

ARTIKLAR

MOURNING EVE: THE HOMILY ON WOMEN AS ATTRIBUTED TO JACOB OF SERUGH

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Abstract:

A two-volume edition of previously unpublished *mēm̄rē* attributed to Jacob of Serugh offers scholars new material for studying late antique poetry and transmission history. Several of the newly available poems touch upon the theme of gender featuring familiar female biblical figures. One of the previously unpublished works, the *Homily on Women* (*mēm̄rā* 146), contains a fascinating portrait of Eve, retelling her actions in Genesis 2–3 and imagining her near death. This article offers an introduction and translation of this poem along with an initial analysis of its portrayal of the “first” woman. Beginning as a recapitulation of the Genesis narrative and the primordial sin in the Garden of Eden, the final half of the poem recounts a dialogue at her deathbed between Eve and her sorrowful children. While the short length, style, and content of the *mēm̄rā* render the attribution to Jacob questionable, the presence of the work within several later manuscripts suggests that it was received and transmitted as a part of his corpus. Moreover, this poetic work contributes to the variegated portraits of Eve that circulated among Christians and Jews in a variety of literary genres and languages in antiquity.

Key words:

Syriac poetry, Genesis, Eve, Biblical interpretation, women, gender, death

Introduction

Within communities of Syriac-speaking Christians poetry was a prominent medium for religious formation and biblical instruction.¹ Poets crafted vivid portrayals of familiar characters from the details of biblical narratives, imbuing these figures with imaginative speech and psychological depth.² Often performed within the liturgy and vigils, Syriac poetry has provided modern scholars of late ancient Christianity access to how biblical literature *lived* through poetic re-narrations, reaching Christians from diverse social locations.³ While recent

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¹ For readers unfamiliar with Syriac literature and history, there are several accessible introductory articles and books. The standard reference works remain Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, Bonn: A. Marcus und E. Webers, 1922 and Rubens Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, 3rd ed., Paris: V. Lecoffre, 1907; Amsterdam: Philo Press 1970; translated by Olivier Holmeý as *Syriac Literature*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2013. Several publications by Sebastian Brock would orient the reader to the major themes and debates within Syriac Studies, such as *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Kottayam, Kerala, India: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute 1997; idem, "The Syriac Orient: A Third 'Lung' for the Church", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 71 (2005), 5–20; idem, "Poetry and Hymnography (1): Syriac", in: S. A. Harvey & D. G. Hunter (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press 2008, 657–671.

² Some important works include: Sebastian P. Brock, "Creating Women's Voices: Sarah and Tamar in Some Syriac Narrative Poems", in: E. Grypeou & H. Spurling (eds.), *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, Leiden: Brill 2009, 125–142; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9:1 (2001), 105–131; eadem, "On Mary's Voice: Gendered Words in Syriac Marian Tradition", in: D. B. Martin & P. C. Miller (eds.), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2005, 63–86; Hannah M. Hunt, "The Tears of the Sinful Woman: A Theology of Redemption in the Homilies of St. Ephraim and his Followers", *Hugoye* 1:2 (2010), 165–184.

³ The performance of poetry within the liturgy has been a fruitful site for analysis, notable works include Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the

decades have witnessed the growth of Syriac Studies as a field, scholars continue to broaden access to this body of literature through the work of editing, translation, and digitization.

Among Syriac authors, Jacob of Serugh, Bishop of Batnan (*ca.* AD 451–521) has long been recognized as one of the greatest poets within the tradition.⁴ Providing the basic outline of his life and remarkable career, later biographies and panegyrics memorialized Jacob as a luminary renowned for his remarkable artistic gifts and personal holiness.⁵

Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity", *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 8:2 (2005), 125–149; Kathleen McVey, "Were the Earliest *Madrāšē* Songs or Recitations?", in: G. J. Reinink & A. C. Klugkist (eds.), *After Bardaisan: Studies in Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers*, Leuven: Peeters 1999, 185–199; idem, "Ephrem the Kitharode and the Proponent of Women: Jacob of Serugh's Portrait of a Fourth-Century Churchman for the Sixth Century Viewer and its Significance for the Twenty-First Century Ecumenis", in: S. T. Kimbrough (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 2007, 229–253; more recently Jeffrey Wickes has revisited the centrality of liturgy to the study of poetry to suggest broader approaches to the performative contexts in "Between Liturgy and School: Reassessing the Performative Context of Ephrem's *Madrāšē*", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 26:1 (2018), 25–51. Attention to "popular theology" has increased for Latin and Greek sources as well, see Jaelyn Maxwell, "Popular Theology in Late Antiquity", in: L. Grig (ed.), *Popular Culture in the Ancient World*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2017, 277–295.

⁴ For a basic introduction to the life and works of Jacob of Serugh, see Sebastian P. Brock, "Jacob of Serugh: A Select Bibliographical Guide", in: G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 8), Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2010, 219–244; idem, "Ya'qub of Serugh", in: S. P. Brock, A. M. Butts, G. A. Kiraz, & L. Van Rompay (eds.), *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2011, 433–434; E. Tisserant, "Jacques de Saroug", *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 8:1 (1924), 300–305; I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum 1965, 104–109; François Graffin, "Jacques de Saroug," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 8 (1974), 56–60; Wolfgang Hage, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Band XVI (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 470–474; Christian Lange, "Jakon von Sarug", in: W. Klien (ed.), *Syrische Kirchenväter*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer 2004, 217–227. For an excellent introduction to Jacob's life, works, and theological thought see Philip Michael Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh*, New York: Oxford University Press 2018.

⁵ One of the first resources available to western scholars was the biography and anonymous *vita* found in J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* I, 2nd ed., Rome: Sacrae

Known as the “Flute of the Holy Spirit and Harp of the Church,” Jacob composed lengthy narrative poems or *mēm̄rē*, mainly in dodecasyllabic meter, on a variety of scriptural, doctrinal, and devotional subjects. During church celebrations and the commemoration of saints and martyrs, *mēm̄rē* were recited presumably by a single voice.⁶ While Jacob excelled in the poetic form of the *mēm̄rā*, his extant corpus also includes six prose homilies and forty-three letters on assorted topics.⁷ Jacob trained at the famed School of Edessa where he was formed in the artistic and interpretative legacy of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) and gained exposure to the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350–428) translated from Greek.⁸ In addition to his fame within the Syriac-speaking world, Jacob’s poetry was later translated into Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Arabic, and Ethiopic, thus shaping doctrinal and liturgical traditions beyond his native land.⁹

Congregationis de Propaganda Fide 1719; New York: G. Olms Verlag 2000, 283–340; see also J. B. Abbeloos, *De vita et scriptis D. Jacobi Batnarum Sarugi in Mesopotamia episcopi*, Louvain: Apud Vanlinthout Fratres 1867. For information about the manuscript tradition as well as the various *vitae*, see Arthur Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-Dichtung des Ja’qob von Serug*, I–IV (CSCO 344, 345, 421, 422), Louvain: Peeters 1973, 1980. Two panegyrics, composed at a later date, were published with a German translation by Paul Krüger, “Ein bislang unbekannter sermo über Leben und Werk des Jakob von Serugh”, *Oriens Christianus* 56 (1972), 80–111; idem, “Ein zweiter anonymes memra über Jakob von Serugh”, *Oriens Christianus* 56 (1972), 112–149.

