

THE REJOICING SAILOR AND THE ROTTING HAND: TWO FORMULAS IN SYRIAC AND ARABIC COLOPHONS

WITH RELATED PHENOMENA IN SOME
OTHER LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

A common simile in Greek colophons likens the scribe at the end of the copying work to a sailor reaching harbor, and Greek colophons also sometimes include lines contrasting the abiding power of written texts and the short-lived hands that wrote them. Formulas of both of these kinds also appear in Syriac and Arabic manuscripts. They have been studied before, but few of the texts themselves have been published in full. This paper presents many relevant examples from Syriac and Arabic colophons, with English translation, along with a few remarks on these themes in other literature. The Syriac and Arabic examples are prefaced by several in Greek, which have been published before, but generally without any English translation.

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago Sebastian Brock offered a survey of the very well-attested scribal lines in Syriac manuscripts that liken the scribe finishing his book to a sailor reaching the harbor at his journey's

end.¹ That article additionally pointed to examples of similar lines in Greek manuscripts, from which the Syriac practice apparently arose, as it also did in Latin manuscripts. In this paper I first add a few examples of variations to the patterns of those lines from recent cataloging work of manuscripts in ʿAbdin, Jerusalem, and Iraq. The previous study supplied no Syriac texts of these scribal patterns, only translations, but the variations highlighted here are given both in Syriac and in English. The second part of the paper turns to a scribal reflection commonly met in Arabic manuscripts on the expected permanence of what is written over against the impermanence of the hand that wrote it. These newly published examples, too, come from collections recently cataloged or re-cataloged. As a background and context for these formulas, analogous expressions found in colophons and elsewhere from a few other languages are also mentioned.

The theme of the sea-voyage, with sailors having braved and survived the dangers of the sea and finally arriving to the safety of land, appropriately served as a type for laborious literary enterprises that intrepid writers or scribes turned to tackle in Late Antiquity in more than one language tradition. The Armenian historian known as Agatʿangelos begins the *History* that bears this name with “a long and exceedingly tortuous *Prologue*” using such nautical (and mercantile) imagery.² Since it so picturesquely lists the reasons for, dangers of, and eventual reliefs from, sea-travel — and scribes in colophons also allude to all of these, albeit often more briefly — the first part of this prologue will serve as a fitting backdrop to this scribal language to be quoted in full below.

The fervent wish of sailors is the joy of reaching
port safely. So in the midst of the surging billows
which oppose them with tempestuous winds, the

¹ “The Scribe Reaches Harbour,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 21 (1995): 195-202, reprinted as ch. 16 of *From Ephrem to Romanos* (Aldershot, 1999).

² R.W. Thomson, *Agathangelos, History of the Armenians* (Albany, 1976), xxiv. Thomson continues, “The basic theme of the *Prologue* is the parallel between the merchant who risks his life on the sea in search of pearls and precious stones for princes and the writer who entrusts himself to the ‘sea of history’ for the sake of the pearl of spiritual profit for his readers... But he has so overdone the comparison and the imagery is so convoluted that the flow of the argument is often lost.” See also the note on 452 for references to similar imagery from other Armenian historians.

many who are anxious and thirsty for gain join forces and prepare for the struggle; with oars they spur on their steeds that are constructed of wood and iron and held by nails. With mutual encouragement, but anxious fears in their hearts, they race across the azure plain; with motionless step and unmoving feet, they fly over the surface of the sea's piling waves, where the furious billows pile up like a mountain and in turn sink down; as the harpist David sings on the lyre: "They go up and become mountains, and descend and become plains" (Ps 104:8). Then finally escaping from troubled water, they race to each one's land. This story they relate to their close loved ones: the toilsome course of their journeys, their tossings on the continually agitated waters, the risking of their lives for profit, as they aimed at victory in their struggle against death. To increase their merchandise they risk their lives. For although they may see the great force of the tempestuous and furious waves which in myriad colors are agitated by the ferocious swells and pile up in unstable spray, and which in successive lines rise up against the sandy beaches — yet arriving on dry land they will laugh.³

³ Իդձք բաղձացեալք ցանկալեացն զկամս նաւելոցն ի նաւահանգիստն հասուցանել խընդութիւն է խաղաղութեամբ. վասն զի ի մէջ ընդոստուցեալ ալեացն որ ընդդէմ դառնան, մրրկածին օդովքն ի մարտ պատրաստին, ընչաքաղցիցն եւ օգտածարաւեացն ժամ եղեալ բազմաց, միաբան սանձեալ թիակօքն զերիվարս տախտակագործացն բեւեռակապ երկաթագործացն՝ զմիմեանս քաջալերելով, կասկած երկիւղի սրտիւք ի կապոյտ դաշտին ձիարձակ լինին, անբայլ գնացիւք անընթաց ոտիւք թռուցեալ ի վերայ ծովուն մկանանց ջուրցն ալեացն կուտակելոց. ուր բարկացայտ ալիքն լեռնաձէ կուտակին, մէտ ի մէտ խոնարհին, ըստ աղեգէտն պատմողին մարմնաքնար Դաւթեան երգոյն, թէ «Ելանեն լեռնանան, եւ իջանեն դաշտանան». ուր ուրեմն ապրեալք ի ծխանացն՝

This notably florid description stems not only from common experience in coastal lands, however: in the Bible itself, in addition to the narrative context of the story of Jonah, is an extended scene (Ps 107:23-30 [in Greek Ps 106]) with mariner-merchants at first in peril from stormy waves and then brought by God in safe calm to “their desired haven” (ܡܨܦܬ ܚܝܬܐ-ܕܐܝܐ, ἐπὶ λιμένα θελήματος αὐτῶν).⁴ The imagery was broadly applicable.⁵ Among others, an example from

արշաւանս դնեն յիրաքանչիր գաւառս. զայս վէպ պատմեն ներձաւոր սիրելեաց — զանցս եղելոյ աշխատութեան ուղւոյն ճանապարհաց, զելեւջս տարաբեր անդադարն սահանաց, գրաւական եղեալ զանձինս շահաւորն օգտութեան, եւ կէտ՝ զմահ մրցանաց յաղթութեան. ընդ մեծանալ վաճառացն փոխանակեն զինքեանս. զի թէպէտ եւ տեսանիցեն զբռնութիւն սաստկութեան հողմակոծեալ ալեացն տատանելոց, որ յերփն երփն զերանգսն շրջշրջեն ըստ սաստկութեան ծփանացն, դիզադէզ յեղեղուկ փրփրացեալ զմիմեանց կարգեալ զկնի տողիցին, եւ յափնածիր յաւազադիր սահմանս բարձրացելոցն ընդդէմ՝ հասեալ ի ցամաքակէտն ծիծաղեցցին: (Thomson, *Agathangelos*, § 1).

