered," 349–354.

20 Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 137, 138.

21 Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," 137, 138, 142.

22 Ḥošabbā, q. Šlēmōn Išo', ed., *Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē, Mēmre w-Mušḥātā. Nūhadrā* (Dohuk, 2002), 190–191.

edited critically and translated into English.²³ It is preserved in at least four manuscripts.²⁴

The dialogue poem by Khāmīs is characterized by the following features:

- 1) It reflects the stage of development of the poetry of the so-called Syriac Renaissance, which uses Arabic and Persian poetic features.
- 2) At the same time, the piece is a modification of a traditional Aramaic dialogue poem, having a thousand-year history.
- 3) All the existing manuscripts of the poem go back to a single archetype (which could be an autograph) that had the same lacunas (stanzas 17–21).

Using the figure of a bird as an allegory of the human soul may be found for the first time in Syriac poetry in a poem by Yūḥannōn bar Ma'dānī (d. 1263).²⁵ The works by this poet were fundamental in forming the poetic style of the Syriac Renaissance. They were, however, neither translated nor carefully studied. The outstanding Syriac man of letters borrowed the plot from his elder Muslim authors, transforming its character from the tradition of Islamic mysticism to the Christian one.

All stanzas consist of four 7-syllable lines and a final refrain ܫܪܝܫܝܢ ܫܪܝܫܝܢ ܫܪܝܫܝܢ ܫܪܝܫܝܢ ܫܪܝܫܝܢ, reminding the reader of both weeping and a bird's twittering. Stanzas 1–8 and 11–22 present a monologue of the body addressed to the ringdove, i.e. to the soul. Stanzas 9–10 contain its reply. Thus, the poem under discussion represents a reworking of dialogue *sōghīthā*. Its distinctivv feature is that the division of the cues is not obvious, since there are no designations of the actors before each stanza, as is common for the classical Syriac dialogue poems. The only way to distinguish them is to note the difference in the grammatical gender of the addressees, as the body (ܫܪܝܫܝܢ) is masculine, whereas bird (i.e., soul, ܫܪܝܫܝܢ) is feminine. Such an arrangement seems to be an adaptation to the new literary tastes of the Church elite of the Mongol era, influenced by the accomplishments of Arabic and Persian poetry. An educated Syriac reader was supposed to be able to recognize the traditional genre form using a sophisticated indicator.

Among the dialogue poems identified by Sebastian Brock are three conversations between soul and body.²⁶ In its main motif the text by Khāmīs is similar

23 See A. Pritula, "O Ringdove! Where Are You Heading For? A Syriac Dialogue Poem of the Late 13th Century," in *Syrische Studien: Beiträge zum 8. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Salzburg 2014*, ed. D.W. Winkler, Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica 10 (Wien: LIT Verlag, 2016), 351–360.

24 Pritula, "O Ringdove! Where Are You Heading For?," 354.

25 The text is edited in F.Y. Dolabani, ed., *Mušḥōtō d-Mōr Grīgōriyūs Yūḥannan Bar 'Ebrōyō maḥriyōnō qaddišō d-Madnhō* (Glane/Losser, 1983), 5–16.

26 Brock, *Sughyotho mgabyotho*, 88–92, 93–102, 103–107.

to one of the poems published by Brock (no. 21), namely the departure from this life of the two characters and their concern about their future destiny in the life to come.²⁷ Both poems finish with a supplication regarding the reunification of the soul and the body for eternal life, and about safe passage through the Last Judgment. All the other texts involving the same personages seem to have the character of dispute, where the qualities of the two are compared.

Among contemporary Syriac dialogue poems of the Islamic period is a piece forming a part of the famous book *The Eden Paradise* by ‘Abdīšō’ bar Brikhā (d. 1318), who apparently had an idea of reworking traditional Aramaic topics while exploiting poetic innovations of his time. This poem, representing a disputation between body and soul uses a regular rhyming system, as is usual for the period.²⁸

Syro-Turkic Poem from the Mongol Time Ascribed to Khāmīs

In many manuscripts of the *Divan* (collection of poems) of Khāmīs bar Qardāhē there is a bilingual poem.²⁹ All the Syriac stanzas use quatrains in a 7–7–8–8 meter. Each of them has its own internal rhyme that follows a constant scheme, i.e., in every first, second and fourth verse (*aaxa*). In the Turkic stanzas the verses have an irregular meter that varies from eight to ten syllables. In the Turkic translation of the Syriac original, one finds many syriacisms, such as *bar Maryam* (*the Son of Mary*), a stable combination used in the texts. Such a broad use of borrowings, both in vocabulary and syntax, is common for translated religious texts, especially liturgical ones, in which the proximity to the original has a great importance. Some terms, nevertheless, used in the Turkish version testify to the opposite tendency, specifically to adapt the text to the cultural tradition of the target language. This approach also appeared in translations of the Holy Scriptures into Persian during the Mongol dynasty.³⁰ This tendency to use concepts from the target language explains why the Turkish text renders

27 Brock, *Sughyotho mgabyotho*, 93–102.

28 Brock, *Syriac Dispute Poems: The Various Types*, 113.

29 An edition of this text in A. Pritula, “Syroturcica: A Bilingual Poem from the Mongol Time,” *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. S.H. Griffith, and S. Grebenstein (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 345–357. A critical edition is published in A. Pritula and P. Zieme, “A Syro-Turkic Poem on Divine Economy Ascribed to Khāmīs: Critical Edition,” *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (2019): 299–324.

