Sebastian P. Brock, *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face: Translation and Introduction*, Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 20: The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug, Fascicle 1 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009). Pp. x + 70; $35.00.

Aaron Michael Butts, *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Tower of Babel: Translation and Introduction*, Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 21: The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug, Fascicle 15 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009). Pp. vii + 64; $35.00.

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Translating into English all the metrical homilies by Jacob of Sarug is a task that obviously ought to be done, beneficial not only for students of Syriac literature, but for the wider church so that the wealth of Jacob's poetic exegesis may become finally accessible. However, obvious tasks are seldom easy and credit goes to the vision of George Kiraz and Gorgias Press to have endeavored to unveil this previously not-so-accessible corpus of knowledge and beauty.

The starting point was the digitization and republication of Paul Bedjan's massive five-volume set of Jacob's metrical homilies.[1] These were not critical editions *per se*, and no translation was provided, but the basic sources are there, 195 homilies in all, stretching out to 4452 pages in the original five volumes. A handful of scholars have edited and translated a number of the *mēmrē*, but all too many of the homilies have sat forlorn and unexamined on Bedjan's pages. Jacob of Sarug is reputed to have written 763 *mēmrē*, of which Sebastian Brock estimates about 380 are extant.[2] If either number is close to being accurate, there are many reams of translations to go before we sleep.

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[1] *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug. Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, edited by Paul Bedjan and Sebastian P. Brock, 6 vol. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006). The added sixth volume contains Jacob's poems on the Virgin Mary, a comprehensive index of incipits to Jacob's published and unpublished poems by Sebastian P. Brock, a detailed biography of Bedjan by Heleen Murre van den Berg, and other resources.

[2] "Ya'qub of Serugh," by S. P. Brock, *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 433–435.

Kiraz sent out a call to numerous scholars and students to take on a homily or two and many responded. The procedure is practical and simple: translators generally work from Bedjan's text, proofreading the digitized Syriac text, then translating and annotating a single or several commonly-themed *mēmrē*, and adding a brief introduction to the manuscript history and argument of the text. Nineteen volumes have been published in the series so far, a total of 30 *mēmrē* translated by ten different scholars.

Those readers familiar with Jacob of Sarug know that no matter what the principal subject of his *mēmrā* is intended to be, Jacob will eventually find his way to a deft and imaginative Christological detour. The particular departure points for such detours induce a sense of anticipation in the reader, especially in Old Testament-oriented poems, and this phenomenon can be seen in both of the *mēmrē* reviewed here.

1. THE VEIL ON MOSES' FACE

The first volume published in the series, Fascicle 1, is the translation of the "Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face," by Sebastian P. Brock, a homily of median length, 460 lines.

The veil is where Jacob begins, and after a few tangents and detours where he returns. His prologue commences with the question asked by an acquaintance to explain the meaning of the veil. The symbolic meaning of Moses' veil points to God's employment of prophecy; the advent of Christ is the final lifting of the veil so that all may understand the nature of God.

Now that Christ is center stage, the image of the Bridegroom and Bride is introduced in the fulfillment of another prophecy as they are united through baptism and eucharist, water and blood. A number of other typologies come to mind for Jacob, returning full circle to Moses' speech impediment or stammer as a symbol of prophecy.

Jacob goes back to the cause and source of the radiance on Moses' face, the reason for the veil, and then on to a comparison of the Bridegroom's side and Adam's side. All these symbols culminate with the crucifixion, where Christ's cry on the cross overthrows Sheol. The personifications of Prophecy in Moses and Virginity in Mary rejoice that the veil is now lifted.

The last section rhetorically addresses a Jewish reader who believes that the veil is still in place, that God's word is unclear and

hidden. Jacob invites him to remove the veil because it is no longer needed.

Imaginative in his images and typologies, Jacob does not necessarily make them all up himself. Brock translates the first six verses of Ephrem's *Madroshe on Faith*, Number 8, showing this work to be the main source on the veil of Moses for Jacob. He notes how Jacob seems to borrow a number of passing allusions, words and concepts, and suggests that he had absorbed some of Ephrem's images and then recreated them in his *mēmrā*.[3]

Brock identifies two other sections which are borrowed from or by other Jacob *mēmrē*: lines 89–106 from Homily 80, "On Mysteries and Types of Christ";[4] and lines 389–460 in "Against the Jews."[5] Brock, however, does not imply that "The Veil on Moses' Face" is not an original composition by Jacob.

