

CHAPTER 8



CYRILLONA'S *ON ZACCHAEUS*

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Early Syriac literature was the product of an eastern Christian tradition centered in greater Mesopotamia. Syriac is an Aramaic (i.e., Semitic) dialect, and early Syriac Christianity has been described as “essentially semitic in its outlook and thought patterns.”¹ Like authors of the Hebrew Bible, early Syriac writers favored teaching theology through poetry that was extravagant in symbolism and lavish in trope, in stark contrast to the systematic and philosophical prose of the Greek East and Latin West. Because of this and other singular features, early Syriac Christianity has become of ever-increasing interest to church historians.

Unfortunately, little early Syriac literature survives that predates the Council of Chalcedon (451), when theological controversy precipitated the split of the Syriac church into eastern and western communions, each of which developed its own literary tradition. The post-Chalcedonian churches rapidly became hellenized, and

1. Sebastian P. Brock, “From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning,” 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), 17. For an expansion of this idea, see Brock’s *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, rev. ed. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 14–15.

earlier works were often neglected. Most extant Syriac writings that predate Chalcedon “just happen to have been preserved, totally cut off from their original context, without any indication of when and where they originated. . . . There is no common denominator for this early literature: it consists of individual authors and anonymous works, each with its own characteristics, with very few connections between them. Much of this period soon must have fallen into oblivion.”²

Cyrillona

One of the most noteworthy of these precious pre-Chalcedonian authors is Cyrillona, and he and his work certainly fit the description just given.³ He is all but anonymous. His surviving works have been preserved by happenstance, severed from their original context, but with evident merits; however, their historical, literary, and theological antecedents are unclear. Cyrillona’s writings are preserved in a single sixth-century manuscript in the British Library (BL Add. 14591).⁴ This codex is a miscellany of hymns and homilies, some with named authors and others anonymous. One homily each is attributed to *Qurloka* and to *Quriloka*, clearly variants of the same name, regularized in English as Cyrillona.⁵ On stylistic

2. Lucas Van Rompay, “Past and Present Perceptions of Syriac Literary Tradition,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3/1 (2000): §§ 8–9 at <http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol3No1/HV3N1VanRompay.html> (accessed 4 May 2009).

3. Detailed introductions to Cyrillona and his work may be found in Dominique Cerbelaud, *Cyrillonas. L’Agneau Véritable: Hymnes Cantiques et Homélie* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1984), 7–34; and Costantino Vona, *I carmi di Cirillona: Studio introduttivo, Traduzione, Commento* (Rome: Desclée and Editori Pontifici, 1963), 19–61. A published edition of the Syriac text may be found in Gustav Bickell, “Die Gedichte des Cyrillonas nebst einigen anderen syrischen Ineditis,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 27 (1873): 591–93; with corrections in Bickell, “Berichtigungen zur Cyrillonas,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 35 (1881): 531–32.

4. On the dating, see J. Josephus Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque Opera selecta* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1865), xx; and William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870–72), 2:669.

5. *Qurloka*/*Quriloka* is both unattested and inexplicable as a proper name. *Cyrillona* (*Qurilona*) is not an anciently attested name either, but would be the Syriac

and other internal grounds, three further anonymous works in this manuscript may confidently be ascribed to the same author.⁶ The first editor of these texts praised Cyrillona as “the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem,” who was the greatest poet of the patristic age.⁷ He is certainly in the first rank of Syriac poets and one of the last masters of Syriac poetry’s golden age.⁸

There survives no ancient testimony of Cyrillona or his work, and all attempts thus far to correlate him with a known historical figure must be judged unsuccessful. The inconsistent spelling of his name in the manuscript may indicate he was not even known to scribes working just two or three generations later. Based on his reference to a Hunnic invasion of 395,⁹ Cyrillona must have been active in the late fourth century, and from the content of his writings we may assume he was a bishop or at least a priest. Three of his poems are based on the Last Supper, and more specifically the Last Supper and Last Discourse as found in the Gospel of John (John 13-17). A fourth poem, apparently a pastoral homily for a feast of all saints, concerns a plague of locusts, an invasion of the Huns, and other calamities. Associated in the manuscript with this homily *On the Scourges* is a short, untitled poem (*soghitha*) conventionally called *On Zacchaeus*.

diminutive form of the popular Christian name Cyril (*Qurilos*). Since Syriac *k* (*kaph*) and *n* (*nun*) are similar letterforms, and admittedly the names are badly written in the manuscript, scholars have concluded that the manuscript as it appears to be written is somehow in error. However conjectural, then, the naming of this author as Cyrillona has become a fixed convention.

6. The original editor ascribed to Cyrillona a sixth poem, *On the Wheat*, which I do not accept as genuine; see Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, 21.

7. “Ich halte ihn für den bedeutendsten syrischen Dichter nach Ephräm.” Gustav Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte der syrischen Kirchenväter Cyrillonas, Baläus, Isaak v. Antiochien und Jakob v. Sarug* (Kempten: Kösel, 1872), 14. This comment resonated with subsequent scholars, who at times have repeated it in substance or even verbatim, either with attribution to Bickell or simply as their own judgment.

8. So Robert Murray: “After Ephrem and Cyrillona, Syriac poetry falls into a facile and monotonous fluency which only a few writers of genius will transcend.” *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, rev. ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004), 340.

9. Cyrillona, *Scourges* 264-65, in Bickell, “Gedichte des Cyrillonas,” 586.

I will dedicate the remainder of this paper to a discussion of *On Zacchaeus*, which is one of the earliest works based on the gospel story of Zacchaeus in all of Christian literature.¹⁰ It is likewise one of the earliest Syriac texts devoted to the subject of repentance. Following an introduction, I will survey a number of important themes in this poem and contextualize them within the early Syriac tradition. Particular attention will be given to Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306-73), Cyrillona's older contemporary and Syriac literature's greatest poet-theologian, whose writings and theology of symbols inform our understanding of Cyrillona on many points.¹¹ Familiarity with the poem will be helpful to the reader; reference may be made to the translation provided in the final section. All citations of it in my introduction and commentary are by line number. This is the first translation of *On Zacchaeus* into English, based on my own edition of the Syriac text.

