

GREEK WORDS IN EPHREM AND NARSAI:
A COMPARATIVE SAMPLING

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To anyone familiar with Syriac literature of the fourth and fifth centuries, there is a marked difference in feel between writers of the fourth and those of the fifth century. This is largely the result of the ever increasing hellenization of Syriac culture that was taking place in late antiquity, culminating in the seventh century. One practical way of 'taking the temperature' (as it were) of Syriac literature at any given time is to look at the number of Greek words used. If one takes the Peshitta Old Testament (translated from Hebrew), there is normally a marked difference between those books which were probably translated earliest, and those which came rather later: thus the Peshitta Genesis has 12 Greek words, whereas Isaiah has 22, and 1 Maccabees 39. For the Syriac New Testament, translated from Greek, the numbers are not surprisingly higher: thus the Old Syriac Matthew has 40, the Peshitta 44, and the Harklean 70.¹

Of course, it is important to compare like with like, and this is especially so if one looks for figures in native Syriac authors: what is wanted is a similarity of genre, location and quantity, and a difference only in time. Poetry is especially suitable, since most of the Greek words used will be genuine loanwords, rather than temporary, or learned, borrowings (it is only in poetry of the eighth century and later that authors seek out *recherché* vocabulary, which may often be of Greek origin). A reasonably good 'matching' is provided by the two poets, Ephrem and Narsai. Ephrem was born in the early years of the fourth century, lived most of his life in Nisibis, but ended up (from 363-373) in Edessa; Narsai must have been born about a century later, was educated and spent much of his life in Edessa but moved in his later years to Nisibis, where he died c.500. Accordingly, as the basis for the present sampling I use Ephrem's *madrashe*, together with those *memre* which are generally thought to be by him,² and for Narsai the entire corpus of his surviving *memre*.³

¹ For Greek words in the Syriac Bible, see J. Joosten, "Greek and Latin words in the Peshitta Pentateuch: first soundings", in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII*, (OCA 256, Rome, 1998), pp.37-47, and S. P. Brock, "Greek words in the Syriac Gospels (vet. and pe.)", *Le Muséon*, 80 (1967), pp. 389-426.

² Beck's editions in CSCO conveniently provide indexes of Greek words (though these need slight modification at times). Details of editions of Ephrem can be found in my "A brief guide to the main editions and translations of the works of St Ephrem", *The Harp* (Kottayam), 3 (1990), pp. 7-29.

³ Thus, besides A. Mingana, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, I-II, (Mosul, 1905) [= M], which only gives 47 out of the 81 extant *memre*, I also use the complete facsimile edition

A general idea of the situation can be gained by some crude overall figures: Ephrem in his poetry employs a total of 92 different words of Greek origin, 34 of which are used ten or more times, while Narsai uses a total of 160 different words, of which 55 are used 10 or more times. Ephrem in fact has 25 words which are not used in Narsai, and so the number of Greek words used by Narsai but not by Ephrem is 93. In fact many of these are not new arrivals in Syriac, but are already found in the Syriac Bible, but happen not to be used by Ephrem in his poetry (several of them, however, feature in his prose works). In some cases the difference in use between Ephrem and Narsai can simply be attributed to individual choice and taste: thus Ephrem, who likes imagery of fragrance and smell, employs *herômâ* (= ἄρωμα) which is absent from Narsai, who has no such interest. The fact that Ephrem lived all his life within the Roman Empire, whereas Narsai spent his early and last years outside it, may explain why *bîmâ* (= βῆμα), which is very common in Ephrem (and occurs in the Old Syriac Gospels), is never used by Narsai.

Nevertheless it is not difficult to point to some diachronic developments. Ephrem is the earliest witness to the Greek particle γοῦν in the compound form *badgûn*, but he never uses *'arâ* (= ἄρα) which, however, features 57 times in Narsai: this is entirely in accordance with the wider evidence, for no certain occurrence of *'arâ* is to be found in any Syriac source before the fifth century (normally it asks a question, and only more rarely does it have an inferential sense).⁴ Although *badgûn* is quite frequent in most Syriac writers from Ephrem onwards, it so happens that it is absent from Narsai's genuine works, for it features only in Homily 17 (M I, 271, 277, 288): this homily happens to display a whole number of linguistic features which are absent from all the rest of the corpus,⁵ and so should be seen as a work belonging probably to a generation or so later than Narsai.

