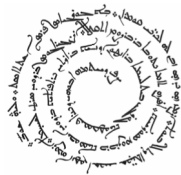


Cyrrilona



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Cyrillona

A Critical Study and Commentary

Carl Griffin

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To Tani and Tasha

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL

ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> (ed. Roberts and Donaldson)
BHG	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca
C	Codex Curetonianus
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CPG	Clavis Patrum Graecorum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
Diat.	Diatessaron
MT	Masoretic Text
OS	Old Syriac
Pesh.	Peshitta
PG	Patrologia Graeca
S	Codex Palimpsestus Sinaiticus
Syr.	Syriac
Targ.	Targum
TS	<i>Thesaurus Syriacus</i> (ed. Payne Smith)

WORKS OF CYRILLONA

<i>Euch.</i>	<i>On the Institution of the Eucharist</i>
<i>Wash.</i>	<i>On the Washing of the Feet</i>
<i>Pasch</i>	<i>On the Pasch of Our Lord</i>
<i>Scourges</i>	<i>On the Scourges</i>
<i>Zacch.</i>	<i>On Zacchaens</i>

WORKS OF EPHREM THE SYRIAN

- Arm.* *Armenian Hymns* (ed. Mariès and Mercier, *Hymnes conservées en version arménienne*)
- Azym.* *Hymns on the Unleavened Bread* (ed. Beck, *Paschahymnen*)
- Cruc.* *Hymns on the Crucifixion* (ed. Beck, *Paschahymnen*)
- Diat.* *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (ed. Leloir, *Commentaire de l'Évangile*, 1963 and 1990)
- Dom. Nost.* *Sermon on Our Lord* (ed. Beck, *Sermo de Domino Nostro*)
- EccI.* *Hymns on the Church* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Ecclesia*)
- Epiph.* *Hymns on Epiphany* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Nativitate*)
- HFid.* *Hymns on Faith* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Fide*)
- Haer.* *Hymns against Heresies* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen contra Haereses*)
- Ieiun.* *Hymns on the Fast* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Ieiunio*)
- Nat.* *Hymns on the Nativity* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Nativitate*)
- Nic.* *Hymns on Nicomedia* (ed. Renoux, *Mémre sur Nicomédie*)
- Nis.* *Hymns on Nisibis* (ed. Beck, *Carmina Nisibena*, 1961 and 1963)
- Par.* *Hymns on Paradise* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*)
- Pub.* *Letter to Publius* (ed. Brock, “Ephrem’s Letter to Publius”)
- Res.* *Hymns on the Resurrection* (ed. Beck, *Paschahymnen*)
- Serm.* *Sermones* (ed. Beck, *Sermones I-IV*)
- Virg.* *Hymns on Virginity* (ed. Beck, *Hymnen de Virginitate*)

OTHER SYRIAC TEXTS

- Dem.* *Aphrahat, Demonstrations* (ed. Parisot, *Aphraatis*)
- Heb. Sanc.* *Ps. Ephrem, Sermons on Holy Week* (ed. Beck, *Sermones in Hebdomadam Sanctam*)
- Mens.* *Ps. Ephrem, Sermons on the Blessing of the Table* (ed. Mariès, Froman and Graffin, “Mimré de Saint Éphrem”)
- Sogh.* *Soghyatha* (ed. Brock, *Soghyatha mgabyatha*)
- Wheat* *On the Grain of Wheat* (ed. Griffin, “Cyrillona”)

CHAPTER ONE

CYRILLONA: THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS

INTRODUCTION

Syriac Christianity has been described as “essentially Semitic in its outlook and thought patterns.”¹ Like authors of the Hebrew Bible, early Syriac writers favored teaching theology through poetry, extravagant in symbolism and lavish in trope, and a stark contrast to the systematic and philosophical prose of the Greek East and Latin West. Because of this and other singular features, early Syriac Christianity has become of ever-increasing interest to church historians.

It is unfortunate that comparatively little early Syriac literature has been preserved. Most Syriac literature postdates the Council of Chalcedon (451), when theological controversy precipitated the split of the Syriac church into eastern and western communions, each of which developed its own literary tradition. Cyrillona and his works are in the same lamentable position as so much of early Syriac literature, which Lucas Van Rompay has well described:

Writings antedating the split [of the East and West Syrian churches, following Chalcedon,] and representing the common heritage of all Syrian Christians have in part been incorporated into one or both of the two later traditions. Others just happen to have been preserved, totally cut off from their original context, without any indication of when and where they originated. Many more have simply disappeared. And yet, it is

¹ Brock, “From Antagonism to Assimilation,” 17; see also Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 14–15.

this pre-fifth-century stage of Syriac culture, which is sometimes seen as “essentially semitic in its outlook and thought patterns” and less hellenized, which has such a strong appeal today. Judging by the titles, more than half of the papers read at the present symposium deal with this period. There is no common denominator for this early literature: it consists of individual authors and anonymous works, each with its own characteristics, with very few connections between them. Much of this period soon must have fallen into oblivion.²

Cyrrillona is precisely one of these valuable early authors, all but anonymous, whose surviving works are preserved by happenstance, severed from their original context, with evident merits but uncertain historical, literary, and theological connections.

Cyrrillona has been celebrated as one of the foremost early Syriac poets since almost the moment of his discovery by Western scholars in the mid-19th century. An important factor in establishing his high reputation was the publication of a translation of his works by the eminent German semitist Gustav Bickell in the popular series, *Bibliothek der Kirchenväter*.³ Bickell lavished upon Cyrrillona the highest of praise: “I consider him the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem.”⁴

In 1912 a reviser of Bickell’s translation, Simon Landersdorfer, would note Bickell’s praise, and while not disagreeing, was careful to specify that this was Bickell’s opinion.⁵ Nevertheless, Bickell’s superlative praise influenced many scholars of his generation, who at times repeated his declaration, in

² Van Rompay, “Past and Present Perceptions,” par. 9. The symposium he refers to, and the venue for his address, was the third Syriac Symposium, Notre Dame, 1999.

³ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 9–63.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14; translation mine, as are all translations of secondary literature throughout.