⁴ For more on nautical imagery, especially as used by Syriac writers, see Édouard René Hambye, “The Symbol of the ‘Coming to the Harbour’ in the Syriac Tradition”, in Ignatius Ortiz de Urbina, ed., *Symposium Syriacum*, 1972: *célébré dans les jours 26-31 octobre 1972 à l’Institut Pontifical Oriental de Rome*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 197 (Rome, 1974), 401-411, and R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1975), 249-253, with references to earlier literature, including studies of the imagery used by the Greek fathers.

⁵ In addition to the following references, it is notable that similar are known from Slavic scribal tradition, for which see G.O. Vinokur, *The Russian Language: A Brief History*, trans. M.A. Forsyth, ed. J. Forsyth (Cambridge, 1971), p. 36, where two examples are given. The first, from 1164, comes from *The Dobrilo Gospels*: “...as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride so the scribe rejoices in seeing the last page” (же радується женихъ о невестѣ тако радується писецъ видя послѣдний листъ). The second example is from Lavrentiy’s copy of the *Chronicle* (1377): “The merchant rejoices having made a bargain, the helmsman heaving to in calm water, and the traveller returning to his native land, so also rejoices the scribe reaching the end of his books” (Радуется купецъ прикупъ створивъ. и кормьчии въ отишье приставъ и странникъ

Georgian hagiography refers to a martyr's death with "He departed for the sheltered haven and eternal resting place" (მოიცვალა ნავთსაყუდელად მეუდროდ და განსასვენებელად საუკუნოდ).⁶ A colophon in a Georgian manuscript among the new finds at Sinai (N.2) refers to Sinai itself as "this holy mountain, the spiritual harbour" (წმიდასა ამას მთასა სულთა ნავთსაყუდელსა),⁷ and a proverb known in Armenian about solitaries compares their propensity to desert-dwelling with a ship seeking port: "A ship in trouble heads for port, and a continent soul seeks the desert" (որպէս ասաց ոմն, թէ ի նաւահանգիստ փութայ նաւ խոռվեալ, եւ անձն ժուժկալ ինդրէ գանապատ), which is quoted in Movsēs Xorenac'i.⁸ The scribe of a fifteenth-century Armenian manuscript refers in the colophon with analogous language to the grim situation of his city and fellow citizens: "And we are still amidst these waves like a wrecked ship, and what will happen God [only] knows" (եւ դեռ յայս ալեաց միջի կամք իբրեւ գնաւ բեկեալ, եւ թէ զինչ իննելոց է յառաջկայն՝ աստուծոյ է գիտելի):⁹

In addition to the biblical imagery just highlighted, there is still more pre-Christian literary evidence for this theme. Texts in

въ отѣчество своё пришедъ. такоже радуется и книжный списатель. дошедъ концѣ книгамъ).

⁶ *The Martyrdom of Romanos*, § 5. Text in Alexander Khakh-anov, *Материалы по грузинской агиологии*, Труды по востоковедению 31 (Moscow, 1910), 25-46 (here, p. 28.29-30); cf. P. Peeters, "S. Romain le néomartyr († 1 mai 780) d'après un document géorgien," *Analecta Bollandiana* 30 (1911): 393-427.

⁷ Zaza Aleksidze, Mzekala Shanidze, Lily Khevsuriani, and Michael Kavtaria, *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai* [Athens, 2005], 247, 375).

⁸ 3.47, text in M. Abelean and S. Yarowt'wnean, *Movsisi Xorenac'woy Patmowt'wvn Hayoc'* (Tbilisi, 1913), p. 316, English translation in R.W. Thomson, *History of the Armenians*, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 4 (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1978), p. 310; see a list of a few other nautical metaphors in Armenian listed by Thomson, p. 337, n. 4.

⁹ Translation adapted from Avedis K. Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480: A Source for Middle Eastern History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 207. The Armenian will be found in L.S. Xac'ikyan, *XV Dari Hayeren Jeragreri Hištakaranner, I (1401-1450)* (Erevan, 1955), p. 602.

Akkadian, too, exhibit the harbor (*kāru*, also “port, trading station” [Sumerian *kar*]) as a desired place of safety. This theme does not feature in the Akkadian colophons published by Hermann Hunger,¹⁰ and while a usage like “on the day when Aššur lets you arrive safely at the trading station” (*ina ūmim ša akārim dn ušallumukama terrubu*)¹¹ certainly has a literal meaning, it is not difficult to go from there to a figurative meaning of the same, in which the harbor becomes an emblem of rest and security, like that which scribes avail themselves of in colophons. What is more, the converse outcome, in which the sea-traveler fails to reach port, becomes imprecatory: “may the mooring place not welcome you, the embarkation point of the ferry reject you” (*kāru ay ib]dika nibiru liṣṛka*).¹² Finally, moving across centuries, genre, and language, there is a relevant phrase from the New Testament that would have been known to the scribes whose lines come below: the toponym “Fair Havens” (Καλοὺς λιμένας, Acts 27:8).

FROM GREEK MANUSCRIPTS: THE REJOICING SAILOR

With this background in view, we turn specifically to manuscripts and colophons. As Brock, following Treu,¹³ relates, the earliest dated example is from a Latin manuscript (probably 669):¹⁴

*ut nauta gaudet litore post evectus
ita et scriba novissimum versum sulcatum.*

- (1) As the sailor rejoices at the shore after having
gone out,
So, too, the scribe [after] the last plowed line.

From Greek a little over two centuries later (898) comes the earliest dated example in that language (Val. Palat. gr. 44):

¹⁰ *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1968).

¹¹ See *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* K 234, s.v. *kāru* A 3a.

¹² *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* K 233, s.v. *kāru* A 1c, from *Gilgamesh* XI 235.

¹³ Kurt Treu, “Der Schreiber am Ziel: Zu den Versen “Ὠσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσιν...und ähnlichen” in Kurt Treu, ed., *Studia Codicologica*, Texte und Untersuchungen 124 (Berlin, 1977), 473-492.

¹⁴ All of the following examples, regardless of language, are numbered to facilitate future reference.

ὥς ἡδὺ τοῖς πλέουσιν εὖδιος λιμὴν,
οὕτως καὶ τοῖς γράφουσιν ὁ ὕστατος στίχος.

