

# Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Fashioning of Creation



## **Texts from Christian Late Antiquity**

67

**Series Editor**

**George Anton Kiraz**

TeCLA (Texts from Christian Late Antiquity) is a series presenting ancient Christian texts both in their original languages and with accompanying contemporary English translations.

# Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Fashioning of Creation

Edited and Translated by

Edward G Mathews Jr

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Bedjan	P. Bedjan, <i>Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis</i> (see BIBLIOGRAPHY)
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BUSEK	Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint Esprit
CA	Christianisme Antique
CBOTS	Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSS	Cistercian Study Series
ECF	The Early Church Fathers
FOTC	Fathers of the Church
GECS	Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LM	<i>Le Muséon</i>
LNPF	A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
MUSJ	<i>Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
ODCC	<i>Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i>
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OS	<i>L'Orient Syrien</i>
OtSt	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>

PdO	<i>Parole de l'Orient</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PPS	Popular Patristic Series
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
S	<i>Sobornost</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
TEG	Traditio Exegetica Graeca
TFCLA	Texts from Christian Late Antiquity

## PREFACE

For more than a decade Gorgias Press has been releasing volumes of the individual days of this homily of epic proportions – the first Hexaameron of Syriac literature. But with the final day published and rest finally in sight, we encouraged Ed Mathews to revisit the editions with the aim of assembling the entire homily in a single volume. This was not a straightforward endeavor, and any scholar will recognize the difficulties in bringing together and attempting to standardize work undertaken over a long period. I am grateful to Ed for his willingness to take up the homily once more, and to once again wrestle it into shape and form. As Jacob writes in line 2991, “That Mighty One has now completed His work and entered into His rest.” Ed, with the work on this great homily now complete, I hope you will also be able to rest!

George A. Kiraz



## FOREWORD

I was honored and humbled when, upon the completion of the seventh fascicule of my translation of Jacob of Sarug's *Homily on the Days of Creation*, George Kiraz suggested that he would like all seven fascicules to be collected and reprinted in a single volume. The original project had taken far longer than anticipated due to other commitments, unexpected demands on my time and a number of those unexpected various and sundry surprises, both good and bad, that life presents to us all. The first fascicule was published in 2009, the second not until 2016, while the final five fascicules followed a relatively steady and nearly annual progression until the final fascicule appeared earlier this year.

To put seven fascicules into a one-volume format might appear to be a simple prospect. Tables of contents and the various indices found in the separate fascicules had to be consolidated into single, larger items; this was not entirely straightforward but was fairly easily accomplished, if a bit time-consuming. At the same time, however, there were many other elements that could not be left "as is". There were a number of repetitions in both the introductory materials and in the footnotes. Because the original text had been prepared over such a long period of time, there was also a large number of inconsistencies, more complicated redundancies and inadvertent errors throughout the fascicules, all of which had to be addressed while trying to maintain the work in its original format.

The introduction found herein is essentially the same as those found in the original fascicules, particularly for the discussions of the individual days. I did, however, find it necessary to consolidate those elements that were repeated from one fascicule to the next into a 'new' general section, separating out from the original intro-

ductions those discussions that pertained more to the entire homily than to any one particular day. I also had to rewrite the first sections in order to clarify a number of ambiguities, contradictions and outright errors but, at the same time, tried to maintain the original style and content. Many footnotes and references to footnotes had to be renumbered, if not slightly reworded, as they referred to other fascicules; now they refer either to page numbers in the new introduction or to line numbers of the complete translation as found in this volume. I hope I have thus provided the reader with a more consistent whole, yet still managed to preserve the same material as in the original seven volumes.

As a result this new one-volume edition turned out to be a bit more complicated and a lot more time-consuming than originally thought and I am beholden to many people for its completion as well as for the original seven fascicules. Of the many friends, colleagues and editors to whom I am so beholden over the course of many years, especial mention must be made of two members in particular on the Gorgias Press staff. Dr. George Kiraz first invited me to translate this long homily, and has always been most encouraging and supportive of my work. Beyond all reason, he still continues to solicit and even publish my translations. Throughout the entire revision, Dr. Melonie Schmierer-Lee has combined a patience that would make Job envious with an incredible eye for detail and has made this work a far more unified whole than it would otherwise have been. Thanks primarily to her, the errors, inconsistencies and redundancies from the original fascicules have been greatly reduced in this edition. Lastly, my deepest gratitude to Dr. Sebastian Brock, the universally recognized Dean of Syriac scholars and general editor of this series, who has throughout this long process saved me from many errors and has always provided kind suggestions for further improvement. To all of these my deepest thanks; this work would be far less useful without their contributions.

Lastly, as I reflect back on this long journey with Jacob and his meditations on the creation account, I realize that during the nearly decade and a half that it took to finish the translation and then to prepare this one-volume edition, I lost the three most important people in my life: just after the publication of the first fascicule, I lost my wife Susan; in the very final stages of the second fascicule I lost my mother; and now, as I was in the midst of mak-

ing the necessary revisions for this one-volume edition my father passed away. To these three my eternal thanks falls so very far short; they constitute the true *sine qua non*. I miss them all terribly and I happily dedicate this edition to them.



## INTRODUCTION

### INFORMATION ON THIS HOMILY

Homily Title: Homily on the Fashioning of Creation

Source of Text: *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, edited by Paul Bedjan (Paris-Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1907, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), vol. 3, pp. 1–151. [Homily 71]  
3020 lines

The long *Mêmrrâ* translated here in this volume was first published in 1907, by Paulus Bedjan in vol. III of his edition of *Selected Works of Jacob of Sarug*.<sup>1</sup> He titled the work, following his manuscripts, *The Fashioning of Creation* (Syr. *dē'al tūqānâ dēberyātâ*),<sup>2</sup> but it was already known as the *Hexaemeron* of Jacob of Sarug by which title it has been traditionally known ever since. Assemani first gave it this title in his encyclopedic catalogue of early Syriac literature.<sup>3</sup> Bedjan offers this as an alternate title in his edition (perhaps with Assemani's work in mind),<sup>4</sup> and this title has been repeated in nearly all the standard handbooks and histories of Syriac literature.<sup>5</sup> While this

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<sup>1</sup> P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Iacobi Sarugensis*, III.1–151.

<sup>2</sup> Bedjan utilized three manuscripts: BL 12162, BL 14584 (both incomplete), and Ox. Pocock 404.

<sup>3</sup> J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, I.339: *de opere sex dierum* (Syr., *'al 'eštāt yawmê*).

<sup>4</sup> P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Iacobi Sarugensis*, III.913, provides the title *dē'al tūqānâ dēberyātâ*, but adds in parentheses *'eštāt yawmê*.