⁵ Landersdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 1, 8. Landersdorfer made only minimal changes to Bickell’s translation; in the following study I rarely find cause to cite his revision as an independent work.

substance or even verbatim, at times with attribution to Bickell or simply as their own opinion.⁶ Clearly many of these writers had no direct acquaintance with Cyrillona, but Syriac scholars have repeatedly affirmed his importance. Aphram Barsoum ranked Cyrillona among the highest tier of Syriac poets, “famous for their illuminating introductions, clear expression and exquisite style,” and found him in no way inferior to his predecessors.⁷ Murray regards him as the last great theological poet before Syriac poetry lapsed into “a monotonous and facile fluency which only a few writers of genius will transcend.”⁸

DISCOVERY AND PUBLICATION

The first publication of a text now attributed to Cyrillona appeared in fact under the name of Isaac of Antioch, a long excerpt from *On the Institution of the Eucharist*, published by Overbeck in 1865.⁹ While

⁶ E.g., Bardenhewer: “Bickell declared the author the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem” (*Geschichte*, 4:397); “Bickell described the author as the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem” (*Patrologie*, 342); Danglerd: “Cyrillona, whom the translator would consider the most important Syriac poet after St. Ephrem . . .” (“*Courrier allemand*,” 265); Hurter: “Moreover, the first of these [per Bickell] is the deacon Cyrillona; per the same critic, he is the foremost poet after St. Ephrem” (*Nomenclator*, 1:202–3); Kurtz: “Next to [Ephrem] stands Cyrillona” (*Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, 296); Leitner: “Cyrillona, the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem . . .” (*Gottesdienstliche Volksgesang*, 102); Nirschl: “Cyrillona may be looked up to as the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem” (*Lehrbuch*, 277); Rump: “Cyrillona, whom the translator considers as the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem . . .” (“*Neuere Publicationen*,” 138); Streber: “Of the six surviving hymns by this poet, who approaches Ephrem in grandeur and power . . .” (“*Cyrillonas*,” 1282).

⁷ Barsoum, *Scattered Pearls*, 36, 239–40.

⁸ Murray, *Symbols*, 340.

⁹ Overbeck, *Opera selecta*, 379–81 (= *Euch.* 95–238). I reference all works of Cyrillona according to the titles and title abbreviations I have assigned them. See the Table of Abbreviations above, and also the table of manuscript titles and incipits on pp. 8–9 below. In all cases my

the title of this text is given in the manuscript as simply **ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ**, without any authorial attribution,¹⁰ it is preceded there by twelve homilies which are explicitly attributed to Isaac (**ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ** or simply **ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ**). Overbeck made an understandable assumption concerning its authorship, one later made as well by Wright in his catalog.¹¹

In 1869 Gustav Bickell announced that there was in London a manuscript containing “a few poems” by a “heretofore entirely unknown Cyrillona,” one of which was a homily on the invasion of the Huns.¹² He speculated that this author was perhaps identical with Absamya, a nephew of Ephrem who was reported to have also composed “hymns and sermons on the invasion of the Huns.”¹³ Bickell further announced his intention to publish these poems together with those of Isaac of Antioch.¹⁴

In 1871 Bickell published a second notice concerning “three hymns of Cyrillona . . . transcribed by me,” from which he provided some short extracts in Latin translation of “some items pertaining to historical matters.”¹⁵ He again suggested the identity of Cyrillona

citations from Cyrillona, in Syriac or English translation, are taken from my own bilingual edition of his works (Griffin, *Works of Cyrillona*).

¹⁰ Overbeck gives the title as **ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ** (“From a *mimro* On the Crucifixion by Mar Isaac”), but this is an editorial expansion. He does, however, correctly observe of the heading to this section, **ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ**: “I regard this as referring to the meter rather than to the source, i.e., in the meter of Mar Balai (**ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ ܘܢܘܠܘܚܘܬܐ**)” (Overbeck, *Opera selecta*, ix).

¹¹ Wright, *Catalogue*, 2:670. Wright, uncharacteristically, fails to note Overbeck’s publication, so this may well represent his independent judgment. Bickell does note Overbeck and his attribution of it to Isaac, but without further comment (Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 40n1).

¹² I.e., *Scourges*.

¹³ See Assemani, *Bibliotheca*, 1:169–70, 401.

¹⁴ Bickell, “Syrisches für deutsche Theologen,” 150.

¹⁵ Bickell, *Conspectus*, 21, 34–36. The three hymns he references are *Pasch*, *Scourges*, and *Zacch*. The extracts are of *Scourges* 1–26, 95–106, 194–201, 245–339, and 570–633, and of *Zacch*. 21–46 and 53–56. While the

with Absamya, and in another place noted that Cyrillona was an early witness to Bel and the Dragon in the Syriac tradition.¹⁶

In 1872 Bickell published his German prose translation of six homilies which he attributed to Cyrillona,¹⁷ and in 1874 he published an experimental retranslation into verse of two passages.¹⁸ In 1873 he also published an edition of the Syriac texts,¹⁹ with corrections following some years later, in 1881.²⁰ Bickell's final, more modest, mention of our author was in his great work on Hebrew poetics, where he notes in passing that Cyrillona preferred 4+4 meter.²¹

AUTHOR'S NAME

The manuscript containing the sole surviving copy of these texts is BL Add. 14,591, a vellum codex of 151 folios written in a fine Estrangela hand which Wright dates to the end of the sixth century.²² It contains a number of homilies and hymns by Isaac of Antioch, and in addition: Balai's hymns on the dedication of the church at Qenneshrin and on the bishop Acacius; a homily on the Crucifixion by Peter of Callinicus; five anonymous texts; and two homilies ascribed, notes Wright, "to a writer named ܩܝܪܝܠܘܢܐ ܩܝܪܝܠܘܢܐ."

extracts from *Scourges* are, as Bickell indicates, historical in character, the passages from *Zacch.* are on Mary.

¹⁶ Bickell, *Conspectus*, 7n7 (Bel) and 21 (Absamya). Bickell does not specify such, but the allusion to Bel and the Dragon he references must be that found in *Scourges* 54 (cf. Bel 27).

¹⁷ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 9–63.

¹⁸ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 410–11, 414–21.

¹⁹ Bickell, "Gedichte," 566–98.

²⁰ Bickell, "Berichtigungen."

²¹ Bickell, *Carmina*, 231. Bickell's observations about Cyrillona and Hebrew poetry were also repeated (inaccurately) by Maas ("Scripture Poetry," 58).

²² Wright, *Catalogue*, 2:669. Overbeck also dates it to the sixth century (*Opera selecta*, xx). For a full description of the ms. see Wright, *Catalogue*, 2:669–73.