Word formation

Another area where some general diachronic developments can be observed concerns inner Syriac developments, where Syriac suffixes are added to an original Greek loanword.

(based on a very late manuscript) published by the Patriarchal Press, *Homilies of Mar Narsai*, I-II, (San Francisco, 1970) [= P]. Both are cited by volume and page number; where homilies have been published in *Patrologia Orientalis* (= PO) 34 (on Creation) and 40 (on Nativity etc.), I have cited from these instead, by PO volume, homily number and line. Three *memre* that are not in Mingana's edition are published by E. P. Siman, *Narsai. Cinq homélies sur les paraboles évangéliques*, (Paris, 1984): these correspond to P II as follows: Siman 2 = P II, 318-36; Siman 5 = P II 872-886, while Siman 4 (Workers in the Vineyard) is in neither M nor P (the other two *memre* in Siman correspond to Mingana's edition as follows: Siman 1 = M I, 243-256; Siman 3 = M II, 84-99). Some further *memre* only in P are to be published by J. Frishman.

⁴ For Greek particles in Syriac, see my "Greek words in Syriac: some general features", *Studia Classica Israelica*, 15 (1996), [= *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity*, (Aldershot, 1999), ch.XV], pp. 251-62, esp. pp. 258-260.

⁵ See my "Diachronic aspects of Syriac word formation: an aid for dating anonymous texts", in R. Lavenant (ed.), *V Symposium Syriacum*, (OCA 236, Rome, 1990), pp. 321-330, esp. pp. 327-328.

(1) -ûâtâ

A couple of witnesses to this process can already be found in Ephrem, where the abstract ending *-uta* has been added: thus he has 'āsôḫûâtâ < 'āsôḫtâ < ἄσσωτος,⁶ and *hedyôḫûâtâ* < *hedyôḫtâ* < ἰδιώτης.⁷ The former already occurs in the *Liber Legum Regionum* (21) and the Peshitta New Testament (Luke 21:34, but not Old Syriac; Eph. 5:18, Tit. 1:6, and I Peter 4:4), while the latter first appears in the Syriac translations of the Clementine Recognitions (pre AD 411, the date of the manuscript) and Eusebius (as so often seems to have been the case, new developments of this sort often first feature in translations and then get taken over by native Syriac writers).⁸ To these formations of abstract nouns Narsai adds a further seven examples:

- 'atliḫûâtâ < 'atliḫtâ < ἀθλητής; (this is already to be found in Aphrahat, *Dem.* VI.1).⁹
- *hegmônûâtâ* < *hegmônâ* < ἡγεμών; (this already occurs in the Old Syriac Gospels, Luke 3:1, and the Syriac translation of Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* I.5.2).¹⁰
- *qapîlûâtâ* < *qapîlâ* < κάπηλος; (M I, 360; Narsai is the earliest witness).
- *pô'îḫûâtâ* < *pô'îḫtâ* < ποιητής; (S IV, 148; Narsai is the earliest witness).
- *rhîṭrûâtâ* < *rhîṭrâ* < ῥήτωρ; (found in early translations of Eusebius and Basil).¹¹
- *sûn'igrûâtâ* < *sûn'igrâ* < συνήγορος; (also in Isaac of Antioch and Jacob of Serugh).¹²
- *târônûâtâ* < *târônâ* < τύραννος; (found in early translations of Eusebius and Titus of Bostra).¹³

(2) -ā'îṭ

No certain example of the adverbial suffix *-ā'îṭ* added to a Greek loanword can be found in Ephrem's poetry,¹⁴ but Narsai again provides seven examples:

- 'atliḫtâ'îṭ; (P II, 133; Narsai is the earliest witness).

⁶ *H. de Virginitate* 14:11; *H.c.Haereses* 28:2.

