

Chapter Title: Ancient Syriac Sources on Mary's Role as Intercessor

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Book Title: *Presbeia Theothokou*

Book Subtitle: The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium (4th-9th Century)

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Published by: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press. (2015)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8pzdqp.13>

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Ancient Syriac Sources on Mary's Role as Intercessor

INTRODUCTION

Mariology is an aspect of theological inquiry and a subdiscipline of Christian dogma, to the study of which the Syriac tradition is able to make a solid contribution.¹ Ideas and thoughts about Mary and her relevance in the history of Christianity are well represented and beautifully developed in texts written in Syriac, beginning already in ancient Christianity.² The fourth- and fifth-century poets Ephraem the Syrian and Jacob of Serugh, for example, composed numerous stunning lines of reflective meditations on Mary's role in the life of Christ. Over the course of the twentieth century, a respectable number of scholars with specialist expertise in Syriac studies, including Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, Edmund Beck, and Sebastian Brock, have dedicated remarkable efforts to studying and making available to a modern audience through editions and translations important ancient sources that speak of Jesus' mother in the Syriac language.³

Dominant themes in ancient Syriac mariology that have been highlighted in scholarly studies are Mary's motherhood of the Son of God, her virginity, humility, reception of God's mercy, purity, and any traces one might be able to identify of Mary being active in the work of salvation or reconciling human beings with God. The theme mentioned last is related to Mary's role as intercessor. Yet if one defines intercession more narrowly and precisely as the activity of a person who intervenes with God for the needs and concerns of human beings and other creatures primarily through prayer,⁴ Mary's role as intercessor as featured in early Christian texts in Syriac is not a topic that has been singled out for much sustained attention. Aspects of the relevance of such a study emerge from the perspective of comparative studies in religion. For one subset of Christian believers in the modern world, especially within the Catholic traditions, Mary's powers and role as intercessor are of pronounced relevance. Perhaps the best-known and most frequently recited prayer to Mary within Catholicism, the "Hail Mary," concludes with the petition that she "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death." Wherever Christians recite the set of prayers known as the rosary, they repeat that request for intercession more than fifty times.⁵ Also at other

¹ For useful introductions to historical and doctrinal dimensions of the study of mariology, see for example Hilda C. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics; and London: Sheed and Ward, 1985); Georg Söll, *Mariologie, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte Bd. 3, fascicle 4* (Freiburg: Herder, 1978), 41–99; and Brian K. Reynolds, *Porta Paradisi: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods, vol. I: Doctrine and Devotion* (Taipei: Fu Jen University Press, 2009).

² For helpful introductions to the spirituality and world of thought of early Syriac-speaking Christians through the lens of the works of Ephraem the Syrian see Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, revised edition, Cistercian Studies Series 124 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992); and Kees den Biesen, *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought*, Gorgias Dissertations 26 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006).

³ Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, "La mariologia nei padri siriaci," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 1 (1935), 100–113; I. Ortiz de Urbina, "María en la Patrística Siriaca," *Scripta de Maria* 1 (1978), 29–114; Sebastian P. Brock, "Marie dans la tradition syriaque," in *Lettre de Ligugé* 189 (1978), 5–15, which appeared in English as "Mary in Syriac Tradition," in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed. Alberic Stacepoole (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1983), 182–191; and Edmund Beck, "Die Mariologie der echten Schriften Ephräms," *Oriens Christianus* 40 (1956), 22–39. See also Placid J. Podipara, "La mariologia delle chiesa siro-orientale (caldea)," *Studi e Ricerche sull'Oriente Cristiano* 3 (1980), 49–63 (= "The Mariology of the Church of the East," *Christian Century* 2 [1981], 165–182).

⁴ For helpful overviews of the place of intercession in the context of mariological thought throughout biblical and later history, see for example E. Sebald, "Fürbitte," in *Marienlexikon herausgegeben im Auftrag des Institutum Marianum Regensburg e.V.*, ed. Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk (Erzabtei St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 1988), vol. 2, 549–559; and Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos. A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), 186–189 (s.v. "Intercession, Mary's").

⁵ The recitation of the Rosary received new impetus when the late Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II added a new set of mysteries, the so-called luminous mysteries, as a fourth option for that prayer. See his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, issued on October 16, 2002. For the text in English, see http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20021016_rosarium-virginis-mariae_en.html [accessed June 18, 2011]. For studies on the origins of the rosary see for example Andreas Heinz, "Der Rosenkranz vor dem Hintergrund seiner Entstehungsgeschichte," in *Edelsteine, Himmelsschnüre. Rosenkränze & Gebetsketten. Katalog*

instances, at which repetitions of the “Hail Mary” occur, for instance in the Angelus, prayed three times a day, with its three repetitions of a “Hail Mary,” those who pray are constantly reminded not only of their sins, but that they are called upon to turn to Mary for intercession. The idea that Mary’s intercession should be an integral and relevant component of Christian piety is not foreign to the spirituality of believers who avail themselves of these prayers. Yet throughout the centuries, Christians in the East in various orthodox churches likewise turned some of their attention to the pursuit of a spirituality focused on Mary. Witnesses from the liturgical tradition amply demonstrate this. Many of the *kontakia* of Romanos the Melode, for instance, begin or end with requests to Mary that she might intercede for humankind.⁶ For Constantinople, one can identify the period from the late sixth to the early seventh century as a time, when emphasis on Mary as “the most potent intercessor before God” dominated perceptions of her role.⁷ During the crisis of 626 CE, the icon of the Virgin was understood to have successfully protected the imperial city against the siege of the forces of the Avars and the Persians. With this event, Mary’s rank not only as an effective intercessor but also as the powerful protectress for those who turned to her for help was established.

Given the relatively wide-spread trust Christians place in Mary’s intercession, it seems a justifiable enterprise to inquire into some of the roots of such practices, as well as into the details of the extent of that practice within the Christian landscape in areas that thus far have not been explored very well. Therefore this article seeks to explore the role which Mary as intercessor played in the spirituality of ancient Syriac-speaking Christians in ancient times.⁸

ODES OF SOLOMON AND APHRAHAT

One may remark already at the outset, that the earliest stages of the development of mariology in the Syriac tradition are not particularly explicit regarding Mary’s role as intercessor. The mariology of the *Odes of Solomon* is interwoven in an almost inextricable manner with pneumatology.⁹ Forms of direct or indirect intercession are not to be found. In Aphrahat’s twenty-three *Demonstrations* the reader encounters Mary in the roles of being the

zur 33. Sonderschau des Dommuseums zu Salzburg 9. Mai bis 26. Oktober 2008, ed. Peter Keller and Johannes Neuhardt (Salzburg: Dommuseum, 2008), 21–31; John Desmond Miller, *Beads and Prayers: the Rosary in History and Devotion* (London: Burns & Oates, 2002, c.2001), especially ch. 1; Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: the Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); A. Heinz, “Die Entstehung des Leben-Jesu-Rosenkranzes,” in *Der Rosenkranz. Andacht-Geschichte-Kunst*, ed. Urs-Beat Frei und Fredy Bühler, issued in conjunction with an exhibit entitled “Zeitinseln – Ankerperlen: Geschichten um den Rosenkranz” held at the Museum Bruder Klaus Sachseln, May 25–October 26, 2003 (Bern: Benteli; and Sachseln: Museum Bruder Klaus Sachseln, 2003), 23–47; A. Heinz, “Lob der Mysterien Christi. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Leben-Jesu-Rosenkranzes unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner zisterziensischen Wurzeln,” in *Liturgie und Dichtung. Ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium. Festschrift für W. Dürig*, ed. H. Becker and R. Kaczynski, 2 vols., Pietas liturgica 1–2 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1983), vol. I, 609–639; and A. Heinz, “Die Zisterzienser und die Anfänge des Rosenkranzes. Das bisher älteste unveröffentlichte Zeugnis für den Leben-Jesu-Rosenkranz in einem Zisterzienserinnengebetbuch aus St. Thomas an der Kyll (um 1300),” *Analecta Cisterciensia* 33 (1977), 262–309. For a discussion of the rosary as a prayer that centers on Jesus in a manner comparable to the so-called Jesus-prayer of the Christian East, see Andreas Heinz, “Der Rosenkranz – das immerwährende Jesus-Gebet des Westens,” in *Auf der Suche nach der Seele Europas. Marienfrömmigkeit in Ost und West*. Studientagung der PRO ORIENTE – Sektion Salzburg aus Anlass ihres 20-jährigen Bestehens 7. und 8. Oktober 2005, ed. Peter Leander Hofrichter (Innsbruck and Vienna: Tyrolia, 2007), 143–156.

⁶ See, for example, Romanos, *Hymns* 1.24, 4 (*prooemium*), 6.22, and *On Niniveh* (*prooemium*) (ed. and tr. José Grosdidier de Maton, *Romanos le Mélode. Hymnes. Tome I: Ancien Testament (I–VIII)*, Sources chrétiennes 99 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964], 93, 173, 293, and 411). Further examples could be provided. For recent work on the Mariology of Romanos, consult Leena Mari Peltomaa, “Roles and functions of Mary in the hymnography of Romanos Melodos,” *Studia Patristica* 44 (2010), 487–498. Antoine Wenger, “L’intercession de Marie en Orient du VI^e au X^e siècle,” in *Recherches sur l’Intercession de Marie. Vol. I: Fondements et premiers développements*, *Bulletin de la Société Française d’Études Mariales* 23 (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1966), 51–75, here 53–55, has considered the evidence from Romanos.

⁷ See Averil Cameron, “The Theotokos in Sixth-century Constantinople,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 29.1 (1978), 79–108, here 104.

⁸ Wenger, “L’intercession de Marie en Orient du VI^e au X^e siècle,” represents an earlier study of Mary’s role as intercessor in the Christian East. The clear focus of that investigation was on the Greek-speaking world.

⁹ For considerations of aspects of the mariology of the *Odes of Solomon* see J. M. Bover, “La Mariologia en las Odas de Salomón,” *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 10 (1931), 349–363; and Cornelia Horn, “The Virgin and the Perfect Virgin: Traces of Early Eastern Christian Mariology in the *Odes of Solomon*,” in *Studia Patristica. Vol. XL. Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003. Liturgia et Cultus, Theologia et Philosophica, Critica et Philologica, Nachleben, First Two Centuries*, eds. F. Young, M. Edwards, and P. Parvis (Leuven, Paris, Dudley, MA.: Peeters, 2006), 413–428.

mother of Jesus, the Great Prophet, a virgin, a woman of prayer and humility, and, one might argue, a woman who stands in solidarity with other women.¹⁰ The *Demonstrations* do not feature passages that show requests on the part of individuals or groups that address Mary with the intention to elicit from her any help or advocacy with God on behalf of the needs of humankind as a whole, of individuals, or of groups of people. Yet Aphrahat did feature Mary as a woman whose prayer the angel Gabriel carried up to God.¹¹ As he expanded on his interpretation of Luke 1:30 “You have found grace before God (Syriac),” he explained that Mary found grace with God exclusively through her fasting and her prayers. In the immediate context of his comments on Mary, Aphrahat did not suggest that her prayers carried any connotations of intercession. His inclusion of a reference to fasting however, which went beyond any suggestions for Mary’s behaviour found in the text of the New Testament, alerted the reader to a possible connection between Mary and Daniel. Aphrahat had mentioned Daniel just a few lines earlier as a model intercessor, fasting for his people. Commenting on Daniel 9:1–3, he emphasized that Daniel fasted three weeks in order to obtain from God the release of the Israelites from Babylon after seventy years. Quite noticeably, Daniel’s fasting was presented as a fasting in support of intercessory prayer. In light of this immediate literary context for the presentation of Mary as a woman of prayer, it is conceivable that a reader of the text would also have understood Mary’s activities of fasting and prayer as connectable to intercession, even if the text did not explicitly articulate this idea. In what Aphrahat formulated directly with regard to presenting Mary as a person of prayer, he was interested primarily in offering an example of persistent and dedicated prayer to those in the ascetic life.

