



"On April - to the Praise of its Creator" | "ܐܕ ܡܝ ܥܠܡܐ ܠܡܨܠܐ"

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 his 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 have not preserved the meter, so as to better follow the literal meaning of the Syriac. The original Syriac is rhymed, but this was not preserved 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 Scebabī. *Gregorii Bar-Hebraei carmina a patre Augustino Scebabī monaco maronita libanensi aleppensi correctā, 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.

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

- 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 ṭēyṭkūs (tēyṭkūs, "cicada"). To my knowledge, this is the only other English translation of this poem.



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.

מִכְלָלָא נִבְרָא הָלֵכְתֶּם בַּכָּהֲנִים:
 הַכֹּהֲנִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֶחָד אֲלֵהֶם.
 שְׁלַל הָיָה לְפָנֶיךָ אֶתְּשֶׁה מִזֶּה אֶף חַיִּים:
 הָיָה לְפָנֶיךָ תִּפְסֶה שְׁלָל אֲהַיְשֶׁה הָיָה:

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.

אֲנִי חָתָם כֶּסֶף כִּי אֶפְקֹד וְכִי אֶחְסֶה
 וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר
 וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר
 וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר וְכִי אֶשְׁמֹר

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. 10
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.

מִן אֲדָמָה וְעַד אֲדָמָה חַיִּים הָיוּ מְשֻׁבָּתִים:
 מִיָּדָם יִפְסֵם אֶפְרַיִם וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִלְעָדָם.
 מִן אֲשֶׁל מִדָּה לִּי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כִּסֵּב אֶת־עֵינָיו:
 וְהָיָה אֶת־בְּלִיָּה מִיָּדָה לִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל חַיִּים הָיוּ מְשֻׁבָּתִים:

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.

[illegible]

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

לְהִזָּק כְּמִזְחָה וְלִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּיָדָא חֲסִידָא:
 הָיָה כְּשֶׁהָיָה אֶפְרָיִם וְהָיָה יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחָד.
 וְהָיָה קִרְיָת שַׁלּוּחַ לִי וְעִיר אֶלֶף מֵאוֹת:
 וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִזְחָה וְכָל הַיָּדָא חֲסִידָא:

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."

לֹא־זֶה אֲמַנְתְּ לָנוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־נִשְׁמָרָה׃
לָנוּ לֹא אֲמַנְתְּ עַד־עַתָּה כִּי־נִשְׁמָרָה חַיֵּינוּ׃
זֶה־כֵּן פֶּדֶי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכּוּף־חַיֵּינוּ׃
וְכֵן לֹא־פָדִינוּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיָּד־שׂוֹנְאֵינוּ׃



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?"

25

לֹא־זָרָא סִפְּשֵׁתָהּ הָלַחַי לְפָנַי לְחַל אִתְּהָאָהָ:
הֲכִי עֲשֵׂתָא דְּזָרָא חֲסֵדָא לִי חַל מְחַל.
דְּזָרָא פִּרְיָהּ דְּחַיָּהּ בְּסֵהּ הָאֵלֶּה מָא רָאָה:
לַחַי אֲהָפִלָּהּ הָלַחַי אֲהָפִלָּהּ מִפְּנֵי שִׁחַלִּי.

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."

30

לֹא־זָרָא אֲמַרְתָּהּ חַד לִנְפִי לִי מֵה סִפְּשֵׁתָהּ:
דְּסִפְּשֵׁתָהּ, חֲסֵדָא הִלָּךְ הָאֲבַחֲסִימִי, דְּלִי מִתְּאִשְׁלָה.
דְּזָרָא פִּרְיָהּ דְּחַיָּהּ אֲחִישְׁתָּהּ, מָא רָאָה:
דְּלִפְתָּהּ, חַד מִבְּחֵהּ מִתְּשִׁיבָהּ שִׁלָּה.

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."

35

לֹא־זָרָא אֲמַרְתָּהּ חַד לִנְפִי זָכָה דְּחַיָּהּ תְּפִשְׁמֵהּ:
חֲסֵדָא דְּסִפְּשֵׁתָהּ, דְּתִשְׁלָפִי מִי לִי אֲבַחֲסִימִי.
דְּזָרָא פִּרְיָהּ דְּחַיָּהּ חַד מָא רָאָה פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ דְּאֵשֶׁתִּי:
אֵת חַד אֲנִי דְּלִי חַד מִבְּחֵהּ דְּתִשְׁלָפִי תְּפִשְׁמֵהּ.

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.

40

חַד מִתְּפִשְׁתִּי דְּזָרָא שָׂכָה פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ חַד זִבְלָהּ:
הָאֵת תְּחַלֵּךְ חַד מִתְּפִשְׁתִּי זָכָה אֲבַחֲסִימִי.
חֲלִמֵהּ פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ אֲנִי פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ מִמֵּה סִפְּשֵׁתָהּ:
אֵת תְּפִשְׁתִּי פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ מִמֵּה לִשְׁתִּי אֲבַחֲסִימִי.

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.

45

אֵת פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ דְּלִמָּךְ הָאֵת לֹא־זָרָא זִבְלָהּ:
הִלָּחֲתָהּ מִתְּפִשְׁתִּי מִתְּפִשְׁתִּי סִפְּשֵׁתָהּ.
חֲלִמֵהּ פִּתְשֵׁתָהּ חֲתָהּ אֲנִי חֲתָהּ מִמֵּה שָׂכָה:
הִלָּחֲתָהּ מִתְּפִשְׁתִּי חֲלִמֵהּ חַד מִסִּי אֲנִי דְּלִמָּךְ.

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

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הָאֵת שָׂכָה לֹא־זָרָא חֲתָהּ חֲלִמֵהּ חֲלִמֵהּ:
הִלָּחֲתָהּ אֲבַחֲסִימִי דְּזָרָא מִתְּפִשְׁתִּי.



אֵלֶּכָּה חֵלְמִי חֶבְדִּי. פִּלְסִי לִי כֹּהֲנִי:
 דַּמַּמְבִּי כְּלִשְׁתִּי מִזֶּה מִפְּשָׁתִּי לִי אֶשְׁתִּי.

[illegible]

חָלַם וְפָקַד אֶת מִצְרָיִם וְעָלָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָאָרֶץ
 אֲשֶׁר עָלָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָאָרֶץ
 חָלַם וְעָלָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָאָרֶץ
 חָלַם וְעָלָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָאָרֶץ

חַלְמָה אִמְרָה דְּרִיבָה כְּלִסָּה אֶחָדָה, לֵבָי:
 אֶחָד נִמְסָה בְּרִיבָה חֲפִיבָה דְּנָה.
 חַלְמָה חֲפִיבָה בְּרִיבָה דְּנָה רִיבָה:
 דְּנָה חֲפִיבָה דְּנָה חֲפִיבָה.

65 זָבִיב מִדְּהָרָה לָּא חָד יִפְתָּא מַלְכָּא אִמְכָּא:
 דָּה לָּא פִּקְסָא חֲלִמָּה פִּלְשָׁא מִיָּבֵה מַלְכָּא.
 חֲלִמָּה אִמְרָא לֹא חֲלִסֵּה דְּהָמָה, מְסִיחָא בְּהָרָא:
 אֲרִיסָא בִּי לֹא דִּינָא דִּי־עֲסִיבָא נִסְכָּא מַלְכָּא.✽