⁶ Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, 14.

⁷ Brock, “A Select Bibliographical Guide”, 221–235.

⁸ For the translation and reception of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s works into Syriac, see Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 2006, 113–125.

⁹ There is a growing body of literature on the translation of Jacob’s works into other languages, a key aspect of his later reception and transformation. A sample of important introductions include: Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Studi e Testi 118, 133, 146–147, 172), Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1944–1953, 1:444–452; Samir Khalil Samir, “Un exemple des contacts culturels entre les églises syriaques et arabes: Jacques de Saroug dans la tradition arabe”, in: R. Lavenant (ed.), *III^e Symposium Syriacum, 1980: Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures* (Goslar 7–11 Septembre 1980) (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 221), Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium 1983, 213–245; Aaron Michael Butts, “The Christian Arabic Transmission of Jacob of Serugh (d. 521): The *Sammlungen*”, *Journal for the Canadian*

A prolific writer, Jacob left behind a sizeable œuvre covering a broad range of biblical and doctrinal subjects. Reputed to have composed 763 *mēm̄rē*, Jacob's now extant works are numbered around 380.¹⁰ Long commemorated within the Syrian Orthodox and Maronite churches, Jacob came to the attention of western European scholars through the work of Joseph Simon Assemani (1687–1768), followed by subsequent articles, translations, and studies.¹¹ Arthur Vööbus offered an essential guide to the complete corpus, and this publication remains an invaluable resource for the manuscripts of Jacob's works.¹² Scholars engaged in the translation and study of Jacob's works have principally relied upon the printed edition prepared by Paul Bedjan (1838–1920), *Homiliae selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis*. Appearing between 1905 and 1910, these volumes made at least 195 *mēm̄rē* available, roughly half of Jacob's total extant corpus. Sebastian Brock later updated Bedjan's edition with some additional material in 2002, reprinted in 2006.¹³ Nevertheless, half Jacob's extant works remained unedited and unprinted. The inaccessibility of these poems meant that Syriac scholarship has rarely taken these works into account in studies of Jacob's poetry.

This situation has recently changed. In 2017, Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryany published a further 160 *mēm̄rē* attributed to Jacob of

Society for Syriac Studies 16 (2016), 39–59; Edward G. Matthews Jr., "Jacob of Serugh, Homily on Good Friday and other Armenian Treasures: First Glances", in: G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Jacob of Serugh and his Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Christianity* (Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 8), Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2010), 145–174; Witold Witkowski, "Jacob of Serugh", in: S. Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopædia Aethiopia*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2007, 3:262–263; Alin Suci, "The Sahidic Version of Jacob of Serugh's *Memrā* on the Ascension of Christ", *Le Muséon* 128:1–2 (2015), 49–83.

¹⁰ Roger Akhrass, "A List of Homilies of Mor Jacob of Serugh", *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal* 53 (2015), 87–161.

¹¹ Sebastian Brock, "Foreword", in: R. Akhrass & I. Syryany (eds.), *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, vol. 1, Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate Orthodox Patriarchate 2017, iii–iv.

¹² Arthur Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-Dichtung des Ja'qub von Serug* (CSCO 344–345, Subs. 39–40, 1973; CSCO 421–422, Subs. 60–61), Louvain: Peeters 1980.

¹³ Jacob of Serugh, *Homilies*, in: P. Bedjan & S. Brock (eds.), *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug* Vol. 1–6 Paris-Leipzig 1905; 2nd ed. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2006. Subsequent citations to poems in this collection will use volume and page number.

Serugh, opening new avenues for research into Jacob's prodigious corpus.¹⁴ As Akhrass notes in his preface to the two-volume edition, greater access to the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Library in Damascus made this undertaking possible. The editors also used resources from lesser known collections housed in Syriac libraries and monasteries across the Middle East.¹⁵ By emphasizing the attribution of these poems to Jacob rather than debating the merits of authorship for each work, the editors admirably reflect the transmission history of these works and allow scholars to carefully assess authenticity on an individual basis. The editors have conceded that the last fifty homilies in the collection, the group to which the present poem belongs, are of "debatable" authorship.¹⁶

According to the editors, the *Homily on Women* is attested in seven manuscripts.¹⁷ This new printed edition is based on a manuscript dated to 1618 from the Mor Gabriel Monastery in Turkey, recently digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (MGMT 300). The critical apparatus indicates that the editors consulted another manuscript from Mor Gabriel Monastery (MGMT 284) dated to 1874 along with a manuscript from the Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin dated to 1711. The other manuscripts containing this work range in date from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries.¹⁸ The profile

¹⁴ Jacob of Serugh, *Homilies*, in: R. Akhrass & I. Syryany (eds.), *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*, (vols. 1–2), Damascus: Department of Syriac Studies–Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate 2017.

¹⁵ Sebastian Brock, "Foreword", iii–iv. As Brock and the editors note, developments in digitization and preservation have been instrumental in expanding access to heretofore unedited and untranslated texts. François Briquel Chatonnet and Muriel Debié have collected essays surveying the efforts to preserve and digitize Syriac manuscripts in an accessible volume (Chatonnet & Debié, eds., *Manuscripta Syriaca: Des sources de première main* (Cahiers d'études syriaques 4), Paris: Geuthner 2015.)

¹⁶ Roger Akhrass & Imad Syryany, "Introduction", in: Akhrass & Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies 1*, vii.

¹⁷ Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Women*, in: Akhrass & Syryany, *160 Unpublished Homilies 2*, 533–535. Subsequent references will be to line numbers. This poem exists in seven manuscripts ranging from the twelfth to the nineteenth century: MGMT 300, p. 335–341 (1618); MGMT 284, p. 272–277 (1871); CFMM155, p. 379–385 (1711).

