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**THE DEPENDENCE OF ROMANOS THE MELODIST
UPON THE SYRIAC EPHREM: ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE
ORIGIN OF THE KONTAKION***

BY

WILLIAM L. PETERSEN

The scholarly world has been greatly enriched by the continuing publication of the hymns of Romanos, "the Melodist".¹ The fifth of the projected seven volumes has appeared, and was recently reviewed in these pages.² The edition is consistent with the high standards we have come to expect from Sources Chrétiennes. José Grosdidier de Matons of the Sorbonne is to be applauded not only for his meticulous care in editing the hymns, but also for his most helpful monograph, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance*.³

Some readers may be unfamiliar with the name Romanos and his significance. It is partially indicated in the title of Grosdidier de Matons' monograph—*les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance*—for Romanos is credited with the invention of the genre which became the crowning jewel of Byzantine poetry, the *kontakion*.

Grosdidier de Matons must be regarded as one of the two experts in the world on the *kontakion*.⁴ His views, therefore, will be influential and often accepted as definitive. He regards the *kontakion* as "une création originale du génie grec". According to his investigations, Romanos did not use sources written in Syriac, nor did Romanos employ the Syriac works of Ephrem as a source. This is a striking reversal of the opinions of earlier scholars, who regarded the *kontakion* as an offshoot of Syriac poetry, grafted onto the tree of Greek verse.

As happens so often—and understandably—when studies in an area are little advanced, there are several issues here which have not been properly distinguished. As we will see, this lack of definitional clarity has led to confused conclusions. There is also the more serious matter of hard evidence, for it is clear that Romanos not only knew but also quoted the Syriac works of Ephrem, the gospels in the harmonized form of the Diatessaron of Tatian, and the Syriac versions of the NT.⁵ The

evidence presented below will show the error of Grosdidier de Matons' assertion regarding Romanos' use of the Syriac works of Ephrem, and, as a consequence, may lead one to question his attribution of the *kontakion* to "(le) génie grec".

Our information about Romanos is slight, but has great value for the question at hand. Therefore, we shall begin our study with a brief look at the life of the poet.

Romanos was born in Syria, in the city of Emesa, c. 485 CE.⁶ It would seem that Emesa was bilingual, and there is reason to presume that Romanos was, as well.⁷ The hymn for Romanos' feastday (October 1st) informs us that he was "of the Hebrew race".⁸ Leaving home, he trained as a deacon in Berytus (modern Beirut).⁹ From there he moved to Constantinople, where he gained fame for his hymns, which he composed in Greek. He died sometime after 555 CE, having composed, according to legend, more than a thousand hymns.

Romanos' fame rests squarely on the *kontakion*, this new genre of hymn. The *kontakion* was a sung, metrical sermon, and was revolutionary for three reasons. First, it is credited with the introduction of the *accent metric* ("Byzantine metric") into Greek verse. Eventually, this system would replace the *quantitative metric* ("Hellenic metric") of Classical Greek verse. Rather than each vowel having a particular assigned metrical value ("long" or "short"), as in Classical poetry, the accent metric of the *kontakion* generally paralleled the spoken word, reckoning metre on the "accented" or "unaccented" status of the syllable, much like contemporary poetry.

But the *kontakion* did more than introduce this new system of reckoning metre. Its second achievement was to introduce new metrical *structures*. Rather than being constructed along Classical lines, with predictable metrical patterns (such as Homer's dactylic hexameter), a *kontakion* consists of cola of varying numbers of feet, and within the strophe the cola themselves follow no regular pattern.¹⁰

Finally, the *kontakion* introduced a new vibrancy into ecclesiastical poetry. This was achieved by the use of dialogue between characters in the story. These characters were given a hitherto unknown psychological depth. By heightening the drama of the situation depicted, the hymns took on a new immediacy for the listener.

The *kontakion* is now recognised to have been the pinnacle of Byzantine poetry. As the apparent originator of the *kontakion*, Romanos'

position within not only Byzantine hymnography but also Greek poetry is preëminent. He has been called “the Christian Pindar”, “the greatest Christian poet”, and his *kontakia*, “masterpieces of world literature”.

For this reason, scholarship has devoted particular attention to the *kontakion* and its origins. It is from this point that we may begin to examine Grosdidier de Matons’ conclusions in the context of earlier research, and the new evidence to be presented in this article.

In his *Hymnographie de l’Église grecque*, Cardinal J.-B. Pitra suggested that the accent metric had crept into Greek poetry from Semitic verse.¹¹ This was based on the simple observation that the accent metric was native to Semitic poetry, which was ignorant of the Greek quantitative system. In the Greek world, the opposite was the case; therefore, the transference had been from the Semitic world to the Greek world.

