General Introduction

Jacob of Serugh

Jacob of Serugh was born around the year 451 at Kurtam (now known as ‘Kurtak’), a village on the river Euphrates, and was brought up at Hawara, a Mesopotamian village close to Edessa in the district of Serugh. He studied at the School of Edessa and spent most of his life as Chorepiscopos of Hawara. In 519 at the age of 67 he was appointed Bishop of Batnan by Pawlos Bishop of Edessa. He died a couple of years later. While available sources do not agree on the year of his death (520 or 521), there is no dispute regarding the date, which all accept is 29th November. Patriarch Jacob II fixed the year of Mar Jacob’s death the age of 69 at 520 or 21.

The influences on Jacob of Serugh

Jacob of Serugh was a student at the School of Edessa around 470 at a time when the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia were being translated into Syriac. The School of Edessa adopted the Antiochean school of exegesis as its preferred model and considered Ephrem as the best representative of such exegesis. Being the continuation of the School of Nisibis which had been founded by Ephrem, the School of Edessa not only venerated the saint and his writings but also promoted his method of biblical exegesis. Thus the writings of Theodore of Mopseustia, the exegetical method of Antioch, the writings of St Ephrem and the traditions of the School of Edessa may be considered the main the influences on Jacob of Serugh.

1 Thomas Kollaparampil, Salvation According to Jacob of Serugh, Bangalore, 2001, p.27.
3 Thomas Kollaparampil, Salvation According to Jacob of Serugh, p.30.
Specific linguistic features of Jacob of Serugh

Quoting Manolis Papoutsakis, Johns Abraham Konat explains the linguistic features of the *mimre* of Jacob of Serugh as follows: Isosyllabicism i.e. a metrical structure in which each verse has 12 syllables divided into three units of four syllables each; two verses form a *baita* or a strophe, each *baita* forming a complete period. The linguistic styles include: 1. The use of the four-syllable grammatical formulae such as *Pael* and *Etpaal* infinitives. 2. Four syllable abstract nouns ending in *...uto*. 3. Feminine plural emphatic state adjectives and passive participles 4. Four syllable adjective endings in *... it*, 5. The use of the infinitive form of passive verbs that end in *o* in the Pael and Aphel forms. 6. The use of a number of verbs and nouns in a verse. Internal cohesion, interrelatedness of ideas, absence of doctrinal polemics, the search for types of the Old Testament and absence of allegory are characteristic features of the *mimre* of Jacob of Serugh, the presence or absence of which in works act as a criterion to determine their authenticity.

The Literary contributions of Jacob of Serugh.

St Severios who by his chants glorified your church
And John who by his translations advised and admonished
St Ephrem and St Jacob who sang mimre
And St Bar Sauma who fasted and prayed.

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7 *Ktobo d ċakso dʾannapuro*, M.O.C. Publications, Kottayam, p.86.
In this ḫutomo of Holy Qurbobo of the West Syriac tradition, each saint is commemorated in the Church for his specific contribution. Jacob of Serugh’s contribution and the reason for his commemoration is his mimre. However Jacob was a prolific writer and produced many other works apart from verse homilies or mimre. The following is a summary list of writings attributed to him:

1. Six turgome or prose homilies
2. Lives of Holy men of his own time
3. A collection of 43 letters
4. Liturgical texts (attributed to him)
   a. Three anaphorae
   b. Maronite baptismal rite
   c. Liturgical Bo’awoto

Ya’qub is primarily known for his verse mimre in the 12-syllable metre (which is named after him). He is reputed to have composed some 763, and of these at least 380 survive. Over half of the extant mimre, 222 to be precise, have been edited and published by P. Bedjan. The rest remain to be published.

The majority of the mimre are on biblical topics consisting of imaginative expositions of biblical passages and figures from both the Old and New Testaments. There are mimre on

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only three of the Apostles: Ss Peter, Thomas and Paul. Ss Peter and Thomas both have three
*mimre* composed in their honour while St Paul has two. The two *mimre* of Jacob of Serugh
on St Paul the Apostle are the topic of this dissertation.

Jacoby of Serugh’s place in the field of Syriac literature is compared to the place of
Kalidasa in Sanskrit and to Wordsworth and Longfellow in English literature.