- (2) As a calm harbor is pleasant to those who sail,
So, too, is the last line to those who write.

Treu provides the text of this and several more Greek colophons and, due to their variety, which may be compared with the variety present in Syriac colophons, a few more examples merit repetition here.¹⁵

In addition to the “calm harbor”, scribes at a relatively early period also used the imagery of a hungry person who finally gets something to eat, as in Jer. Patr. Stauru 55 (dated 927):

ὥς ἡδὺς ὁ ἄρτος τοῖς πεινῶσιν,
καὶ τοῖς πλέουσιν ὁ εὖδιος λιμὴν,
οὕτω τοῖς γράφουσιν ὁ ὕστατος στίχος.

- (3) As bread is pleasant to those who hunger,
And the calm harbor to those who sail,
So is the last line to those who write.

In Vat. gr. 1591 (dated 964), only the “bread for the hungry” theme is present, nothing about reaching a harbor:

ὥσπερ τοῖς πεινῶσι ἡδὺς ὁ ἄρτος,
οὕτω καὶ τοῖς γράφουσιν ὁ ἔσχατος στίχος.

- (4) As bread is pleasant to those who hunger,
So, too, is the final line to those who write.

Paris 781 (from 939) offers yet another theme, that of wanderers seeing their homeland:

ὥσπερ ξένοι χαίρουσιν πατρίδα βλέπειν,
οὕτως καὶ τοῖς κάμνουσι βιβλίου τέλος.

- (5) As wanderers rejoice to see their homeland,
So, too, is the end of a book to those who labor.

This example is also notable for having a verb in the first line (and not just a noun and adjective), for highlighting the labor of those

¹⁵ For all of these Greek examples, see Treu, “Der Schreiber am Ziel,” 475-486.

involved with book-production, and for the different wording to refer to the book's completion: "the end of the book," rather than "the last line."

As examples of expanded and rearranged forms of these themes, of which there are many, we may consider the following. Many of these have no parallel in Syriac colophons, but even knowing that fact further defines the typology of Syriac colophons.¹⁶ In Laur. 9.3 (10th c.) a third category of longing people, travelers by road, serves to illustrate the scribe's wish for the finished book:

Ὡσπερ λιμὴν πλέουσι, καὶ πατρίς ξένοις,
καὶ τοῖς ὁδοιποροῦσι τῆς ὁδοῦ πέρας,
οὕτως ἐκάστῳ τῶν γραφόντων βιβλία
ἐράσμιον ἐφέυκε τοῦ γράφειν τέλος.

- (6) As the harbor to those who sail, and the homeland
to wanderers,
And the end of the road to those who travel,
So to each one who writes books
The end of writing is naturally gratifying.

With different wording, but still putting forth these same three kinds of people (sailors, wanderers abroad, and road-travelers), is Athos, Lavra E' 145:

Ὡσπερ πλέουσι λιμένες χρημα ξένον,
πόρρω δὲ τοῖς βαίνουσιν ἀνύσαι τρίβον,
καὶ τοῖς ξενιτεύουσι πατρίδος θέα,
οὕτως βίβλους γράφουσιν εἰς τέρμα φθάσαι.

- (7) As harbors are a foreign¹⁷ thing to those who sail,
And further, finishing the beaten path is to those
who walk,
And sight of the homeland to those living abroad,

¹⁶ In addition, while Treu, who gives no translation, has done scholars a great service in providing the text of these Greek colophons, it will hopefully be a greater service still to offer for readers an English translation of them.

¹⁷ That is, something not commonly seen or found, and hence wished for.

So to those who write books is reaching the end.

From the eleventh century, Oxford, Bodl. Misc. 219 combines those who hunger with wanders together in comparison with scribes:

Ὡς τοῖς πεινῶσιν ἄρτος ἡδίων
καὶ τοῖς ξένοις εἰς οἶκον ἄφραστος χάρις,
οὕτω πέφυκε τοῖς γράφουσι βιβλίου τέλος.

- (8) As bread is more pleasant to those who hunger,
And kindness in a home is inexpressible to
wanderers,
So the end of a book is naturally to those who
write.

Wholly different, but probably from the same century, is Oxford, Bodl. Barocc. 50, which compares the delight of finishing a book to the pleasantness of flora:

Ὡς τερπνὸν ἄνθος ἐν θεωρίᾳ πέλει,
κρίνον δὲ πανθαύμαστον εἰς εὐοσμίαν,
οὕτως χαρᾶς πρόσληψις ἔσχατος στίχος.

- (9) As a flower is delightful in appearance,
And a lily all-marvelous for its aroma,
So the final line is the acquisition of joy.

Unlike the others, this comparison is one-sided, in that it brings no attention in either the comparator or the compared to the prior toil and the wish for a goal.

Vat. 95 (15th c.) and others offer yet another means of comparison, that of the thirsty deer who has come upon a refreshing stream,¹⁸ a biblical motif (Ps 42:1-2 [in Greek 41:2-3]):

Ὡς ταῖς ἐλάφοις καύματος ὥρα πέλει
πηγὴ ποθινή, ἄκος οὔσα τοῦ θέρους,
οὕτω πέφυκε καὶ γραφεῦσιν ἡδύτης
τὸ τέρμα βίβλου, τοῖσδε τῶν πονουμένων.

- (10) As to deer at the time of burning heat

¹⁸ Treu calls the theme here “das Bild vom kühlenden Trunk des Rehs an der Quelle in Sommerglut” (“Der Schreiber am Ziel,” 483).

The longed-for spring is a remedy for summer,
 So, too, to scribes a natural pleasantness
 Is the end of a book, to those who have labored.

The next two examples clearly highlight the rest from toil that scribes enjoy once their copying is completed. Athens 788 (12th c.):

Ἡδὺς ὁ λιμὴν τοῖς πλέουσι τυγχάνει
 καὶ τοῖς γραφεῦσι τέρμα τῆς βίβλου πάλιν.
 Ἄμφω γὰρ ἀνάπαυλαν εἰσφέρει πόνων.

- (11) Pleasant to those who sail is the harbor,
 And to scribes, too, the end of the book,
 For both bring a rest from labors.

Paris 111 (15th c.):

Λιμὴν μὲν ἡδὺς, ἀλλὰ καὶ βίβλου τέλος.
 Ἄμφω γὰρ εἰσὶν ἀνάπαυλα τῶν πόνων.

- (12) The harbor is pleasant, but also the end of a book,
 For both are a rest from labors.