Brock also sets apart the treatment by Ephrem and Jacob of the piercing of Jesus' side on the cross (John 19:34). Jacob points back to the 'birth' of Eve from the side of Adam (Gen 2:21) as a prefiguration of the Church, the Bride, which is born in blood and water (now the mysteries or sacraments of eucharist and baptism) issuing from the pierced side of Christ. A short section of the *mēmrā* of Jacob (53.7) on the Passion is also included by Brock to point to a similar treatment of the same themes elsewhere in Jacob's work.[6]

Bedjan used Vat. Syr. 114 (6th c.) and Vat. Syr. 117 (12/13th c.), the only manuscripts known to contain the text, but not consistently. Brock followed Bedjan's printed text for this translation, but sometimes utilized preferable readings from Bedjan's footnotes (p. 9).

Below is a sampler from the translation.

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[3] *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Veil on Moses' Face*, transl. & intro. by Sebastian P. Brock (*TeCLA* 20: *The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, Fascicle 1; Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2009), 4-7.

[4] *The Veil on Moses' Face*, Bedjan, vol. III, pp. 309-310.

[5] M. Albert, *Homélies contre les Juifs*, Patrologia Orientalis 38.1, 1976, VII, lines 431–508.

[6] *The Veil on Moses' Face*, 8; Bedjan, vol. 2, 589.

a. The many facets of *rāzā*

A good place to begin is with an important term in Syriac literature in line 2 (p. 12–13).

ܘܡܢܘ ܪܙܐ ܗܘ ܟܣܝܐ ܕܡܫܐ ܥܠ ܦܢܝܗ

What was the symbolic meaning of the veil upon Moses' face?

The critical and enigmatic concept of *rāzā* – ܪܙܐ – often rendered as "mystery," "secret," can also be "symbol." Brock expands the range of its English translations with the more colloquial concept of "symbolic meaning."

A further nuance of *rāzā* concludes a couplet which Brock translates in a form of dynamic equivalence (lines 25–26).

ܚܙܐ ܐܒܐ ܒܪܗ ܟܕ ܠܐܬ ܚܕܐ ܡܢ ܪܙܐ ܕܢܬ
ܐܠܐ ܒܨܐ ܠܡܓܠܐ ܒܪܡܙܐ ܗܢܐ ܪܙܐ ܕܐܠܡܐ ۞

The Father kept the Son in concealment without anyone being aware,
but He wished to reveal this matter to the world *in symbolic terms*.

Brock employs the verb "kept" to intensify the sense of the idiom "the Father had a son," governed by the phrase "in secret/in concealment," and also inserts "without anyone" to broaden the scope of the prosaic phrase "and no one knew." In the second line "*his* matter" is rendered "*this* matter" specifying the reference to the concealment of the Son. "In symbolic terms" translates freely the sense of the not very common adverb of *rāzā*, retaining the 'symbolic' rather than 'mysterious' connotation. This adverb occurs again in line 86 with the same translation.

A few lines below, line 32, Brock treats an even rarer use of *rāzā* in a difficult sentence which offers insight into the dynamic flow of Jacob's ideas.

ܕܢܬ ܪܙܐ ܕܡܐ ܡܠܝܗ ܡܢ ܡܕܥ

And for his words to be understood, it requires an awareness of what they symbolize.

The key term is the idiom "sons of the mystery/symbol" which Brocks shifts to a communal characteristic, "those who have an

awareness…" He footnotes the idiom as "lit. 'sons of (= sharers in) the mystery'" (p. 14, n. 13).[7]

b. References

ܩܠܝܗ ܫܦܝܗ ܩܠܝܗ ܚܙܝܗ ܚܙܝܗ ܩܠܝܗ ܫܦܝܗ ܩܠܝܗ:
ܐܠܐ ܫܬܟܦ ܗ ܗ ܐ ܐܗܦܬܗ ܘܦܗܐ ܙܐ ܀

They [the prophets] covered over *their references* to Him
[Christ], spreading over a veil as they spoke,
so as not to deviate from the example of the great Moses
(lines 67–68).

"Their references" is literally "[they] speaking or telling his story." "References" is a modern term, but certainly replicates the sense of frequent instances of "telling his story."

c. Profundity

A less complex, but interesting translation comes in line 129 referring to the authority of the Apostle Paul.

ܩܟܝܗ ܙܐ ܗܘܐ ܙܐ ܥܡܝܩܬܐ

The mighty Paul, the great *profundity* among the Apostles.