¹⁸ The volume does not list the dates for the following manuscripts which I have found independently: Hermann Zotenberg dates Paris Syr. 122 to the 15th century (*Manuscripts*

and contents of the manuscripts containing this poem, a topic deserving of further treatment, display some suggestive patterns for the performance of the work. MGMT 300, the base text, contains various funeral rites and poems related to death.¹⁹ Both Paris Syr. 122 and Mardin Orth. Syr. 189 contain funeral offices for individuals in various stations of life along with sermons attributed to Ephrem, Isaac of Antioch, and Jacob on topics such as the death of women and children.²⁰

A relatively short text of fifty-five verses composed in Jacob's signature dodecasyllabic meter, the *Homily on Women* in the present form coheres as a complete work. Even in translation one notes the strained structure and rapid (at times abrupt) shifts in the narrative. The editors have rightly called into question the traditional attribution of the work to Jacob, but the present article will leave that question open. The truncated length, style and slightly awkward phrasing at

orientaux: Catalogues des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandaites) de la Bibliothèque nationale, Paris: Imprimerie nationale 1874, 82); Robert Payne Smith dates Oxford Bodl. Or. 412 to the 16th century (*Catalogi codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae. Pars sexta: Codices syriacos, carshunicos, mendaeos, complectens*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1864), col. 472; According to Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, Cambridge in Mass. Harvard 85 dates to the 12th century (*Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library Catalogue* (Harvard Semitic Studies 23) Missoula, MT: Scholars Press 1979, 71). Based on the colophon, Arthur Vööbus establishes the date of Mardin Orth. Syr. 189 to 1964, suggesting that it was copied by Philoxenos Yuḥanon Dolabani (1885–1969), the Syriac Orthodox bishop of Mardin (1947–1969). While Dolabani may have used a number of manuscripts, the *Homily on Women* is located in a cycle attributed to Jacob organized around the theme of death alongside other *mēmre* attributed to Ephrem and Isaac of Antioch on the same subject (*Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-Dichtung des Ja'qob von Serug*, III (CSCO 421), Louvain: Peeters 1980, 111–112).

¹⁹ Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, "Manuscript Details", <http://www.vhmdl.us/research2014/catalog/detail.asp?MSID=123184> (accessed December 19, 2018).

²⁰ Hermann Zotenberg, *Manuscrits orientaux: Catalogues des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandaites) de la Bibliothèque nationale*, 81–82. Similarly, Cambridge in Mass. Harvard 85 contains orders for burial categorized by various social locations as well as poems from Ephrem and Jacob regarding death (Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library Catalogue*, 71); Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-Dichtung des Ja'qob von Serug*, III.112.

various points do raise concerns about the authorship of the piece.²¹ One quickly notices the frequent repetition of thematic words, but these do not amount to formulaic language characteristic of Jacob's style as demonstrated elsewhere.²² In the present author's assessment, if a poet other than Jacob composed the *Homily on Women*, he was familiar with Jacob's style and earlier poetic and interpretive traditions. If one posits that Jacob is not the author, one may surmise that the pseudonymous author attempted a plausible imitation of his poetic forebears but lacked the necessary virtuosity. Nevertheless, readers familiar with the poetry of Ephrem and Jacob will recognize the playful use of images and wordplay as well as the dramatic use of imagined speech.

The *Homily on Women* contains a dramatic portrait of Eve as it retells select moments from of Genesis 2 and 3 and depicts a deathbed dialogue between Eve and her children. In making the text of the *Homily on Women* available to a larger audience through an English translation and summary, the present article offers some preliminary suggestions about the larger literary context for situating this portrait of Eve, the female protagonist. In addition, I will argue for its potential contribution to current discussions of the construction of gender and the scripting of faithful grief within Christian communities.

Summary and Analysis

Lines 1–20: Recounting Eve's Transgression

The *mēm̄rā* begins with a narration of the events recounted in Genesis 2–3, focusing on Eve's creation as a "helper" (ܐܘܘܢܐ) and "help-mate" (ܥܘܘܢܐܝܬܐ) in Genesis 2:18 and her actions in Genesis 3:6–7. The poet grants Eve uncompromised agency as she "plucks" the fruit of the tree

²¹ One possibility is that the present form is an abridged form of a longer work or an adaptation, but it is difficult to prove this definitively.

²² See Manolis Papoutsakis, "Formulaic Language in the Metrical Homilies of Jacob of Serugh", in: R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages 11–14 August 1996*, Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale 1998, 445–451.

ing the listener of their ancestral tie to this female protagonist. By personalizing Eve as “our mother” throughout the work, the author elevates the emotive qualities of his verse and implicates his reader in the unfolding events.

The depiction of Eve immediately after her transgression and exposure in the garden is particularly poignant: “Without a garment she stood nude, our mother Eve, and death, which was harsh and enslaved her, was placed upon her neck.”²⁷ Our author juxtaposes the enslavement and degradation Eve suffers with the beauty and idyllic setting of pre-lapsarian existence.²⁸ Adam and Eve are imagined as a newly married couple reclining within the a “bridal chamber in the garden” (ܩܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ).²⁹ The image of the bridal chamber appears elsewhere in Jacob’s poetry, conveying the potentiality and bliss of creation’s initial condition. In Jacob’s *Hexaemeron* he likens the joy of fish in the sea to the bride in this space: “As her bridal chamber is attractive to a bride and she is joyful there, so a fish rejoices in the water which is plentiful for it.”³⁰ Extending the metaphor, Jacob notes that fish perish when removed from water without offering the same dire warning to brides! As a gendered image for delight and contentment, the author of the *Homily* employs this image to underscore the

²⁷ Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Women* 5:

ܩܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܩܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܩܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܩܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܩܘܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ

²⁸ In depictions of Eve, the imagery of being a slave to sin co-exists with the language of sexual promiscuity within Syriac literature and early Christian readings more broadly. It should be noted that these two depictions convey different rhetorical effects. While the *Homily on Women* presents Eve as an enslaved person following her transgression, the late fifth-century Syriac poet, Narsai uses the imagery of adultery to describe her. While these two depictions work in tandem to convey the dire effects of her actions, Narsai’s use of heated sexual slander renders Eve a greater villain than the author of *Homily on Women*. See A. Mingana ed., *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina* (Mosul, 1905), 2.353–365; Corrie Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters and the Tricks and Devices they Perform”, *Le Muséon* 106 (1993), 76–78 for the English translation.

²⁹ Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Women*, 7. For a discussion of bridal imagery within Syriac literature see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2004, 131–158.

³⁰ T. Muraoka, ed. and trans., *Jacob of Serugh’s Hexaemeron* (Ancient Near Eastern Studies 52) Leuven: Peeters 2018, 134–135 [translation altered].

hortation, the author bridges the biblical past with the contemporary state of human affairs. Invoking these contrasting images of life and death, the poet coaxes his listener to meditate and imagine the events described.

