



"On April - to the Praise of its Creator" | "ܠܗ ܝܫܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ"

Text Information

Author | Bar 'Ebroyo

Language | Syriac

Period | 13th Century

Genre | Devotional poetry

Source | Bar 'Ebroyo. *Bar Hebraeus's Mush'hotho Book*. Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian, 1983.

Collection | Prayer, Spirituality, and Life after Death: Global Medieval Perspectives

URL | https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/bar_ebroyo_on_april/

Transcription, translation and introduction by Patrick Conlin

Introduction to the Text

This poem by Maphrian Mor Gregorios Bar 'Ebroyo (1226-1286) is from a collection of his poems (**mush'hotho**) compiled by Mor Philoxenos Yuhanon Dolabani in 1929 and republished by the Mor Ephrem Monastery in Glane, Holland in 1983. Bar 'Ebroyo (also latinized as Bar Hebraeus) was a prolific author who wrote on topics ranging from astronomy, medicine, theology, poetry, grammar, canon law, and more. He wrote in Arabic and Syriac and **many of works** are translations of earlier Arabic works, or at least rely heavily upon such works. As maphrian, Bar 'Ebroyo oversaw the eastern half of the Syriac Orthodox Church, with his seat being in the Mor Matay Monastery, near Mosul, Iraq. This office was second only to the patriarch of Antioch, although in function the two were largely equal.

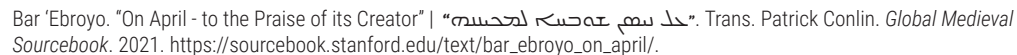
The title of this poem implies that the month of April (**nisan**, in Syriac) is the subject of the author's praise, yet the rose is really the recipient of the panegyric. The author seems to be alluding to the popular Arabic genre of the disputation poem, where two or more inanimate objects, animals, or even abstract concepts are anthropomorphized and debate their qualities. The rose and narcissus (daffodil) flowers were common interlocutors in such poems. In this poem, the rose is heralded as the most beautiful of all **flowers**, but is scolded by the narrator because it allows its beauty to be plucked and used by disreputable people. The Syriac text uses a 12-syllable meter with stanzas of four lines.

Introduction to the Source

Bar 'Ebroyo's poetry is largely undated, and relatively little has been written about it, although he wrote over 300 poems on topics as diverse as those found in his prose corpus. His poetry exists in several manuscripts, but there has been no critical edition published that includes **an apparatus** and discussion of the manuscripts. Two collections have been published, the one I have used for this poem (Dolabani) and an earlier one by Augustinus Scebabi (1877). In Dolabani's collection, the poems are grouped by subject, and this poem is the first a section that focuses on the theme of nature.

About this Edition

I have maintained the lines and stanzas in this **poem**, but did not follow the meter in order to better follow the literal meaning of the Syriac. The original Syriac is also rhymed, but this was not maintained either. I have translated the month **nisan** into **April**, rather than transliterating it for the sake of clarity, although it may not have exactly corresponded to the modern Gregorian month.



Bar 'Ebroyo. **Bar Hebraeus's Mush'hotho Book.** Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian, 1983.

- Bar 'Ebroyo, Gregorius Abū Al-Faraġ, and Augustin Scebabi. **Gregorii Bar-Hebraei carmina a patre Augustino Scebabi monaco maronita libanensi aleppensi correcta, ac ab eodem lexicon adjunctum.** Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1877.

- Heinrichs, Wolfhart. "Rose versus Narcissus: Observations on an Arabic Literary Debate." *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East: Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures*, edited by G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout. Peeters, 1991, pp. 179-198.

- Takahashi, Hidemi. **Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography.** Gorgias Press, 2013.

- *This is a thorough biography of the author with an exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary sources.*

Takahashi, Hidemi. "The Poems of Barhebraeus: A Preliminary Concordance." *Khristianskiĭ Vostok* 6, no. 7, 2013, pp. 78–139.