[Mar Qurlokha] or ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ [Qurilokha],” the second followed by an associated *soghitha* (ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ).²³

There is no known historical author named Qurlokha or Qurilokha, and the possible derivation of such a name is unclear. In his initial notice of these works, Bickell names the author as “Cyrillonas” without further explanation.²⁴ Wright in his catalog, referencing Bickell, further explains: “The name seems distinctly written, but it may possibly be a mistake for ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ, a Syriac diminutive from Cyrillus, as ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ and ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ from Sergius and Eusebius.”²⁵ Martin likewise says the author is “*Kourlouca*, for which one should perhaps read Cyrillona,” again referencing Bickell.²⁶ In his edition of the Syriac text Bickell renders the problematic letter as *nun*, noting simply that it does indeed “appear” to be a *kaph* but not explaining the basis of his emendation.²⁷ It is only in 1881, as a parenthetical note to his textual corrections, that Bickell offers any further qualification: “At both places where the name of the poet appears in the rubricized titles, it looks almost like ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ. Such a Nun, so very similar to a Kaf, is however regularly found in the rubrics of this manuscript.”²⁸

²³ Wright, *Catalogue*, 2:670.

²⁴ Bickell, “Syrisches für deutsche Theologen,” 150. This is a Latinization of Cyrillona.

²⁵ Wright, *Catalogue*, 2:670n. Bardenhewer affirms too, “In the manuscript it does indeed say in both places ‘Cyrilloka,’ ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ instead of ܩܘܪܝܠܟܗ” (*Geschichte*, 4:395n1).

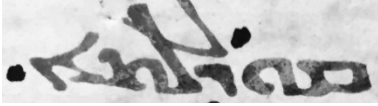
²⁶ Martin, *Saint-Pierre*, 22, citing *Pasch* 119–22 and referencing Bickell, *Conspectus*, 7, 21, 34–36. His reading of the name certainly represents an independent judgment, since Martin cites both *Pasch* and *Wash.* 119–24 directly from the manuscript (the latter as a work of Isaac) and shows no awareness of Bickell’s edition (Martin, *Saint-Pierre*, 21–22).

²⁷ Bickell, “Gedichte,” 576n3, 583n1.

²⁸ Bickell, “Berichtigungen,” 531n1. Bickell would repeat this argument in 1874: “The name Cyrillona is the correct one, as has emerged from repeated comparison within the manuscript, although the Nun seems very similar to a Kaf; for in the rubrics of this manuscript is

I cannot see for myself any tendency in the manuscript to write *kaph* and *nun* alike, either in text or rubrics. However, it is the unfortunate case that both instances of our author's name are written badly:

fol. 62r, col. 1, ln. 2



fol. 72r, col. 1, ln. 26



In both examples we see that the character in question has an almost hook-like thickening at the top of the down stroke that may be suggestive of *kaph*; but based on my own autoptic examination of the manuscript and its rubrics, I find that the character is certainly a *nun*.²⁹ We see, for example, that the rough thickening at the top of the stroke is also evident in a word adjacent to the second instance, much less exaggerated, but in both cases the same letter *nun*.

fol. 72r, col. 1, ln. 25



The inclusion/exclusion of the *yudh* in *Ⲛⲁⲃⲓⲁⲟⲟ*/*Ⲛⲁⲃⲓⲁⲟ* is a discrepancy that no one has addressed. Nor has anyone identified any other occurrence of the name Cyrillona in extant literature, as far as I can determine,³⁰ though the above-cited “diminutive thesis”

regularly found the same form of the Nun” (Bickell, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 410).

²⁹ I emend here my own, previous position (Griffin, “Cyrillona,” 8–9).

³⁰ Perles remarks, “The name Cyril and Cyrillona was very widespread amid the Greeks and Syrians,” but he adduces our Cyrillona as the only example of the latter (“Jüdisch-byzantinische Beziehungen,” 582–83). As Bardenhewer says, “To literary-historical written sources,

makes excellent sense.³¹ While the evidence is imperfect, no better alternative presents itself. So I take here the most conservative and arguable course and continue to call our author Cyrillona.

CORPUS

Bickell first established the canon of Cyrillona's writings, as follows:

BL Add. 14,591 fols.	Syriac title	Incipit	English title	Abbv.
54r–59r	ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	<i>On the Institution of the Eucharist</i>	<i>Euch.</i>
59v–61v	ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	<i>On the Washing of the Feet</i>	<i>Wash.</i>
62r–67r	ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	<i>On the Pasch of Our Lord</i>	<i>Pasch</i>
72r–77v	ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	<i>On the Scourges</i>	<i>Scourges</i>
77v–79r	ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܘܢܐ	<i>On Zacchaeus</i>	<i>Zacch.</i>

indeed, to the entire later literature of the Syriac tongue, the name Cyrillona is completely foreign" (*Geschichte*, 4:397).

³¹ *Kύριλλος* is a diminutive already (of *Kύρος*), making *ܕܝܘܢܐ* a double-diminutive from both Greek and Syriac. But that likely was unknown to namers or named. There is, in fact, some evidence for a cultural practice of semitizing Greek names with the semitic diminutive in this period, at least in Syrian monasteries (see Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 252). In addition to *ܕܝܘܢܐ* and *ܕܝܘܢܐ*, another notable example from this same period is *ܕܝܘܢܐ*, a heretical disciple of Ephrem (see Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 20, on Gennadius's description; Budge, *Book of Governors*, 2:354n4, on the Paulonians).

79r–83r	ܐܘܨܚܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܐܘܨܚܐ	ܐܘܨܚܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܐܘܨܚܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܐܘܨܚܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ	<i>On the Grain of Wheat</i>	<i>Wheat</i>
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As previously noted, BL Add. 14,591 contains three texts attributed to Cyrillona, two homilies being directly attributed to him and the second having an associated *soghitha*. In their manuscript order, they are *On the Pasch of Our Lord (Pasch)*, *On the Scourges (Scourges)*, and *On Zacchaeus (Zacch.)*. These are the “three poems” Bickell references in his 1871 *Conspectus*,³² and here as in his other work he simply accepts, without defense or argument, that all three proceeded from the same pen. This has been the judgment of all subsequent scholars, too, based both on attribution and stylistic affinity, and is a judgment which I also accept. While *Zacch.* does exhibit some stylistic differences from the other two poems, the correspondences seem more compelling, and I agree with Cerbelaud that “one should not hasten to modify the attribution of this text.”³³

However, in 1872 Bickell published *six* homilies which he ascribed to Cyrillona. Whence the additional three? Following the manuscript order, the first of these is a homily titled *On the Crucifixion (ܐܘܨܚܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ)*. Because it does not discuss the Crucifixion at all, I follow Cerbelaud in titling it more accurately, *On the Institution of the Eucharist (Euch.)*.³⁴ In the manuscript it follows a series of homilies by Isaac of Antioch and, as noted previously, a portion was published by Overbeck as a work of Isaac.³⁵ While it is not included in any of the standard catalogs or

³² Bickell, *Conspectus*, 21.

