

Translation

O Son of God, whose door is open to whoever calls on him,  
open your door to me, so that I may sing of the beauty<sup>39</sup> of the children of  
light.

O good shepherd who chose lambs from the midst of his flock,  
and gathered them into the sheepfold on high to be with him.<sup>40</sup>  
Blessed is the farmer who selected the wheat from the tares 5  
and sowed them in the field of life, in the kingdom.

It is concerning the offspring of the leading men of Ephesus  
that I am to utter a discourse before (my) listeners.  
Give ear to me, labourers, and sing praise, O children of the bridal  
chamber.<sup>41</sup>

The emperor Decius set out from his place to another one 10  
to visit the towns and cities in his realm;  
he entered Ephesus and threw it into great commotion,  
making a festival to Zeus, Apollo and to Artemis too.  
He wrote a missive to the lords of his realm<sup>42</sup>

that everyone should come<sup>43</sup> and place incense before the gods. 15  
He assembled the leaders, old men<sup>44</sup> and infants, along with the children,  
and they placed incense for the deaf images, the work of (human) hands.  
Now there were there some dear boys, sons of leading men,  
who despised the order and did not subject themselves to it, like their  
companions.

They went in and hid themselves in the sheepfold of Jesus<sup>45</sup> 20  
so that the unclean smell of impure incense should not ascend for them.<sup>46</sup>  
Their companions saw,<sup>47</sup> and denounced them in the emperor's presence:  
"There are some boys here who have rebelled against your order."  
The emperor listened and was clothed in anger<sup>48</sup> against the innocent.

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<sup>39</sup> B tale.

<sup>40</sup> B and protected them in a sheepfold of love and of faith.

<sup>41</sup> B (with an extra line) children of the bridal chamber, become workers for me so that I  
may sing praise to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who has crowned them.

<sup>42</sup> B omits the line.

<sup>43</sup> B bring; B adds a line: and whoever does not come I will cut up limb by limb.

<sup>44</sup> B nobles.

<sup>45</sup> B They fled and took refuge in the sheepfold of the Lord, and hid themselves there.

<sup>46</sup> B so that they would not have to put choice incense before the gods.

<sup>47</sup> B heard.

<sup>48</sup> B The emperor's anger went up like smoke.

The emperor gave orders that the boys be brought, for him to see them. 25  
The wolves rushed off and grabbed the lambs from the midst of the sheep,  
bringing them in haste to the emperor's presence.

The emperor saw how admirable were their persons  
and he spoke to them with blandishments,<sup>49</sup> saying,  
"Tell me, boys, why have you transgressed<sup>50</sup> my orders? 30  
Come along and sacrifice, and I will make you leaders."<sup>51</sup>

The son of the hyparchos opened his mouth, along with his seven  
companions,

"We will not worship deaf images, the work of (human) hands:  
we have the Lord of heaven, and he will assist us.  
It is him that we worship, and to him do we offer the purity of our hearts. 35  
You have as king Zeus and Apollo, along with Artemis,  
but we have as King Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>52</sup>

The emperor gave orders and they beat them with rods.<sup>53</sup>  
He gave orders again, "Leave them until I come";  
for he was in a hurry to visit the towns and the cities 40  
and (then) to return back to Ephesus with this intention.<sup>54</sup>  
(So) the emperor departed from Ephesus on his business.<sup>55</sup>

The dear boys deliberated among themselves,  
"Let us leave and escape from this town of Ephesus  
before the accursed emperor comes to judge us."<sup>56</sup> 45

There was there a rock cave on the top of the mountain  
and the dear boys decided to hide there.  
They took with them some of their parents' money  
so that it might serve them (both) as an accusation and as a source of pride.  
They did not take with them choice clothing or fineries.<sup>57</sup> 50  
It was some of the coinage of the pagan emperors that they took with them,

<sup>49</sup> B in haste.

<sup>50</sup> B despised; B adds a line: and you have not sacrificed in accordance with the law which my royalty has instructed.

<sup>51</sup> B adds a line: If you do not sacrifice, you shall die amid tortures in a bitter fashion.

<sup>52</sup> B adds two lines:

for he will deliver and save us from harm,  
the emperor heard, and his wrath went up like smoke.

<sup>53</sup> B adds a line: until they placed choice incense before the gods.

<sup>54</sup> B omits the line.

<sup>55</sup> B adds a line: to visit the towns and cities of his realm.

<sup>56</sup> B adds a line: and separate us from the harmony we embrace.