A scant four years later, in 1871, W. Christ and M. Paranikas published a compendium of medieval Greek ecclesiastical poetry. In it they stated that Byzantine metres were reducible to and derived from the Classical Greek quantitative metres.¹²

After this prelude, studies became more detailed. W. Meyer (1885)¹³ and H. Grimme (1893)¹⁴ published studies which traced Romanos’ metres to Syriac poetry, specifically, to Ephrem.

A few remarks on these studies are in order. Pitra’s opinion was only a conjecture, albeit one which was informed by his theological education, which must have included the Semitic languages. In the case of Christ and Paranikas, we begin to see the sins of scholarly specialisation, for they were Classicists, less well versed in eastern languages. This probably accounts for their conclusion—which is correct, but only at the level of a *reductio ad absurdum*, for virtually any poem, when viewed in small enough units, may be reduced to some collection of iambs and trochees, anapaests and dactyls. What Christ and Paranikas fail to consider are (1) the larger picture of the irregular arrangement of feet within each colon, and the irregular arrangement of the cola within the strophe; and (2) what might be responsible for the shift from the quantitative metric to the accent metric.

Source critical work on Romanos also began in this period. Karl Krumbacher noted parallels with Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and the Greek corpus of Ephrem.¹⁵ Paul Maas drew attention to parallels with Basil of Seleucia.¹⁶ Perhaps the most significant discovery was that of Th. Wehofer (1907), who noted extensive agreements in vocabulary

between Romanos' hymn *On the Second Coming* (L) and a Greek hymn attributed to Ephrem.¹⁷ From this *literary dependence*, C. Emereau (1919) rashly concluded that the *poetic form* of the *kontakion* was "identical" with the *memrā*, a particular form of Syriac poetry.¹⁸

Here we begin to see the confusion which has resulted from a failure to clearly define the question under investigation. Note that the *literary sources* of a poem (such as the parallels adduced by Wehofer) do not automatically indicate the origin of the *poetic form*. If Shakespeare were quoted in a haiku, it does not follow that the origin of the haiku, as a poetic genre, is English. Now, when one is dealing with the work of the *first* known composer of a haiku, the inventor of the genre, the case may be a bit more probable, but one still cannot automatically equate the two.

It is necessary to distinguish carefully between evidence for literary dependence and evidence for congruity of poetic form. The two are not the same; apples cannot be used to prove that oranges are round.

This is especially true when the literary evidence of the Greek translations of works attributed to Ephrem is used, as Emereau did. The relationship of the Greek Ephrem, as these works are called, to the Syriac corpus of Ephrem is very dubious. Since there is little if any duplication, it is impossible to determine the genuineness of the Greek works by comparing them to the Syriac originals. We cannot determine if the Greek texts are totally inauthentic or genuine, loose paraphrases of genuine works or radically revised translations. We simply have no answer.¹⁹

It was Karl Krumbacher who laid the foundation for the first modern scholarly edition of Romanos' hymns. On his death, the project passed to his student, Paul Maas. In the course of his researches, Maas came to the conclusion that the origin of the *kontakion* was Syrian. He noted seven features of congruity with the three major forms of Syriac poetry, the *sugīṭā*, the *maḍrāšā* and the *memrā*:

- (1) The acrostic is a Semitic invention, obligatory in the *sugīṭā*.
- (2) The refrain is obligatory in the *maḍrāšā*.
- (3) Dialogue is integral to the *sugīṭā*.
- (4) The *sugīṭā* handles biblical themes in a dramatic fashion.
- (5) The *memrā* is a metrical sermon.
- (6) Syrian metres are based on the principle of the accent metric.
- (7) In the *maḍrāšā*, the metrical construction is complex.²⁰

He concluded:

Von der Existenz ähnlicher fester, häufig verwendeter Literaturformen in der gleichzeitigen griechischen Poesie ist keine Spur zu finden. Hierdurch scheint mir der syrische Ursprung des Kontakions gesichert.²¹

In passing, note that Maas' work respects our distinction between evidence for poetic form and for literary sources, for he uses only evidence of poetic form when he argues for the Syrian origin of the *kontakion*.

Since Maas (along with C.A. Trypanis) edited the so-called "Oxford edition" of Romanos' hymns, his appraisal has held the field. The liturgist and Orientalist Anton Baumstark concurred,²² as did the musicologist Egon Wellesz.²³ Thus, prior to Grosdidier de Matons' monograph, the weight of scholarly evidence was uniformly on the side of a Syrian origin for the *kontakion*.