³³ Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 21. Since Cerbelaud’s introduction as well as his translation are paginated with Arabic numerals, I specify throughout when I am referencing his introduction.

³⁴ See Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 15. Cerbelaud gives a double title to each text, a descriptive title followed by the manuscript title in parentheses. Other translators have likewise adopted descriptive titles for these texts.

³⁵ Overbeck, *Opera selecta*, 379–81.

handlists of Isaac's works,³⁶ Bou Mansour apparently considers the first section of this homily (fols. 54r–55v) to be a genuine work of Isaac.³⁷ Bou Mansour seems unaware of Overbeck's publication and does not indicate why he regards only the first section as by Isaac. There can be no doubt about the literary unity of the entire work. He also does not engage or even acknowledge the issue that it has long been attributed to Cyrillona. In the absence of specific argument, there is no reason to accept *a priori* Bou Mansour's suggestion.

Bickell was an editor and translator of Isaac, and in fact was editing and translating both Isaac and Cyrillona at the same time. He discovered Cyrillona through his study of BL Add. 14,591, an important manuscript witness to Isaac, and presumably his comparative reading of *Euch.* against the works attributed to Isaac and Cyrillona led him to conclude that this was in fact a work of Cyrillona.³⁸ But all we have from Bickell is the simple explanation, "Cyrillona is not named as the author [of *Euch.*], but beyond doubt this homily belongs with the one following [i.e., *Pasch*], which is

³⁶ See Assemani, *Bibliotheca*, 1:207–34; Bickell, *Opera omnia*, iv–vii; Brock, "Published Verse Homilies"; Mathews, "Bibliographical Clavis."

³⁷ Bou Mansour, "Distinction des écrits," 2n5, 16. For more on his criteria for determining authenticity, see Bou Mansour, "Clé pour la distinction."

³⁸ There is also the possibility that Wright first suggested to Bickell that both *Euch.* and its associated *soghīṭba* (*Wash.*) were the work of Cyrillona. We know that the two scholars corresponded about *Euch.*, since Wright provided Bickell with the transcription of *Euch.* 239–576 for his 1873 edition (see Bickell, "Gedichte," 573n1), but there is also a slightly earlier connection. Bickell's translation of Cyrillona, which included these two works, was published in 1872. In the 1872 index to his catalog, under "Isaac," Wright also references *Euch.* and *Wash.*, and asks parenthetically, "(by Cyrillonas?)" (*Catalogue*, 3:1289). Wright did not raise this question in the catalog entry (published in 1871), where these works are attributed to Isaac (*ibid.*, 2:669–273), but only in his index. So was this Wright's own conjecture, of which Bickell was made aware, or was it Bickell who suggested Cyrillona's authorship to Wright?

explicitly attributed to him.”³⁹ This has been the unanimous opinion of subsequent scholars as well.

Immediately following *Euch.* in the manuscript is a *sogbita* associated with it by title (ܩܘܿܡܿܘܿܬܿܐ ܕܰܩܰܘܿܠܰܘܿܢܰܐ ܕܰܩܰܘܿܠܰܘܿܢܰܐ) on the washing of the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper (*On the Washing of the Feet* [*Wash.*]). The thematic and stylistic affinity which this shares with *Euch.* is pronounced and all scholars to date have affirmed their common authorship.

Authenticity of *On the Grain of Wheat*

It is the last of the six homilies which Bickell attributes to Cyrillona that is of debatable authorship. An anonymous homily *On the Grain of Wheat* (*Wheat*) follows *Zacch.* in the manuscript, and is itself followed by two more anonymous homilies, one on the Crucifixion and the other on perfection.⁴⁰ These last two homilies Bickell believed to be by Isaac.⁴¹ *Wheat*, however, he published as a work of Cyrillona, though he acknowledged that its authorship was less certain than for the other five texts.

We regard the unnamed author as Cyrillona, who also in the preceding poem spoke in a similar way about wheat, but do not deny that the same certainty does not exist here as for the other three anonymous poems which we have ascribed to Cyrillona. It is not altogether impossible that Isaac of Antioch may have written it. We include it in our collection nonetheless, not only to offer in absolute completeness the poems of Cyrillona, but also because it contains many important passages concerning the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist.⁴²

³⁹ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 37n1.

⁴⁰ A provisional critical edition and English translation of *Wheat* may be found in Griffin, “Cyrillona,” 533–59, and was further discussed in Griffin, “Queen of Grains.”

⁴¹ Bickell, *Opera omnia*, nos. 89 and 112; likewise, Brock, “Published Verse Homilies,” nos. 270 and 331, and Mathews, “Bibliographical Clavis,” nos. 102 and 130.

⁴² Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 56.

So Bickell knew well enough that *Wheat* was at best just possibly Cyrillonan, but nevertheless found in its (practically nonexistent) eucharistic theology warrant to include it in the collection. It is noteworthy that Bickell was also an editor and translator of Isaac of Antioch.⁴³ He says here of *Wheat*, “It is not altogether impossible that Isaac of Antioch may have written it,”⁴⁴ which seems to me Teutonic understatement. I suspect he believed Isaac was, in fact, much more than not impossibly the author or he would not have mooted it. Might he even have edited this text originally as a work of Isaac together with the two other Isaac texts he took from this manuscript?⁴⁵

Bickell speaks both here and elsewhere about the importance of Cyrillona as a witness to Roman Catholic teaching, and specifically Catholic eucharistic theology.⁴⁶ Bickell was an enthusiastic convert to Roman Catholicism and certain apologetic biases in his work are transparent.⁴⁷ Given his exuberant claim that

⁴³ Bickell, *Opera omnia* (edition), and *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 109–89 (translation).

⁴⁴ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 56.

⁴⁵ *De vigiliis Antiochenis et de eo, quod bonum est confiteri Domino*, and *Contra eos, qui ad hariolos vadunt* (Bickell, *Opera omnia*, 1:294–306 and 2:204–20).