Introduction to *On Zacchaeus*

In the manuscript, *On Zacchaeus* bears no title but rather the simple descriptor, "soghitha of the homily" (*sugita dileh dmimra*), apparently meaning the preceding homily *On the Scourges*. A *soghitha* is typically a kind of dialogue poem, which *On Zacchaeus* clearly is not, though it does exhibit some other standard features of *soghyatha*, such as 7+7 meter, brevity, stanzaic form, and acrostic structure.¹²

10. A hymn attributed to Ephrem, preserved only in Armenian, is devoted to the story of Zacchaeus and would predate Cyrillona if genuine (*Armenian Hymns* 25). A Greek homily on Zacchaeus attributed to Amphilochius of Iconium may also predate this poem (CPG 3239).

11. A basic introduction to Ephrem and his thought may be found in Brock, *Luminous Eye*. A useful anthology of Ephrem in English translation is Sebastian P. Brock and George A. Kiraz, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2006). My citations from Ephrem follow the standard editions conveniently listed, with available translations, in Brock and Kiraz, *Select Poems*, 259-62. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Some early writings that come down under Ephrem's name are of uncertain authenticity, which I denote, though their early date nevertheless makes them valuable for this study.

12. On this poetic genre, see Sebastian P. Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems," in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen—Oosterhesselen 10-12 September)*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers et al. (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum

But because the use of the term *soghitha* only becomes well-attested at a much later date, its precise meaning as used here is unclear. This poem reads like a kind of short sermon (and early Syriac sermons were typically poems), but its original setting and use are unknown. Its relationship to *On the Scourges* is likewise not obvious. The two poems may have been composed separately and only later brought together.

The poem derives its modern title from its principal character, Zacchaeus (see Luke 19:1-10). It is not, however, a commentary on the gospel episode, but a discourse on salvation and the mercy of God toward sinners. In Syriac homiletic literature similar works often bear the title *On Repentance (datyabuta)*. In its brief compass it invokes a number of the most potent and oft-used types and symbols of redemption in the Syriac tradition: the medicine of life, the garment of glory, the shepherd, the fisherman, the fruit of life, Eve and Mary, etc. Nevertheless, it is certainly not just a typological exercise, but a call to repentance and, even more so, a message of hope that presents Zacchaeus as an example of God's mercy toward penitent sinners.

Cyrrillona, then, understands the story of Zacchaeus to be that of a penitent finding salvation. This was the story's traditional interpretation. Most interpreters of the Bible have assumed Zacchaeus was a sinner whom Jesus either called to repentance or who was moved to repent through their encounter. A contemporary Syriac biblical commentary portrayed Zacchaeus as, if not yet penitent, at least "praying in his heart" in the sycamore tree that he might entertain Jesus.¹³ Cyrrillona seems to take the more unusual, though not unique, position that Zacchaeus had repented before climbing the tree.¹⁴ The gospel narrative does not in fact make Zacchaeus a sinner, former or current, except in the minds of a people who despised his profession as

Orientalium, 1987), 135-47, and Brock, "Syriac Dialogue Poems: Marginalia to a Recent Edition," *Le Muséon* 97 (1984): 29-58.

13. (Ps.) Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 15.20.

14. See similarly, e.g., Ps. Chrysostom, *De caeco et Zacchaeo* 3 (PG 59:603).

a tax collector. “For in the episode Jesus pronounces not forgiveness but the vindication of Zacchaeus: Jesus announces salvation to ‘this house’ because he sees that Zacchaeus is innocent, a true ‘son of Abraham,’ despite the post that he held, which branded him otherwise.”¹⁵

Jesus’s approbation of Zacchaeus was unappreciated or misunderstood by early Syriac exegetes, who regularly incorporated Zacchaeus into recitations on penitent sinners, associating him with others such as Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6), the adulterous Samaritan woman (John 4), and especially the “sinful woman” (prostitute) of Luke 7.¹⁶ The collocation of Zacchaeus and the sinful woman was popular doubtless due to Jesus’s (favorable) comparison of them both to the Pharisees.¹⁷ Their professions were iconically sinful—in Ephrem’s words, “Tax collectors and prostitutes are unclean snares”—making them potent icons of repentance.

The sinful woman who had been a snare for men—
he made her an example for penitents.

The shriveled fig tree that had withheld its fruit
offered Zacchaeus as fruit.¹⁸

15. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1220-21. See Luke 19:9-10. The term *lost* in v. 10 does not mean Zacchaeus was necessarily a sinner. This verse is actually a fulfillment citation of Ezekiel 34:16, which describes Yahweh gathering scattered Israel as a shepherd. It summarizes the message of this story and is another affirmation that Zacchaeus “too is son of Abraham” (v. 9). In Luke, to the Pharisees, Jesus refers to both publicans and sinners equally as lost sheep, meaning, those outside the fold of the “righteous” who are nevertheless heirs of salvation (see Luke 15:1-7).

16. On the sinful woman in early Syriac literature, see Edmund Beck, “Der syrische Diatessaronkommentar zu der Perikope von der Sünderin, Luc. 7,36-50,” *Oriens Christianus* 75 (1991): 1-15; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 148-55; and Hannah M. Hunt, “The Tears of the Sinful Woman: A Theology of Redemption in the Homilies of St. Ephraim and His Followers,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 1/2 (1998) at <http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol1No2/HV1N2Hunt.html> (accessed 4 May 2009).

17. See Matthew 21:31 NRSV: “The tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”

18. Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 4.39-41, in Kathleen E. McVey, trans., *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 92-93, slightly revised. Compare Ephrem,

One of the best examples of this exegetical pairing is found in the introduction to another *soghitha*, one of two extant on the sinful woman:¹⁹

The Compassionate Doctor turned aside;
 towards sinners did He direct His path,
 showing humility towards them
 so that they might come to Him without fear. . . .

He caught Zacchaeus from the fig tree
 and Zebedee's sons in the boat,
 likewise the Samaritan woman beside the well,
 and the sinful one from Simon's house.

The sinful woman heard the report
 that He was dining in Simon's house;
 she said in her heart "I will go along,
 and He will forgive me all I have done wrong.

I am yearning actually to see
 the Son of God who has clothed himself in a body.
 Just as he forgives Zacchaeus his sins,
 so in his grace he will have compassion on me."²⁰

Such depictions of Zacchaeus make him an unsurprising choice as the dramatic subject of this poem on repentance and divine mercy. More subtly, his very name (at least, its first letter) contributes to the poetic structure of this poem, which is an alphabetical acrostic, a

Nisibene Hymns 60.9 (Satan speaking): "I had made Zacchaeus the chief of usurers and her (the sinful woman) the chief of prostitutes—Jesus broke my two wings."