Grosdidier de Matons' argument posits three traditions which combined to create the *kontakion*: "la riche tradition de l'hymnographie syrienne (et) deux autres traditions proprement helléniques, celle de l'homélie poétique et celle de la poésie liturgique."²⁴ Although he admits that "La même est sans doute, pour le fond, ce qui se rapproche le plus des grands kontakia de Romanos",²⁵ he nevertheless asserts that

...il n'y a rien dans la poésie syriaque qui puisse être directement assimilé au kontakion. Celui-ci jusqu'à preuve du contraire, passe à juste titre pour une création originale du génie grec, dont les éléments sont complexes.²⁶

I, for one, detect a profound contradiction between these last two quotations.

Examining Grosdidier de Matons for hard evidence of Greek parallels in poetic form (such as Maas' seven points) leaves one empty-handed. Melito's *Peri pascha* is the sole substantive example of a Greek precursor adduced.²⁷ This is not convincing, for (1) *Peri pascha* was a spoken sermon, not a sung hymn; (2) it has no acrostic; (3) it is not divided into a series of metrically identical strophes; (4) it has no refrain; etc. An even more telling criticism, however, is that *Peri pascha* is composed in an elusive blend of the so-called "Asiatic" (Greek) style and the Semitic style. Zuntz, that great defender of the Asiatic, Greek content of *Peri pascha*, specifically observes that "The combination of *Semitic features* with the artifices of the contemporary Asiaticism is the mark also of *Melito's style*...."²⁸ Thus, in addition to a fundamental internal con-

tradition, Grosdidier de Matons' evidence for his conclusion is simply insufficient. Maas' points of congruity between the *kontakion* and Syriac poetry have not been disproven, nor have more telling parallels been adduced from Greek verse.

When attention is directed to Romanos' literary sources, Grosdidier de Matons correctly states that "Dans l'état actuel des recherches, qui sont fort peu avancées, rien n'indique qu'il ait eu accès à des ouvrages écrits en langue syriaque."²⁹

In an effort to see if Romanos has a literary dependence upon the Syriac works of Ephrem, he checked four of Romanos' hymns against their counterpart in Ephrem's Syriac corpus. The result? "Là encore, rien n'indique que Romanos ait eu le texte d'Ephrem sous les yeux."³⁰

Since Grosdidier de Matons nowhere appears to be sensitive to the logical distinction we have made between proofs of dependence in poetic form and proofs of literary dependence,³¹ one can only surmise that he interpreted his *failure* to find any literary parallels in the Syriac Ephrem as further proof for a Greek origin of the poetic form of the *kontakion*. This is, of course, methodologically incorrect.

In addition to this logical problem, scholarly specialisation once again appears to have provided at least a partial stumbling block in research, for the Classicist Grosdidier de Matons employed Lamy's nineteenth century edition of Ephrem's works in his investigation, and relied on its Latin translation. Now, although Lamy's edition is leagues ahead of the eighteenth century edition of Mobarak and Assemani (which F. C. Burkitt called "one of the most confusing and misleading works ever published"), it is grossly inferior to the superb modern edition of Edmund Beck in CSCO.³² Thus, the choice of edition for conducting the comparison was unfortunate. Furthermore, I am mystified by Grosdidier de Matons' failure to consult Ephrem's *Commentary*, presumably written on the Diatessaron of Tatian. This commentary is extant only in the original Syriac and in an Armenian translation. Its editor, Louis Leloir, terms it "la plus importante des œuvres exégétiques d'Éphrem."³³ At several points Grosdidier de Matons himself draws attention to Romanos' penchant for harmonising gospel accounts—and the Diatessaron was a gospel harmony.³⁴ He even goes so far as to speculate that this may be the result of Romanos' dependence on "une tradition syro-palestinienne"—an excellent description of the Diatessaron.³⁵ It is all the more puzzling then, that Grosdidier de Matons has not consulted this work, especially when, in different con-

texts, he shows he is acquainted with the Diatessaron, and cites Leloir's French translation of Ephrem's *Commentary* which appeared in the same series as his own edition of Romanos' hymns, *Sources Chrétiennes*.³⁶

My own investigations into Romanos' hymns began as an attempt to determine whether Romanos quoted Tatian's Diatessaron. This gospel harmony was almost certainly composed in Syriac and, from its composition in the mid-second century until its suppression in the fifth century, remained the most popular version of the gospels in Syria.³⁷ The results were emphatically positive. Romanos knew and quoted the gospels not only in the form of the Diatessaron, but also from the Syriac versions, namely, the *Vetus Syra* and the *Peshitta*. He also has parallels with the *Palestinian Syriac Lectionary*. Elsewhere, I have provided numerous examples of these biblical parallels, and would direct the reader to that preliminary report.³⁸ The appearance of the complete collection of parallels is imminent.³⁹