⁴⁶ “But [Cyrillona] becomes even more important for us due to the sure witness which he provides in the few pages of his poems for so many of the Catholic teachings contested by the Reformers; namely, for the holy sacrifice of the Mass, for the true presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, for the sinlessness of the Holy Virgin, the invocation of the martyrs and the veneration of their relics” (Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 14). This observation was promoted by some other subsequent Roman Catholic authors (e.g., Hurter, *Nomenclator*, 1:202–3; Nirschl, *Lehrbuch*, 2:277–79), though actual acquaintance with the texts is not always in evidence, so that, for example, Cyrillona is numbered among authors of “poems about the Virgin Mary” (Kolb, *Wegweiser*, 202).

⁴⁷ This was noted by a contemporary reviewer (*Methodist Quarterly Review* 54 [1872]: 666–67) and also a more recent scholar, who pointedly suggests that apologetic bias undermined Bickell’s judgment (Lohse, “Fußwaschung,” 1:45).

Cyrrillona was “the most important Syriac poet after Ephrem,”⁴⁸ and the early date Cyrillonan authorship would imply for *Wheat*, Bickell would have been strongly tempted to include it in the corpus to enhance its perceived apologetic value.

The only textual rationale Bickell offers for his attribution is that Cyrrillona “also in the preceding poem [*Pasch*] spoke in a similar way about wheat.”⁴⁹ Vona, accepting this attribution, published a list of correlations between *Pasch* and *Wheat*.⁵⁰ Some of these parallels⁵¹ appear to be of little substance, and in the case of the most striking, wheat bearing up its fruit upon its head, the referents in either case are completely different.⁵² Still, it can be said that both poems appear to draw on some common fond of nature imagery for the grain of wheat.

But these two texts are much more striking, upon closer comparison, for their typological dissimilarity than their modest verbal similarity. *Wheat* is principally an agricultural paean to the “queen of grains” and “most beloved of seeds,”⁵³ a text that is strikingly non-religious in contrast with Cyrrillona’s genuine works. It is only toward the end of *Wheat* that the author begins to develop religious typology from the symbol of the grain of wheat, principally in connection with the resurrection⁵⁴—though not the resurrection of Christ, as in *Pasch*, but the hope of the resurrection

⁴⁸ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁰ See Vona, *Carmi*, 33. For a parallel comparison of the texts from Vona’s list, see Griffin, “Cyrillona,” 16–17.

⁵¹ I reference “parallels” here conventionally but with caution, since a bare “parallel” is rarely treated as the opaque signifier that it certainly is (see classically, Sandmel, “Parallelomania”). I savor the anecdote, perhaps apocryphal, that Erwin R. Goodenough used to remind his students regularly and drily that a parallel is two lines that meet at a point only in infinity.

⁵² *Pasch* 251–54; *Wheat* 38, 43–48, 59–66. See pp. 159–60 below.

⁵³ *Wheat* 121, 129.

⁵⁴ See *Wheat* 244–77.

of the just.⁵⁵ Likewise in *Wheat*, the grain of wheat is not depicted as a type of Christ or the Eucharist, except perhaps in passing,⁵⁶ whereas this is central to *Pasch*'s symbolism.⁵⁷ And while *Wheat* appears to associate (awkwardly) the sprouting of the seed with the piercing of Jesus's side upon the cross,⁵⁸ *Pasch* associates the piercing with the harvesting of the grape vine.⁵⁹

There is, then, substantial ground for disagreement with Bickell's assertion that the two poems speak "in a similar way about wheat."⁶⁰ The typological employment of any common elements they share is quite different. In fact, the few commonalities that might connect them, in the end, witness against a shared author. "The employment of these elements [parallel to *Pasch* in *Wheat*] is characterized by a heaviness and clumsiness which pervades the entirety of the text. One hardly imagines Cyrillona utilizing so poorly one of his own texts."⁶¹

These differences are not just confined to typology or the use of these common elements, but also are manifest in *Wheat*'s verbal and rhetorical style generally. Notes Cerbelaud, "Its style is clearly different from that of the other texts. The development of allegory is artificial, and its systematic character leads to a certain leadenness."⁶² Indeed, *Wheat* is a prolix and lumbering composition, wanting the lively and spare style of Cyrillona's genuine works. The Ephreman style of Cyrillona, rich with a symbolic theology of antithesis and paradox, is absent from *Wheat* as well. Some of the specific stylistic incongruities in *Wheat* that may be noted are the use of ethical datives for meter;⁶³ use of

⁵⁵ This connection with the resurrection of the dead is almost certainly due to *Wheat*'s sources; see below.

⁵⁶ See *Wheat* 240–41.

⁵⁷ See *Pasch* 259–86.

⁵⁸ See *Wheat* 234–42.

⁵⁹ See *Pasch* 363–66.

⁶⁰ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 56.

⁶¹ Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21. See also Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 67.

⁶³ *Wheat* 4, 14, etc.

pleonastic pronouns for meter;⁶⁴ use of *yotbo* and the simple personal pronoun for the reflexive;⁶⁵ clumsy metaphors;⁶⁶ and occasional solecisms.⁶⁷ There is also an instance of strikingly Chalcedonian language, when the author says of Christ: **ܘܡܫܟܘܢ ܕܢܝܘܬܗ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ** (“and he mingled the life of his nature / with that nature of ours which dies”).⁶⁸ This parallels a phrase of Jacob of Serugh: **ܘܡܫܟܘܢ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ ܕܚܝܬܐ** (“and he mingled that nature which dies with that one which does not die”).⁶⁹ Such technical theological expressions are absent from Cyrillona and typical of a later period. Moreover, Vona showed the almost certain dependency of *Wheat* upon a discourse on the resurrection attributed to Gregory of Nyssa.⁷⁰ It seems doubtful, judging from his other work, that Cyrillona would have made free use of a Greek text, and whether he even knew Greek is an open question.⁷¹ His other works, at least, do not evidence any direct dependence on Greek sources.

Cerbelaud regards *Wheat* as, while not a translation, perhaps a “free transposition” and compilation by a later author drawing

⁶⁴ E.g., *Wheat* 80 and 184.

⁶⁵ E.g., respectively, *Wheat* 81 and 5.

⁶⁶ See *Wheat* 104–5, 228–29, 234–35.

⁶⁷ See esp. *Wheat* 16, 64, 220–21, 226–27.

⁶⁸ *Wheat* 268–69.