19. Both texts were published and translated in Sebastian P. Brock, "The Sinful Woman and Satan: Two Syriac Dialogue Poems," *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988): 21-62. Brock dates the *soghitha* cited here to between the fifth and seventh century, and given certain parallels to a homily by Jacob of Serugh on the same topic, it is probable that the author knew Jacob's homily, or conversely, this poem was known to Jacob or even authored by him (Brock, "Sinful Woman," 25).

20. *On the Sinful Woman I* 2, 5-7 (trans. Brock, "Sinful Woman," 43-44, slightly revised). Other early Syriac texts on the sinful woman and Zacchaeus include (Ps.) Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 22.5; Ephrem, *Sermon on Our Lord* 42-48; Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns* 60.1-10; and Ps. Ephrem, *Sermons I* 7.79-88.

popular device for *soghyatha*.²¹ The first words of the poem's stanzas all begin with successive letters of the Syriac alphabet as follows: *zayn* (stanzas 1-4), *heth* (stanzas 5-10), *teth* (stanzas 11-14), *yod* (stanzas 15-18), *kaph* (stanzas 19-24), and *lamad* (stanzas 25-28). The varying number of stanzas for which each letter of the acrostic is employed (4 6 4 4 6 4) yields the chiasmic structure A B A A B A.

The letters of this acrostic run from the seventh (*zayn*) to the twelfth (*lamad*) of twenty-two in the Syriac alphabet. Some scholars have speculated, based on this fact, that *On Zacchaeus* as we now have it may be incomplete, but I can see nothing in structure or content that would warrant such a thesis.²² The fact that this alphabetical acrostic does not extend to all the letters of the alphabet indicates nothing in itself. Ephrem authored a large number of alphabetical acrostics (Palmer lists forty-one), and the majority do not extend to the full alphabet.²³ Ephrem's fourteenth *madrasha* of his *Hymns on Faith*, for example, covers the letters *zayn* through *nun*, very similarly to *On Zacchaeus*. In some cases Ephrem's reasons for selecting a certain range of letters is not entirely clear.²⁴ In this instance, Cyril-lona's choice of *zayn* as the starting letter for his poem seems logical enough, given its central character—Zacchaeus (*Zakay*).

21. See the selection of such *soghyatha* published in Bruno Kirschner, "Alfabetische Akrosticha in der syrischen Kirchenpoesie," *Oriens Christianus* 6 (1906): 1-69; 7 (1907): 254-91.

22. See Vona, *Carmi*, 30, though he recognizes that nothing can be definitively concluded. Cerbelaud likewise states that *On Zacchaeus* is "certainly fragmentary," though he does not elaborate his reasoning (*Agneau*, 24).

23. See the useful tables in Andrew Palmer, "Akrostich Poems: Restoring Ephraim's *Madroshe*," *The Harp* 15 (2002): 283-85.

24. See the important studies of Andrew Palmer on this topic: "Akrostich Poems"; "The Merchant of Nisibis: Saint Ephrem and His Faithful Quest for Union in Numbers," in *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, ed. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 167-233; "Restoring the ABC in Ephraim's Cycles on *Faith* and *Paradise*," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55 (2003): 147-94; "St Ephrem of Syria's Hymn on Faith 7: An Ode on His Own Name," *Sobornost / Eastern Churches Review* 17 (1995): 28-40; and "Words, Silences, and the Silent Word: Acrostics and Empty Columns in Saint Ephraem's *Hymns on Faith*," *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 129-200.

While less explicit, one might also discern a thematic structure to the poem that correlates with its acrostic and chiasmic structure. *On Zacchaeus* may be divided into four main sections (four, ten, ten, and four stanzas), with the thematic structure A B B' A' and which I have titled:

- A The Evil One and Zacchaeus (1-16 = *zayn* stanzas)
- B Fall and Redemption (17-56 = *heth* and *teth* stanzas)
- B' Christ, the Ocean of Mercies (57-96 = *yod* and *kaph* stanzas)
- A' Zacchaeus and the Penitent (97-112 = *lamad* stanzas)

Cyrillona begins (A) with the story of a single penitent, a notable and even “chief” sinner. A seemingly incidental detail from Zacchaeus’s story, the sycamore tree, becomes a typological point of departure for a meditation on the fall of man (B), in which the entire cosmic drama of sin and salvation is distilled into forty poetic lines. The climax of this drama is the incarnation of Christ and redemption of humanity. While salvation in Christ is a recurring theme throughout, it would seem quite deliberate that at the precise center of the poem “the serpent’s bite (is) healed”—humanity is redeemed from the Fall (56).

But moving from the universal again to the specific, Cyrillona particularizes this act of redemption in the figure of Zacchaeus. He is introduced here a second time, now as an example of the patient solicitude of Jesus toward sinners, which Cyrillona elaborates upon at length (B'). But it is only in the final quaternary of stanzas (A') that Zacchaeus clearly becomes more than *an* example of God’s redemptive grace. This poem begins with “Zacchaeus the chief,” or first (*riša*)—chief or first among whom is left ambiguous (9).²⁵ But in the end Zacchaeus is clearly made an archetype of divine mercy. He is the chief among penitent sinners, through whom God calls out to all sinners (97), and the antitype of the first man, wrapped in mercy

25. See note 56 below.

and reclothed in Adam's lost glory (101-4). Zacchaeus is every sinner who repents and embraces the mystery of God (110).

Commentary

The Evil One and Zacchaeus (1-16)

The theme of Satan's defeat by Christ, and the decline of the devil's power with the rise of Christianity, is common in early Christian literature. It became a favorite theme of apologists, especially in the imperial era, when the rapid expansion of Christianity could be readily adduced as evidence of Christ's victory over Satan. The most notable example of this in the Syriac tradition may be a homily on the fall of the idols by Jacob of Serugh (ca. 451-521),²⁶ but this theme is found at least as early as Ephrem. Similar to Cyrillona (5-8), Ephrem dramatized the astonishment and dismay of Satan at the desertion of Zacchaeus and the sinful woman from his ranks, the beginning of his downfall:

If Zacchaeus has become (Jesus's) disciple, and if (the
sinful woman)
has hearkened unto him, they have now put a halt
to our craft.

The idols are now a laughingstock; their artisans
derided and their craftsmen ridiculed.²⁷

While Ephrem described Satan's waning power among pagans and Jews,²⁸ Cyrillona celebrates his powerlessness among "the communities of those who have not sinned" (3). Opposing the Evil One is "the Son of Mary," to whom Satan's defecting minions turn for refuge (8) and of whom the chief is Zacchaeus.

26. See Paulin Martin, "Discours de Jacques de Saroug sur la chute des idoles," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 29 (1875): 107-47.