Since the Diatessaron is lost, we are dependent upon secondary sources for its reconstruction. Chief among these is, of course, Ephrem's *Commentary*. As I compared its Diatessaronic citations with Romanos' hymns, I began to notice that Romanos cited not only the Diatessaron's text, as quoted by Ephrem, but also borrowed from Ephrem's own exegesis, phraseology and interpretations. Consider the following examples:

EXHIBIT I:

In Romanos' *Fifth Hymn on the Resurrection* (XLIV, 5), *Adam* addresses the following lines to Hades:

- 1 Ὡστε καὶ πληγὰς δι' ἐμὲ οὐκ ἂν παραιτήσῃται,
 δεύτερος Ἀδὰμ δι' ἐμὲ γενήσεται μου
 [ὁ Σωτήρ·
 τὴν ἐμὴν τιμωρίαν δι' ἐμὲ ὑπενέγκῃ
 τὴν σάρκα μου φορέσας, καθάπερ καὶ γώ·
- 5 ὃν Χερουβὶμ οὐχ ὄρᾱ, τούτου νύξουσι πλευρὰν
 καὶ ὕδωρ ἀναβλύσει καὶ τὸν καύσωνά μου
 [σβέσει.⁴⁰

(Adam speaking:)

- 1 “Therefore he would not refuse even blows for me,
The Second Adam will become the Saviour
 [on account of me;
 He would endure my punishment for me
 Wearing my flesh, just as I do;
 5 *They will pierce the side of Him* whom the
 [Cherubim do not see
And water will gush forth and extinguish
 [my (Adam’s) burning heat.”

This is an extraordinarily complex image, with seven points to be noted. (1) The *side* of the (2) *Second Adam* will be (3) *pierced*, and out will flow (4) *water*, which will (5) *extinguish* the (6) *burning heat* of (7) the *First Adam*.

Compare this image from Romanos with that offered by Ephrem in the Syriac recension of his *Commentary*:

כף לזו הניחא דמגשטו כהונק .
 חק ארעטו סו סגשטו כח .
לפול סוהא ארעטו דהונק דהונק ארעטו .
סגשטו סגשטו דהונק דהונק .
לגשטו לזוהא סוהא דהונק סגשטו .

—Ephrem, *Comm.*, XXI, 10⁴¹

Quia enim ignis qui arsit in Adamo
 e costa sua arsit in eo,
 ideo perfossum est latus Adami secundi,
 et exiit ex eo fluvius aquarum,
 ad exstinguendum ignem Adami primi.

—idem, translation⁴²

The parallel is extended, specific and exact, save that Romanos speaks of “burning heat”, while Ephrem speaks of “fire”. To my knowledge, the image is unique to Romanos—and Ephrem’s *Commentary*.

EXHIBIT II:

In Romanos' hymn *On the Annunciation* (IX, 8), the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is to bear a child. Mary's incredulity leads Gabriel, in exasperation, to utter the following aside to the congregation:

1 Ἴδου κωφὸς ὁ ἱερεὺς καὶ κυοφόρος ἡ στεῖρα,
[καὶ Μαρία ἀπιστεῖ μοι⁴³

1 “Behold, *the priest is mute and the sterile*
[is pregnant, yet Mary does not
believe me]”

The reference is, of course, to the priest Zechariah, and the sterile woman is his wife Elisabeth. With these events already having come to pass, reasons Gabriel, Mary ought to be convinced of what he is telling her. Compare Ephrem's text, taken from his *Commentary*. (The text is from the Latin translation of the Armenian recension, for the Syriac has a lacuna at this point).

...immo insuper impossibile erat illi (Joseph)
ut *non crederet* Mariae, quae multa testimonia
habebat, nempe *silentium Zachariae, et*
conceptionem Elisabeth...

—Ephrem, *Comm.*, II, 4⁴⁴

In both Ephrem and Romanos, the passage is linked with unbelief; an approximate parallel is Lk. i, 36, where Gabriel cites the pregnancy of Elisabeth in answering Mary's doubts. (Romanos keeps this context; Ephrem transposes it to Joseph and his doubt.) The noteworthy point, however, is the addition of *the muteness of Zechariah*, which is absent from the Lucan version, yet which is found in both poets. Furthermore, observe that the order is the same in our two poets: Zechariah/the priest is mentioned first, followed by Elisabeth/the sterile one. I am ignorant of any other sources which make this expansion.

My investigations show that the majority of Romanos' parallels with Ephrem's Syriac corpus are to be found in the *Commentary*. This is significant, for it serves to confirm the findings of Diatessaronic readings in Romanos, and vice versa: the Diatessaronic readings in

Romanos reënforce the assertion that Romanos knew Ephrem’s works, including the *Commentary*.