<sup>5</sup> Neither W. Wright nor R. Duval makes mention of this particular work, but Baumstark, *Geschichte der Syrischen Literatur*, 151, refers to the work as

*Mémrâ* certainly discusses the six days of creation, to categorize it as a *Hexaemeron* is not strictly speaking accurate, and it has caused unnecessary confusion. In both recent English translations of this work, this confusion has become manifest. T. Muraoka notes right at the outset of his introduction that the work is actually a *Heptaemeron*, yet he retains the title *Hexaemeron* on the cover and throughout his work. And in our own translation of this work, each fascicule was titled *Jacob's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day, Second Day*, etc. But this title format, unforeseen with the early fascicules, also left us with no option but to give the final fascicule the embarrassing and laughable title of *Jacob's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Seventh Day*.<sup>6</sup>

The same works just enumerated are also divided as to whether to categorize this extensive work as one single long *mémrâ* or as seven separate *mémrê*. Again, we follow here the series format, which is to follow the text as edited by Bedjan, and he has edited this work, following his manuscripts, as if it were one long homily, which he numbers 71 in his edition, divided up into seven 'sub-sections' by the day of that original week. For the sake of accuracy, then, and in order to avoid such confusing problems altogether we have maintained in this one volume edition the single homily format and the title that Bedjan had given to Jacob's work: *The Homily on the Fashioning of the Creation*.<sup>7</sup>

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"eine poetische Behandlung des Sechstageswerkes der Schöpfung", and T. Jansma, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarûg," clearly consider Jacob's work to be a *Hexaemeron*. More recently, while A. Barsoum, *Scattered Pearls*, 257, speaks only in general terms of the many Old Testament commentaries composed by Jacob, E. ten Napel, "Some remarks on the Hexaemeral Literature in Syriac," includes Jacob's works in the category of *Hexaemeron*, and S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, 37, refers to the "*mémrê* on the Six Days of Creation".

<sup>6</sup> It is not much consolation to note that Sebastian Brock used similar titles in his English version of the Table of Contents in the Gorgias reprint edition, Vol. III, p. v.

<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is to be noted that it is more commonly found in manuscripts as the seven homilies "On the Creation of the World". Very possi-

Regardless of the fact that this *Mémrâ* is not technically a *Hexaemeron*, it is nonetheless incontrovertible that it stands near the head of Syrian exegesis on the beginning chapters of Genesis, and as such even betrays a certain parallel, albeit a bit imprecise, to the position that the *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* of Basil the Great play in Greek tradition. In his native Syrian tradition, Jacob's work was preceded by Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*, nearly a third of which deals with the Creation and subsequent fall of Adam and Eve; similarly, the work of Basil was preceded by the Genesis commentaries of Origen, Eusebius of Emesa and possibly Didymus the Blind.<sup>8</sup> It was not until nearly the beginning of the eighth century when another *Hexaemeron* appeared in either tradition, when Jacob of Edessa and Anastasius of Sinai composed theirs at nearly the same time.<sup>9</sup> Over the next centuries, however, interest in the text of Genesis seems to have waned somewhat in Greek tradition, while in Syrian tradition, it became a topic of even more interest. Jacob of Edessa was followed by the great *Hexaemeron* commentaries of Mošê bar Kêphâ and Emmanuel bar Shaharê, along with a number of Genesis commentaries including those of Išôdad of Merw, Dionysius bar Salibi and Bar Hebraeus along with several works in *Question and Answer* format that became popular in East Syrian tradition, particularly those of Išô bar Nun and Theodore bar Kônai, that dealt extensively with the text of Genesis.<sup>10</sup>

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bly, these served as Lenten homilies much as did those of Basil the Great who composed his *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* just over a century earlier.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek tradition, however, is a bit fuller in this early period; in addition to the *Homilies* of Origen and John Chrysostom, other relatively contemporary compositions include the *Commentaries* of Severian of Gabala, Cyril of Alexandria, as well as such texts as the *Questions on Genesis* of Theodoret. In the Syriac tradition, the *Commentary* of Ephrem, and the *Homilies on Creation* of Narsai are essentially the only other such works; cf. bibliography below, for specific references.

<sup>9</sup> Both Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) and Anastasius of Sinai (d.c. 700) wrote extensive commentaries on the six days of creation.

<sup>10</sup> One might consult, with profit, Erik ten Napel, "Some Remarks on the Hexaemeral Literature in Syriac," in H.J.W. Drijvers, et al., eds., *IV Symposium Syriacum: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature* (OCA 229; Rome: Pon-

As to Jacob's influences, apart from the biblical text itself, he was clearly indebted to Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*. This is demonstrable at numerous points, although he is in no way slavishly dependent on Ephrem; in fact, he clearly expands on Ephrem at certain important points. Basil's *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* certainly existed in Syriac translation before Jacob began to compose his *Mémrà*,<sup>11</sup> and several indications make it very likely that Jacob was acquainted with this translation.<sup>12</sup> Apart from these two works, it is not clear what Jacob's sources might have been. He seems aware of traditions found in Theophilus of Antioch, but these traditions had already become generally accepted in Christian exegesis by the time of Jacob. This may also be true of the *Commentary on Genesis* of Eusebius of Emesa, which Basil clearly knew of but no literary dependence can be demonstrated in Jacob's homilies. Jansma lists quite a number of parallels to Jacob's *Mémrà*, but they are just that – parallels, not sources. In addition, it hardly needs mentioning that the majority of the works he cites are actually later compositions.<sup>13</sup>

As he does throughout this long *Mémrà* 71, Jacob follows the biblical text fairly closely, in what we might call literal fashion. This is not to say, however, that he is in any way a fundamentalist; he clearly thinks his way through the text, is remarkably astute in his presentation, brings in other biblical texts to make his point, and even engages in some speculation where he feels it is needed to expound on the meaning of the text. From the outset, Jacob introduces certain firm and “non-negotiable” propositions in his poetic

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tificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 57–69, and Bas Ter Haar Romeny, “Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac Literature,” in A. Volgers and C. Zamagni, eds., *Erotapokriseis: Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context* (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 145–163.

<sup>11</sup> The text of Homilies 8 and 9 have survived in a Vth century manuscript; cf. Thomson, *Syriac Version of the Hexaemeron by Basil of Caesarea*, vol. 550, pp. v–vi. The work was apparently popular enough to require a second translation in the middle of the seventh century, though whether it was an entirely new translation or a revision of the first is unknown; cf. Barsoum, *Scattered Pearls*, 332.

<sup>12</sup> See introductory sections to each day, and notes to translation, below.