27. Ephrem, *Nisibene Hymns* 60.10-11; see also *Hymns on the Church* 40.1-4.

28. See *Nisibene Hymns* 60.14-16.

Early Syriac treatments of the story of Zacchaeus, as seen in Ephrem's *Armenian Hymns*,²⁹ often focus on Zacchaeus's reception of Jesus into his home and his remuneration of those he had defrauded. In contrast, this poem begins with Zacchaeus in the sycamore tree and focuses exclusively on his descent and cheerful greeting of Jesus. Only twenty-four lines are devoted directly to the figure of Zacchaeus, and Cyrillona's discussion of him is very narrowly circumscribed. And here his sycamore tree is as important as the recumbent Zacchaeus.

Early exegetes saw the sycamore tree from which Zacchaeus descends as a rich and multivalent symbol. Cyrillona identifies it first as Zacchaeus's refuge when he escaped from Satan: "the sycamore was a harbor on the path; / he came down from it weary and found rest" (11-12). The symbol of the haven or harbor (*lmina*) has rich typological potential in the Syriac tradition, often connected liturgically with baptism, but used as well in a number of other associations.³⁰ It was used as a metaphor for Christ as early as the *Acts of Thomas*, and in later liturgical usage (as also in the Manichaean psalms) Christ is called the "harbor of peace" and "harbor of life."³¹ But while the sycamore certainly may be employed as a positive scriptural type,³² here the tree seems to be called a *lmina* less for

29. See note 10 above and discussion below.

30. See Sebastian P. Brock, "The Scribe Reaches Harbour," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995): 195-202 (esp. 195-96); E. R. Hambye, "The Symbol of the 'Coming to Harbour' in the Syriac Tradition," in *Symposium Syriacum 1972: célébré dans les jours 26-31 octobre 1972 à l'Institut pontifical oriental de Rome: rapports et communications* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974), 401-11; and Murray, *Symbols*, 249-51.

31. See *Acts of Thomas* 37, 156; Hambye, "Coming to Harbour," 403, 406; Murray, *Symbols*, 250-51, 362.

32. Ephrem alludes to a tradition, also found in Jewish Haggadah, that the tree which caused the fall of humanity also reached out in sympathy to Adam and Eve and even associates that tree with the sycamore of Zacchaeus (*Hymns on Virginité* 35.1-2). But in this particular case, Ephrem describes the tree as "worthy of curses," due to his association of it with the fig tree in Mark 11:12-14 and parallel passages, even if "the leaves of scorn stretched out to the guilty." See McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 417 n. 550, who also notes *Hymns on the Crucifixion* 5.15 and the discussion of Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition*

its function as a harbor or port than as a portal from the life of sin to life in Christ. Zacchaeus does not find rest or refuge in the sycamore, but rather in Christ upon his descent (12).

Zacchaeus descends from the tree weary because, as becomes clear from the narrative, it is a symbol of the fallen world. Cyrillona associates Zacchaeus's sycamore with the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, since in Christ, the "barren fig" (sycamore) becomes fruitful—the tree of life.³³ This association is made explicit at the end of the text, when the penitent comes down from the tree, is planted again in paradise, and clothed in the "garment of mercy," which Adam lost (101-4). This typology is certainly not original to Cyrillona, but unique is his lyrical description of the very shade of the tree becoming luminous before Christ's splendor—a striking bit of poetic imagination (13-16). I think Vona rightly interprets this as a dramatic depiction of Christ dispelling the shadow cast upon the earth by the Fall.³⁴ A similar understanding is found in Ephrem, who said of Nathanael and his fig tree:

Blessed are you whom they told among the trees,
 "We have found Him Who finds all,
 Who came to find Adam who was lost,
 and in the garment of light to return him to Eden."
 The world in the symbol of the shade of the fig tree

(Lund: LiberLäromedel/Gleerup, 1978), 219 (to which add 111 n. 66). Elsewhere Ephrem (or one of his school) portrays the sycamore as the antitype of the tree of knowledge: "The former fig tree of Adam will be forgotten, on account of the latter fig tree of the chief tax collector, and the name of the guilty Adam [will be forgotten] on account of the guiltless Zacchaeus." *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 15.20, in Carmel McCarthy, trans., *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* (Oxford: Oxford University Press on Behalf of the University of Manchester, 1933), 240.

33. Exegetes understood the tree of knowledge to be a fig tree—that is, the tree from which Adam and Eve took fig leaves to make garments (see Genesis 3:7). But both the Peshitta and Old Syriac gospels call Zacchaeus's tree a "barren fig tree" (*tita pakihta*; Gk. *sykomorea*), rather than a simple fig tree (*tita*) as found in Genesis. Of course this discrepancy was not prohibitive for exegetes, who found that discrepancy typologically useful (see the quotation from Ephrem cited just below). Cyrillona calls Zacchaeus's tree simply a *tita* (11).

34. Vona, *Carmi*, 29.

is belabored as if in a heavy shadow.
 From beneath the fig tree as a symbol of the world,
 you emerged
 to meet our Savior.³⁵

When we understand the sycamore as a type of the tree of knowledge, the relationship between the call of Zacchaeus from that tree and the following discussion of the Fall becomes apparent.

Fall and Redemption (17-56)

This next section is cohesive even if, as is common in early Syriac poetry, it is more a rondo of symbolism than a linear narrative. Zacchaeus's tree, from which he descends and finds redemption from sin, points us to that tree through which sin came into the world. The tree of knowledge and its fruit are not directly named, but instead invoked through types. The tree was introduced in the image of a sycamore, and now a number of types corresponding to its fruit are introduced—sin, the blood of death, the salt of death, the leaven of death, and grief. Such images are prominent here, but employed in service to a narrative which is devoted to dramatic characters and their relationships: Eve and the serpent, Eve and Mary, Christ and Mary, Christ and Eve, Christ and the Evil One.

In Cyrillona's meditation on the Fall and redemption, the motif of fallen Eve (humanity) being restored to her paradisiacal state takes a central place. While fallen Adam is referenced at the end of the poem (103), the author may have been inspired to focus on Eve here, in part, for poetic reasons. As discussed above, this poem is an alphabetical acrostic, beginning with *z* (*zayn*) for Zacchaeus. The next letter in the Syriac alphabet and in the acrostic, beginning here, is *ḥ* (*ḥeth*)—the first letter of Eve's name (*Ḥawa*). While this connects Zacchaeus with the Fall poetically, also significant is the opportunity it provides to discuss Eve's antitype in the economy of salvation, the Virgin Mary.

35. Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginit*y 16.9 (trans. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 331).

This section of *On Zacchaeus* has been much referenced in scholarly literature for its exploration of the Eve-Mary typology widely used in the early church.³⁶ This typology is touched upon in Justin Martyr (103-65), but the first full articulation is found in Irenaeus (d. ca. 202).³⁷ Irenaeus frames it within his elaboration of Pauline “recapitulation” (see Ephesians 1:10), whereby redemption in Christ comes through a second creation, restoring God’s work to its original, paradisiacal form. So Christ the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45) recovers that which was lost by the first Adam in the Fall, destroying sin and death and restoring humanity to the image and likeness of God. Mary and Eve likewise are cast as antitypes in the drama of redemption:

For Adam had necessarily to be restored (or, recapitulated) in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.³⁸

36. For a general survey and bibliography on the Eve-Mary typology, see G. Söll, “Eva-Maria-Parallele,” in *Marienlexikon*, ed. Remigius Bäumer and Leo Scheffczyk, 6 vols. (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1988-94), 2:420-21; on the early church specifically, see Lino Cignelli, *Maria nuova Eva nella Patristica greca (sec. II-V)* (Assisi: Porziuncola, 1966), and Hugo Koch, *Virgo Eva—Virgo Maria* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1937); and for an incisive synthesis, Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 39-52. On the Syriac tradition, see esp. Sebastian P. Brock, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches* (Keral, India: SEERI, 1994), 1-3 et passim; Brock, introduction to *Jacob of Serug, On the Mother of God*, trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 4-12; Brock, “Mary in Syriac Tradition,” in *Mary’s Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1982), 182-91; Brock, “The Mysteries Hidden in the Side of Christ,” *Sobornost* ser. 7, 6 (1978): 469-71; and Robert Murray, “Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers,” *Eastern Churches Review* 3/4 (1971): 372-84.

37. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100.5. On Irenaeus, see Cignelli, *Maria nuova Eva*, 32-39; Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 51-58; and Koch, *Virgo Eva—Virgo Maria*, 17-60.

38. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 33, in Joseph P. Smith, trans., *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* (New York, NY: Newman, 1952), 69. Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4; 5.19.1.

We likewise find in Ephrem³⁹ and Cyrillona the idea of Mary becoming an “advocate” for Eve, in the fuller ancient sense.⁴⁰ In the tender image of Mary bearing up Mother Eve, Cyrillona depicts an act of both intercession and compassion:

The crippled serpent crippled Eve;
 Mary became feet for her mother.
 The maiden bore up the aged woman,
 that she might draw life-breath in her
 former place. (33-36)

While he does not describe Mary as the feet of Eve, Ephrem invokes several anatomical images to relate Eve and Mary. So while Eve conceives sin through her ear, Mary conceives Jesus through hers, and while Eve is the blind left eye of humanity, Mary is the illuminated right.⁴¹ Very striking is Ephrem’s long description of Eve and Mary as two hands, sympathetic and synergistic: “as they move away from one another, they become weak; but when they are brought together, they dominate the world.”⁴²

39. Much has been published on Ephrem’s development of the Eve-Mary motif. See, in addition to the general titles above (note 36): Edmund Beck, “Die Mariologie der echten Schriften Ephräms,” *Oriens Christianus* 40 (1956): 22-39; P. J. Botha, “Original Sin and Sexism: St. Ephrem’s Attitude towards Eve,” in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford, 1995*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 5 vols. (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 5:483-89; Paul Krüger, “Die somatische Virginität der Gottesmutter im Schrifttume Ephräms des Syrsers,” in *Alma Socia Christi V/I* (Rome: n.p., 1952), 77-83; Franz S. Mueller, “Die unbefleckte Empfängnis Marias in der syrischen und armenischen Überlieferung,” *Scholastik* 9 (1934): 165-73; Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, “Le Vergine Maria nella teologia di S. Ephrem,” in *Symposium Syriacum 1972*, 89-96; Aristide Serra, *Miryam, figlia di Sion* (Milan: Paoline, 1997), 19-72; and Pierre Yousif, “Marie et les derniers temps chez saint Ephrem de Nisibe,” *Études Mariales* 42 (1985): 48-55.

40. The Greek term *paraklētos* (*advocatus* in Latin) may mean “advocate,” “helper,” or “comforter.”

41. See respectively Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church* 49.7 and 37. On Mary conceiving through her ear, see Alois Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1955), 150-51. Brock cites this as a “quaint idea” and example of the “purely ‘mythological’ elements” introduced by Syriac authors in developing the contrast between Eve and Mary (Brock, “Mary in Syriac Tradition,” 188).

42. See Ephrem, *Hymns on the Church* 35.2-14 (quotation from 35.7).

But one of the most striking literary parallels to Cyrillona is a passage in a Pseudo-Ephremian hymn on Mary, of uncertain date, which is found in abbreviated form in later liturgical collections:

(7) In Mary is Eve's bowed head raised up again,
for she has carried the Child who seized hold
of the adder.

Those fig leaves of shame have been swallowed
up in glory!

(8) Two virgins have there been for humanity,
one the source of life, the other the cause of death:
in Eve death arose, but Life shone out through Mary.

(9) The daughter gave support to her mother
who had fallen,
and because she had clothed herself in fig
leaves of shame,
her daughter wove and gave to her a garment of glory.⁴³

Ephrem and Cyrillona both see in Mary not only the antitype of Eve, but a source of life who renews her mother through her Holy Child. So Cyrillona observes,

Eve grew old and bent;
she begat Mary and was made young;
and her daughter's child took it upon himself
to atone for the sins of his ancestor. (37-40)

Throughout this section Cyrillona interweaves and contrasts images of the Fall with the symbols of Christ the Redeemer, culminating with:

The sweet maid bore the Good Fruit
and placed it with her hands in the manger.
The nations ate it and, by its savor,
the serpent's bite was healed. (53-56)

43. Ps. Ephrem, *Hymnus de Beata Maria* 2.7-9 (Lamy 2:525; trans. Brock, *Bride of Light*, 36).

The contrast implicit here between the fruit of death and the fruit of life (the Body of Christ/Eucharist) is one of many Eucharistic typologies employed by Christians from a very early date and is first found in the Syriac tradition in Aphrahat and Ephrem.⁴⁴ Uniquely in Syriac, the fruit (*pi'ra*) of life even suggests homophonically the unleavened bread of the Eucharist (*paṭira*). Cyrillona here makes no distinction between the infant body of Christ laid by Mary in the manger, “the Good Fruit” of her womb (53-54), and the Eucharistic host which heals the nations with its savor (55-56). The Eucharistic fruit of life and Christ the Fruit of Life represent a single salvific reality.