30 See A. Pritula, *Khristianstvo i persidskaia knizhnost 13–17 vekov* (St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Bulanina, 2004), 15, 28, 37.

the name *Jesus* in the standard Islamic way, *Īsā*, which functions as a refrain in the last verse of each stanza. Interestingly, this corresponds in the Syriac version not to the name *Jesus*, but rather to the title *messiah* (Syr. *mšīhā*, Ar. *masīh*). The Arabic *šayṭān* found in Turkish stanza 3, a term typically used by Muslims, corresponds to the traditional Syriac epithet ܩܠܒܢܝܐ (*slanderer*). The word *kalīsā*, found in Turkish stanza 11, is a typical term for designating a church in Persian.

Large discrepancies occur in rendering glosses in the Turkish stanzas in contrast to a relative unity of readings in the Syriac ones. In addition, the poem is one of the earliest texts of this group, dated to the period closest to the life of Khāmīs, although not necessarily composed by this poet, since it is absent from the earliest surviving copies. This poem, as well as similar bilingual ones, started a tradition of alternating stanzas in different languages, which is an innovation of the Syriac dialogue poems. Using the traditional strophic structure, the authors tried to reflect the new cultural and linguistic situation, when the Christian communities living in Islamic surroundings were increasingly using vernacular languages. Such an alternation of the Syriac and Turkic stanzas was apparently meant as a sort of a dialogue between different national communities that lived in the Ilkhan Empire.

Short Poems: A Means of Literary Communication and Correspondence

Two outstanding contemporaries, Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē and Bar ʿEbrōyō, conducted a poetic correspondence, typical in their time for both the Islamic and Christian educated elite in the Near East. There are at least three groups of texts extant that give evidence of the correspondence.³¹

- 1) One of these verse text groups has the character of a theological disputation concerning the union of Christ's two natures, a discourse usual for the East-West Syrian Churches' dialogue. Although these texts were published, neither has yet been translated nor studied thoroughly.³² The discussion consists of Khāmīs' poetic appeal to his West Syrian contemporary Abrāham ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, followed by a short responsive quatrain by the latter, and then concludes with an extended homily by Bar ʿEbrōyō.

31 They are listed in A. Pritula, "One More Unknown Khāmīs' Ode in Honor of Bar ʿEbrōyō," *Christian Orient* 8, no. 14 (2017): 187–194 (188–189).

32 Dolabani, ed., *Mušḥōtō d-Mōr Grīgōriyūs*, 157.

This combination of texts is usually contained in the manuscripts of this great West Syriac author's poetical heritage.³³

- 2) A rather lengthy poetic homily by Bar 'Ebrōyō, *On Perfection*, with additions by Khāmīs. This text has an unparalleled long literary development that lasted up to the early twentieth century. The various stages of the poem's extension were registered by Hidemi Takahashi in his reference book on Bar 'Ebrōyō. After Khāmīs the following Syriac authors contributed to the poem: Išo'yahb bar Mqaddam (in 1451/2), Patriarch of Chaldean Church Joseph II (1697/8), Şawmō of Piyoz (ca. 1730), Eliyā Šēr of Shaqlawa (in 1882) and Philip bar Ishāq Zayyā (in 1933).³⁴ Thus, seven poets participated, who lived within a time framework of eight centuries and belonged to three different churches: Syrian Orthodox, Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. The text was published in a complete way, including all its stages, occupying over two hundred pages.³⁵ It has also been recently edited as a facsimile from a nineteenth century West Syriac manuscript including the first two authors' works. A critical edition, translation, and thorough study of this unique poem is nevertheless still needed.
- 3) An ode by Khāmīs on Bar 'Ebrōyō's death found in many manuscripts of the Khāmīs book.³⁶ In the manuscripts this piece is identified as a *mēmra* and therefore has a non-strophic structure. In the last verses "the two Grīgōriūs" are mentioned, the deceased and the living one. The first one of them is, most likely, Grīgōriūs bar 'Ebrōyō and the second one – his brother Grīgōriūs bar Şawmō bar 'Ebrōyō, who succeeded him in the post of Maphrian.³⁷

The form of quatrains, most popular in Persian literature, first appeared in the Syriac tradition during the period of the so-called Syriac Renaissance, namely in the Mongol period (thirteenth century), as were most of other literary

33 Dolabani, ed., *Mušhōtō d-Mōr Grīgōriyūs*, 157.

34 H. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), 339–341.

35 ܡܫܗܘܬܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܪ ܓܪܝܓܘܪܝܘܫܐ: ܐܢܘܡܐ ܡܢܘܨܘܚܐ ܒܝ ܟܡܐܠ [A 'Double' Homily on Perfection] (Baghdad: Publishing House of Mar Anthonius Monastery, 2005).