<sup>13</sup> T. Jansma, “L’Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarûg”.

meditations on the creation account. The first such proposition, now standard in Christian theology, is that it was the One God and Him alone who created the earth and everything that is in it. While he seems to refer primarily to the Father (he never uses this term in this *Mémrâ*), he uses such terminology as Creator (employing both *bârôyâ*, the Syriac *nomen agentis* and the abstract *bârôyûtâ*), Maker (also using both *‘âbôdâ* and the abstract *‘âbôdûtâ*), Divinity (Syr., *‘alâbûtâ*), and even Essence (Syr., *‘îtûtâ*).<sup>14</sup>

In addition to this Jacob is equally insistent throughout this *Mémrâ* that God did not refashion already existent matter but that He created the world and everything that exists in it from nothing (Syr., *men lâ medem*). We cannot be sure exactly what Jacob understands this to mean as he rather insists on this and does not really expound on it but he does distinguish between God’s “creating” and His “making”. It appears from his comments at the beginning of the Second Day that God had created – from nothing – all the necessary materials on the first day but left them “unfashioned and unbuilt”,<sup>15</sup> and then began to take these building blocks and fashion them, over the course of the next five days, into the world.<sup>16</sup>

In bringing about this new fashioning of the world, Jacob utilizes several distinct yet closely related terms to describe how God brought this about. Most prominently, God created this world by His ‘signal’ (Syr., *remzâ*), by which he refers to some sort of supra-anthropomorphic indication of His intentions, perhaps similar to what the scholastics would later refer to as “pure act of will”.<sup>17</sup> In

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<sup>14</sup> On these absolute forms, see further below.

<sup>15</sup> Not a literal translation of Jacob’s translation of Genesis 1:2, but perhaps close to what he means to convey in this section; see ll. 65–84, esp., 73–74.

<sup>16</sup> See, especially, his discussion in lines 521–548, below.

<sup>17</sup> Syriac, *remzâ*. The term is very important for Jacob, particularly in this long verse homily on the *Hexaemeron*; it is already found in the hymns of Ephrem, and is also an important term in the homilies of Jacob’s contemporary Narsai; for the latter, see P. Gignoux, *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*, 23. *Remzâ* normally means “sign, gesture, nod”, but is nearly impossible to translate in these contexts, as already noted by Kh. Alwan, “Le ‘remzo’ selon la pensée de Jacques de Saroug”. I have chosen to use the

other places Jacob relates that God also created by His command (Syr., *pūqdōnā*), His hidden power (Syr., *ḥaylā kasyā*), and even His impetus (Syr., *zaw'ā*). Further study is required to determine the similarities and differences in these terms, but as Jacob uses them in this *Mémra* they are all aspects of God alone.

Jacob also insists at many points that the world was created in exactly six days. He posits two reasons for this: 1. to set down an order for those creatures in the world; and 2. to put forth a prophetic symbol of the ages of human existence: just as there were six days of work and then one of rest, so too will there be six millennia of toil on earth and then one of rest and peace in Paradise.

While such words are in no way unique to Jacob's writings, some little note should be made of his use of certain abstract terms, particularly those just mentioned above: *bōrōyūtā*, *'ābōdūtā*, *'alāhūtā*, *'ūtūtā*, and even *pūqdōnūtā*. These are common abstract nouns in Jacob and in early Syriac literature, conveying the meaning of either the process or the product of making, creating or being divine, respectively. Jacob, however, sometimes uses them in this fundamental sense but he also employs them from time to time in a context that demands translation in a more direct, active nominal sense such as Maker, Creator and Divinity. In this homily I have had to resort here to several different circumlocutions in order to translate these abstract nouns and still maintain some sort of poetic rhythm to the translation.

### PREVIOUS TRANSLATIONS

For a long time, one had only the text as printed in Bedjan's edition, and the summary that Taeke Jansma published some years later.<sup>18</sup> No modern translation of any portion of this *Mémra* had appeared until only recently. First, two very partial segments appeared and then almost simultaneously in the last decade two complete English translations have appeared. Interest in Jacob's theo-

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English word 'signal' as it is ambiguous enough not necessarily to indicate a physical gesture on the part of God as "nod" or "gesture" would. Nonetheless, the precise meaning remains impossible to translate into English.

<sup>18</sup> T. Jansma, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug."

logical anthropology inspired Behnam M. Boulos Sony to provide a French translation, with short introduction and commentary, of the larger, second portion of the section on the Sixth Day of this *Mémorâ* that deals with the creation of Adam, while omitting the initial section that treated the creation of the land animals that were also created on that same day.<sup>19</sup> Sony claims to be basing his translation on the text as found in Bedjan, who utilizes Ms. Oxford Poc. 404, dated 1640/1, while correcting it at certain places “à partir d’autres manuscrits plus anciens (sic),” found in the British Library: BL Add. 14584 and BL Add. 12162, both of which date from the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> Sony does not print a text so it is not always clear what text he is following and, as a result, his translation sounds very periphrastic in spots and in others, he omits entire phrases, making it even more curious just what text he is translating. Just a few years later, an English translation, with no text, of most of the section on the First Day, appeared in a collection of representative texts on early biblical exegesis.<sup>21</sup>

Nearly three decades later, we began our own translation that began to appear in ‘daily’ fascicules in 2009. In the same year that our translation of The Fourth Day appeared (see bibliography, below), the Japanese scholar Takamitsu Muraoka published a new translation of the entire *mémorâ* 71, with a new Syriac text based on a collation of manuscripts not utilized by Bedjan.<sup>22</sup> He too chose to utilize additional manuscripts as a corrective to Bedjan’s edition,<sup>23</sup> but in this case he prints his text on facing pages to his translation.

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<sup>19</sup> B. Sony, “Hymne sur la création de l’homme de l’hexaméron de Jacques de Saroug.”

<sup>20</sup> Sony does note, p. 167, that these are in fact the very same manuscripts, both incomplete, in which Bedjan finds the alternate readings for his edition.

<sup>21</sup> An English translation only, without the opening acrostic, was done by Robin Darling [Young], and published in J. Trigg, *Biblical Interpretation*, 184–202.

<sup>22</sup> T. Muraoka, *Jacob of Serugh’s Hexaameron*; although he titled his volume *Hexaameron* he also includes the portion of this *mémorâ* that treats Day seven, as Muraoka himself notes in his introduction, p. ix.

<sup>23</sup> For list, see T. Muraoka, *Jacob of Serugh’s Hexaameron*, ix–x.

Muraoka is a biblical text critic and Semitic philologist, not necessarily an expert in Jacob's literary *œuvre*, but his translation is generally clear, and not at all periphrastic.<sup>24</sup> Muraoka's translation then earns the distinction of being the first ever complete translation into any modern language. Barely three years later, the last fascicule of our translation appeared. It is the text and translation from those fascicules, that are now being re-published here in this volume.