In his capacity for description he equals the great Indian Poet Kalidasa, and the
English Nature poets, Wordsworth and Longfellow.

The importance of St Paul the Apostle in the churches of the West Syriac tradition is very
evident from the practice of reading his epistles in virtually all their liturgical celebrations. Not
only the daily and Sunday Eucharistic Services but also the celebration of the sacraments, the
Burial Service, the Propria Services of the Dominical (*Moronoyo*) feasts and the thirteen-day
Lent held in honour of the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, all include readings from the
Pauline letters. However the importance of St Paul for the West Syriac tradition extends beyond

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11 The three *mimre* of St Peter the Apostle are found in the first volume of the Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi
Sarugensis of Paul Bedjan. They are 1. *Our Lord’s Question, and the Revelation which Simon received from the
Father*. 2. *The Denial of Simon*. 3. *Homily on St Peter when our Lord said ‘Get behind me, Satan.’* Among
these the third *mimro* was translated by McCollum, A.C. (MIMJS 22; Piscataway NJ, 2009).

12 Among the three *mimre* on St Thomas the Apostle two are found in the third volume of Homiliae Selectae
Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis of Paul Bedjan. They are 1. *The Apostle Thomas*. 2. *The Castle which Apostle Thomas
build in India*. The *mimro* on *New Sunday, and the Apostle Thomas* are found in the second volume and it was

13 The two *mimre* on St Paul the Apostle is found in the second volume of Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi
Sarugensis of Paul Bedjan. They are *The Conversion of the Apostle Paul* and *A second homily on Paul the
Apostle* and this second homily was translated by The True Vine 10 (1991), pp. 57-73.

xxxi.
the liturgy and it is of interest to appreciate how one of its most celebrated writers, Jacob of Serugh, has understood and represented this saint in his mimre. My endeavour in this thesis has been to present this understanding and portrayal. Jacob of Serugh is known as ‘the Flute of the Holy Spirit and Harp of the Church’ on account of his mastery of the art of religious poetry. Although Jacob’s poetic genius is doubtlessly lost in translation I have attempted to render these two mimre on Paul in poetic prose so that at least something of Jacob’s empathetic understanding of this difficult saint comes to fore, albeit in garb that is muted and threadbare.

The structure of the thesis

Part One has three Chapters. The first chapter is an examination of the manuscript witnesses to Jacob’s two mimre on St Paul the Apostle. Relevant catalogues are cited and a survey of extant manuscripts housed in libraries all over the world is presented. All in all ten manuscripts were identified to contain mimre 61 and 62.

The second chapter is an edition of mimro 61 presented in vocalised sersto (West Syriac) script with a parallel English translation. The Syriac text is taken from Paul Bedjan’s edition: Homiliae Selectate Mar Jacobi Sarugensis (Vol. 2, pp. 717—747); in a few places alternative readings have been incorporated. This is the first time that mimro 61 appears in English translation. Although my translation aims to keep close to the original Syriac text, it avoids being overly literal. For the sake of clarity a few expansions have been made or names added (in brackets) to avoid ambiguity that might arise from the use of personal pronouns. Likewise the convention of using capital letters for personal pronouns referring to God has been adopted since this often helps clarify the sense.

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16 ܣܶܪܛܳܐ
17 ܝܶܐ ܕܡܳܪܝ ܝܰܥܩܽܘܒ ܕܰܣܪܽܘܓ
Chapter three deals similarly with mimro 62 (Bedjan, Vol. 2, pp. 747—769). It has been translated into English by the monks of the Holy Transfiguration monastery. I present here is a fresh translation along the lines of the methodology described above.

The second part of the thesis explores and expounds the person and role of the Apostle Paul as presented in Apocryphal literature, the Bible, the Syriac Fathers and the Syriac liturgical tradition. It has four chapters. The first chapter of Part two focuses on apocryphal works containing material about St Paul. These includes the Acts of Paul, the Apocalypse of Paul, Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and the Doctrine of the Apostles and Doctrine of Simon Cephas, in the City of Rome.

The second chapter provides an account of Paul according to the Biblical sources—the Apostle’s own letters as well as the Acts of the Apostles. The multifaceted identity of Paul as described in the biblical sources can be summarized under the following headings: Paul as a Roman Citizen, Paul the Hebrew, Paul the Pharisee, Paul the Apostle, Paul the Missionary and Pastor.