Brock intends to transmit Jacob's emphasis on Paul as not only the chief of the Apostles, but also the most theologically adept of those who acquired the title. The literal phrase "the great depth of the apostolate" is awkward and not clear in its meaning. "Profundity" subtly indicates the intellectual depth of this Apostle, about which few would argue. "Among the apostles" moves from an abstract institutionalization—the apostolate—back to Paul's standing within a specific group of people.

d. Epiphany

The latter half of line 212 employs one of the more distinctive Syriac terms.

ܥܕ ܐ ܚܒܫܗ ܘܣܒܐ

…until the epiphany of the Only-Begotten.

[7] The term is recorded in Payne Smith (p. 54b) as "sharer of a secret," hence "admitted to counsels or purposes, counsellor; partaker of Holy Communion."

Note that "epiphany" is not capitalized as the Feast, but indicates the appearance of Christ the Son. Jacob here employs the unique Syriac term *iḥīdāyā* for the Greek *monogenēs*, an expression which can designate also the "solitaries, singles, monks."

e. Moses stammered

An excellent instance of alliteration and word-play is found in lines 283–286, in which Brock deftly retains as much as possible of the rhythm of Jacob, but alas, not his alliteration.

ܡܠܝܢ ܒܪܡܙܐ ܠܐ ܦܫܩ ܠܗܘܢ ܦܫܪ̈ܐ ܀
ܡܛܠ ܕܗܘ ܟܒܕ ܠܫܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܠܡܡܠܠ ܀
ܗܕܐ ܗܘ ܥܠܬܐ ܕܥܠ ܗܕܐ ܐܬܛܪ ܟܕ ܐܬܛܪ ܀
ܕܟܠ ܡܐ ܕܡܠܠ ܐܦ ܗܘ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܛܘܡܐ ܀

He spoke in symbols, but did not provide their explanations,
for he was a stammerer, and not able to speak clearly.
It was for this reason that his stammer was kept,
so that all he spoke might be kept unexplained.

In these four lines, Jacob employs several strategies, both in terms of meaning and in the use of key words and alliteration. In meaning the quatrain is a classic A:B:B:A structure. The first and fourth lines describe the speech of Moses as symbolic, yet intentionally unexplained (*pūšāqā*). The second and third lines explain that the method of keeping things unexplained is Moses' stammer (note the alliteration – *pīqā*, *pīqūta*), a style of speech that is basically unclear. Two roots govern respectively the first two and last two lines. The root *p-š-q* ends the first two lines: in the first instance as "[no] explanations," in the second, "[not] speaking clearly"—a lack of understanding resulting for the listener in both cases. The third and fourth lines center around *n-ṭ-r*, in both occurrences rendered as "kept." Moses' stammer was retained in order that all of his words and prophecies might remain unclear and unexplained. His physical impediment is therefore symbolic of God's desire to render revelation in a form not completely understandable.

Brock is not able to replicate all these moves and wordplays to the English reader, although he transmits the meaning clearly. One needs to remember the format in which we are reading Jacob's Syriac homily and Brock's English translation: text and translation function complementarily for the reader. The readers who will

benefit the most are those who read both versions in order to learn more about Jacob's theology and poetic use of language.

f. Tabernacling and leaping with joy

Two more translation choices of Brock are worth indicating. In line 311, Jacob returns to the need for the veil on Moses' face and describes the phenomenon.

ܙܝܘܗ ܕܐܒܐ ܐܓܢ ܬܡܢ ܥܠ ܦܪܨܘܦܗ

The brightness of the Father *tabernacled* there on the face (of that Levite).

Brock has previously examined this particular verb (*'aggēn*) in a well-known article[8] and devotes to it here a thorough footnote. This verb is used both in Luke 1:35 and John 1:14 (Peshīṭtā), although in the Greek two different words are used, ἐπισκιάσει ("overshadow") and ἐσκήνωσεν ("dwelt"), respectively. He shifts from a prosaic translation, "dwelt" to the more evocative "tabernacled," perhaps building upon John's use of the root *skēnē*, "tent," "tabernacle."

The last observation refers to line 377 in which the unveiling of Christ through Mary is compared with the unveiling of prophecy through Moses.

ܘܕܨ ܡܘܫܐ ܕܓܠܐ ܫܘܦܪܗ ܕܡܟܣܝ ܗܘܐ

Moses *leaps with joy*, for He has revealed his beauty that had been veiled.

Brock offers an explanation for his translation: "Jacob perhaps deliberately reflects Luke 1:41, where the verb is used of John the Baptist in his mother's womb, when she meets Mary, pregnant with Christ" (p. 52, n. 49). The translation could have been simply "exults," but Brock knew that the choice of the verb was intended to direct the reader's memory straight to the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary.