The parallels are, however, not limited to the *Commentary* alone, but also extend to Ephrem’s Syriac hymns as well:

EXHIBIT III:

Romanos, *Hymn on the Holy Innocents* (XV, 8):

- 1 Ἰχνεύσας ἡ ἀλώπηξ τὸν μέγαν σύμνον,
 διεγείρει κατ’ αὐτοῦ τοὺς κακοὺς κύνας
 ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν Βηθλεὲμ περιτρέχοντας
 [καὶ ζητοῦντας τὸ θήραμα·
 τοὺς ἄρνας δὲ σπαράττει, οὐχὶ δὲ τὸν λέοντα.⁴⁵

(The poet is describing Herod’s search for the infant Jesus and the slaughter of the young boys:)

- 1 “Hunting the great whelp, *the fox*
 Rouses against Him the evil dogs
 Which are running about inside and outside
 [Bethlehem, seeking their prey;
 But he (the fox) lacerates the lambs, not *the lion*;”

This symbolism and the context are identical with Ephrem’s *Sixth Hymn on the Nativity*, strophe 20:⁴⁶

ܘܥܘܪܘܢܘܢ ܕܥܘܪܘܢܘܢ ܕܥܘܪܘܢܘܢ ܕܥܘܪܘܢܘܢ ܕܥܘܪܘܢܘܢ

“Es hörte aber *der Fuchs*, * dass *der Löwe*
 noch jung sei,...”⁴⁷

Jesus is the “lion” in Rev. v, 5, and Herod is likened to a “fox” in Lk. xiii, 32, but the combination of these symbols in the specific context of the slaughter of the innocents is the feature which links our poets.

EXHIBIT IV:

Sometimes—and this is one of the surest proofs of dependence—Romanos’ text is understandable only when read in the light of Ephrem’s hymns. Note the use of “thorny” in the following passages in Romanos:

Romanos, *First Hymn on the Nativity* (X, 11):

(The reference is to Joseph and his dream (Mt. i, 20-21) in which an angel assures him that Mary's conception is indeed divine:)

7 πυρίνη θέα τὸν ἀκανθώδη
ἐπληροφόρησε νυκτὸς περὶ τῶν λυπούντων αὐτόν.⁴⁸

7 “A fiery vision reassured *the thorny one*
In the night concerning his distress.”

Romanos, *Third Hymn on the Nativity* (XII, 11):

(Mary wonders over her conception:)

5 Πηλὸν ὁ πλαστοουργὸς πῶς μοι οἰκήσει;
Τὴν ἀκανθώδη φύσιν τὸ πῦρ οὐ φλέγει;⁴⁹

“How can the Creator reside in me, clay?
(Or) fire not consume (my) *thorny nature*?”

Grosdidier de Matons has felt it necessary to elucidate these two passages with the following note:

On trouvera fréquemment chez Romanos l'antithèse du feu et de l'épine, ou bien du feu et de l'herbe, plus ou moins adroitement amenée.⁵⁰

We are given to understand that this is one of the less adroit antitheses, for in all other cases a note is lacking—the symbolism is clear. It is true that Romanos often juxtaposes *feu* (πῦρ, “fire”) with *herbe* (βάτος, “bramble”). The image is based on the OT story of the burning bush. As it bore the divine fire without being consumed, so Mary bears the Christ without being destroyed. An example of this archetypal exegesis is found in Romanos' *Third Hymn on the Nativity* (XII, Prooimion):

4 βάτον ἐν πυρὶ ἀκατάφλεκτον,⁵¹

(Joseph understood when he saw Mary,)

4 “A *bramble* on *fire* without being consumed,”

The symbolism is obvious and immediately understandable. No explanatory footnotes are required.

This image, the fire in the bramble, is, appropriately enough, reserved for Mary. Note that “bramble” (βράτος) is a noun. It is a thing, the bramble, which bore the fire; it is a person, Mary, who bears the Christ. It is not a quality or a characteristic, but an object.

The mere fact that Grosdidier de Matons finds it necessary to append a footnote only at those two points where Romanos uses “thorny”, and not when he uses “bramble”, demonstrates that he senses the two passages with “thorny” are somehow different. He senses correctly.

Observe that, unlike “bramble”, which is a noun, “thorny” is an adjective in both our cases. Note that in the first example (*First Hymn on the Nativity*, X, 11), it is descriptive of Joseph; he is the “thorny one”, not Mary. How could the archetype of the burning bush possibly be applied to him? Clearly, something is amiss. Let us see if Ephrem’s use of “thorny” can illuminate Romanos’ use of the term.