The third chapter looks at St Paul as depicted in the Syriac Fathers. Sources are identified and a description of relevant content about the Apostle is supplied. A vita or life of Paul is found in the The Acts of the Martyrs and the Saints, albeit in a very abridged form. The Demonstrations of Aphrahat say little about Paul, though the Persian Sage does quote from the Pauline letters. More substantial material about the Apostle is found in both Ephrem’s Homily on our Lord (sections XXV to XXXIII) and in his commentary on Genesis (section

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19 ܠܼܶܥܶܐ ܘܩܰܕܺܝ ܒܶܐ ܕܣܳܗܶܪ ܫܶܪ

20 ܡܺܐܡܪܳܐ ܥܰܠ ܡܳܪܰܢ
XLI). Narsai composed a *mimro* of 352 couplets on Paul and there are references to Paul in John of Tella’s work *The Faith of the Venerable and Holy Bishop of Tella*.

Finally the fourth chapter examines the presentation and celebration of Paul in the liturgical texts of the Syriac tradition, East and West. The West Syriac liturgical texts include the *Penqito* (the prayer book for Sundays and feast days), the *šimo* (the prayer book of the ordinary days) and the *Takso* (the text for the Holy Mass). From the East Syriac there is the *hudra* (the prayer book for feast days and ordinary days). Titles applied to Paul in these liturgical texts are illustrated and contextualised.

Part three provides an analysis of the *mimre* to investigate how Jacob of Serugh perceives and understands Paul, his identity, role and significance. It is divided into ten chapters.

In the first chapter elucidates the literary techniques employed by Jacob of Serugh. The literary techniques such as dramatic presentation of the events of the conversion episode of Paul, the use of soliloquies by different characters, images taken from different fields of life, creative imagination of the biblical account of the life of Paul and the use of opposite parallelisms used by Jacob of Serugh is exposed in this chapter. The second chapter recalls Paul’s history as a persecutor (*rodupo*) of the nascent Christian community. It is the story of Paul before his conversion and Jacob is not afraid to reflect on and examine this side of the

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21. ܡܺܐܡܪܳܐ ܪܒܺܝܥܳܝܳܐ ܕܕܽܘܟܪܳܢܳܐ ܕܦܰܛܪܳܘܣ ܘܦܰܘܠܳܘܣ
22. ܗܰܝܡܳܢܽܘܬܳܐ ܕܚܰܣܝܳܐ ܘܩܰܕܺܝܫܳܐ ܕܐܶܦܺܝܣܩܳܦܳܐ ܕܬܶܠܳܐ
23. ܦܶܢܩܺܝܬܳܐ
24. ܫܚܺܝܡܳܐ
25. ܛܰܟܣܳܐ
26. ܚܽܘܕܪܳܐ
27. ܪܳܕܽܘܦܳܐ
man. He gives two reasons for Paul’s persecution, the first being his failure to understand Jesus, and the second, his acquiescence in being misled by the Jewish priests. Jacob has Paul admit his mistake and creates a moving account of one man’s humble admission of failure. Using eleven different titles (Enemy of Jesus, Adversary, Assiduous [one], Source of sorrow, Bloodthirsty [one], Mattock, Demolisher, Insolent [One], Hawk, Wolf, Snake) he represents various aspects of the personality of Paul the persecutor.

The third chapter is Jacob’s portrayal of Paul as a persecuted one (rdipo)\textsuperscript{28}. He achieves this by taking four proof texts from Paul’s letters and providing a commentary on each in turn. Jacob highlights the fact that the persecutions Paul endured and the wounds he suffered for Christ are like objects of great beauty and worth, comparable to precious gems and splendid garments, but infinitely more valuable. Paul’s afflictions were many and varied and he looked on them all as filling up for what was still lacking in Christ’s sufferings. Paul was prepared to take on suffering not only on behalf of Christ’s body, the Church, but even desired to be accursed for the sake of his own people, the People of God whom he loved.

The fourth chapter considers Paul the convert (’ettalmad)\textsuperscript{29}. Paul “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” was proud of his Jewish origins, heritage and traditions. He viewed the world from the perspective of his background, upbringing and culture. That view of the world and of himself collapsed when he came crashing down to the ground on the road to Damascus. Paul was a changed man and Jacob presents that change as a repudiation and rejection of his past. For Jacob the new dispensation leaves no space for the old. Paul ‘the convert’ forsakes, forgets and finishes with his religious heritage. Spiritual birth is now what matters.