Cyrillona employs a second familiar Eucharistic typology, this one looking not to the Garden but to pharmacology. Two verbs for mixing used here (*mzg* and *hlt*; 21-22, 24) were regularly employed by Ephrem in developing his typology of Christ as the Medicine of Life.⁴⁵ They are used of both the mixing of wine and the compounding of medicine. In theological usage, they may describe the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ. So Christ mingled divinity with humanity in the Incarnation and became the Medicine of Life. Likewise, when the Eucharistic wine is mixed and consecrated, it too becomes the medicine of life, the sanctifying blood of Christ. Typologically, Christ and the Eucharist are one Blood, one Medicine, and one Fruit of Life. Each of these symbols is implicit in the other, and may be freely interchanged in theological typology,

44. This broad and pervasive Eucharist imagery comprises an “intricate web of typology” (Brock) and “a very complex theological tradition” (Amar), which I just touch upon here. But for Aphrahat, Ephrem, and the early Syriac tradition, see the discussions in Joseph P. Amar, “Perspectives on the Eucharist in Ephrem the Syrian,” *Worship* 61 (1987): 441-54; Edmund Beck, “Die Eucharistie bei Ephräm,” *Oriens Christianus* 38 (1954): 41-67; Sebastian P. Brock, “Mary and the Eucharist: An Oriental Perspective,” *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 1/2 (1979): 50-59; François Graffin, “L’eucharistie chez saint Éphrem,” *Parole de l’Orient* 4 (1973): 93-121; and the numerous studies of Pierre Yousif, culminating in his *L’Eucharistie chez Saint Éphrem de Nisibe* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, 1984).

45. See Aho Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2002), 150-51. A third “mixing” term employed here (*ptk*; 25) is more rare, and its use in this context seems unique to Cyrillona.

often assisted by their poetic assonance. So Cyrillona contrasts here, for example, the blood of death (*dma dmawta*) (22) with the Medicine of Life (*sama dhaye*) (26).

A third, related typology is implicit here as well: the Ephre-
mian contrast between the poison of death (*sam mawta*) (poison of
the serpent/fruit of death) and the Medicine of Life (*sam h̄aye*).⁴⁶
Ephrem relates the poison and the Medicine, the fruit and the Fruit,
in complex ways, since the Eucharist itself can be not only the rem-
edy to the poison, but a poison itself if partaken by the unworthy:

The Fruit came down and went up
to you in love—rejoice!
Its sweetness should gladden you;
its exploration will not harm you.
It is the Medicine of Life, which is able
also to become the poison of death.
Take from it what it has produced—
also give to it that it might produce.⁴⁷

While Cyrillona also contrasts the Medicine/Fruit with the venom
of the serpent, he places his emphasis on the healing contained in
its “sweet savor,” which “overpowered the lethal salt of death” and
healed the serpent’s bite (27–28, 55–56).

Christ, the Ocean of Mercies (57–96)

Leaving the grand narratives of sin and redemption, Cyrillona
returns to Zacchaeus. While Zacchaeus was introduced as a notable
penitent (9–12), it is only now that his typological significance be-
comes fully clear. He is a vessel of mercy, a symbol of the serpent’s

46. See Shemunkasho, *Healing*, 150–54, and further on this typology: 147–54, 236–37, 341–44, 381–82, 466. Since the same Syriac word (*sama*) is used for both poison or medicine (among other things), this trope is lost in translation.

47. Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 5.16. Elsewhere Judas is invoked as an example of one who received the Medicine unworthily and for whom it therefore became a poison (Ephrem, *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread* 18.16–17).

defeat, and proof that “compassion is greater than sin” (see Romans 5:20):

The Ocean of Mercies flowed forth
to wash away the impurity of Zacchaeus,
and because compassion is greater than sin,
the sinner arose without punishment. (57-60)

The floods hidden in Mary (45) now become the Ocean of Mercies that washes away Zacchaeus's sin. Here this is a reference to baptism, but in Cyrillona's sermon *On the Scourges*, a similar image is also invoked for the holy power vested in the relics of the saints and martyrs: “An Ocean without measure dwells in them, / which was conceived in the womb, / and was hung on the wood, / and was entombed in the sepulcher, / and worshipped on high.”⁴⁸

The typological employment of Zacchaeus as a symbol of God's mercy toward sinners is not unusual, but neither was it universal among early authors. His general employment as a notable penitent has been mentioned, but other lessons were drawn from his story as well. Ephrem notes, for example, the significance of his shortness of stature: “The example of Zacchaeus teaches me: because he reached out to you, / his shortness grew through you and, seeking, he came to you. / That word from you brought to you / him who had been far from you.”⁴⁹

Unlike Cyrillona, longer treatments of the story of Zacchaeus rarely focus on Zacchaeus coming down from the tree, but rather on his declaration: “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (Luke 19:8 NRSV). This is the focus of an Armenian hymn attributed to Ephrem, in which Zacchaeus becomes a model for the virtue and heavenly rewards of almsgiving:

48. *Scourges* 22-26 (Bickell, “Gedichte,” 584). Cf. note 57 below on the baptismal imagery evoked in lines 45-48.

49. Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith* 25.14; cf. *Hymns against Heresies* 7.5, where Ephrem refers to “midgets” like Zacchaeus (*pelgut bnay 'naša*).

First he satisfied his obligation, then thereafter
 began to give alms.
 He paid first what he owed, and afterwards
 gave for profit.
 When he restored all he had defrauded,
 he paid his debts,
 And when he gave away half of his goods,
 he gave to God with profit.
 O debtor who unexpectedly became a creditor!⁵⁰

But in Cyrillona there is no mention of almsgiving. Zacchaeus is used here solely as an example of penitence and of God's mercy.