Two more examples have still different formulas for travelers on both land and water. Ven. Marc. 64 (386; dated 1112):

Ποντοπλωοῦσι παῦλα λιμὴν τῶν πόνων
 κόρειβατοῦσι τέρμα τοῦ δρόμου πόλις
 καὶ τοῖς γράφουσι χάρμα βιβλίου τέλος.

- (13) To sea-sailors a harbor is a rest from labors,
 To mountain-crossers a city is the end of their
 course,
 And to those who write the end of a book is joy.

Paris 571 A (dated 1415):

Ἡδὺ μὲν τοῖς ὁδεύουσι τέλος τοῦ δρόμου,
 ἡδὺ δὲ τοῖς γράφουσι τέλος βιβλίου.]

- (14) Pleasant to those who travel is the end of the
 course,
 And pleasant, too, to those who write is the end
 of a book.

The following four examples, some of which are long, use language that differs from each other, but they all employ the old image of the sailor. Vienna theol. 318 (dated 1286, the year of Bar ʿEbrāyā's death):

Πλωτὴρ γέγηθεν ἐκ πελάγους ἀγρίου
 σώζων γαληνῶ λιμένι τὴν ὀλκάδα·
 χαίρει δὲ μᾶλλον ὁ γραφεὺς τοῦ βιβλίου,
 τιθεὶς τὸ τέρμα καὶ τὸν ἔσχατον στίχον.

- (15) The sailor has rejoiced, bringing from the wild sea
 His trading vessel safe to a calm harbor,
 But the scribe of the book rejoices more,
 Having brought to pass the end and final line.

Vat. 906 (dated 1421) and Ambros. 688 (15th c.):

Γήθει μὲν λιμένα πλωτὴρ πολυβενθέα μάρπτων,
 γήθει δ' αὖτε γραφεὺς, στίχον ὕστατον
 ἐκτολυπέων.

- (16) The sailor, laying hold of the much-deep harbor,
 rejoices,
 And the scribe, further, rejoices, winding up the
 last line.

Alexandr. 106 (282; 14th c.):

Ὡσπερ τοῖς θάλασσαν παρωχηκόταις [sic]
 οὕτω καὶ μοι γράψαντι τὴν δέλτον
 χειραλγίας ἔπαυσα καὶ ἰάθην πάνυ
 ὁ τῆς παροῦσης πυκτίδος χειρογράφος.

- (17) As with those who have gone their way over the
 sea,
 So, too, with me, who wrote the table,
 I am finished with hand-pain and I am fully
 healed,
 The hand-writer of the present codex.

Vat. 279 (14th c.):

Ἐφθασεν ἡ ναῦς ἐκ πλάτους τῆς θαλάσσης,
 ἐκ τοῦ κλυδῶνος καὶ πάσης τρικυμίας,

πρὸς τὰ στενωπὰ τοῦ γλυκυτάτου ὄρμου,
 πᾶσαν λαθοῦσα τῶν κυμάτων τὴν ζάλην.
 καὶ νῦν ὁ γραφεὺς τῆς παρούσης πυκτίδος,
 λήθη παραδούς τῆς γραφῆς μακροὺς πόνους,
 ἀφοσιεῖται τέρψιν πᾶσαν τὴν λύπην
 καὶ τῇ τριάδι ὕμνον ἄληκτον νέμει.

- (18) The ship arrived from the expanse of the sea,
 From the wave and every tri-wave,
 To the narrows of the sweetest haven,
 Having forgotten every squall of the waves.
 Now, too, the scribe of the present codex,
 Having handed over to forgetfulness the long
 labors of writing,
 Acquits himself of every grief as enjoyment
 And allots to the trinity an unceasing hymn.

Finally, the scribe of one more long example turns to the hard-working farmer eager for produce as his similar fellow-laborer. Vat. 156 (10th/11th c.):

Ἔχει γεωργὸς ἡδονὴν πλείστην ὅτε
 ἀσταχύν γέμουσαν ἀθρεῖ τὴν ἄλω,
 ἐν ᾗ καμάτων συγκομίζεται τέλος·
 καὶ χαρμονὴν ἔχει δὴ γραφεὺς ἡνίκα
 τέλος προσεγγίσασαν ἴδῃ τῆς βίβλου,
 ἧς ἐμπόνως ἤρξατο καὶ μετὰ πόθον·
 ὥς γὰρ ἐκεῖνος καταβάλλων τὸν σπόρον
 καὶ σταχὺν ἀδρὸν κατιδεῖν ἤδη θέλει,
 ὧ¹⁹ καὶ πάσας ἐλπίδας ἐκκρεμεῖς ἔχει,
 οὕτως ὁ γραφεὺς ἀντὶ μέν γε τοῦ σπόρου
 ἔχειν νομίζει τὴν καταρχὴν τῆς βίβλου,
 τὸ τέρμα δ' αὖθις σταχύν ἀνθ' ὠρίμων.

- (19) A farmer has full pleasure when
 He observes the grain full of ears,
 By which he gathers in the end of toils.
 The scribe has delight at the time when

¹⁹ Treu's text has ὧ, which must be a mistake.

He sees that the end of the book has approached,
[The book] he began laboriously, in accord with
his desire.

For as the former throws seed down,
And forthwith wishes to gaze down at a full-
grown ear,

On which, too, he hangs all his hopes,
So the scribe, instead of seed, on the one hand,
Customarily has the beginning of the book,
And on the other hand, the end [of the book]
instead of ripe ears.

FROM SYRIAC MANUSCRIPTS: THE REJOICING SAILOR

We now turn to the Syriac examples themselves. Brock's article gives a few different forms of the lines from Syriac, and the following Syriac lines quoted and translated here add further variations to this type. As a control to these further variations, we may consider the following as a kind of standard, simply because it, or something very much like it, is the most common. The most regularly found form in the manuscripts I have read, also given in Brock's treatment, is:

ܐܘܬܪܐ ܕܢܒܐ ܡܚܠܐ: ܕܡܨܠܐ ܕܠܥܠܐ:
ܐܨܢܐ ܕܡܨܠܐ ܕܡܨܠܐ: ܕܡܨܠܐ ܕܡܨܠܐ:

- (20) As the sailor rejoices for his ship to reach harbor,
So the scribe rejoices at the last line he writes.