### THE FIRST DAY

Jacob begins this homily with a long prayer to God begging for the grace necessary to speak of something that is entirely beyond the capacity of human speech. He also begs to come to the question with love and awe, the only way that one can truly come to any real understanding of God and His creation. In this homily, Jacob essentially insists on two main themes: that God – and God alone! – is the creator of everything that exists; and that everything that exists was created by God from nothing. Not to acknowledge these two fundamental principles leads inevitably to idolatry, an idolatry into which the world had already plunged when God chose to reveal Himself and the mystery of His creation to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Jacob also writes at some length about the creation of the various angelic hosts, whose creation is not mentioned at all in the Genesis account. Early writers had speculated widely on when the creation of the spiritual beings actually took place. Ephrem had refused even to speculate about when the angels had been created. Jacob, who usually follows the teaching of Ephrem, here parts from him and sides with his contemporary and antagonist, Narsai, teaching that the angels were, in fact, created on the first day. From this, one can easily presume that by the mid-fifth century this was already the general teaching found at the School of Edessa. Alt-

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<sup>24</sup> A fact that Prof. Muraoka himself humbly acknowledges; T. Muraoka, *Jacob of Serugh's Hexaemeron*, xi. Simply for the sake of completeness it might also be added here that some lengthy sections of my own preliminary translation of this *mêmrâ* had already appeared in E.G. Mathews, Jr., "What Manner of Man?", 136-142.

though Moses had said nothing at all about the creation of the angels (a fact which formed the basis of Ephrem's refusal to speculate on when they were created), Jacob turns to the prophets, especially David, Ezekiel, and Daniel, to discover what they reveal about the angels and their creation. Jacob is very careful to emphasize the fact that even the angels were created from nothing; created specifically to give God continual praise, they learned of their own creation as they watched the rest of creation come into being. This then was one example of why God "had" to take six days to bring about creation rather than by doing it by a simple "snap of His fingers." Not only did God thus set out an orderly pattern for creation, but He also took six days so that all creatures could discern their own creation by seeing the creation of other, subsequent beings.

### THE SECOND DAY

In his discussion of the Genesis account of what was created on the second day, Jacob, following the biblical account, expounds on the creation of the firmament: what it was, where it was, what – as far as can be determined – was placed above it and what below it, its purpose and utility for humanity, and the importance of its place in the Genesis account of the six day progression of creation. Jacob uses several words to describe the physical structure of this firmament that covers the entire earth, the "great house of mankind": tent (Syr., *mašknâ*) ll. 552, 665, 791; roof (Syr., *mētaltâ*) l. 664; ceiling (Syr., *taḥlîlâ*) ll. 667, 794; vault (Syr., *kaptâ*) l. 669; and dome (Syr., *qūbtâ*) l. 683.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike the light and the other elements that were created on day one, the firmament was not something created but was something made; that is, it was not made *ex nihilo* but was fashioned or composed from previous existing elements, in this case – most likely – from water (see l. 550, below and note ad loc). It was posi-

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<sup>25</sup> Ephrem uses no such analogy in his *Commentary on Genesis*, while Jacob's contemporary and theological antagonist Narsai confines himself to a single analogy: ceiling (Syr., *taḥlîlâ*); cf. *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*, I.55, II.296, III.145, 155. Curiously, neither employs the word found in the Peshitta of Psalm 104:2: curtain/tent (Syr., *yārî'tâ*).

tioned as a roof (or dome, etc.) above the earth but it served also as a dividing wall that maintained a permanent separation between the lower waters below and the upper waters above. Above this firmament God set that realm that is one entirely of light and in which there is no movement of time. It is also a realm that is completely without motion or movement and which has only rarely been even glimpsed. The realm below, on the other hand, is the realm where mankind lives and dwells and which is familiar to all; it is rather a realm of interchanging light and darkness, of days, months and seasons and other movements of time, not to mention varying climates characterized by such things as winds, storms, earthquakes, etc.

Beginning on this same second day, this just-named darkness first appeared. Unlike the first day when the darkness was produced by the presence of clouds, this newly formed firmament now became the cause for all subsequent darkness. According to Jacob, this was neither a bad thing nor a punishment, it rather provided the occasion for rest and reinvigoration for the work of the next day. This second day thus established a new pattern from the first day, and this new pattern then became the model for all subsequent days.

### THE THIRD DAY

On this day God does two things: first, He separates, or draws back, the waters from the earth (vv. 9–10), and then He brings forth all sorts of vegetation “each according to its kind” upon that newly revealed dry land (vv. 11–12).<sup>26</sup>

As was already noted in the introduction to the section entitled *Homily on the Second Day*, Jacob may have known only one written source other than the bible, but he still was not writing within a vacuum; several of his contemporaries and near contemporaries recorded their thoughts on these first days as well. Jacob almost certainly read his predecessor Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis*, as he seems well aware of his teaching here and throughout this long homily. With regard specifically to this third day, Jacob differs very

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<sup>26</sup> See summary in T. Jansma, “L’Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug,” 20–23.

little from what Ephrem said in his *Commentary on Genesis*. In fact, in contrast to these 338 lines that Jacob consecrates to the third day, Ephrem comments very little on the events of the third day, seemingly content simply to reiterate what is found in the biblical text.<sup>27</sup>

Jacob's contemporary and arch-antagonist Narsai also does little more than to recount the facts as recorded in the biblical account of the third day. In his first homily, a resume of the days of creation, he skips right over the third day. In the third homily, *On the Formation of Creation*, he writes only:

[God] gathered the waters and turned the seas into a huge reservoir;  
 His mighty signal united them and made them bring forth reptiles.  
 The womb of those fluid waters brought forth dense bodies,  
 and from heavy bodies [God] made the birds with their light wings.  
 He gave command to the earth and it conceived and brought forth species and families:  
 wild animals, domestic animals and every species.  
 He tilled the earth and cast into it the seed of life;  
 seeds sprouted, trees rose up and fruits blossomed.<sup>28</sup>

In a later homily from the same collection he writes:

[God] said, "Let the waters be gathered and let them become seas in a single place,  
 and let the surface of the earth be revealed that it may be suitable for habitation."  
 O commandment that does not toil! O word that cannot be impeded!<sup>29</sup>  
 Just as His will commanded it, the waters gathered into seas.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.21–22. In his commentary on the second day Ephrem does, however, undertake a rather lengthy discussion concerning the question of the saltiness of the seas that were formed on the third day.

<sup>28</sup> *Homélies de Narsai sur la création*, III.105–112.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Isaiah 55:11.

Further on in this same homily, he again adds:

[God] gathered the water from the earth into reservoirs of seas  
and abysses,  
and He adorned it with grains and with trees for the life of  
man and of beast.<sup>31</sup>

Eusebius of Emesa, whose *Commentary on Genesis* was composed in Greek a century earlier but which survives only in Armenian translation, deals very cursorily on the events of day three, commenting only on the growth of that day.<sup>32</sup> Jacob's predecessor in the Greek world, Theodoret of Cyr, apparently thought that no commentary was necessary, as his questions pass over day three altogether.<sup>33</sup> In his short discussion, Eghishē is concerned primarily with the location and the precise nature of the seas.<sup>34</sup>

Only his predecessor, Basil of Caesarea, devoted any lengthy commentary on the third day; in fact, he devotes two of his nine homilies *On the Hexaemeron* specifically to the third day, one for each of the two 'events' of this day.<sup>35</sup> Although a Syriac translation of this work certainly existed by the time that Jacob composed his *Homily on the Fashioning of Creation*, there is here no discernible literary dependence as exists in other places, which are cited in the notes to the translation, below.