This emphasis on mercy is in contrast to many similar texts on repentance which focus more on the divine punishments awaiting the unrepentant. That is, for example, the central theme of an early sermon on repentance attributed to Ephrem, a grueling recitation of the agonies that the sinful soul does now and, infinitely more so, will yet have to bear:

Better is the grave without guilt / than the light
 (of this world) full of sins.
 Whoever does sin here, / him will the
 darkness overcome in the end.
 So what shall I do, my friends? / For both here
 and there dwell I in grief,
 Here out of fear, because of my sins, / and there
 because of punishment.⁵¹

50. (Ps.) Ephrem, *Armenian Hymns* 25.10-4. My translation is from the Latin version of Louis Mariès and Charles Mercier, *Hymnes de Saint Ephrem conservées en version arménienne* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1961), 139. Compare Ps. Ephrem, *Sermons on the Blessing of the Table* 10.8: "And when He was invited to the house of Zacchaeus, He showed there a sign: there He changed the plunderers and made them givers; Zacchaeus gave back the fourfold of all which he possessed," in Mary Hansbury, trans., *Hymns of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Oxford: SLG, 2006), 39.

51. Ps. Ephrem, *Sermons I* 5.119-26.

Beck has suggested that two other sermons, materially related to this one, were in fact intended as a tempering response to its “radicalism.”⁵² There is nothing to indicate that *On Zacchaeus* is a response to such oppressive rhetoric, but certainly Cyrillona is principally concerned with extolling the mercies of God, while not denying in any way his sure justice.

Cyrillona emphasizes divine justice with his repetition of the title “the Just One” (*ki'na*) (73, 85). But like any good pastor, he is also sure to remind of God’s “stern and terrible rebuke” (77) and of his “bow (drawn) to terrify us” (79). God is an inquisitor who has prescribed a mournful judgment for transgressors (85-88) and whose “wrath has claim on those who refuse” to repent (96). Nevertheless, God is both “just *and* kind— / fear, O sinners, but also be confident” (93-94). Christ comes as the “Inquisitor who bears mercy” (88), who does not feel human anger toward sinners or take pleasure in their destruction (66). But instead, as the good shepherd, he seeks them out (61-64); “abundantly forgives” (77); “teaches the meaning” of salvation (74), and prepares the way to mercy (107-8), which he is eager to grant (92); and rejoices with the angels in the repentant sinner (67-68, 83). “Not a single day has he allowed / fury and wrath to remain upon us” (69-70; cf. Ephesians 4:26).

Zacchaeus’s joyful countenance is scriptural (87; cf. Luke 19:6) but, given his sinful state, Cyrillona feels a need to temper that joy. He therefore ascribes to him a (nonscriptural) timidity and reticence which is proper for the penitent:

How timid, nonetheless, was Zacchaeus—
 he was afraid to seek mercy;
 but how forthright was our Lord—
 he was eager to grant mercy. (89-92)

52. Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones I* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1970), xx.

The impression conveyed is that Zacchaeus could not restrain his joy before such swift mercy, however much such a sinner should rightly feel to fear and mourn. This small expansion of the gospel narrative shows a pastor's concern to read into the biblical text the lived experience of the penitents in his care.

Zacchaeus and the Penitent (97-112)

In the preceding section Cyrillona develops Zacchaeus as an archetype of God's mercy to penitent sinners. He speaks of the body of sinners first as "they" (61-62, 65) and then, more personally, as "us" (70-74, 79). But it is only now in his closing exhortation that Cyrillona connects Zacchaeus directly with his audience:

In Zacchaeus he calls out to you sinners,
 that you may see his love, for how anxious is he!
 For he casts his nets like a fisherman,
 that the leader of your cohort may rejoice in you.
 (97-100)

The metaphor he invokes is of Jesus the fisherman as the Fisher of Men (cf. Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). The fact that birds, like fish, were caught in nets and snares underlies a more expansive typology to which Cyrillona tacitly refers. Zacchaeus the publican was a snare, yet himself was snared like a bird from the sycamore by Jesus's net, which saved him from the snares of the devil. While purely allusive here, these types were skillfully interwoven by Ephrem in an extended meditation on those caught by the Fisher:

Into the stream from which fishermen come up,
 the Fisher of all plunged, and he came up from it.
 At the stream where Simon was catching his fish,
 the Fisher of men came up and caught him. . . .
 Tax collectors and prostitutes are unclean snares;
 the Holy One caught the snares of the Deceitful One.
 The sinful woman who had been a snare for men—
 He made her an example for penitents.

The shriveled fig tree that withheld its fruit
 offered Zacchaeus as fruit.
 Fruit of its own nature it had not given,
 but it gave one rational fruit.⁵³

Instead of “rational fruit,” Cyrillona has the barren tree (the Fall) yielding a barren seed (fallen man) which God plants again in paradise and clothes with mercy (101-4). Cyrillona is moved to conclude, in the voice of Zacchaeus,

I have entered into your house instead of the sycamore;
 I shall live in the mystery which I embrace,
 for your cross is higher than the bough—
 multiply the floods of your mercy upon me! (109-12)

The cross of Christ rises above that tree of sin, the shadow of the fall made luminous in the shadow of the cross (15-16), the sinner (Zacchaeus/Adam) again receiving a robe of light and glory (104).⁵⁴ For Cyrillona, the church (“your house”) is the antitype of the tree, the paradise into which penitents enter as a refuge from the fallen world. The cross is a nest higher than any tree, to which the contrite sinner swiftly wings. His thoughts and joy are echoed in the verses of a contemporary homilist:

See, my Lord, how I have escaped from sin / like the bird
 from the snare (Psalm 123:7).
 I wish to flee to the nest of your cross, / which the
 serpent cannot approach.

53. Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 4.35-36, 39-42 (trans. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian*, 92-93, slightly revised). On Christ as the Fisher of Men, see also Murray, *Symbols*, 176-78. On the “shriveled fig,” see note 33 above.

54. On the robe of glory, see the following studies by Sebastian Brock: “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter: Internationales Kolloquium, Eichstätt 1981*, ed. Margot Schmidt and Carl-Friedrich Geyer (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), 11-40; *Luminous Eye*, 85-97; “The Robe of Glory: A Biblical Image in the Syriac Tradition,” *The Way* 39/3 [= *Spirituality and Clothing*] (1999): 247-59; and *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 66-72.

See, my Lord, how I have flown away from my guilt / as
 the dove from out of the nets (Psalm 55:6-7).
 I wish to dwell in the heights of your cross, / where the
 dragon cannot come.⁵⁵

Translation

Cyrrillona, *On Zacchaeus*

[zayn] The Accursed One has armed his blade against us,
 and brandishes his sword to frighten us,
 but among the hosts of those who have
 not sinned,
 among them it has melted like wax.

The Evil One trembles, for the companies of the just
 have grown to be more than his band,
 and his own troops are in revolt against him
 and take refuge in the Son of Mary.

Zacchaeus the chief⁵⁶ escaped from him,
 10 for his Lord met him and received him well.
 The sycamore was a harbor on the path;
 he came down from it weary and found rest.