Here we have four lines in heptasyllabic meter. Innumerable manuscripts of the later periods have the lines this way, or very similarly, such as SMMJ 38 (dated July 17, 1477), f. 205v and SMMJ 58 (dated 1485), f. 189v, the latter having ܡܨܠܐ at the end.²⁰ Instead of ܡܨܠܐ in the first line and ܡܨܠܐ in the second, CFMM 757 (on the inside front board) has:

ܐܘܬܪܐ ܕܢܒܐ ܡܚܠܐ ܕܡܨܠܐ:
ܐܨܢܐ ܕܡܨܠܐ ܡܨܠܐ [sic] ܕܡܨܠܐ ܕܡܨܠܐ:

²⁰ See a list of the nomenclature for these and the following manuscripts at the end of the article.

- (21) As the sailor rejoices for his ship to return to harbor,
So the scribe rejoices at the last line he inscribes.

A variant on the last word, and a noun instead of a verb, occurs in CFMM 391, p. 431:

וּנְבִיא מַחְלָא: וְעֵסֶד אֲלֵפֶה אֲלֵפֶה אֲלֵפֶה
הֵחָדָשׁ נְבִיא מַחְלָא: חֶסֶד וְנְבִיא אֲסִינָא וְעֵסֶד

- (22) As the sailor rejoices for his ship to reach harbor,
So the scribe rejoices at the last line of his writing.

Mor Gabriel Monastery 92, p. 541, instead of having a sailor reaching harbor with his ship, has the sailor simply finding rest:

אֲעֵלָא וּנְבִיא מַחְלָא: וְעֵסֶד אֲלֵפֶה אֲלֵפֶה אֲלֵפֶה
הֵחָדָשׁ נְבִיא מַחְלָא: חֶסֶד וְנְבִיא אֲסִינָא וְעֵסֶד

- (23) As the sailor rejoices that his ship has reached rest,²¹
So he [the scribe] has rest at the last line he writes.

Again with the harbor, but with “captain” instead of “sailor”,²² is CFMM 352, p. 840:

אֲמִי אֲלֵפֶה וּנְבִיא חֲלֵפֶה וְעֵסֶד אֲלֵפֶה
הֵחָדָשׁ נְבִיא מַחְלָא: חֶסֶד וְנְבִיא אֲסִינָא

- (24) As the captain rejoices in his ship that has reached the harbor,
So the scribe rejoices at the last line!

Notable, too, is the absence of any verb for writing at the end of the second line. Similarly, SMMJ 43, a Garshuni manuscript dated Nov 25, 1552, has the same second line, and has “captain” in the first, but the scribe qualifies the harbor with an adjunct noun:

²¹ For the preposition (*l- + qā*) in *d-menʿat elpēh l-qā nawhā*, which is not standard Syriac, cf. G. Khan, *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Barwar* (Leiden, 2008), vol. 2, 1360 (also R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 3451).

²² The former word, derived from “ship”, may also simply be another word for “sailor” or “shipman”, but in any case it is not the oft-occurring *mallāhā*.

ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ

- (25) As the captain rejoices when his ship has reached
the peaceful harbor,
So the scribe rejoices at the last line!

CFMM 353, p. 241, also has “captain”, but there is still more variation:

ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ

- (26) As the captain rejoices in his ship that has come to
the shore,
So the copyist exults in the last line he pens!

The ship has a different verb than the examples given hitherto, and instead of reaching a harbor or rest, it comes to the shore, and while the first line has the same verb for rejoicing as in the previous examples, that in the second line is different. The word for the scribe here is different than in the other examples, *sāprā* (here translated as “copyist”) rather than *kātibā*. The verb for copying in this example is noteworthy, too: the quadriliteral *ṭarṭeš*, and not the more usual *ktab* or *sraṭ* (the latter in no. 21 above).

Three more examples with “captain” will suffice. The first one (MGMT 95, pp. 878-879) has a unique ending line (“without fail”):

ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ

- (27) As the captain rejoices that his ship has reached
the shore,
So he [the scribe] has freedom from writing
without fail.

The next example comes from a late East Syriac manuscript (copied in 1906) now in Iraq shows further lexical variation (MACCK 6, f. 238r):

ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
ܐܡܝܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ

- (28) As the captain rejoices that his ship has reached
the shore,
So the χαρτουλάριος exults at the last line he pens!

The item of interest here is *kaltūlārā*, derived (with the first *l* < *r*) from the Greek word (Latin *chartularius*) given above, which means “archivist”, but as a derivative of *χάρτης* (“papyrus, leaf of paper”, and later “document, record”), the word points more generally to a writer of some kind or other, as it apparently does in this Syriac example. For a final example with “captain”, although using a different word for it (*κυβερνήτης*), here is an extended reflection on the analogy from CCM 58 (dated 1742), f. 228r:²³

ܕܢܝܢܐ ܠܨܬ ܠܡܕܐ ܡܚܬܬܐ ܕܡܫܥ. ܕܢܝܢ ܕܨܬ
ܡܚܬܬܐ ܡܚܬܬܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ. ܡܢ
ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܡܢ
ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ.

- (29) Truly, my brothers, the scribes [*maktbānē*] who
have made the effort have said: As the captain
[*qubarnīṭā*] watches and looks forward to reaching
the peaceful harbor, that he might rest from his
work and his being tossed about among the waves
of the sea, so also the poor scribe [*kātobā*]
[watches and looks forward] to the last line, that
he might rest from his labor and his work in his
copying.

Now for two more longer variations. From Dayr Al-Za‘farān
(ZFRN 197, f. 100v) comes an especially noteworthy version:

ܢܒܐ ܦܚܠܐ ܡܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ
ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܬܐ.

- (30) The sailor rejoices when his ship, loaded with
great wealth, reaches the harbor, but a scribe
rejoices even more than him at the last line he
writes, for he sees his pages full of spiritual wealth.

²³ Cf. no 34 in Garšūnī below for some of the wording.

Here imagined is not just a ship, but a ship with valuable cargo, and the scribe directly ties this part of the image to something in the scribe's work: the ship brings valuable goods, and the manuscript brings valuable spiritual treasure. This example is not wholly unique, as two other examples, both in Jerusalem, bear witness. Only slightly different is the one in SMMJ 62 (dated 1569), p. 591:

ܐܘܠܐ ܘܢܒܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܘܡܫܐ
 ܥܒ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܐܡܢܐ ܘܕܠܐ. ܘܢܒܐ ܥܒ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܘܡܫܐ
 ܘܡܫܐ.

- (31) As the sailor rejoices when his ship, loaded with great wealth, reaches the peaceful harbor, but a scribe rejoices even more at the last line he writes, for he sees his pages full of spiritual wealth.