EPHRAEM THE SYRIAN: AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC TRADITIONS

The mariological thought expressed in the works of Ephraem the Syrian has been the subject of considerable scholarly and ecclesiastical interest. In fact, it was one of the points that were highlighted when Pope Benedict XV declared Ephraem a Doctor of the Church in his Encyclical “Principi Apostolorum Petro,” promulgated on October 5, 1920.¹² When paragraph 19 spoke of how “‘the Lyre of the Holy Spirit’ never sounded sweeter than when he was asked to sing the praises of Mary or to celebrate her perfect virginity, her divine maternity, or her full patronage of mercy toward man,” a reader might readily expect Mary’s intercession to have been a component of that patronage. Yet traces of a role of intercession for Mary are hard to come by in Ephraem the Syrian’s authentic works. Any researcher will notice soon that when examining the dimensions of Ephraem’s possible interest in the question of Mary’s role as intercessor, she or he needs to exercise sufficient care in distinguishing authentic from inauthentic works.¹³

The cycles of hymns and metric prose compositions authentically authored by Ephraem were edited by Edmund Beck in multiple publications in the series *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* in the middle of the twentieth century. Beck also offered a reasonably detailed study of the mariology of these authentic writings.¹⁴ In the works that can firmly be ascribed to Ephraem, one does not find references to a direct role of Mary as intercessor through prayer on behalf of those in need. What one finds in inauthentic works is not straightforward evidence either.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive study of the mariology of Aphrahat’s *Demonstrations* see Cornelia B. Horn, “Frühsyrische Mariologie: Maria und ihre Schwestern im Werk Aphrahats des Persischen Weisen,” in *Die Suryoye und ihre Umwelt. Viertes deutsches Syrologen-Symposium in Trier 2004. Festgabe Wolfgang Hage zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Martin Tamcke and Andreas Heinz, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 36 (Münster, Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna, and London: LIT-Verlag, 2005), 313–332. For earlier discussion, see Ortiz de Urbina, “La mariologia nei padri siriaci,” 102–103.

¹¹ Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 3.14 (ed. and tr. Jean Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes [I–XXII]*, Patrologia Syriaca 1 [Paris: Firmin-Didot et Socii, 1894], 129, line 24 to 132, line 4). See also the comments in Horn, “Frühsyrische Mariologie,” 321.

¹² For the text of Benedict XV’s encyclical in English, see http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xv/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_05101920_principi-apostolorum-petro_en.html [accessed June 18, 2011]. Paragraph 19 cites from Ephraem’s *Carmina Nisibena* what it considers to be evidence for the doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception that had just recently been declared at the First Vatican Council. Thus the encyclical text cited from *Carmina Nisibena* 27:8: “You, O Lord and your Mother ... are the only ones who are in all respects perfect beauty; in you, my Lord, there is no stain, nor in your Mother is there any dishonor.” For discussion, see Beck, “Die Mariologie der echten Schriften,” 25–29 and 39.

¹³ See Beck, “Die Mariologie der echten Schriften,” 22.

¹⁴ Beck, “Die Mariologie der echten Schriften.”

In Thomas Lamy's edition and translation of hymns and metrical sermons in Syriac, twenty-three hymns and *sogithas* are included that deal with Mary.¹⁵ The authenticity of these hymns as works of Ephraem, which their editor, Lamy, but also Ortiz de Urbina upheld, has been rejected by more recent scholarship. Beck argued against their authenticity in 1956.¹⁶ Sebastian Brock, in his English translation of a small selection of these hymns, also expressed doubts about their authenticity.¹⁷ In his later, complete translation of these *Hymns on Mary* and other Syriac Marian hymns,¹⁸ Brock saw in this poetry a witness to Syriac literature of the fifth and sixth centuries. Although they are not part of the work of Ephraem, they are relevant and valuable as a part of late ancient Christian literature on Mary arising from the realm of speakers of Syriac.

When examining the collection of *Hymns on Mary*, it is possible to discern a few indications in the text that suggest that the poems' original audience believed that Mary could function as one who might assist in establishing contact between her son and the Christian believer. In the concluding stanza of *Hymns on Mary* 7, Mary invites all who discern, who are "advocates of the Spirit," prophets, and "farmers who sowed seed, and slept in hope," that is, the living and the dead, to "rise up and rejoice at the harvest."¹⁹ Although the text does not speak of her as intercessor, it presents her as the one who is instrumental in making Christ present for "the hungry" and "the needy." As her "arms ... clasp the wheat-sheaf of life," she is thought of as carrying the one who "provides bread" and "feeds." Yet these hymns leave aside the idea of Mary's mediation or even intercession. The voice of the poet is quite clear that the Christian may turn to God directly in prayer. *Hymns on Mary* 10:22, for instance, states:

"Thanks be to You, O Son of God, who has held me worthy
to sing the tale of your Nativity;
Have pity and forgive my shortcomings;
May I give thanks to You, Lord, and praise You.
For it is out of Your gift that I have sung praise.
On the day of Your Nativity forgive our wrongs,
and may Your compassion bring healing to our disfigured state.
May Your peace, Lord,
Reign over Your people and Your Church.
And to You, Lord, be praise
on this Your feastday, O Child most glorious!"²⁰

FROM THE FOURTH TO THE SIXTH CENTURY: BALANCING MARY'S INTERCESSORY ROLE BETWEEN CYRILLONA, BALAI OF QENNESHIN, AND THE *LIFE OF RABBULA*

Studying Syriac prose and verse compositions dating to the period leading up to the sixth century reveals a slow growth of an interest in Mary's intercession. Such an interest, however, did not dominate the realm of possibilities believers considered as options they had when seeking assistance in approaching God for help. Perhaps the first clear evidence derives from poetry ascribed to author Balai of Qenneshrin.

CYRILLONA

Syriac manuscript BM Add. 14,591, dated to the end of the sixth century, contains among other texts a set of six compositions that comprise three metrical homilies (*mimrā*, pl. *mimrē*), two poems (*sogithā*, pl. *sogiāthā*), and

¹⁵ Thomas Josephus Lamy, ed. and tr., *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, vol. 2 (Mecheleu, 1886), cols. 521–642; and Thomas Josephus Lamy, ed. and tr., *Sancti Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, vol. 3 (Mecheleu, 1889), cols. 969–990.

¹⁶ Beck, "Die Mariologie der echten Schriften," 22.

¹⁷ Sebastian Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit. Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem* (2nd enlarged edition), Studies Supplementary to Sobornost No. 4 (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1984), 59.

¹⁸ Sebastian Brock, *Bride of Light. Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, Mōrān 'Ethō 6 (Baker Hill, Kottayam, Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute [SEERI], 1994), 32–102 and 111–118. This collection of English translations also made accessible helpful versions of *sogithas* on Mary that were critically edited and translated into German in Edmund Beck, ed. and tr., *Nachträge zu Ephraem Syrus*, CSCO 363–364, *Scriptores Syri* 159–160 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1975). Also here, Brock relied on manuscript evidence that was not available to Beck for parts of his translation.

¹⁹ Anonymous / Pseudo-Ephraem, *Hymns on Mary* 7:7 (ed. and tr. Lamy, *Hymni et sermones*, vol. 2, 545–546; tr. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit. Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, 60–61; see also tr. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 45).

²⁰ Anonymous / Pseudo-Ephraem, *Hymns on Mary* 10:22 (ed. Lamy, *Hymni et sermones*, vol. 2, 565–566; tr. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 55–56).

one hymn (*madrāshā*, pl. *madrāshē*).²¹ This collection was edited by Gustav Bickell in 1873.²² The Syriac text in the manuscript itself assigns some of the works explicitly to an author named Cyrillona.²³ At times, scholars identify Cyrillona with Absamyā, a nephew of Ephraem the Syrian.²⁴ On stylistic grounds, the third homily of the collection, which deals with the theme of wheat, is assigned to Cyrillona as well.²⁵ The works that are ascribed to Cyrillona can only be dated imprecisely to sometime between about the fourth to the sixth century at the latest. Although they do not develop mariological thought at any great length, they allow for insights into how Mary's role as mediator and assistant was perceived.²⁶ The texts do not feature Mary directly in the role of an intercessor. Instead, she is portrayed as assisting Eve and as functioning as mediator of life by nurturing her infant child with milk.

In the second poem, a text on the conversion of Zachaeus, Cyrillona presented three dimensions of the activities of Eve and Mary.²⁷ The first dimension to be mentioned here is an antagonistic interaction. Whereas Eve "buried ... the leaven of death and sadness" in us, Mary saw it as her role to pull up such death and sadness in order to prevent all that was created from being corrupted. A second aspect of Mary's role in this relationship that one may discuss is that of mediating life and redemption to Eve. Growing old and shrinking, Eve averted her fate and became young again because she had Mary as her child. More specifically, a christological dimension of this second interrelationship was introduced as well, given that the act of birth-giving that took place constituted an experience that was available to Eve as well as to Mary, Eve's daughter, who had a child and whose child bought back the debts of his ancestor. This second level of relationship was made possible by the fact that Mary was able to mediate between Eve and Christ by virtue of being born and giving birth. The third dimension of the relationship between Eve and Mary that emerges from this passage in Cyrillona's work is most directly one of active assistance, albeit not one of intercession. When developing this dimension of the relationship, the author spoke of Eve as a person suffering from disability. Availing himself of the story element known in Syriac tradition that the serpent was punished with the loss of its feet because it had tempted Eve to disobey God's command,²⁸ Cyrillona presented both the serpent and Eve as physically unable to move, having been rendered disabled. "The serpent which had been mutilated, mutilated Eve." Yet Mary, who was spoken of as being a young girl, was able to carry Eve, who was called the "old one" or "grandmother." The poet formulated directly that "Mary came to be the feet for her mother" (V.3). Through her enabling Eve to walk again, ultimately Mary served with her assistance the goal of allowing Eve to breathe again life.

In other instances in Cyrillona's text, Mary was featured as the one who was able to give or mediate life. In the first of these compositions, a text on the institution of the Eucharist, one reads that in contrast to the cloth in which the people of Israel carried ineffective leaven out of Egypt, Mary's womb represented for the Christian

²¹ See William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 2 (London: British Museum, 1871), 669–673, here 670–671.

²² See Gustav Bickell, "Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas nebst einigen anderen syrischen Ineditis," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 27 (1873), 566–599; and Gustav Bickell, "Berichtigungen zu Cyrillonas," *ZDMG* 35 (1881), 531–532. An Italian translation was offered in Costantino Vona, *I carmi di Cirillona. Studio introduttivo – tradizione – commento*, *Scrinium Patristicum Lateranense* 2 (Rome, Paris, Tournai, New York: Desclée, 1963), 65–153. A French translation followed twenty years later. See Dominique Cerbelaud, *L'Agneau Véritable. Hymnes Cantiques et Homélies. Introduction, traduction du texte syriaque, notes et index* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1984).

²³ See fol. 72r. Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, 670.

²⁴ Cerbelaud, *L'Agneau Véritable*, 8.