⁷ *S. de Fide* 5.201; *H. de Fide* 53:11, 85:5.

⁸ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, VIII.14.11; Titus of Bostra, ed. de Lagarde, p. 76.

⁹ For Greek words in Aphrahat, see A. Schall, *Studien über griechische Fremdwörter im Syrischen*, (Darmstadt, 1960), pp.86-114 (a Greek index to this book is provided by R. Voigt in *Symposium Syriacum VII*, (OCA 256, Rome, 1998), 539-543). For the occurrences in Narsai, see M I, 88, 90, 161, 170, 313, II 4, 29, 263, 264 etc. (15 references in all).

¹⁰ Narsai M I, 274 only.

¹¹ Eusebius, *Theophania* L60; Basil, *ad Adolescentes* (BL Add. 14543, f.39v2). Narsai: M II, 77; S IV, 140, 148.

¹² Isaac of Antioch, *On the Royal City*, ed. Moss, p.299; Jacob of Serugh, ed. Bedjan, V, 642. Narsai: M I, 167, 275; II 137.

¹³ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* II.21.1; Titus, ed. de Lagarde, p. 158. Narsai: M I 69, 103, 239-241, II 31(bis), 35, 37, 40, 89, 298; PP I 328.

¹⁴ Thus *nāmôṣā'îṭ* occurs only in Appendix 1:2 to *H. de Ieiunio*, a *madrasha* preserved only in a later liturgical manuscript; the adverb, however, occurs in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 5:20b, and in the *Acts of Thomas*, ed. Wright, p. 249, and the *Doctrina Addai*, ed. Phillips, p. 39.

- 'āsôṭā'îṭ; (P II, 125, 322; PO 34, VI.80,84; already occurs in the *Liber Graduum* 29:7, 9; Jacob of Serugh likewise uses it, e.g. ed. Bedjan, V, 784).
- hedyôṭā'îṭ; (M I, 25; II, 334; P II, 142, 324, 739; already found in Ephrem's *Prose Refutations* II, p.217).
- nāmôṣā'îṭ; (already found in the *Acts of Thomas*, ed. Wright, p. 249; for Ephrem, see note 14).
- mṭakksā'îṭ < ṭakkes < ṭeksâ < τᾰξίς; (only PO 34, VI.228; first attested in the early Syriac translation of Basil's *Hexaemeron*, ed. Thomson, p. 94, 141; also features in Jacob of Serugh, e.g. ed. Bedjan, IV, 8, 45).
- rahbônā'îṭ < rahbônâ < ᾰρραβών; (M I, 284; Narsai is the earliest witness).
- rhîṭrā'îṭ; (M II, 344; Narsai and Jacob of Serugh, *Epistulae*, p. 70, are the earliest witnesses).

(3) -āyâ

No example is to be found yet in Ephrem, while in Narsai¹⁵ the only instance is *nāmôṣāyâ* < *nāmôṣâ* < νόμος; this, however, he uses no less than 27 times, usually in the sense 'pertaining to the Law' (e.g. of *debhê*, M I,32; II, 74). The adjective (which Jacob of Serugh only seems to use in his *Epistulae*, p.198) is first attested in translations from Greek of Eusebius, *Theophania* III.2, and Titus of Bostra, ed. de Lagarde, p.176).

This adjectival suffix added to Greek loanwords becomes increasingly common in the 6th and following centuries.

(4) -tānâ

No example occurs in Ephrem, and Narsai has only *krômṭānâ* ('insolent', 'immodest')¹⁶ < *krômâ*¹⁷ < χρῶμα. Narsai and Jacob of Serugh (e.g. ed. Bedjan, I, 437) are the earliest witnesses for this form. The earliest extant attestation of this type of word formation is provided by 'eskîmtānâ (both 'decorous', and 'hypocritical') < 'eskîmâ < σῆμα, found in the Syriac translation of Eusebius *Theophania* I.37, although, since the adverb based on it is already found in the *Liber Legum Regionum* (4), it must go back at least to the early third century AD.