So, too, SMMJ 128, f. 240r; dated 1784/5, at the end of a longish colophon:

ܐܘܠܐ ܘܢܒܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܘܡܫܐ
 ܥܒ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܕܥܠܡܐ ܘܡܫܐ ܘܡܫܐ ܘܡܫܐ.

- (32) As the sailor rejoices when his ship has reaches the peaceful harbor, so a scribe rejoices at the last line he writes, for he sees his pages full of spiritual wealth.

The first of the three examples in this group has no “as” at the beginning, the second and third add that the harbor is peaceful, and the the third fails somewhat in the comparison since it omits mention of the ship's cargo, so the second is the most complete, but with all three it is clear that we are dealing with a specific form of comparison.

The last variation on the sailor-harbor theme in Syriac comes from MGMT 89, p. 385. Here the scribe expands the comparison in terms of actors. The Greek note in Vat. 156 given above (no. 19) pairs the scribe with a farmer, and here in this Syriac manuscript the scribe gives not only a sailor, but a farmer, too:

ܐܘܠܐ ܘܢܒܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܘܡܫܐ

ܡܠܝܚܐ. ܡܥܢܗܐ ܐܨܝܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ.
 ܡܥܢܗܐ ܐܨܝܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ. ܡܥܢܗܐ
 ܡܥܢܗܐ ܡܥܢܗܐ.

- (33) As the sailor rejoices that his ship has reached the harbor, so the scribe rejoices at the last line he writes. As the worker at the furrow of his land as it is worked, there is rest for the scribe in the line of his right hand as it works.

A notable part of this expansion with the scene of the land-laborer is that the rejoicing is not necessarily reserved for the completion of, in the farmer's case, the land's being plowed, or, in the case of the scribe, the book's completion. The participles used with "land"²⁴ and "right hand" are both of the same verb (*plah*) and both refer to a continuous activity. This is different from the sailor, who rejoices at the end of the journey, the verb "has reached" (*menʿat*) indicating a completed fact. Both the land-laborer and the scribe, while able to rejoice at the end of their work, too, here have joy and even some kind of rest while they are engaged in their toil.

FROM ARABIC (GARŠŪNĪ) MANUSCRIPTS: THE REJOICING SAILOR

Now we turn to some colophons in Arabic (Garšūnī). While hardly as common as in Syriac, similar lines to those just given in Syriac also show up in Arabic. CCM 45, f. 182r, an East Syriac manuscript from the year 1698,²⁵ has the following long form in Garšūnī:²⁶

ܡܠܝܚܐ ܡܥܢܗܐ ܐܨܝܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ.
 ܡܥܢܗܐ ܐܨܝܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ. ܡܥܢܗܐ ܡܥܢܗܐ.

²⁴ That the participle goes with "land" (*ʿarʿā*) and not "furrow" (*ḥīṭā*) is evident from the fact that it is feminine and thus only agrees with *ʿarʿā*. In the corresponding part of the text for the scribe, the participle is again feminine, this time to agree with the understood *ʿidā*, even though *yammin-eh* itself has the appearance of a masculine noun (cf. Th. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, trans. J.A. Crichton, [Winona Lake, 2001], § 84, p. 56).

²⁵ And similarly in CCM 33, f. 155v, from the following century, but the formula is incompletely attested there due to a missing folio.

²⁶ Cf. no. 29 above for some of the wording.

ܬܗܠܝܬܐ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܕܕܝܢ ܡܠܝܬ ܕܠܝܬܝܬ ܕܠܝܬܝܬ ܕܠܝܬܝܬ
 ܡܠܝܬܝܬ. ܕܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ. ܕܝܬܝܬ
 ܕܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ. ܠܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܡܠܝܬܝܬ
 ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ.
 ܡܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܠܝܬܝܬ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܕܝܬܝܬ
 ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܡܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ.
 ܡܠܝܬܝܬܝܬ. ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ.

- (34) Truly, my brothers, the scribes who have made the attempt claim that as the foreigner rejoices when he has reached his people in safety, and when the ships have reached the harbor in calmness and tranquility, so, too, the frail copyist rejoices when he has finished copying the book. May he find rest from the labor, toil, and strain of copying, as he thanks, glorifies, praises, and worships the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one God, who has guided him and helped him in ending, completing, and finishing.

SMMJ 182, p. 526, has a shorter version of the sailor-theme in Garšūnī:²⁷

ܡܠܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ
 ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ [ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ] ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ
 ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ ܕܝܬܝܬܝܬ

- (35) As the sailor [*< ναύτης*] rejoices when his ship reaches the harbor [*< λιμήν*], so the scribe rejoices at the last line, that it remains to him in the book.

For “harbor” here, the Greek loanword, which reached Arabic via an Aramaic dialect,²⁸ is well known, but the loanword for sailor (*nanti*) is more noteworthy.

²⁷ Here given as in the manuscript, but with corrections in brackets.

²⁸ S. Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden, 1886), pp. 231-232.

FROM GREEK, COPTIC, ARABIC, AND SYRIAC MANUSCRIPTS: THE ROTTING HAND

The sentiment and the vocabulary of the end of the lines just given brings to mind some scribal verses originating in Greek and commonly found in Arabic (including Garšūnī) along these lines:²⁹

سحما الجال في الخلاء
ملا الحراف في الداء

- (36) The handwriting will remain in the book,
But the finger and the hand will rot in the dirt.

Garitte gives many examples of the Greek form, but it will suffice here to give just one, Greek Patr., Alexandria, 20 (dated 1540):³⁰

ἡ χεὶρ μὲν ἡ γράψασα σέσηπται τάφῳ,
ἡ δὲ γραφή τε μένει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

- (37) The hand that has written lies rotten in the grave,
But the writing remains forever.

In comparison with the Arabic examples given below, two things are notable in the Greek examples. First, the sentence about the hand typically comes first, and the one about the writing then follows, but in the Arabic ones that order is at least usually reversed. Second, while both Greek and Arabic have “to rot” and “to remain”, in each the verbs are sometimes put differently. In the version above, but not always, the Greek has a perfect and then a present, while the Arabic has the imperfect for both. The

²⁹ For the formula in Greek, see Gérard Garitte, “Sur une formule des colophons de manuscrits grecs,” *Collectanea Vaticana in honorem Anselmi M. Card. Albareda* I (Vatican City, 1962), pp. 369-391, reprinted in his *Scripta Disiecta 1941-1977*, vol. 1, Publications de l’Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 21 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980), pp. 394-425. Further, see Stig Y. Rudberg, “Note sur une formule des colophons de manuscrits grecs,” *Scriptorium* 20 (1966): 66-67; Kurt Treu, “Weitere Handschriften mit der Schreiberformel ἡ μὲν χεὶρ ἡ γράψασα...,” *Scriptorium* 24 (1970): 56-64; and Johannes Koder, “Ein inschriftlicher Beleg für ἡ μὲν χεὶρ ἡ γράψασα...,” *Scriptorium* 28 (1974): 295. For Arabic examples, see Adam Gacek, *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 237-238.