Ephrem, *Fifth Hymn on Paradise* (13):⁵²

كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا

“Und als ich zum Ufer kam, * (zum Ufer)
der Erde, der Mutter der Dornen,...”⁵³

Ephrem, *Sogita I* (28):⁵⁴

كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا كأنا

“Die Kinder der Erde vermehrten * ihre
Verfluchung und die Dornen, die sie entstellten;”⁵⁵

We understand from Ephrem that “thorns” are, for him, a symbol of the *earth*, of *humanity* in its fallenness. Consequently, the adjective “thorny”, as used by Romanos, would mean *earthly*, *human* or *mortal*.

Suddenly, Romanos’ text is clear. In the first example, we are not dealing with some misapplication of the burning bush archetype to Joseph. Rather, the adjective “thorny” stands independent, descriptive of Joseph as *mortal*, with *human* doubts. Moreover, we see that “fiery” is also independent; it is, in fact, Romanos’ usual way of describing an angel (cp. Romanos’ *Hymn on the Annunciation* (IX, 3, line 8): (of

Gabriel) “the image is *fiery*”; idem, 4, line 5-6: (Gabriel, speaking to Mary) “Why does my *fiery* image frighten you?”). Just as in these passages “fiery” stands without an antithesis, so it could here, simply as a description of the angel in the vision. Equivalently, “thorny” does not require the antithesis “fiery” to be effective. Armed with the knowledge from Ephrem that “thorny” means “human” or “earthly”, the passage retains its symbolism and precision when read *without* “fiery”: “A vision reassured the thorny one/ In the night concerning his distress.” This ability to delete either half of the presumed “antithèse”, and still read the passage intelligibly, makes it obvious that this is not, in reality, an antithesis in Romanos’ usual sense. “Fiery” is not juxtaposed with “thorny”, for each has its own specific function in Romanos’ symbolic scheme.

In the second instance (*Third Hymn on the Nativity*, XII, 11), Romanos undoubtedly intended to juxtapose “fire” and “thorny nature”, for the reference is to Mary. But only when read in the light of Ephrem do we perceive the poet’s brilliant double-entendre. Mary is, yes, the bramble (à la the OT story of the burning bush). But Mary also has a “*thorny (= human, mortal) nature*”. Remember that “thorny nature” could equally be applied to any other mortal; indeed, we have just seen it applied to Joseph.

Grosdidier de Matons sensed correctly when he appended a note at the two places where Romanos uses “thorny”. The passages *are* different from those which read “bramble”. But, as we have just seen, Romanos’ diction is hardly “*moins adroitement*” in the passages with “thorny”. Indeed, it is so skillfully nuanced that its meaning is lost on most readers.

It is unfortunate that Grosdidier de Matons’ footnote attempts to equate these two symbols, erasing the difference between them. It is fortunate that we have Ephrem’s Syriac hymns to enlighten us, for they make manifest subtleties in Romanos’ hymns which make *cognoscenti* smile with delight.

Earlier, we pointed out the necessity of distinguishing between the evidence for literary dependence and the evidence for congruity in poetic form. Our parallels, on their own, do *not* establish the Syrian origin of the *kontakion*. Rather, they merely establish that Romanos owes a debt—a *tremendous* debt—to Syriac sources, especially to Ephrem, the greatest Syrian poet. Romanos’ choice of symbols, his ex-

egesis, phrases and metaphors are often dependent upon the Syriac Ephrem.

When one reflects upon this for a moment, it is not at all surprising, for we saw that Romanos was a Syrian by birth, who received his earliest training in Berytus. As a hymnographer, a liturgist, he most certainly would have been acquainted with the greatest hymnographer of his native land, Ephrem.

There is no question but that Romanos knew and used Greek sources in his hymns; after all, he was writing in the "Vatican" of his day. It is also beyond dispute that Romanos adapted certain features of Greek rhetoric and incorporated them in his hymns; after all, he was writing in Greek. However, inasmuch as Maas has already established points of congruity between Syriac poetic forms and the poetic form of the *kontakion* (and no one has refuted these points or discovered more compelling points of congruity with Greek verse), and inasmuch as Grosdidier de Matons' assertions that "rien n'indique que (Romanos) ait eu accès à des ouvrages écrits en langue syriaque" and "rien n'indique que Romanos ait eu le texte d'Ephrem sous les yeux" have now been shown to be simply wrong, one sees that *both* modes of inquiry are in agreement.

Maas' research in poetic form indicates that Romanos was dependent upon the formal *forms* of Syrian poetry. The texts presented in this article⁵⁶ demonstrate Romanos' *literary* dependence upon the Syriac corpus of Ephrem. The implications for the origin of the *kontakion* are self-evident.

NOTES

* Portions of this article were incorporated in a paper presented to the Ninth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford, England, from 5th through 10th September, 1983.

¹ José Grosdidier de Matons, ed., *Hymnes*, Vols. I-V, respectively SC 99, 110, 114, 128 and 283 (Paris 1964-81). All references to Romanos' hymns are to this edition, by hymn number, strophe and line number in the text, and by Vol. number and page in the footnote.