36 At least, in seven: Vat. Syr. 33, Vat. Syr. 185, Vat. Syr. 186, St Petersburg B III 5, Berlin Or. quart. 801, Trichur 25. For the edition and translated into Russian and German of this text, see A. Pritula, "Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē, vostochnosiriiskii poet kontsa XIII v.," *Symbol* 61 (2012): 303–317; Pritula, "Zwei Gedichte des Ḥāmīs bar Qardāḥē," 315–328.

37 On his life, see H. Takahashi, "A Mimro on Maphrian Gregory Bar Şaumō Safī Bar 'Ebroyo by Dioscorus Gabriel of Bartelli, Bishop of Gozarto d-Qardu," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. H. Teule and C.F. Tauwinkl (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 151–195.

borrowings from the Islamic tradition. This form, being one of the most popular in the medieval Persian poetry, was used for correspondence, real or imaginary. It is noteworthy that a four-line verse structure is the most common type of a stanza in the Syriac traditional poetry. That is why the term used for the quatrains in the manuscripts – *tar'ā*, means stanza. The collections of this type of poems are usually entitled *tar'ē* (pl. of *tar'ā*), which leaves some ambiguity, meaning both a set of quatrains and a complex structure that has a strophic character. That is why the form of quatrain might have been perceived in the Syriac tradition as a potential part of a larger text, unified at least in contents.

Apart from these, there are shorter poems that are still unpublished and not studied, but were popular to some extent, since they were included in sixteenth century poetic anthologies. One of them is found in a manuscript in the Chaldean Cathedral of Mardin (CCM 00013, olim Diyarbakir 50, written in 1553 CE),³⁸ which includes fifty-two quatrains by different authors, as well as anonymous, and one final ode (CCM 00013, fol. 212^r). The earliest of these authors, Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē and Bar 'Ebrōyō, were active in the second half of the thirteenth century. The final ode is ascribed to Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē and addressed to Bar 'Ebrōyō, which was published by the author of this paper.³⁹

The poetry collection under discussion, which is of great importance for Syriac literary history, needs to be published and carefully studied. Five quatrains ascribed to Bar 'Ebrōyō (CCM 00013, fol. 119^r–119^v) are immediately followed by the six ones ascribed to Khāmīs bar Qardāḥē (CCM 00013, fol. 120^r–210^v). The former is called *maphrian* (due to his Church position in the Syriac Orthodox Church), which is how he is usually called in East Syriac manuscripts, and the name is omitted.

One of those ascribed to Bar 'Ebrōyō is a quatrain on spiritually perfect men (fol. 119^r). There is no doubt that the poem was composed by this outstanding East Syriac literature, since it is found in the earliest manuscripts of his poems, and is generally attributed to him in the editions.⁴⁰ The poem (its first line is ܘܠ ܕܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܘܠܗܘܢ) praises spiritual persons, obviously in first turn, monks and hermits, who reached perfection like arrows. The piece contains a typical Christian discourse: a necessity to despise the world's wisdom in order to reach spiritual perfection.

38 See Pritula, "One More Unknown Khāmīs' Ode in Honor of Bar 'Ebrōyō."

39 Pritula, "One More Unknown Khāmīs' Ode in Honor of Bar 'Ebrōyō," 193–194.

40 See H. Takahashi, "The Poems of Barhebraeus: A Preliminary Concordance," *Christian Orient* 6, no. 12 (2013): 78–139 (124). According to this concordance this poem is found in the earliest manuscripts and in both editions: Or. 298, 1487 CE (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana), 12; Huntington 1, 1498 CE (Oxford, Bodleian Library), 139; Dolabani 2.10.2, Scababi 154.

On the next folio (fol. 119^r), in the same collection of quatrains, a piece on the same subject occurs that is ascribed to Khāmīs (its first line is **ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ**) that has a notable textual similarity, or, to be precise, uses the same words and grammatical constructions.

The first line of the quatrain is very similar to the initial line of the one by Bar ʿEbrōyō. Moreover, the whole text by Khāmīs uses the same words and constructions as the poem by the former. The second text seems to be a response to the original poem by his West Syrian contemporary. It does not actually try to refute it, but rather develops and paraphrases. It looks like a literary dialogue of two contemporary authors who treated each other with much respect.

Conclusion

All the above mentioned issues require a new approach from scholars. Since a number of manuscript collections has been recently digitized, new opportunities are opening for involving more texts in scholarly publications. Since the texts discussed are transmitted irregularly, and are dispersed in quite different manuscripts in various collections, the historical and poetic context, as well as their communicative connection, are not always visible to scholars. First, a general data base should include all the extant hymns and poems, especially short poems, where every single short poem – be it a quatrain or even a one-line poem – must be registered, at least with the incipit to make them searchable. Then after all the texts in all the manuscripts are included in such a database, only then can one really get a general idea about the overall typology and the context of the development of this kind of poetry.

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