<sup>57</sup> B silks.

for whoever carries any of that coinage meets with accusation.

They ascended the mountain and went into the cave to spend the night there,

and they called upon the Lord with a plaintive voice, saying as follows:

"We beg you, good shepherd who has chosen his sheep,  
preserve your flock from that wolf who is thirsting for our blood." 55

The Lord saw the faith of the dear lambs  
and came to give a good reward as their recompense.

He took their spirits and raised them up above, to heaven,  
and left<sup>58</sup> a watcher to be guarding their limbs. 60

The emperor returned, entered Ephesus, and was asking,<sup>59</sup>  
"Where are the boys who rebelled against the commandment?"<sup>60</sup>

In answer they told him, "They are hidden in a cave at the top of the mountain".

The tyrant<sup>61</sup> emperor thought he would make them die there;  
he gave orders once more, and along came craftsmen with their skills. 65

They cut stones with skill and placed them against the entrance.

There were there two sophists,<sup>62</sup> sons of the leading men,  
and they reckoned that the Lord would resurrect them,  
so they made tablets of lead and placed them beside them;  
on them they wrote down the names of the children of light,<sup>63</sup> 70  
and why the young men had gone to hide in the cave,  
and at what time they had fled from the presence of the emperor Decius.<sup>64</sup>

The time of the pagan emperors and their rule passed away,  
and the Lord wished to arouse<sup>65</sup> these children of light.  
There was there in Ephesus a wealthy man 75  
who wanted to build a fold for his sheep at the top of the mountain.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> B sent down.

<sup>59</sup> B adds two lines:

"Come, boys who have dared to transgress the commandment."

He seized their parents and whipped them.

<sup>60</sup> B "Bring me the boys who have transgressed my commandments."

<sup>61</sup> B accused.

<sup>62</sup> B wise men.

<sup>63</sup> B their names and their deeds.

<sup>64</sup> Instead of 71-72 B has:

And after a time the years of the pagan emperor passed away  
and wrath abated and there was peace for the whole world.

<sup>65</sup> B resurrect.

<sup>66</sup> B adds a line: this too having been devised by God.

He gathered stones and built the fold for his sheep there,  
and he saw the cut stones and tore them down:  
the light entered in and awoke the children of light.  
They shook off sleep and sat up on the ground – a wonder to tell.<sup>67</sup> 80  
The dear boys deliberated amongst themselves,  
“Who will go down and see if the emperor has come,  
and (so) we will learn and see what he has ordered concerning us.  
Let him go down and show us whether he has required us or not.”<sup>68</sup>  
There was there one of them whose name was Iamlikha; 85  
he said, “I will go down and I will find out;  
I will go into the palace as a poor person  
and learn and see what he has commanded concerning us.”  
They answered him and said, “Take some small change and bring back  
some bread:  
ever since evening we have been short of bread, and we have not had a 90  
meal.”  
The boy dashed down from the top of the mountain and reached the city.  
He called on the Lord with a plaintive voice, saying as follows:  
“I beg of you, good shepherd who has chosen his sheep,  
guard your flock<sup>69</sup> from that wolf who thirsts after our blood.”  
He lifted up his gaze and saw a cross above the gate; 95  
he bowed his head in veneration before it, feelingly.<sup>70</sup>  
He began to look round, in case any of the pagans had seen him;  
he began to say in his mind, “What is this?”<sup>71</sup>  
In the evening the cross was hidden from pagan eyes,  
but here it is today, openly placed above the gate!”<sup>72</sup> 100  
The boy turned back to go and enter by another gate;  
he lifted up his gaze and saw a cross above the gate.  
He began to say, “I have gone completely mad, and I am crazy:

<sup>67</sup> B altogether; B then adds a line: and they were praising the Lord of the heights who had awoken them.

<sup>68</sup> Instead of 83-84 B has:

What is he commanding concerning us, or devising,  
for ever since yesterday he has been menacing and threatening to whip us.

<sup>69</sup> B my innocence.

<sup>70</sup> B with penitence.

<sup>71</sup> Instead of 97-98 B has:

That disciple was thinking in his mind

“What is this, that a cross is fixed above the gate?”