- *Further discussion of Bar 'Ebroyo's poetry with a list of major manuscripts.*

Taylor, C., "The Dirge of Coheleth." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 4, no. 4, July 1892, pp. 533-549.

- This is a discussion on the biblical book of **Ecclesiastes**, but contains a translation of the first two stanzas of this poem, in relation to the word תֵּיטְקוּס (tēyṭkūs, "cicada"). To my knowledge, this is the only other English translation of this poem.



"On April - to the Praise of its Creator" | "חד ספם עהכס לחכסם"

Behold, April has arrived and has given refreshment to those who grieve
 And in glory has clothed mountain and pasture with flowers
 At the wedding feast of the rose, it invited, indeed, gathered blossoms as guests
 And prepared the way for the bridegroom to leave the bridal chamber.

מִכְּמָלָא נִבְּשׁ הָלַכְתֶּם כִּי נִפְּדָה:
 וְכִמְכֹּתָ לְהוֹרֵא הָרִבָּא עֵשֶׂה כְּלָד.
 בַּלֵּל הָרִבָּא לְפִנֵּיתָ אֲתִישׁ מִזָּא רֹא חַיִּת:
 וְרִבְתָּ לְעֵשֶׂה נִפְסֵם שְׂמֵחַ אֲרֻסֵּי הָרִבָּא.

Blossoms of the field are adorned like beautiful brides
 And they have attained freedom from the iron bands of winter's fierceness
 Behold, the tongue of the cicada has been loosened and it ever sings
 And, on the seat of the narcissus and the myrtle, twitters to the rose.

5

וְהִשְׁחִיחַ חֲלָהָ מִכִּי לְבַחֲהָ פִּקֵּשׁ הָרִבָּא:
 וְכִי מִלִּיתָּ הִשְׁחִיחַ וְהִשְׁחִיחַ מִנֵּה שִׁוְרָא.
 מִכִּי רִעַח, לֹא לִי לְבַחֲהָ מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי:
 וְחָל כְּמָלָא הִנֵּס מִרְסֵּה לְהוֹרֵא מִנִּיזָא.

O! the lilies look like brides from their bed-chambers
 He is adorned and he goes out, indeed, he bears himself grandly in colorful beauty
 O! It is madness to the cicada – the love of the lilies
 His chirping is poetry to the rose in the midst of the garden.

10

מִכִּי עֲשִׂיתָ וְהִשְׁחִיחַ חֲלָהָ כִּי מִלִּיתָ:
 מִיִּכְחֵם נִפְסֵם רֹא וְכִי לְבַחֲהָ מִנֵּה הָרִבָּא.
 מִכִּי עֲשִׂיתָ מִרְסֵּה לֹא לְבַחֲהָ מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי:
 וְכִי פִקֵּשׁ לְבַחֲהָ מִנִּיזָא לְהוֹרֵא מִיִּכְחֵם.

The time when the rose is new is brief
 It prefers to be destroyed, and will appear to rest amidst the garden
 Then it sees the house of stalls when it is spread out
 And it lays itself down among the gluttons like a prostitute.

15

אֲכִיל וְחֵרָא בֵּי אֲרֻסֵּי, מִכִּי הָרִבָּא נִשְׁחִיחַ:
 כִּי תִשְׁחִיחַ וְכִי תִשְׁחִיחַ כִּי חֵם לְבַחֲהָ.
 מִכִּי שִׁוְרָא מִכִּי תִשְׁחִיחַ כִּי תִשְׁחִיחַ:
 וְכִי נִפְסֵם חָל אֲרֻסֵּי כִּי אֲרֻסֵּי.

I said to the rose, "Why will you be in the hand and on the bosom
 Of every prodigal, and indeed, wanton, greedy drunkard?"
 "Pooh to you!" answered the rose, and it ceased and drew back from my uproar
 They who are companions of thorns are reduced to dust and brought to Sheol.