⁶⁹ Assemani, *Bibliotheca*, 1:326. See TS 1277–78 for the Christological usage of **ܘܡܫܟܘܢ**.

⁷⁰ See Vona, *Carmi*, 115 and passim. This work of Gregory (CPG 3174) is found under the titles *In sanctum Pascha* and *In Christi resurrectionem oratio iii*; text in PG 46:652–81 and Heil, *Sermones*, 245–70. I present these parallels in full in Griffin, “Cyrillona,” 21–22.

⁷¹ It is of course possible that this work was translated into Syriac, as very many of Gregory’s works were. There is no surviving translation, though Martin Parmentier believes a translation of the general collection to which it belongs may be referenced in both Abdisho and the Chronicle of Se’ert (see Parmentier, “Syriac Translations,” 145). That it would have been translated at this very early date is less likely.

from both Gregory of Nyssa and from Cyrillona.⁷² A textual connection between *Wheat* and Gregory of Nyssa does indeed seem possible, if not likely, based not only on these explicit correspondences, but also on the broader thematic connections made in their mutual treatments of the symbol of the wheat and the resurrection of the dead. I am not, however, convinced that the parallels between *Wheat* and *Pasch* are close enough that any kind of derivation or direct connection between them need be assumed. Both are of course drawing from a shared fond of tropes found elsewhere in early Christian literature,⁷³ but their use of this wheat imagery is fundamentally different.

As noted, Bickell states his modest case for the Cyrillonan authorship of *Wheat* in the preface to his translation, and in his subsequent edition of the Syriac text he does not discuss authenticity any further. Landersdorfer largely repeats Bickell, though deleting Bickell's shallow argument for including *Wheat* "to offer in absolute completeness the poems of Cyrillona"—making his own basis for continuing to include *Wheat*, wittingly or not, even more exclusively theological and apologetic.⁷⁴ I believe even Cerbelaud's recommendation that *Wheat* be ranked among Cyrillonan *dubia* goes too far.⁷⁵ There is no manuscript ascription to Cyrillona, which would seem a minimum requirement for asserting "dubious" authenticity. If *Wheat* had been found in another manuscript, or even a different place in this manuscript, I do not

⁷² Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 22–23. So also Camplani, "Cyrillona (Qurillona)," 1054.

⁷³ The brief survey of Kötting ("Weizenkorn Gottes") suggests the exegetical richness and diversity in the patristic tradition. In contrast to Gregory and *Wheat*, for example, Irenaeus developed a eucharistic wheat imagery in connection with vine symbolism—in quite a different way than Cyrillona but certainly pointing toward him (see Weinrich, "The Image of the Wheat Stalk").

⁷⁴ Landersdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 47; cf. Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 41.

⁷⁵ Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 23. Elsewhere he says simply, "The authenticity of the homily on the grain of wheat is disputed" (Cerbelaud, "Kyrillonas," 557). See also Griffin, "Cyrillona," 533.

believe Cyrillonan authorship would have ever come into consideration, based on style or content.⁷⁶ Bickell simply made a false conjecture, informed by apologetic bias, about its authorship. I can find no critical basis for considering this a work of Cyrillona.

An Anonymous Homily on Pentecost

BL Add. 17,189 (5th/6th cent.) preserves a series of short prose homilies, labeled in the manuscript as *turgame*. At page heads the manuscript attributes them to Ephrem (as does Overbeck), but the manuscript title seems to imply that the scribe thought they were by Basil or John Chrysostom.⁷⁷ While not by Ephrem, Jansma would date the first text quite early, to the late 4th or early 5th cent., a homily on the effusion of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.⁷⁸ Based on this dating and the text's "very curious correspondences" with Cyrillona, Cerbelaud suggests, "Perhaps one day we'll need to count this text as part of the 'Cyrillonan corpus!'"⁷⁹ This opinion has been subsequently repeated by Peter Bruns.⁸⁰

But while this text shares a few modest parallels with *Pasch*, in particular, the style and content are very different from the genuine works of Cyrillona. To cite just one stark difference, this is in prose. Also, Cyrillona's works are full of scriptural allusions and

⁷⁶ It might be noted that the compiler of BL Add. 14,591 clearly collected some of his texts together because of shared topicality, regardless of authorship, so that we find together not only these two *memre* that share agricultural imagery, but also, e.g., another *memra* on the Crucifixion, by Peter of Callinicus (69v–72r), and even another on the Huns, attributed to Isaac of Antioch (48r–54r).

⁷⁷ See Wright, *Catalogue*, 2:407. Two, in fact, are translations from Greek.

⁷⁸ BL Add. 17,189, fols. 1–16. Published in Overbeck, *Opera selecta*, 95–98; French translation in Jansma, "Homélie anonyme," 157–78. On dating, see below. Fuller discussion of this text and a more extensive comparison of it with the work of Cyrillona will be found in Griffin, "Anonymous Homily."

⁷⁹ Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 25.

⁸⁰ Bruns, "Cyrillonas," 159.

imaginative paraphrase and elaboration, but direct scriptural citations are almost entirely lacking. The opposite is the case here. Further, at least two citations from the homily conform to the Peshitta;⁸¹ Cyrillona contains no Peshitta readings.⁸² Another serious objection is the use of technical theological terminology and formulas, some of which may have been aimed at the “Pneumatomachians.”⁸³ This terminology includes the phrase, **ܠܘ ܕܥܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܢܐ**,⁸⁴ apparently a translation of the homoousian formula. Jansma notes that this formula is absent from Ephrem, who in fact does not use **ܥܘܢܐ** at all in this technical sense.⁸⁵ Such technical vocabulary is likewise absent from Cyrillona, as is any employment of controversial rhetoric aimed at heretical opponents. For these and other reasons,⁸⁶ I find little ground to argue that this homily might have come from Cyrillona’s pen and cannot regard it as authentic.

IDENTITY OF CYRILLONA

As is the wont of scholars, there have been efforts made from the time of his discovery to correlate Cyrillona, otherwise unknown, with a known historical figure. Some deductions may be made concerning his location and date of writing (discussed below). Otherwise, his writings reveal almost no other personal data, though from them we clearly see that he was a caring pastor, perhaps even a bishop. The manuscript in one place ascribes to him the title “Mar” (**ܡܪ**),⁸⁷ an honorific used with bishops, but also more generally for ecclesiastical superiors and the holy.⁸⁸ Opinions about his ecclesiastical office in prior literature have

⁸¹ See Jansma, “Homélie anonyme,” 175.