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[8] Sebastian P. Brock, "Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis: Some Remarks on the Term *aggen* in the Syriac Versions of Lk. 1:35," *Novum Testamentum* 24.3 (1982), 222–233.

2. THE TOWER OF BABEL

The second volume under review here, Fascicle 15, is "Homily on the Tower of Babel," translated and introduced by Aaron Michael Butts, a slightly longer *mēmrā* of 550 lines. Butts translates the title given by Bedjan as "On the Construction of the Tower of Babel,"[9] based on Vat. Syr. 115, ff. 13–22.

Butts immediately draws attention to the dominating themes and word-plays of rebellion (*mārūdūtā* – ܡܪܘܕܘܬܐ) and discipline (*mardūtā* – ܡܪܕܘܬܐ) which are threaded throughout the entire *mēmrā*. This dichotomy begins with the opening proem in which Jacob declares his inadequacy to properly interpret this story of the Tower of Babel, and then turns to the example of the teacher who must use corporal punishment, specifically beating, in order to mercifully discipline his students so that they may learn. This section may seem harsh to modern readers, but later on Jacob will apply the concepts of resistance, discipline and mercy to the builders of the Tower of Babel and God's response to them.

Jacob generally follows the story in canonical order, describing the initial motives of the people who wish to prevent the devastation of the Flood happening again. This practical motive evolves into the arrogance of challenging the authority and dominion of God. God observes what is going on and decides the best tactic is to confuse (ܒܠܒܠ) their languages. The tactic works well, and Jacob shows shrewd insight into the kinds of conflicts and blaming that arise from the confusion, which presumably Jacob himself had heard in his own parochial situation.

The climactic moment of the story comes when God decides to confuse their languages. "Now let us descend…," is the departure point for Jacob's excursus on the presence and role of Christ. Jacob's explanation of this enigmatic statement removes the enigma, delving in several passages on contemporary language and issues regarding the hypostases or *qnōmē* of Christ and the Spirit. Butts indicates that in his argument for the identity of "us" Jacob is refuting contemporary Jewish interpretations and charges (3–4).

Despite the switch from the Old to New Testament contexts, Jacob never wanders far from Babel and returns to the story in the

[9] *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, *mēmrā* 33, ed. Bedjan, vol. 2 (Paris/Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1906), 1–27.

final three sections. The discipline of the teacher in the proem of the first section is now revealed to be God's, for in his harsh punishment of the people of the Tower, God has mercifully saved them and, in fact, has recreated the world by pushing them to move away and inhabit the other regions of the world.

Butts' translation is lucid and contemporary, succeeding in a dynamic equivalence that still maintains the character and integrity of the original text. A selection from his translation will show how he creatively handles a number of difficult technical phrases.

a. Rejecting

The opening line of the *mēmrā* (line 1) begins with the traditional apology of the author for his weakness and inadequacy.

ܐܵܡܵܐ ܐܶܒܥܵܐ ܘܡܶܛܠ ܕܣܓܝܐ ܐܢܐ ܡܬܠܝ

How should I seek? For I have received abundantly, while rejecting.

Butts notes that the root *ṭ-l-m* (ܛܠܡ) is used throughout the *mēmrā* to give the sense of "to deny or reject the grace of God" (p. 8, n. 10).

b. Co-workers

ܗܵܕ ܗܘ ܕܚܒܪܐ ܐܝ ܐܡܕܘܪܐ ܐܝ ܥܡܝܩܬܐ

Both the speaker and the listeners are coworkers (line 71).

Here is a concise instance of effective dynamic equivalent translation, the "speaker" being Jacob and the "listeners" being "the discerning ones" (ܡܬܢܝܗܐ, line 69) who are reading and hearing the lessons of this *mēmrā*.

c. Another Second Adam

ܗܘ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܢܘܚ ܒܪܝܫܝܬܐ ܬܢܝܢܐ ܐܕܡ

The righteous Noah became a new beginning, a second Adam (line 85).

The real beginning of the story of the Tower is the end of the Flood and the resettlement of the earth by Noah and his family. This section is prior to Jacob's main christological move in Section 7, but while it is clear that emerging from the Ark, Noah is playing

the role of Adam as first man in a new creation, is Jacob not hinting at a larger role christologically with the expression "second Adam" (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15:45)?

d. Citadel

ܢܒܢܐ ܒܝܪܬܐ ܕܢܫܪ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܡܒܘܠܐ

Let us make a citadel that is able to provide safety from a deluge (line 106).