Lines 21–56: A Shared Lament

The author of this poem, whether Jacob himself or some pseudonymous imitator, brings together variegated traditions and representations of Eve to depict her as simultaneously culpable and pitiable. Through invoking a maternal and sympathetic Eve, our poet complicates his indictment of her actions and lends emotive texture to traditional depictions. Eve's dramatic speech, filling nearly half the text, reinforces ideals of maternal devotion and feminine virtue. Despite her flawed personal history, Eve emerges as an authoritative spokesperson for Christian ideals of female behavior. The inclusion of this text within manuscripts containing funeral rites and poetry about the death of children and others according to social status is significant for understanding how this text functioned within the Syriac Christian community. This poem not only depicted a grieving Eve, it provided a script for faithful expressions of sorrow and helped shape Christian attitudes toward loss.

Within early Byzantine literature, liturgical poetry played an important role inculcating patterns of faithful grief. In her survey of Greek and Syriac liturgical texts, Susan Ashbrook Harvey has emphasized emotive portraits and embellished portrayals of grief were part of an over-arching salvific narrative. Mirroring the role of the identification of types, poetic depictions of grief were "embedded" within the broader liturgical setting, framed by hymns and biblical readings, homilies, the liturgical calendar, various prayers, and creeds worked in

For Syriac authors, the theme of human discernment is important in recounts of the fall. See Lucas Van Rompay, "Humanity's Sin in Paradise Ephrem, Jacob of Sarug, and Narsai in Conversation", in: G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 8), Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2010, 210–211.

concert for the sake of the worshipper's formation.³⁶ The potential for late ancient poetry and hymnography to guide grief crossed religious boundaries as Laura Lieber's study of eulogies and laments within Jewish Palestinian Aramaic has shown.³⁷

As the manuscripts that contain the *Homily on Women* indicate, Syriac poets often dealt with death, resurrection, and the existence of the soul. Jacob approached the theme of death from a variety of angles depending on his audience and intent.³⁸ In one work he provides us a glimpse of the pastoral challenges he perceived as he expresses dismay over the purported emotional excesses of grief-stricken women.³⁹ Within his series of *mēmṛē* on Genesis 4 featuring Cain and Abel, Jacob scripted elaborate scenes of Eve mourning over the wickedness of Cain and the fate of her son, Abel.⁴⁰

Along with the nuptial imagery and familial language, the personification of the house as sharing in the mourning of the children renders this narration of Eve's life and death as remarkably domestic and relatable. Despite the repetitive vocabulary of mourning and weeping, the emotional *pathos* of the deathbed scene still moves the reader as it touches upon the rawness and universality of grief. Linked to this lamentation of death as the universal fate of all is a depiction of Eve upon her deathbed weeping over her children. Not only does the narrative traverse past and present, it also eclipses Eve's life between her transgression and her death. At this point the exposition of Eve's misdeeds shifts into a dramatic scene between a mother and her children. Dialogue and exclamation quicken the pace of these emotional verses (lines 23–58). Through the imagined speech the author nuances his characterization of Eve as she morphs from a flawed and undis-

³⁶ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Guiding Grief: Liturgical Poetry and Ritual Lamentation in Early Byzantium", in: M. Alexiou & D. Cairns (eds.), *Greek Laughter and Tears Antiquity and After*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2017, 204–205.

³⁷ Laura S. Lieber, "Stages of Grief: Enacting Lamentation in Late Ancient Hymnography", *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 40 (2016), 101–124.

³⁸ For an example of Jacob's poetry on death of ascetic women in particular, see Robert Kitchen, "The Pearl of Virginitly: Death as the Reward of Asceticism in Mēmṛā 191 of Jacob of Serug", *Hugoye* 7:2 (2004), 147–156.

³⁹ Richard Hugh Connolly, "A Homily of Mār Jacob of Sérūgh on the Memorial of the Departed and on the Eucharistic Loaf", *The Downside Review* 10:29 (1910), 260–270.

⁴⁰ See Jacob of Serug, *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug* V.44–46.

Testament.”⁴⁵ Sergey Minov has shown how the diffusion of “exegetical and rhetorical motifs containing serpentine imagery for Eve” traveled across religious and linguistic boundaries as interpreters spun images of Eve as sexually promiscuous from etymological and linguistic analyses of the Genesis text.⁴⁶ Within the Christian literary tradition, Eve has been a flashpoint for negotiating sexual difference and perpetuating stereotypes of female behavior and vices.⁴⁷ While Paul’s reference to Christ as the “Second Adam” in Romans 5:12 spurred Christian readings, the text of 1 Timothy 2:14 stressed Eve’s culpability.⁴⁸ In the early centuries of Christianity, writers could attribute

⁴⁵ There is a large body of literature on Eve in the Genesis narrative. For a preliminary discussion of the lack of allusions in the books that would come to make up the Hebrew Bible, see Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, New York: Oxford University Press 1988, 3–10, 72–79; John J. Collins, “Before the Fall: The Earliest Interpretations of Adam and Eve” in: H. Najman & J. H. Newman (eds.), *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (Supplements to the *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 83), Leiden, Netherlands: Brill 2003, 293–308.

⁴⁶ Sergey Minov, “‘Serpentine’ Eve in Syriac Christian Literature of Late Antiquity”, in: D. V. Arbel & A. A. Orlov (eds.), *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elior* (Ekstasis 2), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2010, 92–114

⁴⁷ In the western Mediterranean, early Christian writers engaged in polemics over the value of marriage relative to asceticism turned to Genesis 2–3, sparing over proper interpretation. See David G. Hunter, “‘On the Sin of Adam and Eve’: A Little-Known Defense of Marriage and Childbearing by Ambrosiaster”, *The Harvard Theological Review* 82:3 (1989), 283–289; Elizabeth A. Clark, “Adam’s Only Companion: Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage”, *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986), 139–162; eadem, “Heresy, Asceticism, Adam and Eve: Interpretations of Genesis 1–3 in the Later Latin Fathers”, in her *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press 1986, 353–385. Placing multiple readings of Genesis in conversation, Clark demonstrates how ascetically-oriented authors negotiated contemporary concerns about sexuality and marriage through strategic readings of the biblical account. Unlike these readings of Genesis, our author does not venture into reflections on marriage as an institution, opting instead to focus on the inherent sinfulness of the human condition.

⁴⁸ 1 Tim 2:14 καὶ Ἀδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν, “And Adam was not deceived, but *the woman* was deceived and became a transgressor” (New Revised Standard Version). The characterization of Eve in this verse is intertwined with other views about women and idealized feminine behavior in 1 Timothy. See for

pain, sin, death, and the drudgery of labor to the erroneous decision of Eve (and Adam) while simultaneously arguing for the defense of free will.⁴⁹ In light of the Genesis account, Eve's character proved a malleable resource for authors hoping to bolster their arguments concerning the proper behavior of their female contemporaries.