20

לְהוֹרֵא רִעַח וְלִמְדָּה אֲרֻסֵּי בֵּי אֲרֻסֵּי:
 וְכִי אֲרֻסֵּי רֹא וְכִי אֲרֻסֵּי לְבַחֲהָ.
 וְכִי פִקֵּשׁ לְבַחֲהָ לֹא לְבַחֲהָ מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי:
 וְכִי לְבַחֲהָ מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי.

I said to the rose, "Why are you unrestrained in the appearance of licentiousness?
 Why not reject your comely beauty in the harsh time?"
 The rose answered, "Be a preacher to yourself,
 The banquet of thorns is better to me than to become strung together."

לְהוֹרֵא רִעַח לְבַחֲהָ אֲרֻסֵּי כִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי:
 לְבַחֲהָ לֹא לְבַחֲהָ מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי כִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי.
 וְכִי פִקֵּשׁ לְבַחֲהָ אֲרֻסֵּי, חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי:
 וְכִי לֹא פִקֵּשׁ כִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי מִכִּי חֵם אֲרֻסֵּי.



I reprimanded the rose, "Why do you give yourself to any man?"
 And he who is like a mad drunkard in the bosom every time you are new?"
 The rose answered, "My life is short and of little value,
 Why should its elegance and beauty flee when it is gathered?"

To the rose, I said, "When your gardener gathers you
 And you gore him with a thorn, he will not forgive, and you will be **snatched**"
 And the rose answered, "I thought to myself, he would have learned this:
 His ugly companion will be renewed by my loveliness."

To the rose I said, "When the gardener wants to prune you
 Interiorly, and you poke him, you will be **snatched** and not **forgiven**
 And the rose answered, "Concerning my mouth, you open it and I will kiss
 The hand of all who will remove me from the thornbush."

The rose succumbs to the praises of every rhetor
Even those who will fill up with myriad senseless songs
All blossoms are like laborers and he a curator
Even lilies are laborers and he alone is the emperor.

Colossian roses are conquered by every tongue
 Because magnificent lilies are obtained as a gift by charmers
 All blossoms are like laborers and he is the ruler
 Every brightness is accidental and his is essential.

O! Is the rose not distinguished above Syrian rue?
 And are not the lilies' old splendors hated by beautiful ones?
 All blossoms are servants while he is noble
 And to him they bow, every single day like to the Lord.

Come, see in the rose the image of a baby inside swaddling clothes
 And in the rest of the other lilies are old splendors

25 לְהַזְכִּירָא מַעֲשֵׂה דְלִילִי נִפְתִּי לְחַד אִנְשָׁא:
 וְאִי אִנְשָׁא דְהָוָה כְּהָוָה לִי חַד מְלָא.
 הָוָה אָמַר דְּחַיִּי בְּסֵה הָוָה מָה אֲנִי:
 לִילִי אִתְּפִלָּה דְלִפְתָּא מִהָוָה אִתְּפִלָּה.

30 לְהַזְכִּירָא אִתְּפִלָּה חַד לִילִי מִהָוָה:
 דְּהָוָה, כְּהָוָה הָוָה אִתְּפִלָּה מִי לִי מִהָוָה.
 הָוָה אָמַר דְּחַיִּי אִתְּפִלָּה, מָה אֲנִי:
 דְּלִפְתָּא, מִי כְּהָוָה מִהָוָה אִתְּפִלָּה.

35 לְהַזְכִּירָא אִתְּפִלָּה חַד לִילִי מִי דְחַיִּי נִפְתִּי:
 כְּהָוָה דְּהָוָה, דְּהָוָה מִי לִי אִתְּפִלָּה.
 הָוָה אָמַר דְּחַיִּי מִי מִהָוָה אִתְּפִלָּה:
 אִתְּפִלָּה חַד אִתְּפִלָּה מִי כְּהָוָה מִהָוָה אִתְּפִלָּה.