Cultural borrowings

It is not surprising that a considerable proportion of the Greek loanwords found in both Ephrem's and Narsai's poetry are connected in one way or another with the trappings of the Graeco-Roman world. Many of these will al-

¹⁵ Several examples occur in Homily 17, and these serve as one of the several indications that this homily cannot be by Narsai (see note 5).

¹⁶ M I, 44, 215; II, 313, 334, 362.; P II, 453. (The word also features in *S. in Hebdomam Sanctam* I.271, but this collection is definitely later than Ephrem).

¹⁷ This occurs several times in Ephrem, *H.c. Haereses* 8:6, 36:7, 41:6; *H. de Ecclesia* 11:3.

ready have been familiar to Ephrem from the Syriac Bible, but a few are not yet found there: *'aṭlîṭâ* (25 times; already used by Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6:6, 14:16(bis), 37); *yûqnâ* < εἰκών (9 times; contrast the form *'îqônâ* (as in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic) that is found in the Syriac translation of Eusebius)¹⁸; *katôlîqâ* (*H. c. Haereses* 5:17, of the Church, as *Liber Graduum* 27:5; also in the Syriac translations of Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* II.23.25, and Titus of Bostra, ed. de Lagarde, p.118); *qutrâgâ* < *qatreg* < κατήγορος (10 times; the verbal form *qatreg* occurs some 30 times); *sûn'îgrâ* (15 times).

To these Narsai adds *'agônîstâ* < ἀγωνιστής (14 times; first attested in the Syriac translation of Titus of Bostra, ed. de Lagarde, p.133; also used by Jacob, ed. Bedjan, V, 255, 822 etc.); *'apôpasîs* < ἀπόφασις (8 times; in Ephrem it occurs in the *Sermo de Domino Nostro* 47, and *Comm. Diat.* 11:8, 21:14; also found in the Syriac translation of Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* V.1.44); *'eksôryâ* < ἐξορία (10 times; also found in the Acts of Shmona and Gurya, ed. Burkitt, 70, and the Syriac of Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* I.11.3); *henyôkâ* < ἡνίοχος (20 times; first attested in the Syriac translation of Eusebius, *Theophania*, II.46; see also below); *qandîlâ* < κανδήλη (M II, 248; PO 34, I.87, III.180); *qânônâ* < κανών (13 times; already in the Syriac translation of Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* III.25.6 etc.); *'ûsyâ* < οὐσία (M I, 274, 281; PO 40, II.337, always of the godhead; already found in the Syriac translation of Eusebius, *Theophania* I.4, 5); *perîdûtâ* < περιοδευτής (M I, 286; it occurs in dated inscriptions of 491/6 and 511)¹⁹; *partûzmyâ* < προθεσμία (6 times;²⁰ already in Ephrem, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 21:22); *prestegmâ* < πρόσταγμα (M II, 294; already in Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, II, p.51); *sôpestâ* < σοφιστής (5 times – always in a negative context; also found in both Isaac of Antioch and Jacob of Serugh); *skôlasîqâl'eskôlasîqâ* < σχολαστικός (M II, 26, 142; P I, 355; PO 40, II.474; all in the sense of 'advocate'. Already found in the Julian Romance, ed. Hoffmann, p. 243).

To these can be added a number of words of Latin origin which, however, will have reached Syriac by way of Greek. Of the six to be found in Ephrem's poetry, five were already familiar from the Syriac New Testament (*caesar*, *centurio*, *denarius*, *legio*, *mille*), but one is new, *mônîṭâ* < μόνητα < *moneta* (*H.c.Haereses* 22:9 and 41:10). This happens never to be used by Narsai,

¹⁸ Eusebius, *Hist.Eccl.* IX.9.10 and IX.11.2 and 7; yet at II.6.4 the normal Syriac form is employed. Cf also L. van Rompay, "Some preliminary remarks on the origin of Classical Syriac as a standard language. The Syriac version of Eusebius of Caesarea's Ecclesiastical History", in G. Gioldenberg and S. Raz (eds.), *Semitic and Cushitic Studies*, (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 70-89, esp. p. 77.