²⁵ Peter Bruns, "Cyrillonas (Qûrillônâ)," in *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Siegmund Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings, translated from the German by Matthew O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 159. Bruns also suggests that a poem on the Holy Spirit that has been transmitted anonymously could be a work of the same author. See T. Jansma, "Une homélie anonyme sur l'effusion du Saint-Esprit," *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965), 157–178, who did not think he was able to discern the identity of the author of this homily based on the data he had available.

²⁶ For earlier discussions of the mariology of the compositions ascribed to Cyrillona, see Ortiz de Urbina, "La mariologia nei padri siriaci," 110–111; and Vona, *I carmi di Cirillona*, 46–52.

²⁷ See Cyrillona, *Poems* V.3 (ed. Bickell, "Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas," 592; Cerbelaud, *L'Agneau Véritable*, 89–90) for the text passage that features this relationship.

²⁸ See for example Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* III.15 (ed. and tr. Edmund Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen De Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, CSCO 174–175, *Scriptores Syri* 78–79 [Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1957], 12 [Syriac] & 11 [German]; tr. Sebastian Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns on Paradise* [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998], 96): "They all blushed at Adam who was suddenly found naked; the serpent had stolen his garments, for which it was deprived of its feet." The last comment in these verses expands upon Genesis 3:14, "on your belly you shall go."

church the veil in which Christ as warm, active leaven was covered and hidden.²⁹ Being presented as a young girl, Mary was the one from whose womb the true vine arose (III.14).³⁰ In yet another passage, that life-giving and life-sustaining function of Mary with which she was endowed through her role as mother to the infant child she nourished with “virginal milk” at her breast, again showed her quite clearly as one who mediated life to the new generation.³¹

In some respects, Cyrillona’s verses echoed ideas related to the “wheat metaphors” of the pseudo-Ephraemian material. Underlying that area of thought is the idea of Mary mediating between her son and individual human beings.³² His verses do not unequivocally state that Mary was seen as an intercessor.

BALAI

Syriac liturgical poetry preserves a collection of relatively short poems, composed in the five-syllable metre. Tradition has come to associate that meter with the name of Balai of Qenneshrin, given that this fifth-century Syriac author is understood to have composed all of his poetry in it.³³ In 1902, K. V. Zetterstéen edited two sets of these poems, one numbering 65 and a second one numbering 69, taken mainly from liturgical manuscripts preserved in London, Paris, and Berlin.³⁴ The manuscript evidence ascribes the set of 65 poems explicitly to Balai. The authorship of the second set of poems is decided through recourse to the metre as criterion. For his edition, Zetterstéen could not avail himself of relevant manuscripts preserved in libraries in Italy, including the Vatican. The ascription of several of the poems oscillates between Balai and Ephraem the Syrian.³⁵ It cannot be excluded that a few of the poems are neither by Balai nor by Ephraem. Whereas the identification of this poetry remains difficult and awaits a renewed, careful study, ideally in connection with the critical examination of the complete corpus of works attributed to Balai, scholars who have commented on the mariology of the poems edited by Zetterstéen were confident that these works reflect ideas dating to the period of the sixth century or earlier.³⁶ The importance of the collection has been emphasized in particular by Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, who judged these poems to be the first Syriac witnesses to the invocation of the Mother of God as intercessor.³⁷

In the first poem on the Mother of God the poet encouraged the church to rejoice on the day of Mary’s commemoration. The text does not permit an identification of the Marian feastday with which this poem was associated. Yet the author proclaimed that through Mary’s “prayer there will be mercy upon the world.”³⁸ In another poem, the author addressed a female person who was given the epithet “the honoured one (ܩܘܕܫܬܐ),” to “come and stand up on behalf of our weakness.”³⁹ As a consequence, the poet expected that “in grace we shall come to

²⁹ Cyrillona, *Poems* I.4 (ed. Bickell, “Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas,” 570; tr. Cerbelaud, *L’Agneau Véritable*, 39–40).

³⁰ Cyrillona, *Poems* III.14 (ed. Bickell, “Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas,” 580–581; tr. Cerbelaud, *L’Agneau Véritable*, 66–67).

³¹ Cyrillona, *Poems* VI.7 (ed. Bickell, “Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas,” 596; tr. Cerbelaud, *L’Agneau Véritable*, 98–99).

³² For some reflections on and probing into the question of Mary’s role as mediator in ancient Christian literature see Luigi Gambero, “Patristic Intuitions of Mary’s Role as Mediatrix and Advocate: The Invocation of the Faithful for Her Help,” *Marian Studies* 52 (2001), 78–101; and Virginia M. Kimball, “The Language of Mediation in Eastern Liturgical Prayer: The *Akathistos* and *Small Paraklesis*,” *Marian Studies* 52 (2001), 183–218.

³³ For a monograph-length study of Balai and his most substantial work, see Robert R. Phenix, *The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin. Rhetoric and Interpretation in Fifth-Century Syriac Literature*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 50 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

³⁴ K. V. Zetterstéen, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der religiösen Dichtung Balai’s nach den syrischen Handschriften des britischen Museums, der Bibliothèque Nationale zu Paris und der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1902).

³⁵ The main work Balai wrote is a substantial cycle of poetry dedicated to the interpretation of the figure of the patriarch Joseph, known elsewhere from the account in Genesis 37–50. Often this collection is ascribed to Ephraem the Syrian. For some recent discussion, see Phenix, *The Sermons on Joseph*, 14–31 and 72–112; and Martin Tamcke, “Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrers und ihre Verwendung im christlichen Gottesdienst unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Josephtexte,” in *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld*, ed. Tilman Nagel with the assistance of Elisabeth Müller-Luckner, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs. Kolloquium 72 (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2010), 173–195, here 186–190.

³⁶ Ortiz de Urbina, “La mariologia nei padri siriaci,” 112, fn. 1. A complete edition and translation of Balai’s Hymns on the Patriarch Joseph is in preparation.

³⁷ Ortiz de Urbina, “La mariologia nei padri siriaci,” 112.

³⁸ Balai of Qenneshrin, *Poems* 4 (ed. and tr. K. V. Zetterstéen, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der religiösen Dichtung Balai’s nach den syrischen Handschriften des britischen Museums, der Bibliothèque Nationale zu Paris und der königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* [Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1902], ١ and 14).

³⁹ Balai of Qenneshrin, *Poems* 15 (ed. and tr. Zetterstéen, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis*, ٣ and 17).

ܠܫܘܒܘ).⁴⁵ “By the power of his prayer” therefore, those in need received healing.⁴⁶ Since Rabbula was thought to be in direct converse with God, “mention of his [intercessory] prayer alone was sufficient (ܐܘܪܘܟܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܘܪܘܟܘܢ ܕܪܒܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) even to bring the dispute of a man’s house with his neighbor to a peaceful end.”⁴⁷ The roles of intercessors in prayer were even seen as interchangeable between Rabbula and the Christians of his flock. As they were able to “cleave[] to the wings ... of his prayers that [they] be protected,” they in turn “prayed for his perfect health so that he would endure in a long life.”⁴⁸ The biographer promptly compared Rabbula to “a sturdy wall, entirely encircling all his territory,” and keeping “those who were within the stronghold of his borders” “secure in peaceful calm.”⁴⁹ The power of prayer which Rabbula possessed and passed on also manifested itself after his death. The author of his *Life* commented that “even after his departure” the bishop left to the poor and needy “a good inheritance of prayer, and he commended them to the grace of God (ܠܘܫܘܒܘܢܐ ܡܢ ܕܘܪܘܟܘܢ ܕܪܒܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ), the Mother of all (ܡܝܬܪܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ), that from her should be distributed every day what was necessary for their needs.”⁵⁰ Any need a believer may have had to be able to turn to a female-identified source of assistance could be satisfied, in the eyes of the author of this biography, by relying on “the grace of God, the Mother of all.”

This hagiographical biography of the sixth century or earlier clearly witnesses to the fact that speakers of Syriac had a well-developed set of ideas regarding the possibilities of prayer of petition and intercession on the part of individuals who were endowed with a special status in the community, here those functioning in the office of the bishop of a local congregation. As bishop, and as ascetically minded leader of the church, Rabbula interceded with God on behalf of himself and his congregants. He also set the proper model beyond his grave. Through his personal example which lasted beyond his death he was depicted as having been able to mediate God’s assistance, portrayed as a female person, for those in dire distress. The role of an intercessor was quite fully textured in fifth-century Christian traditions in Syriac. The comparison of Rabbula to a sturdy wall in a text that intended to present “by means of written [words] the icon of the excellent deeds”⁵¹ of that bishop is noteworthy. Later on, in 626 CE, a prominent place would be taken up by the role of the icon of Mary in the defense of the walls of Constantinople. Yet in Syriac texts that are roughly contemporary to the *Life of Rabbula* as well as in that *Life* itself, the respective authors did not choose to develop such an image of the embodiment of powerful protection for Mary.

INTERCEDING IN HEAVEN: JACOB OF SERUGH AND THE SYRIAC *TRANSITUS MARIAE*

The instances in Syriac literature at which the idea of Mary as intercessor is at all developed in the early period centre on the spread of the cult of Mary’s death and translation into heaven. This basis for the paradigm of intercession is best explained on the older (though still current) intercession of martyrs who were conveyed directly to be with the godhead after their acts of witnessing.

⁴⁵ *Life of Rabbula* 33 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 185; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

⁴⁶ *Life of Rabbula* 34 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 186; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

⁴⁷ *Life of Rabbula* 34 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 186; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

⁴⁸ *Life of Rabbula* 35 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 187; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

⁴⁹ *Life of Rabbula* 35–36 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 187; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

⁵⁰ *Life of Rabbula* 49 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 202; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

⁵¹ *Life of Rabbula* 1 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 159; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming). For discussion of the rhetoric of this passage, see Robert R. Phenix Jr., “Kunstprosaistische Elemente in der *Vita Rabbulae*. Ein Blick auf das Encomium an den Helden,” in *Die Suryoye und ihre Umwelt. 4. deutsches Syrologen-Symposium in Trier 2004. Festgabe Wolfgang Hage zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Martin Tamcke and Andreas Heinz, *Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte* 36 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 281–293.

JACOB OF SERUGH

Explicit references to Mary's work of direct intercession are found only rarely in texts written in Syriac that are datable beyond any doubt to the period prior to the ninth century. The one context that constitutes the notable exception to this observation is that of material relating to Mary's transition from this life on earth to the next.

Ancient Christian tradition developed a narrative that focused on events taking place during the last few days of Mary's earthly existence and her passage through death into God's kingdom.⁵² In at least two texts that deal with this experience in the life of the Mother of God – a *memrā* or verse homily by Jacob of Serugh and the apocryphal story of the *Transitus Mariae* as it is preserved in Syriac in an account consisting of five or six books – explicit comments address her role as that of a woman of prayer, a woman, whose prayer of intercession was thought of as being effective in remedying human needs.