The depictions of Eve in the *Homily on Women* resonate with portraits of her found elsewhere in literature from antiquity, blending together interpretative strains.⁵⁰ Within the Syriac poetic tradition specifically, the *Homily on Women* provides further evidence for Eve's multivalent *Nachleben*.⁵¹ The poem encapsulates two interrelated views of Eve's character and significance. The first third of the poem, retelling the events of Genesis 2 and 3, stresses Eve's culpability for the original transgression and uses her as a metonymic for all feminine vice.⁵² The dialogue between Eve and her imagined offspring echoes accounts of her narrative which depicted Eve as a penitent and a

instance Geert van Oyen, "The Character of Eve in the New Testament: 2 Corinthians 11.3 and 1 Timothy 2.13–14", in: B. Becking & S. Hennecke (eds.), *Out of Paradise: Eve and Adam and their Interpreters*, Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2011, 14–18; Anna Rebecca Solevåg, "Salvation, Gender and the Figure of Eve in 1 Timothy 2:9–15", *Lectio Difficilior* 2 (2012), sec. 1–8; Marjorie J. Cooper, "The Prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 in Light of Eve's Having Been Deceived (1 Tim 2:14–15)", *Presbyterion* 44:1 (2018), 115–125; Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, & H. Scott Baldwin (eds.), *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1995.

⁴⁹ Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, New York: Random House 1988, 127–150.

⁵⁰ Exegetical traditions around Eve within Jewish and Christian contexts has attracted much scholarly attention. Some larger overviews include Pamela Norris, *Eve: A Biography*, New York, NY: New York University Press 1999; John A. Phillips, *Eve: The History of an Idea*, San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row 1984; Anne Lapius Lemer, *Eternally Eve: Images of Eve in the Hebrew Bible, Midrash, and Modern Jewish Poetry*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press 2017.

⁵¹ For an overview of Eve within the liturgical context, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Encountering Eve in the Syriac Liturgy", in: M. Doerfler, E. Fiano, & K. Smith (eds.), *Syriac Encounters: Papers from the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium Duke University, 26–29 June 2011*, Leuven: Peeters 2015, 11–49.

⁵² The extension of Eve's sin to all women is not unique to the Syriac milieu. As scholars have observed before it is clearly stated by Tertullian in *de cultu feminarum* 1.1.1–2 (PL 1.1417–1419). Within the Syriac tradition it appears in Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6.6 (PS 1.266–272) as well as in Narsai (Molenberg, "Narsai's Memra", 65–87). For a discussion of this strain of interpretation see Harvey, "Encountering Eve", 13–15.

grieving mother. Wedding these two traditions together, the *Homily on Women* juxtaposes Eve's culpability with an almost sentimental rendering of maternal grief. This ambiguity highlights tensions inherent within ideological constructions of gender formed on the binary of feminine vice and virtue.

Similar to the strategic deployments of Genesis within theological treatises and biblical commentaries, poets often selected interpretations that suited their overall rhetorical aims and artistic visions. Syriac-speaking Christians encountered diverse portraits of Eve within liturgical poetry and worship as Susan Ashbrook Harvey has previously examined.⁵³ The various roles Eve assumed within the writings of Ephrem the Syrian have been well-studied in conjunction with views among early Syriac authors on original sin and his advocacy for human free will.⁵⁴ The *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, traditionally attributed to Ephrem, states unequivocally that through Eve the serpent slew humanity.⁵⁵ The binary of Eve and Mary, representing the polarity of vice and virtue, appears prominently within Ephrem's thought, as well as early Syriac literature as a whole.⁵⁶ Among the myriad examples one representative passage from Ephrem renders Eve and Mary as a polarity between spiritual blindness and illumination:

⁵³ Harvey, "Encountering Eve", 12–21.

⁵⁴ Van Rompay, "Humanity's Sin", 199–217. As Van Rompay shows, all three luminaries of the Syriac literary tradition developed distinct readings of Adam and Eve's sin while sharing a common conviction that humanity's discernment – the basis for free will – was activated through the couples (albeit erroneous) decision. The tenor of their treatments often reflects changing theological concerns and shifting interlocutors.

⁵⁵ Louis Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscript Chester Beatty 709) Folios additionnels*, Leuven: Peeters Press 1990, 1.1; Carmel McCarthy, *St. Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, 40.

⁵⁶ Botha, "Original Sin and Sexism"; Robert Murray, "Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers", *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970–1971), 372–384; Ortiz de Urbina, "La Mariologia nei Padri siriaci", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 1 (1935), 100–113; Edmund Beck, "Die Mariologie der echten Schriften Ephräims", *Oriens Christianus* 40 (1956), 22–39. For an overview of the theme of recapitulation around the figures of Eve and Mary see Sr. Maria del Fiat Miola, "Mary as Un-tier and Tier of Knots: Irenaeus Reinterpreted", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24:3 (2016), 337–361.

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The world, you see, has two eyes fixed in it:
 Eve was its left eye, blind,
 While the right eye, illumined, is Mary.⁵⁷

Humanity, living between these extremes, rests its hope in the promise Mary's offspring offers to creation. As Harvey has convincingly shown, typological readings such as the invocation of Eve and Mary maintain the community's focus on the entirety of the salvation drama.⁵⁸

Like Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh held together the Old and New Testament figures of Christian scripture through linking types and anti-types.⁵⁹ While such readings appear throughout Syriac poetry, one also finds treatments of Eve without explicit or frequent reference to Mary. Jacob's older contemporary, Narsai composed an extended meditation on Eve that mirrors the *Homily on Women* in its sustained focus on Eve's actions and character.⁶⁰ The rare allusions to Mary within this poem shift the theological emphasis and characterization of Eve. Narrating Eve's actions without any immediate reference to Mary, the *Homily on Women* foregrounds death as a result of sin as well as attendant phenomena such as the pain in childbirth.⁶¹ If this poem was

⁵⁷ Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church*, in: Edmund Beck (ed. and trans.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ecclesia* (CSCO 198–199/ Syr. 84–85), Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO 1960, 37.5; Ephrem, *Mary and Eve as the World's Two Eyes*, in: Sebastian P. Brock and George A. Kiraz (eds. and trans.), *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press 2006, 66–67.

⁵⁸ Harvey, "Encountering Eve", 20–21.

⁵⁹ Emphasis on Jacob's use of "typologies" may be found in Behnam M. Boulos Sony, "La méthode exégétique de Jacques de Saroug", *Parole de l'Orient* 9 (1979–1980), 67–103; Johns Abraham Konat argued that Jacob's interpretative habits were not limited solely to the identification of types but included appreciation for Old Testament narratives without reference to the New Testament ("Typological Exegesis in the Metrical Homilies of Jacob of Serugh", *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006), 109–121.

⁶⁰ Narsai, *On the Admonition of Eve* 353.1–355.10; Molenberg, "Narsai's Memra", 75–58.