¹⁹ H. Pognon, *Inscriptions sémitiques de la Syrie, de la Mésopotamie et de la région de Mossoul*, (Paris, 1907), no 21 (Basufan); and *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, II, (Paris, 1939), no. 310 (Zebed), respectively; slightly earlier, it occurs in the Syriac Life of Symeon the Stylite, ed. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, IV, p. 527.

²⁰ M I, 51, 52; P II, 146, 154; PO 40, I.306: '...that the appointed time of prophecy might have been fulfilled'.

though his younger contemporary Jacob of Serugh employs it quite frequently.²¹ Narsai has eight further words of Latin origin that do not feature in Ephrem. Two of these are in fact already attested in the Syriac Bible (*carruca*,²² *uncinus*²³). The others are: 'ôrârâ < ὄρᾶριον < *orarium* (M I, 350; of deacons, as in the earliest Syriac Commentary on the Liturgy, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 37 (1986), pp.390-391);²⁴ *masyônâ* < *mansio* (M I, 183; P II, 731; no Greek intermediary is attested²⁵); *qerqîs* < κίρκος < *circus* (M I, 361; 'the circus, stadium²⁶, and spectacles are the invention of Satan'); *saqrâ* < σάκρα < *sacra* (9 times);²⁷ *ïabelârâ* < ταβελλᾶριος < *tabellarius* (M I, 52, quaintly referring to John the Baptist; the loanword already features in the Peshitta Old Testament at 2 Sam. 15:1 and Prov. 23:34); *wê'lâ* < βῆλον < *velum* (M II, 133; P I, 123; PO 34, I.14, always of the heavenly veil).

Thus far the emphasis has been on aspects of attestation, and in order to provide a different perspective, I turn now, first to two Greek loanwords which both Ephrem and Narsai employ with reference to Christ, 'atliât and *hmayrâ* < ὄμηρος, and then, to conclude, to an example of a popular metaphor that belongs very much to the Greek cultural world.

Christ the Athlete

Both Ephrem (27 times) and Narsai (77 times) use 'atliât as a metaphor in many different contexts. Normally the context is positive and the reference is to bishops, martyrs or ascetics and the like,²⁸ although Narsai on occasion describes Satan as 'atliât 'awlâ²⁹ What is more interesting is the use of the term

²¹ E.g. ed. Bedjan, IV, 82, 139; V,1 etc.

²² Exodus 14:6.; for this, see M. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament*, (Cambridge, 1999), p. 257.

²³ Acts 27:28, 29, 40; Heb. 6:19. Narsai uses it 11 times; on several occasions the 'anchor' is faith: e.g. P I, 595 "Faith is the anchor that holds the ship of the Church", and M I, 326 "With the anchor of faith let us moor the ships of our mind".

²⁴ From this Commentary the word gets into Sogdian: see E. Benveniste, "Diffusion d'un terme de culture: latin *orarium*", in *Studia... A.Pagliaro oblata*, (Rome, 1969), I, pp. 213-218.

²⁵ The corresponding Greek terms are σταθμός and μονή. The term may denote either the staging post, or a journey's distance. Contemporary with Narsai, the term also occurs in the Life of Symeon the Stylite, ed. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, IV, p.562 ('seven *mansiones* distant'), as well as in Jacob of Serugh, ed. Bedjan, I, p. 504 etc.

²⁶ 'estadyôn < στάδιον. Although the connotations are negative here, in most of the other 22 occurrences Narsai employs the word metaphorically in a positive sense (e.g. 'spiritual stadium', M I, 83, 366). Narsai would have been familiar with the stadium outside the west wall of Edessa (*Chron. ad annum 1234*, I, p.124). Although the loanword in the sense 'stadium' occurs in the Syriac Bible (1 Macc. 1:15, 1 Cor. 9:24; in the sense 'stade' the Greek form is taken over as 'estdâ, and this occurs, in the plural, several times in the Gospels), it is never used by Ephrem in his verse.