40 מִי מִהָוָה הָוָה מִי מִי חַד דְּחַיִּי:
 דְּחַיִּי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 חַיִּי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 אִתְּפִלָּה מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי.

מִי מִהָוָה הָוָה מִי מִי חַד לִילִי:
 דְּחַיִּי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 חַיִּי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 חַיִּי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי.

45 אִתְּפִלָּה מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 חַיִּי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי.

50 אִתְּפִלָּה מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:
 מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי מִי:



But they are all made to serve, working for freeborn sons.
 That is to say, he alone is Lord and the blossoms are bound to him.

כֹּלֵךְ חֲלֹמֶה עֲבָדֶה. פֻּלְשֵׁם לִי כִּי שָׂדֵךְ:
 דְּמִתְבָּה כְּלִשְׁתֵּי דְּמָרָא דְּפֻשְׁתָּא לִי אֶשְׁתֵּךְ.✧

O discerning one, come be bright in this bridal chamber
 Which has no equal in beauty and elegance of scent and color
 Consider the roses of the entrance which are clothed in a linen tunic
 In the midst of blossoms undivided, that is to say, married.

אֵה פִּזְרֵיךְ אֵה אֶרְחֻבֵךְ כְּמוֹתֵי יֵשׁוּבֵי:
 דְּלִיבָא לִי פֻשְׁתָּא חֲפֻצָּהּ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ דְּרִישׁ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ.
 55 כְּהֹרֵךְ אֶרְיָה דְּחַתְלִיבָא דְּחֵלֶם חֲסִידָא:
 חֲסִידָא פֻשְׁתָּא אֶלֶּה אֶרְחֻבֵךְ דְּמִתְבָּה שְׂדֵךְ.✧

All of the blossoms are as if stripped bare, and the rose, a nobleman
 The lilies are all like invited guests and the rose is married
 All flashes are like lights and the rose is the eye
 And the only one that surpasses them in brilliance is the rose.

חֲלֹמֶה פֻּשְׁתָּא אֶרְיָה שֻׁפְתֵּיךְ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ כְּהֹרֵךְ:
 אֶרְעֵתְךָ חֲלֹמֶה אֶשְׁתָּא אֶרְחֻבֵךְ שְׂדֵךְ.
 60 חֲלֹמֶה אֶמְרָא אֶרְיָה נִשְׁתָּא אֶרְחֻבֵךְ חֲסִידָא:
 אֶרְחֻבֵךְ חֲסִידָא דְּמִתְבָּה אֶרְחֻבֵךְ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ.✧

With every flash, the rose alone has a banner
 Although it will be from drunkards in an evil banquet
 The rose tramples on all blossoms in the image of a foot
 And its own beauty is unique and theirs are bastardized.

חֲלֹמֶה אֶמְרָא דְּרִישׁ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ, נִשְׁתָּא:
 אֶרְעֵתְךָ נִשְׁתָּא חֲסִידָא חֲפֻצָּהּ דְּרִישׁ.
 חֲלֹמֶה פֻּשְׁתָּא כְּהֹרֵךְ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ דְּרִישׁ:
 אֶרְחֻבֵךְ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ דְּרִישׁ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ.✧

The rose is desirable above every living king and lowly one
 Because, concerning blossoms, they are all laborers compared to the king
 All of their flashes are made to kneel to it alone
 And they who draw near to it receive gifts of glory from the king.

דְּרִישׁ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ אֶלֶּה אֶרְחֻבֵךְ אֶרְחֻבֵךְ:
 65 כִּי אֶלֶּה פֻּשְׁתָּא חֲלֹמֶה פֻּלְשֵׁם מִתְבָּה אֶרְחֻבֵךְ.
 חֲלֹמֶה אֶמְרָא לִי כְּלִשְׁתֵּי דְּמִתְבָּה, חֲסִידָא:
 אֶרְחֻבֵךְ חֲסִידָא לִי אֶרְחֻבֵךְ דְּמִתְבָּה אֶרְחֻבֵךְ.✧