⁸² See the Appendix.

⁸³ See Jansma, “Homélie anonyme,” 169–73. This forms the basis for Jansma’s dating.

⁸⁴ Overbeck, *Opera selecta*, 98.19–20.

⁸⁵ Jansma, “Homélie anonyme,” 170–71.

⁸⁶ See Griffin, “Anonymous Homily.”

⁸⁷ BL Add. 14,591, fol. 62r, col. 1, ln. 2.

⁸⁸ See Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 9.

often been conflated with speculation about his possible identification with known historical figures.

Unfortunately, the very name Cyrillona, as already noted, is entirely unattested outside of his writings. The inconsistent spelling of his name in the manuscript may indicate he was not even known to scribes working just two or three generations later. That this should be the case with a writer of such great talent is dissatisfying and perplexing, and has therefore provoked speculation about his identity from his first discovery.

The Cyrillona-Absamya Hypothesis

In his first published notice on Cyrillona, Bickell observed that one homily concerned the invasion of the Huns in 395, which led him to observe, “Because Absamya, a nephew of St. Ephrem, also composed poetry on this topic, the two are probably one and the same.”⁸⁹ Bickell then references the *Chronicle of Edessa* for the date of the Hunnic invasion, but his information on Absamya comes from the same source, where the lemma for 715 Sel. (403/4 CE) reads: “Absamya (~~Ⲁⲃⲥⲁⲙⲓⲁ~~) the priest, the son of blessed Mar Ephrem’s sister, composed *madrashē* and *memre* on the invasion of the Huns into Roman territory.”⁹⁰

Bickell repeats this basic hypothesis again in his *Conspectus*,⁹¹ but then in his translation of Cyrillona he expands upon his reasoning. In the volume introduction, he proposes that the 495 invasion of the Huns provides both the likely dating and a probable locale for our author, Edessa. He continues,

If our supposition that Cyrillona was an Edessene is found commendable, then it may not be too bold to identify him with the Edessene priest Absamya, the son of St. Ephrem’s sister, who composed ca. 404, according to the Chronicle of

⁸⁹ Bickell, “Syrisches für deutsche Theologen,” 150.

⁹⁰ *Chron. Edessa* 47 (Guidi, *Chronica minora I*, 6.13–16). See below for the Syriac text.

⁹¹ “Cyrillona ... is probably no other than Absamya, the son of St. Ephrem’s sister, who himself also composed a poem on the invasion of the Huns” (Bickell, *Conspectus*, 21).

Edessa, odes and metrical homilies (*madrashé* and *memre*) on the invasion of the Huns into Roman territory. For Cyrillona himself also tried his hand, as we see, at both types of poetry concerning the war with the Huns.⁹²

Bickell also notes a report in the *Vita Ephraemi* about the siege of Edessa by the Huns, about which event the biographer claims Ephrem wrote, though in fact Ephrem died more than 30 years previous to the invasion.⁹³ Bickell deduces from this: “The latter clearly derives from a confusion of the saint, who died long before the invasion of the Huns, with his nephew Absamya.”⁹⁴

In his introduction to *Scourges*, Bickell further explains his claim that, like Absamya, Cyrillona too wrote, “as we see, in both types of poetry concerning the war with the Huns” (i.e., in *madrashé* and *memre*). *Scourges* is titled in the manuscript, **ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܝܪܝܠܘܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܝܪܝܠܘܢܐ**. The employment here of the pl. *madrashé* is puzzling, since this work consists of what may be, at best, a single short introductory *madrasha* (26 lines) followed by a *memra* (663 lines). Bickell explains this structure, and continues,

Now one must ask if both these components of our poem originally belonged together. Clearly both were sung at the same feast; for we find in both the *madrasha* and the *memra* clear references to a feast of all martyrs and saints celebrated at that time. They therefore follow each other very directly and stand in close connection; however, each must have originally been an independent poem. The *madrasha*, in any case, contained many more lines following, which were omitted by the copyist who, as we shall see, also shortened another of Cyrillona’s poems.

From this emerges a strong argument for the identification of our Cyrillona with Absamya, the nephew of St. Ephrem, who composed *madrashé* and *memre* on the invasion of the Huns. For

⁹² Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 13.

⁹³ See *Vita Ephraemi* 36 (Amar, *Syriac Vita Tradition*, T. 84).

⁹⁴ Bickell, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, 13.

Cyrillona also speaks in his *memra* expressly of the Huns; that he, however, mentioned also these wild hoards in his *madrasha*, of which regrettably only the first two strophes remain to us, emerges from its title. Therefore, Cyrillona too composed *madrashbe* and *memre* on the invasion of the Huns.⁹⁵

Bickell's entire argument therefore rests fundamentally on a single correspondence between Absamya and Cyrillona. Absamya is said to have written *madrashbe* and *memre* on the invasion of the Huns, and from Cyrillona we have a work, part *madrasha* and part *memra* (on Bickell's thesis), that has to do with an invasion of the Huns. But does his argument bridging the differences succeed?

First we must examine all the witnesses to Absamya and his work. Bickell cites only the *Chronicle of Edessa*, but there are in addition other testimonia in various chronicles (ordered in the table on the following page, chronologically).

Bar Hebraeus has as his source Michael the Syrian, so that testimony has no independent value. But there are a number of discrepancies between the remaining five which must be considered, all of which seem to derive from a single urtext.⁹⁶


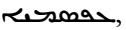


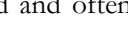
The first discrepancy is dating. In the first four witnesses, where Absamya is mentioned in connection with dated lemmas, the dates all disagree, ranging from 708 Sel. (396/97 CE) to 715 Sel. (403/4 CE). The only date specifically assigned to his compositional activity is the latest, in lemma 715 of the *Chronicle of Edessa*. Michael the Syrian mentions him at a chapter's end with some other incidental items, including the fire set by rioters to Hagia Sophia at the banishment of Chrysostom (20 June 404) and the appearance of a great comet (probably 400).⁹⁷

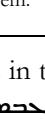
⁹⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁶ I follow here the analysis and conclusions of Witakowski, "Chronicles of Edessa."

⁹⁷ Michael's description appears to draw on the language of Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 6.6, describing the comet C/400 F1 which appeared in 400, "reaching from heaven even to the earth." See Cameron, "Earthquake," 352.