²⁷ On this, see my "Some aspects of Greek words in Syriac", in A. Dietrich (ed.), *Synkretismus im syrisch-persischen Kulturgebiet*, (Göttingen, 1975) [reprinted in my *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, (London, 1984), ch. IV], pp. 80-108, esp. pp. 104-106.

²⁸ For Ephrem, see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, (Cambridge, 1975), p. 198.

²⁹ M II, 260; P II, 345. Likewise Jacob, ed. Bedjan, IV, 618.

with reference to Christ, a usage which surprisingly appears to be largely confined to Syriac authors.³⁰ The earliest examples are to be found in the *Acts of Thomas* 39 (ed. Wright, p. 209, 'atlîtan da-shrârâ) and 50 (p. 218, 'atlîtan zakkâyâ). Such a usage is never found in Aphrahat, who confines the term to ordinary human beings, but Ephrem employs the term three times referring to Christ, always in the context of his contest with Satan. Thus in *H. de Virginitate* 12:9 Ephrem speaks of 'our Athlete' as undergoing the toil of the third temptation by Satan, and in *Carmina Nisibena* 40:4 Satan declares concerning Jesus, 'I see he is an Athlete, endowed with strength...'. In the third passage, in *H. de Paradiso* 12:6, Ephrem uses the term in the context of First/Second Adam typology:

There came another Athlete who would not be defeated;
He put on the same armour³¹ in which Adam had been vanquished.
That Adam is the 'first athlete' is specifically stated in *H. de Fide* 24:1:
With the armour of the vanquished athlete (sc. Adam)
was our Lord victorious.

Narsai, too, describes Christ as an 'Athlete' in two different contexts in particular: the Temptation, and the Crucifixion. Thus, before the Temptation '(the Spirit) caused the Athlete to go out to the wilderness' (P II, 341), and a little further on,

The contestants went down to the contest ('agônâ),³²
the Athlete of righteousness³³ and the head of the Aer³⁴, the envious one.
The preceding Gospel narrative, with the 'anointing' of Christ by the Spirit, provides Narsai with the implied image of the oiling of a wrestler's body before a wrestling contest:³⁵

With the Spirit did He (the Father) anoint Him (Jesus) as an athlete to engage in contest (PO 40, II.309).

On at least two occasions Narsai extends the image of Christ as Athlete to the scene of the Crucifixion:

As an athlete did He stand on the Cross (M I, 330),
and

³⁰ To judge by G.Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, which records only the Greek translation of the *Acts of Thomas* in this connection. It is used of Christ ('our great and invincible Athlete') by Eusebius, *Hist.Eccl.* V.1.42 (Rufinus' Latin translation, however, tacitly drops it).

³¹ Here, as quite frequently elsewhere in Ephrem, the 'armour' (*zaynâ*) is the human body.

³² < ἄγων. Narsai uses the word a little over 110 times, and quite often in construct phrases such as 'agôn 'amlêl/ħaşšê, 'contest of labours/sufferings'. The loanword is also quite common in Ephrem and already occurs in the Syriac New Testament (I Cor. 9:26, Col. 2:1 etc.).

³³ This phrase is a favourite one of Narsai's; elsewhere it is used, e.g. of martyrs (M II, 35), Job (M II, 261), etc.

³⁴ I.e. Satan; the Aer is the sub-lunar realm, under the domination of the demonic powers. This phrase is characteristic of Narsai, whereas Jacob normally has *nāṭar 'ā'ēr*, 'keeper of the Aer' (Jacob, however, also has Narsai's phrase *rēshâ d-'ā'ēr* occasionally, as at ed. Bedjan, II, p.462). The New Testament basis is Eph. 2:2, where the Peshitta has *rēsh shûltânâ d-'ā'ēr*.

³⁵ The imagery is common in baptismal texts.

Hail to the Athlete who engaged in a contest with the strong one (Satan) (PO 40, IV.171).