² By J. Munitz, *VigChr* 36 (1982) 406-9.

³ (Paris 1977), hereafter cited as *Romanos*.

⁴ The other living expert would be C. A. Trypanis who, with the late Paul Maas, edited the so-called "Oxford edition" of the hymns. See also Trypanis' *Fourteen Early Byzantine Cantica* in *WBS*, Band 5 (Wien 1968).

⁵ See my “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method”, *NTS* 29 (1983) 484-507, which presents parallels with the Syriac versions (syr^{s.c.p}) and the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary. It was C. Peters, “Die Entstehung der griechischen Diatessaron-übersetzung und ihr Nachhall in byzantinischer Kirchenpoesie”, *OrChrP* 8 (1942) 474-6, who first called attention to Diatessaronic readings in Romanos’ hymns. G. Quispel, “The Diatessaron of Romanos”, 305-11 in the Festschrift for B. Metzger, *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis*, eds., E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee (Oxford 1981), adduces further readings from Romanos, which he terms Diatessaronic.

⁶ The dates of Romanos must be arrived at by inference; see H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (München 1959) 425; P. Maas, “Die Chronologie der Hymnen des Romanos”, *ByZ* 15 (1906) 1-44; *Romanos*, 175-8.

⁷ Emesa’s bilingualism is probable, given that the notorious Roman emperor Antoninus (born c. 205; reigned 218-222) was born in Emesa and had a Syriac name, Elagabal. As for Romanos’ knowledge of Semitic languages, see the “Semitisms” which P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis pointed out in *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica*, xvi, n. 1; e.g. Romanos’ scansions, which require Hebrew names be scanned as in Hebrew, not Greek. See also the citations of the Syriac NT versions adduced in my article, cited *supra*, n. 5.

⁸ Stated in the second strophe of the hymn. The text is most readily available in *Romanos*, 169.

⁹ For biographical information about Romanos, such as his birthplace and career, we are dependent upon the *Menaia* and *Synaxaria* of the Byzantine church. The texts are conveniently collected in *Romanos*, 161f.

¹⁰ Both the *SC* and Oxford editions of the hymns give scansions for each hymn. The reader is referred to them. So that the complexity of Romanos’ metrical patterns may be quickly grasped, I reproduce only the first three lines of the Prooimion of Romanos’ most famous hymn, Ἡ παρθένος σήμερον, *First Hymn on the Nativity* (X):

ὁ-ὁ-ὁ | ὁ-ὁ-ὁ | ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ
 ὁ-ὁ-ὁ | ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ
 ὁ-ὁ-ὁ | ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ-ὁ

¹¹ (Roma 1867) 33.

¹² *Anthologia Graeca, carminum christianorum* (Lipsiae 1871) esp. C.

¹³ *Anfang und Ursprung der lateinischen und griechischen rythmischen Dichtung in ABAW.PP* Band 17 Abt. 2 (München 1885).

¹⁴ *Der Strophenbau in den Gedichten Ephraems des Syrers mit einem Anhang über den Zusammenhang zwischen syrischer und byzantinischer Hymnenform in Collectanea Friburgensia (Helvetia)* Fasc. II (Friburgi (Helvetia) 1893) esp. in the appendix 77-95.

¹⁵ *Miscellen zu Romanos in SBAW.PPH* Band 24 Abt. 3 (München 1909) 82f; 90.

¹⁶ “Das Kontakion”, *ByZ* 19 (1910) 298-306.

¹⁷ *Untersuchungen zum Lied des Romanos auf die Wiederkunft des Herrn in SAWW.PH* Band 154/5 Abh. 5 (Wien 1907).

¹⁸ *Saint Ephrem le Syrien. Son œuvre littéraire grecque*, (Paris 1919) 103.

¹⁹ Apropos the problem of the relationship of the Greek Ephrem with the Syriac Ephrem, see the article “Éphrem” by D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris 1959) Tome 4. première partie, 800-15, esp. 801.

²⁰ “Das Kontakion”, *ByZ* 19 (1910) 290.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² “Syrische und hellenistische Dichtung”, *Gottesminne* 3 (1904/5) 570-93; “Festbrevier und Kirchenjahr der syrischen Jakobiten” in *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums* (Paderborn 1910) Band 3 Heft 3-5, 48f.; “Vom geschichtlichen Werden der Liturgie”, *Eccllesia Orans* 10 (1923), 103-8, esp. 107f.; *Comparative Liturgy* (London 1958), translated from the third (1953) French edition, 104f.; “Hymns (Greek Christian)” in the *ERE* (Edinburgh 1914), Vol. 7, 5-12; “Zwei syrischer Weihnachtslieder”, *OrChr* N.S. 1 (1911) 193-203, esp. 196.