³⁰ See Garitte, “Sur une formule,” p. 396 (cited from the reprint).

distinction is reflected in the English translations given here. Some of Garitte's other examples give a present verb, *σήπεται*, some a future, *σήψεται*, which agrees more closely with the Arabic versions that follow below. Garitte cites a seemingly related epitaph from the *Palatine Anthology* (7.16):³¹

ὁστέα μὲν καὶ κωφὸν ἔχει τάφος οὖνομα Σαπφoῦς·
αἱ δὲ σοφαὶ κείνης ῥήσιες ἀθάνατοι.

The grave holds the bones and the mute name of
Sappho,
But her wise words are immortal.

He avers that these lines are nevertheless distant from those about the hand and the writing that occur in manuscripts. I am more inclined to see the similarity in them, given the prevalent idea, if not of rotting body parts, at least of a body in the grave and, if not of writing, at least of a literary activity that long survives its dead author. But however similar the epitaph and the colophon notes are, the real impetus for their spread in Greek manuscripts probably did indeed come from Egypt and spread first from southern Italy.³² If Coptic is the origin of these lines, which seems likely at least in the context of these colophons penned by Christian scribes, it is worth including some specimens. The first is from BL Or. 3581 B (69), copied at the White Monastery in 1112:³³

ΟΥΟΙ ΝΑΙ ΔΗΟΚ ΧΕΩΔΡΕΟΟΥΕΙ<Ω> ΩΩΠΕ Ν†ΩΟΟΠ
ΔΗ' ΤΟΙΧ ΝΑΤΑΚΟ ΠΕΣΖΑΙ ΝΑΜΟΥΝ ΕΒΟΛ.

- (38) Woe to me, for there will be a time when I will not be! The hand will perish,³⁴ the writing will remain.

³¹ Garitte, "Sur une formule," p. 418.

³² Garitte, "Sur une formule," pp. 421-422.

³³ W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1905), p. 232; also given in Garitte, "Sur une formule," p. 418. He translates, "Vae mihi, quia tempus fit in quo non sum; manus corrumpetur, scriptura permanebit."

³⁴ Garitte notes that the verb *τακο* stands for *σήπεσθαι*, the verb used in the Greek form of this formula, in James 5:2 (ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν).

The other two examples, clearly of the same pattern as the one just given and almost identical to each other,³⁵ are not from manuscripts, but from inscriptions, although like the manuscript above, these inscriptions both come from the White Monastery. The first (A8, dated between 1184 and 1284) is:

ΟΥ[ΟΙ] ΝΑΙ ΑΝΟΚ ΧΕΩΡΕΟΥΩΕΙΩ ΟΥΠΕ
ΝΔΙΩΟΠ ΑΝ' ΠΕCΖΑΙ ΝΑΜΟΥΝ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΤΕΝΙΧ
ΤΑΚΩ ΖΗΝΤΑΦΟC

- (39) Woe is me! For a time will be when I shall not be.
The writing shall endure; the hands shall perish in
the tombs.³⁶

And the second (A9):

ΟΥΟΙ [Ν]ΑΙ ΑΝΟΚ ΧΕΩΡΕΟΥΩΕΙΩ ΟΥΠΕ
ΝΤ[ΙΩΟΠ ΑΝ] ΟΥΑΡΕΠΕCΖ[ΑΙ] ΜΟΥΝ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΝΤΙΧ
[sic] ΤΑΚΟ...

- (40) Woe is me! For a time will be when I shall not be.
The writing shall endure; the hands shall
perish...³⁷

The variants among these three types of the formula are minimal. The inscriptions have “hands” in the plural rather than the singular of the manuscript, and the inscriptions also differ in referring to the writing first, then secondly to the hands.

Now for examples in Arabic (Garšūnī) from some of the collections already mentioned for the Syriac examples above. First, SMMJ 58, f. 189v (referred to above) in addition to the lines about the sailor has an expanded and repetitive rhyming variation of the pattern just introduced in Garšūnī. (The orthography, hardly as expected in some places, is given as in the manuscript.)

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³⁵ The differences are orthographic and, in the second part, grammatical (ΠΕCΖΑΙ ΝΑΜΟΥΝ...ΝΑΤΑΚΩ vs. ΟΥΑΡΕΠΕCΖ[ΑΙ] ΜΟΥΝ...ΤΑΚΟ), but the English translations below are the same.

³⁶ W.E. Crum, “Inscriptions from Shenoute’s Monastery,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904): 552-569; here pp. 561-562. See also Garitte, “Sur une formule,” 419.

³⁷ Crum, “Inscriptions,” 562-563. No date for the inscription is given. See also Garitte, “Sur une formule,” 419.

ܐܠܚܝܢ ܡܬܐ ܦܕ ܡܚܠܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܦܚܝܬ ܡܥ ܡܢܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܡܢܝܕ ܕ ܡܚܠܐܐܢ ܡܥ ܕܐܕ
 ܠܚܝܢ ܡܬܐ ܡܚܠܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܡܠܟܝ ܡܡܐ ܠܕܝܐܕ

- (41) The handwriting will remain after me in the book,
 While the hand will rot in the dirt,
 (???)³⁸ who reads my book,
 And prays for my salvation from punishment.
 The hand will rot in the dirt,
 While the handwriting will remain the reward.

As a variation on these lines, here is an example from SMMJ 143 (dated 1891), p. 391, where they again follow the sailor theme in Syriac:

ܡܡܠܐ ܠܠܝܝ ܡܡܐ ܦܕ ܠܡܠܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܡܠܐ ܠܚܝܢ ܡܡܐ ܦܕ ܠܡܠܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܦܠܐ ܠܡܠܐ ܡܥ ܦܠܐ ܡܢܐ ܦܕ ܦܠܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܦܢܝܝܐ ܕ ܡܚܠܐܐܢ ܡܥ ܕܐܕ

- (42) The handwriting will remain after me in the book,
 While my hand will rot in the dirt.
 You who are reading in my book,
 You should pray for my salvation from punishment.