Christ the Hostage

The Greek loanword *hmayrâ*, ‘hostage’, already features in the Peshitta Old Testament (e.g. Num. 21:29; Is. 18:2; and several times in I Macc.). There are many different metaphorical uses of the term in early Syriac writers, the most interesting of which is in a christological context. Before looking at Ephrem and Narsai’s usage, it is important to recall that in Antiquity the term ‘hostage’ had very different connotations from the ones that it has acquired in the last century or so: a hostage was not seized by violence, but was willingly handed over as a pledge that an agreement or treaty would be honoured; often the hostage would be given by a vassal to an imperial power, but in the case of parity treaties each side would hand over hostages. Furthermore, the hostage was well treated, and he was selected by the giving side.

Characteristically, Ephrem uses the term *hmayrâ* of Christ in connection with first Adam/second Adam typology. Thus in *Carmina Nisibena* 36:17, personified Death, faced with the descent of Christ into his realm, offers to hand over Adam to Christ as a hostage to take back to his Kingdom:

O Jesus, Sovereign, accept my petition,
and with my petition take for yourself a hostage:
lead off Adam as a noble hostage,
for in him are buried all the dead,
just as, when I received him,
all the living were hidden in him.
As a first hostage I have given you the body of Adam;
ascend now, and reign over all:
when I hear your clarion call
I will bring out the (rest of the) dead with my own hands, for your Advent.

On several occasions Ephrem likes to speak of the Incarnation in terms of an ‘exchange’:

He gave us divinity,
we gave Him humanity (*H. de Fide* 5:17).

Seen from this perspective, there is an exchange of gifts: humanity gives a body to the divine Logos, while the Logos gives to humanity the Spirit. This becomes especially meaningful in connection with the Ascension, when Christ’s human body, received from humanity, ascends to heaven, while in exchange he provides the Spirit (John 20:22, Acts 2:4). In this context Aphrahat had already introduced the imagery of Christ’s human body as a *hmayrâ* given by

humanity³⁶. This image of Christ's body as a 'hostage' received from humanity is likewise taken up by Ephrem in a striking passage in *H. de Nativitate* 22:40:

Depth and height stood amazed that your Nativity has subdued the rebels;
for we have provided a hostage for You (sc. Christ's body),
and You have given us the Paraclete.
A hostage went up from us,
the Comforter descended to us.
Blessed is He who received and who sent!

Narsai also employs the image on several occasions, as for example:

A hostage of peace³⁷ did You take off from our race that is full of debts,
and he is escorted amidst the glories of Your divinity (M I, 126),
and

With the hostage that he took from us
did he bind (to himself) the love of created beings (P II, 218).

One can readily see that two authors who were both associated with Nisibis 'of the border territory' should find this imagery meaningful. To later generations, however, its strongly dyophysite implications led to its abandonment by all apart from those in the christological tradition of the Church of the East, where it remains current to this day in the liturgical tradition.³⁸

The soul as 'charioteer'

The metaphorical use of ἡνίοχος is common in Classical Greek writers and was often taken over by Christian authors writing in Greek who not infrequently make use of Plato's famous passage in the *Phaedrus* (246A-248B) concerning the soul as ἡνίοχος. The loanword *henyôkâ* is already found in the Syriac translation of Eusebius, *Theophania* II.46, and (though absent from Ephrem)³⁹ it becomes quite common in Syriac writers of the 5th century onwards and Narsai uses it some 20 times, always in a metaphorical sense. Most frequently it is the soul which is described as the charioteer (the chariot being the body)⁴⁰, but it can also be the intellect (*hawnâ*)⁴¹, or the will (M II, 246) or

³⁶ *Dem.* VI.10, XXII.51. In *Dem.* VI.10 Aphrahat also uses the term 'pledge' (*rahbônâ*) in the same way: 'Our Lord took from us a pledge and went off; and he left us a pledge from what belonged to him, and was raised up'. For the passages in Aphrahat, see my "Christ 'the Hostage': a theme in the East Syriac liturgical tradition and its origins", in *Logos. Festschrift für Luise Abramowski*, (BZNW 67; Berlin, 1993), pp. 472-485.

³⁷ Narsai also employs the phrase 'peace hostage' of Enoch (F I.123) and the Innocents (PO 40, I.371; Ephrem had already used *hmayrâ* of these latter in *H. de Nativitate* 24:1).