Jacob of Serugh (ca. 450–521),⁵³ a Syriac author and poet of theological works, included a prayer of intercession at the end of his verse homily *On the Death and Burial of the Virgin Mother of God*. In his concern for obtaining peace, relief from trials, healings, protection, an end to hunger, and liberation from the oppression of evil spirits, the poet addressed the Son of God directly but also asked that Mary's prayers for such requests be heeded. Thus Jacob implored:

*O Son of God, by her prayers make your peace to dwell
in heaven, in the depths, and among all the counsels of her sons.
Make wars to cease, and remove trials and plagues;
bestow calm and tranquility on seafarers.
Heal the infirm, cure the sick, fill the hungry;
be a Father to orphans whom death has left destitute.
In your piety, drive out devils who harass mankind,
and exalt your Church to the four quarters of the globe,
that it may sing your praise.
Watch over priests and purify ministers;
be a guardian of old age and youth.
O Bridegroom Christ, to you be praise from every mouth,
and on us be mercy at all times. Amen. Amen.*⁵⁴

This passage from a prayer to the Son of God⁵⁵ envisions Mary praying alongside the poet. The poet's prayer expects and formulates, whether rhetorically or not, that the primary reason for God granting the requests of the human petitioner is that Mary herself addresses these prayers to God.

⁵² Scholarly attention has repeatedly concentrated on the exploration of this tradition. Main contributions include Simon Claude Mimouni, *Les traditions anciennes sur la Dormition et l'Assomption de Marie: études littéraires, historiques et doctrinales*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 104 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Brian E. Daley, tr. and introduction, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998); Michel van Esbroeck, *Aux origines de la Dormition de la Vierge*, Collected Studies 472 (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1995); Simon Claude Mimouni, *Dormition et assomption de Marie: histoire des traditions anciennes*, Théologie historique 98 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1995); and Antoine Wenger, *L'assomption de la T. S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VIe au Xe siècle: études et documents*, Archives de l'Orient chrétien 5 (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1955).

⁵³ For a helpful introduction to Jacob of Serugh, see Christian Lange, "Jakob von Sarug, †521," in *Syrische Kirchenväter*, ed. Wassilios Klein, Urban Taschenbücher 587 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 217–227. Recent work on Jakob has made an effort to contextualize his writings more fully. See for example the contributions collected in *Jacob of Serugh and His Times. Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity*, ed. George Anton Kiraz, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 8 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010). The systematic investigation of Jacob's theology offered in two volumes by Tanius Bou Mansour (*La Théologie de Jacques de Saroug, Tome I: Création, Anthropologie, Ecclésiologie et Sacrement*, and *Tome II: Christologie, Trinité, Eschatologie, Méthode exégétique et théologique*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit 16 and 40 [Kaslik: 1993 and 2000]), only occasionally treats aspects of Jacob's mariology in a somewhat sustained manner. See vol. I, pp. 103–105, 109 fn. 220, 223–227, 211, and 250–255. For a monograph-length study of Jacob's mariology, see now James Puthuparampil, *Mariological Thought of Mar Jacob of Serugh (451–521)*, Mōrān 'Eth'ō 25 (Baker Hill, Kottayam, Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute [SEERI], 2005).

⁵⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of the Virgin Mother of God* (ed. Paul Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia* [Paris and Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1902], 709–719, here 719; tr. Mary Hansbury, *On the Mother of God. Jacob of Serug*, with an introduction by Sebastian Brock [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998], 89–100, here 99–100). See also Puthuparampil, *Mariological Thought*, 343–344.

⁵⁵ Puthuparampil, *Mariological Thought*, 343.

Jacob's expectation that God would hear prayers that reference Mary appears to have been grounded in two lines of reasoning. On the one hand, Mary had been involved in facilitating communication between God and humankind previously, specifically in the incarnation. In his composition *On the Blessed Virgin Mother of God*, Jacob formulated that "The Son is the Word and she is the letter ... by which forgiveness was sent forth to the whole world." As a letter carries the words of the communication that are written upon it, in her role as birthgiver to God's son, Mary brought God's forgiveness to humankind. Thus "with her the Father sent us tidings full of good things, and through her forgiveness to all condemned for their bonds of sin." As a result of this mediating communication which Mary worked, Adam was emancipated from his slavery to sin, "heavenly beings" and "those below" were reconciled with one another, "and the sides which had been at enmity were in great peace."⁵⁶ Through her role in the incarnation as being the one who came to be the mother of God, Mary facilitated communication between God and humankind, between the world above and the world below, with the result that oppressions ended and peace was restored.

A second line of reasoning that encouraged the poet to envision that Mary's assistance in prayer would be effective was grounded in the expectation that at her death, Mary "the Mother of the King seeks to enter the bridal chamber of light," the heavenly realm, and that she would be able to do so.⁵⁷ Jacob's text did not formulate explicitly that Mary was in heaven. Yet the contrast his words evoked between the manifestations of the joy of those in heaven at Mary's departure and the trouble and grief of the disciples left behind who mourned Mary's death spoke to the imminent fulfillment of that expectation of seeing her inside that "bridal chamber of light."⁵⁸ Christian tradition had developed early on a theology of martyrdom that saw paradise as the reward martyrs received immediately after their death. Belief in their power of intercession was grounded precisely in that conviction of the martyrs' immediate access to God's presence. A prominent early witness to the belief in the martyr's potent access to heaven is available in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.⁵⁹ That such ideas were present also among speakers of Syriac is demonstrated by the fact that Eusebius's *Church History*, which incorporated much of the account of Polycarp's death, was available in Syriac translation already in the fifth century.⁶⁰ Native Syriac martyrdom accounts likewise display the same idea.⁶¹

Jacob of Serugh did not think of Mary as a martyr in his poetry. Yet interest in exploring the details of events pertaining to the end of her life became more prominent in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, especially in Syriac-speaking regions. Along with this was an increasing focus on exploring the possibilities of what it might mean that Mary, residing with God, could be thought of as being able to guarantee that her prayers of intercession were bound to be answered.

⁵⁶ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Virgin Mother of God* (ed. Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia*, 614–639, here 636; tr. Hansbury, *On the Mother of God. Jacob of Serug*, 17–42, here 39).

⁵⁷ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of the Virgin Mother of God* (ed. Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia*, 718; tr. Hansbury, *On the Mother of God. Jacob of Serug*, 98).

⁵⁸ Jacob of Serugh, *On the Death and Burial of the Virgin Mother of God* (ed. Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona quae supersunt omnia*, 718; tr. Hansbury, *On the Mother of God. Jacob of Serug*, 98–99).

⁵⁹ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.1 and 19.2 (ed. and tr. Bart Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers I: I Clement, II Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Didache*, Loeb Classical Library 24 [Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2003], 390–391 and 394–395) speaks of Polycarp having "received the crown of immortality." In addition, *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 19.2 (ed. and tr. Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers I*, 394–395) expands upon this comment and adds that "now he rejoices together with the apostles and all those who are upright, and he glorifies the Father and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ."

⁶⁰ For the fragmentary manuscript evidence, see Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß der christlich-palästinensischen Texte* (Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers Verlag Dr. jur. Albert Ahn, 1922), 59, who refers to a manuscript kept in Saint Petersburg, dated to 462. Eusebius, *Church History* IV.15.40 (Greek text and tr. Giuseppe del Ton, *Eusebio di Cesarea. Storia Ecclesiastica e I Martiri della Palestina*, Scrinium Patristicum Lateranense 1 [Rome, Paris, Tournai, and New York: Desclée & C. i Editori Pontifici, 1964], 290–291) contains the relevant material from *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.1. *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 19.2 is not to be found in the Greek text of the *Church History*. Eusebius's acquaintance with Syriac traditions is discussed in Sebastian Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 212–234.

⁶¹ The idea that martyrs are able to enter heaven immediately is in evidence in early Syriac documents. See for example the *Martyrdom of Habib, the Deacon* (ed. and tr. W. Cureton, *Ancient Syriac Documents Relative to the Earliest Establishment of Christianity in Edessa and the Neighbouring Countries, from the Year after Our Lord's Ascension to the Beginning of the Fourth Century* [London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1864], ܩܕܫܐ ܕܩܘܪܕܐ, here ܩ [Syriac] & 72–85, here 79 [English]).

SYRIAC TRANSITUS MARIAE

Perhaps the most important witness in Syriac to the development of Mary's role as intercessor in the sixth century (though perhaps already in the fifth century) is the apocryphal Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, which came to be an integral part of an apocryphal *Life* or *Book of Mary* that developed over the course of several centuries.⁶² A sizeable and crucial witness to the early stages of the *Book of Mary* was edited in 1902 on the basis of a palimpsest manuscript.⁶³

The main body of material comprising the Syriac texts on the lower level of the palimpsest constitutes an important witness to the development of the composite apocryphal *Book of Mary* in the Syriac tradition.⁶⁴ Dating in its origins at least to the late fifth or early sixth centuries, as is evidenced by the manuscript used by Smith Lewis, that *Book of Mary* included the texts of the *Protoevangelium of James*, that is, an apocryphal account of events in Mary's early childhood leading up to and including her conception of and birthingiving to Jesus,⁶⁵ and the so-called *Transitus Mariae*, a narrative account of the events of the last days of Mary's life and her departure from this world to the next. Of primary relevance for the present discussion is the text of this second component, the Syriac *Transitus Mariae*. Comments within that text claim that an original, on which the work was based, "was written in Hebrew, and in Greek, and in Latin."⁶⁶ Although there is some evidence that points to the early existence of a work on Mary's exit from this world in the Greek language,⁶⁷ the Syriac text of the *Transitus Mariae*, which is divided into five or six books and thus at times is identified as the *Six Books Transitus Mariae*, is the earliest substantial form of the work now accessible. Given the sixth-century manuscript evidence for the work, it ought to be regarded as an integral part of Syriac literature of that period.

At the end of the first book of the *Transitus Mariae* the author (or the scribe) expressed the hope that "by the prayers of the mother of God, Mary, and also of all the saints, may God make to pass away from the earth and from this place where this book is, the sword, captivity, famine, pestilence, and all plagues and rods of anger."⁶⁸ Here the text articulated the expectation that intercessory prayer of the saints, including that of Mary, could offer relief and protection from various types of evil that might afflict human beings. Such an idea fit well with Jacob of Serugh's presentation of Mary's intercessory capabilities in his *On the Death and Burial of the Virgin Mother of God*. Yet one problem to keep in mind when evaluating the evidence of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* on the basis of Smith Lewis' edition is the fact that the editor employed evidence not only from the ancient, fifth- to sixth-century palimpsest, but also from a more recent Syriac manuscript, datable to the nineteenth century. While the manuscript evidence does not support on its own the antiquity of the comments regarding Mary's intercessory function in this instance, the parallel in ideas to Jacob of Serugh's verses speaks in favor of the fact that the comments in the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* could indeed be reflective of the spirituality of the sixth century. Yet the

⁶² See also Horn, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives," 273–275.

⁶³ Agnes Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca. The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae with Texts from the Septuagint, the Corân, the Peshitta, and from a Syriac Hymn in a Syro-Arabic Palimpsest of the Fifth and Other Centuries, with an Appendix of Palestinian Syriac Texts from the Taylor-Schechter Collection*, Studia Sinaitica XI (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1902). Agnes Smith Lewis published the Syriac and Arabic texts of a palimpsest manuscript she had acquired in Suez in 1895 (p. ix). On palaeographical grounds, A. Cowley had assisted her in dating the upper writing to the tenth century. The Arabic script of the lower writings were assigned a date of about 750 CE. For the hand in which the Syriac texts were written that constitute most of the text of the lower layer of the palimpsest, the editor proposed a possible date of "the latter half of the 5th century; or at the latest ... the beginning of the 6th" (p. x).