<sup>72</sup> B but here today the cross of the Son is openly placed.

is this not Ephesus, the city where I was brought up?"<sup>73</sup>  
He saw a man sitting<sup>74</sup> in the street; he approached him and asked, 105  
"Tell me, sir,<sup>75</sup> this city – what is it?"  
The man said, "This city is named Ephesus."  
And he was wondering in his mind what had happened to him.  
The boy ran among the streets, unperturbed;<sup>76</sup>  
he arrived at the palace, and saw its door closed in front of him.<sup>77</sup> 110  
He went out to the street to buy some bread to take it (back) with him;<sup>78</sup>  
he took out and produced some of the small change he had in his purse.  
The man who was selling took it and examined it;  
he gave it to his companion, so that his [companion] too might examine it.  
The small change passed through the hands of five people as they 115  
examined it,  
[and they began] whispering amongst themselves over it.  
The boy saw that they were whispering and he answered and said,<sup>79</sup>  
"Give me some bread if you are going to give me any; otherwise I am off."  
The man who was selling came up and grabbed the boy.<sup>80</sup>  
"Tell me, boy, where are you from, and what is your country? 120  
As for the treasure you have found, let us be sharers with you in it;  
if you do not reveal it to me, I will hand you over to the law-court."<sup>81</sup>  
The boy said, "This is not at all the case, it is not true:  
I have never seen any treasure, or been aware of any."<sup>82</sup>  
Gossip fell on all the streets of the Ephesians 125  
that a boy has found some treasure; and they immediately grabbed hold  
of him.

<sup>73</sup> B where I was born?"; B adds a line: While that child was standing and wondering.

<sup>74</sup> B a boy passing by.

<sup>75</sup> B boy.

<sup>76</sup> B wondering.

<sup>77</sup> B adds two lines:

He was thinking, "What is this unusual thing",  
seeing that the gates of this blood-thirsty lioness are closed?

<sup>78</sup> B adds a line: and bring to his companions all the signs his eyes had seen.

<sup>79</sup> Instead of 116-118 B has:

and they were thinking as follows amongst themselves:  
"This man has found some treasure and is keeping it to himself.  
Come, let us question him gently between ourselves and him."  
But the child was saying, feeling sorry.

<sup>80</sup> B But the person selling turned round and questions him.

<sup>81</sup> B lest the whole city becomes aware and it slips away from you.

<sup>82</sup> B There is no treasure that has been found, as you are saying.

Word entered the holy church, reaching the bishop;  
he sent and snatched him from their hands; he asks him,<sup>83</sup>  
"Tell me, boy, where are you from, and what is your country?  
What is your family, and where is the treasure they are saying you have 130  
found?"<sup>84</sup>

The boy said, "I am from Ephesus;  
I am the son of Rufus, the elect,<sup>85</sup> one of the leading men."  
Iamlikha<sup>86</sup> began looking around all the crowd  
in case he might see one of his family or relations,  
or one of his friends and neighbours and acquaintances,<sup>87</sup> 135  
so that he might summon his father to come and snatch him from their hands;  
but he did not see any of his family or relations:  
tears welled up in his eyes, and he began to cry.<sup>88</sup>

There was there a sophist in the holy church  
who took hold of the boy and questioned him discerningly: 140  
"Tell me the truth, boy; why should you die?  
Disclose and explain to me where you are from, and do not hide it from me."<sup>89</sup>  
The boy said, "I will show you the truth,  
(but) do you reveal and show to me what I should say to you truly."<sup>90</sup>  
He went on and said, "Where is the emperor Decius? 145

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<sup>83</sup> B took him off quickly from their hands.

<sup>84</sup> Instead of 131 B has:

The boy imagined that the pagan emperor had sent to bring him,  
to take him to the palace to be whipped there.  
He was unaware that the Lord, Christ, was with him,  
and was bringing him into the church so that he might renowned there.  
The child had never seen a church building,  
and he began looking around at the furnishing of the house of God.  
There was there in the holy church a wise man:  
he sent and took him aside, questioning him gently:  
"Tell me, boy, who are you, and what is your country?"

<sup>85</sup> B a prince.

<sup>86</sup> B The child.

<sup>87</sup> B omits the line.

<sup>88</sup> B adds four lines:

The Lord saw that he was greatly saddened because of him,  
and he called David to come and comfort him.

David says, "What is up, man, why are you sad? (Ps 43:5)

Come close and speak with me in righteousness, and do not be sad."

<sup>89</sup> B up to now you have been uttering all sorts of excuses.

<sup>90</sup> B (but) reveal to me what you are wanting, and explain what I should tell you.