\textsuperscript{28}ܪܕܺܝܦܳܐ
\textsuperscript{29}ܐܶܬܬܰܠܰܡܰܐ
The fifth chapter examines Paul’s identity as an apostle (šliḥo)\(^{30}\). According to Jacob of Serugh this aspect of Paul’s identity is crucial, for it was Jesus who incorporated him into the company of Apostles. Jacob gives two reasons for this. Firstly Paul was highly educated in the customs and laws of Jewish tradition. In contrast to the other Apostles, who for the most part were simple uneducated people, Paul’s impeccable intellectual credentials placed him in a position of being able to refute any possible accusations by the Jews that the disciples of Jesus were ignorant of and remiss in the practice of Jewish laws and customs. In other words Paul was an expert in all things Jewish and could rebut on an equal footing any allegations of Jewish experts. Secondly Jesus needed a trustworthy witness for his gospel. A witness who had once been an enemy—and an implacable one at that, would prove all the more convincing. So it was that Paul, the erstwhile persecutor of Jesus, became his ardent witness and was thus included into the band of apostles. Jacob of Serugh presents Paul as an Apostle (šliḥo) among the Apostles (šlihe). Called and chosen by Jesus, he was placed by Him in the midst of their company, and even given a certain preeminence.

The sixth chapter portrays Paul the Preacher (koruzo)\(^{31}\) as he emerges in that role from the mimre. Jacob portrays Paul as a tireless and energetic minister, fully committed and dedicated. Conscientiously refusing any payment for his preaching, he supports himself by the work of his hands. Ever focused on what lies ahead, he doesn’t dwell on what is past. He travels extensively, motivated by the desire to spread the Gospel. In this work he is a partner of the Spirit. The centre and heart of his preaching is Christ crucified. “The Cross (zqipo)! The Cross (zqipo)\(^{32}\)” is his song.
The seventh chapter focuses on the importance of humility (makikuto) in Paul’s life. This humility, Jacob insists, is modelled on that of the Lord Jesus, whose humility Paul first encountered on the road to Damascus. Although Paul could with reason boast of many things such as his distinguished background and education or even his sublime spiritual experiences, he glories only in the cross, his true treasure and teacher.

The eighth chapter looks at Paul the scholar (yalip and mdaraš). According to Jacob of Serugh one of the chief characteristics that distinguished Paul from the other Apostles was his confident and lively intelligence. Paul had an excellent education, especially in the customs and laws of Jewish tradition. By contrast the others Apostles were simple uneducated people, devout and zealous for sure, but lacking a knowledge and acumen needed for persuasive debate with the religious authorities. Jacob argues that it was Paul’s intellectual credentials and competence, coupled with his impeccable knowledge of tradition that contributed to the Lord Jesus’ including him in the company of the Apostles.

The ninth chapter reflects on Paul’s zeal (ṭanonuto). For Jacob it was this character trait of Paul that drew him to the attention of both the Jewish priests and Jesus. Both parties accurately identified it as a valuable asset to be ‘exploited’ in their cause. Tap into Paul’s zeal and he would do anything. Zeal can be channeled in many a direction depending on the desired goal. The objectives of the priests differed greatly from that of Jesus. Paul the zealous persecutor for the priests became the zealous persecuted one for the sake of Jesus.

The tenth chapter depicts Paul, the imitator of Christ. Jacob insists that the only model Paul imitated (ʾetdami) was Christ. However inspiring and worthy of imitation were some of
the great Old Testament figures such as Melchizedek, Enoch, Elijah, even Moses, Paul chose not to imitate them. According to Jacob Paul imitated Christ so successfully that he even resembled Him. Because his imitation of Christ was so complete Paul could charge others to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

Jacob of Serugh based his *mimre* on the Apostle Paul on the biblical accounts given in both the Acts of the Apostles and in the Apostle’s own letters. While there is nothing contrary to the biblical presentation in both *mimre*, there is an imaginative expansion of the narrative. Jacob was possessed of a gentle and kind spirit and he eschewed all doctrinal polemics.