⁶¹ Cf. Jacob of Serugh, *Homily on Women* 24–25.

performed within the context of a funeral liturgy or memorial service as the manuscript location suggests, the *Homily on Women* further demonstrates how liturgical poetry preserves distinct portraits of Eve. While we lack the response of listeners and readers of this text, one can intuit that the didactic tone of the poem remains in tension with the emotional portrait of grief. Instead of consolation, the poet offers counsel and solidarity. Christian mourners, hearing this work performed, would be reminded of the connection between sin and death through a starkly gendered account.⁶²

While the beginning verses of the *Homily on Women* participate in theological discourses around Eve's role within the larger economy of salvation, the prominence of Eve's speech within the *Homily* offers a far more significant resource for deepening our understanding of her role within liturgical poetry. Christian authors were simultaneously troubled and intrigued by Eve's voice. Ephrem cites the fateful consequence of Eve's persuasive speech as a reason for the prohibition against women teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:34, and within the same stanza he reminds his listener that within the Church – the new Paradise – Eve's mouth may once again sing praise.⁶³

Later poets differ over the amplification or silencing of Eve's voice. Narsai references her injudicious words with the "Evil One" and her querulous nature, but he never attributes imagined speech to her.⁶⁴ Relying on the imagery of adultery, Narsai constructs an unambiguously sexualized Eve, uncompromising in its indictment of her character. The attribution of lament and sorrow to Eve fosters a more sympathetic portrait, as dramatic speech adds dimension to her characterization. Within Jacob's larger corpus, one encounters a mournful

⁶² The Hebrew liturgical poems composed by Yannai, a sixth-century poet, provide a fruitful comparison to Syriac poetry around the issues of gender dynamics and emotive speech. For Yannai's depiction of Sarah and Abraham, see Ophir Münz-Manor, "All about Sarah: Questions of Gender in Yannai's Poems on Sarah's (and Abraham's) Barrenness", *Prooftexts* 26 (2006), 344–374.

⁶³ Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, in: Edmund Beck (ed. and trans.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum* (CSCO 174, 175; Syr. 78, 79), Louvain: CorpusSCO 1957, 6.8; Sebastian P. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press 1990, 111.

⁶⁴ Narsai, *On the Admonition of Eve*, 353.10; Molenberg, "Narsai's Memra", 76.

Eve within his third homily on Cain and Abel where Eve laments the death of Abel and the wickedness of Cain.⁶⁵ Inhabiting the narrative world of the biblical text, the author extends the biblical portrait of Eve by extrapolating her emotional turmoil over the death of one child and the depravity of the other. Edward G. Matthews has called attention to a short *mēmṛā* attributed to Isaac, *On Adam and Eve*, which features a dialogue between Adam and Eve.⁶⁶ Offering solace to Adam and bemoaning her own actions, Eve expresses hope for redemption and alleviation of their “debt.”⁶⁷ At the time of the publication of his article, Matthews noted that the *mēmṛā* attributed to Isaac was “unique” within the poetic tradition for capturing a scene between Adam and Eve.⁶⁸ While the *Homily on Women* imagines a very different dramatic action, it adds to the growing poetic resources for Adam and Eve traditions within Syriac literature.

In addition to poetic compositions and biblical commentaries, Jewish and Christian extracanonical narratives arising expanded the Genesis story. Within Syriac studies, *The Cave of Treasures* has been a key source for understanding indigenous traditions around Genesis narratives.⁶⁹ In the *Life of Abel*, Eve and Adam lament the actions of Cain: “When Eve heard that Abel had been slain, she filled her mouth with wailings and lamentations, and at the sound of her laments the very walls of the house shook.”⁷⁰ In the introduction to his edition and translation of the *Life*, Sebastian Brock notes that dating the work poses terrible difficulties before positing a late fifth to early sixth century

⁶⁵ Jacob of Serugh, *Homily 149*, 5:32–47. For discussion see Harvey, “Encountering Eve”, 26.

⁶⁶ Edward George Matthews, “Isaac of Antioch and the Literature of Adam and Eve”, in: E. G. Chazon, D. Satran, & Ruth A. Clements (eds.), *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*. (Journal for the Study of Judaism, Supplement Series 89), Leiden: Brill 2004, 331–344.

⁶⁷ Matthews, “Isaac of Antioch,” 340–341.

⁶⁸ Matthews, “Isaac of Antioch,” 337.

⁶⁹ Su Min Ri (ed. and trans.), *La Caverne des Trésors. Le deux recensions syriaques* (CSCO 486–487/Syr. 207–208), Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO 1987; idem, *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors: étude sur l’histoire du texte et de ses sources* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 581), Louvain: Peeters 2000.

⁷⁰ Sebastian P. Brock, “A Syriac Life of Abel”, *Le Muséon* 87:3–4 (1974), 482.

date based on style and interpretative posture.⁷¹ This imagery of the house, found here in the *Homily on Women* as well, underscores the work's domestic and maternal depiction of Eve, the *Homily* offers further evidence of for reconstructing traditions around Eve in Syriac literature.⁷²

While Brock observes that Jacob's four homilies on Cain and Abel provide one of the sole sites of shared traits with the *Life of Abel*, the lamenting Eve is found more broadly in extracanonical literature in Greek. The *Life of Adam and Eve*, which exists in Latin, Greek, Slavonic, Armenian, Georgian and in Coptic fragments, has given rise to a considerable body of research.⁷³ Although the *Life of Adam and Eve* is not extant in Syriac, Lucas Van Rompay has demonstrated significant shared imagery and conceptions about paradise between the *Life* and Syriac authors.⁷⁴ Without positing textual dependence, comparative readings offer insights into how distinctive interpretative traditions in antiquity can still intersect. The *Life of Adam and Eve* features a sorrowful Eve lamenting her sinful actions, but it also offers an account of Eve's death. The *Life* presents a penitent Eve who mourns for the legacy she has left behind.⁷⁵ It is this creative addition to Eve's story

⁷¹ Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 468.

⁷² Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 468: "Apart from the possible case of Jacob of Serugh, I have been unable to discover any instances where our text has influenced other surviving treatments of the theme in Syriac literature, such as the *sughitha* on Cain and Abel appended to Mingana's edition of Narsai."

⁷³ Some valuable resources that focus on the characterizations of Eve include: Michael E. Stone, *Adam and Eve in the Armenian Tradition: Fifth through Seventeenth Centuries*, Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press 2013; Gary Anderson, "The Punishment of Adam and Eve in the Life of Adam and Eve", in: G. Anderson, M. Stone, & J. Tromp (eds.), *Literature on Adam and Eve Collected Essays*, Leiden: Brill 2000, 57–82. The various recensions of the Greek texts are discussed in Marinus de Jonge & Johannes Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha), Sheffield: Academic Press 1997; Vita Daphna Arbel, *Forming Femininity in Antiquity: Eve, Gender, and Ideologies in the Greek Life of Adam and Eve*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2012.