⁶⁴ For more detailed discussion of this development, see Cornelia B. Horn, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels regarding Jesus' Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The 'Book of Mary,' the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur'ân," *Apocrypha* 19 (2008), 267–291, here 270–281; and Cornelia Horn, "From Model Virgin to Maternal Intercessor: Mary, Children, and Family Problems in Late Antique Infancy Gospel Traditions and Their Medieval Trajectories," in *Christian Apocryphal Texts for the New Millennium: Achievements, Prospects, and Challenges. Proceedings of the International Workshop Held in Ottawa, September 30th – October 1st, 2006*, ed. Pierluigi Piovanelli, Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

⁶⁵ For separate access to the Greek text of the *Protoevangelium of James*, accompanied by a French translation, one may avail oneself with benefit of Émile de Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques. En appendice: Les versions arméniennes traduites en Latin par Hans Quecke*, Subsidia Hagiographica 33 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961). An edition of the Greek, which is largely but not exclusively based on de Strycker's edition and which is accompanied by an English translation, is also found in Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*, The Scholars Bible 2 (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995), 32–77.

⁶⁶ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܩܠ (Syriac) & 19 (English).

⁶⁷ See the evidence of the so-called *Tübingen Theosophy*, discussed in Horn, "Syriac and Arabic Perspectives," 276–278.

⁶⁸ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܩܠ (Syriac) & 19 (English).

advantage of a confirmation of an idea through a contemporary textual parallel is not available in all other instances in which the text of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* that is found in the palimpsest features *lacunae*. Therefore it is necessary to observe critical vigilance at all times when examining this material.

As one evaluates the evidence for Mary's role as intercessor in the Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, one notices that the text is characterized by a prominent liturgical atmosphere that weaves a path for itself throughout.⁶⁹ In its frequent references to persons engaged in prayer Mary is prominent. Yet the text also addresses problems encountered by those who pray as well as a conflict over sacred space. In the second book, for example, the Jews are said to have restricted access to the tomb of Christ and the site of Golgotha in order to make it difficult or impossible for Christians, including Mary, to pray there.⁷⁰

Book two of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* states that Mary "used to go to the tomb of the Christ" daily.⁷¹ She regularly "prayed beside Golgotha and the grave."⁷² That behaviour is said to have enraged the leaders of the Jews, primarily the priests who suggested she should be stoned for it.⁷³ Undaunted, Mary continued to pray and offer "sweet spices and fire" and "myrrh ... thrown on the censer." The text offers details of how one Friday

*while she was praying and had lifted up her eyes and gazed at heaven, suddenly the doors of heaven were opened and a scent of myrrh went up, which the Lady Mary had thrown on the censer; and its odour went about all the regions of heaven. And in that hour came Gabriel the angel to her from heaven, and knelt to worship her; and he said to her: "Hail to you, mother of God! Your prayer has been accepted in heaven before your Son, our Lord Jesus the Christ."*⁷⁴

As the story reports it, Gabriel told Mary, "at the time when you prayed on earth, at once you were answered in heaven; and whatsoever you seek from the Christ, your Son who is in heaven at the right hand of God, you shall have both in earth and in heaven, and your will is done."⁷⁵ These words would have suggested to any reader of the text that Mary's prayers, including her prayers on behalf of the interests of others, not only her own, were guaranteed a positive response from heaven. They grounded her power as an intercessor, the only one whose prayers were able to yield immediate responses.

The Syriac *Transitus Mariae* added an intriguing dimension to the question of Mary's role as intercessor insofar as it dealt with the challenges Mary had to confront in order to be able to continue with her prayers at Golgotha and the tomb of her son. The question of who could function as intercessor seemed to have carried interreligious dimensions, here those of the conflict between Jews and Christians. In fact, not long after the reader was informed that the Jews tried to impede Mary from praying at the tomb, the text developed its anti-Jewish argument by suggesting that a competition regarding the effectiveness of prayer may have been playing a role here. The efficacy of the prayer of Mary was set over against the prayer of the Jewish priests. The reliability of the claims of the Jewish priests had been called into question right from the outset of the description of this scene of competition in book two, however. Having recourse to the authority of the Roman governor, the Jewish priests were said to have tried to prevent Mary from praying "at the grave of Golgotha."⁷⁶ In addition, in order to prove Mary wrong, the priests relied on the witness of "heaven and earth" that Jesus was not the Messiah but "the son of Joseph the carpenter."⁷⁷ As they attempted to remind Mary of "sins which you have committed before God,"⁷⁸ it remained unclear to the reader, what kind of sins these were supposed to have been, given that the claim was advanced that Joseph, and not another male, was presumed to have been the father of Jesus. In the polemic between Jews and Christians that is accessible for instance in the writings of Origen of Alexandria or the Talmud, evidence remains from antiquity that in some Jewish circles Mary was accused of having conceived her son from a soldier named

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the relevant material see also Stephen Shoemaker, "Apocrypha and Liturgy in the Fourth Century: The Case of the 'Six Books' Dormition Apocryphon," in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of 'Canonical' and 'Non-canonical' Religious Texts*, ed. James H. Charlesworth and Lee Martin McDonald (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 153–163.

⁷⁰ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܠܘܘܩܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 19–20 (English). For a detailed discussion of relations between Jews and Christians as they are relevant to the context of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, "'Let Us Go and Burn Her Body': The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions," *Church History* 68.4 (1999), 775–823.

⁷¹ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܪܝܡܐ (Syriac) & 20 (English).

⁷² Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܠܘܚܐ (Syriac) & 20 (English).

⁷³ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܠܘܚܐ and ܡܠܘܚܐ (Syriac) & 20 and 31 (English).

⁷⁴ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܠܘܚܐ (Syriac) & 20 (English, translation modified).

⁷⁵ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܠܘܘܩܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 21 (English).

⁷⁶ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܠܘܘܩܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 22 (English).

⁷⁷ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܠܘܘܩܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 22 (English).

⁷⁸ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܠܘܘܩܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 22 (English, translation modified).

Panthera.⁷⁹ Yet the accusation of adultery did not seem to have been operative in the present instance. Underlying the argument which the priests advanced against Mary's chastity in the *Protoevangelium of James* was the assumption that Joseph had received Mary from the hands of the Temple priests as a virgin in order to keep her as a virgin, but then had had relations with her. The accusation raised against Mary in the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* was in line with this argument. The implication of a connection between Mary's sin and Joseph's fatherhood of her child thus connected the two texts of the *Protoevangelium of James* and the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* and, on the literary level, points to the development of the *Book of Mary*, of which these two texts are two constituent parts. The portrayal of Mary as a sinner, however, also served the purposes of attempting to disqualify her prayers of intercession.

Initially in the text of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, the priests were shown as trying their best to demonstrate that Mary was a sinner who needed to return to proper worship. Instead of her praying at the tomb of Christ, the priests recommended to her to pray in the synagogue and listen to the Torah. Moreover, the priests suggested to Mary that they could intercede for her with God, and they presented themselves as being convinced that God would heed their prayers. With such an anachronism, Christian prayer was set up as standing in competition with nascent rabbinical Jewish liturgical practice. As an added dimension to the polemic of this interaction, the text implied that the priests thought of Mary as being sick and requiring healing. Such healing, the Jewish priests suggested, could be achieved if they were to call into her ears "with a trumpet." Should Mary not accept this offer of effective prayer on the part of the Jewish priests, she was threatened with expulsion from Jerusalem and with a form of confinement to her "house in Bethlehem."⁸⁰ In her response, according to the second book of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, Mary clearly rejected the Jewish priests' demands.⁸¹ Instead, she relocated the site of her prayer activities from Golgotha to her house in Bethlehem. Yet she had no doubt that God would continue to accept her prayers at that new location. Thus, she could inform "all the women of the neighborhood in which she dwelt" that her Master in heaven would continue to "fulfil my wish, whatsoever I seek from Him."⁸² For her, the competition between the prayers of the Jewish priests and her own prayer was decided in favour of her own activities. Moreover, as book two highlighted as well, those who sided with Mary, especially a circle of virgins who "were with the Lady Mary night and day" and who "were the daughters of rich men and rulers of Jerusalem,"⁸³ likewise could obtain, through Mary's prayers, that their own prayers became acceptable to God and thus effective.⁸⁴

Prayer activities, often sponsored by Mary, permeate important sections of the Syriac *Transitus Mariae*. A prominent object that emphasized the liturgical dimensions of this apocryphal text is the "censer of incense". It is present in numerous scenes of prayer in the second book. In some cases, the censer accompanied prayer in settings of intensive worship.⁸⁵ As Mary and the virgins who accompanied her "to Bethlehem on Thursday"⁸⁶ were getting ready to move from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, Mary took a censer from a chest, in which she had kept her garments.⁸⁷ Another instance is narrated, that on the following day, Friday, Mary requested to be given "the censers of incense" in order to be properly equipped to pray to Christ in heaven.⁸⁸ In a scene that showed the apostle John visiting with Mary before the hour of her death, Mary encouraged John to "set the censer of incense" so that incense could accompany prayer.⁸⁹ In response, John functioned as an intercessor on behalf of Mary by praying to Christ that he might heed his mother's prayers.⁹⁰ Here, incense arising from the censer provided an appropriate setting for intercessory prayer. In another scene, successful intercessory prayer for a sick child was presented as the logical con-

⁷⁹ See Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus*, I.28 and 32 (ed. and tr. Marcel Borret, *Contre Celse. Origène*, Sources chrétiennes 213bis [Paris: Cerf, 2005], 150–152 and 162–166; tr. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953], 27–28 and 31–32). For a discussion of the evidence from the Talmud, see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 15–24.

⁸⁰ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐ (Syriac) & 22–23 (English).

⁸¹ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 23 (English).

⁸² Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 23 (English), and see also pages ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 25 (English).

⁸³ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 24 (English).

⁸⁴ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 24 (English).

⁸⁵ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 32 (English).

⁸⁶ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 25 (English).

⁸⁷ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 24 (English).

⁸⁸ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 25 (English).

⁸⁹ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 27 (English); see also the passage at pages ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 26 (English).

⁹⁰ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܠܡܢܐܐܘܪܐܝܢܐ (Syriac) & 27 (English).

when requesting Mary's intercession and assistance. In addition to simply asking for her prayers, book four developed the perception that Christians could also offer commemorations to her, which meant that feastdays were celebrated in her honour.¹⁰¹ For specific geographical locations, for instance at the Mount of Olives, the site that eventually featured Mary's tomb, such commemorations were to take place "three times in the year."¹⁰² In a prayer of intercession Mary was said to have offered to God, some details were provided concerning how such commemorations were to happen. Mary's prayers requested that God accept the offerings and prayers, supplications, and tears of all those who assembled in order to commemorate her, present her with offerings, and were "naming the memory of the Lady Mary, the mother of the Messiah."¹⁰³ In addition, passages in the text that is contained in the later manuscript also spelled out for the reader that "whoso shall make a commemoration of her shall be excellent in heaven before the face of the Father and whosoever shall make and magnify her commemoration before all mankind, shall be blessed by God."¹⁰⁴ Those who celebrated Mary's memory therefore were promised to have sure access to God's ear.