These Garšūnī lines appear only slightly differently in CCM 1, f. 76v, but then the scribe adds on f. 77r:

ܡܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ
 ܡܡܐ ܠܡܠܐ ܦܕ ܠܡܠܐ ܕܐܕ
 ܡܠܠܐ ܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܡܠܠܐ ܕܐܕ

- (43) I have written the book with my hand,
 [Which] will rot in the ground,
 But the book will remain for [my] reward.

³⁸ The Arabic is unclear, but see the similar lines of the following example.

This formula that appears not uncommonly in Arabic seems to have far less presence in Syriac manuscripts, the only related examples known to me being those that A. van Lantschoot pointed out to Garitte. They are the following.³⁹ First from Vat. syr. 567, two notes on f. 268v (dated 1568):

ܐܢܬܐ ܚܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܦܠܐ

- (44) My hands rot and the book remains.

This short note is elaborated by a more verbose one in the same manuscript:

ܩܬܝܢ ܚܬܝܢ ܠܩܕܝܫܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܚܬܝܢ ܠܥܕܝܢܐ
ܡܠܬܐ ܚܬܝܢ ܠܥܕܝܢܐ ܩܬܝܢ ܚܬܝܢ ܠܥܕܝܢܐ

- (45) The twins⁴⁰ rot in the dust and are annihilated in nothingness,
But the paper and the writing(s) remain for length of days.

Then from the much later (dated 1900) Vat. syr. 497, f. 285v, we have the following:

ܡܠܬܐ ܦܠܐ ܚܬܐ.
ܡܠܬܐ ܚܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܚܬܐ.

- (46) The writing⁴¹ remains in the book,
But the hand is corrupted⁴² in the grave.

The earlier of these two Syriac examples has for “rot” the same root as that seen in the Arabic versions, but the other one uses another verb of similar meaning. These two Syriac versions differ, too, in the order of their subjects: the hand(s) comes first and then

³⁹ See Garitte, “Sur une formule,” p. 425.

⁴⁰ That is, the hands, or with the number “five”, the fingers: see the mention of ܩܬܝܢ ܚܬܝܢ, “the five twins” of a scribe in Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 4372. The expression “five twins” may be found, among others, in CCM 59, f. 113v (dated 1593) and CCM 58, f. 227v (dated 1742).

⁴¹ In Garitte’s article the word is given as ܡܠܬܐ, without “sic” or the like. He translates it with “scriptum” and it is almost certainly a mistake for the reading as given above.

⁴² The manuscript reads ܡܠܬܐ ܚܬܐ.

the writing in the older example, with the opposite order in the later one. There is no grave in the older witness, and that one also has the unique phrase “length of days” (*nugrā d-ḡammātā*), borrowed from Proverbs 3:2.

CONCLUSION

The experience and memory of the nautical longing for land thrived in the words of writers who may or may not have even known that experience itself directly. It made for a fecund image of something sought-after, especially following a period of worrisome danger or wearisome toil. So it is not surprising that scribes, who typically trumpet their humility and make inventories of their laborious hardships,⁴³ appropriated it so ably to their own voyages in writing. These samples taken from manuscripts in Latin, Greek, Syriac, and Arabic (Garšūnī) show how widespread the analogy became, and how creative scribes could be when artfully recording their happiness at the end of their copying labor, even though for many of them the respite was only temporary, since there was always more copying to do. The thread that runs through these languages with the sailor theme and its expansions is conspicuous, and there are some parallel expansions, such as the comparison between the farmer and the scribe that shows up in both Greek and Syriac.

The second theme, more common in Arabic than in Syriac, is altogether different. There is a hint of this theme with the same pattern in a non-Christian Greek composition (the Sappho epitaph), but in the Christian setting of overt and excessive humility and of the constant remembrance of bodily destruction this theme has more space to flourish, with its origin most likely in Egypt. In this formula the focus is not the scribe's joyful rest, however momentary, which is found in the immediate present and during

⁴³ For Greek scribes, see especially C. Wendel, “Die ταπεινότης des griechischen Schreibermönches,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 43 (1950): 259-266. Many similar examples from Armenian scribes will be found in the selections translated into English by Sanjian, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts*. For some time I have been gathering Syriac and Arabic colophons from the collections mentioned above and others, among which are many such similar boasts of humility and self-deprecations, and I hope that the assembly will eventually result in publication.

the scribe's lifetime, but rather the eventual fate of the body of every human being, including every scribe: to ruin in a tomb. But the scribe takes consolation in remembering that as his body spoils, that which is written will survive. It will survive in the mouths, ears, and memories of other readers and hearers and it will survive further thanks to the labors of other scribes, whose hands will also one day rot. There may be "no end" to "making many books" (Ecclesiastes 12:12), but while the writing hands of scribes do have an end, the writing itself continues on and on.

This survey of these two patterns, with some examples of each in both Syriac and Arabic but with the attestations in each language clearly falling more on the side of one or the other formula, underlines some continuity, both between these two language traditions, but also with others, and these formulas are each in some way echoes of earlier ideas that are not specifically Christian. These formulas stem from different sentiments toward scribal work, and scribes at one time or another might hold more to one or the other: they occasionally even juxtapose them in one colophon. The varieties of these two formulas in Syriac and Arabic, here given in some hitherto unpublished examples, although they are certainly literary *topoi*, still shed some light on scribes' views of their work and their product, reveal a little literary artistry in *variatio*, and show their carrying on of themes known from other traditions and languages. While authors will often remain at the fore in much of literary and manuscript studies, investigations like this one, with a focus on colophons rather than the dedicatedly transmitted texts and on formulaic rather than the more typical kinds of textual variants, give place to scribes and their own specific literary remnants, worthy of further study in their own right.

SYRIAC AND GARŠŪNĪ MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS CITED

These collections are all accessible through the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, which uses the following names for them:

CCM

Chaldean Cathedral of Mardin⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Made up of the Chaldean collections of Mardin and Diyarbakır, the early twentieth-century state of which will be seen in Addai Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés à l'archevêché chaldéen de Diarbékirk," *Journal asiatique* 10 (1907): 331–362, 385–431 and Addai Scher, "Notice des mss. syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque

CFMM	Church of the Forty Martyrs, Mardin
MACCK	Mar Addai Chaldean Church of Karmless
MGMT	Mor Gabriel Monastery, Midyat
SMMJ	Saint Mark's Monastery, Jerusalem
ZFRN	Dayr al-Za'farān, Mardin

de l'évêché chaldéen de Mardin," *Revue des bibliothèques* 18 (1908): 64–95. The combined collection now has in comparison a number of both additions and lacunae.