Butts points to the strong play on words used here, *mērdā* meaning both 'citadel' and 'rebellion.' The term is used as well in lines 135 and 235.

e. Rebellion out of freedom

ܡܪܕܘܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܒܡ ܕܐܬܝܠܕܬ ܗܘܬ ܒܪܝܫ ܚܪܝܬܐ
ܘܟܕ ܚܕ ܐܢܫ ܢܫܐܠ ܡܢܘ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܗܘܐ
ܗܢܘܢ ܡܫܘܐ ܕܒܝܕܝܗܘܢ ܐܝܬܝܗܒ ܗܘ ܡܪܕܘܬܐ
ܘܡܢ ܡܫܐܠ ܡܫܘܚ ܗܘܐ ܕܠ ܢܫܒܩ ܗܘ ܒܚܝܪܘ

It was a rebellion that had been born out of freewill,
So when someone was beaten, he could not say anything.
They were severely beaten on their own account.
Who questions that beating which was the result of free-choice? (lines 171–174)

In the fourth section, "The Weariness and Suffering that resulted from the Rebellion," Jacob's themes of rebellion and discipline and beatings are attributed ironically to freewill and free choice without constraints. Regarding the word play, Butts translates in line 171 *mardūtā* (ܡܪܕܘܬܐ) not as 'discipline' as the word is rendered in the rest of the *mēmrā*, but as its homonym 'rebellion' to fit the context.

f. Qnōmē and Hypostases

ܗܢܘ ܕܒܪܐ ܘܪܘܚܐ ܩܕܫܐ ܐܬܦܠܓܘ ܒܗ
ܕܐܡܪ ܢܢܚܬ ܘܢܪܕ ܬܡܢ ܘܐܡ ܠܐ ܢܫܡܥ

The hypostases of the Son and the Holy Spirit were signified in the revelation of that expression 'Come let us descend' (lines 275–276).

The Tower of Babel is not the location where one would expect to hear about the *qnōmē* or hypostases of the Trinity, but Jacob embarks seamlessly upon his transition from this Old Testament saga to the uniqueness of the Christian interpretation of God at the critical juncture of the story. This jarring disjuncture from a compelling narrative to a virtual academic proposition—albeit quite familiar to Jacob's contemporary listeners in the late fifth to early sixth centuries—is interpreted clearly by Butts. A few lines later, a more difficult quatrain involving *qnōmē* is rendered lucid by Butts without great resort to dynamic equivalent interpretations.

ܩܢܘܡܐ ܣܓܝܐ ܕܟܝܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܠܝܐ ܀
ܠܡܫܡܥ ܒܗ ܒܪܫ ܐܝܬ ܘܡܬܦܫ ܩܕܡܝ ܀
ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܡܐ ܕܐܡܪ ܐܢܚܢ ܒܥܠ ܀
ܡܥܒܪ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܠܗܐ ܀

The revered hypostases of inscrutable divinity
were signified for the one who hears discerningly,
but the one who flees from the interpretation that has been
spoken by us
introduces companions or gods with God (lines 283–286).

Butts' translation makes it clear that Jacob is addressing the reading public and explaining or apologizing for his use of the language of hypostases targeted towards those who have the ears to hear and understand the subtleties of those difficult concepts. Those who do not comprehend erroneously perceive only the mumbling of lesser gods huddling around God.

g. Spiritual sense

In the ninth section, Butts negotiates Jacob's conclusion about the spiritual purpose of the story. In the simplest and briefest of terms, Jacob is saying that one can only understand the story in a spiritual, not literal manner.

ܥܡ ܗܘ ܡܢܐ ܕܡܛܠ ܩܪܝܢܢ ܀
ܐܠܐ ܒܪܘܚ ܥܡܝܩ ܠܐ ܐܡܪ ܀

The story is higher than literal (lit. corporeal) understanding,
and it was said only in spiritual rational (lines 365–366).

It is the second line that is problematic. Butts' translation of "and not…not" as "only" is an agile rendering. The term "spiritual ratio-

nal (sic)" is still a tad obscure, for which I would suggest "in spiritual reasoning" or "in a spiritual sense." None of these suggestions quite capture the idiom, but do direct one to Jacob's conclusion.

Both volumes are very satisfying to work through slowly and deliberately, not only in format and presentation, but in the satisfaction of seeing exactly how master translators interpret one of the greatest of Syriac exegetes and poets, the Flute of the Holy Spirit. Brock and Butts do not tell the reader too much, but give us all the material we need to engage our minds and imagination in conversation with Jacob. A good type (ܛܘܦܣܐ) to follow.