²³ *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography* (Oxford 1961²) 44, 156, 184f., 325.

²⁴ *Romanos*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 16ff.

²⁸ G. Zuntz, “A Piece for Early Christian Rhetoric in the New Testament Manuscript 1739”, *JTS* 47 (1946) 73, italics added.

²⁹ *Romanos*, 254.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ For example, his criticism of Emereau (at n. 18, *supra*, in this article; at pp. 4, 6f. in his *Romanos*) focuses *not* upon the dubious logic Emereau employs (which runs something like: “since Romanos used the Greek Ephrem as a *literary source*, his *poetic form* must have been *Syrian* too”), but upon the difficulty of attributing the Greek Ephrem to Ephrem Syrus (see n. 19 *supra* and our remarks in the text at that point). The clear implication is that *if* Grosdidier de Matons could be convinced that the Greek Ephrem was from Ephrem Syrus, *then* he would accept Emereau’s logic! However, as we have shown, Emereau’s logic was faulty. Grosdidier de Matons is correct in questioning the relationship of the Greek Ephrem to the Syriac Ephrem, but he remains in the same methodological *cul-de-sac* as Emereau.

³² Dom Beck’s edition spans more than eighteen volumes in CSCO, and I shall not enumerate them all here. Two, however, because of the large number of parallels they offer, are worth noting: *Hymnen de Nativitate* in CSCO 186 (text), 187 (translation) (Louvain 1959) and *Paschahymnen*, CSCO 248 (text), 249 (translation) (Louvain 1964).

³³ *Doctrines et méthodes de S. Éphrem d’après son Commentaire de l’évangile concordant*, CSCO 220 (Louvain 1961) 40.

³⁴ *Romanos*, 256.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁶ The Diatessaron is mentioned *ibid.*, 10, 22; Leloir’s *SC* edition of the *Commentary* is cited *ibid.*, 258, n. 90.

³⁷ The Diatessaron was composed c. 170. It was suppressed in the early fifth century. Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrhus from 423 to 457, reports impounding over two hundred copies of the Diatessaron in an effort to enforce the reading of the separated gospels (*Haer. fab. comp.*, I, 20). A similar situation is probably being addressed in the fifth century *Canons of Rabbula* (Bishop of Edessa c. 412 to 436), which direct that “priests and deacons should take care that in every church there should be a copy of the Separate Gospels and that it should be read.” The text is in W. Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature* (London 1894) 4; F. C. Burkitt also reproduces it in Vol. II of his *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* (Cambridge 1904) 177. See also the comments in the standard handbooks (Vööbus, Klijn, Metzger) and L. Leloir, *Commentaire de l’évangile concordant ou Diatessaron*, SC 121 (Paris 1966) 16ff.

- ³⁸ “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method”, *NTS* 29 (1983) 484-507.
- ³⁹ In my forthcoming *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus As Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, *CSCO* 466 (Louvain 1985).
- ⁴⁰ *Hymnes*, Vol. IV, 556.
- ⁴¹ L. Leloir, ed., *Saint Éphrem, Commentaire de l'évangile concordant* in *Chester Beatty Monographs* 8 (Dublin 1963) 214.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 215.
- ⁴³ *Hymnes*, Vol. II, 28.
- ⁴⁴ L. Leloir, ed., *Saint Éphrem, Commentaire de l'évangile concordant*, *CSCO* 145 (Louvain 1964) 18.
- ⁴⁵ *Hymnes*, Vol. II, 214.
- ⁴⁶ E. Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Nativitate*, text, *CSCO* 186 (Louvain 1959) 54.
- ⁴⁷ E. Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Nativitate*, translation, *CSCO* 187 (Louvain 1959) 46.
- ⁴⁸ *Hymnes*, Vol. II, 62.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 126, 128.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63, n. 1.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 118.
- ⁵² E. Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, text, *CSCO* 174 (Louvain 1957) 18, line 20.
- ⁵³ E. Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, translation, *CSCO* 175 (Louvain 1957) 17.
- ⁵⁴ E. Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Nativitate*, text, *CSCO* 186 (Louvain 1959) 195.
- ⁵⁵ E. Beck, ed., *Hymnen de Nativitate*, translation, *CSCO* 187 (Louvain 1959) 182.
- ⁵⁶ Other parallels with Ephrem's Syriac corpus have been presented in my article cited in n. 38, *supra*; only one of the seven parallels presented there duplicates evidence adduced here. This same article also presents parallels with the Syriac versions and with the Diatessaron. The complete collection of Diatessaronic parallels and parallels with Ephrem Syrus will be in my study cited in n. 39, *supra*.

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