Jacob of Serugh's brief treatment of the theme of Mary's intercession that was presented above corresponds well with the evidence that can be derived from the Syriac *Transitus Mariae* as a solid witness that in the sixth century, the idea of Mary's intercessory prayer and role as intercessor were well developed in some subsets of the Syriac-speaking realm. In fact, the parallel between Jacob's verses on Mary as intercessor and sections of the text of a longer prayer of intercession Mary offered in the fourth book of the *Syriac Transitus Mariae* is quite striking. Given the prayer's length and detail, its attestation in the early palimpsest, and given its extraordinary relevance to the topic of the present article, it is justified to present this prayer in full here, omitting only the narrator's comments. Mary was imagined to have prayed as follows:

May God, Who willed of His own will, and was reconciled in His love, and sent His Son from Heaven, and He dwelt in the palace of my members, have mercy upon the world which calls upon Him O Christ, Son of the King of Heaven, Son of God who does not fail, receive the prayers of men, who call [upon] and commemorate the name of Your mother before You, and make tribulations pass away from them; and make bad times cease from the earth Lord Jesus the Christ, give a crown to old age, and a bringing up to youth; and help the souls that call upon You; and whosoever makes a commemoration of my spirit and of my body, which have left this world. ... I entreat You, Lord [p. 57] Jesus the Christ, that what I have sought, You will do in heaven and on earth. This, Lord, I would persuade You, that wherever men are assembled and are making a commemoration of me, and are presenting me with offerings, and are naming the memory of the Lady Mary, the mother of the Messiah, accept, O Lord, their offerings from them, and accept the prayer which goes up to Your presence. And receive the supplication of men, and the tears which are shed from their eyes; and cause to pass away from the land in which they make my offerings, the sword, and captivity, and famine and pestilence, and grievous calamities; and all the afflictions which befall the children of men, do you cause to cease from people who make offerings before You.¹⁰⁵

The concerns of this prayer with the well-being of the whole world, the coming of an end of tribulations and evil times, as well as the request to extend well-being to all stages of human life, the old and the young, stand in parallel to themes one encounters in the verses Jacob of Serugh composed about Mary's role as intercessor as discussed above. Since both texts date to about the same period, namely the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the fact that they overlap in topic in this case constitutes a valuable witness to prayer practices and sentiments among the Christian populace in the Syriac-speaking realm during that time. As in the case of Jacob's metrical homilies, in which occasional comments and circumstantial evidence added up to allow one to discern a fuller picture of the composition of his audience in the region of Serugh, southwest of Edessa,¹⁰⁶ additional themes that characterized Mary's intercessory prayer in the *Syriac Transitus Mariae* in this instance might likewise be evaluated and provide

¹⁰¹ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܘܨܝܘܪܐ (Syriac) & 56 (English).

¹⁰² Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܘܨܝܘܪܐ (Syriac) & 59 (English).

¹⁰³ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܘܨܝܘܪܐ (Syriac) & 57 (English).

¹⁰⁴ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, 105 (Syriac) & 63 (English).

¹⁰⁵ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܐܘܨܝܘܪܐ (Syriac) & 56–57 (English).

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the audience of Jacob's homilies, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "To Whom Did Jacob Preach?" in *Jacob of Serugh and His Times. Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity*, ed. George Anton Kiraz, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 8 (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2010), 115–131. Some of Jacob's letters reveal that Christians with whom he corresponded were afflicted by the oppressions accompanying persecution and war. See for example Letter 18, addressed to the Himyarites. See Gunnar Olinder, ed., *Jacobi Sarugensis epistulae quotquot supersunt*, CSCO 110, Scriptorum Syri 57 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1937, reprinted 1952), 87–102. For a recent translation, see Micheline Albert, tr., *Les Lettres de Jacques de Saroug*, Patrimoine Syriaque 3 (Kaslik, Lebanon: Parole de l'Orient, 2004), 129–144.

some insights regarding the needs, concerns, and identity of early listeners and readers of this apocryphal text. Thus when Mary requested of Christ a few lines later in the same prayer, attested in the palimpsest, to bless “the land in which [Mary’s] offerings are made,” that the locust not destroy it, that it would not be affected by heat, blight, or hailstones, that the “sick be cured,” the afflicted find relief, the hungry be satisfied, the poor “become rich,” those tormented by Satan or violence have their “bonds be loosed,” and that those who found themselves in distress when travelling on sea “be delivered from destruction,”¹⁰⁷ concerns of a society that is based on agricultural production and familiar with travel and economic activities on sea come to the fore. That the audience was one that depended primarily on the success of agricultural activities is supported by several further references in book four of the text, evidenced in the palimpsest, that speak of the power of Mary’s prayer to bless the fruits of the earth¹⁰⁸ and the appropriateness of commemorating her on a given day “on account of the seeds that were sown; and on account of the abundance of the wheat” or “on account of the vines bearing clusters, on account of the trees bearing fruit.”¹⁰⁹

MARY’S ROLE AS INTERCESSOR IN SYRIAC LITURGICAL HYMNOGRAPHY: SYRIAC *THEOTOKIA* AND THE HYMNS ASCRIBED TO RABBULA IN LATER LITURGICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Much material that is relevant for the study of Syriac liturgical hymnography has not yet been edited critically. Any conclusions drawn in the following discussion on the basis of liturgical hymns therefore have to be considered as preliminary statements that are open to revisions in light of the results of future examinations of the manuscript evidence. Yet despite such a *caveat*, one may venture as a working hypothesis for the time being that the ninth century constitutes an important further stage in the development of the approach to Mary’s role as intercessor on the part of speakers of Syriac. In its final section, this article considers two bodies of Syriac texts that reveal abundantly that attention to and reliance upon Mary’s intercession increased substantially during that latter period, likely in dialogue with the Greek tradition. The sets of texts that come into view are *theotokia* in Syriac and a set of hymns ascribed to Rabbula of Edessa, which, even if they were composed by the bishop originally, in their present form only allow the researcher access to the reception of this material in later liturgical manuscripts.

SYRIAC *THEOTOKIA*

The tradition of dedicating hymns explicitly to the Theotokos, the Mother of God, can be traced back in the Greek tradition to as early as the fourth century.¹¹⁰ After the eighth century, these hymns were also translated into Syriac and Arabic, among other languages. The earliest attestation of specimens of Syriac *theotokia* is contained among the Syriac manuscript fragments that were discovered at the Monastery of Saint Catherine’s on Sinai in 1975. This material dates to the period between the ninth and eleventh centuries.¹¹¹ In the context of a study of biblical citations and allusions as they are revealed in Syriac *theotokia*, Natalia Smelova has made more readily available an English translation of a rather unique, independent, and almost complete collection of Syriac *theotokia*, kept in St Petersburg, at the National Library (MS Syriac, new series, 11).¹¹² Some of the hymns contained in that manuscript are almost identical with those in the Syriac fragments that came to the fore at St Catherine’s monastery.¹¹³ The manuscript has been identified as belonging to the Syriac-speaking Melkite milieu and should be

¹⁰⁷ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܘܠܝܬܐ (Syriac) & 57 (English).

¹⁰⁸ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܘܠܝܬܐ (Syriac) & 59 (English).

¹⁰⁹ Smith Lewis, ed. and tr., *Apocrypha Syriaca*, ܡܘܠܝܬܐ (Syriac) & 60–61 (English).

¹¹⁰ Natalia Smelova, “Biblical Allusions and Citations in the Syriac Theotokia according to the MS Syr. New Series 11 of the National Library of Russia, St Petersburg,” in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 6 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 369–391, here 369; Anton Baumstark, “Ein frühchristliches Theotokion in mehrsprachiger Überlieferung und verwandte Texte des ambrosianischen Ritus,” *Oriens Christianus*, New series 7–8 (1918), 37–61; and D. M. Montagna, “La lode alla Theotokos nei testi greci dei secoli IV–VII,” *Marianum* 81 (1962), 453–543.

¹¹¹ Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 370; Sebastian P. Brock, *Catalogue of Syriac Fragments (New Finds) in the Library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai* (Athens: Mount Sinai Foundation, 1995), 66–67 and 268–271.

¹¹² Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 382–391.

¹¹³ Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 373.

dated to the ninth century.¹¹⁴ Smelova has argued that the manuscript is a product of the scribes at St Catherine's.¹¹⁵ She also concluded that the hymns that are preserved in MS Sinai Greek 1593, a manuscript that is datable "to the late eighth or early ninth century" and that has its origins in Palestine in the Melkite community, are the most likely archetypes for the collection of Syriac *theotokia* featured in the St. Petersburg MS Syriac New Series 11.¹¹⁶ The translation activity of *theotokia* into Syriac therefore as it is evidenced in this material goes back to the early ninth century or even before then.¹¹⁷

Mary's prayers, supplications, and intercessions are sought with great vigor in the *theotokia* presented in Syriac translation in the St Petersburg manuscript. Early on in the collection in *theotokion* 3, the text compared the "Mother of God and Virgin" as a "spiritual mountain" to Mount Sinai upon which God descended when giving the Law to Moses. Consequently, the author invited Mary to "pray to Him [i.e., God] with us."¹¹⁸ The request included that Mary "[o]ffer Him supplications for our salvation."¹¹⁹ That the Virgin "gave birth to the incarnate Word" was one of the reasons that encouraged the poet to ask her to "beseech for us with your supplication and pray for the salvation of our souls."¹²⁰ References to Mary's motherhood as the basis for the expectation of successful intercession on her part could also find their expression in the image of Mary who "beheld Him in [her] arms when he was feeding on the milk of [her] breast."¹²¹ Yet one also discovers references to her virginity which could serve as the foundation on which those who requested her intercession built their hope.¹²² Mary's humility and her characterization as being "full of grace" (cf. Luke 1:28), "most glorified," "pure one," and "blessed one" functioned as further motifs that grounded the poet's trust in asking for her supplication.¹²³ Allusions to Mary's state of being "full of goodness," "entirely unblemished," or the "most-holy one" likewise served as a firm basis for the confidence of the ones who approached her in the hope that her prayers would be successful.¹²⁴ An argument for the effectiveness of Mary's intercession seemed to have been based on understanding her position and power to be "more glorious than the highest powers" or "exalted."¹²⁵ Thus Mary was seen as being endowed with and using "audacity."¹²⁶ Other images that presented her as a person, in whose support one could trust, spoke of her as "full of every fairness" or as being the "union of all good things" and "source of blessings."¹²⁷ Occasional imagery used for Mary that presented her as the "limit of mysteries, types and symbols of Christ the God"¹²⁸ or the "consummation of all mysteries and symbols"¹²⁹ and that placed on that foundation the trust that her prayer would be effective, ultimately was resounding theological terminology with which Christian speakers of Syriac would have been intimately familiar. Related language that favored the concept of ܠܘܘܝܐ, *raza*, "mystery" or "sign," saturat-

¹¹⁴ Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 372 and 373.

¹¹⁵ Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 370–371.

¹¹⁶ Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 372.

¹¹⁷ See also Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 373.

¹¹⁸ *Theotokion* 3 (first mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 383.

¹¹⁹ *Theotokion* 5 (first mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 383.

¹²⁰ *Theotokion* 6 (second mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 383. See also *theotokion* 12 (third mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 385; *theotokia* 16 and 17 (third mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 385; *theotokia* 19, 21, and 23 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 385–386; *theotokion* 26 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387; *theotokia* 30 and 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388; *theotokion* 37 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 389; *theotokia* 39–42 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 389–390; and *theotokia* 46, 49, and 51 (eighth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 390–391.

¹²¹ *Theotokion* 20 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 386; see also *theotokion* 29 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387.

¹²² *Theotokion* 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388; see also *theotokion* 35 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388–389; and *theotokion* 41 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 389.

¹²³ *Theotokia* 7 and 8 (second mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 384; see also *theotokion* 26 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387; *theotokia* 27, 30, and 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387–388; *theotokion* 35 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388–389; and *theotokia* 39–41 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 389.

¹²⁴ *Theotokia* 16 and 17 (third mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 385; see also *theotokia* 20–21 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 386; *theotokion* 35 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388–389; and *theotokion* 41 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 389.