³⁸ See my "Christ 'the Hostage'", pp.483-485 for these liturgical texts. In the West Syriac liturgical tradition it survives vestigially in an archaic baptismal service, attributed to Timothy of Alexandria (edited in *Le Muséon*, 83 (1970), pp. 367-431, esp. p. 379).

³⁹ It occurs in *Sermones* I.iii.464, but this is not a genuine work of Ephrem.

⁴⁰ Thus M I, 236; II, 26; P II, 603.

⁴¹ Thus P II, 325 (= Siman II.81), 'where are you, o intellect, the body's charioteer who guides the senses?' and PO 40, I.335.

the *yasrâ*, or ‘inclination’⁴². In the following passage (M II, 240), quoted at greater length in order to give an impression of Narsai’s general style, it is man (as possessing all these faculties) who is the charioteer:

Through the soul’s lightness man traverses the sea as though it were on dry land,

and the weight of the body does not sink amid the storms.

The soul acts as an anchor (*uncinus*) hanging from the ship of man’s bodily nature,

preserving it from harms, so that it does not get destroyed.

Man travels to his destination, like a sailor (guided) by the day star, as the soul directs the course of man’s journey straight to the harbour (λιμὴν) of peace.⁴³

Through the soul’s skill, man teaches dumb beasts to serve him; through the soul’s intelligence, man provides order where there was no order;

through the soul’s cleverness, man establishes himself in authority over silent (animals);

through the soul’s cunning, man can bridle wild beasts.

Like a charioteer (ἡνίοχος), man rides upon the wild world,

setting it in order so that it does not act wildly beneath his steps.

The soul has harnessed the entire creation under man’s authority, causing him to sit, like a king, upon the chariot.

By means of the reins of the soul’s stirrings, man holds in his hand both heaven and earth,

directing the will of his authority wherever he likes.

* * *

The aim of the present paper has merely been to touch on a few selected aspects of the occurrence of Greek loanwords in these two Syriac poets living approximately a century apart. Enough, however, has been said to indicate how the study of the attestation of Greek loanwords can serve, as it were, as a thermometer in order to gain some idea of the degree of hellenization that Syriac literary culture has undergone at different times in the course of its history. On the basis of this criterion this preliminary enquiry has nicely con-

⁴² M I, 242; *yasra* is a favourite term of Narsai’s, and elsewhere it is described as the *qubernita* (κυβερνήτης): M I, 212; M II, 252.

⁴³ The phrase – a favourite of Narsai’s – already occurs in Ephrem, *H. de Virginitate* 31:15 and *H. c.Haereses* 26:8; it is likewise found in Jacob, e.g. ed. Bedjan, V, 829. For other aspects of this loanword in Syriac, see my “Some aspects of Greek words in Syriac”, pp. 83-84, and “The scribe reaches harbour”, in *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995) [repr. in my *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity* (London, 1999), ch. XVI], pp. 195-202.

firmed two general impressions: firstly, the fact that Ephrem was evidently heir to a Syriac lexical stock that had already been considerably enriched by borrowings from Greek gives support to the view that he was living in a milieu that was already considerably hellenized;⁴⁴ and secondly, the marked increase in the number of Greek loanwords employed by Narsai is clear evidence of the rapid progress of this process of hellenization in the course of the century after Ephrem's death.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Cf. my "Syriac culture, 337-425", in A. Cameron and P. Garnsey (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History. XIII. The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 708-719, esp. 716-717, and the valuable detailed study by U. Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian*, (CSCO 580, Subs. 102; Louvain, 1999).

⁴⁵ The process is sketched out in my "From antagonism to assimilation. Syriac attitudes to Greek learning", in N. Garsoian, T. Mathews and R. Thomson (eds), *East of Byzantium. Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, (Washington, DC, 1982) [repr. in my *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London, 1984), ch. V], pp. 17-34. It is from this diachronic perspective that one can characterize the writings of fourth-century Syriac authors as being comparatively unhellenized.