Then I will reveal to you concerning the affair."<sup>91</sup>  
The sophist heard; a gasp seized him as he wondered greatly<sup>92</sup>  
at that youth who was showing forth deep matters.  
He bent his fingers and stretched them as he spoke with him,  
"Crazy idiot, you deserve to die for mocking me; 150  
I can see that you are about twelve<sup>93</sup> years old,  
and the person you are talking about was a great long time ago.  
By the reckoning and accounting among the Greek  
the emperor (would be?) 372 years (old)!"<sup>94</sup>

The boy said, "It was from him that I and my companions ran away; 155  
we went to sleep at the top of the mountain,"<sup>95</sup> I and my seven companions."

The head men and elders, the nobles and youths, gathered  
to go up and see the living treasure that had been revealed to them.<sup>96</sup>  
Talk went out in all the district of the Ephesians:  
"Come and see this treasure that has been revealed to us."<sup>97</sup> 160

The youths in the cave heard, and trembled in fright  
supposing that the emperor had sent to take them off.<sup>98</sup>  
The son of the hyparchos encouraged them, saying as follows:  
"Stand up and take courage; put on the armour of faith,  
and we will rely on God, for it is he who assists us, 165  
giving us strength and guiding us according to his will."<sup>99</sup>

While he was encouraging<sup>100</sup> them, the boy entered and stood beside them,  
and the bishop, and the leaders too, entered with him.  
They saw the boys sitting on the ground;<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> B omits the line.

<sup>92</sup> B heard the boy mentioning the name of Decius. (B omits the next line, 148).

<sup>93</sup> B fifteen.

<sup>94</sup> B Decius...350.

<sup>95</sup> B we went up and hid in a cave. B then adds five lines:

He made a festival to Zeus, Apollo and Artemis,

and in order not to sacrifice we ran away from him and hid.

I left my companions in the cave and it was I who came down.

Word went out through all the region of the Ephesians.

"A living treasure has been revealed to us at the top of the mountain!" (cf. lines 159-160).

<sup>96</sup> B treasure at the top of the mountain.

<sup>97</sup> B omits 159-160 (but see n. 58).

<sup>98</sup> B to destroy them.

<sup>99</sup> B omits 165-166.

<sup>100</sup> B speaking to.

<sup>101</sup> B and he found inside the cave the fine sheep.

they<sup>102</sup> greeted them saying, "Peace be with you".

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And straightway they wrote a missive to the emperor Theodosius:<sup>103</sup>  
"Come, my lord, and see a living treasure that has been revealed to us."

The emperor made haste and came down and saw them;<sup>104</sup>

he greeted them, saying 'Peace be with you'.

He took the lead tablet and began to read

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(the reason) why the youths had gone into the cave to hide.<sup>105</sup>

Theodosius the emperor urged them to come down with him

in the midst of Ephesus, and he would build a shrine over their bodies.<sup>106</sup>

They say in reply, "Here we shall be, for here we love;

the shepherd who chose us is the one who bade us be here.<sup>107</sup>

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For your sake has Christ our Lord awoken us

so that you might see and hold firm that the resurrection truly exists."<sup>108</sup>

He took a mantle (with which) he was covered, and covered them up;

and he left them, and they slept the sleep of repose.

Blessed is the shepherd who chose the lambs from his sheep

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and caused them to inherit the bridal chamber, the garden and the kingdom  
on high.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> B he. B then adds two lines:

He took hold of the tablet of bronze that was with them  
and read for himself their names and their deeds.

<sup>103</sup> B He wrote a missive to Theodosius quickly.

<sup>104</sup> B came down quickly. B then adds two lines:

to see the treasure that had been revealed at the top of the mountain.

The emperor went in and found them inside the cave.

<sup>105</sup> B and read on it their names and their deeds.

<sup>106</sup> Instead of 177-178 B has:

He urged them to come down with him to Ephesus,  
and he would build a shrine over their bodies in truth.

<sup>107</sup> Instead of 179-180 B has:

They say in reply, "Here it has pleased the Lord who has chosen us,  
and he has commanded that we should be here in the cave."

<sup>108</sup> B omits 181-182.

<sup>109</sup> Instead of 185-186 B has:

Blessed is the Lord who chose his sheep from his flock  
and caused them to inherit the bridal chamber of life in the kingdom;  
and to him be glory, and us his compassion at all times.

For the eschatological "bridal chamber", see my "The bridal chamber of light: a distinctive feature of the Syriac liturgical tradition", *The Harp* 18 (2005) 179-191.