¹²⁵ *Theotokion* 46 (eighth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 390; see also *theotokion* 30 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388; and *theotokion* 37 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 389.

¹²⁶ *Theotokion* 44 (eighth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 390.

¹²⁷ *Theotokion* 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388.

¹²⁸ *Theotokion* 25 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387.

¹²⁹ *Theotokion* 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388.

ed the hymnography and poetry of prolific early Syriac authors such as Ephraem the Syrian and Jacob of Serugh.¹³⁰ Thus even as translation literature, these Syriac *theotokia* gave expression to ideas that were not at all foreign to Syriac-speakers. For the most part, these short hymns featured Mary as the one and only intercessor, on whom people should rely. Yet on occasion they also revealed that others could function as fellow intercessors alongside of her. For example, *theotokion* 37 argued that Christians placed their trust in her successful defense because she was seen as working together “with the choir of the Apostles.”¹³¹ The relevance of such an emphasis on apostolic authority also had its bearings on *theotokia* 7 and 35, where requests for her prayer and supplication came at the end of doctrinal teachings that formulated basic points of christology.¹³²

Two of the goals one could discern that Mary’s supplication was thought to be able to achieve were “to give rest and peace to our souls,”¹³³ and provide “salvation of the souls of us all.”¹³⁴ Further goals that were promoted through Mary’s intercession were the “pacification of the world by His mercy”¹³⁵ and the “redemption of our race.”¹³⁶ Yet one also expected to be “save[d] and deliver[ed] from all diseases and sufferings,”¹³⁷ to be purified from inequities committed in the past and be held back from engaging in ruinous acts in the future,¹³⁸ to be freed from all sufferings,¹³⁹ and to have God respond to Mary’s supplication with “abundant grace [granted] to the world” or “great mercy.”¹⁴⁰ As those who asked for Mary’s intercession self-identified as sinners, they hoped to gain through her aid the “forgiveness for the great multitude of offences that we have committed.”¹⁴¹ They also expected that her prayer would “deliver and save us from various temptations,”¹⁴² and more generally “deliver [from the curse] the souls of all of us.”¹⁴³ Even a sense of her being able to “justify us freely” arose from the texts.¹⁴⁴ Those who sought refuge in her prayer expected to experience the workings of “force and might.”¹⁴⁵

Epithets that Mary received and that were pertinent to her role in interceding were those of “intercessor” and “refuge of our souls,”¹⁴⁶ “great bridge leading and transferring from death to life,”¹⁴⁷ and “calm haven, healing and succour.”¹⁴⁸

¹³⁰ On types and symbols in Syriac literature, see the discussions in Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Hymns on Paradise*, 41–45; and Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye. The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Cistercian Studies Series 124 (Kalamazoo, Mich: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 41–42, 53–84, and 162–163.

¹³¹ *Theotokion* 37 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 389.

¹³² *Theotokion* 7 (second mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 384; and *theotokion* 35 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388–389.

¹³³ *Theotokion* 8 (second mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 384. See also *theotokion* 20 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 386; and *theotokion* 35 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388–389.

¹³⁴ *Theotokion* 21 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 386; see also *theotokion* 6 (second mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 383; *theotokia* 25–26 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 387; *theotokion* 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388; *theotokia* 33–34 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388; *theotokia* 38, 39, and 42 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 389–390; and *theotokion* 46 (eighth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 390.

¹³⁵ *Theotokion* 42 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 389–390.

¹³⁶ *Theotokion* 51 (eighth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 391.

¹³⁷ *Theotokion* 11 (third mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 384; and *theotokion* 27 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 387.

¹³⁸ *Theotokion* 16 (third mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 385; and *theotokion* 23 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 386.

¹³⁹ *Theotokion* 19 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 385.

¹⁴⁰ *Theotokion* 12 (third mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 385; *theotokion* 20 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 386; *theotokion* 30 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 387; and *theotokion* 35 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388–389.

¹⁴¹ *Theotokion* 30 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388.

¹⁴² *Theotokion* 41 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 389; and *theotokion* 49 (eighth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 390.

¹⁴³ *Theotokion* 37 (sixth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 389; and *theotokion* 40 (seventh mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 389.

¹⁴⁴ *Theotokion* 24 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 387.

¹⁴⁵ *Theotokion* 31 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388.

¹⁴⁶ *Theotokion* 9 (second mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 384.

¹⁴⁷ *Theotokion* 31 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388.

¹⁴⁸ *Theotokion* 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, “Biblical Allusions,” 388.

Despite the strong confidence in the power of Mary's intercession, the poet also gave voice to a lingering concern that Mary might reject those who came to her asking for her prayers.¹⁴⁹ Thus the ones desiring Mary's prayers presented themselves as her servants,¹⁵⁰ or as persons affected by a disease.¹⁵¹ In the end they clearly expected to be saved by "taking refuge [under the cover of /] in [her/your] mercy/prayer."¹⁵² They also readily strove to "pray to [her],"¹⁵³ or "offer [their] supplication to [her]."¹⁵⁴

THE SUPPLICATIONS ASCRIBED TO RABBULA OF EDESSA

A second set of liturgical hymns that offered a similarly rich treatment of the role of Mary as intercessor and of related expectations and ideas Christian believers consists of the collection of *Supplications* (ܬܟܫܦܐܬܐ, *takšepātā*) attributed to Rabbula of Edessa. These compositions are contained in Syriac manuscripts dating to the eleventh through fifteenth century and constitute a sizeable collection of short liturgical pieces composed as optional hymns for the Midnight Office on Sundays.¹⁵⁵ Elements of the biography of Rabbula that are pertinent to the topic of this article have already been examined above. If the Supplications are indeed his compositions, they date to the fifth century. Yet the final judgment has not yet been settled regarding their authenticity. It is contingent upon further results of scholarly work that have to establish the critical text of the collection of hymns attributed to him and that would also have to develop reliable criteria based on which such a judgement could be reached. Thus far, only a few attempts have been undertaken in that direction.

In 1998, Peter Bruns published an article discussing selected aspects of the theology and motifs of this collection.¹⁵⁶ His examination laid down a foundation that might allow one to discern to what extent main themes one encounters in the Supplications might be congruent or reconcilable with what is known from elsewhere about Rabbula's interests as church leader and theologian. For Bruns, Rabbula's authorship of at least a subset of the Supplications was not to be excluded *a priori*.

A second contribution to the study of the Supplications consists of an English translation of the whole of the collection, based on the text that is available in two preliminary editions of varying size, one published by Julian Joseph Overbeck and one published in the *Breviarium* of the Church of Antioch in Mosul at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁷ This additional tool may perhaps encourage scholars to embark on the path of producing a critical edition of the text of the Supplications. The translators' study of the hymns led them to conclude with Bruns that a final judgment has to be postponed until detailed critical examination of the texts based on all manuscripts is possible.

Natalia Smelova's study of medieval Syriac liturgical manuscripts suggested a line of development from Melkite *theotokia* to the genre of *takšepātā* as they appeared in the tradition of the Syrian Church.¹⁵⁸ She also noted

¹⁴⁹ *Theotokion* 16 (third mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 385; and *theotokion* 27 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387.

¹⁵⁰ *Theotokia* 16 and 17 (third mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 385; and *theotokion* 27 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387.

¹⁵¹ *Theotokion* 31 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388.

¹⁵² *Theotokia* 23–24 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 386–387; and *theotokia* 27, 31, and 32 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387–388.

¹⁵³ *Theotokion* 24 (fourth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387; and *theotokion* 30 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 388.

¹⁵⁴ *Theotokion* 27 (fifth mode), tr. Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 387.

¹⁵⁵ For an overview of the manuscripts, see Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 72.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Bruns, "Bischof Rabbulas von Edessa – Dichter und Theologe," in *Symposium Syriacum VII. Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages, 11–14 August, 1996*, ed. René Lavenant, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 256 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1998), 195–202.

¹⁵⁷ The Syriac text and English translation is to be found in Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming. Parts or the whole of the Syriac text can also be found in Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 245–248 and 362–378; and *Breviarium juxta ritum ecclesiae antiochenaе syrorum*, 3 vols. (Mausilus is this Mosul?: Typus Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1886–1896), vol. 1, 77–124. For an illustration of the often fragmentary nature of the presentation of ancient works contained in such liturgical collections, see for example Sebastian Brock, *Bride of Light. Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, Mōrān 'Eth'ō 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press and SEERI, 2010), 18–19.

¹⁵⁸ Smelova, "Biblical Allusions," 374. With this observation, she expanded upon the work of H. Husmann, "Die melkitische Liturgie als Quelle der syrischen Qanune iaonaie (Melitene and Edessa)," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 41 (1975), 5–56; H. Husmann, "Syrischer

that some of the more recent liturgical manuscripts containing the Supplications ascribed them to Rabbula. Yet since her study focused on the Syriac *theotokia*, and not on the Supplications, and since she did not state whether or not she had had the opportunity to examine earlier liturgical manuscripts which Anton Baumstark indicated contain the Supplications,¹⁵⁹ the question of the precise date to which this ascription can be traced in the manuscripts still appears to be open. In addition, the question of Rabbula's linguistic background requires further consideration. All of what remains of his writings or works about him is preserved in Syriac. Yet the *Life of Rabbula* as well as the works of Rabbula himself clearly witness that the bishop was actively translating Greek works into Syriac.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, the biographer commented that Rabbula composed at least forty-six letters in Greek, which the biographer intended to translate into Syriac.¹⁶¹ Several of the Supplications in the fourth and seventh tone that were published by Overbeck are identified as Greek hymns.¹⁶² What precisely this refers to remains to be discovered. It could be an occasional reference to the memory that at least some of the Syriac Supplications had their roots in Greek texts or traditions. Perhaps it might also reveal a memory that Rabbula composed hymns in Greek and in Syriac, which ultimately were preserved in the Syriac-speaking churches only in Syriac. The fifth- or sixth-century, apocryphal Syriac *Transitus Mariae*, indeed, displays a strong emphasis on Mary's identity as intercessor. Whether or not the collection of the Supplications, or only some of them, might be a roughly contemporary, likely earlier parallel, and whether or not they are indeed Bishop Rabbula's compositions, are questions it seems that simply require further investigation. It is possible though to study the content of the Supplications in some detail.

Given that the very genre of the hymns in question is one of "supplication," it is no surprise that one encounters the theme of intercession quite frequently in these short texts. The Supplications feature this theme in connection with various sets of stakeholders. At times, "apostles, prophets, and martyrs" are addressed. They could be described as those who have been "invited to the chamber of light," an expression that paralleled the idea of the existence of a bridal chamber in the heavenly kingdom. This notion, in turn, was one that was quite familiar to readers of ancient Syriac literature.¹⁶³ Since the members of this aggregate of "apostles, prophets, and martyrs" were thought of as having already reached that most desirable, final destination of the Christian faithful, that is, their place in the heavenly kingdom, believers also imagined them as having access to and being in direct communication with God. Thus it was congruent with the logic of these hymns that one could encourage such an illustrious group to "intercede and make supplication on our behalf, so that the souls of us all may be saved from anger."¹⁶⁴ At other times the group of saints made up of prophets, apostles, and martyrs might be asked to "offer intercession for us all" on the basis of their having suffered pains on behalf of God.¹⁶⁵ Motivated by their intercession then, the believers expected that God in turn "might work mercy" on those who through prophets, apostles, and martyrs approached him in their intercession. The effectiveness of their supplication was thought to have been grounded additionally in the fact that God had already crowned them. Furthermore, special days were set aside for their commemoration.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Christians remembering these saints on such days by singing supplicatory hymns

und Byzantinischer Oktoëchos. Kanones und Qanune," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 44 (1978), 65–73; and A. Cody, "The early history of the octoëchos," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews, and Robert W. Thomson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Center for Byzantine Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 1982), 89–113, here 97–99, who had observed a notable influence of liturgical texts employed in Melkite circles and of Greek hymnography on liturgical traditions in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

¹⁵⁹ Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 72.