The splendor of Jesus shone before him
 who reclined on the tree in the path,
 insomuch that the shadow cast upon the bough
 became luminous in appearance!

55. Ps. Ephrem, *Sermons I* 7.554-61.

56. Syr. *riša*. Aside from its nominal usage (“head,” “point”), *riša* is a widely used modifier to designate the first or principal example of *x*. Vona construes *riša* with the preceding couplet—“Zaccheo, capo dei peccatori” (Vona, *Carmi*, 28; cf. 1 Timothy 1:15)—that is, chief among Satan’s rebellious troops. *Riša* may also refer more prosaically to his designation as a chief tax collector, shortened from *riš maksā*. While the Old Syriac gospels and the Peshitta render *rab maksā* for the Greek *architelōnēs* at Luke 19:2, Ephrem uses *riš maksā* (*Nisibene Hymns* 60.9), as does the later Harklean version.

[*heth*] Eve succumbed, besieged
 by counsel which made her an exile;
 Mary arose radiant—
 20 she reclaimed the grace of the matriarch.

The serpent mixed sin in secret
 and mingled (it) with the blood of death for Eve,
 and that she might not be loath to drink it,
 he filled her full of sins in the guise of a friend.

Our Lord mixed wine with his blood;
 he confected the medicine of life 'till it
 brimmed over.

His sweet savor descended and overpowered
 the lethal salt of death.

Sins so beset Eve in Eden
 30 that, succumbing, they drove her from the garden,
 and because she inclined her ear to the voice
 of the serpent,
 she became estranged from that garden.

The crippled serpent crippled Eve;
 Mary became feet for her mother.

The maiden bore up the aged woman,
 that she might draw life-breath in her former place.

Eve grew old and bent;
 she begat Mary and was made young;
 and her daughter's child took it upon himself
 40 to atone for the sins of his ancestor.

[*teth*] She had hidden there in our dough
 the leaven of death and grief;
 Mary strove to remove it,
 so that all creation would not be corrupted.

He hid his floods in the virgin,
 life flowed from the glorious maid;
 his streams caught upon and climbed the mountains,
 and the depths and torrents climbed higher
 than them still!⁵⁷

This news about the Son brought low the Evil One,
 50 whose soldiers too fell upon their faces.
 He revealed himself (to them) when they
 questioned him,
 and they withered like straw, for they could not
 bear him.⁵⁸

The sweet maid bore the Good Fruit
 and placed it with her hands in the manger.⁵⁹
 The nations ate it and, by its savor,
 the serpent's bite was healed.

[yod] The Ocean of Mercies flowed forth
 to wash away the impurity of Zacchaeus,
 and because compassion is greater than sin,⁶⁰
 60 the sinner arose without punishment.

Jesus, though smitten by adversaries,
 see how he was not angry with sinners;
 in his mercy he was like a shepherd,
 and he went out and sought out that errant one.

57. The author's meaning here has not been clear to translators. It is the first instance of the recurring motif of Christ's vivifying mercy flowing out to us (cf. 57-58, 112), but the referent and meaning of the prepositional phrase *menhun* ("than them"; 48) is ambiguous. Perhaps the imagery is baptismal: Life (Christ) issues from Mary, flowing higher than the tops of the mountains, as did the cleansing Noachide floods, symbol of baptism (cf. Genesis 7:19-20; 1 Peter 3:18-22).

58. "The allusion remains obscure. Is it referring to an episode from the passion of Jesus (the soldiers falling backwards at Gethsemane: John 18:6; or those who guarded the tomb: Matthew 18:4?), or a more general reference to the fate of the impious?" (Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, 112 n. 90).

59. See Luke 2:7.

60. See Romans 5:20.

He swore this by himself,⁶¹ that they⁶² might
have faith in him:

“I take no pleasure in those who perish;
in one sinner, if he repents,
the Father rejoices with his angels.”⁶³

Not a single day has he allowed
70 fury and wrath to remain upon us;⁶⁴
he has taken care that we might become like him,
for he abundantly forgives those who go astray.

[*kaph*] The Just One does not wish to destroy us,
and he teaches the means (for salvation),
that he might aid us;
the watchers on high revere him,
but by those on earth, see how he is condemned!

His stern and terrible rebuke
do tears appease and mollify;
he draws his bow to terrify us—
80 mercy opposes it and it goes slack!

When he was passing next to the sycamore,
he saw the debtor, and regarded (him),
and stopped;
just as with Simon (Peter),⁶⁵ so also he rejoiced
in Zacchaeus, whom he brought down
from the sycamore.

61. A biblical oath formula; cf. Isaiah 45:23; Jeremiah 22:5; 49:13; Hebrews 6:13.

62. Vona (*Carmi*, 129) translates this as 1 pl., but the form is clearly 3 m. pl. He was perhaps misled by the subject of the next stanza. The referent is the sinners just mentioned (see line 62).

63. Conflation of Ezekiel 33:11 and Luke 15:7, 10.

64. Cf. Ephesians 4:26.

65. This probably refers to the calling of Peter (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11) and would find a parallel in Ephrem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 4.34-35 (see note 53 above and quotation in text). It might also refer to Peter's confession of faith, blessing, and investiture (Matthew 16:16-19).

The Just One had commanded that, for the
 one who has gone astray,
 the Judgment should be mournful,
 (but) his mien was merry⁶⁶ when he met
 that Inquisitor who bears mercy!

How timid, nonetheless, was Zacchaeus—
 90 he was afraid to seek mercy;
 but how forthright was our Lord—
 he was eager to grant mercy.

Your God is just and kind—
 fear, O sinners, but also be confident,
 for he forgives the sins of those who repent,
 but wrath has claim on those who refuse.

[*lamad*] In Zacchaeus he calls out to you sinners,
 that you may see his love, for how anxious is he!
 For he casts his nets like a fisherman,
 100 that the leader of your cohort may rejoice in you.

He took the penitent from the sycamore
 and straightway planted him in the Garden;
 he saw him stripped of glory, like Adam;
 he wove for him a garment of mercy
 and clothed him.⁶⁷

Confess our Lord, who sought out and came
 to the debtor who was found owing,
 and made a path on which we should go,
 that he might mete out (to us) the mercy
 which he bore.

I have entered into your house instead of
 the sycamore;

66. See Luke 19:6.

67. See Genesis 3:21.

110 I shall live in the mystery which I embrace,
 for your cross is higher than the bough—
 multiply the floods of your mercy upon me!

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