Jacob begins this portion of his homily with a second appeal to the reader to adopt the necessary spiritual state of mind and heart in order to understand properly what Moses is trying to convey by what he records of the events that occur on the third day. For "one understands by faith . . . that by [His] Word the Lord created [everything] from nothing". In this one line, Jacob sets out the

<sup>30</sup> *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*, III.161–164.

<sup>31</sup> *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*, III. 340–341.

<sup>32</sup> Eusebius of Emesa, *Commentary on Genesis*, 36–37; and see n. 38, below.

<sup>33</sup> *Theodoret of Cyrus, The Questions on the Octateuch. Volume 1: On Genesis and Exodus*.

<sup>34</sup> Eghishē, *Commentary on Genesis*, 24–27.

<sup>35</sup> *The Hexaemeron of Saint Basil*; Basil treats the gathering of the waters in Homily IV, and the growth of the various types of vegetation in Homily V.

two things he most insists on: “God created” – no one else –, and only by His power did all things come into existence and act according to their nature; and God created “ex nihilo” – from nothing. He has certainly emphasized these two things earlier in this homily, but he puts them forth again here with even greater assertiveness.

It is completely and exclusively by God’s command that the waters gather together and then go to their appointed places, leaving the earth now visible and free to dry off in the air that it feels for the first time. These waters do not go to their places by any natural means or characteristics, not even by any geophysical inclines or channels, but only by the command of God. Once they have arrived in these places the waters are then bound by sand, but only at the command of God for the sand itself is far too insignificant and naturally ill-equipped to hold back the waters by itself. The world itself, on the witness of Job, is suspended in the middle of nothing again solely by the command of God, without whose power the earth would just fall into oblivion.

Once the dry land appeared God commanded that it produce vegetation of all sorts. Again Jacob emphasizes that it was only by the command of God that the vegetation was produced. God watched over this production like a wife and a mother with great love for the earth, both His “spouse” and His “child”. And He commanded that all this vegetation appear ripe and fully mature on this same third day presumably, as his contemporaries argue, so that the animals as well as Adam and Eve who were soon to enter the world would have the necessary sustenance to maintain their own lives. As all vegetation produced “according to its own kind”, both animals and humans would be able to know the beneficial characteristics of each type of plant.

Jacob concludes this section on the third day with a short review of the procession of these first three days and then points out that these first three days are to be distinguished from the three days to follow by reason of the fact that they alone were illuminated by that original unchanging light that was diffused over everything for those three days. On day four the sun and the moon were created and thereafter it was from these two orbs that the earth received its light.

### THE FOURTH DAY

On this day God created the two great luminaries, the sun “to rule over the day,” and the moon, along with the stars of the heavens, “to rule over the night”.<sup>36</sup> As was the case with his coverage of the first three days, Jacob follows the biblical text very closely and, while his meditation introduces to the hearer/reader much that is not directly related in the short text of Genesis, he differs very little from what Ephrem said in his *Commentary on Genesis*, although he always expands upon, and often shows further development than his main inspiration. Above all, Jacob continues to exhort his hearers/readers that the primary teaching of this Genesis account is that it is God – and God alone – who made everything, and it is He who continues to guide and to oversee all things according to the patterns He set down in these first six days. This is the primary error of the Chaldeans, whose teaching is widely followed by so many peoples, who thought that the sun moved itself and caused the movement of the other spheres, and thus denied any creator or source.<sup>37</sup>

Following a fairly wide-spread tradition, Jacob, as does his mentor Ephrem, states that when God set about to create the sun, the moon and the stars, He created the appropriate size spheres and then placed within them that very same light that had been created on the first day. This light is now dimmed to varying degrees in each of its new receptacles: the sun clearly the brightest, then the moon, and then the various stars that each had their own level of illumination.<sup>38</sup> In this portion of the homily, Jacob gives the impression that the entire light created on the first day is now apportioned into its new receptacles, but one must remember from the portion of this *mémrà* dealing with the second day that that orig-

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<sup>36</sup> See summary in T. Jansma, “L’Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug,” 23–27.

<sup>37</sup> See, below, ll. 1249–1276.

<sup>38</sup> See, below, ll. 1511–1536.

inal light still existed above the firmament where it was seen separately by Paul, Ezekiel and Stephen.<sup>39</sup>

God then set these luminaries on their individual courses, and these courses then determined the various times that occur on the earth: not only day and night, the times of work and of rest for humans, feeding and grazing for animals, but for each of the four seasons. In addition to the seasons of sowing and harvest, the sun and moon, in particular, are both important for the growth of all vegetation: after the earth puts forth the first steps of germination, it is the moon that provides the first impetus of growth, and then the sun takes over and causes the vegetation to grow and reach full maturity. The sole exception to this is everything that was created on the third day, when God commanded the earth to put forth vegetation – n.b., before the existence of the sun and the moon! And Jacob reiterates here in this portion of his homily what he had previously said on the third day – again following that which he had received from Ephrem –, that everything that was created on that third day was created instantaneously in its full-grown form.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the account of the creation of the luminaries, Jacob teaches his hearers/readers that the sun and the moon also serve as types of God and man, respectively. The sun rises with its full light and heat and maintains both as it traverses through the sky throughout the entire day, depicting the God who does not change, who is “the same yesterday, today and forever”.<sup>41</sup> The moon, on the other hand, waxes and wanes, depicting the ages of humankind, who is born, grows up to maturity, and from then gradually grows old and feeble. This should stand as a warning to young people to be humble when they are young and strong, because it is only a matter of time before old age sets in.<sup>42</sup>

Once the creation of the heavenly hosts has been completed and all the various luminaries are moving along their designated

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<sup>39</sup> See, below, ll. 683–694, 735–764; and cf. Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.4; Eng. tr. in E. G. Mathews, Jr., *St Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 77, for his likely source.

<sup>40</sup> See, below, ll. 1450–1452, and note ad loc.

<sup>41</sup> Hebrews 13:8.

<sup>42</sup> See, below, ll. 1338–1360.

courses directing the various seasons and times, Jacob invokes the first verse of Psalm 19, calling on his hearers/readers to join all of creation in marveling at what God has wrought: “The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament makes known the work of His hands”<sup>43</sup> As the heavens and the firmament do, so too should humankind, for whom God created all that He created. Again, following his mentor St. Ephrem, Jacob highlights the primary purpose of all creation, and of mankind, in particular – to give praise to the Creator and Lord of all. To the creation of mankind on the sixth day we approach closer and closer, but next we move to the birds and the animals on the fifth day.