⁷⁴ Lucas Van Rompay, "Memories of Paradise: The Greek 'Life of Adam and Eve' and Early Syriac Tradition", *ARAM* 5 (1993), 555–570.

⁷⁵ *The Life of Adam and Eve* in: Johannes Tromp (ed.), *The Life of Adam and Eve in Greek: A Critical Edition* (Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece 6), Leiden: Brill 2005), 31–43

that displays the strongest resonance with the account of Eve's death in the *Homily on Women*. Alongside liturgical poetry, extracanonical literature such as the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the *Cave of Treasures*, and the *Life of Abel* fostered popular reflection on the characters of Genesis and gave rise to multivalent portraits of Eve, often depicting her as a speaking, sorrowful character.⁷⁶

Conclusion

For historians of early Christianity and Late Antiquity, the lack of texts authored by women presents a continual challenge for discerning women's voices and reconstructing an inclusive historical portrait of the period.⁷⁷ Texts authored by men, often in positions of ecclesial authority, are replete with *representations* of women and women's voices, but they present a thorny hermeneutical challenge as historical

and 160–176. For a discussion about how various manuscript traditions abridge this section of the narrative, see John R. Levison, "The Exoneration and Denigration of Eve," in: G. Anderson, M. Stone, & J. Tromp (eds.), *Literature on Adam and Eve Collected Essays*, Leiden: Brill 2000, 264–272.

⁷⁶ Minov, "'Serpentine' Eve", 92–114; idem, "The Cave of Treasures and the Formation of Syriac Christian Identity in Late Antique Mesopotamia: Between Tradition and Innovation", in: B. Bitton-Ashkelony & L. Perrone (eds.) *Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Self, Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 15), Turnhout: Brepols 2013), 155–194. Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 467–492.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth A. Clark, "Early Christian Women: Sources and Interpretation", in: L. L. Coon, K. J. Haldane, & E. W. Sommer (eds.), *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia 1990, 19. Clark notes that "lower" genres such as letters, homilies, pilgrimage accounts, martyrologies, hagiography, and apocryphal acts have proven more useful for reconstructing the history of early Christian women than theological treatises written for and by the elites. Liturgical poetry, although composed by an ecclesial elite, may bridge this divide given its didactic and spiritual concerns. Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey have wrestled with the question of female authors in Syriac literature. They discuss the self-proclaimed female authorship within *The Life of Febronia* in *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1998, preface, 150–176, and 192–193. As they note, such statements of authorial self-presentation could be a rhetorical strategy.

evidence.⁷⁸ These images of women give us more information about what elite authors thought *about* women, and attempts to discern the social forces and ideologies that produced such representations are equally tentative and partial in nature. Bearing these challenges in mind, traditions around Eve offer historians of early Christianity and Late Antiquity insights into how constructions of gender proliferated and shifted in the period. For feminist historians, the *Homily on Women* is a valuable resource deserving of further study. Like the Virgin Mary, Eve served as a canvas for early Christian authors to project their idealizations and theological meditations. Alongside her depictions in extracanonical literature, Eve emerges from these poetic verses as a “symbolic construction of antithetical aspects of femininity,” encapsulating the ambiguities inherent in ancient constructions of “woman.”⁷⁹

Syriac literature is rife with tantalizing portraits of biblical women vividly characterized with voluminous imagined speech. Syriac authors, like their Latin- and Greek-speaking counterparts, bore a fascination with the text of Genesis as they traced the etiology of sin and the gender dynamics of the biblical account.⁸⁰ Syriac literature contains manifold interpretations, replete with varied emphases dependent upon authorial intent and theological concerns. Poets and commentators alike found Genesis 2–3 a fertile resource for justifying a subordinate role for women and hierarchical social structures in their

⁷⁸ In recent decades historians and scholars of religion have developed increasingly sophisticated approaches to the study of early Christian women. The self-reflective posture of scholars employing feminist methods is especially illuminating of the limitations and potentialities within the field. Important overviews include: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press 1992; eadem, “Text and Reality – Reality as Text: The Problem of a Feminist Historical and Social Reconstruction Based on Texts”, *Studia Theologica* 43 (1989), 19–34; Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press 2011, 3–29; Elizabeth Castelli, “Virginity and its Meaning for Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity”, *Feminist Studies in Religion* 2:1 (1986), 61–88. For an overview of the methodological challenges of historical writing about women, see Elizabeth A. Clark, “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn’”, *Church History* 67:1 (1998), 1–31.

⁷⁹ Arbel, *Forming Femininity*, 53.

⁸⁰ Van Rompay, “Humanity’s Sin”, 199–217.

contemporary society.⁸¹ Overriding questions of authorship and authenticity, the *Homily on Women* displays a dynamic reflection of the interpretative traditions around Eve. Clearly attributed to and presumably written by an elite male author, the *Homily on Women* is a prime example for how literature actively participated in the construction and perpetuation of presuppositions around gender as a fundamental structuring category of social order.

The rhetorical constructions of the idealized “woman” that coalesce around Eve, understood in their literary and historical particularity, illuminate the breadth of gendered discourse. While typological treatments of Eve as the converse of a virtuous Mary provided a clear binary of feminine vice and virtue, this sustained portrait of Eve adds to her character a certain degree of *pathos*. Imagined speech, attributed both to Eve as well as her companions, raises the emotive tenor of the text. This *ambiguous* portrait reflects and contributes to larger societal discourses around gender and women that held in tension justifications for female subordination with ideals of female sanctity. In its dramatic deployment of traditions around Eve, the *Homily on Women* nuances our understanding of how early Christian poets constructed the figure of “woman” and deepens our resources for understanding the scripting of death and grief in antiquity.

⁸¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, “Devil’s Gateway and Bride of Christ: Women in the Early Christian World”, in her *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press 1986, 29–31. Clark’s insights into treatments of Genesis in Latin- and Greek-speaking authors extend to Syriac texts as well.

Translation

A Mēmrā of Mar Jacob: On Women
p. 533

(1) Eve, our mother, plucked and ate from the tree;
and she took the fruit that was full of death and gave (it) to Adam.⁸²
She had forgotten the commandment that was made as a boundary,
and she went forward and proceeded;
and she drew near and stood at the tree that was full of bitter things.
She saw that it was desirable, and she plucked the fruit from its
boughs;
on the surface, beautiful – on the inside, bitter and full of death.
She plucked and ate, carried, and brought (it) so that Adam would eat;
and as soon as they ate they were exposed among the trees.⁸³
(5) Without a garment she stood nude, our mother Eve,
and placed upon her neck was death, which was harsh and enslaved
her.
She ate the death-filled fruit first,
and all her children were abandoned to death on her account.
A bridal chamber (was) in the garden, and above it hung death,
and the beloved spouses, Eve and Adam, were reclining in it.
A serpent entered spitting out bile and exposed them;
and they acted shamelessly, and in (their) wedding feast they were ex-
posed.
The beautiful ones fell from the loftiness of a garden of blessings,
and they became dust and excrement abominable within Sheol.