¹⁶⁰ *Life of Rabbula* 19 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 172; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming). Rabbula translated, for instance, Cyril of Alexandria's *De recta fidei ad Theodosium* (CPG 5218). For further discussion, see Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming.

¹⁶¹ *Life of Rabbula* 47 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 200; ed. and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁶² See *Supplications* IV.16–18 and 22 and VII.26–27 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 366–368 and 378; text and tr. Phenix and Horn, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁶³ See for example the discussion in Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom, revised edition. A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 131–142.

¹⁶⁴ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* IV.2 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 362–363; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁵ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.3 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 370–371; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁶ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.12 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 373; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

to them with the accompanying request for their intercession could trust that they would receive their assistance. When seeking the intercession of the apostles, the author emphasized that they were enabled “to entreat on our behalf the Lord” because God had singled them out and assigned greatness to them already. As a result of the apostles’ intercession, the Christian believer could expect to gain stronger faith and “become worthy of the remission of debts.”¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the author included himself among the number of the supplicants. He presented himself as a sinner, yet at the same time also as someone who was willing and able to ask God directly for mercy, hoping to be spared and saved through God’s compassion.¹⁶⁸ The biblical images alluded to were those of the publican (Luke 18:10–13) and of the “son who squandered his riches” (Luke 15:11–31). Yet again in other instances, one encountered the group of the Christians as a whole who were reciting the Supplications and joined the saints, consisting of prophets, apostles, and martyrs, in their work of entreating and interceding before God. As much as the poet himself was able to, they likewise, as a group, were in a position to ask God directly for mercy.¹⁶⁹

At times, the poet grouped Mary together with the saints and expected God to have mercy through their prayers.¹⁷⁰ In fact, in the midst of this bustling activity of supplications and intercessions offered by apostles, prophets, martyrs, the author of the collection, and the Christians as a group, the presentation of Mary as an intercessory figure took up considerable space. The text allows one to discern some of the reasons that, in the poet’s mind, enabled Mary to function as an intercessor. When the poet encouraged the “pure and holy virgin” to “make intercession on behalf of us all” in the hope that “the souls of us all may be saved from anger,” one of the reasons for Mary’s ability to approach God effectively in her intercession had already manifested itself in the incarnation. Although she had conceived God and carried “the living fire in [her] womb of flesh,” she was “not consumed by it.”¹⁷¹ One is left to conclude from the juxtaposition of this circumstance with the request for intercession in Supplication IV.9 that at least one aspect of what made her intercession for humankind with God possible was that she was able to enter into God’s presence without any hindrance. In her case, the rule that “no one shall see me [God] and live” (Exod 33:20) did not seem to apply. Another set of verses spoke of Mary as being “like that cherubic throne” and “that edenic bridal chamber.”¹⁷² Here the poet used imagery for Mary that brought to the fore how one could conceive of her as being like a place that could encompass, and thus be near to, God. Another line of argument this poetry pursued built on the reflection that since “the Only Begotten” “sprang forth from [Mary],” which at least theoretically proposed that she worked on his behalf in the process of giving birth to him, she could “entreat and make supplication” with the goal “that he might work for us compassion.”¹⁷³ The simple fact that Mary was the Mother of God also sufficed to motivate believers to seek Mary’s intercession.¹⁷⁴

Some of the Supplications commented on the circumstances of particular situations in which Mary’s intercession was requested. These included times when “our end has arrived” and “we the earthly ones are perishing.”¹⁷⁵ At other occasions those who asked for Mary’s intercession felt afflicted by “the rods by which [evil ones] have been plagued from generation to generation” and had seen the “Corruptor” lying in ambush waiting for them, while portents in this world and the world beyond deeply affected the sensitivities of all.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* II.1.3 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁸ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* IV.4 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 363; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.12 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 373; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷⁰ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* V.5.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷¹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* IV.9 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 364; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷² (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* IV.1 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 362; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming); see also *Supplications* IV.1.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷³ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1–2 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 370; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷⁴ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VIII.5.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷⁵ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 370; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷⁶ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.11 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 372–373; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming); see also *Supplications* VII.3.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

Arguments used to persuade Mary to intercede on behalf of human beings and their needs included the point that as “pure mother” she already had become “accustomed to help our poverty.”¹⁷⁷ Mary was thought of as being able to intercede on behalf of human beings, because of her caring motherhood for “the one by whom the cherubim are burnt, [and whom she] bore on [her] arms.”¹⁷⁸ This idea may be expressed elsewhere as Mary being the one from whom “the Only Begotten One ... dawned.”¹⁷⁹ Anticipating the threats of harsh treatment at the hour of judgment, the believer availed herself or himself of references to “the love of her who begat you and the prayers of her who bore you” when approaching God with the request to be spared, saved, and receive mercy at that judgment.¹⁸⁰

The nature of Mary’s intercession was envisioned as her “constantly making supplication that we may not completely perish on account of our evil.”¹⁸¹ The believers addressed Mary with the request for her intercession in part because they had observed a custom of her giving “aid to our poverty” especially at the end of life.¹⁸² They trusted that the Virgin’s supplication on their behalf was unceasing. One of the goals of their turning to Mary was that they hoped her prayers might move Christ to have compassion for them.¹⁸³

The help believers expected to receive from Mary’s intercession was compared to the protection provided by a wall, to a house of refuge, and as a source of hope.¹⁸⁴ Her activity of petitioning her Son on behalf of human beings inspired the poet to feature her as a being with wings, able to cover or protect others “on the day of judgment.” The poet also availed himself of the image of Mary’s wings as a tool that guided believers to their final destination of being placed in the “bridal chamber.”¹⁸⁵ Her entreating and petitioning is geared towards moving her son to “act [with] mercy for us all.”¹⁸⁶ Mary’s intercession could be sought in the hope of gaining assurance of Christ’s “ransom ... of us from all debts” and protection “so that we not do anything in which there is injury.”¹⁸⁷ A further effect of Mary’s intercession, that was expected, was that Christ “be reconciled to us through [her] prayers.”¹⁸⁸ Mary’s intercession was thought of as being able to “bestow on us peace and tranquility,” while at the same time providing liberation from the believers’ opponents.¹⁸⁹ The Virgin’s intercession could be understood as a powerful tool that rescued believers from the anger or wrath that was thought to be the justified reaction of God over and against their actions.¹⁹⁰

Occasionally the beneficiaries of Mary’s acts of entreating her Son were not only individuals but also creation as a whole, which could receive peace from God that way.¹⁹¹ Most often, however, the hymns thought primarily of human beings and expressed the expectation that “by her prayers may mercy be upon us all.”¹⁹² More specifically, and in a way more to the point, namely that human beings required Mary’s intercession because they as sinners were further removed from God, some hymns requested Mary to “beseech your only-begotten son on behalf of the sinners who seek refuge in you.”¹⁹³

The believers saw themselves as being in a reciprocal relationship to Mary. On the one hand, they asked her to beseech God on their behalf with the hope of being “delivered from ... evil deeds.” In return, they eagerly

¹⁷⁷ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 370; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷⁸ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* I.4.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁷⁹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1.2 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁰ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* I.4.3 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸¹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 370; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸² (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸³ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.1.1–2 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁴ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VIII.5.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁵ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VI.3.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁶ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* I.4.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁷ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* III.5.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁸ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VI.3.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VI.3.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹⁰ See (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* IV.1.1 and VIII.1.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹¹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* II.1.2 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹² (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* II.2.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹³ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VII.11 (ed. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae episcopi ... opera selecta*, 372; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming); see also *Supplications* VII.3.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

encouraged Mary to “accept ... the gifts we offer you.”¹⁹⁴ The reciprocal character of the situations into which Mary’s intercession was integrated shines forth for instance from a hymn that presented to Mary as the object of the benefits derived from her intercession the ones “who magnify you at all times, birthgiver of God.”¹⁹⁵ The hymns clearly sought Mary’s intercession for the sake of all those “who rightly praise [her].”¹⁹⁶

At times, a close connection between the global observance of feastdays dedicated to Mary’s commemoration and the effectiveness of her prayers on behalf of humankind transpires in the hymns.¹⁹⁷ In a few instances, one of the Supplications requested Mary’s intercession in a context of doctrinal teachings that addressed the essentials of the belief in the Trinity.¹⁹⁸ Ideas pertaining to Mary’s intercession as they were conveyed in a hymn with such a thematic focus grounded at least part of the potential for effectiveness of Mary’s intercession in the dogmatic purity of the faith of the believer. For those who did not believe wrongly, who did not make mistakes, and thus “[can]not be found guilty” of distorting the truth of the faith, the “Virgin birthgiver of God” interceded with her son in order “that the souls of us all may be saved from wrath.”¹⁹⁹

CONCLUSIONS

Syriac poetry of the fourth to the early sixth centuries offers little positive information concerning the role of Mary as intercessor. It is first with the appearance of the “Book of Mary,” and in particular the *Transitus* traditions, that Mary as an intercessor can be attested firmly. The first unequivocal reference to Mary as intercessor occurs in Jacob of Serugh, an author whose language in which he addresses Mary has striking parallels with material in the *Transitus* tradition.

The presence of Mary as intercessor in the Supplications attributed to Rabbula, as well as in the Syriac *theotokia*, suggests, in form and content, a close dialogue with Greek liturgical piety. Rabbula was an innovator in Edessa, leaving the stamp of a strong Cyrillian christology and its supporting hymnography. Whether Rabbula composed the Supplications or not, the best explanation is that they reflect the influence of currents in theology from Greek-speaking Christianity.

Taking the sources at face value, Marian piety in the literate circles of the Syriac church before the second half of the fifth century (as a conservative estimate) was limited, and did not include a theology of intercession. One caveat is that the absence of Mary as intercessor from Syriac literature prior to Jacob of Serugh does not imply that belief in the efficacy of Mary’s intercession was marginal. The Supplications ascribed to Rabbula and the *theotokia* would have been recited in monastic liturgies. How plausible is it that working men and women would have heard them? The *Transitus* tradition may well have inspired the development of the Syriac liturgy for the Dormition of Mary and other Marian feasts, but would the texts have been heard in the churches? It is clear that by the time of Jacob of Serugh, the propaganda in favour of strengthening Marian piety, for whatever reasons, and including her role as intercessor, was in full swing in the Syriac-speaking world. If Mary as intercessor had been an element of popular belief in earliest Syriac Christianity, it would be difficult to explain why Ephraem did not weave this element into his tapestry. It seems that the “Greek tsunami” of christological controversy that arrived on Syriac Christian shores in the fifth century played an important role in raising the profile of Mary as intercessor. One question that requires further examination is whether this was a change from the “top down,” or the use of a popular but “progressive” type of piety in the Syriac theatre of the christological controversies.

¹⁹⁴ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* II.3.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹⁵ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VIII.1.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹⁶ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* V.4.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹⁷ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VI.4.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹⁸ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VIII.1.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

¹⁹⁹ (Pseudo?)-Rabbula, *Supplications* VIII.1.1 (Mosul edition; text and tr. Horn and Phenix, *Rabbula*, forthcoming).