<i>madrasbe</i> and <i>memre</i> on the invasion of the Huns into Roman territory.	Ephrem's [...] ¹⁰⁵ sister, and composed <i>madrasbe</i> on the invasion of the Huns.	Ephrem the Syrian's sister, flourished, (who was) a doctor and composed <i>madrasbe</i> on the invasion of the Huns.	Gabala; also Apsima, the son of Mar [Ephre]m the Syrian's sister, who composed <i>madrasbe</i> on the invasion [of] the Huns.	was a writer. He composed many <i>memre</i> on the incursion of the Huns, who invaded at that time, and he composed them in the meter of Mar Ephrem.	many <i>memre</i> in the meter of Mar Ephrem on the incursion of the Huns, who invaded at that time.
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The second discrepancy between the chronicles is in the spelling of Absamya's name, variously given as , ,  and . The spelling , found in Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus, seems to derive from the earliest sources for the Absamya tradition and is likely the original.¹⁰⁶ This is important for the only other evidence-based argument adduced in favor of Bickell's hypothesis. Czeglédy observed that, based on early inscriptions published by Segal,¹⁰⁷ "the word *Absamya* appears as a theophoric name of heathen origin. Thus it is almost certain that Absamya also had another—Christian—name."¹⁰⁸ The argument that Cyrillona was the priest-name of Absamya was not advanced by Bickell (*pave* Sauget),¹⁰⁹ but it was soon suggested and often repeated, and may be implicit in Bickell's reasoning.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Based on the other witnesses, the word that has been lost here is most likely ; i.e., "Ephrem the doctor."

¹⁰⁶ See on this point the following discussion and note on Segal, and below on the title .

¹⁰⁷ See Segal, "Some Syriac Inscriptions," 21–22. The reference in Czeglédy is incorrect.

¹⁰⁸ Czeglédy, "Syriac Legend," 239.

¹⁰⁹ See Sauget, "Cyrillona," 214.

¹¹⁰ The first mention of it that I can find is in Wright, *Short History*, 42, who rejects Bickell's thesis. Landersdorfer introduces the priest-name

Segal was somewhat less declarative than Czeglédy that the name Absamya is a pagan theophoric,¹¹¹ though even assuming it is (very likely), the degree to which this datum makes it “almost certain” that Absamya took a Christian name would need to be argued. Amir Harrak has shown that pagan theophoric names are found in Syriac Christian use throughout the 4th and 5th centuries, and even later, as seen even with such luminaries as Rabbula (“Bel is great”) and Rabban Hormuzd.¹¹² Hormuzd was the supreme god of Mazdaism, and “this Mazdean divine name is still borne almost exclusively by members of the Christian community of Iraq.”¹¹³ While there were at times attempts to alter the pagan theophoric names of historical figures, or at least reinterpret them through creative etymology, their continued use seems to indicate (together with common sense) that “names do not necessarily reflect the belief of their holders.”¹¹⁴

A related question is just how common, and therefore how plausible here, a change of name was at ordination or upon entering a monastic order. Phillipe Escolan, citing Cerbelaud, invokes Absamya/Cyrillona as his only example of monks

hypothesis into his revision of Bickell’s translation, at the end of his introductory discussion (*Ausgewählte Schriften*, 8), to which he adds the misleading note: “This hypothesis, which Bickell stated previously in the first edition of the translation at hand, is in itself entirely probable and has also found approval, cf. Duval, *Lit. syr.*, p. 336.” Landersdorfer must be referring to Bickell’s general Cyrillona-Absamya hypothesis, not specifically the priest-name hypothesis.

¹¹¹ Segal says specifically: “These names (i.e., Absamya, Barsamya, et var.) have been associated with a deity Seimios, who is probably mentioned by Lucian, *De dea Syria*, as Σημίτιον ... But Seimios would doubtless be rendered in these texts as ܫܝܡܝܘܨ or ܫܝܡܝܘܨ; cf. ܫܝܡܝܘܨ, Cureton, *Spic.*, 45 (= ܫܝܡܝܘܨ 1. 20). *Samyā*, the blind one, may be an epithet of Mars, as among the pagans of Harran according to our late Arab sources” (“Some Syriac Inscriptions,” 21). His supposition is supported by the spelling found in our best source, Michael the Syrian.

¹¹² Harrak, “Pagan Traces.”

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

changing their names to indicate separation from their former, secular lives. But Escolan recognizes that even this sole specific instance is just “a hypothesis” and that “our knowledge of this subject is very limited.”¹¹⁵ In fact, propositions regarding such name changes appear mostly theoretical.

A third discrepancy between the chronicles is whether the significant title **ܡܠܟܢܐ** belongs to Absamya (Ps. Dionysius, *Chron.* 819) or to Ephrem (Michael the Syrian/Bar Hebraeus). That such an honorific would be applied to an otherwise unknown author is surprising, though of course it is regularly used of Ephrem. Witakowski finds this variant especially significant:

In this lemma two qualifications of Abhsamia appear: “priest” (*qaššā*) and Doctor (*malḫpānā*). It seems as if [*Chronicle of Edessa*], [Ps. Dionysius], [*Chron.* 819] and [*Chron.* 846] did different extracts of the lemma of [the “original” *Chronicle of Edessa*], which they, for one reason or another, did not fully understand. Thanks to [Michael the Syrian’s] more exhaustive information and his better understanding of the apparently corrupted text of [“original” *Chronicle of Edessa*], we learn that Ephrem, not Abhsamia, was called *malḫpānā*—‘teacher, master, doctor,’ a title the Syriac writers, not unlike their medieval contemporaries in Western Europe, reserved for those of their Fathers who were kept in especially high esteem.¹¹⁶

From his analysis of this and other important variants, Witakowski concludes that Michael the Syrian is in fact drawing upon a source

¹¹⁵ Escolan, *Monachisme et église*, 163, 163n2. Cf. Cerbelaud, *Agneau*, [Intro.] 8, who says, “it is generally accepted that one must identify Cyrillona with a certain Absamya.” Cerbelaud observes that a change of name makes sense upon entering a monastic order although, on the other hand, Cyrillona’s preoccupation with the mystery of the Eucharist is most befitting a priest, admitting therefore that “it is difficult here to move beyond the stage of conjecture.” Nevertheless, Bettiolo (“Lineamenti,” 540) and Vergani (“Mondo creato,” 126) accept both Cerbelaud’s identification of Cyrillona with Absamya and his rationale for the name change, even suggesting that this represents the critical consensus.

¹¹⁶ Witakowski, “Chronicles of Edessa,” 494–95.