⁸² Cf. Gen 3:6

⁸³ Cf. Gen 3:7

(10) How indeed did Eve benefit Adam among the trees?
For the Lord said that He gave her to Adam as a helper in Eden.⁸⁴
She thrust him down from the land full of delights;
how then was she called “a help-mate”?
She (is) an over-thrower, a deceiver, a murderer;
death (comes) from her! How then was she called “a helper”?
She brought death and on account of her, alas, we die,⁸⁵
and rather than in that glory we are (now) clothed in the garment of
the dead.⁸⁶

This is the lot of all those born from her, and henceforth
she bitterly left death as an inheritance to all her offspring.
(15) Behold the inheritance that Eve left behind to all her children!
And behold the portion that is full of death for all her heirs!
This is the bed that Eve has spread for all her children;
behold every day she carries the dead ones to the house of ruin.
This bridal chamber our mother has prepared from the beginning:
the tomb, the darkness, and the place of the dead that is full of trembl-
ing.

Behold the inheritance that she has left behind to her children – mother
of debts!
Behold (her children) are shrouded in death, sorrow, and great pain.
Behold the contract that she wrote in Eden – the mother of all!
(A contract) that produces death from between the lines that are writ-
ten in it.

(20) The discerning ones have seen the daughter of this Eve in our own
day,
for she also incites every grief in the likeness of her mother.
When she fell ill and the time arrived for the day of her departure,
she gathered her children and wept over them passionately.

⁸⁴ Cf. Gen 2:18

⁸⁵ This verse is faint echo of Rom 5:12, but through a subtle change the poet changes the Pauline verse to place blame squarely on Eve for introducing death into the world suggesting the influence of 1 Tim 2:14.

⁸⁶ See Sebastian Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition”, in: M. Schmidt & C. F. Geyer (eds.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter. Internationales Kolloquium, Eichstätt 1981* (Eichstätter Beiträge 4), Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet 1982, 18–19.

She looks upon her children, and her tears are flowing from her pupils;⁸⁷
she gives forth lamentation and sounds of pain over her beloved ones.
She raises her eyes and sees her children above her bed,
and she mourns in pain and with the voice of lamentation passionately:
“My beloved children whom I conceived and bore with pains and suffering,⁸⁸
who, in my mourning today, deprived me from your company?
p. 534
(25) My inner recesses⁸⁹ lament bitterly over you, my beloved ones and children,
and they play the sounds of suffering on my tongue as on a harp.
My belly is in mourning on account of you, beloved fruits,
for from now on I will no longer see your beautiful countenance.
Who has taken me away from your midst, my beloved ones and my children?
And who has led me away from among you, beloved children?
Cry over me in suffering and multiply lamentations over me!
Behold today the house of the dead is casting me (there).
This day makes silence rest upon my lips,
and speech ceases from my mouth bitterly.
(30) This day binds my hands as one dead,
and also places the fetters of death upon my limbs.
This day dissolves movement within my thoughts
and places mourning as a cloth over my face.”
Her children cry out in mourning before her bitterly:
“Dear mother, whither do you hasten to depart?
A small dove who raised and carried all her chicks,
now what hope do we have after your death?

⁸⁷ The shift here to the present tense moves the poem from a narration of the biblical past to the present moment, bringing the audience into the scene.

⁸⁸ For an overview of Ephrem’s views on pain in childbirth as a punishment of Eve, see Trygve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian, with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Traditions*, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell 1978, 118–119.

⁸⁹ Lit. “bowels”

ARTIKLAR

A dear sheep to which her sweet lambs clung,
why did you bitterly abandon your offspring in desolation?
(35) A fair bird who within her nest reared her offspring,
why did you remove that shelter in which (the offspring) dwelt?
A hen who enshrouded her chicks with her wings,
why did you take your wings away from us, for behold, we are miser-
able!
Where should we go that we might seek you there, the one full of
mercy?
And where might we turn? In what place are you to be found by us?
If we enter into the house to see and to seek you there,
it stands in mourning because your activities have disappeared from it.
Its stones are weeping, its walls are lamenting, and all of it is covered;
and with groans its roof is covered as with a cloak.
(40) All of (the house) is mourning and suffering, and it is filled with
woes,
and in its inner rooms mourning rises up like smoke.
Along with your companions who are mourning over you, (the house)
is indeed filled with groans;
and it is clothed with suffering and the voice of lamentation (coming)
out of their mouths.
Behold your companions seek to hear you, dear mother;
speak with them, for behold, they are crying to you by your pleasing
name.
They seek your love, and they have put on mourning because of your
departure;
behold they surround your bed bitterly with lamentations.
Who led you, brought you, and placed you within the tomb?
And who deprived you of our company, friend and sister?
(45) Who separated you from our companionship? Who cut you off?
Who led you and with force led you out into captivity?
Speak with us, for your pleasing speech is very much beloved to us;
answer your friends who don mourning because of your departure."
"Alas you, my friends! What shall I do? For behold, under coercion,

behold, they are escorting me to enter and find rest in the house of the dead.⁹⁰

Grant me the weeping of your mouths bitterly,
and grant me tears from your eyes mournfully.

Grant me (your) suffering with piteous laments,
and grant me mourning and doleful weeping from your mouths.

(50) Death conducted me, brought me and placed me in the house of the dead;

you⁹¹ look upon my demise and be mindful of yourselves.

For this truly is the end of all children born, and this is the lot that is prepared for the sons of the flesh.

For this day are prepared kings as well as nobles,
and for this hour are kept the generations and races.

In me the boastful women who, behold, are bearing themselves with pride will be brought down,

and in me all the women who have embellish themselves with their garments will be ashamed.

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Every woman who is proud in the shape of the body should come and see me,

and be mindful of my demise and weep for her soul bitterly.

(55) As for me, I have girded myself (for the journey), a great power will accompany me.

The prayer of the upright ones will escort me in the house of the dead.

Blessed is He who led you and who, as it is pleasing to him, is going to raise you up;

praise to him who ransomed you by his blood and will raise you up.”

It is finished by the hands of one miserable and weak.

⁹⁰ I believe that **صلى** at the end of 47a goes with **وحي** at the beginning of 47b (the same combination as in 45). The enjambment and the repetition of **وحي** make the verse a bit clumsy.

⁹¹ The feminine second-person plural of the verb forms and of the pronouns (**كن**) pronoun underscore the fact that Eve is addressing women as a collective within this verse.