### THE FIFTH DAY

On this day God created, from those waters that had just been separated from the dry land into oceans, seas, lakes, etc., the various species of fish, reptiles, crustaceans and marine animals, as well as the assorted types and sizes of birds and other winged creatures such as insects, flying mammals, etc.<sup>44</sup>

In his *Commentary on Genesis*, Ephrem makes relatively little comment on these four verses of Genesis.<sup>45</sup> In the course of his own meditation on this fifth day, Jacob does not diverge from the few comments that Ephrem makes. But, as he has consistently done prior to this point in this *mémrà*, he brings his own powers of observation and meditation to expand upon, and even to show further development to the thought of his main inspiration. Jacob clearly has his own very fertile mind and this is made manifest throughout this long homily.

Jacob continues to exhort his hearers/readers<sup>46</sup> that the primary teaching of this Genesis account is that it is God – and God alone – who made everything, and it is He – and He alone – who continues to guide and to oversee all things according to the pat-

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<sup>43</sup> See, below, ll. 1403–1436.

<sup>44</sup> See summary in T. Jansma, “L’Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug,” 27–30.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.26; Eng. tr. in E. G. Mathews, Jr., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 92–93.

<sup>46</sup> We moderns tend to presume that these long poems were read, but see S. A. Harvey, “To Whom did Jacob Preach?”

terns He set down in those first six days. Jacob emphasizes throughout this *mémrâ* just how God went about preparing everything during these initial days of creation for the benefit of all those creatures that are to dwell in this world – He created everything in wisdom and in love.<sup>47</sup> He prepares their nourishment, He provides whatever is necessary for their clothing, and He instills in their particular natures everything that they will need for their particular happiness and peaceful living. He foresees what each creature needs and provides for it right from the start. And He continuously watches over them all to ensure that they are taken care of and have all they need.

God is Lord over all. In this section on the fifth day of creation, Jacob makes use of the epithets “Lord of the seas” and “Lord of the rivers”,<sup>48</sup> to highlight the fact that all the creatures that were created on the fifth day were generated from the waters. As Jacob also notes, there was no water anywhere that did not generate some sort of creature that was fitting for the size and location of the particular body of water: the oceans produced the great sea monsters, seas and lakes the larger and smaller fish, etc., and even puddles produced small insects. Following that which Basil taught in his *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, Jacob asserts that “Where there was even a scent of water or moisture, the command brought forth gnats in that place.”<sup>49</sup>

Jacob also utilizes the *double-entendre* implicit in the Syriac word *māry* (equivalent here to Grk., *kyrios*): “Lord and husband”. Following Basil (or perhaps here the teaching of the School of Edessa; see notes *ad loc.*, below) – he presents the image of God as the husband and the various waters as wombs. It is only here in this context that Jacob uses these epithets “Lord [or, husband] of the seas” and “Lord [or, husband] of the rivers”. Together, God and the various waters are the propagators of all these new creatures, both those that swim in the waters and those that “swim”, that is, fly, through the air.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See, *inter alia*, lines 1757–1758, 1899.

<sup>48</sup> See lines 1608 and 1614, below.

<sup>49</sup> See lines 1619–1620; see also, lines 1625–1626, and notes *ad loc.*

<sup>50</sup> See lines 1601–1632, 1912.

Jacob also emphasizes here, more so than on any of the previous days, how God endows His creatures with certain natural characteristics right at the beginning of creation. Birds do not require any training to learn how to fly or to sing, nor do fish require training to learn how to swim. Nor does either need instruction to maintain their dwelling in the air or water, respectively. God has placed this knowledge directly into their nature. To buttress his argument, Jacob also points out that other creatures – such as we human creatures – cannot acquire the ability to fly or to make our dwelling in the water by any sort of learning or instruction, either; flying and dwelling in water are abilities that have been placed solely in those creatures that require them for that particular type of life that God has ordained for them.<sup>51</sup>

The entire first section of this part of Jacob's *Mémorâ on the Fashioning of Creation* is a reiteration, or resume, of the previous four days of creation.<sup>52</sup> He again praises “the great Moses” (l. 1567), “that wondrous prophet” (l. 1569), for the brilliance of his record of the creation; it is his account of the acts of creation that has opened up to Jacob the great riches that he now feels compelled to hand on to his flock and thus to transmit to posterity the “wealth and riches and precious pearls that [he] saw therein”.<sup>53</sup>

Jacob is here, I think, rehearsing these first four days for two reasons. Firstly, as he himself states, these first four days constituted the creation of the “places” that were about to be filled up with creatures on the remaining days. He reminds his hearers/readers that God had already begun this pattern when He created the earth on the first day and then the vegetation and plants on the third day; He had also created the firmament on the second day and then He set the great lights in that firmament to “give light upon the earth”. So, now, on the fifth day of creation, from the waters that had receded into seas, lakes and rivers, God creates living things to inhabit that dry land that had been revealed by the receding waters on the third day.

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<sup>51</sup> See lines 1769–1820

<sup>52</sup> See lines 1567–1596.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. lines 1576–1577, below.

But Jacob does not stop here at merely noting this pattern; he highlights the fact that this pattern of “the third day”, culminating to this point in the creation of all these living creatures on the fifth day to inhabit the dry land that appeared on the third day, is a symbol of the Resurrection of Christ, who rose on the third day after His crucifixion.<sup>54</sup> For the creation of the fish took place on the third day since the creation of the seas on the third day. Just so the firmament, that had been created on the second day, was completed or ‘resurrected’ by the creation of the great lights on the fourth day; so too the earth, that had been created on the first day, was completed, or ‘resurrected’ by the appearance of the dry land on the third day. In this same way that single mass of water that had receded into bodies of water of various sizes and shapes were now “resurrected” by the creation of the fish on the fifth day, and the dry land that appeared on the third day was now also “resurrected” by the creation of those birds that had also been generated from the waters. “They were generated, were ‘resurrected’, and were at peace, for the symbol of the Son is great peace for all creatures.”<sup>55</sup>

Another element of this fifth day that causes Jacob to pause and marvel is the matter of air, or breath. Jacob notes the necessity of air for all creatures, and then describes just how God took care of this for the various different types of creatures, particularly, fish, birds and mankind, and angels.<sup>56</sup> Fish cannot breathe the air that mankind breathes without perishing, so God “put air in the water” for them to breath there, just as he puts it in His own Essence, or in the burning coals, for those who inhabit the angelic realm. Each of these three categories of creatures requires its own particular own type of air or breath and, since fish live in water, “[God] placed [air] there in the waters and that nourishes them [even] in the midst of raging seas.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See lines 1713–1762.

<sup>55</sup> See below, lines 1743–1744; see also lines 1733–1736, just prior to these.

<sup>56</sup> See lines 1657–1712.

<sup>57</sup> See below, lines 1711–1712.

### THE SIXTH DAY

Closely following the text of Genesis as he has done to this point, Jacob treats here the text of Genesis 1:24–31, which narrates God’s creation of the large beasts and other land animals (ll. 1921–2062), after which He brought to a completion His creation of the entire world with the creation of man and woman in the persons of Adam and Eve (ll. 2063–2562). During the course of his treatment, however, Jacob also includes material from the account found in Genesis 2:4b–23, as if were of a piece with Genesis 1:24–31. Readers more acquainted with modern biblical scholarship, which generally holds the account of the six days to be that which is found solely in Genesis 1:1–31, will perhaps find it a bit odd that Jacob here includes what is now generally held to be a second, and separate, account of the creation. Each of these creation accounts is currently held to be representative of what contemporary scholars distinguish according to the categories “Creation of the Whole” and “Creation of the One”,<sup>58</sup> each with its own separate and distinct origins and purposes.<sup>59</sup>

In Jacob’s world, however, it was otherwise. He inherited from his mentor Ephrem a tradition that Genesis 2 was rather a continuation or, more precisely, a recapitulation, of the six days of creation, rather than a second, distinct account. As Ephrem himself puts it:

After Moses spoke of the sabbath rest, of how God blessed and sanctified this day (Gen 2:2–3), he returned to the account of how the Creation was first fashioned, briefly passing over those things of which he had already spoken, while recounting in detail those things that he had left out. He then began to write about the creation account a second time, saying, *These are the generations* (Genesis 2:4) ...<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 22–26.

<sup>59</sup> Even more conservative scholars maintain this same position; see, for example, The Navarre Bible, *Pentateuch*, 45\*: “At v. 2:4b begins a *new* creation account ...” (emphasis added).

<sup>60</sup> Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, II.1; translation in E.G. Mathews, Jr., *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, 97.

Jacob begins the penultimate section of this *mémrâ* with a short introduction (ll. 1921–1948), in which he re-emphasizes that the entire creation was accomplished within six days as Moses claimed in the first chapter of Genesis, and that this creation clearly points back to the One who brought about this creation.<sup>61</sup> Moses tells us about the creation, while both Moses and creation witness to us about the One who created it all. As Jacob is wont, he again follows his mentor Ephrem in asserting that scripture and nature are the two trumpets that proclaim God as Creator.<sup>62</sup>

Jacob then turns, in the next five sections (ll. 1949–2086) to address the creation of the land animals as recounted in Genesis 1:24–25.<sup>63</sup> When it comes to the creation of these animals, Jacob draws a direct parallel to those animals that had just been created on the fifth day from the sea, and that were made to inhabit both the waters below and the air above. Jacob employed there the two-fold image of the sea as mother and womb, which brought forth these animals at the command of God.<sup>64</sup> Now, on the sixth day, he reapplies these very same images to the earth. On the sixth day, the waters now become still and it is the earth<sup>65</sup> that becomes mother and womb. At the signal/command of God, the earth “went into

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, lines 375–424, above.

<sup>62</sup> For Jacob’s insistence on Scripture and Nature being the two primary witnesses to the Creator, see T. Kollampampil, *Salvation in Christ according to Jacob of Serugh*, 58–72, for discussion and other sources. The classic statement from his mentor Ephrem is found in his *Hymns on Paradise*, V.2, translated in S.P. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Hymns on Paradise*, 102–103; see further, R. Murray, “The theory of symbolism in St. Ephrem’s Theology,” S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, 40–43.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. T. Jansma, “L’Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug,” 31–32.

<sup>64</sup> Jacob had already employed the image of God as husband and bride to the earth in his description of the creation on the third day, see lines 1037–1078, below.

<sup>65</sup> Syr., *’ar’â*; or, “soil” (Syr., *’apr’â*). Jacob uses both terms interchangeably in this section; cf., for example, ll. 1949–1964. He also employs the term “mud” (Syr., *tîndâ*), not uncommon among early Syrian commentators, reflecting the land watered by the mist in Genesis 2:6, just before Adam was formed; for all these terms, see Index of Names and Themes, below.

labor ... bent down and gave birth ardently” (ll. 1958–1960). These newborn animals quickly spread out in order to occupy the valleys, meadows, mountains, etc.; they rejoiced in their new lives and habitats, finding all the nourishment that they would require, both food and drink, already at hand. Immediately and with great joy, they adapt themselves to their proper and natural environments already prepared for them.

All these creatures, however, soon realize that this world – or house or city, et al.<sup>66</sup> – has been made for someone else but that that someone has not yet arrived. Whatever the choice of appellation, the idea that God created everything and then introduced the newly created Adam as if into a house appears early in Christian commentary literature. Generally associated with Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>67</sup> it appears at least as early as the Apologists,<sup>68</sup> and may even have Jewish roots that go back before the time of Christ.<sup>69</sup> In Syriac tradition, it remains a prominent theme in commentary literature at least until Jacob of Edessa.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Jacob employs various images here for the world. While “house” is the one most commonly found (ll. 2027, 2037, 2066, 2077, 2135, et al.), he also likes to use the image of the city (e.g., ll. 2143, 2145), and cf., especially, his *Homily on the Creation of Adam*, 61, in E.G. Mathews, Jr., *Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Creation of Adam and the Resurrection of the Dead*, 20–21, and n.19. Narsai also uses both world and city in his works; see, for example, Narsai *Homily on Creation*, IV.3, in P. Gignoux, *Homélies de Narsai sur la création*, 192–193. In this *mêmra* alone, Jacob also uses the image of building, palace, banquet and bridal chamber, as well as the very closely related Paradise, Eden and garden. For the instances of these words in this installment of Jacob’s *mêmra*, see Index of Names and Themes, below.

<sup>67</sup> See Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 4; cf. also, Eghishē, *Commentary on Genesis*, 36–37.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> See Philo, *De opificio mundi*, XXV. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, I.49, records the tradition; the sources he cites, V.63, are actually later, but the traditions behind these sources may be older. See also, J. Levinson, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism*.

<sup>70</sup> See J.-B. Chabot, *Jacobi Edesseni Hexaemeron*, 279–280; cf. also discussion in E.G. Mathews, Jr., “What Manner of Man?”, 144–146.

In His great wisdom God had saved Adam for last; and it was necessary that God make Adam last lest he think that somehow he was his own creator, or at least had input into his own creation. Now that the world was filled with land animals, creation had now reached the point where the stage was set for that one who was both the acme of all creation and the very reason for the creation.<sup>71</sup> Jacob highlights here three primary features of the biblical account to demonstrate the pre-eminent position of Adam in creation, again weaving elements from both Genesis 1 and 2 into his discourse.

Firstly, Jacob follows nearly every other early biblical commentator in noting how God completely alters the pattern of His way of creation. Up until this point, God had exclusively followed a rather strict pattern of saying, “Let there be (Syr., *nebwel*)” light, firmament, etc., or “Let the waters bring forth,” “let the earth bring forth”. When it comes to Adam, the last of His creation, God now says, “Let us make ... (Syr., *ne'bed*)”, switching from the third person singular jussive to the first person plural cohortative. God now takes not just a more active interest, but even gets personally involved in Adam’s creation. When God says, “Let **us** make,” He is summoning His Son “through whom all things were made (John 1:3). Jacob steadfastly maintains that God speaks only to His Son; Jacob does not include the Holy Spirit here as most Christian commentators have done.<sup>72</sup>

Jacob also here highlights how Adam was so precious in God’s eyes that, eschewing any intermediary, God Himself stooped down to scoop up some of the soil of the earth with His own

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<sup>71</sup> That Adam was the apex and the reason for the creation was not only a common notion among the earliest Syrian commentators, but an extremely important point of emphasis for Jacob; see E.G. Mathews, Jr., “‘What Manner of Man?’”

<sup>72</sup> Jacob is quite insistent that the Father speaks only to the Son; see ll. 2213–2214, 2225–2232. In both his *Homilies on Creation* 4 and 5, Severian of Gabala also argues passionately that the Father speaks to none other than the Son.

hands<sup>73</sup> and to mold it Himself in order to fashion it into Adam, the first human being. If this was not enough to distinguish Adam from the rest of the creation, God then blows His own breath/Spirit into this newly molded soil/mud and thus gives Adam life, a life that is thus truly distinct from all the rest of creation.

Secondly, Moses states that God created Adam “in His image and according to His likeness.” (Genesis 1:26) Nothing in creation that preceded Adam was called the “image of God”. While he develops this idea further elsewhere<sup>74</sup> Jacob, in this *mémrà*, again follows Ephrem’s rather literal reading of the Genesis account and interprets “the image of God,” as the ruling authority and dominion that was bestowed on Adam: “Let [Adam] have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26, RSV) Jacob occasionally even calls Adam “king” (cf. ll. 2144, 2286, 2377), and alludes to the ancient notion of “image” whereby a king would send out an image of himself to the outer reaches of his empire to be his “ruler” in that place (cf. ll. 2139–2148). All the animals bowed before him in subservience; even the luminaries, the earth and the sea, all that was created before Adam, knelt down in worship (ll. 2329–2340).<sup>75</sup>

The third and final element that Jacob highlights is the bestowal of names by Adam upon all the animals, a deed that only a ‘divine’ creature could perform. Jacob also argues that Adam’s being given the privilege of bestowing names upon the other crea-

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<sup>73</sup> See ll. 2168–2169, below. Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* II.18, had earlier stated that “[God] regarded the making of man as the only work worthy of his own hands.” Jacob himself also penned an entire *mémrà* on the explanation of this verse; see his *Homily on “God said, ‘Come, let us make man in our image according to our likeness,’”* in K. Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug, Quatre Homélie Métriques sur la Création*, 1–17 [text]/1–16 [trans].

<sup>74</sup> See Jacob’s *Homily on “God said, ‘Come, let us make man in our image according to our likeness,’”* in K. Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug, Quatre Homélie Métriques sur la Création*, 1–17 [text]/1–16 [trans], and the thorough study of T. Bou Mansour, *La théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, I.67–134.

<sup>75</sup> This “litany” is the fourth and last of the “mini-resumés” that Jacob scatters throughout this section of his *Mémrà* 71; see further, below.

tures that God has created is indicative not only of his ‘divine’ status, but even of his thus “participating” in the creative process, a process that he clearly could not have directly participated in since he was the very last of all God’s created beings. As Ephrem, whom Jacob is once again following, explains it:

“For God gave Adam not only rule over everything, which had been promised to him, but He also allowed him to bestow names [on the animals], which had not been promised to him. . . . For someone to give a few names to be remembered is not a great thing, but it is too large and too great a thing for any human being to bestow thousands of names in a single moment, without repeating any. It is possible for someone to bestow many names on many kinds of insects, animals, beasts, and birds, but never to name one kind by the name of another belongs either to God or to someone to whom it has been granted by God.”<sup>76</sup>

Between a long description of Adam’s physical characteristics (ll. 2245–2282) and his bestowing the names upon all creatures, Jacob turns to the creation of Adam as described in Genesis 1:27 “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (RSV)” He says, quite directly, that God “formed Eve . . . in [Adam]’s body . . . that when she was revealed the world would perceive that they were from a single body” (ll. 2286, 2289–2290). He continues on to highlight just how Eve is already completely and entirely and “equally beautiful (l. 2309),” within Adam’s body when he was created. Although Jacob never explicitly says so one might presume, according to this description, that Eve thus shared equally in all that is given to Adam: the formation by God’s own hands, the inblowing of God’s spirit as well as a share in the ruling authority.

In a shorter section that follows Adam’s naming of the creatures (ll. 2381–2400) Jacob, however, puts forward a seemingly contradictory picture as he here highlights the differences between the creation of Adam and the actual formation of Eve as described

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<sup>76</sup> Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, II.10.2; translation in E.G. Mathews, Jr., *St. Ephrem the Syrian, Selected Prose Works*, 103–104.

in Genesis 2:18–23: Jacob, perhaps with Paul echoing in his mind (1 Timothy 2:13), highlights the fact that Adam was made before Eve; she was created presumably by the hands of God, but not from the soil/mud, rather from a single one of Adam’s ribs, and she had no divine breath blown into her. She was within him, but only to appear later, after had been established as ruler and had named the creatures. Thus, Adam alone was to exercise the royal dominion over the other creatures, and stood upon the earth as sole heir (ll. 2393–2400). For Jacob then, Eve was equal according to her humanity – that is, greater than all other creatures – but in second place according to humanity’s ruling authority.<sup>77</sup>

Jacob then turns to a more spiritual interpretation of the creation of Adam and Eve and, in step with many other early commentators, shows how certain elements of their creation share parallels with the crucifixion of Christ: Adam slept, Christ “slept” on the cross; Adam had his chest ‘pierced’, Christ was pierced in the side; Adam lost blood and water along with the rib (inferred from the text of Genesis), and Christ’s side flowed with blood and water.<sup>78</sup>

This typology of baptism then leads Jacob to develop another typology, that of the physical birth of the human race at creation and the spiritual birth of Christians at the crucifixion. Just as the blood and water from Adam and Eve were necessary for the birth of the race of mankind at the beginning of the creation (ll. 2423–2430), so too is the blood and water that flowed from Christ’s side necessary for the baptism, or the spiritual birth, of the “second race” of mankind, i.e., those Christians who are members of the new creation, following the true *imago Dei*, Christ, in the final days after the resurrection (ll. 2431–2440).

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<sup>77</sup> For a broader, more nuanced exposition of Jacob’s thought on this subject, see T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de saint Ephrem*, 125–134. Narsai is even more literal; see, for example, Narsai *Homily on Creation*, IV.25–26, in P. Gignoux, *Homélies de Narsai sur la création*, 192–193: “[Eve] is equal in constitution but lesser in authority, for Adam is the head and she is the feet.”

<sup>78</sup> The outflow of blood and water from deceased Christ mentioned in John 19:34, was a popular image of baptism for early Christian writers.